Destination upon Exit:
Housing Trajectories and Shelter Program Use Histories
among the Homeless Population in Miami-Dade County

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Introduction

In 2010, the U.S. government released a federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010). Part of that plan relies on a housing first model, whereby the most vulnerable of the homeless population are housed permanently and connected with social services. This new housing first approach may alter the housing trajectory of homeless sub-populations. We use longitudinal client-level Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data from Miami-Dade County to conduct an event history analysis on program use and housing trajectories of people accessing emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing programs from 2010 to 2012.

Background

Although social stratification and inequality have been long-studied social processes, research and theory traditionally ignore the impact on the poorest of the poor. Increasing income inequality as well as a rise in the number of people who were homeless during the 1980's sparked research on homelessness (Burt and Cohen, 1989; Burt, 1992). Most studies were cross-sectional, which enabled them to characterize the homeless at one point in time, but only longitudinal studies can capture the mechanisms behind the causes and consequences of homelessness as well as duration of homelessness.

Early longitudinal quantitative studies on homelessness revealed that a significant proportion of the homeless population was frequently moving in and out of homelessness (Sosin, Piliavin, and Westerfelt, 1990; Piliavin et al., 1993). A series of investigations followed to understand how the pattern of homeless exit and reentry, as well as the duration of homeless spells, varied for different sub-populations. Piliavin et al. (1996) showed that welfare receipt was positively linked to homeless exits, and that females and those without recent work experience were more likely to reenter homelessness compared to males and those with recent work experience. Wong and Piliavin (1997) distinguished between sources of homeless spell exits and returns as either personal characteristics (e.g. substance abuse, mental illness) or availability of social services (e.g. welfare, shelter programs). However, these studies suffered from limitations, including sample selection bias, that left inadequate explanation for the results (Dworsky and Piliavin, 2000). Data for this study, in contrast, covers the vast majority of the homeless population in Miami-Dade County.

Given the new housing first model, we might expect a new landscape in the characteristics of people who are more likely to exit homelessness and those that are less likely to reenter homelessness after exit. Preferences to offer permanent supportive housing to people with

disabilities, the chronically homeless[1] (Byrne et al., 2014), and veterans (Montgomery et al., 2013) can increase their likelihood of exiting homelessness and reduce their likelihood of reentry into homelessness.

This study aims to understand the housing trajectories of people who are homeless in the new landscape of a housing first model to end homelessness. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions: 1). How long does it take for people experiencing homelessness to exit shelter programs, and how does this vary for sub-populations (e.g. people with disabilities, people who are chronically homeless, veterans, people in families, and people who identify as Hispanic)? 2). What is the likelihood of homeless reentry following an exit, and how does this vary for sub-populations? 3). How does the destination upon exit affect the likelihood of homeless reentry, and how does this vary for sub-populations?

Context
Miami-Dade County offers an interesting context in which to investigate homelessness. First, it contains one of the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. and has seen population growth since 2010 above the national average (4.6% compared to 2.4%) (Census, 2010). Second, it contains one of the nation's largest Hispanic populations (Brown and Lopez, 2013). In addition, Hispanics make up nearly two-thirds of the county's population (Census, 2013). With new policy efforts aimed at especially vulnerable populations within an already vulnerable group, understandings from Miami-Dade County may be especially useful in understanding the effectiveness of the housing first approach. In addition, Miami-Dade County has over 3,600 permanent supportive housing units that facilitate the housing first method (Housing Inventory Count,[2] 2013) and had been working over years to expand these units, as well as innovative approaches to reach the street homeless (Epstein, 2001). Of all the emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing units available to people who are homeless in Miami-Dade County, over 85% of these units are covered in HMIS (Housing Inventory Count, 2013).

Data and Analysis Plan
This analysis uses longitudinal client-level Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data covering Miami-Dade County. The concept of developing a national HMIS dates back to 1999 (Poulin, Metaux, and Culhane, 2008). Miami-Dade County Continuum of Care developed their local HMIS in 2005. The data for this study focuses on the highest quality HMIS[3] data, collected between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2012. These data not only include information on the national universal data elements (HUD, 2010) that are required for the national report (Solari, Cortes, and Brown, 2013) but they have additional details about the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, service use, and housing trajectories of people who are homeless and access the shelter programs.

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[1] A person who is chronically homeless has been continuously homeless for at least one year or has experiences at least four episodes of homelessness in the last 3 years and has a disability. See the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act for a more detailed definition of chronic homelessness (https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/homelessassistanceactamendedbyhearth.pdf).

[2] Housing Inventory Count data are publically available: https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/ (accessed on 9/26/14).

[3] The Miami-Dade HMIS software is ServicePoint, managed by Bowman Systems (http://www.bowmansystems.com/software/servicepoint).

The Miami-Dade County HMIS contains one record for every entry into a shelter program or permanent supportive housing program such that people with repeated shelter program use will have multiple records. Preliminary data analysis indicates that data on destination upon shelter program exit for 7,319 records between 2010 and 2012. Table 1 shows a summary of those destinations.

Table 1. Destination upon Shelter Program Exit, Miami-Dade County, 2010-2012

Destination	N	%
Independent Housing	1,717	23.5
Dependent Housing	2,798	38.2
Permanent Supportive Housing	577	7.9
Shelter Program	2,002	27.4
Street	225	3.1
Total	7,319	100.0

Independent housing includes situations such as owning or renting one's own housing unit without a government subsidy. Dependent housing includes being housed in a unit with a subsidy, staying with friends. Exiting to a shelter program suggests moving from one emergency shelter or transitional housing program to another one of these programs.

The HMIS data also contain a unique identifier for each person, such that separate entry and exit information over time can be attributed to an individual. This will allow for a longitudinal program use history for every person entering shelter programs in Miami-Dade County over a two-year period. Event history modeling will serve as the analysis methods to address the research questions (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004).

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