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Exploration of Transportation Obstacles for Those Seeking Selected Social Services in

Northern Mississippi

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Doctor of Public Administration

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Exploration of Transportation Obstacles for Those Seeking Selected Social Services in

Northern Mississippi

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ABSTRACT

Transportation obstacles create problems that on the surface appear simple; turning

frustratingly complex to the policy makers and public administrators tasked with tackling

them in modern human communities. Two primary imperatives focus administrators and

legislators attention to transportation obstacles: (a) Transportation obstacles are primary

contributors to an inability to access public services, and (b) transportation obstacles

prevent all citizens from benefitting equally from public services which are paid for by all

members regardless of transportation ability. Literature has long identified transportation

obstacles as a priority in public debate about transportation policy, practice, and social

equity, with myriad studies and academic works to support the supposition that obstacles

to transportation in modern society make it difficult for the least among its citizens.

Missing in large part among all this work is a contemporary, operating, definition of what

actually constitutes a "transportation obstacle." The available literature is rich in

quantitative data identifying "obstacles" to transportation as a major problem, but there is

precious little deeper qualitative information of what obstacles are actually encountered.

This study attempts to define and describe transportation obstacles. This study did this

by conducting focus groups of public service providers in northern Mississippi in which

the participants were asked to articulate their views on the construct and secondary

effects of a transportation obstacle. This will assist legislators and administrators in

developing strategies to deal with these issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A primary task of any public legislator or administrator is to provide public goods and services to their constituents in a manner that produces a socially, economically, and politically equitable community (Appleby, 1945; Fredrickson, 1971; Norman-Major, 2011; Svara & Brunet, 2005). Transportation obstacles—anything that prevents an individual from accessing or obtaining goods or services or participating in communal activities because of an inability to transcend a space promptly—present a fundamental challenge to this in that they play a significant role in preventing individuals from accessing public services (Buzza et al., 2011; King et al., 2017; Martens, 2012; Smart & Klein, 2017). Martens (2017) in *Transport Justice* articulated this by stating,

> The importance of transportation, and the possible impacts of a lack of transportation, cannot be overestimated. Transportation is a fundamental requirement to participate in the labor market, obtain health care, enjoy education, or meet family or friends. It is a fundamental prerequisite for a life of meaning and value. (p. xiv)

This is not lost on public officials and administrators who for years have been addressing transportation obstacles with myriad programs, systems, and initiatives designed to assist those unable to access available transport (Blumenberg & Pierce, 2016; Manuagh et al., 2015; Martens, 2017). Public servants are not short in material and research to help guide their efforts in addressing this issue. Literature regarding transportation issues and policy is vast and deep in quantitative content. The qualitative (describing exactly what these obstacles are and consist of) not as much (Manaugh & El-Geneidy, 2013; Lucas et al., 2018). Lucas et al. (2018), in "Is Transport Poverty Socially or Environmentally

Driven?" made the point that the vast majority of transportation studies are useful in developing qualitative data but

> do not assess the micro-spatial and social distributional effects of their policy decisions, although these can have major consequences for people's livelihoods and well-being, such as maintaining a job, taking up healthcare, education, and other public service opportunities and avoiding social isolation, especially in later life. (p. 624)

Policy decisions are often made in the absence of information regarding the real-world effects on affected populations. Public officials and administrators need this information to develop, legislate, and execute effective public programs and services to ensure to the highest possible level social equity and inclusion within the polity in all economic, social, and political activities. Lucas et al. (2019) unpacked this concept in the final section of *Measuring Transport Equity* with the following:

> Measurement of the other social outcomes that are more broadly associated with transport provisions, such as economic and social participation, well-being, social inclusion, and quality of life are generally less well evolved within the academic domain and also thus less recognized by policy-makers. (p. 295)

This study attempted to produce a portion of that information by conducting virtual focus groups of public service providers across north Mississippi, seeking their views and ideas on what transportation obstacles consist of concerning their clients. The intent was to allow public officials to explore the width and breadth of the term "transportation obstacle"; their construct and consequence in reality, and how these officials attempt to mitigate or eliminate them. Those who lack safe, reliable, and affordable transportation

risk missing the appointments, screenings, and other interactions required by social workers and other public administrators to access public services.

Background of the Problem

Before the second phase of the Industrial Revolution, human life was structured (for the most part) around the walking distance of the individual—at most within an afternoon's buggy or horseback ride (Hall, 1998). The development and acceptance of automobiles created access to larger numbers of personal and public services and conveniences dispersed over larger geographical areas (Hall, 1998). The result was (is) very much a society developed by and for those with unfettered access to these new vehicles. Those without the means to reliably, safely, conveniently, and affordably navigate these new transportation systems in most developed nations (especially in the West—and most especially the United States) based on the automobile find themselves at a disadvantage in obtaining the necessities and accouterments of modern life and maintaining a connection with the larger community. King et al. (2019) stated as much in "The Poverty of the Carless: Towards Universal Auto Access":

> Over time, as driving becomes more necessary, anyone who can acquire a vehicle will, even if doing so is financially burdensome. As a consequence, the population without vehicles will become increasingly disadvantaged, because only the most disadvantaged people will be unable to afford cars. (p. 2)

Transportation obstacles consistently rank high among issues affecting low-income individuals from accessing and enjoying the benefits of modern society (Garasky et al., 2006). These issues are not new to public officials and administrators (Hansen, 1958; Koenig, 1980; Martens, 2017). Transportation literature since the 1950s deals with

the issue of dispersed population centers based on the automobile and the accessibility challenges faced by those unable to obtain use of these vehicles (Hansen, 1958; King et al., 2019; Koenig, 1980). Complexity fuels much of the issue. Studies on topics as varied as poverty, illiteracy, health care concerns, and voter apathy (just as a sample) all list the inability to access safe, convenient, and affordable transportation as a primary causation of these issues (Frank & Hibbard, 2016; Garrett & Taylor, 1999). Much of the current and past literature on the topic focuses primarily (read solely) on the need to access an automobile, but an issue that cuts hydra-like in myriad manifestations across such a large cross-section of the primary features of what is considered an adequate modern life is much more complicated.

Transportation obstacles add exponentially to social injustice and isolation in a modern community. The literature is rich in quantitative information detailing and chronicling this. What is missing is the qualitative context and definition needed to accurately identify and target the issue as it manifests itself in any given region and begin to develop effective and efficient public action to address it (Combs et al., 2016; Geurs & van Wee, 2004).

Equally crucial to the social injustice and isolation caused by these obstacles is the political inequality created when those who pay for public goods and services cannot access them because they cannot get to them (Wellmon, 2015). The focus of this study (the State of Mississippi) in its Constitution lists all individuals living permanently within its borders as citizens and that all powers and authority residing in this state government come from these same people (Miss. Const., Art I, §§ 5 & 8), all residents pay land and usage taxes (Miss. Const., Art. 4, § 112 and Art. 11, § 236), which go to fund the various

state functions, goods, and services created and designed to create a better life and lifestyle for all citizens (Miss. Const., Art. 8, §206 and Art. 14, § 262). These include (but are not limited to) schools, health care centers and services, social services, and (perhaps most important) the machinery to vote (Miss. Const., Art. 3, § 24 and Art. 12, § 242). Transportation obstacles prevent many of the states most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations from participating in or receiving these goods or, at best, pay an exorbitant transportation premium (or what in her biography of President Coolidge Amity Shlaes [2013] calls a "tax of isolation," p. 119). Transportation obstacles prevent many of the most vulnerable from receiving public assistance, participating in regular educational, economic, and communal activities, and achieving an acceptable standard of living. It is incumbent on public officials and administrators to understand this issue in real-time to adequately and equitably address it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the various types of transportation obstacles that impede those using public services in north Mississippi. This study asked how public administrative professionals view and deal with transportation obstacles as they affect their clientele; discuss whom they feel has a duty or obligation to address these obstacles; what assumptions have been made socially, culturally, and politically in contributing to constructing these obstacles; and what strategies or actions produce positive results in ameliorating these obstacles.

To be equitable and effective, public legislators and administrators must have accurate information on what a problem is and how it affects their citizens (Fredrickson, 1971; Wellmon, 2015).

Research Questions

The study aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?

2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?

3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?

4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Significance of the Problem

Transportation obstacles contribute significantly to poverty and illiteracy, which fuel economic and societal inequality and injustice. Public officials and administrators have ample literature detailing this problem but a dearth of information explaining what "transportation obstacle" actually consists of and how it affects their clients. It is imperative that legislators and administrators have an accurate picture of what these obstacles look and feel like in human terms in order to effectively, efficiently, and equitably address them.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the term *public officials* describes those individuals employed by the agencies included in the sample and directly charged with providing public goods and services. Low income relates to individuals qualifying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] benefits through the MS Department of Human Services. This was used for ease of definition and defines low income as those making less than 130% of the gross federal poverty wage and 100% of the net poverty wage on an expanding scale depending on family size.

Thus an individual would qualify with an income up to $1,396 monthly gross or $1,074 net. A family of four would qualify up to $2,871 and $2,209. Elderly and disabled individuals, and families with elderly or disabled members only have to meet the net requirements (Mississippi Department of Health Services [MDHS], 2021).

Disclosure

The researcher is a social service provider in North Mississippi, which is the geographical setting in which the study occurs. The researcher is aware of the offices and individuals located in the target area, is acquainted with several of the individuals working in these offices on a professional level, and is personally acquainted with a few individuals through conference attendance and interactions during case management.

No one personally acquainted with the researcher participated in the focus groups during the study. Additionally, through his professional activities, the researcher is familiar with the material and issues of which this study is concerned. All data, findings, and conclusions in the study originate from participant data gathering processes. The researcher has not added to or altered any comments or data to reflect any particular point of view or position.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of the study presents the introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research hypotheses, the significance of the study, and the definitions of terms.

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature. It addresses the following topics:

- An Overview of Transportation
- Social Equity in Public Administration

- Transportation as a Social Good

- Conclusion

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study, including the research design, population and sampling procedure, and the instruments and their selection or development, together with information on validity and reliability. Each of these sections concludes with a rationale, including strengths and limitations of the design elements. The chapter goes on to describe the procedures for data collection and the plan for data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses and analyzes the results, culminating in conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Transportation and social justice/equity literature agree that obstacles to affordable, efficient, safe, and convenient transportation contribute fundamentally to poverty, illiteracy, and isolation (social, mental, physical, and spiritual) in a modern community (Blumenberg, E., 2017; Bullard et al., 2000; Hansen, 1958; Koenig, 1980; Martens, 2017). This body of work also makes consistent note that (a) while transportation obstacles are indeed genuine, (b) there is no clear and concise definition or reality-based context on the construct or factual nature of these obstacles as they relate to those so impeded (Combs et al., 2016; Litman, 2006; Manaugh et al., 2015; Martens, 2017; Manaugh & El-Geneidy, 2013; Wellmon, 2015). Additionally, this issue and the effects it has on social equity is of fundamental concern to public legislators and administrators, for, as Martens (2017) states in *Transportation Justice*,

> Transportation is a fundamental requirement to participate in the labor market, obtain health care, enjoy education, or meet family and friends. It is a fundamental prerequisite for a life of meaning and value. … Moreover, transportation systems are, to a large extent, the outcome of intentional design. Governments at all levels, in developed and developing countries alike, have a leading role in the design of these systems. The design is typically guided by concerns over economic growth and economic efficiency. Yet, more than any other actor, governments as the representative of all persons in their jurisdiction have a moral obligation to act as guardians of the interests of all persons. Their actions should thus avoid pertinent injustices, while promoting justice where practically feasible. The design of transportation systems cannot be an exception

to this rule. Governments fail, and an injustice is done whenever the design of transportation systems ignores the plight of persons lacking adequate transport services. (p. xiv)

Packed inside this discussion are several terms and ideas that must be explored to understand the importance of transportation in any modern society and the harm caused to citizens when it is impeded or stopped—in essence, inside these terms rest the rationale for the entire study. The rest of this literature review focuses on exploring these ideas, which include,

- An Overview of Transportation

- Social Equity in Public Administration

- Transportation as a Social Good

Affordable, safe, convenient, and efficient transportation systems are fundamental elements to a healthy human community.

Documentation

Primary searches for literature originated from the OneSource search engine located on California Baptist University's Annie Gabriel Library link. Working off this link with the search terms "transportation obstacle," "transportation equity," "social equity," "social justice," "social justice issues in transportation," and "problems with equity in transportation," a body of literature was created that provided an excellent body of literature regarding transportation history, systems, and issues in providing equity to all members of a community. Additionally, the search terms "public administrative pillars," "social equity in government," and "social justice and equity in public programs" assisted in reviewing literature dealing with the public administrative pillars of equity and

representation. Finally, these terms were also used in Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest.

An Overview of Transportation

Transportation, the movement of people and objects through space to facilitate economic, political, and cultural activity is and has been a creating, sustaining, and defining feature of human society (Durant, 1935; Hall, 1998; Martens, 2017). Transportation systems allow individuals to exchange goods, services, and information, creating the structures and entities that make up a modern community (Martens, 2017), providing the framework for what is considered an adequate quality of life with meaning (Blumenberg & Pierce, 2016; Blumenberg, 2004; Foth et al., 2013).

Changing Nature of Transportation

While consistent in import, the actual construct of transportation continually evolves. Human innovation consistently produces tools, vehicles, and systems increasing the distance one might travel over a given period of time, at increasingly higher speeds, and with a larger carrying capacity (Durant, 1935; Foth et al., 2013; Hall, 1998; Martens, 2017). Pedestrian transportation, long the dominant form of human transportation (Durant, 1935), has been supplanted in large parts of modern society by the advent of the internal combustion engine and the automobile (Blumenberg, 2004; Blumenberg & Piece, 2016; Combs et al., 2016; Smart & Klein, 2018).

A consequence of this fluidity inherent in transportation is the mismatch in evolving transportation modes and systems and the existing communal structures and social norms for which these new modes and systems are fashioned to serve. As mentioned previously, human communities, for the vast majority of their existence, were

pedestrian in that all the goods, services, and other accouterments of communal life were within a days' (at most) walking distance (Marchetti, 1994). Automobiles have increased this range exponentially, resulting in a much higher standard of living (most notably in the developed world but evident globally in even the most impoverished nation). As with any innovation, this societal shift to new technology has altered not just the physical but also the social and cultural. Peter Hall (1998) in *Cities in Civilization* illustrated this evolution well in his description of technical and societal progression when he chronicled the evolution of human communities and their relationship to space:

> Getting to work was no problem in the village or small town; a five-minute walk to the field or workshop would suffice. And similarly in even the largest cities down to 1800 and beyond: technology was lacking, and—save for the fortunate few who were carriage folk, or could at any rate afford the fare of a hackney carriage—all must walk to work and every other urban chore or pleasure … the effective limit of a city's growth was set by the ability and the inclination to walk: in practice, as already a rule of thumb, three miles (five kilometers), equal to an hour's travel on foot. … Transport technology provided the answer [to this constriction], in the form first of steam railways and horse buses and streetcars, then electric trains and subways and motor buses and electric trams, finally the private motor car and its accompanying highway system. (p. 612)

Loosening spatial constraints created consequent social and cultural shifts as the "chores and pleasures" of the community (urban or not) were spread out over a larger area, and new economic, academic, and social opportunities manifested themselves. Using Los Angeles as an example, Hall (1998) described streetcar systems created at the

turn of the century, pushing much of the working population out of the traditional city center and into the new suburbs. Following behind by 15 years, the automobile and its obligatory highway system built on the framework of the existing rail lines (Hall, 1998). Automobile ownership or access became a necessity in the region, with the rest of the nation following over the next 20 years (Hall, 1998).

Durant (1935) demonstrated the fundamental nature of transportation to human communities in general, while Hall (1998) highlighted its importance to the construct and sustainment of modern human communities. Marten's (2017) work *Transportation Justice* highlights both of these concepts as it focuses on the consequences of inadequate and/or inequitable transportation options and/or systems in any given community. A dedication to social equity mandates that legislators and public administrators alike explore, define, and deal with obstacles to this core element of modern human society.

Social Equity in Public Administration

Equity is a primary concern in the administration of public programs and the distribution of public goods and services. Current (best) practice, both academically and practically, mandates that an ethical legislator or public administration professional work to ensure that public programs, goods, and services are accessible and consumable by all eligible citizens regardless of their station or circumstance in life and to particularly be cognizant of and protect the interests of the most vulnerable (Fredrickson, 1971). A brief review of the literature is essential to understand the most vulnerable and why their interests are imperative to the legislator and public administrator. Herein lies the heart of the rationale of the paper.

