STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING USING THE
POVERTY SIMULATION

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STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING USING THE POVERTY SIMULATION

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Session Goal

To show student responses about how the Poverty Simulation Project helps bridge the gap between social work education and practice and enables student to provide more compassionate care by improving their knowledge and attitudes toward poverty and increasing their empathy toward people who are poor.

Project Rationale

- Poverty is a major social problem in Mississippi and surrounding states.

- In Mississippi, 31.1% of children are poor and 23.5% of women are poor with an overall poverty rate of 22% of the population (or 637,128 people) living below the poverty line of $24,250 for a family of four in 2015 (www.talkpoverty/ms).

- The majority of social workers encounter people who are poor regardless of their practice setting.

- Social workers cannot empathize very well with people who are poor if they have not observed or experienced what it is like to be poor.
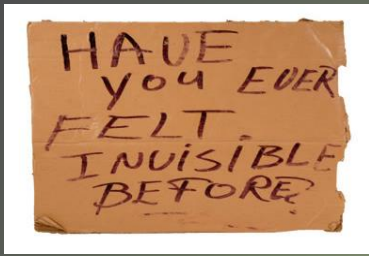
ISSUES

Living in poverty is tough and dangerous.

Immediate Problems: Food, housing, clothes, transportation, health care, employment, education, etc.

The length of time a person lives in poverty affects how much harm poverty causes.

Long-term Problems: health, mental health, malnutrition, education, etc.

Causes and Solutions

- Structural/Economic
- Cultural
- Environmental
- Relational
- Behavioral
- Moral
- Physical
- Intellectual/Psychological
- Spiritual

We need compassionate policies and programs that comprehensively address poverty and compassionate social workers who will design and provide services.

Talk Poverty

Our Common Response

- Too often we neglect, ignore, or mistreat the poor by what we do or fail to do.
- Social workers often become burned out and calloused after dealing with the issues of poverty on a daily basis.
- We often unjustly blame the poor or stereotype them due to misconceptions about poverty.
- We often lack compassion and feel helpless to help the poor since the problems are so big and varied.
- *How do you think the poor are mistreated in social service agencies?*

Scriptural Mandates

➢ God cares for the poor and wants us to care as well (Job 4:9, 16; 34:18-19; Ps 10:14, 17; Prv 22:2)

➢ Jesus was poor (Phil 2:5-8; Mt 8:20)

➢ God commands us to help the poor (Dt 15:7-11; Lv 19:9-10; Prv 22:9; Lk 3:11; Mt 19:21, etc.)

➢ When we care for the poor, we care for Christt (Mt 25:34-45; Prv 19:17).

➢ God blesses us when we help the poor (Ps 41:1-2; Dt 15:10)

➢ God curses those who ignore and do not help the poor and those who oppress them (Ezk 16:49-50; Prv 21:13; 22:22; Lv 25:36; Dt 15:7; 24:14; Zech 7:10; Mt 25:42-45; Js 2:15-17; I Jn 3:17).

The Lord has told us what is good and what He requires of us is this: To do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.
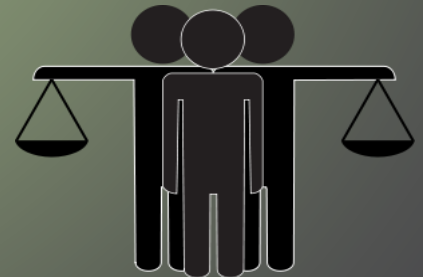Micah 6:8

None of us should be looking out for our own interests, but for the interests of others.
I Corinthians 10:24

The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all.
Proverbs 2:22

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all He has made.
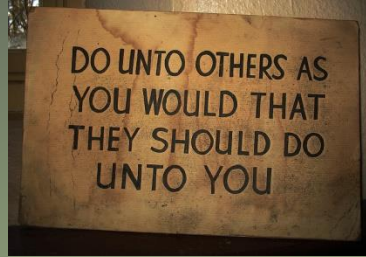
Psalm 145:8-9

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12

This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another.'

Zechariah 7:9

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.
Proverbs 9:17

...Has God not chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor.
James 2:5-6

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of theses who are members of My family, you did it unto Me.
Matthew 25:40

Christ's Compassion

When He [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a Shepherd.
Matthew 9:36

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Compassion

➤ Author Fredrick Buechner describes the meaning of compassion in these words: "Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too." (www.compassion.com/meaning)

➤ The Hebrew (*hamal* [l;m'j], *rachuwm* [Wj;r]) and Greek (*splanchnisomai* [splagcNIVzomai]) words sometimes translated as "compassion" also bear a broader meaning such as "to show pity, " "to love, " and "to show mercy." Other near synonyms for compassion in English are "to be loved by, " "to show concern for, " "to be tenderhearted, " and "to act kindly." (www.biblestudytools.com/compassion)

➤ A feeling of wanting to help someone who is sick, hungry, in trouble, etc. (www.merriam-webster.com/compassion)

➤ Concern for the sufferings and misfortunes of others (http://en.oxfoddictionaries.com/compassion)

Our Appropriate Response

We should show compassion to the poor like Jesus did.

