



Criminal Justice Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gjup20>

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Available online: 15 Nov 2010

To cite this article: Tammy S. Garland, Tara Richards & Mikaela Cooney (2010): Victims hidden in plain sight: the reality of victimization among the homeless, *Criminal Justice Studies*, 23:4, 285-301

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2010.516525>

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Victims hidden in plain sight: the reality of victimization among the homeless

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Using the framework of structural choice theory, this exploratory study discusses self-reported differences in criminality and victimization within the homeless population as a predictor of future victimization. A sample of homeless individuals ($N = 105$) in a mid-size southern city was collected to investigate factors related to past and current victimization. Findings reveal that homeless individuals who reported being turned away from a shelter and as having committed a new crime since becoming homeless are significantly more likely to experience victimization.

Keywords: homelessness; victimization

Introduction

With the current economic and foreclosure crises plaguing the USA, the rising homeless population has been thrust to the forefront of public attention. In 2009, two laws were passed to protect the homeless. First, Congress passed the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 requiring the Interagency Council on Homeless to find alternatives to the criminalization of the homeless (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty [NLCHP] & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009a). Second, in response to the increasing number of violent acts committed against the homeless by housed persons, Maryland became the first state to extend hate crime protection to the homeless population. Although the enactment of such laws seemingly attempts to prevent harm perpetrated against the homeless, the trend of criminalizing these individuals rather than providing protection has been the prevailing policy. With the proliferation of gentrification within cities nationwide, homeless persons have been increasingly criminalized. As noted by Ferrell (2001) 'the daily lives of the homeless are all but outlawed through a plethora of new statutes and enforcement strategies regarding sitting, sleeping, begging, loitering, and urban camping' (p. 164) while Mitchell (1998) emphasizes, 'if homeless people can only live in public and if the things one must do to live are not allowed in public space, then homelessness is not just criminalized; life for homeless people is made impossible' (p. 10). In fact, since 2006, there has been a 7% increase in laws prohibiting camping in certain places, and an 11% increase in laws prohibiting loitering in public places. In addition, there was a 6% increase in laws prohibiting begging in

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public spaces and a 5% increase in laws prohibiting aggressive panhandling (NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009).

Without question, the extant literature has found an increased rate of incarceration within the homeless population when compared to housed individuals (Fisher, 1992; Schlay & Rossi, 1992; Snow, Baker, & Anderson, 1989). Previous findings, however, do not necessarily indicate that homeless persons engage in more criminal activity than housed individuals but instead may be more at risk for arrest and incarceration as a result of their high visibility (Barak & Bohm, 1989; Snow et al., 1989). For example, McNeil, Binder, and Robinson (2005) found that over a six-month period in a city with a homeless population of 1%, one in every five individuals incarcerated were homeless and that even after controlling for demographic characteristics and the severity of charges, homeless individuals were incarcerated for substantially longer than those who were not homeless. Research on criminal activity among the homeless has generally found that they are most often involved in petty crimes such as vagrancy or public intoxication (DeLisi, 2000; Fisher, 1988; Lindelius & Salum, 1976; Snow et al., 1989). In addition, offenses perpetrated by homeless individuals are oftentimes a direct result of meeting subsistence needs (Aulette & Aulette, 1987; Fisher, 1988; Snow et al., 1989). For example, Fisher (1988) reported that arrests of homeless individuals were persistently due to public order violations such as sleeping on a park bench or trespassing. Snow et al. (1989) further demonstrated that the majority of homeless individuals' arrests for trespassing resulted from breaking into a building to secure shelter and a place to sleep. Moreover, among homeless individuals arrested for theft offenses, their perpetration was typically commercial in nature; nearly half of the theft offenses were for stealing food, drink, or cigarettes. Truthfully, for the homeless 'finding a place to sleep is trespassing, waiting to eat at a soup kitchen is loitering, trying to get cigarettes is panhandling, and carrying around one's belongings is "squatting"' (Benda, Rodell, & Rodell, 2003, p. 42).

