



Men's Shelter of Charlotte

Criminal History Among Homeless Men

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Introduction

The Men's Shelter of Charlotte surveyed 100 homeless men staying at the shelter in June 2011. The purpose of this survey was to create a demographic picture of homeless men in Charlotte who had criminal records. The survey was completed by staff who asked 100 randomly chosen clients to respond to questions on a one page questionnaire. The questions were written at a basic reading level. A college intern was then asked to compile the responses for analysis by the executive director. Responses to the survey were collected anonymously, so there was little incentive to give less than honest answers. No incentive was given for completing the survey. That said, all responses are client self-reported with no verification of validity. The desire to learn more about homeless men with criminal records was our sole intent and the results described below may dispel some commonly held beliefs about homelessness and criminal history.

Of the 100 homeless men surveyed, 99% responded to one or more questions and only one person returned a blank questionnaire. In addition to gathering basic demographic information (i.e. age, race), we also asked about educational level, employment status, length of homelessness and, of course, involvement in the criminal justice system. This report will be broken into several sections presenting the data and then concluding with some observational comments. Please note, not all responses will equal one hundred percent due to rounding.

Special Thanks

Special thanks to Andrew Miller, Men's Shelter of Charlotte staff member, for coordinating the completion of surveys. Also, thanks to Paul Spellings for compiling the statistical results. Paul, a Davidson College student, served at the Men's Shelter last summer through the Stapleton-Davidson Internship program.

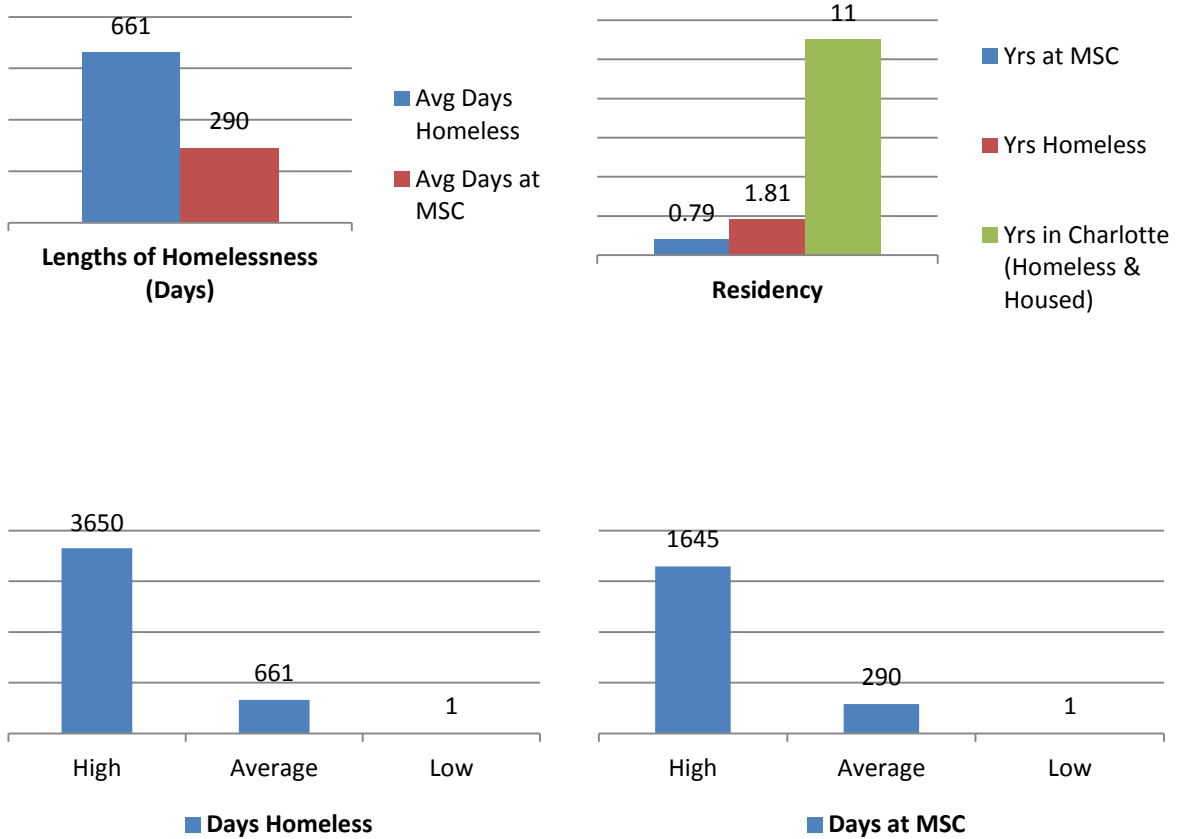
Length of Time Homeless¹

Key Findings:

Homeless men surveyed reported living in Charlotte for an average of 11 years

Men surveyed reported being homeless for less than 2 years on average

Homeless men surveyed reported using the Men’s Shelter for less than 1 year on average



¹ 95% responded to average days at MSC, 94% responded to average time homeless, 86% responded to time in Charlotte.

