Research Update

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"An Analysis of the Economic Circumstances of Canadian Seniors" by Richard Shillington (Broadbent Institute, February 2016)

Reviewed by Natividad (Natty) Klimo

In this article, Richard Shillington provides a statistical analysis of economic factors affecting Canadian seniors. These include, insufficient retirement savings, inadequate guaranteed income levels, and increasing poverty rates. Shillington argues that more needs to be done to increase the economic well-being of seniors, particularly for single seniors who rely more heavily on the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). Shillington recommends that the federal government increase pension income and adjust the GIS levels to help reduce seniors' poverty rates. This article will be of interest to program managers, policy analysts, and community organizations.

Based on the Low Income Measure (LIM), the proportion of seniors living in low income increased from 3.9 percent in 1995 to 11.1 percent in 2013. During the same time period, the poverty rates for single senior women increased from nine percent to 28 percent, and from six to 24 percent for single senior men (Shillington, 2016, p. 4). A continued increase in poverty rates is anticipated given that the Old Age Security (OAS) pension and GIS levels have been falling behind seniors' median income (Shillington, 2016, p. 13). For example, in 1984, OAS and GIS levels were 76 percent of single seniors' median income and 53

percent for senior couples, declining to 60 percent for single seniors and 40 percent for senior couples in 2011 (Shillington, 2016, p. 10). This imbalance is especially significant for single senior women (44-48 percent) and single senior men (31- 37 percent), who depend more heavily on GIS (Shillington, 2016, p. 9).

Poverty rates will also be impacted by the problematic practice of indexing OAS and GIS benefits to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), because average wages increase at faster rates than CPI (Shillington, 2016, p. 13). Shillington estimates that the total amount of money required to raise the incomes of poor seniors to the LIM poverty line is $2.5 billion, with the average gap being $2,400 for single seniors and $5,500 for senior households (Shillington, 2016, p. 21). The author explains that a 10 percent increase in GIS benefits would cost $1.63 billion, bringing the poverty rate to 10.5 percent, and decreasing the number of poor seniors by approximately 149,000 (Shillington, 2016, p. 22).

The report does a good job of highlighting the future economic challenges that will be experienced by seniors. The report analyzes the implications of the federal government's commitment to increasing GIS amounts by 10 percent, but does not provide an analysis on the implications that an alternate or greater

increase to GIS may have on the economic situation of seniors. For example, what would a 15 percent or 20 percent increase cost and how much would that increase affect the poverty rate for seniors?

The report mentions that indexing the OAS and GIS to the CPI is not a feasible approach, but does not discuss the implications of establishing a Seniors Price Index as proposed by the federal government in its 2015 election platform. It would be beneficial to analyze the spending and consumption habits of seniors to better understand which Items could be included and how they would differ from the CPI. The report primarily discusses OAS and GIS levels as sources of income, but does not provide an overview and analysis of the most common sources of income for seniors, nor offer a breakdown of the assets owned by seniors. Incorporating these additional components into the analysis of Canadian seniors' economic circumstances would provide a more comprehensive overview.

Publication source:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/broadbent/pages/4904/attachments/original/1455216659/An_Analysis_of_the_Economic_Circumstances_of_Canadian_Seniors.pdf?1455216659

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Natividad (Natty) Klimo completed her Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Sociology and Spanish Language and Literature at the University of Alberta. She is currently enrolled in Athabasca University's Master of Arts – Integrated Studies program focusing on Equity Studies and works as a Policy Analyst for the Government of Alberta.

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"Beyond Survival: A Qualitative Study of the Impact of Homelessness and Incarceration on Women's Health" by Rabia Ahmed and Louanne Kennan (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2015)

Reviewed by Lauren Melnyk

Rabia Ahmed and Louanne Kennan (2015) seek to examine whether housing stability affects the way female offenders prioritize "health-seeking" behaviours based on their perceived level of certainty and safety while in prison and upon release (p. 3). This report would be of interest to front-line staff working with female offenders, and administrators designing programs for female offenders both in prison and upon release.

Ahmed and Keenan reveal that female offenders often note similar types of barriers when attempting to access adequate physical and mental health care both in correctional institutions and in their community. These barriers are most evident when female offenders attempt to reintegrate back into their community. Female offenders typically describe these barriers as a lack of access, support, time, understanding, mentorship, knowledge, resources (physical and financial), stability (in personal relationships and housing), and security (Ahmed & Kennan, 2015, pp. 9-18).

