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HOUSING ASSOCIATES

NJ 2015 Counts!

Bergen County's 2015 Point-In-Time Count of the Homeless

February 3, 2015

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This report was prepared for
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by
Monarch Housing Associates

I. Introduction

NJ Counts 2015

NJ Counts 2015, New Jersey's annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count of the Homeless, provides a statewide snapshot of homeless households in our communities; where they find shelter, what their needs are, and what factors contribute to making them homeless. The 2015 Count reveals important demographic and other information about families and individuals who were homeless on the night of Tuesday, January 27th, 2015 or Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015 (depending on the community, see limitations below), and was carried out with the help of government agencies, community-based organizations, and local volunteers.

In New Jersey, each County's count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally, and the information gathered enables each community to better allocate housing resources and services in order to prevent and end homelessness. The PIT Count is the only opportunity throughout the year for most communities to take a comprehensive look at the total homeless population, and is especially crucial in assessing the needs of the unsheltered homeless.

Acknowledgements

Monarch would like to thank all Point-In-Time Coordinators, homeless service providers, agencies, and volunteers who participated in NJ Counts 2015. Monarch would also like to specifically thank Bergen County for providing a Spanish translation of the 2015 paper survey tool.

Finally, a special acknowledgement is given to all the respondents who were willing to share personal information about themselves and their households' experiences in order to help our communities better understand and assist the homeless.

Funding for coordinating New Jersey's 2015 Point-In-Time and producing this report was provided by New Jersey's Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA).

This Report

The findings in this report are presented in the following sections:

1. Total homeless population;
2. Those experiencing chronic homelessness (families and individuals that have been homeless for a year or longer, or who have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years, and have a disabled head of household); and
3. Unsheltered families and individuals;

The structure of this report is intended to provide not only an overall snapshot of the homeless population counted in the Point-In-Time, but also to focus attention on the homeless subpopulations that are the most in need, and those that represent federal funding priorities set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In addition to the main findings presented in the body of this report, Appendix A includes charts illustrating the responses to all survey questions that were part of the 2015 Point-In-Time Count.

II. Data Collection and Methodology

Requirements for the Count

As part of its Continuum of Care (CoC) application for homelessness funding, HUD requires that jurisdictions across the nation conduct a statistically reliable and unduplicated count of the homeless for one overnight period during the last 10 days of January. New Jersey's Continuums of Care (regional networks of organizations, agencies, and community stakeholders that plan local efforts to help the homeless) conduct an annual count of sheltered homeless persons (i.e. persons in emergency shelter, transitional housing for the homeless, and Safe Haven programs) and at least a biennial count of unsheltered homeless persons. 2015 was a HUD-required full count year.

In their Point-In-Time Count, CoCs must count and report all individuals and families who meet the criteria in paragraph (1)(i) of the homeless definition in 24 CFR 91.5 of HUD's Homeless Definition Rule on the night designated for the count. This includes individuals and families who are:

- **Sheltered**, or "living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)," or

- **Unsheltered**, "with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Because this report focuses on those respondents who meet HUD's definition of homeless, it does not include information about those who may be at risk of homelessness, precariously housed, or considered homeless under other federal statutes. Persons who, on the night of the count, were living doubled up with another household, living in illegal or overcrowded units, being discharged from a jail or health facility with no subsequent residence, scheduled to be evicted, or paying for its own motel unit were not considered

homeless. All survey information collected for respondents who were at risk of homelessness or precariously housed was preserved and shared with each community for local planning purposes, but is not included in this report unless otherwise noted.

Data Collection Methods

Monarch Housing Associates provided each of New Jersey's 21 counties with in-person training, online video and print training guides, a practice online survey tool, and technical assistance to aid in the data collection process for New Jersey's 2015 Point-In-Time Count. Point-In-Time Coordinators in each county disseminated PIT training materials and helped facilitate local planning around implementation of the PIT count in their communities.

For the second year, the count of homeless persons who were sheltered on the night of the point in time was primarily taken from New Jersey's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), while the count for the unsheltered and those sheltered by non-HMIS programs was conducted using a Paper Survey tool, personal interviews, and agency client records. This strategy was designed in accordance with HUD guidance regarding conducting both sheltered and unsheltered Point-In-Time Counts.

The 2015 PIT Survey tool closely mirrors information collected in HMIS so that the data was comparable for important factors such as household characteristics, income, services needed, and factors contributing to homelessness. Agencies updated all HMIS data to accurately reflect the night of the count, and those with programs that were non HMIS-participating submitted information from interviews utilizing the Paper Survey tool through SurveyMonkey.

Limitations

1. HUD requires a count of sheltered homeless persons and families annually, but only a biennial count of those who are unsheltered. Even though New Jersey conducts both a sheltered and unsheltered count each year, the comprehensiveness of the unsheltered count may be influenced during the non-HUD required full count years. This report includes comparison data from 2011 to 2015. 2012 and 2014 were not HUD required full reporting years while 2011, 2013 and 2015 were.

2. The winter of 2014 to 2015 was particularly cold, with parts of New Jersey seeing significant snow accumulation. NJ Counts 2015 was originally scheduled to take place Tuesday, January 27th, 2015. Unfortunately, there was a blizzard predicted for the night of the PIT, which led to about half of the Counties in the State postponing the PIT activities to the following week, Tuesday, February 3rd, 2015. This weather led to half the communities counting the households that were homeless on the night of January 27th and the other half counting those that were homeless on the night of February 3rd. Besides leaving the date of the count inconsistent, this winter weather forced many communities to set up emergency warming stations or shelters for the unsheltered.

While this means that many more people are able to sleep in a warm place, it may skew Point-In-Time data to show fewer unsheltered households than are actually present in communities on a regular basis.

3. The information presented in this report is based on survey interviews and agency HMIS records. In some cases, survey respondents did not answer every question completely, and homeless provider agencies did not report all client information on the night of the count. For this reason, all charts presented in this report will be based on the responses received, while all percentages will be based on the total households or individuals served and may not equal 100% in each category due to possible missing data.

4. Because the Point-In-Time Count represents only one night during the last ten days of January, it is widely accepted that the PIT will undercount the overall homeless population. Undercounting may occur due to difficulty finding those living on the street, incomplete information for people who do not agree to complete the survey, a shortage of volunteers to cover a geographic area, or homeless persons choosing not to seek housing services on the night of the count. This data should not be viewed as a comprehensive measurement of all families and individuals who experience homelessness throughout the year, but rather as a minimum number of persons who experience homelessness in New Jersey on a given night.

De-duplication

Monarch Housing Associates collected and merged all HMIS and SurveyMonkey Point-In-Time data from each community into its combined database. Monarch generated two unique identifiers, one more general and one more in-depth, based on the identifying information for each individual record. Using a formula, these unique identifiers were compared to all identifiers for other records in the database to identify potential duplicates.

All duplicates detected through comparison of unique identifiers were then de-duplicated by the following process:

1. Multiple HMIS records where all fields match – a single record was preserved, and all duplicates were removed;
2. Multiple SurveyMonkey records where all fields match – a single record was preserved, and all duplicates were removed;
3. Comparing HMIS to SurveyMonkey records where unique identifiers, disabilities, income sources, household size, and location on the night of the count all match – the HMIS record was preserved and the SurveyMonkey duplicates were removed.

Following this de-duplication of the data, communities were given preliminary data to review all identified duplicates and records with missing data. Communities were then able to update records with missing information and/or request any additional de-duplication they determined prudent. Monarch then updated and removed additional records based on community feedback prior to completing its final analysis and report

III. Findings for Total Homeless Population

Key Findings

- On the night of February 3rd, 2015 a total of 260 households, including 340 persons, were experiencing homelessness in Bergen County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count.
- A total of 28 households, with 28 persons, were identified as chronically homeless.
- 33 unsheltered homeless persons were counted.

Total Homeless Population

On the night of February 3rd, 2015, a total of 340 persons, in 260 households, were experiencing homelessness in Bergen County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is a decrease of 29 persons (7.9%) and 11 households (4.1%) from 2014. Bergen County had 3.3% of New Jersey's statewide homeless population in 2015.

Fig. 1. 5-Year Comparison of Total Homeless Population by Housing Situation

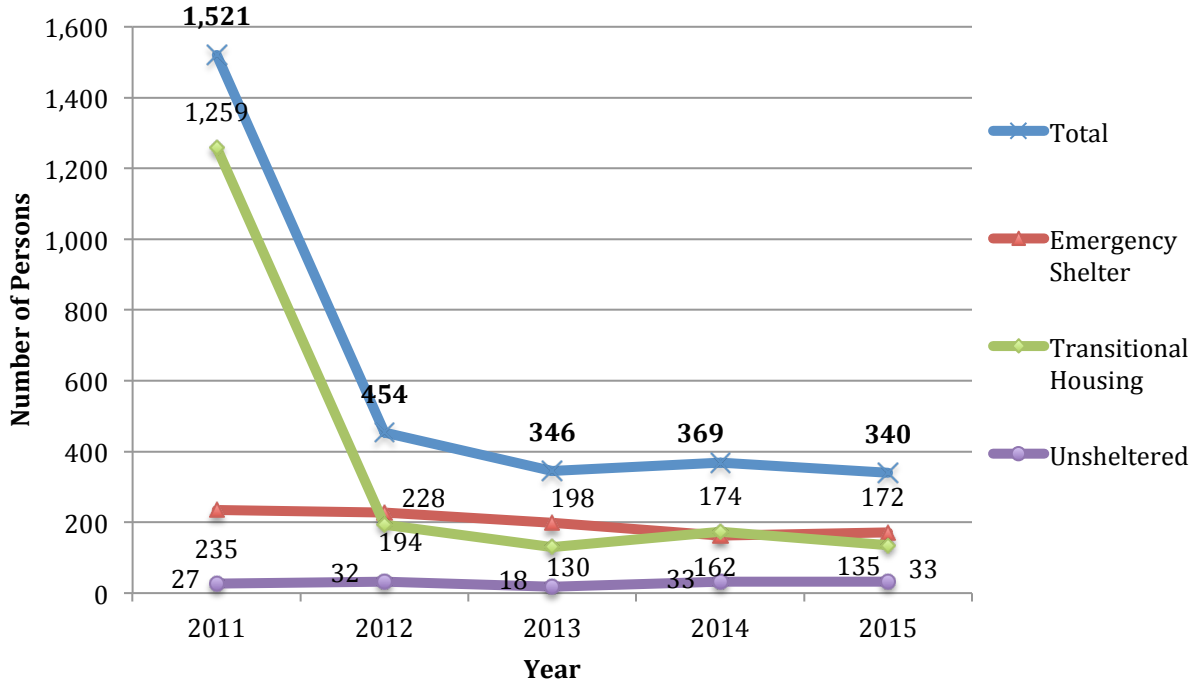


Figure 1 shows that, in 2015, 172 homeless persons stayed in emergency shelters, 135 stayed in transitional housing, and 33 were living unsheltered on the night of the count. The total number of those counted in emergency shelters was an increase of 10 persons (6.2%) from 2014. However, there were 39 (22.4%) fewer persons in transitional housing, and the number living unsheltered remained at 33 persons from 2014 to 2015.

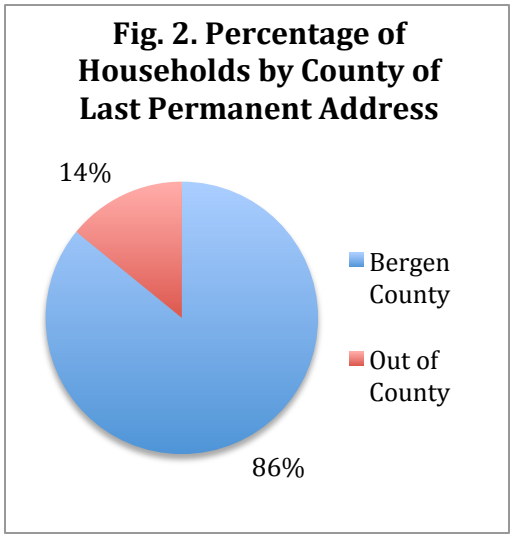
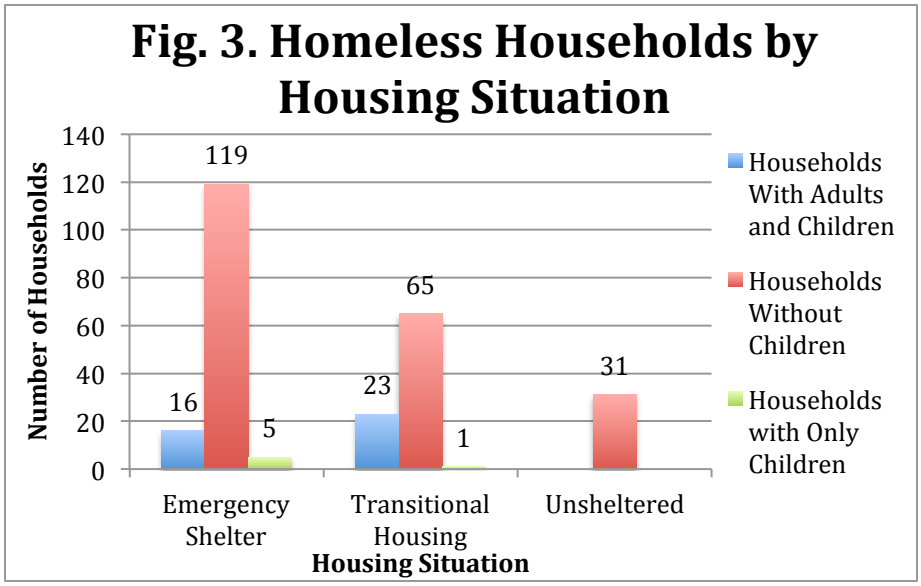


Figure 1 also shows that, over the past five years, the total number of homeless persons has been fluctuating in Bergen County, with the highest count in 2011 (1,521). 2011's high count is an aberration caused by a change in methodology, which counted temporary rental assistance from the Board of Social Services as transitional housing. While this is true, over the 4-year period from 2012 to 2015, Bergen County has seen a decrease of about 25%.

