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**Wealth Inequality and the Poverty Trap in America**

The top 0.1% has doubled control of wealth in the United States over the past thirty years (Konczal & Covert, 2014). In the meantime, although American wages have grown substantially over the last 40 years and unemployment is low, the purchasing power of the American paycheck has not seen equivalent growth (Desilver, 2018). These issues have prevented those who were not fortunate enough to be born into a socioeconomically stable situation to “pick themselves up by the bootstraps” and pursue the American rags to riches dream. As such, it has struck a chord with the American public and both sides of the political aisle have offered their solutions for closing the wage gap.

The ‘poverty trap’ is the cycle of poverty in which those born into poor families are prevented from opportunities which would allow them to move up the socioeconomic ladder into the middle class. These opportunities include access to quality education, employment, healthcare, housing, and other basic needs. Two of the biggest traps for those in poverty are lack are access to quality education and healthcare. In today’s society, a college degree is all but a requirement for obtaining a well-paying job. However, it is difficult to get into a good college without good grades, high standardized test scores, and involvement in a variety of activities. Students of poor families likely live in underfunded school districts that do not offer AP courses or standardized test preparation courses that help them achieve the academic success that colleges expect of the modern student. Additionally, they are more likely to have a job and/or spend time taking care of their family members in order to help their families make ends meet, meaning that they have less time to dedicate to extracurricular activities or studying. Even if they do get accepted into college, the cost of education is so astronomical that even with need- and merit-based scholarships and work-study programs, the prospect of paying for four years of education and living costs without an income may not seem feasible to many students and their families.

On the side of healthcare, the price of medicine and receiving care can be unattainable for those who do not have quality insurance from their employer. As such, people in poverty may have to choose between feeding themselves and their families or paying for medicine or other healthcare costs. One example is that of the price of insulin for diabetics. Over the last two decades, the primary producer of insulin, Eli Lilly, has raised their prices by nearly 1200%; in the same amount of time, the price of a gallon of milk or a car only rose about 20%. Because of this, diabetic patients are forced to ration or stop taking their insulin, a drug that they need to survive (Indianapolis Business Journal, 2017). Additionally, affordable family planning resources, specifically birth control for women, allows women more economic freedom and the ability to take control of their life plans. It prevents teenage pregnancy and allows women to continue their education and pursue a higher paying job (Dugger, 2016).

In order to improve the quality of life for Americans in poverty and stop the poverty trap, the government needs to expand the Affordable Care Act to provide universal healthcare for all Americans and make public education free for all while ensuring better funding for all public schools and better salaries for teachers. Additionally, the government should require paid sick leave for all workers as sickness not only affects one’s health, but also one’s ability to earn money (Guglielmi, 2017). These measures would ensure that one’s ability to obtain success is not determined by how much money they have, but by their drive and determination to reach their goals.

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