In 2008, the National Conference of Mayors reported a 12% increase in homelessness. Seeing that shelters are already at capacity, the homeless have no choice but to 'survive on the streets' (NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009). At night most homeless bed down under bridges, squat in abandoned buildings, sleep on park benches, lie down on sidewalks, and when very lucky, procure themselves a bed in a crowded and understaffed shelter (see National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty [NLCHP] & National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). During the day in many cities the homeless spend their time lingering at bus stops, panhandling for spare change, or rummaging through garbage cans and dumpsters for food (see NLCHP & National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). It is these acts for which the homeless are criminalized. Although some government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels have made attempts to curtail this criminalization (see NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009; US Conference of Mayors, 2007), many lawmakers still fail to acknowledge that living in high crime areas without shelter places the homeless more in harm's way than the general population. In reality, this population is more at risk of being victimized than committing any criminal offenses. With the unemployment rate reaching an estimated 10% in December 2009, lawmakers can no longer afford to ignore what was at one time believed to be a problem confined to those of the lower class. Today, individuals once considered middle class are at risk of becoming homeless. This increasing 'newly homeless' population includes women, children, and families (Richards, Garland, Bumphus, & Thompson,

2010), individuals who will garner the public eye and, in turn, demand the attention of public policy makers.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study is not simply to look at criminality as a result but as a factor related to the victimization of the homeless. Second, although this exploratory study is not a test of structural choice theory, this analysis will draw upon the conceptual framework of structural choice theory to determine if structural factors are predictive of the victimization of the homeless.

Victimization among the homeless

The rate at which homeless persons are victimized is disproportionately high compared to the general population (D'Ercole & Struening, 1990; Fitzpatrick, La Gory, & Ritchey, 1993; Kushel, Evans, Perry, Robertson, & Moss, 2003; Lee & Schreck, 2005; Simons, Whitbeck, & Bales, 1989). Despite using different definitions of victimization, the extant homeless literature reports that anywhere from one-quarter to over half of homeless individuals had been victimized since becoming homeless (Anderson, 1996; Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Lee & Schreck, 2005; Simons et al., 1989). For example, Padgett and Struening (1992) found that victimization rates in cases such as robbery and forcible rape were more than 20 times higher for homeless men and women compared to rates within the general population. Several studies demonstrate that, similar to domiciled individuals, homeless men are more likely to be victims of all types of crime when compared to homeless women with the exception of rape and sexual assault (Lee & Schreck, 2005; Padgett & Struening, 1992; Whitbeck & Simons, 1993). Evans and Forsyth (2004) found that both men and women experienced similar patterns of victimization in regards to theft; however, as noted, women were more susceptible to sexual victimization while men were more likely to be the victims of assault and robbery.

Snow et al. (1989) suggest that most homeless victimization comes from within the homeless population, finding that the risk of a homeless individual being victimized by another homeless male was 11 times greater than the risk to the general population. Lee and Schreck (2005) further report that a majority of violent confrontations among homeless individuals are the result of protecting oneself or property from harm or are in retaliation for a previous victimization. However, Anderson (1996) maintains that many violent crimes against the homeless are without economic motive in that individuals are assaulted but not robbed. In fact, a report by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH, 2009) found that teenage thrill seekers were most often responsible for violent and hate crimes against the homeless. In 2008 alone, there were 106 violent acts committed against the homeless by housed persons (NCH, 2009). Not surprisingly, Fitzpatrick et al. (1993) found that 87% of homeless respondents could not identify their victimizer compared to only 59% of housed respondents.

The intersection of victimization and criminality

Empirical evidence suggests that several of the factors associated with criminal activity within the homeless population are also predictive of victimization. Considerable health problems such as mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse, and degenerative disease significantly increase the likelihood of becoming a victim (Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Lee & Schreck, 2005; Simons et al., 1989; Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg, 2000).

Mentally disordered homeless or those under the influence of drugs or alcohol may be unable to accurately perform a risk assessment or protect themselves from attack. This vulnerability may also transform homeless men and women into attractive targets (Miethe & Meier, 1994).

The marginalized status of those living on the streets has also been positively correlated with victimization. Simply passing time on the street increases the odds of both being directly and indirectly exposed to crime and victimization (Lee & Schreck, 2005; Wenzel et al., 2000). Gaetz (2004) surmises that, 'if one regularly frequents dangerous and poorly supervised locations or engages in delinquent behaviors, one's proximity to other criminal offenders places one at a greater risk for victimization' (p. 427). Additionally, engaging in subsistence activities such as panhandling and selling drugs or sexual favors greatly increases the chance of being a victim (Kushel et al., 2003; Padgett & Struening, 1992; Wenzel et al., 2000; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce, & Paradise, 2001). For instance, females have been shown to resort to survival sex more often than males and as a result are more likely to be sexually assaulted. Males are more likely to resort to nonsexual deviant strategies such as robbery and dealing drugs and thus are more likely to be physically assaulted (Whitbeck et al., 2001).