As Figure 2 shows, 14% of homeless households in Bergen County reported that their last permanent address prior to becoming homeless was outside of the county.

Homeless Families and Individuals

When reading the data regarding different types of homeless households, it is important for the reader to remember that, in this report, 'household' means "any group of persons who, if they were able to attain permanent housing, would choose to live together; and, shared the same sleeping arrangements on the night of the count." Three different types of households are discussed below: households with adults and children under 18 ('families'), households without children ('individuals'), and households with only children under 18 ('unaccompanied youth').



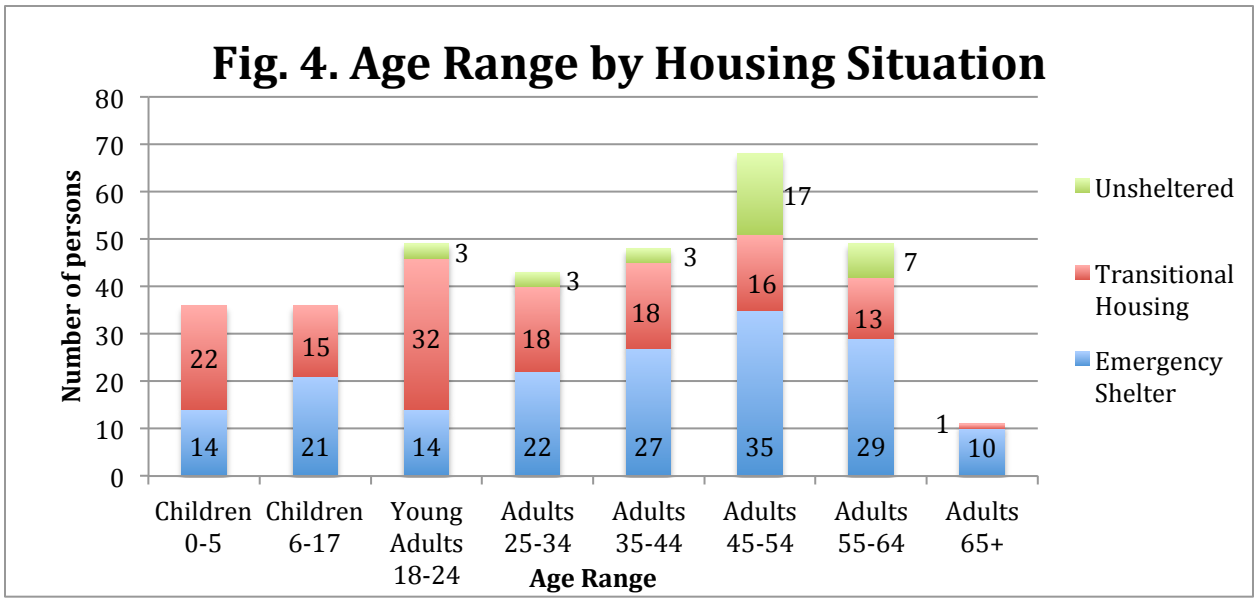
Of the 260 homeless households counted in Bergen County in 2015, 39 (15%) were families with at least one child under the age of 18 and one adult. This represents 14 (26.4%) fewer homeless families than in 2014. These families included 116 persons, 66 children under age 18, and 50 adults. The average family size was 3 persons. Figure 3 shows that 23 families (59%) were staying in transitional housing on the night of the count. There were no unsheltered families, a decrease from the 1 counted in 2014.

82.7% (215) of the homeless households counted in Bergen County were households without children under 18, and they were composed of 218 persons. 119 (55.3%) of these adult-only households were staying in emergency shelters, 65 (30.2%) were in transitional housing, and 31 (14.4%) were unsheltered. Bergen County has seen the number of adult-only households increase by 5 (2.4%) since 2014.

As Figure 3 indicates, there were 6 youth only households reported in 2015, a decrease of 2 from 2014. All of these households were one-child households. 5 unaccompanied youth were staying in emergency shelters, while 1 was in transitional housing on the night of the count.

Demographics

The majority (219 persons, 64.4%) of those experiencing homelessness in Bergen County on the night of the count were adults over age 24. There were a total of 49 (14.4%) homeless young adults between 18 and 24 years old, and 72 (21.2%) children under 18 years old as well. As Figure 4 shows the age range most represented, with 68 persons and 20% of the total homeless population, was adults between 45 and 54, a shift from 2014, where the most represented age range was adults between 25 and 34.

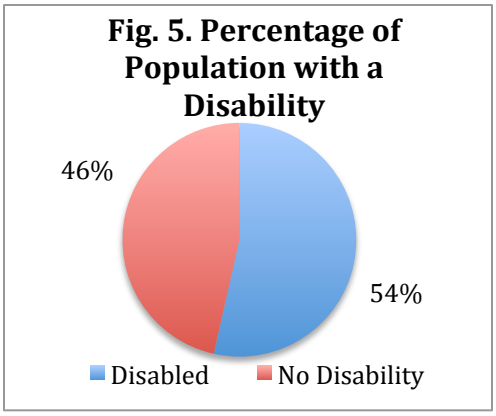


56.5% (192) of homeless persons were male, and 43.5% (148) were female.

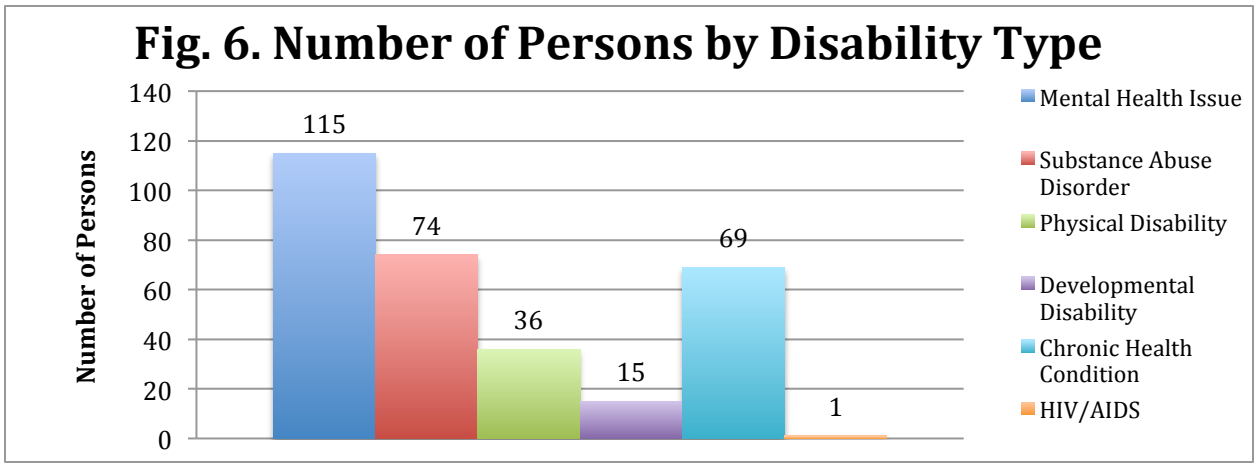
55% of homeless persons identified their race as White, making that the largest racial subgroup of homeless persons reported. The next largest group self-identified as Black or African-American (34.7%), followed by those identifying as Asian (7.6%). With regard to ethnicity, 21.2% of persons identified themselves as Hispanic.

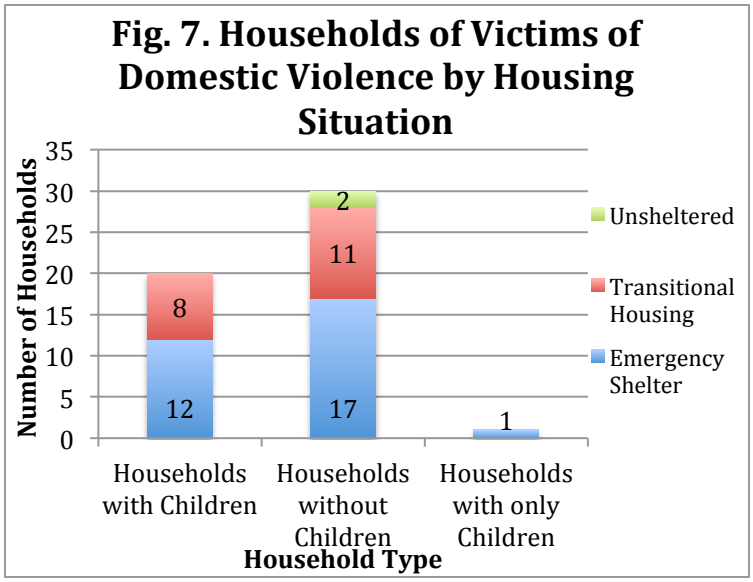
Disabilities

Figure 5 illustrates that 54% of homeless persons reported having some type of disability. 63.4% of adults 18 or older reported some type of disability compared to 16.7% of children. Figure 6 shows the number of the homeless persons that identified as having various disabilities. The most prevalent disabilities were mental health issues, substance abuse disorders, and chronic health conditions.



Among disabled adults, 62.9% reported mental health issues making this the most prevalent disability; representing 39.9% of the total adult homeless population. 42.4% of disabled adults reported a substance abuse disorder. Among disabled homeless children, 66.7% reported a mental health issue.



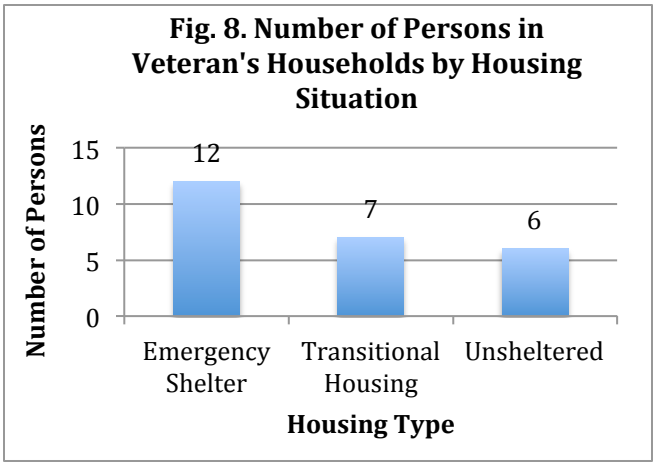


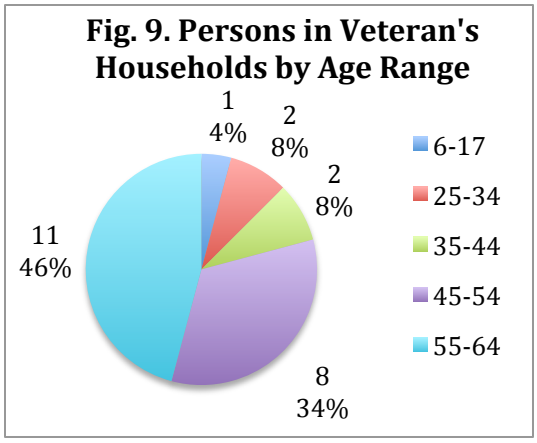
Victims of Domestic Violence

On the night of the count, in Bergen County, 51 homeless households reported having a victim of domestic violence, 20 fewer households than 2014. Figure 7 shows that the majority (56.9%) of these households were individual adult-only households. 20 families with at least 1 adult and 1 child under the age of 18 were counted. 1 unaccompanied homeless youth and 1 adult only household composed of 2 persons were also counted in 2015.

Veterans

In its plan, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has prioritized ending homelessness among veterans by 2015. Many communities in New Jersey have also been working hard to end homelessness among our country's servicemen and women.





22 homeless veteran households were counted on the night of the count, 4 more than 2014. The majority, 90.9%, were individual veterans, 1 was an adult only household composed of 2 persons, and the final household was a household with at least 1 adult and child under 18, composed of 3 persons, making the total number of persons in veteran households 25.

88% of persons in veteran's households experiencing homelessness in Bergen County were male, and the most common racial background identified among them was White (56%). Figure 9 Illustrates the percentage of homeless veterans by age range.

3 individual homeless veterans reported being victims of domestic violence and 13 of the 25, 52%, of persons in veteran's households reported having some kind of disability. The most common disabilities cited were substance abuse disorders (61.5%) and chronic health conditions (53.8%). 13.6% of veteran households were receiving Veteran's Disability as a form of income, and 18.2% were connected to VA non-cash benefits. The two types of service that homeless veteran households sought most were emergency shelter (40.9%) and legal services (18.2%).

Income and Benefits

Among all households experiencing homelessness on the night of the count, 39.6% had no source of income, and 18.5% reported receiving some form of earned cash income. The most common sources of cash income among homeless households outside of earned income were SSI (21.2%) and General Assistance (15.4%).

