

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY TO EXPLORE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF  
HISPANIC UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, thank you to God, for blessing me all around and for your unwavering sustenance. To my wife Kristina, for your continuous support and for always waiting for me in the pathway of life. You managed our family and took care of our kids many days and nights so that I could pursue my goals. You believe in me even when I do not do so myself. This accomplishment is ours and could have never become a reality without you. Thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (HUHY) enrolled in public high school in Texas. Homeless students face unique living challenges. However, homeless students have proven abilities critical for their academic pursuits. The study results showed homeless students are resilient and needed at least one deep personal connection with a school staff member. Among this study's findings are that homeless students might sometimes camouflage signs of their homelessness by concealing their indigent status. Moreover, homeless students in some instances were denied enrollment and services. All the participants in this study were pursuing their studies with determination and aspirations to graduate from high school. The participants used their homelessness as a source of resilience to overcome their living challenges. This study contributes new insight to the phenomenon of Hispanic homeless students and adds new knowledge on homeless students' lives and their experiences in high school. The study's findings, applications, and usefulness target audiences made of educators, school administrators, and private and political stakeholders. Additionally, this study may be used to advocate for the welfare of homeless students and the time use of school counselors as individuals that promote student connections and social policies for at-risk populations.

**KEY WORDS:** Homeless students; Urban high school; McKinney-Vento Act; Hispanic unaccompanied homeless youth

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The stereotype of a homeless person is of a lazy, uneducated individual, who is expected to suffer with addiction or be mentally ill (Hughes et al., 2009). Negative stereotypes of homeless people often lead to disapproving attitudes toward this group (Mallet et al., 2003). Many Americans have indifferent or negative attitudes toward homeless people which is the biggest obstacle obstructing policy changes regarding treatment of the homeless (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000).

Stereotypes are not accurate and not all individuals experiencing homelessness do so alone. Families also experience homelessness (Grant et al., 2013). In fact, homeless families have increased the number of reported homeless population in the U.S. (Flannery, 2010; Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2019). In 2017, single individuals comprised 66.7 % of all people experiencing homelessness, with the remaining 33.3 % being people in families, and 7.4 % were unaccompanied children and young adults (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2018). These children and young adults faced homelessness without the company of their biological parents or legal guardians.

### **Background of the Study**

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2018) youth homelessness is a growing concern in the U.S. According to Rahman et al. (2015), the growth in family and youth homelessness can be attributed to a slowdown in the economy, lack of affordable housing, a tight job market, and low wages. Poverty and the lack of affordable housing are considered the most prevalent causes of homelessness

(NAEH, 2018). According to the Executive Summary on the state of homeless in America by the Council of Economic Advisers (2019), over half a million people go homeless on any given night in the United States. Urban and rural municipalities alike are expected to complete annual point-in-time counts (PIT) of people experiencing homelessness. The PIT count conducted in January 2018 by HUD (2018) tallied 111,592 homeless youth. In 2019, HUD (2020) counted 35,000 unaccompanied youth, under the age of 25, in unsheltered locations (e.g., streets, vehicles, or parks), emergency shelters, and transitional housing each night. According to data gathered in the 2016-17 school year by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the primary federal entity responsible for collecting and analyzing data related to education, there were a total of 1,354,363 homeless students in public schools; 95,475 of these students were considered unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY).

Homeless youth are the fastest growing and most at-risk group within the U.S. homeless population (HUD, 2010; National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY] 2012; National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH] 2012; Tobin & Murphy, 2013). Data from the National Center for Homeless Education ([NCHE], 2002) indicates that abuse, neglect, family conflict, and parental substance abuse are the main causes of homelessness among UHY. According to a study conducted by Pedersen et al. (2016) with homeless youth in drop-in centers, one-third of the youths in their sample reported leaving home for the first time because they were kicked out by a parent or guardian. This vulnerable population faces many challenges including basic human needs such as food, clothing, and shelter (Thompson et al., 2016). In addition,

other educational related needs include official documentation, transportation, counseling, and academic interventions (Beharie et al., 2018).

Homeless youth face barriers for identification by governmental agencies and school districts and therefore accessibility to agency and school district programs (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). For instance, the local education agency (LEA) interpretation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (The McK-VA), and the lack of knowledge among youth about the rights and qualifications of the homeless serve as a barrier for students to access services in the school setting (Rahman, 2015). Furthermore, because homelessness is in many instances self-reported, many youth lack official identification at their schools (Wynne & Ausikaitis, 2013). Without proper identification, UHY do not receive the resources and opportunities available to them such as: (a) support for mental health, (b) education related services, (c) removing barriers for enrollment, and (d) school of origin transportation, which often results in poor academic achievement and low attendance rates (Bender et al., 2014; Toro et al., 2007).

Recognizing homeless students in the school setting can be challenging because neither parents nor students want to admit to being homeless (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). Families and their students often try to hide their homelessness causing many homeless students to never receive available benefits and services (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2016). Similarly, youths' perceptions of the educational system and older adults can present a challenge to identification and engagement (Walls & Bell, 2011).

Lacking consistency in the methodology for conducting a youth count and no common definition of homeless youth across federal agencies increases the difficulty of

obtaining an accurate count of homeless children (Bender et al., 2014). However, according to the NCHE (2014), any student without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence qualifies as homeless. Morton et al. (2017) estimate that 4.2 million youth and young adults in the U.S experience unaccompanied homelessness within a 12-month period. Without a common understanding and language regarding the definition of youth homelessness amongst federal, state, and local agencies; it is challenging to quantify the number of young people without safe and stable housing (NCHE, 2014).

Housing instability is associated with the development of social-emotional and academic problems (Cutuli et al., 2013). Homelessness events include frequent school changes, transitions, and exposure to trauma (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). Family histories often include substance abuse (Tyler & Schmitz, 2013) and maltreatment, including physical and sexual abuse, violence, and criminal activity (Tyler & Schmitz, 2013).

Most of the students identified as homeless experience homelessness with their families, however, there is a subgroup of homeless students that go through homelessness on their own for various reasons (Arango-Ricks, 2014). This subset of students is identified as UHY. These students are not under the care of a parent or legal guardian who provides for them and include young people who have either run away from home or have been thrown out of their homes by their parents or legal guardians. UHY also include individuals who age out of the foster care system. The National Conference of State Legislatures (2019, June 18) classified homeless youth in four main categories: (a) throwaway youth, (b) street youth, (c) runaway youth, and (d) system youth.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Many UHY are falling through the cracks (Arango-Ricks, 2014). In educational lingo, falling through the cracks refers to those students who are dropping out of school or falling substantially behind in their academics (McEwan, 2008). Experiencing homelessness has a high correlation with dropping out of school (Aratani & Cooper, 2015). Cutuli et al. (2013) and Masten et al. (2015) conducted studies in large school districts indicating homelessness and housing instability were associated with significant lower growth in math and reading achievement. This effect was calculated outside effects associated with living in a low-income household.

According to Lubell and Brennan (2007) and Edidin et al. (2012), homeless students experience negative social-emotional and academic problems which leads to long-term adverse consequences. Negative life experiences such as abuse, exposure to trauma, and homelessness have been found to be a factor in the development of social and emotional problems in homeless students (Bassuk, 2010; Edidin et al., 2012). When compared to housed youth, UHY experience higher rates of mental health problems which include disruptive behavior disorders, social phobia, major depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Aratani, 2009; Buckner et al., 1999; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013; Whitbeck et al., 2007).

Poor academic performance by homeless students, especially UHY, is well documented in literature and reports on the subject (Buckner, 2012; Hardy, 2009; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011; Masten et al., 2014; Obradović et al., 2009; Richardson, 2002). In the 2012-2013 school year, less than 50 percent of UHY met or exceeded state proficiency requirements (47% in reading and 44% in math; NCHE, 2014). Additionally,

almost double the youth with repeated homeless episodes (35%) dropped out of high school in comparison with housed youth (16%) (Aratani & Cooper, 2015).

Despite Hispanics being a collective group, where the needs of the group usually takes priority over individual needs (Bal & Perzigian, 2013), the number of Hispanic unaccompanied homeless youth continues to increase (NCHE, 2016). Roughly a quarter of the population of unaccompanied homeless youth is Hispanic; and almost a third of unaccompanied youth who experience unsheltered homelessness are also Hispanic (Henry et al., 2017). There was a 25% increase in the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in public school ages three to eighteen between the 2013-14 and 2015-16 school years according to data provided by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2016a).

According to Robinson and Clardy (2011), Hispanics are the largest racial minority group in the United States and by 2030 its growth will make up approximately one-third of the United States' population. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) predicts that by the year 2023, the number of Hispanic students will increase to 30% of the total school population. This increase in the number of Hispanic students attending public school will create pressure on teachers, counselors, and school administrators to support and assist their growing needs.

Few studies have explored the cultural diversity of homeless youth in-depth, regardless of the fact that social minority groups experience homelessness at higher rates than the social majority (NAEH, 2018; Varney & Van Vilet, 2008). Most of the research conducted on homelessness studies the general homeless population (Toro et al., 2011). Furthermore, due to the absence of a clear and consistent definition of homeless youth,

many studies' data might not be transferable due to the use of a particular homeless definition or research methodology (Toro et al., 2011). Nevertheless, homeless youth is the most diverse subpopulation category of the homeless general population in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status (Toro et al., 2011). These approaches usually include large general population surveys (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998); service-setting samples (Kipke et al., 1997); homeless youth residing in shelters; and street youth (McCaskill et al., 1998). However, these studies did not focus on HUHYP and were not carried out in the phenomenological tradition of research. Therefore, it is imperative to seek a deeper understanding of this group of students and find answers that may help create successful interventions to close the academic learning gap between HUHYP and their stable-housed public-school classmates as they are currently overrepresented and understudied by educational researchers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the perspective of HUHYP students attending high school and to provide them with an opportunity to describe their lived educational experiences. My goal was to engage in deep conversations with HUHYP to learn their stories, perspectives, and understanding regarding being qualified as UHY in the high school setting. The research plan was to use semi-structured personal interviews to conduct a qualitative study in the phenomenological tradition, exploring the experiences and perspectives of HUHYP.

## Significance of the Study

Youth homelessness is an increasing concern in U.S. public schools. Homeless students confront many challenges that make learning and educational success difficult to attain such as transportation, internet access, and hygiene concerns (Tucker et al., 2012). According to Cunningham (2014), ~~even when~~ identified homeless students are some of the most difficult students to serve due to their trauma exposure, high levels of mobility, and absenteeism.

Although there are efforts at the legislative, district, and campus levels to address the needs of HUHYP, schools continue to underreport homeless students, which means that homeless students not officially identified are not receiving specialized assistance, as required by state and federal law (Ammerman et al., 2013). Furthermore, these approaches exclude the insights of the population being studied. Sharing the HUHYP's unique educational experiences has the potential to add to the counselor literature and help in the design, creation, and implementation of interventions that are culturally responsive.

Studying HUHYP may provide a window into their unique educational lived experiences and serve as a catalyst to finding better ways to serve them and implement interventions to address their needs. Possibly, in time interventions that are developed for this particular subset of students might be extended to serve other racial minority populations. Information learned from UHYP students could be utilized in developing new strategies and interventions to serve future homeless students.

This approach to qualitative research involves delving into a human story and culture that is not clearly revealed by numbers through a quantitative analysis alone.



Exploring how homeless students are supported in the school setting and their unique family circumstances has the potential to add to the literature of HUHYP. The significance of this study includes providing a clear account of how HUHYP perceive and experienced how teachers and other staff members interact with homeless students.

The results of this study might be valuable to school counselors and other educators working with HUHYP. School counselors and other mental health professionals might find the emerging themes beneficial to gain a better understanding of their Hispanic students and their culture. This study might provide the school staff and administrators with evidence of the daily struggles HUHYP go through and how their experiences and traumas are reflected in their academic work. Finally, this study may promote more understanding from teachers and school administrators towards these students and heighten their determination to play a more active role in the identification of homeless students and the services they are rendered.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions lead a qualitative research study (Agee, 2009). Qualitative research questions are open-ended and explorative in nature in order to provide the researcher the liberty to follow a line of inquiry to clarify ideas or themes as they emerge (Agee, 2009). Furthermore, semi-structured questions are designed to invite in-depth descriptions of the participant experiences (Brown et al., 2015). The focus of this study was guided by the following research question:

### ***Research Question***

What are the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

The following semi-structured interview questions will help to answer the research question mentioned above:

1. Describe your current living situation.
2. What are the circumstances that led you to this situation?
3. As a HUY student in your particular living situation describe your experience at school.
4. Tell a story that depicts a day in your life at school.
5. Name one thing that keeps you moving forward in school.

These questions were designed to increase understanding of the participants' experiences.

### **Definition of Terms**

Definitions of terms in this study are necessary to provide clarity and understanding of the terms used throughout the paper. The following is a list of terms fundamental to this research and its associated scholarly literature.

### ***Hispanic and Latino***

The term Hispanic was introduced officially in 1970 by the Nixon administration (Cole, 2019). Hispanic is a person of Latin American or Iberian ancestry, fluent in Spanish. Latino is a U.S.-born Hispanic who is not fluent in Spanish. Many people use these terms interchangeably. However, Hispanic refers to language whereas Latino refers to geography (Cole, 2019). For the purposes of this study, I will be using the term Hispanic because this is the term used by the LEA.

### ***Homeless Definition***

There are at least 27 different federal entities that administer programs for homeless individuals (Rahman, 2015). Each organization employs its own definition of the homeless population, which includes “homeless individual,” “homeless family,” “homeless child,” “unaccompanied youth,” and “homeless youth” (Congressional Research Service, 2013). Although there are various definitions for homelessness, for purposes of my study, I will be using the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition of homeless. The McKinney-Vento Act as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) defines homeless children and youth as those who lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (NCHE, 2018).

### ***McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act***

The McK-VA ensures the education rights and protections of homeless children and youth (NCHE, 2018). The McK-VA is a federal law that provides educational support for students experiencing homelessness. The act provides for the removal of barriers for enrollment and school of origin transportation (NCHE, 2018). This act also compels LEAs to provide educational and other needed services to homeless students in order to afford them a free and appropriate public education (NCHE, 2018).

### ***Homeless Youth***

Homeless youth are classified into the main categories below (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

**Runaways.** Youth under the age of 18 who have left their home without permission are considered runaways (Gary et al., 1996).

**Throwaway Youth.** Youth are classified as throwaways when parents or legal guardians force them to leave the home and do not allow the youth to return (Hammer et al., 2002).

**System Youth.** System youth refers to youth who aged out of the foster care system (Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2016). This particular group youth is at the greatest risk of becoming homeless (Dworsky et al., 2013).

**Street Youth.** Street youth refers to boys and girls, under 18 years of age living on the street and/or are improperly protected or supervised (Wenzel et al., 2010).

**Unaccompanied Homeless Youth.** The McK-VA identifies unaccompanied homeless youth as a homeless youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (NCHE, 2018). There are two conditions for a person to be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth under the McK-VA: (a) The youth is homeless, and (b) the child or youth is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. The absence of a custody or guardianship figure would not make a student eligible for the McK-VA Act services; rather the student's living arrangement must be considered in order to determine homelessness (NCHE, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretically, this study is based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This model offers the foundation for understanding the needs and motivation to prevail in school of HUY. Utilizing this theoretical model highlights the needs of UHY and provides for the exploration of their experiences associated with being an unaccompanied homelessness youth.

Maslow's (1945) model is based on a five-level pyramidal construct of hierarchy of needs which can be used in relation to the UHY's context. The different levels of needs are categorized into two different sets: basic needs and higher-level needs. Basic human needs are considered fundamental for human life and include food, water, shelter, and safety. Higher-order needs comprise those needs related to growth and self-improvement. Maslow's initial theory proposed that basic needs were to be met before higher level needs (Maslow, 1945).

Maslow postulated that a person's ability and desire to grow is linked to his or her unmet needs. Based on Maslow's model, it is suggested that homeless students' needs are at the lower level of the pyramid with the state of homelessness compromising the physical, mental, and emotional status of young people (American Psychological Association, 2014; Goodman et al., 1991; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child & National Forum on Early Childhood, 2014). Following Maslow's (1945) model one must assume that until an individual has met his basic needs, he will not have a path to effectively reach self-actualization (Greenwood et al., 2013).

Maslow's (1945) Hierarchy of Needs model explains the process of motivation to satisfy one's needs. This model does not address HUH in particular. However, for the purposes of this study, utilizing Maslow's Model as a theoretical framework is appropriate because of the focus on the interconnected nature of being Hispanic and homeless.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations in this study. One of the shortcomings inherent in the research design is that some of the participants were expected to be more vocal

than others. Another limitation is that all members of the sample were enlisted from the same geographical area and interviews were conducted only in English. Third, this phenomenological study was limited to the self-reported data obtained from the participants. Although there may be applicable themes to other HUHYP, the single location for this study was taken into consideration when examining the results. In addition, I interviewed those young people who attend high schools who I was able to identify, access, and who were willing to offer an interview. Finally, due to the high mobility of this population, there was a possible loss of opportunity for member checking.

### **Delimitations**

A number of delimitations were made to make the study feasible. For ethical reasons, the participants selected were delimited to HUHYP over the age of eighteen who have not yet reached their twenty-first birthday. The selected participants I interviewed gave written consent for themselves without requiring permission from their parents, the state, or the district Homeless Liaison who under the McK-VA definition might represent these minors in formal matters. For accessibility purposes, my sample was limited to HUHYP attending public high school in a large, culturally diverse area in the Southeastern United States. The study sample was further limited by those English-speaking young people who were willing to participate in the study.

