

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:
THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF A POVERTY SIMULATION ON
GOVERNMENTAL EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL EMPATHY
TOWARD INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY

by

James E. Green

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
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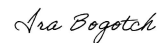
This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Valerie C. Bryan, Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, and has been approved by all members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



[Valerie Bryan \(Jul 18, 2022 14:08 EDT\)](#)

Valerie C. Bryan, Ed.D.
Dissertation Advisor



Ira Bogotch, Ed. D.



[John D. Morris \(Jul 20, 2022 15:21 EDT\)](#)

John C. Morris, Ph.D.



[Susan K. Dennett \(Jul 20, 2022 15:29 EDT\)](#)

Susan Dennett, Ph.D.



[Robert Shockley \(Jul 20, 2022 15:36 EDT\)](#)

Robert Shockley, Ph.D.
Chair, Department Educational
Leadership and Research Methodology



[Stephen Silverman \(Jul 20, 2022 16:46 EDT\)](#)

Stephen Silverman, Ed.D.
Dean, College of Education



Robert W. Stackman, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate College

July 21, 2022

Date

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ABSTRACT

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The problem of the current study was the challenges experienced by those living in poverty can be propagated by poor attitudes and lack of empathy among the social service workers tasked with helping them. A key factor in individuals' attitudes and empathy are their understanding of the experiences of others, as well as an awareness of their personal biases. While poverty simulations can help increase individuals' awareness of personal biases and difficulties experienced by individuals living in poverty (ILP), little was known about how poverty simulations may influence the perceived social empathy and attitudes of participants who work for local government organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of the current phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes

toward ILPs following participation in the Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) poverty simulation exercise. Data were collected via semi structured interviews with 10 social service providers employed at the study site location, who had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last 6 years. Data were analyzed following Groenewald's approach to phenomenological analysis. The themes included: Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes, participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy, and the system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it. The subthemes included: Developed an understanding of system flaws, developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, uncovered personal attitudes/biases, the COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants, and the COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF A POVERTY
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ILPs Individuals Living in Poverty

COPE Cost of Poverty Experience

IRB Institutional Review Board

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has more people living in poverty than any other developed nation in the world (Lott & Bullock, 2007). As of 2020, the national poverty rate was 11.4%, which equates to 37.2 million individuals living in poverty (ILPs) (U.S. Census, 2021). Between 2019 and 2020, a 1% increase in the poverty rate was the first national increase after five consecutive annual declines (U.S. Census, 2021).

Poverty has detrimental and widespread effects that influence nearly every facet of life. For example, impoverished Americans are more likely to lack health insurance, be impacted by obesity and food scarcity, receive a poorer quality public education, drop out of post-secondary educational programs, and be victimized by crime (Ingraham, 2015). Economically disadvantaged individuals often receive inadequate healthcare and experience poor health outcomes (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014; Chetty et al., 2016; Chokshi, 2018). Research also indicates ILPs are more likely to experience mental health issues such as shame, stigma, depression, despair, and suicidal ideation (Ali et al., 2018; Link & Phelan, 2014; Ridley et al., 2020).

The creation of economic opportunities for ILPs through the provision of resources and services is essential to reducing national poverty. However, the inherent biases and negative attitudes of those working for organizations tasked with providing this assistance can undermine efforts to improve conditions for ILPs. Individuals' beliefs and judgements about the causes of poverty can be used to either reinforce or dismantle

economic inequality (Piff et al., 2020). Accordingly, Krumer-Nevo (2020) argued that organizations must develop policies that consider the lived experiences and cultural injustices of marginalized groups. If this does not occur, ILPs may be adversely impacted by policies and institutional practices, especially during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employees in social service organizations that provide support to disadvantaged communities and ILPs often adopt policies and institutional practices that make it difficult for impoverished families to access necessary supports. According to Lahat (2011), stereotypes and myths about ILPs can negatively impact policies and institutional practices. At a systems level, these policies and practices can undermine the economic advancement of ILPs. Such policies are often enacted because of a lack of empathy and unwitting disregard for the less fortunate (Segal, 2007). As Stephan and Finlay (1999) explained, a lack of empathy can have myriad adverse effects on individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

According to Batson et al. (2002), inducing empathy can improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups and foster helping behaviors toward those in need. Empathetic concerns can also lead to altruistic motives (Dovidio et al., 1990) to improve the well-being of others. One way to foster empathy is through simulation exercises that help individuals understand the challenges faced by those in need. Poverty simulations can increase participants' awareness of difficulties experienced by ILPs (Stout, 2016), reveal personal biases and stereotypes about ILPs, and highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of poverty. Poverty simulations may also help participants discover ways to better serve the poor and improve ILPs' opportunities for self-sufficiency.

A common simulation used throughout the United States is the Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE). According to ThinkTank (n.d.), the COPE simulation is a 2.5-hour experience that helps participants understand the lives of ILPs. The simulation provides a snapshot of the challenges, decisions, and consequences faced each day by those living in poverty (ThinkTank, n.d.). Zosky and Thompson (2012) concluded that the COPE simulation can cultivate empathy and increase awareness of the plight of ILPs. During the COPE simulation, participants are exposed to life in poverty to develop deeper understandings of the lived experiences of ILPs and help them examine their own values and beliefs about poverty.

Individuals' attitudes and views about why people experience poverty are often characterized as either individualistic or structural beliefs (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Individualistic beliefs emphasize negative personal traits as primary causes of poverty. Ryan (1976) described individualistic beliefs about ILPs as "victim blaming" rooted in beliefs that people "get what they deserve." Structural beliefs emphasize structure as the primary cause of poverty. A person with structuralist beliefs may view poverty as the result of factors beyond an individual's control, such social background, discrimination, and the lack of equitable opportunities (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

According to Ellemers (1993), many scholars believe wealthier individuals and those who experience opportunities for upward mobility tend to adopt individualistic beliefs about poverty, while those who lack economic opportunities and experience poverty are more likely to hold structural beliefs. Individual beliefs can then influence organizational policies and procedures. Banerjee et al. (2006) discussed how an institution's distribution policy depended on employees' attitudes and beliefs about

poverty. When employees embrace more individualistic views about poverty, they display less empathy and understanding toward ILPs seeking assistance (Vega & Scribney, 2017). Consequently, employees' implicit biases can result in institutional policies and practices that adversely affect ILPs.

Over the last several years, the study site organization, a governmental agency serving children and families in the southeastern United States, has incorporated COPE simulations into its menu of trainings. The agency provides financial support to more than 40 nonprofit social service agencies throughout the local county. As a funder of other agencies, the agency's board, leadership, and employees can influence local policies and institutional practices to improve access to services and economic opportunities for ILPs. While researchers have examined outcomes associated with poverty simulations among a variety of samples (Ehmke, 2018; Hsieh & Coates, 2017; Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009; Sams et al., 2019; Smith-Carrier et al., 2019), investigation is lacking among government employees. Specifically, little is known about how poverty simulations may affect social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among individuals working in local government organizations. The current research addressed this gap in the literature.

This chapter provides an introduction to the current study, beginning with statements of the study's problem and purpose. The research questions, significance, and key terms are discussed. Study limitations and delimitations are also presented. The chapter closes with a summary and explanation of the organization of the research.

Statement of Problem

The problem of this study was the challenges experienced by those living in poverty can be propagated by poor attitudes and lack of empathy among the social service workers and organizations tasked with helping them (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). A key factor in individuals' attitudes and empathy are their understandings of the experiences of others, as well as their awareness of personal biases (Piff et al., 2020). While poverty simulations can help increase individuals' awareness of personal biases and difficulties experienced by ILPs (Stout, 2016), little is known about how poverty simulations may influence the perceived social empathy and attitudes of participants who work for local government organizations. Social empathy, which describes the ability to understand others by experiencing or perceiving their circumstances (Segal, 2011), is particularly important for social service providers and agencies. According to Stephan and Finlay (1999), a lack of social empathy can cause policymakers and social service providers to disregard the welfare of others. In addition, the attitudes and beliefs of social service providers can influence their ability to engage critical thinking and problem-solving skills to address the needs of ILPs.

An understanding of the needs of ILPs is critical to providing them with effective responses and resources (Segal, 2007); however, the demonstration of empathy and caring attitudes is also essential to improving outcomes for ILPs (Stout, 2016). Without social empathy, employees and leaders within government organizations that make decisions about funding, anti-poverty initiatives, social service supports, and neighborhood investments, could make decisions that are detrimental to ILPs. Research indicates poverty simulations may be an effective tool for improving individuals'

understandings of the experiences of poverty (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019), but little is known about how simulations may influence the social empathy and attitudes of governmental social service providers. To address the research problem, investigation was needed on how poverty simulations influenced the perceived social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among social service providers working in a local government organization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with 10 social service providers employed at the study site location, who had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last six years. Findings shed light on the utility of the COPE simulation for improving perceived social empathy and attitudes toward those living in poverty.

Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence attitudes toward ILPs?

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence social empathy toward ILPs?

Significance of the Study

This study was important because poverty simulations are designed to improve knowledge and attitudes about ILPs among social service providers. Findings from this research may influence the types of policies and programs promoted by social service organizations (Bullock et al., 2001). Gorski (2012) asserted that understanding how adults learn and develop stereotypes is a significant step towards findings ways to shift their paradigms. Increasing one's understanding of personal biases and attitudes could lead to the development of policies to mitigate systemic barriers that prevent ILPs from accessing services and advancing economically.

Previous studies on poverty simulations among health and social service workers provide evidence of increased understandings of the experiences of ILPs. For example, after participating in a poverty simulation, nursing students in Hellman et al.'s (2018) study demonstrated an increased awareness about ILPs. Todd et al. (2011) found poverty simulations were effective at changing the attitudes of education students, which could have implications for future social services practice. Goleman et al. (2017) reported that a poverty simulation increased teachers' empathy toward students and families living in poverty. The simulation also increased teachers' understandings about poverty and recognition of their own biases toward poor families (Goleman et al., 2017). According to Wagaman et al. (2018), an increase in social empathy can improve individuals' attitudes toward ILPs receiving government assistance.

The provision of necessary resources and supports is critical to improving economic opportunities and reducing poverty among ILPs. However, negative attitudes and biases about ILPs among those tasked with distributing resources to assist them may undermine access to support and resources and negatively influence governmental policies. Improving social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs is essential to maximizing support and improving policies that directly influence these individuals. The current study was significant because it supported the use of poverty simulations as a tool for improving the attitudes and social empathy of social service providers working for a local governmental agency.

Definition of Terms

To contextualize the current research, key terms are defined as follows.

Attributions to poverty describe the causes that individuals associate with poverty. Attributions to poverty are important because individuals' beliefs and judgements about the causes of poverty can be used to either reinforce or dismantle economic inequality (Piff et al., 2020).

Attitudes and the process in which they are formed are significant predictors of behavior (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). There are strong correlations between beliefs, attitudes, and the formation of stereotypes according (Woods et al., 2005).

Belief systems are interrelated structures and social norms that vary mainly to the degree in which they are systemic. Domenech and Nescolarde-Sela (2016) described beliefs as stories people tell themselves to define their own personal sense of reality.

Poverty describes the lack of necessities in relation to the social definition, lived experiences, and widespread sense of social deprivation (Bradshaw, 2005). Payne (2005)

described poverty as the extent to which individuals function without necessary resources. Myers and Gill (2004) discussed some factors that have been used to describe ILPs, including indicators related to income, education, or percentage of individuals on public assistance, such as free and reduced lunch and healthcare services.

Poverty simulations are a method of learning that requires participants to perform problem-solving tasks while assuming roles to which they are typically unfamiliar (Rice et al., 2017). Krumer-Nevo et al. (2009) suggested poverty simulations can help students understand the structural nature of poverty. In the current research, the focus was on the COPE simulation.

Social empathy describes one's ability to understand the life experiences of others within a context of social inequities and disparities (Hylton, 2018).

Limitations

Simon (2011) defined limitations as aspects of an investigation that are outside of a researcher's control. The limitations of the current study related to the method, data collection, researcher positionality, and sample. First, the research followed a qualitative method, which precluded the generalization of findings to a larger population. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are subject to the biases of participants. The researcher had no way of confirming the accuracy of the information provided by participants, and it was possible participants censored themselves to improve how they come across during interviews. Because confidentiality was provided to all participants, the potential effects of this limitation were likely minimal.

Another limitation related to the researcher's positionality, as they may have participated in a COPE simulation with one or more study participants, or assisted with

facilitation of the simulation for one or more participant. The researcher also held a position within the government and is responsible for overseeing the performance of the health and human services system of care, and is known within the local community as such. To help prevent these factors from influencing data, the researcher performed bracketing before and during all steps of data collection and analysis.

Participants' levels of engagement may also create a limitation, as the researcher could not force participants to engage or share in-depth information during interviews. Current events could have created limitations, as events of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes of participants regarding ILPs. Recent news accounts of fraudulent activities related to stimulus relief provided by the federal government were prevalent at the times of the interviews, and participants' attitudes and beliefs may have been impacted by these narratives. Another limitation may relate to the researcher's decision to perform interviews virtually, in light of precautions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While certain nuances in body language may be difficult to detect through virtual interviews, video and audio connections provided through Zoom allowed the researcher to observe much of participants' expressions and physical movements during the interviews.

Another limitation was that there was no pre-/post-assessment of perceived attitudes and social empathy. The goal of this study was not to empirically examine traits related to attitudes and empathy and how participation in the COPE simulation changed these traits. This research recognized the unavoidable subjectivity of individuals' attitudes and social empathy and embraced perceived changes in these traits as valuable indicators of the potential impact of the COPE simulation.

Due to limitations in the pool of prospective participants, those who participated in a COPE simulation during the last six years were eligible for participation. It was possible that individuals who participated in the simulation a few years ago may have had memory fatigue that limited the information they were able to provide. It was also possible that participants' experiences with the simulation varied slightly based on differences in how it was facilitated.

A final limitation pertained to the examination of participants' *perceptions*. Participants' attitudes and social empathy were not quantitatively measured, and one person's perceptions may vary significantly from those of another. The researcher was interested in how participants believe participation in the COPE simulation influenced their attitudes and social empathy towards ILPs, and recognized the inherent subjectivity in this research approach. However, qualitative researchers embrace individual differences and subjectivities of the human experience. Findings were interpreted with care to ensure claims did not exceed results to emerge from interview data.

Delimitations

According to Simon (2011), delimitations describe researcher defined boundaries that limit the scope of a study. The current study was subject to several delimitations. First, the sample was limited to 10 individuals who participated in the COPE simulation within the last six years. Individuals who participated in the simulation more than six years ago, or who participated in a different poverty simulation, were not eligible for the study. Another delimitation was that participants only included individuals who were currently employed by the study site organization. Employees of other local, state, or federal governmental organizations were not included.

The current research focused on the public sector, as participants only included social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Employees within the private sector may also have valuable insights regarding the perceived effects of poverty simulations, but those populations were beyond the scope of the current investigation.

