

***A Comparative Portrait of Individuals and
Families Utilizing Boston Emergency Shelter
Programs, 1999***

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Highlights

- Boston homeless individuals were more than six times as likely to be African American and just over three times as likely to be Latino than the overall state population.
- The average age of Boston individual shelter consumers was 40; 10% were ages 24 or under, and another 10% were 55 or over.
- Half of the Boston individuals had not yet completed high school.
- More than three in five Boston individual shelter users had never married.
- Over one-third of Boston homeless individuals reported that they had stayed at another shelter before entering their current program; just under another third rented their own home or lived with relatives or friends; and less than one in ten spent time in a substance abuse program.
- Just over one-quarter of Boston's homeless individuals lacked health insurance.
- Almost one-third of Boston individual shelter residents were employed, either exclusively or in conjunction with public assistance. Two in five had no formal source of income.
- Boston homeless family heads were more than eight times as likely to be African American and just under four times as likely to be Latino than the overall state population.
- On average, Boston heads of household were 33 years old.
- More than three in five Boston family heads had not completed high school.
- More than two-thirds of the Boston homeless family heads had never married.
- Almost two-thirds of Boston homeless families consisted of a parent and one to two children. One in five families were made up of five or more members.
- Over one-third of Boston homeless families reported being doubled up with family and/or friends immediately before entering shelter, just under another third rented their own home, and slightly over one in five came from another shelter. More than 80% lived in the greater Boston area prior to becoming homeless
- One-quarter of Boston homeless families were employed, either exclusively or in conjunction with public assistance. Almost one in five lacked a formal source of income.
- Just under half of the Boston homeless families reported receiving TAFDC and less than one-third stated that they participated in the Food Stamp program. These proportions are significantly lower than those reported in a 1997 CSP study of Boston's homeless;¹ almost three-quarters of the earlier group reported receiving TAFDC and just under two-thirds stated that they obtained Food Stamps.

¹ Friedman, D.H., Hayes, M., McGah, J., Roman, R. (1997). [A Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997](#). McCormack Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston. Please note that this was a point-in-time survey, and included some individuals and families in transitional programs, as well as some families from domestic violence shelters.

Introduction to the Massachusetts Homeless Management Information System

History and Methodology

The Center for Social Policy (CSP) at the McCormack Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston oversees the Connection, Service, and Partnership through Technology (CSPTech) project.² CSPTech operates a homeless services data system being implemented throughout the Commonwealth. Founded in 1995, this project is a networked computerized record-keeping system that allows homeless service providers across Massachusetts to collect uniform client information over time. This information is aggregated in a database used by service providers, advocates, government officials, researchers, and people experiencing homelessness. Analysis of this information is critical to efforts to understand the extent of this problem in Massachusetts in an attempt to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty.

Through multi-year contracts with the City of Boston and the State of Massachusetts, more than 140 homeless programs are currently involved in the CSPTech project, representing over 60% of the homeless individuals and families served in emergency shelters in the state. Involved sites include the full range of programs serving homeless persons across the Continuum of Care: emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, permanent-, and permanent-supportive housing. Many of these programs serve persons who have highly sensitive needs, such as HIV/AIDS, mental health, chemical addictions, and domestic violence. Statewide expansion of the network is underway, with a long-term goal of including 90% or more of the publicly funded shelters in the state, over 225 programs at full implementation.

Prior to the CSPTech project, Boston and the Commonwealth had no consistent means by which to identify service needs, barriers to accessing services, and program-, region-, and system-wide results. Advocates and planners were forced to rely upon point-in-time census counts to estimate the size of the local homeless population. While this approach is useful for gathering a one-time unduplicated count of homeless individuals and families, it is limited by vulnerability to seasonal fluctuations. Snapshot counts also tend to over-represent those with the most chronic problems while under-representing those facing time-limited situational crises.³

The ongoing gathering of data on homeless persons who utilize service programs offers cumulative, longitudinal information, thus enabling the tracking of service

² This project was previously referred to as the ANCHoR Project.

³ For more detail on this topic, see Culhane, D., Metraux, S., Raphael, S. (2000). The Prevalence of Homelessness in 1998: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data in Nine US Jurisdictions. Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research, University of Pennsylvania.

and demand trends. These data are critical to accurately calculate the size and needs of the homeless population, as well as the outcomes of specific interventions and programs. Policy makers, agency directors, homeless program consumers, and advocates require this information for service and systems planning and advocacy.