Equity in American Public Administration

Equity in the administration of public goods and services early in the American Republic had less to do with its constituency and more with the individuals entrusted to carry out public business: Jacksonian democracy solidified the "winner take all" and "spoils system" created in the early endemic in the first-, second-, and third-party system period of the nation (Keller, 2007, p. 91). Equity, in this case, meant ensuring that the victorious faction in any given election would be permitted to execute its agenda uninhibited by holdover officeholders from previous (and often hostile) administrations (Keller, 2007). Loyalty was often valued above competence and professionalism, resulting in critiques such as the one noted in Keller's (2007) *America's Three Regimes*: "The government, once formally served by the elite of the nation, are now served by its refuse" (p. 91).

Political scandal and intrigue following the usual motivations of political power and money plagued the early periods of American public administration. Most often perpetrated by the aforementioned "elite" of the national community with the influence and reach to attain office; the shift to the spoils system was in part to eliminate this feature, but the result was to continue with the same types of corruption and malfeasance committed by the "refuse" instead of the "elite" (Keller, 2007, p. 91). Human nature is equally corrupt in both elite and common.

Corruption of this sort resulted in widespread inequity in creating and distributing public programs, goods, and services, and equally challenging, an accompanying significant level of inefficacy in government operations at all levels (Keller, 2007). Addressing this in his 1887 paper "The Study of Administration," Woodrow Wilson

proposed the idea of a European (mostly German) concept of professional civil service based on merit alone and the administration of public programs, goods, and services separate from the legislative process as a logical and efficient way to mitigate or eliminate these issues from government (Wilson, 1997). While the actual construct of the term is foreign to the modern critic as described by Wilson's (1997) work, he does provide a starting point for the modern understanding of equity and provides a solid foundation for the work of Appleby, Fredrickson, Rawls, and Walzer:

> The question was always: Who shall make the law and what shall the law be? The other question, how law should be administered with enlightenment, with equity, with speed, and without friction, was put aside as "practical detail" which clerks could arrange after doctors had agreed upon principles. … There is scarcely a single duty of government which was once simple which is now not complex. … Where government once might follow the whims of a court, it must now follow the views of a nation. (pp. 15-16)

"The Study of Administration" serves firstly as a rationale for the development of the study of political science in general and public administration in particular (Wilson, 1997). For this, it (and Wilson) stands as the field's genesis (at least in its American context). Secondly, on a deeper level, this work provided a bridge between the less technical world of steam and the early internal combustion age of the 20th century. Wilson (1997) articulated in definite American terms the political/administrative divide, and the need for a professional civil service versed in the myriad sciences, arts, and the topics of the coming modern age. Finally and most importantly, he articulated the idea

that public administrators needed to be above the partisan political fray accompanying

legislative functions to deliver these goods and services with equity.

Equity, as understood by "The Study of Administration," is concerned with

meritocracy and competence in both the legislative and administrative process and

ensuring that these two functions maintain an incorruptible distance(Wilson, 1997).

Wilson (1997), writing with the recent experience of President assassinated by a scorned

office seeker, made the point that this standardization of public administration

professionals was imperative to deal with an increasingly complex and technical human

community to maximize efficiency and ensure equity, as he understood the term.

Goodnow (1900) nurtured this with another more succinct explanation in *Politics and*

Administration:

> There are, then, in all governmental systems two primary or ultimate functions of
>
> government, viz. the expression of the will of the state and the execution of that
>
> will. There are also in all states separate organs, each of which is mainly busied
>
> with the discharge of one of these functions. These functions are respectively,
>
> Politics and Administration. (p. 18)

An Expanding Definition of Social Equity and Justice

Wilson (1997) and Goodnow (1900; and White [1997] as well in "Introduction to

the Study of Public Administration") in large part created and articulated the accepted

meaning of the term equity as it applies to public administration into the early part of the

20th century. Shafritz and Hyde, in *Classics of Public Administration*, noted that a global

pandemic and economic collapse bookended by two catastrophic world wars altered the

expectations and requirements of liberal democracy. The national government expanded

(both in scope and complexity), surpassing even that of the expansion of the Civil War and Reconstruction period due in no small part to the accompanying demographic and cultural shifts consequent of the aforementioned global events. Writing during this period followed this trend as academics began to make the case that it was not enough to ensure that government was unbiased, competent, and uncorrupted. It also needed to be responsive to human needs, including protecting and assisting previously marginalized populations. This process was gradual as the communal experience of the 20th century validated the core ideas of Wilson (1997) and Goodnow (1900) in general while challenging some of their primary underpinnings. White (1997), in "Introduction to the Study of Public Administration," supported Wilson (1997) and Goodnow (1900) in that he states that,

- Public Administration bases its legitimacy on public law.

- Public Administration depends on experts and technicians from myriad disciplines and occupations to create, deliver, and distribute an increasingly complex and varied range of goods and services. (White, 1997, p. 48)

But, he continued past this, hinting that these traits mean more than the simple sterile functional separation and a focus on eliminating corruption:

> The industrial revolution has necessitated, in short, a degree of social cooperation in which laissez-faire has become impossible. … These new ideas involve the acceptance of the state as a great agency of social cooperation, as well as an agency of social regulation. The state becomes, therefore, an important means by which the program of social amelioration is effected. … Today, it acts on the theory that the good of the individual and society may be discovered by the

processes of social reason and action and be implemented through statutes.

(White, 1997, p. 48)

Here in its nascent form is the form and understanding of social equity and justice as recognized by current literature. Still and yet, equity and justice, while important to public administrators, were still viewed as an outcome of separated functionality and increased technical and scientific competence.

Minnowbrook

Administrators are not neutral. They should be committed to both good

management and social equity as values, things to be achieved, or rationales.

(Frederickson, 1971, p. 312)

Social equity and justice in public legislation and administration came to be defined in the middle and later parts of the 20th century as more than simply ensuring that public programs and goods were produced efficiently and formally available to all. Equity in public administration began to be seen as an outcome. This viewpoint mirrored the writing of the period by academics such as Dwight Waldo's (1948) *The Administrative State*. While familiar and in many ways supportive of the Wilson (1997) and Goodnow (1900) view that equity and justice resided within competence and public administrative neutrality, Waldo (1948) was very much an advocate of the practical effects of public action. Government and the administration thereof needed practically and positively to affect those in the citizenry. In this, Waldo used his work in addition to others of the era to articulate the growing awareness that governance and those trusted to administer it make things better. Much of *The Administrative State* cites contemporary work as support for the point of equity in public administration being concerned with

protecting and improving the lot of the most vulnerable (Waldo, 1948). Particularly valuable is the use of the earlier *Report on the Administrative Management of the Government of the United States (The Brownlow Report)*, which was commissioned by President Roosevelt to assist in his drive to reconfigure the administrative levers of the government, but couched much of its recommendations as being a conduit for better services for the aforementioned "those who need the help of the government in their struggle for justice, security, steadier employment, better living and working conditions, and a growing share of the gains of civilization" (Waldo, 1948, p. 69).

The mid-century cultural challenges of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War coupled with the residual social effects of the Second World War (most notably in racial relations) altered public perception of the government and what (and who) were entitled to expect to be able to share the fruits of community. For public administrators, this manifested itself by a perceptible rift between the older public administrative practitioners and academics and the younger generation schooled in both the traditional (Wilson [1997] and Goodnow [1900]) school of practice and a newer construct of administrative values and responsibilities (Marini, 1971).

This communal discord led to a seminal conference in 1968 at the Minnowbrook Conference Center of Syracuse University. Preeminent public administrators representing both the traditional and emerging "new" style, which became known as New Public Administration, met to discuss not just the mechanics of the administration of public programs, but their meaning and definition as well (Marini, 1971). This was a diverse group representing a wide variety of institutions and government entities, all bringing differing practical, academic, and life experiences to the conversation. This was

deliberate as the editor of the subsequent book *Towards a New Public Administration:*

The Minnowbrook Perspective Frank Marini (1971) noted:

> My interest in sponsoring the conference was, to be sure, a reflection of a career-
> long interest in the study and practice of Public Administration, but the grave
> happenings and urgent problems of the times were my reasons for becoming
> involved. … I reached the conclusion that neither the study nor the practice of
> Public Administration was responding inappropriate measures to mounting
> turbulence and critical problems. (p. xiii).

This applied to an age dissonance as well:

> I thought there was a special reason to be concerned about recruitment into Public
> Administration. … What could be done to encourage new thinking, enlist new
> energies, and attract more and better talent to the task of dealing with public
> problems. (Marini, 1971, p. xiv)

> Speaking directly to the issue of generational dissonance, Marini (1971) related a

specific incident that sparked his awareness:

> The first was the Conference on the Theory and Practice of Public Administration
> … held in December of 1967. … I found myself troubled by the fact that probably
> not one of the conferees was under thirty-five and most were in their fifties and
> sixties. Where was the future of Public Administration? (p. xiv)

> Getting to the heart of his point, Marini (1971) finished the section by noting in a

conversation with a "young teacher of Public Administration,"

> The issue [a special issue of Public Administration Review published in
> November of 1967] was "shameful." I was startled: Why? Because it presented

old men talking to old men about irrelevancies, old men out of touch with the real

problems of a chaotic and dangerous world and the youth that would have to deal

with them. (p. xiv)

Minnowbrook produced a trove of academic discussion, including much of the

post-war practical experience articulated in articles, conference summaries, and papers

collected in *Toward a New Public Administration* (Marini, 1971). In this volume, the

postwar generation records their ideas and aspirations for the practice of public

administration, most especially as it relates to social equity and justice and the need for

public programs to be forward-leaning in their scope, intent, and accessibility.

Critical among this material is this book was the marquee paper by H. George

Fredrickson (1971) "Toward a New Public Administration." In this work, Fredrickson

explicitly asserted that a primary (if not the primary) focus of the public administrative

professional is to execute their duties and conduct themselves with the equity they

provide their community (Fredrickson, 1971). This is not an imperative voiced without

context, Fredrickson took time at the beginning of the work making the point that the

proper public administration has rested on differing values over the history of the

Republic; now it was imperative that the profession and the legislators it supported must

add social equity to the formula: "A Public Administrator which fails to work for changes

which try to redress the deprivation of minorities will likely be eventually used to repress

those minorities" (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 311).

Fredrickson (1971) highlighted social equity as the goal of the public

administrator, but what does that mean? He provided the answer earlier when he wrote,

The phrase social equity is used here to summarize the following set of value

premises. Pluralistic government systematically discriminates in favor of

established stable bureaucracies and their specialized minority clientele (the

Department of Agriculture and large farmers, for example) and against those

minorities (farm laborers, both migrant and permanent, as an example) who lack

political and economic resources. The continuation of widespread

unemployment, poverty, disease, ignorance, and hopelessness in an era of

unprecedented economic growth is the result. This condition is morally

reprehensible and, if left unchanged, constitutes a fundamental, if long-range,

threat to the viability of this or any political system. Continued deprivation amid

plenty breeds widespread militancy. Militancy is followed by repression, which

is followed by greater militancy, and so forth. (p. 311)

Fredrickson, which earlier chronicled the path of social equity throughout

American political history, takes issue with the traditionalists Wilson (1997) and

Goodnow (1900) as he made the point that public administrators are naturally unable to

be completely "neutral" when administering programs: Administrators (especially street-

level) see on a day-to-day basis the value and effect of their programs, goods, and

services. These professionals can gauge precisely where and when their particular item

would be the most effective and should thus operate in a way that takes advantage of any

opportunity for social gain and assistance (Fredrickson, 1971). Put in his own words,

Fredrickson made the following point:

Administrators are not neutral. They should be committed to both good

management and social equity as values, things to be achieved, or rationales …

Simply put, new Public Administration seeks to change those policies and structures that systematically inhibit social equity. (p. 312)

Herein lies the significant difference between the traditionalist and the new public administrators: an imperative for the administrator to reach into the world of the legislative to guide policy. Additionally, Fredrickson continued this by stating that this goes past simple service delivery or operation. Should the obstacle or obstacle be institutional or structural, it is the job of the administrator to point this out and work to eliminate this as soon as possible (Fredrickson, 1971). Thus, the public administrator wrestles not just with the mechanics and techniques of public goods and services but the philosophy and politics that drive their development.

Minnowbrook is still a touchstone and anchor for the practice of public administration. The fact that the conference itself has become habitual speaks to its importance to the philosophy of the field. Fredrickson (1971) still serves today as a primary source for the contemporary definition of social equity as it relates to the practice and pillars of public administration.

This is evident in the follow on work by others in the field looking to build on and develop "Toward a New Public Administration" (Fredrickson, 1971). Nowhere more so than in "Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services" by Michael Lipsky (1980). In this work, Lipsky examined the challenges that the lower street level bureaucrat faces as they administer any given public program to the public. Lipsky made the case that these professionals, even more than being involved in the formation and political meanderings of a program, are in fact the primary interpreters of the program (Lipsky, 1980). By virtue of guiding the program through its day-to-day

operation, often being the face of and the first point of contact, street-level professionals can guide a program as they wish through their actions (Lipsky, 1980). Implied throughout is the assumption that public administrators have a primary role in developing public policy and a natural role in the political process (Lipsky, 1980).

While this point in and of itself is not germane to the definition of social equity, it does serve to illustrate the fluidity of the term and how its underlying assumptions can shift. Social equity, like transportation modes and systems, evolves as technology and human innovation make the previously impossible commonplace. As the term evolves and the expectations of government rise with this evolution, it is vital that bureaucracies (street and otherwise) and the legislators they serve, advise, and (in some cases) manage are equipped with relevant and timely information. Transportation policy is no different.

Rawls and Walzer

The Minnowbrook Conference and subsequent literature established the pillar of social equity in public governance and administration. Building on and expanding this work, in 1971, John Rawls seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*, lays out the rationale philosophically for a community in which all things are designed behind a "veil of ignorance" in which individuals make up the rules for any given society before knowledge of personal circumstances (p. 12). This work, as with Lipsky (1997), lightly touches on the primary issue of this work, but Rawls (1971) is vital to any discussion regarding social equity in that, as Martens (2017) in *Transport Justice* noted Nozick (1974) stating in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, "Political philosophers must either work with Rawl's theory or explain why not" (p. 183).

Rawls (1971) is vital to this discussion in that he begins the translation of Fredrickson and Minnowbrook from the abstract and academic into terms understood and operational to the street-level administrator of Lipsky. While Fredrickson lauds the need for social equity for all members of a polity and warns of the consequences otherwise, Rawls develops the parameters of what this might look like in real life. Most importantly, he develops the two "principles of justice" supported by five "primary goods" which, if protected, Rawls posited, will ensure social equity across a community (pp. 60 & 92). The principles speak to the need for equal access to the most basic goods needed to establish an individual as a full member of a community:

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.
>
> Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls, 1971, p. 60)

Building on both points, Rawls presents five basic concepts or "primary social goods" required by all members of a community to ensure that these two principles are met: "to give them in broad categories, are rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth" (Rawls, 1971, p. 92).

Martens (2017) in *Transport Justice* breaks out these terms in more concrete terms:

> a. a set of basic rights and liberties, including freedom of thought and association, freedom defined by the integrity of the person, and so on.

b. Freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against the background of diverse opportunities.

c. powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility, particularly those in the main political and economic institutions.

d. Income and wealth, understood broadly as all-purpose means for achieving directly or indirectly a wide range of ends, whatever they might be.

e. The social basis of self-respect. These are those aspects of the basic structure that are normally essential if citizens are to have a lively sense of their own worth as moral persons and to be able to realize their highest-order interests and advance their ends with self-confidence. (p. 64)

The importance of Rawls to this paper is that these principles and designated primary goods highlight the essentials and necessity of social equity in the contemporary sense. Minnowbrook and Fredrickson (1971) laid out the case for social equity as a primary concern of the public administrator; Rawls (1971) provided the framework for what this might look like in practice.

