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## **PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY: THE VOICE OF YOUTH**

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# PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY: THE VOICE OF YOUTH

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“Age is foolish and forgetful when it underestimates youth.”

J. K. Rowling

# Presentation Overview

- Background
- Review of Literature
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion
- Questions



# Objectives



- Have a knowledge base of literature surrounding youths' views of poverty.
- Study participants' perceptions of poverty in a geographic community.
- Further comprehend implications of student research for social work practice research and social work education.

# Brief Discussion

# Research Question

- What are the experiences of impoverished youth, ages fourteen to twenty-four, in Waco, Texas?

LISTENING TO OUR KIDS



# Background

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# Background: Poverty in Waco

- 1 24,805 Residents
  - 29,488 youth between the ages of 15-24.
  - **39% are below the Federal Poverty Level**
  
- High concentrated areas of poverty
  
- Children and youth are at the highest percentage

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)



# Plans to Reduce Poverty: The Past Two Years

- Poverty Solutions Group
  - 2009
  - 12 Aspirations
- Poverty Solutions Steering Committee
  - 2010 – Present
- Collaboration
  - Advanced Community Practice Class
  - City of Waco Housing and Community Development
  - 12 Aspirations were further developed
  - 4 Task Teams

# Plans to Reduce Poverty: This Year

- Aspiration Three states:
  - ▣ *“Launch our young people into productive working lives.”*
  
- Social work classes
  - ▣ Interviewed 64 Adults
  - ▣ Three Findings
    - Adolescent Development
    - Relationships
    - Systemic Factors

# Theoretical Framework

- Social Development Theory
  - ▣ People participate in the process
  - ▣ Change is more lasting
  
- Develop theory surrounding youth and poverty
  
- Including the voice of the youth

(Weil , 2005)

# Review of the Literature

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# The Impact of Poverty

- Lack of financial resources and options
- Inability to meet basic needs
- Marginalization
- Children as a source of strength



(Weiss-Gal et. al., 2009, p.125; Strier, 2005; Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010)

Literature Review

# The Impact of Poverty on Youth

- Limited studies
- Research on children
  - ▣ Head Start



- Information from adults' perspective

(Cohen & Long, 1998; Walker, 2011; Wager, Hill, Bailey, Day, Hamilton, & King, 2010; Kalifeh, Cohen-Vogel & Grass, 2011; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011; Vick Whittaker, Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook, 2011)

Literature Review

# Adolescent Behavior

- Erikson: Identity vs. Role Confusion
  - ▣ 13 – 19 years of age
  
- Erikson: Intimacy vs. Isolation
  - ▣ 20 – 24 years of age



(Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2006; Newman & Newman, 1999)

Literature Review

# Educational Achievement

- Less likely to graduate
- Lack of labor readiness skills
- Extra-curricular activities



(Brownell, et.. al., 2010, p.822; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Wikeley, Bullock, Muschamp & Ridge, 2009; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011)

Literature Review



# Direct Relationships

- Supportive family environment
- Mentors
  - ▣ Positive outcomes
  - ▣ Affects multiple areas of life
- Teachers
  - ▣ Important role
  - ▣ Help reduce drop out



(Berzin, 2010, p. 114; Thomson & Zand, 2010; Perry, Liu & Pabian, 2010, p. 274)

Literature Review

# Employment Opportunities

- Job training opportunities
- Shadowing career paths
- Early employment experiences
- Schools and businesses working together



(Donohue, et. al, 2005, p.655; Johnson, 2004; Simmons, 2009)

Literature Review

# Civic Engagement

- Participants in society
- Given a voice
- Valued constituents



(Whitlock & Powers, 2008, p. 13)

Literature Review

# Methodology

# Methodology: Focus Groups

- Real rather than imagined needs
- Giving voice to the youth
- Direct interaction
- Building answers off each other
- Six focus groups
- Two middle schools, two high schools, and two GED sites
- 21 participants

# Sample

- Sample
  - Purposive
- Gender
  - 14 Females
  - 7 Males
- Diversity
  - 11 African American
  - 8 Hispanic
  - 1 Bi-racial
  - 1 Caucasian

# Questionnaire

- 10 questions for middle and high school students
- 13 questions for GED students
- Topics
  - ▣ Relationships
  - ▣ Jobs/Career
  - ▣ Education

# Questions



- Describe your family
- Who do you go to for advice
- Who do you admire
- Jobs in Waco
- Not in college or working
- Life affected by high school diploma
- Decision to obtain GED



# Coding Process

- Lower level analysis
  - ▣ The codes “mom”, “dad”, “brother”, etc. were placed into the category of “family”
  
- Higher level analysis
  - ▣ Categories, sub-categories, further sub- categories
  
