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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

50 TO 65 YEARS OF AGE

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Joseph William Staudt

June 2008

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

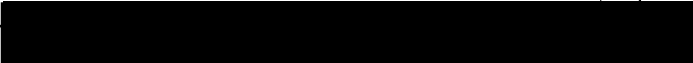
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Joseph William Staudt

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the reasons older Americans become homeless and their social networks. Interviews were conducted by the writer to get a first hand perspective from homeless individuals. A major theme of why they became homeless was due to a catastrophic incident in their life. Another finding was that the respondents did have contact with their families or chose not to be assisted by them. The theme was they wished not to be a burden on their immediate families. Instead they chose to form new social networks among their peers. A major need of the homeless was found to be affordable housing. Most of the respondents either worked or had steady income. However, this income was not sufficient enough to allow for housing. The study results offer a deeper understanding of the causes of homelessness among elder individuals and their needs.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Mary Pearle Tucker who encouraged me to fill out my application for the Masters in Social Work program. She never doubted I would be able to complete the program. This project is dedicated in her memory.

Further dedication goes to those who supported me throughout the project. To my parents who supported me throughout the program and to my brothers and sisters for their encouragement. To Childhelp for their support and encouragement throughout the program. Finally, to Quibe "Pops" Snow who inspired the topic of this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement	1
Purpose of the Study	6
Significance of the Project for Social Work	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction	9
Homeless Studies	9
Theories Related to Homelessness	16
Summary	19
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction	20
Study Design	20
Sampling	22
Data Collection and Instruments	23
Procedures	24
Protection of Human Subjects	25
Data Analysis	25
Summary	26
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction	27
Presentation of the Findings	27

Summary	34
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction	35
Discussion	35
Limitations	39
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research	39
Conclusions	42
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE	44
APPENDIX B: HOMELESS FLYER	46
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT	48
APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT	50
APPENDIX E: HOMELESS GENOGRAMS	52
REFERENCES	63

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the problem of homelessness among the population 50 and 65 years old. Statistics from the United States Census were utilized to show the prevalence of homelessness among the nation's elderly population. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of homeless individuals and their support systems. This research was done due to a lack of research being done on the elderly homeless population.

Problem Statement

The problem this study focuses on was homelessness among individuals between the ages of 50 and 65 years. This population has been selected because there is little or no literature about them. This study focused on the social support networks this population has or may not have.

A study done by the National Coalition for the Homeless (2005) estimated there are about 3.5 million Americans that are homeless at any given time which is about one percent of the United States population. The number of people in this group who are between the ages

of 50 and 65 is not known. According to the McKinney Act of 1987, Federal law defines homelessness as: lacking a regular, fixed, and adequate nighttime residence, living in a shelter or transitional housing residence for homeless persons, living in a temporary residence for persons waiting for institutionalization, sleeping in a place not intended for human beings, being evicted within one week from their home, or being discharged within one week from institutions where they have lived for more than 30 days in a row and not having found a place to live and having no money or other resources to find a place to live. If a person falls into one of these categories they are eligible to stay in a homeless shelter and or receive aid from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). To get to this point in their life the homeless have lost the means to live in affordable housing. The problem being investigated was whether or not these individuals had a strong family support network that they could fall back on in their time of need.

In the United States, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 12.4 percent of the nation's population was living at or below the poverty level (US Census, 2003).

Being at poverty level did not indicate people are homeless but they were at a high risk of becoming homeless.

Poverty has been defined by the Census Bureau as a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to detect who is poor. If the total income for a family or unrelated individuals falls below the relevant poverty threshold, then the family or unrelated individuals are classified as being below the poverty level (Census, 2007).

In 2005 the Census Bureau defined the poverty threshold for a single person under 65 years old as \$10,160. This rate has risen to \$1,493 for persons under the age of 65 since 1999. It represents the total amount of earnings of an individual in a year. The Census Bureau reported the average amount paid in rent in the United States in 2000 was \$602. This was a 5.4 percent increase over the 1990 average at \$571. The average rent paid by a person 65 to 74 years was \$479 and \$491 by a person over 75 years old.

However, these only represent the averages paid by the elderly for rent. For example, Boston, MA experienced a 47 percent increase in rent between 1995 and 1999.

Citizens in the city were spending over half of their income on rent (Crane, Byre, Fu, Lipmann, Mirabelli, Rota-Bartelink, et. al., 2005). When researchers surveyed the population of those 65 years and older, they found that 71 percent of the respondents earned less than \$1,120 per month and 79 percent of those had no housing subsidies. With average rent for a one bedroom apartment in Boston being \$1,135 per month, the majority of respondents did not have enough to pay for their rent (Watt, Ryan, Byrne, & Shea, 2005). Thus, the national average does not necessarily represent different demographic areas. Sachs estimated the homeless population in San Bernardino County as between 5,270 and 8,351 or more (Sachs, 2007).

Studying the group from 50 to 65 years of age is important at this time because they are close to retirement and are not eligible to receive any kind of Social Security or Medical benefits unless they are disabled. This forces these individuals to seek work where they may face job discrimination based on their age. The Federal minimum wage has been raised from \$5.15 to \$7.25 per hour in three \$.70 increments over a two year span after the Senate approves a current bill and it

is then signed into law by the President of the United States (Progressive Business Compliance, 2007). Thus, a person working a 40-hour week, at minimum wage, will be earning approximately \$1,226 a month before taxes. Estimating that twenty percent will be taken out of that amount for taxes, or other deductions, an individual will take home approximately \$900. In many geographic areas this is not enough to cover rent or living costs. Therefore, even if these individuals are employed, they may still find themselves homeless.

Currently, social workers are trying to find creative ways to house these individuals. There are transitional housing programs where the homeless can live while they prepare themselves to live in permanent housing. These programs offer job training, drug and alcohol addiction recovery, and financial training. Vouchers are used for motels and there are, of course, homeless shelters. These programs alone do not solve the problem of homelessness. The main issue is the lack of affordable housing for individuals living in poverty. Social workers are constantly battling this as cities gentrify their neighborhoods to get more affluent individuals to live in their cities. By doing this, the

cities are pushing more impoverished people out of their housing onto the streets.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships homeless individuals have and their support systems. It analyzed what social supports an individual homeless person had in their life and how they utilized that support. This could be in the form of family, friends, or places in the community. How they made use of these resources provides us insight as to why they are homeless.

Homeless individuals appear not to have a nurturing world they can fall back on in times of need. These individuals may be homeless due to drug and alcohol addiction, lack of employment, underemployment, or mental illness. Their families may have given up on them and are not there for their support. In other cases their families may be in other states or countries and there is very little if any contact. However, there may be those who choose not to use their family resources.

The main concern is what these individuals are doing not to be homeless. They may have the option of staying

with a friend or family member. There may be places they can stay but prefer not to. However, the lack of affordable housing is at the root of the problem and that is why many are living on the streets.

The best way to do this research was by using a qualitative design. Ten homeless people were interviewed using a series of open-ended questions allowing each individual interviewed to elaborate on their answers. It also allowed the researcher to ask more questions, probing into specific answers the individuals gave. Thus, the research was qualitative. It was conducted at the Central City Lutheran Missions Cold Weather Shelter for Men.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study was significant because it studied a population of the homeless on whom little or no research has been done. By doing individual interviews the study aimed to identify areas that are lacking in the social support network of the homeless individual. It also identified services homeless individuals needed from the surrounding community, city, state, and federal government.

