

Definitions and Counts of Doubling Up

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While the problem of Homelessness in the United States has always presented challenges to policy maker, the growing issue of “doubling up” is only making it more complex. A person doubling up is either living with family, friends, or other non-relatives. This is generally because of economic need, but can also be for other reasons. As a result of the economic recession the amount of doubled up individuals and families is increasing. Though this is a growing problem, there is no exact count or definition across all departments of government. Definitions of doubled up range from the very general to rather specific and result in a large discrepancy in the number of people in these living conditions.

Currently, doubled up children and their families are considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. However, this only gives them equal right to education, it does not qualify them for funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development(HUD). Recent legislation by HUD, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing or HEARTH Act, also excludes doubled up individuals and families from its definition of homeless. However it does state that under different definitions from different departments these individuals are allowed to be considered homeless.

The debate over how to define the doubled up population is such a heated one because depending on the definition and parameters used it can range from about 6.8 million people to 69.2 million. This becomes increasingly important when the question of who deserves funds comes into play. To understand more fully how estimates of the doubled-up population vary with the definition used, I computed estimates under various definitions using data from the US Census Bureau.

Introduction

Homelessness in the United States is an ever present problem, but the phenomenon of doubling up has further complicated the issue. As a result of the recent economic recession, many people who could formerly afford to live in their own homes have been forced to move in with friends, relatives, or others. This is known as doubling up. While those in doubled up situations are not homeless in the sense that they have no place to sleep, their “homes” are often unstable, not permanent, and can be abusive. As a result, doubled up housing situations are potentially detrimental to the health and well being of these individuals, especially children.

One obstacle for helping those who are doubled up is that there is no single definition or count of the doubled up population in the United States. With no set definition, counts of doubled up individuals are dependent upon the source conducting the count. While the doubled up population in the United States might well be 72.8 million, those that would potentially receive funding would have to meet poverty levels and other requirements that would justify aid. As a result there is a vast range of estimates for this population which can range from about 2.7 million to 72.8 million. The large discrepancy in these estimates creates a policy problem. It would be inefficient and unnecessary to disperse funds to 72.8 million people, but the lack of a set parameters to distinguish the needy prevent this policy problem from being solved.

This paper seeks to give a more accurate picture of the number of doubled up individuals in the United States by using different definitions of doubling up, and uses information from the American Community Survey to generate data. The definitions used by other studies have produced very conservative estimates to large numbers representative of people are simply currently living in another person’s home in a permanent and stable situation. In order to understand where the numbers that other studies came from, I compared their numbers to census

bureau data which fit corresponding criteria. With this data I was able to demonstrate the vast difference in size of the doubled up population under different parameters.

Background of Existing Policy and Definitions

The current policies concerning doubled up individuals are the McKinney-Vento and Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) act. Both pieces of legislation pertain to doubled up individuals and families however they classify them differently. The McKinney-Vento act of 1987 is the primary federal law concerning the education of children and youths in homeless situations.¹ This act allows schools to define children who are doubled up as homeless, and affords doubled up children the same rights as homeless children in regards to their right to attend school. As a result the Department of Education classifies doubled up children as homeless. The HEARTH act of 2009 reauthorized and amended, with substantial changes, the McKinney-Vento Act. In the HEARTH amendment it allows for other departments within the US government, such as the Department of Education, to follow other definitions of homelessness; however it includes doubled up persons from the reauthorized definition of homelessness.² As a result of this, though the HEARTH act was just recently passed doubled up supporters have introduced amendment HR-32. This amendment seeks to expand the current definition of homeless to include children, youths, and their families who are verified as homeless under the Department of Education definition by local homeless

¹ *McKinney-vento homeless assistance act.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.naehcy.org/m_v.html

² *Homeless emergency assistance and rapid transition to housing (hearth):defining "homeless" final rule.* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewResource&ResourceID=4519>

education liaisons, head start programs, and the Runaway Homeless and Youth programs (RHYA).³The issue of the amendment had created a heated argument over the possibility of an expanded definition of homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was originally passed in 1987, and previously reauthorized in January of 2002 as Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act.

This legislation is the primary federal law dealing with the education of homeless children and youths. It requires that each states educational agency must ensure that homeless children and youths have equal access to the same free public school education, including preschool.

