

What You Should Know About Poverty



Poverty is defined as the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support. In the United States, we measure poverty in a number of ways.

The first versions of poverty measures developed were poverty thresholds, created in the 1960's. These are income amounts used by the U.S. Census Bureau to determine poverty status and vary based on size of a household and age of its members. Currently, the poverty thresholds range from \$12,228 for a single person to \$49,721 for a household of nine or more. Although this measure is still used, it is outdated—assuming that food is one third of a family's budget—for example.

The poverty guidelines are issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services, and help determine eligibility for certain federal programs (like SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, National School Lunch Program, and others). Different programs have different eligibility guidelines. For example, to qualify for SNAP, your household must have a gross monthly income at 130 percent of poverty or less. Therefore, for a single mom with two kids, her income cannot exceed \$2,213 a month.

The supplemental poverty measure was developed in the 1990's. This measure takes into account items such as child care expenses, money from public benefits, and other “real world” expenses such as geographic differences in cost of living. The U.S. Census Bureau releases both the original and supplemental poverty measures yearly.

Who is more susceptible to poverty?

Children under 18, people of color, and families headed by a single mother have the greatest rates of poverty.

What are the contributing factors to being in poverty?

Lack of education, unstable family situations, and lower-wage work all contribute to poverty.

What are the effects of poverty?

Those in poverty have greater chances of food insecurity, chronic health problems, mental illness, lack of education, and being involved in or affected by criminal activity.

Are there different types of poverty?

There is situational poverty, which is caused by an unexpected crisis such as divorce, health issues, or a disaster. This is usually temporary. There is also generational poverty, defined as two or more generations born into poverty. This is more long-term, and often more challenging to escape.

Where do we see poverty?

Poverty used to be primarily in the inner cities and in rural areas. However, there has been a rapid increase in poverty in the suburbs. This is a trend that has been growing since 2000.

How many people are in poverty?

In the United States, 40.6 million people or 12.7 percent of the population lived in poverty in 2016. In Texas, the rate is higher; about 14.3 percent of people live in poverty.

What's the connection between poverty and food insecurity?

Poverty is not the ultimate determinant of food insecurity, but is one of many associated factors. The majority of people who are food insecure do not live in poverty, and the majority of people who live in poverty are not food insecure.