The CSPTech system is designed to balance the interests and needs of three levels of stakeholders: homeless men, women, and children; service providers; and policy makers and advocates. Homeless program consumers who agree to have their information entered into the system can receive a printout listing their eligibility for various state and federal benefit programs. Homeless service programs are assisted in managing operational information through access to a wide array of agency, program, and client level reports. Policy makers benefit through access to system-wide data for identifying service gaps, targeting resources, and making informed planning decisions at city, regional, and state levels.

Representativeness

Based upon policies developed by the project's Steering Committee, aggregate data must meet a minimum threshold criterion before they can be released: data must represent at least 60% of those persons served in a region. Based on a calculation of client records contained in the database versus system capacity for a particular period, the data are deemed eligible for release.

The data in this report are a Boston subset of statewide information representative of 68% of individuals and 62% of families served in the state's emergency shelter programs between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 2000.⁴ This slice of the data comprises 45% of the individuals and 47% of the families in the larger sample.⁵

Limitations

These data were collected in large part by interviewing people experiencing homelessness, sometimes on the street, and most often in shelters or other homeless service agencies. The data do not capture information on people who are in doubled-up living situations and others who are homeless but do not come into contact with the service system.

⁴ Meschede, T., Kahan, M., Hayes, M. (2000). A Comparative Portrait of Individuals and Families Utilizing Massachusetts Emergency Shelter Programs, 1999. McCormack Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston. Please note that the Boston data represent a subset of the larger sample. Boston is also included in the Massachusetts data.

⁵ The Boston slice of the data represents 57% of individuals and 61% of families served in emergency shelter programs in the region in 1999. It should be noted that the data include only a small percentage of homeless individuals served at Pine Street Inn and Long Island shelters. These data are not representative of the complete populations of these two large shelters.

It should be noted that the homeless individuals and families who are interviewed as part of this project respond to specific questions with varying levels of depth. As can be seen in the table headers⁶ in the report, information on demographic characteristics is based upon a much higher level of accuracy than is that for prior residence, income sources, etc. These data are limited in their informative value and cannot be extrapolated to the whole data set.

Report Structure

The report begins by focusing on individuals served at Boston emergency shelter programs. It describes the demographic characteristics, residential history, health insurance coverage, and income sources of individual shelter users, and compares these findings to information about the larger Massachusetts population, a national sample of homeless people, and a previous CSP survey of Boston emergency shelter users.

The report next goes on to focus on homeless families. In addition to presenting demographic and other characteristics⁷, the report also provides some information about children and the family unit. In addition, findings for Boston families are compared to the national sample of homeless families, the family population of the state, and the 1997 CSP survey of Boston emergency shelter users. An appendix lists the shelters that contributed client records to the data set.

⁶ See the N under each column heading for the exact number of respondents to that particular set of questions. Data for the remainder of the client records are missing (e.g. the Individuals section reports on 3,755 records; in Table 2 N=2,155 for type of prior residence data, thus 1,600 records did not contain this information).

⁷ Health insurance information is not provided for families, as the Boston family shelter programs do not appear to be entering this information. The data set includes this information on just 11 Boston families.

INDIVIDUALS SERVED AT BOSTON EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTERS

The following describes the information collected by Boston individual emergency shelter providers on clients served during 1999. An unduplicated count of 3,755 individuals was obtained during the year. This section of the report contains data on these 3,755 people. It is notable that in comparison to the larger CSPTech 1999 statewide sample, the Boston records are almost twice as likely to have flawed client codes (16%, as compared to 9% of the larger data set).

Total Records	4,679
Records with Valid Client Codes	3,929
Unduplicated Count	3,755

The following shows the shelter utilization patterns of these 3,755 consumers. As described below, 4% of shelter users were seen in two shelter programs, and less than one-half of 1% accessed three shelters. No shelter users accessed more than three programs.

Users of One Shelter Program	3,599
Users of Two Shelter Programs	147
Users of Three Shelter Programs	9

Based upon this information, the total number of individuals who utilized emergency homeless shelters in Boston in 1999 is estimated at approximately 8,200.⁸

Characteristics

Table 1 presents information comparing the 3,755 individuals served in Boston emergency homeless shelters in 1999 to: the 1997 Boston census, a 1996 national

⁸ This calculation is based upon an average annual turnover rate of 5 (the average of the actual turnover reported by Dennis Culhane in Philadelphia and New York City in 1994) as specified in the ANCHoR Three Year Workplan. For more detail, see Culhane, D., Dejowski, E.F., Ibanez, J., Needham, E. Macchia, I. (1994). Public Shelter Admission Rates in Philadelphia and New York City: The Implications of Turnover for Sheltered Population Counts. Housing Policy Debate 5, 107-151.

homeless sample⁹, and the overall and below poverty populations of the Commonwealth¹⁰. Highlights are discussed below.

