

Running Head: LASTING EFFECTS

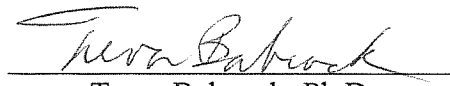
Lasting Effects: How Poverty as a Child Still Affects the Adolescent

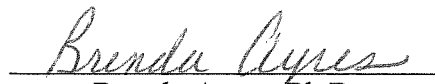
Jennifer Lenker

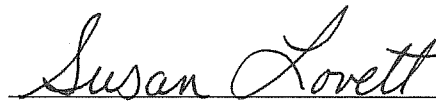
A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring Semester 2005

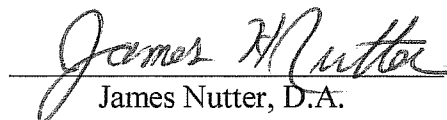
Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

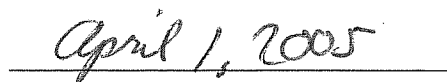
This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
Honors Program of Liberty University.


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Abstract

Based on her review of research concerning the millions of children and teens who live in poverty-stricken families in the United States, the writer seeks to identify the long-term effects of poverty in the adolescent years. In order to do this, many of the factors contributing to poverty are discussed. The parents' education, the overall decline in marriage, the absence of the father, single-parent households, structural causes, natural disasters, domestic violence, culture, and government policies are all factors which can contribute to poverty. In addition, poverty has many effects on children, such as lower educational achievement, greater likelihood of abuse, poor environment, and a variety of negative emotions. As children enter their adolescent years, they also often encounter potential substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, and STDs. Furthermore, teen pregnancy and connecting factors, such as the absence of the father and drug abuse, contribute to poverty. Sadly, the effects of teen pregnancy are long lasting in many cases, resulting in a cycle of poverty. Lastly, prevention options and a biblical perspective on poverty are discussed.

Lasting Effects: How Poverty as a Child Still Affects the Adolescent

Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate of 2003 rose .4% from 2002. In 2003, almost 40 million people, 12 ½ % of the United State's population, lived in poverty. Almost 13 million of those people were under the age of 18. In fact, the "poverty rate of children under 18 remained higher than that of 18-to-64 years olds and that of seniors aged 65 and over" (2004, para. 5). Sadly, most of the population in poverty was under the age of 25 (Books, 1998). Kathryn Edin stated that "More children are poor today than at any time since before Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty began three decades ago" (Wilson, 1997, p. 91). The government has spent around seven billion dollars total on children and teens who suffer from poverty (National Conference, 2004).

Poverty is "a condition of being in want of something that is needed, desired, or generally recognized as having value" (Valentine, 1968, p. 12). It can exist on several levels: "starvation, death from exposure, and loss of life due to some other total lack of resources are the only absolute forms of poverty" (Valentine, 1968, p. 12). In measurement, the United States government counts poverty in terms of a family's cash income. It does not include any form of welfare the family may receive from the government nor does it include any form of help the family receives from another source, such as family or church members (Poverty, 2004). Poverty heavily affects many families in the United States. Children who experience poverty in their younger years experience lasting effects throughout their adolescence (Harris, 1996).

Factors Contributing to Low-Income

Several factors contribute to a family's low income. One such contributor is education. Evidence shows that the higher education a parent has the more likely that family is to have sufficient income. For example, over 60% of children of parents with no college education are in a low-income family. Over one-quarter of these children's parents do not have a high school diploma. Around one-third have a high school degree but do not have a college education. In addition, the higher education one has predicts a greater salary. About four-fifths of children whose parents do not hold a high school diploma live in low income. Half of the families where the parent holds a high school degree but no college degree are in the low-income bracket, compared with around 20% of those families where the parents have some college education (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2004).

Furthermore, even if a parent has a full-time job, lower education levels predict lesser income. Just a little under three-quarters of children whose parents hold a full-time job but do not hold a high school diploma are in the low-income bracket. On the other hand, if the parents have received at least some college education, then only 15% of those children are found in low socioeconomic families. These records show that over the last 20 years, those children whose parents held a full-time job but did not have a college education were more likely to be in the low-income bracket (NCCP, 2004). For instance, "the percent of children in low-income families increased from 68% to 73% if parents did not hold a high school degree" (NCCP, 2004, para. 5). However, if the parents held at least some partial college education, then the rate actually decreased from 18 to 15% (NCCP, 2004). In actuality, men who graduate from college are five times

more likely to be employed than those who did not receive a high school diploma (Sider, 1999).

The decline of marriage has furthered poverty in families. For example, in 1993, over six million children were living with a parent who had never been married. Just slightly less than one-third of these children were African Americans. Interestingly enough, lower education correlates with a higher rate of single-parent families, specifically in the African-American community. Wilson discovered that “better-educated black women are more likely to marry than black women with less education” (1997, p. 88); many children and teens living in low-income housing fail to get a decent education, thus decreasing their likelihood of marriage (NCCP, 2004). In addition, the decline of the marriage rate seems to be more evident with African Americans. This is possibly due to the growing number in poverty: “And of the black parents living in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or more, more than half (56%) have never been married” (Wilson, 1997, p. 89). Mexican and whites that live in the inner city are at least two and a half to three times more likely to marry their child’s mother after the birth of that child than are blacks (Wilson, 1997).

