

The Effects of Homelessness in the Head Start Program in the United States

A Thesis Submitted to the Master of Social Sciences Program, in partial Fulfillment of the  
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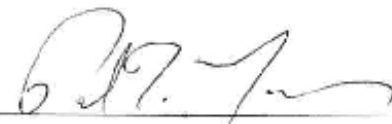
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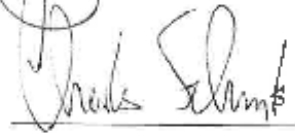
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## Abstract

This paper examines the prevalence of homelessness among families participating in the Head Start program in the United States. In conducting this study, data were collected from three sources. The first source was State and Metropolitan Area Data from the 2010 state-to-state statistical census report. The second source of information was collected by the department of Health and Human Services, and the last source of information was state-to-state statistical data collected by the Head Start program. I analyze information from the United States Census report ranging from 2006, 2008, and 2009 relating to social conditions and environmental factors in the fifty United States, such as the number of adults in a state who have completed less than a high school education, and the number of families who are living slightly above and below the poverty line. Overall homelessness rates among Head Start participating families were low. However, regression analysis showed an unexpected inverse relationship between indicators of poverty in a state and the number of families and children in that state's Head Start program who experienced homelessness during the course of the enrollment year. These findings are discussed in light of Head Start's mission to help underserved children.

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## **Introduction**

The Head Start Program was launched during Lyndon B. Johnson's administration and provided a wide-ranging and comprehensive developmental childhood education, nutrition and health for children and families who faced great social and economic hardships. Thus, the program's resource and services were often intended to aid orphans and children that were at risk of school failure in later years and to protect children from becoming a driving force of creating larger societal systemic issues like crime and the perpetuation of poverty. The primary goals of The Head Start Program were to improve, increase, and strengthen social, emotional, reading, mathematical, verbal and cognitive critical thinking and reasoning skills before a child makes the transition into elementary school. This study is designed to present evidence from secondary data analysis on the long term effects of federal governmental funded programs such as The Head Start Program, Preschool Programs, the U.S. Census Bureau data and many other branches of early childhood development programs. Furthermore, this study examines the effects of children who attend programs like preschool and Head Start Program who live just above the poverty line and slightly below the poverty line.

In the summer of 1965, The Head Start Program was launched by its director Jule Sugarman. The program was initially sought out to be of assistance to children who were characterized and deemed as disadvantaged children. Other aspects that were a part of the programs overall goals were to promote and encourage involvement, participation, and support from parents. This encourages independent, self-governing, and self-regulated parents in their child care and early childhood education roles. Additionally, The Head Start Program is funded and operated by local public nonprofit delegates that were chosen, directed and founded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. To date, it has been estimated since the launch of The Head Start Program it has assisted 900,000 or more children and families across the United States and cost approximately over 6.7 million dollars.

In this study, I hope to find positive benefits for children who attend The Head Start Programs as they make their critical transitional phase from preschool to kindergarten. There are many challenges they may face upon making that significant and important transitional phase in their quest in developing educational skills. For example, families and children may experience homelessness and many other social, societal and environmental factors.

The research question for the present study is whether children coming from low social economic status who are homeless are experiencing positive effects from early childhood development programs. Are families who are experiencing homelessness also reaping the positive benefits of enrolling into the Head Start Program? The evidence will be in terms of whether the families of children have experienced homelessness during the time frame I study.

These factors may affect the overall success rate of children who are listed or categorized as being homeless in connection to many other social and societal dynamics that shape homeless Head Start families who live below the poverty line. For instance, the higher the poverty rate in a state, the lower the percentage of Head Start families who report homelessness in that state. In addition, the higher the percentage of adults (over 25) who have less than a high school diploma, the lower the number of Head Start families who report homelessness in a state.

In the literature review, I wish to discuss the overall success of children from low social economic status concerning:

- Academic Success and the effects of the Head Start,
- Language and multicultural children participating in the program,
- Quantitative Data on the Effects of Being in Head Start,
- Homeless and non-parented children, and
- Homelessness and the participation of children and parents in the Head Start Program.



## **Academic Success and the effects of the Head Start**

Deming (2009) showed that Head Start participants were negatively selected across families, so inclusion of covariates that were positively correlated with the outcomes of interest increased the estimated effect of Head Start. They also asserted that within-family differences in sibling participation were uncorrelated with long term outcomes. To show these patterns directly, they presented results for the effect of Head Start on test scores, with controls for gender and first born status, plus age-at-test and year fixed effects. Rather than allowing the treatment effect to vary each year they created three age categories- initial (age 5-6), primary (7 – 10), and middle school (age 11-14)- and ran interaction models with indicators for Head Start and other preschool programs. With all control variable in the model, African American Head Start participants score about 0.287 standard deviations higher on the PPVT and PIAT Math and Reading Recognition tests at age 5-6 than children who are not in preschool. (Deming, 2009 p. 123). In addition to the point estimation of decreases, over time to what was estimated about 0.20 standard deviations below by the age of 11-14. However, children in other preschools' programs score between 0.16 and 0.23 standard deviations higher without any additional controls. While they displayed controls for three powerful signs of socioeconomic status (SES): permanent income, maternal AFQT, and maternal education. Thus the estimated effect of The Head Start Program was positive.

Schweinhart (2013) examined The Head Start Program participants. He compared non- Head Start participants' intellectual performance at school entry, long term effects on Head Start non-participants and their success rate regarding high school graduation rates, adult employment rates and income rates. He also looked for a connection between antisocial behavior, adult crime and incarceration rates and found significant correlations that differ between non-Head Start participants and the people who participated in Head Start programs or other early childhood developmental programs (Schweinhart, 2013).

In related work, in 2002 Robinson and Fitzgerald investigated the effects of The Early Head Start participants as they make their transition into the Head Start Program and into elementary school. In addition, they investigated how a child's agents of

socialization impact the lives of children and the way they interact with their families, communities, and education institutions (Robinson and Fitzgerald, 2002).

McWayne, Green & Fantuzzo (2009) conducted a longitudinal study examining 152 students from low income families who participated in the Head Start Program as they made their transition into pre-k and first grade. Measurements used to examine the validity of the study were a wide variety of social variables linked to behavioral, emotional, and social skills during participants' early developmental phases of childhood. In addition, the study addressed characteristic of students' academic functioning and cognitive skills. Results in the study discovered dissimilar and significant linking between variables concerned to social and cognitive skills of children attending preschool and kindergarten leading into the first grade. Moreover, findings also supported the use of both methods and approach of using social variables linked to behavioral, emotional, and social skills for examining the linkage between social and cognitive skills while children attend the Head Start program (2009).

Zhang (2015) examined the effects of the Head Start programs analyzing teachers and the roles that they play in the lives of children who attend the Head Start program. Teachers provided additional literacy instructions in non-book reading context than during book readings. They also provided more reading vocabulary instructions and lessons than code-related instructions during reading books. Moreover, the results displayed that more vocabulary instructions had taken place during the winter semester than in the fall. This study provided an approach to distinguish the different components of teachers' literacy instruction during non-book-reading group activities (Zhang, 2015).

A comprehensive examination of early childhood education and the Head Start Program used a randomized assignment evaluation (Chazan-Cohen, Pan, Ayoub, Roggman, Raikes, Hart, McKelvey and Whiteside-Mansell, 2007). A positive pattern emerged regarding the impacts on the lives of children who attended the Head Start Program and the many other benefits that it has on their families. Results were measured in a follow up study in the spring before the children attended kindergarten. The focus was on the mental health of children who participated in Early Head Start and Head Start Programs. Early Head Start programs helped reduce mental health issues linked to

depression and many other mental illnesses that may greatly affect children throughout their elementary education.

