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Understanding the Unstably Housed: Assessing the systemic gaps of young adults who are "doubling up" in Washington State

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Abstract

Youth and young adults exiting the juvenile justice system are at risk for entering a new system- the homeless system. This current research aims to understand the conditions that youth enter the homeless system. Current research and homeless reports from point in time (PIT) counts and other databases do not measure specific circumstances of housing instability such as couch surfing or "doubling up" with friends and close relatives versus couch surfing with strangers, and whether there are potentially criminogenic transactions or conditions that juveniles must adhere to in order to sustain this temporary housing. Methods include two areas of analysis. First, this research examines four youth and young adult social service providers with reported experiences with serving youth and young adults who are couch surfing in two large counties in Washington State using an outward snowball sample methodology through qualitative semi-structured interviews. Second, a univariate and bivariate quantitative analysis of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data was conducted to assess frequency and mean differences of young adults in King County, Washington who had entered a HUD-funded homeless program between 2020 to 2021. Results of this research, policy implications, and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Keywords: juvenile justice, street youth, homelessness, couch surfing, Washington state, developmental criminology, trajectories, transient youth, public definitions, HUD, risk categories, recidivism, prosocial outcomes

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Preface

Washington is surrounded by national parks, great mountain ranges, and evergreens. The state is also home to as an up-and-coming urban landscape promoted by a rising tech industry that attracts young professionals to the city. Many large companies that produce much of the state's revenue are embedded in the heart of Seattle.

I moved to Washington State in 2017 from a small New England town where there was a small visible homeless population. In October of 2017, I started my first day at a non-profit organization that provides services to the low-income community. During my time working in this small Washington city, I learned the normative beliefs surrounding the homeless population very quickly. However, there is no consensus on where the underlying issue of homelessness stems from. The root cause of homelessness is framed by political interest groups as a result of societal moral fading, becoming "weak on crime" and for not punishing the use of methamphetamine and heroin. Opposing political interest groups frame the issue of homelessness as stemming from income inequity, gentrification, and a public health crisis. At the non-profit agency, I worked as a case manager for a permanent supportive housing program for young adults who were chronically homeless. While my colleagues and I were strongly passionate about our work in fighting homelessness, there were vast perspectives on the issue of homelessness. Outside of the service provider world, many viewed the homeless as nuisances, vagrants, and signs of visible disorder. Many residents were discomforted by the growing number of encampments, panhandling, and shelters surrounding the city, and others grew to ignore it.

The program that I worked in specifically provided permanent supportive housing (PSH) for chronically homeless young adults who were ages 18 to 24. The program

subsidized apartments where tenants only paid one third of their income, and included case

management, peer support, and 24-hour supervision. The overall goals to this program

were to maintain housing stability, long-term goals, develop self- sufficiency, and prevent

homelessness. In order to obtain permanent supportive housing, emergency shelter, or any

homeless service meant entering a new system- the homeless system.

Referrals to the permanent supportive housing program came from an entry point

system in which homeless individuals take an assessment with an intake worker providing

details of their homelessness, disability, income, and other personal details to determine

risk and chronicity. Ultimately, this information determined eligibility into various housing

programs and entered into a database to potentially fill the housing vacancy. If one exited a

housing program or shelter, then exit information had to be completed and entered into the

database. Referrals are elected similarly to a lottery process; except they are not based off

random chance. A referral is determined by the eligibility of a particular program vacancy.

For a young adult to be eligible for this program, they would need to provide proof

of chronic homelessness and a documented disability. Chronic homelessness was

operationalized as experiencing homelessness for one year or more or experiencing 4 or

more episodes of homelessness within the past three years that total up to one year. Most of

the time of reported homelessness had to be verified by a third party such as a shelter

worker, outreach worker, or other provider. Attaining proof of homelessness is always

tricky, particularly in young adults who are transient and disconnected from services. Some

may not carry cell phones or even a form of valid ID. I found that often young adults will

couch surf with friends, family, and sometimes even strangers to avoid their last resort of

sleeping on the streets.

Although in some circumstances couch surfing may be considered a form of homelessness by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the eligibility criteria for our program did not. Working with different community providers, I found that many experienced the same uphill battles when dealing with a young adult in need of housing services who reported they were couch surfing. Some young adults reported being in unsafe couch surfing situations that could arguably be more dangerous than someone experiencing literal homelessness. As much as it pains me to admit, I was only left pointing them in the direction to a center that provided intake assessments knowing that they would likely be ineligible for many local housing programs, and that their chances of receiving a referral in the near future were very slim. Many providers were left in the same boat.

I do not write my accounts to show that my experiences are in-fact a phenomenon in all housing provider networks. Rather, I illustrate my accounts to paint a small picture on how this became of a particular research interest in a criminal justice academic program. Much of the current literature uncovers homelessness as having a correlational effect to criminal behavior and system involvement. However, I sought to examine the experiences of couch surfing in young adults, and the service gaps that come along with it as told by social service providers through interviews in two Washington counties. I write this during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, many have experienced illness, death, job loss, and housing loss. Society has experienced an extended duration of isolation, economic desolation, and a cessation of resources. As the eviction moratorium comes to an end, many may be left with limited financial options. Assumably speaking, couch surfing and other forms of housing instability may be more common now more than ever.

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Chapter 1
Importance to the Field of Criminal Justice

Introduction

The risks associated with unaccompanied or "homeless" youth have historically and recently received great attention in many facets of research as it continues to be a prominent public health concern. However, there has been particularly less attention to the impact of youth who are couch surfing or "doubling up." These terms often get used interchangeably and there as a lack of consensus on these definitions (Curry et al, 2017). Couch surfing is often used to describe an individual who is staying with friends or relatives who would otherwise be homeless. "Doubled up" is often referred to as housing situations in which the head of household takes in other adults who have nowhere else to stay due to economic challenges (Curry et al, 2017). A good deal of research has examined the risk factors that are attributed to youth homelessness, such as household income, education, family structure, race, gender, sexual orientation, mental illness, and substance use (Brown et al, 2019; Hoy et al, 2016; Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007; Morton et al, 2017; Shillington et al, 2011). Correlates of youth homelessness and housing instability have been studied both qualitatively and quantitatively (Curry et al, 2017; Morton et al, 2017; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). However, very little research has been conducted to assess the risks associated with couch surfing and "doubling up" alone, and there is limited research on the social connections that develop through this experience in youth.

Previous research has called the internal validity of housing vulnerability categories into question, and whether it is appropriately applied to transient youth. Housing vulnerability and risk factors are the only significant determinants in eligibility into the public housing system. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines

homelessness into four risk categories: 1) literally homeless; 2) imminent risk of

homelessness; 3) homeless under federal statutes; and 4) fleeing/ attempting to flee

domestic violence (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019). The HUD

homeless criteria are often applied in order to determine whether an individual is eligible

for HUD-funded supportive services. Homeless under other Federal statutes (category 3) is

defined by HUD as unaccompanied youth under the age of 25, or families with children

who do not otherwise qualify under homeless definitions but are defined as homeless

through other federal statutes and have experienced persistent housing instability such as

couch surfing. In order to be eligible for HUD-funded supportive services under these

categories, and individual or family must provide appropriate documentation to prove their

vulnerability to agencies. This includes a third-party verification of homelessness, eviction

notices, proof of disability or other barriers (U.S Department of Housing and Urban

Development, 2019). Although youth who are couch surfing and experiencing residential

instability are considered homeless under category 3, federal legislation ultimately leaves

discretion to the state, and non-governmental agency to determine eligibility that often

create barriers to secure permanent housing and case management services (Edwards,

Torgerson, & Sattem, 2009).

    Homeless youth who have crossed over into the juvenile justice system face barriers

that can contribute to cycles of instability, offending, and victimization. Adolescents

involved in the juvenile justice systems face multiple challenges on their pathway to

adulthood. This research study takes this area of criminal justice research a step further by

examining the conditions of "couch surfing" or "doubling up" and whether couch surfing

can contribute to increased levels of delinquency and system involvement. The current

study aims to address the potential systemic gaps in identifying youth who are "doubling up" and how they are "doubling up." Lastly, the study aims examine the impact of COVID-19 on this population through the experiences of service providers.

Importance of Homelessness to the Field of Criminal Justice

The research surrounding homeless youth in the criminal justice literature was not given much attention by scholars until the early 1990s. However, the studies of delinquency with respect to the effect of urbanization and macro-level demographic variables date back to the Chicago school of sociology. The earliest studies involving youth homelessness were dominated by sociologists, psychologists, social work scholars, and public health scholars, and in some ways still are. McCarthy and Hagan (1992) conducted a qualitative study of homeless youth in British Columbia that aimed to answer the fundamental question of "How do youth survive on the street?" In their study, McCarthy and Hagan (1992) interviewed 390 adolescents living on the streets of Toronto, Canada. The authors found that youth experiencing homelessness survive using a variety of strategies. When examining accessing shelter, approximately 50% of respondents reported making use of a variety of accommodations that include couch surfing with friends and relatives, the streets, and hostels. They also found that youth tend to use a variety of food sources and maintain a diverse circle of friendships. Unsurprisingly, the study also found that respondents resorted to street level crime to survive on the streets. The common offenses associated with street youth were theft, substance use, and prostitution. Roughly, half of the sample had reported being incarcerated. In sum, the authors found that their condition of homelessness (length of time on the street, couch surfing, shelter) is a significant indicator in the trajectory to incarceration (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992).

Delinquency had first been studied using ethnographic and other qualitative methodologies. However, over time criminologists turned away from studying street youth, and instead focused on delinquent youth in schools and residential treatment programs, using self-report surveys to test criminological theories and conceptualize youth offending patterns. Measuring delinquency shifted toward reported classroom performance from parents and teachers (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Piquero & Sealock, 2004; Wells & Rankin, 1988). Subsequent studies have applied criminological theories to homeless youth in providing contexts for juvenile delinquency. McCarthy and Hagan (1995) hypothesized that embeddedness in networks of deviant associations provides access to learning relationships that facilitate the acquisition of criminal skills and attitudes that are referred to as "criminal capital." Several criminological theories that were applied to homeless youth specifically examined deterrent effects in offending, effects of stigma and labeling on offending, the role of negative strain and victimization, self-control, and the effect of deviant peer associations (Baron & Kennedy, 1998; Baron, 2009, Gallupe & Baron, 2014; Hoolachan,2020; Roschelle & Kauffman, 2004). Most of the available criminal justice research that involves homeless youth does not examine the specific circumstances related to couch surfing or "doubling up" such as the cohabitation patterns, and subsequent victimization or offending. "Doubling up" refers to housing situations in which a head of household takes in other adults who have nowhere else to stay.

Homeless youth are often referred to as "street youth" in the criminal justice literature. There have been attempts to define homeless youth into categories. These distinctions include the "*runaways*," the "*throwaways*," the "*street youth,*" and the "*systems youth.*" Runaway youth are defined in literature as youth who have run away

from their homes. Whereas throwaway youth have been expelled (or "kicked-out") from their homes as a result of dysfunction (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). More generally, street youth are characterized by youth lacking a permanent residence and who also engage in illegal street crimes such as drug dealing and prostitution. Systems youth are identified as those youth who having aged out of the child welfare system, find themselves homeless. However, there is no empirical support or explanation for this typology for homeless youth (Toro et al, 2011). Particularly in criminal justice research, there is a lack of explanation and operationalization of the criminogenic factors and risks of homeless youth. Most research on homeless youth examines existing criminological theories. While earlier criminal justice research tended to focus on the ecological factors that influence delinquency on street crime. According to Hagan & McCarthy (1997) research that involved the study of delinquent youth moved "from the streets" to "the school." More recent research has examined homeless youth through the lens of general strain theory, labeling theories, and individual level factors that contribute to criminal behavior. More recent research examining homeless youth have aimed to collect larger sample sizes and identify systemic gaps associated with varying circumstances.

A national survey conducted by Curry et al. (2017) found that couch surfing is a relatively common experience for young adults, as most young adults experiencing homelessness are also couch surfing. The study also found substantial differences in education and underemployment income between groups that reported experiencing literal homelessness only and those who have only couch surfed. The study also found a disproportionate representation of minorities and LGBTQ+ youth in their sample. The

disproportionate representation of minority and LGBTQ+ young adults could potentially

result from the systematic biases toward these groups and in-turn curtail trajectories to

homelessness. Curry et al. (2017) argues that there is a lack of consensus and consistency

on what constitutes homelessness in unaccompanied youth and how to measure it, as

federal definitions also differ in whether couch surfing is a form of homelessness. The

official definition of couch surfing is ambiguous and not well understood.

The Present Study

The present study investigates the policy gaps related to couch surfing or "doubling

up" through the accounts of social service providers with experience in working with this

population directly. The objective to interviewing social service providers is to capture

their previous experiences providing services to youth and young adults who are couch

surfing and to understand the relationships they had with the hosts they were "doubled up"

with and whether these relationships influenced anti-social behavior or offending.

Interview questions were designed to measure their relationships and criminality through

the lens of pioneering criminological theories and previous studies on this research topic.

The project also aims to understand the systemic barriers participants experienced during

their experiences couch surfing. Previous research has established that youth who are couch

surfing are often underrepresented in official data collection in explicit and implicit ways

(Fowler et al, 2019).

Point in Time (PIT) counts are required by HUD funded Continuums of Care to

generated nationwide data on the amount of people experiencing homelessness on given

night in January (HUD, 2012). Community partners and volunteers survey unsheltered and

sheltered individuals and conduct observational counts in order to "count" the number of

individuals experiencing homelessness. Couch surfing is often excluded explicitly in

federal surveys such as Point in Time counts as a result of the Department of Housing and

Urban Development's definitions of homelessness. Those who are couch surfing can be

excluded in homeless counts implicitly because of the observational count methodology

that is not well suited for identifying individuals who are not literally homeless (sleeping in

places not meant for habitation, emergency housing paid for by an agency, or staying in

shelters). Assessing systemic barriers and qualitative experiences associated with couch

surfing will provide context for policy implications.

This thesis will examine the experiences of social services providers and the

barriers surrounding youth labeled as couch surfers. These providers are identified non-

profit organizations that provide a range of services to vulnerable populations experiencing

economic instability. This project specifically samples case workers who provide

supportive services to youth and young adults to examine their experiences in serving their

young clients through virtual semi-structured interviews. In order to supplement the

interview data collected from social service providers, King County Homeless

Management Information System (HMIS) data is examined to include data points of young

adults who had been experiencing homelessness or housing instability in 2020 and 2021.

Chapter one includes an overview on housing as a social institution and its

importance to criminal justice research and the theoretical implications behind couch

surfing youth and young adults. Chapter two includes a description of the previous

literature on youth homelessness and housing instability as well as the criminological

theoretical foundations that are applied to transient youth. Chapter two concludes with an

overview of the literature detailing the couch surfing, homelessness, and the homeless

management system, and the role of housing instability, the child welfare system, and the juvenile justice system. This section will specifically focus on research with participants with reported experiences of both the criminal justice system and homelessness at one or more times in their lifetime. An overview of the research methodology is presented in chapter three, including a description of the sample of young adults and non-profit housing providers in Washington State, how they were interviewed, and how their responses were measured. Chapter four covers the results from this research project, including a comparison of the responses from young adults and providers. The last chapter provides a discussion of the results and strengths and limitations to the research project. The concluding paragraphs will discuss future policy implications and recommendations for future research based on the outcomes of this research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter is devoted to providing a comprehensive overview of literature on homeless youth. Most of the articles included in this review were obtained from databases that included EBSCOhost, ProQuest, JSTOR, Science Direct, Springer Link, and Google Scholar. The government reports on youth homelessness referenced in this review were obtained from websites of agencies that include the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Voice of Youth Count (VYC), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. This section will first cover the empirical status of homeless youth in the criminological literature. Overall, criminologists have moved away from studying the ecological influences of deviant adolescent behavior and delinquency and shifted toward using peer influences, family education, and strain variables to study deviant and delinquent behavior in homeless youth. Second, this section will provide an overview of research conducted within the past decade and provide a summary of prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness and couch surfing. In this section, this chapter will also outline federal definitions of homelessness and how youth homelessness in conceptualized. While recent research on youth homeless as aimed to include couch surfing, there is little research within the past decade that provide detailed qualitative data on the conditions in which youth couch surf and reported experiences. The following section is devoted to outlining the history of the homeless management system and relevant policies that have passed that shaped where/how youth "fit" under the homeless management system. The last section provides a summary of the research on homeless youth who are dually involved with the child welfare system, and homeless youth who crossover to the juvenile justice system and the adult criminal justice

system. The last section will also address risk factors associated with homeless youth that include victimization, substance use, mental illness, incarceration, survival criminogenic behaviors, recidivism, and early pregnancy.