Another delimitation related to the poverty simulation upon which the current research focused. The COPE simulation did not portray every experience and challenge encountered by ILPs; rather, the COPE provides a glimpse of ILPs' everyday lives. The simulation cannot be considered a holistic reflection of the barriers and struggles of ILPs, and a simulation exercise is different from experiencing the actual circumstances of poverty. Thus, the simulation has limits in the education and experience it can provide to participants.

A final delimitation was the researcher's selection of method and design. A qualitative phenomenology provided rich, detailed findings regarding participants' perceptions of changes in their attitudes and social empathy. Results are not generalizable and will be interpreted within the boundaries of the investigation.

Summary

The problem of the current study was the challenges experienced by those living in poverty can be propagated by poor attitudes and lack of empathy among the social service workers tasked with helping them (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). A key factor in individuals' attitudes and empathy are their understanding of the experiences of others, as well as an awareness of their personal biases (Piff et al., 2020). While poverty simulations can help increase individuals' awareness of personal biases and difficulties

experienced by ILPs (Stout, 2016), little is known about how poverty simulations may influence the perceived social empathy and attitudes of participants who work for local government organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with 10 social service providers employed at the study site location, who had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last 6 years. This chapter provided an introduction to the current investigation. The organization of the study, detailed by chapter, is provided below.

Organization of the Study

This study has the potential to contribute to the body of research that already exists about ways that people perceive ILPs. Chapter one of this study provided an introduction and overview of the current research problem, purpose, and guiding questions. The study's significance, key terms, limitations, and delimitations were also outlined.

In chapter two, the researcher provides a comprehensive literature review on the existing research to contextualize the current investigation. The literature review covers essential background information while revealing the gap that was addressed in this research. The third chapter contains details of the methodology, design, data collection, sample, and analysis procedures. Ethical considerations are also detailed.

Following approval of the proposal and IRB application, data collection and analysis occurred. A narrative of the results are presented in Chapter 4. Finally, a discussion of the findings, including an interpretation, recommendations, and directions for future research, appear in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

More people in the United States live in poverty than in any other developed nation (Lott & Bullock, 2007). In 2020, the U.S. poverty rate was 11.4%, with approximately 37.2 million ILPs (U.S. Census, 2021). Narratives about ILPs create barriers and stigmas that foster the cycle of poverty and undermine effective policy and program changes needed to improve their economic situations (Patrick, 2020). Smith-Carrier et al. (2019) concluded that poverty simulations can help shift narratives and change participants' attitudes and beliefs, which has valuable implications for individuals working in social services. Similarly, Stout (2016) argued that poverty simulations can improve participants' awareness of the challenges faced by ILPs. Simulations can also help participants better understand stereotypes toward ILPs and foster better understandings of the causes of poverty.

While researchers have examined outcomes associated with poverty simulations among a variety of samples, investigation is lacking among government employees. Specifically, little was known about how poverty simulations may affect empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among individuals working in local government organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of the current phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs; specifically, the

researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in a poverty simulation exercise.

Organization of the Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the current research through a review of existing scholarship on the effects of poverty, attitudes toward ILPs, and how positive and enduring shifts in perceptions toward ILPs may be made. In addition, the chapter highlights the importance of economic advancement opportunities for ILPs. Commonly held attitudes and beliefs about ILPs are discussed, as are the implications for organizational policy and institutional practice. Finally, the chapter highlights the transformational role poverty simulations can have on increasing leaders' and employees' awareness and empathy towards ILPs.

Individuals Living in Poverty

Poverty is a state of poor economic status that undermines one's ability to obtain shelter, food, and healthcare (Vandsburger et al., 2010). Poverty is determined by household size and income, according to thresholds set by the government (Price et al., 2018). According to Lott and Bullock (2007), the United States has more people living in poverty than does any other developed nation. A 2013 U.S. Census revealed 45.3 million people were living below the federal poverty line. The data also revealed 20.7% of U.S. children live in poverty. Of these impoverished children, 34.7% were African American and 33.1% were Hispanic, compared to 17.7% of Caucasians.

More recent data indicate the national poverty rate declined to 11.4% in 2020, with approximately 37.2 million ILPs (U.S. Census, 2021). While the longitudinal poverty trend is declining, the 2020 figure represents a 1% increase between 2019 and

2020, which is the first increase after five consecutive annual declines (U.S. Census, 2021). Of particular concern, poverty rates for individuals under the age of 18 increased to 16.1% in 2020 (U.S. Census, 2021).

Effects of Poverty

The detrimental effects of poverty are widespread, affecting nearly every facet of an individual's life. According to research from the Center for American Progress, poverty impairs the emotional, intellectual, and physical development of children. As a society, the economic impact of poverty is substantial. Child and youth poverty, along, costs the country nearly \$500 billion each year in reduced economic output, increased healthcare costs, and increased criminal justice expenditure (Hughes & Tucker, 2018). As public and private entities seek to rebuild the U.S. economy, creating more living wage jobs, enhancing employment supports, and early investment in children is necessary to ensure everyone can contribute to economic growth.

Impoverished Americans are more likely to lack health insurance, be impacted by obesity and food scarcity, receive a poorer quality public education, drop out of post-secondary educational programs, and be victimized by crime (Ingraham, 2015). In addition, the poor are more likely to miss important medical treatments, which often results in worsening health problems and more expensive treatments. When people who live in poverty do seek treatment for health conditions, they often face over-crowded clinics, long waits, a loss of wages, and spiraling debt. The effects of poverty can create immediate shortages of basic needs, such as food and housing, as well as long-term psychological and emotional stress (Price et al., 2018). The chronic stress of poverty, referred to as allostatic load, has long-term health consequences and is associated with

premature death (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014). The primary effects of poverty relate to the areas of physical health, education, economics, and mental health.

Health Disparities

Individuals living in poverty face significant health disparities. Poor health outcomes among the poor are largely associated with low SES, which limits access to healthcare, resources, and education about preventive care. Strasser et al. (2013) discovered that individuals of low SES receive less efficient healthcare and are often unable to pay for prescription medication. Strasser et al. (2013) also asserted that poor people's health conditions worsen from exposure to conditions of poverty. The poor are more likely to experience hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and sleep loss. Lott and Bullock (2007) found health insurance is the resource most lacking among the U.S. poor.

The long-term consequences of health inequities result in significant discrepancies in the life expectancies of the rich and poor. Chetty et al.'s (2016) landmark investigation on differences in the health outcomes of the country's richest 1% and the poorest 1% revealed poor men and women had an average life expectancy of 15 and 10 years shorter, respectively, than that of the most affluent men and women in the country. As Chokshi (2018) explained, the 10-year discrepancy in life expectancy among women is equal to the shortened life expectancy caused by a lifetime of smoking. The deprivation and stress created by poverty is also associated with a number of poor health outcomes, including increased risk for coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, kidney disease, dental disease, and respiratory diseases (Price et al., 2018). Poor children are more likely to experience

behavioral problems, risky health behaviors, childhood injuries, infectious disease, and chronic disease (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014).

Educational Disparities

In addition to health disparities faced by the poor, ILPs contend with significant disparities in educational access, educational quality, and academic outcomes. The educational disadvantages faced by ILPs can perpetuate the cycle of poverty by making it difficult to access the skills and knowledge needed to obtain higher paying jobs. As explained by McKenzie (2019):

Children living in poverty see many chronic stressors, including unsafe neighborhoods where there are high levels of crime, parents who are making minimum wage which causes a financial strain on the family, parents who are separated or divorced, siblings living in different households...all of these stressors create a void in the lives of children raised in poverty, and result in academic and behavioral issues in school. (p. 22)

Research indicates educational disadvantage becomes apparent at a very young age. For example, Betancourt et al. (2015) found that low SES had a negative impact on infant language development as early as seven months of age. Fernald et al. (2013) compared vocabulary development among low- and high-SES children and found the vocabularies of low-SES children was around 150 words fewer than that of more affluent children. Neuman et al. (2018) reported that children from low-SES families had fewer verbal interactions with parents, and interactions that did occur were typically comprised of short sentences and limited vocabulary. In school settings, the researchers found

kindergarten children from low-SES families were exposed to less complex language than were children from more affluent homes (Neuman et al., 2018).

Another way poverty creates educational disparities is through the fewer resources to which economically underprivileged children have access. For example, Neuman and Moland (2019) found stores in low-income neighborhoods carried fewer print resources and children's books than did stores in wealthier communities. The researchers reported more affluent communities had 16 times as many books per child as did communities with high levels of poverty (Neuman & Moland, 2019). Along with fewer resources, children in poverty have fewer internal and external supports that foster academic success (Lothrop, 2021). Poverty also has a negative effect on brain development and executive function (Dike, 2017; Lothrop, 2021). Children raised in poverty are more likely to develop cognitive delays due to structural changes in the brain that affect memory and emotion (McKenzie, 2019).

While academic achievement gaps related to race and ethnicity have slowly decreased in recent years, the poverty gap has increased (Paschall et al., 2018). Income-based disparities in academic achievement tend to increase throughout a child's education. Starting with President Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s, the creation of Head Start launched efforts to reduce economic disparities in the United States. However, past and current policies have done little to reduce the academic achievement gap between low- and high-income students (Reardon, 2011). Paschall et al.'s (2018) research on 20 cohorts of children between the ages of 5 and 14 revealed no systemic progress toward academic achievement along income/poverty lines was detected.

Emotional/Psychological Effects

Another negative consequence of poverty is the emotional and psychological effect it has on ILPs. While social welfare programs and policies are designed to aid ILPs, they often have stigmatizing effects that increase the marginalization of these individuals (Ali et al., 2018). As Ridley et al. (2020) explained, ILPs are significantly more likely to experience poor mental health than are affluent individuals. The loss of employment and declines in income not only drive poverty, but can also predict mental illness (Alloush, 2018). Stigma and shame are interconnected experiences among ILPs, with potentially negative emotional consequences (Walker, 2014). As Walker (2014) explained, shame is often imposed on ILPs by society and institutions that view the impoverished as individuals who have are poor because of their own doing.

The exclusion created by shame and stigma can undermine the health and well-being of ILPs (Link & Phelan, 2014), and manifest as depression, despair, suicidal ideation, and the perpetuation of poverty (Ali et al., 2018). The incidences of depression, anxiety, and suicide are negatively correlated with income (Banks et al., 2018; Iemmi et al., 2016). Lund et al. (2010) reported that ILPs are as much as three times more likely than affluent individuals to suffer from anxiety and depression. The relationship between low economic status and mental health disorders is cyclical; not only does the stress and stigma of being poor undermine mental health, but mental disorders can distort economic decision-making in ways that perpetuate poverty (Ridley et al., 2020). In contrast, increases in income can improve individuals' mental health (Ridley et al., 2020).

Researchers have examined the emotional and psychological consequences of poverty in a number of contexts. For example, Ali et al. (2018) investigated the

relationship between poverty and shame among ILPs living in New York City. Findings revealed participants experienced a combination of frustration, shame, and anger in their roles as providers and caregivers, and as recipients of social welfare when accessing benefits. The researchers emphasized the role of social and institutional practices in creating stigmatizing and shameful experiences for ILPs – the consequences of which may perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

As Ridley et al. (2020) explained, “the most compelling causal evidence that poverty causes mental illness comes from randomized-controlled trials that evaluate anti-poverty programs” (p. 5). Such research indicates participation in anti-poverty programs is associated with significant improvements to mental health, both in the short- and long-term (Ridley et al., 2020). Researchers have studied the mechanisms through which poverty causes mental health issues and have reported a number of related factors such as worry, uncertainty, environment, poor physical health, trauma, violence, exposure to crime, shame, isolation, and poor social status (Dean et al., 2018; Perez-Truglia, 2019; Ridley et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2016; Sharkey et al., 2016).

Economic Opportunity for ILPs

Although approximately 43 million people in the United States live in poverty, disdain for government assistance programs continues to worsen (Wagaman et al., 2018). During the State of the Union Address in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared an unconditional war against poverty in the United States. Sawhill (1988) recounted how economists and other government officials were tasked with developing a plan to measure poverty and create programs to assist ILPs. Bertram (2011) discussed the challenges President Johnson faced with enacting policies and programs to assist ILPs,

which included fierce opposition from Congressional policymakers who held differing mindsets about programs designed to assist the poor. Bertram emphasized ways the conservative wing of Congress fought against allocating additional resources to these programs, and how many southern states and institutions reinforced this mindset through local policies and institutional practices. Despite their opposition, President Johnson and his administration enacted the Economic Opportunity Act and launched a number of policies, programs, and initiatives to provide ILP with opportunities for economic advancement.

Since President Johnson's declaration of war against poverty, decades of neoliberal social policies have resulted in the current social welfare state (Ali et al., 2018). As Ali et al. (2018) explained,

The impetus for the 1996 welfare reforms, the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, included "blaming the poor" for their material situation, dependency on welfare, and not entering the labor market...The United States has a history of developing and implementing stigmatizing means-testing tools, which has implications for policy, policy practice, and the ways in which individuals are treated. (p. 2784)

While social welfare programs have helped to raise 39 million individuals out of poverty in the last several years, they are also targets for federal budget reductions (Rachidi, 2017).

Godfrey (2016) suggested that a key reason for the failed War on Poverty was that some Americans believed the causes of poverty were more individualistic than structural. According to Stricker (2007), when individuals develop a more empathetic attitude

toward ILPs, they begin to view the causes of poverty as more structural. Davidson (2009) asserted this perspective is important because beliefs about the causes of poverty influence individuals' attitudes and beliefs towards those living in poverty. As Trout (2009) discussed, people's behaviors and decisions about ILPs are shaped by their attitudes and beliefs. Individuals who are empathetic have the ability to advocate for policies and institutional practices that can create economic opportunities for ILPs.

According to Winship (2011), upward mobility for individuals in deep poverty is the crux of the American promise. Even individuals who embrace the notion that *a rising tide lifts all boats* have reservations about economic advancement among the U.S. poor. According to DeParle (2012), the mobility gap that places poor children at a disadvantage makes it difficult to rise out of poverty. Only 8% of men in America rose from the bottom to the top fifth, compared to 12% in Great Britain and 14% in Denmark. The United States offers less economic mobility than comparable nations, as reported in major studies (Jantti et al., 2006).

Attitudes and Beliefs Toward ILPs

Over the past two decades, studies have been conducted to examine attitudes towards people living in poverty. For the most part, these studies discuss individualistic and structural dimensions of poverty. The individualistic focuses on poverty being derived from areas in which individuals are lacking. According to Reutter et al. (2005), an individualistic explanation argues people are poor because of their bad choices or lacking motivation and work ethic. Structural explanations focus on deficiencies within the market economy, systemic inequalities, and limited opportunities for ILPs (DiNitto, 2000; Mullaly, 2007). Fatalistic explanation is another dimension of poverty that is

generally attributed to factors beyond one's control (Golding & Middleton, 1982). Nickols and Nielsen (2011) provided this explanation of poverty as the result of fate, divine nature, or just bad luck. Patrick (2020) argued that narratives about ILPs contribute to the negative imagery of anti-poverty programs and encourage policymakers to take a more participatory approach toward understanding and addressing poverty.