### **Assumptions**

There are certain assumptions intrinsic in qualitative research. Vogt (2014) defines an assumption as a statement that is presumed to be true and sets the conditions

under which statistical techniques yield valid results. In this phenomenological research, the following assumptions were identified:

1. The participants will answer the interview questions honestly and candidly. It is assumed that the participants will tell their stories accurately without embellishing them and as they remember them.
2. The inclusion criteria of the sample are appropriate and therefore, assure the participants have all experienced homelessness as defined by the McK-VA and are identified as HUHYP.
3. The participants have a sincere interest in participating in the research and do not have any other motives other than to tell their stories.
4. The participants understand that participation in the study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation follows the Sam Houston State University dissertation format and is comprised of five chapters. These chapters are organized in the following manner. Chapter I contains the (a) introduction of the study, (b) background of the study, (c) statement of the problem, (d) purpose of the study, (e) significance of the study, (f) research questions, (g) definition of terms, (h) theoretical framework, (i) limitations, (j) delimitations, (k) assumptions, and (l) organization of the study. Chapter II includes (a) the review of literature relating to HUHYP, (b) homelessness: issues of definition and meaning, (c) prevalence of homelessness, (d) homelessness stigma and effects of homelessness, (e) theoretical foundation, and (f) a summary. Chapter III consists of the methodology to be used to conduct this study, including (a) research questions, (b)

research design, (c) selection of participants, (d) local education agency and institutional review board approval, (e) recruitment, (f) instrumentation, (g) grant tour questions, (h) data collection and interview process, (i) privacy concerns, (j) data processing, (k) trustworthiness, and (l) conclusion. Chapter IV covers a description of the demographic data and analysis of the study. Finally, Chapter V contains (a) the summary of the qualitative research, (b) discussion of the findings, (c) implications for counselors, (d) recommendations for further research, and (e) a conclusion.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

In this chapter, a review of the literature foundational to exploring the lived experiences of UHY students is introduced. The increase of HUHYP created by the economic and housing crisis in the United States, has amplified the difficulty of addressing the academic success of homeless students (Miller, 2011). A predictable constant regarding homeless students is their socioeconomic status, which predominantly remains below the poverty line. Some UHY students are given the choice by their parents or guardians to work and contribute financially to the household or leave their homes, while others leave escaping abuse or neglect (Middleton et al., 2018). Residential instability and lower socioeconomic status have been directly linked to low academic achievement, truancy concerns, behavioral issues, and high dropout rates (Gubbels et al., 2019; Herbers et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2004).

Chapter II is organized into the following sections: (a) the review of literature relating to HUHYP, (b) homelessness: issues of definition and meaning, (c) prevalence of homelessness, (d) homelessness stigma and effects of homelessness, (e) theoretical foundation, and (f) summary of the chapter.

#### **Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning**

According to Kusmer (2002), homelessness has been a constant phenomenon in American history almost from the founding of the English colonies. Historically, “Vagrants” were documented as social outcasts that needed to be arrested as far back as 1640 (Kusmer, 2002, p.13). Homelessness as a historical social issue has existed since the 1700s (Hopper, 2003). According to Cronley (2010), during the 1700s and early

1800s kinship care networks provided shelter and services to homeless family members and neighbors. Then in the mid-nineteenth century the homeless began to be cared for by institutionalized care rather than kinship. This shift continued through the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century (Cronley, 2010). During these transitional periods, the general public tended to view the homeless as deviant individuals needing correction and discipline (Hopper, 2003).

Between the late 1920s to early 1930s, the federal government assumed a central and permanent role in social welfare (Eisenberg, 2018; Hopper, 2003; Wright et al., 1998). Due to the increase in the number of people needing assistance and the lack of resources of kinship networks and private organizations, there was a move from private care to governmental-based care for the homeless (Burt, 2001). In contrast to previous generations this particular homeless population was more diverse and included a significant number of women, children, and families (Cronley, 2010). In 1937, Congress passed the first federal housing program. Then in 1947 a second major piece of legislature was introduced with the purpose that “every American would have a decent home and suitable living environment” (Wright et al., 1998, p. 87). Finally, in 1965 HUD was formed as the cabinet-level agency responsible for overseeing housing policies (Danzinger & Danzinger, 2006).

In the 1970s and 1980s, homelessness policy decisions resulted in cuts in HUD funding which reduced its budget by 80% between 1980 and 1989 (Koschinsky, 1998). Similarly, during the 1980s, HUD policy moved toward playing a smaller role in the housing business (Wright et al., 1998). However, during this time, the population grew by as much as 22% in some cities (Burt, 2001). Diversity within homeless people increased

including precariously housed and economically vulnerable women, children, families, and ethnic minorities (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Wright et al., 1998). In response to the increase of the homeless population, Congress passed the first federal homeless policy in 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Danzinger & Danzinger, 2006). The McK-VA was the first and remains the only major federal legislative response to homelessness, it protects the rights of homeless students in the school setting and provides for grants to better serve homeless individuals (USDE, 2016a).

In 2003, President Bush declared a commitment to ending chronic homelessness in 10 years (HUD, 2003). Then President Bush charged the Interagency Council on Homeless to coordinate the activities of 18 federal agencies involved in assisting the homeless with the sole purpose to end homelessness (HUD, 2003). President Bush made this a focus of his administration since these individuals consume a disproportionate share of public resources and allocated \$1.4 billion for Homeless Assistance Grant Awards for 2005 (HUD, 2003).

The United States has experienced an increase in homeless youth since the 1980s (Cunningham, 2014). From the creation of the United States to the present-day aftermath of both hurricanes Harvey in the Houston area and Irma in Puerto Rico, homelessness is an ongoing and pressing concern affecting many school-age youth. According to a report by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council ([NHCHC], 2011), in 2011 there were 1,018,084 patients served by the Health Centers; of which 17% of their patients were children or youth under the age of 19. Health Centers are community-based organizations that care for the most vulnerable individuals such as the homeless (NHCHC, 2011). According to the 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)

to Congress, 35,000 youth were considered unaccompanied homelessness according to the annual PIT count (HUD, 2019).

While the traditional understanding of homelessness might be universal, the actual working definition of homeless tends to differ (Hendricks & Barkley, 2011). According to the NHCHC (2018), there is more than one official definition of homelessness. In a document published by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018), homelessness is defined in several different ways depending on which agency is consulted, HHS, HUD, or USDE. Below are federal definitions and key terms that are used when referring to youth who have run away and are experiencing homelessness.

***The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services***

HHS (2018) defines homeless youth according to The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) definition:

Homeless youths are individuals who are “less than 21 years of age or, in the case of a youth seeking shelter in a center under part A, less than 18 years of age ...for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement” (HHS, 2018, p. 199).

This definition excludes youth who stay with friends or extended family members.

Individuals who shared the house of others are commonly referred to as “doubled-up” homeless people and they make up the largest population of homeless students.

According to Dill (2015), approximately one million homeless students live in doubled-up situations.

### ***Housing and Urban Development Definition***

Programs funded by HUD use a more limited definition of homelessness based on the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HUD, 2009, p. 175). HUD defines homelessness for their programs into four categories. The categories are:

Category 1: Literally Homeless

Category 2: Imminent Risk of Homelessness

Category 3: Homeless under other Federal statutes

Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Although the definition used by HUD (2009) appears to be comprehensive, HUD reports a significantly low number of homeless in the United States. This is most likely due to the nature in which they obtain their numbers of UHY individuals, by point-in-time counts (NAEH, 2017). Data on UHY individuals is established on annual point-in-time counts conducted on a given night (NAEH, 2017).

### ***Point-in-Time Count***

HUD requires that communities receiving federal funds from the McK-VA Grant program conduct an annual count of all sheltered homeless people in the last week of January. This is called a point-in-time count (PIT). One of the gaps that exists in these PIT counts is the inclusion of unaccompanied youth (those living apart from their parents or legal guardians) under the age of 24 (NAEH, 2017). Regardless of the fact that PIT counts are required to count number of unaccompanied youths under the age of 18, results from those counts appear inaccurate, since many areas report zero unaccompanied homeless youth in their communities. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth might be afraid

or unwilling to enter individual shelters and communities (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty [NLCHP], 2019). Most likely, these communities report the beds available to homeless youth rather than the number of youths who actually need shelter (NLCHP, 2019). Further difficulties originate when trying to identify the number of youths who are unsheltered since UHY are often not engaged with traditional homelessness assistance programs nor do they gather in areas with older individuals experiencing homelessness (NLCHP, 2019). The method of counting used by HUD makes unsheltered youth harder to find and accurately count since point-in-time contacts are performed by volunteers, and UHY are only counted during the time window of the count, one single day of the year which may not reflect accurate numbers (NAEH, 2017). Furthermore, lack of accurate demographic data and understanding of the homeless youth population, increases the difficulty in policy advocacy efforts and programs planning to address the needs of this population (NAEH, 2017).

In 2012, changes were made to HUD's definition of homelessness contained in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act. Although the new definition shares some similitudes to the McK-VA definition, the doubled-up criteria is not included, and the documentation requirements are significantly higher and stricter (Desmond, 2016).

### ***Department of Education***

The Department of Education identifies homeless students as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (USDE, 2004). This definition is broad and is subject to interpretation (Schweid, 2016).

### ***The McKinney-Vento Act Definition***

In the school setting, homelessness and youth are defined by the McK-VA. The McK-VA was designed to provide homeless youth access to education and to remove barriers for enrollment (Mendez et al., 2017). The McK-VA was originally authorized in 1987 and was most recently reauthorized in December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (USDE, 2016a). The McK-VA was enacted in response to the social outcry of people working and advocating for homeless families and youth in the 1980s (Hombs, 2011; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Levinson & Ross, 2007; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). This piece of legislature was intended to address the challenges homeless youth face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school (USDE, 2016a). The purpose of the legislation was to provide legal benefits and protections to homeless children and youth by eliminating administrative and procedural barriers for enrollment (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Knowlton, 2006; Swick, 2005; Vissing, 2004).

Section 725(2) of the McK-VA defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (USDE, 2016a). The term includes children and youth who are: (a) Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; (b) Living in motels, hotels, or (c) Living in shelters; or (d) Living in cars, (USDE, 2004, p. 4). The McK-VA requires that state departments of education and LEAs support students experiencing homelessness with access to school and assist them with attendance and academic endeavors (USDE, 2016b).

The McK-VA provides unaccompanied youth with many educational rights including the right to enroll in school and begin attending immediately. Homeless

students also have the right to continue attending the same school they were attending before becoming homeless (USDE, 2004, p. 8).

### ***Unaccompanied Homeless Youth***

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (2016), calculates that annually 1.6 to 1.7 million youth experience homelessness without a parent or legal guardian. These youth experience an array of unsafe and temporary situations while homeless. Most of these young people have left home due to severe dysfunctional family situations, including abuse and neglect (Aratani, 2009). Children and youth identified as UHY, or living among homeless families, often go unrecognized in schools, especially in the high school setting (Samuels et al., 2010). Unaccompanied homeless youth high school students are not always willing to disclose their personal living conditions for various reasons, including, (a) lack of awareness, (b) stigma attached to homelessness, (c) embarrassment, (d) fear of being ridiculed or taken away, and (e) directive by parents not to disclose the information (Wynne & Ausikaitis, 2013). Students and families are encouraged, but not required, to self-disclose or identify themselves as homeless in order to receive protection under the McK-VA. Many UHY do not identify as homeless because they may not be familiar with the legal definition of homelessness or the rights and protections they are entitled to by the McK-VA (Wynne & Ausikaitis, 2013).

Homeless children are not always in a family or with their biological parents or legal guardians, many UHY are living with friends, extended family, or other situations, rendering them as unaccompanied homeless youth (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Some of these students may be considered doubled-up or living in a precarious situation moving



from place to place and are deemed UHY by the McK-VA definition if their living arrangement is due to economic reasons or unstable family circumstances (i.e., abuse, disagreement, or other scenarios which could result in the youth being asked to leave). Some of the UHY students live in a shared house or apartment with other families who may have taken them in. Other students stay at transitional houses or shelters, while some live in cars, and others live in substandard conditions (i.e., no electricity or running water). A student is considered homeless by the definition of the McK-VA whenever the student is living in any of the aforementioned situations (e.g., doubled up, unsheltered, hotel, or living with friends and relatives). These students are considered at-risk of falling behind in their academics or not completing high school (Varney & Van Vilet, 2008). Homeless students are more vulnerable and at-risk than low-income housed children (Masten et al., 1993; Mendez et al., 2017).

### **Prevalence of Homelessness**

The estimates of the number of youths experiencing homelessness vary each year (e.g., HUD or USDE). The methodology employed to collect data and the definition used to identify the youth as homeless influences the numbers reported. For instance, using HUD's definition, the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, Part 2 estimates that in 2015 nearly 500,000 people in families with children live in a shelter (Solari et al., 2016). In contrast, in the 2014–2015 school year data from DOE reported 1.26 million students as homeless (NCHE, 2016).

Homelessness is a universal societal circumstance. The exact number of homeless people is impossible to determine worldwide, but in the United States alone, over three and a half million people experienced homelessness in a given year (NCH, 2014). More

than two million children in the United States are classified as homeless (NAEH, 2017). In addition, on a single night in 2019, roughly 568,000 people were experiencing homelessness in the United States (HUD, 2020). Included in those numbers is the percentage of homeless families with children. Sixty-seven percent of people experiencing homelessness were adults without children. The remaining 33% of people experiencing homelessness as part of a family (HUD, 2020). Some studies estimate that 84% of homeless families are headed by single mothers, and 50% of the families headed by single mothers are the result of domestic violence (Mallet et al., 2010).

According to HUD's (2020), 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, between 2018 and 2019 there was an increase of three percent in the PIT counts of homeless people. Homelessness rates in the United States continue to increase and one-third of the reported homeless people include families with children (HUD, 2020; NAEH, 2017). According to The NCH (2014), the fastest-growing group of persons who are identified as homeless are families with children, comprising almost 40% of the homeless population.

Undocumented, unaccompanied students who arrive in the United States illegally are not covered under the McKinney Vento Act. However, they might be included if they become homeless and meet the McK-VA criteria (Carlson et al., 2012). This homeless classification is important to note because there are approximately 1.8 million undocumented students under the age of 18 currently attending school in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Each year more than 8,000 undocumented, unaccompanied youth are placed into the custody of HHS (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Many of these youth cross the border into the U.S. as unaccompanied minors and get

arrested, however, an unknown number of additional young people come unaccompanied and are unknown to immigration officials since they were never arrested. These individuals live in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the United States (NAEHCY, 2010). In 2018, HHS had custody of approximately 14,000 unaccompanied undocumented youth (Kopan, 2018). Seventy-six percent of the individuals captive were male and 24% female; 85% were between the ages of 14 and 18. Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador comprised for 85% of the children in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (Kopan, 2018).

### ***Homeless Students in Texas***

Every academic year the Texas Education Agency [TEA] (2019) reports the number of homeless students. According to TEA (2019), in the 2016-2017 school year, a total of 116,103 students were identified by schools as homeless, 15,608 were unaccompanied homeless. The majority (79%) of the identified homeless students were living in doubled-up situations, 11% were living in shelters, 7% were living in hotels or motels, and 3% were in unsheltered situations (TEA, 2019). The number of reported homeless students nationwide also included children or youth who have been kicked out by parents, guardians, or institutions, resulting in tens of thousands living on their own (Fernandes, 2007).

### **Homelessness Stigma and Effects of Homelessness**

#### ***Factors Contributing to Homelessness***

Various causes force youth and their families to experience homelessness. Poverty, lack of affordable housing, and eviction are some of the reasons that might lead to sudden or prolonged periods of homelessness (Reed, 2010; Reganick, 1997). In

addition, substance abuse, mental health, abuse and neglect, family conflict, and violence are also reasons that youth and families experience the loss of housing (Swick, 2005).

According to the National Center for Homeless Education (2009), physical or sexual abuse by a parent or guardian, neglect, family conflict, and parental substance abuse are major sources of homelessness among UHY. In many instances, youth run away from their homes to escape their living circumstances. Some UHY leave home because their parents encourage them to leave, abandon them, or deny them entry to the home (Aratani & Cooper, 2015).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth is a particular subgroup that is overrepresented in the homeless population (McCann, & Brown, 2019). Many LGBTQ homeless youth are forced to leave their families and live on the streets after they acknowledged their sexual orientation (Cochran et al., 2002; Corliss et al., 2011). Surveys of homeless youth providers reported that LGBTQ youth experience longer periods of homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth and are at greater risk of mental health and substance use (Choi et al., 2015; Middleton et al., 2018).

Natural causes are other reasons that force families or youth to experience periods of homelessness (Tobin, 2016). For instance, in the 2017-18 school year, the Houston area and Puerto Rico experienced a surge of homeless families and UHY due to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma (TEA, 2019). In some instances, male youths become homeless with their families but end up experiencing homelessness alone due to limited space in the living arrangements or due to shelter policies that exclude unaccompanied homeless youth (Tobin, 2016). Sixty percent of homeless mothers live apart from at least

one of their minor children while 35% live apart from all their children (Aratani & Cooper, 2015).

### ***Negative Effects of Homelessness***

Homelessness is often associated with adverse life experiences that result in trauma and school interruption (Buckner, 2008; Miller, 2011). When considering demographic and psychosocial factors, children living in emergency shelters experience more negative life events than stable-housed children (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Masten et al., 1993; Obradović et al., 2009). Homelessness and residential mobility cause children to go through disturbances in daily routines, schooling, social relationships, and family dysfunction (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homeless youth also experience shame, self-consciousness, and insecurity due to their living circumstances (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Reganick, 1997; Schmitz et al., 2001).

Homelessness increases rates of physical health problems, substance abuse, and sexual victimization for UHY (Ali, 2009; Noell et al., 2001; Stewart et al., 2004). Researchers report homeless children experience more exposure to traumatic events than very low-income housed children (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Buckner et al., 2001).

Homeless and highly mobile students experience higher levels of family dysfunction and educational, social-emotional, and health problems (Buckner, 2008; Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Samuels et al., 2010). Bassuk & Tsertsvadze (2015) found that homeless school-age children endure mental health problems 2 to 4 times more than poor children who were stably-housed.

Researchers believe homelessness has long-term adverse consequences on children, including, (a) neurocognitive development, (b) mental and physical health, (c)

lower-academic performance, (d) increased chances of retention, and (e) increased risk of dropping out of high school (Edidin et al., 2012; Lubell & Brennan, 2007). Furthermore, exposure to traumatic events (e.g., homelessness, abuse, or neglect,) during brain development can harmfully impact the physical and mental health of youth (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). According to Shonkoff et al. (2012), undergoing harmful experiences can affect brain development at an organic level.

