Poverty has been shown to have extensive and profoundly harmful effects on psychological well-being. It’s understood that these effects are acted out on two dimensions – through the material disadvantages that come with having little money, but also that poverty creates a uniquely harmful psychological state, involving a concoction of social comparison, feelings of inferiority, status anxiety, and chronic environmental stress. Research has neglected student populations in this area, as the majority is focused on large-scale population samples. Students’ sense of belonging is also implicated heavily in well-being. This study set out to investigate the compared effects of absolute (objective) material poverty, and perceived poverty; seeing which was a stronger predictor of well-being, and belonging, through a multiple regression analysis. We hypothesised that predictors in model 1 would significantly predict well-being, and that perceived poverty would be a stronger predictor. We also hypothesised that these predictors would significantly predict belonging. Neither absolute nor perceived poverty were found to significantly predict psychological well-being or belonging, and absolute poverty was shown to be a slightly stronger predictor of absolute poverty. Several limitations could have influenced these results, but they also could reflect the extreme complexity and conflicting research of this research area. While studying subjective perception is difficult, far more research is required to understand the effects of perceived poverty on psychological well-being and belonging, especially in understudied demographics such as students.

This paper was an investigation into how subjective perception of income affects psychological well-being in students. While it didn’t use a clinical sample, and wasn’t focused on a specific disorder, it was completely rooted in discussion around mental illness and social health. Mental well-being and clinical health frequently rely on discussion around the medical model, clinical diagnosis, and neurochemistry. It is absolutely essential, however, that practitioners are mindful of the wider societal pressures and ills that have a profound effect on mental health. This paper was focused on the psychological impact of poverty, and discussed the objective impacts, but also the impacts of poverty as a subjective perceptual construct. Poverty is not just a social crisis, but a deeply individual and psychologically harmful problem, and the implications for clinical disorder if policy-makers neglect it as a problem are massive. I believe clinical practice can not be abstracted from the sociopolitical, and this is why I chose to focus the paper on this topic: to tackle a wider sociopsychological issue, but always with the mental health of individuals, and the development of clinical disorders, strictly in mind. Despite not finding the desired results, I hope I furthered the cause of focusing some attention on this highly complex research area.