2018 Homeless Enumeration – Bruce County

45.0°N | 81.3°W

BRUCE
county

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Introduction

In April of 2018, Bruce County, advised by the Grey Bruce Poverty Task Force - Housing Subcommittee, conducted a homelessness enumeration using a Period Prevalence Count (PPC) methodology. The count was mandated by the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Housing in an effort to measure the extent of homelessness in each municipality, as well as to capture key demographic information of the homeless population in Ontario.

The homelessness enumeration was the first of its kind to be conducted in Bruce County, the result of a mandate set by the provincial government in 2016 with the passage of the Promoting Affordable Housing Act and the commitment to end chronic homelessness by 2025[1]. Beginning in 2018, all Ontario municipalities are required to conduct a homeless enumeration every two years with the goals of:

- Improving community awareness and understanding of homelessness;
- Helping to monitor and assess developing trends over time;
- Providing a method through which to measure progress; and
- Strengthening efforts to end homelessness.

In addition, the homelessness enumeration represents an opportunity for knowledge mobilization that can aid in reaching the objectives outlined in Bruce County's Long-Term Housing Strategy[2], which was updated in 2013 and is scheduled to be updated again in 2019. By conducting the enumeration every two years, the County will yield information about the scope of homelessness, and will be equipped to use this knowledge to outline strategies that will assist in effectively meeting the needs of the homeless population.

Rural Homelessness

The problem of homelessness is most often associated with urban communities, however, a growing body of research over the past 15 years has shown that the problem is also prevalent in rural Canada. The size and the dynamics of the problem in these rural areas is still largely unknown, in part because of unique problems that rural areas pose for data collection. Rural areas often have fewer services geared towards people experiencing homelessness and the services that are available often

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[1] https://news.ontario.ca/mma/en/2016/12/ontario-passes-legislation-to-create-more-affordable-housing-for-families.html

[2] https://brucecounty.on.ca/sites/default/files/Bruce%20County%20Long%20Term%20Housing%20Strategy%202013.pdf

serve a large geographical region. A recent study conducted in rural and northern Ontario found that only 32 percent of service providers in these regions are able to keep ongoing records of their at-risk and homeless populations[3]. This problem is compounded by the fact that rural areas tend to have smaller populations spread out over relatively large geographic regions, making it more difficult to locate those who sleep rough or stay in unsafe dwellings[4]. The research that has been done is much less frequent and has been conducted in disparate parts of the country, making a nation-wide view of the problem's unique characteristics difficult to attain.

Bruce County is comprised of eight local municipalities with a total population of 68,147[5]. Although this homeless enumeration was the first of its kind, the County previously conducted a Homelessness Intake Survey over a two-month period with individuals who reported being homeless or at-risk of homelessness. The Grey-Bruce YMCA Housing Support Program also collected data over a one-year period. Results show that while those experiencing absolute homelessness are a relatively small group compared with the overall population, those who may become homeless come from diverse groups, and the number of individuals who are at-risk of homelessness in Bruce County is rising. There are currently no emergency shelters for men or youth in the County rather those seeking emergency housing are placed temporary accommodation (i.e. motels or hotels). The absence of public transportation also makes service access difficult for Bruce County residents, as many services are located in Grey County. There is currently limited supportive housing in Bruce County, which creates barriers to suitable housing for those with serious physical and mental health issues, and those with disabilities.

Bruce County currently administers a number of programs and services to address the challenges related to homelessness and the issue of affordable housing. For more information, please visit Bruce County Housing Services.

Bruce County, will begin consultations in the fall of 2018 to update the Long Term Housing Strategy. This update will be an opportunity to develop an increased understanding of the issues around affordable, safe and secure housing.

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[3] Kauppi, C., O'Grady, B., Schiff, R., Martin, F. and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. (2017). Homelessness and Hidden Homelessness in Rural and Northern Ontario. Guelph, ON: Rural Ontario Institute.

[4] Waegemakers Schiff, J, Schiff, R., Turner, A., & Bernard, K. (2015). Rural homelessness in Canada: Directions for planning and research. The Journal of Rural and Community Development, 10(4), 85-106.

