Research Update

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"Apples to Apples: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of Homeless and Housed Youth in Canada" by Buccieri et al. (Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 8(1) 2016)

Reviewed by Ahmed Yali

In this article, Buccieri et al. analyze demographics of homeless and precariously housed youth for a Youth Matters in London (YML) study in London, Ontario. They then compare this information with data collected on housed youth in Ontario, as well as homeless youth in other Canadian cities. This study is intended for "researchers, policy-makers, and service providers" (Buccieri et al., 2016, p.19).

The authors of this study make a case for researchers to conduct critical comparative demographic analysis in their homeless youth research. Buccieri et al. argue that because homeless populations are diverse in age, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment, policy recommendations must adjust for demographics in order to maximize effectiveness. To this end, the authors conduct an extensive literature review to highlight the ways in which these characteristics interact with each other to impact homeless youths' "health, mental health, suicidality, substance use, HIV rates, engagement in survival sex, criminality, victimization, home lives, and involvement with child welfare authorities" (Buccieri et al., 2016, p.26).

Buccieri et al. compare the YML sample to housed youth by utilizing data from the 2009/10 and 2011/12 Canadian Community Health Surveys. They also compare this sample with other homeless youth by utilizing studies conducted in Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Toronto. The authors note several important trends. First, homeless youth in London were far more likely to cohabitate than housed youth in Ontario. Second, homeless youth were more likely to have been pregnant or had children, suggesting the need for parental resources. Third, homeless youth in London were less likely to have graduated from secondary school than housed Ontario youth, and this educational attainment gap increased at higher age groups. The authors believe that to limit this gap, service providers need to deliver educational support at younger ages. Due to inconsistent measures for demographic information of homeless youth, comparisons within the homeless population proved difficult and produced "mixed results" (Buccieri et al., 2016, p.38).

Although the study reveals several useful insights, it is undermined by several shortcomings. Since the researchers did not collect the data, only performing a secondary analysis on an existing study, they were unable to ask questions that better allowed direct comparisons to other homeless youth studies. Buccieri et al. address this limitation in their conclusion where they express the need to use standardized demographic measurements.

A more serious weakness is that inclusion in the YML study required individuals to have a serious

self-reported mental disorder. While studies reveal that homeless youth have disproportionately poorer mental health compared to housed youth, not all homeless youth have poor mental health (Buccieri et al., 2016). As such, the YML study may not be an accurate representation of London's homeless youth population. Likewise, any policy recommendations obtained from this study may not be applicable to the larger homeless youth population.

The authors observe that the study presents a surface level exploration of demographic trends in cohabitation, pregnancy/parenting, and education, but far more work is required to understand what social processes result in these trends. Considering that many of these demographic trends are shared amongst the different homeless youth studies, policymakers should exchange best practices with each other to achieve better targeted interventions (Buccieri et al., 2016).

This study is a useful example of the benefits of comparative demographics analysis and provides meaningful insights on cohabitation, pregnancy/parenting rates and education. However, their findings would be more powerful with more consistent demographic information available, and with a sample that is more representative of the homeless population.

Publication source: https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cjfy/article/view/27141/20000

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Ahmed Yali is completing his Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Human Geography at the University of Alberta. He hopes to pursue a career in community economic development upon graduation.

"Community Voices: Insights on Social and Human services from People with Lived Experiences of Homelessness" by Walsh, Lorenzetti, St-Denis, Murwisi, & Lewis (Review of Social Sciences, February 2016)

Reviewed by Natty Klimo

In this article, Walsh, Lorenzetti, St-Denis, Murwisi and Lewis (2016) summarize the results of the Community Voices participatory action research (PAR) study, which captured the lived experiences and realities of 41 homeless participants in Calgary, Alberta between October and November of 2011.

The results of this study revealed various interconnected, overarching themes in regards to the participants' lived experiences. This included: systematic oppression; barriers to employment; criminalization of homelessness; lack of accountability; homelessness being about more than housing; and resilience in the face of adversity. Systematic oppression is characterized by a socially dominant group reinforcing their privileged and powerful position by exploiting and denying other groups the opportunities to fully participate in society and is manifested as discrimination (Walsh, Lorenzetti, St-Denis, Murwisi, & Lewis, 2016, p.29). Oppression can be experienced at multiple levels, primarily: the individual (negative attitudes towards a homeless individual); cultural (stereotypes and stigma); and structural (inequities in society as a whole) levels (Walsh, Lorenzetti et al., 2016, p.29).