McKinney-Vento states that compulsory residency requirements or policies that may act as a barrier to enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children be revised. In addition the act mandates that homelessness is not reason enough to separate students from a mainstream school environment. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, children in doubled up living situations are considered to be homeless by their schools. While only applying to children, youths, and their families define homeless as it pertains to education as

(A)means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence(within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

(B) includes--

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

³ ("Mckinney-vento homeless assistance,")

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).⁴

By including clause B1 into the definition of children who may be in at risk of homelessness of situations as homeless, they are able to continue to have the same right to an education regardless of living situation. The proponents of the proposed amendment to the HEARTH act want to expand its definition of homelessness to include all those who are considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act

In May 20, 2009 President Obama signed the HEARTH act of 2009. As previously stated the HEARTH act reauthorized and amended the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. HEARTH also contains substantial changes to the McKinney-Vento act. HEARTH includes a consolidation of the Department of Housing and Urban Developments competitive grant programs, the creation of a Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program, changes in HUD's definition of homelessness and chronic homelessness, a simplified match requirement, an increase in prevention resources, and increase in the emphasis on performance.⁵

This act allows for the Department of Education to follow the McKinney-Vento legislation classification of children as homeless in regards to education, however this classification does not apply to funding outside of education. While the previous statement holds

⁴ McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance

⁵ HEARTH Act

true, the HEARTH reaffirms the fact that in order to receive HUD funding this definition of homelessness must be met,

- (1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground; (ii) An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or (iii) An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;
- (2) An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: (i) The primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, needed to obtain other permanent housing;⁶

This definition goes on to include unaccompanied minors under the age of 25, or families with children or youths that do not already qualify as homeless under other legislation, such as McKinney-Vento. HEARTH's regulations therefore exclude those children who qualify as homeless because of their either doubled up, or other non-permanent living situation. The act also excludes individuals from meeting this definition through use of the phrase, "The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, needed to obtain other permanent housing."⁷ By including these phrases those who are doubled up are excluded being considered homeless, because they are considered to have a "support network." However, advocates for doubled up persons argue these situations are often unstable, and can be violent. Many times those who are doubled up are not sleeping in quarters

⁶ HEARTH Act

⁷ HEARTH Act

meant for human habitation, such as someone's floor. It can be said however, that these doubled up situations may present a better option than the alternative.

Proposed Amendment to McKinney-Vento act definition of homeless persons, Legislation H.R.32

On February 7th, 2012 the House of Representatives Financial Services Committee Insurance, Housing, and Community Opportunity Subcommittee passed HR-32, the Homeless Children and Youth Act. HR-32 is a piece of bi-partisan legislation that amends the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of homelessness. Bill HR-32 was introduced by Republican Judy Biggert (R-III). The purpose of the H.R. 32 Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2011 is to "amend the definition of 'homeless person' under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to include certain homeless children and youth."⁸ The H.R.32 legislation would expand the definition to include,

- `(3)(A) a child or youth who has been verified as homeless, as such term is defined in section 725(2)(B)(i) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)(B)(i)), by a local educational agency homeless liaison, designated pursuant to section 722(g)(1)(J)(ii) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)), and the family of such child or youth;
- `(B) a youth verified as homeless by the director of a program funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.), or a designee of the director;
- `(C) a child verified as homeless under section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401) by the director or the designee of such program, and the family of such child; and
- `(D) a child verified as homeless under section 637 of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9832) by the director or designee of such program, and the family of such child.⁹

In passing this legislation children and their families who fit the requirements of H.R.32 would eligible to receive funds from HUD. The number of unsheltered homeless children who receive

⁸ *Homeless youth and children act of 2011*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.32>:

⁹ *Homeless youth and children act of 2011*.

funding from HUD throughout the year is close to 350,000. Under the H.R.32 legislation this number would grow to an additional 2,351,762 children.¹⁰

Reasons for Contention

The main reason these definitions are so contested is due to funding. Opponents to amendment HR-32 want to exclude those who are doubled up from being considered homeless because HUD will not receive additional funding to support the increase in those who qualify for assistance. Success rates among programs are expected to decrease due to more people qualifying for funding, and with lower success rates many shelters and other agencies will lose the funding they need to serve these larger numbers. Proponents of HR-32 argue that a change to the McKinney-Vento act is important because under the current legislation HUD makes it extremely difficult of those who are in doubled up those living situations to qualify for the HUD homeless assistance program. In order to be considered homeless by HUD families must prove through documentation that they either lack the funds to pay for a motel room for more than two weeks, or confirmation that a doubled up living situation is not permanent. The documentation that a doubled up living situation is not permanent must come from the householder of where ever they are living. These documents are often hard for individuals and families to produce, and as a result, they are often unable to apply for assistance.¹¹ While it is true that families in doubled up living situations do have some sort of shelter, many times these environments are unsafe and families would be better off if they would be able to receive homeless assistance. In addition

¹⁰ *Hr 32 will mean less help for the neediest homeless children.* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/4422>

¹¹ *Homeless advocates divided over bill aimed at helping kids.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/11/homeless-children-bill_n_1269670.html

doubled up living situations are often a precursor to homelessness. HR-32 therefore, presents an opportunity to potentially prevent families from becoming homeless by offering assistance.