The instability of homelessness can be devastating when intersecting with other negative life experiences and is often traumatic (Miller, 2011). For example, children who experience homelessness are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions and are less likely to have access to medical care than their stable-housed peers (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Literature on toxic stress establishes how exposure to adverse events experienced during brain development can have long-lasting implications for physical and mental health (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). The likelihood of experiencing serious emotional and behavioral problems increases after experiencing homelessness (Samuels et al., 2010). Homelessness has also been associated with poor academic performance in school-aged youth (Obradovic' et al., 2009) and chronic absenteeism (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 2015).

### ***Homelessness and Academic Achievement***

Homelessness and high residential mobility among low-income families negatively impacts learning and academic achievement (Ellis & Geller, 2014; Obradović et al., 2010). Academically, homeless students, including UHY, face an increased risk of school dropout, grade retention, low-test scores, low grades, educational disabilities,

truancy, and school behavior problems (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Israel, 2004; Masten et al., 1993; Zieseimer et al., 1994).

There are marked disparities in academic achievement among students from distinct levels of SES and ethnic backgrounds (Caro et al., 2009). As a group, children who experience poverty underperform academically compared to students from higher SES families (Cutuli et al., 2013). Pungello et al. (1996) found that low-income students had lower reading and math achievement scores compared to students with higher income level. Similarly, Caro et al. (2009) found that students from age 7 through 15 had a widening gap in math achievement due to socioeconomic status.

The loss of stable housing is also accompanied by a loss of possessions, changes in family or friend relations, and daily routines. For example, according to Tobin (2016), homeless students miss an average of 20 days of instruction in a school year. Changes mentioned above are particularly impactful for school-age children, who are developing physically and emotionally (Grant et al., 2013). As a result, children experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of poorer health as well as diminished social and educational outcomes compared to their housed peers (Gultekin et al., 2019). Finally, homeless children are also more likely to be retained and experience physical and sexual abuse than the general populations of students (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Hart-Shegos, 1999; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). Homeless students consistently underperform on standardized tests compared to their peers with stable homes (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Dworsky, 2008; Masten et al., 1993; Rubin et al., 1996). Tobin (2016) suggests that despite homeless students who are able to overcome the barriers to access school and are attending school regularly, efforts addressing their unique needs are not in place.

### *Homelessness in High School*

Limited research has been conducted with students who experience homelessness in their high school years compared to younger students (Cumming & Gloeckner, 2012; Toro et al., 2011). Hart (2017) conducted a phenomenological research study of the lived experiences of students in postsecondary institutions and the factors contributing to the academic resilience of formerly homeless high school students. This study's participants were African American students interviewed almost two years after their homelessness experiences. A phenomenological study conducted by McCullough (2017) focused on youth experiences in residential foster care while attending high school. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the perspectives of young people in foster care, particularly in residential settings, and to gather their thoughts on what they wish could be different about their situation. Yet, when examining the literature, one finds that there is little research on the thoughts and experiences of HUH, the central figures in this study. The subjects of these studies were not Hispanic homeless unaccompanied youth.

Many homeless youth demonstrate high levels of proficiency in their lives and academic success despite the evident harmful risks of homelessness (Masten et al., 2009). Obradović et al. (2009) reported that homeless students attained average or better reading and math scores on a standardized national test.

Most of the literature concerning UHY students has focused on exploring the causes of homelessness or coping mechanisms (Mendez et al., 2017). Less is known about how the students work through the process of remaining in school while homeless, and much remains to be learned about how resilience develops and how UHY develop agency and positivity (Carlson et al., 2012).



## **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical framework foundational to this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs for human motivation. This study uses Maslow's hierarchy as a theoretical lens to explore the experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Youth in the public-school setting in order to situate and address the students' needs and motivation.

### ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory***

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1945) is the theoretical framework applied in this study regarding the needs of homeless students. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been one of the most cited theories of human behavior (Henwood et al., 2015). This model is depicted as a pyramid that places physiological needs at the base, followed by safety, belonging, and esteem needs at higher levels in the pyramid (Henwood et al., 2015). Maslow's original theory suggested that in order to acquire higher levels of self-actualization, one's basic needs must be met first (Maslow, 1945). Maslow's work addressed human motivation in a hierarchical manner suggesting that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1945) is considered by many psychologists to be the most substantial theory of human motivation and one of the most used theories in research (Kenrick et al., 2010). This model proposes that people must fulfill basic needs before advancing onto self-actualization needs. Maslow (1945) categorized human needs into five different levels and stated that they are evolved sequentially: (a) physiological needs, (b) security needs, (c) social needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs.

**Physiological Needs.** Physiological needs include food, breathing, water, physical intimacy, and homeostasis (Maslow, 1945). Physiological needs include basic human needs that are necessary to sustain life such as food, clothing, and shelter.

**Safety Needs.** Safety needs include protection from bodily harm, physical health, and well-being (Maslow, 1943). Satisfaction of physiological needs in an individual results in an emergence of safety needs that include being free of fear of deprivation of basic needs. When working with homeless children or youth, school counselors might need to employ counseling interventions that address safety threats like bullying or abusive parenting (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008).

**Social Needs.** The next level in Maslow's hierarchy is social needs, which can only follow after safety needs have been satisfied. Social needs should focus on acquiring a sense of acceptance by others and a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1945).

**Self-esteem Needs.** Maslow (1945) described self-esteem as, "the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom" (p. 381). Self-esteem needs is the level in which a person is motivated to contribute his or her best efforts to the group in return for recognition.

**Self-actualization Needs.** Self-actualization is defined by Kenrick and his colleagues (2010) as the realization of reaching one's potential and fulfillment.

**Self-transcendence Needs.** Maslow's hierarchy of needs is commonly understood as five layers arranged sequentially in a pyramid diagram. However, in his later work, Maslow included a sixth level, self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Self-transcendence refers to a person's motivation to promote a cause bigger than oneself

such as service to others, social causes, and “to experience a communion beyond the boundaries of the self through peak experience” (Koltko-Rivera, 2006, p. 303).

Intrinsic values are also referred to as the sixth need in Maslow’s hierarchy (Skelsey, 2014). The commitment or connection to something beyond oneself often serves as a source of strength (Kenrick et al., 2010). The hierarchy of human needs outlined by Maslow was introduced in the 1940s, however, he continued to develop it throughout his career (Skelsey, 2014). Some authors have produced what they believe to be versions that more accurately reflect his later ideas (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Maslow’s theory has been applied to the fields of education and management (Kiel, 1999), social and emotional well-being (Ochocka et al., 2005), and behavior change in relation to health (Freund & Lous, 2012; Roychowdhury, 2011). Maslow’s theory has been applied as a theoretical model when studying recovery from mental illness (Clarke et al., 2012). However, there has been limited discussion and data to support how material deprivation, or a lack of basic needs such as housing, affect one’s mental health (Draine et al., 2002; Padgett et al., 2012). Maslow’s ideas have been applied effectively to the study of mental health of people struggling with homelessness (Padgett et al., 2013).

Maslow’s model hierarchically categorized needs. Maslow’s early work hypothesized that lower-level needs must be met first in order to reach higher-level needs (Freund & Lous, 2012). According to some researchers (Henwood et al., 2015) Maslow’s (1970) subsequent model suggests that the pursuit of self-actualization possibly is the end-result for the lack of not having basic needs meet. Thus, facing adversity and failure can lead to self-actualization.

## Summary

Some researchers contend that the phenomenon of homelessness is both a human condition and a societal problem (Toolis & Hammack, 2015; Toro et al., 2007). It is evident that the concept of homelessness and the homeless is ancient and found in all societies (Kusmer, 2002).

There are different definitions of homelessness depending on the agency engaging in the process with homeless people (NCHE 2014). However, the McK-VA definition is the one used in the K-12 public school setting and adopted for use in this study. For minors or UHY who are not together with their parents or legal guardians, parental consent can be a challenge to obtain, reducing the services they may receive such as health care, academic or enrichment field trips, or scholarship applications (NHCHC, 2011).

The causes contributing to homelessness are multifaceted and complex (McBride, 2012). Contributing factors to the phenomenon of homelessness include (a) poverty, (b) mental illness, (c) drug abuse and the use of illicit substances, (d) physical and or sexual abuse, (e) knowledge deficits, (f) natural disasters, and (g) the internalized factors of human personalities and its unique characteristics (McBride, 2012; Toro et al., 2007).

In chapter three the methodology for exploring the lived experiences of Hispanic HUY students enrolled in high school in an urban area in Texas will be explained.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The components of this chapter are: (a) research design, (b) selection of participants, (c) instrumentation, (d) data collection, (e) grand tour questions, (f) data analysis, (g) trustworthiness, and (h) summary of the chapter.

#### Research Question(s)

This phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived educational experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (HUHY) in high school. The following research question guided this study: *What are the lived educational experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?*

According to the 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (HUD, 2020), the number of homeless unaccompanied youth increased from the previous year. However, the literature on the experiences of the HUHY students has been very limited (Nuñez & Kim, 2012). This absence of consideration to HUHY, although their percentage has been increasing in the U.S. homeless population, was an issue of concern and, therefore, called for research.

#### Research Design

##### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research is closer to the participants' point of view than quantitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research allows the researcher to understand a lived experience, or phenomenon at a deeper level. Qualitative research consists of interpretative practices

used to understand a phenomenon through the experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomena refer to conscious experiences that are observable (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2012) also proposed that a phenomenological research study is designed to capture the perceptions of participants by giving voice to their experiences. Phenomenological research requires understanding and describing how research participants experience the event being studied (Patton, 2002).

### ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenology began as a philosophy and evolved into a research method commonly used in qualitative research (Dowling, 2007). Husserl (2012) suggested that knowledge is produced by “setting aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking to learn to see what stands before our eyes” (p. 45).

Phenomenology as a research process was developed by Husserl in an attempt to define a systematic method that would provide insight into the lived experiences of others (Christensen et al., 2017). Phenomenological philosophy attempts to find the ultimate truth and to describe a phenomenon in an objective manner (Christensen et al., 2017).

The purpose of Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology was to analyze phenomena objectively and in an unbiased way (Berglund, 2005). This process is known as bracketing. By implementing the procedure of bracketing, Husserlian phenomenology attempts to detract misrepresentation of an experience by reducing judgment (Tan et al., 2009). According to Goulding (2005) and Lukaitis (2013), Husserl strived to develop a model for describing and analyzing subjective experiences in an unprejudiced manner.

Husserl introduced the concept of epoché epoche which implies setting aside current thoughts, beliefs, and judgments in order to observe the phenomenon from an impartial viewpoint. Husserl called it epoché, meaning “to stay away from or abstain” from judgment (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Phenomenology as a research method, refers to the investigation of the first-person experience (Grossman, 1995; Patton, 2002; Pascal et al., 2010). The fundamental question of phenomenological inquiry is “What is the essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

### ***Transcendental Phenomenology***

Phenomenology as a methodological framework seeks the reality in individuals’ narratives of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Cilesiz (2011) describes transcendental philosophy as to being able to observe the phenomenon being studied from an objective point of view (Cilesiz, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2018) propose transcendental describes the essence from which a new perspective is observed and perceived as if for the first time (2018).

Phenomenological research is based on subjective reports of life experiences. However, by adhering to an organized scientific process, created knowledge can be validated (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is the scientific study of a subjective phenomenon in a systematic and objective manner (Moustakas, 1994). In the following sections, I present key elements and provide a basic structure of Husserl’s phenomenology.

**Intentionality, Noema, and Noesis.** Intentionality, noema, and noesis are fundamental principles in phenomenology. Intentionality is the principle that every mental act has meaning while noema is what is being experienced (Shahabi & Rassi, 2015). Noesis, on the other hand, is described as the way in which the phenomenon is being experienced. Approaching research in an objective manner and reflecting on what one has seen, will bring deeper meaning and knowledge of the phenomenon. No perception of a phenomenon is conclusive and deeper layers of meaning may unfold when one keeps searching. According to Moustakas (1984) in order to finally arrive at the essences of a phenomenon one must unify the external perception (noema) and the internal perception (noesis).

**Epoché, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis.**

To minimize researchers' bias when conducting transcendental phenomenological research Moustakas (1994) created a systematic investigative procedure that includes Epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Epoché is described as blocking biases and assumptions in order to explain a phenomenon in an impartial and detached manner (Christensen & Brumfield, 2010). This is a general predisposition the researcher must assume before beginning a phenomenological study. The process involves systematic steps to bracket assumptions and beliefs about a phenomenon in order to examine how the phenomenon presents itself in the world of the participant (Petitmengin, 2006). Epoché requires an open mind to observe the phenomenon and to abstain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994). The Epoché process has made accessible to empirical science the study of subjective experience (Vermersch, 2009; Petitmengin 2006).



Followed by the process of Epoché is phenomenological reduction: describing what is seen, externally and experienced internally, and the relationship between phenomenon and self. Moustakas (1994) presents this procedure in which the researcher must look and describe independently of any preconceived notions the phenomenon being studied. The method of phenomenological reduction refers to the inherited preconceptions of conscious phenomena which are pared away in order to reveal their essence, or primordial truth (Zahavi, 2019).

The next step in the research process is that of imaginative variation. In this stage, intuition is purely imaginative and not empirical (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The point of this exercise is to imaginatively stretch the proposed transformation to the edges until it no longer describes the experience (Brough, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1989). Through the imaginative variation process, the researcher can derive structural themes. Moustakas (1994) explained the imagination variation process as:

The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meaning through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals' and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words, the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience. (p. 85)

The final step in the phenomenological research as described by Moustakas (1994) is the combination of the values of the experience to emerge into the core or essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological studies involve asking the participants about their experience with the phenomenon, which in this study was homelessness, and allows the researcher to act as the instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2012). Moustakas (1994) advised that a researcher conducting a transcendental phenomenological study focus on the description of the participants' experiences and not on the researcher's experiences of the participants. Implementing a transcendental phenomenological research design is appropriate for the level of inquiry of this study. For this study, I used the following research question to guide the study. What are the lived educational experiences of HUHYP?

Since the objective of this research is to explore the lived experiences of the participants, I chose to use the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological data analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). I followed the indicated stages for data analysis which are discussed in detail in the data analysis section.

### **Selection of Participants**

For purposes of this study, I interviewed HUHYP as defined by the McK-VA Act. The McK-VA Act defines homeless youth as individuals under the age of twenty-one who lack a fixed and adequate nighttime residence (NCHE, 2018). All identified HUHYP homeless youth, whether in shelters, doubled-up, on the street, expelled, cast out by parents, or in any other homeless situation were approached and asked to participate in the study. The criteria for participating included: (a) active student attending high school, (b) currently identified as HUHYP at the time of the interview, (c) being eighteen-years-old or older since this is the legal age for the student to provide consent to participate in

the study, and (d) English speaking according to their Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) score or by attending all English classes. Participation in the interviews was completely voluntary. In addition, as part of the consent process, potential participants were informed that their answers were confidential, that they could choose to skip any questions that made them feel uncomfortable, and that their decision to participate or not was not to influence their eligibility for services or academic standing.

The objective was to enlist all the participants who met the established criteria in the LEA selected to participate in the study. However, due to the mobility of the participants, the objective was to carry the study with at least ten participants which researchers have established as a minimum (Creswell & Potts, 2018). According to Creswell (2012), in order to develop rich results in a phenomenological study there must be a minimal sample size suggestion of no less than ten.

Hennink et al. (2016) established sufficiency and saturation of information as the standards for determining a sufficient number of participants. Sufficiency indicates the number of participants required in the sample to accurately represent the population. On the other hand, saturation of information suggests the point where there is no new information being discovered from the data collection. Boyd (2001) considers appropriate to have two to ten participants as adequate to reach saturation and Creswell (2012) recommends "long interviews with up to ten people" for a phenomenological study (p. 65). Finally, Creswell (2012) noted, "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will help the researcher to understand the research question" (p. 185).

### **Local Education Agency and Institutional Review Board Approval**

Several steps were completed before being able to collect data. The first step was to submit for proposal approval through the dissertation committee. After the dissertation proposal was presented and accepted, the next step was to secure the LEA's approval for the study to take place with their students. The third step was to secure Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Once these steps were completed, the next phase was to select the participants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants since it allows for only those who fit the particular characteristics to participate (Creswell, 2012). This particular group of students had typically dealt with adversity in their young lives. Therefore, it was extremely important for this study to be carried out with particular care in the following areas: informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Informed consent was provided in detail to ensure the participants understood the objective of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Once informed consent was obtained from the participants, a demographic form was provided to the participants in order to obtain their basic demographic information: name, current address, gender, and date of birth. Data was then to be collected through semi-structured personal interviews.

Since the intent of this study was to work with at-risk youth students attending high school, the welfare of participants was a priority. These students had faced adversity in their young lives and the participants' protection and the disposal of collected data was of extreme importance. To protect the participants, the purpose of the study was explained in detail. The researcher also made himself available to answer any questions the participants might have before or after the interview.

## **Recruitment**

Legitimation and verification of the participants' homelessness and personal knowledge of participants' living conditions was conducted previously following the (LEA) established procedures for identification and validation of homeless students. Using purposeful sampling, homeless students were identified, and the criteria reviewed (Hispanic, homeless unaccompanied youth, eighteen-years-old or older, fluent in English) to ensure eligibility. The students were approached for possible participation via phone call by the researcher. If students agreed to participate in the study, a meeting was scheduled to perform the interview. After the initial contact, participants were invited to sign the consent form, which explained the nature and purpose of the study.

When conducting human subject research informed consent is an ethical and legal requirement (Escobedo et al., 2007). The consent to participate clearly outlined the purpose of the study and how the information gathered was to be used. Furthermore, the consent form was available in English at a high school reading level to increase the probability of individuals signing the consent form while being fully aware of what they are signing. A statement that participation was voluntary and that refusal to participate or terminating participation at any time did not involve penalty or loss of benefits to which the student is otherwise eligible was included in the consent form. In sum, obtaining informed consent from minors and other vulnerable populations is a fundamental attribute of the ethical process of research (Chappuy et al., 2008).

Participants were informed that they were to remain anonymous by applying a pseudonym for each participant's data. The participants were also assured that their participation was not going to affect their academic standing and their participation was

completely voluntary. Participants were also able to withdraw from the research study at any time. For the convenience of the participants, the interviews were conducted via Zoom or at the students' campuses. Specifically, the interviews were to take place at the high school counselors' suite after an introduction by the student's academic counselor if the student was to choose a face-to-face interview. This introduction was to facilitate the interview process.

