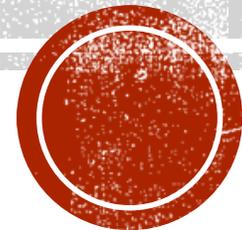


STUDENT HOMELESSNESS IN POST- SECONDARY SCHOOLS: AN INTRODUCTORY CASE STUDY

**Conference Paper for the Canadian Alliance to End
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“DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY TO FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU'RE SLEEPING THAT NIGHT. IT MAKES IT FAR MORE STRESSFUL. TRY TO FOCUS ON CLASS THE BEST YOU CAN AND KNOW THAT IF YOU STICK WITH IT, IT WILL PASS. REACH OUT AND LET PEOPLE KNOW THE SITUATION THAT YOU'RE IN, EVEN IF YOU'RE EMBARRASSED ABOUT IT BECAUSE IT MAY NOT EVEN BE YOUR FAULT. MAKE SURE YOU'RE FED AND JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD UP.”(RDC STUDENT, 2018)



MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

- Lack research specifically examining homelessness(es) in the post-secondary sector in Canada, even though many researchers agreed that there must be some. We asked ourselves, “who is working on this and why are we not aware of each other?”



NARRATIVE SUPPORT

- Discussions with students across Canada and the US who had, in the past, been homeless while studying and had been forced to drop out, or who were currently homeless and studying, spoke to their worries about educational outcomes
- Their stories suggested that they were less likely to achieve scholastic, social, personal and professional goals.
- Spoke to this as an enduring and common experience in their networks



CANADA BASIC NUMBERS

- In 2016, there were approximately 5 million students in public elementary and secondary schools in Canada and 2,034,957 in post-secondary institutions . Together these groups represent approximately 20% of the Canadian population
- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/151119/dq151119d-eng.htm>
- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/449105/enrollment-in-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools-in-canada/>
- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710001101>



THE RDC BASELINE TEST

- 1. 84% Female, 14 % male and 2.5% Gender Queer/Gender Non-conforming
- 2. 83% Canadian, 9% FNMI, 8% Ethnic Canadian
- 3. 55% between 18 and 22 years of age
- 4. 18.5% very well-off families, 40% well-off, 25% - well off and optimistic (please see survey for categories)
- 5. 60% earned less than 15,000 CDN/yr., 22% earned 15-24,000 CDN/yr.



THE RDC BASELINE TEST

- Simple Survey – 40 Questions
- 184 responses out of a potential pool of 1200 students from nursing, social work, sociology and business departments
- No sample was selected per se; part of the study was to get an idea of who was willing to reply to the survey
- Estimate response rate of 16.4%
- Long answers and some data suggest motivation of some respondents related to prior trauma, chosen field of study and prior lived experience



THEMATIC FINDINGS



MENTAL HEALTH

- 43% of respondents had had mental health diagnoses. 23.7% were ongoing We found this a curious, if not troubling result; it is twice the expected rate. It could mean that students with this experience were more likely to fill out the survey



PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH HOMELESSNESS

- 31.4 % of current students said they had previously experienced homelessness (as defined by the COH typology) and that 52.5 % of those were students at that time
- 70% of this was “hidden homelessness” - 7% had lived completely unsheltered
- 37/39 (42 in total) respondents to this question, experienced this as post-secondary students



CURRENTLY HOMELESS

- 3.6% reported that they were currently homeless. (2.7% if looking at only youth 18-25)



STRESS

- 31% of students said they worried about their housing and this stress was a major concern impacting the performance of 48% of these people. (Respondents offered elaborate explanations of what this stress looks like)



TACTICS AND RESILIENCE

- Alarming, almost 40% of students suggested they would do anything to find shelter. And this has obvious implications for understanding the criminalization and exploitation of youth. 72.5% of respondents would couch surf while 14.4% would sleep in a car or RV
- In our report we also remark on the resilient nature of students who fight for their education despite hardship
- We are cataloguing techniques and other adaptations



STIGMA

- 71% of students are aware of the issue, but they see the stigma attached to it as the reason few people talk about it. They also suggest that they have no idea to whom they should talk, if it is an issue.
- In Red Deer, especially, the idea of being unsheltered or temporarily at risk of homelessness is sometimes seen as hardship, not actual homelessness – relate to boon and bust economy
- Students hide the issue so as not to be compared to others seen by the mainstream as undeserving (for some this included stories told about Indigenous persons and the historical isolation of the “problem” to those communities)



THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

- 77% of students think that schools ought to play a central role in addressing the issue. Furthermore, 78.6% felt that students should not have to leave school because of poverty and lack of housing. This supports the premise that for our respondents, school is seen as a basic and necessary right of all persons wishing to obtain it



EDUCATION AS A BASIC RIGHT

- 72.9% of respondents felt that housing and education are basic rights that a combination of all levels of government should support



INDIGENEITY AND STUDENT POVERTY

- Of Red Deer's 100, 418 residents, 5,185, or 5.3% are Indigenous, which is a 13% increase from the previous census. This is slightly higher than the national average of 4.9%. 7.7% of our respondents were FNMI
- Have not cross-tabulated Indigeneity with other outcomes (Treating this in a separate document)
- However, informal discussions about the project with Indigenous students overwhelmingly suggests that they see the reserve system in Alberta as a form attenuated homelessness, and worse as a sort of "cruel joke," as one student put it



WHO TO TALK TO – UTILIZING AN EXISTING STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS

- Of those that did identify individuals to speak to, 42% selected a teacher/instructor, 31.4% chose a friend, and 11% selected student services. Clearly this indicates that from a structural perspective, in line with the observation that started this summary, educators are key agents for addressing this issue



NEXT STEPS

- Surveys under way at University of New Brunswick, Univ. of Calgary and Lakehead University
- Compare data across sites
- Critical Analysis of data and look for gaps
- Secure adequate funding from various sources
- Establish a nationwide survey and interview protocol for next step study
- Convene a working group of scholars, educators and students to discuss findings and observations
- Quickly upstream solutions and find tie-ins with other poverty reduction plans
- Publish results and engage media



FINAL WORDS

- ***“[sic] ... i have to not focus on the bills and pray food will come, or my husband will get some overtime. saying no to things my child wants to do but we cannot afford it like gymnastics or a holiday. try not to get depressed or anxious. feelings of being a failure and suicide often come up. i have to focus on the positive and believe that going to school will get me a good paying job. we have an over 60,000 of credit card debt. gambling contributed to that and me not being able to get work during school hours so i could be home with my child. my husband works shift work. sitters are expensive. for example, working at fast food places they want you available for all shifts. by the time i pay a sitter there is no money left and i would not have seen my child. so that was pointless. then i get depressed because you want to work and get out of this horrible situation, but it seems hopeless. i had always wanted to go to school so i applied and got a student loan. i cannot think of all the debt because i literally can't breathe at times. it is very overwhelming living like this.” RDC student***



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