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INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE OF POVERTY: BAD NEWS FOR CHILDREN, CHALLENGE FOR POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Children suffer when they live in poverty. Their inability to articulate their perceptions does not reduce that suffering, but that inability to tell us about their perceptions gives us a clue about the nature of early unintentional cognitions that remain largely unchallenged throughout their lives. It contributes to a foundation of attitudes and abilities that facilitate the ongoing nature of poverty. There are many reasons for deprivation during childhood, but because of the nature of poverty, the outcome will likely be intergenerational persistence of poverty and its problems. Although the *powerlessness and vulnerability (of children) provide a moral imperative for collective action* (Nolan, Maitre 2004: 53), the growth of poverty in a state also presents severe economic and social difficulties. Because child poverty and its effects are so hard on social systems, it is in the best interest of the State as well as children to reduce or eliminate child poverty. The purpose of this paper is to consider the implications of the transmission of poverty for children and for policy.

The intergenerational continuity of poverty and inequality is well-documented, even in cultures where the belief in equality of opportunity is widely held (Rodgers 1995). However, the extent of continuity is difficult to measure and to interpret. Most studies find less than a 50% effect when examining the probability that the children of poor parents will be poor or stay in occupations that are ranked the same as their fathers. However, those children who do not stay in the same quintile of resources (income, education, etc.) generally only move into the adjacent upward (or downward) quintile (see for example Rodgers 1995). Thus, a change in resources from one generation to another does not necessarily signal a movement out of poverty. Because poverty is a labile social condition, with some families experiencing chronic poverty and some experiencing more

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transient poverty, movement among adjacent quintiles does not yield much insight into the overall experience of poverty across generations (Harper et al. 2003; Nolan, Maitre 2004). The greatest certainty seems to be that when experiencing poverty, children are less able to help themselves than are adults.

Using the Luxembourg Income Study data, Vleminckx and Smeeding (2001) reported that in the industrialized world, the highest percentages of poor children appear to be in the USA and in the UK. In general, the lowest incidence of child poverty is in the northern European countries, lead by Sweden. Although poor, it should be remembered that children in the industrialized world are much better off than are children in underdeveloped and developing countries. However, that can hardly be considered a reason to ignore the problem. Poverty causes misery for both adults and children; it is costly because of reduced income tax revenues, the need for support programs, high crime rates and the constraint on the ability of individuals to carry out the responsibilities of citizenship.

At the end of the 20th century, *In a majority of (European) countries the risk of living in poverty (was) at least one-third higher for children than for adults* (Nolan, Maitre 2004: 53–54). A comparable risk was observed in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). According to UNICEF, in these early years of the 21st century, 600 million children are growing up in conditions of poverty (UNICEF, 2000). The wealth of a nation does not predict the number of children who live in poverty; income inequality is much more predictive than overall wealth (Nolan, Maitre 2004). In most countries (with noted exceptions of Sweden and perhaps Denmark), efforts at intervention have not been successful overall (Bradshaw 2006; Nolan, Maitre 2004).

In this paper, I briefly discuss the phenomenon of intergenerational inheritance of poverty. Then the issue of child poverty is addressed followed by policy implications. Policies to ameliorate or end child poverty must include interventions to improve the quality of life of individuals as they grow toward fully contributing members of society. The importance of early intervention is emphasized in the final section of the paper.

INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE

The phrase *intergenerational inheritance* implies outcomes for one generation that result, at least in part, from the actions of those in the preceding generation. Another phrase that is used almost interchangeably with intergenerational inheritance is *intergenerational transmission*. This phrase puts subtle emphasis

on the processes associated with intergenerational inheritance. The emphasis on processes leads to the question of exactly what is being transmitted. According to Harper, Marcus and Moore (2003), the intergenerational transmission of poverty means that real and financial assets (including debt) are transmitted, also human capital, attitudes, cultural and other knowledge and traditions. That is, poverty as an outcome is not transmitted. Assets, human characteristics and social processes are transmitted through genetics combined with environments (see Caspi 2004).

