

Migratory and Transient Homelessness In Northern Ontario



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Literature search

- A gap in the literature pertaining to migratory and transient homelessness.
- Relatively few published studies on this issue.
- Virtually no Canadian studies published within the last 40 years.

Objectives

- ❑ Expand the base of knowledge about migratory/transient homelessness in a northern Ontario context.
- ❑ Examine the definition, extent, nature and impact of the issue.
- ❑ Identify strategies for mitigation.
- ❑ Provide information on an area of concern to local service providers in Sudbury.

Definition of transience/migration

- Four dimensions based on the concepts of
 - Migration;
 - Duration;
 - Intention; and
 - involvement.

- Pollio (1997)

Definition (2)

- Three groups based on duration:
 - Recent migrants: moved to Sudbury within one year of the study.
 - Intermediate-term: moved to Sudbury within five years.
 - “Stayers”: moved to Sudbury more than 5 years prior to the study.

- Rahimian, Wolch & Koegel (1992)

Data

- Two sources of quantitative data
- (1) Analysis of Existing Quantitative Data (2000-2007)
 - 8 period-prevalence studies (2000 to 2007) provided a database of 2,472 homeless and near homeless persons.
 - Included 421 persons who self-reported transience/migration.
 - Information on characteristics, housing status, reasons given for homelessness, seasonal patterns, sources of income, agencies accessed, mental and physical health, prior experiences with homelessness, and dependant children.

Quantitative Data (2)

- (2) 2009 Survey of Homeless Persons
 - 23 February to 1 March 2009.
 - Participants were individuals accessing front-line services for homeless persons.
 - Questions included the four dimensions described by Pollio (1997):
 - migration, duration, intention and involvement.
 - Participants were 349 adolescents and adults and 113 dependent children under the age of majority.

