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The Impact of Executive Hiring Decisions within Homeless Services Providers

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

Thelá R. Thatch

MBA, North Greenville University, 2011

BA, Kean University, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy, Administration & Law

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Abstract

Inequities in staffing may affect the ability of organizations to deliver social services to the homeless. As homeless services are challenged with roadblocks exacerbated by systemic racism, a focus on hiring diverse employees may impact the delivery of services to minority clients. Little is known about the effects of diverse hiring in social service programs that serve the homeless. The purpose of this study is to bridge the gap in knowledge by examining the diverse hiring practices of senior employees that hold decision-making roles that affect the delivery of homeless services. Research questions were focused on discovering participants lived experience around the level of diversity in the hiring process. The theoretical framework for the study used social constructionism to define cultural competence along with the social identity and critical race theories to provide additional insight into how participants construct their reality. A qualitative, interpretative, phenomenological study design was integrated, using purposeful semi-structured interviews of 12 senior-level employees of organizations that support the homeless. Data from the interviews were coded and categorized for thematic analysis and comparison. Participants expressed the need for diversity in recruiting, and interviewees have confirmed that they are not aware of a formal process around diverse hiring within their organization. The implications for social change include informing decision makers around the importance of hiring diverse employees that possess cultural competence so they can provide services that benefit diverse communities.

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Dedication

This PhD degree was never just for me. This degree is for my ancestors, who were taken from Senegal, Nigeria, and other parts of Africa and forced into a life of bondage in America. This degree is for my ancestors enslaved for over 300 years in South Carolina and other parts of the South that worked the cotton, sugar, and tobacco plantations. This degree is for my grandparents, who lived through Jim Crow, race riots, massacres, and harassment just because of the color of their skin. This degree is for my parents, Richard and Theola Hosten, who dealt with overwhelming negative effects to their well-being created by the lack of support and resources. This degree is for family members and friends who consistently struggle with the effects of systemic racism resulting in poverty, mental illness, addiction, crime, incarceration, disease, and death.

Thank you to my friends for your words of encouragement and prayers that kept me motivated toward the finish line. A special thanks to my children Simone, Chris, and Anthony and my grandson Jayden. A special note of gratitude to Sharon Foushee who took a chance on me and provided me with an opportunity to pursue higher education. Ms. Foushee, you are proof that a seemingly small act of kindness can truly change lives.

Finally, yet importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Norman A. Thatch III, who embodies Romans 8:5 – 6, which states, "Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." I am so grateful God has placed you in my life to be my rock and accountability partner. You provided the additional motivation and strength I needed to complete this doctoral journey. You are a kiss from God, my rock, and my best friend. I dedicate this dissertation to you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Homelessness coupled with racial disparities is an increasing concern in the United States. According to the U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development's (HUD, 2019) Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), 567,715 people in the United States were homeless in 2019, representing an overall 2.7% increase from 2018; Non-Hispanic Whites account for 77% of the total U.S. population and 48% of the homeless population. The report also found that the other 51.1% are minorities and from a less dominant group (HUD, 2019). In fact, Blacks account for 13% of the U.S. population, and 40% of all people experiencing homelessness (United States, 2019). With more than half of the homeless in the United States belonging to a minority group, it is evident that minorities make up a disproportionate share of the homeless population.

According to HUD (2019), the increase in the homeless population in the United States in 2019 was largely due to a surge in California's unsheltered and chronically homeless population. In fact, in 2019, nearly half of all unsheltered people in the country (47%, or 89,543) were in California, where Los Angeles saw a 16% increase (United States, 2019). Despite major investment in combating the homelessness crisis, the homeless population in Los Angeles County increased to approximately 66,436 people in 2020 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority [LAHSA], 2020) representing a 12.7% rise from 2019's point-in-time count. Equipped with funding from recent public policy measures, social service program administrators face the challenge of strengthening their organizational capacity to deliver social service programs designed to end homelessness across the country.

According to the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE, 2015), executives within social service programs and other community supporting roles do not necessarily look like the population they support. The intent of this study was to explore the practices of hiring mid- and senior-level employees within homeless services provider organizations and the impact of hiring practices on service delivery.

This research was motivated by experiences gained during a fellowship with FUSE Corps and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Diversion and Reentry (Hudson, 2018). During the fellowship, I was tasked with an assignment focused on investing in human capital to eliminate homelessness. The fellowship assignment involved a series of listening interviews that were conducted to determine the level of diverse recruiting for roles that supported homelessness initiatives.

The interview sessions established that there was a need for greater diversity in the selection process. In addition, numerous practitioners interviewed described that the lack of diversity in senior roles created a level of cultural incompetency that affected how homeless services were delivered to diverse communities. During the fellowship, personal and professional relationships were fostered between practitioners and senior executives within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services and various community-based organizations that provide services to the homeless.

This study was needed to explain the gap in the literature that exists around the selection of executive-level employees who hold decision-making roles and those hiring practices that may affect people experiencing homelessness (Aydin & Rahman, 2017; Cho, Kim, & Mor Barak, 2017; GARE, 2015; Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Chapter 2

includes specific literature detailing executive-level recruitment and how decision makers affect the delivery of homeless services in Los Angeles County.

The social change implications of this study include providing policymakers and other decision makers with a deeper understanding of leadership effectiveness within organizations that deliver services through programs that may impact social outcomes (Callahan, Gardner, Mendonca, & Scott, 2014; Tierney, 2006). Executive career paths in for-profit organizations have been examined; however, comparable studies about nonprofit executive careers have been limited and have not looked holistically at factors that contribute to individual career development (Norris-Tirrell, Rinella, & Pham, 2018; Suarez, 2010). In addition, recent research has suggested that insufficient efforts have been applied to developing all types of leadership in the social services sector (Landles-Cobb, Kramer, & Smith Milway, 2015). Investigating selection processes may help identify unexplored alternative possibilities and establish untapped employment pools.

An examination of the hiring practices of mid- and senior-level managers was crucial to improve performance outcomes within organizations by exploring the methodology for selecting key decision makers responsible for providing services to the homeless (Geletkanycz, Clark, & Gabaldon, 2018; Mullen & Leginski, 2010). The goal for this study was to examine gaps in executive hiring strategies that will aid in creating solutions and policies to eradicate the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles County.

In the same way that Blacks are disproportionately represented in homelessness, Whites are disproportionately overrepresented in senior level roles that prescribe services to the homeless. Existing literature supports the implication that the lack of representation

of minorities in leadership roles may affect the delivery of services to marginalized communities (Cho et al., 2017; D5, 2013; Fernandez & Brown, 2015; GARE, 2015; Medina, 2017; Mullen & Leginski, 2010). A recent study by the search firm Battalia Winston surveyed 315 of the largest foundations and nonprofits in the United States to measure the level of diversity within the highest levels of the organization and found that these organizations suffer from a lack of ethnic diversity (Medina, 2017). Medina's (2017) findings were aligned with recent findings from a 2015 study by Community Wealth Partners, which found that only 8% of nonprofit executive directors were people of color (Fernandez & Brown, 2015). Similarly, a study conducted by D5 (2013), a coalition of funders, community activists, and thought leaders, found that 92% of foundation executive directors were White. The County of Los Angeles, the leading provider tasked to support homeless initiatives, employs approximately 109,000 employees with approximately 42% of all mid- and senior-level managers identifying as White (County of Los Angeles Open Data, 2019). The impact of these demographics was further explored in this study.

Chapter 1 consists of an overview of the study and background material concerning executive hiring within homeless services providers. Next, the problem statement elaborates on the lack of knowledge about the impact of executive hiring decisions to program delivery of homeless services. The purpose of the study, the research questions, and hypotheses, the limitations of the study, and implications for social change follow. Chapter 1 concludes with a definition of the terms, theoretical foundation, the nature of the study, the significance of the study, and a summary.

Background of the Study

The impact of executive hiring within social services providers that specifically support the homeless has not received significant attention in the past (Beck, 2012; Cho et al., 2017; Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Cho et al. (2017) focused on the dynamics of organizational performance in social enterprises and found that without effective management in place, an organization experiences results that negatively affect productivity around capacity building, sustainability, and delivery of services. Similarly, Bersin's (2015) two-year research study confirmed that the highest performing companies are focused on building a diverse, high-performing talent system to achieve organizational goals. Supplementary research may determine the correlation between executive hires and the organizational effectiveness of homeless services programs.

The research explored in this study may affect the effective implementation of public policies such as Measure H, various California Assembly and Senate bills, as well as various legislation across the nation. Decision-making processes of agencies such as the LAHSA and other governmental organizations that focus on homelessness may also be impacted by this research. In fact, in March 2017, Los Angeles County voters approved Measure H providing an estimated $355 million per year for 10 years to fund services for the homeless (LA County Homeless Initiative, 2019). The implementation affects administrators and draws attention to the skills and qualifications of administrators to oversee services to the homeless community. Furthermore, representation from senior-level decision makers that reflect the demographic makeup of

the homeless population they serve may influence decision-making and how funding is distributed within the community.

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth look at how legislation has affected homelessness and how recent funding has resulted in the need for leadership. As the complexity of homelessness increases, executives contend with challenges that affect organizational capacity to deliver services (Gumbel, 2018; LAHSA, 2019; Mullen & Leginski, 2010). For instance, Measure H is expected to generate an estimated $355 billion over the next ten years to finance efforts to end homelessness (LA County Homeless Initiative, 2019). Due to this, Los Angeles policymakers have passed a myriad of measures and legislation to address the homelessness crisis and have directed leadership within social service programs to deliver (Ridley-Thomas, 2019). While billions of dollars are being channeled into social service programs in an attempt to solve the homeless issue, executive leaders of organizations must be prepared and skilled in strengthening partnerships with law enforcement, health agencies, and community-based organizations to provide services.

Executive hiring plays a major role in how services are delivered within an organization (Despard, 2016; Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Smoyer, 2019). Research has found that executive leaders face numerous barriers to organizational performance that range from bureaucracy to insufficient resources (Despard, 2016; Guerrero, Henwood, & Wenzel, 2014). In fact, according to Guerrero et al. (2014), areas that affect executive leadership are frequently ignored. Social service providers have encountered barriers within their organizational design that has inadequately prepared employees for successful placement or succession into executive leadership roles (Landles-Cobb et al.,

2015). Consequently, organizational deficiencies in leadership add to existing challenges when recruiting and retaining an effective homeless services workforce. Job creation within service providers and implicit bias in hiring play a role in how agencies diversify and retain competent workers (Cho et al., 2017; Delphin-Rittmon, Andres-Hyman, Flanagan, & Davidson, 2013). The research purports that the ability to secure competent leaders may have an effect on the ability to deliver services to the homeless.

A gap in knowledge can be attributed to the minimal research conducted that reviews factors that motivate the hiring decisions of executives (Cho et al., 2017; D5, 2013; Fernandez & Brown, 2015; GARE, 2015; Medina, 2017). In this research, I examined literature from social constructionists and other researchers that explore how the lived experiences of decision makers contribute to assumptions around recruitment and selection. The research focuses on hiring executive leadership and the impact executive selection has on homeless services providers. The lack of research around the topic of executive-level hiring and leadership within homeless services providers were addressed through the examination of key topics around homelessness, legislation, implicit bias, and hiring practices. The findings of this study might provide decision makers with alternative ways of thinking about hiring executives that will allow for more effective service delivery to the homeless in Los Angeles County.

Problem Statement

The research problem is that executive hiring practices have not been evaluated in terms of their impact on social service programs that support the homeless (Cho et al., 2017; Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011; D5, 2013; Fernandez & Brown, 2015; GARE,

2015; Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). This doctoral study was needed in the field of public

policy because homelessness is a national issue with multiple facets which include the

impact of leaders working in homeless services. That is, the importance of effective

organizational capacity building within agencies and predictions of leadership turnover

may affect an organization's ability to deliver services, which increases the importance of

understanding leadership pipelines (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). For instance, a 2011

survey of nonprofit executives determined that three-quarters of those executives planned

to vacate their positions within the next 5 years (Cornelius et al., 2011). This and other

studies assert the need to investigate access, representation, and associated outcomes of

employing leadership to systematically document if the type of leadership is not just an

ideal but necessary for providers to achieve mission mandates.

The problematic condition that led to this study is the lack of significant attention

in the past to the impact of executive hiring within social service providers that

specifically support those lacking housing (Cho et al., 2017; Cornelius et al., 2011; D5,

2013; Fernandez & Brown, 2015; GARE, 2015; Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). Cho et al.

(2017) focused on the dynamics of organizational performance in social enterprises and

found that, without effective management in place, an organization experiences results

that negatively affect organizational productivity. Given the growing body of literature

regarding employment practices within organizations, it is suspected that inequities in

hiring influence the level of organizational development of social service programs

(Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018; Suarez, 2010). By analyzing the impact of hiring on the

organizational performance within social service providers, these providers were equipped to deliver services more effectively to the homeless.

Leaders within several community-based organizations (CBOs) have expressed that a lack of cultural competence exists in regard to how services are delivered to communities comprised mainly of people of color (GARE, 2015; Hudson, 2018). During listening surveys, it was expressed that the management of human capital contributed to cultural incompetence, which affected hiring decisions (Hudson, 2018). Additional background on the research topic supports and clarifies the need to examine the effect of hiring decisions on the delivery of homeless services. According to GARE (Nelson & Tyrell, 2015), the people in executive roles that make decisions on homelessness and other issues often do not look like the community they support. In fact, a study of 150 nonprofit organizations operating in the top 20 metropolitan areas and markets related to health and human services found nonprofit executives are primarily White (60.5%) (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). This study will review disparities existing within the hiring practices of mid- and senior-level employees and explore the impact of those hiring practices to service delivery to the homeless.

Homelessness has risen exponentially in Los Angeles County. In 2019, California Governor Gavin Newsom described the recent annual point-in-time count results of 59,000 homeless people as an immediate concern requiring solutions from the local level (County of Los Angeles, 2019). Those solutions involve programs and strategies to be implemented by executives of Los Angeles County agencies and organizations that support those agencies. The research secured in this study can affect the implementation

of public policies and legislation that seek to end homelessness, provide opportunities for marginalized individuals, and increase diversity.

More specifically, the research obtained in this study can influence the decision-making processes of LAHSA and other governmental organizations that focus on homelessness and guide current hiring practices. The implementation and administration of Measure H and other public policies by organizations like LAHSA are impacted by administrators' skills and qualifications to administer services. Understanding the impact of having senior-level decision makers who reflect the demographic makeup of the homeless population they serve may influence decision-making and how funding is distributed within the community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gain more insight into the practices and experiences of executive leaders working in homeless service provider organizations within Los Angeles County. The insight gained from this study was intended to provide researchers, policymakers, and homeless service providers with more information that would support successful capacity building outcomes. In Los Angeles, the ratio of people experiencing homeless to the number of Blacks experiencing homelessness is hugely disproportionate (LAHSA, 2020). Consequently, there are unique needs that stem from the overrepresentation of Blacks experiencing homelessness and an opportunity to examine the level of services to this specific population. Such dissimilarities suggest the need to consider race and ethnicity as a factor when selecting

leaders who will implement Measure H and other programs through services and programs to prevent and end homelessness.

It is the intent that the research will allow for substantive findings surrounding the impact of executive hiring practices that may influence the way executive-level decision makers are selected when they are tasked to serve vulnerable communities (Cho et al., 2017; GARE, 2015). This research will support social change by allowing social services providers to be more aware of the ways organizations reflect the communities they serve, and as a result, they will approach hiring efforts through a diversity lens. Social impact may be achieved as leaders deploy revenue from Measure H and other legislation to create housing and combat homelessness within marginalized populations.

Research Questions

The aim of this qualitative study was to understand hiring practices of mid- and senior-level employees within social services providers for the homeless. The research topic supported and clarified the need to examine the effect of hiring practices of executive staff in the workforce and the impact on the delivery of homeless services. Therefore, this study included the following overarching questions:

RQ1: What are the hiring practices of mid- and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?

RQ2: How does the ability to understand, communicate with, and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?

RQ3: What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of overall social services to the homeless?

The research questions supported the phenomenological approach as the goal of this study was to discover the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the particular phenomenon of performance within social services to the homeless (see Patton, 2015). Since phenomenology focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Ungvarsky, 2019), RQ1 allowed the participant to describe the level of impact that relatability has to the population they serve from a subjective perspective.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in the social constructionism framework (SCF) while taking an interpretative phenomenological approach to social constructionism, social identity theory (SIT), and critical race theory (CRT) to provide insight into the social complexity of the executive hiring process. In this study, social constructionism was used to understand the correlation between human behavior and recruitment at specific levels, while the SIT was used to examine the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions (Ellemers, 2019). Social constructionism aims to expound on how groups of people come to share perspectives (Patton, 2015). The SIT maintains that a person's social identity emerges from the natural process of creating social categories such as occupation, ethnicity, economic class, race, and gender (Rodriguez, 2018). Use of the SIT in this study provides insight into the

selection process and the concept of in-groups and outgroups as it applies to recruiting diverse talent.

The intent of this study was to apply the SCF to perspectives shared within social services organizations during the recruitment and selection process. The research posited that, under the SCF, current recruiting practices and programs are not tangible and are instead defined interpersonally by people interacting in a network of relationships (Patton, 2015). For example, these networks of relationships may consist of family members, referrals, or those with lived experiences. Defining the social construct through research questions addressed the meaning that is placed on hiring executives and how organizations view or deal with recruiting as it relates to service delivery. Specifically, the assertion of the tangible interpersonal interaction between a network of relationships may influence hiring decisions resulting in nepotism and referrals or second chances for individuals with lived experience. As Patton (2015) asserted, a constructionist evaluation would compare participant's perceptions to interpret the effects of differences in perceptions on attaining recruiting goals to present varying experiences rather than reaching singular conclusions. Subsequent research and application of the social constructionism theory offers guidance on ways to approach the phenomenon found in executive hiring practices.