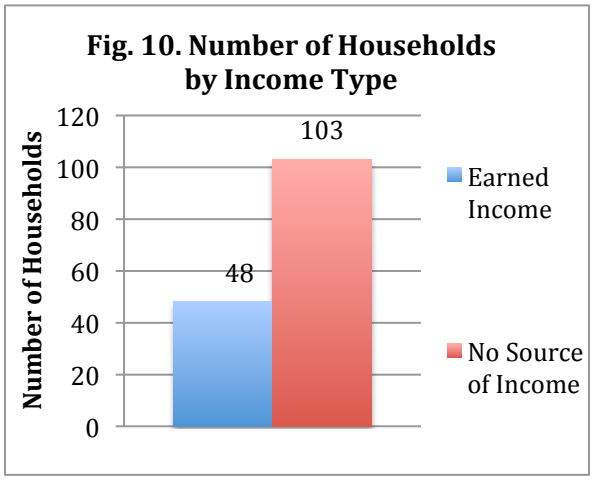


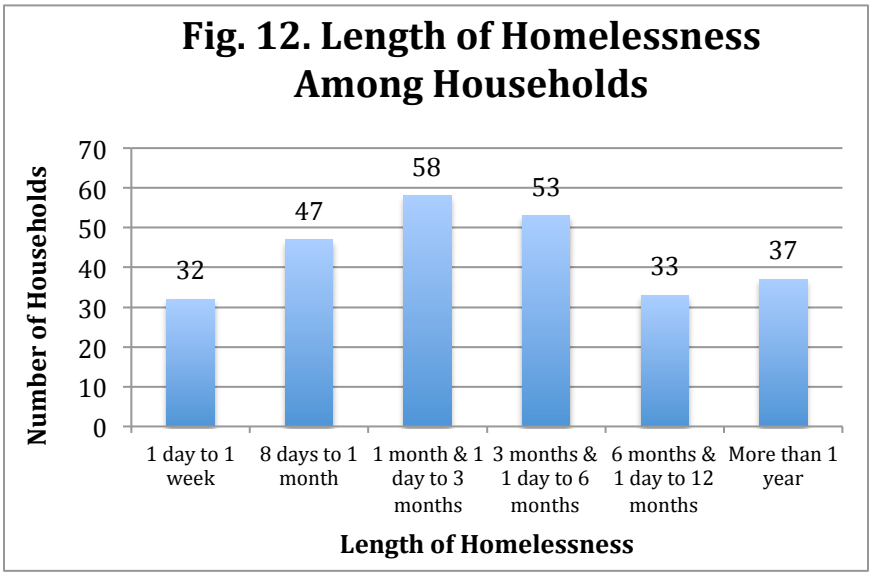
Figure 11 shows the average monthly income for all homeless households.

Figure 11. Average Monthly Income For Households by Housing Situation			
	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Unsheltered
Average for All Households	$721.26	$705.91	$136.67

50.4% of households reported that their household was receiving no kind of non-cash benefit on the night of the count. Food Stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was the top reported non-cash benefit, and was received by 42.7% of households. 12.7% of homeless households were connected to Medicaid benefits.

Length of Homelessness

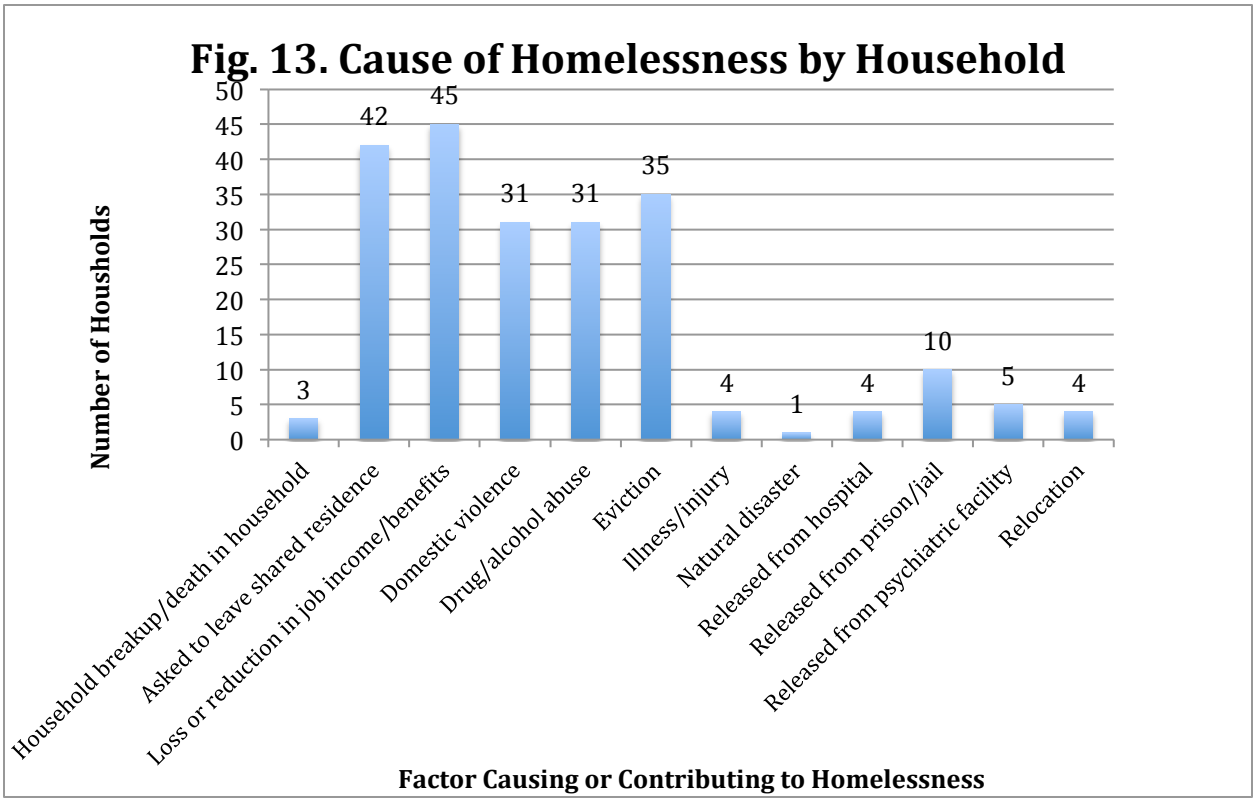
Figure 12 shows the range lengths of homeless episodes experienced on the night of the count by households in Bergen County. Similar to 2014, the largest grouping of households reported their most recent, continuous episode of homeless had lasted between 1 month and 1 day and 3 months (58, 22.3%). 6 more households reported being homeless for more than 1 year compared to 2014.



Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, more households attributed their homelessness to a loss or reduction in job income or benefits (45 households, 17.3%) than any other cause. As Figure 13 shows, the next most common factor reported was being asked to leave a shared residence (16.2%).

When homeless households were asked 'what was your residence prior to your current living situation?' more said they were staying in an emergency shelter (26.2%) than any other type of residence. Another 24.2% of households reported staying or living with friends or family prior to their current living situation.



IV. Findings for the Chronically Homeless

Someone with a long-term disabling condition, who has been continually homeless for a year or more, or at least four times in the past three years, meets HUD's definition of chronically homeless. Any family with one adult that meets this definition is considered a chronically homeless family.

HUD currently has a goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2017. This goal reflects the urgency of helping to house those persons who have not been able to remain stably housed over the course of an extended period of time. Chronically Homeless persons are among the most vulnerable homeless groups, and providing effective supportive services and case management may be required in order to help some stay in the housing they need. Prioritization of new Continuum of Care funding opportunities has recently been giving some communities in New Jersey new resources for housing this subgroup.

Total Chronically Homeless Population

28 households, made up of 28 total persons, were chronically homeless in Bergen County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is a decrease of 5 households and 7 persons (20%) from 2014. The rate of chronic homelessness as a percentage of overall homelessness decreased from 9.5% in 2014 to 8.2%.

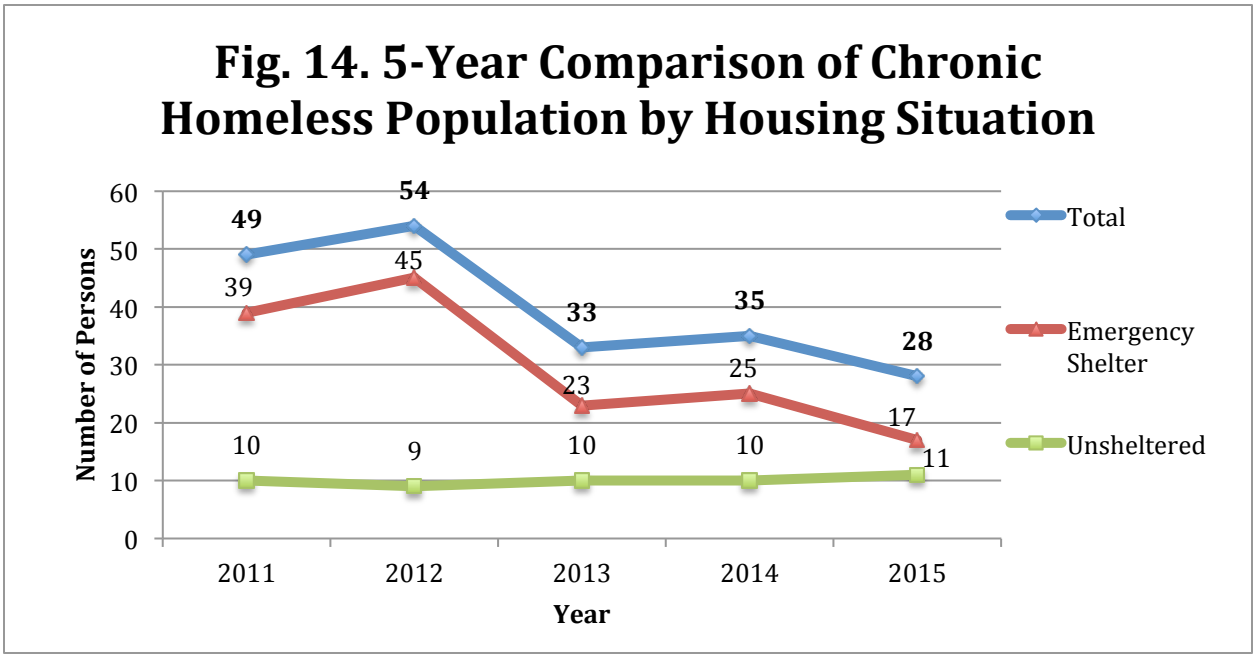
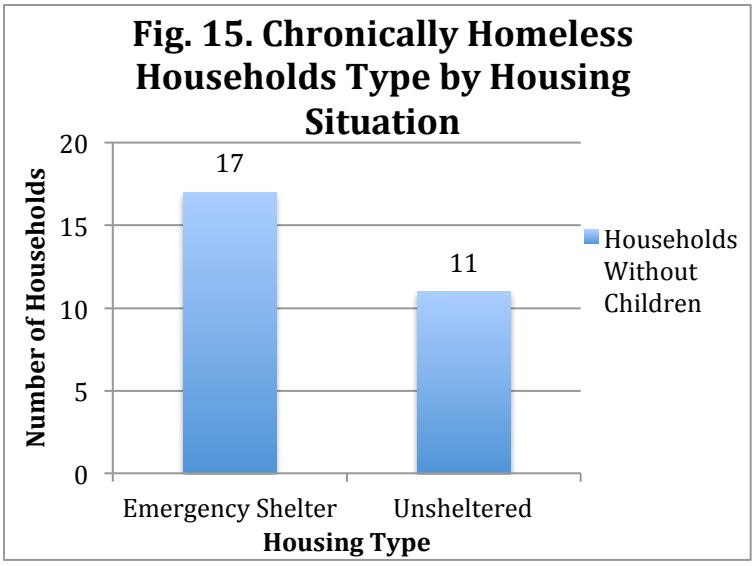


Figure 14 shows the number of chronically homeless persons who were in emergency shelter or living unsheltered in Bergen County from 2011 to 2015. Over the past five years, the overall number of chronically homeless persons has fallen by 21 persons, or 42.9%. While the number of total chronic households decreased from 2014, the number of unsheltered chronically homeless persons increased by 1 person (10%) from 2014.

Families and Individuals

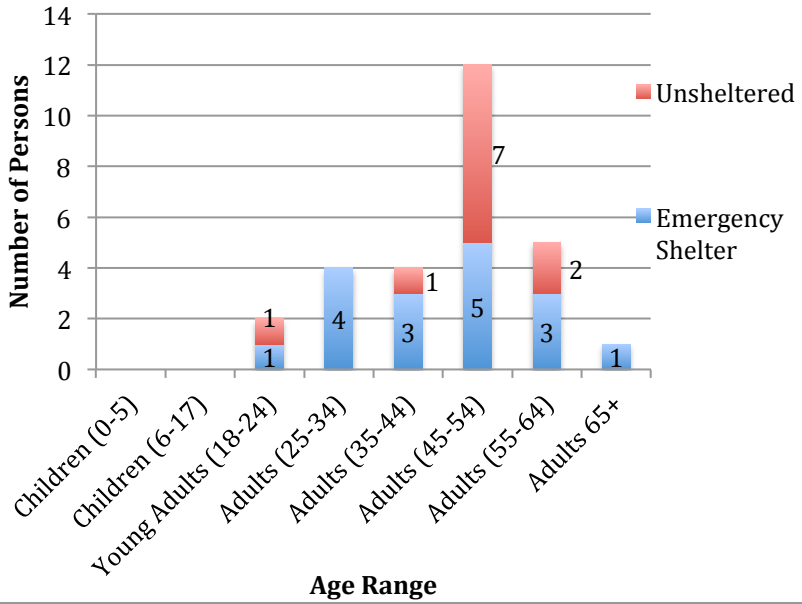
All of the 28 chronically homeless households counted in Bergen County in 2015 were individual adults. This is a change from 2014 in which 1 chronically homeless household was a family household of both adults and children. 17 of the chronically homeless households (60%) were in emergency shelter projects on the night of the count.



