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Safe Streets for Whom:
An in-depth look at the Harms Associated with the Safe Streets Act

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Abstract

Homelessness is a problem that exists in every city around the world. Citizens want this problem to go away, but instead the homeless population continues to grow. The laws that are put in place in cities are supposed to help citizens – most times they do, but people living in poverty rarely receive the help they need, instead undergoing harm. This thesis examines the Safe Streets Act and the harms that laws can bring to people experiencing homelessness or poverty. This study analyzed literature that looked at the components of the Safe Streets Act, as well as the harms that can come from the Act or similar laws. Two face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with personnel who work with people experiencing homeless, both in different capacities. Results were gathered by looking at four different themes that appeared frequently throughout the literature, as well as in the interviews. Based on the research, the study concludes that my results agree with existing literature on the harms of laws.

April 3rd, 2018

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Introduction

Hungry, broke and cold – anything helps. We as a society see these signs in every city we go to, held by those in need of shelter, food, and income. “Spare some change?” they call out to us while we pass them on the street. Some of us give pocket change, while some will say “no” and keep walking. Even at the end of the day, these people will not have enough to pay a month’s worth of rent, let alone give them enough for food for the next few days. Unfortunately, the homeless is a population that is growing larger every year. Even worse, many people look down on the homeless with the stereotypes that they brought their homelessness on themselves, they spend the money they get on drugs and alcohol, that they are beyond help, and that they are a waste of space that needs to be moved away from the public eye. Rarely are these stereotypes true – most of the time, circumstances beyond a person’s control can leave them homeless and without anything to call their own. The homeless are in need of our help, but yet we as a society choose to listen to moral panics and our government saying that the homeless are dangerous and drug addicted, and that rules and laws should be implemented to keep them away from us. Simply put, upper-class citizens and people in power criminalize lower-class citizens because they are not of the same capital or social status. This is what my thesis seeks to address – the criminalization of the homeless and other marginalized groups and the harms that can come to them due to laws put in place that work against them. This is a very important topic, as the homeless population in Halifax has been growing for the past few years and little has been done to help them, let alone address the severity of the issue. Addressing the harms that homeless and marginalized groups face daily may bring to focus just how in need of our help that they really are, as well as hopefully create action to aide them and help get them off of the streets.

My thesis is broken down into five sections. The first section reveals my research

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question that is the force behind my thesis, then I will be going on to explain existing literature on the law I will be focusing on, the Safe Streets Act. It also explains the Safe Streets Act that Halifax was supposed to enact, but did not; instead choosing to ticket the homeless via the Motor Vehicle Act. Also in this section is existing literature on the homeless; that is, the negative stereotypes and assumptions that people hold against them. In the book *Disorderly People*, there are three chapters that are relevant to my thesis that I will be discussing: what harms squeegeers face on a daily basis; the debate on public versus private space and how this relates to people experiencing homelessness; and how the Safe Streets Act violates the panhandlers freedom of expression, as seen in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Next, I will discuss the literature on some of the many harms that can come to the homeless because of laws put in place. Finally, I will talk about articles found on the search engine Eureka and from Halifax's newspaper the *Coast* that detail some of the events and aspects of harm that took place here in Halifax when the Safe Streets Act was being proposed.

The next section will focus on my research objectives and aims – why I am doing this research and what I seek to accomplish from doing it.

The following section explains the theories (Broken Window Theory, Social Disorganization Theory) that I will be using to guide my research as well as new and future studies that use their designs, concluding the section with why they are important for my thesis.

The fourth section is focused on my research methods and design. This will explain the method that I am using to conduct my research (interviews) and why they are important. I will also discuss the participants of my research – who they are, why I chose them, and the steps that I took to invite them to participate in my study. I have also included a small sub-section within this section explaining what Navigator Street Outreach program is; who they are, what they do,

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and the projects that they are involved with.

Finally, the last section of my thesis is my results and conclusion section, which contains my results of my interviews, in which I have chosen the four main themes that I found occurred the most throughout the interview; as well as my closing conclusions, how my method of interviewing was beneficial to my study, limitations and implications of my study, and future research ideas and suggestions. In the Appendix section I have included the recruitment script I emailed to my participants to invite them to join my study, the consent form I gave to them before conducting the interviews, the ten interview questions that I asked my participants, and the transcriptions of the interviews from both Wayne Mason and Eric Jonsson.

Background and Literature Review

The research question that I am seeking to answer in my thesis is "In what ways does the Safe Streets Act cause harm to the homeless?" When reading articles that relate to my topic, three main themes appeared: the law itself (the Safe Streets Act), the way citizens treat the homeless (usually negatively, hence the title "Disorderly People"), and the harm that is brought onto the homeless from laws and citizens. Because the Safe Streets Act was also proposed here in Halifax, I have included a subsection called "Halifax and the Safe Streets Act". This subsection explains seven main events that happened during the time the Safe Streets Act was in the proposal stages here in Halifax; almost all of these events include some aspect of harm done to those living in poverty. This section explains the themes in detail.

Safe Streets Act

The Safe Streets Act was proposed in 1999 in Toronto, Ontario, to "wipe out street corner squeegee squads in Toronto", as said by then Liberal MPP Michael Cole (Hermer & Mosher, 2002). Coming into effect January 31st, 2000, the Act outlawed squeegee cleaning in Ontario,

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thus bringing great trouble to the squeegeers, as this form of work was their only source of income. The Act begins by defining “solicit” which it says means to “request, in person, the immediate provision of money or another thing of value, regardless of whether consideration is offered or provided in return, using the spoken, written or printed word, a gesture or other means” (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s.1). The Act states that “Solicitation in an aggressive manner is prohibited” (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s. 2 (2)), where “aggressive manner” is “a manner that is likely to cause a reasonable person to be concerned for his or her safety or security” (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s. 2 (1)). The examples the law includes of aggressive solicitation are as follows:

- 1: Threatening the person solicited with physical harm, by word, gesture or other means, during the solicitation or after the person solicited responds or fails to respond to the solicitation.
- 2: Obstructing the path of the person solicited during the solicitation or after the person solicited responds or fails to respond to the solicitation.
- 3: Using abusive language during the solicitation or after the person solicited responds or fails to respond to the solicitation.
- 4: Proceeding behind, alongside or ahead of the person solicited during the solicitation or after the person solicited responds or fails to respond to the solicitation.
- 5: Soliciting while intoxicated by alcohol or drugs.
- 6: Continuing to solicit a person in a persistent manner after the person has responded negatively to the solicitation. (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s. 2 (3)).

The Act then goes on to say that the solicitation of a captive audience is prohibited, with examples of a captive audience being:

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- 1: A person who is using, waiting to use, or departing from an automated teller machine.
- 2: A person who is using or waiting to use a pay telephone or a public toilet facility.
- 3: A person who is waiting at a taxi stand or a public transit stop.
- 4: A person who is in or on a public transit vehicle.
- 5: A person who is in the process of getting in, out of, on or off a vehicle or who is in a parking lot.
- 6: While on a roadway, solicit a person who is in or on a stopped, standing or parked vehicle. (*Safe Streets Act, 1999, c.8, s. 3 (2)*).

For someone that is homeless, this does not give them many options on where they can panhandle, let alone be around the public. Esmonde (2002) criticizes the definition of “solicitation” for being so broad; giving the example of a homeless person that is in need is in violation of the act simply by being present in large areas of public space, though they have nowhere else to go. Rook and Sexsmith (2017) criticize the Act as being too vague in its language, where its definition of aggressive panhandling can indeed be aggressive and dangerous to one person, but may be less daunting to another. This is also true of what the Act deems to be a “reasonable person”, as most people have their own standards and characteristics of what it means.

However, solicitation does not apply to charities or any fundraising events. Persons who are fundraising are free from getting fined, as long as: “1. They are conducted by a charitable organization registered under the *Income Tax Act* (Canada) on a roadway where the maximum speed limit is 50 kilometers per hour. 2. They are permitted by a by-law of the municipality in which the activities are conducted.” (*Safe Streets Act, 2005, c. 32, s. 1*).

For the homeless that are charged with any of these offences, consequences can be

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severe. For someone charged with a first offence, fines can be up to \$500. For each subsequent conviction that is faced, the fine can be anywhere from not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment of up to six months, or both (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s. 5 (1)). Sending the homeless to jail gets them off of the streets, but into harsher environments, now with the added label of ‘criminal’ when they only had to worry about the label of ‘homeless’ before. Also, a police officer is able to carry out an arrest without a warrant if they believe on reasonable or probable grounds that a person has violated section 2, 3 and/or 4, if:

“a) before the alleged contravention of section 2, 3 or 4, the police officer directed the person not to engage in activity that contravenes that section; or b) the police officer believes on reasonable and probable grounds that it is necessary to arrest the person without warrant in order to establish the identity of the person or to prevent the person from continuing or repeating the contravention” (*Safe Streets Act*, 1999, c.8, s.7).

Here in Halifax, our own version of the Safe Streets Act was proposed in 2005, but was never enacted. Our proposed law was almost a word-for-word replica of Ontario’s Act, using the exact same examples of aggressive solicitation and captive audiences. The offence and conviction section of the proposed law is also very similar to Ontario’s, but instead of Ontario’s subsequent convictions being up to \$1,000 fine or imprisonment of up to six months or both, our is subsequent convictions being not less than \$200 but no more than \$1,000 fine or imprisonment of up to six months or both.

When this bill was not passed here in Halifax, police began ticketing the homeless through the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act, section 173A: Selling or Soliciting on a Roadway.

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This section states that:

(1) No person, while on a roadway, shall stop, attempt to stop or approach a motor vehicle for the purpose of offering, selling or providing any commodity or service to or soliciting the driver or any other person in the motor vehicle.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to the offer, sale or provision of towing or repair services or any other commodity or service in an emergency.

(3) Subsection (1) does not apply to fund-raising activities that are (a) permitted by a by law of the municipality in which the activities are conducted; and (b) approved by the traffic authority responsible for the roadway on which the activities are conducted.

As the reader can see, these laws are extremely hurtful to the homeless population – by giving them tickets that they will never be able to pay off, by sending them to prison because they are out trying to find ways to earn income, the government is making the homeless stay homeless, as opposed to helping them get back on their feet.

In a chapter in *Poverty, Regulation and Social Justice*, Claire McNeil writes about the Safe Streets Act and how it came to be proposed in Halifax, its effects, the reactions, and the end result. In 2002, the Halifax police force took aim at removing squeegeers and panhandlers off of the streets by charging them under a “vintage municipal by-law regulating the use of signs, and a very old but never previously enforced section of the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act (MVA), restricting the use of the streets by pedestrians” (McNeil, 2010, p. 150). Surprisingly, Nova Scotia legislation has even been taking aim at loitering as early as 1941, allowing police to arrest or detain those who they believe are in violation of said legislation.

In 2000, squeegee kids became the centre of media attention for doing a service to earn money instead of just holding out a cup and asking for change. Here in Halifax, police assigned a

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special Problem Solving Unit of officers, where they conducted a six-week review of the squeegeers by assigning many officers to the “problem” spots where squeegeers were found. Here, police would question the young squeegeers, made a list of names of those who were involved, issued warnings, and charged those who were repeat offenders under the MVA, an Act that had never been used to charge individuals prior to this situation (McNeil, 2010). During this time, police found twenty-one squeegee kids working at six different intersections in Halifax. In regards to charges, police noted that after four summary offense tickets were issued to an offender, police had the right to arrest and detain the suspect. There were thirty-nine charges filed under the MVA as well as the signs by-law (McNeil, 2010). Thousands of dollars were issued from these fines, in which panhandlers and squeegeers could not pay due to their evident lack of jobs and financial support, resulting in many youths leaving Halifax and the region to avoid being punished further.

Support for squeegeers and panhandlers was found in the staff at Ark Outreach, a drop-in centre for street-involved youths. Squeegeers were being bombarded with tickets, leaving them with a sense of despair in not being able to provide for themselves. Ark Outreach turned to Dalhousie Legal Aid Services for help to argue against the tickets, to try and bring back some fight and strength back into the youth. As a result, there were twenty not guilty pleas entered between August and September of 2002 (McNeil, 2010). When lengthy delays pushed court dates back further, youth began to travel elsewhere due to lack of services to meet their needs while awaiting court. By June 2003, only one youth stayed within the city to contest the charges (McNeil, 2010, p. 155). It was not until the trial of *R. v. McCluskey* that the issues of legality and fining came to a head in court, when Mr. McCluskey was charged under section 127(2) of the MVA; an offence that makes it illegal to walk “along or upon” a roadway.

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In the end, the court's decision was that "selectively targeting a disadvantaged group with criminal sanctions violates the defendant's equality rights under section fifteen of the Charter.", and that "the law, which prevented pedestrians from walking "upon or along a roadway" was vague and overly broad, and thus contrary to section seven of the Charter" (McNeil, 2010, p. 159). The law was so broad that for any reason that a person might step off a curb, other than crossing the street, might result in charges. The result of the trial was that charges against Mr. McCluskey were dropped, and that section 127(2) of the MVA was seen as overly broad and contrary to the principles of fundamental justice, as well as section seven of the Charter. After the trial was over, there was little to no charging instances against squeegeers or panhandlers at intersections.