Structural choice theory as a pathway to victimization

Literature revealing the relationship, and at times, extensive overlap between offenders and victims (e.g. Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990; Singer, 1981; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967) has helped foster a paradigm shift in criminological theories of victimization. Contemporary theories seek to explain crime and victimization not by offenders alone but by the characteristics and habits of potential victims, characteristics that increase one's opportunity for victimization. Opportunity theories argue that predatory victimization occurs as a result of the juxtaposition of a potential offender and a risky situation with an attractive target under a low level of guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen, Kluegel, & Land, 1981; Miethe & Meier, 1990).

As a synthesized model of opportunity theory, structural choice theory (Miethe & Meier, 1990) is an especially appropriate framework in which to elucidate the high rate of victimization within the homeless population. The strength of structural choice theory as it relates specifically to the homeless population is its dual attention to both the 'structural' (macro) factors that contribute to criminal opportunity as well as the 'choice' (micro) processes that promote the selection of a target for victimization. 'Structural' factors include the proximity to high crime areas and exposure to offenders while 'choice' processes refer to the attractiveness of a victimization target to an offender and the level of guardianship over the target (Miethe & Meier, 1990). Furthermore, the homeless are generally without the resources to either increase their guardianship or decrease their exposure and proximity (Hoyt, Ryan, & Cauce, 1999), which makes these factors extremely relevant in explaining both initial and repeat victimization.

Proximity

One's physical proximity to risk has been established as a predictor of victimization (see Garofalo, 1987; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990). For homeless individuals, whose use of space is constantly policed, proximity to crime is especially salient. In a recent study of homeless women in Los Angeles County, Heslin, Robinson, Baker, and

Gelberg (2007) found a 48% increase in the odds of being physically assaulted for every one standard deviation increase in proximity to areas where services aimed at the homeless (such as shelters and food assistance programs) are clustered. Furthermore, Snow and Mulcahy (2001) suggest that the homeless are literally relegated to the spaces of least value to most residents: clusters of abandoned buildings, empty allies, vacant lots, and areas of such concentrated disadvantage that residents overlook their presence. Homeless individuals' best housing options such as shelters and homeless camps are located where they cannot be 'eyesores' to affluent neighborhoods – in downtown, urban areas – where crime is concentrated and the risk of victimization is disproportionately high.

Additionally, shelter space is limited and thus not guaranteed to all homeless individuals. Moreover, most shelters are 'dry houses' prohibiting the use of drugs and alcohol, which is problematic for the homeless – a population saturated with substance abuse issues. As an added stumbling block, some shelters charge per night for bed space rendering prolonged stays impossible. When homeless individuals cannot secure themselves a position in an overnight facility, they must find an alternative place to sleep, most often located outdoors leaving them especially vulnerable to victimization.

Exposure

The extant literature has repeatedly found that time spent on the street is related to increased victimization (Evans & Forsyth, 2004; Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Huey & Berndt, 2008; Lee & Schreck, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2001). Although time is a relevant factor, it is the exposure of self during this period that is associated with victimization. Exposure refers to a potential victim's visibility and accessibility to an offender (Miethe & Meier, 1990). An individual is at an increased risk for victimization when their daily activities place them at risk (Hoyt et al., 1999; Miethe & Meier, 1990). Simply being homeless places one at such a risk. 'To be homeless is to be placeless; life thus becomes a series of actions in indefensible spaces, which offer little privacy or security' (Fitzpatrick et al., 1993, p. 366). Lee and Schreck (2005) suggest that living on the streets regardless of time of day increases the likelihood of homeless victimization. Additionally, homeless individuals who engage in subsistence seeking behavior such as panhandling or trading sexual services are at an increased risk for potential victimization. Moreover, the high rate of alcohol and substance abuse within the homeless population further facilitates an increase in exposure to criminality (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990).