Another contributor to low income in families is the absence of the father. Approximately one-third of all children are born to single females (Sider, 1999). The U.S. Census Bureau of 1995 determined that 90% of the families with dependent children on welfare were headed by a single mother (Medora, Wilson, & Larson, 2001). In fact, Kathryn Edin concludes that those children born to a single mother “are American’s poorest demographic group” (Wilson, 1997, p. 91). For whites, almost a quarter of the children are born to a single woman. For African Americans, over two-thirds of children

are born to a sole female (Sider, 1999). However, in low-incoming housing, the percentage increases to almost 95% of all black children being born to a single mother (Murphy, 1997). Thus, these women find it difficult to hold a job since high quality affordable day care is challenging to obtain. Also, these women normally receive a lower hourly rate than men (Sider, 1999). This is as a result of women holding subordinate status jobs that pay a lower salary (Chilman, Cox, & Nunnally, 1988). Furthermore, child support is not being paid, thus forcing the family into a lower socioeconomic status. Sider holds that the broken families must be mended before poverty can be terminated (1999).

Single-parent households, especially those run by mothers, often negatively effect children. Those children who grew up with only a mother are more likely to quit school, receive a lower wage in future jobs as a young adult, and to receive welfare when they are older. The daughters of a black single-parent household are also more inclined to establish the same pattern when they reach adulthood. In addition, parents in this situation exercise less control of their children and adolescents (Wilson, 1997).

Some argue that single parenting may be counteracted by having another adult live in the house, such as cohabitating or living with a relative. However, this is not a very likely case in many situations. African-American mothers are less likely than other minority groups to live in a house where another adult presides: “whereas 44% of the black women living with their children in Chicago’s inner city have no other adults in the household, only 6.5% of comparable Mexican women are the sole adults in their households” (Wilson, 1997, p. 93). In fact, African-American children under the age of

12 are eight times more likely to live in a household with a single adult compared with children of a Mexican decent (Wilson, 1997).

The nation's economy has also contributed to the increase of low-income families. Many high-paying jobs with low skill are decreasing. Many of these jobs are newly located overseas. Thus, the replacement job's salary does not compare with the original. Also, wages have declined. From 1979 to 1993, those men who did not obtain a college degree witnessed a decline in their wages. In addition, the real value of the minimum wage has declined. The welfare wage has decreased. Furthermore, unions are not as successful as they once were, and they have fewer members and less influence. Thus, once when a union was able to increase the pay rate, the likelihood that this will occur is not as high today (Sider, 1999).

Two more factors contributing to families living in poverty are sudden catastrophes and permanent disabilities. The breadwinner may be unexpectedly killed or suffer a terminal illness. Now the family's primary source of income is nonexistent. Also, some people are born with disabilities which prevent gainful employment. As a result of handicaps, they may never be able to obtain a job (Sider, 1999).

The debate as to the causes of poverty rages in the political arena. Many conservatives hold that poor moral choices, such as divorce, single-parent families, alcohol, drugs, and sex; contribute to poverty. For example, if one chooses to participate in sex out of wedlock and then has a child nine months later, then that is his or her fault. The parent or parents are then forced to care for the child. Many drop out of high school, and others do not obtain college degrees. They have little choice but to live in government housing in order to support their child. This family has low income as a

result of their own choices. However, liberals believe the lower socioeconomic status is due to the lack of jobs. For example, a plant decides to use robots instead of manpower, thereby forcing a father out of work, not due to personal choice but to circumstances beyond his control. Furthermore, not only does new technology reduce the number of low-paying jobs, but it also requires more education. Even in industries where jobs still exist, businesses change locations. Many jobs originally located in the cities are now found in the suburbs. Thus, the urban poor now compete with those in the city to hold a job. In reality, both political camps argue valid points (Sider, 1999).

Another contributor to low income is abuse. Many women enter the lower socioeconomic status as a result of domestic violence. Around 50% of those homeless families headed by a single mother become destitute as a result of domestic violence. Sadly this history of domestic violence often began when they were children. In a study completed by Bassuk, over three-fifths suffered physical violence by someone close to them, most of this violence originating in their childhood. Two-fifths of these women also suffered sexual abuse (Books, 1998). They or their children are being abused and are thus forced to leave. These mothers are then faced with no place to call home, a need for a job, expensive childcare, and undependable child support payments. Though they may have been in a higher class before, they are soon forced into the lower economic bracket. This continues to create stress in the family (Cohen, Mulroy, Tull, White, & Crowley, 2004).

One's culture or race is related to poverty: "Poverty rates for minorities are more than double those for whites" (Sider, 1999, p. 31). Almost 20% of African Americans and not quite 30% of Latinos lived in poverty in 1996 compared to approximately 11% of

whites (Sider, 1999). Latino immigrants are the “fastest growing minority in the United States” (National Conference, 2004, para. 7). They are expected to be the largest minority group in the year 2010 (National Conference, 2004). When many Latinos come to the United States, they speak very little English. As a result of the language barrier, many of them work low-paying jobs with little promise of promotion. Their employers sometimes cannot understand what their Latino employees are saying. This makes it difficult for Latinos to increase their work status and increase their wages. In addition, since many immigrants have a lower education level, they have difficulty obtaining a higher paying job. An additional obstacle for immigrants to overcome is their status upon entering the United States. The legal status of immigrants further pushes them into poverty. In 1996, “citizenship or long-term residency” became “a condition of eligibility for most public benefits” (Causes, n.d., para. 14). Thus only one-twentieth of those receiving welfare are immigrants. However, that slim percentage of the poor experience about two-fifths of the governmental cuts (Books, 1998). As a result of these factors, many of these immigrants and their children will remain at an economic disadvantage. Studies also show that Latino teens have the highest birth rates, while African Americans have the highest pregnancy rates. Latino adolescents also use fewer contraceptives than other teens (National Conference, 2004). It is hard for minority groups to escape poverty. Around 67% of all African Americans will experience at least one year of poverty compared to only 25% of Caucasians. Seventeen percent of blacks will struggle with living in poverty-stricken situations for at least 10 years, while only two percent of Caucasians will fit in the same bracket (Sider, 1999).