Analyzing the effects of books in a classroom setting and learning environment, Hindman, Wasik and Erhart (2012) show that on average, children learn more words over the course of the year when teachers used more contextualized and decontextualized talking books. In addition, they showed positive effects and associations regarding vocabulary and learning abilities amongst children attending the Head Start programs. Similarly, Son, Kwon, Hong and Hyun (2013) investigated the effectiveness of teachers trained in early childhood education within classrooms in Head Start Programs. The study found that children in higher-quality social-classroom process better math skills, verbal skills and many other education skills. Another study was designed by Hell-Kenyon, Mackay and Bullough (2012) to examine Head Start teachers who have acquired a higher level of education who will better assist children in their developmental stages of education. Findings were clear that teachers with a higher level of education will better assist children during their developmental stages of education.

Bellone, Dufrene, Tingstrom, Olmi and Barry (2014) studied the relative effectiveness of a control condition versus two interventions designed to encourage pro-social behavior and discourage inappropriate behavior among three- to- four year old Head Start participants. One technique, labeled the “Mystery Motivator” relied on an intermittent positive reward for pro-social behavior. Children accrued points that could be used to try at a game of chance to win a toy that they could take home with them. The other intervention was a combination of immediate positive and negative verbal sanctions from the teacher. Results showed that “both the intervention matched to function and the Mystery Motivator intervention were superior to a no-intervention control condition, but the function-matched intervention was more effective than the Mystery Motivator intervention for reducing problem behaviors and increasing appropriate engagement for all four child” (Bellone, et al., 2014:379). The results addressed in the study support “learning philosophy and principles potentially reasonable for discrepancy in efficacy, in addition to suggestions for theoretical practices.” (Bellone, et al., 2014:379).

In a study of disruptive classroom behavior, Witt and Gatti (2001) found that the most prevalent reinforcement for disruptive behavior, on average, was teacher attention delivery. The average probability of engaging in unruliness was increased when the teacher paid attention to the child for disruptive behavior (Stedman, 1971).

In a study that was intended to investigate the Head Start Program, Nix, Bierman, Celene and Sukhdeep (2013) examined the processes of change connected to positive educational outcomes of preschool and kindergarten children who received The Head Start (REDI) Research-based Developmental Information intervention. Furthermore, the information used to analyze the outcomes of the study displayed from a large scale randomized controlled trial (N= 356 children), 42% African Americans and Latino/a, who were all from low income families. The study investigated the logic model that improving preschool social-emotional skill “(i.e., emotion understanding social problem solving, and positive social behavior) as well as language/ emergent literacy skills and behavioral adjustment after a child transitioned into kindergarten (2013).

In a study that was designed by Zhang, Hur, Powell and Diamond examining classroom writing environment in 31 Head Start classrooms, one of the main focal points in the study analyzed Head Start students’ abilities in writing, understanding and comprehension of the alphabets that was facilitated by lessons constructed by teachers (2015).

Vitiello, Greenfield, Munis and George examined The Head Start Program and they found that a key component of learning cognitive flexibility and school readiness has shown the effects of cognitive flexibility and school readiness may be connected to cognitive skills. Furthermore, the findings in this study suggest that the improvements of children’s cognitive skills may lead to the improvement in the early childhood educational school systems, which will eventually improve children’s cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional skills (2011).

Carpenter and Mendez (2013) analyzed parenting styles among African American mothers of children who are in Head Start programs in the Northeast and Southeast. Their results “indicated 3 adaptive parenting profiles and 2 challenged, or less adaptive

profiles among the sample, with the greater proportion of parents represented by the adaptive profiles.” (pp. 233) The less adaptive parenting profiles were significantly linked with children that expressed aggressive behaviors in the first wave of the study, and with hyperactive behavior symptoms in the second wave. They infer that that healthy parent-child relationships during early childhood developmental stages in African-American families will positively affect the performance of African-American children who attend Head Start Programs.

Kirk, Vizcarra, Looney and Kirk conducted a study in 2013 that was focused on The Head Start Program analyzed physical activities during free time and play time, and the finding indicated that physical activities have improved during free time and play time has improved children’s educational skills and other cognitive educational social-skills of children who attend The Head Start Program. In addition, the findings in the study have also suggested that academic lessons taught using physical activities has improved early literacy in preschool of the participants enrolled in The Head Start Program (2013).

In a study formulated by Beyazkurk examining The Head Start Program analyzed the emotions and reactions of male students who enrolled in a college early childhood educational who program generally expressed anxiety about attending a university which is primarily dominated by women. Findings in the study indicated that male students in educational programs that are typically dominated by women often question themselves about making a career change or applying for other educational fields and educational program that focuses on male and male-dominated professions (2006).

### **Language and Multicultural Children Participating in the Program**

A present study Fuligni and Brook- Gunn Jeanne analyzed The Head Start Program and parenting styles of European- American, African-American and Latin-American parents. In conducting their study, a coding scale was used to indicate the positive and negative effects of the parenting styles of a cohort of parents and children in The Head Start Program. Indicators that were used to measure the effects of the parenting styles of parents who participated in the study, various social variables that was used as

an indicator to measure the positive and negative effects of parenting styles that could be linked to a parent's socioeconomic, level of education and marital status in addition whether the parent was a single parent, or not was used to measure the findings in the study, which pointed out positive and negative effects and relationships associated with the roles that mothers play in the lives of their children while attending the Head Start Program.

Results gained in a Head Start study displayed the relationships between children's English and Spanish speaking abilities and their receptive language and vocabulary skills while attending the Head Start Program. In addition, this study also shows that children's reading abilities in English were within the normal range of monolingual norms at the end of kindergarten. On the other hand, children's reading abilities in Spanish were nearly 1 Standard deviation below the test mean or lower. Thus, results indicate that children's growth in their English and Spanish Language abilities while attending the Head Start Program predicted their early reading abilities in English and Spanish. Study Table 1 displays the means and standard deviation for children's English and Spanish language component score during the child's second year in the Head Start program. Also shown in Table 1 that the child's average English scores were higher and deviation was larger among children in HEC group than those in the SEC group. On the other hand, it has been indicated that children's Spanish speaking abilities show different results. In addition, children in SEC groups had higher scores, on average, but the HEC groups displayed more variations in the components scores (239).

A study conducted by the Head Start Program analyzing children's vocabulary intake reports in association with vocabulary test has indicated that children who were asked vocabulary noneliciting questions that included novel words had higher receptive word knowledge posttest scores than children who were asked questions that elicited the novel words. Furthermore in the study, vocabulary noneliciting questions facilitated children's preliminary in relations to the novel label and referent throughout storybook readings. In addition, the study was measured by the reduction of the effects for the SWCG (Seasonal Word Comprehension Game) words which were examined as a controlled group only for children who answered correctly for seven or fewer words that

were in analyses and the test. The sample sizes of the study were 42 of the original 45 children who initially participated in the study. The findings in the study showed examined by using a Kruskal Wallis nonparametric analyses for baseline PPVT-III scores showed that there was no significant differences between condition  $\chi^2(2) = 0.0$ ,  $p = .966$ . And also indicated that there was no significant difference between groups of SWCG pretest scores  $\chi^2(2) = .26$ ,  $p = .987$ , based on a separate Kruskal-Well nonparametric test (pp.38 Walsh & Rose 2013).

Early reading outcomes for kindergarteners are displayed in table 2 for the bilingual group. Depending on the measure, the data presented shows children's scores on distal reading outcomes ranged between 49 and 57. In addition, no major differences were detected between the two groups of English and Spanish language participants. Table 2 also projects the mean of each group remaining within one standard deviation (SD) of one another. Correlations between language and early reading outcomes are also provided (Hammer, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2007:240). Results in one particular study displayed how classrooms at partnership centers confirmed higher observation on global value in all six subscales of the ECERS-R, as well as the total number of scores compared to non-partnership classroom. Furthermore, evidence displaying Head Start partnership compared analytical data to other early childhood educational centers completed higher on seven out of ten subscales that were measured by the ECERS-R, with the highest differences seen in language and literacy skills. To further explore the potential benefits on classroom quality, hierarchical regression models were developed to highlight the findings in the study. All the while, results in the study regarding the benefits of partnerships with different early childhood centers were evaluated by Head Start Programs. Results also emphasized data showing the benefits of Head Start Program scores compared to non-partnership early childhood educational classroom scores (Schilder & Leavell 2015).

