

Understanding Poverty: an Interactive Workshop

Office of the Pima County School Superintendent
Summer Institute

June 1, 2016

Workshop Purpose

In this workshop, we will examine how **poverty, stress and scarcity** shapes **body, brain and behavior** and what happens when it **concentrates** in our communities and **accumulates** generationally.

Today's Goals

Objective 1:

To identify the links between poverty, health, stability, trauma, and stress and why poverty is a health related risk factor and considered “toxic stress.”

Objective 2:

To convey the complexity and impact of poverty on health and education particularly as it relates to people experiencing generational poverty.

Objective 3:

To compare and distinguish the different experiences with and use of the health care and education systems between resourced and under-resourced users.

Building Relationships

No significant learning
happens without a
significant relationship *of
mutual respect.*

James Comer

Poverty is expensive

- ◎ It is a drain on resources
- ◎ It is a waste of human potential
- ◎ It impacts the next generation
- ◎ It limits our capacity to have full and meaningful relationships

We can't have a **sustainable community** unless we **address poverty in more effective ways**



Economic class

- Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.
- We all have our own stories of economic class
- This work is based on patterns.
 - Patterns have exceptions.
- If we understand patterns...
 - We can change outcomes.

What *is* poverty?



How do we measure it?



Poverty ...

Middle Class

Wealth



Unstable ...



Stable ...



Very Stable ...

US Official Poverty Guidelines: 2013

Family Size	Annual Income*
Four	\$ 24,300
Three	\$ 20,160
Two	\$ 16,020
One	\$ 11,880

Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services .

Monthly budget for a family of four

- \$561 on shelter (\$6734)
- \$238.50 on utilities (\$2,862)
- \$332 to own and repair a car (\$3,989)
- \$402.50 on food or \$50 per person per week (\$4,830)
- \$1.10 per person per meal.
- \$47.81 per person on health and medical expenses (\$2,295)
- \$237 on child care or \$54 a week (\$2845)
- **TOTAL: \$24,300**



The arithmetic of poverty doesn't add up

Shopping List

What can you
live without?



- ✓ Cleaning Supplies
- ✓ Personal Care
- ✓ Children
- ✓ Entertainment
- ✓ Health Care
- ✓ Work related
- ✓ Household
- ✓ Celebrations



The poorer you are...

the more things cost and the more time it take



- The poor **pay more** for things middle-class America takes for granted.
- **More time** is required.
- **More opportunity** for things to fall apart.



- Food
 - Convenience stores vs. bulk buying (\$3.79 v \$1.19 for loaf of bread)
- Laundry
 - Laundromat vs. home washer and dryer
- Transportation
 - Car vs. bus
- Being unbanked
 - Cashing checks, loans, etc.

Ron Shaich: ***“I had no clue!”***

SNAP Challenge:

One week living off \$4.50 a day.

“My approach to grocery shopping was to try to stay full... Luxuries such as fresh fruit, vegetables and yogurt were too expensive.”

- Four days in, he posted *“I can’t stop thinking about food.”*

Felt listless and grumpy

- **“All I had to worry about was my food, and that was challenging enough.**

I wasn’t worrying about my car breaking down or not being able to pay for gas or having my electricity turned off or finding work or paying an unforeseen medical bill.”



Frugality is hard to afford

The poor pay 6% more for their toilet paper

$$\begin{aligned} IPT_{htp} = & \alpha_h + \delta_0 I[sale]_{htp} + \sum_{i=2}^5 \delta_i I[INC = i] I[sale]_{htp} \\ & + \psi_0 I[Week1]_{htp} + \sum_{i=2}^5 \psi_i I[INC = i] I[Week1]_{htp} \\ & + \gamma_0 I[sale]_{htp} I[Week1]_{htp} + \sum_{i=2}^5 \gamma_i I[INC = i] I[sale]_{htp} I[Week1]_{htp} \\ & + \eta_3 [Time]_t + \eta_4 [Product]_p + \eta_5 [Channel]_{ht} \end{aligned}$$



BRIDGES' DEFINITION OF POVERTY

“The extent to which an individual does without resources.”

Situational Poverty: A lack of resources due to a particular event (divorce, natural disaster, etc.)

Generational Poverty: Having been in poverty for at least two generations



Lack of Resources

In poverty, life is falling apart without enough resources to fix it

The
Equation
of Poverty

Lack of Resources

+ Instability

+ Stress

+ Environment

(which includes structures and systems... or lack of)

+ Coping strategies

= Poverty

Mental Models ...

ARE...