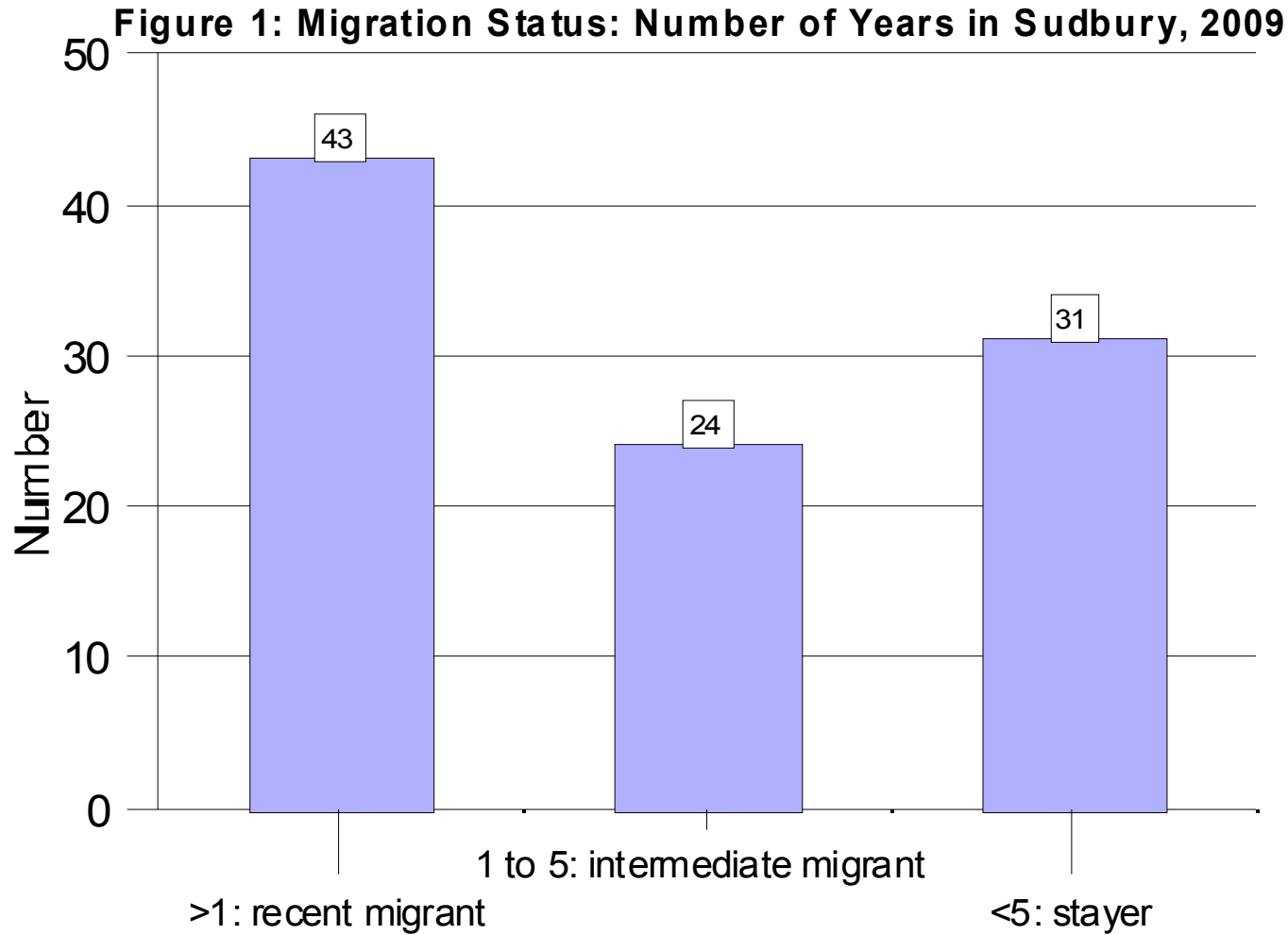
Two Sources of Qualitative Data

- (1) Analysis of interviews conducted 2002-2004
 - 49 interviews; 15 (31%) were migratory/transient.
- (2) Focus groups conducted in April 2009
 - Three focus groups with service users:
 - Anglophone, Francophone and Aboriginal.
 - Three focus groups with service providers/municipal stakeholders:
 - Anglophone, Francophone and Aboriginal.

Results

- Extent of the issue:
 - Existing quantitative data
 - On average, 12% of homeless persons were migratory/transient.
 - Range was 3 to 26%.
 - 2009 Survey
 - 32% (n=111) self-reported migration/transience.
 - 28% (n=98) provided detailed information about migration.
 - 19% (n=67) were recent or intermediate-term migrants.

Duration—migrant groups



Duration (2)

- Average length of stay in Sudbury
 - Recent migrants: 3 months
 - Intermediate-term migrants: 2 years
 - Stayers: 22 years

- Number of moves in previous year
 - Recent migrants: up to 8 times
 - Intermediate-term: up to 6 times
 - Stayers: up to 3 times

Communities of Origin

- ❑ Migration pathways are complex.
- ❑ Some had travelled from multiple communities on their way to Sudbury.
- ❑ Over three-quarters had come from a region in Ontario.
 - Typically in northern Ontario—examples:
 - ❑ Northeast: Timmins, Cochrane, Chapleau
 - ❑ Northwest: Thunder Bay, Terrace Bay
 - ❑ West: North Shore, Manitoulin Island, Sault, Wawa
 - ❑ East: North Bay, Sturgeon Falls
 - Often in southern or eastern Ontario:
 - ❑ Toronto, St. Catharines, Ottawa, Kingston

Communities of Origin (2)

- Up to 11% were migrating from other provinces/territories:
 - BC, Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland
- Very few were migrating from another country:
 - USA, Indonesia, Zimbabwe

Nature of the issue

- Characteristics of recent migrants (2009):
 - 69% men
 - 74% single or separated, divorced or widowed
 - 72% did not have custody of any children
 - Cultural groups
 - 54% Anglophone of European origins
 - 28% Aboriginal origins
 - 15% Francophones
 - 3% other (e.g. visible minorities)
 - 81% were absolutely homeless
 - 33% had no source of income

Reasons for homelessness: Recent migrants, 2009 survey

- Unemployment or inability to obtain employment (29%)
- Illness or mental illness (15%)
- Family issues/domestic violence (14%)
- Problems with social assistance (12%)
- Travelling/moving/transience (12%)
- Substance use (8)
- Housing problems (6%)
- Out of jail (4%)

Reasons for leaving a community: qualitative data

□ Community-level

- Lack of services, employment, housing or education, isolation, racism, insecurity, violence.
- A participant from a James Bay First Nation left because of education and a lack of housing:
 - *Yeah if I were to move back there with my two kids I would have to live with either my grandmother or my aunt. And my grandmother has a five bedroom house and, in total, there is about 18 people living in there, with ahh three or four different families. I probably like umm, I know my aunt and her husband they have five children and they share one bedroom.*

Reasons for leaving a community: qualitative data (2)

□ Individual-level

- Relationship problems, boredom, desire to travel, events, encouraged to leave
- *[People move because of] bad relationships, or you owe money or something. (service user)*
- *I came [from northwestern Ontario] because I lost my mom and dad. (service user)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on homeless persons

□ Range of emotional impacts

- Loneliness, isolation, loss, shame, fear.
- *[Newcomers] they pretty much keep to themselves. When I come to shelters like this, I usually keep to myself. (service user)*

□ Loss of social networks

- *The rule is that I can't go home [when] drinking because we are trying to get [a child back] from Children's Aid. I'm looking for an apartment so I can have a stable place when I come back from treatment. (service user)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on homeless persons (2)

- Difficulty in finding/accessing services
 - *ID or verification, they don't necessarily always seem to have it. But yet if they need a health card, they have to have a place of residence. There's no transitory health card, you have to have an address. If you don't have a place to call home or an address to call home, or an address to get mail, they can't give a health card to you. (service provider)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on homeless persons (3)