### **Instrumentation**

Since the goal of this study was to explore the lived educational experiences of HUHYP, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into the participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews are profound and personal dialogues characterized by open and direct questions employed to elicit detailed narratives and stories (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were prepared ahead of time and this allowed the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. The use of semi-structured interviews was selected since this form of inquiry provides participants freedom to express themselves and supplies reliable qualitative data (Bernard, 1998; Miller & Glassner, 2011). Finally, semi-structured interviewing, according to Bernard (1988) is best used when the researcher may not get more than one chance to interview the participants. The goal of the researcher was to reach an understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Interviews allowed the opportunity to ask follow-up questions for clarification and to connect with the participants. This process also offered the youth an opportunity to speak about their particular experiences, circumstances, and share their viewpoints in a more comfortable and private setting.

### ***Grand Tour Questions***

A grand tour question is an opening request that solicits a broad response from the participant over a particular subject being studied (Brannen, 2007; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). From the point of view of the researcher, the grand tour questions are just the beginning of an interview journey and are followed by a variety of questions that probe deeper into the area being studied. According to Atkinson (2002), grand tour questions provide the researcher with the participants' perspective of the topic of interest, within the cultural framework of the participants. For my study the following grand tour questions were included:

1. Describe your current living situation.
2. What are the circumstances that led you to this situation?
3. As a UHY student in your particular living situation, describe your experience at school.
4. Tell a story that depicts a day in your life at school.
5. Name one thing that keeps you moving forward in school.

### **Data Collection and Interview Process**

Interviews with the participants were audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator. Recording allowed the interviewer to focus on interacting with the youth and away from the possible disruption of note-taking. This allowed for an accurate and verbatim transcription of the interviews. Once the interviews were conducted, transcriptions of the audio recordings followed. All transcriptions were made by the principal investigator. Then, the interview transcriptions were coded for themes in light of the research questions. Once transcriptions were completed, the audio

recordings were deleted. Similarly, at the conclusion of the research, notes were stored electronically and the electronic file containing such notes was password protected for security and for validation purposes stored in a locked cabinet. After three years all notes will be destroyed.

### **Privacy Concerns**

In qualitative research, confidentiality violations are of particular concern due to the rich descriptions of study participants (Tolich, 2004). The ultimate goal was complete confidentiality for every research participant, which Baez (2002) refers to as the ultimate mean to protect research participants from harm. To address the challenges for upholding the promise of confidentiality and keeping data stored securely, practical precautions for balancing rich data with the need to protect respondent confidentiality were taken into account.

Data security is critical to protect participants from harm which include protecting confidential personal information and their privacy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). According to Emanuel and Wendler (2008), protecting confidentiality in phenomenological research is an ongoing process that includes securing databases, locking filing cabinets, using pseudonyms, and interviewing participants in private spaces. Therefore, electronic and paper documents such as consent forms, audio recordings, printouts, or case tracking sheets that contain personal identifying information (PII) was stored securely by the principal investigator in locked file cabinets when not in use and were handled only by the researcher when actively used during the research. Furthermore, the consent form was physically separated from the subject's data. To protect the confidentiality of the subjects, other security measures were used. For



example, data was encrypted and emailed, sharing the password separately and securely to the coding team.

### **Data Processing**

For data processing, the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used as described by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' (1994) data processing procedure includes systematic steps to convey the overall essence of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method is popular among researchers due to the uniqueness of this method and the clear description of the steps (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Instead of using data analysis, it was deliberately chosen to use data processing as the general term. Groenewald (2004) and Hycner (1999), caution that the word "analysis" is not appropriate when using the phenomenological paradigm in a research study since analysis assumes "breaking into parts," and this would imply that the data is not studied as a "whole." The clear description of the steps and its efficiency to manage phenomenological data interested me since it fits the sample criteria and the question under investigation. The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method employs the following steps: (a) starting with the researcher's full descriptions of his individual experiences with the phenomenon, (b) reviewing and selecting relevant and non-repetitive statements from the verbatim transcripts; (c) grouping the significant statements into larger units of information; (d) constructing textual descriptions from the participant's verbatim transcripts; (e) constructing structural descriptions from the participant's transcripts; and (f) integrating the individual into composite textural and structural descriptions that represent the whole group (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, to explore the participants' lived experiences, data

processing was based on the comprehensive descriptions of their experiences organized following the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen phenomenological method as described by Moustakas (1994).

### **Trustworthiness**

To increase the rigor of the study, certain precautionary actions to ensure trustworthy findings were implemented. The researcher completed validation strategies to address and rule out threats to dependability and credibility of the study as described by Chenail (2011): (a) bracketing, (b) rich-thick data, (c) peer debriefing, (d) journaling, and (e) member checking.

### ***Bracketing***

Bracketing is a qualitative research practice used to reduce bias and preconceptions that might contaminate the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing is a process for distancing from previously held theories and assumptions in order to become a non-judgmental observer of the phenomenon being studied (Bertelsen, 2005). An essential concept of phenomenology is the belief that only from a non-judgmental stance can inquiry proceed freely without assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon (Simon, 2013).

Self-reflection enables the researcher to discuss their position within the study and how his or her personal beliefs and previous training might have influenced research findings (Chan et al., 2013; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Long & Johnson, 2000). As a researcher, my goal was to be reflective and as bias-free as possible in order to describe the reality of the participants from an objective perspective. In order to avoid unsuitable

subjective judgments during the research process, the researcher is required to deliberately bracket their own assumptions (Groenewald, 2004).

According to Miller and Crabtree (1992), bracketing is about the researcher putting away his or her own presumptions and entering into the individual's lifeworld to use the self as an objective observer. Furthermore, to maintain a disciplined bracketing strategy, the researcher must differentiate and balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as intuitions, inklings, or feelings. All notes must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data (Miller & Glassner, 2011).

As the principal researcher and practicing educator, I was aware that when interviewing students, I needed to remain neutral, setting aside my own views and reactions and to listen from the perspective of an objective researcher. Therefore, I implemented a strategy proposed by Chan et al. (2013), to prepare for data collection using face-to-face interviews, semi-structured interviews. The manner in which the researcher asks questions during the interview affects the direction of the interview and the way the participants answer the questions and tell their stories. To ensure that the information is objectively obtained, the use of semi-structured interviews is recommended. Chan et al. (2013) proposes that the researcher must ask questions focusing not on leading questions about their situation but listening carefully to the participants. However, it was difficult for me to not experience an emotional reaction to some of the situations and stories that the participants were voicing during the interviews. I served as the district Homeless Liaison. Nevertheless, I attempted to remain objective and to set aside my personal and professional experience when interviewing the

participants by bracketing my personal experiences and compartmentalizing my feelings at the time of the interviews.

Members of the coding team reflected on their experience of the subject. The Black, female doctoral graduate found the stories of some of the participants very challenging to digest. However, she was able to work through her own experience by taking notes. This process ensured careful reading and decoding the information properly. The second coding member was a White graduate student who was not familiar with working in the school setting. However, she had experience in the private setting where she had encountered participants with similar life stories. This particular coding member was able to compartmentalize her feelings towards the participant by using her experience in private practice.

### ***Rich, Thick Data***

Rich, thick data was collected through intense interviews with participants who have experienced the phenomenon. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the simplest approach to distinguish between rich and thick data is to think of rich as quality and thick as quantity. Therefore, thick data referred to the amount of information while rich data represented the depth and level of detail of the information captured.

The rich and thick data collected included extensive details describing the participants' lived experiences. Descriptions incorporated direct verbatim quotes from the participants. The data was "detailed and varied enough that it provided a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Chenail, 2011, p. 126). Providing large and quality descriptions is used to obtain validity since it requires the researcher to provide sufficient details about setting, inclusion criteria, sample characteristics, data collection,

and analysis methods in order for the reader to evaluate the conclusions made by the author (Long & Johnson, 2000; Ogunbayo et al., 2015).

### ***Peer Debriefing***

Peer debriefing is also known as analytic triangulation (Burns, 2015). This process embraces ongoing discussions between the principal researcher and a peer(s) who is not directly involved in the research project to address possible bias during the research methodology, data analysis, or interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tong et al., 2012). Peer debriefing enhances credibility and trustworthiness because it provides the researcher with the opportunity to verify that emergent themes originated from the data and are endorsed by an objective peer (Burns, 2015). The research plan included a peer to review the research process and discuss possible biases, values, and experiences that might contaminate the study. This individual was also knowledgeable about high school education and the McK-VA Act. An external peer serves as an auditor who examines the process and product of the research study for accuracy and observes if the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Creswell, 2012).

### ***Journaling***

According to Clarke (2006) and Hadi and Closs (2016) the use of a reflective diary can be beneficial to the researcher in maintaining self-awareness and effective bracketing. Therefore, in addition to audio recording, reflective notes are taken as the interviewer writes down his or her thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the interview (Chesney, 2000). The use of introspective notes, after the interviews, were helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the interviewer. Journaling was a key to developing personal interview skills and it was potentially less disruptive than

documenting these elements during the interview. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to keep a reflective journal in order to become aware of any personal biases since self-description promotes credibility of research findings (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

### ***Member Checking***

Member checking consists of seeking participant or respondent validation. Research themes are returned to participants to check for accuracy with their experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Due to the high mobility of homeless students, every attempt was made to contact the students in order to provide for member checking. However, after three attempts to follow-up with every participant for member checking, it was determined that the participants were not interested in this process and further contact was terminated.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the methodology of this phenomenological research study was described. The research was designed to explore the lived educational experiences of HUY who were identified as homeless while in high school. The selection of participants was presented, and the methodology and design of the research were discussed. Finally, the methods of data analysis were introduced. The results of the research are presented in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (HUHY) attending high school. This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data obtained through in-depth participant interviews. In this chapter, the biographical data of the ten students who participated in the study is presented. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. This is followed by a description of the data analysis processes and the themes that related to the phenomenon of experiencing homelessness while attending high school. This chapter includes: (a) a reintroduction of the research question, (b) presentation of the study setting, (c) participants demographics, (d) a review of data collection method and analysis, (e) evidence of trustworthiness, (f) results, and (g) a summary.

#### Restatement of Research Question

The research question of this study was: *What are the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?* The grand-tour questions designed to answer the research questions were:

1. Describe your current living situation.
2. What are the circumstances that led you to this situation?
3. As an HUHY student in your particular living situation, describe your experience at school.
4. Tell a story that depicts a day in your life at school.
5. Name one thing that keeps you moving forward in school.

By examining the experiences of Hispanic high school students experiencing homelessness, the meaningful and significant characteristics of their young lives were identified. The analysis of the data examined the distinctive structural and influential processes that shaped the interviewees' perceptions, which were considered their own entities (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to understand the phenomenological experience of becoming homeless, it was essential to understand the circumstances that led to that episode of homelessness and how the participants' growth and development influenced their identities. Therefore, this study was organized according to the grand tour questions that supported and informed the overarching research question.

### **Study Setting**

Purposeful criterion sampling was the sampling strategy used in this study. Therefore, all interviewees experienced an episode of homelessness during the school year in which they were interviewed. The shared setting or context of the participants derived from the structural description of their life and relationships in general, with their family of origin, school life, and sources of resilience. The participants' interviews were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 except for one student. This particular student felt more comfortable meeting at the high school of attendance. Participants were first approached by the principal researcher and then an overview of the research study was presented with a particular emphasis on answering any questions that the participants had.



## **Participant Demographics**

A homeless person in this study is defined as a student without a fixed and adequate nighttime residence (Hallett, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; NCH, 2014). There are opposing views on the question of what the right population sample size should be for qualitative phenomenological studies. In general, the sample size that scholars advocate for in qualitative studies ranges from five to 25 participants (Crain & Joehn, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; McBride, 2012).

In this study, the population sample was 10 homeless HUHYP that met the established criteria. Participants were recruited after being identified by the LEA on a first come basis. The researcher initially targeted 10 participants, a cohort made of nine females and one male. However, during the recruitment process, two potential participants could not be enlisted for the study. However, after further recruitment, ten homeless students were retained for data collection. All participants were recruited from the same local education agency (LEA).

Ten Hispanic high school students who met the established criteria (Hispanic, Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, English Speaker) participated in this study. The final sample consisted of three males and seven females. All participants were 18-21 years of age. All participants were seniors and attended public high schools. Two of the interviewees had less than 4 years in the United States. The participants were identified as Hispanic based on their enrollment paperwork and description provided by the (LEA). The selected LEA served at the time of the study a population of 62,359 students with 30,637 being females (48%) and 31,712 males (52%). The homeless population at the time of the study mirrored the demographics of the students with a total of 322 identified

homeless students, 152 females and 170 males. Seven of the ten participants were living with a friend's parent who had taken them in, one participant was living with his boss, another participant was living with a friend from work, and only one participant was living on his own. Data from the LEA was unavailable at the time of the study to compare the participants of the study with the population of employed students.

Descriptions of the participants are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Pseudonyms and Employment Information*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Employed</b>
<b>Daisy</b>	20	12	Yes
<b>Iris</b>	18	12	No
<b>Jasmine</b>	18	12	No
<b>Jose</b>	18	12	Yes
<b>Liana</b>	18	12	Yes
<b>Lilly</b>	18	12	Yes
<b>Rose</b>	18	12	Yes
<b>Rosemary</b>	18	12	No
<b>Miguel</b>	18	12	Yes
<b>Adam</b>	18	12	No

## **Data Collection**

The participants' homelessness episode was determined by the LEA's established procedures for identification and validation of homeless students. The students were approached for possible participation via phone call by the researcher. If students agreed to participate in the study, a virtual meeting was scheduled to conduct the interview.

Students who expressed an interest in participating in the study were verified to meet the research criteria and signed informed consent documents provided by the researcher. To protect anonymity all of the participants were assigned pseudonyms; and to increase their levels of comfort, participants chose a convenient time to complete the interview. Nine of the ten research interviews were conducted electronically. Interviews conducted electronically were done via Google Meet, a HIPAA compliant video application (Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Based on the preference of the participant, one interview was conducted face-to-face following LEA Covid-19 established procedures (wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitized space, etc.).

The participants' interviews lasted approximately 30-50 minutes and were audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and any identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality. Then the audio files were converted into text by the principal researcher. The audio recordings were replayed and verified to ensure the information was transcribed correctly and sent to the participants for member checking, which provides the participants to review the transcriptions for accuracy. The ten participants were either not reached for verification or chose to opt out of the member checking process. After several attempts to contact participants and invite them to respond, the researcher opted to mark transcription text as unverified, since the

participants did not respond. The results of the member checking process are included in Table 2. Upon the completion of the member checking process, the audio files were destroyed.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Pseudonyms and Member Checking Results*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Member Checking</b>
<b>Daisy</b>	No
<b>Iris</b>	No
<b>Jasmine</b>	No
<b>Jose</b>	No
<b>Liana</b>	No
<b>Lilly</b>	No
<b>Rose</b>	No
<b>Rosemary</b>	No
<b>Miguel</b>	No
<b>Adam</b>	No

### **Trustworthiness**

Each transcript was then analyzed by a coding team consisting of the researcher and two doctoral graduates. The researcher is a Hispanic, male doctoral candidate. The coding team consisted of one Black, female doctoral graduate and one White, female doctoral graduate. Both of the coding members wrote their dissertation in the phenomenological

tradition. Both members are experienced in this tradition and have collaborated with the principal researcher in other projects.

As the main researcher and practicing educator, I was aware that when interviewing students, I needed to remain neutral, setting aside my own views and reactions and to listen from the perspective of a researcher. Since I served as the district Homeless Liaison, it was difficult for me to not react to the situations where the participants were denied enrollment by the LEA and experiences that the participants were voicing during the interviews. Nevertheless, I attempted to remain objective and to set aside my personal and professional experience.

Both members of the coding team reflected on their experience of the subject. The Black, female doctoral graduate found that the note-taking process itself was helpful, as it ensured that she was reading carefully and decoded the information properly. Not all the information she coded was relevant but noting was informative and contributed to the formation and general overview of the themes. On the other hand, the second coding member was not familiar with the school setting and found that jotted notes alone served to better understand the subjects.

The coding team met over several days and completed Moustakas' (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis for each participant's interview. The coding team collaborated and discussed the different statements when there might have been a difference of opinion. This process employs phenomenological reduction, which includes bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing invariant qualities and themes, and constructing textural description (Moustakas, 1994). The use of horizontalization gives equal value to each of the participants' statements (Moustakas, 1994). These statements

were grouped into themes. Themes were then analyzed into a description of what the phenomena was for the participants. Then, the descriptions were examined from different perspectives (imaginative variation) and eventually arrived at a description of the final themes. The textural-structural descriptions that emerged represented the meaning and essence of the experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Descriptive themes were generated by each coding team member by repeating the above steps. Finally, the themes were integrated into a common description of the group experience (Moustakas, 1994). Further data analysis was completed to verify emerged themes with a White, male retired school counselor, through an in-depth examination of their lived experiences of the participants.

## **Themes**

Six general themes emerged from the interview responses after conducting Moustakas' (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. The general themes were (a) personality traits, (b) family of origin, (c) current living situation, (d) school experience, (e) sources of resilience, and (f) an economic concern. Each theme and the corresponding subthemes are presented below as they emerged.

1. Personality traits (Resiliency of Participants)
  - a. Intrinsic motivation
  - b. No little jobs: Examples of resiliency
2. Family of origin
  - a. Breakdown with family of origin and absent parents
  - b. Physical or emotional abuse

3. Living situation
  - a. Current living situation
  - b. Uncertainty
4. School experience
  - a. A trusted adult
  - b. School atmosphere
5. Sources of resilience
  - a. Faith
  - b. Long term perspective
6. An economic concern
  - a. A motivation to stay in school

### ***Theme 1: Personality Traits***

Personality traits in this study refers to the qualities that the coding team observed of the participants when analyzing the interviews. In particular, character traits were described in the context of the participants' specific situations, such as facing homelessness as an opportunity or a challenge. According to Roberts et al. (2015), personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This general theme incorporated two subthemes: (a) intrinsic motivation; a desire to do better, and (b) a no "little job" mentality which shows examples of resilience. The participants reflected on the experiences that currently impacted them in their academic settings.

