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**Small Towns, Texas-Sized Problem:
Examining Poverty and Homelessness in the Panhandle of Texas**

by

Meg DeJong-Shier

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

University of St. Thomas
Morrison Family College of Health, School of Social Work

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Abstract

This Banded Dissertation focuses on rural poverty, with special attention on homelessness in the Panhandle of Texas. This was done through a conceptual framework looking through the lens of othering, rabble management, and social contact theory, a quantitative analysis study, and the creation of an undergraduate course. Product One is a conceptual manuscript examining the recent trend in the United States to increasingly criminalize activities associated with poverty, especially homelessness. Examining this trend through the concept of othering, it is suggested that social work educators utilize activities focusing on positive social contact interaction to counteract negative perceptions held by students towards those in poverty. Product Two is a quantitative, descriptive analysis of recent Person in Time Counts (PIT Counts) that were held in Amarillo, Texas. This study explored the purpose of the PIT Counts and threats to its internal reliability. A descriptive analysis was used to assess the quality and quantity of data collected by Amarillo Continuum of Care (CoC) over the course of nine PIT counts. It was noted that PIT counts conducted in the summer had a considerably higher number of responses, however response rate as whole was below the recommended rate for in-person surveys. Finally, Product Three is an undergraduate course designed to introduce students to poverty both as a concept and as a social construct. Objectives for the course include understanding the dynamics of poverty nationally and as it relates to the Panhandle region of Texas, exploring the different theories of poverty, and critically analyzing anti-poverty efforts.

Keywords: rural poverty, homelessness, othering, social contact theory, criminalizing poverty

Dedication/Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who have provided continuous support during the course of my doctoral journey.

To the faculty of the social work doctoral program at University of St. Thomas. A special thank you to Dr. Chigbu, for being a steady and calm influence.

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Small Towns, Texas-Sized Problem

Examining Poverty and Homeless in the Panhandle of Texas

Poverty and Homelessness are social issues that exist in every corner of the world. In the United States, it is estimated officially that 11.6 percent or 37.9 million people experienced poverty in 2021 (Creamer et al., 2022). In January 2020, there were 580,466 people experiencing homelessness across the United States (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022). Poverty's impacts on the community are varied and pervasive. Poverty contributes to deficient housing, increased crime, decreased lifetime education attainment, increased incarceration, lowered income, and an increased likelihood to suffer both physical and mental health concerns which can lead to a lower quality of life (Chaundry & Wimer, 2016; Murray 2006). While poverty and homelessness are found in all environments across the U.S., most research on the topic focuses on urban areas, particularly in northern states (Lile & MacTavish, 2020). This has led to a gap in research relating to poverty and homelessness in southern, rural regions. An issue with research focusing on poverty from the perspective of northern, urban areas is that it frequently leads to the generalization of urban research to both urban and rural populations which are inherently different from one another (Duncan, 1992; Tine, 2017; Kamenetsky et al., 2019; Tickamyet et al., 2017). This is a disservice to rural communities whose differing dynamics must be considered when addressing social justice issues such as poverty and homelessness in their community.

Rural communities are often seen as idyllic spaces to live for most people, but they present unique challenges. A particular challenge is that availability of resources to address poverty and related issues are limited in rural areas (Baker, 2019; Duncan & Tickamyet, 1990; Lorenz et al., 2009). Compounding the issue is the stigma of inter-generational poverty, rigid

social hierarchies, and the general distrust towards “outsiders” (Duncan & Cole, 1999; Duncan and Tickamyer, 1990; Sherman 2009). Shared values and ideology also influence a community’s response to social issues.

Increasingly, researchers are acknowledging the importance of geographic space and place as key contributors of social inequality (Gans, 2002; Lobao, Hooks, & Tickamyer, 2007; Tickamyer, 2000). There is a clear relationship between geographic location and poverty (Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, 1993; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990). Examples of this association in the U.S. include, but are not limited to, the Appalachian region, Native American reservations, the Borderland, and the Delta. This is not a recent observation though. In the 1960’s during the U.S. War on Poverty the President’s National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty issued a report entitled *The People Left Behind* (1967). This report observed that poverty rates were generally higher in rural areas, compared to urban areas. In addition, it found that the poorest regions in the country were found in the U.S. within the rural south. Unfortunately, this trend has remained consistent for the past fifty years. When analyzing poverty in 2019, it was determined that the national average for rural regions was 15.4% , with southern rural regions experiencing a higher rate of 19.7% (USDA, 2021). These observations are consistent with what is being observed in the Panhandle region of Texas.

Consisting of the top 26 counties of Texas, the Texas Panhandle region is bordered by Oklahoma and New Mexico and is defined by the High Plains environment (Rathjen, 2021). With an elevation greater than 2000 feet, this subhumid to semiarid region experiences strong winds and extreme weather changes. Historically devoted to the cattle industry, much of the grassland has been replaced by a farming economy (Rathjen, 2021). Amarillo is the sole urban

area in the Texas Panhandle, and while its inhabitants number just over 200,000, it provides resources and services for the region's population which number over 500,000.

The issues of poverty and homelessness are serious ones facing the Panhandle region. Recent census reports suggest that the poverty rate for the city Amarillo is over 16%, and over 14% for the region, both of which are higher than the national average (Census Reporter, 2023). Regarding homelessness, Amarillo consistently reports the highest homelessness rate per 10,000 in the state of Texas. The current rate of homelessness in the state of Texas is 9 per 10,000 (HUD, 2021). Amarillo's rate of homelessness is approximately 25 per 10,000 which is comparable to regions such as Pasadena, California and Baltimore, Maryland (HUD, 2021). This is particularly disconcerting as Amarillo is often rated one of 25 U.S. cities with the lowest cost of living (McDowell, 2020). In rural counties of the Panhandle, individuals and families dealing with issues related to poverty often come to Amarillo for assistance, meaning that these issues are frequently overlooked or underreported in the rural regions and disproportionately observed within Amarillo city limits (Rollinson & Pardeck, 2019).

It must be noted that this region of Texas is known for traditional conservative political ideology. This is important because public opinion towards poverty and any other social issue is influenced by the personal beliefs of a person, which are heavily influenced by their political ideology (Iyenger, 1990). A dominant belief of conservative political ideology is that the individual is primarily responsible for their current situation (Weiner, Osbourne, & Rudolph, 2011). When a person is perceived to be responsible for a negative situation, such as poverty or homelessness, it will provoke others to feel anger and apathy toward that person (Weiner, Osbourne, & Rudolph, 2011). Thus, it can be anticipated that conservative parts of the United States may be less likely to want to devote resources within the community to address poverty

related issues. In addition, those with conservative viewpoints are more likely to enact laws which are seen as punitive to those experiencing poverty.

American culture tends to penalize the homeless and impoverished by criminalizing daily living activities such as sleeping or resting in public. This approach is either mitigated or exacerbated depending on the regional political climate. Until it was repealed, for several years Amarillo had a city ordinance against people sleeping in public which was penalized by citations or fines for the individual (Duerdan, 2021). As of September 2021, it is a class C misdemeanor to sleep or camp in public in the state of Texas. This law is unique in the fact that it will not allow local municipalities to opt out of enforcing this law (Duerdan, 2021). The logic behind such legislation is to motivate both the creation of services for the homeless and increase the utilization of such services. However, it also continues the legacy of punishing the poor without acknowledging the systemic forces in play that encourage generational, regional, and situational poverty to thrive.

The Panhandle region of Texas is not immune to the issues of poverty and homelessness. In fact, like many other Southern rural areas, this region observes a higher rate of poverty compared to the rest of the U.S. It is particularly disconcerting that Amarillo has one of the highest rates of homelessness for a metropolitan area in the entire United States. The purpose of this Banded Dissertation is twofold; to investigate potential factors which may be driving these higher rates of poverty and homelessness in the Panhandle of Texas and proposing how innovations in social work education can better prepare future social workers to actively combat these issues through both individual and community education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this banded dissertation was formed from two primary theories: othering and rabble management theory. Both theories work together to provide a plausible rationale for why those who are experiencing poverty, specifically homelessness, are ostracized in society to the point where the general population are more likely to enact laws that are punitive towards this subgroup (Amster, 2003; Charles, 2009; Hansel, 2011).

Othering is the process where an individual understands who they are, a sense of 'self', through focusing on the differences found in the 'other' (Linares, 2016). This process is not a conscious one and occurs at both the individual and group level. What makes othering potentially harmful to social order is when these differences are interpreted by the individual to be inferior to those beliefs, opinion, or status they hold true for themselves (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Linares, 2016). When this occurs, the 'other' are believed to display a lack of morals, capabilities, willpower, ethics, and rationality that 'we' have. By this process, 'they' lack all the qualities that 'we' perceive as desirable (Canales, 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). As a result, this process quickly progresses to stigmatization and marginalization of the 'other'.

The way that we view the 'other' in society forms the foundation for how we interact with one another, whether it is to create partnerships or to isolate and devalue them (Vargas, 2005; Hansel, 2011). In the United States, social norms largely value the ability and capacity to work and own property and gather other forms of wealth. This is a legacy of the Puritan values that the founders of the United States brought with them from Europe (Rollinson & Pardeck, 2006). Historically, there has been a largely negative narrative towards those experiencing poverty and/or homelessness which continues to the present day (Bullock et al., 2001; Clawson

& Trice, 2000; Gilens & Heiden, 2004). Homelessness is associated with crime and depreciation of property values (Amster, 2003; Aykanian & Lee, 2016). In addition, it is largely perceived that homelessness is a choice or a consequence of bad decisions or personal failings (Aykanian & Lee, 2016; Diamond et al., 2022). The natural progression of vilifying the homelessness leads to the determination that this population is unworthy of society's attention and resources, to the point where they are treated as criminals. This is where Irwin's rabble management theory becomes involved.

The rabble management theory as proposed by Irwin in 1985 is the notion that incarceration is not solely a method to house those dangerous to society, but functions to control the rabble, those deemed undesirable by society (Fitzpatrick & Myrstol, 2011). There are two distinguishing characteristics of rabble: they are both detached and found to be disreputable in society. By detachment, Irwin infers that those deemed as rabble are not integrated well into society. These individuals rarely participate in community organizations nor establish institutions and frequently have poor ties to community social networks (Fitzpatrick & Myrstol, 2011). By engaging in behaviors seen as abnormal or deviant, the rabble is seen as disreputable or unworthy of attention from society. As a result, the rabble are viewed as a population to isolate and control, frequently through incarceration.

Incarceration of the poor and homeless is not a recent practice. The poor and homeless have been routinely categorized and institutionalized simply based on their financial status since before the birth of the United States (Graham & Grisard, 2019). For decades society utilized debtor's prisons, widows' homes, jails, and mental institutions to remove this rabble from public view. In the present era, most cities in the United States have at least one municipal code that restricts the behaviors of homeless individuals in some fashion. These laws are increasing both in

number and their comprehensiveness. A study conducted on 187 cities from 2006 to 2016 by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) found that bans on sitting or lying down in public had increased by 52 percent, camping bans increased by 69%, bans on living in vehicles rose 143% along with an increase in 88% on bans for loitering and loafing (NLCHP, 2019). The result is a disproportionate number of homeless individuals being incarcerated for misdemeanors compared to the general population (Fitzpatrick & Myrstol, 2011). Through this process, society effectively isolates and remove from public view a group of people it has deemed to be without virtue.

Summary of Scholarship Products

This Banded Dissertation consists of three scholarly products addressing rural poverty in the Panhandle region of Texas with special attention to the issue of homelessness. The first Product is a conceptual paper examining the recent upward trend in the U.S. to introduce legislation which effectively criminalizes poverty. This article examined strategies educators may apply in working towards dismantling the stigma and barriers experienced by homeless populations. The central thesis of the article is reducing stigma will result in communities being more willing to entertain alternative solutions to poverty instead of relying on legislation that is punitive in nature. Utilizing the concept of othering, this author explored how stigma against a marginalized population can develop and is maintained. Through understanding a method in which stigma is fostered, educators can enact strategies in the classroom to educate students in a manner which humanizes those who experience poverty and homelessness. Such strategies revolve around the use of social contact theory which proposes that tolerance and acceptance between people with inherent differences can be fostered through positive interactions between the two (Allport, 1979; Attell, 2013; Crisp et al., 2008; Emerson et al., 2002; Pettigrew, 1998).

The second Product of the Banded Dissertation is a study that described the Person In Time Count (PIT Count) as it is conducted in the Amarillo Continuum of Care (CoC). The purpose of the PIT count is to present to the U.S. government a count of the homeless on a given night in January to help determine the amount of funding each CoC receives on an annual basis. A descriptive analysis was done on the past five years of PIT counts in Amarillo. It was found that PIT counts which were completed in the Summer saw higher survey completion rates, but still fell short of survey response rate recommendations for in person surveys. Suggestions on how to make the PIT count more responsive were discussed.

The final Product of the Banded Dissertation is an undergraduate course designed to examine the root causes of poverty and explore how poverty manifests in the Panhandle region of Texas. This course design includes a syllabus, prepared lessons, and proposed assignments for a sixteen-week course delivered virtually. Designed to be taught asynchronously, this course utilizes a multi-media approach in delivering information to students and evaluating their learning. Objectives of the course include understanding how poverty is conceptualized and measured in the United States while considering social contexts, identifying and evaluating anti-poverty programs at the agency or community level, and analyzing various theories of poverty.

Discussion

Poverty has many pervasive effects on a community. Poverty contributes to poor housing, increased crime, increased incarceration, lowered income, decreased lifetime educational attainment, and an increased likelihood to endure both physical and mental health concerns (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016; Murray, 2006). While it is a national problem, research on poverty and associated problems tend to focus on northern and urban areas (Duncan, 1992; Tine, 2017). The United States is an incredibly diverse nation, with a multitude of cultures and environments.

Addressing social issues as complex as poverty requires not a “one size fits all” approach but understanding that geographic space is key to understanding the nuances of the problem of poverty. The reality is that while poverty may be a national issue, it requires innovative and individualistic approaches best tailored to the local region's ability, capacity, and willingness to engage in anti-poverty tactics.

One of the immediate take-aways of this Banded Dissertation is that research into poverty ought to happen on a local level. While there are benefits to learning from larger urban areas who have similar rates of homelessness to Amarillo, it is rare when an intervention utilized in Los Angeles is suitable for Amarillo without serious modifications. Understanding differences in resources allocation, regional development, and regional tolerance is paramount.

