Exploring the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

From School Counselors' Perspectives

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Abstract

An increased understanding of the needs of students experiencing homelessness will better inform educational and clinical practices to ensure student success. Through an analysis of survey data using the Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Survey (Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013), this exploratory study applied a mixed methods approach to assess school counselors' ($N = 160$) perceptions of the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Thematic analysis of the survey data indicated the existence of four dynamic and interrelated themes of student needs as well as differences in reported needs by school counselors' school level and location.

Keywords: homelessness, education, school counseling

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From School Counselors' Perspectives

In 2007, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimated that nearly 1.35 million children experience homelessness, affecting nearly one out of every 45 children each year (Griffin & Farris, 2010; The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2010). As the number of families experiencing homelessness continues to escalate, there is a growing concern for researchers, educators, and policy makers to better identify and address the needs of these children. Although children experiencing homelessness are a highly heterogeneous and vulnerable subpopulation of homeless persons, research has continuously confirmed the shared harmful impact of homelessness on children's physical and emotional wellbeing (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011; The National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999). These children, when compared to peers with consistent housing, are also more likely to demonstrate higher levels of anxiety, depression and withdrawal, and display a disproportionately higher incidence of mental health, physical health, and behavioral issues (Bucker, Bassuk, Weinreb, & Brooks, 1999; Mansoo, North, Lavesser, Osbourne, & Spitznagel, 2008; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2005). The pervasive and chronic nature of homelessness negatively impacts other areas of functioning as well, including children's academic achievement and educational opportunities (Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, & Knight, 2011; Herbers et al., 2012; Masten et al., 2012). As children experiencing homelessness are exposed to extensive and often debilitating difficulties that impact the trajectory of their later development, it is essential to further understand their complex and collective needs. Through exploring the needs of

students experiencing homelessness from school counselors' perspectives, this study seeks to expand on the present findings regarding students' needs in order to develop more effective and individually tailored services and interventions to facilitate emotional, behavioral, and academic development at the school level.

This exploratory study investigates school counselors' perceptions of the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Through use of the Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Survey [KSHSS] (Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013), the present study includes school counselors' (N = 160) responses to a survey section asking them to describe the academic, personal/social, and career planning needs of students experiencing homelessness. These areas were selected based on the three developmental domains of students according to the American School Counselor Association [ASCA] National Model (ASCA, 2012). While several articles identify the needs of students experiencing homelessness from a community perspective (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Coker et al., 2009; Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003), no empirical study to date investigates the needs of students experiencing homelessness from a school counseling perspective. As comprehensive school counseling programs address the needs of all students (ASCA, 2012), including students who experience homelessness, school counselors are likely to work closely with these students and are uniquely attuned to their needs (ASCA, 2010). In this sense, the perspective of the school counselor – a valuable yet often overlooked vantage point – offers a useful layer of insight with which to better inform school-based approaches targeting students' needs. Through a mixed methods analysis, this study provides a deeper understanding of the needs of students experiencing homelessness as well as offers important

practical implications to better address these needs. The results of this article propose a model of needs that can guide educators and other service providers to offer supportive interventions for students experiencing homelessness at the school level.

Impact of Homelessness on Children and Youth

In order to comprehensively and effectively address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, it is essential to first illuminate the challenges and stressors associated with homelessness. Through an enhanced understanding of the shared struggles that these students' face, their needs can be further clarified and used to enlighten best practices. Several authors have concluded that homelessness can impact the emotional, behavioral, and academic development of students. For example, Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, and Brooks (1999) drew attention to the impact of homelessness through a comparison of children experiencing homelessness ($N = 80$) and children with consistent housing ($N = 148$). They found that children experiencing homelessness are exposed to more stressful life events than their peers with consistent housing and are also more likely to exhibit internalizing and behavioral concerns. Research also indicates that homelessness can interrupt a child's personal and social development, contributing to a sense of isolation and anxiety (Anooshian, 2003; Daniels, 1992), which can make it difficult for children to maintain consistent relationships (Daniels, 1992). Further, Gewirtz et al. (2008) suggests, the emotional and behavioral consequences of homelessness may worsen the longer a child experiences homelessness.

Related to their emotional and behavioral difficulties, children experiencing homelessness are also at an increased risk for facing academic concerns (Fantuzzo,

LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012; Obradovic et al., 2009). Due to their transience, children experiencing homelessness often do not attend school on a regular basis, thus preventing them from receiving the same academic services as their consistently housed peers (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). As a result of their frequent disruptions from school, these children are subject to a host of academic-related difficulties including developmental delays (Karger & Stoesz, 1998), lower academic performance (Miller, 2011; Rubin et al., 1996), increased risk for learning disabilities (Rubin et al., 1996; Biggar, 2001), and increased likelihood for grade retention (Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004). Further, children experiencing homelessness have difficulty receiving consistent transportation, providing documentation of residency, and having appropriate academic placement services (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; McCarthy, 2000; Strawser, Markos, Yamaguchi, & Higgins, 2000). Importantly, the multifaceted nature of these academic challenges has a complex and, at times, symbiotic relationship to the child's psychosocial difficulties. The intricacy and co-morbidity of these consequences of homelessness demands an increased awareness of how these problems can be appropriately and sensitively addressed.

Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Addressing the emotional and academic impact of homelessness requires an identification of the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness in order to improve interventions and services in the school, family, and community. In light of the emotional, behavioral, and academic consequences of homelessness, several authors have suggested needs that emerge due to challenges faced by students (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Daniels, 1992; Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Grothaus et al., 2011;

Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). For instance, Aviles and Helfrich (2004) and Hicks-Coolick et al. (2003) describe service needs, as those comprehensive services that are needed to support students experiencing homelessness. These are described as services related to education, emotional guidance, daily living, health, and basic needs (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004). Further, Daniels (1992) suggests a conceptual framework of needs related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). These needs include Physiological Needs (food, clothing, and finances), Safety Needs (personal security and having a safe haven), the Need of Love and Belonging (acceptance, affection, and being loved), and Self-Esteem Needs (a healthy psychological disposition). These needs can be broken down into separate, yet interconnected categories that often dynamically co-exist.

Basic Needs

On the most primary level, basic needs are commonly highlighted as lacking for students experiencing homelessness (Daniels, 1992; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). These basic needs include food, shelter, privacy, and clothing (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Browne, 1993; Buckner, 2008). Further, Hicks-Coolick et al. (2003) describes basic needs as Care Needs including daycare, developmental assessments, and medical screenings. Additional basic needs related to financial stability include having heat in the winter and worrying about family safety (Buckner, 2008). The lack of basic needs such as those described above leads to prominent challenges in a child's development.

Emotional Needs

Emotional services, such as direct facilitation in both individual and family counseling (Baggerly, 2004; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003; Strawser et al., 2000), as well as

creating a comforting school environment (Strawser et al., 2000) that is family-oriented (Buckner et. al., 1999) are frequently suggested in the literature to address the emotional impact of homelessness. Interventions that target self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other struggles faced by students experiencing homelessness (Baggerly, 2004) are needed as well as student services that focus on empowerment (Swick, 2010). A need for a supportive school environment is further emphasized in the literature, which includes providing a safe and trusting climate for the students as well as educational and emotional support for parents (Hausman & Hammen, 1993). Generally, programs that provide emotional supports are critical in ensuring students in schools attain their full emotional and academic potential.

Academic Needs

Related to their emotional needs, children experiencing homelessness have additional academic needs that include obtaining consistent transportation to and from school and having access to school records and documentation required for enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Other academic needs associated with the school environment include a well-trained staff (Amatea & West-Olantunji, 2007), increased awareness by staff regarding the rights of children experiencing homelessness, and knowledge of warning signs of developmental and behavioral problems associated with these experiences (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). Further, students need academic programs such as tutoring and mentoring in order to complement their educational experiences (Gaenzle, 2012; Grothaus et al., 2011; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). Other academic needs include shelter space, before- and

afterschool care, attendance support, and training and support for parents (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003).

Methods

While the research literature has identified and defined the needs of children experiencing homelessness, these studies are limited in their scope and perspective. As children experiencing homelessness are often embedded within the school system, it is imperative to explore how their needs are described and classified by those who work intimately with these students. Given school counselors are likely to directly interact with and provide services for students experiencing homelessness, an increased understanding of their perspective on the needs of these children will better inform developmentally-appropriate and individually-tailored interventions.

Researchers in this study analyzed qualitative survey data from a free-response section of the Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Survey [KSHSS] that prompted school counselors to respond with what they felt were the major needs of students experiencing homelessness (Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013). The purpose of this analysis is to better understand and identify themes and patterns within school counselors' perspectives regarding the needs of students experiencing homelessness, as well as determine differences in reported needs by school level and location. A mixed methods approach was selected to maximize the strengths inherent in qualitative and quantitative research and to render the most useful and thorough solutions to the research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thematic analysis was selected as a qualitative method to organize and comprehend the perceived needs (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The chi-square statistic was selected to analyze the coded categorical

data to determine differences between each of the reported needs and participants' school levels (elementary, middle, and high school), and locations (urban, rural, and suburban) (Schumacker & Tomek, 2013). This study addressed the following research questions:

- What do school counselors perceive as the major needs of students who are experiencing homelessness?

- Is there a relationship between each of the major needs of students experiencing homelessness as reported by school counselors and the location (urban, rural, and suburban) and level (elementary, middle, and high) of the schools where they work?

Sample

Participants included 160 randomly selected school counselors from the American School Counselor Association [ASCA] member directory. Participants in this study identified as 67 (41.9%) suburban school counselors, 39 (24.4%) rural school counselors, and 50 (31.3%) urban school counselors. Broken down by grade level, there are 59 (36.9%) elementary school counselors, 33 (20.6%) middle school counselors, and 64 high school counselors (40%). Four participants did not provide demographic information and therefore, were included in the thematic analysis, but not in the chi-square analysis.

