

1-10-2017

Working with Students Living in Poverty: What Can School Counselors Do?

Krystle Seekamp
Winona State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/counseloreducationcapstones>

Recommended Citation

Seekamp, Krystle, "Working with Students Living in Poverty: What Can School Counselors Do?" (2017). *Counselor Education Capstones*. 71.
<https://openriver.winona.edu/counseloreducationcapstones/71>

This Capstone Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Counselor Education at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counselor Education Capstones by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact klarson@winona.edu.

Working with Students Living in Poverty: What can School Counselors do?

Krystle Seekamp

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science

Degree in Counselor Education

Winona State University

Spring 2017

Winona State University
College of Education
Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Working with Students Living in Poverty: What can School Counselor's do?

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Krystle Seekamp

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: Dr. Eric Baltrinic

Approval Date: 1/10/17

Abstract

This literature review contains information about the impact of poverty on the development of children and young adults, as well as what school counselors can do to help. Poverty is something that impacts many individuals throughout their lifetime and it is important to develop an understanding about how to better help these individuals. School counselors have the ability to instill change and provide a positive and safe environment for not only all students, but students that are living in poverty as well. Additionally, information is provided on how to combat the effects of poverty to prepare students for a successful future.

Keywords: poverty, school counselors, academic achievement, social/emotional behavior

Contents

Introduction..... 5

Review of Literature.....6

 Academics.....7

 Social and Emotional Development.....9

 Future Success of Students.....11

 Academics and School Counselor’s.....12

 Social Emotional Development and School Counselor’s.....13

 Students’ Futures and School Counselor’s.....14

Conclusion or Discussion.....15

Author’s Note.....18

References.....19

Tables/Figures/Appendix.....21

Introduction

In an ever-changing society individuals' must adapt and change to meet the needs of the world around them. While these changes may be difficult for many adults, children experience even more difficulty understanding the changes that are happening. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) 44% of children under the age of 18 in the United States qualify as low-income (see Appendix A). Granja, Koball, and Jiang (2017) explained how children represent 23 percent of the population in the United States, but comprise 33 percent of all the people that live in poverty. This statistic is concerning since poverty can have such a large impact on the development of an individual, especially children. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2014) reports for a family of four with two children to qualify as poor, they must make \$24,008 per year. Due to the fact that there is a large proportion of the population living at or below the poverty line, this makes this an issue that will affect every individual that comes in contact with these students or families.

Students that are living in poverty face many obstacles throughout their education. Many students struggle to maintain passing grades to graduate from high school to provide a better future for themselves. There are many factors that deter these young people from successfully completing high school such as household chaos, neighborhood violence, parents that are uneducated themselves, and other factors. Gordon and Cui (2014) discussed how important parental involvement in a child's academic achievement. "Research suggests that school-related parental involvement is particularly important in affecting adolescents' academic achievement" (Cui & Gordon, 2014, p. 616). This can be difficult for many low-income families due to schedule constraints as well as other forces outside of their control. Children from low-income households also face an overrepresentation with behavioral diagnoses. Many households that these children come from are chaotic so as a result a lot of the behavior they exhibit is the

way they have learned to survive in their community. This can be a struggle for many professionals within a school to understand why a student may be acting a certain way. Lastly, children growing up in poverty are faced with consequences that may affect them for the rest of their lives. Many children have not received proper nutrition, education, or coping skills while they were growing up to develop into a successful adult. This can lead to a future of higher teenage pregnancy rates, lower income, and earlier death.

When working with children that come from low-income households, it may seem like a difficult task but school counselors have the skills and knowledge to help these children and families. School counselors can be a catalyst for change in a school that may be struggling with students living in poverty. Some professionals may not know how to reach out to students that are having difficulties outside of school. School counselors can also work with community resources to help connect with families that are in need. Overall, school counselors are a catalyst for change when working with children in poverty and there are many things that can be done. Throughout this paper research will be presented on how children living in poverty are affected through academics, behavioral, and their future. Also, the impact school counselors can have and what they can do to improve the futures of these students.

Review of Literature

There is a lot of research that has been conducted on how poverty can impact academic success (Garrett-Peters, Vernon-Feagans, & Willoughby, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). This helps to show that this is an ongoing issue and is relevant anywhere an individual may go. School districts work to help students that are living in poverty and dealing with trauma on a daily basis. O'grady (2017) explains how trauma can have a lasting impact on

a child's developing brain, their behavior and health which can influence them for the rest of their lives.