From a sociological perspective, education is generally presumed to be the most effective mediator of poverty from one generation to the next (see Hout 1988). Education of parents has been found to exert a greater influence than income on the transmission of poverty (Corcoran 1995), but there is some contradictory evidence. For example, Rytina (1972) provided evidence that ascription (getting a job on the basis of social position of family of origin) explains occupation in the second generation even better when not mediated by education. Rytina's analyses suggest that occupation is transmitted from one generation to the next as a function of family position and that there is very little mobility of occupation. Given his argument, no mobility in income or poverty would be expected either. However, both Kilson (1981) and Wilson (1987) have suggested a more complex process; that is, that members of the underclass inherit their status through the socialization process. They observed that families and neighborhoods support the development of attitudes, behaviors and aptitudes that constrain the movement of children out of low status occupations and poverty. The evidence that, in a poverty situation, low education of parents predicts low education of children seems to support the socialization process. It is especially convincing when we consider that for most poor children opportunities for higher education are too little and too late. To alter the "inheritance" of low education, it will, according to Nolan and Maitre (2004: 61), be necessary to have a *sustained attack on the scale of poverty and disadvantage itself*. Nolan and Maitre (2004) were referring to the general issue of healthy development, an outcome that is highly influenced by education. They noted that in the context of poverty, healthy development is achieved only when a complex, multidimensional set of disadvantages is offset. If not addressed early in life, those disadvantages are difficult to counteract and, with time, they become more expensive.

In an effort to sort out effects, Caspi (2004), among others, has suggested that it is important to differentiate between the effects of the environment on persons (social causation) and the effects of persons on their environments

(self-selection). This can also be expressed as differentiating between environmental/nurture and genetic/nature effects on persons. The next sections address these causal processes.

SOCIAL CAUSES OF INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE

The socialization, or social causation, argument supports the explanation that social and environmental conditions cause people to develop attitudes and psychological attributes that are consistent with poverty and disadvantage (see Caspi 2004). This argument suggests that children develop psychological characteristics based on environmental forces. The implication is that the causal factor is external to the person; that is, the environment is “acting” to produce children with poor health, low education and more unemployment. For example, children who live in poverty whose parents have low levels of education are less likely to have access to health care – thus, poorer health – and are less likely to value education – thus, less education and more unemployment. They are likely to exhibit conduct disorders that further limit their opportunities. Conduct disorders have been explained by poor health along with the stress and frustration of poverty on parents and the likelihood that quality of parenting is poor (see also Masden, Coatsworth 1998).

Social and environmental causal factors can be either distal or proximal. When distal factors are implicated, such as social policies, there are links from policy to social institutions usually ending in the institution of the family and, more specifically, parents. The argument is that if parents want badly enough to provide opportunities for their children, they should be able to. However, when we consider intergenerational transmission, we must recognize that parents also were socialized to devalue education. They may consider well-paying employment unattainable, just as they may consider good health an illusive goal for themselves and their children.

Single-parent, mother-headed families is a proximal social factor that is thought to be to some extent heritable (Hardy et al. 1998). In a 30-year follow-up of children and mothers in the Pathways to Adulthood Study, Hardy and colleagues (1998) found significant associations in the timing of age at first birth between mothers and their sons and daughters. This report clarified that the previously observed link between age at first was observed of mothers and their first-born daughter’s first pregnancy is not due to the experience of having a young mother. The pattern of young age at first birth was observed for both daughters (not just first-born) and sons (especially second- and later-born sons). The low

income of poor single mothers generally means that mothers work more than one job and do not have health insurance. Because their efforts to provide food and housing are so time consuming, they have little time to spend with children. Children are often in the care of each other or they are left alone. Children often lack the stimulation early in childhood that facilitates cognitive development and school success. The effects of inadequate nutrition and stimulation on brain development are not limited to the early childhood years. There are lasting effects on intelligence and emotional regulation. Both have implications for behavior and relationships (Meyers, Chawla 2000; Pollitt et al. 1996). Thus, marital status and age at first birth appear to be relevant primarily if accompanied by deprivation for children in their early years.

SELF-SELECTION CAUSES OF INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE

Another argument is that psychological characteristics lead people to a default selection of an environment of poverty and disadvantage. The emphasis in the selection argument is on individual characteristics. The environment is considered less an actor than a context in which individual qualities are expressed. For example, the selection argument suggests that children with certain characteristics are more likely to exhibit problems beyond poverty, such as conduct disorder. Children with conduct disorders are less likely to achieve in school, more likely to have fewer years of education, more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be in poor health.

The issue of selection is also partly about brain development. Children who grow up without stimulation in the home and without parental nurturance have less effective cognitive development. In the poorest families, this insufficient brain and cognitive development is, according to Noble, Norman and Farah (2005), a function of poverty. Stimulation is critical to brain development; in addition, children need peace and stability (Harper et al. 2003). Adults without adequate time and assets are much less able than other parents to provide beneficial levels of stimulation and stability.