Books also believes that the government plays a part in poverty. She claims that the U.S. government has shirked its task to “[protect] its citizenry and residents against homelessness, hunger, destitution, and lack of health care” (1998, p. 19). She suggests that housing at a decent price needs to be offered to these families. The housing also needs to be safe and free of drugs. In addition, Books holds that it is also the government’s responsibility to offer above minimum wage jobs to the adults. With that comes affordable and quality daycare. Mothers need to be able to drop their children off at a childcare center without worrying about the treatment of their child. This is not a fruitless dream; nations “where family and child supports are strongest” experience less child poverty (1998, p. 19). In 1996, the United States exceeded at least 18 other Western industrialized countries in its child poverty rate. Books concludes that government involvement in the arena of poverty-stricken teens and children does prove effective (1998).

Effects of Low-Income on Children

As a result of low income, children suffer serious consequences in several ways. Their level of education is not as high as it could be. Three-quarters of a million school-age children have no home, and almost one-fourth of these children do not go to school during their phases of homelessness. This decreases the amount of time they have in the classroom to continue to learn (Books, 1998). Even when they are in the classroom, the learning opportunities are inadequate. In fact, children from low-income families are at the highest risk for having trouble learning to read and write. One reason is that many school libraries are not sufficient. In one study observing 54 classrooms in six schools, many of the schools’ libraries did not contain the amount of books needed for children to

effectively learn. Also, in most of the schools, the children were allowed only one weekly visit to the library. Since many children do not have a large amount of books at home, this decreased their learning opportunities. Furthermore, in the schools that had a good deal of economically underprivileged children, there were fewer books and magazines available. The study results also indicated that few classrooms had the appropriate grade level of books for the children (Graves et al., 1996).

Another reason for illiteracy among low-income children is that the parents do not encourage education. When children in middle class homes fail to read at school, they seek instruction from their parents. However, those children whose parents make very little often do not receive the instruction they need at home. This is due in part because of their parents' lack of education or lack of funds (Graves, Broek, & Taylor, 1996). Education was not promoted when they were young; thus, they give no reason for supporting it now. Many children fail to try as a result of their parents' lack of encouragement. Some teens even drop out of school (Murphy, 1997). Teens who are on welfare make up almost 50% of those who drop out of high school (Lebelle, 2000). Thus, they continue to fall behind in school even though they advance to the next level. Even when early intervention programs are in place, many low-income children still struggle (Graves, Broek, & Taylor, 1996).

Another reason that these children struggle is because they have a difficult time focusing in school. Since many of these children are forced to change living situations somewhat often, they "often manifest their problems by acting out, exhibiting aggression, depression, regressive behavior (especially younger children), inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and chronic tiredness and anxiety" (Books, 1998, p. 17). Many children

from low-income situations worry about where they will obtain their next meal. Some are afraid of the violence that occurs in the neighborhoods in which they live.

Classmates' opinions also affect their concentration in school. As a result, these worries and fears distract the child, and he has trouble focusing in school (Books, 1998).

However, many scholars argue when parents are involved in their children's education, they will succeed more academically. For instance, Walberg's 1984 meta-analysis concludes that parents' involvement in school had more effect on the child's academic success than the socioeconomic status. Thus, if parents of low-income children want their children to succeed, they must get involved in their children's schooling. Still, other studies show that lack of parental involvement is not a result of parent disinterest in their child's schooling. Instead, it is lack of resources, such as the fund to purchase adequate books or educational materials (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

Abuse is another factor in poverty-stricken homes. Though there are arguments that poverty does not cause abuse, it is much more noticeable in the poorer communities (Luthar, 1999, p. 49). Approximately 25 to 50% of all suspected abuse and neglect are attributed to households where poverty presides (Medura et al., 2001). Several studies conclude that those families reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) are more often characterized as having fatherless homes, described as having fathers without jobs, labeled as those receiving public aid, and/or differentiated as dwelling in poverty stricken neighborhoods (Guterman, 2001). Poverty does play a large part in abuse. In some of the results of her study, Waldfogel found that "low income, rather than race or ethnicity, seems to be the prime determinant of the higher rates at which minority children are reported to CPS" (1998, p. 9). Furthermore, abuse is more likely to be reported to the

CPS if a child lives in a poorer community (Waldfoegel, 1998). Also, when political officials became more involved with investigating child abuse in the 1990s, the research drew attention to the excruciating pain, and subtracted attention away from the deeper pain, such as economically unstable families, crumbling inner cities, and rapid increase in poor incomes. This then distracts the researches from discovering and correcting the contributors to poverty (Ashby, 1997).

