

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Notes

POVERTY

Introduction

Introduction

According to World Bank, poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival and dignity.

Poverty also includes low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better quality of life.

In simple terms, poverty means the inability to secure minimum human needs or the basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter.

What is Poverty?

What is poverty and how should it be defined? Poverty is a situation that gives rise to a feeling of a social phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to fulfill even its basic necessities of life. Poverty is a condition where the basic needs of a family, like food, shelter, clothing, and education are not fulfilled. It

can lead to other problems like poor literacy, unemployment, malnutrition, etc.

Definition of Poverty

Gillin and Gillin: Poverty is that condition in which a person either because of inadequate income or unwise expenditures, does not maintain a scale of living high enough to provide for his physical and mental efficiency and to enable him and his natural dependents to function usefully according to the standards of the society of which he is a member.

According to Adam Smith, A person is rich or poor according to the degree in which he can afford to enjoy the necessities, the conveniences and the amusements of life.

Goddard says, "Poverty is insufficient supply of those things which are requisite for an individual to maintain himself and those dependent upon him in his health and vigour".

Poverty Line

Many countries have an official poverty line to define poverty. The first Director General of FAO (food and Agricultural Organization of the UNO) was the first to explain poverty on the basis of 'starvation line' in 1945. According to him, an intake of less than 2300 calories of food per person per day, was considered the line of starvation and this has been transformed into "poverty line".

The Indian Planning Commission defined "poverty line" on the basis of nutritional requirements of 2400 calories per person per day for rural areas and 2100 calories per person per day for urban areas.

Sociologists and researchers have favored two different approaches to poverty: absolute poverty and relative poverty.

Types of Poverty: Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty

These two approaches, absolute poverty and relative poverty, are quite common in any in-depth study of poverty.

Absolute Poverty:

Right from the 19th century, some researchers are trying to fix some yardstick for measuring poverty in precise terms. Ideally speaking such a yardstick would help us establish a fixed level of poverty, known as the “poverty line” below which poverty begins and above which it ends. Such a yardstick is believed to be universal and would apply to all societies. This concept of poverty is known as “absolute poverty”.

Absolute poverty is often known as “*subsistence poverty*” for it is based on assessments of minimum subsistence requirements or basic “physical needs” such as food, clothing, shelter, health requirements etc. Some concepts of absolute poverty would even include the idea of “*basic cultural needs*”. This broadens the idea of basic human needs beyond the level of physical survival; Drewnowski and Scott include education, security, leisure and recreation in their category of “*basic cultural needs*”. Therefore, if a person’s income or consumption expenditure is so low that he cannot live at a minimum subsistence level, he is said to be absolutely poor. It basically indicates deprivation of some sort resulting in hunger and starvation. People are said to be in absolute poverty if their earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of physical efficiency. Such minimum necessities are usually measured in terms of minimum nutritional requirements.

Relative Poverty:

The difficulties involved in the application of the concept of “*absolute poverty*”, made some researchers abandon the concept altogether. In place of absolute standards, they have developed the idea of relative standards that is; standards that are relative to a particular time and place. In this way, the idea of absolute poverty has been replaced by the idea of relative poverty. “Relative poverty is measured in terms of judgments by members of a particular society of what is considered as a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and

styles of life according to the conventions of the day. Just as conventions change time to time, and place to place, so will definitions of poverty". In a rapidly changing world, definitions of poverty based on relative standards will be constantly changing. Hence, Peter Townsend has suggested that any definition of must be *"related to the needs and demands of a changing society."*

The relative poverty concept indicates inequalities of income. The people of low-income groups are relatively poor as compared to the people whose incomes are high. Here poverty is viewed in terms of inequality between the poorest group and the rest of the community. It is to be noted that relative poverty cannot be eradicated without transfers from the rich to the poor. At the same time, the relatively poor may be living above the minimum subsistence level.

Who are the Poor?

The face of poverty is diverse and ever changing, so it is difficult to present a profile of 'the poor'. What we do know is that people in some social groups are more likely to be poor than others, including children, women, older people and ethnic minorities. In particular, people who are disadvantaged or discriminated against in other aspects of life have an increased chance of being poor. For example, recent migrants from outside the European Union face higher poverty rates than indigenous European populations. Many developing countries have large sections of their population living in extreme poverty.

