

Perspectives

On Poverty, Policy, & Place

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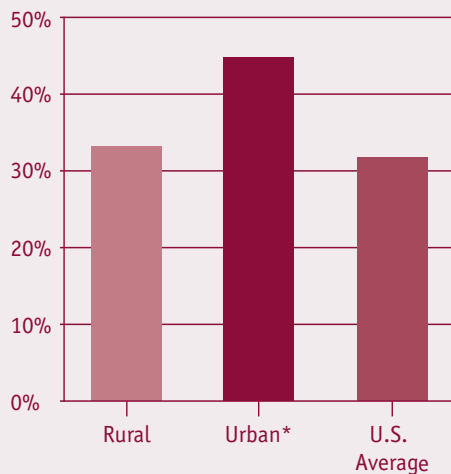
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The Newsletter of the
**RUPRI Rural Poverty
Research Center**

FAST FACT

**Percentage of Children
Living in Families
Where No Parent Has Full-Time,
Year-Round Employment**



*Top 50-city average

Source: 2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book

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This issue presents the findings from several recent RPRC working papers. The studies consider a variety of issues unique to rural areas, from the differing effects of the economy and social programs on poverty, to the effects of social networks on welfare and employment among single mothers, to the social position of mobile home parks in rural communities. The final article looks broadly at the reigning theories of poverty and how they influence community development approaches. All papers are available on the RPRC website (www.rprconline.org).

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Perspectives:

On Poverty, Policy, & Place

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Bylines—Each article in the newsletter features the byline “based on research by...”, which signifies that the article, while written by our editorial staff, has been reviewed and approved by the original researcher. With this approach, we hope to disseminate research to a broad audience in a format that is accessible, reliable, and accurate.

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Inequality and Rural Mobile Home Parks: Life on the Wrong Side of the Tracks

Based on research by Katherine MacTavish

As rural communities are increasingly becoming transformed by upscale development driven by urban sprawl, the social fabric of these towns has evolved in new ways. In but one example, as suburbanization changes the social structure of small towns, personal wealth increasingly becomes a measure of family worth, and with it a rising sense of inequality, either real or imagined.

These social divisions are perhaps no more apparent than in perceptions of mobile home parks. As wealth comes to define family worth, those on the “wrong side of the tracks” risk being excluded geographically and socially from the larger community and the social ties that bind small towns and that are so central to economic success and family well-being.

In her RPRC working paper, “We’re Like the Wrong Side of the Tracks: Upscale Suburban Development, Social Inequality, and Rural Mobile Home Park Residence,” Katherine MacTavish documents the effects of overt and subtle prejudice on rural children and families, finding that the social ramifications of being “outside” a rural community can narrow the life chances of rural children and youth by excluding them from educational and cultural experiences that would otherwise support successful development. With half of the nation’s 8.9 million mobile homes sited in mobile home parks (housing an estimated 5 million children), and three-fourths of these parks in nonmetro settings, the ramifications of social stigma and social isolation are significant.

Prairieview

Located 12 miles from a small city with a population of 100,000, the central Illinois village of “Prairieview” was ripe for suburban development, and indeed its population more than doubled between 1980 and 2000. The new residents tended to be wealthier, younger, and better edu-

cated, and both average household incomes and housing prices increased as the village grew.

In a year-long study beginning in the fall of 1998, MacTavish examined the effects of upscale suburban development on the residents of a nearby mobile home park. Because zoning in the Prairieview area restricted mobile home parks from locating within the municipal limits, the Prairieview mobile home park was situated just outside the village. In 2000, some 1,600 residents in 560 units called the park home.

MacTavish used traditional anthropological methods of participant observation and repeated interviewing, as well as immersing herself in community life, to piece together a picture of life in a mobile home park. She interviewed 85 households, or 15% of the mobile home park residents. She also spent additional time with 16 families with children and youth, including approximately 10 hours of in-home interviews per family.

MacTavish used census data to check the accuracy of demographic similarities or differences between the village and the park that might otherwise have been minimized or exaggerated by park or village respondents.