Target attractiveness

Attractiveness refers to 'the differential value or subjective utility associated with a potential victim' (Hoyt et al., 1999, p. 376). A victim's attractiveness to an offender may encompass traditional notions of value such as monetary worth or may be associated with a victim's vulnerability and in turn decreased likelihood to resist victimization. Since the homeless live transient lifestyles, they most often carry all their possessions with them or alternatively hide them in an unsecured location such as a homeless encampment where they may easily be stolen. In addition, rampant alcohol and substance abuse (Lee & Schreck, 2005) as well as mental health issues (Koegal, Burnam, & Farr, 1988) and poor physical health (Gelberg, 1996) within the homeless

population may leave homeless individuals particularly susceptible to both property and person crimes. Furthermore, prior victimization, an established correlate to future victimization, is copious among the homeless, especially in terms of repeat victimization (Hoyt et al., 1999; Lauritsen & Quinet, 1996). As noted in the literature, the female homeless population is without question susceptible to revictimization. Specific violent traumas noted to be prevalent among homeless women include childhood physical and sexual abuse (Browne, 1993; North & Smith, 1992; North, Smith, & Spitznagel, 1994; US Conference of Mayors, 2007), adult physical and sexual abuse including intimate partner violence (Baker et al., 2003; North & Smith, 1992; North et al., 1994; Styron, Janoff-Bulman, & Davidson, 2000; Wagner & Menke, 1991), sexual assault including rape (Cook, 1995; North & Smith, 1992; North et al., 1994), and physical assault (Cook, 1995; North & Smith, 1992; North et al., 1994; Styron et al., 2000). The previous research has found high rates of sexual exploitation and violence among homeless women (Evans & Forsyth, 2004; Huey & Berndt, 2008; Maher, Dunlap, Johnson, & Hamid, 1996). Hence, this population may be considered attractive to would be predators especially when these individuals lack a guardian.

Guardianship

Guardianship refers to the presence of protective measures to prevent crime and victimization. The concept of guardianship can encompass physical dimensions like locks on doors and burglar alarms as well as social guardians such as the companionship of others. For homeless individuals, the simplest form of physical guardianship, secure housing, is beyond their reach. Lack of secure housing forces the homeless to carry out the majority of their day-to-day activities in the public eye creating an unavoidable increase in their contact with strangers and at the same time reducing their level of guardianship and increasing the likelihood of being victimized (Sampson, 1987). In addition, the majority of homeless individuals lack social guardians – they are single and without strong personal relationships (Burt & Cohen, 1989; Heslin et al., 2007; Snow et al., 1989). Moreover, the sense of relative worthlessness of the homeless exuded by society at large may result in a lack of protection by law enforcement and bystanders alike.

Methodology

This exploratory study consisted of a convenience sample of homeless individuals living in a mid-size southern city between October 2006 and June 2007. The sampled population consisted of individuals, who were at least 18 years of age or older and were characterized ‘by the absence of conventional, permanent housing’ (Snow et al., 1989, p. 533). The study took place in the downtown area of the city where the majority of the homeless shelters are located. The data for the sample population ($N = 105$) was collected by the primary researcher and student assistants at local homeless shelters and soup kitchens upon approval from the Institutional Review Board.¹ Potential respondents were approached by the research team and asked if they would participate in the study. Staff from one women-only shelter assisted in the recruitment of participants; those who declined to participate were not reprimanded in any way. A total of 105 participants were interviewed during this timeframe using a 38-item structured survey. Interviewers described the study to the participants and ensured confidentiality

of all information. Interviews were used to preserve the integrity of the questionnaire and to circumvent any instances of illiteracy that could prevent a participant from completing the survey and erroneously impact the sample.² The confidential interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Measurement of variables

The dependent variable in this study is the presence of criminal victimization after becoming homeless. Respondents were asked 'have you been a victim of a crime since becoming homeless?' The victimization question was coded as a dichotomous variable (no = 0); a response of 1 indicated that the participant had been a victim since becoming homeless. In addition, those who indicated they had been victimized were asked an open-ended follow-up question regarding the nature of the victimization.³

To explore factors that influence homeless victimization, several variables were used in the analysis including socio-demographic characteristics, length of current homelessness and number of times homeless within the past three years, where the participant slept the previous night, whether the participant had been turned away from a shelter, victimization prior to becoming homeless, current relationship status, and criminal histories. The socio-demographic variables, seen in Table 1, include gender (male = 0), race (white = 0), age (in years), and education level (did not graduate high school = 0). Length of current homelessness (in years) and number of times homeless in the past three years (1–3 times = 0) was also measured. The place the respondent slept last night was coded as a dichotomous variable, sheltered or non-sheltered). In addition, whether an individual had been turned away from a homeless shelter (no = 0) and current relationship status were also measured as dichotomous

Table 1. Description of variables.

