

Study Guide for the Australian Collaboration Fact and Issue Sheet

POVERTY AND ITS CAUSES

FOR REVIEW

1. Definitions of poverty

1a. What does it mean to say that poverty is a 'relative' concept?

2. Measuring poverty in Australia

2a. According to ACOSS, how many people in Australia are currently living in poverty? What proportion of Australia's population does this represent?

2b. What is the formula used by ACOSS to determine this figure?

2c. What effect would raising the above threshold by 10 per cent have on the estimated number of people living in poverty?

2d. What percentage of children are living in poverty in Australia, and how does this compare internationally?

2e. Which groups of people in Australia are most likely to be affected by poverty?

3. The causes of poverty

3a. Assuming that the causes of poverty are structural, as opposed to individual, what are the main causes of poverty in Australia today?

4. Work and income

4a. How many people in Australia are currently receiving unemployment benefits?

4b. What proportion of these people have been unemployed for twelve months or longer?

4c. How many people in Australia are currently receiving either a disability or parent's pension?

4d. Is unemployment spread evenly across the population, or do some sections of the population experience higher rates of unemployment? Could your postcode, for instance, determine your likelihood of being unemployed?

5. Education

5a. In what ways do low educational levels contribute to the risk of poverty?

5b. What are some of the causes of low education?

5c. How important is education for employment? (Give evidence to support your answer.)

6. Housing

6a. How many people are homeless in Australia?

6b. What is the link between housing affordability and unemployment, and, consequently, poverty?

7. Health

7a. In what ways might disability or illness contribute to poverty?

7b. Does poverty itself contribute to poor health? (Give evidence for your answer.)

FOR DISCUSSION

For each of the statements below, work in pairs to decide whether you agree or disagree and explain why. Alternatively, use each of the statements below as a starting point for a class debate.

1. 'The only truly poor people are those who are at risk of starving to death, or who cannot get access to urgent medical assistance when needed. Given that this is not the case for the vast majority of people in Australia, poverty is not really a problem in this country.'
2. 'If someone finds themselves without the resources for access to proper housing, health care, or other services, it is because they didn't work hard enough to get a good education or a good job.'
3. 'It should be up to the individual to ensure that they can pay for things like health care, child-care, housing and education. If the government was to increase funding for these services then there would be little or no incentive for people to work, and those who did work would be supporting those who did not.'
4. 'Sometimes the symptoms of poverty can become the causes of poverty.'
5. 'A fair society is one in which every person is given the same opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their family background. This means that the state must ensure that housing is affordable, and that access to quality health care and education is universal.'

FOR RESEARCH

1. Use any of the sources on the list provided under Useful Sources at the end of the Fact and Issue Sheet to investigate further the nature of poverty in Australia today.

- What are the different ways that poverty can be defined?
- What is the difference between poverty and inequality?
- How can poverty be measured?
- Who are the most disadvantaged groups in Australia?
- Has poverty in Australia become better or worse over time?
- How does the rate of poverty in Australia compare with that of other industrialised countries?
- What are some of the ways that poverty can be ameliorated and/or prevented?

2. Use the internet to research debates in the media regarding the issue of poverty.

- Is poverty or unemployment currently discussed much in the media?
- Is the problem of homelessness currently discussed much in the media?
- What about specific areas of social policy such as education, health, housing, maternity leave and child-care?
- What is the nature of the debates relating to some of these issues?
- What are the policies of the major political parties in Australia on the issue of poverty?