Children in low-income families, with an income below \$15,000 a year, are twice as likely to be abused or neglected than the children in a middle-income family, with salary range of \$15,000 to \$29,000 (Waldfoegel, 1998, p. 9). Also, the National Research Council has pointed out that child mistreatment, especially neglect, seem to be located in the “poorest of the poor” (Guterman, 2001, p. 27). Leroy Pelton concludes that there is a strong relation between poverty and child maltreatment. Around two-fifths to one-half of all child maltreatment occur within a little more than one-tenth of all U.S. families that live below the poverty level (Guterman, 2001, p. 191). Even though abuse can occur on any economic level, the abuse that occurs on the lowest level is more evident. This is as a result of people being more likely to look for signs of abuse in low-income levels of living, and suspicions of abuse are more likely to be reported.

Effects on the Abused Child

The abused child is affected in many ways, such as low self-esteem and a desire for unconditional acceptance. Many of the children who experience some form of abuse carry with them negative and permanent consequences (Howling, Wodarski, Kurtz, & Gaudin, 1993). First of all, when someone is abused, he or she normally does not develop a high self-esteem and crave attention in order to gain acceptance. Many times,

the affection is found in someone who will then abuse him or her all over again. This occurs because the abused child finds temporary acceptance in the new abuser. When the head of the household is a female, many times a boyfriend is also present. In order to assert authority, many boyfriends will sexually abuse some of the girls in the family. Sadly, this can create teen pregnancy, increasing the chance that that family will live in poverty (Sider, 1999).

Abuse also often results from the absence of the father in the home. Since there is no father, young girls do not have a protectorate and are often abused by the men in their mother's lives. Often times, when the daughters do report to their mother what is happening, the mom does not believe them. This sometimes is a willful ignorance on the mother's part (Musick, 1993). In addition, mothers are sometimes the source of abuse. Mothers who experience low income occasionally mistreat their child, putting him or her at risk. Egeland and Stroufe discovered that the abused infants by two years old are more likely to get frustrated and are easily infuriated. They are also less likely to be agreeable babies. These characteristics carry on into their later lives when they demonstrate numerous behavioral problems (Luthar, 1999). Most likely these children do not properly bond with their mothers within the first two years. This creates distance within the mother-child relationship and causes difficulty for the child to bond with others in his or her life. Since children are born with the need to properly develop, live, demonstrate their needs, and love, they need an adult who is willing to love and help them. By modeling these skills and teaching the child to develop, physically, mentally, and socially, the parent strengthens the relationship with the child and accomplishes the important task of loving the child. Not only does the child receive love, but the child also

understands what is required in a successful parent-child relationship. But, in the case of an abused child, the parents' meeting the child's basic needs does not happen. Thus, the child is usually frustrated and angry. Some of these children act out their frustration and anger through violence. They treat others in the same way they themselves have been treated (Miller, 1999).

Furthermore, in their survey, Howling (1993) and his co-authors discovered that abused children develop slower than their peers who are not mistreated. The survey also showed that abused children consistently earn lower grades than non-abused children. They are also more likely to cause trouble in the class, to adjust in their classes more slowly, and to appear unhappy. At home, they tend to be depressed, they are inclined to distant themselves from their families, and they strongly desire to change their home situations in some way. These same children have trouble in social activities. They are often not as well accepted into groups. Some of the abused children exhibit forms of violence, which prevent furthering friendships. Others are frightened of being rejected (Howling, 1993). Furthermore, the majority of these children will look at themselves from a negative viewpoint (Luthar 1999). As a result of their parents' mistreating them, they will begin to think of themselves as failures and useless children, which often translates into aggressive acts of violence, drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, psychological disorders, and even suicide (Miller, 1999). Sadly, many of these battered children will raise their children in an abusive home since this is the way in which they were raised (Miller, 1999).

Once in poverty, children and their families normally live in a difficult environment. Around 12% reside in "urban ghettos – defined as an area in which at least

forty percent of all the residents are poor” (Sider, 1999, p. 30). Most of the poor reside in cities with the next largest portion living in the suburbs (Sider, 1999). Regardless of where they decide to live, affordable housing is rare and difficult to find: “There are at least two low-income renters competing for each unit of affordable housing” (Causes, n.d., para. 24). Many families do not earn enough income to afford housing. According to Books (1998), “3.8 million households with children pay more than 50% of their income on rent, whereas over 2.2 million households with children pay more than 70% of their income on rent” (p. 5). Homelessness is also a result. One out of four homeless people is under the age of 18. Around three-fourths to nine-tenths of all homeless families are headed by a single mother. Not only is the housing inadequate and difficult to find, but also living in this type of housing produces side effects, such as trouble in school and violent reactions. Many children choose to live on the streets because they seek to escape the poor home life (Books, 1998). Others “ ‘run away not because they want to but because they have to; because even the streets are safer than where they’re running from...Even so, they are not running to anything but death. Nationwide, more than 5,000 children a year are buried in unmarked graves’ ” (Books, 1998, p. 185).

