

2011

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Recommended Citation

Tamba, Kotatee, "Shelter Program for Homeless Males with Substance Use and Mental Illness: A Strength and Effectiveness Based Approach" (2011). *All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. Paper 540.

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Shelter Program for Homeless Males with Substance Use and Mental Illness: A strength and Effectiveness Based Approach

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Introduction and Statement of Purpose

Homelessness represents one of the United States most pressing and complex problems. Approximately, nine percent of the nation's homeless are considered to be rural. Locally, homelessness in Steele County continues to be a problem. A one night survey of homeless individuals in southeastern Minnesota revealed that there are 217 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. Homeless males have been found to be at greater risk of becoming homeless and tend to remain homeless for longer periods of time. The high risks associated with substance use, lack of adequate shelters and limited access to health care services in rural communities increases and exacerbates the vulnerability of males experiencing homeless in rural communities (Healing Hands, 2001; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

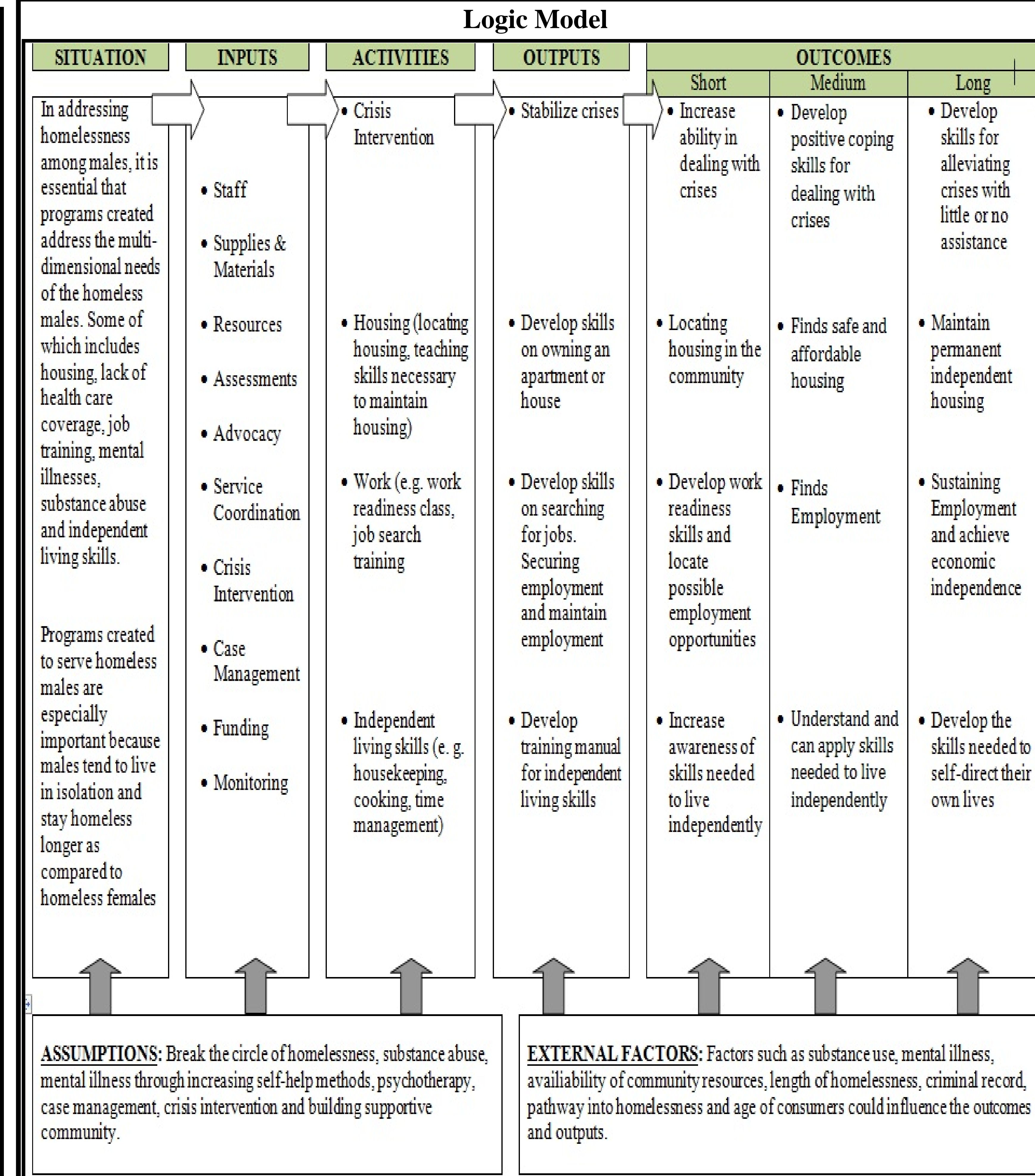
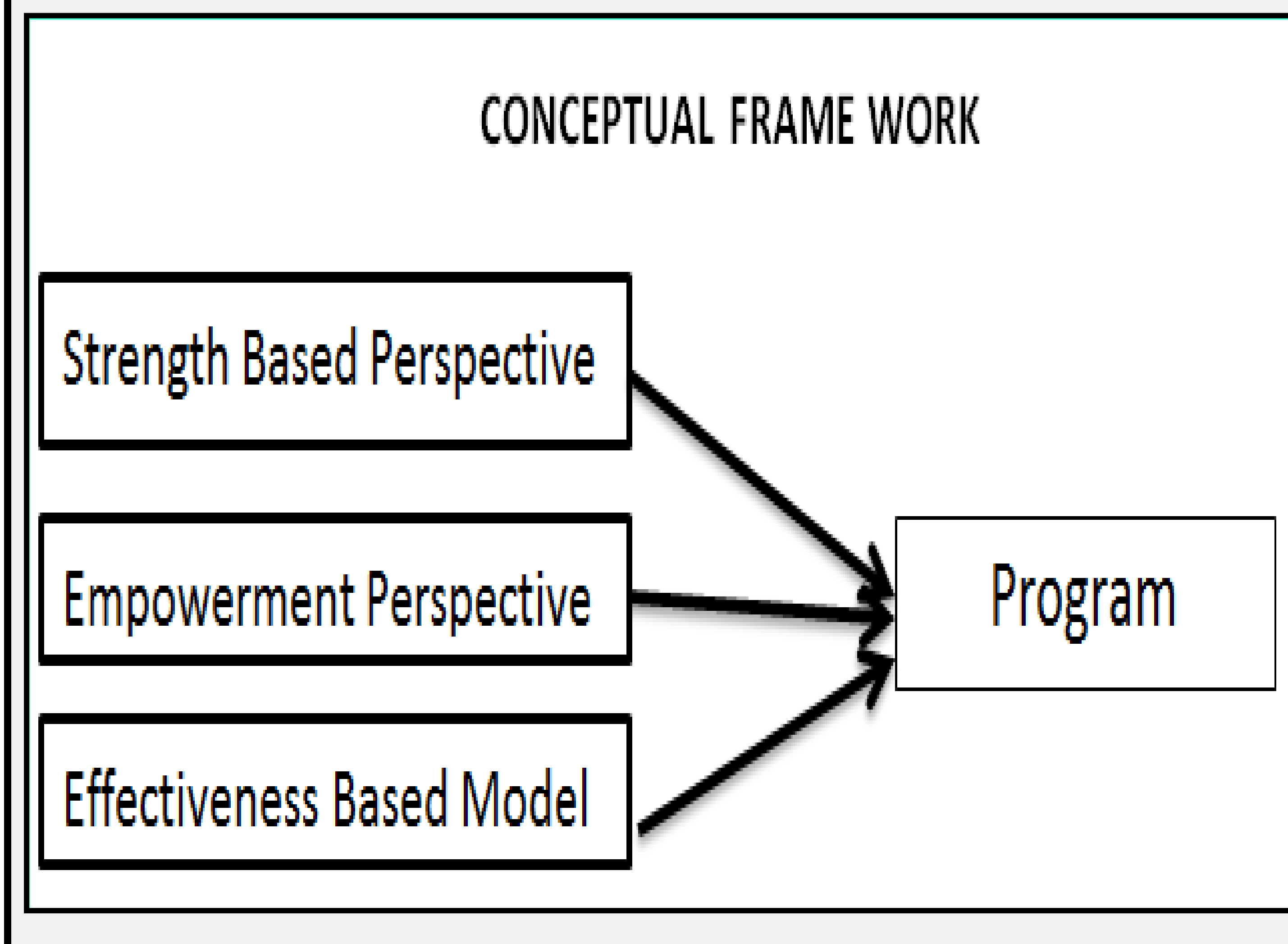
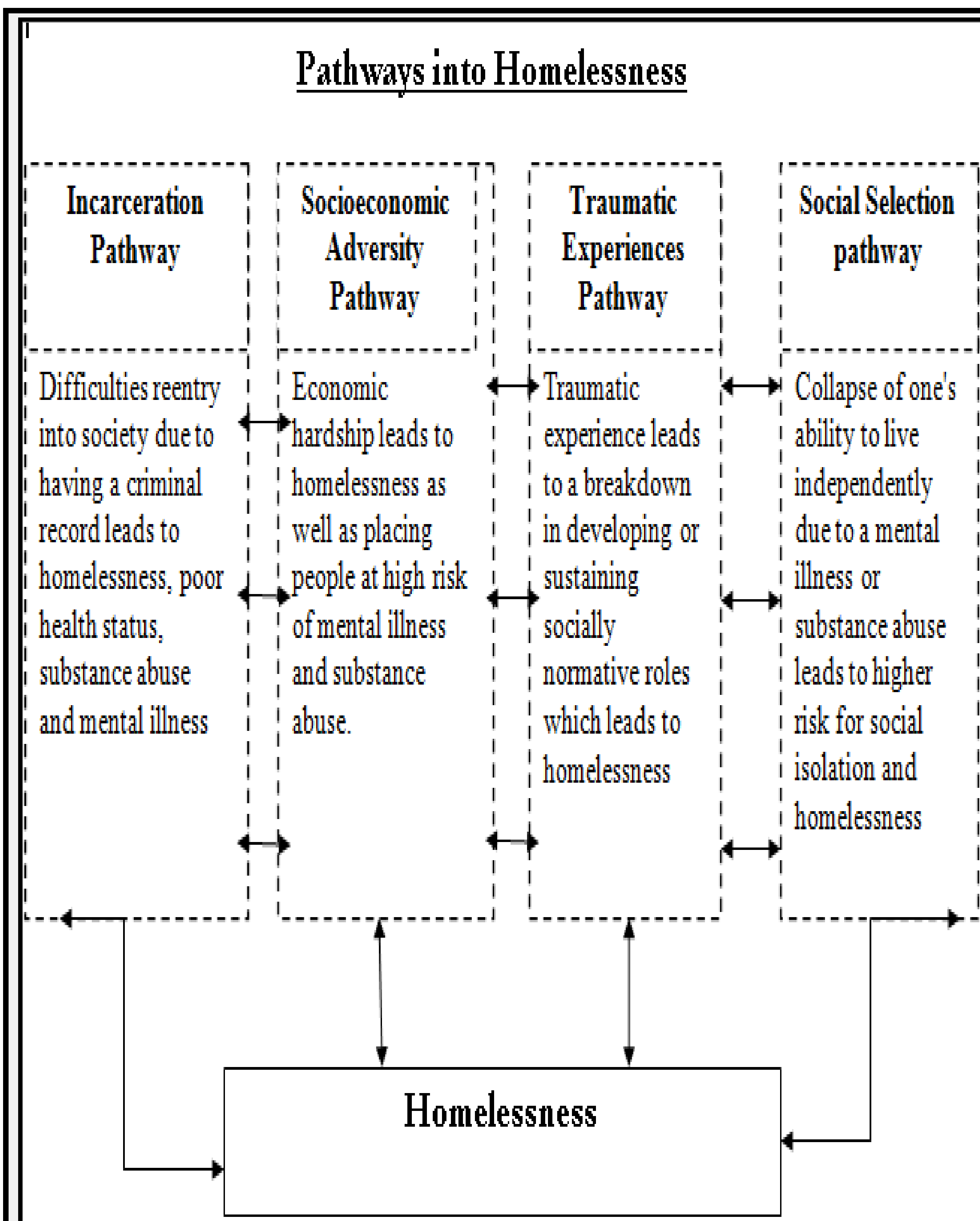
The various services supporting homeless consumers pulls them in different directions and may provide conflicting advice, support and treatment options. As such, the coordination of needed services for homeless males is a necessary task in aiding homeless males toward self-sufficiency. The manual developed as part of this project was created as a response to the urgent need for providing case management services to homeless males at emergency and transitional shelters.