Demographics

Of the 28 total chronically homeless persons, 2 (7.1%) were between 18 and 24 years old, while the remaining 26 were over the age of 24. Similar to 2014, the age range with the highest concentrations of chronically homeless persons were adults between 45 and 54 years old (12 persons, 42.9%). While this is true, there was a decrease of 5 persons (55.6%) in the 55 to 64 age range from 2014.

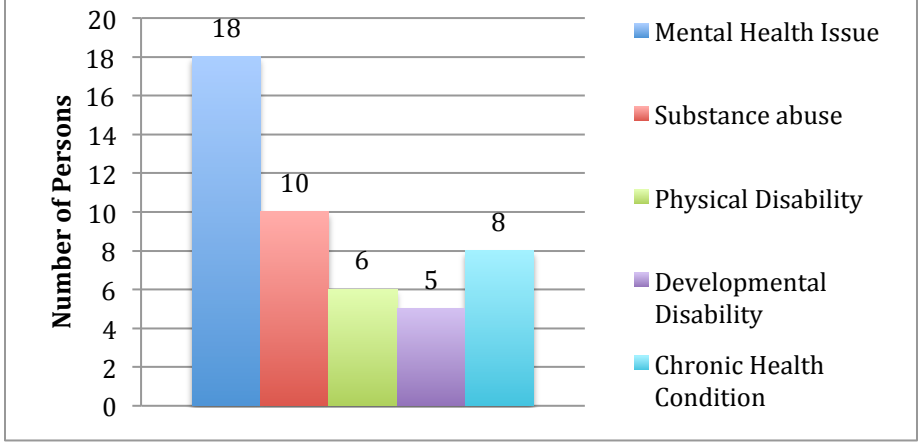
Fig. 16. Chronically Homeless Age Range by Housing Situation



67.9% of those counted as chronically homeless were male, and 32.1% were female.

The largest racial subgroup of homeless persons reported their race as White (64.3%), and the next largest group self-identified as Black or African-American (32.1%).

Fig. 17. Number of Chronically Homeless Persons by Disability Type



Disabilities

In order to meet the definition of chronically homeless, at least one adult in each household must have some kind of disability. The disabilities most commonly identified were mental health issues (64.3%) and substance abuse disorders (35.7%). The complete numbers of reported disabilities among the chronically homeless can be seen in Figure 17.

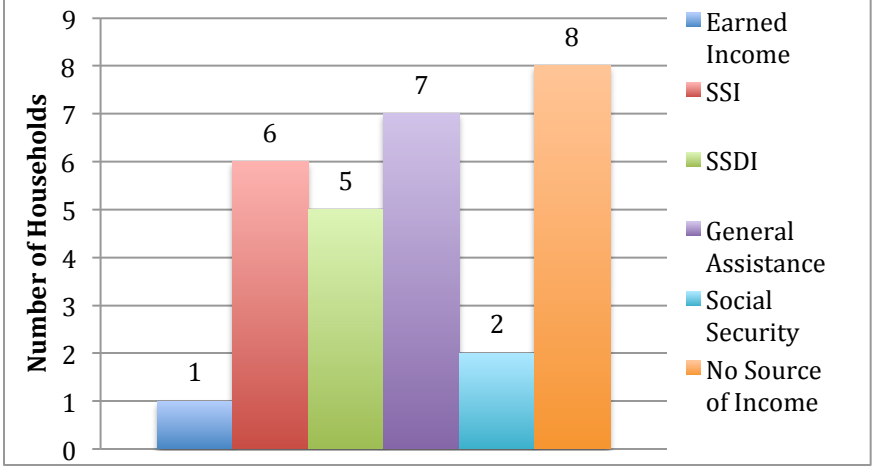
Subpopulations

On the night of the count, 4 chronically homeless persons in Bergen County reported being victims of domestic violence (14.3%). This is 7 less than were counted in 2014 (63.6%). 1 of the 4 were unsheltered on the night of the count, the other 3 (75%) were in emergency shelter projects.

There were 2 chronically homeless veterans identified on the night of the count, an increase from the 0 that were counted in 2014. One of the veterans was unsheltered on the night of the count, the other was in an emergency shelter project.

Income and Benefits

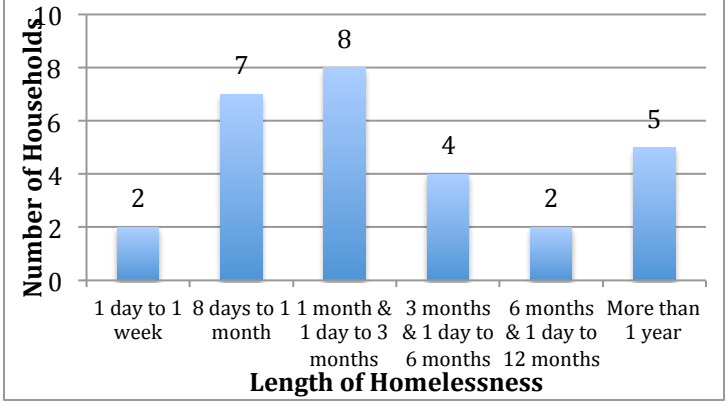
Fig. 18. Number of Chronically Homeless Households by Income Source



Among all the chronically homeless households on the night of the count, 28.6% reported receiving no type of cash income. Figure 18 shows the sources of income received. The most common source of cash income among chronically homeless households was General Assistance, which was received by 25%. 1 chronically homeless household reported having a form of earned income (3.6%).

47% of chronically homeless households reported they were not receiving any type of non-cash benefit on the night of the count. Food Stamps (SNAP) was the top reported non-cash benefit among the chronically homeless, with 47% receiving this benefit. 20.6% reported receiving Medicaid and 14.7% reported receiving Medicare.

Fig. 19. Number of Chronically Homeless Households by Length of Homelessness

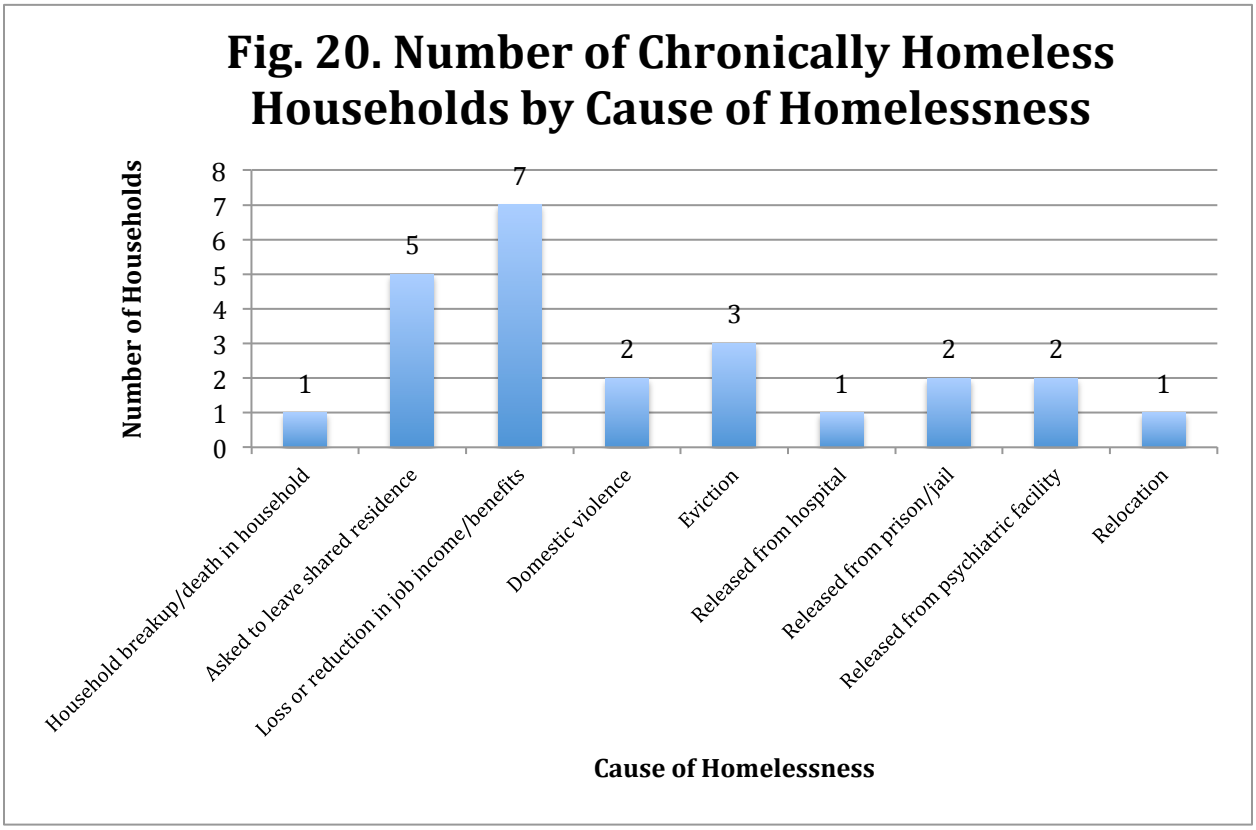


Length of Homelessness

Figure 19 shows that, similar to 2014, the majority of chronically homeless households (60.7%) reported that their most recent, continuous episode of homelessness had lasted for less than 3 months. Only 5 of the 28 households (17.9%) reported being homeless for more than 1 year.

Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, 25% of chronically homeless households cited a loss or reduction of job income or benefits. Another 17.9% reported being asked to leave a shared residence.



V. Findings for the Unsheltered Homeless

HUD's definition of "unsheltered homeless" applies to any individual or family "with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Unsheltered homeless individuals and families are among those with the most critical housing needs in a community. The unsheltered are especially vulnerable in the cold weather and the elements, which are in evidence at the end of January when the Count takes place. The Point-In-Time survey can play an important role in helping communities understand why some of the homeless remain unsheltered, and who is included in this group.

Total Unsheltered Homeless Population

31 households, made up of 33 persons, were living unsheltered in Bergen County, according to the 2015 Point-In-Time Count. This is a decrease of 1 household (3.1%), but no change in total persons from 2014.

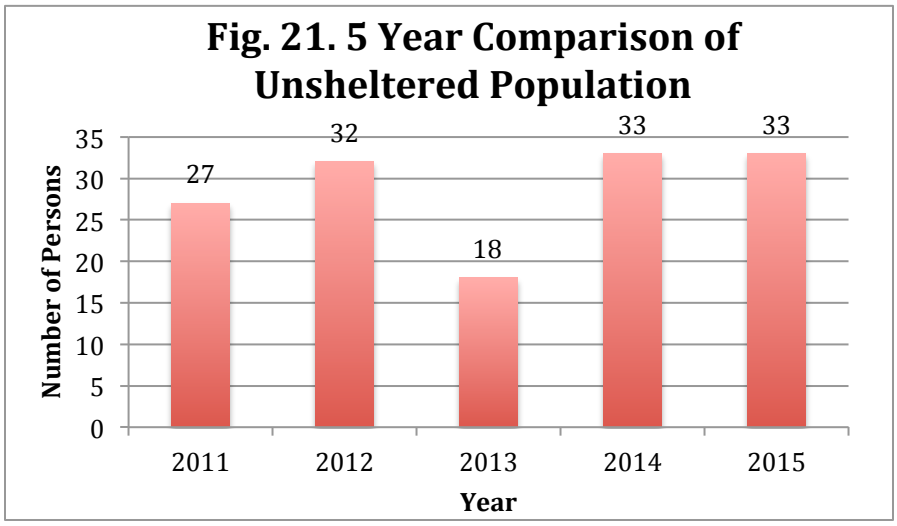


Figure 21 shows the number of unsheltered respondents from 2011 to 2015. With slight fluctuations, the number of unsheltered persons has remained relatively consistent over the timeframe. Despite the consistency, the total has increased from 2011 to 2015 by 6 (22.2%) unsheltered persons in total.

