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How Can Canada's New Official Poverty Line Serve the Needs of our Community?

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Background

- Since early 2020, our research team, with generous support from **Affinity Credit Union and the SPRP**, have been working to better understand how Canada's new official poverty line can serve the needs of our community
- This work has been carried within the **Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR)** at the **University of Saskatchewan**.
- In addition to myself, our full team includes **Sugandhi del Canto, Connor Morrison, Colleen Christopherson-Cote, Isobel Findley, and Suresh Kalagnanam**.



Outline

- Quick recap of Canada's Official Poverty Line (COPL)
- Results of our consultation with community stakeholders
- Results of our scoping review of the academic literature
- Key takeaways and future steps

Quick recap of Canada's Official Poverty Line (COPL)



Why do poverty thresholds matter?

- Leading thresholds are created by agencies like Statistics Canada and researchers to measure the extent of poverty in populations
- However, they are frequently used by governments and local service providers to determine the generosity of benefits and services, and set access cut-offs
- THESE ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS!
- If we aren't careful, we can hurt people



A quick COPL recap

- Also known as the Market Basket Measure (MBM)
- Consists of five baskets of expenditures: food, clothing, transportation, shelter, “other”
- Adjusted for household size
- A person is poor if their disposable income does not meet the threshold





Figure 1. Various components that need to be subtracted from total household income to arrive at disposable income.

Results of our consultation with community stakeholders



Consultation with community stakeholders

- In February 2020, we hosted a workshop and consultation with community stakeholders at Station 20 West
- Colleen presented on the SPRP and the 12 Bold Ideas before I led a workshop detailing the concepts and calculations that go into the COPL
- We then led a discussion with participants in which we we asked:
 - Are there baskets that are missing?
 - Which should we prioritize first for Saskatoon?

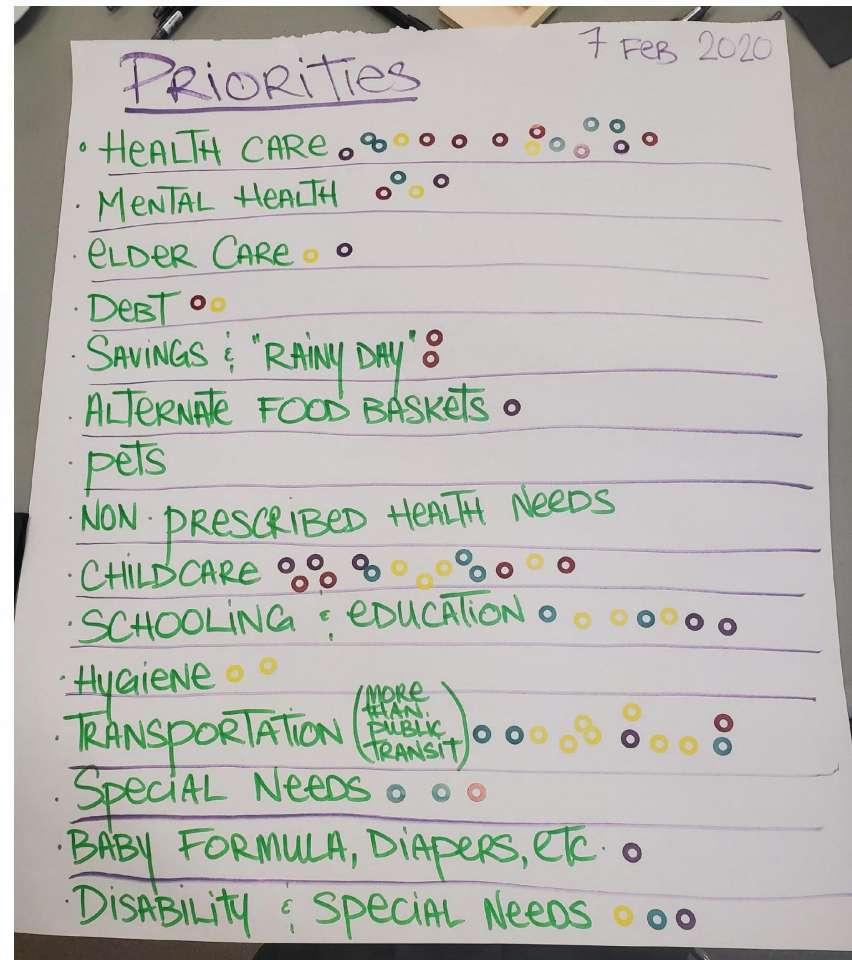


Figure 2. Results of February 2020 dotmocracy exercise with community stakeholder in Saskatoon.



