Homeless in Houston: It’s Cold Out There

Catherine L. Troisi, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, MPACH
University of Texas School of Public Health

Gary M. Grier
Director of Community Engagement
Coalition For The Homeless of Houston/Harris County

19 June 2013
DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

HUD definition

- Literally homeless
  - On the streets and in encampments
  - Places not meant for human habitation: car, abandoned building, parks, and no electricity or plumbing
  - Emergency shelter or transitional housing
WHO IS NOT REPORTED AS HOMELESS FOR THE PIT ACCORDING TO HUD

• Persons incarcerated in jail or penitentiary
• Persons in hotels/bunk houses on self pay
• Persons in substance abuse treatment facility unless specifically designated homeless bed
• Wards of the state CPS
• Living with a family member or friend (doubled up)
• In permanent supportive housing
• In hospital beds or waiting rooms
ENUMERATION: POINT IN TIME COUNT

• Federally mandated count of homeless Point-in-Time (P-I-T) last ten days of January
• Must determine percent of vets, families with children, chronic homelessness
• Canvass all of Houston/Harris County/Fort Bend County
• Street Count and Sheltered Count
• 2013 – pilot city for YouthCount!
CITIES THAT FIT INTO HOUSTON & ETJ COMPARISON

HOUSTON DEMOGRAPHICS
City of Houston - 644 sq. miles
Population - 2,145,000
Population Density - 3,372 per sq. mile
ETJ (excluding city limits) - 1172 sq. miles
Transit - 7.5 miles

MAP NOTES
- The cities represented within Houston’s city limits have approximately 373 cumulative miles of transit.
- The cities represented within Houston’s ETJ have approximately 262 cumulative miles of transit.
- The cities represented within Houston’s ETJ have approximately 1161 cumulative sq. miles of area

LAND AREA COMPARISON: HOUSTON AND OTHER U.S. TRANSIT CITIES
November 10, 2010

From: Knudson,LP www.knudsonlp.com
NEW METHODOLOGIES EMPLOYED

• ICS
• Joint effort between academia and community
• Just-in-Time training
• Plant and Capture method
• SWAT teams
• More staging areas/teams
INCIDENT COMMAND STRUCTURE

Hotwash held after each count
A JOINT ACADEMIC/COMMUNITY EFFORT

IC located at HDHHS

• IC – UTSPH
• Deputy IC - Ft. Bend Health Dept
• Planning Chief – HDHHS
• Operations Chief – HDHHS
• Logistics Chief – CFTH
• Finance/Admin – CFTH
• Safety officer – HDHHS/HPD
• Street teams – CFTH, UT, UH, and other students, other community orgs, HDHHS
• SWAT teams - HDHHS
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

• Continuum of Care housing providers
• Service Providers
• Consumers, CAC, and Corps
• Schools
• Faith-based community
• Specialized outreach teams
• Special sub-populations
• Citizen Corps
• Student group
• Public officials
• Citizen groups and organizations
• Homeless and formerly homeless veterans
SWAT TEAMS

• Teams in the “bullpen” at ICS Headquarters
• Team captains could request their help if needed
• Assured all areas were covered
P-I-T: WAYS WE COUNTED

• Surface teams
• Specialized outreach teams
• Shelter count using HMIS
• Next day interviews to determine make-up of population
SURFACE TEAMS

• Ten staging areas – Houston/Harris Co/Ft. Bend Co/Baytown
• 29 study areas subdivided
• 79 teams
• Each car had:
  • Driver
  • Navigator
  • Homeless guide
  • Recorder
• Using GPS application to map locations
OUTREACH SPECIALIST TEAMS

• Eighteen teams
• Sub-population specialists
• Canvassed encampments, under bridges, off surface surveillance
• Interviews and engagement
SHELTER COUNT

- HMIS data confirmed for each housing provider for night of the count
- DV and non-HMIS shelter data confirmed through self-report
- Utilize expanded CoC including faith based programs
- Calls made to shelters to verify
- Information obtained on clients using the shelter
P-I-T INTERVIEWS

Service providers
- Day shelter
- Food services providers

Outreach specialist

Street interviews
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE HOMELESS IN HOUSTON

On January 29 2013, there were 6,359* people experiencing homeless in Houston/Harris County