This does not imply that national trends regarding poverty and the homeless should be ignored or discounted. The unnerving trend nationally to pass laws that are antagonistic towards those in poverty needs to be acknowledged and explored further. Understanding how this trend is fueled through the combination of the othering theory and rabble management theory provides us with a foundation on which we can counteract this trend through favorable social contact. Interventions using positive social contact can be utilized both in the classroom and in the community.

Current efforts to count the homeless and learn about their needs should be improved. While the Person in Time Count is likely to remain the sole method of learning about the homeless in the United States authorized by the government, it's not a perfect instrument. PIT Counts are designed to identify potential trends in the homeless population which can direct the individual region to focus on those needs within the population. One of the highlights from the second Banded Dissertation product is the fact that for Amarillo, the collective survey response

rate for an in-person survey was 47%. This is considerably lower than the 80% response rate that most federally funded in-person surveys require (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). However, there was the observation that PIT counts done in the summer had considerably higher completion rates than those conducted at the end of January, which is when the government requires the PIT count to be completed.

Implication for Social Work Education

It is a sad reality that those who enter the field of social work to help the neediest often do not have sincere intentions towards them (Nadan & Stark, 2017). Studies also show that graduate social work students have deep misunderstanding about the poor including not believing that the poor are as financially deprived as they may be (Rostenthal, 1993). Few social workers initially desire to work with the homeless and those who do will judge their clients as not appreciating or accepting services rendered in good faith (Gallup et al., 2020; Miller, 1988; Winner, 2022). It is imperative that social work education devotes efforts to addressing inherent biases towards the poor that social work students may have.

This is a hard task made even more difficult by the general trend in social work education to move to online delivery. The recommended use of positive social contact to mitigate students' inherent biases during the course of their education is more easily facilitated when classes are face-to-face, and instructors can therefor supervise and monitor students' interaction with those experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. Instructors will have to be innovative and creative in the online environment.

Another potential time for students to engage in positive social contact with those in poverty is during their internship period. While students tend to focus on one population for the duration of their internship, with thoughtful planning and execution, students can be exposed to

multiple client populations, including those in extreme poverty. One suggestion would be for the social work department to encourage students to participate in their annual Person in Time Count for their local region. Another possibility is to have students, either as part of their coursework or for a student organization, to volunteer for an agency that primarily services those in poverty. It would also be advantageous for students to participate in research within the topic of poverty locally.

Implication for Future Research

There are multiple avenues for future research as a result of the Products within this Banded Dissertation. The first product implicitly suggests that using activities in the classroom based on positive social contact will have a positive effect on students' beliefs towards those experiencing poverty. It should be explored more fully if such activities in the classroom do have a positive effect on students' opinion towards those experiencing poverty. An exploration of students' inherent beliefs towards those in poverty is necessary to create a baseline for comparison after an intervention of an activity designed to promote positive social contact is implemented. It would also be interesting to compare various activities within the classroom and to compare online and face-to-face activities to determine what impact, if any, activities with a focus on positive social contact has on students' beliefs toward those experiencing poverty. Also, how long those "attitude changes" last with follow up interviews.

The second product focused on the analysis of the Person in Time Count for Amarillo, Texas. While it attempted to identify trends within the homeless population for this region, it was limited to just the Amarillo CoC. While it may be a strong possibility that trends observed, such as the higher completion rate of surveys during the summer, is likely to occur in other regions of the U.S., at this time the results are not generalizable to other similar CoC. It would be

interesting to explore the Point in Time Count results for other CoC that conduct it on a biannual basis to determine if the trend of higher completion rate in the summer is observed in other CoC in the United States or if it is a singular event that is unique to Amarillo CoC.

Conclusion

To be homeless in the United States in the present day is a demoralizing and dehumanizing condition. It is also made more difficult to remedy when compounded by the effects of criminalization and stigmatization. It is sadly more prevalent in southern, rural regions of the United States. While it is a national tragedy, it needs to be solved by innovative approaches that best suit the needs and resources of individual regional areas. The goal of this Banded Dissertation was to provide additional insight to this issue from the perspective of the Panhandle of Texas. The hope is that with this additional insight, targeted interventions to help make homelessness brief and nonrecurring may be achieved for the Panhandle.

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‘Othering’ and Criminalizing the Homeless: A Critical Review

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Abstract

The general perception about those experiencing homelessness has been, and continues to be, derived from social, historical, and media contexts that are alienating. As a result, people experiencing homelessness may be viewed as the “other” and deemed less worthy of community resources. This lack of access to community resources may lead to future criminalization, which perpetuates the negative views of the homeless, thus continuing the cycle. In this paper, I exposed a set of common processes and conditions that fosters group-based inequality and marginality and how it relates to the widespread practice of criminalizing the homeless. In addition, the concept of Social Contact Theory is explored as a potential recommendation for social work educators to increase compassion among social work students which can lead to constructive conversations for solutions that go beyond punishing the poor.

Keywords: Othering, marginalization, homeless, social contact theory

Othering: Criminalizing the Homeless

In many instances, people experiencing homelessness are treated as the “others” in society (Joern, 2008; Torino & Sisselman-Borgia, 2017), partly since in the journey to understand ourselves as individuals or members of a group, we often internalize our experience as “mine vs. theirs.” It has thus become important to examine how the notion of mine versus theirs feeds the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness. In this paper, I reviewed the concepts of othering, and how this process has been and continues to be used to define and encourage the criminalization of the homeless in the United States. The consequences of the current practices of criminalizing the homeless led to a discussion of how this nonproductive cycle of othering and punishment is perpetuated. In conclusion, the feasibility of utilizing social contact theory in social work education to diminish bias towards the homeless, which may be found in social work students, is discussed.

The idea of mine versus the other is a framework for an individual to explore their identity through what is familiar, standard, foreign, or divergent. Identifying oneself in relation to the “other” is the basis for Othering, where attitudes towards the other facilitate the definition of oneself (Canales, 2000; Linares, 2016). When the perception of self is based on negative views of the other, it often leads to alienation of the other and therefore functions as a potential vector in the process in which marginalized populations are born (Vargas, 2005; Hansel, 2011). How we view the “other” in society forms the basis for how we interact, whether it is to facilitate potential mutually beneficial relationships or to isolate and deprecate outsiders to uplift our own personal standing in relation to them. Homeownership in the U.S. has long been considered a pillar of the American Dream (Dickerson, 2009). As a result, homeownership is considered a virtue by society (Marcuse, 2020). Those who own a home use this as a reference point in which

view themselves, other homeowners, and those who do not have a home. Because homeownership is a 'virtue' in U.S. society, by default those without a home are considered to not have virtue.

Homelessness is considered by many to be an infrequent occurrence, but one that is associated with crime, a drain on community resources, and a depreciation of property values (Amster, 2003; Aykanian & Lee, 2016). This is compounded by the prevalent belief that homelessness is a choice, a consequence of bad decisions or a result of personal failings (Aykanian & Lee, 2016; Diamond et al., 2022). This has naturally led society to treat the homeless as a group that is unworthy of resources and, further, one that should be dealt with as criminals. However, society's responses to sub-groups deemed deviant and dangerous are rarely based on facts (Amster, 2003; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Diamond et al., 2021; Herring et al., 2020; Kim, 2020). Society's responses to homelessness are based on a historically hostile narrative which continues to be reinforced by present-day negative depictions in the media that presents the homelessness as the "other" (Bullock et al., 2001; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Donley & Gualtieri, 2017; Gilens & Heiden, 2004). Such dissociation between society and this marginalized population is what fosters the ongoing trend to want to monitor and control the consequences of homelessness, rather than the causes (Charles, 2009).

Prevalence of Criminalizing Homelessness in the United States

On any given night in the United States, there are over a half a million people who are without shelter of any kind (Herring et al, 2020; Stasha, 2021). Since the 1970s, there has been a steady increase in laws that criminalize activities that are necessary for survival on the streets such as sleeping or camping in public, loitering, the use of shopping carts in public, and panhandling (Foscarinis et al, 1999; Diamond et al., 2022; Herring et al, 2020). Texas became

the first state to implement a state-wide ordinance against sleeping or camping in public in 2021, a new development in using the criminal justice system to monitor and control the homeless which used to be solely implemented on the local level (Oxner, 2021). As a result, homeless individuals daily face the “choice” of survival or compliance with the law. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that these laws are counterproductive as preventative interventions cost communities less money than enforcing these laws that are detrimental to the physical and mental health of those experiencing homelessness (Amster, 2003; Herring et al., 2020; Foscarinis et al., 1999).

Othering the Homeless: What We Know

Othering is the process in which an individual constructs their understanding of ‘self’ through identifying differences found in the ‘other’ (Lagos, 2015). What makes othering detrimental is when those differences, such as not owning a home, are translated by the individual to be one of inferiority compared to their own (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Linares, 2016). This process is executed unconsciously both at the individual and group level. Those defined as “other” are believed to lack the morals, capabilities, willpower, ethics, rationality that “we” have. “They” hold all the qualities that “we” do not want to possess (Canales, 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

Othering leads naturally to stigma and marginalization of the other, for their voices and ‘self’ are denied at the fundamental level. Those with power in society define what is acceptable in society and determines who the “other” is through identifying what they perceive as “deviant” behavior. As these “others” are perceived to be a threat to the natural order, efforts are made to diminish the potential capabilities of the now marginalized group (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Linares, 2016). A powerful way for “us” to maintain power is to demonize and criminalize

the behaviors of the other (Lagos, 2015). This commonly happens with the homeless in the United States.

Of consequence is the presumption that social work students are predisposed to have negative attitudes towards the homeless. It is assumed that social work students have similar attitudes to both professional social workers and general society, both who look at homeless people with reservations. It has been noted that few social workers desire to work with the homeless, and those who work with them on occasion believe that homeless individuals do not hold sincere intentions regarding the services rendered (Gallup et al., 2020; Miller, 1988; Winnet, 2022). Studies also show that graduate social work students have misconceptions about the poor, including not believing the poor being as financially deprived as they are (Rostenthal, 1993).

Social Contact Theory and the Homeless: What We Know

A possible intervention to reduce the negative impact of othering the homeless and decrease criminalization of this vulnerable population may be found in social contact theory. Also referred to as ‘intergroup contact theory,’ social contact theory was developed in 1954 by George Allport. The key principle of social contact theory is the interaction between groups encourages more tolerance between them (Allport, 1979; Attell, 2013; Crisp et al., 2008; Emerson et al., 2002; Pettigrew, 1998). Originally proposed to specifically target racial groups, this theory has been expanded to include intergroup relations that have inherent differences due to class, socioeconomic status, age, education, and any groups whose viewpoints differ from one another (Allport, 1954; Aberbach and Walker, 1973; Crisp et al., 2008; Emerson et al., 2002; Pettigrew, 2006). Over the years, there have been proposed stipulations on social contact theory, the most important being that contact between the self-identified groups must be positive to promote increased open-mindedness about members in the other groups (Pettigrew, 1998; Emerson et al.,

2002). Based on this theory, positive exposure between social work students and homeless individuals can lead to the erosion of harmful bias or preconceived notions that students may have about this population.

The following segments of this paper will explore three concepts: criminalizing the homeless, social contact theory, and Othering. First will be the demonstration that the practice of criminalizing the homeless has increased over the past few decades and is counterproductive. Second, studies relating to othering will be explored and it will be demonstrated how to use of this theory with the homeless. Lastly, social contact theory will be evaluated as a potential method for social work educators to reduce or counteract the process of othering the homeless. It is argued that through increasing compassion and understanding of the homeless, this will lead to communities being less likely to support efforts which criminalizes the homeless.

Criminalizing the Homeless

Criminalizing a specific population happens when there are laws that prohibit or severely restrict daily activities commonly associated with them (Kim, 2020). There are no laws that utilizes the term “homeless” or profess to target this population directly, in terms of criminalization. However, in the past, vagrancy laws targeted “rogues, vagabonds, or dissolute persons who go about begging” which served to isolate homeless people as criminals (Hansel, 2011). Currently, loitering laws and “anti-camping” ordinances have been used to fine and imprison people sleeping or resting in public (Amster, 2003; Charles, 2009). As such, and upon a critical review, such laws may share some characteristics with the old laws that targeted the homeless. For example, laws targeting panhandling, begging, or the use of shopping carts. These laws can be viewed as targeting the homeless because they target the behaviors associated with homelessness and because enforcement of these laws results in a disproportionately high number

of homeless being punished via fines, citations, and arrests compared to the general population (Charles, 2009; Hansel, 2011).

Studies prove that criminalization of the homeless has a lengthy history in the United States and has been steadily increasing over the past few decades. At the start of the 16th century when private ownership of property began to dominate the cultural and physical landscape, vagrancy became a perceived threat to the system (Middleton, 2014). Puritan values conveyed the elevation of work in American culture, condemning those who were unable or seemingly unwilling to work. Vagrancy laws designed to remove the indigent from the general population were commonplace prior to the 20th century. Except for a brief period from the 1940's through the 1960's, the number of local legislations which targeted the behavior associated with the homeless population steadily increased (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Middleton, 2014).

City ordinances created to monitor and limit the behaviors of the homeless and the poor have become commonplace. When 235 cities were surveyed in 2009 by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and the National Coalition for the Homeless (NHLHC), it was found that 33% prohibit "camping" in specific zones within the city, 30% prohibited sitting and/or lying down in various public places and approximately half of them prohibited loitering and begging in targeted areas (NLCHP, 2009). When the study was repeated in 2019, the NHLHC found that there was a 92% increase in city-wide ban on camping, 78% increase in laws against sitting and resting in public spaces, 103% on loitering, and 213% increase in laws that prohibited living in vehicles (NLCHP, 2019; Dholakia, 2022). In 2021, Texas became the first state to implement a state-wide ban on camping in public places with no option for local municipalities to opt out of enforcing this law with the enactment of Texas House Bill 1925 (Dholakia, 2022).

Contrary to popular opinion, criminalizing the behavior of the poor is not about increasing safety. It is a common misconception of the public that homeless individuals can increase crime in a city (Lyon-Callo, 2001). In addition, attitudes towards the homeless often results in negative attitudes towards services for this population (Lyon-Callo, 2001). Laws designed to ‘manage’ homelessness by controlling the behavior of the homeless focuses on making society feel better about itself by reducing the visibility of the ‘problem’ of homelessness by limiting the access to public spaces through the means of forced migration, incarceration, and creating a sense of hostility towards the homeless (Herring et al, 2020; Diamond et al., 2022).

