Fair Housing Snap Shot Research Project
A University and Community Collaboration

Executive Summary
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A University – Community Collaboration Between:
Utah State University Social Work Program
Utah Labor Commission Fair Housing Unit

May 2015

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Executive Summary

The federal Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968. The intent of the law is to reduce and eliminate housing discrimination toward seven (7) specific “protected classes” in the United States. Utah has passed the Utah Fair Housing Act which adds Source of Income, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in addition to the seven protected classes under federal law.” Which makes ten (10) protected classes in Utah.

To date, in Utah we have not had an assessment of the general public’s basic understanding of the law or attitudes towards aspects of the law. The first general attempt to collect the public’s awareness of the Fair Housing Law was not until 2001 and 2005. This was accomplished through a national survey of understanding conducted on behalf of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

This report looks at two specific aspects of this statewide research project focused on assessing Utahans’ knowledge and attitudes of the Fair Housing Law. The report will examine the Fair Housing Snap Shot Research Project, which is a university/community collaborative project. The research is divided between undergraduate and graduate students. The undergraduate students examined the general population of Utahans’, while the graduate students looked at responses from state human service professionals.

The process of this project is grounded in “Community-Based Research (CBR).” The project partners a university and a community organization working together towards a common goal. The partners are, the Social Work program at Utah State University with the Fair Housing Unit of the Utah Labor Commission. This report will discuss in general the results of the Fair Housing research as well as the student/educational outcomes of the project.

Community-Based Research (CBR)

CBR is a collaborative research effort in which academic and community partners share in all aspects of the research process. This provides a method wherein a university and a community organization may work together on a project that could have mutual benefits. The Fair Housing Snap Shot Research Project was such an endeavor. The project participants were: Three (3) Utah State University professors; Seventy (70) undergraduate (BSW) students; Twelve (12) graduate (MSW) students; and One (1) Community partner, Utah Labor Commission/Fair Housing Unit.

Methodology

The methodology consisted of a written survey with three main sections. The sections were: a) knowledge (general knowledge of Fair Housing); b) attitude (overall attitudes of aspects of Fair Housing) and c) respondents demographics.

Both the knowledge and attitude sections contained 5-point Likert Scale questions (15 and 9 respectively). The knowledge section also contained eight (8) true/false questions.
Additionally, the attitude section contained one question listing the protected classes at that time and asked the respondent to rank in order which of the protected classes they perceived needed to be protected the most. There were five (5) fair housing scenarios followed with a question with a Yes/No response option. In the scenario section, there was also a question asking if the respondent had experienced housing discrimination.

The demographics section contained a combination of multiple choice, yes/no, fill in the blank and rating scale questions.

The survey was presented in both Spanish and English languages.

Survey Results

General Public Knowledge

On the 5-point Likert Scale questions (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), when adding up the possible highest and lowest scores on all of the questions, they range from 15 – 75. On this scale of 15 – 75, Utahans had an average score of 49. Some significant points were 59% reported that they had heard of the Fair Housing Law, 71% indicated that the intent of the law is to prevent housing discrimination, while 64% stated that the law protects people with disabilities. An encouraging note was that only 10% of the respondents indicated the law only applies to minorities.

There were some concerns regarding the general knowledge of the law. There were 38% of the respondents who stated the law protects them while 18% indicated that they would know whom to contact if they felt they were a victim of housing discrimination. Just under 19% stated that they understand what a protected class means under the law and 30% indicated that how a property is advertised also falls under the law.

True/False

Based on the eight (8) T/F questions, Utahans’ had average score of 52% correct. The questions indicated that 88% of those responding thought age is a protected class, 76% believed a single parent with children can be restricted from renting in an adults only building, and 33% felt that applicants with children can be charged a higher rental deposit than those without children.

General Attitude

It is the attitude of 23% of the respondents that when selling a house through a real estate company, the homeowner has the right to decide to whom to sell the house, even if they prefer not to sell to someone of a specific race, religion or nationality. Other results show that 16% indicated the seller has a right to sell to a White buyer only, 9% believe someone should be restricted from renting based upon their religion, and 3% of those who completed the survey feel that a landlord has the right to charge a refugee a higher rent if the refugee does not speak English.
Ranking

Of interest to note on the ranking of which class was perceived to need the greatest protection, religion was last on the list. This is in contrast to religion being indicated as the highest form of housing discrimination reported by the respondents.

