

Homelessness and Social Isolation in Ontario County



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Abstract

In January of 2018, The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that approximately 553,000 individuals experienced homelessness on any given night in the United States. In the Ontario County alone, Family Promise of Ontario County identified 345 homeless school-aged children in the last year. In conjunction with Family Promise of Ontario County, Saoirse and Kahiya are investigating the relationship between homelessness and social isolation. They will be using in-depth interviews to collect data on this relationship. Their participants will be the heads of their family unit who were or are currently experiencing homelessness. They will use this methodology in order to garner a better understanding of which support these families rely on and seek out before, during, and after periods of homelessness. They have broken this support into three types: Emotional (expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care), Instrumental (tangible aid and service), and Informational (advice, suggestions, and information). They will be coding these interviews to uncover common themes in individuals' stories of how homelessness affected their family and ultimately their connection with their community. They will give their analysis to Family Promise of Ontario County, an organization who works with homeless families in the area, so they can structure their services to best fit the needs of current and future families. They will also be gathering quantitative data on eviction in Ontario County to support our qualitative research.

Qualitative interviews are ongoing

Table 1
Outline of Focus Group Topics and Questions

Topic: Types of Social Support	Questions
Emotional	Who provides you with emotional/mental support? Did you open up to anyone about your emotions? Who was your main support system? Did anyone support your mental health?
Instrumental	Did anyone support you with money or other aid?
Informational	Has anyone provided you with information/advice? How did you find this information?

Introduction

Literature Review

Kennett (1999, p.39) writes "...homelessness is best seen as an outcome of processes of social exclusion, particularly 'the inability of a section of the socially excluded population to get access to welfare services and social housing'" (Homelessness: Exploring the New Terrain)

Social science research in the 1950's and 60's of skid row residents defined homelessness "in terms of personal ties and relationships to the broader society" rather than a housing problem (Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness, Shlay and Rossi 1992, p. 132)

Research Question

How does homelessness influence social isolation?

Hypothesis

Families experiencing homelessness will experience high levels of social isolation without social support.

Conceptualizations

Homelessness: Lacking a fixed permanent address

Social Isolation: A lack of social support

Social Support: The perception and actuality that an individual is cared for, has assistance from other people and is a member of a social network. These networks provide support during stressful events

Method

QUANTITATIVE

We gathered data from multiple organizations (DataUSA // Geneva NY HUD Homes // EvictionLab.org) that work with housing and evictions in the city of Geneva. We gathered data on several characteristics of Geneva as compared to Ontario County and NY state. We compiled the information in an excel sheet and created visual representations of the data.

QUALITATIVE

For the second prong of our research, we conducted in-depth interviews with individual families to garner a better understanding of the relationship between homelessness and social isolation. Due to this population being difficult to locate, we will be utilizing the convenience sampling method to gather our sample, as well as flyers to gather a larger sample pool. We recorded the interview data on our phones, transcribed the interviews on our laptops and then coded the transcriptions without use of qualitative software to find common themes. We expected a low sample size for interviews due to the population.

Qualitative Data

Common Themes

Forced Eviction Children Transportation
Community Connections Mental Health

Forced Eviction

"Then she finally went the legal way and she manipulated the courts because basically DSS was supposed to pay my rent and when she first went DSS would give me money and I was giving it to her. Then after that she started telling people I wasn't paying her, which I had been. Then she said well okay I want DSS pay me directly. I had no problem with it. Then DSS started paying her directly. Then she hands me the eviction notice because DSS was late during the government shut down"

"I um lost my father ... He was one of our main providers. Main person that helped me with everything, and I went through a really bad depression... I was living in a trailer park... I owned my trailer... And the trailer park has been wanting my trailer for god knows how long and they finally found a way to evict us because we weren't paying on time."

