

Executive Summary - Undocumented Immigrants and the lack of short term housing

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SWK - 433: SW Capstone - Applying Strategies to Develop Solutions to Social Issues

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April 3rd, 2024

Executive Summary

The recent Immigration Crisis has exposed many disparities in the delivery of social services within the United States. A core issue is the inadequate housing for marginalized populations. This scarcity can particularly impact populations such as immigrants, fueling social problems on a broader scale including economic injustice. Many undocumented immigrants struggle to secure affordable and safe housing once they enter the United States. The lack of access to short-term housing can serve as a catalyst for many other vulnerabilities, inequities, and failure to integrate into society for this population.

The lack of short-term housing for undocumented immigrants can have detrimental consequences that damage the quality of life for this population. According to city data, over 67,200 migrants were staying in city homeless shelters as of late November (Meko, 2023). There are several socioeconomic factors that influence and perpetuate this social justice issue. When undocumented immigrants enter the country they are vulnerable and are solely dependent on government support. However, the status of being an undocumented immigrant also creates barriers to individuals being eligible for government aid and support such as medicaid, social security, and other public benefits (Lander, 2024). Without adequate support undocumented migrants are susceptible to different forms of exploitation and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. There are many factors that influence and perpetuate this social issue. The level of acculturation with the United States economy and housing market can directly impact outcomes for individuals within society. Immigrants who are not familiar with the procedures and housing policies in the US can face hardship with homeownership and housing (Narine & Shobe, 2013). Lack of knowledge on how to efficiently function in the United States economy places undocumented immigrants at an immediate disadvantage. Without stable employment, income,

education, and community based support, economic prosperity is nearly unattainable (Narine & Shobe, 2013). There are many gaps within support towards this group that limits them from properly integrating into the United States.

Lack of affordable housing is another factor directly perpetuating this social issue. The undocumented immigrant population may struggle with access to financial capital due to low incomes and unfamiliarity with United States economic systems (Narine & Shobe, 2013). This creates barriers to affording housing by rent or ownership. Many individuals may only be able to afford housing in small, underserved, and unsafe conditions (Ballard, 2020). This is not only a result of affordability but also discriminatory practices in the housing market. Although discriminatory practices are illegal, they are still prevalent among the immigrant population. Examples of this include shifting property maintenance responsibilities onto renters. (Ballard, 2020). These practices create more barriers for immigrant families to maintain and function in a home.

With a scarce amount of accessible shelter for this population, individuals become vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and mistreatment. Housing exploitation is a prime example of this. In these circumstances, exploitative landlords may dismiss harsh living conditions such as pest infestations, poor insulation, etc. (Ballard, 2020). This can perpetuate other disparities such as health concerns and unsafe living conditions for immigrants among children within this population.

A recent news report highlighted another example of housing exploitation occurring in Queen's, New York. The exploitation of over 70 undocumented immigrants who were found living in the basement of a Queen's furniture store was reported. This incident highlights the great safety, human rights, and social justice concerns regarding undocumented immigrants as

individuals were housed in inhumane conditions and paid up to \$300 for accommodations. (Bisram & Bauman, 2024). This is a distinct example of exploitation in which the owner, in their position of privilege, is aware that undocumented immigrants may be in immediate need of housing, making them vulnerable. The lack of accessible housing for this group of individuals creates major vulnerabilities to housing exploitation, overcrowding, and inhumane housing conditions, as the example emphasizes.

The profound inequities highlighted emphasizes the prominent social injustices faced by the undocumented immigrant community. This community is in need of advocacy and policy practice that acknowledges the unique struggles and needs of the undocumented immigrant community. Addressing the housing crisis is one step into creating economic justice for this community, assisting them to properly integrate into society. Creating equitable housing policies is needed to foster an inclusive society where basic human needs and rights are not dependent on an individual's immigration status.

