



SCHOOL *of* HUMAN ECOLOGY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Children and America's Future

Aletha C. Huston

University of Texas at Austin

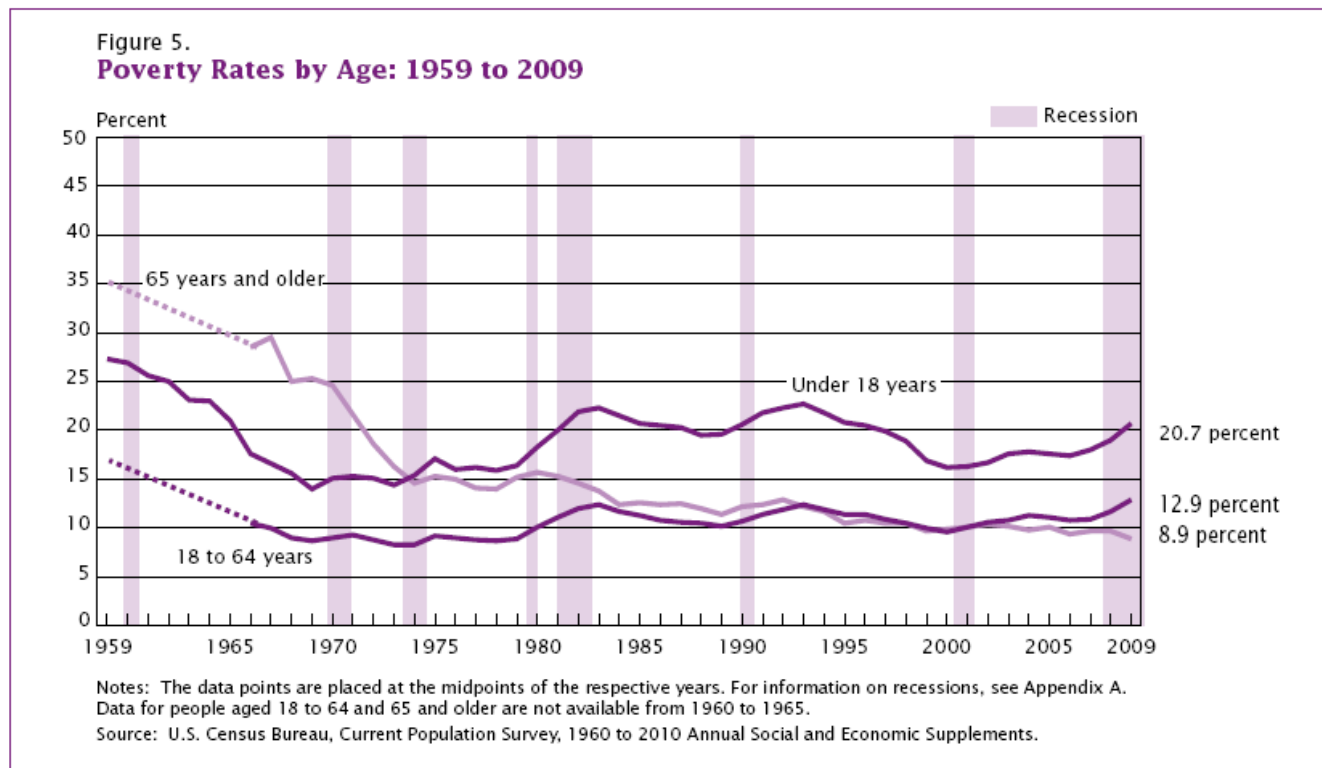
Major Points

- U.S. policies have not made significant dents in problem of child poverty
- Explicit and implicit theories of change
 - ▣ Definitions of poverty
 - Economic hardship or low income
 - Social exclusion
 - ▣ Causes of poverty
 - Social selection – individual deficiencies of the poor
 - Social causation – economic, social, and political structures and opportunities

Major Points

- Examples of evidence-based policies
 - ▣ Early intervention
 - ▣ Work supports for low-income parents
- Goals for Children
 - ▣ Economic – increasing human capital
 - ▣ Beyond human capital to well-being and child rights
- Policy implications
- Research implications

Child Poverty Persists in U.S.



