

“ The Effects of Poverty and Promoting Awareness ”

Arelis Elias

Borough of Manhattan Community College

In America's public schools system more than 51% of students are experiencing poverty. In the year 1964 president Lyndon B Johnson, declared a war on poverty when the poverty rate was only at 19% and yet the number continues to grow. As an Early Childhood Educator myself I am advocating for other teachers to spread awareness of signs of poverty and to provide resources directly from schools to prevent its lasting effects on our children and youth into adulthood. How is it that the richest Nation on earth is having this issue that will impact our Nation's future? With poverty on the rise now more than ever before, during, and after the Covid pandemic more than 71 million Americans are being pushed into extreme poverty projected by the June 2020 Global Economics Prospects, educators must promote solutions of change with early detection but first we must understand what is poverty and how it has lasting effects on children.

When one thinks of poverty one automatically might think of the lack of finances but never the impacts of not having the basic needs to live on a day to day basis. What poverty means is the lack of basic necessities that include food, clean water, shelter, clothing, access to health care, transportation, and even education. Children have no control over their socioeconomic status that they were born into and those children who were born into poverty are likely to stay in poverty if they do not have the resources to overcome it. As educators we have the ability to

change this cycle by identifying those children in our classrooms who are being affected so that they are likely to succeed in the future, after all children spend most of their days at school.

Some key indicators to look for in children being affected by poverty are insufficient hygiene, old or torn clothing, hunger, restlessness, anxiety, depression, irritability, physically and emotionally needy, and developmental delays. These key indicators can be seen through proper observation in a classroom. I remember as a student many children in the public schools I have attended were getting bullied for always eating excessive amounts of school lunch, or for wearing the same clothes. I went to schools located in low income communities where I also lived, but I guess I too did not understand the impact and influence my economical status of my parents can have on me and my personal growth. We were not educated as children about being sensitive to our peers' situations that we may not know about because it's such a sensitive topic. So I am advocating for awareness for educators to do more and spreading awareness where they are able.

I can personally remember how my teachers addressed poverty in insulting ways. Teachers would always address poor hygiene that was evident in our classroom and told us how we must take care of our hygiene neglecting the fact that these children were too young to provide their own resources in order to maintain their hygiene. Teachers would insult common jobs of low income families such as working in McDonalds or any fast food restaurants or being a housekeeper if they did not finish school. None of these educators that I had who witnessed the key indicators of poverty were addressing the issue commonly found in my schools which always resulted in bullying, or teachers microinsulting students who were at-risk and vulnerable by poverty. As an adult who is also equally responsible for the success and wellbeing of children the way my educators handled poverty did not respond with solutions to these children in need.

Why didn't my educators in school help these children who clearly needed the assistance of basic living necessities ? When a child is showing these key indicators we must take action and address the problem with solutions and help the children and their family overcome this difficult situation especially when you are working in districts with at risk children .

It is important for educators to get involved and help to come up with solutions to poverty because it has a great impact on a child's ability to become successful in school and their overall life. Children who experience poverty tend to result in having disabilities, developmental delay, low self-esteem, mental health disorders, encounter substance and physical abuse, and antisocial behavior making it difficult to function in society. Researchers have concluded that children who experience poverty also have a shorter life expectancy according to Child Trends, a company that specializes in research and data of children in order to improve their lives.

So what solutions can be available to students when a teacher observes key indicators of poverty in the classroom? The answer is actually not so simple but achievable if you are dedicated to your students and the well-being of the children in your care. In a blog "5 Concrete Ways to Help Students in Poverty", author Wynita Harmon shared ways "-to do our best to help and empower our students". Although Wynita Harmon makes 5 ways to help children in poverty which include having high expectations, exposing students to places outside of the classroom, building relationships with the student and family, teaching them social emotional learning strategies, and creating positive classroom culture ,there are three key points in which are general but direct solutions that can be used as an educator to help the child in need within and outside of your classroom.

One of the ways Harmon expressed to giving direct help to students in poverty that I believe would be the first step towards a solution as an educator is creating and building a relationship

with the child and their family. In order to understand the entirety of the type of poverty as well as the severity of the circumstance you need to create some type of communication to find out the need of the family. Some solutions are bigger tasks than others but you have to make sure to understand the situation before getting fully involved. As educators we are also mandated reporters and sometimes child neglect can look like a child is experiencing poverty but it is actually intended child abuse so we must distinguish the two before moving forward.

