Helping Aspiring Principals Understand the Identification and Support Needs of Homeless

Unaccompanied Youth

by

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With the number of homeless unaccompanied youth continuing to rise in the United States, it is imperative that schools learn and understand federal guidelines and best practices to be able to best support these young people. Professional development can be a critical step in supporting these students. This study explored educators' understanding before and after participating in a professional development workshop about homeless unaccompanied youth. The inquiry questions investigated to what extent the school personnel showed an increased understanding of youth homelessness after a 30-minute online training video and if the same school personnel could apply what they had learned in case study examples. To accomplish this a pretest and posttest and a 30-minute training video were added to a spring K-12 Principal Certification course at a Mid-Atlantic University. The statistical analysis of the pre- and posttest scores showed a significant increase in knowledge from the pretest to the posttest. Some improvements to the professional development could be made to help see an increase in scores as relates to the case study questions where participants were asked to apply the new knowledge. Through professional development, districts can increase educator awareness and knowledge of homeless unaccompanied youth and aid in staff's learning of basic policy mandates and best practices.

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Preface

I have been a high school counselor for many years. I have had many homeless unaccompanied youth walk through my office doors. I have worried about them, cared for them, cried for them, and felt helpless many times that I was unable to do enough. This research study sets out to bring attention to this growing population and help educators be able to best support these students. The resiliency and courage of my former and current students provided inspiration as I went through my studies.

There are so many people in my support system that have made my completion of this process possible. The first and foremost would be my husband, Christian. He did not think twice when I brought up the idea of returning to school for my Doctorate. He has been a constant comfort and encourager. Thank you, Chris, for being my supporter, encourager, and best friend. Secondly, I need to thank my daughter, Arden, and my son, Miles. They may not have fully understood what I was working on all this time, but they loved and supported me along the way. I hope I have made them proud and that they will share my love for education and helping others.

When I was growing up and questioning the importance of life and why we do things, my parents always responded with that our main purpose in life is to make the world a better place for others. Their actions and life are a testament to that. They have been a source of strength through this and even let me "hide away" at their house to get work done! There is no doubt, watching in wonder as my mother completed her Doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh when she was 50 years old, had a big part to do with why I knew I could do this! I am blessed to have their guidance and friendship and I hope to make the positive impact on others' lives as they have made both professionally and personally.

If you need a cheerleader in life, Lisa Jenkins has you covered. Her positivity is infectious, and her encouragement is motivating. My sister, Lisa, is the hardest working person I know. A dedicated mother and social worker, she balances two, sometimes three jobs at a time and does everything with a smile and grace. Thank you, Lisa, for helping keep me going through all of this! Thank you also to my brother-in-law Jamison, my nephew JJ and my nieces Emily and Ellie. Love you guys!

I have been blessed to be in the family I am in but am also blessed for the family I married into. Thank you Dr. Tomley and our "one and only" Donna for all your love and support! Thank you also to my awesome set of sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law and nieces and nephews!

I would like to thank my best friends since high school, the Ladies, who have been some of the best friends a girl could ask for. Thank you for being my rock and the friends I can always come back to when life gets crazy. I also would like to thank my "work wives". Being the sole counselor to 700 high school students can be an exhausting and overwhelming position to be in! Having these amazing women by my side everyday kept me having a smile on my face and has given me the strength to get through some hard times. There has been more than one desperate conversation about possibly wanting to quit my doctorate program, and these ladies were not having it. Always giving me the needed push to get through. Thank you for being such a support and such good friends.

There are many other friends to thank who were a constant source of support and friendship through this. So many times of texting me sport scores when I couldn't be at a game, letting my kids hang at their house, taking an extra driving shift and just being a friend I can laugh and cry with through this journey.

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I would like to thank my Dissertation committee who took time out of their busy lives to read my work and discuss my topic. I felt honored to have such esteemed members be a part of my committee. My committee members were Professor Ira Weiss, public sector legal authority and adjunct faculty at the University of Pittsburgh, and Dr. Rich Regelski, Director of Special Education at Franklin Regional School District.

Finally, I would like to thank Susan Dawkins, whose editing work was a life saver and Scott Conger, graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, who assisted with the statistical analysis. Their expertise was an invaluable addition to my work.

1.0 Introduction

There is no equality in education for students who are considered homeless unaccompanied youth. Homeless unaccompanied youth are young persons who are both homeless (experiencing homelessness defined by the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987) and unaccompanied (i.e. not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian). Students experiencing homelessness face a range of challenges related to their health, emotional well-being, and safety (McFarland, Hussar, de Brey, Snyder, Wang & Wilkinson, 2017). As the number of unaccompanied youth continues to rise, it is imperative for educators and others to understand the experiences of this vulnerable population (Aviles De Bradley, 2011).

Homeless unaccompanied youth need substantial support and particular assistance from the school systems to help them navigate through the high school years and become productive adults. Educational success can support life-altering outcomes (Hallett, Low, & Skrla, 2015). Educators and administrators at all levels play a key role in how homeless unaccompanied youth experience school and access resources (Hallett et al., 2015). Through professional development, districts can increase educators' awareness and knowledge of this population and aid in staff understanding of basic policy mandates and best practices.

1.1 Homeless Unaccompanied Youth

The number of U.S. public school students reported as homeless increased from 910,000 in 2009-2010 to 1.3 million in 2014-2015, a percentage increase of 1.8 percent to 2.5 percent

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). While most homeless students experience homelessness with their families, 8 percent of homeless students during the 2014-2015 school year were not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, which is equivalent to 94, 800 young people who are unaccompanied (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This includes individuals experiencing a range of personal circumstances, including runaway youth and youth who have been separated from their families due to conflict or loss of contact.

The increased number of homeless youth in the United States results from complex social forces such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, racial inequities, trauma, and limited resources (Hallett et al., 2015). Children and youth who become homeless are typically well-acquainted with the challenges caused by housing instability. How youth respond to homelessness depend on variables such as level of resiliency, gender, age, available resources, outside support, current living situation, amount of mobility, reason for homelessness and length of time spent without a home (Grineski, 2017).

Many homeless unaccompanied youth have had negative experiences with education systems. Some of these negative experiences are reflected in individual characteristics such as poor attendance, changing schools, poor academic performance and grade retention and some are institutional, characterized by unnecessary special education placement and students' perception that school is an unsupportive environment (Grineski, 2017). School teachers and other school staff are often perceived by young people as reliable adults with whom they interact daily. School staff can be the first to notice early warning signs such as change in behavior and other characteristics that could signify changes in housing status (Thielking, La Sala, & Flatau, 2017). The educator's role in these situations can be to increase their own knowledge regarding homeless students, help students access resources, and nurture positive relationships.

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Several subgroups are at a higher risk for homelessness, the largest being youth with less than a high school diploma. Other risk factors include LGBT youth; youth reporting an annual household income lower than $24,000; Hispanic, non-White youth; Black or African-American youth and unmarried parenting youth (Voices of Youth Count, 2018). With lack of a high school diploma being such a significant risk factor, it can also be one of the most important protective factors in helping youth to avoid homelessness. Educators can play a vital role in identifying and supporting youth who are experiencing housing instability. By promoting positive educational experiences, encouraging youth to stay in school, and making education attainable, educators, at all levels, are on the front lines.

1.2 Institutional Efforts to Address Youth Homelessness

Over time, the capacity of school systems to identify students experiencing homelessness, collect information and report data to the Department of Education has improved (NCES, 2017). This improvement may be attributed to better reporting practices, improved educator knowledge and/or continued provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. The McKinney-Vento Act was enacted in 1987 to help remove barriers for educational attainment for students who are homeless (Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017). The MVA became the first piece of legislature to address the wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness and helps to ensure that students who are homeless get the same opportunities as their housed peers (Mullins, Wilkins, Mahan & Bouldin, 2016).

1.3 Research Questions

Personal experience working in high school settings as well as literature reviews have guided this research study.

Research questions that will guide this work are as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent do school personnel show an increased understanding about youth homelessness after a 30-minute online training session?

Research Question 2: Can school professionals apply what they have learned in case study examples?

