

The Relationship between Incarceration in the Richmond City Jail and Stays in Local Homeless
Shelters

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Executive Summary

One of the goals of the *Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in the Richmond Region* is to transform the homeless services delivery system to focus on housing stability. In pursuit of this goal, one of the strategies is to support ex-offenders and current offenders in obtaining and maintaining housing stability by working with public safety, criminal justice, housing, and workforce officials to develop housing and related services.

Homeward, the Richmond region's coordinating agency for homeless services, in collaboration with the Richmond City Jail (RCJ), compared inmate records from the RCJ and client records from the Homeward Community Information System (HCIS). HCIS is a database that tracks the shelter stays of clients experiencing homelessness in the Richmond area. The data included all inmates and clients who entered the RCJ or area homeless shelters between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010. These records were compared to answer two main questions: 1) among jail inmates, what percentage have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region? and 2) among clients who have stayed in area homeless shelters, what percentage have been incarcerated in the RCJ? Specific analyses examined demographics, homeless experiences (i.e., whether people had experienced homelessness, been homeless multiple times, and been accompanied by children in shelter), and RCJ experiences (i.e., whether people had been in the RCJ, classification level, sentence length, and number of days between booking and release) among inmates and people who had stayed in shelters.

Overall, the RCJ data supplied 11,203 unique clients, and Homeward supplied 2627 unique clients. The number of clients who appeared in both datasets was 828. From the jail data, 7.4% of inmates had stayed in an area shelter during the year. From the HCIS data, 31.5% of clients had spent time in the RCJ during the year. It is important to note that young clients –

those younger than the youngest RCJ inmate – were removed from the HCIS data to ensure that inmates and clients were of comparable ages.

A summary of results appears below:

- Among people who had experienced homelessness, males were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were females. Similarly, people with multiple episodes of homelessness were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were those with just one episode.
- Also among people who had experienced homelessness, there were no significant differences for males or females on whether they had spent time in the RCJ based on whether they were accompanied by children in shelter at any point. However, it was notable that 40.4% of females who had been in the RCJ and in an area shelter were accompanied by children at the time of their shelter stay.
- Among people who had spent time at the RCJ, there were no significant differences between males and females in the percentage who had experienced homelessness.
- Among people who had spent time at the RCJ, those who had experienced homelessness were more likely to be classified at higher security levels.
- Among people who had spent time in the RCJ, there were no significant differences in sentence length (for those who had been sentenced) based on whether or not an individual had experienced homelessness. For individuals who were not sentenced and not booked and released on the same date, those who had experienced homelessness were held in jail custody significantly longer than those who had not experienced homelessness.

Some methodological limitations are important to note. Perhaps the most substantial limitation is that the Richmond City Jail is not the only facility where individuals experiencing

homelessness are incarcerated, and HCIS is used by most (but not all) shelters in the area. Further, HCIS does not contain information about people who live outdoors or in places unfit for habitation. Finally, due to the longitudinal nature of the data examined, the decision was made to look at offenders' most recent sentences and classification levels, rather than analyzing every occurrence. While these considerations limit generalizability of the present study, the findings inform the local community's understanding of the relationship between incarceration in the RCJ and staying in the main shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

In spite of these limitations, the data presented here shed light on the relationship between homelessness and jail incarceration. These findings address the prevalence of shelter stays among the RCJ population and therefore support the need for housing-related services. The fact that so many women who have had contact with both systems were accompanied by children in an area shelter suggests the need for programs that can address the needs of children affected by disruptive events such as parental incarceration. In addition, offenders who have experienced homelessness tend to be held longer prior to sentencing, and they tend to be classified at higher security levels than those who have not experienced homelessness. This suggests that homeless clients at the jail have other characteristics (e.g., severity of charges, prior criminal history, history of jail infractions) that require higher security levels, as homelessness is not considered in the classification process.

Future research might examine the types of crimes committed by offenders who use area shelters. It is possible that some individuals commit crimes directly related to their lack of housing and that being able to connect them to housing would reduce recidivism (to both jail and shelter). Learning more about the overlap between offenders from the RCJ and individuals who access homeless shelters contributes to the community's efforts to both understand and address

the housing and service needs of people who encounter both the criminal justice and homeless services systems.

Background

The link between incarceration and homelessness is most often examined from the side of homeless service providers that seek to quantify the specific barriers individuals face in trying to obtain permanent housing (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2008). Incarceration disrupts a person's ability to maintain social ties and employment, and experiencing homelessness may put an individual in situations that increase their risk of committing certain crimes (e.g., trespassing).