The CRT is a theoretical framework that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power (Simba, 2019). Critical race theorists combine progressive political struggles for racial justice with critiques of the conventional legal and scholarly norms, which are themselves viewed as

part of the illegitimate hierarchies that need to be changed. CRT posits White racism as a hegemonic, socially and historically constructed cultural force in American society (Simba, 2019). CRT was used to provide additional insight into the recruiting and hiring phenomena occurring within social services organizations.

The CRT, SCF, and SIT are all socially constructed theories that can be shaped by the environment and culture (Patton, 2015; Rodriguez, 2018; Simba, 2019). In fact, all the theories used in this research are influenced by external factors as well as shaped by human interaction and activity. Although subjective in nature, biases and stereotypes are present and directly influence the nature of the theories (Patton, 2015; Rodriguez, 2018; Simba, 2019). In the same way, the CRT, SCF and SIT have significant differences that range from the focus on race and self-image to an overall understanding of the human world.

The conceptual model posited the concepts of recruiting executive candidates and hiring senior managers as decision makers as the independent variables to be measured. The effect the independent variables have on the delivery of homeless services is seen in the effect of executive staff on the delivery of homeless services. The hiring of executive staff becomes the intermediate variable, and ultimately the actual delivery of services becomes the dependent variable (Figure 1).
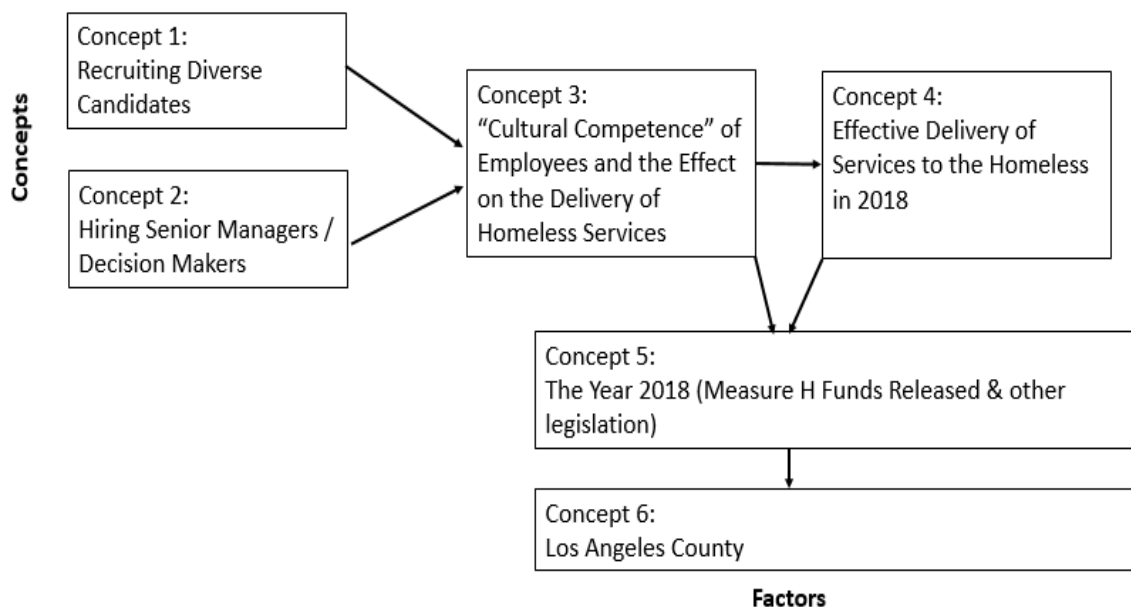
Figure 1. Conceptual model: An analysis of the impact of executive hiring within homeless services providers.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a qualitative interpretative phenomenological study. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) seeks to grasp and clarify the meaning of lived experiences of phenomena for a person or group of people; then, that experience is interpreted by the researcher for others to comprehend (Patton, 2015). Analysis of hiring practices within homeless services providers provided additional insight into improving organizational performance, which will equip providers to deliver services more effectively to the homeless. The research introduced theories and concepts that will help to determine how to apply theoretical concepts to build on additional research.

The study used a self-designed questionnaire created for phenomenological studies and was authenticated by the Walden Faculty, peers and colleagues for content validity. The self-designed questionnaire allowed the ability to quickly collect data, evaluate hiring practices, and to survey segments of the workforce from private, non-profit, and public organizations working together to address the complex issues of homelessness. The research included stratified sampling and split the entire population into subgroups in which the overall sample consisted of participants from each group, and then participants were randomly chosen from the subgroup (Patton, 2015). The purpose of stratified sampling in this study was to capture major variations rather than to identify a common principal (Patton, 2015). The participants interviewed represented a purposeful sample size based on Creswell's (1998) maximum recommended criteria for phenomenological studies of 25 participants or to the point of saturation. This study hypothesized that analyzing qualitative data through sampling provided information around hiring decisions that were beneficial to supporting historically underrepresented groups.

Definitions

The terms listed below are operational terms and definitions that have been used in the scope of this study.

Cultural Competence: Culturally competence refers to programs that maintain a set of attitudes, perspectives, behaviors, and policies that promote positive and effective interactions with diverse cultures (United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d).

Diversity: Diversity is defined as the variation in the human capital profile of the organization, which includes people from different races, religions, perspectives, ethnic backgrounds. Diversity also includes different cultures, values, beliefs, and reactions to the organizational environment (Roberson, 2004).

Executive: An executive is a person with senior managerial responsibility in a business organization. Executives are typically participatory, visionary, and transactional leaders who drive and implement complex organizational change within companies (Manz, Bastien, & Hostager, 1991). For the purpose of this study, the term executive refers to mid-and senior-level managers.

Executive level: Executive levels consist of positions that make up U.S. corporations. These positions include owner, chairperson, president, CEO, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), senior vice president, vice president, treasurer, and organization director (Sawyer, 2017).

Homeless Services Providers: A group of private, non-profit, social enterprises, and public organizations working together to specifically address the complex issues of homelessness and provide services to the homeless in Los Angeles County (LAHSA, 2020).

Homeless Services Sector: a group of organizations or agencies (non-profit or profit, public or private) that operate to secure access to affordable, safe, and sustainable housing (LAHSA, 2020).

Recruiting: Recruitment is the discovering of potential candidates for actual or anticipated organizational vacancies. It involves the activity of connecting those with jobs to fill and those seeking jobs (Kumari, 2012).

Social Services Providers: Social services providers are agencies that deliver direct services to aid individuals and families comprised of disadvantaged, distressed, or vulnerable (Pinker, 2016). Social services providers engage in social work that intervene to change social institutions and systems to enhance the well-being and material circumstances of excluded individuals like the homeless.

Assumptions

One assumption was that the SCF provides a reasonable explanation into the research topic and justifies the questionnaire used for the data collections. Additional assumptions included that the participants provided honest and accurate responses and that the sample reflected a population of employees that were interested and invested in improving executive hiring practices in social services programs. Assuming participants were honest and engaged was a necessary element of the study to support the validity of the research findings.

Scope and Delimitations

This study examines to what extent does executive hiring impact the delivery of social services program to populations experiencing homelessness. The problem is focused on the lived experiences of those recruiting and who have been recruited into senior level decision-making roles. The attention to lived experiences aligns with the social constructionism theory (SCT) which is focused on relationships and sustaining the

individual's role in the social construction of realities (Turner, 1991). Since SCT purports

that we know only stories about what is true, false, right, or wrong, the validity of SCT is

based solely on the perception of the participant and the researcher.

In addition, reflexivity, which refers to circular relationships between cause and

effect, can be problematic and a potential threat to the validity of the findings. Absolute

validity may be difficult to achieve since the perceptions of participants and concepts of

the truth may vary (Turner, 1991). A primary criticism of social constructionism is not

recognizing an objective reality is both widespread and common (Bury 1986; Burr 1995).

Further criticism purports research using social constructionist framework lacks the

ability to create change due to the inability from which to judge the findings of research,

therefore creating a methodological issue (Bury, 1986). In short, there is no way of

determining which reality is best.

Participants for the current study was limited to either current or past employees

(within 5 years) of Los Angeles, 18 years and older. Additional exclusionary criteria were

persons who were terminated from roles within social services providers to avoid any

claims of retaliation or negative feedback motivated by retaliation to a specific process or

service provider. Potential transferability of this study were applicable to social services

providers seeking to hire executive staff.

Limitations, Challenges, and/or Barriers

It is essential to recognize the limitations in the study in order for the study to

make a significant contribution to hiring and diversity literature. The use of a

phenomenological research design presented limitations of the study. For example,

participants in the research were expected to articulate thoughts and feelings and may have had difficulty expressing feelings about the experience being studied (Giorgi, 2012). In addition, cognition, language, age, embarrassment or other factors may h how participants articulate feelings.

The use of the social constructionism design involves a level of critique that is dependent upon what is being critiqued which may reinforce the very thing being analyzed (Gergen, 1994). In social constructionism, the researcher is not able to uncover reality but rather invent a perceived reality. Therefore, the inability to uncover reality is in itself a limitation. As SIT attempts to explain how and why individuals identify as members of a group, limitations include that it overlooks individualism and the importance of history, culture, and other environmental factors (Brown, 2000). In addition, SIT limitations include the simplification of significance of self-esteem and makes claims about in-group biases that may not be supported by data.

Additional limitations that existed include a lack of trust between participants and the researcher, which had the potential to pose challenges to data collection if participants were not honest about personal experiences. Similarly, organizations could have been cautious to disclose the details of recruiting and hiring processes. Additional limitations included bias of respondents exhibited in attempts to prove current methods are working. Challenges that could have evolved include accessing individual-level hiring data. Due to the confidential nature of employment records, organizations often prefer to provide aggregate level data. Although aggregate level data may be a great resource to get a broad overview, individual-level data may allow for a more rigorous empirical research.

Individual level data may be more difficult to access, yet necessary when examining specific employment outcomes.

Cultural and language barriers were minimal while interviewing within a stratified sample. The need for translators and interpreters were not required to bridge language barriers between the researcher and the participant. Additional barriers included time constraints and the time it took to conduct interviews, transcribe them, and analyze the results. Thoughtful and deliberate planning was required to ensure reasonable measures were in place to address limitations.

Significance

The significance of this study included addressing factors that contribute to equitable access to executive roles within providers that deliver services to people experiencing homelessness. By providing important insights into workforce management within homeless services providers, this study contributes to an understanding of the dynamics within these organizations. Consequently, this study supports homeless services providers' efforts to focus on hiring as it relates to an assortment of factors that affect organizational performance (Cho et al., 2017; Shibeshi, 2012). According to Bersin (2015), the relationship between ethnic diversity and organizational performance in agencies has not been clear. The current disproportionate ratio of minorities experiencing homelessness to minority decision makers in social services to the homeless has made this an opportune time to fuse the current sentiment with facts and metrics to deliver positive social change implications. Chapter 2 delves into an evaluation of the gaps in the literature and an exploration of the foundational study of the research.

Summary

Homelessness is a complex, complicated, modern-day local and national crisis

affecting every aspect of our society. The number of people experiencing homelessness

living in the streets and shelters of the city of Los Angeles surged 75% — to roughly

58,000 from about 32,000 — in the last six years (Holland, 2018). Most recently, the

LAHSA released the results of the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, which

showed 66,436 people in Los Angeles County experiencing homelessness representing a

12.7% rise from 2019's point-in-time count. Since the enacting of various legislation,

there has been an increased focus on how to administer resources to implement services

to support the homeless population (LAHSA, 2020). As real change commences at the

top of the organization, the selection of executive leaders should take priority in the quest

to find solutions to mitigate homelessness (Stewart, 2016). Therefore, the implication for

social change includes the ability to transform how homeless service providers select and

hire executive leaders who are equipped not only to deliver services but also to support

solutions designed to end homelessness, which leads to significant social impact.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature and contains a synthesis of current research

related to the theoretical framework on which the study is based. Chapter 3 includes a

description of the qualitative research method for this study and an explanation of

research procedures, data collection, and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 includes all the

demographics and characteristics of the participants in the study along with the findings

that have emerged from the data collected. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the

research findings, recommendations, and implications for social change while identifying

the areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap in knowledge by examining the hiring practices of executive-level employees who hold decision-making roles that affect people experiencing homelessness. Considering over 60 percent of executives in human service roles are White and advancements for hiring minorities have been slow (Stewart & Kuenzim, 2018), the correlation between leadership within homeless service providers and the delivery of homeless services to the community warrants exploration. The impact of equitable access amongst diverse candidates into executive roles within homeless service providers could help researchers, policymakers, and the homeless community provides crucial information on how to deliver homeless services more effectively. This study addresses the gap in the literature that examines the hiring practices of executive-level employees who hold decision-making roles that affect people experiencing homelessness that do not reflect the population they serve (GARE, 2015; Cho et al., 2017; Aydin & Rahman, 2017). By focusing on the lived experiences of those recruiting and who have been recruited, the research provides additional insight into how decisions are made that may influence organizations and policy.

LAHSA recently released the results of the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, which showed a 12.7% increase (66,436) from last year of people in Los Angeles County experiencing homelessness. The County has been faced with the challenge to serve, and house people experiencing homelessness and people without homes has risen exponentially since voters made unprecedented investments in homeless services over the

past three years. The numbers confirm the existence of a regional housing affordability crisis that continues to drive thousands into homelessness.

Los Angeles is attempting to build a robust safety net in Los Angeles County. However, addressing the economic inequities and lack of affordable housing that are becoming the attributing factors to falling into homelessness is complicated and requires innovative and progressive thinking (LAHSA, 2020). Some have expressed the importance of working with local community members and every level of government to increase affordable housing, limit rent increases, and prevent unjust evictions while continuing to scale up and refine the system.

The national homelessness crisis is becoming more complex as homeless services executives deal with the challenges of delivering services while competing with decades of national and local housing policies and other underlying obstacles (Gumbel, 2018). In fact, experts within government circles are working to break traditional models and create new lines of authority. There is a growing demand to hire and equip staff at all levels to be prepared to deliver services to the homeless. Chapter 2 includes a synthesized literature review that historically examines the public policy response to the delivery of homeless services and includes an extensive exploration of executive hiring practices as they relate to the theoretical frameworks within the social constructionism, social identity, and critical race theories.

Strategy for Searching the Literature

The literature review consisted of primary sources such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, professional websites, and federal government publications.

Articles were accessed through Google Scholar and the following Walden University

research databases: SAGE Journals, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Social Work

Abstracts, ABI/Inform, Business Source Complete, and SocIndex. Extensive database

searches were conducted using key words and phrases, including executives, senior

leadership, hiring, recruitment, homeless services, diversity, and inequities, through

Google Scholar, as well as in a Thoreau multi-database search. Variations on terms (e.g.,

executives, executive hiring, leadership, leader, recruitment, diversity, social

constructionism, social identity theory, critical race theory) were also used to locate

articles that might have been otherwise overlooked. The search strategies yielded over

155 articles, of which 65 were germane to the topic.

Theoretical Foundation

The practice of hiring involves independent decision-making, sound judgement,

cognitive reasoning, and critical thinking based on experiences and opinions. The

recruitment and selection process is intended to identify the most qualified candidates

that will align with the organization's goals using interpersonal and intrapersonal

techniques (Ahmad & Schroder, 2002). Minimal research has been done to consider the

motivating factors surrounding hiring decisions of executives. This study takes a

phenomenological interpretative approach to the SCF, SIT, and CRT to provide insight

into the executive hiring process.

As seen in Table 1, a comparison and contrast of socially constructed theories

provides insight into decisions that are shaped by human interaction, as well as internal,

and external factors. Social construction theories have been used to underpin how the

development of jointly constructed understandings of the world form the basis for shared

assumptions about recruiting decisions (Schneider & Ingram, 1977). In this study, social

constructionism was used to understand the correlation between human behavior and

recruitment at exact levels. SIT is used to examine the consequences of personal and

social identities for individual perceptions (Ellemers, 2019). By analyzing social

constructionism as it relates to the SIT when making decisions on recruiting and selection

within social services, the research provided a phenomenological interpretation of the

human experience during the selection process for executive-level staff.

Table 1

Theoretical Frameworks – Differences & Similarities

Theoretical Frameworks	Differences	Similarities
Critical Race Theory (CRT) Theoretical framework that use critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power (Simba, 2019)	- Based solely on race and ethnicity - Power and the law play a substantial role	Socially constructed Institutional disposition of prestige & power may shape concept of identity Affected by popular culture
Social Constructionism Framework (SCF) Aims to expound on how groups of people come to share perspectives (Patton, 2015)	- Primary focus is on obtaining a favorable self-image and self-concept - Emerges from a natural process of social categorization	Influenced by external factors Shaped by human interaction and activity
Social Identity Theory (SIT) Maintains that a person's social identity emerges from the natural process of creating social categories such as occupation, ethnicity, economic class, race, and gender (Rodriguez, 2018)	- Explains but does not drive behaviors and attitudes Purports but does not drive behaviors and attitudes	Biases and stereotypes are present and inherent Subjective in nature

Social Constructionism Framework

Patton (2015) asserted that social constructionism aims to illuminate how groups of people come to share perspectives. Social constructionism asserts that things are defined interpersonally and intersubjectively by people interacting in a network of relationships (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Patton, 2015). The intent of this study was to apply the SCF to perspectives shared within social services organizations during the recruitment and selection process. The research posits that under the SCF, current recruiting practices and programs are not tangible and are instead defined interpersonally by people interacting in a network of relationships (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Patton, 2015). Defining the social construct addressed the meaning that is placed on hiring executives and how organizations view or deal with recruiting as it relates to service delivery.