- Stories and metaphors
- Analogies
- Cartoons
- Graphics
- Diagrams
- Two-dimensional drawings

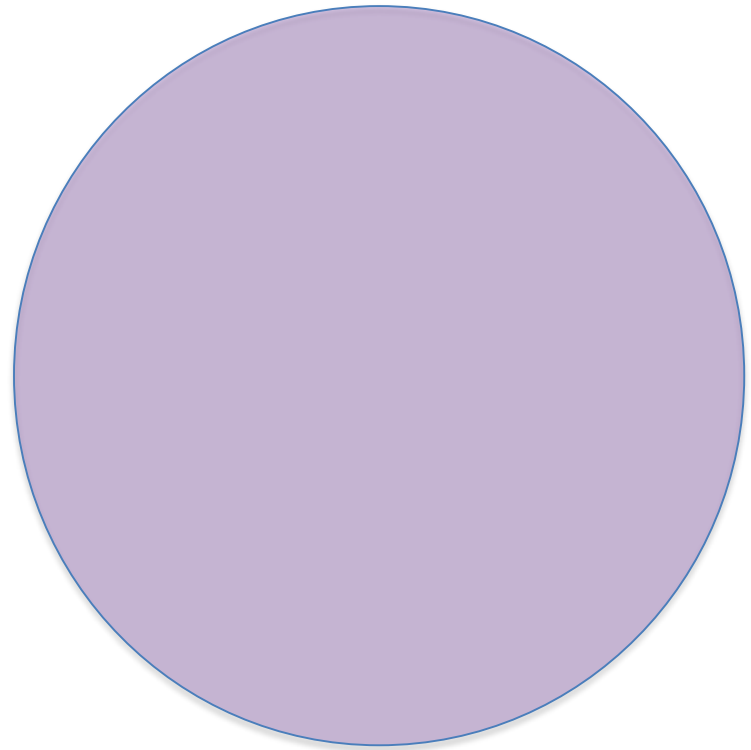
HELP TO ...

- Speed learning
- Aid memory
- Save time
- Comprehension of complex ideas
- Illustrate relationships and systems
- Show part to whole
- Engage and empower learners