To a point, Rawls (1971) was primarily a philosopher, so he required more work to make the concept of social equity operational in transportation (or any other) public policy. Martens (2017) recognized this in *Transport Justice* and reached to Michael Walzer's (1983) *Spheres of Justice* to construct a practical and operational context for transportation policy and administration. Walzer's work dealt with distributive justice and the fact that equity is more complex than simply making a system of community formally and legally equal. Real-world inequalities in geography, circumstance, human nature, and physical (and mental) potential make a flat and level playing field for all

individuals unrealistic. Articulating a point made back to antiquity, Walzer made the point that

> we may dream of a society where all the members are equally honored and
> respected. But though we can give everyone the same title, we know that we
> cannot refuse to recognize—indeed we want to be able to recognize the many
> different sorts and degrees of skill, strength, wisdom, courage, kindness, energy,
> and grace that distinguish one individual from another" (p. xi).

In this, Rawls (1971) agreed when he stated, "All social values-liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" (p. 62). Rawls and Walzer both agreed that inequalities exist in any given human community. Rawl's work made the point that inequalities are things to be prevented except in cases where they benefit everyone; Walzer's (1983) work reflected much of the same sentiment, with a proposed course of action to alleviate the consequences of an unequal society.

Borrowing from Rawls (1971), Walzer (1983) developed a concept known as "social goods," which described those items and ideas that provide the "primary goods" of Rawls (1971); or Walzer's (1983) social goods operational Rawls's (1971) idea of things that individuals require to successfully participate in any given community or

> things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants. … With
> more of these goods men can generally be assured of greater success in carrying
> out their intentions and advancing their ends, whatever these ends may be. (p. 92)

For Walzer (1983), these "things which it is supposed a rational man wants" consist of the basic building blocks of contemporary life. Access to health care, education, governmental agencies, and communal interaction all meet the definition of "social good" in Walzer's work (pp. 80-83). Walzer used the term *social goods* to articulate the fact that most of these items and/or ideas are loaded with collective meaning and value, altering in importance and construct (both physical and abstract) depending on place, time, and circumstance. This is a complex concept; Walzer uses six "propositions" to frame and define his term:

1. All goods with which distributive justice is concerned are social goods. …

2. Men and women take on concrete identities because of the way they conceive and create, and they possess and employ social goods. …

3. There is no single set of primary or basic goods conceivable across all moral and material worlds—or, any such set would have to be conceived in terms so abstract that they would be of little use in thinking about particular distributions. …

4. It is the meaning of goods that determines their movement. Not the physical good or idea itself. …

5. Social meanings are historical in character, and so distributions, and just and unjust distributions change over time. …

6. When meanings are distinct, distributions must be autonomous. (Walzer, 1983, pp. 7-10)

All of this leads to the definition of social good as those things that an individual needs to be successful in obtaining and maintaining what would be considered an adequate

standard of living (Walzer, 1983). Walzer in *Spheres of Justice* pointed out that in these

propositions, these goods are pliable in physical and philosophical construct, are not

universal in all communities, and change over time. This is the model Martens (2017)

used to frame transportation equity in *Transport Justice*. Martens placed transportation

over the social good template in the same manner and context that Walzer (1983) used

education as a complex term describing various items and ideas in a very large social

good container.

Transportation as a Social Good

The central role transportation plays in modern human communities ensures that

it is organic to most (if not all) of the things comprising these communities. Martens

(2017) stated as much in the foreword of *Transport Justice*: "Transportation is a

fundamental requirement to participate in the labor market, obtain health care, enjoy

education, or meet family and friends. It is a basic prerequisite for a life of meaning and

value" (p. xiv). Martens continued in the next paragraph to lay out the rationale for

legislators and public administrators to be concerned with transportation at all levels:

> Transportation systems are to a large extent the outcome of intentional design.
>
> Governments at all levels, in developed and developing countries alike, have a
>
> leading role in the design of these systems. … More than any other actor,
>
> governments as the representative of all persons in their jurisdictions have the
>
> moral obligations to act as guardians of the interests of all persons. (p. xiv)

Governments, to deal with issues created by transportation inequalities and obstacles,

need to have accurate information on what these issues consist of tangibly in construct

and/or mechanics as well as the intangible elements of social isolation and inequality.

Combining transportation and social equity successfully to get to a point where governments are indeed acting in the best interests of their citizens, or even more to the point, dealing with inequalities (systemic or otherwise) in the tradition of Fredrickson (1971), requires a framework or template in which to gather all the discrete elements of transportation. Walzer (1983) did as much using the terms education and health care to describe other social goods with specific social meanings required by society. While defining the term transportation is well beyond the scope of this study, it is helpful to keep Walzer's concept of a large and somewhat fluid term when dealing with an all-encompassing element of a human community such as transportation.

A review of literature dealing with transportation obstacles and inequalities quickly establishes that the issue of transportation obstacles is pervasive across human communities and takes on different forms in different locations (Martens, 2017). In the American experience, a complicated combination of social, economic, and political interests have combined to develop and operate a transportation system built around the automobile (Blumenberg, 2004; Blumenberg & Pierce, 2016; Manaugh et al., 2015; Martens, 2017). Suppose transportation is indeed to be a social good—that is a good desired by all members of the community in its myriad manifestations and equitably distributed among even more myriad interests—it will need a definition as large education or health care to satisfy the communal will. A complicated balance of oft-competing interests and philosophies of the individuals involved in consuming the social good transportation make any level of equity difficult. *Complex equity* is the term Walzer used to describe a social good in which distributive decisions need to be made to satisfy a higher level of equity that is not always evident on the surface. Again, the intent

of this dissertation is not to frame the limits of what is and is not in the realm of transportation (or even transportation obstacles). However, understanding the potential size of the issue along with the difficulty in definitively defining it provides the legislator and public administrator with the intellectual space to allow for things that might not seem related to transportation.

Child-Care to Social Isolation

Throughout Martens (2017) work *Transport Justice*, elements of social inequities and injustices appear to include everything from the creation of "food deserts" in impoverished neighborhoods (Martens, 2017, p. 40) to skewed user fee and subsidy rates for differing modes of mass transit. Social issues and problems that transportation touches on are varied and debilitating in their effect if a transportation obstacle continues to fester in an individual or community. Martens is effective in articulating this point, but past this, there is ample work to support the idea that transportation obstacles are serious and complex:

Blumenberg (2004) in "Engendering Effective Planning: Spatial Mismatch, Low-Income Women, and Transportation Policy" explored the challenges of women, particularly low-income women, attempting to navigate child-care, employment, and all the other tasks expected of responsible and successful members of a community:

> Transportation trips only particularly deal with employment; low-income women make more trips and have more stops than men (child-care, food shopping). … These factors lead to a complexity [in transportation patterns and needs] that is difficult to measure and define. (pp. 18-21)

Blumenberg explored the current transportation structure of the nation and its proclivity to mandate car ownership and how this feature of American society does not often (read almost never) factor into the design and distribution of public goods and programs to those most likely to not have a car. This provides the support for her underlying object of the paper, which was to illustrate (a) how complex and insidious transportation issues are to low-income women and (b) how out of touch social program design and execution tends to be with regard to transportation issues across the nation (Blumenberg, 2004). She further stated that the need for actual data from those so affected is vital to effectively deal with the issue (Blumenberg, 2004).

Blumenberg (2004) was not alone in making these points, and it is not simply tangible elements of communal existence that are affected by transportation obstacles. Transportation literature is deep in material exploring the role of transportation obstacles and their impact on social isolation and exclusion. Martens (2017) described this in *Transport Justice* as "the decision to forego a doctor's appointment, a meeting with family and friends, a job interview, or even a full-fledged job opportunity due to lack of adequate transport means" (p. 55). Isolation from the usual activities and experiences is available to those with the ability to utilize common transport modes and methods.

This lack of access and opportunity is the key ingredient to social inequality and injustice in transportation. This inequality is not unique to urban populations. Rural populations are often more susceptible to the issue due to a lack of public transit and larger distances (Combs et al., 2016; Liddle et al., 2012; Manaugh & El-Geneidy, 2013). Frank and Hibbard (2016) stated bluntly in "Rural Planning in the Twenty-First Century: Context Appropriate Practices in a Connected World" that "The root of poverty [in rural

areas] is isolation from the mainstream economy, healthcare, and wealthier neighborhoods" (p. 303). Social isolation and exclusion stem tangibly from the inability by many socially and economically disadvantaged groups to navigate established transportation systems and modes (which in America means an automobile). But the underlying cause of this is usually a lack of financial means to obtain and maintain an automobile for unfettered use or some sort of physical or mental challenge, which makes operating an automobile dangerous or problematic (Liddle et al., 2012). Those so challenged represent the socially unequal in any community and are the population of which Fredrickson (1971) spoke.

Transportation as a Social Good

Transportation should then be treated as a social good in the general way of education and health care. That is, education is understood to be more than simply classrooms and formal curriculum for a set portion of a community; it is understood to be that and all the philosophical elements leading to teaching techniques, the physical facilities created to support these activities, along with the myriad other things, ideas, and activities communities use to teach one another. Martens (2017) described transportation in the same manner when he stated the following:

> The good—however conceptualized—is a combination of objects like cars and bicycles; artifacts like roads and railways; services, like public transport lines; car repair services and guarded parking facilities; and less tangible goods like driving licenses, traffic regulations, or route guidance systems. (p. 50)

In a sentence or phrase, transportation (and the transportation social good) are all those things required for a member of a community to access those things needed to be a member of that community.

This leads to a final point regarding a transportation social good. It is incredibly hard to define and frame. The same literature that describes the shortcomings of current transport policy also makes the point consistently that transport equity, justice, and any resulting transportation social good will be hard to define because of the aforementioned myriad interests, traditions, and expectations from individual persons and groups in any given community (Blumenberg, 2004; Frank & Hibbard, 2016; Litman, 2006; Manaugh et al., 2015; Sen, 2006). Or put another way, transportation needs, expenses, and priorities are not consistent throughout a society, thus as Martens (2017) noted in the first part of *Transport Justice*, "Transportation planning is inevitably political because interventions in the transportation system always affect different persons in different ways" (p. 5). The legislator and public administrator will find it imperative to have the most current and accurate information on how any interventions will affect different persons to craft a transportation social good that is effective, efficient, and equitable.

Conclusion

A commitment to social justice and the pursuit of equity across all facets of a community in good conscience requires that legislators and public administrators seriously examine and remedy the issue of transportation obstacles, as Martens (2017) puts it:

> Governments as the representative of all persons in their jurisdictions have the
> moral obligation to act as guardians of the interests of all persons. Their actions

should thus avoid pertinent injustices, while promoting justice where practically feasible. The design of transportation systems cannot be the exception to this rule. Governments fail, and an injustice is done whenever the design of transportation systems ignores the plight of persons lacking adequate transport services. (p. xiv)

He further addressed this concept directly in its modern manifestation when he wrote about the advent of the automobile. The introduction of motorized vehicles and supporting infrastructure transformed the nature of transportation into an element or "good" needed to access the things needed to obtain and maintain an adequate lifestyle. Martens (2017) said,

In traditional societies, transport was primarily a matter of walking. Only a small segment of society could afford regular travel by horse. … The near-universal ability to walk—with the exception of small infants and persons with impairments—implied that accessibility, at least to everyday destinations, was possible for all. … The widespread availability of the motorcar, triggered by vast investments in the road system, implied a fundamental shift in the meaning of transport. … Once transport was hardly perceived as a good but rather taken for granted as a natural extension of life itself. Now the ability to travel through space has become so important for everyday lives that it can be considered an asset. … The availability or unavailability of transport, in other words, shapes peoples life opportunities. (pp. 54-55)

Transportation Obstacles Impede Access and Force Payment for Services Denied

How does this new construct of transportation shape the manner in which people live? In many ways, but for the legislator and public administrator focused on the pillar of social equity, it is essential to examine how this new construct of transportation has contributed to poverty, illiteracy, and social inequity (Combs et al., 2016; Frank & Hibbard, 2016; Lucas, 2012; Needles Fletcher et al., 2010; Solomon & Titheridge, 2007).

Transportation obstacles impede the poor and disadvantaged in lost employment and academic opportunities and social, political, and communal interaction required to be a full member of a community (Garrett & Taylor, 1999; Lucas, 2012; Needles Fletcher et al., 2010; Solomon & Titheridge, 2007). Equally disturbing is that these populations, even though unable to access and utilize the transport systems and modes commonly available, are still required to contribute to their construction and upkeep through taxes (especially transportation systems (MS Const. Art 4, Section 112; Walzer, 1983). Indeed, Walzer (1983) reached back into transportation directly when noting that all segments of a community often pay for communal goods and services, whether they agree with them or not: "A community-wide decision is necessary, for the private car requires an enormous subsidy in the form of roads and their maintenance. Today we may be locked into that subsidy without a great deal of room to maneuver" (Walzer, 1983, p. 115). Communities make decisions that affect all members in different ways, and these decisions often affect countless following generations. Using Walzer's illustration of a "good," Martens (2017) articulated that transportation has become an item that individuals now have to source and consume as opposed to just having as an organic part of their existence. A transition—much like well water becoming water supplied by a city

or central city—that is an item of everyday life sourced from an outside entity requiring money as opposed to an organic part of a homestead. Walzer's quote finishes this point and caps the inherent danger in the commoditization of transportation by noting that decisions affecting core elements of communal existence affect everyone (never equally) for much longer than anyone might imagine. In transportation, this shift created an ongoing chasm of opportunity and equity between those with access to the new motorized transport and those without. Or, as Frank and Hibbard (2016) put it, "The root of poverty is isolation from the mainstream economy, healthcare, and wealthier neighborhoods" (p. 303). Shlaes (2013) described this as a "tax of isolation" (p. 119) in her biography of Calvin Coolidge. Transportation obstacles cut individuals off from the larger community with dire social consequences—legislators and public administrators must strive to fix this.

The Need for Better Information

This literature review has introduced a relevant body of work supporting three main ideas driving this study:

- Transportation is a fundamental element to human communities and plays a significant role in determining the level of equity in these communities.
- Social equity and justice are traditional core values in the American political and social tradition, and as such, are primary concerns of legislators and public administrators.
- Obstacles to the first point threaten the second, and thus transportation equity is a primary concern of legislators and public administrators.

Accepting the third point mandates action by public administrators to mitigate or eliminate the first. Requiring current and timely information, addressing transportation obstacles, especially with regard to social equity and justice, has been (and continues to be) complicated and exasperating because of the complex and subjective nature of the issue, which in many cases seems to be insoluble (Combs et al., 2016; Geurs & van Wee, 2004; Manaugh et al., 2015). According to Manaugh et al. (2015),

> Transportation outcomes include those that are "tangible" such as reduced congestion and GHG emissions. … There are also those less tangible outcomes related to issues of social equity and exclusion. … The former outcomes are easier to measure and present to the public and often have more political cachet than those focused on social equity. This can be problematic as more easily quantified goals can be—and are—prioritized at the expense of the "intangible" outcomes. (p. 168)

Because of transportation's central role in communal existence and the consequent pull of transportation on communal resources, Manaugh et al.'s point of priority is important because the political nature of the discussion of transportation is key. Marten's (2017) discussion in the first part of *Transport Justice* develops this and the difficult and complex nature of competing priorities in its discussion of the Los Angeles light rail project.

The light rail project of the 1990s in Los Angeles created massive amounts of deliberative resistance from a group called the Bus Riders Union because of several issues related directly to the development and operation of a system they saw as discriminatory to those citizens in the community that relied on bus travel (Martens,

2017). Light rail in Southern California was touted as being good for the environment and would cut down on transit times throughout its range. While potentially true, investment in this system would negatively impact the bus system in cost and reach, disproportionally affecting low-income and otherwise disadvantaged populations in the city (Martens, 2017).

Martens (2017) used this event to illustrate the previous point of competing communal priorities and their political nature in transportation especially:

> Transportation planning is inevitably political because interventions in the transportation system always affects different persons in different ways. … The Los Angles case thus powerfully illustrates the inevitable political choices and trade-offs that have to be made in transportation planning and policy. (Martens, 2017, p. 5)

This builds on his earlier point,

> Governments at all levels, in developed and developing countries alike, have a leading role in the design of these systems. … Yet, more than any other actor, governments as the representative of all persons in the jurisdictions have the moral obligations to act as guardians of all persons. (Martens, 2017, p. xiv)

Governments and the people in them, legislators, and administrators alike are charged with protecting and advocating for the least in a community. The philosophical arc of public administrative thought from Wilson (1997) to Rawls (1971) and Fredrickson (1971) chronicles this. The technological advancements since the internal combustion engine ensured (and continue to state) that transportation will become more essential and technologically based as time goes by.