Homelessness, as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), refers to a condition in which an individual "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" and includes shelters, institutions, and outdoors, as well as other places that are not intended to provide sleeping accommodations

(<http://www.hud.gov/homeless/definition.cfm>). Two requirements that HUD has for agencies that receive the agency's homelessness funds are that they periodically conduct a cross-sectional count of people experiencing homelessness and that they record information in a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). In the HMIS, emergency and transitional housing sites can record information about people's stays in shelter.

One of the goals of the *Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in the Richmond Region* is to transform the homeless services delivery system to focus on housing stability. In pursuit of this goal, one of the strategies is to support ex-offenders and current offenders in obtaining and maintaining housing stability by working with public safety, criminal justice, housing, and workforce officials to develop housing and related services.

Homeward, the community's planning agency for homeless services, administers the Richmond region's HMIS (referred to locally as the Homeward Community Information System, or HCIS), which tracks the shelter stays of clients at a majority of the local shelters available for

people experiencing homelessness. Given that over 70% of adults experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region have a history of incarceration (see Appendix A for the most recent data), the Community Criminal Justice Board (CCJB) was interested in learning more about the relationship between homelessness and incarceration. Specifically, *what is the percentage of people who have spent time in the local (Richmond City) jail who have also had experiences with the homeless services system?* Learning more about the overlap between offenders from the Richmond City Jail (RCJ) and individuals who have stayed in area homeless shelters will contribute to the community's efforts to both understand and address the housing, service, and support needs of people who access both systems.

Procedure

The RCJ and Homeward agreed to share data in order to learn more about the overlap in clients. Both entities produced a data set that included client Social Security Numbers (SSNs) and birthdates. In order to be included in the analyses, clients had to have entered the Richmond City Jail or area homeless shelters (including both emergency and transitional housing) between 5/1/2009 and 4/30/2010. To ensure that clients of both systems were of comparable ages, individuals in HCIS with a birthdate later than the youngest person in RCJ were deleted ($N = 404$). In addition to data required for matching clients, the RCJ provided for inmates 1) their sentencing date 2) (if sentenced ...) the length of the individual's most recent sentence and 3) the individual's most recent classification level and 4) the individual's release date (past or projected). Homeward also provided information on 1) whether the individual had experienced homelessness more than once (defined as exiting a shelter for at least 30 days before returning) 2) the individual's gender 3) whether or not the individual was accompanied by a minor at any point.

Research Questions/Analysis Plan

The main research questions addressed by this study were “among RCJ inmates, what percentage have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region?” and “among people who have experienced homelessness in the Richmond region, what percentage have spent time in the RCJ?” In addition to answering these questions, specific analyses were devised to compare people who have spent time in the RCJ on demographic and homelessness variables, as well as to compare people who have been homeless on demographic and jail-related variables.

Measures

There are two sources of information: inmate data from the RCJ and data on clients of homeless shelters in the Richmond area. Both data sets contain information on people who entered jail or shelter between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010. The specific information used in the analyses and definitions of fields from each source are detailed below.

Richmond City Jail data. From the Richmond City Jail data comes information about:

- Inmate gender. Available genders are male and female.
- Inmate classification level. Classification levels range between 1-8, with 1 indicating a high security level (e.g., inmate may have a violent felony charge and infractions within the jail) and 8 indicating a low security level (e.g., offender may have a misdemeanor charge and no negative history at the jail). Inmates may also be classified as work detail or be unclassified. Inmates are required to be classified within 72 hours of entry, so unclassified inmates include those who entered and exited the jail within a 72 hour period and those who have not yet been classified. To aid in the analysis, classification levels were recoded into three categories: “high” indicates high security level inmates (from an

original classification level of 1 or 2). “Medium” indicates medium security level inmates (from an original classification level of 3-5). “Low” indicates low security level inmates (from an original classification level of 6-8 and work detail). These categories were developed with the help of jail staff. Inmates who had not been classified are not included in the analysis of classification levels.

- Length of sentence. For offenders who have been sentenced, the length of sentence (in days) was calculated by adding the number of years, months, and days of the most recent sentence after converting years and months to days.

