



The Colorado Statewide Homeless Count

Homeless People Count...

Homeless Families Count...

Homeless Children Count...

Homeless Veterans Count...



COLORADO STATEWIDE HOMELESS COUNT

Summer, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

February 2007

Research Conducted by:

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I. INTRODUCTION

"If there is more than one who does not wish to be out in the wilderness or stuck in a shelter, and we can change this equation, then the number is too great a burden on our consciousness."¹

*On Monday night, August 28, 2006, there were an estimated **16,203** homeless men, women, and children in Colorado.*²

On the evening of August 28, 2006, the Colorado Interagency Council on Homelessness (CICH), along with hundreds of volunteers from Colorado counties, conducted a "point-in-time" study of homeless persons in Colorado, the first such study in over fifteen years. CICH defines homelessness as follows:

An individual is considered homeless if he or she is:

- Sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, or abandoned or condemned buildings;
- Sleeping in an emergency shelter;
- Spending a short time (30 consecutive days or less) in a hospital or other institution, but ordinarily sleeping in the types of places mentioned above;
- Living in transitional/supportive housing but having come from streets or emergency shelters;
- Staying temporarily with family or friends while looking for a permanent place to live;
- Staying temporarily in a hotel/motel paid for by others/vouchers and/or while looking for shelter or housing;
- Being evicted within a week from a private dwelling unit and having no subsequent residence identified and lacking the resources and support networks needed to obtain access to housing; or
- Being discharged from an institution and having no subsequent residence identified and lacking the resources and support networks needed to obtain access to housing.

Homelessness is a traumatic and terrifying experience. Many families are unable to stay together; homeless persons often have serious health problems directly related to their lack of housing; and children suffer long-term effects on their physical and emotional health including diminished educational performance and difficulties in school.

Homelessness not only affects the very poor, but also working and middle class individuals and families. Americans are homeless primarily because they cannot pay for housing and are increasingly unable to

¹ Thank you, Randle (Randle Loeb).

² Agencies from across the state submitted estimates of unsheltered homeless persons, that is, unsheltered individuals and families who were known to be homeless but were in locations where they could not be counted. These estimates identify a total 1,218 homeless persons. Combined with all the surveyed homeless, the domestic violence aggregate data and the number of unsheltered homeless who were counted but not surveyed, an estimated **17,421** people were homeless on August 28, 2006.

afford to buy or even rent their homes. They face the national trends of low wages, declining public assistance programs, and limited affordable housing.

It is impossible to know the precise number of people who are homeless. In the words of a formerly homeless person, now a tireless homeless advocate, “If there is more than one who does not wish to be out in the wilderness or stuck in a shelter, and we can change this equation, then the number is too great a burden on our consciousness.”³

ESTIMATING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMELESS PERSONS IN COLORADO

There is considerable literature on methods for estimating the total number of homeless persons from point-in-time data. Some of these studies have used extremely complicated and sophisticated methodologies to estimate the total number of homeless. The survey questions and the overall methodology for this study were the consequence of a number of considerations. These primary factors included the following:

- To the extent possible, collect data consistent with previous local point-in-time surveys for comparison purposes.
- Limit the survey to a one, two-sided page in order to facilitate survey distribution and administration, and eliminate the possibility that any pages of a survey could be lost.
- Use an extensive system of trained agency staff and volunteers to collect data to make the experience comfortable for homeless persons and to keep the cost of the survey affordable.

TOTAL HOMELESS STATEWIDE

On Monday night, August 28, 2006, an estimated **16,203** people were homeless in Colorado.

KEY FINDINGS: Table A. TOTAL HOMELESS – STATEWIDE	
SURVEY DATA	
Respondents	6,665
Relatives	5,225
Total All Survey Homeless	11,890
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER DATA	
Respondents	159
Children	170
Other Family Members	5
Total Domestic Violence	334
UNSHeltered COUNT	
Count – Unsheltered	2,981
SURVEY ESTIMATE	
Additional relatives not fully identified by respondents	998
TOTAL	16,203

³ Thank you, Randle.

The one consistent finding in all the research on homelessness is that surveys undercount the homeless. It is particularly difficult to count those homeless persons who are unsheltered.⁴ The total number of homeless individuals fluctuates over time. People who are homeless typically move in and out of homelessness as conditions in their life change. Data collected during one day of the year only represents a snapshot of homelessness on that day.

