

Researchers highlight treatment, research needs for homeless families

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A new paper from North Carolina State University calls for more research on how to help homeless families with children who are facing mental-health problems, as well as changes in how shelters are treating these families.

"We wanted to lay out the specific mental-health challenges facing homeless parents and children living in shelters and transitional housing," says Dr. Mary Haskett, a professor of psychology at NC State and co-author of the paper. "This is important, because at any point in time there are approximately one million families with children who are homeless in the United States."

The paper includes recommendations on shelter practices and future research. The paper was authored by researchers from NC State, Kutztown University, the University of Minnesota and the University of Kansas.

The paper calls on shelters to take a "trauma informed" approach to their operations, meaning shelter staff should be aware that most families they serve have had [traumatic experiences](#) that shape the way they view the world. "This should be accounted for in the shelter's rules and regulations, and inform the services they provide," Haskett says. "Very few shelters currently take this approach."

For example, homeless families often feel the need to be able to close and lock doors to their [personal space](#) to feel safe. Many shelters do not

allow this, because they want to be able to monitor residents' activities.

Future research should focus on parenting in homeless families, Haskett says.

"The mental-health community knows a lot about parenting approaches and interventions that help parents and reduce the risk of [child maltreatment](#). But we don't know how to modify these approaches so they can be successful in a shelter environment. We need more research in this area, to give us a solid foundation for developing approaches that can help homeless families."

More information: The paper, "Promoting Positive Parenting in the Context of Homelessness," was co-authored by Dr. Beryl Ann Cowan, a psychologist in private practice; Dr. Abigail Gewirtz of the University of Minnesota; and Lauren Stokes of the University of Kansas. The paper was published this month in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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