Attributions to Poverty

Individuals' beliefs and judgements about the causes of poverty can be used to either reinforce or dismantle economic inequality (Piff et al., 2020). As Piff et al. (2020) explained, "An observer's attributions can vary in terms of certain dimensions, including locus and control" (p. 496). While controllable attributions can suppress concerns about economic disparities, poverty is usually the result of uncontrollable factors, such as unemployment, cognitive load, wage stagnation, illness, discrimination, and predatory lending (Desilver, 2018; Mani et al., 2013; Piff et al., 2020). Because individuals tend to focus on controllable causes of poverty, such as laziness or poor planning, the blame for poverty is often placed upon the poor (Heiserman & Simpson, 2017). According to attributional theorists, individuals' tendencies to associate poverty with controllable factors extends biases and false narratives about the poor (Hunt & Bullock, 2016). Those who believe the poor are responsible for their economic situations are more likely to believe they are deserving of poverty (Piff et al., 2020).

Because poverty attributions can create tolerance for inequality, helping to educate individuals about its uncontrollable causes may help raise people's awareness and opposition to economic inequality (Piff et al., 2020). Situational attributions for poverty signal that the poor are not deserving of their situations, can increase willingness

to help those in poverty, and provide support for social welfare programs. Through transformational learning and poverty simulations, individuals may learn about uncontrollable causes of poverty and come to view it as more situational. In two large surveys with cross-national samples, Piff et al. (2020) found situational attributions for poverty were associated with opposition to economic inequality. Three follow-up investigations by the same scholars revealed virtual simulations could increase individuals' situational attributions for poverty and prompt support and behavior aimed at reducing economic inequality.

Addressing attitudes and beliefs about poverty, as well as its attributions, is particularly important for those in health and social service positions. As Smith-Carrier et al. (2019) explained, “Students and practitioners from privileged socio-economic backgrounds may have little understanding about the root causes, effects, and experiences associated with poverty, and may (perhaps inadvertently) perpetuate negative stereotypes and/or prejudices about people they will, or currently do, serve” (p. 644).

Social Empathy

A major cause of the negative attributions to poverty relates to empathy, which describes “the act of perceiving, understanding, and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person” (Barker, 2003, p. 141). Through prosocial behaviors such as altruism and cooperation, empathy promotes positive social interactions (Segal, 2011). Public attitudes toward ILPs have been historically negative because of a lack of understanding (Wagaman et al., 2018). As Frank and Rice (2017) explained, U.S. citizens often struggle to understand poverty because they lack empathy and are unable to relate to ILPs. The distance between the privileged and ILPs can undermine empathy and

diminish prosocial behaviors; however, that distance can be bridged by developing deep understandings of the contextual factors that contribute to the experiences of others (Wagaman et al., 2018).

Social empathy is an essential component of understanding and promoting social justice (Hellman et al., 2018). When individuals understand the experiences and needs of others, they are more likely to act on empathy in ways that demonstrate altruistic motivation (Wagaman et al., 2018). As such, Segal (2007) argued that teaching social empathy can lead to the creation of social policies and programs that help address persistent causes of poverty. Segal (2011) explained that social empathy serves as a pathway for social policies and communities that are governed by empathy.

Social empathy describes empathic feelings across societies and groups (Wagaman et al., 2018). Segal (2011) defined social empathy as “the ability to more deeply understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities” (p. 266). In contrast to social empathy, interpersonal empathy describes the ability to identify and understand the emotional experiences of others (Hylton, 2018). Social empathy combines interpersonal empathy with contextual understandings (Segal, 2014) and is founded on three components: (a) interpersonal empathetic abilities, (b) contextual understandings of structural barriers to economic and social opportunities, and (c) the ability to broadly understand the economic and social conditions of the less privileged (Segal & Wagaman, 2017). Through social empathy, individuals can consider the lived experiences of those from different backgrounds and cultures, who are subject to marginalization and oppression (Segal, 2011).

As Wagaman et al. (2018) explained,

Deep understanding of the lived experiences of people from groups different from ourselves means learning about that group's historical exposure to oppression or privilege, barriers to or support for social and economic opportunities, and what it would feel like to be in such a marginalized or privileged position. (p. 475)

Social empathy can foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of poverty (Segal, 2007). A lack of social empathy can cause people to become intolerant or to believe negative stereotypes about those different from them (Hellman et al., 2018). In contrast, the presence of social empathy is associated with better understandings of the social problems and structural inequities (Frank & Rice, 2017). When individuals possess social empathy, they are more likely to demonstrate cooperation, altruism, social responsibility, consideration of others, and promote positive social change (Hellman et al., 2018). Social empathy can protect against compassion fatigue and increase the specificity of aid that people provide to those in need (Gerdes, 2011). For these reasons, Segal (2011) argued that social empathy is a powerful tool for fostering social justice and social change.

Transformational Learning

The changing of problematic attitudes and behaviors about poverty often requires transformational learning through experience. According to Senge (1990), mental models are derived from narratives and often lead to the formation of coalitions around a common cause and shift in power dynamics. When relationships and connections are formed, and power dynamics shift, structural change can then occur. New policies and institutional practices can be adopted, and resources can be reallocated to address systemic issues. This all begins with people changing their attitudes and beliefs toward poverty.

Mezirow (1994) discussed how some experiences lead individuals to question currently held frames of reference and subsequently, cause them to reflect and change their views due to the acquisition of new information. In addition, Fanning and Gaba (2007) described how experiential learning enabled adults to transfer learning to their own context. Experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). According to Kolb (2013), the framework for experiential learning consists of six key concepts:

1. Learning is best understood as a process not as an outcome;
2. All learning is a form of relearning;
3. Learning requires a resolution of conflicting views of adaptations to the world;
4. Learning occurs through the process of adapting;
5. Learning comes from synergetic interactions between individuals and their environment; and
6. Learning takes place when individuals acquire knowledge.

Each stage of Kolb’s model is directly aligned with the poverty simulation experience. Concrete experience occurs when individuals participate in the simulation. Reflective observation takes place during debriefing sessions and reflections. Abstract conceptualization takes place when participants discuss how their beliefs and stereotypical thinking about ILP were derived. Active experimentation occurs when participants apply learned concepts to their everyday work experiences.

Experiential learning is a type of learning that occurs through actual, first-hand experiences (Strange & Gibson, 2017). Transformative learning asserts individuals can develop an understanding of the world around them and transform their perspectives and frames of reference through reflection, active learning, and by placing themselves in uncomfortable situations (Strange & Gibson, 2017). As Strange and Gibson (2017) explained, experiential learning can lead to transformative learning. Similarly,

MackIntosh (2014) argued that experiential learning fosters transformative learning experiences and changes to individuals' perceptions. Simulation exercises allow individuals to simulate experiences that can be transformative by helping them understand and examine others' experiences. One's opinions or ideas cannot be changed without the willingness to examine another's view or experiences (Mueller, 2021).

Poverty Simulations

Poverty simulations provide a way to leverage experiential and transformational learning to improve attitudes toward ILPs. As Hellman et al. (2018) explained, "The purpose of a poverty simulation is to encourage students to reflect on the misconceptions, biases, and judgements regarding people who live in poverty and experience some of the pressures that they face within a safe environment" (p. 12). According to Rice et al. (2017), simulation is a method of learning that requires participants to perform problem-solving tasks while assuming roles that are typically unfamiliar to them. Simulations provide unique learning opportunities that rely on the interplay of participants and simulation conditions (Rice et al., 2017). Simulations are steeped in real-world scenarios, which provide participants with opportunities to learn and practice problem-solving in risk-free settings. In addition to teaching participants new information and skills, simulation exercises can create change in participants' perceptions and attitudes of the scenarios and individuals they role-play (Todd et al., 2011).

Smith-Carrier et al. (2019) concluded that poverty simulations have been effective at shifting narratives and changing the attitudes and beliefs of participants, which has valuable implications for individuals working in social services. Krumer-Nevo et al. (2009) suggested poverty simulation can help students understand the structural nature of

poverty. Vandsburger et al. (2010) also supported the use of poverty simulations to create a mental model shift in the way individuals relate to ILPs. According to Vandsburger et al. (2010), poverty simulations highlight the challenges low-income individuals face when attempting to gain access to support services that could ultimately lead to economic mobility and wealth-building.

Kreber (2001) suggested that activities can create intrinsic experiences during the process of transformation. Research indicates poverty simulations can help change participants' attitudes about poverty (Roll & Browne, 2017), and foster pro-civic behavior and empathy toward the poor (Browne & Roll, 2014). Through experiential learning, poverty simulation activities can increase empathy toward ILPs by challenging beliefs about the causes and effects of poverty (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). This type of learning fosters critical thinking, dialogue, engagement, reflection, and evaluation of personal values that help learners make meaning from knowledge (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019).

Steck et al. (2011) explained individuals who participate in poverty simulations are forced to make impromptu decisions that could lead to the transfer of knowledge, improved development and application of skills, and transformational learning experiences. According to Boggs et al. (2007), impromptu simulations have an element in which the learner is in control over their learning, making it more effective. Jarrell et al. (2014) described poverty simulations as an exercise in which participants are made aware of common barriers ILPs face, and how these experiences vary based on individual traits such as age, gender, and race. Salzman (1990) purported that in order to overcome these barriers, one must first acknowledge and understand them. Sturm (2008) asserted the

need for individuals to further explore the plight of the poor through research and training to prevent negative attitudes and assumptions towards ILP.

Sturm (2008) argued the culture of poverty is perpetuated through policies and resource allocation when ILPs are not fully engaged in the political system via their expression of personal power. According to Toporek and Pope-Davis (2005), biases, stereotypes, and assumptions can create barriers to professional growth that negatively impact relationships with ILPs. Knowles (1975) discussed the importance of helping adults draw from their own experiences during the learning process. During the COPE simulation debrief, participants reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs about ILP based on worldviews that are often derived from past experiences (Sue et al., 1992).

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effects of poverty simulations on participants. Sams et al. (2019) studied the effects of a poverty simulation on allied dental health students. The simulation required participants to role-play as low-income families, such as single parents caring for children or senior citizens trying to live on social security. The simulation included a registration process, simulation experience, and debriefing. Four trained facilitators led the simulation. Results from pre- and post-simulation surveys revealed significant increases in participants' understandings of all five categories assessed, including financial pressures, difficult choices, improving situation, emotional stress and frustrations, and obtaining community resources. By understanding the experiences and stressors of poverty, the researchers concluded that participants' affective perceptions of poverty could be improved.

Using a sample of nursing students, Ehmke (2018) found a poverty simulation led to significant improvements to participants' understandings of the structural causes of

poverty. Among participants, 58% became more aware of their attitudes and beliefs, 67% became more sensitive toward those living in poverty, and 66% reported improvements in their abilities refer impoverished individuals to community resources. Hellman et al.'s (2018) research on the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students revealed participation in a poverty simulation was associated with increases in empathy and social justice beliefs.

Menzel et al. (2014) also explored the effects of poverty simulation on nursing students. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial using a 2.5-hour virtual poverty simulation, which was delivered three times over a 1-year period. While the researchers found simulation participants developed more favorable attitudes toward ILPs, these changes in attitude did not differ significantly from nursing students in the control group. Menzel et al. (2014) concluded that while poverty simulations can help transform participants' attitudes, they must be employed in conjunction with social justice concepts to facilitate lasting and significant changes. Mueller (2021) employed a poverty simulation developed by the United Way among a sample of nurses and found significant positive changes in nurses' attitudes toward ILPs after participating in the simulation.

A commonly used poverty simulation project was developed by the Missouri Community Action Network (MCAN, 2010). The MCAN is a 2-hour program designed to help participants better understand the experiences of ILPs. The program's objective is to "increase students' awareness of the realities of life faced by low-income people and to review community resources that are available to them" (Vandsburger et al., 2010, p. 305). In so doing, the MCAN can challenge common beliefs and myths about poverty

through a process of transformational learning (Vandsburger et al., 2010). Vandsburger et al. (2010) studied the effects of MCAN participation on students' understandings of life in poverty. While participation did not significantly change students' beliefs about the causes of poverty, it did alter perceptions about the challenges faced by ILPs and fostered further thinking about the problem of poverty (Vandsburger et al., 2010).

Hsieh and Coates (2017) also incorporated the Missouri Community Action Network's poverty simulation exercises with medical interns and found the simulation provided participants with valuable insights about the challenges faced by ILPs. The scholars shared that during the simulation, "many appeared frustrated with service providers and other family members; others almost came to tears" (Hsieh & Coates, 2017, p. 52). In a similar investigation, Smith (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the effects of a poverty simulation on students in an undergraduate nursing program and found significant improvements in students' stigmas and structural perspectives of poverty. The researcher called for additional study on the perceived effects of poverty simulations, using a qualitative approach; the current research answered Smith's call for investigation.

Roll and Browne's (2017) research revealed how students learn about poverty through simulation exercises. Using participatory action research, the scholars found the simulation fostered transformational learning and that the environment of the simulation had a significant effect on student learning. After the simulation, participants demonstrated an increased interest in social justice issues and decreases in harsh judgements toward ILPs. Rice et al.'s (2017) study on the use of a poverty simulation among teachers revealed participation helped improve teachers' understandings of

poverty, reveal their personal biases, and improve empathy toward children and families living in poverty. Smith-Carrier et al.'s (2019) mixed-method research explored whether poverty simulation participation affected beliefs about the causes of poverty and attitudes toward those experiencing poverty. While survey results indicated improvements in participants' attitudes toward poverty, the simulation did not seem to foster action to reduce poverty. Consequently, the scholars argued that poverty simulations can help foster positive changes in attitudes and beliefs about poverty, interventions that foster action are needed to create lasting changes in economic inequality (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019).

Smith-Carrier et al.'s (2019) study revealed that poverty simulations were not a cohesive solution to problems related to negative attitudes toward poverty; rather, this type of experiential learning is a tool that may help students and practitioners learn about poverty and reflect on their personal attitudes and biases toward poverty. Similarly, Nnakwe (2019) found that a poverty simulation could help students develop more empathy toward ILPs, but it did not significantly change their sensitivity toward low-income individuals. Sanko et al.'s (2020) study on the effects of a poverty simulation on undergraduate and graduate nursing students revealed no significant changes in overall attitudes toward ILPs. However, the researchers did find the simulation increased participants' willingness to help ILPs, as well as their empathy toward those individuals (Sanko et al., 2020). A study on the effects of a poverty simulation on attitudes and learning outcomes of family and consumer sciences college students revealed simulation can be an effective educational tool that fosters more positive attitudes and empathy toward ILPs (Arnett-Hartwick & Davis, 2019).