Though HR-32 is a bill that expands homeless support, not all homeless advocates support it. The Cooperation for Supportive Housing and the National Alliance to End Homelessness both oppose the change to the McKinney-Vento act because it would increase the homeless population, without increasing funding. The fear among these groups is that the neediest within the homeless population will suffer due to the increase in those who qualify for assistance. However, the Insurance, Housing, and Community Opportunity Subcommittee disagreed with that hypothesis because while more individuals would be able to qualify for assistance, local officials would still be able to decide which individuals and families have the greatest need.

Policy Implications

The policy implication for this issue is simply that the more inclusive the definition of double up is, the more people that will be able to qualify for assistance from HUD. If the definition is limited by requiring families to have incomes at a certain level of the poverty line, and show that a living situation is unstable, it might be a manageable amount of people. However, the more general the definition the less likely it is that doubled up individuals and families will receive assistance.

Comparison of Definitions and Counts

In order to compare the number of doubled up individuals there are in the United States, census bureau data was compiled and then compared to numbers that the Census Bureau itself

had compiled, and with figures from the National Alliance to End Homelessness. The numbers compiled from the Census Bureau specifically came from the American Community Survey 2010 one year estimates, and attempt to give some explanation for the numbers gathered from private studies. Using similar definitions and parameters that these other figures were obtained under, an accurate picture of the individuals these studies were counting as doubled up shown. Explaining the scope of the separation between the numbers of doubled up people given by the US Census Bureau's official blog, Random Samplings, which was 69.2 million individuals,¹² and the number given by the National Alliance to End Homelessness which was 6,800,000 was the primary focus of the tables. While the US Census Bureau's definition of doubled up was much less exclusive than that of the National Alliance, study of the original counts from the Census Bureau was necessary in order to find the most fair figure of this population.

The three tables included in my paper each reflect the doubled up population under different definitions. Table 1, includes low end estimates based on the definition of doubled up used by the National Alliance to End Homeless, and data from the US census bureau American Community survey under similar parameters. Table 2, includes high end estimates based on the US Census Bureaus official blog, Random Samplings, and corresponding data from the US Census Bureau. Table 3, includes middle range estimates that I compiled based my own definition and Census Bureau data.

In Table 1, the National Alliance data is shown in comparison with the American Community Survey data that was gathered under a similar definition. The National Alliance reported 6,800,000 people were doubled up in the United States, under the parameters that a

¹² *Household doubling up*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://blogs.census.gov/2011/09/13/households-doubling-up/>

doubled up person lives with friends, family, or other non-relatives for economic reasons and earns no more than 125% of the federal poverty line.¹³ The definition from the American Community Survey, was non-relatives living in family households below the poverty line and non-relatives in family households above the poverty line. The number of non-relatives living in family households below the poverty line was 2,728,768, and the number of non-relatives living in family households above the poverty line was 3,574,495 people. The sum of those above and below the poverty line is 6,303,263. This number is relatively similar to that of the National Alliance which estimated the total doubled up population at about 6,800,000.

Although the definition used in this study is slightly different than that used by the National Alliance, it shows the type of population that was counted as doubled up by the National Alliance study. While the second part of my definition does include all doubled up individuals above the poverty line, this does include those that are between 100 and 125% of the federal poverty line, Additionally the smaller number can be explained by the fact that mine only included non-relatives, not relatives or friends. It is clear that the National Alliance definition of doubled up is a conservative estimate and one that sets specific parameters for counting this population. One of the ways to explain this is that the National Alliance does not support the HR-32 legislation act. Reason being, a wider definition would mean more people would qualify so it is to be expected that this group would have a more exclusive definition, reflective of most needy in the doubled up population.

Table 2 of the data set shows the number that was generated by the US Census Bureau's official blog, Random Samplings, and a comparable definition that was generated with numbers from the American Community Survey. The Census Bureau estimated that 69.2 million people are living in doubled up situations in the United States under the definition that a doubled up

¹³ National Alliance study.

person is 18 years of age or older who is not enrolled in school or in not the household, or the partner of the householder. This definition focuses more on individual adults rather than children who are living in doubled up situations. The estimate includes grow children who might have moved in with their parents, and also does not take the poverty line into consideration. In order to find a figure that would be comparable to this number the number of people in over 18 enrolled in school (23,451,209) was subtracted from the total US population (309,349,689) which equals 285,898,480. Then the number of people under 18 (74,785,618) was subtracted from 285,898,480 equaling 211,112,862. Next, the number of males employed living below the poverty line (4,494,037) and the number of females living below the poverty line (5,265,535) were subtracted producing the number 201,353,290. After the number of males employed living above the poverty line (67,566,258), and the number of females living above the poverty line (60,942,410) were subtracted finally producing the number 72,844,622. By subtracting all of these groups from the US population, the study was able to produce a number that fit a similar definition for doubled used by the US census bureau.

