A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON PUBLIC SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS
OF SERVICE SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS

By

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Kisha Nicole Napper   February 22, 2022

I dedicate this work to Gabrielle, Caleb, and Ethan.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore public school counselors' beliefs about service supports and barriers to the academic success of secondary students experiencing homelessness in public schools. The theories that guided this study were Maslow's hierarchy of needs and social justice theory. Participants for the study were 10 school counselors from a large suburban district located in the Southeast, with 3 to 22 years of experience working in secondary public school settings. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological research design, and videoconferencing technology was used to conduct in-depth, semistructured interviews with the participants. Further, thematic coding was used to analyze the data. Findings indicated that school counselors received limited or no preservice training to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. The findings further revealed that school counselors felt unprepared to comprehensively meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Participants also reported a lack of professional development related to homelessness, challenges with student identification and service delivery, and limited access to resources for students experiencing homelessness. Implications for practice include embedding education about homelessness into preservice curriculum and providing ongoing professional development for supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Implications for future research include conducting an evaluation of required preservice coursework at universities that provide school counselor training and have a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs designation and replicating this study in other school districts to determine if similar results are yielded in other public school contexts.

Keywords: homelessness, students experiencing homelessness, secondary students, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, social justice theory, school counselors, public schools

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Chapter I

Introduction

Homelessness among youth in the United States is a burgeoning social issue that demands attention. Nearly 1.5 million youth were identified as homeless in public schools during the 2017-2018 school year, representing an increase of 11% over the 2016-2017 school year (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2020). The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness is defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (NCHE, 2020). Students who have been identified as homeless and enrolled in public schools share housing with others, live in shelters, hotels, motels, campgrounds, cars, parks, or other unsheltered situations due to hardship. The data further provide evidence that homelessness among youth in the United States is at an all-time high, with nearly 1.5 million documented cases of youth homelessness among K-12 public school students in the United States (NCHE, 2020). Students experiencing homelessness attend schools in various urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Presently, a point-in-time count is the measure used to determine the dimension of homelessness in the United States. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012) defined a point in time count as "an unduplicated count on a single night of the people in a community who are experiencing homelessness that includes both sheltered and unsheltered populations" (p. 1). As such, designated individuals within a community are tasked with identifying an individual or family's homeless status and subsequently reporting the results to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Although the point-in-time count is a helpful measure for collecting data, the measure cannot be sufficiently employed with fidelity, nor can the point in time count do what it purports.

Furthermore, the methodology used to try and count, and thus identify, every individual experiencing homelessness in the United States on a given day is an impossibility. Therefore, the enumeration is inexact, and the number of students experiencing homelessness is likely greater than the data currently represents (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012).

Today, more than ever, the challenges of youth experiencing homelessness in public schools is pervasive and multifaceted. This vulnerable population of students continue to experience increased barriers related to resources and educational access in public schools (Buckner, 2008; Edidin et al., 2012; Havlik et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015). Students experiencing homelessness in today's public schools often lack educational opportunity and have challenges that are not comprehensively understood (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014). To that extent, students experiencing homelessness are often underserved (Grothaus, 2011) or altogether unseen in educational settings (Toolis & Hammack, 2015).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1987) was established to remove educational barriers for students experiencing homelessness. Students are assisted with school enrollment, transportation, nutrition services, and academic support in public school settings. Furthermore, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has undergone subsequent reauthorizations to provide increased educational support for students who meet the criteria for homelessness (Miller, 2011). Schools carry out the provisions of the federal mandate in the educational setting by requiring school personnel to work with students who are experiencing homelessness.

In K-12 educational settings, school counselors are tasked with the responsibility of trying to address educational needs that are both complex and critical for this vulnerable population, a mandate they fulfill by providing support to students experiencing homelessness

(Havlik et al., 2017). School counselors are most often the first individuals to engage with students experiencing homelessness in public schools, and they are the individuals who are tasked with ensuring that the needs of these students are met. School counselors provide responsive services that encompass students' needs in academic, career, and social-emotional domains and help students who are experiencing homelessness in the public schools overcome barriers that may impede success (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2018). The immensity of the endeavor is felt by school districts as they work to address issues of student homelessness in the educational setting (Havlik et al., 2017). Due to the realities that students experiencing homelessness face on a daily basis, it is imperative that schools understand the complexities that exist for these students in order to serve them. Therefore, this study will explore the educational experiences and challenges related to homelessness for secondary students in one suburban school district in the Southeast.

Problem of Practice

There are nearly 1.5 million documented cases of youth homelessness among K-12 public school students in the United States, which is the largest case count in the nation's history (NCHE, 2020). The daily realities of working with students experiencing homelessness in public schools have evidenced a lack of alignment in the way that practices are carried out (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2015). Moreover, there is a significant difference in the types of resources available to these students in different public school settings. Student support remains uneven in terms of student identification, school enrollment, and service delivery across school settings (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Havlik et al., 2017; Miller, 2011). Students' homeless status present roadblocks that hinder their ability to access quality education because of issues such as delayed school enrollment, school records requirements, delayed transportation services, and

insufficient support for school stability (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014). Research studies about students experiencing homelessness in public schools have continued to demonstrate that this population of students continues to encounter a unique set of challenges that impact their educational wellbeing (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Howland, 2017; Low, 2017). A gap in knowledge exists about the most effective ways to respond to the needs of these students (Havlik et al., 2017). Thus, the impediments of homelessness among students in public schools is not fully understood and needs to be examined further. In the context of the present study, secondary public school counselors, from one large suburban district in the Southeast, seek ways to effectively address the needs of a growing population of students experiencing homelessness.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore public school counselors' beliefs about service supports and barriers for the academic success of secondary students experiencing homelessness. This study endeavors to understand less discernible issues faced by students experiencing homelessness, through the perspective of public school counselors who serve them in schools. As such, this study aims to develop a deeper understanding about the challenges of this vulnerable population so that the knowledge base can be expanded on this issue. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding about necessary support for these students is required for educational professionals to adequately respond to their needs in public schools. The phenomenon under investigation is public school counselors' beliefs about service supports and barriers for the academic success of secondary students experiencing homelessness.

Research Questions

The specific research questions that guide this study are the following:

1) How do public school counselors describe their experiences working with students experiencing homelessness?

2) What do public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness?

3) What do public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness?

The research study is most directly based on previous research that sought to understand the many challenges related to homelessness among youth (Buckner, 2008). Moreover, research that sought to clarify needed support for students experiencing homelessness in schools, through the work of school counselors who serve these students also informed the research study (Havlik et al., 2017). Havlik et al. suggested that future research about students experiencing homelessness in public schools should aim to provide a clearer description of the services and supports that are needed for these students, to include school counselors' perspectives across varying educational settings.

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of phenomenological research is to understand the essence of individuals' lived experiences, in relation to the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenology is rooted in German philosophy and involves in-depth engagement with a small number of participants, whereby the core meaning of human experience is unearthed (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research explores and captures participants' lived experiences: "How they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense

of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Thus, individuals' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences call attention to the core essence related to a particular phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

Because K-12 students experiencing homelessness in public schools represent the fastest growing subgroup of homeless individuals in the nation (NCHE, 2020), understanding how external forces, due to the experiences of homelessness, impact K-12 students in the public school setting is important. As such, current and future educational professionals, and those who provide supportive services to these students within schools will be uniquely positioned to effectively respond to their needs. In this regard, the research study may yield long-term, positive implications for policy and practice related to the research problem at the district and state level, whereby contributions to best practices in education are realized.

Previous research studies about students experiencing homelessness in public schools have highlighted the necessity of exploring the problem further (Buckner, 2008; Canfield, 2014; Evangelist & Shafer, 2020). Research on this specific population of students has far-reaching value. The experiences of all students who live in homelessness are important, diverse, and multifaceted in context. For this reason, strides have already been made to inform educational practice.

Moreover, the issue is socially significant because despite the enactment of federal legislation to respond to the needs of students experiencing homelessness in public schools, findings of research studies have continued to highlight the persistence of negative outcomes for students experiencing homelessness in areas of educational access (Buckner, 2008; Edidin et al., 2012; Masten et al., 2015). Furthermore, challenges related to homelessness for students in

public schools have led to disparities in academic achievement, to include graduation attainment, as well as issues in areas of cognitive development and social-emotional stability (Cutuli et al., 2013; Howland et al., 2017; Murphy & Tobin, 2012).

Whereas the majority of research studies on students experiencing homelessness have been about the experiences of young children and their school experiences (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Herbers et al., 2012; Howland et al., 2017), this study adds to a limited literature base on the impact of homelessness among secondary students experiencing homelessness in public schools (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Uretsky, 2016) and builds on previous research (Buckner, 2008) that sought to understand the impact and challenges related to homelessness among youth.

This study will further address those issues, while exploring the lived experiences of school counselors who work with secondary students in public schools who are experiencing homelessness. The research study will contribute to knowledge about education by attempting to gather information that will help individuals who serve students in homeless situations more fully, by understanding school counselors' who work with students experiencing homelessness in a more comprehensive fashion. The information will support school counselors in their work and allow them to provide responsive services that contribute to the educational success and wellbeing of students experiencing homelessness in all domains.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following section provides definitions of key terms that are pertinent to the discussion surrounding the education of students experiencing homelessness in this dissertation.

1. **Homeless:**

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); (McKinney-Vento Act, 2001, para. 1) and

(B) includes:

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). 42 U.S.C. § 11434a (2) (McKinney-Vento Act, 2001, para. 2)

2. **Doubled-up:** Children and/or youth who are sharing housing with other persons due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (Education for Homeless Children and Youths [EHCY], 2015).

3. **Unaccompanied youth:** A child or youth who is experiencing homelessness and is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (EHCY, 2015).

4. **McKinney-Vento Act:** Federal legislation designed to remove barriers for K-12 students who are experiencing homelessness, thereby increasing equal educational access (EHCY, 2015).

5. **Local education liaison:** A person within a local education agency who oversees the

    implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in schools so that students experiencing

    homelessness are identified and provided with school access and educational support

    (EHCY, 2015).

Chapter II

Synthesis of the Research Literature

Homelessness in the United States is a burgeoning social issue that has continued to grow, with K-12 children and youth among the fastest-growing subset of the homeless population. According to the NCHE (2020), the identification of more than 1.5 million students who experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year represented a substantial 15% increase from 1.3 million students who were identified as experiencing homelessness during the 2015-2016 school year. These numbers are noteworthy and demonstrate an increasingly challenging societal ill to contend with. Despite annual data that provide information on students experiencing homelessness in public schools, the reality is likely more grim given the impossible task of being able to observe and accurately account for every individual that experiences homelessness in the United States on a given day.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This review of literature is informed by the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Success for students experiencing homelessness in public schools goes beyond academics. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a useful framework for analyzing the influence of homelessness on students' educational experiences in schools. This theory recognizes the importance of environmental factors related to the educational experiences of these students living in homeless situations and provides a lens wherewith to view students' educational experiences, particularly those experiencing homelessness. Thus, the theory recognizes that the fulfillment of basic needs is required before successive needs can be

met. Further, the theory asserts that there are five distinct levels of basic needs that must be achieved in order for individuals to advance to successive levels of need.

Accordingly, students' educational experiences are contextualized against the backdrop of the hierarchy of five basic needs that Maslow (1943) described as central to development. The theoretical perspective provides a useful lens to contextualize the holistic nature of students' educational experiences related to homelessness in public schools. Students' engagement with schools is informed by both internal and external factors. If a child is hungry, tired, unsafe, or otherwise impacted by the consequences of homelessness, they will likely be unavailable for learning.

Consequently, research establishes that students' basic needs generally overshadow other services that school counselors provide for students who experience homelessness (Havlik et al., 2017). Students experiencing homelessness have unique lived experiences that must be considered in the educational setting. Before students are able to fully engage in school experiences, attention must be given to each level of need. Accordingly, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is a framework that school counselors have integrated into their daily approach to working with students experiencing homelessness in the school setting, first seeking to ensure that students' basic physiological needs of food, clothing, and shelter are met (ASCA, 2018).

Thereafter, school counselors move to progressive levels of students' basic needs, to ensure that students' lower level needs are met (Canfield, 2014; Grothaus et al., 2011; Havlik et al., 2017). When working with students experiencing homelessness, Level 2 needs require attention to needs relative to safety, whereby students have both physical and emotional safety in their living environment. Students' Level 3 needs are encountered in relational aspects that are

outworked at home through family relationships and with regard to friendships at school, represented by love and belonging. Level 4 needs address students' sense of personal value through engagement with others and their self-esteem. Feelings of worth and acceptance depict level five needs and relate to students' self-actualization and is evidenced by their desire to achieve at their full potential. As progressive levels of needs are met, the experiences of students experiencing homelessness are more clearly distinguished.

To substantiate the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) as a theoretical framework, students experiencing homelessness in public schools must be viewed through a holistic lens. Because research studies have determined that students experiencing homelessness are negatively impacted by food insecurity, malnutrition, and inadequate health care (Buckner, 2008; Dahir & Stone, 2009; Murphy & Tobin, 2011), students' basic needs present ongoing barriers related to educational opportunity. Therefore, the applicability of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to this study is underscored in relation to students experiencing homelessness, given their lived experiences often present significant challenges to ensuring that their basic physiological and safety needs are consistently met. As such, multidimensional complexities exist in the lives of students experiencing homelessness, and the connection between each level of human need influences the experiential nature of a child's education and life.