The earliest studies of homeless youth used qualitative methods to assess the criminological effects of urbanization and delinquent "street youth." As a result of rapid population growth stemming from immigration, the end of slavery, and booming industrialization, Chicago became major area of study for criminologists that was later known to be the Chicago School. In 1942, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay's social disorganization theory argued that economic status, heterogeneity, and residential mobility lead to a disruption of community social organization and weakened institutional controls, and in turn, affects variations in crime and delinquency. Shaw and McKay (1942) conducted interviews and recorded the histories of boys living in socially disorganized neighborhoods. Subsequent empirical tests of social disorganization theory found moderate support for the theory, but other external factors unrelated to social disorganization theory had strong signification effects on crime. Findings in later studies found that local friendship networks have a strong negative effect on certain street-level crimes and disorderly peer groups had a significant positive relationship with property crime victimization (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Veysey & Messner, 1999).

Hagan and McCarthy (1992, 1995) studied street youth when evaluating how they learn income generating criminal behavior. The authors assessed the utility of Sutherland's 1937 theory of differential association that focuses on the socialization within a disorganization community. This theory contends that criminal behavior is learned from others though a process of symbolic interaction and intimate groups. Differential

association occurs when an offender learns definitions of techniques of committing crime and violating legal codes that are favorable, and unfavorable definitions of the law are developed (Matsueda, 1988). Hagan and McCarthy (1995) used Coleman's 1990 conceptualization of social capital and Sutherland's 1937 differential association theory to substantiate their hypothesis of the presence of "criminal capital" and embeddedness in street youth subcultures. In networks with those proficient in crime, embeddedness in relationships is a source of social capital that is referred to as "criminal capital" that can establish a foundation of facilitating the knowledge and skills to remain successful in criminal networks. Embeddedness and criminal capital can affect definitions favorable to crime, and unfavorable to the law. Findings from this study show that embeddedness in criminal networks is a significant indicator of crime, and that youth can easily acquire criminal skills from deviant peers (Hagan & McCarthy, 1995).

Homeless youth are understood to be vulnerable to strains and stressors that can contribute to deviant or delinquent behavior. Strains that are commonly experienced by homeless youth include victimization, financial loss, rejection, and punishment. Several studies in the field of criminology use homeless youth samples to evaluate Robert Agnew's general strain theory (GST) (Agnew, 1985; Agnew, 1992). General stain theory suggests that criminal behavior can result from a blockage of pain avoidance behavior when confronted with an aversive environment. Delinquency or aggression is likely to occur as a means to cope with negative events and the inability to cope in a pro-social manner (Agnew, 1985). Agnew's general stain theory (GST) identifies three types of strain that include- experienced, vicarious, and anticipated strain. Experienced strain refers to an individual personally experiencing strain. Experienced strains have the strongest relation to

crime. Vicarious strain refers to the individual's strain resulting from the experienced strain of others that are closest to them. Individuals are more likely to experience vicarious strain and respond with criminal behavior when family or friends are victims of serious assault. Criminal behavior is likely to occur because of the individual seeking revenge against those who victimized their family or friends. Agnew argues that crime likely to occur when vicarious strain is severe (Agnew, 1985). Anticipated strain is defined as an individual's expectation of current strain to continue or the expectation of a new strain. Baron (2009; 2019) examined these three types of strain on homeless youth and the effect on violent offending and found that the effect of victimization on violent offending was moderated by conditioning variables in youth who experienced low constraint, presence of delinquent peers, and negative emotionality. When extending the research on GST and homeless youth to understand how males and females are affected, findings affirm that there are few differences between male and female in the effect of strain on crime (Baron, 2007). However, gendered differences exist when examining outside factors such as emotionality, constraint, and social support that impact the link between strain and crime (Baron, 2007, 2009). Offending behavior in homeless youth is commonly examined through the lens of general strain theory as they are presumed to be subjected to severe strain as well as multiple types of strain. Homeless youth are also subjected to unique strains that result from their frequent interactions with institutionalized systems such as the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system (Snyder et al., 2019).

Most early research on homelessness focused on demographic variables, survival rates, and the social problems they pose without assessing the personal identities and adaptations of the homeless. Labeling and symbolic interactionist theorists later used

ethnographic methods to examined identity constructions of homeless individuals that

assessed the process in which homeless individuals generate identities, roles, self-concept,

and self-worth. Snow and Anderson (1987) identified three patterns of identity talk to

include distancing, embracement, and fictive storytelling. Distancing occurs in homeless

individual when they disassociate themselves from other homeless individuals

(*associational distancing*), from occupational roles or street roles (*role distancing*), and

from institutions (*institutional distancing)*. In contrast, embracement occurs in the

homeless community when they express acceptance of a role, relationship and social ties,

or ideology that reinforce their identity avowal to their life on "on the street." Lastly, fictive

storytelling occurs when a homeless individual is deceptive in some way that can either

include an embellishment of the past or present, or fantasizing of the future (Snow and

Anderson, 1987).

Homeless youth can display similar coping strategies when confronted with stigma

to augment their self-esteem. Coping strategies include verbal denigration to distance

themselves from the stigmatized "other," physical posturing or the use of body language to

mimic a "gangsta" bravado, and exaggerated sexual posturing to create a more empowering

identity (Rayburn & Guittar, 2013; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004). Hoolachan (2020)

examined similar concepts of identity, stigma, and self-concept in homeless youth ranging

from ages 16 to 21 and found that youth experience a similar process of distancing. Youth

reported making remarks about other homeless youth, using stereotypes when referring to

"spoiled identities" or identities that are associated with greater stigma. Such forms of

distancing are prominent when comparing levels of homelessness. Those who are literally

homeless and on the street are more stigmatized than those who are residing in shelters,

supportive housing, or couch surfing. Youth also report making similar distinctions when comparing their own substance use to that of their peers.

While some celebrate uses of certain drugs such as cannabis, amphetamine, cocaine, and ecstasy, they also reject the use of heroin and heroin users. Heroin users are more stigmatized and are subjected to being perceived as "other" and are given labels such as "junkie" or "tweaker" (Hoolachan, 2020). Samuels et al. (2018) indicated that stigmatization affects youth attitudes toward seeking financial and housing resources, and that they will disengage from seeking to sustain their personal agency and to mitigate the risk of disclosing their identity. In studies that examine deterrent effect on street youth found that while most youth fear legal sanction, serious offenders do not fear legal sanction and that the fear of legal sanction is reduced by the effect of poverty, drug use, association with criminal peers, and the isolation from conventional society (Baron & Kennedy, 1998).

There is evidence to support that homeless youth are exposed to anti-social influences in early childhood that can lead them to anti-social behavior throughout the life course. Antisocial behavior in children is characterized by maladjustments in school such as poor grades, and social bonding to peers and family such as peer rejection. Antisocial behavior is prone to escalate to alcoholism, chronic unemployment, mental illness, and poverty in adulthood. Moffitt (1993) argues that there are two prototypes of antisocial persons that explain the onset of delinquency and criminal behavior. The first type of antisocial person engages in antisocial behavior more frequently and more severely and offends through much of their life. Moffitt (1993) refers to this type of offender as *life-course persistent (LCP)*. Life-course persistent offenders make up only 5% of the population and exhibit antisocial behavior from early childhood into adulthood (Moffitt,

1993). The second type of antisocial person are more common, only engage in antisocial behavior and delinquency in adolescent years and phase out of their behavior in adulthood. Moffitt refers to this type of offender as *adolescent limited (AL).*

Moffitt (1993) argues that the pathway to life-course persistent offending and antisocial behavior is exacerbated when a child that is already suffering from neurocognitive deficits, and is presented with adverse trauma, neglect, criminogenic environments, antisocial behavior in parents, and economic disadvantage. The environmental structural factors can influence a parent's ability to adequately socialize children and initiate bonds with their children. Children then later may have negative relationships with teachers, peers, spouses, and employers. Continuity of antisocial behavior is characterized by the failure to learn conventional pro-social alternative behaviors and the inability to desist from deviance lifestyle. Frequent criminal behavior, incarceration, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and quitting jobs often limit the opportunities to success and conventional opportunities. By adulthood, life- course persistent persons have already been labeled by society as deviant, and interventions to try and start a career through legitimate means are often too late because of their chronic barriers such as criminal records, lack of education, impulsiveness, and diminished emotional regulation have already been long established.

In contrast, the second type of anti-social behavior in Moffitt's (1993) developmental taxonomy is adolescence- limited. An adolescence-limited offender exhibits antisocial behavior in early adolescence during puberty. However, unlike their life-course anti-social counterparts, adolescence-limited offenders eventually experience a loss of motivation for delinquency, because they are in more privileged circumstance that allows

them to desist from delinquency and pursue a career and education (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt et al., 2002).

According to Moffitt's (1993) developmental typology of life course persistent offenders (LCP) make up a small group offender. Life course persistent offenders experience neuropsychological deficits early in life that biologically predisposes them to anti-social behaviors such as aggressiveness, impulsivity and other temperamental disadvantages that could have been influenced by poor prenatal health or exposure to toxic agents while in the womb. Babies born with pre-natal cocaine, alcohol, and tobacco exposure are shown to have a negative relationship with adaptive functioning indicators such as stable housing, work, and education (Forman et al, 2017). Therefore, it is less likely that these children develop prosocial coping mechanisms, and are more likely to experience low self-control, decreased attachment to family and pro-social peers, academic failure, teenage parenthood, and unstable work histories. These create greater social barriers that influence delinquency and befriending other life course persistent youth in residential treatment facilities or other areas of juvenile justice that where they learn from other deviant peers and be victimized. In Moffitt's (1993) typology of life course persistent offenders, children are typically integrated into disadvantaged neighborhoods, schools, and homes where parents have difficulty providing behavioral intervention.

Previous research has examined the developmental trajectories in youth involved in the child welfare system, and the juvenile justice system. In a recent study, Herz et al. (2019) sought to determine the characteristics of dual system youth, and their pathways found persistent maltreatment adolescents are at the highest risk for delinquency. Pathways to the child welfare system for young children and involvement often continues into

adolescent years. Youth and juvenile pathways touch welfare system as adolescents rather

than young children indicate that maltreatment is either adolescent limited or unidentified

until they reach the juvenile justice system. Maltreatment, child welfare involvement, and

juvenile justice involvement are at an increased risk for homelessness, behavioral health

problems, and substance use (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson; 2007; Oliveira & Burke, 2009;

Morton et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2009).

In studies that examine homeless youth and patterns of deviance, studies showed

that youth were homeless for various reasons such as running away from abuse, aging out

of the child welfare system, and getting "kicked out." Homeless youth are typically

detached from pro-social relationships, have little contact with family, have young parents,

have maladaptive coping mechanisms, mental illness, experience academic failure and

conflict with the law. The nature of this lifestyle increases the likelihood that youth will

create bonds with other deviant peers, retreat from society, and engage in substance use and

survival criminal behavior that will create a pathway to the juvenile justice system.

Identifying with homeless culture and "the streets" through the process of acculturation

strengthens negative anti-social behavior (Thompson et al., 2009).

Survival criminal behavior can include engaging in survival sex for food, drugs, or

shelter, selling drugs, stealing, and shoplifting. Studies on runaways show that females

disproportionately engage in survival sex work and experience childhood sexual abuse

(Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007; Roe-Spowitz, 2012; Chen et al., 2007). According to

Roe-Sepowitz (2012), the average age that juveniles entered prostitution is 13 years old,

and on average, African American women are likely to engage at a younger age than white

women. Motivations to engage for survival sex work in juveniles include a need for money,

shelter, and a pimp for protection that increases the chances of developing post-traumatic

stress disorder, and substance use disorder (Roe-Sepowitz, 2012).

Previous research has sought to examine the impact of homeless youth diagnosed

with conduct disorder. Conduct disorder (CD) refers to a pattern of persistent antisocial and

aggressive behavior that is manifested in childhood or adolescence. Childhood-onset

conduct disorder is characterized by showing at least one symptom prior to the age of 10

years old. Symptoms include aggression to people and animals, destruction of property,

deceitfulness or theft, serious violations of rules, and limited prosocial emotions (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013). A study on childhood onset CD in homeless youth found

that over half of homeless youth had childhood onset conduct disorder (Chen et al., 2007).

Many youths reported delinquent survival strategies, but earlier onset adolescents reported

delinquency more frequently and in more serious forms including sexual strategies

especially for money and drugs, but also shelter (Chen et al., 2007). The study also

indicated that violent victimization was significantly more likely to occur for delinquent

homeless youth. Robbery is the most common form of victimization in homeless youth.

However, abuse from a family member or caretaker is shown to be a contributing factor in

the likelihood of a youth being abused on the street. Street exposure, or the duration of time

a juvenile has been homeless and adopted deviant survival strategies are also more likely to

experience violent victimization (Chen et al, 2007).

According to Moffitt, homeless youth with childhood onset conduct disorder are

more impulsive, short sighted, and aggressive. The pattern of behavior is reinforced on the

street, with the combined effect of having little social support and weak bonds to

conventional social institutions to buffer street life (Chen et al., 2007; Chen, 2016).

According to Patterson et al. (1989), parenting practices are significant in determining conduct disorders among children that can lead to chronic delinquent behavior in adolescence. Patterson's social learning theory was used examine victimization in homeless youth. Research has shown that homeless youth more prone to engage in delinquency resulting in situations where they are likely to be victimized. Under this framework, children and adolescents are raised in abusive homes in which they learn coercive behaviors and lack structure. As a result, the children run away from their home with negative attitudes toward authority. Adolescents are then more likely to be victimized physically, and sexually while on the streets (Terrell, 1997; Whitbeck & Simons,1993).

Current Research on "Couch Surfing" and "Doubling Up"

Couch surfing refers to individuals who are staying with friends or relatives who would otherwise be homeless. Whereas "doubling up" is defined as housing situations in which the head of household takes in other adults that have nowhere else to stay due to economic challenges (Curry et al., 2017). Over the past several years, the research on homeless youth has dedicated attention to including youth who are couch surfing or doubled up. Early research primarily focused on homeless youth who were living on the streets, shelters, and detached from the education system (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992). Currently, there is still a lack of research that focuses on the conditions in which youth are couch surfing or doubled, and the relationships they have with their hosts (Curry et al., 2021). This section provides a brief overview of the prevalence of homeless youth, correlates, and current research on the couch surfing experiences of youth samples.

On a single night in 2020, the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated 37,599 unaccompanied youth and young adults under the age of 24 were experiencing homelessness nationwide (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2021). This estimate is based off the Point in Time (PIT) Count of 2020. The PIT Count is a national count of homelessness that is required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to deliver and allocate funding to programs that support the homeless community. On a specific night in January, service providers and community volunteers survey the homeless population to obtain these estimates. However, the methodology of the Point in Time count has raised questions on whether these estimates are accurate in estimating youth homeless as it largely relies on the street and shelter-based identification. This form of identification excludes youth who are couch surfing, sleeping in remote locations, and avoiding services (Morton et al., 2017).

The prevalence research and national data on homeless youth who experience couch surfing is limited. The most comprehensive national count of homeless youth to date is the Voice of Youth Count that had been conducted between the years of 2015 and 2017. This count examines the size and demographic characteristics of runaway and homeless youth population, contributing factors in youth becoming homeless, services and strategies they use to survive, and the role of federal policies and programs in addressing their needs (Morton et al., 2017, 2018). According to the Voices of Youth Count (VYC) conducted out of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, approximately 5.3% of households in their national sample with a 13-to-17-year-old reported some experience of homelessness. In households with young adults ages 18-25, 21% reported experiencing homelessness, and the majority reported couch surfing experiences. The authors estimated in a 12-month

period, 1 in 10 or 3.5 million young adults experienced a form of homelessness. The

prevalence of couch surfing experiences only within this sample is approximately half of

this estimate. There is also evidence of a considerable overlap in young adults experiencing

literal homelessness and couch surfing. Approximately 65% of respondents in this sample

reported homelessness also reported couch surfing (Samuels et al., 2019; Morton et al.,

2017; Morton et al., 2017). Recent research has found that couch surfing is relatively

common in young adults between the ages 18-25 and can serve as a precursor to entrenched

homelessness. A survey of American households with youth ages 18-25 found 21%

included an emerging adult who had couch surfed within the past 12 months that suggests

housing insecurity occurs when occurs in meaningful patterns among subgroups of

emerging adults (Fowler et al., 2019).

Recent studies that examined the policy surrounding youth homelessness shed light

on varying federal definitions of homelessness that can potentially impact youth who are

not literally homeless in eligibility for services. Housing stability is often conceptualized by

stakeholders as a continuum of severity. Under this notion, youth who are couch surfing or

doubling up may not be eligible for services because their circumstances are not as severe

as youth who are sleeping on the streets or at a shelter (Fowler et al., 2019). Federally

funded programs that provide housing services to homeless youth may have different

eligibility criteria depending on how homelessness is defined. Federal legislation ultimately

leaves discretion to the state and non-governmental agency and even intake workers to

determine eligibility (Edwards, Torgerson, & Sattem, 2009; Osborne, 2019).

