

# Children in Poverty in the Diocese of Newark



**WHY IT MATTERS  
WHAT WORKS  
WHAT WE CAN DO**

Cynthia Lamy, Ed.D.

PUBLIC POLICY • EDUCATION

"It is time as a nation that we dedicated more attention to the problems of the poor and the ways in which we can effectively alleviate them. Cynthia E. Lamy should be commended for tackling such a large and complex issue and for doing so objectively and thoughtfully."

—Phillip B. Levine,  
Wellesley College

"Few problems have been as resistant to policy 'cures' as child poverty in the United States. Lamy explains why. Her passionate plea for a new policy prescription based on the cold logic of cost-benefit analysis is a must-read for anyone in government or philanthropy working to end child poverty."

—W. Steven Barnett, Rutgers University

Why is it so difficult for some people to escape poverty? Cynthia E. Lamy answers that question in *American Children in Chronic Poverty: Complex Risks, Benefit-Cost Analyses, and Untangling the Knot* by describing the complex and interacting "knot" of problems that children face as they grow up in poverty. Through a vast store of research on topics related to children, families and poverty, and methods to estimate "social return on investment," Lamy determines which programs and policies produce benefits that exceed costs, providing evidence for an efficient fight against poverty.

Specific expert policy recommendations for keeping poverty from ruining children's potential are described within three broad themes: bringing equity to our educational system, supporting families as they transition through difficulties, and making work pay. Lamy concludes with foundational concepts for building an overarching model of poverty-fighting to bring separate, narrowly defined programs and policies together. Benefit-cost analysis confirms what the great religions have been trying to tell us for millennia: when we respect and care for the most vulnerable members of our society, we create a strong, successful society in which everyone prospers.

CYNTHIA E. LAMY is a senior fellow at the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University and Metrics Manager at the Robin Hood Foundation.



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Lamy

American Children in Chronic Poverty



# American Children in Chronic Poverty



*Complex Risks, Benefit-Cost Analyses,  
and Untangling the Knot*

Cynthia E. Lamy

# A quick look at the numbers



- 46.5 million Americans below the ‘poverty line’
  - Includes 16 million children, or 22% of all children
- The ‘poverty line’ is \$23,300 for a family of 4
- 106 million Americans at 2x the poverty line, or 34% of all Americans
  - Includes 32 million children, or 44% of all children
- In our diocese:
  - Essex, Hudson and Passaic counties 25% of children below the poverty line, about 100,000 children
  - In Newark, 37% of children below the poverty line

# Poverty is a Knot

*(Many dangers, toils, and snares)*



- Children are embedded in layers of context that impact their outcomes (Bronfenbrenner)
  - So are families
  - So are schools
- Poverty commonly impacts children from multiple contextual angles at once (McLoyd)
- Separate problems tend to build upon one another, intertwining and strengthening
  - Tipping point about 3 risks (Sameroff)

# What are some of the risks to child development?



- Inadequate family resources – money, time, effort
- Parental stress, negative parenting
- Mental and physical illness
- Inadequate parental education
- Child hunger, cognitive status
- Under-qualified school staff
- Low expectations, high disrespect
- Unsupportive school policies
- Dangerous neighborhoods and schools

# Strengths and protections for child development



- A loving and capable adult
- A supportive educational context
- Strong social networks
- Community supports for families – including churches
- Religious faith/spirituality (some evidence)

# Programs that untangle some strands of the knot *(Loving our neighbor on a program level)*



- Nurse-Family Partnership
- High quality preschool
- Clinically strong school-based mental health programs
- Success For All; Reading Recovery
- The Carrera Program
- Career Academies (some of them)
- Alternatives to Incarceration (Family Functional Therapy, Multi-Systemic Therapy)
- College transition and retention (Opening Doors; ASAP)

# Benefits exceed costs, for evidence of an efficient fight against poverty

- Benefits go to the children:
  - ✦ More educational success, higher adult earnings, less criminal activity, fewer teenaged pregnancies, better health;
- And to society:
  - ✦ higher revenues to government, decreased costs to education and criminal justice systems, less use of safety net programs

**Programs with benefits that exceed costs should be fully funded to reach every child in need, at full program strength. Doing so is fiscally responsible.**



**“Benefit-cost analysis confirms what the great religions have been trying to tell us for millennia – that when we truly respect and care for the most vulnerable among us, we create a strong society in which everyone prospers.”**

# Support for families: Housing, food, health, jobs



- **There is no real substitute for contextual sufficiency in these things. Without it, families will continue to need help.**
- **Policies/programs that work:**
  - Supportive housing, e.g. Housing First
  - Nutritional supports - WIC, SNAP
  - Health care with broader contextual reach (e.g. HCZAI)
  - EITC
  - Living wages, paid sick leave, high quality child care

# Policy goals to loosen the poverty knot (*Making the rough places plain*)



- Equitable education
- Support families as they transition through difficulties
- Work must pay a living wage

# Policy implications for equitable education



- High quality preschool
- State of the art national standards
  - Curriculum and assessment systems
- Smaller class sizes
- Improved teaching
  - Effective PD/TA for teachers
  - Paired with high standards and high reward
- Renovate decrepit schools
- School turnaround
  - Aggressive transformation – very highly skilled leaders and staff, small learning communities, strongest psychological supports, longer educational day and year

# Policy implications for families transitioning through difficulties



- Family paid leave/sick time policies
- Attention to gaps in support as families stabilize
- High quality programs for children of all ages
- Child support is for the children, not the state
- Human capital-based encouragement of marriage and delayed childbirth

# Making work pay



- Best practice job training
  - Rich contextual supports
  - Educational for youth
  - Continued support for newly employed
  - Strong relationship with employers that continue to train
- Modernize the minimum wage
- Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC)
  
- **The corporate business community must creatively re-engage with low-skilled workers.**

**“To keep poverty from  
ruining a child’s potential is  
to free a child from poverty.  
To accomplish that on a  
broad scale is to end  
poverty as we know it.”**