This definition therefore includes people who are not enrolled in school, over the age of 18, and are most likely unemployed or not in the labor force at all. Keeping in mind the fact that this number is similar to that which was produced by the Census Bureau, those who are considered to be doubled up most likely have no source of income. Due to their lack of income these individuals might be forced to rely on friends, parents or other relatives, and other non-relatives for a place to stay. The fact this number is so large can also be attributed to the fact that there are no restrictions concerning poverty level. This estimate could also include those that choose not to be in the labor force, and those who are in doubled up situations that might be steady and permanent, and therefore not necessarily needing assistance from the government.

However, this estimation of doubled up individuals does not include children, the group that is the major concern of recent legislation. While some of the individuals in this estimation might qualify for HUD funding if act HR-32 is passed into law, under it they might not receive assistance from the government.

Table 3 simply shows numbers found in the American Community Survey for other relatives and non-relatives that are living in family and non-family households regardless of poverty level. The Census Bureau defines other relatives as a “household member related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption, but not specifically included in any other relationship category. Can include grandchildren, parents, in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles, etc.”¹⁴ It defines non relatives to be “any household member, including foster children, living in the housing unit, but not related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption.”¹⁵ The number of other relatives living in family and non-family households in the US is 20,411,239, and the number of non relatives living in family and non-family households is 18,300,051. Together the entire population of other relatives and non-relatives is equal to 38,711,290.

While this number does not consider the poverty line, it can be assumed that in most cases individuals would not be relying on doubled up living situations unless forced to by economic need. Though it is true economic need is the main reason for doubled up living situations that does not necessarily mean these situations are unstable. This number could also be representative of young adults that are living with parents in order to save money, or older relatives that move in with family for health reasons. It is reasonable to think that this number is also a higher than the number of people in doubled up living situations that are truly in need of assistance from the government.

¹⁴ census bureau glossary

¹⁵ census bureau glossary

Though the number produced by the National Alliance presented in table 1 is significantly smaller than that produced by the Census Bureau, by looking at numbers of American Community it is it shows the neediest group within those who are living in doubled up situations. Taking into account the poverty line and the fact these individuals are living with family, friends, or other non-relatives because they are forced to due to economic need, they represent those who would most likely receive funding through HR-32. In conclusion though tables 2 and 3 were formulated with less bias towards legislation table 1 is the most representative of the doubled up population in the most need of funding.

Conclusion

In summation, it is most important to stress that the most important of any doubled up estimate is one that includes only the most needy within the population. While each estimate is accurate in reporting individuals and families that are not living in their own homes, the estimates made under the more strict definitions. However, even the most conservative of estimates from independent studies (6.8 million from the National Alliance), is still significantly larger than the amount of children that would qualify as homeless and receive HUD funding if amendment H.R. 32 is passed, 2,351,762. This is evidence that the issue of definitions and requirements among doubled up individuals and families is not only complex but will by undoubtable hard to solve. As populations grow and as definitions get more general, larger amounts of people could potentially qualify for funding, even if the amount of money allocated does not increase. When the growing doubled up population as a result of the recession is compounded with the amount of people who are unsheltered and homeless the issue of choosing who to give funds to becomes a profound moral dilemma.

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Table 1- Low End Estimates based on National Alliance Data

Source	Definition	Number of People
National Alliance to End Homelessness	Persons who live with friends, family or other non-relatives for economic reasons earning no more than 125% of the federal poverty line	6,800,000
American Community Survey-My compilation	Non-relatives living in family households below the poverty line	2,728,768
American Community Survey-My compilation	Non-relatives living in family households above the poverty line	3,574,495
American Community Survey-My compilation	Non-relatives living in family households below and above the poverty line	6,303,263

Table 2- High End Estimates based on US Census Bureau Blog

Source	Definition	Number of People
The United States Census Bureau	A person 18 years of age or older who is not enrolled in school and is not the householder, or the partner of the householder	69.2 million
American Community Survey-My compilation	Population of the US, minus the population over 18 in school, children, employed males and females above the poverty line, employed males and females below the poverty line	72,844,663

Table 3- Medium Estimates Based on My own Census Bureau Compilation

Source	Definition	Number of People
American Community Survey - My compilation	Other relatives living in family and non family households	20,411,239
American Community Survey - My compilation	Non relatives living in family and non family households	18,300,051
American Community Survey - My compilation	Other relatives and non- relatives in family and non family households	38,711,290