



Research Update

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Articles, quotes, and commentaries reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of ESPC.

“Bisexuality, poverty and mental health: A mixed method analysis” by Ross et al. (Social Science & Medicine, 2016)

Reviewed by Irene Kakai

Ross et al. (2016) begin their analysis by discussing existing research that suggests an overall relationship between mental health and poverty. The focus on bisexuality in the paper is due to limited research on this group, with usual lumping of individuals who identify as bisexual with sample data of those who identify as lesbian or gay. Therefore, an examination of this relationship is meant to conceptualize and address health/income differences in the community (p. 64-65).

Particular relationships explored in this study include: the association of poverty and mental health amongst bisexual individuals; whether disclosure of sexual orientation and perceived discrimination of those living below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) has social implications compared to those living above it; and whether bisexuality and experiences related to poverty intersect to impact health and well-being (p. 65).

This paper is vital for researchers, clinicians, policy makers and LGBT community practitioners interested in addressing the financial inaccessibility of mental health services, as well as understanding specific issues that influence mental health and socioeconomic status of individuals who identify as bisexual.

Ross et al. (2016) define poverty as living below Canada's LICO, while mental health indicators in the study include depression, suicidality, post traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. The closest definition for bisexuality is: attraction to

more than one sex/gender. Demographic data is also collected and includes age, sex and ethnicity. To evaluate 'outness', the MOSSWS Scale is used to indicate the level of openness one has to their sexual identity; while the Perceived Discrimination Scale is used to measure major and micro experiences of discrimination. The quantitative data is evaluated using chi tests, t-tests and linear regressions, while the qualitative interviews are assessed using grounded theory approach (p. 65-67).

In examining the effects of poverty and mental health on sexual orientation disclosure and perceived discrimination the authors indicate several findings. First, those below the LICO had higher mean scores in two psychological distresses with no differences in suicidal attempts compared to those above the LICO. In addition, when the data is adjusted for demographic factors, those below LICO were found to be more 'out' than those living above LICO (p. 67).

From the qualitative findings, four pathways explain the interconnectedness of the three variables. The authors find that: early life experiences linked to bisexuality or poverty have an impact on current poverty or mental health; bisexuality has an impact on income/employment which further affects mental health; poverty and/or bisexuality is linked to discrimination which contributes to a lack of social support and results in poor mental health; poverty and bisexuality combined limit

access to appropriate mental health services and further impacts mental health (p. 67-70).

While both aspects of the study explain interconnectedness, more depth could be provided if the pathways in relation to the quantitative findings were elaborated, specifically with the mental health indicators being studied. In addition, the definition of bisexuality in the paper is limited to an attraction based definition (p. 65 & 70), hence an exploration of the complicated nature of operationalizing sexuality is necessary. Furthermore, there is support for the minority stress model as it relates to racial and sexual minorities, however, the used

definition of the minority stress model in this paper seems to suggest that the model only explains sexual identity stress (p. 65).

Of the participants who provided data to calculate LICO, 76 of 296 were living under the poverty line and were found to identify as trans and Aboriginal in comparison to those living above the LICO. This is a large number considering the demographic data in the follow up interviews that shows 85% white participants. This speaks to the need for extended research on marginalized populations, since higher levels of poverty are found amongst the few marginalized participants (p. 65- 71).

Publication source: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953616301095>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Irene Kakai graduated with a Combined Bachelors Degree in Applied Economics and Psychology. Her current research interests include Global Mental Health, Economics of Health and Economic Development. She currently works with Chrysalis: An Alberta Society for Citizens with Disabilities.

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“Child Poverty and Family Structure during the Recession in English-speaking Liberal Welfare States” by Rothwell and McEwen (Luxembourg Income Study, February 2016)

Reviewed by Shion Aonuma

In this article, Rothwell and McEwen (2016) investigate various welfare regimes during an economic crisis. In particular, they examine: the market and social policy transfers; the effects of taxes on child poverty; and how child poverty is impacted by family structure. The intent of this paper is to address social economists, likely in the sector that deals with child welfare, and to understand the impact of policy on the market, which inadvertently impacts child welfare.