The current homeless population is growing. With the "Baby Boomer" generation reaching retirement there may be a large group that is simply not prepared financially. By exploring the current social and family networks of the homeless, this study hoped to gain insight into the lives of homeless individuals. This is beneficial to the field of social work to assist in understanding the needs of homeless individuals. Many of the programs that were in place to assist these individuals did not meet their needs. This study allowed homeless individuals to express their needs and assist social workers to serve them better and create policies that better suit the needs of the homeless. The study engaged the homeless in order to see what their needs were rather than just assuming what they were.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section reviews the literature on homelessness. There are volumes of literature on younger homeless populations and some on the elderly population. Some of these studies do include persons who are 50 years and older. However, there appears to be a gap for those between 50 and 65 years of age. As of the beginning of this study the researcher could not find a substantial amount of literature about the impact of relatives on the homeless. This study looked at homelessness and how having a strong social network or not related to it. Due to the gap in available literature the researcher must look at research based on the elderly population 65 years and older.

Homeless Studies

A study conducted in Boston used a sample consisting of 125 newly homeless elders' ages 50 years and beyond (Watt, Ryan, Byrne, & Shea, 2005). This group was chosen because the age of 50 is when people in Boston are eligible for homeless assistance. Their findings were

that the majority of the respondents indicated that poor physical health was a major contributing factor to their homelessness; many did not earn enough to pay rent; and the homeless had regular contact with family and friends prior to becoming homeless. Also, many were not aware of the services available to them (Watt, Ryan, Byrne, & Shea, 2005). This study suggested that homelessness was not caused by a lack of a social network; the homeless did have contact with family and friends. Their social network simply did not come to their aid in their time of need.

Another study done in Boston pointed out that Boston experienced a forty seven percent increase in rents between 1995 and 1999 which caused 50,000 of its residents to pay over half of their income for housing (Crane et al., 2005). The study also pointed out that eighteen percent of Boston's elderly lived below the poverty level, an increase by fifteen percent over ten years. Of the 1,228 homeless people counted in the 2000 Census, 610 were age 50 and older. Causes of homelessness were the death of a marital partner, poor physical health, decreased social networks, mental illness, difficulty paying rent, forced retirement, and lack of

income (Crane et al., 2005). This study supports the idea that a lack of strong social networks is the result of a lack of a strong family network in that many had lost a spouse and thus had a decreased social network. Not having this support may have been a contributing factor to their homeless situation.

Killion (2000) examined homeless African American women and found that extended family has been the main source of social networks in the African American community. Her sample consisted of sixteen African American women age 65 and older living in a Midwestern city shelter for the homeless. Killion's goal was to see if these women would be open to sharing a residence. One of the main causes of homelessness among the sample was the inability to find affordable housing on their own with their current income. Also, Killion found a growing trend of African American women who did not marry young due to high unemployment rates and low incomes of African American men (Killion, 2000). This study looked at a possible solution to homelessness by seeing if those sixteen women would be receptive to sharing a residence. The women were not receptive. However, this study does provide a possible solution to some homeless situations.

Tobin, Hua, Costenbader, and Latkin (2006) did a study on the change in social network characteristics and non-fatal overdose in Baltimore, Maryland. The study took place between 1999 and 2001 with a total of 659 individuals, 373 of whom were thirty nine years of age and older. This study found that a decrease in social networks increased the probability that an individual would turn to drug use. It also found that the people an individual associated with would lead to increased or decreased drug use (Tobin et al., 2006). This study showed how the lack of a strong social network contributed to a corrupted lifestyle, in this case drug use among the homeless.

Hecht and Coyle (2001) conducted a study in Bakersfield, CA comparing older and younger homeless individuals. A total of 3,132 people were used for the sample, 262 of whom were 55 years old and older. The researchers found that the major reasons the elder individuals were homeless was because of job loss and the inability to find affordable housing. These researchers used the age of 55 years to define elderly because they display similar physical characteristics to those 65 years and older due to the exposure of living on the

streets (Hecht & Coyle, 2001). This study focuses on both age groups of the homeless. The study describes loss of employment as a major contributing factor to a person's state of homelessness.

A study done by Bottomley (2001) found that a main reason an older person may experience homelessness is poor health. This was due to a sudden illness causing an older person to spiral into debt which may have lead to homelessness. The author cites numerous medical conditions that have affected older adults which may include diabetes, respiratory illnesses, physical problems, sleep deprivation, heart and high blood pressure to name a few Bottomley, 2001). Such illnesses required medical attention some older Americans could not afford or absorb on a fixed income.

This article raises the question of how older Americans, who did not have extra disposable income, were not able to afford extra costs of health care. The answer is they did not and had to make many unbearable decisions to save their health and their home. This brings into question what they could have done as individuals to make both happen.

Another study addressing the causes of homelessness in adults considered education levels, race, income level, citizenship, employment status, public assistance and health as relevant issues pertaining to the state of homelessness (Cousineau, 2001). It analyzed those adults who were eighteen and older and looked at these indicators as elements of becoming homeless. The author used interviews conducted in English, Spanish and five different Asian languages. The study showed the majority of the homeless were not well educated and at low income levels.

This article explains the precursors that may lead to homelessness. It does not break out the statistics by age groups which may hinder its use in research. However, it does provide a foundation that supports a theme many articles support: a precursor to homelessness is the inability to afford housing. This article gives a base that could assist a person in understanding the process by which a person may become homeless.

Quan (2007) described the current statistics of homeless in San Bernardino County, CA. That study showed there were approximately 7,331 homeless in the county itself. These people lived in camps, under bridges, in

recreational vehicles, in parks or on the streets. The article also cited that approximately 17,551 people in San Bernardino County may have experienced homelessness in 2006 (Quan, 2007). It also discussed the cause of homelessness being the lack of affordable housing.

This article is valuable for its statistics on a local level. It also raises the question of how the other 10,221 prior homeless people found their way out of homelessness. However, the article did not break down the amount of homelessness by age. It did have statistics on those receiving government assistance, those with substance abuse issues, gender and sources of income. The article would have been more useful if it had statistics for age ranges.

A Newsday story (Lefkowitz, 2006), reporting on homeless elderly people in New York City noted that more elderly are becoming homeless because of their inability to afford housing. One of the respondents stated he did not want to trouble his children because they were living successful lives in Texas and New Mexico. A woman wanted to keep her homelessness a secret from her children because of her shame. Others had no family support to

fall back on (Lefkowitz, 2006). This article does address the issue of social support networks.

The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) provided up to date numbers on homeless populations. Through moment in time counts, shelter counts, and other sources they were able to give the most accurate population counts of homeless populations. This organization provided fact sheets on the different homeless populations which they updated each year. The NCH also attributed homelessness among the elderly to poor physical health, lack of affordable housing, low income, and a lack of strong social networks. They also proposed that individuals who are 50 to 65 years old would be counted as homeless due to their physical characteristics from being exposed to sickness and the conditions by living on the streets.

Theories Related to Homelessness

Theories which were relevant to the homeless issue were those of Erikson, Valliant, Chestang, and Fowler. The first three involved social development and the other two involved moral and spiritual development.

Erikson proposed a theory that had eight stages defining human development. The last stage was integrity versus despair (Erikson, 2004). This dealt with the person looking back on their life with integrity or despair. The homeless person would experience despair due to having lost everything or feeling they had not accomplished anything. This stage was directly impacted by the seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation (Erikson, 2004). Many of these individuals may have had successful careers and were looking back as if to say their successes were all for nothing.

Valliant was a theorist who validated Erikson's eight stages of development. He, however, added two more stages which were career consolidation and keepers of the meaning (Valliant & Milosfschy, 1980). Many homeless may have consolidated their careers in their lifetime and moved into the generativity phase of life. Due to circumstances in or out of their control, their generativity was cut short. Thus, they would believe they had no advice to give to the keepers of the meaning.

Chestang proposed a theory in the 1970s stating that people lived in two social worlds. One was the sustaining world and the other was the nurturing world (Chestang,

1989). The nurturing world is the one where a person's family, close friends and relatives exist. The sustaining world is where one works and has contact with the larger community outside their family. If the sustaining world and nurturing world are closely aligned, the person will have a greater chance of not becoming homeless. If they are not, a person will struggle through life. This theory was originally applied to minority populations but is relevant in describing the risk in becoming homeless. Homeless individuals have become a minority population by living on the fringes of society. They are ridiculed, discriminated against, and harassed by members of the general public. They are not seen as being part of the norm of society.