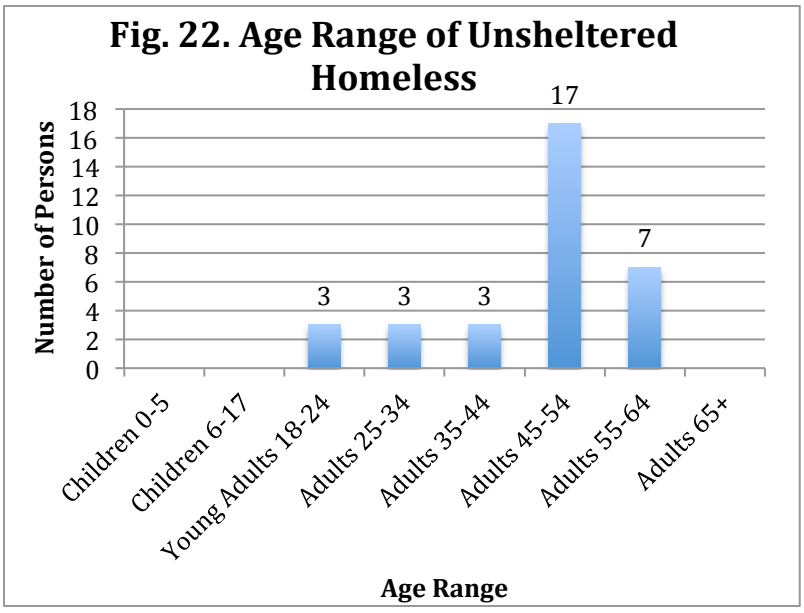
Families and Individuals

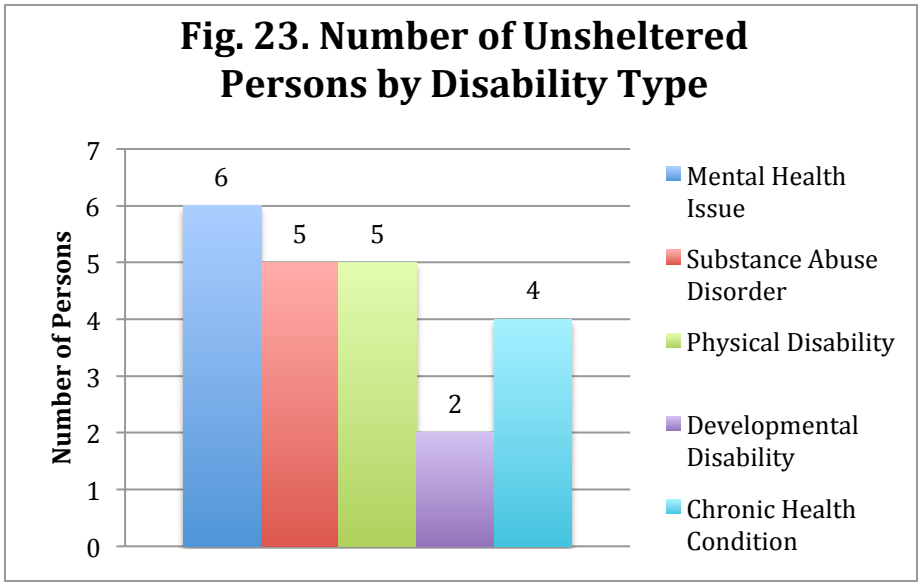
All 31 unsheltered households counted in 2015 were adult only households. This represents a decrease of 1 unsheltered family household from 2014. There were 2 adult only households that were each composed of 2 adults, bringing the total to 33 total unsheltered persons.

Demographics

Similar to 2014, the largest portion of the 33 unsheltered persons counted in 2015, 51.5%, was between 45 and 54 years old.

24 of the 33 unsheltered persons were male (72.7%). 24 (72.7%) identified their race as White and 6 (18.2%) identified as Black or African-American. 5 (15.2%) of the unsheltered persons identified as Hispanic.





Disabilities

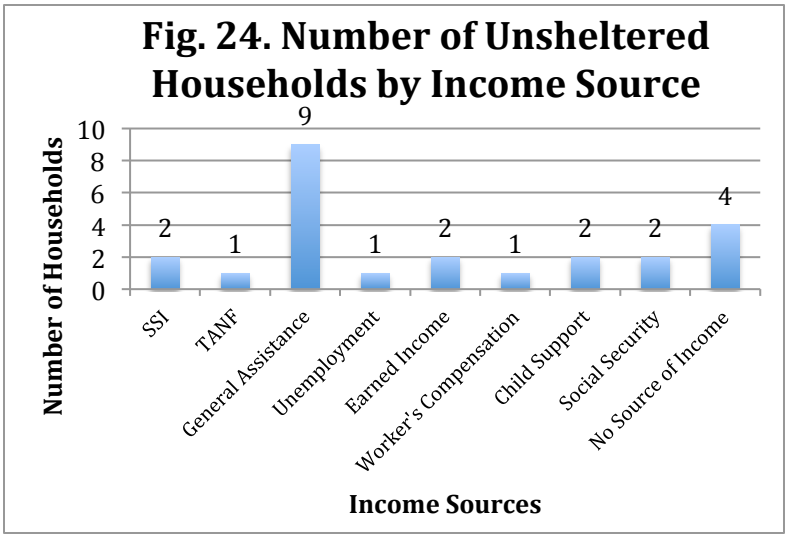
12 of the 33 unsheltered persons (36.4%) reported having some disability. Among the disabled, the most common disability was mental health issues (6 persons, 50%). The complete numbers of reported disabilities among the unsheltered can be seen in Figure 23.

Subpopulations

On the night of the count, 2 unsheltered homeless persons (6%) in Bergen County reported being victims of domestic violence. This was 5 less (71.5%) than were counted in 2014.

There were 5 unsheltered veteran households on the night of the count, an increase of 3 from 2014.

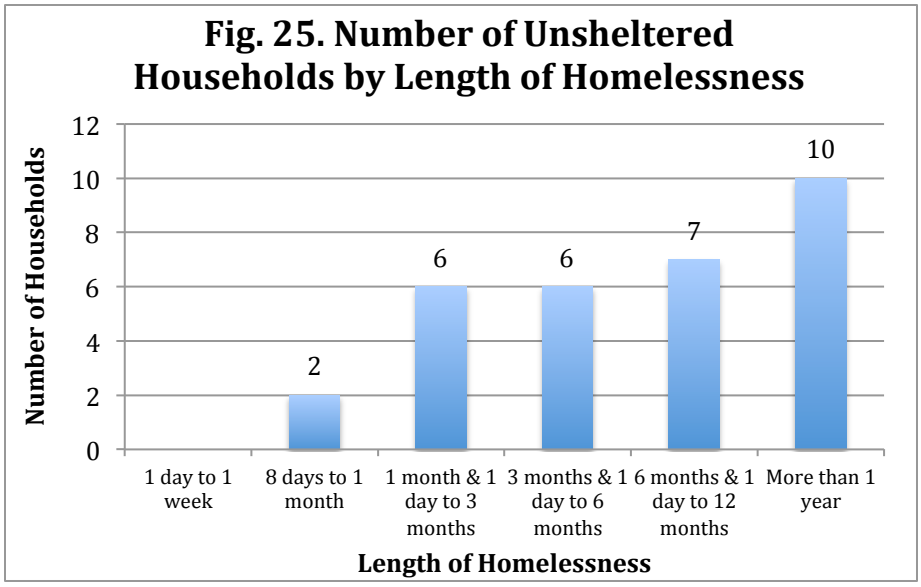
Income and Benefits



Among all the unsheltered households on the night of the count, 4 (12.9%) reported having no source of cash income. The average monthly income reported among unsheltered households was approximately $137. 29% of unsheltered households received General Assistance (GA), making it the most common source of cash income. Figure 24 shows all sources of income received.

7 unsheltered households (22.6%) reported they were not receiving any type of non-cash benefit on the night of the count. Food Stamps (SNAP) and was the top reported non-cash benefits among this group, with 41.9% receiving this benefit. In addition, 16.1% were connected to Medicaid benefits.

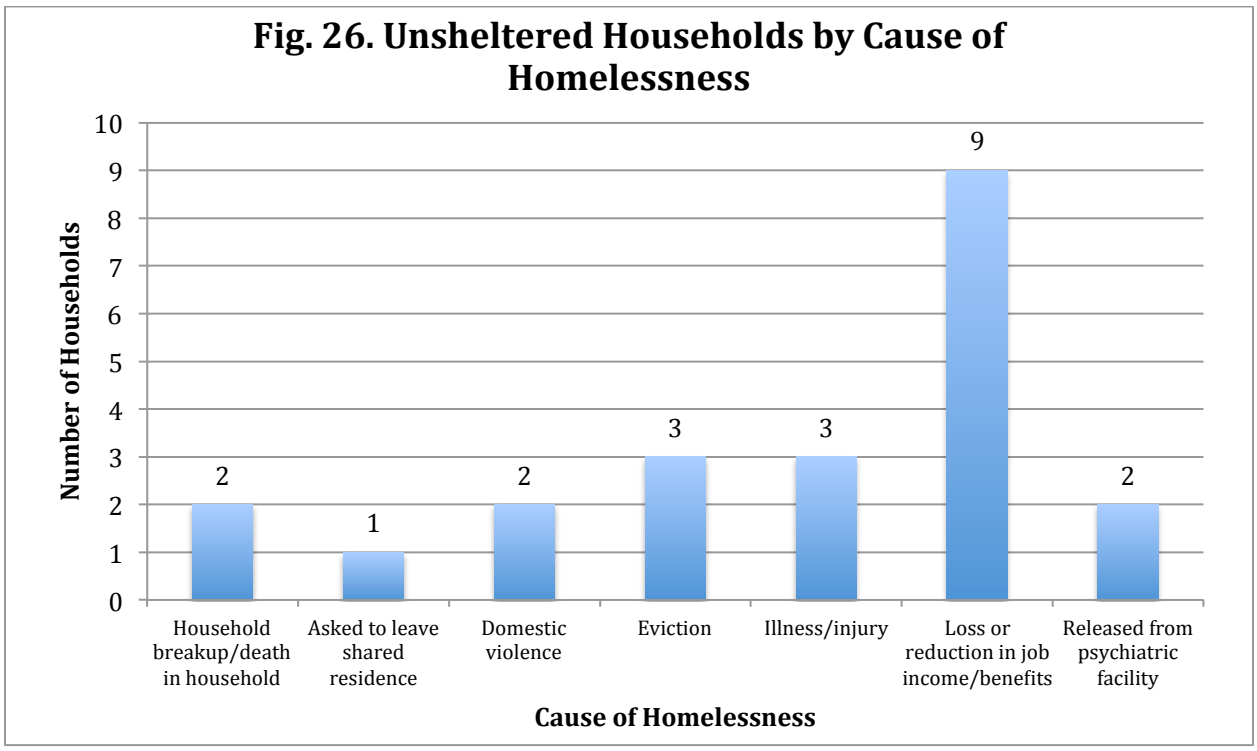
Length of Homelessness



As shown in Figure 25, more unsheltered homeless households (10, 32.3%) reported their households' most recent, continuous episode of homelessness had lasted more than 1 year. This is a shift from 2014, where the largest grouping of households reported that their more recent, continuous episode of homelessness lasted 8 days to 1 month.

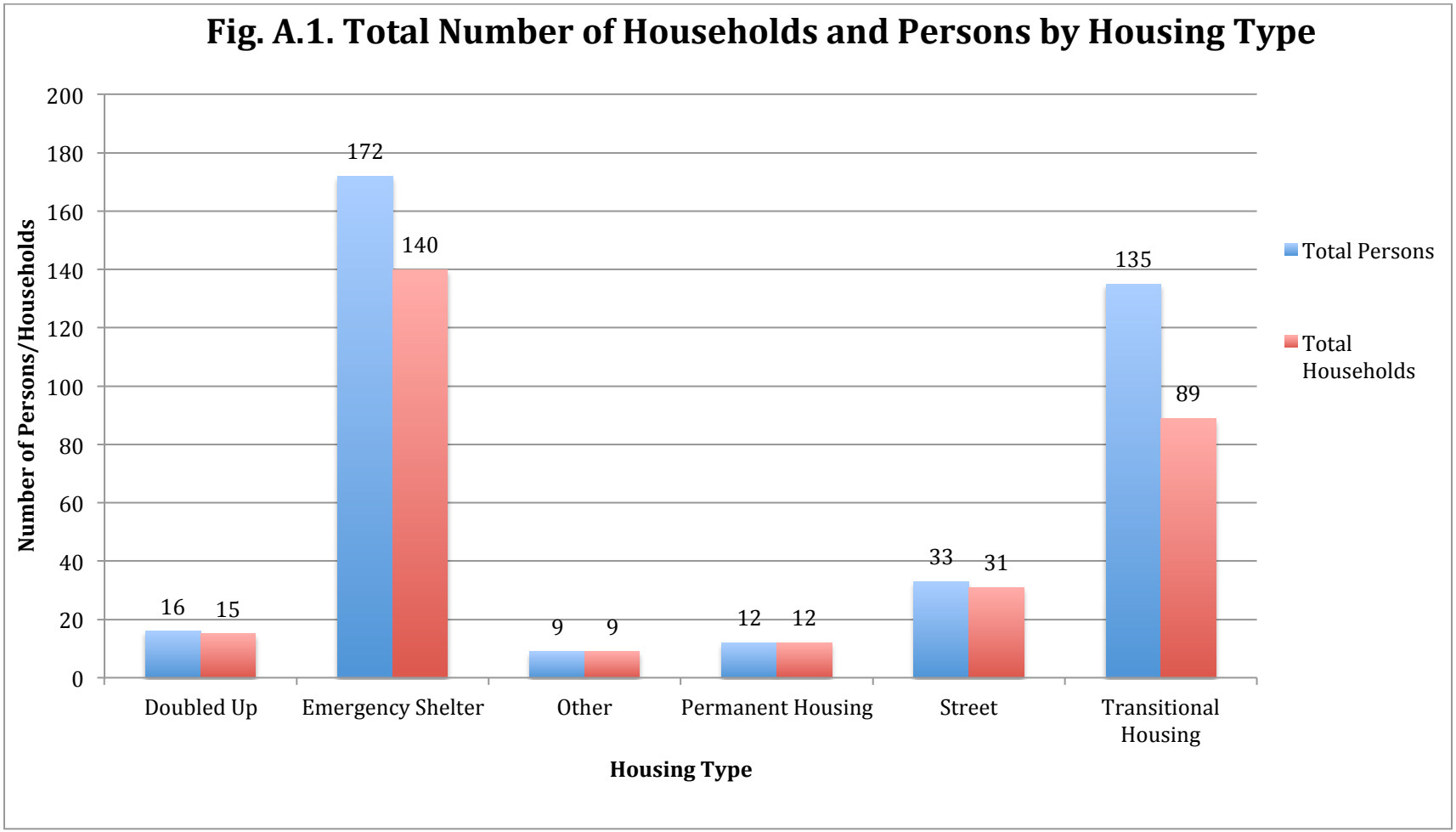
Cause of Homelessness

When asked to share the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, more unsheltered households cited loss or reduction of job income or benefits (29%) than any other factor. Figure 26 shows the full breakdown for unsheltered households.