In total, 873 school counselors received a link to participate in this survey. The overall response rate for the original study was 207 participants (23.7% response rate), with 160 (18.3% responses rate) participants completing the survey in its entirety (Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013). The authors speculate that many of the participants who

opted out of the last section, which asked them to report the needs of students experiencing homelessness, may have had little interaction with students experiencing homelessness and therefore did not have any needs to report. Some participants ($n =$ 21) reported having no students experiencing homelessness on their caseload and others ($n = 76$) reported having less than five. All of the participants who did complete the survey in its entirety ($N = 160$) had one or more students experiencing homelessness on their caseload.

Data Collection

In order to collect responses, randomly selected participants who identified as elementary, middle, and high school counselors from the ASCA member directory were emailed a link to the KSHSS survey through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), with an electronic consent form and university institutional review board statements. Participation was completely voluntary. The link was re-sent five times to increase participation. After survey responses were collected, they were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for coding and thematic analysis and then recoded into an SPSS spreadsheet for chi-square analysis.

Instrumentation. For the purposes of this study, open-ended responses from one section of the KSHSS were analyzed (Gaenzle, 2012; Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013). For more details on the instrument design, see Gaenzle and Bryan (2013). The full survey consisted of seven sections of multiple-choice items and one open-ended section. Based on the three domains of school counseling, in the open-ended section participants were asked to "list the five most important academic/educational, personal/social, and career/college planning needs of homeless students". This open-

ended section allowed participants to write in their perceived needs, based on the three domains of the ASCA national model of school counseling (ASCA, 2012), with no word limit.

Data Analysis

A mixed methods approach to analysis was selected to gain additional insight and understanding that may be missed in a single methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As the literature on homelessness has not examined the needs of students experiencing homelessness from the perspective of the school counselor, the authors believe they can better inform policy and practice to support students through the corroboration of findings across methodologies. A team of three females from a small mid-Atlantic institution conducted the analysis. The team included an assistant professor with a background in school counseling and one first year and one second year graduate student in clinical mental health counseling. The assistant professor had an extensive understanding of school counseling and students experiencing homelessness. The graduate students entered the study with limited background and understanding of school counseling and the impact of homelessness on children.

In order to develop the coding for this data, the three researchers applied theoretical thematic analysis as a deductive approach for analysis, using the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clark (2006) describe a six-step approach to thematic analysis; these steps include becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. This method was selected due to the large number of responses in the data set and in order to have a clear process to identify a

number of themes that reflect the textual data in this study (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The theoretical approach to thematic analysis was selected because the initial codes were developed in light of previous research on the needs of students experiencing homelessness (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Daniels, 1992; Hicks-Coolick, et al., 2003).

After individually coding the responses in an Excel spreadsheet, the researchers uncovered new codes that seemed to best capture the data set. Through individual reflection, reflective journaling, and group discussion of the codes, the researchers then began identifying broader themes within the data. Throughout the six steps, the team worked independently and then jointly as they discussed and reflected upon their understanding of the analyses. The codes were refined and revised throughout the process (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). After the researchers gained a better understanding of the themes they derived from the coding, they analyzed each individual theme further, operationalized the definitions of these themes, and then determined how they connected to the initial research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Subsequently they developed thematic maps, which are provided in the results.

The researchers sought to converge and expand these research findings through quantitative analysis. In order to elaborate on and enhance understanding of the identified needs of students experiencing homelessness, the researchers examined the relationship between school level (elementary, middle, and high school) and school location (urban, rural, and suburban) and the participants' reporting of each need. Initially, frequencies were run on the participant's reported needs by location and level. Since many participants reported multiple needs, in order to calculate the frequencies, a

total count was provided for each of the needs, regardless of the specific participant, to determine how often each need was reported overall by level and location.

For the chi-square analysis, in order to produce a dichotomous variable, each participant's individual responses were given a 0 or a 1 based on whether or not they reported on each of the major needs that emerged from the thematic analysis. For example, if a participant reported an academic need, they were given a 1. If the same participant did not report a need related to emotional connection, then they received a 0 for that type of need. Responses were coded by using six needs based on the thematic analysis. The six needs included academic, survival, emotional connection, access and knowledge, career, and parental needs. Chi-square analysis was chosen due to the categorical nature of the independent variables (level and location), as well as the dichotomous coding of the needs reported (Schumacker & Tomek, 2013).

Validity. Threats to validity within this study include researcher "bias" due to the principal investigator's background and prior knowledge on homelessness and school counseling (Maxwell, 2005). In order to rectify possible biases in the coding of responses, two co-investigators were selected whom had limited background knowledge in school counseling and/or homelessness. Investigator triangulation was used to limit bias in interpretation of the data (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Heppner et al., 1999). Each researcher coded and developed themes independently throughout the process, and then a discussion was held as a team. During the process, the three researchers compared perspectives when they did not understand a theme or code and challenged each other when bias was presented. While coding, each researcher

continuously engaged in reflective journaling to create transparency in their interpretations and to identify biases in the process (Ortlipp, 2008).

