

# Poverty in Wyandotte County

The first in a series of three papers

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## Poverty in Wyandotte County

Although Wyandotte County is frequently thought of as the poorest county in Greater Kansas City, Jackson County has more than three times the number of residents living below the federal poverty line and Johnson County has approximately the same number of poor residents as Wyandotte County. Wyandotte County, however, has a much smaller population overall than either of these neighboring counties. At 23.9 percent, Wyandotte County's *poverty rate* – the percentage of the total population living below the federal poverty level – is substantially greater than either Jackson County (17.4 percent), Johnson County (6.5 percent), or any other county in the Greater Kansas City Metropolitan Area. Approximately one in four residents of the county is poor. Most of them reside in the roughly two-thirds of the county that lies east of highway I-435.

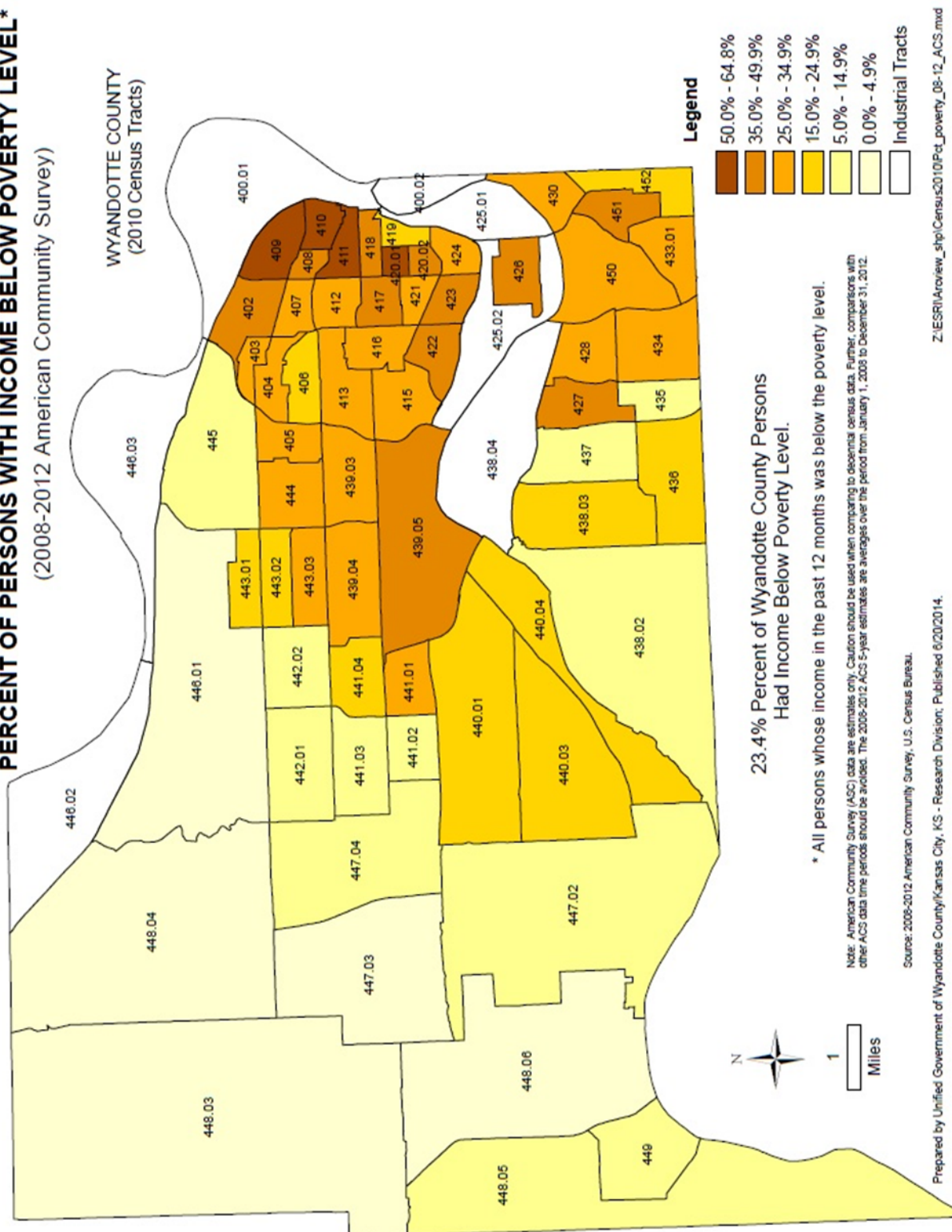
The concentration of poverty within the county grows as one travels east. The U.S. Census Bureau defines census tracts with poverty rates at or above 40.0 percent as “high-poverty areas” and census tracts with poverty rates falling between 20.0 and 39.9 percent as “low-income areas.” Following this definition, seven of Wyandotte County's census tracts (11.5 percent of all residential census tracts) are high-poverty areas, and 33 census tracts (54.1 percent) are low-income areas. (The map on the next page shows the census tracts in Wyandotte County. Note that the legend does not break down the poverty rate categories according to the Census Bureau scheme just described. The map, however, still presents a good picture of the concentration of poverty within the county.)