- Service use differs by community — in some communities, substantial proportions of the homeless, including homeless street persons, are service users; in other communities, they are not. Homeless persons are most likely to seek services from persons and agencies that specialize in helping the homeless.⁵
- Some groups may be underrepresented among service users, including youth, recently homeless persons, and persons who are doubled up with friends and family.⁶
- Many homeless persons hide themselves from public view and are living in places where they are not easily found, such as vehicles, tents, boxes, caves or boxcars.
- The homeless population is often underestimated in rural areas and other locations where there are few or no homeless services.⁷

NATIONAL AND STATE CONTEXT

In the United States, approximately 3.5 million people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year.⁸ The number of homeless families with children has increased significantly over the past 10 years, and is one of the fastest growing segments of homeless persons.

The primary causes of homelessness include poverty, the growing shortage of affordable housing, domestic violence, the cost of health insurance, mental health problems, and substance abuse. Homelessness is often thought of as an urban issue; however, many people experience homelessness in small towns and rural locations.

According to recent U.S. Census data,⁹ Colorado's poverty rate has risen steadily since the late 1990s. Some services are available to help low-income families remain housed, but these programs do not begin to meet the demand.

⁴ For example, "Number of Homeless Ohioans," Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, 8/27/02; : "Report on Homelessness in North Dakota, March 2005" (p. 15); S.J. Farrell and E.D. Reissing, "Picking Up the Challenge: Developing a Methodology to Enumerate and Assess the Needs of the Street Homeless Population," Evaluation Review, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 144-155.

⁵ Franklin J. James. (1991). "Counting Homeless Persons with Surveys of Users of Services for the Homeless," *Housing Policy Debate*, Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 733-753.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Urban Institute. "America's Homeless II: Populations and Services." February 1, 2000.

⁸ National Coalition for the Homeless. "How Many People Experience Homeless? NCH Fact Sheet #2." National Coalition for the Homeless. June 2006. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/How_Many.pdf>

⁹ *The Denver Post*. "Poor Numbers on Poverty." August 30, 2006.; *The Rocky Mountain News*. "Colorado Incomes on the Decline." August 30, 2006.

II. ORGANIZATIONS/PEOPLE

The Colorado Interagency Council on Homelessness (CICH) initiated Colorado's August 2006 homeless count, which was primarily led by the Colorado Division of Housing (CDH). The project included active participation and collaboration from numerous agencies, organizations, and individuals, including the Colorado Housing Finance Authority (CHFA); Colorado Coalition for the Homeless; Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs; the Colorado Department of Human Services; Adams County Housing Authority; Volunteers of America; Posada; Fannie Mae; Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative; United Way; Rocky Mountain Housing Development Corporation; and homeless advocates. Individuals from these organizations formed the Housing Subcommittee Group for the Statewide Count (Housing Subcommittee). CHFA, CDH, the Daniels Fund, and Fannie Mae funded the project, and the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless agreed to serve as the fiscal agent.

The Colorado Statewide Homeless Count required a phenomenal amount of collaboration. Throughout every phase of the project, participants exhibited consistent patience, dedication and skill in resolving issues and reconciling differing opinions. Coordination of agencies and volunteers occurred primarily at the county and local level, through regional and county coordinators. All but three Colorado counties participated in the statewide point-in-time survey and count.¹⁰ Hundreds of agencies participated in collecting data and distributing the survey. Agency staff and volunteers from government programs, non-profit organizations, supportive service and food distribution programs, meal sites and faith-based organizations literally worked thousands of hours to help organize the count in their area, recruit volunteers, and disseminate and collect surveys, among many other tasks.

The Housing Subcommittee contracted with the Center for Education Policy Analysis/Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation (CEPA/CPPSC), Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, and the National Research Center, Inc. (NRC). CEPA/CPPSC's primary role was to develop the point in time methodology, analyze data, and write a comprehensive final report. NRC primarily served as the statewide project coordinator and principle trainer.

The Housing Subcommittee conducted the planning and communications of the count as a *campaign*. The Subcommittee created a logo, developed an extensive website, recruited a spokesperson, provided a media kit, and consistently communicated with key stakeholders statewide via email, telephone, phone conferencing, video conferencing, fax, website, and post.