How can we do this?

www.tagxedo.com

The Poverty Simulation

The Poverty Simulation increases empathy and compassion toward people who are poor by giving social workers a glimpse of what it is like to briefly experience some of the struggles of living in poverty. It helps refute common myths and stereotypes about poverty and improves attitudes and understanding toward people who are poor. It challenges us to provide comprehensive and compassionate micro, mezzo, and macro level services to the poor. When we understand and feel what it is like, we can be better helpers and provide better services.

Quote of the Day

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

Benjamin Franklin

Addressing the Issue

The Poverty Simulation

The Poverty Simulation Project

- The Poverty Simulation Project is an IRB-approved and exempted research project conducted through a partnership with the BSW Programs of Belhaven College, Delta State University, and MSU-Meridian.

- The Project began the Fall of 2015. MSU-Meridian joined the Project in the Fall of 2016.

- Belhaven's BSW Program implements the simulation within each program. The data are analyzed by Dr. Jana Donahoe, Principal Investigator, and Cora Jackson and Angela Savage, DSW students at Tulane University .

Project Goals

- To improve participants' knowledge and attitudes about poverty

- To increase their empathy and compassion toward people who are poor

- To bridge the gap between social work education and work practice by briefly simulating the struggles of living in poverty.

Simulation Description

The Poverty Simulation is a 3 hour structured role play that simulates real life. The environment is arranged with various community services. Participants are given a role to play with props based on a real-life client who is struggling to survive on a very low income. They pretend to be poor in order to change their perspective about poverty. There are four 15-minute segments that each represent one week. The challenge is to come out ahead at the end of the hour/month after paying bills, getting food and medicine, securing benefits, experiencing crime, and retaining shelter and transportation. Many participants end up in jail or in the homeless shelter. Neglected children may be removed form their families. Families may be evicted. Benefits and jobs may be out of reach. Hard times may occur. This sensitizes participants to the realities faced by social welfare clients. After the simulation, de-briefing is provided to help participants process and integrate the experience. They complete pre and posttest assessments about their knowledge and attitudes toward poverty.
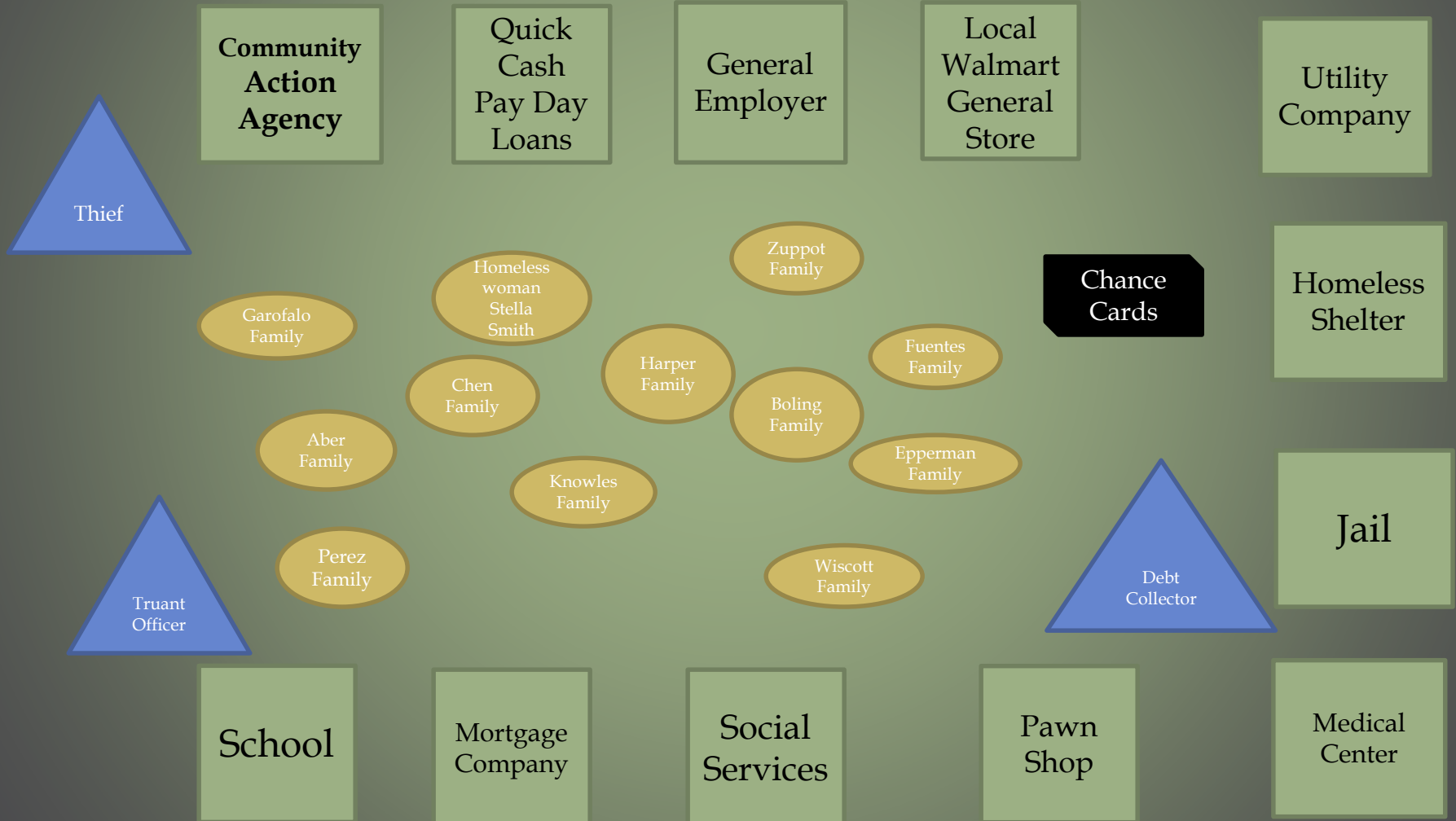
TYPICAL ROLE-PLAY SCENARIO PACKETS

