

Understanding the culture of poverty

Objectives

- Discuss strategies to increase our skills and knowledge
- Raise our individual and group awareness about biases
- Enhance the understanding of children and families from poverty to assist in strengthening interactions.
- Understand what constitutes as neglect

What is culture?

Pattern of behaviors, thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group and the ability to transmit the above succeeding generations.

Culture gives context & meaning

- A filter which people process their experiences and events in their lives
- Influences people's values, actions and expectations of themselves
- Impact's people's perceptions and expectations of others

Definition of poverty

According to the dictionary:

The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions,

According to The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive

The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, they are considered in poverty.

Guideline & statistics

2015 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia	
Persons in Family/Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$11,770
2	\$15,930
3	\$20,090
4	\$24,250
5	\$28,410
6	\$32,570
7	\$36,730
8	\$40,890

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,160 for each additional person.

20,000 people homeless in NE. every night
2,000 people in Omaha

3.5 million people nationally
1.35 million are children
31.1 million in poverty

30+% of homeless families have open case
for child abuse or neglect.

Nationally 50% of homeless women &
children are fleeing domestic violence

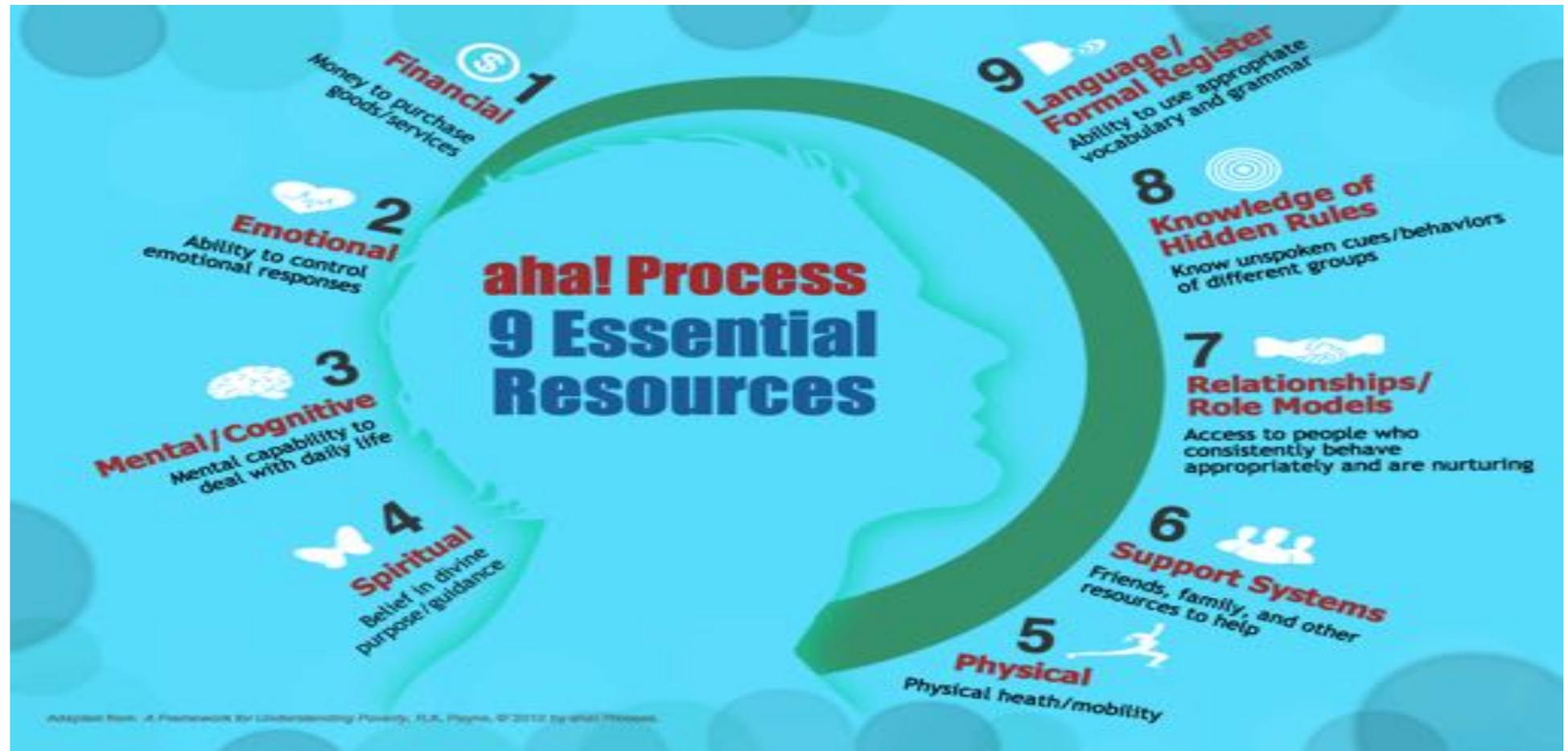
16% suffer mental illness
30% suffer substance abuse & addiction

Dr. Ruby Payne's definition

Understanding poverty as the varying degrees to which a person lacks any one of following nine resources: To make permanent, positive change in people's lives.