It is possible that poor people have a genetic vulnerability that supports their selection into poverty. Being marginalized as a group, poor people are likely to select environments that support attitudes and beliefs about the improbability of moving out of poverty. People who are not poor may have a similar genetic vulnerability, but they may not select into an environment of poverty because they do not “have enough of the susceptibility genes, or ... not the right pattern of susceptibility genes, or they have not encountered the environmental hazards required to bring out the genetic effects” (Rutter 2006: 202). Thus, it

is not a simple issue that a genetic code will make a person more comfortable in an environment of poverty (as in finding a niche; see Scarr, McCartney 1983). The most obvious reason that it is not simply the action of genes is that a genetic code is not deterministic it is probabilistic. Even in an individual, genes are not deterministic. There is a causal chain that links the product, or outcome, of a gene to actions of the gene. The chain passes through different levels of hierarchical organization that characterizes the human system. At each level, the chain is transformed and responds to different rules. Any gene can have several different effects coded in DNA. Simple as this explanation is, we can readily see that culture cannot be reduced to the action of one or many genes (Rutter 2006). As implied here, it is more important to consider the interaction of genes and environment than to consider either in absence of the other.

INTERACTION OF SOCIAL CAUSATION AND SELECTION

When causation is considered in the context of human development, it becomes more apparent that neither social causes nor selection work alone to enable the intergenerational inheritance of inequality. According to Ford and Lerner ((1992)), development throughout the life-span occurs at the interface of the individual and the environment. Taken alone, neither determines the course of development. The evidence that gene expression is affected by environment is extensive. For example, the condition called **phenylketonuria** (PKU) is dependent on the expression of a gene. The gene is recessive, but if present and expressed, it causes mental retardation. The expression of the gene can be almost completely eliminated through diet (Antshel, Waisbren 2003; Channon et al. 2004). Another example available from a complex series of studies of rats, the prenatal environment has been shown to influence the way an organism responds to postnatal care. The prenatal environment altered the development of the endocrine response to stress through a tissue-specific effect on gene expression (Champagne et al., Francis et al. 2003; Meaney 2001; Weaver et al. 2004). More behavioral examples come from studies of resilience. Individual differences in response to environmental risk vary with preexisting factors such as temperament, personality and cognitive functioning. These factors are all known to be under a degree of genetic influence (Rutter 2006). Finally, according to Bateson and Martin (1999) and Gottlieb (2003), the biological development of individuals involves adaptation to the environment during formative development. Because the human system is guided by a genetic code and because human development is an environment-dependent process,

it is only logical to recognize that genes and environment work together to produce the observable outcome.

Another example that is especially relevant to the intergenerational inheritance of inequality is brain development and its related cognitive development. When families are very poor and cannot afford adequate nutrition, brain development suffers. Adequate nutrition is especially important for mothers during pregnancy. Likewise, it is a serious issue for children during periods when the rate of development is high, such as early childhood and early adolescence. Development of the brain is guided by genes, but it is not a deterministic process (see Tanner, Finn-Stevenson 2002). Not only are the wiring and neurochemistry of the developing brain affected by nutrition, brain function is affected by the formation of and pruning of synapses and by myelination. Developing brains are positively affected by activity, interaction and other stimulation and negatively affected by conditions associated with poverty such as inactivity, exposure to toxic substances (alcohol, tobacco, lead) and chronic stress (Nelson 2000).

We may consider that influences specific to the individual (genes) and culture co-evolve so that characteristics and behaviors that are specific to a species are sustained across generations. However, social behaviors are not themselves coded in the genes. Rather, particular processes are genetically coded. It is those processes that ensure that the evolved social behaviors will develop (Rutter 2006). Weaver et al. (2007) have evidence that the modification, or tweaking of our genetic blueprint can occur very early in an individual's development with effects that are long lasting, possibly even passed to future generations.