- Family Names and Ages: Name Tags

- Family Issues: Health/Mental Health, Education, Skills; Life Crises

- Monthly Income—from work simulated using play $ and work cards; or from welfare simulated using EBS cards, transportation cards, etc.

- Monthly Expenses: Rent, Transportation, Medicine, Food, Utilities, Clothes

- Current Assets: Stove, CD Player, TV, etc.

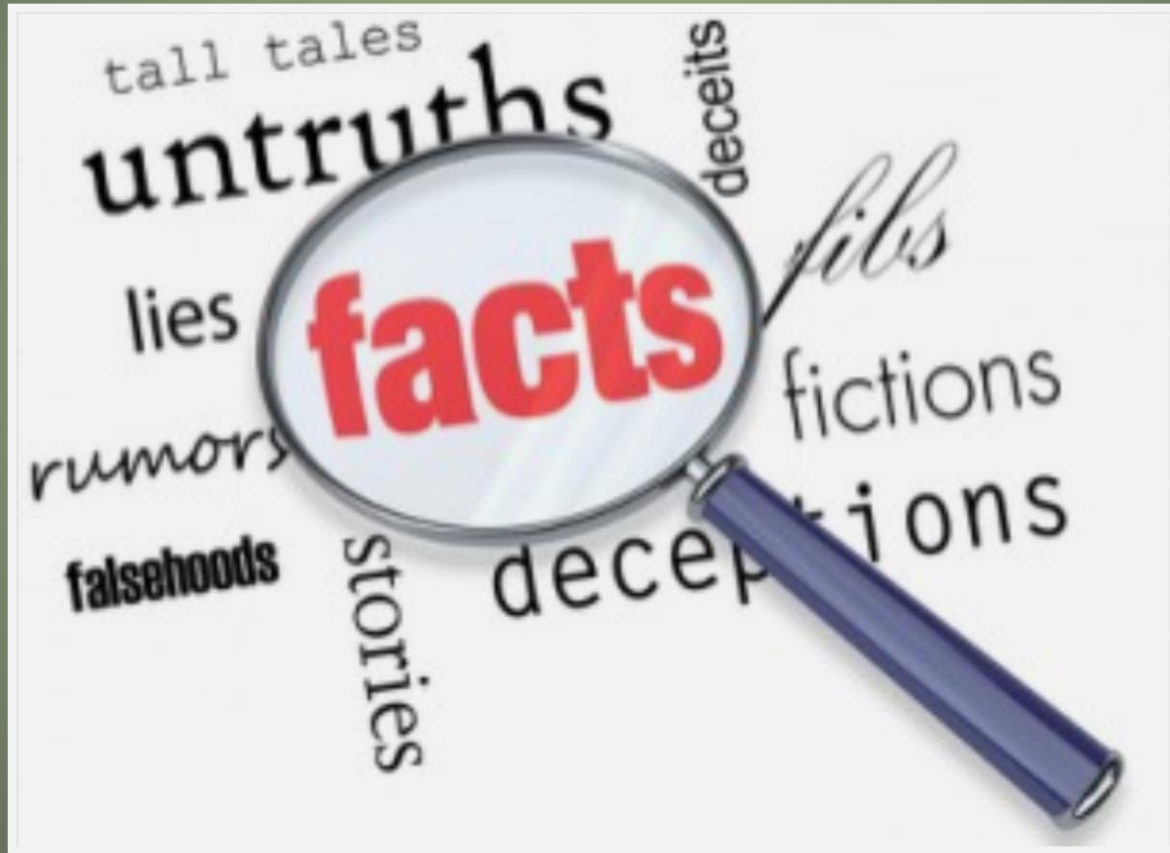# Video of Simulation

- https://youtu.be/qEsjpMfMEPs

# OUR STUDY

Simulation Photographs

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's (1984) **Experiential Learning Theory** is the basis for the simulation. We agree that students learn best when they experience real life situations that may be encountered in their future practices. They can critically think and plan what they might do in those situations and assess what might be needed to foster the helping process. The emotions they experience will not likely be forgotten. They can learn more in 2-3 hours of simulation than in a month of lectures. It bridges the gap between the classroom and the community.

