

# UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN A NORTHERN COMMUNITY—TIMMINS, ONTARIO

## SURVEY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

Arshi Shaikh, MSW, PhD

Carol Kauppi, PhD

Henri Pallard, LLB, D<sup>oct</sup>

Emily Faries, PhD

with

Roger Gervais, D<sup>oct</sup>

Mandy Scott, MA

Stephanie Fournier

**Poverty, Homelessness and Migration**

Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy

Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario

Presented to

Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Employment and Social Development Canada

Canada

December 31, 2013

POVERTÉ, SANS-ABRISME ET MIGRATION  
**POVERTY, HOMELESSNESS AND MIGRATION**  
**PAUVRETÉ, SANS-ABRISME ET MIGRATION**



POVERTY HOMELESSNESS AND MIGRATION  
**POVERTY HOMELESSNESS AND MIGRATION**  
**PAUVRETÉ SANS-ABRISME ET MIGRATION**

# **UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN A NORTHERN COMMUNITY—TIMMINS ONTARIO**

## **SURVEY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Arshi Shaikh, MSW, PhD

Carol Kauppi, PhD

Henri Pallard, LLB, D<sup>oct</sup>

Emily Faries, PhD

with

Roger Gervais, D<sup>oct</sup>

Mandy Scott, MA

Stephanie Fournier

**Poverty, Homelessness and Migration**

Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy

Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario

Presented to

Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Employment and Social Development Canada

December 31, 2013



*Understanding and Addressing Homelessness in a Northern Community—Timmins, Ontario. Survey of Service Providers.*

© 2013 Carol Kauppi, Henri Pallard, Arshi Shaikh, and Emily Faries.

How to cite this document:

Arshi Shaikh, Carol Kauppi, Henri Pallard and Emily Faries (2013). *Understanding and Addressing Homelessness in a Northern Community—Timmins, Ontario. Report 3: Survey of Service Providers.* Report prepared for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Employment and Social Development Canada: Sudbury, Ontario: Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy, Laurentian University.

This study was funded by the  
Homelessness Partnering Strategy  
Employment and Social Development Canada

*Poverty, Homelessness and Migration* is funded by  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

PNLP-Δ' ▽b b-ΔP' <▽a <C^9-Δ'  
*Poverty, Homelessness and Migration*  
*Pauvreté, sans-abrisme et migration*

Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy  
Laurentian University  
935 Ramsey Lake Road  
Sudbury ON P3E 2C6

Tel. 705-675-1151, ext. 5156	Fax 705-671-3832
homeless@laurentian.ca	www.lul.ca/homeless
sansabri@laurentienne.ca	www.lul.ca/sansabri

### **Disclaimer**

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada

Les opinions et les interprétations figurant dans la présente publication sont celles de l'auteur et ne représentent pas nécessairement celles du gouvernement du Canada.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
<hr/>	
II. METHODOLOGY . . . . .	3
A. Instrument . . . . .	3
B. Procedure . . . . .	3
C. Respondents . . . . .	4
<hr/>	
III. FINDINGS. . . . .	7
A. Agency Staffing . . . . .	7
B. Geographic Area Served . . . . .	7
C. Linkages with Service Providers . . . . .	8
D. Referrals to Other Agencies . . . . .	10
E. Referrals from Other Agencies . . . . .	10
F. Homeless Families Served—Service Use by Homeless/ Near Homeless Families . . . . .	10
G. Emergency Housing/Shelter Services Use . . . . .	11
H. Demand for Services: Peak Times and Slow Times . . . . .	12
I. Characteristics of Homeless Families . . . . .	13
J. Factors Related to Absolute Homelessness among Families . . . . .	14
K. Factors Associated with Near Homelessness/At Risk of Homelessness among Families . . . . .	15
L. Barriers in Access to Services among Homeless Families. . . . .	15
M. Service Providers' Perceptions of Client Needs . . . . .	17
N. Service Providers' Perceptions on Meeting Clients' Needs . . . . .	18
O. Unmet Needs . . . . .	19

P. Perceived Solutions . . . . .	20
<hr/>	
IV. CONCLUSION . . . . .	21
<hr/>	
REFERENCES . . . . .	23

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Organizations responding to the survey . . . . .	5
Table 2. Linkages between service providers . . . . .	9
Table 3. Referral pattern among service providers . . . . .	9
Table 4. Services provided to/utilized by homeless/near homeless families . . . . .	11
Table 5. Strategies used to accommodate service use in peak times . . . . .	13
Table 6. Perceived factors related to absolute homelessness among families . . . . .	14
Table 7. Perceived factors related to the risk of homelessness/ near homelessness among families . . . . .	16
Table 8. Barriers in access to services . . . . .	17
Table 9. Types of services required . . . . .	18
Table 10. Perceived reasons for challenges in serving homeless/ near homeless families . . . . .	19
Table 11. Proposed strategies to address homelessness or near homelessness in families . . . . .	20

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Geographic areas served by agencies. . . . .	8
Figure 2. Percentage of service providers reporting Peaks and slow times in service demand . . . . .	12



# I. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a major social issue affecting the lives of an increasing number of Canadians (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). The crisis is particularly disturbing when one focuses upon the growing proportion of families with children among homeless populations across various cities, towns and rural communities (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2003; Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010; Noble, 2014; Gould & Williams, 2010). In contrast to the prevailing myths and stereotypes about the homeless population as being composed of single men, people with substance abuse issues, formerly institutionalized mental health patients, and labourers engaged in low-paying jobs (Averitt, 2003; Gulati, 1992; Rossi, 1994), the contemporary reality reveals the rapidly growing presence of families with dependent children among homeless people (Gould & Williams, 2010; Lee, Tyler & Wright, 2010).