Implications for Organizations

Bolman and Deal (2013) identified four distinctive frames from which individuals can view issues related to their organization: Structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. According to Bolman and Deal, the structural frame should be considered when the existing structure contributes to the problem. The structural frame usually involves rules, policies, and procedures. Aligning local, state, and federal policies to prevent low-income families from losing support and benefits is an example of resolving the issue from a structural lens. Many individuals experiencing poverty have a desire to earn more income but choose not to because even a marginal increase in their salary might cause them to lose important support benefits like childcare, housing, food, and healthcare; this phenomenon is commonly referred to as the “fiscal benefits cliff.”

Bolman and Deal (2013) described the human resource frame as having an integrated focus on the needs of employees within an organization. Employees within organizations and institutions often have implicit biases that contribute to attitudes and behaviors. These biases often shape policymakers’ attitudes and beliefs about poverty, which in turn, influence the policies they support. They also influence interactions with ILPs.

Within the political frame, decisions are primarily focused on maintaining coalitions or protecting the power of those who control decision-making processes (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The policies that contribute to poverty are often supported by one of the two dominant political groups in the United States. There are often conflicting views about how federal funding should be allocated. The political party that has the majority is often the party that prevails.

Bolman and Deal (2013) focused on how humans use meaning and belief to create culture. This is often supported by stories and narratives that have symbolic meaning. Many of the stereotypes and stigmas associated with poverty are perpetuated by the culture and narratives conveyed by the media. For example, Foster (2008) elaborated on how “The Welfare Queen” stereotype was used symbolically to perpetuate a false narrative about single mothers who live in poverty. These stories, especially the negative ones, are directly related to the environments created by inequitable policies.

Summary

More people in the United States live in poverty than in any other developed nation (Lott & Bullock, 2007). Narratives about ILPs create barriers that foster the cycle of poverty and undermine effective policy and program changes needed to improve their economic situations (Patrick, 2020). Poverty simulations can improve participants’ awareness of the challenges faced by ILPs and better understand stereotypes toward ILPs.

A review of the existing literature highlighted the challenges and barriers faced by ILPs, and how those challenges are compounded by negative stereotypes and stigmas about poverty. Ample research indicates poverty simulations may provide experiential learning opportunities that lead to transformative changes in participants’ attitudes and beliefs about poverty. While researchers have examined outcomes associated with poverty simulations among a variety of samples, investigation was lacking among government employees. Specifically, little was known about how poverty simulations may affect empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among individuals working in local government organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of the current phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service

providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Methodological details of the investigation are provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Of the existing research on poverty-related training and interventions, little was known about how poverty simulations may affect perceived social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among individuals working in local government organizations. Accordingly, the purpose of the current study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs; specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. This research was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence attitudes toward ILPs?

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence social empathy toward ILPs?

This chapter provides methodological details of the current investigation. First the study method and design are discussed, followed by a description of the sample, sampling strategy, and recruitment plan. Next, the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plans are detailed. The role of the researcher and trustworthiness checks are

described, followed by the plan to ensure ethical treatment of all participants. The chapter closes with a summary.

Research Method and Design

A qualitative research method was employed to explore the perceived experiences of participants in the current investigation. Qualitative research is useful for gathering an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences relative to phenomena under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Through qualitative inquiry, researchers can explore ideas and concepts that are difficult to quantify (Portela et al., 2015). Rather than measure relationships between variables or performing statistical analyses, as done in quantitative research, qualitative investigators forgo statistical certainty and embrace the subjectivity of each person's unique experience (Walliman, 2011). The goal of the current research was not to test relationships between variables or provide generalizable results; rather, the researcher aimed to explore the unique and subjective perceived experiences of individuals who participated in the COPE poverty simulation. Accordingly, a qualitative method was selected.

Several qualitative designs were considered but not chosen for this investigation, including case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative. Ultimately, a phenomenological design was selected to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences with study phenomena (Van Manen, 1990); in the case of the current study, the phenomenon under investigation was perceived changes in personal attitudes and social empathy toward ILPs after participating in the COPE simulation. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology can be used to understand participants' experiences through reflection and intuition. Phenomenology allows researchers to capture

understandings of phenomena from those individuals who directly experience them (Tuohy et al., 2013).

The two main schools of phenomenology are hermeneutic and transcendental. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the meaning developed and attributed to a phenomenon by those experiencing it. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of experience and embraces subjectivity as an interpretive lens (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In contrast, transcendental phenomenology attempts to *transcend* the subjective to understand an objective reality. Because the aim of the current study was to explore participants' perceptions of the ways participation in a poverty simulation influenced them, this research leveraged, rather than transcended, participants' personal and subjective experiences. Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological design was selected.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of employees of a local governmental agency located in the southeastern United States. The study site organization funded nonprofit organizations that assisted ILPs. Examples of these state-level agencies included the Department of Children and Families, Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Healthy Kids, and SNAP. For the current research, a single agency located in a South Florida county was selected.

The study site organization was established in 1986 to serve the families of its surrounding county. The organization received funding from property taxes, grants, and other sources. The council distributes funding to 55 programs that serve four categories of needs: (a) childcare, after school, summer camps, and scholarships, (b) services for pregnant women and young children, (c) community safety and literacy initiatives, and

(d) community hubs. Overall, the organization works with programs that help improve the lives of families and children, connecting them with resources to reduce poverty. As of 2021, the study site organization employed approximately 120 workers.

The study sample included 10 employees of the study site organization who had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last 6 years. The COPE simulation was regularly conducted at the study site organization, and the researcher did not experience any challenges obtaining the sample. A sample size of 10 participants was selected based on recommendations by previous qualitative researchers (Francis et al., 2010; Morse, 1994). In qualitative investigations, a sample is adequate in size when saturation is indicated. Saturation represents the point at which the addition of new participants does not result in any novel findings (Mason, 2010). Because saturation was indicated by the 10 participant interviews, additional participants were not needed.

Sampling Strategy

Participants were recruited based on a purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher “seeks out subjects who have experienced the types of experiences the researcher seeks to understand” (Denzin, 1989, p. 49). Ten employees of the study site organization participated in this study. Each individual had participated in the COPE poverty simulation within the previous six years. The sample was diverse in terms of gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status. In addition, participants represented various levels within the organization. The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (a) be a current employee of the study site organization, (b) have been employed by the study site organization for at least one year, (c), have completed the COPE simulation within the last six years, and (d) be at least 18 years of age.

COPE Simulation

The focus of the current research was the Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) simulation. The COPE simulation “is a 2.5-hour immersive experience that gives [participants] the opportunity to gain a glimpse into the lives of families” facing poverty in their own communities. (ThinkTank, n.d.). Organizations across the United States use the COPE simulation to work with organizations, help employees uncover their own biases and attitudes, understand the challenges associated with poverty, and develop comprehensive ways to address the poverty-related issues (ThinkTank, n.d.). The simulation provides a snapshot of the challenges, decisions, and consequences faced each day by those living in poverty.

During the COPE simulation, participants are assigned the roles and identities of those living in poverty. Participants are provided with limited access to resources and must contend with issues such as unemployment, childcare costs, limited access to healthy food, poor healthcare access, and incarceration. As Singh et al. (2019) explained, the simulation may include community resource areas such as courthouses, pawn shops, grocery stores, and gas stations. During the simulation, participants must access and use limited resources to accomplish daily living tasks, such as paying rent, buying groceries, or paying utility bills (Singh et al., 2019).

Instrumentation

Data were collected via individual semi-structured interviews; thus, the study instrument was an interview protocol (Appendix A) consisting of open-ended items aimed at exploring participants’ perceived attitudes and empathy associated with participation in the COPE simulation. Phenomenological researchers leverage semi-

structured interviews to gather rich data on participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Using smaller samples, phenomenologists focus on gathering detailed information through interviews in comfortable, intimate settings. By creating rapport and privacy, respondents may respond more openly and honestly, providing the researcher with meaningful and insightful data.

The interview protocol (Appendix A) ensured all participants were asked the same questions in the same order, to create consistency across the interviews (Gall et al., 2003). Creswell (2007) suggested follow-up questions to create flexibility and unearth additional information during interviews. As appropriate, probing and follow-up questions were asked to clarify or add more detail to participants' responses. The protocol consisted of 10 questions and interviews were expected to last no longer than 30 to 45 minutes. The interview protocol was developed, reviewed, and field tested to ensure questions were not leading or biased.

Expert Review

Prior to the field test, the researcher had the interview protocol (Appendix A) reviewed by four subject matter experts. The objective of the review was to ensure questions were clearly written, objective, unbiased, and well aligned with the research questions. The reviewers suggested additional questions to consider and slight advised changes to the wording of existing questions to improve clarity.

Field Test

Following the expert review, the interview protocol (Appendix A) was field tested with one individual who met the stated inclusion criteria. Importantly, data from this interview was not be included in the study; it was destroyed following the field test. The

objective of the field test was to examine how well the interview protocol communicated the questions being asked. The field test also helped the researcher understand how much context was necessary to provide to participants prior to the interviews, to direct their thinking toward the phenomenon of interest and ensure understanding of essential constructs such as attitudes, social empathy, and poverty. Following the field test, the researcher asked the participant if they have any suggested changes for the protocol, or if there were any additional questions they suggested including. The participant was thanked for their time and subsequent changes to the protocol are reported in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2013), data collection involves setting boundaries for the study and collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations, interviews, document reviews as well as analyzing visual materials. Prior to participant recruitment or data collection, the researcher called the President and Chief Executive Officer of the study site organization to request permission to recruit and interview employees. The following script was used to make this request:

I am currently enrolled as a student in the College of Education Leadership Adult and Community Education doctoral program at Florida Atlantic University. I am interested in examining how the COPE simulation has affected employees at all levels of the organization. More specifically, I am exploring whether the simulation led to any perceived shifts in employees' attitudes or beliefs about individuals living in poverty. The perceptions of COPE participants would be explored through individual, semi-structured interviews. I am seeking a sample of 10 employees for this investigation. The name of the organization and the

employees who would be interviewed will remain confidential. May I have your permission to administer the survey and interview ten of your employees?

After receiving a verbal approval, the researcher sent a follow-up email to obtain written approval, as well (Appendix D). The researcher then worked with the designated organization representative to identify and invite employees to participate. The researcher obtained the list of employees who participated in the COPE poverty simulation during the previous 6 years. The researcher then emailed each identified person the study invitation (Appendix E)

After receiving responses and scheduling interviews, the researcher sent each prospect an email that contained a link to the online informed consent form (Appendix B) and demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), which was hosted on SurveyMonkey. The consent form contained details of the study purpose, inclusion criteria, participation requirements, and the voluntary nature of participation. The demographic questionnaire gathered basic demographic information to help the researcher develop a description of the study sample. Participants read the consent form and indicated consent by clicking a button that read, "I agree." If a participant did not complete the consent form or clicked "I do not agree," they were not enrolled in the study. Those who provided consent were then directed to the online questionnaire. After the consent form and questionnaire have been completed, the researcher reached out to schedule a time and day for the participant's interview. After interviews were scheduled, the researcher emailed participants links to their Zoom meetings for their scheduled times. In compliance with safety precautions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted remotely, via Zoom.

The researcher logged into Zoom 10 minutes early for each of the scheduled interviews. When the participant entered the meeting, the researcher thanked them for their time and interest, and welcomed the participant to ask any questions they may have. After questions were answered, the researcher notified the participant that the interview was about to begin, and that the meeting would be recorded for later transcription. The researcher then used the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A. The researcher asked each open-ended question in the order it appeared in the protocol, to explore participants' perceptions of the ways the COPE simulation affected their attitudes and social empathy toward ILPs. After all questions were asked, the researcher welcomed the participant to share any additional information they felt was relevant. The meeting then ended and the recording was stopped. Recorded meetings were downloaded from Zoom for later transcription. This process of data collection continued until all participants were interviewed.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were conducted, the process of data analysis began. First, each interview was professionally transcribed. Following transcription, each participant was emailed a copy of their interview transcript for review. The process of transcript review helped confirm the accuracy of interviews and increased the trustworthiness of results. The transcript review resulted in no changes to the data.

Study data were managed electronically. The researcher placed transcribed interviews in an electronic folder on their personal, password-protected computer. Patton (1990) discussed the use of an analytical framework to translate phenomenological qualitative data using inductive analysis and bracketing. Epoché involves the researcher

setting aside their personal biases. Phenomenological reduction involves outlining specific steps that will be used to bracket and analyze the data.

Analysis of the interviews followed Groenewald's (2004) approach to phenomenological analysis. This process of analysis consists of five steps:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering units of meaning into themes and subthemes
4. Summarizing each interview
5. Creating a narrative of the results

For the first step, the researcher performed bracketing and phenomenological reduction. Bracketing and reduction helped the researcher identify and set aside any preconceived ideas or biases prior to working with the data. Using a *reflexive journal*, the researcher reflected on and became aware of their own opinions and beliefs prior to working with the data, to minimize potential bias. Next, the researcher began delineating and assigning units of meaning in the study data. Units of meaning, or codes, were indicated by the repetition of words, ideas, phrases, sentiments, etc. When repetition was identified, a unit of meaning was created and noted at each occurrence in the transcripts. After the researcher coded all 10 interviews, a second pass was performed to ensure all units of meaning were identified and assigned. Saturation was indicated during coding.

Following the second pass of coding the transcripts, units of meaning were clustered based on relationships, in alignment with the research questions. The researcher reviewed the codes for similarities, and worked to arrange and rearrange them until themes and subthemes emerged. Once themes and subthemes were identified, a succinct

definition was created for each. Each of the 10 interviews were then summarized as a validity check, to ensure the themes and subthemes were in alignment with the essence of participant interviews. Finally, a narrative of study results was developed using examples and quotes from the interviews. Member checking occurred following analysis, and each participant was sent a copy of the results for review. Participants were asked to review the results to ensure findings were in alignment with the sentiments they desired to communicate. Member checking resulted in no changes to the analysis. Results are presented in the following chapter.

Role of the Researcher

According to Maxwell (2013), researchers must acknowledge their personal subjectivity and biases when analyzing data and reporting findings. Researcher bias is acknowledged for this study. The researcher had personally participated in a COPE simulation in the past and also assisted with the facilitation of COPE simulations on numerous occasions. The researcher promotes activities that raised awareness about the experiences of ILPs and administered several programs to support impoverished families. To help prevent researcher bias from interfering with findings, the aforementioned process of bracketing was employed.

Methods of Verification

Because the robustness of qualitative data cannot be calculated numerically, qualitative researchers employ a series of trustworthiness checks to ensure findings are accurate and reliable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the importance of member checking as a crucial technique to establish credibility. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher asked each participant to review their transcripts and clarify

any information that was not clearly articulated. Transcript review is a form of member checking that allows participants to ensure their sentiments were accurately captured by confirming or denying the interpretation of the information shared (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher provided participants with one week to approve or make revisions to their interview transcripts. The researcher allowed participants additional time to review transcripts, upon their request. The second form of member checking was employed to allow participants to review findings that emerged from the analysis, as previously described.