1.4 Organization of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether students pursuing principal certification would improve their knowledge of homeless unaccompanied youth after watching a training video on the topic.

Students enrolled in the 2019 spring term School Law course in the K-12 Principal Certification Program took a 20-question pretest and posttest before and after watching an online training video. Pre and posttest result were compared to see if gains were made in the professionals' understanding of the homeless unaccompanied youth population.

Ultimately, this study seeks to add to the current body of literature on homeless unaccompanied youth and close the gap between the experiences of this population and educators' ability to identify and support them.

2.0 Review of Literature

The increase in the number of homeless families in the United States has resulted in higher numbers of homeless students in U.S. Public Schools. This increase challenges school systems to meet the educational needs of these students (Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). Research shows that although children experiencing homelessness share many risk factors with other disadvantaged children, they fall higher on a continuum of cumulative risk (Masten, Fiat & Labella, 2015). In addition to being at risk for academic and behavior problems, these youth face challenges related to repeated school changes, frequent absences, high rates of grade retention, school mobility, and lower than average grades and test scores (Masten et al., 2015). With homeless populations continually on the rise year to year, schools are charged with not only following federal guidelines to support these students but to look for ways to support them in the educational setting (Mullins, Wilkins, Mahan & Bouldin, 2015).

Professional Development can play a critical role in supporting homeless unaccompanied youth. This program evaluation explores educators' understanding before and after participating in a professional development workshop about homeless unaccompanied youth. The following literature review provides context on the definition of homelessness, barriers to identification, risk factors, policy surrounding homeless students, and best practices.

2.1 Definitions of Homelessness

There are many different definitions of homelessness when it comes to policy and eligibility for services. For the purposes of this program evaluation, I will rely on the definition of homelessness in the McKinney-Vento Act (MVA). The MVA defines homeless youth as "minors living in homeless shelters, abandoned buildings, cars on the street, children denied housing by their families and youth doubled up with friends" (2020). Homeless Unaccompanied Youth (HUY) are young people who are both homeless (experiencing homelessness according to MVA) and unaccompanied (not in physical custody of a parent or guardian) (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

The MVA's definition of homelessness varies slightly from definitions of homelessness in other policies. The lack of a consistent definition can cause difficulties in securing services (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012). Because of these inconsistencies, youth are often left under served. The different federal and state definitions fail to fully capture this unique subset of the homeless population (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was created with the intent of providing education access and stability to homeless youth (Ausikaitis, Wynn, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Reker, & Flores, 2015).

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) uses three separate definitions and distinguishes among homeless youth, runaway youth, and street youth. A "homeless youth" is a young person between the ages of 16 and 21 who does not have a relative who can offer a safe home environment. An example of this would be a person whose family has abandoned them or is unwilling or not capable of supporting the youth and providing a stable home. A "runaway youth" is a young person under 18 who has left home without permission from a parent or guardian.

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This definition includes youth whose parents or guardians did not give permission for the young person to leave the house. The youth chose to leave after a disagreement, out of fear or out of defiance. A "street youth" is a young person who has either run away or is intermittently homeless (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012). To these youth, the street has become their home and livelihood. They are not residing in a shelter or sleeping in other people's homes, they have taken residence in the streets.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses more restrictive definitions and defines a homeless person as someone who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate night residence and whose primary night residence is a shelter, institutional residence or a public or private place not designated for sleeping (Curry, Morton, Matajasko, Dworsky, Samuels, & Schlueter, 2017). Examples of this could be youth who are residing in a homeless shelter, a youth home, or sleeping in a building that is not considered to be for sleeping such as the back of a store or living in a car. This last definition excludes couch surfers or young people living in other people's homes. Couch surfing is defined as moving from one temporary housing arrangement to another (McLoughlin, 2013). These youth rely on their social connections for shelter rather than formal service systems (Curry et al., 2017). The definition inconsistency between federal agencies translates into a policy gap, leaving some students not getting the services they should (Rahman et al., 2015).

Historically, youth who couch surf were not considered homeless, but, more recently, both MVA and RHYA have included couch surfing as a qualified designation to meet their criteria. In the Voices of Youth Count national survey, results highlight couch surfing as a strikingly common experience for homeless youth (Voices of Youth Count, 2018).

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Often homelessness is viewed as a personal choice. (Aviles De Bradley, 2011). More often than not, however, young people's choices are very limited. When they may "choose" to leave home, it is often due to a stressful, unhealthy situation that is forcing the choice. Under McKinney-Vento, a student may be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth regardless of whether the student was forced from the home or ran away (National Center of Homeless Education, 2019). Determination of McKinney-Vento eligibility for unaccompanied students should be made on a case-by-case basis focusing on the nature of the student's nighttime residence (NCHE, 2019).

2.2 Invisible and Underserved: Identification Limitations

A first step in supporting students who are homeless is identification. Staff training can help to provide the knowledge to make that initial identification and start a student towards receiving services. Training should occur at the individual school level as well as the district level. At the individual school level, teachers and support staff should be knowledgeable of homeless indicators in order to make appropriate referrals. They also should know who their district McKinney-Vento Liaison is, in order to know who to turn to if they are concerned about a students situation. At the district level, administrators and district personnel can use data to help implement policy, provide resources and provide professional development for staff.

Identification is often not simple, partly because, this population can be reluctant to self-identify. There are several barriers that limit students' self-referrals. First, students may not consider themselves homeless if they are staying with a friend and/or moving from house to house (Terui & Hsieh, 2016). dCouch surfing has emerged as a form of homelessness without

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"rooflessness" (McLoughlin, 2012). With a roof over their heads, young people may not self-identify as homeless and therefore will not access services to which they may be entitled.

Second, youth may not self-identify because they are afraid that they will be forced to return to a home situation that is unsatisfactory or unsafe (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012; National Center for Homeless Education, 2019). Mandated reporting requirements may have an unintended consequence of deterring youth who are afraid to return to an unstable home life (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012).

Also, youth may not have trusted adults in the school system. A nurturing relationship with a trusted adult has a positive impact on healthy development (Elster, 2008). This can be especially true for unaccompanied youth who may have limited or no relationships with adults outside of school. School can serve as an anchor of stability, allowing students to have relationships with teachers and other staff that can help improve educational outcomes as well as allow students a safe space to discuss their living situations. While many youth may not have the skills to express their needs to the adults in their lives, they should view school as a space of support that could help bridge the support gap in their personal lives (Aviles De Bradley, 2011).

Another barrier to students not seeking help is lack of awareness regarding available resources. A lack of knowledge of support services was considered the most common barrier to help seeking (McLoughlin, 2013; Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017).

Lastly, young people might go to great lengths to hide their unstable living conditions to avoid the stigma of homelessness (Thielking et al., 2017). Mainstream views and perceptions of homelessness can limit youth understanding of their situation and simultaneously prevent them from seeking resources (Aviles De Bradley, 2011). For many young people being officially

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identified as homeless can create a burden and a sense of being different from others (McLoughlin, 2013). Such stigma can impact help-seeking behavior.

Due to the obstacles of self-identification and self-referral, it is important that educators are trained about the signs of possible homelessness. Several common identifiers can be used as warning signs of possible instability. The most common are issues related to (a) Attendance: consistently being late, arriving very early, or missing school all together, (b) School work: not doing homework, not being able to keep up in class for being tired or distracted, falling behind in classes, (c) Lunch: not having enough money for lunch or not bringing a lunch at all, (d) Clothing: repeatedly wearing the same clothes or looking unkempt, (e) Mental health issues- decline in psychological well-being, behavioral issues (Thielking, La Sala & Flatau, 2017). Through staff awareness of signs of homelessness and building meaningful relationships with their students, staff can help to identify homeless unaccompanied youth.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates that schools remove barriers for homeless students. In order to meet these mandates, schools are charged with identifying students who qualify as homeless. ESSA outlines the following tools that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can use to help ensure students experiencing homelessness are identified: (a) housing questionnaires, (b) referral forms, (c) local liaison contact information, (d) language access with materials that are easily read, (e) ongoing outreach and training for school staff, (f) interagency collaboration (ESSA, 2016).