A Head Start Program study concerning medical care investigated by Garwick, Seppelt, & Riegraf (2010) identified 4 common challenges: (1) undiagnosed and unreported asthma, (2) coordinating asthma care with parents. (3) medication administration issues, and (4) variability among asthma action plans. The action plan

focused on: (a) early identification of asthma, (b) improving coordination of asthma care with parent, (c) developing more asthma education and resources for Head Start staff and parents, and (d) developing a standardized, comprehensive Head Start asthma action plan ( 2010, p.329).

### **Quantitative Data on the Effects of Being in Head Start**

A study conducted in 2002 by Hawken, Johnston and McDonnell analyzed a 10 page survey of a random sample of preschool teachers who work for the Head Start Program, which the survey was based on a percentage of children under the age of 5 living in each of the nine regions recorded in the 2000 U.S Census. All the while, demographic information used in the study was collected in the survey, which was mailed to houses selected in the selected geographical region. The study used questionnaires to measure the opinions of preschool teachers who work for the Head Start Program regarding the benefits and the positive educational effects that the program has to offer to children coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds (2005).

A more recent Head Start Program conducted by Farver, Lonigan, Xu and Eppe, examined information regarding early childhood literacy skills in both English and Spanish as children enter into preschool. The study highlighted 392 Latino immigrants who participated in the study, (85%). Families and their children's mothers completed questionnaires about their families and their home environment, and it was noted that there were no significant cross-linguistic associations between any characteristic of English and Spanish pre-literacy skills. Yet results collected in the study focused on aspects of oral language and vocabulary regarding children's literacy and understanding of language of children who come from English and Spanish-speaking families (2012).

McKelvey and Whiteside designed a study to investigate children who participated in Early Head Start programs; they determined that a child's development during the preoperational educational phases is linked to behavioral, emotional, and social skills. It was a randomized trial involving 3,001 children and families from 17 program site measured by variables associated and linked to behavioral, emotional, and social skills during the developmental stages of early childhood educational phases.



Findings in the study displayed that Early Childhood Education (EHS) benefited children who came from households where levels of warmth and stimulation were low (Bradley 2011).

In 2014, Lee investigated and formulated study a on the Head Start Program that studied the connections between children's entry age, enrollment duration, probability and likelihood of mental health illnesses and treatment. Aspects of the study focused around questions that were used to guide and measure the validity of the study. Social variables were used in the study to measure the percentage of the participants who were receiving mental health treatment through programs associated or connected to early childhood programs. Questions used in the study were: "a) Do baseline characteristics differ among three groups of Head Start children? (children who enrolled at 3 years of age and stayed for 1 year {group 1}, enrolled at 4 years of age and stayed for 1 year {group 2}, and enrolled at 3 years of age and stayed for 2 years {groups 3}. b) Does the likelihood if children's mental health treatment differ among the groups? and c) Are baseline characteristics associated with the likelihood of children's mental health treatment" (2014, p. 823). Except ethnicity and family size, other baseline characteristics did not differ across the three groups. Findings indicated that group 1 and 3 received more mental health treatment than group 2. Different percentages of mental treatment were found, depending on a child's gender, ethnicity, family income, special needs, and bilingual status

### **Children Who Live apart from their parents.**

Waldfoegel (2014) conducted a study examining Head Start children's cognitive skills and social behavioral skills. The study uses control groups for participants and children in non-parental care to examine the benefits that the Head Start program has on modifying children's social, emotional and behavioral skills Compared to children who receive other non-parental care. The Head Start Program showed positive effects on children's social behavioral skills (2014).

Pratt, Lipscomb, & Schmitt (2015) examined the effects of the Head Start Programs and parenting outcomes for children living in non-parent care. They suggest

that early childhood programs such as the Head Start Programs may have a greater effect on supporting regions where there are higher numbers of non-parental families. Pratt, Lipscomb, & Schmitt also noted the need for more in-depth research to further understand the roles of early childhood care education in the lives of non-parental families. The authors note that the study had limits and may have potential weakness in addressing parenting outcomes for children living in non-parent care. It was further mentioned that the Head Start program did not affect parenting outcomes; children living in non-parent care showed no difference from those living with parents regarding the hours of a family's participation in the subsidy program. Moreover, it was also indicated in the study that classrooms in child care centers that partnered with the Head Start displayed higher observed global qualities in all six subscales of the "Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)" and the overall total scores compared to non-partnership classrooms (Pratt, Lipscomb, & Schmitt 2015).

Knoche et al., (2012) investigated the effects of the Early Head Start programs home based programming. Their focus was on parenting behaviors supporting the parent- infant connection for families who are enrolled. 234 parents and their children participated in the randomized study with 42% of parents reporting education of less than a high-school diploma. Semi-structured parent-children collaboration and interaction tasks were videotaped every four months over a sixteen month intervention period. In addition, observational codes of parent infant relationship behaviors contained a quality of three parental behaviors. Results in this study were presented in two sections. "First given some loss of participants across time, it is important to fully investigate attributions in the sample. Second, analyses are presented on the specific parent-infant relationship behaviors, included quality, amount and appropriateness of warmth and sensitivity, encouragement of autonomy, and support for learning" (Knoche, et al., 2012, p. 439). Findings in the study showed that children and parents who participated in the study increased positive support for their children while attending the program.

In a recent study in 2013, Kim examining the Head Start Program and children participating in the study analyzed various social variables of its participants relating to parental income, parental education levels and parental involvement in the lives of their

child's education. Information collected and used in the study to measure the validity and strength were measured by using social variables such as a child's, race, age, gender and weight at birth and whether a child could speak English or any other language, in addition to if a child was born in the United States or outside of the United States. Additionally, other social variables that were used in the study to examine its validity were non-parental condition of children attending the Head Start Program, in testing and analyzing whether or not a child is speaking on a moderate English level before they enter kindergarten.

Control variables used in the study were parental characteristics environmental and community factors regarding social variables such as (SES scores): mother's marital status, or whether not the mother was pregnant in her teens, in addition to whether or not the mother worked between the child's birth and entry into kindergarten, or received WIC benefits for herself or the child. Furthermore, other social variables that were used in the study to determine the strength regarding parental involvement and social status of parents were how often that parents told stories and read books to the child, whether or not they visited a library for the child in the last month, or whether or not they acted as a volunteer at school, in addition to whether or not they attended parent teacher association (PTA) meetings, the number of siblings and the number of children's books that were at home, and environmental social aspect pertaining whether or not a child lived in urban area or live below the poverty line of poor geographical regions. Nonetheless, results in the study has estimated that African American children who attended the Head Start will make tremendous progress in both in linguistic skills, reading and math as they made their transition to higher grades (Kim, p.513) (2013).

Robinson and Diamond (2014) provide evidence regarding elementary school readiness for children that have attended the Head Start Program. They found little correlation between parents/guardians' and teachers' reports of children's adjustment and readiness in kindergarten. Children's social- interpersonal skills were negatively associated with teachers' reports of children's kindergarten readiness. On the other hand, the findings in the study point out that children's social skills, which were developed before to entering into kindergarten, were highly important for a child's readiness for

elementary school. The preliminary analysis, which was tested regarding gender and receptive vocabulary skill had shown that girls received significantly fewer teacher reports of difficulty with transition from kindergarten into elementary school than boys. The research indicated that receptive vocabulary was considerably higher regarding the number of children's social, emotional and cognitive skills and problem solving skills and preschool teachers' ratings of children's social competence. However, the study has shown that there were no connections between a child's receptive vocabulary intake reports associated with vocabulary and gender (2013).

