about it and they're really like, kinda nonchalant about it. You know, I guess because they have a place to live.

- I: Yeah, they don't know.
- B: They don't know and its almost like they don't really care. You know, um, I told my counselor about this and she was like, oh well talk to me later about it.
- I: Like it'll wait.
- B: Yeah. And um, I know, Monday night I really got suicidal. And I was really... I, I even wrote a letter out. And it was like, you know, I don't care anymore. Nobody gives a shit so why should I? You know, and um I showed her the letter yesterday. The only thing she said was "deep." It's deep. And you know, like I've been hearing voices a lot lately. And that tends to make it worse. You know, so, and it's like, oh well. You know, it's like they don't really care anyway. I find myself breaking down at the strangest times.

Though not as widespread as suggested by the "defect" literature, disabilities do play a role in some peoples' homelessness. But homelessness among the disabled usually occurs as a result of the same complex mix of structural, domestic and personal factors that create homelessness for the non-disabled, including a lack of housing alternatives, suffering abuse, having to rely on dilapidated structures, living with few resources, and not having a sufficient income or social support system. The only thing different that characterizes the cases of the disabled is that the same problems of impoverishment are more difficult to deal with as a result of being disabled. Whether that disability is physical or mental, disabled people are less likely to be able to secure employment, and families may be less willing to adapt to the conditions of aiding the disabled family member. Hence, all of the struggles facing other homeless people are more acute for disabled people, perhaps making it even more difficult for them to secure independence from the shelter system.

Experiences In Institutional Living:

Many of the homeless in this sample have had institutional living experiences, and though it is the exception that those institutional experiences were reported as

Table 25. Insitutional living experiences in the sample.

I. Jail/Prison	12
II. Foster care	7
III. Psychiatric hospital	3
IV. Military service	2
VI. None	22
	N=46

* Includes the following duplications: two cases had experiences of both jail and foster care, one case experienced both foster care and military service.

occurring along the pathways to homelessness, the fact of having had institutional experience may be an indication of the diminished resources of participants, and may reflect other sources of "marginal" housing for those who have had few housing alternatives. Participants were asked during their interviews about such "institutional living" experiences as jail, psychiatric hospitalization, foster care and military service. Participants were also asked if they felt such experiences were related at all to their homelessness. The distribution in Table 25 shows the range of institutional living reported by participants, examples of which will be considered here. But before doing that, it should be noted that a near majority of the survey participants had *no* prior institutional living experiences.

As can be seen, jail or prison is the most common institutional experience reported by participants, with 12 of the participants having spent time in jail (two cases had also been in foster care as a child). In only one case did jail immediately precede entrance

into the shelter system, and that was true in the case of Randy (age 24). Randy was released from jail one month before the interview, and because Randy was raised in foster care, and perceived that he had no family support available following his release from jail, he went into the shelter system. He attributes his homelessness to having been "state-raised," which left him with few resources with which to confront adult life. At the age of 18, Randy was already staying in the shelters, and was familiar with the network of emergency services available to homeless people. After living in the shelter system for two years and travelling around to a number of cities, Randy committed burglary, for which he served 2 1/2 years in prison in Florida. He reports that jail made him grow up, "I went from boyhood to manhood. I was talking a lot of shit before. Now I'm more serious." Randy is currently employed full-time, and says that he does not plan on staying in the shelter system for very long, hoping to secure a rented room.

Only one other case of prison had any reported relationship to homelessness, and that was the case of James (age 28). James committed "petty theft" soon after he became homeless, about one year before the interview. He says that he became homeless because "I separated from my family." When James first became homeless, he knew nothing of the shelter system so he "roamed the streets":

Interviewer: What happened the first time you had to stay on the street or in the shelters? James: I got locked up.

- I: What happened there?
- J: I just got locked up.
- 1: The police locked you up?
- J: Yeah. Something happened.
- I: You prefer not to say what happened?
- J: I'm saying that I gotta get out of this shit. I'm trying to find a way out. Some things, you know, I can't handle.
- I: Did you get locked up because you were homeless?

