

Are Social Welfare Programs the Answer?

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As a child raised in an affluent community, extravagance is the norm for many around me. A quick drive to the beach and I am staring at million-dollar properties, vacation homes and a giant line of expensive hotels; this is paradise for those who can afford. My trek back home tells a completely different tale. 10 minutes into town and panhandlers crowd busy intersections, dilapidated houses placed directly in front of run-down medical centers and mold covered preschools on roads ridden with potholes engulfing this neighborhood with desperation where just a mile up the road seems foreign.

How can there be such a divide?

At school, some students bring fancy food prepared at home, while others pretend to enjoy the bland monotony of a free chicken sandwich and boxed milk. No time or money to cut their fruit into shapes or separate their snacks into cute containers, they might even be lucky to indulge in food at all, for many this may be their only meal of the entire day. Leading me to wonder how this level of poverty can go ignored, especially in a city that is home to an abundance of funds. This seems unjust that communities can seem to prosper but ignore their weakest links. In the United States, welfare exists to help these low-income individuals, but is it really solving the problem? All these small issues tacked on top of each other lead me to wonder, Are Social Welfare Programs the Answer?

Welfare Programs

As Defined by The Federal Safety Net, Welfare Programs within the United Sates include 13 programs working to combat poverty among low-income Americans, beginning with the

Medicaid Program and running through Refundable Tax Credits, The SNAP Program (formerly known as food stamps), Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, Pell Grants, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Child Nutrition, Head Start, Job Training Programs, Women, Infants and Children, Child-Care, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and the Lifeline or Obama Phone (*Federal Safety Net*, 2021).

All the programs listed above expect no contribution from their users, deeming them non-contributory, instead they are paid for by the taxes of the American Public. As these programs operate for all Americans, they are competitive because specific required criteria must be met to qualify, thus why they are only available to low-income Americans. Contrarily, contributory programs require the user to contribute over time, such as Social Security that comes as steady payments once a specific age is reached.

For the purpose of this paper, I will not be including NGO's run within the United States as part of the United States Welfare Programs definition, as private organizations are not run by the government. This exclusion is to alleviate any confusion between Government Assistance and outside assistance in reference to Welfare provided for the American people.

'The Answer'

In the writing of this paper, I will be defining 'the answer' as the key to a balance between work and compensation in a concerted effort to stop the cycle of poverty where it begins. This is in regard to proper provision of basic needs to individuals who are lacking necessities. 'The answer' will provide these needs without harm to the individual or the taking away of other essential uses of the individuals' time such as childcare. My definition of 'the answer' is to

provide social harmony or freedom from contentions, without division because of socio-economic status and other poverty attributing factors.

Methodology

The division of my paper follows a macro to micro approach, as if zooming in on a microscope. I will examine the effectiveness of Welfare Programs at creating ‘the answer’ through the lenses of the Country in its entirety, Class by socio-economic status, and moving to the micro of an Individual trying to find ‘their answer’ within the United States Welfare system. By decreasing the size of sample under the microscope, a proper allocation of ‘the answer’ can be formed about the effectiveness of welfare programs under each category, allowing a final judgement to be contrived.

I have chosen to strategically include the arguments of six main experts to add a sense of well roundedness and adept understanding to my research. These authors all are highly knowledgeable and have years of intense training and real-world experience embedded within their arguments, some of my authors such as Maggie Dickinson and Kathryn T. Bailey share the perspectives of multiple lenses within their arguments, helping to strengthen their stance on the issue of welfare and will in turn bolster the final decision.

Are Social Welfare Programs the Answer?

Country

‘The answer’

Starting the furthest out on my metaphorical microscope I am looking to the overall macro umbrella of the country. Arguing the two sides of ‘the answer’ found through social welfare programs as the voice of the United States in its entirety. Ryan Steed has spent his entire educational career arguing and standing up for the effectiveness of social welfare programs in America.