The participants expressed that homelessness was exacerbated by barriers to employment, such as a lack of access to secure housing, transportation, technology, and information about how to access employment services, as well as discrimination from employers (Walsh et al., 2016, p.31). The criminalization of homelessness also resulted in discrimination, because the homeless were often blamed for their situation and were perceived as being dangerous and unstable (Walsh et al., 2016, p.34). The participants expressed that homelessness is about more than affordable housing and that case management that provides supports for the unique needs of homeless individuals is an important factor to helping the homeless community (Walsh et al., 2016, p.34).

Participants expressed that it is important that all levels of governments and community organizations be committed to being transparent about how funds are allocated, increasing education and awareness, and providing affordable housing, as well as a living wage to help reduce social stigma and marginalization, and to assist individuals to escape homelessness (Walsh et al., 2016, p.32). Despite all their challenges many participants manifested resiliency through peer support by sharing information on services and advocating for change (Walsh et al., 2016, p.35).

Overall, the study suggests that a housing first model--designed to reduce housing barriers for vulnerable individuals by focusing on providing

them with housing first and then addressing other issues through adequate case management--may be effective to helping individuals exit homelessness (Walsh et al., 2016, p.1). This article assists the reader to understand the need to embed an anti-oppressive model based on social justice principles within policies and services developed to address homelessness, and will be of interest to policy analysts and social services and community organizations. However, the study has certain limitations.

Questions on the participants' personal life (e.g. family status and marital status) were not asked, so the study was not able to comment on the family dynamics of homeless individuals and how to develop services to help homeless families (Walsh et al., 2016, p.36). The study was intended to include the perspectives and views of groups such as the disabled, immigrants, refugees, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) community,

but these focus groups did not take place, as the study was put on hold due the dissolution of the community partner involved in the project (Walsh et al., 2016, p.36). As a result, the unique experiences of these groups were not captured. Although funds were secured to continue with the project, the time delay resulted in distrust from some of the homeless community members (Walsh et al., 2016, p.36).

The study mentions that it is important to explore the development of a national strategy on affordable housing and rent stabilization policies, as well as the implementation of a living wage in Alberta. However, the study does not provide ideas for how to achieve these goals. Providing potential solutions and a Canadian cross-jurisdictional comparison on these issues would have helped strengthen the analysis of the participants' lived experiences of homelessness.

Publication source: http://www.socialsciencejournal.org/index.php/site/article/view/7/9

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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"Equal Worth: Designing Effective Pay Equity Laws For Alberta" by Kathleen A. Lahey (Parkland Institute, March 2016)

Reviewed by Jacqueline Pelechytik

In this report, Lahey (2016) diligently covers the subject of a pay equity law in Alberta. The author addresses pay equity laws as a fundamental step in reducing the gender income gap in Alberta. Pay equity laws deal with equal pay for work of equal or similar value. To date, Alberta has the biggest gender income gap among the provinces, at a 41% average compared to a national average of 33%. This report provides information to familiarize employers with the background surrounding pay equity in Alberta, and also provides legislators with information on the public benefits resulting from equal pay.

Lahey (2016) touches on the economic landscape in Alberta that gives way to the high gender income gap. The author explains that Alberta's high gender-segregated workforce is a result of Canada's resource-based economy. Alberta's workforce is comprised of at least 20 occupations that have concentrations of 70% or 80% of one or the other gender. Furthermore, even within female-dominated workforces, males often earn higher pay than females. Pay equity laws look at equal pay for jobs held predominantly by females to be compared to jobs held predominantly by males. For example, comparing a male physical labourers wage with the skill, experience, judgement, and training of a female retail labourers wage. If they are found to be of equal value than pay equity laws should compel the lower wage to be adjusted to match the higher paid, male wage.

In her report, Lahey (2016) conducts a simulation using Statistics Canada microsimulation software to project what equity pay laws would look like in Alberta and how they would benefit citizens and government. She finds that by closing the income gap, the federal and provincial government would earn higher tax revenues, but would also save on transfer payments to previously lower-earning female breadwinners. The author concludes by providing recommendations for pay equity legislation. She suggests that legislation should be compulsory, comprehensive, comparative, collaborative, and be based on Canadian and international best practice.