- J: Homeless. Homeless mostly.
- I: How did it make you feel?
- J: Lousy. Like dirt. Dirt. Like dirt.
- *(...)*
- I: So what are some of the ways you've gotten money in the last month?
- J: Well there's a lot of ways to get money in an average month. You can be honest, you can do it legal. Or, you can do it illegal.
- I: Ah huh. And what do you do?
- J: Uh, I'm like the government, you know. I'm a capitalist. You know, I go out, you know, and find small mistakes that other people make. And I try capitalizing on em.
- I: What sort of things do you do?
- J: Scams. We try capitalizing offa other's mistakes. Other peoples' mistakes. We see em make a mistake and we, you know, we can, you know, capitalize offa them.
- I: What sort of scam would you run?
- J: In other words, I would try to trick somebody.

James was among the more resistant survey participants, and seemed highly suspicious of the interviewer and the interviewer's intentions. It is interesting that he perceives himself and the scams in which he partakes as acting as part of a group, and that capitalizing off of others' mistakes is like "the government." He was reluctant even to talk to the interviewer, which may help to understand his evasiveness. He terminated the interview when it got more personal, and insisted on his \$5 pay for participation. However, when seen several days later, he was very friendly to the interviewer, asking to have another chance and another \$5.

These two cases of jail being directly linked to the pathways to homelessness are, however, the exception. Most of the people who have had experience with the criminal justice system have done so months or usually years before the onset of their homelessness, and do not perceive their confinement to be at all related to their homelessness. However, in two instances, participants did report that prison had helped them to shape some of their attitudes about their homelessness. One was the case of John (age 27), the young man whose homelessness occurred after a fire started by a kerosene

heater:

John: ...The only reason why I haven't waged an all out war with this society as far as getting mine - as far as like financially - the only reason is because of the fact I am afraid to put myself in a position to be incarcerated. And I'm being honest with you. I do not want to be incarcerated no more. I refuse. I have been there.

Interviewer: So how long ago were you in jail?

John: I was in jail. As of November the 5th is when I came home [9 months ago]. And I was in jail. I stayed in jail 27 months. Some people stayed longer. But the point is, ah, that was the longest time I ever stayed in jail, and man, from that point on, I tell my friends, I say I would never be in another jail again. I mean that from my heart.

- I: What do you think brought you to that place?
- J: The same thing as what I'm doing now. Being out of work, trying to get training can't obtain proper work so I sold drugs and got locked up. That's why I was in jail.
- I: Do you think that that place being in jail, had anything to do with you're being on the streets now?
- J: No. No I don't think that. If anything being in jail has brought me to the kind of realization that I never want to go there again. So if it haven't taught me anything, it taught me that much to stay out of jail. OK. So now it goes to a different phase, if I'm out of jail, then what am I gonna do? I have to work somewhere because the basic things that I need as far as eating and stuff, how can I eat without no money?
- I: Anything else you learned?
- J: Yes, I have learned a lot about jail. I've learned that it's a very racial situation.
- I: What do you mean by that?
- J: By that I mean that 99% of the inmates in jail are black. It makes you, gets you in the picture that there's no white people committing any crimes, you understand what I'm saying? And its very racial.
- I: Ah huh. Or at least no white people getting caught.
- J: Or getting caught. So there's must be some real good white criminals out there, you know, when I seen all them slick, slime-wicked ones, the best of em they black and they get caught. So I don't know how these guys get caught. But it seems that way, I mean, this is deep. The things in front of your eyes, even you as a white person you're a very nice person if you could see that for yourself, I know you would be unbiased enough to say man, this is a bunch of bull crap. How is you gonna have all these guys in jail that black and you mean to tell me.... I mean really, how is that? That's like a guy putting a picture of Jesus on the wall that's saying he's God and he's white. How do you expect a person to look at that if he's Chinese or Black or even Oriental.... That's God? You know what I

mean? It don't add up. The same with if I put a black God up there. How am I gonna tell a bunch of white people that's God? It's ridiculous. We have so many things that right in front of your eyes that you see that is like a big contradiction. It makes it hard for you to really believe in anything. It really do.

Clarence (age 33), the former heroin abuser from "the projects" (where he also learned to steal cars), also remarks that though he has been arrested for hanging around buildings and sleeping in them, his last time in prison was between 1974 and 1977. He was incarcerated for robbery, and claims that "Jail made me a worse person. It dehumanizes people. I would never go back.... But it has nothing to do with where I'm at now."