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (2019), youth

who are couch surfing can be considered "homeless" under category 3. Category 3

homelessness is defined as an unaccompanied youth under the age of 25, or families with

children who do not otherwise qualify under homeless definitions, who are defined as

homeless through other statutes such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (amended

in 2008). Therefore, it was not until 2008 where youth who were couch surfing could be

considered homeless by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Federal definitions encompass some important aspects of youth homelessness.

These definitions include literal homelessness (on the street), transitional housing or

sheltered, and specifically includes couch surfing or doubling up. However, current policies

use different definitions to determine eligibility for homeless services among young adults.

For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development definition for

homeless service eligibility is explained as youth aged 18-24 in an emergency shelter,

receiving short term housing assistance, literal homelessness- lacking a regular place to

sleep, in a shelter, facing imminent eviction, or fleeing domestic violence. The Runaway

and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) outlines eligibility for services through the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services. This definition is described as the inability to

live safely with a relative under the age of 21. U.S. Department of Education definition in

Every Student Succeeds act of 2015 counts youth and families who reside with others

because they cannot afford to live elsewhere, which includes "doubling up" or "couch

surfing."

Definitions of homelessness determine eligibility for resources but lack empirically

sound assessment and screening tools to determine who is eligible. Federal eligibility

criteria all share the same assumption that housing problems fall on continuum of severity

or risk. Under this assumption, youth only receive services when they experience literal

homelessness. Youth in less severe levels of homelessness remain ineligible and the lack of empirical evidence on whether these thresholds adequately assess need for housing services that affect policy initiatives and current services (Fowler et al., 2019, Morton et al., 2017; Samuels et al., 2019).

The Voices of Youth Count (VYC) also indicates that rural communities are also deeply affected when providing homeless services to youth. Rural service providers tend to be under resourced as opposed to urban agencies. Homeless youth organizations typically are left up to non-governmental organization and public schools to services them and they typically only address one dimension of the homeless problem such as providing food or counseling, and there is a lack of coordination between these organizations and government stakeholders. This finding is consistent with a qualitative study conducted by Edwards, Togerson, and Sattem (2009), that interviewed social service providers and homeless youth in a rural county in the Northwest, draw insights about the challenges of providing social services in a rural county. This study was also one of the few that examined the circumstances of youth who were homeless and the conditions in which they had couch surfed. When youth and providers were asked, circumstances of homelessness were typically caused by the parents using drugs and not the homeless youth. Participants reported that it was common for dealers to offer unaccompanied youth a place to sleep, take showers, and a sense of safety in hopes of accessing under-age users. This form of couch surfing can also lead to greater risk of sexual abuse. One youth in this sample reported exchanging sex for food and shelter after getting hooked on meth. Middle school aged girls were getting primed for prostitution through pornography and sexual abuse

before getting pimped out and in some cases be engaging in these acts with their mother where they stayed at flophouses.

A recent qualitative study conducted by Curry et al. (2021) was the first and only study to examine the relationships between youth who are couch surfing and their hosts and to interview hosts directly. The study sampled nine youth in a Midwestern state from the ages 17-23, and ten adult hosts. The authors sought to examine the process in which youth found their hosts, the type of support youth received from their hosts, and the relationship between the youth and their hosts. The study sampled hosts to gain their perspective on the housing situation to address the gaps in research. The authors argued that previous research has shed a negative light and yield mixed results on housing situations in youth who are couch surfing. The most noteworthy finding to this study was that the relationships between a host and youth in the sample were mostly positive and hosts in this sample served as a primary informal social support for their youth occupants. The study also suggested that the arrangements were primarily initiated by a third party or long-term connection such as an agency, close friend, or relative. The results from the study challenges previous literature on couch surfing that postulate the connotation that couch surfing is inherently a negative experience for youth and young adults.

History of The Homeless System and Policies Enacted for Youth Homelessness

The history of housing the low-income and homeless is tenacious. Although this study aims to address the systemic gaps when responding to youth who experience levels of housing instability, it is equally important to examine the developmental history of homeless youth policy and practice. This section is devoted to providing an overview on the overall government response to homelessness and to demonstrate how it has been

largely influenced by conflicting political powers. The history in which we respond to the overall homeless population shaped how the government responded to homeless youth populations, and those roots continue to hold sway in modern policy and practice (Ausikaitis et al, 2015).

The response to the influx of visible homelessness and inner-city neighborhoods involves a partisan policy cycle in which ideologies shift from social welfarism to neoliberalism (Barak, 1992; Wilson, 1987). Conservative and liberal ideologies take different approaches in responding to homelessness, and conflict as to its existence in the first place. Conservative perspectives have historically viewed unhoused populations to result from a free-rider problem and welfarist policies introduced by the Democratic party (Barak, 1992). This perspective takes an individualist approach, because homelessness is perceived because of one's flawed individual character, or lack of motivation to succeed. Conservative responses take a neoliberalist approach that firmly argue that the government should not play a role in the housing market. In contrast, liberal ideologies have historically acknowledged that various institutions such as politics, economy, and social ties affect homelessness. This perspective takes a structural approach, because homelessness is perceived to result from economic recession, scarce low-income housing, deinstitutionalization, and a lack of jobs (Barak,1992; Kyle, 2005). However, liberal responses take a social welfare approach that promotes short-term public funding and economic safety nets to aid in homelessness that fail to address larger social structures that contribute to homelessness (Barak, 1992).

In the late 1980s, many public subsidized low-income housing complexes, and single resident occupancy (SRO) hotels began to shut down. Public low-income housing

was demolished and replaced with luxury high-rise condominiums in inner cities. Many

were left without affordable housing and were displaced to the streets. With inner cities

under pressure to remedy visible homelessness, there became an increased reliance on

emergency shelters, and a new shelter service complex. Temporary shelters during this

time were described as not only being insufficient and costly but were also known for

having such poor conditions that they were comparable to public mental institutions of the

19th century. Sleeping conditions were generally overcrowded with minimal access to

restrooms, showers, and cooking facilities (Beckett & Herbert, 2010). By the end of 1990,

the shelter industry had significantly increased. The new shelter system expanded with

more expensive intake facilities and long-term transitional shelters for families. Many of

these facilities and housing programs required the residents to maintain sobriety. There had

been a more significant growth to the shelter industrial complex where there had been an

increased demand of professions such as social workers, shelter staff, and managers (Barak,

1992). New York City had experienced increasing levels of homelessness that the city

resorted to the expansion of mega-shelters. Alongside the shelter industrial complex,

became the demand for other services for the homeless such as programs that included

mental health programs, substance use, emergency food, long-term housing, and job

training. The federal government addressed this demand through the passage of the

McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, signed into law in 1987, and the Interagency Council

on the Homeless, which was reauthorized in 1988. These laws called for the review and

evaluation of Federal programs and for the dissemination of information and improvements

to local governments and non-profit agencies (Barak, 1992; Holtzman, 2019).

The homeless management system in the United States has shifted away from a "housing readiness" scheme that implemented strict sobriety requirements in order to qualify for a subsidy. Instead, there has been a shift to a "housing first" philosophy that prioritizes placing individuals into homes while simultaneously providing services for mental illness and substance use and adheres to a harm reduction model. Advocates for a housing first approach provided government organizations with a set of directives to "set a path to end homelessness." The housing first approach was adopted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness in 2006, a nationwide federation of private, public, nonprofit organizations devoted to ending homelessness. A revised system for determining housing eligibility at the service provider level was adapted across the United States (Osborne, 2019).

Typically, a "housing first" approach to homelessness is implemented in private or non-profit organizations that assist chronically homeless individuals with supportive housing and wide variety of other supportive services for the individual entering that housing project. Under U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development criteria, to be considered for supportive housing, an individual must provide proof of a disabling condition and provide proof of chronic or episodic homelessness. Eligibility is determined by the vulnerability and the homeless status of the individual (Nooe & Patterson, 2010; Osborne, 2019).

Housing first has been incorporated in both long-term and short-term supportive housing. More recently, short-term housing programs have shown positive outcomes in assisting homeless individuals (Brown et al., 2017; Holtschneider, 2016). Rapid re-housing is a form of short-term supportive housing program that is cost-effective and provides

temporary housing and supportive case management services to counter homelessness. A study on rapid re-housing programs among homeless youth found that the average wait time to be housed in a rapid re-housing program is approximately 131 days (Hsu et al., 2019). The same study also found that most youth housed though rapid re-housing were highly vulnerable and youth that were couch surfing did not meet the eligibility criteria and were therefore less likely to be housed through a rapid re-housing program (Hsu et al, 2019).

An ethnography conducted by Osborne (2019) at a nonprofit housing organization found that normative beliefs and cultural expectations of case managers, intake specialists, and other members of a homeless organization, on the vulnerability of an individual, is a significant determinant on whether they will be deemed "eligible" and be granted the opportunity to be assigned to a subsidized housing project. Osbourne (2019) argues that these beliefs are problematic because these preconceived notions produce barriers for those who are deemed "ineligible" and creates a system where being just homeless is no longer enough to access services when they do not fall within certain target populations such as women and children, veterans, elderly, or disabled.

Federal polices addressing homelessness date back to the Civil War and the Great Depression, but youth homeless prevention policies were enacted in the 1970s. In 1974, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act was enacted, and the Runaway and Homeless Youth program (RHY) was established. These were the first federal programs to focus specifically on homeless youth. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) was officially enacted in 1977 through the Department of Health and Human Services. This landmark legislation provides funding to states and local organizations to implement

services that include mental health, shelter, education support, drop-in center, and street

outreach services to runaway and homeless youth.

After RHYA had been passed, there had been several amendments to definitions of

eligibility to include circumstances of housing instability and to ensure eligibility until the

age of 21. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was enacted in 1987 to address

the uptick in homelessness and address the social barriers to families with children that are

homeless. McKinney-Vento was reauthorized in 2002 as a part of the No Child Left Behind

Act through the Department of Education that allowed for homeless youth to have the same

access to education as non-homeless students in order to overcome intergenerational

poverty and high dropout rates. The provisions to the McKinney-Vento Act mandate

schools to enroll students that disclose their homeless status without requiring self-

identification. The act also provides funding to school districts for supportive services to

homeless students such as transportation and social services in the school system.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004 revised McKinney-Vento to

include evaluations and accommodations for homeless students with disabilities. Ausikaitis

et al. (2015) argue that there are several shortcomings to the McKinney-Vento Act. One

shortcoming is that it relies on students to disclose to the school that they are homeless.

This could be a potential barrier if the students chose not to disclose this information to the

school. Another shortcoming is that many school districts lack the necessary funding to

successfully provide services to all the homeless youth in their school district. Without

these resources, youth are likely become detached from their education and drop out. In

2009, the Homeless Emergency and Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act

(HEARTH) redefined the supportive services available to youth and offered federal

guidelines ensure youth have access to both shelter and school services defined in

McKinney-Vento. The HEARTH Act defines homelessness and eligibility, as well as data

collection and reporting requirements to the Department of Housing and Urban

Development.

Through McKinney-Vento, the Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law in

2015. This extension mandates the Department of Education to approve funding plans, and

more services to address educational barriers. These services include more mechanisms to

identify homeless students and McKinney-Vento liaisons to coordinate child welfare

services, retention, and staff training (Curry et al., 2017; Fowler et al., 2017; Morton et al.,

2018; Rahman et al., 2015). The literature shows that there have been substantial

improvements throughout the years to support youth who are homeless or at risk of

becoming homeless. However, the legislation that has been passed does not address the

systems that impact homelessness in emerging adulthood; the child welfare and the

juvenile justice systems.

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Involvement Among Homeless Youth

The child welfare system often refers to child serving institutions and services that

are responsible for the removal and placement of children from their home. Such

placements can include foster care, temporary custody of a legal guardian, or a group

home. Referrals to the child welfare system often involve reported abuse, maltreatment, or

neglect of a child. However, the juvenile justice system also has the jurisdiction to remove

children from their home and make out of home of placements. Juvenile courts will order

out of home placements in situations of escalating behavior in the home that results in

violating probation (Irvine & Canfield, 2016; Wylie, 2014).

In the United States, there is approximately 407,493 children in foster care. In the past year, approximately 224,396 children exited the foster care system. Of those children who exited the foster care, approximately 20,000 emerging adults have aged out of the foster care system (United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Youth who have crossed over from the child welfare system into the criminal justice system are referred to as "Crossover youth." Youth who have both been in contact with the child welfare system and juvenile justice system are referred to as "dual system youth." Previous research establishes a clear association between youth involved in the child welfare entering the juvenile justice system, and the adult criminal justice system (Herz et al., 2019; Lee & Ballew, 2018, Simmons-Horton, 2020).

A study conducted by Herz et al. (2019) examined the pathways of crossover youth into each system. The study found that dually involved youth experience the highest average number of out of home placements and recidivism. Youth who experience persistent maltreatment within the child welfare system are at a higher risk for delinquency and crossing over to the juvenile justice system. Crossover youth are at increased risk for homelessness, adult incarceration, and unemployment. Frequent out of home placements in the child welfare system are also significant predictors in these negative outcomes. The authors suggest cross system collaboration and limiting out of home placements is necessary preventing negative outcomes. When examining system involvement in young adults experiencing homelessness across 7 U.S. cities, 57% of young adults in the sample reported having been exposed to either the juvenile justice system, the child welfare system, or both systems. Results showed dual status youth were more likely to have higher child trauma scores, a lifetime mental health diagnosis, and have higher odds of trading

sex, being arrest after the age of 18, and substance use. However, risk factors associated with system involvement significant vary based on the type of system exposure (Narendorf et al., 2019). Although there is a growing body of research that examine the risk factors associated with dual system youth and crossover youth, there is a lack of empirical research available that examines causal factors and potential buffers.

There are significant policy gaps between the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system as a result of attempts to address growing concerns of emerging adults who age out of the foster care system when they turn 18 and lack additional support. Previous research suggests that youth who remain in care after turning 18 tend to have a greater likelihood of positive outcomes than those who exit the system when turning 18. Many experience challenges across many domains in sustaining employment, education, familial social support, and social integration that are vital aspects in the transition into adulthood (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 was established to provide federal funding to foster care services beyond an emerging adult's eighteenth birthday. However, states have discretion on whether to utilize the funding and extend a child's benefits. In addition, there is a clause that requires youth receiving funds must be assisted with a comprehensive transition plan into adulthood. This provision potentially results in the exclusion of many youths who are incarcerated or under supervision by the juvenile justice system to receive financial resources and ongoing support. Consequently, emerging adults are "exited" from the child welfare system into another system of care- the penal system (Schelbe, 2010; Wiley, 2014).

It is no surprise that there are racial and ethnic disparities that exist in the child welfare system and juvenile justice system. There is an entrenched history of

institutionalized racism and oppression in America that has resulted in the mass

incarceration of African Americans (Alexander, 2011). Disproportionate minority contact

(DMC) refers to the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority youth in the juvenile

justice system in proportion to the general population, even when controlling for legal and

extralegal factors. In a systematic review of 94 empirical studies that examine youth

processed in the juvenile justice system, the study found small effects of race and ethnicity

in some stages of juvenile justice processing such as detention adjudication, and placement.

However, race and ethnicity were not shown to have an effect in other stages of juvenile

justice system processing (Zane & Pupo, 2021). The juvenile justice system exists under

the assumption that youth are not considered as culpable for their criminal behavior as

adults, and therefore deserve rehabilitation as opposed to punishment (Zane et al., 2022).

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system often experience economic disadvantage,

abuse and neglect, addiction, and mental illness. Courts will serve youth by requiring

behavioral health treatment services and providing resources to fund treatment services for

justice involved youth. African American and Latinx justice involved youth are less likely

to receive such services (White, 2019).

There are several theoretical explanations for disproportionate minority contact.

One explanation is referred to as differential patterns of offending in minority groups that

lead to a disproportionate number of arrests. A second explanation for disproportionate

minority contact is referred to as differential treatment in which minorities are

overrepresented in the juvenile justice system as a result of a race-related selection bias

stemming from discriminatory practices and stereotypes. Another theoretical explanation as

to why Black juvenile defendants are less likely to be diverted to treatment and more likely

to have a punitive outcome may stem from a differential age attribution. In turn, Black youth may be perceived as "aging faster" than white youth resulting in more punitive sanction (Zane et al., 2022). Campbell et al. (2018) sought to examine the interactions between race, gender, and risk assessment scores on the risk for recidivism. They found that Black males were more likely to recidivate than White males even though risk assessment scores were less predictive and there was no significant difference to the initial crimes committed prior to court. The authors suggest that there could be potential shortcomings in which risk for recidivism is examined and that minority youth tend to receive less treatment services for prevention than White youth.