To that point, an education perspective also informs this study. Given the interrelatedness of students' experiences with homelessness and the impact on educational experiences, the education perspective is realized and intersects with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Foundational to the understanding of individuals who serve students in public school settings is the importance of addressing basic needs before being able to effectively deal with educational needs. In this way, the saying "Maslow before Bloom," which refers to Bloom's Taxonomy

(Bloom, 1956), is often repeated among educational professionals, in a variety of school settings. The education perspective helps to further contextualize students' experiences of homelessness and the impact on learning in the educational setting.

Social Justice Theory

The study is also informed by a social justice framework. Shriberg and Fenning (2009) define social justice as "an overarching framework centered around ensuring that all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and protecting the rights and opportunities for all" (p. 4). With more than 1.5 million students experiencing homelessness in public schools in the United States, vulnerability among this student demographic, relative to educational access and lived experience, creates a myriad of concerns that can be explored through social justice theory. The social justice framework provides a critical lens for examining the impact of homelessness on students in public schools and the perspective of counselors who serve these students. Prior research studies (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Milner, 2013; Ockerman & Mason, 2012) have used a social justice theoretical framework to examine inequity in society. As such, the applicability of the research has been illustrated. Thus, the social justice framework highlights aspects of inequity that are outworked and represented by inherent privilege, power structures, and wealth.

Because of the many impediments associated with homelessness among youth, school counselors who work with students who are experiencing homelessness in public schools ensure that their work is informed by a socially just perspective. According to the ASCA (2018), school counselors are social justice advocates who try to identify and remove barriers for students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Given the work of school counselors and other educational support personnel with students experiencing homelessness, a social justice theoretical orientation is useful for contextualizing students' experiences with homelessness and

amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals in society. In doing so, they advocate for equitable educational opportunities for these students. The outworking of such support aligns with social justice theory because the perspective regards an often overlooked segment of society.

According to Watson and Cuervo (2017), a social justice perspective promotes an understanding of the lives of students who experience homelessness. To that point, Toolis and Hammack (2015) assert that youth who experience homelessness are a stigmatized group who are subject to dominant figures and inherent power structures. The symbolic burden of homelessness among youth often results in denigrating treatment and disempowerment in society (Farrugia, 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand how social justice relates to the benefits, burdens, and entitlements of individuals and groups in society (Jost & Kay, 2010).

As such, the social justice perspective is a lens wherewith to view the social interplay present in students' experiences, particularly with regard to their social positions in both school and society. A socially just perspective underscores the applicability of the social justice framework for the purpose of contextualizing the experiences of students with a homeless status. To that extent, equity should be examined in relation to students' needs and the outworking of policies, practices, and procedures that are designed to respond to educational exigencies of students experiencing homelessness in public schools.

Central to the issue of homelessness among youth in public schools is the cultivation of a critical level of consciousness that considers students' experiences of homelessness in ways that are not singular in scope. It is important that less perceptible needs are also considered for students who experience homelessness. In this regard, when homelessness is reduced to focusing solely on material needs, the significance of needs that do not manifest materially are often

discounted or ignored (Watson & Cuervo, 2017). Thus, a social justice lens is useful for understanding and processing the experiences of students in homeless situations.

In the previous section, theoretical frameworks that are used to explore factors that impact students experiencing homeless in educational settings were discussed. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs was highlighted as a useful framework for examining various factors that contribute to the educational experiences of students with a designated homeless status in schools. Social justice theory is also recognized as an important theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the challenges and successes of students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Both theoretical frameworks were discussed in regard to providing a lens to understand the challenges associated with homelessness in the public school settings.

Review of the Literature

This section reviews the literature to gain a greater understanding of the factors that contribute to educational attainment and unique lived experiences of public school students who experience homelessness.

Academic Achievement

It is a misnomer to describe homelessness among students in public schools as synonymous to living in poverty. Research studies demonstrate that although many characteristics of poverty are also true for homelessness, the impact and effects of homelessness exceed those of poverty (Duffield & Lovell, 2008; Low et al., 2017; Pavlakis et al., 2017). Literature has illustrated varied experiences as it relates to homelessness. Low et al. (2017) found that the living situations of students experiencing homelessness impacted their ability to excel in the educational setting. The study highlighted the experiences of students who resided in doubled-up homeless situations, which is characterized by sharing housing with others due to a

loss of housing. Students experiencing homelessness were compared with peers who had stable housing. When the two study groups were compared to stably housed peers, differences were more pronounced among both groups, which included 6,088 doubled-up secondary students and 4,612 doubled-up seniors respectively. The study indicated a significant negatively associated impact on students' academic achievement, attendance status, school discipline, and ability to graduate on time, when doubled-up.

Pavlakis et al. (2017) conducted a research study on the impacts of homelessness on students' academic growth from an education perspective to contextualize the experiences of the study participants, the study used the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness among participants. The research questions investigated in the study were: "To what extent does homelessness impact students' academic growth?" and "To what extent does chronic homelessness impact students' academic growth?" (Pavlakis et al., 2017, p. 7). The study explored homelessness among students and sought to understand the impact on their academic growth above and beyond the shared experiences of poverty, using a continuum of risk framework. Through a secondary analysis of administrative data across 51 schools in the Midwest, the research indicated that distinct differences were demonstrated between fourth through seventh grade students that lived in poverty or experienced chronic homelessness when both were examined.

Although the study demonstrated a negative impact to math achievement for homeless students, the study did not account for students' deficits in overall achievement growth. The finding of the study was similar to Herbers et al. (2012) and showed a negative impact to achievement among students experiencing homelessness. However, a dissimilarity that was highlighted in the findings presented by Pavlakis et al. (2017) concluded that a significant impact

to overall achievement was not substantiated for students experiencing chronic homelessness. The findings demonstrate that other factors may be attributed to the outcomes.

Thus, the contrast illustrated in research also provides evidence for resilience in students experiencing homelessness (Masten et al., 2015). Despite research indicating negative outcomes associated with the achievement of students experiencing homelessness (Ausikaitis, 2015; Buckner, 2008; Grothaus et al., 2011), research has demonstrated that students experiencing homelessness have been able to succeed in educational settings and excel academically, (Edwards, 2019) which has shown that resilience may be a factor that contributes to the findings for students experiencing homelessness.

In the previous section, discussion about academic achievement and the disparities that create ongoing educational problems throughout students' school experiences of students experiencing homelessness was highlighted. Students experiencing homelessness had increased levels of academic risk; however, evidence is provided for different educational interactions and academic outcomes due to the presence of resilience in students. Attention was also called to the dissimilarity in achievement findings relative to demonstrated impacts in overall achievement among students experiencing homelessness.

Mobility

Research identified high mobility as a factor that impacts the academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Students experiencing homelessness in public schools demonstrate exponentially more school mobility between schools than peers with stable housing (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Herbers et al., 2012; Masten et al., 2015). Further, high mobility evidences a negative impact to academic achievement. Similar research conducted (Obradović et al., 2009) indicated that negative impacts to achievement were prevalent for

students due to increased transience. This finding was particularly noted among students experiencing homelessness in early grades. Following this, further research investigated the impact of intradistrict school mobility and homelessness (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). A sample of 8,762 third-grade students in Philadelphia were included in the study which examined academic achievement in reading and mathematics. Standardized achievement data were analyzed using linear regression. The study concluded that students who experienced homelessness and school mobility had lower achievement on subject-matter tests. The findings were attributed to the combination of housing instability and high mobility.

The research reflects that increased mobility results in greater academic vulnerability for students experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, this study extends other findings (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Herbers et al., 2012; Obradović et al., 2009) that denote high mobility increases the educational detriment for students experiencing homelessness. Research further asserts that achievement trajectories for highly mobile students experiencing homelessness are extremely consequential (Herbers et al., 2012). Poor early reading skills are impacted by homelessness, which have a negative association to students' academic trajectories (Cutuli et al., 2013; Herbers et al., 2012). Despite high mobility presenting as a factor that impedes the success of students experiencing homelessness, a gap in literature existed about the impact of high mobility among high school students.

As a result of the gap in literature about the impact of high mobility among high school students, Low (2017) contributed to the limited research in this area by investigating academic outcomes of doubled-up high school students who were experiencing homelessness. Guided by a mixed-methods research approach, the study compared academic outcomes of students experiencing homelessness. Achievement data were used to examine the issue among two focus

groups of high school students. The study established that high mobility among the students resulted in a significant negative impact to students' academic achievement. Moreover, students' ability to graduate on-time was impeded. Further, increased educational risk was evidenced by low achievement in reading and math.

The findings were attributed to the combination of housing instability and high mobility. The combined effects of homelessness and mobility also demonstrated other associations. Students' unstable living conditions and high mobility indicated victimization rates that were higher among students experiencing homelessness than their peers. Moreover, the literature reflects that increased mobility results in greater academic vulnerability for students experiencing homelessness and increases students' overall educational detriment in the school environment (Low et al., 2017; Obradović et al., 2009).

Although associations with housing instability and high stability have been demonstrated as negatively impactful in the short term, more extensive research has supported the finding. To that point, a longitudinal research study was conducted using a risk and resilience framework to investigate the relationship between 18,011 third through eighth-grade students' early literacy skills and their educational trajectories (Herbers et al., 2012). The study concluded that 10% of the students were homeless and highly mobile and demonstrated the lowest achievement scores overall. Because a longitudinal research design was employed, historical data were able to provide a link to students' future achievement. The study implies that highly mobile students experiencing homeless have compound educational risk. The negative association between high student mobility and achievement has been evidenced in the literature and supported findings of multiple negative outcomes (Cutuli et al., 2013; Masten et al., 2015).

Attendance

Attendance has been identified as a factor that contributes to the educational experiences of students in homeless situations. To determine the extent and impact, a cross-sectional study conducted by Howland et al. (2017) investigated academic risk among 766 students experiencing homelessness in elementary and middle grades. Researchers collected standardized achievement data and explored subject-specific data and considered each student's homeless housing status in relation to McKinney-Vento services that they received. The researchers concluded that students experiencing homelessness were not proficient in academic areas by logistic regression analysis. The researchers' findings were attributed to insufficient educational access and consistent findings of poor student attendance, which was determined to be a predictor of poor achievement and reduced access to educational services.

Other research studies explore academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Miller, 2011), relative to McKinney-Vento mandated service provisions for students experiencing homelessness and the impact of insufficient support. However, Tobin (2016) contends that attendance mediates poor achievement among students experiencing homelessness. This research brings to light the challenges with ensuring student support in the educational setting, given the existence of chronic absenteeism. The finding has implications for attendance as a major contributing factor related to access barriers. Among other things, the study contributes another explanation about why students experiencing homelessness may lack opportunity due to attendance issues.

In the previous section, high student mobility and academic achievement were discussed as factors that contribute to the educational experiences of students experiencing homelessness. Throughout the literature, the academic impact of poor attendance was contextualized among

students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Poor attendance and high mobility provided evidence for increased risk for poor educational outcomes.

School Counselors and Liaisons

Educational opportunity or inopportunity for students experiencing homelessness is tied to supports provided by schools. McKinney-Vento requires each local educational agency to designate a liaison to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, while school counselors carry out the work at the school level. The American School Counselor Association (2018) notes the training and qualifications needed to effectively promote the wellness of students experiencing homelessness is prioritized. McKinney-Vento mandates within schools have uniquely positioned school counselors to work with this vulnerable population of students to remove barriers and decrease educational risk. Daily interaction with students experiencing homelessness at the school level ultimately manifests as a support or a barrier to students' education. Research studies have been conducted to examine the experiences of individuals who support students experiencing homelessness (Grothaus et al., 2011; Havlik et al., 2014; Wilkins et al., 2016).

Accordingly, a research study conducted that included 10 local liaisons examined the role of liaisons, challenges that existed in their roles serving students experiencing homelessness, and counselor training (Havlik et al., 2016). The results indicated that local liaisons needed increased levels of preparation to adequately serve students in homeless situations and felt underprepared in their work. The findings highlighted that systems of support were needed for both liaisons and students to enhance service delivery. Similarly, research conducted by Havlik (2017) used a sample of 23 school counselors from metropolitan and suburban settings to examine support

structure for students experiencing homelessness. Examination of counselor perceptions indicated that needed counselor training impacted service delivery for students.

The previous section discussed the role of the school counselor and McKinney-Vento liaison. Additionally, challenges carrying out McKinney-Vento mandates were stifled due to school level learning constraints. The literature indicated that preparation and training would enhance service delivery for students experiencing homelessness.

Educational Outcomes

Research demonstrates that homelessness and educational attainment demonstrate a bidirectional relationship (Morton et al., 2017). As such, Canfield (2014) notes a graduation rate of less than 25% for students experiencing homelessness as cause for alarm. Further, research studies that have examined the issue established that the lack of educational completion is a risk factor for adult homelessness (Buckner, 2008; Duffield & Lovell, 2008; Morton et al., 2017). In other research, Uretsky and Stone (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study of approximately 50,000 students in an urban school district. The study sought to determine the extent that demographic and academic performance factors related to students' ability to both take and pass content tests in language arts and mathematics among high school students who experienced homelessness. Factors that contributed to students' high school exit exam outcomes were examined through historical standardized exam data for students who experienced homelessness.

Notwithstanding the fact that 27% of the 316 students who completed both exams had a pass rate of 27%, Uretsky and Stone (2016) concluded that students' ability to pass high school exit exams was related to students' overall grade point average and standardized test results from previous years. The study results suggested that students' grade point average and test scores over time had predictive value. The study differs from other research (Howland et al., 2017;

Murphy & Tobin, 2012) as it fills a gap in literature by highlighting the educational outcomes of students experiencing homelessness in high school. Educational risk factors among this demographic are important to understand, given the predictive value of exit exams, as discovered in this research.