Disorderly People

Instead of the homeless being viewed as people that need our help, they are viewed as people that are muddying up our public spaces, that are dangerous and who need to be banished from the public eye. In the book *Disorderly People*, it is squeegee kids that are the focus of homelessness; the reason why the Safe Streets Act came into being. They are seen as the cause of traffic congestion, and accused of constantly harassing motorists for money. Containing eight chapters, different authors discuss different facets of harm that come to Ontarians due to laws that are put in place; namely the Safe Streets Act and the Ontario Works Act. I will be discussing three chapters within this book that are relevant to my thesis: the first chapter, which interviews squeegeers and what troubles they might face in a day; the second chapter, which explains the divide of public versus private space and how they both are shrinking for the homeless, leaving them with few options; and the fourth chapter, which discusses how the Safe Streets Act violates ones freedom of expression, as found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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In the first chapter, O’Grady and Bright (2002) explain squeegeeing – small groups of homeless youth that appear in many intersections throughout Toronto with a bucket full of soapy water and a squeegee in hand, ready to wash vehicles windshields in exchange for a couple of dollars. While the squeegee youth are actually working to earn their money as opposed to just begging, motorists feel threatened by them due to unavoidable contact, the cause of traffic congestion, harassment of motorists, and the engagement of territorial fights over street corners and intersections (O’Grady & Bright, 2002). A few squeegee kids are interviewed by the authors to hear their side of the story; what harms they might face in the run of a day. Hugh was the oldest squeegee kid that was interviewed. He thinks that people in Toronto view him as a “second-class citizen” because of his homelessness and choice of work (O’Grady & Bright, 2002, p. 25). Other squeegeers agreed with Hugh – a man wearing a suit and tie would not get harassed by police and other citizens, but yet squeegeers do. Some squeegeers like Lindsay even reported verbal and physical harassment from local police; that they will constantly use intimidation or coercion tactics to try and get squeegeers off of the roads and put into prison. Aggressive drivers can be just as bad as police at times, too. Many squeegeers report being given the finger, pieces of fruit thrown at them, being spat at or threatened. Some have reported getting their foot run over, and even Lindsay reported that a motorist tried to pull her into his car (O’Grady & Bright, 2002, p. 30). Luckily, she managed to escape without injury. Unfortunately, motorists do not get stopped by police or ticketed for their behaviour towards squeegeers, but if a squeegee tries to defend themselves against an irate motorist, as one squeegee attempted to do, he was thrown in jail for four and a half months (O’Grady & Bright, 2002, p. 31). Most squeegeers are out doing this work to try and survive and to actually work for their money, yet motorists and police officers are undermining their work and causing them additional harms

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asides from being homeless and experiencing the dangers of the roads. The lack of ‘proper’ jobs, housing, nice brand-name clothing, clean faces – everything that relates or connects to a squeegee or homeless person is seen as corrupt and evil. The reality of it, however, is simply because people do not like others that are different from ourselves.

Chapter two begins with a dismal look at some of the statistics that show the reality of poverty: welfare benefits were cut by 21.6 percent; eligibility criteria for welfare assistance was tightened; and the more knowledge that was learned about welfare fraud, the more that it led to increased scrutiny and surveillance on welfare recipients (Mosher, 2002, p. 41). Mosher then goes on to explain the divide between public and private in relation to work and family: work is public, family is private. Privacy can also be seen as the “norm of exclusion” (Mosher, 2002, p. 42); private property gives the owner of the property the choice of who they let onto their land, the ability as an individual to choose what one will share with others or keep to themselves. The author of this chapter notes that privacy is usually represented in a good light, something that people value and is something to cherish. However, not everyone in society, specifically the poor, can enjoy the luxury of privacy. They themselves, along with their belongings and every aspect of their life, are out in public view. The norms that coincide with the concept of public are fairness, impartiality and equality (Mosher, 2002, p. 45). Yet, we know that these norms may not always be respected or practiced, especially when people living in poverty are involved. For example, the sidewalks are considered a public space – everyone has a right to use them, no permission is needed. The sidewalk is one of the main places one might see a panhandler, and yet people will yell at them to leave and tell them that they are not welcome within this space – so much for equality and fairness. People experiencing homelessness do not have a space that they can call theirs and theirs alone; everything that they have is also belonging to everyone else

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around them, save for their personal items. The homeless are not allowed to sleep in public, because people do not want to see their dirtiness. They are not allowed to share the sidewalk, because they are taking up too much space. They are not allowed to eat in a nearby restaurant, because they do not have the money or it makes the business look bad – the list goes on. Everything that people experiencing homelessness do is always in front of the public eye, even things that we would do in private like sleeping, bathing and eating (Mosher, 2002). There is not a single aspect of life when living in poverty that is not seen by the public, eliminating the notion of privacy completely.

It has been mentioned in many readings that the Safe Streets Act is very broad when defining aggressive solicitation because of the way it targets panhandling and squeegeeing directly, even without mentioning the words (Esmonde, 2002; Lightstone, 2007; McNeil, 2010). However, the Act does more than just ban aggressive soliciting – it bans soliciting of all types, rendering panhandling illegal. It is for that reason that the author of this chapter, Richard Moon, argues that the Safe Streets Act is a violation of one's freedom of expression, as found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Moon begins by quoting the Supreme Court of Canada when they defined “expression” in subsection 2(b) of the Charter as “any act that conveys a message” (*Attorney General of Quebec v. Irwin Toy* 1989: 969, in Moon, 2002, p. 67). Moon then says that soliciting and begging fall under expression, because begging “conveys a message... begging involves a request to passers-by for money. The request may be made by spoken or written word or by holding out or displaying a cup or hat” (Moon, 2002, p. 67). Begging is a request for money, hence why it bears a resemblance to commercial advertising like we see in everyday media – it is profit-oriented. Advertisements make us want to buy whatever product the company is selling, either because it looks cool, it is popular, or we feel that it is

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something that we need in our lives. To make the connection, profit is the motive for both the panhandler and the salesperson: the salesperson might get a raise in pay or commission on the item sold, however, the panhandler is making profit to live. Moon (2002) points out that the advertisement of a panhandler is not an advertisement that passers-by would view as important or something that they as a consumer would benefit from, thus the panhandler is ignored. A person can see numerous panhandlers throughout their day, all with variations on their advertisements that ask for money. People become overwhelmed, Moon says, because of its invasiveness; its “message of need does not fit within the dominant discourse of lifestyle-based consumption” (Moon, 2002, p. 71). What people do not understand is that panhandlers are not just asking for money when they beg, they are asking for help – help that can be achieved by a food donation or spare change – yet people continue to ignore them, still wondering why the problem will not go away.

Harm

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), ‘harm’ is defined as “to damage or injure physically or mentally: to cause harm.” In this section, I will explain a list of harms that can occur to the homeless. It is noteworthy to keep in mind that these are not the only harms that can be caused by homelessness, but those listed are the most predominant in the literature.

First, Claire McNeil discusses in her chapter about Halifax and the Safe Streets Act the trial of *R. v. McCluskey*, where Dr. Jeff Karabanow, an expert on homeless youth culture, took the stand to address the harms that can be caused due to the actions of the police and the Act. Karabanow explained that most street-involved youth end up in their current situations due to poverty and lack of social support from family. Many of the youth have had experiences with foster care and/or the child welfare system and have been bounced between homes, leaving them

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to look to the streets after enough unpleasant experiences. Addictions and depression were the by-product rather than the cause of living on the street (McNeil, 2010, p. 158). Karabanow concluded by saying that the transience of youth in poverty is mainly due to police harassment and mistreatment; the goal for them is to get away before more harm falls upon them.

Illness is extremely prevalent amongst the homeless. The homeless can be malnourished, unable to get proper sleep, and when they get sick they are unable to access proper health care. Their lack of living space is another contributing factor – the stress of not having a roof over one’s head, the communicable diseases and sickness one can be faced with when living in groups faced with similar situations as themselves, and exposure to the elements all aid in illness (Gaetz, 2012). Gaetz mentions a study done in his article *The Real Cost of Homelessness* that mentions that the homeless are 29 times more likely to have Hepatitis C, 20 times more likely to have epilepsy, 5 times more likely to have heart disease, 4 times more likely to have cancer, 3.5 times more likely to have asthma, and 3 times more likely to have arthritis or rheumatism (Gaetz, 2012, p. 7). The issue is not the types of sickness -- people that have proper housing are at risk of contracting the same diseases – but the lack of housing that is basically killing the homeless that much quicker.

Prisons and the justice system are another factor that can harm the homeless. Rook and Sexsmith (2017) stated that those with lower income are more likely to be arrested than someone with a higher, more stable income. In Gaetz’s (2012), he states that roughly one in five prisoners were homeless when incarcerated. When released from prison, there is a higher likelihood that the homeless will reoffend (Gaetz, 2012). Because the homeless person now has a criminal record from being in prison, it is less likely that he/she will find work due to the label of ‘criminal’, as well as less likely to find halfway housing or even afford general housing (Rook, &

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Sexsmith, 2017). These are all harms that can come from ticketing and policing the homeless. Gaetz (2012) found that because of the Safe Streets Act, there were 67,388 tickets issued to panhandlers; a value totalling more than four million dollars. Only \$8,086.56 were able to be paid back from those fines, yet the debt of the tickets stays with the homeless person for life.

Prostitution is one of the more dangerous harms that is more prevalent to the homeless female; one that can result in death or disease. Prostitution is a way that the homeless, particularly of the younger generation, can find a source of income. Drug use, as will be discussed next, is a key factor in why youth will engage in prostitution – either to receive drugs as the payment, or to get money to buy drugs (Rook & Sexsmith, 2017). In Rook and Sexsmith's article, it was found that roughly one in three youth living on the streets has had some experience with prostitution. Unfortunately, prostitution can great harms to the homeless – unprotected sex can leave a female pregnant, unable to care for herself or the baby, STD's can be transmitted, or youth could become trafficked.

Drug use and homelessness are strongly correlated, according to Rook and Sexsmith (2017). Research shows that 30% to 40% of the homeless population studied abused alcohol, while 10% to 30% abused other substances. Drug use may be a result of homelessness (used all of their money to support their drug habit), or the stress of being homeless (the hardships) may also be a result of drug use. Rook and Sexsmith also mentions that those who use drugs are also more likely to sell them, which could get them in trouble with the law.

Lack of schooling is harm that is more prevalent to the younger homeless. In a power point done by Rachael Collins, it is said that kids that are kicked out of their homes with negative or abusive relationships with parents are the ones who turn to squeegeeing to make their income. These children do not have high education levels; only 25% of homeless youth studied had

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completed high school. Those that did not graduate from high school were either expelled due to bad behaviour (which could stem from home life), or that they had dropped out. Those youth that did not finish high school cannot find employment, due to not having the right requirements. Those youth that did finish high school cannot find employment because they do not have enough income for clothes to look presentable, or because they do not have a permanent address (required for cheques/deposits).

Physical harm is amongst one of the greater harms, one that could result in injury or death. In *Disorderly People*, squeegeers in Toronto recount some close calls that they had with motorists when they were trying to clean the motorist's windshields. Lindsay mentioned that one motorist tried to pull her into his car when she was reaching out to get her change from cleaning his windshield. Luckily, she was able to smack him and get away. Another story told was that of Christian's, who was lightly hit by a car while out squeegeeing. Christian in turn punched the driver, which ended up giving him a four and a half month sentence of jail time, whereas the driver was not charged. The homeless are always at risk of getting injured or killed because of people who do not like them, or what they stand for – a true injustice, where before poverty, they might have been an ordinary person, walking down the street.

Halifax and the Safe Streets Act

This section explores some of the noteworthy events and happenings here in Halifax during the timeframe that the Safe Streets Act was proposed and in the process of being reviewed. My data from this section came from reading thirty-two articles that I found on *The Coast's* website (an on-line and in-print newspaper that has information on just about everything in and around Halifax) and Eureka, a search engine found in the university's library database that can access newspaper articles and different forms of media. I found these articles by searching

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“Safe Streets Act” Halifax on google, finding the *Coast*’s articles; as well as in Eureka’s search engine, clicking on “all content” and “all archives”, as the Safe Streets Act proposal here in Halifax is almost fourteen years old, making it not new or relevant information at this time. In this section, I will talk about seven events and/or happenings that either appeared more than once in these newspaper articles, or that I found to be in relation with the topic of harm for my thesis.

The first event that was talked about in many articles was about a man named Christopher Neale and the City Hall meeting regarding the proposal of the Safe Streets Act. On June 14th, 2005, Neale and ten others from the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty were sitting in the public gallery for a meeting about the proposed Safe Streets Act in council chambers. During this meeting, Mayor Peter Kelly denied the activists a chance to speak before the councillors voted 21-3 on a motion to propose the Safe Streets Act (Mackinlay, 2005). An uproar began over the Act, causing many people to be asked to leave; however, Neale stayed and was subsequently ushered out by police and then ticketed \$215 (Bornais, 2005). In the same article, Bornais (2005) said that Neale told the court that the municipal clerk nor the police had any authority to ask him to leave the chamber, and that he had “legal justification” to stay because he believed that the council was debating the legislation and it was the public’s right to be allowed to be in attendance. During this uproar, councillor Steve Streach, who was in favour of enacting the Safe Streets Act, gestured to the Coalition and told them to “take a bag and clean up some garbage” for money (Mackinlay, 2005). Neale eventually lost the fight over the ticket and had to pay it.

The next story only appeared once in the *Coast*, but the story itself was so shocking with the factor of harm towards people experiencing homelessness that it is definitely noteworthy. A campaign was made by the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission (DDBC) to target aggressive panhandlers and get them off of the streets and away from local businesses. The way

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that they planned on accomplishing this was by giving stickers to local business owners that state that panhandling is illegal, noting city ordinance 180-41-1 and also placing a phone number for the police on these stickers (Landry, 2007). Evidently, this is a lie; seeing as panhandling is not illegal – it is protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as mentioned in *Disorderly People*. Landry also points out that the city ordinance is only applicable in Halifax, not Dartmouth. Even though the stickers are not factual, it did not stop DDBC executive director Tim Olive from distributing them. Landry writes that Olive hopes that the stickers will gain an increased police presence around the businesses and for the public to register complaints with police if they have any issues with aggressive panhandlers. The shocking information? Landry interviewed police Constable Jeff Carr, who said that what the DDBC is doing is not illegal; it is not a crime to distribute the stickers. The stickers seemed to have gained a lot of attention and support; retailers were asking for more to be put in their windows and there was a lack in presence of people experiencing homelessness. However, there are people who felt that these stickers were a bad idea – it is not right to lie to panhandlers and scare them away. At the end of the article, Landry mentioned that the DDBC is looking into a partnership with the Capital District Task Force and HRM community services to provide education and employment to panhandlers in the area, as well as lobbying for more mental health programs and initiatives.

