

When a family of four, the poverty

Economics



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When considering poverty, it is important to note that poverty can appear differently depending on where you are at in the world. In the United States, the federal poverty level is determined by income vs. how many people are in the household. For a family of four, the poverty level is deduced to be at \$24, 600 or lower. In more populated cities such as Chicago, homeless people sitting along the sidewalk is not an uncommon sight. In other parts of the world, specifically third countries, poverty can mean something much more drastic.

When I think about severe poverty in America or other first world countries, I picture what I mentioned earlier, homeless folk who often ask those passing by for spare change or food, as well as people who live out of their car for prolonged periods of time perhaps. Although this is a generalization of poverty conditions in America, it isn't too far off of what some people living in poverty have to go through. On the other hand, when I imagine poverty in third world countries, images of malnourished children who don't have much more than the clothes on their back appear in my mind. At some point, we have heard the shocking statistics of poverty around the world. For example, 3 billion+ people globally live on less than \$2. 50 a day, according to dosomething.

org. Poverty in the United States is far different than poverty in third world countries. Growing up as a young child, I can remember realizing that I had less than others, but by no means did my family ever come close to living in poverty, at least in the sense of not having a definite place to live or suffering from hunger.

My mother struggled to make ends meet, but we always had a place to live, clothes on our back, and food to eat. Our family was eligible for food stamps for a few months, and my brother and I qualified for free school lunch. There was never a time when we had to worry about not eating.

At times we didn't eat the most nutritious meals, but food is food. My younger brother was actually quite picky about his food choices, and although accommodating him was a hassle, it's a testament to how much access we had to food. When my mother lost her job, she received unemployment until she found another job. With government assistance, we were able to stay afloat. Without it, the outcome may have been quite different. I won't say that governmental assistance isn't flawed, but there are at least options for a many people.

The homeless have a chance to seek shelter and food at homeless shelters. It's not a permanent fix to their problem by any means, but it's better than nothing. Most schools hold food drives to provide food for those in need as well. There is always some effort to alleviate severe poverty conditions for the citizens of the United States. Poverty in third world countries is a different dynamic as compared to first world countries.

Famine isn't uncommon, with starvation being the leading cause of death in the world. Poverty in third world countries a lot of times means not having access to clean water, no health care, or proper housing. Not having access to clean water alone means that many will catch waterborne illnesses, which typically leads the individual to severe dehydration and ultimately death. Poverty in these countries is more or less a fight to remain alive and make it

to the next day. In “ Poor Us: An Animated History of Poverty”, Jeffrey Sachs defines poverty as “...lack of reliable access to basic needs, whether food or water, or the best known health technology of the day.

” His definition is succinct and can be applied to many different scenarios globally. When I first began to think about what poverty meant, I had the notion that the face of poverty looks different around the world, thinking in terms of first world countries vs. third world countries. The take away from Sachs is that true poverty lies within his definition. Under his definition, it can be deduced that poverty is rare for countries like the United States when compared to other parts of the world. His definition is similar to my view of poverty in that way, because in America, many people think of poverty in terms of how much you make a year, not if you have access to all basic necessities. As said previously, even when my family may have been considered “ below the poverty line”, we still had access to everything he listed off in his definition of poverty.

I agree with his definition, however my view of poverty differed in that I was thinking more about what it means to be poor in the United States, not necessarily poverty. There is a difference between being poor and living in poverty. There are different degrees of being poor, and the severest being living in poverty, in light of Sachs definition. Poverty in the Middle East during the Middle Ages was not an uncommon part of society. As noted in the video, it was more or less accepted as an unavoidable reality. Beggars would line up outside of mosques after a service to beg. It was all a part of a cycle. This cycle has roots in the religious philosophies common during that

time, specifically that charity is a good deed and will help to solidify ones place in the afterlife.

