

Poverty, Intersectionality, & Privilege

This section explores poverty, class, economic mobility, privilege, intersectionality, social justice, and equity. In order to understand how to improve one's financial situation, it is essential to recognize how poverty, class, privilege, power, and oppression function in the United States. It is impossible to discuss poverty without discussing the other systems and institutions that interact with and reinforce poverty and social class. It is important to understand how poverty and classism intersect with other systems that discriminate and harm, and recognize that these barriers and injustices can affect a person's economic situation and mental health and well-being. Just as lived experience of poverty and economic insecurity can negatively impact a person's mental health, so too can discrimination based on one's race or ethnicity; gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, religion, immigration or refugee status; and more.

Poverty: measured in the United States by comparing an individual or family's income to a set poverty threshold (the minimum amount of income needed to cover basic needs). People whose income falls under this threshold are considered poor.⁸ However, many other factors go into defining poverty, including geographic location, resources such as childcare or financial assets, a state's minimum wage and public benefits, multigenerational or cyclical poverty, demographics such as race/ethnicity, gender, ability, migrant status, veteran status, and more. These factors can make it difficult for people to experience **economic mobility** – improving an individual or family's economic status over a lifetime or over generations. The U.S. is a wealthy country, yet millions of Americans remain in poverty or on the brink of poverty. In 2019, an estimated 34 million Americans lived in poverty.⁹

Economic insecurity: a lack of a stable income or confidence in maintaining an adequate standard of living, often caused by unemployment or low-wage jobs.¹⁰ Economic insecurity can result in debt, food insecurity, and housing insecurity and/or homelessness.

Economic well-being: defined as having *present* and *future* financial security. Present financial security means individuals or families can meet their basic needs and have control over their daily

⁸ "How is poverty measured? *University of Madison Wisconsin*. <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resources/how-is-poverty-measured/>

⁹ "What is the current poverty rate in the United States?" *UC Davis Center for Poverty and Inequality Research*, September 15, 2020. <https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/what-current-poverty-rate-united-states>

¹⁰ Daniel Kopasker, et al."Economic Insecurity: A socioeconomic determinant of mental health." *SSM-Population Health*, vol 6, December 2018. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827318300594>