Poverty, Homelessness, Incarceration
in the NYC Chain Cohort

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This is a brief report on rates of poverty, homelessness, and incarceration among the most recent New York City CHAIN cohort, enrolled in 2002.

SAMPLE

Data on poverty are based on W4 interviews, completed in 2007-2008 and for baseline interviews, completed in 2002-2004. Since over time, the federal poverty threshold increases but income among PLWHA remains fairly constant or declines with increasing inability to maintain employment, information is presented for most current as well as the earlier period. Rates of homelessness are based on baseline interviews. Rates of homeless history are based on interviews completed in W3, updated for homeless experience reported in subsequent interview periods. Data on incarceration are based on W4 interviews, with the addition of information from our client tracking system. We are not able to interview persons who were incarcerated during the study period but we often learn of their involvement with correctional system through our tracking efforts.

Note that for homelessness, is not possible to generate accurate rates using the most recent interviews. All persons in the current agency recruited cohort have been in services for at least 7 years. Over time, most persons with housing needs get their needs met. Another consideration is that study participants who are literally homelessness are the hardest to locate and interview. Especially between Wave3 and Wave4 when budget limitations at that time reduced our field staff to two persons with limited time for tracking in street and community settings, we experienced higher than usual cohort attrition among homeless persons. For example, among persons who completed W3 interview but not W4 we have positive information from family or agency contacts that 9 were homeless, ‘on the streets’ etc. and another 7 have extensive histories of homelessness, strongly associated with continuing housing instability. Homeless PLWH also have higher mortality rates which also contributes to differential cohort attrition.

Thus rates of homelessness based on Wave 4 interviews or the partially completed W5 interviews would provide a biased indicator of prevalence among the broader population of PLWHA. We’ll be better able to make population estimates when we have added the refresher data; however these data are not currently available for analysis. We could use statistical modeling to generate estimates based on the data at hand if you require it.
MEASURES

Poverty

Below the Poverty Line = Past yearly household income from all sources (excluding rental assistance and food stamps) was below the federal poverty threshold established yearly which takes into consideration household composition and age of household members.

Housing status

Homeless = Staying in a shelter for homeless persons, on the street, public place (e.g. subway) or other place not meant for sleeping, in a limited stay SRO without services, currently or during the 6mos prior to interview.

Unstably Housed = Staying in a temporary or transitional housing program, or temporarily doubled up with others, in someone else’s home, currently or during the 6mos prior to interview.

Incarceration

Ever incarcerated= Respondent answers ‘Yes’ to the question : Have you ever been in jail or prison?

Recently incarcerated = Respondent reports that he/she has spent at least one night in jail or prison during the 6 months prior to interview.

FINDINGS

Poverty

Poverty rate among NYC PLWHA

68% below federal poverty line among CHAIN participants interviewed in W4, 2007-2008

54% below federal poverty line in baseline interviews, 2002-2004

Homelessness

Best estimates among NYC PLWHA

18% homeless

10% unstably housed (includes 3% in temporary or transitional housing programs, considered by some federal programs to qualify as “homeless”)

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1 Based on baseline interviews, conducted 2002-2003, n=693
Lifetime homeless history

60% have had one or more lifetime episodes (since age 18) of being literally homeless

32% reported two or more episodes; 10% five or more episodes

20% have had persistent pattern of homelessness indicated by more than 12 months of literal homelessness OR five or more episodes of homelessness. (Other research has shown that this classification captures approx 90% of those who would be defined as ‘chronic homeless’ according to the federal definition of chronic homelessness).

At time of HIV diagnosis

25% were homeless during the year they found out their HIV diagnosis

27% were unstably housed

During the study period

25% were literally homeless at one or more interview period

19% were unstably housed but never homeless

Incarceration

Lifetime experience of incarceration

47% report ever in jail or prison

At time of HIV diagnosis

11% were incarcerated during the year they found out their HIV diagnosis

Recent experience of incarceration

3 – 7% of the sample report recent jail/prison experience or are known to be incarcerated during the interview period.

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1 Question about lifetime episodes of homelessness first asked in W3 interviews and updated with subsequent information.

2 Homelessness or unstable housing reported in any interview, W1-4, 2002 – 2008, n=693.

3 Based on interview reports of jail/prison experience past six months, or located in correctional facility during the interview period, W1 – W4.