More than two-thirds of the 3,755 individuals served in Boston emergency homeless shelters in 1999 were male. This distribution represents a greater proportion of woman than that in CSP's recent report on homeless individuals across Massachusetts, as well as both the 1997 Boston census and the 1996 national homeless sample. This difference may be attributed to the fact that 18% of the records in the data set derive from Pine Street Inn's Women's Inn.

In terms of race, homeless individuals served in 1999 were most likely to be white (48%), African American (32%), or Latino (16%). Not surprisingly, the Boston group differs from the larger 1999 CSPTech statewide homeless sample, which shows, proportionally, more whites (57%), and fewer African Americans (23%). Compared to the state population, homeless individuals were more than six times as likely to be African American and just over three times as likely to be Latino, indicating that people of color were disproportionately homeless. However, the Massachusetts poor population more closely resembled that of homeless shelter users.

Four out of five individual shelter users were between 25 and 54 years of age, similar to the distribution of both the earlier Boston sample and the national group. The average age of Boston individual shelter consumers was 40; just over 10% were ages 24 or under, 10% 55 or over, and the largest group, 37%, were ages 35-44. The 1999 Boston group was, proportionally, somewhat younger than the 1997 census population.

Of the individuals reporting educational attainment, half had not yet completed high school, 32% had earned a high-school degree or GED, and 20% had some college experience. Only 6% received an undergraduate or graduate degree. In comparison, both the 1997 census and the national sample were somewhat more educated. Proportionally, fewer in both groups had not completed high school, many more of the 1997 sample earned a high-school degree, and more of the national group reported some college education. The difference between the two Boston groups may be attributed to the fact that the earlier Boston sample included some individuals in transitional programs; this population may be somewhat more educated than that of emergency shelter users. The overall state population was, proportionally, much more educated.

Most individual shelter users (64%) had never married; 18% were divorced. The general state population was much more likely to be married than were any of the

⁹ Interagency Council on the Homeless (1999). Homelessness: Programs and the People they Serve. Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Please note that this was a point-in-time snapshot survey conducted in 1996.

¹⁰ Data for the Massachusetts general and poor populations were obtained from the Current Population Survey March 1999 Supplement for Massachusetts. Please note that these data include families.

other groups. Proportionally fewer 1999 Boston individual shelter users (17%) indicated having served in the military than did those in the 1997 Boston group or the national sample.

**Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of Boston Homeless Individuals and the General Population¹¹**

	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=3755)	Boston Homeless Individuals 1997^a (N=338)	National Homeless Clients 1996^b (N=2473)	MA Population Below Poverty Age 17+ 1998^c	MA Population Age 17+ 1998^c
Gender					
Female	31%	15%	23%	63%	52%
Male	69%	81%	77%	37%	48%
Race					
White	48%	48%	41%	64%	87%
African American	32%	36%	40%	17%	5%
Latino	16%	9%	10%	13%	5%
Other	3%	3%	1%	NA	NA
Multiracial	1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Native American	<1%	2%	8%	1%	<1%
Asian	<1%	2%	NA	6%	4%
Pacific Islander	<1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Age					
Under 18	<1%	5% ^d	1%	3%	2%
18-24	10%		9%	15%	12%
25-34	22%	24%	22%	23%	19%
35-44	37%	37%	40%	16%	23%
45-54	21%	22%	19%	11%	17%
55-64	7%	10%	7%	15%	11%
65 and older	3%	4%	2%	18%	17%
Average Age	40	NA	NA	44	45
Education					
Grade school	15%	23%	7%	11%	6%
Some high-school	35%		30%	21%	11%
HS grad./GED	32%	56%	36%	37%	32%
Some college/AA	14%		26%	17%	23%
BS/BA	4%	21%		9%	19%
Grad. Degree	2%		2%	5%	10%
Marital Status					
Single/Never Married	64%	55%	50%	43%	31%
Divorced	18%	23%	26%	13%	8%
Separated	10%	14%	14%	6%	2%
Married	7%	5%	7%	24%	52%
Widowed	2%	3%	4%	13%	7%
Veterans					
Yes	17%	31%	26%	NA	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bSource: National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, December 1999.