Again, while not linked to their homelessness, there were two cases in which people were put in jail because, they claim, they were wrongly accused. One man, Rich (age 23) was picked up by the police and spent six months in jail for a robbery, only to be released because of a lack of evidence. He claims to know nothing about the crime, except that he had similar clothes as the perpetrator on the night of the crime, and therefore was arrested. Another case, Charlie (age 35), spent four months in jail charged with 22 cab hold-ups, though he too claims to know nothing about them, and was eventually released because of a lack of evidence.

The few cases of prison not yet discussed were all prior to becoming homeless, and were not linked by the participants to their homelessness. Two of the crimes were robbery, one was assault, and one was for drug dealing. Generally speaking, these instances of criminal behavior were motivated by a need for money, and could be interpreted as driven by the same kinds of circumstances and difficult personal choices that eventually helped to create residential instability and homelessness.

The second most common institutional experience reported by participants was being raised in foster care. Six of the participants had some experience as children or teens

with the foster care system (one also had been in jail, and one in the military). Readers may remember the case of Ruth (age 36), who reported that she had recently separated from an abusive husband, and went into a deep depression. Ruth also reported having been "abandoned" by her parents as a small child, and ran away from the foster care home at age 11 because "the foster home guy was feeling us over in the nighttime." She terminated her interview after that statement because she was upset by discussing her past. But earlier in the interview she had also said that after she ran away at age 11 and was caught, that she was put into detention, "on Slaton Farms," for four years. At age 16 she returned to her natural mother, and within a few years had gotten her own apartment, and later married.

Readers might also remember the case of Karen (age 29), whose mother died when she was five, and who was reared by adoptive grandparents. Her adoptive grandmother also died, and so she says that she had no family to whom to return after her son was beaten by a boyfriend, and after she was raped. Consequently, she had to rely on the shelter system. And there is the case of Randy, who was just discussed regarding his having nowhere to go following his recent release from prison, and who blames his homelessness on his being "state-raised."

Curtis (age 31), who was the bill collector whose income "went up in smoke" [cocaine], and who had a relationship with his landlord's daughter, both of which resulted in his becoming homeless, was also reared part of his childhood in foster care. He and his brothers and sisters were taken from his mothers' home at the age of four due to neglect, and placed in a foster home. They spent six years in the foster care home, but he says that they were taken out of there because of abuse, "Man, that woman was crazy. Talk about a house of horrors, she'd kick you in the face and tie you to a pole and burn you in the arm, shit like that." Curtis was then placed in the "Methodist Home for

Children," where he lived for two and half years. When asked whether he saw it as related to his current situation, he said:

Curtis: If you are able to see through to people you can see that basically, I'm a very sensitive person. And it doesn't take much to - at the age I was - to mess with a child's mind. Well, nowadays they give em psychological counselling. I think that back then, there was no understanding of young black kids and no one took into account the situation that we had been through. So no one sought counselling for us. And um, so we acting, us acting strange, we're just like a bunch of nigger kids, know what I mean? To them, we just a bunch of strange nigger kids. No one said, what's their background? Do they need some counselling or what? They put me and my sister and my brother on Thorazine and Stellazine, shit like that.

I: They gave you drugs?

C: You know, after a while. After the first year we were there. Cause we were acting strangely. But as I got older I realized to myself that no one took into account our background - what might have happened to us. I don't even think the staff knew.... And so they put us on these drugs without even - instead of dealing with the problem head up. Man, they dealt with the problem in a drug fashion. All that fucked me up. I feel as though I'm still, age I am [age 31], I'm still recovering from that shit that happened.

After the Methodist Home, Curtis was placed in a combined "school and hospital" for emotionally disturbed children for two more years: "They called me emotionally disturbed. Of course I was emotionally disturbed. You're fucking right I was emotionally disturbed. Think about it man, wouldn't you be?" Curtis believes that if his "hunger and thirst for knowledge" had been better channelled, that his entire life would be different now.

In considering other institutional links to homelessness, there is the psychiatric hospital. The literature on homelessness, particularly research from the early 1980's, placed great emphasis on "deinstitutionalization" and the role of psychiatric hospitalization in homelessness. It has usually been assumed that the homeless mentally ill are incompetent, and therefore, when released from psychiatric hospitals, that they can't undertake the responsibilities of independent living, and therefore fall through safety nets and into the streets. Well, far from finding that most of the homeless have

prior psychiatric hospitalizations, this sample had only three reported incidents of such institutionalization. In all three cases, the participants begin their story of becoming homeless with circumstances prior to that hospitalization, with hospitalization happening as a result of factors up to and including becoming homeless. Moreover, rather than being placed in housing and "falling through" safety nets, none of these persons was ever placed in housing following their hospitalizations, so there was no "safety net" through which to fall.