The following information provides a picture of the men, women and children, veterans, disabled, and all of those homeless individuals and families that dedicated volunteers and service providers were able to survey on August 28 and 29, 2006.

¹⁰ Twelve counties did not submit any surveys but did submit tracking forms, indicating that they tried to participate but did not serve any homeless clients during the relevant time. Of these 12 counties, one submitted a homeless count.

III. THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The statewide survey findings report on the respondents who completed the survey and their relatives who also were without a permanent place to live. The researchers refer to the sum of respondents and relatives as “all survey homeless.” Most survey variables are reported only for respondents. A small number of variables can be extrapolated to the homeless relatives that respondents identified as with them.

SURVEY DATA

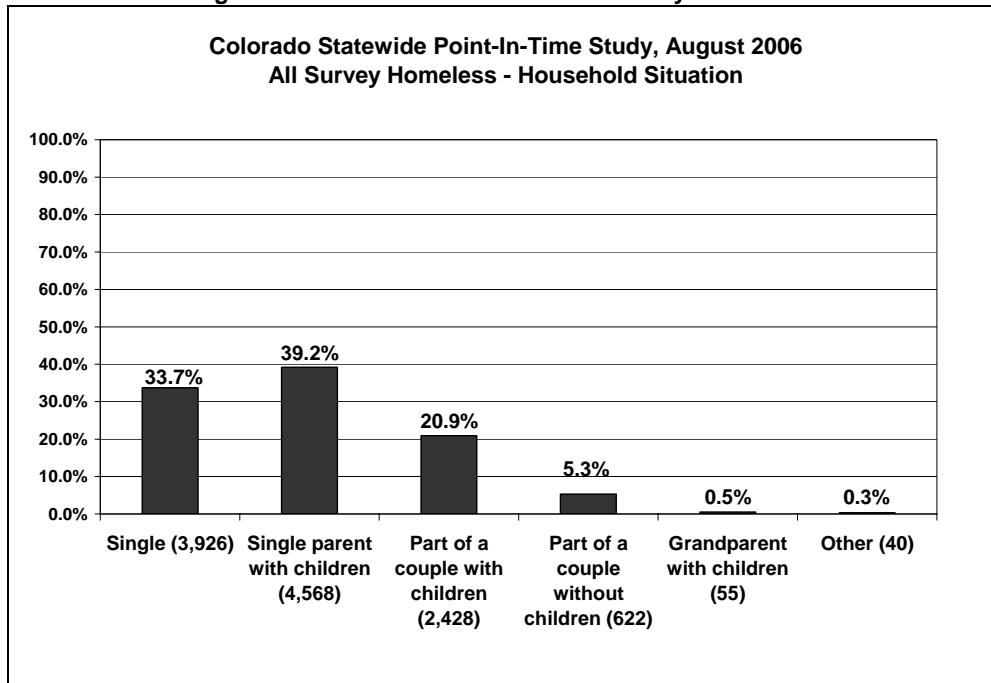
Survey respondents did not complete every question; because of these missing data, the numbers and percentages in the report do not always equal the number of respondents or all survey homeless. The percentages do not represent the total number of respondents, that is, the percentages do not include missing responses.¹¹

Statewide Survey Data

Household Situation – All Survey Homeless

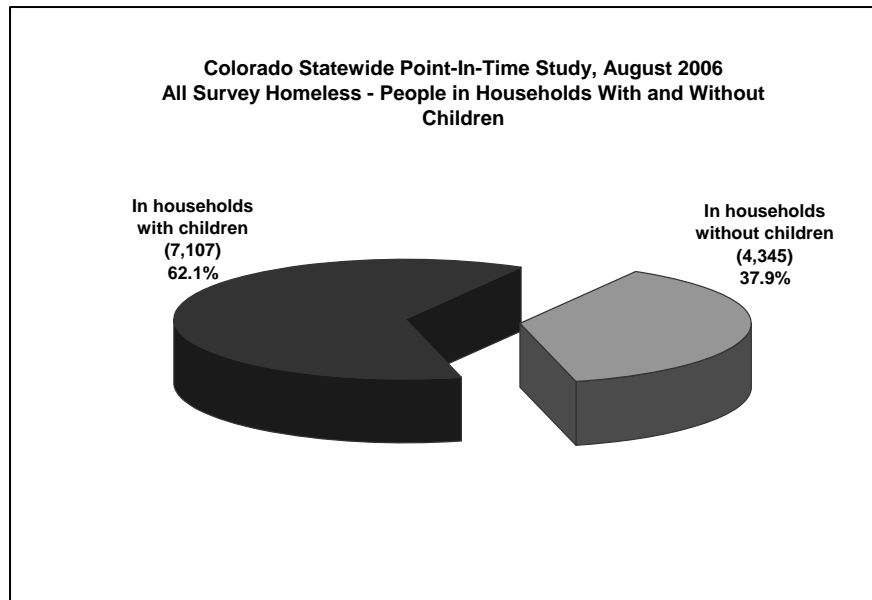
People in households headed by a single parent accounted for the largest group (39.2%) of all homeless people, followed by single individuals (33.7%).

