Adolescent Women's Perspectives of Homelessness in the Canadian North

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Abstract

Youth homelessness in Canada has been highlighted in the media as a growing

problem. Research with homeless youth, while limited, has illuminated the heterogeneity

of the youth homeless population, and identified a number of factors that challenge

researchers. As well, youth homelessness research specific to the Canadian north is

extremely limited, and adolescent homeless women in the north have been overlooked as

an individual population. Data collected in many jurisdictions with adult and male

homeless populations has been generalized to young women. The purpose of this study

was to explore the perceptions and experiences of adolescent homeless women in

Whitehorse, Yukon. The study design was qualitative and utilized in-depth semi-structured

interviews and a focus group for data collection. The foundations of the study were

grounded in structural social work theory and approached from a feminist perspective. The

goal of the study was to develop an understanding of how adolescent women experience

homelessness, how the young women believe adolescent women's homelessness should be

addressed, and to provide recommendations that may lead to social change in Whitehorse.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 Introduction

According to Novac, Serge, Eberle, and Brown (2002), there is general consensus among researchers that homelessness may be relative or absolute. Many perceive homelessness as a continuum ranging from absolute to relative (Higgitt et al., 2003). Absolute homelessness is defined as an absence of physical shelter or "houselessness" (Novac et al., 2002), including lack of a place to sleep and to which mail may be delivered. Higgitt et al. (2003) define absolute homelessness as a complete lack of long-term shelter. Relative homelessness is defined as insecure, inappropriate, inadequate, or unstable housing (Novac et al., 2002; Higgitt et al., 2003). It includes couch surfing, staying with friends or extended family, and short-term rentals. Lack of personal safety and access to employment, education, and health care are components of relative homelessness (Charette, 1991 as cited in Novac, et al., 2002). Robert, Pauze, and Fournier (2005) differentiate between absolute and hidden, or relative, homelessness by focusing on whether youth utilize their social networks or public places in their experiences of homelessness.

Since the mid 1990s, the Government of Canada has recognized that homelessness cannot be ignored, and that it is the responsibility of both government and communities to, at a minimum, alleviate the conditions of homelessness, and at best, to address the root causes and reduce or eliminate it. This has come about through the increased awareness of the Canadian public about homelessness, and the growing global focus on homelessness. The Canadian Public Health Association (1997) claims that homelessness has emerged into a position of prominence and is a fundamental health issue for Canadians. This position is reflected in actions of advocacy groups, and non-government agencies. For example, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) reports that advocacy groups have

pressured the Canadian government to double rent supplements and to provide new social housing.

Also, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) pressured the Canadian government to

increase the budget for social housing (CCPA, 2000 as cited in Novac et al., 2002).

The CHRA and the Status of Women Canada (Novac, 2002) and the Canadian Mortgage and

Housing Corporation (CMHC) (Novac, Brown, & Bourbonnais, 1996; Novac, Brown, & Gallant,

1999; Serge, 1999; Kraus, Eberle, & Serge, 2001) have supported research in the area of Canadian

homelessness. The research projects completed through these institutions in the past nine years have

focused on young women's homelessness, youth homelessness, adult women and homelessness, and

best practices addressing homelessness (see Appendix A which provides a Summary of Key Youth

Homelessness Studies in North America along with the key findings).

In December 1999, the federal government announced its commitment in the form of $753

million toward the alleviation and prevention of homelessness in Canada (Kraus et al., 2001). Of this

amount, $59 million was allocated to youth under Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, and $43

million was allocated to the Shelter Enhancement Program over 4 years, which included an expansion

of the program to include youth shelters and second stage housing. As well, $305 million was

committed to the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, which has resulted in 113

community based projects geared toward identifying needs and developing strategies to address

homelessness. This project has included a number of initiatives for youth homelessness in particular,

including research projects.

The National Report on Investments and Accomplishments (Government of Canada, n.d.)

reports that this initiative resulted in 9000 new, permanent beds. This report states that 725 different

sheltering facilities and 403 different support facilities were constructed, renovated, or enhanced.

Some 203 housing units, including shelters, supportive, transitional and affordable were created. In

addition, 3,600 support services were either created or enhanced. A thousand different capacity projects were established and 29 knowledge and research activities were completed at both national and regional levels.

According to the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative website (http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/initiave/index_e.asp.), the Canadian Government has renewed the National Homelessness Initiative for an additional three years, and with a financial commitment of $405 million. The purpose of the ongoing initiative is to support communities to implement measures to assist homeless individuals and families in achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency.

Whitehorse Adolescent Homelessness

The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness is a group of community stakeholders who are working together to address Whitehorse homelessness (Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, 2001). The group was formed in 2000 to implement the federal homelessness initiative in Whitehorse. In the summer of 2000, community stakeholders met with federal officials to begin the process of community collaboration in the area of Whitehorse homelessness. In September 2000, the official Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness was formed and took the lead on developing a community plan for Whitehorse. The group consists of representatives from the federal and territorial governments, the city, the non-government sector, and from First Nation agencies. Membership includes such groups and agencies as the Yukon Anti Poverty Coalition, Yukon Housing Corporation, the City of Whitehorse, the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon Territorial Government (Health and Social Services; Justice), the Salvation Army, the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, and Yukon Family Services Association (The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, 2001).

According to the Whitehorse Community Plan on Homelessness, the community has a number of services to offer to youth (Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, 2001). These are

predominantly in the areas of training, counselling (during normal business hours), youth websites, a youth addictions worker's presence in three schools, government services for youth in care and for youth who are on the case load of a social worker with Health and Social Services, special projects (i.e. Youth Shaping the Future), and two youth centres (day and evening services). They have identified that welfare services, housing and financial assistance, a safe house, a residence for teen mothers attending school, services for children of near homelessness, and services for youth in care are services that are required for youth under the age of 19 years. These recommendations were based on a combination of research and consultation with stakeholders and the community. Homeless youth input was obtained through House and Home – A Study of Whitehorse Youth at Risk of Homelessness (McDowell and Madsen, 2001).

Purpose of Study

Despite the recent research, intervention, and prevention projects targeted toward Canadian homelessness, homelessness in general continues to be an ongoing concern in Canadian communities. Higgitt et al. (2003) report that although we do not know how many youth are homeless, the number of young people without adequate housing is a growing concern. In a recent Canadian study involving street youth in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Higgitt et al.), researchers found that serious gaps in services and problems with present services exist, and many youth fall through the cracks of our social safety net. Systems meant to support youth and families, and provide interventions, fail to meet the needs of youth experiencing neglect, abuse, and family conflicts, resulting in an ongoing stream of youth to the street.

The issue of homelessness locally was highlighted during a cold snap in Whitehorse in late January 2005 (CHON-FM 12:30 p.m. News, January 13, 2005). Two staff members from the No Fixed Address Outreach Van were interviewed about the cold weather and the impact on homelessness in

Whitehorse. Both interviewees described high numbers of youth on the streets, accessing the van's services. One of the Outreach Van staff members noted that although there has been talk of a youth shelter in Whitehorse for years, nothing has been done. He stated that the need exists, and that youth are engaging in couch surfing, they are participating in survival sex, and living with abuse.

Campbell and Frymire (2005) report that in Whitehorse, there is a lack of awareness about homelessness issues, particularly in regard to youth, families and children. They also state that little evidence can be seen of the visible homeless, and no knowledge exists of them. Although northern quantitative data is lacking, Higgitt et al. (2003) note that in Calgary, the incidence of youth homelessness is increasing, an increasing number of youth are chronically homeless, and the age at which youth become homeless is decreasing.

Whitehorse is an isolated northern city of approximately 22,000 people, located in the Yukon Territory. For this study, programs that adolescent homeless women consider to be important, effective, and worthwhile are of particular interest. The intended goal for this research project is to provide research findings that make a difference, and to help move the Whitehorse community toward homelessness prevention and intervention action through increased awareness and social change.

The primary purpose of this study is to determine what Whitehorse adolescent women, who are or who have been homeless, perceive the best solutions to their homelessness to be, and to make recommendations for services based on this information. Applied research may be used to illuminate a societal concern, and to provide information that may then be used in program development (Patton, 1990). Through the process of this investigation, adolescent women will be provided with a voice and an opportunity to communicate their knowledge and opinions. The information obtained from this study will provide a base for recommendations for community services, future research, and social action.

Significance of Study

The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) commissioned the Northern Research Institute to conduct a Whitehorse based study on youth homelessness in 2001. The primary purpose of this study was to increase the level of understanding about youth homelessness in Whitehorse (McDowell & Madsen, 2001). The question of how to improve the living situations of the homeless youth in Whitehorse was addressed in two questions in the final section of McDowell and Madsen's 2001 survey. The questions were "what kind of services would you use, if they were available?" and "What services do you presently use?". The participants of this survey included men and women between the age of 13 and 29 years of age. Thus, the perceptions and needs of adolescent homeless women were not clearly identified through this study.

In 2001, this researcher conducted an exploratory study (Le Camp, 2001) for the purpose of ascertaining service providers' perceptions of the Whitehorse community's adolescent women's homelessness issue. The participants included four service providers, including one staff member from each of the local women's transition home, the women's center, a youth center, as well as a youth outreach worker. These participants were unanimous in their conviction that adolescent women's homelessness is a serious issue in Whitehorse. The data collected in this study suggests links between the need to leave home because of violence, a lack of services in our community, and the development of a vulnerable population at high risk for victimization and exploitation due to homelessness.

The interest in young women's homelessness arose through experiences and observations as an employee at the Yukon Women's Transition Home in Whitehorse (2001). It became apparent to the researcher that although emergency shelter was provided for women aged 19 years and older if they were potential victims of violence, younger women unaccompanied by an adult did not have access to

overnight emergency shelter in order to escape violence. Under special circumstances, the Yukon

Women's Transition Home provides services to young women under the age of 19 years (B. Powick,

personal communication, November 15, 2005). However, the transition home must be very cautious

in providing shelter services to youth under the age of 19 as these services are not supported by the

Yukon Children's Act, and there are serious liability issues. Their only real choices appeared to be

friends, family, or the street. The lack of safe alternatives puts young women at high risk of

victimization and ill health.

The focus on adolescent women, as opposed to youth in general, is a result of this researcher's

interest in women's issues. Results from studies that have utilized male participants, and used

traditional research methods, have been generalized to women. As a result, women's ways of knowing

and telling their stories have not been well utilized, and therefore, women's experiences have not been

well documented in many areas. Reinharz (1992) confirms that it is widely accepted that women's

realities are different than men's. Other researchers also state that traditional research has not

adequately captured the content and quality of women's lives and experiences (Campbell & Schram,

1995). As well, Reinharz points out that changes in consciousness arise among relatively powerless

groups through feminist based research when they may examine their situation in a new light. Thus,

providing adolescent women with a voice may result in increased awareness, in addition to more

accurate identification and descriptions of potentially effective programs. Therefore, this study is

undertaken specifically for young women, to explore their experiences in ways that will enable them to

tell their stories as completely and honestly as possible to provide the community with improved

understanding of the issues facing young women who experience homelessness, and what effective

solutions might be.

Recently, Gehmair, Cochrane, and Bolton (2004) completed a research project on Whitehorse poverty that culminated in the production of a video entitled "2 Cents Worth". A significant focus of their video is homelessness, and they estimate that there are approximately 15 to 24 homeless people in Whitehorse on any given day. This number refers to "absolute" homelessness, and is based on their conclusion derived from estimates of local service providers. Whitehorse currently has one homeless shelter which has ten beds, and local experts interviewed in this film were clear that in their opinions, this shelter cannot meet the existing and emerging need in this community. While the purpose of the video appears to be to raise awareness of the homelessness issues in Whitehorse, provide insights into the extent of the issue, and increase understanding of relative homelessness, it is clearly not intended as a quantitative study of the problem.

The research proposed herein will break new ground as it will be "intervention research", designed to address significant gaps in both knowledge and research in Whitehorse with regard to the potential solutions of adolescent women's homelessness, from the perspective of adolescent homeless women. The people of Whitehorse, as a community, have been unable to effectively address adolescent women's homelessness because, at least in part, of a lack of knowledge of what these young women need in the way of services. In order to move from a research focus to an intervention/implementation focus, we need to have a solid understanding of what services might actually be successful in our community. An important measure of success will be how well utilized each intervention is for specific populations, and whether positive outcomes can be identified for young women who access services.

Currently, our society - instead of our community – tends to take action against homeless youth as opposed to action for homeless youth. Homeless youth are criminalized (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997), or institutionalized (Corrado, Odgers, & Cohen, 2000), because they desire to escape

abusive or conflict laden homes. Running away, exchanging sex for food or shelter, and substance abuse are not crimes but symptoms of a larger problem. We have child protection laws, and with these laws, we justify removing children from the street and putting them back in their families, or in other families or institutions. Child protection is a structure of control - where a few people have control over the individual, the family, and the community (McKnight, 1997). The issue of control and participation in the generation of solutions has been noted by youth in other jurisdictions to be of high importance and to be relevant to the success of interventions (CMHC, 2002b; Karabanow, 2003).

In order to support Whitehorse adolescent women who are either experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, we need to ascertain what community services they envision as prospective solutions. Youth must be provided with a meaningful choice of services that they consider useful to them, and they must not be forced to place themselves "in care" in order to access services. If the services are not accessible and appropriate, they will not be utilized, and the youth homeless population will continue to increase. Without this clear and effective support, youth will continue to make second best choices that put them at risk, while protecting themselves from dangers elsewhere.

By becoming aware of potentially effective solutions identified by homeless adolescent women, community members can make informed choices and make social change happen. This study will provide information and insights that will enable the community to effectively address the issue of adolescent women's homelessness. This will be accomplished by asking the population experiencing the problem to provide constructive solutions to the problem.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Due to the difficulties in counting a largely invisible and highly mobile population, accurate statistics on the number of homeless adolescents in Canada do not exist. A number of cities have made estimates based on data garnered from shelters, however, the accuracy of this quantitative information is highly questionable given that many underage youth avoid official services (Robert et al., 2005). On the other hand, qualitative research describing the homelessness experiences of youth, although limited, has provided insights into many of the issues and concerns related to youth homelessness. American research on youth homelessness suffers similar limitations to the Canadian research, but is useful all the same. The experiences of youth and impacts of homelessness studied in American settings by necessity are generalized to the Canadian population to supplement the paucity of Canadian research.

Systematic research with this population is difficult because the definition of homelessness varies amongst researchers and the participants themselves, and because homeless youth are a mobile and largely invisible population. Issues that have been perceived by researchers to be relevant include health and well-being (Yates, MacKenzie, Pennbridge, & Cohen, 1988), risk factors and resiliencies (Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001; Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998), criminalization and institutionalization (Corrado et al., 2000), events precipitating the homelessness condition and causes of homelessness (Janus, Archambault, & Brown, 1995; Whitbeck et al., 1997), gender issues (MacLean, Embry, & Cauce, 1999; Ryan, Kilmer, Cause, Watanabe, & Hoyt, 2000; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce, & Paradise, 2001), and northern and rural factors (Whitbeck & Simmons, 1990; Krause et al., 2001). All in all, the majority of North American research examines isolated factors of youth homelessness outside the context of society and without explanatory frameworks.

Researchers have typically included homeless youth in their research as participants. With respect to research focused on developing recommendations for solutions and interventions, however, the opinions of youth have not been the primary focus of the research. Researchers tend to develop their own recommendations, a process which the youth are not normally engaged in. The purpose of this study is to determine what Whitehorse homeless adolescent women perceive the best solutions to adolescent women's homelessness to be. Thus, the participants will be asked to generate solutions.

Counting Homeless Youth

According to the Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown (2002), Canadian statistics relating to youth homelessness are scarce. Kraus et al. (2001) report that while there is no accurate number of Canadian homeless youth, key informants of the Canadian 2001 Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness report that they are observing a rising trend. There is an absence of systematic data on youth homelessness in particular, and quantitative research has focused primarily on shelter use in Canadian cities (Novac et al., 1996). Roberts et al. (2005) report that research that utilizes participants accessed through homeless services excludes a significant number of youth who experience hidden homelessness. In terms of number, a study done by Caputo, Weiler, and Anderson (1997), The Street Lifestyle Study, cited an early estimate by Radford et al. (1989) which estimated that there are approximately 150,000 runaway youth in Canada.

In terms of gender distribution, Novac et al. (2002) report that the limited research that does exist indicates that young women make up a third to a half of the homeless youth population in Canada. Kraus et al. (2001) state that the number of adolescent homeless women is on the rise. The National Missing Children Services (2001; as cited in Higgitt et al., 2003) state that the majority of reported runaways under the age of 18 are female.

The lack of systematic data is not the only problem with youth homelessness research. Novac et al. (1996) point out that Canadian statistics are problematic because they are not representative of the whole homeless population (which covers both absolute and invisible homelessness) as they focus predominantly on those individuals using shelters.

Likewise, American researchers believe that the numbers of homeless youth in the United States are growing (Cauce, 2000), and the Institute of Medicine (1988, as cited in Cauce & Morgan, 1994) advise that youth are the most understudied homeless group. Recently, Van Leeuwen (2004) found that the number of street youth in Denver Colorado has increased by more than one hundred percent over five years. These trends may be generalized to the Canadian situation as well because our social issues do not differ significantly from those in the United States, and Canadian homeless youth have similar life experiences as youth in the United States.

The primary reason for the lack of systematic, reliable data regarding the number of homeless youth is related to the characteristics of the population itself. Both Canadian and American researchers state that homeless youth are a difficult-to-follow and mobile population (McDowell & Madsen, 2001; Pollio & Thompson, 2000). They are largely a "hidden population" who are not typically found in shelters, are visually indistinguishable from other youth, and above all, they avoid researchers (McDowell & Madsen, 2001; Ringwalt et al., 1998). Pollio, Thompson, and North (2000) note as well that youth are difficult to track, and have received limited research attention. Ringwalt et al. found that homeless youth actually avoid contact with shelters, medical services, police, and service providers, which clearly limits the usefulness of any data originating from these sources.

Defining Homelessness

Another complication related to the measurement of homelessness is how homelessness can be defined, and what it means. Homelessness research that has been conducted over the past

twenty-five years has utilized inconsistent definitions of homelessness – from definitions encompassing only absolute homelessness, to definitions encompassing a variety of combinations of absolute and relative homelessness, to definitions that are totally inclusive of absolute and relative homelessness, and those at risk of homelessness (Peressini & McDonald, 2000). Murray (1990, as cited in Peressini and McDonald, 2000) report that the United Nations considers that people are homeless when they either have no home and live outdoors or in shelters, or they live in homes that do not meet UN basic standards. According to Murray, basic UN standards include access to safe water and sanitation, affordable price, secure tenancy, personal safety, and access to health care and employment.

Lack of consistency in our definitions is problematic. If homelessness is measured based on the number of individuals using shelters, then the groups who are staying with friends or extended families, living in substandard or overcrowded housing, or on the streets but not accessing services, will not be included. Underage youth avoid official services because they do not want to be reported to the authorities (Robert et al, 2005), and therefore, shelter statistics are a very unreliable indication of the extent of youth homelessness in any city. This claim is substantiated by data. For example, according to Statistics Canada (2001), no homeless youth utilized a shelter in Whitehorse during 2001. However, according to scholars like McDowell and Madsen (2001), there were definitely a number of homeless youth living in Whitehorse during 2001.

According to Stewart et al's (2004) study for the Social Support Research Program of the University of Alberta, youth are homeless if they:

- o Have no home at all and are living on the streets;
- o Are living in a place that was not intended to be housing or not a suitable long term residence; or

o Are at risk of becoming homeless through losing their home, being discharged from an institution/facility with nowhere to go; or

o Through loss of income support.

If homelessness is defined not by physical characteristics, but by emotional qualities, then how homelessness is measured ought to be changed. According to Novac et al. (1996), women attach different meanings to the concept of "home". These concepts of home include, but are not limited to, emotional and physical well-being, loving and caring social relationships, and personal control and privacy. Homelessness, then, is defined by the absence, or poor quality, of these characteristics. Viewed from this perspective, homelessness may be the solution to the problem of housing or home (Tomas & Dittmar, 1995). If a person leaves home in order to avoid abuse, for example, then homelessness is the solution to the problem.

Ringwalt et al. (1998) state that estimates of American homeless subpopulation size are usually based on researching the number and characteristics of a homeless group at a given point in time, and that these estimates tend to be biased toward various groups. For example, they state that this method of analyzing youth homelessness leads to estimates of average duration that are biased upward, and estimates of prevalence incidence that are biased downward. Since homelessness among youth is much more episodic than chronic (Robertson, 1991 and Institute of Medicine, 1988, as cited in Ringwalt et al., 1998), snapshots cannot reveal the true picture. Ringwalt et al. (1998) further argue that measuring youth homelessness using longitudinal methods would provide a much more accurate picture of the extent of youth homelessness than would cross sectional methods. Novac et al. (2002) also state that cross sectional research methods miss the cycles of youth homelessness, and over represent those youth who are homeless for longer periods. Schewitzer and Hier (1994) also contend that longitudinal studies are required in order to fully understand the extent and characteristics of youth homelessness.

Profile of Homeless Youth in Canada

Miller, Donahue, Este, and Hofer (2004) report that homeless adolescents are a very diverse group, and providing a typical profile is difficult. They classify homeless youth into two groups, those who are runners (and do not return home) and in-and-outers (those who run as a coping mechanism and return home episodically). Thus, youth homelessness is a solution to problems. According to Bridgman (2001), classifications of homeless youth include runaways, throw-a-ways, system kids, and street kids (sleeping rough). Wright (1997; cited in Peressini & McDonald, 2000) confirms that the homeless are a group of subpopulations with specialized needs, requiring specialized programs, services, and policies. Again, homelessness is described as a solution to problematic youth experience.

