



# How Poverty Impacts Mental Health

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# Agenda

- Participants will learn what Social Class is, and the impact Social Class has on mental health.
- Professionals will explore facts on poverty and how sifting perception can bring about support and change for children and families in need.
- Identify different types of poverty and the patterns families engage in to survive poverty.
- Take a quiz about Community Mindset and learn the hidden rules of social class.
- Learn the most common factors that help individuals move out of poverty.
- Poverty and mental health statistics will be discussed, and participants will learn how building poverty awareness, and applying a Person-Centered approach can create change.



# What is Social Class?

- A social division based on:
- Economic Status (i.e., income and wealth), and
- Socioeconomic Status (i.e., a combination of education, occupation, and income).



# The Impact of Social Class

Who you  
know (social  
capital)

Access to  
education

Mental and  
physical  
health

Access to  
good  
healthcare

# Defining Social Class

- Working class (work but still struggle financially).
- Middle class (Have money but are not wealthy).
- Upper class (Have a lot of money, connections, privilege).
- Poverty (Always struggling and without).



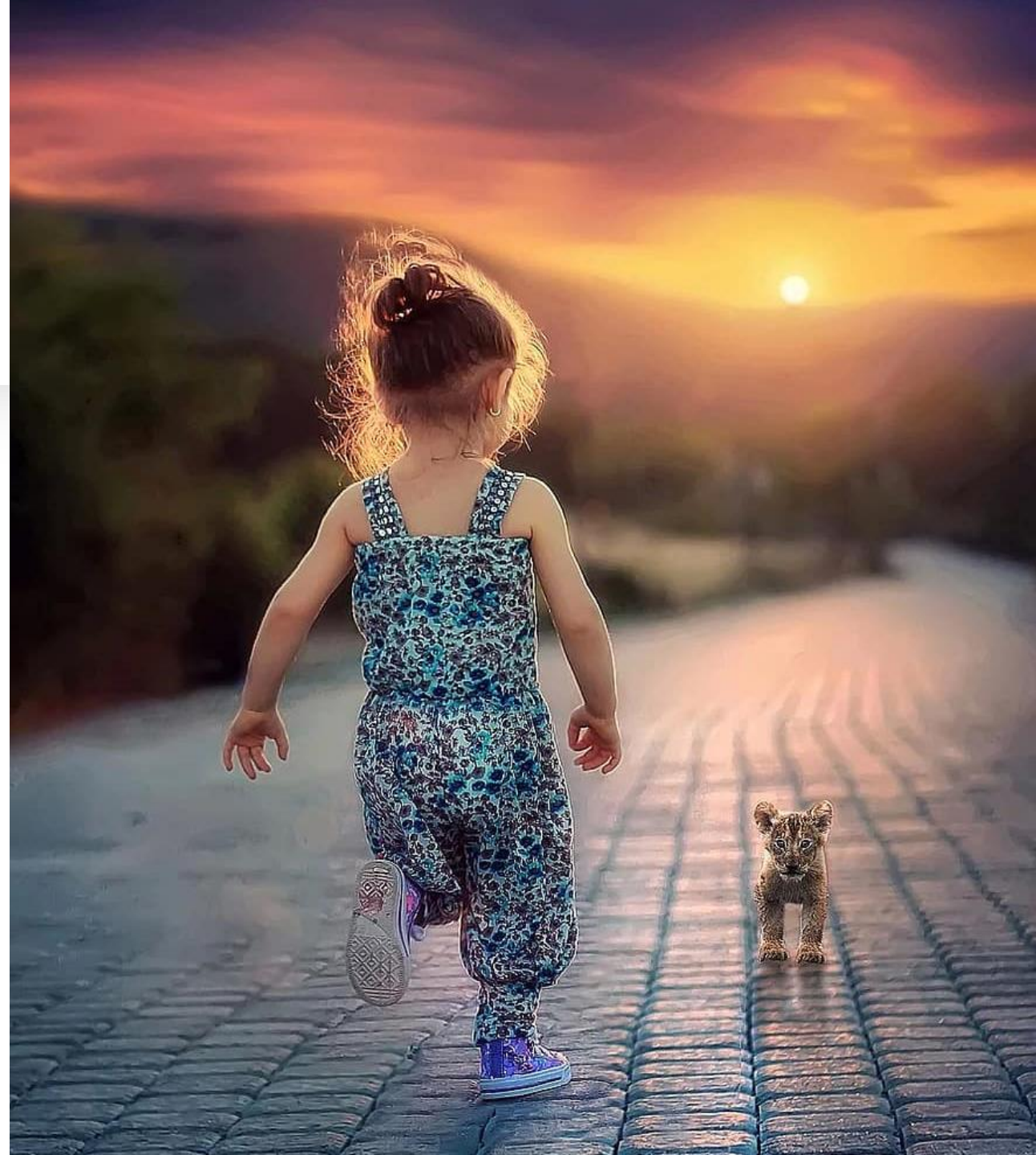
# Facts About Poverty

- Poverty exists in all races and in all countries.
- The belief that middle class is a large segment of society is not accurate.
- Poverty is subject to definition and circumstance.



# Poverty is Based on Perception

- Poverty is relative; meaning, if everyone around you has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague.
- Poverty or wealth only exists in relationship to known quantities and expectations.



# Types of Poverty



- **Generational Poverty:** is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer.
- **Situational Poverty:** is a shorter time and is caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.).

# Poverty Reflects Patterns

- An individual brings with them the hidden rules of the class in which they were raised.
- Therefore, even though the income of the individual may rise significantly, many of the patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain with the individual.





# Community Mindset

- Schools and businesses operate from a middle-class mindset.
- The norms and hidden rules of the middle class are not directly taught in schools or in businesses.
- As a result, individuals may struggle to interact in these settings.

# Hidden Rules of Class

- For individuals to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful.
- We can neither excuse or punish them from not knowing these rules.





## Let's Take A Quiz

- Poverty
- Middle Class
- Wealth

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# Moving Out of Poverty

