Homelessness in Sweet Home Students

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Introduction to Counseling Research

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March 11, 2017

**Abstract**

In the community of Sweet Home, Oregon, homelessness is common. Districtwide, there is a 10% homelessness rate and individual buildings have higher rates (one elementary school has a 24% homelessness rate). In addition, there are limited resources available to students experiencing homelessness in this small community and there is a need for the district to reflect upon the current practices and supports regarding students experiencing homelessness.

The current research on homelessness is primarily conducted in the context of urban environments, which is very different from the Sweet Home community. In addition, much of the research is conducted by individuals who have never experienced homelessness, thus the research questions and problems being addressed are determined outside of the context of homelessness.

Although past research is very informational and helpful in guiding practices, there is a significant need for the district to have access to a different type of research, conducted in the context of the community. This paper is proposing that research be conducted by a team comprised of high school students who have experienced homelessness and a school counselor. As opposed to past research, this study will be conducted within the context of homelessness in Sweet Home, because it will be driven by the input of students who have lived the experience. In addition, it will be strengths-based, geared at identifying qualities and behaviors that promote academic success. It will also explore barriers to academic success and the current academic performances of students experiencing homelessness.

The study will utilize a youth Participatory Action Research (PAR) pragmatic mixed-methods design. As such, quantitative data will be gathered on the academic performances of students experiencing homelessness, compared with the general Sweet Home population. Quantitative data will also be gathered through semi-structured interviews, to identify student strengths, advocacy behaviors, and barriers to success.

**Problem Statement**

**Area of Study**

Upon reviewing the research on homeless youth in school (or homeless people in general), one would find that the majority is completed by outside researchers. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find research on homelessness completed by someone who has experienced homelessness themselves. In addition, much of the research is deficit-focused, and outlines characteristics and qualities of homeless individuals. As Paradis (2000) states, “epidemiological research focused on characteristics of ‘the homeless’ constructs homelessness as an individual trait, rather than a state situated in a social and historical context”, in doing this, research places the blame and responsibility on homeless individuals, for their own marginalization (p. 840). In addition, social systems of inequity are perpetuated when research is solely conducted by outsiders, who have the freedom to choose how they disseminate the information, without the input of the people actually experiencing homelessness. The only way to truly understand how our education system is serving (or underserving) homeless youth, research must be completed by the people of focus. Through Participatory Action Research such as this, change can be advocated for, thus empowering this traditionally marginalized group.

Much of the research conducted on homelessness focuses on those living in urban environments, which often have more community resources for families experiencing homelessness. This reflects a need to conduct more research on the experience of students experiencing homelessness in a rural community with few resources. Sweet Home is an ideal community to conduct this type of research. It only has one emergency homeless shelter with very limited capacity and few resources provisioned to support the needs of homeless families.

Per the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (UDHUD) (2016), around 549,928 people were experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2016. Over one-fifth of those individuals were children and about 35% of the homeless population were people in families with children. In the state of Oregon, 18,902 students experienced homelessness during the 2013/14 school year (Oregon Department of Education, 2014). Oregon also had the highest rate of unsheltered people in families (75.8%), the second highest rate of unsheltered homeless individuals (60.5%), and the fourth highest rate of unsheltered unaccompanied homeless youth (64.4%) in the United States in 2016 (UDHUD, 2016), which reflects a lack of resources being provisioned for homeless children and their families. With only one emergency shelter, with very limited capacity, Sweet Home Oregon is clearly lacking in this area. In addition, even though homelessness has been increasing in the United States, research on homelessness has not been very coherent in addressing the diverse conditions and how to best serve homeless students (Miller, 2011).

In addition, there are well-documented inequities in schools meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness across the nation. For example, homeless students receive only limited accommodations for disabilities and social/emotional needs, compared with their housed peers (Sulkowski, 2014). As is outlined below, homelessness is correlated with several disadvantaged educational outcomes, including an overrepresentation in special education, increased behavioral identification, academic difficulties, and even poorer health outcomes (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Zima, Bussing, Forness, & Benjamin, 1997; Rubin et al., 1996).