2.3 Collecting and Accessing Data on Homeless and Homeless Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied youth is a significant national problem, yet its scale and scope are not fully known (Curry et al., 2017). Responses to the issue have been hindered by the lack of credible data on the size and characteristics of this population (Morton et al., 2017). Data collection can be a critical first step in identifying homeless youth and being able to understand the scope of the issues that they face. Typically, data collection on homeless youth yields inaccurate numbers that vastly undercount the numbers of homeless unaccompanied youth (Auerswald & Adams, 2018). Homeless counts are done by way of point-in-time measures, meaning they account for homeless persons counted on a single night in January each year. These point-in-time measures are required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to count the number of homeless people (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019). People are counted who are staying in shelters and who can be seen visibly in public places. Homeless youth often go to great lengths to hide their living arrangements, so a point-in-time method would not give an accurate count if couch surfers and others who may not be visibly homeless are missing from the data.

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, committed to a goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020 (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). In 2016, in an effort to generate more accurate national data on youth homelessness, the Chapin Hall-based Voices of Youth Count Organization began a study to generate a more complete understanding of the number of youth experiencing homelessness. Through youth counts, national household surveys and youth surveys, the organization has established national estimates of youth homelessness that provide more complete data on homeless youth and unaccompanied homeless youth (Auerswald & Adams, 2018).

2.4 Risk Factors

Youth homelessness is a problem characterized by multiple levels of vulnerability. This population is at risk for many factors that can impede their education and lower their chances of continuing their education or finding meaningful employment after high school (Aviles de Bradley, 2011). Risk factors such as not having consistent and safe housing, adults that they can trust to take care of them, money for basic needs, and/or nutrition can make everyday life a challenge.

Youth experiencing homelessness have a high prevalence of mental health, physical health and behavioral challenges (Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson & Knight, 2011). Often physical and mental health needs go unmet, even if a school identifies those needs through screening, due to the students not having insurance, money for copays, transportation, or adults willing to sit and make appointments and arrangements with them (Sanetti, 2017). Rates of depression and anxiety as well as disruptive behavior are higher for youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds, when compared to youth in middle-class homes. Once a youth becomes homeless, these rates increase even more (Ausikatis et al., 2015). Homeless youth and homeless unaccompanied youth may face higher rates of abuse, neglect, and mental health problems as well as barriers that make it nearly impossible for them to succeed academically and emotionally without additional systemic supports (Havlik & Bryan, 2015).

2.5 Homelessness and Educational Outcomes

Scholarship on the subject consistently finds a strong negative correlation between homelessness and educational success (Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, & Bourgeois, 2015; Rahman et al., 2015). The McKinney-Vento Act was enacted to assist in removing barriers for educational attainment for this population. When young people are not in a supportive home environment, are without secure accommodation and are dealing with family conflict or other personal trauma, keeping up with school demands is extremely difficult (Thielking et al., 2017).

Grade retention is higher for homeless youth than it is for their housed peers. One study found that 38 percent of homeless children ages 8 through 17 had repeated a grade and had changed schools more frequently than their low-income housed peers (Masten et al., 2015).

Students who have been identified as homeless at any point in their lives generally demonstrate lower levels of reading and math when compared to more stable housed peers (Cutuli et al., 2013). Other school-related risk factors can account for this difference, including poor attendance, undiagnosed learning disabilities, and slower rates of skill acquisition (Ausikatis et al., 2015).

Lack of a high school diploma or GED is the top risk factor for homeless youth (Miller et al., 2015; Morton et al., 2018; Voices of Youth Count, 2018). There is a high correlation between dropping out of school and poverty, and formal education is important in accessing opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility (Ausikatis et al., 2015). Positive outcomes associated with high school completion include decreased unemployment, decreased criminal justice involvement, increased income, increased health outcomes, and increased life span (NCHE, 2019). Illustrating the preventive value of education, 95 percent of the jobs created since the Great Recession have gone to workers with at least some post-secondary education (NCHE, 2019).

2.6 Resiliency

Though there is much research documenting the tremendous challenges that homeless unaccompanied youth face, it is important to note the resiliency of these young people. Many homeless unaccompanied youth have shown their ability to develop constructive relationships, structural support tools, and reliable networks (McKay, 2009). When offering professional development to educators, it is equally important to ensure that they understand the positive attributes that many homeless unaccompanied youth have developed. Grineski (2014) calls for his readers not only to look at this population's challenges but also their resiliency: "Children who are homeless, without question, are weighed down with a myriad of real, serious, and difficult challenges to overcome. These challenges, however, do not automatically imprint negative life trajectories on these young people" (pg. 207).

Resiliency is an important survival attribute for all humans but can be of the utmost importance to homeless youth (Rahman et al., 2015). More recent research foregrounds the strengths of homeless unaccompanied youth and indicates that such youth possess many qualities that can lead to positive adaption into adulthood (Grineski, 2014).

2.7 McKinney-Vento Act

Most media coverage of ESSA has focused on how the legislation signaled the end of No Child Left Behind. Overlooked are the significant implications that ESSA has for students experiencing homelessness (Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017).

The McKinney-Vento Act helps to ensure that children who are homeless get the same opportunities as their housed peers (Mullens, Wilkins, Mahan & Bouldin, 2016). The following are the primary provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act:

- Schools are mandated to enroll students within 48 hours who self-identify as homeless without requiring proof of residency and medical or immunization records.

- Homeless students and families are given the choice of continuing to attend their school of origin (at the time they became homeless) until they are permanently housed or transfer to a school near their current location, and the school district must also provide and fund transportation to either the school or origin or the new school within 48 hours.

- Homeless students suspected of having disabilities are entitled to expedited evaluations for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (ESSA, 2015).

Since its inception in 1987, the McKinney-Vento Act has grown stronger and more impactful for the youth that it was put in place to support. In response to the growing number of homeless people, the federal government originally enacted The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. It became the first piece of legislation to directly address the well-being of people experiencing homelessness. Included in this act were important services for students. Through the years the act has grown stronger and more beneficial for students experiencing homelessness, despite wide-ranging obstacles (Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017). As the number of homeless students in the United States continues to rise, the educational provisions of the act are important in improving students' educational outcomes and experiences (Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017).

A review of this legislation's history illustrates its importance. Contemporary events, such as Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Great Recession (2007-2009) highlighted the needs of students who are displaced from their homes. Hurricane Katrina, for example, forced around 42,000 children to be relocated to Texas (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011). The value of immediate enrollment became undeniably clear. Texas schools additionally enrolled 21,000 school-aged children who were evacuated from the Gulf Coast. The Texas Education Agency turned to McKinney-Vento to justify requiring school districts to accept this influx of students. Not only did the events of Hurricane Katrina validate McKinney-Vento, it made districts aware of the act and its requirements (Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017).

Central to the implementation of the MVA are the McKinney-Vento School Liaisons, who coordinate services for students experiencing homelessness and report the numbers of such students annually to the US Department of Education (Mullens et al., 2016). Districts are required also to work with high school students to assure that credit accrual is prioritized, that counselors work with students on reaching graduation, and that a student's homeless status be taken into consideration when discussing fees, fines, and absences (Havlik & Bryan, 2015).

A review of the literature on MVA shows some clear limitations to implementation (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). The policy, as designed, mandates that educators identify and support students facing homelessness. The first challenge occurs with the very first step of the process: identifying students who are homeless. When students are not identified, they do not get services they should and are not counted in the national average.

Another barrier to implementation is that often homeless students who are identified may still be underserved. For example, they may not be connected to liaisons despite the MVA provisions. In some circumstances, some liaisons did not even know they were listed as the district

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liaison (Thompson & Davis, 2003). One study concluded that most MVA Liaisons only spend 25 percent of their day on MVA duties due to other job responsibilities (Mullen et al., 2016). In addition to the MVA Liaison, the school counselor can play a vital role in helping to identifying students who may be homeless and unaccompanied, but their caseloads are often double the recommended 250 students to one counselor ratio. For example, the average counselor in Pennsylvania has 398 students in his or her case load. Some state ratios are more extreme, such as Arizona, which has a ratio of 903 students per counselor (American School Counselor Association, 2018).

