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Perceptions of Homelessness and Mental Illness

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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, 5% 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

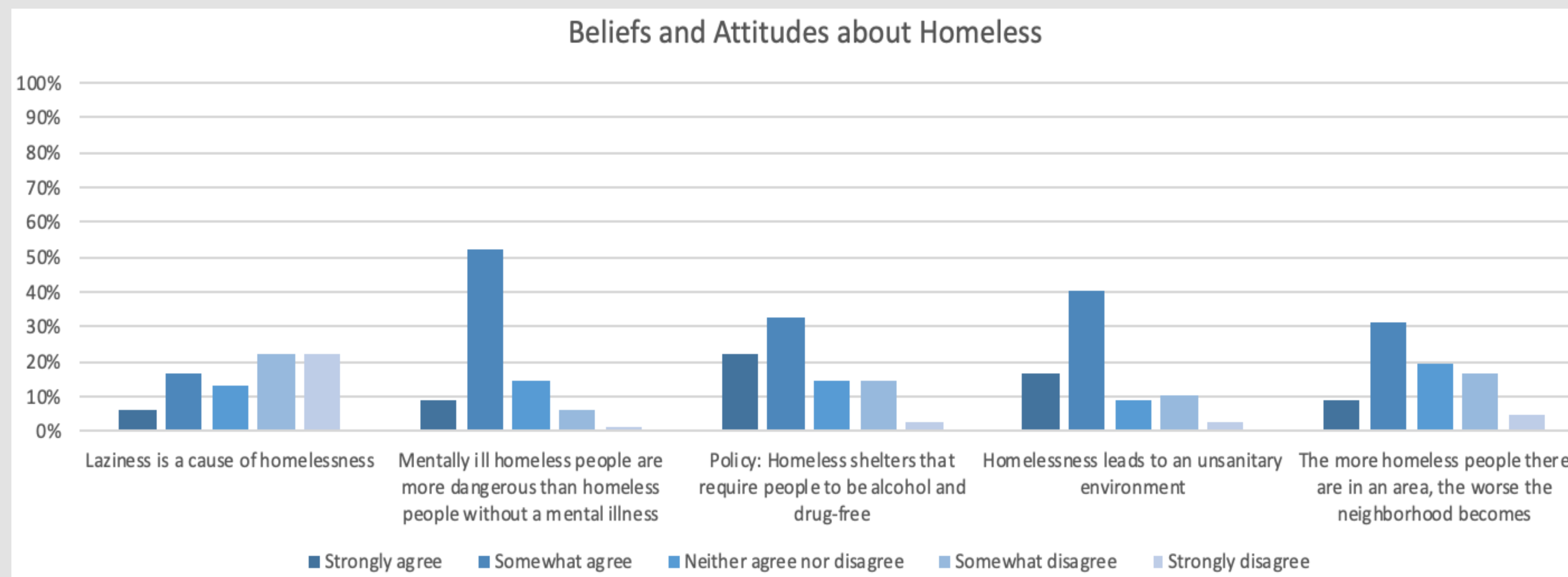


Figure 1

- 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

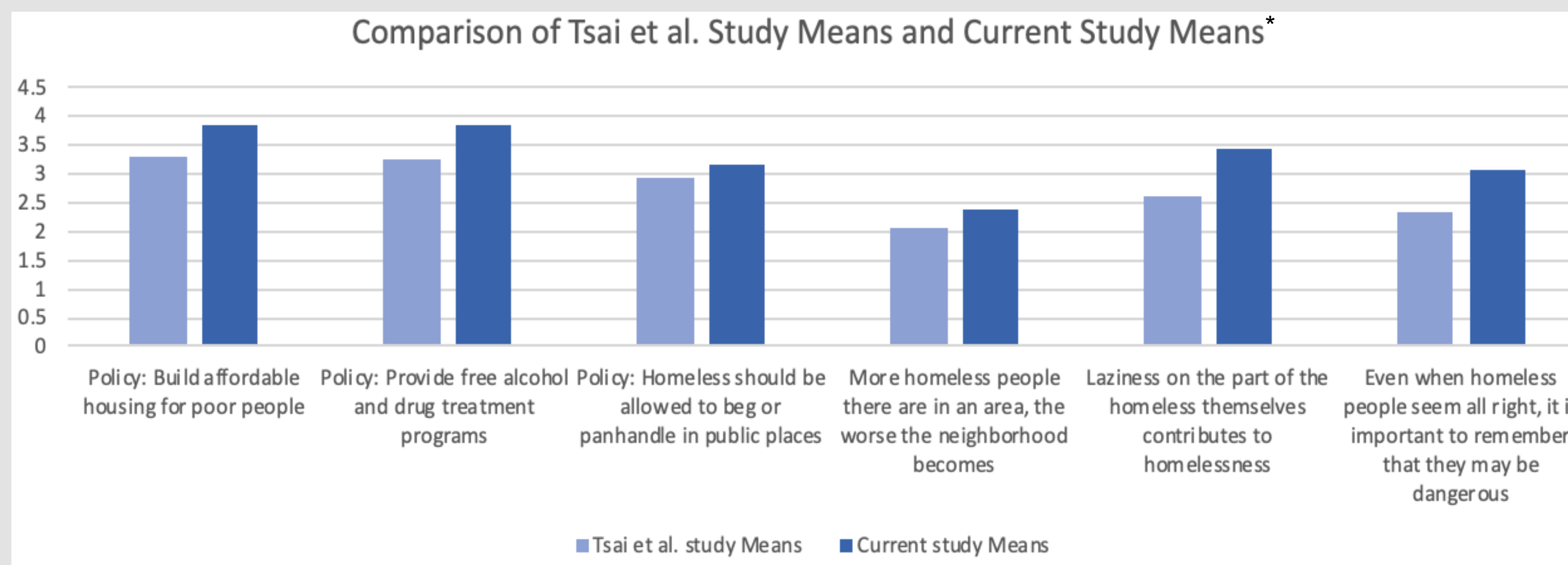


Figure 2

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

*Means were coded so that higher scores reflect greater endorsement of federal support, more compassionate and liberal attitudes, and fewer internal attributions about homeless individuals

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

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