Of the foreign-born population, 42.6

poverty rate for the Northeast was

51.2 percent of poor people in metro-

U.S. Has Low Child Well-being in Comparison of 21 OECD Countries

		Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6
Dimensions of child well-being	Average ranking position (for all 6 dimensions)	Material well-being	Health and safety	Educational well-being	Family and peer relationships	Behaviours and risks	Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

Income Poverty

- Poverty defined by current family income
 - ▣ Absolute: in U.S. – threshold based on estimated minimum budget
 - ▣ Relative (OECD) – % (e.g., 50%) of median income in country
- Implications
 - ▣ Absolute –primary issue is material hardship
 - ▣ Relative - poverty is more than material deprivation— it reflects a person’s economic situation relative to the standard of living of her or his society

Poverty as Social Exclusion

- “the poor are those whose resources (material, cultural, and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live.” (European Union 1984)
- “inequalities in basic living, family economic participation, housing, health, education, public space, and social participation, as well as the subjective experience of social exclusion” (Kahn & Kamerman 2002)

Implications of Social Exclusion



- Expands both theoretical and policy concerns to the material, cultural, and social conditions that are correlated with (and result from) low incomes in industrialized societies

Causes of Poverty

- Social Selection – Individual skills, motivations, and behaviors.
- Social causation – Economic, social, and educational structures and institutions
- Interactionist – Both are true
 - ▣ Culture of poverty resurgence
 - ▣ Parallel to nature-nurture dichotomy
- US policies heavily to changing individuals

Targets of Change: Social Selection

Targets of Policy (examples)	Sample Policies
For Adults	
Job skills and ability	Job training
Work motivation and behavior	Sanctions and requirements in TANF; work-contingent EI/TC
“Dependence” on welfare	Time limits on TANF
Marriage	Marriage promotion programs
Parental responsibility	Child support enforcement
For Children	
Early development	Home visiting programs
School readiness – literacy and number skills	Early childhood education programs
Behavior problems	Parent training programs

Targets of Change: Social Causation

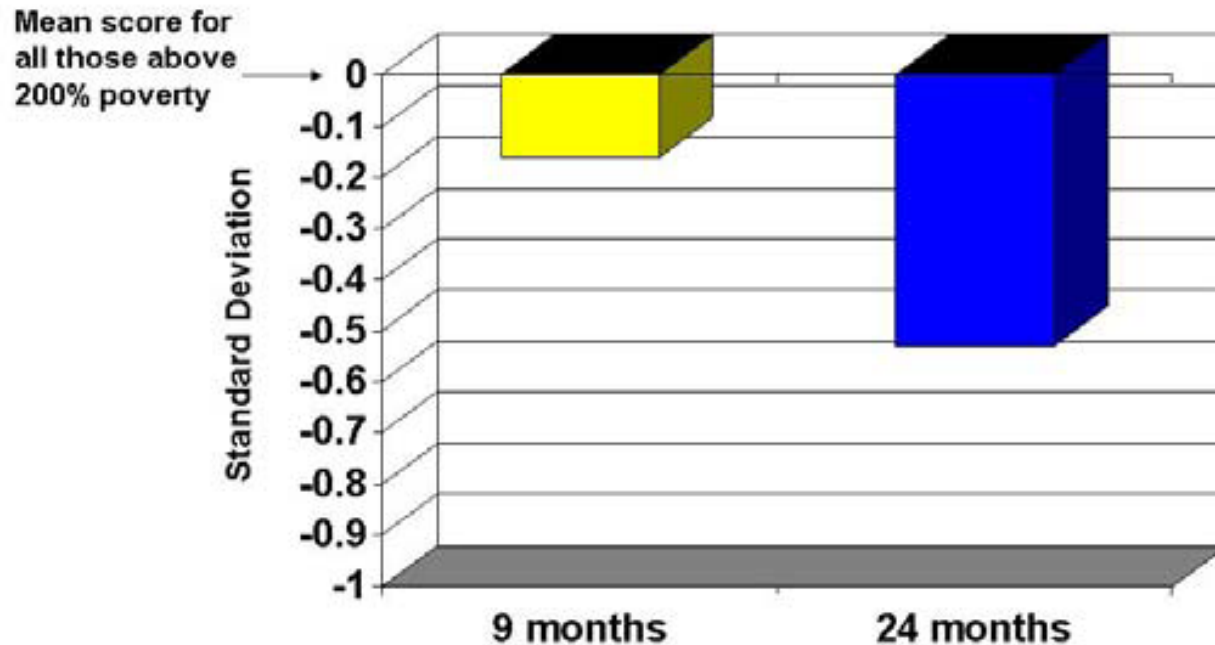
Targets of Policy (examples)	Sample Policies
For Adults	
Opportunity for work, job availability	Job creation
Wages	Minimum or living wage, wage supplements (e.g., EITC)
Race and gender discrimination	Anti-discrimination policies
Child care availability	Publicly supported child care centers
Educational opportunity	Job training, ESL
For Children	
Quality child care	Quality initiatives and support
Educational opportunity	Quality education
Neighborhood resources	Parks, safety measures