Fowler's theory deals with spirituality and has seven stages. Homeless people may be in the mythic-literal stage of faith, Fowler's third stage (Fowler, 2004). They may be wondering why God is punishing them and focusing on the bad things instead of the good things they have done. In short, they may believe they are at the mercy of God.

Summary

Overall, the literature collected on this subject supports the theme that elderly homeless lack a strong social support network. Most of the research points to the lack of a strong social support network followed by the inability to find affordable housing on a limited income causing homelessness. This information was found using United States Census data, peer reviewed articles, a newspaper article, and the National Coalition for the Homeless.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods used in this study. The study was intended to be an exploratory study of homeless individuals and their social networks. In detail the researcher discusses the study design, sampling, the process of collecting data and instruments used, the procedures, the efforts used to protect human subjects, and the analysis of the data.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent of the social network of homeless persons who were between the ages of 50 and 65 years. That social network may include immediate family or friends. The objective of this study was to find why homeless individuals have not utilized their social networks to prevent themselves from being homeless. The objectives of this study were to:

- (1) identify why an individual was homeless
- (2) identify whether homeless persons had immediate family members,
- (3) explore how the homeless individuals perceived their social networks,
- (4) identify what social services the

homeless individuals were utilizing for their welfare, and (5) identify what the homeless individual was doing to gain employment or income.

A qualitative design was the best design for this study because the questions being asked were on a personal level. The answers to the questions are from individual respondents and, thus, will have subjective meaning. However, the responses will be arranged into categories and themes that may be common among the respondents. The researcher was seeking to interview men from among the homeless in San Bernardino, CA. who were between the ages of 50 to 65 years. The rationale for this design was that the researcher wanted to understand the reasons individuals became homeless from their perspective. A quantitative design cannot capture this information because it would limit the research to narrow answers. The qualitative design allowed both the researcher and participant to expand the questions and give a more personal and specific answer as to why a person was homeless and the impact of their social network on their current living situation.

The limitations of this study are that the researcher will only have access to individuals who are

utilizing the services of homeless shelters and places where they find assistance. Another limitation is that the study was not generalizable to the entire homeless population. Flyers were posted in several locations throughout San Bernardino, CA. and at a central location which was the Central City Lutheran Mission (CCLM) in San Bernardino, CA. As a result, the participants were those who had access to the CCLM site. At that time there was a cold weather shelter for men at the CCLM which was open from November 15 through April 15. Also, the CCLM gave out food from its food pantry every Tuesday. This allowed for homeless individuals to come and receive food.

Trust was another limitation because the respondent was not comfortable answering these questions and would only give the perspective of those being interviewed. However, these answers would possibly lead to further research in understanding how strong social networks can prevent a person from being homeless.

Sampling

The size of the sample was ten participants. Due to the study being conducted at a homeless shelter the sample was not a non-probability sample. Participants for

the study were recruited from the CCLM and other services for the homeless. The criteria for the sample was that the participant being considered had to be homeless and between the ages of 50 to 65 years of age. Those who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed. Recruitment of participants was done by utilizing responses to the flyers, not by the researcher actively searching for individuals to interview.

The ages of 50 through 65 was chosen because there is a gap of literature covering this age group. They were referred to but not necessarily studied. Some studies have referred to this age group as having the physical characteristics of a person over the age of 65 due to being exposed to the elements and life on the streets. Another reason to explore this group was to explain why "Baby Boomers" could possibly face homelessness as they reach retirement.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data collected for this study was done through face-to-face interviews administered by the researcher (Appendix A). Genograms were utilized to map each individual's family and their connection to their family

dating back to their parents who were biological or adoptive parents. This data was utilized to identify possible common themes as to why individuals were homeless.

The questions asked by the researcher were about what led the individual to being homeless, identifying immediate family, asking what the person considered to be their social network, identifying social services the participant was utilizing, and what the individual was doing to gain employment or income.

Procedures

Participation in this study was solicited through the use of flyers (Appendix B) posted at the Central City Lutheran Mission (CCLM) and other services for the homeless in San Bernardino, CA. The interviews were also conducted at the CCLM in a private office or a site in which the participant and researcher were comfortable doing an interview. At no time was the CCLM or any other entity informed if an individual was actually interviewed. Each participant was given a letter of informed consent (Appendix C) and the interview was not conducted until it was marked by the participant.

Following the interview each participant was given a debriefing statement (Appendix D). Prospective participants were able to contact the researcher through the CCLM. Participation in this study was allowed through January 31, 2008.

Protection of Human Subjects

Measures were taken to ensure that each participant remains anonymous and their answers were kept confidential. The only identifying items that were recorded would be their age and gender. After the data was analyzed the original documents written during the interviews were destroyed. Male subjects were identified as John Doe one, John Doe two etc. All the research materials were kept in a locked safe at the researchers' home or kept on his person. All computer data were kept on a computer disk on his person and a back up copy was kept in the researchers' computer. These procedures insured the participants' identity was safeguarded in the studies findings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach. All data were collected in written form. No use of audio

or visual recording was utilized. Once the information was retrieved from each participant it was typed and saved. After the ten interviews were conducted the researcher looked for common themes from the respondents and coded those themes to show similarities or dissimilarities among the responses. The interviews were conducted at the cold weather shelter for men at the Central City Lutheran Mission

Summary

This study was designed to be an exploratory study of social networks and the homeless. The researcher conducted interviews with individual homeless participants in the city of San Bernardino, CA. The purpose of this research was to find common trends and insights about the use or the lack thereof, of social networks by homeless individuals. These data were analyzed using a qualitative approach to find common themes among the studies' participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the narrative data collected from the homeless interviewed in a homeless shelter and other locations in San Bernardino, CA. The findings are presented in themes which emerged from the interviews. These themes speak to why a person became homeless, what their family background was, what they considered their social network to be, what social services they were utilizing and their employment status.

Presentation of the Findings

In this study ten homeless men were interviewed at the Central City Lutheran Mission (CCLM) and other locations in the city of San Bernardino, CA. The subjects' time on the streets varied from one to twenty years. The ages of the participants ranged from 55 to 65. Five of the participants had no current income, two had Social Security income or were on disability and three had stable full time work.

The data collected from the face-to-face interviews were summarized based on common themes from the responses

of the participants. They were then grouped into significant themes which described their journey toward homelessness and the composition of their social network. Over all six major themes emerged with many having sub themes. The major themes were drug use, catastrophic events in the person's life, choosing not to utilize family support, how social services were utilized, the need for affordable housing and what they needed from social services.

The first question asked of the participants was what led them to being homeless. Three major themes emerged from this question. They were drug use, a catastrophic event in their lives and financial difficulties. In many of the cases, a catastrophic event precipitated the individual's becoming homeless.

Drug use appeared to be linked to a catastrophic event that happened to three of the ten participants in the study. In one case the participant described how his wife and two children were killed in a car accident. His account of the incident was: "In 1980 my wife and two children were in a car crash and died. I haven't been the same since. I've had several jobs over the years but haven't been able to hold one down. The problems started

with alcohol, then weed, then other drugs." Another participant reportedly was in a car accident which left him disabled. His account was: "I was in a car wreck about 15 years ago that really messed me up. I had an auto body shop that I was running. I had everything going for me the nice cars, nice house and all that. My wife left me after five years after the crash because she wouldn't put up with my shit. I got into drugs and started hearing voices. Fuck I went crazy." The third client lost his wife due to kidney failure. He had used drugs earlier in his life but became addicted after her death. He served a total of 12 years in prison for drug related offenses.

