

-For Immediate Release-

December 19, 2007

FAMILIES AND HOMELESSNESS

Canadian study examines the relationship between the homeless and their family at the Ottawa Mission

OTTAWA: The results of a new study examining the links between homeless men and their families are being released today. Last Christmas the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada initiated a study with the Ottawa Mission, a homeless shelter for men. "It is during the holidays that the absence of family becomes more evident," says lead researcher Peter Jon Mitchell.

The study reveals that 32 per cent of the sample of homeless men have regular contact with their immediate family. 24 per cent were divorced, and about half of those have children. 37 per cent of those surveyed with children have some contact with those children. "Many will pass by the homeless on the street and assume that no family is ever in the picture," says Mitchell. "This snapshot is meant to examine who the homeless are in contact with, and to what extent family relationships exist," he says.

It remains true that the majority of those surveyed had no or little contact with family. "Sociologists consistently find the homeless have little contact with family," says Mitchell, "and our study echoes that finding," he adds. Still, there remains much to research.

"There is a dearth of Canadian research on the topic," says Mitchell. While there is some existing literature on homelessness and the family, Canada has done very little. "Leading scholars say that the family is the greatest social safety net," says Mitchell. "In probing how, when and why family contact is maintained, we hope to understand the problem of homelessness a bit better," he adds.

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For additional information or comment, please contact Peter Jon Mitchell, research analyst, at 613-565-3832.

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada acknowledges the vital role of marriage and family life in our society and is devoted to effectively promoting the best thinking on how society can support and strengthen the institutions of marriage and family. The IMFC is an Ottawa-based initiative of Focus on the Family (Canada).