THEORY

PRACTICE

Research Questions and Hypotheses
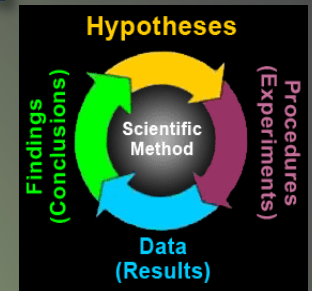
The primary research questions and narrative hypotheses were:

1) Will the Poverty Simulation improve students' knowledge and attitudes about poverty?

2) Will the Poverty Simulation increase students' empathy toward people who are poor?

HR: The mean and median scores of students' pre/posttests will not equal zero. There will be a statistically significant difference between their pre and posttest mean/median scores indicating that the Poverty Simulation was effective in increasing empathy and improving students' knowledge and attitudes about poverty.

H0: The mean and median scores of students' pre/posttests will equal zero. There will be no statistically significant difference between students' mean and median pre/posttest scores indicating the Poverty Simulation made no difference.

Project Design

- **Design**: Mixed Methods Quasi-Experimental Pre/Posttest Design with a Control Group
- **Sample**: Senior Social Work Majors; Junior Nursing Students, Junior Control Group
- **Instrumentation**: Measures that came with the Simulation Kit that assess participant knowledge and attitudes toward poverty with added qualitative questions were given before and after the simulation.
- **Data Analysis Method**: Parametric Dependent Matched Pairs Sample t-tests and Non-Parametric Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were used to test each group.

Sample Demographics

Participant Type	Race			Gender		N
	African Am	Caucasian Am	Other	Male	Female	
Social Work	17	12	0	2	27	29
Nursing	4	30	2	10	25	35
Control Group	20	9	1	4	26	30

DESIGN LIMITATIONS

The design is quasi-experimental because the sample was purposively selected and not randomized; there are questions about the instrument's reliability and validity; and the pre/posttest were given on the same day so certain intervening variables could not be controlled.
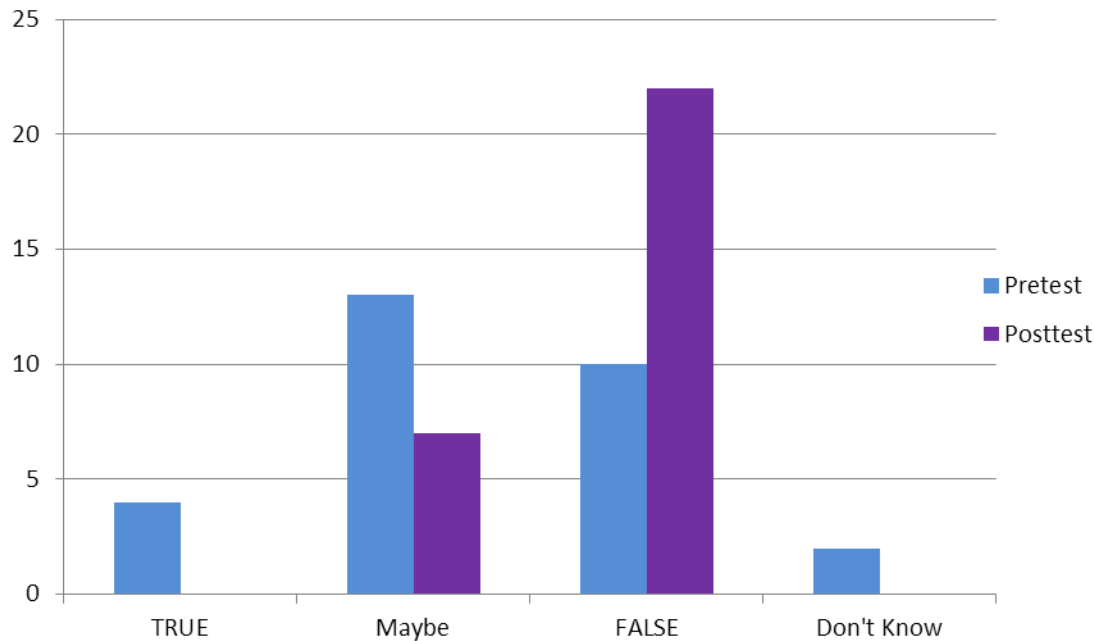

KNOW
YOUR LIMITATIONS
& THEN DEFY THEM
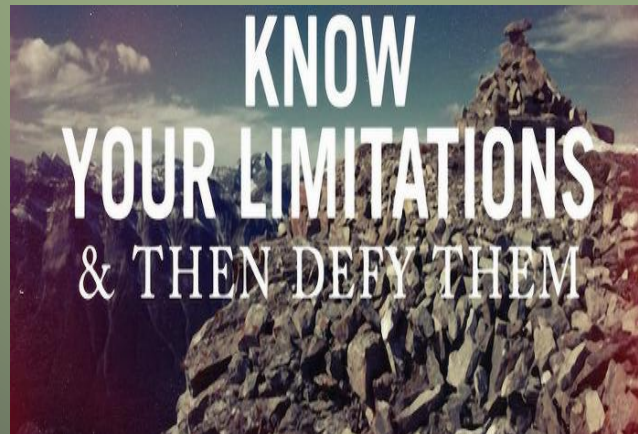
Project Findings

Group Type	Group N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Dependent t-test	Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
Social Work	29	43.9655	49.6897	$p = .000$	$p = .000$
Nursing	35	41.1429	46.9714	$p = .000$	$p = .000$
Control	30	43.3667	44.7	$p = .322$	$p = .665$

Interpretation: The Social Work and Nursing Students' posttest scores are higher than their pretest scores indicating that the Poverty Simulation was effective in improving their knowledge and attitudes toward people with low incomes and in increasing their empathy for people who are poor. The control groups' scores did not significantly improve from pre to posttest because they did not participate in the Poverty Simulation. Therefore, the Null Hypotheses is rejected for the two experimental groups since the scores are greater than zero.