Academic studies in recent years have focused on the “neighborhood effects” of concentrated poverty on health, psychological distress, social isolation, learning, and other areas of human development. This line of research suggests that living in a high-poverty neighborhood imposes additional burdens on a family beyond those expected of a poor family living in a less compromised neighborhood. In other words, neighborhood effects compound the impact of poverty. These compounding effects begin to show only after a neighborhood exceeds a poverty rate of 20 percent.

### What is Poverty?

Poverty is commonly described in terms of income, or more correctly, the lack of income. It denotes the shortage of financial resources to secure a minimum standard of life and well-being within a given society. In the United States, the most widely used measure of poverty is the federal poverty guideline. Adjusted annually, the federal poverty guideline lists poverty-level income according to family size. The guidelines are often referred to as the federal poverty level (FPL); family incomes below 100 percent of FPL are considered to fall below the *poverty line*. The FPL is used as a benchmark for many federal and state programs. Program eligibility is determined by the percentage relationship, above or below, to the poverty guideline. Table 1 displays the Federal Poverty Guideline for 2015.

# **PERCENT OF PERSONS WITH INCOME BELOW POVERTY LEVEL\*** (2008-2012 American Community Survey)



At the beginning of the Great Society's War on Poverty in 1964 there was no official federal definition for poverty. In that year, a Social Security Administration economist named Mollie Orshansky developed a system to measure poverty income by family size. She began with the "economy food plan" developed by the Department of Agriculture. The economy food plan was the least expensive of four family food plans developed by USDA and was "designed for temporary or emergency use when funds [were] low." Orshansky then turned to a USDA survey conducted nine years earlier, in 1955, which estimated that families of three or more spent approximately one-third of their income on food. Orshansky simply multiplied the economy food plans for various family sizes by three to arrive at the first Federal Poverty Guidelines used in 1965. The Guidelines have been updated every year since using the Consumer Price Index to reflect price changes.

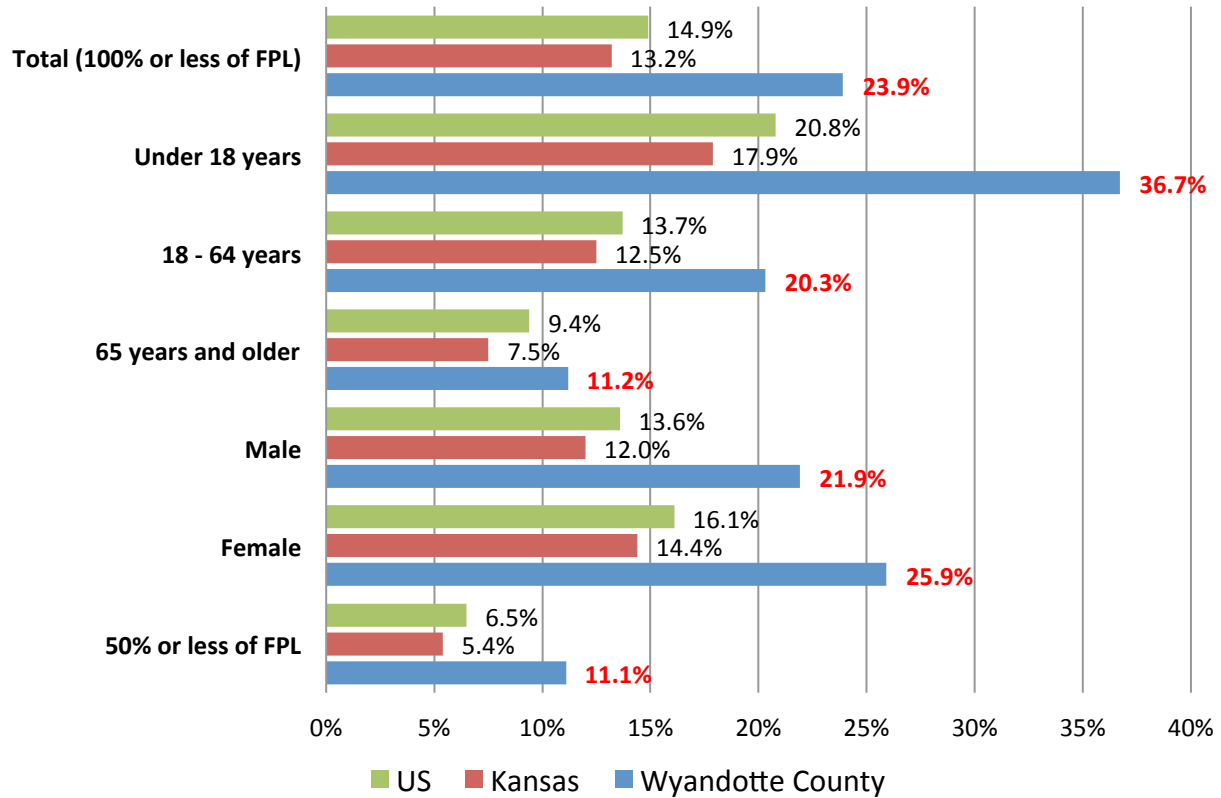
Table 1 2015 Federal Poverty Guidelines	
Persons in Family/ Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$11,770
2	\$15,930
3	\$20,090
4	\$24,250
5	\$28,410
6	\$32,570
7	\$36,730
8	\$40,890
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,160 for each additional person.	