Consequently, the assertion of the tangible interpersonal interaction between a network of relationships may influence hiring decisions resulting in nepotism and referrals or second chances for individuals with lived experience. As Patton (2015) asserted, a constructionist evaluation would compare participant's perceptions to interpret the effects of differences in perceptions around attaining recruiting goals rather than reaching singular conclusions. Subsequent research and application of the social constructionism theory offered guidance on ways to approach the phenomenon of bias and preference found in executive hiring practices.

Social constructionism provides a rationale for why stereotyping of and discrimination against candidates occur as well as impact organizational norms. Theories to explain behaviors emerge through data collection and analysis that is compatible with social constructionist underpinnings (Kolb, 2012). Exploring participant's responses to hiring decisions also involved tenets of SIT.

Social constructionism states that reality is socially constructed by the actions of people in society, that knowledge is constructed and understood based on these actions, and that social institutions are responsible for creating stereotypes and discrimination, which continue to exist because of them (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Diaz-Leon, 2015; Gergen, 1985). It is suggested that our identity is not innate but originates from societal influences (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Instead, socialization occurs through interaction with others who intermediate the objective reality of society, making it meaningful prompting individuals to internalize those meanings.

Social constructionism purports that target populations have varying levels of political power and that actors characterize them in positive or negative terms (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). As seen in Figure 2, Schneider and Sidney (2009) suggest a set of four "ideal types" of constructions: advantaged (powerful groups with positive images), contenders (powerful groups with negative images), dependents (powerless groups with positive images), and deviants (powerless groups with negative images). In fact, researchers have expanded their focus on policy design to include an investigation into social constructions that have been ubiquitous in the policy field to further develop the relationship between policy design components and target populations (Ramsay &

Scholarios, 1999; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). As Figure 2 describes, employers, the

employed, and the homeless are integrated elements for analysis when evaluating social

constructions and their effect on target populations.

       According to Andrews (2012), social constructionism has been instrumental in

attempting to make sense of the social world with the view that knowledge is constructed

as opposed to created. Berger and Luckmann's (1991) research that asserts that reality is

socially defined and that our truths are based on both objective and subjective lived

experiences can be applied to the socialized process of determining the best candidate for

a role. That is, in social constructionism, although reality is always defined socially it is

human beings that make the decision on how it is defined (Andrew 2012; Berger &

Luckmann, 1991). Subsequently, the emphasis that social constructionism places on

everyday interactions between people may provide significant insight into how leaders

select other leaders.
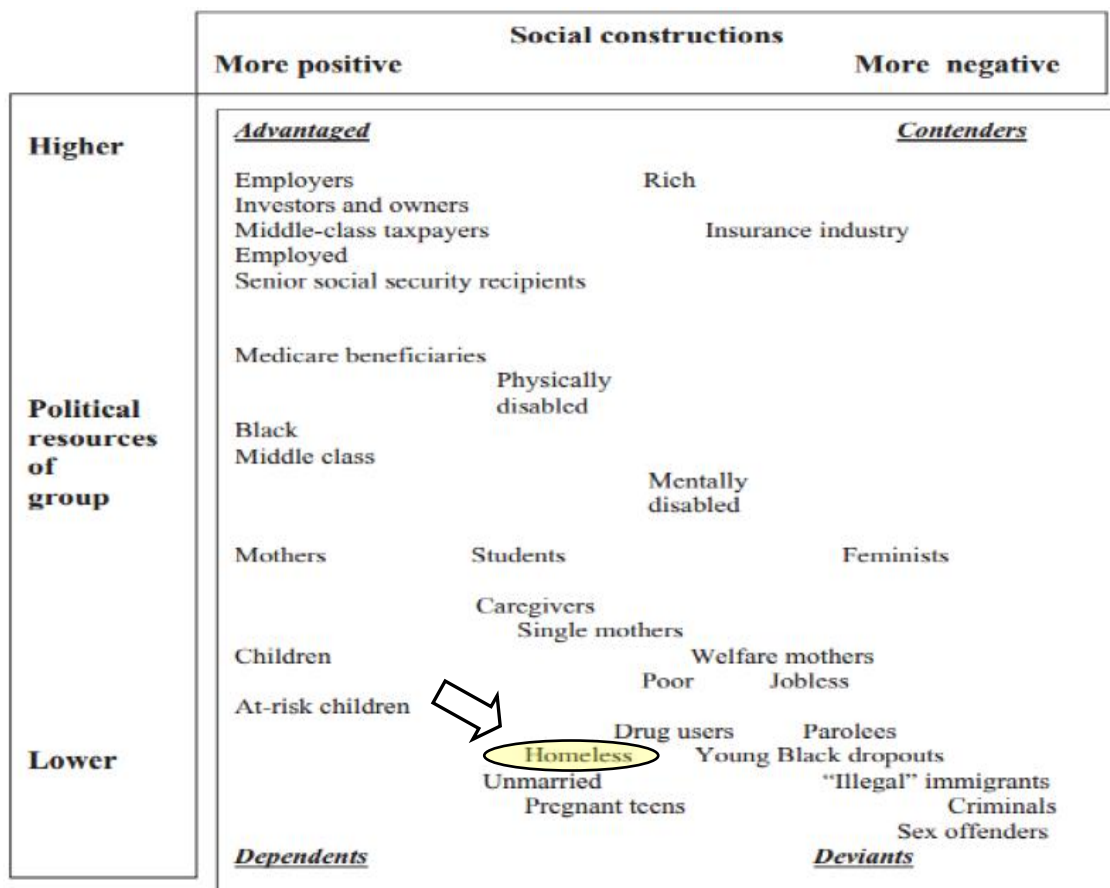
Figure 2. Power and social constructions of target populations. Reprinted from "What is Next for Policy Design and Social Construction Theory?" by A. Schneider and M. Sidney, 2009 by *Policy Studies Journal*, 37(1), 103-119.

Ramsay & Scholarios' (1999), research around selective decisions and the hiring process, sets the stage for social constructionism within the hiring process. In the research, hiring is approached as a social relational phenomenon involving cognitive processes of key actors or decision makers (Ramsay & Scholarios, 1999). Similarly, research by Vial, Dovidio, and Brescoll, (2019), included five studies highlighting how occupying particular roles can often lead individuals to behave inconsistently in ways that perpetuate biases and social disadvantages within underrepresented groups.

Social Identity Theory

SIT is a self-categorizing process in which individuals within the same group display similarities while individuals in the out-group display dissimilarities (Ellemers, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018). Differences in age, race, and generation lead to categorization of the groups and lead individuals to form behaviors toward the other group, resulting in favoritism, discrimination, and preference for the in-group (Allen, Schetzsle, Mallin, & Pullins, 2014; Rodriguez, 2018). Social identity attributes the cause of in-group favoritism to a psychological need for positive uniqueness. Typically, such stereotypical behavior results in in-group favoritism, inter-group disadvantage, lower prestige and preference for the in-group over the out-group.

In SIT, an individual establishes and identifies a psychological state of identity with certain categories and rejects the others to establish superiority of one's own group, affluence, or positive distinctiveness (Allen et al., 2014; Rodriguez, 2018). SIT argues that the motivation to maintain a positive social identity and high self-esteem leads to a bias in favor of the ingroup (Lewis & Sherman, 2003; Rodriguez, 2018; Tajfel, 1978). This bias affects the hiring process when decision makers consider applicants who share similar ingroup characteristics (Lewis & Sherman, 2003). Consequently, SIT may influence the levels of employer attractiveness and perceptions of diverse populations of potential employees.

Research has explained the phenomenon that occurs within SIT and recruiting decisions by evaluating the level of impact these decisions have on the decision makers self-esteem (Tajfel, 1978). Tajfel's SIT proposed that an individuals' self-esteem is

connected to the groups in which they belong (Lewis & Sherman, 2003; Tajfel, 1978).

Individuals are motivated to see their ingroups in the most favorable light possible to

maintain their own positive social identity (Lewis & Sherman, 2003; Tajfel, 1978). The

research indicates that individuals strategically evaluate their relationship with ingroup

targets in attempt to maximize their own worth or abilities.

Studies examining the evaluation between ingroup and outgroup targets indicate

that participants show ingroup favoritism and bias toward qualified applicants and

marginally qualified applicants depending on how the level of qualification reflects the

reviewer (Lewis & Sherman, 2003). In as much as there is ample evidence of ingroup

favoritism, there are significant documented reversals described as the black-sheep effect

which occurs when the same negative performance is evaluated more harshly to an

ingroup member as compared with an outgroup member (Jost, 2001; Lewis & Sherman,

2003; Linville & Jones, 1980; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988). Overall, research

within SIT and decision making may provide explanations for ingroup denigration and

biases that may have an overall impact to the process of hiring executives. SIT provides a

framework to evaluate how leaders make decisions which may provide input into

eliminating barriers that exist within recruitment processes.

Critical Race Theory

Understanding that race is a social construct, this study used the concept of race to

explore the effects of CRT on the hiring process and selection of persons of color.

Critical race theorists argue that people of color experience racism based specifically on

racial identification daily (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Simba, 2019). Despite the fact

overt discrimination is discouraged, microaggressions have progressively emerged (Simba, 2019). Microaggressions are the intentional or inadvertent slights and other subtle discriminatory or racist acts concentrated at minorities solely based on group membership and have been theorized to describe the challenges that minorities continue to face (Simba, 2019; Torres-Harding & Turner, 2015). In fact, within CRT, the concept of meritocracy is fallacious, and discrimination is ultimately inevitable in a society in which wealth, education, and power are distributed and affirmed by the workings of a hierarchy of White over Black (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Simba, 2019). CRT provides a historical context for the origins of the White leader stereotype that may be present in hiring within social service hierarchies (Sawyer, 2017). Consequently, CRT may provide insight into biases and stereotypes inherent to recruiting and selection processes within this study.

CRT has been selected due to its illustration of the fact that organizations that adopt diversity ideologies and characterize themselves as advocates of racial and gender equity, often retain policies and practices that preserve racism through inequality in the chain of command (Hughey, 2014). Heanne (2019) describes CRT as a form of academic study which accounts for explicit and implicit bias while seeking to eliminate racism and other forms of oppression. Other scholars of CRT focus on the existence of idealists and realists; idealists perceive racism as ideals that can be addressed through a change in systems and teachings while realists argue that racism goes beyond undoing attitudes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Heanne, 2019). Employment practices and other factors are

recognized examples within CRT of physical circumstances that involve deep-rooted racial disparities.

The body of work by CRT scholars Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that ignoring racial difference maintains and perpetuates the institutionalized injustices within the status quo and insists that dismissing the importance of race guarantees the continuation of institutionalized and systematic racism (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olson, 2003; Zuberi, 2011). Many CRT researchers embrace an antisubordination ideology that has been described as central to CRT (Calmore, 1992; Heanne, 2019). According to Bell (1980), interest convergence is a concept essential to CRT and attributes the self-interests of Whites as the leading factor of civil rights gains for people of color rather than motives of social decency or conscience (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Heanne, 2019). Bell's research criticizes workplace diversity initiatives for primarily serving the interests of employers by focusing on compliance versus discriminatory practices.

Both antisubordination and interest convergence theories within CRT purport that the interests of employers converge with the interests of members of marginalized groups who seek to work in a diverse, inclusive environment free from discrimination (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Heanne, 2019). Overall, critical theorists believe that individual and organizational racial biases in the workplace create economic inequality within and outside the place of employment (Bell, 1980; Calmore, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Heanne, 2019). The research and research questions within this study

will explore the lived experience of the participant as it relates to CRT, SCF, and SIT theories and the participant's lived experiences around employment and hiring.

Homelessness

National homelessness. The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is a Housing of Urban Development (HUD) report that provides nationwide estimates of homelessness to the U.S. Congress. AHAR includes demographic information characteristics and the capacity to house homeless persons (United States, 2019). According to the 2019 AHAR, roughly 567,715 people were experiencing homelessness in the United States on a single night in 2018. Approximately two-thirds (65%) were staying in sheltered locations and about one-third (35%) were in unsheltered locations such as on the street, in abandoned buildings, or in other places not suitable for human habitation (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019).

In the 2019 AHAR, Blacks, and other minority groups are overrepresented among the homeless population compared to the overall U.S. population (United States, 2019). That is, Blacks account for 13 percent of the U.S. population, yet Blacks account for 40 percent of all people experiencing homelessness and 51 percent of people experiencing homelessness as members of families with children (United States, 2019). Nearly 3 in 10 people in families experiencing homelessness were Hispanic or Latino, and Hispanics and Latinos comprised 29 percent of families in sheltered locations and 23 percent of people in families in unsheltered locations (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). Seven in ten people experiencing homelessness as individuals identified as men and the remaining 30 percent identified as women,

transgender, or gender non-conforming (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). Approximately 18 out of every 10,000 veterans in the United States experienced homelessness on a single night in 2018 and veterans experiencing homelessness were half as likely to identify as Hispanic or Latino as all people experiencing homelessness (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

Homeless populations constitute an array of subgroups from chronically homeless people to those who experience temporary homelessness (LAHSA, 2020., Mullen & Leginski, 2010). The phrases "homeless services," "homeless population," and "homeless sectors" are used throughout the research and these phrases do not suggest any homogeneousness among homeless people or services. In fact, homeless services, populations, and sectors are so varied it requires a workforce trained to meet the sundry of challenges.

Homelessness & homeless services in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County, California has the highest concentration of homeless individuals in the nation and faces significant challenges to provide care although it features the largest social services system available to homeless people in the nation (Guerrero et al., 2014). LAHSA is a joint powers authority of the city and county of Los Angeles, created in 1993 to address the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles County (LAHSA, 2020). As the lead agency in the HUD-funded Los Angeles Continuum of Care, LAHSA coordinates and manages over $300 million annually in federal, state, county, and city

funds for programs providing shelter, housing, and services to people experiencing

homelessness (LAHSA, 2020).

LAHSA released results of the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, which

showed 66,436 people in Los Angeles County experiencing homelessness representing a

12.7% rise from the 2019 point-in-time count of 58,396 (LAHSA, 2020). According to

the Count, 23% of the unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in LA County was

homeless for the first time last year and the majority of the unhoused cited economic

hardship as the cause (LAHSA, 2020). In addition, the Count revealed that widely

coordinated efforts to assist veterans had resulted in a small decrease in that population

and Black people, who constitute 8.3% of the overall county population, continue to be

overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness at 33% (LAHSA, 2020). The

capacity of LA County's homeless services system has been impacted by new resources

made available in 2018 (LAHSA, 2020). In the past year, LAHSA and similar

organizations have been challenged to hire competent staff to support these needs.

The County offers programs and social services to the less fortunate to address

hardships and promote financial independence to thousands of families through financial

assistance and other programs. In response to the crisis, the Los Angeles County Board of

Supervisors created the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative in 2015 (LA County,

2019). The primary initial objective of the Homeless Initiative was to develop a

coordinated set of recommended strategies to combat homelessness. To achieve this

objective, the Homeless Initiative convened policy summits on nine topics and brought

together County departments, cities and other public agencies, and a wide range of

community partners and stakeholders resulting in 47 recommended strategies. There are

47 strategies resulting from the Homeless Initiative (County of LA, 2019) and they are

divided into six areas:

- Prevent Homelessness;

- Subsidize Housing;

- Increase Income;

- Provide Case Management and Services;

- Create a Coordinated System;

- Increase Affordable/Homeless Housing.

According to research by Mullen & Leginski (2010), there are between 202,300

and 327,000 workers in the United States that provide homeless services. The research

emphasizes the imperfection of the data and how little is known about the composition

and size of the homeless workforce as little attention has been given to developing the

capacity needed to address the myriad of issues of the homeless (Beck & Boulton, 2012;

Hilliard & Boulton, 2012; Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Smoyer, 2019). Studies show that

without investing in the professional development of homeless service providers through

activities that range from recruiting, training, and credentialing, success in ending

homelessness were difficult to achieve (Mullen & Leginski, 2010) The homelessness

crisis has provided an opportunity to establish a local and national agenda for workforce

development while leveraging action across agencies to build workforce capacity.

Policies affecting homelessness and hiring. Measure H is just one of numerous

initiatives that are designed to provide billions of funding to eliminate homelessness. As

billions are being funneled into agencies and other organizations to address the homeless epidemic, various polices around the employees that work with law enforcement, health agencies, and other workplaces have been devised to promote fairness and equity as employees strive to deliver services. Policies such as Measure H, California Assembly Bill 241, California Assembly Bill 243, California Senate Bill 826, House Bill 3394 all have an impact on how homeless services are delivered to the communities they serve. Consequently, decision-makers within agencies such as LAHSA and other governmental organizations that focus on homelessness are directly impacted by these policies.

Measure H. In response to the homelessness, the County launched the Homeless Initiative in August 2015, a multi-department effort to develop a comprehensive set of recommended County strategies to reduce homelessness (Hamai, 2016). An inclusive, collaborative planning process brought together County departments, cities, and over community organizations to discuss strategies to tackle homelessness. In February 2016, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Homeless Initiative's coordinated set of 47 recommended strategies and allocated $99.7 million in one-time funding to support the initial implementation of the approved strategies (Hamai, 2016). Soon afterward, the Board's adopted ordinance placing Measure H, a ¼-cent special sales tax for a period of 10 years on the March 7, 2017 countywide election ballot passed.

Measure H is expected to generate an estimated $355 million per year for ten years to fund services dedicated to fighting homelessness (LA County, 2019). Measure H has since increased $58M over FY 2018-19 and California Governor Gavin Newsom's

May 2019 budget revision added $650 million in one-time funding with the intent that the $460 million Measure H budget will help scale up services. The five-year goal is to provide permanent housing for 45,000 families and prevent homelessness for 30,000, and indirectly create thousands of jobs to support these directives (Ridley-Thomas, 2019).