Lahey addresses important issues that come up when discussing gender pay equity. That is, the consideration of "work of equal or comparable value", not "same or similar work" (Lahey, 2016, p.15). The latter can help to begin closing the gender wage gap, but doesn't completely address the societal effects that gender segregated occupations have on Albertans as a whole. In addition, it may be difficult to compare apples to oranges in the way of comparing male physical laborers' positions to female retail workers' positions. Questions arise, including: who will be making the comparisons to determine which positions are of equal or comparable value? and, what system will be used to compare different positions from different industries?

Lahey (2016) highlights that moving in the direction of pay equity laws by addressing

gender segregated occupations would help improve Canada's GDP as a whole, as well as improve Alberta citizens' ability to weather economic bust cycles. Increasing women's wages to match those of their male colleagues and neighbours will essentially better prepare Alberta families for times when the male oilfield worker is laid off during an oil crisis. In these times, the female worker of the family could carry the income burden until the oil sector improves again.

On a different note, the money that the provincial and federal government save on transfer payments and make from higher female wages can be directed in part to softening the government's extra payroll costs, but it could also be used to provide subsidies to private firms for increasing their female employees' wages.

Publication source:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/parklandinstitute/pages/341/attachments/original/1457119686/equalworth.pdf?1457119686

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Jacqueline Pelechytik graduated from the University of Alberta with a combined Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and French literature. She also holds certificates in International Learning and Global Citizenship. Her research interests include gender issues and local service delivery. Jacqueline currently works as the Administrative Municipal Intern with the City of Wetaskiwin where she is taking the hands-on approach to learning about municipal government.

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"Homelessness among older people: Assessing strategies and frameworks across Canada" by Grenier, Barken, Sussman, Rothwell, & Bourgeois-Guerin (Canadian Review of Social Policy, Spring 2016)

Reviewed by Hanna Nash

Homelessness in Canada is an expanding problem across the country. In this article, Grenier, Barken, Sussman, Rothwell and Bourgeois-Gucerin (2016) discuss different research that has been conducted throughout Canada to understand why greater numbers of older adults are experiencing homelessness and the unique complexities that face them. The research offered in this article compares government investigations conducted in 2014 to gain an understanding of what is known about older adult homelessness compared to other groups of people living in homelessness (p. 2).

Grenier, Barken, Sussman, Rothwell and Bourgeois-Gucerin (2016) compared 42 local, provincial and federal strategies on homelessness in Canada and focused on whether or not the government research includes homelessness in older adults. If an examination was conducted to this effect, the authors then observed what measures are created or implemented to prevent and assist older homeless adults.

The authors determined that the base age of an older homeless adults is 50 years of age or greater. Although the average life expectancy of a homeless person in Canada is 39, there are growing numbers of older homeless adults. Homeless adults typically age 10 years quicker than the rest of Canada's population, as they are often subjected to harsher outdoor conditions,

lack of medical assistance, and are much more vulnerable to victimization (i.e. theft and abuse) (Grenier, Barken, Sussman, Rothwell, Bourgeois-Gucerin, 2016 p. 5). In addition, two thirds of homeless older adults become homeless for the first time later in their lives, and few encounter homelessness periodically.

The report finds that existing help, such as shelters and group homes that are usually directed at other populations of homeless people (namely teenagers and substance abusers), are of little assistance to adults over 50 years of age. Many older homeless people are unable to ascertain help in a shelter as many have advanced physical and mental problems. Additionally, many of these individuals cannot access government pension money until they become seniors as per government guidelines. These factors combined make the struggles of older homeless adults even more daunting, and prolong their lives on the streets (Grenier, Barken, Sussman, Rothwell, Bourgeois-Gucerin, 2016 p. 24).

This report provides a very comprehensive portrait of the difficulties associated with being an older homeless adult. The authors discuss problems that many would not consider. However, what is lacking in this article is the understanding of which groups are most affected by homelessness at an older age.

Finding solutions to preventing and helping older adults who are affected by homelessness cannot truly be accomplished until the full reasons why homelessness occurs at an older age are understood. Subgroups, such as women, indigenous people, substance abusers and low-income earners, among others, are all groups who struggle with homelessness.

In addition, what causes these groups of people to be homeless for the first time in later life must also be observed. Little is understood about why people come from living with a part of conventional society to becoming destitute, when most would consider their later life to be a point in which they have amassed most of their capital.