## Question 1: The community provides effective and efficient services to help families with low incomes.

	Pretest	Posttest
TRUE	4	0
Maybe	13	7
FALSE	10	22
Don't Know	2	0
Total	29	29

Implications: Since the community often does not provide effective and efficient services to people with low incomes, Christian social workers must be effective advocates and brokers to ensure such services are provided and/or created. We must love and have compassion for the poor in all we do.

Question 6: People with low incomes could get ahead/improve their situation if they could just apply themselves differently.

|	Pretest	Posttest
TRUE	3	6
Maybe	17	9
FALSE	7	13
Don't Know	2	1
Total	29	29
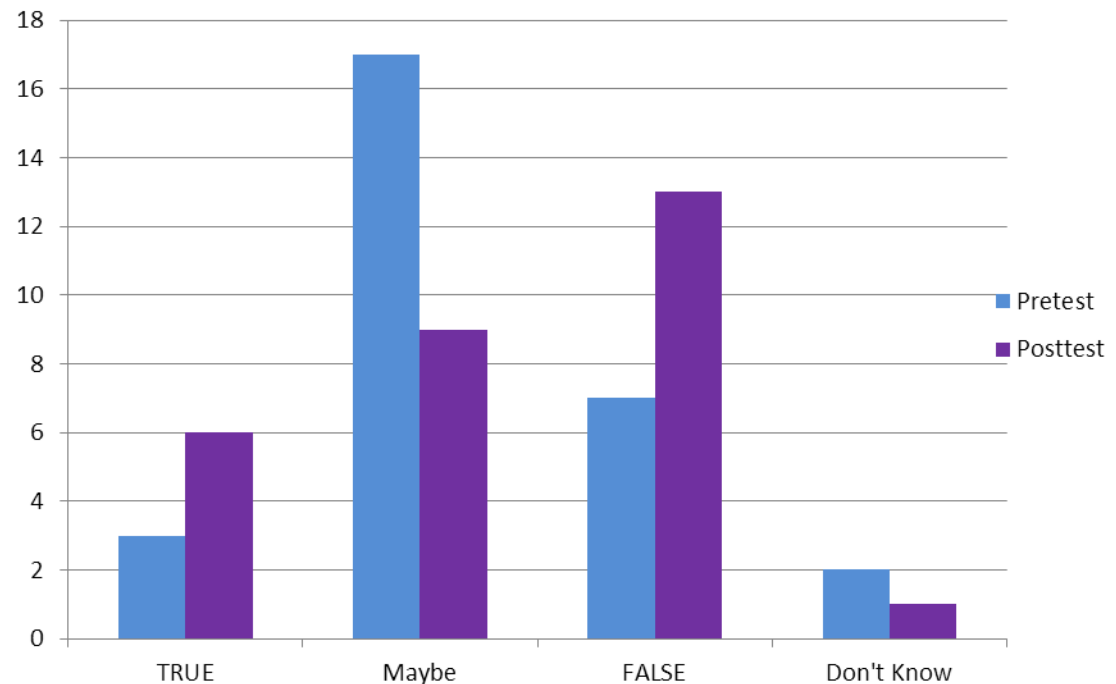
Implications: Hard work, learning new skills, and other personal factors may not help people with low incomes get out of poverty. Many causes of poverty are structural, meaning that we need to advocate for changes in the community, state, and nation. And we must stop being judgmental and provide love and care for the poor instead of criticizing or blaming them.

Question 7: The private sector has no role in improving the situation for people with low incomes.

