Homelessness and Social Isolation in Ontario County

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Abstract

In January of 2018, The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that approximately 533,000 individuals experienced homelessness on any given night in the United States. In the Ontario County alone, Family Promise of Ontario County identified 345 homeless school-aged children in the last year. In conjunction with Family Promise of Ontario County, Saoirse and Kahiya are investigating the relationship between homelessness and social isolation. They will be using in-depth interviews to collect data on this relationship. Their participants will be the heads of their family unit who were or are currently experiencing homelessness. They will use this methodology in order to garner a better understanding of which support these families rely on and seek out before, during, and after periods of homelessness. They have broken this support into three types: Emotional (expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care), Instrumental (tangible aid and service), and Informational (advice, suggestions, and information). They will be coding these interviews to uncover common themes in individuals’ stories of how homelessness affected their family and ultimately their connection with their community. They will give their analysis to Family Promise of Ontario County, an organization who works with homeless families in the area, so they can structure their services to best fit the needs of current and future families. They will also be gathering quantitative data on eviction in Ontario County to support our qualitative research. *Qualitative interviews are ongoing.*

Introduction

Social science research in the 1950’s and 60’s of skid row residents defined homelessness “in terms of personal ties and relationships to the broader society” rather than a housing problem (Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness, Shlay and Rossi 1992, p. 132).

Research Question

How does homelessness influence social isolation?

Hypothesis

Families experiencing homelessness will experience high levels of social isolation without social support.

Conceptualization

Homelessness: Lacking a fixed permanent address
Social Isolation: A lack of social support
Social Support: The perception and actuality that an individual is cared for, has assistance from other people and is a member of a social network. These networks provide support during stressful events

Method

QUANTITATIVE

We gathered data from multiple organizations (DataUSA // Geneva NY HUD Homes // EvictionLab.org) that work with housing and evictions in the city of Geneva. We gathered data on several characteristics of Geneva County as compared to Ontario County and NY state. We compiled the information in an excel sheet and created visual representations of the data.

QUALITATIVE

For the second part of our research, we conducted in-depth interviews with individual families to garner a better understanding of the relationship between homelessness and social isolation. Due to this population being difficult to locate, we will be utilizing the convenience sampling method to gather our sample, as well as flyers to gather a larger sample pool. We recorded the data on our phones, transcribed the interviews on our laptops and then coded the transcriptions without use of qualitative software to find common themes. We expected a low sample size for interviews due to the population.

Quantitative Data

Table 1: (top left) Poverty Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: (top right) Median Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>$53,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: (bottom left) Rent Burden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Rent Burden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Profile of Geneva

- Geneva has approximately 13,136 citizens
- The median household income is around $37,975 which is slightly below the poverty line for a family of three. ($38,443)
- The most common job sectors are administrative (11.4%), sales (11.2%), education/training/library (10.7%), food service (9.8%) and management (6.2%)
- Food Service and Sales earn the least amount of money in Geneva

Comparison of Geneva and Ontario County

- Overall in Ontario County, Geneva has a higher poverty rate than the Ontario County poverty rate being 10.7% as compared to Geneva’s 21.7%
- The median household income of Ontario County in 2016 was $58,070 dollars
- Men aged 18-24 are the largest group at risk of being impoverished in Geneva. While women aged 18-24 are more likely to be impoverished than men in Ontario County.
- Occupations in Ontario County with the highest percentage are management (10.2%), sales (11.9%), administrative (11.7%), and education/training and library (7.9%)

Conclusion

Quantitative Overall we found that Geneva had an extremely high poverty rate when compared to Ontario County and New York State. We can see that Geneva’s median income is lower than both Ontario County and NY state. However, their rent burden is consistently higher than Ontario County. The job sector in Geneva is also dominated by lower-income work. If people in Geneva are earning less money but are on average spending more on their income on housing this may put a severe strain on their overall budget.

Qualitative We deduced from our research that informal emotional support and transportation are the most important resources for the individuals we talked to. All of the individuals we interviewed talked about their need for transportation in order to get to and from their jobs. Without this institutional support from their social network the participants would not be able to keep their jobs. We also noticed that these cases of homelessness stemmed not only from financial problems but also from interpersonal conflict within their original social or familial network.

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