

People Who Live in Poverty Usually Do So Due to Circumstances Far Beyond Their Control: A Multiple Case Study on Poverty Simulation Events

Authors : Tracy Smith-Carrier

Abstract : Burgeoning research extols the benefits of innovative experiential learning activities to increase participants' engagement, enhance their individual learning, and bridge the gap between theory and practice. This presentation discusses findings from a multiple case study on poverty simulation events conducted with two samples: undergraduate students and community participants. After exploring the nascent research on the benefits and limitations of poverty simulation activities, the study explores whether participating in a poverty simulation resulted in changes to participants' beliefs about the causes and effects of poverty, as well as shifts in their attitudes and actions toward people experiencing poverty. For the purposes of triangulation, quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources were analyzed: participant feedback surveys, qualitative responses, and pre, post, and follow-up questionnaires. Findings show statistically significant results ($p < .05$) from both samples on cumulative scores of the modified Attitudes Toward Poverty Scale, indicating an improvement in participants' attitudes toward poverty. Although generally positive about their experiences, participating in the simulation did not appear to have prompted participants to take specific actions to reduce poverty. Conclusions drawn from the research study suggest that poverty simulation planners should be wary of adopting scenarios that emphasize, or fail to adequately contextualize, behaviours or responses that might perpetuate individual explanations of poverty. Moreover, organizers must carefully consider how to ensure participants in their audience currently experiencing low-income do not become emotionally distressed, triggered or further marginalized in the process. While overall participants were positive about their experiences in the simulation, the events did not appear to have prompted them to action. Moving beyond the goal of increasing participants' understandings of poverty, interventions that foster greater engagement in poverty issues over the long-term are necessary.

Keywords : empathy, experiential learning, poverty awareness, poverty simulation

Conference Title : ICSW 2017 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : May 18-19, 2017