HCIS data. HCIS contains information about client stays in area homeless shelters. It is important to note that HCIS does not contain data from all local shelters. Domestic violence shelters are not included in the data, and two local congregation-based shelters (i.e., Good Samaritan Ministries and the Richmond Outreach Center) that serve people experiencing homelessness are not included. From Homeward’s HCIS data comes information about:

- Client gender. In the data matching process, the jail data overwrote the gender of matched clients.
- Multiple episodes of homelessness (yes/no). This variable was calculated based on all of the entries and exits from area shelters. A new variable was created that indicated the break between shelter stays. Individuals who had a break of 30 days or more before returning to shelter were coded as having multiple episodes of homelessness. Those who may have had multiple entries into and exits from shelter but did not have a break between stays of 30 days or more were coded as experiencing a single episode.

- Whether accompanied by children (yes/no). This variable was calculated based on the existence of children with the same household identifier as an adult. Adults in families with children were coded as having been accompanied by children at some point in shelter.

Results

Participants

Overall, RCJ provided information on 11203 unique clients, and Homeward provided information on 2627 unique clients. Eight hundred and twenty-eight participants appeared in both datasets.

Demographic information on individuals who had spent time in the Richmond City Jail between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010 appears in the table below.

Characteristic	Clients (N = 11203)
Gender	Male = 79.2% Female = 20.8%
Most recent classification level	High security = 2.1% Medium security = 34.3% Low security = 27.5% Not classified = 36.1%
Sentence length	Median = 50 days Unsentenced or 0 = 52.6%

Demographic information on adult clients who had experienced homelessness in an HMIS-covered shelter between 5/1/2009-5/1/2010 appears in the table below.

Characteristic	Clients (N = 2627)
Gender	Male = 76.4% Female = 23.6%
Experienced more than one episode of homelessness	Yes = 34.0%
Accompanied by children in shelter at any point	Yes = 11.6%

Demographic information on adult clients who had experienced homelessness in an HMIS-covered shelter and entered the RCJ between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010 appears in the table below.

Characteristic	Clients (N = 828)
Gender	Male = 80.6% Female = 19.4%
Experienced more than one episode of homelessness	Yes = 40.5%
Accompanied by children in shelter at any point	Yes = 9.4%
Most recent classification level	High = 4.2% Medium = 47.3% Low = 19.7% Not classified = 28.7%

Research Questions about People Who Have Experienced Homelessness

Demographic information on people who have experienced homelessness broken down by whether they spent time in the RCJ appears in the table below.

Characteristic	Clients –RCJ no (N = 1799)	Clients – RCJ yes (N = 828)
Gender	Male = 74.5% Female = 25.5%	Male = 80.6% Female = 19.4%
Experienced more than one episode of homelessness	Yes = 31.0%	Yes = 40.5%
Accompanied by children in shelter at any point	Yes = 12.6%	Yes = 9.4%

Research questions examined differences in this population between those who had entered the Richmond City Jail between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010 and those who had not. Because of gender differences and program requirements, some of these analyses were conducted by gender.

Among people who have experienced homelessness, are males or females more likely to spend time in the RCJ? Males (33.2%) were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were females (26.0%), $\chi^2(1) = 11.39, p = .001$.

Among people who have experienced homelessness, are people who have had more than one episode of homelessness more likely to spend time in the RCJ? People who had more than one episode of homelessness (37.6%) were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were those with just one episode (28.4%), $\chi^2(1) = 22.81, p < .001$.

Among males who have experienced homelessness, are those who were accompanied by children in shelter at any point more likely to spend time in the RCJ? Among males, there were no significant differences in whether they had spent time in the RCJ based on whether they were accompanied by children in shelter at any point. Males who had been accompanied by children (40.6%) were just as likely as those who had not been accompanied by children (33.1%) to have spent time in the RCJ, $\chi^2(1) = .80, n.s.$

Among females who have experienced homelessness, are those who were accompanied by children in shelter at any point more likely to spend time in the RCJ? Among females, there were no significant differences in whether they had spent time in the RCJ based on whether they were accompanied by children in shelter at any point. Females who had been accompanied by children (23.9%) were just as likely as those who had not been accompanied by children (27.7%) to have spent time in the RCJ, $\chi^2(1) = 1.13, n.s.$

Research Questions about People Who Have Spent Time in RCJ

Demographic information on people who have spent time in the RCJ broken down by whether they had experienced homelessness (i.e., have stayed in a shelter recorded in HCIS) appears in the table below.