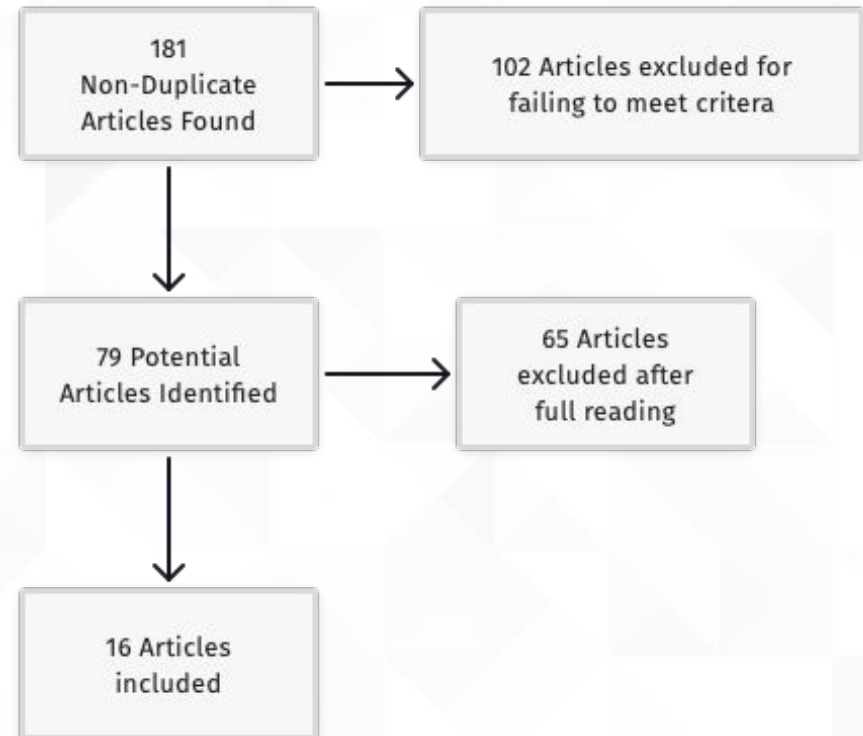
Priority	Votes (n=dots)
Health care	15
Childcare	14
Transportation	12
Schooling and education	7
Mental health	4
Disability	3
Special needs	3
Elder care	2
Debt	2
Hygiene	2
Savings and rainy day	2
Alternate food baskets	1
Baby formula, diapers	1
Pets	0
Non-prescribed health needs	0

Table 1. Dimensions of poverty and their priority identified by community stakeholders in Saskatoon.

Results of our scoping review of the academic literature

Scoping Review

- Searched for articles in Canada that mentioned poverty in dimensions identified by community
- Retained articles that specifically presented methods for calculating these thresholds
- There were very few that actually took this final step





Priority	Votes (n=dots)	Academic Articles
Health care	15	0
Childcare	14	2
Transportation	12	2
Schooling and education	7	0
Mental health	4	0
Disability	3	0
Special needs	3	0
Elder care	2	0
Debt	2	0
Hygiene	2	0
Savings and rainy day	2	0
Alternate food baskets	1	0
Baby formula, diapers	1	0
Pets	0	0
Non-prescribed health needs	0	0
<hr/>		
COPL Dimensions		
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Food		4
Housing		4
Employment		4
Clothing		0
Other		0

Table 2. Dimensions of poverty and their priority covered in the academic literature.



Broad findings

1. There is a lot of academic writing on poverty but very little of it is of practical use
2. The priorities and focus of researchers do not reflect the priorities identified by community stakeholders in Saskatoon
3. Academic literature considers controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, and income, over and above household composition
4. There is very little emphasis on local measurement

Promising exception: living wage calculations

- There is no academic literature on how to calculate living wages
- Nonetheless, these calculations are routinely carried out in communities across Canada
- They are framed very differently

Expense	Cost
Food	\$866.99
Clothing	\$180.28
Shelter	\$1,209.42
Transportation	\$493.40
Other	\$798.81
Child Care	\$1078.33
Health Care	\$141.85
Advanced Education	\$100.00
Contingency Fund	\$195.65
Total	\$5037.98



Key takeaways and future steps



Key takeaways

- When using poverty thresholds to set benefits and services and their access, it's important to have a firm understanding of their design
- Population based poverty thresholds are not designed to accurately determine whether a single individual or household is poor
- Nonetheless, they can provide a helpful foundation. The COPL is particularly amenable to modularization and modification
- For now at least, the government and community sectors are on their own. Academia is apparently disinterested in this problem



More to come

- We are still working on three written deliverables for this project which we will share in the coming weeks:
 - A report summarizing all the key findings from the study (this presentation, but in more detail)
 - An academic paper presenting the results of our scoping review and raising alarm about the incongruity we've identified between research and practice
 - An academic paper explaining the strengths and limitations of the COPL in local and practice contexts



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Thank you

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