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
Background: Poverty in Waco

- 124,805 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
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
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)
The Impact of Poverty on Youth

- Limited studies

- Research on children
  - Head Start

- Information from adults’ perspective


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)
Educational Achievement

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


Literature Review
Direct Relationships

- Supportive family environment

- Mentors
  - Positive outcomes
  - Affects multiple areas of life

- Teachers
  - Important role
  - Help reduce drop out


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)
Civic Engagement

- Participants in society

- Given a voice

- Valued constituents

(Whitlock & Powers, 2008, p. 13)
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

Methodology
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

Methodology
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, they got an education, but if you ain’t got a good job, you need one for you’ good life, but you at least have a job though.”
“I’m gonna go to high school, but I didn’t get a scholarship in basketball. I’m gonna go to college. Cuz then if that don’t work out, I’m gonna be a chef and if that don’t work out, I’m gonna move to California. Be a doctor.”

Goal Incongruence
Disparities

“In one year I’m gonna quite school. Nah, in one year I’m gonna be in the 10th grade. In three years still in school and in five years I see myself at Baylor.”

― I’m just sayin’ if they see a high school diploma, they gonna want to hire you because they know you smart.”

Goal Incongruence
“You've gotta get a job, you've gotta be able to pay your bills and you gotta be able to help your significant other here and there.”

Goal Incongruence
“Yeah, finances are important but being well with the family is the first step to finding balance.”

Being happy with what you have.

But if you’re unhappy, you can’t buy your friends.”

Goal Incongruence
Findings: Relationships

- Family
- Friends
- Clergy
- Educators
- Absent Fathers

- Most reoccurring influence
  - Relationship with the 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
Even when she worked, she would still make time in the mom... she never gave up in spite of all her obstacles.
the strength of a woman...”

afternoon to talk to me about stuff.”

Relationships
Motivating Mothers

“She always tell me to finish school, ‘cuz even, she did finish school, but like, I don’t care if tell me I couldn’t have to finish school if I didn’t. Without my mom, I probably wouldn’t even come to school or nothin’. ‘If I didn’t have my mom, I wouldn’t be able to do anything at all.’ She always tell me to finish school ’cuz even, she did finish school, but some of my family didn’t, like it. So, if I do finish school, I’ll be the second person to graduate in my family.”
“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 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... I finished school. Getting pregnant my senior year... it was just an awakener and they said 'not', it happens.”

Future Hopes
More for their Future

“I’d like to have a family, possibly, and have a stable job... I want to make my life a whole lot better... I want to make my life a whole lot better... I want to be able to sit down and give them more than what my mom gave me, ‘cause she struggle a lot... I want to be able to do more than I want money in my pocket. I want to be able to sit down and have no money for myself like my mom does now... She’s on disability, she’s going through a lot of problems right now, we live, like, from check to check.”
"At home we learn the example from our parents, and then we give our own example to our children. And I think that we cannot change the world because there is a lot of evil, but we can start with our home. And then we can have a better life."

"...if I don't give a good example to my daughter, she is going to say if my mom did not finish then I wont finish."

"I want my kids to do way better than me. If I don't give a good example to my daughter, she is going to say if my mom did not finish then I wont finish."

"I want to tell my kids to finish school 'cuz I finish school."
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
Future Possibilities

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

- Outside support
- Parenting classes
- Mother’s self-worth
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:
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"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
References

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