In a few of the articles, panhandlers were interviewed about their opinion on the Act, squeegeeing, and aggressive panhandlers. The *Coast's* Lezlie Lowe interviewed two squeegee kids named Danielle Talbot and Jonathan McAuley back in 2008. Talbot said that during her time squeegeeing, she had people yell at her, had motorists banging on their windows, getting out of their vehicles, and sometimes even trying to hit her with their car (Lowe, 2008). Talbot receives welfare, but only receives \$560 to try and pay for her \$850 apartment with her

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roommate, not including any other bills, groceries, or the necessities to survive. The rest she makes by going out and squeegeeing. Jonathan McAuley was named the “good Samaritan” squeegee kid after chasing down the attackers of a 66-year-old woman who was assaulted in the Commons in the previous year. Strangers would come up to him and congratulate him on a job well done, but as the months passed, “good job” would eventually turn back into “get a job” (Lowe, 2008). Another panhandler named Rowan Kafka is diabetic, so he panhandles for money to get speciality food because his social assistance cannot afford all of the rent bill and food costs. When he panhandles outside of Shoppers Drug Mart on Spring Garden Road, he says that people will yell and swear at him (Jones, 2005). Scott MacPhee, another squeegeer, feared that if the Safe Streets Act was passed in Nova Scotia, that squeegeers and panhandlers would resort to crime to try and get some money. MacPhee panhandles because he is “not a criminal” and “wants to keep some self-respect” (Visser, 2007). The final squeegee kid that was interviewed in these articles was named Michael, who did not want to give out his last name. He says that he has already racked up \$30,000 in fines for just standing in traffic, because he says that intersections are the only places where he can make money because the vehicles have to stop due to traffic lights (Pugsley-Fraser & Smith, 2007).

With everyone looking to get panhandlers off the street, some legitimate sellers are being roped in with the panhandlers, even though their sales are perfectly legal and is their every day job. One woman who works for a Halifax newspaper called Street Feat was kicked off of public property on numerous occasions, including by the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, the Tim Hortons on Barrington Street, and Spring Garden Road (Mac, 2005). Of course the seller, Holly, got mad because there are a lot of people who sell items on Spring Garden Road. Street Feat began its debut back in 1998 to “provide a voice for the city’s poor” (Mac, 2005). The vendors

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will buy copies for 75 cents and sell them for \$1.50, additionally keeping any tips that they might make. Street Feat's editor, Juan Carlos Canales-Layton, said that the newspaper has had troubles in the past with guards on Spring Garden Road chasing them away, but Canales-Layton along with the Halifax Regional Police know that it is not illegal to sell the newspaper, as long as vendors are not selling aggressively. However, businesses along the waterfront do not permit selling on the waterfront without approval. The president of the Waterfront Development Corporation heard about Holly's misfortune and said that they might review the rules set in place and change it to be more like the streets of Spring Garden – vendors can sell, as long as they are not aggressive.

Aggressive panhandling has been one of the biggest issues that many citizens and lawmakers are seeking to bring to an end with the arrival of the Safe Streets Act proposal. Throughout many of the articles that I have read, the sentiment seems to be that it is not panhandling that is the issue, it is the people that become aggressive when trying to ask for money or who do not receive it. In an article written by Virginia Insua of the Daily News (2007), news of four panhandlers that stabbed and killed a man in Toronto have citizens of Halifax worried that our homeless population could do the same to anyone here. One of the people that Insua interviewed in this article said that a panhandler yelled at her when she declined to give them money (Insua, 2007). According to RCMP spokesperson Joe Taplin, police can intervene when a panhandler becomes aggressive or are causing a disturbance. Signs of these behaviours can be “yelling, screaming, shouting, cursing, swearing” (Insua, 2007). Insua (2007) also writes that this incident is creating fear for other panhandlers that simply ask for change, nothing more. They are afraid that people will paint them all with the same brush, and have fear of them even though their intentions are good. In another article written by Rachel Boomer of the Daily News

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(2005), it was said that panhandlers are actually in agreeance with the proposed Safe Streets Act, because aggressive panhandlers can be stopped, making sure that all panhandlers are not given a bad name. Many of the panhandlers that are mentioned in this article stand silently with their cup in hand on Spring Garden Road or wish the passerby's a nice day, change or no change.

This article shows the good that can come out of people in bad times, as well as strength in numbers. A number of supporters plan on backing a man that was fined by police due to panhandling. According to Lightstone (2007), the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty has been backing said panhandler who did not want to be named since he was ticketed back in November 2005. The ticket was \$157 and filed under the provincial Motor Vehicle Act. The Halifax Coalition Against Poverty argue that "the man is poor and was within his rights to ask for spare change", "police were out of line to even ask the man to move" and that "the legislation is overly broad and allows police to discriminate against poor people who panhandle and squeegee along roadways" (Lightstone, 2007). The article then gives a list of panhandling hotspots, such as Barrington, Argyle and Sackville Streets and Spring Garden Road, along with the Halifax Commons, the Windsor Street Exchange, and near the Dartmouth Sportsplex. These hotspots remain as busy as ever, even present day. The Halifax Coalition Against Poverty will remain strong in their support of this man, arguing that municipal officials and police have better things to do with their time than to ticket panhandlers.

The last event that appeared frequently within the articles was the Carnival of Resistance, an event that took place in Victoria Park that was organized by the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty. There was free food, puppet shows and live music, all in support to try to "bring awareness and protect legislation that would ban aggressive panhandling in Nova Scotia" (JONES, 2005). It was said that more than one hundred people attended the Carnival of

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Resistance, a weekend event (CP, 2005). Members of the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty urged citizens to look at the root causes of why people might panhandle, such as the lack of affordable housing, low social-assistance rates, and how low minimum wage is within the province. By enacting this law, the city would be criminalizing panhandlers that have the right to ask for money, since what they are doing is legal and is their way of making means to survive. By using these articles and themes as the base for my research, I believe that I am in the right direction to answer my research question "In what ways does the Safe Streets Act cause harm to the homeless?"

Research Objectives and Aims

The specific objectives or questions that my research aims to achieve is identifying the harms that marginalized communities or groups can face due to certain laws that protect the people in the majority group, but not so much in the minority group. Looking back, I feel bad because some of the connotations and stereotypes that people hold about the homeless – they brought this on themselves, they're using the money that we give them for drugs and alcohol, they're an eyesore – I held the same ones. The more I read and the more information I found out about these harmful laws, I felt ashamed of my previous thinking. The overall aim of my thesis is to get people thinking like I did, to learn more about the Safe Streets Act and the harms that it can cause to the homeless or marginalized populations. By learning more in general about the harms of certain laws, and the affect they have on certain groups or communities, people will hopefully gain more knowledge on the situation and find a way to help end the harm. It will also aim to educate more people around Halifax on what they can do to help out the homeless, as well as show our city what great organizations we have put in place to help out those in need. Some of the questions that I have written out for the interview consist of job description, what our city

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was like before vs after the proposal of the Safe Streets Act and the allowance of ticketing via the Motor Vehicle Act, as well as questions centered on the experience of working with the homeless.

Theory

The theories that I used to guide my research are the Broken Window Theory, and Social Disorganization Theory. In this section, I will explain both theories in depth, as well as the current and future research that can be done with these theories, ending with why these theories are good for my research.

Broken Window Theory

Back in the mid 1970's, The State of New Jersey announced their "Safe and Clean Neighbourhoods Program" in twenty-eight cities. The goal of this program was to "improve the quality of community life" by sending police officers out of their vehicles and into the streets to do foot patrols (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 1). Officers thought that foot patrols were useless and a waste of time, as they reduced mobility, they were hard work, and officers had to be out in any type of weather (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Five years after the program had begun, an evaluation was done on the foot patrol project. The findings were that these foot patrols did not decrease the crime rates, but residents of neighbourhoods who had foot patrols taking place felt more secure, believed that there was a subsequent decrease in crime since the foot patrols had started, had a more favourable opinion of the police, and quite frankly were able to not live in fear (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). George Kelling was able to spend many hours walking with police officers on their foot patrols to see what they did to maintain peace and order within the neighbourhoods. Thus, after seeing the changes in neighbourhoods, Broken Window Theory was created by James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982. The theory posits that if there is a broken

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window in a building and nobody tries to fix it, it is seen as “abandonment, a lax attitude towards property, and therefore an absence of respect for the law” (Adams, 2006, p. 26). This leads others to show that this type of behaviour is acceptable here, in turn allowing more windows to be broken, and greater damage to occur, such as graffiti, trash accumulation, and criminal activities. People soon start to see this as a bad part of a neighborhood, or a bad part of town. Soon, the only people that will frequent these areas are panhandlers, prostitutes and drug dealers – citizens will avoid these areas so as to not become involved with any wrong-doing. They will “modify their behaviour accordingly”, according to Kelling and Wilson (1982): their house will become their new safe spot. Adams (2006) explains that even though it begins with one window in one building, it will soon spread to many other windows in the area. This makes neighbourhood residents fear for their safety, making them less likely to intervene for fear of getting hurt or killed. Fear can also make people avoid one another, weakening social controls. They might call the police and an arrest might occur once or twice, but crime and disorder is still rampant. Soon, citizens within the neighbourhood will stop calling the police because they believe that it is either ineffective or the officers are uncaring, continuing the cycle of fear and crime (Kelling & Wilson, 1982).

A good example of Broken Window theory is highlighted within the article, explaining more on Zimbardo’s 1969 experiment. An automobile without license plates and their hoods up were placed in a street in the Bronx and also in Palo Alto, California. The results were that the car in the Bronx was attacked within ten minutes of it being placed in the street; within twenty-four hours virtually everything was taken. After there was nothing left, destruction of the vehicle began – smashed windows, torn up seats, breaking anything that was left over. The culprits were “well-dressed, clean cut” white people (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 5). However, in Palo Alto,

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the car sat unscathed for more than a week. After the week, Zimbardo smashed part of the car with a sledgehammer, which signalled to others that this was acceptable and more people began to join in the wreckage. Again, these culprits were well-dressed white people. Basically, monkey-see, monkey do: almost all of these people would never commit to doing these types of activities by themselves, because they know it is against the law. However, when someone else begins the destruction of something or commits a criminal act and does not get caught, it signals to others that this behaviour is okay and they will also not be reprimanded.

So, how can someone stop one broken window from turning into a notorious bad part of town? Easy: Fix the window. If someone decides to break a window and attention is drawn to it immediately making sure that the window gets fixed, people will know that the neighbourhood cares about damage and that there is always a watchful eye in place. If the neighbourhood shows that they do not care, window after window will get broken. To quote Adams (2006), “Letting the small infractions slip by with no consequences creates an atmosphere that encourages people into believing that those small infractions aren’t a big deal” (Adams, 2006, p. 26). Another way that Kelling and Wilson (1982) saw as a solution was the collaborative effort between residents and police of the neighbourhood in question. Community members can become “watchmen” and do what they can in their own powers to keep crime at bay. If it is something out of their hands, they can report it to police and they will step in, removing the individual or stopping the trouble before it escalates. If you stop a small infraction when it starts, it will never get to be a bigger one.

Current research in Broken Windows is a study done by Ling Ren, Zhao and He (2017). The purpose of their study was to look at citizen involvement in maintaining public safety within their community by looking at core components of Broken Windows theory. Ling Ren, Zhao and

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He's (2017) research have made three contributions to Kelling and Wilson's (1982) work: looking at citizen withdrawal due to neighbourhood disorder, the ability to "see" the actual/objective disorder measures in one's neighbourhood due to visual cues by using smaller geographical units as opposed to large cities, and the ability to examine key factors of Broken Windows theory on the actual involvement in crime prevention in neighbourhoods with high or low concentrated disadvantages.

Ling Ren, Zhao and He's (2017) research methods were gathered from a professional survey firm as well as an address-based sample from a landline-phone survey. Participants were from Houston, aged eighteen and older. A total of 1,108 residents were interviewed. The researchers found that respondents believe that citizens have a responsibility in keep the streets safe from crime, should participate in a neighbourhood watch type of group, should provide law enforcement-related information to the police, and should help provide a safe neighbourhood for children (Ling Ren, Zhao, & He, 2017, p. 17). The researchers also found that the number of crime or nuisance-related incidents that occur within a .3 mile radius of their dwelling is a predictor of public perceptions of disorder, social disorders do increase ones fear of personal safety, and fear for personal safety has a negative effect on one's sense of collective efficacy within the neighbourhood.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social Disorganization Theory was created by Shaw and Mckay in 1942, after doing a study in Chicago that showed that high delinquency rates persisted in certain neighbourhoods regardless of different races and ethnicities that came and went over time. The majority of delinquents at this time were young boys, usually under seventeen years old. Shaw and Mckay (1942) defined 'male juvenile delinquency' as: "A boy under seventeen years of age who is

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brought before the Juvenile Court, or other courts having jurisdiction, on delinquency petition; or whose case is disposed of by an officer of the law without a court appearance” (Shaw and Mckay, 1942, p. 43). There were many different types of delinquency that the boys consisted of: school truants, alleged delinquents, and repeated offenders and recidivists. Delinquency areas of the city were the low-income areas of town, as well as industrial areas. The study looked at three time periods: 1900-1906, 1917-1923, and 1927-1933.

In the study done from 1927-33, there were 8,411 males that were charged with some form of delinquency. The delinquents were found to be near industrial and commercial areas; closest to the central business district. Many of the male’s families were low-income, or were on some sort of relief. In 1917-1923, the same 8,411 males were studied. The majority of the males were between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, with many similarities found in the location of the delinquent acts. In the 1900-1906 study, there were 8,056 delinquents, many of which were younger males than in the other studies; ages were between thirteen and fifteen. There were variations in locations of delinquency as well – concentrations were more restricted or closer to the central business district and industrial areas than what they were during the later studies (Shaw & Mckay, 1942).

All this being said, the theory does not focus on people committing crimes, rather the area (like a neighbourhood) that the crime is committed in; how these areas create conditions that are favourable or unfavourable to commit crimes (Kurbin & Weitzer, 2003). According to Kurbin and Weitzer (2003), social disorganization refers to the “inability of a community to realize common goals and solve chronic problems” (Kurbin & Weitzer, 2003, p. 374). The theory states that factors like poverty, residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity, and weak social networks all contribute to a decrease within the neighbourhood’s ability to control the behaviour

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of people, thus increasing the likelihood of criminal activity.