Characteristic	Clients – HCIS no (N = 10375)	Clients – HCIS yes (N = 828)
Gender	Male = 79.1% Female = 20.9%	Male = 80.6% Female = 19.4%
Most recent classification level	High security = 1.9% Medium security = 33.3% Low security = 28.2% Not classified = 36.7%	High security = 4.2% Medium security = 47.3% Low security = 19.7% Not classified = 28.7%
Sentence length	Median = 50 days Unsentenced or 0 = 53.3%	Median = 60 days Unsentenced or 0 = 43.6%

Research questions examined differences in this population between those who had entered the RCJ between 5/1/2009-4/30/2010 and those who had not.

Among offenders, are there gender differences in whether or not people have experienced homelessness? There were no significant differences by gender on whether or not individuals had experienced homelessness. Males (7.5%) were just as likely as females (6.9%) to have stayed in a local shelter, $\chi^2(1) = 1.03$, *n.s.*

Among offenders, are there differences in classification level based on whether or not people have experienced homelessness? People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to be classified at higher (greater risk) security level, $\chi^2(2) = 69.21$, $p < .001$. People who have stayed in area shelters are more likely to be classified at high (5.9%) or medium (66.4%) security levels than people who have not stayed in area shelters (high = 3.0%; medium = 52.5%). They are less likely to be classified at low security levels (27.6% vs. 44.5%).

Among offenders who have been sentenced, are there differences in sentence length based on whether or not people have experienced homelessness? Because the data on sentence length was skewed, a log 10 transformation was applied to the variable and a *t*-test performed. Due to a significant Levene's test (used to check for equal variances between the two groups),

the equal variances not assumed statistic is reported. There were no significant differences in sentence length based on whether or not an individual had experienced homelessness, $t(577.09) = -1.58, n.s.$ People who had not been homeless ($M = 1.70, SD = .68$) had similar sentence lengths to those who had been homeless ($M = 1.74, SD = .63$) based on the log transformed sentence length variable.

Among offenders who have not been sentenced, are there differences in length between booking and release date based on whether or not people have experienced homelessness?

Because the length of time between booking and release date was skewed, a square root transformation was applied to the variable and a t -test performed. Due to a significant Levene's test (used to check for equal variances between the two groups), the equal variances not assumed statistic is reported. Unsented individuals who had been homeless ($M = 3.52, SD = 4.06$) had significantly higher lengths of time between booking and release than did those who had not been homeless ($M = 2.24, SD = 3.47$), $t(827.26) = -8.06, p < .001$ based on the square root transformed length of time.

Discussion

Two sets of research questions were considered. The first set of questions was examined for all adults who had stayed at an area shelter using HMIS during a year's time period. These questions looked at whether there were differences between people who had and had not spent time in the RCJ during this same time period. Specifically, differences in gender composition, family status, and homelessness episodes were assessed.

The second set of research questions had to do with whether, among people who had spent time in the RCJ, there were differences between inmates who had and hadn't been homeless during a year's time period. Specifically, differences in gender, classification level, and most recent sentence length were examined.

Overall, the RCJ data supplied 11,203 unique clients, and Homeward supplied 2627 unique clients. The number of clients who appeared in both datasets was 828. From the jail data, 7.4% of inmates had stayed in an area shelter during the year. From the HCIS data, 31.5% of clients had spent time in the RCJ during the year. It is important to note that young clients – those younger than the youngest RCJ inmate – were removed from the HCIS data to ensure that inmates and clients were of comparable ages.

A summary of results appears below:

- Among people who had experienced homelessness, males were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were females. Similarly, people with multiple episodes of homelessness were more likely to have spent time in the RCJ than were those with just one episode.
- Also among people who had experienced homelessness, there were no significant differences for males or females on whether they had spent time in the RCJ based on

whether they were accompanied by children in shelter at any point. However, it was notable that 40.4% of females who had been in the RCJ and in an area shelter were accompanied by children at the time of their shelter stay.

- Among people who had spent time at the RCJ, there were no significant differences between males and females in the percentage who had experienced homelessness.
- Among people who had spent time at the RCJ, those who had experienced homelessness were more likely to be classified at higher security levels.
- Among people who had spent time in the RCJ, there were no significant differences in sentence length (for those who had been sentenced) based on whether or not an individual had experienced homelessness. For individuals who were not sentenced and not booked and released on the same date, those who had experienced homelessness were held in jail custody significantly longer than those who had not experienced homelessness.

