Identifying Student Poverty & Homelessness at Post-Secondary Institutions: A Prevention Opportunity

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Overview

Background of Study

Study Questions

Study Design & Methodology

Results

Some Conclusions/Considerations
Background

Unpublished study in Alberta – students self identified issues with housing, vulnerability to poverty, invisible homelessness (Gordon & Kovacs Burns, 2005)

Stats Canada (2000) – 20% of 300,000 homeless in Canada < 24 years old

Parents < 25 years old – 39% higher poverty (National Council of Welfare, 1999)
Study Questions

How vulnerable are post-secondary students to poverty and homelessness?

Are these issues of any concern to post-secondary institutions?

What services, information and supports exist on campus to assist students?

Whose responsibility is it to ensure students have what they need to be successful with their studies?
Study Design – Multi-Phased and Multiple & Mixed Methods

Student vulnerability to homelessness & poverty in post-secondary institutions

Questions/Issues to Explore

Phase 1: Student Survey

Phase 2: Document Analysis

Phase 3: Interviews

OUTCOMES from Study

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION INITIATIVES

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Phase 1 – Student Recruitment for Surveys

Contacted students through:

- Registrar’s office
- Random selection of 2000 students out of general student population (40,000)
- Email notices and invitations sent out with link to online survey
- Voluntary responses – implied consent
Survey for Students

I. Current living arrangements – where and with whom
II. Payment for accommodation – expenses for housing
III. Housing-related problems
IV. Assistance with accommodation – person to turn to or finding assistance
V. Accessing information on housing
VI. Know of other students experiencing problems
VII. Impact of accommodation personally
VIII. Other Supports/Services accessed

Descriptive Quantitative Analysis of surveys
Phase 2: Document Analysis

Post-secondary website and related links
Administration and International Student offices
Student’s buildings and residences
Others

Thematic analysis of documents
Phase 3: Targeted Interviews

Students – self identified and contacted study coordinator to be involved

University administration and faculty staff, service providers – targeted and snowballing contact

Interview guide based on survey results

Audiotaped and transcribed

Thematic analysis
Results

Survey respondents:
Students – 526/2000
1/3 had housing problems; 2/3 had financial challenges

Documents gathered for analysis: 20 documents (2010-2012) – general institutional (student services & online guides/advice); Aboriginal Student Services; International Student Services on & off campus; On-campus residence; and Student Associations

Interviews: 6 students; and 15 of 21 invited participants from campus and off-campus offices, services and supports, administration, Faculty staff and student associations
Phase 1 - Student Survey Results

- 62% Living Location
- 30% Living With Parents
- 23% Living With Spouse &/or Children
- 23% Living With Friends
- 13% Not on Campus, Campus Residence
- 10% Not for use without permission. KKovacsBurns June 2014
Impact of Accommodation on...... Having Someone to stay with & assistance/information

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<th>Impact of Accommodation</th>
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Factors Impacting on Acquiring Housing (Agree/strongly agree)

- Lack of student loans: 40%
- Lack of information: 43%
- Lack of work opportunities: 41%
- Cost of living: 80%
- Cost of rent: 87%
- Shortage of affordable Housing: 73%
- High Tuition Fees: 82%
Which of the following assistance have you ever used?

- Food Bank: 32%
- Hostel/shelter: 8%
- Financial subsidy: 9%
- Family: 4%
- Friends: 8%
- Other: 73%
Phase 2 - Document Analysis

All 20 documents were online, printable and available to students (at orientation or in general), staff and administration as well as service providers.

Different types available – written handbooks, factsheets, videos and contact lists; links to government or other sites provided.

Information on housing on and off-campus available at different sites.

Access to help lines, health centres, financial aid and other advice available to students and staff.

Service providers information available and accessible.
Phase 3 – Interview Themes (condensed)

- Vulnerability of Students
- Housing Options & Choices
  - Campus Housing
  - Off-campus Housing
  - Housing Choices
  - Housing Information
- Student Housing Concerns/Issues
- Tuition Issues
- Communication, Supports & Services
- Responsibility for Student Housing
  - Post-Secondary Institution Role/Responsibility
  - Student Role/Responsibility
- Institutional Challenges to Address
  - Housing
  - Students at Risk
  - Support System & Funding
  - Campus Values, Policy & Changes

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Qualitative - Quotes

“most people would not associate homelessness with getting a university degree.” (Administrator)

“there’s no policies for example that say a student has to have a mailing address, or a student has to have a home… I don’t know if there’s a policy that says a student can’t couch surf…” (Campus Administrator)
“the information isn’t really accessible…. To be honest, I’m like, woefully ignorant when it comes to the support that is available for people. So…I honestly wouldn’t know what I would do, because I just feel like I don’t know the supports that are available” (Student Association Executive).

“when international students come, they need a better understanding of what they’re signing on for….they sign all the things saying they’re prepared, but they’re really not. They don’t have enough cash, to do more than tuition, and …They don’t have an idea what it’ll cost to get winterized, themselves or their home.” (Faculty staff)
Conclusions

Campus services need to be appropriately funded to support students.

Institutional policies and procedures need to be more student-centred.

Perceptions varied regarding how known and accessible student information and services were.

Institution, Family & Student responsibility to ensure that students’ non-academic needs are met.
Perspectives were similar around the need to
• improve communications between students and staff or services to identify & assist students at risk
• centralize information and services
• create a more supportive campus environment for
  - students to be successful
  - service providers to be better prepared to assist vulnerable students with financial, housing and other challenges.
Publications


Thank you!

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