In order to further improve validity and to reduce researcher bias, a peer audit was applied (Maxwell, 2005). A fourth individual was invited to audit the thematic analysis. The individual was outside of the counseling field and had no background in working with students experiencing homelessness. The peer auditor reviewed the thematic analysis and offered her insights on the codes and themes. These codes were then reexamined and adjusted accordingly.

Findings

School Counselors' Perceptions of Needs

The thematic analysis of participant responses led to four interrelated themes. These themes provide a deeper understanding of the needs of students experiencing homelessness from the perspective of school counselors and provide a framework for educators addressing the needs of students. The four main themes include a) survival and healthy development, b) systems and services for emotional connection, c) academic services and supports, and d) access to and knowledge of services. Further, 18 subthemes emerged under the main themes. As no previous studies describe these needs from the perspective of the school counselor, this study offers insight into the provision of services that can better address and enhance the development of students experiencing homelessness from an educational perspective. The results of this study support previous findings, provide a framework for educators and service providers and highlight areas that had not previously been mentioned in the literature.

Survival and healthy development. The first theme, survival and healthy

development is defined as the basic element necessary for children to develop and

thrive (see Figure 1). This theme includes the subthemes food, clothing, and shelter.

The participants in this study described the need for these necessities as well as a need

for safety in the home and school environment for students experiencing homelessness.

In reflection of the importance of this primary need, one participant stated, "safety and

shelter needs must first be addressed." Further, having clean clothes or school uniforms

as well as snacks at home and in school to increase focus and energy were frequently

described. For example, one participant stated that there was "not enough

food…including snacks (at home)." Related to food, clothing and shelter, participants

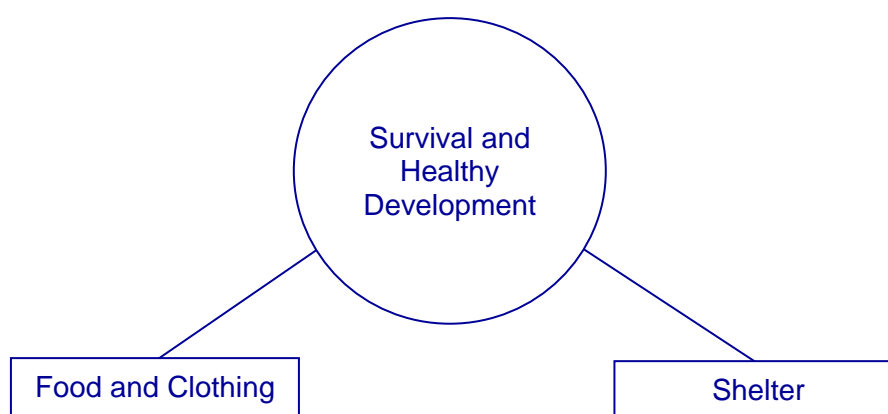also identified the necessity of obtaining financial security to meet these basic needs.

Figure 1. Thematic map of Theme 1: Survival and healthy development.

Systems and services for emotional connection. In the second theme,

participants reflected on the general school atmosphere as well as emotional support

systems and services, such as counseling, as being necessary for students

experiencing homelessness (see Figure 2). Subthemes include supportive school

atmosphere, supportive relationships, parental involvement and support; counseling needs; and individual and group counseling (skill building: goal setting, communication and stress management). Participants commented that students experiencing homelessness need "understanding that they are not the only ones in the situation." Further, one participant stated that educators should be "supporting students so they don't feel alone and disconnected." Participants also consistently mentioned the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging and stability in their environment. They reported that students experiencing homelessness feel isolated in the school and require supportive services to help them feel a sense of connectedness, such as counseling approaches that support both personal and social development. The necessity of accessible counseling interventions, including individual and group counseling that addresses emotional support and skill building, were also persistently affirmed. Moreover, developing communication skills and stress and anxiety management, as well as goal setting were frequently described, with one participant suggesting that educators "meet with student[s] to set short and long term goals for their future – this gives them hope and a focus as long as they know they will be supported in their efforts."

In general, supportive relationships with counselors, parents, peers, and other educators were recognized as significant socio-emotional needs for students to ensure they feel supported and connected. Participants often mentioned including and educating parents so they can better support their children emotionally. One participant suggested "student/parent awareness of rights/accommodations under the Homeless Act [McKinney-Vento 2001] as appropriate" in order for parents to optimally advocate for

their children. Another suggested that schools "provide parents with a list of

social/services/resources." Consistent within the context of supportive relationships,