This article is created for an academic and scholarly readership. The writers of this article have included many technical references and write in a theoretical way that does not make the article accessible to the average person.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Hanna Nash is a graduate of Grant MacEwan's Journalism program and enjoys writing whenever she gets the chance. Currently, she is a Coordinator for the Alberta Ballet and loves all things that have to do with the performing arts, gardening and animals.

"Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada" by David Macdonald and Daniel Wilson (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May 2016)
Reviewed by Manuel Escoto

"The outrageous reality is that the majority of children on First Nation reserves in Canada live in poverty and their situation is getting worse" (Macdonald and Wilson, 2016, p. 1). With this somber line, MacDonald and Wilson (2016) begin their study on child poverty rates on Canadian reserves and throughout Canada. Utilizing data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and the 2006 Federal Census, the authors illustrate that Indigenous children are exposed to extreme vulnerability and poverty compared to other Canadian children. To exemplify this comparison the authors used a tiered system of child poverty, and break-down rates into three categories.

The first tier includes both on-reserve and off-reserve First Nations children. For off-reserve children, the poverty rate was found to be 41%, however, this number increases by 19 percentage points for on-reserve children alone. This means that of the 236,000 Status First Nation children both on and off reserve, 119,000 (or 51%) live in poverty. Moreover, the tiered group includes a category of disadvantaged children. For example, of the 570,000 immigrant children in 2010, 184,000 (or 32%) lived in poverty. This is followed by visible minorities, whose child poverty rate was 22%. The last tier includes non-indigenous, non-racialized, and non-immigrants whose child poverty rate falls to 13%. In other words, of the 4,629,000 children who fell into this category, 617,000 lived in poverty. Significantly, this child poverty rate is on par with other developed nations.

Given the disproportionate poverty gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian children, it is obvious that Canada has failed to adequately address First Nations peoples' historic disadvantage in society. MacDonald and Wilson (2016) note that this failure has led to chronic underfunding of schools, welfare services, appropriate housing, lack of drinkable water, and a suicide epidemic (p. 6). First Nations poverty rates also vary by region in Canada. For example, on-reserve poverty rates in Manitoba were 76% while Quebec had the lowest rates at 37% (p. 15). The authors include an overview of on-reserve, off-reserve, and non-ingenious child poverty rates on page 16 of this publication.

Although income is the threshold used to analyze poverty rates, and is a significant determinant of health and a primary tool needed to bring families and communities out of poverty, the authors correctly note the sweeping affects poverty has on Indigenous children, families, and communities. The authors argue that income "tells us nothing about other barriers that may impede a child's ability to achieve their full potential…the barriers to achieving their full potential do not end with low family income…the barriers for children living on reserves are substantial, systemic, and exacerbate income poverty" (Macdonald and Wilson, 2016, p. 20).

The data presented by MacDonald and Wilson (2016) certainly makes the case for urgent action. As such, the authors put forth the following recommendations: (1) report poverty rates on reserve and in the territories; (2) improve direct income support; (3) improve employment prospects; (4) begin to implement longer-term solutions (p. 22-27).

The main deficiency with this report is its reliance on the 2011 NHS and 2006 Canadian Census. Given the outdated source of the data, this publication does not provide an accurate reflection of Indigenous child poverty rates in 2016. Although this is the most up-to-date data available, the publication would have benefited if the authors spoke to this issue.

Also, the publication is biased towards having the federal government implement solutions. Throughout the publication, there are references to the new Federal Liberal Government and their budget. However, there was no discussion on how provincial and territorial governments could move the dial. Although the federal government does have a significant role to play in addressing this issue, real strategic solutions must be made in collaboration with provincial, territorial, municipal, community and Indigenous leaders.

In general, the authors make a strong case for implementing policy strategies to reduce Indigenous child poverty rates, and the recommendations could be viewed as a broad pillars to follow. As such, this report should be read by federal, provincial, territorial, and community policy leaders.

Publication source:
https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/05/Indigenous_Child%20_Poverty.pdf

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:

Manuel Escoto is the former Research Assistant with the Edmonton Social Planning Council and has been involved with the organization as a volunteer since 2012. Currently, Manuel works at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as a Legislative Services Officer with the NDP Government Caucus. He is also a graduate student at the University of Alberta, where he is working towards a Master's in Public Health (Health Policy and Management).

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> *—The Edmonton Social Planning Council*

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THE RESEARCH UPDATE:

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