

# Giving Voice to the Unhoused Community: A Photovoice Education Intervention

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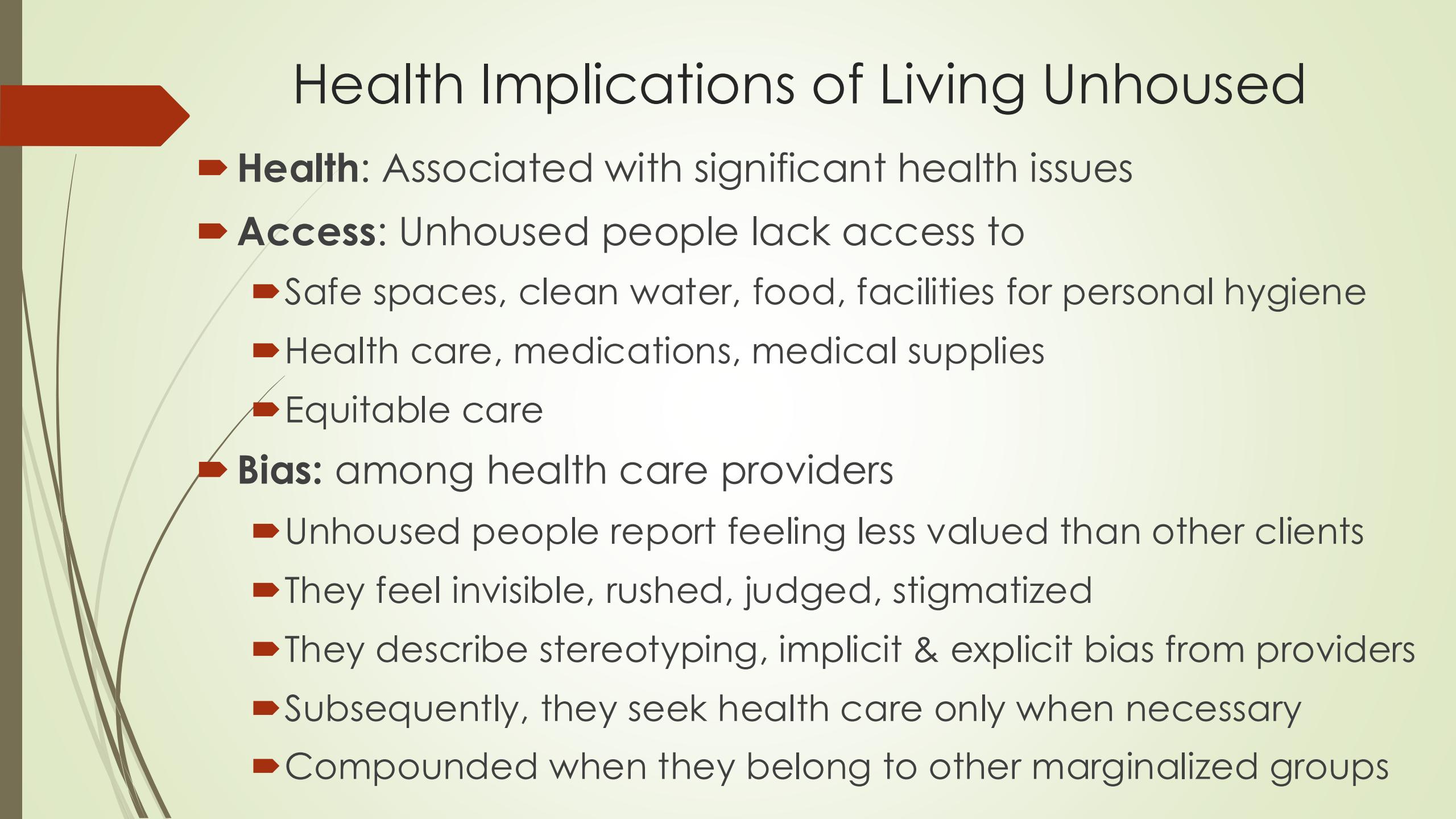
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# Living Unhoused

- ▶ **Incidence** of people living unhoused increasing world-wide
- ▶ **The US:** homelessness has been increasing since 2017
  - ▶ Currently at an all-time high
  - ▶ On a single night in 2024, 771,000 people were living unhoused
- ▶ **Homelessness increasing among**
  - ▶ Families
  - ▶ Youths
  - ▶ Elders
- ▶ **Homelessness more prevalent among**
  - ▶ Marginalized populations
  - ▶ Including people of color and indigenous people



# Health Implications of Living Unhoused

- ▶ **Health:** Associated with significant health issues
- ▶ **Access:** Unhoused people lack access to
  - ▶ Safe spaces, clean water, food, facilities for personal hygiene
  - ▶ Health care, medications, medical supplies
  - ▶ Equitable care
- ▶ **Bias:** among health care providers
  - ▶ Unhoused people report feeling less valued than other clients
  - ▶ They feel invisible, rushed, judged, stigmatized
  - ▶ They describe stereotyping, implicit & explicit bias from providers
  - ▶ Subsequently, they seek health care only when necessary
  - ▶ Compounded when they belong to other marginalized groups

# Photovoice

## ► **Telling their own stories**

- Unhoused people don't always get to tell their own stories
- Researchers seek out shelter staff, volunteers, social workers
- When unhoused people do get to speak, researchers report
  - They reveal a unique perspective & expert knowledge