These laws are counterproductive. Multiple studies show that the fines, citations, and arrests homeless individuals receive makes it harder for them to escape poverty due to the financial hardships and limitations in housing for those with criminal records (Dholakia, 2022; Charles, 2009; Amster, 2003). These actions perpetuate the state of homelessness as individuals are unable to secure a stable location and often must deal with the additional consequences of unavoidable criminal history due to being arrested or cited for homeless-related activities which have negative life-long impact on a person. For example, anti-camping laws prohibit a basic human necessity, sleeping. A person cannot sleep on private property as that would constitute trespassing, which limits them to sleep on public property, except when there are laws that prohibit this as well (Smith, 2016). Thus, an individual is forced to make the decision to enter a homeless shelter, which may be unappealing to the individual for multiple reasons, relocate to an area that permits sleeping in public, or face the possibility of violating the law which results in citations or tickets that are cost-prohibitive to pay (Kim, 2020). Not paying often leads to a bench warrant which leads to arrest and time in jail due to the inability to pay bail or legal fees. Those with criminal records then suffer negative consequences as they are unable to qualify for public

housing, employment opportunities, welfare benefits, and other rights afforded to citizens (Kurlychek et al., 2007; Agan & Starr, 2017; Burton et al., 2021). Not being eligible for income or low-cost housing condemns a homeless person with a criminal record to remain homeless.

A final argument against criminalizing the homeless is that the costs of executing these laws is greater than it would be to simply house the homeless and provide them supportive services (Amster, 2003; Aykanian & Lee, 2016; Herring et al, 2020). Additional financial burdens fall on the taxpayers as a result of laws that criminalizes activities associated with poverty (Amster, 2003; Herring et al, 2020). Understanding the cycle between criminalization of the homeless and the perpetuation of homelessness is a crucial step, however we must try to understand why citizens are willing to encourage criminalization although it rarely solves the situation. The concept of Othering provides that insight.

Othering

Marginalizing a segment of the United States' population to the extent of being criminalized only occurs with the consent and encouragement of general society. Othering is the process in which 'we' reassure ourselves that 'we' are separate from the problem of homelessness and that it is acceptable to punish this group of people and deny them their rights to coexist in society. Used in a variety of social science fields, Othering seeks to explain the process of how and why another group of people should be demonized and their power restricted (Canales, 2000).

Othering is a method of validating 'our' world view paradigm by comparing it to another, different paradigm which 'we' deem deficient in some manner. The 'other' is never a voluntary position but imposed on the targeted population by mainstream society or those in power (Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). This begins the process of stigmatizing the other and

currently media is a very powerful tool to reinforce this mindset. This is not a problem localized to the homeless, or even in the United States.

Poverty and homelessness are issues that make the public uneasy, and public opinion deems these issues as those that need to be solved, with considerable debate on how to do so. However, the perception of those experiencing homelessness or other extreme forms of poverty is one akin to victim-blaming.

The trend to describe those in extreme poverty as passive victims of their circumstances is both erroneous and harmful to those experiencing homelessness. Sociologists studying the experiences of homeless individuals since the 1980's flip the public narrative that this population is lazy and unresourceful by highlighting the complex strategies of survival that the homeless employ daily (Meanwell, 2012). Being homeless is inherently stressful and dangerous and requires strong mental and physical fortitude along with the ability to negotiate personal and social networks to survive (Petrovich, & Cronley, 2015). Unfortunately, this is not the common narrative, which is presented by politicians, the media, and accepted within society.

Multiple studies demonstrate that media around the world is used to dehumanize the experiences of the poor (Jensen, 2011; McClean et al., 2015; Jacobs & Flanagan, 2016; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Curato & Ong, 2015). When analyzing how the media portrays poverty, including homelessness, the findings of studies indicate that while the media demonstrated sympathy for the plight facing the poor, little was done to explain the causes of poverty or contextualize poverty (Bullock et al., 2001; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Gilens & Heider, 2004). This lack of comprehensive analysis permits the average reader to erroneously believe that they are not at risk of experiencing poverty or homelessness, further reinforcing the 'us' vs. 'them' poverty paradigm. This dissociation by the public about the issue of homelessness reduces the sense of

need for a solution as the public feels that they are not at risk of becoming homeless. Therefore, homelessness must be a rare and unusual circumstance and not an urgent problem to solve.

This is supported by a recent study analyzing tweets made in the United States conclusively showed that users blamed people experiencing homelessness for their own situation, attributing ‘unattractive’ behaviors to this group of people and rationalizing that people who are homeless deserved to be so (Kim et al., 2021). This is just one study that validates the stigma that homelessness is driven by individuals’ poor decisions and personal faults.

Social Contact Theory

Social scientists began to explore how social groups interacted with one another after World War II (Pettigrew, 1998). In 1954, Allport developed a theory which became known as social contact or intergroup contact. In his work, Allport hypothesized that there were four conditions for social contact to have the greatest effect on reducing prejudice between the groups. According to Allport (1979), equal group status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support from authorities are necessary to facilitate respect for and between diverse groups. The reality of any chance intergroup interaction achieving all four conditions is slim which makes research into this theory difficult (Pettigrew, 1998). Compounding this issue is a selection bias which limits studies as well. Individuals are less likely to want to voluntarily interact with those for whom they are biased against (Pettigrew, 1998). Despite these criticisms, research continually shows that the positive benefits of intergroup interactions are larger than for those groups isolated by bias, even when all the conditions are not met (Pettigrew, 1998; Crisp et al., 2008; Attell, 2013).

For example, those who work with the homeless are less likely to describe their clients as lazy, or undeserving. Instead, they ascribed the difficulties facing their homeless clients to the

fact that they experienced a poor fit with their environment, such as being disadvantaged competing in a labor market (Paat et al., 2021). In addition, other research into the effect of various outreach programs with the homeless demonstrated that social science students' attitudes towards this population significantly improved over time (Richmond & Noone, 2020; Zeien et al., 2021; Copeland et al., 2021).

However, studies into social contact theory and poverty demonstrate limitations to this theory. Recent studies conducted to see if merging of public housing residents into mixed-income neighborhoods would reduce the stigma of those using public housing found mixed results (McCormick et al., 2012; Raynor et al., 2019). Those in poverty living in mixed-income neighborhoods found that they still faced isolation, and at times were stigmatized in new ways (McCormick et al., 2012). Similar studies found that exposure to poverty through mixed-income housing developments were not enough to create heterogeneity, but those interactions must be positive along with strong social ties to the neighborhood for respect to fully blossom (Raynor et al., 2019). These studies show that if one cannot have all four conditions to make intergroup interaction function, the most important condition is that the interactions that occur must be positive in nature.

Discussion

Attitudes towards the homeless by social work students are important to acknowledge and address since, regardless of their field of practice, it is extremely likely that the average social worker will have clients who are homeless. Negative attitudes towards this vulnerable population can lead to reluctance to provide diligent case management which would lead to substandard care. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics stresses the value of dignity and worth of a person, regardless of their situation or personal beliefs

(NASW, 2022). If a social worker holds an internal bias towards a population which is not acknowledged, the ability to value that individual and respect their dignity becomes compromised.

As previously demonstrated, those who experience positive interaction with the homeless frequently exhibit more benevolent attitudes towards this population. It behooves social work educators to facilitate this positive interaction with the homeless to negate any possible negative attitudes that students may hold towards the homeless. Ensuring that all interactions are positive is beyond the control of social work educators but ensuring that students are more frequently exposed to the homeless is not.

Understanding and acknowledging the process of Othering and the damage it can cause to marginalized populations should be part of the classroom. While many classrooms focus on identifying bias within oneself and how it can influence one's interaction with others, the process of how that bias evolves is rarely discussed. Understanding the process of Othering creates more awareness of the subtle methods society uses to marginalize another group of people. People who are more aware of these subtle messages are less likely to be swayed by them. Identifying social trends in the media and isolating the message created by these trends is very important as current social work students are especially active on social media. Acknowledging historical social attitudes towards the homeless, and the origin sources for such attitudes is vital as well. Activities in the classroom centered around the trend to criminalize the homeless and how this perpetuates the issue can highlight one important aspect of the cycle of poverty for students.

Creating more internship opportunities through collaboration with homeless services providers within field education is a strong start. However, it is unlikely that students are eager to explore these specific internship opportunities unless working in housing and/or emergency

services is their end goal (Gallup et al., 2020). One remedy is to encourage students to explore this environment on a weekly basis as part of their field coursework. Encouraging students to explore another social work environment, even for just a week, can cause the student to critically examine the skills and knowledge needed to work with diverse populations, including the homeless. Also, even a brief positive exposure to the homeless can be enough to start the student on a journey to critically evaluate potential biases and skewed perceptions they may have towards this population.

Exposure through classroom activities is another potential avenue for social work educators to introduce students to the realities of becoming homeless or the lifestyle of the homeless. Poverty simulators can demonstrate that becoming homeless is a real possibility for the average person who lives paycheck to paycheck. Engaging with an individual who has experienced homelessness is another way to humanize the problem for students. This can be done by encouraging field trips to local service providers for the homeless or hosting knowledgeable individuals as guest speakers in the classroom. Creating self-reflection assignment after these events will permit students to acknowledge how their opinion towards the homeless is changing through these positive experiences with the homeless.

Conclusion

Understanding how biases develop and are reinforced through the process of Othering can facilitate the development of compassion and understanding towards marginalized populations. Social work educators can facilitate understanding and deconstruction of this harmful practice in the classroom. They can also encourage positive interaction with the homeless through activities in the classroom or through direct field exposure. Positive interaction with the homeless also leads to the dismantling of any bias towards this population the student

may have. This can eventually lead to lower support for criminalization of these groups, which is an undesirable situation as it tends to perpetuate the marginalization of these groups as demonstrated with homelessness individuals.

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**Everyone Matters:
Identifying Trends in Unhoused Statistics**

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Abstract

Homelessness in the United States is insidious and pervasive. The first step in mitigating this social issue is collecting data on those who are unhoused to help regions obtain federal resources and plan on how best to apply those resources to their community. The Person-In-Time count (PIT count) is utilized on an annual basis across the United States to count the unhoused and identify unique trends within this population. This descriptive study looked at five years of PIT counts for Amarillo, Texas. The goal of this study was to determine what trends in the population there may be as it relates to veteran status, mental health, and addiction within the unhoused population of Amarillo. In addition, proposals on how to improve the reliability of the PIT count is discussed.

Keywords: Homeless, unhoused, Person-In-Time Count, data collection

Everyone Matters:

Identifying Trends in Unhoused Statistics

It is not an easy time to be unhoused, or homeless, in the United States. Trends in the economy since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic have made Americans more vulnerable to becoming homeless, and it is increasingly difficult to find affordable housing once it is lost (Lopez, 2022). To be unhoused, or homeless, in America means to have no safe shelter or to live in temporary shelter that is not meant to be permanent housing (HUD Exchange, 2019). While the federal government continues to use “homeless” as the primary designation for this population, increasingly this term is seen as derogatory, implying one is “less than” those who have housing. Using “unhoused” not only has a personal impact upon those experiencing insecure housing, but it also reframes the narrative that often blames people for being unhoused (Slayton, 2021).

Among the larger population, there is general confusion about who is unhoused and why (Lemings, 2019). This lack of understanding contributes a large proportion of the public’s lack of tolerance and compassion for the homeless, resulting in increased criminalization of this vulnerable population (Lemings, 2019; Truong, 2012). In addition, this intolerance and confusion increase the likelihood that systematic causes of the unhoused will go unaddressed. Americans are far more likely to believe that being unhoused is a personal choice or the result of poor decisions made by the individual rather than systemic causes (Allison, 2007; Mowbray, 1985).

Currently, the primary method of collecting data on who is unhoused is the utilization of the Person-In-Time count (PIT count) which is a census of those who are unhoused according to Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) definition at that time. Currently HUD mandates that

all Continuums of Care (CoC), which is a “regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals” to conduct a PIT count in its jurisdiction at least every year within the last 10 days of January (HUD, 2022; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). Specifically, HUD requires a count of unhoused individuals currently residing in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe havens annually and a count of unsheltered individuals annually (HUD Exchange, 2022). These data are collected and reported to the Homelessness Data Exchange (EDX) and is used to report to Congress and helps to determine the allocation of funds and other resources for the unhoused community (HUD Exchange, 2022). There are concerns that this data collection process does not accurately reflects the prevalence of our unhoused population and worse, may even present a skewed picture of trends to be found in this population through inconsistent methodology, the narrow scope which HUD uses to define homelessness, and the difficulty of locating those who are currently experiencing lack of safe housing (Agans et al., 2014; Swenson, 2022).

This study, which was done with the full support by the city of Amarillo looked at the raw data for each of the PIT counts from January 2019 through the Summer of 2022. The goal of this study was to determine what trends in the population there may be as it relates to veteran status, mental health, and addiction within the unhoused population of Amarillo. The results of this study were reported to the city of Amarillo along with recommendations to improve the reliability of the PIT count for this CoC.

Literature Review

History of Counting the Unhoused and the McKinney-Vento Act

The unhoused have been a part of the American landscape since colonial days, however the issue did not gain national attention until the 1980s (Schneider et al., 2016). During the

1980s, the increased visibility prompted increased research and advocacy on this issue. Through the efforts of advocates such as Snyder and other researchers, this issue began to capture the attention of the general American public (Smith & Castaneda-Tinoco, 2018). During this time, interest grew in counting the unhoused population, which eventually led to the first national count of the unhoused in 1984 and evolved to the present practice of the government requiring an annual national Person in Time (PIT) count (Smith & Castaneda-Tinoco, 2018).

The effect of these early data collections prompted the first national response to the issue of the unhoused. In 1987, after multiple minor laws addressing this social issue were proposed and partially enacted into law, the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, which proposed emergency relief provisions for emergency shelter and additional services, was passed. In 2000, it was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Since then, this legislation has been amended four times, expanding the scope of the legislation (Adler, 1991; Foscarinas, 1996). This legislation allocates Homeless Assistance Grants to CoCs based on need, which depends on current data collection through the annual PIT count (Berg, 2015; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006).