others highlight the value of healthy, encouraging relationships with peers and "positive
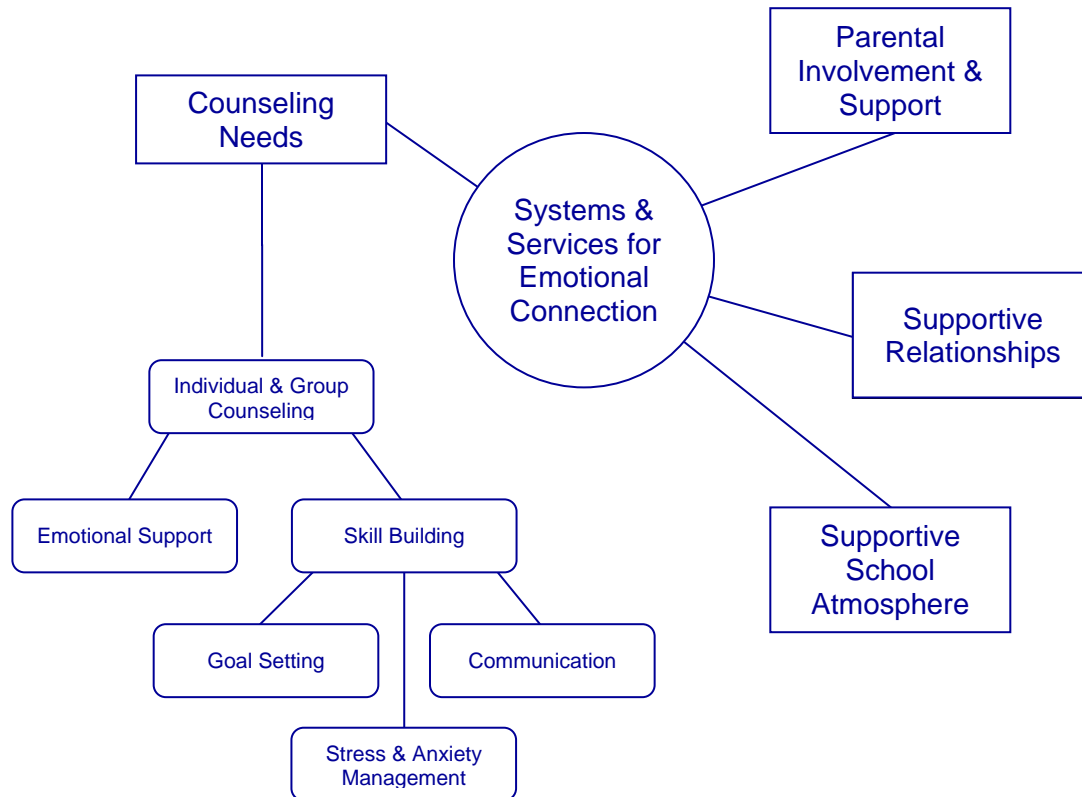
relationships with teachers/counselors."

Figure 2: Thematic map of Theme 2: Systems and services for support and connection.

Academic services and supports. In the third theme, participants identified the

inclusion of additional academic support systems to improve academic success (see

Figure 3). Subthemes include having a location to study, school supplies, career and

college planning, and academic services. In order to contend with the educational level

of their peers with consistent housing, on the most basic level, participants

recommended that students obtain academic supplies such as pencils, notebooks and school uniforms. For instance, one participant stated that students experiencing homelessness need "supplies to complete school assignments: scissors, glue, crayons, notebooks." Moreover, participants suggested the need for a consistent and quiet location where students can study and complete assignments, since privacy may be lacking where they live. Additionally, supplemental services such as assessments to determine appropriate class placements, after/before school programs to provide additional learning opportunities and tutoring programs were recommended as necessary for students to be on track with their peers. Further, participants proposed that students experiencing homelessness should "not [be] penalized by teachers for school absences or failure to complete required assignments due to homeless [ness]" and that they are given opportunities to "[overcome] educational needs that have not been met due to transitions and moving."

Most notably, related to their academic development, participants identified a need to ensure students are career and college ready through creating educational plans and addressing financial concerns related to application fees, cost of college, and cost of tests required for admission. This includes the need for providing resources and support for students to evaluate their post-graduation plans and prepare for college. For example, a participant suggested, "creating a plan to let homeless students know they can attend college."
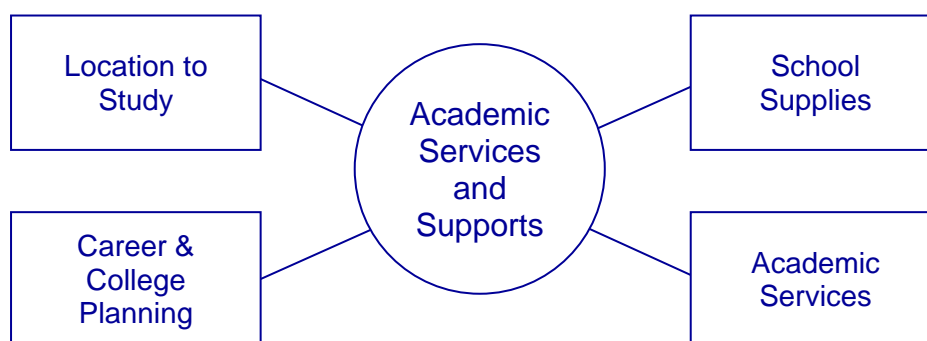
Figure 3: Thematic map of Theme 3: Academic services and supports.