Funding is also a barrier for full implementation of MVA at the district level. Lack of funding at the state and district levels likely contributes to reports that many appointed liaisons tend to occupy various other job positions in addition to the liaison role (Miller et al., 2015; Mullins et al., 2015).

2.7.1 Intersections Between Title I, Part A and the McKinney-Vento Act

The purpose of Title I, Part A is to provide all children with a fair, equitable and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps (NCHE, 2020). This program is designed to meet the educational needs of low-achieving children in schools with the highest level of poverty by providing assessments, teacher preparation, curriculum and instructional materials. Title I, Part A provides financial assistance to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) with the highest number of children from low-income families. While challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness are addressed by the MVA, Title I, Part A also plays a role in supporting these students.

To identify and address the needs of homeless students, both the McKinney-Vento Act and Title I, Part A require cross program coordination. Whereas the McKinney-Vento Act requires districts to provide a liaison, Title I, Part A requires districts to include in their plan a description of how they are coordinating with its MVA program and requires meaningful consultation with the assigned liaison. Cross-program coordination also optimizes resource allocation. This is necessary since many districts receive Title I, Part A funding, but only a percentage of districts receives McKinney-Vento subgrants.

Students experiencing homelessness automatically become eligible for Title I, Part A services, whether they attend Title 1, Part A schools or not. This automatic eligibility acknowledges that students experiencing homelessness are at higher risk for academic failure, regardless of their previous academic standing. This eligibility allows homeless students to participate in additional non-instructional education-related support services (NCHE, 2020). In addition, if a previously homeless student becomes housed during the school year, they are still able to receive Title I, part A services even after becoming permanently housed, for the remainder of that school year.

Title I, Part A requires school districts to reserve sufficient Title I funds to provide services to students experiencing homelessness. Homeless set-aside funds may also be used if a homeless student attends a school that is not Title I. Two principles govern the use of homeless set-aside funds. First, the services must be reasonable and necessary to assist students in taking advantage of educational opportunities. Second, the funds are used as a last resort. In other words, funding should first be found through school lunch programs, public health clinics, and local discretionary funds, such as PTAs (US Department of Education, 2017). Allowable uses of funds may include but are not limited to:

- Items of clothing, particularly if needed for uniform requirements

- Clothing and shoes necessary to participate in physical education classes.

- Student fees necessary to participate in general education classes, fees for college entrance exams, GED testing

- Birth certificates, immunizations

- Medical and dental exams, eye glasses, hearing aids and counseling services.

McKinney-Vento and Title I, Part A personnel are encouraged to communicate and collaborate regularly to identify needs of students experiencing homelessness. When collaborating, they should review available resources and plan ways to meet the needs of students (NCHE, 2020).

2.7.2 Transportation Concerns Under the McKinney-Vento Act

One of the McKinney-Vento Act mandates can create logistical and financial challenges for school districts. The MVA requires LEAs to provide transportation to and from a student's school of origin. The goal underlying this mandate is to allow students to maintain social connections related to educational success, limit time transitioning between schools, and/or remove gaps created by differing curriculum delivery (Low, Hallett, & Mo, 2017).

Many districts have found this mandate difficult to implement fully. The National Center of Homeless Children at SERVE developed a list of recommendations to help districts navigate the complexity of this mandate (National Center of Homeless Children at SERVE, 2004). Some of these recommendations include:

- Initiating conversations and creating partnerships with stakeholders such as the department of social services, housing authorities, foster care, shelters, group homes, child protective services and both public and private transportation agencies.

- Developing a strong partnership between the homeless education program and the department of pupil transportation.

- Establishing inter-district collaboration between local liaisons and pupil transportation directors across districts.

- Establishing formal procedures for equity, transparency and consistency.

- Establishing policies that support federal legislation. A means of doing this is to develop state and/or local policies that clarify roles and responsibilities related to transporting children and youth experiencing homelessness.

- Create economical and creative solutions by identifying potential resources within the community, planning, and being flexible with bus routes.

2.8 Strategies and Best Practices

This section synthesizes findings on best practices for educators working with homeless unaccompanied youth.

2.8.1 Professional Development

Homelessness among students is alarmingly common in many districts and classrooms, therefore, adequate training of school personnel is vitally important (Grothaus et al., 2011; Havlik

& Bryan, 2015). Though the McKinney-Vento Act was enacted to provide protection and assistance for homeless youth, district personnel often do not understand homelessness and how to implement the provisions outlined by the federal law (Hallet et al., 2015).

It is essential that school personnel have adequate training on the issues and rights of homeless unaccompanied youth (Havlik & Bryan, 2015; Masten et al., 2015). School staff such as teachers, counselors, and social workers provide the best opportunity for these students to get connected to resources. In addition to school-level staff, district leadership needs to be trained in order to research the issues, develop policies, and create resources and training for individual school leaders (Hallett et al., 2015).

Some districts have found ways to inspire and encourage staff to be invested in this cause. Patricia Rivera, who was hired as the manager of the Homeless Education Program for Chicago Public Schools, attempted to shift the attitudes of school staff during mandatory staff trainings by inviting homeless or formally homeless students and parents to participate in the trainings. She also made efforts to recognize support staff who provided excellent service to students and families and hosted events in their honor and recognized their hard work (Nix-Hode & Heybach, 2014).

2.8.2 Training on McKinney-Vento Mandates

Staff who understand McKinney-Vento requirements will be able to better support their students and assure they receive resources that are available to them through this policy. Educators are required to comply with the following mandates:

- **Immediate Enrollment**: Students who identify as an unaccompanied youth must be enrolled immediately.

- **Determining Best Interests**: The following factors must be considered: impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety, and prioritizing the requests of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth.

- **Transportation:** Transportation must be provided to and from the school of origin, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, at the request of the local liaison.

- **Rights of Homeless Students Handout**: Students need to be informed of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act.

2.8.3 Giving Students a Voice

As youth homelessness persists, homeless unaccompanied youth need opportunities to share their experiences and to identify areas of need as well as solutions to addressing their needs (Aviles De Bradley, 2011). At the school level, this can be done through building relationships with the students or offering small groups. By giving the students a voice, they will feel more empowered to help problem solve and will be able to help identify needs (Masten et al., 2015).

2.8.4 Brokering Education Opportunities Across Levels

Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino and Bourgeois (2015) discuss the importance of being able to connect students and families to educational opportunities. They found three primary "levels of brokerage" that can shape efforts to connect students to resources and opportunities. At the *district* level, a district-wide administrator disseminates information and resources across the entire district and all its schools. At the school *building* level, school environment, relationships, staff and administration affect the way relationships are built with students and resources are designated.

And finally, at the *neighborhood* level, community agencies and individuals serve as key stakeholders. Districts, buildings, and neighborhoods function interdependently; the practices at each level affect (and are affected by) the practices and conditions of the other levels (Miller et al., 2015).

2.8.5 Providing Youth-friendly Outreach

The biggest challenge in student self-referral is their lack of knowledge about available resources. Creating youth-friendly materials and outreach brings the information to the student. By creating bulletin boards, social media posts, and opportunity fliers, educators provide information to all audiences. This passive brokerage of information can be useful, allowing students and others to access information about opportunities they may not have even known to ask about (Miller et al., 2015). Letting students know what McKinney-Vento is and who it serves could reach youth who may not have even known they needed support until they realized it was there. Often students and families are reluctant to share their living experiences due to concerns about privacy and a negative stigma around homelessness. Creating positive community outreach during school enrollment can help educate young people about a school's nonjudgmental response to homelessness (Masten et al., 2015).

2.8.6 Terminology

Educators should avoid using the word "homeless" when discussing a living situation with a student. Instead they can use terms such as "temporary living situation" or "not having a stable place to live" (NCHE, 2019). A person who is homeless may actively refuse valuable resources

in order to reject a homeless identity. By being sensitive to this reaction and being aware of terminology, staff can help promote ways for youth to obtain resources without perpetuating the associated stigma (Terui & Hsieh, 2016).