Wrong Side of the Tracks

Although residents were not asked explicitly about social stigmatization, both adults and youth consistently reported such experiences. One in five respondents in the general sample spontaneously reported being stigma-

As a result of stigma, many park adults simply avoided interactions in Prairieview by working, shopping, worshipping, and pursuing recreational activities outside the village.

Katherine MacTavish is an assistant professor in Human Development and Family Sciences at Oregon State University. The study was funded by USDA-NRI Competitive Grant #9801645.

tized, and residents in 13 of the 16 intensive study households reported such experiences.

In a telling example of the degree of stigmatization, adult respondents tended to avoid mentioning that they lived in the park. As one resident stated, “I never tell anyone where I live. If they ask I say Prairieview. I’ll do almost anything to avoid saying I live in [trailer park]. I’m too embarrassed about it. My boss didn’t even know until the other day, and he was so shocked. He said, ‘You live in [trailer park]!’”

Even though the park residents were homeowners with average household incomes in 2000 of about \$30,000, they were still considered in relative poverty—given that the average household income for Prairieview in 2000 was \$57,574.

As one village official stated, “Most of Prairieview thinks the trailer court is low-income. Most free and reduced lunches in schools are served to children from the trailer court. Most police and ambulance activity comes from the trailer court. Residents there are just never going to pay their way [in taxes] and because of that, the trailer court is the focus of the entire community’s wrath.”

Park Adults Disengaged from Prairieview

As a result of this stigma, many park adults simply avoided interactions in Prairieview by working, shopping, worshipping, and pursuing recreational activities outside the village. For example, 68.1% of park parents reported that they worked outside the area, while 64.4% reported shopping for groceries outside Prairieview. They were also much less likely to turn out for local elections compared with town residents.

Ironically, 82% of park respondents indicated that they preferred living in a small town or rural setting, even though most park families were not benefiting from the hallmark social networks of small-town life.

Although personally hurtful and socially isolating, such treatment, MacTavish notes, can be particularly damaging to children and youth, who absorb such negative messages into their own self images.

Children’s Experiences

MacTavish found that park children and youth bore the brunt of stigmatization, which they experienced daily in the Prairieview schools. These experiences ranged from overt acts, such as name calling (“trailer trash”), to more subtle attitudes and assumptions on the part of students, teachers, and administrators, including lower academic expectations.

As one park mother commented, “They [the Prairieview schools] do consider this [the mobile home park] ‘The Project.’ There’s a difference between those who live here and those who don’t in the way they treat kids. My niece lived here. Then she moved out to a farm. She says the way they treat [them] in school is completely different.”

Another mother had a slightly different take on the treatment of her children in the local schools, and about general assumptions made by Prairieview residents: “We’ve been really lucky—both kids have had great teachers, but they always assume. They assume way too much. At the beginning of last year, I went in to register both my kids. As

soon as I walked in, the principal handed me a lunch waiver form. They assume that because you live in [trailer park] that you qualify for that.”

The students themselves felt the stigma, as this straight A student revealed. “It was like I was assumed to be stupid. Like when the teacher hands back papers and says there were so many A’s and so many B’s. Everyone tries to guess who the A’s are. They never think it could be me. Even when I say I got an A, they’re like, ‘No—it couldn’t be you.’”

Park children and youth bore the brunt of stigmatization, which they experienced daily in the Prairieview schools. These experiences ranged from overt acts, such as name calling (“trailer trash”), to more subtle attitudes and assumptions on the part of students, teachers, and administrators, including lower academic expectations.

Perhaps even more insidious, the stigma risks becoming internalized, as this mother's story reveals. "When we first moved in, we had this group of girls in the [park] yard doing 'Go team go!' and all that. One of our neighbors came over and said, 'You can forget about that—about her making cheerleader. We're from [trailer park], did you forget that?'"

"That's why people only want to live here a few years and then move on," said one mother, "because of the discrimination. Especially those with children, because they know that if they get them out and move them into Prairieview, the kids will suddenly be O.K."