- To move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up people, places, and things.

1. Education

2. Relationships

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” –Dr. James Comer



# What Moves a Person Out of Poverty?

- Difficult Circumstances
- Vision or goal
- Strong Relationship
- Skill or Talent



# Statistics

- The poverty threshold for a family of four in 2022 was \$29,678. The official poverty rate in 2022 was 11.5%, with 37.9 million people in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2023).
- According to Samhsa.gov (2016), 9.8 million adults aged 18 or older in the U.S. had a serious mental illness (SMI), of which 2.5 million adults were living below the poverty line.
- Regardless of race and ethnicity, poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to suffer developmental delay, to drop-out of high school, and to give birth before adulthood.
- Poor inner-city youth are seven times more likely to be the victims of child abuse or neglect than are children of high social and economic status.



# Poverty

- Poverty can have a profound impact on mental health due to the multitude of stressors and challenges it imposes on individuals and families.



# The Impact Poverty Has On Mental Health

A person's mental health is impacted by social, environmental, and economic conditions experiences between birth to seven (7) years old.

Poverty and deprivation impact mental health by:

1. Increasing hospitalizations
2. Causing psychological distress
3. Linked to depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicide.
4. Psychological stress has been found to impair a person's ability to perform everyday tasks (mental functioning).

[How Poverty Can Impact Mental and Physical Health | Psychology Today](#)



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## Stress & Anxiety

- Living in poverty often means facing constant stress related to financial instability, housing insecurity, and inability to afford basic needs. This chronic stress can lead to anxiety disorders and exacerbate existing mental health issues.

# Depression

- The persistent struggle with poverty can contribute to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and low self-esteem, which are all factors associated with depression.
- The lack of access to resources and opportunities can further contribute to feelings of despair.



# Trauma

- Poverty is often intertwined with experiences of trauma such as violence, abuse, or neglect.
- These traumatic experiences can have long-lasting effects on mental health, leading to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



# Social Isolation

- Economic hardship can lead to social isolation and feelings of alienation from society.
- Lack of resources may prevent individuals from participating in social activities, leading to feelings of loneliness and exacerbating mental health issues.