Haber and Toro (2004) report that adolescents are the single age group most at risk of experiencing homelessness. According to a Government of Canada 2003 report entitled "Youth Profile Toronto/York Service Delivery Sector", youth under the age of 18 is one of the two fastest growing groups in the homeless population, and three quarters of the homeless youth do not utilize the shelter system in Toronto. Callaghan (1990) reports on a study that found that there are between 20,000 and 25,000 homeless youth in Toronto, of which half are between the ages of 12 and 18 years. Callaghan (1990) states that the need to secure good long-term housing is their most pressing concern; they are unable to establish themselves in work, school, or home life without stable housing; and they experience discrimination because of their age, limited income, and limited life experience. While homeless youth are widely perceived to abuse substances, Mallet, Rosenthal, and Keys (2005) report that just over half the youth involved in a recent study confirmed that substance use was a factor in leading to their homelessness, and a quarter of the sample indicated that they began to use substances after they became homeless. Given the prevalence of substance use among homeless youth, it would

undoubtedly play a role in the ability to youth to secure employment, attend school, and maintain secure housing.

In their study of youth homelessness in Calgary, Miller et al. (2004) found that most youth felt a sense of optimism, and that their homelessness was temporary. In fact, according to Peressini and McDonald (2000), homelessness is a fluid and dynamic process, which occurs and reoccurs over time. These researchers argue that the majority of the homeless population commence with short homeless episodes, and proceed to longer and longer periods of homelessness until they become chronically homeless. The longer people remain on the street, the more likely they are to remain homeless (Dear & Wolch, 1987; Jencks, 1994 as cited in Peressini & McDonald, 2000).

Population Characteristics

According to The Street Lifestyle Report (Health Canada, 1997), the lower age of street youth has been identified as 12 years, while the upper age may be considered to be 24 years. Compared to male homeless youth, female homeless youth are more likely to be on the younger end of the continuum. Researchers found that youth between the ages of 12 and 17 made up 24% of the homeless in Calgary, and that 31% of these youth were female (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2002, as cited by Miller et al., 2004).

Hagan and McCarthy (1990, as cited in CMHC, 1999) found that Toronto street youth leave home, on average, at the age of 13 years. In a more recent study, Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, and Cauce (2001) found that American children who leave home at a young age run away numerous times, and may develop a pattern where they return home for brief periods and then run again. Both Canadian and American youth who are exposed to the streets at a young age often spend more time on the streets, form ties with deviant peers, and engage in criminal street networks (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999, as cited in Tyler et al., 2001). Street youth frequently develop social

relationships, become members of street families, and carry weapons in order to obtain some degree of safety (Novac et al., 1999).

Researchers of a study in Canada report that families of street youth are likely to have been disrupted, resulting in the youth living in foster or group homes (Novac et al., 1999). This is confirmed by Robert et al. (2005) in their study of youth who were under the care of the youth protection system at the time of the study, and youth who were under care of the youth protection system at some other point in their lives. As well, numerous American studies (Kurtz, Jarvis, & Jurtz, 1991; Koegel, Melamid, & Burnam, 1995; Herman & Susser 1997) state that many homeless youth have histories of out of home care. These findings are supported by other literature which suggests that, in general, homeless youth typically come from conflict-laden, violent, and dysfunctional homes (Schweitzer & Hier 1994; Janus et al., 1995; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Cauce, 2000). In the United States, Whitbeck et al. conducted a study to determine if homeless youth reports of neglect and abuse in their homes were biased or even false. In interviews with parents of homeless youth, they found that the neglect and abuse that were reported by the youth were substantiated. Recent Canadian research confirms that very high levels of childhood abuses are common in runaway and homeless youths' histories (Novac et al., 2002). Countless researchers have verified that homeless youth have experienced abuse and neglect in their homes, and that they are vulnerable to a number of problems once they are on the street.

Chen, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2004) report that a history of sexual abuse puts adolescent homeless women at higher risk for chronic drug use and adult homelessness. Noell, Rohde, Seeley, and Ochs (2001) link early sexual abuse with later victimization, and found that a significant amount of sexual activity among adolescent homeless women was involuntary. As well, Rosenthal and Mallett (2003) found that 58.3% of homeless adolescent women studied reported having unwanted sex out of fear, or because they were unable to refuse due to being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Whitbeck et al. (1997) report that high levels of family violence and parental rejection, and critical levels of physical and sexual abuse occurred in the homes of homeless youth interviewed. Kurtz et al. (1991) observe family, personal, and school problems among homeless youth. MacLean et al. (1999) report high levels of victimization and psychological maladjustment. Whitbeck et al. (2001) report that homeless youth are put into a deviant subculture. Whitbeck et al. (1999) state that learning to survive on the street involves learning to be antisocial, and that interactions reinforce low self concepts. Researchers like Browne and Finkelhor (1986) and Conte (1985) (as cited in Cauce and Morgan, 1994) suggest that homeless youth are at high risk for fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic reactions, sexual problems, drug and alcohol abuse, poor school adjustment, and delinquent acting-out and aggressive behaviours. Emotional and behavioural problems, along with substance abuse and physical health problems, are not uncommon in this population (Cauce & Morgan, 1994).

Homeless adolescents are also at high risk of suicide. Rotheram-Borus (1993) found that more than a third of the homeless youth studied had attempted suicide in the past, and that many had attempted suicide in the month preceding entering a youth homelessness program. Kidd and Kral (2003), in a study examining suicide and prostitution, found that a day without food and shelter was often described as the breaking point for the participants, leading to suicidal behaviour.

In spite of the predisposition toward emotional and behavioural problems that traumatic home events and subsequent street experiences may instill in youth, positive outcomes are not unheard of in some situations. McCarthy, Hagan, and Martin (2002) argue that youth friendships can augment or replace the intimacy, support and other resources typically provided by families. They found that street family associations, also known as "fictive kin" or "fictive street families", generate social capital that results in reduced victimization. These researchers define social capital as having two intertwined components: relationships and intangible resources of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity. In their 2002

study, McCarthy et al. found that fictive street families generally improved homeless youths' abilities to procure shelter, food, and income, in addition to providing protection from victimization.

Health and Well-Being

Everything about homelessness degrades health (Wright, 1990). In fact, according to Wright (1990), no other socially defined risk factor appears to have greater impact on a person's physical well-being. Wright further contends that in extreme cases, homelessness can be fatal. This is proven in some recent studies, such as a Quebec study which found that the mortality rate among a group of homeless youth was 13 times higher than for youth in the general population (Regie regionale, 1998, as cited in Novac et al., 2002).

Homelessness greatly impacts whether a person is able to access adequate health care. Wright (1990) states that the transient and mobile nature of the American homeless population makes continuous contact difficult; the average homeless person does not maintain an appointment diary, resulting in unkept appointments and irregularly ingested medications; and homeless individuals are often untrusting and fearful of health care settings and the appearance of anything official. Adolescents may lack parental permission to access health care, and they are typically unable to follow up with prescribed treatments when they do (Jackson & McSwane, 1992). Lack of transportation and disrespectful treatment by health care providers are additional barriers to health care access as reported by Wojtusik & White (1998).

Rew (2002) explains further that expending energy to cope with traumatic life situations and survival reduces the time and energy available for preventative activities such as immunizations and annual health check ups. In fact, she states that youth may not perceive that they have a long future to be concerned about. This was confirmed in a recent report of a Montreal study (Ubelacker, 2004), where the researchers found that homelessness itself is a predictor of early death for youth.

North and Smith (1993) and Benda (1991) (as cited in Pollio, McDonald, & North, 1996) report that the differences between needs perceived by the homeless individuals and needs identified by the system are barriers to appropriate service provision. In addition to inadequate matching between perceived needs and available services, health care services in the United States are fragmented (Rew, 2002). Jackson and McSwane (1992) report that in general, health care for the homeless is crisis oriented rather than preventive. In addition, the homeless youth experience biased attitudes on the part of caregivers that reflect a belief that the homeless are unworthy of high quality care (Jackson & McSwane, 1992).

Another factor that appears to be significant to youth well-being is affiliation with society, or social connectedness (Cohen et al., 1992, Blankertz et al., 1992, Morse et al., 1994, as cited in Pollio et al., 1996). Rew (2002) studied the relationships between sexual abuse, social connectedness, and loneliness with perceived well-being and health status. The evidence she found suggests that homeless youth with histories of sexual abuse perceive themselves to be less socially connected, and that social connectedness is inversely related to loneliness, and positively related to well-being. Overall, well-being and health status were found to be lower among homeless youth than among youth who were not homeless.

Research has shown that homeless individuals commonly feel that no one cares, have a low sense of self-worth, and have a sense of limited control over their lives (Kinzel, 1991). Karabanow (2003) confirms these findings through his Canadian research, in which youth reported feelings of being alone, of having little purpose, of feeling alienated and marginalized, and of perceptions that most people saw them as thieves, criminals, and the dregs of society. Earlier, Jackson and McSwane (1992) reported that homeless persons may be viewed as dirty, frightening, and crazy. These thoughts, feelings, and experiences directly impact physical well-being as health seeking behaviours and

motivation for self-care are negatively influenced by real and perceived exclusion and discrimination. Well-being is also impacted by environmental conditions commonly experienced by homeless individuals. For example, nutritional deficiencies, trauma, and persistent exposure to dampness all contribute to poor health (Kinzel, 1991).

Ironically, ill health is also a reflection of subsistence strategies that homeless youth are known to adopt for survival purposes (Tyler et al., 2001). The difficulties that homeless youth experience finding food and shelter are well documented (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992; Ringwalt et al., 1998). These youth are often sexually exploited, and many exchange sex for basic necessities in order to survive, leading to high safety risks (Whitbeck & Simons, 1990) and high health risks (Yates et al., 1988). According to McKay (2004), in Canadian street youth, chlamydia rates were nine times higher than in Canadian housed youth. Other known health risks include HIV, Hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis (Kraus et al., 2001) and depression, suicide, and mental health problems (Yates et al., 1988).

Another barrier to health care services for homeless youth who suffer from psychological and psychiatric problems may result from challenging behaviour. According to Pawsey and Fuller (1993), youth may miss out on help for their challenging behaviours, and at the same time, these behaviours exclude them from accessing other services. Tyler et al. (2001) point out that street youth relationships with deviant individuals also contribute to ill health, and that youth with behavioural problems may fall into these relationships through lack of acceptance by other groups. The base level of risk that an individual faces is heightened simply by proximity to offenders (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990).

Criminalization

According to Tyler et al. (2001), subsistence strategies include selling drugs, prostitution, robbery, and defrauding (conning) people. Some Canadian studies confirm that the majority of street youth are involved in delinquent activities such as burglary and stealing (Novac et al., 2002). Although

studies relating homelessness to the criminal justice system are virtually nonexistent (Novac et al., 2002), our society tends to treat most subsistence strategies that youth engage in as crimes, and to punish the perpetrators accordingly. Whitbeck et al. (1997) state that American law enforcement and parent advocacy groups share this view. However, if homelessness is actually defined as the solution to a problem (such as abuse or intense conflict in the home) as many researchers propose (Kurtz et al. 1991; Janus et al., 1995; Novac et al. 2002; Karabanow, 2003), then society is punishing victims of abuses for attempting to solve their problems. Another aspect of criminalization is the tendency of Canadian courts to protect young women by putting them in custody, as opposed to using custody for the protection of society (Corrado et al., 2000).

Panhandling is a common practice for homeless individuals, and criminalizing the Canadian poor by criminalizing this activity has recently been supported in more than one Canadian jurisdiction. Ontario passed legislation in 2000 to criminalize many forms of solicitation, and the business district in Vancouver has recently been advocating adoption of similar legislation (Vonn, 2004) in the form of Bill M 202 -- 2004 (Legislative Session: 5th Session, 37th Parliament, 2004). Vonn (2004), policy director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, argues that panhandling is a charitable solicitation, and that laws are already in place to address common nuisance, harassment, causing a disturbance, intimidation and mischief. He also points out that this law, which would criminalize panhandling, is designed to be applied in a discriminatory manner, and that it promotes legal inequity.

Causes of Homelessness

North American researchers have considered both individual and societal factors in the search for the causes of adolescent homelessness. Many researchers and community members have focused on themes of delinquency, individual deviance and pathology, and blaming the victim (Bridgman, 2001). This individualized model emphasizes the role that personal pathology, disabilities, and

limitations play in contributing to homelessness (Peressini & McDonald, 2000). Another school of thought brings the focus onto a societal level where human spirit, community, and wellness combine to produce an array of outcomes (Cadell, Karabanow, & Sanchez, 2001). Peressini and McDonald (2000) describe this as a structural model of homelessness, in which a number of structural systems impact susceptibility to homelessness. These include poverty and unemployment, availability of social housing, social welfare and health care cut backs.

What we do not know about Canadian homelessness far outweighs what we do know (Peressini & McDonald, 2000). Peressini and McDonald contend that this is largely due to the fact that we do not have a systematic database that would allow testing of theoretical perspectives. As well, what seems to be consistent throughout a significant amount of the youth homelessness research is a lack of theoretical underpinnings (Haber & Toro, 2004). Additionally, Robert et al (2005) also point out that the majority of research projects do not use a control group, and therefore, risk factors leading to youth homelessness have been difficult to identify accurately.

Canadian researchers point to gentrification (Jackson & McSwane, 1992; Murphy 2000) and deinstitutionalization (Murphy, 2000) as direct causes of homelessness. Kraus et al. (2001) and Murphy blame homelessness on lack of affordable housing and poverty. Koegel et al., (1995) and Tosi (1999, as cited in Novac et al., 2002) theorize that homelessness is caused by structural, macro-level forces such as those causing poverty, and biographical, micro-level risk factors such as mental health and personal histories. Novac et al. (2002) report that Canadian analysts have identified major factors that impact youth homelessness, including how long the youth remains in the parents' home, length of time in school, high unemployment rates (and marginal employment opportunities for youth), as well as a lack of available, affordable housing.

Mallet et al. (2005) have identified four pathways that youth may follow to homelessness and which are linked to alcohol and drug use. The youth may engage in drug or alcohol use, which may result in family conflict and lead to homelessness. Or, the youth may experience family conflict, engage in drug or alcohol use, and then experience homelessness. Alternatively, the youth may experience family conflict, leave home, and then engage in alcohol or drug use. Finally, another member of the family may engage in alcohol or drug use, causing family conflict, and the youth may then experience homelessness. These researchers point out that homeless youth are widely perceived to use and abuse alcohol and drugs, and that this behaviour is a cause of homelessness. In reality, however, it may be a coping strategy.

Numerous researchers have also confirmed that homelessness is a solution to a number of micro level factors such as lack of safety (Novac et al., 2002), abuse and neglect (Kurtz et al. 1991; Tyler et al., 2001), and homophobia (Rew et al., 2001). The micro-level forces are proclaimed to leave individuals vulnerable to the structural forces. Higgitt et al. (2003) report that youth become homeless because of the failure of multiple systems, including but not limited to the family and community. Robert et al (2005) support this in their argument that homeless youth may be rejected by their families, and then by youth protection agencies which label the youth as having behavioural disorders. Thus, they become undesirables in our society, in need of reform and discipline, when in fact they were the victims.

While our society is short on provision of services for homeless youth, the literature (as cited throughout this paper) is not lacking in theories of the causes and risk factors for homelessness. Childhood abuse and neglect appear to be among the primary precipitating factors. Higgitt et al. (2003), in a recent Canadian study, found that the child protection system in many cases failed the participants when the youth were experiencing family conflict, neglect, or abuse. Herman and Susser

(1997) propose that the combination of lack of care and childhood abuse are directly associated with a dramatically elevated risk of adult homelessness. In addition, they state that childhood neglect and abuse actually cause homelessness in a social context that allows the existence of widespread homelessness. Karabanow (2003) reports that "escaping" or "graduating" from child welfare institutions accounts for part of the youth homelessness problem. The United States General Accounting Office (1989, as cited in Rotheram-Borus, Parra, Cantwell, Gwadz, and Murphy, 1996) reports that half the youth who run away have been in foster care and appear to be attempting to leave a poor placement. Haber and Toro (2004) add that adolescents who are "aging out" of the foster care system seem to be at very high risk of homelessness as transitional programs are not provided.

Research conducted by Koegel et al. (1995) confirms that systemic changes that would enable children to grow up in healthy and stable homes are needed in order to significantly alleviate youth homelessness. Prevention of homelessness could occur at more than one level. For example, providing youth with skills, employment, and housing is one method. Interventions or support for families and children prior to a runaway situation is another. In Canada, an example of a structural change that would promote more positive family dynamics would be the adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, as reported by Tang (2003). Neither the federal nor provincial governments have passed legislation that would facilitate recognition of the rights of children to be free of physical punishment. Even if this change were to occur, the family supports necessary to make it a positive change, as opposed to a punitive change, would have to be put in place.

Gender Issues

The prevention and intervention of homelessness should be considered in a gender specific context, as girls and boys have different experiences in the home and on the street. Hoyt, Ryan, and Cauce (1999), in studying whether proximity to criminal activity leads to increased rates of

victimization, found that female homeless youth who participated in interventions experienced a major reduction in victimization. This finding was not consistent with male homeless youth in the study, indicating that in addition to having differing needs and experiences, different interventions may have different success rates depending on gender.

In regard to experiences, the results of an American study conducted by Ryan et al. (2000) suggest that young women may be more vulnerable to maltreatment than males, both in the prevalence of abuse and in the psychological impact of the abuse. Cauce (2000) and Tyler et al. (2001) found that American girls reported much higher rates of childhood sexual abuse in the home and on the streets than did boys. Janus et al. (1995) also report that girls are at greater risk of abuse in the home than are boys. Further, Noell et al. (2001) found a clear association between being sexually abused as a pre-adolescent and experiencing sexual coercion as an adolescent, and a significant amount of involuntary sex among homeless adolescent women. Young homeless women are also at higher risk for attempted suicide (Rosenthal & Mallett, 2003).

MacLean et al. (1999) found that girls are more likely to run away from home than are boys. Once on the street, girls are more than 20 times more likely than boys to engage in survival sex (Ryan et al., 2000). It is not surprising then that Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, Unger, and Iversen (1997) found that girls are more likely than boys to be victims of sexual assault on the street. Wardhaugh (2000, as cited in Novac et al., 2002) explains that young women must disappear on the streets in order to survive, while young men visibly occupy the streets and public spaces.

Novac et al. (2002) report that in many Canadian homes, there are higher expectations for girls than boys in the areas of responsibility and standards of conduct. This puts additional pressure on young women, setting the stage for family conflict.

Northern Research

There are no published Canadian studies that have focused on the perspectives of youth in relation to support and service needs (Stewart et al, 2004). And in the Canadian north, there is a noticeable lack of youth homelessness research in general. Over the past few years, there have been two Whitehorse-based studies focused on youth homelessness. In 2001, McDowell and Madsen completed a youth homelessness survey in Whitehorse which included 47 participants. This survey revealed that homeless youth in Whitehorse are a diverse and heterogeneous population and that the majority of homeless youth in Whitehorse are considered to experience "relative" homelessness. The researchers found that adolescents aged 16 to 19 years do not have their needs met by the social welfare system and that teenagers with children are not eligible for residential facilities. Some youth had few legal means to earn money to meet basic needs, which put them into a position of having to resort to high risk behaviour in order to survive. Finally, youth without stable homes reported difficulties attending school due to lack of parental support and problems with transportation.

McDowell and Madsen (2001) state that the homeless youth in Whitehorse are vulnerable because they are living away from home, on the street, and "couch surfing" (using their social network), and because of the factors that led to the homelessness. Their survey revealed that youth are homeless because they are running from homes where they experienced violence, excessive use of drugs and alcohol, and physical or sexual abuse. Some youth have been neglected or asked to leave by their parents or guardians.

In November 2005, the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness released a second report on Whitehorse youth homelessness entitled, "Room to Grow: A Made-in-Yukon Model of Service for Homeless Youth" (Finton & Kramer, 2005). Kramer (personal communication, July 5, 2005) states that the focus of this study was to develop workable housing and service delivery models

based on community inputs, and that the overall goal of this project was to produce a concrete plan to address youth homelessness in Whitehorse. The report reinforces the community's need to address youth homelessness in Whitehorse, and the need to address relative homelessness as conditions in the north force youth to go underground, particularly in the colder months. Finton and Kramer identify two models that they state would have high probabilities of success: a comprehensive model to provide a full range of services over the long term, and an essentials model to meet immediate need in the short term. As well, this study identified five core services that are needed to address youth homelessness in Whitehorse: emergency shelter; transitional and semi-permanent housing; permanent supported housing; affordable independent housing; and a wide range of support services provided by a coalition of services. As well, the report highlights core approaches for effective service delivery: long-term collaborative vision with incremental steps; youth centred problem solving and planning; a range of services to meet diverse needs; non-judgmental, persistent, caring service provider behaviour; relationships and collaboration between agencies; and sustainable and creative funding arrangements. While this report promotes services that meet immediate needs, it also promotes social action through youth empowerment and coalition building (Mullaly, 1997).

Interventions

According to Levine, Toro, and Perkins (1993), services for the homeless in the United States have focused on developing shelters and other emergency services that do not address root causes, and many services are actually targeted toward groups showing particular deficits such as mental illness and substance abuse. Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, and White (2003) state that some areas of the United States are rich in services, and some are woefully lacking due to lack of resources. Services tend to be centralized, with smaller and larger agencies offering different types of services. These researchers point out that differences in types of service may actually be beneficial as there are diverse

needs among homeless youth, however, the shortage of services are very detrimental. Levine et al. caution that professionally based emergency services are very costly and may not reach a substantial proportion of the homeless.