Community Planning

Park children and youth, unlike their parents, cannot avoid engagement in Prairieview, and the daily mental comparisons made by town and park residents can take their toll. Town is where youth attend school each day,

where they may form friendships, and where potentially they spend their leisure time. For rural youth, in particular, town is where they define themselves as belonging, and where they are defined by the world outside of neighborhood and home. Whether children and youth define themselves as valuable or bothersome in the context of community can ultimately shape their life chances.

Local planning and decision-making processes, MacTavish argues, should help to address these potential imbalances before they solidify. Further, land use planning and zoning policies should strive to integrate development across social and economic boundaries to avoid geographical separation of wealthy and poorer households. Finally, mobile home park residents should also take steps to strengthen the social resources within their own neighborhoods by building traditions that can provide residents with many of the social benefits of a small town. **RPRC**

Effects of Social Networks among Rural Single Mothers on Welfare and Employment

Based on research by Sally Ward and Heather Turner

In 1997 Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein published their seminal work, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*, which underscored the importance of social networks of friends, family, and boyfriends to poor, single women in cities across America.

Social networks are potentially important not only to urban single mothers, however. Even though the number of rural single mothers is growing,¹ we know very little about how they make ends meet, especially under the new welfare reforms. Sally Ward and Heather Turner, in their RPRC working paper, "Work and Welfare Strategies among Single Mothers in Rural New England: The Role of Social Networks and Social Support," examine how informal and formal social networks affect the likelihood that low-income single mothers in rural areas will work

or rely on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Although rural single women often face many of the same barriers to working as urban poor mothers do—lower levels of education, for example—they also face a different set of social and place-based characteristics that are unique to rural America. Work is often farther away, for example, making reliable transportation a must. Buying and maintaining a car can be expensive for a low-income family. Further, community services such as child care are often limited in rural areas. On the other hand, rural families often have tighter networks of social support, ▶

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1. Katherine MacTavish and Sonya Salamon, "What Do Rural Families Look Like Today?" In *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Davide L. Brown and Louis E. Swanson (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003).

either from family and friends or from community networks that may help women balance work and motherhood more easily. And yet, these very ties may limit the scope of options to which a woman is privy. Urban dwellers, for example, are more often exposed to a wider range of casual contacts who could potentially connect them to jobs or other types of support. Rural communities' networks are often more tight-knit but less diffuse.

Study Design

Data for this study come from telephone interviews with a sample of approximately 500 unmarried women aged 18–39 with dependent children (under age 18) in rural and semi-rural areas of northern New England (New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont).

The goal of the study was to gauge the effect of both formal and informal networks on single mothers' odds of finding work or relying on TANF or other social services (in this case, subsidized housing or food stamps). Informal networks include the number of relatives and friends living nearby or within the home, including both cohabiting relationships and shared housing arrangements with friends or family. Informal supports also include the degree of the father's involvement with his children. The authors also determine the perceived emotional support the women gained from family and friends.

Formal networks include the number of organizations with which respondents reported being involved, and level of involvement during the prior year. The authors also include a measure of trust in those networks. Community attachment includes length of time the person has resided in the community and how participants ranked their community as a place to live.

Effects on TANF and Social Service Use

As found in other studies of welfare reform, women with very little education, those with more children, or younger

women are more likely to be receiving TANF. However, unlike studies of urban welfare use, marital status (whether divorce, separated, or single) had no effect on the likelihood of receiving TANF among rural women. Those who have never been married, however, were more likely to use other social services, such as food stamps or subsidized housing, than were those who had ever been married.

Although marital status has little effect on the odds of TANF receipt, in certain cases the father's involvement did. For never-married rural mothers, father involvement reduced the likelihood of TANF and other social service use. Such involvement, however, mattered little for divorced or separated women.

For never-married rural mothers, father involvement reduced the likelihood of TANF and other social service use. Such involvement, however, mattered little for divorced or separated women.

The authors suggest that fathers who are more involved with their children may also be more likely to provide financial support, thus decreasing a mother's reliance on welfare. It is also possible that a father's involvement expands the mother's social ties to include his friends and family, and thus providing her with additional resources. The lack of any effect for divorced or separated women might stem from an existing child support order, which renders

father involvement less important to the economic bottom line.

