# Everyday information needs and information sources of homeless parents

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## Abstract:

Homelessness has been a problem in the United States since Colonial times. This study frames the homeless as an information user population and examines the everyday information needs and information sources of homeless parents. The underpinning assumption is that people in their everyday lives are assessing their information needs in order to maintain or improve their everyday living situations.

Methodologically, extended periods of participant observation and in-depth, open- ended interviews were utilized to gather rich, descriptive data. Twenty-eight residents in the six family shelters were interviewed to gather data concerning everyday problems, needs, information needs and information sources. The interview transcripts were content-analyzed using an established analytic scheme of everyday information needs. Informants utilized social network connections as primary information sources while media sources were perceived as less useful.

Findings identify everyday problems, needs, information needs and information sources. An interesting finding of the study is that the complex nature of the problem leads to interconnected needs that must be dealt with in certain sequences in order for the primary problem to be solved. An important conclusion of the study determined that homeless parents rely on information networking rather than information systems.

## Article:

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness has been a problem in the United States since Colonial times. The lack of housing was seen as only a minor social concern in the 1950s and 1960s. Since 1980, homelessness re-emerged as a social problem caused by a lack of affordable housing, the breakup of families and domestic violence, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, a decrease in the availability of sleeping-room-only (SRO) facilities and the gentrification of urban areas, cutbacks in government aid to the poor, a loss of manufacturing jobs, unemployment and underemployment where the cost of living exceeds the minimum wage rate, and problems with substance abuse. Even in current, prosperous times, homelessness continues to be a social concern in the United States. Recent welfare reforms have eliminated several of the homeless from welfare rolls, but those that remain experience problems not resolved by an improvement in the economic climate.

Chronic problems with drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and family dysfunction continue to contribute to the steady presence of the homeless in society.

Literature in the field of library and information science has focused on the homeless as a problem patron population in libraries rather than as an information user group. This study frames the homeless as an information user population and examines the everyday information needs and information sources of the homeless. In order to overcome homelessness, addressing problems and resultant needs must be undertaken. This effort often involves gathering relevant information from useful sources. This study is based on the assumption that people in their everyday lives are assessing their information needs in order to maintain or improve their everyday living situations [Dervin, (1) and Savolainen, (2). The homeless are not a homogeneous population and there are several distinct sub-populations. For example, there are the chronic homeless who are not concerned with improving their everyday life situations beyond everyday survival. This study focuses on the distinct sub-population of homeless parents who are a higher functioning group among the homeless, as most parents are actively dealing with problems in order to improve their everyday life situations for themselves and their children. Homeless parents are dealing with complex problems in their everyday lives, and their resultant needs and information needs reflect this complexity.

Two research questions guided this study:

1.     what are the everyday information needs of homeless parents?
2.     what are the everyday information sources of homeless parents?.

Deceptively simple on face, the study was designed to peel back complex layers of everyday life, particularly problems and needs within the context of homelessness, to identify information need and information source categories with rich description articulated by informants to aid in achieving a better understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
The conceptual framework for this study is a modification of an earlier work by Dervin (1,7) who developed a taxonomy for examining information needs of the average citizen based on studies conducted in Baltimore, Maryland, Washington, DC, Seattle, Washington and Syracuse, New York. The utility of using this particular framework is that it allows for examining the breadth of everyday life information needs. The findings from this study will serve as baseline information on which future studies will expand. The underpinning assumptions for the earlier work also guided this study:

- individuals want to control their own life environments
- in the modern, technological world, information is essential for asserting this control
- average citizens [and homeless parents] have difficulty in assessing and meeting their everyday life problems, needs and information needs, and
- that by examining four basic elements of the average citizen's [and homeless parents'] information system and their linkages, a better understanding of how ordinary citizens

[and homeless parents] attempt to assert control over these life environments will be reached.