	Pretest	Posttest
TRUE	8	11
Maybe	2	5
FALSE	4	7
Don't Know	15	6
Total	29	29
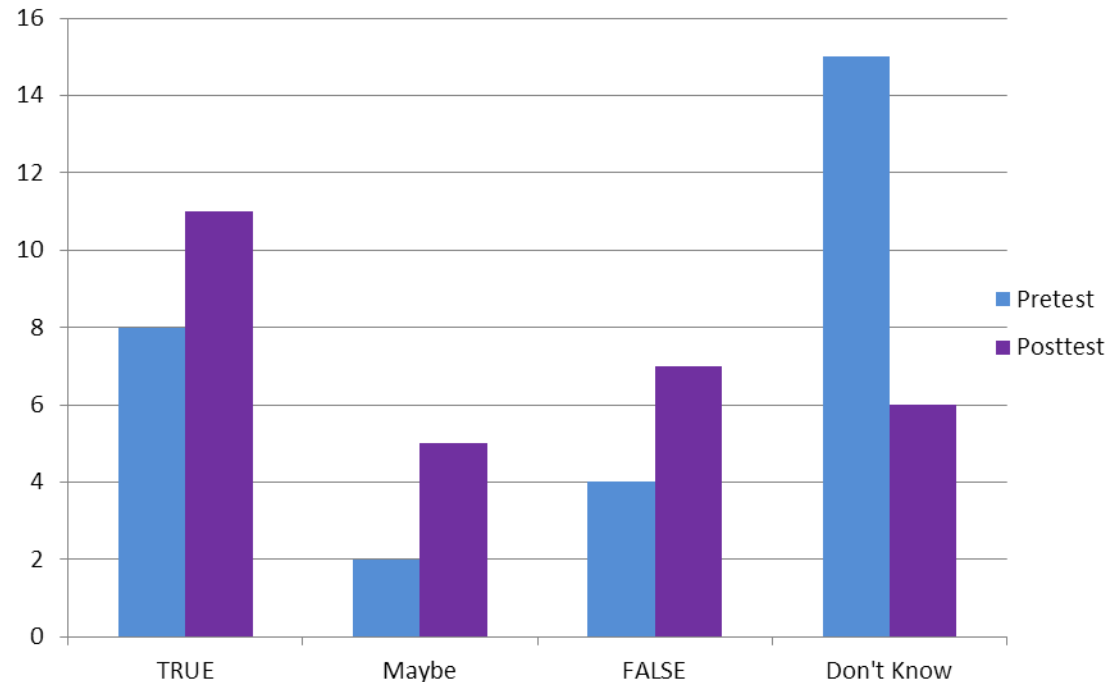
Implications: When the private sector creates jobs and community resources, the situation for people with low incomes can be improved for those who choose to take advantage of them. More macro-awareness and advocacy efforts are needed to improve systemic causes and solutions concerning poverty. The church can play a role in making this happen.

Question 9: The social service system in America only has a positive impact on those it serves.
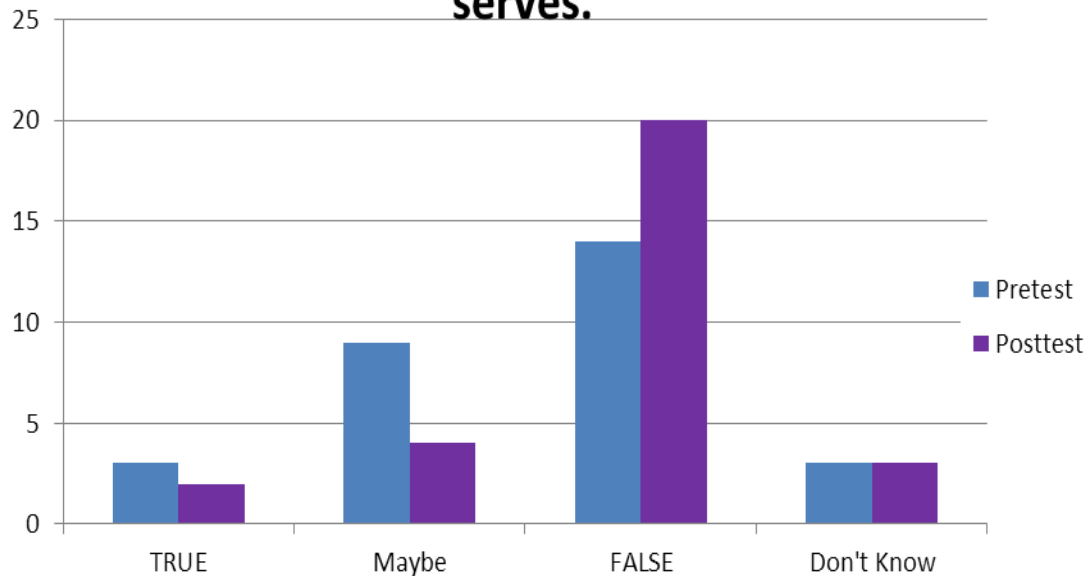
	Pretest	Posttest
TRUE	3	2
Maybe	9	4
FALSE	14	20
Don't Know	3	3
Total	29	29

Implications: The social service network is not working. It has a negative impact on clients. Social service providers must improve service access, equity, and professional attitudes to create an environment that expresses compassion and care for those who are poor.