# Limited Access to Mental Health Services

- Ironically, those who are most in need of mental health support often have the least access to it due to financial barriers, lack of insurance, or shortage of mental health professionals in low-income areas.



# Becoming Poverty Informed

- Cultural Competency
- Trauma Informed
- Taking a Strength-Based Approach
- Collaboration with Community Resources
- Advocacy



# Cultural Competency

- Education about the socioeconomic factors influencing clients' lives.
- Understanding the cultural context of poverty can provide more empathetic and effective support.



# Trauma Informed Care

- Given the prevalence of trauma among individuals living in poverty, adopting a trauma-informed approach to therapy should be considered the gold standard.
- This involves recognizing the signs of trauma, creating a safe and supportive environment, and integrating trauma-sensitive interventions into treatment.





# Taking a Strength Base Approach

- Rather than focusing solely on deficits, adopting a strengths-based approach that acknowledges the resilience and coping strategies individuals and families develop in the face of poverty can be empowering.
- Acknowledging and building on these strengths can empower clients to overcome challenges.

# Collaboration With Community Resources

- Become familiarize with local resources available to individuals living in poverty.
- Collaborating with community organizations can help clients access the support they need, such as food assistance, housing resources, and mental health services.
- Quarterly community orientation for new professionals in the county.



# Advocacy

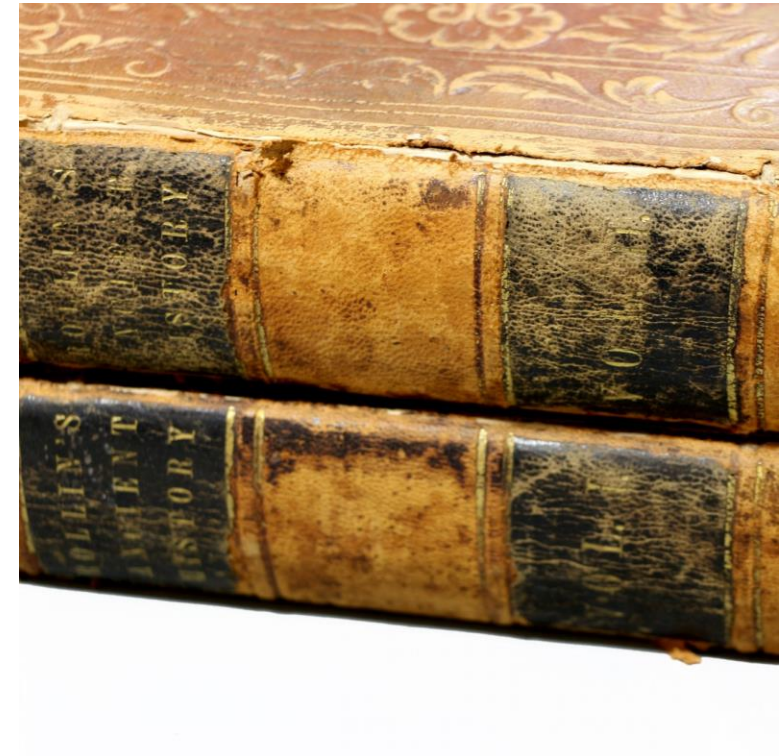
- Advocating for policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty and improving access to mental health care.
- Participating in advocacy efforts can help address the systemic factors contributing to poverty-related mental health issues.
- Sometimes we need to work harder than our clients.



# The Importance of Poverty-Awareness

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- Making sure poverty awareness is embedded in trainings, policies and procedures.
- Recognizing and responding to poverty as part of assessment and treatment.
- Helping individuals access benefits, resources, employment, childcare, medical and mental health treatment.
- Promoting education and employment of mental health workers in low-income areas.



# Doing Our Part

- By integrating these approaches into practice, we can better support children, families, and clients affected by poverty, helping them build resilience and work towards improved mental health and well-being.



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