

## The PIN: Problem, Issue or Need of Interest (200 Points)

**Objective:** After completing this assignment, you will be able to

- Explain how community context and characteristics affect the prevalence, severity and expression of social problems, needs and issues.

### Components in the Assignment

Select any social problem, issue or need (from here on called PINS) that interests you. I provide a list of typical PINs that are amenable to interventions at the community level through policy or action programs. You do not have to choose from this list. I want you to work with a PIN that matters to you. The PIN must be one that we could try to address at the community level rather than the individual or household level. You want a PIN where community context affects how the PIN develops, why it persists, and or how we might address it. Students in the past have had difficulty identifying PINs that differ based on community context. Examples of context include rural versus urban settings, large cities versus smaller ones, communities that differ by race, ethnicity, class or other demographics -- these are all contextual factors and there are many others including, for example, environmental risks, economic environment (infrastructure, investment, etc.). You may narrow your focus if you want. For example, you might narrow crime and violence to “crime and violence among youth” or even perhaps to “school violence” or “family violence.” Keep uppermost in your decision that we are interested in phenomena that vary **due to characteristics and traits of communities**, even though the problem may and usually does express itself at the individual or household level. For example, obesity expresses itself at both the individual and household level. However, there is strong evidence that the community context plays an important role in the **incidence and severity** of obesity. Residents of low-income communities typically exhibit both greater incidence and severity of obesity and obesity has been linked to community characteristics like density of supermarkets, fast food outlets, and convenience stores as well as things like number and type of parks, violence and crime. In this course, you should **focus on exploring the role of these kinds of community characteristics on the problem of obesity, rather than individual traits**. I understand that this distinction is not an easy one to make, but I want you to focus on how **community context and characteristics** affect the PIN you select. Use the following file name for the Word document you submit under Assignment 1 on Canvas:

**YourLastName(s)\_6330\_PIN**

You may complete this as an individual or as a small group of two to four people. The only caveat is that you need to agree on the PIN. You have to have shared interests and remember that you will work with this PIN throughout the semester. If you choose to do a group project now, you do NOT have to work with the group for Assignments 2 and 3. And should you discover after completing Assignment 1 that someone else is working on a PIN that is similar to yours, you can always decide to develop a group for Assignment 2. Assignment 3 will be an individual assignment.

### List of Potential PINS

Crime and incarceration  
Underemployment, unemployment, job growth/loss  
Poverty, including persistent (multi-generational) poverty  
Educational opportunities, quality, and/or achievement  
Family structure, stability and/or resilience, or violence  
Interpersonal violence  
Race, gender, ethnic, sexual orientation and gender disparities a  
Problematic or risky behaviors by youth  
Food security

PIN: Problem, Issue or Need

Health outcomes  
Housing quality, availability and/or affordability  
Socio-economic status and/or mobility  
Environmental risks (due to pollution, failing infrastructure, inadequate water supplies, etc.)  
Substance abuse  
Opportunities for recreation, physical activity, participation in sports, leisure activities  
Opportunities for cultural expression, participation in the arts

1. **Define and describe the extent and nature of the problem, issue or need that you will address in your semester project – maximum 500 words (about one page), excluding reference list.** See the example below, which contains 470 words. *Note that the references in this document exist, but they are dated. I am using this as an example and did not want to spend a lot of time looking for the most recent references. I want you to see how to lay out the nature and extension of a PIN – why it needs to be addressed – and see how to focus on community level indicators.*

**(Definition)** Homelessness is a condition in which a person is without permanent and/or stable shelter for any period. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a homeless person is defined as “an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” and “a person whose primary nighttime residence is...a public or private shelter ... an institution ... a public or private place not designed for ... a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings” (HUD, 2007). However, current social research about homelessness suggests that this definition is problematic contingent with the actual nature of homelessness in the U.S. According to the research, a large proportion of homeless people are part of a group known as the “hidden homeless,” or those who live in the homes of friends or family members and often do not seek public assistance for their condition (Rollinson, 2007).