Although the applicative knowledge of real-world experience is lacking, meaning he hasn’t seen welfare programs implemented in person, and Steed has very few publications, he proves himself to be a credible author on the subject by having attended and earned a PhD from Carnegie Melon in Information Systems and Public Policy (*Ryan Steed*, 2021), consistently providing assistance in researchers’ studies while in school, and by cofounding a Maker Space for Student Innovation at George Washington University, exhibiting he can take on a leadership role (*Ryan Steed*, 2021). Evaluating further, the authors’ intense devotion to schooling and community program driven work displays Steed’s proficiency in being able to write about public policies and how they relate to welfare programs. Coming to a final judgment about the author’s credibility to dispute the subject, there should be no questions about Steed’s qualifications to speak on public policies and welfare programs. An appraisal of accomplishments by Steed reveals supported evidence of his qualification.

His argument is taken into great account when he suggests numbers from the following study to back his claim that social welfare programs for the whole country are ‘the answer.’

Quote:

[Because the] United States [is] 7th in child poverty among the world’s 41 richest countries... Constant maintenance and monitoring is required to keep programs on track... [through] surveys [from] citizens about issues from housing to transportation, [this study] tests new programs such as flexible rent subsidies to prevent homelessness and evaluates government programs with scientifically rigorous methods. A consistent, widespread implementation of this kind of data-driven policymaking will generate more improvement in the lives of the poor in the long run than most universal policies (Steed, 2019).

The study above asserts the notion that through continued implementation and careful checks and balances among the welfare programs such as rent subsidies offered by the government, succeeding should be the expectation in the long term. By maintaining the government programs this is further proven with the positive repercussions that low-income individuals gain when given access to lower living costs through welfare aid. The initial price that the government pays of the forefront of implementing the program is vastly outweighed by the benefits granted to those seeking ‘the answer.’

He points out that of the world’s 41st most economically endowed countries, the United States is 7th in the category labelling the most impoverished youth (Steed, 2019). With his argument he contends the claim that because the United States is so high on this negative list that welfare

programs should be put into place to lower that statistic and create ‘the answer’ specifically in subsidized living and maintaining a consistent program for those in need of its utilization.

His prominent voice arguing for welfare programs evinces how the members of the country who use welfare programs would not be able to compete within the society if these programs did not exist, such as having no dwelling. Proving that when used correctly with a checks and balances system, social welfare programs are ‘the answer.’

Not ‘the answer’

Maggie Dickinson has dedicated her life to proving that welfare in the United States is ineffective and not ‘the answer.’

Even though the author is still attending school and has primarily focused her efforts into one longitudinal study, Dickinson demonstrates her adept knowledge in the subject area through a PhD in anthropology from City University of New York, working as an assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies, and her intense understanding of the SNAP food stamp program in the United States (*Dr. Maggie Dickinson, Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies Guttman Community College, 2021*). Concurrently, she understands the programs implementation as well as benefits and issues associated, making her a reliable source to include as her work holds much weight. A sound judgement can be devised that the author hosts the proper credibility to be taken into consideration within this research.

In her credible status she upholds and argues the view that intense politicization from the entire country has led to the demise of the effectiveness of social welfare programs in the United States.

Quote:

In the United States, the number of people receiving state-subsidized food aid has risen dramatically since 2001.... In New York City, welfare office workers operationalize policies that ease access to food assistance for poor workers who can demonstrate that they are formally employed. Meanwhile, workfare programs punish the unemployed and marginal workers by making them work for food stamps. This conservative, paternalistic welfare regime commodifies labor, creates new patterns of stratification among the urban poor, and redraws the terms of economic citizenship (Dickinson, 2016).

The above quote debates that the politicization by the country of these programs creates more harm for its users through the stigmas and passionate feelings associated with welfare programs than the programs themselves create. Dickinson is declaring the concept that as a country, the United States bipartisan system plays a significant role in the heavy increase of food assistance welfare use in the past two decades. A final assessment can be drawn that state-subsidized food aid has been radically politicized by the country and therefore has caused a major increase in use among one specific socio-economic class above others.