Figure. 1 shows the modified diagram that revises Dervin's hierarchy to a process model.
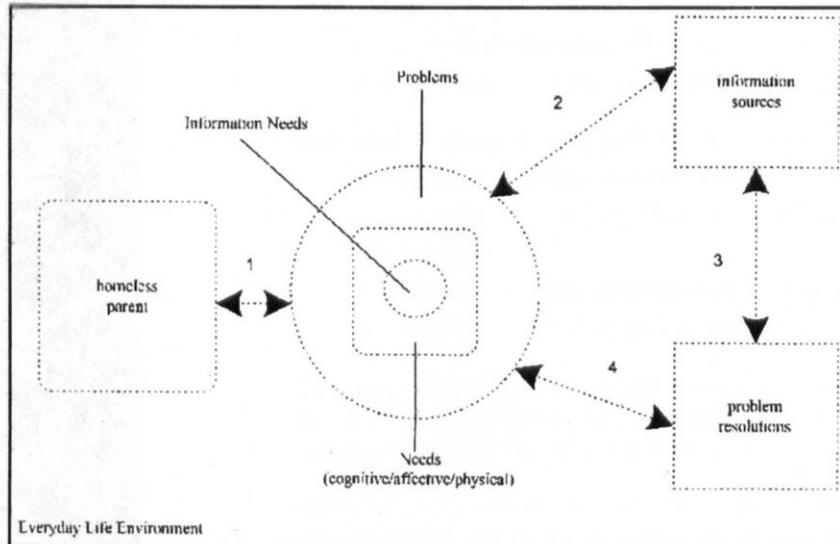


FIG. 1: *Conceptual model of everyday life problems, needs information needs, information sources and problem resolutions of a homless parent.*

The elements of the model are based on the four assumptions above. The everyday life environment is shown in the model that sets the context within which information needs assessments are made. Few information user studies are set in everyday life environments (Savolainen, 2). Many user studies narrow the focus of the study to gain a depth of knowledge while this study focuses on the breadth of everyday problems and resultant needs and information needs.

The homeless parent and linkage #1 represent the internal connection of the individual to problems, needs and information needs. Taylor (3) posits that, 'It is the argument that [when studying similarities among group members] each of these groups has different kinds of problems over varying time frames, different ways of resolving those problems and consequently differing information seeking behaviours.' The use of problems to set a context in order for informants to articulate needs and information needs was used in the original Dervin (1) studies. Taylor (3) also uses the term 'problems' and emphasizes their characteristics in his framework of an information use environment. Information needs are embedded in problems, according to Taylor, when users use personal insights gained from prior experience, by acquiring new knowledge that `illuminates, resolves, or alters the problem' or through a discovery that there may be no resolution to the problem. Three problem dimensions articulated by Taylor are also relevant to the conceptual model but rather than conceptualized as dichotomies are viewed rather as continuums: well- structured to ill-structured problems, complex to simple problems and familiar to new pattern problems. Information needs are conceptualized as a situation in which one's 'internal sense has 'run out' (Dervin and Nilan (4).

Wilson (5) articulates both cognitive and affective information needs areas that are relevant to the study and concomitant ways to determine these needs:

- the need for new information
- the need to elucidate the information held
- the need to confirm information held and
- the need to elucidate beliefs and values held
- the need to confirm beliefs and values held

Four modes of questioning then are utilized to discern these needs:

- questions to discover what is happening (orientation)
- questions to check that the person in "on the right track" (reorientation)
- questions to form an opinion or solve a problem (construction) and
- questions to build one's knowledge of a subject (extension)

The types of information needs are embedded in the problems/needs area of the model and the modes of questioning occur as information seeking behaviours which take place at linkage #2.

Information sources include both human and media sources and are perceived by the homeless parents as aids to answering questions or providing advice, opinions, or other forms of information that could help in problem resolution. Chen and Hernon's (6) typology of information sources was modified and used as a content analytic schema for analyzing study data.

Other links and components of the model, including linkages #3 and 4, and component of resolutions of problems, needs and information needs, were not the focus of this particular study and will be utilized in future research. Dervin's sense-making approach might be a useful approach if one wanted to study the entire problem-solving process of a narrower focus, for example, sense-making of housing problems of the homeless. The object of this study was to determine information needs and information sources of the homeless in order to establish baseline data on which to build future studies of the homeless as a user population.

HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES
Historically, homelessness in the United States has been tied to the economic climate of the country with the numbers of homeless fluctuating in tandem with prosperity or recession. Periods of high numbers of homeless include 1873-1879, that began with the advent of the industrial 'volution following the Civil War, and the Great Depression (1929-1939) when over 1,000,000 persons were estimated to he homeless (8). Estimating the numbers of the homeless has always been controversial and political in nature as the estimates are frequently tied to request for aid. This results in the service sector inflating estimates and the government underestimating the numbers of the homeless. In reality, counting the homeless can be very difficult as the official census count is conducted house-to-house and the homeless are often counted via emergency shelter numbers and estimates based on soup kitchen usage. Rates of recidivism are high for many people (periodic homeless persons), and many of the chronic homeless avoid contact with

service providers. Therefore it is difficult to reliably assess or estimate how many people are homeless at a particular time. Definitions of homelessness also are critical in counting the homeless. For this study, the definition of homelessness is taken from the Stewart B McKinney Act (8) that stipulates a person is homeless if they lack a fixed, regular nighttime residence, are living in emergency shelters or other temporary living institutions, or living in places not ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations. Other definitions include wording of `inadequately housed' or 'imminently homeless' and 'hidden homeless' where the homeless are living on a temporary basis with families or friends. Given the factors of varying definitions and the difficulty in finding and counting the homeless, it is not surprising that it is difficult to establish a reliable figure of the number of the homeless at any given time (9).