- Peer debriefing & key quotes

# Findings

# Findings



- ❑ Goal Incongruence
- ❑ Relationships
- ❑ Future Hopes

# Findings: Goal Incongruence



*“...at least you have a car, as long as you got a job, like I know a lot of people don’t go for an education, for like, I ain’t gonna say you need one for you’ good life, but you at least have a job though”*

# Plans for the Future

*"I'm gonna go to college and get a scholarship in basketball. I'm gonna play in the NBA. Cuz they ain't gonna let me be a chef and if they ain't gonna let me be a doctor."*

Goal Incongruence

# Disparities

*"In one year I'm gonna quite school. Nah, in one year I'm gonna be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, if you're still in school and in five years I see want to hire you because they know you smart."*

*"I'm just sayin' if they see a high school diploma, they gonna opens up more opportunities."*

*myself at Baylor.*

Goal Incongruence



# Financial Stability

“Yeah, finances are important but being well with the family to help you out. But the first step to finding a balance.”

Goal Incongruence



# Findings: Relationships

- Family
- Friends
- Clergy
- Educators
- Absent Fathers
  
- Most reoccurring influence
  - ▣ Relationship with the mothers

# Resilient Mothers

“My mom is like the one that has always been there for me and  
“Well, the people I admire are my parents. Specifically my  
“My mom, she reached the top of the ladder. She has a mother,  
mom... she never gave up in spite of all her obstacles.”  
the strength of a woman.”  
afternoon to talk to me about stuff.”

# Motivating Mothers

“She always tell me to finish school, ‘cuz even, she did finish school but, like, she did it on her own, so I can’t be a doctor or anything.”

“I did finish school, but my mom said, ‘if you don’t do good in school, some of my family didn’t, like if I do finish school, I’ll be the second to quit school, the best grade.”

person to graduate in my family.”

# Supportive Mothers

*"I look up to my mom, 'cuz my dad got deported six years ago... And then, I haven't been the best child and... I stress her out more and even talk to her about some stuff but then I realized we were closer than I thought. Like, we are really close."*

*"When I need advice, it's my mama. At first it was hard for me to though I was like that she never gave up on me. She always kept fighting for me to change and she kept fighting to keep us where we are now. 'Cuz I think without her I would have been like, nothing."*

# Mentors

- ❑ Emphasis on mentoring in Waco
- ❑ Only one youth spoke about a mentor

*“At first I didn’t like him; I didn’t want nothin’ to do with him. I didn’t need no counselor, I didn’t want no counselor. But really, he has turned out to be like a second father to me... He has been with me for at least five years now.”*

# Findings: Future Hopes



- ❑ Wanting more for adult lives
- ❑ Wanting more for their children
  - ❑ The possibility of not achieving current goals

# Dreams Unfinished

“...“I got pregnant with my little girl... I only had a year left  
to finish school. Getting pregnant was just a big mistake. It was  
an awakener and the science teacher, it happens.”

Future Hopes

# More for their Future



“I don't like my family. I don't like to live in a place where we don't have a whole lot better. I want to make my life a whole lot better. I want to go to college and get a degree. I want to go to work and make money for now, we're like, like my mom does to work.”

Future Hopes



# More for their Children

“At home we learn the example from our parents, and then we give our own example to our children. And I think that we can start with our home. And then we can have a better life.”

# Limitations and Implications

# Limitations



- New instrument
- Parental consent
- After school programs

# Implications



- Socioeconomic status
- Adolescent development and youth
- Teachers and mentors

# Further Research



- Self-esteem and self-worth of the youth
- Concretely achieve dreams
- Follow-up studies with mothers

# Future Possibilities


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# Future Possibilities



- Three Themes:
  - Goal Incongruence
  - Relationships
  - Future Hopes

# The Mothers

- 
- Outside support
  - Parenting classes
  - Mother's self-worth

Future Possibilities



# Mentors



- Absence of male mentors
- Collaborative efforts of mentoring groups

Future Possibilities

# Apprenticeships



- Summer apprenticeships
- Opportunities after high school
- Exposure to the workplace environment
- Determine future direction

Future Possibilities

# Lessons Learned



- Studies involving children are always difficult
- The researcher must be persistent and patient
- Developing relationships

# Group Discussion & Questions

- Your experiences with youth
- Similarities and differences from my findings



# Thank You!

- For further discussion you can contact me:
  - [ryn@wacocdc.org](mailto:ryn@wacocdc.org)
  - 254.644.2913 (cell)

*"I believe in a world of justice and human rights for all. A world where girls can grow up free of fear of abuse. A world where women are treated with the respect and dignity that is their right. A world where poverty is not acceptable. My dear young friends, you can make this your world."*

*- Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*

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