According to Rothwell and McEwen (2016) the group that has the lowest risk of poverty are children in married families (p.14). In addition, children are indirectly affected by the recession through the economic impact on the family, and this impact outlasts the economic pressure of the recession. It is also important to recognize that social policy also shapes the living standards of children and families. Children in male-headed single family households have less risk of experiencing poverty than children in single female-headed families. Therefore, it is important to recognize that household poverty is influenced by factors such as the number of adults in the household, the marital status of household, and the gender of the household head.

Rothwell and McEwen (2016) state that earnings, transfers, and taxes have large influences on child poverty and this impact varies between countries (p. 20). Countries like

Canada and Australia have low proportions of children living in single person families, whereas Ireland, UK, and U.S. have more children living in single person families. Canada was found to have the lowest proportion of single female families and the UK had the highest. This data illustrates that children living in married families experience the lowest risk of poverty, and children in single parent male-headed families have lower poverty rates than household with female-heads.

There are several limitations to this article. First, because the impact of a recession on children is staggered, the true impact of the 2008 recession is still not known as not enough time has passed. Second, there are numerous other factors that contribute to child welfare outside of recession conditions, so an unbiased comparison is excessively difficult, especially when extrapolating across countries, even though they may all share the designation of a welfare state.

Transfer gaps associated with certain parts of the population falling through the crack is a significant issue. Governments may end up neglecting parts of the population due to inadequate policy priorities that do not address certain contingencies. In order to make sure nobody is left behind policy needs to be drafted that allows for a multitude of situations and economic factors that contribute to child poverty during recession times.

“Rural Homelessness in Canada: Directions for Planning and Research” by Schiff, Schiff, Turner & Bernard (Journal of Rural and Community Development, 2015)

Reviewed by Hanna Nash

In this article, rural homelessness in Canada is researched with an emphasis on looking for information outside of statistics on urban homelessness. Schiff, Schiff, Turner & Bernard (2015) identify how rural homelessness manifests itself and examine the conditions and consequences of rural homelessness in Canada.

The authors of this article discover that existing statistics and information on rural homelessness are very difficult to procure. Most available research extracts data from urban communities where resources such as shelters and charities are already created and can therefore be used readily to ascertain data. The majority of research used in this article was obtained from what little information could be found from Canadian as well as American and British sources. The difficulty the authors stress repeatedly is that the research they looked at mostly involves community-by-community studies, rather than studies by the issues affecting each province. The authors believe that by studying rural homelessness through a provincial/territorial approach, patterns and themes would emerge from the data and would therefore reveal the true state of rural homelessness in Canada (p. 86).

The available studies the authors examine show that quite often rural homelessness reveals itself uniquely. People experiencing homelessness in rural areas often find short-term living accommodations with friends

and relatives, until they are able to find permanent housing. Additionally, the authors found that although many people in rural Canada may live in a home, the conditions of their homes are such that they are unfit for habitation or overcrowded to be considered comfortable and safe. Conditions such as these fall into the category of rural homelessness, where residents may continue to have a shelter, but it is not thought to be adequate or sustainable housing (p. 88).

The studies the authors look at for this article, bring attention to the crisis of rural homelessness in Canada. Homelessness has long been thought to only exist in urban areas, but may in fact be just as widespread in rural areas. The difficulty to prove this lies in the fact that proxy indicators are used in this article instead of statistical information. This gives some indication of the scope of rural homelessness in Canada, but does not give an accurate portrayal of the problem and therefore what recommended steps society can take to resolve it.

The authors of this article examine the unexpected and different complications of rural homelessness that ultimately lead to the same outcome as with an urban area. For example, the researchers brought forward that while many small communities are known for helping out friends and family in time of crisis, residents who have difficulties such as mental health issues, alcoholism, financial difficulties etc., may

be even less likely to receive any help compared to an urban setting as their community members may not want to associate themselves with a problematic person. However, information such as is was incomplete, without any measureable results. Therefore, an accurate indication of what and how many people experiencing rural homelessness encounter cannot be determined.

The readership for this article could potentially be anyone from an academic to a member of general public who is interested in learning more about rural homelessness. Although technical information is included about gathering information and conducting research methods, a person with post-secondary education would be able to read this article with ease.