Access to and knowledge of services. The final theme, closely related to the first three themes, is the need for students and families experiencing homelessness to have access to and knowledge of the services available to them (see Figure 4). This theme includes the subthemes transportation, access to resources and knowledge of resources and policies. Included in this theme is transportation to and from school with one participant noting that students experiencing homelessness have "difficulty arriving on time to school because they take the bus from far away." Participants identified a need for accessible and reliable transportation as it ensures students can attend school and outside academic functions consistently and timely each day.

Participants further describe a need for available resources for students and families experiencing homelessness so they can "connect with outside [agencies] to provide for basic needs – food, shelter, clothing, etc." Within this service context, many participants highlighted the need for a resource specialist to "assist with needs at the place of residence". Further, obtainable referrals to resources in the community were frequently identified as well as ability to access these general services. They also discussed the importance of counselors, faculty, administrators and parents knowing

policies such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2001) to better understand the rights of the child and to be able to advocate to remove barriers.
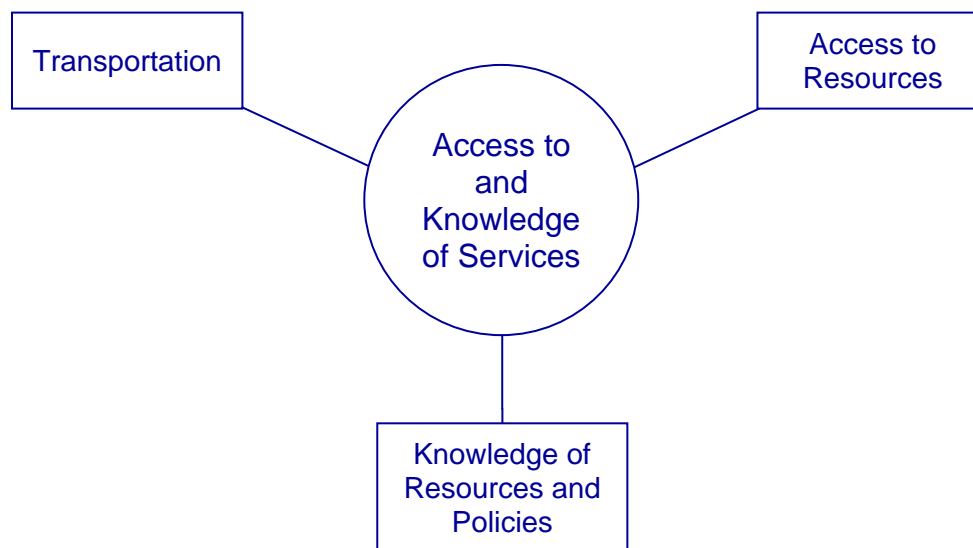

Figure 4: Thematic map of Theme 4: Access to and knowledge of services.

Relationships Between Reported Needs and Level and Location

In order to further investigate the suggested needs of students experiencing homelessness and to explore whether there are possible differences between groups, frequencies on all reported needs were run, as well as chi-square analyses. The frequencies suggest the possibility of differences between the participant's school level and location and their perceptions of the students' needs. Although academic needs were reported at similar frequency, when broken down by sub-theme, career planning, was reported more frequently for those at the high school level (17.8%), than at the middle (11.6%) or elementary school levels (5.4%). Survival needs were reported more frequently among elementary school counselors (22.5%), than middle (12.8%) or high school counselors (13.6%). Further, the need for access and knowledge of services was

reported more frequently by participants at the high school (14.7 %) and middle school levels (14%), than at the elementary school level (7.9%). See Table 1.

Table 1

Frequencies of Reported Needs by School Level

Reported Need	Elementary	Middle	High	Total Responses
Academic	49 (29.9%)	25(29.1%)	45 (23.6%)	121
Survival	37(22.5%)	11(12.8%)	26(13.6%)	75
Emotional Connection	52(31.7%)	25(29.1%)	54(28.3%)	134
Access and Knowledge	13(7.9%)	12(14.0%)	28(14.7%)	54
Career	9(5.4%)	10(11.6%)	34(17.8%)	54
Parental	4(2.4%)	3(3.5%)	4(2.1%)	11
Total	164	86	191	449

Some similarities and differences were also suggested by location (rural, urban, and suburban). For instance, academic support needs were reported consistently across locations. However, rural school counselors reported survival needs slightly more frequently (22%) than suburban (15.3%) or urban (15.3%) school counselors. Emotional connection was reported frequently across all three locations; however, rural school counselors (24.8%) reported this need less frequently than suburban (30.1%) or urban school counselors (32.8%). Additionally, suburban (14.3%) and rural school counselors (12.8%) reported needs related to career planning more frequently than urban school counselors (8.0%). Lastly, urban school counselors reported needs related to parent involvement more frequently (5.8%). See Table 2.