The proposed study is a Pragmatic PAR Mixed Methods study. As such, data will be gathered and examined by a team of students at Sweet Home High School (SHHS) who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. A school counselor will also be a member of the team. Operating from a pragmatic framework, the team of research is aware that the questions will evolve throughout the process. However, the primary questions we will begin with are:

1. How are students experiencing homelessness performing academically in the Sweet Home School District (SHSD)?
2. What strengths and resilience factors do these students possess? What difference do these qualities make in their experiences at school?
3. What are the barriers and supports for these students?
4. What are effective ways that students experiencing homelessness have advocated for themselves? What differences do these efforts make?

**Definition of Terms**

Per section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the definition of homeless includes children who are sharing a house with others, due to lack of housing; children living in a residence that is public or not ordinarily used for human beings; and highly mobile children. The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of students experiencing homelessness (per the above definition) living in the rural community of Sweet Home, Oregon.

**Description of School Context and Advocacy Plan**

**School Demographics**

SHSD has a poverty rate of around 80% (Oregon Report Card, 2016) and a 10% overall district homelessness rate (Personal Communication, June 7, 2016). There are four elementary schools in the school district, one junior high, and one high school. At the end of the 2015/16 school year, the homelessness rates per school were as follows:

* Charter Elementary School: 2%
* Holley Elementary School: 3%
* Hawthorne High School: 8%
* Oak Heights Elementary School: 14%
* Foster Elementary School: 24%
* Junior High School: 6%
* SHHS:10%

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) (2016) estimates that in 2016, the rate for homelessness was 17.7 for every 10,000 individuals. It estimates that the homelessness rates in Oregon to be 33.3 for every 10,000 individuals. The state average homelessness rate for students in Oregon is about 3.6% and the Sweet Home student homelessness rate is close to 11% (Personal Communication, March 1, 2017). In East Linn County’s 10-year housing plan, released in 2009, Sweet Home School District had almost 21% of the homeless students enrolled in East Linn County Schools. Homelessness is clearly a significant issue for SHSD.

With a 24% homelessness rate, Foster Elementary School leads the other elementary schools in the district by at least ten percentage points (Personal Communication, June 7, 2016). Interestingly, if one looks at the SHSD zoning map, it is notable that trailer parks which should logically be zoned for a different school are explicitly zoned for Foster Elementary School. Although it is the largest elementary school in the district and has the highest poverty and homelessness rate, Foster Elementary School is the only school of a relative size in the district without a full-time school counselor. Clearly, there are equity issues and arguably economic segregation of elementary school students in the district.

The SHSD student body is about 87% white, about 5% Hispanic/Latino, less than 5% multiracial, and around one percent black, American Indian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander each (Oregon Report Card, 2014). Most of the students in the district speak English as a first language, with less than four percent overall students registered as an English Language Learner (ELL).

**Advocacy Plan**

As mentioned above the purpose of this research project will be to examine the common experiences of students experiencing homelessness in the SHSD. However, this research project will go further than to simply investigate the issue. The high school students conducting this research will collaborate with the school counselor to determine how to use the outcomes to serve students experiencing homelessness, specifically the students in elementary school.

Although the advocacy plan will likely change as research is conducted and information is gathered, the overall goal will be to identify resilience factors that help students experiencing homelessness overcome obstacles and the barriers to success. With this information, the research team will design a mentoring intervention program to reach out to elementary school students experiencing homelessness (targeting Foster Elementary) to boost these resilience factors in students and to remove barriers. This intervention will target self-advocacy and self-regulation skills.

This research will also inform advocacy on a more systemic level. The research team will then use the information discovered in this study to advocate for more systems of support to be in place to support students experiencing homelessness.

**Literature Review**

Below is an outline of the literature on homelessness in schools so for. It will begin with an outline of the historical context and background of homelessness. Then, themes from current literature will be discussed. Finally, the literature review will be discussed in the context of the research problem.

