



Poverty eradication requires prevention (American Psychological Association, European Federation of Psychologists' Associations)

Psychology is the science of the mind and behaviour, helping to understand and guide thinking, feeling, and action; and offering scientifically founded means to evaluate and improve health and wellbeing. Psychology addresses the root causes of the many challenges of the global agenda, including health, climate change, inequality, poverty, and security. We encompass nearly half a million psychologists globally. Our work is built on the ethical foundation of human rights and the importance of promoting conditions for healthy and sustainable development.

Psychological science offers preventative, collaborative, whole-of-society approaches that increase communities' capacity to eradicate poverty. Crisis-driven responses are expensive and ineffective. Governments should take proactive measures utilizing a population health framework (APA, 2022) to pre-emptively address the root causes of poverty. Psychology can also help combat stigma, showing that poverty, a social determinant of health, most often results from systemic barriers (Shah, Mullainathan, & Shafir, 2012).

Exposure to poverty is detrimental to mental and physical health (e.g., U.S. National Academies, 2019). Globally, poverty compounds systemic inequities. A child might live over 80 years if born in one country, but fewer than 45 years if born in another. Within countries, dramatic differences in outcomes are linked to degrees of social disadvantage (World Health Organization, 2008). But inequity is not inevitable; effective responses to risk factors of deficient safety, housing, education, economic stability, food security, or social connectedness broaden inclusion and reduce societal inequality (APA, 2021; Thurston, et al., 2023).

Public policies drawing on behavioural science principles can implement the social protections needed to eradicate poverty. For example, access to improved nutrition in pregnancy and childhood lessens cognitive impairment. Universal access to early childhood education and school infrastructure keeps adolescent girls in school, reducing achievement gaps. Upstream policies of this type can pre-empt poverty and promote physical and mental health equity (KFF, 2018).

Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (A/77/300) urges Member States to “address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health, including mental health, and to address holistically the range of barriers arising from underdevelopment, lack of economic opportunities, inadequate investment, poverty, inequalities, and discrimination that impede the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of mental health.”

We urge ECOSOC to promote upstream, preventative, health-promoting approaches to eradicating poverty.