Protection of Human Subjects

To ensure the fair and ethical treatment of all study participants, a number of ethical considerations will be made. First, the researcher completed all trainings required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to engaging in the research. The researcher also ensured the appropriate forms and waivers were submitted to IRB and provided additional explanations to the IRB as requested. In addition, the principles of the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) were followed, which included respect, justice, and beneficence. All participants were provided with confidentiality and pseudonyms were used in all published data. Personal autonomy was ensured through the informed consent process, as previously described. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time prior to analysis of the transcripts. No participant withdrew.

The researcher took measures to protect the information collected from the participants. All data were stored on a computer that was protected by a password only known by the researcher. The researcher was the only individual who had access to raw

data. Any hard data, such as printed transcripts, were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. All study data will be stored for a period of 2 years, after which time it will be permanently deleted.

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs; specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. The researcher gathered qualitative data via interviews with 10 employees of the study site organization who have participated in the COPE simulation in the last 6 years. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data were analyzed following Groenewald's (2004) approach to phenomenological analysis. The researcher used an approved interview protocol to gather data regarding participants' perceptions of any effects they believed the simulation had on their attitudes and empathy toward ILPs. Results of the analysis are reported in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The problem of the current study was that the challenges experienced by those living in poverty can be propagated by poor attitudes and lack of empathy among the social service workers and organizations tasked with helping them (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). A key factor in individuals' attitudes and empathy are their understandings of the experiences of others, as well as their awareness of personal biases (Piff et al., 2020). An understanding of the needs of ILPs is critical to providing them with effective responses and resources (Segal, 2007); however, the demonstration of empathy and caring attitudes is also essential to improving outcomes for ILPs (Stout, 2016). The purpose this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. The study was guided by the following two questions:

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence attitudes toward ILPs?

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence social empathy toward ILPs?

This chapter provides study results. First, a description of the sample is provided. Next, the analysis process is detailed, and emerging codes, themes, and subthemes are discussed. Themes and subthemes are presented as a narrative, drawing examples and quotes from participant interviews. The chapter closes with a brief discussion.

Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of 10 individuals who were employed by the study site organization and had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last 6 years. In addition, all participants had been employed by the study site organization for at least 1 year and were at least 18 years of age. The sample was demographically diverse, as illustrated in Table 1. Three participants were male and seven were female. In terms of race, three were Hispanic, four were Black, and three were White. Only one participant identified as upper middle class during childhood; seven identified as middle class, and two identified as below middle class. Age range responses indicated most participants were older professionals.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

| Participant # | Age range | Sex | Race | Socioeconomic status during childhood | Position Title | Date Participated in Simulation |
|----------------|-----------|--------|----------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Participant 1 | 36-55 | Female | Hispanic | Middle class | Administrative Assistant III | 11/7/2017 |
| Participant 2 | 56-75 | Female | Hispanic | Middle class | Communications Director | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 3 | 56-75 | Female | Black | Middle class | Program Officer | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 4 | 36-55 | Female | Hispanic | Middle class | Sr. Executive Asst. to CEO | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 5 | 25-35 | Female | Black | Middle class | Program Specialist | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 6 | 56-75 | Male | White | Upper middle class | Communications Officer | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 7 | 56-75 | Female | White | Middle class | Business Systems Analyst | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 8 | 56-75 | Male | White | Middle class | Research and Evaluation Officer | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 9 | 36-55 | Female | Black | Below middle class | Community Planning & Partnerships Lead | 11/10/2016 |
| Participant 10 | 56-75 | Male | Black | Below middle class | Director of Audit & Compliance | 11/10/2016 |

Instrument Review and Field Test

Prior to the field test, the researcher had the interview protocol reviewed by four subject matter experts. The objective of the review was to ensure questions were clearly written, objective, unbiased, and well aligned with the research questions. As a result of the expert review recommendations, the interview questions were field tested with two additional individuals who met the stated inclusion criteria. The objective of the field test was to examine how well the interview protocol communicated the questions being asked. After the field tests concluded, a few changes were made to the interview protocol. First, the interview length was reduced to 30 minutes to fit with participants' busy schedules. The language in the opening paragraph of the protocol was reduced

because it was unnecessarily redundant. The question, “do you have any questions before we get started” was added prior to asking the first interview question. Finally, a question was added to the end of the protocol to allow participants to share any additional information they felt pertinent.

Analysis

After the field test and receipt of full study approval from the IRB, the researcher conducted the 10 participant interviews, via Zoom. Recorded interviews were then professionally transcribed and the process of thematic analysis began. The researcher followed Groenewald’s (2004) approach to phenomenological analysis, which included the following five steps:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering units of meaning into themes and subthemes
4. Summarizing each interview
5. Creating a narrative of the results

For the first step, the researcher performed bracketing and phenomenological reduction. Bracketing and reduction helped the researcher identify and set aside any preconceived ideas or biases prior to working with the data. Using a reflexive journal, the researcher reflected on and become aware of their own opinions and beliefs prior to working with the data, to minimize potential bias.

Next, each transcript was read twice to foster deep familiarity with the data. Following this review, the researcher began delineating and assigning units of meaning within the study data. Units of meaning, or codes, were indicated by the repetition of

words, ideas, phrases, sentiments, etc. When repetition was identified, a unit of meaning was created and noted at each occurrence in the transcripts. Two full passes were performed through each transcript to ensure all codes had been identified and noted in the data. A total of 75 codes, with 632 occurrences, were identified. A frequency table of the codes was then developed to help the researcher visualize the prominence of each code (Table 2).

Table 2

Code Frequency

| Code | <i>f</i> | Code | <i>f</i> | Code | <i>f</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------|----------|
| transportation | 21 | system is hard to navigate | 9 | desire to help | 6 |
| frustration | 20 | obstacles | 9 | wanted the experience | 5 |
| struggle | 19 | stuck in cycle | 9 | bureaucracy/red tape | 5 |
| lack time | 19 | domino effect | 9 | impactful | 5 |
| disjointed | 18 | learning experience | 8 | stress | 5 |
| eye-opening | 17 | good intentions | 8 | criminal record | 5 |
| system works against | 16 | didn't understand the struggle | 8 | late payment | 5 |
| experience fostered empathy | 16 | gained new perception | 8 | one person can't make a change | 5 |
| changes needed | 15 | nobody wants poverty/assistance | 8 | Cold/callous | 5 |
| many parts | 13 | crisis | 8 | people deserve respect | 4 |
| responsible for situation | 13 | victims of circumstance | 7 | stipulations of assistance | 4 |
| stereotypes | 13 | privilege | 7 | how to better serve | 4 |
| feel helpless | 12 | realistic | 7 | repeat attendee | 3 |
| understand needs | 12 | inconvenient hours | 7 | immigrant | 3 |
| broken system | 11 | budgeting | 7 | sad | 3 |
| juggle | 11 | jump through hoops | 7 | compassion | 3 |
| experienced negative emotions | 11 | in their shoes | 6 | vulnerable populations | 3 |
| job | 11 | personal experiences with poverty | 6 | no change | 3 |
| inflexible | 10 | admitted misconceptions | 6 | experience during simulation | 3 |
| daily life | 10 | systems | 6 | prejudice | 3 |
| judgmental | 10 | poverty is a complex problem | 6 | stability | 3 |
| buy food | 10 | humbling | 6 | pull up bootstraps | 2 |
| unaccommodating | 10 | parent responsibilities | 6 | limitations of simulation | 2 |
| housing | 10 | childcare | 6 | changed attitude | 2 |
| navigate system | 9 | lack money | 6 | concerns | 2 |

Codes were then examined in relation to the research questions to ensure alignment. This examination resulted in the discard of four codes that lacked alignment with the research questions and demonstrated weak relationships with other codes. These codes included *wanted the experience*, *limitations of simulation*, *no change*, and *repeat attendee*.

After all transcripts were coded, units of meaning were clustered based on relationships, in alignment with the research questions. The researcher reviewed the codes for similarities, and worked to arrange and rearrange them until themes and subthemes emerged. A total of three themes and five subthemes were revealed. The themes included: *Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes*, *participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy*, and *the system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it*. The subthemes included: *Developed an understanding of system flaws*, *developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs*, *uncovered personal attitudes/biases*, *the COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants*, and *the COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty*. Themes, subthemes, and their supporting codes are described in Table 3.

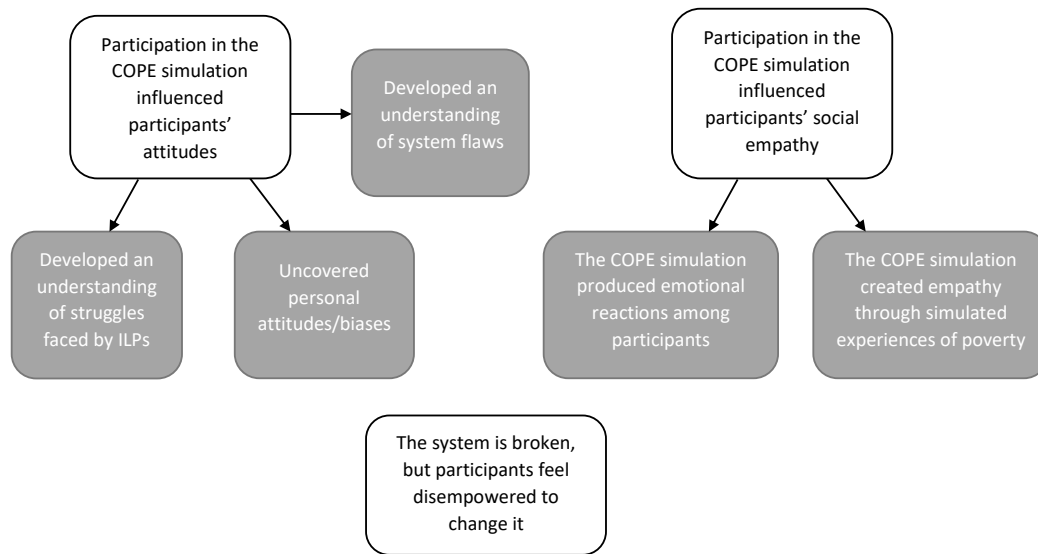
Table 3*Themes, Subthemes, Codes*

| Theme | Subthemes | Codes | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes | Developed an understanding of system flaws | -disjointed -system works against -many parts -broken system -bureaucracy/red tape -inflexible -unaccommodating | -inconvenient hours -navigate system -system is hard to navigate -jump through hoops -stipulations of assistance -stuck in cycle -domino effect -systems |
| | Developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs | -transportation -job -struggle -housing -obstacles -crisis -stability -lack time -late payment -buy food -budgeting -lack money | -understand needs -juggle -daily life -criminal record -parent responsibilities -childcare -didn't understand the struggle -gained new perception -victims of circumstance -vulnerable populations -poverty is a complex problem -eye-opening |
| | Uncovered personal attitudes/biases | -responsible for situation -stereotypes -prejudice -judgmental -pull up bootstraps -learning experience | -nobody wants poverty/assistance -admitted misconceptions -people deserve respect -changed attitude |
| Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy | The COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants | -frustration -experienced negative emotions -humbling -impactful | -stress -cold/callous -sad -compassion |
| | The COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty | -experience fostered empathy -privilege -realistic -in their shoes | -personal experiences with poverty -immigrant |
| The system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it | | -changes needed -how to better serve -feel helpless -concerns | -good intentions -desire to help -one person can't make a change |

A thematic map was also developed to provide a visual representation of the relationships between themes and subthemes (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Thematic Map



Member Checking

Prior to analysis, all participants were sent copies of their transcripts to ensure accuracy. Other than minor typos, transcript review resulted in no changes to the data. Following the development of the final list of themes and subthemes, each participant was sent a copy of the results for review. Participants were asked to review the results to ensure findings were in alignment with the sentiments they desired to communicate. The member checking process affirmed the preliminary findings and resulted in no changes to the analysis.

Findings

As previously mentioned, a total of three themes and five subthemes emerged. The themes included: *Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes*, *participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy*,

and *the system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it*. The subthemes included: *Developed an understanding of system flaws, developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, uncovered personal attitudes/biases, the COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants, and the COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty*. Each of these themes and subthemes is discussed, as follows.

Participation in the COPE Simulation Influenced Participants' Attitudes

The first theme to emerge from the interviews was in direct alignment with the first research question: *Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes*. This influence occurred in three ways, which are reflected in the following subthemes: *Developed an understanding of system flaws, developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, and uncovered personal attitudes/biases*. Each of these subthemes is discussed, as follows.

Developed an Understanding of System Flaws

The first subtheme focused on the ways understanding flaws in the system helped improve participants' attitudes toward ILPs. Participant interviews revealed many problems with the social welfare system tasked with helping ILPs, which came to light through the simulation. Some participants acknowledged the system as "broken," and pointed out the ways it seemed to work against the very individuals it was designed to help. Participants 1, 2, 9, and 10 described the brokenness of the system. For example, Participant 10 expressed guilt for "subscribing to a system that really wasn't working well," while Participant 1 described the system as "not necessarily created to favor the poor." Six participants pointed out how the system worked against the poor, contributing

to a cycle of poverty that was very difficult to break free from. As Participant 7 pointed out, “the institutions are kind of set up to make to access and services more difficult.” Participant 8 echoed this idea, adding that “the system will accommodate itself,” rather than those it is supposed to serve. According to Participant 9, the system is “not designed to be readily accessible, and it's quite confusing.”

The barriers created by the system itself were related to disorganization and moving parts that made obtaining assistance a very difficult process. Eight participants described how difficult the system was to navigate. As Participant 2 said, “When we think it's an easy thing that help is offered. It's not that simple.” Through the simulation, Participant 5 discovered, “families who are in a low socioeconomic status have a lot of barriers in order to get services.” Participant 7 described a helpless feeling associated with navigating the system: “I think that it just uncovered a whole different awareness for me of what it can be like to navigate these systems and to feel in that moment, that little, tiny moment to feel the sort of helpless.” Similarly, Participant 10 said the simulation experience “grounded me to [the] reality of what it takes to navigate the system.”

A significant culprit of the navigational challenges associated with navigating the system was disjointedness between its many moving parts. Participants described challenges with overlap in service requirements, poor organization, and a lack of communication between the different offices and organizations from which ILPs must obtain assistance. Participant 2 shared, “I think all of these separate, I guess, areas of resources, that I'll describe it as, not necessarily working together in a cohesive way to serve folks in poverty.” Participant 6 described the challenges of having assistance fragmented across so many different organizations: “in that simulation, where you go to

get your bus pass is a different place than where you go to get your food stamps, and that's a different place than where you go to the doctor or to a drug store.” Describing their experience with the simulation, Participant 8 said, “So now you got to hit four or five different, not even government agencies, anywhere....at the same time. You just can't do it.”