Defending how the program is working against the members of the country it is designed to offer help to, allows for light to be shown on Dickinson's argument that welfare is not 'the answer.' She continuously argues examples of the programs failing to complete their intended jobs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP program, that offers monthly exchange tickets for necessary items like food to aid in creating self-sufficient families (*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, 2022). She scolds this discriminatory operation

that only offers aid when its users are working, thus putting them at a disadvantage to those who may not have to work for the necessity of food.

The term economic citizenship is used and helps to understand the objective Dickinson believes. Her debating of how the relationship between working and receiving is different for members of the country because of politicization of the programs, assists in making a judgement that social welfare programs are not ‘the answer’ due to deeply embedded politicization.

Drawing a conclusion about the whole country emulating the arguments of experts is no easy task, but one that foundationally displays the faults of the existing welfare programs in the United States. Dickinson explains that from their commencement welfare programs are not ‘the answer’ because of deep-rooted political conflict that negatively effects the citizens economically and I personally believe socially, because they become isolated. This idea is countered when Steed altercates the notion that welfare programs are ‘the answer’ because they create stability and routine for those that utilize them. He references quantified studies of subsidized housing and how it can create ‘the answer’ through consistency to relieve the impoverished of the strain that comes from living without ‘the answer.’ Contemplating Dickinson’s argument, presentation of the faults instilled from the beginning of the program’s installment create the judgment that for the United States social welfare programs are not ‘the answer.’

Class by Socio-Economic Status

‘The answer’

When taking the next step closer into *the microscope* I look to Douglas Elmendorf to light the way to supporting social welfare programs as ‘the answer.’

Though there are allegations of poor leadership and staffing during his 6-year stint as dean at the Harvard Kennedy school, the purposes of this paper are not to evaluate the author's ability to dean (*Douglas Elmendorf*, 2021). Instead, Elmendorf has proven he is more than qualified to offer in-depth arguments pertaining to the classism lens. Through his work as the director of the congressional budget office where he heavily involved himself in budget policy, health care issues, social security, income security programs, and many other categories intensely, it should come with no surprise that he is labeled as profoundly competent. His work experience when coupled with the dependability of his PhD in economics from Harvard and other degrees from Princeton prove him a valuable expert (*Douglas Elmendorf*, 2021).

His main argument consists of a pipeline where he explains how the loss of welfare programs are detrimental to the American people specifically by their class.

The quote reads:

The outcome is damaging to our social cohesion and political process, because many lower- and middle-income people feel a growing distance from higher-income people and a growing frustration with our economic policies. Moreover, people with limited skills tend to have significant trouble finding work, even when overall labor demand is strong. And even if people did work enough more to maintain their total income after a benefit cut, the extra work would reduce their time for childcare, elder care, or other activities. This crowding out of activities by additional work would make people worse off (Elmendorf, 2016).

Through segregation of socio-economic class in relation to time allotted for childcare vs. time spent working, this quote helps to quarrel the differences and capabilities that government aid could be used to prevent further struggle in these low-income families, essentially closing the socio-economic gap within the primary family structure through economy. When weighing the issues associated with conflict between childcare and labor, it is important to recognize the cycle of events that will continue if there is not a force put in place to create change.

He continues to cerebrate his argument in a simple yet profound statement, saying that “the primary goal of economic policy should be to raise living standards for people of modest means” (Elmendorf, 2016). Circling around to his background as the director of the congressional budget office, it only makes sense for his words to relate back to the ‘economic policy’ of the United States, but within the discourse of the ‘economic policy’ is the deeply embedded social welfare argument. The ‘modest means’ he refers to for the people is ‘the answer’ as I have previously defined. Elmendorf is maintaining his claim that without the proper economic implementation of social welfare in the United States, the people who need it to achieve their most ‘modest means,’ cannot.