To counteract the reaction that genes might have a determinative effect on intergenerational inheritance of inequality, several points need to be taken into consideration. To begin, individuals are likely to form a family or family-like relationship with individuals who are like them (see Krueger et al. 1998; Mare 1991, for more on assortative mating). This environmental or social influence is likely to be as strong or stronger than a genetic influence. Continuity across generations is likely to be stronger when a problem is pervasive and persistent (see Rutter 2004). If the behaviors associated with poverty are persistent, then it is more likely that they will persist across generations, not just because of genes, but also because of the environment that may facilitate the expression of genes that work against the self-regulation and attention that are needed in a non-poverty environment.¹ In a study examining the role of environment, Duyme

¹ Self-regulation is an essential component of adaptation. It is preceded by the development of attention and is part of a complex system of executive function located in specific areas of the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Of interest, and simply put, one aspect of attention is orienting, or

and colleagues (2004) found in their longitudinal study of late-adopted children (age 4–6) that socioeconomic status “causally influences variation in children’s intellectual abilities” (p. 287). These researchers were interested in knowing whether an improvement in SES and an enriched environment would counteract the effect of early deprivation on intellectual ability. They found a dramatic effect; children in high SES adoptive homes had a mean IQ increase of 19 points. Perhaps the most powerful message here is that a change in environment can be helpful, but without dramatic effort, a deprived environment will suppress early intellectual development (see Moffitt et al. 1993). Mental processes that favor non-poverty living will be underdeveloped in deprived environments. An important point made by Ford and Lerner (1992: 60) is that, “The fusions of genes and context – of nature and nurture – mean that they are mutually facilitating and mutually *constraining* in influencing behavior.”

CHILDREN AND POVERTY

For children, the outcomes of poverty include: the lack of timely prenatal care, smoking during pregnancy and the associated low birth weight, lower IQ scores, lower verbal test scores, grade failure, behavior problems, aggression, mental health problems, early pregnancy and childbirth, school dropout and labor market problems (Bradshaw 2002; Lichter 1997). When considering poverty and children, it is useful to recognize that the effects of long-term poverty are the most serious. When children experience poverty for more than 5 years, undesirable outcomes are most likely to occur (Ashworth 1994; Duncan et al. 1994).

On the other hand, the effect of short-term poverty is more dependent on the timing of poverty. According to the analyses of Duncan et al. (1994), children who lived in poverty for 4 or 5 of their first 5 years, had IQ scores 9 points lower than children who did not live in poverty during their first 5 years. Children who lived in poverty fewer than 4 of the first 5 years of life had IQ scores that were only 4 points lower than non-poverty children. Similarly, Baydar et al. (1993)

the selection of information from the available array of sensory input. Another aspect of attention is executive control which involves the mechanisms for how conflicts among thoughts, feelings, and responses are resolved. Orienting and executive control (that is, attentional control) contribute to self-regulation. It is self-regulation that transforms animal instincts into civilized human behavior (see Reuda et al., 2005, for an excellent discussion). The irony is that adaptation is to a specific social system thereby increasing the likelihood that healthy development of children in poverty will lead to attention to poverty sustaining information and the conflicts of thoughts, feelings and responses will be resolved in ways that sustain poverty.

found that children who live in families with low income and receive welfare during their first 5 years are more likely to drop out of high school than children who experience these problems later in childhood. Indeed, welfare receipt in the first 5 years predicts school readiness, which, in turn, predicts grade failure, school completion and literacy. In contrast, when children experience poverty in their families during adolescence, the outcomes are most likely to be teenage childbearing for girls and school drop-out for girls and boys (see Haveman, Wolfe 1994).

We can conclude that poverty during the early childhood years has more substantial effects than poverty during later years, especially when poverty is experienced for as many as 5 years. However, all children who experience poverty during the early years do not experience severe consequences. That is, it is possible to mediate the effects of poverty on child outcome. Some factors that have been found to mediate the effects of poverty during the early years are: well-baby care, quality of child care, mother's education, family structure, mental health of parents, richness of home environment, parental aspirations and encouragement from other significant adults. Many of these mediators are reflective of policies that provide appropriate support for poor individuals and families (Harper et al. 2003; Mheen et al. 1997).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Poverty does not affect only children and families. For society, the outcomes of child poverty include: the high cost of unemployment; high cost of social welfare, including income support, health care and housing; lower income tax revenues and a high crime rate. According to a new report on the economic extent of poverty in the US, "costs associated with childhood poverty total about \$500 billion per year, or the equivalent of nearly 4% of GDP" (Holzer et al. 2007: 1). Poor children as opposed to non-poor children grow up to have lower earnings as adults. Lower earnings are associated with lower workforce productivity. Poor children are somewhat more likely to engage in crime and have poor health in adulthood. The cost of health care alone is a huge issue for state budgets. It is well known that poor childhood living conditions increases the risk of poor health in adulthood (Attree 2006; Lundberg 1993; van de Mheen et al. 1997).

