

The Scholar-Practitioner

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Editor: Liz Neria-Piña

Oklahoma State University



National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations

nchp@okstate.edu

<https://nchp.okstate.edu>

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care or justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence, who are recovering drug or alcohol addicts, who face housing insecurity, or who are considered Third Culture Kids

NCHP Conference Fellows

Dr. Jennifer Geiger, University of Illinois, Chicago

Dr. Royel Johnson, University of Southern California

Dr. Kerri Kearney, Oklahoma State University

Dr. Megan Piel, University of Texas, San Antonio

Dr. Lori Tiller, University of Georgia

Dr. Lisa Will, Oklahoma State University



The Scholar-Practitioner is a monthly publication of invited research summaries that target the research-to-practice gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner advocates for college students with experiences in foster care and other hidden college student populations.

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. NCHP was the first research conference dedicated to this multidisciplinary area of study. The NCHP 4th conference will be held in 2024.

Does housing matter? Exploring housing insecurity in relation to student success.

Kornbluh, M., Wilking, J., Roll, S., & Donatello, R. (2022). Exploring housing insecurity in relation to student success. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2068016>

Research Summary by Mariah Kornbluh

The high rates of housing insecurity and homelessness among college students is a notable educational and mental health concern for both educators and practitioners (Brotan & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Housing insecurity encapsulates various dimensions of housing challenges including affordability, physical safety, quality of shelter, instability, crowding, and loss of housing (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). Additionally, homelessness is defined as having no conclusive place to rest or shelter (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018), and as such, arrangements may include sleeping on the street, in a shelter, car, or couch surfing. Research has noted that students experiencing housing uncertainty experience roadblocks to fulfilling their coursework, as they must balance academics and locating basic resources on a day-to-day basis (Tierney & Hallet, 2012). Such experiences are notably tied to heightened feelings of stress, anxiety, and internalized stigma (Crutchfield, 2018). This study used multi-variable analyses to explore the relationship between housing insecurity and homelessness, academics (specifically GPA), and mental health outcomes (poor mental health days) among college students.

Research Questions

- Are college students who experience housing insecurity or homelessness more likely to have lower GPAs as compared to peers with stable housing?
- Are college students who experience housing insecurity or homelessness more likely to have poorer mental health outcomes as compared to peers with stable housing?

Methodology

The study consisted of a random cluster sample design. Ninety-four classes were randomly sampled during the Fall of 2019. Instructors were notified that their classrooms were sampled for the study, and the research team requested that they spend class time distributing the online survey. Follow-up emails were distributed to students who were absent from class. A total of 1,416 students completed the survey.

Measures. Housing insecurity was assessed using an eight-item scale from previously vetted measures (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; California State University Sacramento Basic Needs Survey). Example items included: Have you been evicted? How many times have you been unsure of where you are going to sleep at night? A standard measure of homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018) was employed asking participants: Have you slept in the following places: street, sidewalk, alleyway, etc.? Regarding outcomes, GPAs were matched with participant responses from the Office of Institutional Research. Additionally, mental health outcomes were self-reported using a measure from the Center for Disease Control Risk Surveillance Systems (How many days in the past month has your mental health kept you from doing your usual activities, such as self-care, work, and recreation?). Ordinary least squares regression models were performed to understand the relationship between housing stability and academic, as well as mental health outcomes.

Key Findings

1. 43.9% of the college student sample had experienced housing insecurity, and 14.6% experienced some form of homelessness.
2. Housing insecurity and homelessness both had a negative impact on college students' overall GPA. Specifically:

- Students who experienced three or more instances of housing insecurity had lower GPAs as compared to their housing stable peers.
 - Students who experienced homelessness within the past year had lower GPAs relative to their peers who had not experienced homelessness.
 - Students who reported awareness of basic needs services on campus (e.g., food pantry, short-term housing services) had higher GPAs than students who were unaware of such services.
3. Housing insecurity and homeless both had a negative impact on the overall mental wellness of college students. Specifically:
 - Students who experienced three or more instances of housing insecurity had higher odds of reporting more days impacted by poor mental health outcomes as compared to their housing stable peers.
 - Homeless students had higher odds of reporting more days impacted by poor mental health outcomes.

Implications

Study findings indicate a relationship between college students' housing stability in association with their academic and mental health outcomes. College health practitioners ought to screen for housing stability in their assessment, treatment, and support of

students. Furthermore, professional training ought to be provided to college staff and educators surrounding trauma-informed care. Universities can benefit from working intentionally with community agencies to build a larger network of basic needs resources and diverse housing support services for students. Lastly, university dissemination efforts that are accessible and destigmatize basic needs services are critical for providing students with needed information and resources.

References

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