2.8.7 Examining Perceptions and Biases

Educating staff on experiences of homeless unaccompanied youth can help the staff better meet the needs of homeless unaccompanied youth. Staff training can also help professionals act more sensitively when working with students experiencing homelessness (Miller et al., 2015). School staff should challenge themselves to examine their perceptions and biases about homeless unaccompanied youth and explore vehicles for meaningful collaborations with other school personnel and outside agencies (Grothaus et al., 2011).

2.8.8 Providing Trauma Informed Care

Trauma informed care principles are based in an understanding of traumatic stress and a commitment to implement strategies to attend to the needs of those who are experiencing effects of trauma (McKenzie-Mohr, Coates & McLeod, 2012). Homeless youth experience high rates of chronic stress; physical and emotional neglect and abuse, including sexual abuse; and other forms of trauma, violence and victimization in their early lives (Gwadz, Freeman, Leonard, Kutnick, Silverman & Powlovich, 2019). When working with this population, it is important for educators, including counselors, to be aware of the traumatic effects of homelessness. In one study, Coates and McKenzie-Mohr (2010) interviewed 100 youth that had faced homelessness. On average, both male and female youth had faced 11 to 12 different forms of highly stressful life events.

Examples of stressful life events used in the study were abuse, rape, bullying, witnessing death or injury, being in trouble with the law, violence, fear of being injured or killed, miscarriage or abortion and stressful school experience. These stressful life events happened before and after becoming homeless. These stressful life events have far reaching consequences (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012), and the effects should be considered when working one-on-one with a student but also in relation to discipline, academics, and attendance issues.

Traditional psychotherapy requires a great deal of commitment on the part of the client. Homeless youth may not have the resources and stability to commit to those services. Traditional psychotherapy requires the person seeking therapy to locate a service provider (which can be accomplished by school personnel), make an appointment, come to an initial appointment and return for scheduled appointments. Such requirements create barriers for homeless youth (McManus & Thompson, 2008). Even if appointments are made by the school and sessions are held at the school, homeless youth may struggle getting to school on a regular basis in order to keep scheduled sessions.

McManus and Thompson (2008) suggest an outreach intervention model that is based on Levy's *Homeless Outreach: A Developmental Model as a Guide* (1998, p. 125). The four phases of this model are:

1. Pre-engagement- attempt to communicate with the individual

2. Engagement- build a functioning relationship

3. Contracting- encourage and assist in setting goals

4. Termination- maintain the goals

Strength-based practices have also been proven effective (McManus & Thompson, 2008). Strengths-based and solution-focused approaches use the strengths and resources of the students.

Students are encouraged to continually strive towards their goals even if there are setbacks and challenges (McManus & Thompson, 2008).

2.8.9 Utilizing Data

Data can be an important tool for school districts to evaluate the effectiveness of the work they are doing to meet the needs of homeless unaccompanied youth. Data can inform districts about progress in meeting the needs of homeless unaccompanied youth; these needs include but are limited to transportation, credit attainment, summer school, and graduation, and provide evidence on the success of the district's efforts to address achievement disparities (Masten et al., 2015).

2.9 Conclusions and Possible Research Opportunities

There is considerable research focused on homeless youth and services that they need. Positive changes have been made. Through the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act, schools have been required to allocate time and funding to better support students who may be in unstable living conditions and living without family support. However, research does also show that there is space for more work and for more research to be done.

Overall, this review of literature identified four gaps in the literature related to the following topics: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and homeless unaccompanied youth, resiliency, implementation of McKinney-Vento, and educator knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act.

First, research is needed to understand the development and manifestation of PTSD symptoms among chronically traumatized populations, especially youth who are homeless (McManus & Thompson, 2008). Looking at these symptoms in a sensitive way could lead to more effective treatments and ways to work with HUY without re-traumatizing them.

Second, resiliency and protective factors are characteristics of homeless unaccompanied youth that call for more attention, as better understanding could inform practice for more population-specific programs. Masten's (2015) study documented substantial evidence of youth resilience. The differences among groups of students tested invited a question: what made the difference between how some homeless youth scored against how other homeless youth scored? Some differences could be accounted for by considering earlier achievement, but Masten called for further exploring protective factors. Learning about protective factors that have helped some students do well in school despite their experiences of adversity and disadvantage could yield future practices for school personnel.

Also lacking in the current research is how effectively schools are implementing McKinney-Vento. More detailed information on how some districts are carrying out the mandates and success stories can help lead the way for districts who are struggling.

Lastly, this review addressed educators' knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. The studies measured participants' perception of their knowledge rather than their actual knowledge, which may have led to self-report bias (Mullins et al., 2015). Support staff, including counselors and McKinney-Vento liaisons did not feel knowledgeable of the federal policy and the requirements (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). Other areas to consider are how and when trainings happen on these important mandates, including through graduate school, professional development, and conferences. This study is, in part, a first step by helping aspiring principals in identifying

homeless unaccompanied youth and the supports they need. The workshop developed for this study supports this goal through a distance education module that can help increase educators' knowledge and efficiency when working with this population.

3.0 Methods

This program evaluation focused on the effectiveness of an online training video provided to help educators in the identification and support of homeless unaccompanied students (see Appendix C). This online training was delivered as part of the professionals' graduate coursework in a principal certification program. Pre- and posttests were evaluated to see if the training video affected the participants' understanding of supports for homeless unaccompanied youth and how educators can play a role in supporting homeless unaccompanied students.

3.1 Problem of Practice

The number of homeless unaccompanied youth continues to rise (NCES, 2019). This population is at risk for many factors that can impede their education and lower their chances of continuing their education or finding meaningful employment after high school (Aviles de Bradley, 2012). Schools can play a vital role in identifying these factors and supporting students (Thielking et al., 2017). This study addresses the knowledge that is needed to work effectively with this population, not only with the initial identification of a student who may be homeless but also with ongoing support.

3.2 Inquiry Questions

Personal experience working in high school settings as well as literature reviews on this topic have guided this research study. The inquiry questions were developed in response to the following themes:

- Recent research has concluded that although youth experiencing homelessness share many risks with other disadvantaged youth, they fall higher on a continuum of cumulative risk (Masten et al., 2015).

- Data on homeless youth yield numbers that are vastly undercounted (Auerswald & Adams, 2018). For high school students, homelessness or unstable living conditions often go unreported (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012). Reasons could be that (a) students do not consider themselves homeless if they are able to sleep at a friend's or acquaintance's house, (b) they fear they will have to return to an unsatisfactory home if they report their situation, or (c) they do not have a trusted adult at the school in whom they confide (Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice & Appleseed, 2012).

- The increase in homeless youth in U.S. public schools challenges school systems in their capacity to meet the educational needs of these students (Rahman et al., 2015).

This evaluation was guided by the following inquiry questions:

Inquiry Question 1: To what extent do school personnel show an increased understanding about youth homelessness after a 30-minute online training session?

Inquiry Question 2: Can school professionals apply what they have learned in case study examples?

3.3 Setting and Participants

The online training video was added to a spring semester K-12 Principal Certification course at a Mid-Atlantic University. All students enrolled in the School Law course in this program watched the online training video during a class session and took the pretest and posttest (see Appendix B). Participation and performance on the test did not affect their grades. Participants were graduate students and therefore were over the age of 18. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. (See Appendix A.)

3.4 Procedures

3.4.1 Protocol

Twelve students enrolled in the spring semester School Law course in the K-12 Principal Certification Program took the 20-question pretest and posttest before and after watching the training video. Students' grades were not affected by their participation nor their scores on the assessments. The pretest and posttest were accessed through the class Blackboard site. (See Appendix A)

Test results were compared between the pretest and posttest to see if gains were made in the professionals' understanding of the homeless unaccompanied youth population.

3.4.2 Training Program

The training video followed the structure below:

1. Introduction

2. Identification of Homeless Youth

3. Statistics

4. Risk Factors and Resilience

5. Understanding their Experiences

6. Policy Implications

7. Best Practices

3.4.3 Survey Tools

The pretest and posttest were administered as surveys prior to and following the training video (see Appendix B). With the pretest and posttest design, the participants' scores were measured both before and after watching the training video. If the treatment was effective, the outcome scores would be expected to improve. (Mertens, 2015).