What are some solutions to decreasing the risks of social disorganization? To begin, if criminals know that there is a chance that they could get caught, there is less of a likelihood that they would go and try to commit the crime. Coupled with that is the area that one lives in – if the neighbourhood is focused around positive cultural norms, where they are shared, taught and enforced, citizens will see that this is not an area for criminal acts. Kurbin and Weitzer (2003) also suggest social ties and how people exercise social control in their neighbourhoods are also factors that contribute to the decrease in criminal activity. Examples of this would be programs like Neighbourhood Watch, programs that increase the surveillance of one's community to make sure that criminal activity is kept at bay. Social ties are the people we are friends or acquaintances with; positive social ties are with those that do not engage or promote criminal activity.

Current research done in Social Disorganization is done by Kurbin and Weitzer (2003). They explain some factors of Social Disorganization theory that need to be looked at and examined more thoroughly when studying the relationship between structural conditions and neighbourhood crime, such as informal control, social ties, social capital and collective efficacy. They also discuss other variables that receive little to no attention within social disorganization literature, such as neighbourhood culture, formal social control, and the urban political economy. Finally, Kurbin and Weitzer (2003) look at new methods being used to enhance ways to do research on Social Disorganization theory, such as dynamic models that allow measurements of the changes over time in neighbourhood crime and structures, reciprocal effects between social disorganization and crime; in particular how community organization shapes crime and vice versa, and neighbourhood contextual effects on individual outcomes, and spatial

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interdependence; which is how adjacent neighbourhoods may compare and contrast or affect the researched neighbourhood's level of crime and disorganization.

Why are these theories important for my research?

Broken Window Theory and Social Disorganization Theory are important for my research because it shows the divide of rich and poor, and how each group is treated. Both Esmonde's (2002) and Rook and Sexsmith's (2017) articles touch on panhandling versus charity groups and fundraisers, and what makes one more acceptable than the other. The answer? Class status and fear. Fear, as quoted from Kelling and Wilson's (1982) Broken Windows article, "Fear of being bothered by disorderly people. Not violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed." (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 3). Basically, this is why it is acceptable for organizations, university groups, charities – anyone really – to go out on a street corner and ask for money and it is fine, usually with lots of donations received. However, homeless people are outside panhandling every day, rain or shine, and it is seen as disgraceful because their clothes are torn, they are dirty, they smell bad, they do not have anything better to do with their time, and they are not using the money for good. Yet, both sets of people are asking for money. We see the homeless as the reason for rundown neighbourhoods; the ones creating the broken windows and social disorganization, the ones making others fear for their safety, that they are pushing drugs and have nothing but bad intentions. When we see university students and charities out asking for donations, or even just walking down the street, we think of all the good deeds that they do, how they are today's leaders, and how many people they help get out of bad situations. Why do the homeless always

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have to equate to bad neighbourhoods and bad people, when usually it is just the opposite? My research intends to answer this question in detail.

Methods

The way that I collected my research was through qualitative methods; both a mix of primary and secondary data. The secondary data that I used is similar to what has been explained earlier in my literature review – articles on the Safe Streets Act, the harms caused by such acts, and the ways (mostly negative) that people view the homeless and people of low-income status. The way that I collected my primary data was through semi-structured interviews, in which I had went through Saint Mary’s Research Ethics Board to obtain permission to conduct. I created a list of ten questions for the interview that took approximately a half an hour to complete. My participants allowed me to record the interview, subsequently transcribing them. The interview responses are used as my results section for my thesis. In this section, I will explain what an interview is, why they are important, and who my participants are for my research.

Interviews

The method of interviewing has been around for an incredibly long time, with the first documentations stemming back to the late 1800’s and early 1900’s (Lewis-Beck, 2004; Fontana, 2007). Interviews first became popular in clinical diagnosing and in counseling, later moving on to become a central method used in psychology so doctors could learn more about what their patients were experiencing (Fontana, 2007). In Sociology, Charles Booth is credited for introducing the interview to the field by conducting a survey of social and economic conditions in London (Fontana, 2007). According to Lewis-Beck (2004), “The purpose of qualitative interviewing in social science research today, as of qualitative research in general, is to understand the meanings of the topic of the interview to the respondent” (Lewis-Beck, 2004, p.

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521). Interviews usually have ten to fifteen questions that researchers plan on asking the respondents, and they can take anywhere from fifteen minutes to several hours (Lewis-Beck, 2004). The three most popular kinds of interviews are Structured, Semi-Structured (which is what I am doing), and Unstructured.

Structured interviews can include telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and interviews having to do with survey research can be included in this group (Fontana, 2007). The questions in this type of interview are usually pre-established, and are usually limited to the questions at hand, not typically allowing for questions that were not already planned to be asked. The same questions are read in the same sequence to all respondents; any explanations given in regards to the questions asked should be the same as well (ibid). It is up to the interviewer to make sure that no one answers for the participant, and that he/she (the interviewer) does not influence the respondent's answer in any way. Fontana (2007) mentions three problems that arise in structured interviews: how close-ended questions limit the respondent's answers, how interviewers are influenced by the nature of the context and the variations of respondent's, and that respondent's may not answer truthfully to make themselves appear in a better light to the interviewer.

Unstructured interviewing can include traditional interviewing, oral history, and creative interviewing (ibid). The researcher has an idea of the topic at hand, but does not have any set questions to ask the respondent. Fontana (2007) mentions that this type of interview is to understand the way of life of the respondents.

Semi-structured interviewing is a mixture between both structured and unstructured interviewing, leaving room for extra questions to be asked other than the ones that have already been planned. The respondent's answers can also elicit new questions.

Why are interviews important?

Interviews are important because, as Lewis-Beck explains, “Social scientists interview people because they have questions about the life worlds of their respondents” (Lewis-Beck, 2004, p. 522). This is the reason that I chose to do interviewing as my research methodology, specifically the semi-structured interview: so I could learn more about my thesis topic, in the hopes of better educating others of the harms of homelessness and how they can help change people’s mentality and end the stigma. They are also important because they give the interviewee a chance to tell their story, the way that they want it to be told. Many times, words and stories can get twisted around so that a person or group appears in a certain negative or positive light. When this happens, parts of a story may have been left out that are crucial to the story as a whole. Where my research deals with a marginalized group, it is sometimes hard for them to be heard due to the stigma surrounding them. I am lucky to be interviewing people that are allies of the homeless; people that can tell their story with truth and honesty where they work with the homeless daily, trying to get them back on their feet. With the interviews that I conducted, I made sure that everything that was said is told and published with no editing involved, letting the whole story be heard.

Participants

I had two participants take part in my thesis research, Wayne Mason and Eric Jonsson. Wayne Mason is a city councillor in Halifax, based out of District 7, which covers the Halifax-south downtown area. Wayne takes care of many different municipal services, such as housing, public health, parks and recreation, and future plans for the city.

Eric Jonsson is the program coordinator of a program based here in Halifax called Navigator Street Outreach. Eric meets many street-involved and people who are experiencing

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homeless to try and help them find affordable housing, jobs, getting identification cards and anything else that one might need to survive. I have added a short subsection to explain more on Navigator Street Outreach.

I picked Wayne and Eric to be my participants because I wanted to see the differences, if any, the beliefs and opinions each participant had about the Safe Streets Act due to their job. My hypothesis going into the study was that each participant would hold different views on the Safe Streets Act, but after transcribing and analyzing the interviews, I conclude that they hold the same view about the Act – that it is ineffective and that provinces could be focusing on fixing the factors that make people panhandle to begin with: the lack of affordable housing, low minimum wage, and the lack of income assistance.

I first got in contact with my participants by emailing them both a letter of recruitment, which described what my thesis was about and what they would be doing as participants in my thesis, should they choose to accept. I have attached a copy of the recruitment script (see Appendix A). Both participants accepted my invitation to participate, in which then I emailed them a copy of the interview questions that I planned on asking them. These questions can be found in Appendix B. When it came time to do the interviews, I gave both participants a hard copy of the consent form I had written for my research (see Appendix C) for them to sign for me to keep for my records, as well as a copy for them to keep if they wished. Both interviews that I conducted with my participants can be found in Appendix D.

About Navigator Street Outreach

Navigator Street Outreach is a program that was developed by Downtown Halifax Business Commission and the Spring Garden Area Business Association in 2007 to provide support and services to people experiencing homelessness in the area (Navigator Street Outreach,

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2019). These supports and services can include finding and maintaining housing and employment, as well as finding services that aid in areas of mental health, addictions, and general health and well-being.

On the Navigator Street Outreach website, it states that last year, the program helped 52% more street-involved individuals gain employment support than the previous year. In total, navigator connected with 310 different people, 160 of which were first time connections (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019). Employment support is focused around securing and maintaining a job, whenever the person at hand feels they are able to commit to a position of work. Employment support can also be the provision of bus tickets to help get to work, getting or replacing identification cards so the person at hand can apply for work or open a bank account, providing clothing for work or the tools necessary (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019).

Housing support is another huge helping hand that Navigator Street Outreach lends to people experiencing homelessness and street-involved individuals. Not only does the program aid in finding adequate housing, but it also aids in eviction prevention (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019). Navigator also helps with housing searches, paying damage deposits, transportation to viewings, references and securing funding. The website shows that there has been 285 intakes for housing, 145 people who have been housed, 90 evictions that have been prevented, and 7 housing relocations (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019).

The Navigation section on the programs 'About' page focuses on street-involved individuals who may have drug addictions or mental health issues that prevent them from being able to secure a job or housing. The website shows that 80% of individuals that are involved with or receiving aid from Navigator are dealing with addictions like alcohol, drugs and gambling; 20% are dealing with addictions and mental health; and 30% are dealing with mental health

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struggles (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019). Navigator Street Outreach aims to help these people by providing them with addictions services, mental health supports, Income Assistance and accompaniment to these appointments.

One of the projects that Navigator Street Outreach has done was in partnership with the Freedom Renewal Centre (FRC) that was called “Community Building Community”. This project gave six individuals the chance to work within the community one day a week to “enhance physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and economic well-being” (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019). The group of six gathered at FRC and did community-based projects in the morning, such as gardening, painting and landscaping. After that, they enjoy a home-cooked meal for lunch then spend their afternoons “engaged in personal development and renewal” (Navigator Street Outreach, 2019). The group chooses the learning and renewal activities.

Results and Conclusions

For this final section, I have taken what I have thought to be the main points from both participant’s interviews and will discuss them, linking them with supporting points from the literature I have read on the Safe Streets Act and the potential harms that can stem from such a law. The four points that will be discussed are squeegeers and the dangers of the road, ways that we as the public can participate in order to stop the destigmatization and decriminalization of street-involved individuals or people experiencing homelessness, why laws like the Safe Streets Act do not work, and information on panhandlers coming in from different provinces.

In their interviews, both Eric and Waye mentioned squeegeers; for both participants, it was the discussion of their experience with squeegeers. Eric had said that when he was younger, back when he was living in British Columbia, he would see squeegeers constantly as he and his father drove through Vancouver. Eric had thought that it was a cool but sad concept; a different

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way to make money as opposed to simply panhandling but the fact that they were doing that to try and make some extra change made him feel bad. His father would never give them any money, but many other motorists did, which is why squeegeeing persisted. Wayne's experience with squeegeers was back when squeegeeing was rampant here in Halifax back in the early 2000's. He said that there was many cases of "aggressive squeegeeing" taking place at the Willow Tree intersection, where the panhandlers would come up and clean your windshield without even asking. This can be scary for both the squeegeer and the motorist – if you are the squeegeer and you choose to squeegee without permission, you do not know who is in the vehicle or what they are capable of if you make a wrong move or your squeegee slips and the car is scratched. It can be scary for the motorist, particularly women with small children, as there is someone outside of their car whose behaviour may be unpredictable and will not take 'no' for an answer. This is also in agreeance with what squeegeers discussed in the literature in *Disorderly People*, as well as in the subsection of "Halifax and the Safe Streets Act", where squeegeers listed the harms that they faced when out trying to make some money (Lowe, 2008; O'Grady & Bright, 2002; Jones, 2005; Visser, 2007).

With squeegeers as a thing of the past, present day, Wayne said that there is still concerns with panhandling at busy intersections. Once, he had almost hit a panhandling woman at the Windsor Street exchange, because the light had turned green and she was still between the two moving lanes asking people for money. Sadly, this panhandler is not the only one out in the Halifax area risking her safety. In the next few minutes of the interview, Wayne and myself exchanged stories of where we have seen panhandlers at busy intersections, walking in between traffic. Places like the Willow Tree intersection, the intersection by the MacDonald Bridge on the Dartmouth side, the Burnside Drive intersection by Commodore, and the intersection of

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Connaught and Bayers down by the Halifax Shopping Centre are all home to panhandlers that are making their situations dangerous. In the interview, I made the point that cars cannot stop on a dime when going 80-100 km/h. If these panhandlers are out on the road when the light turns green, an accident can occur easily. I definitely do agree with Wayne when he said about there being a difference between panhandling on the sidewalk, back from a busy road versus walking out on the streets asking for change between light changes, the median being the only “safe” spot to go. This present-day issue begs the question: Is the few dollars in change worth more than your life?

Destigmatization and decriminalization is definitely a factor to discuss when talking about the harms that laws can cause, because it is a way that people can start finding out more information on ways to end the stigma and harm that comes to street-involved individuals. Eric’s opinion on decriminalization is that they create harm towards individuals that are already suffering enough, and uses the example of the smoking ban that recently came into effect here back in October. He talks about how the ban is just another way to ticket people experiencing homelessness, as they have nowhere to go that is safe or legal to smoke their cigarette. As for destigmatization, Eric’s thoughts are simple, but drive the point home: have compassion, take the initiative to educate yourself on what street-involved people are going through and experiencing, and to treat everyone you meet with kindness – even if you do not have money for panhandlers, ask them how their day is going to show that you still care. Wayne’s answer to this question is similar as well; sensitivity training for our police force to make sure that all situations can be understood and reduce the risk of harm for people experiencing homelessness, keeping a “human lense” on these types of situation when explaining to the public what some street-involved people might be going through, such as mental health crises or issues with addictions, and using

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more support groups similar to Navigator Street Outreach to help these people get back on their feet and regain control over their lives. In my opinion, even if we as citizens started small and would try to put ourselves in street-involved people's shoes or asked them how their day is, I bet it would make their day to know that someone still cares or sees them, instead of just acting like they are not there. Another thing I would like to add is to donate to your local shelters; they are always looking for items! If there is something that you are not using or have some clothes you do not want any more, consider donating them – I guarantee that they will be appreciated and put to good use.