Moreover, there is an inextricable link between exit exam pass rates and high school graduation. Graduation outcomes are associated with opportunity throughout life (Ausikatis, 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Miller et al., 2015). The number of students experiencing homelessness in public schools is significant and growing. Yet, the academic implications brought to light by the research are far-reaching. The ability to receive passing class grades does not help students graduate if an overwhelming percentage of students do not pass the high school exit exams. The inability to graduate from high school presents educational risk that can ultimately cause students experiencing homelessness to lack opportunity in life. Conversely, graduating from high school can provide a protective factor that enhances students' opportunities in life (Edwards, 2019; Havlik et al., 2017; Low et al., 2017).

Contrary to established expectations from previous research studies, Tobin (2016) noted that the effects of homelessness on the educational experiences of students experiencing homelessness were not significantly different than peers from low-income backgrounds, there was not a consensus in the literature on this issue (Low et al., 2017; Uretsky & Stone, 2016), thus the inconsistency created mixed results. In contrast to other literature, negative bias and decreased expectations surrounding the abilities of students experiencing homelessness (Grothaus, 2011) may contribute to negative perceptions about the academic ability of students experiencing homelessness in schools.

Moreover, the finding suggests that the differences in academic outcomes may also be impacted by students' experiences with biases or perceptions of others in the school setting. There are similarities in Tobin's (2016) study and Hyman et al. (2011) research that examined resiliency in educational outcomes. The study determined that resiliency was evidenced in educational outcomes, despite educational disruption and challenges due, to the instability associated with homelessness. A research study that examined a sample of six high school students experiencing homelessness explored the impact of educational policy on their schooling. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of the issue, the study concluded that resources to help facilitate success among youth living in homeless situations remains challenging to acquire, yet needed (Aviles de Bradley, 2011), in order to bolster favorable outcomes among students experiencing homelessness.

Conversely, Edwards (2019) conducted a qualitative study that sampled eight high school students that experienced homelessness and graduated from high school. The study was informed by an antideficit framework and used the students' counternarratives to understand the students' successes, despite a myriad of structural barriers. The study's antideficit framework focused on strategies and supports that contributed to the students' successful academic outcomes. Despite inconsistent educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, noteworthy educational disparities persist for these students and need to be addressed to positively affect the academic trajectories of students experiencing homelessness.

In the previous section, discussion about educational outcomes of students experiencing homelessness was highlighted. Although most of the conclusions from the literature were aligned, inconsistency was reported in the findings. Challenges in academic areas were discussed, as well as discussion about persistent educational disparities for students experiencing

homelessness. Further discussion acknowledged the necessity of understanding students'

academic achievement in present and future contexts.

Mental Health

Mental health has been established as a factor that impacts the educational experiences of

students experiencing homelessness (Buckner, 2008; Edidin et al., 2012). Armstrong et al.

(2018), informed by a risk and resilience framework, set out to understand various mental health

characteristics of students experiencing homelessness in public schools, through a cross-sectional

research study model. A sample of 245 high school students experiencing homelessness took the

Youth Risk Behavior Survey to determine mental health functioning and potential moderators of

peer victimization. Study results underscored significant differences between homeless and

housed students' mental and behavioral health status. The same instrumentation was used by

Cutuli's (2018) and resulted in similar evidence for significant differences in mental health

functioning between student groups, with increased prevalence of victimization among students

experiencing homelessness. These findings suggest that students experiencing homelessness are

more vulnerable to mental health challenges than their peers that have more stable living

situations. Further, the findings of the study are consistent with other studies (Edidin et al., 2012;

Yoder et al., 2008) that suggest mental health challenges are a greater issue for students

experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, research in the behavioral health domain explored risk and resilience

among high school students experiencing homelessness (Cutuli, 2018), using a developmental

and person-focused approach to examine risk and resilience in the behavioral health domain. The

study investigated students' connection between homeless status and increases in victimization

rates, similar to Armstrong et al.'s (2018) study. Questions explored where students lived at

night, explanations for their current living situation outside of their parents' homes, and identification of their historical homeless status. The randomly selected 1,280 students were chosen from a two-stage cluster design. Behavioral health was examined from the perspective homelessness, victimization, and threat. Data were obtained from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which tested multiple areas of risk. The study showed increased risk existed in behavioral health domains for students experiencing homelessness. Students reported between 101% and 271% greater risk than their peers without homeless status (Armstrong et al., 2018). Moreover, the research suggested that greater risk exists for students who are currently enduring the challenges associated with homelessness.

The risk and resilience framework used in Armstrong et al.'s (2018) study suggests that tension exists for students experiencing homelessness in adaptability. Given the adversity associated with homelessness, the risk and resilience framework employed in the study provides a perspective that counters literature that highlights negative outcomes and victimization (Moore et al., 2019). The contrast between the studies represent differences in students' level of functioning. Amid adversities, the impact to health domains and educational experiences is not singular in scope. The risk and resilience framework provide a different way to contextualize manifested experiences among students' experiencing homelessness. However, the study's findings do not generalize to demographics outside of the urban participant sample.

Further research has established that students experiencing homelessness often have a high continuum of risk associated with traumatic life experiences that result in family separation and loss due to divorce, social service involvement, abuse, neglect, parental incarceration and complex family systems, to include undereducation and unemployment (Buckner, 2008; Masten et al., 2015). Subsequent research notes that lack of social support (Grothaus et al., 2011)

continues to place students experiencing homelessness at increased risk for more problems with internalizing and externalizing behaviors due to instability in housing situations, school mobility, stress, academic challenges, and challenging life circumstances due to homelessness are factors in increased risk (Cutuli et al., 2013; Edidin et al., 2012; Masten, 2015). The study by Moore et al. (2019) study further illustrates the point. A statewide study conducted among more than 320,000 high school students examined school-based victimization, to include discriminatory bullying, and weapon victimization among students experiencing homelessness (Moore et al., 2019). Through the research, evidence showed that students experiencing homelessness have an increased risk for rates of victimization in school violence experiences.

In the previous section, the lived experiences of students experiencing homelessness were discussed in relation to their mental health status and behavioral health outcomes. The literature showed that students experiencing homelessness were at increased risk of adverse impact in mental health domains due to a host of consequential life experiences.

Policy Implementation in Schools

The outworking of homeless educational policy does much to create opportunity or inopportunity. For decades, numerous research studies have demonstrated the impact of homelessness on academic achievement among students experiencing homelessness in public schools (Buckner, 2008; Masten et al., 2015; Obradovic et al., 2009; Pavlakis et al., 2017). Despite the long-standing interest in students experiencing homelessness and McKinney-Vento policy, research surrounding this critical issue continues to be examined (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Evangelist & Schaefer, 2020). The relationship between uneven policy implementation in schools has been established as a factor that adversely impacts achievement for students who experience homelessness in schools.

A cross-sectional study conducted by Howland et al. (2017) investigated academic risk among students in elementary and middle grades. Researchers collected standardized achievement data and explored subject-specific data and considered each student's homeless housing status in relation to McKinney-Vento services they received. The authors' concluded that students experiencing homelessness were not proficient in academic areas. The researchers' findings were attributed to insufficient educational access and consistent findings of poor student attendance.

Therefore, uneven implementation of McKinney-Vento services in schools seemed to provide insufficient support for students experiencing homelessness. Similar to claims made by other studies (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2015), differences in the way that McKinney-Vento services are provided to students experiencing homelessness in public schools perpetuate building barriers for this vulnerable population. Wilkins et al. (2016) also assert that the outworking of the McKinney-Vento Act for students experiencing homelessness has been impactful in terms of support at the school level, citing that there has been a lack of effective support provided in the school setting (Wilkins et al., 2016). When McKinney-Vento services are not implemented in ways that enable services to be rendered in purported ways, negative academic outcomes are perpetuated for students experiencing homelessness.

Identification and Enrollment

In order to support students who are experiencing homelessness, students must be identified. The challenges associated with identifying students that are homeless are immense. Stigma and lack of knowledge about homelessness and available supports are factors that impact identification (Havlik et al., 2017). Self-reporting homeless status can be socially consequential for students (Cutuli, 2018; McLoughlin & Carey, 2014). If students are not identified, they

cannot enroll in programs tied to supportive services. Therefore, identification and enrollment present a barrier to access, in that homeless educational policy supports cannot be implemented. Review of the literature describes challenges in policy implementation (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Havlik et al., 2017; Miller, 2011) and issues accessing resources (Aviles de Bradley, 2011) for students experiencing homelessness in the public school setting.

Prior to the study conducted by Howland et al. (2017), research was conducted that used a social justice framework to explore educational access services provided by the McKinney-Vento Act for unaccompanied youth (Ausikaitis et al., 2015) using an observational and cross-sectional research design. A critical qualitative approach was used to examine challenges for unaccompanied youth working towards high school graduation while experiencing homelessness. The primary research question of the study explored the experiences of unaccompanied youth as they attempted to access educational services under the McKinney-Vento Act and complete high school. Additional questions from the study explored identification as a factor that hindered students' education or facilitated support for students experiencing homelessness, with regard to educational access and attainment.

Ausikaitis et al.'s (2015) study participants engaged in focus groups where participants had variable educational and homeless experiences. Research showed that students' ability to complete high school was impeded because practices related to the McKinney-Vento Act were not aligned with the supportive services needed for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. The authors suggest that there is a noted disconnection between the McKinney-Vento Act as prescribed and the actual enactment of the law in public school settings. The findings of the study further suggest that this disconnection impeded students' educational

attainment, with particular impact on the ability of students experiencing homelessness to finish high school.

Similarly, research indicates that problems with transportation and the inability to produce school records and other requested documents present barriers to school enrollment for students experiencing homelessness (Grothaus et al., 2011). Despite the fact that McKinney-Vento requires immediate enrollment for students who are unable to supply documentation, school counselors express challenges with identifying students who are experiencing homelessness (Havlik et al., 2017). Therefore, policy mandates are not immediately implemented due to their inability to identify and enroll students in necessary programs.

Pavlakis et al.'s (2017) findings indicate that there are greater academic consequences for students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Additionally, the study asserts that the timing of student identification in schools extremely important. The study suggests that identification is a contributing factor associated with negative academic outcomes, underscoring the relationship between immediate identification and implementation of services for students experiencing homelessness in public schools.

Uneven Implementation

Despite the differences in study approaches, inconsistent service practices surrounding the McKinney-Vento Act as a negatively contributing factor for students experiencing homelessness were indicated (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Havlik, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2016). According to the authors of the study, disconnected McKinney-Vento practices being employed in schools have created educational barriers for students. Resources and supportive services in schools differ for students experiencing homelessness. Despite McKinney-Vento implementation in schools, student support remains uneven (Wilkins et al., 2016). Furthermore, the literature

suggests that failure to examine the way that McKinney-Vento services are implemented for students experiencing homelessness in public schools will result in ongoing educational barriers that directly impact these students.

Race

Underrepresented students experiencing homelessness represent a sizeable portion of the homeless population. Homeless educational policy relative to McKinney-Vento implementation has been explored, yet limited research exists combining race. Aviles de Bradley (2015) extended the work of studies that delved into the nuances of McKinney-Vento practices that were implemented in public school settings. The study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore McKinney-Vento policy implementation for students experiencing homelessness. Through the context of the study, critical race theory provided a framework to further explore McKinney-Vento policy in public schools. The study examined underlying factors that can be seen in schools and educational policy through a critical lens. Research has indicated a need to examine the role race plays in McKinney-Vento policy implementation in schools, further addressing how the racialization process affects policy implementation of educational policy for students experiencing homelessness. One of the questions posed in the study explored whether students' treatment was due to their identity as persons of color or whether the students' treatment was related to their socioeconomic standing in society. The underpinnings of the study include both race and class in the context of McKinney-Vento implementation in the school setting.

The study participants included six unaccompanied African American youth experiencing homelessness, in addition to five adults who were school officials and advocates for individuals experiencing homelessness. Interviews occurred over the course of one year contended that examining the impact of race on homelessness would heighten awareness about a sizable

population of students experiencing homelessness**.** Comparative methods were used in the data analysis and the study found that race was central to the issue of McKinney-Vento policy implementation in urban school settings. The findings also indicated the need to further examine the influence of race in the context of homeless educational policy, as the study determined marginalization and disparities persist for students of color that experience homelessness within the public school setting. Moreover, the study findings speak to far-reaching implications in increasingly diverse school settings, particularly urban settings.

Similar in context to the study conducted by Aviles de Bradley (2015) is research conducted by Milner (2013) that examines racial significance in policy implementation. Milner's (2013) study, informed by a critical race theory lens, explores ways that racial discrimination and acts of oppression contribute to ongoing marginalization among individuals experiencing homelessness. The consideration is noted as broadening a societal and racial perspective (Aviles de Bradley, 2011) and provides another context whereby McKinney-Vento policy implementation in schools can be viewed, given the interactions of race and class relative to disproportionate policy consequences for a segment of students experiencing homelessness in public schools.

Accordingly, research notes that African Americans make up nearly 60% of the homeless population (Aviles de Bradley, 2015). There are inequities across racial and socioeconomic lines (Milner, 2013). With racial minorities making up the majority of the homeless population, compounded marginalization of an already vulnerable population of students experiencing homelessness is implied. The underlying factor of race is evidence as being impactful in the way that McKinney-Vento policy is carried out in some public schools.