Interestingly, having a strong network of friends increased the likelihood of TANF use, but it had no effect on the use of other social services. The authors speculate that a large group of friends might offer an avenue of information on the availability of TANF benefits, or because they are not working, they may have the time to interact more with friends. On the other hand, although those who interact with friends more often are more likely to receive TANF, those who feel that their friends provide them with significant social support are less likely to rely on TANF or other social supports. The authors speculate that perhaps the added emotional support creates a resolve in women to avoid welfare.

Strong formal ties to community organizations had little effect on the likelihood of TANF or use of other social services. However, the longer a woman had lived in a

community—regardless of her community involvement—the less likely she was to receive TANF. Length of time in a community, the authors suggest, may contribute to more diverse social networks and more opportunities for finding alternatives to welfare dependence.

Effects on Employment

The majority (66%) of women in the study were working, and the single most important predictor of work was education. The odds of employment are reduced by more than one-third for women with less than a high school education. Personal, informal networks were less important to work than they were to TANF use. None of the informal network measures—cohabiting, involvement of fathers, interactions with friends or relatives—were significant predictors of employment. The length of time in the community, however, remained important. The longer a woman had lived in her community, the more likely she was to be working outside the home. Again, marital status had no effect on employment prospects.

Policy and Program Implications

Several forms of informal supports played a role in limiting TANF or social service use among rural poor women. These informal networks, however, were less influential to a woman's employment prospects. The one factor that influenced both TANF use and employment was the length of time the woman had been living in the community.

Mobility, therefore, may be an important policy and program focus. Studies have found that rural poor families

are more mobile than urban families, moving frequently to other nearby areas, also rural, for better jobs or, more often, because of housing instability or personal relationship issues.² Given the benefits of long-term residence to employment and dependence on welfare, efforts to welcome newcomers and quickly integrate them into the community might help alleviate welfare dependence and poverty. Fostering links among relevant organizations in a community, from schools to employment offices,

to day care providers, and connecting newcomers to these supports holds promise for creating a set of resources when personal networks and their associated resources are lacking.

The other significant finding for policy is the central role of fathers in improving a mother's economic bottom line. Never-married women who cohabit or whose children are involved with their father were less likely to rely on welfare. Divorced or separated mothers yielded no such benefit from father's involvement. Policies to promote the continued involvement of fathers in the absence of formal marriage should be developed given that father involvement lessens reliance on welfare among these single

mothers. Finally, given the strong link between education and employment, continued efforts to bolster education and training remain imperative if single mothers in rural areas are to find work. **RPRC**

Strong formal ties to community organizations had little effect on the likelihood of TANF or use of other social services. However, the longer a woman has lived in a community—regardless of her community involvement—the less likely she was to receive TANF and the more likely she was to work.

2. Kai Schafft, "The Push and Pull behind Residential Mobility of Low-Income Families in Upstate New York," *Perspectives: On Poverty, Policy, and Place*, vol 3, no. 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 6–9

The Differing Effects of the Economy and Social Policies on Poverty in Nonmetro and Metro Areas

Based on research by Craig Gundersen

Poverty is influenced by both the state of the economy and by a broad set of social policies. Changes in unemployment or wages, for example, will inevitably have an influence on poverty, as will policies directed toward low-income households such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). But will these effects be different in rural areas than in metro areas? Craig Gundersen, in his RPRC working paper, assesses the extent of economic and social policy effects on poverty in both metro and nonmetro regions, finding not only that they differ between the two areas, but that the results differ depending on how poverty is measured.¹

In general, state-level social policies have only limited impacts on poverty in both metro and nonmetro areas.

Study Design

Gundersen uses annual state-level panel data to assess the effects on poverty of changing unemployment rates and median wages (macro-economic changes) and policy changes. The policy changes include federal waivers that allowed states to experiment with their welfare systems prior to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA); the addition of state EITCs, a tax credit for low-income workers; and state increases to the federal minimum wage.