In the same short statement, he goes on to very clearly indicate this is a goal of the government, and not just a goal, but the primary goal. As someone in the public eye when speaking, these words were chosen carefully. By articulating the heft of the word primary, it is known that to achieve ‘the answer,’ economic policy as it relates back to social welfare needs to be satisfied immediately. When reviewing the pipeline comparison of childcare and work and the direct word choices about the economy within this argument there should be no questions pertaining to the importance of social welfare programs and their accountability as ‘the answer.’

Not ‘the answer’

John Buck and Sharon Villines offer in their book, “*We the People – Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*” the argument that social welfare is not ‘the answer’ as lower socio-economic groups can never achieve equality with upper socio-economic groups despite the attempted aid of welfare programs. They contend their point through an example of corporate America, suggesting that in the United States our working/living social and economic circumstances are dictated by major corporations (Buck and Villines, 2007).

Remonstrating further that welfare is not of any use to the lower-income Americans because corporation's rule over their living/working conditions, same as the upper-class Americans. This contrasts with the contrary above belief that through welfare, class can be ignored for the sake of providing ‘the answer’. Diagnosing the effect of corporate America on the effectiveness of social welfare at providing ‘the answer’ alludes to a heavy tint by these corporations and a dilution of social welfare as it relates to class.

Understanding personal bias of the Experts opinions in authoring their book and the high stakes their reputations carry by displaying subjective opinions, each of these authors hosts the criteria to be noted as reliable for the purposes of this research. By obtaining professorship at SUNY Empire State College for business planning and management, and contributing to local organizations and boards, Villines promotes her adherence to the subject (Sharon Villines, 2021). Buck does the same through freelance community writing and serving on several boards pertaining to sociocracy as well as continuing his work as a certified sociocratic organizational consultant in the Washington, DC region (John Buck, 2019). Evaluatively, the authors carry enough education and real-world experience amongst themselves to be considered credibly valid to speak on social welfare. Judging finally, each author is more than capable on their own to

speak on the subject, but together they have more educational strength with their firm grasp of awareness in their field, especially when discussing economics relating to class in America.

Tying back to the destruction of finding ‘the answer’ in America through the implementation of social welfare programs, the authors make the statement that while major American corporations provide nearly all “modern comforts we enjoy, an end to corporations would end many ills but would also end many comforts.” (Buck and Villines, 2007). The argument is continued when the bleak relation of the unethicity of corporations is put into comparison with the American government (Buck and Villines, 2007). In the explanation and indication of corporations providing “modern comforts” it is assumed through base knowledge of the American class system that these modern comforts are not afforded by each socio-economic group in the country. Only those who have already found ‘the answer’ are able to engage in the positive of corporations, but unfortunately, in their downfall, all socio-economic groups suffer in the negative.

Signifying that when there is inequality with the classes, even with the aid of social welfare through the government, the unethicity and corruption of both the American government and their affiliation with large corporations makes ‘the answer’ by social welfare programs for Americans unattainable. In calculating the importance of class by socio economic status it is of the most value to include the arguments connecting to Americans major corporations because they have taken over the control of the government and have a chokehold on the placement of welfare programs that could provide ‘the answer.’

Leading to the determinative asking of, how can a welfare program be the answer in a country that cannot even let its own government be in control? Exhibiting instead, major corporations are in control; corporations consisting of those within the upper class able to fulfil their needs plus

some. While the issues for the lower class cannot be fixed because the people who could fix it for them, the American government through welfare programs, are not in primary control of the country.

Even as Elmendorf attempts to withhold his educationally opinionated viewpoint through the idea that the disadvantaged are stranded there because of socio-economic status, and that welfare could help to alleviate stressors caused by not finding ‘the answer,’ this idea is shoved out of the way as welfare could never be properly implemented to help those it is intended for based on the argument of Buck and Villines from their heavily opinionated book. In examining methodology both arguments could be viewed as highly opinionated as none are quantitative data but because of the authors education and real world experience their arguments stand as eminently dependable. Uncovering the harsh truth that because of the lack of governmental control, lost to large corporations that stem from upper class Americans, the actualization of finding ‘the answer’ from social welfare for lower class Americans is not possible.