KEY FINDINGS: Figure A. Household Situation – All Survey Homeless



¹¹ The exception is that, for questions where respondents could check “all that apply,” the percentage giving each response is based on all respondents.

KEY FINDINGS: FIGURE B. Households With/Without Children – All Survey Homeless



Nearly two-thirds (62.1%) of all homeless persons in Colorado are in households with children.

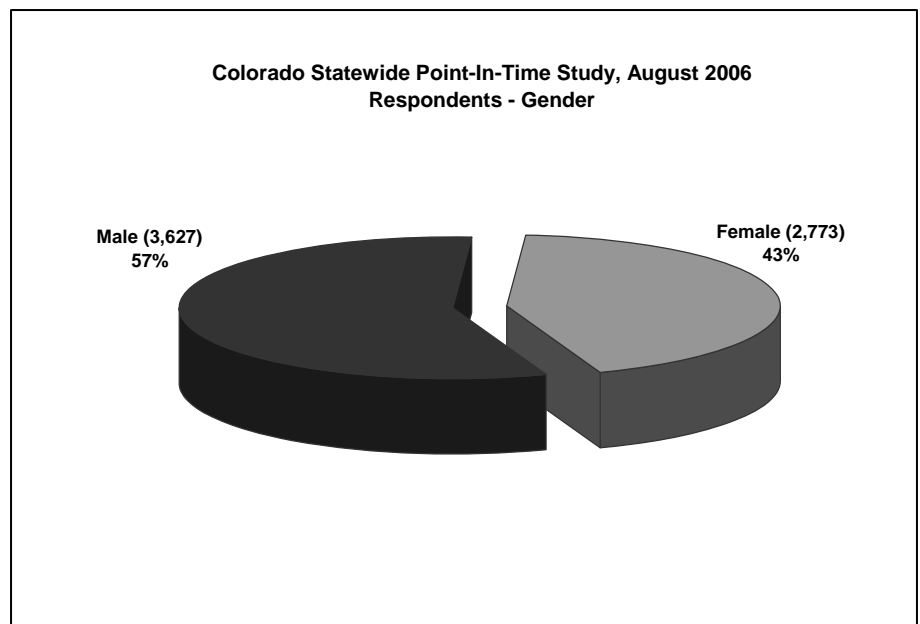
Ages – All Survey Homeless

Homeless persons ranged in age from less than one year to 98 years old. Half (51.2%) of all homeless persons were adults age 25-64. There were a total of 3,643 homeless children and teens; they comprised one-third (34.0%) of all people who were homeless on Monday night, August 28, 2006.

