

Poverty and inequality essay



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Abstract

The extent of poverty and inequality remains a topic of enduring interest in Australia and overseas. Poverty in Australia, however, is generally relative poverty. People are considered to be poor if their living standards fall below an overall community standard, and they are unable to participate fully in ordinary activities of society. Earnings inequality and the extent of child poverty is an important issue due to their innocence and their future life chances and social structure.

This position paper provides a brief portrait the issues faced by the disadvantaged community at Sydney South West. How can various welfare organizations and agencies assist these disadvantage community groups, briefly explains few facilities provided by such agencies. The paper then discusses the affects of poverty in children and advantages of such knowledge to pre-service teacher. Finally we conclude by exploring the role of teachers and its effects.

Community:

Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winning economist, described poverty is the lack of “ substantive freedoms - the capabilities to choose a life one has reason to value.” And, as “ deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion for the identification of poverty”... “.. the approach concentrates on deprivations that are intrinsically important (unlike low income, which is only instrumentally significant). Thus poverty in this sense is an oppression from which we should aim to liberate our people.

Poverty is a condition of living which is difficult to measure and almost impossible to conclusively define. People living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa may lack safe housing, struggle to find food and have no access to drinkable water. This standard of living is known as 'absolute poverty'. But in Australia the standard of living are generally much higher than the countries like Africa. Poverty in Australia is measured relatively, that is benchmarking a disadvantage community group's standard of living with the life style of majority of the population in Australia.

The main factors which contribute to poverty in Australia are inequity in the education system (which means some people have less opportunity to enter the skilled labor force), the casualisation of the workforce (which has meant that people have less job security), and reduced government spending on services which are of benefit to the community.

The people most affected by poverty in Australia are those with low levels of formal education, the long-term unemployed and others who have restricted access to high-paying work. Certain demographic groups tend to fall into these categories. In 2000 it was recorded that Indigenous Australians, for example, had an unemployment rate of 17.6 per cent - much higher than the national average of 7.3 per cent. Another group more likely to live in relative poverty are first-generation immigrants and refugees, many of whom arrive in Australia with few language skills and less support networks than Australian-born residents. Elderly people, disabled people and single parents also record higher rates of poverty.

The reason poverty can be considered a spatial issue is two-fold. People of a similar

socio-economic background tend to live in the same areas because the amount of money a person makes usually, but not always, influences their decision as to where to purchase or rent a home. At the same time, the area in which a person is born or lives can determine the level of access they will have to quality education and employment opportunities. As education and income can influence settlement patterns and also be influenced by settlement patterns, they can therefore be considered causes and effects of spatial inequality and poverty.

Sydney provides an example of a large urban environment with a high level of spatial inequality. Suburban pockets of poverty can be found on the city's fringes, such as Sydney's south-west. This less-affluent (poorer) area is generally higher in unemployment, welfare-dependency, single-parent families, substance (drug and alcohol) abuse and crime, than other Sydney suburbs. The overseas migrants and refugees also chose to settle in this area, because the real estate is much cheaper and the ethnic and racial composition is generally more diverse.

Unemployment figures from the 2001 Census revealed vast differences between many areas of Australia. Particularly alarming were certain areas of Sydney. The Glenquarie Housing Commission Estate in Sydney's south-west had an unemployment rate of 26.4 per cent; the national unemployment rate at that time was only 7.1 per cent. The highly publicized riots which occurred in this same area in 2004-05 were an example of some of the

violence-related problems that can result if social inequalities are not dealt with.

Nonprofit organizations and welfare agencies have played a critical role in helping community in need by providing education, training, residences, counseling, electricity or water vouchers, and in-kind and cash support.

Organizations such as Inspire Community Services provide practical support, offering emergency relief, services, and assistance for individuals and families in crisis. They exist to break the cycle of poverty in South West of Sydney through inspiration and without discrimination. Services provided by this organization:

- Welfare Services – Provides services like Emergency Relief, Food Care and Playgroups to Internet Café and Christmas Hampers.
- EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) vouchers for gas and electricity bills.
- WAPA (Water Authority Payment Assistance) vouchers for water bills.
- TBAP (Telstra Billing Assistance Program) vouchers for Telstra telephone bills.
- Clothing vouchers from Inspire Fashion.
- Direct Debit of Centreline payments through Centrepay.

As well as moral support for any situation and other referring community organizations. Clients are assessed on their income and current circumstances.

Providing quality fashion wears at a reduced price. Price ranges from 50¢ to \$10.

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- Enterprise Development - Providing mentoring services in a real life professional business environment. Services such as meeting targets, working in teams, computer diagnosis and many more.
- Financial Solution - Assist in budgeting, personal casework/budget, counseling and financial education. Offering free budgeting service to help clients prepare a budget that is targeted to individual needs.
- Employment Services - Employment Services aims to help people within the community gain relevant skills and self confidence for the workplace.

Partnering with great organizations such as Mission Australia, MTC Work Solutions, Wesley Uniting Employment and Community First Step we provide Work for the Dole Programs. These programs are designed to equip job seekers with highly valuable skills in order to prepare them for the workforce.

We also offer on site skills following careers such as computer refurbishment, warehousing, screen printing, administration and gardening.

- Training - Our Training Services department offers a variety of training opportunities ranging from accredited to non-accredited courses. Training packages are specially designed to increase clients' knowledge and confidence in areas where they may have experienced limitation as well as enhancing their existing skills.
- Social Welfare - We are dedicated to seeing our community empowered through our self development courses. We offer a variety of courses and workshops that relate to every day issues.

Poverty has economic and social impacts. Sometimes, instead of being described as living in poverty, people in Australia who do not possess the living standards of the majority, are thought to be socially marginalized or socially isolated. This is because they may feel excluded from benefits of society that the mainstream enjoy, whether or not this is because of where they live or the amount of money they have.

The widening the gap between rich and poor Australians is likely to increase this sense of social isolation, which will no doubt negatively impact upon social cohesion. This is particularly true of larger urban centers because the inequalities between different areas are much more obvious when they are in the same town or city. The more observable inequalities become, the more likely people are to directly compare their standards of living with those of others around them. This can have the effect of reducing the sense of mutual belonging and respect that is important for maintaining social cohesion in any community, however large or small.

Children in poverty is an emotive issue that has engaged the attention of politicians ranging from Bob Hawke's famous 1987 election promise " by 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty" to John Howard's March 2004 commitment of \$365 million over four years principally for " early intervention strategies to help children and families at risk of not growing up in a stable and supportive environment".