Assembly Bills 241, 242, and 243. California Assembly Bill 241 requires that all continuing education courses for a physician to contain curriculum that includes specified instruction in the understanding of implicit bias. By January 1, 2022, the bill would require associations that accredit these continuing education courses to develop standards to comply with these provisions (A.B. 241). Assembly Bill 242 mandates implicit bias testing and training for officers of the court, including judges, attorneys, and trial court administrative employees. Assembly Bill 243 requires biennial Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in implicit bias for peace officers after completion of the basic law enforcement-training academy.

In passing A.B. 241, A.B. 242 & A.B. 243, the legislation defined implicit bias as the meaning, attitudes or internalized stereotypes that affect our perceptions, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner, exists, and often contributes to unequal treatment of people based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, and other characteristics (A.B. 241, A.B. 242. A.B. 243). The legislation also explicitly contribute the need for these bills due to studies showing that in the United States, most people have an implicit bias that disfavors Blacks and favors White Americans, resulting from a long history of subjugation and exploitation of people of African descent (A.B. 241, A.B. 242, A.B. 243). The legislation also found and declared that strategies must be

put in place to address how unintended biases in decision making may contribute to health care disparities by shaping behavior and producing differences in medical treatment along lines of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics (A.B. 241). A.B. 241, A.B. 242, and A.B. 243 are examples of how policy has been used to address implicit bias in recruitment and retention in the areas of healthcare and law enforcement.

California Senate Bill 826. Senate Bill 826 is the nation's first law that mandates female membership on boards of directors. California Senate Bill 826 addresses the lack of gender equity within director roles in organizations by mandating Corporations to have a minimum of one female its board of directors, as specified (CA SB826, 2018). SB826 addresses the fact that among the 50 California-based companies with the lowest revenues, with an average of $13 million in 2015 revenues, only 8.4 percent of the director seats are held by women, and nearly half, or 48 percent, of these companies have no women directors (CA SB826, 2018).

House Bill 3394. As of June 28, 2019, H.B. 3394, legislation created in Illinois to mandate Blacks and Latinos on corporate boards was revised then passed by both Houses and sent to the Governor of Illinois for approval (H.B. 3394, 2019). H.B. 3394 originally would have required Illinois companies to have at least one woman, a Black, and a Latino on boards. However, the version the Senate passed eliminated those requirements and replaced them with a mandate for publicly traded companies in Illinois to report Board demographics on websites along with plans for promoting diversity in the workplace (Shropshire, 2019).

Executive Hiring

A recent study found that employers who excelled in recruiting and hiring experienced 3.5 times more revenue growth (Breaugh, 2010). In fact, by excelling in the organizations achieved twice the profit margin of other employers (Breaugh, 2010). However, acquiring the right talent can be challenging across industries. Healthcare, law enforcement, and homelessness services are tied together by forward-facing roles within the community. Consequently, common elements and challenges face the public and social service providers alike in efforts to place executives.

Mental health, substance use and other health issues among the homeless require a workforce with highly-developed knowledge and skills (Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Smoyer, 2019). In addition, adaption to new service delivery models is needed to adjust to various changes within homelessness policy. According to Mullen & Leginski (2010) workers in homeless services confront a daunting array of barriers to success which include but are not limited to; (a) providing for population with special needs, (b) challenges engaging clients in services, (c) working in settings that are non-traditional, (d) managing multiple systems, (e) dealing with negative public attitudes, (f) working in an environment with low wages, and (g) managing compassion fatigue and burnout. The research will examine how these factors impact the effectiveness of hiring practices within agencies that support the homeless.

Executive hiring in healthcare. Managers have an important role in innovative health services implementation, yet roles are poorly understood. Extant research on health care implementation has focused on the roles of executives and physicians while

middle managers are largely overlooked (Birken et al., 2013). In the same sense, diversity in hiring is an organizational leadership issue that can be seen in healthcare that is often addressed through legal policies regarding equal opportunity, affirmative action, and nondiscrimination statutes (Grant, 2010). The selection of executives working in healthcare is instrumental in determining the roles and significance of managers and other front-line employees.

Executive hiring in law enforcement. Law enforcement and healthcare agencies influence the delivery of homeless services. Recent implementation of programs like Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) involve police officers exercising discretionary authority at point of contact to divert individuals to a community-based, harm-reduction intervention for law violations driven by unmet behavioral health needs (LEAD.com, 2019). In these types of programs, prosecutors and police officers work closely with case managers to ensure that all contacts with LEAD participants are coordinated with the service plan for the participant to maximize opportunities for success (LEAD.com, 2019). LEAD is one example of a program where executive input may affect the selection of police officers and those decisions may have a direct effect on the delivery of services to the community, which includes the homeless and other populations.

Historically, law enforcement recruitment strategies were focused on hiring White men. Female and minority recruitment within in law enforcement began around 1970 and the all-White male police force has been transformed into a force that actively recruits women, minorities, and homosexual officers (Hoisington, 2018). Moreover, the quality of executive hires in leadership within the organization has a direct effect on the

effectiveness of a law enforcement organization and how those leaders inspire and motivate employees (Campbell, 2012). Consequently, poor recruitment strategies have failed to attract diverse and qualified candidates and often elicit unqualified applicants (Breaugh, 2009). Due to law enforcement's close proximity to the homeless crisis, it can be deduced that the hiring disparities that are prevalent in law enforcement, impact the delivery of services within partner agencies.

Executive hiring in homeless services providers. Homeless services providers consist of nonprofit and for-profit organizations working in collaboration and tandem to achieve similar goals. Once considered the voluntary sector, the nonprofit sector is staffed by professionals possessing specialized expertise and advanced degrees compelled by a trend of professionalization (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). Accountability pressures coupled with a scarcity of resources resulting from a mass exodus of baby boomers from the workplace has shifted the sector from value-driven to data-driven (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). In addition, with boards often holding the responsibility for hiring executives and the scarcity of resources preventing the use of executive recruiting firms, many executives are selected based on their familiarity or credibility to a board connection (Stewart, 2016). Given the role that nonprofits play in communities and the increasing reliance on nonprofits and CBO's to deliver government services, this leadership crisis could have far-reaching implications for the organizations and for the communities depending on service.

Executive leadership in homeless services providers. According to Despard (2016), between 44% and 71% of nonprofit leaders were unable to improve leadership,

performance, and service delivery capabilities. Organizational development and its impact on executive leadership have often been overlooked (Beck & Boulton, 2012; Birken et al., 2013; Hilliard & Boulton, 2012; Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Smoyer, 2019). Existing literature has revealed multiple organizational barriers to integration, which include the bureaucratic process of service delivery, professional and philosophical differences among providers, and inadequate resources (Guerrero et al., 2014). The research will review those organizational barriers as it relates to recruitment processes, hiring practices, capacity building, and delivery of services.

Hiring Practices and job creation are a symptom of the overall problem of barriers in the organizational design within services providers. In addition, the sector that encompasses service providers has been critiqued for inadequately preparing heirs to the executive office (Landles-Cobb et al., 2015). Leadership is an emerging focal point in efforts to develop organizational capacity and improve treatment services (Guerrero et al., 2016). Leadership styles, such as transactional and transformational leadership, are essential for fostering change in organizations that provide social services.

Leaders play a key role in supporting strategic initiatives such as evidence-based practice implementation and efforts to leverage funding resources to foster an organizational process that improves both organizational capacity and client outcomes (Guerrero et al., 2016). The role of nonprofit leaders has morphed from establishing academic credibility to exercising legitimacy based on levels of lived experience that garners street believability (Suarez, 2010). The ability to relate and understand the community has emerged as criterion for recruiting managers.

The role of the leader within an agency sets the pace for internal and external decisions at all levels. For example, Los Angeles County leaders have been vocal on the state of homelessness and have challenged the response and effectiveness of other leaders within social services agencies to the crisis (Ridley-Thomas, 2019). In a recent paper by Mark Ridley-Thomas, member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for the Second District, Ridley-Thomas alludes to the need for leaders to jumpstart implementation of statewide re-housing efforts, including street engagement, service triage, crisis housing, permanent housing navigation and other innovations and interventions (Ridley-Thomas, 2019). The report holds leaders within state agencies responsible for providing solutions and participating in collective action to remove the homeless from the streets into suitable housing.

Another recognized leader, LA County Controller, Ron Galperin, released an audit in 2019 which further highlighted the homeless crisis while challenging leaders from LAHSA. Galperin's audit found Blacks (19,000) and Latinos (20,504) represented 70% of the homeless population which contradicted LAHSA's previous reports (Galperin, 2019). The report also found that leaders within LAHSA inaccurately reported the number of homeless people that died on the streets directly impacting the ability to provide appropriate services (Galperin, 2019). Galperin's report delivered strong criticism of leadership within LAHSA and found that the agency did not show improvement asserting that the reason for the overall decline was due to poor leadership.

Hiring Practices in Homeless Services Providers

One of the most under-valued assets in this nation's fight to end homelessness is the homeless services workforce (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). From program administrators to direct service workers, homeless services providers are responsible for solving one of the most complex expressions of poverty in America today (LAHSA, 2020). A critical service LAHSA provides is street outreach, which involves a representative, typically titled a community health worker, who connects people experiencing homelessness to resources, shelters, housing and supportive services. Over the last two fiscal years, the City allocated a combined $10 million for these type of outreach services, while the County provided the largest amount, totaling $44 million (Galperin, 2019). Yet, insufficient attention has been paid to providing the support and skills they need to succeed.

Currently, homeless services providers throughout Los Angeles County are seeking thousands of candidates for the field of homeless services ranging from front-line community health workers and housing navigators to managers and executives (LAHSA, 2020). Through the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative and Measure H funds, these new employment opportunities have enabled the County to significantly ramp up services to those in need and provide job opportunities at all levels.

Job creation in service providers. Whether in social services or other industries, the recruitment process requires objectives to help identify and target the ideal candidates for the role. The process is enriched when departments develop objectives with input from human-resource personnel, supervisors, and managers with knowledge of the job

expectations (Breaugh, 2010). Objectives should include the number of expected job vacancies, the time frame for hiring applicants, diversity requirements, education levels, and skill sets desired.

Implicit bias in hiring. Ingroup biases are a well-documented and well-studied phenomenon in which members of one's own group receive preferential treatment (Lewis & Sherman, 2003). With the passage of A.B. 241, A.B. 242, and A.B. 243, Assembly member Kamlager-Dove recognizes a need for training on how to acknowledge and reduce implicit bias in the healthcare, law enforcement and judicial professions in California (Kamlager-Dove, 2020). Addressing implicit bias addresses the attitudes or internalized stereotypes that affect our perceptions, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner and what may contribute to unequal treatment in hiring of people based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, and other characteristics. Implicit bias often is how discrimination manifests itself. For instance, White men hold 68 percent of C-suite positions, compared with 19 percent for White women and 9 percent for men of color, according to a report by Lean In and McKinsey & Co. (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018). Women of color hold just 4 percent of those posts. Only half of White men say they are committed to diversity, according to the report.

Implicit bias in law enforcement. Law enforcement's approach to hiring impacts the hiring and delivery of services to the homeless. Assembly Bill 243 would require biennial implicit bias Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) after completion of the basic law enforcement-training academy for members of law enforcement agencies.

(Kamlager-Dove, 2020). The Department of Justice recognizes that it must ensure the criminal justice system is fair and impartial. In the same way, AB 243 would reduce disparities in policing to those not yet housed by requiring implicit bias training as a component of mandatory training.

Implicit bias in healthcare. Biases, whether explicit or not, can affect how healthcare providers treat patients different from themselves. Assembly Bill 241 requires continued medical education (CME) curriculum in implicit bias for licensees under the Medical Board, Physician Assistant Board and Board of Registered Nursing (Kamlager-Dove, 2020). Since homelessness is a public health problem, biases in healthcare is also a part of a key public health dimension. Furthermore, the conditions of homelessness contribute to poor health.

People experiencing homelessness are also more likely to face extended gaps in access to care, which may lead to frequent hospitalizations for mental and physical health problems and visits to emergency rooms. Many studies find that disparities in medical services because of implicit prejudices remain even after adjusting for socioeconomic differences and other healthcare access-related factors (Kamlager-Dove, 2020). People who experience homelessness are far more likely than the general population to suffer from serious mental illness, chronic medical conditions, and substance use disorders.

Implicit bias in homelessness services providers. The correlation between health and homelessness warrants a review of the extent of implicit bias in the delivery of homeless services. This research examines to what level executives that administer homeless services should be required to examine implicit bias. Beliefs or feelings of

superiority of a dominant group compared to a disadvantaged group motivate acts of workplace discrimination (Creighton, 2017). This implicit bias leads to workplace discrimination; those actions of institutions or individuals that create unfair terms and conditions that systematically impair the ability of members of certain groups to work.

Although legislation has created processes to minimize discriminatory practices, discrimination continues to occur during the application, hiring, training, or anytime during the employment process. In fact, in 2014 89,385 claims were received by the EEOC citing workplace discrimination (Lotito, Fitzgerald, & LoVerde, 2016). Antidiscrimination legislation has been focused primarily on employers' conscious behavior. Consequently, discrimination is often proven through documentation of discriminatory acts or measurement of employment outcomes (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Research within behavioral science suggests the need to improve specific employment processes such as interviewing, performance evaluation, or succession planning.

In fact, a recent study demonstrated that White job interviewers sat further away from Black job applicants than White applicants, made less eye contact, and made more speech errors during interviews, and that this interviewer behavior caused applicants to perform less well during interviews (Macan, 2015). Biased treatment, or the anticipation of it, can adversely affect the actual performance of employees or job applicants. Researchers have found that these situations may elicit stereotype leading minorities and women to perform less well when they are aware that performance may confirm a negative.

Another line of research focuses on the tendency for individuals to prefer members of a personal group called in-group bias to maintain a positive social identity. Consequently, this process then leads to employment decisions not based on applicants' abilities to perform the job, but rather categorization either consciously or unconsciously.

Employment advantages reflecting shared traits occur when young persons with authority rate young job applicants more favorably than older peers are prevalent in the hiring process (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). In the same way, highly segregated relationships affect how social relationships serve as resources to applicants in the labor market. Many job vacancies are never publicly advertised in newspapers or on Internet job boards, so they become known primarily to the hiring managers in-group (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Similarly, informal coaching and insider information may equip applicants who are in the hiring manager's in-group to outperform competitors during the pre-employment and interview process (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). This practice may result in traditionally excluded groups receive limited access to information that would allow them to be included.

Homeless services providers are faced with hiring challenges that are rooted in implicit bias, stereotypes, and challenges that stem from in-group and out groups. Providers of homeless services are tasked with solving issues that affect the chronically unhealthy. Unfortunately, studies have documented poorer patient-provider interactions, less involvement in decision-making and higher chances of discrimination in healthcare encounters among people of color compared to Whites (Attanasio & Hardeman, 2019). In the healthcare system, cultural competence has become a key strategy to eliminate racial

and ethnic health disparities (Delphin-Rittmon et al., 2013). Unlike the past where intentional actions excluded minorities from employment opportunities, present-day discrimination is embedded in everyday interactions and workplace structures.

Cultural competence research and practices largely focus on improving provider competencies, while agency and system level approaches for meeting the service needs of diverse populations are given less attention. Strategies for promoting and sustaining organizational and systemic cultural competence include (a) providing executive-level support and accountability, (b) conducting organizational cultural competence assessments, (c) developing incremental and realistic cultural competence action plans, and (d) diversifying and retaining a culturally competent workforce (Delphin-Rittmon et al., 2013). These strategies rely on the ability of competent and mindful leaders to execute.

Executive-Level Support and Accountability

A critical element needed to advance cultural competence efforts at the organizational and system levels is to have executive-level individuals promote and provide ongoing support by ensuring policy and fiscal alignment, disseminating cultural competence standards and guidelines throughout the system, and instituting accountability strategies for ensuring multicultural change (Delphin-Rittmon et al., 2013). Other strategies include; (1) developing formal recruitment strategies, (2) recruiting community members, diverse professionals, and peer mentors, (3) instituting ongoing cultural competence education and training for staff at all levels of the organization

(Delphin-Rittmon et al., 2013). These strategies are a direct result of attempts to find a solution to biases rooted deep within hiring practices.

Overall, there are gaps in the literature explaining the phenomena of executive hiring for social services programs that support the not yet housed. Empirical literature in social work around the hiring practices and preferences of human service administrators is scarce (Curran, Sanchez Mayers, & Fulghum, 2017). Research has found that many social work administrators primarily value interpersonal skills, academic factors, and preference based on the race or ethnicity of the hiring administrator (Curran et al., 2017). A miniscule amount of research exists that takes into consideration executive hiring preferences and hiring criteria for leadership roles in the social services and the business sector as well.

Due to the existing gaps, there is further opportunity for exploration. In fact, a recent study of 370 social service administrators, found that the gap between White and non-White respondents could be further explored and implies that targeted interventions around equity issues might be useful (Curran et al., 2017). Considering the minimal research in this area (Beck & Boulton, 2012; Birken et al., 2013; Hilliard & Boulton, 2012; Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Smoyer, 2019), this study contributes to a better understanding of the question of the impact of hiring practices on executive roles within social services programs and the policies that exists to support those practices. Chapter 3 includes an extensive account of the research methodology used to collect the necessary data to test the hypotheses for this study. Chapter 3 encompasses the qualitative methodology, phenomenological research design framework of the study, a discussion of

the alignment of method instrumentation with the research problem, as well as a

comprehensive description of the theoretical and conceptual framework.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, research methods associated with the hiring practices of executive-level employees who hold decision-making roles within social services programs were outlined. The case study, research questions, theoretical propositions, design, and rationale were highlighted. During the next section, the principal researcher role, information gatherer, and organizer for the study were expanded. Additionally, details on site selection, participant selection, and instruments utilized, types of data gathered, and the method of data collection was expounded. Further, limits, threats to reliability, and shortfalls that may exist within this study and the data collected were explained. In conclusion, potential ethics violations that could have existed during this study and the methods and measures used to prevent such issues were discussed. A concise summary concludes this chapter.