One of the participants had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which he was diagnosed with after returning from the war in Vietnam in 1972. Since that time he dropped out of college and has had several jobs. He pointed out he can hold a job but occasionally he will "flatten" out and not want to do anything. Another client got home and found his wife with another man and he slapped her. His account was: "I found my wife sleeping with another man and I blew my top and slapped her. As a result, I got twelve days in jail. When I got out I found

I had a restraining order prohibiting me from returning home. My wife kept everything and I found I was fired from my job while in jail." One of the respondents was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After being treated for this he found himself too weak to work and was convinced by the Veterans Hospital to go on disability. His account was: "In 2005 I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and was sent to Seattle, WA for a new procedure for treating it. The doctors said there was a 90 percent success rate for the procedure. I found I must have been weakened. After I got my new job with Riverside County Mental Health, I found I was too weak to work. I was convinced by the V.A. (Veterans Hospital) to go on disability." He soon found that these benefits were not enough to provide food, clothing and shelter for himself. Another respondent described how the city of San Bernardino, in 2005, condemned his house and business and had them torn down. The business was a bar and it was his livelihood which his mother and father had opened in 1963. Since that time he has been homeless.

Two of the respondents claimed financial difficulty as being their primary reason for becoming homeless. The first lost his job in construction to lower paid workers.

When this happened he could not gain the income to maintain a residence and became homeless. At this time he is unemployed. The second resident found himself without a job and ran out of finances which caused his homelessness.

One respondent reported he was living in an unhealthy living situation and he moved out to figure himself out. He claimed to be homeless by choice and was trying to find himself.

Overall, the main cause of homelessness appeared to be a catastrophic event in the respondent's life. Seven of the ten participants reported having a catastrophic event occur in their life such as personal injuries, a death of a loved one, or an illness. In these cases they were confronted with an issue they could not work through personally and became homeless.

The second question asked was what their family background was and if they maintained contact with them. Nine of the ten respondents indicated they had contact with their family and one had no contact. Seven had parents who were deceased but kept in contact with their children. One was adopted and recently made contact with his adoptive family. Two indicated they had contact with

a brother or sister. Three respondents claimed they grew up in a stable environment.

A major theme that developed during this phase of the interview was that the respondents did not want to be a burden on their siblings or children. A typical answer from the respondents with children was that their children were just starting out and they did not want to be a burden for them. Six of the respondents answered in this way. Three of the respondents had a brother or sister they stayed in contact with and again indicated they did not want to be a burden them for them. Examples of responses to this question were: "I don't want to be a burden to her (respondents Daughter)." "I'm not used to that lifestyle like they are: it's not me. I might get back into drugs and destroy their lives with mine. It's not fair to them and I don't want them to go through that." "If they (son and daughter) offered it I wouldn't take it. My son and daughter are just starting out and have troubles of their own." One indicated he was unaware of any of his siblings being alive and was not aware of their whereabouts if they were.

The respondents were asked what they felt their social network was outside of their family. Five of the

respondents indicated that the homeless shelter and the homeless were their primary social support. They indicated the homeless were those they identified with the most. Three indicated their church was their primary support system and relied on it heavily. Two indicated they had no social network. Overall, eight of the ten said they had established a social support network they had created for themselves for nurturance and support through their peers and churches.

It was found that the social services the respondents were using were limited. Three indicated they utilized the Vista Recovery Center, not for its counseling services, but as a place to "hang out." Four of the respondents utilized the Veterans Hospital for medical care. One noted he was using Behavioral Health for his counseling needs. Two were receiving food stamps.

The need for food was another theme that was noted in the interviews. One respondent noted that a homeless person had to walk for miles to get free food on a daily basis. With the exception of the Central City Lutheran Mission, most of the food pantries were on the outskirts of the city, not in the central area where that service was needed the most as indicated by another respondent.

All were utilizing the Central City Lutheran Mission as a shelter. One major theme the respondents had in common was that they needed affordable housing. The ten respondents all noted this was their primary need. Those who worked a full time job or collected monetary benefits (social security or disability) noted that they could not afford to rent a place to stay on what they were making. One respondent lived in a garage with three other homeless men and the four pooled their finances to pay the landlord rent. A respondent noted: "More outreach has to be done to poverty stricken areas by social services. They need to see what the people need not what they think they need." He was referring to having social services embed workers in poverty stricken neighborhoods to see the services needed first hand.

Summary

This chapter discussed themes that emerged through interviews with ten homeless men age 50 to 65 about the causes of homelessness and their social networks. Throughout the findings six major themes were developed which appeared to affect each respondent in some way.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will cover the meaning of the findings and implications for social work. This study of the social networks of homeless men in San Bernardino found six distinct themes. This study was not meant to generalize the answers to the questions to the entire population of the homeless in San Bernardino. Its purpose was to explore the use of social networks and social services used or needed by elderly homeless men.

Discussion

Since the study was qualitative it did not set out to generalize the causes of homelessness for the entire homeless population. It was an exploratory study to get the perspective of homeless individuals about why they are homeless and their social networks.

Age played a role in the study due to the individuals being between the ages of 50 and 65. This is the age most people are preparing to retire. The respondents in this study were starting over. Many of the

respondents had skills that were too limited and needed to be retrained in some other form of work.

A theme that emerged early in the study was that many of the respondents had had a catastrophic event happen in their lives right before they descended toward homelessness. The respondents looked at these events as having a major impact on their life and as a loss of hope for their future. One respondent stated "In 1980 I lost my wife and two children in a car accident. I haven't been the same since: I never got over it." Another noted that his life changed after he had been in a car accident. The major theme was about a life-changing event that was out of their control. The moment the event happened they felt they had no control over it and had no support to work through it.

Another theme that emerged was drug use. Many of the respondents blamed illegal drug use for their homelessness and linked it to having had a catastrophic event happen in their lives. They admitted that the drug use had held them back from numerous opportunities for being gainfully employed or being active with their immediate family.

Another theme that developed was their utilization of family members to help them out. For those who had families, the respondents did not want to be a burden to them. Each respondent that did not utilize their family support used the word burden. Those who had daughters and sons did not want to seek their help because they were just starting out. The respondents did not want to get in the way. In essence those interviewed appeared to divorce themselves from their families. Most had regular contact with them but did not want to be a major part of their lives. It was if they were content with their current social network.

Many of the respondents indicated they felt the homeless community was their social network. They looked toward each other for advice, resources and protection. One response was: "The street people, the prostitutes, the homeless and people who know the streets. Those are the people who help me out. (Other) People don't understand we are a family. We help each other out when we need it. We watch each other's back." This response represents the underlying theme that the homeless respondents looked toward other homeless individuals for social support instead of their family. This idea was

also echoed when a homeless individual noted that he and three other homeless rented a garage together. They were looking out for each other. Another respondent noted that he was learning from the other homeless individuals and they had become a family to him. Having a sense of family around them appeared to be important to them. Some of the respondents noted their church was their major source of social support. Again, this was like belonging to a family.

A theme about affordable housing emerged from all ten of the respondents. When asked what their major needs were this was the priority. It was the first thing they talked about. They noted that before they could truly stabilize they needed permanent shelter. This was a need they indicated social services could not readily provide for them. The need for food came after this and only five respondents mentioned it.

The final theme that emerged is that the majority of the respondents are actively working or pursuing work. Three of the respondents had full time jobs which they found while being homeless. Five were actively looking for work. Two said they were not going to look for work. The overall theme was that the majority wanted to work

and that created a sense of pride for them. They noted that homelessness was not a choice they made. They found working was their way to get out of their current situation.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were the sample size, the accuracy of the responses and the lack of female respondents. All the participants met the standards set for the study, however only ten were interviewed which limits generalization to the entire homeless community. The study was not able to recruit any female respondents. Female subjects who were approached refused due to trust issues. Having female respondents would have given a different perspective to the study. The accuracy of the responses may be called into question because they are self reported. Authenticity of the information cannot be assured.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

This study was done to get the perspectives and thoughts of elder homeless individuals living on the streets of San Bernardino, CA. By doing so, this writer

was able to understand what the elderly homeless needed by asking them directly. By doing individual interviews the study aimed to identify areas that are lacking in the social support network of the elderly homeless individual. It also identified services homeless individuals needed from the surrounding community, city, state, and federal government.