Research continues to highlight the inconsistencies of McKinney-Vento implementation (Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Miller, 2011; Moore et al., 2019). McKinney-Vento guidelines require student support in areas of school enrollment, transportation services, school nutrition programming, acquiring school records, and academic support services. As the number of students experiencing homelessness steadily increases, it is crucial that each requirement of the McKinney-Vento Act is implemented effectively. Equitable enforcement of McKinney-Vento policies will provide needed educational access, thereby increasing access and addressing the need for advocacy in public schools. Further, the research cited noteworthy challenges in areas of policy implementation because of ineffective accountability structures and lack of coordination efforts across schools and districts that provide McKinney-Vento services.

In the previous section, discussion about the impact of homeless educational policy and the importance of student identification is punctuated so that McKinney-Vento provisions of educational policy can be effectively implemented and carried out for students experiencing homelessness. The need for equitable enforcement of McKinney-Vento is counteracted by current policy practices.

Conclusion

Limitations of Existing Research

Research on students experiencing homelessness in previous studies have contributed to an increased understanding of the educational experiences of these students. For example, the experiences of students experiencing homelessness are not equal to students who live in poverty, as students experiencing homelessness have greater challenges in the educational setting (Duffield & Lovell, 2008). Further, findings that have highlighted disconnected and inconsistent service practices in schools have heightened awareness about the potential for perpetuating

negative outcomes for students experiencing homelessness in the school setting. Although contributions to this topic have been plentiful, limitations have existed. Namely, in some studies participant sample size was too small, or the study setting, to include region and type of community, did not allow for generalizability due to dissimilar characteristics. Despite the use of administrative data sets, one side of the student experience was represented, but fuller explanations may speak to additional contributing factors to students' success or lack thereof. As such, some relationships have not yet been clarified, and significance has not been established among variables.

Moreover, various methodological approaches have established and further highlighted the limitations of existing research. Namely, the cross-sectional method used in some studies were limited in that causality could not be determined, due to the distinctions associated with different populations. Additionally, the assumption of truthfulness could present a problem in studies where narratives and self-reported data were collected. Further, studies could be limited by potential bias. Through review of the literature, limitations were found in areas of methodology, sample size, measures used in data collection, and inherent study assumptions.

Gaps in Research

Past studies have made strides towards contextualizing issues related to student homelessness and education. The experience of homelessness among students is not a homogeneous experience, thus unearthing a more profound understanding of students' issues related to homelessness in public schools will further highlight discernible challenges related to the educational experiences of a vulnerable population of students in public schools.

Previous research can only be considered a first step towards a deeper understanding of the day-to-day realities and outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. To that point,

unexpected findings in some of the research literature signals the need for additional studies to understand more about this historical problem. Many studies have evidenced negative educational trajectories for students experiencing homelessness (Ausikaitis, 2015; Buckner, 2008; Grothaus et al., 2011). However, a dissimilarity in findings suggested that a significant negative impact to the achievement of students experiencing homelessness could not be substantiated (Pavlakis et al., 2017). The overall strength of the research that has been conducted thus far has contributed strongly to the field of education, as it has helped to understand more about the experiences of homelessness among students.

Despite this fact, current research findings have not been able to comprehensively inform understanding and enable educational professionals to mitigate ongoing factors that negatively impact students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Some weaknesses of the research, however, indicate that a critical perspective might be missing, given the ongoing work to support this student demographic in schools. Thus, more extensive research about students experiencing homelessness is needed.

Therefore, the unique challenges associated with students' experiences of homelessness should be investigated further, to moderate factors that continue to adversely impact their educational experiences and overall wellbeing (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Namely, issues associated with uneven policy implementation (Ausikaitis et al., 2015), academic achievement, high mobility (Low et al., 2017), attendance (Howland et al., 2017), mental health disparities (Armstrong et al., 2018), and service delivery in schools are ongoing challenges that students experiencing homelessness are faced with. Through the review of literature, additional research about this vulnerable population has been signaled as a worthy undertaking.

Previous studies have examined the research problem using qualitative and quantitative methods. The exploratory nature of a qualitative research design would expand and extend current knowledge about students experiencing homelessness in public schools. The in-depth study approach would provide new knowledge for practitioners and policy makers. In doing so, highlighting a critical perspective would provide increased understanding about specific experiences of a marginalized population in society.

Moreover, the review of literature highlighted persistent challenges in areas of policy implementation (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2015). The need to further examine the relationship between uneven policy implementation in schools has been established as a factor that adversely impacts achievement for students who experience homelessness. The influence of race in the context of homeless educational policy reinforces marginalization (Milner, 2013), as does inequitable resource distribution among rural, urban, and suburban school communities. Service providers and school personnel that work closely with students experiencing homelessness work to remove such barriers to support students in the educational setting.

Research that integrates the perspectives of school personnel that provide supportive services to students experiencing homelessness is limited. Havlik et al. (2017) assert that in-depth interviews with support personnel that provide responsive services to students experiencing homelessness is needed to better understand the needs of this population, yet there is a need for further research that examines the lived experiences of the educational professionals that support students experiencing homelessness in public schools. New knowledge in this area would strengthen understanding about barriers and facilitators that exist for students experiencing homelessness within schools. Further exploration of the issue would continue to

inform practice, relative to protective factors that exist for students, aiding school counselors who support these students in schools.

Moreover, access barriers could be more clearly discerned so that service delivery is strengthened at local and state levels. In this regard, further study would fill a gap in research about school level support structures that are implemented in schools for students experiencing homelessness. Such inquiry should be addressed with expediency, as the number of students experiencing homelessness continues to grow, as do barriers that manifest as educational and opportunity gaps.

Despite literature highlighting a limited number of successes among students experiencing homelessness (Edwards, 2019), the overwhelming majority of students remain highly susceptible to poor educational outcomes and diminished future trajectories (Buckner, 2008; Cutuli et al., 2013). The unique challenges associated with students experiencing homelessness require context-specific application. Therefore, challenges for this group of students must be researched and clearly discerned. New insight gained through the lens of school counselors who provide support services to students experiencing homelessness would contribute to a context-specific understanding. Amplifying the voices of these critical perspectives would present new knowledge to inform understanding and educational practice. As such, heightened awareness precedes the ability to be responsive to the needs of a growing and increasingly vulnerable cadre of students experiencing homelessness in public schools.

Chapter III

Method

The content and organization of this chapter presents the research design and describes the qualitative phenomenological approach. Additionally, the research questions that guide the study are restated, and the setting and participants are described, to include the geographic location and organizational structure of the school district. Further, pertinent details explain the study's procedures, the researcher's role and positionality, the data collection process, and analysis for the study. The purpose of the study is to explore public school counselors' beliefs about service supports and barriers for the academic success of secondary students experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, this study endeavors to understand less discernible issues faced by students experiencing homelessness, through the perspective of public school counselors who serve them in schools. The specific research questions that guide this study are the following:

1) How do public school counselors describe their experiences working with students experiencing homelessness?

2) What do public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness?

3) What do public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness?

Context of the Study

The research study was conducted in one large suburban school district in the Southeast. The school district is comprised of a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff. The school district includes elementary, middle, and high school tiers and serves students in more than 50 schools throughout the district. The organizational structure of the school system is hierarchical,

with the superintendent and school board possessing primary leadership authority. The setting

was chosen because of the diverse demographics that exist within the community and school

district. Pointedly, recent demographic data from the district indicate that more than 1,000 K-12

students have been identified as experiencing homeless throughout the school district on an

annual basis during the last 5 years. Therefore, the rationale for selecting this site was that

secondary school counselors who provide services to students experiencing homelessness in this

particular school district could offer perspectives that are critical to understanding more about

the phenomenon of homelessness.

Research Design

In an effort to represent the multifaceted nature of participants' experiences, a qualitative,

phenomenological approach was used in this study to depict the realities of service supports and

barriers for the academic success of students experiencing homelessness. According to Creswell

(2012), qualitative research methods are both holistic and comprehensive in scope. The purpose

of phenomenological research is to understand the essence of individuals' lived experiences in

relation to the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenology is rooted in

German philosophy and involves in-depth engagement with a small number of participants,

whereby the core meaning of human experience is unearthed (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly,

the research design is well-suited to meaningfully explore the phenomenon and research

questions highlighted in this study. A condensed version of key study information can be found

in the research matrix in Appendix A. More specifically, phenomenological research is

appropriate for capturing the realities of participants' lived experiences: "How they perceive it,

describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others"

(Patton, 2002, p. 104). Thus, individuals' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences will call attention to the core essence of the phenomenon.

Participants

Participants for the study were 10 school counselors from a large suburban district located in the Southeast. Creswell (2012) suggests that phenomenological study provides rich, detailed data with a small sample size, as do Smith and Osborn (2003). All 10 participants for this study were females who worked in secondary public school settings. Four participants worked in high school settings, and six participants worked in middle school settings. Moreover, participants were certified school counselors with 3 to 22 years of experience in their current or similar role serving students experiencing homelessness in public schools. See Table 1 for the participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 1

School Counselor Demographics

School Counselor	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Setting
Kya	34	Female	Caucasian	5	MS
Cynthia	39	Female	African American	3.5	MS
Alisha	28	Female	Caucasian	3	MS
Joy	30	Female	Caucasian	7	HS
Angela	30	Female	Caucasian	5	HS
Marly	29	Female	Caucasian	5	HS
Shannon	43	Female	African American	6	MS
Amanda	46	Female	Caucasian	21	HS
Megan	34	Female	Caucasian	4	MS
Kimber	35	Female	Caucasian	7	MS

Note: Setting denotes the educational setting where school counselors currently work. MS represents middle school. HS represents high school.

Instrumentation

Semistructured interview questions were used to gain a greater understanding of school counselors' perspectives and experiences relative to the phenomenon. The interview consisted of 10 questions adapted from Havlik's (2017) interview protocol with the author's express permission. Although Havlik's study explored the perspective of school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness, a few changes were made to align the research and interview questions for my study.

Accordingly, the third and ninth questions from Havlik's (2017) protocol were removed since they were not related to the study's purpose. Interview Question 1, 2, and 3 are aligned with Research Question 1, while Interview Question 4 and 5 are aligned with Research Question 2. Further, Interview Question 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 are aligned with Research Question 3. Each participant was asked the following questions. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

1. In general, what has your experience been like working with students who are experiencing homelessness?

2. What are the biggest challenges you've faced?

3. Describe any training that you have had to work with students who are experiencing homelessness (in graduate school and/or in the field).

4. What educational barriers do you believe students experiencing homelessness are facing?

5. What is the biggest challenge faced by students who are experiencing homelessness at your school?

6. How have students who are experiencing homelessness overcome those challenges?

7. What types of educational supports do you believe are needed to assist students who are experiencing homelessness?

8. How comfortable are you with your understanding of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and your ability to support students experiencing homelessness?

9. How prepared do you feel teachers, administrators, and staff in your school are to support the needs of students who are experiencing homelessness?

10. How could school counselors, teachers, administrators, etc., improve their work with students who are experiencing homelessness?

Procedure

After IRB approval was secured, I presented documentation of my research proposal to the Assistant Superintendent of the school district where my study took place (see Appendix C). After a detailed review process, I received approval to conduct research with school district participants (see Appendix D). Thereafter, I met with the school district's Student Services Department to describe the study and participation criteria for the school counselors. I was provided with a list of potential participants who worked in the district's middle schools and high schools. Purposive sampling was used to solicit suggested participants via an informational letter sent by email to 77 school counselors in the district (see Appendix E). According to Smith and Osborn (2003), purposive sampling obtains a group of willing participants for whom a study's research question will be significant. Furthermore, purposive sampling ensures that individuals who meet the criteria for the phenomenological study are participants that have conceptual understanding about a specific phenomenon relative to the research study (Creswell, 2012).

The study was conducted using a phenomenological study design, with semistructured interviews taking place over the course of 1 month. Smith and Osborn (2003) assert that

semistructured interviews are the exemplary data collection method in phenomenological study and provide rich, in-depth data. Interviews were conducted with each participant for 30 to 40 minutes via Zoom, as mandated safety protocols were still in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All data collected were coded according to phenomenological practices (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The duration of each participant interview was audio recorded. Thereafter, each audio recording was transcribed verbatim.

Additionally, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal during the entirety of the research process. A reflexive journal was used to reduce researcher bias, enhance researcher subjectivity (Ratner, 2002), and clarify how the researcher's values might have influenced the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). The reflexive journal consisted of the researcher's thoughts, feelings, actions, and insights gained through self-examination and reflective practices.

Data Collection

In preparation for the research study, interview questions were piloted with one participant to explore the complexities of the interview process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Seidman, 2006). Once the predetermined participation criteria were met, 10 school counselors were selected to participate. The first 10 school counselors that responded affirmatively via email were included in the study, and each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Participants were emailed a copy of the informed consent to review and sign after an affirmative response to participate in the study was received (see Appendix F). One additional individual responded affirmatively 1 week later via email and was placed on a waitlist in case an additional participant was needed. Study participants had experiential knowledge of students with homeless status, as defined by McKinney-Vento educational policy. Furthermore, participants were not compensated for their participation in the study.

The interviewer began each interview with the same opening statements: "I am completing a study for my dissertation, and I would like to learn more about the experiences of school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness in school settings. I would truly appreciate hearing your story and understanding your experiences relative to your work."