Since the period of incarceration is a time of "stability", it is an opportune time for female offenders to improve their health (Ahmed & Kennan, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, Ahmed and Kennan (2015) recommend that correctional facilities: create formalized peer support

networks and professional mentorships for female offenders while in prison and post-incarceration; develop orientation manuals for female inmates entering the system; design gender-specific health awareness education programming; and develop clinics specifically focused on addressing the various medical issues that directly impact women (pp. 19-20).

Even though female offenders often improve their medical and mental health problems during incarceration, they appear unable to maintain their health improvements outside of prison. Ahmed and Kennan (2015) maintain there is a lack of discharge planning as well as inadequate housing choices for female offenders, which in turn causes released female offenders to place less emphasis on personal and mental health and a greater emphasis on "basic survival needs" (p.6). As a result, female offenders typically retreat back into criminal activities and their unhealthy lifestyle behaviours.

Ahmed and Keenan (2015) reveal that "[a] successful transition into the community is perceived to be dependant on safe and supportive housing immediately upon release" (p. 18). Ahmed and Kennan (2015) believe that a "Housing First program" would effectively begin to target this "vicious cycle"

(pp. 20-21). The program would allow female offenders to immediately obtain permanent housing upon release, and the option to access "specific resources to support the attainment of resident centered goals" (Ahmed & Kennan, 2015, p. 21).

The broad focus of this report, presents an opportunity for other researchers to explore additional causal relationships between housing stability and the "health-seeking" behaviours of female offenders, based on demographics and geographical differences. This would determine if the findings of this study are applicable to all female offenders, based on certain variations, such as demographics. Additional studies based on the characteristics of female offenders could also be completed to validate the findings of this report.

There was a lack of follow up data from the research participants upon their release from prison. Consequently, the authors struggle to clearly prove that the rate of recidivism increases, as well as a return to previous harmful lifestyle behaviours, if female offenders cannot secure stable housing. While female offenders did insinuate that this would be the case (based on what they believed their risks/challenges would be upon being released), there is a lack of concrete follow-up evidence to back these claims. A longitudinal study on this subject matter would allow researchers to see if the levels of recidivism and the incidences of them returning to previous harmful lifestyle behaviours would be as noticeable as the authors claim.

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Lauren Melnyk completed her Bachelor of Arts in History and English at the University of Alberta. She currently works at MacEwan University as a University Advisor in the Department of Public Safety and Justice Studies.

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"Creating a Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton" by Giri Puligandla, Naomi Gordon, & Robin Way (The Homeless Hub Press, 2016)

Reviewed by Élise Hervieux

Homeward Trust is a not for profit organization seeking to end homelessness in Edmonton. There has been a noticeable void within the youth serving sector causing the city be ill equipped to address the complex and specific needs of homeless youth. In 2014, the Homeward Trust initiated the development of the Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton (Youth Strategy) to address these shortcomings.

A literature review revealed three strategic areas of focus: (1) integrated systems of care; (2) prevention and sustainability; (3) housing and supports across a continuum of need. An initial scoping review was held with Edmonton's youth homelessness sector to outline local contexts, priorities and gaps in service. Service providers weighed in on community-level resourcing and cross-systems planning, showing immense support for the creation of a strategy. In a subsequent planning session, the needs for the streamlined navigation and coordinated access for youth across services were identified, as was the need to prioritize a youth-centred approach. Other suggestions included creating clear pathways through which youth could transition through housing and services and adopting cultural competency practices, particularly towards Aboriginal perspectives. Greater awareness of the complexities of youth homelessness, and "its linkage to identity and social relationships" (Puligandla, Gordon, & Way, 2016, p. 190) is also required.

The decision to be inclusive toward youth while creating program strategies that affected them was supported by homeless youth upon their consultation. The youth also restated the necessity for increasing collaboration across the youth-serving sector, specifically in information sharing and continuity of services. The proposal of a more "coordinated and accessible continuum of housing and support options" (Puligandla, Gordon, & Way, 2016, p. 191) drew support from youth. The Youth Systems Committee was established in January 2015 to implement the Youth Strategy; the Committee adopted a work plan comprised of actions that align with the strategy.

Further implementation efforts led to the Youth Services & Access Design Forum, which began with the Youth-guided Neighbourhood Tour and the Photovoice project – two engagement activities that enabled the inclusion of youths' voices in program planning. Participants identified the geographical distribution of resources in Downtown Edmonton and Old Strathcona next, and finally drew an idealized youth serving system incorporating all resources that would be needed to achieve it. The forum concluded with a group reflection, which was illustrated by a graphic artist.