Children and teens alike face a variety of emotions as a result of living in poverty. For example, those children that experience homelessness also undergo shame and isolation. They struggle to hide their lack of a home and are thus isolated. In addition, they are forced to move often, thus leaving friends and familiarity behind. Many of these children and teens are mocked because of their poverty (Books, 1998). They may not have the right clothes or even clean clothes to wear to school (Murphy, 1997). James Garbarino believes those children and adolescents living in housing projects face

continual feelings of fear and weakness. This can even result in posttraumatic stress syndrome. Furthermore, many of the teachers in the school system view such children or teens in a similar manner as do other students. They find it difficult to work with such students. Since the children move often, behavioral problems result, and those children disrupt the classroom. Moving often forbids the students from developing a consistency in their lives. When children enter a new classroom, they are often faced with new rules. Since many of these students do not receive a great deal of attention from their families, they act up in class. Not only do the adolescents receive a negative vibe from the students, but also they obtain a negative attitude from the changing adults, such as teachers and principals, in their lives (Books, 1998).

Effects of Poverty in the Teenage Years

Several characteristics are attributed to underprivileged youth. One such attribute is a substance abuser. Drug activity is common in poorer housing areas. This is due partly to the lack of people holding jobs. Once a person loses his job, he needs money. One quick way in which he can obtain money is by selling drugs (Wilson, 1997). Another characteristic of teenagers who have experienced poverty is increased involvement in criminal activity (Musick, 1993). Drug activity can spawn violence, which produces fear in the hearts of many who live in low-income housing (Wilson, 1997). Though these drugs and violence are more common in males, females also display some of these same qualities. Perhaps males seem to display these traits more because males have been studied more on these issues, while females are studied more for pregnancies (Musick, 1993).

Violence. Sider (1999) declares that crime is an additional product of low-income (1999). Some attribute violence to lack of a father in the home, not poverty. Yet many fatherless homes are in poverty (Mackey & Immerman, 2004). In the spring of 1994, the New York Times produced an article on over 25 children 15 and under who had been accused of murder in New York City. In the article, “more than twenty times, the phrase ‘the child had not involved father’ leaped out of the text. Two profiles were silent as to the presence of a father. Only four children seemed to have any kind of father” (Murphy, 1997, p. 93). Society is quick to point out the increase in “homicide and violent crime arrests among young people” (Books, 1998, p. 191). However, what is not noted is the fact that children and youth in poverty have escalated by 60% in the last two decades (Books, 1998). Another reason for crime in poorer neighborhoods is the lack of jobs. When a man is without a job, he finds other means, such as dealing drugs, in order to make a living (Wilson, 1997). Drugs and joblessness often lead to crime. Research indicates “when unemployment goes up 1%, there's a 4% increase in homicides, a 6% increase in robberies, a 2% increase in burglaries, and measurable effects on rape and other crimes” (Poverty, 2004, para. 6). Wilson holds that “high rates of joblessness trigger other problems in the neighborhood that adversely affect social organization, including drug trafficking, crime, and gang violence” (1997, p. 59). In a low-income neighborhood, there is an abundance of “murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and weapons offenses” (Sider, 1999, p. 196). Garbarina’s Chicago studies indicate that “shootings, gangs, elevators, and darkness are the most serious daily dangers that single mothers and their children confront” (Books, 1998, p. 8). In addition, these studies reveal that every child five years old and younger has “had direct contact with shooting”

(Books, 1998, p. 8). Thus, crime, in addition to other contributing factors, is essentially an effect of poverty (Mackey & Immerman, 2004).

Interestingly, regardless of age, a direct correlation seems to exist between poverty and crime. According to Books, “statistics for 1993 show ‘teenagers experienced three murders and 40 violent crime arrests per 1,000 teens living below federal poverty guidelines – the same rate as among similarly impoverished adults in their 20s and 30s’” (1998, p. 191). Sadly, many young African American males are involved in these forms of violence. These males from age 14 to 24 account for only one percent of the population. Still, acts of violence result in thousands of teens facing jail time under harsh sentencing (Books, 1998). A little less than 20% of African American young men are homicide victims and almost one-third are the cause of the homicides (Sider, 1999). Teenagers begin to carry guns when they encounter a drug deal. Many see guns as a means to solve temporary problems, which arise when dealing drugs. These adolescents do not realize the danger in which they place many of the residents when they carry weapons. A citizen in the community can easily happen upon a drug deal and thus encounter gunfire. Also, teens are “generally less likely to exercise restraint than mature adults are” (Wilson, 1997, p. 61). When a drug deal turns sour, youth are not as likely to realize that using a gun to solve a temporary problem will eventually create a permanent dilemma (Wilson, 1997). Drug trafficking, too, heightens the violence and crime in poverty-stricken areas.

A second type of crime that affects the low-income family is violence involved in an intimate relationship. This is more common in lower socioeconomic homes than in middle-class families. Stress is considered a cause. Since males in the poorer brackets

have less with which to diminish stress, they many times use violence on their partner. Instead of relieving stress at a gym, males often exercise their stress on others close to them. Moreover, inequality in the homes causes this type of violence. Jewkes holds that much of the intimate partner violence is due in part to the lack of male identity. In many situations where the woman works and the man does not, intimate partner violence is prevalent because the man feels inferior to the woman. So, he takes it out on what he deemed to be the cause – the woman. He is unable to support himself or the woman; the lack of support causes violence in the home. Thus poverty is a contributor to violence in a male-female relationship. This type of violence is also more prevalent in societies where violence is considered the norm, which is often the case in a low-income housing area (2002). Since around 350,000 teens and children experience some sort of violence in the home, normally from a parent, it follows that they would carry that same violence out on others (Books, 1998).