Previous scholars suggest there is an overrepresentation of African American children in the foster care system. Consequently, a disparity in treatment within the child welfare system exists for minority children. In regard to African American parents with child welfare experiences involving child removals, many report a profound lack of trust with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), overwhelming trauma, concentrated poverty, physical and mental health challenges, and a sense of social isolation that contribute their child being removed from the home. Living in an unsafe neighborhood, lack of financial resources for childcare, transportation, medical expenses, and living expenses can contribute to the decision to remove a child from the home. However, negative and punitive interactions with the child welfare system exacerbate the chances of children being removed. Additionally, parents emphasized the need for proper investigations and more effective communication in communications because investigations often rely on second-hand information (Kokaliari et al., 2019). Although reunification with children and their families is considered the most ideal outcome in many

child welfare cases, there are racial and ethnic disparities that exist in family reunifications. However, the effect on race and ethnicity can vary depending on the circumstances of the parents (LaBrenz et al., 2021).

Irvine and Canfield (2016) examined the disproportionality of LGBQ, gender nonconforming, and transgender youth that crossover from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system. Results from the study showed that LGBQ or gender nonconforming and trans youth are three times more likely to have been removed from their home and five times more likely to be placed in a group home or foster care than straight and gender conforming youth. Gender nonconforming and transgender youth are at an even greater risk of being removed from their homes and placed in the juvenile justice system. The authors suggest could experience higher rates of abuse and conflict with their parents. In turn, they are more likely to report running away or being kicked out of their home prior to placement in the juvenile justice system. The findings to this study also confirmed a significant relationship between the intersectionality of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. About 20% of the participants within the study identified as LGBQ, gender nonconforming, or transgender. Out of youth who reported being LGBQ, gender nonconforming or transgender, roughly 85% were youth of color. The findings of this study support the existing research that establish links between family rejection of LGBTQ+ youth, child welfare involvement, homelessness, survival crimes, and juvenile justice involvement.

The relationship between homelessness and juvenile justice involvement can be perceived as tautological. Homeless youth are more likely to engage in survival street crime and encounter police and the juvenile justice system (Hoy et al., 2016; McCarthy &

Hagan,1995; Snow et al., 1989). On the other hand, youth who are being released from custody are subjected to social and legal barriers and deviant labels that make them more susceptible to end up homeless. The barriers and labels coupled with individualized factors such as experiences of trauma, lack of support, mental illness, and negative coping mechanisms exacerbate chances of negative outcomes such as homelessness (Inderbitzen, 2009; Quirouette et al., 2016).

To date, there are no empirical studies that examine whether there is a causal relationship between the criminal justice system and subsequent homelessness in which homelessness is measured as a dependent variable. In most published studies, homelessness is typically measured as a possible risk outcome associated with having prior criminal justice involvement, or an indicator of either criminal or deviant behavior and arrest (Baron, 1999; Hoy et al., 2016; Ramchand et al., 2009; Shillington et al., 2011). Homelessness can strain successful community re-entry and can increase the likelihood of recidivism. There are individual and structural level contributing factors that can affect a successful re-entry and preventing recidivism. Studies in adults with criminal justice backgrounds have shown that keys to reintegration include providing resources to ex-offenders, establishing institutional and community anchors, social support, and personal motivation to change their lifestyle (Salem et al., 2021; Valera et al., 2017). However, there is limited empirical support on the correlational effects of the juvenile justice system and youth homelessness.

Juvenile justice involvement can limit the opportunities to secure housing as there are often restrictions associated with having a criminal record (Quirouette et al., 2016). Homeless youth who have prior involvement with the juvenile justice system face barriers

that can contribute to cycles of instability, offending, and victimization. Predictive factors associated with housing instability and homelessness in young adulthood include limited social support, prior system involvement or abuse, low educational achievement, behavioral health issues, and childhood homelessness (Fowler et al., 2019).

In emerging adults with juveniles transitioning into adulthood and out of a juvenile correction facility, participants reported that successful re-entry was one of the most significant challenges they have faced. Social barriers associated exiting the juvenile justice system involve familial support and relationships with others. Often youth involved in the justice system lack emotional support from family members, and barriers increase when family members are also involved in the criminal justice system. Research on juveniles exiting the justice system showed that they were associated with the same peer networks upon release. Other social barriers include lack of community resources or activities, and the lack of affordable housing (Inderbitzin, 2009; Unruh, Povenmire-Kirk, & Yamamoto, 2009).

Ramchand, Morral, and Becker (2009) found in a longitudinal study of adolescent offenders after 87 months two thirds reported re-offending, almost half had spent time in jail within the previous 90 days, one third reported hard drug use, 59% had completed high school or GED, 14% reported being homeless at some point the previous year, and only 34% reported being employed full time. Conditions of homelessness were not measured in this study. The study found that juvenile rehabilitation shows to have a significant positive short-term outcome, but not long-term outcomes.

Homeless youth and justice involved youth often face tremendous legal barriers. These barriers include lacking the resources for emancipation, having to provide

documentation to show that they are homeless, and accessing higher education. Juvenile

justice histories can increase legal burden. In some cases, homelessness triggers actions

that contribute to youth to encounter the criminal justice system. For example, homeless

youth are at an increased risk to engage in criminal activities in exchange for food, drugs,

or shelter (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Chen et al., 2007; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Oliveira

& Burke, 2009). Other legal barriers can influence youth reporting their housing status.

Homeless youth may not report that they are couch surfing because it is crime to harbor a

runaway, and they also do not want to be penalized for running away from home.

Washington State statute grants immunity for those who report a runaway within 8 hours of

learning their runway status (RCW § 13. 32A.080). However, if the person who has taken

in a runaway has a previous record, warrant, or is engaging in criminal behavior it is not

likely they will report to police (Vissing, 2012).

Youth that have experiences with both the child welfare system and juvenile justice

system are at a great risk for homelessness. There are related public health risks associated

with crossover youth and youth homelessness that include victimization, risky sexual

behavior, substance use, mental illness, and physical health challenges. The chances of

homeless youth encountering the juvenile justice system are greater with these

individualized factors. Many offenses associated with homeless youth are considered status

offenses. For example, homeless youth who have a substance use disorder are at an

increased risk for incarceration for drug dealing or possession. Youth who are addicted to

illicit substances commonly participate in subsequent low-level dealing (Hoy et al., 2016).

In homeless youth who are involved in the justice system, there are substantially higher

rates of mental illness than among those youth being treated in the mental health system.

The literature covered in this section confirm that there is a significant gap in collaboration between the systems serving this vulnerable population, and there are significant challenges in identifying youth that are homelessness in the school system and within juvenile courts (Britton & Pilnik, 2018; Walker et al., 2018).

This current study attempts to identify the housing conditions in young adults that have reported experiences of couch surfing. Using a qualitative methodology, this study will examine the interactions between the service gaps, housing instability, and deviant peer associations. Service providers at local community organization are utilized in this sample to assess the barriers that are faced when serving youth that are not considered literally homeless.

Chapter 3
Methods

The present study aims to address the gaps in previous research in youth who report that they are "couch surfing." The previous literature indicates that there is a need to examine the conditions in which youth are labeled as being unstably housed. To evaluate the prominence of couch surfing and systemic gaps in housing policy, this study takes on a blended sample approach. This study examines Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data from young adults who are seeking homeless supportive services. Previous research has used HMIS data to predict housing outcomes in adults seeking temporary housing services (Brown et al., 2017). The second sample consists of case managers, peer outreach specialists, program managers, and other community providers who provide housing services to youth and young adults. Data collection occurred within a four-month window between October 2021 and January 2022. The present study took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic when the United States had experienced the first case in January of 2020. Both state and federal levels of government had initiated policies to address the spreading virus. In March of the same year, a state-wide shutdown went into effect in the state of Washington that resulted in many losing their primary sources of income, unemployment, and eviction (State of Washington Office of the Governor, 2020). In order to combat the rising instances of poverty, stimulus checks were issued by the federal government, federal loans were frozen, and eviction moratoriums went into effect. In 2021, Washington State signed Senate Bill 5160 into legislation. This bill restricts landlords from charging late fees for rent as well as prohibits them from filing unlawful detainer actions if a tenant was unable to pay rent from March 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021 (S. 5160, 2021). The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

reports 747,940 COVID-19 related deaths as of November 2021(Center for Disease

Control and Prevention, 2021; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021). The COVID-19

pandemic affected the health and economic stability of many. However, the present study

collects measures whether COVID-19 was a significant determinant in a young adult's

housing instability or criminal offending.

The study uses two primary frameworks of qualitative inquiry to address the following

research questions. The first level of qualitative inquiry follows a phenomenology

framework in order to capture the lived experiences of couch surfing individuals and their

interactions with social institutions (Patton, 2015). Under the phenomenological

framework, couch surfing is the phenomenon in which the subject will be asked to illicit

meanings to their reflective experiences. The open-ended questions are designed to

transform the phenomenon and follow a service theory framework in order to examine the

boundaries and interrelationships between various complex systems (Patton, 2015). The

interview questions with service providers assess the homeless management system,

juvenile justice system, and the child welfare system, and their interpretation of how these

systems function.

1. What are the common couch surfing experiences in young adults?

In order to assess the common couch surfing experiences in young adults, social service

providers were asked the following questions: *Have any of your clients reported they have*

couch surfed? Have any of your clients reported couch surfing with people they do not

know? Can you think of situations where you think this may have been a safety concern?

Why and how? Do you think illegal activity is involved in these circumstances and/ or

frequent involvement with the justice system? Can you explain why or why not? These

questions were asked to service providers in order to determine whether the experiences of youth and young adults is positive, or whether there are potential safety risks associated with couch surfing that could be underreported.

2. Are housing interventions and services readily available for young adults in undesirable couch surfing arrangements?

In order to examine whether there is recommended policy improvements, social service providers were asked how they would handle cases in which young adults report they are couch surfing, and how their processes can improve. Social service providers were asked: *What can be done to help clients when confronted with this situation? Can you identify any barriers that are common in youth and young adults that are couch surfing? Where in your line of work do you think can improve? If working in the housing system, how do you think the housing system can improve for those that are couch surfing?*

3. Did the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to couch surfing experiences and service gaps in community organizations?

Lastly, this study occurred during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in which many experienced economic hardship, and potentially housing instability in homelessness. It is anticipated that the pandemic impacted not only the ability to provide services to young adults, but also their overall number of cases on an assigned caseload. Social service providers were asked two questions: *Has COVID-19 affect your ability to provide services to the community? If so, how? Do you think COVID-19 contributed to youth and young adults experiencing unstable housing circumstances such as couch surfing or doubling up? If you have witnessed this firsthand, can you name an example?*

Methodology

   The present study utilizes an exploratory methodology to examine retrospective recollections of service providers that provide services to young adults with experiences couch surfing. Data was collected through qualitative in-depth interviews with community service providers. Interviewing took place virtually either via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, after the process of consent was completed then the interview questions were asked (See Appendix B) to the service provider participants.

Sampling and Recruitment

   Following review and approval from Seattle University Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were selected and interviewed between the months of October 2021 and January of 2022. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The sample included social service providers in both Pierce County and King County who frequently serve youth and young adults who are couch surfing. Once service providers were identified for qualitative interviews, they could also provide referrals for their young adult clients or other providers. If a participant chooses to enroll, then the informed consent process took place remotely.

   Potential subjects were recruited through social service agencies and word of mouth. Social service providers were selected through referrals and online searches of local non-profit organizations. Advertisement posts were also made on LinkedIn. Emails were sent to 62 selected non-profit service providers that asked if they would like to participate in a research study about their clients and reported experiences of homelessness from October 2021 to February 2022. Social services providers were also contacted via phone

call. If a provider responded to the email or phone call, then the provider participant was contacted to consent to the study and enroll.

In order to ensure recommended practices for semi-structed interviewing were followed, social services were provided with the consent form, estimated timeframe of the interview, and the number of questions they would be asked and the nature of those questions prior to the interview (Adams, 2015). Social service providers were provided a copy of the recruitment flyer, and an email was sent regarding referring their clients to take part in the study. Social service providers will also be made aware that referring their clients is completely voluntary and they can decline at any time and without any consequence. Clients were provided contact information to participate in the study and can reach out regarding any questions about the study. If the client subject is interested, then the principal investigator will set up a time to go over the consent form and set up an interview. Following their interview, they were encouraged to refer other young adults they know to participate in the study with understanding that referring other participants is completely voluntary. A total of four social service providers (n=4) were interviewed, and no young adults were interviewed.

Consenting

Participants were consented virtually and orally. Once a participant made contact and confirmed they were interested in moving forward with the study, then their basic information will be collected to send them the copy of the consent form and to schedule a time to review the consent form. Oral consent is provided when the participant confirmed that they understand the components in the consent form and that they would like to move forward with the interview.

Data Collection

      After the sample of youth social services providers have been identified, they will

be asked if they would like to participate in qualitative semi-structured interview. Interview

questions for the social services providers will be related to their experiences of serving

youth and young adults that are couch surfing and will be asked to report any common

systematic barriers with their clients such as obtaining permanent housing, access to

community resources, and frequent involvement with the criminal justice system. Social

services providers were asked to identify whether their client's couch surfing experiences

are pro-social or anti-social, and whether they were in contact with other support networks

for the client. In pro-social couch surfing experiences in young adults, the dynamic

between the host and guest is relatively positive. The host may be a close friend or relative

and provide emotional and/or financial support that allow them to excel in other areas. In

anti-social couch surfing experience, the dynamic between the host and the guest is

negative. Such experiences can include trafficking, or criminal activity in exchange for free

housing. Hosts are either strangers, acquaintances, friends, or family to the guest. However,

the relationship dynamic between the guest and their host may not be perceived as

negative. In turn, they may be less likely to report their couch surfing experience.

      The purpose of these targeted questions is to identify the systematic barriers that are

associated with youth and young adults that are couch surfing, whether the providers are

aware of their couch surfing situation, associated criminal behavior, and whether clients

that have a criminal history are being provided wraparound services. Wraparound services

would be conceptualized by whether a case manager or assigned worker is in frequent

contact with other assigned service workers such as a probation officer, behavioral health

provider, or school counselors for their client.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews with service providers were recorded and

transcribed. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to over an hour. Once the interviews

were transcribed, they were analyzed and interpreted using an inductive method of analysis

(Patton, 2015). Given the small sample, data was first collected and assessed for patterns

and themes between each specific response from the participant. Common themes found

across interview questions and between the participants generated patterns and were

outlined in the results.

Integration of HMIS Data

This study integrates data from the King County Homeless Management

Information System (HMIS) to supplement the interviews with service providers and

capture data from young adults in King County who were experiencing housing instability

or homelessness during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data was obtained from

King County Human Services. The data was inclusive of all young adults in King County

from ages 18-25 that have entered the homeless system in King County from January 2020

to December 2021. Data had been updated to include their most recent entry to a homeless

program. Specific variables that were analyzed were data elements from Runaway and

Homeless Youth (RHY) funded program (Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, 1978).

Variables included prior child welfare or foster care involvement, prior juvenile justice

involvement, school status, employment status, and sexual orientation that are presented in the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS) Version 28.0. To answer the research questions and supplement the service provider interview data to include data from young adults experiencing housing instability, statistical analysis was completed in two parts. First, the HMIS data was analyzed in SPSS to show frequency and percentages of young adults for each variable. Variables were separated into demographic characteristics, risk indicators, protective factors, and housing variables. Missing or blank categories were excluded from the count. Demographic characteristics include race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Risk indicator variables include disability status, former foster care involvement, and former juvenile justice involvement. Protective factor variables include school status and employment status. Housing variables include residence prior to project entry and the relationship to the head of household. Second, a chi-square test was conducted to determine if there were statistical differences in self-reported residences prior to homeless project entry in young adult according to sociodemographic characteristics and prior system involvement. Blank and missing responses and instances where responses were Client doesn't know, Client Refused, and Data Not Collected were excluded from the bi-variate analysis. However, the three responses were included in the univariate descriptive analysis.

Measures

Sociodemographic Variables. All demographic information of young adults was collected from HMIS data. Gender was coded into three groups where 1= transgender, questioning, or a gender other than singularly male or female (e.g., non-binary, genderfluid, agender,

culturally specific gender), 2= Female, and 3= Male. Sexual Orientation had been coded

into two groups where 1=Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Other, Questioning/Unsure (LGBQ), and

2= Heterosexual. Race was recoded into six categories where 1= American Indian, Alaska

Native, or Indigenous, 2= Asian or Asian American, 3= Black, African American, or

African, 4= multi-Racial, 5=Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 6= White.