Cauce and Morgan (1994) assert that homeless youth in the United States face a non-responsive service system and piecemeal interventions. Reid and Klee (1999) confirm that a lack of coordination and inconsistency between services also negatively impact the quality of services available to youth. Youth shelters are reportedly dangerous places and are under accessed (Green & Ringwalt, 1997). Pollio et al. (1996) state that differences between needs perceived by clients and system, mistrust of service providers, population heterogeneity, disaffiliation from society, and services limiting individual freedom negatively impact utilization and success of youth homelessness interventions.

In a study for the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2002a), researchers conducted case studies on 12 homeless services across Canada. The agencies studied provide services to an array of subpopulations, including youth services. The types of services include emergency shelters, drop-ins, supported housing, and education, training and counselling. The focus of the study was to ascertain whether program user involvement in service provision would increase opportunities for personal growth and social action. The study found that program users are seldom involved at the Board level, and for this reason, are not meaningfully involved in policy, consultation, or planning. Nor are program users involved to any significant degree in research and evaluation. Actual work was found to be the most common type of involvement in service provision. A number of service agencies involve service users in building design or development, creative activities, community projects (such as fundraising), and training.

There is another line of inquiry. Karabanow (2002) states that there is little research regarding the types of organizations that exist to help the street youth population, but that by understanding how individual agencies work, and how agencies work together, the community may ascertain whether the population in question is actually being helped within the system. He reports that youth shelters have been characterized as helpful and needed services, and points out that how agencies work together to meet the needs of the homeless will determine how well the community actually meet those needs. Even if the community is providing services, if the environment is not one of cooperation and genuine concern, then the community action would be compromised.

Karabanow (1999) explains that interventions reflect ideologies about youth homelessness. For example, homelessness may be considered a pathology, where the focus is on the individual youth as causing her own homelessness. This ideology may lead to criminalization for subsistence strategies. Homelessness may also be viewed as a horrific condition from which youth must be removed and protected. This attitude also maintains pathology as the root cause. On the other hand, homeless youth may be viewed as "normal", but living a life that reflects societal inequities and difficult life circumstance. Karabanow (1999) conducted a case study of a particularly successful Montreal street kid agency in which in-depth interviews were held with eight front line workers, two supervisors, the executive director, and the founder. Karabanow found that this program was based on a community development perspective, with a focus on normalizing youth homelessness and building on the strengths of the program users, and he attributed the success of the agency to the empowerment and acceptance of the youth.

Bridgman (2001) conducted a study on the development of a demonstration project for homeless youth in Toronto. This project was also based on an approach of empowerment and acceptance and was designed to provide transitional housing in addition to training and employment

opportunities for homeless youth. The training is expected to benefit the youth over the long term because it provides opportunities for career development, not just minimum wage jobs for the duration of the placement.

Recommendations for Interventions

For northern regions, Finton and Kramer (2005) articulate a vision which includes a holistic service model to address underlying needs contributing to homelessness, along with a comprehensive model providing a continuum of services to meet a comprehensive range of needs. A key factor of both models is the approach under which they are intended to be implemented. For example, a collaboration of community stakeholders, a youth-centred problem solving and planning method, and a harm reduction and accepting approach are integral components in successfully addressing short and long term needs.

According to Haber and Toro (2004), long term needs require even more attention than immediate needs, and are also more difficult to address. As well, they state that treatment and prevention are points along the same continuum, and interventions should be targeted toward communities, in addition to individuals. Haber and Toro further argue that by meeting short term needs only, we are contributing to the homelessness issue. Transition and long term services are required to actually alleviate homelessness. As noted by a significant number of researchers, homeless youth are a diverse population with diverse needs (Brooks et al., 2003; Mallet, Rosenthal, Myers, Milburn, & Rotheram-Borus, 2004; Haber & Toro, 2004) and therefore individualized services, or at the least, a variety of services, are needed.

Whitbeck et al. (2001) report that those most in harm's way are the most challenging to engage, and the least accessible youth are those most likely to be at greatest risk. Levine et al. (1993) state that self help programs run by the homeless themselves can be cost effective and accessible to a wide array

of homeless persons and that institutions, including residential youth treatment facilities, should be avoided. Community based care has been found to be the best hope of success for children (Levine et al., 1993).

Canadian researchers have also found that involving the homeless in the solutions to homelessness provides real opportunities for personal growth and positive change (CMHC 2002a). In a Canadian study, researchers identified innovative housing projects for youth, located in the United States, France, and Great Britain, and examined the factors that made these projects successful (CMHC, 2002b). The researchers identified common factors that they deem critical to intervention success, including the following:

- project must be centred on youth and their needs

- youth must demonstrate their desire to do something about their situation

- service provision must be global (i.e. range from shelters to long term empowerment)

- relationships of trust are critical

- individualized services are important (reflecting heterogeneous nature of population)

- an evaluation process must be built in

- programs must be community based, and include neighbourhood, employment, and education

- family mediation services should be available

- agencies/community must work in cooperation; existing services utilized

- large decentralized services should be avoided

- ordinary housing distributed throughout the community is the preference

CMHC (2002b) reports that researchers found that support services for youth are noted as being a critical component in providing solutions for homelessness. They report that homeless youth

have identified four types of help as being critical: compassion; rules and boundaries, with consequences for inappropriate behaviour; practical assistance such as food, housing, and money; and professional intervention. The youth identified the need for relationships as being of imperative importance, and in addition to the commonly accepted needs such as safe and affordable housing, opportunity to develop life skills, and access to services such as training and education, the studies also showed the need for social ties. Participation and control issues were seen by the youth as important.

Kraus et al. (2001) confirm that a continuum of housing and support services, a full range of housing options and support programs, more programs and services, and more affordable housing are essential. They also confirm that models that enable youth to remain in one housing option as they progress through the continuum of services and stages are important. Measures to prevent homelessness, such as family mediation, conflict resolution, helping youth stay in school, recreation centres, and family and children support are also identified as significant components.

In Karabanow's 2003 report, he articulates that services for street youth that are successful have provided youth with a space where they can feel safe, cared for, and part of a community. An environment where youth can gain courage, strength, resiliency, and where citizenship instead of pathology is reinforced is needed for homeless youth. Karabanow (1999; 2002) advises that how we approach the issue of youth homelessness, and how well agencies work together are the critical factors in service provision for homeless youth. Agencies must not stand alone, and both the ideology and spirit of each community must reflect cooperation and respect for the strengths of the population being served. Van Leeuwen (2004) supports the notion that government, non-government, and private agencies must collaborate to successfully remove youth from the street on a permanent basis.

A number of researchers have also identified the importance of providing on site services (Jackson & McSwain, 1992) and to strategically locate the services (Levine et al. 1993). Karabanow

(1999) describes a successful project where a youth shelter became a part of the street culture – the shelter came to the youth as opposed to the youth having to leave their environment to go to the shelter. This project was based on the ideology of accepting the youth where they are, as opposed to moving them to where society thinks they should be.

Although family mediation is an important service, programs that "restore" youth to their families must be avoided (Janus et al., 1995). Many youth have left their families for safety reasons, or at the very least, because they did not feel comfortable. Therefore, while mediation services are important, programs that return youth to the environment from which they have escaped would be avoided by many youth. As well, ensuring that services provide equitable access to all youth, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, is essential (O'Brien, Travers, & Bell, 1993). Novac et al. (2002) also point out that services must recognize and respect the distinctive needs of female youth.

Timing of interventions is another factor to consider. Proactive interventions before youth are well established on the street provide a better chance for youth to avoid prolonged homelessness (Reid & Klee, 1999). McCarthy et al. (2002) report that youth build relationships involving trust and reciprocity with other homeless individuals and groups. Timing is important because once youth have established these relationships, they may be resistant to interventions where they will need to develop new relationships with people whom they do not yet trust.

All in all, the research and North American professional experience indicate that although immediate needs must be met, long term needs must be addressed if youth homelessness is going to be alleviated (Haber & Toro, 2004). Governments and community agencies must collaborate to meet the needs of homeless youth (Van Leeuwen, 2004), and we must meet they youth where they are and ensure that they are included in community (Karabanow, 1999). As well, we must address accessibility

issues, ensure that services provide equitable access (Janus et al., 1995), and meet the needs of all sectors of the homelessness population, including adolescent women.

A Recapitulation

The literature review conducted for the purpose of this paper reveals that adolescent homelessness in Canada is a significant problem, and it is not going away - in fact it is on the rise. Homelessness puts youth at risk for ill health, victimization, and criminalization, and many youth resort to dangerous subsistence strategies to survive. Issues relating specifically to homeless adolescent women include high rates of sexual and physical abuse in their families of origin and high rates of victimization on the street. In order to survive, many adolescent homeless women are forced to participate in survival sex, prostitution, and other illegal activities such as selling drugs. The risks that these young women face due to survival strategies, environmental factors, and lack of structure place them at very high risk for victimization and ill health.

Social action is needed to address the root of the problem - otherwise, we are simply applying band-aids to child abuse and neglect issues, and to poverty. Social change may begin when we learn what the youth who have experienced homelessness in our community believe the community should be doing to support adolescent homeless women. This research may provide a solid base of understanding from which our community can collectively begin to take action.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Approach to Understanding Homelessness

In order to effectively address adolescent homelessness, we require approaches that result in social and structural changes, as opposed to approaches that merely result in provision of safety nets. Each approach to understanding and addressing homelessness is based on a theory of why and how youth become homeless. Theoretical approaches may differ in whether they assume the perspective of individual or collective responsibility, whether they are based on macro or micro causes, and whether they favour a top down or bottom up approach to intervention. They may also differ significantly in fundamental political belief systems. A number of approaches and perspectives have been utilized in North American research, and this chapter provides a summary of these. The theories range from trauma theory, an individualistic approach, to more holistic and collective approaches such as ecological theory. The chapter concludes with a description of the theory on which this study is based.

Trauma theory proposes that psychological traumas experienced in life predispose youth to homelessness, and exacerbate the experience of homelessness when it occurs (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991). Risk amplification is a theory proposed by Whitbeck et al. (2001), and according to this theory, children who experience abuse at an early age are set on a trajectory that will predispose them to homelessness as adolescents. Schweitzer and Hier (1994) argue that a multicausal model for explaining adolescent homelessness is most appropriate. They believe that early life stage deprivations are associated with adolescent homelessness. Still other researchers argue that poverty and child development are linked, and that these are strong contributing factors to adolescent homelessness (Haber & Toro, 2004). Intergenerational theory links out of home care children to increased risk of homelessness at later stages in life (Haber & Toro, 2004). Finally, ecological theory proposes that a multitude of social issues contribute to adolescent homelessness (Haber & Toro, 2004). A detailed description of each theory follows herewith.

Youth Homelessness Theories

Trauma theory.

Goodman et al. (1991) argue that psychological trauma theory is a useful perspective for understanding the experience of homelessness. Psychological trauma is a set of responses to extraordinary, emotionally overwhelming, and personally uncontrollable life events (Figley, 1985b and Van der Kolk, 1987a, as cited in Goodman et al., 1991), and homelessness may actually exacerbate symptoms of psychological trauma among individuals who have histories of victimization (Goodman et al., 1991). Not only may personal history have produced trauma and put an individual at risk for homelessness, but the event(s) of becoming homeless and the condition of homelessness are both likely to produce trauma as well. These researchers report that symptoms of psychological trauma include those grouped under post traumatic stress disorder as well as substance abuse, self-mutilation, intolerance of intimacy, a general sense of helplessness, and social disaffiliation. They also explain that psychological trauma damages one's sense of trust, safety, and security. In sum, trauma theory supports the contention that significantly reducing trauma in the lives of children (before they become homeless) would have a substantial positive impact on the prevalence of youth homelessness.

Risk amplification.

Whitbeck et al. (2001) propose that a risk amplification model is useful in explaining what happens to youth on the streets. They argue that early abuse by caretakers increases the likelihood of deviant behaviours while the adolescents are on their own, and that participation in deviant behaviours places adolescents at risk for street victimization. In addition, they postulate that negative chains of events develop momentum over time and become difficult to change - putting youth on a trajectory for deviant behaviours. Research has shown that patterns established by coercive/abusive caretakers

are particularly insidious (Finkelhor & Asidgian, 1996 and Straus & Gelles, 1990, as cited in Whitbeck et al., 2001).

Theoretically linking lifestyle exposure and life course development with youth homelessness provides a base for understanding behaviour and risks of adolescents who are homeless. This in turn enables relevant prevention and intervention strategies to be conceived and designed. As supported by trauma theory, early intervention prior to homelessness is the key.

Multicausal psychosocial model.

This model argues that emotional, social and cultural deprivation is associated with homelessness in adolescents (Schweitzer & Hier, 1994). These deprivations include lack of adequate warmth and affection, inadequate fostering of interpersonal skills in the home, and an environment which fails to encourage personal growth and development. Empirically, Schweitzer and Hier found that parents of homeless adolescents were perceived as less caring than parents of housed participants, that homeless adolescents rated their families higher on conflict and lower on cohesion than did housed participants, and that homeless adolescents perceived their family environments as relatively unstimulating.

According to this model of understanding youth homelessness, experiences of physical and sexual abuse are not named specifically. However, the model clearly identifies aspects of home life that contribute to youth homelessness, and the timing of intervention according to this model is no different than what has been identified through trauma and risk amplification theories.

Poverty and child development.

According to Haber and Toro (2004), there is a positive correlation between family income and child development and outcomes. They cite studies that show that parents living in poverty have fewer resources to devote to their children (Becker & Thomas, 1986), and that quality of parenting is

negatively affected by poverty because parenting skills are negatively affected by the stress related to poverty (Conger & Elder, 1994). Thus children of families living in poverty are proposed to be disadvantaged, leading to heightened risk for homelessness as adolescents.

However, it is well documented that adolescents who are homeless leave home for variety of reasons, and poverty has not been identified as one of these reasons. The United States General Accounting Office (1989, cited in Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996) reports that lack of a supportive and functional family is the most common factor associated with youth homelessness. Rew et al. (2001) list emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, homophobia, and parental disapproval of their substance use as leading reasons. Schweitzer and Hier (1994) found that family environments of homeless adolescents were perceived as unstimulating and devoid of meaningful social, political, intellectual, and cultural activities. Kipke, Palmer, LaFrance, and O'Connor (1997) conducted a study that supports the theory that no one parenting style or set of child-rearing practices are associated with homelessness among youth.

Youth homelessness has been linked to childhood abuse by a number of researchers (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996; Janus, Brown, & Welsh, 1994; Kurtz et al., 1991). Associating family poverty with youth homelessness leads to a dubious link between poverty and childhood abuse, and caution in forming this association is warranted. It appears that while poverty may be the primary determinant of youth homelessness in developing countries (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996), conflict and family dysfunction prevail as leading risk factors in developed countries.

Haber and Toro (2004) argue that family poverty may lead to family homelessness, which in turn may lead to inconsistent and disrupted physical environments. These factors may contribute to poor performance in school, and reduce the probability of future success in the areas of education and employment, and thus may provide an indirect path to adolescent homelessness. Although poverty as

a cause of adolescent homelessness in North America is questionable, poverty has been identified as a barrier to adolescents removing themselves from the street once they have become homeless (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). As well, poverty and lack of economic opportunity have been identified as key reasons for the high risk behaviours of youth on the street, since street youth have little opportunity to find legitimate employment (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2002).

Intergenerational homelessness theory.

The proposition of intergenerational homelessness theory is that out of home care increases risk for homelessness later in life. Haber and Toro (2004) include time spent in a shelter and other homeless situations in their definition of out of home care. As noted above, family poverty may place youth at risk for future unsuccessful outcomes in the areas of education and employment, and thus for homelessness as adults.

Haber and Toro (2004) point out that a high number of homeless adults spent time in care of the state as children. The GAO (1989 as cited in Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996) estimates that about half of the youth who run away have spent time in foster care. Other adolescent homelessness researchers have also found that a significant proportion of the adolescent homeless population arrive at homelessness via care of the state, and some refer to this group as the "doubly homeless" (Kurtz et al., 1991; Herman & Susser, 1997). However, studies designed to explore the complex relationships between out of home care and childhood homelessness on future homelessness have not been conducted (Haber & Toro, 2004).

Ecological theory.

Haber and Toro (2004) describe the ecological perspective as a general framework that can guide research, intervention, and policy concerning homelessness. They recognize that our complex social system requires broad social analysis, including a focus on individual factors, family factors, and

societal factors. Although not always identified as an ecological perspective, a number of researchers are focusing on broader issues including the need to address immediate needs of the individuals along with longer term solutions, and some are questioning whether to blame the victim or wider systemic problems (Novac et al., 1996).

Theoretical Framework for Present Study

Upon completion of a thorough review of the literature relating to adolescent homelessness in Canada and the United States (see literature review, chapter 2), it has become evident that social scientists have, almost without exception, examined the issue in isolation. The problem has been named and described, youth have been labeled, precipitating factors have been identified, and impacts on health and well-being have been well documented. As noted previously, a number of theoretical frameworks for youth homelessness have been proposed, yet for the most part, researchers are continuing to examine the problem in isolation, outside of politics and society. Proposed interventions thus flow predominantly from this perspective as well, with little real social changes actually happening, and the problem continuing to escalate (Bridgman, 2001; Haber & Toro, 2004).

This chapter provides a description of social power in our society, and links it to adolescent homelessness. As well, brief explanations of social problems, social work, and feminist work are provided. Finally, social problems, structural social work, and feminist theory are discussed in relation to adolescent women's homelessness, and provide the theoretical framework of this research.

Social power

According to Ricks, Charlesworth, Bellefeuille, and Field (1999), each individual's capacity is limited by both internal potential and external factors. They explain that in Canada a hierarchical bureaucracy provides the foundation for the rules and procedures that guide and govern members of our communities. Smith (1995) states that political institutions are undemocratic in almost every way

and that the great bureaucracies within which we live and work are stifling, authoritarian, and hierarchic. Because our social, health, and justice programs are imbedded in our bureaucracies, the bureaucracies control these programs.

Ricks et al. (1999) also point out that bureaucratic accountability is focused on fiscal responsibility, and therefore, long-term outcomes take a back seat in terms of priority. As well, the choice for community members is limited because policy makers set expectations, and the policies are translated into programs with little discretion. Bureaucracies have a need to be efficient, combined with a need to follow policy, resulting in inflexible and top down programs and services. Thus, power over many resides with a few.

The nature of bureaucracies includes an "us" and "them" mentality; they pay little attention to individual needs; provide fragmented services; are competitive, self serving, and self protective; utilize reductionist thinking to produce simple solutions; and remove choice (Ricks et al., 1999). Smith (1995) confirms that we have developed specializations and experts, resulting in fragmented and compartmentalized services. There is a lack of will for collaborative service delivery because of the "us" and "them" mentality, perceived competition for resources, and division of labour and skill, creating problems for those working toward resolution of social problems.

Youth homelessness as a social problem.

Youth homelessness has been identified as a social problem in Canada as well as in other industrialized countries, and the question to ask now, before we can ask how can we eradicate youth homelessness, is how the problem should be framed. We have examined youth homelessness under an overarching theme of delinquency, and denied the roles played by larger systemic forces (Bronstein, 1996, as cited in Bridgman, 2001). By continuing to frame the problem as youth and family pathology, we focus on deficiencies and this may actually foster homelessness and detract from wellness based

programs (Haber & Toro, 2004). The focus on deficiencies results in a cyclical dependency on the state as the underlying social issues cannot be articulated or addressed and may even be exacerbated by proposed solutions. According to Giroux (2003), a generation of youth is at risk because of our failure to recognize inherent strengths in youth, and our failure to frame the problems as community or societal issues.

Giroux (2003) reports that in the United States, there is systematic failure to provide safety and security for children. Children have fewer rights than almost any other group, and fewer ways to protect their rights. Their voices are almost completely absent in the development of policy. Homelessness is only one of the issues facing American youth as a result of their position in society and their lack of power. Giroux also reports that the political attitude of suspicion and mistrust of youth in the United States is being translated into policy, and youth are being criminalized and persecuted at accelerated rates. For example, extracurricular activities have been cut, and youth are being excluded from public spheres outside of schools and forced to spend time in the streets. In some jurisdictions, youth have to submit to drug testing in their schools, and school years have been shortened.

Were we to fund youth programs extravagantly, but maintain the structure of power over youth without reform, the problems facing youth would persist. According to Mullaly (1997), a state of welfare capitalism exists when the social welfare model supports the structures of domination and oppression. Thus, by redistributing resources without changing the social fabric of society to one of equity or participatory democracy, the whole area of spiritual, emotional, and motivational needs of youth cannot be met. Therefore, social change must be considered if we are to genuinely improve the lives and futures of youth.

Social change.

Social change can begin at different levels. For example, according to Kuyek (1990), affecting political change comes down to confrontation with a power structure - those people who benefit from the way things are now, and who control resources. When contemplating how to make political change to counter social injustice at this level, it is important to work with an issue that generates passion, to determine the ideal solution, and to assess both allies and adversaries. Then, a concerted push for reform may occur.

Reform may also occur through community development. Advocates for community development urge social change in the area of youth homelessness from a less grand and possibly more manageable level. For example, Cadell et al. (2001) propose a wellness model that encompasses and advocates a vision combining human spirit and healthy community. While this model promotes a strengths based perspective and empowerment, it operates within our existing political and bureaucratic system. Social change occurs over time, and like a wave as more communities move toward community health models.

Healthy community.

