

Why is Poverty such a risk factor in children's lives?

Abstract:

Even in the new millennium, poverty has remained as a stigma on the human society. Irrespective of the countries, poverty remains either in absolute or in relative form. It has been found that poverty leaves some permanent marks on a child's mind. It hinders the child's growth and often leads to an unhealthy society in the long run. The long lasting deprivation that poverty inflicts into the formative period of human life encourages antisocialism and at its grimmest, may beget a fresh genome of terrorists. It has also been observed that the global unequal distribution of wealth aggravates the effects of poverty on children from several aspects. The following paper is an investigation into the actual effects that poverty bores into a child's life, considering all the aspects of a living being.

Introduction:

Poverty till now is the most alarming problem to any nation. It not only hampers the economic prosperity of a country but also dismantles its' social stability. Increasing rate of poverty may bring political change and thus bring political instability. Though poverty affects the human irrespective of his age but the children are most affected. If not in terms of hardship but in terms of its long lasting effect on his/her future life.

Effects of poverty on the emotional and mental health of children

Before we focus on the issue regarding the effects of poverty on children's psychology, we should know who are the poor. A person having a daily minimum income below the subsistence level is known as the poor person. Now, for the upbringing of a child in a healthy manner one

needs money. Day by day, the cost of education is rising and so is the price of food and transport as well as the price of recreation. So a child in a poor family is bereft of proper education, remains hungry for most of the days and mentally tires up with lack of recreation.

Education at school also provides a place to socialize. So, without schooling, a child not only remains educationally deprived, but also, lacks proper exposure to the world. It has often been found that a child belonging to a poor family is introvert, shy and lacks proper understanding of our society, that is, the social definitions are not quite defined to him. Moreover, in such cases a child belonging to a poor family mingles up with those infants who have the same social background. In this manner, a vicious circle of similar social interaction culminates in further ignorance and creates a self-created social surrounding that redefines the concept of good and bad to him. Obviously, social values interpreted in his own wrong term resist the child from joining the main stream and in the process often draws him into trouble.

The growing number of pregnancy among teenagers belonging to the below poverty line (BPL) exemplify the above fact. Lack of proper diet leads to malnutrition and often hinders the growth of the brain cells. In such cases, the child may be subject to depression and frequent upswing of the mind. Children, often-in order to escape from the harsh reality seeks for shelter in illusion and a world of fantasy. For instance, in the short fiction, “Araby”, James Augustine Aloysius Joyce illustrates a late 1800’s or early 1900’s low income neighbourhood of an urban city, Dublin in Ireland. The story takes the help of a simple dream or illusionary craze of the young boy to show him the stark reality of Dublin’s life that is very different from the world of his own

making. He fascinates about a girl who becomes and remains real to him unless he is disillusioned in the end.

He uses this kind of a background to depict the lifestyle of the character of the boy, depicted in his story – a boy who creates an outlet for a way to escape from reality. A poor family often considers a child as an investment good. Therefore, the number of children in a poor family is often more than that in a well off family. They have to look after their younger brothers or sisters, look after the household work, and as soon as possible have to join the work force to earn bread for their family.

A survey lead by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) states the fact in Bangladesh; a child becomes a net producer at the age of only 12. So all these needs squeezes the place for a child within a single room in which a family below poverty line is most likely to live. Lack of adequate place, light and air create a gloomy set up around the child which in course of time surround his mind and compels him to bear unnatural thoughts. This situation gets mostly reflected when a child from a poor family thinks that he is out of this society.

Due to lack of proper diet, nutrition and medicinal facilities, the infant mortality rte among the poor families is much more high than the national average. It is painful to watch ones brother or sister die in front of his eyes at a very early age. This painful visual effect puts some gruesome scars into a child's mind and he often succumbs to it; if not in terms of his mortal life, then in terms of his normal social life.

Poverty and ill-health

As explained earlier, poverty has serious bearing on nutritional intake. When the body does not get the necessary caloric input to sustain life then slowly but surely it erodes out of its resources. With the physical condition at a poor level, the fall back position to any disease, deteriorates. At that point, exposed to any kind of minor diseases, may prove to be fatal.

Childhood is a formative period of a human being. The nutrition a child gets determines his future health. Due to the poor nutritional intake, a going-to-be mother from a poor family often suffers from anemia or mal nutrition. This necessarily affects the health of the baby she is bearing and the baby at birth may be still born, physically deformed or underweight. This baby, due to its poor family background in monetary terms, never gets access to nutritional food and can never fight back the ill health that he is born with.