Audio-recorded and transcribed interview data from each participant were converted into word processing files and stored on a password-protected computer that was kept in a secure location. Further, the researcher's reflective journal and all printed transcripts used in the analysis and coding process were stored in a locked file cabinet. Sensitive research information and participant data collected during each stage of the study will be kept for 3 years or longer based on IRB requirements and destroyed thereafter.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed in accordance with phenomenological data analysis (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2009) best practices. Personal bracketing occurred to separate myself from any presuppositions relative to the research study, allowing me to attend to any noted biases or opinions that could potentially influence the research study (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, significant statements, meaning units, and textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences were analyzed to understand the essence of each participant's lived experience (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenological guidelines (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990; Smith & Osborn, 2003) were used to analyze the data manually first, then electronically (Saldana, 2009) using NVivo software to become better acquainted with the data. The data were thematically coded accordingly:

1. Each interview transcript was read multiple times to develop a deep understanding of the data, relative to each participant's experience.

2. With each reread, the data were annotated relative to associations, connections, similarities, and differences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

3. Interview data were be read line-by-line and case-by-case. Data were separated by words, sentences, and paragraphs that represented significant statements (Creswell, 2012).

4. Each item was represented as a meaning unit, single, or clustered theme (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

5. Phenomenological reduction was used to determine the essence of each interview (Patton, 1990).

6. The themes were examined to find points of connection and made into a table of themes that were transferred into a narrative account (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Techniques used to establish credibility were data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks. Thick descriptions were provided to increase transferability of the research findings in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability and confirmability were ensured by establishing a well-documented audit trail that detailed how the data were collected and managed, and verified that the findings were accurately supported by data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's positionality was acknowledged upfront to meet issues of validity during the research process, and bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) was used to view the study through a fresh lens.

Further, the researcher used direct quotes from all interview data collection and consulted with her dissertation chair and an additional higher education professional with a background in K-12 leadership. Both individuals have expertise in qualitative research and provided feedback

throughout the study. Additionally, a reflexive research journal was used during the entire process of collecting and analyzing data from the study. Steps were also taken to guard the study against confirmation bias and increase validity. Interview data were also verified for accuracy by the participants through member checks. Participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript and had 48 hours to make any necessary corrections to ensure that the interpretation of each participant's message was accurately conveyed. Additionally, data were triangulated by closely examining each source of data collected and by utilizing evaluators with expertise in qualitative research to examine data interpretations. Peer debriefing occurred weekly with my dissertation chair. Moreover, an audit trail that consists of all data collection and management processes will allow for replication of the study and strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Ethical Considerations

In thinking about my future research, I have considered a few issues that could arise because of my research topic. Namely, it is very common for students experiencing homelessness to not want to acknowledge or discuss their situation due to the stigma and trauma associated with the homeless experience. When students do confide in others, particularly their school counselors, much of the information shared is confidential, by virtue of the relationship. Great care will be taken to ensure that research questions are crafted to ensure that the lines of inquiry have been carefully considered and informed by necessity only, to preserve respect for the participants' professional roles, their stories, and the stories of students experiencing homelessness.

Moreover, I believe that my middle-class background is an area that I will continually have to contextualize. There are certainly class norms and processes that may emerge in my

research. I will have to be sensitive to issues of personal bias that may arise, and attend to those issues. Because of my middle-class background, it is important to be aware of possible perceptions and ways of being that may exist due to the social class that I was born into and have lived throughout my life. In addition to the way that I may perceive things, I believe that it is also important for me to consider others' perceptions of me. My most earnest efforts could potentially be looked upon with skepticism and mistrust.

As someone that has never been homeless, participants may be guarded with questions that I pose, due to me not sharing a common lived experience. I believe, however, that these issues could be resolved by me conversing with them and sharing about my ongoing work to support and connect individuals to resources in the community. Additionally, it may be helpful for me to share some of the local initiatives that I have been a part of, or my advocacy that has resulted in policy change for youth experiencing homelessness. Alternately, with the scope of my work in the schools, there have been many occasions when word of mouth has proved helpful. On occasion, someone that I have assisted has shared the information with someone that they know. Although I had not previously met these individuals, the trust that I gained from others seemingly gave me credibility with them.

The Researcher's Role

My role in the study will be that of a human instrument. In light of my role and the study design, it is important to be forthright about how my role relates to the data collection process and analysis in the study. I have some knowledge of the participants' work settings, given my employment in the school district and previous work experience in other educational settings. I was a teacher, an interventionist, whereby I provided additional academic support for students who needed to strengthen their reading skills, and a school counselor. Because of my

background, there was a time when I would have had an emic view of the participants' daily work within the schools and could speak to the innerworkings in certain educational settings. However, I do not have group membership with the participants in the study at this juncture, as I have worked in a different professional role for the past 5 years. Further, I do not have a personal relationship with, nor do I provide administrative supervision to any of the participants in the study.

Situation to Self

I have worked in the field of education for more than a decade, and during that time, I have had the opportunity to work with a diverse population of children, youth, and adults. As a teacher, counselor, mentor, and educational advocate, I have served students and families, in various capacities. I am fortunate that my vocation has always lined up with my passion and that I have built my life around service. As such, everything that I have been paid to do in the field of education I started out doing on a volunteer basis because it was important to me. From preparing and serving food for individuals experiencing homelessness, to tutoring children and teaching classes to women residing in shelters, I have tried to be of service in areas where I could affect positive change. Over the years, I have discovered that my work in education continually calls me into deeply meaningful service. As I work with individuals experiencing homelessness, the world is revealed to me in both complex and simple ways. Upon deep reflection, I have concluded that the culmination of my volunteer and professional experiences has led me down the path to my current research.

Positionality

As I have considered the research endeavor before me, I have had to reflect upon my positionality. Culturally, I identify as a middle-aged female from a middle-class background. I

am a college-educated person of color who is also Christian. In light of my cultural identity, I recognize that I have a worldview that may be different from other individuals who I interact with during my research study and in life. Assuredly, I have perceptions and beliefs that have been with me throughout my life that may come up in the context of my study.

I believe that my middle-class background is an area that I must particularly have an awareness of. As a person who works with individuals experiencing homelessness, I have come to understand homelessness more fully. Even so, there are many things that I still do not understand. I recognize that I do not have the lived experience of an individual experiencing homelessness and am not able to connect with them on that level. Cognizant of these truths, I plan to conduct a qualitative research study that explores how homelessness impacts youth in public schools.

Summary

The content and organization of Chapter 3 presented the research design and described the qualitative, phenomenological approach of the study. Research questions that guided the study were restated, and the setting and participants were described. The study's procedures, the researcher's role and positionality, the data collection process, and data analysis for the study were explained.

Chapter IV

Findings

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological research design to provide insight into the problem of practice. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth individual interviews with 10 secondary school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness in public school settings. This chapter will describe the findings that emerged from the data collected and analyzed. Moreover, the findings will be organized by research question, and direct quotes will be used from each participant interview to present research findings accordingly. Further, school counselors will be identified by pseudonym in the findings. The presented findings respond to the following research questions that center on public school counselors' experiences working with students experiencing homelessness. The results also focus on the perceived barriers to educational access as well as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness.

1) How do public school counselors describe their experiences working with students experiencing homelessness?

2) What do school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness?

3) What do public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness?

Table 2 shows dominant themes that emerged from the data that were collected and analyzed, and sample excerpts are denoted accordingly.

Table 2

Experiences and Perceptions of Educational Barriers and Supports

Categories	Themes	Sample Excerpts
School Counselor Experiences	Conflicting Feelings: Rewarding and Frustrating	"It's been some of the most rewarding experiences, but it's also difficult and frustrating."
	Lack of Preparation	"We didn't really cover anything about homelessness, if I'm being honest about it."
Barriers to Educational Access	Improving Student Identification and Service Delivery	"Identification. It's not always that easy… so they aren't getting the services that they need until you know, it's too late."
	Access to Resources	"There has been such a huge push for online learning and access, but not all our families have internet access, not all our families have laptops."
	Transience and Attendance	"For some students they are out for 10 days and then the entire 9 weeks is just gone."
Educational Supports	Significant Relationships and Students' Resilience	"Having an adult, teacher, or mentor makes the difference."
		"I would say a lot of our students are very resilient. They have learned to push through and overcome those challenges."
	Focused Professional Development	"More intentional trainings, trauma informed training…"
	Responsive Enrichment and Intervention Programming	"Students need a combination of supportive services."
		"After school programs are needed at more locations, plus training and mentorship."

School Counselor Experiences (RQ1)

Research Question 1 sought to describe the experiences of school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness. After analyzing the school counselors' individual interview responses, two dominant themes emerged relative to school counselors' experiences working with students experiencing homelessness: (a) conflicting feelings and (b) feeling unprepared to help students experiencing homelessness.

Conflicting Feelings: Rewarding and Frustrating

School counselors noted the positive aspects of being able to support students experiencing homelessness through their work in the public school setting. During individual interviews, school counselors commented on being fulfilled by their ability to work with, and on the behalf of, students experiencing homelessness in the educational setting. When asked about her experience working with students experiencing homelessness, Kimber stated, "It's been a positive experience because I can help students." Similarly, Shannon expressed, "Overall, it's been a great experience working with the students, and I still have parents come in or reach out to me to let me know their kids are doing well." In discussing her work with students experiencing homelessness, Cynthia said that she has a passion for working with her students, and she went on to say, "When you help the students, it just fills you up [makes you feel good]." Some school counselors even remarked on a more personal level about their experiences. For instance, Joy shared,

> I was never homeless, but I did grow up in rural poverty. I think it's easy for me to look
> back and be like, these things were tough, but I'm perfectly positioned in a lot of ways to
> be the person that some people need. I knew when I got into school counseling that I

wanted to be the person for students that I didn't have in a lot of areas of my life. So, this work is rewarding.

Although school counselors shared positive aspects of their work with students experiencing homelessness, frustrations and daily challenges were noted throughout counselor interviews, and school counselors' statements revealed conflicting feelings about their work experiences. When asked about her experiences working with students, Kya stated, "It's [working with students and helping them] been some of the most rewarding experiences that I've had as a school counselor, the work that I do with our homeless students and their families, but it's also difficult and frustrating." When asked how she would describe her experience working with students experiencing homelessness, Angela expressed frustration when she stated, "Although I think we can meet the needs of the students at the school, you're just so limited on what you can do for the student beyond the four walls. It's not being able to provide everything they need."

During the course of the interviews, school counselors responded similarly and expressed a sense of frustration about the realities of their work. When asked how she would describe her experience working with students experiencing homelessness, Alisha stated, "Although I really love my role working with all my students, it's really very frustrating sometimes, not because of the students themselves, just because it's challenging to see the barriers that they face." Throughout participant interviews, it was clear that school counselors make a concerted effort to focus their daily energies on fully supporting students. School counselors expressed that their work with students who experience homelessness uniquely positioned them to positively impact students' lives in both the present and future by helping students acquire their basic, social-emotional, and educational needs.

Despite that truth, in-depth conversations with school counselors highlighted a dual sentimentality, as it related to the experiences that they had with students experiencing homelessness. School counselors stated that there is an emotional aspect of their work with students who are experiencing homelessness on a daily basis. Although the nature of the school counselors' work is solution-focused, their inability to help in every situation affects them. To that point, Megan said that she constantly grapples with her frustration stating, "Gosh, I wish I could do more, but I can't. I don't know what the solution is. I don't know if there is one. I would say that it is a definite challenge."

Throughout the interviews, school counselors voiced frustration with being unable to fully reconcile the realities of their jobs, and there were remarks that the difficulty serving a growing number of students experiencing homelessness could not be overlooked, given the size of their caseloads. To that point, Marly stated, "It would be easier to help students if we only had 250, but we have double that [number]." Similarly, when asked about the challenges she faces, Kya noted, "There are just so many students, and with the numbers, you can't get to them all."

School counselors have been consistently called upon to provide responsive services and support for students, and that fact holds true for the school counselors interviewed. However, many of the school counselors shared that substantial student needs have caused a level of reactivity that was not as prevalent in their work, prior to COVID-19. At some point during each counselor interview, they made it clear that students' needs are more pronounced now than ever before. Table 3 shows school counselors' perceptions of increased student need. Sample excerpts related to increased student need are included.

Table 3

Perceptions of Increased Student Need

Theme	Description	Sample Excerpts
Increased Student Need	School counselors spoke to students' increased need	"People are so overwhelmed with so much more need." "When students need stuff now, everything is bigger." "Across the board, there's more need." "We have so many needs." "The needs, they're growing." "The resources aren't there as needs get bigger and bigger." "They [students] have so many needs now that it feels like it's not something that I'm capable of fully meeting." "More needs." "It's just that they [students] need a lot more things all at once." "I feel like our district has had an influx of needs."

Moreover, school counselors shared that growing student needs and growing student numbers have placed additional demands on them, which have been increasingly difficult to shoulder. According to Marly, "It's really hard for a counselor to do their job and wear 10 other hats [perform additional duties beyond their role as school counselor]. Plus, there's 7,000 other things [responsibilities that require your attention]."

Consequently, school counselors shared that the challenges they have encountered when working with students experiencing homelessness have ultimately created feelings of frustration on an individual and collective level. Amanda stated, "It's very difficult to exact [enact] change. That's a struggle." In addition to serving a growing number of students experiencing

homelessness and an increasingly needy caseload of students, school counselors remarked that time constraints also added to the frustration felt by school counselors who were interviewed.

