

I COUNT MTL 2015

**Complementary
Survey of
Homeless People
on the Island of
Montreal on
August 24, 2015
– Highlights**

Douglas
INSTITUT MENTAL HEALTH
UNIVERSITAIRE EN UNIVERSITY
SANTÉ MENTALE INSTITUTE

**Centre intégré
universitaire de santé
et de services sociaux
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l'île-de-Montréal**

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**Eric Latimer, Ph.D.
Christian Méthot, M.Sc.
Zhirong Cao, M.Sc.**

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Project Team

Many people contributed to the report on the complementary survey of homeless people on the island of Montreal on August 24, 2015 – only highlights of which are presented in this English language document. Following the awarding of a contract from the City of Montreal, the members of the scientific committee (whose names are provided further on) as well as Pierre-Luc Lortie of the City of Montreal and James McGregor, consultant, greatly contributed to the conceptualization of the survey, to the formulation of its specific objectives and to the elaboration of the questionnaire as well as the strategy for data collection. Christian Méthot then coordinated a team that initially consisted of four research associates: Marie-Anne Bourassa, Marc-Antoine Lapierre, Cynthia Lewis, and Elizabeth Rousseau. Together they largely devised the plan for the field survey that they then led, between August 24 and September 15, 2015. This team also coordinated the administration of the survey by 22 organisations in Montreal. Four interviewers also participated in the 3-week-long field survey: François Bordeleau, Gaëlle Étémé, Jacques Labonté and Daniela Sottas. Together they filled out hundreds of questionnaires in outside locations as well as within organizations where homeless people are often found. Cynthia Lewis and Elizabeth Rousseau, under the supervision and with the help of Christian Méthot, entered the data. Zhirong Cao then analyzed the data, with the help of Erika Braithwaite, Christian Méthot and Guido Powell. Members of the scientific committee, especially Serge Chevalier, as well as James McGregor, commented on the results and made many suggestions that improved the report. Eric Latimer coordinated the whole of the project.

Funding

This project was commissioned and funded by the City of Montreal, as part of the homeless count that had been awarded, following the request for proposals by invitation no 14-13872, to a consortium led by the Douglas Hospital Research Centre and that included the Downtown YMCA and Convercité. The contract between the City of Montreal and the Douglas Hospital Research Centre was signed on November 29, 2014.

Members of the scientific committee

Eric Latimer, Ph. D. (chair of the committee)

Researcher, Douglas Hospital Research Centre, CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Professor, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University

Jean-Pierre Bonin, Ph. D.

Professor, Faculté des sciences infirmières, Université de Montréal

M. Serge Chevalier

Consultant

Laurence Roy, Ph. D.

Researcher, Douglas Hospital Research Centre

Professor, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University

Alison Smith

PhD candidate (Political science), Université de Montréal

KEY FINDINGS

Objectives of the complementary survey

- The objectives of the complementary survey were: (1) to acquire additional information on people who were homeless and present in Montreal at the end of March 2015, when the count was carried out. Women, youth and Aboriginals were to receive particular attention; and (2), to describe those who had arrived in Montreal since the month of March.
- Contrary to the count of March 24, 2015, this survey did *not* aim to count the number of homeless people.

Methods

- The complementary survey was administered to a sample of people who had been experiencing homelessness in Montreal on August 24, 2015. The survey was administered between August 24 and September 30, 2015. Data were collected in outdoor locations, public locations, and in 85 community organizations and public institutions.
- People were deemed eligible or not according to their residential status on August 24, 2015. Persons living with others and who had no permanent residence were considered in hidden homelessness. For the purpose of this survey, people in rooming houses were not considered homeless.
- To meet the objectives of the survey, those who answered the questionnaires were divided into two groups: those who were present in Montreal during the count (to deepen our understanding of this population) and those who had since arrived in Montreal. Most analyses focus on the first of these two groups.

Number and distribution of questionnaires for people who were in Montreal at the end of March

- 72% of those approached, that is, 1,085 people, agreed to answer the questionnaire. Among these, 1,066 provided usable data. Of this number, 896 (84%) reported having lived in Montreal during the March count, while 170 (16%) reported having arrived in Montreal after that time.