A large body of literature exists that examines the causes of homelessness (10, 11, 12). The classic causes of poverty still exist such as chronic problems with drugs, and alcohol. Newer causal factors of domestic violence and family dysfunction now contribute to the steady presence of the homeless in current society.

Compared to the homeless of the past, today's homeless are younger, have a higher level of formal education, and include more females and families. Single men still comprise the largest population (55%) and African- Americans represent the largest racial group (52%). Youth, veterans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans are represented in varying numbers depending on geographic factors (8, 13).

Families are the fastest growing population of the homeless (14, 15, 16, 17). Causes of family homelessness include lack of a job, loss of a job, domestic violence, lack of money, mental illness, substance abuse, divorce, sexual abuse and a lack of low-cost housing. The average age of homeless parents is 27-29 years old; almost two-thirds have completed a high school education or a GED; about one-fifth have completed several years of college or technical school; and one-third have a partial high school education. Families average just under three children, and most sheltered families have one to two children living with them in the shelter, although they frequently have other children living with their relatives or with relatives of the other parent.

Since 1997, changes to laws in the United States have caused several families to be removed from the welfare rolls. Welfare benefits cease after three years with the emphasis being placed on obtaining gainful employment. While this program seems to have been successful, a study by the Conference of U.S. Mayors (18) of hunger and homelessness in 26 major cities, reports that demand still outpaces supply for services. 'Among two key findings...demand for emergency food related assistance during 1999 grew at the highest level since 1992, and demand for emergency housing related assistance grew at the highest level since 1994.'

Underlying all the research on homelessness is the concept of the `deserving' versus the 'undeserving' poor. The deserving poor are those who, although diligently working within the system, still fall through the cracks or are homeless due to systemic failure (18). The undeserving poor are those who are perceived to be homeless due to personal dysfunction (i.e. problems with substance abuse and alcohol, laziness, an inability to hold a job because they cannot get along with others, etc.). Such views are often held subconsciously but are tied to the public's view of homelessness and the willingness of society to fund governmental support programmes it to

support grassroots service agencies. Homeless families often fall into the category of deserving poor and thus have more aid available to them. It hen becomes important for the homeless parents to be able to assess their everyday problems and needs and to then identify resultant information needs and access useful information sources in order to utilize these services to resolve problems.

METHODOLOGY
The nature of this particular study is best suited to a naturalistic approach using qualitative methods of participant observation and interviews. Spending extended periods in the field studying the homeless population intensively was needed to gain a clear understanding of what was occurring and why. Ultimately, this was a study of the stories of homeless parents in their everyday life environment: their problems, information needs that arose from these problems and who or what were perceived as information sources.

*Participant observation*
Prior to undertaking the task of analyzing why people are behaving the way they do, it is important to observe what it is they are actually doing (19). Utilizing participant observation accomplished four things. Participant observation allowed me to: 1) gain access to the shelter residents and build rapport, 2) become familiar with the shelter staff and shelter rules and regulations, 3) better develop the interview guide by understanding the population better and getting better resident input to designing the interview protocol and 4) improve the overall research design.

Three phases of participant observation were conducted. The first participant observation phase afforded insights into how the shelter functioned and observation shelter residents by participating as a front desk volunteer for a four-month period. Volunteer duties included answering the shelter phone, surveying other shelters for vacancies, screening shelter visitors and monitoring security video, handing out hygiene supplies and toiletries, and monitoring prescription drugs and their use. During the second participant observation phase, I served as a volunteer in the soup kitchen in the shelter serving lunch twice weekly over a four-month period. The third participant observation phase involved participation as an observer and not a shelter participant. During this four-month period, three days a week were spent in 6-8 hour sessions, observing and recording daily life in the shelter. The shelter director introduced me at a weekly mandatory meeting. I became known as a 'college student who was writing a book.' Shelter residents took an active role in educating a 'naïve researcher' about daily shelter life. It became apparent that acceptance was achieved when, during a mandatory meeting with Planned Parenthood, the speaker inquired if I was a resident. Before being able to respond, other residents had volunteered, 'She's a student,' another said, 'She's writing a book,' while another volunteered, 'It's okay, she's like one of us.' It was during this period that the interview guide was developed and tested with the assistance of several residents. After a year of observational fieldwork, the groundwork had been established to begin the interview process of data collection.