**History and Background**

Below is a discussion to give some context to the issue of homelessness. Risk factors will be outlined, the McKinney Vento Homeless Education Act (McK-VA) will be outlined, and finally there will be a brief discussion of the research gaps historically.

**Risk Factors.** The most common causes of homelessness are insufficient affordable housing and a shortage of sufficiently-paying jobs (Burt, 2001; Wong et al., 2009). Although most single individuals experiencing homelessness are single men, homeless families are most often headed by young single mothers. Compared with their single male counterparts, these mothers have often have completed high school, are less likely to have mental health and substance abuse issues, and more likely to have contact with social connections (Culhane, Metraux, Park, Schretzman, & Valete, 2007).

People of color, specifically African Americans, are overrepresented in the homeless population (Lowin, Demirel, Estee, & Schreinder, 2001; Rog & Buckner, 2007). Another risk factor for becoming homeless is holding a low socio-economic status (SES); poor families are at an increased risk for becoming homeless because of a lack of financial resources and social capital, increased health problems, and higher instances of accidents and trauma, which all contribute to residential mobility (Miller, 2011; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998).

Clearly, there is wide variety in individuals experiencing homeless. There are also different kinds of homelessness. Some families experience homelessness only temporarily, others experience more chronic levels of homelessness, causing them to be more mobile (Miller, 2011). The families experiencing chronic homelessness have worse outcomes than transitionally homeless families. This is likely because of their increased mobility, higher instance of mental health and substance abuse struggles, and lack of social capital (Miller, 2011). In addition, youth who experience homelessness only once have been found to be less likely to experience the other risk factors associated with homelessness (Miller, 2009). Youth whose families experienced parental stress or other negative life events were more likely to demonstrate disruptive behavior (Danseco & Holden, 1998).

Most homeless children live with their families, however some adolescents no longer live with their parents, known as ‘unaccompanied youth’. These children are likely to have become homeless for reasons beyond their control, such as family conflict, abuse, or parental substance abuse. They often struggle in school, however have been found to be resilient (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002).

**McKinney Vento Homeless Education Act (Mc-VA)**. McK-VA is a federal law written to assure that homeless students have educational stability. It requires school districts to provide bussing to the student’s school of origin if he or she moves and provides needed funding and resources to assist homeless students. Since the implementation of McK-V, school districts have been doing a much better job of providing for homeless students (Rog & Buckner, 2007). For example, one well-documented barrier to the success of transient students was the restriction of enrollment of students who did not have academic transcripts. With the provision of McK-VA, schools are now required to enroll homeless students, with or without transcripts.

In addition to providing these direct resources to students, McK-VA has influenced districts to provide professional development for staff on homelessness so that they can better connect students with needed resources, and provide school supplies for students experiencing homelessness (NCHE, 2010).

**Current Literature Themes**

Below is a discussion of themes discovered in the review of current literature on homelessness.

**School Experiences.** There is a significant amount of research that has noted the correlation between homelessness and attendance difficulties (Canfield et al., 2005; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987). For obvious reasons, poor school attendance limits student’s access to education. This attendance issue is often because of the high mobility of many families experiencing homelessness (Miller, 2011). Also because of this high mobility, many students experiencing homelessness attend multiple schools in their academic career, sometimes within one academic year. This can cause issues with transcript and immunization records, limiting access to needed academic supports and interventions (Hardy, 2009). It also leads to the student feeling more isolated (Miller, 2011).

In addition, students experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk for experiencing academic, behavioral, emotional, and health problems, compared with other students (Nbors, Proscher, & DeSilva, 2001). These students are more likely to have mental health challenges requiring clinical evaluation (Bassuk, Richard, & Tsertsvadze, 2015) and teachers are more likely to identify homeless students as having behavioral, social, and emotional struggles in the classroom (Chow, Mistry, & Melchor, 2015). In addition, students experiencing homelessness have an overrepresentation in special education, and lower academic scores (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Zima, Bussing, Forness, & Benjamin, 1997; Rubin et al., 1996). These students exhibit lower self-esteem, more aggressive behaviors, and demonstrate internalizing and externalizing behaviors more frequently than other students (Downer, 2001).