Timmins is a small urban city located on the Mattagami River in northeastern Ontario, approximately 300 kilometres north of Sudbury. The total population of the city is 43,165, of which 55.7% is Anglophone and 37.2% Francophone (Statistics Canada, 2012). Timmins is also home to a significant Indigenous population which currently accounts for 8% of its population (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Timmins has been reported to have a large number of families living below the Low Income Cut-Off. Nearly 3 in 10 Indigenous people were living under the LICO while nearly 1 in 10 non Indigenous were living under the LICO. The latter figure is similar to the Canadian average of 11.4%. *Lone parent families* have been particularly adversely affected since 20.8% of single male households in Timmins and 28.3% of single-female households were living under the LICO standards. (Statistics Canada, 2006).

In 2011, research undertaken by the *Poverty, Homelessness and Migration* team indicated that the families constituted two-thirds of those who were absolutely homeless in Timmins (Kauppi, Pallard, Lemieux & Nkosi, 2012). Due to the high proportion of families among homeless persons, a study was designed to generate and disseminate knowledge about various aspects of family homelessness in Timmins. The six phases of the study encompass (i) a review of the scholarly literature in the area of family homelessness with a specific focus on rural, Indigenous and Francophone families; (ii) an analysis of a period prevalence count of homeless families in Timmins; (iii) a survey of service providers; (iv) individual interviews with homeless families; (v) focus groups with homeless families; and (vi) focus groups with service providers. The current report contains the findings of the survey of service providers (phase iii).

Service providers play a vital role in the lives of people who are homeless or at high risk of becoming homeless in the future (i.e. the near homeless). Agency staff may serve as facilitators to reintegration into the community, especially for marginalized people. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of the services available to homeless people,

## 2 Survey of Service Providers

the resources within the network of agencies, and the perspectives of providers on needs, causes, and solutions to homelessness. The survey of service providers was conducted in order to obtain information regarding existing services offered to homeless persons with children in Timmins and the capacity of organisations to serve this population. The survey collected data on agency information, clients, families and service use, links to other agencies, needs of homeless families, characteristics of homeless families, factors related to homelessness among families, and addressing homelessness among families.

The contemporary reality reveals the rapidly growing presence of families with dependent children among homeless people. It is important to understand the nature of the services available to homeless people, the resources within the network of agencies, and the perspectives of providers on needs, causes, and solutions to homelessness.

# II. METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted in the spring and summer of 2013. The final response rate was 82%.

## A. Instrument

A questionnaire was developed by reviewing existing survey instruments and selecting questions that addressed the objectives of the current project and that were appropriate for the cultural context in Timmins. Additional questions were added based on the results of the literature review conducted for this project (Report 1) as well as the findings of the analysis of existing data (Report 2). The final questionnaire developed for this phase of the project included definitions of homelessness (absolute homelessness and near homelessness) and family; the latter stated that, for the purposes of the survey, a family was regarded as “An individual (parent/guardian) or a couple with a dependent child or children. The child or children can be biological, step, half, foster, and/or adopted.” The definitions were included to assist with consistency in responses to the questions.

The questionnaire begins with a set of questions about the respondent and the agency (e.g., length of time at the agency, size, catchment area, service to families experiencing forms of homelessness or the risk of homelessness). Additional sections deal with linkages to other agencies serving this population, service use by homeless and near homeless families, characteristics of homeless families, perceived factors related to homelessness among families, barriers in access to services faced by homeless families, needs of homeless families, capacity of agencies to serve homeless families and strategies for addressing homelessness among families. Printed packages included the questionnaire, information letter, consent form and postage paid return envelope. A corresponding email package in MS Word was also prepared.

The questionnaire developed for this phase of the project included definitions of homelessness (absolute homelessness and near homelessness) and family; the latter stated that, for the purposes of the survey, a family was regarded as “An individual (parent/guardian) or a couple with a dependent child or children. The child or children can be biological, step, half, foster, and/or adopted.”

