

# The Health and Well-Being of Foreign-Born Homeless Families Living in Ottawa's Family Shelter System

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# Introduction

There is an increasing number of immigrant and refugee families entering the family homeless shelter system in Ottawa

- Mental and physical health issues can increase the risk of homelessness for immigrants and refugees
- There is a breadth of research on the health of foreign-born individuals
- Little is known in regards to the health of foreign-born homeless families

## **Research Question:**

- Are there differences in physical and mental health for foreign-born and Canadian-born homeless heads of families?
- Is there an association between country of birth and mental health diagnosis for homeless heads of families?





# Methods

## **Sample:**

- 75 homeless families
  - One or more adults with one or more children under the age of 18

## **Data Collection:**

- One-on-one interviews
  - Interviews covered a number of different themes
  - Focus on mental and physical health





# Methods

## Measures:

- Self-report mental and physical health (SF-12)
- Existing mental health diagnosis

## Data Analysis:

- Chi-square tests
- Independent-Samples t-tests





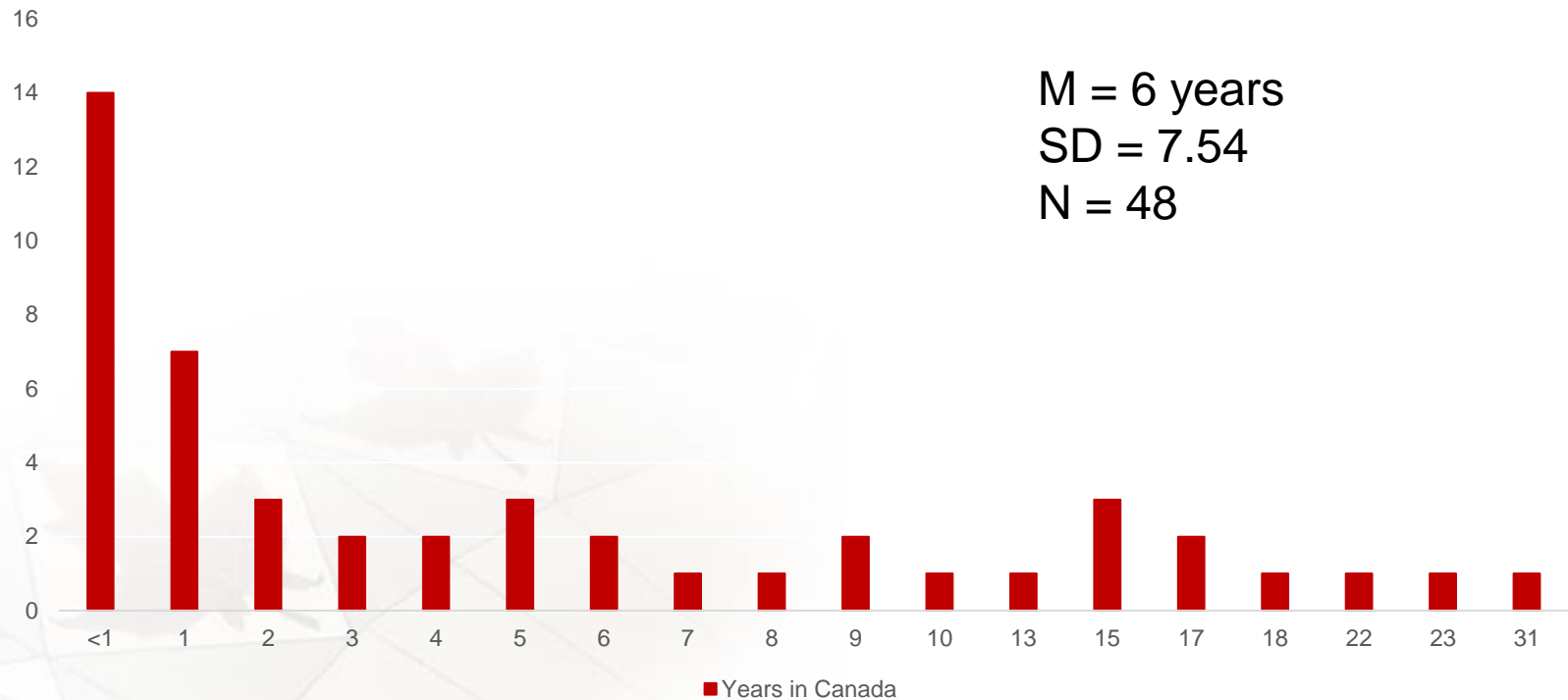
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Study Sample</b>
<b>Sex</b>	55 female (73.3%) 20 male (26.7%)
<b>Age</b>	35.78 years (SD = 8.55)
<b>Citizenship</b>	Canadian Citizen - 35 (46.7%) Perm. Res/Imm. – 18 (24.0%) Refugee Claimant – 19 (25.3%) Other/Missing 3 (4.0%)
<b>Born in Canada</b>	Yes – 27 (36.0%) No – 48 (64.0%)
<b>Most Common Countries</b>	Congo, Haiti, Burundi, Somalia
<b>Most Common Languages</b>	English - 24 (32.0%) Arabic - 11 (14.7%) French - 8 (10.7%) Creole – 7 (9.3%) Swahili – 6 (8.0%)





