



Defining Homelessness

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Homeless Gap Analysis: Defining Homelessness

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides a homeless definition that is used by all homeless service providers that accept HUD funding.
 - Throughout the Homeless Gap project a common theme emerged that there is a gap in philosophy regarding how to help the homeless.
 - Differences in philosophy can be seen even from the various ways people choose to define homelessness.

Methods

Researchers asked two questions in the Gap Analysis survey regarding how homelessness should be defined:

- “How do you define homelessness?” (Open Response)
- “Do you think the definition of homelessness is most effective when it is defined narrowly or when it is defined more broadly?” (Scale 1-5)
- Content Analysis was used to aggregate the open responses into 8 non-exclusive categories.

References

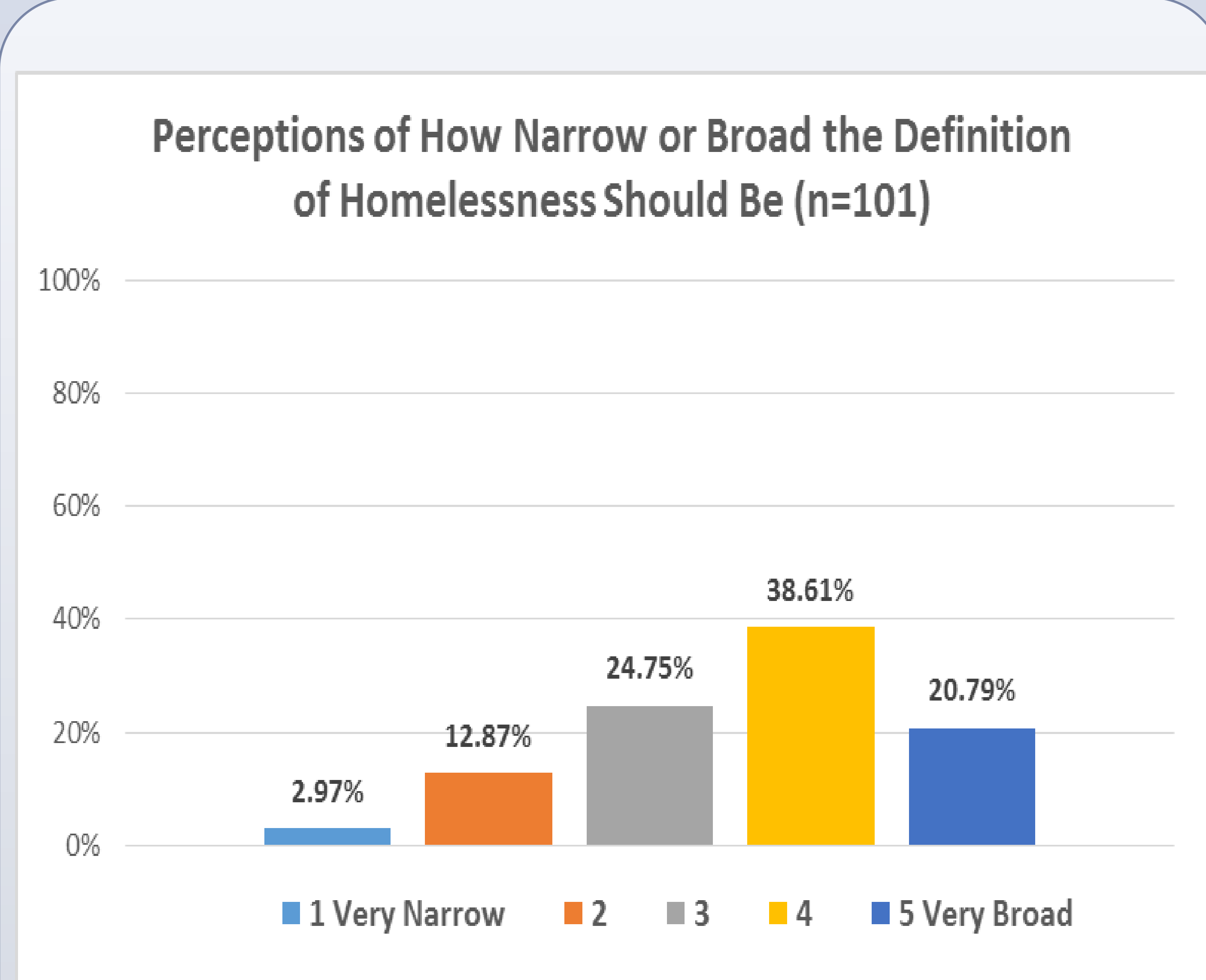
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Results

Homelessness is more than an individual	• “A person (family) that is not housing stable...”
Not having a physical address	• “Anyone not having a physical address”
Unstable, temporary, or transitional accommodations	• “An individual who has no shelter or who is couch surfing or staying with family, using hospital for a place to stay the night.”
Unsafe, unprotected, or uninhabitable conditions	• “Homelessness is the lack of shelter. Living in inhabitable conditions that are unsafe, risk to health and safety of individual”
Lack of ownership, private space	• “If it is not “their” housing with their name or parent’s name on the lease or mortgage I consider them homeless.”
Regulation, government, or policy-driven	• “I refer to HUD definition...”
Not having a place to store stuff or perform personal tasks	• “Homelessness is when individual doesn't have a place to keep belonging and a key to a door.”
Not having a place to stay	• “An individual who has no shelter or who is couch surfing or staying with family, using hospital for a place to stay the night.”



Conclusions

The data are supportive of a broad definition in order to effectively serve the homeless population.

Local leaders may not have the ability to alter the federal HUD definition, however local leaders may still tailor non-HUD resources toward local needs based on how the community defines homelessness.

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