[5] Statistics Canada. 2017. *Bruce, CTY [Census division], Ontario and Ontario [Province]* (table). *Census Profile*. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Period Prevalence County (PPC) Methodology

A PPC is a method used for counting and obtaining information about people experiencing homelessness that normally takes place over a longer period of time than other methods of enumeration, e.g. one week as opposed to one day. The information collected allows communities to develop strategies that address homelessness and tracks changes in the homeless population. It is often the method of choice for homeless enumerations taking place in rural areas. A PPC normally uses "hub sites," or community service locations that are frequented by individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. PPCs are generally favoured in rural areas where "hidden" homelessness (temporarily living with friends or relatives) is more prevalent because it "casts a wider net" over a larger region for a longer period of time[6].

In Bruce County, the PPC was conducted over the course of a five-day period, between April 23 and April 27, 2018. It was conducted during regular business hours in partnership with local social service agencies. This time-frame was selected at the end of the month, a time when homelessness is generally known to increase[7]. In advance of the PPC, local agencies were asked to act as "hub sites" for the count, or were provided with informational materials about its purpose, as well as when and where it would occur.

Following a period of community outreach and establishing a list of hub sites, front-line social service workers employed with Bruce County and other local service organizations were provided with enumeration training that involved familiarizing enumerators with the survey tool and the purpose of the enumeration. The survey tool, provided by the Ministry, consisted of a questionnaire composed of 18 questions that asked respondents to disclose demographic information, as well as information about their experience of homelessness and where they would be staying that night.

Enumerators also received empathy training for interacting with respondents from marginalized groups.
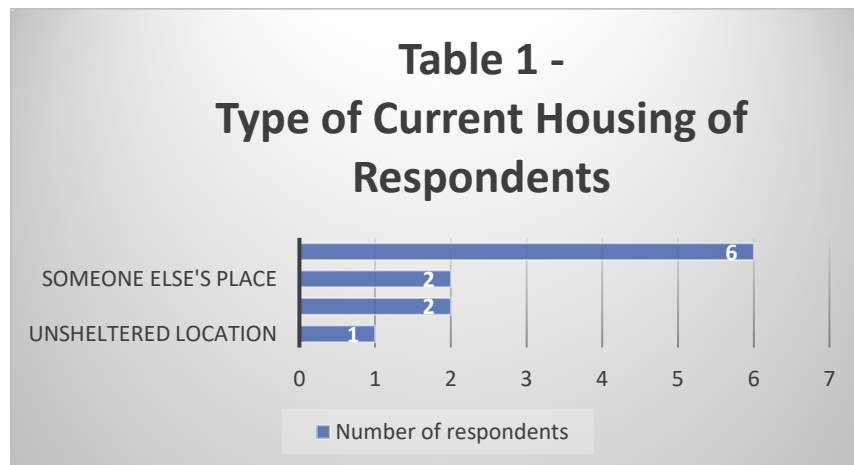
Results

Over the course of the enumeration week, a total of 17 individuals experiencing homelessness were counted in Bruce County. Eleven of them completed questionnaires, while 6 identified as homeless, but chose not to participate. Over half

