

# Impact of economic disadvantage to families



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

*Demonstrate an understanding of the nature and extent of the “ problem” before applying your chosen sociological theory to explain the causes and experiences of the problem in society.*

Societies definition of family function has evolved throughout time, but its importance still remains. Each family provides their own form of love, support and framework of values for each of its members, but as this differs with each case so do the outcomes and influences on those involved. This means family plays a major part in personal growth, introducing and influencing the way in which we see ourselves on a macro and micro level of society. Through the theory of symbolic interactions, we are able to explain the outcomes of family function and experiences of the importance of family function in relation to economic benefits, how dysfunction can lead to crime and how family environments help frame self-image.

Poverty is best described as an economic state that does not allow for the delivery of basic family needs. The culture of poverty can be perceived as low opportunities, income, education and recreation. Families in lower economic circumstances have been seen as a ‘ threat’ to society as they are likely to turn to other forms of revenue such as violence and crime. The association between indices of socioeconomical deprivation in childhood and later involvement in crime suggest that the family environment play a major key in self-image and growth. ‘ *Crime affects the wellbeing of individuals and families. In Australia, high crime rates are often associated with poverty, unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, family relationship problems and high levels of drug use. The prevalence of crime may also depend on available opportunities and the size of the potential rewards,*

*perhaps weighed against the risk of detection, apprehension and punishment'* (Australian Bureau of statistics). This social problem can shape individual view of themselves and the social world. Our identities are developed through trying on all sorts of roles, therefore adopting some and disregarding others. Fitting in with society's standards, especially when already being characterised from your family background tends to outline ideas, values and beliefs of an individual behaviour. This deviance and dysfunction from inferior families can typical generates social problems in society by the pressure put on them by social norms.

Forms of family environments help individuals understand their place in society. Fitting in with societies expectations of the ' perfect nuclear family' can lead inferior families to such deviant behaviours. Deviance is created by powerful social status, such as higher economic communities who then apply their understand of this ' nuclear perfect family' lifestyle. Such pressure of obtaining this stereotype can create dysfunction in family environments. How members of a family perceive themselves are based on their action and behaviours through which then forms their self-image. Although this self-image can be perceived by the upper class as negative it can play a positive part in lower class communities, as that status of deviance can provide safely and opportunities for those individuals. Through Charles Cooley theoretical concept of *the looking glass self* he pursued to define our own self-image comes from our own self-reflection. Primary groups, such as families, provide emotional support, love and compassion which is important for individuals to experience to develop a sense of self purpose. Through social interaction with other individuals Cooley's theory stated that " to

*understand behaviour, we must first understand the meanings humans attach to certain situations and, thus, the behaviour that is taught to go along with that situation"* (Charles Cooley) . Cooley's theory explains family poverty to be a social problem by the influences within high class society labelling less fortunate individuals to be faulty or imperfect, then therefore strongly impacting their self-image and behaviours towards society and one's self.

The media also has a major effect of the label obtain to less economical families. The expectations of families portrayed on television sets a society's understanding of prospects to have high class in education, luxury living, and also play in the inequality of gender stereotypes. Some Labels can also be attached to lower class families and their members on the basis of their behaviour. We learn society rules by how people react to situations.

Rebelling towards society's set laws can lead to consequences of deviant identity in self and a career. Label given to one family member can also pre judge others. This then not allowing individual member to obtain their own individual self-image, setting their label to be prejudicially negative.

Labelling theory created by Howard Becker supports this argument, viewing that people become criminals when labelled as such . *" All social groups make rules and attempt, at sometimes and under some circumstances, to enforce them. Social rules define situations and the kinds of behaviour appropriate to them, specifying some actions as ' right' and forbidding others as ' wrong' "*( Howard S. Becker). Under his perspective, individuals are more likely to become deviant by how people react to them. It one was to label a less fortunate family to be violent or scary, this will then change

those member self-image and identity of themselves, acting as society tells them to be.

In Australia the social problem of underprivileged families is still existing within the Aboriginal culture due to Indigenous families not being afforded the same opportunities as white supremacists. An example of economic disadvantage given by Australian society show that '*on average, Aboriginal people earn half the income of other Australians*' (Choo 1990). This statistic clearly highlights inequalities between Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal Australians, supporting the importance and nature poverty. Because of the lack of social status within society indigenous individuals have loss a sense of their identity, spirituality and cultural heritage. They have become marginalised and labelled as helpless in humanity, impacting the way in which they behave and see themselves. Through the labelling and marginalisation of society view of their prejudice identity, member of the indigenous communities have become more excepting of their portrayal. In her report Aboriginal Child Poverty, Choo (1990) writes that for Aboriginal families, '*material poverty, which can be measured through social indicators such as income, employment, housing, health, education and criminality, is secondary to the more deep-seated deprivation that is the consequence of cultural invasion, racism and oppression*'. (Australian Institute of Family Studies, report *Aboriginal child poverty*, Choo 1990). Choo emphasised that the non-materialistic factors such as dignity and self-respect have been oppressed over the years. Loss of contact with land have led indigenous communities numb with their understanding of themselves and the society which they live. George H Mead Sociologic concept of '*the self develops out*

*of social interaction*' highlights how individuals develop self-image through interaction with other people. Having positive social experiences with the environment you surround with heavily defines your self concept. Aboriginal families having negative socialisation can lead them to dysfunction and damaging self-image.

As we have discussed economic disadvantage within a family has significant power over its functions and subsequently its influences and impact on those involved. The scale of this is not always appreciated but it is clear they are meaningful, as we have explored through the theories of Cooley, Becker and Mead, and the existing impact of the media and issues faced by Aboriginal Australians. Families living in poverty are more likely to be influenced by social norms of violence and crime, this in turn seriously impacts the place they hold in society. This is furthered by the media as they create even more pressure to conform and maintain these norms and reinforce the negative expectations. These trends are keenly displayed by Aboriginal Australians as communities and the families within them as they create and display the effects of the pressures that stem from economic disadvantage across generations.

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