

Employment Obstacles for the Poor

A poor person can work full time and by being paid at minimum wage will still be poor. Such a person works as hard as a middle class person, yet lives a life of poverty, while the middle class person lives well. What's wrong with this?

Getting a well paying job requires a certain degree of experience, whether directly through life, and/or through education, and good enough health to perform the work. These obvious prerequisites sometimes mask other considerations that are more subtle, such as **access to education and or training, to work availability, to connections, to health services, to reliable transportation, and if required to childcare.**

Most of the better paying employment opportunities require diplomas and degrees. Certainly people raised in poverty attend school with far less resources than those raised in the middle class. The children not only have few school resources their families are often unable to provide the critical in-home support such as the ability to assist their child with homework. Also the incidents of traumatic events in poverty environments are commonplace and being witnessed by the children and so are deeply affected by these experiences. Many children growing up with such common events often believe they will not live to adulthood. The trauma may also be taking place within the home which causes such emotional stress that the children cannot sleep well and given the degree of poverty may not be able to access mental health services. In addition to the emotional difficulties there is the fact that many impoverished families are unable to provide regular meals and when they do the quality of food may be less nutritious.

All of these factors affect the children's ability to benefit from whatever level of education to which they may have access. So, from the moment of birth these children are at a serious disadvantage when compared to the life of middle class families. The consequence is that there is a higher dropout rate from school and the grades of many of these children are insufficient to be able to go to college. Of course while public education is free, should they qualify for college there will be insufficient family resources to pay tuition and for books. In addition given that they may be struggling with academics, most schools have eliminated shop, where some of these children would be able to learn skills such as electronics, mechanics, woodworking, computer repair, etc. that could lead to apprenticeships with local company's and businesses that would provide a pathway into the middle class.

Once the children become adults they then face another series of obstacles in obtaining employment. Especially in our today's economy even many people who have experience and degrees are struggling to obtain gainful employment. While there is a great deal of free competition for employment, regardless of the application process, still individuals are deciding who is interviewed and who gets hired. A civil service procedure seems without bias as it sets standards for each job and anyone meeting those standards has the right to apply. However, when panel members interview a prospective applicant, the members being individuals have their own perspective of the attributes of the applicant. Even when an applicant is placed in the A group, which is the group that will be interviewed by the supervisor of the department, this does not guarantee fairness. That interview is done in private and is solely at the discretion of the supervisor as to who is hired. In this case, the process starts out democratically and finishes autocratically.

Through this system each step becomes ever less objective. Certainly, the supervisor's personal biases come into play in the final stage.

The hunt for employment can be even more tilted. It is not uncommon that a company has pre-picked an applicant for a position. In this situation they will still have to follow the company policy and procedures for interviewing and hiring for the position. In doing so the Human Resources department advertises, interviews those qualified, and then sets up the final group to be interviewed. The pre-chosen candidate ends up with the job and the other qualified candidates are rejected with no one the wiser. Most applicants are unaware of this, and as such favoritism is "under the table," Not getting a job that one is qualified for is discouraging and can overwhelm a job applicant if this happens repeatedly.

Then there is the consideration as to the personal resources that gainful employment requires. Having a reliable car, or adequate public transportation is critical to getting to work. Having sufficient money to pay for repairs to keep the car reliable is essential. Having access to a reputable mechanic so that the repairs are done well and in a timely manner is also critical. Competent mechanics usually work in communities that can pay for their higher performance capabilities. As a result, the mechanics who serve the poor, while they may charge less, are likely less capable. Being forced to use less qualified mechanics can result in frequent tardiness and job absences due to the car being improperly serviced. Having sufficient money to buy food, pay for rent, utilities, clothes, etc. when the car takes up a significant part of the budget is a great burden for a poor family and too often is overwhelming. Should the car breakdown there may not be sufficient money to repair it or to replace it. It is clear that transportation is a critical factor in keeping employed. Not being able to control this factor can be overwhelming for a family with limited funds.

The location of the employment opportunities is also a key variable. It is obvious that jobs do not abound in the poorer communities. A person from a poor community has to travel an inordinate distance to their place of employment. Having a job close to home, which would minimize the impact of the welfare of one's car, would ensure a higher degree of job maintenance.

In addition, reliable and affordable childcare is essential for a poor person to succeed in employment. When there is a lack of affordable childcare how can the person work? The cost of childcare may cut into the income so as to make the effort of work worthless.

Looking at the variables of childcare, transportation, the proximity of employment opportunities, and having connections one can see how for poor people that these variables can become overwhelming obstacles to fair employment opportunities.

It's interesting that companies who outsource or who set up production in foreign countries do so because the labor is far cheaper than what they would have to pay in the United States. While this may be somewhat valid one has to consider that here in our own backyard we have a multitude of impoverished people who would work for far less than union organized shops and where land is quite inexpensive. So then why are industries not choosing to locate in the inner-city? The following may explain some of this.

Politics! Politicians garner votes for broadcasting illusions. These illusions form their rhetoric to convince people to vote for them. They consciously fabricate this rhetoric to manipulate the voters by presenting the poor as the scapegoat for the ills of society.

They convince the public that the poor are choosing not to work so that they can live off the taxes paid by hard work of the employed. They reinforce this rhetoric by their focus on the few who abuse the system and use these examples to generalize to the whole population of impoverished families. They choose to totally disregard the unequal education that is created not through overt segregation, but segregation nonetheless by the economics of where poor people can afford to live, which is removed from middle class communities. The result of this is that the poor go to school with the poor and the middle class children go to school with middle class children. So, when money is allocated to schools, the schools with the greatest affluence, thus political influence, get the first tier of resources. Should those resources be somewhat limited, then the more affluent PTA's pick up the difference.

By about half the middle class supporting this type of politics they block their awareness of the facts behind poverty in the United States and move forward in a state of denial, which allows them to continue to ignore the desperate inequities that influence access to work.