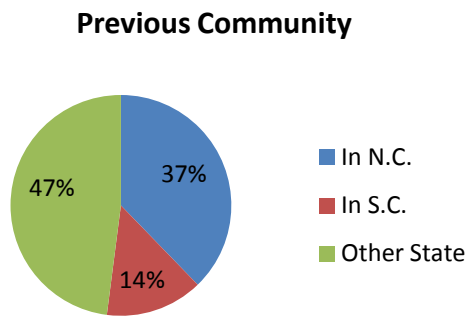
Demographics²

Key Findings:

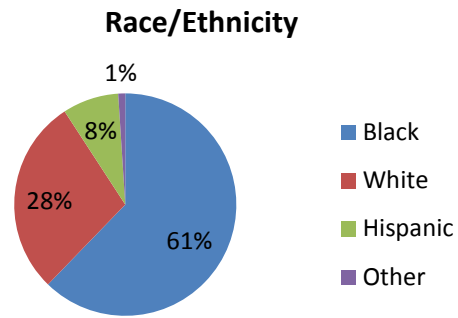
The average age of the 100 homeless men surveyed was 47 years

Over 60% of the homeless men surveyed were African American

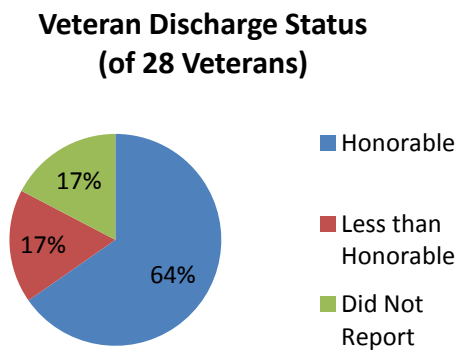
70% of homeless men surveyed had a high school diploma or above



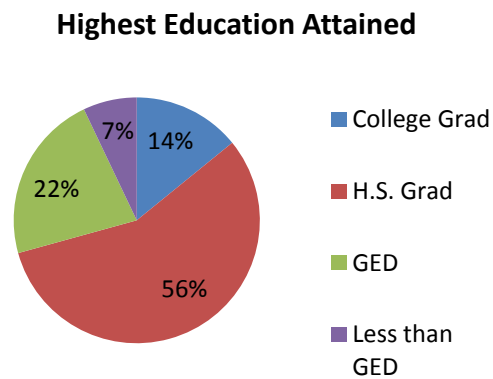
88% responded



94% responded



97% responded identifying 28 Veterans



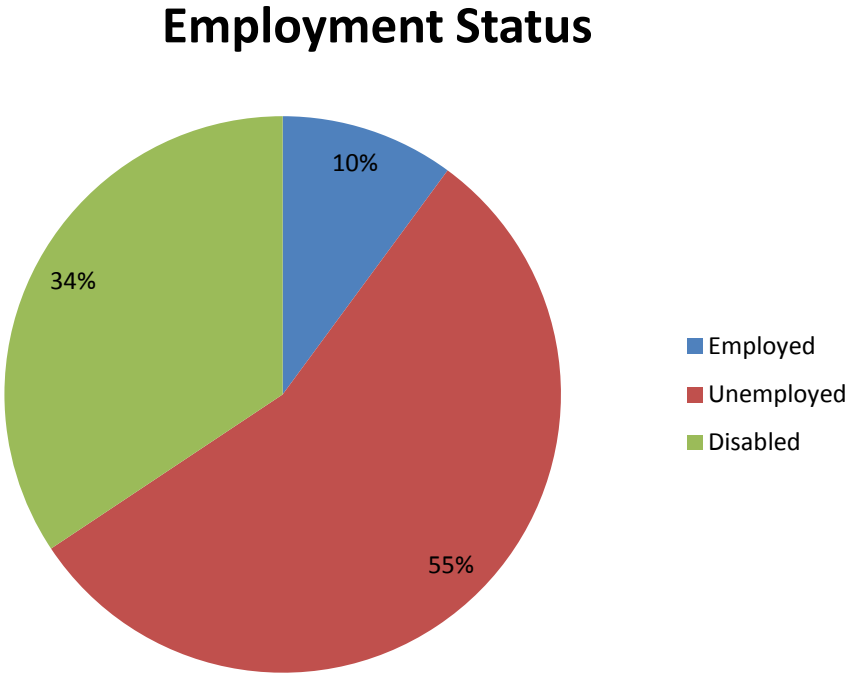
99% responded

² Percentages of responses based on 100 men surveyed

Employment Status³

Key Finding:

Unemployment is a significant barrier for homeless men with criminal histories



³ 94 of 100 men surveyed responded to this question

Criminal History

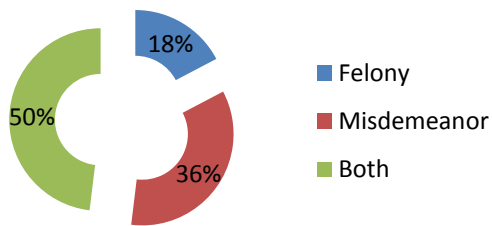
Key Findings:

60% of homeless men acknowledged having a criminal record⁴

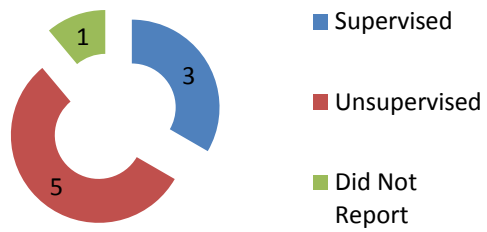
75 of 96 homeless men responding acknowledged having been arrested at least once

Only 3 of 97 homeless men responding acknowledged being a registered sex offender

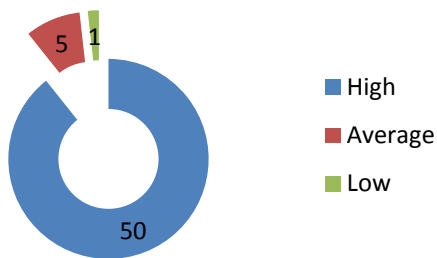
Types of Convictions



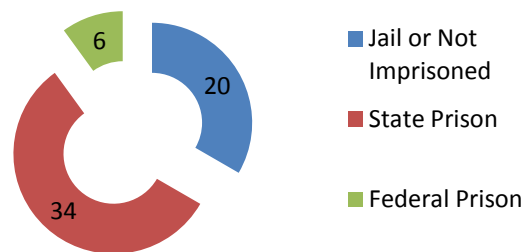
Probation Status



Times Arrested



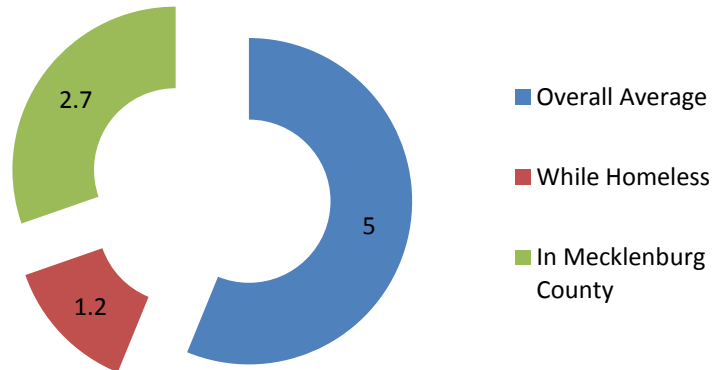
Incarceration Upon Conviction



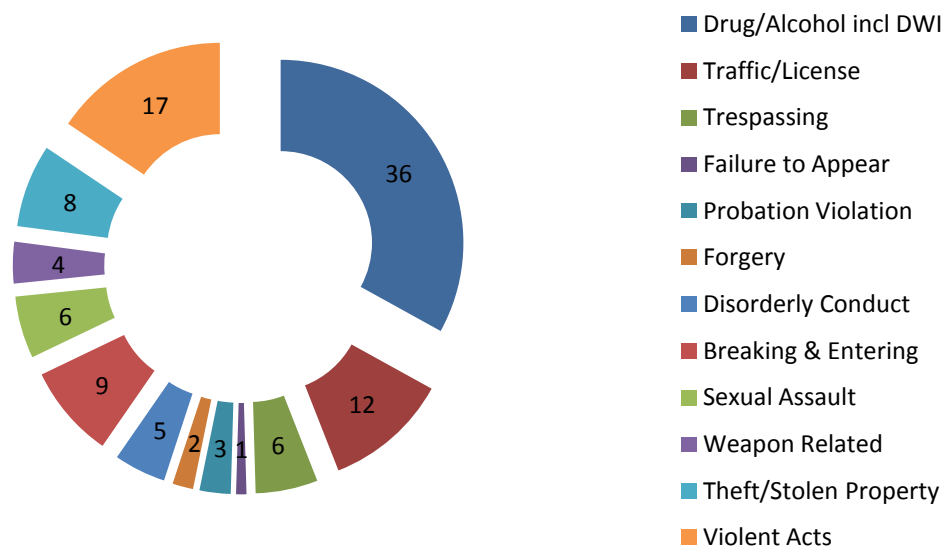
⁴ 99% of 100 men surveyed responded to this question

