

Poverty & Homelessness

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2023, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers conducted a statewide study to establish a baseline for public perceptions related to the awareness, understanding, and attitudes about challenges that Utah women and girls face (see [Background & Methods](#) for details). The study was created to support the work of 18 areas of focus (spokes) within the movement called [A Bolder Way Forward](#), which is dedicated to helping more Utah girls and women thrive. One of the 18 areas of focus is poverty and homelessness, and this summary shares findings that highlight present perspectives of Utahns and establishes a baseline to track progress.

BACKGROUND

In the last few years, the UWLP has released research snapshots on [“Poverty Among Utah Women: A 2022 Update”](#) and [“Homelessness Among Utah Women”](#) that share the latest available data on these critical areas of focus. Although Utah fares better than many other states, both poverty and homelessness are daily realities for thousands of Utah women and their families. Helping Utahns better understand these challenges can help generate positive change, and tracking changes is vital in measuring actual change. The four related survey items asked in this new study provide insight that can guide changes and improve Utah women’s experiences and thereby enhance the lives of Utah’s children.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participants responded to each survey item using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=some-what disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree). For Sample 1 (non-probability), 2,526 Utahns responded to these four questions, and for Sample 2 (representative), there were 650 participants (Total=3,176).

1. Poverty: The first survey item was “If one is experiencing poverty in Utah, it is the result of their own choices.” The statistical mean was 2.47 (SD 1.37) for the non-probability sample and 3.11 (SD 1.62) for the representative sample. With the combined samples, 2,355 (74.2%) respondents disagreed at some level, with only 12.4% agreeing. In the representative sample (which is most likely better aligned with the general population’s perspectives), 58.6% of respondents disagreed at some level (22.6% selected neither agree nor disagree). See demographics below.

2. Homelessness: The second survey item was “If one is experiencing homelessness in Utah, it is the result of their own choices.” The statistical mean was 2.60 (SD 1.41) for the non-probability sample and 3.17 (SD 1.61) for the representative sample. In combining the results of both samples, 82.3% (2,289) of respondents disagreed at some level (75.8% of Sample 1 and 58.2% of Sample 2). Significantly more Sample 2 respondents (21.7%) than Sample 1 (10.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. See demographic below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (2.46 and 3.22, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among age range categories.

**Education:* The more the education, the stronger the disagreement.

**Marital Status:* Divorced Utahns disagreed more strongly than those in other marital status categories.

**Income:* Those who had annual household incomes over \$75,000 had stronger disagreement.

**Children:* There were no significant differences between parents and nonparents. Among parents, those with multiple children disagreed less.

**Race & Ethnicity:* Those who identified as Asian, Hispanic, and White more strongly disagreed.

**Religion:* Latter-day Saints, Protestants, and Catholics disagreed the least. Those who were “not at all” religiously active had the strongest disagreement.

Employment: There were no significant differences among categories.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Counties:* Summit/Wasatch, Cache, and Salt Lake disagreed the most.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (2.58 and 3.28, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among age categories.

**Education:* The higher the educational attainment level, the stronger the disagreement.

**Marital Status:* Those living with a partner/cohabiting had the strongest disagreement.

Income: There were no significant differences in responses by income level.

**Children:* There were no significant differences between parents and nonparents. Parents of teenagers disagreed less than other parents.

**Race & Ethnicity:* The strongest disagreement came from those who identified as Black and Hispanic.

**Religion:* Latter-day Saints, Protestants, and Catholics disagreed the least, but still disagreed. Atheists and agnostics disagreed the most.

**Employment:* Respondents who were full-time students and unemployed more strongly disagreed with the statement.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Denotes statistically significant differences within the demographic categories.*

**Counties:* Summit/Wasatch, Cache, and Salt Lake counties disagreed the strongest.

3. Involvement: The third survey item was “I don’t think there is much I can do about poverty and homelessness in my community.” The statistical mean was 3.23 (SD 1.53) for Sample 1 and 3.66 (SD 1.51) for Sample 2. Although most respondents agreed (from “somewhat agree” to “strongly agree”), in the representative sample, 28.6% believed there was nothing they could do. In addition, 24.8% of that sample neither agreed nor disagreed. This finding suggests that more than half of Utahns believe that their involvement would not or may not change things for those experiencing poverty and homelessness. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s disagreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (3.18 and 3.46, resp.).

**Age:* Respondents younger than 45 years old had less disagreement. The strongest disagreement came from those aged 45 to 69.

**Education:* Respondents with graduate degrees had the strongest disagreement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Income:* The higher the annual household income, the stronger the disagreement.

Children: There were no significant differences between parents and non-parents; there were also no differences in responses from parents in terms of the number and ages of their children.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences among categories.

**Religion:* There were no significant differences among religious affiliations, but those who selected “very active” had stronger disagreement.

Employment: There were no differences by employment category.

Residency: There were no significant differences among the categories representing the years respondents had lived in Utah.

Counties: There were no significant differences among counties.

4. Home’s Influence: The final survey item was “Home is the first step toward positioning children and families for the opportunity to thrive and to plan for the future.” The statistical mean was 6.22 (SD .99) for Sample 1 and 5.76 (SD 1.32) for Sample 2. In combining the two samples, 2,916 of 3,176 (91.9%) agreed with the statement, with 46.6% selecting “strongly agree.” It is clear to Utahns that children’s experiences in the home are the most important influence for their future lives. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly stronger than men’s (6.17 and 5.97, resp.). Although still significant, this is a closer statistical mean than most questions.

Age: The older the respondent, the more they agreed that children’s experiences in the home are key to their thriving in the future.

**Education:* Study participants who had at least some postsecondary education agreed more strongly with the statement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences by marital status category.

**Income:* Respondents who had annual household incomes less than \$25,000 did not agree as strongly.

**Children:* Parents were significantly more likely to agree more strongly than nonparents, and parents with more children selected “agree” or “strongly agree” more often.

**Race & Ethnicity:* American Indian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and White respondents agreed most strongly.

**Religion:* Although all categories had high statistical means, Latter-day Saints had significantly stronger agreement than all other religious affiliations. Also, the more active in their religious affiliations, the stronger the agreement.

Employment: There were no significant differences by category.

**Residency:* The more years respondents had lived in Utah, the more likely they selected “agree” or “strongly agree.”

**Counties:* The Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute region, the Tooele, Morgan, and Rich region, Box Elder, and Cache agreed the most.

CONCLUSION

This summary highlights key findings regarding four survey questions focused on poverty and homelessness in Utah. Respondents from across the state participated in the study (see [Background & Methods](#) for the demographic details on both samples). Although each sample is useful in understanding the perceptions and attitudes of Utahns on this topic, Sample 2 (representative sample) is more likely to represent the perceptions of Utahns more broadly.

The findings show that most Utahns understand that the reasons people experience poverty and homelessness are often beyond their own choices. Yet, there is more work to do. A second finding that warrants future exploration is that, although most Utahns disagreed that they don’t think there is much they can do about poverty and homelessness in their community, the statistical mean hovered between “somewhat disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree.” This is not a confident response; it demonstrates some hesitancy that could be linked to Utahns’ not understanding the meaningful remedies they can help implement to reduce poverty and homelessness for individuals and families in Utah.

The goal of [A Bolder Way Forward](#) is to make Utah a place where more women and girls thrive. When more Utah women experience economic stability, Utah families and communities will thrive.

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