## B. Procedure

The survey was conducted in the spring and summer of 2013. A list of 31 service providers in Timmins and South Porcupine that had been compiled in preparation for our period prevalence count of homeless persons conducted in 2011 (Kauppi, Pallard, Lemieux & Nkosi, 2012) was reviewed and revised. The contact information was updated and three additional agencies serving families experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness were added to create the

sampling frame for the survey. However, subsequently it was determined that six agencies/services did not fit the criteria for the survey in that they did not serve homeless families in the Timmins area. These six agencies/services were not included in the survey. The final sampling frame was based on 28 organizations, services or programs. A bilingual research assistant living in Timmins verified the list of agencies by reviewing it with project partners in Timmins. Contact information was obtained for a front-line staff person and an administrator of each agency/service. Following the receipt of approval from the Research Ethics Board at Laurentian University to conduct the survey, interviews and focus groups, the questionnaire was sent via email and via Canada Post. The bilingual research assistant followed up by providing reminder emails and telephone calls at one-week intervals. Two weeks after the initial questionnaire had been sent, a second copy of the survey package was sent. Reminder calls and emails were subsequently sent at one-week intervals. Many service providers stated that time constraints prevented them from completing the questionnaire, yet many were willing to complete the survey when it was administered by a research assistant via telephone. The final response rate was 82%.

### C. Respondents

Twenty-eight respondents in 23 agencies participated in the survey (see Table 1). In four agencies, questionnaires were completed by more than one person. These agencies provided more than one program or service and respondents answered the questions for the specific program/service. A strong effort was made to obtain two completed questionnaires from each organization; the goal was to obtain participation from an administrator and from a front-line worker in each agency or program serving families experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness in Timmins. However, the research team encountered challenges, primarily due to time and resource constraints within agencies. These constraints impacted on the sample size, as the questionnaire was completed by one person within each agency. Despite the smaller sample size relative to that originally projected, the respondents indicated that they were those most knowledgeable about services for homeless families provided by the organization or program.

As noted above, six agencies originally identified as potentially suitable respondents were deleted from the list because they were not operating at the time of the survey (e.g. student services), were not operating in Timmins/South Porcupine, or did not serve homeless families. Thus 28 agencies were contacted, of which 23 participated in the survey for a response rate of 82%. The participating agencies included a wide range of services/programs including shelters, soup kitchens, employment services/income support, outreach, physical and mental health services, and housing services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness (see Table 1). The agencies participating in the survey had been in existence, on average, for 33.1 years and the range was between 11 and 96 years.

The respondents comprised a mix of managers and front-line staff: 47% were upper managers, 18% were middle managers and 36% were front-line staff. The survey respondents had been working in their positions for an average of 13 years. The length of time the respondents had worked in these positions ranged from less than a year to thirty-two years. Overall, the participants had considerable experience working with homeless people, with 12 years of experience in this area. The length of time in working with homeless families ranged from 0 to 32 years.

**Table 1: Organizations responding to the survey**

Name of agency	Respondents	
	N	%
Centre Passerelle pour femmes (Timmins)	1	3.6
CMHA (Timmins)	2	7.1
Cochrane (Timmins) Housing—DSSAB (varied programs)	3	10.7
Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre (Timmins)	1	3.6
Family Counselling Centre (Timmins)	1	3.6
Good Samaritan Inn (Timmins)	1	3.6
Jubilee Centre (Timmins)	1	3.6
Lord's Kitchen (Timmins)	1	3.6
Mennonite Central Committee	1	3.6
Metis Nation of Ontario (Timmins)	1	3.6
Ontario Works—DSSAB	1	3.6
Porcupine Health Unit (Timmins)	2	7.1
Salvation Army (Timmins)	1	3.6
Seizure and Brain Injury Centre (Timmins)	1	3.6
South Cochrane Addictions Services (Timmins)	1	3.6
South Porcupine Food Bank (Timmins)	1	3.6
St-Vincent de Paul (Timmins)	1	3.6
Temiskaming Community Legal Clinic	1	3.6
Timmins and District Hospital—Mental Health	1	3.6
Timmins Area Women in Crisis	1	3.6
Timmins Native Friendship Centre	2	7.1
Tranquility House—Matheson Shelter	1	3.6
VCARS	1	3.6

The participating agencies included a wide range of services/programs including shelters, soup kitchens, employment services/income support, outreach, physical and mental health services, and housing services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.



# III. FINDINGS

## A. Agency Staffing

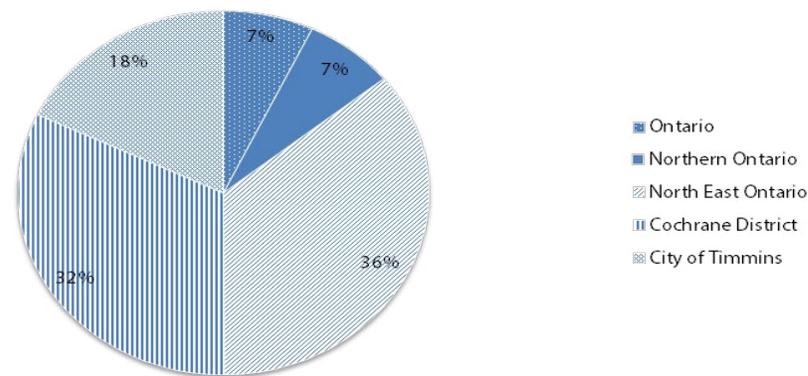
Fifty percent of the agencies operated with a staff of less than twelve persons. On average, the agencies had 37 full-time and 9 part-time staff. The largest organization participating in the study was Timmins and District Hospital which reported about 850 staff members; however, it was the mental health service that participated in the survey. The total range for the number of full-time staff was 0 to 155 (excluding the Timmins and District Hospital) while the range for part-time staff was 0 to 46. With regard to volunteer staff, slightly less than one third (32%) of the agencies in the survey reported that they do not have any volunteers. Hence, the majority of these agencies are supported by volunteers. The number ranged from 0 to 225 and volunteers provided, on average, 29 volunteer hours each week.