**(Extent & nature of the problem)** The most current survey of homelessness in the U.S. puts the number of homeless around 754,000 nationwide (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2005; Associated Press, 2007). The number of homeless people with severe mental health disorders has been consistent over the years, but current research points to a greater prevalence of these conditions in the chronically homeless (Caton et al., 2005; Weinreb, 2006). Poverty and market forces are significant contributors to homelessness today just as they were in the post-depression era (Dale, 2004; Rollinson, 2007). Work opportunities are declining consistently despite increases in real wages. The real value of the U.S. minimum wage was 26% lower in 2004 than it was in 1979 (The Economic Policy Institute, 2005). Falling real wages reduce an individual’s ability to secure housing. Public assistance has declined since the mid 1990’s (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). The current level of assistance from several major sources, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), is below the poverty level in every state by an average of 29% (Nickelson, 2004). In addition, fewer people are enrolled in and/or qualify for welfare benefits as a result of current welfare reform laws. These families struggle to obtain medical care and even to meet basic needs like housing. Current economic and real estate trends have decreased affordable and low-cost housing units. Between 1973 and 1993, the availability of low-rent housing units decreased by over two million units, despite the fact that the number of people in need of these units has soared (Daskal, 1998). In addition, the amount of federal support for low-income housing decreased by 49% between 1980 and 2003 (National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2005). These trends have created waiting lists for affordable housing units supported by government subsidy or private agencies like Habitat for Humanity. Other factors that contribute to the prevalence of homelessness are inability to secure healthcare or healthcare benefits, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006).

2. Compare the prevalence, extent or severity of the PIN in several communities. You might select rural and urban communities, for example. Select several communities and find data. This will help you with question 3 in this assignment and with all of the remaining parts of the semester project. ***If the prevalence, extent or severity of the problem does not vary across communities, it is not an appropriate choice for this class.*** Summarize what you find.

**Example of Variation among Communities.** “Food insecurity varies greatly from community to community. In parts of some large cities, entire communities are virtually devoid of places where local people can buy affordable, nutritious food. Goodson (2013) found that nearly 70% of the census blocks in Detroit are characterized as “food deserts” according to USDA’s Food Desert Atlas. Yet, other parts of the city are literally “urban meccas” of local, organic, and ethnic foods often grown right in the community (Childson & Greely, 2010). The same extreme differences occur in other cities. Syracuse (Endelman & Silverman, 2014; Silverman and Pothukuci, 2012), Chicago (Alison et al., 2008; Flynn & McSorley, 2013) and Houston (Martinez & Ruiz, 2014; Beaulieu & Torres, 2010) all show the same pattern.” **Maximum one page, excluding tables, graphs, and reference list.**

3. Identify and describe the characteristics of communities (the community context) that are associated with variance in the PIN. For example, I reviewed a body of literature about food insecurity. These are just a few examples of community characteristics associated with food insecurity and I have super-summarized here, but this may give you an idea of what I mean by “community context and characteristics” and some indication of the kinds of literature and sources of information you can use. As a professional, expertise in the nature, extent and community context of the problem, need or issue that you address is critical. Do not accept truisms as fact. The phrase “everyone knows that ...” often means that the individual simply has not actually examined the evidence. Quite often, it turns out that the claim is poorly supported by evidence. Explore the literature in depth. **Maximum two pages, excluding reference list.**

**Examples of characteristics/context.** Households in principal cities of metropolitan areas have a higher prevalence of food insecurity than those outside principal cities (Economic Research Service, 2009), although food insecurity also occurs in rural communities (Smith, 2009; McEntee & Agyeman, 2010). Economic, physical and social characteristics of the community co-vary with food insecurity. Low-income communities in both rural (Smith, 2009) and urban (Freedman and Bell, 2009; Mammen, Bauer & Richards 2009; Walker, Keane & Burke 2010) settings experience both a higher percentage of food insecure households and a higher percentage of households in the very insecure USDA category. However, overall spending on food purchases has declined over the past three years for the U.S. as a whole (Economic Research Service, 2009) and food insecurity is a problem in “middle class” suburban communities as well, possibly reflecting the trend of increasing poverty in suburban communities (Kneebone & Garr, 2010; Raphael & Stoll, 2010). Nonetheless, the evidence that poverty *per se* is the cause of food insecurity is not robust (Quan et al., 2000; Bhattacharya, Currie & Haider, 2004; Champagne et al., 2007; Rose et al., 2009). Physical characteristics of the community that co-vary with food insecurity include low density of supermarkets (Wrigley et al., 2003; Cummins, 2007; Lytle, 2009; Larson, Story & Nelson, 2009; Laraia et al. 2004) and high density of fast food outlets and convenience stores (Sturm & Datar, 2005; Morland, Roux & Wing, 2006; Liese et al., 2007; Black et al., 2010; Timperio et al., 2008). Social characteristics of importance ...”