Apparently, poverty is not a static state for most people. It is dynamic and most likely to occur in spells. When spells of poverty accumulate to 8 or 9, "children are condemned to a life of penury." (Ashworth, Hill, Walker 1994: 670).

Poverty is not assumed to be “fixable” with money alone; however, improvement in the material resources of poor families is seen as an important policy objective, along with provision of high quality pre-kindergarten education. Also behaviors, neighborhoods and parents’ actions need to change (Lichter 1997; Barnes et al. 2004). With the social cost of poverty so high, policy makers must decide which is most important: reducing the cost of current poverty or the cost of eliminating child poverty.

For a deeper understanding of the effects of poverty on children, it is necessary to take a multi-dimensional perspective of child well-being rather than simply consider some indicator of income and/or needs. Multiple dimensions have been found to include the material situation, housing, health, subjective well-being, education, children’s relationships and civic participation. When combined, factors such as these are highly correlated with, for example, feeling safe, life satisfaction, family affluence, infant mortality and teenage fertility rate (Bradshaw 2006). To achieve these goals, Harper et al. (2000) pointed out that an enabling environment is required. An enabling environment means that key areas of policy are prioritized including, at the very least, adult labor markets, asset generation, and education (including retention efforts).

Rainwater and Smeeding (2003) questioned whether there is hope for countries trying to fight poverty. They concluded that there are no policies that will fit every country in the same way. Winning the battle requires impassioned political leadership. Success requires a high political and economic priority placed on fighting poverty. It requires that we acknowledge and engage multiple aspects of society including the social, political and economic cultures. Creative, effective solutions require a full commitment. Anything less will result in yet more claims of great effort, some success, but ultimately it will result in the continuation of poverty, its hardships and its costs.

Supporting this outcome, Lichter (1993; Lichter, Eggebeen 1993) observed that since the “War on Poverty” in the United States in the 1960s, the rate of child poverty has changed very little. After some early successes, child poverty is now at a 30-year high. The income gap between rich and poor is greater than at any time in recent history. Lichter’s comments serve as a reminder of the need for policy priorities that are maintained at a high level over time. Awareness of the need for long-term solutions is not new (Sawhill 1988; Fischer et al. 1996), but witnessing the increasing poverty, the human misery and the economic costs makes any disinterest on the part of policy makers illogical, inhumane and costly.

It is important to acknowledge that the production of an idyllic childhood is not necessary. Some who speak on behalf of children seem to cross the line between having the resources and information to make constructive decisions

and a state defined and enforced idyllic quality of life (see Pichaud 2001). The important goal for policy is to have realistic, sustained efforts to decrease poverty and increase opportunities.

INTERVENTION

Even though there is compelling evidence regarding the importance of early child development and of smart investments in early childhood (Stebbins, Knitzer 2007), policy makers are hesitant to implement targeted, multifaceted interventions even though they have proven to be the most effective (Rutter 2004). They are, admittedly, complex and expensive. In their review of literature on interventions for promoting human capital, Duncan and Magnuson (2004) reported that the logic of both economics and human development support the profitability of intervention in the early years of life. Only a handful of very careful studies consistently supported their conclusion, but it was enough to lead them to suggest that efforts should be focused in early childhood and preadolescence.

Children who are most positively influenced by cognitive and social developmental interventions are biologically healthy but they already show evidence of problems, especially when problems are due to low-income environments (Chase-Lansdale, Votruba-Drzal 2004). Thus, to insure that late childhood interventions will be effective, early intervention to promote biological health is important. The relevance of early intervention can also be seen in the results of Sure Start Local Programmes in England. As with Headstart in the United States, some evaluations of Sure Start have been disappointing. However, Barnes et al. (2004) have suggested that for both the effectiveness of local programs and their evaluations, it is necessary to take into account the differences between disadvantaged communities. Within the population of disadvantaged there are specific patterns of variability that are relevant for service provision and evaluation. Interventions must be targeted to specific problems in specific populations.

More generally, Brooks-Gunn (2004) concluded that early education is not the same for all children. Deprived children benefit the most, but only when the quality of care/education is high. However, early intervention does not benefit all children. Children with low birth weight and very severe, enduring conditions of six or more familial risk factors do not benefit so much from early intervention as it is conceptualized at this time. As more is learned about these most deprived children, programs can be tailored to their needs.