Amarillo's Continuum of Care

Amarillo is a mid-size city with a population just under 200,000 people located in the Panhandle region of Texas (Census Reporter, 2022). Amarillo is the 16th-most populous city in Texas and is the largest city in the Texas Panhandle (World Population Review, 2023). It's important to note that Amarillo exist in a rural part of the country, while there are several small towns in the surrounding areas, the next largest city is roughly two hours by car. Amarillo is famous for is unpredictable weather patterns and is frequently named as the windiest city in the U.S. (TWSE Explains, 2023). In the winter, the average temperature consistently remains below

30 degrees Fahrenheit with the wind chill making it feel far colder (NOAA, 2020). Summertime comes with extreme heat with low humidity, with Amarillo experiencing multiple days of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or more (NOAA, 2020). The cost of living in Amarillo, TX is estimated to be 18.5% lower than the national average (Council for Community and Economic Research, 2021). Despite enjoying a lower cost of living, Amarillo ranks among the top cities in the U.S. with the highest unhoused rates, observing 250 unhoused individuals per 100,000 residents (City Mayors research, 2020). This rate is considerably higher than the five largest cities in Texas. Currently, there has been no in-depth study to explore why this is the current situation facing Amarillo. Not to make light of a serious issue, Amarillo is a small city with a big problem.

The Amarillo Continuum of Care (CoC) exists to serve the residents of Amarillo. Its membership consists of those services providers who serve the unhoused, the city, and concerned citizens including those unhoused. Limited to the physical boundaries of Amarillo city, the Amarillo CoC seeks to address the social problem of the unhouse with the goal to make the event of becoming unhoused less frequently and nonrecurring. Acknowledging that it experiences the highest rate of unhoused in Texas, this CoC have taken the step of conducting the PIT count twice a year. It is hoped that by collecting data on the unhoused more consistently and frequently, trends in the population will be identified which may lead to innovative solutions.

Mental Health and Addiction issues in the Unhoused

A persistent trend in a large portion of those who are unhoused is the difficulty they have with mental health issues and addiction. There have been several studies that show that unhoused individuals have higher incidence of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and schizophrenia (Burt et al., 2001; Irwin et al., 2008; Fitzpatrick & LaGory, 2011). Mental health issues are seen to be more prevalent in those living in high-risk, stressful

situations such as those who are unhoused. Likewise, existing mental health disorders can be a factor that contributes to the individual becoming unhoused. A systematic review of studies on the prevalence of mental health issues suggests that 56% to 93.3% of the unhoused suffer from a severe mental health illness (Gutwinski et al., 2021). In contrast, only 20% of the general population is thought to have a severe mental health diagnosis.

A similar disturbing trend occurs with substance abuse. The lifestyle of those unhoused makes it increasingly difficult for them to access affordable and accessible health care. As a result, many of them turn to self-medication with illicit drugs. It is estimated that over 30% of this vulnerable population suffer from alcohol use disorders, while just slightly more than 20% experience a drug use disorder (Gutwinski et al., 2021). According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, drug use is found in nearly 13% of the U.S. population (NCDAS, 2022).

This trend in both mental illnesses and addiction makes a complex situation even more fraught and requires that social services agencies serving the unhoused be willing to work with compromised individuals or offer additional services to meet these needs. However, if data collection tools such as the PIT count do not accurately reflect these problems in the homeless populations, agencies will be hard-pressed to obtain the funding and resources to meet their clients' needs. While there are multiple studies that suggest that PIT counts are inaccurate, they do not explore the ways they are incorrect or misleading. This study will provide more concrete information on how the PIT count may be inaccurate and suggestions on how to remedy this.

Method

To describe the potential demographic trends within the unhoused population of Amarillo, this study analyzed data from multiple PIT counts from the Amarillo CoC. Using descriptive statistics general trends in the data were examined and compared to projected

national trends. The goal was to determine to what extent PIT counts may provide an accurate and inaccurate reflection of those who are unhoused as well as potential suggestions on how Amarillo CoC can improve the reliability of the PIT count.

Sample and Population

The PIT count is a snapshot, cross-sectional survey conducted by volunteers of CoCs and attempts to accurately reflect the number of the unhoused in that community at that one point in time. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally. This count informs government leaders both about the prevalence of the unhoused in the United States and the individual needs of the various CoCs. It is the primary source of information for the government on this issue and, through the Homeless Assistance Grants funded by the McKinney-Vento Act, determines how much resource each CoC receives to combat the problem.

On a designated night near the end of January, volunteers of each CoC attempt to locate and interview self-identified unhoused persons and families using a standardized survey consisting of 21 items. These survey questions collect basic demographic information on the individual person, along with veteran status, chronically homeless status, mental health disorders, and substance abuse issues (Pont-in-Time Survey Tools, 2022). For those unwilling or unable to participate in the full interview, an observation survey is made where surveyors' record visible characteristics of an individual presumed to be unhoused but is either unwilling or unable to participate in the survey. Through the PIT count, the goal is to collect additional information about vulnerable populations that are unhoused.

The purpose of PIT counts is to describe the experiences of the unhoused within a particular geographic region by interviewing and observing those homeless according to HUD's definition. This study is restricted to the boundaries of Amarillo, which conducts the PIT count

biannually in the last week of January and the end of July. Convenience sampling was utilized by volunteers administering the PIT count to identify potential unhoused individuals. Volunteers canvassed the streets, parks, abandoned structures, and known gathering spots to first identify those who may be unhoused and to survey these individuals and families. In addition, local emergency shelters and transitional housing programs surveyed their residents on the designated day. The instrument utilized was a 21-question survey that is designed to extract demographic information, determine length and frequency of homelessness, and identify vulnerable populations such as those with mental health issues or addiction.

The PIT counts examined in this study are from 2019-2022 as this is when volunteers utilized a mobile application to complete surveys. The use of technology allows for data from these surveys to be recorded digitally which facilitates data analysis. During this period over 3,400 individuals were either observed to be homeless or participated in a survey that identified them as homeless according to HUD's standards. The sample size consists of those who completed 3 specific questions of the 21-question survey in full: veteran status, self-reporting mental health issues, and self-reporting addiction.

Protection of Human Subjects

This research project approached the issue of protecting all human subjects seriously. The unhoused are at higher risk of being exploited by others, and it was important to ensure that these individuals are treated with dignity, respect, and to ensure that their privacy was protected. Due to inherent power imbalance between the unhoused and surveyors, it was also important to avoid coercion by surveyors. During the initial process of conducting PIT surveys, participants in PIT count surveys are asked for consent to participate. Those being surveyed are informed that participation in the PIT count survey is voluntary, and they can rescind their consent at any time

during the survey. They are also informed that their information is private and will not be released to another party. Confidentiality is granted through the immediate deidentification of the secondary data obtained from the Amarillo CoC. Lastly, IRB approval for this study was granted by West Texas University prior to this study beginning.

Data Collection

With the permission and encouragement of the authority agency of the Amarillo CoC, access to raw data via the PIT command center which contained all the electronic data from previous PIT counts for the Amarillo CoC was granted. Only data which were collected 2019 or later were reviewed and analyzed for a total of seven PIT counts, because during the initial pandemic relating to COVID-19 there was only the PIT count in January in 2020. For each PIT count, the raw data was exported with 'base fields' function in excel format. Observation surveys were then identified and excluded from data collection, as these surveys simply note the physical description of a potentially unhoused individual who was not approached and interviewed. Of those who were interviewed, surveys that did not have information completed for veteran status, mental health self-report, and disclosure of addiction status were extracted and removed from the data set. Thus, only those whose surveys contained data for these three categories were identified and analyzed.

Description of Data Collection Instrument

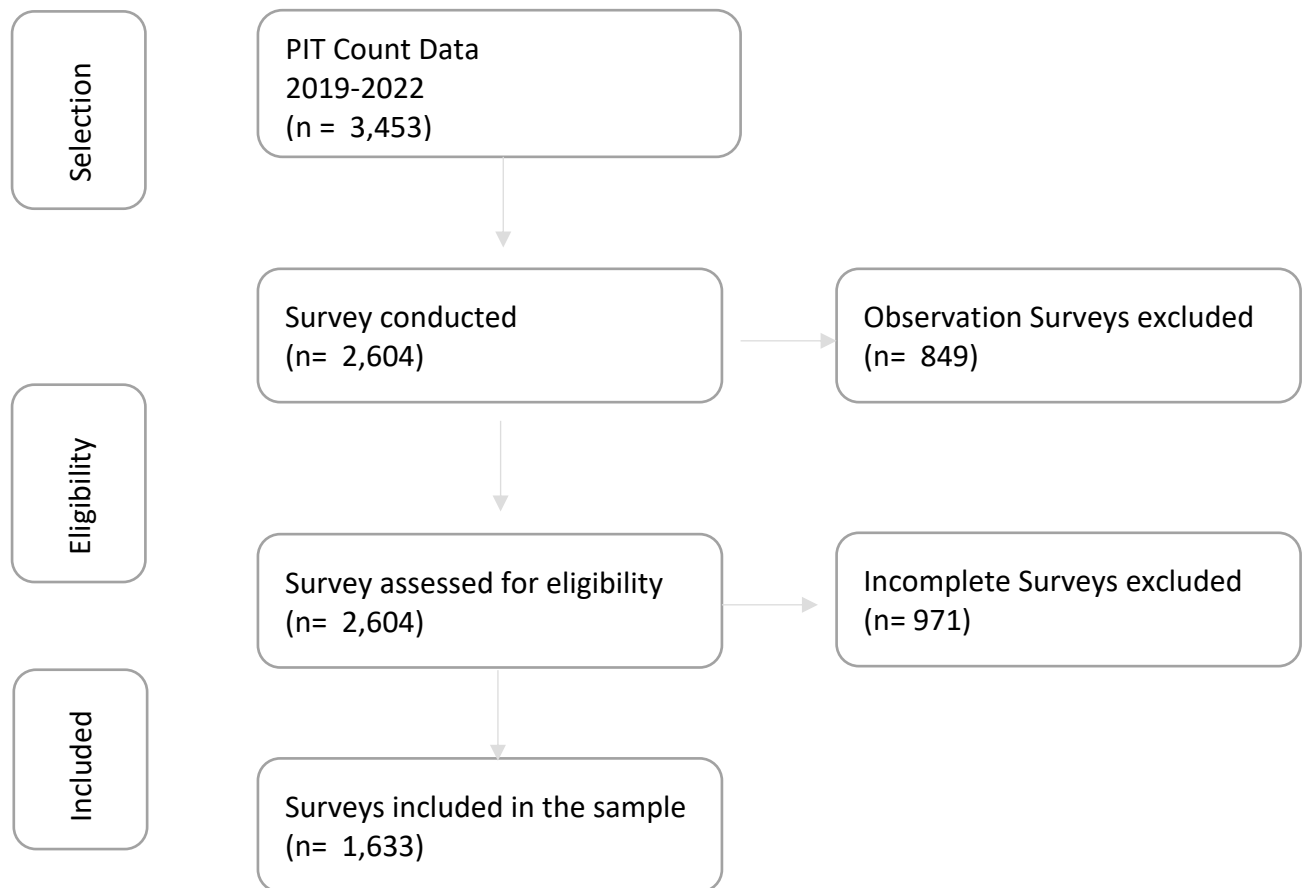
The PIT count is a snapshot, cross-sectional survey conducted by volunteers of CoCs and attempts to accurately reflect the number of the unhoused in that community at that one point in time. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally. This count informs government leaders both about the prevalence of the unhoused in the United States and the individual needs of the various CoCs. It is the primary source of information for the government

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On a designated night near the end of January, volunteers of each CoC attempt to locate and interview self-identified unhoused persons and families using a standardized survey consisting of 21 elements. These elements collect basic demographic information on the individual person, along with veteran status, chronically homeless status, mental health disorders, and substance abuse issues (Pont-in-Time Survey Tools, 2022). For those unwilling or unable to participate in the full interview, an observation survey is made where surveyors' record visible characteristics of an individual presumed to be unhoused but is either unwilling or unable to participate in the survey. Through the PIT count, the goal is to collect additional information about vulnerable populations that are unhoused.

In preparing the data for analysis, the following process was utilized to determine which surveys from the PIT count would be included. All surveys completed for the PIT count were part of the original sample with the first exclusion criteria focused on those surveys that were observation surveys. As noted earlier, observation surveys are conducted when an identified unhoused person is unwilling or unable to participate in the 21-question survey. To be considered a 'completed' survey, the respondent must have completely answer four questions out of the 21-question survey. These questions asked the respondent if they were a veteran, experiencing mental health issues, identified as having an alcohol issue, and identified as having a drug addiction. The following diagram details the exclusion process.

Figure A: Exclusion Protocol



Data Analysis

Data from initial PIT counts from 2019 forward was extracted as secondary data in excel format from the national PIT command center which is where every CoC reports their data. Data was examined for suitability with the kind of analyses to be performed. Identifying information was immediately removed along with any duplicated variables. The data were then imported into SPSS as individual data sets. Quantitative descriptive statistics were used to identify trends and discrepancies in demographic variables, mental health illness, and addiction between individual PIT counts and collectively.

Demographics.

Demographics were analyzed for each Amarillo CoC PIT count and then compared to relevant national data sets, including the U.S. reported census for the region with the aim of identifying unusual trends in demographic reporting. There is a potential that demographics within the unhoused population in this region may not follow larger census data due to the location in the Panhandle of Texas which is rural and predominantly Caucasian. Particular attention was made of veteran status. Since there is a Veteran Affairs health center located in this city, there is a possibility that there is a higher number of unhoused veterans in the Amarillo CoC compared to others.

Mental Illness

A question in the PIT survey asks the individual to self-disclose if they have mental illness. Data analysis looked to see if there is any trend between PIT counts related to this variable. Rates of mental health illness were calculated for each Amarillo CoC PIT count and collectively. Fluctuations between rates of mental illness among individual PIT counts were documented and explored. In addition, the rate of mental illness for individual PIT counts are compared to the collective PIT count rate along with the national rate of mental illness estimated in the U.S. population.

Addiction

This study analyzes trends and inconsistencies with the variable of addiction which is also disclosed by individuals during the initial data collection process. For this study, an individual who reported either drug addiction or alcohol addiction was counted as a positive for addiction. Rates of addiction were noted for each seven Amarillo CoC's individual PIT count as well as collectively. Variance between PIT counts were analyzed and reported. In addition, the

rate of addiction for each PIT count were compared to the U.S. general population and to the collective PIT count reported addiction rate.