Sample Policies: Early Intervention

- Brain research: Neurological architecture of brain established in first few years of life
- Architecture built by complex interactions of experience with genes
- Income differences in cognitive development appear early in life
- Family income in early years is important for intellectual development and academic achievement
- Quality early intervention programs can improve children's life chances

Developmental Disparities by Family Income

Figure 1: Disparities on the Bayley Cognitive Assessment between Higher- and Lower-income Infants at 9 and 24 Months



Low Family Income from Ages 0-5

- For cognitive development and school performance, income in the early years matters more than income in later years
- Low family income during the first 5 years predicts
 - ▣ Poor school performance
 - ▣ Low adult economic attainment
- Income in middle childhood and adolescence does not add to prediction

But for Social Behavior – All of Childhood Matters

- Low income throughout childhood predicts
 - ▣ Poor social skills
 - ▣ Behavior problems in middle childhood
- Poverty in adolescence predicts
 - ▣ Psychological distress
 - ▣ Arrests
 - ▣ Non-marital child bearing

Evidence-based Early Interventions

- Birth to age 3 years
 - ▣ Home visiting
 - ▣ Early Head Start
- 3-5 years old
 - ▣ Head Start
 - ▣ Pre-Kindergarten
 - ▣ Child Care Quality Initiatives
- Theory of change: Improving skills and “readiness” of child will increase child’s ability to master demands of school and to succeed in adulthood

How Effective?

- ECE *can* improve children's chances: Rand summary of effects on school achievement
 - ▣ Average effect size = .33
 - ▣ Model programs: ES range from .35 to .97
- Long-term economic benefit
- BUT ...
- Early Head Start – some gains at age 3 when programs implemented well.
- Head Start for 3- and 4-year-olds. By first grade, few statistically significant gains

Sample Policies: Welfare and Work Supports

- 1996 welfare law (PRWORA) – work is the mantra
- 1990s “make work pay” policies (e.g., EITC)
- Evidence base
 - ▣ Experiments testing variations of welfare policies
 - ▣ Longitudinal studies following low-income families
- Theories of Change
 - ▣ PRWORA - Alter individual behavior by mandates, work requirements, incentives
 - ▣ EITC – Interactionist. Use public funds to compensate for inadequacies of wage structure (but work-contingent)

Next Generation: Policy Variations

- Analyses of ~10 to 15 large RA experiments testing variations of welfare policies
 - ▣ Mandatory vs. voluntary
 - ▣ Earnings supplements
 - ▣ Time limits
 - ▣ Enhanced child care assistance
- Effects on adults and their children depend on policy features