According to Gusfield (1975 as cited in Cadell et al., 2001), community means that the members have a shared sense of belonging, a common history and identity, shared experience, and emotional closeness. Ricks et al. (1999) translate the meaning of community to be a collection of relationships in which people feel identification, belonging, sharing, and mutual caring. They argue that healthy community requires a shift from power and control values to learning, creativity, and harmony values, giving community members the ability to shift from the perspective of scarcity and pessimism to abundance and optimism.

A limited number of innovative Canadian projects designed to build on strengths, foster a sense of community, and empower homeless youth have been piloted and evaluated (Karabanow, 1999; Bridgman, 2001). These projects demonstrate how a holistic approach, combined with a commitment to perceive homeless youth as part of the solution rather than the problem can have a dramatic impact on the lives of homeless youth in the community, and on society's perception of the problem.

Structural Social work theory and social change.

Social work is based on the values of humanism, egalitarianism, respect, self-determination, and acceptance (Mullaly, 1997). As well, Mullaly (1997) states that the foundations of social work inherently include a belief in participatory democracy, a system where societal decisions drive economic decisions, and a social welfare system that emphasizes equality, solidarity, and community. However, since social work is primarily carried out in agencies managed by or heavily dependent upon the state (McKay, 1999), social workers are put in a difficult position. By meeting the demands of the state, which is also the employer and program funder, social workers may be in conflict with the values and goals of their profession.

Mainstream social work practice tends to focus on individuals as opposed to environments (Mckay, 1999), supporting the status quo. It follows that the majority of the research and interventions designed to address the problem of youth homelessness have focused on the individuals experiencing homelessness, and their families, as opposed to community or society. On the other hand, progressive practitioners recognize that social problems are rooted in the social order and inequities in societal structures (McKay, 1999), and therefore, attempting to rehabilitate people experiencing problems, instead of changing the environments, is likely going to be ineffective. Proponents for progressive social work practice advocate for transformative change toward a fairer society. Canadian efforts to

address youth homelessness have focused on the individual for the most part (Bridgman, 2001), yet Canadian youth homelessness is still on the rise (Krause et al., 2001; Karabanow, 2002), which suggests that another approach, such as a societal change perspective, may be warranted.

The position of structural social work theory is to provide immediate relief on one level, and longer term institutional or structural change on another level (Mullaly, 1997). Social workers practicing under this theory strive to alleviate the negative effects of an exploitative social order, and to transform the social structures that cause the negative effects. Structural social workers may still be caught in a dilemma of how to best meet the needs of individuals and communities within the parameters of policy and fiscal restraint.

Feminist theory and social change.

In many studies on homelessness there is a distinct lack of feminist perspective. Such absence is lamentable. Feminist social work practice is focused on eliminating domination, subordination, exploitation, and oppression of women (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001). Campbell and Schram (1995) state that women's lives and experiences have not been adequately captured or addressed by mainstream science, and that the dominant group's view has been imposed on everyone, including women. They explain that science and its practice uphold the values and experiences of white middle class males and that the values and experiences of women have not been systematically examined. However, in regard to homelessness, there are clear differences between women's and men's experiences (Harman, 1992). By studying homelessness through a feminist lens, women's experiences and realities may be validated, and feminist social action may begin (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001). Social action should begin through consciousness raising, which allows women to recognize that the personal is political and to address societal inequities (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001).

The goal of feminist scholarship is to improve the status of women (Eichler, 1997). Eichler explains that feminist research is a perspective, not a method. In fact, there is no feminist methodology per se. Feminist research is an inclusive process, providing voices to oppressed women; it is subjective; it is nonhierarchical; its theory is grounded in experience; and it aims to create social change.

Implications for adolescent women's homelessness.

Adolescent homeless women are triply disadvantaged in our society. They are among Canada's homeless population, they are youth, and they are female. If they are of a visible minority group, their position is disadvantaged further. Their position in society, their lack of power, and their lack of voice have amassed into a lack of research on issues that pertain specifically to them, and a lack of programs designed specifically for them. While adult women have attained recognition that male dominated research and programs do not fit their needs, adolescent women's homelessness research remains sparse. Validation of women's experiences has become a key component of feminist research, yet for Canadian adolescent homeless women, both validation and research are almost nonexistent.

The driving purpose of this research is to ascertain what adolescent women who have been homeless in Whitehorse need from our community. A strong consideration of this research methodology is to approach the problem of adolescent women's homelessness from the perspective that it is not the youth that are at the root of the problem, but their environments. By being empathic and open to their explanations, the researcher enables the participants to avoid feeling blamed, to feel that they are heard, and to have an opportunity to be creative in stating their needs and suggestions. This research is also intended to provide validation of the experiences of adolescent women who have been homeless in Whitehorse, and to enable adolescent women to have active voices in describing their experiences, their needs, and in generating solutions in their community. The information

provided by the young women is intended to be used to advocate for social change, whether it is in the form of consciousness raising, community development, or political action.

Theory for present research.

The assumption that youth in our society, particularly female youth, are without power is a strong underpinning of this research. The focus on bureaucratic efficiencies and fiscal responsibilities, which have been the driving forces about whether and how our community should act, is a serious concern. A desire to remove the focus from the individual, and the family, and redirect it to society and the systematic processes that provide an environment that allows youth homelessness to occur guides this research as well. The goal of moving toward transformation through social action, by facilitating a focus on wellness as opposed to pathology is part of the framework guiding this research. The framework also incorporates a high regard for the value in developing a healthy community, and a strong desire to facilitate social change through healthy community. Overall, the framework for this research recognizes and embraces feminist theory, structural social work theory, and a wellness approach.

Chapter 4 Youth Homelessness in Context

While research on adolescent homelessness in North America is becoming more prolific, it is guided by a number of theoretical approaches, as described in Chapter 3. The context in which the theoretical frameworks exist is perhaps as important in understanding and addressing youth homelessness as the frameworks themselves. For example, how pervasive the issues are in global, regional, and jurisdictional contexts can have implications on how the issues are addressed within different regions and jurisdictions. Understanding how the issues are perceived on various levels, how much support is provided to each community and country, and what the obligations of each of these jurisdictions are, are important factors in whether or not the issue is given priority, how it is addressed, and by whom. This chapter provides an overview of youth homelessness on regional, national, and global levels.

UN Convention

On November 20, 1989, the United Nations adopted a document entitled the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which spells out the rights of children and youth worldwide (Canadian Children's Rights Council report on Canada's National Child Day, 2004). This Convention outlines responsibilities of governments, families, and caregivers, in addition to rights of children. Each child's right to supportive family, housing, and education are specifically identified. The United States and Somalia are the only countries in the world that have not yet ratified this Convention, and the United States has indicated that it does not have any intention of doing so.

UN Convention in Canada

Canada ratified the Convention in 1991 (McGregor, 2005). However, the development of a legal framework that would meet the obligations of the Convention is still ongoing. The federal

government was planning to meet with territorial and provincial governments to discuss ways to fulfill the Convention in late April 2005, however, the outcomes of these meetings are currently unknown.

Canada's commitment to the Convention has been questionable, according to Senator Andreychuk, the Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, as there is no one single enabling piece of legislation that puts it into law (The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005, February 14). In fact, a recent Supreme Court ruling upholds the use of "reasonable force" against children, thus permitting capital punishment (McGregor, 2005). Peter Dudding, the Executive Director of the Canadian Child Welfare League of Canada, reports that the number of children and youth entering the public foster care system increased by 50 percent between 1996 and 2003 (The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005, February 14). Dudding states that this is an indication of the state of well-being of children in Canada, and of the nature of Canada's prevention programs.

On December 13, 2004, the Senate of Canada Standing Committee on Human Rights commenced an investigation process on Canada's international obligations on the rights and freedoms of children (The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2004, November 18). The focus of this investigation has been directed to the children of other countries. The Canadian Children's Rights Council (2004) states that an investigation of the rights of Canada's children would be embarrassing as Canadian governments have failed to provide for the rights of Canadian children.

The Government of Canada reports to have taken a leading role at the World Summit For Children in 1990, and claims that by ratifying the Convention, Canada has affirmed the inherent dignity, equality, and inalienable rights of all people, including children. (A Canada Fit for Children, 2004). Canada has developed a national action plan for children ("Brighter Futures"), as well as designated a National Child Day. The National Children's Agenda has been developed and provides a

vision for promoting the best starts in life for Canadian children, and the necessary opportunities to reach their full potential. The Government of Canada claims that "for the most part, children in Canada are doing well." (A Canada Fit for Children, 2004). This appears to fly in the face of what critics have described as increasing child poverty and deteriorating social programs resulting in an increase of children and youth in care of the state.

International Setting and Canada

There are an estimated 30 to 170 million homeless adolescents worldwide (Farrow et al., 1992 cited in Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). Panter-Brick (2002) reports that UNICEF (cited in Campos, 1994) estimates that there are 100 million youth growing up in the streets worldwide. Estimating the number of homeless youth, and classifying or categorizing street youth is a challenge due to the fluidity of the youth, and the heterogeneous nature of the populations (Panter-Brick, 2002).

Street children are highly visible in urban centers worldwide, and have begun to be considered only one group of poor children who are considered high risk (Panter-Brick ,2002). Although in western countries children tend to be on the street because of a lack of a suitable family or family conflict, in many developing countries, many children on the streets are working to support families (Panter-Brick, 2002). However, this is not always the case, as a notable exception may be street children of Africa who are homeless because they are orphans (Rotheram-Borus et al. 1996). In Brazil, many children are homeless due to the poverty of their families, and the parents are unable to support them (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996). In these cases, homelessness is a way of life (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996) as opposed to a temporary state as it is hoped to be for homeless youth in Canada (Higgitt et al., 2003).

According to Haber and Toro (2004), there have been only a few attempts to compare homelessness across nations. Results of one study show that lifetime prevalence of literal

homelessness was the highest in the United States and the United Kingdom, with lower rates in four other European countries (Toro et al., 2004, cited in Haber & Toro, 2004).

In prosperous countries worldwide, homelessness in general is a concern that continues to plague the poor. Bitoun (1999) reports that in France for example, there are an estimated 1 million homeless people (out of a total population of 60 million) despite the fact that the gross national product has increased by 50 percent, and average income has increased by over 33 per cent in the past twenty years. Share International ("Homeless in Holland" 1999, June) also reports that although Holland is considered one of the most affluent nations of the world, the number of homeless has been estimated at 40,000, out of a total population of 15.5 million. In Spain, there are 273,000 homeless out of a total population of 39.6 million, but ironically, some 15 percent of existing housing is empty (Font, 1998).

Hargrave (1999) reports that homelessness in Canada is estimated at 100,000 to 250,000 out of a total population of 28 million. As Canadian youth homelessness alone has been estimated at 150,000 in some other studies (Radford et al., 1989, and Caputo et al., 1997, cited in Higgitt et al., 2003), an estimate of 100,000 to 250,000 for the total number of homeless appears low.

The Canadian North

Krause et al. (2001) report that there is very limited information in terms of numbers of adolescent homeless, and their characteristics, in the Canadian north. These researchers found that although the invisible homeless predominate, youth who are absolutely homeless have been identified as well. In spite of this, until recently there were no youth shelters in the north.

Yellowknife began a new drop in program for youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years in July 2003, funded through Yellowknife Health and Social Services ("Overnight weekend...", 2003, July 31). This program was open weekends from midnight until 7:30 a.m. to provide youth with a safe

haven, but did not provide beds. Unfortunately, due to funding issues, the shelter was forced to close. On November 1, 2005, the Side Door Youth Centre opened a new shelter called The Living Room (R. Peters, personal communication, November 7, 2005). Youth are able to access emergency shelter from midnight until 8:00 am on any night of the week until at least March 31, 2006 when the current funding arrangement concludes.

Two youth shelters opened up in the north in 2004. CBC North ("Teen shelter …", 2004, January 9) reported that a five-bed shelter for people aged 16-25 had opened in Iqaluit, the capital city of Nunavut, the preceding August. However, after only five months of operation, its existence was jeopardized due to lack of funding. In 2005, both the homeless shelter and home for troubled youth, while still in operation, are also still struggling financially. Younger-Lewis (2005) reports that the budget crunch has never been so bad, that the Illitiit Society, which runs the shelter, is struggling to pay staff wages, and that volunteers are covering expenses out of their own pockets. The territorial government is expected to provide enough funding to support local agencies to leverage funds from federal programs, but are not committed to funding a shelter.

Kirstinsdottir (2004) of the Yukon News reports that in Whitehorse, the Youth of Today Society piloted a six month youth homelessness project during the winter of 2004. According to Kirstinsdottir the shelter provided homes for 18 people between the ages of 18 and 25 years. However, at the conclusion of the six month project, the shelter was unable to secure funding from either the federal or territorial governments to keep the shelter in operation. Gehmair et al. (2004) report that the Blue Feather Housing Program closed in the spring of 2004 due to lack of funding even though $1 million had been committed to Yukon homelessness through national initiatives.

According to Novac et al. (2002), in which the writers report on young women's homelessness in Yellowknife, young northern homeless women couch surf, stay in coffee shops at night, sleep over

warm grates, in stairwells, and in bank machine entryways, and trade sex for shelter. Aboriginal youth are over represented in this homeless population. Due to the northern location of Yellowknife, and its isolation, conditions are different than those in the south. Not only are weather conditions more extreme, it is common for houses to have no plumbing or heat, for one room dwellings to house a multitude of people, for shacks to provide housing on the outskirts of town, and for extremely high rents.

Bell (2004) reports that homelessness in Nunavut remains hidden in the stairwells and overcrowded homes. This is verified by the National Housing Research Committee (NHRC) (2002) which states that Nunavut has the highest average number of people per dwelling, with the average number of people per room being 0.84, while the Canadian average is 0.04. To the homeless in the Canadian territories, sleeping outdoors is not an option (Bell, 2004), and many of the homeless crowd in with relatives where it is not uncommon for 10 to 15 people to share a small home or apartment. Bell claims that hundreds of people are on waiting lists for public housing in most communities and many more do not even put their names on the list because the waiting time is too long. As Nunavut has one of the highest birth rates and youngest populations in Canada, the housing problem is expected to get worse (Bell, 2004). Bell reports that rent on a bachelor apartment ranges from $1500 - $2000 per month.

The NHRC (2002) confirms that homelessness in the north is different than in the south. Living in the north means that the temperatures are colder, and the homeless population is less visible as they crowd into dwellings. Construction costs are higher, and buildings tend to be smaller, with less livable space. As well, communities tend to be isolated, with large centres, where more services are available, being a significant distance away from smaller communities.

Whitehorse is a relatively large northern city, with a population of just over 20,000 people. It is located in the Yukon Territory where there are thirteen rural communities outside of Whitehorse, one of which is accessible only by airplane during spring, summer, and fall. The population of the entire territory is approximately 32,000. One of the closest large Canadian cities is Edmonton, a 24-hour drive away. Physical isolation makes Whitehorse unique when compared to southern (south of 60th parallel) communities, including those in the northern areas of British Columbia and Alberta. Youth in Whitehorse have limited ability to leave the region, as other urban areas are such a long distance away.

The housing market in Whitehorse has been on an upward trend for the past three years, with availability declining, and prices rising. A CHON FM news broadcast (July 11, 2005) reports that between the last quarter of 2004 and the end of the first quarter in 2005, the average cost of a house in Whitehorse increased by $20,000. The average cost of a country residential home increased by $50,000 over the same period. And, while Whitehorse has a public transit system, it has limited hours of operation (i.e. the only evening service is on Fridays, and there is no service on Sundays) and regular but infrequent schedules. Thus transportation from the downtown area is limited outside of business hours. Lack of public transportation is also a significant problem for youth, often resulting in youth being stuck in unsafe places overnight (Finton & Kramer, 2005).

Whitehorse Key Informant Reports

In order to gauge the extent of homelessness from a professional point of view, two Whitehorse service providers in the area of youth services were interviewed on July 6, 2005. One service provider has extensive experience working in the area of youth outreach in Whitehorse, and the other works in the area of youth advocacy and is director of an agency that supports youth led projects. Specific questions asked of the service providers are listed in Appendix B. The purpose of these

interviews was to obtain current information about local services available for youth, and to assess current trends or issues related to youth homelessness.

The services available to homeless youth in Whitehorse, as verified by service providers (Interview #1 and Interview #2, July 6, 2005) who work with homeless youth in Whitehorse, include the adult shelter; soup kitchens; two youth centers (with daytime and evening hours); youth outreach (advocacy, support, and referrals); and the No Fixed Address Outreach Van (for food, condoms, first aid, and referrals). The services available depend on the age of the youth, because the community has an array of services geared toward young children, families, and adults, but there is a significant gap for those aged 16 to 19 years.

Both service providers consulted stated that many youth are couch surfing at a young age in places that are unsafe. One service provider noted that the youth that she encounters who are couch surfing appear to be getting younger, and many are coming from the foster care system. She also reports that we are "band aiding" individual youth, but more keep coming and falling through the cracks.

With regard to Whitehorse as a unique and northern community, the second service provider reports that relative homeless is very high in comparison to absolute homelessness because of seasonal conditions. Although many homeless youth are invisible, and are not actually sleeping in doorways and under bridges, they are still unsafe.

Federal Responsibility

The National Homeless Initiative (NHI) (Government of Canada, n.d.) is the primary focus of Canada's federal response to the growing Canadian homelessness crisis. The NHI was originally a three year plan designed to support communities to address homelessness issues through both short term and long term solutions and prevention measures. It was designed to support a holistic approach

to the problem, by focusing on collaborations between different government levels, community agencies, and those at risk. The Government of Canada has extended the NHI to continue for another three years, ending in 2006. The purposes of the extension (called Phase II) were to allow communities to increase supports for homeless populations and encourage and strengthen partnerships and collaboration between stakeholders. Between 1999 and 2004, over 2900 projects across Canada were undertaken, funded wholly or in part by the various components of the NHI.

The National Secretariat on Homelessness (NSH) in collaboration with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada developed and implemented a Promising Approaches Project (Government of Canada, n.d.). In 2005, a call for proposals for Promising Approaches Project-Phase II went out. The purpose of Phase One was to identify and collect information on effective local programs in the areas of transitional and supportive housing, and to disseminate the information. One Whitehorse project, Options for Independence (OFI), a supported housing initiative for individuals living with intellectual disabilities, was one of the eight projects selected for Phase 1 of the Promising Approaches Project. Other initiatives of the NHI include the First National Research Conference on Homelessness, in collaboration with York University; Strategies for Gaining Community Acceptance Workshop and Train the Trainer project, in collaboration with CMHC, NSH, and Skills Development Canada (SDC); and the production of a web guide to support building strength in organizations, and providing strategies for supporting individuals and families who are at risk for becoming, or who are, homeless (Government of Canada, n.d.).

Although the federal government has committed to addressing homelessness through the NHI and the NSH, in some aspects, the commitment appears to be sorely lacking, giving a mixed message of our government's sincerity. The federal government claims that phase one of the NHI enabled communities to focus on the most pressing and urgent needs of their homeless populations,

investing primarily in emergency shelters, establishing new ones, and renovating and upgrading others (Government of Canada, n.d.). However, as noted previously the youth emergency shelter services available throughout the north are sketchy and highly unstable.

Through the NHI (Government of Canada, n.d.), a number of Whitehorse services received funding from the federal government. The Salvation Army received $343,569 for support services, Yukon Family Services Association received $304,315 for support services, the Fetal Alcohol Society and Options for Independence Society received $300,000 and $112,151 respectively for capacity building, support services, and public awareness. Where the funding to ensure sustainability of any of these projects will come from at the conclusion of the federal project appears uncertain, and increasing community services to provide emergency shelter for youth would be yet an additional expense.

On another front, the federal government claims to be a world leader in advocating for the rights of children. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of UNICEF, states that "Canada continues to be an effective and long-time voice for children and their rights in the international arena" (press release from the Government of Canada, "A Canada Fit for Children", 2004, May 10). However, in reality the Canadian Children's Rights Council has a different perspective. They point out, for example, that the Government of Canada committed to eliminating child poverty in Canada by the year 2000, and this has yet to happen. In fact, over 400,000 more Canadian children live in poverty now than in 1989 (Canadian Children's Rights Council report on Canada's National Child Day). According to the United Nation's Convention, all children have the right to a supportive family, to provision of adequate food, clothes, housing, and education.

The Caledon Institute for Social Policy (2000, October) reports that Canada has a National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention which has an annual budget of $32 million and is intended to reduce crime and victimization by addressing their root causes though a social

development approach. The strategy focuses particularly on children and youth, Aboriginal people, and women and girls. The social development approach is intended to remove personal, social, and economic factors that lead to crime and/or victimization. It appears contradictory that at one level, Canadians are approaching youth social issues from a social development perspective, and at another level, are approaching it from a criminal and individualistic angle.

Criminalization of behaviour associated with homelessness represents a perspective of blaming the victim. As noted in the theoretical framework chapter, and in the literature review, youth tend to be homeless because of a lack of other acceptable solutions, and for many, homelessness actually is a solution. Ontario implemented a Safe Streets Act in 2000, and in British Columbia, a Safe Streets Act has been proposed and has attained a high level of support (Von, 2004). The Safe Streets legislation makes many forms of solicitation illegal under the criminal code (Von, 2004). Thus, while the federal government is supporting social programs to address youth homelessness, at some provincial and community levels, we are blaming the youth for being on the street and have criminalized their survival strategies. As Peter Dudding, the Executive Director of the Child Welfare League, points out, the federal government must work in partnership with the provinces and territories, municipal governments, civil society organizations, community members, and the private sector to provide political leadership in relation to children and youth (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005, February 14). Dudding recommends, among other things, that a child and youth secretariat within the federal government, and a Canada fit for children commission, be established.