Prior System Involvement. Prior system involvement was measured by whether the young

adult respondents reported either "Yes" or "No" to being formerly a ward of a child

welfare/foster care agency or juvenile justice system. Prior juvenile justice involvement

was recoded into two categories where 1= No prior involvement, 2= Prior involvement.

Similarly, prior foster care involvement was recoded into categories where 1= No prior

involvement and 2= prior involvement.

Prior Living Situation. Prior living situation was measured as a key indicator variable in the

chi-square test. The respondent's residence prior to entry was recoded into four categories-

1= homeless, 2= housed, 3= couch surfing, and 4= jail, foster care, or other institution.

Participants were categorized as homeless if they reported their prior living situation as

being either in an emergency shelter, RHY-funded host home shelter, hotel or motel, or

place not meant for habitation (e.g., a vehicle, abandoned building, a subway/train/bus

station/ airport, or anywhere outside). Young adult respondents were categorized as housed

if they reported their prior residence as being in interim housing, owned property with or

without ongoing subsidy, rental property with or without ongoing subsidy or voucher,

residential project or halfway house without homeless criteria, Safe Haven, or being in

transitional housing for homeless persons. Young adults were categorized as couch surfing

if they reported either staying or living in a family member's room, apartment or house,

staying or living in a friend's room, apartment or house, or in a host-home. Lastly, the jail,

foster care, or other institution residence category was inclusive of young adults that

reported their prior living situation of being in jail, prison, or juvenile detention facility,

foster care or foster care group home, hospital or other residential non-psychiatric facility,

psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility, or substance abuse treatment facility or

detox center.

Chapter 4
Results

Service Provider Sample

A total of four (n=4) service providers were interviewed for this study from two Washington State counties over a three-month period. The service provider's experience with working with youth and young adults with housing instability ranged from three to twelve years. All participants reported that they work with youth and young adults experiencing housing barriers directly on a daily basis. All service provider participants reported varying responsibilities when asked about their position. When asked about their positions, one participant reported as independent living case manager for a nonprofit where they are responsible for providing services to foster youth from ages 15 to 23 in an independent living program. The services provided include assisting foster youth obtain housing, employment, education as well as teaching life skills such as budgeting. Many of the youth on their caseload experience homelessness, trauma, and sex-trafficking. Similarly, another participant reported working as a lead for homeless services at a non-profit providing outreach, housing, and life skill services to homeless or at-risk youth that age from 12 to 24 years old. One participant reported working with youth that were specifically court involved in connecting youth and their families to community resources. Whereas the fourth participant reported working as a senior program manager of transitional living in overseeing three transitional living programs that provide housing and case management services to young adult women and their children, as well as young families.

When asked about the frustrations associated with their line of work, almost all participants expressed they had frustration with the lack of resources, funding, affordable

housing, and the number of "hoops" or "red tape" that exists in accessing resources for

homeless youth. Some indicated that it even boiled down to the lack of accessibility of

information or ineffective communication among stakeholders. Overall, the frustrations

between services providers were unique to their roles and the services that are provided

within their program.

One participant described the impact of losing funding as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic. They reported that the lack of funding and not being able to provide housing to a

client affected the rapport with their client:

> "With COVID and my specific program, at first we were cut back a lot. So like
> financially to support most of our youth we usually have like $1200 per year, and
> when COVID hit in our fiscal year started again it got reduced to $500 per kid, and
> even then it was like "don't use all 500 'cause if we use 500 on every kid the money
> will run out really quickly" so that was just very scary but I mean that has kind of
> been fixed there's been like COVID relief things and now we have more money to
> spend. I guess that unknown of how much we have and how quickly resources
> change, and we run out of money and housing stuff. Like when COVID started for a
> lot of my youth we had these things called FUP vouchers which was great. They are
> like housing vouchers for foster youth. So, I was able to get like a lot of my kids who
> are like chronically homeless housed, but they basically didn't give us a cap to the
> number, and so we kept sending in referrals and I think I had five or six participants
> who we had already done the application. I'd collected like all of their Social
> Security, their ID, and all this stuff like send in, and I said sent it all in, and they
> replied back that like "these seven don't get it because we're out of vouchers" and so
> I had told these seven kids that like "you're going to be housed in like three months,
> like max" and then all of a sudden be like "Well OK sorry to have lied to you but I
> was lied to as well." So that's really frustrating. The worst part is having to tell them
> that like what you told them is incorrect, and they because direct service work like a
> lot of it is the rapport you build with your clients. Right, you know and so it like it
> ruins the rapport and they don't trust you and then they don't trust the resources you're
> getting that even if it's helpful, they stop like believing in you know and it's just that's
> the absolute worst part of it."

One participant reported frustration due to lack of resources specifically for

therapeutic support in their transitional living programs. Transitional Living Programs

(TLP) provide affordable housing and case management for residents for up to 24 months.

Following completion of the program, clients are expected to maintain their housing

independent of the support from the agency (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, 2020; Holtschneider, 2016). They advocated for the need of onsite mental health

support within transitional living programs because of the large barriers and traumas that

their clients experience in order to move toward self-sufficiency. The housing case

managers within the program are limited in providing such services because they are not

clinicians or therapists. Although clients may potentially benefit from mental health

services, coordinating childcare and transportation create significant barriers in attending

appointments. For example, the provider responded:

> "Yeah, something that our clients really need that we do not have the appropriate
> resources for are onsite therapeutic support. So, like therapists that is on site and part
> of the program team, to be providing to like so you can build some rapport with them,
> and kind of see them around and whatnot you know. So many of our clients have
> really negative histories with providers of any kind. So having somebody within our
> program that can build a rapport overtime but still provide therapeutic services and
> like active therapy versus the case management services that may team provides.
> They're not licensed therapists. So having that on site and available is the biggest gap
> that we have right now outside of not enough affordable housing to have people
> move into, and you know they have kids and chaos that they're comfortable in, and
> transportation issues. So having the therapist available on site reduces so many
> barriers to actually working on their mental health and moving forward with it,
> because if you have actually have to go somewhere and find somewhere for your
> child to be, and get there, and get there on time, it just becomes too much. Especially
> if you're depressed, or anxious or have things going on with your mental health. It's
> hard to get over those barriers in order to even seek services."

Two providers affirmed frustrations associated with the housing system itself and

how structurally has yet to address systemic racism and poverty. One participant mentioned

that the discussion of systemic racism in program development only occurred recently. The

process of addressing the race in homeless services is slow moving as a result of the

policies and funding that are tied to their services. The second provider indicated the

difficulty in getting youth housed due to the barriers that include waitlists, income,

identification that make getting housing already difficult. These barriers are exacerbated

due to cycles of poverty, racism and oppression that are frequently experienced in young

clients.

> "Yes, and then we aren't up until really this year, maybe the last two years is really dealing with systemic racism and we're not always to it and BIPOC population. We're just now like talking about the differences of homelessness versus race. Where like, where that sits. It's just being talked about now. The past ten years or nine years it's never been a topic. it's just yeah, it's just been age appropriate but now we're starting to dig a little bit deeper and trying to understand where all of that lies, and where, how can we have better programs if we're sensitive to a particular race and how homelessness has affected that race. So, it's just really slow, that's the other thing. It's really you know talking about problems that there are things that have you know come up and it's just it's such a slow 'cause we're dealing with with state and local county dollars and federal dollars and it's slow. Everything is just slow. Change is slow, and I've learned to just understand it, and just try to figure out loop ways through it, but it's a frustration for sure."

> "It's very complicated and you have to have someone that you're working with to really understand it and get the resources that you need. Sometimes even with that there's lots of lines and waitlist and things and then also just like, I mean there are so many small things that are not small things around the requirements somebody might need to move into housing whether or not that's identification or financial means, and you know cycles of poverty make that difficult and cycles of oppression and racism. So yeah, I think face all of the above fairly regularly."

Another reported frustration was specific to the processes in determining eligibility

for independent living resources and how there is not specific processes in providing

services and determining eligibility for their age group. Lastly, one provider expressed

frustrations with the structural organization and slow-moving changes of courts and how

the system is currently centered around punishment versus rehabilitation making it difficult

to serve youth during the re-entry process.

> "Yeah, I mean there are so many and I think that like a huge piece is just the amount of Red tape that exists in accessing so many resources, as well as just the fundamental system itself of courts and the carceral system, and the ways that the people that I work with are punished and incur harm in that process of punishment, rather than rehabilitation or actual care and healing, and so I think the idea is that I'll you know coalition build and collaborate with people who are interested in moving more toward restorative processes, but it's a slow it's a slow moving process, as I'm sure you know and so I think that yeah the day-to-day can be hard to witness and just being in compliant with these really top down systems."

Reported Experiences of Couch Surfing

The difficulty in accessing housing resources, limited funding for affordable housing and supportive services, and how improving these systems is a relatively slow process were all common themes among participants describing their frustrations associated with their line of work. As service providers they are still expected to either house homeless youth and young adults or ensure housing is maintained despite the lack of resources available and the barriers experienced by their young clients. Although couch surfing is considered a form of housing instability, it is not considered a form of literal homelessness. Literal homelessness refers to those who are living on the street, in a car, shelter, or place not meant for human habitation. Therefore, any young adult or youth who are couch surfing would not be eligible for housing programs or resources that specifically require literal homelessness. This presents a potential service gap in youth and young adults who are couch surfing but are unable to afford housing or obtain housing on their own. All service provider participants expressed that they have had clients who reported couch surfing to them at some point. Not all clients who report couch surfing report that these experiences are negative. However, service providers are limited to the information that is disclosed to them and getting information from youth and young adults in these situations is not always easy for housing providers. All service providers that were interviewed reported that they had client reported that they were couch surfing. However, the relationship with their host varies. Overall, social service providers reported that youth tend to couch surf with people they know whether it be a friend or family member. In situations where a youth is couch surfing with someone they do not know, trafficking tends to be a concern for the provider.

One service provider explained their experience when having clients disclose couch surfing and whether youth report couch surfing with people they did not know. Majority of the time, youth tend to couch surf with people they know. However, if it is an unsafe situation or they are couch surfing with a stranger, it is difficult as a service provider to fully understand the situation if the client is not willing to disclose. This becomes even more problematic if the service provider is either doing an intake or meeting the youth client for the first time.

> "No, usually well… I have heard where it'll be like "my friend knows this person." It'll be... it could be that like "I know somebody" that they're all like "My friend and I" that sort of a situation. I've never in all these years doing this, I've had somebody say, "I don't know this person" because if they didn't, I would be trying to talk them into a safer situation immediately because I would definitely go to the sex trafficking side of my brain."

They further explain that getting a client's full disclosure can be difficult. Sometimes it takes several times in meeting the youth and providing food, clothes, or even bus tickets to help form a rapport and eventually learn more about their situation. However, not all youth are willing to provide this information and will only provide enough information to obtain the resources that they need.

> "I usually have to start kind of peeling back the layers and seeing like what's happening. Is it safe? Like where are you sleeping? and there's questions, but the thing with all of that is you have to get their buy in. They have to feel safe to talk to you and sometimes that can be really tough. It could take me three times meeting with them before I could actually get conversation going. First, I might just give them some food and some bus tickets and like "Hey do you need a coat, do you need some gloves or a warm hat?" or whatever that looks like and then I'll invite them to come back and talk to me again and then I can gradually start kind of peeling back the layers and finding out- who's house is that? and who's you know- how are you getting your food? how was you know because I have had situations where it's not, it's kind of the sex trafficking type like, "oh their giving you, what are they getting?" So, I have to go slow sometimes depending on have to evaluate that person in front of me, where they're at, and can I get them to really disclose, and not always it works either. Sometimes they the cards are held very close to their chest and they're only giving me enough to help them get to that next step in their lives."

Another service provider expresses that couch surfing is common in young adults who have children. Similarly, they reported during their interview that young families will mostly couch surf with individuals that they know, because when there are children involved people are more willing lend their space. Additionally, young parents are more reluctant in staying at homeless shelters due to the concerns of exposing their child to that environment. However, the service provider explains that couch surfing with children can still pose a risk to a child's well-being and social development.

Researcher: "Have any of your clients reported couch surfing with people they did not know?"

Service Provider: "That is less common for my clients to disclose. Usually, it's people that they know. Otherwise, they are in shelter. You know there's been a few people definitely there's a lot of people who couch surf with people that aren't safe, but my understanding is that they know them, but I don't know to what level."

As a service provider who specializes in providing housing services to young adults from ages 18 to 24 with children, they confirmed that there are risks posed to the young families as a result of couch surfing. The presence of a consistent routine is detrimental to child's development. However, when young families are in a couch surfing situation, it is easy for them to lack this routine because their host is in control. If the host is having other guests in and out of the home and lacking a consistent schedule, then the child is also exposed to this environment and lacking a routine.

"Yeah, there I think couch surfing can be a big safety concern around just the chaos that occurs within it. You know usually you're couch surfing with your child, and there isn't like a safe clear place for them to be for their own like sleep and routine. Like the kids that come into our programs are lacking any sort of routine. I mean that doesn't mean that some of the moms aren't trying or don't know that that's important, but they're really lacking in any routine. The people whose places they're at often have a lot of people coming in and out of the home. So, a lot of different folks coming in and out. So, it's dependent on kind of what's going on in

that home and if it's a safe environment for them. There's a lot of kind of like guilt
and holding it over people's head and like what they're supposed to do to contribute
to the home, which could be a variety of things including sexual favors. Yeah, and
just usually there's a lot of people in and out of that house if they're if they're able
to crash there. It's usually at home that has a lot of people in and out and just the
chaos of it and not knowing you know the people that might come in and out might
be more of strangers around your kid, and so pieces like that."

Service providers were asked if they could think of situations where couch surfing

may have been a safety concern, and then they were asked whether they thought illegal

activity or frequent involvement with the juvenile justice system can be attributed to couch

surfing. All service provider participants had reported a situation where it was a safety

concern to some degree. However, the reported safety concerns ranged from conflict with

hosts, unknown guests that are in and out of the home, sex trafficking and domestic

violence. Most of the illegal activity that was reported by participants was substance use

and how couch surfing may have a negative effect on recovery. Two participants reported

they had youth clients couch surfing who were also involved in gangs.

One service provider participant tells the stories about two cases. In one of their

cases, they report that they had a youth client who was being trafficked but had been able

to leave her sex trafficking situation after becoming pregnant. In another case, they explain

that they had a youth who had been couch surfing while also struggling to stay sober as a

result of his transient lifestyle.

"Yeah, well for the trafficking ones it's like very clear that they're not safe. They're
being sold or not I guess they're not being sold but they're selling sex for money,
and I know it that in itself is dangerous 'cause like protection and stuff isn't being
used. I had one of my youth who got out of the game and is only out of it because
she got pregnant. So that's also like a factor she doesn't know who her baby daddy
is or anything so she's dealing with that and that can be you know emotionally
scarring as well as physically you know giving birth to a child is not a small feat.
So, that's that. In terms of other youth, I have one youth who is couch surfing who
it was a big threat, because he was trying to stay sober off of meth and that just
wasn't helpful with the couch surfing lifestyle he was living. He would often say
that like weed and meth were his only release from like being stressed and
homeless and sad, but also that just creates another barrier, right. Like if you're

doing drugs, you're not conducive to holding a job you're not conducive to like going to school."

The same service provider participant also identified a potential gap when working with justice involved youth in their housing program. They report a situation where one of their youth clients had been incarcerated. They had not been notified of their client being incarcerated and was able to confirm through an online database. However, in most cases where youth do not get into contact with their case managers after an extended period of time, they can be exited from the housing program. They also explain that the chances of justice involvement increase with older foster youth.

> "Definitely. I don't wanna say all my participants who are homeless end up interacting the justice system because that's incorrect, but a solid handful do. Yeah, and it's just it's as from a provider's perspective, I think it's harder to even get in contact with them. Like I had an experience where I was trying to get in contact with this youth for like two months and our thing is that if we're not we don't see you for three months then we exit you from our caseload, and I didn't want to do that to this youth. So, I tried really hard to contact them not find them and found out they were just incarcerated. Which is like, I had to go through the Washington database to find that and I was like "oh that's why they're not responding" and so they yeah, they just tend to get in more trouble right, you don't have a home base. A lot of foster youth have records like especially if they're foster youth who were perpetually in Group homes. Which unfortunately, it happens a lot with the older foster youth. They just have like more records, and if you have a record, you get stopped by a policeman, you're likely to get taken in regardless. So yeah, it definitely increases their risk and will the sex trafficking and the drugs."

Another service provider tells the story about how a youth participant was referred to the housing program by a probation counselor. The youth participant had been staying with family which prompted concerns of abuse and substance use. However, the youth felt it was easiest to stay in their current couch surfing situation rather than pursue their own housing.