While youth experiencing homelessness often have higher academic needs than other students, they are often less likely to receive the interventions required for them to access their education; 45% of homeless youth meet criteria to be evaluated for a disability, yet only 22% of them are evaluated or receive special education services (Sulkowski, 2014; Zima, Bussing, Forness, & Benjamin, 1997). This is likely the result of the high mobility of these children. In addition, students are less likely to seek academic, social, or emotional support, because they often distrust adults; Sukowski (2014) found that they often worry about being judged negatively or being reported to DHS.

**Homelessness and Trauma.** Recently, there has been an upsurge of research on trauma caused by a specific set of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s), which include abuse, neglect, alcohol or drug abuse by a caregiver, incarceration of a family member, loss of a parent, mental illness in the family, and family domestic violence. Exposure to these ACE’s increases the risk for an individual to experience a trauma response in the brain; specifically, researchers have found that exposure to three or more ACEs is a significant risk factor in behavioral difficulties, absenteeism, mental health diagnoses, and health issues (Ginsburg, 2014). Students who experience long-term or chronic homelessness are more likely to be exposed to one or more ACE, making them at an increased risk for trauma **(**Roos et al., 2013). In addition, exposure to one or more ACE increase one’s risk of becoming homeless in the future.

**Supports for Students.** Importantly, the literature has identified support factors that can buffer some of the negative impacts of homelessness on students.

***Resilience*.** Resilience factors have been found to buffer the impact of exposure to ACE’s. Ginsburg (2014) outlines the following resilience factors as being helpful: parental resilience, social connections, support in times of need, and social emotional learning (SEL). These are all factors that can be addressed within schools and should be utilized when working with students experiencing homelessness, particularly those who have also had one or more ACE.

***Family* *Support*.** An important protective factor for students experiencing homelessness is family connection, specifically with the parent or caregiver. Parental guidance, love, and support during homelessness has been consistently been found to be a strong predictor of positive outcomes for students experiencing homelessness (Shields & Warke, 2011; Shwik, 2008) However, students experiencing homelessness often have stressful relationships with their parents (Buckner et al., 1999; Molnar, Rath, & Klien, 1990). This is likely because of the exposed nature of living in a shelter, and the crowded nature of doubling up with another family and not necessary because of deficits in parents experiencing homelessness (Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994; Nuez & Fox, 1999). In addition, youth experiencing more chronic homelessness are more likely to have parents who struggle with substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health difficulties (Roose et al., 2013).

***School Staff Support*.** It is important that school staff members are educated on the issue of homelessness, so that they can boost the social support experienced by homelessness and ensure that the student is receiving adequate educational support and SEL. However, many school districts with high instances of homelessness do not provide professional development to staff members on the issue and are thus not adequately identifying homeless students or meeting their needs. In addition, school staff members tend to be more highly educated than the general population. Phelan, Stueve, Link, and Moore (1995) found that education level is correlated to a greater tolerance and acceptance of homelessness, however, highly educated people are less likely to support the provision of economic aid to homeless families. This reflects a greater need to provide professional development on homelessness and the needs of families experiencing homelessness, even for the more highly educated staff members.

School counselors are often noted in research to be responsible for creating awareness of homelessness, consulting with school staff, and providing social/emotional support to students experiencing homelessness, however, the school counselors’ role in this is also often noted to vary by school and district (Miller, 2011). Homeless liaisons work to ensure that McK-VA is implemented, by securing transportation, resources for students, and consulting with parents. However, there is limited research investigating homeless liaison’s direct impact on student outcomes (Miller, 2011).