Draw a circle

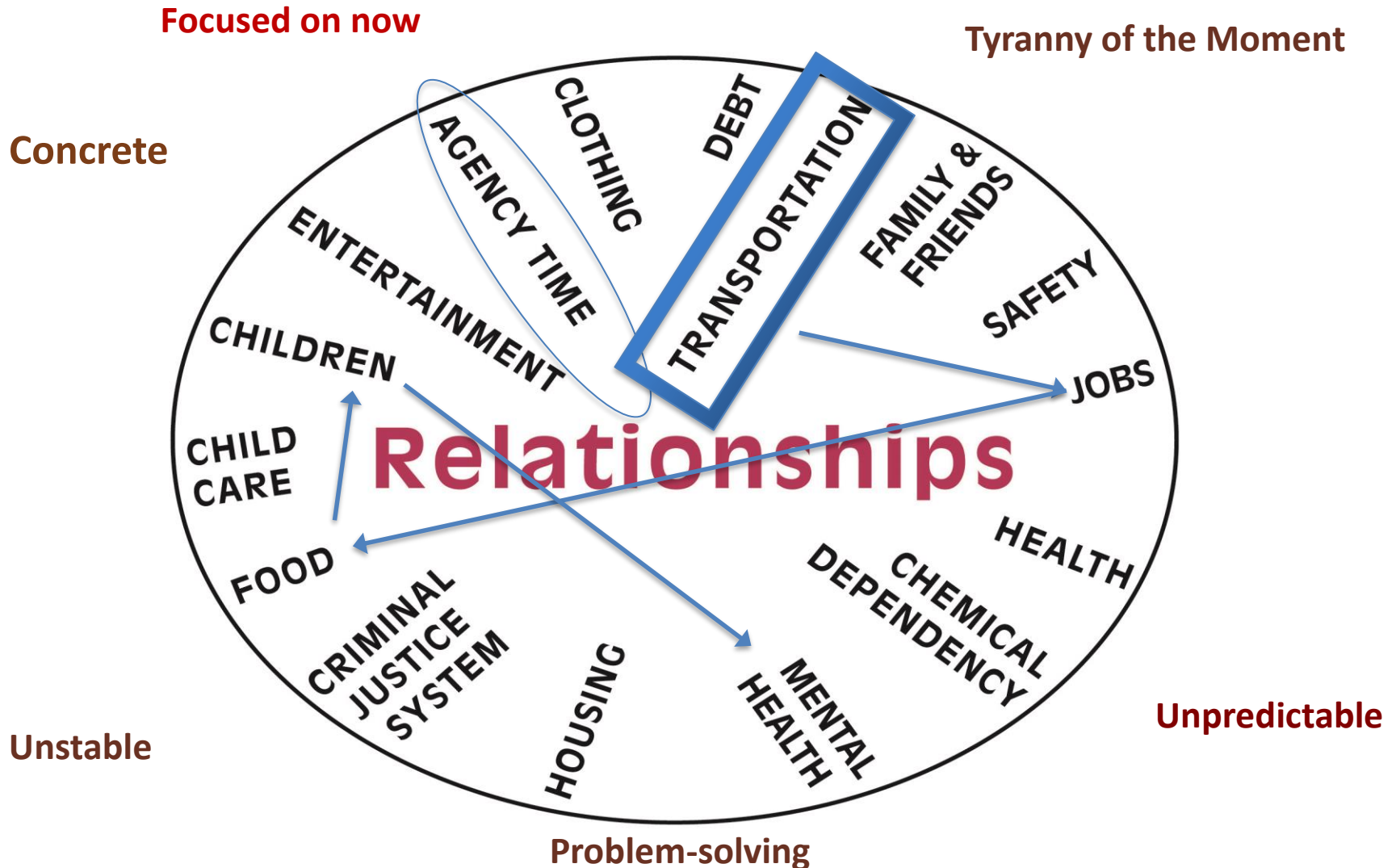
Where do people in
poverty put their

- Time
- Resources
- Money
- And Attention?



Mental Model for Poverty

Problems are interlocking...



11 Resources

“the extent to which an individual or family does without resources”



spiritual



financial



emotional



coping
strategies



relationships
& role models



formal
register



social
expectations
(hidden rules)



integrity
& trust



physical



support
systems



mental



motivation &
persistence

The *Stress* of Poverty

- Poverty-related concerns **consume mental resources**, leaving less for other tasks.
- Roughly the **same results** found in people subjected to a night with **no sleep**.
- = a drop of as much as **13 points in their IQ** —

*“Poverty is the equivalent of **pulling an all-nighter**.*

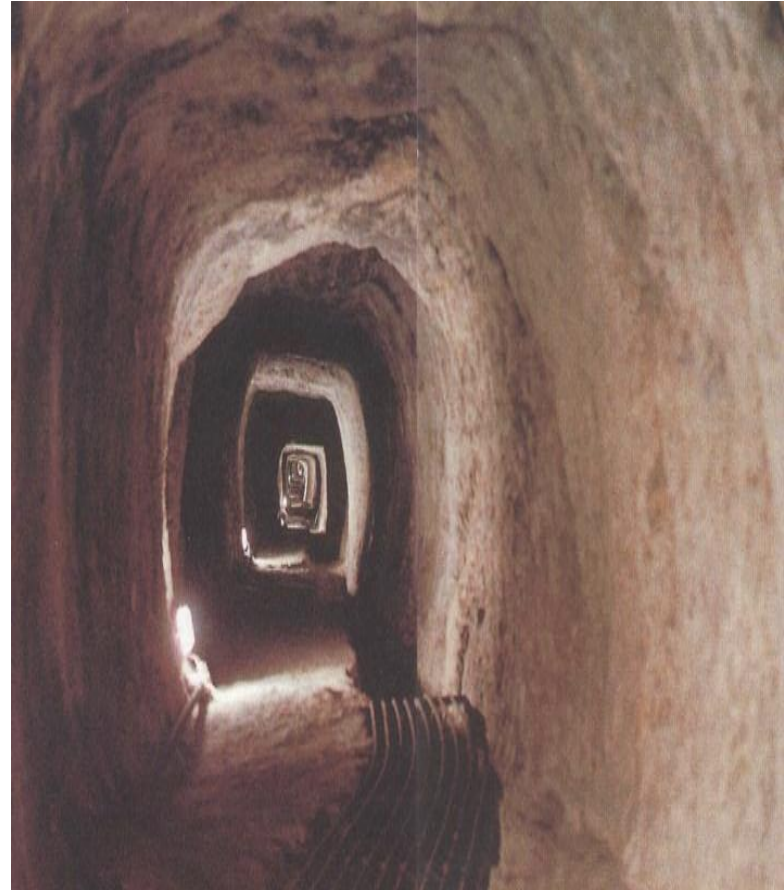
Picture yourself after an all-nighter.



Being poor is like that every day.”