^cSource: Current Population Survey March Supplement 1999 for Massachusetts.

^dAge categories for the 1997 Snapshot data vary slightly. They are: under 25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; and 66 and up.

¹¹ Please note that in this and other tables, percents do not always total 100 due to rounding.

Residence Prior to Shelter Entry

More than one-third of individual shelter users reported that they had stayed at another shelter just before entering their current program; 17% spent time in a substance abuse program, 14% rented their own home, and 13% lived with relatives or friends. In addition, fewer than 5% reported entering shelter directly from each of the following: the streets, park, car, and/or an abandoned building; supervised living (foster home, halfway house, three-quarter house, or nursing home); mental health or other hospital; jail, prison, or detention center; owned house; boarding home; hotel/motel; transitional housing; or another type of facility. In comparison, the 1997 sample was less likely to come from another shelter or substance abuse treatment, and more likely to have rented their own home, lived with family and friends, stayed on the streets, or been imprisoned immediately prior to entering shelter.

Table 2:
Type of Residence of Boston Homeless Individuals Prior to Entering Shelter

Prior Residence	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=2155)	Boston Homeless Individuals 1997 ^a (N=338)
	Other Shelter	39%
Detox./Substance Abuse Treatment Center	17%	4%
Rented Home	14%	31%
Homes of Relative/Friends	13%	28%
Street/Park/Car/Abandoned Building	4%	8%
Supervised Living ^b	2%	NA
Mental Health/Other Hospital	2%	1%
Other	2%	4%
Jail/Prison/Detention Center	1%	7%
Owned Home	1%	NA
Boarding House	1%	NA
Hotel/Motel	1%	NA
Transitional Housing	1%	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bFoster home, halfway house, three-quarter house, or nursing home.

More than half (59%) of Boston individual shelter residents who reported the information cited the city as their residence prior to becoming homeless. An additional 15% derived from the greater Boston area. Of those from outside the area, most were from another state.

**Table 3:
Area of Residence of Boston Homeless Individuals Prior to Entering Shelter**

City of Residence	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=1128)
<u>Boston</u>	
Dorchester	21%
Other Boston (neighborhood not specified)	15%
Roxbury	6%
Mattapan	4%
Jamaica Plain	3%
East Boston	2%
Roslindale	2%
South Boston	2%
Brighton	1%
Brookline	1%
Charlestown	1%
Hyde Park	1%
Allston	<1%
Beacon Hill	<1%
Readville	<1%
West Roxbury	<1%
<u>Greater Boston</u>	
Other Greater Boston neighborhoods	5%
Quincy	3%
Somerville	2%
Cambridge	1%
Chelsea	1%
Malden	1%
Randolph	1%
Revere	1%
Waltham	1%
Medford	<1%
<u>Other</u>	
Out of State	11%
Southeastern MA	6%
Northeastern MA	4%
Western MA	4%
Central MA	2%
Out of Country	1%

Health Insurance Coverage

Of those reporting health insurance status, 26% had no coverage. Most were covered by Medicaid/Mass Health (55%).

Table 4:
Health Insurance Coverage of Boston Homeless Individuals

Health Insurance	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=841)
No Health Insurance	26%
Medicaid/Mass Health	55%
Medicare	8%
Private Plan	6%
VA	3%
HMO	2%

Income at Shelter Entry

Of those providing income information, just over one-third (36%) reported no income. The remainder reported income from multiple sources, primarily employment and Social Security. Just under one-third reported earnings from employment (\$967 average per month), and one-quarter reported Social Security income (\$550 average per month). Ten percent or less reported income from each of the following: other public benefits, Food Stamps, informal sources, TAFDC, and other private income. In comparison, the 1997 study gathered information on only two income sources: Social Security and Food Stamps¹²; proportionally fewer in the 1997 group reported receiving Social Security income (14%), while more stated that they received Food Stamps (10%).

¹² The 1997 study collected benefits information at two points in time: within the past 12 months, and currently. The comparisons presented here utilize study participants' reports of current benefit receipt. In all cases, these percentages are lower than those for benefit receipt in the past year.

