

In Their Shoes

Understanding the Impact of Poverty on the Families We Work With

Jamie Mathewson, LGSW

Who Decides What Poverty Is?

Poverty is when a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials to enjoy a minimum standard of life and well-being that's considered acceptable in society. In the United States people that do not meet a certain threshold level set by the Department of Health and Human Services are considered to be living in poverty.

US Census Bureau: Poverty Threshold

statistics

Department of Health and Human Services: Poverty Guidelines

guidelines for program eligibility

Who Does it Affect?



22%

Over 16 million children in the United States – 22% of all children – live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level – \$23,550 a year for a family of four. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this standard, 45% of children live in low-income families (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2016).

Types of Poverty

Situational-caused by a sudden crisis or loss, such as divorce, illness, or job loss.

Absolute-generally rare in the U.S. Involves an ongoing scarcity of food, water, shelter.

Urban- occurs in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 50,000 people. The urban poor deal with a complex aggregate of chronic and acute stressors (including crowding, violence, and noise) and are dependent on often-inadequate large-city services.

Generational-occurs in families where at least two generations are born into poverty.

Relative-economic status of a family whose income is insufficient to meet its society's average standard of living.

Rural-occurs in nonmetropolitan areas with populations below 50,000. In rural areas, there are more single-guardian households, and families often have less access to services, support for disabilities, and quality education opportunities.

What's the Point of a Poverty Simulation?



To expose participants to the realities of living in poverty, including the challenges of navigating the complex systems of government agencies and other service providers.

Participants assume the role of an individual or family dealing with the stresses of poverty and the difficulty in accessing resources. The goal for each family is to provide basic necessities, like food and shelter, during the allotted time, while adhering to all the requirements of the service providers. Typically a month is broken down into four 15-minute weeks and participants are given a brief bio on their person or family.



Why is it Important?



Reflect on your own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes

Experience the challenges of living with limited resources

Learn the importance of safety net programs for families

Enhance empathy and compassion

Explore how different agencies and professions can collaborate

Poverty Simulations: Not a Game

Tips for Making Your Simulation Successful

-
- Don't reinforce stereotypes
 - Make it relevant and meaningful
 - Know your audience
 - Make it your own!

The Importance of the Debrief

Unfacilitated family discussion.

Facilitated large group discussion and facilitated small group discussion.

Compare experiences across families.

Questions can move from general to more specific.

Did your attitudes about poverty change over the month?

What was it like to live on the edge of poverty?

What was the biggest challenge you faced as an individual or as a family?

Poverty

Families making impossible
choices everyday



“Poverty is like punishment for a crime you
didn’t commit.”

- Eli Khamarov

Promoting understanding and empathy

Many of us have simply acquired our beliefs and attitudes about poverty without examining or challenging them. Let's start working to change this!

Resources

SPENT-an online poverty simulation

<http://playspent.org/>

Can You Live on the Minimum Wage?

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/09/opinion/100000002696007.mobile.html?_r=0

The Stack of the Deck: An Illustration of the Root Causes of Poverty <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/stack-of-the-deck.cfm>

The Skittles Game.

<https://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/wp-content/uploads/SkittlesGame.pdf>

Take a Step: Illustration of Advantages, Disadvantages and Factors Leading to Poverty

<http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/take-a-step-activity.cfm>

References

- Atherton, C. R., Gemmel, R. J., Haagenstad, S., Holt, D. J., Jensen, L. A., O'Hara, D. F., et al. (1993). Measuring attitudes toward poverty: A new scale. *Social Work Research and Abstracts*, 29(4), 28-30. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxyuwindor.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9609194559&site=ehost-live>
- ABC News. (2010). *ABC world news poll: The middle class. Within the middle class, four in 10 are struggling*. <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1106a1MiddleClass.pdf>
- CBS News. (2011). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv48A9BSews>.
- Jensen, Eric. (2009). **Teaching with poverty in mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it**. Alexandria, ASCD.
- National Center for Children in Poverty (2017). <http://www.nccp.org/>
- Rank, M. (2013, November 2). Poverty in America is Mainstream. *The New York Times*. <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/02/poverty-in-america-is-mainstream/>
- Wise, J. (2016, March 28). Guidelines on Depicting Poverty [Msg 1]. Message posted to http://effective-altruism.com/ea/v4/guidelines_on_depicting_poverty/
- Yun, S. H., & Weaver, R. D. (2010). Development and validation of a short form of the attitude toward poverty scale. *Advances in Social Work*, 11(2), 174–187.