School counselors have the responsibility to connect with all students that attend the school they are working in. Students that are living in poverty may need more assistance which can sometimes seem as though it is a difficult task. As of 2013, approximately 24% of children either qualify as deeply poor or poor (Ekono, Jiang, & Smith, 2016). This large percentage of the population helps to show just how much contact a school counselor, or any individual in a school, will have with these individuals.

Academics

As a child is developing they experience many milestones throughout their time attending school. Many children thrive and learn a lot about themselves while attending school, but many other students may need more assistance. There has been an abundance of research conducted on how poverty can impact academic success even beginning at an early age. Research has found that low achievement is correlated with lack of resources and studies have documented the connection between low socioeconomic status and low achievement (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). There is a strong correlation that has been researched between low socioeconomic status and low achievement of students, which is an area of concern for professionals working in schools.

One concern of families and children that are living in poverty is food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as "uncertainty about the financial ability to provide the next meal" (Jackson, 2015, p. 146). Food insecurity is something that families living in poverty experience and this can have a negative effect on the cognitive development of children. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows food insecurity is highest

among Hispanic households when compared to Non-Hispanic Black and Non-Hispanic White households (Kalof & Seith, 2011). While food insecurity is higher among the Hispanic population, it is still an issue across all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Jackson (2015) explains how a supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) can help to provide a family with necessary food to help improve the negative outcomes that accompany food insecurity and growing up in poverty. This program helps to support families in making healthy choices to provide a better start to their children's future. While there has not been a lot of research conducted on the impact WIC programs have on the cognitive development of children, there has been a small portion of research devoted to the cause. Research has shown WIC participation to improve the cognitive functioning and academic progress of children that take part in the WIC program (Jackson, 2015). This research helps to show how early intervention may help to improve the cognitive development of children living in poverty.

Another area that many children that are raised in poverty are challenged with is their exposure to language around their house. Hart and Risley (2003) found that children that when you compare the amount of language experience children from professional families, working-class families, and welfare families there are large differences. Children that are raised in professional families typically experience 215,000 words throughout a 100-hour work week, compared to 125,000 words for working-class children, and 62,000 words for welfare children (Hart & Risley, 2003). The inequalities that Hart and Risley discovered help show the dramatic differences that children who are raised in different socioeconomic classes experience which can impact them in the future. "By age four, the average child in a welfare family might have 13 million fewer words of cumulative experience than the average child in a working-class family" (Hart & Risley, 2003, p. 116). There are many factors that contribute to the lack of language

children who are raised in poverty, but this is an issue since this will put children in these situations at a disadvantage when compared to their peers.

Many students bring a lot of concerns with them to school that they may be dealing with at home. This can have a large impact on their ability to focus on what they are learning, control emotional outbursts, and many other factors. Chaotic households have also been shown to have an impact on a child's academic success. Chaotic households can be defined as being "crowded noisy homes filled with distractions, limited structure and routines, and frequent changes in family structure and residential moves, all of which can undermine young children's developing regulatory and pre-academic skills and ability to focus on school-related activities" (Garrett-Peters, Vernon-Feagans, & Willoughby, 2016, p. 16). It would be easy to see how an individual would not be successful in retaining information to help their learning process in a chaotic household. Garrett-Peters et al. (2016) discuss how excessive noise and crowding may negatively impact a child's developing regulatory system which helps the individual focus and maintain attention. Children that come from these chaotic households may find it difficult to focus their attention during class resulting in negative reactions due to their living conditions. This may cause frustration for teachers or other professionals in the classroom since it may seem as though the student is uninterested or does not care about the material. It is important for school professionals to understand where the students are coming from to help the individuals meet their potential.

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development typically progresses throughout a child's school years. A lot of social and emotional development is reinforced either positively or negatively, but many low-income students do not experience the necessary positive reinforcements. This may be a concern due to the fact it is beneficial to have well-developed social and emotional coping

mechanisms to better succeed within a classroom. Research has found a disproportionate representation of minority students living in poverty in special education classrooms.

Disproportionate refers to a “group’s representation in special education is different from that of a comparison group (e.g., Caucasian students or all other ethnic groups combined)” (Bogan, Frederick, Kauffman, & Wiley, 2013, p. 30). There are several hypotheses as to why there seems to be a larger proportion of low-income, minority students represented in special education.

One hypothesis is that students living in poverty are exposed to more risk factors that are associated with disabilities. Children raised in poverty are disproportionately minority children which may help to explain the overrepresentation of minority students in special education classroom. Students may be exposed to violence in their neighborhood and household which may cause confusion on the behaviors they should exhibit when in school.