The Tunnel of Scarcity

- Scarcity captures the brain and leads people into a tunnel.
- **Your only focus is solving the emergency of the moment.**
- You can't notice what is outside the tunnel.
- **Important things on the periphery get ignored.**



- Mullainathan and Shafir concluded that *when you don't have something you desperately need, the feeling of*

scarcity works like a trap.

- MULLAINATHAN: When you have scarcity and it creates a scarcity mindset, it leads you to take certain behaviors which in the short term help you manage scarcity, **but in the long term only make matters worse.**
- VEDANTAM: Scarcity, whether of time or money, tends to focus the mind on immediate challenges. You stretch your budget to make ends meet. People in the grip of scarcity are tightly focused on meeting their urgent needs, but that focus comes at a price. **Important things on the periphery get ignored.**
- MULLAINATHAN: That's at the heart of the scarcity trap. You're so focused on the urgent that the important gets waylaid. **But because the important gets waylaid, you're experiencing even more scarcity tomorrow.**

THE SCIENCE OF STRESS: Physiological, Mental, Emotional and Environmental

Chronic stress =
Challenging and
uncertain
events that
exceeds
resources.

Heightened by

- 1. no predictive information**
- 2. lack of social supports**
- 3. lack of coping strategies**

(RWJ Foundation)