Results

The goal of this study was to identify trends and, in addition, to identify potential discrepancies within demographics, veteran status, self-disclosure of mental health and addiction found in PIT counts within the Amarillo CoC. Analyzing rates between PIT counts determined if certain observed characteristics are consistent in the way they are reported across a sample of the unhoused population in the city of Amarillo, Texas. In addition, comparing these rates to national anticipated rates can identify either validity concerns or unique trends found in this homeless population.

The following table details the results of this study. It includes each PIT count that was examined, the number of attempted interviews for that individual count, and the response rates broken down by category. The percentage noted in completed interviews is based of the attempted interviews for that same count. The percentage rates for veteran status, mental health reported, and addiction reported was calculated using the number of completed interviews for that PIT count.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis Amarillo PIT Count 2019-2022

PIT Count	In-Person Interview Attempted	Interviews completed	Veterans	Mental Health Issue Self-Reported	Addiction Self-Reported
2019 – January	575	214 (37.2%)	35 (6.1%)	83 (38.79%)	108 (50.5%)
2019– Summer	167	154 (92.2%)	19 (11.4%)	67 (43.5%)	63 (41.7%)
2020 – January	540	355 (65.7%)	38 (6.7%)	129 (36.5%)	155 (43.9%)

2021 – January	362	199 (54.9%)	34 (9.4%)	80 (35.9%)	170 (76%)
2021 – Summer	342	256 (74.8%)	21 (6.1%)	106 (44.5%)	123 (48%)
2022 – January	321	220 (68.5%)	13 (4%)	106 (46.9%)	73 (33%)
2022 – Summer	297	216 (72.7%)	23 (7.7%)	77 (35.6%)	100 (46.3%)

Response Rates

The rate of response for PIT surveys out of those interviewed conducted consisted of the percentage of surveys that recorded information in the three categories of focus of 1) veteran status, 2) self-disclosure of mental illness, 3) either alcohol or substance abuse out of the total number of completed surveys for that PIT count. As noted in table 1, the rate of completed surveys ranged from a low of 37% in January of 2019 to a high of 92% in Summer of 2019. Collectively the survey response rate was 47%, which is considerably lower than the 80% response rate that most federally funded in-person survey requires (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). There was also the trend to experience higher response rate during the PIT counts that occurred during the summer compared to the typical annual count which occurs at the end of January.

Veterans

Based on the census information for 2021, it is estimated that five percent of the general population in this southern region are veterans (census.gov, 2022). As described in table 1, for the Amarillo CoC, PIT counts saw a range of 5.9% (2022 January Count) to 16% (2019 January Count) of unhoused reporting veteran status with the collateral average being 11.2%. This average is 6% higher than the anticipated regional average and may indicate that unhoused veterans are being pulled into this region. Out of all the three demographics analyzed for this

study, this category had the lowest standard deviation, which suggests that the data for this category is the most reliable compared to individuals reporting mental health and/or addiction.

Mental Health

When analyzing the raw data regarding mental health disclosure, there were discrepancies in the data provided compared to the published HUD Point in Time combined reports. Counting those who reported mental illness from the raw data consistently provided a considerably higher number than presented in the HUD reports for the same survey period. It is not known what the source of the differences is, though most likely some data has been excluded for reasons not currently provided in the HUD combined reports. Table 1 shows that the rate of self-disclosed mental illness ranged from 35.6% of viable surveys to 48.2%. Nationally it is estimated that 21% of all U.S. adults experience mental illness (NAMI, 2022). However, as previously noted in the literature review, it is estimated that at least 56% of the unhoused are dealing with a mental illness (Gutwinski et al, 2021). With the average of all PIT counts reporting mental health issues being 40.3% of the region's unhoused, one must wonder why there is a discrepancy between the estimated national average for the unhoused, and the average observed in this unhoused population. It should also be noted that the large standard deviation for this category indicates that the data is widely spread, and thus suspect.

Drug and Alcohol Addiction

During the PIT survey, respondents can disclose that they have an alcohol addiction, drug addiction, or both. Again, as table 1 demonstrates, the raw data analysis provided indicated a higher number of individuals who disclosed substance abuse than is reported in the official PIT count reports issued by HUD for the same time period. It is unclear what exclusion protocol HUD implements that results in this overall disparity in reporting those with substance abuse

issues. Collectively, the rate of PIT count participants who reported substance abuse was 48.5%. Individual PIT counts ranged from a low of 33% to a high of 76%. Compared to conservative estimates which propose that 30% of this vulnerable population suffer from alcohol use disorders while just slightly more than 20% experience a drug use disorder, the rate reported through PIT counts indicates that this region's unhoused experience a higher rate of substance abuse than what a systemic review which analyzed the prevalence of mental illness in the unhoused (Gutwinski et al., 2021). Of course, this data may be unreliable as noted by the high standard deviation observed.

Discussion

What is unique about analyzing the PIT for the Amarillo CoC is that the PIT counts are conducted biannually, which is not required by HUD. This allows comparison PIT counts within the same year for the same region, identifying potential seasonal trends and providing a larger pool of surveys within this time frame.

What is evident by the results is that, even with in-person interviews, the rate of surveys done face-to-face to even partial completion for this CoC's PIT count falls below the 80% benchmark expected of federally funded surveys. While this study looked at surveys that were partially completed, it may have been more accurate to only consider those surveys where all 21 questions were answered. Unfortunately, limiting the sample to only fully completed surveys would have potentially made the sample too small to analyze. In addition, the wide variance in completion rate between PIT counts also indicates that there is inconsistency in how surveys are conducted and administered. This has been an ongoing concern regarding PIT counts. HUD attempts to provide CoCs with the flexibility to administer PIT counts in the manner that they think best applies to their district; however, this can frequently result in inconsistency in

volunteer training. Volunteers often are not knowledgeable in survey administration and come from a variety of backgrounds which can influence how they approach potential unhoused individuals and engage with them throughout the survey. Having a consistent approach with volunteer training in basic survey techniques would likely make PIT counts be more consistent in the level of responses that are received. By educating volunteers on the importance of completed surveys while providing them tools in how to administer surveys more efficiently, CoCs would likely increase the rate of completed surveys.

The trend of higher interview completion during summer PIT counts is an important one to note. Winter nights can be bitterly cold in Amarillo as it is in many CoCs, and this factor may have a larger impact on individual participation in the survey. Neither volunteers nor those being interviewed may be as willing to spend the necessary time to administer the survey in full in the cold and, instead, will attempt to do an abridged version. This would reduce the interview completion rate among those interviewed. In addition, unhoused individuals are more likely to be hidden in unsafe locations seeking protection from the elements. Summer PIT counts may be more reliable, as shelter is often less of a primary concern so unhoused individuals may be more visible. Both volunteers and the unhouse are more comfortable and willing to complete a survey that often takes several minutes or more during warmer months.

A shift from winter PIT counts to summer PIT counts is unlikely, as that would require a mandate from HUD and approval from the federal government. However, it can be recommended that CoCs conduct biannual PIT counts with the second PIT count of the year occurring in July. This will allow CoCs the ability to compare PIT count data between seasons and facilitate better understanding of their unhoused population throughout the year, not just at one snapshot in time. Especially in regions which experience cold weather during January, CoCs

who do PIT counts in July may capture more accurate information than those in January. Conducting a second PIT count in an annual time frame is often a hardship financially and logistically. To utilize the online counting app costs \$1,500 per event, which smaller CoCs may have difficulty paying. In addition, there is the effort to recruit and coordinate volunteers to participate in PIT counts. A partial solution to this could be if HUD would allow CoCs who do biannual counts to submit the PIT count that they feel best represent their unhoused population, whether that be in January or July. As noted earlier, the PIT count affects HUD funding for the CoC and could, therefore, help to offset the additional cost of a second PIT count.

It was also noted that, on average, the PIT counts for the Amarillo CoC reported a comparatively higher rate of unhoused veterans than what is anticipated nationally. Considering that there is no local active military base, this trend may be unusual and unique. As noted, there are comprehensive services for veterans available in this region, including a fully functioning VA health care facility. Unhoused veterans may be attracted to this region since these services are available to them, or there may be other unknown factors. Additional research is necessary to determine if unhoused veterans will congregate in CoCs that offer comparable services for veterans. This can be done by comparing rates of reported unhoused veterans in CoC's that have a VA healthcare facility within their boundaries.

As reported, the rate of unhoused individuals self-disclosing they had mental health issues occurred at the rate of approximately 40% for this CoC. This is considerably lower than the national expected average of 56% for all unhoused individuals. While some of the discrepancy can be due to inconsistent surveying methods, the continual stigmatization of mental illness is likely also to play a role. Individuals are more likely to attempt to project a positive image of themselves during in-person interviews, and having a mental health illness does not fit

in the mold of positive image, especially in the rural south. Another potential reality is that while the unhoused are more at risk for mental health issues, it is not to the level where more than half of unhoused individuals suffer. Future research could compare rates of self-reported mental health illness in CoCs which share similar characteristics. This research could ascertain whether the projected rate of unhoused with mental health in the U.S. is unrealistic, or if there are other factors such as regional location that may be influencing the unhoused to underreport or overreport mental health illnesses.

Unlike mental health illness, those interviewed were more likely to report drug or alcohol addiction than anticipated for unhoused individuals. This either indicates that the national prediction of alcohol and drug addiction among the unhoused is underestimating the pervasiveness of the issue, or there is a higher need in this CoC. Again, comparison between similar structured and regionally located CoCs can verify if this CoC is experiencing an anomaly or if drug and alcohol a larger issue among the unhoused than anticipated. If it can be determined that this CoC is indeed experiencing a higher proportion of unhouse with addiction concerns, future research can delve into why this may be the case and what remedies exist for this region.

It was considered that the presence of veterans could skew the rates of mental illness and addiction as this population is also known to be vulnerable to both conditions. The fact that there are more veterans reported in this CoC's unhoused population doesn't account for the fluctuations noted for both subpopulations. In fact, the fact that mental health illness is reported less, and addiction is reported more than veterans can account for lends additional credence that the PIT counts are not an accurate representation of the unhoused population. This can only be remedied through the application of more structure in the administration of PIT surveys and

allowing CoCs the flexibility of executing the PIT Count during the summer months if it would provide a better chance to get responses that are closer to the expected 80% threshold.

Limitations and Strengths

There are several challenges when conducting PIT counts. For instance, communities vary considerably in size, culture, and circumstances (Tsai & Alarcon, 2022). Conducting a survey in a major metropolis such as New York City presents unique circumstances that smaller CoCs in rural areas will not encounter and vice versa. Acknowledging that each CoC that participates in the annual PIT count has unique needs, HUD allows for variations in the ways the counts are conducted (Tsai & Alarcon, 2022; Troisi et al., 2015). This means that urban areas will likely utilize walking surveys, while rural regions are more dependent on cars or mixed methods to cover a wider area. While this approach allows CoCs the flexibility to execute the PIT count in the style and manner best suited for their communities, there are multiple concerns that the inconsistency in methodology naturally yields inconsistent results.

While HUD does not have strict protocols on how a CoC may execute a PIT count, it does make several recommendations such as completing the survey at night when unhoused individuals are more likely to be stationary and easier to be found (PIT Tools, 2022). However, by nature this is a vulnerable population that frequently seeks to be out of public view. The natural inclination to hide at night makes it difficult to ensure that unhoused individuals are found and interviewed. Rural areas may be dealing with wooded areas or fields that are dangerous and difficult to navigate and thus are not explored to their full potential (Troisi et al., 2015). In addition, there is a natural reluctance to approach and engage a sleeping individual in a survey. It is estimated in larger cities such as Los Angeles, California 20 percent of the unhoused population remained hidden (Agans et. al., 2014)

An additional challenge in execution of the PIT count is the dependence on volunteers who often are not trained or skilled in survey methodology (Schneider et al., 2016). This can result in an increase in incomplete or inaccurate surveys, as these individuals may not ask questions consistently, focus on only a few questions within the survey, or be uncomfortable asking what may appear to be very personal questions. Also, relying on volunteers that may not be known or familiar to the unhoused population may produce higher response bias, where participants will respond inaccurately or falsely to questions (Furnham, 1986). Specifically, there is the concern of social desirability bias, which encourages a person to deny undesirable traits, such as having had a mental health issue or the length and frequency of being unhoused (Grimm, 2010). The unknown effect of interviewer bias and response bias inherently threaten the validity and reliability of the PIT count survey.

There is also considerable concern about the narrow definition of what constitutes a unhoused individual in the eyes of HUD. As of 2022, HUD defines homeless, or unhoused, individuals as those who are 1) literally homeless; 2) at imminent risk of homelessness; 3) homeless under other Federal statutes; or 4) fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence (HUD Exchange, 2012). For the purpose of PIT counts, the focus is on those who are staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, safe havens, or those with no shelter for the evening. Those who are precariously housed, but not literally unhoused are not included in the count. Precariously housed individuals could include those currently incarcerated or in treatment centers with no place to go upon discharge and people who are living doubled-up with others (HUD Exchange, 2022). Precariously housed individuals and families have no permanent housing available, but because they are residing in a safe environment temporarily, they are not considered viable candidates for the PIT Count. However, many CoCs consider these vulnerable

members part of their unhoused population and may attempt to count them in their PIT counts (Schneider et al., 2016).

These challenges contribute to questioning the reliability and validity of the annual PIT count. While it's unlikely that any CoC would be successful in identifying all those unhoused within its borders, it's likely that the majority are identified. However, it goes beyond simply identifying those who are unhoused on a particular night in January. PIT counts are also designed to identify potential trends in the unhoused population to help the CoC determine what needs are prevalent in this vulnerable community, so they can direct resources to assist them. While not even HUD would not agree that the PIT count is a perfect instrument in counting the unhoused, it is currently the only government-sanctioned option to counting and recording this population (Swenson, 2022).

Surveys do allow access to traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as the unhoused. In-person surveys also report lower data entry errors and potentially higher data quality compared to other survey methods (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). In addition, data collection is much easier with surveys, especially when performed with technology that records the survey responses. Offering anonymity or promise of confidentiality can prompt people to answer survey questions more candidly, which serves to increase the validity of the survey. Also, the surveyor's potential bias is decreased since all the participants are provided with the same survey.

There are, however, several disadvantages with the method of surveys to consider. There may be survey bias where participants are uncomfortable with providing responses that may put themselves in an unfavorable light. In addition, there may not be consistency in how the surveys are conducted by the surveyors due to lack of training or sense of purpose. Surveyors may feel that some of the questions are inappropriate or uncomfortable to ask, and therefore a survey is

not completed in full. It's also very difficult to develop a rapport with unhoused participants as they may be less likely to trust strangers. While this research study attempts to minimize the impact of incomplete data sets by only considering completed surveys, the final sample size may not be representative of the unhoused population in question.

