

Why is there so much poverty?

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



With the thought of poverty, several issues come to mind: money, crime, health and welfare. These are the top four concerns when responding to the issue of poverty in our nation as a whole. Each presents problems and solutions, but addressing them in the face of government is difficult; for every good point or action, there is a negative reaction affecting both pro and con supporters. The most prevalent means of measuring poverty have been, and continue to be, benchmarks related to money. Poverty lines are used to measure absolute and relative poverty in terms of incomes and affordability. Such measurements are relatively easy to make and quantify. However, lack of money is more a symptom of poverty rather than its cause. In most cases the poor are not without some income. What they lack is the ability to accumulate assets, which is a key ingredient to the creation of wealth and breaking the cycle of poverty (6). In addition to low earnings, the prime reason for the inability to increase funds and thus increase security of income is that profits or potential savings are often pocketed by moneylenders who charge lofty interest rates, by formal and informal regulatory and enforcement agents/organizations who demand bribes or extort protection money, and by middlemen or other stronger business partners who exploit the poor because they lack market information or the ability to use the market information to increase their own incomes. Another key that prevents the poor from raising capital is that they are often forced to purchase public goods and services at a much higher cost than are readily available to other groups in society at market or below market prices(6). Some effects of poverty are not easily understood, and are therefore sometimes mistakenly considered the cause of poverty. For example, studies

link poverty to crime. In many cases, most crime leads to poverty and not the other way around. Crime indirectly increases poverty in many ways, even simple burglary or mugging. A high crime rate drives businesses out of neighborhoods. This eliminates both availability of products and services, as well as sources of jobs. Further, those who do stay find it necessary to charge higher prices to compensate for losses due to thievery, and higher costs of both security measures and insurance premiums (if insurance is available at all). Property values are driven down by lighter demand because of the greater potential difficulty purchasers may encounter in obtaining mortgage loans. The loss of productive activity by those who thrive on preying on others reduces the positive output of an area in which they live. Thus, crime injures economically both direct victims and others in a crime-ridden neighborhood. Just as people are better off in a society where a large portion of people are more educated and more productive, people in a crime-infested area become more oppressed than otherwise. Criminals themselves lose ground economically. A large portion of people charged with criminal activity are relatively young. Criminal behavior harms them in several ways. They may spend time incarcerated when they could be gaining employment experience. A criminal record may impede future employment. Young criminals develop attitudes and habits that are detrimental to participation in the workplace. By these actions, many criminals, in essence, condemn themselves to poverty (9, 10). With poverty, sickness is often found. Most illnesses associated with poverty are infectious diseases, such as diarrhoeal illness, malaria, and tuberculosis. All of them are associated with lack of income, clean water and sanitation, food, and access to medical services and

education, all of which characterize poor countries and communities. Diseases are linked to malnutrition, and children are most susceptible to them. Environmental, social and dietary changes produced by industrialization and urbanization lead to higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and respiratory illness among both urban poor as well as the affluent (3). There is in fact a two-way relationship between poverty and health, with disease often further impoverishing the poor. Illness prevents people from working, or affects their productivity, lowering their income. The cost of obtaining health care can also be substantial, both in terms of time off from work and money spent on services. Therefore, a cycle of illness and poverty become difficult to break. Some countries, however, managed to tackle the diseases of poverty even though they themselves remain at comparatively low levels of development. Some underdeveloped countries have levels of life expectancy far above much richer developing countries. There are several reasons for success of these poor countries in achieving good health at low levels of per capita income. They include high levels of female literacy, fewer income inequalities, government commitment to providing health, education and social security services, and making them available to the poor, and finally higher levels of public participation in political life (2). Health professionals have a key part to play in eradicating poverty. First, they need to make sure that the interventions inside the health sector benefit the poor. Too often government health expenditure is skewed towards urban hospitals which unreasonably serve the rich. Second, they need to make sure that in their everyday relationships with patients they treat the poor as well as anyone else. One of the most common