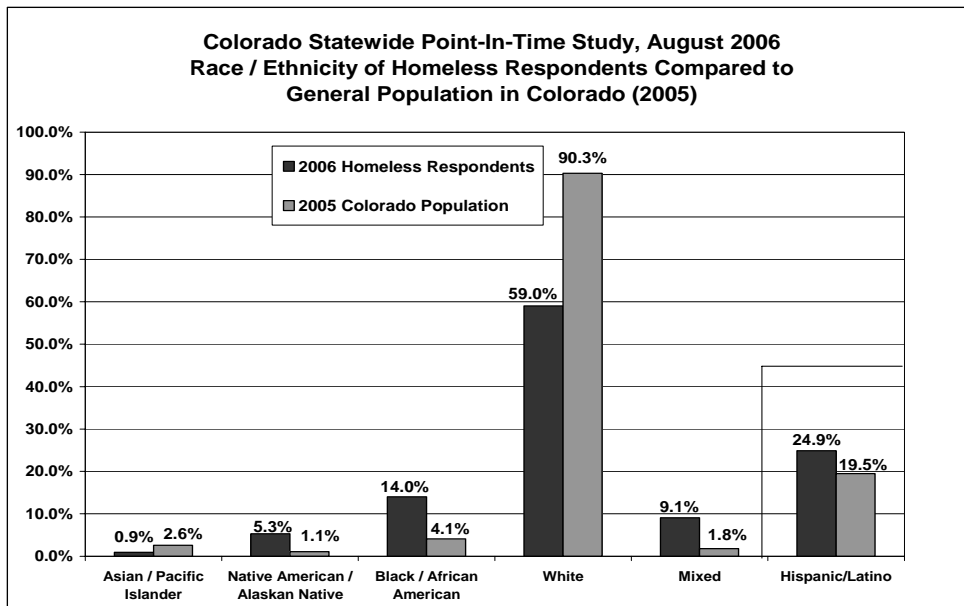
Gender – Respondents

Almost six in 10 (56.7%) respondents were male. Single individuals were predominantly male, while most single parent households were headed by females.

KEY FINDINGS: Figure C. Household Situation by Gender - Respondents



KEY FINDINGS: Figure D. Race/Ethnicity – Respondents¹²



Race/Ethnicity – Respondents

Compared to the general population in Colorado in 2005, minorities were over-represented and whites were under-represented among Colorado’s homeless.

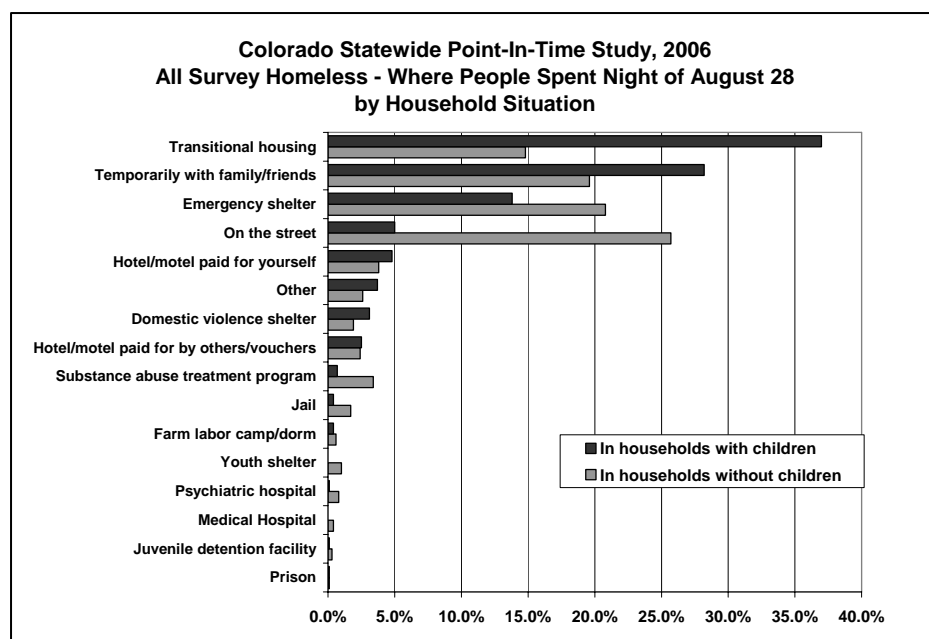
Monday Night, August 28, 2006 – All Survey Homeless

The majority of all homeless people in Colorado spent Monday night in transitional housing (28.0%), staying temporarily with family or friends while looking for shelter (24.4%), or in an emergency shelter (16.6%). Many more people in households with children stayed in transitional housing and with family and friends, while many more people in households without children slept on the street and stayed in an emergency shelter. (Figure F)