I think that this is one of the central arguments around my thesis: criminalizing those who live in poverty is not the right solution to the problem. In the interviews, Wayne states that in Moncton, who has an Act that is similar to the Safe Streets, the cops have never handed out a ticket to a panhandler for violating some section of their Act. Why? According to Wayne, police are not going to give a panhandler a ticket then go stand in front of a judge, just to have a ticket dismissed; it is counterproductive. Panhandlers get these tickets, have no money to pay them, so either the ticket gets dropped or the panhandler is arrested and sent to jail after so many offences, thus continuing the vicious, pointless cycle either way. A good example of this is in McNeil's (2010) chapter when she discusses the youth panhandlers receiving aid from the Dalhousie Legal students; after a while, all youths left the region except for one to ensure that their tickets do not add up, or because the hearings kept getting backed up. In the end, all tickets did end up getting overturned, so there was no money ever received for the tickets anyways. At the beginning of his interview, Eric said that people experiencing homelessness are resilient, innovative, as well as survivors: no matter what life throws at them, they will always find a way to persevere. A law will not stop them from trying to make the money they need to survive. Instead of ticketing, both

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Eric and Wayne suggest putting the money towards items that could benefit people in low-income situations or that are experiencing homelessness, such as affordable housing, higher income assistance rates, and more programs that are in support of getting street-involved people back on their feet.

Panhandlers from different provinces – in my opinion, this was the most interesting piece of information that I found out while conducting my interviews. Wayne had mentioned about there being more panhandlers that pop up in different parts of Halifax throughout the summer months, many who are not Halifax natives. In particular, Wayne referred to a summer back a few years ago, where I can remember there being a distinct increase in panhandlers and street-involved individuals. Panhandlers will come in from out west or from other parts of the country because of it being tourist season, which is a better chance for them to get more money panhandling. However, this particular summer the influx was larger because of the ban that the city of Montreal put in place against Pitbull's and other "bully"-specific breeds. Panhandlers would come to Halifax because the city did not have those laws put in place, also because we are relaxed in many of our laws and by-laws as it is, as Wayne said. These panhandlers took their dogs with them where they were allowed to be, because in most cases, their dog is the only family or love that they have in their lives. So, there were groups of panhandlers all over Halifax with their stuff spread out everywhere and their dogs in tow, which would drive people crazy, because they felt uncomfortable or did not like the sight of them. Some of the travelling panhandlers were nice and would ask for money politely and tell passerby's "god bless" or "have a nice day", regardless of whether or not they received money. However, there are always a few people in a group that can make a good experience go bad. Wayne had said during the interview that some of these travellers had gotten arrested, fined or jailed because of aggressive

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panhandling, and in a couple of cases, even assault. In all the years that I have lived here in Halifax, never have I ever once heard of a panhandler assaulting a passerby, nor have I seen one take place. Once the breed-specific legislation got overturned in Montreal, the travelling panhandlers went back to where they came, but not without leaving a sour taste in everyone's mouth here. It only ever takes one person, or in certain cases a group, to turn something good into something awful; leaving people to paint the remaining panhandlers that have good intentions with a bad brush.

Based from my interviews and the existing literature on my topic, there are numerous harms that come to people experiencing homelessness due to laws that target poverty. The research presented in this thesis has further demonstrated that the criminalization of poverty remains an ever-present issue that continues to plague Canadian society.

I found my research method of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to be beneficial to my thesis. Being able to open up the conversation to ideas, opinions and answers outside of the questions that I had for my participants gave them a chance to say what was on their mind about the topic, subsequently giving me information that I may not have known about that proved favourable to my thesis. I enjoyed not being strictly confined to just asking the ten questions I had for my participants, as well as the freedom and flexibility to ask new questions if I needed more information or clarification on what my participants were discussing.

Limitations to my research are lack of time, limited sample size, and limited knowledge from participants. First, I had a limited amount of time to complete my research. As soon as I received permission from the Ethics board to conduct my interviews, it was almost the end of January, leaving me less than two months to gather all of the necessary data. When I was able to do the interviews, both of my participants gave me a lot of great information that I wanted to find

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out more about, but I did not have the time or resources to research them. With more time, I feel that I would have been able to do more. My expectations were an eye-opener as well; they were constantly changing throughout my entire thesis. I had an assumption made about how everything would go – my participants, my interviews, my results – and not one of them went as planned. I had never done an interview prior to these ones, so I stuck to the questions I had for the most part. Whenever my participants brought up something that was interesting but was not within the list of interview questions, I could never think of questions that I had pertaining to what they were talking about at the time, only after the interview was over. Overall, I am very proud of my work for my first thesis, however, for any future research that I do on this topic, I hope to be better prepared for my interviews. Third, my limited sample size was a limitation because I only interviewed two people from different organizations and positions. I am glad I was able to interview my participants, as they had similar but sometimes differing views, maybe due to their professions. If I was able to interview more people, I would be able to get more information on the Safe Streets Act and more viewpoints and opinions. There are so many more people that I wish I could have interviewed if I had the time, such as people experiencing homelessness, other shelter workers, other groups similar to Navigator Street Outreach, such as the Mobile Outreach Street Team, other members of council, and a member of one of the Anti-Poverty groups stationed here in Halifax. Finally, the limited knowledge from my participants on the topic of the Safe Streets Act was a limitation of my results section. This is no fault of my participants, as they were either not around in the city or not working in their current job positions during the time that the Safe Streets Act was proposed here in Halifax. However, the information that they were able to provide me with gave me a better idea of their job titles and what their interactions are with people experiencing homelessness. For any future research done

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on this topic, I would like to interview a street-involved person that was around when the Act was being proposed here in Halifax, or a member of the since-passed Halifax Coalition Against Poverty, as mentioned above.

Implications of my research are that the Safe Streets Act and other similar laws do cause harm to certain groups in city populations, mainly to persons of low income status or those that are experiencing homelessness. Rarely are there damaging laws put in place for those that are above the poverty line or higher – for example, persons of high economic status that commit a criminal act, like taking thousands of dollars from clients in an act of fraud or embezzlement tend to get a slap on the wrist with no jail time. However, the poor are just trying to survive and make some change for food and other bare necessities by panhandling.

Finally, if any future research were to be done on this topic, I would expand my sample size and aim to interview the people who are actually experiencing homelessness and facing the harms first-hand due to acts like the Safe Streets. Interviewing people experiencing homelessness would give readers a better idea of the direct harms that this population faces, as opposed to just hearing about it from policy makers or office workers that work with the poor, but are not experiencing poverty themselves.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script for Participants (Waye Mason, Eric Jonsson).

Dear Waye and Eric,

As you may know, I will be conducting a research project for my undergraduate honours thesis in criminology. For my thesis, I will be looking at the Safe Streets Act and the harms that can come to homeless people because of certain laws put in place. This research will involve interviewing people who work in jobs that provide services and aids to the homeless, as well as those that are of a political standing in the city of Halifax.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in the research as someone to be interviewed. The interview will ask open-ended questions relating to your job, your knowledge of the Safe Streets Act for when it was being proposed here in Halifax, and any stories or experiences that you might have had in regards to the Act back when it was in its proposal stage. I am interested in knowing about your opinions on the Safe Streets Act and your thoughts on how Halifax had benefitted or suffered from the proposal of the Act. The interview should last around an hour and will take place in a location of your choosing.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by email at kaitieeflemingxo@hotmail.com, or by phone at 902-499-6997.

Sincerely,

Kaitiee Fleming

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Safe Streets for Whom: An In-depth Look at the Harms Associated with the Safe Streets Act

Kaitiee Fleming (Principal Investigator)

Saint Mary's University

Department of Criminology

Interview questions for thesis

These are the questions I had asked my participants at the time of our interviews.

- 1) What do you do for a living/What is your job description?
- 2) How long have you been working for this organization?
- 3) Have you heard of the Safe Streets Act?
- 4) What are your general reactions or sentiments towards the Safe Streets Act?
- 5) What was the city like before and after the Safe Streets Act was proposed?
- 6) What are some ways, or the steps we should take, that we could de-stigmatize and decriminalize homeless people?
- 7) Do you think that the Safe Streets Act will ever be repealed? Why/Why not?
- 8) In your own opinion, what are some of the harms that homeless people endure due to the Safe Streets Act and the criminalization against them?
- 9) You have worked within the shelter systems for a long time. Do you remember any specific incidents regarding the criminalization of those in poverty or homeless back when the Safe Streets Act was being proposed between 2005-2007?
- 10) Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix C: Consent Form

**SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

“Safe Streets for Whom: An In-depth Look at the Harms Associated with the Safe Streets Act” (REB # 19-030)

Investigators: (PI) Kaitiee Fleming and Faculty Supervisor Dr. Rachael Collins

INFORMATION

My name is Kaitiee Fleming and I am a criminology honours student in my fifth year of study at Saint Mary's University here in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am working under the direct supervision of Dr. Rachael Collins for my thesis research about the harms of a criminal law called the Safe Streets Act and the harms that it can cause to marginalized communities, particularly the homeless. The Safe Streets Act was enacted in many provinces, and was proposed here in Halifax. The act never advanced any further from the proposal stage here in Halifax, however, the homeless are still being targeted and criminalized – solely for being poor. I invite you to participate in a ten-question interview that I will be conducting for my research that will take about 75 minutes. The goal of my study is to increase awareness of the harms that marginalized communities face due to criminal laws. The purpose of this project is to (1) understand the role that certain criminal laws play in the lives of the homeless and (2) analyze how these factors effect these individuals in regards to the harms that they may cause them.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to you as the participant. However, if at any time you feel stress or discomfort, please feel free to stop the interview or skip the question.

BENEFITS

Although you may not directly benefit from participation in this study, there are benefits to both the community and the academic community. By learning more about the Safe Streets Act and the harms that it can cause to the homeless or marginalized populations, as well as learning more in general about the harms of certain laws, people will hopefully gain more knowledge on this topic. Regarding academic benefits, this research is a starting point for any more research that may be done on the topic of harms of law in the future.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Once the data is transcribed, the interview will be erased off of the tape recorder, following by destruction of the tapes. The transcribed interview will be stored on my (Kaitiee Fleming)'s password-protected laptop. Only I (Kaitiee Fleming) and Dr. Rachael Collins will have access to the data. Confidentiality is your choice; you can choose whether or not your identity is known. I will take measures to withhold your name and role from my results in order to protect your

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privacy. If you choose not to be identified, there will be no usage of your name within the interview transcription, nor will any identifying characteristics be used (ie, generic descriptions of job titles and roles will be used; an alias will be used instead of your real name if you wish).

I do / do not wish to be identified in this research (please circle one)

I am / am not okay with being recorded for the purpose of Kaitiee Fleming's notes (please circle one)

COMPENSATION

There will be no compensation available for this research study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researchers, Kaitiee Fleming at kaitieeflemingxo@hotmail.com, or Dr. Rachael Collins at r.collins@smu.ca or by phone (902) 491-6475. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB # 19-030). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board, at Saint Mary's University. Phone: 902-420-5728 Email: ethics@smu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty at any time. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. Please note that once data collection is completed your data cannot be removed, as they are stored without identifiers. You have the right to omit any question(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research will be published in an honours thesis. The results may also be published in an academic journal or presented at an academic conference. You are fully entitled to receive feedback about the outcomes of this research, which will be available by April 1st, 2019. If you wish to have a copy of the results, please include your email address on the consent form.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information.

I, _____ agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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I wish to receive a copy of the results of this study (if yes, provide email you would like it sent to): _____

It is recommended that you print or save a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D: Interviews

Interview #1: Waye Mason
February 11th, 2019

Kaitiee (Primary Investigator): Good morning, I am here with Mr. Waye Mason, councillor of District 7, which covers the Halifax-south downtown area. I am meeting with Waye today to interview him as part of my thesis research on the Safe Streets Act and the harms that it can bring to the homeless. Thank you very much for meeting with me today, Waye!

Waye Mason: My pleasure!

Kaitiee: So the first question that I have for you is what do you do for a living, and what is your job description?

Waye: Uh, so I'm an elected municipal councillor for Halifax Regional Municipality. I represent about 22,000 people, 16,000 voters.

Kaitiee: Wow!

Waye: Uh, so everywhere in Halifax in the peninsula south of Quinpool Road, south of Cornwallis Street in on Gottigen, and includes Sable Island. So the ponies are mine too, not that I've ever been but I hope to someday. The job's a full-time job and it's the entire range of municipal services uh, which is different in every province, so it's important to note that housing and public health and all that stuff, basically all the social stuff, in the bigger provinces is delivered by municipalities in larger urban centers on behalf of the province. Here, it's all provided by the province with good and bad results, right? Probably better for smaller municipalities like Annapolis Royal, population 400 people that, they don't have to worry about housing. In the urban municipalities, especially in Halifax, it's hard to get the province to engage, especially in the urban core. So yeah, everything from public safety stuff and police and fire, to parks and rec and paving roads to uh, you know, planning and how the city's gonna grow is all kinda our job.

Kaitiee: Wow, so what made you want to get into this field?

Waye: Uh, the city was stupid in 2012, we had constant scandals, my predecessor didn't impress me. I actually ran against an incumbent and [inaudible], uh, to get elected. She had been there for 12, 13 years and uh, yeah. It's hard to imagine now how the city is growing and all the great stuff that's been happening which we can't even, like the current administration can take some credit for, but a lot of the groundwork was laid in planning that happened well before us, but in 2010, 11, and 12 the thing here was we're losing to Moncton, and... and our thing, Mike Savage, the mayor's thing, is we don't talk about those other towns in Atlantic Canada, our competitors aren't even Quebec and Regina and Hamilton and other similar sized cities, our competitors are global, right? We're not, we're the only city in Atlantic Canada that has global demand and is the kind of city that people are gonna wanna invest in and move their companies to and all that stuff.