# Time Spent in Canada

Years in Canada





# Overall Health of the Sample

- Physical health ( $M = 50.88$ ,  $SD = 9.44$ ) comparable to the general population ( $M = 50$ ,  $SD = 10$ )
  - Most common physical health issues: Back problems (44.7%), dental problems (32.9%), migraine headaches (30.3%), anemia (26.3%)
- Mental health ( $M = 44.66$ ,  $SD = 11.78$ ) significantly lower than the general population ( $M = 50$ ,  $SD = 10$ )
- Low rates of problematic substance use (9.3%) and alcohol use (2.7%)

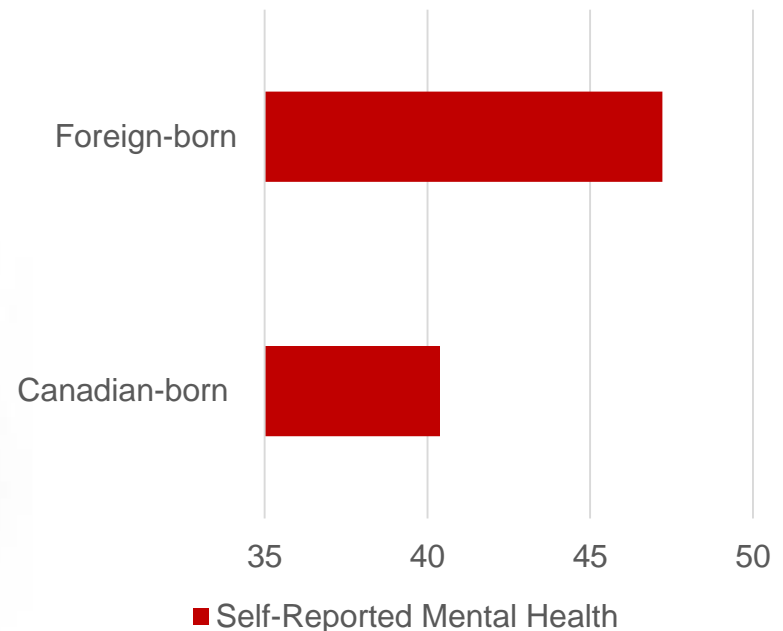




# Physical and Mental Health

- No significant differences in physical health
- Heads of families that were born outside of Canada ( $M = 47.22$ ,  $SE = 1.65$ ) reported their mental health to be better than heads of families that were born in Canada ( $M = 40.38$ ,  $SE = 2.44$ )
  - Mean of 50 for U.S general population
  - Subscale of the SF-12 measuring mental health (MCS):  $t(283) = -2.315$ ,  $p = .02$
  - Cohen's effect size values ( $d = 0.59$ )

Self-Reported Mental Health



\*Multiple imputation was used to replace missing values



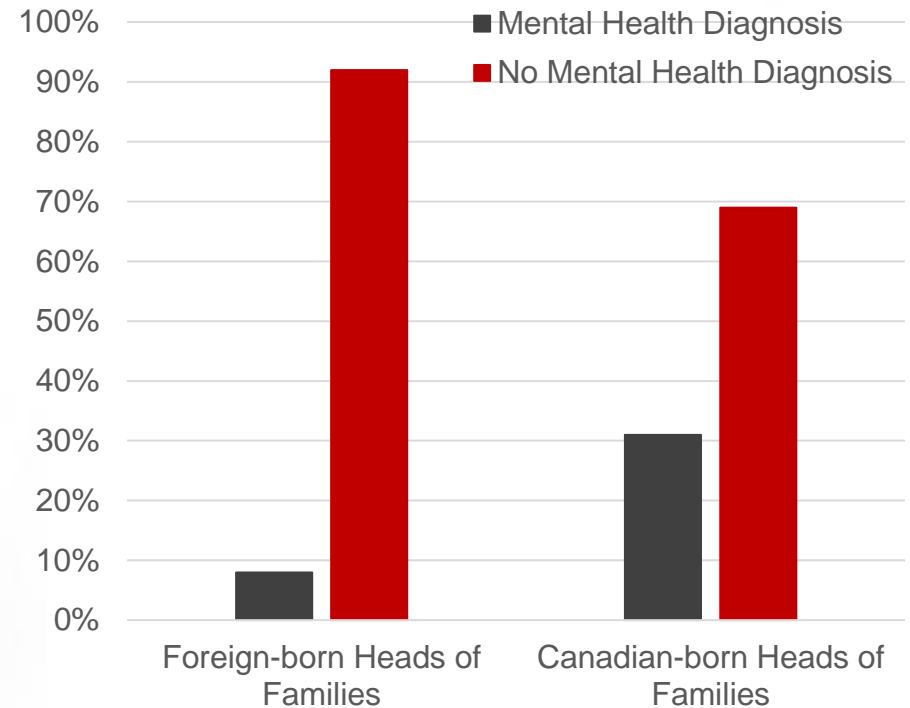




# Mental Health Diagnosis

There was a significant association between country of birth and mental health diagnosis

- N = 75
- Fisher's exact test,  $p = .02$
- Phi Coefficient = .30





# Discussion & Next Steps

The results suggest that foreign-born heads of families have better self-reported mental health and low rates of mental health diagnoses

- Higher health ratings than Canadian-born
- Mental health as a “personal problem”
- Low users of the healthcare system
  - Stigma surrounding mental health
  - Difficulty accessing culturally appropriate services
- Underreporting