4. **References.** Your task is to review a lot of literature and summarize it. Your work should be reference dense – about like the “Examples of characteristics/context” piece under question 3. You’re not interpreting. You’re not giving us your thoughts. You are simply telling us what

is out there in the literature about your PIN that ties to differences among communities and identifying some of the traits that co-vary (positively or negatively) with the severity and incidence of the PIN. You should have a few pages of writing – and plenty of citations.

1. Bhattacharya, J., Currie, J. & Haider, S. (2004). Poverty, food insecurity, and nutritional outcomes in children and adults. *Journal of Health Economics* 23, 839-862.
2. Black, J.L., Macinko, J., Dixon, L.B. & Fryer, G.E. (2010). Neighborhoods and obesity in New York City. *Health & Place* 16(3), 489-499.
3. Champagne, C.M., Casey, P.H., Connell, C.L. et al. (2007). Poverty and food intake in rural America: Diet quality is lower in food insecure adults in the Mississippi Delta. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 107(11), 1886-1894.
4. Cummins, S. (2007). Neighbourhood food environment and diet – time for improved conceptual models? *Preventive Medicine* 44, 196-197.
5. Economic Research Service. United States Department of Agriculture. (2009A). *Food security in the United States: Definitions of hunger and food security*. Downloaded May 7, 2010 from [http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/stats\\_graphs.htm](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/stats_graphs.htm)
6. Freedman, D.A. & Bell, B.A. (2009). Access to healthful foods among an urban food insecure population: Perceptions versus reality. *Journal of Urban Health* 86(6), 825-838.
7. Kneebone, E. & Carr, E. (2010). *The Suburbanization of Poverty: Trends in Metropolitan America, 2000-2008*. Metropolitan Opportunity Series No. 3. Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C.
8. Laraia, B.A., Siega-Riz, A.M., Kaufman, J.S. & Jones, S.J. (2004). Proximity of supermarkets is positively associated with diet quality index for pregnancy. *Preventive Medicine* 39(5), 869-875.
9. Larson, N.I., Story, M.T. & Nelson, M.C. (2009). Neighborhood environments: Disparities in access to healthy foods in the U.S. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 36(1), 74- 81.
10. Liese, A.D., Weis, K., Pluto, D., Smith, E., & Lawson, A. (2007). Food store types, availability, and cost of foods in a rural environment. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 107(11), 1916-1923.
11. Lytle, L.A. (2009). Measuring the food environment: State of the science. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 36(4), S134-S144.
12. Mammen, S., Bauer, J.W. & Richards, L. (2009). Understanding persistent food insecurity: A paradox of place and circumstance. *Social Indicators Research* 92 (1), 151-168.
13. McEntee, J. & Agyeman, J. (2010). Towards the development of a GIS method for identifying rural food deserts: Geographic access in Vermont, USA. *Applied Geography* 30(1), 165-176.
14. Morland, K., Roux, A.V.D. & Wing, S. (2006). Supermarkets, other food stores, and obesity: The atherosclerosis risk in communities study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30(4), 333-339.
15. Quan, T., Salomon, J., Nitzke, S. & Reicks, M. (2000). Behaviors of low-income mothers related to fruit and vegetable consumption. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 100(5), 567-569.
16. Raphael, S. & Stoll, M.A. (2010). *Job Sprawl and the Suburbanization of Poverty*. Metropolitan Opportunity Series No. 4. Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C.
17. Rose, D., Hutchinson, P.L., Bodor, J.N., Swalm, C.M., Farley, T.A., Cohen, D.A. & Rice, J.C. (2009). Neighborhood food environments and body mass index: The importance of in-store contents. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 37(3), 214-219.
18. Smith, C. & Morton, L.W. (2009). Rural food deserts: Low-income perspectives on food access in Minnesota and Iowa. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 41(3), 176- 187.
19. Sturm, R. & Datar, A. (2005). Body mass index in elementary school children, metropolitan area food prices and food outlet density. *Public Health* 119(12), 1059-1068.