The lactating mother without proper food lacks in milk and in this way the baby is deprived of the most nutritious food that he can access. The growing number of rickets patient, cases of osteoporosis, night blindness, berry-berry and whooping cough among the impoverished children are clear example of this fact. Further, due to living in a very unhygienic condition, infectious diseases are likely to attack as all the households have minimum distance among each other in an impoverished community. So, the virility of the disease is a lot more than the normal cases. The disease spread fast and kills many of the children at one time.

In recent times, lead poisoning among the impoverished children is catching the headlines of the newspapers. As most of the poor houses use very base quality of paints comprising of high level

of lead. As the house erodes, so does the paint and it readily mixes with the air as tiny invisible fragments. The children living there inhale poison each moment and get severely affected.

As it has been mentioned earlier that among the poor family, teenage motherhood is a growing problem, a teenager whose body is not totally prepared to carry a baby, on conceiving, it harms both the mother and child. In most of the cases it has been observed that teenage motherhood often affects negatively the mother's psychology. She becomes short tempered and might even deliver unnecessary physical punishment to the baby. This behavior follows from a sudden realization of right and wrong and off course due to the restrictions that motherhood imposes at an early age (it restricts a teenager from getting involved into her natural flow of life).

In developing countries, drinking arsenic contaminated water is posing another health problem to the poor families and thus, affecting their children. The poor families, due to lack of money cannot dig enough and set up a deep tube well for water. The water they drink comes from a tube well with minimum depth and thus they fall ill due to arsenic contaminated water.

Poverty and violence

The long lasting effect that poverty leaves deep into a child's heart gets portrayed in the increasing number of criminals who came from a poverty stricken household. Lack of food, lack of place, lack of socialization, brings a feeling of deprivation within a child's mind. The child is bereft of any physical power that he can use and snatch what he deserves. But somewhere, this deprivation remains within the heart and the child starts to think that he is someone who is not socially accepted and it is not justified. Throughout his childhood he nourishes this idea deep

into his heart and in youth, this feeling of deprivation gets reflected through his actions. Society becomes his foremost enemy and breaking social laws seems to be a sign of victory to him.

Not only the deprivation, often due to the lack of education a child from an impoverished family, is left with no option but to indulge in theft and robbery. His surroundings beget people similar to him and they often come together to form a gang. With a homogenous group, everyone resorting to crime to earn a living, or even a mark of heroism, no one is there to show the right way. The distinction between right and wrong fails and ends up in choosing the wrong way. In Brooklyn, America, most of the children, due to their impoverished childhood, at a very early age, becomes a criminal.

If not a criminal, it has been observed that a child coming from an impoverished background often indulges in violence quite easily. His childhood poverty and all the distresses that he has faced have touched the peak of his endurance. He always suffers from an inferiority complex that he cautiously wants to hide. Whatever happens to him he pretends that it is happening only because he is poor. This inferiority complex combined with financial bottlenecks that he faces, turns him intolerant and it seems to him that whatever hurdles he faces, he can overpower them with physical power.

It will be pretty interesting to note that almost all the world famous boxers, starting from Jack Johnson to Mike Tyson, all came from a low-income family background. Also, before becoming a boxer, they indulged in criminal activities at a very early age.

Poverty and armed conflict

Human beings resort to gun for two reasons, either to earn his living, or to protect him. The growing poverty that stresses a child and finally lead to mental disorders like depression, anxiety, anger, in his youth compels him to take law in his own hand. His needs those are long suppressed, tries to find an outlet through physical power. In recent times, countries like Nigeria, Somalia, Rwanda and so many others have witnessed and armed upraise of the mass. Interestingly, all these countries belong to the very bottom line of the global economic order in terms of the per capita income. People there earn a mere subsistence, bereft of proper schooling and medication. The government is not at all people friendly and all these combined, forced him to come to the road and choose a bloody battle to win his share.

Again, armed conflict dismantles a country's social and economic structure. Its infrastructure gets badly impaired and in that manner it creates a fresh bed for poverty to foster. This vicious circle continues again and again with almost no end. Another subdued one-armed uprising and the country rather than looking after its economic goal gets occupied with military intervention.