**Intrinsic Motivation - Desire to Be Better.** According to Noor and Mohammed (2016), intrinsic motivation is an internal drive that reflects the intimate personality aspects of individuals. These researchers propose that intrinsic motivation occurs when one acts without any obvious external rewards; simply to enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn, or actualize one's potential.

Daisy was kicked out by her parents when she refused to take on a full-time job. Her parents believed that she was too old to continue school and wanted her to contribute financially to the household. When Daisy moved to the United States, she was placed three years behind in school. Daisy lived in a church her senior year and when asked about one thing that kept her moving forward in school, she responded:

I feel that what we go through in high school is little in comparison to what we will face in real life. No, not that that is not real; but I mean the responsibilities of adulthood and trying to be a responsible and a good adult for society. And if we start to quit from the beginning, we won't be able to do well at the end. And it is better to be strong, to trust in the Lord and fight and give everything that one can give and, in the end, say that I achieved this through many people; but thank God I achieved it rather than to regret what would have been of me had I pushed myself little more; what would have been if I had tried to do this or to ask for help or do that. I feel that a person's courage, aim to strive or get ahead without needing to quit or without having to say I have not backed up is something greater than any knowledge a person might possess.



Iris was living with a friend from work at the time of the interview. Iris was kicked of her home by her mother, who abused her physically, when she turned eighteen years of age. Iris experienced a period of homelessness where she stayed with friends, 24-hour laundromats, or restaurants. Iris expressed her motivation to keep going in the following excerpt:

I'm graduating, and I'm planning on going to college and I want to work to help students like me. So, they do not have you know... not everyone has that "click" to come back. People drop out ...all the time. People drop and think "what's the point?". And I want to do something to change that. I tell myself all the time, "I'm gonna change this". And I know I am.

Jasmine spoke about her motivation and desire to become a medical doctor. Jasmine lived with her father but due to constant conflict, she decided to move in with her biological mother. However, after a short period of time, Jasmine's mother and her half-sisters kicked Jasmine out and she was forced to move in with a friend's parent. In the following portion, Jasmine addressed what motivated her to keep moving forward:

I want to keep on coming to school because I want to get an education because my parents did not complete high school. I want to be a surgeon. I always saw my dad having different jobs, more than one job... working hard for everything. I have the opportunity to go to school and get a high paying job like a doctor.

Jose traveled alone to the United States from Honduras through Mexico and spent a few months in a detention center. He originally moved in with his older brother and resided there for a few months. However, after his brother moved away Jose spent two

weeks living in his car until he was able to find his own apartment. Jose expressed similar assertions regarding his motivation:

So, when I came here, I wanted to learn English because I know that this is important because when they graduate in Honduras and they come here they don't speak any English. And it's gonna be really hard. So that's why I wanted to do something else. And yeah, that's why. It's hard to explain because I just want to be someone good. So, the people can say, "Oh, this man could do it." To help other people, because if he could do it, I could do it too.

Liana lived with her mother in different precarious living situations. They would stay in hotels or with friends or acquaintances who would take them in. Liana lived in this manner until a friend's mother took her in. Liana's mother was an alcoholic who abused her. However, Liana's main concern was that after every move her mother would not re-enroll her at school. Liana had a similar premise regarding her motivation to continue in school:

What keeps me coming to school? Is because I know that if I do not finish school, I would feel incomplete. I would feel like I would throw my whole life. Because like I feel my graduation is ahead of me and is pulling me up. Every time I come to school, I go up, like. I am closer to my career. And I want a good life like because I see the way my mom is and how she didn't finish school. My older brother he also dropped out and he is struggling right now too. And I know that if I go to school, I can get my degree and go to college and I can be somebody. And that is what brings me to school... I want a normal life. I want to be able to have something that I work for... and be able to have something that will bring me a

good life. I know that is the only way, you can't drop out of school, you can't not go to school and not work for it, and think you are going to have it, everything how it's supposed to be.

Lilly lived with her grandparents after her mother's death. Lilly described her grandparents as very traditional and strict. They often asked Lilly to drop out of school and get a job instead and contribute financially to the household. Lilly was taken in by a friend's mother. Lilly described wanting to keep on moving forward below:

See, when I hear of students like that, I always question why don't they prove those people or those obstacles wrong? That is honestly what keeps me going. You see my grandparents don't believe in me. My family tends to look down upon education over work. But I am like, you guys can go ahead and think that, but you know what? I'm going to go ahead and pursue a higher education so that later on I am the one bringing in the big bucks. I am the one happy, am gonna be the one who is gonna be able to provide for my children without thinking I am gonna be in debt, I'm gonna be successful in the end and I'm gonna prove you wrong. That is what I want to do.

Rosemary lived with her great-grandmother after her father was deported back to his country of origin. Rosemary reported that her mother was in and out of her life but was never constantly involved. In fact, her biological mother was not even allowed to "see her." Rosemary described her great-grandmother as distant and emotionally abusive. Rosemary shared that on her eighteen birthday she was taken in by an old female friend of her dad's after an argument with her guardian who kicked her out of the house.

Rosemary's intrinsic motivation was observed in the paragraph below when answering the question about what kept her moving forward:

School. The dream of not struggling, the dream of "giving back." Maybe one day I can help someone who is in the same situation as me. I would love to do that too because I really wish someone could do that for me right now. That is what motivates me. The dream of one day having my own house, have my career.

**No Little Jobs: Examples of Resilience.** Six of the participants expressed a clear desire to better themselves. They feared being trapped in entry-level positions for life. The participants mentioned friends and relatives who had to work several jobs just to try to survive day-to-day. Liana expressed her concern clearly:

You have to go to school and work for it. Just like other people who are lawyers and doctors, they went to school for it, it wasn't easy for them! They had to work for it, they had to go to school. They had to study. They had to do all these things... and they did it. So, if they can work for it, I can work for it too. And I want to, it's just a want...I want to do it, I do not want to be sitting at a little job, like a McDonalds or something. I want to be somebody, a lawyer, a nurse, I want to be up there.

Daisy expressed how she wanted to continue learning despite the challenges:

He (the participant's father) wanted for me, that instead of studying, I start working and helping them or building what they wanted to build; but my goal has always been to develop intellectually. Not so much to work, because I know that I have much ability for learning, to be someone other than just an employee.

Jose also expressed his desire to have a better job. He talked about the lack of opportunities in his country of origin even when having a degree. He wanted to learn English and complete his degree:

Well, in Honduras is very hard, it's difficult. People go to school and graduate. Then they come here (USA) and work construction works and all that. But I wanted something else. I wanted to come here and study, get my education.

Jasmine showed a similar desire to become someone educated in order to have a better life without having to work odd jobs:

I want to be a surgeon. I always saw my dad having different jobs, more than one job... working hard for everything. I have the opportunity to go to school and get a high paying job. I want to be a doctor.

Lilly expressed a desire to pursue higher education and was willing to work hard to accomplish her goals. She mentioned the aspiration of not settling on a short-lived, low-paying job:

What you are dealing with now will pay off later. In this society with you being Hispanic with very little like no, like high school is something but is not up there either. So, with little education it may or may not be a factor that will stop you from getting where you want to be... There is no shortcut in life. You always have to go through the tough parts, through the patchy roads, and that's gonna hurt, that's gonna beat you around, but if you can think that you'll eventually be there, that you'll be going to the Bahamas, going to the beach and going in your fancy robe, and just kind of stay positive for the long term.

Rosemary also talked about having the will to get an education in order to have better opportunities and a better job:

There were times, I felt like, “That’s it, no more, I’m just gonna get a regular job” but fast money also goes very fast. So, I do not want to do that to myself... And breaking off my family circle. None of them. I will be the first one to graduate; I will be the first one to go to college. I will do it!

Rose lived in a hotel and then with a friend. She was almost withdrawn from school and had to research her rights as a homeless student. Rose emailed the state agency that protects homeless students and reached out to the LEA’s homeless liaison in order not to be withdrawn from school.

The school was trying really hard to kick me out and one of the AP’s wanted me withdrawn, she was the one wanting me withdrawn from the school, but I can’t withdraw from school without my parent. I can’t enroll without my parent, I tried to explain that to them, but they weren’t listening, and they were talking about me paying a fee, like an “out of district” fee, but they didn’t kind of leave that alone so I emailed the state, I emailed you and you e-mailed the AP and that was when they like backed off but they were trying really hard to kick me out of the school. And I did try to talk to the counselor, I talked to the crisis counselor, but she just gave me the shoulder kind of like “eh...” I’m a debate student and you know I’m not gonna let people mess with me, so I looked it up like on Google, “Can they kick you out of school if you are like homeless, if you don’t have a stable house. It was just Google and then one thing led to another and I just found Homeless Youth Association, and that is how I found you and emailed you.

## ***Theme 2: Family of Origin***

In this study, family of origin refers to the immediate caregivers of the participants. Family of origin was discussed as the family that the participants grew up with. However, it may also include grandparents, other relatives or divorced parents who cared for the participants during part of childhood. This theme incorporated two subthemes: (a) breakdown with caregivers and absent parents, and (b) physical or emotional abuse. The participants reflected on the experiences that influenced or led to their currently living situation.

**Breakdown with Caregivers and Absent Parents.** Five of the participants explained that after their period of homelessness there was a breakdown of communication with their caregivers. Furthermore, some of the participants elaborated on how their biological parents were not involved in their lives at all.

When Daisy was kicked out by her parents for refusing to work full-time and contribute financially, her relationship with her biological father was completely terminated. Daisy explained that her mother wanted to continue to have contact with her, but out of respect for her father she also stopped all connection. Daisy said the following regarding the relationship with her parents:

I didn't talk to them at all, because my dad ... well my dad is a colonel in El Salvador, so he has a very strong character, very strong, very ... a very decisive character. So, if he wants to teach someone a lesson, he says "I'm going to teach him a lesson, a lifelong lesson." And this doesn't go with me anymore, because I know him. If I spoke and needed something from him, he would say "no, it was your decision, see how you do it."

Iris described how her biological mother would regularly abuse her physically as a form of discipline or when upset. However, one time her mother was reported to the authorities and she reacted by beating Iris and kicking her out of the house and withdrawing her from school. Iris described this episode in the following paragraph:

Yes, she beat me. I was black and blue all over my body. You know, she was always really careful not to hit me where people could notice... my Mom signed me out and got me out. I just know, I was dropped out. I'm not sure which one is which, but I know I was. And, um, I returned to school myself without my mother, without anyone.

Jasmine described arguing a lot with her biological father and choosing to leave to move in with her mother. However, after a short time of moving in with her biological mother, she was kicked out and she reported a total breakdown in their relationship.

I lived with my dad ever since I was two. And me and my Dad started to have some problems. We argued a lot. And then that led to me moving out and I went to live with my Mom. And I hadn't lived with my Mom. I barely talked to my Mom, and so I moved in with her. So that was it. And we started having issues, and she kicked me out of the house, and I ended up having to live with my friend.

Liana lived with her biological mother after her father passed away. However, after many periods of instability and physical abuse, she moved out and started living with a friend's mother. After Liana moved out, she mentioned that the relationship with her mother became unstable and sporadic at best.

It's like we could go about one to three months without talking. Usually when we go like 3 months without talking, my brothers will call me and tell me how she's



doing and how she is being. She doesn't have a job. So, I will call her and tell her, like, Mom, you need to get a job and tell my stepdad you need to get a job. Like ya'll should have a job, I have a job and she gets mad and she gets like, "You're a little girl and you don't know." And I'm like well, mom I have a job and I'm going to school and if I can do it, then you can do it too. And she will just hang up the call and she won't call me for like two or three months.

Rose lived with her parents until she turned eighteen years of age. Rose mentioned that her mom used to tell her: "When you turn 18 you are getting out of the house." Rose believed it was a probability but not an expectation. Rose mentioned having been surprised by being kicked out and how that terminated the relationship with her parents:

I got kicked out. Me and my parents had an argument. And they just kicked me out. My Mom, I mean she already had issues, like mental issues, so she just kicked me out. And I lived with my sister after that, but then, she has five of them in a two- bedroom apartment and there wasn't enough space so I lived in a hotel for a little bit, and then the lady from work offered to let me stay there temporarily... Ever since I was like 12, my Mom would tell me, when you turn 18, you gotta go. So it was like that, when you turn 18 you got to go. She was like Ok, you are 18 you gotta go...I wasn't even thinking of moving out yet. But I was fine at the house, you know! But it was surprising, in a way it was but then again it wasn't

**Physical or Emotional Abuse.** Four of the participants experienced violence, either witnessed violence or were abused physically or emotionally. These findings are similar to other studies where housing insecurity experienced by youth and families reported physical and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, and sex-trafficking while staying in shelters, on the streets, or while staying with acquaintances, family, or strangers (Morton et al., 2017). For instance, Iris reported ongoing physical abuse:

I would come back the next day (to school) and I come back with a bruised eye. Obviously because my mother she was upset I was taking a while with the officer and she got mad because I didn't come home as soon as she told me to... Yes, she beat me. I was black and blue all over my body. You know, she was always really careful not to hit me where people couldn't notice... But this time she hit me and it was right here and it was all down here and I had bruises all here (participant pointing to her eye and face).

Liana reported similar abuse by her mother:

When I was like 14, she was, she would drink a lot. And she would, when she would drink, she would get mad, she would get mad over little things like, anything that she would find to get at she would get mad at and I feel like she would just take it out on me... But whenever she would get drunk, she would get mad and she would bring up my dad, and she would start arguing with me and um she would like, start getting my stuff and moving it outside and tell me to like "go find a place"... she would sometimes come up to me and push me and fight with me, and my brothers would have to get her off because I wouldn't touch my mom.

Lilly reported living with her great-grandmother and while she did not report physical abuse, there was emotional abuse:

My grandparents decided that they would keep us instead and take pity and decided that if we were separated, since me and my siblings have different fathers, we would have all been split all over the place. And yes, so they kept us together, but the thing is, they already had a lot of problems because whenever someone is sick, my mom was hospitalized for 4 years, and that made my grandpa and my grandma go in debt by a lot. The funeral cost was also too much. So, my grandparents were always like, they would get upset that I wasn't working, that I wasn't trying to work... My mom actually dropped out in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade I believe, she was a wild person though, she preferred to be "out and about" you know, and so my grandma would start comparing me to my mom "At this rate you are gonna end up just like her. You're gonna end up with so many drugs in your system, you probably won't be able to keep up." and she was like, "OK if that is what you want. You don't want to deal with this, you don't want to deal with me and your grandfather you can just leave."

Rosemary reported living with her great-grandmother and while she did not report physical abuse, there was emotional abuse. She shared a story of abuse and neglect as reflected in the paragraph below:

I was living with my great-grandmother, but it was a very hostile place and then I decided that I didn't want to have my senior year be ruined by the drama and the name-calling all that, there was verbal abusive violent environment for me that I just didn't want to be involved with any more... I was around 8 years old. So, I

went to live with my grandmother, but my custody was with my aunt. But my aunt was not a very stable person, so I felt more comfortable with my grandmother. So legally, I was supposed to be with my aunt so that was already trouble, they would do home-checks and we would “fake” that I live there. They would do a home-check, that I would be safe, and I would be there. So, we got that situated and my aunt signed over custody to my grandmother. But my mother was also in and out of my home and she was not allowed to see me... So, my grandmother took care of me and I was abused by her and have the scar to prove it. I could show it to you, but it hurts very much. So, my great-grandmother came back from El Salvador and she found out that I was hit by her, so my great-grandmother sent my grandmother back to El Salvador.

### ***Theme 3: Living Situation***

**Current Living Situation.** Current living situation referred to the actual living situation at the time of the interview. In some instances, some students found short, temporary lodging with friends and acquaintances, had lived in hotels, in a car, with a friend’s parent, or in a church. Five of the ten participants were living with a friend’s parent. Two were living independently, after having lived in a hotel or in a car respectively, and one of the participants was living in a church at the time of the interview. One participant was living with his supervisor from work. Four of the students who were living with their friend’s parents and reported feeling like a burden or unwelcomed in the household.

Jasmine reported living with a friend’s parent in the following paragraph:

I am currently live with my friend’s mom, well, my friend doesn’t live there, she

lives with her boyfriend. I just stay there... Um, I lived with my Dad ever since I was two. And me and my Dad started to have some problems. We argued a lot. And then that led to me moving out and I went to live with my Mom. And I hadn't lived with my Mom. I barely talked to my Mom, and so I moved in with her. So that was it. And we started having issues, and she kicked me out of the house, and I ended up having to live with my friend.

Liana also reported living with a friend's mother after leaving her mother and siblings. Liana made decision to leave her mom in order to continue attending school. She described her current living situation as follows:

So, right now, I live with one of my friend's parents. But it's kind of difficult because um like the way I live is I always have to be doing something. Like I always have to be at work or if I am at home, I feel like I have to be obligated to be doing something. Like I can't just sit down and like do my homework without somebody getting mad. I feel like anything I do that could like bother his mom, and she could easily just kick me out just because.

Lilly also described living with a friend after she left her grandparents' house. Lilly recounted telling her friend about her living situation and how her friend responded by letting her know that she was welcome to live with his family.

Um, like right now my living situation is that am living with a friend and the reason why I am living with this friend is because I was basically, removed from my home. I lived with my grandparents for quite a few years ... And so, I ended up telling a friend about what just happened, and that friend was like, hey, let me try to talk to my parents, and see what they have to say. And I'm like, OK, and

she said, “they are willing to work something out with you”. So I said Ok, and the next thing you know I am packing my bags and with the money I had saved up from my job getting an Uber and getting a ride over there and I end up sitting down and chatting with her parents and they were like, “We’re willing to give you, let you share a room with your friend but we won’t be able to provide for you financially or anything so if you want to get a job that will come in handy for you.” Because they already had like, I want to say they had 5 children in total.

Rose left her parents’ house after being kicked out. She lived with her sister for a short period of time then moved into a hotel. Finally, Rose moved in with a friend from work. Rose described her experience below:

My Mom, I mean she already had issues, like mental issues, so she just kicked me out. And I lived with my sister after that, but then, she has five of them in a two-bedroom apartment and there wasn’t enough space, so I lived in a hotel for a little bit, and then the lady from work offered to let me stay there temporarily.

