

# Hunger in america

Sociology, Poverty



\*\*\*\*\* Willingham M. Handran English 112 Hunger in America We live in a nation where a large percentage of its inhabitants suffer from economic hardship and are left with no other option but to pick and choose between certain necessities over other fundamental needs due to a lack of financial resources. Many of these people are forced into having to choose between taking their life-saving medications or being able to eat for that day, while others simply have no choice at all.

These people simply have no other choice but go hungry despite the copious amounts of food produced in this nation. Some of the primary factors responsible for this heartbreaking predicament stem from a lack of consistent public awareness outside of the quick fix Band-Aid approach during Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday food drives and other short-term feeding campaigns coupled with an inadequate job market for both the unemployed and the underemployed which causes poverty.

Insufficient and inconsistent charitable donations to assist those in need are also contributing factors along with the physical and financial barriers which prevent general access to food to a large population of children, the elderly and the disabled. Another high profile reason for this wide spread problem is due to the direct relationship between the increase in the cost of fuel and how it affects the price of food. Hunger is an equal opportunity destructive force which gives no preference to sex, age, race, religion or educational background.

Food insecurities in the United States alone affect an outrageous percentage of citizens in the world's most affluent nation, afflicting millions of Americans on a daily basis. Hunger in America is neither widely acknowledged nor

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highly publicized due to the fact that the United States is the world's wealthiest nation. In light of the facts as stated by our government's Department of Agriculture and in the minds of all hungry persons in this country, America should be recognized as being the world's most wasteful and irresponsible nation on earth.

The United States disposes of billions of pounds of high-quality edible food every single year. Hunger in America is an egregious and inexplicable indictment against our society, and it has created an environment of extreme hardship and suffering that is completely inexcusable in a land where hunger should not even exist and where something more must be done to alleviate hunger in our great nation. Our Citizen's Health and Sustenance We live in the world's wealthiest and most plentiful country, yet almost 15 percent of U. S. families, about 49 million Americans, including 16.2 million children struggle to acquire sustenance (Bread for the World). About 15 percent of the American population find themselves struggling at varying degrees from day to day in order to provide food for themselves and their families. Why, in the midst of plenty, are people forced to go without basic necessities? Tens of millions of Americans are directly affected by this silent plague known as the American hunger crisis which is directly proportional to the level of poverty existing in the United States.

As a matter of fact, "The nation's official poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1 percent, up from 14.3 percent in 2009..." (Income, Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States: 2010). These proximate percentages between hunger and poverty blatantly illustrate the relationship between the two. Without poverty, hunger doesn't exist. In the discussion of poverty and

hunger, inevitabilities such as food, healthcare, basic and adequate shelter, utilities and transportation expenses are severely limited and some of these necessities are either cut back drastically, or they are simply inaccessible.

One might have enough money to feed their family, but not have the ability to pay for their children's health expenses or clothing. "The number of people without health insurance coverage rose from 49.0 million in 2009 to 49.9 million in 2010..." (Income, Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States: 2010). The vast number of people without health insurance is simply another statistic where the figures are obviously too much of a similarity to be justified as mere coincidence.

Without their health, how can any American citizen be expected to obtain, much less maintain an adequate paying job and continue to be able to provide sustenance for themselves and their families? Regarding jobs, for a significant number of Americans, the U. S. labor market is not very efficient and doesn't work as a reliable way to create a steady career to provide for their families (Bread for the World). The job market in the United States has continued to remain stagnant with an unemployment rate that has surpassed eight percent since February 2009, and it has been projected that the very same percentage is going to exist in our country until 2014 (Understanding and Responding to Persistently High Unemployment). When the unemployment rate is coupled with the rate of underemployment, those who are employed only part-time but possessing the skills necessary for full-time employment, the percentage of food insecure individuals more than doubled. People that are having a hard time finding full-time work, and those who are willing and able to work, but who have been discouraged from

searching so long has risen to 17. percent in the month of September 2010 (Record Underemployment Devastates American Workers). Far too many people are in desperate need of both food and full-time employment. Hunger in America - Hidden in Plain Sight Not only is it extremely disconcerting and an indictment against the government at both the federal and state levels, but it's also a direct reflection of American society in general that the issue of hunger in America has not been given the recognition or public awareness that is warranted for such a national and catastrophic epidemic.

While there are organizations and individuals that continue to bring this concern into the light of the public eye, it is still neither adequate nor consistent enough to bring a broad awareness to our current hunger plight in this country. Members of Bread for the World continue to write letters to members of Congress to emphasize the severity of this situation hoping that those with the political power and clout will actually do something (Bread for the World). Many American children are at risk because they have not been recognized as being the victims of this national disaster which is American hunger (Lichter et al, 97).

While there is promising news on the war against hunger, there are many more battles to be won. The House of Representatives recently passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act which was signed into law on December 13, 2010 by President Barack Obama (Advocacy). This legislation authorized the funding and set the policy for the United States Department of Agriculture's primary child nutrition programs (Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act). This is definitely a step in the right direction but much more must be done.

