

Relationship between poverty and employment



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The social problem I have chosen to focus on is poverty, but specifically the lack of access to adequate employment and the obstacles people living in poverty might encounter. For this particular social issue, I have decided to compare and contrast the United States with Australia. Taking a closer look at this problem, I am going to focus on the more specific issues pertaining to this concern, which include, the lack of access impoverished individuals in rural or remote communities face when it comes to employment, as well as the difficulties individuals living in urban communities encounter. Some of these obstacles consist of, limited access to needed transportation, lack of sufficient means to acquire or obtain access to technology, such as computers and the internet; lack of essential hygiene necessities and other resources, such as the proper attire required for employment, and most people living in poverty lack the essential skills and knowledge needed for adequate employment. These problems are faced by impoverished people living in both the United States and Australia, because generally speaking and for comparison purposes, they are similar when it comes to their development, economy, industrial level and social problems. Even though these two countries are very well developed, poverty continues to be an issue, especially when dealing with employment, unemployment or lack of adequate employment. Due to the disadvantages mentioned above, people continue to remain in poverty and at a social disadvantage, because their social mobility is hindered.

The social problem I chose, problems individuals living in poverty face when trying to find adequate employment, is a big problem in today's society because of the lack of employment and financial hardships that are

occurring. Finding employment is a particular problem for impoverished people because individuals living in poverty typically lack access to living essentials such as clean water, food, housing, health care and education; these essentials are also the necessities when trying to get employed. I chose this social problem because, for employment purposes, individuals need access to a computer with internet and a printer, proper attire, necessary hygiene items, transportation and skills, however, people living in poverty lack most or all of these things. In our society's mind, we think individuals who do not have a job and who are living in poverty as just lazy or that it is their fault, however, in this paper I am going to discuss the problems they face and the reason why getting a job is not so easy for them. Also, this problem is not just affecting Americans; it is affecting individuals all over the world.

There are many countries that have populations living in poverty and have different social/economic classes like the United States has, however, I think this problem is different in developing countries compared to developed countries or countries that have adequate economic resources. For my purposes, I wanted to compare this social problem between countries that were similar, so I chose to research this problem in the United States and Australia and find the similarities and differences between the two. I think there countries are comparable because they are of similar economic standing and they are a developed nation, and like the United States, they have individuals who are living in poverty along with other inhabitants who are doing financially well.

This social problem of poor lacking access to employment in the United States has been going on all throughout history, but I believe has gotten worse after the economy began to decline. For my purposes, I am interested in the lack of access to resources that are essential to getting a job, when getting a job means improving their current situation in an honest way. The kind of poverty I am referring to is relative poverty, which is where someone lacks resources that many people take for granted (S201 lecture 1/18/11). This problem affects any individual living in poverty regardless if they live in cities or away from the city. In World War II, populations and jobs moved away from the city and into the suburbs, which resulted in job loss for individuals living in the city and causing them to become poor (S201 lecture 1/20/11). This action had major implications that are still taking place today, where people cannot afford housing, which is a huge part to getting a job because employers need a permanent address for employees, and as learned in class, approximately 500,000 people are homeless on any given day (S201 lecture 1/20/11). Also, if they cannot afford a place to live, chances are they cannot afford a vehicle and they have access to public transportation at a relatively low cost, however, as mentioned the majority of decent jobs are in the suburbs, which is not typically serviced by public transportation. Public transportation also is not always reliable, which could result in them being late to work and getting fired because of it. These problems were encountered by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Nickel and Dimed*, where she had a difficult time finding and affording a place to stay and she relied heavily on her car. Another resource people in poverty lack is access to computers. When applying for a job, employers require a resume, references and sometimes a cover letter, which all need to be typed and

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printed or emailed, which cannot be done without a computer and a printer. Also, some jobs only post openings online and some require an applicant to fill out an application online, which requires a computer and internet access. Without these resources, individuals cannot even get past the first step when applying for a job. There are public libraries which are available to everyone, however, an individual would need a way to get there, money to print or copy documents, and computer access is sometimes limited to 30 minutes, which is not enough time to complete everything. Individuals living in poverty lack many employment resources, one of these things is proper attire for a job interview. Interviewers are looking for someone who dresses well and is presentable, some require business professional or business casual, this type of clothing is expensive and not something an impoverished individual can afford, so here is just another employment element that stops them from getting employed. To go along with proper clothing, employers want someone who is clean and does not smell, which is a difficult thing to do when individuals do not have adequate water access and cannot afford the basics such as soap and tooth paste. In Nickel and Dimed, Ehrenreich experienced these problems first hand when she had to buy clothing or had to wear worn out clothing to work or for an interview; sometimes she could not afford to wash her clothes, so she wore dirty, smelly clothes to work. When it comes to education, chances are that people living in poverty did not receive adequate education and also lack some basic employment skills (S201 lecture 1/25/11). Most employers require a high school diploma or GED, and without that it is impossible to get a good job. Another component is having some essential skills, which include good communication and experience working on computers and with computer programs, which poor

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people lack because they have not had much professional interaction and as mentioned earlier, they lack access to computers, therefore they do not have the required computer experience that well-paying jobs are looking for. This problem is not only an issue in America, it is an issue other places, a relatively comparable place is Australia.