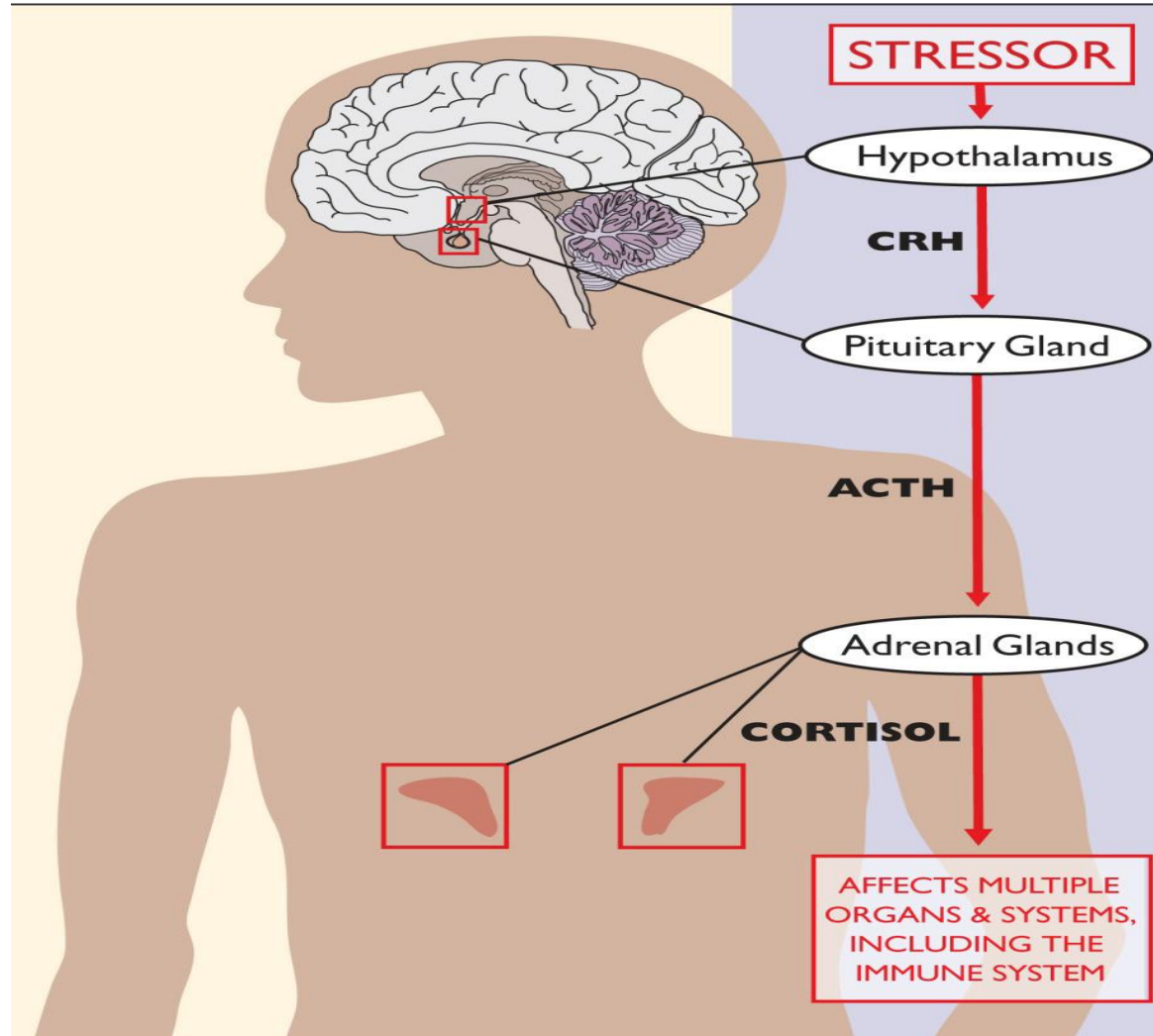


Figure 1. A simplified illustration of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis of the stress response.
© SJC Bridges 2013



Few Resources...

More Resources...

Abundant Resources



Stressor

- Challenging events or conditions, short-term and ongoing, that strain a person's ability to cope.

Stress Response

- Set of behavioral and physiologic processes provoked by a stressor.

Stress

- The experiences people have when they face challenging events or conditions that they feel exceed their resources for coping.

TRYANNY OF THE MOMENT

“The need to **act overwhelms any willingness people have to **learn**.”**

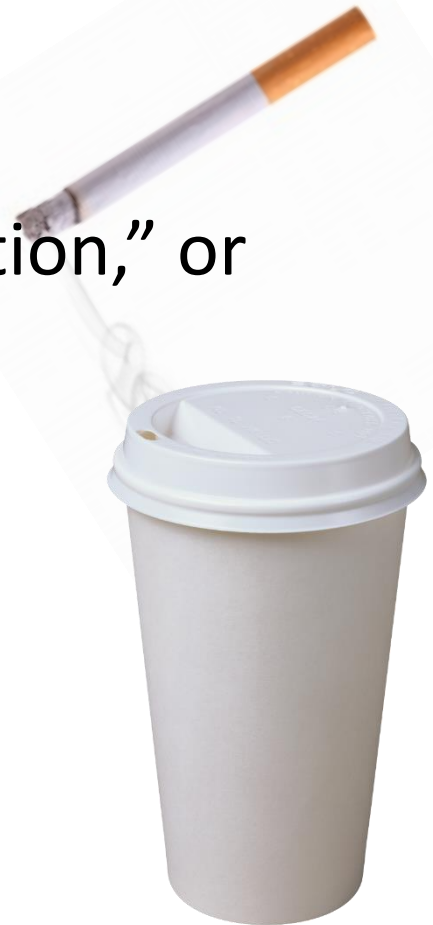
Source: *The Art of the Long View* by Peter Schwartz

“The **healthier you are psychologically, or the less you may seem to need to change, **the more you can change**.”**

Source: *Management of the Absurd* (1996) by Richard Farson

Behavioral Aspects of Stress

- Increased alcohol or substance use
- **Smoking**
- Disruption of sleep, “sleep deprivation,” or oversleeping
- **Increased caffeine intake**
- Poor diet
- **Inattention leading to carelessness**
- Exhaustion, fatigue, disinterest