Children

"I would have to go around the area... and, whenever one has a room for us, would take us in. But not only that, but they would also call CPS because they would need a child protective service worker on the case to say, if everything is going on okay in that room. And you don't want CPS in your business. And here (Family Promise) you come as you are and you're a family and nothing splits you up"

"My biggest thing is that if it was just me it wouldn't really matter. But it's the way they help out, especially for the kids that was the biggest deal for me"

Transportation

"And just to get to work so [my son] and I can have a stable place and the whole 9 yards. I would be dragging him out at 4 o'clock in the morning and getting home about 7/8 o'clock at night"

"[The program director] has transportation for me every night for work, so I don't have to worry about my husband taking out my four kids because I work till like 9 o'clock at night."

"They're helping me get on my feet and getting to work because that was a major milestone for me ...it's not easy getting around"

Community Connections

"It's basically somebody at least you can talk to. They'll help you out like for instance if I had no ride to go get groceries, or just somebody just to talk to just to relieve some of the stress. Just so you have somewhere to talk to about the stuff rather than just having to deal with it on your own."

"I really am connected still to the community. And it's kinda hard to think about moving out of [it], I wanna stay in [the community] because that's where everything is for me right now, it's all my support. It's kinda scary to think about leaving ...'laughs' to be honest with you. Like I don't know what it would be like to leave because I've been there since I was literally 12 or 13 and all my family is from [here] so, I really don't know."

Mental Health

"Just somebody just to talk to just to relieve some of the stress. Just so you have somewhere to talk to about the stuff rather than just having to deal with it on your own. Because sometimes just talking about it helps"

"The last thing I'm thinking about is [whats next] I'm just tryna work ... and survive like staying with [my boyfriend], do all that, all that verbal and physical abuse feeling like at a very low point, feeling very suicidal not having like like no real support."

"And like I said, my depression definitely had a big factor and a lot of people don't realize. Like, okay this person homeless, they must have done something stupid before - it's not the case. A lot of things can happen, like stress and anxiety, and depression..."