Interview 1:

The patient was brought to the Emergency Department by the Nassau Police Department due to ETOH intoxication. The patient's appearance is disheveled, resembling that of someone who has been walking barefoot. The patient cannot be discharged until his blood alcohol levels have decreased to a safe level. The patient is ineligible for DSS placement due to his disclosure that he does not possess a Social Security Number. The only undocumented housing option for Long Island is Mary INN, but they require a need for substance-abuse treatment. However, the patient is currently declining the recommended alcohol treatment. The patient was then offered undocumented shelter placement located in Manhattan but declined, stating he needed to continue employment at the nearby Home Depot where he does freelance construction. The

patient reports he is currently residing in a park and expresses a desire to return to the park, even when offered shelter placement and behavioral health assistance. The patient then became agitated, seeking immediate discharge. Since the patient is placed off 1-1/safety watch, he has self-determination to leave the hospital. The patient is unwilling to remain in hospital and declines housing support, transportation assistance and even clean clothing, subsequently leaving the emergency department. The patient appears to have a deficiency in his confidence and reliance with the hospital staff. He may feel stigmatized due to his immigration status, which could explain why he declined the housing placement. Additionally, this demonstrates the lack of resources offered.

Interview 2:

The patient in the Labor and Delivery (L&D) unit has been identified as having a positive screening for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) related to Housing Stability. The patient stated that she and her life-partner have recently migrated from Nicaragua. Patient reports they are currently living in a one-bedroom apartment located in Far Rockaway, Queens. The patient reports experiencing concerns regarding their financial capacity to meet rent payments over the past year. The patient reports cohabitating with her life partner, brother, and father-in-law in the small apartment. The patient reports that her partner's employment has reduced the number of hours provided. The patient states that everyone in the household, including herself, is employed on a full-time basis. The patient is at the end of her pregnancy and is expected to give birth today. Without the new requirement of the SDOH screening from L&D nurses, patients may not have disclosed difficulties that could potentially impact the well-being of the infant. Many immigrants are unaware of their ability to seek aid when they encounter difficulties. This is especially important when it comes to new mothers and their newborn infants in need. SDOH is

essential as it also showcases issues with the quality of the home, including the evidence of overcrowding. There is a newborn infant involved and the mother states there will be 4 adults and an infant in a one-bedroom apartment, social work will plant the seed and suggest that the mother seek less crowded housing through the WIC program. This also demonstrates an example of landlords taking advantage of certain situations by not adhering to housing guidelines.

The vision for homeless immigrants is to create communities where everyone has access to safe and stable housing and the necessary support services. For immigrants, the vision involves fostering inclusive societies where newcomers are welcomed, integrated, and have opportunities to contribute to their new communities while preserving their cultural heritage (Dettlaff & Fong, 2016). Our social action project can promote this vision by establishing a social media page that allows people a safe space to discuss their experiences with immigration and/or homelessness. The first step of solving a social problem is spreading awareness on why this social problem exists and how it impacts society. Our social media page will bring light to this issue through spreading factual information, including statistics, first-hand interviews, newly proposed bills, and the work that politicians and organizations are doing to fight this issue.

Homelessness among immigrants can stem from a combination of factors, including economic hardship, lack of affordable housing, limited access to social services, language barriers, discrimination, fleeing persecution and or violence in their country of origin, and difficulties in navigating the immigration process (Dettlaff & Fong, 2016). Although many immigrants are employed, they may face discrimination in the workplace where they are given less pay than U.S. citizens for doing the same work (Presiado et al., 2023). This is just another challenge that may prevent immigrants from getting out of poverty or homelessness.

The goal of this project is to increase awareness among the homeless immigrants, especially since this issue is so prevalent in the state of New York. Many people do not know that the Migrant Relocation Assistance Program, which was created to move the high volume of immigrants in NYC outside of the city, has failed drastically, with only about 174 households actually being relocated (Rubinstein, 2024). Because of this, our long-term goal is to get homeless immigrants to achieve stable and sustainable housing and integration into their new community (Aldaco et al., 2019). Although Latino immigrants in Kern County are eligible to receive unemployment or disability benefits, the benefits received are only a fraction of their income. Unemployment benefits pay a minimum of 60 percent of the average weekly earnings, and disability benefits pay a minimum of 70 percent (Aldaco et al., 2019). Since the introduction of Latino immigrants in America under the Bracero Program, the homelessness rate has increased throughout the nation. The rise of income inequality, lack of affordable housing, medical conditions, and domestic violence are critical contributors to Latino immigrant homelessness these are some of the challenges government and nonprofit organizations face when addressing the Latino immigrant homelessness crisis (Aldaco et al., 2019).