Research incorporated extensive community engagement and consultation involving a broad range of stakeholders within and outside of the housing and homelessness sector. The

coordination of perspectives from frontline service workers, agencies and government leaders and especially of homeless youth themselves demonstrates a dedication to the cross-systems integration.

The research would benefit from a more substantial youth consultation – the frequency of consultations should increase and be ongoing in order to provide youth with greater opportunities to be involved in the discussion in which they are heavily implicated. An opportunity for this would be on The Youth Systems Committee, which could include youths' perspectives towards program and service planning by opening seats to them at each meeting. The activities in youth engagement (the Youth Guided Neighbourhood Tour and the Photovoice project), which required considerable contributions from the youth, should include follow-up activities that acknowledge these contributions. Youth should be given the opportunity to see the impact they made toward the success of the Youth Services &

Access Design Forum, and should have the chance to provide their input on any decisions that resulted from it.

Finally, data concerning the percentage of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness in Edmonton was scarce prior to the development of the Youth Strategy. Despite the "growing anecdotal evidence of unmet needs for this subpopulation" (Puligandla, Gordon, & Way, 2016, p. 185), it appears that no special attention was given to this area of planning. Further consultation should occur with LGBTQ2S identified youth and greater data should be gathered in this area.

This research is relevant to policymakers, planners, and government officials at the municipal level. Those in the youth serving sector, both providing frontlines services and in leadership roles should concern themselves with the results of the Design Forum as well as the Youth Strategy itself.

Publication source: http://staging.thecampushub.com/yorku/outerweb/various/SystemsResponses-ebook.pdf

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"Ending Homelessness? A Critical Examination of Housing First in Canada and Winnipeg" by Matthew Stock (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2016)

Reviewed by Shez Kassam

In this article, Matthew Stock provides an overview of the Housing First (HF) program and discusses its operational challenges in addressing homelessness in Canada. Stock argues that these challenges stem from the shortage of housing, lack of services in communities, inability to address homelessness through prevention, and complex nature of supporting diverse demographics within this population (Stock, 2016, p. 2). Due to the nature of Stock's analysis, this piece is best suited for policy makers, academics, and other stakeholders who may have a financial and political influence over social programming.

It is estimated that there are 35,000 visibly homeless and 50,000 hidden homeless Canadians at any given time, and these categories are not mutually exclusive with the majority of individuals transitioning between them. While homeless Canadians are prominently single middle-aged adult males in urban regions, this population comprises of people from all backgrounds, including rural community members, women, youth, Aboriginals, ethnic and sexual minorities, and people experiencing mental illness and/or addictions (Stock, 2016, p. 4).

Through a comparison with the Continuum of Care (CoC) model, HF was shown to be successful in that it has few conditions in order to be housed, provides choices on types of housing for clients, and provides additional services for community reintegration, substance use, health, education, and employment. On a broader scale, HF has been an effective and cost efficient approach and reduces healthcare admissions, incarcerations, and emergency shelter use (Stock, 2016, p.8).

While these achievements have been a positive impact in the community, Stock argues that there are weaknesses that must be examined. With respect to research of HF effectiveness, many studies were conducted internally and lacked both methodological rigour and involvement of sub-populations (Stock, 2016, p.10). HF is also limited by conditions within their communities. For example, they rely heavily on enough affordable housing and social services for their clients in order to be successful. This is especially challenging for small and rural communities. Ironically, providing funding for HF leaves less funding for health and social services that HF needs to function, so it falls into a cyclic pattern of reduced resources. Stock notes that HF is a reactive approach rather than preventive one, so it may be difficult to consider this program as the sole means to "end homelessness," and instead should be only one part of a more comprehensive strategy. In addition to these

limitations, Stock also outlines HF's inability to address the unique needs of women, youth, and Aboriginal peoples (Stock, 2016, p.14).

This article gives an extensive overview of the successes and weaknesses of HF and provides solutions for each challenge that this program faces with evidence. However, the rhetoric of this piece may leave the audience confused about the appropriate next steps. By being unbiased, Stock's arguments may be viewed as contradictory. For example, he suggests that there are gaps that need to be filled in HF policies and interventions, yet he notes that funding allocations for HF will reduce resources from other community services that may be of greater importance for addressing homelessness.

