Changing Perceptions of Poverty in a Large-Lecture Setting

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Illinois has the highest rate of deep poverty in the Midwest region.¹

Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS)

- The Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) is an interactive and sensitizing experience where the participants have an opportunity to actively discover the realities and effects of living in poverty.
- Facilitated by University of Illinois Extension Service
Methods

- SOA 240: People in Places: Understanding and Developing Community
  - General Education course, average enrollment 190 students

- Students completed a questionnaire at two points in time:
  - Time one (one week prior to CAPS simulation)
  - Time two (one week following CAPS simulation)

- Quantitative measures:
  - Perceptions of poverty in U.S. and McLean County
  - Rating causes of poverty
  - Rating agents responsible for alleviating poverty
  - Rating agents effectiveness for alleviating poverty
Findings - Demographics

Class Standing
- Freshmen 5%
- Sophomore 31.3%
- Junior 42.5%
- Senior 21.3%

Majors:
- Education 20%
- Sociology 19%
- Psychology 7.6%
- Recreation Management 7.6%
- Mass Communication 6.3%

Age:
- 19-22 88.6%

Sex:
- Male 27.5%
- Female 72.5%

(N = 133)
Changes in Poverty Perceptions

### Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>U.S. Poverty T1 vs T2</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>U.S. Poverty</td>
<td>-.425</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>-5.242</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>McLean County Poverty T1 vs T2</td>
<td>-.481</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>-5.152</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= not at all a problem; 5= major problem
## Changes in Perceptions of Poverty Causes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>-.463</td>
<td>1.414</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical bills</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>1.249</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment/lack of low-wage jobs</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td>1.344</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many single parent families</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job shortages</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>1.099</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare system</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>1.148</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many immigrants</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>-.388</td>
<td>1.278</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor quality public schools</td>
<td>-.250</td>
<td>1.196</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor quality public schools - Lack of comm</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>1.364</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support - Lack of comm support</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>1.178</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of social capital - Lack of comm support</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>1.271</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of human capital - Lack of comm support</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>1.218</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Paired Samples Test
Personal Concern with Helping People to Make Ends Meet

“Of all personal concerns about community, how would you rate your concern with helping people struggling to make ends meet”

1 = top concern; 5 = not a concern at all

Mean(T1): 2.72

Mean (T2): 2.44

(sig .021)
Community Effectiveness

“How often do you believe that your own community can do something effective about the problem of poverty”?

1 = always; 5 = never

Mean (T1) 2.46
Mean (T2) 2.25

(sig .001)
Perceptions of Poverty: Who is Responsible for Alleviating Poverty?

- No statistically significant change in perceptions about who is responsible for alleviating poverty

- Variables:
  - Poor people individually
  - Poor people in groups
  - Civic/community organizations
  - Private charity
  - Private enterprise
  - Local government
  - State government
  - National government
Perceptions of Poverty: What is most Effective at reducing poverty?

- Same variables as responsible measure.
- \(1=\) not at all effective; \(5=\) completely effective
- Statistically Significant Change:
  - Civic/community organizations (.040)
  - Poor people in groups (.006)
Discussion

- Common theme:
  - reduction in blame towards individuals, increased blame towards forces outside of poor people’s control
- Role of institutional forces/structural forces
- Increased awareness of the importance of social networks/social capital
- Poverty is not an individual problem, but a societal problem
Discussion

- Significant impact in General Education classroom
- Application of class concepts in real world setting
- Barrier: cost and time