

## 4. PROSPECTS FOR SECONDARY ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 identifies key knowledge, as well as gaps in that knowledge, related to homeless families and families at risk of homelessness that will be critical to the development of a relevant typology for the purposes of this study. While there is a considerable amount known about currently homeless families and their needs, there are also significant gaps in the knowledge because of limitations in population coverage (focus on the currently homeless and small samples that do not permit subgroup analysis), the cross-sectional nature of many of the studies, the lack of focus on intervention, and the lack of data on children (Table 4-1).

**Table 4-1. Knowledge gaps**

Knowledge gaps	Type of research needed to address gap
Geographic coverage gaps	A. National sample B. Multisite sample C. Aggregation of numerous site-specific samples
Population coverage	D. Data on a population broader than homeless population only
Longitudinal studies	E. Track study participants over time
Subgroup gaps	F. Families at risk of becoming homeless, working but still homeless, episodically homeless, two-parent homeless families, families that fall back into homelessness, moderate needs homeless families, families living in extended family networks, noncustodial homeless parents
Focus on prevention/intervention	G. Track services used, government support (welfare, housing subsidies, etc.)
Focus on children	H. Track children and collect data

The lack of comprehensive population coverage in previous studies is due to several factors, including a dominant focus on currently homeless families, relatively small study sample sizes, and a concentration of research in East Coast cities. The focus on currently homeless families provides an understanding of the characteristics of those who become homeless, but generally explains little about families prior to entering homelessness (and, even then, only retrospectively) and does not provide any

knowledge of the specific subgroups of the broader population who may be at risk of homelessness. In addition, because only a few studies have tracked homeless families for 12 months or longer, little information is available on families after they leave shelter or about their long-term stability.

The small study samples generally inhibit the ability to examine specific subgroups. For example, survey questions may be asked about families who are currently working but, because the percentage of working families in currently homeless samples is typically 20 percent or less, the overall study samples are generally not large enough (e.g., 500 or more) to provide subsamples of sufficient size. Other key subgroups with inadequate sample sizes in current studies include those who are episodically homeless (because they are homeless for such short periods of time and generally are not represented in studies with restricted recruitment patterns or with criteria that require a minimum period of homelessness before being included in the study); families with two parents; moderate-need families; families living in extended family networks; and chronically homeless families. Although one study (Burt, M., Aron, L.Y., Douglas, T., Valente, J., Lee, E., and Iwen, B., 1999) had a large sample of families, only limited information on the families was collected because it was part of a larger effort.

A final limitation with respect to population coverage is the fact that many studies concentrated their data collection in East Coast cities. Because of the contextual nature of homelessness and the diversity in labor markets, housing markets, and service systems, the lack of attention to other geographic areas of the country—especially the Midwest, South, and rural areas—limits the generalizability of the findings and would likely distort any typology efforts that were based solely on existing data.

Although a few past studies had longitudinal study designs, only one study tracks families over a 5-year period and even then only two waves of data were collected. Longitudinal, ongoing data on families who have experienced homelessness would increase the understanding of the course of residential instability and homelessness and the factors that influence this course (including individual, contextual, and intervention factors).

There is also a paucity of data on the role of prevention efforts in keeping families from becoming homeless and intervention efforts to help them exit homelessness. Finally, most of what is understood about homeless families is either about the mother or from the mother's perspective; few studies have focused on the children in the families.

Most of the data that is available on homeless families has been drawn from research studies that focus exclusively on homeless families, as opposed to the population at large or even studies that have explored the needs of low-income families or families living in poverty. A number of existing data sets that include low-income families potentially contain information to support the development of a typology of homeless families. In order to be useful, a data set must include information on each family's housing status or housing history to determine if the family is or has been at risk of homelessness or has experienced homelessness.

This chapter summarizes our review of data sets that focus on or include low-income families (i.e., families who have the greatest probability of experiencing housing instability), including the stepwise approach taken to identify and screen the data sets to determine if they have the necessary housing information. The purpose of this undertaking was to identify existing prospects for secondary analysis—that is, data already being collected that could serve to inform the development of a homeless family typology. Project staff examined major national or multijurisdictional surveys that might include large numbers of low-income respondents (e.g., potentially homeless or homeless families) and the types of data currently being collected. This chapter highlights what can and cannot be answered with existing data.

## **4.2 Identification of Potential Data Sets**

Data sets were sought that could extend the understanding of homelessness beyond currently homeless families to a broader sample of families who may have been homeless in the past or may be at particular risk of homelessness in the future. Some of the candidate data sets are ones that Westat has previously analyzed, such as the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), and the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (currently called the National Survey on Drug Use and Health [NSDUH]). Other data sets reviewed include the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), the California Health Interview Survey, the Current Population Survey (CPS), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD), the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience (NLS), the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, and the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW). Three other studies—the Women's Employment Study, Three-City Study, and the Chicago Women's Health Risk Study—were identified through the review of the literature and the Internet, and through contacts with colleagues in the field.

