**Reasons behind poverty**

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Why the poor remain poor is a question that requires a look at linkages of poverty. The culture of poverty passes poverty from one generation to the next through the process of socialization. The poor lack skills and so get low wages or are unemployed. Poverty and low wages benefit the rich. The existence of poverty makes sure some low paid jobs get done. The stigma attached to claiming benefits means many go unclaimed. The inadequacy of the welfare state means benefits are too low to eliminate poverty. The welfare states favor the better off. This creates an excluded underclass. The poor lack power to change their position. The generosity of the welfare state creates a dependency culture and a work-shy underclass.

Wealth, poverty and welfare discussion raises an important question about poverty and value judgment. Defining and measuring poverty is inevitably a value-laden exercise. The definitions, measurements and explanations of poverty, and the social policies adopted to tackle the problem, rely to some extent on the value judgments of researchers and politicians. For example, if you adopt an absolute definition of poverty. Then you will find very little in modern society.

The solutions to poverty often reflect the political/ideological values of the researchers and their different interpretations of a similar range of evidence. The role of the welfare state in relation to poverty ultimately rests on judgements about what kind of society we should have. The assumptions that the problem of poverty is primarily created by the nature of the poor themselves, and therefore the poor need harsh, punitive policies like cuts in benefits as an incentive for them to change their behavior.

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More liberal researchers are less likely to blame individuals for poverty. They are more likely to focus on the structural constraints on the poor arising from the unequal nature of society. Such researchers are likely to see solutions to poverty in providing opportunities for the poor to escape their poverty, through means like the national minimum wage, better education, better health care, more job opportunities, more children care support and higher pensions. These different analyses and policy to solutions often rest on a similar base of evidence, but the different values of the researchers lead to different interpretations of that evidence.

Does this mean that poverty research is therefore so value laden as to be pointless? The answer is ‘No’, because the intense sociological, political and media debates about the definition, measurement and solutions to poverty have overcome the value judgments of individual researchers. Poverty research, regardless of values, has certainly exposed the extent to which many people in a society face social exclusion, and are cut off from what most of us take for granted as a normal life. This alone makes it a worthwhile and productive research area.

While the welfare state has provided some assistance to the poor, widespread deprivation remains. Poverty persists, some argue because benefit levels are too low to lift people out of poverty. From this view point, the welfare state is not generous enough. This has led to an alternative view of the underclass.

Sociologists like Frank Field and Peter Townsend suggest this underclass consists of groups like the elderly retired lone parents, the long term unemployed, the disabled and long-term sick. These groups are forced to rely on inadequate state benefits which are too low to give them an acceptable standard of living.

Structural approach explains poverty as arising from the inequality of capitalist society, which is an unequal distribution of wealth, income and power. Poverty is seen as an aspect of social inequality and not merely an individual problem of poor people.

The Marxist approach such as that adopted by Miliband and Vestergaard and Ressler suggest, wealth is concentrated in the hands of the ruling class, and this general class inequality of poverty is the inevitable result of capitalism, The privileged position of the wealthy ultimately rests on working class poverty. The threat of poverty and unemployment motivates workers, and provides a pool of cheap labor for the capitalist’s class. The existence of the non-working poor helps to keep wages down, by providing a pool of reserved labor which threatens the jobs of the non-poor should their demands become excursively high. Poverty divides the working class, by separating the poor from the non-poor working class, and preventing the development of working-class unity and a class consciousness that might threaten the stability of the capitalist system. A dynamic balance is the need. And to further clarify concepts and prospects.

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