Experience

It was found that 14% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some kind of housing discrimination. Religion, marital status, familial status, and sexual orientation comprised the top three (3) focuses of discrimination. Familial status and sexual orientation shared the third spot as reported.

Human Service Providers

General Human Service Providers Knowledge

Graduate social work students explored the reported knowledge and attitudes of professional human service providers. To be clear service providers are human service employees from the profit and/or non-profit sector, such as social workers, case managers, and visiting care assistants.

There was a significant difference between the reported Fair Housing knowledge with this group. In regard to hearing of the Fair Housing Law, seventy-seven percent (77%) of the human service providers indicated they had heard of the law. This is in comparison to the fifty-nine percent (59%) of the general public. Both groups reported below thirty percent (30%) as to knowing whom to contact if they feel they are victims of housing discrimination (general public 18.4% and human service workers 29.3%). Both groups seemed to be uncertain of how the Fair Housing Law influences advertising available property.

General Human Service Providers Attitude

Reported attitudes of the human service workers were in sharp contrast to the general public. In response to the survey item that stated housing discrimination should be reported, ninety-six percent (96.2%) of the human service workers responded “strongly agree” in contrast to thirty-four percent (34.1%) of the general public who responded “strongly agree”. Families with children were perceived differently between the two groups. Zero percent (0%) of the human service workers agreed that a family with children should be restricted to a particular section of a building while forty-nine percent (49.4%) agreed that a family with children should be restricted to a particular section.
Student Researchers

The research for the Fair Housing Snap Shot Research Project was conducted by undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Social Work at Utah State University. The following is a brief overview of the benefits that the students gained from the research project.

Students took pre- and post-surveys measuring their attitudes regarding their perception of themselves as researchers and community workers. Results indicated that the students had a significant positive shift in both areas.

Students reported low confidence to conduct research prior to the project. To increase the knowledge, confidence and the self-efficacy of the students, their course work was designed around aspects of community interaction, data collection, interviewing skills, research, and fair housing presentations.

Student reflection throughout the project was an integral component to the learning process. Students participated in weekly reflections as well as pre- and post-reflective activities in and out of class.

Students had the option to contribute to a student monograph for publication. The focus of the monograph was to provide an opportunity for students to create scholarly writing regarding their work and learning throughout this project. Criteria for selection of the writing was decided upon as part of the students’ coursework. A graduate student editor with a selection rubric decided selection of the articles. Fifteen (15) manuscripts were submitted and seven (7) students’ contributions were selected for publication.

Student groups were formed and each group conducted a Fair Housing presentation to a community-based organization. Ten (10) student groups presented eleven (11) student-led Fair Housing presentations, complete with Power Points and handouts, to approximately two hundred and fifty (250) members and leaders within the community.
Conclusion/Call to Action

The Fair Housing Snap Shot Research Project was a successful collaboration between university and community partners. Each partner gained much from this project, which could be utilized to improve their present delivery of services and information.

This first of its kind research yielded some informative information regarding Utahans' general knowledge of and attitudes about the Fair Law. What was learned in this project can be seen as both disappointing and promising.

It is disappointing that only eighteen percent (18%) indicated that they knew whom to contact if they felt they became a victim of housing discrimination. A similar percentage of respondents indicated they understood the concept of a protected class (19%). Over three quarters of those completing the survey felt a single parent with children can be restricted from renting in an adult only complex (76%). While one third (33%) felt a higher rental deposit could be charged to parents with children, than parents without children.

The results indicated some promising information to build upon. Regarding general knowledge that the Fair Housing Law exists, fifty-nine percent (59%) indicated they were at least aware of it. Three quarters stated the law is intended to prevent discrimination in housing (71%). Quite encouraging was that the reported attitude of human service provider's toward reporting housing discrimination was almost three times higher than the general population (96.2%:34.1%).

The one aspect that is clear from this project is there is a great need for a concentrated, sustained and intentional effort to increase the general knowledge of Fair Housing and influence attitudes to create a more inclusive culture.