If building a relationship with a family is not achievable then you should create a bond with the child so that they have a foundation of trust and work towards building proper social-emotional skills with a trusted person in their life. Finding out the cause of their poverty and what key indicators need to be addressed such as the lack of food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, or transportation would be your task. Once you find out what resource needs fulfillment find local sources of help in the area where the child lives . This information is accessible when you look in the right places and when you do that be sure to give that family the information they need to access these resources or try to provide it within the classroom if possible.

Once you become a source of consistency and support for that child you'd move onto the second step towards a solution which would be motivating the child to set their own goals within the classroom. When children don't have role models in their lives it is hard to see success as achievable so blending your trust with the student with self-motivation and goal setting it helps the child set goals in their life outside of the classroom. Children need the support from teachers to understand that what they do is valued and it is important to follow through with goals in order to see results. This will help the child break the cycle of poverty because researchers have proven that children who experience poverty are more likely to drop out of school. With the lack of

education the child's likelihood of being at risk of staying in poverty is higher than those who never experienced poverty.

The third and last step would be teaching your student social emotional learning strategies. In the blog Wynita Harmon states “students who live in poverty can have trouble focusing in school because of things troubling them in their personal lives”. This third step helps the child learn self regulating themselves from the situations going on at home that they cannot control. Some self regulating techniques commonly used in a classroom are the calm down corner usually where a teacher sets up a privacy space for a child depending on the age you’d set up appropriate materials in which the child would be able to express their feelings the way they’d like to. Another self regulating technique would be classroom circles also known as group time where students share ideas creating a sense of community within their classrooms. This helps the child build confidence, vocabulary, socioemotional, and possibly friendships. The last but not so commonly used is breathing techniques using different methods of breathing to release unwanted stress.

I chose these three because the child does not need other people to participate in these activities. We go through life alone even when there are people around us and for that reason I chose some general and helpful self help solutions. Poverty is something that sometimes people do not feel comfortable talking about even when it is visually evident. Many people can feel shame in being in poverty so they disassociate with finding the necessary help in peers alongside them. Sometimes a child is too young to understand what poverty even means and why they are in that situation in the first place. Educators can use these strategies in order to help the child overcome such a difficult obstacle that can set them up for a better future. But what happens

when teachers avoid helping their students in poverty and don't promote awareness and solutions?

Poverty has long lasting effects on children and this can happen even before they are born starting as early as the fetus. Being that poverty is a cycle of the likelihood of a child's mother who is already in a low income family it has been studied that the fetus becomes affected by stress that comes directly from poverty. In an article titled " Effects of Poverty on Pregnant Women" doctors from the Department of Gynae and Obstetrics at Dow University of Health Sciences conducted a cross sectional study of five hundred woman. The five hundred women in this study were separated into three groups in which were based on their socioeconomic status as well as past medical history of themselves and their family. The results were not surprising but had concluded that "Various maternal behaviours and experiences before,during, and after pregnancy are associated with adverse health outcomes for both mother and infant". The child who's socioeconomic status was deemed to be in poverty is likely to be born with low birth weight, failed to grow at a normal rate, higher rates in disease, and early death. This is just the beginning effects of poverty in a child's early life that would continue to affect the rest of their lives.

Even if a child indirectly experiences poverty they can still suffer from its long term effects. As the brain is developing in the womb of a stressed and malnourished mother the child's body system and growth will be impacted even though the child may not show signs until adulthood such factors may include heart disease, hypertension, stroke, obesity, and certain cancers. Mental health problems that are associated with poverty affects the "-overall academic achievement and the ability of children to succeed in school.The effects of poverty can place these children at a higher risk of involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice agencies "-

Children in Poverty - and its Effects on Children. Children who are born into a low income family tend to have parents who suffer from depression that results in substance abuse, domestic violence, lack of coping skills, poor parenting that all lead to child abuse or child neglect. With negative experiences that the child witnesses leads to further problems in teen and adulthood.

Educators have a big job to educate the youth and their families by spreading awareness about poverty. Schools should be a hub of resources for the youth and their families and the biggest issue that schools are having to try to support their students is due to the lack of funding. Although funding is a big issue in education everywhere especially in low income communities, we shouldn't stop at blockroads that will lead to our students' success. What we can do is try to find local organizations that help families overcome poverty in your surrounding areas. A few organizations that help families in poverty are Save the Children, Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind, and Child Poverty Action Group. These groups are non-profit organizations that help the families directly and just with that little bit of information you can change a child's entire future. If you saw the future of your students success wouldn't you help too? Join the fight against childhood poverty by being an educator who cares, see the signs and take action !

Citation

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