

The AAP California Chapter 2 sent out a call for abstracts on scholarly projects by pediatric residents and medicine-pediatric residents from CHLA, Harbor-UCLA, Kaiser LA, Loma Linda, UCLA and USC; and medical students from the Southern California counties of Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura. The accepted abstracts were showcased at the 2021 Virtual Advances in Pediatrics Virtual Symposium.

We are thrilled to share with you the authors and their abstract each month.

Virtual Poster Presenter:

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Understanding the Experiences of Families with Histories of Homelessness and Involvement with Child Protective Services: A Qualitative Analysis



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**Understanding the experiences of families with histories of homelessness and involvement
with Child Protective Services:
A qualitative analysis**

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Background:

Family homelessness and parental substance use disorders (SUD) are independently associated with increased interaction with child protective services (CPS), which can lead to family separation, trauma, and later homelessness among youth. However, little is known about the experiences of these families who have histories of homelessness, parental SUD, and CPS involvement.

Objective:

To understand the experiences, needs, and recommendations among CPS-involved families with histories of homelessness and parental SUD, inform service recommendations, and improve outcomes for these families.

Design:

We analyzed 38 qualitative semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with parents who had a history of homelessness within two years and parental SUD within three years (n=7), youth in these families between the ages of 10-18 (n=6), and homeless service providers (n=25). Participants were recruited from housing facilities throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Interviews explored family experiences, needs, stressors, processes, and recommendations. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using in-depth content analysis. Codes were managed using Dedoose.

Results:

A complex relationship exists between trauma, parental substance use, and homelessness. Several parents and providers noted a distinct parental fear of seeking services for homelessness and substance use due to concern for child removal by CPS. A couple parents recommended seeking services before CPS involvement was even necessary, while a few noted benefits of their interaction with CPS. The trauma of separation from parents was a prevalent theme expressed among youth, and also described by various providers. Upon reunification, numerous parents reported emotional and behavioral issues among children; multiple providers also reported these issues and attributed them to emotional distance and communication breakdown between parent and child in the context of the stressors of separation. A few parents and providers felt the reunification process is complicated for families to navigate and recommended access to additional social support and mental health resources during this period. Post-reunification, all parents noted their children were using mental health services. Parents and children demonstrated resilience, which many providers echoed. Some parents shared lessons they learned through their experiences, other parents described how they had changed in positive ways, and multiple children identified helpful strategies to cope with stress.

Conclusions:

Families with histories of homelessness and parental SUDs are at increased risk for involvement with CPS. Fear of punishment discourages parents from seeking services. Separation caused profound trauma and communication challenges within the families interviewed, leading to difficulty with family adjustment post-reunification. Our findings reveal a need for service providers to proactively and collaboratively support parents experiencing homelessness and SUDs, in order to preempt separation. In cases where separation has occurred, greater mental health and social support is needed. Trauma-informed care, family-based treatment services, social supports, and increased access to permanent stable housing are needed to address the needs of CPS-experienced and homeless-experienced families.

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