These resources (or the lack of them) have an impact on a person's ability to handle stressful situations.

EX. lottery winners who lack other resources and spend all of their winnings rather quickly.



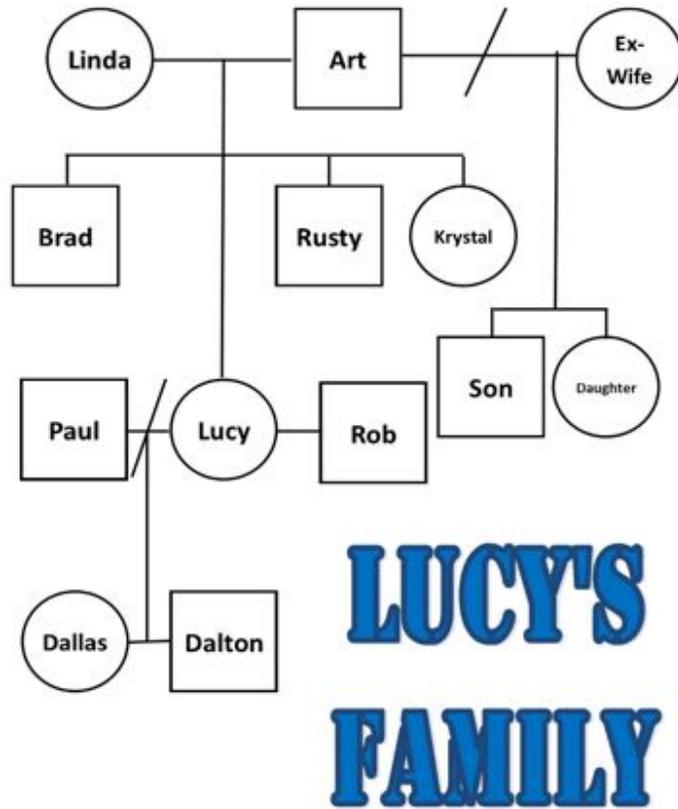
Types of poverty

- Generational: Living in poverty for two generations or more, long term poverty necessitates a cultural norm and skills which differ from the norms and skills of middle class.
- Situational: Clearly connected to a major life event such as divorce, death, illness, or a natural disaster that eliminates resources.
- Situational poverty is temporary, and individuals in situational poverty probably have more resources to draw on than those in generational poverty.

Keep in mind

- Be aware of your own prejudices/bias...
- Many of the attitudes clients, patients and employees bring with them are an integral part of their culture and belief system. Just as ours are!
- An understanding of poverty may lessen anger and frustration some people feel when working with those in poverty.
- Flexible thinking is the ability to remain constructive and positive.
- We all need spontaneity to cope with things like; the car won't start; day care quits with no notice, sanction letter from public assistance; This usually creates a crisis mode.
- Grasping abstract concepts, doing future planning, thinking ahead, and anticipating what has not happened yet is a complex brain function which requires time, quiet, and concentration.
- Life in poverty is unpredictable, and help is not just a phone call away.

Case study



We will revisit Lucy later...

Childhood:

- Unstable environment/pets/belongings
- Domestic Violence between parents
- Marital conflict with parenting practices
- Physical abuse/discipline/yelling
- Parents divorced
- Working poor while parents married and then into further poverty
- All children had IEP's in school
- Runaway
- Drugs (brother)
- Lack of basic needs
- Dropped out at 15

Adulthood:

- Meets husband and moves in at 16
- Married at 17 -move into own place
- Domestic Violence every aspect of power & control
- Unstable environment
- First child (18) second child (19)
- Separate about 9 months (children 3 & 4)
- Both children have IEP's
- Get back together (about a year)
- Divorce

Complexity of the situation: Poverty is usually not the only thing happening:

- Unemployment
- Transportation
- Substance abuse
- Learning problems
- Unsafe/no housing
- Lack of parenting
- Domestic violence
- Mental health history
- Trauma history
- No family/social supports
- Educational status
- Prior history with CPS
- Abuse history