Eight participants discussed the disjointedness and poor communication among the different parts of the system, which compounded challenges with obtaining help. As described by Participant 8: “So the whole mix of services don't work together. They don't work well together.” Participant 9 recognized their savvy as professionals working in the system, but found the simulation shed light on just how disconnected all the working parts can be:

The amount of personal time it takes to go to these places and to ask the questions, and to be sometimes misdirected in places. I feel as though I know I have a fairly solid understanding of what it takes to get my needs met, so I'm always humbled when I do the poverty simulation, because folks don't have access that I have.

In discussing the problems of the system, and corrections that were needed, Participant 1 said, “Sometimes we have to go deeper, again into the creation of the systems, into the creation of how all of the systems interact.”

In addition to navigation challenges, participants found the rigidity and bureaucracy of the system was often unaccommodating. Speaking of their experience in the simulation, Participant 4 explained, “They were very inflexible. They were like, ‘If you don't do it this way, there's no other way.’ I thought that was, not unfair, but it was

very strict.” Participant 9 referred to the bureaucratic limitations of the system: “Well, certainly it affirmed that there is just way too much bureaucracy. Way too much bureaucracy.” Two participants described how unaccommodating the system is for ILPs, who are often working with very little resources and spare time. Participant 8 explained the system was accommodating to itself, and those who were responsible for assisting ILPs were often more focused on their own needs: “They don’t accommodate you, you accommodate them.” When asked for more detail on this sentiment, Participant 8 responded,

We don't want to work weekends. We don't want to work past 5:00 or 6:00 o'clock at night. So, you have to arrange your schedule. Even if you're working somewhere else, you have take off an hour to go to work, to come over here to get whatever paperwork signed, or whatever. We're not opening another hour after work so it's easy for you to come. So, I think that's my takeaway is that it accommodates itself. It doesn't accommodate their clients.

Participant 4 shared a similar idea, which was illustrated through an experience at their COPE simulation:

Well, some of the things that we had to experience... For instance, you have to buy a bus pass, and how the rent and everything, the process of certain things. They were so strict. And sometimes, you were like, like I said before, "Hey, just give me a break. I just arrived five minutes before the closing time. Let me in.”

The challenges of the system created domino effects that made it extremely difficult to escape the cycle of poverty. Participants described having to “jump through hoops” and comply with various stipulations to obtain help. Participant 3 described the

“ripple effects” of small missteps, like miscalculating a budget, which could quickly worsen the experience of an ILP. Participant 5 shared a similar sentiment, “if one thing happens to them, that completely throws off their ability to move forward.” These “ripple” or “domino” effects can make it extremely difficult to escape the trap of poverty. Five participants described how the simulation revealed the ease at which ILPs can become stuck in the cycle of poverty. Participant 5 explained:

If they're sick or if their kids are sick, that's days off of work. And if you're working minimum wage more than likely you're not getting like sick days or health insurance. So that's, you know, something to factor in into how it's even harder to kind of get out of that cycle.

Through the COPE simulation, Participant 6 developed a better understanding of how hard it can break out of the poverty cycle. Participant 7 acknowledged the role of systems and institutions in “sort of keeping people stuck” in poverty. Broken systems and daily obstacles, as Participant 2 shared, “Make it really hard to break through.” Contributing to the challenges to breaking out of the poverty cycle were all the stipulations placed on obtaining assistance through the system. Participant 5 said ILPs often have to “jump a lot of hoops just to talk to someone.” Participant 6 described stipulations ILPs face when trying to obtain basic assistance, such as food stamps:

You're the guy who wants food stamps and you got to fill out a form, and you got to have the right answers. And if you don't have the right answers, it's not going to work. Without the right documentation, it's not going to work.

When asked about perceptions of the care and assistance provided to ILPs, Participant 2 replied:

There's just not enough. They need the whole package. Yes, maybe you can get Food Stamps for food. Well, even the childcare scholarship, that's a tricky thing, right? Because you got to have the job. And then, it's you don't have the housing, there's no stability to put all these other resources in place and make them work for a family.

Developed an Understanding of Struggles Faced by ILPs

The second subtheme to emerge focused on how participation in the COPE simulation helped participants develop an understanding of the struggles faced by ILPs, which helped to improve attitudes toward these individuals. Twenty-four codes supported this theme, capturing the wide range of challenges ILPs face in their daily lives, such as finding reliable transportation, buying necessities, and obtaining housing and childcare. Transportation was the most frequent code across all interviews, with 21 mentions of the challenges associated with relying on public or other unreliable forms of transportation. Three participants discussed housing costs and instability, while five participants described job and employment challenges. Other common challenges mentioned were parent and childcare responsibilities. Through the simulation, two participants experienced barriers related to criminal records.

In total, struggles related to a lack of money were highlighted most, especially in terms making late payments, budgeting, and buying food. Participant 4 described their challenges at the simulation, in terms of not having money to pay rent on time and getting kicked out of their home, as a result: "I didn't pay on time, the rent. And we landed at the park." Participant 6 described an appreciation of the economic restrictions faced by ILPs:

It made you appreciate the restrictions, the constrictions of living at a poverty level to where your dollars are extremely limited. You can eat or you can go to the doctor, but you can't do both. You can go to the doctor or you can buy your pills, but you can't do both. It was a very tight budget.

Participant 8 became aware of the decisions ILPs must make when buying food, which they had never considered:

I just thought... I don't have to go to the store and decide, how am I going to divide out my money between what kind of foods I need and my family needs? When you're not in that world, you don't think about that world. Just a one-day simulation showed you what that world is.

A similar experience was had by Participant 2:

Never having money. And just that burden, just that daily burden, of walking around with so many concerns. How even to have enough on the table to feed one's family for the night. How do you make the time to go get it? How do you have the time to prepare it?

In addition to the material challenges that participants experienced through the simulation, they also developed an understanding of the stress, challenges, and daily struggles that ILPs face. Speaking of their simulation experience, Participant 4 described the daily challenge of juggling responsibilities in the face of multiple setbacks:

I think when you're trying to juggle with everything... I was a wife. We had a young baby. He was unemployed. I was the only one working. I think he was in jail so he had a record. So, we had a car. That was an advantage. So, we had to juggle different things, so it was hard.

Participant 5 lamented, “families are living this every day and struggling every day for help,” while Participant 2 observed: “living in poverty with obstacles, what they must come up against on a day-to-day basis that makes it really hard to come through.”

Participant 3 found that often, ILPs are victims of circumstance, and many of the obstacles they face are beyond their control:

It’s just that things, circumstances beyond your control can occur that can totally give you a 180 on whatever your plan might have been in and that you have to really bounce back, figure it out in order to survive.

The grind of daily life and the juggle of responsibilities in grim circumstances created profound reflections for some participants. As Participant 6 said, “I think about the moms in poverty and how they have to do that day in and day out just to be there, just to exist.” Participant 7 similarly shared, “It gave me a different sense of what the experience can be like, an everyday experience for someone.” Participant 8 reflected on the juggle that ILPs face: “That was the one thing that I can remember really hit me is you can't do everything in that time, especially if you work.

By developing a better understanding of the material and non-material struggles experienced by ILPs, simulation participants came to understand poverty as a complex problem. The experience also helped them gain new perspectives of the lives of ILPs, and appreciation of how often ILPs are victims of unfortunate circumstances. Eight of the participants described ways the simulation was an eye-opening experience. Participant 8 shared, “it opened a world up to me that you don't know about.” Participant 2 described the experience as “mind awakening,” while Participant 3 described “a-ha” moments among fellow simulation attendees. Participant 4 explained, “I think it's an experience

that makes you just more aware of everything that's happening in their surroundings.” For Participant 7, the simulation was revealing in terms of how the system often works against ILPs: “It's those systems and institutions that are creating these different experiences. So yeah, I think that's how my perception changed in large part.” Participant 7 later added, “I think that is probably how it's changed for me, given me just a little different sense of what they're kind of up against.” Participant 3 felt the simulation provided “clarity about what it means to be in poverty.” Participant 9 realized “there's a whole set of structures that really impact why someone is in poverty.”

Uncovered Personal Attitudes/Biases

The third subtheme centered on how participation in the simulation helped uncover hidden biases, prejudices, or stereotypes held by participants. Some common misconceptions about ILPs, such as they are lazy or do not want to work, were acknowledged by participants. The COPE simulation helped shed light on some of these held biases and attitudes of which participants were unaware. For example, Participant 7 acknowledged their own stereotypes, prior to the simulation:

I think it's very likely that before I went through that experience, my perceptions might have been that people maybe didn't work hard enough, or that it was more of an individual responsibility type of thing, right? If you were having a tough time, it might have been more because it was your own stuff.

Participant 8 admitted to thinking: “why don't you just get a job?” But after the simulation, explained, “Then you see all the barriers to that, that you don't think about.”

Participant 9 shared similar thoughts:

We have biases that have been a part of the way that we live our lives, the way that culture moves through us, and sometimes our biases and the messages that we get, and particularly repeated messages about certain groups, it may make you think, "Oh, well, this person is homeless because they drank too much or they made poor decisions," and you can find yourself really making classifications and generalizations about people just based on very little information.

Prior to the simulation, Participant 7 subscribed to the "you pull yourself up by your boot straps kind of thing and the hard work ethic and all of that stuff. And so, if you're not successful or if you're not making it, then it must be as a result of you're not working hard enough." Participant 8 explained that ILPs contend with a lot of these stereotypes, that poverty is a "your fault kind of thing." Participant 9 described stereotypical questions cast toward ILPs: "Are they just not going out and wanting to get jobs? Are they just being lazy?"

Reflecting on their own stereotypes and biases helped participants consider the ways these judgmental attitudes had negative impacts on ILPs. For example, Participant 9 recounted that ILPs often stop pursuing assistance because of the judgement and stereotypes they face: "They often stop because of the negative treatment." Participant 1 admitted "we're quick to judge" ILPs when they are late to pick up their children from childcare, without really considering *why* they are late. Participant 3 said the simulation made them "try to be less judgmental."

Through the simulation, many participants were able to realize nobody truly wants to live in poverty or struggle to obtain assistance. Participant 9 said that participation "uncovered this myth that there are somehow choices. I don't think anyone

is choosing to be in poverty.” When asked if they held any stereotypes about ILPs prior to the simulation, Participant 7 replied, “Yes. I wasn’t aware of it at the time, but I’m sure that I did.” Participant 3 said the simulation helped reveal “preconceived notions about what it means to be living in poverty.” Participants 3 and 6 admitted that the simulation had a direct effect on their attitudes toward ILPs. As Participant 3 explained, “My personal attitudes changed from participating in the simulation.”

Participation in the COPE Simulation Influenced Participants’ Social Empathy

The second theme to emerge focused on ways participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants’ social empathy. Interviews revealed that empathy was fostered in two ways, which align with the two subthemes for this theme: (a) by creating strong emotional reactions and (b) by creating simulated experiences of poverty. Each of these subthemes is discussed, as follows.

The COPE Simulation Produced Emotional Reactions among Participants

The first way the COPE simulation affected participants’ social empathy was through the strong emotional reactions generated by the simulation. Participants described a number of ways the experience made them feel. The most common emotional sentiment was that of frustration. Participant 6 described the simulation as “a really good exercise,” sharing, “It was interesting to see the frustrations of dealing with the public agencies and requests for services.” When asked about any ways the simulation affected them, Participant 1 shared, “It gave me a lot of frustration. It was a mix of being mad, and sad and frustrated.” Participant 2’s response to the same prompt was: “My takeaway was shock, realizing how much I did not understand or know about the daily struggles and

frustrations of many members of our community and how they have to attempt to navigate through life and through the system.”

Participant 3 shared an anecdote about their experience when they were robbed during the simulation: “I was waiting in line to probably purchase something or buy something and somebody came and just took all of the money that I had that was dangling in my hands.” Reflecting on the situation, Participant 3 explained:

It was, that setback just caused a whole, it had a domino effect for the family that I was with and it just caused us to really kind of re-group and think about, what would you do if something like that occurred? I just did not expect that I was going to be so upset that this person took my money, and then it was just like, well, this is the way it is. That stuck out for me.

Participant 5 said participation in the simulation made them “very concerned” and “very upset.” Participant 9 explained that although it was just a simulation, participation generated profound, negative feelings: “Even though it's a simulated game, I remember making those phone calls and having someone shut me down, or I show up in front of them and they're like, ‘Oh, you really need supports?’” Participant 10 said “Playing those various roles in the COPE simulation process, every single role that I was involved with was kind of like a kick in the gut,” adding, “it kind of tore me up a little bit.”

Participants also described feelings of stress and sadness, and a new awareness of the cold and callous interactions that ILPs often faced when seeking assistance.

Participant 4 was tasked with earning all the income for their household – they shared, “For me, as the only person that was bringing money to the house, income to the house, I felt just pressure. I felt stressed.” Participant 6 reflected on their emotions during the

simulations, and how that must feel for ILPs who live these experiences every day: “The drain that that has on that individual's emotions, on their psyche, on their personality.”

Participant 5 recounted the rude treatment from service providers in the simulation, and considered how these attitudes are imprinted from stereotypes and norms:

And then in terms of the customer service, it was really interesting in the simulation because you don't get an explanation of, "this is how you act," but people who are in the service roles seem to just automatically think that this is how you treat people who are lower than you or a lower socioeconomic status.

Participant 6 was also struck by the poor treatment they received by service providers during the simulation: “I don't want to be derogatory about it, but they had the right attitude for the role that they were playing.” Participant 9 explained, “it's just always, for me, humbling to see the assumptions that we make about people.” Participant 3 said the experience fostered humility and empathy.

As a result of their own negative feelings, playing the roles of ILPs during the COPE simulation, participants described increase compassion. When asked about the effects of the simulation, Participant 2 said they gained “a deeper understanding and great compassion about how heavy the burden is for many in the community to be able to just access resources.” Participant 7 said the experience was “really, really impactful,” while Participant 10 said it “had a profound effect.”

The COPE Simulation Created Empathy through Simulated Experiences of Poverty

The second subtheme for this theme highlighted ways the simulation created empathy by allowing participants opportunities to catch glimpses of the daily life challenges that ILPs contend with. The simulation allowed participants to walk in the

shoes of ILPs. As Participant 1 reflected, “it was a great opportunity just to be in the shoes.” Similarly, Participant 4 reflected, “I think it was very helpful to be in the shoes of those people out there.” Participant 3 described how the debriefing experience at the end of the simulation fostered empathy among participants:

I think the debrief at the end when you hear from all of the participants and the things that they thought might contribute to a person's situation and seeing a lot of that unfold in front of them, walking in their shoes per se, really help to illuminate what it means to be in poverty.

Participant 1 shared that “you never know what that person goes through.” For Participant 6, “I felt a little bit of dehumanization.” Participant 8 said the simulation made them much more sympathetic. Recalling their role as a service provider, the COPE simulation cause Participant 9 to consider how they might change their behaviors to be more empathetic toward ILPs on the other side of the counter:

You can lose sight of that when you're just making decisions on behalf of folks and doing the things that you're doing, so having these experiences just make us more empathetic to what people are going through and to what they experience.