- Difficulty in finding shelter/housing
 - *It's just, at the Salvation Army—there really isn't enough room. I mean just for men. There's not enough; now they have men and families living in the shelter. They need to get something suitable. I don't think they should be sending women and children out to stay at motels rooms at months at a time. Or even staying there for month at the time. (service user)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on homeless persons (4)

□ Involvement in substance use

- *Because I went into treatment, I was doing a lot more better out there [western Canada] than I was here. Then six months I went right back to where I was—here in Sudbury. Went back to using drugs again. For me personally, I had a hard time staying clean. (service user)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on service providers

- Difficulty in providing services at short notice
 - *A woman came here from Fort Albany with 2 others because it was over crowded in her house. And she came to Sudbury and they turned her away at the Salvation Army women's shelter. And OW wouldn't take her to stay because she initially paid rent for April where she was. So now that she's here in Sudbury, she was not able to get help, it was Thursday afternoon and she couldn't get anything. (service provider)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on service providers (2)

- Difficulty in determining eligibility for services
 - *And sometime you have to decide, are we gonna give out a huge chunk of our money just so this person can leave Sudbury, or are we going to try to stabilize them here and encourage them to do that. It's hard—this one time a gentleman had a home in Barrie and we gave him a ticket, cause if we didn't he would have been worse off, because he had nothing. (service provider)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on service providers (3)

- “Greyhound therapy” (Rahimian et al.):
 - *Greyhound tickets to get back to where they're from—this what they've come to expect. People know that if they're migratory and they're not from Sudbury, they [need to] tell them—to say —they're from Sudbury. Don't say you're from somewhere else cause you won't get through.*

Impact of migratory homelessness on service providers (4)

- Lack of resources to serve particular subgroups
 - *There are actually problems—what it comes down to is who is going to pay for it? In the sense were already providing services that go way beyond—that basically driving the agency to bankruptcy. But providing services that we can't afford to provide—it makes such a significant difference to the client. (service provider)*

Impact of migratory homelessness on service providers (5)

- Absence of a continuum of services
 - *Oh for sure, a big gap—like that time that family of 3, had 2 children, 2 years old and 4 years old. What's that other gap you guys? The shelter one. You have to be totally sober to get in the shelter. (service provider)*
- High quality services attracts more homeless migrants
 - *One transient man who came through town one day, he said, "You know its funny, you get a better feel for the town, 'cause in Vancouver I can get money the same day, but in Edmonton I have to wait one day or two days and that's not good enough; if I can't get my money that day then I have to move on, continue to travel and find somewhere where they will give the money quicker'. (service provider)*

Issue mitigation

□ Housing:

- Rent caps and controls on landlords who exploit tenants.
- More shelters and related services.
 - Shelters for transients requiring immediate assistance.
 - Accessible shelters.
- More drop-in centres.
- Drop-in centres open 24 hours per day.
- Transitional housing.
- Housing support services.

Issue mitigation (2)

- Agencies:
 - Communication and cooperation between agencies.
 - Agency accountability to each other.
 - More staff and resources.

Issue mitigation (3)

□ Needs:

- Recognition of the limits and needs of homeless migrant/transients.
- System to provide ID cards, especially for access to health care.
- Improvements to community health clinics and services.
- Literacy centre.
- Harm reduction approach.
- Continuum of services.

Issue mitigation (4)

□ Funds:

- Assistance to transients in various communities.
- Improvement to services.
- Travel assistance to transients to get to their destination.

Issue mitigation (5)

- Governments:
 - Communication and cooperation between provincial governments to change policies that disadvantage homeless migrants.
 - Systemic changes to address poverty and the lack of affordable housing.

Conclusions

- The definition of migration used in the study was useful in collecting quantitative data about homeless migrants/transients in order to understand the nature and extent of the phenomenon.
- The study provided information about the extent of the problem.
 - The 2009 survey indicated that the proportion of the total homeless population that is migratory/transient was over a quarter (28%), if stayers who self-reported migration are included.
 - Excluding this subgroup and drawing on official definitions of migration that are limited to moves within a five-year period prior to the study, approximately a fifth of homeless persons were migratory/transient (19%).

Conclusions (2)

- The study has clearly shown, for most transient/migrant homeless:
 - extensive histories of absolute homelessness;
 - experience with sleeping rough.
 - Problems with physical and/or mental health.
- They experience impacts at an emotional level and social level (e.g. through the loss of relationships).
- Compounding these difficulties for some were issues related to addictions.

Conclusions (3)

- It is challenging for them to find and access services to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, healthcare and income support.
- Some of the issues which confront the service system due to the needs of migratory homeless persons are similar to those generated by the general homeless population.
- There are also some unique service pressures that stem from the circumstances surrounding individuals who have migrated from another place and are often unfamiliar with their surroundings.

Future directions

- Service users and providers emphasized the complexity of migratory/transient homelessness.
- This problem must be addressed through the development of a comprehensive action plan that includes the five areas for issue mitigation, followed by its implementation.

References

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