For each data set, information was obtained on its purpose, use, size, scope, domains, and individual variables and each was initially screened based on three criteria:

- The data set was public and could be readily obtained (e.g., through electronic download);
- The data set contained information on a family’s housing status or history so that it was possible to determine if a family was, or had been, at risk of homelessness or had experienced homelessness; and
- The data set was organized by family so that analyses could examine the family-level information that related to housing status.

The first criterion was essential so that any secondary analyses could be conducted within the time frame of this project. The second criterion relates to the study’s relevance to our typology efforts; data sets may contain housing information but, if there is no information on homelessness or other unstable housing situations, there is little to inform how we would define a typology of homeless families. Finally, data need to be available at the family level to permit analyses that can examine the factors that put families at greater risk for homelessness or buffer them from the experience. Some data sets provide data only at the aggregate level (i.e., by city or community) and do not allow for individual family analyses.

Table 4-2 displays the data sets that were screened and the results of the screening. The review is divided into two sections, focusing on the general population surveys first, followed by the special population studies. Studies were classified as “General Population” if the sample was designed so that estimates could be made for a national (or state) population, even if, as in some cases, the study also oversampled low-income or other groups. “Special Population” studies focused on specific subsets, such as families involved in the welfare system (NSCAW), low-income families (Chicago Women’s Health Study, Three-City Study, and Women’s Employment Study), and children born to unwed mothers (Fragile Families). Results from these studies cannot be generalized to a national or state level. The table displays information on the population scope and design for each data set, as well as the content relevant to the typology development, and the data sets are listed by their scope and population focus.

Of the national population studies identified, only the NLS and PSID met all three screening criteria. All others lacked information on housing stability or homelessness, with the exception of the American Housing Survey (AHS), which collected data at the housing unit level, rather than the

individual or family level. The four “special population” studies that focus on discrete populations of women and their families met the criteria. All seven data sets that met the criteria were then reviewed more closely to determine their benefit for secondary analysis.

**Table 4-2. Data sets screened for secondary analyses**

	Structure		Domains addressed			
	National sample	Longitudinal design	Housing/homelessness domain	Housing subsidies	Employment/income data	Agency service involvement
<b>General population studies</b>						
<b>National</b>						
American Housing Survey* (AHS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Current Population Survey (CPS)	✓	No	No	No	✓	✓
National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)	✓	No	No	No	✓	✓
National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience (NLS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)	✓	No	No	No	✓	No
Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓
Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD)	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓
<b>State/local</b>						
California Health Interview Survey	No	No	No	No	✓	✓
<b>Special population studies</b>						
<b>National</b>						
National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF)	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW)	✓	✓	No	No	✓	✓
<b>State/local</b>						
Chicago Women’s Health Risk Study	No	✓	✓	No	✓	✓
Fragile Families Study	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Three-City Study	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women’s Employment Study <sup>+</sup>	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*Family-level data unavailable.

+ Data currently unavailable.

### **4.3 Review of Data Sets**

Seven data sets were identified as warranting further consideration for possible reanalysis. In this section, each of these data sets is reviewed in detail, including their structure and content. Then, the nature of the reanalysis that is indicated, including the type of questions that could be addressed, and how the results could inform the typology efforts, is presented.

#### **4.3.1 General Population Studies**

Three of the data sets are ongoing, general population studies that are widely known and have been analyzed for a variety of research purposes. Two, the NLS and the PSID, are national, longitudinal studies, and the other is a large, national cross-sectional survey of families, NSAF. The three national data sets identified have potential for informing the efforts to conceptualize a typology of homeless families. In the following section, each study is described in detail and information on the structure, content, and strengths of the data set is further outlined in an accompanying table.

**National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experiences (NLS).** The NLS (see Table 4-3) is a series of longitudinal cohort studies. Four initial cohorts were selected in the mid-1960s, including samples of both young and mature men and women. Tracking of the two male cohorts was stopped in the early 1990s, while the two groups of women continue to be monitored. Tracking began of another cohort of 12,686 youth between the ages of 14 and 22 in 1979 (NLS79). Annual surveys of this cohort were conducted for the next 25 years and, since that time (1994), biennial surveys have been conducted. In 1986, surveys were begun with children from the NLS79 cohort. Information was initially collected on these children in 1986 and has been biennially updated since 1988. A sixth cohort NLSY97 sample of 9,000 youths who were 12 to 16 years of age as of December 31, 1996, has been tracked annually since 1997.