Raikes, Summers and Roggman (2005) examined the role that fathers play in the lives of their children who participate in Head Start. Statistical data were used in the study to measure the results from 326 early childhood programs. The dependent variable was parental involvement of fathers when their children were 3 years old. Surveys of all Early Head Start programs funded during the mid-1990's were conducted during the winter of late 1990's and the early 2000's to indicate the importance of fathers' involvement in the lives of their children as they attended the Head Start Programs and other early childhood outreach organizations. In addition, program agents and representatives from 261 programs finished a survey on the World Wide Web or by mail. There was a 62.5 percent response rate. Results discovered differences among the programs with respect to the role fathers served and their goals in participating in the programs. On the other hand, variation transpired as a result of each program's stage of development. While a great deal of evidence has predicted series of stages toward the early developmental process of childcare, which has determined father involvement in their children's education, it was noted that more and more fathers are becoming involved in their children's while attending early educational programs (Raikes, Summers and Roggman 2005).

Dove, Neuharth-Prichett, Wright and Wallinga (2015) investigated the Head Start Programs by examining parental involvement of children attend the Head Start Programs and child literacy outcomes. In conducting their study, data were gathered from "The National Head Start/ Public School Transition Demonstration Research Project." They provided information concerning the benefits and literacy outcomes of children who

participated in the Head Start Program as they make their transition into kindergarten and elementary school (Dove, Neuharth-Prichett, Wright and Wallinga p. 173). Results measured positive effects of parental participation in the lives of children their children as they attended early educational programs (Dove, Neuharth-Prichett, Wright and Wallinga 2015).

Hustedt (2015) examined experimental data of groups of mothers serving as tutors to children in Head Start Programs completing Wonder box task has shown on average students completed the task within 177.4 seconds. In addition, other tests were conducted in the study examining children's problem solving skills within experimental and control groups to measure different outcomes in the study. The participants in the study included 54 mother-child groups from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States selected from a countywide Head Start program. Each mother and child group participated in two sessions in an effort to make observations regarding the findings of the study. The first session included mothers attending their four year olds' Head Start during class time sessions.

Children's mean age at the Time 1 mother-child interaction was 54.3 months (range = 47-59 months) and 49% of participants were male. Seventy eight percent of the children were White, 8% were African American, 4% were Latino, 2% was of Asian descent, 2% were of another ethnicity, and 6% were of mixed racial heritage. This reflects the ethnic makeup of the community. The mothers mean age was 31.7 years (range 22-45 years). Eighty-six percent of the mothers were White, 6% were African American, 2% were of Asian descent, 2% were Native American, 2% were of another ethnicity, and for 2% ethnicity was not provided" (p. 291). Observational measures known as scaffolding were used to classify problem solving behaviors during play sessions involving the "Wonder Box" and "Cootie." Children modeled their mother's non-verbal behaviors when they were given an opportunity to tutor other children. They did not model their mothers' verbal behaviors as closely (Hustedt, 2015).

## **Homelessness and the participation of children and parents in the Head Start Program**

One fact that is very likely to predict the success and well-being of children is whether or not they experience homelessness during the school year. One of the goals of the Head Start program is to prevent families from experiencing homelessness and to help them find housing. A study was conducted examining the positive impacts on homeless Head Start families on a state- to-state basis ranging from 2009 through 2010. It examined around 3,000 Head Start Programs showing that 1,008 Early Head Start Programs and 1,804 Head Start Programs and 61 programs serving migrant and seasonal workers, served 1,024,969 low-income families with 1,047,184 children. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs provided service to children of low-income framework who relocated during harvest season to engage in agricultural labor.

It has been estimated that over 40% of all children who are homeless are under the age of six (Smith, 2012). An announcement had been made to provide and identify children who are experiencing homelessness so that they would have access to quality early childhood programs under the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). Several agencies address these issues: Early Intervention, Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, Early Head Start Grants, Child Care Works, Child Care, Parent-Child Home and Nurse-Family Partnerships. In July of 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act became law. The law was the first comprehensive federal law dealing with homelessness in the United States, but the Act was recently incorporated in the 2001 “No Child Left Behind Act,” and the law is now called the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act. Under this enactment, each state educational agency is required to ensure that children listed as homeless will be aided with access to free public education (2012).

For a child to meet the criteria to receive educational assistance and many other accommodations provided by state and federal government that have to meet the following standards as listed.

- The parent or guardian of the child may be sharing housing with another person due to loss of housing, economic hardships or any similar reason: if a family lives in a motel, hotel, trailer park or camping grounds, transitional shelters, abandoned in a hospital or waiting for foster care placement or facing a lack of alternative inadequate accommodations.
- Families or children living in nighttime residence that is either public or private place that is not designed for ordinary use like an airport, bus station, a state park or any other public or private facility.
- Children who are waiting for foster care placement, emergency foster care or transitional foster care.

Other aspects of the 2001 “No Child Left Behind Act,” in connection with the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,” address the needs for infant/toddler and early childhood programs to identify, locate, and evaluate children with a disability including those who are facing homelessness or are facing the circumstances above. In addition, parents to the Head Start Act children who are homeless are eligible for services founded by Title I.

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) Programs offer the following guidelines:

- Ensure that the staff members know which children are considered homeless and are aware of the services and resources that are available for proper accommodations
- Developing collaborative strategies across early childhood programs and appropriate agencies to aid and support for families who are experiencing homelessness or frequent movement or housing displacement due to a house fire, natural disaster or any other tragedy that may cause housing displacement.
- Ensure that children find assessments and evaluation or referral to services and programs for children and families in early intervention or Head Start program are provided as required by applicable by law.
- Collaborating with families and agencies serving families confronted by homelessness and other programs addressing educational rights, health care and nutrition and housing accommodation linked to the Department of Health and Human Services and Children and Family Homelessness Resources.

The Head Start Collaboration, Partnership Cooperation office (HSCO) facilitates relationships between Head Start agencies and other states and other organizations to benefit children and families living below the poverty line, including children and families facing homelessness. Additionally, the Head Start Program and other federally funded organizations, public and private, that are in partnership with Head Start Program provide fact sheets and statistical data. These data are reported nationally and state wide, giving information about state- to-state statistical figures recorded by governmental agencies.

According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration families facing homeless, in October 1993, The Head Start Bureau of (HHS) founded 16 Head Start grantees to implement demonstration projects for children and families experiencing homelessness. The primary goals of the project were geared to aid homeless families and provide access to early childhood education and other resources and accommodations for homeless families, including: food supplements, clothing, transportation, and many other forms of governmental assistance. Other goals that the Head Start Program has are to provide services for special needs children who are homeless and ways to identify effective methods, practices and techniques to address the needs of homeless families regarding collaborating with organizations connected to the Department of Health and Human Services and other private and public agencies serving homeless families and children. In addition, the Head Start has a mission of providing housing for homeless children and families enrolled in the program. During a three-year demonstration period, the Head



Start program promoted and provided services for homeless families and children based on reviews from the projects' reports and telephone interviews regarding:

- Characteristics of the projects and families served.
- Critical issues relevant to project implementation.
- Challenges encountered and effective methods, practices and techniques to address the needs with respect to each problem or issue.
- Key information that could be used or learned for the interviews and data charts and reports from personal accounts, statistical data or any other forms of analyses.
- Furthermore, housing and other resources that would accommodate homeless families allowing more self-sufficiency, helping them find housing, transitional housing facilities, and many other public accommodations.