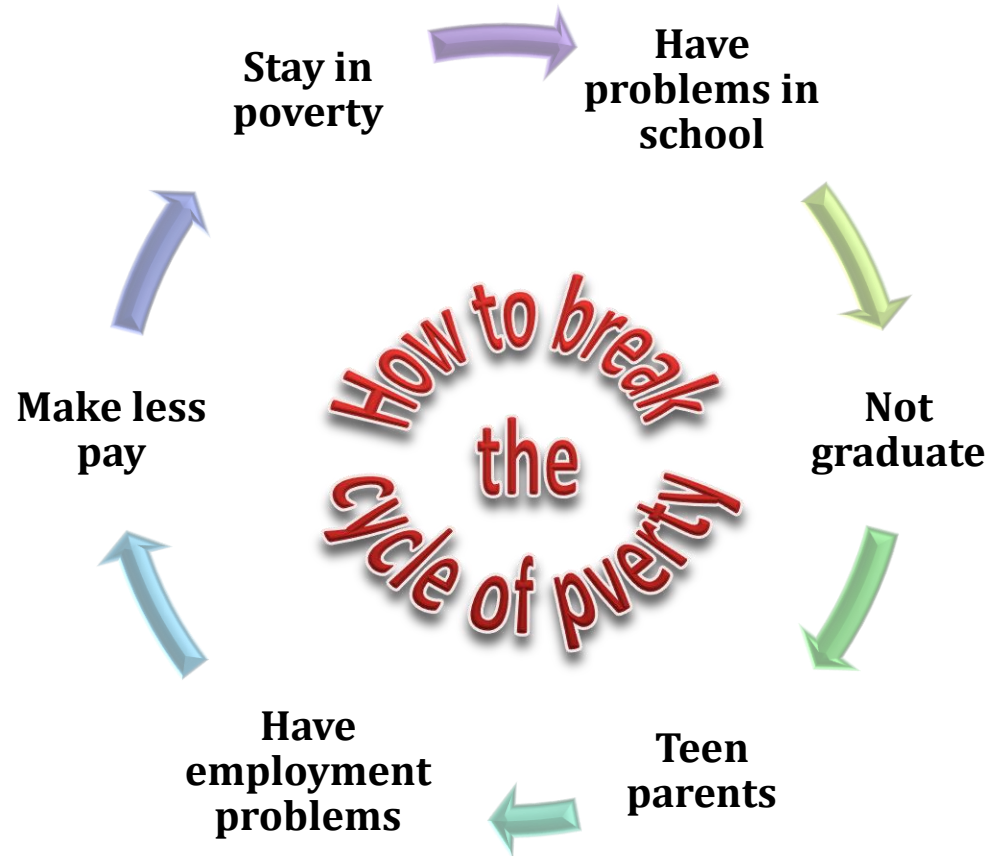
A Tale of Situational Poverty



- **Story of 8 families** in Portland, Oregon
- **Listen** for the stress
- **Listen** for the impact on children
- **Listen** for the change in coping strategies
- **Listen** for the change in future story
- ***What is long-term impact on these families financial stability?***

Kids Count Study 2011

“Children who grow up in poverty have a much tougher time...”



Poverty as toxic stress

- When young children grow up in **toxic environments** associated with poverty, **their brains naturally make survival their top priority.**
- The result is that parts of the brain associated with **survival** are prioritized, rather than areas of the brain that control **higher-order thinking and reasoning.**

Over the last few years, many other scientists have also found links between growing up poor and differences in cognitive development.



Toxic Stress can impact children in the following ways:

- Causes children to live in **fight, flight or fright** (freeze) mode.
- Short attention span
- Struggle learning; fall behind in school
- Respond to world as constant danger
- Distrustful of adults
- Unable to develop healthy peer relationships
- Feel failure, despair, shame and frustration



Evidence Suggests

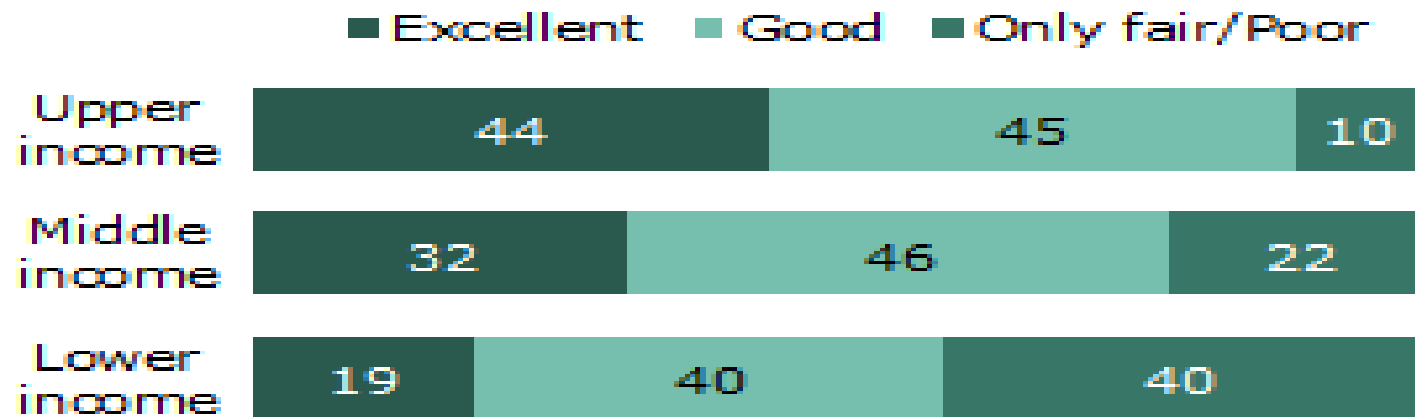
- Many chronic diseases in adults are determined decades earlier by experiences in childhood.
- Risk factors/behaviors for these diseases are initiated during childhood or adolescence and continue into adult life.



