

Homelessness in infancy linked to poor health outcomes for children and mothers

30 July 2018



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A new study led by researchers from Children's HealthWatch, a research and policy network headquartered at Boston Medical Center (BMC), shows infants under 12 months old who experience homelessness are at-risk of poor health and development compared to their peers in housed families. These results demonstrate the importance of addressing homelessness among new families in order to help prevent negative health and development outcomes down the line.

For this study, researchers interviewed families of young children in emergency departments and primary care clinics in Boston, Baltimore, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Little Rock between May 2009 and December 2015. Of the 9,980 families interviewed, three percent responded that they experienced homelessness during the first year of their infant's life. Compared to infants and mothers in housed families, infants who experienced homelessness were more likely to be in fair or [poor health](#) and have developmental delays. In addition, their mothers were more likely to report fair or poor health and depressive

symptoms. Families of infants experiencing homelessness were also more likely to say they were not able to afford enough food, known as food insecurity, and that some [family](#) members were unable to afford medical care or prescription medications compared to housed families.

"We too often refer to 'resiliency' when we talk about children exposed to hardship as infants," says Diana Cutts, MD, the study's first author, Co-Lead Principal Investigator for Children's HealthWatch, and Interim Chair of Pediatrics at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis, "we should not mislead ourselves about the very real long term impacts that are seen."

According to the federal Administration for Children and Families, infancy is the period of life when a person is most likely to live in a homeless shelter. Given the negative health implications of homelessness for mothers and infants during the first year of life, the study authors recommend policies and programs that prevent homelessness. They also highlight the need for developing and funding interventions, such as partnerships between health care systems and housing and social service providers to coordinate housing and other [health](#)-related resources for [homeless](#) families with [infants](#).

The study is published in the journal *Cityscape*.

Provided by Boston Medical Center

APA citation: Homelessness in infancy linked to poor health outcomes for children and mothers (2018, July 30) retrieved 20 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-07-homelessness-infancy-linked-poor-health.html>

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