Variable and coding	Distribution and descriptive findings
Gender (male = 0)	Male = 49.5%, female = 50.5%
Race (white = 0)	White = 54.3%, nonwhite = 45.7%
Age (in years)	Range = 20–66, M = 41.61
Grade (did not graduate = 0)	No diploma/GED = 71.4%, high school/GED = 15.2%, some college and above = 11.4%
Length of time homeless (less than 6 months = 0)	Less than 6 months = 48.6%, 6 months–1 year = 22.9%, 1–5 years = 19.0%, 5–10 years = 1.9%, more than 10 years = 6.7%
Times homeless of 3 years (1–3 times = 0)	1–3 times = 75.0%, 4–10 times = 8.7%, more than 10 times = 16.3%
Stay last night (sheltered = 0)	Sheltered = 65.7%, non-sheltered = 34.3%
Turned away from shelter (no = 0)	No = 65.7%, yes = 34.3%
Current relationship status (no = 0)	No = 81.0%, yes = 19.0%
Sexual abuse (no = 0)	No = 73.3%, yes = 26.7%
Pre-abuse (no = 0)	No = 78.4%, yes = 21.6%
Arrest record (no = 0)	No = 48.9%, yes = 58.1%
New crime since homeless (no = 0)	No = 77.5%, yes = 22.5%
Victim after homeless (no = 0)	No = 67.6%, yes = 32.4%

variables (no = 0). Abuse history consisted of two variables: abuse before leaving home (no = 0) and sexual abuse (no = 0). Criminal history also consisted of two variables noting if the individual had ever been arrested (no = 0) and if the individual had committed a new crime since becoming homeless (no = 0).

Characteristics of the sample

Data was gathered to determine the gender, age, race, education, length and time homeless, where the participant slept the previous night, being turned away from a shelter, current relationship status, 'victimization' characteristics, and self-reported criminal histories of the respondents. Men and minorities were underrepresented compared to the homeless population nationally. As noted in Table 1, over 50% of the sample were female ($N = 53$) and 49.5% were males ($N = 52$). Even though female homelessness is becoming more prevalent when compared to the total homeless population, the percentage of homeless women has been relatively small ranging from 12% to 17% (Bassuck et al., 1997; Burt & Cohen, 1989; McCarty, Argeriou, Huebner, & Lubron, 1991). However, the sampled cities homeless population 'is split fairly evenly by gender with men slightly outnumbering women' (*Blueprint*, 2007, p. 21). Hence, much of the data was collected at a women's only shelter to represent the city's homeless population.

Although the final analysis used a recoded dichotomous variable for race (white vs. non-white), specific racial characteristics were collected during the interview (see Table 1). White respondents were overrepresented when compared to the corresponding national data on homeless persons; over 50% of the respondents were white ($N = 53$), approximately 46% were African-American ($N = 48$), 1% were Hispanic ($N = 1$), and less than 3% were other ($N = 3$). National statistics report that approximately 49% of the homeless population consists of African-Americans compared to 35% of whites and 12% of Hispanics (US Conference of Mayors, 2005). In comparison, 59.7% of the general population in the sample city are white, 36.1% are African-American, and 2.1% are Hispanic (US Census, 2000).

The average age for respondents, 41.6 years old, was higher than the city's population; however, no one under the age of 18 was allowed to participate in the study. National statistics have reported the percentage of the homeless population under the age of 18 to be around 39% (NCH, 2007). Nearly half of the sample, 44.7% ($N = 47$), reported to be 46 and older while national statistics report that only approximately 6–8% of the homeless population is older than 55 years of age (NCH, 2007). Respondents 26–35 years old and 36–45 years old comprised 26% and 22% of the sample, respectively, which is consistent with national reports on the homeless. Less than 10% of the sample consisted of those between the ages of 18 and 25.

Participants were asked the highest grade level they had completed. The majority of the sample 71.4% ($N = 75$) completed some high school but did not graduate or receive their GED. Nationally, approximately 38% of the homeless population did not graduate from high school (Urban Institute, 1999). Slightly more than 15% ($N = 16$) of participants did graduate from high school or receive their GED compared to 34% of the general homeless population. Less than 6% of the respondents ($N = 6$) completed an undergraduate or graduate degree while approximately 2% ($N = 2$) of participants listed 'other' as their educational status but did not specify the highest grade level they had completed. National data reported that approximately 28% of the homeless population went beyond high school (Burt et al., 1999).