## B. Geographic Area Served

There was some variation in the catchment areas served by the agencies participating in the survey (see Figure 1). About 18% of the agencies reported that they serve the area within the current boundaries of the City of Timmins. A significant proportion of the respondents noted that they serve people in the Cochrane District (32%) and North East Ontario (36%). A few agencies reported that they have mandates to serve people within a specific geographic area, but stated that they serve anyone who requests services.

A significant proportion of the respondents noted that they serve people in the Cochrane District (32%) and North East Ontario (36%).

Figure 1. Geographic areas served by agencies



## C. Linkages with Service Providers

The survey results indicated that there is a considerable degree of collaboration between the various service providers. All respondents (100%) stated that they are linked up with other services in some way. Agencies work together through both formal and informal agreements and relationships that have been established over time. Examples of linkages involved primarily forms of partnerships, participation on joint committees or board memberships, establishing informal service agreements or strategies for joint working, or establishing formal service agreements (see Table 2). A majority of the service providers reported that the linkages to other agencies were functioning effectively (67%).

The main advantages of maintaining linkages were identified by the participants. They included improvements in overall service delivery, access to a greater number of services with fewer “roadblocks”, consolidation of expertise, effective communication, better understanding of Indigenous homelessness, poverty and other issues, and fewer clients falling through gaps in services. Making joint referrals is a strategy used by all respondents for coordinating service delivery. All service providers stated that they refer clients to other providers and that they also receive referrals from other agencies (see Table 3).

Participants also identified a number of challenges to linkages with other agencies. These included a lack of capacity in terms of financial and human resources, a lack of specific knowledge about other agencies, services or programs, working in silos, frequent staff changes, competitive funding, geographic distance between agencies, racism, transience among homeless families, and differing perspectives or approaches (e.g., “not all services view violence against women by using a feminist approach”).

The main advantages of maintaining linkages included improvements in overall service delivery, access to a greater number of services with fewer “roadblocks”, consolidation of expertise, effective communication, better understanding of Indigenous homelessness, poverty and other issues and fewer clients falling through gaps in services.

**Table 2: Linkages between service providers**

<b>Types of linkages*</b>	<b>%</b>
Partnerships, participation on joint committees, or board memberships	89
Informal agreements for services	86
Formal agreement for coordination of services	71
Working jointly to provide a service	71
Sharing resources	61
Providing joint assessments and treatment	43

\*Results are based on multiple responses, therefore the number of responses exceed the total number of homeless Indigenous families with custody of children.

**Table 3. Referral pattern among service providers**

<b>Type of services</b>	<b>Referrals to services</b>		<b>Referrals from services</b>	
	<b>Very often or often</b>	<b>Rarely or never</b>	<b>Very often or often</b>	<b>Rarely or never</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Basic needs (e.g., food/clothing)	79	7	64	25
Housing support	65	15	56	41
Income support	59	19	27	62
Mental health	56	7	35	54
Substance abuse	48	7	27	46
Disability pension assistance	48	15	27	46
Domestic Violence Counselling	44	26	35	54
Transportation	41	33	42	42
Counselling and case management	37	22	46	23
Employment support	37	30	19	65
Education support	37	37	19	62
Legal aid	37	26	15	63
Life skills training	37	48	27	50
Medical and dental care	33	30	27	58
Self-help group	33	33	27	50
Child care	26	41	30	70

## D. Referrals to Other Agencies

The pattern of results shown in Table 3 suggested that there were varying levels of contact for referrals among the agencies participating in the survey. More than half of the participating agencies made frequent referrals to agencies dealing with basic needs (i.e. food and clothing), housing support, income support and mental health. Between 40% and 48% of agencies made frequent referrals to agencies providing services for substance abuse, domestic violence counselling, transportation and disability pension assistance. Slightly over one-third of the agencies made frequent referrals to services dealing with counselling and case management, medical and dental care, employment support, educational support, legal aid, life skills training, and self-help groups. Less than a third of the respondents frequently referred their clients for child care.

More than half of the participating agencies made frequent referrals to agencies dealing with basic needs (i.e. food and clothing), housing support, income support and mental health.

## E. Referrals from Other Agencies

An examination of the pattern of referrals from other services (see Table 3) showed that between 42% and 64% of the respondents reported that they frequently received referrals from other service providers for such services as basic needs, housing support, case management, and counselling and transportation. A quarter to a third of the respondents reported that they frequently received referrals from other agencies for their clients requiring substance abuse, mental health, medical and dental care, income support, child care, domestic violence counselling, life skills training, disability pension assistance, and self-help groups. Less than a quarter of the service providers stated that they frequently received referrals in regards to employment, educational support, and legal aid.