Conclusion

In recent decades the United States has taken progressive steps to admitting that being unhoused is a societal issue that has lasting impacts not only for those living through the experience but for the community that they reside. By requiring Continuum of Cares (CoCs) throughout the U.S. to count those who are unhoused within their geographic borders, the U.S. government is recognizing that this pervasive issue affects a considerable proportion of the population at any given time and allows those who are unhoused to have a voice by having their presence noted and acknowledged. It also presents an opportunity for communities to learn about trends that may exist within their unhoused population, which can lead to more targeted, efficient, and effective services dedicated to eradicating homelessness in their communities.

The result of this study highlights the importance of consistent methodology in implementing the PIT. It readily became evident for the Amarillo CoC, that the surveys are not being completed in full and the level of response is less than desirable for a face-to-face survey. However, it was noted that surveys were more likely to be completed in full during Summer PIT counts for seasonal reasons. HUD and other CoCs may find it more beneficial to conduct and report their findings from Summer PIT count as higher number of responses. In addition, consistent training for volunteers who are the surveyors in PIT count is highly recommended.

The Person in Time count remains a useful tool in identifying trends within the unhoused population. As noted in this study, discovering, and understanding these trends can be useful in

directing CoCs to tailor their services for the homeless within their boundaries. However more research is needed to help the Amarillo CoC determine if they are experiencing unusual trends within their PIT counts which can be done by comparing PIT counts between similar structured CoCs. While analysis of certain data points for this southern, rural CoC identified potential trends concerning those who identified as veterans, suffer from mental illness, and deal with drug and/or alcohol addiction, it is uncertain if these trends are unique as there is no definitive identified national trends for these populations within the unhoused.

Effective solutions can only be based on accurate data collection. If we continue to utilize a data collection system which lacks validity, then we are doing an incredible disservice to both those who are unhoused, and the communities they live. It is not the goal of this paper to simply vilify the Person in Time count as a faulty measurement but to better understand what trends and flaws may exist so that potential solutions to improve both reliability and validity of this important tool can be found.

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Teaching Poverty in the Social Work Classroom

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Abstract

Regardless of the area of specialization, social workers are extremely likely to encounter poverty during their career. What one believes about the causes of poverty, and their feelings on those affected, has a significant effect on how they provide services to people in poverty. Even though social work is a field dedicated to work with those affected by poverty there is a trend within social work education to avoid in-depth discussions about the repercussions of poverty. To address this gap within social work education, and to provide a mechanism to address students' attitudes towards poverty, an undergraduate course was designed to introduce undergraduate social work students to the concepts of poverty and provide them with the skills to address poverty in their future careers.

Keywords: poverty, social work education, poverty-aware

Teaching Poverty in the Social Work Classroom

One of the key tenets to the social work profession is the ability and desire to empower those experiencing poverty. The Code of Ethics for the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) makes it clear that social workers should work “to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty” (NASW, 2021, p. 1). Unfortunately, it has been demonstrated that social workers frequently view clients who are poor and struggling as difficult and responsible for their own plight (Davis & Wainwright, 2005). If the mission of social work is to work on behalf of those who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty, it is an obligation of social work educators to prepare students for this reality.

The lack of education on poverty within social work program has a larger ramification for society. It is undeniable that public policy is influenced by cultural values. Public social welfare policy is directly impacted by how people conceptualize poverty. There are several frameworks such as ‘unworthy’ poor, the ‘culture of poverty,’ and the ‘underclass’ which present poverty with minimal empathy for those experiencing poverty (Halper & Muzzio, 2013). Social media in the U.S. commonly present a harmful narrative about poverty (Halper & Muzzio, 2013). General media portrayal of poverty contributes to the marginalization of the poor (Bullock et al., 2001). This constant barrage of a negative narrative towards those poverty contributes to a society that is less compassionate to the poor (Frank, J. & Rice, K, 2017). Social workers students are not immune.

Studies have shown that students’ attitudes towards poverty directly affects how they are likely to treat clients who are poor (Delavega et al., 2016). Research evidence indicates that while social workers generally express the mindset that poverty is caused by systematic causes,

they do not see themselves as having a responsibility to address poverty directly (Davis & Wainwright, 2005). This may be since most social work students come from privilege backgrounds and have little to no direct experience with poverty (Vandsburger et al., 2010). Due to the lack of personal experience with poverty, students can develop unrealistic expectations about the poor (Hattery, 2003). This is evident as social work students are less inclined to pursue a career choice that focuses on working with people living in poverty and preferring to work with higher income clients (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, & Monnickendam, 2009; Weinger & Reeser, 2018). In addition, there is evidence that social workers believe that the fundamental issues facing clients in poverty are psychological, cognitive, or behaviorally in nature while their clients expressed that it was living in poverty was the reason for their difficulties (Krumer-Nevo, Slonim-Nevo, & Hirshenzon-Segev, 2006). Any systemic change in public policy is contingent on society, especially social workers, having a shared understanding about the nature of poverty.

Happily, there is evidence that education on poverty is effective in changing one's beliefs and attitudes as it relates to poverty (Delavega et al., 2016). The Council of Social Work Education has in the past made recommendations that social work programs in the U.S. to highlight the issue of poverty within their curriculum (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, & Monnickendam, 2009). However, most social work programs in the U.S. simply approach the subject of poverty as a context within other class materials (Davis & Wainwright, 2005; Frank et al, 2023).

To address this gap in social work education a course focusing on poverty was designed. This course is designed to be value based. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own previous experience, life history, and personal worldview as they make progress in acquiring the knowledge, values, and skill to effectively address poverty in a positive way in their future

practice. Through self-reflection exercises, students will gain the ability to identify and acknowledge their own attitudes, including potential biases, towards those in poverty. Students will gain theoretical and empirical knowledge about poverty; causes of poverty, how it manifests in daily life, ways to elevate oneself from poverty, and how to advocate for clients who are in poverty at all levels of social work practice.

The syllabus for this course is provided as Appendix A. The course was created to introduce social work students to poverty in the United States, with focus on the Panhandle region of Texas. This course is designed to fit a typical semester at West Texas A&M University which is 16-weeks. To accommodate non-traditional students, this course will be delivered as an asynchronous online course. To provide equitable access to course materials, there is no physical textbook for the course. Instead, assigned readings have been gathered from various journal articles which will be accessible to students via links to electronic copies through the course delivery platform (Blackboard). Each week of the course will follow the same organization pattern to create consistency for students, including beginning on Mondays and closing on Sunday. The entire course is made available to students at the beginning of the semester.

Each module, or week, will open with an introduction video detailing the activities students will need to complete in that time period. A longer pre-recorded lecture on the designated topics for the week will follow the short weekly introduction video. Students will then be provided with links to the assigned readings and provided with additional suggested readings and/or videos to enrich their learning. Most modules (10) will close with a discussion requirement for students. A discussion prompt (Appendix B) is provided for students who are asked to post their initial post by Friday of that week and then provide substantial responses to two of their peers by end of day Sunday.

At the beginning of the course students will be asked to complete a brief reflection paper (Appendix C) that provides a non-judgement space to acknowledge and process their initial beliefs and attitudes towards poverty. During the duration of the course, students will be asked to complete two short papers that are no more than 4 pages. The student will be prompted to complete an activity of their choice prior to completing the assignment (Appendix D). These activities include completing a free online poverty stimulation, watching from a selection of documentaries, or interviewing a person who presently, or in the past, live with poverty. The final project for this course is an in-depth exploration of a service provider that directly attempts to empower those in poverty (Appendix E). A draft is required for all students. The instructor provides feedback on the rough draft but does not provide a grade. This encourages students to become more creative in all aspects of the paper and to become more comfortable revealing their thoughts and feeling about the subject. In addition, a rubric for this final assignment is not provided. Often when using rubrics, students simply write to conform to the demands of the rubric, and this stifles creative thinking (Meister, 2018).

It was purposeful that various teaching approach was used at various times during this course. Literature suggests that experimental learning, student-centered learning, dialogical learning and active learning maximizes student growth when discussing poverty and inequality (Bush, 2018; Vandsburger et al., 2010). Through the various activities of the course, students are likely to change their perceptions about the lives of those in poverty and encourage further exploration into poverty (Vandsburger, et al., 2010). Social work students who gain increased awareness of the factors maintain poverty will be invested and encouraged to serve this population. Social worker educators have an obligation to prepare social worker students to be competent in the mission of social work.

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APPENDIX A**Syllabus**

SOCW 4350
Understanding Poverty
Margaret DeJong-Shier, LMSW

Contact Information and Office Hours –

Instructor Preferred Name	Meg Shier, LMSW (She, Her, Hers)
Email	Mdejong-shier@wtamu.edu
Office	Old Main 426 Canyon Campus
Office Hours	Mondays 11am – 2pm Tuesday 1pm – 4pm Thursdays 12pm – 4pm @ Harrington Center, Amarillo Online meetings available upon request
Office Phone	806-651-2624
Class Meeting Dates	N/A, this is an asynchronous class
Class Time	Online
Location	Online

Course Description –

Instill competency in understanding, acknowledging, and exploring poverty as a complex issue with multiple systemic layers and consequences in the United States. We will explore poverty concepts in a manner that is inclusive of knowing the history and theories of poverty rather than operating from “stereotypes.” The goal of this course is for students to develop a comprehensive understanding of poverty and the skills to acknowledge, challenge and address its impacts on a person or society. In this course, we will examine factors that facilitate the increase of poverty in the United States, particularly in rural areas. We will also review in depth the major social policies used to reduce poverty. While this class will focus on the U.S., it will include comparative perspectives (high income countries in Europe).

Texts and Other Materials –**Required Texts:**

All reading materials for this class will be made available online. Links to weekly assigned readings are also provided in this syllabus starting on page 10.

Power Points and recorded lectures will be posted on WT Blackboard for each week/topic.

Other Required Materials (software, other readings, etc.):

American Psychological Association (2020). Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Purdue Owl: APA Resource at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

WTAMU Cornette Library - <https://www.wtamu.edu/library/help/cite-it-apa.shtml>

Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes –

Social Work Education is framed by a competency-based approach to curriculum design. Social work students are expected to be competent in 9 core areas. Please refer to Appendix A for description of each of the competencies and explanation of how each assignment helps each student develop knowledge, values, skills and, cognitive and affective processes associated with that competency.

In addition, students in this course will:

1. Recognize how poverty is conceptualized and measured in the U.S. and worldwide. Students will understand how social contexts can influence and define poverty and potential solutions in different social systems.
2. Students will examine how poverty is normalized in U.S. society.
3. Able to see and utilize the connection between poverty trends, incarceration rates, and the labor market at the community, organizational and societal levels. They will use their knowledge and understanding of poverty to promote policies that promote social and economic justice and well-being.
4. Students will be able to interpret and differentiate between different theories of poverty and economics to explain poverty. Students will use this knowledge to find the most effective problems solving methods based on the client system and the intervention most appropriate for the client situation.
5. Able to use the knowledge and skills to use multidimensional and multidisciplinary assessment methods when analyzing poverty. Students will learn how poverty has a direct relationship to health, education, families, incarceration, and housing.
6. Explore anti-poverty programs regarding to the coverage, gaps, and implementation
7. Identify, critically evaluate, and apply appropriate, evidence-informed interventions at the agency or community level. (Such evidence-informed interventions may come from outside of the United States, so students should cultivate a global perspective on sources of information and evidence).
8. Students will demonstrate policy practice skills, particularly in terms of critical thinking, research, analysis, and writing.
9. Demonstrate skills in ethical and empowerment-based social work policy practice, considering the impact of diversity (race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, culture, religion, national origin, and other client characteristics) in organizations, and communities.

Course Requirements and Evaluation –**Explanation of Assignments and Requirements:**

Evaluation of academic performance in this course will be based on the total number of points accumulated. Final grades will be based on a cumulative total for the following assignments:

Requirement/Assignment	# Req'd	Points per Assignment	Total
Online Discussion	10	30	300
Short Papers	2	100	200
Self-Assessment/Reflection Paper	1	100	100
Draft of Final Project Paper	1	150	150

Final Project Paper	1	250	250
Total			1000

Course Grading Scale:

Letter Grade	Points
A	1000-900
B	899-800
C	799-700
D	699-600
F	599 points and below

Description of Assignments –

General guidelines:

This course includes the idea that all persons involved in this class will participate in weekly readings and online discussion through sharing their thoughts and ideas. You are expected to cover all of the readings and be prepared to discuss online with your peers in class. Assignments will require thoughtful application of information from readings, lectures, and outside sources. Because discussion of the course materials will consume a large part of every lecture, students should complete the required readings prior to viewing the weekly lectures.

Discussions – Initial post due Fridays with response to peers done by Sundays.

(Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)(30 points each for a total of 300 points)

Students will be expected to participate in weekly discussions. The topic of each discussion will be provided by the instructor. Each person must post their initial post by Friday evening and respond thoughtfully to two of their peers.

Initial posts should be around 350 words, with replies to your peers averaging 200. Please remember the following core rules of netiquette:

Remember the Human

Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life

Make yourself look good online

Share expert knowledge

Be forgiving of other people's mistakes

No flaming

Self-Assessment/Reflection Paper (Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) (100 Points)

Paper Guidelines This paper should be no more than 5 pages; typed and double-spaced. The cover page and references do not count as part of the 5 pages. The following outline provides suggestions that may help you write a successful paper and meet the learning objectives outlined above. Additionally, please remember that page count means nothing without depth. Title Page: A title or cover page should include your paper's title, name, course title, semester, university and department name, and date. Be sure to review the section and the Self-Assessment Reflection Grading Rubric for coverage in your self-assessment.

This assignment will consist of the following sections, please refer to WT Class for more details on each section along with the rubric.

Section 1: Background information

Section 2: Current Assessment

Section 3: Ethics and Values Assessment

References

Short Papers (Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9) (2 @ 100 points each)

To help focus discussion and debate, each student will be required to write two (2) short (3-4 pages) papers answering the question assigned to either readings or activities as assigned. These short papers are to be written in APA format in terms of the paper being double-spaced and written in Times New Roman or Arial 12-point font. Start each paper by retyping the question you are answering. Additionally, address advocacy and social change issues, NASW Values and ethics, as well as implications for social work policy, practice, and research. Cite any other references you use (at least 3 or 4 plus and any materials from class readings.) Be sure to review this section and the Short Paper Rubric to insure coverage in your papers. Remember, the point of these papers is to answer the prompted questions. These short papers are due at the beginning of class on the due dates.