Methodology

A systematic literature review was conducted to identify research material on homelessness and programs developed to serve homeless males. The first step in the literature review process consisted of keyword search of popular academic databases including EBSCO, Social Services Abstracts, and Sociological Abstracts. To ensure that relevant studies and programs developed for homeless males were not overlooked, additional search of organizations that works with this population was conducted. In reviewing the literature, the author searched for effective homelessness response programs and models. Following the literature review, the program assessment tools and theoretical framework were created.

Literature Review

Rural homelessness is fundamentally due to the interaction of structural and personal factors. Structure factors such as inadequate housing quality, declines in home ownership and the rising price of rent has accelerated the percentage of homeless individuals in rural communities. Single homeless males are at greater risk for being chronic homelessness. The high health risks associated with substance abuse, and limited access to needed health services and other resources helps explain males enhanced vulnerability of being homeless. Eighty-four percent of homeless men are single men between the ages of 25-54. In general, homeless men are older than homeless women. In examining family status, men comprise 77 percent of single homeless adults, but only 16 percent of adults in homeless families. Single adults are more likely than homeless families to have experienced multiple homeless episodes of longer duration (Healing Hands, 2001; Robertson, Harris, Fritz & Noftinger, 2007).



Implications for practice include the following:

- ❖ It is imperative that programs developed to serve homeless males addresses the multi-dimensional needs, including housing, use of support services, job training and placement, treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.
- ❖ For programs targeting homeless males to be effective, they must support the return to functioning within the mainstream society by providing skills, strengthening values, and by reestablishing and reinforcing a positive social network within the community.
- ❖ Understanding homeless males' pathway into homeless is fundamental to creating strategies and programs to get them out of homelessness. Understanding the path into homelessness can help program developers and programs program manager understand homelessness as a process rather than a random occurrence.

References

References are available from the author upon request.