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[6] Kauppi, C. 2017. Period Prevalence Counts of People Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide for Rural and Northern Communities. Ministry of Housing, Government of Ontario.
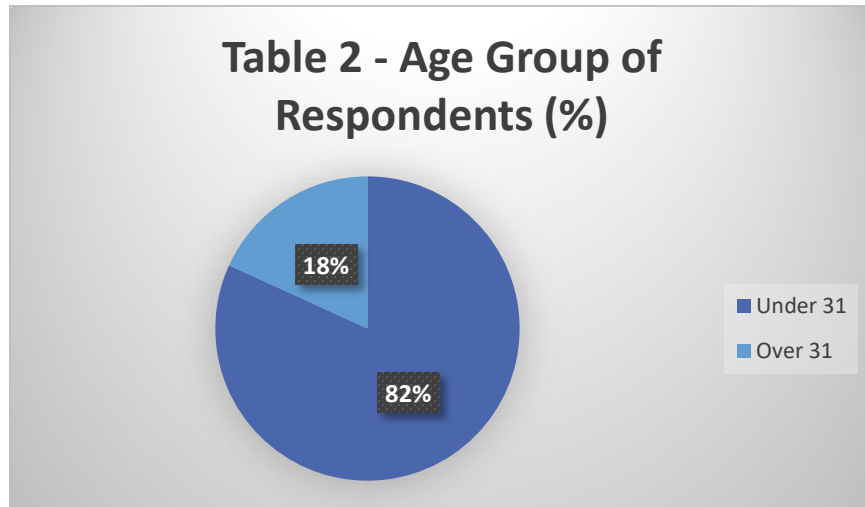
[7] Peressini, T., McDonald, L., & Hulchanski, D. (1996). Estimating Homelessness: Towards a Methodology for Counting the Homeless in Canada. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Ottawa, Ontario.
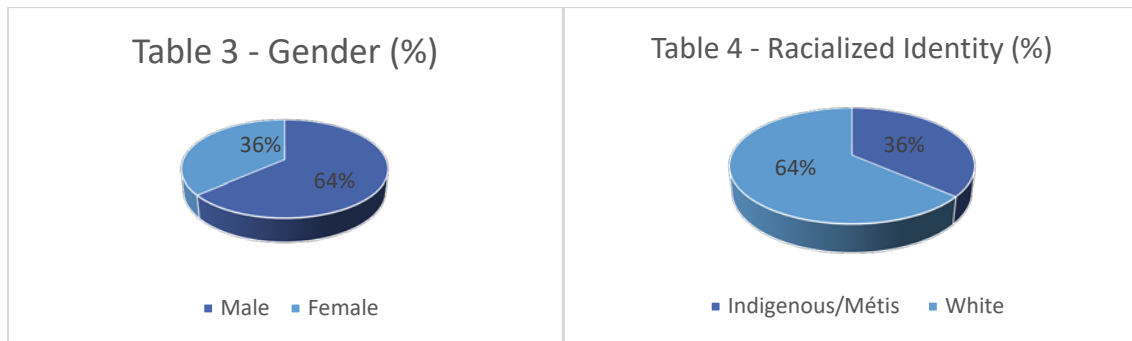
of those who completed the questionnaire reported that they were currently living at a motel/hotel. The other five reported that they were either staying with friends or family, at an undisclosed location, or that they did not know where they would be staying that night (see Table 1 below). About 45 percent of respondents said that they had been homeless for less than three weeks, while another 45 percent had been homeless for up to 7 months. One individual reported having been homeless for one year. The reasons for homelessness varied considerably, a result that might suggest a disadvantage in using a structured questionnaire to address this question. The most commonly chosen response was "conflict with a parent/guardian," which was selected by over 45% of respondents. It was also determined that 9 of the 11 respondents were under the age of 31 (see Table 2 below). These findings could suggest youth homelessness in the area is a target for further investigation and programming, however additional research is required to determine the extent of the need.

**Table 1 -
Type of Current Housing of Respondents**

Category	Number of respondents
	6
SOMEONE ELSE'S PLACE	2
	2
UNSHELTERED LOCATION	1

■ Number of respondents

Table 2 - Age Group of Respondents (%)

- 18% Over 31
- 82% Under 31

Respondents were asked to identify their racialized identity, gender identity and sexual orientation. It was found that over one third of respondents reported having an Indigenous or Métis identity. The majority of the respondents reported 'heterosexual' as their sexual orientation, with two individuals identified as bisexual and one as homosexual. Males made up 64 percent of the survey respondents, with the other 36 percent being female.