Rosemary described a similar experience after leaving her grandparent’s house. She was contacted by a family member of her father and decided to move in with this person to avoid more hostility. She described her experience in the following paragraph:

I was living with my grandmother, but it was a very hostile place and then I decided that I didn’t want to have my senior year be ruined by the drama and the name-calling all that, there was verbal abusive violent environment for me that I just didn’t want to be involved with any more... I got reunited with, I call her my mother. But she was a very close friend of my dad’s. Unfortunately, he got deported when he went back. We kind of lost connection and communication but

when I turned 18, she decided to contact me. There were a lot of family problems, because of this she did not want to contact me. She did offer me her home, that's where I am currently living.

**Uncertainty.** Participants mentioned that one of the biggest stressors about homelessness is the unpredictability and uncertainty of what might be next: "What if the people you are staying with just kick you out?" said Jasmine. The participants that were living with their friends' parents reported feeling like a burden to their hosts and living with a constant fear of insecurity.

Jasmine described feeling comfortable living with her friend's mother. However, she was concerned about the possibility of being asked to leave:

Me and my friend aren't friends anymore. But me and her mom are fine. But I think is going to become a problem. And it hurts because I'm staying with her mother and she's still her daughter. And I'm gonna have to go back with my dad because I can't go back to my mom.

Liana recounted similar sentiments about her housing arrangement. Liana reported feeling that she had to be in a constant state of helping to ensure her friend's mother did not consider her a burden.

So, right now I don't, I live with one of my friend's parents. But it's kind of difficult because um like the way I live is I always have to be doing something. Like I always have to be at work or if I am at home, I feel like I have to be obligated to be doing something. Like I can't just sit down and like do my homework without somebody getting mad... when I first moved in she would get mad at him and she would be like to me, "You know what? Just get your stuff and

call your mom and figure out where you are gonna go.” So it’s like ever since then I gotta feel obligated so I feel like I gotta be doing something, so I don’t get kicked out.

Lilly also talked about feeling anxious about living with a friend. She was aware that her living arrangement could change at any given moment. She was living with her friend’s parents.

I end up sitting down and chatting with her parents and they were like, “We’re willing to give you, let you share a room with your friend, but we won’t be able to provide for you financially or anything so if you want to get a job that will come in handy for you.” Because they already had like, I want to say they had 5 children in total... And so, they didn’t want to have to include me in on that. And I was like, “OK” and their rent was like over 2,000, and the house wasn’t even like that big for like to be that much. So, I understood where I was at and was like OK.

#### ***Theme 4: School Experience***

**A Trusted Adult.** The participants were recruited from four different public high schools. While there were varied school experiences ranging from posing barriers to enrollment to paying for cap and gown, there was one common denominator in five of the participants: the close connection to one staff member in the school.

During her interview, Daisy spoke about being shy and not willing to ask for help. She did not want others to worry or talk about her situation. She described the help of one of her counselors:



I am the type of person that I don't like to tell people. So, I didn't want people to worry thinking: "Ah ... she's going through that." But I kept studying and went to work and even though I was sleepy in class I did my job. I think the fact that teachers knew me from the year before helped a lot since I always did my job and everything. Either I submitted my work late or submitted it fast, but I always did my work in a responsible manner at school. Sometimes it was difficult for me to participate in extracurricular activities like outside of school. That was the hardest thing of all, but the help from the school, from the teachers, from Miss Counselor, the person who supported me the most here at school was huge. They always met with me.

Jose reported a similar experience in his school. He talked about having many friends at school and feeling supported. He felt particularly close to his counselor:

Oh, I like it. I have a lot of friends. Pretty good teachers. A lot you know. It's pretty good. I am learning a lot. Trying to talk to people. You know when you first come here you don't know even the language... My counselor is nice. She's been helping a lot with the applications and all that. The SAT test, we are gonna have it tomorrow. She gave me all the papers and all that and she helped me complete them. The application and all that. She's pretty nice.

Liana talked about the support she was receiving at her school by her counselor and building principal. When asked about her school experience she responded the following:

My experience here at school has been good, like perfect, because when I came here my counselor, she is the reason why I am graduating this year. When I first

came here, she said that not a lot of kids would be able to do what I did... she made me do 9 and 10 grade together, because I missed the last two months of the nine grade... so I failed... There is a lot of teachers, counselors, and even the principal, they all know my situation. They always talk to me, but my counselor she know how to put things together for me so I succeed... Yes, and also the principal. I used to be scared to talk to her... because they can do anything, change anything, take away from anything... I was so scared! But then when I talked to her, she gave me like the best advice, the things that I needed to hear, I told her everything, I was scared but I was, if they are telling me I need to talk to her, then I have to talk to her. I told her everything and we talked for about two hours, she gave me like the best advice, she told me that I came this far, and there is no point in dropping it, and wasting all these things that I did to graduate, to be somebody... Yes, and she never turned her back on me... I never got like a surprise, like the principal called this person and you are going to have to leave... you are going to have another place, you are not going to be able to stay. She never did that! She always kept her word. She always treats me, like she knows me, like I am a part, like a family to her... And that is what helps.

Lilly was hesitant about sharing her living situation. In fact, it was only discovered after filling out scholarship applications that she was in fact a HUHY. However, Lilly mentioned that once the school found out about her living arrangements, the school staff became more involved and helped with different resources.

Shortly after that (School staff found about situation) I actually had one of my AP's bring me down and tell me that the school is notified of this and because of

this the school would be able to take care of my cap and gown which I was very happy and excited to hear...and that was like the very first thing that the school was able to provide and it was like, a few weeks later... I actually emailed my counselor who my counselor has actually been a big part in all of this...

Rosemary disclosed how school was her refuge from the house environment. She mentioned that she was quiet and many of her teachers were not aware of her situation. However, she also mentioned that once her school counselor found out, she became more involved:

My counselor was very good about talking to me. But other than that, there was no help. There was also another counselor, I'm not sure of her name but she usually comes and would get me and ask how am I doing? I was like, "I'm OK" whether I was lying or not or, "I'm fine" to get a pass, So I could go back to my class.

**School Atmosphere.** Five of the participants responded as having a positive school experience. However, two of the students had negative experiences with their administrators, and the rest had mixed feelings about the support provided at the school. The participants that reported having a positive school experience also reported having a good relationship with at least one trusted adult in the school. Two of the participants reported having experienced no support from the school and one of the participants had a very negative school experience with an administrator posing many barriers for enrollment.

During the interview, Daisy described the help of one of her counselors. She also spoke of the overall school experience:

Above all, that... give, not thanks, but rather recognition to all the people who work are behind helping us, putting up with us, and supporting us. Eh... people such as the counselors, the teachers, in that case you and many people who are part of the school, who know about our situation and who are always encouraging us saying, "You can do it; keep going; you will achieve." For me, that is the most important point of being in such a situation and that there be people behind trying to help us; because it is practically their dream to see us be successful. So, ahm,, like trying to motivate many people to maintain the capacity and strength to continue supporting more people. Keep doing it, because it is something very important that makes its mark on the life of a person and many times perhaps the destiny that person may have and opens for him better opportunities.

Jose also talked about his experience at school as positive. However, he mentioned that it was important for the teachers to build a connection with their students:

I really liked to come to school. And because of my friends and because of my teachers, I like talking to my teachers, cause they are pretty nice. There are teachers that are more than others, but they have been pretty nice and helping me a lot. So, I think if they can talk to the students, it would be better. Because you know they have to feel comfortable with you. Because it's really nice when you can talk to people.

Liana was very appreciative about her school experience. She expressed a high opinion of the school she was attending when compared to others that she previously attended:

There is a lot of teachers, counselors, and even the principal, they all know my situation. They always talk to me, but my counselor, she know how to put things together for me so I succeed.

Lilly mentioned how originally, she did not reveal her living situation to the school staff. However, once the school personnel found out about her situation, they provided resources and were more understanding:

It was actually interesting to me because I didn't know about this Unaccompanied Youth thing, I didn't really know what stance I was in until I started filling out the FAFSA. I had completed my FAFSA when it first came out in October, but the school had invited someone to come and talk to the people who were in the top percent of the class, and I honestly, I don't know her name, but I do remember that when we were filling out, she was the one who brought us to the cafeteria and said, "Hey if you guys haven't filled out the Aldine Education Foundation Scholarship or if you guys have not completed your FAFSA, you need to do that now and I am here to assist if anyone needs help"... I live with someone; they provide me with a room. And um, food on my, um, plate... shortly after that I actually had one of my AP's bring me down and tell me that the school is notified of this and because of this the school would be able to take care of my cap and gown which I was very happy and excited to hear.

Rosemary described an optimistic school experience after leaving her grandparent's house. She described her experience in the following paragraph:

At school, it was my escape, and I am so thankful that I chose that route because who knows? I could have been out on the streets...I always found my love for

school. That's where all my friends were at school. I knew that even if I left, I would make school my priority, my education.

Iris presented a different experience in her school. After her mother kicked Iris out of her home, the participant's mother withdrew Iris from school. Then Iris tried to continue to attend school and attempted to enroll herself but was denied.

I just know I was dropped out. I'm not sure which one is which, but I know I was. And, um, I returned to school myself without my mother, without anyone. And I asked them, "What can I do to enroll myself at school because I do not want to be dropped out?" and they were like, "The person who signed you out has to be the person who signs you in". And I was like underage at the time, and I couldn't do it... So, I was dropped out of school (withdrawn) and I was selling drugs and I did not have a place to stay. I remember there were times we lived in an apartment complex and the washateria, they would leave it open so me and this other person that was with me...I guess the main thing would be that knowing that the Counselors are here for us. They want us to talk to them. Because not once in the four years that I've been in this district has anyone ever asked me, "Are you OK?" "Are you fine?" "How is your home situation?" All this is going on even after I classified myself as homeless; no one has asked me anything! You know. I feel like with kids they want to talk, they want say something, they want to, but they want someone to reach out to them. But here at the school no one has ever. You know! You see in movies, people talking about the school is here for you what do you need? All that stuff... But it's like it stays in the movies, you know it doesn't happen here.

Jasmine experienced an indifferent response from her school. When she was asked to update her address since she had moved, she was advised to bring her father or mother. Since she was unable to do so, she invited the friend's mother who she was staying with. That is how the school staff found out about her homeless situation. There was no further support offered on the school's part. When asked about her experience at school, this is how she described her experience with the school staff after they found out she was not living with her parents:

My friend's mom told me to change my address and when I changed my address, I told them. They told me I needed to bring someone to talk to. Well, I told them I can't bring my Mom or my Dad to change it can I bring her... Well, the teachers don't really say or do anything... They haven't really changed any.

Rose experienced a neglectful period in her school. After being kicked out by her parents, Rose was almost withdrawn from school. She researched homeless students' rights and had to contact the State Homeless Coalition who advised the district homeless liaison who intervened on her behalf. After that the participant was finally allowed back in school. While Rose had to protect her rights as a homeless student, she also had the guidance of one of her teachers:

They (the school) found out I was homeless because my Mom came up to take her name off the emergency list. Like the contact thing and the school was trying really hard to kick me out and one of the Assistant Principals (AP) wanted me withdrawn, one of the AP's, was the one wanting me withdrawn from the school, but I can't be withdraw from school without my parent, I can't enroll without my parent, I tried to explain that to them but they weren't listening, and they were

talking about me paying a fee, like an “out of district” fee, but they didn’t kind of leave that alone so I emailed the district homeless liaison and he emailed the AP and that was when they like backed off but they were trying really hard to kick me out of the school. And I did try to talk to the counselor, I talked to the crisis counselor, but she just gave me the shoulder kind of like “eh.” Yeah, I was like, “YOU ARE the Crisis Counselor, Help Me!” My teachers were the main ones who helped me... Well, I had a teacher, he is my debate coach, my debate and speech teacher, because I am in speech and debate and he is the one I went to for guidance and what to do and he is the one who helped me out because the counselors didn’t do anything. The APs didn’t either. I just think they need to care because the counselors, they don’t really care. They don’t care. A lot of people don’t care. The AP’s they don’t care. Like when I tried to explain so many times the situation why they couldn’t kick me out of school, I’m gonna be a dropout if you kick me out of school. But they never listened to me. It wasn’t until I sent the email that they ever listened to me and left the situation alone. I went to the crisis counselor because I heard that is what she is here for because it was a crisis situation but she wasn’t any helpful neither you know because the way I was getting by it wasn’t a good way of getting by because you know I had to miss school and I had a lot of NG’s but my job, they actually helped me with my schedule, and but I didn’t make good money there because I was a waitress but only in the afternoon, so it wasn’t good money, so the only way I got money was, it wasn’t like in a good way, I’ll just put it like that, so I told my counselor about that and told her “I’m tired” and was like “I’m tired of doing this” my spirit was



like worn out, and she was just like, “Just do whatever you gotta do.” That kind of broke me down because I wasn’t expecting that kind of outcome because I was sobbing in her office and that is all she said to me.

### ***Theme 5: Source of Resilience***

In this paper, resilience is identified as the capacity to adapt and persist in the face of adversity (Pinsker et al., 2018). In particular, resilience in this paper focuses on continuing to attend school despite experiencing homelessness. According to McGee et al. (2018), even when affected by traumatic events, individuals with high resilience feel less apprehensive or depressed and more likely to overcome these emotions compared to individuals with low resilience. Based on this definition of resilience, it was evident to the researcher that the participants showed a great amount of resilience. However, this theme concentrated more on the source of resiliency rather than on the examples when the participants showed resiliency. Four of the ten participants mentioned faith as a source of resiliency. Three of the participants mentioned that they know their period of homelessness was temporal and therefore they focused on the future and staying strong at the moment.

**Faith.** Faith in this paper is defined as belief with strong conviction in a higher being; a firm belief in someone for whom there may be no tangible proof. However, the participants exhibited complete trust and devotion as an assurance of hope.

Daisy spoke of her intrinsic motivation grounded in her faith. Daisy believed that her homelessness time was designed by her creator and when asked how she overcame her situation she responded in the following manner:

I have always trusted God a lot... Thanks to the Lord, I have the opportunity to complete my high school...I did feel sad and at the same time anguished, but later I started thinking that the Lord does not send something to someone that he or she cannot do. He always gives you the strength and everything you need to get ahead. My refuge has been Him since I was a child. Then, I understood that God was always with me; that He has the capacity to say, "Ahm, ok, I send you this person, don't worry, I'm there. There are many people that I can use to help you." So, I am never, never afraid to say I am not going to have money, I am not going to have anything to eat or not ... because I know God always sends something: Maybe a job or people who are good or whatever; but He is in this. So, I know I don't need to worry. What I have to worry about is to do my part, to do what it takes to get where God is going to send me.

Iris presented a similar account for her source of resilience. However, Iris' story is different in the sense that she experienced a conversion rather than being brought up under a certain faith.

With being alone, going through everything that's been happening, you know, I realized, it might sound corny, but I found God. That's what really helped me through everything. In my mind I knew that the school, it is not here with me, my parents are not here with me, friends they can go so far, you know! But one day I was doing drugs and it just clicked to me how people say, "God is always with you" "God will protect you, just got to talked to him." And that very day I know a friend who goes to church and was always wanting me to go with him. So, I decided to go one day and just to see and it clicked. He put that fire in me to

continue school and that is what gives me the motivation to do it now. Knowing someone is here for me and that someone is God. And I went from missing school all the time and not caring to graduating in May.

Rose referred to her source of motivation as spirituality. Rose did not mention faith or a higher being in her interview. However, she talked about taking care of her thoughts and not making excuses.

I am really into spirituality and I really got into the law of attraction and attracting what you want, and you know and all that. And your thoughts are what you become and all that stuff, so I kind of take care of my thoughts. Like I tell myself, you gotta make it, you're gonna wake up, you gotta go to school. You can't be a failure. It's just your thoughts. My thoughts... Spirituality, you know, like prayers, you know, manifestations. I watch a lot of videos, motivational speakers, people who came from nothing and grew to something. And if they can do it, I can do it. There's no excuse for me not to do it.

Rosemary talked about praying for a better situation and believed that finding a friend to stay with was God responding to her prayers. She was taken to church when she was young and found refuge and inspiration in her faith as expressed in the following paragraph:

I would just pray and pray, I think. He finally listened to me and He led me to the lady I called mom. I am Christian. When I was younger, my grandmother will go to church all the time. And I would rather listen to His words that go play, I do not know, and I felt that is what I needed. You could read the bible a thousand times and get a different perspective and that is what I love about it. You can read one

verse one way and then the next day having a totally different way which is so cool to me!

**Long Term Perspective.** In this paper, participants taking a long-term perspective on their challenging times believed that this attitude yields more positive outcomes than negative ones: it brings life lessons that could be applied to make their futures brighter. Three of the participants focused on their future and putting their current challenges into perspective. They believed that their situation was temporary and the focus on school would pay off in the long term.

Liana spoke about the difficult decision to leave her younger brothers and mother. She also talked about how her focus is on the future and not on the adversity that she was going through at the time of the interview. Liana compartmentalized her feelings in order to be able to focus on the future.

I had to keep moving forward and stepped out that (living with her family and abuse), to be alone and I put my feelings aside. I take it (living with a friend's mom and feeling uncomfortable) because I know what is coming, if I finish. I know that If I just deal with that right now, if I just deal with the feelings that I am having right now and do not let it get to me as much and I focus on graduating, I know I am going to get out of it. I know that sooner or later, after I graduate. I am going to get a good job I am going to go to college. I am going to find a job that is going to let me move out. So, I know that is not forever.

Lily displayed an uncanny ability to focus on her long-term goals. Lily mentioned how she knew other students who were going through similar circumstances and they

found a job and dropped out of school. Lily believed that school and receiving an education were her ticket to get out of poverty and to have a better life.

What you are dealing with now will pay off later. Something like that. You always have to go through the tough parts, through the patchy roads, and that's gonna hurt, that's gonna beat you around, but if you can think that you'll eventually be there, that you'll be going to the Bahamas, going to the beach and going in your fancy robe, and just kind of stay positive for the long term, you know, but for the short term you'll probably feel you know, a lot of stress a lot of buildup and it will hurt, but you know eventually it gets somewhere.