Participant 3 shared, “It just makes me feel as though I'm empathetic and humbled, because I think in many situations that could be me.” For Participant 3 and others, the simulation also helped foster an awareness of their own privilege. Participant 6 explained, “I realized how fortunate I am,” while Participant 2 shared, “I think, better how lucky I've been in my life.” Participant 7 said, “I had a glimpse of my own privilege in a way that I never had before.”

Although only two participants listed themselves as “below middle class” during childhood, four participants described how their personal experiences with poverty, coupled with the simulation, helped to foster social empathy toward ILPs. As Participant 3 shared, “I’m from New York, I’ve worked in the projects. I grew up in the project. So, it’s not like I don’t get it. It just makes me feel as though I’m empathetic.” As “someone who has myself at different points had to access services and supports and figure out how to get things done,” Participant 9 said the simulation was both humbling and grounding. Participant 10 admitted that, although being poor as a child, they had improved their economic status through life and had forgotten what it felt like to be an ILP:

I believe or grew to become complacent that they existed is probably more it, than believe because I knew growing up as a poor kid, I knew what poverty was. But, as you navigate through becoming more educated, more, I guess, affluent in your lifestyle, you tend to forget something.

The System is Broken, but Participants Feel Disempowered to Change it

The final theme to emerge from the data was focused on participants’ awareness of the broken system, but their sense of powerless to do anything to fix it. This theme was particularly profound and helped shed light on how unmoving and daunting the challenges associated with the social welfare system seem to be. Participants felt those who worked within the system, from individuals to entire organizations, were often well intended. However, red tape and regulations often undermined assistance for ILPs. Participant 2 shared that even with “the great intentions that organizations have put into place,” bureaucratic obstacles often undermine their efforts to help ILPs. In discussing the disjointed nature of the system, Participant 5 shared “everyone really wants to do well

and creates all of these different types of programs to help families.” Speaking of nonprofits designed to help ILPs, Participant 9 said, “I believe that they're in this game because they want to do good work, but they're not solely responsible for how the system is activated.” That is, participants understood that intentions to do good were undermined by red tape and other roadblocks within the system, which made it nearly impossible for ILPs to find quick and easy access to essential help.

There was an expressed desire to help and find ways to better serve ILPs. Participant 1 described their frustration in wanting to help ILPs while being bound by rules and regulations that hampered assistance that could be provided: “So being on both ends was equally frustrating, because you want to help that person, you want to be able to provide what they need, and then having to follow certain rules.” Reflecting on problems within the system, Participant 2 urged that a plan was needed to make improvements, sharing that providers and organizations must “come together to help [find] solutions.” Participant 3 explained, “You maneuver and navigate through the system and try to assist the best way that you can,” despite the obstacles to aiding. Participant 1 called for changes to better serve the needs of ILPs: “We need to change how things are done, and not necessarily create a different system, but it goes deeper. Understanding the needs and understanding what better serves.”

When asked what the simulation revealed about the social welfare system, Participant 4 said, “That it needs some changes.” Participant 9 shared, “As a gatekeeper of social service supports, and in my role, somebody who's making decisions on behalf of other people, we need to not make it so hard.” Participant 5 hoped the simulation prompted action among those who were in positions to enact needed changes. Participant

8 took a proactive approach, advocating for changes following participation in the simulation: “Since then, I have been more or less advocating a lot for, hey, the hours that places work, what we do, all the services we provide.”

Despite the desire to help ILPs and correct flaws within the social welfare system, there was also a strong sense of helplessness in doing so. A sense of powerlessness in actualizing change seemed rooted in beliefs that each participant was just *one person*, and that one person could not possibly enact the changes that were needed. When asked how the COPE simulation affected the ways they interacted with ILPs or funded agencies, Participant 1 replied:

I don't think about it until now that we're talking about it. I do know there's a deep problem, but I continue working on a day-to-day basis, which is, wow, it's sad, right? I don't know if it's because I don't believe I have the resources or the knowledge to make any change, and I recognize that change required, wow, it would be huge, and I'm sure that I can't do it by myself.

Participant 2 shared feelings of frustration when thinking about the simulation and the broken social welfare system: “What can I do? What can I possibly do to help make a difference? It's larger than one person or one person's effort.” Later, Participant 2 added, “It's a crisis. And I want to be told what can I do? What can I do? Out there trying to figure it out. How do we come together?” Describing the limitations placed on service providers, Participant 4 said, “There's [only] so much they can do.” Participant 9 echoed this sentiment: “I'm interacting with funded agencies I also understand that sometimes they're at a crossroads and they feel that their own hands are tied.”

Summary

The purpose this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher explored participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. Data gathered through 10 interviews were thematically analyzed. A total of three themes and five subthemes emerged. The themes included: *Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes, participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy, and the system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it.* The subthemes included: *Developed an understanding of system flaws, developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, uncovered personal attitudes/biases, the COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants, and the COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty.*

This chapter provided a detailed narrative of study results. In the following chapter, details of these findings and their implications are discussed. Practical recommendations and suggestions for future investigation are highlighted.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Poverty has detrimental and widespread effects that influence nearly every facet of life. For example, impoverished Americans are more likely to lack health insurance, be impacted by obesity and food scarcity, receive a poorer quality public education, drop out of post-secondary educational programs, and be victimized by crime (Ingraham, 2015). Economically disadvantaged individuals often receive inadequate healthcare and experience poor health outcomes (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014; Chetty et al., 2016; Chokshi, 2018). Research also indicates ILPs are more likely to experience mental health issues such as shame, stigma, depression, despair, and suicidal ideation (Ali et al., 2018; Link & Phelan, 2014; Ridley et al., 2020).

The United States has more people living in poverty than any other developed nation in the world (Lott & Bullock, 2007). As of 2020, the national poverty rate was 11.4% (U.S. Census, 2021). The creation of economic opportunities for ILPs through the provision of resources and services is essential to reducing national poverty. However, the inherent biases and negative attitudes of those working for organizations tasked with providing this assistance can undermine efforts to improve conditions for ILPs. Employees in social service organizations that provide support to disadvantaged communities and ILPs often adopt policies and institutional practices that make it

difficult for impoverished families to access necessary supports. Stereotypes and myths about ILPs can negatively impact policies and institutional practices (Lahat, 2011)

Poverty simulations can increase individuals' awareness of difficulties experienced by ILPs (Stout, 2016), reveal personal biases and stereotypes about ILPs, and highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of poverty. A common simulation used throughout the United States is the Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE). According to ThinkTank (n.d.), the COPE simulation is a 2.5-hour experience that helps participants understand the lives of ILPs.

The problem of this study was the challenges experienced by those living in poverty can be propagated by poor attitudes and lack of empathy among the social service workers and organizations tasked with helping them (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). A key factor in individuals' attitudes and empathy are their understandings of the experiences of others, as well as their awareness of personal biases (Piff et al., 2020). While poverty simulations can help increase individuals' awareness of personal biases and difficulties experienced by ILPs (Stout, 2016), little was known about how poverty simulations influenced the perceived social empathy and attitudes of participants who worked for local government organizations.

A review of the existing literature highlighted the challenges and barriers faced by ILPs, and how those challenges are compounded by negative stereotypes and stigmas about poverty. Ample research indicates poverty simulations may provide experiential learning opportunities that lead to transformative changes in participants' attitudes and beliefs about poverty. According to Reutter et al. (2005), an *individualistic explanation* of poverty argues people are poor because of their bad choices or lacking motivation and

work ethic. *Structural explanations* focus on deficiencies within the market economy, systemic inequalities, and limited opportunities for ILPs (DiNitto, 2000; Mullaly, 2007). *Fatalistic explanation* is another dimension of poverty that is generally attributed to factors beyond one's control (Golding & Middleton, 1982). Narratives about ILPs contribute to the negative imagery of anti-poverty programs and encourage policymakers to take a more participatory approach toward understanding and addressing poverty (Patrick, 2020).

Poverty simulations provide a way to leverage experiential and transformational learning to improve attitudes toward ILPs. Poverty simulations can shift narratives and change the attitudes and beliefs of participants, which has valuable implications for individuals working in social services (Smith-Carrier et al., 2019). Krumer-Nevo et al. (2009) suggested poverty simulations can help students understand the structural nature of poverty. These simulations can also shift the ways individuals relate to ILPs by highlighting the challenges low-income individuals face when attempting to gain access to support services that could ultimately lead to economic mobility and wealth-building (Vandsburger et al., 2010).

While researchers have examined outcomes associated with poverty simulations among a variety of samples, investigation was lacking among government employees. Specifically, little was known about how poverty simulations may affect empathy and attitudes toward ILPs among individuals working in local government organizations. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. The researcher explored participants'

perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with 10 social service providers employed at the study site location, who had completed the COPE poverty simulation within the last six years.

Interview data were thematically analyzed, following Groenewald's (2004) approach to phenomenological analysis. A total of three themes and five subthemes were revealed. The themes included: *Participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' attitudes, participation in the COPE simulation influenced participants' social empathy, and the system is broken, but participants feel disempowered to change it.* The subthemes included: *Developed an understanding of system flaws, developed an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, uncovered personal attitudes/biases, the COPE simulation produced emotional reactions among participants, and the COPE simulation created empathy through simulated experiences of poverty.*

Findings indicated participation in the simulation helped foster improve attitudes and social empathy among participants. Attitude improvements occurred through (a) understanding flaws in the system; (b) understanding the struggles faced by ILPs; and (c) uncovering hidden biases, prejudices, or stereotypes held by participants. Social empathy improved through (a) the strong emotional reactions generated by the simulation and (b) opportunities to catch glimpses of the daily life challenges with which ILPs contend. The final theme to emerge from the data was focused on participants' awareness of the broken system, but their sense of powerless to fix it. This theme was particularly profound and helped shed light on how unmoving and daunting the challenges associated with the social welfare system seem to be.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers' social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise. The first two themes to emerge from the analysis drive home two important conclusions: that the simulation did improve attitudes and social empathy, but the mechanisms by which these improvements occurred differed. That is, attitudinal changes appeared to occur through understandings of systemic flaws and challenges faced by ILPs. Social empathy, on the other hand, seemed to improve through the generation of emotions and opportunities to experience the struggles of ILPs, firsthand (albeit, in a simulation). Findings suggested changes to attitudes may be more likely to occur when participants are presented with factual evidence regarding challenges related to the system, and the hardships faced by ILPs.

When working on the provider side of the counter, it can be easy to lose sight of flaws in the social welfare system that create barriers and domino effects for ILPs who need to access the system for help. The COPE simulation provided participants with opportunities to observe and experience the flaws in the system, helping them to see ways the system often worked against the poor. While assuming simulated roles as ILPs, participants described ways they had to juggle money, time, and personal responsibilities while navigating between parts of the system. Often, this navigation took place with unreliable transportation while trying to work within operating hours that were difficult, if not impossible. Without having the chance to experience the system from the other side of the counter, social service providers may fail to understand hardships the system places on ILPs, and the barriers it creates to accessing services. Participants described the

disorganized, often chaotic systems that were difficult to navigate, even with their insider experience as service providers. The inflexibility and bureaucracy of the system often compounded the navigation challenges that keep ILPs stuck in the cycle of poverty.

Poor attitudes toward ILPs may not only result from failure to understand the brokenness of the social welfare system, but also failure to understand the gravity of the challenges faced by these individuals. The COPE simulation helped participants develop understandings of the challenges related to economic strain, stress, time constraints, hardships, and unfortunate circumstances. Participants had opportunities to understand the barriers, which then helped reveal how ILPs often try hard to improve their circumstances, but the process of doing so can be very difficult.

By revealing problems with the system and highlighting the material and non-material stressors and challenges that ILPs contend with, participants had opportunities to uncover their own negative attitudes and biases. Several participants admitted to holding stereotypes or prejudices, of which they were not aware prior to the simulation.

Participants became aware of how misleading stereotypes of ILPs are, especially those which place blame for circumstances on ILPs. Ultimately, it was through learning about the system's flaws and the plight of ILPs that participants became aware of their own attitudes, which they were then eager to adjust.

Opportunities to experience the daily experience of ILPs seemed to provide an avenue for improving social empathy. Findings from the study suggested the simulation created emotional responses among participants, such as frustration and sadness, which triggered empathy toward ILPs. In addition, the chance to participate in simulated experiences of poverty fostered empathetic reactions.

There was a softened kindness and sympathy among many participants when they described their experiences in the simulation. It was as if reading about hardships faced by ILPs created a very different reaction from that created through the simulation. Most participants seemed to have at least cursory understandings of the obstacles in ILPs' lives; while learning more about these obstacles through the simulation helped to generate improved attitudes toward ILPs, it was the opportunity to walk "in their shoes" that created social empathy. Participants expressed sadness and pity toward ILPs, as well as a strong desire to correct the system and improve assistance provided to these individuals.

The third theme to emerge highlighted participants' awareness of the broken system, but their sense of powerless to do anything to fix it. This theme was particularly profound and helped shed light on how unmovable and daunting the challenges associated with the social welfare system seem to be. Participants felt those individuals and organizations tasked with helping ILPs were often well-intended, but they operated within a colossal system that was both broken and unmovable. Despite developing an understanding of the flaws of the system and the challenges ILPs faced, and having a strong desire to help ILPs and enact change, participants expressed feelings of helplessness. It seemed that many felt that as just one person, they lacked the power to do anything about it.

The third theme seemed to drive a key takeaway that could be added to the simulation experience – that through collaborative efforts, system changes can be made to help ILPs. Rather than feeling like they are working in silos, social service providers need to understand there are many other like-minded professionals out there with hearts

that desire to help. Through organization and collaboration, concerted efforts could be made to improve the system. The awareness that there are others out there with the same desire is important to fostering this type of communication and collaboration, and it may be an integral element to creating meaningful improvements to the social welfare system.

Discussion

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, “Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence attitudes toward ILPs?” The first theme to emerge from the interviews was in direct alignment with the first research question, suggesting that participation in the COPE simulation had a positive influence on participants’ attitudes. This influence occurred in three ways, through: (a) developing an understanding of system flaws, (b) developing an understanding of struggles faced by ILPs, and (c) uncovering personal attitudes/biases.

Findings for this research question support those reported by previous researchers, in that individuals’ beliefs and judgements about the causes of poverty can affect their attitudes toward ILPs. Because individuals tend to focus on controllable causes of poverty, such as laziness or poor planning, the poor are often blamed for their economic situations (Heiserman & Simpson, 2017). As Piff et al. (2020) explained, because poverty attributions can create tolerance for inequality, educating individuals about its uncontrollable causes may help raise people’s awareness and opposition to economic inequality (Piff et al., 2020). Smith-Carrier et al. (2019) explained that service providers from privileged backgrounds may not have a strong understanding of the causes of the

systemic causes of poverty, or what life is like for ILPs, thus perpetuating negative attitudes toward these groups. Because findings from the current study revealed the poverty simulation may improve understandings of these issues, it can thereby improve attitudes toward ILPs and reduce negative stereotypes and attributions.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “Based on the perceptions of social service providers working for a local governmental agency, how did participation in the COPE poverty simulation influence social empathy toward ILPs?” The second theme to emerge was in direct alignment with this question, suggesting that participation in the COPE simulation had a positive influence on participants’ social empathy. This influence occurred in two ways: (a) by creating strong emotional reactions and (b) by creating simulated experiences of poverty.