Transportation accommodations are also provided for families experiencing homelessness, so they could have easy access to other agencies and organizations that might provide assistances for their needs. Services are fostered by shelter facility and staff members who are in contact with program directors in order to document the progress and the upward mobility of the families. Other project services provided for homeless families and children were addressed by employed specialists hired to help families obtain housing, jobs, and self-sufficiency. Statistical data have shown that a vast number of participants being aided by the project in the large cities in the East and the Midwest tend to provide assistance for primarily African-Americans families.

A large percentage of Caucasian, Latino/a, and African-American families were reported to have been assessed by the Head Start Program. The largest cohorts of families participating in the project were primarily single-parent, female-headed families. The majority of families participating in the project were not homeless, were receiving some

public assistance funded by the government, or were listed as staying in shelter facilities. Reports displaying that a population of women who lived in shelters from a 30-day period to a two year period, due to other systemic social, personal, or societal issues such as: domestic violence, teen paternity, homeless women with young children, the breakup of a woman's relationship with a male partner, or death of a spouse.

Challenges that were encountered in conducting the project assessed by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration serving homeless family were:

- Building health and positive relationships and collaborative relationship with private or public agencies and families/ emphasizing the benefits of collaboration to potential partners.
- Establishing formal agreements, specifying roles and responsibilities by partners and collaborators.
- Involving homeless parents in the Head Start Program.
- Recruiting, enrolling, and retaining homeless families in the Head Start Program.
- Assembling and gathering unique solutions for the needs of homeless parents.
- Involving staff and participants in project activities.
- Informing partners and agencies about the importance of early childhood development services for the well-being of parents and children.
- Addressing and identifying homeless children needs in addition to the lack of services for homeless children.
- Educating partners about the efficacies of opportunities, resources services for homeless families.
- Identifying collaborators with similar philosophies in accommodating homeless families and homeless children.
- Co- locating Head Start representatives or staff members and collaborating agencies within the same state, region or city.

In addition, other challenges that were encountered and addressed in conducting the project assessed by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services

Administration serving homeless families were:

- Contacting other homeless agencies serving homeless population and outreach centers.
- Educating community agencies on other outreach agencies pertaining to developmental childhood issues.
- Developing and formulating clear goals and expectation for ways to enrolling children in the Head Start Program and other community educational centers.
- Clearly identifying children's needs and ways to fill the gap between staff and child ratios.
- Assisting homeless families through navigating the bureaucracies in obtaining necessary documentations.
- Developing and establishing relationships with health care agencies to provide free physical examinations and immunizations for homeless children.
- Developing creative ways parents can be involved in their children's education without being in the classroom with their children.
- Holding meetings at times and locations that accommodate parents' schedules- for example, in the evenings coordinating with schedules with shelters and parents' availabilities.
- Coordinating with social workers and social services departments and shelters so that parents can obtain work, job training or schooling.
- Hiring child developmental specialists and skillful teachers that will address the needs of children and families.

In comparison to children and homeless families that are being assisted by Head Start Programs, it was reported by U.S Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Children and Families Administration (2010) that homeless children

were reported to have higher developmental delays, predominantly in language development. They tended to be more likely to have learning disabilities and mental health problems and to display higher frequencies of social-emotional problems such as: withdrawal, shyness, separation anxiety, short attention spans, flat affect, aggression, hoarding, demanding, attention-seeking behaviors, or anxieties in response to changes in classroom settings.

The evaluation in Seattle Head Start Program project reported that the total number of development delays decreased significantly from an average of 2.3 per child at pre-test to less than one per child at the post intervention assessment. Reports in Baltimore also noted an increase in vocabulary skills from the time that children entered the project until they left the project and enter pre-K and kindergarten. In addition, reports in Baltimore indicated that children appeared more rested and less anxious about eating after spending a month or longer in Head Start. They were also less aggressive or out of control the longer they remained in the project. And in Boston, data reports showed that children who moved from the homeless Head Start classroom into existing centers did better at the end of the year while attending Head Start which was measured by academic performance and personal adjustments than those who stayed in a homeless classroom. While in Chicago, all children included in the evaluation demonstrated developmental progress over a six- month interval (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Service, 2010:29).

Studies have displayed evidence that homeless parents who participated in the study repeatedly needed mental health, domestic violence, substances abuse, or physical health services. Homeless parents who participated in the study needed self-

sufficiency related services and displayed low literacy levels, lacking basic skills regarding managing their time and finances. Primary strategies for aiding homeless parents to become self-sufficient were collaborating with community, federally- funded, and private agencies devoted to helping homeless families and homeless children. Other tactics and strategies were also developed to address the problems that homeless children and families by: (1) creating and offering workshops on job training and financial management, (2) establishing relationships with local businesses that are willing to hire participants of the project (3) working with parents to develop individual goals, and helping them become motivated in accomplishing their goals. (2010, p.29)

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 81 percent of families in the evaluation had secured housing by the time they departed the program. Additionally, reports have also shown that in Cedar Rapids 74 percent of the families were unemployed at the intake intervals, while 41 percent were unemployed when they departed the program. And in Chicago, 84 percent of the families participating in the program secured permanent housing, and 92 percent of mothers enrolled in school or went directly into the workforce. Sixty-six percent completed or made adequate progress in job training programs, 62 percent found employment, and 29 percent ended dependence on welfare and government assistance. Moreover, reports in Phoenix displayed that 89 percent of the Spanish-speaking parents enrolled in English as a second language courses, and 11 percent of the parents were enrolled during the same time they were in the program.

In addition, in Phoenix, reports showed that 61 percent of families obtained permanent housing upon leaving the program. In D.C., three months after leaving the program, 31 percent of parents were employed, 65 percent had completed job or school

training, and 2 percent had received GED's. Lastly, reports have displayed that in Oakland of the 29 families studied, 41 percent secured housing within six months of entering the program, and the percentage of families sharing housing (doubled up) was reduced from 21 percent to 9 percent (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010:30). However, several of the more difficult challenges, in addressing the needs of homeless children and families enrolled in the Head Start program was the lack of sufficient housing for low-income families, and the difficulties for families experiencing homelessness qualifying for eligible subsidized housing, if they had an eviction notice or were already living on the streets, or in a shelter.

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that children who live below the poverty line and are registered and classified as being homeless in Head Start Programs throughout the United States display higher functional levels psychologically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, verbally and educationally by the time they enter elementary school than children who are similarly poor and homeless but do not participate in the Head Start Program.

## **Theory**

Within a capitalist society with a representative political system, the more people who are poor in a state or region, the more likely a family with preschool age children will be homeless during the year, because poverty and homelessness are intertwined.

## **Methods**

In conducting this study, information was composed from data collected from three sources. The first is the State and Metropolitan Area Data from 2010 census state-to-state statistical reports. The second source is data from the Department of Health and Human Services. Finally, I used state-to-state statistical data collected by the Head Start

Program. I analyze social variables from the United States census report. The years of study range from data collected in 2006, 2008 and 2009 relating to social conditions and environmental factors in the United States, such as total number of violent crimes committed in a state, total unemployment percentage, total number of property crimes and total number of families living slightly above and below the poverty level.

I developed a model that initially started with a wide range of independent variables (from the State and Metropolitan Area Data and the 2010 census crime state-to-state statistical reports) and dependent variables (from the Department of Health and Human Services and state-to-state statistical data collected by the Head Start Program). The initial independent variables were the percentage of families in a state that were living below the national poverty level, and the percentage of adults in a state who were 25 years old or older, and who achieved less than a high school diploma. I also tested models that predicted that Head Start results using crime statistics, but none of them were significant predictors.