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And that is exporting, IT, and stuff. One of my afternoon meetings is meeting with Volta so trying to change that narrative was a big piece of it and to make it real as a result things seem to be changing super fast right now and that's really exciting.

Kaitiee: That's great! So, have you heard of the Safe Streets Act?

Waye: Uhh, vaguely, because that's an Ontario thing and a BC thing and it's something that's certainly [inaudible]... I'm the downtown councillor so I have... for my sins I have 63 grand institutions, two hospital sites, Spring Garden road and all of downtown and uh, the southern part of the north end. So I get the phone calls and emails from people who are angry about people on the street, or as they would put it, panhandlers or bums. And so, my main familiarity with the Safe Streets Act is people quoting it at me as, "Why don't we do that here?" First of all, we're a municipality so we don't do Acts and we can only do what we're allowed to do, and second of all, our by-law we feel, already has all of the reasonable protections you need in a by-law to allow for tickets to be applied if someone is blocking the sidewalk, or aggressively harassing someone. What I've found is that for the most part, what people are saying is "I want those bums moved", what they mean is they literally just don't want to see them. It's not about like, "That guy got in my face and made me feel threatened", it's the guy jingling the change cup in front of the Tim Horton's on Spring Garden Road makes that person feel uncomfortable and bad about themselves and they want us to like, make them disappear and that's never gonna happen here, we're not gonna do that.

Kaitiee: No. And that's been a lot of the sentiments that I've been reading online because back in 2005 to 2007 area, I read here that we were trying to get something like the Safe Streets Act in Halifax, um... and it never came into play.

Waye: Yeah, I mean so... so, there's so many different kinds of gradations of this, so people who were from the poverty activist camp first went to [inaudible] and their allies don't want any rules at all. I don't agree with that either, right? So I started to see... I almost hit a woman panhandling in the uh, Windsor Street Exchange, because it's between two moving lanes and the light was green and everyone was going, but she was still there asking people for money, right, waving her Tim Horton's cup around and I question... and I know that there was some kind of lower court decision that said that there was a... there was a ban here on squeegees on the road, but it might've been a by-law. It's all well before my time, right?

Kaitiee: Yeah.

Waye: I think a lower court struck it down, it might've been that it was overly restrictive or whatever, but I see... I see dangerous behaviour that makes me worried about those people, and I don't like that um, that it has now spread to places that it's never been before. The bridge approaches in Dartmouth, and in Burnside... and like, those cars in Burnside drive at Commodore around 80, 90, 100 km/h, and they're walking down the median right into traffic... Yeah! I think there's a case to be made that that should be illegal, right, which is different from uh, you know, one of the familiar faces that I've come to know in the 25 years that I've lived here, on Spring Garden Road bumming for change, right?

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Kaitie: Yeah.

Waye: Uh, standing out of the way of a sidewalk on the verge, you know, on the bricks, saying “God bless” when you walk by, not being aggressive – totally different things.

Kaitie: Yeah. Because that is dangerous though, especially now in the Burnside area because I do live in Dartmouth, and I’ve seen them popping up in places where you would never think to see them before... and they weren’t there before!

Waye: Yeah.

Kaitie: And now that it’s coming up, it’s... it’s kind of concerning because cars can’t stop on a dime, so if people are still out on the roads, it’s a huge safety priority.

Waye: Yeah, it’s terrifying. So I think that we have to be open-minded to like, uh, behaviour that is... you know, those medians are not designed for people to be standing on them, uh... and people aren’t expecting it. Especially if you’re not from town, the fact that they’re there every day are things that I know, which means that there’s probably gonna be someone, hopefully not today in the cold, at Connaught and Quinpool Road.

Kaitie: Exactly.

Waye: But, uh the road isn’t designed that way so there’s plenty of people who come in from out of town who aren’t from here and don’t know that. And then there’s some places where it’s just plain dangerous, like Burnside and anywhere that has a highway-type feel. Uh, so yeah, I mean, I hope it gets revisited but the pretty direct one and stuff that I’ve read they did in Ontario and all kind of street involvement, aside from the fact that it’s dangerous and the fact that it’s targeted at poor people who can’t defend themselves uh, whatever municipalities across the country is... it never works.

Kaitie: No. That was the general sentiment that I got while reading too.

Waye: For your research, there is a by-law on the books in Moncton that bans panhandling.

Kaitie: Oh wow!

Waye: And RCAO is the CO there and I asked him and they’ve never handed out a ticket, because the other thing that happens is that you can make all the stupid, shitty by-laws you want as a municipality, but the cops are not going to enforce a law that they know they’re gonna be in front of a judge and the ticket will be dismissed.

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Waye: Because that is not an efficient use of police time, right, so no one... I think there’s been like maybe one or two tickets in 15 or 20 years in Moncton, uh you know, right at the start... and it’s just like the Vancouver Safe Streets by-law that they did where they handed out 4 or 5 tickets in 20 years, right? Like, it just, you might make a, kind of, law-and-order, right-wing politicians feel good, but the fact of the matter is that if you cross that line into people’s constitutional

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rights, courts aren't gonna enforce it, cops aren't gonna enforce it because they know the courts are gonna go and overturn the tickets.

Kaitie: Mmhm. So safe to say about that, your general reactions or sentiments towards the Safe Streets Act, is that it's just not gonna work? It's not something that's effective for cities like Ontario or BC?

Way: Well I mean, I don't know enough about their situations to judge and like, when I read about what's going on in East Hastings and I see what they've done in Toronto going back to the Harris government [inaudible] degradation of civil society in Ontario, uh quite deliberately by governments elected by the 905. But I'm not from there, so I don't know that. For me, you know, we are talking with service providers here about having a, you know, poverty-centric uh... is it still recording, are we good? –looks at tape recorder-

Kaitie: Uhh.. –looks at tape recorder- yeah, we're good.

Way: Yeah, having a poverty-centered approach where we would like have people with first voice on a committee that would help create ah, new rules and approaches. Um, you know what we hear from emergence is, recently we've started to see some of the people on Spring Garden Road sitting down with their legs sticking out into the sidewalk and like, spreading out all of their stuff and maybe their dogs there are not on a leash or not tied up... and like, all of those things are scary, especially if you're an older person, I've heard too... especially some women. So it's like, you know, we have talked and were formulating rules on Spring Garden and downtown about like what you could and couldn't do that the street navigator could talk about more that aren't really being enforced anymore because we have a newer, younger group of panhandlers who are like... "I know those rules don't have any legal backing so I'm not gonna follow them". But, uh, you know, don't sit down, don't spread your stuff out, clean up after your dog and have it on a leash, uh, and don't get in the way of people walking by, don't position yourself so you're blocking the traffic... those are all things that uh, that could be in a by-law. That is, so it's more about... how did I put it the other day? We're not talking about banning panhandling in Halifax, we're talking about managing and regulating panhandling, like normalizing. This is how you do it, this is how you don't do it.

Kaitie: Yeah, the rights and wrongs, yeah.

Way: Yeah, but I don't think you can ban that behaviour, and we uh, the other thing you may wanna look into is, which is probably you're a little young to remember this but like, look into what they did in Saskatoon, the starlight rides? Have you heard about that?

Kaitie: Yeah, I have actually! My policing class at school.

Way: Yeah! Like... they killed people.

Kaitie: Yeah.

Way: They took first nations people and they left them in the cold to die because they didn't like the look of them walking around their downtown cuz they were drunk and they were downtown, and that's like not... obviously not legal or moral or okay.

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Kaitie: And it's probably the worst way to go, I mean freezing in the cold.

Waye: Yeah, yeah it's bad. So I think, you know, certainly there are people in this community who would like 'it' to go away, 'it' – the problem – to go away, which is panhandling. And the picture all around that [inaudible] that is, is that "city hall's not doing anything, the province isn't doing anything and that when I travel, I don't see this". And it's like... come on. Like go to Toronto or Montreal, I was in Paris last year and it's like, they had to open up the metro for the homeless people to sleep in because it was -30 outside, people could freeze to death. There are homeless people, there are like, you know, there are street-involved people, there are panhandlers, right, and not always the same thing. And they're everywhere, it's a global phenomenon and I think, you know, I'm not a scientist so I'm not going to try to investigate why that it's reaching around the world, but it appears to be that we're not alone and the idea of criminalizing poverty is not something that this council has any interest in doing.

Kaitie: Perfect! So... here, way back in 2005 there when they had the idea of creating the Act... what was it kind of like before the Act was proposed here, and kind of after?

Waye: Well, so... weird because we have a really, uh... we have a kinda seasonal uh, street punk... that's what we used to call them when I was young, much younger... uh, wave that comes in from Montreal or from out west, and it's folks who come in here, you know, our shelters services are pretty crowded and our social assistance, our income assistance isn't as good as a bigger province. But in the summer, there's lots of tourists and people come in, you know, some would be from here, but most would come in from across the country and uh, they would be panhandling and squeegeeing. That was the big thing, there was aggressive squeegeeing happening at the Willow Tree intersection I remember, especially on Bell Road. Like you couldn't get through that light if you stopped without someone cleaning your car, right?

Kaitie: Really?

Waye: They'd clean your windshield and they'd hold out their hand for money, and uh, you know... cool, don't touch my car if I didn't give you permission would be one thing, but of course, you know, you might have a thousand interactions with people doing that, and that's really all it takes is one guy to kinda bang on the car with the bottom handle of the squeegee brush.

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Waye: And uh, and that lady who's in the car by herself with her kids is calling her MLA and her MP demanding action. So like, that was kinda what happened, um... and it was a brand new thing here as I recall. And so they brought forth some legislation, I don't remember if it was passed or if it was proclaimed or if it didn't pass at the house or whatever, but... but also I think there may have been a by-law that might've been overturned, I think I remember hearing something about that but as all these thing do, they come in waves and then they go away.

Kaitie: Yeah.

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Waye: Even a more contemporary example that I'm much more familiar with because I was here, two years ago we had a lot of people on Spring Garden Road and all over the place. Like you may have noticed here there were way more street-involved people panhandling and aggressively panhandling and maybe sitting in groups, and they would have their stuff set up... so like that corner by uh, I would say Dresden Row...

Kaitie: Yeah!

Waye: There'd be like 3 or 4 folks sitting there with all their crap and a couple of dogs and they would drive people crazy and they would sit... and near as we could tell, what happened is the last mayor of Montreal, before the new one got elected, brought in breed-specific legislation that banned Pitbulls and like certain dogs.

Kaitie: I remember.

Waye: And a lot of those homeless kids, the only person that they had in their life that they loved was their dog. And they came here, because this is the city that like, we're known apparently on facebook as the easy mark that is soft on enforcing these things, so we're a little bit more firm, not more mean, but firm. And so we had, you know, I've never seen it before. We had kids sleeping on like, old yoga mats uh, in front of the old library, just sleeping rough right there on the lawn –laughs- and stuff like that.

Kaitie: Oh man! –laughs-

Waye: But yeah, it freaked people out right, I mean there was a lot of sleeping rough, there was a lot of young people kinda displaced the familiar faces that we've been seeing for 20-25 years, and had to push them off Spring Garden Road. They were a lot more aggressive, a couple of them did get arrested and had conditions put on them or were fined or jailed. And I'm not talking about for like, shaking a cup in your face, it was like, you can't grab people to try and stop them that's... then you're moving into assault. So these things were happening, and then there was the election in Montreal and the new progressive young mayor got elected and they overturned the breed-specific legislation and that was it, most of them don't come back now. They stay in Montreal.

Kaitie: Okay.

Waye: So, uh... but that was a one-time blip. I think the squeegee kids and the lead up to the... you know, I think it was an overreaction to it, you know? And I also think the province does not like to look at its involvement in these things. They feel like it's a policing issue or a municipal issue... but they own housing, and they own income assistance, so the other big blip that we saw of locals out of the street, was people who had a lot of income precarity, or mental health issues or were on income assistance. 5 years ago, when the province took away the bus pass, right, they made the bus pass broadly available and then they made it, "well if you have 4 or 5 appointments a month, we're just gonna give you tickets".

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

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Waye: “10 tickets for 5 appointments, that’s fair.” But the problem is, you can buy... get taken away the mobility of the bus pass because you were gonna use the bus or ferry as much as you want with the province’s assistance that can come uh, people with... who are facing housing challenges, that the best way to house them now is to give them a rent supplement... you know, if you’re out in Clayton Park West where there’s no services, if you have that mobility you can get to your doctor’s appointment, to the hospital, to the mental health professional, to the grocery store. We basically have the province putting people on rent supplements in houses where they’re completely isolated and have no way, especially [inaudible] to move anywhere. They only have those friggin’ bus tickets. And guess what? You are having to be able to engage with the uh, with employment, for whatever reason and you have historically had some kind of street involvement, and you know the easiest place to go to get a bit of money is to go back on the street. So you have people showing up maybe that you haven’t seen for quite a while, maybe they went for housing first, maybe even before that... and they’re showing up and they’re, uh bumming for change to make the money to pay for a little bit of bus fare or whatever... but then there’s also some bad people... there’s drug dealing around, there are bad people on the street and all that stuff. And they’re hanging out with people who aren’t really where you’re at on the path to recovery, and that could potentially expose you to harms. So, uh, those are in my experiences in the 6 years that I’ve been here, those were the two big problems: was uh, poorly thought out uh, government policy, at a different level of government or in a different municipality so [inaudible] up here, and the response from us has been like, more foot patrols, telling people to move along when they’re not following the rules, uh but for the most part I’ve seen our police have been quite... So I was walking with my wife, civilian clothes, Saturday night, and there’s a guy passed out on the Starbucks, in front of the Starbucks. Head on the table – I’m miming it right now for the audio!