Federal, state, and city agencies should be opening up more open lines of communication to better communicate the needs of the homeless. These needs would be communicated by social workers working with the homeless population. By doing so they would be able to enact policies which would help resolve the issue of homelessness. Also, they may be better able to understand future needs and resources which could be allocated for the elderly homeless.

A problem faced by the elderly homeless is that they need job training. Currently, there are no comprehensive job training programs for the homeless elderly. The Department of Aging and Adult services currently refers such unemployed clients to Good Will, The Salvation Army or to the unemployment office for job retraining. Social workers should be focusing on creating meaningful job

trainings for the elderly homeless population. This can be done throughout the county utilizing different departments. For example the Department of Behavioral Health can do job training as part of their mental health services. The Department of Aging and Adult Services can create their own job retraining instead of referring clients to other agencies.

Social workers should be embedding themselves in the different diverse populations with which they work, e.g. visiting homeless shelters to meet with the homeless to find out what their needs are instead of waiting for a referral from the shelter. Different agencies such as the Department of Behavioral Health and the Department of Aging and Adult Services should share information regarding elderly homeless clients to assess the needs of the homeless. This is one example of how County departments can work together. Currently departments are separate entities and inclusive to themselves. Social workers should have the freedom to access departments other than their own for the benefit of the client.

Currently the Department of Housing and Urban Development oversees the Section Eight housing program. They may be able to allocate a certain amount of housing

specifically for the elderly homeless or develop a program to house the elderly homeless such as a cooperative housing program. Social workers should be looking for innovative ways to find housing for the elderly homeless.

The current homeless population is growing. With the "Baby Boomer" generation reaching retirement there may be a large group that is simply not prepared financially for retirement. By exploring the current social and family networks of the elderly homeless, this study hoped to gain insight into the lives of elderly homeless individuals. Many of the programs that are in place to assist these individuals are not being used and are not meeting their needs. This study allowed elderly homeless individuals to express their needs and assist social workers to serve them better and create policies that better suit the needs of the elderly homeless. The study engaged the elderly homeless to see what their needs are rather than assuming what they are.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this study is that the elder homeless do try to form social networks for themselves.

It was found that many of the participants had family with whom they kept in contact. However, it was their own choice not to utilize their family because they did not want to be a burden to them. As a result they created new social networks with their peers or at the churches they attended. A major theme that emerged during the study related to tragic events that lead them toward homelessness. In the future this should be considered when a person suffers from a great personal loss and counseling services should be sought for the person affected. The main social service theme was that more affordable housing be made available to the general population. Steps should be taken by social workers to ensure this will happen in the future by promoting cooperative housing and other housing programs.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Guide for the Family and Social Networks of the Homeless Interview

- 1) What led to you being homeless?
- 2) What is your family background?
 - A. Adopted
 - B. Foster Home
 - C. Parents
 - D. Brothers/Sisters
- 3) Do you have immediate family members?
 - A. How often do you keep in contact with them?
 - B. If you do what is your relationship to them?
 - C. If not what do you consider your social network?
- 4) What social services are you using at this time?
 - A. What are your needs from social services?
 - B. What agencies are you using?
- 5) What is your employment status?
 - A. If you're not employed what are you doing to become employed?
 - B. What is your primary source of income?

APPENDIX B
HOMELESS FLYER

Attention

HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS
AGED 50 TO 65

GRADUATE STUDENT
Joseph Staudt

IS LOOKING FOR

PARTICIPANTS TO

INTERVIEW ABOUT THEIR
FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

IF INTERESTED, CONTACT:
"POPS" AT THE
CENTRAL CITY LUTHERAN MISSION
OR JOSEPH STAUDT AT
(909) 886-3015

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at
California State University San Bernardino

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

I, Joseph Staudt, a Masters in Social Work student under the supervision of Professor Rosemary McCaslin, Department of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino, invites you to participate in a study that is totally voluntary. This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino, Institutional Review Board.

I plan on interviewing you about your family and your social networks which should take about an hour. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the interview you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail.

This study may cause some minor psychological discomfort due to questions being asked about your extended family. You do not have to answer any questions and may withdraw at any time. The Central City Lutheran Mission (CCLM) will not know if you participated or not and no services you are receiving will be affected. Also, your name will not be recorded anywhere to protect your identity and confidentiality. If you have any questions or concerns about this study feel free to contact my faculty advisor Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 50 years of age.

Place your mark here

☐

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

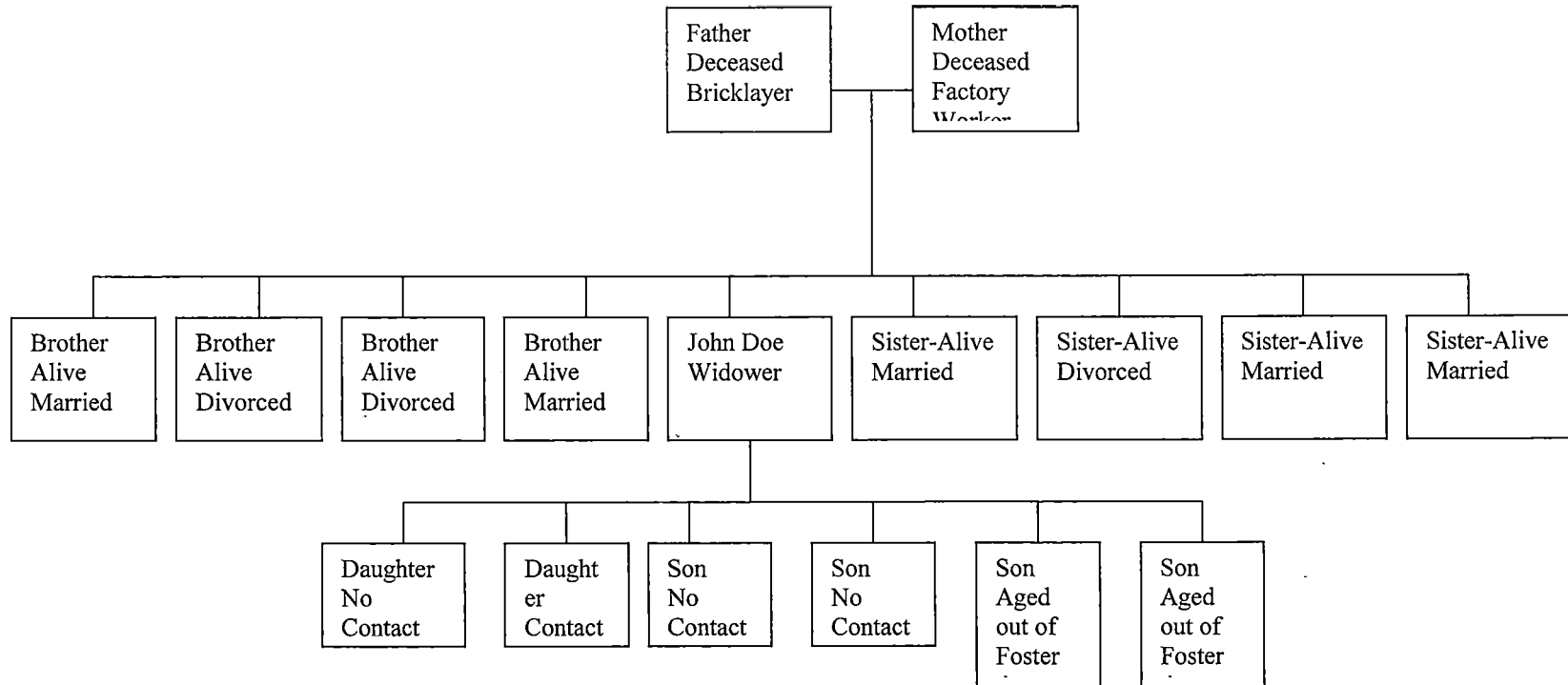
Study of Social Supports and the Homeless Debriefing Statement

The interview that you have just completed was designed to look into the social supports and family networks of homeless individual's ages 50 to 65 years of age. The researcher is interested in whether having strong social or family support protects people from being homeless.

