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Mental Health and Homelessness

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Mental Health and Homelessness

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Introduction

Homelessness in the United States is a persistent public problem, rising in its modern form from the 1980s through today. Nationally, there has continued to be rising levels since 2016. The result is an increasingly visible epidemic of unsheltered homelessness, affecting individuals and families. When analyzing factors influencing those who are experiencing housing insecurities, individual factors, as well as systemic factors, are contributing to this ongoing issue. An individual factor that is especially relevant is the relationship between mental health and homelessness.

Variables and Hypothesis

Independent Variable: Homelessness

Dependent variable: Grief response

H_0 = No relationship between homelessness and a grief response

H_1 = Homelessness increases the likelihood of a grief response

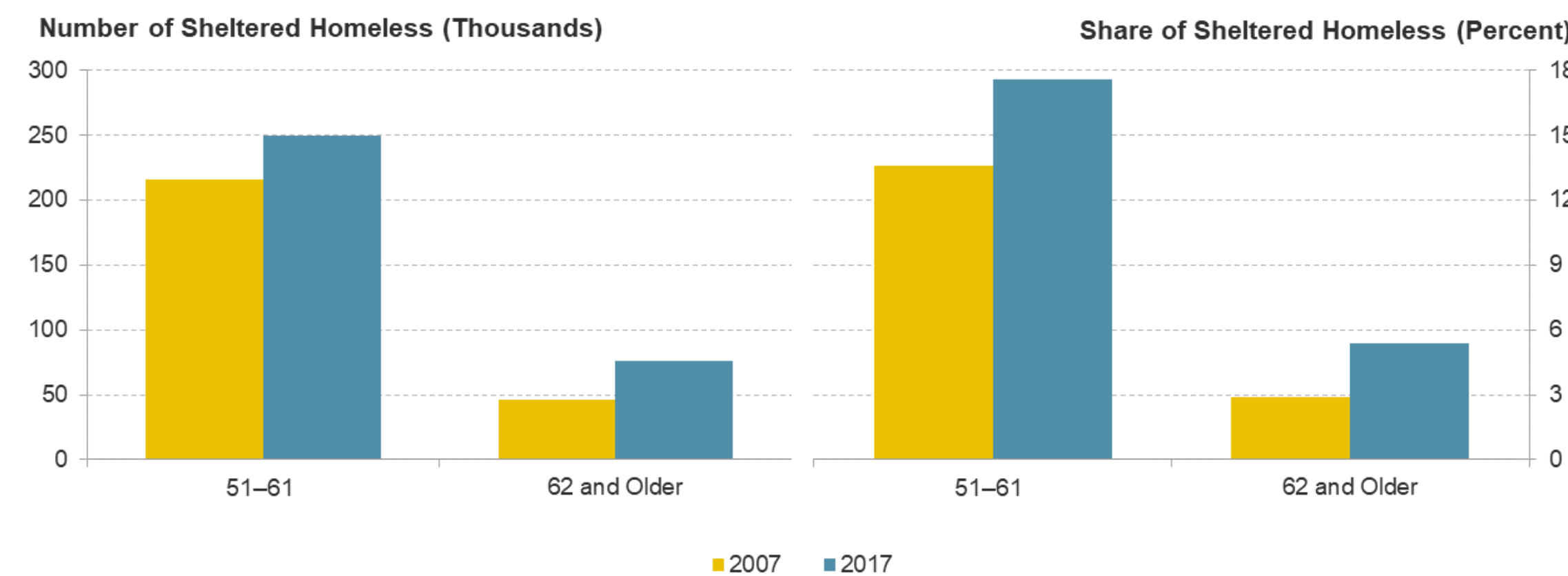
Theory

The literature on homelessness and mental health has largely focused on personality disorders. Ever since deinstitutionalization occurred in 1955, it impacted those who have mental illness. Researchers have found a connection between individuals that have a mental illness and the individual becoming homeless. Looking at grief, there is a knowledge gap in the research about homelessness individuals experiencing grief symptoms after initially becoming homeless. This study allows there to be more information relating to older individuals becoming homeless in the United States.

Research Question

Is there a relationship between elderly adults experiencing first-time homelessness and experiencing a grief response?

Figure 2: Sheltered Homelessness is Increasing Among Older Adults



Source: JCHS tabulations of 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report: Part 2.
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Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University JCHS
Source: Joint Center for Housing Studies

Methods and Data Collection

- Survey data collection – all homeless shelters in Western Michigan: Kent & Ottawa Counties
 - Holland Rescue Mission, Degage Ministries, Mel Trotter, Guiding Light
- Stratified sample
 - the subpopulation of elderly individuals who have experienced first time homelessness and those who have not
 - Elderly = 65 years or older
 - First time homelessness = first episode of homelessness in the past year
- Survey to get a socio-demographic information among the population
- Qualitative interviews – for deeper information on experiences and emotions that felt after initially becoming homeless
- Target the emotions that were felt by the individuals experiencing homelessness that will be cross-references with the coded keywords and phrases.

Expected Outcome

- A positive relationship between homelessness and experience of a *grief response* to initial shock
- A wide variety of responses to interview questions
- Common patterns and language used concerning symptoms of grief

Limitations

- Small population to which it can be applied because of limited resource
- Homeless shelter may have few elderly individuals which would limit the number of individuals that would be able to be interviewed
- The amount of time it would take to conduct the interviews could limit the amount of people that are interviewed

Selected References

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