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www.afgazad.com

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The Global Reserach

Intergenerational Poverty in America

by Devon DB
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Poverty today is greater than ever, with about 1/6th of the American population living in such conditions, according to the US Bureau of Census.

"There are over 4 million more Americans living in poverty than previously reported and poor people make up 15.7 percent of the population instead of 14.3 percent, according to new figures for 2009 released by the US Census Bureau" (See Barry Grey, [US Census Bureau: Rising Levels of Poverty in America](#), wsws.org, 2011-01-07)

It is a highly talked about and debated topic, yet it seems that the plight of those suffering from *intergenerational* poverty is ignored. Whereas poverty is “the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; condition of being poor; indigence,”[1] which could potentially be limited to one person, intergenerational poverty is the state of *generations* of a family being impoverished.

Intergenerational poverty mainly stems from education and economics. In terms of education, being well-educated lowers the chances of being in poverty. Even having only a high school diploma or equivalent can help as “those in households headed by persons with no high school degree are the most likely to enter poverty of any educational grouping.”[2] And when one factors in that “urban schools systematically receive less qualified teachers than their suburban counterparts”[3], one can assume they will not receive a quality education, thus having a greater chance of being impoverished. One can also assume that the children of these urban-dwellers also will be impoverished seeing as how “social and economic deprivation during childhood and adolescence can have a lasting effect on individuals, making it difficult for children who grow up

in low-income families to escape poverty when they become adults.”[4] Thus the cycle of intergenerational poverty begins. The parent, having been the victim of circumstances, was unable to attain a quality education, and thus was unable to find a well-paying job and wound up in poverty. The child, still living in that same area, is also suffering from not having a quality education and the results are the same: more poverty.

Economically, it is a fact that children who are born poor are likely to remain poor. According to a 2009 study of the National Center for Children in Poverty, “children who were born to families at the top of the income structure have the highest probability of being in the highest income strata as adults, while those born at the bottom have the highest probability of being poor as adults.”[5]

A cycle of poverty that starts with the adult continues for generations and only gets worse, seeing as how workers’ wages have not increased since the 1970s. Also, this decrease in wages is also exacerbated by globalization, in which companies pit workers from all around the world against one another in what results as a race to the bottom in terms of wages, which only serves to increase the number of impoverished people globally.

Helping to end intergenerational poverty should be a serious matter for every government, seeing as how they would benefit from it.

Spending money on eliminating poverty can be looked at as an investment “which generated returns to society over time in the form of higher real gross domestic product (GDP), reduced expenditures on crime or health care problems, reduced costs borne by crime victims or those in poor health, and improvements in everyone’s quality of life in a wide variety of other ways as well.”[6]

Thus ending poverty helps the health of the economy and saves the government and community money in terms of not needing to aid the impoverished, as well as allowing people to reach their full potential.

Ending poverty truly aids everyone, and a full long-term plan needs to be developed to effectively break the cycle.

References:

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3: www.stanford.edu/~sloeb/papers/TeacherSorting.pdf

4: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_909.pdf

5: Ibid.

6: http://npc.umich.edu/publications/u/working_paper07-04.pdf