complaints from poor people regarding health services is that health professionals treat them with disrespect and offer substandard treatment. Training to eliminate this kind of prejudice should be mandatory for health professionals. Finally, health professionals need to promote interdepartmental cooperation and action by governments to promote better education, water and sanitation and other services which improve the lives of the poor. The disease of poverty cannot be tackled without concerted economic and political action. This means justice and equality for the poorest people within our societies (1, 2). Although the government has systems for those who do not have the money to provide themselves standards usually are just out of reach, or just not fitting to those who need the help the most. Therefore, even having a minimal living habitat is sometimes impossible due to insufficient funds. Some ways that the government is trying to ease the poverty rates through welfare are by eliminating the dependency trap, redefining what is expected from America's poor and devising job strategies. First, our government plans to eradicate welfare by trying to eliminate the dependency trap. Those who support this theory claim that although the U. S. government has to spend billions of dollars on welfare over the past few decades, it has done little to reduce poverty. Those who argue for this approach say that communities and private charities can help the poor more effectively and efficiently than government can. They also say that automatic assistance to the poor weakens the family by subsidizing out-of-wedlock births and single-parent families. The supporters also agree that by providing a deterrent to work, welfare creates a cycle of dependency on the government. They declare that in the long run, the only helpful course of

action is to help people become self-sufficient. Supporters reveal that eliminating the dependency trap can be accomplished by phasing out benefits for able-bodied workers, limiting other benefits, including healthcare and nutrition, to children, and by encouraging communities and private charities to take more responsibility for helping the needy. Those opposed to this approach say that poor people need and deserve government assistance, including cash assistance, and that welfare isn't draining the public treasury, that welfare cuts won't save a lot of money for the government. They also claim that it is morally wrong to remove such assistance at a time when many unskilled people can't find adequate employment, and that it is wrong to punish children for their parents' predicament or behavior. Finally, private charities and communities can't be expected to step in when benefits to the poor are sharply reduced, and welfare payments don't increase out-of-wedlock births, according to some studies (4, 5). Next, some people encourage that redefining what's expected from America's poor will help diminish the need for welfare, but also establish who really needs it, and who doesn't. They say that it is fair for working poor families to get some kind of public support, and those who are able to work should be expected to do so. Cohorts state that socially responsible behavior should be a requirement for obtaining public assistance, and failing to impose behavioral requirements on recipients of public assistance undermines public support for such assistance. These supporters set a plan to use benefits as incentives to promote socially desirable behavior, such as finishing high school and planning families responsibly, as well as discouraging socially undesirable behavior. For

example, benefits would be reduced or withheld from parents whose children have too many unexcused absences from school (5). However, critics to this proposal say that the problem is not welfare, but rather that too many poor people do not have the education or skills to find good jobs. This approach requires government to intrude into people's private lives. In our democracy, government should not infringe on what can and cannot be done. They also explain it is not clear that linking welfare payments to children's school attendance is effective. Early studies of the Wisconsin program show that it did not decrease truancy. They also object to the approach because they say that the poor have a moral right to public assistance. They shouldn't go through increasingly difficult procedures, and that it is not right for the government to use public assistance to promote two-parent families at the expense of single-parent families. Finally, by devising a job strategy, supporters say that eliminating welfare will not be such a difficulty in the future. Groups that defend this approach state that if there are not enough adequate jobs, it is futile to expect people to be able to support themselves. They also defend the fact that education and job-training are the best poverty prevention programs, and they are the least expensive measures to expunge welfare. Finally, people do not have the right to an endless series of government assistance, but everyone has the right to a decent job. These people say that the government can reduce poverty by making it possible for people to work, by doing such things as subsidizing public day care, job training, public transportation to and from work, and also by providing adequate and equal funding to all public schools so that all children have access to high quality education. Furthermore, supporters, say that the

government should be capable of expanding job training programs so more people have the skills for decent jobs, raising the minimum wage so full-time workers receive more than a poverty-level income, and as a last resort, government should provide temporary jobs to unemployed workers (4, 5). Their critics say that guaranteeing jobs for all Americans or providing public sector jobs for those who cannot find employment elsewhere, would be prohibitively expensive, and that substantially raising the minimum wage would be counterproductive as many employers would be forced to lay off workers. They also fight the thought that the best way to reduce poverty hinges on something that government cannot provide: motivation and hard work. But in our free market economy, government should not be the employer of last resort. We need less government, not more of it, and we certainly do not want millions of Americans in makeshift government jobs (4). In the United States alone, 45% of all Americans are considered to be living in poverty, and with that statistic come many causes and effects. We have solutions to these problems, but utilizing them may not be easy or quick. It just takes a strong government and even stronger support from the population to tailor our approach to fit the needs of our society.