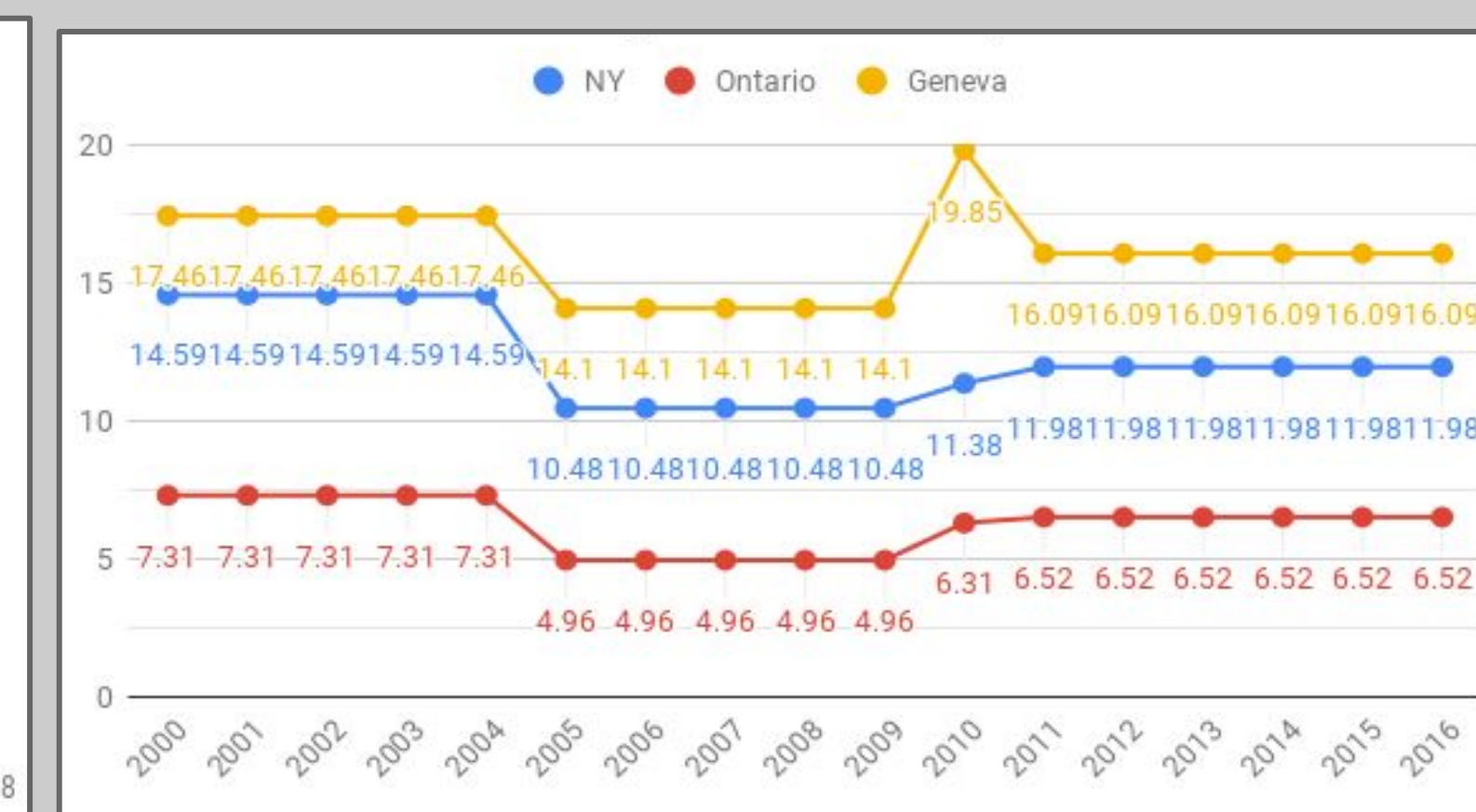
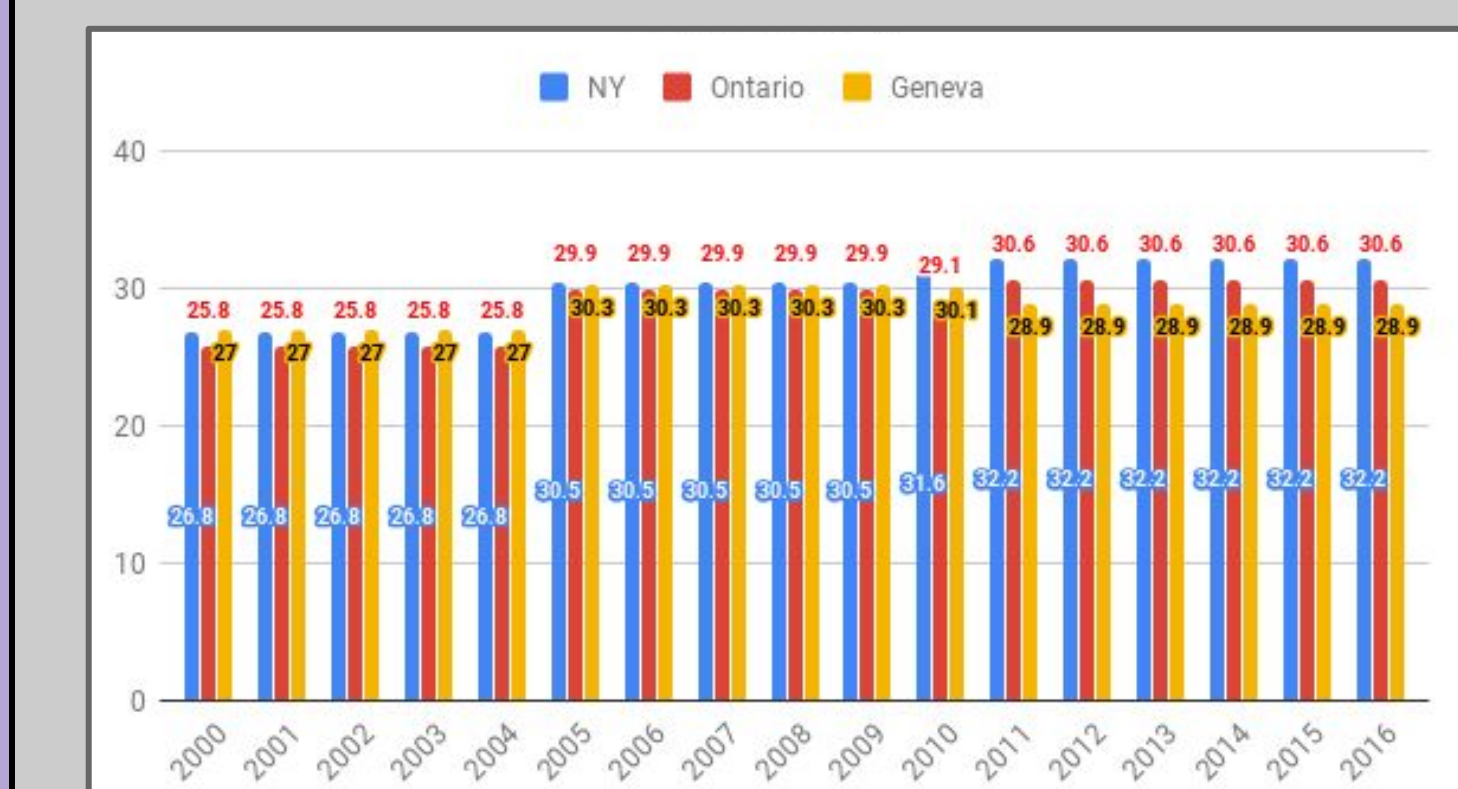
