



# Severe Deprivation in America

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# Introduction

- Crystal's Story
- Defining Poverty - it is more than a material condition
  - Multidimensional problem that is being viewed one-dimensionally
- Poverty is a complex issue involving many factors, therefore it is not easily quantifiable
  - Megan Comfort and her coauthors approach the issue qualitatively - fully integrate clinical social work
- Different interpretations of poverty
  - Material Scarcity
  - Psychological Turmoil

# Discussion

1. Of the factors mentioned, which do you think the public focuses on as the main source of poverty? Why?
  - a. Institutional factors - deindustrialization, racism, welfare reform, etc.
  - b. Individual factors - upbringing, childhood abuse, failed education, mental disorders, etc.
  
2. How can different interpretations of poverty affect proposed solutions?

# Severe Deprivation

Can be defined as Hardships that are:

- Acute
- Compounded
- Persistent

# Acute Hardships

## Scarcity of critical resources and material hardship

- In 2015, almost 50 million people in the U.S. lived under the federal poverty line
- In 2010, 20.5 million people in the U.S. had incomes less than half of the federal poverty threshold
- 1 in 50 americans rely solely on food stamps as their source of income.

# Compounded Hardships

Clustering of disadvantage across multiple dimensions.

- Psychological
- Social
- Material
- Work
- Family
- Prison
- Not just an economic issue, but the “linked ecology of social maladies and broken institutions”
  - Pervasive and hard to research
  - Most poverty research looks for a single explanatory factor

# Persistent Hardships

Enduring disadvantage that is impervious to change

- Early life trauma
  - Abuse, hunger, or violence as a child
  - Many below the poverty line known to have traumas leading to certain paths
- Experience over long stretches
  - Coping strategies/effects of social suffering
- Generational
  - Poverty passed down from parents to children

Many social problems centered around those who experience these hardships

Most people minimize issue of poverty in U.S. by comparison despite an increase in children facing chronic extreme poverty

# Skid Row Poverty





# Discussion

1. Which aspect of severe deprivation do you think of first when you think of poverty? Why?
1. Do you agree that poverty isn't just an economic issue?

# A New Poverty Agenda

Large-scale changes in in federal policy have created new “winners” and “losers”

- Households just above the poverty line receive more help today than 20 years ago, while those below the poverty line receive less
- There is a growing divide between those below the poverty line; the stable, working poor vs. unstable, non-working poor
- The rift is caused by the priorities of public policies
- There has also been a change in the modern-day American family, with one-third of American children living in a single-parent household

# Public Policy and Moral Urgency

## Acute Hardship

- Policy Skimming
  - Increasing aid for working families and withdrawing support for the very poor
  - \$54 billion spent on Earned Income Credit: \$17 billion on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
  - Mean-tested program funding doubled between 1986 and 2007
    - Only working poor benefited
    - Safety net hasn't been effective
    - Went from 56% going to families below 200% of the poverty line to 32%

# Public Policy and Moral Urgency

## Compounded Hardship

- 1st: Budget allocations encouraged policymakers to focus on their issues rather than cross-system collaboration
- 2nd: Poverty is difficult to communicate
- 3rd: Multidimensional interventions to deprivation pour resources into bounded neighborhoods.
  - Obama's Promise Zone: job promotion, economic growth and safety in 20 neighborhoods

# Public Policy and Moral Urgency

## Persistent Hardship

- Persistent=Generational=Historical
- Addressing poverty isn't only about effective policy and economic opportunity, but also about justice and Fairness
  - People in the past built cases for change, now they are satisfied with nudges and incremental change

# Discussion

1. In what ways do you think policy should be changed in order to prevent policy skimming so that more resources are allocated to the very poor?
2. What ways do you think we can get people to advocate for more than just nudges and incremental change?