20. Timperio, A., Ball, K., Roberts, R., Campbell, K., Andrianopoulos, N. & Crawford, D. (2008). Children's fruit and vegetable intake: Associations with the neighbourhood food environment. *Preventive Medicine* 46(4), 331-335.
21. Walker, R.E., Keane, C.R. & Burke, J.G. (2010). Disparities and access to healthy food in the United States: A review of food deserts literature. *Health & Place* doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2010.04.013
22. Wrigley, N., Warm, D. & Margetts, B. (2003). Deprivation, diet and food-retail access: Findings from the Leeds 'food deserts' study. *Environment & Planning A* 35(1), 151-188.

### Grading Rubric for the PIN

You need to meet the criteria for Excellent to receive the full possible points. This is the only time I will show the criteria for Acceptable and Needs Improvement. I provide this as an example so that you can have a better understanding of how I award points.

| <b>Content Criteria – 80 possible points</b>      |   |
|---|---|
| Excellent   | <p>Discusses and explains key concepts in the literature concerning the problem issue or need (PIN) of interest and the way community context or characteristics interact in the expression of the PIN</p> <p>Examines the range of perspectives in the literature, is in-depth without being redundant (relying on too few authors, for example)</p> <p>Discussion is well organized and topics flow logically so that the reader gains a good understanding of the key points that the author wants to make</p>   |
| Acceptable  | <p>Discusses and explains key concepts in the literature concerning the problem issue or need (PIN) of interest, but does not include an in-depth explanation of how community context or characteristics interact in the expression of the PIN</p> <p>The review is limited to one or a few perspectives and relies too much on one or a few authors or sources of information</p> <p>Discussion is well organized and topics flow logically so that the reader gains a good understanding of the key points that the author wants to make</p>   |
| Needs Improvement                                 | <p>Discusses and explains some key concepts in the literature concerning the problem issue or need (PIN) of interest, but provides an abbreviated or superficial discussion of how community context or characteristics interact in the expression of the PIN</p> <p>Provides little or no discussion of differences between ideas or perspectives that are present in the literature</p> <p>Content of the literature reviewed is relevant to the PIN of interest, but the review is highly redundant, relying primarily on a few authors or sources of information</p> <p>Discussion is poorly organized and it is hard to understand the key points the author wants to make</p> |
| <b>Use of the Literature – 80 possible points</b> |   |
| Excellent   | <p>More than 70% of references are peer-reviewed reports in research journals</p> <p>Almost all other sources consist of (1) peer-reviewed articles in practitioner journals and/or (2) reports from credible organizations, such as government agencies or private for-profit or non-profit organizations with extensive expertise in the topical area</p> <p>Popular literature and information from sources that could be biased such as advocacy organizations are used very rarely, if at all, and the potential</p>   |

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|  | <p>bias/limitations of the source are explicitly indicated in the text</p> <p>All references are cited in the body of the document and the author refers to the relevant content in the reference in the body of the document</p>  |
| Acceptable   | <p>At least half of the references are peer-reviewed research journal articles</p> <p>Several other sources are 1) peer-reviewed articles in practitioner journals and/or (2) reports from credible organizations, such as government agencies or private for-profit or non-profit organizations with extensive expertise in the topical area</p> <p>Popular literature and information from sources that may be biased such as advocacy organizations are used, in some cases without clear indications of the potential bias/limitations of the source</p> <p>Fails to cite some references in the body of the document and it is not always clear what kind of information the reference provided</p> |
| Needs Improvement                                  | <p>Less than half of the references were peer-reviewed research journal articles</p> <p>Many citations are articles in practitioner journals or are reports from organizations, such as government agencies or private for-profit or non-profit organizations rather than scholarly literature</p> <p>Popular literature and information from sources that may be biased such as advocacy organizations are used without clear indications of the potential bias/limitations of the source</p> <p>Fails to cite several references in the body of the document and does not explain how each was used</p>  |
| <b>Instructions and Style – 40 possible points</b> |  |
| Excellent  | <p>Follows all instructions</p> <p>All references and citations are in APA format</p>  |
| Acceptable   | <p>Follows all instructions</p> <p>Occasionally fails to use appropriate APA format in references or citations</p>   |
| Needs Improvement                                  | <p>Does not follow all instructions</p> <p>Consistently fails to use appropriate APA format in references or citations</p>   |