**Table 4-3. National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience (NLS79)**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Nationally representative sample of youths who were 14 to 22 years old in 1979
Size	12,686 youths
Timeframe	First interviewed in 1979. Interviewed annually through 1994 and biennially since then.
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/homelessness	Information collected on current residence and on moves since the previous interview. Homelessness (e.g., living on the streets or in a shelter) is not recorded
Specific housing questions	What is the address of your current residence?  What type of living quarters? (Answer choice- Other- Temporary individual quarters)
Demographics	Work history, education, high school transcript, income and assets
Family	Marital status event history, child births, and family composition
Service needs	Health conditions, alcohol and substance abuse, insurance coverage
Agency/service involvement	Event histories of participation in government programs such as unemployment insurance and AFDC
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	Yes, large, national representative sample
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes
Subgroups available	Yes, to identify those at risk, provides ability to examine role of risk factors and protective factors as they relate to housing stability, work, and family
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, data on government programs, including housing subsidies
Data on children	Yes, limited data on children of NLS79 cohort's mothers
Weaknesses	Possibly biased sample if did not successfully track those who became homeless; does not collect any information on homelessness
<b>Conclusion</b>	Cannot be used for typology – no information on homelessness

The four initial cohorts are unlikely to yield information relevant to family homelessness. By the time this topic began to emerge as a national issue in the mid-1980s, most of the original 1966 and 1967 samples were too old to have young children and less likely to have been at risk of homelessness. Conversely, the latest cohort, the NLSY97 sample, is just beginning to reach the prime age for entering homelessness as families. Data available on this cohort, however, exist only through 2000, when most of the youth in the sample had not yet reached their 20s. This data set, because it specifically collects

information on whether a respondent was living in a shelter or on the street, may be important to examine in the future.

Only the NLSY79 sample is likely to have experienced homelessness, with the group entering their 20s during the mid-1980s. A review of the data set revealed that, in addition to labor force behavior, information has been collected on a wide range of key domains, such as welfare receipt, educational attainment, income, health conditions, alcohol and substance abuse, family histories, and residential history. Contacts with individuals at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicated that the NLS does not provide any measure of homelessness, though the database is built on panel surveys that track living arrangements over time. At this time, only the addresses, not types of location, are coded. Thus, a shelter cannot be distinguished from a stable living arrangement. In addition, even if the type of location could be discerned, it is likely that because of the difficulty in locating homeless people for followup interviews, individuals who are not stably housed would be underrepresented.

If coding of homelessness and precariously housed arrangements did exist in a reliable and valid fashion, a reanalysis of this data set could make an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of residential instability from early adulthood on and the role that labor force involvement, welfare, and some basic health issues play in these dynamics. The size, scope, and longitudinal nature of the data set would amplify its potential importance for the efforts as long as there could be some determination of the representativeness of the study sample with respect to unstable families. As it currently stands, however, the NLS does not provide this information.

**Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID).** The PSID (see Table 4-4) is a nationally representative, longitudinal study that began in 1968. The initial PSID study consisted of two independent samples: a cross-sectional national sample of approximately 3,000 families and a national sample of 2,000 low-income families. From 1968 to 1996, individuals from these families were interviewed annually, whether or not they were living in the same dwelling unit or with the same people. As a result of both low attrition of the original sample and additional followups of the children as they formed their own families, the PSID grew to a size of more than 65,000 individuals, clustered into families branching off from the original family sample. To keep the PSID sample representative of the U.S. population, adjustments were made in 1997 that reduced the number of core families and added a refresher sample of post-1968 immigrant families, particularly Latino and Asian households.



**Table 4-4. Program Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID)**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Representative, national sample of families, including a national sample of low-income families in 1968, refreshed in 1997
Size	Initial sample of 4,800 families, grown to 7,100 by 2001, with data on over 65,000 individuals
Timeframe	First survey conducted in 1968, annual surveys administered until 1997, starting in 1999 surveys administered biennially
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/homelessness	Residential followback calendar for all places lived in during the previous 2 years; however, homeless not directly coded
Specific housing questions	Asks for a residential follow-back calendar of all places lived during the previous 2 years (lists addresses).  Is this house in a public housing project; that is, is it owned by a local housing authority or other public agency?  Are you paying no rent because the government is paying all of it?
Demographics	Education, ethnicity, religion, military service, parents' education, occupation, poverty status, income
Family	Family composition and changes
Service needs	Physical health, emotional distress
Agency/service involvement	Public assistance in the form of food or housing
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	Yes, large nationally representative sample
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes, with a subsample of low-income individuals from 1997
Subgroups available	Yes, provides ability to examine role of risk and protective factors as they relate to housing, family, and employment for those at-risk for homelessness.
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, housing and food public assistance
Data on children	Limited
Weaknesses	Does not collect any information on homelessness
<b>Conclusion</b>	Cannot be used for typology – no information on homelessness

The PSID collects information on a broad range of core topics, including income sources and amounts, poverty status, public assistance, marital status, childbirth, employment status, military service, and health. Supplemental questions also have been added to various waves of the PSID. For example, various types of health questions have been included in several different years. Retrospective questions also have been asked to clarify relationships between people identified in the early years of the PSID and to obtain more detailed work histories from participants.