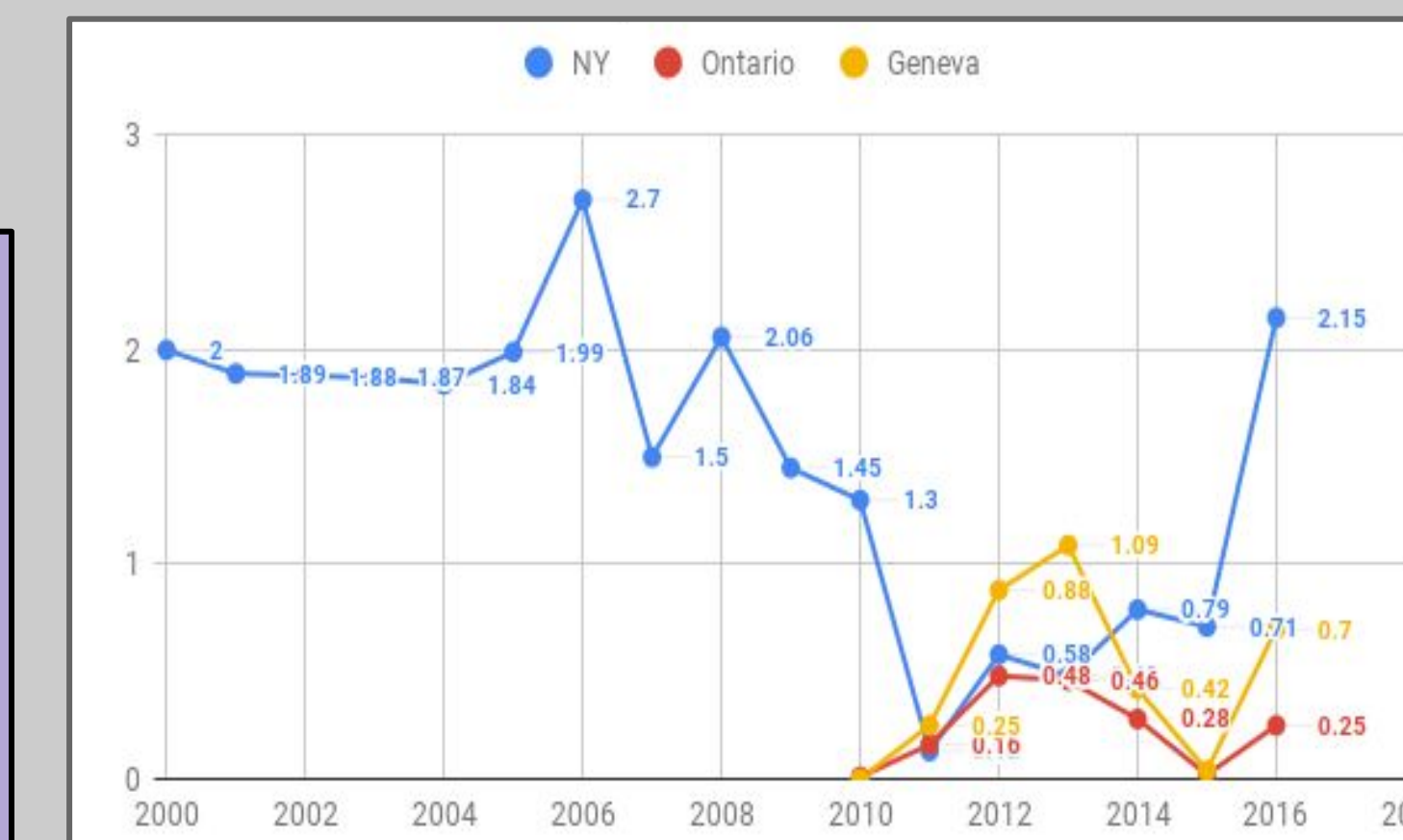