*Interviewing*
The purpose of collecting interview data was twofold; to gather data for analysis and to provide rich description to support the findings that the analysis produced (19). Informants were audiotaped with permission and extensive notes were taken. The semi-structured interview guide

began with demographic questions. In the pretest interview sessions, informants articulated that they felt more comfortable answering the 'easy' questions first. Subsequent interview questions asked informants to articulate everyday problems they were trying to resolve and who or what they used or would use as information sources. Interview sessions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and informants were paid for their time with grant funds. Payment of informants may have affected the data collection although techniques were utilized (keeping informants talking, re-phrasing questions, etc.) and most relaxed over time and appeared to respond candidly and honestly to the questions. Most informants reported they would have agreed to the interview even without remuneration, and many reported they enjoyed the process. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted, resulting in over 40 hours of taped conversations and over 800 pages of interview transcripts and notes for analysis.

## Sample

Purposeful sampling, which involves the selection of 'information rich cases' (19), was utilized to recruit informants knowledgeable about a subject from personal experience. Due to the problems of finding homeless families living outside of shelters, the decision was made to sample informants from the six family shelters in Indianapolis, Indiana, and note the resultant limitations.

The sampling technique of category saturation determined the sample size. Category saturation, or interviewing and analyzing until no new data is being collected, occurred after interviewing the 18 residents of the main shelter. All data collected was analyzed, and theoretical saturation was reached after these 18 interviews. In order to make certain that a shelter Ileo did not exist, 10 more confirming interviews were conducted in the 'her five family shelters in the city.

The study population was older than the national average and less educated MI far as the number of informants holding high school degrees, while Matching the national average for informants with college degrees and the number of dependent children. Additional data was collected, such as Marital status, employment histories, length of homelessness and whether he family had been homeless before to provide a more complete description of the sample.

## Data analysis

A content analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted using both deductive and inductive approaches. Using the coding schema developed by Dervin and others (1, 7), problem and information need categories were matched. Other information need categories emerged from the data, for example, needs concerning domestic violence, gangs, drugs, and guns. The unit of analysis was the entire interview transcript. Using key words and the Ethnograph software, unitizing of data was accomplished. Credibility and reliablity of the content analysis scheme were enhanced through previous use studies of information needs of various cities in the United States. (1,7). Interview transcripts were compared with the tapes and any errors corrected. Intercoder reliablity testing was conducted for the problem schema, needs and information needs schemata, and the information source schema. Intercoder agreement was 100% for problem areas for the first testing because there were only 19 problem areas. A level of 93% agreement was reached testing information sources on the third coding iteration. With 157 needs/information needs categories, an acceptable coding level of 89% agreement between three coders was reached after four revisions.

*Trustworthiness*

Several techniques were utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of results. Lincoln and Guba (20) established four areas of concern: 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability and 4) confirmability. Credibility and truth value were enhanced by the extended period the researcher spent in the field. Persistent observation over an extended period helped avoid any tendency to come to conclusions prematurely. Over a year was spent in the field conducting participant observation and interviews, and analyzing the data took another year's time. Intercoder reliability testing also enhanced the credibility of the analysis. Transferablility was tested by utilizing a shelter director in another state to evaluate whether the study findings would be similar if conducted in his shelter. An extensive audit trail, consisting of all field notes, transcripts, reflexive journals and other data was maintained.

FINDINGS

Study findings are presented by problem categories in the order of frequency articulated by informants. Included will be the findings of need, information needs, and information sources rather than presenting each separately.

*Finances*
- Informants articulated finances as the most pressing issue (27 of 28, 96%).
- Financial needs were linked to employment, education and housing.
- Informants primarily articulated finances as cognitive needs.
- Specific needs areas include bad credit, problems with handling money and not having enough money.
- Information sources informants articulated are using knowledge gained from personal experience and social service agency staff.
- Interestingly, although financial needs were reported as the number one problem experienced by homeless parents, informants did not articulate a wide range of information sources and may reveal a dissonance between information needs and knowledge of possible resources.