The PSID collects housing and mobility information but does not include homelessness as a specific location. For example, it obtains information such as when and why people have moved, whether they own or rent, and how much they pay for housing. It is possible that homelessness or other information related to homelessness is collected but coded as other.

A potential strength of the PSID for this effort is oversampling of low-income families. However, because the percentage of families that experience long-term poverty is fortunately relatively small, the number of families experiencing long-term poverty in the PSID is not large (Gottschalk and Ruggles, 1994).

**National Survey of America's Families (NSAF).** The NSAF (see Table 4-5), consists of representative cross-sectional samples of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population under the age of 65, and was designed to gather data on economic, social, and health characteristics of families and children. Individuals were contacted through either random-digit dialing (RDD) or, for households without a telephone, face to face. The NSAF is a national sample, but it oversamples 13 states to provide more accurate state-level numbers. The survey was administered to 44,461 households in 1997, 46,000 households in 1999, and 43,157 households in 2002.

The NSAF provides a rich data set on both parents and children. In households with children, up to two children were randomly sampled, one child under the age of 6, and another child between the ages of 6 and 17. Information on children in the household was gathered by asking questions of the adult with the most knowledge regarding the children's education and health care. The NSAF contains information on a range of domains, including employment, welfare receipt, social relationships, and emotional and physical well-being and provides child-level data on social, emotional, behavioral outcomes, mental and physical health outcomes, and academic outcomes.

Another potential strength of the NSAF is that, although the homeless population is not specifically surveyed, the three administered surveys focus on housing and economic hardship variables. The survey includes questions that identify families who were forced to live with other families because of the inability to pay the monthly mortgage, rent, or utilities. Additional questions that capture families at risk for homelessness identify the use of emergency food banks and the inability to pay monthly rent. The NSAF would, therefore, provide a rich data set to measure families who are doubled-up and provide valuable information to identify those at risk for homelessness. A potential limitation of the NSAF is that the cross-sectional design would not provide information on the same families across points in time.

**Table 4-5. National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF)**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Representative sample of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population under the age of 65, oversampling people with low incomes
Size	44,460 households surveyed in 1997; 46,000 households surveyed in 1999; approximately 40,000 households surveyed in 2002
Timeframe	Cross-sectional design, surveys conducted in 1997, 1999, and 2002
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/homelessness	Asks if family had to move in with another family because of inability to pay mortgage, rent, or utility bills (doubled-up population identifier)
Specific housing questions	How much paid for rent?  Are you and your family paying lower rent because the Federal, state, or local government is paying part of the rent?  During the last 12 months, did anyone move into your home even for a little while because they could not afford their own place to live or because their parents could not support them?  During the past 12 months, was there a time when you and your family were not able to pay your mortgage, rent, or utility bills?
Demographics	Gender, education, employment, ethnicity
Family	Births/pregnancies, parent-child interactions, family formation, and stability/living arrangements
Service needs	Adult health, physical, and emotional well-being, children’s mental/physical health
Agency/service involvement	Welfare, mental health services, medical services
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	Yes, three very large, national representative samples
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes, oversamples low-income individuals
Subgroups available	Yes, provides ability to examine role of risk and protective factors as they relate to housing, family, and employment for those at risk for homelessness. Provides ability to track the hardships families face, the role of welfare and other services in affecting the course of the hardships, and the role of family interactions and stability as both factors in shaping hardships and buffering hardships
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, housing and food public assistance
Data on children	Yes, child-level data collected
Weaknesses	Does not collect any information on homelessness
<b>Conclusion</b>	The data set may provide valuable information on those doubled-up and at risk for homelessness.

At this point, the specific size of the doubled-up population has not been identified; however, interim analytical findings suggest that 3 in 10 low-income families answered that they were unable to pay for a month's rent, utility bills, or mortgage payment and nearly half of the low-income families reported food affordability problems (Nelson, 2004). These findings suggest that an ample-sized, at-risk population exists and should be further examined on all variables.