3.4.4 Analysis of Survey Data

The pretest and posttest results were analyzed using a matched pairs T-test analysis to determine if individual participants increased their knowledge about the experiences of homeless unaccompanied youth.

4.0 Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether students pursuing principal certification would improve in their knowledge of homeless unaccompanied youth after watching a training video on the topic. The study was guided by the following inquiry questions:

- o To what extent do school personnel show an increased understanding about youth homelessness after a 30-minute online training session?
- o Can school professionals apply what they have learned in case study examples?

Participants' knowledge was evaluated through pretest and posttest responses based on the 30-minute online training session. This instrument included 20 questions in two categories. The first 15 questions centered on facts regarding homeless youth statistics, risk factors, terminology, policy, and mandates. The last five questions required the participants to apply their knowledge to a case. Twelve students took the pretest and posttest before and after participating in the online workshop. The results of the pretest and posttest are presented in the following sections and organized by inquiry question.

4.1 Inquiry Question 1

The participants understanding of youth homelessness was measured via the pretest and posttest. Twelve participants completed the pretest and posttest, providing a 100 percent response rate. There was a significant increase in posttest scores. Indicating that the participants showed an increased understanding about youth homelessness after the 30- minute training video.

Results for the pretest and posttests were analyzed with a paired-samples t-test, using a Type I error rate of .05. The paired-sample t-test showed that post-test scores (M=0.88, SD=0.06) were significantly higher than pre-test scores (M=0.76, SD=0.11); t(11)=4.839, p=.001. On average, there was a 12 percent increase in scores. These results suggest that student knowledge of homeless unaccompanied youth increased after participating in the workshop.

The statistical analysis conducted for this study indicates that educators can significantly increase their understanding of homeless unaccompanied youth after a single 30- minute training session.

4.2 Inquiry Question 2

The second inquiry question considered whether school professionals could apply what they learned to case study examples. The last five questions of the survey were created to examine the professionals' understanding of how McKinney-Vento mandates can be applied in different scenarios. The scenarios address the following situations: determining McKinney-Vento eligibility; identifying an educational decision maker in lieu of a parent or guardian; and determining school of origin, enrollment, and credit accrual when homelessness is experienced during senior year and multiple high schools have been attended. The results show that though there was an increase in knowledge scores, there was not a significant increase in test scores for the case study questions. Further analysis of the case study questions was conducted with another paired-samples t-test which revealed post-test scores (M=.92, SD=.13) that were not significantly higher than pre-test scores (M=.83, SD=.18); t(11)=1.82, p=.096.

These findings lead the writer to examine the workshop and the importance of using more case study examples for the content in the training protocol. When learning the mandates and facts, the participants had a more significant increase in test scores than when they translated the new knowledge to case study examples. For specific test questions, for example, participants were able to indicate that enrollment for an unaccompanied homeless youth needed to happen immediately, but when that information was presented in a case study scenario, the participants did not respond correctly as often. Educators want concrete and practical ideas that directly relate to their day-to-day situations in their classrooms (Svendsen, 2020). Giving case study scenarios in professional development allows educators to see how information plays out in situations they may find themselves facing later.

Separating the two types of questions provides a better understanding of the results. The results for the first 15 questions are more significant than results for the entire survey. The analysis for the factual first 15 questions are as follows: The paired-sample t-test shows that post-test scores (M=0.87, SD=0.05) were significantly higher than pre-test scores (M=0.74, SD=0.09); t(11)=6.141, p<.001. Overall, scores were higher on the posttests than the pretests; with results from the fact-based first 15 questions showing an even more significant improvement.

4.3 Implications for Workshop Improvements

The results of this study indicate that a 30-minute training session can have a significant improvement on a participant's understanding of unaccompanied homeless youth and the policies that apply to them. Adjustments should be made, however, to make the training more effective. Changing the sequence of the training could allow for a better understanding by the participants

of important points. For example, the training video could provide information on a topic and then immediately follow each topic with a topic-specific scenario. In addition, scenarios could be added at the end to synthesize all of the content.

In reviewing survey responses, specific questions stood out as needing further explanation in order to help the participants better understand specific concepts. The posttest results indicate that two questions had the most incorrect answers, even after the training. The two areas that need further explaining in the training include a) how long a homeless student can remain in the school of origin and receive transportation, and b) the case study question about whether a student who is unaccompanied and displaced during senior year could continue at the school of origin or have to enroll in the new district. This finding provides helpful information regarding revisions of training that could benefit future participants.

5.0 Discussion

In 1987, when the McKinney-Vento Act was enacted, it resulted in a heightened awareness of the homeless population. Through this legislation, important services were put into place for students suffering from homelessness (Mullens et al., 2015). With the most recent strengthening of the MVA through the Every Student Succeeds Act, the legislation continues to address the well-being of these students. Schools and districts have an emerging understanding that some supports exist for serving students who are homeless; however, educators may be uncertain about the specifics of federal or state laws or how they may be implemented in the local context (Hallet & Skrla, 2016). This study helps bring to light the need for professional development to help educate school personnel on MVA mandates and best practices to support this population. As policies change and staff turnover, it is important for school personnel to receive assistance on navigating the complexity of the law and helping them understand what homelessness may look like in their communities.

The training program employed in this study was designed to be easily replicated and used in different districts. It is also in an online format that can be distributed to larger groups. Important areas covered in the training include: risk factors for becoming homeless, barriers to identification of students who may be suffering from housing instability, McKinney-Vento mandates, and best practices on how educators can support these students. Throughout the training, stories of youth were told to help give participants a look at different circumstances that brought these young people to homelessness. The pretest and posttest also walked participants through case studies on different scenarios and asked the participants to answer questions

regarding how to best handle a situation involving a student with housing instability and lack of parent or guardian support.

The results of this study indicate that a brief training session can have a significant impact on an educator's understanding. Though the session was only 30 minutes, it brought about improvement in participants' understanding and knowledge of the topic. These findings serve to extend the field of study on homeless unaccompanied youth by establishing the effects of continued professional development on the subject.

5.1 Limitations

This study had limitations that should be noted. Participants were enrolled in a course in one university program, and all are professionals in the same state; the findings, therefore, may not be applicable to other educators in other settings. Generalizability is also impacted by the small and specific sample size. The findings described can only represent the experiences of those who participated. While all have in common their aspiration to become principals, other background factors were not available (e.g., their current positions, teaching experience and the like). Their current positions and previous training could have influenced their prior knowledge of the subject matter.

In summary, educator knowledge did significantly increase after the training. The next two sections will address implications for future research as well as implications for educator practice.

5.2 Implications for Future Research

Findings from this study support the writer's prior acknowledgement of gaps in research related to homeless unaccompanied youth, including implementation of McKinney-Vento, and educators' knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. Improved and increased education and professional development for educators on these subjects can improve implementation of related policies and overall knowledge.

5.2.1 Implementation of McKinney-Vento

Failure to properly implement the MVA puts children and youth experiencing homelessness at an even further disadvantage than children and youth not experiencing homelessness (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015). Limited research has been done on MVA effectiveness and implementation. A better understanding of the ways in which other educators have successfully implemented the MVA to support youth experiencing homelessness is integral for improving services for this unique population (Clemens, Hess, Strear, Rue, Rizzolo & Henninger, 2018).

In 2012, Canfield, Teasley, Abell and Randolph created the McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Scale. This scale was designed to help researchers learn about school-based social services personnel's knowledge and awareness of implementation of the MVA within their service areas. The researchers identified three domains of implementation: preparation, accessibility, and collaboration (Canfield, Teasley, Abel & Randolph, 2012).

The first, preparation, means that districts need to have a plan in place for students who are homeless, who enroll as homeless, or become homeless. Preparation includes taking steps to

reduce risk factors that can keep students from attending school. Because homelessness can put children at risk for poor academic performance, truancy, grade retention, and a host of other risk factors, the preparation component is important for meeting the unique needs of homeless youth. Preparation requires school staff to be cognizant of the laws in place to support these students. The next domain is accessibility. The MVA addresses five aspects of accessibility to assure homeless students educational needs are met (Bernard, Hardee, Magnani & Angle, 1995):

- Geographic- School districts making themselves physically available to homeless children. This is achieved by transportation assistance and residential requirement waivers.