The dependent variables are from the statistical data collected by the Head Start Program. In each case, the variables pertain to families that participated in the Head Start Program in a given state. The variables are: the number of Head Start families that experience homelessness in the school year, the number of Head Start children that experience homelessness in the school year, and lastly, the number of homeless families participating in the Head Start Program that find housing during the school year. Data on families and children participating in Head Start Programs in each state were compiled from Head Start Program Information Reports filed by state Head Start agencies (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/pir>, retrieved on November 6, 2016). The following variables were taken from those reports and were available for use as the dependent variables in the regression models:

- Children up-to-date with immunizations (C11)
- Number of Two Parent Families in HS Programs (C35a)
- Number of Single-Parent Families in HS Programs (C35b)

- Number of Single-Parent Families in which the Parent/Guardian is Employed (C37a)
- Number of Single-Parent Families in which the Parent/Guardian is Unemployed (C37b)
- Number of Families that were Homeless during Enrollment Year (C49)
- Number of Children that were Homeless during Enrollment Year (C50)
- Number of Homeless Families that Acquired Housing During Enrollment Year (C51)
- Number of Children in Foster Care during Enrollment Year (C52)
- Number of Children referred to HS by a child welfare agency (C53)

The Head Start participant data were merged with data on crime rates and economic status in each state taken from the United States Census Bureau, States & Local Areas (<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2010/compendia/databooks.html>, retrieved on October 29, 2015.). The following census data were available as the independent variables for the regression models:

- Violent Crimes per 100,000 Population - 2008 (ViolentTotal\_2008)
- Property Crimes per 100,000 Population - 2008 (PropertyTotal2008)
- Percent of Families below the Poverty Line (FamUnderPovertyLevel)
- Percent of Adults over 25 with less than High School Diploma (EducPctNotHS)
- Unemployment Rate 2009 - Total Population (UnemployTotal2009)

Data were compiled using the Microsoft Excel program and were analyzed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). In order to test the relationships among overall homelessness in a state, family poverty in a state, and under-education in a state with the homelessness among head start families, I used OLS regression analysis.

One consequence of using the amalgamated state-level dataset that I created with help from my committee is that the initial number of variables was very limited. Several control variables were included in models testing the relationships, but two related



problems occurred: either the control variables were non-significant predictors, or the covariation among predictors was so high as to make the models unreliable. So the models used in the final results are very simple.

### **Hypotheses**

1. In the states in our sample, the higher the percentage of adults over the age of 25 who have less than a high school diploma in a state, the higher the reported homelessness among families that participate in the Head Start Program will be, net of all other variables in the model.
2. In the states in our sample, the higher the percentage of adults over the age of 25 who have less than a high school diploma in a state, the higher the reported homelessness among children that participate in the Head Start Program will be, net of all other variables in the model.
3. In the states in our sample, the higher the percentage of adults over the age of 25 who have less than a high school diploma in a state, the higher the percentage of homeless families that participate in the Head Start Program who report finding housing during the school year will be, net of all other variables in the model.
4. In the states in my sample, the higher the percentage of families living below the poverty line in a state, the higher the reported homelessness among the families that participate in the Head Start program will be, net of all other variables in the model.
5. In the states in my sample, the higher the percentage of families living below the poverty line in a state, the higher the reported homelessness among the children that participate in the Head Start Program will be, net of all other variables in the model.
6. In the states in our sample, the higher the percentage of families living below the poverty line in a state, the higher the percentage of homeless families that participate in the Head Start Program who report finding housing during the school year will be, net of all other variables in the model.

## Results

Before discussing the analyses of regression, a basic description of the rates of homelessness is needed. Each state in the United States, including the District of Columbia, is characterized according to the overall percentage of Head Start participants and their families who have experienced homelessness and/or found housing during the year that they enrolled. Figures One through Three represent the three dependent variables as histograms, showing the means, standard deviations, and distributions in the data.

Figure One: Histogram of the Percentage of Head Start Families who experienced Homelessness during the Enrollment Year.

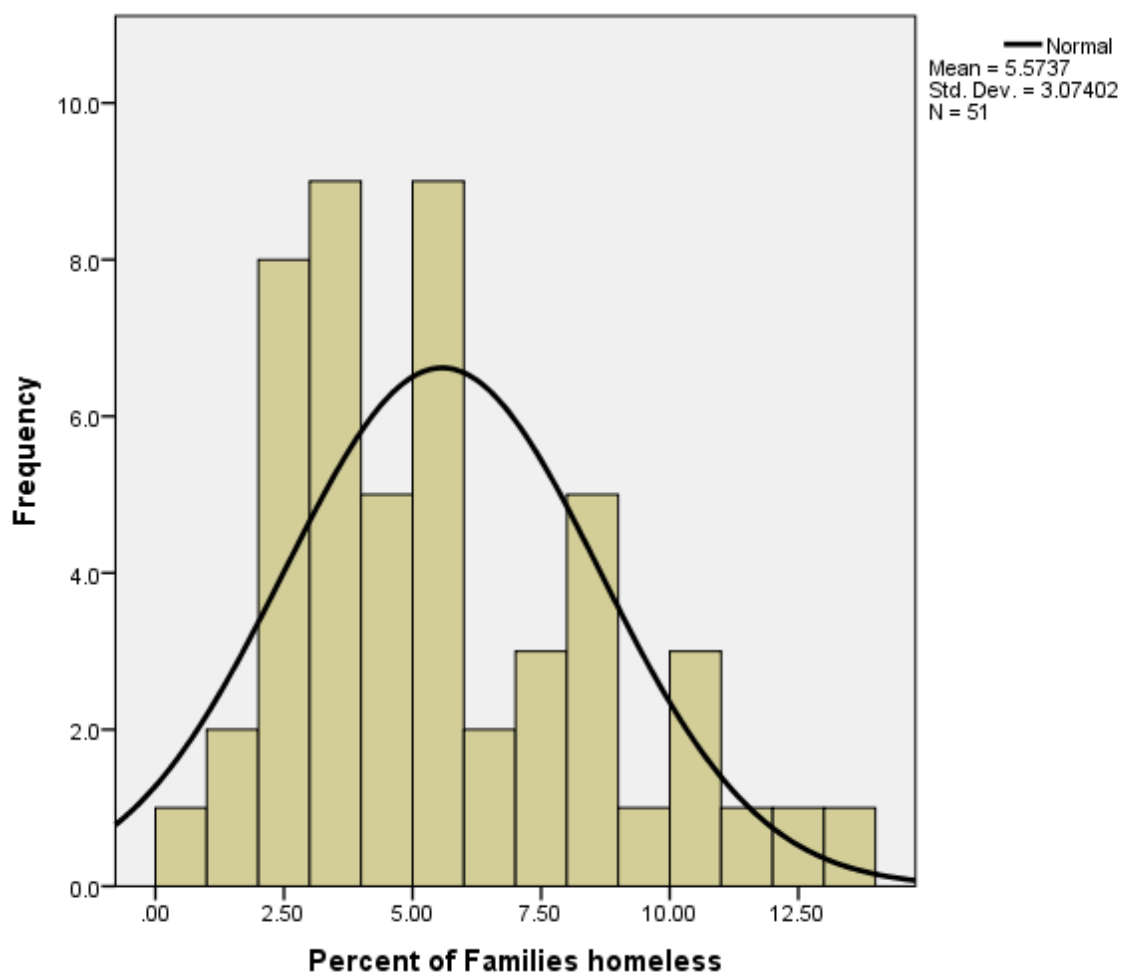


Figure One represents the distribution of percentage scores for the families in the Head Start program who experienced homelessness during the enrollment year. The state with the lowest value was 0.85% and the highest value was 13.13%. The mean percentage was 5.6% with a slight positive skew, indicating that only six states had over ten percent of their Head Start families experiencing homelessness, while 37 states had between 2.68% and 10%. Although it is difficult to establish overall rates of homelessness, the fact is that most states have between 90% and 99% of the families participating in Head Start *not* experiencing homelessness. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, Estimates of the number of homeless families include, “On a given night in February, 842,000 (in 637,000 households) experienced homelessness – which translates to almost 10% of the population of people living in poverty” (2009 p. 2). Given this, a mean value of 5.6 % seems quite a good outcome. One of the Head Start Program’s goals is to ensure children have stable living situations.