All of these elements make the case for the necessity of current first-person

information regarding the effect that transportation obstacles have on those so impeded,

most especially the low-income and otherwise disadvantaged populations. In this, the

literature is explicit:

> Most of the existing literature seeks to quantify transportation disadvantage using
>
> standard measures of land use patterns, transportation infrastructure, and transit
>
> services. However, no single standard exists for what level or quality of
>
> transportation options would be adequate or equitable across geographic regions
>
> and across various populations … there is limited empirical research available on
>
> how relationships between socio-demographic and environmental characteristics
>
> may relate to the consequences of transportation disadvantage, such as diminished
>
> ability to obtain and keep employment, reduces participation in social and
>
> recreational activities, and poorer overall health and well-being. (Combs et al.,
>
> 2016, p. 69)

Coombs's article focuses on rural populations, but other works echoed the same points:

> Social issues form an important part of the transport policy challenge in both the
>
> developed and developing world and yet the social impacts and distributional
>
> effects of the transportation systems and transport decision-making has been far
>
> less well researched and addressed than the economic or environmental
>
> considerations. (Lucas, 2012, p. 1)

Not only are social issues important in the abstract, as Lucas stated, but they are also

continually cited as a primary function of transportation systems worldwide. However,

determining equity is difficult because there is no standard definition of

distributional equity in transportation benefits. … Although it is common to

mention equity in transportation planning documents, very few explain how it is

measured or include performance measures to follow up on this goal. Even the

equity goal itself is often vague. This is likely due to debates over the definition

of equity and the difficulty associated with implementing it in practice. (Foth et

al., 2013, p. 2)

Continuing, Foth et al. (2013), in their article, "Towards Equitable Transit," stated:

To determine if a transit system is equitable and serves socially disadvantaged

populations, it is critical to understand where people travel to and from in a region

in addition to their level of access to public transport. Due to data availability,

actual commuting patterns are less commonly examined, and few studies look at

how regions change over time. (p. 3)

Blumenberg (2004) developed the point of sparse research when she made the point in

"Engendering Effective Planning: Spatial Mismatch, Low-Income Women, and

Transportation Policy" that transportation is a complex topic involving many points of

contact that might not register in narrow research. Central to her work is the idea that the

current definition and perception of transportation fails to consider things such as child

care and health services in their formulas, which result in skewed transportation policy

failing to address the real-world situation of single mothers and other low-income women

(Blumenberg, 2004), leading to her statement for the "policies intended to meet the

transportation needs of welfare recipients must be informed by research on the lives,

work, and travel of low-income mothers" (p. 23). This dissertation intends to do just that.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Transportation obstacles contribute directly to the poverty level and illiteracy rates across the nation (Amedee, 2005; Needles-Fletcher et al., 2010; Salehian, 2014). Studies consistently make this point in all regions of the nation to include urban and rural areas alike. What is missing from the ample literature on the topic is not the fact of transportation obstacles but their construct. This study explored the physical manifestations of transportation obstacles both explicitly and implicitly by discussing them with social service providers in northern Mississippi.

Transportation obstacles contribute significantly to the national issues of poverty and illiteracy, which fuel economic and societal inequality and injustice. Public officials and administrators have ample literature detailing this problem but a dearth of information explaining what "transportation obstacle" actually consists of and how it affects their clients. It is imperative that officials and administrators have an accurate picture of what these obstacles look and feel like in human terms to effectively, efficiently, and equitably address them.

This chapter briefly outlines the methods, instruments, and theory utilized in the study to develop and operationalize the term *transportation obstacle* and what it means to those charged with providing social services to those so impeded. The ultimate goal was to provide public officials, administrators, and other interested parties with a picture of how social service providers in north Mississippi view and deal with transportation obstacles in reality. The study also explored strategies used to mitigate or eliminate the obstacles and what secondary issues are caused by these obstacles. This study used a qualitative methodology which drove a descriptive or explanatory phenomenology;

however, the dearth of knowledge currently available regarding the true nature of transportation obstacles will most likely necessitate a quantitative element to identify primary and common characteristics of transportation obstacles and provide a rationale for the case studies. The chapter is organized as follows:

1. Research Questions

2. Research Design

3. Population and Sample

4. Instrumentation

Research Questions

The study aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?

2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?

3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?

4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Research Design

The study itself was accomplished as follows:

Virtual focus groups consisting of public service providers and using Bacchi's What's the problem represented to be model (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p. 19) as a guide to explore transportation obstacles to (a) discover the actual construct of the issues, (b) how these providers perceive them, and (c) what providers currently do to mitigate or eliminate them.

Virtual focus group participants were from a random convenience sample of the offices of the following public agencies in the 27 county north Mississippi region:

1. Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MSDRS)

2. Mississippi Department of Health Services (MSDHS)

3. Veterans Administration (VA)

These agencies represented a convenient population for the author as he is a colleague of the potential participants. The researcher has professional relationships with administrators in these agencies in the research area, making group scheduling and logistics more straightforward and timely. There are over 60 offices in the selected population. Of this master population, four offices were randomly selected for inclusion in focus groups.

Best practices dictate that for participant safety, face-to-face interaction be kept to a minimum. Video conferencing technology makes this possible so that the researcher could conduct all focus groups via video link-up.

These focus groups considered questions that covered the four research questions. The purpose was to compare and contrast provider experience and viewpoint concerning client transportation obstacles, their construct, and meaning. Organic to this discussion and exchange were ideas and impressions of how these obstacles were viewed socially and administratively by the providers and what the providers do to mitigate or eliminate these issues.

The intent of the virtual focus group research design was to provide an opportunity and space for providers to define and construct the meaning of transportation obstacle in the context of actual experience. Focus groups were the best vehicle to conduct this research in that they are the "method of choice in one narrow sub-spectrum of the broadband of sociological topic areas, namely that of documentation of group

norms and understandings" (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 89). Additionally, focus groups tend to generate various ideas, even more so than other methods such as observation or individual interviewing (Berg, 1995). For a study such as this, interested in gaining a sense of the true nature of transportation obstacles, this is important.

This leads to the question of what a focus group truly is. Using Kruger and Casey (2000) as a guide, this study used the following as a definition of a focus group: "A focus group is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive non-threatening environment" (p. 5). This study was focused on examining service provider views and experiences concerning transportation obstacles challenging their clients. This coupled nicely to obtain perceptions listed in the definition. Additionally, this construct emphasized the permissive and nonthreatening nature of focus groups, which assisted in allowing participants to feel at ease and more open.

This began to provide data required to evaluate current efforts to mitigate and eliminate transportation obstacles and to serve as a starting point for future study. The researcher anticipated that this study in this construct would allow a free-flowing conversation touching on all aspects of transportation obstacles and how providers view them. The researcher anticipated that this study would spark questions along a wide range of socioeconomic, cultural, and political topics as transportation is an organic part of human life in the 21st century. Among these areas for which the researcher believed there would be emerging themes or queries was the dividing line between personal and public responsibility, the nature of public service and goods delivery, and what is to be

considered a minimal standard of living for an accepted member of any given society. Conducting these groups virtually provides two primary benefits:

1. Virtual groups increase the probability of participation due to the ease with which these groups can be arranged across the study area. The selected offices from the sample are equipped with the required equipment for video conferencing, and the staffs are familiar with the equipment. Additionally, any satellite or remote offices attached to these selected for the study can be included without the need to schedule a time in which it is possible for all staff members to be in one location (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 83).

2. Virtual groups cost less than arranging and conducting face-to-face groups (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 81).

Population and Sample

The study focused on the providers of social and educational services aimed at the low income of north Mississippi. In focusing on these, the study assumes, based on previous literature, that the detrimental effects of transportation obstacles are felt most in these populations (Smart & Klein, 2018, p. 10). Consequently, the study concerned itself with the providers of services most readily understood to be associated with low-income individuals.

Specifically, as mentioned in the previous section, the study pulled its sample from clients seeking VA services, those seeking assistance from rehabilitative services (MSDRS), and those seeking services and education from human services (MSDHS). These entities were selected due to the researcher's established amicable professional relationship as a colleague with supervisors at the offices listed. The study itself focused

on a randomized convenience sample populated by the aforementioned agencies (see Table 1):

Table 1

Number of Agency Offices

Total of offices in selected region	68
MDRS	15
MDHS	27
VA	26

The study had the following goals in mind as to the population and sample for the focus groups:

1. One VA office: 10 participants

2. Two MSDRS offices: 20 participants

3. One MSDHS office: 10 participants

The goal for focus groups was one half of this for a sample of providers spread among the four groups. Criteria for selecting sample size and construct revolved around two primary considerations: time and availability. The actual locations selected for each indicated group were determined as follows:

1. Agency offices were assigned a random number on a selection table.

2. A lottery or drawing process was used to select which actual office was asked to constitute the focus group.

[As an example:

1. All agency offices will be assigned a number on a study selection table (Appendix A).

2. The author will randomly select a number from a drawing. The author will use #32 (Lafayette County MDRS) as the selected office for this example.

3. This selection is one of the two required MDRS offices from the draw. Thus the next draw may contain another MDRS office, but during the draw, if an office is drawn for which the required number of locations have been selected, the author will redraw until the open agency is drawn. The author will continue to draw until all the offices required are filled.]

Participation of selected offices was secured by receiving written permission from regional supervisors to conduct virtual focus groups during business hours. The author did this by formal email (Appendix B) to the regional managers of the agencies and received written permission, which was then noted in the participation invitation and consent forms (Appendix C & D) distributed to each participant. Once written permission to conduct the interviews in each selected office was obtained, invitation emails (Appendix C) and participation consent forms (Appendix D) were sent to individuals listed on the roster of each selected office. The researcher was not an employee of any of the agencies in this study; he is a social services colleague located in the same area.

No personal demographic information was collected during the study. The researcher assigned individual participants a number as they logged onto the virtual session, and they were not identified by any ethnic or demographic indicator. The virtual focus groups was recorded via a Maxell 4g thumb drive possessed by the researcher and

stored in his home safe and then archived on the researcher's Zoom account. As noted on the participation form, the only identifier used during the study was the location of the selected agency office (e.g., Desoto MDRS office).

Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) spoke to sample size and construct in their paper, "A Typology of Mixed Methods Sampling Designs in Social Science Research," in which they stated that the effectiveness and reliability of mixed methods samples are generally less tied to a number than their straight quantitative cousins due to the nature of the research questions being asked. Tang and Davis (1995) stated in "Critical Factors in the Determination of Focus Group Size" that

> the size of a focus group can be determined with ease, relatively, with reference to four other critical factors: the number of questions asked, the allotted time for each question, the format of the focus group session, and the duration of the session. (p. 475)

Building on this, Bloor et al. (2001), along with Tang and Davis (1995) in "Critical Factors in the Determination of Focus Group Size," stated that

- smaller number of participants tend to lead to more open conversation and allow the researcher to concentrate more on developing ideas and concepts emerging from the conversation and less on having to referee and manage participants.
- it is vital to set a target participation goal for each group to a realistic number in relation to the number of available potential participants. (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 27)

Finally, in "A Typology of Mixed Methods Sampling Designs in Social Science Research," Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) detailed the parameters of adequate participant and group levels. In this work, a mix of studies was explored, which stated that three to six groups are adequate to achieve sufficient discussion and topic saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). With all this in mind, this researcher was confident in using four scheduled groups to gain adequate data.

Instrumentation

The study was conducted as follows to collect data:

Virtual focus groups were scheduled and executed at the aforementioned venues. The focus groups were as follows:

1. Virtual Focus Group 1, four participants; May 19, 2021

2. Virtual Focus Group 2, five participants; June 03, 2021

3. Virtual Focus Group 3, four participants; June 08, 2021

4. Virtual Focus Group 4, six participants; June 09, 2021

There was no personal information to include individual agency affiliation.

Focus groups' responses were coded to rank features and elements of transportation obstacles as described and related by the service providers selected for the study. This instrument was developed by the researcher and committee, with the final blessing coming from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to execution. The focus groups provided a hierarchy of elements, circumstances, and traits shared to create a common definition of a transportation obstacle in north Mississippi. These groups were designed to provide public officials and administrators with a tactile and relatable

narrative to the concept of transportation obstacles in language and format that was easily

understood and easily transposed into public testimony and policy.

Data Collection

Virtual focus groups provided the tool with which data were collected for the

study. Scheduling virtual focus groups sessions with the U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, Mississippi Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Mississippi

Department of Human Services, the author conducted these sessions using the following

interview questions to prompt open-ended discussion. These are the virtual focus group

questions (derived from the study's research questions), which were presented during the

virtual focus groups:

1. What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?

2. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

3. What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?

4. What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?

5. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

6. What assumptions do you feel are made by your agency regarding your services and/or your clients in defining or constructing the term *transportation*?

7. What programs or courses of action seem to be effective in ameliorating these obstacles?

These questions were created from the four research questions as the mechanisms to elicit

the conversation and discourse required to address the themes and queries raised by the

four research questions.

Once focus groups were completed, the data were coded to identify commonalities and trends among the data. Upon identifying any commonalities, the discussion and conclusion section of the dissertation examined these to define and frame the term *transportation obstacle* as it was seen by these providers in North Mississippi.

The point can be made that a study of this sort would be more valuable produced from the client's perspective as opposed to the provider's. This researcher agrees. Safety protocols dictate that participant comfort and safety is the paramount concern when conducting research. A client-based study, while important, will have to wait.

Data Analysis

That transportation obstacles contribute to social inequity and exclusion is an accepted point as demonstrated by the preceding chapter's list of literature; the construct and actual effect of these obstacles remains a salient research point, which this study is designed to explore. Using the Bacchi model of "What's the problem represented to be?" (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012), the study collected and analyzed data from focus group participants with the goal of gleaning firsthand information and experience in dealing with client transportation obstacles.

"What's the problem represented to be" (WTR) is a qualitative research strategy that examines the meanings of concepts and ideas; specifically, WTR seeks to "put in question the common view that the role of governments is to solve problems that sit outside of them, 'waiting' to be addressed" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). In short, WTR is a form of grounded theory well designed to address the purpose of this study. WTR's rubric closely resembles this study's research questions, making data analysis less problematic, and has already been used in several studies similar in purpose to this one,

including studies on health care (Payne, 2014), gender equality (Poulson, 2006), and transportation itself (Nielson & Bonham, 2015).

Inside of the WTR process is the traditional constant comparative method in which data generated from focus groups were coded through the four stages of analysis typical to this method of grounded theory (Kolb, 2012). Once this process was completed, the data were submitted to three inter-rater reliability peers to ensure reliability and validity to the data analysis.

Using the grounded theory and the WTR method supported with inter-rater reliability, the researcher was confident that the study would provide pertinent, accurate, and timely information regarding the construct and consequence of transportation obstacles to clients as perceived by those charged with providing public goods and services.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The study is designed to explore the actual construct of transportation obstacles challenging those seeking social services as understood and experienced by social service providers in North Mississippi. This section details the research design and the findings of the study. This is done by reviewing the research's design and research questions and then examining the findings from the actual research. This section is organized as follows: Research Questions, Research Design, Findings (separated by Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4), and Conclusion.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the transportation challenges faced by individuals seeking selected social services in North Mississippi. The following four research questions were developed to provide data for this:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?
2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?
3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?
4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Research Design

Four virtual focus groups consisting of 16 total provider participants representing three social service agencies (Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services [MDRS]; Mississippi Department of Health Services [MDHS]; and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA]) were conducted via the BlueJeans video conferencing system in May and June of 2021, answering the following virtual focus group questions:

1. What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?

2. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

3. What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?

4. What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?

5. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

6. What assumptions do you feel are made regarding the term or idea of transportation and your services do you believe your agency uses in constructing the term "transportation"?

7. What programs or courses of action seem to be effective in ameliorating these obstacles?

Four virtual focus group sessions focusing on each agency were planned. However, scheduling issues with participants made it necessary to cross-pollinate sessions with individuals from different agencies. Even with this cross-pollination, participation was even across the agencies (see Figure 1). Different levels of authority and responsibility were well represented and balanced in the participants (see Figure 2).

Participant breakout in official and formal positions and job descriptions did develop evenly. Additionally, participants shared in group sessions that their positions operationally involved (for all but the interviewers) a combination of supervisory, case management, and interviewing/administration duties. Interviewers were the only participants stating that they only dealt with interviewing and intake duties. Staffing realities of the three agencies included in the study necessitated their providers navigating a certain amount of "position creep" to provide agency services.

