



Hidden in Our Midst:

Homeless Newcomer Youth in Toronto

Key Details

KEY WORDS

hidden homelessness, homeless newcomer youth, homelessness prevention, LGTTBQ youth,

POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer youth, youth living in poverty, racialized youth, LGTTBQ youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety, Health and Wellness, Coordinated and Youth-Friendly Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Institution

“It is understood that age, gender, race, and sexual orientation are among the multitude of factors that shape a young person’s experience of and pathway into homelessness. For newcomer youth however, it is the juncture of these factors, in addition to the presence of language and cultural barriers, lack of status, personal ties and history in Canada that uniquely situate them amongst the most vulnerable of homeless youth”

1. What is the research about?

Not enough is known about how newcomer youth in urban centres experience homelessness and associated services. The Hidden in Our Midst report presents the first research of its kind to examine the intersection of youth homelessness and newcomer status in Toronto. Newcomer youth homelessness is often “hidden” because these youth may not formally interact with the homeless services sector. Rather, these youth are often precariously housed, for example, staying with relatives or friends. This research provides a profile of newcomer youth experiencing homelessness, which offers a starting place for designing programs and services to meet their unique needs. The key objectives of this study were to:

- learn from the experiences of newcomer youth who have experienced homelessness in Toronto
- examine service needs from the perspective of these youth in order to design appropriate responses
- understand the capacity of service providers to meet the needs of newcomer youth experiencing homelessness
- identify opportunities to improve services for newcomer youth experiencing homelessness

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in the City of Toronto, Ontario. This study was developed in partnership between the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about newcomer youth between the ages 16-24 who immigrated to Canada from low and middle-income developing countries. “Newcomer” was defined as anyone who arrived to Canada within the last ten years. These youth lacked a stable, secure, or affordable home. They accessed supports from either homeless or newcomer services.

4. How was the research done?

This study used multiple research methods and engaged newcomer youth with lived experience as peer researchers in a youth participatory action research team.

The project was headed by an Advisory Committee that included participants from diverse organizations that serve newcomer youth. The study began with an extensive

literature review. Peer researchers were trained in quantitative and qualitative research methods. They functioned as both consultants and research team members. The peer researchers facilitated the focus group discussions and interviews.

An online survey was distributed to over 130 members of agencies serving homeless youth and newcomer communities operating at the provincial and federal levels of Government within the City of Toronto. The survey sought to identify service gaps and best practices that could reduce and prevent newcomer youth homelessness.

Data from all these sources were transcribed, coded and analyzed to reflect the emerging themes.

5. What are the key findings?

Newcomer youth experiencing homelessness have multiple identities and challenges which programs and services are rarely designed to support. For example, significant numbers of youth in this study identified as LGBTTIQ, have African or Afro-Caribbean heritage, and are young parents. When they are seeking services they are often required to choose a service for one, rather than all, of their identities.

Service coordination or expansion is needed to adequately support newcomer youth experiencing homelessness. There is rarely one service or program that is equipped to respond to the multiple dimensions of the youths' needs.

There is a need to provide preventative services. If the social safety net is more responsive, fewer newcomer youth will experience homelessness.

The majority of participants in the study identified family conflict as a primary contributor to their homelessness. There is a need to provide services for newcomer families in order to support family reunification and health. Moreover, LGBTTIQ youth face multiple risks due to lack of familial and community acceptance. Settlement agencies, faith groups, and front-line services should provide culturally responsive services to support families and communities support LGBTTIQ young people.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The young people you work with may be homeless, precariously housed, or at-risk of becoming homeless. Many newcomer youth are homeless but their needs are invisible because they are not accessing traditional services for people experiencing homelessness.

This study shines a light on the unique challenges and experiences newcomer youth face when seeking accessible, equitable, and culturally responsive programs and services to meet their needs.

As a youth serving program, service, or initiative you can use this study to review your current practices with an eye to identifying gaps and opportunities to better serve newcomer youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The needs of newcomer youth experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless are complex. Therefore, you can seek to expand your services internally. You can also develop a network of supports to assist these youth. These may include: "family doctors, faith leaders, culturally-specific services, child and family services, and community health centres." Improved coordination between services and sectors, as well as culturally responsive, and asset-promoting services will provide newcomer youth with better supports.



Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2014). *Hidden in our midst: Homeless newcomer youth in Toronto*. Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

FIND IT ONLINE

http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/reports_and_books/Documents/Hidden%20in%20Our%20Midst%20Final%20Report_Nov%202014.pdf