Many children that are raised in poverty also do not receive an equal amount of positive affirmations when compared to other students. Hart and Risley (2003) compared the affirmatives and prohibitions that children in professional, working-class, and welfare families experience throughout the day. The research showed that children in professional families received 32 affirmatives and five prohibitions per hour, children in working-class families experienced 12 affirmatives and seven prohibitions per hour, and children in welfare households experienced 5 affirmatives and 11 prohibitions per hour. The differences that were noticeable amongst all households is interesting since it may help to explain why some children that are living in poverty behave the way they do. Many children in these households are accustomed to negative reinforcement that it does not have as much impact on them as it would other children. From the research, Hart and Risley (2003) found by the age of four children in professional

families would experience 560,000 more affirmatives, and children in working-class families would experience 100,000 more encouragements than discouragements. The research also shows that children living in a welfare household experience 144,000 fewer encouragements and 84,000 more discouragements by the age of four. This research helps to explain why low-income children may behave in a way that professionals may not see as beneficial, but it is the way they have been conditioned and raised to believe is acceptable.

Future Success of Students

The future success of students can be determined by the events they have experienced in life, their education level, and their social and emotional development.

Compared with children whose families had incomes of at least twice the poverty line during their early childhood, poor children complete two fewer years of schooling, work 451 fewer hours per year, earn less than half as much, received \$826 per year more in food stamps as adults, and are more than twice as likely to report poor overall health or high levels of psychological distress (Duncan, Kalil, & Ziol-Guest, 2010, p. 312).

The effects of poverty on a young child can have an impact on that individual for the rest of their life.

Poverty has the ability to impact the brain of a developing child and lead to a discouraging future for the individual. Duncan et al. (2010) explain how poverty has the potential to change the neurobiology of a growing child which may lead to poorer outcomes later in life. The ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) scale which was developed by Kaiser Permanente “established that ACEs are associated with early mortality, increased comorbid conditions, and increased prevalence of the leading causes of death in adulthood” (Campbell, Egede, & Walker, 2016, p. 345). The scale contains childhood experience that include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as household chaos which includes substance abuse,

mental illness, violence, and incarceration (Campbell et al., 2016). Many of the children living in poverty experience many of the listed qualifiers on the ACEs scale. This is setting these children up for a future of early mortality and an increase in comorbid conditions. Campbell et al. (2016) explained how there is a relationship between ACEs and chronic disease and individuals that experience four or more ACEs are more likely to experience coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. This research shows that children only have to experience a minimum of one of the ACEs listed to feel the impact when they are adults. Poverty is not only impacting children as they are growing, but the effects carry-on into adulthood.

Academics and School Counselor's

While it may seem like a large challenge to positively influence a student to succeed academically, it is worth it for all students regardless of status level. Students and families living in poverty may need extra support and interventions to impact the academic success of student's. Cui and Gordon (2014) noted that academic success during adolescence is related to positive outcomes including better physical health, positive peer affiliation, and advantages economically later in life. There are several ways that school counselors can strive to help families and students that are in need.

One way to improve the academic success of students is to help the parents of the students become involved in their education. "Several studies found that school-related parental involvement is associated with adolescents' receiving higher scores on standardized tests, higher grade point averages, and a general overall sense of higher academic accomplishment" (Cui & Gordon, 2014). It may be difficult to include families of low-income students due to schedule conflicts, childcare issues, and other concerns but the benefits their child may experience when involving their parent is worth the extra work it may take. Parental involvement may be difficult

for low-income families due to less access to adequate resources, unavailable due to work schedule, and lack of knowledge of their child's schoolwork (Cui & Gordon, 2014).

Schools and school counselors could work to provide childcare after school hours so parents can be involved with activities that are occurring at the school. Another option may be to develop an open communication system with parents alerting them to what work their children may be bringing home as well as resources so the parents understand the school-work as well. It may also be beneficial for school counselors to get to know the families so they feel comfortable discussing any concerns with them. Another way to involve parents is to host a parent night or even meetings where the school counselor works with the family's schedules and the school can provide childcare for the meeting time. This would help the parents understand what work their child may be doing or any concerns and also allow for the parents to discuss their child with people that work with them every day.

Social and Emotional Development and School Counselors

Social and emotional development can be a struggle for children from all backgrounds if they do not have the proper role models and resources to positively develop (Bachman, El Nokali, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). There are several ways that school counselors can work to help develop the social and emotional development of low-income students.