Children:

In a variety of ways, children who live in poverty tend to have worse health than those who do not. They are more likely to have a low birth weight, to be injured (and killed) in a road accident (because they are more likely to be pedestrians and less likely to have access to a safe play area or garden), to suffer abuse and self-harm or to attempt suicide. Poor children are also less likely to do well at school and are far more likely to become poor adults.

Women:

Women are more likely to be poor than men. The causes of women's poverty are complex. One important element concerns the gendered division of labour both inside and outside the home. The burden of domestic labour and the responsibility of caring for children and relatives still fall disproportionately on

women. This has an important effect on their ambitions and ability to work outside the home. It means that they are far more likely than men to be in part-time, rather than full-time, paid employment and they earn less as a result.

Older People:

Many people who may have been reasonably well paid during their working lives experience a sharp reduction in income (and status) when they retire, especially if they did not, or could not afford to, invest in a private pension while working. The ageing of the population is putting increasing strain on state pension provision. As life expectancy increases, so too does the number of older people in the population.

Ethnic Minorities:

Members of ethnic minority groups are also disproportionately represented among the poor. Employment rates differ substantially across ethnic minority groups. There is also a high degree of labour market and occupational segregation. Ethnic minorities are also more likely to have poorly paid jobs, struggle at school, live in deprived areas and in poor quality housing and to suffer health problems.

Poverty and Social Mobility

Most research into poverty in the past has focused on people's entry into poverty and has measured aggregate levels of poverty year by year. Less attention has traditionally been paid to the 'life-cycle' of poverty over time. A widely held view of poverty is that it is a permanent condition. Yet being poor does not necessarily mean being mired in poverty. A substantial proportion of people in poverty at any one time have either enjoyed superior conditions of life previously or can be expected to climb out of poverty at some time in the future. Recent research has revealed a significant amount of mobility into and out of poverty: a surprising number of people are successful in escaping poverty, and at the same time a larger number than previously realized live in poverty at some point during their lives.

While climbing out of poverty is surely fraught with challenges and obstacles, research findings indicate that movement into and out of poverty is more fluid than is often thought. Poverty is not simply the result of social forces acting on a passive population. Even individuals in severely disadvantaged positions can

seize on opportunities to better their positions; the power of human agency to bring about a change should not be underestimated. Social policy can play an important role in maximizing the action potential of disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Poverty and Welfare in a changing World

Changes in the occupational structure and the global economy have contributed to the trend towards inequality in Britain, the United States and elsewhere. A decline in the manual workforce had an important effect both on patterns of income distribution and on unemployment. It is often the case that workers in unskilled or semiskilled jobs have found it difficult to re-enter a rapidly changing labour market where educational qualifications and technological competence are in increasing demand. Although there has been a marked expansion of opportunities in the service sector, much of this has been for positions that are low-paid and with little prospect for advancement.

In the twenty-first century, welfare debates are not simply about material prosperity, but about the overall well-being of the population. Social policy is concerned with promoting social cohesion, fostering networks of interdependence and maximizing people's abilities to help themselves. Rights and responsibilities are taking on new importance- not only for those at the bottom attempting to move off welfare and into work, but also for those at the top whose wealth should not entitle them to evade civic, social and tax obligations. Critics say labour should have done more to tackle spiralling inequalities at the top. This issue is not as distant from attempts to reduce poverty as it may seem at first sight. For if the rich paid higher levels of taxation, not only would they be living up to their social responsibilities, but that extra money could be used to help the poor-for example, to make more impact on reducing child poverty than the government has so far been able to achieve.

Summary

Poverty remains widespread within the affluent nations. There are two methods of assessing poverty: one involves the notion of 'subsistence poverty/absolute poverty, which is a lack of the basic resources needed to maintain health and effective bodily functioning. The other, 'relative poverty, involves assessing the gaps between the living conditions of some groups and those enjoyed by the majority of a population. Inequalities between the rich

and poor widened dramatically in spite of Government policies and transformation of the occupational structure.