*Child care and relationships*
- Second most frequently articulated category [82%, 23 of 28] was childcare and relationships.
- Elucidating and confirming beliefs underpinned many of the problem statements with needs consisting of "what am I going to do" questions.
- Information needs were: daycare and preschool issues, finding cheap daycare, problem behaviour of children, relationship problems with family and spouses including domestic violence, a need to talk with others.
- Information sources: social service staff were most frequently consulted concerning the behaviour of children and daycare resources, friends and family were trusted sources of information concerning dealing with relationships, but television talk shows were also seen as useful as they frequently discuss problem relationships.

*Housing*
- Seventy-five percent of the study informants mentioned having housing issues (21 of 28).

- Those not reporting housing as a problem had either already secured housing or had been through the process multiple times and were confident that housing would eventually become available.
- Information needs were: finding a place, needs concerning public housing, and needs concerning barriers to getting housing such as bad credit, number of children, crime and safety concerns, etc.
- Information sources were informal, formal and mass media.
- Professional sources, such as staff from township trustee offices, housing authority staff, the shelter staff and other housing programs were mentioned.
- Family, friends and personal insight from past homeless experience were also reported. Newspapers and looking for "For Rent" signs when riding on the bus were also used.
- Other shelter residents were mentioned, but as housing is a limited commodity, information was only passed on to those who were not competing for the same size and types of space.

### *Health*
- Mental and physical health concerns for both the personal health of the homeless parents and their children were articulated by informants.
- Information needs were: availability and adequacy of health care, health information, mainly concerning specific diseases, problems, both their own and of children, spouses and relatives, concerning drug addictions and alcoholism were reported.
- Information sources: health professionals were mentioned as the main source of information.

The majority of residents received Medicaid benefits so only those new to the welfare system were worried about the availability of and access to health care. Others reported consulting family, friends, using personal experience and other shelter residents for insights, especially regarding treating routine childhood illnesses and for some personal health issues. Some informants mentioned God as a source of help in dealing with stress.

### *Employment*
- Three informants held jobs at the time of their interviews.
- Seventy-six percent (19 of 25) of the other residents articulated needs concerning gaining employment.
- Information needs were: unemployment was the most frequent problem response, and barriers to getting jobs which included difficulty in finding daycare due to expense or hours available, transportation, either from bus routes not traveling to where the job was, poor timing of bus routes, or too many bus changes needed, and a lack of job training programs.
- Information sources mirror those mentioned as sources for housing needs. Shelter staff and staff of agencies providing employment services, friends, relatives and other shelter residents were informal sources mentioned and informants mentioned reading the newspaper and looking for 'help wanted' signs.

### *Education*

- Fifty-percent of informants (14 of 28) expressed concerns with educational needs of their own and their children.
- Information needs consisted of parents seeking adult education opportunities and educational certification and concerning the education of their children, especially parent-teacher conflicts.
- Information sources included shelter staff and other shelter residents, mainly concerning enrolling children in new schools and transferring records. One informant spoke of the problem of obtaining $135.00 to take her license board exams for licensed practical nurse. Family, friends, and teachers were also mentioned as sources of information.

### *Transportation*
- Forty-three percent of the informants reported problems with transportation.
- Information needs arose due to frequent car breakdowns with little or no money for repair, needs linked to gaining employment, finding daycare, getting health care, etc.
- Residents new to the city reported directional problems in 'getting around.' Buying a cheap used car was also reported as a problem by two of the males in the study. A few informants mentioned problems reading bus schedules or getting information on public transportation. The shelter provided bus tokens for residents to seek employment and to visit the doctor but having to pay for trips for other purposes themselves, transport was cost prohibitive for some families.
- Information sources included sources of cheap, dependable cars. Those new to the area sought information from anyone present when the need arose, including strangers and bus drivers, and mentioned frequently getting wrong information. Other shelter residents and staff were also viewed as information sources concerning transportation problems.

### *Public assistance*
- Eleven of 28 informants (39%) had problems with public assistance.
- Information needs concerned acquiring food stamps, Medicaid, getting emergency housing or emergency food and welfare benefits in general. Those shelter residents who had never been homeless before were the ones reporting this as a problem. Others mentioned a problem with acquiring furniture for their new apartments.
- Information sources included shelter staff and social service providers were reported as the major sources of information and shelter residents were seen as information sources as long as they were not competing for the same limited resources.