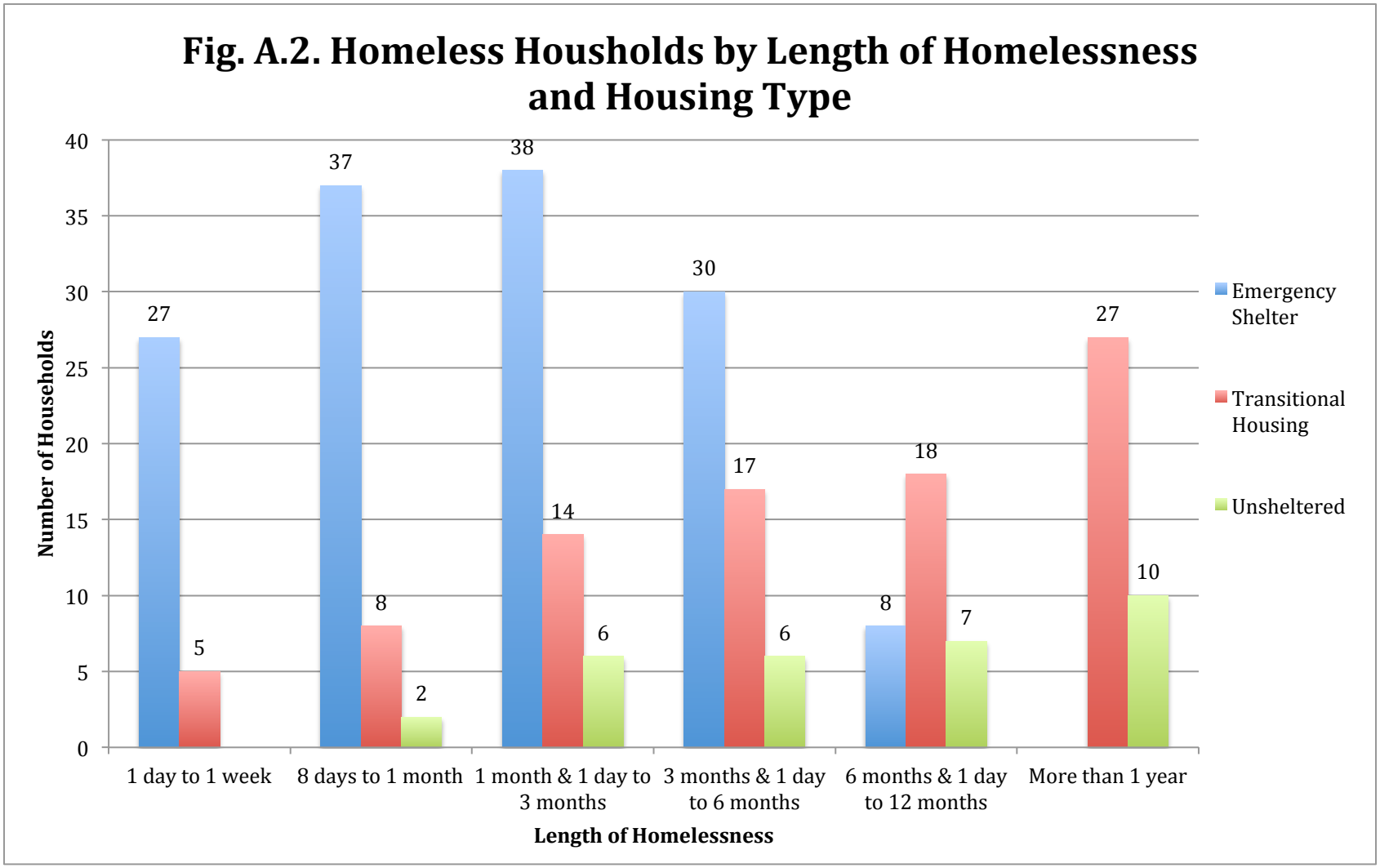


VI. Appendix

Where did you spend the night of Tuesday, February 3, 2015?



How long have you been in your current living situation?



Who was homeless with you on the night of February 3rd?

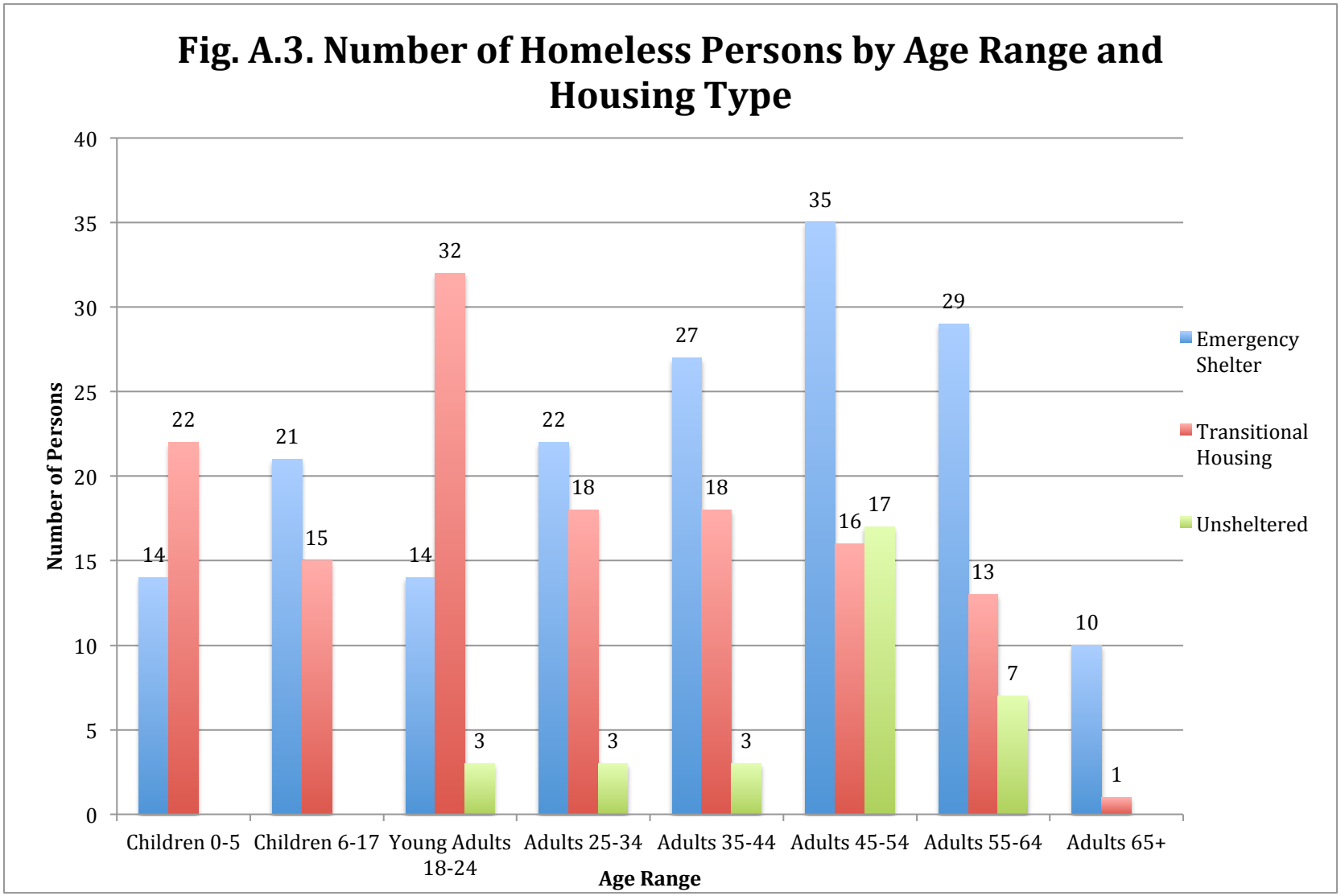


Fig. A.4. Number of Homeless Persons by Gender and Housing Situation

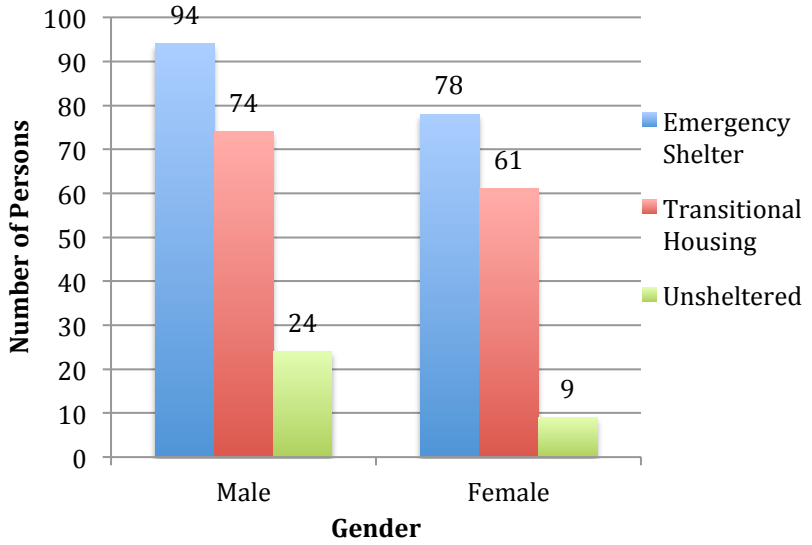


Fig. A.5. Number of Homeless Persons by Race

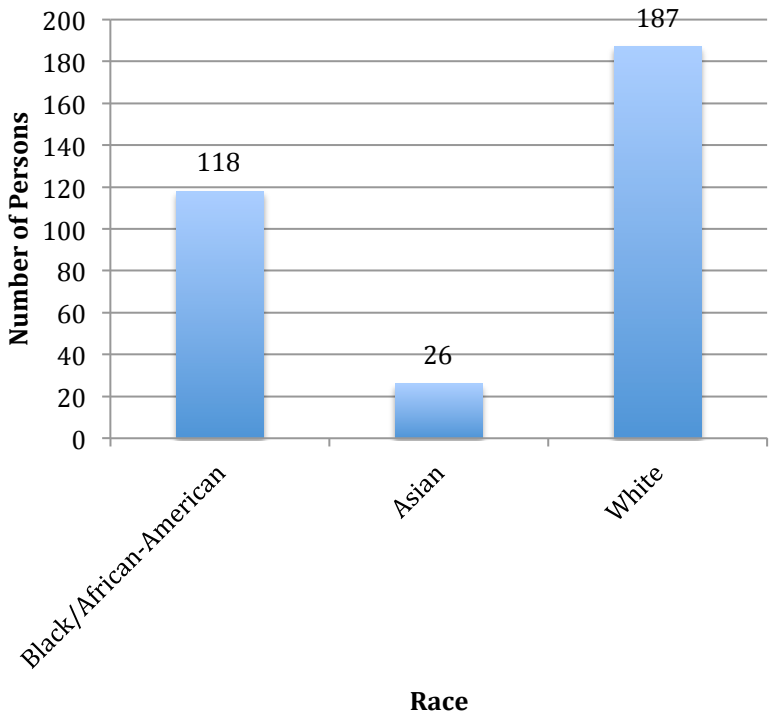
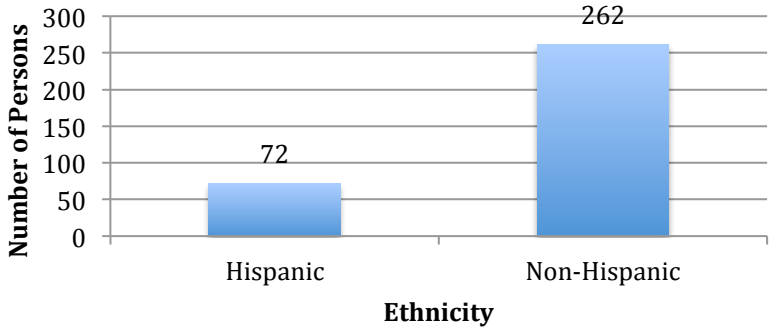
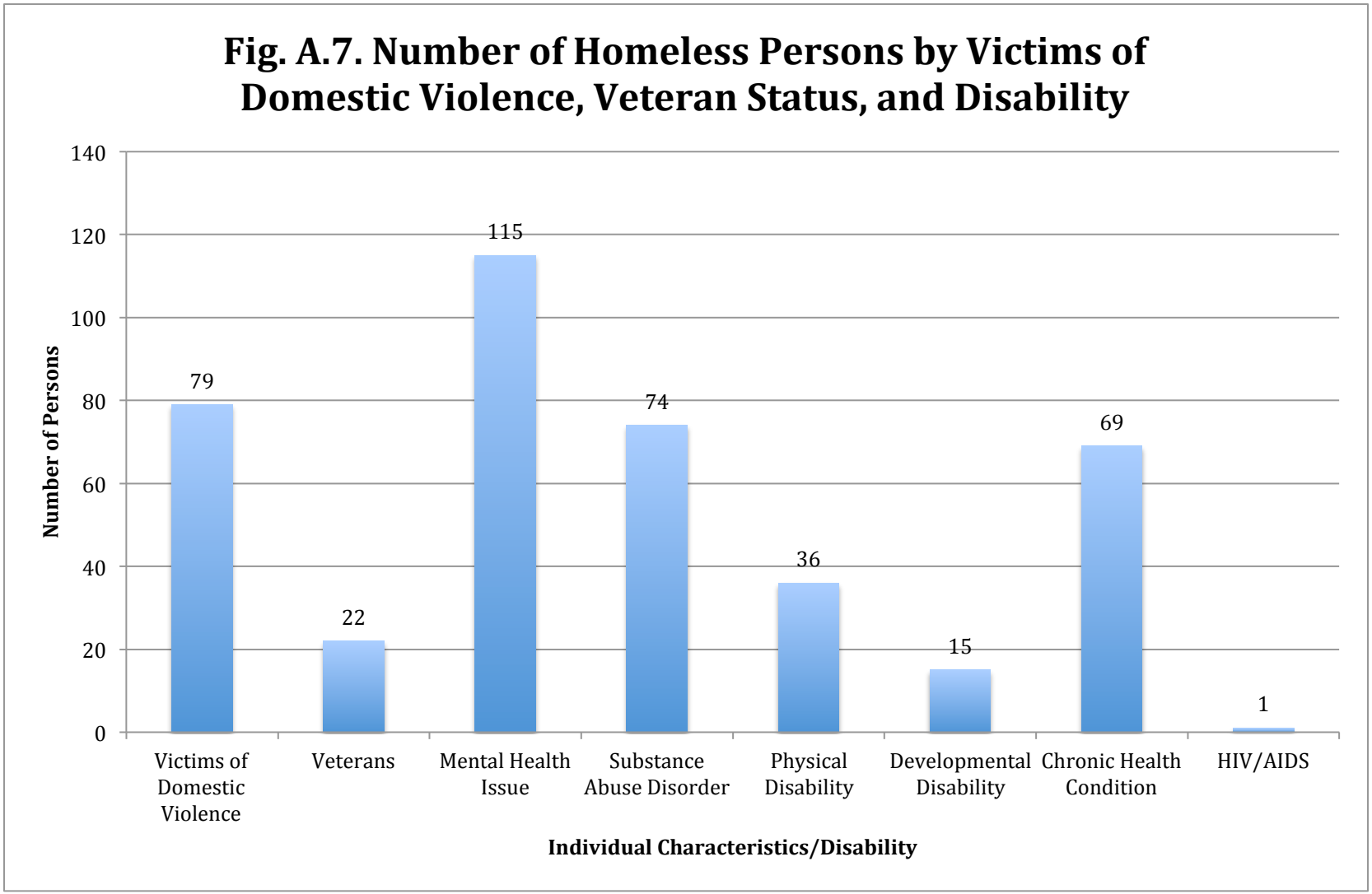