Individual

The closest examination under *the microscope* attempts to expose the intricacies of social welfare programs and their effectiveness for an individual themselves.

‘The answer’

Kathryn T. Bailey aims to explain the positives of social welfare programs through the example of young children within the housing system. Her argument unveils her sentiment that without welfare programs, children in need of these programs do not have necessities for their daily lives, or their ‘answer’.

Regardless of limited understanding of the housing market and the difficulties of working in a team setting within a children's hospital, the author has overcome these discrepancies by holding board certifications to work and study at the Children's HealthWatch program at Boston Medical Center, attend the medical student program at University of Massachusetts, and hold an AB in Anthropology and Global Health and Health Policy earned from Princeton University (*Author: Bailey, Kathryn T, 2015*). In evaluation, the author is more than qualified to have an understanding of individuals through healthcare and social policy because of work experience and prestigious education. In a final judgement one can conclude that the author is credible and can speak on the subject of social welfare programs for the individual.

While Bailey argues that social welfare is ‘the answer’ due to housing condition for the individual it is important to take into consideration her data. In the creation of an index of availability of subsidized housing needed to meet the demand of low-income households, Bailey and her team were able to find strong relations between ‘making subsidized units... available to an additional 5% of the eligible population and showing that the odds of overcrowding decrease by 26% and the odds of families making multiple moves decrease by 31%” (Bailey, 2015).

To the individual, these figures are huge indicators of “poor child health outcomes” which in turn illustrate that a lack of the subsidized housing leads to larger numbers of these poor health outcomes, especially in young children (Bailey, 2015). Pulling from the quotes above it can be assessed that government housing aid combined with the location of this housing can cause other issues that may create the need for more widespread use of welfare programs in totality. With an increase of subsidized housing included with social welfare consequentially there would be lower figures of overcrowding as well as lower figures of multiple moves, that could arguably increase positive childhood health outcomes, countering the negative effects of multiple moves.

The diagnosis that the lack of surplus subsidized housing creates negative health outcomes for children who would otherwise be utilizing social welfare programs adds value to the argument that social welfare programs are ‘the answer’ if they are implemented at a higher and more effective rate.

Despite a publishing date of 2002, Hillary Botein and Lance Freeman contribute a study investigating crime levels and subsidized housing. Here they found that “the presence of subsidized housing does not lead to racial transition”(Botein & Freeman, 2002). In their findings the pronouncing of social welfare programs as ‘the answer’ is fitting due to the social harmony aspect of ‘the answer’, where neighborhoods do not show change and those who live there stay during periods of subsidized housing implementation, exposing that the installment of social welfare programs is not a direct cause of ‘racial transition’ and leads to lower figures of multiple moves, upholds the argument that social harmony can still be achieved and ‘the answer’ is attainable with further implementation of social welfare programs.

Not ‘the answer’

Jacqueline Olds has dedicated her life to arguing against social welfare programs by dissecting the pieces of social isolation in the 21st century and how there is no common thread keeping Americans together. The argument of social welfare standing as ‘the answer’ within the 21st century is absurd when considering Olds's argument that each American is looking for their own interests in total social isolation without the assistance of others, completely negating the social welfare system.

In contempt of her major of Psychiatry and lack of spare time between housing two important jobs at once, Olds has proven she is more than reliable as she has been a part time professor at

Cambridge University for over 35 years as well as maintaining her job at McLean hospital since 1974, in addition to writing many books about social issues and having been a full-time employee at the Massachusetts General Hospital (*Jacqueline Olds*, 2021). Interpreting further, the author presumes an innumerable stance by providing supplemental psychiatric knowledge that could not be offered by another author. In the final assessment it should be well understood that the author is overly qualified to speak on individualistic stances about welfare programs because of her comprehensive knowledge.