Feeling Unprepared

Feeling unprepared to comprehensively help students experiencing homelessness was cited by the school counselors who were interviewed. When they were asked to describe any training that they had to work with students who are experiencing homelessness, school counselors remarked that their preservice education lacked training specific to homelessness. Kimber said, "We didn't really cover anything about homelessness, if I'm being honest about it." Joy similarly noted, "Oh, nothing, like, specific to that population in the same way that, like, you do cultural competency training." Training programs provided little to no exposure to the topic of homelessness. Cynthia explained, " Without the background knowledge, you sometimes find yourself scrambling to figure things out when you work with a student." Joy reiterated experiencing a lack of preparation specific to homelessness and how it manifested in her current work when she commented,

> Yeah, actually, I don't think I had any [training] in my graduate program. We don't talk
> about it [homelessness], and I didn't do it in my program really. When I graduated, I
> didn't know what McKinney-Vento was. It shows the lack of education. So, I feel like
> you kind of have to train yourself or look for resources.

School counselors consistently indicated that training was an area that was not extensively addressed. Accordingly, Amanda stated, "I wouldn't say there's been extensive training on dealing with homelessness itself." Moreover, school counselors noted that there was little supplementary training and support offered to them once they came into the profession. To that point, Angela explained,

We've had like roundtable discussions with other people, you know, but I mean it's been limited. It's so case-by-case that being able to have someone who can answer questions that you have when you have questions ends up just being a learn-as-you-go a lot of times.

Additionally, school counselors expressed concerns that their preservice programs did not cover anything that effectively equipped them to serve students experiencing homelessness. For example, one school counselor who was interviewed shared that although she has worked in two different public schools in the district, she described how she felt ill-prepared to serve students experiencing homelessness. When asked about her experiences working with students experiencing homelessness in public schools, Megan said,

Well, I've worked in two different schools where we had the helpers program (pseudonym), so I was basically aware of students experiencing homelessness because of the helpers program (pseudonym) here in ABC County (pseudonym). And honestly, I feel like I would be fairly lost if I didn't have support, like you know, you don't show up ready or knowing really what to do, to really help these students. You don't really get that in school. Um, so I feel like I would want to do a lot [to help students] and I wouldn't know how to do it, or what to do, or where to find answers because I just feel like one of those flotation devices. Floaties.

Other school counselors expressed thoughts surrounding feeling unprepared to fully engage in the work required of them. For instance, Angela said,

I wouldn't say that there's great training [related to homelessness] and that I learned a lot. It's a lot of trial and error [trying to figure out how to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness] and just understanding, you know, what is what [what to do].

There are a lot of times when I don't know what to ask, don't know what to say, but I'm going to try for them [the students].

School counselors did not speak to specific coursework that heightened awareness with regard to serving students experiencing homelessness. However, school counselors acknowledged the importance of being able to effectively work with this student demographic. Notably, school counselors detailed their lack of preservice training throughout the interviews.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 1

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to describe and thus more fully understand the experiences of school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness in public school settings. School counselors described positive aspects about working in their given educational contexts with students who are experiencing homelessness. Conversely, school counselors expressed conflicting feelings of frustration in their work with students who experience homelessness. According to many individual interview responses, school counselors further described feeling unprepared to confidently meet the demands of their current role working with students who experience homelessness. Additionally, school counselors indicated that they did not have a source of information to turn to as they endeavored to serve students who were experiencing homelessness in their schools.

Barriers to Educational Access (RQ2)

Research Question 2 sought to better understand what public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness. After analyzing the school counselors' individual interview responses, three themes emerged relative to school counselors' perceived barriers to students' educational access: (a) identification challenges, (b) access to resources, and (c) transience and attendance.

Improving Student Identification and Service Delivery

When asked about perceived barriers to educational access, the need for improved student identification was noted among several counselors. In that regard, school counselors explained that there was a connection between student identification and educational access, given student identification precedes implementation of McKinney-Vento services. Moreover, school counselors remarked that the timing of student identification affected students' ability to access educational and outside service supports. When asked about educational challenges, Kimber said,

> Identification. It's not always that easy. We have forms that they fill out to begin the year, but a lot of times, those students, those families aren't doing them, or they don't know, or we aren't aware, so they aren't getting the services that they need until you know, it's too late.

School counselors are not always able to pinpoint the reason that identification is delayed. However, the ramifications of students not being identified in a timely manner result in delayed or nonexistent service delivery. School counselors further expressed that challenges with student identification exist because students and families may not be open to disclosing their current homeless status due to perceived stigma. Kya explained the stigma associated with being identified as a student experiencing homelessness when she said,

> I feel like there is maybe even more bias, or like it's more obvious now for kids who are financially struggling because they're riding the SPED buses to school. It's a little more obvious to their peers that they're getting assistance, or if they're, you know, having to be picked up in front of the hotel that they're staying at. They just want to fit in too.

When asked about improving work with students experiencing homelessness, Cynthia agreed that some identification issues were attributed to stigmatization and noted, "We want to encourage them to come and get the food and things, but a label is attached to it. Not being singled out could be better." School counselors could not specifically speak to all of the reasons that students were not identified in a timely manner; however, they recounted instances where students were not immediately identified, and students were negatively impacted because of a failure to identify or delayed identification.

To that point, school counselors expressed that student identification directly affected their ability to provide responsive services to students in need. School counselors asserted that the connection between student identification and service delivery goes hand-in-hand because as Megan stated, "One thing cannot occur without the other." School counselors expressed their desire to improve student identification and service delivery within their schools to increase educational opportunities for students experiencing homelessness.

Lack of Access to Resources

When interviewing school counselors, they noted a problematic issue that they consistently encounter is a shortage of resources to help students who receive McKinney-Vento services. In that regard, a lack of access to resources was also mentioned as a barrier to students' educational wellbeing. When discussing resources for students, many school counselors explained that the primary barrier to students' education was the ability to access resources that they needed. In discussing the lack of access to resources for these students, Angela stated, "It's a different playing field." To the same issue, Kya further explained, "There has been such a huge push for online learning and access but not all our families have internet access, not all of our families have laptops." With regard to the resources noted, school counselors overwhelmingly

spoke of the challenges after COVID-19, noting that there were challenges with limited resources and a lack of awareness with how they locate resources. The most prevalent resource needs for students experiencing homelessness as denoted by school counselors were basic needs, transportation, and technology.

School counselors indicated that getting adequate resources to address students' needs was the biggest challenge that they face at this time. When expounding on the biggest challenges faced by school counselors who serve this demographic, Alisha stated,

> Yeah, I would say that things are so limited. Community resources is probably one of the biggest challenges. I think, you know, I think of challenges in terms of like at school and outside. Like, our families really need those resources, and they are really limited. As I said, in terms of school and my role as the contact for the McKinney-Vento program, I really love working with those families, but I also think I'm needing something else because as a school counselor, we have so many resource needs. They just don't get as much as they might need, and they need more support from the school because the need, it's growing. But the resources and personnel is not there to help as things get bigger and bigger.

Marly also stated that access to resources was a barrier when she said, "Yeah, I think resources, more and more, just the accessibility of them are a challenge. The hoops some of the families have to jump through create more hurdles." Similarly, Cynthia remarked,

> Resources are limited, and limited resources come with a whole line of barriers. I have a list, but once you call, like whether it's whatever services they may be, mental health services or something like that. It becomes, so what insurance do you have? Oh, we gotta push you back. Or you follow up with the plan, like hey, did you make that appointment?

Why don't you have insurance? You know, it's different challenges trying to link them to resources.

Every school counselor acknowledged that there were inherent challenges associated with accessing needed resources. Namely, school counselors talked about being unable to access resources that would assist their students with their most basic and supplementary needs. More specifically, one school counselor shed light on the fact that she perceived her school's location within the county presented an even greater challenge to accessing resources. To that point, Shannon said, "Resources are very limited, and the access to resources depends on your location within the county. So, it seems, for me working with the northern part of the county that we get the tail end of resources." Regardless of educational tier or school setting, school counselors consistently pointed to the lack of access to resources as a formidable challenge when it came to the students they served on a daily basis.

Transience and Attendance Challenges

School counselors characterized transient students as being more susceptible to attendance issues. School counselors spoke about how attendance with this demographic was generally poor and often turned into chronic absenteeism, due to the circumstances of students' daily lives and issues beyond their control such as inadequate means of transportation to get to and from school after being forced to move. Students' frequent relocation often caused them to miss several days of school. Moreover, it was noted that students' extended absences from school proved challenging to recover. Angela expressed the challenges with attendance accordingly when she said, "For some students, they are out for 10 days, and then the entire nine

weeks is just gone. It's like okay, it's not that we can't recover this. You know, it just… it takes so much more… You know?"

When students miss several days of school or become truant, their absences translate into educational barriers because they are not attending school regularly. When students are not in school and available for learning, the situation is often manifested in knowledge and skill gaps that have proven challenging to overcome. Accordingly, transience and attendance issues were noted as fundamental barriers to students' education. The gravity of the issue was explained when Joy said,

> I think from a counselor perspective, one of the largest barriers I've seen is the transience of that population and how it can create, you know, a situation where, like maybe they're not even in school for a semester. Or, if they are, I know, like, for example getting transcripts from Metro is very difficult. So, then they may have been in our school a whole year before we even get their transcript, and they repeated classes they took their freshman year, but we didn't know. So, just like the logistics of this and that, how that impacts their education is huge because they may not end up having time to fix that. And then, with that, they have gaps in education. Like, this year, I have a junior who since her seventh grade year, she's probably been in school a total of like 3 semesters. She had a baby. So, I think just dealing with the fact that she doesn't qualify for an IEP or 504 and that she has no educational foundation, that's a huge barrier. I think absenteeism is just another. So, what do we do with that?

School counselors revealed that increasingly complex educational issues occur when transience and attendance are realized among students who experience homelessness.

Further, they contend that challenges with students' transience and attendance present barriers that have far-reaching implications.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 2

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to explore and better understand what public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness. School counselors described identification challenges, access to resources, transience, and attendance as highly consequential to students' educational opportunities. School counselors asserted that the timing of student identification, transience, attendance issues, and limited access to needed resources affected students' ability to receive adequate educational services and school support.

Educational Supports (RQ3)

Research Question 3 sought to better understand what public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. After analyzing the school counselors' individual interview responses, three themes emerged relative to school counselors' perceived supports for students' educational success: (a) significant relationships and students' resilience, (b) focused professional development, and (c) responsive enrichment and intervention programming.

Significant Relationships

School counselors cited a personal sense of connection with a caring adult or peer as paramount to students' educational success. Given the lack of connection that may result due to family relocation and changes in the environment for students experiencing homelessness, significant relationships with school personnel were noted as being the primary factor in positively influencing students' school experiences. Moreover, school counselors indicated that

significant relationships with members of the school community and other caring individuals contributed to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. Amanda noted, "Having an adult, teacher or mentor makes the difference." Similarly, Joy said, "If you have this connection with this person and get built up, you know, that's your person and they figure it out." During the interviews with the school counselors, they continually remarked on the importance of being relationally connected to a supportive adult. In response to being asked about how students experiencing homelessness that she worked with were able to overcome their various challenges, Marly said,

> They connect to any adult that is going to be caring and loving to support them. And you know, I've had students that have started out very embarrassed and kind of closed off on their situation. Then, eventually they realized that I did not judge them any differently, knowing their situation, and so that gave them courage and hope that there are people out there that are going to help them.

Although all of the school counselors mentioned that establishing a relationship with caring adults increased students' sense of connection, the outworking of these relationships also related to students' academic and personal success. School counselors also commented that having a trusted friend or peer was positive and empowering for students experiencing homelessness. Additionally, school counselors mentioned perceived supports to students' educational success as including peers and mentors as well. This sentiment was captured in Alisha's response when she said,

> The ones that are doing well and thriving have an [sic] another supportive adult in the picture. Whether it's a parent or a friend that they're living with, or a mentor or a family member that will check in on that student. They make sure that they're being supported

academically or social emotionally throughout their experience. I do think that that supportive figure is really important to the students who've been able to stay on track academically.

The importance of students establishing significant relationships with a caring adult or peer was noteworthy among school counselor responses. Whether the connections are with friends, family members, or other school personnel such as counselors, teachers, or administrators, the significance of those relationships was not diminished by the school counselors' statements. Accordingly, a sense of belonging, whereby students are able to develop positive and supportive relationships, was alluded to as being able to promote resilience among students experiencing homelessness.

Students' Resilience

All of the school counselors mentioned the establishment of a strong relational connection with a caring adult, mentor, or friend as positively impacting students' educational experience and even as promoting resilience among students experiencing homelessness. Some school counselors were less specific and noted that students sometimes have something "on the inside" that cannot be pinpointed that allows them to succeed. An example of this was expressed by Kimber when she said, "There are some students we have that maintain really good grades somehow with everything that's gone on. They just kind of find the drive to do what they need to, to get out of that cycle." Students' motivation and persistence were similarly described by Cynthia when she noted, "They push themselves. They just excel academically. Like okay, I'm going to take the stance. I'm not going to be a product of my environment." Other school counselors were able to describe the presence of resilience in students more explicitly and noted

it as contributing to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. Alisha remarked accordingly,

> I would say a lot of our students are very resilient. They have learned to push through and overcome those challenges. Unfortunately, a lot of them have been in the situation many times throughout their lifetime or have been experiences where they have to learn to cope and adapt. And they find ways to, you know, adapt and push through those. So, I think a lot of them have built up this resilience to that situation because they probably have no other choice.

