



# **Socioeconomic Status**

**Educate & Motivate!**

**Social Justice Conversation Cards**

**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension



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# Imagine what it would be like for your family to live at the 2017 federal poverty level.

Number of people  
living in the family  
unit

1            2            3            4            5            6            7

Annual family  
income  
(100% Federal  
Poverty Level)

\$11,880   \$16,020   \$20,160   \$24,300   \$28,440   \$32,580   \$36,730



The federal poverty level is determined annually by the U.S. Census Bureau using a formula established in 1962, which allotted \$18.60 a week for a family of four with two school-aged children — or \$143.47 in today’s dollars. That 1962 food plan on which the current level is based relied heavily on the cereals, dry beans, peas, and nuts, and potato groups, and on the selection of the less expensive items only intended for “emergency use.” The 1962 plan did not include the cost of meat, fruit and vegetables, dairy, diapers, cleaning supplies, hygiene items, or other supplies.

*Center for Poverty Research, Univ. of California – Davis*  
(<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/how-poverty-measured-united-states>)

What values related to social class are held in your family? Among your friends?



What thoughts/feelings do you have about the social or economic class group you grew up in? What comes to mind when you think of social or economic classes different than your own?



Define what it means to be part of the working class, middle class, and upper class. Can you tell by looking at another person what class they belong to?



**What has your economic status enabled you and your family to do? How has it hindered you?**



Today 1 in 4 children under the age of 18 — a total of about 17.4 million — are being raised by a single mother and nearly half (45 percent) live below the poverty line.

**True or False?**

# True.

U.S. Census Bureau. Poverty Status, Food Stamp Receipt and Public Assistance to Children Under 18 Years by Selected Characteristics, 2014.

Are the following statements about poverty in Kansas true or false?

- A. In 2016, the overall Kansas poverty rate was 13 percent (placing Kansas at 20th among the 50 states) compared to the U.S. poverty rate of 13.5 percent. True or False?
- B. In 2016, the percentage of Kansas households who were food insecure (that is, had difficulty in providing enough food due to lack of money) was 12.7 percent as compared to 14.6 percent in the U.S. True or False?
- C. In 2016, the overall Kansas poverty rate for children under the age of 18 was 16.8 percent (placing Kansas at 20th among the 50 states) compared to 19.7 percent for children in the U.S. True or False?
- D. In 2016, Kansas ranked in the upper third of states for the percentage of individuals having health insurance. True or False?

A. True.

B. False: It is opposite. Kansas ranks 32 of the 50 states with 14.6 percent of families being hungry and food insecure.

C. True.

D. False: Kansas ranked 32nd of 50 states with 21.8 percent (compared to 19 percent for the U.S.) of people under age 65 and below 138 percent of the federal poverty line who did not have health insurance at any time.

*Center for American Progress (talkpoverty.org)*

Homelessness means that an individual or family does not have a permanent home address. True or false?

**False.** Homelessness is more complex. Being homeless means someone . . .

- lacks a regular, fixed, and adequate nighttime residence (substandard housing);
- shares housing due to economic struggles;
- lives in a shelter, hotel, or motel;
- lives in a public place not designed for sleeping (cars, parks); or
- (for children, youth) are abandoned in a hospital, store, restaurant, anywhere.

*US Department of Education – National Center for Homeless Education*

*<https://nche.ed.gov/>*

People living in poverty and individuals that survive poverty possess strengths and resilience that are often not part of the stereotypical image that people in other classes have of the poor.

**True or False?**

# True.

There are many terms used to describe people living in poverty that focus on negative stereotypes: Welfare queen, poor white trash, rednecks, hillbillies, trailer trash, rubbish. The strengths of people living in poverty are seldom highlighted in our society.

*Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2013). Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice. New York, NY: Wiley.*

There is a higher percentage of lesbians that live in poverty than straight women.

True or False?

# True.

24 percent of lesbians live in poverty as opposed to 19 percent of straight women.

*Albelda, R.; Badgett, MVL; Schneebaum, A.; & Gates, G. 2009. Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community. The Williams Institute. UCLA: The Williams Institute. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2509p8r5>*

Whites have the lowest percentage of poverty rates in the United States.

True or False?

# True.

*(U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c)*

Particular cultural groups tend to be consistently overrepresented among the poor. This data suggests that poverty comes from an individual's sociopolitical and historical contexts and not individual peculiarities.

*e.g., Belle, D. 1990. Poverty and women's mental health. American Psychologist, Vol 45(3), Mar 1990, 385-389.;*

*Carmon, N. (1985). Poverty and culture. Sociological Perspectives, 28(4), 403-418.;*

*Costello, EJ., Compton, SN., Keeler, G., & Angold, A., 2003. Relationships between poverty and psychopathology: a natural experiment. JAMA. 2003 Oct 15; 290(15): 2023-9.*

**White children have the highest poverty rates in the U.S.**

**True or False?**

# False.

Black, Latino/a and Native American children have the highest poverty rates in the U.S. Twelve percent of White children live in poor families, along with 36 percent of Black children, 15 percent of Asian children, 34 percent of Native American children, and 33 percent of Latino/a children.