**Table 5:
Income Sources and Amounts of Boston Homeless Individuals at Shelter Entry**

Income	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=1964)	Avg. Monthly Amount 1999	Boston Homeless Individuals 1997^a (N=338)
No Income	36%	NA	NA
<u>Income Source^b</u>			
Employment Income	29%	\$967	NA
SS/SSI/SSDI	25%	\$550	14%
Other Public Benefits ^b	5%	\$364	NA
Food Stamps	4%	\$105	10%
Informal Sources ^d	2%	\$188	NA
TAFDC	2%	\$311	NA
Other Private Income ^e	1%	\$727	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bMore than one response possible.

^cEarned Income Tax Credit, refugee assistance, veterans administration disability, veterans pension, workers' compensation, unemployment, general assistance, and rent supplements.

^dMoney earned on streets, from the sale of personal belongings, peddling, blood/plasma, or cans, and from spouses, partners, parents, other relatives, or friends.

^eRetirement, investments, savings, private disability insurance, and other pension.

Of all individual shelter residents providing income information, 29% were employed, either exclusively or in conjunction with public assistance. Another 30% subsisted on public assistance alone. Interestingly, as compared to larger 1999 CSPTech statewide group the Boston sample was somewhat less likely to rely on public assistance alone; public assistance was the sole source of support for 36% of the larger group.

**Table 6:
Income by Category of Boston Homeless Individuals at Shelter Entry¹³**

Income Category	Boston Homeless Individuals 1999 (N=1964)
Employment ^a	27%
Public Assistance ^b	30%
Employment and Public Assistance	2%
No Formal Income ^c	40%
Other ^d	1%

^aWages, Earned Income Tax Credit, savings, and investments.

^bTAFDC, WIC, Food Stamps, SSI/SSDI, workers' compensation, unemployment, refugee assistance, veterans administration disability, general relief, and rent supplements.

^cIncludes those receiving income solely from informal sources as defined above.

^dChild support/alimony, retirement, veterans pension, other pension, and private disability insurance.

¹³ Please note that for the analysis in Table 6, each individual providing income information was grouped into one of the five income categories. As such, those with multiple sources were counted only once, as compared to Table 5 where more than one income source was reported.

FAMILIES SERVED AT BOSTON EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTERS

The following describes the information collected by Boston family emergency shelter providers on clients served during 1999. An unduplicated count of 482 families was obtained during the year. This section of the report contains data on these families.

Total Records	494
Unduplicated Count	482

The following shows the shelter utilization patterns of these 482 consumers. As described below, just under 2.5% of shelter users were seen in two or more shelter programs. These other shelter programs were not necessarily located in Boston.

Users of One Shelter Program	470
Users of Two Shelter Programs	11
Users of Three Shelter Programs	1

Based upon this information, the total number of families who utilized emergency homeless shelters in Boston in 1999 is estimated at approximately 800.¹⁴

Characteristics of Heads of Household

Table 7 presents information comparing heads of household of the 482 families served in Boston emergency homeless shelters in 1999 to: the 1997 Boston census, a 1996 national homeless sample¹⁵, and the overall and below poverty populations of the Commonwealth¹⁶. Highlights are discussed below.

Most Boston homeless families were headed by women (89%). This proportion is lower than that of the 1997 Boston survey, which may be attributed to the fact that the earlier sample included families from battered women's shelters. Not

¹⁴ For most of the family records, this calculation is based upon an average annual turnover rate of 1.5 as specified in the latest DTA data. As 41% of the family records derive from the Family Emergency Services program at Travelers Aid Society, a turnover rate of 24 was used for that data, based upon Travelers Aid staff reports that hotel/motel stays average approximately 2 weeks.

¹⁵ In comparing the Boston homeless families to the national sample, it should be noted that the national group includes both parents in two-parent families while the Boston data only report on the heads of household.

¹⁶ Data for the Massachusetts general and poor populations were obtained from the Current Population Survey March 1999 Supplement for Massachusetts. For the family comparison, information on heads of household is presented.

surprisingly, families in the larger state population were much less likely to be female headed, and the poor population more closely resembled the homeless.

More than half (52%) of the families described themselves as African American, just under one-fourth as Latino (23%), and less than one-fifth as white (13%). These data are similar to those for the 1997 study¹⁷, but significantly different than those from the national sample, in which the proportion of African Americans is lower and whites is higher. Not surprisingly, these data also differ from those for homeless families across the state, as presented in the CSPTech statewide report, who are less likely to be African American (35%) and more likely to be white (27%). This distribution was also different from that for the larger populations of the state. Those living below the poverty line more closely resembled the homeless; they were less likely to be white, and more likely to be African American and Latino than the rest of the Massachusetts population.