## F. Homeless families served—Service use by homeless/near homeless families

Twenty seven service providers specified the types of services they provided to families or those that were used by homeless families/near homeless families in the year prior to the survey. The primary services utilized by families experiencing forms of homelessness pertained to food, basic needs and housing (see Table 4). A second type of service pertained to counselling, crisis intervention, or mental health services. Third, life skills and support services, as well as education and literacy were reportedly required. Fourth, participants reported that homeless families required access to outreach services. Parenting assistance and childcare, in addition to addictions treatment, rehabilitation, and needle exchange were also identified as key services required.

The primary services utilized by families experiencing forms of homelessness pertained to food, basic needs and housing.

**Table 4. Services provided to/utilized by homeless/near homeless families**

<b>Type of services*</b>	<b>Agencies N</b>
Food and basic needs	20
Counselling and referral/crisis intervention	20
Life skills and support services	16
Housing and room rentals	16
Outreach	16
Public education	15
Parenting assistance	12
Mental health services	13
Addictions treatment and rehabilitation	11
Needle exchange	5
Recreation programs	8
Child care	7
Court and jail visitation	7
Education and literacy	7
Legal aid	6
Other (e.g., case management)	1

\*Results are based on multiple responses

## G. Emergency Housing/Shelter Services Use

The participants were asked to specify whether homeless families utilized emergency shelter beds by accessing the agency (including the use of motels or other types of emergency housing). Eleven agencies reported the number of homeless/near homeless families utilizing housing in the month prior to the survey. On average 4.8 families (with a range of 0 to 20 families) utilized housing/beds offered by these agencies. On average 27% of the beds were utilized by homeless families accessed through ten agencies. The range of bed utilization varied from 0% in one agency to 98% in another agency. Among three agencies, the bed utilization was reported to be 25%, 70%, and 80%. Only one agency responded affirmatively that it had sufficient emergency housing/shelter beds for homeless families in Timmins. In contrast, twelve agencies reported not having sufficient beds to serve homeless families. Some of the reasons cited by the latter agencies included “demands exceeding the capacity” and lack of adequate funding.

Twelve agencies reported not having sufficient beds to serve homeless families.

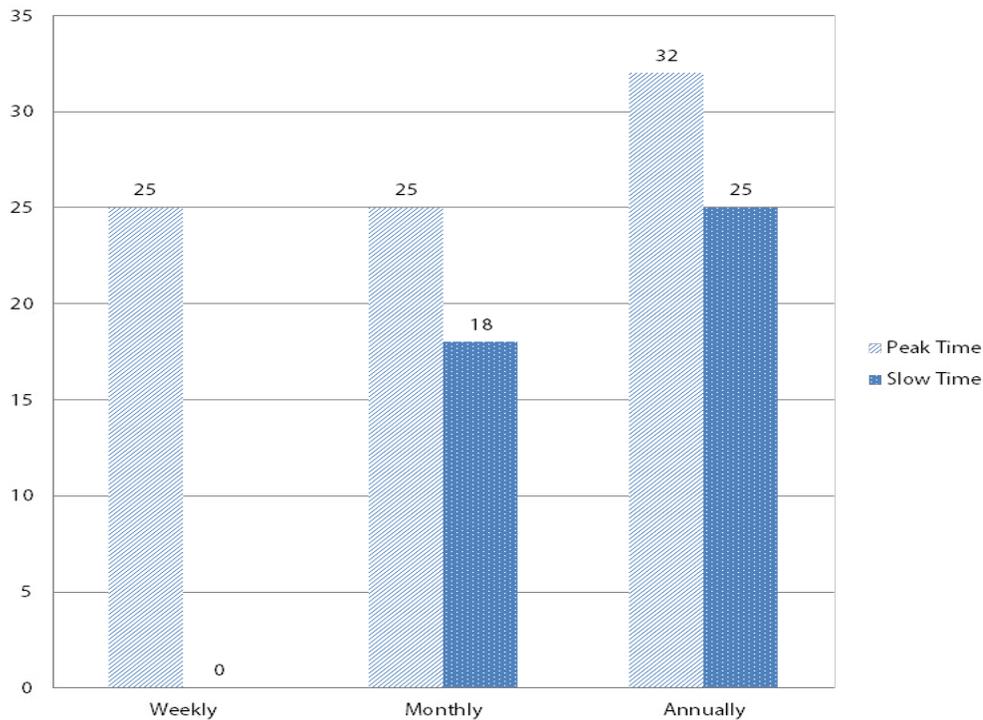
## H. Demand for Services: Peak Times and Slow Times

More than half of the service providers reported experiencing peak times in the demand for services by homeless or near homeless families.

More than half of the service providers reported experiencing peak times in the demand for services among homeless or near homeless families. A quarter of the service providers reported experiencing peak times on a weekly and monthly basis, while about one-third reported experiencing peak times in the service use on an annual basis. The middle to the end of the month was the time period identified by more than half of the respondents as the busiest time. Moreover, start of the school year, Christmas and winter months were described as the busiest times. The reasons for peak times in service demands were identified as circumstances in which “many were falling out of the safety net”, “crisis times”, and periods of decreased migration out of Timmins, particularly during the winter months.