*Wight, V., Chau, M., Arantani, Y. 2011. Who Are America's Poor Children?  
National Center for Children in Poverty. Columbia University*

Women are \_\_\_\_\_ more likely to live in poverty than men.

A. 25 percent

B. 40 percent

C. 60 percent

D. 75 percent

# B.

They are 60 percent more likely to live in poverty.

*NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. 2003. Legal Momentum, 2003  
<http://www.legalmomentum.org/2003-annual-report>*

When you hear the words “ghetto,” “slum,” or “poor side of town” what comes to mind? Is there anything problematic about using these terms to describe parts of communities?

The word “ghetto” has been used to label the neighborhoods and marginalized communities that people were forced to inhabit due to social and economic disadvantage. Using the word “ghetto” to describe a person or place can have classist and racial undertones.

Are you surprised that . . .

In 2015 the number of homeless students in America's public schools increased 15 percent to 1.3 million children from the year before. In Kansas, the number jumped 16.5 percent to 10,378. The increases were among children with no permanent home and who stay in places such as motels or “couch surf” with friends or family.

*US Department of Education – National Center for Homeless Education*

*<https://nche.ed.gov/>*



Prior to the 2002 federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act there were no federal housing and education programs for homeless children. The Kansas Department of Education is required to create a McKinney-Vento homeless service plan and implement that plan with public schools.

The following statements from youth are related to social or economic class. Discuss how each affects you.

- “I have never been on a family vacation.”
- “I am embarrassed of my clothes and where I live.”
- “I know how to hunt, can prepare my own food, and can live without video games.”
- “I have never been to summer camp.”
- “My parents work nights and weekends.”
- “I’m proud that I take care of my younger brother and sisters when mom has to work a double-shift.”



Attitudes about the causes of poverty often fall into one of three “camps” or a mixture of the three. Look at the following statements and determine whether you think they might accurately represent the thoughts of someone who thinks that poverty is due to:

1) personal deficiencies/weaknesses; 2) stigma, bias of others; 3) system/structural, social problems:

Public assistance makes people lazy.

People are poor due to circumstances beyond their control.

Poor people are different from the rest of society.

Poor people are discriminated against.

Poor people have a different set of values than do other people.

Society has the responsibility to help poor people.

*Yun, S.H. & Weaver, R.D., (2010). Development and validation of a short form of the attitude toward poverty scale. Advances in Social Work, Vol. 11, No. 2, 174-187.*

While visiting the city, you give a homeless man some money. Your friend scolds you saying that handouts only encourage laziness. When you were growing up you believed that with hard work anyone can move up the socioeconomic ladder. Do you regret giving him money? Lately, however, you wonder if this is really true, particularly when you reflect on the disproportionately high number of low-income students of color from your high school that did not attend college. How level is the socioeconomic playing field?



*Bullock, H. (2006). Justifying Inequality:  
A Social Psychological Analysis of Beliefs about Poverty and the Poor  
University of California, National Poverty Center  
(<http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/workingpaper06/paper08/>)*

For many, the 2016 Presidential election revealed differences among sectors of U.S. citizens that have been described as differences between people who have “white- or blue-collar jobs,” people who live in rural or urban areas, and people who are poor and high school graduates or affluent and college educated. What might happen if people are described as being “one or the other” or identified in one of these ways?



You are at a department store looking at electronics and you notice a family you know are considered to be “trouble makers.” You’ve heard stories about their kids being “handfuls” in school and have witnessed them using Vision cards (SNAP public assistance) at the grocery store. You also know that the mother has another baby on the way after having two children under the age of 6. The family are looking at a 55-inch flat screen TV and you hear someone in the next aisle say loud enough to be heard, “Why is it that poor people always think they need the fanciest cell phones, televisions, name-brand clothing along with smokes? Just look at her nails . . . she should save that money for the baby that we’ll all be paying for.” The man with the family overhears this and looks directly at you, thinking that you were the person who made the remarks. What do you do?

Bias and judgment do not help us bridge the gap between classes or bond communities to find solutions to poverty. The adage that “you need to walk at least a mile in someone else’s shoes” applies.

The responsibility for poverty and prosperity is an individual's responsibility.

True or False?

# False.

The solution to poverty and prosperity lies within the awareness of not just the individuals that are poor, but within our community, our institutions and our society at large. This is a solution we must find together.

What can you do to increase your understanding of the culture of poverty?

1. Supplement your knowledge of social class, poverty, and related issues.
2. Increase your understanding and awareness of social class privilege.
3. Learn about the everyday realities of life in poverty: welfare procedures, housing offices, food stamps, health services, and other aspects of government bureaucracy.
4. Learn to see the everyday signs of social class and bias, including identifying how we use classist terms in everyday speech that can be culturally insensitive.

*Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2013). Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice. pp. 523-524  
New York, NY: Wiley.*

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