On average, heads of household were 33 years old and were most likely to be between ages 25 and 44 (75%). Of the Boston families, 16% of household heads were ages 24 or under; and just 10% were ages 45 or over. Only 1% were 55 or over. These data are similar to the findings of a recent DTA survey¹⁸ that found the average age of shelter residents to be 28-30 years. These data are significantly different from those collected in 1997; the earlier group was proportionally younger. This difference may be attributed to the fact that, in conjunction with welfare reform, the state created specific teen living programs; these new programs are not represented among the shelters participating in CSPTech.

Over half of family heads had not completed high school (63%), while 18% obtained a high-school diploma or GED, and 19% had some college education. Just 2% earned an undergraduate or graduate degree. These data differ somewhat from the results of the DTA survey which found a proportionally more educated shelter population: 10% had completed grade school, 36% attended high school, 36% received a high-school degree, and 20% attended at least some college. DTA's study is, however, similar to the data collected in 1997. As with the individual population, the difference between the two Boston groups may be attributed to the fact that the earlier Boston sample included some individuals in transitional programs; this population may be somewhat more educated than that of the emergency shelters. It should also be noted that CSPTech's 1999 statewide report shows that homeless families were more likely to graduate high school (30%), and less likely to attend college (less than 14%). The national sample was also, proportionally, more highly educated. As could be expected, the general population was, proportionally, much more educated than were the homeless heads of household.

¹⁷ The 'other' category does show an increase between the two periods. In the 1999 data, other may include some Latino families; if that is the case, this shows an increase among that population.

¹⁸ DTA interviewed 678 family shelter residents in March 1999. Results are reported in a 7/28/00 memo from Bill McGillivray, Director, Local Office Quality Control.

More than two-thirds (68%) of family heads had never been married, 16% were married, and the remaining 16% were either separated, widowed, or divorced. Differences between this group and the national sample were significant. Families in the national group were more likely to be married, separated, or divorced, and less likely to be single than were the Boston families. There were also some differences with the earlier Boston group; those surveyed in 1997 were less likely to be married and more likely to be separated. Not surprisingly, the larger family population of the Commonwealth was much more likely to be married, and those living in poverty more closely resembled the homeless families. A very small proportion of families in either this or the national group had military experience.

**Table 7:
Demographic Characteristics of Heads of Household of Boston Homeless Families and the
General Population**

	Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=482)	Boston Homeless Families 1997^a (N=94)	National Homeless Families 1996^b (N=465)	MA Family Population Below Poverty Age 17+ 1998^c	MA Family Population Age 17+ 1998^c
Gender					
Female	89%	94%	84%	76%	42%
Male	11%	5%	16%	24%	58%
Race					
African American	52%	55%	43%	25%	6%
Latino	23%	21%	15%	17%	6%
White	13%	16%	38%	48%	86%
Other	10%	2%	1%	NA	NA
Multiracial	1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Asian	1%	4%	NA	7%	3%
Native American	<1%	1%	3%	3%	<1%
Pacific Islander	<1%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Age					
Under 18	0%	46% ^d	1%	0%	0%
18-24	16%		25%	10%	3%
25-34	43%	33%	43%	45%	17%
35-44	32%	16%	28%	19%	27%
45-54	9%	4%	4%	9%	23%
55-64	1%	1%	<1%	16%	30%
Average Age	33	NA	NA	37	48
Education					
Grade school	12%	42%	13%	10%	6%
Some high-school	51%		40%	31%	9%
HS grad./GED	18%	37%	21%	33%	32%
Some college/AA	17%			15%	22%
BS/BA	1%	21%	27%	9%	20%
Grad. Degree	1%			1%	12%
Marital Status					
Single/Never Married	68%	67%	41%	44%	9%
Married	16%	9%	23%	29%	76%
Separated	7%	14%	23%	12%	3%
Widowed	5%	1%	0%	3%	4%
Divorced	4%	8%	13%	12%	9%
Veterans					
Yes	1%	NA	5%	NA	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bSource: National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, December 1999.

^cSource: Current Population Survey March Supplement 1999 for Massachusetts.

^dAge categories for the 1997 Snapshot data vary slightly. They are: under 25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; and 66 and up.

Family Members

Almost two-thirds of homeless families consisted of a parent and one to two children. These data are consistent with DTA's findings that most families have from 1.6 to 2.5 children; but differ from the 1997 study, which shows proportionally fewer large families. Just under two out of five families had four members, and the remaining 20% consisted of more than five people.