KEY FINDINGS: Figure E. Type of Place, Monday Night – All Survey Homeless

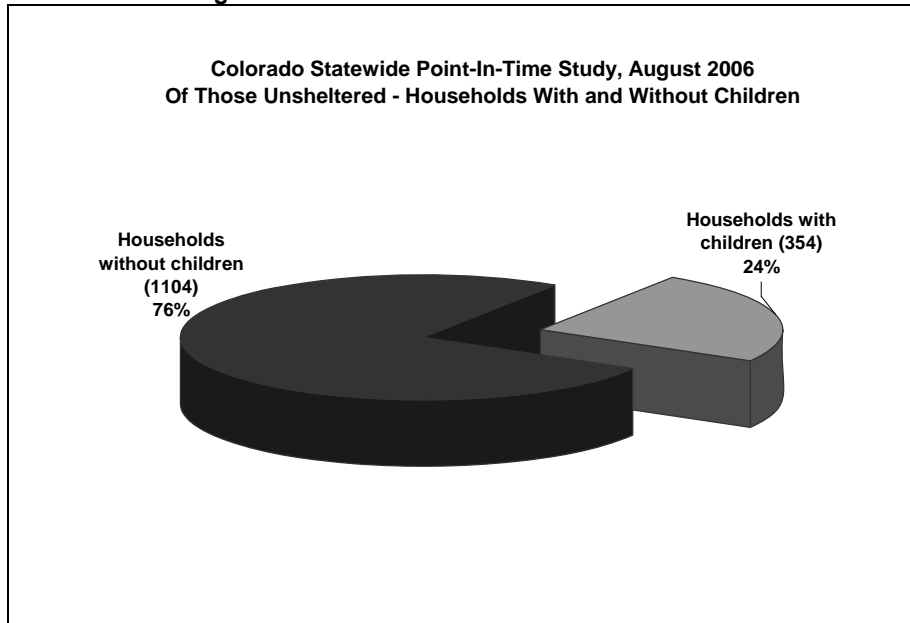
Unsheltered Homeless – All Survey Homeless

Thirteen percent (13.2%) of all survey homeless were unsheltered. Of the unsheltered homeless, one-quarter (24.3%) were people in families with children.



¹² Race and ethnicity were asked in separate questions. Race does not add to 100 percent because 11.6% of respondents described their race as “other.”

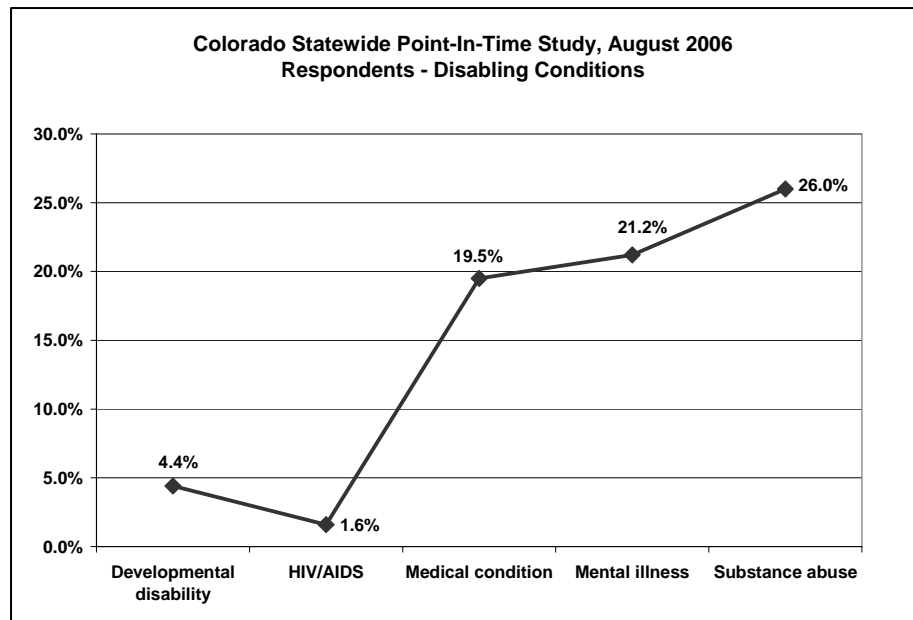
KEY FINDINGS: Figure F. Unsheltered – All Unsheltered Homeless