One Islamic proverb says “ A single act of charity closes 70 gates of evil.”, as well as a saying from Buddha: “ The wise one, rejoicing in charity becomes thereby happy in the beyond.” With these notions in the minds of many, it wouldn't be a surprise that many would reciprocate the beggars wishes. This is how the cycle would continue: The beggars beg, people accept poverty as something that will never end, and people knowing that acts of charity is your ticket into the beyond give to the beggars. There were a lot of beggars, as many of them slept outside, even in ditches. This may be because it was easy to quickly run yourself into poverty. The video shows a scenario where the Jewish carpenter cannot pay his dues to the tax collectors, even after asking the local rabbi for the money in hopes that he will commit an act of charity towards him. We can only assume that the carpenter and his family is soon thrown into poverty.

Poverty came upon Latin America in a much different way than in the last example in the Middle East. The colonization by the Spaniards is the dynamic that laid the foundations of modern poverty, as stated by the video. The Inca had a lot of power and were prosperous in their own terms before the Spaniards arrived. Poverty was forced upon them, including the leader along with his people. Chaos ensued as many of the Inca were dying because of the new diseases brought over from Europe. Weakened by this factor alone, the Inca had no choice as well as no means to provide for themselves anymore. Their only choice was to work in the mines and plantations to produce commodities for the Europeans.

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This was the beginning of Colonialism, which would strike other various parts of the world with similar ill effects. Poverty in China is interesting because there was so much effort to alleviate poverty. According to the video, even the earliest records of China show that things such as famine prevention and flood control were important, and it was the responsibility of the ruler to take care of his people by preventing famine. In 1743, China knew that a drought would begin in the near future, so they had their granaries full and ready to provide grain to those in need during the drought.

The video notes that it is possible that nearly 2 million people received grain during the drought, which can give us an idea of how many people by technicality were poor. The Europeans were extremely impressed with this system and the overall wealth of the country. With this image of how China took care of its citizens, we get the idea that poverty wasn't such a cataclysmic problem, as compared to the Middle East example, with how easy it was to fall into poverty in that society. As far as ending poverty on a global level, I am a bit pessimistic that it will actually happen someday.

As said, it is now clearly possible, but I am weary that it will actually happen. Ending poverty would cost billions of dollars, and none of the figures who have the means to do so wants to give up their money. Inequality has always existed. Ending inequality seems impossible, at least in our lifetimes. As the video states: "the rich get richer while the poor get poorer". Additionally, I believe that economic stability must be achieved first in order to end poverty.

The state of the economy is ever-changing, and achieving a prosperous economy is nothing short of a goal that might not ever be met. People have to want to end poverty, specifically higher politicians, but it's just not really on the agenda of many. They have the power to enact change. Poverty just isn't the top issue that politicians adhere to.

The problem isn't having enough food, or not having the technology to help aid those who suffer from famine, because the world has enough food with all things considered. Additionally, getting politicians motivated to make an active effort to reduce poverty is possible, but I believe that it must first start with the people. By that I mean there must be major public outcry to persuade them to make active changes.

For a public outcry or even public outrage, the public must first be informed. Frankly, I don't think many people care about others in poverty or even realize the severe conditions. Personally, what I know about global poverty comes from classes I've taken, like this class for instance, as well as various commercials from organizations like UNICEF.

Even then, those commercials are not very hard hitting for most, as after the commercial is done, we are distracted by the events in our own lives and soon forget about the message from the commercial. In reality, if something doesn't directly affect us, most of the time people could care less. There needs to be more advocacy for something like this, and there needs to be an effort to get the general population to care, as well as the politicians. As said previously, many people are not concerned with poverty or might not see it as a big issue as long as it is not affecting them. Poverty is clearly an issue

that still needs to be addressed, despite the vast improvements that have already been made throughout history. Looking at poverty through a historical perspective from the video really sheds light on why things are the way they are now, and I think looking at it from this historical perspective can really help us access and tackle the issue of poverty now.

My takeaway from the video is that there is really only one definition of poverty, as before I thought poverty could mean something different depending on what part of the world you are in. The circumstances can be different, but not having access to food, water, shelter, and healthcare is a universal necessity, and everyone knows that.