- Economic- School districts can eliminate cost barriers by providing free transportation or waiving enrollment fees. They also can help remove economic barriers to other opportunities such as college entrance exams and activity and sports fees.

- Administrative- When a homeless youth is trying to enroll, districts can help improve accessibility by eliminating requirements such as proof of residency or previous school records. Through the MVA, students can enroll without proof of immunization and can remain without proof of residency.

- Cognitive- Districts are to provide information on the rights and services available to homeless students. Information sharing needs to be done in a way that is understandable to the student and in a language and format appropriate for a school-age student.

- Psychological- School districts should decrease stigma and other negative psychosocial stressors.

These aspects of accessibility are all designed to increase educational access. It is important to note that accessibility extends to extracurricular activities including sports, theater, and any other school-related activity.

Finally, collaboration, is largely managed by the policy-mandated school-employed liaison. These liaisons act as conduits between the schools and children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness (Wilkins et al., 2015). Often led by the liaison, the MVA policy requires schools to act in the best interest of children and to work with other organizations in serving their needs.

The results from Canfield et al.'s study show that the MVAIS could be used as a predictor variable in future studies on MVA implementation. When testing his scale, the authors reported that their hypothesis was confirmed and that the scale is a sound instrument for use by social workers for understanding their perceptions of MVA implementation in their service areas. This tool could be useful in practice evaluation and understanding how the MVA influences practice with homeless youth (Canfield et al., 2012) In 2017, Canfield went on to study whether the MVAIS could be used with other school personnel besides Social Workers, which would be important since all districts do not employ social workers.

The results of these studies by Canfield, Teasley, Abell and Randolph (2012) show that there is some validity to the MVAIS but that further research and testing is required. It is also noted that since homeless policies are continually being updated, the MVAIS also will need continual updating. In addition, homelessness is unique to each person. Homelessness can look different in different communities or regions. Future studies on MVAIS could benefit the study of MVA implementation and possible improvements.

Further research on the implementation of the McKinney Vento Act can help policy makers and practitioners understand the underlying concepts that are key to implementation. Additional studies can also address if and how MVA is meeting the needs of homeless youth. In other words,

is the MVA being implemented appropriately at current funding levels? What implementation strategies seem to be the most effective?

5.2.2 Implementation of Liaison Assignments

How effectively a district implements the MVA mandates is often left in the hands of the school-assigned McKinney-Vento Liaison.   According to the National Center for Homeless Education, the liaison's responsibilities include ensuring that:

- children and youth are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination with other agencies

- homeless children and youth are enrolled in and have full equal opportunity to succeed in school

- homeless children and families receive referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services

- parents and guardians and unaccompanied youth are informed of educational and other related opportunities

- public notice of educational rights of homeless students is disseminated in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and/or unaccompanied youth. This information must also be understandable to the population it is trying to support

- enrollment disputes are mediated appropriately

- families and unaccompanied youth are fully informed of all transportation services

- school personnel that support homeless children receive professional development

- unaccompanied youth are informed of their status as independent students when completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The liaison position is key to ensuring that homeless children and youth receive the services they need (NCHE, 2020). This position is required of all LEAs regardless of school status. A review of the literature shows that there is no consistent process for how districts assign the position. While districts meet the mandate to have liaisons in place, the duties appear to be assigned to a variety of personnel. According to the Pennsylvania's Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Homeless Liaison Directory (2020), the liaison position is held by several different positions within a district. In one mid-sized county in Pennsylvania, the assignment is held by a range of positions, including a school social worker, school psychologist, director of pupil services, and assistant superintendent (Pennsylvania's Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness, 2020). In carrying out this position, the liaison role may be filled by any of the positions mentioned above, including administrator, social worker, or outreach specialist (NCHE, 2020).

Districts that have a person in a social work role tend to assign that person the MVA Liaison designation. However, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 39,940 school social workers were employed in the United States in 2017. Given the lack of school social worker positions, there is no obvious next choice, resulting in the assignment going to a range of positions, from union positions to district-level administrators. With the importance and load of the responsibilities that the liaison must take on, consideration of best practices would be a valuable avenue to explore for future research.

5.2.3 Educators' Knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act

Another possibility for further research would be educators' knowledge of issues related to homeless unaccompanied youth, including understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act. While this study calls for more research into effective implementation of the MVA, it also calls for further exploration of educators' knowledge of this important policy. From the pretest to the posttest, scores increased by 12 percent. Removing the case study questions yields even more improvement. Pretest scores indicate that participants had limited or no knowledge of the MVA in advance of the training, confirming that more educator training is needed on protections for homeless unaccompanied youth

Findings from this survey can inform future investigations into other personnel's understanding of this population and best practices. Valuable information could be gained by studying other types of school personnel's knowledge before and after an intervention. Following are key school personnel who can play significant roles in the identification of homeless unaccompanied youth and the successful implementation of MVA mandates.

- McKinney-Vento Liaisons- Who fills these positions, and how knowledgeable are they about their responsibilities and MVA mandates? Liaison positions are filled by different personnel, leading to staff with different levels of prior knowledge and experience. Only a small percentage of liaisons understand what their role entails (Thompson & Davis, 2003), making it challenging for them to train staff and carry out required duties. One study reported that many liaisons in Illinois reported being unaware that they were chosen for the position by their local education agencies (Wilkins et al., 2015). The liaison can be the key to ensuring homeless students receive the services they need. Their understanding and knowledge is critical. Researching how knowledgeable liaisons are regarding their

responsibilities and policy mandates could inform improved implementation strategies moving forward.

- Teachers- While support staff and administrators are often brought in for support, teachers play a key role in identification. Many best practices include strategies that teachers would most likely execute, making it critical that they get the training they need. The counselor or even the assigned liaison, for example, may not see the students on a regular basis. Understanding their knowledge base would be useful for implementation structures.

- Teachers' Aides- Teachers' Aides are often the eyes and ears in a classroom. They know the students and have often created strong enough bonds that they know the students' needs better than the teachers do; they also know more about the communities the schools serve (Platt, 2018). These important classroom assistants may be the first to notice warning signs and would benefit from professional development on this subject.

- Career and Technical Instructors- Forty-three percent of public schools have students interested in studying in a career and technical education (CTE) pathway and who attend a part-time CTE center (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). At those centers, instructors are industry-trained and do not have standard teacher certifications. Because of CTC schedules, students are often with the CTC instructor for a longer time each day than with any other adult. Adding homeless unaccompanied youth and MVA training to their professional development schedules could allow them to identify student behaviors that indicate a need for support.

5.3 Implications for Practice

Districts can support educators' understanding of homeless unaccompanied youth and policy mandates by providing professional development opportunities. Professional development involves educators learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students (Avalos, 2011). With the number of homeless unaccompanied youth rising in the United States, it is imperative that educators learn the warning signs and support procedures to work with these students (Aviles De Bradley, 2011). Educators need to be prepared for the varied students who will be walking through their doors. They need to be aware of student risk factors and behaviors that may require intervention. In addition to being able to help with identifying students and connecting them to supports, a fuller understanding of the experiences of homeless students and formerly homeless students may enable educators to become more responsive to students' academic needs (Grothaus et al., 2011). Districts can support educators at all levels by providing them with learning opportunities and resources.

5.4 Conclusion

Yearly, nearly 95,000 young people in the United States find themselves without stable living conditions and without the support of parents or guardians (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Students experiencing homelessness face a range of challenges related to health, emotional well-being, and safety (McFarland, Hussar, de Brey, Snyder, Wang & Wilkinson, 2017). With their continuum of risk markedly higher than those of their housed peers, they need support and specific assistance from school systems. With the McKinney-Vento Act's inception and

continued revisions, schools are required to work actively to identify these youth and follow the mandates that the law outlines.