Demographic characteristics

- The demographic characteristics of the sample are quite similar to those of people met during the count. This turned out to be case even though, in order to better describe women, youth, and Aboriginals, a special effort was made to increase the proportions of these groups in the sample. Thus,

women represent 30% of the sample (24% in the count), youth (aged 30 and under) 25% (19%), and Aboriginals 12% (10%).

- Following Toronto's example, the complementary survey included questions on sexual orientation. Among those who were in Montreal during the month of March, 3.3% reported having a homosexual orientation and 7.7% a bisexual one: 11% in total. These percentages are significantly higher than in the general population (1.7% and 1.3%, 3% in total). Similarly, in Toronto, the 2013 count had reported that 9% of people experiencing homelessness belonged to the LGBTQ population (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Transsexual, Two-spirited, Queer).

Arrival of new people among the homeless population, from those who were in stable housing in Montreal at the end of March

- 27% of people identified as visibly homeless in August 24, and who were in Montreal during the count of March 24, were at that earlier time in stable housing. These people make up a part of the difference between the 3,016 people identified as visibly homeless in March 24, and the larger but unknown number of people who would have been visibly homeless over the course of a year.

Use of Services

- One third of the respondents who were in Montreal in March report having used an ambulance in the last six months. Almost half (46%) report having been to the emergency room or having been hospitalized for a physical health problem during the same period. One third had at least one contact with the police.

Stays in youth detention centers

- The 2015 count had identified a very small proportion of respondents who mentioned having spent time at a youth detention centre as a factor in their most recent transition to homelessness. This was true even of people 30 and under who were experiencing their first episode of homelessness. However, in the present sample, about one-third of respondents in this age group reported having spent over six months in a youth detention center.
- If we exclude the hypothesis that having spent six or more months in a youth detention center would actually cause homelessness, it seems that the underlying factors that lead children to be placed in youth detention centers render them more at the risk of becoming homeless as adults. Interventions currently available in youth detention centers are evidently insufficient to compensate for these risk factors.

Obstacles to finding housing and factors that could help

- Two-thirds of respondents (64%) report either financial problems, or bad credit, or both, as a barrier to finding housing. In addition, 44% of respondents consider either an increase in income from social assistance, or a form of rent subsidy, as factors that could help them find housing. About a third of respondents, however, report a wide range of other obstacles (relationship problems, discrimination, mold or infestation problems, etc.). Similarly, a significant minority of respondents noted a variety of factors that could help them find housing (assistance in accessing employment or training, physical or mental health care, legal aid, etc.). Thus, financial factors represent the most common obstacle to finding housing, but there are many other factors of very different kinds.
- The vast majority of people experiencing homelessness desire permanent housing. It is among those who live in outdoor places that one finds the highest percentage – 13% – who say that they do not want permanent housing.

Health Status: High prevalence of untreated hepatitis C

- 13% of those who were in Montreal in March reported having hepatitis C. It is likely that the true prevalence is higher still. Among the 13% who report having hepatitis C, the majority (58%) indicate they are not being treated for it.

Those who stayed in an outdoor place on August 24

- The count estimated that about 429 people had spent the night of March 24 in outdoor locations. This number is higher in proportion to the population (2.2 per 10 000 inhabitants) than in Toronto (1.6) or Calgary (1.5). Individuals in this group differ from others (those who had remained in a shelter, in transitional housing or were staying with others) in several ways.
- Specifically, compared to those who had stayed in other types of places, those who had stayed outdoors were more likely to have spent time in a youth detention center (or another institutional setting, in the case of older people). This is the case for half (52%) of those aged 30 and under. They are the least likely to have taken drugs for mental disorders (29%), but most often report alcohol dependence (34%) or drug dependence (39%). Thirteen percent reported having injected drugs in the last 30 days, with 30% reporting having been exposed to potentially contaminated needles.
- Fewer than half of those who reported having spent the night of August 24 in an outdoor location reported having used a shelter in the last six months. If they were not in an outdoor location in March (43%), they were mainly either in a shelter (21%) or in stable housing (23%).