### *Shelter*
- Nine residents mentioned experiencing problems arising from' living in the shelter.
- Information needs arose when residents were coping with other residents, other shelter children, shelter contacts, disciplining children, shelter rules and regulations, and a lack of privacy.
- Information sources were sought secondarily as informants dealt with these problems mainly through personal experience and insight to deal with specific difficulties. Informants sought family and friends for support and advice, and at least one shelter resident consulted a therapist for assistance.

### *Lesser problem areas*

Problem areas not frequently mentioned include crime and safety, mainly involving finding a safe place to live. Informants mentioned legal problems including having husbands in jail and needing legal advice, while other residents articulated having legal problems of their own. Some needed help with acquiring legal documents such as obtaining duplicate marriage certificates to gain entry to shelters requiring this documentation. Other informants articulated miscellaneous information needs, all needing to find how to replace lost identification or needing specific addresses or telephone numbers. One informant, who was new to the area, needed information about summer recreational opportunities for her daughter and was consulting shelter staff and other shelter residents for this information. Lastly, one informant needed information concerning family planning. `Grace' was pregnant and prenatal testing had revealed her baby had Downs Syndrome. Grace was gathering information to help her decide if she could care for the child or if the child would have a better life if adopted. Shelter staff had referred her to an agency staff member who, herself, had a child with Downs Syndrome. Grace could not remember the name of the agency, but the staff member had provided her with a book, a video and other brochures to help her make her decision.

*Summary*
Informants articulated 145 specific needs/information needs categories within the 16 major problem categories. Modes of questioning consisted of orientation questions to discover what is happening, reorientation questions to check that the person is 'on the right track', construction questions that form an opinion or solve a problem, and extension questions that build on a person's knowledge (5). Of these four modes, the constructive, or problem solving mode was most frequently articulated which is not unexpected given the context of everyday life problems.

Most informants spoke openly and easily about these everyday life problems. They were not always able to easily link these needs to information sources that could help resolve the need. This information dissonance is an area for possible further research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
Everyday life for homeless parents is complex and messy. Problem areas are often inter-linked and problem resolution may involve structured sequencing. For example, financial problems are mainly linked to employment, hut can also be connected to education needs for job training and barriers to getting housing due to bad credit. Childcare and relationship problems may be linked to legal issues, health issues, and shelter problems. Housing problems were linked to bad credit as already mentioned, education, when parents wanted to live in a certain area in order to get their children in better schools, and related to public assistance for transitional housing programs. Health issues were linked to shelter problems, stress over finding housing, and transportation problems of getting children to health care providers.

The best example of this interconnectivitv of problems is seen in the dilemma faced by 'Marie.' Marie spoke of the problem of trying to find a lob in order to increase her financial earnings. However, prior to finding a jib, Marie had to find cheap daycare for her toddler, and the daycare centre had to he open early so she could get the child to the centre and then to work on time by taking public transportation.

Others have conducted similar studies, particularly Chatman's various user needs studies of the economically poor (21, 22, 23). In her work on The impoverished life-world of outsiders, (24), Chatman identifies four key concepts that result in an impoverished life-world for individuals. These Concepts are: 1) risk-taking, 2) secrecy, 3) deception and 4) situational relevance. Chatman concludes 'Insiders, because of their status, reinforce Information poverty by neglecting to accept sources of information not created by themselves.' Homeless parents in this study, however, often failed to seek information when required or recommended to by, others demonstrating that the origin of the information need played a role. Internal versus externally motivated information needs would then be perhaps included under situational relevance. Chatman further concludes, ...the world of insiders is one in which outsiders are not sought for information and advice and is a world in which norms and mores define what is important and what is not.' Some homeless parents represented themselves as very information rich while others represented themselves as information poor. Some of the informants mentioned they would ask anybody they saw any question in order to get needed information. Others mentioned not even knowing the question that needed to be asked. Experience seemed to play a major role in whether one felt like a homeless insider (i.e., those who had previously been homeless, or had been on welfare before) or an outsider. The perception of the role of information insider/outsider changed based on the contexts of prior experiences with poverty, housing, employment, relationships, childcare, etc.

Another important conclusion is that these homeless parents seldom thought in terms of consulting formal information systems, such as a library or electronic database to gain needed information. One informant had a bachelor's degree in computer science and mentioned using the Internet as a source of information, and one informant mentioned using the public library to research the Prozac prescription her doctor had given her, hut these residents were exceptions. Homeless parents, instead, spoke of social networks comprised of close ties to family and friends and weak ties to social service providers. Research is currently being conducted to examine the flow of information among the homeless via social networks.

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