Figure Two: Histogram of the Percentage of Head Start Children who experienced Homelessness during the Enrollment Year.

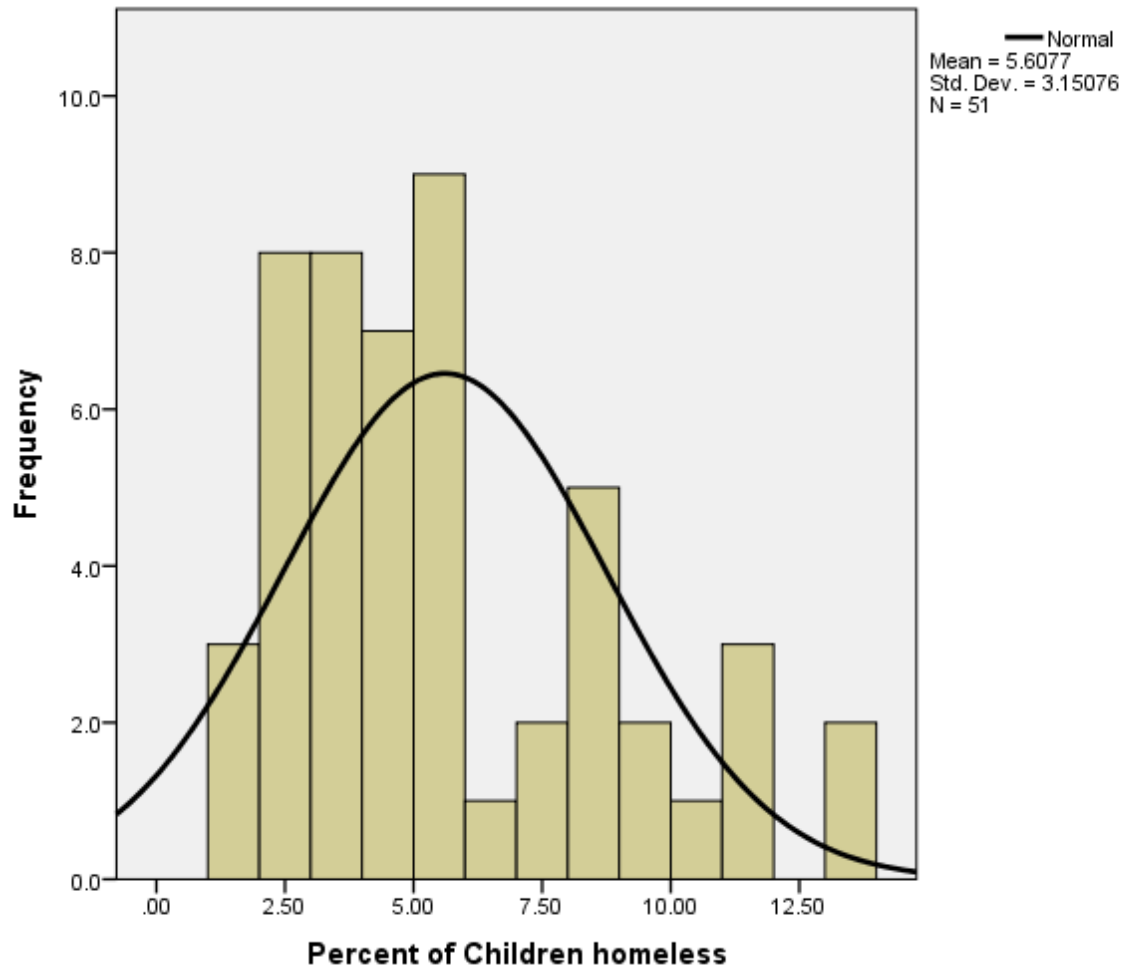
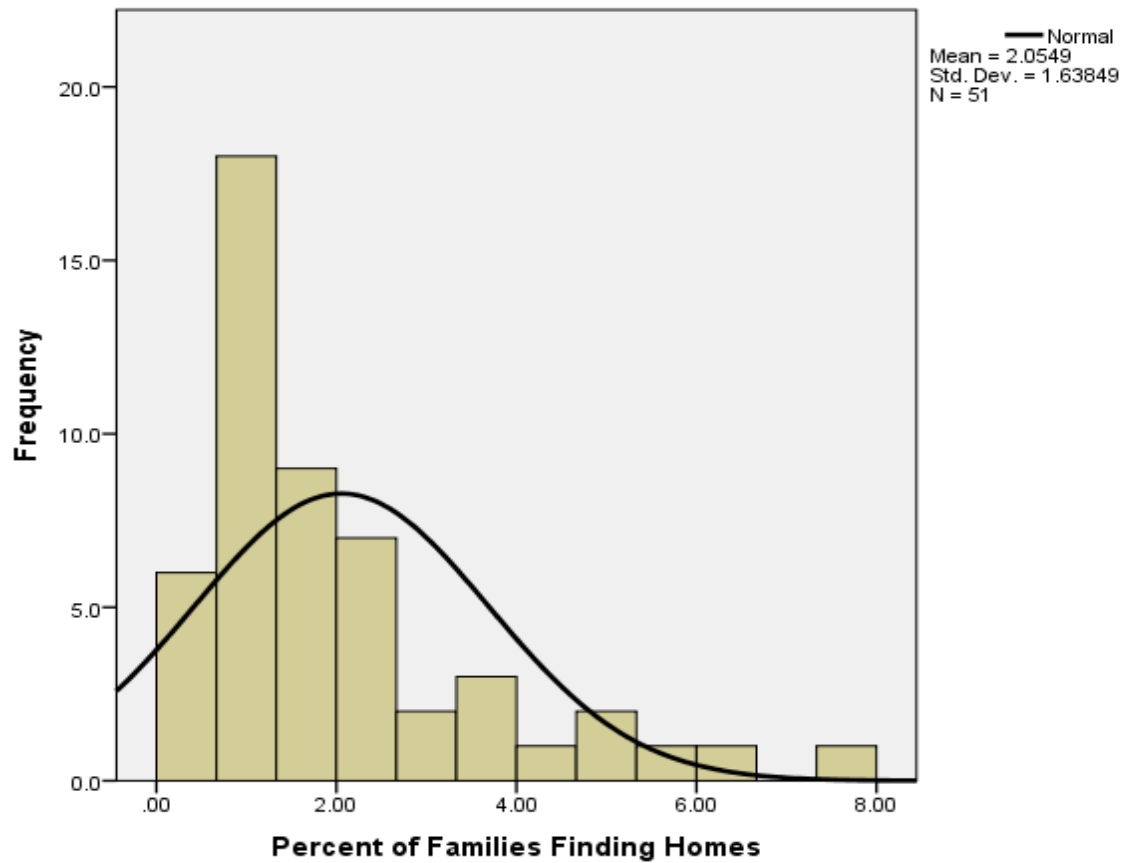


Figure Two presents a check on Figure One, by presenting the percentage of children (rather than families) in the Head Start programs who experienced homelessness during the enrollment year. Here again we see a mean of 5.6% with a slight positive skew. The results are consistent with those in Figure One.

Figure Three: Histogram of the Percentage of Head Start Families Who Found Housing during the Enrollment Year.



Lastly, Figure Three displays the percentage of Head Start families who found housing during the enrollment year. The percentages are smaller, since they are a subset of the number who experienced homelessness in the first place. In this case, we see a mean value of 2.05, with a more dramatic positive skew. These numbers are low by design, but they add meaning to the pattern in which Head Start participation seems to be preventive for the risk of homelessness.