You will probably be frustrated by having to keep these papers brief, but that is an important skill in policy work to learn to write in a concise and lean style. An important part of writing lean is to know what you want to say. Often, this will take more than a single draft to figure out. From experience, starting the night before the paper is due is not sufficient time to write an excellent paper, though you will be tempted to try.

Final Project Paper (Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

Rough Draft (150 points) is Due

Final Draft (250 points) is Due

The final project for this class is an in-depth paper. Each person will choose a state, county, federal, international, or non-profit human service program that addresses poverty. (A list of suggestions will be provided in WTClass) The paper will describe how poverty affects who the clientele is, how they are viewed and treated and how resources are allocated to this program. It is advised that students start this project early in the semester. ***Creativity and innovation is encouraged for this assignment such as the following: reviewing agency policies and procedures, interviewing administrators, clients, staff and volunteers in these programs.***

A rough draft of this paper is mandatory. The goal of the rough draft is to have completed sections so that the instructor can provide helpful suggestions on how to improve your work prior to the submission of the final draft. Please note that the rough draft is worth 150 points. Concerted effort is expected for this rough draft, and each section should be a completed essay.

Required Outline for the Final Project Paper/Presentation

I. Introduction of paper/presentation

Discuss the overview of your paper and presentation. Include all major sections that will be addressed. It is great to include statistics on poverty or similar agencies/programs addressing poverty, or lack thereof of such information.

II. Description of program selected and its clients

Describe the history of the agency and the specific program (including the legal base.) What problem is the program designed to solve? (It may not be designed to address poverty.) What do they do to solve the problem? What values are inherent in the approach to the situation targeted? Are these values congruent with social work values? What is the source of funding? How do clients become eligible for the program? How many clients are in the program? What are some examples of other related program issues/components?

III. How do poverty and inequality impact the program?

General Overview, e.g., What are *poverty and inequality* in the context of this program? What definition of poverty makes the most sense in this program's context? What are some other general issues?

A. Clients

What percentage of the client population is poor? Give demographics of the client population served. How does being poor make you more or less likely to have the problem the program (s) is (are) designed to solve? How are poor clients viewed as opposed to non-poor clients? How does inequality affect clients? What are some other related issues or descriptions of the clients?

B. Administratively and Socially

What are the attitudes of workers and program administrators to having poverty or inequality raised as an issue? Is it seen by employees or administrators as an important reason people might be in the program? Are some clients systemically excluded or included based on their income or class status, even if these are not explicitly stated criteria? What are some other related issues? Give examples for the questions.

IV. Advocacy and Social Change/NASW Code of Ethics

How does the agency/program address advocacy and social change efforts? Be as specific as possible. Provide examples of advocacy and social change effort activities carried out by the agency and/or program. Do the values of the programs align with the NASW Code of Ethics? Give examples. What are the roles of social workers in these agencies? What are the implications for social work practice, policy, and research?

V. Conclusion

What impact do poverty and inequality have on this program and its clients? How would the program be different if poverty or inequality was a more central focus of the

program? What recommendations do you have for improving the program based on what you have learned? (Consider what policies need to be developed or modified. How can you as a social worker promote these policy changes?)

Policies and Responsibilities –

Guidelines for All Written Work. Grading criteria for written work include: thoroughness, logical development of points, clarity of written expression, application of theory/ readings from the course and from independent research, and appropriateness of the product to the assignment given.

Each sentence or part of a sentence must be entirely in the student's own words (paraphrased), **unless a direct quotation is indicated using quotation marks and page numbers.** All sources of words or ideas must be attributed by citation. Failure to do so constitutes failure to meet the assignment and may be plagiarism. **The instructor reserves the right to give a grade of “F” for the course as whole to any student found guilty of plagiarism of any assignment by the Office of Student Conduct.**

Unless prior permission is granted, late work is penalized a letter grade per week or part thereof (e.g. an "A" paper earns at best a "B"). Always keep a copy of your work. Papers will be returned only to the student with annotations in WT Class within 5 days of the due date.

All written assignments must be submitted using the APA (American Psychological Association). The Sixth Edition is the latest available. All papers must be double-spaced and use a 12-point font. Margins should be no greater no less than one inch. Students are advised to maintain back-up copies of all assignments kept on computer disks, networks, thumb drives, or hard drives.

COVID-19 Restrictions and Rules: ** COVID-19 ADDENDUM-**

While West Texas A&M University has relaxed Covid-19 restrictions, we encourage you to continue practicing healthy habits, including social distancing where possible, wearing a face-covering if you choose to do so, and staying home when sick.

For information on Covid-19 protocols, follow this link:
<https://www.wtamu.edu/about/information/covid-19/index.html>.

For health-related questions or information on Covid-19 testing or vaccines, contact Student Medical at 806.651-3287.

For counseling support, contact Student Counseling at 806.651.2340

Incomplete Grade (I)

A grade of “I” indicates a portion of required course work has not been completed and evaluated in the prescribed time period due to unforeseen, but fully justified (i.e. hospitalization, personal injury), reasons and that there is still a possibility of earning credit. It is the student’s responsibility to bring pertinent information to the instructor and request the incomplete option.

Students electing the incomplete option must normally complete the required course work within the time designated by the instructor but not to exceed 12 months. If a student fails to complete the required course work within 12 months, the grade will be changed to an “F”. Once a grade of “I” is assigned by the instructor, the student cannot drop the course. Students who are given an incomplete do not re-enroll in the class to complete the “I”.

Submitting Papers/Assignments

Papers and journals submitted incomplete, or not typed in word document will be considered late. If you are unable to submit a paper on time, it is your responsibility to notify me **at least 4 days in advance** about your inability to turn in the paper on time and to discuss a possible extension. A student might be granted an extension only under special circumstances. All papers and journals are due at the time posted on the schedule. Anything received after the time posted, even one minute, is considered to be late. This policy holds for disabled vehicles, broken computers, lost papers, crazy printouts, caught in traffic, etc. The only exceptions to this policy are for those students who suffer a **documented** and clear emergency.

Papers must be submitted to the assigned “drop boxes” located under the lessons tab on the course page in WTClass unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. Please submit your papers either in doc or pdf format. Effective social workers plan so that they are prepared for emergencies. Start your papers early.

APA format, citations, and writing skill

At this point in the educational process, it is expected that students are able to write clear and cohesive documents. All assignments **MUST** contain proper citations and references and be written using APA format. Writing skills and proper communication of ideas are very important in the social work profession, so use of poor grammar, punctuation, and overall poor writing **WILL** impact your grade. Each evaluated component contributes toward the final grade that you earn. Students are expected to complete work on or before the assigned dates shown in the course outline. All assignments should be submitted using APA format (see the following website for a helpful guide <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>).

All assignments **MUST** be typed in Microsoft Word document only. Any other format will deem the paper as not submitted and the student will be required to write the paper again in word document and submit. A second submission is at my discretion only and is not granted automatically to student who doesn't adhere to the submission guidelines.

Communication

Since this is an online course, there will be no face-to-face components. A variety of formats will be utilized to enhance the student's ability to apply critical thinking skills as well as demonstrate adequate skills. Call me, Text me through the Remind App, or email me as the need arises. I will do my best to respond to requests within 48 hours and am available by appointment to speak with you via Zoom.

All electronic communication must be done through your buff email; the email function through WT Class will be shut off, as this improves accountability for effective communication. Students

are responsible for checking for communications regularly; “not checking email” is not a valid excuse for missing information. Messages to the instructor will, in general, be answered within 48 business hours (this does NOT include weekends or holidays). You are strongly advised to read this syllabus thoroughly. There will be no response to questions that are addressed in this syllabus!

Students may also reach out via cell phone, as some issues may need immediate attention.

When communicating online, you should always:

- Treat the course faculty with respect.
- Faculty will respect you as their student.
- Use clear and concise language and use correct spelling and grammar.
- Avoid texting abbreviations in your email communications and careful while using emojis.
- Use standard fonts such as Times New Roman and use a size 12 or 14 pt. font.
- Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETED AS YELLING.
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or offensive.
- Be careful with personal information (both yours and others’).

Technology Requirements

All technological requirements for the successful completion of this course are the responsibility of the student, including access to a working computer and or to a device with secure broadband Internet connection, data storage and retrieval, and state-of-the-art security. The student is responsible for all technological problems not related to WTAMU, including but not limited to equipment failures, power outages, and Internet breakdowns. Furthermore, students are responsible for all necessary technical and operational skills for completing this course, and for being familiar with WTClass (the Blackboard Learning System) both in a general sense and in a specific sense as pertaining to this course and any materials stored within. The professor is not responsible for any technical matters related to WTClass. Students must contact WTClass if they have problems accessing and/or using the WTClass environment. Contact the IT Success Center by email at itsc@wtamu.edu or phone at 806.651.4357 and support personnel will be happy to assist you.

If your computer does not have Microsoft Word, Office 365 ProPlus package is available to you free of charge and allows you to install Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Publisher, and Access on up to 5 PCs or Macs and Office apps on other mobile devices including tablets. Google Chrome and Firefox are most compatible with Blackboard, any other browsers may cause issues.

24/7 Technical Support/Helpdesk

Students can reach the Information Technology (IT) help desk at 806-651-HELP. This number is accessible 7am to 9pm, students must have Buff ID ready

Students can also email Information Technology at itsc@wtamu.edu

WT Blackboard has an extensive help page that is accessible using the “Help” tab that is available in the upper right corner

All students will use Blackboard as their learning management system. Students should preferably use Chrome or Firefox for optimal use of Blackboard.

Library

Library staff will help you with access to electronic resources, obtaining interlibrary loan material, providing instruction and research assistance, and handling reserve materials. As a graduate student, WTAMU library is one of the major resources you need to be a successful graduate of the program. Use it accordingly and frequently.

Academic Integrity

All work must be completed individually unless otherwise stated. Commission of any of the following acts shall constitute scholastic dishonesty: acquiring or providing information for any assigned work or examination from any unauthorized source; informing any person or persons of the contents of any examination prior to the time the exam is given in any subsequent sections of the course or as a makeup; plagiarism; submission of a paper or project that is substantially the same for two courses unless expressly authorized by the instructor to do so. For more information, see the [Code of Student Life](#).

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives will find a safe place in this course to learn and grow as students and professionals. It is my goal that all students' learning needs will be addressed both in and out of the classroom. I firmly believe that the diversity students bring to the class should be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. I greatly welcome your suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students and student groups. You are also more than welcome to contact the office of diversity and inclusion at diversity-inclusion@wtamu.edu

Acceptable Student Behavior

Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor's ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (*Code of Student Life*).

Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. Inappropriate behavior may result in disciplinary action or referral to the University's Behavioral Intervention Team. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

ADA Statement

West Texas A&M University seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Student Disability Services, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services with SDS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include, but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to register with [Student Disability Services](#) (SDS) and to contact faculty

members in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations. Contact Information: Student Success Center, CC 106; phone (806) 651-2335.

Title IX Statement

West Texas A&M University is committed to providing a learning, working and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free of sexual misconduct and discrimination. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. Harassment is not acceptable. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- WTAMU Title IX Coordinator Richard Webb – Old Sub, **or** call 806.651.3199
- WTAMU Counseling Services – Classroom Center 116, **or** call 806.651.2340
- WTAMU Police Department – 806.651.2300, **or** dial 911
- 24-hour Crisis Hotline – 800.273.8255, **or** 806.359.6699, **or** 800.692.4039
<https://www.notalone.gov/>

For more information, see the [Code of Student Life](#).

Evacuation Statement

If you receive notice to evacuate the building, please evacuate promptly but in an orderly manner. Evacuation routes are posted in various locations indicating all exits, outside assemble area, location of fire extinguishers, fire alarm pull stations and emergency telephone numbers (651-5000 or 911). In the event an evacuation is necessary: evacuate immediately do not use elevators; take all personal belongings with you; report to outside assembly area and wait for further information; students needing assistance in the evacuation process should bring this to the attention of the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

WT Attendance Policy for Core Curriculum Classes

For the purposes of learning assessment and strategic planning, all students enrolled in Core Curriculum courses at West Texas A&M University must swipe their Buff Gold cards through the card reader installed in the classroom/lab for each class/lab meeting.