Our group's action plan for achieving our goal is to develop a social media advocacy action plan that entails using a venue to spread information, interact with our audience, and create awareness. We will start off by defining our cause, identifying our key messages and goals, and establishing our presence by making our social media account as concise and easy to read as possible. We will diversify our content through photographs, reels, links, and share local media from news outlets, such as articles, snippets, and videos. We want to engage our audience, in this case our followers, by assembling polls and encouraging discussions/debates while staying active and responding quickly to any comments or concerns. We want to share any

personal experiences/stories to connect on a transparent level while encouraging others to maybe share their own experiences if they are comfortable. In addition to this, we will be conscious of current stories regarding our topic to be aware of any changes in policy. We will effectively utilize social media to advocate for our cause by adhering to this action plan, which will help us establish a strong online presence and rally support for our main cause. Our goal is that our group would have created up to 10 posts by the week of April 15th, 2024.

One of the key allies to our project we were able to identify was the New York Immigration Coalition (<https://www.nyic.org/>), an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that provides low-cost legal assistance and health services to immigrants while advocating for affordable housing and workers' rights for immigrants in the New York metro area. Another ally we identified is Representative Jamaal Bowman (NY-16) who spoke out against the decision to suspend the "Right to Shelter" law, which gave single migrants the right to shelter in NYC. Due to its suspension, the city is now unable to keep beds for single migrants who had stayed for the shelters' 30 or 60 night limit (Paz 2023). The final ally we were able to identify was RDJ Refugee Shelter (<https://www.wanacommunitycenter.org/>), a program run by WANA Community Resource Center in Harlem, which is currently the only shelter in NYC specifically for refugees and asylum seekers experiencing homelessness. Because each of these allies work toward ending the current short-term housing crisis for immigrants, we can examine their advocacy and share resources through our project.

To create our coalition of like minded people to engage in our social media page, we will spread the word and share our page with our Adelphi colleagues within the BSW and MSW programs, share with our friends and family, and find online forums focused on immigration housing to post our social media link to. We also want to reach members of the Adelphi

community that are not in the social work programs as well as individuals who are uninformed on the issue of immigrant homelessness who find our page online. Our hope for the coalition is to gather both professionals in the social work field, experts in our topic, and uninformed individuals to create a space where said persons can share their experiences and resources to help spread awareness and advocate for our population.

Guo & Saxton (2014) studied nonprofit organizations' outreach on Twitter and identified three steps used in social media advocacy: providing information on the social issue, building a community online, and effectively calling their online community to action (Guo & Saxton, p. 73-74, 2014). While we will not be using Twitter for our project, we will still follow this method as we are still using a social media platform. We will use this method on Instagram by sharing information and statistics on migrant homelessness, working to build a community, and then sharing ways that our community can use their voices to help advocate. These steps will help guide us in constructing our posts for our audience.

Our group will create an Instagram page where each of our group members will gather information on what immigrants and asylum seekers are, the housing crisis within the population, as well as posting polls, facts, and resources on the issue. We would like to share our social media link to our whole class (as well as the other 433 class) so they can follow the webpage and participate in our polls and watch videos of each of our group members speaking on the situation. As a group, we determined that it is often common for social media advocacy pages to only gain a small following of colleagues, making it harder to reach more people outside of our immediate circles. Due to this factor, we will evaluate our project by tracking our numbers of followers, viewers, likes, shares, and comments retained to measure if we gained enough traction to influence a larger audience. We can determine the impact of our project by

assessing the increase in productivity of our account, or if we are able to gather an audience at all. To evaluate our project, we also plan to examine the knowledge retained on our topic from our Instagram audience by polling through an Instagram story or asking in our comments section. We will evaluate the impact of our project by surveying or polling the people following or engaging with our social media page to ask how if they have learned about immigration and homelessness from our posts, if they knew about the topic previous to seeing our page, and if they plan to continue seeking information on the topic after engaging with our page.

We will also evaluate our own knowledge and our group members' knowledge regarding our topic to determine if our project was effective. We will look at our individual growth in understanding short term housing for immigrants facing homelessness and reflect on our own participation as a way to evaluate our social action project.

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