> "Yeah, I have a current client that I don't know well who was interested in our navigation diversion program and getting his own housing and he was referred to me by a probation counselor who indicated that his home life with his family was pretty rough. There was some abuse happening there and it also perpetuated some of this client's substance use, but I don't think that were for necessarily

using with the person who they were staying with but it wasn't necessarily
conducive environment for their overall well-being or recovery and they ended
up deciding it was the easiest and decision to go back and stay with them rather
than pursuing their own apartment and that's something that we've been
following up with and talking about even though there are some safety concerns
involved in that decision."

When asking service provider participants what can be done to help their young

clients when confronted with the situation of couch surfing, many report that they will

work with the client to decide on their best options. Overall, these discussions involve

working with the provider to determine which pathway is most suitable for the youth client

whether it be referring them to an in-house housing program, education programs, a

homeless shelter, or advising that they go through the coordinated entry system to get in the

pool for housing. However, the availability of these resources is dependent on the program

and varies between each service provider.

One service provider emphasized the importance of motivational interviewing when

helping a young client determine whether their housing situation is suitable for them.

Additionally, the provider describes several housing resources within the agency that are

available to youth and young adults who are couch surfing.

"Yeah, I think my kind of mode of case management is always like during motivational
interviewing to like show them and like discuss like what are their values, and what is
you know what do they ultimately want, and is there current housing situation one that
like aligns with where they want to be going and where they see themselves succeeding
and so I think that also entails providing all the resources and opportunities that I can
that are available and that might be accessible and providing yeah safety respite
resources as well, but I also feel like I'm never in a position where I want to force
somebody to do something unless it's like you know it's a crisis situation and we have to
confront that, but rather you know if it's not the best situation for them I want it to be
their decision to move somewhere else and want them to be on board and leading that
process."

The same provider elaborates that the in-house resources available in the agency.

While some programs offered can be supportive housing programs for the specific age

group. Other programs available can include Host Homes or the Kinship Program. If the

provider is unable to find a placement within the agency, then they will seek any vacancies

through the King County Coordinated Entry for All (CEA).

> "Yeah, I think that I mean I feel very lucky at [social service agency] to be connected to so many housing resources and so many different sorts of programs and people who like I know might be able to tell me if there are external fill openings in the CEA, transitional housing pool. I think yeah so usually I tap into my kind of in-house resources at [social service agency]. Whether or not that's resources for under 18 youth and housing, or a program which is 18 to 25. There are so many that I can just reach out to case managers about and also like introduce those to the client as options but maybe you know it really depends on what the opportunities are and what the openings are and then ask them. Yeah, I think ask them their preferences of where they want to be and what would be the ideal situation and reach out to appropriate resources whether or not that's through [social service agency] or through CEA or yeah just any sort of external openings in King County."

Host Homes programs and Kinships programs are relatively new housing programs.

Host Homes programs allow for people in the community to house a spare bedroom for a

young adult ages 18 to 25 for a period of time (Washington State Department of

Commerce, 2017). The Kinship program allows for a youth to enter the program with their

host who they already have matched with or may already be couch surfing with. However,

if the youth is at risk for losing their housing due to the host being unable to financially

support them, the kinship program provides short-term financial support and case

management services to the youth.

Although one service provider participant named many resources available to youth

who are couch surfing, other providers did not feel the same way and expressed that they

had to often come up with ways to work around the housing system. Options are limited are

either convincing the youth or young adult to either stay at a shelter or to have them take a

coordinated entry assessment and letting them know that disclosing that they are couch

surfing can limit the chances of eligibility for a housing project.

> "There's not a lot. I hate to say it, but there is not a lot I can do. Fast solutions are offering shelters. Shelters are often not safe spaces especially for young women. In my 2 years at this role, if I've ever offered a shelter to young woman, they have adamantly

refused and said they feel safer on this street. Which says something, and so that's the fastest solution I have. After that, I always recommend they take the, I sign them up for the CEA which is a Coordinated Entry for All assessment, the housing assessment for King County, and the assessment is kind of rigged cause if you say you're couch surfing, they don't count you as homeless, and you get less points and you're less likely to get put into housing program. So, I don't tell any of my clients to lie and say they're not couch surfing. I just let them know if they say they're couch surfing, they're going to count that as "your housed" and kind of hint that at them, because idea is to try to get them into housing program as fast as possible and then hopefully within a few weeks they are contacted by some sort of housing program in King County. If there are, so we have housing programs at [social service agency], if there are places for external fills so fills not from the CEA, so I as a case manager can refer someone to, I try to do that but those are kind of rare and far between. The other solution I have for them is we also have another program called Host Homes, which is where we place a youth with like a random person, couple, or family, kinda depends- and it's more of a roommate situation but the host will let them stay for up to six months. So that's a really nice in between for some youth who are like willing to live with someone and just like need six months to save money and move out. I will say to I will say that youth who are chronically homeless or have been homeless and had bad experiences in Group homes and foster homes are very unlikely to take either of those options. If it's not a solid apartment by themselves, they feel more comfortable staying on the streets. Yeah, so sometimes none of those options apply to them and you just kind of hope that maybe like another housing voucher will pop up, but if not I kind of like "I can do it on my own" and continue to be homeless and I can't force them to do anything and that's just you know you never want to force anyone to do anything right as a human being. Not a lot of options."

Another provider described the limited options for a youth or young adult with a child and how it can be difficult to convince them to go to a shelter if they are couch surfing in an unsafe situation. However, there are any youth shelters that specifically serve young families.

"We definitely support clients with accessing appropriate shelters and talking them through why that could be a better choice than if it is feeling unsafe where they're couch surfing. [Social Service Agency] has like a youth specific shelter, but there aren't any youth specific shelters for families, and so I think that's a gap. I also think it would be very helpful if HUD changed their guidelines so that we could have people that are couch surfing in family programs, so that they don't have to be putting themselves in that situation, because it is… it's a struggle of "am I going to stay with people that I know aren't safe or stay with people I don't know that might not be safe?" meaning like usually at the shelter then."

Barriers and Service Gaps to Couch Surfing

Service providers were asked whether they can identify barriers associated with couch surfing. This question was asked in order to measure any potential gaps within the housing system that could affect youth who are couch surfing or unstably housed. Following, they were asked to identify where their line of work could improve in order to address policy implications and organizational developments with the housing system. The main barrier that was identified by in youth who were couch surfing was just the ability to access housing through the coordinated entry system because many programs require youth be literally homeless. The coordinated entry for all (CEA) system is a centralized entry point to access housing resources. In order to receive a referral for a housing project, an individual must take an assessment with an intake specialist at an access point. Once they have taken the assessment, the individual is placed into a pool where they can be triaged for housing services if they meet the eligibility criteria for enrollment into a specific housing program (King County Coordinated Entry for All, 2020).

Another barrier was the difficulty in accessing information to obtain resources. A service provider reported that often youth who are couch surfing do not know where to access resources or affordable housing is a significant barrier. In Washington State, there is a hotline that youth can call that guide them to the appropriate resources. However, this process can be difficult for a youth who has limited access to a phone or is unaware of the hotline. The service provider participant stated that the process in which youth access resources should be more youth-driven, less formal, and that the county should take youth's feedback into consideration when creating new processes. Another service provider

affirmed that processes can always improve in ensuring trauma informed, client led

services and involving clients in the decision- making process and getting their feedback.

> "Yeah, I mean there's just so many. There's so many barriers with youth that are
> couch surfing and first the biggest barrier is their knowledge of what's available. I
> think if we could figure out a way to get information out to young people and be
> transparent with young people so they know where they can find these resources. It's
> like... I work with a couple of different groups, and one is called the ACI, and
> Anchor Communities and we have a youth board that meets with us. Actual youth
> that are going through homelessness currently, and some that have moved past that
> and it's amazing some of the ideas that they have and part of our job with this ACI is
> to act upon these ideas that these youth have. Why do we make it so hard, and you
> have to be all formal, you know call the 211…No, let's just put it on the outside of
> the weed stores! Super genius. That and at the buses because young people that are
> experiencing homelessness more than likely are riding the bus and like they know
> when the buses are coming. Like, have information on the sides of the buses to
> inform these young people of the supports that they can get. Very smart. So, I think
> listening to these young people is really really important."

All four service provider participants identified the limited availability or

opportunity to access resources as a barrier for youth who are couch surfing. Participants

expressed several reasons for this barrier that varied from limited availability of affordable

housing and supportive programming to meet the demand, risk/ eligibility assessment and

determination, financial instability, mental illness, substance use, transient lifestyle, racism,

and cycles of poverty. All the reasons that the participants have provided make it difficult

to access affordable housing programs, maintain stable housing, or create barriers in

achieving an education and full-time employment to obtain housing at market price.

Participants expressed that that eligibility for supportive housing projects through the

coordinated entry system should be inclusive of youth who are couch surfing. Many couch

surfing youth and young adults will not disclose their couch surfing experiences at the time

of intake because it could limit the chances of being referred.

One provider explains that homelessness is difficult to quantify and verify.

> "They just have to have spent a night. We just need even need like a night in a shelter. So
> something that will happen is we'll have somebody call and they're like "I can't stay

where I am it's not safe" but it's not like fleeing DV it's like "she's kicking me out" or "she's moving at the end of the month and I don't have anywhere to go" and it's like "OK but you like according to our HUD requirements you need to either be on the street for a night." Which is like, why would we subject them to that? Like in a shelter or in a place not meant for habitation- so like a car, or someone's garage, or something like that, or a tent. My programs aren't chronic no, but that is very difficult to calculate. No so they just need some like well "you have to go stay in the shelter that night" it also just really teaches our clients that they have to lie in order to make it through the system because it's like well, you just need to like have someone sign off on this and if you can't get anyone to sign off, you know you can self-certify in some way but it's like you know they say like "yeah I stayed in my car" and I believe it's like we just kind of have to go off of what we understand is going on with her. So that's really it's really gross to be on the phone with somebody who's so desperate for housing and for something else and to say like "I understand that you are in a position where I agree that you should qualify for this housing but who pays us says that you don't. So, I am asking you to go sleep at a shelter for a night and have like that trauma and that confusion for your child in order to move in here." It's some really silly hoops when it's like I know that this person needs this housing."

Participants were asked how their line of work could improve for those who are couch surfing and two participants responded in considering couch surfing as homeless so that youth who are couch surfing are deemed eligible for housing programs. Two participants expressed the importance of improving the operational processes of housing organizations. One participant conveyed that the agency is limited by the parameters of funding and contracts which results in the limitations around services they can provide. In turn, youth clients are impacted. Another participant advocated for the improvement in eligibility and requirements for rapid-rehousing and transitional housing programs. Rapid rehousing is a specific housing program that provides housing subsidy for about three months. After the three months, the client's subsidy and services are ended and they are expected to pay for their housing in full on their own without the added support. The social service provider participant expressed that due to added barriers that a youth may experience, they may need more time to become fully self-sufficient. In this case, referring them a youth to a longer-term supportive housing program would be beneficial for them to

allow more time to get on their feet. At the provider level, referring a youth client to

another supportive program has negative consequences. The social service provider

explains how this is considered a negative outcome of the non-profit organization, and

program outcomes are examined by funding governmental agencies.

> "Yep, so we are supposed to hit 80% of our exits to permanent housing, and so if somebody leaves and goes to another transitional program because that's what's best for them that is not considered permanent and it's considered, it's a negative outcome on our outcome report with HUD. Yeah, it doesn't make any sense huh. I'm always like trying to beg them to just like count it as nothing. Like don't count it as positive then and don't count it as negative just don't count it against us then, but I've yet to win that battle. Yeah, it's really the expectation of us as providers in the transitional living field feels like well and all social work in general, but certainly within housing it feels like you are expected to solve the historical context of poverty with like band-aids and peanuts and it's ridiculous and outrageous and offensive."

Effects of COVID-19

Lastly, service provider participants were asked about the impact of COVID-19.

First, they were asked whether COVID-19 has impacted their ability to provide services to

the community. Second, participants were asked whether they thought COVID-19

contributed to youth and young adults unstable housing circumstances. All participants

reported they had been affected in their ability to provide services in the community. The

shutdowns and the switch to telework was most frequently reported by housing providers

as negatively impacted their ability to provide services for several reasons. First, the

shutdowns resulted in the shutdown of drop- in centers which provided many services to

youth such as housing navigation resources, employment opportunities, education

resources, food, clothing, and bus tickets. Drop-in centers also provide a safe space for

youth to interact with their peers. Three participants reported that their drop-in centers

remain closed. One participant reported that the drop-in center that they worked out of had

closed permanently and the building had been sold. In order to meet the needs of their

clients, the agency rented out office spaces for case workers to meet with youth in person.

> "It is no longer. So, it literally closed down. I worked out of there for 8 years. It was a very sad thing when I went over there and packed up my desk. It was very sad, because you could be there and the youth at the school or wherever could find out that was a place where they can go that's safe. They can get a backpack, a coat, food, a bus ticket, just even a conversation with somebody to have a conversation. And, they don't have that anymore. So, it's really tough. "

Second, all participants expressed that COVID-19 affected the rapport they have

with clients and their ability to contact them. All four participants emphasized that rapport

is generally formed through in-person interaction and therefore meeting with clients

through video chat and phone call. Often times, they are required to have virtual meetings

with youth on their caseload on a monthly basis depending on their needs, but it creates

barriers for youth who do not have access to a phone or computer. This also created

barriers for social service providers as they had difficulty reaching their youth clients. If

they were able to get into contact with youth, virtual interactions were brief, and case

management services were limited. One participant reported that they had to contact their

youth clients on a weekly basis because of the heightened need for homeless services.

> "To put it in perspective the first, well the pandemic happened in like March 2020. I think until September or October of 2020 we are maybe longer? Maybe till like January of 2021? We were doing weekly check-ins with our youth, and to put that into perspective, I would check in with my youth regularly once a month if that and especially if they're like low need like once a month sometimes, once every two months depending on if they respond to me or not. Like my high need clients, I work with once a week, but at the peak of the pandemic it was three days to once a week that we were contacting all of our participants. That's like 50 people every week and that's just because everyone was struggling, and a lot of people became homeless because of the pandemic which made it terrible."

Respondents reported that COVID-19 also affected young adult clients that were

stably housed in a housing program. Two respondents reported that the eviction

moratorium had both positive and negative impacts on housed young adults. While

residents of the program were not evicted during the moratorium, they were still

responsible for paying back rent and utilities after the moratorium had been lifted. Many

affected did not have the funds to pay their debt due to subsequent job loss following the

shutdowns. Providers reported the financial crisis that their clients experienced had a

negative impact on their mental health. Fourth, social service providers identified finding

housing for their young adult clients as a significant problem as a result of COVID-19. The

lack of affordable housing had been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. Social service

providers struggled with their housing searches for their clients. They reported that there is

a lack of affordable housing as well as a shortage in property owners that are willing to

work with young clients and the non-profit providers that are trying to house them. Many

properties require rental history, proof of income, rental references, and multiple forms of

identification. When specific housing programs do not own properties, they must find

properties in the community and property owners that are willing to work with youth

clients despite not meeting income qualifications, and providers must advocate for their

clients and the program. One participant describes their experiences trying to house young

adult clients during the pandemic, and how landlords were reluctant.

> "Before they maybe we could work with them a little bit easier, and now they're just kind of shut down because they've got a lot of debt on their properties and a lot of landlords are going under. So, it's kind of a snowball effect. It's the people that want to rent and then the landlords are just like getting out of it. I mean, I can't tell you how many countless landlords are saying "I'm done I can't do this anymore" and it's very sad because we need those spaces. We need apartments."

Three participants identified barriers in accessing public benefits as a result of COVID-19.

Prior to the COVID-19 shutdowns, social service providers could go to Social Security

offices, Department of Licensing, and Department of Social and Health Services to assist

youth in enrolling in benefits such as TANF, or Social Security, non-cash benefits, or to

obtain a copy of their identification. Following the shutdowns, public benefit offices closed, and workers switched to working remotely. This left social service providers and youth clients to call an operator which became time consuming.

> "You couldn't go into DSHS, you still can't even walk into DSHS. You have to do it by phone. So, I can't even tell you the hours I spent. I would do some other case management type things that we call DSHS on my phone just to access the food benefits and it would be like the whole hour on the phone we're on hold waiting and waiting. Finally, we get an operator after 60 minutes and then we just want to get this interview going through can get the food benefits and literally we were lucky if it was an hour."

The last point that social service providers associated with COVID-19 was related to their specific housing programs. One provider worked with in a Host Homes programs in which youth are paired with a family or another adult that has an extra bedroom in their house to allow the youth to live with them. However, this participant explained that hosts had getting concerns of being exposed to COVID-19 and no longer wanted to host youth that have previously been paired to live with them.

