



CHILD AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Overview

MetroWest has seen a dramatic increase in youth living in homelessness and poverty as a result of the economic environment. This report details the state's national rankings on a number of homelessness criteria and the issues associated with it.

Massachusetts Youngest Outcasts, State Report on Child Homelessness, The National Center on Family Homelessness

- **Geography:** State
- **Year:** Report issued March, 2010
- **Website:** http://homelesschildrenamerica.org/pdf/report_cards/short/ma_short.pdf

Key Findings:

- **National Rankings:** According to the data collected by the McKinney-Vento Educational Programs, Massachusetts ranks 30th (1 is best) in the number of homeless children and 27th in the percentage of children who are homeless. Of the 193,000 children living in poverty in Massachusetts, nine out of every one hundred (9%) are homeless.
- **Overall Massachusetts ranks 8th in the country on the following domains:** extent of child homelessness (27th), child well-being (18th), risk for child homelessness (18th), and state policy and planning efforts (Extensive).
- **Numbers:** Total Number of homeless children (17,505)
 - 1.21% homeless out of all children
 - 9% homeless among children living in poverty
 - **By Age:**
 - Under 6 years-7,352
 - Grades K-8 (enrolled)-7,642
 - Grades 9-12 (enrolled)-2,511
 - **By Race:**
 - White (48%)
 - Black (17%)
 - Asian (5%)
 - Native American (0%)
 - Hispanic (30%)
- **Overall Health Problems:** Homeless families are twice as likely as middle-income families (18% vs. 9%) to report that their children have moderate or severe health problems such as asthma, dental problems, and emotional difficulties.
- **Emotional Disturbances:** Eight percent of children in middle-income families are described by their parents as having moderate to severe emotional disturbances. A larger percentage of children in homeless families in Massachusetts (10%) were reported as having moderate or severe difficulties with emotions, concentration, behavior, and getting along with other people as compared to children from middle-income families.

Bridging the Gap. More Homeless Children, Less Access to Early Education and Care, Horizons for Homeless Children

- **Geography:** State level
- **Year:** October, 2009

- **Website:** www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org

Key Findings:

Child and family homelessness are at an all-time high in Massachusetts, due to current economic conditions and fewer families being able to afford their own housing. As of the end of July 2009, there were:

- Approximately 2,880 families with about 5,050 children temporarily housed in emergency shelter in the Bay State, including approximately 2,780 children under the age of six.
- On any given day, there are about 1,000 additional homeless children in the Commonwealth who live in domestic violence shelters, residential programs for teen parents and their families, transitional housing programs, residential substance abuse programs, and HIV/AIDS residential programs, for a total of over 6,000 homeless children living in shelters in Massachusetts on any given day, about 3,000 of whom are under the age of six –
- 11% more homeless children than reported in last year's (2008) "Bridging the Gap."

The Commonwealth's emergency shelter system has far exceeded its capacity. As a result, more than 1,500 of these 6,000+ homeless children and their families are currently placed by the Commonwealth in motels, an increase of 50% since last year's report. More than 800 of the children placed in motels are younger than school-age.

A Snapshot of Homelessness in Massachusetts Public High Schools, 2005 **Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Massachusetts Annual Homeless Enrollment Data**

- **Geography:** State
- **Year:** 2005
- **Website:** www.doe.mass.edu

Key Findings:

The 2005 YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) included a housing question for the first time.

1. What is your primary nighttime residence? (In other words, where do you typically sleep at night?)
 - a. At home with my parents/guardians
 - b. At a friend's or relative's house with my parents/guardians
 - c. At a friend's or relative's house without my parents/guardians
 - d. In a supervised shelter with my parents/guardians
 - e. In a supervised shelter without my parents/guardians
 - f. In a hotel/motel, car, park, campground, or other public place with my parents/guardians
 - g. In a hotel/motel, car, park, campground, or other public place without my parent/guardians
 - h. Other

The choices cover as many homeless living situations as could fit in the survey format, and as a result anyone who selected "b" through "h" was considered homeless. Respondents were allowed only one response to the primary nighttime residence question.

Of the 3,522 students who participated in the YRBS in Massachusetts, 3,264 answered the question about nighttime residence. Students that selected "a. at home with my parents/guardians" were identified as housed and totaled 3,112. The numbers of students in each individual homeless category were too small to be considered reliable, but as a group 152 students were considered to be homeless.

Through data collected from this question, it was estimated that as many as 48,000 homeless students enroll in and attend Massachusetts public schools, far exceeding the number of homeless students actually identified by all public schools in Massachusetts.

Some findings from the group who were considered homeless:

Depression and Suicide

- 38% of homeless students had felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past year compared to 26% of their housed peers.
- 38% of homeless students compared to 17% of their housed peers had hurt themselves on purpose in the past year – by cutting or bruising themselves.
- 28% of homeless students compared to 12% of their housed peers had considered suicide in the past year.
- 27% of homeless students compared to 11% of their housed peers had planned a suicide attempt in the past year.
- 19% of homeless students compared to 6% of their housed peers had attempted suicide at least once in the past 12 months.
- 14% of homeless students compared to 2% of their housed peers had attempted suicide resulting in an injury in the past year.

Substance Abuse:

- 48% of homeless students started drinking before the age of 13, compared to 21% for housed students.
- 70% of homeless students have had a drink of alcohol in the past month, while 46 % of housed students had a drink in the past month.
- 48% of homeless students have had five or more drinks in a row in the past 30 days, compared to 25% of their housed peers.
- 23% of homeless students compared to 4% of housed students have used marijuana at school in the past 30 days.
- 31% of homeless students compared to 9% of housed students tried marijuana before 13.
- 57% of homeless students vs. 25% of housed students have used marijuana in the past 30 days.
- When asked if they have ever used cocaine, homeless students answered "yes" 28% of the time, compared to 7% of housed students.
- 28% of homeless students have used ecstasy at some time in their lives, while only 6% of housed students have.
- 15% of homeless students compared to 2% of housed students have ever used heroin, and 14% have used it in the past month.
- 13% of homeless students compared to 1% of housed students have ever injected drugs.

Sexual Contact/Behavior:

- 31% of homeless students, compared to 9% of housed students, have been hurt by a date.
- 26% of homeless students experienced sexual contact against their will compared to 9% of their housed peers.
- 84% of homeless students have ever had sexual intercourse compared to 45% of their housed peers.
- Twice as many homeless students as housed students have had sex in the past 3 months (69% to 33%).
- Homeless students were twice as likely to consume alcohol at the time of engaging in sexual behavior (44% compared to 22%).
- Homeless students are less likely to have used birth control than housed students (77% compared to 91%).
- Homeless students are less likely to have been taught about HIV/AIDS in school (81% vs. 93%).
- 53% of homeless students had more than four sexual partners compared to 12% of their housed peers.

- 29% had been pregnant, or had gotten someone pregnant, compared to 4% of their housed peers.
- 15% compared to 3% had ever been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease or HIV/AIDS.
- 16% of students who self identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual are homeless, compared to 4% of their straight peers.
- 15% of homeless students self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.