People who lived in transitional housing on August 24

- People who had spent the night of August 24 in transitional housing (including shelters for women victims of abuse) make up another distinct group. They tended to be younger (43% were 30 years old or under) and were more often (43%) women. A smaller proportion (14%) were episodically homeless; more commonly, they had been homeless without interruption for between one and three years (31%). They often had less interaction with the police or street workers. Very few (1%) said they did not want to find permanent housing; 17% cited wanting help to find safe housing, and 23% wanted help to be able to maintain housing. Almost 60% of residents of this type of housing reported having been prescribed one or more medications for mental health problems in the past 5 years, most often for major depression (35%), or anxiety disorders (30%). A relatively large proportion (17%) reported help with mental health problems as a factor that would help them find housing.
- Half (52%) of those who were in transitional housing in August 2015 were also in transitional housing in March. The others were mostly either stably housed (22%) or in shelters (21%). Only 1% were in outdoor locations in March.

Women

- Women were more likely than men to report financial problems (64% vs 55%), relationship problems (17% vs 5%) and mental health problems (20% vs 10%) as barriers to finding housing. In terms of factors that could help them find housing, they were more likely to mention getting more money from social assistance (38% vs 30%), a rent subsidy (32% vs 18%), help finding affordable housing (36% vs 22%), help with mental health problems (12% vs 5%) or access to safe housing (16% vs 4%). They reported having been prescribed medication for major depression or anxiety disorders much more frequently than men (33% vs 16%, 32% vs 17%).

Aboriginals

- Aboriginal people were disproportionately represented in outdoor locations (22%), less in shelters (8%) and transitional housing (7%). A much larger proportion than among non-Aboriginals were living common-law (17% vs 2%) or with children 18 and under (33% vs 16%). They were more likely to report having been at a day center over the past 6 months (84% vs 57%) or having been to an emergency room or having been hospitalized for physical health reasons (56% vs 44%), but less often for mental health reasons (10% vs 18%). They were more likely to have had contact with the police (45% vs 31%) and street workers (41% vs 24%). A quarter of them (25%) mentioned discrimination by landlords as a barrier to finding housing, significantly more than non-Aboriginal people did (13%).

People who make extensive use of services

- A subgroup of 129 people (representing 14% of those who were in Montreal in March) reported having used the ambulance AND the emergency room or a hospital (for physical or mental health) AND having contact with the police or having been imprisoned, during the past six months. These people also used most other services in greater proportion than others. The great majority of such people were found among those who spent the night of August 24 in an outdoor location (38%) or in a shelter (30%), few in transitional housing (12%) or hidden homelessness (8%). They were proportionally more likely than others to have reported using medications for mental illness in the past 5 years - especially for schizophrenia and psychotic problems (16% vs 7%), anxiety disorders (35% vs 20%), and major depression (29% vs 20%).

Those who arrived in Montreal since March

- Among the 170 individuals who were homeless on August 24 and who reported having arrived in Montreal since March (16% of the total sample of 1066 people), nearly a third (53), reported planning to leave Montreal before the end of 2015, while the others planned to stay. Demographically, the two subgroups were very similar. However, they differed in terms of the use of services: those who planned to leave Montreal and therefore, it seems, came to spend the summer, were less likely to report having used health services (emergency care or hospitalization for physical health: 15% vs 33%; CLSC for physical health: 17% vs 39%; CLSC for mental health: 8% vs 20%), food banks (6% vs 17%) and transitional housing (none vs 18%). They were much more likely to have come from other provinces (38% vs 14%).
- Twenty percent (20%) of those who had arrived in Montreal since March were Aboriginal. They made up a slightly larger proportion of those planning to leave Montreal (26%) compared to those who were planning to stay (18%).

Note: The English translation of the questionnaire may be found at the end of the full report, "*Enquête complémentaire sur la population itinérante sur l'île de Montréal le 24 août 2015*".

Acknowledgments

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