Characteristics Of Poverty

these statements are patterns not absolutes

- Survival orientation: Little room for abstract, academic topics, you talk about people and relationships.
- Polarized thinking: Black or white - very little room for gray
- Living space is smaller
- More conflict; more active protection of turf & belongings
- Unexpected additional financial resources (income) need to be shared & spent quickly
- Belief in fate: Destiny & fate make or break you: not choices
- Background noise: TV always on, people talk over one another in conversations
- Importance of personality: You bring your personality, because it is what you have (if good & entertaining - you are valued)
- Significance of entertainment: Important to get away for survival and entertainment is for escapism.
- Importance of relationship

Impacts of Living in Poverty: adults

- Depression & Anxiety
- Reduced literacy – problems reading/writing
- Increased mobility = decreased stability
- Ongoing stress
- Unable to meet basic needs
- Difficulty maintaining relationships
- Physical health challenges

Poverty's Impact on Child Well-Being

These factors are usually present in abuse/neglect cases as well...

- Infant deaths
- Low-birth weight
- Birth complications
- Poor nutrition
- Chronic health conditions
- Stunted growth
- Environmental toxins
- Poor quality education
- High drop-out rates
- Teen pregnancy
- Criminal activity
- Brain development

Poverty can place children at risk for:

- Cognitive difficulties: poor academic performance, higher drop out rates
- Social and emotional problems: anxiety, difficulty getting along with others, boundaries in relationships, and low self-esteem
- Behavioral problems: engagement in high risk activities like, smoking, drinking, and early sexual activity
- Challenges in adulthood: poor health, lower earnings, criminal behavior

Child Neglect & Poverty

- Significant confounding factor in defining child neglect.
- Most impoverished families manage to provide strong, nurturing care for their children, but looks/sounds different.
- Lack adequate/safe housing, health care, and child care. (Basic needs)
- Difficult to establish parents' accountability for providing basic needs, in the face of inadequate income, and the absence of accessible, affordable medical and supportive social services.

Child neglect

Defining neglect is complicated by the necessity of considering the following:

- What are the indispensable, minimally adequate types of care that children require?

By law it is clothing, food, shelter, care

- What actions or failures on the part of the parents or caretaker constitute neglectful behavior?
- Intentionally neglecting to obtain any of the above, not providing medical care when needed...
- What are the effects of the actions or inaction on the child's health, safety, and development?
- Is the family's situation a result of poverty, or a result of parental neglect?

Types of neglect: physical

- Refusal, failure or delay to provide treatment or care for a physical injury, illness, medical condition, or impairment.
- Abandonment: Failure to arrange for reasonable care/supervision. Failure to make whereabouts known.
- Supervision: Many circumstances (left alone overnights/whereabouts unknown)
- Environment: Hazards in the home, gang activity...
- Other: Driving reckless/intoxicated with children in the vehicle...

More on environment & neglect

- The dangerous conditions of many poor, urban neighborhoods pose threats to children's safety and well-being
- Housing may only be affordable in risky neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. (evidence of gangs, drugs, and criminal activity.

Example: For older children who seek greater freedom outside of the home, the community may pose significant hazards.

- Not understanding their rights

Example: Landlords who can evict them without cause. Landlords who balk at making necessary repairs. Leaving them living in hazards conditions

Types of neglect: emotional

Domestic violence

- Failure to provide necessary mental health services, in which the parent/ guardian had reason to be aware of the existence and seriousness but did not attempt to intervene. (severe depression, suicide attempt, self-mutilation)
- Inattention to the child's developmental or emotional need
- Chronically applying expectations clearly inappropriate in relation to the child's age or level of development

Poverty tends to co-occur with other risks: negative life effects

- Marital distress
- Single parenthood
- Teen pregnancy
- Exposure to violence
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Parent psychopathology

Different is just different

- Communication
- Problem solving
- Family relationships & relatives
- Owning property & priorities of ownership
- Parenting

Parenting: looks & sounds very different

Low-income parents are more likely to use “negative” parenting strategies.

- Limited parental responsiveness
- Harsh / coercive parenting
- Less vocal with infants
- Lax supervision

Psychological Realities

Limited time and emotional availability to offer children

- Work
- Interaction with public and private agencies
- General time requirements of doing laundry outside the home or taking public transportation to simply buy groceries
- Concentration on relationship

Challenges to protecting children from harm: Parents are also keenly aware that money buys greater protection for children

- Protection from bad neighborhoods
- Protection from sub-standard housing
- Protection from poor quality day care
- Protection from poor quality schools

Psychological Realities of Parenting

- Cumulative effects of poverty can influence children's behavior, development, and health issues, which leads to parent not understanding or handling behaviors/development appropriately
- The impact of facing serious difficulties in providing the necessities of life for their children

Example: Parents may worry about paying the rent (and not get evicted) or won't have enough money for diapers or milk for their baby at the end of the month.