***Community Resources*.** Another important support for families experiencing homelessness is access to community resources. Shelters are key support mechanisms for homelessness students (Miller, 2011). Most homeless families live in emergency shelters, which are temporary. However, there are also longer-term options, many of which offer transitional housing options, case management, addiction counseling, support finding jobs, and life skills programs (Gerwirtz, Hart-Shegos, & Medhanie, 2008; Livingston & Swenson-Miller, 2006). Sweet Home has one emergency shelter, called the Hope Center; however, it has limited capacity to provide shelter for many people at once. Many homeless families in Sweet Home live with another family (often in small quarters) or camp.

In addition, community-based programs are also helpful for families experiencing homelessness (Miller, 2011). In Sweet Home, there are a few community supports, including Sweet Home Emergency Ministries (SHEM), which provides financial assistance and food to families. Hope’s Closet collaborates with SHEM to provide clothing to needy families. In addition, the Department of Human Services aids in finding jobs, financial support, and case management. The Sweet Home School District also has a Youth Support Team, which gathers representatives from various community agencies to support needy families. Miller (2011) points out that collaboration between the various community agencies is ideal to best address the needs of families experiencing homelessness.

**Research Problem**

Since the implementation of McK-VA, students experiencing homelessness have begun to perform better academically (NCHE, 2010). However, despite these improvements, school districts are still not adequately meeting the needs of homeless students. Many school districts are not successfully identifying homeless students, are underfunded to meet the needs of students, and are not adequately identifying students experiencing homelessness for needed interventions (Wong et al., 2009).

As mentioned above, much of the research on homelessness has been conducted by individuals who have never experienced homelessness, has been deficit-focused, and has not been conducted with the intention of advocacy. The mixed-method PAR study being proposed will address some of those and will incorporate an advocacy plan, to be built based on the research findings.

**Methodology**

**Research Question**

The purpose of this study will be to gather information on the experiences of students experiencing homelessness in the SHSD. This study will be designed and conducted by students who either are experiencing homelessness of have in the past, because they have the most accurate perspective of what is important in this context. Specifically, the research team will investigate the academic performances, strengths, supports, and barriers to students experiencing homelessness in Sweet Home. As this information is gathered, the research question might shift as other issues become apparent and relevant. The information gathered by this research will be utilized to design an advocacy plan. The advocacy plan will likely include a mentoring program between students at SHHS and students at Foster Elementary School experiencing homelessness and a plan to increase homeless families’ access to community and mental health resources.

**Research Design**

As mentioned above, this will be a mixed methods PAR project. This study will be PAR, because of the lack of inclusion of individuals experiencing homelessness in the research conducted on the issue. Then, these students will have the power to decide how to best utilize the information gathered in the study to improve the situations of students experiencing homelessness in Sweet Home. In doing this, PAR places traditionally marginalized people in positions of power.

The youth researchers will be recruited by the school counselor, who will be a member of the research team. She will reach out the students who she knows are experiencing homelessness (or have in the past) and invite them to an informational session on the project. To recruit research team members from various backgrounds and experiences, she will not be selective in who she invites to come to the informational session. During the session, she will outline the idea behind the research, ask for input, and gauge interest. Interested students will commit to joining the research team, with full knowledge of the time commitment required of them. Once the research team has been built, they will meet and discuss norms and expectations. Through this work, a contract will be drafted and signed by all. Then, the team will discuss the research question, procedures, and make any adjustments as agreed upon by the team. After all these preliminaries have been covered, the team will begin to gather data (see below).

Data will be gathered sequentially and the data gathered will inform the evolving research question and the type of data gathered. The team will begin by gathering quantitative data on the academic performance of students. This information will inform the content of semi structured interviews with students experiencing homelessness.

Once all this data is gathered (and any further data that the team sees fit as the research is underway and new information is discovered), the team will analyze the data (see below). This analysis will inform the advocacy plan to be created by the team. The advocacy plan will likely include a mentoring program for students experiencing homelessness at Foster Elementary School and an plan to advocate for more supports of homeless students in the Sweet Home community.