## ► **Photovoice**

- Members of unhoused community take photographs
- Express their perspective of what it's like to live unhouse
- Researchers have used photovoice with other communities
  - Draw attention to a topic or issue
  - Increase understanding and empathy
  - Participants feel validated and satisfied at being heard

# Purpose

## ► The purpose of this study

- To give voice to a marginalized community through photovoice
- To obtain a rich description of the lived experiences of those who live unhoused
- To explore homelessness from the perspective of people who live unhoused

# Methods

## ► Design and Sample

- Qualitative, descriptive study
- Utilized photovoice & recorded, open-ended interviews
- Recruitment: convenience sample (n=19) from shelter
- Thirteen participants returned with photos for interview
  - 1 participant had unusable film
- Demographics
  - 7 males, ages 33-66 (mean 52); 5 females ages 23-37
  - 5 African American, 7 Caucasian
  - Time spent homeless ranged from 3 months to 20 years

# Methods

## ► Measures

- Researcher developed
- Demographic tool
- Open-ended interview with prompts

## ► Procedure

- Distributed cameras: Participants asked to take photos that illustrated what living unhoused meant to them
- Interviews:
  - Selected favorite photos
  - Explained why these images resonated with them
- Photos & narratives made into posters
- Used as teaching intervention (reported elsewhere)

# Methods

## ► Data Analysis

- Participants identified by numeric code
- Interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Content analysis of themes
- Data coding performed by 3 members of team
- Iterative process to achieve consensus in final themes
- Major themes & sub-themes identified

## ► Trustworthiness

- Bracketing to mitigate researcher bias
- Audit trail
- Member checking immediately after interviews
- Triangulation through iterative review of data

# Findings: Demoralized

## ► Sadness

- Homelessness is walking down a path alone. (33 C M)
- The face of homelessness is sadness. (66 C Male)
- When you're homeless and you're walking around, it's kind of depressing. (35 C Male)

## ► Powerlessness

- This place is unsanitary... But they have authority over me. I can't tell them, clean this place up... Having to tolerate this kind of stuff is what homelessness means to me. (59 C Male)

## ► Neglect

- Some debris by the railroad tracks. You see a lot of this when you're homeless. You see a lot of neglected areas (35 C Male)

# Findings: Demoralized

## ► Longing for more

- I was amazed at how this house and the colorful trees made me feel comfortable... If I was able to have a yard... to have a home of my own. It gave me hope and assurance of where I should be. (43 AA Male)

## ► Systemic Injustice

- Most of the people up there are veterans who came home from the war and didn't have a home anymore. (33 AA Male)
- When I was younger, me and my mom were homeless and we would sleep in our care. (33 AA Female)
- Every missile fired, every battleship launched is... a theft from those who hunger and are not fed... The homeless, the people who are hurting; money spent on war [and not them] is a trade off. (66 C Male)

# Findings: Demoralized

## ► Unsafe

- In the shelter, the people were horrible... so we were roaming the streets with no place to go. A lot of people were sleeping under this bridge. (33 AA Female)
- This is Bloomington Police Department. The cameras would record any problems, any bullying situation, and the cops would come down and talk to us. It was like a space safe. (23 C Female)

## ► Discarded

- The dumpsters represent how America discards a lot of stuff, including its people. (66 C Male)
- The people in this building (Woodhill Towers) don't care about homeless people. They run you out. They want to hurt you. (64 C Male)



# Findings: Demoralized

## ► Hard on children

- It's got our diaper bag, our 'stuff to do bag,' my purse. There's a spot for my son to sit. We have to have everything we could possibly need on us at all times. We keep a blanket and umbrella. If it rains, we hold the umbrella on him (3 year old son) so he doesn't get wet... It's a high stress situation. (33 C Female; children 11 and 3)
- I take my baby here and he won't feel so overwhelmed... It's kind of hard on him in the shelter. He cries and screams a lot. I really don't want him going through this... seeing the bad side of things.(23 AA Female)
- To be homeless with children can be difficult at times. The women's lounge is a safe, warm environment for kids and parents. (37 AA Female)



# Findings: Hopeful

## ► Motivated

- If I was able to have a yard... I'd like to have my own home. Living in the shelter, how congested it is, that motivates me to move forward. Keeps me striving for more. (43 AA Male)

## ► Grateful

- People need to be thankful and appreciate that there's someone to help them when they are struggling. I've had nothing but help, especially from my counsellor. (62 C M)

## ► Community

- Lots of people go to the library... to congregate in the social area. It's their way of keeping together. (37 AA Female)
- We call it 'the square.' People sit and talk. A place that everybody hung out and got caught up. There's a garbage can where a lot of people found a food source. I know that sounds kind of rough, but that's what happens sometimes. (23 C Female)

# Findings: Hopeful

## ► Resourceful

- It's all about the person. What they do to access resources to get on their feet. I chose PATH... they help you get whatever resources you need, birth certificate, housing. It's a good resource, right up the street. (37 AA Female)
- Trinity Lutheran Church. You need to have hope. A church is a place of hope. (66 C Male)
- Second 'Pres' church, they have a big lunch for all the homeless and families. They are provided scarves, hats, and a place to go. They have a lot of helpful resources (23 C Female)
- Abundant Life... it's not the greatest support system, but it's something. They provide clothes, food pantries and a place to go for Bible study... You can do laundry and take showers. (23 C Female)

# Implications

## ► Research

- Seek to better understand the experience of living unhoused.
- Gimme Shelter event, 2026, to help researchers better understand one night in the life of an unhoused person

## ► Education

- Posters have been used to educate nursing students
- Themes could be used with the posters for further context and deeper understanding of the experience.