For example, becoming an advocate for individuals suffering from food insecurity is critical to fighting hunger because it offers many ways to become active not only in important public policy issues of the day, but also within our communities (Advocacy). More focused and stringent efforts from the public and private sectors are necessary to keep this critical issue in the arena of public awareness since a large majority of the American population is completely unaware of the reality that almost 50 million of their neighbors, friends, family and coworkers suffer daily from this silent epidemic.

Single Mothers and Others Among the several millions of people that do suffer from food insecurity in America, there are certain groups of people from distressed backgrounds that tend to deal with much more pressure than others when it comes to hunger and poverty. Fathers all over our nation are deserting their partners and children. In merely three decades, the percent of children living without their fathers increased from 17 percent to 36 percent, more than doubling the number ( Popenoe, 33). As disturbing as it may seem, the percentage that exists today continues to grow.

Young developing children and their struggling mothers that strive to endure the difficulties of life without a father in the home or with an estranged father who doesn't pay child support has resulted in huge numbers of women and children to be left in great need of financial aid. In fact, single mother families are the group of citizens that are most at risk. Their numbers are rapidly growing, and they are becoming the poorest segment of the population in the country (Dodson, 109). Many of the worst tragedies in situations like these are the children that go to bed without enough to eat at night.

Millions of children are left to sit in hunger and are helpless because their guardians cannot provide an adequate amount of food for their nourishment. In fact, one in five children or 20 percent suffered from hunger in the year 2000. That was ten million children. Even worse, three million of those children underwent an even more stomach wrenching hunger predicament where they had no other choice but to eat even less and were forced to skip meals due to a lack of food (Food First). A major contributing factor that has had a direct negative impact on these families is the seemingly ever increasing cost of fuel or access to energy.

Whenever the price of oil and gas increases, every aspect of our economy is affected. The worst of which is the increase in the cost of food. Beginning with the farmers who require fuel to operate their tractors and other farm equipment along with oil-based pesticides and other chemicals needed for large crop production, this is just the beginning (Heinberg ). As manufacturers require energy to produce food for public consumption, they must increase their costs of production to cover the extra energy expense.

The large semi-trucks that deliver those food products have to pay more for fuel, and the grocery store is forced to increase their prices in order to remain in business (Gas Prices Start to Affect Food Prices). While single mother families are at the top of the food insecure pyramid, another group of individuals is suffering just as much. These people are our senior citizens and the disabled who must survive on fixed incomes, the majority of whom depend solely on the federal government through social security payments they receive along with certain entitlement programs if they qualify (Sepulvado).

Furthermore, the fact that the United States of America disposes of over 100 billion pounds of edible food annually is an ignominious slap in the face to the masses of hungry American citizens (Hunger In America). Hunger in America - Conclusion Alleviating hunger in America may be a disheartening and seemingly overwhelming task, but there is an untold and extremely underpublicized confidence among many public and private organizations and individuals that it is possible with persistence and dedication. The facts are clear. Approximately 50 million American citizens suffer from a lack of food.

In our politically correct society, the phrase ' food insecure' was adopted as a more palatable euphemism to avoid and hide the harsh reality that the wealthiest nation on earth is filled with millions of desperately hungry people, over 16 million of whom are children. Lack of consistent public awareness, inadequate government funding and insufficient charitable contributions, the unemployment and underemployment rates and the increasing costs of fuel are all contributing factors that continue to feed the national disgrace of American hunger.

There are quotes from famous individuals concerning hunger that seem fitting to include and conclude this research. " Most of our citizenry believes that hunger only affects people who are lazy or people who are just looking for a handout, people who don't want to work, but, sadly, that is not true. Over one-third of our hungry people are innocent children who are members of households that simply cannot provide enough food or proper nutrition. And to think of the elderly suffering from malnutrition is just too hard for most of us. Unlike



Third World nations, in our country the problem is not having too little - it is about not caring enough! Write your elected representatives and promote support for the hungry. "-Erin Brokovich. Another quote from the most iconic civil rights leader in the United States said this: " Why should there be hunger and deprivation in any land, in any city, at any table, when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with the basic necessities of life? There is no deficit in human resources. The deficit is in human will. "-Martin Luther King, Jr.

The 32nd President of the United States said this about hunger: " But while they prate of economic laws, men and women are starving. We must lay hold of the fact that economic laws are not made by nature. They are made by human beings. "-Franklin D. Roosevelt. This final quote comes from a woman who many would claim was the most selfless individual in our lifetime: " When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed. -Mother Teresa. Hunger in America is an incomprehensible condemnation against our nation. This social injustice directly inflicts extreme hardship upon millions of Americans and causes unnecessary and completely avoidable suffering simply because we as individuals and federal and state agencies are poor stewards of the food resources which we have in an abundant supply; yet we deliberately dispose of billions of pounds of good edible food which is more than enough to alleviate hunger in the most prosperous and the most powerful country on earth.

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