> "I think absolutely. Yes, and I mean it's happened in ways where I've received referrals particularly in my last program where had it was essentially, host in the community had no extra bedroom. We matched youth and young adults experiencing homelessness with those hosts and so people were referred to the program because of exacerbating factors from COVID-19, but then also there was housing instability that ensued from host and participant matches that we had already made. Where you know things became strained actually in the program too. Which is not good but because there were folks who had, you know underlying health conditions that weren't able to continue to house our youth and young adults that were worried about youth and young adults leaving and exposing them, especially in the beginning when we didn't know as much about COVID."

Another provider participant manages transitional housing programs. Transitional housing programs provide housing subsidy from 12-18 months. However, many young clients were unable to continue to pay rent following the end of their program. Clients were extended in their program due the eviction moratorium. However, if youth are not moving out then it results in limited vacancies for new referrals who need the assistance.

Young Adult Sample

Table 1 illustrates the demographics of young adults ages 18-24 in King County, Washington that have entered the homeless management system from January 2020 up until December 2021. Data was taken from the King County Human Services Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that tracks and stores information about homeless services. The purpose of the HMIS is to improve services that support people who are homeless in obtaining permanent housing, and to have better access to those services, while meeting requirements of funders such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (King County Regional Homelessness Authority, 2022). Young adults that have entered the homeless system either through a housing project, shelter, or have taken the coordinated entry assessment were included in the sample. A total of N= 5,242 young adults had accessed the King County homeless system from January 2020 and December 2021. Blank or missing data had been excluded from the analysis. Table 1 shows the gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation of young adult participants. The following categories- client doesn't know, client refused, and data not collected all are instances in which a young adult did not report their gender, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation.

Table 1. King County Homeless System Demographic Data, N=5,242

	N	%
Gender		
A gender other than singularly female or male (e.g., non-binary, genderfluid, agender, culturally specific gender)	86	1.6%
Client doesn't know	3	0.1%
Client refused	39	0.7%
Data not collected	12	0.2%
Female	2639	50.3%
Male	2371	45.2%
Questioning	1	0%
Transgender	91	1.7%
Total	5242	100%
Ethnicity		
Client doesn't know	26	0.5%
Client refused	120	2.3%
Data not collected	76	1.5%
Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x)	928	17.7%
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latin(a)(o)(x)	4091	78.1%
Total	5241	100%
Race		
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	248	4.7%
Asian or Asian American	147	2.8%
Black, African American, or African	2042	39%
Client doesn't know	79	1.5%
Client refused	237	4.5%
Data not collected	129	2.5%
Multi-Racial	579	11%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	197	3.8%
White	1583	30.2%
Total	5241	100%
Sexual Orientation		
Bisexual	232	11.2%
Client doesn't know	14	0.7%
Client refused	122	5.9%
Data not collected	184	8.9%
Gay	57	2.8%
Heterosexual	1337	64.7%
Lesbian	24	1.2%
Other	62	3%
Questioning / Unsure	36	1.7%
Total	2068	100%

Notes:

Gender categories include a gender other than male or female, client doesn't know, client refused, data not collected, female, male, questioning, and transgender. A gender other than male or female category is specifically in reference to young adults who identify as non-binary, agender, genderfluid, or a culturally specific gender. Out of 5,242 young adults, 86 or 1.6% of young adults they identified with a gender other than male or female. Out of the total young adults, 2,639 or 50.3% were female, 2,371 or 45.2% were male, 1 was questioning, and 91 or 1.7% were transgender. According to the U.S Census Bureau statistics, approximately 49.7% of residents of King County are female. According to Washington State Office of Financial Management population estimates (2019), males constitute the majority in each age cohort until the late 40's then females tend to outnumber males. Therefore, there is a slight overrepresentation in young females indicated in the HMIS data.

The second demographic variable is ethnicity (n=5,241). Approximately 17.7% of young adults or 928 reported identifying as Hispanic/ Latinx, and 78.1% or 4,091 were non-Hispanic/Latinx. In comparison to the population estimates for King County in which Hispanic or Latinx groups make up approximately 9.9%, there is an overrepresentation in Hispanic/ Latinx young adults seeking homeless services. Racial groups in the univariate analysis include American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous, Asian or Asian American, Black, African American, or African, Multi-Racial, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and White. Approximately 39% or 2,042 were Black, African American, or African, 30.2% or 1,583 were White, 11% or 579 were multi-Racial, 4.7% or 248 were American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous, 3.8% or 197 were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2.8% or 147 were Asian or Asian American. The majority of young adults that had entered

the homeless system in 2020 and 2021 were Black or African American. This finding

indicates an overrepresentation in the homeless system as Black or African Americans

make up only 7% of King County. Lastly, sexual orientation groups were categorized as

bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, other, and questioning /unsure (n=2,068).

Approximately 64.7% or 1,337 young adults were heterosexual, 11.2% of 232 were

bisexual, 3% or 62 identified as other, 2.8% or 57 were gay, 1.7% or 36 were questioning

or unsure, and 1.2% or 24 were lesbian. Therefore, approximately 16.9% of the young

adults identified as LGBQ.

Table 2. Homelessness Risk Indicators, N=5,242

		N	%
Disabling Condition			
	Client doesn't know	27	0.5%
	Client refused	120	2.3%
	Data not collected	395	7.5%
	No	2990	57%
	Yes	1710	32.6%
	Total	5242	100%
Prior Foster Care Involvement			
	Client doesn't know	22	1.1%
	Client refused	54	2.6%
	Data not collected	348	16.8%
	No	1339	64.7%
	Yes	305	14.7%
	Total	2068	100%
Prior Juvenile Justice Involvement			
	Client doesn't know	20	1%
	Client refused	66	3.2%
	Data not collected	600	29%
	No	1194	57.7%
	Yes	188	9.1%
	Total	2068	100%

Table 2 and table 3 illustrate the potential predictor variables. Table 2 represents

potential risk indicators that could increase the likelihood of a young adult becoming

homeless or experiencing housing instability. Risk indicators include having a disabling

condition (n=5,424), prior foster care involvement (n=2,068), and prior juvenile justice

involvement (n=2,068). Previous studies have used prior system involvement, juvenile

justice involvement, and disabilities such as substance use disorder or mental illness to

measure the risk propensity to homelessness and other negative outcomes (Narendorf et al,

2019; Unruh, 2009). Approximately 57% of young adults reported that they did not have a

disabling condition, and 32.6% of young adults did have a disabling condition. Out of the

young adults that were enrolled in a RHYA (Runaway and Homeless Act) funded program

approximately 14.7% of young adults reported prior foster care involvement, and 9.1% of

young adults reported prior juvenile justice involvement.

Table 3 represents potential protective factors that serve as a buffer for youth and

young adults experiencing housing instability (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Lee & Ballew,

2018). School status (n=2,068) and employment status (n=2,108) are examined as

protective factors because young adults who have either completed their education,

enrolled in school, or have secured employment are more likely to have a higher earning

potential and positive housing outcomes. According to HMIS data, 33% of young adults

graduated from high school, 17% of young adults dropped out, 8.1% obtained their GED,

6.9% were attending school regularly, 3.2% reported they were attending school

irregularly, and only 0.4% were expelled. However, 31.5% of young adults did not report

their school status either due to the data not collected, they refused, or did not know their

school status. The next protective factor is employment status. Approximately 62% of

young adults reported they were unemployed, and 25.3% reported they were employed.

Table 3. Youth Protective Factors, N=5,242

	N	%
School Status		
Attending school irregularly	67	3.2%
Attending school regularly	142	6.9%
Client doesn't know	26	1.3%
Client refused	84	4.1%
Data not collected	539	26.1%
Dropped out	352	17%
Expelled	9	0.4%
Graduated from high school	682	33%
Obtained GED	167	8.1%
Total	2068	100%
Employment Status		
Client doesn't know	12	0.6%
Client refused	52	2.5%
Data not collected	203	9.6%
No	1308	62%
Yes	533	25.3%
Total	2108	100%

Notes:

Table 4 illustrates the prior residence (n=5,227) and their relationship to the head of

household (n=5,238). Most of the young adults in the sample reported experiencing literal

homelessness prior to entering a housing project or at their coordinated entry intake. Literal

homelessness includes any young adult that is either in a shelter, hotel or motel paid for by

an agency, or a place not meant for habitation such as on the streets, in a car/RV, or tent.

Approximately 35% of young adults reported that they were previously living in a place

not meant for habitation, 17.7% of young adults were in an emergency shelter, and 2.6%

were in a hotel unpaid for by an agency. Other categories in the HMIS data were relative to

couch surfing, self- sustained housing, foster care, juvenile justice, or treatment facilities or

programs. Couch surfing categories were inclusive of young adults staying with a family

member or friend. Approximately 16.4% of young adults reported couch surfing either with

a family member or friend, 8.3% were staying with a family member, and 8.1% were

staying with a friend. Only 10.5% of young adults reported that they were in a self-

sustained housing situation prior to project entry. The HMIS data is consistent with the data

collected from the social service providers in the semi-structured interviews. The social

service providers confirmed that many report literal homelessness due to the eligibility

requirements of certain housing programs. Table 4 also illustrates the young adult's

relationship to the head of household or adult designated as the head for determining

income eligibility and rent (HUD, 1996). Most young adults self-identified as the head of

household (84.5%). The remaining young adults identified as a head of household's child

(10.4%), spouse or partner (3.4), other relation member (1%), and non-relation member

(0.3%).

Table 4. Prior Housing Data, N=5,242

		N	%
Prior Residence	Client Doesn't Know	16	0.3%
	Client Refused	101	1.9%
	Data Not Collected	417	8%
	Emergency Shelter	925	17.7%
	Foster Care/ Group Home	9	0.2%
	Hospital/ Medical Facility	56	1.1%
	Host-Home	14	0.3%
	Hotel without ES Voucher	138	2.6%
	Housing (Rental, Owned, Permanent, Interim)	547	10.5%
	Jail, Prison, or Juvenile Detention	50	1%
	Place not meant for habitation	1828	35%
	Psychiatric Hospital or Facility	32	0.6%
	Residential Project or halfway house w/o homeless criteria	9	0.2%
	Safe Haven	61	1.2%
	Staying with a Family member	435	8.3%
	Staying with a Friend	421	8.1%
	Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	12	0.2%
	Transitional housing for homeless persons/ youth	156	3%
	Total	5227	100%
Relationship to Head of Household			
	Head of household's child	564	10.8%
	Head of household's other relation member	52	1%
	Head of household's spouse or partner	179	3.4%
	Other: non-relation member	16	0.3%
	Self (head of household)	4427	84.5%
	Total	5238	100%

Notes:

Bivariate Analysis

King County HMIS data was used to determine whether there is a significant

association between sociodemographic characteristics, prior system involvement, and

whether they related an individual being homeless, housed, couch surfing, or in an

institution prior to entering the King County homeless system. Sociodemographic

variables included gender, sexual orientation, and race. Prior system involvement variables included prior juvenile justice involvement and prior foster care involvement.

Table 5 examines the association between sociodemographic variables (gender, sexual orientation, race), prior system involvement (juvenile justice, foster care), and the young adult's residence prior to entering the King County homeless system. As shown in table 5, there was a moderate significant relationship between gender and a young adult's residence prior to entry, X^2 (6, 4659) = 19.429**, p<.01, Cramer's V=.046. Young adults who identified as male reported more being homeless prior to project entry (61.6%) compared to Females (60.3%) and transgender, non-binary, or genders other than male or female (54.7%). Additionally, females reported being in jail, foster care, or other institution the least of all three gender groups (2.9%). There was also a moderate significant relationship between sexual orientation and a young adult's residence prior to entry, X^2 (3,1634) = 12.148**, p<.01, Cramer's V=.086. Young adults who were heterosexual reported being homeless prior to entry (60.2%) and housed (16.3%) more frequently compared to young adults who were LGBQ. Whereas young adults who were LGBQ reported couch surfing prior to entry (26.2%) and in jail, foster care or other institution prior to entry (4.9%) more frequent.

Race and a young adult's residence prior to entry was a strong significant relationship, X^2 (15, 4319) = 74.233***, p<.001, Cramer's V=.076. White (64.2%), multi-Racial (61.4%), and Black/ African American (60.5%) young adults reported being homeless more frequently than other racial groups. Asian or Asian Americans reported being homeless less than other racial groups (48.9%) but reported being housed (22.2%) and couch surfing (25.9%) more frequently. Young adults who were White also reported

being housed (14.5%) and couch surfing (15.5%) less than other racial groups, but reported

being in jail, foster care or other institution (5.8%) slightly more frequent.

Prior juvenile justice involvement had a strong significant relationship with a young

adult's residence prior to entry, $X^2 (3,1310) = 27.576$***, p<.001, Cramer's V=.145.

Young adults without prior juvenile justice involvement frequently reported being housed

prior to entry (16.6%) and couch surfing (23.5%) compared to young adults with prior

involvement. Young adults with prior involvement reported homelessness (59.7%) and

being in jail, foster care or other institution (9.4%) slightly more frequently.

Table 5 Chi Square Test for Residence Prior to Entry by Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, and Prior System Involvement

Characteristics	Frequency	X^2 Value	df	Frequency of Young Adults Homeless (%)	Frequency of Young Adults Housed (%)	Frequency of Young Adults Couch Surfing (%)	Frequency of Young Adults in Jail, Foster Care or Other Institution (%)
Gender	(n=4659)	19.429**	6				
Male	2086			1285 (61.6)	363 (17.4)	359 (25.8)	79 (6.9)
Female	2414			1455 (60.3)	424 (17.6)	466 (19.3)	69 (2.9)
Transgender, or gender other than M/F	159			87(54.7)	20 (12.6)	41 (25.8)	11 (6.9)
Sexual Orientation	(n=1634)	12.148**	3				
LGBQ	385			221 (57.4)	44 (11.4)	101 (26.2)	19 (4.9)
Heterosexual	1249			752 (60.2)	204 (16.3)	251 (20.1)	42 (3.4)
Race	(n=4319)	74.233***	15				
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	219			121 (55.3)	47 (21.5)	42 (19.2)	9 (4.1)
Asian or Asian American	135			66 (48.9)	30 (22.2)	35(25.9)	4 (3.0)
Black, African American, or African	1846			1117 (60.5)	336 (18.2)	362 (19.6)	31 (1.7)
Multi-Racial	515			316 (61.4)	89 (17.3)	98 (19.0)	12 (2.3)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	181			110 (60.8)	32 (17.7)	31 (17.1)	8 (4.4)
White	1423			913 (64.2)	206(14.5)	221 (15.5)	83 (5.8)
Prior Juvenile Justice Involvement	(n=1310)	27.576***	3				
No Prior Involvement	1129			651(57.7)	187 (16.6)	265 (23.5)	26 (2.3)
Prior Involvement	181			108 (59.7)	21 (11.6)	35 (19.3)	17 (9.4)
Prior Foster Care Involvement	(n=1546)	10.429**	3				
No Prior Involvement	1256			731 (58.2)	187 (14.9)	299 (23.8)	39 (3.1)
Prior Involvement	290			168 (57.9)	51 (17.6)	53 (18.3)	18 (6.2)

Note: Frequencies will vary slightly due to rounding.
*** Significance at the p<.001 level
** Significance at the p<.01 level
*Significance at the p<.05 level

Lastly, there was a moderate significant relationship between having prior foster care involvement and a young adult's residence prior to entry, $X^2 (3,1546) = 10.429**$, p<. 01, Cramer's V= .082. Young adults without prior involvement reported being homeless slightly more (58.2%) and couch surfing (23.8%) more frequent compared to young adults with prior involvement. However, young adults with prior involvement reported being housed (17.6%) and being in jail, foster care, or other institution (6.2%) more frequently compared to young adults without prior involvement.

Chapter 5
Discussion

This study examined the experiences of social service providers who work directly with youth and young adults in Washington State experiencing homelessness and housing instability such as couch surfing. Providers were asked during the interview questions about their line of work that include experiences working with youth and young adults couch surfing and whether couch surfing involves illegal or unsafe activity, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and whether there were any gaps in serving this group of young adults. Providers were also asked to provide any insight about the effect of COVID-19 and how it impacted their line of work and whether they have seen an increase of young adults and youth who are couch surfing or homeless as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses varied with respect to the service provider's position. One provider who works directly with foster youth reported that her experience when youth and young adults report they are couch surfing with strangers, it is associated with some form of trafficking or substance use. Mostajabian et al. (2019) argued that young adults and youth who are unstably housed and homeless are at a higher risk for trafficking, while at the same time there is a need to improve screening and assessment tools used by healthcare providers. Youth and young adults with a history of childhood sexual victimization, physical abuse, running away from home and substance use are at greater risk (Nadon et al, 1998).