In addition, Stock could have utilized narrative in this article to further support his arguments. When working with marginalized populations, it is essential to combine statistics with qualitative data to fully appreciate individual experiences. While Stock was thorough in his use of the literature to strengthen this paper, a more client-centred approach would have added richness to the research data, and shown the successes and weaknesses of HF through the lens of individuals who use these services.

Publication source: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/ending-homelessness

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Shez Kassam is a first year medical student at the University of Alberta. His interests in inner city and Aboriginal health have led him to pursue a career that combines medicine and public policy to address the social inequities faced by marginalized populations.

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"Taking a leap of faith: Meaningful participation of people with experiences of homelessness in solutions to address homelessness" by Norman, T., Pauly, B., Marks, H., & Palazzo, D. (Journal of Social Inclusion, 6(2), 2015)

Reviewed by Dylan Klemen

In their article, Norman, Pauly, Marks, and Palazzo (2015) include the ideas of people who have experienced homelessness in efforts to address homelessness. In their words they seek "social inclusion," which they note as the "meaningful participation of people with experiences of homelessness in decisions that affect them" (p. 20).

To this end, the authors take into account the views of those who have experienced "social exclusion," which they do by conducting focus groups with people who knew what it was like to be homeless in a Canadian city (Norman, Pauly, Marks, & Palazzo, 2015, p. 22-23). Following participant interviews, and in a collaborative environment, researchers determined the factors respondents believed cause social inclusion and exclusion.

Based on the data, the reasons for social exclusion were provided. First, participants believe agencies that aid the homeless are not concerned with ending homelessness, because their employment depends on the existence of homelessness. Next, the homeless do not have time to engage in any activities not directly related to their survival. Finally, homeless people face rampant disrespect for their social status, and also face racism. In addition, the homeless individuals believe that those who work at social agencies systematically ignore their input and do not possess the ability to make changes. These factors prevent people from being able to participate in efforts directed at fighting homelessness and lead them to believe that participating in any such efforts would be futile (Norman, Pauly, Marks, & Palazzo, 2015, p. 24- 26).

In addition, "inclusionary forces" that are able to promote participation in decisions concerning how to address homelessness, were brought to the attention of researchers. First, participants believe that the people who provide care to the homeless should show more respect to the homeless in order to allow inclusion that is otherwise prevented by these unequal relationships. Second, those who provide services to the homeless should take measures to cultivate trusting and meaningful relationships with the homeless. Finally, researchers noted that an array of methods could be used to allow homeless people to communicate their ideas to those who attempt to address homelessness. These three forces would assist homeless people to take part in processes that aim to

alleviate homelessness. Moreover, homeless individuals should be provided with physical support to allow for their participation (Norman, Pauly, Marks, & Palazzo, 2015, p. 27-29).

This article, although academically rigorous, can be read by anyone that is interested in social issues such as homelessness. This is mainly because the methods used to reach the conclusions are not overtly technical, and therefore could also be understood by those unfamiliar with the empirical methods of social science.

Perhaps the most significant criticism of this study can be found in its sample size. As Norman, Pauly, Marks, & Palazzo (2015) note, the study only relates to homeless individuals in one kind of environment (medium-sized Canadian urban centers) and certain kinds of homeless people (for example, new Canadian immigrants were not interviewed) (p. 30). As such, this study cannot be considered a comprehensive attempt to attain the meaningful involvement of the homeless in discussions concerned with combating

homelessness. Even so, it is a laudable start to such a project that, hopefully, will spur similar studies that address what this study does not.

Further, it would appear that strengths of this article far exceed its limitations. In particular, this piece is important in that it effectively outlines a way to combat paternalism in actions directed towards fighting homelessness. It does so by presenting an attainable method of including homeless individuals in policy concerning homelessness, but also includes them in a way that does not downplay their dignity as human beings and as Canadian citizens. In conclusion, Norman, Pauly, Marks, & Palazzo (2015) are right to note that the input of homeless people would be valuable in policy directed at alleviating homelessness, and that it is clear that many people who have experiences with homelessness wish to participate in such decisions (p. 29-30). With this in mind, this study is a laudable effort to address a pressing issue in Canadian social policy.

Publication source: https://josi.journals.griffith.edu.au/index.php/inclusion/article/view/500/715

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Dylan recently graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Philosophy. He will be pursuing a Master of Public Policy degree at the University of Calgary beginning in September 2016.

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Through our social policy research and advocacy efforts, we hope to create a healthy, just and inclusive community.
-The Edmonton Social Planning Council

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ABOUT

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We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

THE RESEARCH UPDATE:

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