Table 3 - Gender (%)

- 36% Female
- 64% Male

Male · Female

Table 4 - Racialized Identity (%)

- 36% Indigenous/Métis
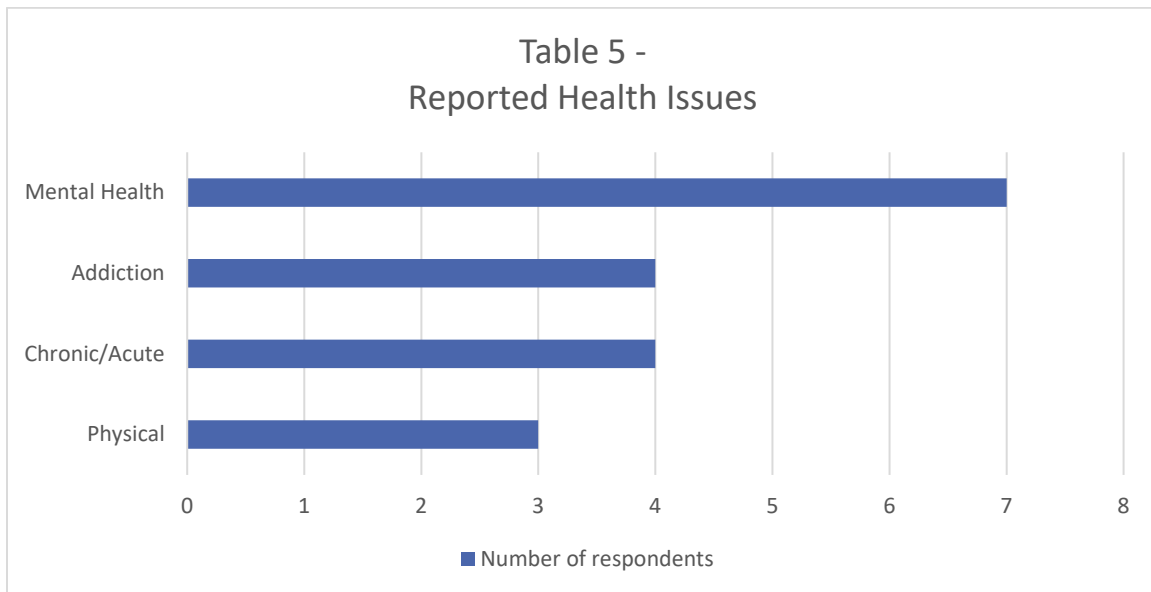- 64% White

Indigenous/Métis · White

The survey data collected did not show a prevalent amount of family homelessness. Only three respondents reported having a partner, and only one reported having children. The survey also asked respondents if they had been in foster care at some point in their lives, and 45 percent reported 'Yes.' These findings would require additional research to determine their level of significance.

Additional survey questions focused on health and income. Nearly two thirds of respondents reported having a mental health issue. Over one third reported having a

chronic or acute medical condition, and over one third reported having an addiction. In regards to income, nearly two thirds selected social assistance as their source of income, with only two of these respondents citing additional income sources. Over one third reported a different source of income, including disability benefits, seniors' benefits, GST refunds, child and family benefits, or no income.

Table 5 -
Reported Health Issues

Category	Number of respondents
Mental Health	7
Addiction	4
Chronic/Acute	4
Physical	3

■ Number of respondents

Limitations to PPC Data Collection

As is the case with all research methodologies, PPC has limitations. One limitation is the risk of under-counting. Service providers in rural areas are burdened with the difficult task of implementing a homelessness enumeration across a very large geographic area. The dissemination of information about homeless counts to community stakeholders is a complicated logistical task that takes a lot of time, personnel, and resources that are often in shortage or non-existent. Obtaining crucial demographic information from service users is also very difficult because due to lack of services and public transportation that would allow potential respondents to travel to hub sites.

Another major disadvantage of the PPC methodology is that it does not contain statistical measures that can be used to produce homeless population estimates. This means that it is impossible to determine how close the number of respondents is to the actual homeless population size in a given area.

Conclusion

Although the results presented are not generalizable to the Bruce County population, they are sufficient to demonstrate that homelessness is a socioeconomic problem in Bruce County, and suggests avenues for further study, particularly in regards to youth homelessness. As we continue to complete homelessness enumeration locally and monitor national standardization efforts, our understanding of how and ability to effectively count individuals and families experiencing homelessness will continue to grow, including a more complete understanding of the limitations inherent in current homeless count methodologies. This understanding will allow us to conduct informative studies, the results of which will allow service providers and other stakeholders the ability to design programs that help ensure a quick and effective community response to in need.

For more information on what Bruce County is doing to address homelessness and housing affordability in our communities, visit Bruce County Housing Services.