Criminal History continued

Average Times Arrested



Types of Charges



67% of 100 men surveyed responded listing 109 total charges

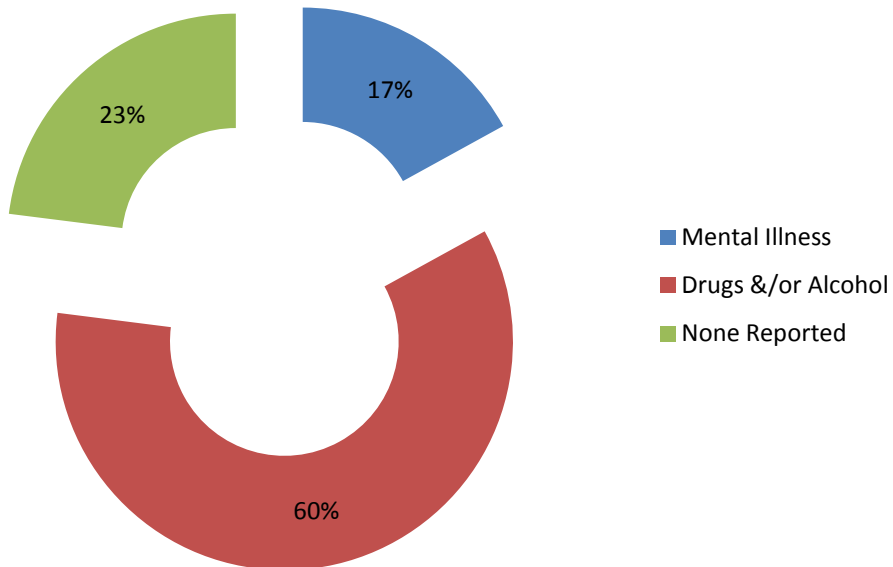
Impact of Mental Illness and/or Drugs and Alcohol on Criminal History⁵

Key Findings:

Of 75 homeless men reporting arrest, 60% indicated that drugs and/or alcohol played a role in their arrest

Of 75 homeless men reporting arrest, 17% indicated that mental illness played a role in their arrest

Factors in Arrest



⁵ 98% of homeless men surveyed responded to these questions

Observations & Conclusions

Key Findings:

Homeless men with criminal records tend not to be transient

Homeless men with criminal records tend to be educated

Drugs and/or alcohol tend to play a significant role in the criminal history of homeless men

While this survey was not scientific in its approach, we believe the responses are valid and, therefore, draw some interesting observations about homeless men with criminal histories. Hopefully this information will debunk several stereotypes. For example, it is reasonable to suspect that a homeless man with a criminal history has a very limited education. In this study, however, we found that more than 50% of the men surveyed reported being a high school graduate, 22% reported having completed their GED, and 14% reported being a college graduate. Another commonly expressed belief is that homeless men, especially those with criminal histories, are transient, having only been in the community a short time. Our study found that, on average, the men surveyed had lived in Charlotte (housed and homeless) for 11 years. Furthermore, they reported having been homeless, on average, for less than two years.

This study also supported some assumptions we make regarding homeless men with criminal histories. For instance, 55% of the men surveyed reported being unemployed compared to only 10% who were employed (the other 34% reported being disabled). It's obvious that homelessness coupled with a criminal record makes gaining employment extremely difficult. Another assumption is that criminal activity among the homeless often involves drugs or alcohol. Sixty percent of the men surveyed indicated that drugs and/or alcohol were a factor in their arrest history. Interestingly, 17% reported mental illness as a factor in their actions that led to arrest. And while it is true that homeless men are often arrested many times, one individual reported 50 arrests, this survey found that respondents were arrested an average of five times. Important to note, however, is that of the five times on average that homeless men reported being arrested, they reported an average of only 1.2 times being arrested while homeless.

Obviously, many interpretations may come from considering the data presented in this study. And, since the sample group surveyed represents less than five percent of the total men served by the Men's Shelter of Charlotte in a year's time, another survey of 100 homeless men may produce significantly different results. However, this survey is still important because it provides a snapshot of homeless men with criminal histories in our community, Charlotte, and is not based on a study somewhere else. Knowing more about our community's homeless population is important because only through understanding the needs and challenges faced by citizens experiencing homelessness in our community can we design solutions to meet their needs and help them move beyond homelessness.