**Sample**

The population of focus for this study will be students experiencing homelessness in the SHSD. The researchers will begin by seeking broad information on the academic performances of students experiencing homelessness in the district. This information will include all students who are known to the district to have experienced homelessness in the 2015/16 school year.

Because this school district is not very large (about 2,270 students) and because information on student’s housing status is highly confidential, chain sampling will be utilized to gather interviewees in the study. That is, the student researchers and the school counselor will reach out to the students who they know are currently experiencing homelessness to request their informed consent to participate in the research study. The students who have been accessed may know additional students in the SHSD who are experiencing homelessness and share this information with the researchers, who will request their informed consent, and so on.

**Obtaining Consent.** Because most of the sample population will be individuals under the age of 18, the team will obtain consent from both parents and the student participants. In obtaining consent, the team will outline the purpose of the study, any possible risks in participation, the potential benefits of the study, confidentiality factors, contact information to direct any questions or concerns, and the conditions of participation (including the right to refuse or withdraw participation). After ensuring that the participants (and their parents, when applicable) fully understand and consent, they will sign a written document.

**Measures**

By gathering all this information, the team will obtain quantitative measures on the academic performance of students experiencing homelessness, compared with the academic performance of the general population. The team will also gather qualitative data on the student’s strengths and resilience factors and barriers to accessing education, by facilitating interviews with students experiencing homelessness.

**Data Collection Procedures**

1. Locate a group of students at SHHS who are currently experiencing homelessness and who are interested in conducting research and advocacy for other students.
2. Hold a meeting with interested students, outlining the purpose of the research and determining their level of interest and commitment.
3. Once a group of committed student researchers is located, a steering meeting will be held, where students will discuss the process of the data collection. This meeting will inform the focus of the evolving research question.
4. Through the district homeless liaison and the SHSD report card online, the team will gather SHSD qualitative data on homelessness rates and the academic performance of students experiencing homelessness, compared to the general student population.
5. The team will conduct a semi-structured interview with students experiencing homelessness, to discover their common strengths, skills, abilities, behaviors, and struggles as students in the SHSD.
6. The team will triangulate and analyze the data that has been gathered.
7. The team will use the data analysis to inform their advocacy plan, which may include a mentorship program that will be provided to the Foster Elementary School students by high school students.
8. Information gathered in this study will be shared with community of Sweet Home.

**Data Analysis**

**Theoretical Basis**

This research will be conducted and analyzed within the pragmatic framework. As such, the research team will analyze the relationship between the data in a way that is determined by the team as meaningful. Our determination will be based on previous literature and within the context of homelessness (as most of the team will be comprised of students who have experienced homelessness). Pragmatic researchers recognize that there is a single reality, but that individuals and groups have interpretations of said reality. This study is conducted to understand the reality being lived by students experiencing homelessness in Sweet Home. In line with the pragmatic ideology, the effectiveness of the research will be based on the ability of the research to answer the research question and to address the research problem. Through this research, the team hopes to discover the implications of specific qualities and behaviors. These results will be utilized to promote freedom, equity, and justice, by initiating the advocacy plan. Through this process, the team will continually reflect on the possible implications and consequences of the research (both positive and negative) and strive to reduce the potential to harm the homeless student community.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The team will utilize inferential statistics to examine the academic performance of students experiencing homelessness, compared with the larger Sweet Home student population. They will do so by conducting a *t* test, to determine if there is a significant difference in academic achievement between housed and homeless students. This data will be placed in a visual graph.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The team will also conduct a qualitative analysis on the data gathered from the interviews of students experiencing homelessness. First, the team will prepare the data for analysis. They will determine what information recorded in the interviews will need to be transcribed and begin transcribing. The team will also consider what non-verbal behaviors to note in transcription. Once the data is transcribed, the team will organize the transcriptions in a well-labeled system.