Figure 1

Agency Participation
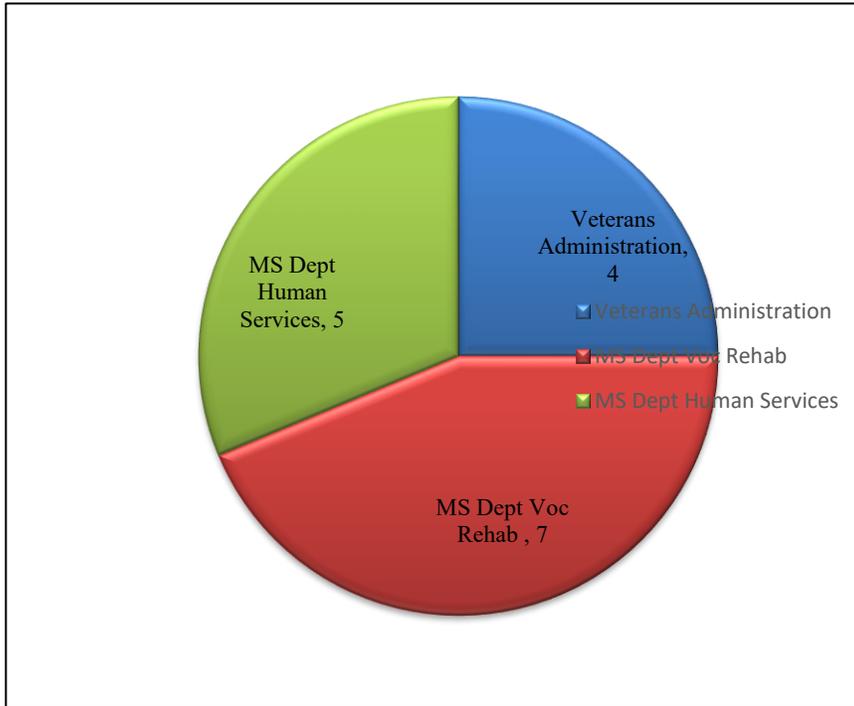
Note. N = 16.

Figure 2

Participant Characteristics
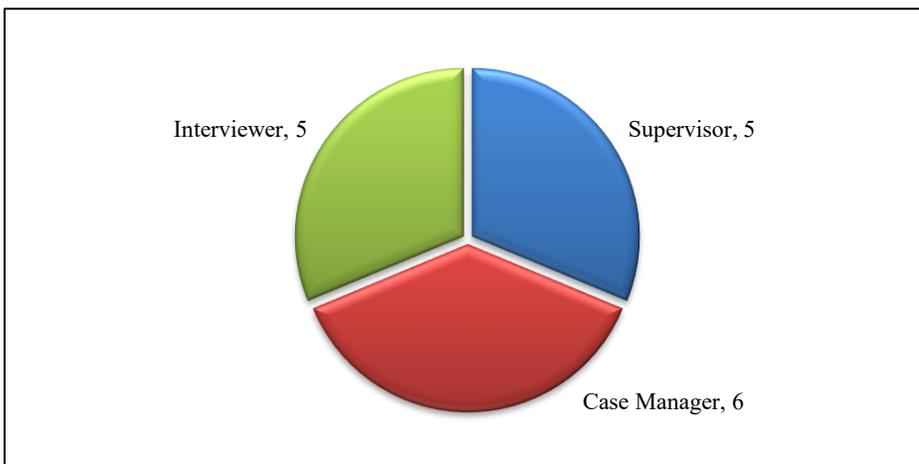
Note. N = 16.

These circumstances provided for a participant pool that had a more considerable aggregate of recent experience across the spectrum in addressing the transportation obstacles faced by their clients, making for a richer data set.

Additionally, with regard to participant characteristics, the participant pool dealt with a wide swath of public services (see Figure 3). Providers from all three participating agencies stated without exception that their caseload and/or assigned intake population had needs in the subject matter area of the particular providers' agency in addition to other needs not formally part of the provider set of services. For example, some providers related that they seemingly spent as much time assisting their clients in navigating job service and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues for their clients as their actual agency services. This fact cut across all focus groups. This particular set of service agencies dealt with clients across the demographic, economic, cultural, and societal spectrum. Providers included in the focus groups dealt with transportation obstacles affecting adults, children, parents, the elderly, and the disabled.

Finally, the 16 participants represented 202 years of social service provider service with an average experience level of 12.6 years. Three had over 20 years of experience involving a mix of supervisory, case management, and administrative positions; seven had 10 to 20 years, and the remaining six had less than 10. None of the participants had less than 5 years of experience as social service providers.

Figure 3

Professional Level of Participants
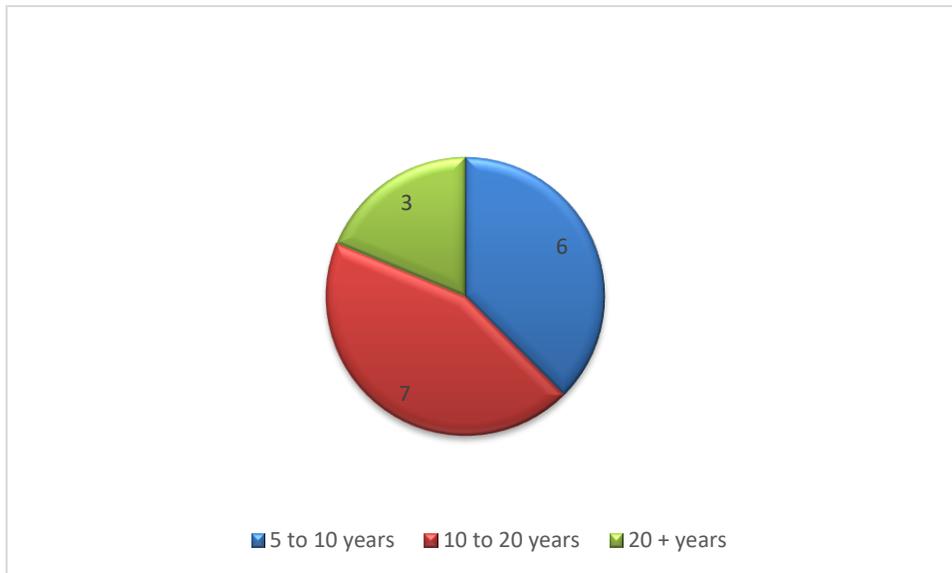
Participants were asked seven virtual focus group questions, created from the four research questions, designed to spark thought and an open-ended conversation about the four research questions. Following are those questions:

1. What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?

2. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

3. What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?

4. What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?

5. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

6. What assumptions do you feel are made by your agency regarding your services and/or your clients in defining or constructing the term "transportation"?

7. What programs or courses of action seem to be effective in ameliorating these

   obstacles?

These questions were created from the research questions to facilitate the conversation

and discourse required to adequately cover the research questions' themes and topics.

The seven focus group questions address the four research questions in the following

manner (see Table 2):

Table 2

Research/Focus Group Correlation Table

RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
FGQ1	FGQ2	FGQ6	FGQ7
FGQ 3	FGQ5		
FGQ 4			

Note. RQ = research question; FGQ = focus group question.

      Virtual focus groups were conducted in May and June of 2021. All sessions were

conducted using the BlueJeans video conferencing system. While video and audio were

available for all participants, the majority chose to participate using audio-only.

      Upon completion of each session, the researcher hand transcribed session data.

Using line-by-line open coding techniques within a constant comparison framework, the

data gleaned from focus group discussions were analyzed and sorted into broad

categories to identify trends and patterns. This was done with two read-throughs of the

data. Once completed, the categories were compared using axial coding to identify

connecting or intersectional themes between virtual focus group questions and the

research questions they were designed to support. These themes are listed in the Findings

section as research results and used in Chapter 5 as topics for discussion and starting points for further research.

Findings

Research Question 1

"What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?" was incorporated into three questions posed to the focus groups:

Focus Group Question 1. "What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?"

Focus Group Question 2. "What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?"

Focus Group Question 3. "What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?"

Subsequent discussion revolved around the eight themes listed in Figure 4, focusing on one unanimous point from all virtual focus groups and participants—lack of ownership or unfettered access to the use of an automobile was the primary element creating transportation obstacles for their clients.

Lack of an Automobile

Without question, the primary obstacle discussed by all participants in all groups was a lack of unfettered access to an automobile. All providers across all agencies stated that the lack of public transport, affordable for-profit transportation (taxis, buses, shuttle services), and the dispersed nature of the area combined to make automobile ownership (or at least unfettered access to one) obligatory to successfully participating in the economic and social fabric of the larger community. Automobile access in North

Mississippi is obligatory due to the (a) distance most live from the essential elements of life to include everything from schools to grocery stores, and (b) the lack of any type of organized or mass transit in the region. Those who do not have access to a vehicle are at an extreme disadvantage when attempting to navigate daily communal, social, and economic life.

Figure 4

Transportation Obstacles
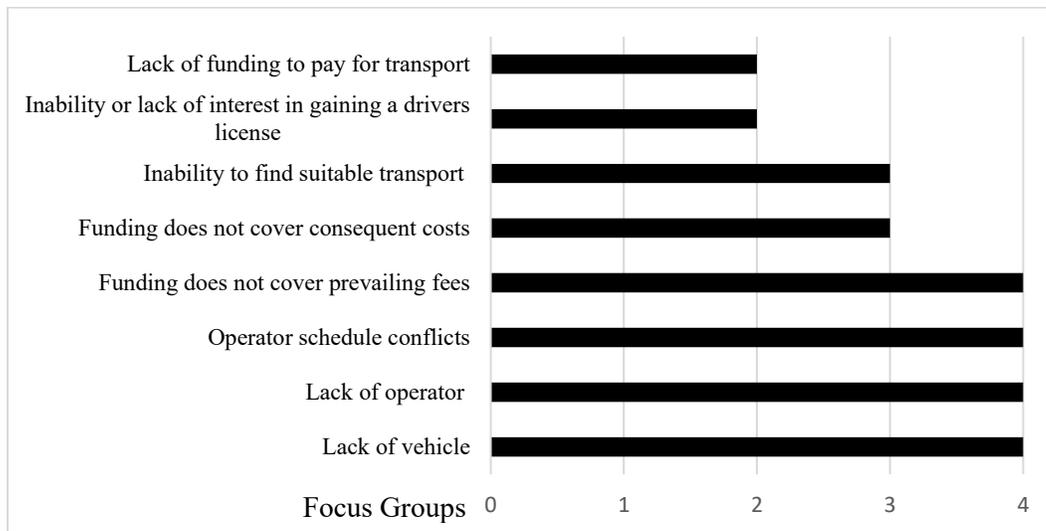
This point is more complex than a simple lack of vehicle ownership. As one provider stated,

> Transportation obstacles deal mainly with the lack of a vehicle. But it's not just not having a vehicle. It's the inability to operate a vehicle, or not being able to find a family member or friend to drive them due to work or other scheduling conflicts. Or not being able to find anyone willing to transport them for what the VA might pay for transportation costs.

As noted by the VA professional, two main themes emerged when describing the inability to access an automobile: (a) lack of ownership and/or unfettered access to one, and (b) an inability to find other forms of consistent transportation.

Lack of Ownership or Access

Automobiles are expensive items that require expensive maintenance, invoke numerous licensing and registration fees, and require expensive fuel to operate. Those seeking the services of participants in the study are those least economically able to pay the cost of purchasing and maintaining a vehicle. A caseworker sums up the point:

> They don't have a vehicle, and they don't have the money to get a vehicle … or they have a car, and it's a piece of junk that breaks down all the time. Sometimes it runs and sometimes it doesn't, and they are faced with the same problem as the other guy: no money to fix the car or get a better one.

Even for those individuals with family or friends able to provide transportation in a reliable vehicle, competing priorities often create issues in securing transportation. As the VA representative noted, access to a vehicle if not owned or controlled by an individual is restricted by others that might need it as well. The same MDRS provider illustrated this by stating,

> Maybe Dad owns the car and has to be at work at 7 a.m., but my client does not have an appointment until 8 a.m., or maybe they have a job that does not start until 8 a.m. What are they supposed to do?"

To put a point on the entire theme: one provider summed up the entire point succinctly: "Our clients do not have vehicles, and if they do, they do not work."

Lack of Other Forms of Transportation

North Mississippi's transportation networks are highway and road systems designed to support conventional wheeled vehicle traffic. Additionally, North Mississippi is relatively dispersed demographically and geographically. Its population is spread over a large area, with only three substantial urban areas serving as hubs for the region: Tupelo, Oxford, and the Desoto County area in the extreme northwest just south of Memphis, Tennessee.

There is minimal public transit service in the region, with only limited point-to-point reservation transit service available in both Tupelo and Oxford for the elderly and disabled, and no service available in Desoto County. Even this service is less than meets the eye in that the service must be reserved at least 24 hours ahead of any trip or visit and can only be used for an extremely limited range of destinations, usually health care or some sort of educational service. No alterations of trip schedules are allowed, and the service follows a strict schedule. If the rider has an appointment or event that goes past a scheduled time, it is probable that they will be left stranded. Rural areas (the vast majority of North Mississippi) have no type of transit service at all.

Focus group participants related that working with individuals without access to any type of personal transportation or informal networks that might provide some type of assistance is a particularly difficult challenge. Funding, especially for the VA, was available to provide a variety of transit, shuttle, and valet services and reimbursement for third parties providing transit to individuals requiring services or needing to get to appointments. Additionally, the VA is unique in that it is a social service organization in which income is not a primary element for eligibility. One simply has to be a veteran to

receive benefits or services, and this provides providers with an extra arrow not often available to their peers at MDHS or MDRS, clients with the resources and ability to assist other clients. Discussion of these services and programs revealed that while they provide a level of transit service for clients, several issues impact effectiveness. The same VA representative stated,

> The other side of that is the fact that the $100 [the reimbursement rate] does not cover the lost wages for family members if they drive the veteran to the hospital, making it costly when they are trying to feed their own family. There are other expenses incurred by those providing transportation past lost wages, which includes daycare costs for those that will need to place children while they are transporting their veteran and extra traveling costs associated with doing this.

When speaking of the van and shuttle services provided by the VA, the participants stated that while they were officially available, in practice, there were severe challenges in simply keeping them staffed. Another VA participant related that

> the large for-profit operators are not interested in taking on these types of contracts because the money is simply not good enough. And it is difficult to find qualified people willing to consistently staff a volunteer service to Memphis or Tuscaloosa more than one day a week. And even then, they burn out quickly.

Most participants stated that even these services were not available through their agencies and that any transportation assistance they were able to provide was through partnerships with other agencies (notably Medicare or Medicaid) or through informal arrangements or assistance they provided personally. Thus in North Mississippi, those without a vehicle (or at least access to a vehicle) are very much stuck in whatever

situation they find themselves in. Or, as a participant put it, "They are at the mercy of everyone else and their ability to take the time to help them."

A final note on the data collected on Research Question 1, the client's lack of driver's licenses was cited by a large number of participants in the focus groups. Participants noted that all of these individuals tended to be youth or young adults, and seemed somewhat ambivalent to gaining this document, or in even seeing the need to have one. When asked to expound on this point, it was noted by more than one participant that the issue seemed to be less the inability to obtain a driver's license and more that the clients in question did not see a need for one. Many participants stated that when conducting intake or counseling with these particular clients, there was no sense of urgency or desire that one might expect from this age group to gain what many would consider a rite of passage. When asked what rationale was provided by these clients for not desiring to gain a driver's license, no consensus or guiding reason or factor was stated. One participant made the following observation:

> For us, one of the big issues revolves around a lack of a driver's license and an apathetic attitude about getting one. Many do not see the need because they do not have a vehicle, and many do not have the education to understand why they need one. … There are some that are unemployed and are happy with being unemployed, so why do they need one [driver's license]. So for a large part of our population, they simply do not care.

Building on this, another stated,

> Their [clients] attitude is that we pay for everything else, so we should pay for transportation too. And this hurts when we are trying to get them to take responsibility for themselves.

This point was secondary to the more significant issue of lack of vehicle access with regard to transportation obstacles, but it does highlight an environmental challenge the participants face in dealing with the issue, an issue that is discussed in the Discussions section of Chapter 5.

Research Question 2

"Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?" was incorporated into two virtual focus group questions:

Focus Group Question 2. "Whom do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues? [transportation obstacles]

Focus Group Question 4. "Whom do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues? [secondary problems]

Discussion by the virtual focus groups centered on four primary responses as listed in Figure 5. Participants were unable to provide a consensus as to where responsibility lies for dealing with transportation obstacles facing the clients of the selected agencies. The most common response was some version of mixed responsibility between the client and the agency. Even from those participants who felt that the agency or larger governmental entities had some obligation to address these obstacles, only one felt it was solely an agency or governmental responsibility. Only two participants put the burden squarely and solely on individuals attempting to access services.