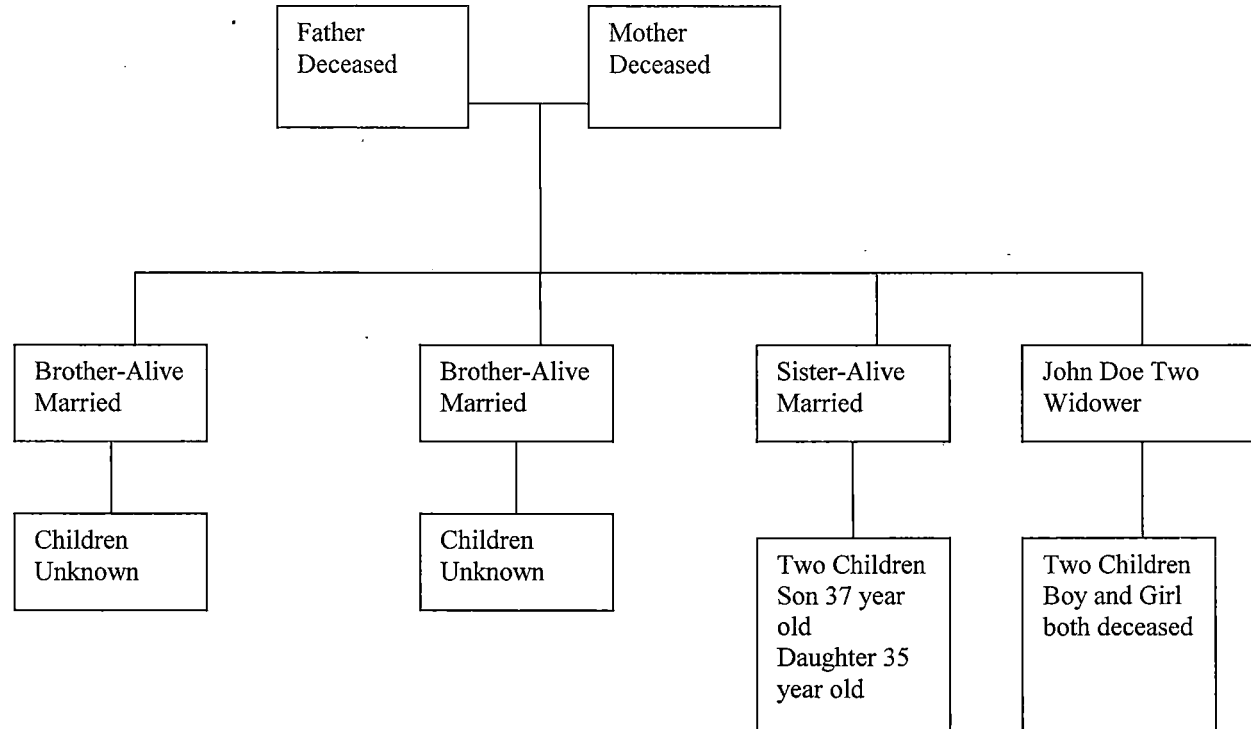
Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions or concerns about the study please feel free to contact Professor Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507. If you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this study, please contact the Central City Lutheran Mission after September 2008.