Next, the team will begin to explore the data, by taking notes on the transcriptions, asking questions, and creating graphic descriptions of the possible relationships between data. Then, the team will decide what is information is significant to the results enough to code and document the reasons behind these decisions. In the initial coding phase, the team will code words, lines, and themes. In the focused coding phase, the team will compare the coding themes of individual interviews to the larger body of data.

**Data Interpretation**

The quantitative data on academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness will be combined with the qualitative data obtained by the interviews, to understand the meaning behind the data. Specifically, the researchers will be looking for consistent struggles, strengths, and behaviors exhibited by students experiencing homelessness and how these interact with academic performance and school experiences. Through this analysis, the team will aim to discover how student strengths and behaviors (specifically accessing mental health and demonstrating self-advocacy) contribute to positive experiences of school (such as academic competency). The team will also seek to identify the barriers to their academic success.

**Dependability**

In addition, the researchers will triangulate the data, to ensure that it is consistent and dependable. This measure is similar to the measure of reliability in post positivist research. The team will compare the reports of academic performance described in the interview, with the quantitative data being collected. As the team begins to interpret data and reach conclusions, they will document the process they utilized, so that the reader can critically consider the process. This will assist in establishing dependability. In addition, the team will seek a dependability audit, where an outside person reviews the research and analysis, to ensure that the conclusions reached are founded.

**Confirmability**

The team will also work to ensure the quality of the results produced by the study, or the confirmability. This measure is similar to the measure of validity in post positivist research. The team will consult with people who are familiar with the phenomena, but who are not a part of the research team itself. In doing this, the team can check the conclusions and interpretations they deducted from the research, to make sure that the conclusions they reached are not completely off base. The team will also compare the results of the study to previous peer-reviewed literature on academic performances, strengths, and barriers of homeless youth.

**Avoidance of Bias**

The research team members will acknowledge and reflect upon their social locations and how they might impact both the administering of the research and the interpretation of results. For example, although most of the team will be comprised of adolescents who have experienced homelessness, there is an implicit power imbalance in that one team member is an adult school counselor, who never experienced homelessness. These social locations and power imbalances will be in the forefront of conversations about building the research and interpreting results. In doing so, the team will come as close to ensuring that the research problem will be created and the data will be analyzed in the context of rural homelessness.

**Limitations**

Although the team will attempt to make this research as founded, unbiased, reliable and valid, there are limitations inherent in the research study.

**Sample Related Issues**

Because the sample is comprised solely of SHSD students (who do not represent the demographic make-up of the larger community), the generalizability of this study is limited. For example, most of the students in SHSD are white, in broader society, people of color are overrepresented in homelessness populations. In addition, chain sampling limits access to students who are connected to the people in the research team and those who have been interviewed. Finally, the research that this study has been built upon and will be compared to is different from the sample in this study. Thus, there may be difficulties with triangulation, making dependability and confirmability difficult.

**Limitations of Mixed Methods Design**

There are some limitations inherent in utilizing a mixed methods design. For example, the sources of data may conflict. In such a case, the team will need to explain the conflicting results. In addition, there is a conflict in the theoretical basis between qualitative and quantitative data. The team must be careful to ensure that the standards are upheld for both types of research.

**Interpretation of Results**

The aim of this study is to give the research team and the larger Sweet Home community information on how to address the issue of homelessness in a positive, supportive and proactive way. However, because this study will compare academic performances of students experiencing homelessness to housed students, there is a potential that readers might interpret the research in a negative way. For example, if homeless students have lower academic performances, people may interpret this as being a reflection on their actual intellectual abilities, instead of a lack of educational equity and outside barriers. Thus, it will be very important that the research team emphasize student strengths and the outside barriers to success, rather being deficit-oriented regarding the students.

It will be important that the research team (or at least a team of students who have experienced homelessness) remain involved in presenting the research and in designing an advocacy program after the research has been analyzed. Otherwise, there is a risk that people in positions of power (such as school employees) who have not experienced homelessness make the decisions regarding how the research is utilized to instigate action.

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