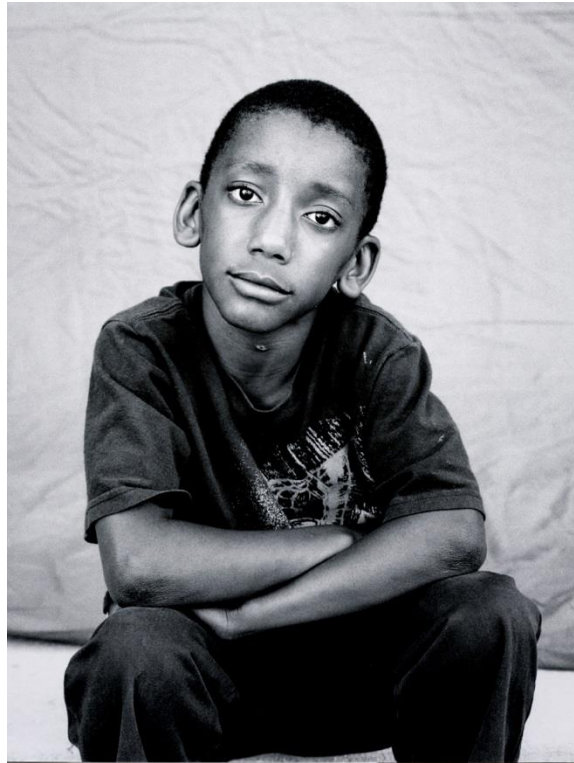


# Children Experiencing Homelessness Face Malnutrition and Cognitive Impairment

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Picture a typical class of 30 students in an Elementary School. Now, imagine that one of those students is fighting a silent battle with homelessness. According to the [American Institutes for Research](#), one in every 30 children in the United States is homeless.

That adds up to 2.5 million children that are homeless in the United States each year.

The lack of income, limited food storage possibilities and limited choice of food are only some of the disadvantages of being homeless that lead to malnutrition.

Malnutrition is defined by the [World Health Organization](#) as deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy or nutrients.

Children who are experiencing homelessness are suffering the negative effects of malnutrition at a time in which nutrition is crucial to their intellectual development. According to a [National Institutes of Health study](#), there is a strong association between childhood malnutrition and intellectual impairment later in life.

Malnutrition when the development of cognitive functions is taking place can delay the rate of development of attention, working memory, cognitive flexibility and other important functions [according to this 2008 study](#).

These deficiencies and the slow of development causes children to have behavior problems and ultimately struggle in school as noted by [an article in Hormones Matter](#). In particular, thiamine deficiencies can induce irritability in children, making them more prone to act out in classes.

Therefore, it is crucial for educators to be patient and understanding with students. Rather than focusing on the seemingly negative behavior of students, educators can make a difference by acknowledging what could be at the root of such behavior. In doing so, educators can assist students at an extreme disadvantage for attending and succeeding in school.

[The McKinney-Vento Act](#) provides youth experiencing homelessness with educational rights. These children are also eligible for programs such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's school meals program which provides free meals to students experiencing homelessness.

Free and reduced lunches have proven to reduce food insecurity new school meal nutrition standards have had a positive impact on student food selection and consumption according to the [Food Research and Action Center](#).

By utilizing such provisions, educators can take action to prevent malnutrition in children and positively impact intellectual development in children. Without the proper nutrients, children are ill-equipped to learn.

However, children experiencing homelessness may not even be enrolled in a school. Without access to education, children and their families might never find out about the rights and provisions they have to proper nutrition.

The [McKinney-Vento Act](#) extends to children experiencing many types of homelessness as well as children without a parent or guardian, otherwise known as "unaccompanied youth."

Every school has a liaison or coordinator that is responsible for identifying homeless youth and raising awareness to the provisions that these youth have. The coordinators are responsible for locating homeless youth in their districts to ensure that all children are enrolled in school.

The coordinators should be contacted by anyone who knows a family experiencing homelessness or children that are struggling with access to education, and therefore, an access to proper nutrition.

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