



How does poverty impact the social development of a child?

Poverty affects millions of families and children worldwide, not only impacting their economic status but also influencing their social development as individuals. Social development is the process by which children develop the skills they need to interact with others, by forming relationships, and understand the norms of society. Poverty has been seen as impacting their emotional, cognitive, and social skills. I will also be discussing the theory related beliefs of Bronfenbrenner, Piaget, and Bowlby. (savethechildren, 2023)

The Impact of Poverty on Social Development



Children in poverty face various developmental problems that affect their social development in one way or another. Lack of access to basic needs such as education, food, and shelter may prevent children from developing appropriate social behaviours. According to the Ecological Systems Theory postulated by Bronfenbrenner, the development of children is determined by the environmental systems around them. Poverty may expose children to environmental situations such as homes and communities characterized by stress, which may cause anxiety and frustration in children. This may cause instability in the child's behaviour, which may affect their ability to relate well to others in a positive manner.

Children in poverty are likely to face adverse childhood experiences such as exposure to substance abuse, domestic violence, and instability in the family. For example, children exposed to domestic violence may find it difficult to develop appropriate social behaviours due to the perception that social interactions may result in violence. (child poverty action group, 2026)

Stated Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children tend to learn from observing others. Children from poor environments may not have good role models to look up to and emulate. What they may end up imitating could be maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, which may cause problems in maintaining good relationships through mutual trust and cooperation. (tutor2u, 2019)

Cognitive Development and Poverty



Poverty can also have an impact on cognitive development, which is crucial for social development. Cognitive development in children enables them to think independently and develop emotional responses and interactions with others through their cognitive development process. Stated by Britannia school of academics, Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development indicates that cognitive development in children occurs in stages characterized by complex cognitive and social interactions with others. Cognitive development in children enables them to think independently and develop emotional responses and interactions with others through their cognitive development process.

For example, poverty may cause children from poverty-stricken families to miss opportunities such as sports and other clubs that are crucial for cognitive and social development. Cognitive development in such cases may therefore be impaired, and this may affect their ability to develop socially. In addition, poverty may cause children from poverty-stricken families to miss learning materials such as books that are crucial for language development and are critical for effective social interactions. (verywellmind, 2025)

Attachment Theory and Social Development



John Bowlby's Attachment Theory highlights the role of early attachments in the social development of children. According to the theory, the primary caregiver plays a vital role in the social and emotional development of the child through the formation of a secure attachment relationship. Children from poor families may experience insecure attachments due to unstable parental care, parental neglect, or parental emotional distress. Such children may experience difficulties in developing trust and managing their emotions, which may affect their social development. (very well mind, 2026)

Parental stress, mental health problems, or drug addictions may impair the caregiver's ability to address the emotional needs of the children. Children from poor families may experience insecurity, tension, and difficulties in developing meaningful interpersonal relationships. According to the Strange Situation experiment proposed by Mary Ainsworth, children who experience insecure attachments may experience difficulties in developing positive social relationships in the future.

Social Stigma and association with Peers



Another challenge that children living in poverty face is social stigma because of their economic status. This may also cause them social isolation from their peers. According to Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, children get their self-esteem from social associations. Children living in poverty may find it difficult to establish their social identity since they feel inferior to their peers. This may cause them negative behaviours such as aggression.

Social challenges may affect a child's confidence as well as their ability to associate with their peers. The social stigma caused by living in poverty may cause a cycle of social isolation for a child.

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Despite the various challenges, there are several measures that can be put in place to help reduce the effects of poverty on social development. Firstly, providing early childhood education is vital in helping to reduce the effects of poverty on social development. This is because early childhood education has been proven to help children from poor families develop cognitively and socially. Some of the social skills that children develop in early childhood include empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation of emotions.

Furthermore, providing support to families is vital in helping to reduce the effects of poverty on social development. This is because providing support to families helps reduce the levels of stress in the families. Therefore, the families can offer their children the much-needed emotional support, which is vital in helping them develop securely and socially.

Community-based programs, such as mentorship programs, also play an important role in the fulfilment of the social needs of poor children. The mentorship programs give the children an opportunity to socialise while under the mentorship of role models who can also boost the children's self-esteem, thus helping them form good relationships.

Conclusion



In conclusion, poverty has an impact on the social development of children. Theories such as the Ecological Systems Theory, the Social Learning Theory, and the Attachment Theory are some of the theories that can help us understand the impact of poverty on the social development of children. The challenges are real, but the situation can be improved through interventions such as early childhood education. It is important to ensure that all children have access to these resources so that they can grow and develop well.

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