Table 2

Frequencies of Reported Needs by School Location

Reported Need	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Total Responses
Academic	53(27.0%)	29(26.6%)	37(27.0%)	121
Survival	30(15.3%)	24(22.0%)	21(15.3%)	75
Emotional Connection	59(30.1%)	27(24.8%)	45(32.8%)	134
Access and Knowledge	23(11.7%)	15(13.8%)	15(10.9%)	54
Career	28(14.3%)	14(12.8%)	11(8.0%)	54
Parental	3(1.5%)	0(0.0%)	8(5.8%)	11
Total	196	109	137	

In order to investigate whether there were significant relationships between participants' reported needs by the categorical values, level (elementary, middle, and high school) and location (urban, rural, and suburban), chi-square tests were performed. Significant relationships were found between level and those counselors who reported survival needs, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 9.59$, $p = .02$ and career needs, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 19.88$, $p = .00$. No significant relationships were found between school level and academic, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 2.90$, $p = .42$; emotional connection, $^2(3, N = 159) = 3.03$, $p = .36$; access and knowledge, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 6.56$, $p = .09$; or parental needs $X^2(3, N = 159) = .51$, $p = .96$. Relationships between school location and academic, $X^2(3, n = 159) = 0.67$, $p = .92$; survival, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 6.60$, $p = .08$; access and knowledge, $X^2(3, N = 159) = .71$, $p = .86$; or career needs, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 5.09$, $p = .16$, were not found to be significant. However, the percentage of participants reporting emotional connection, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 9.18$, $p = .03$ and parental needs, $X^2(3, N = 159) = 10.15$, $p = .02$ were found to have significant relationships by school location.

Discussion

The results of this study offer an improved understanding of the needs of students experiencing homelessness from a school counseling perspective. Although there is literature suggesting the general needs of children experiencing homelessness (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Baggerly, 2004; Browne, 1993; Buckner, 2008; Daniels, 1992; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003; Strawser et al., 2000), this study expands current knowledge through an educational perspective by describing school counselors' perspectives on these needs, as well as investigating differences between level and location of schools. School counselors, who address the emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of all students (ASCA, 2012), offer unique insight as the frequency and regularity of their interactions with students experiencing homelessness affords them a distinct advantage in identifying their needs at the school level. These findings reaffirm the importance of individually tailored services to address these needs.

The findings of this study qualify aspects of prior research that describe the needs of students experiencing homelessness including the importance of identifying survival needs (care needs), safety needs, emotional needs, and service needs (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Daniels, 1992; Hicks-Coolick, et al., 2003). Additionally, this research affirms and reiterates the need for academic support such as tutoring programs (Grothaus et al., 2011), counseling services (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003; Strawser et al., 2000) and supportive and safe school environments for students experiencing homelessness (Hausman & Hammen, 1993; Strawser et al., 2000). However, this study supplements current frameworks for identifying student needs in schools through the identification of career and counseling needs and specific counseling objectives (goal

setting, communication skills, stress, and anxiety management) from school counselors'

perspectives. Additionally, this research offers added insight into the importance of

knowledge and access to resources and services as a need for students experiencing

homelessness. Further, it provides a clear direction for educators and service providers

when assessing the specific needs of individual students in schools, as well as

highlights the differences in needs that students may experience at different levels or

locations of their schools. The distinguishable themes presented within this research

provide a clear framework for service providers in the provision of individually tailored

and developmentally appropriate services for students experiencing homelessness.

Implications for School Counselors

The results of this study render both clinical and academic implications for school

counselors, offering a valuable and often overlooked perspective on homelessness. The

four identified themes presented within this research will better inform the practices of

school counselors and service providers to support students experiencing

homelessness. The distinctive lens of this study will also foster the development and

implementation of tailored services to target students experiencing homelessness at

varying levels and locations of educational settings.

The findings of this study support the previous literature in their emphasis on

meeting student's basic survival needs (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004; Browne, 1993; Buckner,

2008; Daniels, 1992; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). This study reaffirms the importance of

identifying and attending to the survival needs of students, especially as deficiencies

impacting healthy physical development and safety may not be easily recognizable in a

school setting. The prominent survival needs acknowledged within this study hold

meaningful implications for educators and service providers. For example, school counselors may be more inclined to keep a donated collection of clothing and snacks on hand for students in need to help them maintain focus and energy during the school day (Daniels, 1992). In light of these findings, school personnel may also extend efforts to obtain snacks on days when tests or large assignments are given. Moreover, they will want to ensure students are enrolled in reduced or free lunch programs to alleviate the financial burden on the parents. As suggested by this study, the survival needs of students experiencing homelessness may differ depending on the level of the school. For example, elementary school students may have very different survival needs as compared to high school or middle school students.

The findings of this study also reiterate the value of ensuring that students form safe and secure relationships with faculty and peers within the school. School counselors should be especially sensitive to the interpersonal impacts resulting from student transience and seek to foster opportunities for students to build closeness with others (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). Further, the findings substantiate the need for school counselors and service providers to create a positive school environment that fosters a sense of connectedness and belonging. Given that strong parental relationships are seen as protective factors for those experiencing homelessness (Herbers et al, 2011), it is imperative for counselors to encourage active parental involvement and support in school-based interventions. The need for parental engagement verified within this study implies regular interaction between school counselors and families to impart the knowledge and skills necessary for parents to adequately support their children. Building supportive, trusting, and collaborative

relationships with family members (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Grothaus et al., 2011) is then highly important, and includes having materials on services and programs available, as well as having knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Gaenzle, 2012; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Strawser et al., 2000). The identified need for secure and safe attachments within this study, both within the school setting and the family dynamic, implies that school counselors should implement more interpersonally attuned interventions that capitalize on relationship strengths.

