

A RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

The Lived Experience of Poverty Among Children



Introduction

Even at a young age, children living in low-income households have an understanding of poverty and their family's struggle to meet their basic needs.

They are aware of the stereotypes about poor people and the stigma that comes with being labelled 'poor'.

Poverty can have a big impact on children's day-to-day lives, holding them back from taking part in important childhood activities that many others take for granted.

The impact of poverty

As well as being deprived of basics such as food, clothes, electricity and healthcare, children from low-income households can miss out on other aspects of childhood enjoyed by those from more well-off families such as toys, holidays and birthday celebrations.

Not having the 'right' brand of clothes or shoes, the newest toys or the latest technology can set them apart from their peers – putting them at risk of bullying for being different.

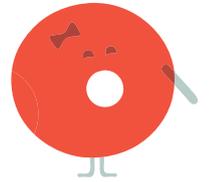


Emotional and psychological wellbeing

Poverty can have serious psychological and emotional effects on children, leaving them with feelings of worthlessness, failure, and a lack of belief in themselves.

They can experience sadness, shame, jealousy, fear, frustration and anger, particularly when they compare themselves to friends and classmates.

Fear of crime and violence in the community and worry about family members' health and safety can add to their distress.



Children living in families without much money are often treated with little respect and find it difficult to fit in as they are made to feel inferior and different.

Friends and social life

Poverty-related bullying is a main source of stress and some children face exclusion by their peers because they are 'poor'.

Children can also miss out on opportunities to socialise because they don't take part in things like sport and their family can't afford to pay for the fees or uniforms.

Making and keeping friends can be hard, too. Some children keep their economic situation secret from friends so they don't have to admit that they can't do things that cost money. Some children, though, will be open about their parents' economic struggles.

Schooling

Poverty can limit a child's enjoyment of school and their ability to participate in school life. This is of particular concern because a high-quality education is a key way for them to escape poverty in the future.

Not being able to afford the proper school uniform or other items such as stationery or the cost to attend school trips can mark them as different from their peers, putting them at risk of stigma and bullying.

Children living in low income households also face a technology divide that means they have limited access to technology and computers to finish homework.

Adults and teachers can have lower expectations of children from poorer neighbourhoods and less faith in their ability to succeed.

Research has shown that if a child comes to believe the negative stereotypes around poverty, this can have an impact on how they see themselves and their hopes for the future.

While some children remain hopeful, recognising education and employment as a way out of poverty, they also know there are some big hurdles for them to overcome.

Family

Family relationships and conflict can be a major source of stress and unhappiness and a stressful home life can lead to behavioural and academic problems at school.

Even young children can worry about their parents trying to make ends meet.

Some children offer to help with money from their own piggy banks or avoid asking for their parents for money because they know the answer will be 'no' or that it will add to the burden.

Housing

Children living in poverty often experience unstable housing, overcrowding and a lack of privacy which can be a big source of distress. Their neighbourhoods, too, may lack safe places to play, be prone to violence and crime, and have poor transport.

As a result of the shame they feel about their home, children may avoid inviting friends over which can have an impact on developing friendships.

Coping

Children find different ways to cope with the challenges of living in poverty, for example they might downplay their own needs and wants so there is less financial pressure on their parents.

Support from relatives and friends can also help. This can be in the form of second hand clothing or attending social outings courtesy of a friend's parents.

Good friendships, too, can provide protection from being bullied.

Some children believe a lack of money helps them to value what is important in life and that it causes families and communities to pull together to support each other.

Conclusion

Poverty can reach into all aspects of a child's everyday life, including at home, at school and socially.

However, it can affect children differently. Many, but not all, children have limited access to school or social activities or feel burdened by their families' financial worries.

Children's views on their experiences of poverty should be listened to and considered important in the development of any policies designed to address child poverty.

Reference

1. Monks, H. (2018). Engaging with children's voices on poverty: The value of their lived experience. Retrieved from <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/>