Teenage pregnancy. Female teenagers display some side effects of poverty through pregnancies. The United States has the most recorded adolescent pregnancies of all industrialized countries. In fact, 13% of all babies born are to adolescent mothers. Surprisingly, over a fifth of those pregnancies are planned (National Conference, 2004). The majority of teens who get pregnant are those who live in or have lived in poverty. In a study by Planned Parenthood, those adolescents from age 15 to 19 who live at least “below 200% of the federal poverty guideline level” make up almost three-fourths of all teen pregnancies (National Conference, 2004, para. 7). Some research has been conducted about whether or not ethnicity is a major cause in teenage pregnancy and motherhood. However, findings show that poverty is a more prominent factor than

ethnicity in whether or not a teenage girl will have a child out of wedlock. Teenage girls from all different culture groups get pregnant out of wedlock; nonetheless, the majority of those who experience some sort of poverty tend to not only have the child but elect to keep the child (Musick, 1993).

Another reason given for teenage pregnancy is substance abuse. When an adolescent involves herself in drinking and drugs, she places herself at a higher risk of getting pregnant. Thus, after becoming pregnant, the teenage mother normally drops out of high school, fails to get married, and fails to obtain a good job. Even if an adolescent mother does decide to stay in school, her grades usually are rather low (Musick, 1993). Only 64% of those girls who become pregnant will finish high school or receive a high school diploma equivalent (National Conference, 2004). In a National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, results indicate that female teens with low “basic math and reading skills were five times more likely to become mothers over a two-year period than those in the top quintile” (Musick, 1993, p. 54). Those females that experienced poverty and had low math and reading skills were five to seven times more likely to become adolescent mothers than those girls who had at least average skills or did not live in poverty (Musick, 1993). Furthermore, not only will the teenager mother have a less likely chance of finishing high school and getting married, but she is also more likely to get on welfare and remain on it. Almost four-fifths of all adolescent mothers will ultimately depend on welfare. Their perspective of the future is also very low (National Conference, 2004).

In addition to teen pregnancy, teens who live in poverty are more at risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection (National Conference, 2004). Girls from ages 10 to 14 are three to four times more likely

to have an STD than a male of the same age (Books, 1998). Books (1998) also adds that “comparisons of the heterosexual AIDS rate for 19-year-old men and women show the rate for young women is more than ten times higher than the rate for young men” (p. 189).

Numerous factors contribute to teenage pregnancy. One of the major reasons is poverty. Books (1998) claims that “poverty causes young single motherhood more than young single motherhood causes poverty” (p. 190). The Alan Guttmacher Institute performed a two year study. In 1994, Guttmacher published that almost two-fifths of all 15 to 19 year olds were part of families that lived below the income level. Ten percent of these adolescents “who either became pregnant or impregnated someone else, 73% lived in poverty or near poverty. Of the 1 in 25 who became parents, 83% lived in poverty or near poverty. And of the 1 in 40 who became a parent while unmarried, 85% lived in poverty or near poverty” (Books, 1998, p. 190). Other results indicate that over 80% of teenage mothers lived in poverty before becoming pregnant (Books, 1998).

Several underlying causes accompany poverty. When any adolescent goes through her teenage years, she faces a time of searching to discover who she is. Combine that sort of searching with poverty. The teenage girl is not only searching to establish self-esteem but is having trouble finding it. Many teens, who live above the poverty line, can find this sort of love and acceptance at home. Many times she seeks the male attention she often lacks at home. In this relationship she finds either abuse or temporary acceptance. Frequently, the young female gets pregnant. Some of the adolescent mothers turn to their babies to find the love and acceptance for which they so desperately long that were not supplied by their family or a man (Musick, 1993).

In addition, many teenage girls become the caretaker at a young age. They begin to change diapers and clean their house. Since they are already taking care of children, they begin to have the mindset that they might as well take care of their own children and clean their own houses. Thus, these young mothers find themselves pregnant.

Furthermore, many teenage girls in poverty-stricken homes witness their own mother's sexual behavior. Since often times no father is present, there may be more than one man who enters the home. The daughter imitates what she sees (Musick, 1993). Research has indicated that not only do daughters mimic their mothers' sexual lives, they also tend to have sexual partners that are adult men, not teenage boys: "Men 20 years and older father two-and-a-half times more babies born to high school girls than high school boys father, and four times more babies born to junior high girls than junior high boys father" (Books, 1998, p. 189). This is as a result of the father's absence and the mother's busyness with work or other children (Musick, 1993). Other female adolescents sell their bodies in prostitution. This, too often results in pregnancies. Too often, young women are taken advantage of, whether through rape or abuse. These girls then become pregnant and eventually mothers. In 1992, a Washington study was conducted of over five hundred adolescent mothers. Almost 66% of those females experienced sexual abuse or rape (Books, 1998).

Long term effects of teenage pregnancy. The results of adolescent pregnancy are lasting. One is that a large portion of those children born to adolescent mothers will remain poor for most of their lives. Not only do these children weigh less at birth, but they also experience more health and developmental troubles. Whereas these difficulties could normally be prevented or treated, many of these children will suffer due to the lack

of health insurance. The abuse and neglect they experience will have lasting effects. They will carry on the cycle of low education because many of them will not graduate from high school (National Conference, 2004). Teen pregnancy can also create a cycle. Depending on welfare creates “loneliness and frustration and the need for more adult and male companionship – and ultimately to more babies and more diapers” (Murphy, 1997, p. 94). In addition, teenage mothers are likely to remain unmarried. This increases the likelihood that the mother and the children will remain in poverty. Part of this is due to the fact that many of these females do not come from families who hold high standards for their daughters. Neither does the community push for teenagers to succeed in a productive future.