Figure 5

Responsible for Addressing Obstacles
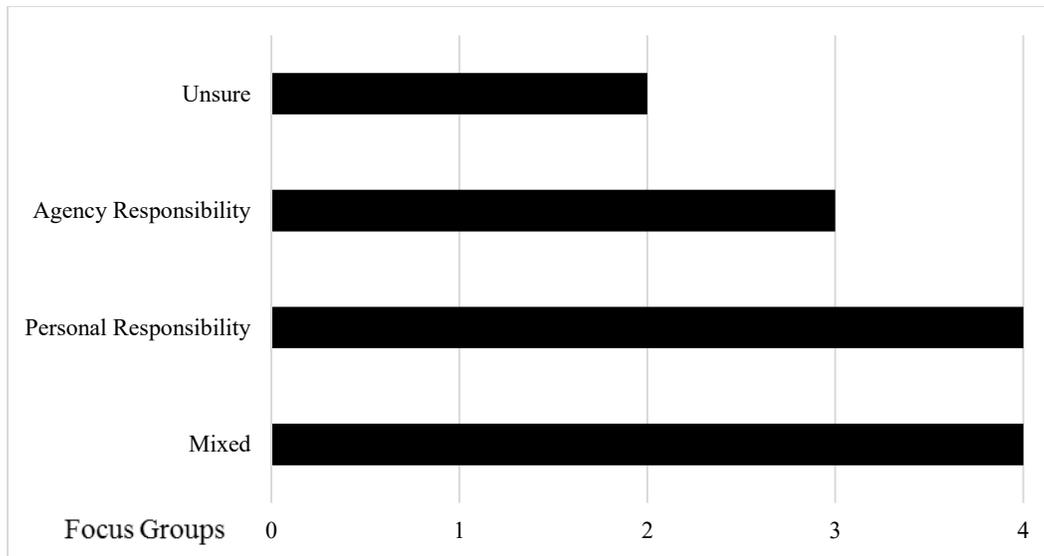
Undefined Responsibility

None of the participants had a clear view of what types of obstacles solely clients or agencies were responsible for. Nor did any have a clear idea or opinion on where individual and agency responsibility crossed over.

"I think it is not just one person and that is the problem," stated a case manager. Continuing, they stated, "You know, it is not one fixed action; I think it is going to take a village." One participant said, "Sometimes I feel we are responsible, and sometimes I do not. It just depends on the situation." Another stated, "I cannot say that anyone should be responsible for those issues. To me, it is a give and take." A third participant elaborated,

> Well, as a state worker, our ultimate goal is to serve the customer. Now we
>
> cannot necessarily solve or fix the transportation problems they might have, but
>
> we can be their advocate in order to provide them with the things they need to be

successful. S o that is where our responsibility lies, and to provide information

and assistance on and with resources *they* can use to fix the problem.

A fourth participant discussed,

Taking responsibility for those things that you have the ability to do and over

which you can control. However, there is a certain responsibility for the state and

even the federal government getting those [unable to gain transportation

themselves] to get to where they need to be. … So I think the responsibility is

kind of spread, and it can be a lot of different things.

Although there was no clear consensus on what responsibility lays where or who

might shoulder which part of this nebulous issue, there was consensus that the agencies

had a vested interest in addressing them and providing some sort of guidance and support

to their clients so impeded.

Ability Versus Need

While consensus was not reached with regard to the exact nature and distribution

of responsibility in dealing with transportation issues challenging clients of the

participating agencies, there was overwhelming agreement that dealing with these types

of issues was a case-by-case endeavor. The theme of ability versus need emerged as a

primary factor for participating providers in deciding how much effort they would expend

in assisting their clients in overcoming their transportation challenges. A majority of

providers stated that they felt a responsibility to assist their clients dealing with

transportation issues, but this responsibility (and the corresponding effort) was correlated

to the ability and willingness of the client to address their issues themselves. Providers

were willing to provide assistance and guidance as far as possible, but they believed that the client needed to demonstrate some sort of vestment or effort themselves.

Encased in this theme was a certain level of frustration sensed by this researcher. A more significant number of the providers noted that many of their clients projected an attitude bordering on entitlement. They believed that the provider and agency would address transportation obstacles and barriers in the same universal manner that other needs had been addressed during their participation in the provider's program. That is that transportation issues and obstacles would become the responsibility of the provider with no effort or input from the client. As one participant stated,

> Within my agency, we have made it easy for them [clients] to believe that they
> will be taken care of totally with no responsibility or tasking on their part. A lot
> of them have developed the attitude that they need not worry about gaining access
> to a license or vehicle because they know or at least believe that all their needs
> (transportation and otherwise) will be taken care of. So I think the responsibility
> is kind of a judgment call. I know that in a particular field, we are able to pick out
> who needs and does not need services and who is taking advantage of the system.
> That is my opinion here. There is a responsibility with the service provider, but
> the participant needs to meet us halfway to help make them better.

In answering the question, providers voiced an overwhelming desire to assist and improve the lives of their clients. They were uncertain as to precisely what their role in dealing with transportation issues was and had few (if any) mechanisms to provide meaningful assistance. Additionally and importantly, all of the participants made the point (without exception) that they were ready and willing to guide and assist clients in

navigating and overcoming transportation obstacles but often were frustrated by the client's lack of effort or interest in taking responsibility and active participation in their progress. These three elements seemed to combine to create the central theme emerging from the research question: Even with no set or clear delineation of responsibility with regard to transportation obstacles, providers are willing and committed to assisting their clients in any way possible but experience frustration when clients do not respond with the same intensity of effort or commitment to their success.

Research Question 3

"What assumptions (culturally or politically) have been made about these obstacles by selected agencies?" was incorporated into one virtual focus group question:

Focus Group Question 6. "What assumptions do you feel are made regarding the term or idea of transportation (culturally or politically) by your agency with regard to your services?

Discussion within the focus groups produced four distinct responses to the question. The most common response and one that all groups voiced was that the participants were unsure as to what assumptions or ideas their agencies had about transportation obstacles as it affected their services. None of the groups or participants responded by saying they knew of guidance regarding any policy or direction regarding or dealing with transportation or transportation obstacles (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Assumptions About Obstacles
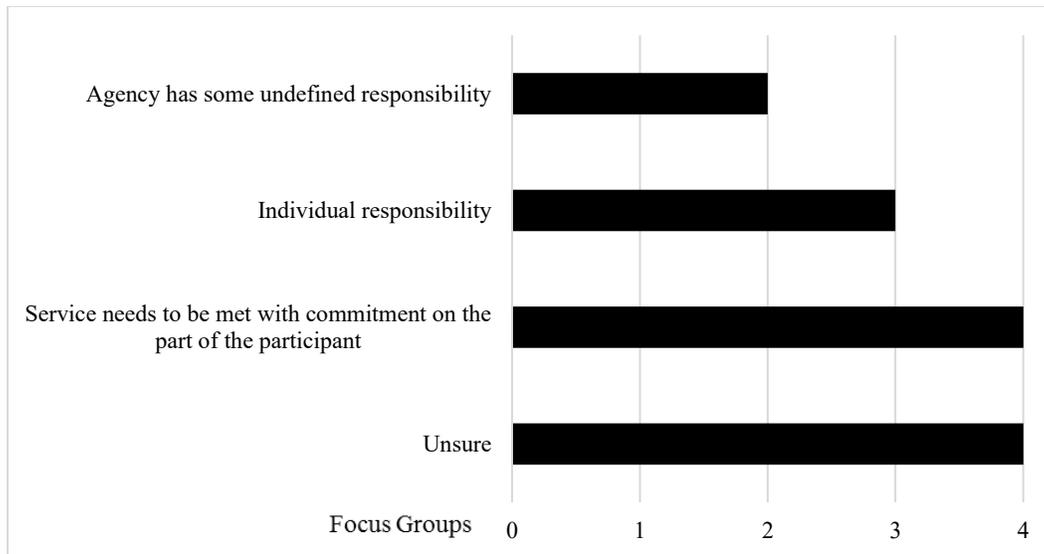
Additional discussion followed these exchanges, and participants provided their thoughts, which most qualified by stating that these additional responses were conjecture on their part based on their personal observation of their agencies. Of all the questions asked, this one seemed to spark the most individual reflection from the participants. Discussion drifted over a variety of points and spotlighted how many felt about their agencies and clients' perceptions of transportation, expectations of service, and responsibility.

Client Assumptions

Only one of the participants had anything to say regarding client assumptions about transportation as a concept or activity, but his response was an excellent encapsulation of a point alluded to by a large number of his fellow participants:

They believe that it is a ride from one place to another and that it is a ride whenever they want to go. We pay for everything else, and they believe that we

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should pay for transportation as well. If they want to get here for services, we

should pay for that, and if they want to go from here to McDonald's, we should

pay for that as well.

The fundamental point raised by participants answering the question from the client angle

was that clients expected transportation for free, and they expected it when and where

they chose.

Agency Assumptions

As mentioned previously, none of the participants stated that they were aware of

any assumptions, ideas, or concepts used by their agency when dealing with

transportation or transportation issues. The same provider mentioned above also stated,

We are a grant-based program, and in that grant, there is no verbiage that states

that we assist with transportation or we will work with anyone to help with

transportation. Our clients have no transportation or any access to reliable

transportation, and the money is here for us to pay for employment training, GED

classes, and a lot of other things, but nothing for transportation. Everything seems

to be included except transportation.

This lack of direction or even acknowledgment by agencies regarding

transportation obstacles and agencies was voiced by a large number of participants in all

groups. When asked why this particular topic was not addressed, there was a large

section of participants again stating that they were unsure as to the cause. However, two

participants (while both qualifying their response by repeating they had no firsthand

reference or source for their response) stated that they thought the individuals responsible

for crafting agency policy or procedure might be unaware of transportation obstacles.

One provider stated,

> Well, I hate to say this, but usually, people in those positions did not come from a position—or I will say growing up—I would say that most grew up with money or at least without having to struggle. And so, how can someone like that realistically look at something like … I cannot think of what I am trying to say … I just think that when people go to get these laws passed, they go into it with their own views and honestly do not know what the picture of … they just do not get the severity of … and they have to get down to what true reality is and they need to get down on other people's levels.

Or as two providers said,

> The assumption that people in power make is that this level of poverty does not exist, that people can take care of these issues themselves. They do not realize what it is like for these people in this situation. [and]
>
> Yeah … they do not know how to help.

All groups articulated this view to a certain extent, but none as concisely as the two examples presented above.

A single provider presented an interesting final point. While not a policymaker, this person has experience advising and providing input to those tasked as such. Their point revolved around the idea that policymakers and legislators did not necessarily see transportation as a human need but as an economic factor used in the abstract equations of moving materials, goods, and products from point to point in the creation of a state or regional GDP:

I believe they are thinking about moving product, moving material, but not

thinking about a labor force. Everyone wants to increase this thing called labor

participation rates, and in this case, they think in terms of educating people to the

jobs in the region and increasing the number of workers in the pool. Well, you

cannot increase a labor pool if the people cannot get from here to where the jobs

are. Thinking of that is a critical piece. We have roadways, rail systems, and

other types of transportation. It is important to include the people as part of those

systems.

This last comment circles back to the first mentioned in this section. Providers

participating in this research had no firsthand formal knowledge of agency policy or

procedure dealing with transportation or transportation obstacles. None was aware of any

printed or passed data or policy dealing with the issue, and this last point postulated that

one of the reasons might be that those producing these policies do not see the issue and/or

do not consider it one that needs to be addressed by the agency.

Research Question 4

"What seems to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?" was incorporated

into one virtual focus group question:

Focus Group Question 7. "What programs or courses of action seem to be

effective in ameliorating these obstacles?"

Discussion in the groups produced several responses, which could be gathered

into five categories. Two fundamental themes emerge from these categories: Using

outside or partnered resources to facilitate transportation and conducting intensive and

comprehensive intake counseling to identify potential obstacles and then work around them (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Ameliorating Obstacles
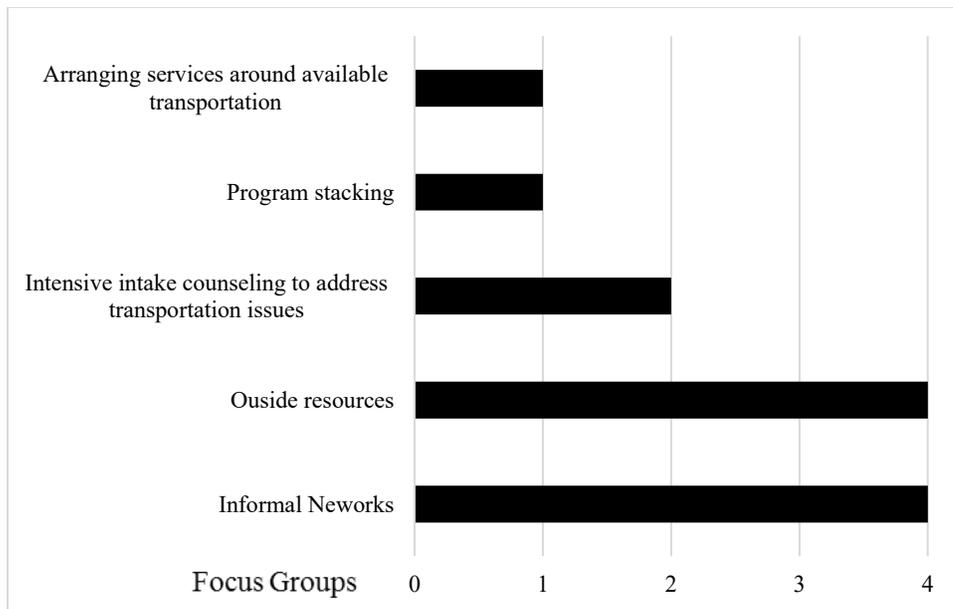
Outside Assistance

All providers, without exception, stated that they used resources and services outside of their agency to assist in providing clients with transportation to and from their services and any other activities. Their services prompted the clients to schedule. Program stacking and using informal networks (both clients and providers) are examples of how participants have found ways to provide transportation assistance to their clients.

This is effective—to a point. Participants pointed out that while this is realistic, there are some significant problems in using these strategies to address transportation obstacles.

Plugging into informal networks and asking others for assistance is not reliable. One provider stated, "They are at the mercy of everyone else and their ability to take the time to help them." Another participant expanded this point by adding,

Inconsistency is the issue. If a person is told they will be picked up at 3 p.m., it might be 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. before their ride shows. If you have several stops to make and several things to do, it makes it tough to get it all done in the time your ride has or to even find a ride at all. Additionally, if you are placed for employment at a place that has a point system, it is easy to point out because they do not care that your ride was late or did not show.

Program stacking is more reliable as the transportation providers are under contract for scheduled services. But these are severely limited to health care services.

Intake Counseling and Guidance

Several participants in two groups discussed the effectiveness of intensive intake counseling and guidance in identifying transportation obstacles challenging new clients. This early identification allowed participants the opportunity to explore these with new clients, working together to find an agreed-upon course of action to overcome them. Participants stated that this early identification and mutual effort assisted in gaining buy-in from the client and demonstrated to them that they shouldered some responsibility in obtaining their services. If nothing else, it helps weed out those interested only in handouts. A case manager summarized the point:

We complete an intensive assessment upon intake. This seems to weed out those that are not serious about helping themselves. Enforcing a certain level of accountability seems to help as well. And those that do not meet the requirements

the first go-round have the opportunity to try again. It is kind of a half and half kind of thing. One needs to meet me halfway in order for it to work.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore the transportation obstacles challenging those seeking selected social services in North Mississippi as seen by the social service providers tasked with providing the services. This study was done using virtual focus groups asking a series of questions designed to elicit data answering the following four research questions:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?
2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?
3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?
4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Virtual focus groups were conducted during May and June of 2021, consisting of 16 participants from the VA, MDRS, and MDHS. Using a Charmez style of constructivist grounded theory, the researcher coded (both line-by-line and axially) to produce categories of data inside the questions and then sorted these into themes addressing the questions.