In addition to demographic variables, the analysis also included information on the length of time spent homeless, relationship status, being turned away from a shelter, prior victimization, and criminal histories. On average, respondents reported a current homelessness of 1.92 years and had experienced homelessness 1.44 times over the previous three years. Only 19% of those interviewed reported currently being in a relationship.

Just over 65% of the respondents reported sleeping in a sheltered facility the night before. Sheltered facilities included staying with friends or relatives (17.1%), in a shelter or transitional facility (45.7%), or in a jail, prison, hospital, or treatment facility (2.9%).⁴ Almost 29% of the respondents reported being turned away from a shelter. Of the 30 respondents who reported being turned away from a shelter, half named that overcrowding was the reason in which they had been denied shelter.

Of the 105 participants, approximately 29% reported being abused before leaving home. In addition, almost 27% of the participants reported suffering sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Approximately 32% of the respondents reported being a victim since becoming homeless. Of those 34 participants reporting being victimized after becoming homeless, 15 of the respondents reported being assaulted or threatened with violence while 15 reported property crimes committed against them.

Approximately 58% of the total respondents reported they had been arrested and 11% had engaged in a violent crime. Of those who had been arrested, only nine respondents reported being arrested after becoming homeless. Of the 105 participants just over 10% reported being released from prison, jail, or a mental facility. Notably, only two individuals who reported being released from a prison, jail, or mental facility, reported being arrested after release; four of those who had been institutionalized indicated committing a new crime after becoming homeless. In total, approximately 22% reported committing a crime since becoming homeless. The vast majority of these crimes were for public intoxication, possession, prostitution, and trespassing.

Findings

As noted in previous research (Fisher, 1992; Fitzpatrick et al., 1993; Lam & Rosenheck, 1998; Lee & Schreck, 2005), the homeless experience victimization at a higher rate than the housed population. A bivariate analysis was conducted to determine what factors may play a role in a homeless person's individual risk of victimization. Interestingly, the Pearson Correlations revealed that only one demographic variable, race, had a significant relationship with the dependent variable, victimized after becoming homeless; whites were more likely to report being a victim of a crime since becoming homeless (see Table 2). However, none of the remaining demographic variables were found to have a significant relationship with the dependent variable, victimized since homeless. In addition, the non-sheltered homeless, individuals who had been turned away from a shelter and those who had committed a crime since becoming homeless were more likely to report being victimized since becoming homeless.

Although the bivariate analysis determined a relationship between the aforementioned independent variables and the dependent variable, logistic regression was utilized for continued analysis (Bachman & Paternoster, 2004). Logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables of interest and the risk of victimization after becoming homeless while controlling for other variables (see Table 3). Using the Forward Likelihood Ratio Method, the independent variables were regressed on the dependent variable. After four iterations, the estimation

Table 2. Correlations.

Variable	Gender	Age	Race	Grade	Length	Times	Slept	NoShelter	Abuse	SexAb	Relat	Arrest	Crime
Gender	1												
Age	-0.456**	1											
Race	0.029	0.003	1										
Grade	0.074	0.033	-0.053	1									
Length	-0.307**	0.321**	-0.071	-0.284**	1								
Times	-0.294**	0.313**	0.072	-0.241*	0.629**	1							
Slept last night	-0.288**	0.278**	-0.341**	-0.073	0.337**	-0.244*	1						
No shelter	-0.006	0.060	-0.284**	0.121	0.238*	0.129	0.209*	1					
Abuse	0.331**	-0.232*	0.157	0.012	-0.049	-0.137	-0.279**	0.113	1				
Sexual abuse	0.382**	-0.066	-0.121	0.147	-0.052	-0.143	-0.118	0.048	0.524**	1			
Relationship	0.189	-0.254**	-0.104	0.294**	-0.175	-0.268**	-0.044	0.069	-0.092	0.091	1		
Arrest record	-0.146	0.199*	-0.034	0.072	0.240*	-0.226**	0.125	0.324**	0.024	-0.055	0.019	1	
New crime	-0.222*	0.214*	-0.054	-0.196*	0.527**	0.271**	0.315**	0.270**	-0.080	-0.005	-0.089	0.070	1
Victim	-0.047	0.006	-0.226*	-0.010	0.166	-0.023	0.272*	0.233*	0.013	0.043	0.027	0.010	0.429**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. Logistic regression of homeless victimization (likelihood ratio).