Question 16: People with low incomes have low self-esteem.
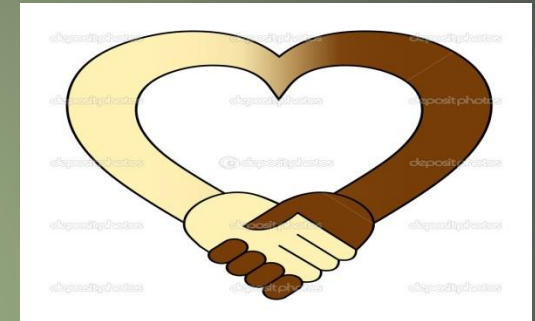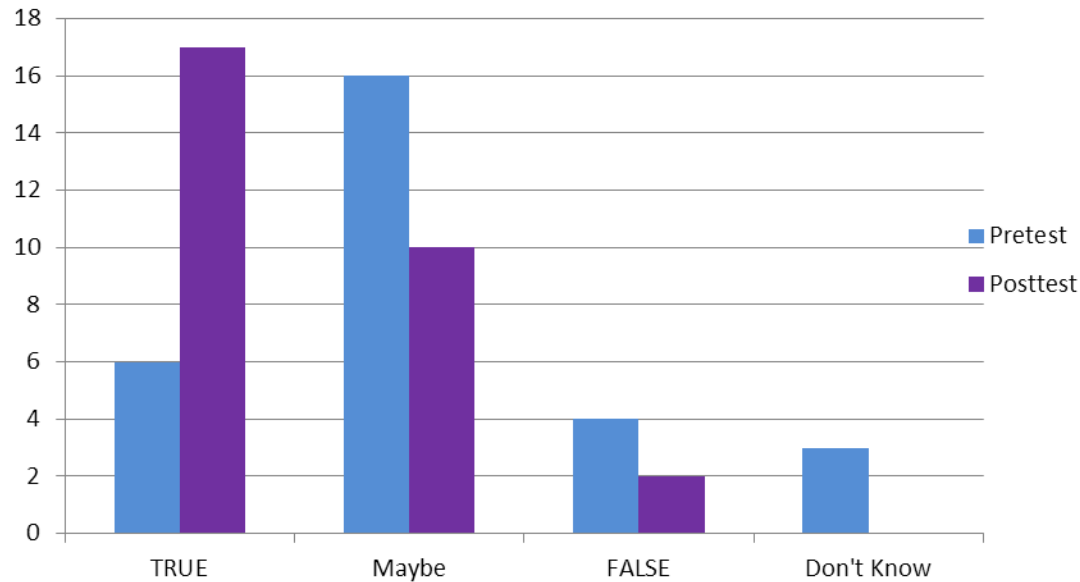
	Pretest	Posttest
TRUE	6	17
Maybe	16	10
FALSE	4	2
Don't Know	3	0
Total	29	29

Implications:
Since people with low incomes struggle in many ways that negatively affect their esteem and well-being, mental health services and spiritual support should be accessible to clients for both prevention and intervention purposes.

The Poverty Simulation's Effectiveness on SW Students' Sensitivity/Empathy toward the Poor and Improving their Attitudes toward Poverty

Simulation Effectiveness at Posttest	on Increasing Sensitivity	on Increasing Understanding
Very Effective	25	26
Somewhat Effective	3	2
Not Very Effective	0	0
Not Effective at All	0	0
No Answer	1	1
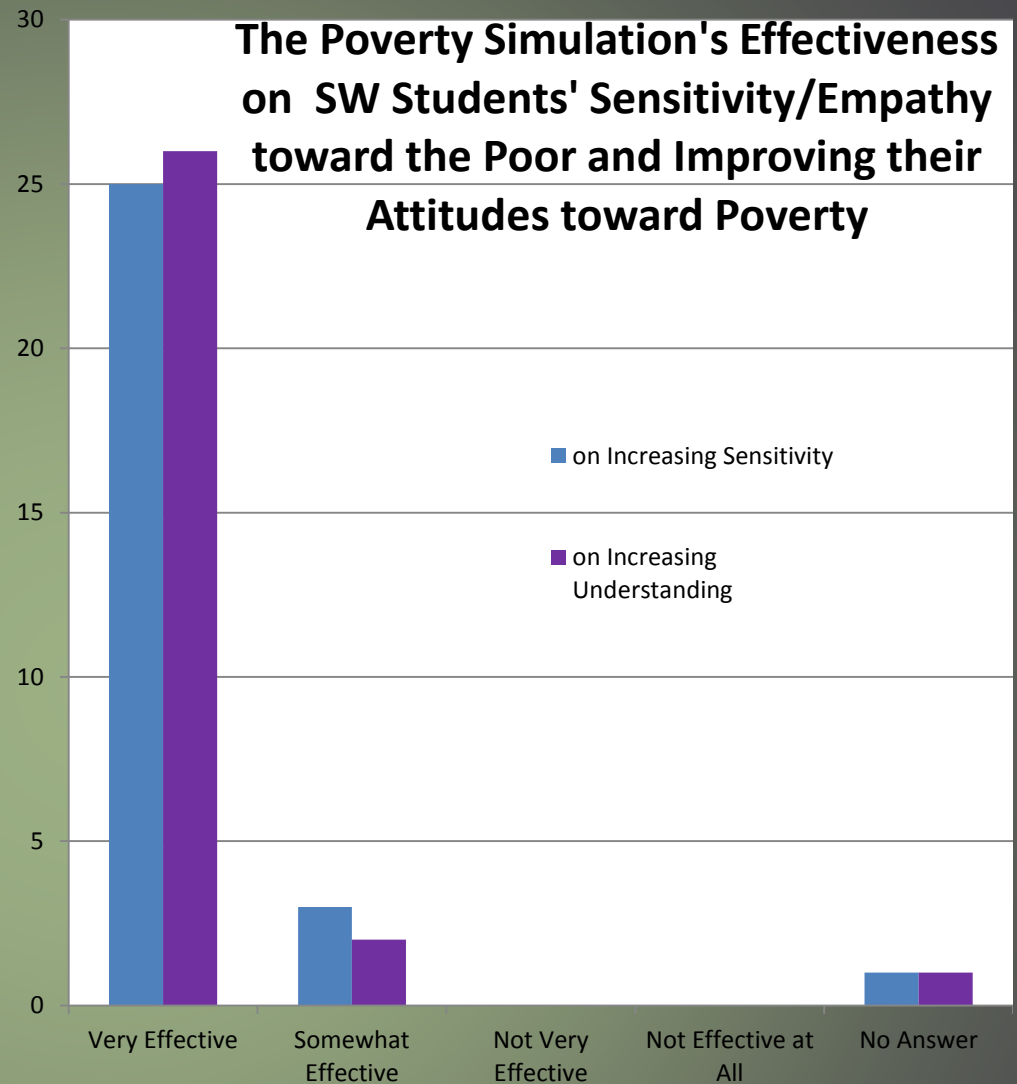
Implications: Students had a lot of empathy already, but reported that the simulation was very effective in increasing their understanding of poverty and in improving their sensitivity/empathy and compassion toward people who are poor.