Kaitiee: -laughs-

Waye: And I said to my wife, as we’re walking down I can see there’s a constable coming up behind him. So I said, “Watch this”. The constable takes his flashlight so he doesn’t have to touch him, and he’s got a good distance, pokes him and goes, “Matt. Matt, man. Matt. Matt. Matt. Man, come on man... you gotta wake up, Matt. I told you, you can’t sleep here. Come on... you okay? Are you okay, Matt?” Once he’s looking at him, he starts lifting up his head, “You okay? You’re just tired, there’s nothing wrong? You don’t need any help? Alright. Well, you gotta get up, you gotta move along.” He’s like, “Alright. Okay Bob.” Or whatever the constables name was... and I looked at my wife and was like, “That’s excellent policing! That’s what we want!” Right? To know their names, to treat them like human beings, because they are human beings, right? And uh... anyways, but that was great, that time, when we had to use [inaudible]. Anyway, the solution to taking away the bus pass was not to have more police arresting people, it was to restore the bus pass [inaudible] and the uh, and all income assistance clients and their families are qualified for a bus pass in Halifax now.

Kaitiee: Wow, that’s great!

Waye: It’s been a year and a half, and there’s 16,000 people who qualify and about 9,000 some or so that have it.

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Kaitiee: That's awesome! Well, hopefully the other 7,000 will have it soon, too.

Waye: Or maybe they live right next to the doctors and grocery stores and they don't need it! – laughs-

Kaitiee: -laughs- That's true! So, in saying that, what are some ways or the steps that we should take that we could destigmatize and decriminalize homeless people?

Waye: Well, I think just continuing the message with just saying this is the big piece, right? It's like we've doing some sensitivity training with the uh, with the police especially to really focus our approach on keeping that human lens on "how are you gonna help these people, these special needs", right? We need to communicate with the public that, for the most part, most people who are street involved have some kind of drug dependency or mental health issue or personal circumstance that makes [inaudible] impossible, like to get a job. So this is not something where it's just like go get a job, for the most part... and uh, the final piece is, uh poverty organization-lead group that would probably have sense on that summer to like look at like how the city and policing and by-law and hopefully our provincial colleagues... uh, if we make it a requirement that the province says something and I know that'll never happen so we won't focus on that, we'll focus on our own resources and how do we [inaudible] changes that are required first, that are required and are there changes that can better support the Navigator Street Outreach program and the other folks like MOSH and all that, who are out there on the streets and really treat it as uh... you know, a solvable problem with a human face rather than just kick them outside.

Kaitiee: Yeah... Cuz that's what I've been reading a lot about in all of my thesis readings, has been, it's basically that people don't see the homeless as actual people, they see them as an issue, and this issue just needs to go away. And I think that the biggest thing about that is... it's true, like we do need to treat them as real people and realize that there's nothing with them, they might have some sort of dependency, like drug dependency or something there, but... it's not something that they will never get over.

Waye: But they're just making a choice, like there's one person –chair scraping in background– that I can't name for privacy reasons, but everybody who lives in Halifax knows what I'm talking about. There's this person who chooses to live rough right by the North branch library, or the old library, right now.

Kaitiee: Yeah, mmhmm!

Waye: So she's got all her stuff piled up, and I get complaints probably about once every week when someone says "Well how come the city isn't doing something about this?" And you know, that's clearly under the law. And they're right, it is illegal and the reason we're not breaking the law is that person has twice... I think it's at least twice been taken to an apartment and decided "Oh, I'm not gonna live in an apartment" and that they want to continue to live out and have the freedom to live rough, and for whatever reason it's not my place to judge or know why, but they will not move into housing. And they have also been judged by medical professions to be competent, so they're not... there's no voluntary committal that's gonna happen here. So choice at that point is to tell this person "you can't be here" or... and you have to go and... that person's

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gonna go sleep rough, like under an overpass or in the woods and then they're at risk of far more harm.

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Waye: And this person's become uh... while some people are so annoyed by seeing this pile of stuff, the library staff and beat cops and a lot of local merchants have basically adopted this person and check on this person to make sure they're safe and like... you know, this person has a specific chair that they sit in in the library so they can have a line of sight to their stuff that's piled out there and make sure no one's touching it and that kinda thing. And until that person decides to actually move into housing... Our choices are to make their lives more risky or just put up with it for a while and just keep trying to convince them to go into an apartment.

Kaitie: That's good though that there is the support there for that person.

Waye: Yeah.

Kaitie: That gives them... although it's not their choice like to live in housing, that's good that people are still looking out for that person.

Waye: I mean, and the other big piece we can do is the Spring Garden Road streets, you know, is make the sidewalks wider so that when someone's standing there, you know like right now, if someone's standing there asking for change in front of the door block, where if they just made the sidewalks wider, it's not as threatening as like it is in front of Tim Horton's where it's only two meters wide and you have to practically brush by them.

Kaitie: Yeah, exactly.

Wade: So, the street-scaping in the year after next I think could be... like it's not gonna be hostile to uh... you know uh, street-involved folks, but it will make it less hostile for everybody I think.

Kaitie: Yeah, great! Okay, so in places uh, where the Safe Streets Act... this is in places like BC and Ontario, do you think that the Act will ever be repealed? Why or why not?

Waye: Well, I mean maybe in BC because they have the NDP government right now but uh... - laughs-

Kaitie: -laughs-

Waye: Whatever. No, it's like it's uh, whatever the Conservative version of virtue signalling is, right? There's no way the [inaudible] government is gonna get rid of that right now. It's not about ineffective law, it's about being seen to do something by people who live in the suburbs and think that that's what should happen.

Kaitie: Mmhmm. Um, so, uh way back when, do you remember any specific incidents regarding the criminalization of those in poverty or homeless?

Waye: No, I don't really have any; that was well before my time.

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Kaitie: Well before your time? Perfect... and last question is, would you like to add anything else about what we've talked about today?

Waye: No, I think that I've rambled enough.

Kaitie: Yeah? Awesome.

Waye: Awesome.

Kaitie: Thank you so much there Waye, I looked forward to meeting you; it was a pleasure and thank you very much for taking part in my study!

Waye: Great, thank you!

Interview #2: Eric Jonsson
February 14th, 2019

Kaitie (Primary Investigator): Good morning. I am here with Mr. Eric Jonsson, program coordinator of Navigator Street Outreach, an organization that provides support to people experiencing homelessness by assisting them in finding employment via partnerships with businesses of downtown Halifax. I am meeting with Eric today to interview him as part of my thesis research on the Safe Streets Act and the harms that it can bring to people experiencing homelessness. Eric, how are you doing today?

Eric Jonsson: I'm doing well, how are you?

Kaitie: Good thank you! Thank you for assisting me in being a part of my study. Umm, so my first question for you is what do you do for a living and what is your job description?

Eric: I am a social worker by trade, um and my job description is to, uh, in the introduction there you highlighted the employment but also um, housing. Housing is a big part too of my job, um so it's a lot of just finding people who are living on the streets, a place to live. Sometimes finding them employment, but most people just struggle finding a place to live. That's like the main barrier that needs to be like... to not being homeless. –laughs—

Kaitie: -laughs- Um, so how long have you been working for Navigator Street Outreach?

Eric: Only... I'm filling in for somebody for maternity leave so only eight months now, nine months I think but I worked in the community in a lot of different, uh roles and shelters and other outreach places for the last nine years I guess? Eight years? Eight or nine years? Um, so, yeah. Been around a long time now. –laughs-

Kaitie: So what made you want to become a social worker and help with shelters?

Eric: That's a good question! Um... I like homeless people? –laughs-

Kaitie: -laughs-

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Eric: Is that too much? –laughs- No, um I think you can make... um, you can change the world a little bit with it, you know, not to sound too idealistic but you can uh, you can make, you can help make positive changes –noise comes from outside of the office- Do you wanna close that door?

Kaitie: Yeah. –closes door-

Eric: Umm.. Yeah. Not really change the world, but, uh.. I just, yeah, I just enjoy working with people. They... They're so much... They're so much stronger and more resilient and innovative than you kind of give people who are... give them credit for, you know. They come up with ways to survive that I would just never even consider and it's really, I find it often inspiring to work with these kind of people.

Kaitie: Excellent! So have you heard of the Safe Streets Act?

Eric: Yup. I have... Um, not super well, because that was before my time that I started really working. Umm... But, you know, I know the reasons behind why people would wanna do it, or would wanna implement something like that, and... yeah. I am familiar with it, but not overly.

Kaitie: Do you want to briefly explain like, what you know about it?

Eric: Well, from what I understand it was brought in, or they wanted to bring it in specifically to do with like, especially in like BC, to do with like squeegee kids and folks that would be aggressively kind of panhandling and that kind of stuff.

Kaitie: Yeah.

Eric: Um, to, I don't know, they made the Safe Streets Act, I guess, to make people who felt unsafe, safe. But yeah, I don't know the specifics of it more than that, really.

Kaitie: Um, so, your general reaction or sentiments towards the Safe Streets Act. Like knowing what you know, like how do you feel about like, where you're working?

Eric: Well, yeah. That's a good, that's a better question because I, you see it all the time; people would like to criminalize homelessness and criminalize poverty, umm... and it's just, it's... not only is it um, insensitive and not very compassionate, its ineffective. You know?

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Eric: People, uh, like I said, um, people who are living in poverty, people who are experiencing homelessness are smart and innovative and creative and if you kind of try to criminalize one way that they survive, they'll just find another way to survive unless you underline... uh, sorry, unless you target the underlying problems in our society which is things like poverty and mental health and addiction and stuff like that, that there's no, you know, the best way to, you know, deal with this problem would be to help people out and to not force them to have to go panhandle and have to be squeegee kids and all that stuff but we don't do that. We don't have the adequate supports for people, so people just do what they need to do to survive, and that's unfortunately, you know, like, I guess aggressively panhandling, as some people call it, or you know, squeegeeing peoples windows and that kind of stuff.

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Kaitie: For sure. Um, so I know this was kind of before your time as well, um, but you've lived here for your entire life, right?

Eric: No, I grew up in out west in BC.

Kaitie: Oh okay, out west in BC!

Eric: Yeah.

Kaitie: So, were you out west when the Safe Streets Act was proposed around that time?

Eric: No, uhh I don't know when it was in BC... was it around 2000?

Kaitie: Like, 2000, 2004?

Eric: Yeah, I graduated high school in 2004, so then I left for Ontario for a bit so uh probably yeah. And I remember that it was a big deal in Vancouver they, it was all over the news um that they, they just wanted to stop the squeegee kids from cleaning peoples windows and I remember driving through Vancouver and I always thought that it was really cool. I always felt really bad that they did this work for money, but my dad would never want to give them... give the guys who were squeegeeing windows any money um, but a lot of people did, and that's why they did it.

Kaitie: Was like... Before the Act came into place what was the city like before, just like a lot of people experiencing homelessness kind of, um... milling around or do you think that there was an influx?

Eric: No, I don't think there was any influx, but this is a bit out of my, you know I was just a kid, uh, back then. From what I understand like, it might, it maybe made homelessness a little bit less visible because there's not as many people, but we say that homelessness is a lot of times it's just people who are, they might have a place to live, but their income assistance rates are so low that they get, you know, a hundred bucks a month or something like that to live off depending on how much their rent is and everything else. They might only have a hundred, hundred fifty dollars to live off for the entire month and it's like, well, they're gonna go out and try to do whatever they can to get some money to feed themselves and do what they need to do.

Kaitie: Exactly.

Eric: Um, I would say if there was any change it would just be superficial, like the poverty's still there, everything else is still there, they just might not be jumping in front of your car when you're parked at an intersection trying to, trying to get money or trying to, to clean your windows for you.

Kaitie: So here in Halifax, um, over the last few months, I know when I was talking to my other participant that I interviewed, um that he mentioned that there was kind of like more of an influx of the homeless over the past little bit here. Would you agree with that, or?

Eric: No, I wouldn't. I would say homelessness... influx is a weird word, like that implies that they're coming from other parts of the province or other parts of the country which I would kind

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of disagree with. Um, I would be interested to see if there was any research to back that up, you know anecdotally sometimes you see more folks panhandling on Spring Garden, or asking for change at intersections, that kind of stuff, but I don't think that there's any data to say there's more folks who are experiencing homelessness or there's more people coming from other parts of the region to Halifax. Like yeah, maybe there's a few folks that have moved here from Alberta that had a job there, but with the downturn in Alberta, um, and some people wouldn't agree with that but I, in my experiences homelessness is relatively, maybe it's a little bit worse this year, but not... that's part of the cyclical nature of homelessness, like I would say yeah all the shelters are full right now, but four years ago, all the shelters were full too, right? And then there goes periods when, um, when there's beds and there's, there's different things going on. But yeah, it's tricky like that.

Kaitie: Okay. So, regarding your job, how many people experiencing homelessness would you expect to take in like, per day? Like how many people do you help? Or, specifically like this program, Navigator?

Eric: Um, well so when I took over my position it was just at the start of a new fiscal year, so April 1st to March 30th I think is, or March 31st is our fiscal year, and that's how we track our stats. I feel like I've, I haven't looked... but I feel like it's around 170 or so folks that I've interacted with, and you know, I don't wanna say helped, because most people can help themselves quite well, but I've given them a hand for whatever they kinda need and that's, like I said, a lot of, mostly things like housing but also like, basic things like getting people ID's, or yeah sometimes getting people jobs. There's really not that many people that I help find employment because... yeah, it's just most of the folks that I work with, like, employment is like, the 20th step of things that they wanna do first. They need to like, get ID's, first they need to get on income assistance, then they need to figure out a place to live, then you gotta pay the power bill. So there's like all these steps that usually would come before employment, and there are a few people that do, that work and want to work, but there are a lot of folks, you know, whether it's disability or something like that, working is not a strong likelihood in any kind of near timeline. Maybe in like a distant future, if everything goes well and they get all the supports that they need maybe then, but, yeah. So... So yeah, I feel like there's been about 170 or so in the last eight months, and I know in the previous year, when Sasha was here, she did, I think it was like 270 over the year.

Kaitie: Wow!

Eric: So yeah, we're pretty... there's a lot of different folks, and it's all, it's the whole, it's a large unit. Mostly my job is to focus on folks who are living outside, or like, definitely homeless in like the urban core.

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Eric: Um, but there's also, it spans to everybody, I work with folks all over the city in all kinds of different levels of poverty and homelessness that can be somebody couch surfing, it could be somebody that's just about to get evicted, that kinda stuff. So it's all, all over the place.

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Kaitiee: So are these meetings like pre-scheduled or?