#### **4.3.2 Special Population Studies**

The remaining four data sets examined are from studies that contain data on specific populations in selected areas of the country. Three of the studies are focused on low-income families in one or more selected cities across the country. One study, the Chicago Women's Health Risk Study (CWHRS), includes a one-time sample of women in Chicago seeking treatment. Each of these studies is described below.

**Chicago Women's Health Risk Study (CWHRS).** Funded by the National Institute of Justice, the CWHRS (see Table 4-6) was designed to identify risk factors that place a physically abused woman or her partner in significant danger of life-threatening injury (Block, 2000). The study collected extensive baseline information on several different samples: women who had been abused in the 12 months prior to seeking general health care (n=497), women who did not report being abused during that same period (n=208), and victims of intimate homicide (based on proxy interviews) (n=87) (Block, Stevenson, Leskin, and Thomas, 2002; Block, 2000; Block, Engel, Naureckas, and Riordan, 1999). Because the CWHRS sought to include the hidden population of women who are experiencing intimate partner violence but who are unknown to service agencies, women were screened for abuse at a county hospital or at community health clinics located in neighborhoods with high rates of intimate partner homicide.

The study focused on the 497 women who had been physically abused at least once in the year prior to seeking general health care, collecting descriptive data on each abuse incident during the 12 months prior to seeking treatment, and reinterviewing the women one time for varying periods up to 12 months following the initial interview. Sixty-six percent (323) of the original abuse sample was reinterviewed. Data were collected on an array of risk and protective factors for abuse across the retrospective and prospective periods. These included one's living situation (with specific attention to homelessness), family composition and child separations, marital status, physical health, pregnancy, drug

and alcohol use, mental health (posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD] and depression/suicide feelings), race/ethnicity, occupation and income, immigrant status, resource and social support network, intervention, and help seeking. Specifically, help seeking included whether assistance was sought from alcohol and drug treatment providers, a domestic violence agency, a medical provider, and/or the police.

**Table 4-6. Chicago Women’s Health Risk Study (CWHRS)**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Women seeking treatment at medical centers in areas with high rates of intimate partner homicide in Chicago
Size	705 total women interviewed, 497 experienced intimate violence in past year, 208 were in the comparison sample
Timeframe	Baseline interviews conducted 1997-1998, one followup conducted from 1998-1999
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/homelessness	Homelessness, living in a treatment center, shelter, number of people living in household (including her children), changes to household structure
Specific housing questions	Was the mother homeless or living in a treatment center or shelter?
Demographics	Age, race, education level, employment status, birthplace, marital status
Family	Age and gender of children living in and outside of the household with mother
Service needs	Physical and mental health, including general well-being, type and duration of any physical or emotional limiting condition, amount of bodily pain experienced, pregnancy outcomes, medical outcomes study, scale of depression
Agency/service involvement	Alcohol/drug treatment, contacting a domestic violence-related agency or counselor, seeking medical help, and contacting the police
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	No, only in Chicago
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes, samples from medical centers with high numbers of intimate violence
Subgroups available	Yes, subgroups include working but still homeless; noncustodial homeless parent; those at-risk providing the ability to examine role of risk and protective factors as they relate to family, work, and physical/emotional health.
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Somewhat, physical and mental health services
Data on children	Very limited
Weaknesses	Not a representative, national sample and only has one followup with a portion of the original sample
<b>Conclusion</b>	Cannot be used for typology- data are not generalizable to national population and the sample size is small

The CWHRS provides additional samples of women at risk for homelessness, as well as those who are homeless, and any transitions they make over the course of 12 months. The study also provides information on women currently being abused that would augment knowledge contributed by the Worcester Family Research Project and the SAMHSA Homeless Families Project. A specific question of interest for reanalysis would be if the help-seeking patterns of those who are homeless differ from individuals who are currently housed. The major drawback is that this is a single-site study with a relatively small sample that therefore is likely not representative of all women being abused.

**Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study.** The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (see Table 4-7), also referred to as the Survey of New Parents, follows a birth cohort of new parents and their children over a 5-year period. The purpose of the study is to provide new information on the strengths, conditions, and relationships of unwed parents and how Federal and state policies affect family composition and child well-being.

The study used a three-stage sampling process. First, a stratified random sample of 20 cities was selected from all 77 U.S. cities with 200,000 or more people. The stratification was based on three variables: welfare generosity, the strength of the child support system, and the strength of the labor market (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, McLanahan, 2001). Second, hospitals within cities were sampled, based on the proportion of nonmarital births in the hospitals or, in New York and Chicago, randomly from the pool of hospitals with over 1,000 nonmarital births per year. Third, random samples of both married and unmarried births were selected in each hospital per preset quotas. Samples were designed to be representative of the nonmarital births taking place in each of the 20 cities, but not necessarily to be representative of the marital births, since hospitals were sampled that had the most nonmarital births. Interviews were conducted with both the birth mother and the birth father. The final sample was composed of 3,712 nonmarital births and 1,186 marital births.