Student Comments at Posttest about the Poverty Simulation

- Poverty is hard work. It's not their fault. I see them in a different light now.
- This was a very hard, emotional, and intense learning experience.
- Great experience. I understand the struggles now.
- This was fun and helped me to learn a lot about poverty and my own issues.
- This really opened my eyes and helped me to be more empathetic.
- I would turn into a thief if I had to fight to survive like that.
- Social workers can be mean, rude, and so not helpful. I hope I am not like that.
- Poor people deal with a lot more than expenses. I felt shame, fear, hatred, low self-esteem, sadness, worry and a host of other things during this.
- Kindness and respect helped me get services. The workers were not nice.
- I hope I will be more helpful to others in real life.
- The effect it had on the kids was hard to watch. They really suffer.
- This really helped me gain insight into my clients' lives. Wow!
- I feel more prepared for practice now. I've seen the harsh realities of poverty.
- We can't help if we don't listen and understand. This simulation helped me.

Educational Strengths/Benefits of the Poverty Simulation

- The project provides a meaningful teaching and learning experiences.
- The simulation can include students from other disciplines providing an inter-professional educational experience.
- Junior students can serve as the control group and then become active participants as Seniors.
- Students say that they learn more in a simulation than they would after a month of hearing lectures on poverty.
- Students are active participants in real-life role-played scenarios in which they are not likely to forget.
- Students feel more prepared for social work practice.
- Students have more empathy for people who are poor.
- Students can voluntarily become involved as research assistants who experience and observe the research process/scientific method from beginning to end.
- The outcomes can be used in multiple ways, such as to test student preparedness for social work practice, advance scholarship for faculty, etc.
- The project can be a community service as helping professionals participate and learn how to better provide services to people who are poor.

Etc.

Benefits

Spiritual Benefits of the Poverty Simulation

- We please God.
- We obey His Word.
- We teach others to have empathy for the poor.
- We learn a little about what it is like to be poor.
- We can help more effectively and pray more deeply.
- We show more true compassion and care for the poor.
- We seek ministry opportunities to meet needs in our communities.
- The kingdom of God is advanced as the poor are properly cared for.
- While poverty may not be directly alleviated, love and compassion abound. We can better model Jesus' compassion for the poor.
- Ripple effects occur as kindness and compassion are being payed forward.

Relevance to 2015 CSWE EPAS Competencies

We believe that the Poverty Simulation Project <u>directly and/or indirectly</u> assists programs in accomplishing all 9 of the 2015 CSWE EPAS Competencies:

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.
2. Engage diversity and difference in practice.
3. Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research informed practice
5. Engage in policy practice.
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Further research is needed to test the Poverty Simulation's effects in field education and in practice after graduation.

Where to Purchase the Poverty Simulation Kit

Missouri Association for Community Action (MACA)

Poverty Simulation

573-634-2969

2014 Jefferson Street

Jefferson City, MO 65109

POVERTY SIMULATION: PRETENDING TO BE POOR CAN CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Summary / Conclusion

Questions?

Comments?

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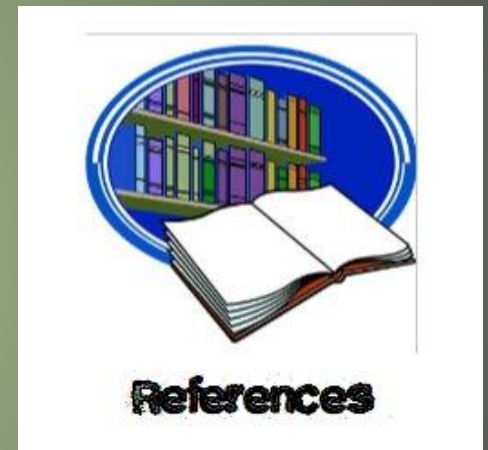MS Report on Poverty. (2015). Retrieved from http://www.talkpoverty.com/ms

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