Self-reported experience of health

A Health Gap Based on Income

% from each social class saying, in general, their health is ...



Notes: Based on adults who identified themselves as "upper" or "upper-middle" class (n=507); "middle class" (n=1,287); and "lower" or "lower-middle" class (n=670). "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER QHEALTH

- Unstable
- Unpredictable
- Stressful
- Hyper-vigilant
- Survival mode
- Concrete problem solving
- **Outside the norm**



In the last election, poverty was mentioned in 3 to 10% of the stories.

The experience of poverty is **a trap**



LOST

Which strategy is better?

Let's get off...



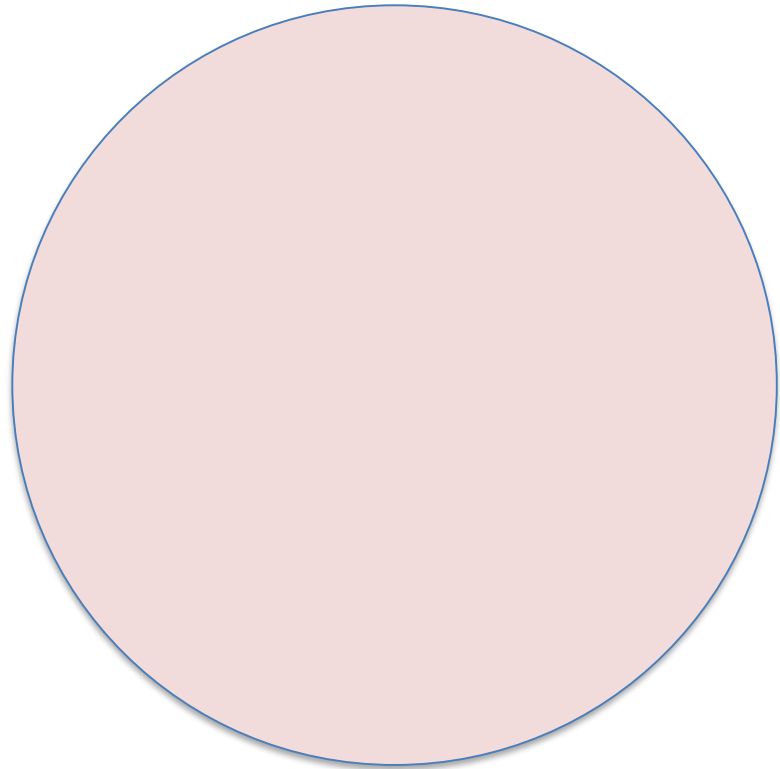
Let's survive...



Draw a circle

Where do people in
middle class put their

- **Time**
- **Resources**
- **Money**
- **And Attention?**



Mental Model of Middle Class



Well-resourced people live in well-resourced environments



Why do middle class people insure everything?





Society – *and organizations*–
are *normalized* to stability and planning

Think of all the abstract and future oriented aspects of the workplace

- Safety and liability concerns

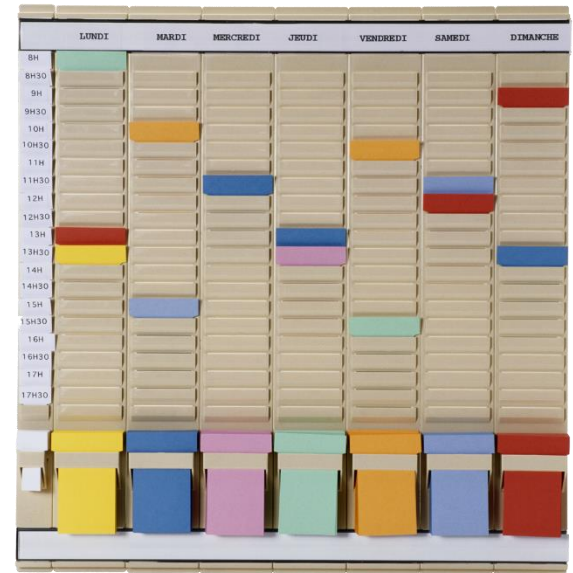
- Falls, injuries, food, medications, OSHA, HIPAA

- Policies and procedures

- Multiple sources, evaluations, changes because of laws or administrative needs

- Time management

- Integrates many people and complex systems



Consider the contrasts...

Poverty



- Instability
- Lack of predictability
- Stressful; hyper-vigilant
- Tyranny of the moment
- Survival mode
 - Feels like constant crisis
- Concrete problem solving
- Outside the norm

Middle Class



- Stable
- Predictable
- Emphasis on safety
- Future focused
- Stress is managed
 - Emphasis on quality of life
- Abstract problem solving
- Politics, consumerism, education – *all normed to you*

Our **default** lens
is for resourced people



Talmud: We see things not as they are, but as **we** are...