Tentative course calendar. This calendar is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion

Week	Topic	Assignment/Readings Due Dates
1	Introduction Review of Assignments	Discussion
2	Conceptualizing and Measuring Poverty	Lister, R. (2004) <i>Poverty</i> , Cambridge (Introduction and Chapter 1: Defining Poverty) Discussion

Week	Topic	Assignment/Readings Due Dates
3	Distribution of Poverty	<p>Review the following links: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html U.S. Census Bureau, Historical income tables http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/index.html Watch: The Takeoff in Income Inequality: Emmanuel Saez https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2VwVH4WNY&index=3&list=PLZapTuSHtu-CeejcJGLVBLqNT-ipS0Idh Discussion & Self-Assessment/Reflection</p>
4	Theories of Poverty	<p>Brady, D. (2019). Theories of the causes of Poverty. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 45(1), p. 155-175 Watch: Labor Markets and Recession: Ann Stevens https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1ugybLMGzI&index=19&list=PLZapTuSHtu-CeejcJGLVBLqNT-ipS0Idh Short Paper #1</p>
5	Normalizing Poverty	<p>Rose, M. & Baumgartner, F. (2013). Framing the poor: Media coverage and U.S. poverty policy, 1960 – 2008. <i>Policy Studies Journal</i>, 41(1) p. 22 - 53 Discussion</p>
6	The Working Poor	<p>Willoughby, L. (2015). U.S. politicians say they want to help the working poor. But how many are there? <i>Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)</i>. Torraco, R. (2016). The persistence of working poor families in a changing U.S. job market. <i>Human Resource Development Review</i>, 2016, 15(1) Short Paper #2</p>
7	Underclass Culture and Race	<p>Ricketts, E. & Sawhill, I. (1988). Defining and measuring the underclass. <i>Journal of policy analysis and management</i>, 7(2), p. 316-325 Cumberworth, E. (2017) <i>The Underclass and the American Class Structure</i>. ProQuest Dissertation Publishing Gilens, M. (1996). Race and poverty in America: Public misperceptions and the American new media. <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i> 60(4) p. 513-535 Discussion</p>
8	Poverty and Health	<p>Wagstaff, (2002). Poverty and health sector inequalities. <i>Bulletin of the World Health Organization</i>, 80(2), p 97-105 Discussion</p>
9	Poverty and Education	<p>Watch: Gaps in Educational Attainment: Richard Breen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X2972bRuSQ&list=PLZapTuSHtu-CeejcJGLVBLqNT-ipS0Idh&index=22 What Influences Student Learning?: Richard Arum</p>

Week	Topic	Assignment/Readings Due Dates
		<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7LKSYUeCQo&list=PLZapTuSHtu-CeejcJGLVBLqNT-ipS0Idh&index=26</p> <p>Short Paper #3</p>
10	Poverty and Incarceration	<p>Braman, D. (2007). Race, poverty, and incarceration. <i>Poverty and Race</i>, 16(6), p. 1 – 12</p> <p>Covin, L. (2012). Homelessness, poverty and incarceration: The criminalization of despair. <i>Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice</i>, 12(5), p. 439 - 456</p> <p>Discussion</p>
12	Poverty and Housing	<p>Haizzan, Y.M et al. (2018). Urban poverty and housing: social work issues. <i>International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences</i>, 8(9)</p> <p>Lim, J., et al. (2017). Double danger in the double-wide: Dimensions of poverty, housing quality and tornado impacts. <i>Regional Science and Urban Economics</i>, 65. P. 1-15</p> <p>Rough Draft of Final Paper</p>
13	Welfare Programs	<p>Minoff, E. (2020). The racist roots of work requirements. <i>Center For The Study of Social Policy</i>.</p> <p>Dobson, K. & Knezevic, I. (2017). ‘Liking and sharing’ the stigmatization of poverty and social welfare: Representations of poverty and welfare through Internet memes on social media. <i>TripleC</i>, 15(2), p. 777 – 795</p> <p>Discussion</p>
14	Social Insurance Programs	<p>Huggett, M. & Parra, J. (2010). How well does the U.S. social insurance system provide social insurance? <i>The Journal of Political Economy</i>, 118(1), p. 76 - 112</p> <p>Discussion</p>
15	Other Anti-Poverty Programs	<p>Van Parijs, P. (1991). Why surfers should be fed: The liberal case for an unconditional basic income. <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i>, 20(2), p 101- 131</p> <p>Reed, H. & Lansley, S. (2016). Universal basic income: An idea whose time has come? <i>Compass Publication</i></p> <p>Discussion</p>
16		<p>Final Draft of Final Paper</p>

Appendix B

Discussion Questions

General instructions for discussion questions

Students are expected to participate in (almost) weekly discussions. The topic of each discussion will be provided by the instructor. Each person must post their initial post by Friday evening and respond thoughtfully to two of their peers. Initial posts should be around 350 words, with replies to your peers averaging 200. Discussion posts are expected to adhere to APA guidelines. Please remember the following core rules of netiquette:

Remember the Human

Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life

Make yourself look good online

Share expert knowledge

Be forgiving of other people's mistakes

No flaming

Week One

Introduction

What personal experience have you had with poverty, if any? This can range from experiencing poverty directly, knowing someone personally who experienced poverty, to working with clients experiencing poverty. What are the first two thoughts that come to mind when you hear the word poverty?

Week Two

Conceptualizing and Measuring Poverty

Identify two examples of "poverty" and explain why they represent this concept. Compare your conceptualization with those of your classmates and what you find in a dictionary. Can you improve your conceptualization based on some feedback?

Week Three

Distribution of Poverty

Watch the YouTube video titled "Wealth Inequality in the U.S" and answer the following questions. What fact was particularly surprising to you. Has this video challenge a belief that you have about wealth distribution? What questions do you have after watching this video.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/OPKKQnijnsM>

Week Five

Normalizing Poverty

Is poverty in the United States already normalized or in the process of becoming so? Is poverty considered an acceptable part of American life? Regardless of your viewpoint, provide a real-life example that supports your viewpoint.

Week Seven

Underclass Culture and Race

As discussed in the readings and in the lecture, the underclass is defined as the segment of the population that occupies the lowest possible position in a class hierarchy, below the working class. Do you agree that the U.S. has an underclass? Why or why not?

Week Eight

Poverty and Health

This week we spent a lot of time discussing poverty's impact on a person's health. Identify in one way that poverty can directly have a negative impact on a person's life and then propose a solution.

Week Ten

Poverty and Incarceration

Having completed your readings for this week, discuss a barrier to financial success a recently released offender may face in society. Discuss whether you think this barrier is just, and a potential solution to mitigate that barrier.

Week Thirteen

Welfare Programs

How do you feel about the welfare system in the U.S.? What change would you propose?

Week Fourteen

Social Insurance Programs

As you have learned, social insurance programs are government-sponsored programs that provide benefits based on individual contribution to that program. Examples include Medicare, social security, disability, and unemployment. Do you think these programs are effective? Why or why not.

Week Fifteen

Other Anti-Poverty Programs

Watch a YouTube video on the concept of universal basic income. What are your thoughts? Are you intrigued by this idea, or do you have misgivings? Explain your stance.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/OQjrhIyaPyg>

Rubric for discussions

Required Elements					
	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Fair (1)	Poor (0)	
Relevance of Post	Posting thoroughly answers the discussion prompts and demonstrates understanding of material with well developed ideas. Posting integrates assigned content and makes strong connections to practice.	Posting addresses most of the prompt(s) and demonstrates mild understanding of material with well developed ideas. Posting references assigned content and may not make connections to practice	Posting fails to address all components of the prompt. Makes short or irrelevant remarks. Posting lacks connection to practice	No posting	
	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Fair (1)	Poor (0)	
Quality of Post	Appropriate comments: thoughtful, reflective, and respectful of other's postings.	Appropriate comments and responds respectfully to other's postings.	Responds, but with minimum effort. (e.g. "I agree with Bill")	No posting	
	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Fair (1)	Poor (0)	
Contribution to the learning community	Post meaningful questions to the community; attempts to motivate the group discussion; presents creative approaches to topic.	Attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group; interacts freely	Minimum effort is made to participate in learning community as it develops	No feedback provided to fellow student(s).	
	Excellent (2)	Good (1)	Fair (0.5)	Poor (0)	

Mechanics	Writing is free of grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors	Writing includes less than 5 grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors	Writing includes 4-5 grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Writing contains more than 5 grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	
				Total:	/10

Appendix C

Self-Assessment/Reflection Paper

Students will write an essay that is no more than five pages reflecting on their current understanding of poverty. Students will attend to the following questions in their essay:

What experiences, if any, do you have with poverty?

At this time, what are the causes and consequences of poverty?

What social dynamics effect poverty?

What do you think is involved in providing a solution to poverty?

Please understand that the purpose of this assignment is for the student to do a self-assessment on their understanding of poverty. It is anticipated that students will have diverse opinions and beliefs on the subject matter. Do not attempt to write this essay trying to find the “correct” answer to these questions. The goal is to verbalize your answer and reflect how those beliefs were constructed. Perhaps these beliefs are based on what your family believes, what was taught in school, the images from newspapers and movies, etc. The goal is to explain what YOUR answer to these questions are, and why you currently hold those beliefs.

Paper Guidelines This paper should be no more than 5 pages; typed and double-spaced. The cover page and references do not count as part of the 5 pages. The following outline provides suggestions that may help you write a successful paper and meet the learning objectives outlined above. Additionally, please remember that page count means nothing without depth. **Title Page:** A title or cover page should include your paper’s title, name, course title, semester, university and department name, and date.

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (15 – 20 points)	Meet Expectations (10 – 15 points)	Approaches Expectations (5 – 10 points)	Needs Improvement (0- 5 points)
Completeness	Clearly and completely answers the assignment prompts. Adheres to the required length.	Almost completely answers the assignment prompts. Adheres to the required length.	Partially addresses the assignment prompts. Adheres to the required length	Does not address the assignment prompts.
Analysis	Rich, detailed description of individual’s	Full description of individual’s beliefs for each	Partial description of individual’s	Minimal or no description of individual’s

	beliefs for each and every prompt	and every prompt	beliefs for prompts	beliefs for prompts
Evidence	Clear attempt to integrate facts, relationships, and the student's beliefs for every prompt	Clear attempt to integrate facts, relationship, and the student's beliefs for some of the prompts	Slight or unclear attempt to integrate facts, relationship, and the student's beliefs for the prompts	Little to no attempt to integrate facts, relationship, and the student's beliefs.
Writing	Impressions plus critical reflection (i.e. exploration and critique of assumptions, values, beliefs, and/or biases)	Impression plus reflection (i.e. attempting to understand the prompts)	Impression without reflection	No impressions, reflection or introspection
Grammar/APA	Writing is clear throughout. APA guidelines used consistently. Minimal grammar issues.	Writing is clear. APA guidelines used with minimal errors. Few grammar issues.	Writing may be confusing at times. APA guidelines used with errors. Some grammar issues.	Writing is disjointed or difficult to read. APA guidelines are not used. Multiple grammar issues.

Appendix D

Short Papers

To help focus discussion and debate, each student will be required to write two (2) short (3-4 pages) papers answering the question assigned to either readings or activities as assigned. The cover page along with the reference page is not part of the page count. These short papers are to be written in APA format in terms of the paper being double-spaced and written in Times New Roman or Arial 12-point font. Students will have the ability to choose from the following activities for their short papers. Please note that each activity may only be used once.

Selected Activities:

Activity One

Online poverty stimulation. Please complete the poverty stimulation *Spent*. *Spent* may be found at <https://playspent.org>. It is strongly suggested that you attempt the stimulation multiple times as there are multiple starting points from which you can start the stimulation. Once completed, please complete the short paper answering the following questions:

How did the activity resonate with you?

What surprised you about the behavior and decisions made during the stimulation?

Did your attitude change at all as you were progressing through the stimulation?

What insights or conclusions have you come to about the life experience of low-income families?

How will your approach to clients/families be shaped by these issues and experiences?

Activity Two

Documentary. Please watch Poverty in the USA: Being Poor in the World's Richest Country. This documentary is free to watch and is available on YouTube. Please note that this documentary runs about 50 minutes in length. You may find the documentary here: <https://youtu.be/f78ZVLVdO0A>. Once you have watch the documentary, please complete the short paper assignment completing the following prompts:

Describe one fact, statistic, incident, story, or thing you remember from the documentary.

Describe any emotional reaction you had to the documentary. (this includes positive, negative, no emotion & other manifestations of emotions.)

In your opinion, what is the most important point expressed in this documentary?

How might you apply this to **one** of the following?

Your social work practice

Social worker practice in general (or whatever your practice is)

Activity Three

Personal interview. For this activity you should attempt to engage with a person who either is currently experiencing poverty or has personal experience with poverty in the past. Please note that this activity may be difficult to complete unless you have a rapport with the person being interviewed. Also, please adhere to the code of ethics which stipulates that we attempt to do no harm to our clients. If you find that the interview process is bringing up strong feelings or is negatively impacting the person being interviewed, end the interview. Here are some suggested interview questions:

Tell me about your childhood home?

How do you celebrate holidays?

How do you spend your paycheck?

Do you like your current home?

Do you experience hunger?

What services do you attempt to use (Food Banks, Welfare, etc.)

How helpful are these services?

Have you ever not had a home of your own?

How well did you succeed in school?

What would you do if you had a \$1000 dollars?

After completing the interview. Write your short paper based on the following prompts:

How did the activity resonate with you?

What surprised you about the behavior and decisions of the person you were interviewing?

Did your attitude change at all as you were progressing through the interview?

What insights or conclusions have you come to about the life experience of low-income families?

How will your approach to clients/families be shaped by these issues and experiences?

Appendix E
Final Project Paper Rough Draft
Final Project Paper

The final project for this class is an in-depth paper. Each person will choose a state, county, federal, international, or non-profit human service program that addresses poverty. The paper will describe how poverty affects who the clientele is, how they are viewed and treated and how resources are allocated to this program. It is advised that students start this project early in the semester. *Creativity and innovation is encouraged for this assignment such as the following: reviewing agency policies and procedures, interviewing administrators, clients, staff and volunteers in these programs.*

A rough draft of this paper is mandatory. The goal of the rough draft is to have completed sections so that the instructor can provide helpful suggestions on how to improve your work prior to the submission of the final draft. Please note that the rough draft is worth 150 points. Concerted effort is expected for this rough draft, and each section should be a completed essay.

Required Outline for the Final Project Paper/Presentation

I. Introduction of paper/presentation

Discuss the overview of your paper and presentation. Include all major sections that will be addressed. It is great to include statistics on poverty or similar agencies/programs addressing poverty, or lack thereof of such information.

II. Description of program selected and its clients

Describe the history of the agency and the specific program (including the legal base.) What problem is the program designed to solve? (It may not be designed to address poverty.) What do they do to solve the problem? What values are inherent in the approach to the situation targeted? Are these values congruent with social work values? What is the source of funding? How do clients become eligible for the program? How many clients are in the program? What are some examples of other related program issues/components?

III. How do poverty and inequality impact the program?

General Overview, e.g., What are *poverty and inequality* in the context of this program? What definition of poverty makes the most sense in this program's context? What are some other general issues?

A. Clients

What percentage of the client population is poor? Give demographics of the client population served. How does being poor make you more or less likely to have the problem the program (s) is (are) designed to solve? How are poor clients viewed as opposed to non-poor clients? How does inequality affect clients? What are some other related issues or descriptions of the clients?

B. Administratively and Socially

What are the attitudes of workers and program administrators to having poverty or inequality raised as an issue? Is it seen by employees or administrators as an important reason people might be in the program? Are some clients systemically excluded or included based on their income or class status, even if these are not explicitly stated criteria? What are some other related issues? Give examples for the questions.

IV. Advocacy and Social Change/NASW Code of Ethics

How does the agency/program address advocacy and social change efforts? Be as specific as possible. Provide examples of advocacy and social change effort activities carried out by the agency and/or program. Do the values of the programs align with the NASW Code of Ethics? Give examples. What are the roles of social workers in these agencies? What are the implications for social work practice, policy, and research?

V. Conclusion

What impact do poverty and inequality have on this program and its clients? How would the program be different if poverty or inequality was a more central focus of the program? What recommendations do you have for improving the program based on what you have learned? (Consider what policies need to be developed or modified. How can you as a social worker promote these policy changes?)