Although there was some variability in the way that school counselors described the presence of resilience in students, school counselors cited memorable instances where students experiencing homelessness were able to learn, cope, adapt, and overcome adversity in school. Despite myriad challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness, school counselors asserted that resilience was the common denominator among students that succeeded in school while experiencing homelessness.

Focused Professional Development

With the continued increase of students experiencing homelessness within their school district, the school counselors interviewed described professional development and training for themselves and school personnel as a way to support the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. When discussing ways to improve work for school counselors, teachers, and administrators, school counselors brought their concerns to the forefront. School counselors perceived that focused professional development training for all school personnel could heighten awareness about the unique needs of students who experience homelessness and build the capacity of individuals who work with students experiencing homelessness to

effectively support them. In light of school counselors' limited preservice experiences and on-the-job training, school counselors mentioned ongoing training as both a desire and a need for themselves.

Even so, since school counselors are not the only school personnel that interact with students experiencing homelessness, school counselors shared that they perceived both a willingness and need for professional development training from other school personnel. Megan said, "I feel like everyone's hearts are in the right place, and I think that there's a huge willingness. There is also some confusion and cluelessness that's not really anyone's fault. Like, I would love to help, but how?" Along the same lines, Shannon shared that it was important for people working with students experiencing homelessness to "be knowledgeable and understand how to help." Focused professional development training is what school counselors expressed as a way to respond to the situation. Joy similarly expressed the struggle at her high school when she said, "Teachers just don't get it, and I've been banging the drum of having like an ACEs training, training beyond their content base, better geared towards, you know, the 'other' of a student."

The theme of professional development training was not overlooked among any of the school counselors. Without exception, school counselors spoke about the necessity of focused professional development as a means to support students more comprehensively. For example, Kimber, Kya, and Joy said that "trauma-informed training" and "trauma-informed practices" were needed to make a difference with all students, but particularly with students experiencing homelessness. When discussing how school counselors, teachers, and administrators could improve their work with students who are experiencing homelessness, without hesitation, Marly stated, "More intentional trainings, trauma informed training, and maybe that's more hands on

deck. That's more than just clicking through a PowerPoint. I'm all for those trainings. Um, I just wish there was more, more impact." Support for additional professional development training was reiterated by all school counselors. In addition to trauma-informed training and training specific to homelessness, school counselors also mentioned the need for training related to adverse childhood experiences when working with students who receive McKinney-Vento services.

Responsive Enrichment and Intervention Programming

Because of the barriers created by issues related to homelessness, academic, social emotional and health related areas, school counselors shared that students' attendance is not always optimal or skill gaps that they may possess require supplemental enrichment and intervention programming. School counselors highlighted the need to connect students to services that were truly responsive in nature. For instance, when sharing about enrichment and intervention programs, Cynthia stated,

> After school programs are needed at more locations, plus training and mentorship. Okay, because a lot of kids are wanting tutoring, you know, wanting to get help, but it's just not available right now, or it's an outside agency type of deal where you've got to pay, and of course they can't pay. Right?

Throughout the counselor interviews, additional layers of support, beyond what the school provides, were noted as being beneficial to students' wellbeing and school success. School counselors indicated the need to increase access to service supports for students experiencing homelessness. To that point, Joy asserted, "Students need a combination of supportive services." In-school and afterschool programming were mentioned by several school counselors as a way to respond to students' needs. Moreover, school counselors emphasized the need for academic

tutoring, mentoring, mental health support, and consistent transportation services. Coordinated efforts to provide additional responsive programs were repeatedly mentioned as ways to improve work with students experiencing homelessness.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 3

The purpose of Research Question 3 was to better understand what public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. After analyzing the school counselors' individual interview responses for Research Question 3, three themes emerged relative to school counselors' perceived supports to students' educational success: (a) significant relationships and students' resilience, (b) focused professional development, and (c) responsive enrichment and intervention programming. School counselors described the importance of having a supportive connection with an adult or peer, citing significant relationships as integral to students' educational success. Further, school counselors asserted that the presence of resilience in students, offering relevant, focused professional development for school stakeholders, and providing supplemental educational and social emotional programming would also respond to the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

<div align="center">**Chapter Summary**</div>

Chapter 4 presented data obtained from 10 in-depth interviews conducted with public school counselors. The key findings of this study revealed that there are both direct and indirect opportunities for improvement, as it relates to working with students experiencing homelessness in public school settings. School counselors indicated a need for improved preservice training and professional development, improved identification and service delivery, improved access to resources, and improved student programming. Moreover, school counselors' perceptions of

structural supports and barriers for students experiencing homelessness were corroborated across educational settings and correspond with the literature reviewed.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purposes of this study are to explore (1) how public school counselors describe their experiences working with students experiencing homelessness, (2) what public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness, and (3) what public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational success of students experiencing homelessness in the educational setting. The following section presents a summary and discussion of the foremost results that were noted in this phenomenological study, particularly as they relate to the review of the literature. Furthermore, this chapter concludes with the limitations and delimitations of the study and provides implications for professional practice, future research, and policy.

Discussion

Interpretations from the research revealed four noteworthy conclusions with respect to working with students experiencing homelessness. First, school counselors are consistently called upon to provide responsive services to a growing number of students experiencing homelessness. However, school counselors expressed that they were unprepared to comprehensively provide support for students experiencing homelessness. Second, school counselors reported that insufficient student identification and service delivery methods inhibited educational access for students experiencing homelessness. Third, school counselors and other school stakeholders are called upon to support students experiencing homelessness without relevant training and ongoing professional development. Finally, access to resources and responsive student programs were not realized within the school district for students experiencing homelessness.

School Counselor Preparedness for Student Support

The provision of responsive student services to all students is foundational to the work of school counselors (ASCA, 2018). For students experiencing homelessness, educational opportunity is largely dependent upon the support provided to them at the school level. School counselors' interview responses indicated that, although they were required to provide responsive services and support to a growing number of students experiencing homelessness, they felt unprepared to support these students comprehensively. Despite attending varied educational institutions, school counselors asserted that their preservice preparation provided limited or no education specific to working with students who experience homelessness in public schools. This reality indirectly creates vulnerability for students, given that research indicates students who experience homelessness present a greater risk for negative academic and social outcomes when support structures are lacking (Grothaus et al., 2011).

The findings of the present study indicate that preservice education was inadequate among the school counselors interviewed and did not aid them in increasing preparedness for their work to effectively support students experiencing homelessness. The connection between preservice preparation and school counselor effectiveness has been established in previous research (Miller, 2011), and the findings of this study align with research that indicates school counselor training ultimately impacted the level of student support rendered (Havlik, 2017).

School counselors offered valuable insight into their preparedness for student support. It is clear from the interview responses that school counselors perceive their lack of preservice preparation directly affects their ability to provide student support and fully promote the well-being of students in their current roles. Based on the lack of preparation cited by school counselors, it is appropriate to suggest that school counselors need additional preservice

instruction to bolster their knowledge and skill, thus enabling them to provide optimal levels of support for students experiencing homelessness. One area that could be addressed in preservice preparation is identification of and service delivery for students experiencing homelessness.

Identification and Service Delivery

During the present study, school counselors highlighted student identification and service delivery as an area of importance in their work with students experiencing homelessness. In order to provide comprehensive support to students who are experiencing homelessness in the educational setting, it is critical that students are identified as being qualified to receive additional services. If students are not identified, they will not receive supportive services that they are entitled to under the McKinney-Vento Act.

Because a combination of factors can lead to increased risk in the educational setting for students experiencing homelessness (Low et al., 2017; Obradović et al., 2009), it is important to examine identification and service delivery methods for students experiencing homelessness, as they relate to student support. To that point, previous research studies have explored the impact of insufficient support for students receiving McKinney-Vento services in the educational setting (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Miller, 2011).

School counselors reported that insufficient student identification and service delivery methods inhibited educational access for students experiencing homelessness. Pavlakis et al. (2017) offers added insight into the issue and suggests that a lack of immediate identification is a contributing factor associated with negative student outcomes for students experiencing homelessness in public schools. In the present study, school counselor reports were consistent across settings and revealed challenges with identification among students experiencing homelessness.

Although school counselors mentioned instances of stigmatizing practices as being a reason for insufficient student identification, they primarily attributed challenges to a lack of knowledge and the way that identification practices were carried out by personnel at the school level. In contrast, research emphasized that when it came to student identification, self-reporting homeless status can have social consequences for students experiencing homelessness (Cutuli, 2018; McLoughlin & Carey, 2014). Accordingly, this finding may be indicative of another reason for insufficient student identification and service delivery in schools.

Despite the fact that some dissimilarity exists, the findings of this study and the literature indicate that both student identification and service delivery in schools are an ongoing challenge. The findings of this study underscore the importance of addressing identification and service delivery issues for students experiencing homelessness. Stakeholder support is an important part of addressing these issues.

Stakeholder Support and Relevant Training

Although school counselors are integral to student success, supporting students in educational settings is a collaborative undertaking. School counselors, teachers, administrators, and other school stakeholders are called upon to serve students experiencing homelessness in the school setting. However, the findings of this study indicate that educational stakeholders are expected to provide needed student support without relevant training and ongoing professional development.

Accordingly, school counselors expressed concern that school personnel have not been adequately trained to respond to issues related to student homelessness. School counselors shared that their district's current training methods simply require school personnel to view a presentation and acknowledge their understanding by signing a document thereafter. School

counselors noted stakeholder support as needful; however, as indicated by school counselor responses, they did not perceive adequate support from teachers, administrators, and other school personnel due to a lack of knowledge and relevant training in areas related to the issues of homelessness among students.

Previous research has demonstrated that adversity exists for students experiencing homelessness beyond academics (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs provides a lens for considering the importance of less perceptible student needs in the educational setting. In addition to students' basic needs, the literature highlighted a myriad of social emotional and mental health needs for students due to the traumatic experiences of homelessness (Buckner, 2008; Edidin et al., 2012, Masten et al., 2015). School counselors indicated the need for school stakeholders to receive relevant training such as trauma-informed practices and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to better support students, due to the traumatic nature of experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, school counselors reported that although they felt that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel would be willing to provide more comprehensive support to students, they stated that they did not feel that school personnel had sufficient knowledge or training beyond their content area to be able to effectively support students. When school counselors sought outside support for sources of information, they collectively indicated that support was insufficient and they had to utilize a trial-and-error approach to providing support, due to their lack of training and the lack of training of school personnel who were unfamiliar with the needs of students experiencing homelessness. School counselors' responses indicated that adequate training and partnerships among stakeholders are needed to help them

improve support for students experiencing homelessness, as is the need for access to resources and support programs.

Access to Resources and Student Programs

Access to resources is critically important for students experiencing homelessness to overcome the barriers they face in school and life. During the course of the interviews, school counselors indicated that access to resources and responsive student programs were not realized within the school district for students experiencing homelessness. School counselors affirmed the need for expanded access to educational and supplementary resources for students experiencing homelessness in academic and mental health domains.

Research reiterates the need for access to school and community programs (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Miller et al., 2018). Access to student programs such as tutoring and mentoring programs (Grothaus et al., 2011) and mental health services are needed due to greater mental health needs for students experiencing homelessness (Armstrong et al., 2018). Although resources are needed to facilitate success for students experiencing homelessness, school counselors indicate that access to resources and support programs are limited. As such, a social justice framework is appropriate for framing aspects of inequity that school counselors represented related to students' needs versus their ability to access resources.

School counselors described the prevalence of limited access to resources as a barrier to the success of students who were experiencing homelessness. Although school counselors overwhelmingly mentioned limited access to needed resources, one school counselor reported that her students received fewer resources than other students in the school district, and she perceived that it was due to the socioeconomic status and racial makeup of her student body, noting that her students were primarily African American and Hispanic students who received

free and reduced lunch. In relation to student access, other research has noted students' race and class reinforced marginalization and presented barriers in educational settings for students experiencing homelessness (Aviles de Bradley, 2015). Somewhat contradictory research brings to light a different perspective about the challenges with ensuring access to students experiencing homelessness, given the prevalence of chronic absenteeism among these students (Tobin, 2016). Although there is an indication that resources remain challenging to acquire for different reasons, the necessity of ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have increased access to needed resources remains.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are factors that are beyond the scope of what a researcher can actually control and require disclosure by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The unavoidable nature of limitations are present in every research endeavor. The limitations in the present study include the decision to change the study design to only include one data source, due to constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the use of self-reported data through individual interviews.

First, the researcher was only able to collect one form of data for this study. The initial research design included both individual interviews and a focus group. However, planning difficulties were immense, given the rolling quarantines of school personnel, emergent school closures, school counselors being required to cover teacher absences, increased workloads, and additional time constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the researcher sought to preserve the integrity of the research by ensuring that the data collected were rich, in-depth interviews with 10 school counselors.

An additional limitation was that self-reported data were collected through individual interviews. The present study utilized self-reported data and could be subject to participant bias, based on modifications of participants' perceptions or recollections (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To counter possible bias, the researcher ensured participants that confidential measures were employed throughout the entire interview process and verified their understanding accordingly. For example, participants were notified that pseudonyms would be used to report research findings. Although COVID-19 presented several challenges beyond the researcher's control, the researcher maintains that the study design was an appropriate approach to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Delimitations

Delimitations to research are constraints intentionally set by the researcher in order for the goals of the study to be realized (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation was the problem that the researcher chose to study. Due to the nature of the researcher's work with students who have experienced homelessness over the years, the researcher endeavored to contribute to improving educational outcomes for these students through this research. The second delimitation was the criteria for participation in the study. Participants who worked in their current role for fewer than 2 years were excluded from the study. The researcher chose to exclude school counselors with fewer than 2 years of experience because the researcher wanted to ensure that study participants had worked in their present role long enough to have had the opportunity to both work with students experiencing homelessness and reflect upon those experiences, thus being able to meaningfully contribute to the research. The third delimitation in the present study was the decision to select participants who worked in one school district where the researcher is employed. While it is true that participants were selected from one district that

the researcher is also employed by, the researcher maintains that the present study is relevant for the school counselors, students experiencing homelessness, and the school district as a whole because recommendations for improvement will be presented to the school district where the research was conducted.