APPENDIX E
HOMELESS GENOGRAMS

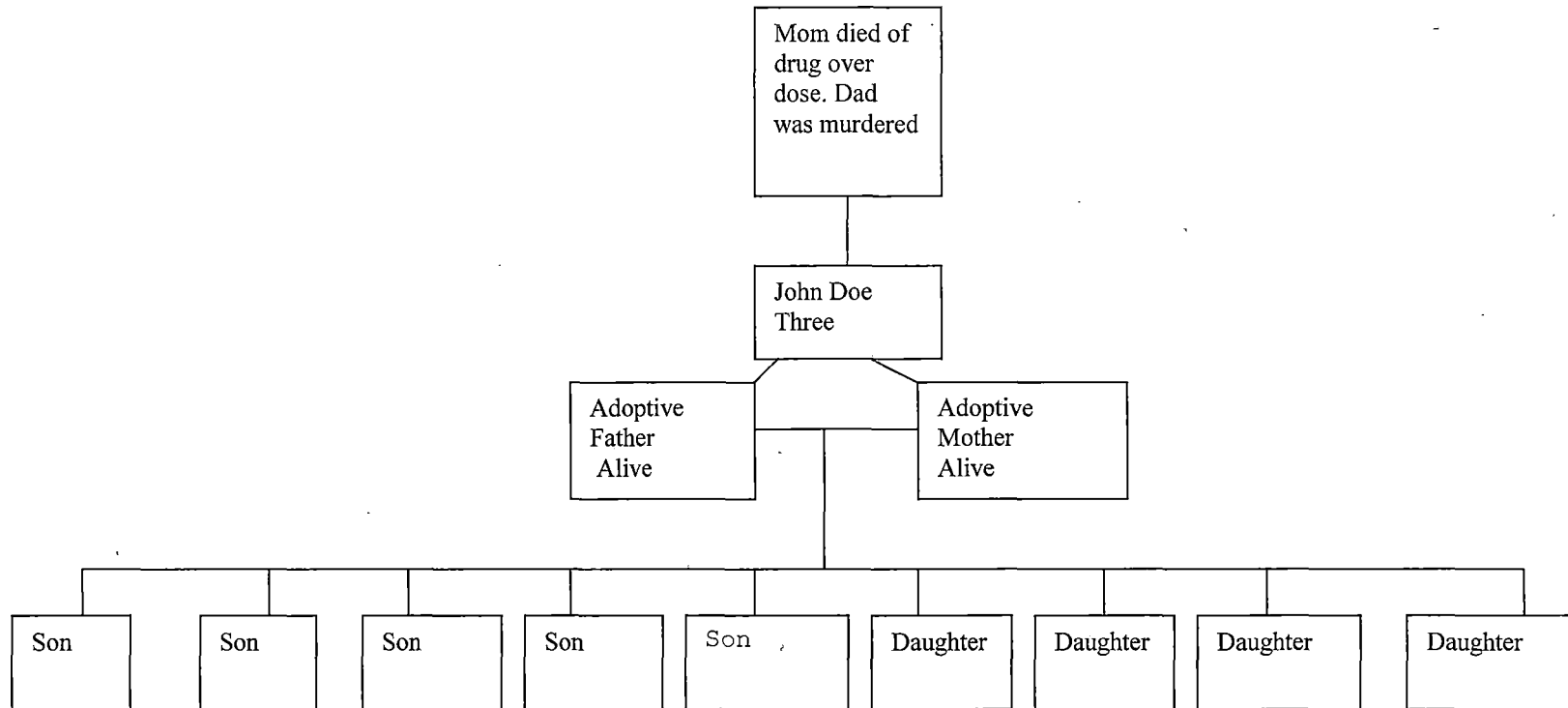
John Doe One
Family Genogram



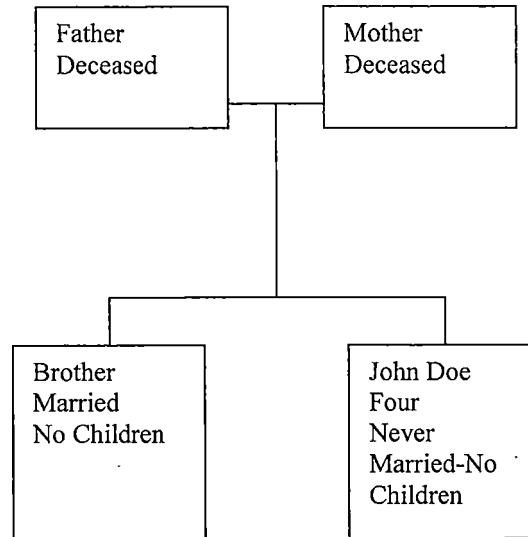
John Doe Two
Family Genogram



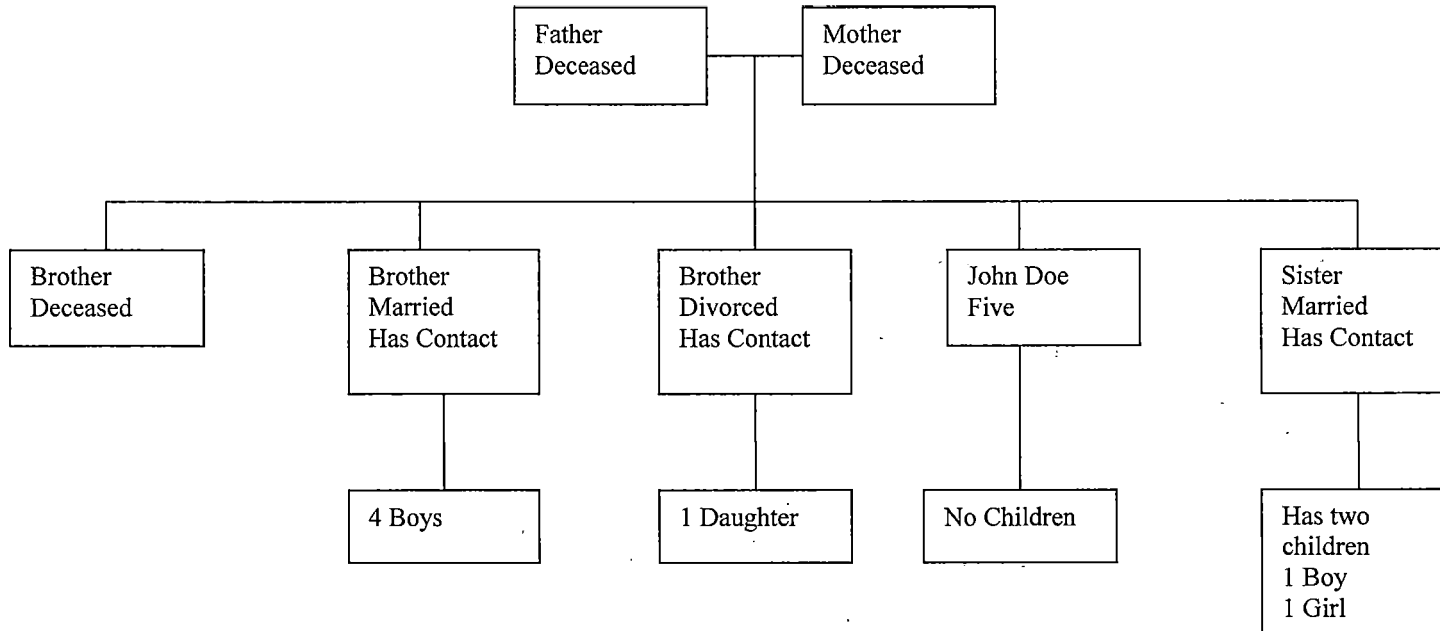
John Doe Three
Family Genogram



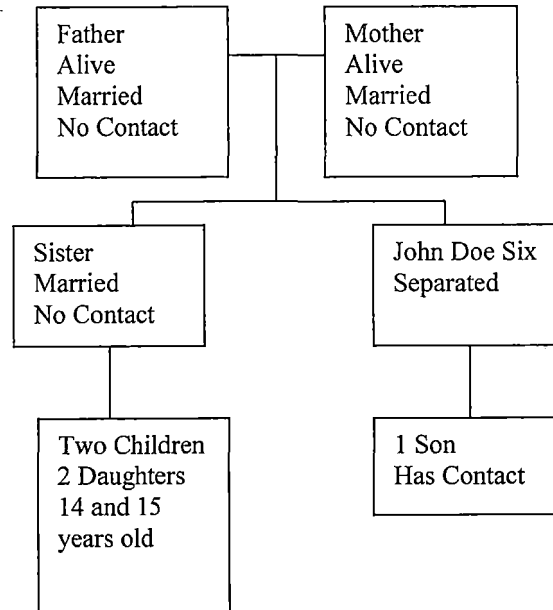
John Doe Four
Family Genogram



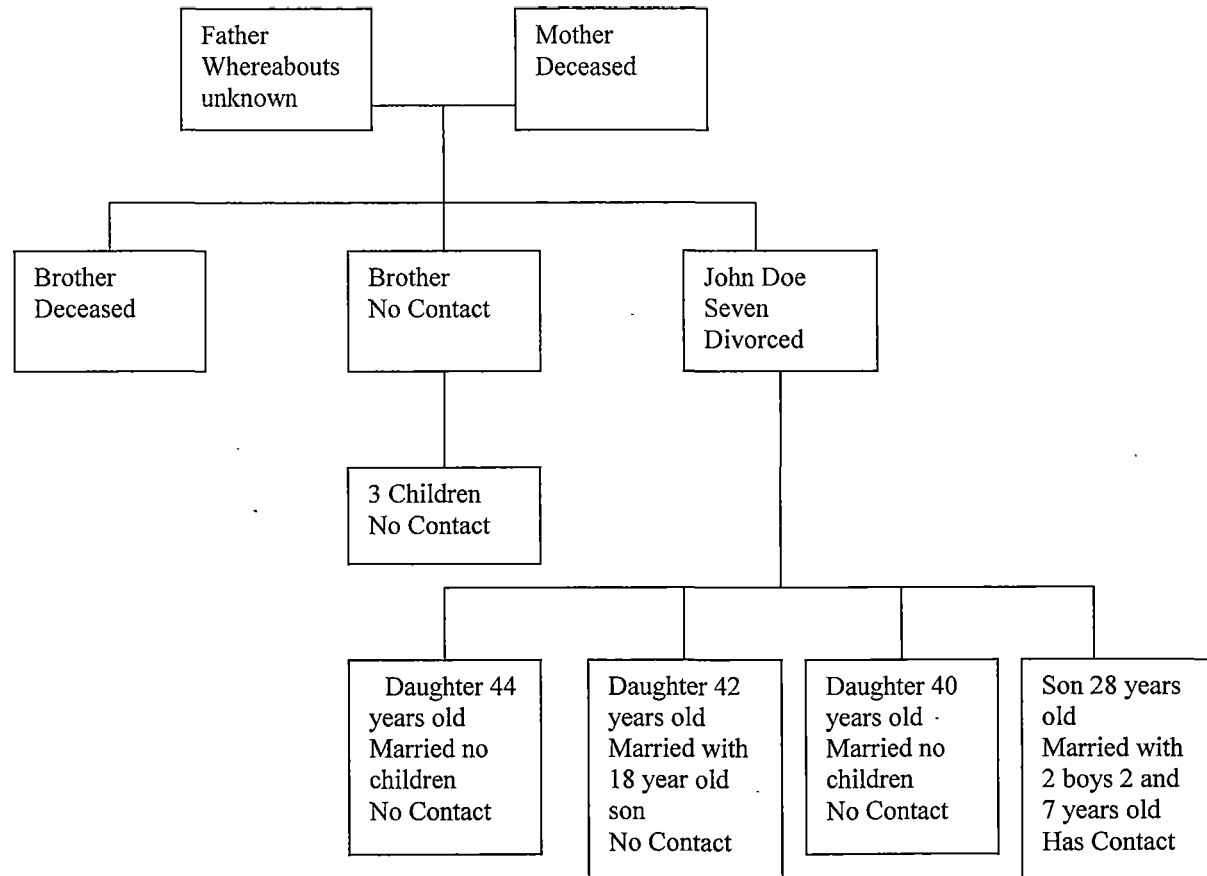