Additionally, involving students in school counseling or outside mental health services, such as group and individual counseling, may enhance their personal growth and provide them with further emotional support (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Grothaus et al., 2011). The findings of this study imply school counselors should regularly incorporate communication skill building, social skills enhancement, goal setting and anxiety and stress management into their interventions. In addition, introducing topics of problem solving and self-esteem are advantageous (Grothaus et al., 2011), as this would provide a context for students experiencing homelessness to attend to and work through their emotional challenges. While the identified counseling needs within this study suggest the inclusion of particular intervention topics, it is still imperative for school counselors to individually tailor their interventions to meet the developmental needs of particular students at their schools.

Supplementing the necessity of emotional and behavioral support, school counselors in this study frequently stated the need for additional academic support. Although prior research indicates school counselors are infrequently engaged in the coordination and implementation of mentoring and tutoring programs for students

experiencing homelessness (Gaenzle, 2012; Gaenzle & Bryan, 2013), the results of this study reaffirm the importance of these supportive programs (Grothaus et al., 2011; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). As these programs often require transportation, service providers must be prepared to coordinate transportation with administration and other school personnel to guarantee students are accessing and attending these programs. Collaboration with teachers within the classroom setting was also repeatedly described, implying that counselors should extend an effort to work jointly with teachers to ensure that students are receiving appropriate and challenging coursework remediation. This also suggests that school counselors and teachers should be attuned to each student's housing limitations and should allocate support and latitude for late assignments and late arrivals.

Within the context of identified academic needs, participants proposed a need to ensure students experiencing homelessness are both ready and prepared in their post-graduation plans. As reports of career needs were found to be significantly different based on level and location, school counselors must be attentive to their student's career goals and able to assist in their future planning pertaining to the developmental level of the students. Through devising of clear graduation goals that are frequently revisited (ASCA, 2012), school counselors can work with students experiencing homelessness to attenuate anxiety and instill a sense of direction. The findings of this study, reiterate the importance of preparing students experiencing homelessness to be career and college ready. As implied by the participants' responses, school counselors must help students access funding for college entrance tests, test preparation programs, test fees and college applications, as well as educate students and parents on financial

aid options. Providing this information may require educators and other service providers to connect with parents in the community settings, such as shelters, so they can learn the steps students should take in order to be prepared for post-secondary planning. Given the multitude of financial and academic steps needed to enhance post-secondary vocational and college options, school counselors should begin planning early in students' academic career.

Finally, increasing knowledge of policies, agencies and supportive services within the community and school is imperative when assisting families. For instance, school counselors must have knowledge on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which addresses the enrollment and transportation needs of students experiencing homelessness, as well as other barriers they may face (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Moreover, providing families and children with tangible resources they can use at their disposal will help them to become empowered and determine how to get their needs met.

Future Research

Taking into account all of the identified needs and implied services for school counselors and service providers to satisfy these concerns, further research would elucidate more specific interventions to implement in the school setting. Although some studies have indicated the effectiveness of counseling and academic interventions with students experiencing homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Grothaus et al., 2011), further research with larger samples of students and varying locations and levels is needed. More specifically, the impact of individual, small group, and large group interventions, as well as community-based partnerships is necessary to ensure best

practices for supporting students experiencing homelessness. Further, investigation into the career and college preparation for students experiencing homelessness is warranted, as well as gaining students' perspectives on their needs.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the inability to member check as the anonymity of the responses prevented the researchers from contacting the participants. Further, an inability to use multiple measures of data as replication and affirmation of participant responses was also a limitation as the researchers were unable to contact the participants post-study (Creswell, 2005). This study also lacks understanding of the context of the school and there was no ability for the researchers to build relationships with the participants (Heppner et al., 1999).

Furthermore, the wording of the open-ended survey question could also confound the findings of the research. The question specifically asked participants to respond to the academic, personal/social, and career planning needs of students experiencing homelessness. This question may have guided participant responses, as well as provided structure for the thematic analysis. However, this design was intentional because researchers wanted to ensure responses were aligned with the role of the school counselor, according to the ASCA National Model.

Conclusions

Although there are limitations for this study, the large participant size for qualitative data analysis represents a prominent strength. Considering that few studies explore school counselors' perspective of the needs of students experiencing homelessness, this study offers a unique lens with which to better identify the

educational and emotional needs of this population. Stakeholders who have a more attuned understanding of the needs of these students will be more capable of implementing developmentally appropriate and efficacious interventions to address these needs. Moreover, the findings can not only inform therapeutic and academic practices but can also improve services at the community level, potentiating the possibility for more accessible, affordable, and equitable interventions to meet these needs. This study provides an initial framework for systemic and multi-level intervention as service providers attempt to collaboratively address the identified needs of students experiencing homelessness.

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