Another provider who works primarily with young adults with children reported that couch surfing often poses more of a safety and well-being concern to the child as it exposes the child to an inconsistent routine and sleep schedule. In these situations, hosts will have other unknown guests in and out of the property throughout the day and night

which poses a potential safety concern to the child. Another safety concern associated with couch surfing that the provider emphasized was the power imbalance between the host and the guest in which the host may use their power to exploit their guests into sexual favors or feeling guilt. This provider also explained such situations can involve illegal activity such as substance use and gang activity. Previous research supports that substance use and gang activity be interrelated factors where physical and social settings of substance use and dealing tend to occur at a friend's house (Hunt-Howard, 2017).

Both providers affirmed that in order to assist them in leaving their couch surfing situation, they would need to become literally homeless such as moving to a shelter or on the streets in order to be eligible for subsidized independent living programs. Many are reluctant to become literally homeless. However, both providers discussed that young adults who are couch surfing can still self-certify as homeless during their intake with the county. Providers identified this as a potential gap, because people who are seeking housing services could falsely declare they are homeless even if they are couch surfing.

The other two providers reported that when youth or young adults couch surf, it is mostly with family or friends whom they are familiar with and normally do not warrant any safety concerns. However, this is based on the client's willingness to disclose to the service provider. Youth or young adults may not disclose any illegal activity or safety concerns with their service provider if their host is a close friend or family member.

COVID-19 has impacted all four service providers in a variety of ways. Primarily, service providers shifted from working with youth and young adults face to face to via telephone. Service providers struggled with phone meetings for several reasons. First, virtual meetings do not pose the same impact in building rapport with young clients as

meeting face to face. Providers emphasized the importance of building rapport with their

clients, because positive rapport is necessary for effective case management and service

delivery. Additionally, young clients may be more willing to disclose to their providers

when there is a positive rapport built between the client and the provider. Second, virtual

meetings make it logistically difficult to get a hold of young clients and meet with them

routinely to provide effective case management services. If a young client loses cell phone

service, do not answer their phone, or do not have access to Wi-Fi then they are unable to

have a virtual meeting with their provider.

COVID-19 did not only impact providers' ability to meet with young clients, but it

also impacted their ability to access services externally to refer young clients to community

resources. Three providers had discussed the difficulty in contacting government agencies

that are gatekeepers to resources such as obtaining a photo ID, disability income, housing

choice vouchers, unemployment, food programs and utility assistance. Prior to COVID-19

shutdowns, providers were able to show up in person to agency offices. Shutdowns of these

offices resulted in providers and young clients to wait long periods of time on the phone for

assistance or having to gain assistance through email and mail.

Accessing external housing resources also became increasingly difficult for

providers that had to find housing vacancies for young adults currently experiencing

homelessness. There were not enough affordable vacancies to meet the demand. Even after

being granted emergency financial assistance to house young clients, there must be

properties that are willing to house them. One provider expressed landlords were reluctant

to house young clients due the eviction moratorium in which COVID-19 shutdowns had a

greater net-widening effect. Young adults had lost their jobs, or their hours were

significantly reduced which resulted in them being unable to pay rent or utilities. The eviction moratorium allowed for young adults to continue living in the property without being evicted, but they were responsible to pay back any outstanding balances upon the mortarium being lifted. Landlords were not receiving rent payments for their properties, and they were unwilling to work with non-profit agencies to house future young adults in need of housing.

Additionally, those young adults currently in a housing assistance program faced eviction after the eviction moratorium being lifted if they were unable to pay their outstanding balances. Another provider struggled in finding host homes for youth. Host home providers were typically families that were willing to house a young adult or youth in their spare bedroom. However, as a result of the pandemic host families were more reluctant to participate due to the fear of exposure and infection. Transitional living programs (TLP) were also extended as a result of the COVID-19 related policies. The eviction moratorium allowed for young adults to extend their time in the program which limited availability for new referrals.

The HMIS data showed an overrepresentation in Black and Hispanic/Latinx young adults in comparison to the general population in King County. When examining the frequencies of potential risk indicator variables, the HMIS data showed that approximately one third of young adults reported having a disability and more young adults had prior foster care involvement than juvenile justice involvement. Protective factors shown that about one third of young adults graduated high school, and 8% obtained their GED. However, approximately two thirds reported being unemployed.

The housing frequency distributions showed that most young adults were either living in a place not meant for habitation or an emergency shelter prior to project entry, and about 16% were couch surfing. Gender, sexual orientation, race, and prior system involvement were all significantly associated with a young adult's residence prior to their project entry. Males and young adults who were transgender or identified with a gender other than male or female were more frequently homeless and couch surfing prior to entry more than females. The results showing that females are less likely to have been homeless, couch surfing or institutionalized seem to support previous feminist criminological literature in which runaway girls are often sent back by law enforcement to live with their abusers and encouraged to stay at home (Chesney-Lind, 1997).

Young adults who were LGBQ were more frequently couch surfing and in a jail, foster care, or other institution, and heterosexual young adults were more frequently homeless and housed. Asian Americans were least frequently homeless, and more frequently housed and couch surfing, White young adults were mostly homeless, but housed and couch surfing the least. Young adults without prior juvenile justice system were more likely to have been housed and couch surfing. Young adults with prior juvenile justice system involvement were more likely to have been in jail, foster care, or other institution. Young adults with prior foster care involvement were more likely to have been housed prior to project entry. A potential reason for former foster youth who had taken an assessment to get housing and reported being previously housed could be due to the nature of them aging out of foster care.

The interactions between race and housing instability substantiates the information provided in the service provider interviews. The HMIS data showed that racial minorities,

and more specifically African American young adults were disproportionately represented. Two participants addressed the role of systemic racism in their interviews and how it is being discussed more recently at their organizations but affirmed that actual policy changes are slow moving. The HMIS data also supports the responses from social service providers on their attitudes regarding the coordinated entry system itself. Many responses and fields from the HMIS data were categorized as either data not collected, client doesn't know, or client refused. Social service providers critiqued the assessment process because of the way it is structured and the number of personal questions that are asked to vulnerable person. One provider described the assessment as being structured for older adults rather than young adults and argued that they should be treated differently with a separate homeless system. Other providers indicated that there are many sensitive and triggering questions that are asked during the assessment in which a young adult may not feel comfortable disclosing to an intake specialist.

Interview data from social service providers illustrated that the COVID-19 pandemic directly affected their ability in providing services to youth and young adults who were homeless and couch surfing. COVID-19 related shutdowns also affected access to community resources such as government agencies, shelters, host home providers, drop-in centers, and affordable housing. However, the interview data did little to explain whether the COVID-19 pandemic increased circumstances of housing instability such as couch surfing in youth and young adults. A couple providers did confirm that their personal caseload was either increased and more intensive but were unable to confirm whether there was an actual rise in housing instability. The HMIS data shows that a total of 5,242 young adults between the ages of 18 to 24 that have either taken a coordinated entry assessment to

be referred to a housing program or have entered the homeless system through an

emergency response program such as a shelter. According to the 2019 King County

Coordinated Entry for All (CEA) Annual Evaluation Report (2020), between January to

December 2019, only 544 youth and young adults had a coordinated entry assessment. The

HMIS data used in this study illustrates young adult entry into the homeless system at a

rate approximately ten times more in the past two years than youth and young adults who

were assessed in 2019. However, the results from the 2019 CEA Annual Evaluation only

includes youth and young adults that had either taken an assessment for housing eligibility

or remained eligible for priority housing in 2019. The data in the annual evaluation

excluded young adults or youth who had entered the homeless system without a

coordinated entry assessment through an emergency response program.

This study adds to the current literature on young adults experiencing housing

instability, and research in youth and young adults with prior system involvement. Previous

research on this population does not provide in-depth qualitative assessment of the policy

and reporting gaps associated with youth and young adults who report that they are couch

surfing. Additionally, previous research has not assessed the varying forms of couch

surfing and whether it could potentially be associated with either illegal activity or a safety

concern for the young adult or youth through the lens of a provider. The study has also

addressed the effect of COVID-19 and how it has affected social service providers and

their young clients that had struggled to either access affordable housing or maintain

housing.

The original goal of the study was to interview young adults with prior experience

couch surfing, and to conduct semi-structured interviews to assess the circumstances of

couch surfing through their lens. However, due to non-response from this population, the HMIS data was used to supplement interview data and to capture data from young adults experiencing housing instability.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, there was a small sample of service providers. Although the participants provided in-depth responses to the interview questions, their experiences may not be representative of all service providers working with youth and young adults. Their experiences vary depending on their client's willingness to disclose to them, and the intensity of their case management. Second, interviews were not conducted with young adults directly and therefore the qualitative experiences of couch surfing were not collected, but rather recollected by service providers in what had been reported to them. Third, there were limitations to the HMIS data. The HMIS data had many missing or blank entries. Additionally, in order to maintain deidentification important information had not been collected such as the date of project entry and exit dates, date of CEA assessment, income information, victim status, and disability categories (physical disability, substance use, mental illness, developmental disability, etc.) that would have benefited the study. The lack of dates in which young adults were living in prior residences, and entries to their project created a time order issue, because it is unknown when exactly they were homeless or couch surfing and when they entered the homeless system. Furthermore, information to include income could be used to disaggregate whether a young adult was employed versus underemployed or receiving other forms of income. Victim status such as intimate partner violence or family violence could be related to a young adult couch surfing. Lastly, evaluating disability types could be beneficial in identifying where

services are needed. Another limitation to the HMIS data is related to the extensive

categories with relatively low frequencies.

Recommendations for future research and policy implications

Given the limitations to the study, future research studies should replicate in-depth

previous qualitative research methods, with bigger samples of service providers and

including interviews or open-ended surveys with young adults and youth with lived

experience couch surfing. Noting the finding of variation in which young adults and youth

disclose to their service providers, it is important to collect data from young adults directly

and assess their situational experiences with couch surfing and the relationships formed

with their hosts. This data has not yet been collected in previous research with youth and

young adults experiencing housing instability. As this study failed to access the young

adults directly though virtual interviews and an outward snowball sample methodology,

future study designs could improve with in person convenience sampling at drop-in centers,

outreach programs, after school programs, or other locations where young adults

experiencing housing instability tend to congregate.

Understanding the risks associated with couch surfing and whether they are

attributable to juvenile delinquency, victimization, or other negative outcomes is critical in

improving policy and services for this group. Another finding from this study presented a

disproportionality of young adults who are racial minorities, LGBQ, trans and gender non-

conforming, or have prior foster care or juvenile justice involvement who are also

experiencing housing instability. Future research studies should examine these

characteristics in young adults who are couch surfing and correlations between long-term

outcomes for youth within these groups and identify its possible effects to community re-

entry. Previous research supports the idea of an intersection between race, sexual orientation, gender in youth that have crossed over from the foster care system to the juvenile justice system (Irvine & Canfield, 2016). Understanding the effect of couch surfing and service gaps in youth and young adults that identify with these groups is also crucial in developing more preventative policies and programming.

Findings from service providers demonstrated the need for organizational and policy improvements. Service providers argued that organizations and policies could improve by redefining homeless definitions and expanding eligibility criteria to be inclusive of couch surfing, adapting policies and trainings at the same rate that housing systems change overtime, and for more flexibility in referring clients to needed services. Providers reported feeling limited by the stipulations of their contracts, the pressure to produce positive outcomes or exits, and limited funding from federal and local agencies. These findings suggest that policy management begins at the top with large government agencies, trickle down to local providers, and in turn effect the services available to young clients. Changing such polices is a generally slow-moving process. The aftermath of COVID-19 has left many underemployed, in need of housing assistance and has affected the physical and mental well-being of many (Auerswald et al., 2021). This ultimately left service providers strained in assisting young clients with a far greater demand than supply of resources while simultaneously navigating these systems from the confinement of their home. As the response to COVID-19 changes, actions to service young vulnerable populations should as well. Overall, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth and young adults experiencing housing instability calls for ongoing examination and response as COVID-19 related policy changes.

Appendix A: Email/ Letter Sent to Service Providers

Hello [Service Provider Name/ Agency],

My name is Chelsea Perry. I am a current criminal justice graduate student at Seattle University,
and I am also a former supporting housing case manager.

Although I am no longer a case manager, I am still interested in working with youth and young
adults who were chronically homeless and understanding their pathways into the criminal
justice system. I also have taken interest to how public and private sectors handle situations in which
youth and young adults report they are couch surfing.

I am currently conducting a research project for my master's program and would like to
interview young adults who are currently seeking social services who have previously
experienced homelessness and couch surfing, but I would also like to take my project a step
further by interviewing social service providers. For this project, I will be conducting virtual
interviews.

If you are interested and taking part in my research project or have any questions, please do
not hesitate to contact me either via email cperry@seattleu.edu or by phone call (860) 608-
0499.

Thank you,

Chelsea Perry

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Service Providers

1. What gender do you identify with?

2. What racial group do you identify with?

3. What is your current position at your agency?

4. What does your position entail?

5. How long have you worked with this population?

6. How long have you worked at this agency?

7. What are your biggest frustrations associated with your line of work?

8. How frequently do you work with young adults with housing barriers?

9. Have any of your clients reported they have couch surfed?

10. Have any of your clients reported couch surfing with people they do not know?

11. Can you think of situations where you think this may have been a safety concern? Why and how?

12. Do you think illegal activity is involved in these circumstances and/ or frequent involvement with the justice system? Can you explain why or why not?

13. What can be done to help clients when confronted with this situation?

14. Can you identify any barriers that are common in youth and young adults who are couch surfing?

15. Where in your line of work do you think can improve?

16. If working in the housing system, how do you think the housing system can improve for those who are couch surfing?

17. Has COVID-19 affect your ability to provide services to the community? If so, how?

18. Do you think COVID-19 contributed to youth and young adults experiencing

    unstable housing circumstances such as couch surfing or doubling up? If you have

    witnessed this firsthand, can you name an example?

Appendix C: LinkedIn Post

CALLING ALL KING AND PIERCE COUNTY COMMUNITY PROVIDERS!

I am conducting a research project for my Master's program at Seattle University on young adults who have reported experiences of couch surfing and housing instability.

For this project, I will be conducting virtual interviews with community service providers who have experience working with this population.

The primary objectives to this research are to understand the service gaps that are experienced systemically while examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you are interested and taking part in my research project or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at cperry@seattleu.edu or through a LinkedIn message.

Thank you,

Chelsea Perry
MACJ Candidate

Appendix D: Consent Information Sheet for Service Providers

 CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: An exploratory study on the offending patterns and systemic gaps of young adults who are "doubling up" in Washington State

INVESTIGATOR: Chelsea Perry, Department of Criminal Justice, Seattle University,

CONTACT INFORMATION: Phone Number: (860) 608-0499
Email: cperry@seattleu.edu

ADVISOR: Peter Collins, PhD, Department of Criminal Justice, Seattle University

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate couch surfing and street connections in youth in Washington State. Currently, supportive housing programs often times do not consider couch surfing as a form of homelessness. Therefore, those who report they are couch surfing would be ineligible for housing services. The goal of this study is to understand the patterns that young adults experienced when they were on the streets or couch surfing and what everyday interactions were like.

You have been selected to participate because you are currently employed at an agency that provides community services to this population. You will be asked to complete a brief interview with myself.

You will be asked questions in regard to your role as a public servant, and your experiences that you have had when confronted with situations in youth who are couch surfing. You will be also be asked about frustrations that are accompanied by your role. Lastly, you will be asked about any barriers that are associated with couch surfing, and your recommendations for improvements.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview will be conducted virtually (phone call, Zoom, FaceTime, Skype). This Zoom meeting will be recorded. Any recordings will be available only to me and my faculty adviser. Recordings will not be reproduced, shared, or uploaded to other online environments.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's degree in Criminal Justice at Seattle University.

RISKS: There are no known risks associated with this study. However, you will be asked about situations that you have experienced in you line of work. Please note that your interview answers will not be shared with your employer, and our interview will be kept confidential.

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BENEFITS:	Your participation in this study will benefit research on couch surfing and criminal justice research, because there is not a lot known about the experiences of couch surfing in youth and young adults. By sharing your experiences as a service provider and your barriers faced in providing services to your clients may benefit future research and policies in knowing how different services can improve.
INCENTIVES:	You will receive no gifts/incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
CONFIDENTIALITY:	There will be no identifying information collected during this interview. You will only be asked of your current position. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All research materials, interviews, and consent forms will be stored on my computer in a password protected file and will not be shared with anyone but myself and my advisor and will only be saved for the purposes of transcribing and analyzing responses. The researcher may need to break confidentiality to report disclosures of threat of harm to self or others, including incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder. Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a <u>minimum</u> of three (3) years. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.
RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:	Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS:	A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. This request can be made by either calling (860) 608-0499 or emailing cperry@seattleu.edu. Results will be available by June of 2021
VOLUNTARY CONSENT:	I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call Chelsea Perry who is asking me to participate, at (860) 608-0499. If I have any concerns that my rights are being violated, I may contact Dr. Michael Spinetta, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at (206) 296-2585.

IRB Updated July 2020

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