Olds very clearly lays out that long term consequences come for individuals who socially isolate themselves, there can be larger risk of heart issues, immune malfunctions, and many other diseases. By isolating yourself as an individual there is a major increase in medical needs that can become present over time (Olds & Schwartz, 2010). These medical tribulations that can be attributed to loneliness begin to present themselves in situations of unstable mental illness as well and when medications are not available, a cycle of untreated medical issues occur. Ruslan G. Yemtsov and team attempt to unwind these discrepancies by coining the terms ‘Dependency Vs. Protection’, here they are able to add depth to Olds's argument by suggesting that there is a major abuse through underuse of the social welfare system allowing individuals to take advantage of the systems that create “negative employment effects” (Yemtsov et al., 1970).

When combined, Olds and Yemtsov showcase that social welfare programs do not create ‘the answer’ because these individuals who need to utilize the system are still at a disadvantage while those who are abusing the system gain significantly through Bonafide laziness that is rewarded. Those who are using welfare as a crutch instead of its intended purpose cause social welfare systems to becomes corrupt and in turn lead those who need into isolation and poor health due to

longer working hours and less free time, presenting itself in later years to the individual as long term poor health effects.

Gauging the importance of presenting social welfare programs as ‘the answer’ is discouraged when the accounts of adverse health effects are conferred as results of abuse and misuse of the social welfare system in its entirety, taking away from those who would benefit from finding ‘the answer’.

Accounting for the proposed evidence from Bailey proving that an increase in subsidized housing would lead to lower ‘poor child health outcomes;’ means that social welfare programs could be the answer to slowing childhood health issues in the future and represents that welfare programs have great positives if implemented properly. Olds and Yemtsov directly disagree with social welfare programs as ‘the answer’ under the support of adverse health effects being due to social isolation.

With this, the argument that social welfare programs are ‘the answer’ cannot be deemed in support because of the misuse and abuse of these programs by those who are not searching for ‘the answer’. Both experts collected quantitative data and presented their findings in a logical manner, Bailey in journal form and Olds with her book, the deeper insight provided by both creates difficulty in assigning a side for the individualistic microscopic slide. Based on implications of lowering childhood health issues I believe that putting in place stricter and more helpful welfare programs would solve and negate the abuse within the system while also stopping children and other individuals from facing negative health consequences from neglect. Under these circumstances, social welfare programs are ‘the answer’.

Conclusion

With the final understanding of ‘the answer’ being to provide social harmony or freedom from contentions, without division because of socio-economic status and other poverty attributing factors, a conclusion is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of social welfare programs in the United States as ‘the answer.’ Methodology of this research followed a macro to micro approach examining each angle of social welfare. Delving into the Country entirely, Class by socio-economic status, and the Individual all within the United States 13 social welfare programs. While this method aimed to be broad and include all aspects within these programs, with restriction of word count and the depth of expert level research available, the division of this specific work should have been narrower to include added details that had to be excluded from the final product. Even so, the inclusion of the microscopic approach painted the bigger picture of social welfare programs; visualizing how the program’s implications overlap alluded to the natural ecology of the United States.

My passion for this subject stemmed from firsthand experiences of lower-income families and interactions with the local homeless population in addition to the gentrification and obviously differing poverty levels within my city. On my initial quest to explore the question of social welfare programs as ‘the answer,’ I had assumed that the main research would point in agreeance with my initial stance that social welfare programs were ‘the answer.’ Knowing that people living in poverty needed help and always considering that the governmentally assembled programs were a great first step to solving these issues; I stood by this belief even with the realization that these programs were not ideal for every citizen.

Throughout my research process and conceptualization of the final product, new perspectives have been presented that have overcome beliefs and changed my opinions on the United States welfare programs. Inspecting the analysis of the Country, the idea that welfare is not ‘the

'answer' is glaring when considering that the programs implementation has not been effective since the program's inaugural days, caused by politicization. The Class lens was my most internally controversial due to the staunchness of the pulled research. Again, I found myself agreeing with a new side, one claiming social welfare programs to not be 'the answer' because of misuse and under implementation. Sparking reflection into the adverse health effects negated through welfare, the impossibility to ignore the system abuses that outshine the positives, once again lead to the final diagnosis that social welfare programs are not 'the answer.'

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