Data were collected at baseline, with initial interviews with mothers occurring within 24 hours of the child's birth and with fathers as soon after the birth as possible. Followup interviews were conducted with both parents when the child reached 12, 30, and 48 months. An in-home child assessment was also conducted with the child at 30 and 48 months. Data were collected on current housing situation and residential mobility from both parents at all data collection points and included homelessness as a

**Table 4-7. Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Stratified random sample of U.S. cities with a population of 200,000 or more, containing samples of families with nonmarital and marital births
Size	Approximately 3,800 unwed couples and 1,200 married couples
Timeframe	Baseline collected between 1998-2000, followups conducted 1 year, 3 years (not yet available), and 5 years (not yet available)
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/homelessness	Current housing situation (street, homeless is a choice), various doubled-up population identifiers
Specific housing questions	<p>In 1-year followup instrument: Asks the mother what the current housing situation is (answer choices include on the street, homeless); question is also present in the 3-year and 5-year followup</p> <p>What are the reasons that you and the baby's father are not planning to live together? Answer choice: housing reasons (no place to live)</p> <p>In the past 12 months, did you not pay the full amount of rent or mortgage payments?</p> <p>In the past 12 months, were you evicted from your home or apartment for not paying the rent or mortgage?</p> <p>In the past 12 months, did you move in with other people even for a little while because of financial problems?</p> <p>In the past 12 months, did you stay at a shelter, in an abandoned building, an automobile or any other place not meant for regular housing for even one night?</p>
Demographics	Race, education, employment status, of mother and father
Family	Followups: Family characteristics, relationships with family members, mother's family background and support
Service needs	Mother's physical and emotional health; child's social/emotional/behavioral outcomes, cognitive skills, overall development, academic outcomes, child mental/physical health
Agency/service involvement	Baseline: drug treatment; Followup: welfare, employment office, Healthy Start, Head Start
<b>Strengths for typology – Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	Yes, nationally representative sample
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes, provides ability to examine subgroups of families from initial development through various changes
Subgroups available	<p>Yes, relevant subgroups include working but still homeless, episodically homeless, two-parent homeless families, families that fall back into homelessness; "moderate needs" homeless</p> <p>Also provides data on those at risk, ability to examine the role of risk and protective factors as they relate to homelessness, family, and work.</p>
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, housing subsidies, welfare, drug treatment
Data on children	Yes
Weaknesses	Sample size of the literally homeless might be small
<b>Conclusion</b>	This sample would definitely inform a typology of homeless families

response option. The data set also included extensive information from both parents on demographics; partner, child, and familial relationships; marriage attitudes; child well-being; the health and development of the child and the respondent; social support; environmental factors; government programs; incarceration; and employment, income, and economic well-being.

Of all the data sets identified, this study offers the most promise for informing the typology efforts. For the purposes of this current effort, the project team conducted a reanalysis of the Fragile Families data set, focusing on specific research questions described in Chapter 5, along with the findings from the reanalysis. The data set contains a high-risk sample for homelessness, in that pregnancy is one of the major risk factors found to precede homelessness (Weitzman, 1989) or its reoccurrence (Rog and Gutman, 1997). Because it is a longitudinal panel study, it affords the ability to track families over time into various residences and presumably homelessness, and to examine the role of various other factors in their lives operating as either risk or protective factors. The database has the added benefits of being readily available and national in scope on the nonmarital births, offering some specific city information. Finally, the study contains a wealth of information on children from birth to 5 years and would provide an invaluable comparative perspective on the development of children living in various environments and experiencing different patterns of residential and familial instability.

**Welfare, Children, and Families: Three-City Study.** This research project is an intensive study of households with children in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. The study (see Table 4-8) is designed to better understand the effects of welfare reform on the well-being of children and families, especially as welfare reform evolves. The study has three interrelated components—longitudinal surveys, an embedded development study, and ethnographic studies.