The primary theme emerging from Research Question 1 was that automobile ownership is imperative to be able to participate fully in communal life in North Mississippi. Participants stated that lack of car ownership or at least unfettered access to one was the most common transportation obstacle they dealt with when providing services. This is a complex problem in practice, often creating a spiral of issues.

Participants did not have a consensus on Research Question 2. Responsibility seemed to be difficult to assign for a variety of reasons. Lack of agency direction, limited resources, and a sense that the clients of the services bear some of the responsibility for transportation themselves all create an ambiguous environment in which no one has a good answer for where responsibility begins or ends with any given party.

Participants again did not have a consensus on Research Question 3. None of the participants had any awareness of formal policy or procedure from their agencies regarding transportation obstacles. This question elicited a range of responses past the lack of knowledge regarding formal policy. About half of the participants' responses dealt with their idea of what they believed their clients' concept of transportation obstacles were and what they believed their clients felt their agency's responsibilities were in fixing these, with the other half of the participants describing what they believed their agency's definition of transportation obstacles were, and what the clients needed to provide to assist themselves. Discussion revolved around the expectation of unlimited service for the former and a lack of knowledge about the issue by the latter. One participant noted that, in her opinion, agencies failed to include humans in transportation policy at all.

Participants had several responses for Research Question 4. All were developed into the themes of outside assistance and comprehensive and intensive intake screening. Outside assistance in the form of other agencies or informal networks was the most effective strategy mentioned by the participants. However, the inherent potential (usually actual) disadvantages and threats make it less than meets the eye. An inability to ensure

consistent and timely service by informal networks and the limited scope of services from other agencies make these strategies sketchy.

Participants stated that intensive screening and intake counseling allows the provider to screen out those not motivated or interested in working to make themselves successful and provides some sense of vestment by the client in their own success. By working with the provider in this process, the client is able to feel like they are an active part of the process of making themselves successful. Furthermore, it provides a tangible expression of control of their own life.

The data collected did provide the desired result with regard to the research questions. While it does provide some sunlight on what transportation obstacles consist of for those seeking selected social services in North Mississippi, it also provides material for further discussion and deeper examination as to how all this fits into the larger mission of the selected agencies in the study, to those impeded by these obstacles, and to the larger community to which the participants and their clients belong.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to assist in developing measures and yardsticks needed to address the issues of social exclusion and isolation created by transportation obstacles in a given population—those seeking selected social services in North Mississippi. Transportation obstacles have been identified as a factor in social isolation and exclusion from economic, cultural, and political communities (Bourgeois et al., 2014; Needles Fletcher et al., 2010, p. 124). While ample literature and research document the fact that transportation obstacles do contribute significantly, there is much less detailing what these obstacles actually are and what they actually cause in the lives of those so impeded (Combs et al., 2016; Lucas, 2012). Put another way, researchers and policymakers know that transportation obstacles cause social isolation and equity issues; what is missing is the reality of these obstacles as they affect those impeded by transportation obstacles. Several researchers have made a note of this, with Manaugh et al. (2015) stating,

> Transportation outcomes include those that are "tangible," such as reduced congestion and GHG emissions, improved air quality and safety, increased coverage and use of public transit, and increased cycling and walking. There are also less tangible outcomes related to social equity or exclusion and concepts such as walkability or livability. The former outcomes are easier to measure and present to the public and often have more political cachet than those focused on social equity. This can be problematic as more easily quantified goals can be— and are—prioritized at the expense of the "intangible" objectives. (Manaugh et al., 2015, p. 168)

The implication here is that transportation policies and programs connected to some sort of measurable marker will get more attention and resources than those difficult to measure or keep score as to the reach or effect of the program on the intended population.

Quantifiable measures and yardsticks for the social equity and isolation costs of transportation programs are not impossible to create; however, they are more complicated to construct and explain to a tax-paying public than those that deal with issues such as roadway capacity, emission levels, and average drive time (Lucas, 2012). Social equity and exclusion programs and policies are often wicked problems dealing with issues and circumstances crossing into controversial issues or circumstances. Transportation policy is no different with competing constituencies within a community arguing over myriad issues and circumstances such as public transit, highway construction, and even items seemingly as mundane as licensing and fuel tax policy.

This chapter's purpose is to discuss the themes and categories emerging from the data collected during the study regarding the nature of transportation obstacles challenging those seeking selected social services and the efforts of those participating providers in mitigating or eliminating them. To accomplish this, the chapter is constructed into six sections: Research Design, Biases, Disclosure, Discussion, Conclusions, Further Research, and Concluding Remarks.

Research Design

This study was created around four research questions related to the construct of transportation obstacles as experienced by this group and executed by conducting virtual focus group sessions with professional social services providers from three selected social service agencies in North Mississippi: The Mississippi Department of Vocational

Rehabilitation (MDRS), the Mississippi Department of Health Services (MDHS), and the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) located in the area. The research questions were the following:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?

2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?

3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?

4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Virtual focus groups were held with social service providers (a total of 16 participants) during May and June of 2021 to collect data on the four questions using a set of seven virtual focus group questions:

1. What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?

2. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

3. What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?

4. What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?

5. Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

6. What assumptions do you feel are made by your agency regarding your services and/or your clients in defining or constructing the term "transportation"?

7. What programs or courses of action seem to be effective in ameliorating these obstacles?

Data collected from these sessions were then transcribed and coded for categories and themes and recorded in Chapter 4: Findings of this study.

Biases

The study and the virtual focus groups used in the operationalization of the study were designed to mitigate the influence of bias a much as possible. No demographic information was collected or used to identify any of the participating providers. The selection process for participating agencies was done via random draw, and participant selection was made by populating the study with the first 16 providers from selected offices who agreed to participate. Research questions and virtual focus group questions were written to eliminate any triggering or slanted language which might hint at a preferred or desired response.

The researcher can think of only one possible avenue for any type of bias to infiltrate the study at the construction or execution level. The researcher is a social service professional in the same area as the study and is a professional acquaintance and peer of all of the participants. Additionally, the researcher works in the same field, and his clients are subject to the same obstacles and challenges as those referenced in the study. The researcher took great care to maintain the anonymity of the participants and, when questioning during the virtual focus groups, took extreme care to ensure that all questions were delivered in the same manner and tone at all times. Because of this, the researcher believes that he mitigated the effect any bias might have on the study in any way.

Disclosure

The researcher is a social service provider in North Mississippi, which is the geographical area in which the study occurred. The researcher was aware of the offices and individuals located in the target area, was acquainted with several of the individuals

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working in these offices on a professional level, and was personally acquainted with a few individuals through conference attendance and interactions during case management.

No one personally acquainted with the researcher participated in the focus groups during the study. Additionally, through his professional activities, the researcher was familiar with the material and issues with which this study was concerned. All data, findings, and conclusions in the study originated from participant data. The researcher did not add to or alter any comments or data to reflect any particular point of view or position.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role transportation obstacles play in preventing people from accessing selected social services in North Mississippi. The literature review provided primary sources and data stating that transportation issues are fundamental elements in social exclusion and isolation, especially for socially impeded populations, and as primary obstacles for those attempting to obtain social services or goods. This study supports this. All participants in the virtual focus groups stated that most of their clients dealt with transportation obstacles of some sort and severity at least once during their time being served by their agencies. Discussion during these virtual focus groups focused on four research questions:

1. What are the transportation obstacles for those in your program?
2. Who is responsible for addressing these obstacles?
3. What assumptions have been made about these obstacles by program managers?
4. What strategies seem to be working in ameliorating these obstacles?

Subsequent discussions during these virtual focus groups on these questions developed one central theme regarding the nature of transportation obstacles and two main themes on the primary issues providers need to overcome when attempting to assist their clients in dealing with these issues. The central theme concerning the nature of transportation obstacles experienced in North Mississippi was the need for ownership or unfettered access to a reliable automobile.

Much discussion followed unpacking what lack of ownership and/or access actually meant in an operational context and its myriad consequences. The two themes emerging from these virtual focus group questions regarding obstacles facing social service providers in assisting these clients were a lack of agency direction when dealing with transportation obstacles facing their clients; and secondly (and related), a seeming lack of understanding by policymakers and senior administrators as to the true nature of these obstacles.

This section examines these discussions in three parts: (a) automobile ownership, (b) lack of agency awareness, and (c) lack of agency understanding.

Automobile Ownership

Transportation literature globally cites automobile ownership or unfettered access as the primary factor in successfully navigating any modern transportation system based on the automobile and the primary obstacle preventing people who do not have them from participating fully in the larger community (Combs et al., 2016; King et al., 2019; Smart & Klein, 2018). This matches with the vast majority of responses in the study: "They do not have a way to get to our program" and "They do not have a way!"

Participants, without exception, stated that lack of automobile ownership and/or unfettered access was the primary transportation obstacle facing those seeking their services. The obstacle is more extensive than simply having an automobile available whenever they wish. Participants discussed at length their clients' issues and challenges with the reliability of the vehicles to which they did have access: "They do not have cars, and when they do, they do not work"; and "or the veteran not being able to operate a vehicle, or the veteran not being able to find someone to transport them."

Those seeking the services of the participants are usually socially and/or economically impeded, making obtaining and maintaining a reliable vehicle problematic. How does one obtain and maintain a reliable automobile if one does not have money to begin with? Clients of the participants were placed in situations in which they often gained access or ownership of vehicles that were old and in poor repair, which they spent a significant amount of time and money to maintain in some semblance of running condition in a desperate effort to maintain some control over their transportation situation.

Literature speaks directly to this: Low-income or disadvantaged individuals spend a higher percentage of their income on transportation simply because this segment of the population usually has the oldest and most repair-prone type of vehicles (King et al., 2019; Smart & Klein, 2017). Clients of the participants often cannot afford the expense and trouble that comes with owning an old vehicle prone to breakdowns, but the cost of not having even this type of vehicle in the transportation environment was even higher. Needles Fletcher et al. (2010) described it as follows:

A lot of people will not hire you … if they already know you do not have reliable

transportation. That is one of the questions they ask you in interviews anymore:

Do you have reliable transportation? Is it yours? When you say, "No, it's not

mine"—then it is not reliable (a welfare recipient in rural Iowa). (p. 3)

Participants in this study in North Mississippi described the condition as "They do not

have cars, and when they do, they do not work"; "They do not have a way to our

program, and if they do, they often do not have gas money"; and "Simply do not have a

way to me!"

The inability to operate a vehicle was the other primary element factoring into a

lack of automobile access that participants noted. The reliability of available automobiles

is a serious problem, but the inability to operate one is multifaceted and wicked in the

myriad ways it manifests itself. While the operability of a vehicle can be a hard problem,

it is usually not complicated. In most of the instances cited by the participants, it was a

relatively simple matter of needing enough money to fix whatever was mechanically

wrong with the vehicle (simple in construct but often tricky in execution). The inability

to operate a vehicle can be both complicated in construct and execution as the inability

can spring from various unrelated circumstances from physical disability to schedule

conflict with a potential ride.

Participants discussed these circumstances and the often involved and

complicated manner in which they needed to be addressed to provide some level of

service to the client. While there were a variety of conditions and circumstances that

contributed to an inability to operate a vehicle, a VA representative described the

problem succinctly:

Those transportation obstacles deal mainly with the lack of transportation, or the veteran not being able to operate a vehicle, or the veteran not being able to find someone to transport them. It is not only not having a vehicle, but it is also not having someone to drive them. Lack of family members being able to get off work to take them somewhere, or not being able to find someone willing to take them for the going rate ... the prevailing thought being that the veteran cannot find someone willing to take them to Memphis for $100 when they have to drive them there, wait for them to finish their appointment, and then drive back. And that is not even mentioning if they have to stay longer. The other side of that is that the $100 does not cover lost wages, child care costs, and other expenses that family members incur on themselves and their families when they agree to transport their Veteran. So it is a difficult problem.

This exchange illustrates the difficult problems that a client's inability to operate an automobile causes themselves and others around them as all work together to assist the client.

Participants also noted one other serious issue with automobile availability: a lack of driver's licenses among their clients. Participants in two virtual focus groups noted that a large portion of their clients did not possess a driver's license, with the consequent issue of being unable to operate an automobile legally. Interestingly, the participants in these groups noted that while a portion of these individuals were not able to obtain a license, there was a sizable portion that had no interest or desire to obtain one and saw no reason that they needed a license.

When asked why they felt that their clients might not see the value in being able to operate a vehicle, the participants gave a variety of answers. However, they all seemed to settle on one major point: their clients who did not wish to gain a driver's license seemed to not understand why they needed one to navigate the transportation system or felt that transportation was something that they would simply receive as a benefit of the participant's program:

> Within my agency, we have made it easy for them to believe that they will be taken care of (and I am not saying that many of our people do not need help), but we have made it easy for them to believe that they will be taken care of totally with no responsibility or tasking on their part. A lot of them have developed the attitude that they need not worry about gaining access to a license or a car because they know or at least believe that all their needs will be met, and this includes getting a ride to wherever.

Another participant mirrored this:

> For us, one of the big things revolves around the lack of a driver's license and an apathetic attitude about getting one. Many do not see the need because they do not have a vehicle, and many do not have the education to understand why they need one at all.

Automobile ownership and access are fundamental to successfully utilizing the transportation network in North Mississippi. Participants stated this as they discussed the major transportation obstacles challenging their clients, with lack of ownership and an inability to operate as the two main conditions creating this obstacle. A lack of a driver's license and a lack of desire to obtain a driver's license were discussed by two groups at

some length as an additional circumstance. Moreover, all pointed to a lack of resources or education needed to understand how the transportation systems available in the region worked and what was needed to use them successfully. It also pointed to the high cost in resources and effort needed to utilize these transportation systems. Licenses, automotive costs, including insurance, fuel, maintenance, and the physical and mental ability to operate an automobile safely contribute to a condition that is often beyond the capability of the provider's clientele. This is not unique to North Mississippi. Needles Fletcher et al. (2010) described this:

> Their stories describe a range of transportation problems that reflect a lack of driving skills, inability to obtain a valid driver's license, lack of access to consumer credit, as well as the high costs of insurance, maintenance, and repairs. Although the social networks of these families allow for an extensive exchange of transportation resources, the informality of these arrangements adds stress and uncertainty to decision making. (p. 140)

North Mississippi's primary network of roads and highways makes the expensive ownership of automobiles imperative to fully engage in the community's economic, cultural, and political life. The high cost means that many socially and economically impeded individuals are unable to participate entirely even with support from their informal networks of family and friends because they are informal and thus fundamentally unreliable. There is not the accountability inherent in owning one's own transportation or using a contracted and professional transit system—none of which exist in the region. This was the primary obstacle facing the clients of the study's participants.

Lack of Agency Awareness

Participants in all virtual focus groups commented that they were unaware of their respective agencies' formal policy or position concerning transportation obstacles or policy. Participant responses developed this idea along two lines through which this lack of awareness was manifested: lack of funding and lack of direction.

All participants in all groups commented that they were unaware of any formal or deliberate guidance or direction from their agency with regard to transportation policy. It simply was an issue that was not dealt with in any way formally or officially, and as one provider stated,

> There is no verbiage that states that we assist with transportation or we will work
> with anyone to help with transportation. Our clients have no transportation or any
> access to transportation, but the money is here with us to pay for job training and
> GED classes, but nothing for transportation. Everything seems to be included
> except transportation.

With no formal direction or guidance, providers stated that they were on their own when dealing with these obstacles with their clients, with the most common course of action being the stacking or sharing of services among agencies and involvement or engagement with another party in some sort of informal network designed to provide transportation support.

All participants made the point that they worked with their clients to ensure that they had some form of transportation support to receive services. The most common (cited by all virtual focus groups) was reaching out to clients' informal networks. While the easiest in resource and time commitment, these arrangements were only as effective

and consistent as the individuals involved. One professional stated that informal network arrangements were as follows:

> There is the issue of inconsistency. If a person is told that 3 p.m. is the pickup time, it might be 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. before someone shows up. If you have somewhere else to be or have several stops to make, this makes it difficult to get it all done.

A provider encapsulated informal networks when he stated, "They are at the mercy of everyone else and their ability to take the time to help them."

Informal networks covered providers as well. Most notably within the VA providers, providers had informal networks of individuals or other organizations they regularly reached out to transport clients. A provider summarized their experience:

> I do have older veterans with no way to go to Tuscaloosa or Memphis, so they come to me to ask for help [to] find someone to drive them there. This means that I call other disabled veterans I know do not work in an attempt to find someone to drive them to their appointments. … Is an 80-year-old veteran who cannot see responsible for getting himself to Memphis? I say no, and this is where the human heart comes in. And when he comes in and needs a ride, even it is just to Tupelo, I feel as a service officer it is my responsibility to help. Now I cannot jump up and run somebody to Memphis, but I can use the phone to find someone. And I find it useful to reach back to those veterans' family members because often I find out that the veteran has not reached back to them out of pride or a desire to not burden them.