KEY FINDINGS: Figure G. Disabling Conditions - Respondents

Disabling Conditions - Respondents

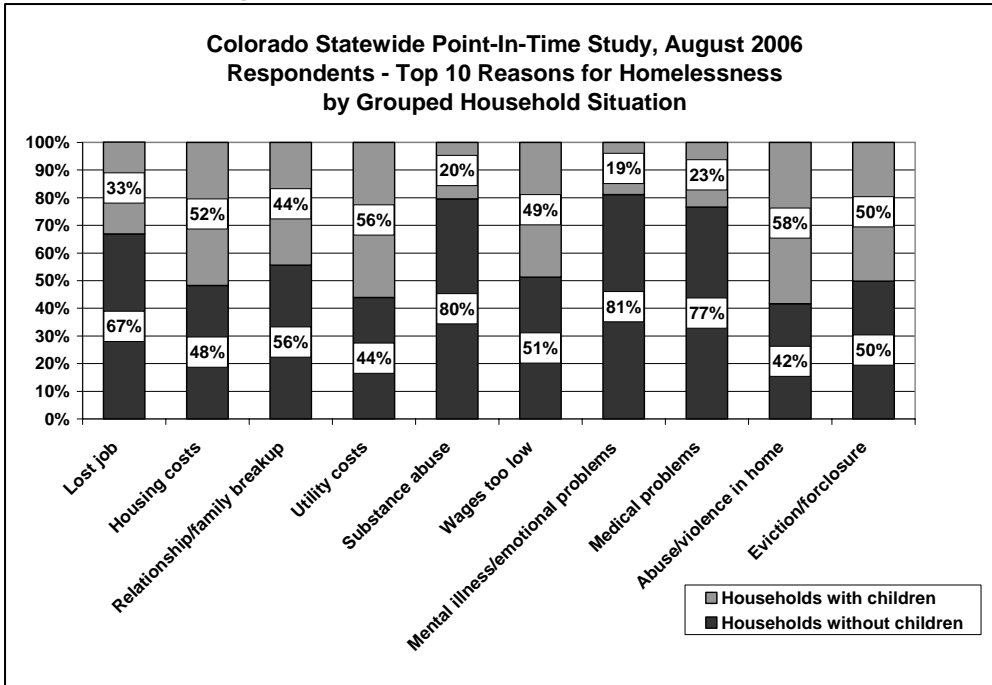
Half of all respondents (50.9%) had at least one of the following disabling conditions – serious mental illness, a serious medical condition, chronic substance abuse problems, a developmental disability, or HIV/AIDS. One in four (26.0%) had a chronic substance abuse issue, and approximately one in five had a serious mental illness (21.2%) or a serious medical condition (19.5%).



Reasons for Homelessness - Respondents

The most commonly cited reasons for homelessness were loss of job and housing costs, followed by family/relationship breakup and utility costs. Slightly more than half (53%) of the reported reasons related to the cost of housing (housing costs, utility costs and eviction/foreclosure), and forty percent (40.9%) related to the existence of serious conditions (substance abuse, mental illness, and medical problems).

