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Participatory Community Action Research in Homeless Shelters: Utilization of Service-Learning Pedagogy in Research and Advocacy

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2017 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Human Rights Practice

Presenters: Roger N. Reeb, Charles Hunt, Sara Wetter, and Cassandra Hartman, University of Dayton

Title: Participatory Community Action Research in Homeless Shelters: Utilization of Service-Learning Pedagogy in Research and Advocacy

Abstract:

Homelessness will be framed as a human rights issue, with reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (e.g., Articles 25 and 27).

A participatory action research project (sustained by service-learning pedagogy) in homeless shelters will be described. In the shelters, we implement Behavioral Activation, which is a strategy to (a) transform the shelter environment; (b) empower shelter guests; (c) enhance their coping; and (d) expand their opportunities for overcoming obstacles associated with homelessness. We will present both quantitative outcomes (using validated psychometric measures) and qualitative outcomes (examining written comments of guests using grounded theory methodology) for shelter guests, including evidence that the project contributes to their perceptions of hope, perceived capability/motivation for employment/education, purpose/meaning in life, well-being (managing anxiety and depression), social/emotional support, and shelter social climate.

We will describe our plans for examining long-term outcomes for shelter guests, which involves quasi-experimental research to compare outcomes of shelter guests in Behavioral Activation with outcomes of other groups, such as: (a) guests who left shelters prior to Behavioral Activation implementation; (b) guests who declined Behavioral Activation; and/or (c) guests from similar shelters without Behavioral Activation.

The project's expanding collaborative network will also be described, such as our connection with the Montgomery County Ex-Offender Reentry Program, which prepares and empowers ex-offenders as they pursue housing, employment, and other positive endeavors. Further, we will show the relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 27 and 29) to our use of service-learning pedagogy.

Outcomes for service-learning students are accessed via quantitative psychometric measures as well as qualitative approaches (examining written reflections using grounded theory methodology). We will review results of quasi-experimental research demonstrating that, relative to non-service-learning students, service-learning students assisting with this project show pre- to post-semester corrective changes in community service self-efficacy, stigmatizing attitudes, and awareness of privilege.

About the presenters:

Roger N. Reeb, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology; the Roesch Endowed Chair in the Social Sciences; and a research associate of the Human Rights Center at the University of Dayton. In recent years, a major focus of his research has been the utilization of participatory community action research and service-learning pedagogy in homeless shelters. Outcomes for homeless shelter guests and service-learning students are evaluated utilizing a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach.

Charles Hunt is a post-graduate research assistant in community engagement at the University of Dayton. A graduate of the master's program in clinical psychology, he establishes connections between homeless shelters and re-entry programs and conducts other collaborative work in the community.

Sara Wetter is a graduate student in the master's program in clinical psychology at the University of Dayton. She is completing research, clinical work, and advocacy within the context of the behavioral activation research project in homeless shelters.

Cassandra Hartman is a graduate student in the master's program in clinical psychology at the University of Dayton. She is completing research, clinical work, and advocacy within the context of the behavioral activation research project in homeless shelters.