Rosemary also talked about being hopeful about the future and knowing that her situation is only temporary.

Where I am currently living, I am still thinking about college, so it's not permanent. The dream of not struggling, the dream of "giving back." Maybe one day I can help someone who is in the same situation as me. I would love to do that too because I really wish someone could do that for me right now. That is what motivates me. The dream of one day having my own house and have my career. There were times, I felt like, "That's it, no more, I'm just gonna get a regular job" but fast money also goes very fast. So, I do not want to do that to myself. And breaking off my family circle. None of them. I will be the first one to graduate; I will be the first one to go to college. I will do it!

***Theme 6: An Economic Concern***

One of the interests of this study was to further explore the role of culture, if any, in the increase of Hispanic homeless students. Five of the participants expressed that homelessness seemed to be more of an economic concern rather than a cultural phenomenon. The participants shed light on how they were forced to leave their homes because their parents wanted them to contribute financially.

Daisy explained how her father believed that she was too old to continue with school and wanted her to drop out and find a full-time job. When Daisy refused, she was thrown out.

When I came here, I had to, they placed me in a grade three years behind in high school; then I was advancing in age and I am about to turn twenty-one and my dad perhaps did not agree that I continue my studies in high school because that was going to delay me, to say in my life. He wanted for me, that instead of studying, I start working and helping them or building what they wanted to build; but my goal has always been to develop intellectually. Not so much to work, because I know that I have much ability for learning, to be someone other than just an employee.... They currently own a restaurant. When they were going to open the restaurant perhaps my father was expecting me to help him; but back then he did not understand my goal, because it is really a little harder to study than to begin to work somewhere and in one's own business.

Iris suspected that her mom was abused and was raised with the trauma. Due to this past experience, Iris believed that her mother never really took on the role of a nurturing and protecting mother.

I'm not sure if it was because she was Hispanic, But I guess it was just the moral she just picked up you know. My mom, she moved to Houston in 2008, and you know so she didn't know anyone in Houston, she met one friend and she was you know, couch-surfing, too. She at the time she was like... OK you know. At 2008 she had two kids and she left me and my sister with my grandparents. The first 8 years of our lives we did not live with our mother. So, I guess it wasn't necessarily because she was Hispanic, it was because she didn't grow that loving bond that the nurturing of her baby and taking care of them. And I felt that is more necessary why.

Jasmine also believed that the bond with her mother was not strong and that was the reason she was kicked out. Jasmine first lived with her father, but after many arguments, she moved in with her mother. However, this living arrangement did not work out and Jasmine was kicked out of the house by her mother. When asked if this was a practice in El Salvador, if the family has issues, they kick their kids out, she responded the following:

Not necessarily. Because my dad never kicked me out, we just argued a lot. He didn't want me to leave, I decided to leave. So, I left... I don't know. I feel like, I really don't know her like that, she doesn't know me like that, so she does have my sisters and my little brother. I really don't, it was like one thing my sister said,

they were like, it came down to “Who do you choose? Us or you?” My mom chose them...

Jose talked about how he wanted to become a doctor and how his options in his country of origin were very limited. He was looking for an opportunity to a better life. He also mentioned that his parents also wanted him to have a better future and was sent alone to the USA to seek those opportunities.

Well, I told them, and they knew I wanted to be a doctor and get my degree or something like that. So, I talked to them and I don't know how, but they said yes. If you can, you can get something better there. And I think, That's true. So even when it gets really hard, I think well it is getting better, you know? It's not perfect but It's better than before... When I was in Honduras I was in school. That school was to help a lot of people. So, they went to other places help other people, so I would like to do something like that. But I can't do it in my country or without a good education.

Lilly mentioned how her grandparents constantly pressured her to get a job to help financially in the household. Lilly ended up getting a job but quit soon after, because her grades were suffering.

I wanted to stay being a student, not having a job, going to school, and then last year, around February, I took a job. but you can see that my grades went from all A's to not even merit roll any more. I was always tired from working. And then it was like my Grandma was on me about how my grades were going down, and I was like, “You see, I took a job, because you and my grandpa insisted that I should get a job, and now here I am took a job and my grades are not up to your



expectations,” heading towards that Summer, I decided to quit my job...she eventually just told me that I wasn’t being of any help around the house and I started getting “back and forth” with her about what I wanted to do. And so, she just said I was useless, and another thing that she would do is that um she would bring up my Mom, because my Mom was one of those people who just, she didn’t like school at all...Other day my grandpa told me the other day, “I don’t think you’re gonna make it through college.” I was like, “Grandpa, I am in the top ten percent of my class, and I’m literally trying my best to go to college, and you’re like telling me that you don’t even have faith in me for this.” He’s like, “I’m just saying that I’d rather you work instead. Get out of High School, get a diploma and work, right away.” And I am like, “That is NOT what I want.”

My grandma, relationships, that’s another thing me and my grandma clashed about. My Mom liked, “exploring”, let’s put it that way. And my grandma always looked down upon that. So, whenever she finds out like I’m talking to someone, she gets on me how I am like “giving myself for free” and, “If you are gonna be with someone at least get money from them.”

## **Summary**

In chapter IV, the data was analyzed according to the data analysis steps detailed in Chapter III. The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used as described by Moustakas’ method of analysis of qualitative, phenomenological data. The qualitative interviews with ten HUHYP students enrolled in public high schools were conducted using semi-structured interview questions. These questions allowed the researcher to obtain the data necessary to conduct an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Participants’

voices were included when analyzing verbatim transcription of their experiences with the phenomenon. Six themes were identified as a result of the data analysis process. These themes attempted to capture the essence of what it is to be a HUHYP student enrolled in high school. The participants' responses generated the themes of (a) personality traits, (b) family of origin, (c) current living situation, (d) school experience, (e) sources of resilience, and (f) an economic concern.

In Chapter V, a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion are included.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

This chapter begins by providing a summary of the study and connecting the results of the study to previous homeless and qualitative literature. Additionally, potential implications of this study are presented in relationship to counselors, school administrators, and legislators. This chapter concludes with a discussion of study limitations and future research implications. In this transcendental phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (HUHY) attending public high school. The following is a discussion of findings, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Homelessness is not a new circumstance; it has been a social reality affecting individuals and families for generations (Eisenberg, 2018). Since the economic downturn of 2008, the number of the homeless student population has increased by a 100% to an estimated 3% of all public-school students in the United States (Layton & Brown, 2015). Youth homelessness is a growing concern in the United States. The growth of homeless students in public school grades K-12 and in higher education is undeniable and growing (Field, 2015; Hallett, 2010). The services commanded by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (The McK-VA) substantially improved access to education for children experiencing homelessness (Masten et al., 2015). Despite efforts at the legislative, district, and campus levels to address the needs of HUYH, schools continue to underreport homeless students, which means that homeless students not officially identified are not receiving specialized assistance as required by state and federal law

(Ammerman et al., 2013). Currently, there is no comparable written legislation similar to The McK-VA Act of 1987, enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1987, and reauthorized in 1997, as a legislative response to mitigate homelessness (Helvie, 1999; Szeintuch, 2017).

According to Robinson and Clardy (2011), by the year 2030, Hispanics will represent one third of the United States' population making it the largest ethnic minority group. Few studies have explored the cultural diversity of homeless youth in-depth despite that Hispanic and African Americans experience homelessness at higher rates and represent a disproportionate segment of the homeless population (NAEH, 2018). Studies focused on homeless students in public higher education institutions were limited, journalistic, and not data-driven inquiries (Roth & Bongoy, 2020). Furthermore, early studies focused only on achievement among homeless African American students (Masten et al., 2015).

Sharing the unique educational experiences of HUHYP has the potential to add to the counseling literature and help in the design, creation, and implementation of interventions that are culturally responsive. Frequently, studies or approaches to address the needs of homeless students exclude the insights of the population being studied. Therefore, the goal of this study was to share the lived experiences of HUHYP students. This study was performed using the transcendental tradition with in-depth interviews that addressed the study question: What are the lived experiences of Hispanic Unaccompanied Youth attending public high school?

## **Discussion of Theme 1: Personality Traits**

Personality shows heritability and stability-across-time traits refer to habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Briley & Tucker-Drob, 2014). This theme incorporated two subthemes: intrinsic motivation and no little jobs: examples of resiliency.

The first subtheme: Intrinsic motivation brought together the participants' personal experiences with homelessness and their deep desire to overcome their living circumstances. Participants shared impactful stories depicting how they repeatedly overcame their difficulties to remain at school and continue their education. For instance, Jose lived in his car for two weeks in order to continue attending school. Similarly, Iris voiced that for a period of six months she was living in laundromats that were open 24 hours. Rose also spoke about her experience of being withdrawn from school by her mother after being kicked out and how she tried to reenroll herself at school only to be denied. Rose also mentioned that there were times where she had to do "things" that she was ashamed of in order to "make ends meet." The participants of this study all were enrolled in school and persisted to continue with their education despite their living circumstances. This subtheme is consistent with the research presented by Perron et al. (2014), which found resilience to be associated with lower psychological distress and less suicidal ideation, which was not voiced by the participants. Taken together, these findings suggest that resilient homeless youth experience lower levels of psychological distress and a persistent desire to improve.

The second subtheme was no little jobs: examples of resiliency. This theme captured the desire of the participants to graduate from high school and further their

studies and to not set their expectations on low-paying jobs. Rosemary spoke about staying in school to better herself and not succumbing to her circumstances. She spoke about having a mindset of no excuses and of not settling down in her current circumstances. Lilly also spoke about having to go to college in order to be an example for her siblings and being able to have her own house one day. Jose and Jasmine expressed their desire to become medical doctors in order to afford “things” and to have a “normal” life where they would not have to worry about where to live. They also mentioned that after watching their parents having to work different jobs in order to survive, they were motivated to move past their situations and invest in education as a means to break out of their current circumstances. This subtheme is consistent with the research presented by Masten et al. (2015) corresponding that some homeless students actually use their deprived circumstances as a stimulus to move forward demonstrating resilience, with many of these homeless students succeeding in school. These students demonstrated resilience in the face of nonacademic obstacles and found ways to cope with adversity. Understanding coping and resilience in this population could expose their strengths and inform tailored interventions to support coping, health, and school stability.

### **Discussion of Theme 2: Family of Origin**

Family of origin refers to the significant caretakers one was born into or where one grows up, which often includes parents, siblings, grandparents, single parents, or other relatives (Guizhi et al., 2020). This theme was prominent in this study. This theme incorporated two subthemes: breakdown with family of origin and physical or emotional abuse.

Most of the participants reported a breakdown in the relationship with their families of origin. Daisy talked about how after her parents threw her out of the house for not wanting to quit school and get a full-time job. Then, they stopped talking to her altogether to “teach her a lesson.” Jasmine talked about how she was thrown-out of the house by her mother in order to maintain peace. Jasmine felt abandoned and afterwards there was no longer contact with her mother. Liana also communicated how she would have months without any contact with her mother. Her father had passed away when Liana was young, and she expressed being very upset with her father for abandoning them. Rose’s relationship with her family of origin, her grandparents, became very difficult if not impossible to maintain due to their ongoing pressure to help support the household financially. Breakdown in family ties is a similar finding to research conducted by Masten et al. (2015) and Gubbels et al. (2019) that demonstrated a significant breakdown in communication between the homeless youth with the family of origin after experiencing homelessness.

Participants emphasized experiencing physical and emotional abuse in the hands of their families of origin. Each participant noted high levels of awareness regarding their living situations, which included being susceptible to abuse. For instance, Iris tells of how after she was physically abused and thrown out of the house by her mother there was no contact with her. Liana voiced how her mom would hit her when she was intoxicated and would put her belongings on the street. Since leaving that environment, Liana reported that the contact with her mother was very sporadic and she did not have a reliable way to get in contact with her mother since she moves constantly. Although Lilly was not physically abused, she was constantly degraded by her grandmother. Lilly was constantly

compared to her mother and told how she would end up like her mother who had different children from different fathers and who did not complete high school. Lilly felt emotionally abused by her grandparents. Research conducted by Tierney and Ward (2017) suggests that abuse and neglect at home is often one of the reasons why youth end up living on the streets. Similar to the findings of this research, participants in this study expressed that they were subject to physical or emotional abuse that contributed or directly caused their homeless episode.

### **Discussion of Theme 3: Living Situation**

The theme of living situation refers to the participants' current living arrangement at the time of the interview and the participants' feelings emitted by such arrangement. This theme was broken down further into two subthemes. The first subtheme included the different current arrangements the students experienced, which was marked by the majority of the participants living with their friend's parents. The second subtheme was uncertainty, which produced a high level of anxiety in the participants based on the insecurity of such agreement and not knowing what the future might bring.

Current living situations denoted the actual living situation of the participants at the time of the interview. Some participants were staying with friends or relatives, others were living with a friend's parent, and one participant was living in a church. Six participants were living with a friend's parent. Two participants were living independently: one had his own apartment and another one was paying rent for a room with a friend from work. Their arrangements were after having lived in a hotel or in a car respectively. One of the participants was living with his boss from work. Four of the



participants currently living with their friend's parents, reported feeling like a burden or unwelcome in the household.

Uncertainty about their living arrangement was a present concern for the participants. Liana explained how she felt that she had to remain in a constant state of housekeeping or risk her host kicking her out of the house. Liana elaborated that the same level of expectations were not present for the host's biological children. Jasmine was also concerned about her future and being dependent on the benevolence of her host. Jasmine's friend was the one who convinced her mother to let Jasmine live with them. However, after some time, Jasmine's friend was no longer living with her mother, which created an awkward situation for Jasmine. She was living with her friend's mother when not even her friend was living in the same house. Rose was also in a precarious situation regarding her living arrangement. She rented a room from a "lady from work." However, being able to pay the rent was always connected to what she was able to make as a waitress. Rose described times when she did not have enough money and had to make other arrangements to come out with the money to pay rent. While the participant did not elaborate, it was clear to the principal researcher that Rose was a possible victim of sex-trafficking. Respondents shared experiences of insecure housing. Research conducted by Cumming and Gloeckner (2012) produced similar results where the individuals experiencing homelessness lived with an ongoing level of anxiety due to the insecurity of their housing situations.

#### **Discussion of Theme 4: School Experience**

School experience covered the interactions that the participants reported to the researcher regarding their daily contacts with the school staff. Some of the participants' experiences were positive while others were neglectful. Some of the participants were denied enrollment by the school administrators. This theme covered what the students answered when describing a "typical" day in school for them. This topic was made of two different but related subthemes: a trusted adult and school atmosphere.

A trusted adult was a constant topic that the participants articulated about the support offered at school. Some participants mentioned their school counselors while others talked about their teachers and one mentioned her school principal as a valued member of her support system at school. Four participants responded to feeling more optimistic by finding a person as a support in the school. Empathetic attachments with peers and educational professionals in the school setting have been recognized as protective factors when experiencing homelessness (Huey et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2016). For instance, Rose spoke of her debate teacher as a support but not her school counselor.

I had a teacher, Mr. W., he is my debate coach, my debate and speech teacher, because I am in speech and debate and he is the one I went to for guidance and what to do and he is the one who helped me out because the counselors didn't do anything.

Participants experiences at their schools differed depending on the level of human connection they had with a staff member. For some students experiencing homelessness, school served as a lifeline for their basic needs (Dworsky et al., 2018).

Two participants were denied attending school while experiencing homelessness, which is a fundamental right under the McKinney-Vento legislation. Two other participants spoke about the little support provided by their school counselors and crisis counselor. These participants felt that neither of these individuals provided the time nor the resources to make them feel supported. Iris mentioned the following regarding her experience with her school counselor:

Not once in the four years that I've been in this district has anyone ever asked me, "Are you OK?" "Are you fine?" "How is your home situation?" All this is going on even after I classified myself as Homeless, no one has asked me anything!...

School atmosphere was another subtheme that emerged. This subtheme covered the overall feeling of the school by the participants. Depending on how the students felt, supported or not, or if they had a deep connection with a staff member at the school, that was related to the overall feeling of the school. Many of the participants felt that they were somewhat supported once the school found out about their living situations. However, some participants also expressed that the school staff needed to reach out to students instead of waiting for students to disclose their different living circumstances. Some participants felt that they had to advocate for themselves in order to be allowed back into their schools without a parent present. Furthermore, one participant was being withdrawn from school for not having a fixed address. A deep positive connection with a staff member at the school served as a bridge to maintain these students engaged in the learning process. These findings are similar to previous research efforts where positive relationships with competent adults in the school served as protective factors in fostering resilience (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014).

### **Discussion of Theme 5: Sources of Resilience**

The participants of this study showed great resilience. Resilience is commonly understood as the capacity to continue advancing forward in the face of adversity, to adapt to hardship, and recover by means of internal coping strategies and adjustment (Huey et al., 2013; Paul et al., 2018). As the participants were struggling with homelessness, they were also attending school and were in good standing academically. This theme consists of two subthemes: faith and long-term perspective.

Participants of this study acknowledged faith and spirituality as imperative when overcoming their homeless situations. A study conducted by Paul et al. (2018) revealed that faith and the ability to take into perspective the immediate obstacles enhances resilience in the general homeless population. Some of the participants expressed obtaining strength from their faith in a divine power. Despite their daily challenges, participants remained optimistic and had a positive view on life. Research conducted on homeless youth and adults show comparable results where faith is depicted as playing a significant role in their lives (Huey et al., 2013; Kidd & Shahr, 2008; Thompson et al., 2016). For instance, Iris described her source of motivation for moving forward after finding God:

With being alone. Going through everything that has been happening, you know, I realized, it might sound corny, but I found God. That's what really helped me through everything. In my mind, I knew that the school, it is not here for me, my parents are not here for me, friends they can only go so far, you know. But one day I was doing drugs and it just clicked to me how people say, "God is always with you," "God will protect you," "Just got to talked to him." And that very day,

I know a friend who goes to church and was always wanting me to go with him. So, I decided to go one day just to see, and it clicked. He put that fire in me to continue school and that is what gives me the motivation to do it now. Knowing someone is here for me and that someone is God. And I went from missing school all the time and not caring to being able to graduate.