Whitehorse Commitment

At a local level, in Whitehorse services for homeless youth are piecemeal. According to one service provider (personal communication, July 6, 2005), youth homelessness in Whitehorse is over studied, and our community has not begun to really address the problem at all. This service provider

states that we have a couple of stopgap measures that are very useful, but we lack a continuum. For example, outreach workers can advocate for youth, but there is nowhere to refer them to, nowhere safe to send them for the night. Another service provider (personal communication, July 6, 2005) notes that we have commitment among community workers who work with youth, and we have some services, but we are not looking at kids as whole people. We appear to be unable to mobilize to deal with youth as holistic persons.

According to a youth outreach worker with Yukon Family Services Association (YFSA) (Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition Meeting, July 27, 2005) the federal funding for the Youth Outreach Program, one of the few existing primary programs of Whitehorse's homeless youth service continuum, was scheduled to terminate on March 31, 2006. The program received a reprieve, however, and funding was extended for another full year. Although the positions have been functioning for over four years, funding has always been on a project or term basis. The Youth Outreach Program provides the only outreach services for homeless adolescents, however, they have been unsuccessful in securing permanent funding. The youth outreach worker states that if ongoing funding is not secured by December 2005, YFSA will commence with winding down the program. Should this occur, Whitehorse's only direct services for homeless youth will be the two youth centers. As noted in the report, Youth Profile Toronto/York Service Delivery Sector (Government of Canada, 2003), research with homeless youth in Toronto indicates that street youth prefer to use programs targeted specifically to them, and outreach services targeted to street youth provide critical links to support services such as drop-ins and shelters. Thus without the youth outreach workers, Whitehorse homeless youth will be disconnected from mainstream society and services to an even greater extent than they are currently.

Some considered the youth shelter pilot project run by the Youth of Today Society in 2004 for six months a success, however, requests for subsequent funding were unsuccessful (Kristinsdottir,

2004). The community has been without an emergency, transitional, or long term youth shelter since that one closed in the spring of 2004.

Short Summary

Although quantitative youth homelessness research in the north is scarce, it is evident that youth homelessness is a significant problem and that youth who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, are in need. Service providers at the street level have clearly identified that a significant number of youth are at risk of homelessness, and at risk of all the perils that accompany that condition. The northern environment impacts youth homelessness in a number of ways, including a cold climate with extreme weather, isolation, and a lack of services for youth because of small population sizes in communities. As well, homelessness tends to be hidden. Youth rely heavily on their social networks to avoid absolute homelessness, which often results in high risk situations and also allows the problem to persist unnoticed by many.

While the federal government has recognized that youth homelessness is a significant problem across the country through its recent initiatives, political leadership in addressing youth homelessness consistently is lacking. In July 2004, the Secretary of State for Children and Youth position was eliminated entirely, and there is no dedicated minister who is directly responsible for children and youth at the Cabinet level (Dudding, 2005). Legislation to protect the rights of children is lacking at all levels, and financial commitments continue to be focused on projects, rather than on ongoing services. Programs across the country are piecemeal, and even within jurisdictions, there is high inconsistency in if, and how, youth homelessness is addressed. Overall, while Canada proclaims to support the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada has yet to provide a legal framework or accountability system to actually protect the rights of Canadian children (McGregor, 2005), leading many to wonder how committed to the UN Convention Canada actually is.

Chapter 5 Methodology

Research Goals

The goal of this study is to obtain in-depth information on potential solutions to adolescent women's homeless from the perspective of adolescent homeless women who are, or have been, homeless in Whitehorse. The research purpose is to understand, rather than predict. Young women have not been specifically consulted on their experiences of homelessness, their experiences utilizing existing services, or their specific challenges and concerns in most of the existing research. Ultimately, this research is intended to lead to the generation of policy that may be useful for local community interventions in relation to adolescent women's homelessness. For example, should the participants consistently identify an aversion to using a shelter that is primarily utilized by adult men, it may be theorized that this is not an effective intervention for adolescent women, and other potential interventions may need to be considered.

Design

Qualitative methodology was selected for this research because of the characteristics of the population involved in the study and because of the nature of the goal of the study. In depth information pertaining to the experiences of adolescent homeless women was sought, and it is generally accepted that unstructured, in-depth interviews and focus groups are suitable for this purpose. Ayers (2003) states that a notable strength of qualitative research is its ability to illuminate the particulars of human experience in the context of a common circumstance or event. Understanding the context of each young woman's experience and narrative is essential to understanding the true meaning of her words, and qualitative research may be used in such a way as to preserve the integrity of the context (Thompson & Barret, 1997).

An analysis of the literature on adolescent homeless reveals that homelessness for youth has a myriad of causes, precipitating factors, and impacts, and that there are as many possible combinations of potential solutions as there are homeless individuals. No one has agreed upon the best, most cost-effective method of addressing the issue. This is reflected in the (dis)connectedness and array of services offered in communities across the country. As well, we have hardly begun to consult the best authority on the issues - the homeless adolescent women themselves. They are the ultimate experts on their own experiences, and they are a heterogeneous population that has experienced a common event. Thus, both the similarities and the differences in their experiences, needs, and proposed solutions are of interest.

This research was a cross-sectional, qualitative study, and involved four one-on-one flexibly structured (or semi structured) interviews and one focus group consisting of six individuals. The individual interviews were conducted in order to address the concern that participation in a group environment (focus group) may limit or inhibit the participants from discussing particular issues. The focus group is beneficial as interaction between participants is known to have the potential to produce a valuable kind of data and can be both consciousness raising and empowering for both participants and researcher (Montell, 2001).

Sampling

Sampling the adolescent homeless population is challenging, as documented by a number of researchers (Pollio et al., 2000; Rew et al., 2001). For this study, sampling was purposive, with specific criteria, so that the participant responses would provide as much insight as possible into the research question. This study's sample is non-representative and small because of the difficulty in locating participants who meet the criteria.

The qualifying criteria for individuals to be invited to participate in this study were:

- the individuals had experience(s) of self defined homelessness when they were between the ages of 13 and 18 years;

- they were of female gender;

- they were at least 16 years of age at the time of the study; and

- they resided in Whitehorse at the time of homelessness.

Although the criteria describe a homogenous population, each participant represents an atypical case and the individuals are thus expected to demonstrate variance in their life experiences and construction of reality. In order to ensure a sample that consisted of enough participants and relevant data to establish patterns or theories, snowball sampling was used to locate individuals, and both current and retrospective data was sought. The first participant identified was asked to refer others who may have similar experiences to theirs to the researcher's contact number.

Prior to identifying specific participants for this study, a proposed strategy was reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of UNBC. Upon approval of the process from the Research Ethics Board in 2003 (Appendix C), participants were sought through advertising and word of mouth. Posters (see Appendix D) were posted at the Whitehorse Youth Centre, the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, and at the Bringing Youth Toward Equality (BYTE) office. A small remuneration was offered both as incentive for participation in the study (if the individual met the participant criteria), and as a demonstration of respect for the time the researcher requested each participant give to the study.

Locating participants who met the established criteria for the study proved to be challenging. However, a staff member of the Bringing Youth Toward Equality (BYTE) office took an interest and assisted in locating one participant for an individual interview, and two participants for the focus group. Two other participants saw the posters at the youth center and BYTE office and contacted the researcher directly. One other participant was located through personal contacts.

The sample size was small, and lent itself to in depth semi structured interviews, which were conducted in July 2003. Four individual interviews and one six-person focus group provided rich contextual information for the benefit of understanding how these women survived homelessness in Whitehorse, accessed services, and addressed the challenges of being homeless. However, due to the small sample size, generalizations to the general population need to be made with caution.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group

Four prospective participants were invited to participate in individual interviews that were audio taped, and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Each of the young women who were interviewed individually were invited to participate in a focus group. As well, two additional participants were invited to participate in the focus group. Thus six young women who had been homeless between the ages of 13 and 18 participated in a focus group which was video taped. The focus group was of a two-hour duration, and was held after hours at the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre.

Research Questions

The nature of the individual interviews was semi-structured, and pre-planned questions were open ended. Questions were designed and worded to facilitate the expression of the participants' personal experiences and thoughts, in the context of each young woman's construction of reality. For example, the study included questions such as (refer to Appendix E for a complete list of questions):

- "in your words, what does homelessness mean?",

- "how do you see yourself in relation to family and community; are you connected?",

- "what do you envision your future to be like?",

- "based on your experiences, what can be done to help homeless young women?".

The interview questions were planned to elicit rich, contextual responses and to provide a focus for the young women's narratives. The researcher intended the questions to be used with flexibility and to enable each participant to focus on areas of particular relevance to her.

Analysis

The researcher transcribed the data verbatim from the interview tapes and the focus group video, and began the official process of data analysis with an immersion in the transcripts. In reviewing the transcripts, the researcher was able to examine the data in its original context. Throughout this process, the researcher documented all intuitions, interpretations, and themes, and noted relevant phenomena and categories for further analysis.

Two matrices were developed for the purpose of locating and documenting all data that related to services. One matrix was used for the individual interviews, and the other for the focus group. The purpose of utilizing the matrices was to identify any responses the participants had made that were common across cases, and to identify where there were differences. The researcher ensured that both within-case and across-case comparisons were made throughout, as both types of comparison are necessary to achieve person-specific information and to form broader generalizations (Ayres, Davanough, & Knafl, 2003).

The data was coded according to categories and then themes. The themes were inductively derived, based on information provided by the respondents. However, based on the literature review, the researcher was aware of some areas that would likely surface. Information obtained from interviews and the focus group was compared to assess whether there was a difference in the type of data obtained from each method. Data was attributed to respective participants (whose identity is not revealed).

The themes and patterns that emerged were used to link the data together, and to develop understanding of adolescent women's homelessness in Whitehorse. While the information was reduced and taken out of context through coding, direct quotes from the participants were linked to each of the categories and/or themes for the purpose of maintaining the richness and context of the narratives. In addition, sub themes were described as a further effort to maintain the richness of the individual interviews (Ayers et al., 2003).

It was anticipated that the data would indicate how the adolescent women defined homelessness, and what the community could do to support each woman before, during, and after homelessness. Each participant's experience was considered relevant, even if it was not supported by a majority of the respondents. Because the purpose of the study was to understand, as opposed to predict in a broader population, less dominant patterns need not be considered errors or outliers.

Rigour

Although the standard methods of preserving research integrity and ensuring rigour for quantitative research are not always applicable to qualitative research, there are a number of other actions a researcher can take for the same purpose (Westbrook, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the following protocols were followed to maximize the reliability, validity, and objectivity of the research:

- The common themes represent the "essential structure" of the research (Ayers et al., 2003). Working back from the essential structure, an analysis was made to ensure that interpretations were based on data from original accounts, and to ensure that the essential structure truly reflected the context and emotion as found in the original accounts.

- Distinct efforts were made to preserve the authenticity of the findings through direct relation of themes to examples from individual accounts.

- Existing literature and theory was used to for the purpose of triangulation. Research findings that were supported in other studies have stronger reliability.

- The system and steps involved in the process of formal analysis were well documented in order to provide an audit trail. By clearly labeling, defining, and describing each theme, and providing examples, other researchers may verify findings.

- Researcher bias was stated at the outset.

Another known option for testing reliability and validity is to bring the findings back to the participants for verification (Westbrook, 1994). The participants of this study are no longer in the same locations, and their whereabouts are unknown to the researcher. Therefore, they have not been contacted to verify the findings. A notice was posted in the Yukon News on March 3, 20006 to invite participants to make contact with the researcher to receive a copy of the report and provide feedback, however, no participants came forward.

Researcher Bias and Values

The researcher's personal and professional experiences led to the research questions guiding this study, and the researcher's values led to the design, methodology, and theoretical framework selected. In Whitehorse, there are shelters for adult women and adult men, however, there is no place for adolescent women to find a safe haven. Adolescent women are an oppressed group in our society with very little economic, personal, or political power.

Across Canada, there is only one shelter specifically for adolescent women and it is located in Toronto (Novac, Serge, et al., 2002). In Whitehorse, as in the rest of the country, young women's homelessness has not been addressed. Their experiences of homelessness, and their stories, can help move the community to social change. This research is intended to be used to benefit the participants, other homeless adolescent women, and other researchers as they investigate the problem further.

As noted, the design of the study was selected from a feminist perspective in terms of providing a forum for young women to tell their stories, and a faith that through their stories, important and valid information will be revealed. Feminist perspective in this context reflects a belief that dominant North American societies are based on patriarchy; that women in general tend to be disadvantaged and marginalized; that social science and health-related theories have traditionally been developed based on male perspectives and have been generalized to women; and that both adult women and adolescent women are understudied populations, and their specific needs are not well understood. This researcher's commitment to respect the experiences, narratives, and time of the participants is reflected in the purpose of the research, the methods of data collection, the analysis process, and in the presentation of the findings as well.

Ethical Issues and Risk to Participants

The interviews were held at times convenient to the participants and the researcher, and were held in neutral locations, usually of the participants' selection. The focus group occurred in late afternoon, in daylight. The researcher had selected three possible locations, for both the interviews and the focus group, that were reasonably accessible and close to the heart of Whitehorse. Final selection of the locations depended on availability of each site and preference of the participants.

Each participant was advised of what the research may potentially be used for, and each was provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix F). All participants were guaranteed that the information they provide would be reported anonymously, and each person was required to sign an interview consent form (Appendix G) prior to commencing the interview and/or the focus group. The researcher ensured that each person understood that she should only consent to participation if she understood the information being presented to her, and if she was truly willing to participate. All participants were asked if they understood that their participation was completely voluntary, and that

they could withdraw at any time. In the focus group, the participants were advised that they could signal their withdrawal by simply leaving the room if they chose. The honorariums were paid equally to all participants.

All participant questions related to the purpose of the study, and their roles in the study were made clear to ensure informed consent was obtained. The names on the consent forms were not linked to the data collected in this study.

A youth counsellor was present at the focus group. In order to minimize the emotional and psychological risk to participants, prior to commencing with the focus group once all of the participants had gathered, the researcher ensured that each participant was aware that she could leave the room at any time if she needed to do so, and that there was a counsellor available with whom she could speak if she needed support. Anything said to this person would be held in confidence, and would not be included as part of the study.

At the conclusion of both the individual interviews and the focus group, participants were invited to stay and debrief. They were invited to identify any concerns they had, and to state whether they required assistance in dealing with emotions which surfaced during the interview or focus group. The youth counsellor was available to provide support for focus group participants, and the researcher ensured that community counselling services were available during the individual interviews. For example, the women's advocate of the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre was on site during the individual interviews held at that location, and the youth advocate was on site at the BYTE office for individual interviews held at that location. The participants appeared to enjoy the interviews and did not access any of the supports provided. The validation of their experiences by each other, and the opportunity to relate their experiences and opinions may have been therapeutic in nature. There was

little deep emotion demonstrated throughout the interviews, although the young women did show moderate levels of indignation, anger, sadness, and humour.

When the results were analyzed and the report completed, it was made available to Whitehorse community members for reference purposes. This was accomplished through a notice placed in a local Newspaper in February 2006 inviting both community members, and those young women who participated in the study, to contact the researcher if they wished to obtain a copy of the report, or to receive a verbal summary of the findings. A copy was distributed to the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness in October 2005 as well.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In this study, four participants were interviewed individually, and a focus group of six participants was held shortly thereafter. The focus group consisted of the four individual interview participants in addition to two other participants. Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information relating to each participant. Participants were asked similar questions in both interview formats. These questions were focused on perceptions of homelessness, experiences of homelessness in Whitehorse, and recommendations for addressing adolescent women's homelessness in Whitehorse. Interview and focus group guiding questions are contained in Appendix E.

The focus group was beneficial in that the discussions validated the experiences of the individuals both explicitly and implicitly. An example of implicit reinforcement occurred when one participant discussed how "coming out" led to experiences of homophobia in her parent's home, and another participant then commented on how important respect, acceptance, and feeling safe to be oneself are. A simple example of an explicit reinforcement occurred when one participant stated that, "Conflict with your parents. Definitely. [as the most common cause of adolescent women's homelessness]" and another participant immediately responded, "Oh yeah."

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographic Information

Participant #	Means of Initial Contact	Age at time of Whitehorse Homelessness Episode(s)	Education	Number of Homelessness Episodes in Whitehorse	Yukon First Nation	Participated In Individual Interview
1	Personal contact	18	Secondary School	1	No	Yes
2	Advertising	18	University Graduate	1	No	Yes
3	Advertising	17	Unknown	More than 1	Unknown	Yes
4	Snowball Sampling	Between 16 and 18	Unknown	Unknown	No	No
5	Snowball Sampling	Between 16 and 18	Unknown	Unknown	No	No
6	Advertising	17	Some University	More than 1	Yes	Yes

The focus group discussions led to issues that were not touched on in the individual interviews as the individual interviews were more directed than the group discussion. As well, in the focus group the discussion reached greater depth in some areas than in the individual interviews as the participants built on each others' responses. The depth achieved appeared to be a reflection of the reinforcement of the value of each participant's opinions and experiences through positive comments from other participants and/or the facilitator, and through natural dialogues that developed as participants discussed both similar perceptions and experiences and the differences in their experiences. For example, one participant described a hard lesson learned when first on the street, and another participant asked if a particular program in secondary school might have helped her. A third participant provided feedback on the status of the program referred to by the second participant, and the discussion then took a turn toward other programs that could be implemented to help prepare students for the reality of what life as an independent adolescent can be.

One of the disadvantages of the focus group was that not every participant provided input on each issue that arose. In some cases, individuals were more outspoken or confident than others, and in other situations the conversation changed direction before all participants expressed their opinions. As facilitator, the researcher ensured that anyone who appeared in any way anxious to speak had an opportunity to do so, but otherwise did not interfere with the direction of the discussion except to bring the group back to the original question or the next planned question, once the divergence had run its course. Therefore, the individual interviews were very important in ensuring that each person had an opportunity to voice her opinion and discuss her own experiences in each question area.

Generally, in both the individual interviews and the focus group, the dialogues progressed in similar fashions, commencing with discussions of home and homelessness before moving to precipitating factors, experiences, problems, and recommendations. The analysis for the individual

interviews occurred independently from the focus group, and the data was not combined. The reason for maintaining separate data bases was that the areas discussed in each of the interview types was not the same, and therefore would not fit into the same matrices. Also, the data was kept separate to avoid placing undue significance on data that may have been reported twice by the same participants through an overlap in participants between individual interviews and the focus group.

In the following sections, the text provides a summary of all of the data relating to key themes. Each summary is followed by one or more quotes that provide context and richness. Tables 2 and 3 provide a list of the themes discussed, concise codes representing the data collected, the number of participants who responded according to each code, and the total number of participants who provided information relating to each specific theme.

Individual Interview Results

Four women, between the ages of 18 and 25 years, who had experienced homelessness as adolescents in Whitehorse, and who were currently residing in Whitehorse, were interviewed individually. Each participant experienced homelessness between the age of 17 and 18 years, and the duration of their homelessness episode(s) varied from eight days to three and a half months. Each participant's responses in key question areas are summarized in Table 2.