Readers will remember the case of Lisa (age 40), who left Los Vegas for employment in Atlantic City. When that employment didn't work out, and after Lisa's car and belongings were stolen, she became emotionally unstable and went to a shelter. But since the shelter had a 12-day maximum stay policy, she was soon on the streets, where she stayed until she voluntarily went to a psychiatric hospital. After the hospitalization, since no housing arrangements were made for her, she had to go through the shelter system again, and was placed in a boarding home for mentally ill women. Such was also the case of Christine (age 37), whose husband brought another woman into the house. As she moved from placed to place, her "mind fogged out"; she was abused by a man with whom she stayed; and she was rejected by her mother. Consequently she stayed on the street for a number of years, where she was eventually raped, and where she was physically harassed by a police officer. Christine entered a psychiatric hospital, and also had to go back through the shelter system, before she was invited into a boarding home for mentally ill women. And there is the case of Betsy (age 21) who fled an abusive home as a teen, and who was subsequently abused and pimped by men. She attempted suicide on several occasions, and was hospitalized after each attempt. She was diagnosed with manic-depression, though she too was discharged into the shelter system after her hospitalizations. Hence, in each of these cases, hospitalization follows a series

of crises that lead to homelessness, and once hospitalization is complete, people are discharged back to the shelters and to their homelessness, as the mental health system had assumed no responsibility for making housing placements.

Finally, the only other institution in which people from this sample reported living prior to their homelessness was the military. There were only two cases of military service, one of which was for a person who was also reared in foster care. Readers will remember the case of Robert (age 25), who grew up in foster care, ran away because of abuse, and eventually joined the military. Following his recent discharge from military service, Robert has taken to the shelters, as he had no family to whom to return after his stay in the military. And there is the case of Ray (age 39) whose alcohol problems eventually led to his family's breakdown, and whose alcoholism stemmed in part from his two tours in the Viet Nam War. Hence, in both instances, military service is linked to homelessness, though indirectly.

In concluding this section on institutional living, it should first be noted that a near majority of the sample have had no institutional living experiences. However, of those who have had institutional experience, most have been in jail or prison, followed by a small group that was reared in foster care, followed by an even smaller group that had been in a psychiatric hospital, and two cases of military service. Jail or prison was directly involved in the pathways to homelessness in only two instances - once because homelessness followed release from prison, and once because a participant was arrested for theft committed while he was homeless. The other instances of imprisonment preceded the onset of homelessness, and included people whose current attitudes have been significantly influenced by their prison experiences, people who were falsely accused, and people who committed crimes out of a need for money. Many of these

instances of criminal behavior were influenced by some of the same impoverishing circumstances and difficult personal choices that led to homelessness.

Those people who were in foster care typically lacked any family support as adults, and therefore were less likely to return to family members given the conditions that created residential instability. In that way, foster care experience is indirectly linked to homelessness. Of particular note, however, is the high incidence of abuse - physical and sexual - experienced by people reared in foster care, and the impact which that experience may have in the psychology of those persons who suffered from that abuse. Though not directly involved in the immediate pathways to homelessness, such persons may have long term difficulties in coping with their childhood experiences, and therefore may be in need of additional support when confronting the circumstances that lead to residential instability.

Psychiatric hospitalization, contrary to dominant interpretations of homelessness, had little to do with causing homelessness in this sample. In fact, all of those people reporting previous psychiatric hospitalizations had those hospitalizations as a result of circumstances leading to and including homelessness. Following that hospitalization, each of the participants was placed back in the shelter system, consequently, receiving no assistance in ending their homelessness from the mental health system.

And finally, though uncommon, a couple people reported having had prior military service. Both cases had indirect links to homelessness, one because of the trauma from war, and another because of discharge. But again, military service was the exception for this sample. It might be noted that many of the peers of this sample, particularly other poor, young black adults, do turn to military service, perhaps as a means of securing independence from parental households, and as a form of "career training." A military recruitment office is adjacent to Philadelphia's Office of Adult Services, where people

must go in order to receive shelter assignments. A few homeless people can always be seen looking at postings and signs on display at the recruitment office.