Fig. A.6. Number of Homeless Persons by Ethnicity



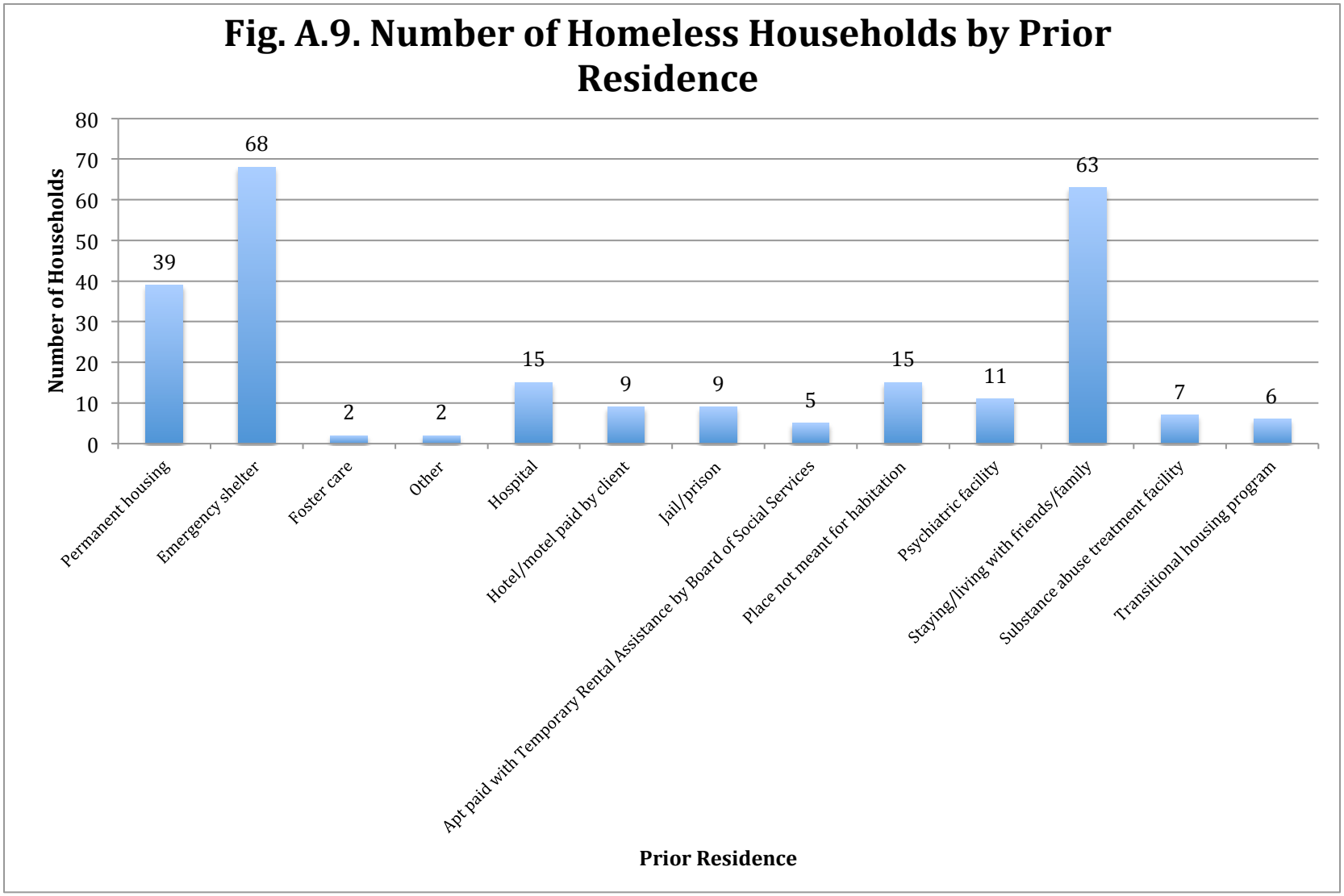
Household Characteristics – check all that apply to each person



Where was your last permanent address before becoming homeless?

Fig. A.8. Number of Homeless Households by County, State or Country of Last Permanent Address	
Last Permanent Address – County/State	**Number of Households**
Alabama	2
Bergen County	**213**
Burlington County	1
Camden County	3
Essex County	6
Florida	1
Georgia	1
Gloucester County	1
Hudson County	2
Hunterdon County	2
Monmouth County	1
New York	2
North Carolina	1
Ocean County	1
Passaic County	9
Pennsylvania	1
Union County	1

What was your residence prior to your current living situation?



Which of the following sources of income or non-cash benefits do you, or anyone in your household, receive?

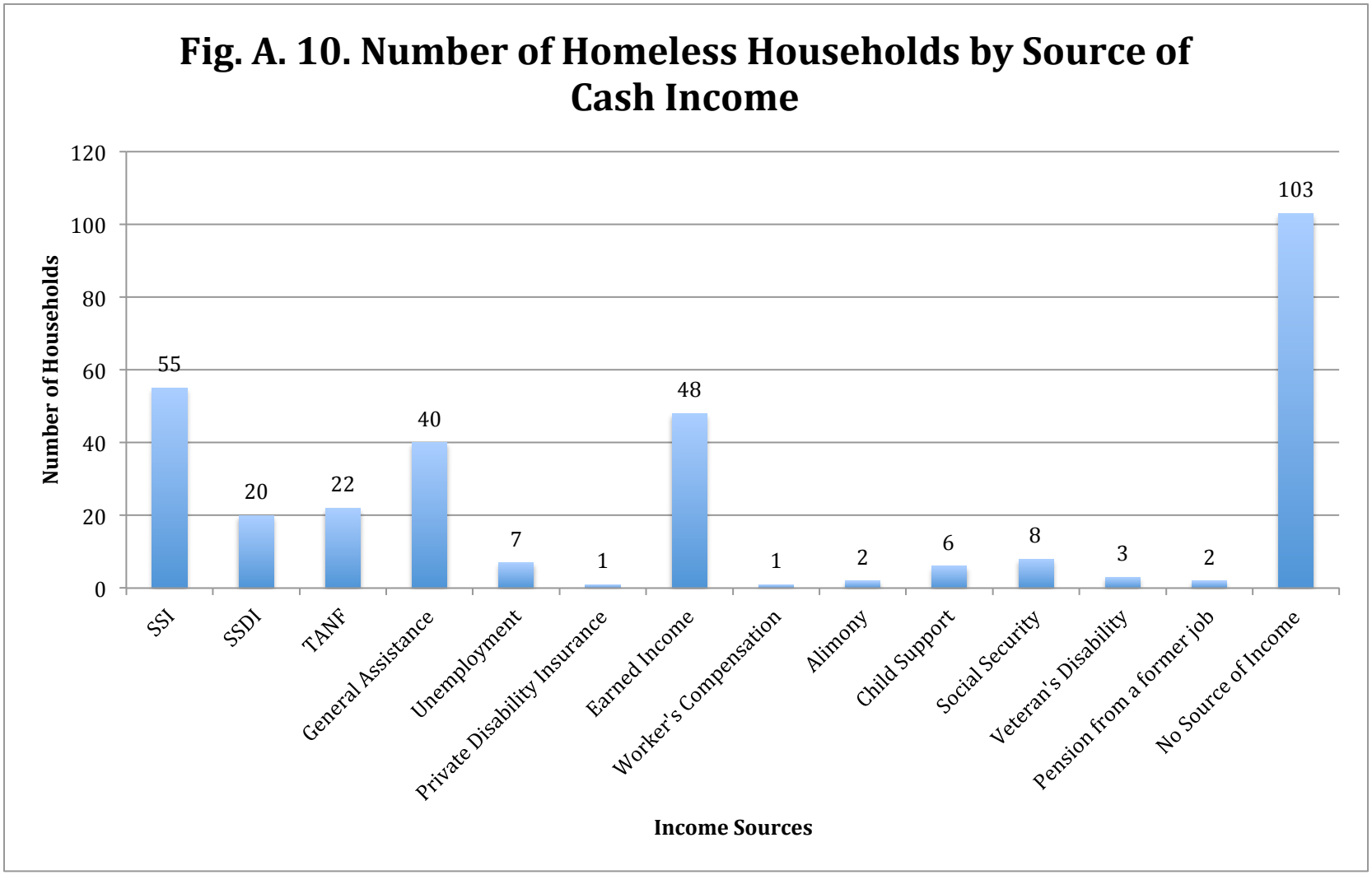
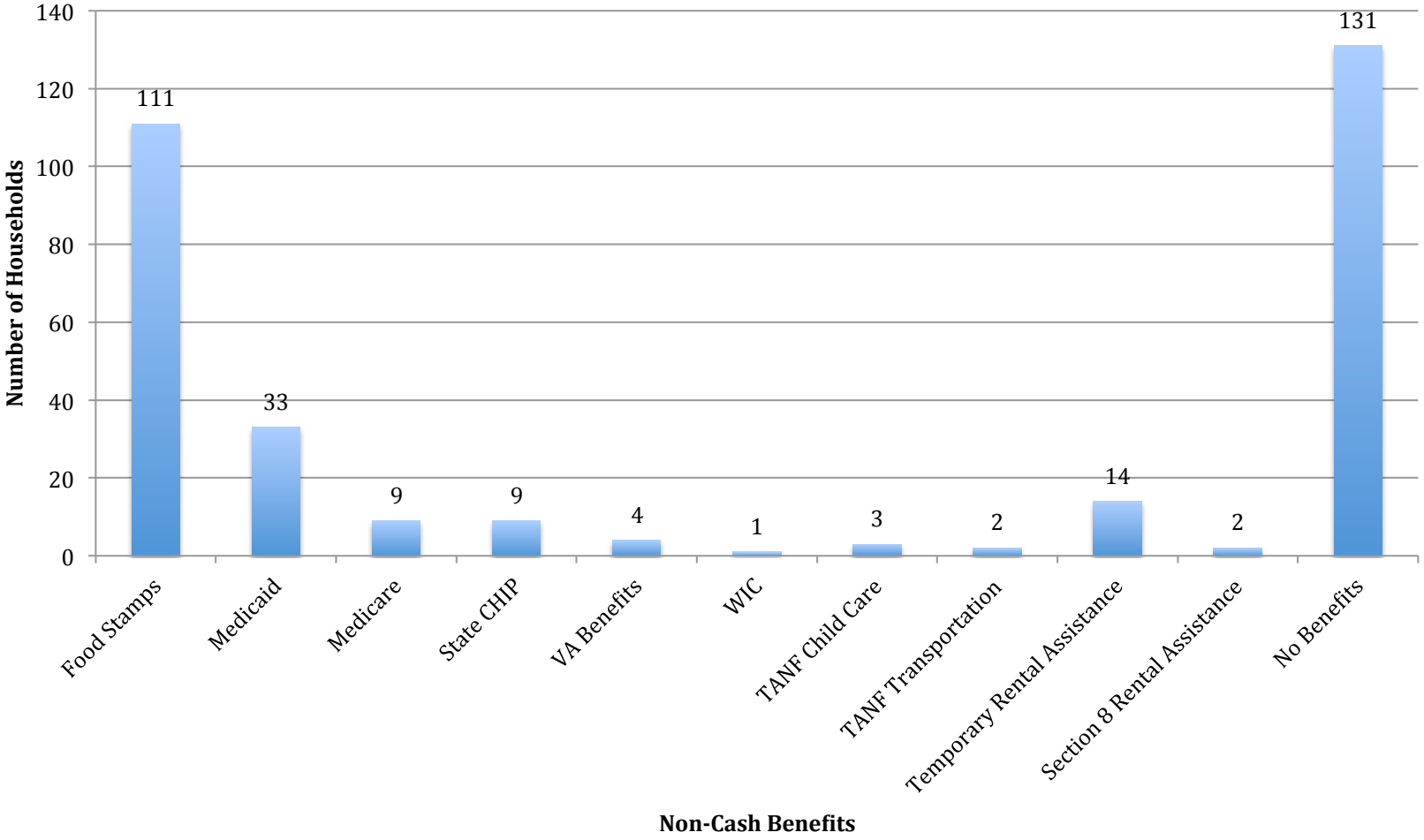
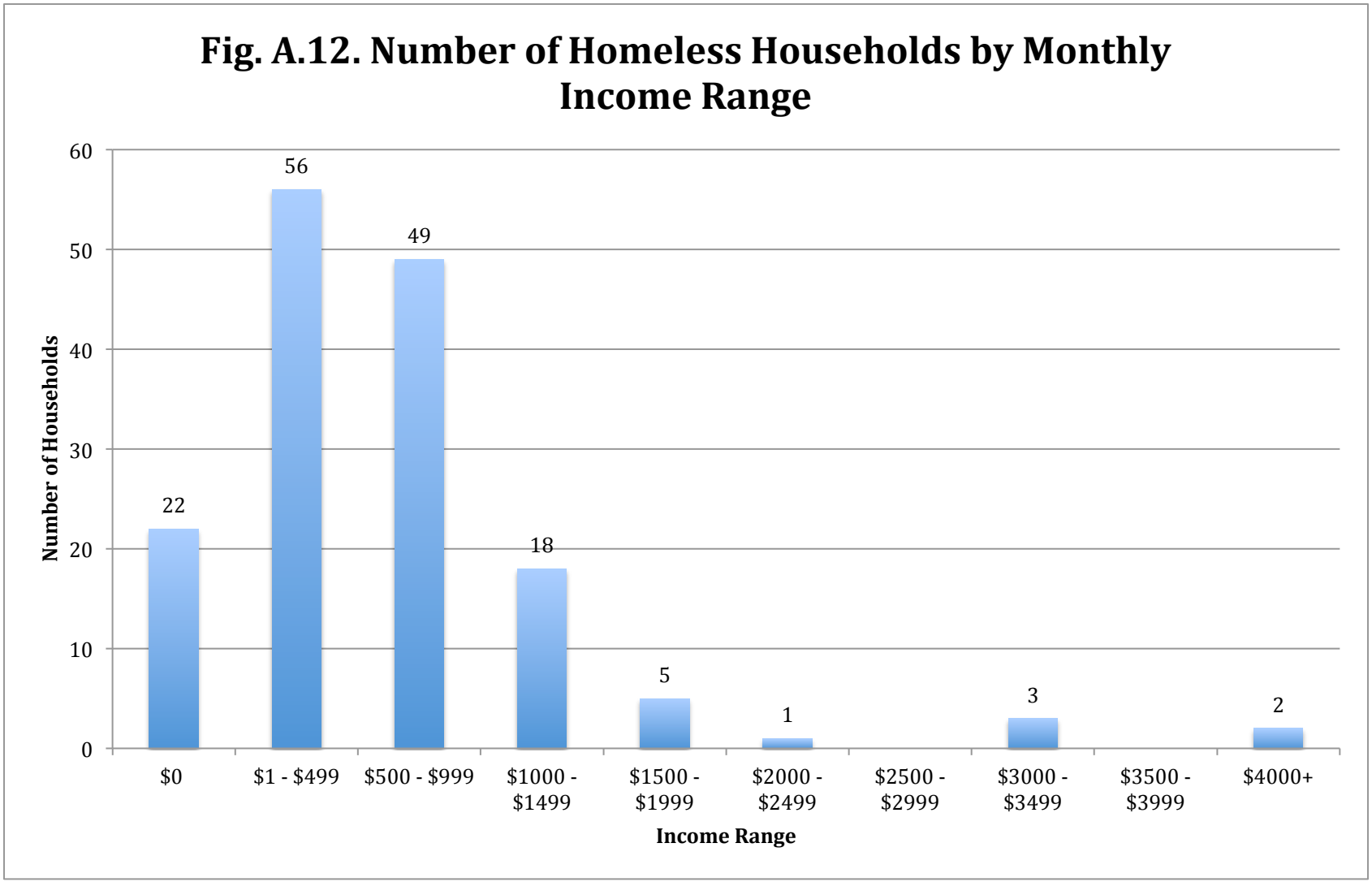