Three participants reported experiencing cycles of homelessness, although not each episode occurred in Whitehorse. One participant commented in regard to her Whitehorse homelessness experiences: "That was like a cycle. You stay there and behave well, and then have enough, get kicked out or leave..." (Participant 4)

The participants were highly consistent in their report on the factors leading up to their homelessness episodes. Each participant attributed her need to leave home at a young age to, at least in

part, conflict with her parents. One young woman stated that, "I just wanted to do my own thing…and it was causing stress on both our parts…and then I was out and sad." (Participant 3)

When asked about future homelessness, most of the young women were highly uncertain. Only one felt that it wouldn't happen again due to her current community connectedness, but the others were less confident. Certainly the desire to avoid future episodes of homelessness was reflected in the response of one of the young women: "God I hope not." (Participant 1)

The reports of the participants in response to questions about what their experiences were like revealed fear, hardship, trauma, loneliness, sadness, and frustration. "They either wouldn't help me because I'm First Nations or … because I have a university education….And they wouldn't help me because I'm not pregnant." (Participant 1) "I made a lot of mistakes and I got in tons of really unsafe situations at a young age." (Participant 2) "I was terrified of asking anyone for help." (Participant 2) "Even a night is pretty scary." (Participant 3) "If it's forty below and you don't have anywhere to go…we'd just go up to the banks on main street and just sleep in there on the floor." (Participant 4)

In response to the question of how extensive adolescent women's homelessness is in Whitehorse, the young women did not have access to specific numbers. However, one young women revealed that her two best friends had also been homeless; another stated that "there was a whole bunch of us who kind of lived in the flop houses….It was always full of people." (Participant 1) Another participant reported on her experiences of frequently arriving at work, the previous February, in the mornings, to find "three or four kids who had spent the night under the Riverdale Bridge and were just waiting for an office to open so they could have some coffee." (Participant 2)

Table 2

Individual Interview Results

Theme	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Defining homelessness	Lack of Something safe	Lack of a stable place for longer than a week	Lack of home for any length of time	No roof over your head or four walls around you	Lack of a physical place that is satisfactory/comfort-abl e
Precipitating Factors	Parental divorce	Family/Parental conflict			
Age at time of homelessness	17	18			
Predictions of future episodes of homelessness	unlikely	Possibility	probability		
Experiences	"hell" "brutal"	unsafe	scary	In the bush	unwelcome
Social assistance	Not eligible	Not enough	Tried but didn't think I needed it		
Numbers	Whole bunch of us who lived in flop houses	Often there were three or four kids … waiting for an office to open so they	Both my best friends		

		could have some coffee			
Existing Whitehorse Shelter(s)	I wouldn't stay there	It's not safe	It's only for men	Unsuitable for young women	There's nothing for youth who aren't in "the system"
Shelter Specific Recommendations	Shelter specifically for women who are homeless for any reason	Emergency shelter for youth			
Mediation	Access to family mediation/conflict resolution	Temporary shelter while family mediation/conflict resolution occurs			
Accessibility	24 hour service				
Basic Needs	My $20 went mainly to the pool for showers	How much I was spending on necessities was shocking			
Other	High school life skills courses in money mgmt, how to find a home and not be taken advantage of	Professionals are not always respectful	Need FN and FAS services		
Community services that did help	YFSA	BYTE	DIA not helpful		

Community	Not connected	Isolated; all alone	Nobody was there for	Your friends' parents
Connected-ness			me	don't want you
				around
North (compared to	Differences exist	Winter comes sooner;	Less homeless services	
south)		colder	in north (more in	
			south)	

With regard to social assistance and housing assistance, the participants found services were lacking. "You're not eligible ...up here until you turn nineteen." (Participant 4) "I was on a waiting list for two and a half years for Yukon housing." (Participant 1)

The data collected in regard to the existing Whitehorse shelter run by the Salvation Army was totally consistent between respondents. The young women all felt that it was unsuitable at best, and generally unsafe. "I wouldn't stay there - I didn't stay there." (Participant 1) "It's not safe....Like for a seventeen year old woman to be with 40 year old men? No way." (Participant 2) "I'd rather just sit in Tim Horton's..." (Participant 3) "I think this is catering to one clientele, which is basically the people on the street...the chronic alcohols [sic], drug addicts type of thing." (Participant 4)

Existing youth homelessness services were described as being nonexistent. "Unless you're a ward of the state...or in a group home, there's nothing they can do...they can't even rent you a hotel room - that's only if you're on social services." (Participant 2) "There's nothing for youth, specifically for young women in this city at all. There's nothing for people who aren't in 'the system'. I mean nothing." (Participant 4)

The recommendations provided in the individual interviews were predominantly shelter related. "I think what we need is a shelter that is for women, but not only for women who are abused, but all women who are homeless." (Participant 1) "We really need a temporary, like emergency, shelter for youth." (Participant 2) "I think we should have a women's shelter....Like there's Kaushee's which is great, but like, I wasn't battered or anything." (Participant 3) "I prefer something specifically for women. Like have a women's and a men's shelter. ...I think there should be one for youth. We could definitely use it." (Participant 4)

In addition, the participants were concerned with the lack of services in the evenings and on the weekends. "If you get kicked out on a Friday night, you're screwed. Like really." (Participant 3)

Two participants also commented that if they had had access to family mediation, and a place to stay during mediation, they may not have had to become homeless. "Maybe if there was someplace I could go while me and my Mom patched up this argument we had." (Participant 4)

Toward the conclusion of each interview, the participants were asked about their experiences of community connectedness during their homelessness experience. The prevailing sentiment reflected feelings of isolation and no where to turn. "No I didn't actually [feel connected]." (Participant 1) "It's pretty isolating." (Participant 2) "I was like all alone…nobody was there for me." (Participant 3) "Sure you have your teenage friends…but their parents don't want to put up with the BS you'll bring in." (Participant 4) "When I got kicked out, like no problem, I've got lots of friends, you know. Then all of a sudden, I didn't." (Participant 3)

In discussions of how the north might differ from the south, the responses were focused on two main issues - the colder temperatures in the north and the lack of options in the north. "Definitely, [winter]comes sooner, yes." (Participant 1) "I definitely saw a lot of differences in the services that I could access in Montreal as compared to Whitehorse." (Participant 2) "Down south we have food bags and stuff - I found that [finding food] was really hard." (Participant 3) "Compare here to Vancouver, we don't have the resources like they do down there…. up here we don't really have anything." (Participant 4)

Focus Group Results

Six women currently in their late teens to early twenties, who had experienced adolescent homelessness in Whitehorse and were residing in Whitehorse at the time of the study, participated in the focus group. Four of these individuals also participated in the individual interviews, therefore, data collected in this section should not be interpreted as corroboration of the data obtained in the individual interview section, as it may be duplication. Table 3 summarizes the results of the focus

group. The participants seemed to feel most intensely about the lack of services available in Whitehorse, problematic services, and were prolific with recommendations. The focus group commenced with a discussion of the meaning of home and homelessness.

Home was described as a place of comfort and safety (including both physical and emotional safety), a place of acceptance where one should not feel afraid. A person can be considered homeless if the place they stay in is not comfortable, given the factors that define a home. "Sometimes it is just without a physical home." (FG Member 1) "If you can't go back there and feel comfortable, then that's not really a stable place for you.... Doesn't have to be physical instability either...there's a lot of emotional instability that leads a lot of young people to leave." (FG Member 2) "I also think that acceptance and respect are huge for you to feel safe." (FG Member 5)

In the group discussion of precipitating factors for homelessness, employment, conflicts with parents or boyfriends, and in the smaller communities of the Yukon, lack of personal safety were identified. "Conflict with your parents. Definitely." (FG Member 4) "It was because of conflict with my parents." (FG Member 5) "It's not just fighting with your parents [in a lot of smaller communities], a lot of it is you have to leave for your own safety, for your own peace of mind...you're not physically able to stay there anymore." (FG Member 6) There is a possibility that the latter response was in reference to issues other than emotional safety or conflict.

Table 3

Focus groups themes and coding

Theme/question	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Meaning of home	Without a physical home	Emotional safety, stability, satisfaction	Emotional support	Acceptance and respect	Physical Safety/Stability
Direct Causes (precipitating factors)	employment	Arguing with parents/conflict with parents	Break up with boyfriend	Personal safety	
Experiences	No help	Couldn't work			
Whitehorse Services (see Gaps for two part quotes)	Services for homeless are indirect	Volunteers	Referral Agencies; daytime services		
Problematic services	Can't quite make it one month (financially) - UI won't help	DIA [INAC]- lack of support and respect	Religious affiliation of services	Childless Youth not a priority for housing	

Theme/question	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Gaps	No homeless specific services for youth; No service to help people keep their homes	Social assistance not available			
Inappropriate Options	Stay in unsafe places	Stay home	Cheap Hotels	Government Group Homes	
Barriers to finding homes	Age (discrimination)	Lack of awareness	Decision makers don't listen to youth	Lack of support from DIA [INAC]	
Community Connectedness	There's nobody there	Only community is other homeless youth	No one cares	Ignorance is bliss (and knowledge brings responsibility)	abandoned

Theme/question	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5
Recommendations	Shelter	Specific Homelessness Prevention Life skills programs (high school)	Nonjudgmental, nondenominational-al, independent services	Prevention emphasis (including awareness)	Address underlying issues and empower women

	Code 6	Code 7	Code 8	Code 9	Code 10
Recommendations Continued	Government supported financial incentives and/or programs	[experienced]Peer educators in schools	Safe place with a shower; food	Cooperative organizations (to ultimately support cooperative housing)	Financial incentives for cooperative, women centred programs

	Code 11
Recommendations Continued	Greater Opportunities for youth to experience trades in high school

In discussing personal homeless experiences the respondents described situations that revealed feelings of embarrassment and rejection. "It's all talk and no action." (FG Member 3) "When I was on the street and needed help, I couldn't find it anywhere." (FG Member 1) One participant described a situation where she found employment but couldn't accept it.

I got a job once in town here and I was so broke and homeless and at the time, they gave me uniforms and they were disgustingly dirty, and she's like, be back in tomorrow at eight a.m. and I'm like how am I supposed to clean these? I don't even have a quarter - you bought me coffee during my interview. [laugh] You know? What am I gonna do? So I ended up just coming back and returning the uniforms and saying I can't work here; these are disgusting - I refuse. And I did it in such a way that I didn't tell them you know I didn't even have a quarter to wash these or a looney to wash these. But I did it in a way that, you know, screw you guys - give me dirty clothes, type thing. (FG Member 6)

The discussion of Whitehorse homelessness services revealed that, with respect to youth, there are tremendous gaps. The following comments from the participants of this study have been recently verified by the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness's report (Finton & Kramer, 2005). In this report, it is noted that there are no after hours services, and no specifically designated youth homelessness service providers. "I think there's lots of people who have experience working with people who are experiencing homelessness, but no organization that is specifically looking at it."(FG Member 2) "Like we've got lots of places that can direct you somewhere….They just direct you all over the place." (FG Member 1)

We've got all these centres, but they all shut down at a certain time. You can hang out there for so long, but then you have to leave and where are you going to go? You go to the next place

that's open a little bit later, and then you go to the next place, or else you go sit at Tim Horton's

because it's open 24 hours, and you can have coffee. (FG Member 6)

In McDowell and Madsen's 2001 study of Whitehorse Youth at Risk of Homelessness they touched on this topic indirectly. In this study, respondents (aged 13 to 29 years) described locations where they normally accessed food, clothing, showers, and a telephone. Only a small percentage accessed any of these items at a shelter (i.e. approximately seven percent), and none of the places listed are typically open beyond normal business hours. Among the responses to the question of where they currently lived, an emergency shelter was not listed amongst the responses at all, and a significant proportion of the respondents stated that they were couch surfing or staying at the home of a friend or relative. Eight percent were living outside or in the bush. The responses from this 2001 study validate the common experience of the participants of the current study – there were no places to go to access services after hours.

In the Whitehorse Community Plan on Homelessness (Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, 2001), a short-term shelter and outreach workers (especially female) were among the items identified as homeless services required in Whitehorse. The 2001 study revealed other requirements as well, such as alcohol and drug treatment programs for youth (in the territory), a drop in medical center, and safe emergency transportation. Accessible primary health care has been noted as being of importance for homeless youth due to the negative health impacts of homelessness and their avoidance of mainstream services (Wojtusik & White, 1998).

If an individual has employment and is trying to maintain independent income, and just cannot quite make it one month, there is nowhere to turn. Making the transition from unemployed to employed can cause a gap in availability of funds, posing a barrier to employment. "If you're not

working you get regular cheques [employment insurance]. But once you start working, and you can't quite make that month, you just need that extra bit..." (FG Member 1)

In addition to lack of services in particular areas, some services were noted to be problematic. The Whitehorse shelter is religion based. "If I'm in a situation like that, I'm not going to want to hear what God has to do for me, or Jesus is going to save me. That's not my style." (FG Member 3) "I worked a lot in Carmacks, but I had no place to live and every time I'd get close to being on the list of Yukon Housing, or the First Nation's [housing], somebody would have a kid. And I ended up having to move. There was tons of work but no place to live." (FG Member 6) As well, the department of Indian and Northern Affairs (now know as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada), was noted as being unhelpful. "They treat First Nations youth like crap." (FG Member 6)

There was discussion of inappropriate solutions to homelessness. Staying in an inappropriate family home was considered an option. "...You stay there and the whole problem just gets worse." (FG Member 4) "There isn't the option to leave home. There isn't. ...Maybe when you're a little older..." (FG Member 5) Another respondent talked about staying in the cheapest hotels. "They are so disgusting, you don't even want to walk in them, let alone stay overnight there." (FG Member 6)

In a discussion of barriers to finding homes, age was noted as a significant impediment. "...You're too young to have a job, you're too young to support yourself, and even if you could, you can't move in somewhere when you're fourteen." (FG Member 4) Government run group homes were identified as being one of the few options available to youth. However, "No fourteen year old is going to willingly check themselves in because they know it's termed the bad kids' place....It's for bad kids....You have to be put in there. You can't go there on your own." (FG Member 6) "There's just so much attached to being young or being not married, or not full time working for the man,...if you're

not any of those things, then you're obviously a party animal who deals heroin and abuses animals..." (FG Member 2)

The general consensus from the group appeared to be that homelessness was associated with disconnectedness from community. "I mean it's not anybody else's responsibility, but ... when you need something there's nobody there....I felt very alone. Almost like that dream where you wake up and go out on the street and there's nobody there."(FG Member 1) "...at that time the only community I could even identify was other people who were in my situation. But I still didn't seek them out because I was really afraid of them because I was afraid of becoming a victim again." (FG Member 2) "No one really gave a damn. You were just a little speck of dirt, you weren't even a human being." (FG Member 3) "I was young and I felt abandoned..." (FG Member 4)

The recommendations generated from the focus group were numerous and diverse. They ranged from very simple interventions such as opening a youth shelter, to prevention initiatives such as life skills programs in the high schools, to longer term cooperative incentive programs for women. Five suggestions are noted herewith in the words of the young women. "...I think that a greater emphasis needs to be put on preventing the problem from actually occurring." (FG Member 4) In the succinct words of another young woman, "I just want a safe place and a shower. And maybe some food." (FG Member 3) Some ideas were more complicated:

> If... the government could put some of that [child tax benefit] away in the kid's name, until they're twenty, then they'd have this chunk of money that you could either put it towards buying land, or the government could meet you a bit of the way, kind of like that, or else towards renting or buying a house. (FG Member 6)

Another suggestion was:

If there was more access for women to get more financial education or money managing [education], or more access to partner loans where you could borrow money with a bunch of people, or... Like that would allow people to get some - get a unit. (FG Member 2)

Another participant suggested a more systemic approach:

Deal with the underlying issues that actually cause it as well. Like women staying with their boyfriends that treat them badly, like body image issues, like self worth, or self respect....We're just still bombarded by like stupid images around us all the time, that make us feel even worse about ourselves....Empower women to feel better about themselves and feel like you know, I can hopefully do something about this situation, you know, and not just feel powerless. (FG Member 5)

In summary, the responses of the participants in both the individual interviews and the focus group reflect dire experiences of homelessness in Whitehorse. The stories reveal a community that has turned its back on homeless youth and left them to fend for themselves, with the exception of a very small number of individuals. The focus group with these young women highlighted the following concerns and recommendations based on their first hand experiences:

- Whitehorse needs an emergency, youth or woman specific shelter that is accessible to, and safe for, all adolescent women regardless of age, and is available seven days per week, 24 hours per day;

- Whitehorse lacks housing that is suitable for, or available to youth;

- Whitehorse community agencies (i.e. schools, youth centers, non-government organizations) could provide many preventive and healing measures such as life skills training, employment programs, counseling/mediation, and supportive housing;

- Underlying issues leading to oppression of young women must be dealt with so that homelessness may be prevented.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion

This discussion begins with a description of the theoretical framework underlying this study, a summary of the systemic issues and limitations related to adolescent homeless research in general and specifically to this study. The rationale for this study is followed by a comparison of the characteristics of this sample with those of other studies related to adolescent homelessness. The experiences and services described by the participants are then summarized and compared with those reported in previous youth homelessness research where applicable. The recommendations generated by the participants are then compared with the recommendations of researchers of other studies. Finally, implications for policy makers, funding bodies, and existing service providers are presented.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research was based on a feminist approach, and was grounded in structural social work theory. According to Eichler (1997), a feminist approach to research is a perspective that is guided by feminist theory; it is not a method in and of itself. Specifically, it is inclusive and provides a voice to individuals and groups who are oppressed in our society; it is focused on empowerment and the improvement of the status of women; and it is undertaken by researchers who define themselves as feminists. Eichler also highlights the lack of objectivity, and the intentional subjectivity, in feminist research. Instead of being objectified, each woman's global experiences are sought and recognized. Joyappa and Martin (1996) contend that feminist research produces knowledge for marginalized people rather than for dominant groups. While the process is intended to be empowering and even consciousness raising, the outcome is also important. Feminist researchers maintain that the goal of feminist research must be social change (Eichler, 1997; Joyappa & Martin, 1996).

Mullaly (1997) describes structural social work theory as another method of eliminating oppression through empowerment and social change. He highlights a number of characteristics of structural social work theory that makes it an excellent foundation for feminist research. For example, Mullaly contends that structural social work theory is based on the premise that the personal is political, a fundamental underpinning of feminist theory. As well, Mullaly argues that structural social work is focused on empowerment and consciousness raising, and that a structural social worker must recognize that social transformation is a necessary outcome of structural social work.

Feminist and structural social work theories were combined in this study to provide a voice for, and to empower, young women who experienced homelessness in Whitehorse as adolescents. A common understanding between the two theories that oppression occurs at a personal level, but is a political machine, is one of the main underpinnings upon which this research is based. The combination of feminist theory with structural social work theory enables the focus on individual experiences to occur in a holistic appreciation of the experiences of the participants, while in the context of society, and provides the impetus to advocate for innovative solutions and social transformation.

Youth Homelessness Research

Youth homelessness research has inherent challenges due to the characteristics of this population. When the population to be studied is broken down further by gender and by a narrow age group, it becomes even more challenging. Cross sectional design with small, non-representative samples are the norm in youth homelessness research due to the difficulty in accessing larger non-random samples, and in following such participants once they are accessed. In a relatively small community such as Whitehorse, these challenges are magnified. The northern context also changes the

face of youth homelessness, reducing the percentage of absolutely homeless youth and increasing the proportion of relatively homeless youth, making homeless youth even less visible.

Living in a northern context not only changes the appearance of youth homelessness, it also impacts services that youth may expect to have access to. Such services that do exist for homeless youth are predominantly located south of the 60th parallel, and research has been focused in southern areas as well. Only recently has the north begun to be included in national research projects related to youth homelessness, and issues unique to the north identified. For example, Krause et al. (2001) report that there is very limited information in the territories related to numbers and characteristics, and there are no youth specific shelters. As noted previously, one youth shelter existed briefly in Whitehorse since 2001, and two other shelters have emerged in other territories. However, at least one of these shelter's existences has been noted as insecure due to funding concerns (Younger-Lewis, 2005).

Limitations of This Study

As noted by numerous researchers, the characteristics inherent in the youth homeless population make research challenging. It is difficult to locate and interview homeless youth, and next to impossible to count homeless youth as they are a highly invisible population, especially in the north. Homeless youth are also highly mobile, as they are of no fixed address and do not tend to rely on shelters. Youth homelessness tends to be cyclical, with youth moving on and off the street over time. Thus, cross-sectional research results in an incomplete picture. Sample sizes tend to be small and non-representative as the majority of homeless youth cannot be found, and may not even self-identify as homeless.

This study involved a sample size of only 6, but this was sufficient for the purpose of the study. The primary purpose was exploratory, thus a qualitative method involving in-depth, semi structured interviews, and a focus group, were employed. Sample selection was purposive snowball sampling, and

was completed in June 2003. Posters advertising for participants were posted in areas where adolescent women would be likely to see them, and one respondent was asked to refer other potential participants for the focus group. A small, non-random sample was used, and therefore generalizations of the data are made with caution. The information provided by each participant was retrospective, and may have been tempered by time.

Although each participant provided in depth information about her experiences and perceptions, all recommendations must be made with caution, and validated by future studies. In establishing validity of the findings of this study, the researcher utilized a number of techniques as noted in Chapter 6, however, the participants did not have an opportunity to review the findings. The primary reason for this was that the participants could not be located as more than two years elapsed between the time of the interviews and the production of a final report for review. Thus, future studies should incorporate a plan for obtaining feedback from participants on the findings in the research methodology, in order to provide participants with an opportunity to comment on the findings before the report is finalized.

Research Rationale

A thorough review of the literature related to adolescent homelessness revealed that research over the past fifteen years has focused on causes and explanations of adolescent homelessness, experiences of homeless adolescents, health issues, and behaviours. As noted in Chapter 3, (Theoretical Approach to Understanding Homelessness), youth homelessness researchers have relied upon a variety of theoretical frameworks to understand youth homelessness. In addition, researchers have focused heavily on an individualized approach to understanding homelessness – what it was about each individual or family that predisposed each youth to homelessness.

Although a number of theories have been generated to explain youth homelessness, a significant amount of research has been conducted without theoretical underpinnings (Haber & Toro, 2004). This has resulted in an abundance of research that examines factors in isolation and from an individualistic perspective. As well, little research has been conducted from a national perspective, resulting in patchy community-based research utilizing an inconsistent array of definitions for both "homelessness" and "youth". Perhaps because of the lack of utilization of theoretical frameworks, an assortment of interventions have been implemented across the country, most without systematic evaluation plans. As a nation, we have not agreed upon what the problem actually is, and therefore, initiatives to address it have been piecemeal, fragmented, and of questionable effectiveness. Thus, the problem continues to exist and grow.

In Canada, little research has been done in the area of how youth make successful transitions off the streets (Raleigh-Duroff, 2004) and what the youth perceive the most needed and effective solutions to be (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004). As well, research pertaining specifically to homeless adolescent women is particularly scarce (Novac et al., 2002). Karabanow (1999, 2002, and 2003) reports a growing need for services in Canada that respect the perspectives of street youth, and a lack of research and services that are developed and generated from a position of respect for the homeless youth population. The underlying theories that guided this study are based on the premises that our society allows homelessness to exist, and that systemic factors play a significant role in contributing to individual and family vulnerability.

Social Change

A focus on individuals and families, outside of the context of society, perpetuates the problem of homelessness. In order to change the social context, so that the circumstances leading to homelessness are no longer present in our community, we must reframe the issue. This may be

accomplished through structural change resulting from consciousness raising, empowerment, and community development. While it is possible to work within the conventional social services system, achieving structural social change through this avenue is unlikely. A collective, community based strategy involving alternative agencies, youth non-governmental organizations, and the service users themselves is called for.

Karabanow (2003) and Van Leeuwen (2004) both advocate for the collaboration of non-governmental service providers to address youth homelessness issues. While this is important at a local level, in researching the global context, Canada's international commitments, and Canada's current commitments in the areas of youth homelessness, it has become apparent that Canada's overall commitment is thin and sketchy. It is important that all levels of government support youth homelessness initiatives that are intended to eliminate youth homelessness, yet this consistency is absent. Communities are assuming a leading role without consistent political leadership and support. High level, political support is necessary, but is only likely to continue for as long as it remains politically purposeful, and therefore, it is critical that the community, including alternative agencies and youth organizations, keep the spotlight on the larger political agenda, and ensure that government remains accountable.

