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**ADVANCING EDUCATION AND POLICY: IMPLEMENTING MCKINNEY-VENTO FOR HOMELESS RIGHTS AWARENESS**

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2024.0826>

**ABSTRACT**

This research will evaluate the McKinney-Vento Act to deepen understanding and improve policy and practice concerning homeless students' rights and educational success. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the potential impact of educational initiatives in increasing public awareness of the rights of homeless individuals, fostering empathy, and promoting social inclusion. Grounded in the social justice theoretical framework, this research critically addresses societal disparities in power, wealth, and privilege, advocating for respect, dignity, and equal opportunities for all, particularly marginalized populations. Through this examination, the research aims to contribute to developing effective policies and practices for providing adequate support and reducing the stigmatization associated with homelessness.

**Keywords:** Racial diversity, McKinney Vento act, MVAIS, systemic racism, educational policy, socioeconomic backgrounds, academic excellence, educational policies, students experiencing homelessness, academic outcomes, social justice, systemic inequalities, marginalized populations, educational equity, stability, homeless rights awareness, social inclusion, policy implementation, educational staff, social workers, purposive sampling.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, established in 1987 and further amended, has significantly influenced educational policies and practices concerning students experiencing homelessness. Despite diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds, thousands of schoolchildren face homelessness daily in the U.S., encountering profound emotional, physical, social, and cognitive challenges (Julianelle, 2008; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). These adversities often translate into poor academic outcomes, including low attendance, achievement scores, and graduation rates (Stronge & Reed-Victor, 2000).

McKinney-Vento was designed to address these issues systematically by defining homelessness, enhancing school choice, ensuring transportation, and fostering necessary support infrastructures (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). Despite implementation challenges, this legislation has catalyzed significant changes in school and community approaches to supporting homeless students, emphasizing collaboration and communication (Wright et al., 1998). However, while practical guidance exists on implementing the Act's provisions effectively, more theoretical analysis of its implications and outcomes must be done. This research seeks to bridge that gap by evaluating the McKinney-Vento Act to deepen understanding and improve policy and practice for homeless students' rights and educational success.

### **Purpose**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the potential impact of educational initiatives in increasing public awareness regarding the rights of homeless individuals, fostering empathy, and promoting social inclusion. By addressing the educational needs of homeless citizens, this research aims to contribute to developing effective policies and practices for providing adequate support and reducing the stigmatization associated with homelessness.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research is grounded in the social justice theoretical framework, which critically addresses societal disparities in power, wealth, and privilege. Social justice theory is essential for examining systemic inequalities that disadvantage minority groups and individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses (S.E.S.). Shriberg and Fenning (2009) define *social justice* as a framework that ensures respect, dignity, and equal opportunities for all. Social justice is pivotal in advocating for the rights of marginalized populations.

Denzin (2009) emphasizes the importance of this framework in elevating the voices of those often overlooked in academic research and broader societal discourse. By employing this perspective, researchers can deeply analyze the influence of societal structures through the direct experiences of marginalized groups. In this study, the social justice theory is particularly relevant as it has yet to be extensively applied to examine the effects of the McKinney-Vento Act (M.V.A.) from the viewpoint of its beneficiaries.

This research aims to critically evaluate the intentions and regulatory framework of the M.V.A., alongside the personal experiences of unaccompanied youth in an urban school district, to understand better how the Act impacts those it seeks to support. By exploring these perspectives, this study contributes to filling the gap in the literature concerning homeless students' pursuit of educational equity and stability. The insights gained will guide the development of effective practices for educational staff working with this vulnerable population, aiming to enhance policy implementation and educational outcomes under the McKinney-Vento framework.

### **Method of Inquiry**

To effectively assess the McKinney-Vento Act (M.V.A.) implementation, we will analyze the McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Scale (MVAIS). This instrument evaluates three critical constructs of policy implementation: preparation, accessibility, and collaboration. These constructs are crucial for understanding how well the policy provisions of the M.V.A. are adhered to and executed in the field. The development of the MVAIS began with a comprehensive review of the McKinney-Vento Act to identify core provisions that could be translated into measurable items. This review created an item pool, each corresponding to specific mandates found within the legislation. The scale comprises 26 items divided across three sections corresponding to the identified constructs. The first section (Items 1-5) measures the degree of preparation by school personnel to implement the Act. The second section is dedicated to accessibility, which is considered a central aspect of the M.V.A., and is further split into two subsections: the first (Items 6-13) focuses on the direct accessibility of services to homeless children, and the second (Items 14-19) explores the actions taken by school homeless liaisons to facilitate access. The final section (Items 20-26) captures aspects of collaboration among stakeholders involved in supporting homeless students. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with the implementation practices as described.

### ***Sampling***

The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling techniques. Participants were recruited from school social workers in midwestern states and educational districts in the United States of America. It attracted schools' social workers, providing an ideal setting for gathering data from professionals directly involved in applying the McKinney-Vento Act. The choice of school social workers was strategic, as they are often at the forefront of implementing policies related to the education of homeless students. Their unique position enables them to provide insights into the practical challenges and successes of the Act's implementation.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data collection involved administering the MVAIS to the recruited sample of school social workers. Participants were provided with a paper-based version of the survey, which they completed anonymously to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. Following data collection, statistical analysis was conducted to measure the reliability and validity of the scale and to analyze the data for underlying patterns and correlations among the constructs. This analysis helped to identify critical factors influencing the effective implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act and will provide empirical evidence to support targeted improvements in policy and practice. The findings from this study are expected to contribute significantly to understanding how McKinney-Vento is implemented across different settings and suggest practical measures for enhancing its effectiveness, ultimately aiding in advancing education and policy for homeless students.

### ***Data Source(s)***

The primary data source for this study was collected through the McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Scale (MVAIS), an instrument specifically designed for this research. The MVAIS captures detailed information on the implementation practices concerning the McKinney-Vento Act from school social workers who directly engage with homeless student populations. Additional data sources included qualitative interviews with a subset of respondents conducted to gain deeper insights into implementing the Act's challenges and practical aspects. These interviews helped to contextualize the quantitative data collected through the MVAIS and provided a richer understanding of the social workers' experiences and perceptions.

### ***Educational Importance***

This research is significant as it relates to the role of education policies in addressing the needs of homeless students. By highlighting the areas where implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act is lacking, the study provides a foundation for policy improvements and targeted professional development for educators and social workers. Enhancing the effectiveness of such policies is crucial for improving educational outcomes for homeless students and ensuring their rights and dignity. Education systems that effectively implement this Act can serve as models of social inclusion and equity.

This study contributes to a broader understanding of how legislative tools can be leveraged to protect and empower vulnerable populations. In demonstrating the direct link between policy

implementation and educational outcomes for homeless students, this research highlights the importance of systemic support and cross-sector collaboration in fostering inclusive educational environments. Doing so advances the field of education in terms of policy and practice and aligns with national and international goals for equity and human rights in education.

## 2. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data collected through the MVAIS revealed significant variations in implementing the McKinney-Vento Act across different school districts. While some districts excelled in preparation and accessibility, others faced challenges primarily in collaboration. The qualitative data from interviews revealed the need for increased training and resources for school social workers to support homeless students effectively. One notable finding was the impact of robust communication networks within schools and between community services on the effectiveness of the Act's implementation. School districts that demonstrated higher levels of collaboration reported better student stability and educational continuity outcomes. The study concludes that while the McKinney-Vento Act provides a robust legislative framework, its success largely depends on local execution and the availability of resources.

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