The first way school counselors can improve social and emotional development in not only low-income students, but all students, is teaching them resilience. Children from low-income families benefit greatly from resilience due to the amount of obstacles many of them have faced prior to beginning school (Cimetta, Cutshaw, Holliday, Marx, & Yaden, 2014). Some of the obstacles that children may have faced prior to entering school may include improper nutrition, housing instability, non-conducive home-learning environments, and/or less nurturing parental interactions (Cimetta et al., 2014). Resilience may help students that face

adversity handle the stress that comes their way and better prepare them for the future. This is not a benefit for only students that live in poverty, but this would benefit all students since resiliency is not an inborn characteristic.

Another way school counselors can help students that are living in poverty with behavioral development is by working to create positive friendships within the school. Many of the students that are low-income go to households and neighborhoods that are unsafe and not conducive to learning. Positive friendships have shown to improve “low-income students’ math and literacy school readiness scores” (Cimetta et al., 2014). School counselors can create small groups or even activities within a classroom lesson to help ignite positive friendships that may help low-income students.

The last way school counselors can impact the futures of low-income students’ behavior is by educating other professionals in the school. School counselors do not know everything so that may mean if there is a gap in knowledge within a school to bring someone in with that knowledge to teach everyone. Children from low-income households can sometimes appear defiant or misbehaved, but they are likely acting that way as a coping skill they have learned while growing up. “One of the most effective resilience-building actions educators can engage in is to dig for and reflect back to a student his or her strengths—the internal protective factors that students have often honed during times of stress” (Henderson, 2013, p. 26). It can be hard to dig deep and focus on the positive things a student may do rather than the negative, but it will be more beneficial to the students’ learning to focus on the positive.

School Counseling and Students’ Future

School counselors should be an advocate for students that come from low-income households. The effects that children face when growing up in poverty or low-income

households, do not stop once they graduate high school. This is why it is important for school counselors to advocate for these students so they can be successful.

Racial/ethnic minority, immigrant, and low socioeconomic (SES) youth may face unique barriers as they transition to adulthood, including protracted or truncated trajectories through school, higher chances of living in poverty, and fewer social resources that result in poorer attainment and health outcomes (Nurius, Prince, & Rocha, 2015, p. 568).

School counselors can work to provide resources to these students throughout elementary, middle, and high school so they will not be faced with a future that they do not deserve.

School counselors can work to connect these students with technical colleges, universities, or education beyond high school. This may be difficult information for many parents that are raising children in poverty since they have possibly not experienced further education. Every student deserves to and has the ability to graduate high school and school counselors can work to help make that happen. School counselors should keep track of those students that are falling behind to provide them with an intervention so they do not slip through the cracks. There are many things that can be done to help these students succeed such as creating after-school programs, brainstorming ideas with teachers to better reach students, or meeting individually with the student to discuss any difficulties they may be facing.

Conclusion

Children living in poverty is a very complex and sometimes challenging circumstance for not only the families, but individuals that wish to help those in need. There is a high population of individuals that live in poverty and children compose a large majority of that population.

While it may seem like a challenging obstacle to face when working as a school counselor, these students need any help they can get and there are ways to provide assistance.

Poverty can have a variety of different impacts on children ranging from academic, social/emotional, or future implications for the child. Many children that are raised in poverty do not have access to the necessary materials or environments to thrive as a student in general education classrooms. This may result in an overrepresentation of low-income students in special education classrooms, especially minority students. It is important for all professionals in a school to have an understanding of their students and their culture to better serve them. Many students that are raised in low-income households experience household chaos which may impact their behavior in school. This may cause a lot of distress for teachers or other professionals in a school, but it is important to know your students and determine whether their behavior is due to their environment.

Lastly, poverty can have lasting impacts on children throughout their lives. Many children that were raised in poverty find it difficult to work their way out of poverty due to the circumstances they are in. Low-income students find it hard to focus in school, learn at the same pace as other children, and regulate their emotions which make it more challenging to complete high school. When children are having difficulties at school they may become discouraged and not want to continue. This may extend the poverty the child experienced in childhood into adulthood. The consequences of being raised in poverty have the possibility to be detrimental to students, but there are ways to combat and stop the negative side effects that poverty can have.

School counselors can advocate for these students to help provide them the necessary resources to help them succeed. Initiatives to help teachers, parents, and other professionals in a school connect in a positive manner can help students succeed. Many parents of low-income students are only addressed when their child is struggling or having issues in class, but it is important to also reach out to parents when their child is excelling or to simply get to know the

child and their family. When parents feel welcomed in the school they will be more likely to be involved in their child's schooling which will help grades and outlook on school improve for both students and parents. School counselors can also help to create programs to involve the parents of low-income children by getting to know the parents and how they would like to be involved. This may include providing the parents resources on childcare so they can be more involved in the school, providing them with books or other resources to use at home, and other methods to make them feel comfortable and welcomed. School counselors also have the responsibility to reach out to students personally that may be falling behind. It is important to get to know all students and especially those that may need a little more help along the way. There are many creative and innovative ways that school counselors can help low-income students and it is important to reach out earlier rather than later.