• Approximately 1 in 5 identified as chronically homeless individual
• 1 in 20 identified as member of chronically homeless family
• Almost 1 in 3 had substance abuse problems
• 1 in 4 had mental health issues
• 1 in 7 was a veteran

*HUD definition
2013 Point in Time Count; n = 6,359

- Unsheltered, 2,927
- Unsheltered Ft. Bend Co, 51
- Sheltered Ft. Bend Co, 52
- Sheltered Harris Co, 3,329
HOT SPOTS FOR UNSHELTERED HOMELESS PERSONS

COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS
Leading Houston Home

2012 PIT Hotspots
Homeless Count 8 and up
Homeless in Houston/Harris/Ft. Bend Counties (n=7,366)

- Unsheltered homeless: 2,978
- Sheltered homeless: 3,381
- Harris Co. Jail: 1,007
Chronic homeless individual
Chronic homeless family
HIV positive
Veterans
Mental Illness
Substance Abuse
Domestic Violence

Sheltered
Unsheltered
Total population

Subpopulations

Coalition for the Homeless
Leading Houston Home
PIT Counts, 2011-2013

- 2011: Total = 8,538
  - Sheltered: 4418
  - Unsheltered: 4120
- 2012: Total = 7,356
  - Sheltered: 3824
  - Unsheltered: 3532
- 2013: Total = 6,359
  - Sheltered: 3381
  - Unsheltered: 2978
Clients in Permanent Supportive Housing, 2011-2013

- 2011: 2178
- 2012: 2902
- 2013: 3126
YOUTHCOUNT!

EXPERIENCE AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS IN HOUSTON
WHERE WE LOOKED

Done in conjunction with PIT Count

- Outreach to schools
- Street outreach (17)
- Covenant House (43)
- Ft Bend Women’s Shelter (4)
- Star of Hope (17)
- Hay Center (11)

- Salvation Army Social Services (18)
- Open Gate – Bering UMC – Youth Advocates (30)
- Montrose Grace Place (9)
- HAWC (2)
- Kinder Emergency Shelter (6)
WHAT WE FOUND:
SCHOOL DATA

Limited information could be asked

616 valid interviews:
- 65% living with legal guardian (not homeless)

Of the 218 not living with legal guardian:
- 6 were in a shelter
- 1 was unsheltered
- 3 had own apartment (ages 17, 18, and 19)
- 208 were doubled up
WHAT WE FOUND
BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

160 youth surveyed
▪ Unsheltered (19%)
▪ Sheltered (54%)
▪ Doubled up/precariously housed (28%)

Ages 12-24 yrs; average of 20 yrs
Half were male
Slightly over half were Black
One-quarter were Hispanic
WHAT WE FOUND

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

11 transgender
- 6 identified as boy/man
- 5 identified as girl/woman

1 in 5 identified as gay or bisexual
WHAT WE FOUND

EDUCATIONAL/WORK STATUS

2 of 3 not currently enrolled in school

1 of 3 had not completed high school

3 of 4 did not work in the past week

1 in 3 had been in correctional system in past year
WHAT WE FOUND

FAMILY STATUS

• 2 out of 5 had been in foster care
  • most common reason for leaving was aged out

• Last permanent home
  ▪ 123 Houston area
  ▪ 9 Texas, not Houston area
  ▪ 17 outside Texas

• 1 out of 3 youth had children; One-half of these lived with their child(ren)

• 14 out of 83 females (17%) currently pregnant
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Geographic area of Houston EMA
- Lack of youth shelters
- Would have been better to disconnect from PIT count
- Data from school districts of limited value
- Try snowball sampling next time
SUMMARY

• 6,359 persons experiencing homeless were counted
  • 2,978 (47%) staying place not meant for human habitation
  • 3,381 (53%) staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven that evening.

• Most of these individuals were found in Harris County (98%).

• Expanded definition of homelessness led to count of 7,366 individuals.

• 2013 PIT count represents:
  • 14% decrease compared to 2012
  • 26% decrease compared to 2011.

• While these numbers are encouraging and may point to evidence that the number of those experiencing homelessness is being addressed and reduced, it should be realized that due to time and the geographic area that needs to be covered, the counts are approximate and many factors can affect the accuracy of the count, including weather.