The Concussion Case

- Take a look at the Concussion Study.
- In your team, **come up with at least one** addition to or variation from the policy that could accommodate an under-resourced parent without harming the child.

In the end I don't think that it's either mostly about intelligence or mostly about the system but a balance, where good system will multiply the effectiveness of intelligent people. (Alan Kay)

All Economic Classes at the table



Poverty...



Middle Class...



Wealth...

Poverty Interrupted

1. Cut the costs



2. Create slack



3. Reframe and empower



We know our customer...

- Mistrust of financial institutions
- Feels overwhelmed; too few financial resources
- Lack experience/ “hidden rules” knowledge
- Lots of debt and no access to fair credit
- Feeling that life is unpredictable and therefore uncontrollable (no future story...)
- Use financial predators
- Managing relationships
Concrete problem solvers
- May have literacy and numeracy barriers
- We approach every class as if these issues are present.



Pre and Post Assessment

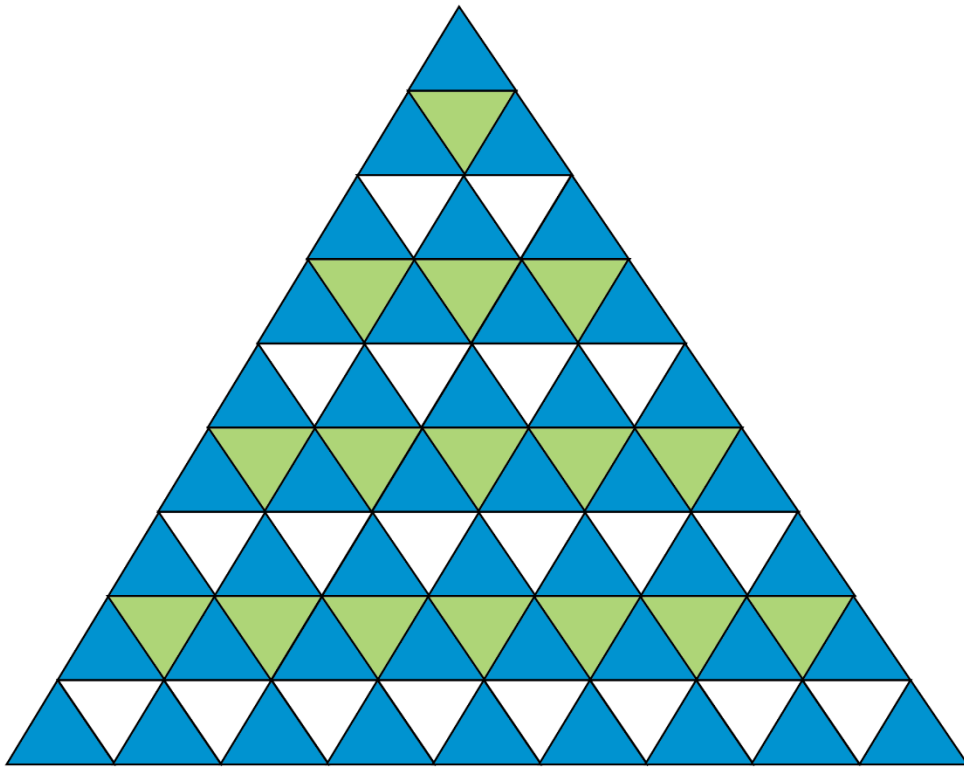
Pre Test

- **56%** reported using financial predator multiple times in the past 12 months
- **55%** of class participants showed they had nobody that they could trust to turn to for financial advise.



Post Test

- **93%** reported not going back to using financial predators
- **100%** at the end of the class had someone they could trust.



MOLEHILLS TO MOUNTAINS

Accumulated risk and resources

- How does **risk** add up?
- How do **resources** add up?

Reducing barriers

- Discovering and addressing the microbarriers
- Finding “nudges” and tweaks that can make a difference



HOPE

CHANGES EVERYTHING

monroehope.com

- **"a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally-derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)"**

1. Ability to create a plan
2. Ability to create and carry out steps for that plan
3. Leads to optimism
4. Optimism is the antidote to stress

Koh Panyee Youth Soccer Team: *Turning Adversity into Strength*



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU4oA3kkAWU>

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ENDING
POVERTY
NOW