Eric: No I rarely schedule meetings with folks, um usually it's, it's... outreach is a big part of my job, so I usually go to where people are at and meet with them, you know, whether it's at like a soup kitchen, or a drop-in center, or the central library, which is where a lot of folks are. Or, you know, wherever they can. I often don't have like set meetings with folks because it's... it's hard for people if they don't have like a phone or a watch. –laughs-

Kaitiee: -laughs- Yeah, hard to get in touch. “We’re meeting today!”

Eric: It's like, “Oh, I'm supposed to be at this meeting for like 2 o'clock!”

-Eric & Kaitiee both laugh-

Eric: But yeah, mostly outreach.

Kaitiee: Okay! So in saying this, what are some ways or steps that we could take to destigmatize and decriminalize people experiencing homelessness?

Eric: That's a good question, all of these are good questions! Um...

-Loud noise from construction within the building begins, some of the conversation becomes muffled on the recording-

Eric: That's... destigmatizing things, I think that there's a difference between destigmatizing and decriminalizing. Um... I think...

Kaitiee: I guess your opinion on both, then.

Eric: Yeah. Like criminalizing is a little bit out of my experience, like I don't know the laws that well and it all depends on how they're enforced and so we have things like the smoking by-law, which just got... I hope this doesn't screw up your recording! –referring to the construction noise- ...Uh, like the smoking by-law, which depending on how you enforce like, the fact that people aren't allowed to smoke on public property like sidewalks or streets or something like that. When that first came into effect, in my mind I was like, “Oh, this just means they're gonna find another way to give a ticket to somebody who's homeless and panhandling, right?” ‘Cuz they're, they're not gonna give it to a guy, the cops aren't gonna give a ticket to a guy in a suit walking into the court, right? They're gonna give it to one of the guys that I'm working with, um, who's sitting on a park bench, smoking in a park, sorta thing and just as a way for them to get them to move on. So it's the laws like that, that apply to everybody theoretically, but will just be selectively applied to people experiencing poverty, people who are homeless, because that's just the way the systems set up, I think. So that criminalizing side of things, I think, is different from the destigmatizing, so... I don't know how to destigmatize like, some of these basic things that we live with, other than just have compassion and don't, I don't... maybe have, if somebody talks to you and asks for money, maybe just see how they're doing that day and just treat them like you would treat anybody else.

Kaitiee: Mmhmm.

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Eric: Um, and I guess just get informed and educate yourself about all the barriers that people who might quickly judge as, you know, being lazy or something like that because they're homeless or, but... realize if you got to know them, and you could kind of understand all the different factors that are... uh... that are at play with people who are experiencing homelessness, you'd realize that it's... there's so many more things than just a simple answer, like there's, you know, like they're lazy, or they can't get a job, or they don't wanna work, it's like...no, they usually... A, there's never enough affordable housing for these people, so that's the biggest reason I would say that they're homeless. The secondary reasons are things like mental health and addiction and... just poverty in general, just how low the assistance rates are for people who are, who need to be on income assistance or who need to be on disability. They're on it to survive, so you kinda see why it's just this cycle of poverty that, this cycle of homelessness that, it's really, really difficult for people to escape from. So I guess just to destigmatize, that would be just to learn about it and to really kinda get a better understanding of what people are going through.

Kaitie: And I think that's great too, because... I think that's kind of what people have been lacking, at least in what I've read in the literature, is that people see things just through one perspective, which is kind of their own. Like they're not opening up to other possibilities, they're not trying to put themselves in other people's shoes and I think that's one of the biggest things that people should try to do, because even though they're not experiencing the same situation as someone else, like, it's always good to figure out, well, you know, what can we do to help? Like what is this person really going through?

Eric: Mmhmm, yeah.

Kaitie: So do you think that the Safe Streets Act in places like Ontario or BC will ever be repealed? Why or why not?

Eric: That's a political question, I don't know. Um... yeah, I don't know. I hope it would be. Um... yeah, I don't really wanna, like I don't know what the political situation is like in those provinces. Um... I can... yeah, there's probably really good arguments against it. It's also probably not a huge priority, it's like one of those things that I don't think anybody is gonna get elected on. "Well we're gonna repeal the Safe Streets Act" – and that will get them, you know, a few votes, but it's not something that's gonna be a campaign promise for people... But maybe I'm wrong, maybe the NDP has that in their... in their platform or something, I don't know. –laughs-

Kaitie: -laughs-

Eric: -coughs- So I guess I hope it is, but like... yeah, I can't really speak on that.

Kaitie: Yeah, no worries! So, in your own opinion, what are some of the harms that homeless people endure due to the Safe Streets Act and the criminalization that is found against them?

Eric: Oh!

Kaitie: What do you see on a daily basis?

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Eric: I don't know, like so there's things like the poverty credit and the GST, uh... the GST credit that you would get in Nova Scotia... well, the GST is federal, but yeah, in the province of Nova Scotia... and I think that can be taken from you if you owe a bunch of fines. Um, so I've seen people who are getting fines for panhandling near intersections, or you know, loitering... well, not very often getting tickets for loitering... but like the panhandling ones especially, and the smoking within 15 feet of a building, and now it's gonna be smoking anywhere... and those fines just add up, and that's just one more thing that people have to deal with. It's like, "Well, now we're gonna give these guys that don't get any money for... it's not a lot of money, so you know it's like \$150 bucks in three months or something like that, but uh... it's a lot of money to those folks. And that's just one more way that we're gonna keep people in poverty, by punishing them for doing what they need to do to live. You know, it's like if you're... yeah, it's okay to smoke on your private property or in your apartment if your landlord allows that, but when you don't have a place to live, you know...

Kaitie: Well where else are you gonna smoke?

Eric: Yeah, where else are you gonna smoke? Or where else are you gonna drink? You know, like I enjoy having a beer at my house sometimes and that's great, but if I didn't have a place to live and I still wanna have a beer, I would get a drinking in public ticket, right? And it's the same thing, you know, university kids. Some of them will just get wasted and go to sleep right, you know, and that's fine, but if you're homeless and you get drunk, then you'll get thrown in the drunk tank cuz you're just sleeping in public, sorta thing.

Kaitie: Yeah.

Eric: It's those things, I think that are just ways that we criminalize folks, even after the systems already failed them it like, doubly fails them because they don't have a place to live and then because they don't have a place to live, all these other um... negative things happen to them that if they did have a place to live, they probably wouldn't happen. Or if they did happen, they wouldn't be that bad so... Yeah. It just kinda, it just really sucks.

Kaitie: And those tickets aren't cheap either, they're probably like what, \$150-\$200?

Eric: Something like that yeah, it's always changing. I don't know, but it's... it's not cheap. It's not like...

Kaitie: It's not like a parking ticket, I mean those suck!

Eric: -laughs- Yeah, I got a parking ticket last night. I looked at it and it was like \$25, which is like sucks, but I don't know, that's manageable. But yeah, if it's open liquor or public intoxication it's like \$120-\$160, so.

Kaitie: Oh my god. And how often do you hear of people getting those tickets?

Eric: Depends. Like, they happen every day, I see folks get tickets all the time and it all depends, you know, a lot of people get drunk in public tickets fairly often because they don't have any place to go so... yeah. I don't know, I don't have any... I don't really keep stats of that, of like how often, but it happens I'd say at least every week, if not every day. But it's like, you know,

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over the dozens and dozens of people that I work with and a few of them will get tickets all the time. –laughs–

Kaitie: -laughs- Yeah, and that's like... that holds people back too because I mean, they don't have the financial means to pay for that.

Eric: Yeah.

Kaitie: And like we said, it's not something cheap like a parking ticket would be, this is like hundreds of dollars in fines and if they keep getting these fines, like it's almost next to impossible to pay it off with the situation that they're in.

Eric: Yeah.

Kaitie: Um... So I guess this question doesn't really apply to you... Do you remember any specific incidents working... um, regarding the criminalization of those in poverty or the homeless back when the Safe Streets Act was being proposed? Well, you weren't really here...

Eric: Yeah.

Kaitie: But do you remember anything, like from back in BC or like, hearing anything on the news from Ontario of those instances?

Eric: Of people... sorry... of instances of what, sorry?

Kaitie: Of instances regarding the criminalization of those in poverty. Like was there anything in the news that was notable?

Eric: I can't remember that well. Um... no. I think it was... yeah, I think it was just the typical giving tickets to, you know, the street youth, the squeegee kids who have no ability to pay. It's just another way to, I don't know... look like, to make it look like the government's doing something and they're not actually, so.

Kaitie: And I remember back here too when I was reading back on the newspaper articles I was reading for my thesis, that there was, back in Dartmouth during those times of 2005-2007, uh they were trying to make it like, illegal over there for people to try and panhandle in front of the shops and everything. And even though it was something that wasn't within our laws and something that the police couldn't enforce I remember that it really stuck out to me because there was people like actively trying to go against the homeless. Like, you know, they're just standing out in front of their stores and they feel like that's a bad business rep. Um... so they were trying to get something in place. And even though the police had no say in it, they were saying "Oh no, like this is illegal, you can't be doing that". And I thought that was so funny, because... you know, they're just business owners. They're not law makers, they're not people above or beyond the law, like they can't be doing that stuff. And it just like, threw me into so much shock that they see this as that big of a problem, when all it is, is...

Eric: Yeah. Yeah, people have... and I mean it's not just business owners, it's... people have their own perception of um, reality, and have their own kind of ideas of what is the worst, what's going wrong, what's going wrong with these things or what's going, what's the bad things. But

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it's not, unless it's kinda, you know I have a lot of faith in data for these things, like okay well prove to me that this is such a problem for you and then maybe we can do something, but a lot of it is just, you know for better or for worse, it's just anecdotal. Like, this is such an obvious thing, like these people are panhandling in front of a place, or like this guy, this homeless person is drinking on the park bench and it's making it unsafe, and it's like, well I understand that, you know, you have a right to your opinion and your opinion is valid for... your experience is valid and I support that, but like... I don't know, is it that big of a deal sometimes?

Kaitie: Yeah.

Eric: So, I don't know.

Kaitie: So, in regards to... I guess I wouldn't say like, preventative measures, but what are kind of some other systems put in place here in Halifax that can aid people experiencing homelessness?

Eric: Well, so like I guess to toot my own horn is like my job is to... I'm really happy that the city, the business associations have kinda come together to be proactive about this and to say "listen, like we had this, you know, we see as a problem and there's a lot of people who panhandle in like the downtown area, and so rather than try and criminalize it, I think they did a really cool thing which is, "let's hire an outreach worker to just see if there's any way we can help these folks to see if there's any way to, you know, get them to just figure out their lives a bit more".

Kaitie: Mmhmm.

Eric: You know, I think the ultimate goal would be to stop people from panhandling, but I think everybody has realized that this is a much bigger issue than just like a one person thing to stop panhandling, and those underlying supports of how our income assistance rates are just too low, and there's no mental health or addictions supports for a lot of folks, and so what, you know, barring, changing the entire system and think this is a good step and we do have a lot of success with people to like, "Oh, if you're... like in distress or if there's something that you're going through in an emergency, like what do you need?" And that's what I can kinda help for.

Kaitie: Yeah! Um.. so that kind of is the end of my questions, uh would you like to add anything else? Like between your job...?

Eric: No, other than I think... I don't know how much research you've done on like, other jurisdictions... But I feel like the research will probably say that criminalizing poverty really doesn't do anything. People will find another way to support themselves, and if you're not really gonna focus on those underlying issues, like you know, Safe Streets Act... are probably just Band-Aid solutions to perceive problems, but they're not actually solving any kind of underlying issues that create the need for Safe Streets Act.

Kaitie: And that is kind of what I have been reading, like the gist of it from my literature is that even though these laws are put in place it's not really helping anyone or anything. Like they think it is, and they think... it is a Band-Aid solution, um but at the end of the day, there is no

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real justice that's done, it's just kind of empty tickets because people experiencing homelessness, they don't have the money to pay for it so... it's all just empty stuff. But at the same time, if people experiencing homelessness happen to rack up enough tickets and they happen to be thrown in jail, I mean that's not fair either, because they've done nothing to be... deserving to be put in that situation. Like when you think of jail, you think of people that have done some unspeakable crime or something like you know that they really need to be in there to correct their behaviour... but homelessness is not one of those things.

Eric: Yeah, no I totally agree, and it's like I think of aggressive panhandlers um, and that kinda stuff which nobody, you know... fair enough, you should be able to feel safe enough to walk down the street and if like some big dude comes at you aggressively demanding money that can be scary, but when I think of like the handful of people who would kind of fall under that classification, um... like, they have been so failed by the mental health system and there's not adequate supports in place for them. Like, they don't care about tickets or jail time or anything like that, they have so many other things going on in their lives like, some of them do well in jail because at least it's a roof over your head and meals every day, whereas like you know, they often can't go to other shelters, they can't go to places, they just try to survive and so they're aggressively panhandling because that is all they, you know, that is... the best that the system has done for them. So like, if you pass a law saying, I don't know, unless you're just gonna lock these people up for doing nothing other than having mental health and addiction troubles for a long time, there's really no way you're gonna... and you know thankfully our society won't do that because it's a huge violation of their human rights, but like that's the only way that you can solve some of these issues unless you're really heavily invested with better supports for the people who most need it.

Kaitie: And I think that speaks to a lot of these issues too, because when you have people that are literally just going to jail to have a roof over their head, or to have three square meals a day, like to have the basic necessities of life... that's like... it's a sin that's what it really takes to get that far um, for them to kinda get what they need, but at the same time like, they'll keep reoffending to get those things but at the same time, you never know what you're going to encounter in prison. Like you never know what you're going to get sucked into, what groups you might be like, asked or threatened to be joined into and that kinda repeats back to the cycle of poverty, because you could be getting looped into something in prison, you go out, you reoffend again, and then you end up back in again but maybe for something more serious that time. So something that wasn't a problem in the first place, becomes an even bigger problem.

Eric: Yeah. Yeah, it's not good. There's a bunch of different problems. –coughs- Excuse me. So yeah.

Kaitie: Wow. Well, thank you very much for all the information that you gave to me today; very helpful, very informative.

Eric: No problem!

Kaitie: And... have a great day!

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Eric: Thanks!