**Data-informed Policy Scavenger Hunt Rose Frech/SWK 647/Cleveland State University**

Description:

Advancing our role as advocates is one of the key reasons why social workers should seek a deeper understanding of policy. Effective advocates rely on current, reliable, easy-to-find demographic data to advance their efforts, and in practice settings, referencing this data can be critical when meeting with policy makers, writing legislative testimony, press releases, and letters to the editors, or even for use on social media. The goal of this assignment is to advance the student's understanding of the importance of finding and using current, reliable, geographically-specific data in advocacy. Students get hands-on experience in searching for data related to poverty, economic inequality, and health disparities, and hone critical thinking skills in considering the implications of this data on policy and advocacy.

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The exercise may be completed in-class as a large group exercise in a computer lab, individually, or in small groups/pairs (we did it as a large group exercise--students followed along on their own computers while I used the overhead projector). We discussed each item throughout, and ended with a broader discussion about the important role of data in policy development and policy advocacy. I found it useful to complete this exercise towards the end of the policy course, when students have a strong foundation to rely on when thinking critically about these issues.

While portions for this assignment are Ohio-specific, many of the data sources are not, and could be easily adapted for use anywhere.

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| **Topic/Issue** | **Data Source** | **Question** | **Response** |
| **Poverty** | **American Community Survey *“American Fact Finder”***  [***https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml***](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml)  ***Click “Advanced Search”***  ***Using the search boxes to search for geography and find topic, and then browse and select an appropriate table*** | Using the most recent data you can find, how many people live in poverty in the city of Cleveland? What is the percent?  How does the senior poverty rate compare to the child poverty rate, and why might these differences exist? |  |
| **Housing Affordability** | **American Community Survey *“American Fact Finder”***  [***https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml***](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml)  ***Click “Advanced Search”***  ***Using the search boxes to search for geography and find topic, and then browse and select an appropriate table***  *HINT! Data on housing affordability is buried in the ACS. The easiest table to find this information is S2503. You may have to some quick math!* | Based on what we discussed in class-what is the affordable housing threshold? How many people live in **unaffordable** housing in the city of Cleveland? What is the difference for renters versus owners? How can policy be a tool to increase access to affordable housing? |  |
| **Health and Healthcare** | **County Health Rankings**  ***Go to*** [***www.countyhealthrankings.org***](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)  **The Ohio Department of Health**  [***https://www.odh.ohio.gov/***](https://www.odh.ohio.gov/)  ***Go to Data and Statistics*** | **Co. Health Rankings:**  What is Cuyahoga County’s health ranking? Looking at the health rankings for different outcomes, where does the County do well, and where do we do poorly? What is the ratio of the population to mental health providers, and why does this matter? As you review this data, what indicator surprises you the most?  **ODH Data:**  What is the leading cause of death in Cuyahoga County (death data)? Review the teen pregnancy data for both 1997 and the most recent available. How are they different, and what could account for the difference? Review the “unwed” births data (birth data) -- you will see great variation in rates across the state. Why might this be? How can policy be used as a tool to address these issues? |  |
| **Hunger** | **Feeding America**  **Map the Meal Gap**  ***Go to*** [***www.feedingamerica.org***](http://www.feedingamerica.org)  ***Go to “Hunger and America,” find “Our Research,” and scroll to “Map the Meal Gap”*** | What is the average cost of a meal in Ohio? What about Maine? What could account for this difference?  What is the food insecurity rate in Cuyahoga County? How could policy makers work to decrease this rate? How might you use this data in advocacy activities? |  |
| **Public Benefits** | **Public Employment Monthly Statistics Report: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.**  ***Go to*** [***http://jfs.ohio.gov/pams/index.stm***](http://jfs.ohio.gov/pams/index.stm)  ***Select the most recent available report.*** | Review the OWF (cash assistance) combined data. How many recipients are there in Ohio as a whole? How many adults and how many children? What may account for the low number of adults receiving benefits?  Find the SNAP (food stamp) data. How many people receive this benefit in Cuyahoga County? Looking at the average issuance per person, and considering the cost per meal from Feeding America, what do you calculate as a possible food gap? Write a tweet (140 characters) that communicates a key point from this data set. |  |
| **Social Service**  **Jobs/Employment** | **The Bureau of Labor Statistics**  [**http://www.bls.gov/**](http://www.bls.gov/)  ***Click on “data tools,” and scroll down to State and County Employment and Wages and click on “one screen data search.” Using the search options, retrieve information on the Social Assistance Industry in Cuyahoga County. HINTS: For #3, NAICS is 624, for #4, #5, and #6 hold down SHIFT to select all options.*** | Review the tables. In 2014, how many local social assistance government establishments are listed? How many private establishments? Review the annual wage and weekly wage for local government and private establishment social assistance jobs. What are the differences? What is surprising to you about this data? What can account for the wage gap between the public and private sectors? |  |