A poor person is easy to allure. A little bit of dream injected into his brain about a hypothetical world fostering equality and providing food, cloth and shelter can easily mould him the way it likes. The growing number of children in various terrorist groups perhaps illustrates the above fact. These poor youths bereft of any formal education and so any knowledge or judgment about right and wrong can easily be motivated for wrong reasons in the name of religion or even the state. In that manner, the number of terrorists increases day by day and disturbs the economy, dismantles the infrastructure and thereby again creates an environment that is capable of

fostering poverty. Thus, these foolish human beings, in order to win life for themselves and their future generation, unknowingly welcome death. This is another vicious circle or cartel between poverty and terrorism that goes on for years after year, complementing each other and ensuring each other's survival. Thus, armed conflict and terrorism may be considered as indirect effects of poverty that have inflicted irreversible changes into a child's mind. Poverty on the other hand may be considered as one of the circular outcome of those two that knowingly or unknowingly, a group of human pursue.

Why poverty affects children the most in the poorest parts of the world?

In the poorest parts of the world, children are more victimized by poverty than in rest of the world. The reasons here do not really pertain to individual incapability only. It is also the incapability of the government to reallocate resources from high to low income families. In such nations, despite having fertile lands, sometimes it is found that most of them are privately owned by landowners who do not reside there or mainly by the government itself. Adding to the surprise, in some parts of such a state one may hardly find a well-furnished multistoried residential house.

Though, even in the richest of the countries, poverty do exist, but due to the social security provided to the impoverished section of the population by the government, they are far more well off than their counterpart residing in the poorest of the nations. In the poorest of nations, there is no social security policy on behalf of the government. Hence, faced with, hunger and illness, the poor people often die. Those who manage to survive the hunger and illness face a cruel world where they are bereft of any proper form of education and means of livelihood.

The malnutrition marked faces of street urchins are very commonly observed anywhere a tourist would visit. The land may be rich in growth of many saleable agricultural products. Yet the common people are forbidden to reap the benefits of the agriculture to the optimum. The poor conditions of health of the children are not really due to unavailability of medicines, but the non-accessibility or low purchasing power of the families.

Lack of money urges the families to send their young children to do menial jobs instead of letting them study. Thus the few schools have more or less empty classrooms. Fed up with the lack of students most schools close down. If the government has to give subsidies, taxes also need to be collected. But in such a country tax evasion is a common feature and that comes often from the richest part of the society. Thus reallocation is almost impossible to sustain. Due to all these factors, the conditions of the children being affected from poverty are more severe in the poorest nations.

Effects of inequality on children

Inequality is another feature that is commonly found in most of the developing and less developed countries. However, in true sense, even in the richest of the countries, inequality does exist. With the wealth distribution being a very skewed one, the larger mass is left with too less. Now, it can easily be judged that the bottom level of that common mass is left with almost nothing. The market operates with profit motivation. The price it determines and the quantity it sells reflect the need of the well off people. Even spheres like education and health are not an exception. The cost of treatment and that of education both are touching the zenith. The concept

of inequality also encompasses social inequality. Social inequality follows from two dimensions - Inequality due to the different possession of wealth and inequality coming out of race and religion. Both the forms of inequality hinder the growth and development of children.

Due to the higher price offered by educational institutions, it is not possible for all to access and that hinders the social development of a child. Often there are substantial differences between the rich and poor class in terms of social gathering and interaction. This also, resists a proper exposure.

Inequality in terms of race and religion by no means, is less detrimental to the growth and development of a child. The child belonging to different races and religion may be restricted from mingling up with one another and through this, a potential cross cultural enrichment dies at its very nascent stage. Inequality, similar to poverty may lead to beget a feeling of deprivation within the mind of an individual and thus creates similar problems as poverty.

Conclusion:

Poverty can be referred as one of the most evil stimulus of the society. It is that malady which can transform someone's entire personality and also affect the neighborhood. Poverty can follow from anything, lack of employment, some natural calamities (temporary poverty), immigration, war and overall indebtedness of the state. The conditions of women and children are the most affected and most severe. Women and children (specially baby girls) are often sexually harassed and exploited. This is a common scenario in case of immigrants where big dreams draw the people from less developed and poor nations to the more developed ones. Lack of ability on behalf of the state to provide occupation to all of them, leads them to end up in the hands of sex

traffickers. Child labor, where a small child is made to do menial labor, is commonly observed in such cases. Children are the lanterns of the future pathway. How bright the light will be depends on the quality of oil poured as input. This quality enrichment depends upon the provision for an all round development of the infrastructure and the conditions or necessities of a healthy child. The IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank and WHO (World Health Organization) are helping the developing nations to sort out their poverty issues. Proper monitoring is also required on the part of the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) to reach the goal of multifaceted development of the children.

References:

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