John Doe Five
Family Genogram



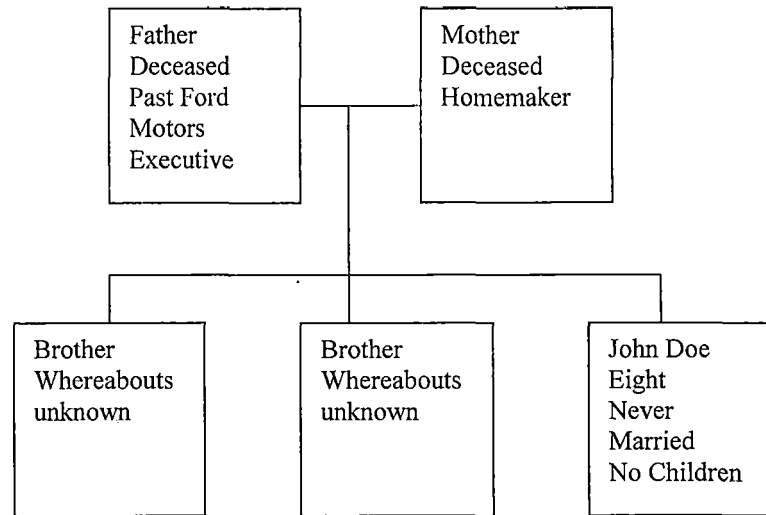
John Doe Six
Family Genogram



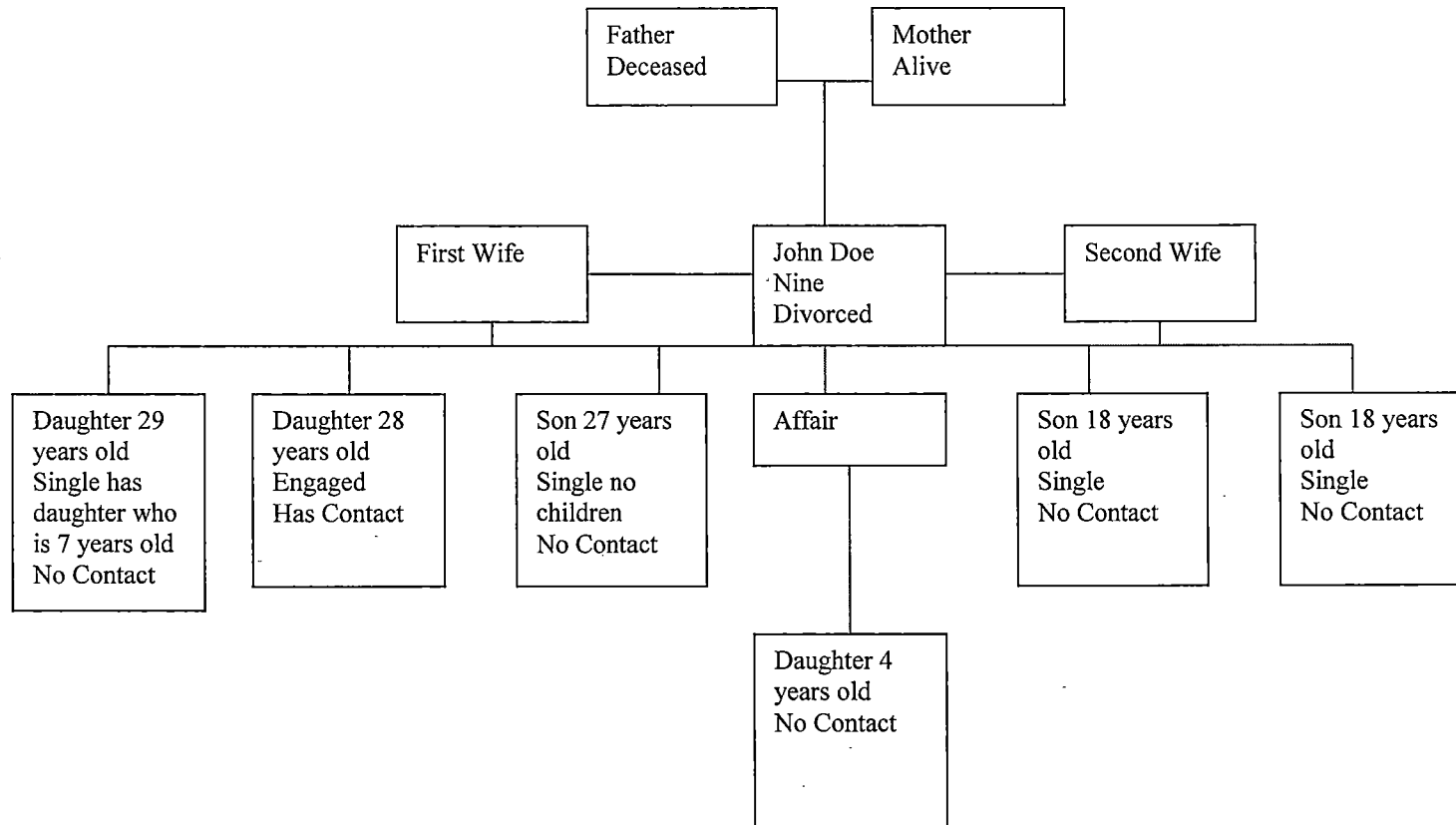
John Doe Seven
Family Genogram



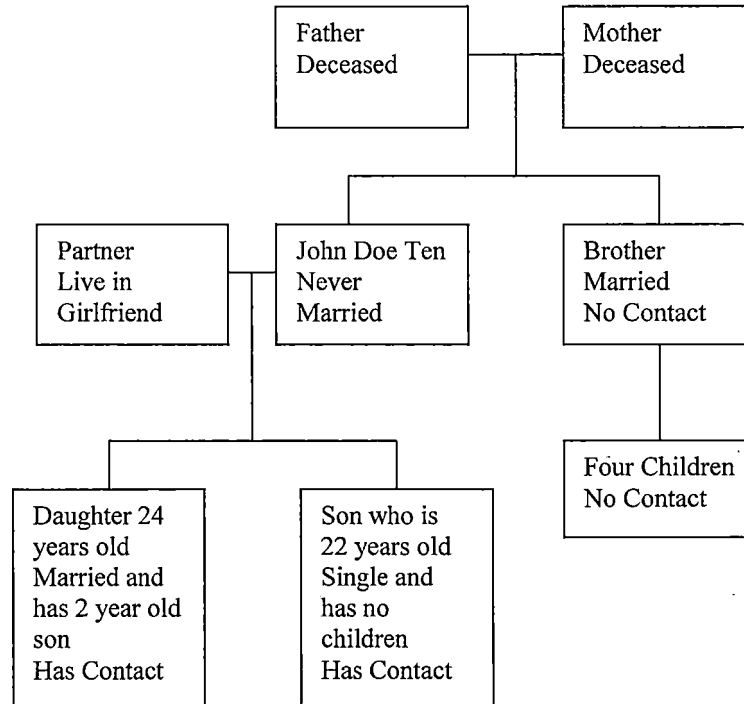
John Doe Eight
Family Genogram



John Doe Nine
Family Genogram



John Doe Ten
Family Genogram



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