Findings suggest that HUHYP homeless students from this ethnic minority group use faith and spirituality as coping strategies and as sources of resilience. Similar to previous research on homelessness involving youth and adult populations, spirituality appeared as a significant contributor to resilience (Banyard, 1995; Thompson et al., 2016). Findings in this study emphasize the need to provide counseling services to promote hope and support to students that experience homelessness or high levels of residential mobility. A pattern of introspection as a coping mechanism emerged among the respondents. For example, the ability to take a long-term perspective. Homeless youth who took this approach were able to face their current struggles by hoping for a long-term solution to their current problem. These participants believed that the homeless episodes they faced were only temporary and they were to come to terms with their situations by focusing on their future. One participant shared how she could focus on the future, find relief, and move forward by saying, “This is only temporary.” Another participant noted, “I’m fine because I am able to put my feelings aside right now and focus on what needs to be done.” Previous research on homeless youth and adults has revealed similar findings where goal-setting is a protective factor in overall recovery (Kirst et al., 2014; Leamy et al., 2011). The participants’ ability to prioritize education and focusing on the future rather than their current living situations served as an intervention to process their

experiences. The participants also voiced how faith and spirituality were sources of strength when coping with their homelessness.

### **Discussion of Theme 6: An Economic Concern**

The final theme that emerged from this study was the idea that Hispanic students experience homelessness as an economic concern and at the same time, it serves as a motivation to improve. The stories of Jose and Maria add to an understanding of this phenomenon. Jose spoke about being on his own and how living in his car was just a temporary situation to a bigger end. Jose saw this experience as a way to improve his future and his chances of become financially stable. Maria spoke powerfully about how her homeless experience had made her stronger and would make her a better college student and a responsible adult. Similarly, Liana spoke about going to college and established herself into a position that would provide financial stability for herself and her younger siblings. Jasmine also talked about how watching her father work different jobs and her period of homelessness served as an incentive to continue school and attend college.

This theme was an overall response about how the participants saw their homeless experience and how it served as source of strength, as motivation to stay in school, and a catalyst to pursue higher education. The participants believed that their source of homelessness was not a cultural factor but was due to economic reasons. Previous work conducted by Henwood et al. (2015), suggests that homeless individuals employed different coping strategies in attempts to reach self-actualization. These findings contradict Maslow's earlier work and where basic needs are a precondition before higher order needs. Maslow (1943) proposed a hieratical framework where a basic level need

must be completed and satisfied before moving onto a higher level. However, the findings for this study suggest that the participants strive for self-actualization due to the lack of attaining the lower-level needs. In other words, the participants used their homelessness as a motivation to raise from their poverty and strive for higher education. These findings suggest that homeless service providers may need to support service users at multiple levels, rather than only focusing on basic needs.

Overall, the experiences and themes explored in this study add to the body of research. They provide the research on HUHYP with deeper insight into the lived experiences of this ethnic minority and shared light into their daily struggles at school. Participants shared their positive and negative experiences at their schools and how feeling connected to the school served as a motivation to continue attending school. One of the major findings of this study was the role that school counselors can play in assisting HUHYP students. Not having a counseling relationship with their students emerged as an area of needed improvement for school counselors.

The resiliency demonstrated by the participants was evident. An unexpected theme that emerged was the construct of how the participants used their lack of home as reason to continue attending school and to seek an education. Maslow's model proposed that unless lower levels of the hierarchy of needs are fulfilled, the individual might not be able to attain high levels of self-actualization. However, information obtained in this research presents an opposite view of this notion.

Much of the quantitative research listed previously provides an understanding of what occurs to the general homeless population but does not specifically address HUHYP. In this study, I sought to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic homeless students.

### **Implications for School Administrators**

Findings from this research indicate a need for the proper implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. The “No Little Jobs” subtheme described the desire of the participants to continue in school. However, some of the participants described a lack of awareness from school staff after revealing their homeless status. The McK-VA is the major legislature that protects homeless youth in the school setting and requires a LEA to actively seek and identify homeless students. However, some of the participants voiced how school administrators actually prevented their attending school.

The McKinney-Vento Act decrees that schools must not pose barriers for enrollment for homeless youth. However, findings of this research indicate that some of the students were denied enrollment. The school atmosphere was perceived as negative by these participants and made them feel unwelcome. These obstructions placed by the local education agencies foster a level of distrust of school administrators concerning identification and provision of services for homeless students. These participants also had a difficult time establishing positive relationships with school staff which was identified as a protective factor for resilience. Ongoing training must be provided for school administrators regarding the proper implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act and more importantly in nurturing a sense of empathy when working with homeless youth.

Theme six of this study suggested that HUYH experience homelessness due to economic factors and the McKinney-Vento Act includes protections for these students. For instance, identified homeless students automatically qualify for school lunch and school of origin transportation. These protections were included in the Act to counteract the educational disruption caused by mobility issues and provide students experiencing



homelessness with the right to continue attending their school of origin. HUYH also receive financial assistance when applying to colleges or universities. The proper implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act is fundamental in the identification of homeless students, in removing barriers for enrollment, and in providing students the services required by law.

### **Implications for School Counselors**

School counselors must prioritize building positive relationships with the students they serve. The participants of this study demonstrated resilience and an intrinsic motivation to thrive in school (theme one). However, none of the participants mentioned how the school counselors at their schools provided counseling sessions that focused on developing internal coping mechanisms. Some of the participants mentioned how their school counselors changed their schedules or put together their graduation plans but there was no mention of a counseling relationship.

All school staff has a duty to report abuse or neglect. School counselors play an important role in the school setting in reporting abuse. However, in order for the youth to build trust they must feel welcome and heard. One of the participants felt that she was not able to communicate with the adults in the school for fear of being withdrawn from school or turned in to the authorities. This participant was afraid of being judged. School counselors must prioritize forming caring relationships with their students. Another participant voiced how her mother was careful to hit her in places where the school staff would not see. However, this participant never felt secure enough to discuss the abuse to her school counselors.

Participants talked about the involvement of caring adults in their schools and the important role this played in feeling supported and understood while in school. Some of the participants described how school became their refuge and their source of hope for the future. Nevertheless, some participants experienced negative interactions with school staff. For instance, Lilly described best about the role school counselors should play regarding the identification and support of homeless students:

I actually filled out a form to see my counselor and they never reached out to me. That is one thing that is very crucial. A lot of the students I hear saying, “oh, the counselors never help. And I went to the counselor for this, and they just dismissed me.”

When Miguel was asked about his experience with his school and in particular with his counselors, he had a similar message but in a very concise and more practical manner:

I did not get any support from the school. And the school counselor? Well, not really.

It is imperative that high school counselors build relationships with their students and support them in a way that they feel understood. Prioritizing connections with students is a critical component for school stability as students continue to experience homelessness and struggle to stay in touch with schools. School counselors working with homeless students may need to provide more than case management and referral support services and focus rather on providing traditional counseling (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2014). Further research into the high school counselors’ duties and responsibilities assigned by campus administrators may reveal more about the actual time school counselors spend counseling their students.

**Limitations**

One of the major limitations of this research was recruitment. The participants were recruited for participation during a school year where many students were learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making recruiting very challenging. Furthermore, identification of homelessness was complicated by virtual learning due to the challenge of learning remotely.

The limited age diversity might have concealed unique disparities and coping strategies related to age. Furthermore, the overall majority female gender composition of the sample may show a limited role in the male homeless experience.

Finally, the sample of HUY obtained for this study is a strength in relation to the depth of the data obtained into their lived experiences. However, recruiting from active students did not cover the subset of homeless youths who were disconnected from school, had dropped out, or had graduated.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The conceptualization of spirituality and faith as a source of resilience might hold implications for future research. Future research with homeless populations could be conducted to further understand the relationship between faith and coping strategies. Findings from this research support how HUY use faith as a coping strategy to overcome their challenges.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counseling programs might also benefit from teaching their students about the McKinney-Vento Act, thus potentially increasing cultural knowledge and advocacy for homeless students' rights. School counseling programs are required to

ensure counselors-in-training enroll in a multicultural counseling course (Barden, & Greene, 2015). For counselors-in training, it may be beneficial to explore multicultural counseling from a socioeconomic point-of-view. This might address individual inherent bias with focus on counselor educators' perceptions of homeless students.

Counselors-in-training, school administrators, and educational researchers are taught to bracket their personal experiences and attend to the students as prescribed by the law. However, as captured in this research some of the participants were denied access to enrollment, which is a fundamental right under the McKinney-Vento Act. Ongoing training and staff development for educators might reduce further bias and could potentially help in the identification of homeless students. Contributions to the literature regarding this topic could influence identification, diversity, and race-related conversations in the school setting.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the increased number of reported homeless youth, it is evident that this is a problem in the public schools in the United States. Homeless youth are broadly defined as individuals between their late teens and mid-twenties who lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including those living in emergency or transitional shelters. It is important that the agencies charged with identifying and counting homeless youth use the same definition. Furthermore, the mode to count homeless youth varies from counting every student who meets the McKinney-Vento Act definition in the school setting to a one-time-point-count (PIT). PIT counts indicate the number of homeless youths at one point in time and do not cover the actual aggregate number of youth experiencing homelessness across the year. The McKinney-Vento Act definition includes

doubled-up youths who stay with friends, family, or others in a nonpermanent arrangement while the HUD definition does not.

In conclusion, the results of the current study demonstrate Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth are experiencing identification and protection issues in the school setting from some of the school administrators. Furthermore, it is evident that some of the school counselors serving these students were not fully reaching out to the participants but found out about their homelessness by chance. These students are resilient, determined, and intelligent in their pursuit of their high school degree.

School counselors can support homeless youth by implementing interventions that foster social support and school connectedness. LaBelle's (2019) research supports connectedness with school and a positive school atmosphere promotes resilience in students who are at risk for academic and behavioral problems. Based on LaBelle's (2019) findings, school counselors can help in the improvement of academic achievement of homeless students by implementing social and emotional strategies that enhance school climate and teacher-student relationships. School counselors can be crucial in the implementation of intervention programs that reinforce student resilience (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

Finally, based on what the participants voiced about their counselors, it seems school counselors' knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act is limited. School counselors are knowledgeable professionals about laws that address mental health and academics, but their understanding of homelessness seems to be lacking based on some of the participants' statements. School professionals who support the identification of and service to students experiencing homelessness must be aware of their higher rates of

victimization and behavioral problems. These concerns are more likely to be present regardless of whether they were contributors or a result of the student's homelessness. In addition to learning about the McKinney-Vento Act, school counselors can help reduce the stigma associated with homelessness by advocating for these students.

School counselors, teachers, and administrators can help support students experiencing homelessness by increased identification efforts and ensuring that the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act are met (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). Homeless students must feel comfortable enough to disclose their living arrangements otherwise the fear of stigma will block them from self-identifying. School counselors and other staff can assist in identifying efforts to ensure homeless youth receive the support needed for their academic and life success.

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## APPENDIX A

### Demographic Questionnaire

#### Section A: Interview details (Interviewer complete)

Date and Time	
Interviewee Identifier	
Interviewer Initials	
Location of Interview	

#### Section B: Basic demographics (Interviewee complete)

Date of Birth	
Gender	
Ethnicity	

#### Section C: Detailed questions (Interviewee complete)

Email	
Academic Grade Level	

**APPENDIX B**

**Research Questions and**

**Personal Interview Guide Questions**

1. Describe your current living situation.
2. What are the circumstances that led you to this situation?
3. As an UHY student in your particular living situation describe your experience at school.
4. Tell a story that depicts a day in your life at school.
5. Name one thing that keeps you moving forward in school.



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Letter of Consent**

#### **TITLE OF STUDY**

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY TO EXPLORE THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF  
HISPANIC UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

#### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Efrain Francisco Uribe  
Counselor Education Department  
1932 Bobby K. Marks Drive  
Huntsville, TX 77340

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My name is Efrain Uribe, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville. I am conducting research on Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. My goal is to talk with some young adults who have experienced at least a period of homelessness. I believe those who have lived the experience of not having a home are best suited to speak about it. I am interested in learning about your experiences. You are invited to participate in a personal interview to share your experience and your ideas.

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Hispanic Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (HUHY) who are attending high school and to describe their educational experiences. My goal is to inform counselors on the needs and barriers of this population.

When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participate or not. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study without consequences

from me or your school. If at any time you wish to stop and discontinue the study you can let me know at any time without penalty

## **STUDY PROCEDURES**

In this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding your current living situation. First you should have received a recruitment call from the researcher explaining the steps for the research. Secondly, you would have received an email with an attachment which will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete (Informed Consent). Then, it will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes (depending on the length of your responses) to answer the questions. The interview will be recorded using google text to speech for accuracy purposes. However, you will be given a pseudonym (made up name) to protect your identity and at the conclusion of the research all recordings will be deleted. None of your personal details like name or school will be released to anyone. All participants are encouraged to be interviewed virtually, however, if you prefer to be interviewed in person, COVID 19 safety procedures will be followed such as wearing mask, social distancing, large area who has been cleaned for the interview.

## **RISKS**

There is no risk participating in this study. However, for some individuals revisiting hard situations or talking about homelessness may be difficult. If you feel uncomfortable you may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose. You will find two resources at the bottom of this consent so that you may consult with a counselor if you find yourself with that need.

## **BENEFITS**

Your participation will benefit the UHY community in that your experiences can clarify the needs of UHY. The goal is that by understating your situation, we, counselors and educators in general, would be able to provide services tailored to other students who may share your experiences.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your responses will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents.
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's locked file cabinet and a locked office door. Only the researcher will know the details of the participants. On paper the participants will be identified by a code number or a pretend name only. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the primary investigator, please contact the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board Coordinator at 936.294.4875

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect your academic status. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed. Otherwise, all data related to the research will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Your participation in this research project in-person, might place you at risk for possible exposure to SARS CoV-2, an agent that causes COVID-19. The risk for exposure to this virus as part of this research project could result in a positive development of COVID-19. COVID-19 infection may necessitate quarantining and additional testing and may result in hospitalization or death.

If you decide to participate, you agree to take certain precautions that will contain a risk for exposure.

- You will only participate if you are symptom-free.
- You will take your temperature before participating. If it is elevated (100 Fahrenheit or more), or if you have other symptoms described for COVID-19, stay home.

- You will wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer upon arrival.
- You will wear a mask, properly fitted around the nose and mouth.
- When possible, you will maintain a distance of 6 feet from other people and limit physical contact (e.g. no shaking hands).
- When proximity to subjects or colleagues is necessary, ensure appropriate ventilation by:
  - Maintaining open doors and/or windows to the greatest feasible extent possible
  - Refrain from using small rooms with poor ventilation
  - Ensuring air circulation indoors.
- You will not to touch your face or eyes with your hands. If you do, you will immediately wash or sanitize your hands.

## CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources:

- Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County  
2000 Crawford St #700, Houston, TX 77002. Tel. (713) 739-7514
- Homeless Shelter Directory  
<https://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org/cgi-in/id/city.cgi?city=houston&state=TX>
- United Way  
<http://www.211.org/>

## VITA

### Efrain Uribe M.Ed. LPCS

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#### Education

Doctor of Philosophy - Counselor Education and Supervision 2016 – Present  
 Sam Houston State University (CACREP Accredited Program)  
 Huntsville, TX

Master of Education - School-Counseling 2007  
 Sam Houston State University  
 Huntsville, TX

Bachelor of Arts – Psychology 2002  
 University of Texas at Brownsville  
 Brownsville, TX

#### Professional Summary

Engaging Entry Level College Professor diligently working with students to present information and encourage learning. Adept at preparing flexible lesson plans tailored to the needs and abilities of each class. Specialize in forming productive relationships with students and fellow faculty members.

#### Core Qualifications

- Comprehensive knowledge of business practices and principles
- Strong ability to prepare lesson plans and lectures
- Adept at assessing individual abilities
- Proficient in the use of standard college-level grading systems
- Solid ability to interact with students through effective communications

#### Professional Experience

Program Director of Counseling and Guidance January 2013 – Present  
 Aldine Independent School District  
 Houston, TX

- Assist with Section 504 District compliance
- District Educational Homeless Liaison
- Monitor Counseling activities for the elementary and Intermediate Counselors
- Member of the district Behavior Team
- Coordination of Social Workers and Community Youth School Workers

Assistant Principal  
Aldine Independent School District  
Houston, TX

September, 2011 – December 2012

- Limited English Program (LEP) Coordinator
- Section 504 Coordinator
- Dyslexia Administrator
- Dropout Coordinator
- Teacher Appraiser
- Assistance with creation and maintenance of the campus Discipline Plan

Elementary School Counselor  
Aldine Independent School District  
Houston, TX

September, 2005 – September, 2011

- Serve as the 504, GT and at Risk Coordinator
- Maintain and incorporate different parent involvement programs on campus
- Dyslexia screener
- Irlen screener
- Function as a consultant to teachers and administrators
- Assist in the administration of formal and informal test
- Extended Day and Summer Session Administrator

### **Clinical Supervision Experience**

Texas LPC Supervisor

2011 -Present

Licensure/Certification

Licensed Professional Counselor #66016, Texas  
Board Approved Supervisor

2011-present

### **Grants**

Texas Support for Homeless Education Program (TEXSHEP)  
Educational and support services for children and youth in homeless situations (\$46,000)

2013 -Present

District Awards Teacher Excellence (DATE Grant)

2009 -2011

Incentive program is to award instructional staff a monetary incentive for their contributions to improving student achievement (\$100,000)

Aldine Vertical Family Literacy Initiative	2007 -2009
Incentive program to assist all LEP and immigrant students to achieve at high levels in the core academic subjects and achieve standards required in Title I (\$9,000)	

### **District Level Presentations**

Annual Section 504 and Discipline.	2013-present
Workshop/Staff development presented for Assistant Principals.	
Aldine ISD, TX (Invited)	

Annual Section 504 and Response to Intervention (RTI)	2014-present
Workshop/Staff development presented for RTI Coordinators	
Aldine ISD, TX (Invited)	

Annual Homeless and Displaced Staff Development	2013-present
Workshop/Staff development presented for campus Registrars	
Aldine ISD, TX (Invited)	

Elementary and Intermediate School Counselors & Social Workers	2013-present
Ongoing staff development presentations on School Counseling	
Aldine ISD, TX	

### **Membership in Professional Organizations**

Texas Counseling Association  
2015-present