Research Design & Rationale

A constructionist theoretical lens typically associated with qualitative research (Saldaña, 2011), was used to focus on the phenomenon of hiring decisions. This qualitative study sought to understand hiring practices within social services providers for the homeless. The research topic supported and clarified the need to examine the effect of hiring practices of executive staff in the workforce and the impact on the delivery of homeless services by exploring the strategies leaders use to address increasing service demands to the homeless through workforce capability. Therefore, this study included the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the hiring practices of mid- and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?

RQ2: How does the ability to understand, communicate with and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?

RQ3: What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of overall social services to the homeless?

According to Patton (2015), the research questions should support the phenomenological approach as it seeks to discover the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon. Since phenomenology focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Bastug, Ertem & Keskin, 2017; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Patton, 2015), the research questions allowed the participant to describe the level of impact that relatability has to the population they serve from a subjective perspective. Additionally, the central question was designed to allow further exploration into the SCF and supported the social constructionism assertion that the current practices and models are not tangible because they are defined interpersonally by people interacting in a network of relationships (Patton, 2015). In this study, the research questions aligned with the problem of determining the hiring practices and delivery of services to the homeless.

The research design comprised a phenomenological interpretative approach to CRT, the SCF, and SIT to provide insight into the executive hiring process. In this study,

social constructionism was used to understand the correlation between human behavior and recruitment at specific levels, while the SIT was used to examine the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions (Ellemers, 2019). CRT was embedded into the research to assist in the phenomenological interpretation of race and racism within executive hiring practices.

Since phenomenology focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2006; Patton, 2015), the research questions allowed the participant to describe the impact that they perceived around inequities from their subjective perspective. The research questions allowed the participant to describe the impact that they perceive around inequities from their subjective perspective with open-ended questions that allowed participants the control to provide responses and comments in an efficient manner. Since phenomenology focuses on obtaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences, RQ1 allowed the participant to describe the impact that they perceive around inequities from their subjective perspective.

Cultural competence has been defined as the ability to respect and engage with diverse segments of communities (Patton, 2015; US Department of Health and Human Services, n.d; Delphin-Rittmon et al., 2013). The research questions allowed the participant to share their lived experience around cultural competence of employees within social enterprises and the effect to the delivery of programs to persons of color affected by homelessness. The question around cultural competence involved defining cultural competence based on how people in a setting have constructed their reality. Due

to this, the SCF worked with question RQ2 as it sought to determine if cultural competence or cultural incompetence exists and what the consequences of cultural competence are as it is perceived to be real (Patton, 2015). The perception of diversity within organizations was measured through the lens of phenomenological essence as a social construction.

Grounded theory and other qualitative research designs were considered for this study. However, those options were inappropriate for this study due to the lack of alignment between the problem, purpose and research study. As established, the phenomenological research design is appropriate due to the focus on in-depth exploration of lived experiences of the employees that have been impacted by or who have influenced executive hiring within social services programs (Cresswell, 2009; Flick, 2006; Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the interview approach was the suitable choice for the study since it allowed the ability to receive objective and subjective feedback while mitigating biases.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher varied within the research effort and consisted of the researcher as the interviewer, data collector, the transcriber, and the scheduler. In the role of the interviewer, significant time was spent conducting objective and comprehensive interviews to social services program leaders, managers, and staff on their perceptions while synthesizing their input. In the collector role, data was gathered from participants during the process using tools that eliminated bias. Recording software was used to transcribe the data resulting from the interview.

Due to human nature, the researcher possessed a level of vulnerability around the topic of diversity and there was a potential to be affected by biases. The topic of diversity and inclusion is relevant, as it has personally affected the researcher as a woman of color. Although the researcher participated in a Fellowship and briefly worked alongside potential participants, biases were minimal since the researcher did not belong to the target population of the study. Hence, there were no experiences in the past where the researcher experienced the ability to hire executive staff in social services programs or to be hired.

To avoid the potential of bias, the interview protocol was used to collect data. The interview protocol contained questions that were asked of participants during the interviews. In addition, the interview protocol included identifying and evaluating personal expectations, points of view, and possible preconceptions about possible findings of the study, prior to collecting data to confirm compliance of ethical standards according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Personal judgment was suspended, and an open mind was kept while striving for objectivity to discover the true nature of the observed phenomenon. In addition, the data collected remained entirely confidential and in compliance with Walden University's IRB guidelines for review and publication.

Bracketing served as a tool to ensure unbiased research during data gathering and analysis. Bracketing was used to maintain the idea of intellectual honesty to ensure authenticity is upheld during research (Friga & Chapas, 2008; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing maintained the focus of the research and allowed avoidance of personal opinions around the interpretation of data collection and analysis within the

research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). In bracketing, the researcher acknowledges any relevant experiences from the past, attitudes, and beliefs, and set them aside for the entirety of the study to keep the objective of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Previous experiences, attitudes, and beliefs were identified as it relates to this topic to establish a reference list of what to avoid and set aside to prevent any personal bias from influencing the process of data gathering and analysis.

To ensure honesty and integrity, initial interpretations were shared with participants to allow them to provide feedback regarding the accuracy of the interpretation. Furthermore, assurances were made to participants to ensure that information was treated confidentially and consent forms were used to communicate that level of respect and sensitivity of their information.

Complete transparency from inception to completion of data collection was provided to encourage participants to answer questions truthfully and to minimize fear of retaliation or the perceptions of disloyalty to their organization. By informing all participants of the research objectives, the participants were able to make an informed, consensual decision to participate. In addition, memos were used throughout the research study to articulate researcher bias (Ravitch, 2015). To minimize bias, additional advisors were used to evaluate the collection of research and responses from participants.

Research Methodology

Population

The population consisted of mid-level and senior-level managers from varying academic backgrounds to explore the level of impact they have on decision-making.

Participants were derived from the over 100 nonprofit partner agencies that receive

funding, program design, and technical assistance through LAHSA to assist people

experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County. Participants were leaders within their

agencies from departments that provide a continuum of programs that include but are not

limited to outreach, prevention, transitional and permanent housing, and supportive

services. Participants had a minimum job tenure of two years from within a social service

program that provides services to the homeless community in Los Angeles County as one

of their primary objectives and the participant's previous work experience varied. This

section addresses the population for study; next, I will discuss sampling strategy and

criteria.

Sampling Strategy

Non-probability sampling techniques are appropriate and were used for this

qualitative research based on the objective to develop an initial understanding of an

under-researched population (Etikan et al, 2016; Smith, 1983). The study used a

nonrandom, purposive sample to gain detailed knowledge about the specific phenomenon

(Etikan et al, 2016; Smith, 1983). Participants were self-selected and participate in semi-

structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews that were conducted to allow participants to

insert new ideas for the researcher to understand the informants' perception of the

research topic. In order to carry out the entire study, the nonprobability technique of

purposive, homogenous sampling and the snowballing technique were used (Etikan et. al,

2016). This allowed a diverse demographic of employees that share similar jobs to be

included in the study according to their capacity to provide the data relevant to the

phenomenon of interest. Convenience sampling was not used due to the sampling

method's unpredictability and vulnerability to hidden biases (Etikan et. al, 2016).

Application of the sampling technique occurred after the target population was defined

and located as the following text describes.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

Participants had to have worked a minimum of two years as a mid-level or senior

level executive in a social services program that provides for the homeless within Los

Angeles County. A homogeneity sampling strategy was the basis for locating a group of

individuals that were knowledgeable about a specific area of interest (Creswell & Plano-

Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015). The research followed international guidelines,

federal regulations, and the IRB's guidance for dealing with Limited English Proficiency

(LEP) and other defining characteristics of the research subjects.

Sample Size

There is not a standardized required sample size set for qualitative studies.

Researchers must select a sample size that sufficiently addresses a set objective and

research question (Malterud et al., 2016). Consequently, the number of participants

needed for data saturation is dependent on the purpose of the study and the specificity of

the participants (Malterud et al., 2016). For the purpose of this research, the initial sample

size were 10 individuals or until saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that there is no

specific number of participants required to reach data saturation. The current guidance

regarding sample size when performing qualitative research ranges from two to more

than four hundred (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Perev, 2018; Saunders &

Townsend, 2016). Although the use of small sample size in qualitative research is a topic

of discussion and concern, Saunders and Townsend (2016) stressed that the reasoning for

a specific sample size is based on the transparency of data, which may measure the depth

of satisfactory information. I addressed the justification of the small sample size and data

saturation within the small sample size as primary considerations relating to the reliability

and credibility of the findings. Based upon the research topic and participant pool, 10

individuals were sufficient to reach data saturation (Beck, 2009; Fugard & Potts, 2015;

Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010; Perev, 2018; Saunders & Townsend, 2016). A sample

of 12 participants who matched the following criteria were selected to provide thick data

based on insights from the research participants' lived experience:

- Participants must be a decision maker (Manager or above) in the field of

  homeless services.

- Participants worked a minimum of two years in LA in homeless services.

Recruitment Strategy

An online search, public records were accessed to secure data on social services

programs located in Los Angeles County. Once identified, emails were sent to leaders

within randomly selected, social services programs requesting participation in a semi-

structured interview. The goal was to target a minimum 10 employees or until saturation

of those social services programs for interviews. Through LinkedIn posts and emails, 12

participants were secured through referrals and the snowballing technique. Participants

were required to gain permission from their respective agencies to ensure full

participation. Starting from the seventh to the 12th participant, data was gathered to

determine if the new data sets added significant amounts of useful data or themes from the first six interviews (Cameron, 2017). Once the 12th interview was reached, the number of useful data was insignificant enough to determine data saturation was achieved.

The use of nonrandom, purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, allowed for selection of participants based specifically on the qualities possessed increasing the probability that participants were well-informed with the phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al, 2016). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated that participants selected purposefully are more willing to participate and contribute to the richness of the data for the study. An invitation letter for the nonrandomly selected employees was sent to review for study participation.

Participants were allowed to select the specific times for the qualitative research interviews. Each interview took place at a private location. The order of participants was randomly selected, and no financial compensation was provided. When participants arrived via Zoom to the scheduled interview, it was confirmed that they had received and completed an informed consent form with information about their voluntary participation and a space to provide consent in lieu of a signature. The demographic questions were distributed next, then the interview guide containing the interview questions were asked last. The individual data was collected upon the conclusion of each interview.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

The main instrument used for this study was a semi-structured, self-developed interview guide or protocol, which contained the questions for the interviews. According

to Seidman (2013), a typical in-depth interview is composed of three phases which include; (a) putting the experiences of respondents in the context of the study by asking questions, (b) focusing on reconstructing respondents' experiences with an emphasis on the details of the current experience, and (c) asking respondents to reflect on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). The ability to ask follow-up questions that are aligned and relevant is an added benefit of using a semi-structured interview. The use of peer debriefers and follow-up questions ensured validity and reliability of the overall study.

An interview guidebook was developed by the researcher to create descriptive, evaluative, circular, and narrative questions to elicit participants' responses (Smith et al., 2009). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to not only respond but also to elaborate on their answers, disagree with the questions, or examine new issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using this strategy, flexibility to adjust the order of the questions and to bypass questions that may not be relevant to the individual was achieved.

Experts from Walden's faculty trained in the field of qualitative research reviewed the questions in the interview guide. The experts reviewed the validity of the content of the interview guide regarding the content of the questions included in the protocol. The faculty also reviewed the validity of the questions based on how the interview questions were written, worded, and framed. Moreover, the committee reviewed the correctness of the structure or wording of the questions. In addition, the committee reviewed the appropriateness of the questions to address the research

questions of the study. Based on the review, the interview questions were modified accordingly.

The interview guide was established by the researcher based on the central research question that asks, "What is the impact of inequities in the workforce on performance within social service providers that deliver social services to the homeless?" Recurring themes such as inequities in hiring, diverse applicant pools, lack of diverse applicant pools, cultural competence, large minority populations experiencing homelessness, and a small minority population making decisions regarding the delivery of homelessness services drove the creation of the interview questions.

Leadership from various social services organizations located in Los Angeles, California was the primary source of recruitment. Requests were sent to the leaders of these organizations via email to solicit their participation in interviews. The organizations received permission to utilize this research study as a tool for their future endeavors as an incentive for participating in this study. Ethical procedures were used to protect the participants during the recruiting and data collection through consent forms and private conversations. In addition, each participant was guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality during and beyond the timeframe of the study by using pseudonyms and information coding. Participants were able to determine the location of the interview and whether to be on camera during the virtual interviews, which allowed for the safety of all parties. Assurances were provided to the participant that information would be treated confidentially.

Digitally recorded interviews captured data that were transcribed verbatim.

Transcriptions from Microsoft Word were uploaded into Atlas.ti. The process of securing

people to interview was not difficult, but time-consuming. Due to the Coronavirus-19

(COVID-19) pandemic, the virtual Zoom platform was utilized to ensure the safety and

wellbeing of participants. The aforementioned elements of recruitment and participation

set the foundation for data analysis as described in the next section.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data, identifying themes,

coding data elements, and presenting the data. A qualitative IPA method initiated the data

analysis process in this study. IPA is a data analysis approach that considers the

individual insights of a given phenomenon to gain a comprehensive understanding of

their lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The collection of these lived

experiences occurred over the course of a month by the researcher administering

interviews and collecting data for a minimum of three times per week.

Qualitative data was obtained from 12 in-depth interviews conducted with

employees that possess lived experience of the hiring and executive hiring process within

social service programs that support homeless populations. Each interview lasted

between 30 and 60 minutes, varying depending on the flow of conversation between the

participants and the interviewer. Participants were asked a set of semi-structured

descriptive interview questions. The purpose was not to examine the specific lives of

participants but rather to synthesize the commonalities of their collective experiences and

perceptions of the impact of the executive hiring process (Saldaña, 2011). The use of in-

depth interviews was useful in gaining preliminary insight into the complexity of lived

experiences of applicants and employees that provide social services to the most

vulnerable within the community.

Data was recorded using Zoom's recording software and an analysis of the data

including organizing the material and sifting through patterns and relationships within the

data using Atlas.ti. After initiating and completing the interviews, the recordings were

transcribed, and data analysis began. The transcripts were read, and passages were

marked that provide significant information around the executive hiring process. Once

themes were identified, the passages were reviewed within each category to examine

interrelationships. Completed questionnaires were collected at the end of every interview.

Individual questionnaires from each qualitative interview were placed in a secure file on

the researcher's hard drive. To ensure participant privacy and data protection, all data has

been stored at the researcher's home office for safekeeping.

The recruitment technique called the snowball method was used to review each

new referral to determine if the participant met the interview criteria and if the semi-

structured interview questions were answered sufficiently. All potential participants

expressing interest in the study were asked to contact the researcher directly to determine

if inclusion criteria were satisfied. In addition, all participants who met the criteria for

participation signed consent forms as well as provided their email addresses and other

contact information for data gathering purposes. This study was based on the theory that

analyzing qualitative data through sampling would provide information around hiring

decisions that would be beneficial to supporting historically underrepresented groups.

Content validity is central to developing a scientifically sound instrument to measure participant responses. Content validity was achieved by providing evidence that the conceptual framework and overall measurement approach was consistent with perspectives and experiences of the participants (Brod, Waldman, & Christensen, 2009). Content validity was established through the expertise of Walden faculty and by conducting qualitative research that included direct communication with participants that adequately captured their perspective through individual interviews analyzed in a systematic, documentable fashion (Brod et al., 2009). As stated above, the interview guide served as a sufficient data collection instrument. Moreover, the most important methodological instrument remained the interviewer and the role of the interviewer in the process.

In summation, the management and analysis of data included organizing the data, synthesizing the data, interpreting themes and codes, and sharing the findings of the research study. All data collected was kept in their original form to prevent distortion. Participants exited the study following a debriefing interview using a script that was developed before the interview process. Colleagues were identified to be peer debriefers to review the overall study (Ravitch, 2015).

Codes and Categories

The coding process involved a second cycle coding process, which allowed for a focus on thematic and conceptual similarity. Theoretical coding allowed for the discovery of core categories that identified the primary research theme (Saldaña, 2012). For example, themes such as the level of human resources and recruiting support, the

perception of diversity, the use of diversity language, the status of a diverse culture in the organization, and the actual number of diverse senior employees that exist within the organization were themes to be codified as they related to the overall research.

Software

Consideration was taken to utilizing the Atlas.ti software that allowed the ability to reveal values and relationships. In choosing Atlas.ti as a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software, the researcher was able to accurately cluster the data by extracting the words and passages from the data that represent the research study (Saldaña, 2012). In addition, the use of intuitive QDA software allowed for a clear, concise, visual display of the data.

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Issues of Trustworthiness

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Issues around validity involve the overall nature of qualitative research and its roots that are grounded in individual interpretation (Ravitch, 2015). That is, each participant had their view of reality, and the participants' view of diversity and perceptions of the recruiting culture varied. Another factor around reliability and ethics was the ability to collect a sample of participants with lived experience from an organization that supported the research. For example, some participants in the population required anonymity to protect their employment, which could have resulted in additional procedures for conducting the interviews to safeguard their identity.