The longitudinal component includes three rounds of interviews with a random sample of 2,400 households selected in 1999 (with an oversampling of welfare families). Each household had a child either between the ages of 0 to 4 or between the ages of 10 to 14 at the time of the baseline interview. Two followup interviews were conducted, one in 2000/01 and the second beginning in 2002. Personal interviews were conducted with the adults and the older children. Assessments were conducted with the younger children. With respect to homelessness, the survey identifies families who indicate that they went to a shelter instead of receiving welfare and those who indicate that they went to a shelter when benefits stopped or were cut. Unfortunately, the code “moving in with others” as a response to either not receiving welfare or what they did after benefits stopped is combined with “moving to cheaper housing;”



**Table 4-8. Welfare, children, and families: Three-city study**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Random sample of households with children in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio
Size	Approximately 2,400 households; approximately 256 women
Timeframe	Baseline conducted in 1999, first followup in 2000, second followup in 2002
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/ homelessness	What did you do to get by without welfare (answer choice is “went to a shelter”) Doubled-up population identifying question
Specific housing questions	What did you do to get by instead of going on welfare? (Answer choice- “went to a shelter”)  What did you do to get by when the welfare benefits stopped? (Answer choice “went to a shelter”)  During the past two years, did anyone move into your house/apartment because they could not afford their own place to live? (doubled-up population)  In the past two years, were you forced to move from a residence or home because you could not afford the rent or mortgage?  Does your household pay less rent because the government pays for part, such as Section 8?
Demographics	Education, basic demographics
Family	Family routines, family background, father involvement, mother-child activities
Service needs	Domestic violence, schooling, pregnancies, mother’s emotional and physical well-being
Agency/service involvement	Welfare participation
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	No, sampled in only three cities
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes
Subgroups available	Yes, subgroups include episodically homeless, families that fall back into homelessness, those at risk for homelessness
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, housing subsidies, welfare
Data on children	Yes
Weaknesses	Unrepresentative sample
<b>Conclusion</b>	Cannot be used for the typology even though the sample identifies homeless families; the sample is nationally unrepresentative

therefore, a transition can be noted but is not well defined. In addition, data are collected on whether another individual or individuals have moved in with the household because they could not live on their own.

The developmental study includes more intensive testing and evaluation of approximately 700 children aged 2 to 4. This includes videotaping and coding interactions, time-diary studies, and observations of child care settings. Ethnographies are also being conducted in each city, focused on how changes in welfare policy affect the daily lives of welfare-dependent and working poor families; 215 families are to be followed for 4 years.

This study may hold some promise for informing the typology. It will depend on the extent to which people indicate that homelessness, or moving to another residence/being doubled up, are options they chose in order to not receive welfare. It will also depend on how they survived once welfare was terminated. Because these are not direct questions but rather open-ended response options, it is up to the respondent to offer this information. Moreover, it is unlikely in most cases that people moved into shelter to avoid going on welfare or as a direct result of benefits being cut. Doubling-up with others is a more likely result, but it may not happen immediately after welfare is cut; it is more likely that families will weather an eviction or two before moving to other housing or in with family or friends. Thus, the usefulness of these data depends on how valid the responses are and the extent to which the relevant options are used.

**Women's Employment Study.** The Women's Employment Study (see Table 4-9) consists of a random sample of 874 single mothers who were on the welfare rolls in a Michigan metropolitan area in 1997. Cases were proportionately selected by ZIP Code, race, and age. Eligibility was also restricted to White or Black women who were U.S. citizens and not classified as exempt from work requirements. Four waves of data were collected, generally at 1-year intervals with the baseline conducted in 1997. The purpose of the study is to examine barriers to employment among welfare mothers. In-person interviews cover a comprehensive set of possible barriers, including education; work experience, skills, and readiness; physical health, mental health, and substance abuse problems; family stress; and domestic violence.

**Table 4-9. Women’s employment study**

<b>Structure</b>	
Sample	Random sample of single welfare mothers who live in a Michigan metropolitan area
Size	753 current and former welfare recipient families
Timeframe	1997-2003; baseline collected 1997, 1-year followup in 1998, 2-year followup in 1999
<b>Content</b>	
Housing/ homelessness	Homelessness Length of homelessness
Specific housing questions	Have you ever been homeless?  For how many days or weeks were you homeless?  Have you ever been evicted?  In the next two months, how much do you anticipate that you and your family will experience actual hardships such as inadequate food, housing, or medical care?  Do government programs like Section 8 pay part of housing costs?
Demographics	Employment, education
Family	Violence in family, births/pregnancies, parent-child interactions, family and relationship outcomes, parenting attitudes, parenting skills
Service needs	Child development, substance abuse, emotional and physical well-being
Agency/service involvement	Case management, counseling, substance abuse, child protection agencies, domestic violence, or mental health treatment
<b>Strengths for typology - Knowledge gaps answered</b>	
Geographic coverage	No, only from Michigan
Population coverage (Broader than homeless)	Yes, sample of single welfare mothers
Subgroups available	Yes, subgroups include working but still homeless, episodically homeless, families that fall back into homelessness, moderate needs homelessness, those at-risk
Prevention/intervention services (agency involvement)	Yes, housing subsidies, CPS, mental health treatment
Data on children	Yes
Weaknesses	Small, unrepresentative sample
<b>Conclusion</b>	Cannot be used for typology; even though homelessness data are collected, the sample is unrepresentative and small.