Table 1: (top left) Eviction Rates

- From 2010 to 2014, the eviction rates in Geneva were higher than in Ontario, and are inclining upwards again

Table 2: (top right) Poverty Rates

- The poverty line in New York for a family of four is \$46,435 - A family of two is \$30,451.

Table 3: (bottom left) Rent Burden

- Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30% of household income on rent. (NCCP)

Quantitative Data

Economic Profile of Geneva

- Geneva has approximately 13,136 citizens
- The median household income is around \$37,975 which is slightly below the poverty line for a family of three. (\$38,443)
- The most common job sectors are administrative (11.4%), sales (11.2%), education/training/library (10.7%), food service (9.8%) and management (6.2%)
- Food Service and Sales earn the least amount of money in Geneva

Comparison of Geneva and Ontario County

- Overall in Ontario County, Geneva has a higher poverty rate with the Ontario County poverty rate being 10.7% as compared to Geneva's 21.7%
- The median household income of Ontario County in 2016 was 58,070 dollars
- Men aged 18-24 are the largest group at risk of being impoverished in Geneva. While women aged 18-24 are more likely to be impoverished than men in Ontario County
- Occupations in Ontario County with the highest percentage are management (10.2%), sales (11.9%), administrative (11.7%), and education training and library (7.9%)

Conclusion

Quantitative

Overall we found that Geneva had an extremely high poverty rate when compared to Ontario County and New York State. We can see that Geneva's median income is lower than both Ontario County and NY state. However, their rent burden is consistently higher than Ontario County. The job sector in Geneva is also dominated by lower-income work. If people in Geneva are earning less money but are on average spending more on their income on housing this may put a severe strain on their overall budget.

Qualitative

We deduced from our research that informal emotional support and transportation are the most important resources for the individuals we talked to. All of the individuals we interviewed talked about their need for transportation in order to get to and from their job. Without this instrumental support from their social network the participants would not be able to keep their jobs. We also noticed that these cases of homelessness stemmed not only from financial problems but also from interpersonal conflict within their original social or familial network.

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