KEY FINDINGS: Figure H. Top 10 Reasons for Homelessness - Respondents

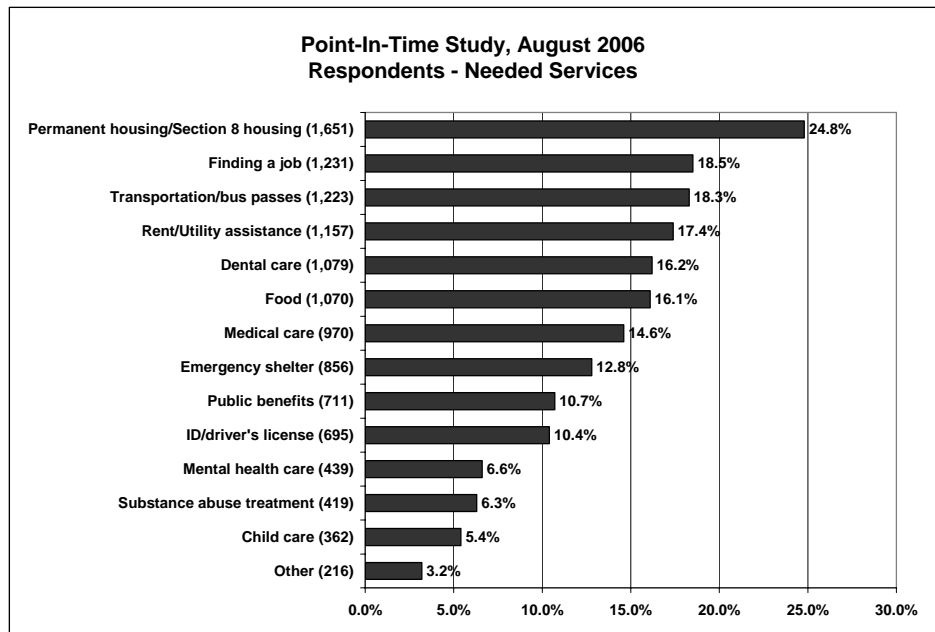


Respondents in households with children were more likely to cite abuse or violence in the home as a cause of their homelessness. Those in households without children were much more likely to report substance, mental illness, and medical problems as a reason for their current homelessness.

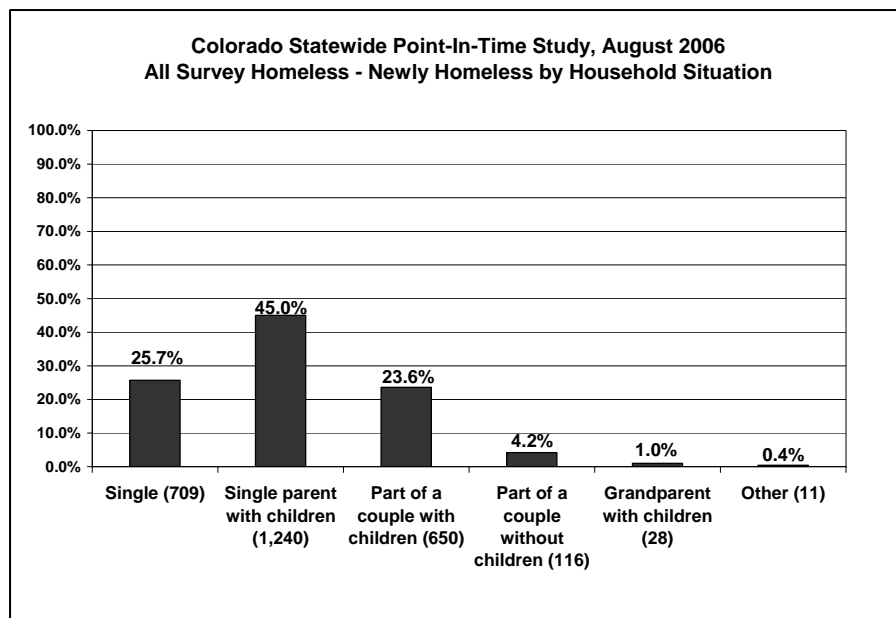
KEY FINDINGS: Figure I. Needed Services – Respondents

Services - Respondents

Nearly two-thirds (63.2%) of respondents reported that, in the past month, they or another family member needed at least one service they could not obtain. The most frequently needed service was permanent housing, cited by one-quarter (24.8%) of respondents. Other frequently needed services were help finding a job, transportation, and rent and/or utility assistance.



KEY FINDINGS: Figure J. Newly Homeless – All Survey Homeless



Newly Homeless – All Survey Homeless

Twenty percent (21.5%) of all survey homeless were newly homeless. Nearly three-quarters (70.8%) of the newly homeless were in households with children. Single parents comprised almost half (45.0%) of the newly homeless.

Since females head most single parent households, most newly homeless families were comprised of women and children.

Duration and Episodes of Homelessness – Respondents

Duration: Almost half of respondents (45.8%) who were homeless on Monday night had been without a permanent place to live for more than one month but less than one year. Sixteen percent (15.9%) had been homeless for less than a month, and 11% (10.6%) had been homeless for more than three years.

Episodes: One-third (32.4%) of respondents reported that they were experiencing their first episode of homelessness in the last three years on the night of August 28. Almost one in five (18.3%) had been homeless five or more times in the last three years. Men and respondents in households without children experienced more episodes of homelessness in the last three years.

KEY FINDINGS: Figure K. Chronically Homelessness - Respondents

Chronically Homeless - Respondents

On the night of August 28, 2006, almost 10 percent (9.2%), or 610 respondents, were chronically homeless; the great majority of the 610 chronically homeless persons (86.4%) were male.

