



**THE
STREET
HEALTH
REPORT
2007**

**The Health Status of
Homeless People
and Homeless
People with
Concurrent
Disorders in Toronto**

Homelessness in Toronto

- City of Toronto: population 2.48 million
- 25,000 different people use a homeless shelter in Toronto each year
- City of Toronto Street Needs Assessment
→ 5,052 homeless individuals (April 2006)

Study background & methods

- Findings are from a larger study conducted by Street Health in winter 2006/2007.
- The Street Health Report 2007: representative, random sample of 368 homeless men and women at meal programs & shelters across downtown Toronto
- Homelessness defined as: having stayed in a shelter, with a friend/relative, in a public place, or other site not intended for human habitation for at least 10 of the last 30 nights

Community Involvement

- Peer researchers: data collection, analysis and dissemination
- Community Advisory Committee
- Key study partners: Wellesley Institute, CRICH - St. Michael's Hospital, NFB: Filmmaker-in-Residence Project
- Research bulletins on specific topics

What is a 'Concurrent Disorder'?

- Term used to describe any combination of mental health and substance use issues
- Lack of coordination between mental health and addiction services. Can make it very difficult to access any type of social service
- Study definition of CD: mental health diagnosis &/or hospitalization for mental health reason *and* regular drug use &/or heavy alcohol use

Findings: Prevalence of CD

- 26% (95) of the total sample had a concurrent disorder
- 14% (51) mental health issue only
- 43% (157) substance use issue only
- 17% (65) neither

Findings: Demographics

- 65% identified as male; 35% female
- Average age 41 years
- 91% born in Canada
- 48% had a high school degree or more
- Homeless an average of 5.4 years

Findings: Homelessness

- Economic factors were the main reasons given for becoming and remaining homeless
- People with CD more likely to cite poor living conditions as the reason for losing last housing (35% vs. 23%)

Findings: Daily living conditions

- 64% unable to get a shelter bed at least once in the past year (vs. 49%)
- 39% often went hungry in past 3 months (vs. 25%)
- 45% had been physically assaulted at least once in the past year (vs. 32%)

Findings: Health & well-being

- Worse self-rated general health (2.5 vs. 3)
- Worse daily stress (3.9 vs. 3.2)
- Greater social isolation: 52% said they often feel lonely or remote from other people (vs. 34%)

Findings: Health & well-being

- 85% have at least one serious physical health condition* (vs. 70%)
- 85% report using substances for self-medication: to relieve stress, pain or feel better about their lives (vs. 69%)

*includes: cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, hepatitis and other liver diseases, gastrointestinal ulcers, diabetes, anemia, epilepsy, cancer and HIV/AIDS

Findings: Access to health care

- 41% hospitalized at least 1 night in past year (vs. 18%)
- 67% visited an ER in past year an average of 7 x (vs. 49% on average 3.4 x)

Findings: Barriers to health care

- 43% left ER without being seen (vs. 28%)
- 53% unable to follow health advice or treatment plan (vs. 26%)
- 43% experienced discrimination from a health care provider in past year (vs. 25%)

Recommendations

Focused on key immediate needs:

- Supportive housing options for people with CD
- Expansion of community-based intensive case management services
- Create and expand community-based mental health and addictions programs
- 24-hour non-medical crisis support centre
- Community Support Worker positions in ERs
- Increase detox and residential treatment options for people with CD

Acknowledgements

- The Wellesley Institute
- The Metcalf Foundation
- The United Way of Greater Toronto
- HRSDC – Homelessness Partnering Secretariat
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Interdisciplinary Capacity Enhancement Grant on Homelessness, Housing & Health

Street Health Research Publications

- Available at: www.streethealth.ca

Street Health Stories Film (NFB)

- 9 mins: available on YouTube

Erika Khandor: erika@streethealth.ca