In Australia, poverty has always been around just like in the United States, and it has been increasing, which results in more people living in poverty and lacking access to resources that are needed for employment. During the 1990's, poverty increased from 11.3% to 13.0%, which then resulted in 60% of poor Australian families relying on government assistance as their main income in 2000, an increase from 46% in 1990 (Harding, 2002). There is not a set standard for how to measure poverty or a poverty line, but in 2000 when researching individuals who make 50% of the average household income, there were 3,274,000 individuals, 17.5%, living in poverty (The Bare Necessities, p. 66). The key cause of poverty in Australia is unemployment, where from the 1990's to 2000, the unemployment rate increased which then led to an increase in the number of individuals living in poverty (Harding, 2002). In Australia, just like in the United States, lack of opportunities or resources such as shelter, education, transportation and housing is included in the definition of poverty; when individuals lack these resources, it hinders their ability for employment (Brokensha). A more specific definition of poverty is participation poverty, which involves lacking resources to participate in economic and social life or is defined by the inability to access certain resources that result in the inability to attain a decent level of wellbeing; an example of this is not having appropriate

transportation (The Bare Necessities, p. 40). Also like the U. S., Australia has been going through a recession, where the economy was weak along with the job market, resulting in an increased unemployment (The Bare Necessities, p. 13). All areas in Australia are affected by poverty, but unemployment and poverty are more present in major cities because there are low employment opportunities for multiple reasons, one of them being businesses in the cities have shut down or relocated; housing in the slums of the cities is cheaper, so poor people tend to live in these areas, which causes them to lack access to adequate employment opportunities (The Bare Necessities, p. 107). Individuals living in rural communities are also majorly affected by unemployment and poverty because they also lack access to the necessary resources for employment, for example, not being in walking distance of a lot of community services and not having some form of transportation (Brokensha). Also affecting their opportunities is low education levels, which is a continuous cycle because, often individuals whose families could not afford to send them to school lack the education levels to get a decent job, therefore they are unable to afford to send their children to school (Poverty and its Causes p. 2). Like the U. S., Australia has government programs that provide assistance to low-income/poor individuals, but the majority of these programs are for children living in poverty, which excludes individuals without children that live in poverty (Brokensha). These government assistance programs have improved over the last few years, but the main assistance program used to combat poverty, social security, provides payments that are lower than the poverty benchmark and the groups who face the highest probability of living in poverty, receive the lowest payments (The Bare Necessities). When

comparing the U. S. and Australia, we can see that there are quite a few similarities, but there are some differences as well.

A similarity between the United States and Australia in reference to the social problem of poor lacking access to employment resources was, they both went through a recession which lead to an increase in unemployment, resulting in an increase in poverty. I think they share this because countries do business together and when the economy takes a turn in one country, it affects other countries. In both places, the government is involved in this issue, by providing assistance to individuals who need it, but people in both places still lack the resources needed to obtain a job, like access to technology and transportation. They might share this because they are both well developed countries and to be well developed, government needs to be somewhat involved but they cannot solve everything. Another similarity in both countries is poverty mostly affects the inner cities, which is a consequence of job relocation/shutdown. I think this is so because as mentioned, both countries went through a change in industrialization, which affected business stability and location. With these similarities there are also differences, one of them being the poverty percentages; in the U. S. the poverty rate is 24%, in Australia it is 19% (The Bare Necessities, p. 10). These percentages aren't really that far apart and I think this is because both countries are well developed but have both went through economic changes that affected the people; this difference could be associated with economic situation in the countries before economic events. Another difference is how the poverty line is determined; in the U. S. it is determined by the standard of living and the lack of goods and services that mainstream

society tends to take for granted, which is constantly being evaluated (Poverty in the United States). In Australia, there are different methods for determining this, but there is no agreed upon measure. Although the definitions vary, I think it is hard to define what poverty is because there are so many variables which make it hard to determine and pinpoint, so I think this difference just comes from different approaches to poverty. Another definition variance is in the U. S., when an individual lacks resources or access to resources need to better their lives is referred to as relative poverty; in Australia, this is referred to as participation poverty. These definitions are basically the same, just with different terms. I think they both have a term for this because individuals that lack the ability to improve their lives do not fit into the typical definition of poverty, but they do lack resources needed for employment and that are typically taken for granted. As mentioned earlier, cities are the areas mostly affected by poverty, but rural communities are also affected; in the U. S., minorities, who have migrated here, tend to live in cities and in Australia, indigenous people tend to live in rural areas. This difference could be from groups not wanting to mix with other groups. Another difference was post World War II, when jobs in America moved from the cities to the suburbs, which left a lot of people at a disadvantage, and after the war in Australia, there was an economic boom, which some of the poor did not take advantage of (Poverty in Australia).

Throughout this paper I have explained the problems people living in poverty face when trying to find a job and getting hired, where they lack housing, education, technology, transportation, clothing and hygienic necessities. This problem affects people in the U. S. and in Australia, so this is not an isolated

issue. With this information, it can be determined that people in poverty have little social mobility because they lack resources needed to better their lives. This is clearly a social problem that has been around a long time and has no signs of disappearing.