Barker (2003) explained that negative attributions to poverty are largely responsible for a lack of empathy toward ILPs. When poverty is viewed as the result of laziness or poor personal decisions, without an understanding of the systemic challenges and obstacles faced by ILPs, social service providers may struggle to develop social empathy toward those they are tasked with helping. Segal (2011) defined *social empathy* as “the ability to more deeply understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities” (p. 266). According to Hellman et al. (2018), social empathy is essential to understanding and promoting social justice (Hellman et al., 2018). When individuals understand the experiences and needs of others, they are more likely to act on empathy in ways that demonstrate altruistic motivation (Wagaman et al., 2018).

Wagaman et al. (2018) purported that deep understandings of the lived experiences of disadvantaged individuals can help reduce barriers to support; Segal (2007) argued that social empathy can foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of poverty. Findings from the current study suggested the poverty simulation helped foster deep understandings of the lived experiences of ILPs by allowing others to experience a simulation of poverty. Through the simulation, participants had emotional reactions and that caused them to reflect on their own attitudes and experiences, as well as flaws within the system that made it difficult for ILPs to break free from the cycle of poverty. Thus, analysis suggested that through the simulated experience and evocation of emotions, the COPE simulation may be an effective tool for improving social empathy among social service providers.

Practical Implications

Practical implications can be gleaned from study findings. First, although this was a qualitative study of participants' perceived changes to their attitudes and empathy, findings suggested participation in the COPE simulation was effective. Participants reported perceived improvements in their attitudes and social empathy toward ILPs, because of learning more about the challenges faced by these individuals, flaws in the social welfare system, and personal stereotypes and biases, along with opportunities to vicariously experience poverty to gain first-hand experience with these obstacles. Thus, one practical implication to emerge is that organizations seeking to improve attitudes and empathy among social service providers who work with ILPs should consider implementing the COPE simulation.

A second practical implication is to integrate the COPE simulation into the undergraduate and graduate educations of social work students. While courses of study in social work programs often provide a theoretical understanding of poverty, the COPE simulation provides an opportunity to learn from the perspectives of ILPs. For those who have never experienced poverty firsthand, it may be difficult to demonstrate empathy toward ILPs because of a lack of personal experience. The COPE simulation would allow social work students to experience a day in the life of ILPs, helping to uncover and dispel personal misconceptions about ILPs and the social welfare system designed to help them.

Additional suggestions relate directly to the third theme to emerge from the analysis. Participants in this study described feeling *overwhelmed* and *powerless* to enact changes to correct flaws in the social welfare system. These feelings seemed to relate directly to perceptions that they were just one person, and that a lack of cohesion within the system made it impossible to collaborate and create meaningful change. Thus, organizers of the COPE simulation could consider providing a forum for participants to connect and collaborate after the simulation. In addition to the debriefing that occurs afterwards, participants could be invited to exchange contact information or form groups to target certain aspects of the system that they feel most passionate about changing. Social service providers and leaders need not feel like they are operating in silos; encouragement to connect and collaborate could help reverse the sentiments described in the third theme to emerge in this study.

COPE organizers could consider creating simulation experiences that integrate professionals from the various organizations and institutions within the social welfare system. The group dynamics to emerge would allow professionals to participate in the

simulation together and identify opportunities to reduce the disjointedness between organizations. This last recommendation would allow professionals from different parts of the system to connect and collaborate, empowering professionals to correct system flaws.

Relative to the brokenness of the system, which was evident in all three themes, five key recommendations may be made. First, leaders must increase awareness about ILPs. Increased awareness leads to increased empathy, which fosters increased action. Leaders and key stakeholders must work to shift narratives to counter myths and stereotypes about ILPs. Second, strategies must be developed to assess structural barriers (i.e., policies and institutional practices) within the Health and Human Services System of care and develop innovative ways to remove these barriers. Third, a platform should be developed to allow more collaboration across sectors within various HHS domains, while creating integrated service delivery approaches to remove the disjointedness in the system. Next, ILPs should be assisted in increasing their social and human capital. ILPs need opportunities to build their social networks, individual skills, and social supports. Finally, opportunities for the economic mobility must be intentionally created for ILPs. A healthy economy should be maintained to make sure ILPs are given a “seat at the table”.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to practical recommendations, findings from the current study revealed opportunities for future research. First, the current study could be replicated with focus groups, rather than interviews. Focus groups create a social dynamic that fosters conversation and interaction. Thus, the data from focus groups can provide richer insights

than interviews, as participants interact with one another and build upon responses to group prompts.

The study could also be replicated with professionals from other organizations, including those that provide direct assistance to ILPs, as well as others responsible for distributing funding to organizations that help these individuals. Another opportunity for future research would be to use an anonymous data collection strategy. An important limitation of interviews is that respondents may censor their responses to protect their reputations or to answer in ways they believe will be pleasing to the interviewer. By allowing participants to respond to prompts in an anonymous format, such as through providing written responses to an anonymous questionnaire hosted online, it is possible that more honest responses and data would emerge.

Future researchers could also conduct investigations to better understand the sense of helplessness that emerged for the third theme. It is important to understand why participants seemed to feel so helpless and disconnected from colleagues and other organizations within the system. Such research could help reveal strategies to improve communication and collaboration between professionals working within the social welfare system. Future researchers could also address the limitation of the current project, relative to recall fatigue from individuals who participated in the poverty simulation many years ago. Researchers could examine how short- and long-term memory factors into recalled experiences and perceptions of the simulation. Researchers could also explore how other demographic factors (age, sex, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.) impact participants' perceptions of the simulation. This study considered the perspective of seven women and three men who participated in the COPE simulation. In

addition, there is limited research that explores whether or not women who participate in COPE simulations exhibit more social empathy than men. Future investigations should address this limitation by considering a larger sample size with more equal gender distribution. Finally, future researchers could replicate the study with professionals in other areas of the country, to see if the simulation experience has different effects on attitudes and empathy, based on the location and socioeconomic climate of the surrounding community.

Dissemination of Findings

To maximize the implications of this project, a strategy was developed to disseminate information to key stakeholders. For internal stakeholders, findings will be shared via a speakers series hosted for all county departments. For external stakeholders, findings will be shared via meetings and local/national conferences. Three key groups and opportunities through which findings will be shared with external stakeholders include:

1. Feed Your Mind Speakers Series. This is a program facilitated by county government that offers presenters opportunities to share innovative thoughts and ideas about various topics.
2. The Citizens Advisory Committee on Health and Human Services. This is a group of community stakeholders appointed by the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners to assist in the assessment of need, planning, implementation and evaluation of a System of Care, as defined within the Health and Human Services Element of the Palm Beach County Comprehensive Plan.

3. The Birth to 22 Steering Committee. This committee is an alliance of community partners that engages and aligns existing coalitions, networks, systems and youth-serving organizations, as well as connecting families, community members, and most importantly, with local young people directly.

In addition, the researcher will partner with higher education institutions (School of Nursing, School of Social Work and School of Criminal Justice, etc.) to share findings via seminars and webinars.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Thank you (participant's name), for taking the time to meet with me today. I am currently enrolled as a student in the College of Education Leadership Adult and Community Education doctoral program at Florida Atlantic University. I am interested in examining any changes in the attitudes and beliefs of CSC employees who have participated in poverty simulation within the past 6 years. Your name and the name of your organization will remain confidential. This interview should take 30-45 minutes.

Are you willing to be interviewed?

Is it ok for me to record this interview?

I am interested in interviewing you to learn from your experience. To ensure accuracy, I am asking for your permission to record our interview. I will be transcribing this interview and will provide you with a written copy to review and approve. The information that you provide will be confidential and all information provided will be destroyed after one year. That includes the audio recording, transcripts and written notes.

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you choose to participate in the COPE poverty simulation?
2. Please describe any personal takeaways from your participation in the COPE poverty simulation (Can you talk a little more about that?)
3. Please describe any ways participation in the COPE poverty simulation affected you (What other ways have you been impacted? Tell me more.)
4. Please describe any ways the COPE poverty simulation influenced your perceptions of the experiences of those living in poverty? (Tell me more. Anything else?)

5. Are there any ways you believe your personal attitude towards individuals living in poverty changed as a result of participation in the COPE simulation?
6. Prior to the simulation, did you believe any personal myths and stereotypes about people living in poverty? (Can you think of any others?)
7. Please tell me any ways you think the simulation uncovered myths and stereotypes commonly attributed to people living in poverty (Why do you think that is the case? What other myths can you think of?)
8. Please describe any ways the COPE poverty simulation influenced your perception of the health and human services system of care provided to those living in poverty? (What other systemic issues can you talk about?)
9. Has participation in the COPE poverty simulation influenced any ways in which you interact with funded agencies? (What other things have you noticed?)

Closing: Thank you for participating in this interview. Again, this information will remain confidential. You will receive an emailed copy of the transcript within the next few weeks to review and approve. Please feel free to make any corrections or add any comments you deem appropriate. If you do add comments, I may contact you again if clarification is needed. Thank you again for taking the time to assist me in this endeavor.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM

1) Title of Research Study: The Perceived Effects of a Poverty Simulation on Governmental Employees' Attitudes and Social Empathy Toward Individuals Living in Poverty

2) Investigator(s): James Green

3) Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, the researcher will explore participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise.

4) Procedures: [Bullets are strongly recommended for ease of reading. Address the participant using the second person (e.g., "you.") Using simple, conversational language, explain:

- You are being invited to take part in a research study.
- If you consent to participate, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form and brief demographic survey
- After providing consent, the researcher will call you to schedule an interview, which will take place online via Zoom. The interview will consist of questions to explore your perceptions of any ways participating in the COPE simulation affected your attitudes or social empathy toward individuals living in poverty.
- The interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription
- Interviews will last 30-45 minutes.
- Participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.
- You will be invited to review your transcript for accuracy
- You will also be invited to review the preliminary findings to ensure they align with the ideas you intended to convey during your interviews – this procedure is known as *member checking*.
- Confidentiality will be provided via pseudonym. No potentially identifiable information will be published.
- You are free to withdraw from the study at any point prior to data analysis.
- No incentives will be provided for your participation

5) Risks:

Participation is associated with no foreseeable risks.

6) Benefits:

Although there will be no direct benefits to any participants, findings from this research could potentially influence the types of policies and programs promoted by social service organizations, which may help improve life for individuals living in poverty.

7) Confidentiality/ Data Collection & Storage:

Unless required by law, all participants will be provided with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used in all published data. Personal autonomy will be ensured through the informed consent process, as previously described. Participation will be completely voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw at any time prior to analysis of the transcripts.

The researcher will take measures to protect the information collected from the participants. All data will be stored on a computer that is protected by a password only known by the researcher. The researcher is the only individual who will have access to raw data. Any hard data, such as printed transcripts, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. All study data will be stored for a period of 2 years, after which time it will be permanently deleted.

8) Contact Information:

- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator, James Green, at jgreen96@my.fau.edu or 561-313-1146.
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) Future Use of Information / Samples (if applicable):

Your information collected as part of this research will not be distributed or used for future research studies.

10) Consent Statement:

I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent

to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree ___ I do not agree ___ to be audiotaped/videotaped.

Printed _____ Name _____ of
Participant:_____

Signature of Participant:_____ Date:

Printed _____ Name _____ of _____ Person _____ Obtaining
Consent:_____

Signature _____ of _____ Person _____ Obtaining _____ Consent:_____

Date:_____

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Age range: 25-35; 36-55; 56-75; 76 and above

Sex:

Gender:

Race:

Ethnicity:

Socioeconomic status (family of origin): Middle Class /Below Middle Class/Above
Middle Class

Have you participated in a COPE Poverty Simulation within the past 10 years?

Yes or No

Approximate month and year you participated in the poverty simulation (if you have
participated in multiple simulations, please provide the most recent month and year):

Current employer:

Position title:

Appendix D: Organizational Consent

From: James Green <james.green1911@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 30, 2022 12:53:35 PM
To: Lisa Williams <Lisa.Williams-Taylor@cscpbcc.org>
Subject: Permission to Interview Employees

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Lisa-

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Educational Leadership, Adult and Community Education program at Florida Atlantic University. I am conducting my research on *The Perceived Effects of a Poverty Simulation on Governmental Employees' Attitudes and Social Empathy Toward Individuals Living in Poverty*.

In order to complete this research, I am requesting permission to interview at least 10 Childrens Services Council employees who have participated in a poverty simulation within the past 6 years. The name of the organization and the employees who are interviewed will remain confidential. May I have permission to interview your employees?

James Green

On Sunday, January 30, 2022, 1:16 PM, Lisa Williams <Lisa.Williams-Taylor@cscpbcc.org> wrote:

Absolutely.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Lisa Williams-Taylor, Ph.D.
she/her/hers [Why Pronouns Matter](#)
Chief Executive Officer

Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County
2300 High Ridge Road
Boynton Beach, Florida 33426

📞 561.374.7623

📠 561.420.2859

📧 561.374.7823

✉️ Lisa.Williams-Taylor@cscpbcc.org

🌐 www.cscpbcc.org [f](#) [i](#) [t](#) [v](#) [y](#)

35 years #HealthySafeStrong

Helping Palm Beach County
children grow up
healthy, safe and strong



Please note: Florida has a very broad public records law regarding government business. Most written communications to or from government agencies such as the Children's Services Council are public records available to the public and media upon request. Your e-mail communications may, therefore, be subject to public disclosure.

Appendix E: Study Invitation

Hello,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. I am a doctoral student at Florida Atlantic University and this study is part of my dissertation research titled, "The Perceived Effects of a Poverty Simulation on Governmental Employees' Attitudes and Social Empathy Toward Individuals Living in Poverty."

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived effects of a poverty simulation on social service providers working for a local governmental agency tasked with distributing funds to assist ILPs. Specifically, I will explore participants' perceptions of changes in social empathy and attitudes toward ILPs following participation in the COPE poverty simulation exercise.

If you consent to participate, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form, a brief demographic survey, and participate in a one-on-one interview, via Zoom. The interview will consist of questions designed to explore your perceptions of any ways participating in the COPE simulation affected your attitudes or social empathy toward individuals living in poverty. The interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription. Interviews will last 30-45 minutes. Participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. There will be no incentives for participation and you are free to withdraw at any point prior to data analysis.

To be eligible, you must: (a) be a current employee of the study site organization, (b) have been employed by the study site organization for at least 1 year, (c), have completed the COPE simulation within the last 6 years, and (d) be at least 18 years of age.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to this email or contact me directly at jgreen96@my.fau.edu or 561-313-1146. I welcome any questions you may have and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

James Green

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