A limited or foreshortened sense of children's futures

Ex. Some parents may be concerned less with child going to college and more about whether or not their child will survive childhood.

5 Registers of language:

Knowing the research on language by economic class can allow us to better understand the importance of language.

- Frozen/fixed: - Always the same- Wedding Vows/bible, anthem (requires no feedback) "all visitors must report to the office"
- Formal-: Official or ceremonial setting. "Court", business meeting (rigid and set vocabulary)
- Consultative: Seeking assistance, between supervisor/worker, most cases one is deemed more experienced. (lawyer vs client, doctor vs patient)
- Casual-: friends, general and not specific, dependent upon non-verbal assists/ syntax is often incomplete (relaxed and focused on just getting information out. Slang usually present.
- Intimate- Language: close relationship (lovers, twins) "inside jokes", terms of endearment, mother's pet names to children, lovers and smooches.

Registers of language

Transition from one language register to an adjacent is usually acceptable but skipping one or more levels is usually considered inappropriate and even offensive.

Exist no matter where you are. Hold power in different settings.

Ex. Asking for a loan in casual register - he/she will respond best to formal register. Yet formal register spoken in poverty almost certainly won't bring the same power.

Honor the language people bring with them while building a bridge to formal. Middle-class structures tend to use formal register; it's beneficial for that register to be nurtured. (mirror language)

Hidden rules of the class

- The unspoken cues & habits of a group
- Generally we recognize this for racial & ethnic groups but not economic groups
- These rules become part of your belief system and guide how you behave.
- Relationships can be broken when you do not know the hidden rules.
- Hidden rules can limit your interaction with people who are different from you.
- Individuals bring the hidden rules of the class in which they were raised.

What to learn about communication...

Relationship is the number one priority for people living in poverty – so a lot of decisions are based upon relationship; respect; authenticity

Express appreciation for the story: may not have a beginning, middle and end,
Ask a lot of clarifying questions

Generational poverty: typically use the “casual register” – 800 words and a lot of facial and body language

Behaviors/characteristics in poverty:

Laugh inappropriately

Complete things partially

Physically fight

Sequencing is not valued or used

Argue Loudly

Disorganized

Polarized thinking

Unable to follow direction

Use vulgar language/comments

Appear angry/hostile

Priorities

- Poverty: survival, relationships, entertainment
- Middle Class: work, achievement, material security
- Wealth: political, financial, social connections

Comparisons

Generational poverty:

- Decisions based on needs of entertainment & relationships
- Ability to fight or have someone fight for you
- Money is entertainment and relationships
- The world = 's what is locally around you

Middle Class:

- Decisions are made related to work and achievement
- Ability to use words as tools to negotiate conflict
- Money is for security
- The world is your own nation

Wealth:

- Ramifications of financial, social, and political connections
- Money is for security
- The world is international

Barrier's to getting out of poverty

- Gaining employment: criminal history, lack employment history, experience, lack of education/qualifications
- Ability to manage money –money is to be used for relationships and entertainment
- Not reporting domestic violence: partner not identified when applying for aid
- Fear of being denied services
- Previous encounters
- Fear of being judged
- Ex. reluctant to seek public assistance or disclose they receive it due to repeated suggestions they are lazy and just need to get a job, or poverty is caused by poor spending decisions, bad behavior or lack of moral character.

Moving out of poverty: what does it take?

- Provide structure and choice to govern themselves from dependence to independence
- To move from poverty to middle class, one must give up relationships for achievement.
- Keep in mind what you are asking: change in belief system, culture, way of life, habits, etc. (stages of change)
- Poverty – more than financial resources; Other resources are important in a person's success and the ability to leave poverty and its habits behind.
- Education and relationships is needed to move from poverty. Education provides emotional support, relationships and role models, appropriate adults – teaching and goal setting.
- Patience, time, desire

Cont.

- Plant seeds to grow
- Take baby steps
- Hope changes everything

Final thoughts?

- Take aways
- How will you take this and use in your work?
- In order to effectively work with those in poverty, it is important to develop an awareness and acceptance of their differences.
- Accept people as they are and where they are; genuinely communicate and show your desire to help and assist them.
- What we see as a workable suggestion, may be seen as virtually impossible to those in poverty.
- Use empathy not sympathy
- There is hope but it takes time & resiliency!!
- Choose to be nice!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Evaluation & Thank you