Interestingly, less than or about quarter of the agencies reported experiencing slow times on a monthly and annual basis. The middle of the summer was reported to be slower by a majority of the agencies. The reasons for slow times in the summer months were identified as situations when clients returned to their First Nation communities and periods of increased migration (i.e., away from Timmins).

**Figure 2. Percentage of service providers reporting peak and slow times in service demand**



All service providers (100%) utilized various strategies to accommodate the particular demands of clients in peak periods (see Table 5). Most commonly, referrals to other organizations or the provision of transportation were strategies for dealing with peaks in service demand. Secondly, agencies found ways to stretch agency policies or mandates. A number of agencies assisted with basic needs through provision of food, blankets clothing, or assisted with the provision of shelter.

Organizations also found ways to “do more with less” and extended hours of operation. They also engaged in triage to serve those with the highest needs.

**Table 5. Strategies used to accommodate service use in peak times**

Strategies*	Respondents	
	N	%
Referral and transportation	16	57.1
Stretched agency policies/staff contribution	12	42.9
Provided groceries or vouchers	11	39.3
Provided blankets and clothing	10	35.7
Helped clients move personal belongings	9	32.1
Aid for motel or hotel	8	28.6
Provided storage for personal belongings	8	28.6
Used triage to serve highest need families immediately	8	28.6
Made extra accommodation	7	25.0
Opened extra hours	7	25.0
Other (e.g., use of informal support networks; use of hospital ALC for clients who could not be discharged safely)	6	21.4

\*Results are based on multiple responses, therefore the number of responses exceed the total number of homeless Indigenous families with custody of children.

## I. Characteristics of Homeless Families

The participants provided limited information on the characteristics of the homeless families they serve. Most were unable to report on the cultural background or ethnicity of homeless families, family size (e.g., one or more dependent child or children), and composition of homeless families (e.g., female-headed, male-headed, couples, guardians) as they did not record or collect such information while delivering services. Twenty-two agencies mentioned serving homeless parents/guardians between the age of 14 and 25 years, while eleven agencies provided services to homeless parents/guardians at the age of 66 years or over in the year prior to the survey. A majority of service providers stated that they served homeless parents falling between the age brackets of 25 to 65 years. Moreover, 82% of the agencies reported that they served homeless families with dependent children falling in the age range of less than one year to 12 years, while 18% of respondents stated that they served homeless families with teenage children (13-18 years old).

A majority of service providers stated that they served homeless parents falling between the age brackets of 25 to 65 years.

## J. Factors Related to Absolute Homelessness among Families

Service providers indicated factors related to *absolute* homelessness among families who accessed services of the agency in the year prior to the survey (see Table 6). Major factors perceived to contribute to absolute homelessness among families, by more than three-quarters of respondents, were lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, mental illness and alcohol/substance abuse in the family, and unemployment.

**Table 6. Perceived factors related to absolute homelessness among families**

<b>Perceived factors*</b>	<b>Respondents %</b>
<i>Family size</i>	
One dependent child	46
Two dependent children	54
Three dependent children	54
More than three dependent children	50
<i>Family composition</i>	
Female-headed family	36
Male-headed family	29
Couple/Guardian	29
<i>Cultural background of parent(s)/guardian(s)</i>	
Indigenous	54
Anglophone	29
Francophone	25
<i>Age of parent(s)/guardian(s)</i>	
14-25	64
26-45	36
46-65	25
66 and over	14
Lack of affordable housing	93
Alcohol and drug abuse in the family	93
Mental illness in the family	89
Domestic violence	82
Unemployment	79
Divorce or separation	71
Dependence on social assistance	71
Migration and transience	61
Discrimination and prejudice in the housing market or racism	61
Conflict with the law	54

\*Results are based on multiple responses; therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

Other factors related to absolute homelessness among families were divorce or separation, dependence on social assistance, and discrimination and prejudice in the housing market or racism. More than half of the service providers believed that parental age (i.e., parents below the age of 25 years) and their culture/ethnicity (i.e., Indigenous background) were linked with the experiences of absolute homelessness. Family composition (in particular female-headed families) and family size (two or more children) were identified as significant factors related to homelessness by about 35% and 53% of service providers.

More than half of the service providers believed that parental age (i.e., parents below the age of 25 years) and their culture/ethnicity (i.e., Indigenous background) were linked to the experiences of absolute homelessness.

## K. Factors associated with near homelessness/at risk of homelessness among families

Service providers indicated the following factors related to families *at-risk of homelessness/near homelessness* who accessed services of agency in the year prior to the survey (see Table 7). The major factors perceived to be putting the families at risk of homelessness were structural in nature such as low income, inability to pay rent, unemployment, receipt of social assistance, lack of affordable housing, and poor or substandard housing. Mental illness and alcohol/drug abuse, divorce or separation, pending eviction, and domestic violence were also indicated to be major factors related to near homelessness among families. More than half of the service providers reported that parental/guardian age (below 25 years) and cultural background/ethnicity (notably Indigenous background) were related to an increased possibility of homelessness among precariously housed families. In addition, 61% of respondents stated that discrimination and prejudice in the housing market or racism were linked with near homelessness among families.

