Eviction can result in depression, poorer health and higher stress

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Rachel Kimbro. Credit: Rice University

Eviction from a home can have multiple negative consequences for families - including depression, poorer health and higher levels of stress - and the side effects can persist for years, according to new research from sociologists at Rice University and Harvard University.

The study, "Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship and Health," is the

first to examine the consequences of eviction from housing in a nationally representative dataset. It will appear in an upcoming edition of the journal *Social Forces*.

The study focused on low-income, urban mothers—a population at high risk of eviction. The researchers found that eviction often results in multiple and multidimensional negative consequences for urban mothers. Mothers who were evicted the previous year experienced about 20 percent higher levels of material hardship and parenting stress.

According to the study, one in two mothers who experienced eviction reported depression, compared with one in four similar mothers who did not experience eviction; and one in five mothers who experienced eviction reported their child's health as poor, compared with one in 10 mothers who did not experience eviction.

"The year following eviction is incredibly trying for low-income mothers," said Rachel Kimbro, an associate professor of sociology at Rice, associate director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Urban Health Program and the study's co-author. "Eviction spares neither their material, physical nor mental well-being, thereby undermining efforts of social programs designed to help them."

Kimbro said that the hardship might lead to additional problems, such as relationship dissolution or moving into a disadvantaged neighborhood.

"Moreover, because the evictions we observed in our sample occurred at a crucial developmental phase in children's lives, we expect them to have a significant impact on children's well-being," she said.

"In some instances, eviction may not simply drop poor mothers and their children into a dark valley, a trying yet relatively short section along life's journey; it may fundamentally redirect their way, casting them onto

a different, and much more difficult, path," said Matthew Desmond, an assistant professor of sociology and social studies at Harvard University and the study's co-author. "If evicted mothers experience higher rates of depression several years after their forced removal, as our findings indicate, that suggests eviction has lasting effects on mothers' happiness and quality of life."

Desmond said that this could affect the mothers' relationships with their romantic partners and children, kin and neighbors; could cause them to withdraw from social institutions, which dampens their civic engagement and level of community embeddedness; and could sap their energy and prevent them from seeking or keeping gainful employment or participating fully in their children's development.

The study includes longitudinal survey data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (FFCWS), which follows a birth cohort of new parents and their children. Interviews were conducted between 1998 and 2000 and contain information on 3,712 births to unmarried parents and 1,188 births to married parents from 20 U.S. cities. The survey oversampled unmarried mothers and contains a large sample of minority and disadvantaged women. The data include substantial information on the resources and relationships of parents and their effects on children.

Both Kimbro and Desmond noted that their research demonstrates that eviction is a cause, not simply a condition, of poverty. By providing rigorous evidence that eviction brings about a variety of hardships, they hope their study will underscore the need for policymakers to focus their attention on forced removal.

"The study implies that effective eviction-prevention initiatives could go a long way toward addressing these enduring problems," Kimbro said. "Relatedly, because evicted mothers and their children were more likely to suffer from health problems, directing eviction-prevention aid

upstream potentially could lower health care costs incurred downstream."

More information: Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship, and Health, sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/ … 3/sf.sov044.abstract

Provided by Rice University

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