Publication source: <http://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/view/1230/293>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Hanna Nash is a graduate of Grant MacEwan's Journalism program and enjoys writing whenever she gets the chance. Currently, she is a Coordinator for the Alberta Ballet and loves all things that have to do with the performing arts, gardening and animals.

“Shrinking the Need for Homeless Shelter Spaces” by Kneebone and Wilkins (School of Public Policy, May 2016)

Reviewed by Maxwell Harrison

In order to set the stage for their study, Kneebone and Wilkins (2016) note that previous work has found that homelessness is an exceedingly complex social phenomenon. As a means of understanding homelessness they adopt a view which posits that homelessness can be partially understood as being affected by structural factors (i.e. employment and housing) and the personal characteristics (i.e. addiction and mental illness) of the afflicted populations. Those homeless due to structural factors suffer from the combined effects of a lack of job opportunities, limited housing options, and insufficient government assistance; however, the bulk of individuals in the throes of homelessness are typically only in such a state for limited periods (p. 1-3).

In this study, the researchers seek to determine what guides the provision of the roughly two-thirds of shelter beds provided for those who suffer from homelessness, mainly as a consequence of structural factors. The authors examine demographic data and a metric for housing affordability drawn from 51 Canadian cities. Employing this information, the authors chart the impact that select poverty reduction measures could have in facilitating the closure of shelter beds resulting from reduced demand (p. 5).

For the first portion of the analysis the researchers attempt to establish the relationship between the number of emergency beds provided per capita, and a city's climate, cost of living, and the effect of housing

discrimination, specifically against the aboriginal and new migrant populations (p. 5-6).

As can be expected, governments across Canada provide for more beds in cities with colder winter temperatures and higher costs of living. The results suggest that for every one degree Celsius fall “in the average overnight temperature in January...” social agencies and governments will increase the number of shelter beds per adult by 3 per cent. Moreover, for every “one per cent increase in the ratio of social assistance income to rent...” cities reduce the ratio of shelter beds to adult population by 1.15 per cent (p. 7-8).

The analysis did not tease out any indication there was a significant relationship between a city's new migrant population and the number of shelter beds provided. Conversely, there was linkage between the number of beds offered and the relative size of city's aboriginal population. The results suggest the discrimination against aboriginal peoples could be at play in Canadian city's housing markets (p. 7-8).

Kneebone and Wilkins (2016) acknowledge that a broad range of policy tools can be used to tackle a city's homelessness challenges. For this study the analysis focuses on social assistance stipends and housing subsidies. The results suggests that a relatively modest increase of \$1,500 annually in the social assistance stipends provided to affected “single employable” persons would permit providers to close 2,599

shelter beds across Canada. This is a reduction of 18 per cent. Similarly, a mere \$100 per month increase in rent subsidies would permit the closure 2,975 beds (p. 8).

The researchers stress that such subtle “market solution(s)” could prove less costly for taxpayers, provide more flexibility to cater to individuals’ differing circumstances, and steer clear of the pitfalls associated with government provided housing units (p. 9).

Given the multidimensional nature of homelessness, it seems unlikely this relatively simple analysis would prove as straightforward as this paper suggests. The findings do, however, provide some initial indications about

the positive effects of increasing social assistance and providing housing subsidies. Further research is needed to determine the most effective combination of policy prescriptions.

In the article, Kneebone and Wilkins (2016) call into question the government’s haphazard approach in providing increases in social assistance to Canada’s most economically vulnerable populations (p. 10). If governments are serious about ending homelessness, the first step is to assure that those already in tenuous economic situations are able to remain in their homes by assuring their rents are paid.

Publication source: <http://www.policyschool.ucalgary.ca/?q=content/shrinking-need-homeless-shelter-spaces>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Maxwell Harrison is a lifelong resident of the Edmonton area. He attended the University of Alberta where he received his Bachelors of Science. Mr. Harrison has worked as a private consultant, with the Public Service, and as an environmental researcher. Recently, he has qualified to become a Professional Biologist. Maxwell is currently employed as an energy policy analyst. Mr. Harrison is also on the Board of Directors for his Electoral District Association and Edmonton Social Planning Council. Maxwell has a special interest in social issues, politics and the overall civic life of his community.