Furthermore, the teenage mother will face difficulties in obtaining a job (Musick, 1993). One such difficulty is deciding what to do with her children if she is able to obtain a job. A lack of daycare or money to pay for the childcare is a mounting frustration in single parents. Societies expect that a single mother should work to support herself and her children, yet this is sometimes impossible because the mother cannot afford the childcare, and the government’s waiting list for childcare assistance is too long (Mason, 2003). Also, the insufficiency of childcare makes it more likely that the children in the next generation will also be poor because the older children have to stay home to care for the younger children. Thus, the older siblings are hindered from furthering their education or vocational goals, which could enhance their chances of overcoming poverty (Investing, 2001). Even if parents are able to locate an affordable childcare center, many times that daycare is unlicensed and unsafe for their children to attend (Books, 1998). Mason (2003) and others conducted a research study in order observe this issue more

clearly. The main concentration in this study was on single mothers that were full-time employees. A large percentage of mothers that were interviewed carried mixed feelings. Almost all of them wanted to hold full-time jobs, but as a result of childcare and other issues, they were not sure what they could do. A mother cannot join the workforce if her children will have no place to go. In order to do provide sufficient care for their children, many mothers stayed on government assistance. Of course, they readily admitted that they would prefer to support themselves and their families without it. Nevertheless, if it came down to knowing their children were safe and living on government assistance or sending their children to an unsafe daycare and keeping a job, they would remain on welfare. Even if mothers did acquire a job, they would most likely be paid on minimum wage. As inflation in the economy occurred, daycare prices increased. However, a large amount of the women's salaries did not increase, thus making childcare less affordable (Mason, 2003). Studies show that when a single mother lives "in a coresidential household" with her children informally cared for, then her chances for working increase five times than those women living in a single parent household with no informal childcare (Wilson, 1997).

Another lasting effect of pregnancy comes from the parent. A parent is crucial to the child, especially in poverty situations. When a child lives in poverty, the importance of the parent increases because of all the other obstacles, such as crime, violence, and trouble in school. Thus, the parent is forced to shoulder more responsibilities. However, many adolescent parents do not have the training or the maturity to do so (Musick, 1993).

Poverty Cycle

In the past and today, many would claim that poverty is an endless cycle. It begins with poverty. Poverty then leads to “cultural and environmental obstacles to motivation” (Moynihan, 1969, p. 9). Then, “poor health, and inadequate education, and low mobility limiting earning potential” follow (p. 9). This, in turn, results in very little improvement in income. Thus, the family is forced into poverty, completing the cycle. Since some attribute poverty to a cycle, both a starting point and an ending point are lacking. When one desires to attempt to prevent poverty, it is hard to decipher the correct place to break the cycle. Increasing a mother’s education is going to help very little if she never obtains a job. A better income opportunity is going to be worthless if she has no place in which to place her children. Thus, poverty can seem very hopeless (Moynihan, 1969).

Prevention

Prevention, when viewed from the poverty cycle, includes three components. The first principle deals with early prevention. This occurs before poverty ever begins. Rehabilitation is the second factor and involves treatment of the person who has been wounded by poverty. The third aspect is improvement which transpires when the person is not able to go through the first two prevention components. Each factor of prevention can be focused on different age groups. For example, early prevention works best with the young children and their parents. If their parents do not have a positive outlook on escaping poverty, then the children most likely will not either. Rehabilitation occurs normally with middle-aged adults. Most likely, prevention did not occur or it was not successful. Lastly, amelioration usually takes place with the elderly, “the physically and

mentally disabled, and those for whom prevention and rehabilitation [were] ineffective” (Moynihan, 1969, p. 9).

However, before prevention of any type can take place, awareness must first occur. Society needs to be aware of the high expenses of poverty: “its terrors, its continuing stability, the shame and humiliation, the hunger, [and] the lack of any sense of stability or belonging” (Books, 1998, p. 16). In the educational realm, some schools, which specialize in reaching poverty-stricken students, encourage their staff to personally visit the homeless shelters. This not only builds a relationship with the students but also creates a real awareness of what some teens and children go through on a daily basis (Books, 1998). Once awareness has occurred, society’s perception of what is considered acceptable must be changed. For example, marriage, instead of cohabitation, needs to become the norm. Family values, such as a hard work ethic, love, and support, need to increase (Wilson, 1997).

Even in the midst of poverty, prevention can occur. For example, if social, academic, and emotional aspects of children’s lives are improved, then children’s cognitive functioning will be normal at age six. In addition, in a 1980 study done by Schweinhart and Weikart, a group of Head Start children were closely observed until they reached the age of sixteen. They discovered that those teens that participated in Head Start as a young child developed socially. Furthermore, fewer of the Head Start participants attended special academic classes or had to repeat a grade. Not only did they have higher social skills than those who did not participate in Head Start, but more of them also held part-time, after-school jobs (Anastaiow, 1982).

