

Project Proposal

OpenDoor: Demonstrating the link between homelessness and access to legal representation

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1. Topic and background

Due to the huge amounts of homeless individuals in America, we want to figure out the relation between legal access and homeless population. As we all know, the poor is the group of people who need the legal aid badly, but because of the poverty and the cost of lawyers and legal services, they cannot afford the expensive fee to get access to the protection of laws. It is a vicious circle obviously. Somehow, we could guess the access to justice is a key factor to homelessness and poverty. Thus, we want to compare our data of state homelessness population between legal aid to poverty by states, and find out what impact legal aid has on poverty and approve that when everyone has access to the law, poverty can be dramatically reduced. Finally supporting our ideas with data results.

2. Questions we raised

- Question #1: What is the relationship between civil legal aid availability ratios and # of unsheltered homeless persons per capita, i.e. between homelessness and availability of legal services? Create a ratio between civil legal aid availability and homelessness rates and see what the relationship is between this ratio and the following data points:
- Question #2: What is the relationship between the cost of housing and the homeless/legal aid ratio? Use median rent as a proxy for cost of housing.
- Question #3: What is the relationship between the level of income inequality and the homelessness/legal aid ratio?
- Question #4: what is the relationship between the urbanization rate of a state and the homelessness/ legal aid ratio?
- Question #5: what is the relationship between the population of a state and the homelessness/ legal aid ratio?
- Question #6: What is the relationship between the percentage of health insurance and the homelessness/ legal aid ratio?
- Question #7: why are there some big changes of number of total homelessness between years? Find out which state has the biggest homeless population change and try to reason it(whether it is due to the access to law or not).

3. Data set

- a. We intend to use the dataset of Point-in-Time (PIT) estimates of homelessness as well as national estimates of homelessness by state and from 2007 – 2017. And

using data from the Justice Index, a gold standard estimates of legal aid availability in US.

- b. About the dataset of homelessness by state, the dataset contains 10 years data from 2007 to 2017. From 2015 to 2017, the size of data is 2509 per year, from 2011 to 2014, the size of data is 1312 per year, from 2007 to 2010, the size of data is 969 per year. And each dataset has the following features of total homeless, sheltered/unsheltered homeless, individual/families shelter/unsheltered homeless, and the different age levels of homeless population, etc. We get the data from the official site of US Housing and Urban Development. On the other aspect, we will use the data in Justice Index which has the data of proportion of legal aid funded attorneys in national and state-by-state level, including attorney access, self-represented access, language access and disability access. We could be able to download the excel file which contains the data of number of civil legal aid attorneys at state-level, etc. The size of the useful dataset is 260.
- c. We also look at the data from apartmentlist.com, which includes the median rent of each state. Then, we found some useful data from United States Census Bureau. We downloaded the data of urban rate and urban population of each state, the data of poverty percentage and income inequality of each state, and the data of health insurance coverage of each state. The data we got are based on 2010 Census and statistics of 2016. The size of the data is not big since it only measures the index of each state during a few years.