	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	Sig.	Exp(<i>B</i>)
Variables in the equation					
No shelter	1.356	0.516	6.912	0.009**	3.882
New crime	2.008	0.552	13.218	0.000***	7.452
Variables not in the equation					
Gender				0.427	
Age				0.229	
Race				0.107	
Grade				0.738	
Length				0.387	
Times				0.189	
Slept last night				0.274	
Abuse				0.710	
Sexual abuse				0.644	
Arrest record				0.739	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.30				
Model χ^2	24.58***				

$N = 105$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

was terminated because parameter estimates changed less than 0.001. The model was determined to be significant ($p = 0.000$); the pseudo R^2 was 0.30. In addition, the Hosmer and Lemeshow chi-square test of goodness of fit determined that the model was a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 0.273$; $p = 0.872$). None of the demographic variables were found to be predictors in the model; however, being turned away from a shelter (Wald = 6.912; $p < 0.01$) and committing a crime since becoming homeless (Wald = 13.218; $p < 0.001$) remained significant. Specifically, being turned away from a shelter was associated with a 3.88 increase in an individual's odds of victimization while committing a crime since becoming homeless was associated with a 7.45 increase in the odds of becoming a victim.

Discussion and conclusion

Although bivariate analysis demonstrated that the race variable was related to victimization, race was not significant at the multivariate level after controlling for other variables. While there is some support for race as a factor in homeless victimization (Lee & Schreck, 2005) the inconsequential nature of the race variable in the current research is consistent with much of the extant literature finding that basic demographic characteristics do not significantly affect the victimization of the homeless (see Fitzpatrick et al., 1993). As noted by Fitzpatrick et al. (1993), simply being homeless eradicates risk differentials typically associated with the general population.

Interestingly, those denied access to a shelter were significantly more likely to be a crime victim while homeless than those who did not report being turned away from a shelter. Intuitively, being denied access to a shelter would increase one's risk of criminal victimization. As noted by Miethe and Meier (1990), 'exposure to crime is indicative of one's overall visibility and accessibility to crime' (p. 250). Although the entire homeless population is at risk of being victimized, it is not simply the lack of

permanent housing (see Snow & Mulchahy, 2001), but any housing at all that places them at such a heightened risk. Although the literature supports that all homeless individuals are at risk, we found participants who reported being 'unsheltered' the previous night were more likely to be report being a victim. Although the variable, slept last night, was not significant at the multivariate level, the fact that it showed statistical significance at the bivariate level further supports this idea of exposure. Hence, homeless individuals are turned away from shelters, and those who are typically unsheltered are more at risk for victimization.

According to the US Conference of Mayors (2007), 52% of cities surveyed were forced to turn people away from shelters due to lack of resources. As noted, this study found that half of the participants reporting being turned away from a shelter were for lack of available space. Other reasons for being turned away included being intoxicated and curfew (the shelters would not admit anyone after 5 pm). For homeless individuals, access to a shelter, even temporarily, guarantees them a safe haven in which they have access to food, shelter, and safety. When denied access to these facilities, the homeless are forced to bed down in the open air or in homeless camps. These 'facilities' are anything but safe; there are no doors, no locks, and individuals are highly visible, left exposed to the dangers that surround them. One study conducted by Lee and Schreck (2005) found that 'information is unavailable on the specific kinds of settings in which the homeless spend their time' (p. 1075). Although we could not find information regarding exactly how our population spent their days, we were able to determine that being turned away from a shelter was a significant predictor of being victimized. Therefore, those who are not spending their nights in shelters are at a greater risk of being victimized. In addition, the majority of these homeless shelters and services are located in downtown areas prone to high levels of criminality, which further enhances their risk of victimization (Lee & Price-Spratlen, 2004).