“Why Some Children Come to School with ‘Baggage’: The Effects of Trauma Due to Poverty, Attachment Disruption and Disconnection on Social Skills and Relationships” by Wilkinson (Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 2016)

Reviewed by Penolopie David

In this article, Wilkinson (2016) outlines three causative factors to address why some children who have experienced adversity in their lives come to school with “baggage.”

The first reason the author discusses is trauma due to poverty, putting it simply as “those who have been loved, love” and “those who have been hurt, often hurt others” (p. 182). Out of resignation to their current situation, some parents who live in poverty and other stressful conditions fail to acknowledge emotional needs of children. Other parents who surrender to addiction in an attempt to cope with hopelessness lead to domestic violence and aggression. This failure of forming meaningful familial relationships creates lasting detrimental effects on children’s social skills since they have little to no experience of compassion (p. 181).

The author identifies the second factor as trauma due to attachment disruption. Wilkinson (2016) argues that separation of children from primary caregivers has painful repercussions psychologically (p. 174). For instance, the author indicated that “it is no accident that 40% of aboriginal prison inmates in Canada today” were taken away from their parents at a young age, and survived residential schools with “horrific living conditions” (p. 183). The author also claims that inconsistent attachment, such as being bounced around between one foster home to

another, leads to insecurity, damaging the right brain development (p. 178). This adjustment to different substitute cares compromises the children’s ability to form strong secure relationships with others.

Finally, Wilkinson (2016) examines the problems encountered by families at the upper end of socioeconomic spectrum. Parents from privileged environments often do not allocate enough bonding time with their kids due to work commitments, resulting in disconnection among the family. The author reiterates that this unhealthy attachment can negatively influence the capability of the children in forging appropriate relationships in the future. In addition, the author briefly tackled power parenting in three ways: 1) showering children with expensive materials in an attempt to purchase love; 2) “attempt[ing] to design children’s lives rather than watch and wait for them to unfold”; and 3) “put[ting] undue pressure on children to succeed” (p. 188-189).

The author cited the study conducted by Schore (2002) that demonstrates the irreversible “manifestations of right brain growth and development” occurred in the critical period (p. 190). Findings from others like this made Wilkinson (2016) conclude that the brain is malleable, especially during sensitive periods, and that self-control is a skill that depends on

early childhood environment (p. 191).

As valuable this article may be, it does have deficiencies. Data was not collected primarily by Wilkinson (2016), relying too heavily on the conclusions from others. This limits the questions that can be addressed. In the last example of power parenting, the author believes that it can cause “depression and anxiety in their children”, with no evidence to back it up (p. 189). It is no surprise the author recommends “more scientific research needs to be conducted to examine the physiological and psychological costs of growing up in affluence” (p. 187).

I would suggest that a separate study for privileged families should be conducted because of the complexities of their situation. Wilkinson (2016) acknowledged the issue that people don’t usually think children from wealthy backgrounds are at-risk. Aside from the susceptibility to physical and emotional abuse, they also have

problems that poor families do not experience, such as over-indulgence. Furthermore, exhaustive discussion of power parenting can benefit educators in comprehending children’s behaviour since it was briefly mentioned in this paper. This is to adjust the programming and policies in school to accommodate everyone’s needs.

As the author repeatedly emphasized, this article is an important contribution to schools which are crucial in the healing process of children at-risk. Apart from educators, this is also geared towards the people making decisions in family courts since this will guide them in better understanding the consequences of attachment disruption. They will have to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of removing the children from home due to emotional and physical threats, knowing that it leads to profound trauma that has long-lasting negative effects.

Publication source: <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cjfy/article/view/27147/20245>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH REVIEWER:



Penolpie David is a fourth year Mathematics and Economics student at the University of Alberta. Her interests include research, financial services, non-profits, social policy, and coding. She currently serves as Co-Chair of UAlberta Women in Science and Engineering.

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Through our social policy research and advocacy efforts, we hope to create a healthy, just and inclusive community.

-The Edmonton Social Planning Council

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ABOUT

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THE RESEARCH UPDATE:

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