Overall, it appears that institutional living has a relatively minor role in creating the immediate circumstances leading to homelessness, even in those cases when people who are homeless have had prior institutional experiences. Most often, that institutional experience occurred earlier in life, and though it may be a source of stressful remembrance, or similar in context to those factors that eventually lead to homelessness, institutional experience is largely independent of the immediate processes of becoming homeless. Though there are exceptions, most instances of institutional living are merely other vivid and painful reminders of the restricted choices and negative life experiences of this impoverished segment of the population.

Personal and Social Problems - Summary:

This section on drugs, disabilities and institutional living was an investigation of those factors usually associated with "defect" models of homelessness. The evidence on exactly how prevalent or how involved personal "defects" are in the pathways to homelessness is mixed. While indeed many of the homeless have had experiences with drugs, and significantly fewer report being "disabled," and some have had prior institutional living, not all of these so-called "defects" have a direct role in producing homelessness. By far, drug abuse is the one unfortunate choice that seems to have the most prominent role in homelessness for a subsegment of the sample. Cocaine or crack addiction in particular has played a role in the homelessness of some people. Such drug addiction, however, seems to occur in circumstances much like those facing other homeless people, where households and neighborhoods facing unemployment, poverty, crowded and dilapidated housing, and other social and economic pressures, are faced with the tempting escape offered by drugs, and the seductive financial benefits offered by

involvement with the drug economy. Sometimes drug addiction can add to employment and income problems, and lead to family break-up. However, it is crucial to note that the drug addiction of people prior to becoming homeless is not the only means by which drugs are involved in homelessness. Many people become homeless because of the drug dependency of other people in their former households and neighborhoods, or because of the drug infestation of their former households and neighborhoods. Many also take to using drugs only after they have become homeless, as a source of coping with the stressors induced by becoming homeless, or as a means of "purchasing" temporary shelter. And of course, like many others in society, drug use often can have no role in precipitating homelessness because it is casually used, and not part of an addictive pattern of drug usage. Such is more likely to be the case with marijuana and alcohol usage than with cocaine or heroin. Overall, however, it is critical to note that drugs have a wide range of involvement with homelessness, not the least of which is through physical and financial dependence, and that drugs appear to play a complex mix of functions in the lives of impoverished communities. Drugs do not, however, appear to act either independently or uniformly in their influence on homelessness.

The situation with disabilities is similar in that disabilities do not act alone in producing homelessness, and are not always prior to the onset of homelessness. Though affecting the minority of persons in this sample, people with disabilities come from households and circumstances like those without disabilities. In some cases, disabilities add to unstable conditions in households, and in others, disabilities result, in part, from those unstable conditions. Some people with mental disabilities may face greater difficulty gaining the sustained assistance of family members and friends, while other peoples' mental disabilities seem to result from a decompensation from the pressures of becoming and being residentially unstable. Both physical and mental disabilities may

affect individuals' prospects for securing employment.

Institutional living experiences, though relatively common in this sample, rarely appear directly related to homelessness, though such experiences seem connected to the impoverished range of alternatives associated with homelessness. In nearly every case, institutional living occurs as a consequence of families and individuals having to confront difficult choices and painful circumstances. Some consequently turn to crime and drug dealing for money, which can lead to imprisonment, or they turn to the military, which can lead to the trauma of war. Others experience institutional living through no choices of their own, but through the neglect or abandonment of parents, or through the mistaken accusations of police. And still others have to rely on institutions such as psychiatric hospitals, due to the disabling effects of becoming homeless, or because of painful experiences that can lead to homelessness, such as being a victim of crime or abuse. Hence, institutional living arrangements often appear to be designed as a social accommodation to the problems created in this social (dis)order, and once people become homeless, they all face the institutional life that awaits all homeless people, the shelter.

In conclusion, the personal and social problems experienced by the survey participants and their families and neighborhoods, do sometimes play a role in homelessness. However, there are multiple functions that personal and social problems have, and they never act independently or uniformly in the experiences of homeless people. As behaviors, traits, decisions, social locations, and effects of social location, these instances of personal and social experience occur amidst a range of other social conditions that can themselves represent precipitating conditions for residential instability. Drug use, disability and institutional experience occur as poor mediators amidst residential instability, and they can in turn create or be created by residential instability. In any case, they certainly are not buffers against the destabilization of

people and communities, and their role in homelessness can be direct, indirect, or in some cases, not at all evident.