He uses two measures of poverty: the poverty rate (the fraction of households with incomes below the federal poverty line), and the squared poverty gap. The more commonly used poverty rate treats all poor households identically, whether they are one dollar or far below the poverty line. The squared poverty gap measures both the

extent and depth of poverty.² Gundersen also incorporates family type, considering separately families with children headed by a single mother and families with children headed by a married couple.

Gundersen uses data on household income and wages from the March Demographic Files from the Current Population Survey (CPS) for the years 1989 to 2004. For information on unemployment and per-capita employment growth rates, he uses data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The information on the social policy variables are constructed from several different sources.

Consistent with the definition used in the CPS, a metro area is defined as a county with a population of 50,000 or more or a county with economic ties to a metro area. Nonmetro areas are defined as areas not meeting any of these criteria.

Effects of the Economy on Poverty

Effects of Rising Unemployment—The economy has a pronounced effect on poverty in both metro and nonmetro areas, although the effect is greater in metro areas. A one percentage point increase in the area unemployment rate leads to a 5.9% increase in poverty for all families in metro areas, but only a 2.7% increase in nonmetro areas, a statistically significant difference (see Table 1). An increase in the unemployment rate has a significantly greater impact on the poverty rate of married-couple households in metro than in nonmetro areas,

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1. Craig Gundersen, "Are the Effects of the Macroeconomy and Social Policies on Poverty Different in Rural America?" RPRC working paper no. 05-06. Corvallis, OR: Rural Poverty Research Center, 2006. Available online at www.rprconline.org

2. The poverty gap index measures the depth of poverty based on the aggregate poverty deficit of the poor relative to the poverty line. Unlike the headcount method of assessing poverty, the poverty gap index is sensitive to changes in the status of those already below the poverty line. The poverty gap index increases with the distance of the poor below the poverty line, and thus gives a good indication of the depth of poverty. The squared poverty gap index is defined as the average of the square of the proportional poverty deficits. This is similar to the poverty gap index except that the poverty gaps are squared, thus giving the highest weighting to the largest poverty gap.

3. It should be noted that unemployment rates are generally higher in nonmetro than metro areas.

Table 1.

EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON POVERTY

A one percentage point rise in the unemployment rate increases the **poverty rate** by:

	Metro Effects	Nonmetro Effects
All Families	5.9% [†]	2.7%* [†]
Married-couples	7.7% [†]	3.6%*
Female-headed	3.9% [†]	2.5%

A one percentage point rise in the unemployment rate increases the **squared poverty gap** by:

	Metro Effects	Nonmetro Effects
All Families	7.9% [†]	5.5% [†]
Married-couples	11.8% [†]	7.3% [†]
Female-headed	3.5% [†]	2.8%

[†] Statistically significant difference from zero (5% level)

* Statistically significant difference between metro and nonmetro (5% level)

Table 2.

EFFECT OF WAGE GROWTH ON POVERTY FOR ALL FAMILIES UNDER DIFFERENT POVERTY MEASURES

A one percentage point rise in the median wage at the following levels changes poverty by:

	Metro Effects	Nonmetro Effects
Poverty rate	-1.75%	-0.15%
Squared poverty gap	-2.24%	1.29%

but its impact on the poverty rate of female-headed households does not differ significantly between metro and nonmetro areas.

The effects on poverty of a strong economy are notably different when using the squared poverty gap. The increases in poverty are larger for metro families when unemployment rises but the difference between metro and nonmetro effects is no longer statistically significant. Similarly, an increase in the unemployment rate leads to a slightly greater increase in the squared poverty gap in metro than in nonmetro areas for both married-couple

and female-headed households, but the difference is again not statistically significant.

Effects of Wage Growth—Another important gauge of economic health is median wages. In previous work, wage growth has been linked to declines in poverty. In this study, this general finding holds true in metro areas. For example, evaluated in a state with an average median wage level, a one percentage point increase in the median wage leads to a 1.75% decline in the poverty rate for all families in metro areas (see Table 2). In nonmetro areas, however, wage growth has no effect.

When the squared poverty gap is used, the effect of median wage growth is even stronger in metro areas in comparison to the poverty rate. For example, evaluated in a state with an average median wage level, a one percentage point increase in the median wage leads to a 2.24% decline in the squared poverty gap for all families in metro areas (see Table 2). For unknown reasons, an increase in the median wage actually leads to an increase in the squared poverty gap in nonmetro areas.