In the sampled city, there were more aggravated and simple assaults reported in the downtown area than any other area in the county during the year of data collection, 2007. Moreover, the drug rate for the downtown area was also highest within the county (Eichenthal & Iles, 2008). For the homeless, a population that is often forgotten or ignored, the risk of victimization in these areas is even greater than the average citizen – they have no neighbors to notice if they are in need, they have no employer to check-in if they don't show up for work. Furthermore, as demonstrated by extant literature many homeless are unable or unwilling to turn to law enforcement (Zakrisson, Hamel, & Hwang, 2004) or other state-based institutions (i.e. hospitals, clinics) due to past mistreatment or the fear of judgment, criminalization, or abuse (Ensign & Panke, 2002; Murray, 1996; Ugarizza & Fallon, 1994).

The majority of crimes perpetrated against the homeless are property crimes; however, the homeless remain at risk for violent victimization. Although assaults were often committed against the homeless to obtain items deemed of value, this study found that reports of property and violent victimization were almost equal. Many of these attacks are simple assaults; however, the exposure to 'dangerous classes' puts the homeless at risk for violent encounters. For instance, one respondent reported being stabbed 6 times while staying in a homeless camp. Although we did not question who their attacker was, in most instances, the vast majority of the respondents reported their victimization by another homeless individual. Thus, evidence supports that the homeless are at risk for physical harm.

Admittedly, some of the extant research has found a connection between criminality and homelessness (Lee, 1989; Rossi et al., 1987). However, some of these studies

have failed to take into consideration the types of crimes in which the homeless engage. Further studies have found that the homeless are more likely to be arrested for minor offenses such as public intoxication and trespassing rather than other crimes (Baumann, Beauvais, Grigsby, & Schultz, 1985; Fisher, 1992; Snow et al., 1989). Our study was consistent with previous findings on criminal behaviors among the homeless. Only 22% of the participants reported engaging in criminal behavior after becoming homeless. Consistent with the previous literature, these crimes consisted primarily of 'public nuisance' and 'victimless' crimes. The literature has found that those with prior criminal records are more likely to be victimized (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990). As the existing literature supports, one would assume that these crimes against the homeless are being committed in retaliation (Lee & Schreck, 2005); however, the results of this study do not support such claims. Although this study found no relationship between arrests and victimization while homeless, the current research did find that those individuals who reported committing a crime since becoming homeless were more likely to be victimized. In the majority of the cases, those who reported committing new crimes since becoming homeless were engaged in victimless offenses such as public intoxication, drug possession, prostitution, and panhandling. In contrast, those who had been victimized reported being assaulted or having items stolen.

Additional research on the homeless population is needed. The current data was collected during a period in which the economy was relatively strong and respondents still reported unemployment and an inability to pay their rent or mortgage as the primary reasons for leaving their last residence (30% and 28%, respectively). Moreover, even with a prospering economy, individuals in the current sample were experiencing difficulty in finding shelter due to the lack of available bed space. Exacerbating the existing shortage of resources to aid homeless individuals the current economic decline and the rising foreclosure rate has contributed to a growing 'new homeless' population (NLCHP & National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Families who were once barely making ends meet are now losing jobs as well the roof over their head. For instance, Atlanta, GA has experienced a 30% increase in the newly homeless coming into their Day Service Center while Denver reports a 10% increase in newly homeless service usage (NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009). Additionally, one New Hampshire food pantry now serves about 4000 meals to over 800 people each month, which is about double their rate of service from 2007 (NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009).

A new population those who have simply run out of money, are now seeking aid from finite resources once reserved for the traditional homeless and likely forcing more people than ever on to the street. Although the recent enactment of the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act has made provisions for ending homelessness and several states have supported constructive alternatives to criminalization, local officials in many states still refuse to invest in housing opportunities, both temporary and permanent, and instead adhere to an enduring trend of crime control measures directed towards the homeless (see NLCHP & National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2009).

Notes

1. Three interviews were terminated due to the mental state of the participant.
2. Since the data for the study was based on self-report surveys, the interviewers were unable to cross-validate participant responses with shelter personnel. In addition, we guaranteed

confidentiality. Hence, cross-referencing with shelter personnel would have been a violation of confidentiality.

3. In order to ensure that the respondents were clear in reporting victimization, two questions regarding the subject were asked during the interview: the first asked about criminal victimization while the second asked about abuse. Each question allowed the study participants to explain their victimization. Hence, it is the criminal victimization that this study addresses rather than interpersonal abuse.
4. Although the variable, slept last night, only reveals the place where the respondent spent the last night prior to interview, we found, using a variable not included in the analysis, the overwhelming majority (88%) reported that the place in which they slept last night was in fact the place they typically reside.

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