### Regression Analyses

Hypothesis one predicts that there is a positive association between the percentage of people in a state who did not complete high school and the number of Head Start

participating families who experience homelessness. Head Start Programs target the children of financially struggling parents, and it would stand to reason that in more impoverished states, there would be more difficulty achieving secure housing. Completing high school should be a precursor to achieving financial security, so I use the percentage of adults who fail to achieve this milestone as a proxy for economic distress.

Table 1: Regression of Percent of Head Start Families Homeless on the Percent of Adults 25 Years and Older in the State who have Less Than High School Education

	b <sup>*</sup>	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	13.9	1.33	p <.001
Percent of adults with less than a high school degree	-.573	.09	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.46		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

Table One shows a significant ( $p < .001$ ) association between the percentage of adults in a state who did not complete high school and the percentage of families who participated in the Head Start program who reported that they had experienced homelessness in the year surveyed. Contrary to prediction however, this relationship is negative, indicating that the larger the proportion of undereducated adults in a state, the lower the homelessness among the group participating in this study. This unexpected result will be discussed further below.

As a check on the results in Table one, hypothesis two predicts that the number of children in the Head Start program who experienced homelessness during the year

surveyed will be positively associated with the percentage of adults in a state who achieve less than a high school degree.

Table 2: Regression of Percent of Homeless Head Start Children on the Percent of Adults 25 Years and Older in the State who have Less Than High School Education

	b*	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	14.3	1.34	p <.001
Percent of adults with less than a high school degree	-.599	.089	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.48		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

Confirming the results from Table One, Table Two shows a similar negative and significant ( $p < .001$ ) association between the percentage of adults in a state who have not completed high school and the percentage of children who participate in the Head Start program who report that they have experienced homelessness in the year surveyed. Since this relationship is negative, it confirms the result that the larger the proportion of undereducated adults in a state, the lower the homelessness among the group of interest in this study. These findings are puzzling and need explanation.

Hypothesis three posits a positive association between the percentage of adults in a state who have achieved less than a high school education and the number of Head Start participating families who find housing during the survey year. Table one once again shows a negative slope for the prediction line, indicating that for every one percent increase in undereducated adults in a state there is a .286 percent decrease in finding homes during the year among the Head Start participating families.

Table 3: Regression of Percent of Homeless Head-Start Families that found housing during the school year on the Percent of Adults 25 Years and Older in the State who have Less Than High School Education

	b <sup>*</sup>	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	6.2	.74	p <.001
Percent of adults with less than a high school degree	-.286	.05	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.40		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

Hypothesis four directly predicts the relationship between poverty in a state and homelessness among Head Start participating families. Specifically, as poverty increases in a state, the percentage of Head Start participating families experiencing homelessness should also increase. Once again, the results disconfirm the hypothesis. For every one percent increase in families who live below the poverty line, there is a .564 percent decrease in Head Start participating families who experience homelessness in the given year. This slope is significantly different from zero ( $p < .001$ ).



Table 4: Regression of Percent of Head Start Families Homeless on the Percent of Families below the Poverty Line in the State.

	b <sup>*</sup>	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	10.9	1.32	p <.001
Percent of families below the poverty line	-.564	.134	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.26		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

Hypothesis five predicts the relationship between poverty in a state and homeless children who are participating in the Head Start program will be positive; the percentage of Head Start participating children who are experiencing homelessness should increase as state level poverty increases. Nonetheless, according to table 5 as the percentage of the families below the poverty line in a state increases the number of head-start children experiencing homelessness decreases. Regarding this hypothesis, the answer shown in the data is perhaps clearest. For every one percent increase in families in a state who are below the poverty line, there is a .617 percent decrease in homeless children participating in Head Start in the study population. Once again, the results disconfirm the hypothesis.

Table 5: Regression of Percent of Homelessness among Head Start Children on the Percent of Families in a State that are below the Poverty Line

	b <sup>*</sup>	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	11.4	1.32	p <.001
Percent of families below the poverty line	-.617	.134	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.30		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

Hypothesis six predicts a positive relationship between poverty, operationalized as families in the state who are living below the poverty line, and Homeless Head-Start Families that found housing during the school year. Contrary to my prediction, this table displays a negative relationship. For a one percent increase in families living below the poverty line in a state there is a .315 percent decrease in Head Start families finding housing during the school year.

Table 6: Regression of Homeless Head-Start Families that found housing during the school year on the Percent of Families in the State that are below the Poverty Line

	b <sup>*</sup>	s.e. b	Sig.
Constant	5.03	.69	p <.001
Percent of families below the poverty line	-.315	.07	p <.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.29		

\* Unstandardized regression coefficients

## Discussion

The analyses present some puzzling results. I predicted that there would be positive relationships between poverty and under education in a state and homelessness among the families participating in the Head Start program. In each case, these predicted relationships were inverted. Perhaps the assumption that those participating in Head Start are the neediest families in a community needs to be interrogated. There may be subtle effects of relative deprivation, or relative poverty which we will explore below.

Suppose parents who complete high school are more likely to sign up for the Head Start programs compared to those who did not complete high school. In states where there are fewer adults over 25 who have finished high school, fewer parents would know about and apply for Head Start programs. There would be less competition for the “slots” available, and a selection effect benefitting Head Start participating families. If it is also true that parents who finish high school are less likely to experience homelessness, in states where fewer people finish high school, the Head Start families may have an advantage and be less likely to be homeless.

If parents who sign up for Head Start programs are more financially stable than those who do not sign up, then in states where more families are below the poverty line fewer parents, those who know about Head Start programs, would apply. There will be less competition for the “slots” available, and once again a selection effect benefitting Head Start participating families. It also is likely that parents who are more financially stable are less likely to experience homelessness. In states where fewer people are below the poverty line, there may be more competition for housing. The Head Start families may have less of an advantage, and be more likely to be homeless.

The issue of homelessness among Head Start families is important for the people who are trying to make the program work. It is a marker of the success rates of the program and the potential weaknesses and failures that different administrators of the program do not properly address. It also gives an indicator of programs that are meeting the needs of families who are benefitting from the program. At the state level, the percentage of Head Start participating families who experience homelessness ranges from 0.85 to 13.13. With a mean of 5.57% of families who participate in Head Start experiencing homelessness in the years surveyed it would seem that Head Start programs are successful. But the pattern that this number is highest when poverty in a state relatively lower may be troubling to the agency.

The inverse relationship here should be intriguing to the people who study the Head Start program because up until now, I know of no research that poses an inverse relationship. If the findings are robust, it may suggest selection effects as I have argued above. Or there may be some other reason for the unpredicted findings. It is also possible that the effects are some sort of artifact of the particular year of this study. Further research is needed to a) replicate this finding or not, and b) explain the inverted findings that the more impoverished and under educated a state appears, the less likely seem the families participating in a Head Start program to experience homelessness.

The results shown in this study are important to social scientists because we often assume that “poverty is poverty,” so the people experiencing poverty will have similar experiences. There may be effects of overall poverty that can benefit those who are just a bit better off. Still, as drastic as homelessness surely is for a family, having steady

housing while being poor is not necessarily without difficulty. One should not overstate the positive outcome, just as it is unwise to understate the negative.

What I found in my study should be useful to the US Department of Health and Human Services because if in fact the relationship between poverty and homelessness is negative, then the HHS should be careful to look at their programs on a case-by-case basis, rather than to assume that, “The more poverty, the more problem homelessness will be.”

My study has some weaknesses compared to the anticipated study. The data are aggregated at the state level and do not allow us to focus on the particular effects of neighborhood, or even zip code. It would be desirable to be able to test particular geographical locations to see the effects of poverty and education on the effectiveness of the Head Start program. This is recommended in future research. It is also true that we are looking at a relatively short period of time. It is cross-sectional and as such it is complete, but it would be desirable to see the effects of particular timespans, especially given the volatility of the economy during the period of time for which we have data.

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