## L. Barriers in Access to Services among Homeless Families

The service providers identified the barriers faced by homeless/near homeless families in accessing services at the agency in the year prior to the survey (see Table 8). The major structural barriers identified by over 60% of respondents included stigma attached to programs/services, lack of program funds to support transportation needs of homeless families, lengthy application or approval processes, and the lack of appropriately sized housing units that can match the needs of homeless or near homeless families.

More than 60% of the service providers stated that the lack of awareness about services and programs and lack of compliance with service rules posed difficulties in access to services. Inadequate financial and logistic resources and increased wait times were agency-level barriers reported by more than half of the service providers. In addition, single parenthood and transience or migration reportedly created obstacles in access to services.

More than half of the respondents reported that most clients need income and housing supports.

**Table 7. Perceived factors related to the risk of homelessness/near homelessness among families**

<b>Perceived factors*</b>	<b>Respondents %</b>
<i>Family size</i>	
One dependent child	39
Two dependent children	43
Three dependent children	50
More than three dependent children	43
<i>Family composition</i>	
Female-headed family	36
Male-headed family	32
Couple/Guardian	32
<i>Ethnicity of parent(s)/guardian(s)</i>	
Indigenous	54
Anglophone	29
Francophone	25
<i>Age of parent(s)/guardian(s)</i>	
14-25	64
26-45	39
46-65	32
66 and over	18
Alcohol and drug abuse in the family	89
Low income	89
Inability to pay rent	89
Dependence on social assistance	86
Lack of affordable housing	82
Poor or substandard housing	82
Mental illness in the family	79
Domestic violence	75
Divorce or separation	75
Unemployment	75
Pending eviction	71
Discrimination and prejudice in the housing market	61
Conflict with the law	57
Migration and transience	53
Disability	4

\*Results are based on multiple responses, therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

Table 8. Barriers to access to services

Barriers*	Service Providers %
<i>Structural Level</i>	
Lack of appropriate-sized housing units	64
Lack of program funds for transportation	64
Stigma attached to programs/services	64
Lengthy application or approval process	61
Requirements for clients to provide documentation	57
Stringent eligibility criteria	57
Lack of shelters for couples	54
Lack of public transportation	54
Lack of child care	54
Complexity of service system	50
Family composition (e.g., adolescent dependent children)	46
Remote and inaccessible location of services	43
Burden of travel time	39
Lack of culturally sensitive services	36
Lack of linkages among agencies	32
<i>Agency Level</i>	
Inadequate financial and logistic resources	54
Wait times or delays in service delivery	50
Insufficient staffing	36
<i>Client Level</i>	
Lack of awareness about services/programs	75
Lack of compliance with service rules	68
Under the influence of alcohol/drugs	64
Single parenthood	57
Transience/Migration	50

\*Results are based on multiple responses; therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

## M. Service Providers' Perceptions of Client Needs

Service providers indicated the varied types of services required by homeless/near homeless families visiting their agency in the year prior to the survey. Table 9 indicates that over three-quarters of the service providers believed that all or most clients needed services in the area of basic needs such as food and clothing. More than half of the respondents reported that most clients needed income and housing supports. One-third or more of the service providers indicated that all or most of their clients need services in the areas of domestic violence counselling and employment supports.

In addition, about one quarter of the survey participants stated that mental health and substance abuse services were required by most clients. Interestingly, over a fifth of the respondents stated that all or most of their clients needed culturally appropriate services designed for Indigenous peoples. In contrast, less than 10% of the respondents suggested that all or most their clients needed culturally appropriate services geared towards Anglophones and Francophone.

**Table 9. Types of services required**

Type of services*	Percentage indicating clients' needs for services	
	All or most clients	None or few clients
Basic needs (e.g., food and clothing)	79	11
Housing support for parent(s)/guardian(s)	62	23
Income support for parent(s)/guardian(s)	58	25
Domestic violence counselling	39	22
Employment support for parent(s)/guardian(s)	33	38
Counselling or case management services for parent(s)/guardian(s)	26	26
Substance abuse	24	28
Mental health care for parent(s)/guardian(s)	24	24
Legal aid services for parent(s)/guardian(s)	21	25
Culturally appropriate services for Indigenous homeless families	21	36
Counselling or case management services for dependent child/children	17	35
Educational support for parent(s)/guardian(s)	17	50
School support services for dependent child/children	17	57
Culturally appropriate services for Anglophone homeless families	10	67
Mental health care for child/children	9	49
Culturally appropriate services for Francophone homeless families	4	52

\*Results are based on multiple responses; therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

## N. Service Providers' Perceptions on Meeting Clients' Needs

A majority of the respondents (64%) believed that the needs of families experiencing forms of homelessness were served well (46%) or very well (18%). Responses were provided on a rating scale ranging between 1 (low) to 10 (high); close to two-thirds of the service providers assigned a score of 7 or higher with regard to their perceptions of the frequency with which the needs of homeless families had been met in the year prior to the study. Approximately a sixth (14%) rated this aspect of service provision as poor (i.e., a rating of 3 or lower) and slightly more than a fifth (22%) rated service provision as moderate (4, 5 or 6).