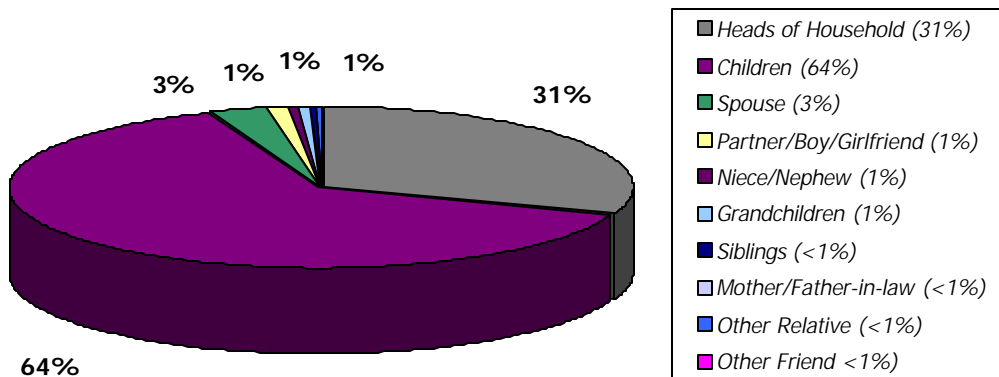
Table 8:
Sizes of Boston Homeless Families

Family Size	Boston Homeless Families	Boston Homeless Families
	1999 (N=444)	1997 ^a (N=94)
Two Family Members	32%	75%
Three Family Members	29%	
Four Family Members	19%	12%
Five or More Family Members	20%	6%

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

Most family members were children (64%), and just under another third were heads of household.

Chart 1:
Family Member Relationships of Boston Homeless Families (N=1557)



Children

As in the national sample, children in Boston homeless families were slightly more likely to be boys than girls. Children in the 1999 sample were proportionally older than those in the 1997 census. More than three in five children served in Boston in 1997 were under 5 years of age, as compared to 46% of the 1999 Boston children, and 42% of the national sample. Another third of 1999 Boston and 1996 national homeless children were ages 6-11, and two in five were over age 12, as compared to just 8% of those in the 1997 group. The average age was just over 7 years.

Table 9:
Characteristics of Children in Boston and National Homeless Families

	Children in Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=993)	Children in Boston Homeless Families 1997 ^a (N=94)	Children in National Homeless Families 1996 ^b (N=1007)
Gender			
Female	48%	NA	47%
Male	52%	NA	53%
Age			
0-2 years	24%	17% ^c	20%
3-5 years	22%	47%	22%
6-8 years	19%	28%	20%
9-11 years	15%		13%
12-14 years	12%	8%	11%
15-17 years	8%		9%
Average Age	7.2	NA	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bSource: National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, December 1999.

^cAge categories for the 1997 Snapshot data vary slightly. They are: under 1; 2-6; 7-12; and teens.

Residence Prior to Shelter Entry

Over one-third of the homeless families reported being doubled up with family and/or friends immediately before entering shelter, just under another third rented their own place, and slightly over one in five came from another shelter. Families interviewed in the 1997 survey were more likely to have been doubled up and less likely to have rented their own home.

Table 10:
Type of Residence of Boston Homeless Families Prior to Entering Shelter

Prior Residence	Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=390)	Boston Homeless Families 1997 ^a (N=94)
Homes of Relative/Friends	37%	53%
Rented Home	31%	15%
Other Shelter	21%	21%
Other	4%	NA
Owned Home	2%	NA
Hotel/Motel	2%	3%
Street/Park/Car/Abandoned Building	1%	NA
Transitional Housing	1%	NA
Supervised Living ^b	1%	NA
Boarding House	<1%	NA
Detox./Substance Abuse Treatment Center	<1%	1%
Jail/Prison/Detention Center	<1%	7%

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bFoster home, halfway house, three-quarter house, or nursing home.

More than three-quarters (77%) of Boston family shelter residents who reported this information cited the city as their residence prior to becoming homeless. An additional 7% derived from the greater Boston area. Most of the others came from the northeastern and southeastern parts of the state, as well as outside of Massachusetts.