Brooks-Gunn (2004) reported that preschool intervention affects IQ until about age 10; preschool combined with primary intervention affects IQ until at

least age 15. Primary school intervention helped to maintain preschool benefits, especially reading, but was not as effective by itself. She reported that primary school interventions are effective for both school performance and self-regulation. Because of her work, she worried that despite the evidence that intervention during the early years is effective, the specific aspects of interventions that are effective on outcomes other than IQ are largely unknown.

In addition, and not necessarily in contrast to Brooks-Gunn, Campbell et al. (2002) have reported evidence that preschool intervention is most important for young adult outcomes. However, when interventions are targeted directly to adults, women appear to benefit most from training and work-related investments. Investments in education yield perhaps the greatest return for increased individual earning (Card 1999).

One of the interesting complications of combating early poverty is in the process of development. Development is a process of adaptation; that is, with development, adaptation increases. Adaptation is defined here as growth of mental, physical, emotional and social competence. In his seminal article, Robert White (1959) argued that the most powerful “drive” or motivational system in humans is the desire for mastery, or competence. The desire to be competent supports the process of adaptation. However, and this is an important point, the behaviors associated with competence are specific to a social system; adaptation may involve some aspects that are general to all developing persons, but it is also specific to the context, or social system, in which the individual is embedded. In western, industrialized societies, self-regulation is considered an important component of adaptation. It is developed in a specific social system within the larger society. Compliance with social rules is an outcome of self-regulation and of consistency and warmth of parenting (Masten, Coatsworth 1998). When the social system is one of poverty (poor family living in a poor neighborhood), adaptation, competence and compliance all will be specific to that system. An intervention designed to interrupt the transmission of poverty must, by definition, attempt to change the competencies of children so that they will be able to adapt and comply with a non-poverty social system.

The importance of early intervention is in the potential for individual change before values, perceptions and patterns of behavior have become securely established. Such entrenchment is a function of brain development and activity and of reinforcement. To change a person, outcomes must be specified, precursors of outcomes must be specified and intervention processes must be specific to precursor and outcome. General improvements in the life of a child hold little hope for targeted change (see Farrington 2003). Also, a targeted intervention directed to children that does not address family environment is less likely to be successful (Duncan, Magnuson 2004).

Poverty is a debilitating condition for both individuals and social systems. It perpetuates itself at the individual level and it perpetuates problems – and costs – at the societal level. The inheritance of poverty is just as real at the societal level as it is for individuals and families. Knowing the inescapability of poverty can lead only to consideration of careful, targeted strategies to change the lives of children in poverty so that they will be able to select education and employment over poverty. Ignoring the problem at the policy level only insures that people will continue to live in poverty and the state will continue to struggle with the consequent problems.

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MIĘDZYPOKOLENIOWE DZIEDZICZENIE UBÓSTWA: ZŁE WIEŚCI DLA DZIECI, WYZWANIE DLA POLITYKI SPOŁECZNEJ

(streszczenie)

Międzynarodowe badania porównawcze dowodzą, że dzieci są najbardziej narażone na ryzyko życia w ubóstwie, co prowadzi do reprodukcji biedy. Wskazując najistotniejsze czynniki wpływające na taki stan rzeczy, autorka podkreśla współzależność uwarunkowań społecznych z uwarunkowaniami genetycznymi, które łącznie oddziałują na szanse dzieci dorastających w rodzinach o niskim statusie społeczno-ekonomicznym. Transmisja ubóstwa w takim ujęciu jest zjawiskiem jeszcze bardziej wielowymiarowym niż w klasycznych ujęciach socjologicznych. Zdaniem autorki, w badaniach procesu dziedziczenia biedy nie powinno się abstrahować od czynników biologicznych determinowanych często przez środowisko społeczne, którego wpływ jest zróżnicowany zarówno w zależności od głębokości, długości, jak i etapu rozwoju, w którym dziecko odczuwa skutki materialnej deprivacji rodziny. Istotne są też implikacje wyników badań we wskazanym obszarze, dla polityki społecznej. Ta, jeśli ma być zorientowana na długoterminową redukcję zjawiska dziedziczenia ubóstwa, powinna uwzględniać zarówno złożoność problematyki szeroko pojmowanego dobrostanu dzieci, jak i interweniować na jak najwcześniejszych etapach ich rozwoju biologicznego, psychicznego i społecznego.