Some methodological limitations are important to note. Perhaps the most substantial limitation is that the Richmond City Jail is not the only facility where individuals experiencing homelessness are incarcerated, and HCIS is used by most (but not all) shelters in the area. Further, HCIS does not contain information about people who live outdoors or in places unfit for habitation. Finally, due to the longitudinal nature of the data examined, the decision was made to look at offenders' most recent sentences and classification levels, rather than analyzing every occurrence. While these considerations limit generalizability of the present study, the findings inform the local community's understanding of the relationship between incarceration in the RCJ and staying in the main shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

In spite of these limitations, the data presented here shed light on the relationship between homelessness and jail incarceration. These findings address the prevalence of shelter

stays among the RCJ population and therefore support the need for housing-related services. The fact that so many women who have had contact with both systems were accompanied by children in an area shelter suggests the need for programs that can address the needs of children affected by disruptive events such as parental incarceration. In addition, offenders who have experienced homelessness tend to be held longer prior to sentencing, and they tend to be classified at higher security levels than those who have not experienced homelessness. This suggests that homeless clients at the jail have other characteristics (e.g., severity of charges, prior criminal history, history of jail infractions) that require higher security levels, as homelessness is not considered in the classification process.

Future research might examine the types of crimes committed by offenders who use area shelters. It is possible that some individuals commit crimes directly related to their lack of housing and that being able to connect them to housing would reduce recidivism (to both jail and shelter). Learning more about the overlap between offenders from the RCJ and individuals who access homeless shelters contributes to the community's efforts to both understand and address the housing and service needs of people who encounter both the criminal justice and homeless services systems.

References

Greenberg, G.A., & Rosenheck, R.A. (2008). Jail incarceration, homelessness, and mental health: A national study. *Psychiatric Services*, 59(2), 170-177.

Appendix A
January 2010 Snapshot of Ex-Offenders

Experiencing Homelessness in the Richmond Region

The following data were collected in Homeward's twelfth winter (January 21, 2010) count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region. A total of 881 adults and 131 children were counted, and 77.2% of adults completed the Homeward point-in-time survey. The statistics reported below represent the 469 individuals who indicated that they had spent time in jail or prison.

- 83.3% of ex-offenders are males, 16.5% are females, and .2% are transgendered. Most are single, never married adults (51.9%). 6.9% are married, and 48.1% have been in families, including those who are married, as well as those who are widowed, separated, or divorced.
- 6.0% of ex-offenders have children living with them.
- A majority of ex-offenders report that they are African-American (65.7%), followed by White (28.8%). 3.6% indicated that they are Hispanic.
- The average age for adult ex-offenders is 44.8 years.
- 52.5% have only a high school education or GED. 20.0% attended some college, and 9.7% have a college degree or higher.
- 17.2% are veterans.
- A majority of ex-offenders have served time in jail (64.6%). 4.3% indicated that they served time in prison, and 31.1% reported that they had served time in both jail and prison. 62.0% reported having felony convictions. 36.2% reported being homeless before incarceration, and 51.1% indicated that they were homeless upon release.
- 33.0% experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Of those experiencing domestic violence, 5.0% had experienced it in the past month, and 29.5% had experienced it in the past year.
- 54.3% report having a problem with alcohol sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem with alcohol, 79.1% are currently in recovery.
- 60.0% report having a problem with substance abuse sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem, 80.6% are currently in recovery.
- 34.2% report having a mental health problem sometime in their lifetime. Of these, 57.2% are currently being treated and 53.5% are taking medication for mental health problems.
- 45.9% report having a long-term disability. Of those reporting a long-term disability, 69.4% indicated that their disability was drug or alcohol abuse, and 50.0% indicated that their disability was a mental illness. (Note that respondents could select both or neither of these options.)
- 19.1% are employed. Of those who are employed, 34.1% work full-time, 45.1% work part-time, and 20.7% do day labor or temp work.
- 49.9% of respondents have lived in Greater Richmond for 10 years or more; 43.0% have lived in the area for 17 years or more.
- Most (55.1%) reported having their last housing in Richmond. Others indicated previous housing in Henrico (9.1%), Chesterfield (5.6%), and Hanover (1.9%). 16.0% of respondents last lived elsewhere in Virginia, and 11.4% lived in other states.
- In the past three years, most homeless ex-offenders have been homeless once (60.7%) or twice (23.2%); 16.1% have been homeless three or more times during this time period.
- A little less than half (45.8%) have been homeless for 5 months or less. 49.0% have been homeless for more than 6 months.