Table 11:
Area of Residence of Boston Homeless Families Prior to Entering Shelter

City of Residence	Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=162)
<u>Boston</u>	
Dorchester	35%
Roxbury	12%
Boston (neighborhood not specified)	8%
Mattapan	7%
Jamaica Plain	4%
South Boston	3%
Brighton	2%
East Boston	2%
Hyde Park	2%
Charlestown	1%
Roslindale	1%
<u>Other</u>	
Greater Boston	7%
Northeastern MA	6%
Southeastern MA	4%
Out of State	4%
Western MA	1%
Central MA	0%
Out of Country	0%

Income at Shelter Entry

Of those families providing income information, more than four-fifths reported some income; 19% had no source of income. Just under half received TAFDC and 30% received Food Stamps. A quarter of the families earned employment income with average monthly wages of \$993. Of those reporting income, 15% received Social Security benefits, \$624 per month on average; and 7% reported receiving child support and/or alimony, an average of \$298 monthly. In comparison, the 1997 study gathered information on only four income sources: TAFDC, Food Stamps, Social Security, and WIC¹⁹; proportionally more families in the 1997 group reported receiving TAFDC (71%), Food Stamps (63%), and WIC (38%); fewer received Social Security income (10%). The sharp decline in TAFDC and Food Stamp receipt may be attributed to the time limits associated with Massachusetts' welfare reform legislation. The difference in WIC utilization may be partially attributed to the higher proportion of older children in the 1999 group.

¹⁹ The 1997 study collected benefits information at two points in time: within the past 12 months, and currently. The comparisons presented here utilize study participants' reports of current benefit receipt. In all cases, these percentages are lower than those for benefit receipt in the past year.

Table 12:
Income Sources and Amounts of Boston Homeless Families at Shelter Entry

Income	Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=475)	Avg. Monthly Amount 1999	Boston Homeless Families 1997^a (N=94)
No Income	19%	NA	NA
<u>Income Source^b</u>			
TAFDC	49%	\$444	71%
Food Stamps	30%	\$219	63%
Employment Income	25%	\$993	NA
SS/SSI/SSDI	15%	\$624	10%
Child Support/Alimony	7%	\$298	NA
WIC	5%	NA	38%
Other Public Benefits ^c	5%	\$344	NA
Informal Sources ^d	2%	\$626	NA
Other Private Income ^e	<1%	\$979	NA

^aSource: Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997.

^bMore than one response possible.

^cEarned Income Tax Credit, refugee assistance, veterans administration disability, veterans pension, workers' compensation, unemployment, general assistance, and rent supplements.

^dMoney earned on streets, from the sale of personal belongings, peddling, blood/plasma, or cans, and from spouses, partners, parents, other relatives, or friends.

^eRetirement, investments, savings, private disability insurance, and other pension.

Of those homeless families providing income information, 25% were employed, either exclusively or in conjunction with public assistance. Another 54% subsisted on public assistance alone. It is notable that CSPTech's 1999 statewide report shows proportionally fewer families relying solely on earnings (9%), and a greater proportion with no formal income (32%).

Table 13:
Income by Category of Boston Homeless Families at Shelter Entry²⁰

Income Category	Boston Homeless Families 1999 (N=475)
Employment ^a	17%
Public Assistance ^b	54%
Employment and Public Assistance	8%
No Formal Income ^c	19%
Other ^d	2%

^aWages, Earned Income Tax Credit, savings, and investments.

^bTAFDC, WIC, Food Stamps, SSI/SSDI, workers' compensation, unemployment, refugee assistance, veterans administration disability, general relief, and rent supplements.

^cIncludes those receiving income solely from informal sources as defined above.

^dChild support/alimony, retirement, veterans pension, other pension, and private disability insurance.

²⁰ Please note that for the analysis in Table 13, each family providing income information was grouped into one of the five income categories. As such, those with multiple sources were counted only once, as compared to Table 12 where more than one income source was reported.

Appendix: Boston Shelters Contributing Records

Shelters Contributing Records for INDIVIDUALS	%
Boston Rescue Mission	16%
Long Island Annex	6%
Long Island Shelter	3%
Long Island Woods Mullen	2%
NE Shelter for Homeless Vets	11%
Pine Street Inn Holy Family	2%
Pine Street Inn Men's Inn	5%
Pine Street Inn Women's Inn	18%
Shattuck Shelter	26%
United Homes Post Detox	8%
United Homes Main Shelter	4%
Total	100%

Shelters Contributing Records for FAMILIES	%
Casa Nueva	3%
Crossroads	3%
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership	37%
Project Hope	4%
Shelter Inc.	4%
Sojourner House	5%
St. Ambrose House	3%
Travelers Aid	41%
Total	100%