Collaboration at all levels is crucial, and we need the federal government to take a leading role, yet the process cannot be top-down. When communities begin the process of societal change, the federal government must be present, committed, and willing and able to role model genuine collaboration. However, as Karabanow (2003) argues, the solution must be bottom up. Parallel processes, one at the community level, and others at territorial and federal levels, must be moving in similar directions. The community can drive its part of the process through mobilization of

marginalized populations, non-governmental organizations, alternative and youth agencies, making a collective effort to effect change.

If Canada as a nation truly desires to eliminate, or significantly reduce the impacts of youth homelessness, communities and regions must be supported through legislation. As well, demonstrated support for innovative programs and progressive approaches through long term and ongoing funding opportunities are required. As a nation, we must demonstrate our respect and regard and hope for our youth in all communities, provinces, and territories. Our approaches cannot be both right and left wing. Specifically, we cannot condone capital punishment and criminalization of youth homelessness survival strategies while supporting social programs in the same jurisdictions. By so doing, we are perpetuating and enhancing the problem and then applying band-aid-type solutions. This approach reflects a high degree of marginalization as opposed to inclusion and respect.

The UN Convention has stipulated that youth must be respected, valued, and included as genuine participants in our decision making processes. Canada has agreed to the UN's stipulations, but has not implemented strategies for accountability. It is time for the federal government to take a strong leading role in implementing the convention's requirements throughout Canada. This means passing legislation, providing long term resources for community programs, insisting that provinces and territories support long term initiatives, and holding provincial and territorial and other governments accountable. Only then can community programs designed to support families and support the homeless achieve positive long-term outcomes.

Comparison of Demographic Information

Counting homeless youth has proven to be a challenging task. As of the year 2000, there had been only two attempts to estimate the number of homeless persons in Canada (Peressini & McDonald, 2000). The most recent attempt was by Statistics Canada, who did not release their findings

due to unidentified inaccuracies. Their study was based on 1991 census data obtained from the number

of individuals utilizing soup kitchens. The other attempt was made by the Canadian Council on Social

Development, in conjunction with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and utilized a key

informant approach to estimating the number of homeless people in Canada in 1987. They concluded

that between 130,000 and 250,000 people were homeless in Canada on any given night.

Though there is a lack of an accurate count, Karabanow (2002) reports that Canada's youth

homeless situation is approaching "disaster status". Krause et al. (2001) report that a rising trend can be

identified. Youth homelessness research is fraught with problems (Kipke et al., 1997; Kipke & Unger,

1997; Pollio et al., 2001; Rew et al, 2001). Researchers do not agree on definitions of youth or

homelessness, research designs are highly variable, and samples are non-representative and tend to be

small. The hidden homeless people have been disregarded due to their inaccessibility and because of a

focus on absolute homelessness, and research has been cross sectional, causing the cyclical nature of

youth homelessness to be understated. Those homeless for short episodes tend to be missed in cross

sectional research (Kipke & Unger, 1997).

In addition to the research problems noted above, characteristics of the population itself make

it practically impossible to measure. Homeless youth are a hidden and difficult-to-track population,

forcing researchers to rely on shelter data (Ringwalt et al. 1998) and small convenience samples (Rew et

al., 2001). According to research conducted in the Toronto and York regions, only about 25 percent of

the homeless youth utilize shelters, and therefore, data based on shelter use is highly inaccurate

(Government of Canada, 2003).

The goal of the current study was not to enumerate adolescent homeless women in

Whitehorse, but to develop an understanding of their experiences and their perceptions of service

needs. As confirmed by Aviles and Helfrich (2004), narrative interviews provide an encounter between

the researcher and informant that allow the researcher to understand the experiences of the informant in her own words. Another important goal of this research was to provide an opportunity for young women to tell their stories through individual interviews and a focus group. In keeping with the premises that youth homelessness is a societal problem, and that young homeless women are a relatively powerless and voiceless population, the researcher guided the participants to discussions of what homelessness meant to the participants, what the community could do to prevent adolescent women's homelessness, and what they believed led to their experiences of homelessness and how this experience might have been avoided.

McDowell and Madsen (2001) identified youth as being between the age of 13 and 29 years in their study of youth homelessness in Whitehorse. For the purposes of the current study, however, youth were identified as being between the age of 13 and 19 years. The rationale for this decision was the researcher's intent to focus on adolescent issues and perspectives, which may differ from those of young adult women in their twenties. As well, the data collected by McDowell and Madsen included information for both males and females. The data for the current study was restricted to adolescent women because of the under representation of this group in the existing research, because of a desire to highlight the needs of adolescent women specifically, and because young women in the north may have unique experiences.

Participant Experiences and Perceptions

A comparison of the responses provided in this study with the literature is a form of triangulation, and demonstrates strong external validity. The location specific information provided by the participants is considered valid, and is used as the basis for recommendations for the community, given the strong external validity of the information provided by the participants in all other aspects of youth homelessness that were discussed. In addition, the youth homelessness research literature

reviewed for this study also supports and validates the prevention and intervention suggestions put forth by the participants in the course of this study.

Highlighted below are the predominant themes that arose from the data collected in this study. The participants discussed definitions of homelessness, the nature of homelessness experiences, and the precipitating factors leading up to their experiences of homelessness. They also described their experiences in relation to the services that were available to them in Whitehorse, and how the community could have assisted them to achieve more successful outcomes. Social barriers that contributed to their homelessness experiences were also noted as being of importance, and as issues that should be addressed to prevent future homelessness experiences for other young women.

In defining homelessness, the informants of this study validated the results found in other research. Absolute homelessness is not an accurate depiction of any homeless population, nor is lack of physical shelter by any means a complete description of homelessness. In the north, definitions of youth homelessness must include those youth who remain with their families in spite of lack of personal safety and/or conflict, as other options are extremely limited. As well, in the north, youth homelessness definitions must include those youth living in overcrowded conditions, and in insecure or unsafe environments, again because of the lack of alternatives. Recognition of the environmental factors that contribute to young women's homelessness in the north could provide a basis for addressing the problem. Haber and Toro (2004), who state that a focus solely on deficiencies of homeless youth may actually foster homelessness, and Karabanow (1999) who concludes that creating a healthy community that empowers youth is critical to resolving youth homelessness issues, substantiate this theory.

According to the respondents of this study, homelessness occurs if a young woman is without a home for any length of time - a day, a week, or three months. As well, there is clearly a difference

between a house and a home. If a person does not have "something safe where you can close your eyes and sleep and feel comfortable", she is homeless. Novac et al. (2002) confirm that young women's subjective definitions of homelessness have been found to be related to their feelings of safety and belonging. This is contrary to Tomas and Dittmar's (1995) report in which adult women defined home as where they lived, with safety and security constituting a quest. The informants of the current study clearly identified comfort, acceptance, respect, and emotional stability as being key factors in their definitions of home. Therefore, according to the respondents of this study, homelessness occurs if a young woman does not feel safe, respected, and comfortable where she is living, if she does not have shelter, or if the shelter is inadequate. Although emergency shelters would undoubtedly benefit adolescent homeless women, a shift in how we as a society understand and give respect to the rights of young women is required in the long term. As Mullaly (1997) states, provision of resources without changing the power structure only perpetuates the problem.

The literature points to a number of precipitating factors and causes of adolescent homelessness, from sexual abuse (Tyler et al., 2001), to being placed in a group home (Cauce, 2000), to gentrification (Murphy, 2000). The participants of this study, however, clearly identified parental conflict as the predominant reason for leaving home at a young age. Without social supports, and in communities where runaway or throw-away youth are identified as deviant or defiant, in combination with a lack of preparation for independence, limited finances, and their young age, youth who leave home often encounter huge barriers in finding suitable shelter. Some youth may return home when the conflict that precipitated the homeless episode has subsided. However, the experience of homelessness for youth has been documented as being episodic (Ringwalt et al., 1998), and many youth find themselves homeless again at some time in the future. The informants of the current study

confirmed the cyclical nature of adolescent homelessness as well - the narratives of half of the informants reflected periods of homelessness, as opposed to a single experience.

Unfortunately, when unable to find suitable lodging, there were no safe alternatives available to the young women in this study. Whitehorse does not have an emergency youth shelter, and the experiences of all of the respondents were that there were no services available outside of business hours from Monday to Friday. While there is no youth specific shelter in Whitehorse, there is one homelessness shelter, and a Women's shelter. The shelter for the homeless is run by a nongovernmental organization, and provides services to all homeless individuals. It was dismissed by all participants as being unsafe and unsuitable for young women for a number of reasons. In fact, the participants felt safer on the streets, in squats, or sitting in Tim Hortons. Whitbeck et al. (2001) state that the most immediate need is protection from further harm, and clearly the participants of this study do not feel that the current Whitehorse shelter can provide that protection. In other words, their needs were not met by existing services.

The women's shelter was also not considered a viable alternative for the participants by the participants themselves, and clearly, its primary purpose is not to provide shelter for homeless adolescent women. The participants clearly understood that this shelter is only an option if a woman is 19 years of age or older, however, in reality the shelter does have some flexibility depending on circumstances. As well, the young women in this study did not identify themselves as victims of violence from a partner, and they did not feel they met the criteria to stay there. From the perspectives of the young women, the Women's Transition Home was not an option due to their understanding of its purpose, and their assessment of their personal circumstances.

On the other hand, the participants did describe two services that were of assistance: the youth outreach councellors of the Yukon Family Services Association, and Bringing Youth Toward Equality

(BYTE) staff. However, these services operate during regular business hours, and they are not focused on addressing youth homelessness. The outreach workers and BYTE staff were noted as being particularly helpful and compassionate, but the participant was still homeless at the end of the day. For example, in one instance, an outreach worked assisted a young woman to apply for social assistance and for emergency housing, but neither application enabled the young homeless women to access emergency shelter or funds.

Age itself was actually identified in this study as a significant barrier to finding suitable housing. Novac et al. (2002) confirm that the program and service gap for 16 and 17 year olds has been noted by researchers in Canada, with youth and young adults falling through the cracks between public systems of care. They are ineligible for children's care systems and yet their needs cannot be met through the adult care system (McDowell & Madsen, 2001; Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, 2001). According to a Yukon Government Health and Social Services adult services unit staff member (personal communication, November 7, 2005), Social Services in Whitehorse reserves one emergency bed for youth under the age of 19. However, this bed can only be accessed once the youth has exhausted all other avenues, and the government has become the parent of last resort, and in any case, the participants of the present study did not reveal any knowledge of this service.

The participants of this study identified government group homes as being the only possible housing resource available to them, as they were too young to qualify for social assistance. However, they did not consider becoming a ward of the state a viable option. It is well documented that youth in care comprise a significant percentage of the youth homelessness population (Karabanow, 2003), and it is not surprising that adolescent women would not consider this an alternative to homelessness. Not only was there stigma attached to it, but they also did not believe they should become wards of the state.

The participants also revealed experiences of mistrust and disrespect from potential landlords, who were reluctant to rent to youth. In his study, Karabanow (2003) has documented that homeless youth may feel perceived as thieves and criminals, which is clearly how the participants of this study felt they were viewed by potential landlords. Renting an apartment was not an option for a number of the participants, even if a sympathetic landlord could be found, as they had no funds to do so.

Finding employment while one is homeless is extremely challenging. The participants of this study confirmed that not only is providing contact information a problem, arriving for job interviews in clean clothes may be nearly impossible. Gaetz and O'Grady (2002) report that homeless youth in Canada face the toughest barriers of any group in the work force in terms of obtaining and maintaining paid employment. They also report that the majority of homeless youth aspire to conventional jobs, and toil hard for little return. The success of the youth homeless population is impacted by social exclusion and limited choices. In this regard, Wolfe and Toro (1999) also note that youth typically lack the skills and education for jobs that pay well.

Couch surfing and living in squats are well known phenomenon for youth who are unable to, or who have no desire to, return to their normal place of residence (Krause et al., 2001). More than one participant of the current study noted that couch surfing is not a realistic option as the parents of the friends of homeless youth generally do not welcome homeless youth in their homes for any length of time. Another participant relayed that living in squats with a number of other homeless persons was how she resolved her homelessness situation, while another described dangerous and negative experiences with squats.

Whitbeck et al. (1999) state that living on the streets involves learning to be antisocial, and that interactions reinforce untrustworthiness of others. This was clearly verified in the experiences of one young woman who reported being terrified of asking for help, and afraid of approaching other street

people for fear of victimization. One respondent in the study reported that the only people she felt connected to were other homeless people, yet she did not approach them, and therefore, she was completely disconnected from the community.

All participants were unanimous in their reports of their experiences of social connectedness during their homeless experiences. They clearly described a lack of social connectedness, feeling alone, with nowhere to turn, isolated, and as if no one cared. Rew (2002) found that social connectedness was inversely related to feelings of loneliness and positively related to feelings of well-being. Since each of this study's participants reported feeling isolated and disconnected, it follows that they would feel alone and unwell. This implication is validated by the participants' comments that homelessness is "hell, brutal, scary, and it sucks."

According to Karabanow's (2003) study involving street youth, perceptions of feeling alone, not fitting in, and being perceived as the dregs of society may be typical. Ricks et al (1999) include belonging and mutual caring in their definition of community, and it is apparent that at least some homeless youth are not part of community. Mullaly (1997) also describes a system or community that is based on equality, solidarity, and community. Clearly, there is a chasm between homeless youth and community.

The information provided by the participants of the study supports the need for an innovative approach to resolving adolescent women's homelessness. The underlying messages from the participants of this study reinforce the notions that barriers exist in many components of life when a young woman is trying to avoid homelessness. A top down approach to resolving adolescent women's homelessness may provide much needed band-aids, but power over the lives of homeless young women then remains in the hands of bureaucrats, as opposed to with the women themselves.

As well, stopgap measures to address homelessness do not prevent future homelessness or provide a means of social change. The participants of this study clearly stated that if one is not treated with respect, and/or does not feel safe or comfortable, then she is homeless. A more systemic approach to community wellness, through empowerment, community capacity building, and a strengths based approach to services may be required to significantly reduce adolescent women's homelessness (Cadell et al, 2001; Ricks et al, 1999; Karabanow, 1999). Building strength and resiliency from the ground up is a way of building capacity and empowerment on an individual and community level, which leads to societal change. A bottom up approach takes power from a few and distributes it to many.

Policy Recommendations

The participants of this study have clearly identified that while there is a strong impetus to meet immediate needs, through shelters and other support systems, social change is the key to prevention of future homelessness for adolescent women. Historically, research has been completed with homeless youth in the areas of experiences, health concerns, well being and safety issues, and needs. Conventional methods have resulted in researchers having the dominant voice in generating potential solutions for youth homelessness, based on input obtained from a number of sources, including homeless youth. The recommendations for solutions and interventions generated through such research are numerous and diverse, and have been prominently focused on the individual experiencing homelessness and her family.

According to Lorde (1993), utilization of the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house; they will never allow genuine change. This argument is supported by Mullaly (1997), who contends that the personalization of social problems, and meeting an individual's needs through conventional social work programs, serve to maintain the status quo. Thus, interventions grounded in

our current welfare systems will not impact the oppression experienced by marginalized groups such as homeless adolescent women, or young women at risk of homelessness.

While we are beginning to recognize that homeless youth are a heterogeneous population with a number of subpopulations, that services need to vary according to subgroup (Kipke & Unger, 1997), and that an array of services is needed for such a diverse population with diverse needs (Brooks et al., 2003; Mallet et al., 2004; Haber & Toro, 2004), we continue to make recommendations to meet needs and to develop safety nets, and have not made the transition to approaching the problem from outside a conventional social work system. Researchers continue to attempt to address gaps in service and accessibility and so on. Pawsey and Fuller (1993) state, for example, that services must reach the most vulnerable populations. O'Brien et al (1993) state that equitable access, and safe, informed, and supportive services are key to success. As well, research through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2002a), while promoting a holistic approach, is still supporting services within the status quo, such as safe and affordable homes, emotional support, relationships with at least one adult, opportunities to develop life skills, access to training, education, and employment readiness programs, and health care. While these services may be effective in supporting youth to transition off the street, they do not necessarily empower individuals or groups, impact power distribution within society, or impact the marginalization and alienation of homeless adolescent women. Structural social work theory (Mullaly, 1997) recognizes that if we provide services, and assist individuals to access services, we are acting benevolently and are not addressing the actual need itself.

In the current study, the participants identify a number of diverse and varied potential policy-related interventions and approaches, aimed at meeting immediate needs while addressing the actual need. These suggestions are based on personal experience, expertise gained through trial and error and survival, and they are all specific to Whitehorse. Most of these recommendations are not new

or unique to the north and have been corroborated through other research. Recommendations for social change, while perhaps uncommon in youth homelessness research, are common throughout feminist based research. The ideas generated by the participants of this study come from the expertise gained through first hand experience, however, and have not been filtered through a researcher or institution.

Because the personal is political, individual work is by necessity an element of a larger movement of social transformation (Mullaly, 1997). A number of the recommendations for interventions and prevention generated by the participants of this study may appear to address short term needs, without social change. However, the methods utilized to generate the solutions embraced the concepts of consciousness raising and empowerment, and led to discussions for the necessity of social transformation as a preventive tool. Individual needs must be met while social change occurs over a longer term, so that today's homeless youth are not sacrificed for tomorrow's youth.

Intervention programs.

In relation to intervention programs, the individual interviews strongly highlight the need for a Whitehorse youth shelter, primarily because Whitehorse lacks a shelter that is specific for youth, and because there is clearly a need for at least one youth specific service that is available in the evenings and on weekends. Although the participants in this study are highly consistent in specifying a need for a women specific shelter, Novac et al. (2002) report that young women generally prefer to align with young men as opposed to adult women. However, they also report that typical homeless youth services that support both genders are oppressive for young women and that sexual violence is commonplace, which supports a woman specific service. A number of experts confirm that shelters can be beneficial interventions (Karabanow, 1999; Krause et al. 2001), however, how well they are accessed and utilized

depends on how successfully they meet the needs and concerns of the youth (Greene & Ringwalt, 1997).

The focus group participants also clearly specify that shelters, and places to access food and showers, are very important. As well, the participants specify that services should not be affiliated with religious institutions or institutions with other agendas. This is corroborated by research conducted in Toronto, in which researchers found that youth prefer to use programs targeted specifically to them (Government of Canada, 2003). Providing emergency services in an environment where youth are stigmatized, alienated, or separated from society will not be of great assistance. In considering emergency services, we need to embrace youth in our community and include them in the development of programs. Thus how we approach interventions is as important as the interventions themselves.

In a structural social work approach to interventions, as with a feminist approach, a focus on empowerment, consciousness raising, and normalization of the issue are fundamental to development of interventions (Mullaly, 1997). Thus, involving service users in defining and developing interventions; supporting activities that enable adolescent women to understand the issues in the context of society and to reframe the problem as a social problem as opposed to a personal or family pathology; and working with service users and community in an inclusive and collective process to reduce alienation, isolation, and rejection are important for success.

Prevention programs.

The participants of this study identify that in prevention, as with intervention, addressing underlying issues and empowering young women to feel positive about the future are critical. Thus prevention recommendations have taken the form of social action. Addressing underlying issues such as power inequities and values (Ricks et al., 1999) and exclusion from community (Karabanow, 1999)

have also been identified through recent Canadian research as being critical to successfully addressing youth homelessness, especially for young women.

In this study examples of specific prevention services that would have been beneficial to the participants prior to their homelessness experiences are provided. Two individual participants state that mediation would have helped prevent their homelessness in the first place. As conflict is a well documented precipitating factor for youth homelessness (Janus et al., 1995; Kipke et al., 1997; Schweitzer & Hier, 1994), this is a well validated suggestion. Since mediation is an individual approach, and is an example of working within the conventional social work system, it should be included in an overall process that leads to social change on political and personal levels.

Research provides a number of examples of how prevention may be accomplished through a service provision approach (Cadell et al., 2001; Karabanow, 2003), but it is also a societal and global issue. The participants of this study identified the need for societal change, while meeting the needs of today's homeless young women. The dual role of services was recognized by focus group participants of this study as they provided examples of how interventions could also be considered prevention tools depending on the timing of the service/program. For example, life skills programs can be both a means of prevention and intervention. Other examples of prevention/intervention programs suggested included:

- having peer educators come into the secondary schools to talk about reality on the street,

- developing school based group projects that present challenges for students - such as going through the process of finding a home if you were to become suddenly homeless;

- providing an extensive trades experience for students to facilitate goal development and informed career choices; and

- providing money management training in the schools.

Also noted by the focus group participants are more complex, longer term solutions. For example, one participant suggests the development of cooperative organizations that could ultimately support cooperative housing for youth and women. Another suggestion involves programs to promote financial education for young women, and access to partner loans to promote cooperative housing. The discussions around collaboration, partnerships, and recommendations for programs that would result in young women assuming control over their finances and careers, and enhancing knowledge of society reflect a high level of understanding that these are key elements to long-term change.

Overall, the youth homelessness research literature validates the experiences of the participants of this study during their homeless periods. In spite of the small sample size, participant responses in the key question areas are typical of homeless youth in other jurisdictions of North America, as documented in the literature. In addition, the theoretical framework that underpins this study both reinforces and is reinforced by the responses of the participants who articulate an awareness of their own exclusion from society, while recognizing the need to be respected, participating members of the community.

Research recommendations.