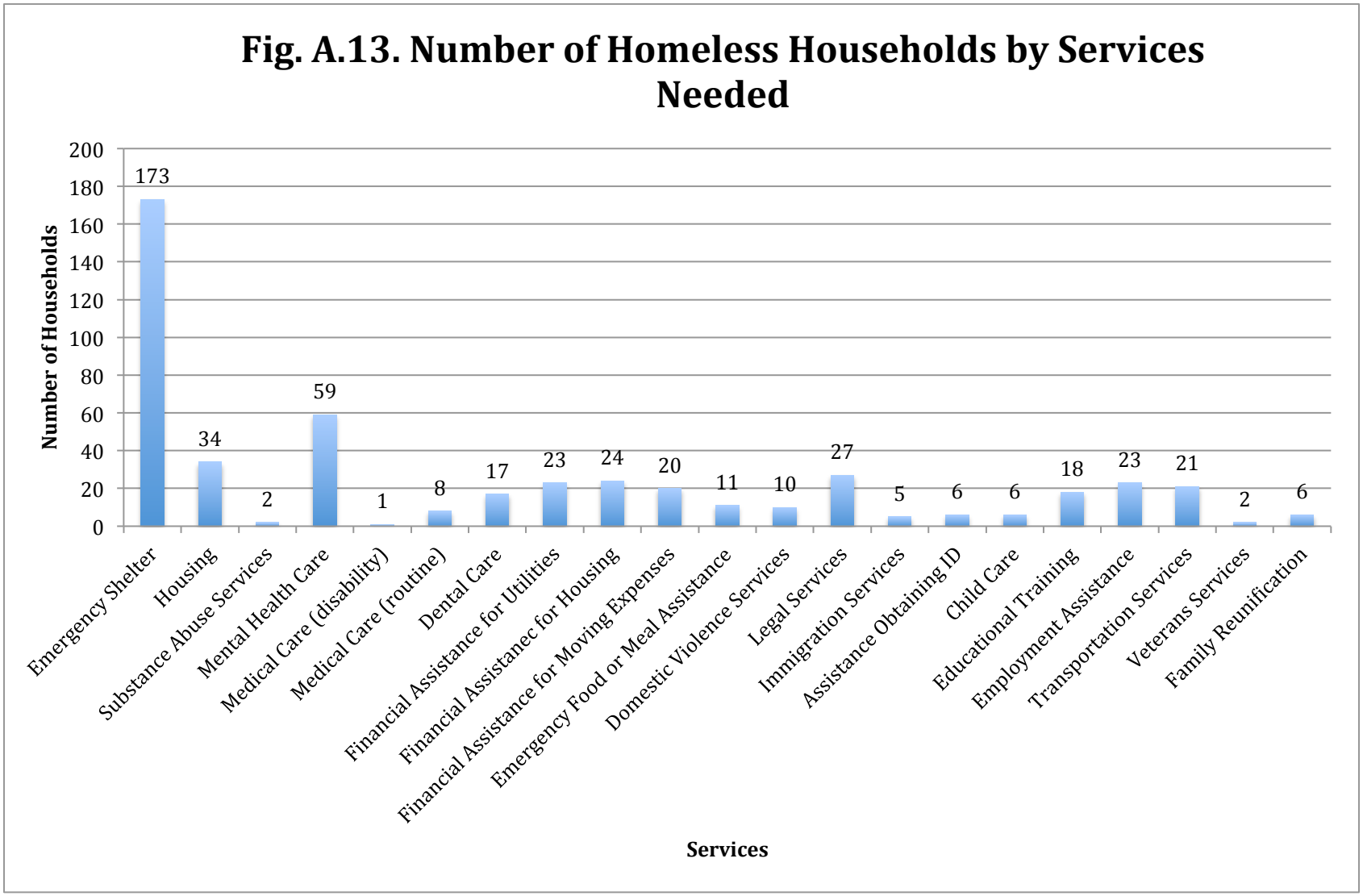
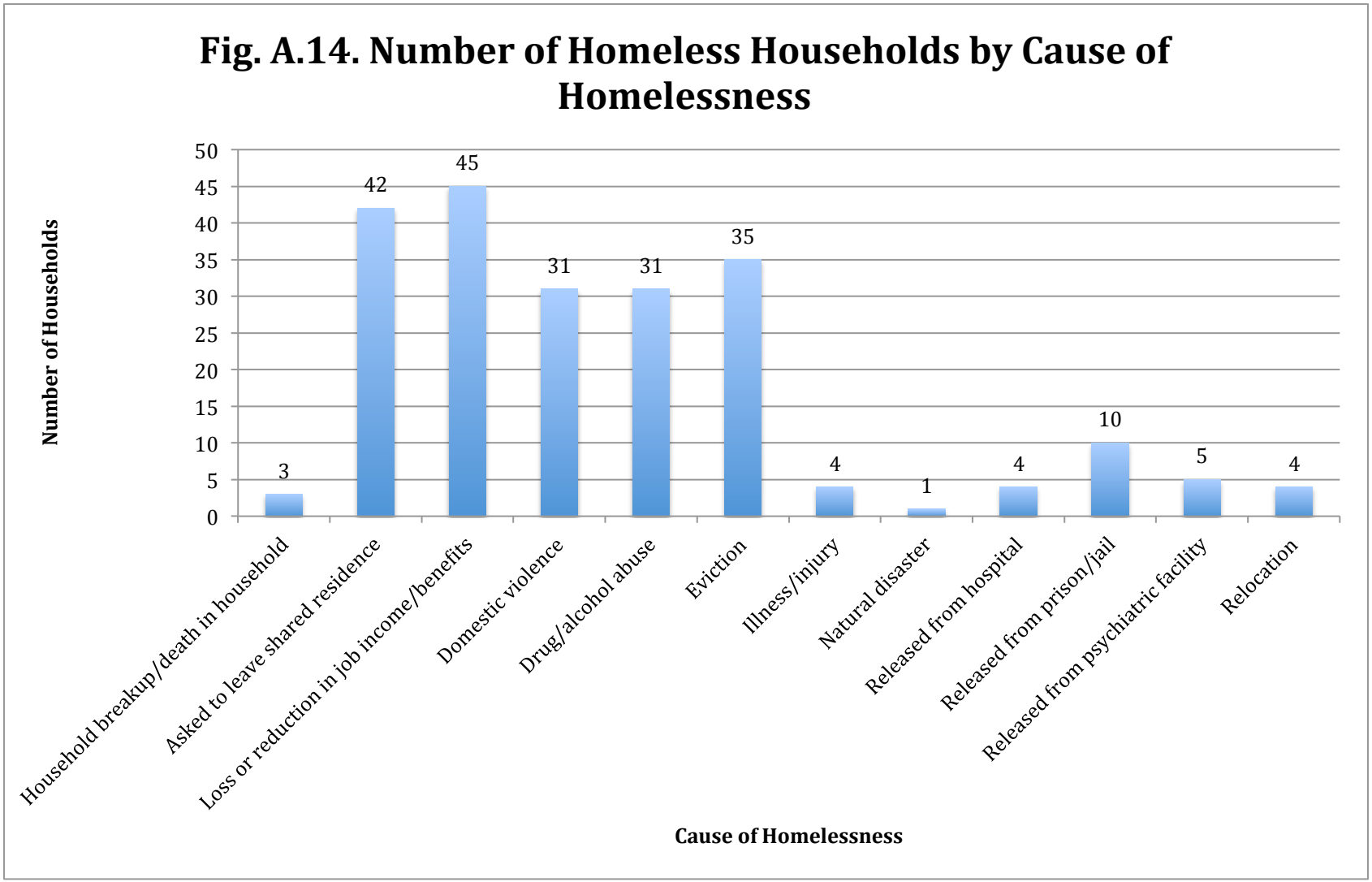
Fig. A. 11. Number of Homeless Households by Sources of Non-Cash Benefits



What is your monthly household income?



Would you, or anyone in your household, like to receive any of the following services?



What was the primary factor that contributed to, or caused, your current living situation?