As the number of unaccompanied youth continues to rise, it is imperative for educators and other school personnel to understand the experiences of this population and the mandates set forth by the McKinney-Vento Act. Educators and administrators at all levels play a key role in how homeless unaccompanied youth experience school and access resources.

Through professional development, districts can increase educator awareness and knowledge of this population and aid in their staff's learning of basic policy mandates and best practices. Through an online workshop, this study set out to do just that. With significant gains made by the educators participating, it shows that there can be a significant increase in educator understanding after just a short professional development intervention.

There are many possibilities for future research that would improve educational practice and the student experience. More work can be done on how districts are implementing the McKinney-Vento Act and which implementation strategies are most effective. In addition, further research is needed to ascertain the knowledge and understanding of other school personnel, such as social workers, teachers, support staff, and career and technology instructors, followed by intervention and instruction to increase awareness and knowledge for these groups.

Increased knowledge will come with improved professional development. With best practices in place, we will hopefully begin to see an equalizing of opportunities and access for homeless unaccompanied youth.

Appendix A Introductory Script

Dear Students,

The purpose of this research study is to study the effectiveness of an online training workshop provided to help educators in the identification and support of homeless unaccompanied youth. For that reason, I will be giving a pretest and posttest to students who are enrolled in the School Law course that is within their program of study at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education. The training video is part of the course's curriculum. In order to evaluate effectiveness, students will participate and complete a pretest and a posttest before and after watching the training video. All students enrolled in the School Law course will watch the online training PowerPoint and participate in the pretest and posttest. Your grade will not be affected by your participation nor score on the assessment. The evaluation involves a 20-question pretest and a posttest that will be embedded in the Blackboard classroom. You will be instructed to take the tests before and after you watch the training video.

There is no foreseeable risk associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. There will be no payments for your participation in this study. The tests will be anonymous. You will be directed to the tests via a link to Qualtrics from Blackboard. Your responses will not be identifiable in any way. All responses are confidential, and results will be kept under lock and key or in password-protected files. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop completing the tests at any time.

Appendix B Online Training Module: Identification and Support of Homeless

Unaccompanied Youth (HUY) Pretest/Posttest

1. How many young adults ages 18-25 experienced a form of homelessness over a 12-month period?
    a. 1 in 10
    b. 1 in 30
    c. 1 in 50
    d. 1 in 80
2. In the 2017 Voices of Youth Count Survey, it was reported that there were this many homeless unaccompanied youth ages 14-24?
    a. 2 million
    b. 3 million
    c. 4 million
    d. 5 million
3. Most children and youth experiencing homelessness live in:
    a. Shelter
    b. Transitional housing
    c. On the street
    d. Shared housing; couch surfing with a friend, acquaintance
4. In addition to conflict with family members, economic challenges and shelter policies, what is the other most common cause of homelessness?
    a. Young person not wanting to follow a guardian's rules
    b. Abuse or neglect
    c. District zoning
    d. Income levels
5. What are some of the barriers that may contribute to homeless unaccompanied youth not self-identifying themselves for services?
    a. They do not believe they are homeless because they stay with a friend
    b. Fear of being forced to return to an unsafe home situation
    c. They do not have a trusted adult within their school system in order to trust
    d. All the above
6. What is the top risk factor from young adults who are homeless?
    a. Instability
    b. Lack of high school diploma or GED
    c. Future income
    d. Mental Illness

7. This strength-based framework is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment?
    a. Supportive counseling
    b. Cognitive behavioral therapy
    c. Trauma-Informed Care
    d. Present center therapy
8. On average both male and female homeless youth have faced this many different forms of highly stressful life events both before and after becoming homeless:
    a. 3
    b. 6
    c. 12
9. ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and which education subtitle to support homeless youth in schools:
    a. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA)
    b. Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH)
    c. Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
    d. No Child Left Behind
10. Enrollment of an unaccompanied youth should happen:
    a. Once a former guardian of the youth is contacted
    b. Immediately
    c. When the previous school records have been received
    d. Once immunizations have been received
11. If a student chooses to leave home, as opposed to being kicked out or removed, they would not be eligible for MVA Services.
    a. True, their living situation is their choice
    b. False, MVA eligibility is focused on housing, therefore the student would be eligible regardless of circumstance
12. When determining Best Interest of a student, factors to consider are impact of mobility on achievement, education, health and safety of the youth. First and foremost, the decision must be:
    a. Student-centered
    b. School-centered
    c. Made within the school or origin
    d. Made within one month that the student was considered homeless
13. Based on best interest, McKinney-Vento students can remain in the school of origin and receive transportation for the duration of homelessness and up and through what part of the child's schooling?
    a. The end of the academic school year in which the child became homeless
    b. High school graduation
    c. End of the next marking period
    d. The end of the student's time in that school building (For ex: up until a student transitions to the middle school, high school)

14. What is meant by the student's School of Origin?
    a. The school where the student is currently staying while homeless
    b. The school in which the student last enrolled while they were permanently housed
    c. The school that accepts students from the local shelters
15. When working with a homeless unaccompanied youth on their FAFSA, the HUY should:
    a. Qualify themselves as independent status
    b. Seek to find financial information from family
    c. Not complete the FAFSA and just meet with the financial aid office
16. Sarah is a high school student who lives with her mother and siblings in a two-bedroom apartment. When Sarah tells her mother she is pregnant, her mother gets angry and kicks her out of her apartment. Sarah has no where to go and there are not youth shelters near her high school. Sarah begins to couch surf and is staying on friends' couches. After a while, Sarah's mother says she can return home, but Sarah does not feel safe doing that. Sarah visits the nurse's office at her school and the nurse refers her to the homeless liaison. The liaison determines:
    a. Sarah meets the definition of an unaccompanied youth because she lacks fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and is no longer in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.
    b. Sarah is choosing to couch surf, even though her mother said she could return home. Because her living situation is her choice, she is not eligible for services under McKinney-Vento.
    c. Sarah has a roof over her head, so she is not eligible for services under McKinney-Vento.
17. Who is the education decision maker for Sarah since she is no longer in the care of the parent or guardian?
    a. The McKinney-Vento Liaison for the district or another faculty member who is deemed
    b. The mother is still able to make educational decisions for the student
    c. The principal of the building
    d. The parent of the friend whose home she is currently staying.
18. **Andrew is a senior in high school who lives with his father. The relationship with** his father has become increasingly hostile and Andrew has started to fear that things will become violent. His father has laid hands on him before and is much bigger than him. After fleeing home one night his sister convinced him to go to an estranged family members house to stay instead of sleeping on the streets. Andrew is now residing with his estranged grandfather and his father is not asking him to come home. Which would be a correct statement regarding Andrew completing his senior year?
    a. Andrew would need to enroll in the new district of residence to complete his senior year
    b. Andrew would qualify under MVA and should be able to remain in his school of origin for the remainder of his senior year
    c. Andrew should be made to return to his father's house in order to complete his senior year

19. Aaron is starting his 4th year of high school. He has attended 3 different high schools and is moving in from a distant state. He is staying with an uncle and has no contact with his parents. When reviewing graduation requirements, the counselor realizes that by simply looking at the tally of credits Aaron may be short to meet their graduation requirements. Since Aaron would qualify under McKinney-Vento the counselor should:
    a. Piece together credits from the three previous schools and work to allow Aaron to graduate on time
    b. Enroll Aaron in an online credit recovery program instead of having him attend their high school
    c. Work with Aaron and explain that he would need to attend summer school, but that he should be able to be a summer graduate
20. Alexandria showed up to enroll at your high school last week. You learned that she had recently ran away from home and was staying in the local youth shelter. You allowed her to enroll as an unaccompanied homeless youth. Yesterday, the principal at Alexandria's school calls you and insists that you never should have enrolled Alexandria because her mom still has legal custody, so Alexandria is not unaccompanied. The principal says that mom needs to come sign all the paperwork and enroll her. Was the school correct in enrolling Alexandria?
    a. Yes, they were correct due to Alexandria's current living situations were not adequate under McKinney-Vento's definitions.
    b. No, the school should have reached out to a guardian

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