In conclusion, students living in poverty experience many obstacles which may cause them to struggle throughout their schooling career. School counselors can play a vital role in combating the negative side effects of poverty and creating a safe environment for students. There are many ways to help students living in poverty which is why it is best to get to know the students within the school as well as their families. School counselors have the abilities to instill a positive change amongst children living in poverty.

Author's Note

As a future school counselor this topic is very important for me to better provide for my future students. The purpose of this research was to raise awareness at for the impact poverty can have on a student as well as how school counselors can combat these negative side effects. Poverty is very common so it is relevant to all individuals that work with children so I see it as an area of concern. A lot of young children, adults, and others that are impacted by poverty need an individual to provide them with support to break the cycle of poverty. I one day hope to be that person for as many people I can possibly provide services to. The impacts of poverty have a large variety of negative side effects that can be avoided when professionals provide students with the necessary tools to succeed. While it may seem like a lot of work when presented with the issues of students living in poverty, the reward of successfully seeing a student reach their potential is worth the effort.

References

- Bachman, H. J., El Nokali, N. E., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2010). Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. *Child Development, 81*(2), 988-1005.
- Bogan, J. E., Frederick, B. J., Kauffman, J. M., & Wiley, A. L. (2013). Disproportionate poverty, conservatism, and the disproportionate identification of minority students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children, 36*(4), 29-50.
- Campbell, J., Egede, L., & Walker, R. (2016). Associations between adverse childhood experiences, high-risk behaviors, and morbidity in adulthood. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 50*(3), 344-352.
- Cimetta, A., Cutshaw, C., Holliday, M., Marx, R., & Yaden, D. (2014). Protective factors for school readiness among children in poverty. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 19*(3-4), 125-147.
- Cui, M., & Gordon, M. (2014). School-related parental involvement and adolescent academic achievement: The role of community poverty. *Family Relations, 63*, 616-626.
- Duncan, G., Kalil, A., & Ziol-Guest, K. (2010). Early-childhood poverty and adult attainment, behavior, and health. *Child Development, 81*(1), 306-325.
- Ekono, M., Jiang, Y., & Skinner, C. (2016, February). Basic facts about low-income children: Children under 18 years, 2014. *National Center for Children in Poverty*. New York: Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.
- Ekono, M., Jiang, Y., & Smith, S. (2016). Young children in deep poverty. *National Center for Children Living in Poverty, 1-15*.

- Garrett-Peters, P., Vernon-Feagans, L., & Willoughby, M. (2016). The role of household chaos in understanding relations between early poverty and children's academic achievement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 37*, 16-25.
- Granja, M.R., Koball, H., & Jiang, Y. (2017) Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 18 Years, 2015. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.
- Hart, B., & Risley, T. (2003). The early catastrophe. *Education Review, 17(1)*, 110-118.
- Henderson, N. (2013). Havens of resilience. *Educational Leadership, 71(1)*, 22-27.
- Jackson, M. (2015). Early childhood WIC participation, cognitive development and academic achievement. *Social Science & Medicine, 126*, 145-153.
- Kalof, C., & Seith, D. (2011). *Who are america's poor children?* New York: National Center for Children in Poverty.
- Lacour, M., & Tissington, L. (2011). The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews, 6(7)*, 522-527.
- Nurius, P., Prince, D., & Rocha, A. (2015). Cumulative disadvantage and youth well-being: A multi-domain examination with life course implications. *Child Adolescence Social Work, 32(6)*, 567-576.
- O'grady, K. (2017). Transforming schools with trauma-informed care. *American School Counselor Association*, 8-13.
- Poverty, N. C. (2014). *50-state Demographic Wizard*. Retrieved from National Center for Children in Poverty:
<http://nccp.org/tools/demographics/>

Appendix A

Income levels of children under age 18

	Income level	
	Low-Income	Above Low-Income
	↑ ↓	↑ ↓ ×
National	44%	56%
Illinois	41%	59%
Indiana	45%	55%
Iowa	37%	63%
Kansas	41%	59%
Michigan	44%	56%
Minnesota	32%	68%
North Dakota	31%	69%
Ohio	44%	56%
South Dakota	39%	61%
Wisconsin	39%	61%

50-State Demographic Wizard. (n.d.). Retrieved April 4, 2017, from <http://nccp.org/tools/demographics/>