Implications for Practice, Research, and Policy

The current study contributes to a body of research about school counselors' perceptions of service supports and barriers for students experiencing homelessness in public schools. The results of this study yield implications for practice, research, and policy. Based upon the findings of this study, implications for practice include building the capacity of school counselors and educational stakeholders to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness by (a) embedding education on homelessness into preservice curriculum and (b) providing ongoing professional development related to best practices for supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Implications for future research include (a) conducting an evaluation of required preservice coursework at universities that provide school counselor training and have a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) designation and (b) replicating this study in other school districts to determine if similar results are yielded in other contexts. Finally, implications for policy include instituting requirements for (a) trauma-informed and ACEs training for school personnel and (b) embedding education on homelessness and homeless educational policy into preservice curriculum for school counselors and licensed educators.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicated that school counselors received little, if any education related to homelessness in their preservice programs. Further, school counselors' knowledge

about working with these students proved insufficient to meet the demands of their daily work with students experiencing homelessness. This knowledge renders important implications for practice. As such, an implication for practice is the necessity to build the capacity of school counselors to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness by embedding education on homelessness into preservice curricula. Doing so will promote the wellbeing of students experiencing homelessness in the educational setting.

In this regard, it has been more clearly discerned that strengthening support for students experiencing homelessness presents a clear direction for increasing equity and opportunity for these students in the educational setting. Heightening awareness about salient issues related to homelessness is the first step toward gaining relevant knowledge, skills, and ability to increase student support. Therefore, it is imperative that graduate programs work toward prioritizing identified training needs that prepare school counselors to effectively work with students experiencing homelessness. Moreover, relevant coursework should be standardized and included in school counselors' preservice coursework.

Educational experiences for students experiencing are both stressful and traumatic; therefore, strides should be taken to provide ongoing professional development related to best practices for supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. To that point, strengthening McKinney-Vento training procedures for school personnel will help to increase knowledge about important student characteristics and polices related to homelessness.

Moreover, an intentional focus on strategies that promote students' holistic wellbeing such as trauma-informed practices and adverse childhood experiences should become an embedded practice in all schools. Such steps will better prepare school stakeholders, to include teachers, administrators, and support personnel, to understand the distinct challenges of students

experiencing homelessness and strengthen their ability to meet the needs of these students. Given the prevalence of homelessness in public schools, training related to best practices for supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness is a responsive approach that should be provided in all schools.

Implications for Research

During the course of conducting this research, additional lines of inquiry were realized. One implication for future research would include conducting an evaluation of required preservice coursework at universities that provide school counselor training and have a CACREP designation. The importance of evaluating school counselor training programs with the CACREP designation could prove far-reaching because associated programs are part of the largest accrediting body of school counselor programs in the United States.

Another implication for future research would be to replicate this study in other school districts to determine if similar results are yielded in other contexts. This present study was limited by including one school district. However, more study with a broader demographic sample of school counselors across school districts would be an interesting direction for future research. In this regard, it would be interesting to determine if the findings of this research hold true across multiple districts or the state.

Studying a more diverse school counselor demographic should also be considered in a replication study. Although my study participants are generally representative of secondary school counselors, it would be interesting to see if the race and gender of the participants proved impactful in the study findings. Accordingly, participants in the present study were all female and eight participants identified as Caucasian. Additionally, this study only used one source of

data. I would recommend extending the qualitative design of this study to include the addition of focus groups as another source of data.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study provide an improved understanding of supports and barriers for the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. Implications for policy include instituting requirements for trauma-informed and ACEs training for school personnel and embedding education on homelessness and homeless educational policy into preservice curriculum for school counselors and licensed educators. This study revealed that school counselors overwhelmingly stated that their preservice programs did not include education related to the experiences of homelessness, although they are required to provide support for this growing student demographic. Thus, systemic changes are needed.

Given the increasing prevalence of homelessness among K-12 students, it is both justifiable and imperative that preservice training requirements include comprehensive education on homelessness and homeless educational policy for school counselors, as well as all licensed school personnel. National bodies should update their educational standards and institute guidelines related to homelessness that preservice programs would use to ultimately increase student support. Additionally, school counselors indicated the need for school stakeholders to receive training related to trauma and adverse childhood experiences to bolster knowledge beyond their content area to increase student support, given the traumatic nature of homelessness.

Further, this present study revealed that purposeful partnership is needed to increase support for students experiencing homelessness. School systems and educational stakeholders, to include parents and students, must work together to collaboratively address the identified needs

of the students experiencing homelessness. To ensure that efforts are comprehensive and responsive, school stakeholders should work together to develop a holistic framework that includes best practices for student support and intervention strategies to equip school counselors, teachers, administrators, and identified school stakeholders to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Moreover, universities' graduate training programs, state, and local educational systems should collaborate to establish guidelines for best practices related to responding to students' identified needs. To that end, stakeholders should work together to clarify current policy goals within the state. Thereafter, resources should be mobilized to provide additional layers of support to improve and inform practice for educational professionals who work with students experiencing homelessness, as the need to remove barriers for this vulnerable demographic remain.

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Appendix A

Research Matrix

Research Questions	Constructs	Instrument	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ 1: How do public school counselors describe their experiences working with students experiencing homelessness?	Counselors' experiences while working with students experiencing homelessness	Individual phenomenological interview (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994)	via Zoom up to 60 minutes	Thematic coding (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2003).
RQ 2: What do public school counselors perceive as barriers to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness?	Stigma, school mobility, policy implementation, attendance, mental health, racism, academic achievement	Individual phenomenological interview (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994)	via Zoom up to 60 minutes	Thematic coding (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2003).
RQ 3: What do public school counselors perceive as supports to the educational access of students experiencing homelessness?	Support systems, school counselors, homeless liaison, counselor training, students' resilience	Individual phenomenological interview (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994)	via Zoom up to 60 minutes	Thematic coding (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Script

I am completing a study for my dissertation, and I would like to learn more about the experience of public school counselors who work with students experiencing homelessness in school settings. I would truly appreciate hearing your story and understanding your experiences relative to your work. Please respond honestly and share as much detail as possible. If you desire to stop the interview at any time or would like to skip a question, please let me know. With your permission, this interview will be audio recorded and immediately uploaded to my password-protected computer. The interview will be transcribed, and you will receive a copy of the interview transcript. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Pre-interview Questions

The following interview questions will be asked: (1) What is your gender? (2) What is your ethnicity? (3) What is your age? (4) How many years of experience do you have as a school counselor? (5) What is your school setting (middle school or high school)?

Interview Questions

1. In general, what has your experience been like working with students who are experiencing homelessness?

2. What are the biggest challenges you've faced?

3. Describe any training you have had to work with students who are experiencing homelessness (in graduate school and/or in the field).

4. What educational barriers do you believe students experiencing homelessness are facing?

5. What is the biggest challenge faced by students who are experiencing homelessness at your school?

6. How have students who are experiencing homelessness overcome those challenges?

7. What types of educational supports do you believe are needed to assist students who are experiencing homelessness?

8. How comfortable are you with your understanding of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and your ability to support students experiencing homelessness?

9. How prepared do you feel teachers, administrators, and staff in your school are to support the needs of students who are experiencing homelessness?

10. How could school counselors, teachers, administrators, etc., improve their work with students who are experiencing homelessness?

Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. As a reminder, the interview will be transcribed, and you will receive a copy of the interview transcript and provide any needed clarification. If you have further questions about the research, you can contact me or my dissertation chair. All contact information is on the informed consent record. Thank you again.

Appendix C

IRB Approval

Austin Peay State University

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date: 10/22/2021

Re 21-046: TITLE OF PROJECT: **"**A Phenomenological Study on Public School

Counselors' Perspectives of Service Supports and Barriers for Students Experiencing Homelessness"
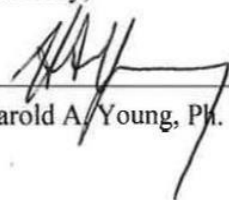
Dear Dr. Lee and Ms. Napper,

We appreciate your cooperation with the human research review process. This letter is to inform you that study 21-046 the application has been reviewed on an expedited level. It is my pleasure to tell you that your application is approved.

This approval is subject to APSU Policies and Procedures governing human subject research. The IRB reserves the right to withdraw approval if unresolved issues are raised during the review period. Any changes or deviations from the approved protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB for further review and approval before continuing.

This approval is for one calendar year and a closed study report or request for continuing review is required on or before the expiration date, 10/21/2022. If you have any questions or require further information, you can contact me by phone (931-2217059) or email (youngh@apsu.edu).

Sincerely,

Harold A. Young, Ph. D. Chair, APIRB

Appendix D

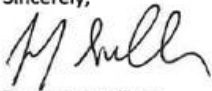## Research Approval Letter

October 27, 2021

Dear Ms. Napper,

The request to conduct a research study, "A Phenomenological Study on Public School Counselors' Perspectives of Service Supports and Barriers for Students Experiencing Homelessness" in ▮▮▮▮▮ County Schools has been approved. Survey instruments used in ▮▮▮▮▮ County Schools must be in compliance with the Board of Education Policy 6.4001. I have included a link to that policy.

http://images.pcmac.org/Uploads/TennesseeSBA/TennesseeSBA/Departments/DocumentsCategories/Documents/64001_94.pdf

When research is conducted in the ▮▮▮▮▮ County School System, it is standard procedure for the researcher to request the principal's approval, and if approved, data collection will also be subject to the time frame and conditions that the principal specifies. I emphasize that the research should not interfere with regular instructional program and that other school staff members' involvement be subject to his/her willingness to participate and the demands upon his/her time.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Sullivan
Assistant Superintendent
Curriculum and Instruction

"Empowering Today's Students to Grasp Tomorrow's Opportunities"

Appendix E

Recruitment Letter

My name is Kisha Napper, and I am a doctoral candidate at Austin Peay State University. I am inviting you to participate in a study on public school counselors' perspectives of service supports and barriers for students experiencing homelessness. Your participation in this study will help increase understanding about barriers and facilitators of educational access for students experiencing homelessness in public schools. Specifically, your participation would include answering a few demographic questions and one in-depth 40- to 60- minute individual interview conducted via Zoom. Additionally, a request will be made for you to verify the interview transcript.

Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time. Minimal risks are foreseen relative to your participation in this study. Your participation has the benefit of heightening awareness and increasing understanding about ways to provide support for students experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration and potential participation in this study.

<p align="center">Appendix F</p>

<p align="center">**Participant Informed Consent**</p>

<p align="center">**"A Phenomenological Study on Public School Counselors' Perspectives of Service Supports and Barriers for Students Experiencing Homelessness"**</p>

Introduction

The Department of Education at Austin Peay State University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You retain the right to refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you consent to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequence. If you choose to withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this department, the services it may provide to you, or Austin Peay State University.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore public school counselors' beliefs about service supports and barriers for the academic success of secondary students experiencing homelessness.

Directions

Please read this informed consent form. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name at the end of the form. Please also include your printed name and date. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time and your data will be shredded and immediately deleted. If you do agree to participate in this study, data will be kept for 3 years as per APSU IRB policies.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will take approximately one hour. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom because of the pandemic and to also be considerate of your schedule. For the interview, please choose a location that is quiet and far away from people so that they do not hear the conversations. You will be asked a variety of questions about your experiences working with students who are experiencing homelessness. Interviews will be recorded with your permission. If permission is not granted, I will take detailed notes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

There are some risks related to this study. Questions pertaining to this topic may be sensitive and could cause some discomfort. If there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, you do not have to answer them. There are increased risks if data is potentially released with identifying information. I will also ensure that all data is kept confidential and will assign you a pseudonym to protect your identity. For this study, there is no direct benefit for participants. However, it is important to gain more insight into the experiences of youth experiencing homelessness so that we can provide more support to assist them.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Participant Confidentiality

Since you are required to sign the consent form, I will have access to your real name. This information will not be released to anyone, and a pseudonym will be assigned to protect identity. All information collected will be kept secure. All data collected will be kept private and anonymous so that you cannot be identified. All data collected will be stored in a password protected computer file. Paper documents will be locked in a filing cabinet. Data will be secured for a 3-year period. After 3 years, all documents will be shredded and deleted. If any part of this research is used for future publication, and names and data will remain anonymous.

Refusal to Sign Consent

You are not required to sign this Consent form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to participate in any programs or events at Austin Peay State University or any services you are receiving or may receive from Austin Peay State University. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

Cancelling this Consent

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, any collected data will be destroyed and not used.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Kisha Napper, and I can be reached at: 815-505-0605 or Knapper1@my.apsu.edu. In addition, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Andrea Lee at 931-221-7098 or leea@apsu.edu.

Consent

I have read the above information and received a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding my participation in this study. I agree to take part in this study as a research participant.

_____

Name of Participant (print)

_____ Date_____

Signature of Participant

Researcher Contact Information
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(815) 505-0605

IRB Contact Information
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Beth Hoilman, IRB Assistant
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