Perceptions of Homelessness and Mental Illness

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Introduction

Background
• CA has more than half of all unsheltered people in the country
  • 20.5% of homeless have mental illness (HUD)
  • 15.7% of homeless have substance abuse problem (HUD)
• Public opinion → Policy formation
  • Misperceptions of homeless and those with mental illness → poor policy implementation

Goals
• 1) Quantify accuracy of public’s understanding of homeless and attitudes towards group
  • Emphasis on stigma and mental illness
• 2) Compare our results to recent study results

Methods
• Undergraduate students at Chapman University and Dominican University
  • N = 77 (removed 19 Ps)
• Demographics:
  • Ages 18-27
  • 63% Liberal, 23% Moderate, 8% Conservative, 8% Apolitical
  • 57% Female, 21% male
  • 52% White

Procedures
• Survey posted on SONA systems at Chapman, sent by professors, etc.
• Validated survey assessed:
  • 1) Perceptions of demographic characteristics of homeless
  • 2) Views of homeless and mental illness
  • 3) Willingness to support policy measures
  • Comparison of means between Tsai et al.’s study in 2016 of national sample (n = 541) vs. our study with undergraduate sample

Results

Beliefs and Attitudes about Homeless

Comparison of Tsai et al. Study Means and Current Study Means

Discussion

Implications
• Significant differences between undergraduate sample and Tsai’s national sample
• Liberal attitudes toward homeless among undergraduate students
• Stigma surrounding homeless and mental illness; need for interventions

Limitations
• Undergraduate students are not representative of national population
  • Small sample size (n = 77) vs. Tsai’s sample (n = 541)

Future Directions
• Send survey to national population via Amazon Mechanical Turk
  • Intervention to correct misperceptions and encourage supporting beneficial policies

Figure 1
• Stigma associated with mentally ill homeless people
• Belief of alcohol and drug-free policy contradicts findings that Housing First programs are better than Treatment First programs that require sobriety

Figure 2
• All were significant differences at α = 0.05 between undergraduate students and national sample (2-tailed t-tests run to compare means)
• More liberal attitudes from undergraduate students

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