**Table 10. Perceived reasons for challenges in serving homeless/near homeless families**

<b>Perceived challenges*</b>	<b>Service providers %</b>
Problem behaviour of parent(s)/guardian(s)	71
Parent(s)/guardian(s) did not meet the program criteria	68
Parent(s)/guardian(s) under the influence of alcohol	54
Parent(s)/guardian(s) refused referral or available services	54
Lack of community resources, services or programs	54
Agency exhausted its resources/could not meet demand	43
Couples wanted to stay together	36
Lack of funds for staff	29

\*Results are based on multiple responses; therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

The respondents indicated that needs remained unmet in the areas of affordable housing, wait lists, shelters for families and rooming choices, substance use/treatment services, culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Indigenous families, and long-term solutions to the issue of homelessness and near homelessness.

## 0. Unmet Needs

The respondents indicated that needs remained unmet in the areas of affordable housing, wait lists, shelters for families and rooming choices, substance use/treatment services, culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Indigenous families, and long-term solutions to the issue of homelessness and near homelessness. As shown in Table 10, the major reasons for challenges in serving homeless or near homeless families reportedly included problematic behaviour on the part of parent(s) or guardian(s), and eligibility criteria for program and services which created barriers in delivery of services. Over half of the service providers stated challenges in the areas of parent(s) or guardian(s) being under the influence of alcohol or refusing the available services. Exhaustion of agency resources and lack of resources within the community were important factors contributing to challenges associated with service delivery. In addition, more than one third of service providers stated that the desire of the couples to remain together posed challenges in serving homeless or near homeless families.

Major solutions suggested by service providers included the creation of services specifically for homeless families, creation or provision of more affordable and subsidized housing, increased public assistance, lowering of rent costs, shelters for couples and mental health and substance abuse services.

## P. Perceived Solutions

Major solutions suggested by service providers included the creation of services specifically for homeless families, creation or provision of more affordable and subsidized housing, increased public assistance, lowering of rent costs, shelters for couples and mental health and substance abuse services (see Table 11). Over half of the service providers expressed solutions in the areas of child care and parenting services, culturally sensitive services, employment support and better incomes for families and improvement in linkages among services. Half of the respondents suggested development and provision of special services and programs for dependent children or adolescents in homeless and near homeless families.

**Table 11. Proposed strategies to address homelessness or near homelessness in families**

Strategies*	Service providers %
Programs and services specifically designed for homeless families	96
Provision of more subsidized or affordable housing	96
Provision of adequate sized housing	86
Better public assistance	86
Provision of shelters for couples	79
Lowering rent costs	79
Mental health and substance abuse services	75
Better social policies	68
Providing better incomes	68
Child care and parenting services	68
Culturally sensitive services	68
Employment services	64
Better linkages among services	61
Provision of domestic violence related services	61
Services related to divorce/separation	57
Special services for dependent child or children	50

\*Results are based on multiple responses; therefore the number of responses may exceed the total number of homeless families with custody of children.

A key challenge is determining how to secure funds for agencies that have been chronically under-funded in the past.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Despite challenges in conducting the survey due to time and resource constraints within organizations/ programs serving homeless families in Timmins, the survey attained a strong response rate, with 82% of the organizations participating. The results provide a comprehensive overview of the views of service providers supporting homeless families in this northeastern Ontario city. Service providers are struggling to find ways, despite limited resources, to meet the needs of families experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness. The profile of homeless families identified by service providers suggests that young, female-headed, Indigenous parents with two or more dependent children are those who are likely to require the support of services and programs.

Service providers identified a combination of structural and individual difficulties related to inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, crises and mental health challenges, and substance use as among the primary issues faced by families. The perceived solutions centre on the design of appropriate, culturally sensitive services, provision of housing and financial support. A majority of the service providers saw the causes of homelessness as stemming from a complex mix of poor government policies, structural and systemic problems, and unique factors. Agency personnel frequently struggle to meet the demand for their services in the face of limited funding and community resources. It is possible to effectively meet the immediate needs of homeless families, even for those in the most marginalized groups, with the provision of well-funded, comprehensive, and responsive services. A key challenge is determining how to secure funds for agencies that have been chronically under-funded in the past.

The profile of homeless families identified by service providers suggests that young, female-headed, Indigenous parents with two or more dependent children are those who are likely to require the support of services and programs.



# REFERENCES

- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Kauppi, C., Pallard, H., Lemieux, S., & Nkosi, T. M. (2012). *Homelessness in Timmins, January 2011 Final Report*. Sudbury, Canada: Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy.
- Liamputtong, Pranee. (2007). *Researching the Vulnerable*. London: Sage Publications.