



Mental Health Among Black and Latino Homeless Populations

Louisa Baidoo (COL 2017)

Advisor: Jason Schnittker

Over the summer, I spent my time at a homeless shelter in Northern California for adults with mental illness. I came into contact with the site as an intern and helped connect clients to a variety of employment, housing, and government resources. While there, I was also able to interact with a wide diversity of clients from a variety of backgrounds.

Homeless shelters, especially emergency shelters, have at times been critiqued for enabling people to live as homeless by offering them survival tools, but not necessarily providing individuals with the tools they need in order to become permanently housed. Through my research, I wanted to discover if there were any social factors that were contributing to how successful individuals were in improving their mental health and progressing out of homelessness. I also hoped to discover if there were any key factors that uniquely impacted Black and Latinx individuals.

After my personal interactions with staff and clients, I was able to understand more about how housing programs operate and got an indication as to what factors seemed to be significant to clients' mental wellbeing and progression out of homelessness.

These insights that I gained over the course of the summer directed my data analysis in which I compared trends in homelessness to social networks. I originally focused my study on relationships between individuals not of kin, but eventually expanded my research to include familial relationships when I recognized how important those relationships were.

Being able to participate in research over the course of the summer taught me the importance of adaptability. Not only was I faced with many unexpected challenges along the way that pushed me to alter my approach to my research, but I also had the honor of hearing the stories of the clients

who pushed themselves and each other to overcome new obstacles everyday and improve themselves.