Efforts to Ensure Content Validity and Credibility

To ensure validity and credibility dialogic engagement tools such as peer debriefing allowed the opportunity to obtain different perspectives. Methodological, data,

investigator, and theoretical strategies were used to assist in establishing validity (Ravitch, 2015). In addition, multiple coding occurred to ensure the research was approached and interpreted subjectively. This section specifically describes how each of these methods was approached.

Data Sources

Data collection planning involves consideration of validity, reliability, ethics, and data interpretation to review the overall research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The research used semi-structured, prearranged interviews to solicit the individual's personal experiences around the research topic as the main source of data (Saldaña, 2011). The research was supplemented with relevant laws, company policies, and demographic information from the social services programs and public sources. Observational notes were taken during the interview to contribute to the overall data collection. Data sources included individual interviews and observations. Interviews were scheduled with the participants that had experience working in nonprofits that served the homeless.

Credibility

To avoid poorly conducted interviews that create a lack of credibility in the interview process (Patton, 2015), the use of procedures and forms aided in formalizing and adding credibility to the process. A systematic search for themes and patterns were conducted to enhance credibility and ensure good analytical practice while conducting a rigorous research analysis (Patton, 2015).

Transferability

The degrees to which the results can be applied beyond the bounds of the research project were seen in the application to organizations and programs that provide services to the homeless (LAHSA, 2020). By analyzing the perceptions around equity and diversity in the hiring process, social services organizations may use this research as a tool to reinforce best practices in diverse recruiting. Transferability was obtained by providing in-depth and detailed descriptions of the phenomena under investigation to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it.

Dependability

The stability of the data (Ravitch, 2015) was established through the organization and alignment of the research plan. The rationale for the methodology and design was rooted in the overall sequencing of methods of the research design (Ravitch, 2015). Overall, the rationale for the choices within the research design arose from the need to answer the central question.

Confirmability

The researcher's awareness of the existence of a personal agenda and awareness of the need to acknowledge and explore the way biases affect the interpretation of the data allowed confirmability to be attained. As the research progressed, researcher reflexivity processes, and external audits were implemented (Ravitch, 2015). Colleagues were identified to be peer debriefers to review the overall study (Ravitch, 2015). Discrepant cases were used to interpret the overall content of the data and to ensure that the content of the data represents unbiased reporting of the participants' perspectives.

Ethical Issues

The study was conducted in accordance with the established procedures of Walden University's Institutional Review Board to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. Human participants were treated with dignity and respect based on the researcher's adherence to a professional code of conduct which requires the protection of privacy of all participants. The study was strictly voluntary, with no benefits provided, and confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured.

After the Institutional Review Board approval was granted, an email was forwarded to selected employees within social services programs inviting participation. Participants were assured that their identities were kept confidential with deletion of any identifying information and the use of pseudonyms in place of any identifying information.

All data was reported in either the aggregate or using these pseudonyms. Participants received information on how to keep identifiable information confidential through the informed consent process. Consent forms, identifying information, recorded interviews, the interview transcript, and all data related to the study were kept on a secure hard drive and paper copies were locked in a fireproof, file cabinet in a private office. All electronic files were password protected on a personal computer inside a private office. The files will be kept in a private, fire proof, file cabinet in a private office for 5 years after the study concludes, and then they will be destroyed. The data will be destroyed by shredding all physical documentation, and through permanent deletion for any data existing on any computer devices.

Participants were reminded that they could refrain from answering anything that may make them feel upset or uncomfortable. In the instance that participants had already consented to participate, they retained the option to discontinue their participation in the study at any time without incurring any consequences on their part.

Summary

In summary, a qualitative phenomenological research design was used to address the purpose of the study, which is to understand the lived experiences of employees involved in the executive hiring process. The target population was participants who are in an employment relationship within a social services program that provide services to the homeless community as one of their primary objectives. The sample was recruited through snowball sampling, while ensuring that they satisfy the following criteria: (a) a decision maker in the field of homeless services, and (b) worked two years or more in the field of social services programs to the homeless. Data was gathered through semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. IPA was the basis for data examination for the study. In Chapter 4, the results from implementing this study are discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In the analyses to seek to understand hiring practices of mid- and senior-level employees within social services providers for the homeless, this chapter presents the results from the interview questions of participants. In further detail, the purpose of this study was to analyze hiring practices and how they impact social service programs to the homeless. The objective was to follow three research questions to learn from the perspectives of those in decision-making situations and to gain knowledge about the hiring phenomenon within organizations that provide social services. The research questions that supported the objectives of this study were:

- RQ1: What are the hiring practices of mid- and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?

- RQ2: How does the ability to understand, communicate with and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?

- RQ3: What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of overall social services to the homeless?

The objective was to explore lessons to learn from the perspectives of decision makers who are supporting the homeless communities. These lessons can be used to inform executives and policy makers. I propose that the awareness of gaps within hiring

processes can allow for improvement in programs that are geared at serving the homeless community. Including those who make hiring decisions regarding who were employed to serve the homeless and the community is crucial in understanding the phenomenon. Although there is no single variable leading to the gaps in the hiring process, diversity, cultural competence, lived experience, organizational structure, and politics all play a role. To follow is a presentation of the study using tables, figures, and text.

In this study, I explored the lived experience through narrative phenomenological methods, which provided a focus on a population previously unexplored. I used a phenomenological research study design for this study to explore the lived experience of mid-level managers and executives. This type of research design provided a platform to explore rich, descriptive profiles of individuals' lived experience as they shared their perceptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This chapter describes setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and results. The following chapter addresses the interpretation of the presented findings.

Setting

The study was conducted in Los Angeles, California between May 4, 2020, and June 14, 2020. Due to the Coronavirus-19 pandemic, the virtual Zoom platform was utilized to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants. The virtual platform was approved during the IRB process with the IRB approval confirmation of #04-17-20-0745104 on April 17, 2020. No participants desired to talk to a counsellor during or after the interview.

Demographics

All participants were between the ages of 29 and 51. The projected sample size was 10 and 12 participants were interviewed. The participants lived in Los Angeles, California and were from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds. The participants identified as White, Black, Black & European, Hispanic non-White, White non-Hispanic, and Other. I interviewed participants over the course of three weeks, and the interviews lasted a maximum of 60 minutes and not less than 30 minutes. I asked open-ended interview questions. Interviews took place in the participants' natural environment; business or personal residences. I recorded interviews via Zoom using Zoom's privacy functions. Table 2 provides the data on profession, years worked in social services programs, race, age, gender, and education. The sample consisted of 12 total interviewees, 4 males and 8 females.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Demographic category	n
Profession	
Chief operating officer	2
Chief program officer	1
Director	4
Project director	1
Program manager	3
Analyst	1
Years worked in social services	
2 – 5	5
6 – 10	3
10 – 25	4
Race	
Black	4
Black & European	1
Hispanic, non-White	1
White, non-Hispanic	5
Other	1
Age	
29 – 40	3
41 – 50	4
51 years old or above	5
Gender	
Female	8
Male	4
Education	
Bachelors	3
Masters	6
Post Grad	1
Some college	2

Data Collection

Participants were selected based on the following criteria; 1) a decision maker in

the field of homeless services, 2) have worked two years or more in the field of social

services programs to the homeless, and 3) no relationship with the researcher. Participants were located through LinkedIn, LinkedIn referrals, professional referrals and the snowball method.

I based participant selection on non-purposeful sampling strategies. This strategy allowed me to approach potential participants and select persons experienced with the studied phenomena (Patton, 2015). During the consent procedure, I informed the potential participant that there would be no incentive offered to participate and that I would not use personal identifiers. At the time of consent, I informed the individuals that they would be identified as a number as in Participant 1, 2, 3, etc.

I collected the open-ended interview data from the 12 participants using the Zoom recording feature. Although a variation from the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3, interviews were uploaded to a private YouTube account to be transcribed. Once transcribed, the transcription was reviewed and formatted. I noted my impressions at the completion of each interview through reflective journaling to document my experience of the interview. At the completion of each interview, I listened to each recording several times. Then, the recordings were viewed for accuracy to ensure that it was captured verbatim into a Word document. Following verification of the transcription, the transcription documents were uploaded into Atlas.ti for organization, coding, and further analysis.

A notable circumstance that occurred during data collection was COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic created minimal limitations to the study and participants were eager to schedule time interview times in spite of COVID-19 work related

responsibilities. The COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders and social distancing guidelines provided a unique opportunity to use technology to conduct interviews that would normally be administered in-person. Participants were noticeably experiencing the strain and challenges associated with serving the growing homeless population during a pandemic. Due to this, their responses were often filled with emotion and intensity around the need for solutions. Although the pandemic expedited the completion of the research interviews, it may have impacted the participant responses.

Data Analysis

Atlas.ti qualitative software was used to aid in analysis of the data. Atlas.ti is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that facilitates the analysis of unstructured and non-numerical data through the identification of themes, patterns and meanings. Atlas.ti combined with cognitive process was used for data sorting to identify significant variables from the interview, coding, themes assembling, category placement, data analysis, and synthesis. Various themes were developed and organized. Atlas.ti was instrumental in keeping the analysis process organized, transparent, and integrated. Through Atlas.ti, Word documents, Excel documents, and notes from the Mendeley reference management software could be uploaded throughout the analysis process. In vivo coding, a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants, was used to honor the voices of participants and provided insight into the culture and micro culture within the social services world. Additionally, the use of memos within Atlas.ti was helpful when coding.

Co-occurrences were used to investigate the co-existence of any two codes on the same piece of data to get an idea of emergent relations among the codes.

To interpret the thick, rich data provided by the participants, a qualitative analysis technique (Byrne, 2017) that involved asking specific questions was implemented. Questions were contemplated such as; do these questions generate answers to the research questions, can they be employed using the resources available, and are they generally acceptable in the discipline or field being explored? Also, while coding, particular attention was paid to whether; the participant answered the question that was asked, if the comment answered another question that was asked, did the comment say something of importance about the topic, and what themes were emerging.

Atlas.ti assisted in revealing the groundedness and frequencies within the coding. Numerous themes were developed and structured following the three research questions. The prominent themes were community, social justice, lived experience, diversity, and organizational change. The detailed themes and categories were then sub-grouped and have been presented throughout the research using tables. Table 3 details the themes and related subthemes for the decision makers within social services recruiting experiences. Table 3 also details the grounded data, which is the number of connected key words and quotations labeled with a particular code.

Table 3

Summary of Themes and Subthemes With Grounded Data

Themes	Subthemes	Grounded data
Community		40
	Community services	23
	Cultural Competence	18
	Impact to the community	13
	Partner organizations	27
	Respect & represent community	19
Social justice		16
	Civil rights	3
	Criminal justice	6
	Injustice	1
	Laws	1
	Policy	4
	Social progress	6
Lived Experience		29
	Ability to relate	10
	Hired from incarceration	2
	Overall experience	43
	Self-awareness	21
Diversity		37
	Biases	3
	Don't use term	2
	Economic diversity	3
	Equity in hiring	20
	Geographic diversity	3
	Hiring for diversity	46
	Inequities	19
	Privilege	4
	Race & racism	29
	Systemic racism	3
Organizational change		2
	Onboarding process	4
	Organizational challenges	15
	Process improvement	22
	Recruitment strategies	19

Five major themes emerged from the data:

1. Community and a deep commitment to understanding the community and community needs. The participants' commitment to the community included an awareness of cultural competences around the community they serve.

2. Social justice and a strong obligation to tackle injustice through the participants work in social services.

3. Lived experience with a focus on the necessity of lived experience to serve clients effectively was a primary theme. Based on the participants' responses, lived experience is crucial to the work that they do and is associated with identity, self-identity, self-awareness, and self-development.

4. Diversity in its broadest sense includes race, racism and the concept of equity and biases. The level and influence of diversity and the necessity for diversity within the organization's system was recognized and acknowledged by all participants.

5. Organizational change and the need to do things differently were presented by the participants as a challenge to the current ideology within the organization's hiring practice. The desire to attain continuous process improvement and to gain knowledge to improve processes was evident during the participant interviews.

Finally, based on the interview responses from the 12 mental health service providers, there were no discrepant cases.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I addressed this study's credibility under the principle that developing trustworthiness in qualitative research requires credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ali & Yusof, 2012). An in-depth investigation into the lived experience of the participant via high-quality methods of data collection, analysis, and verification of reported findings established the credibility. Frequent journaling was used to remove personal bias, opinions, beliefs, and views around the phenomenon of interest. The research findings were exclusively based on the participants hiring experiences and their experience hiring others.

Strategies used to verify the credibility of this study were reflective journaling, engagement, and repeating answers to participants to verify accuracy. At the start of the data collection procedure, I wrote in a reflective journal to ensure my bias did not skew the data collection methods and subsequent analysis and reporting. Engagement with the population for the study occurred throughout the data collection process. Once data collection began, any questions the participant had about the interview questions were addressed. Additionally, colleagues within my dissertation cohort served as peer debriefers throughout the overall study.

In order to ensure transferability, the study participants provided the necessary thick descriptions of experiences. These thick descriptions resulted from a combination of verbatim transcriptions of interviews, field notes, and my reflective journal. Direct quotes provided participant-rich descriptions and the journal activity afforded a means of self-evaluation during analysis. Transferability relates to the degree that results of qualitative

research could be generalized to other contexts or settings (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Trochim, 2008). Appropriate strategies to establish transferability included the use of thick descriptions of findings from participant's lived experiences. Data findings and conclusions revealed how information could be transferred to other like individuals or situations (Ali & Yusof, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Trochim, 2008). The thick descriptions allowed for the transferability of information to other like individuals.

An audit trail ensured dependability for this study. Atlas.ti software was used as an analytic tool, and a means for independent examination of all data uploaded into the software. The software provided an electronic pathway for similar conclusions without contradictory findings. Additionally, dependability of the study increased by the use of video recordings for data collection. With this technology, the gathered data was organized for accuracy and allowed for repeated slicing of data. Creating and writing in a reflective journal supported the validation of confirmability. The self-reflective use of this practice during the life of the study provided a means to practice self-awareness of personal values and a worldview in general.

Results

Ten interview questions were posed to participants to address the phenomenon of hiring for social service programs. The interview questions were designed to explore how the hiring managers of social services programs located in Los Angeles, California experienced and implemented the hiring process. The ten interview questions were

designed based on the following three research questions intended to solicit responses around the overall hiring experience and reveal gaps that may exist within:

- RQ1: What are the hiring practices of mid and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?

- RQ2: How does the ability to understand, communicate with and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?

- RQ3: What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of overall social services to the homeless?

Main Themes

Five themes emerged from the 12 participants' responses to the ten interview questions about their hiring practices, experiences, and perceived barriers when selecting applicants, recruiting, and hiring employees to work in social service programs. The themes that emerged from the face-to-face interview responses included community, social justice, lived experience, diversity, and organizational change

Theme 1: Community

A vital contextual element of the lived experiences of decision makers and leaders who are responsible for recruiting was found to be their commitment and interest to community. For all twelve participants, the focus on community was ubiquitous. In fact, the key word community was codified 147 times. What is more relevant is that the

description sparked a sense of devotion and an emphasis on the priority to serve the

community directly or indirectly through people in the community, community partners

and agencies. The deep commitment to understanding the community and its needs could

be seen in the following participant responses:

Participant 4

"So most of them have a mental health diagnosis coupled with substance use and

then the other areas that I mentioned brushes with our criminal justice system, and

so forth. So, I am directly responsible to make sure these folks get the necessary

services that are needed for them to be able to stabilize in the community."

Participant 4

"We believe community as method is our approach, by the way, that is our

modality. We use community as the method to foster and to build community."

Participant 4

"We want to be an actual representation of the people we serve. We need to have

reference points such as the people we serve. We need to have stories that equate

to some extent to the same as the people we serve."

Participant 4

"So, there are various levels of course of inequality within communities and one

of the things that is significant about (our) approach is that we believe in shared

resources."

Participant 4

"I am responsible for helping folks that are reentering community navigate the re-entry process which of course includes basically the whole person care portion, and you know, includes housing."

Participant 4

"We assist probation with helping to take individuals who are high medically vulnerable and provide the necessary services for those individuals who are also re-entering community from our county jail systems but then also individuals who are already released in and are under probation in the community who probation needs help with."

Participant 4

"Then I have a whole person care project which also is geared towards individuals entering community from (organization). We get referrals from our parole officers here in Los Angeles County and we help those individuals who are also homeless navigate the health care system."

Participant 4

"Within a community, for you to have community enhancement, community engagement, and community building, you must acknowledge and observe all cultures. You must have a reference point for each person in the community to anchor to."

Participant 4

"The one common thread that binds them all together is they are reentering community from incarceration."

Participant 4

"Even though there's inequalities out here in the community we need to work from a different tool bag. We have to change the tools that we use. We use different tools in that kind of environment versus this environment."

Participant 8

"Recommendations? I mean look within. But we do that. We're working at it. Can we get better at it? Absolutely. Can we cast the net out a little wider? When you invest into the community. when you invest into the people in the community, they stay in the community and they fight and work hard to serve the people that live in the community that are less fortunate than you are. And you work towards meeting the needs of those who are in the community so it's really about investment, if that makes sense."

Participant 8

"You have to really be able to relate and be comfortable in the environment that you're working in. You can't be afraid of the people that you're paid to serve. You can't be afraid of the community. You can't be."

Participant 8

"We want to make sure that our staff is a direct reflection of the community."

Participant 8

"So diversity includes their life experience. It also includes their work experience. Have you had any interaction with the types of individuals that live in this low-income community. Have you worked with individuals in this community? Do you have lived experience with the type of services that we provide? Do you have lived experience? Can you speak the same language as the folks that are in the community? So that to me is diversity. It's not just about black or brown or white or yellow or green. It's not the color of the race of the individual, it also is that the life experience that goes along with it as well. And being able to relate."

