

Study links child hunger and poor health to unstable housing

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A new study shows that children whose families move frequently or live in overcrowded conditions are more likely to suffer from hunger and poor health than those in stable housing. The study was carried out by the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) which has the largest clinical data base on poor children under age three in America. C-SNAP has been reporting on the impact of economic conditions and public policies on children's health since 1998.

A report on the findings was issued jointly with the Medical-Legal Partnership for Children (MLPC). C-SNAP and MLPC are based in Boston Medical Center's Department of Pediatrics.

The study found that over 38 percent of families with children under age three interviewed in Boston Medical Center's emergency room had moved more than two times in the previous 12 months, lived in overcrowded conditions, or were doubled up with another family. The study calls these families the "hidden homeless".

Children whose families had moved two or more times were almost twice as likely to be in poor health as children in stable housing. According to C-SNAP founder, Deborah A. Frank, director of BMC's Grow Clinic, "Like so many of the economic conditions hurting our young children 'hidden homelessness' is an invisible problem until doctors see it written on the bodies of infants and toddlers."

The report estimates that there are at least 14,800 "hidden homeless"

families in Boston and the number is likely to grow as the economy declines. "Low-income families are contending with unprecedented challenges: increasing unemployment, continued high rates of foreclosures, rising food prices and heating costs that stretch family budgets to the breaking point. When you've lost your job and can't afford the grocery bill, electricity bill, and rent, trade-offs are made and family health suffers," said Samantha Morton, Deputy Director of MLPC.

Source: Boston University

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