Next Generation Conclusions

- Policies that promoted children's development
 - ▣ Earnings supplements
 - ▣ Enhanced child care assistance
- Why?
 - ▣ More income
 - ▣ Center-based child care
 - ▣ Parents' psychological well-being
- Developmental differences
 - ▣ Preschool years - positive effects on achievement greatest
 - ▣ Elementary years - positive effects on social behavior greatest
 - ▣ Adolescence - Some negative effects

A Different Philosophy: New Hope

“If you work, you should not be poor.”

- New Hope benefits
 - ▣ Respectful services
 - ▣ Contingent on full-time employment
 - Earnings supplements
 - Health care subsidies
 - Child care subsidies
 - ▣ If no job, community service jobs
- Effects on children
 - ▣ Improved school performance
 - ▣ Reduced behavior problems
 - ▣ Increased positive social behavior

HIGHER GROUND

New Hope for the Working Poor and Their Children

Greg J. Duncan | Aletha C. Huston | Thomas S. Weisner



www.newhopebook.com

ECE and Welfare Policies Have Produced Only Modest Successes

- Early childhood interventions improve children's prospects some when done well, but big gaps remain
- Work support programs for single mothers *can* lead to improved child development, at least for preadolescent children
- Neither policy has made significant long-term dents in family poverty or has brought children to levels of nonpoor children

Why? Reexamine Theories of Change

- Social selection: Causes of poverty are individual deficiencies
 - ▣ Both ECE and welfare policies are designed primarily to change individuals
- Social causation: Need corresponding policies designed to alter social structures and opportunities
 - ▣ Schools that sustain gains from ECE
 - ▣ Job opportunities, living wages as well as work motivation

Beyond Low Income to Social Exclusion

- Income – material deprivation
- Social exclusion - Inequality in:
 - ▣ Economic participation
 - ▣ Basic living standard
 - ▣ Housing
 - ▣ Health
 - ▣ Education
 - ▣ Public space
 - ▣ Social participation
- Perception of inclusion or exclusion

Perceptions of Social Inclusion

- New Hope parents
 - ▣ Meeting basic needs for food, housing, utilities
 - ▣ “Extras” – new clothes, birthday presents, activities for kids*
 - ▣ Big ticket items – home purchase, appliances, car
- Children: Peer acceptance & status
- * “extras” predict better social behavior
- Being part of the mainstream = *Social inclusion*

Broader Goals for Children

- Human capital - later economic productivity
- Child well-being now
- Child rights

Implications for Policy

- Integrated rather than piecemeal policies
 - ▣ Children's welfare “mainstreamed” – EU suggests something like a Child Impact review of all policies (analogous to Environmental Impact review)
 - ▣ Design policies to go beyond reducing material hardship to increasing child well-being, social participation, bringing poor into mainstream
 - ▣ Integrate: e.g., System of Care to integrate prenatal, home visiting, child care, ECE

Implications for Research

- Interactions between individual attributes and social context
 - ▣ Ready schools as well as ready children
 - ▣ Job creation as well as job preparation
- Frame policy research around social inclusion
 - ▣ Child well-being and child rights as DVs
 - Positive as well as problem behavior
 - Quality of life – “Happy, Healthy, Smart”
 - ▣ Measures of social inclusion

Conclusion

- Current U.S. anti-poverty policies have limited effectiveness for families and children
- A theory of change based primarily on individual skills and attributes as basis of poverty is incomplete without incorporating social and institutional causes
- Defining poverty by income alone assumes that primary issue is material deprivation
- Defining poverty as social exclusion assumes that social norms for standard of living and social participation are important
- Resulting policies could be more integrated and coherent, with more emphasis on improving child well-being for its own sake



SCHOOL of HUMAN ECOLOGY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Thank you!