Participant 10

"I'm so proud to say that my team is very diverse and at our agency because we serve a population that is mainly African American and Latino, the majority of the individuals that work for our agency are African American or Latino. And our sole focus is within SPA 6, so a lot of people want to give back to the communities that they're from, which is amazing."

Participant 10

"Each educational institution has a group that supports our community, that supports Latino, that support undocumented students, that support the LGBTQ community. So making sure that you're also having conversations with those smaller communities as well."

Theme 2: Social Justice

The focus on social justice was apparent during the participants. Key words involving social justice and the concept of social justice were codified 16 times. During interviews, participants described taking a deliberate approach to social transformation, which can be seen in the following participant responses:

Participant 2

"You know we are all humans we all have the same needs, we are pretty much equal."

Participant 4

"We're a health agency so you know we're teaching people how to beat diabetes, which means no sugar on our on our campuses. I mean just all of those things you know that help us to socially progress. When you're using a therapeutic model you know injustices is something that you stand against as an organization. Because for there to be healing you know within you know the folks that we work with, those are always areas that we kind of have to reopen those wounds and treat them."

Participant 4

"And let me just give you our actual equation that is kind of utilized within our modality and that's - social services, plus social justice, equals social progress."

Participant 4

"The first word that comes to mind is injustice. The first thought that comes to mind is, that being that we are talking about work and workplaces,

and particularly recruitment is not having that balance or a lot of times within

this type of work or nonprofit work. In general people will judge a book by its

cover."

Participant 4

"One of the main things that comes with folks that are leaving those environments

of incarceration is the inequalities that they've faced while they've been in there."

Participant 5

"So pretty much everything has some level to do with ensuring that we're actually

helping with homelessness."

Participant 6

"I'm reading the Color of Law. I don't know if you ever read it but I was talking to

the individual about it but I'm sure you know this - it is eye opening."

Participant 7

"Some of them are here and they shouldn't be here and they're here through the

court systems or they're here through some agency and a lot of times when you

want to get rid of people you move them along and sometimes you add things to it

that really didn't happen."

Participant 11

"What we don't have is enough of our population generating the type of incomes

to live in the type of housing that is made available. So the problem is not a

housing problem, the problem is an economic problem. The problem is an

education or experiential problem. But that's not what we're focusing on. We're

focusing on the fact that people are homeless. Because the illusion that has been created is that people are homeless because it's not enough housing that's not the truth. People are homeless because they cannot afford the housing that has been made available."

Theme 3: Lived experience

For each participant, lived experience was a vital component of how services were delivered and how the selected employees deliver services. The actual word lived experience was used 29 times throughout the total interview process. Insight around lived experience was gained in the following participant responses:

Participant 1

"I had to just kind of learn them on my own and you know reach out to people and ask questions."

Participant 3

"I think balancing that with priority hiring for people who have worked in communities directly with residents directly with people experiencing homelessness or low-income people would provide more diversity and more context to the work that we do."

Participant 4

"I come from incarceration. I actually was brought to (the organization) by my parole officer back in 2006. I went through an internship."

Participant 4

"Because of the population we serve, we are passionate about finding appropriate candidates that have lived experience in certain areas. That circle process that I mentioned of interviewing, it actually sets a tone where personal stories get shared and that gives us insight into people's lives, like you know, is working with our folks like totally foreign to you or have you been touched in some capacity within your own family?"

Participant 4

"We need to have reference points such as the people we serve. We need to have stories that equate to some extent to the same as the people we serve."

Participant 4

"You know from someone you know having brushes with the law or someone with addiction or mental health. You know because that in itself has a personal investment in most candidates and those are the people that we look for because you know they have already bitten into being of service to the folks that we work with."

Participant 7

"I can't have a weak person who doesn't communicate timely or a person who doesn't quickly pick up skills or quickly adapt to the environment. You got to be able to get your hands dirty."

Participant 7

"I'm cleaning toilets as a diverse CEO. I'm cleaning toilets so I have a variety of skills and I don't mind using them."

Participant 8

"Being able to relate. You have to really be able to relate and be comfortable in the environment that you're working in. You can't be afraid of the people that you're paid to serve. You can't be afraid of the community."

Participant 8

"So diversity includes their life experience. It also includes their work experience. Have you had any interaction with the types of individuals that live in this low-income community? Have you worked with individuals in this community? Do you have lived experience with the type of services that we provide? Do you have lived experience? Can you speak the same language as the folks that are in the community? So that to me is diversity. It's not just about black or brown or white or yellow or green. It's not the color of the race of the individual, it also is that the life experience that goes along with it as well. And being able to relate."

Participant 9

"It's hard because you want to find somebody that's going to stay with the organization, someonethat has a mission that aligns with the organization. That has values. And of course has the background, but then has some type of educational background, whether it's lived experience. We do have a lot of lived experience candidates that come in."

Participant 9

"I lived outside for a long time, completely caught up in… and in many different cultures living life."

Participant 9

"It is very important for me to always try to come at it from a lens of what worked for me. Understanding that for the clients that we serve, it's never gonna be like that. It's not gonna be that easy for them often times they come from single family homes, from severe poverty and really living in the space of just having to get by. So I understand."

Participant 9

"So when I was hired initially I was already working for the organization but not working for them I was placed on site through a different contract, so a contractor. And I heard about the role that I got at the time which was a substance abuse counselor. I was already a substance abuse counselor but they were hiring one internally on their own."

Participant 10

"We need people that are willing to put in the work. We need people with lived experience. We need people that are diverse. But at the same time it's really tough to get those people and hold on to those people."

Participant 11

"Because other arenas are completely different. But in social services you have to be mindful of the individuals capacity to engage in the very tumultuous environment of social service and what their capacity is to be resilient. Because the majority of people who are working in social services have experienced some form of trauma somewhere throughout their life trajectory. And you need to be

able to ascertain whether or not they've addressed that trauma is it still impacting

them? Have they learned or grown from that trauma? Or are they still having

experiences from that and does it impact their decision-making. Because there's a

lot of people who have experienced trauma but they've been able to rise above

their circumstances. However they have not successfully addressed their trauma.

And so often they experience countertransference. So you have to be extremely

mindful of that when you are selecting a manager, keeping in mind that this

person may have experienced some type of trauma."

Theme 4: Diversity

The theme of diversity was integrated through various themes and developed its

own pattern throughout the interviews. The word diversity was used by participants 37

times throughout interview process. To follow is a sample of how the word diversity was

used within the following participant responses:

Participant 1

"Regardless of your background like for example I'm a Catholic and you know

like the whole Trans, LGBT, and Gay community is developing. But just because

I am Catholic doesn't mean I don't have any feelings about that. Or Christians or

whatever like you have to put that to the side in order to succeed in this industry.

So whatever your feelings are about a group of individuals, that's something that

you have to put to the side and then look at the needs and what they need to

survive and make it."

Participant 2

"Diversity to me means just coming from different backgrounds. At the same time, (hum...that's hard)."

Participant 2

"My biggest thing is we get more individuals with different backgrounds and we tend to celebrate the differences. As long as your heart is in helping you know and the system and carrying our mission, we celebrate differences."

Participant 2

"I like different personalities, different experiences, people just coming from different backgrounds that will help us connect with different."

Participant 2

"I understand that when you hiring within the company you have to have a certain amount of people with different backgrounds. I guess I'm not at that level yet."

Participant 2

"Need somebody from Asian culture. I said ok. I know that's a thing that we have to have variety in an organization. I heard that. But it hasn't stopped us from fulfilling those roles and position."

Participant 3

"I think it's about creating a diverse group of people to make decisions but then also making sure we have the appropriate conditions in place to make sure that everyone feels valued and supported."

Participant 3

"There's a lot of attention on promotion from within which is good for the employees and we do have a pretty diverse group of employees in terms of racial diversity, some economic diversity, geographic diversity but it limits the perspectives that people have when they move into positions and so I think balancing that with priority hiring for people who have worked in communities directly with residents directly with people experiencing homelessness or low-income people would provide more diversity and more context to the work that we do."

Participant 5

"Well, I think that a lot of people think of the word diversity and they think ethnicity, but I think that that is missing the mark. I think from my perspective when I'm thinking about diversity and building a diverse work group, it hits everything. You're right, cultural background, nationality because business is run differently in other countries and that can be really helpful. As well as gender, gender identity, disability all of those factors I think fall into having to be identified as a diverse workforce."

Participant 5

"I don't use the word diversity a lot because it does have a lot of negative connotations tied to it. I just talked about more efficient and dynamic work groups which I build into that because I know that that means that they have to have a certain level of diversity."

Participant 5

"So, one thing I will say that I like about social services is it is generally a far more diverse industry than other industries and for me when I think about diversity it's not just within the EEO spectrum, which of course makes sense I love having diverse hires, but it's also diversity of background."

Participant 6

"In our formal procurement process I can't recall any specific criteria that would advantage diverse candidates."

Participant 6

"It's about infusing that into our philosophy that you know we want to be inclusive we want to go beyond buzzwords and lip service promote diversity we want to have that diversity of perspective and explosion experience."

Participant 6

"My understanding of diversity is the combination of a variety of differing elements whether those elements are developed through experience through something that's hereditary something that you know indirect exposure, direct exposure. But it's sort of getting all these elements that have different storylines or paths and experiences together to then proliferate or provoke incredible things moving forward. If you have all like elements and there is no diversity and you're never going to see a different thought. You're probably all going to think the same way and you know that's may not be true but you know it's creating a broad amalgamation of experiences, education, exposure, direct experience, indirect

experience, and that lends itself to the development of new ideas or new thoughts or different perspectives. It challenges the status quo, things like that."

Participant 9

"(Hiring for diversity has been) Terrible. It's been tough. It's been really tough. Yeah it's been pretty tough. I used to think it's because we were often called the "White organization" so if you looked at our upper management structure and it's still not great to be honest. You see a lot of people that look like me."

Participant 11

"When I take in consideration diversity first thing I take into consideration is the population that we're serving. And then when I look at the makeup of my team and I try to make sure that we are essentially reflecting the population that we're serving in the different components whether they're Spanish-speaking, monolingual, bilingual, different ethnic backgrounds. I try to be as culturally competent and culturally diverse as possible because I want to take in consideration any cultural traditions or ideologies that the participants might be engaging in so that we're culturally sensitive to those things when we're trying to extrapolate information or provide support service options to them. So I look at the big picture internally as well as outwardly."

Theme 5: Organizational change

Organizational change was an overarching theme that was described by the participants through words such as process improvement, recruiting strategies, structural

challenges, and hiring challenges. Insight around organizational change was gained in the following participant responses:

Participant 1

"…they poach a lot of folks from us."

Participant 1

"So if we want to hire for a certain position and we're not getting applicants just through the website we'll put an advertising request to where we want that to go and then somebody from the HR department will do those postings for us and then once those postings are done electronically then they're shot out to myself and whichever program is in need of that applicant."

Participant 1

"The HR department director and her people or his people…they don't interview."

Participant 2

"One of the challenges is dealing with the population we serve…our heart is on that, we love that. But the way our workers interact with one another you know that's a little more challenging then how we serve who we serve."

Participant 3

"Our top managers have political connections or are in a way connected to people who are in office. So I think that presents a lot of challenges for giving diverse perspectives and getting perspectives that are able to challenge things within the city."

Participant 5

"Trying to find somebody that has experience in other industries and can kind of bring that in here. Unfortunately, usually means we have to get somebody that has the lowest level of years of experience because the pay doesn't really match with somebody that has exactly what the organization needs. So lots of challenges but it's a very similar process."

Participant 5

"Nonprofits and most industries that are afraid of people that don't have industry experience, tend to really suffer from that inbreeding challenge and it's a fear component because there's hundreds of years of bad practices that are built on top of each other and that takes a specific skill set to kind of dig out of. And when all you have is nothing but nonprofit especially social services nonprofit experience then it just kind of feeds into the same challenge."

Participant 5

"For higher level positions I'm much more involved. For the entry-level positions I mean there's going to be high turnover in them anyway so it doesn't really matter."

Participant 5

"Trying to find somebody that has experience in other industries and can kind of bring that in there. Unfortunately, usually means we have to get somebody that has the lowest level of years of experience because the pay doesn't really match

with somebody that has exactly what the organization needs. So lots of challenges
but it's a very similar process."

Participant 5

"(big sigh) Well, I think the challenge that all organizations have is when there is
a vacancy at those levels there becomes a desperation to hire quickly. And the
challenge with that is a fast hire is generally not the best hire."

Participant 7

"we use scheduling and timekeeping software called Homebase. I get tons of
postings out of Homebase but then also maybe the word-of-mouth of those who
actually work here will tell somebody else all the positions we have available."

Participant 7

"a hundred and something applicants are pending and waiting for interviews. It's
not about how many about getting people in necessarily. It's about me and will I
have enough time to do these panel interviews, because there's no way we could
do one-on-one. Will take two but to do the panel interviews and maybe the
interviews might have to include because what I try to do actually prevented a lot
of bad hires because we also make them write. I have them write to me about a
situation you know some experience that they might have had and then we also
have them write or fill out a incident report the way they fill out this information"

Participant 8

"that process takes a little longer with making sure that we select the right person
because we really want long-term relationships we don't really want big turnovers

and I can't say that we don't have much of a big turnover but we just want to make sure that we have the right candidate. So, we kind of want to make sure that we go through the process and vet clients appropriately."

Participant 9

"And so if you didn't get any people that were Black what did you do? Did you interview only from the pool of candidates? Or did you shred it up and say this was a failed recruitment and start over?"

Participant 9

"and culturally I think, especially when you work in the social services realm it's incredibly important, to know that if you can't…it's easy to say that you're looking at it through this particular lens. But unless you've actually lived that lens, like for me I know what it was like as a White person to be stuck on drugs to be incarcerated. To do all those things and to come up the other end. That doesn't mean that a person of color had the same experience even if we ended up in the same place."

Participant 9

"The truth was I hired from the pool of candidates that I had. So it turned into obviously more people that look like me. Or even there were some Hispanic but it wasn't diverse enough. So now the next time I went out, I specifically looked for people that I knew and approached them. I just think it's tough because I don't want to hire… I don't think we as an organization particularly around senior jobs because I have two senior jobs right now in addition to our CEO. I don't want to

just hire a person of color to say look I hired. See we have African-American on our team so we've done good. That's not enough so I've hired now in the last three years three African-Americans at the senior level. And I'm like what in the hell are we doing wrong? How do we get better? I do think that it starts from the top down."

Participant 10

"And it's unfortunate because again we need people with educational background. We need people that are willing to put in the work. We need people with lived experience. We need people that are diverse. But at the same time it's really tough to get those people and hold on to those people."

Participant 10

"A lot of times we in not the nonprofit world will just will hire somebody because they're okay but they're available. We need them, we need a body in that space right now. You know I think that being okay with being overwhelmed for a while is definitely a big take back for us. In particular like let's sit on this and let's find the right person for this role."

Participant 10

"I would say to build really strong rapport with educational institutions. I mean because we seem to be like a word-of-mouth type of field. I mean that's how I received my job."

Additional Participant Observations

Participants 1 and 5 introduced and described the concept of inbreeding in hiring and poaching. Inbreeding and poaching are concepts in hiring that happen in organizations that are worth further exploration.

Participant 2 and 4 were examples of successful hires from the community that possessed lived experience which included jail and gang experience. This experience continues to impact, influence the participants current hiring, and employment decisions.

The majority of participants displayed noticeable sighs and took deep breaths when they were asked about seeking diverse candidates. It became obvious that this was a challenging and thought-provoking question.

Participants 5's comment around the negative connotation the word diversity provides is a starting point and an additional area for research around race and diversity. The CRT, SCT, and SIT may explain or be applied when explaining this contrast of opinion.

Participant 6 mentioned the desire to see a change from the short exposures to individuals during the hiring process. Other participants expressed the need to spend more time getting to know applicants during the hiring process.

Participant 7's comments around "going from being strategic to also cleaning toilets" is an excellent example of the dedication and commitment that the participants displayed to their profession. It was also another example of the participant's commitment to do whatever it takes to support the client.

Participant 7's feedback provided an example of the impact decision makers can have when they are aware of the disparities and inequities that occur through systemic racism and injustices within the system. Participant 7 was passionate about the gaps in the system. "All these programs would be so much more successful if they had better vetting processes." This could be further confirmed in the story the participant shared around how the organization supported a diverse client.

The majority of participants provided insight on the use of job postings such as LinkedIn, Indeed, and Homebase. It became clear that decision makers had access to recruiting tools but not necessarily the support to use them efficiently.

Participant 8 assertion of the importance of "being able to relate" and "being comfortable" in the environment that you're working in was relevant to the concept of cultural competence. "You can't be afraid of the people that you're paid to serve. You can't be afraid of the community" confirmed the importance of community and cultural competence.

Participant 9's comment about "looking past someone's degree and finding ways to help them get back to school to advance themselves" allowed for the idea of utilizing different retention and recruiting strategies. In addition, a reference to using Section 125 plans to support diverse candidates economically may lead to an opportunity for further discussion and research.

Participant 10 recommended improvements in the recruiting process through relationships with colleges and universities and alumni associations to select and recruit candidates for social services programs.

Summary

This study's purpose was to examine the lived experience of employees that are responsible for the hiring decisions within social services programs in Los Angeles County, California. This chapter provided an examination of data collection methods, management of data, and analysis of gathered data. Purposeful sampling techniques were used and appropriate research guidelines were followed during recruitment. Participants were initially invited via LinkedIn, then through direct emails, and then the snowball method was used as associates of the researcher referred their colleagues and peers to the study.

Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the research findings, recommendations for social service providers, implications for social change, suggestions for future research, recommendations for action, and limitations of this research study. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion on how the findings from the current study align or diverge from findings of prior research studies in the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The hiring practices and experiences of leaders in social services programs have not been well documented. Furthermore, most of the responses given by participants in this study agreed with Cho et al. (2017) that there is a lack of research that investigates the hiring and selection process from the perspective of leaders working in social services programs. The nature of this qualitative study was phenomenological. The purpose of this study was to gain more understanding and insight into the hiring practices, experience and perceived barriers within hiring processes within social services programs when recruiting people to work for programs that support the homeless. This qualitative phenomenological research design allowed for the understanding of the experiences of leaders as they experienced recruiting and retention practices within their organizations. Open-ended questions were used to elicit the decision makers' responses in their own words around how they were recruited and how they have experience recruiting within their organization.

Themes emerged during the data analysis process, and participants provided clarifications as well as explanations. Patterns revealed themes that led to an explanation of how social service providers located qualified candidates. Five prominent themes that all participants touched on and that were also provided as responses to all three research questions were; 1) social justice, 2) community, 3) lived experience, 4) diversity, and 5) organizational change. All other emergent themes centered on a variation of the five themes and provided additional overlapping subthemes related to the experiences,

purpose, and challenges of recruiting for social services programs that serve a population with enormous needs.

This chapter includes the key findings, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of the results, and a conclusion.

Key Findings

Of the five prominent themes, secondary findings emerged from the research questions leading to key findings and subthemes. The research questions for the study and their key findings were as follows:

RQ1: What are the hiring practices of mid and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?

Various themes were prominent about the hiring practices of mid and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless. Prominent themes that occurred around recruiting were; a) commitment to hiring in the community, b) need for improvement in the process, c) hiring for diversity, and d) hiring mostly through word of mouth.

RQ2: How does the ability to understand, communicate with and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?

Regarding research question two, themes around cultural competence established noticeable themes that occurred as participants shared their experience with understanding and communicating with the population they serve. The themes are listed as follows: importance of lived experience, relating to the community, representing the

community they serve, respect for the community, establishing trust with the community, and the importance for emotional intelligence.

RQ3: What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of overall social services to the homeless?

Research question three speaks to the influence and power decision makers have when hiring for roles that support social services. The themes that were apparent are listed as follows: recruiting strategies, relationship, and human resources involvement, and hiring challenges.

Interpretation of Findings

Participants of the study included mid-to senior level managers within organizations that provide social services from Los Angeles County, California. The participants represented agencies that provide service to a wide-range of service provider areas (SPA) areas that provided services to within and without of Los Angeles County and surrounding areas. The years of experience as a decision maker within a social service organization ranged from 2.5 to 25 and the mean was 9.8 years. The sample was predominantly female with 8 (66.6%) females and 4 (33.3%) males. The ethnicity of the participants was predominantly White. Five (41.6%) reported their race as White, 4 (33.3%) identified as Black, 1 (8.3%) were Black & European, one (8.3%) were Hispanic, and one (8.3%) identified as other. Only three (25%) study participants reported their age as between twenty-nine and forty years. Four (33.3%) reported their age as 40 - 50 years and five (41.6%) reported being 50-58 years old. The majority of the

participants held a Master's degree (50%) or Bachelor's degree (25%), with two (16.6%) having some college and one participant (8.3%) having a post graduate degree.

Participants in this study shared their expert experiences as a significant voice for this phenomenological study. The twelve participants had common views around hiring practices, the lack of diversity within the applicant pool, personal recruiting experiences, and perceived barriers in response to the interview questions. The next section includes study results relative to the research from a recruitment and hiring lens.

Various patterns emerged from the research questions leading to key findings and themes. As it relates to the RQ1 and the questions "*What are the hiring practices of mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County and how do these practices impact delivery of services?,*" various themes were prominent. Evident themes that occurred around recruiting were; hiring for diversity, need for improvement in the process, and hiring primarily through word-of-mouth.

Regarding RQ2, "How does the ability to understand, communicate with, and interact with the homeless population mid-and senior-level managers serve help in decision-making?," noticeable themes around cultural competence occurred as participants shared their experience with understanding and communicating with the population they serve. The themes are listed as follows: hiring for lived experience, respect, and investment in the community, and establishing trust with the community.

RQ3, "What impact do mid-and senior-level managers within social service programs that support the homeless in Los Angeles County have on the delivery of

overall social services to the homeless?," speaks to the influence and power decision makers have when hiring for roles that support social services. The themes that were apparent are relationship and involvement with human resources and hiring challenges. These secondary findings are detailed to follow:

Secondary Finding 1: Hiring for diversity

Based on responses, the majority of participants agreed that hiring for diversity was essential. This theme emerged alongside the need to be culturally competent and to have a diverse workforce that represented the population served. Although each participant would agree, the majority of participants' responses did not describe a systematic process to ensure the creation of a diverse applicant pool. As participants described the majority of their applicant pool being sourced through the word of mouth, they confirmed that they did not have a strategic process. Examples of a recruiting process committed to diverse hiring would include specific, deliberate steps to increase the recruitment and selection of diverse candidates. Steps towards increasing diversity include but are not limited to; conducting a diversity hiring audit on your current hiring process, selecting a metric to improve diversity hiring, increasing diversity hiring in candidate sourcing, increasing diversity hiring in the candidate screening, and evaluating diversity hiring metrics (Pedula, 2020). Participants were not able to describe any of these specific strategies.

Secondary Finding 2: Need for improvement in the process

An overwhelming theme involved the need for improvement in the process. Participants' interest in the study seemed to be motivated by the hope that the process

may be improved or strengthened through this study. For example, the majority of the participants described their recruiting process as one lacking structure. Participants in senior roles described shifting through hundreds of resumes with minimal support from their human resources departments. In fact, the majority of the participants worked within organizations where the human resource department was not engaged in initial selections but in the later, tactical, administrative stages after the applicant had been selected. Participants described human resources as the department that administers background checks, new hire paperwork, and other post-selection administration tasks. The majority of participants were recruited via word of mouth and the primary source of finding applicants was via word of mouth. It was clear that there is an opportunity to develop additional strategies that involved proactively selecting candidates while supporting executive decision makers in locating talent.

Secondary Finding 3: Hiring primarily through word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth hiring was consistently described as a primary method of hiring. Recommendations from friends or relatives are often perceived as impartial and trustworthy. Studies have confirmed the important element of trust within word-of-mouth recommendations and its benefits and suggests referral programs work (Goers, 2018). However, word-of-mouth strategies should be only one tactic within a robust recruiting strategy. Word-of-mouth referrals may also lead to negative hires based on nepotism.

Secondary Finding 4: Hiring for lived experience

Lived experience was a constant and consistent theme throughout the study. The need to understand the community is essential to be effective in roles that serve vulnerable populations. The importance of selecting applicants and hiring employees who understand the needs of the community based on their own experiences was overwhelmingly apparent in the participant's responses.

Secondary Finding 5: Respect and investment in the community

As Participant 8 stated, "When you invest into the community, when you invest into the people in the community, they stay in the community and they fight and work hard to serve the people that live in the community that are less fortunate than you are. And you work towards meeting the needs of those who are in the community so it's really about investment, if that makes sense." Part of investing in the community is the ability to hire from the community, which provides economic support.

Secondary Finding 6: Establishing trust with the community

Establishing trust with the community was a consistent theme during the participant interview process. Participants shared with deep respect their hands on engagements with the clients that they served and expressed a mutual respect for the communities they served. Various participants physically lit up when describing the work such as cleaning toilets, handing out food, and doing other tasks that directly touched a person experiencing homelessness.

Secondary Finding 7: Human Resources involvement

Except for the participant whose role was Director of Human Resources, each participant described how he or she was mainly responsible for sourcing and selecting candidates autonomous from human resources. The human resources department was described by 11 out of the 12 participants as a place to finalize the paperwork. As a human resources practitioner, it was immediately recognized as an opportunity for human resources to be a strategic contributor and partner in the recruitment process.

Summary of Findings

The aforementioned secondary findings reinforce how hiring decisions are made within social services and provide insights on gaps and areas of opportunities within the process. The CRT, SCT, and SIT provide insight into the motivation of the participants in regards to how and why they hire specific people. To follow is an analysis and interpretation of the findings in the context of the theoretical framework.

As discussed in Chapter 2, minimal research has been done to consider the motivating factors surrounding hiring decisions of executives. A phenomenological interpretative approach to the CRT, SCT, and SIT provides additional insight into the executive hiring process can be gained to bring awareness to the phenomenon that occurs within selection and recruiting.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theorists contend that people of color experience racism based specifically on racial identification daily (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Simba, 2019). Within CRT, the concept of meritocracy is false, discrimination is ultimately inevitable in

a society in which wealth, education, and power are distributed and affirmed by the

workings of a hierarchy of White over Black (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001;

Simba, 2019). CRT provides a historical context for the origins of the White leader

stereotype that may be present in hiring within social service hierarchies (Sawyer, 2017).

Consequently, CRT may provide insight into biases and stereotypes inherent to recruiting

and selection processes within this study. The research and research questions explored

the lived experience of the participant as it relates to CRT and the participants' lived

experiences around employment and hiring. As seen in Table 4, participants described

how hiring practices are influenced by CRT by their described experiences of racial

disparities.

Table 4

Summary of Themes and Subthemes Related to Critical Race Theory

Themes	Subthemes
Commitment to social justice	Aggressive approach to social transformation
Centrality of experiential knowledge	Lived experience Storytelling
Challenge to dominant ideology	White privilege Microaggressions Macroaggressions
Centrality & intersectionality of race & racism	Institutional racism Systematic racism

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism aims to explain how groups of people come to share

perspectives (Patton, 2015). Consequently, social constructionism involves people

interacting in networks of relationships similar to those found in an organization. As people begin to define themselves interpersonally and intersubjectively within these networks of relationships they are operating within a SCF (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Patton, 2015). This can be seen in the research around how participants experience themselves within their organization and their roles within the recruitment and selection process. In fact, research shows that under the SCF, hiring practices are defined interpersonally by people interacting in a network of relationships (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Patton, 2015). Consequently, as seen in Table 5, this study shows that the assertion of these interactions within a network of relationships may influence hiring decisions resulting in positive and negative hiring decisions.

Table 5

Summary of Themes and Subthemes Related to Social Constructionism Framework

Themes	Subthemes
Knowledge based on received info and experience	Practice based on experience Role of personal values vs. formal knowledge Meaning or experiences
Understanding clients through social interaction	Lived experience Sharing stories
Designing interventions to change behavior	Understanding clients' realities Outcomes regarding the care of clients
Promoting professional experience	Demonstrated ethics and morals Distinguish between novice vs. expert Share and combine experience with peers for process improvement

Social Identity Theory

Differences in age, race, and generation lead to categorization of groups during the hiring the process. This segregation of categories also occurs within SIT leading individuals to form behaviors toward another group, resulting in favoritism, discrimination, and preference for the in-group (Allen, Schetzsle, Mallin, & Pullins, 2014; Rodriguez, 2018). Social identity attributes the cause of in-group favoritism to the need to stand out and be different.

As seen in Table 6, participants described behaviors in which their position affects the perception of themselves and others. Participants described in-group homogeneity within their own organizations. In addition they described it was clear that participants closely tied their identity to their work and level of experience or lack of lived experience. As explained by SIT, this may result in in-group favoritism, inter-group disadvantage, lower prestige, and preference for the in-group over the out-group (Allen et al., 2014; Rodriguez, 2018). Participants in this study confirmed the phenomenon that can occur when decision makers provide input that is influenced by their own social identity and perceptions.

Table 6

Summary of Themes and Subthemes Related to Social Identity Theory

Themes	Subthemes
Position affects perception of self and others	Program managers responsible for services Client success = success in position
Social influence established via roles	Leadership roles Ingroup vs. Outgroups

In-group homogeneity	Social services network
	Community
	Group memberships celebrated
Identity tied to role	Satisfaction determined by success of role
	Satisfaction determined by success

Limitations of the Study

Chapter 1 highlighted limitations in the study that exist due to the nature of the study. That is, the first limitation of the study involved data subjectivity that occurs within phenomenological studies around reliability and validity. The participants were used as experts for the study in order to eliminate or control for subjectivity or bias. By transcribing the experts' responses to the interview questions verbatim, bias was reduced. Inherently, limitations existed around the level of trust that is placed in the participants ability to share and express the truth. The participant's expert statements about their experiences, practices, and perceived barriers provided the credibility for the study. For purposes of transferability, future researchers would need to decide if information could be transferred to similar individuals or situations. All of the noted limitations were addressed and resolved for this study.

Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gain additional insight into the selection and hiring practices within social service providers in Los Angeles County. Literature and prior research related to hiring indicated the need for research that explored the recruiting process and strategy of the decision makers that hire for programs created specifically to support the homeless. Five distinct themes and

patterns emerged around community, social justice, lived experience, diversity, and organizational change.

The findings of this study contributed to generating new areas for further research such as:

- Exploring the role of stakeholders in understanding and addressing gaps in recruiting strategies within their organizations;

- Reviewing opportunities for investment in human resources and capacity building;

- Examining opportunities to recruit and source talent directly from communities the social services programs serve;

- Developing research around the need for technological solutions such as a repository and database for diverse candidates qualified for social services roles;

- Determining the need for regular and structured diversity and cultural competence trainings;

- Researching the level of funder accountability to equitable and fair hiring programs;

- Gauging the level of systemic racism and researching the cause and effects to the overall employment of candidates to support the homeless;

- Measuring pay equity and its effects or recruitment and selection;

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- Exploring generational gaps and opportunities within the hiring process. (i.e. how are Millennials or Baby Boomers responding to the current hiring process?);

- Researching the impact of executive hiring as it relates service provider areas;

- Analyzing the results of hiring and recruiting as it relates to the diverse makeup of the organizations' boards;

- Exploring the notion and impact of the use of diversity language that may be perceived as negative, neutral, or positive within an organization's culture.

Conducting inductive studies may result in understanding and exploring what assumptions, factors, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences influences the decision-making process that ultimately lead to employees that support the growing homeless population in Los Angeles County. It is vital to understand what recruiting barriers exist when enacting homeless policies. As such, conducting additional qualitative studies may pave the way for policies focused on capacity building within homeless services. In this study, I explored the recruiting experience from a holistic view. Narrowing down the scope of the findings may result in collecting data that could provide tangible action items for the participants and the organizations they support.

Implications for Social Change

The year 2020 was known not only for the Coronavirus pandemic that swept across the globe but also for the antiracist protests that focused the attention on cascades of killings of Black people by police with impunity. In Los Angeles County, 2020 will

also be known for the year homelessness rose 12.7% despite the best efforts of law makers, politicians, and dedicated leaders within social services.

Participant interviews confirmed that the homeless population are the top highest utilizers of Los Angeles' countywide systems. Based on the findings from this study, the potential impact for positive social change is the expansion of education and communication between decision makers in social services. As one participant described, "they assist the most vulnerable" in our population. The knowledge acquired from this study has the potential to influence policymakers at federal, state, and local levels to implement funding and practices aimed at building capacity around the workforce that supports the most vulnerable populations.

The dissemination of the study's findings will be through traditional mail, social media formats, emails, presentations, and publication in peer-reviewed journals. Finally, as promised to the participants, a copy of the study will be posted on a personal website and on LinkedIn for participants to review. It is anticipated that sharing this study will bring attention to the impact of hiring practices to policy makers and the public.

Conclusion

Homelessness in Los Angeles County has increased by 12.7% since 2019. Based on Los Angeles County's recent homeless count, 66,433 people are living on the streets, in vehicles, and in shelters (NPR.org, 2020). Despite hundreds of millions of dollars created and spent through legislation such as Measure H and Proposition HHH, the crisis is worsening (Garcetti, 2020). As Los Angeles County continues to house people, there has been an appeal for more funding and policies that provide housing especially for

Black, homeless Angelenos that make up only 8% of the total population but 34% of

people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County.

The recent homeless count results also highlight the alarming result that Black

people are four times more represented among people experiencing homelessness than in

the County population overall (LAHSA, 2020). In spite of billions in funding due to

recent legislation, Angelenos and Angelenos of color are disparately falling into

homelessness. The solution to homelessness will require innovation and dismantling the

status quo. Addressing the employment and workforce training needs of people

experiencing and at-risk of homelessness is an essential effort within our countywide

strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that organizations continue to review

and strengthen their hiring processes using a diversity lens. There is an opportunity to

review pay equity and increase the salaries of the front line staff roles such as

Community Health Workers, Housing Coordinators, and Promotoras that serve on the

battlefield connecting with the homeless and providing care to our most vulnerable

population. As a human resource practitioner, the study made it clear that human

resources departments within social services have an opportunity to become more of

strategic partner and to lead in the selection of critical human capital.

Overall, my beliefs were confirmed. That is, the lack of attention to recruiting in

the participants' organizations provide an opportunity in how hiring can be improved to

deliver stronger services to the homeless. The knowledge acquired from this study has the

potential to influence policy makers at federal, state, and local levels to implement

funding and practices aimed at building capacity around the workforce that supports marginalized populations. The research questions provided insight into how leaders select those people who are responsible for the sickest most disregarded people in our society - the homeless, mentally ill, imprisoned, and recently released from prison.

During the participant interviews, the eagerness of participants to take part in interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest was shocking. It is important to highlight that the majority of the research participants were serving as essential workers to the homeless picking up masks and personal protective equipment for the homeless during the time of the research interviews. It is also important to note that the latest Los Angeles Homeless Count figures capture a picture of homelessness in Los Angeles County prior to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the research, participants were responding to the pandemic through efforts such as Project Room Key, rent freezes, and eviction moratoriums. The impact of COVID-19 coupled with racial tensions and their combined effects on homelessness and employment have yet to be measured.

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