Social Policy Effects

In general, state-level social policies have only limited impacts on poverty in both metro and nonmetro areas. The only policy exception was welfare waivers. Nonmetro poverty increases (as measured by the squared poverty gap) were larger in states that implemented waivers prior to welfare reform than in states that did not implement waivers.

Policy Implications

The unemployment rate—probably the most closely followed economic indicator—has a far more pronounced effect on poverty *rates* in metro areas than in nonmetro areas. However, unemployment rates have similar, positive effects on depth of poverty, as measured by a squared poverty gap, in both metro and nonmetro areas. Thus, to accurately gauge the effects of changing macroeconomic conditions, policymakers should keep in mind that effects will likely vary by geography, and they will also vary by the type of poverty measure used.

Finally, the ability of state-level social policies to address the problems of poverty seems to be limited. Although in some contexts, the effects of state social policies are statistically significant, the magnitude of these effects is small. **RPRC**

Theories of Poverty and Antipoverty Programs in Community Development

Based on research by Ted Bradshaw

Community antipoverty programs are often designed and justified by a particular theory of what causes poverty. Some of these theories place the source of poverty with the individual, others place it with the larger economy, still others attribute it to a “culture of poverty,” while some see poverty arising from geographic disparities.

As Ted Bradshaw argues in his paper, “Theories of Poverty and Anti-Poverty Programs in Community Development,”¹ too often community developers become wed to one particular theory, and those theories then justify the community development approach. Although none of these theories is wrong per se, how community developers view the source of poverty can have significant implications. How one frames the question of community development often determines who gets what types of services and who gets left out.

Five Theories of Poverty

Bradshaw identifies five prevailing theories of poverty, outlining their parameters and offering examples of the theories in practice.

1. Poverty Caused by Individual Deficiencies

Under this theory, individuals are viewed as responsible for their poverty. Harder work and better choices, for example, would remedy the problem. With roots in the early Protestant doctrines and weaving through neoclassical economics, this theory culminates in the assumption that welfare programs create a perverse incentive to rely on the state and avoid personal accountability.

An antipoverty program following this theory might work to identify children in families receiving cash wel-

fare who regularly miss school and withhold the child’s portion of the family welfare payment until attendance improves, thus ensuring that another generation does not get left behind. On the whole, however, community development efforts tend to shy away from “blaming the victim,” and individual-level programs are usually embedded in community efforts.

Antipoverty efforts that offer promise are those that are both “deep and wide,” and that stress the strength of social capital. A key is helping groups of poor people build supportive communities with shared trust and mutuality.

2. Poverty Caused by Cultural Belief Systems that Support Subcultures of Poverty

“Culture of poverty” theories hold that people in certain communities or areas develop a subculture of shared beliefs, values, and norms. These beliefs and values are socially generated, but individually held. Although the culture of poverty theory holds that individuals are not necessarily to blame as victims of a dysfunctional subculture, it is often linked to the individual theory, or other social theories of poverty.

Working under this theory, community programs might relocate poor families to better neighborhoods in hopes that they will absorb new values. They might also promote programs such as Head Start, helping children to gain skills and internalize the value of learning necessary to succeed in school. A third approach might help community members design new strategies, through entrepreneurship or cooperatives, to reshape their futures.

3. Poverty Caused by Economic, Political, and Social Distortions or Discrimination

This theory looks not to the individual as the source of poverty, but to the economic, political, and social systems that can limit opportunities and resources. Much of the literature on poverty now suggests that the economic system is structured such that poor people fall behind regardless of how competent they may be. An example is

Ted Bradshaw is associate professor in the Department of Human and Community Development at University of California, Davis.

1. Forthcoming in *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*.

the fact that minimum wages do not allow single mothers or their families to be economically self-sufficient. Poor people lack influence in the political system, and regardless of legal protections, some are stigmatized, resulting in diminished opportunities.