Prevention must also be made in the area of the teenage mother. A large percentage of this prevention must take place inwardly in the girl. For example, the counselor working with teenage mothers must realize even when the adolescents are placed in a position where they are out of the bad environment, they are still very much emotionally connected to those who live in those communities. Musick (1993) gives several instances where a teenage mother was placed into a good environment only to purposefully choose pregnancy again. She explains the adolescent's decision by stating that even when the girl is helped, she is emotionally connected to those in her life, such as her mother and grandmother. When those women are taken away from her, she longs for the familiarity of the old situation. Even though the young mother is in a better situation, she will often times turn to a sexual relationship in order to get pregnant, thus placing her back in the home of her mother. Those things are familiar to her and comfortable. Thus, in order to break the cycle of poverty, one must help the adolescent mother change inwardly. In addition, the teenage mother must have support. Sadly, this often does not come from the family. Sometimes the mother, grandmothers, and aunts are jealous of the young girl's attempt to arise out of poverty. They, too, desire to escape the endless cycle but are unable. The older female relatives then envy the young female's progress. Other times, the family is just unable to give that support.

Once some adolescent mothers receive jobs, they are plagued by guilt from family. They receive calls at work or desperate pleas asking for help in assisting with bills and children. Other times, the welfare check of the family goes down because the teen mother begins to work. This also causes some of the family not to support the new

changes. As a result, the teenage mother must often seek support from elsewhere, such as a supportive teacher or mentor, in order to rise above poverty (Musick, 1993).

Just because a child is born into poverty does not automatically mean that she will become a teenage mother. Some teens are working hard and excelling in school. Others are spending time with mentors in order to gain a positive role model. It is becoming more likely that those females who become pregnant in high school are more likely to graduate from high school than those pregnant teens a few years ago (Books, 1998).

The U.S. government has also put programs together in order to decrease the number of children and teenagers living in poverty. For example, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was organized in 1996. This organization seeks to do four things. The first two purposes are to “[assist] families so they may care for their children in their own homes and [end] the dependence of needy parents on the government” (National Conference, 2004, para. 41). In addition, TANF intends to “prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families” (National Conference, 2004, para. 41). The states have the options to direct their TANF funds in the direction in which they desire. Thus, they can focus these funds on teens and children (National Conference, 2004).

The government can also help prevent poverty in their efforts to target the needs of the educational system. The McKinney Act of 1990 and 1994 asserts that all children and youth, including those in poverty and homeless situations, have the same public access to education and services as those children who come from higher income homes. On top of that, this law affirms that these children must be allowed either to finish the

school year in their district or to move to the future school in the next area where they will be living. The option that is best for the child is the one that is to be carried out. The children not only are allowed to continue to receive equal education but are to be provided with transportation and school meals (Books, 1998).

Since the level of education has a large impact on the economic status of a family, federal and state policies are coming up with opportunities for low-income parents to obtain a higher education. Hence, low-income students are better able to access financial aid. This is as a result of tax subsidies. Further, attempts need to be made to help low-income parents with child care expenses. This is essential if parents are going to be able to obtain a degree. In addition, "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides policymakers with the opportunity to support education for low-income parents" (Sider, 1999, para 9). Head Start endeavors to encourage higher education in the future generation. Those children who participate in Head Start are more likely to obtain a high school diploma and go to college. Thus, in order to complete this, Head Start funding must be protected (NCCP, 2004).

Special schools also exist in order to counter the effects of poverty. One such example is the "Thomas J. Pappas Regional Education Center in the Phoenix area" (Books, 1998, p. 17). Pappas serves students up to the eighth grade who are homeless or dwelling in very difficult living situation. This school efficiently equips the staff with the knowledge of the children's backgrounds as well as the necessary items to motivate these children. The children are under the same teachers and staff on a daily basis, thus providing stability in a normally unpredictable life. The staff prepares the lessons realizing that the following day, every child may not return. In addition, to the staff's

preparedness, Pappas also seeks to meet the physical needs of the students. Students receive two meals, snack, clothing, and toiletries, if needed. In addition, if the family is in need, the school provides food for the families; furthermore, “a medical clinic staffed by a full-time nurse and volunteer pediatricians also attends to the health needs of homeless children and provides a place for students to rest or nap if they have been wandering the streets at night” (Books, 1998, p. 17). At other like-minded schools, the staff seeks to halt the effects of poverty in teens and children by providing emotional support. At the Benjamin Franklin Day Elementary School in Seattle, the principal expects his teachers to go the extra mile in loving the children, whether that is by a hug or smile. What keeps these schools running is “remarkable administrators with strong commitments to destitute and homeless children” (Books, 1998, p. 19).

In conclusion, regardless of where the prevention is occurring, a few elements must be involved. People must be willing to be committed to seeing these children and teens escape the cycle of poverty. They must dedicate themselves to this vision. This, of course, will many times require volunteering. In addition, teachers and principals must step up in the educational realm. And furthermore, the community must get involved (Books, 1998). Around 13 million children and teens suffer from poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This problem will not diminish by itself. It takes active involvement.

From a Christian standpoint, the Bible gives the church instruction regarding the poor. When Mary washes Jesus’ feet in at the home of Simon the Leper, Jesus instructs his disciples that they will always have the poor with them (Matthew 26:12). James defines the church’s involvement with the poor as providing for the orphans and the widows (James 1:27). Regarding poverty, Christ commands his disciples:

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

(Matthew 25:37-40)

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