The literature review conducted for this study points to a lack of theoretical underpinnings for a significant amount of research related to adolescent homelessness. In addition, the adolescent homelessness research that does exist and is related specifically to adolescent women's homelessness is very limited. The theoretical framework for understanding adolescent women's homelessness as identified earlier in this paper clearly illustrates that there are a number of reasons that adolescent women's homelessness merits study as an issue separate from other homelessness research, and that a

feminist approach to research is beneficial to understanding the issues from the perspective of adolescent women.

As well, although Canadian researchers have generated a significant body of research on adolescent homelessness, it has been predominantly focused on youth living in southern, urban centers. This study shows that northern populations face different issues than southern populations, only one of which is a relative lack of resources for homeless populations, such as emergency shelters. The specific impacts of cultural differences, climate, and geographical isolation on adolescent women's homelessness in the north are relatively unexplored. The implications of each of these factors for young women who are homeless could be significant.

Finally, the number of adolescent homeless women in the north remains a mystery. Once again, the characteristics of the Canadian north make generalizations from southern data of questionable value. This study clearly shows that the issue of adolescent women's homelessness does exist, but how well it can be addressed without a valid estimate of the numbers of youth and families impacted is of concern. Not only may bureaucrats be unwilling to allocate funding to an issue that cannot be proven to be of significance, but also measuring outcomes in ways that show that funding is making a difference will be a challenge. Therefore, there is a perceived need to understand how extensive this issue is in the Canadian north.

Policy Recommendations for Whitehorse

Based on the experiences of the participants of this study as presented through the course of this research, and on other Whitehorse based research (McDowell & Madsen, 2001; Le Camp 2001; Krause et al., 2001; Finton & Kramer, 2005), Whitehorse is clearly currently unable to address the needs of adolescent women who are homeless. The implications of allowing the problem to persist and grow, without intervention, are devastating for young women.

Everything about homelessness degrades health (Wright, 1990), and homelessness is a predictor of early death for youth (Ubelacker, 2004). Therefore, through our inaction, the health of every young woman who is homeless for any length of time is seriously compromised. Young women are forced to participate in a number of health compromising behaviours in order to survive (Yates et al., 1988). Not only is their health compromised, their risk of victimization is increased, and they are often criminalized for resorting to survival tactics.

In light of the findings of this study, and the release of the Whitehorse report on youth homelessness (Finton & Kramer, 2005), a continuum of services, including a youth or woman specific shelter, is urgently needed. A youth or woman-specific emergency shelter that is accessible in the evenings and on weekends is vital - especially for female youth, who are very likely to be victimized and to engage in high risk survival strategies (Whitbeck et al., 2001). While this service could alleviate the immediate risk facing young women who are currently homeless in Whitehorse, there is much more that needs to be done as the systemic issues must also be addressed in order to prevent young women from being put at risk of homelessness.

The recently released report on Whitehorse youth homelessness (Finton & Kramer, 2005) advocates for a community based multi-agency, multi-faceted continuum of services for homeless youth. A community based approach is confirmed by a rising voice in youth homelessness research which is recommending that solutions be designed to empower youth (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004), follow a model of wellness (Cadell et al., 2001), and employ community development and social action models (Karabanow, 1999).

Whitbeck et al. (1999) focus on the need to build on the strengths and independence of homeless youth, as does Karabanow (2003) in his description of a culture of hope. A culture of hope is an environment in which individuals can gain strength, courage, resiliency, and a sense of optimism for

the present and the future (Karabanow, 2003). The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2002b) also supports reducing economic and social exclusion through involvement of participants in programs and services. Together, these interventions and prevention tools could be employed in a community plan that would facilitate social change.

In Whitehorse, such a community plan should include the youth agencies, as well as all other interested stakeholders. Mullaly (1997) advises that coalition building is an effective tool for obtaining social change, and this model has been proven to be effective in other programs in Whitehorse. Finton and Kramer (2005) also recommend coalition building as an integral component of the community plan that they recommend for Whitehorse for addressing youth homelessness. Through the establishment of a coalition, all members of the public, non-governmental agencies, government departments, and other interested stakeholders can share responsibility and decision making authority. Coalitions allow groups to share knowledge and expertise and are thus also a tool for community development.

A community plan for Whitehorse must also include an array of services that are based on a bottom up approach. Self help programs have been noted to empower the individuals who participate in them, through consciousness raising and collectivism (Mullaly, 1997). An alternative agency can be formed to facilitate youth self help programs, and a community coalition could act as a coordinating body for the establishment of self help programs, to recruit volunteers, apply for funding, and establish any initial guidelines and policies. An alternative agency is one which distances itself both philosophically and physically from government, and takes a clearly unconventional approach to services. Alternative agencies respect the expertise of service users, and tend to be non-hierarchical.

Funding is a critical aspect of all services, and there is currently no ongoing program funding for specific youth services in Whitehorse, other than the state youth protection system. The Yukon

government must be convinced of the importance of funding a shelter system for Yukon's youth, and for supporting programs that provide the support that youth need to stay off the street. This commitment should be demonstrated by a willingness to work with a coalition, and by providing a human resource that is dedicated to homelessness issues, research, and youth health promotion. Shelters are unable to operate on project funding, and require the commitment of longer term operational funding from the territorial government. While a coalition is important in advocating for youth specific shelters that will address the needs of various age groups as well as male and female youth, and community members (including youth) may be expected to shoulder some work, the bulk of the work itself must be funded by the government.

The Yukon government has a history of political inconsistency. While one government may make commitments to address particular issues, the reality is that it would be highly unusual for one political party to remain in office for more than one term. Thus, it is very important that the youth agencies, alternative agencies, and the coalition be prepared to make youth homelessness an issue of note for each government, to publicly hold government accountable, and to advocate with each government for long term commitment to a community based plan. Advocacy may occur at the federal level as well as locally since leadership and commitment are also lacking in Ottawa. While Canada has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, our country has no legislation in place to guide the country in implementation of the Convention. The impacts of the Convention for youth and children in Canada can only be insignificant if there are no accountability systems or leadership for the governments of the provinces and territories. In campaigning for youth rights, advocates may send delegates to the UN for assistance to hold the Canadian government accountable for failing to solve the problem of youth homelessness. These delegates to the UN should include some young adolescent women who have experienced homelessness.

While Whitehorse is currently in dire need of youth services for homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness, especially young women, there is hope for the future. The community has begun to take action through the Youth homelessness report (Finton & Kramer, 2005) and its recommendations, and discussions are occurring at the grass roots and within government. The proof of the level of commitment of local government to addressing this issue will be in the types of services and the funding commitment that result.

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Appendix A - Summary of Key Youth Homelessness Studies

Researcher(s)	Year	Location	Purpose of Study	Key Findings
Bridgman, R.	2001	Toronto, Canada	Pilot project designed to provide housing and employment training opportunities.	• Challenges were related to youth participation, representational authority, and conflicting values; • Requires flexibility on part of organizers; • Requires sensitivity related to privacy and publicity; • Youth develop sense of community and agency, but then enter a workplace with different values.
Cadell, S. Karabanow, J. Sanchez, M.	2001	Montreal, Canada	Examines empowerment, resilience, and community –building in three populations to develop a wellness model.	• Community is important in fostering empowerment and resilience and these in turn lead to stronger community; • Natural communities are among the last remaining hopes for marginalized populations.
Cauce, A.	2000	Seattle, U.S.	Examines characteristics and mental health of homeless adolescents.	• Youth homelessness numbers are growing; • Removal from home by state authorities was a significant pathway to homelessness; • Girls were more likely to leave home on their own than boys (because of higher rates of abuse); • Recognition of gender and age based heterogeneity is important in program development.
Corrado, R. Odgers, C. Cohen, I.	2000	British Columbia, Canada	Explores offending patterns, social histories, and criminal justice system's response to most serious female young offenders in B.C.	• Most offences are minor or administrative; • Primary rationale for incarcerating young women is to protect them (not society).
Finton, H. Kramer, M.	2005	Yukon, Canada	Explores models for service provision for homeless youth in Whitehorse.	• Continuum of services needed based on age, gender, and specific needs; • Flexible, small, nonbureaucratic agencies needed;

				• Coalition of service providers assuming collective responsibility recommended.
Goodman, L. Saxe, L. Harvey, M.	1991	U.S.	Examines the effects of homelessness itself on mental health.	• Many homeless individuals may be experiencing short and long term trauma wrought by homelessness itself; • Development of trauma theory.
Government of Canada	2003	Toronto, Canada	Profiles youth in the Toronto/York region.	• 75% to 82% of homeless youth in Toronto do not use the shelter system; • in 2002, 6,900 youth stayed in municipally funded shelters (Toronto; estimated; up to age 24) • youth under 18 are one of the two fastest growing homeless groups.
Green, J. M. Ringwalt, C. L.	1997	U.S.	Analyses data from national sample of youth homeless and runaway shelters to assess occupancy rates.	• Youth shelters have low occupancy rates; • Many youth perceive youth shelters to be unsafe; • Homeless youth are among the most vulnerable, elusive, and difficult to serve populations.
Higgit, N. Wingert, S. Ristock, J. Et al.	2003	Winnipeg, Canada	Examines how youth came to be on the street; what their lives were like then; what things made life on street harder or easier; what might facilitate move off the street.	• Many youth perceive they have no choice but to leave home; • Youth become homeless due to failure of family, school, community, child protection, and youth corrections systems; • The longer on the street, the harder it is to get off although most youth dream of meaningful employment, education, homes, cares, and families; • Youth want control over their lives and destinies.
Janus, M. D. Archambault, F. X. Brown, S.W. Welsh, L. A.	1995	Canada	Investigates the physical abuse experienced in Canadian adolescent runaways.	• 86% of sample (195 youth) reported physical abuse (females 90%); • data suggests chronic, extreme abuse at a young age, initiated prior to runaway episode;

				• female youth at greater risk than males for all types of abuse.
Karabanow, J.	1999	Montreal, Canada	Explores the development of an emergency street kid shelter.	• Success of this shelter is due to recognition and acceptance, of and respect for, street culture and to providing youth with pivotal roles in agency development; • Good example of locality development and social action.
Karabanow, J.	2002	Toronto, Canada	Explores the life stages of two Toronto youth shelters.	• These shelters have adapted/evolved to address need and environments, and to survive; • Consciously provide services to formal "system" youth, as opposed to street kids (original target).
Karabanow, J.	2003	Toronto & Montreal, Canada & Guatemala	Illuminates the experiences of street children in Toronto, Montreal, and Guatemala City.	• Labeling youth as delinquents, criminals, victims, clients enables us to avoid seeing them as human; • Programs most successful provide a symbolic space where youth feel safe, cared for, and part of a community; • Notion of citizenship rather than pathology; • Successful agencies are flexible, respectful, and allow youth to retain dignity.
Kraus, D. Eberle, M. Serge, L.	2001	Canada	Examines youth homelessness across Canada.	• Youth have same general characteristics across the Country (i.e. exposure to physical violence, conflict with the law, mental health problems); • Many have been raised in foster homes; • Number of homeless young women is growing; • Lifestyles of homeless youth puts health at risk.
MacLean, M. G. Embry, L. E. Cauce, A.	1999	Washington, U.S.	Investigates three paths to homelessness or separation from family: running away, being kicked	• No differences were found in current family relationships, psychological symptomatology or rates of recent victimization;

			out, and being removed from home by state.	• Girls were more likely to have run away, and boys were more likely to be kicked out.
McDowell, J. Madsen, K.	2001	Whitehorse, Canada	Investigates youth homelessness issues in Whitehorse.	• Homeless youth are largely invisible, difficult to count, mobile; • 64% stated that they sometimes felt they had nowhere to stay; • 62% stated that they sometimes live outdoors or camp; • 70% stated that they sometimes go without meals; • 51% stated that they did not have enough money to meet basic food and shelter needs; • 28% stated that they had jobs;
McCarthy, B. Hagan, J. Martin, M. J.	2002	U.S.	Tests the hypothesis that street families generate social capital resources that protect homeless youth from harm.	• Differentiates between fictive street families and non-family street groups; • Data suggests that fictive street families increase support in areas of shelter, food, and income, and reduce victimization.
Miller, P. Donahue, P. Este, D. Hofer, M.	2004	Lethbridge & Calgary, Canada	Examines diversity issues among homeless youth and those at risk of homelessness in a larger city and a smaller city.	• Themes common to youth homelessness and risk of homelessness included family conflict/violence, lack of permanence in housing, and financial constraints; • Youth looked upon their situations as temporary; • Lack of education contributed to employment limitations, but lack of part time work kept youth from pursuing education; • High reliance on social networks.
Novac, S. Serge, L. Eberle, M.	2002	Canada	Explores the causes, demographics and patterns of young women's homelessness in Canada.	• It is not possible to establish the level of homelessness among young women in Canada; • Young women make up $1/3$ to $1/2$ of homeless

Brown, J.				youth in Canada; • Cross sectional research methods miss cycles of homelessness and over represent groups; • Provides extensive information on a number of factors impacting and influencing young women's homelessness in Canada.
Perissini, R. MacDonald, L.	2000	Canada	Reviews contemporary research on Canadian homelessness.	• Describe two national attempts to count the homeless • Statistics Canada (1991)- did not release findings due to inaccuracies; • Canadian Council on Social Development and CMHC (1987) – estimated 130,000 to 250,000 (unable to confirm accuracy)
Rew, L. Taylor-Seehafer, M. Thomas, N. Y. Yockey, R. D.	2001	U.S.	Examines reasons for youth homelessness, explores relationship between resilience and risk and protective factors; identifies differences in risk and protective factors by gender; determines best predictors of resilience.	• Nearly half reported history of sexual abuse; • Over half thrown out by parents; • Lack of resilience was related to hopelessness, loneliness, risky behaviour, and connectedness; • Resilience may be identified to mean self reliant to some youth.
Ringwalt, C. L. Greene, J. Robertson, M. McPheeters, M.	1998	U.S.	Studies prevalence of homeless episodes among adolescents in the U.S.	• Prevalence varied little by sociodemographic or geographic factors; • 7.6% of national sample reported episodes of homelessness over a 12 month period; • Rates were higher for boys than girls; • Youth homelessness is much more common than is generally thought.
Robert, M. Pauze, R. Fournier, L.	2005	Canada	Compares characteristics of two groups of youth under the supervision of the youth protection system, according to periods or absence of homelessness.	• Youth with experiences of homelessness were more likely to have been placed in substitute homes, have been diagnosed with behavioural problems, and to have experienced relationship problems with at least one parent.

Rotheram-Borus, M.	1993	New York City, U.S.	Describes suicide attempts and risk factors among runaway adolescents.	• 37% had previously attempted suicide; • female runaways were significantly more likely than males to attempt suicide; • staff members in shelters need to be trained to assess suicidality at intake.
Stewart, M. Reutter, L. Letourneau, N. Barnfather, A. Hungler, K. Almond, A. King, K.	2004	Edmonton, Canada	Seeks out homeless youth's views on their support needs and preferred support programs.	• Estimates 1900 homeless in Edmonton, 10% of which are youth; • Current needs of youth are not met; • Identified need for increased or improved emotional support, more support for developing healthy self esteem and identity, non-judgmental people and unconditional support desired; • housing is most critical need • financial aid and help to access services; • increased awareness of services, information.
Van Leeuwen	2004	Denver, U.S.	Examines three housing programs designed to meet needs of youth aging out of care.	• number of homeless youth in Denver has increased more than 100% over 5 years.
Whitbeck, L. B. Hoyt, D. R. Ackley, K. A.	1997	U.S.	Compares runaway and homeless youth reports of and parent reports on measures of parenting, family violence, and adolescent conduct.	• Reports from both youth and parents/caretakers present similar portraits of families of runaway and homeless youth; • Lower levels of parental monitoring, warmth, and supportiveness, and higher levels of parental rejection than comparison groups. • Findings suggest that the family situations as depicted by homeless and runaway youth are realistic.
Whitbeck, L. B. Hoyt, D. R. Yoder, K. A.	1999	U.S.	Examines a theoretical model of risk amplification to explain youth homelessness.	• When abused young people leave home (by whichever path), a negative trajectory is accentuated by what they experience when on their own; • Maladaptive families and behaviours of

runaways select them into environments that perpetuate negative behaviours and negative interaction styles.

- Learning to live in exploitive, dangerous environment involves learning to be antisocial.

Appendix B - Key Informant Questions

Whitehorse Youth Service Providers

Name:

Position/Agency:

Mandate:

Date:

Questions:

1. How long have you been working in the area of youth homelessness in Whitehorse?

2. Have you identified any trends?
   -situation getting worse?
   -any improvements?

3. What services are currently available for youth in Whitehorse if they are homeless, or living precariously?

4. What are the youth that you are seeing asking for most often?

5. What do you think about how Whitehorse has approached the problem?
   -what do we need to do more of/ less of?
   -what are we not doing at all that we should be doing?

6. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix C – UNBC Research Ethics Board Approval

UN**BC**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Research Ethics Board

MEMORANDUM

To: **Janet LeCamp**
            30 - 10th Ave., Whitehorse, Yukon

            Kwong Tang
            Social Work Program

From: **Alex Michalos**
            Chair, Research Ethics Board

Date: **May 27, 2003**

Re: **Ethics Review 2003.0506.040**
            Where Will I Sleep Tonight?

Thank you for submitting the modifications to your participant information sheet and consent form for the above noted project as requested. The modification have addressed the concerns raised by the reviewers and your project is now approved.

Good luck in your research.

Sincerely,

Alex C. Michalos, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Appendix D – Participant Recruitment Poster

Adolescent Women and Homelessness

- Were you ever homeless as a teen?

- Did you ever have nowhere to sleep?

- Did you ever have to exchange favours for food and/or shelter?

- As a teen, did you ever feel unsafe in your home, but have nowhere to go?

I am researching adolescent women's homelessness, and trying to advocate for help and social change.

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, I would like to talk to you - Please call me.

Janet 668-4904 (evenings and weekends)

A small honorarium will be paid to participants.

Appendix E - Interview Questionnaire

In your words, what do you think "homelessness" means?
    Follow up questions   Who can it happen to?
                           What does having a "home" mean to you? (shelter, safety, personal
                           space, sense of belonging, ...)
                           What if you have a safe place, but it isn't your home?

What happened that caused you to leave home? How/Why were you homeless?
    Follow up questions   Did you leave more than once?
                           Did you ever live "in care"?
                                   If so, were you still homeless, or did you have a home then?
                           How old were you?

Can you describe what you did, and what happened to you, while you were homeless?
    Follow up questions   Did you ever get into "trouble" while you were homeless?
                           How did you survive?
                           Did you do things that you normally wouldn't do that were unsafe?
                           (If so, can you talk about these?)
                           How do you think homelessness in the North might be different from
                           homelessness in the south?

Do you feel like a member of a community?
    Follow up questions   What do you think "community" is?
                           Do you feel supported by friends, family, or any one else?
                           Who do you turn to for help when you need it?
                           When you were a teen, did you have someone to help you?

What do you think your future will be like?
    Follow up questions   Do you think you will be homeless again?
                           What about any children you might have?

What could or should have been done to help you?
                           Who should have helped you?
                           How could your homelessness, or its cause, have been prevented?

Based on your experience, what do you think could be done to either help prevent adolescent women's
homelessness, or help young women who are homeless?
    Follow up questions   Who should help?
                                   Government, families, neighbours, healthy families...?
                           What is the cause of most young women's homelessness?

How many other young women do you know who were/are homeless? (Follow up with when?,
simultaneously? How old are/were they?)
Are there some women you know who might have something to tell me?

Appendix F - Participant Information Sheet

My name is Janet Le Camp and I am studying adolescent women's experiences of homelessness in Whitehorse. I am trying to understand and document how adolescent women define homelessness, what their experiences are before, during, and after homelessness, and how our community can support homeless adolescent women and prevent future homelessness.

Part of my research will involve interviewing young women who have experienced adolescent homelessness according to their own definition of what homelessness means. I will also facilitate a focus group after the interviews, and invite the participants from the individual interviews to attend. All interviewees will receive a small honorarium for giving me their time, and sharing their experiences.

I understand you have experience with this topic and you are interested in participating. You may withdraw at any time, or decline to answer particular questions. Your participation will help to provide information about adolescent women's homelessness which may be used to help adolescent women in the future.

Your information will be used as part of my thesis for my Master's degree in Community Health with the University of Northern British Columbia. If warranted, it may be used to advocate for social change or to support a proposal for specific services, at some time in the future. The details of the interview will be stored at the UNBC archives.

If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact me at (867) 668-4904.

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix G - Interview Consent Form

I understand that Janet Le Camp is conducting a study and is interviewing a number of young women who experienced homelessness as an adolescent.

This consent is given on the understanding that Janet Le Camp and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and Yukon College shall use their best efforts to ensure that my identity is not revealed, whether directly or indirectly, unless I have signed paragraph 5.

I understand and agree that the information I have given to Janet Le Camp in our interview of [date] may be:

- recorded and reproduced;

- used by Janet Le Camp in the production of a thesis;

- stored as part of the archives of UNBC and Yukon College, and made available to researchers for study, reproduction, and recording;

- used in a published work in print or by other technologies by Janet Le Camp or UNBC or Yukon College.

I hereby waive any claim against Janet Le Camp, UNBC, Yukon College, their employees, directors, officers, agents, and publishers with respect to the use of said information, provided it is used in accordance with this agreement. I do this freely and with full knowledge of the legal consequences of this consent.

Name:_____   **Date:**_____

Signature:_____   **Witness:**_____

I hereby give my further consent to the use of my name, and/or details about my life which may directly or indirectly reveal my identity.

Signature:_____   **Date:**_____

Witness:_____