Key to typology interest is the measurement of housing affordability, residential mobility, and homelessness in the first followup wave. Respondents rated the difficulty of living on their total household income and the likelihood of experiencing hardships such as inadequate housing, food, or medical care in the next 2 months. They also were asked if they had their gas or electricity turned off, had been evicted, or had been homeless since the previous interview. If a respondent indicated that they had been homeless, the amount of time spent homeless was recorded.

Unfortunately, the Women's Employment Study database is not in the public domain at this time. However, since the study has an active research team, additional analyses relevant to the typology may be ongoing or may be solicited. In particular, the study represents another examination of families at risk of becoming homeless and the various factors that place them at risk or that may cause them to fall into homelessness.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The current homelessness research provides an extensive understanding of currently homeless families' characteristics and service needs and, to some degree, the patterns of residential instability they faced prior to becoming homeless. However, as a whole, the existing studies lack geographic diversity and do not provide the ability to understand subsets of families. Moreover, there is not sufficient data tracking of families at risk of homelessness or those that fall back into homelessness over time. In addition, the small sample sizes of the more general homeless family population studies restrict the ability to focus on subgroups of families. There is little study of the role that prevention and intervention efforts play in the lives of the families or the role that specific government programs have in preventing or intervening with homelessness.

The majority of studies reviewed for this effort, especially the general population studies, do not hold the prospect of filling the knowledge voids. Those studies that focus on, or include, key at-risk populations and that are national in scope lack questions on homelessness. Those that do include a housing or living arrangement question or domain may not have an explicit code for homelessness. For example, after extensive review of the NLS, it was discovered that addresses, and not types of locations, are coded, thus making it impossible to distinguish a shelter address from a housing address. If nothing else, the database investigation has revealed shortcomings in some of the nation's major data sets that are clearly missing a significant segment of the population. Remedies for improving some of the data sets'

ability to inform the efforts would range from adding codes to the “other responses” to adding probes or questions.

#### **4.4.1 Proposed Secondary Analyses**

Among the studies reviewed, there are three data sets that hold the greatest promise for informing these typology efforts. These data sets include the NSAF, Women’s Employment Study, and the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study. The best prospect is the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, which has the following strengths:

- Contains a high-risk sample for homelessness (i.e., new parents);
- Is a longitudinal panel study that is national in scope;
- Measures residential moves, including homelessness, so it can provide a sensitive understanding of the dynamics of homelessness and housing instability;
- Has a number of questions for the prior year that measure incidence of risk factors for homelessness (e.g., being evicted; having utilities turned off), and the incidence of homelessness itself (e.g., staying for at least one night with others; staying at least one night in a literally homeless situation);
- Examines various other factors in their lives that can operate as either risk or protective factors, and can help differentiate those who become homeless from those who do not; and
- Includes developmental information on a cohort of children from birth to 4 years old.

The Fragile Families data set is readily available, free of charge, and has considerable documentation on the web. Given its potential and easy availability, reanalysis of the original data, presented in Chapter 5, has been conducted.

The NSAF is a second data set that has potential for providing data about families at risk of homelessness, and families who are homeless by virtue of being doubled up. As a large national database, it offers the potential to provide a strong understanding of the at-risk population, however, since it is only a cross-sectional study, the data will be a snap-shot of the population. This data set is also readily available and is well documented on the web site.

The Women's Employment Study database is the final data set that appears useful to reanalyze with a focus on homelessness. This data set provides data on families on welfare, their struggles with income insufficiency, and the impact that welfare reform is having, especially on housing stability and affordability. In particular, the study has potential for explaining the dynamics of shelter use and residential instability among welfare families. The drawbacks of the study are that the data are currently not in the public domain, the study is concentrated in a single site, the study includes a relatively small sample, and the number of homeless families in the data set could be too small for analysis. However, as it is an active research team, additional analyses may be ongoing or may be solicited.

Two other studies offer less information for the time and effort it would take to access, understand, review, and reanalyze the data. The Three-City Study, for example, could be useful to the typology development if there is a sufficient sample of families who reveal that they have used shelter or have been doubled up with others. However, the indirect nature of these questions suggests that this is unlikely to be the case.

The CWHRS contains key information on housing affordability, residential mobility, and homelessness of women currently being abused. From a prior examination of this data set, significant subsets of families in the data set are currently homeless. A key analytic question would be if the help-seeking patterns of those who are homeless differ from individuals who are currently housed, and what other factors are related to their help-seeking behaviors. However, the fact that it is a single study, has only two waves of data (with the second wave only a year or less after the baseline), and focuses on only one subset of the overall homeless families population lowers its priority for reanalysis.