The difficulty inherent in changing “the system” often causes many antipoverty programs to revert to trying to change individuals. Programs that attempt to change systems include social movements, such as the civil rights movement or efforts to create alternative institutions to help the poor. They also might advocate for federal and social policies that provide jobs or increase wages, for example.

4. Poverty Caused by Geographical Disparities

Especially applicable to rural areas, a theory of poverty rooted in geography calls attention to the fact that people, institutions, and cultures in certain areas lack resources or an economic base. Several factors converge under this scenario. Economics are such that businesses attract other businesses, and conversely, disinvestment feeds more disinvestment. Knowledge and capital may bypass certain areas, with rural areas especially often the last stop for technologies. Finally, disadvantaged areas tend to lose their most educated and skilled people to areas that provide greater opportunity.

Responses to a geographical theory of poverty focus on solving the key dynamics that lead to decline. Rather than focusing on individuals, businesses, governments, welfare systems, or cultural processes, community developers look at places and the processes by which they can become self-sustaining. Such efforts include improving local industry competitiveness through, for example, cluster development; placing conditions on development, such as requiring affordable housing; promoting downtown revitalization; and national and regional reinvestment that shifts funds from one area to another.

5. Poverty Caused by Cumulative and Cyclical Interdependencies

This final theory of poverty incorporates many elements of the previous four. It views individual situations and community resources as mutually dependent. The interdependence of factors creating poverty quickly accelerates into a spiral of disinvestment and decline. Lack of employment opportunities, for example, leads to emigration, the closing of retail stores, and declining local tax revenues, which leads to deteriorating schools, poorly trained workers, and the inability to recruit new firms to

the area, leading to even greater lack of employment. This cycle also repeats itself at the individual level, in which lack of employment leads to inadequate income, inadequate savings, and the like.

Community development efforts operating under this theory of poverty center their efforts on breaking that one link in the spiral to end the cycle of poverty. The problem is that these links are hard to break because each is reinforced by other parts of the spiraling cycle. Efforts that offer promise, however, are those that are both “deep and wide,” and that stress the strength of social capital. A key, some argue, is helping groups of poor people build supportive communities with shared trust and mutuality.

Another option under this model is asset mapping, in which community strengths are identified and used to solve problems. Use of existing organizations with roots in the community also provides an advantage over new, single-purpose organizations when bridging the range of problems communities face.

In general, community development programs operating under this theory of poverty tend to structure their efforts around three focal points, which, like the cyclical theory itself, combine strategies and tools from the other theories of poverty. The focal points include: ►


The theory of poverty that one holds shapes antipoverty programs. Although each theory has merit, only one—the theory of cumulative and cyclical interdependencies—fully explores the relation between individuals and their communities.

- the development of comprehensive programs that include a variety of services that seek to bridge the individual and community needs;
- collaboration among the different organizations providing complementary services; and
- community organizing to empower the poor to participate in dialogues and decisions regarding the programs and policies that either assist them or create additional barriers to well-being.

Community Development and Policy Implications

The theory of poverty that one holds shapes antipoverty programs. Although each theory has merit, only one—the final theory—Bradshaw argues, fully explores the relation between individuals and their communities. As increased interest in social capital shows, there is a growing realization that individuals are shaped by their communities, and communities are shaped by their members. Communities that possess strong social capital are more resilient to adversity and better able to protect their residents from the spiral into poverty. Similarly, commu-

nity economic and political systems reflect community values and respond to the social capital that underlies these values. Reforming social institutions is an essential policy response to poverty, but without efforts to narrow inequality within communities and social networks, and to promote institutions that reflect the values of a community, efforts to eradicate poverty will be less effective.

Increasing the effectiveness of antipoverty programs requires that those designing and implementing these programs be aware of the implications of the theory of poverty that they hold because these theories constrain which responses are used. Because poverty originates from a very complex interplay of forces, its solutions must be equally complex. Antipoverty programs that are based on a narrow theory of poverty typically only solve that part of the problem, and poverty persists. This is why, Bradshaw argues, the most effective approaches to reducing poverty are as comprehensive as possible, addressing both individual and community issues, and striving to break the vicious cycle that interlinks them. 

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