Going further, the provider's coworker described how informal networks included organizations as well:

Because I am a member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars … we have a veterans assistance program. We have veterans in both organizations that will assist others in getting to and from appointments. … I have a list of veterans I can call to assist. And the organizations will offset the cost as well.

Program stacking or sharing is a primary strategy used by participants in overcoming transportation obstacles. The same provider described a process by which intensive intake and screening counseling allowed the participants to uncover additional circumstances and factors in the clients' lives, facilitating referral to additional agencies and services that provided transportation assistance. It is common for one client to be receiving services from three or more agencies to gain (for example) employment, education, and health services while one of the agencies provides some transportation assistance while another might provide assistance for heating or food.

One final note on lack of agency awareness. This lack of awareness manifests itself at the provider level as confusion or frustration by these providers as they attempt to provide assistance. A point of discourse during each of the virtual focus groups was that each situation was different concerning clients and their transportation obstacles. This hints that agency ambiguity might be useful when arranging services and resources to deal with each individual situation. However, this lack of agency awareness seems to stem not from a desire to create working space for providers but from a lack of awareness that transportation obstacles exist for potential clients. Again the provider stated,

Our clients have no transportation or any access to reliable transportation. We

have money for job training; the money is there for GED classes, but nothing for

transportation. Everything seems to be included except transportation.

All providers participating stated in some manner that the lack of agency

awareness conveyed the message to these providers that transportation obstacles were not

important, to which a typical comment from the participants was that there was a

significant lack of understanding by policymakers regarding how serious and wicked

transportation obstacles were to those needing their services.

Lack of Agency Understanding

When asked what their respective agencies thought of, valued, or understood

transportation to be with regard to their services, none of the participants knew of a

formal or official answer. None responded that they had received any training or

direction as to agency policy or philosophy regarding transportation obstacles, with the

most common response being "I do not know" or "I have no idea."

Several participants who answered they did not know what their agency's concept

of transportation might be stated further that they believed that there was a lack of

direction on transportation and transportation obstacles due in no small part to a lack of

experience with transportation obstacles by those at director level and above inside the

agency and in the legislature. One participant was polite in articulating the idea: "When

they are thinking of the clients, and thinking they might have the same level of resources

as people not attempting to access services, that might not be the case."

One focus group was less so and stated, "The assumption that people in power

make is that this level of poverty does not exist and that people can take care of these

issues themselves. They do not realize what it is like for people in these situations."

Another member of the focus group said, "They do not know how to help." The first

focus group member responded, "They do not realize that this help is needed. These

issues simply do not exist for them." A final participant voiced it slightly differently:

> I hate to say this, but usually people in those positions did not come from a
>
> situation when they were growing up—because that is where everything is
>
> instilled in you—when they were growing up, they probably had money. Not all,
>
> but most had money, and if they did not have money, at least they did not have to
>
> struggle. How can someone who was raised like that? I am not sure what I am
>
> trying to say … it is like, you know I came from a broken home, and I watched
>
> my mom struggle. When the people that write these laws go to write them,
>
> maybe they should go talk to the people it affects. You know they go at it with
>
> the picture they have in their head, and I have no clue as to what that picture
>
> might be. I can look at it realistically because I have lived it. These people, I
>
> have no idea what they think. But I do know it would help them to go talk to the
>
> people their laws affect, get down on their level if they want it to work … you
>
> know; $5 is not a lot of money until you do not have $5.

One provider discussed a final idea regarding agency understanding of

transportation and transportation obstacles. Agencies and the governments they support,

including social service agencies in Mississippi, do not consider individuals in

transportation policy. Her experience was of economic and business factors driving

transportation policy and social services being driven more to facilitate the education and

development of a workforce for these economic players:

I think they are thinking about moving product and improving the transportation system to ensure that this happens, but they are not thinking of the labor force. … Right now, we are focused on moving products, raw materials, and finished goods. And when we think of our transportation systems, these are the things that get prioritized.

This follows with the early point that agencies at the policy level might not have the experience or frame of reference required to understand their clients truly and that in place of this understanding, a contrary frame of reference may be part of the issue.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of transportation obstacles affecting those seeking selected social services in North Mississippi. The catalyst for this was a large body of literature exploring the problems and issues created in communities where access to transportation is problematic for at least some of the population. This topic is of great interest because transportation obstacles do indeed contribute significantly to (among other things) unemployment and illiteracy, which are fundamental elements of social exclusion and isolation. In the words of Fredrickson (1971), "New Public Administrators seek to change those policies and structures that systematically inhibit social equity" (p. 312). According to Fredrickson, this is not the second or third aim of public administrators, but their primary purpose for existing.

Virtual focus groups were conducted with social service professionals representing three social service agencies in North Mississippi. Focus group discussions did reveal that transportation obstacles affected a majority of the participant client base to varying degrees. The most common transportation obstacle faced, according to the

participants, was lack of automobile ownership or at least reasonable and reliable access to one. Participants from all agencies stated that they are unaware of any formal language or direction in program administration, so they, in large part, are left to their own devices in dealing with these issues. Two main themes emerged from the discussion about this lack of direction: that agencies at the policy level seemed to be unaware of the existence of transportation obstacles facing their clients; and that at that level, they seemed not to understand them.

In the current environment of the region, there is no identifiable answer to the issue of the dominance of the automobile and the imperative to own one to be successful. Hence, the inability to own or have access to an automobile will continue to be an obstacle for the foreseeable future. As to the other two main themes emerging from the data, the final point raised in the Discussion section might cast some light on why there is the perception at the provider level that agency policymakers and legislators are seemingly unaware of and fail to understand transportation obstacles or fail to include human beings in the equation.

If the provider advising policymakers is correct, then policymakers, far from adhering to Fredrickson (1971), will develop policy based on an agenda that facilitates the mechanics of business and the perceived interests of employers and manufacturers in the region. While they do make a point that the labor force is indeed fundamental to this, responsibility in developing and maintaining this economic element has not historically been a responsibility of the employer. So, if this observation is correct, policymakers and legislators are not inculcated yet in the idea that transportation obstacles are something that must be addressed to grow and maintain a labor force.

North Mississippi's low-income and socially isolated communities do face transportation obstacles. Even for those in these demographics who own automobiles, family and friends who do not own vehicles, along with maintenance and upkeep costs, make it challenging to stay ahead of the curve. Providers understand this and do the best they can to provide effective and efficient service to these clients in both their core services and in attempting to mitigate the transportation obstacles that make getting these core services challenging. If the reason for lack of agency awareness and understanding is indeed different priorities, then providers will need to approach directors and policymakers in an effort to educate them in the depth and effect that these obstacles have on their clients, and, if failing that, to attempt to adhere their clients' needs to the idea or concept of economic development. They will need to convince policymakers that their clients are just as fundamental to the health of the community as anything else.

Further Research

This study raised several questions. Lack of automobile ownership is attributable to myriad causes; it is not simply a question of lack of income. Social, economic, and cultural issues layer this issue: The inability of certain socioeconomic classes to obtain reasonable credit to purchase dependable automobiles, the inability or lack of desire for individuals to obtain a driver's license, and operational issues for physical and mentally impeded individuals (including the elderly) are all areas of transportation obstacles that warrant more study.

Participants noted throughout the virtual focus group process that they were unaware of any agency doctrine or guidance regarding transportation obstacles affecting clients seeking services. While the main themes emerging from these discussions state

that the participating providers have the impression that agency policymakers are either unaware or lack an understanding of these issues, no data or research are exploring this blank space in policy. Further research involving actual agency policymakers and legislators might assist in understanding better why this one area of communal behavior is not addressed in the distribution of these selected public goods and services.

Related to this would be the manner in which policymakers and legislators actually view transportation and transportation obstacles. One provider did point out during the virtual focus groups that in their experience in assisting policymakers in creating policy and guidelines for their agency, there was a disconnect in the very nature of transportation between the provider and the agency directors and legislators. The discussion revolved around the idea and experience that policymakers and legislators saw transportation as an economic driver focused almost solely on facilitating the movement of goods, services, and commodities with the labor force as a secondary consideration. It would be beneficial to explore this position to see if indeed labor and the ability of the workforce actually to use the transportation system is a consideration when developing policy. This would facilitate several interesting research topics, not the least of which might be to explore the actual perceived purpose of transportation systems as seen by policymakers and their priorities when developing them.

Finally, this study was focused on exploring transportation obstacles not through the lens of those seeking selected social services but through the lens of the providers tasked with providing these services. Providers are unique in their sandwiched position between those seeking and those creating services. A follow-up study that would be vital to validate this study's findings would be one focused on the service seekers themselves.

The researcher believes that a useful construct for all the additional study ideas listed in this section would be to conduct the same virtual focus group construct two more times, with the focus of the first being selected service seekers and the second being aimed at policymakers. In this way, the three perspectives will be available for comparison to gain a true idea as to where all three stakeholders are mentally and emotionally concerning transportation and transportation obstacles and to begin to color in the blank spots that litter the entire issue.

Concluding Remarks

This exploration of transportation obstacles in many ways validated earlier research. As in many other parts of the world, many are impeded with transportation obstacles, contributing to social isolation and exclusion of many, and inhibiting their ability to obtain and hold a job, gain an education, and participate fully in the larger life of the community. This study began the process of identifying key factors and elements to the transportation problems facing socially disadvantaged populations and delivering data to policymakers and legislators that will assist in effectively addressing the issue.

Transportation obstacles are complex and wicked problems that involve myriad and often conflicting societal and political priorities. These problems are for legislators and policymakers to wrestle. Fredrickson (1971), again, made the point that the only true priority for the public administrator is to work to make life better for their populations. This study is a small step in that direction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE SELECTION TABLE

	Sampling Selection Table				
1	Bolivar MDRS	24	Tate VSO	47	Chickasaw MDHS
2	Bolivar MDHS	25	Tunica MDHS	48	Chickasaw VSO
3	Bolivar VSO	26	Benton MDHS	49	Itawamba MDHS
4	Coahoma MDRS	27	Benton VSO	50	Itawamba VSO
5	Coahoma MDHS	28	Calhoun MDHS	51	Lee MDRS
6	Coahoma VSO	29	Calhoun VSO	52	Lee MDHS
7	Desoto MDRS	30	Grenada MDHS	53	Lee VSO
8	Desoto MDHS	31	Grenada VSO	54	Lee VA
9	Desoto VSO	32	Lafayette MDRS	55	Monroe MDRS
10	Leflore MDRS	33	Lafayette MDHS	56	Monroe MDHS
11	Leflore MDHS	34	Lafayette VSO	57	Monroe VSO
12	Leflore VSO	35	Marshall MDRS	58	Prentiss MDHS
13	Panola MDRS	36	Marshall MDHS	59	Prentiss VSO
14	Panola MDHS	37	Marshall VSO	60	Pontotoc MDHS
15	Panola VSO	38	Marshall VA	61	Pontotoc VSO
16	Quitman MDRS	39	Webster MDRS	62	Tippah MDHS
17	Quitman VSO	40	Webster MDHS	63	Tippah VSO
18	Sunflower MDHS	41	Webster VSO	64	Tishomingo MDHS
19	Sunflower VSO	42	Yalobusha MDHS	65	Tishomingo VSO
20	Tallahatchie MDRS	43	Yalobusha VSO	66	Union MDRS
21	Tallahatchie MDHS	44	Alcorn MDRS	67	Union MDHS
22	Tallahatchie VSO	45	Alcorn MDHS	68	Union VSO
23	Tate MDHS	46	Alcorn VSO		

APPENDIX B

REGIONAL AGENCY REQUEST EMAIL

1619 Highland Avenue, Amory, Mississippi 38821

Doe, Jane, John

Regional Director Mississippi Department of (Vocational Rehabilitation/Health Services;

COUNTY Veterans Service Office

Dear Doe, Jane, John:

My name is Greg Yarbrough, a doctoral candidate from the Department of Public Administration at California Baptist University. I also am the WIOA Coordinator for Monroe County at ICC, who understands the frustration of working with clients who are dealing with transportation obstacles that prevent them from accessing your services. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation researching these obstacles and how they are experienced in northern Mississippi by those attempting to access selected social services, including those offered by your agency. Part of this study involves conducting virtual focus groups with social service providers, and I would like to invite your agency in the northern Mississippi region to participate in this research study.

As a participant in a virtual focus group, your office in XXXXX, MS. will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group over the Zoom network that will last 1 hour. In order to expand the current research on transportation barriers affecting those seeking social services,
your offices' knowledge, experience, and testimony to the conditions, effects, and policy tools addressing this issue will enhance this research study.

No personal or demographic information will be collected during this study.
If you have questions, please contact me at gmyarbrough@iccms.edu, my number at xxx.xxx.xxxx, or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Ray Garubo, at rgarubo@calbaptist.edu.

Respectfully,

Greg Yarbrough

APPENDIX C

OFFICE PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

XX, XX, XXXX

Dear Name and Title of Invitee

      I am Greg Yarbrough, a Doctoral Candidate at California Baptist University and the WIOA Coordinator at ICC – Monroe County, and I would like to invite you to participate in a virtual focus group on XX, XX, XXXX at XX: XX about transportation obstacles facing your clients. This virtual focus group will last no more than one hour.

      This focus group will provide an opportunity for social service professionals to voice their (your) experience in assisting clients with transportation issues and obstacles, your opinions on their cause and nature, and your ideas on how they might be addressed.

      This virtual focus group is being conducted as part of my doctoral thesis on the nature of transportation obstacles as experienced by those attempting to use public agencies. No personal or demographic information will be collected from any participants, and there is no cost associated with participation past time expended. More background information will be provided to those confirming attendance. Your office's participation has been approved by your Regional Manager via email on XX/XX/XXX. Your experiences, views, and ideas will help provide a greater understanding as to the true breadth of transportation obstacles in northern Mississippi and their true effects on those so impeded.

      If you would like to take part in this virtual focus group, please confirm signing the attached participant Consent to Participate form and returning via email to gmyarbrough@iccms.edu. Should you have any questions, please reach back at gmyarbrough@iccms.edu or by calling me at xxx.xxx.xxxx during business hours (or xxx.xxx.xxxx in the evening).

      In advance, thank you for your time and assistance in this study.

Respectfully,

Greg Yarbrough

WIOA Coordinator – ICC Amory

gmyarbrough@iccms.edu

xxx.xxx.xxxx

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Topic of Study: Exploration of Transportation Obstacles for those seeking selected social

services in Northern Mississippi

Group Discussion Leader: Greg Yarbrough

 Date: XX,XX,XXXX

 Time: XX:XX

Participant Name: <u>John/Jane Doe</u>

I have voluntarily agreed to participate in a focus group on the topic listed above on the date and time listed above as conducted by the discussion leader identified above. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and understand how the session will proceed. This form authorizes Greg Yarbrough to capture my comments, remarks, answers, and opinions as relevant to the topic. I understand that no personal or identifying data will be collected during this focus group in any way. I agree that such comments, remarks, answers, and opinions may include any of the following:
> - spoken statements.
> - written statements.
> - ideas rendered, which are yielded into the research gathered today.

These comments, remarks, answers, and opinions might be captured in the following ways:
> - audio recordings and written notes and statements

Your agency has granted permission through your regional manager to conduct this virtual focus group. There are no physical risks associated with this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study, its procedures, risks, and benefits, you should contact the Institutional Review Board at irb@calbaptist.edu or call (951) 552-8626. You can also contact Dr. Ray Garubo at (951) 343-3900 or at rgarubo@calbaptist.edu, who can answer any questions you may have regarding this study and assist you in contacting the California Baptist University IRB.

This study has been approved by the IRB at California Baptist University <u>Date</u>

APPENDIX E

VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANT

1) What transportation obstacles do your clients face in obtaining your services?

2) Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

3) What issues or problems do you believe create these issues for your clients?

4) What secondary or consequent issues are created by these obstacles?

5) Who do you feel is responsible for dealing with these issues?

6) What assumptions do you feel are made regarding the term or idea of transportation, your services, or your clients in defining or constructing the term "transportation"?

7) What programs or courses of action seem to be effective in ameliorating these obstacles?