A 1992 history of the development of the poverty threshold prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services noted that "Orshansky later indicated her original purpose was not to introduce a new general measure of poverty, but to develop a measure to assess the relative risks of low economic status (or, more broadly, the differentials in opportunity) among different demographic groups of families with children." Regardless of the intent, Orshansky's method became the official measurement of poverty in the United States for the last 50 years. When designed, 100 percent of the FPL equaled about 50 percent of the median income in the U.S. In 2015, 100 percent of FPL equals only 32 percent of Kansas median income. (The estimated Kansas median income for a family of four in 2015 is \$75,582 (*Federal Register*, 07/21/2014)). Keeping to the 50 percent standard would have raised the poverty line for a family of four by approximately \$13,500 in 2015. This small exercise demonstrates that the way we currently measure poverty has not kept pace with the times and woefully *underestimates* deprivation and poverty in the U.S.

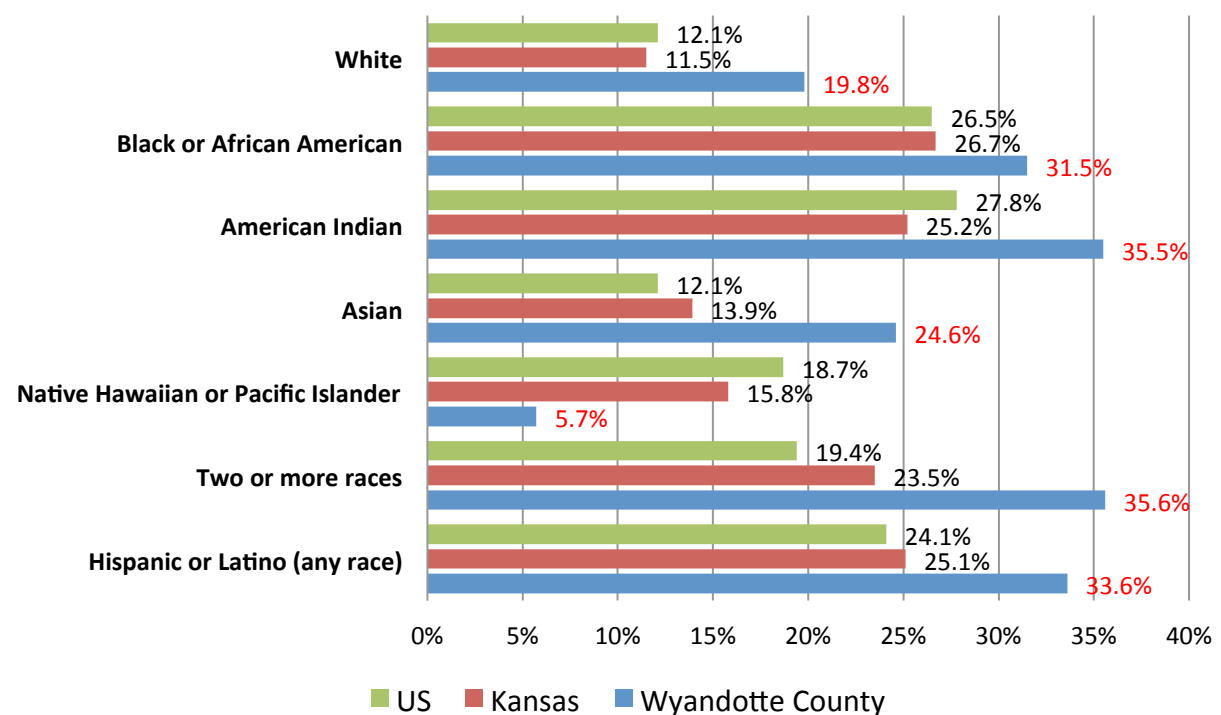
### **The Distribution of Poverty in Wyandotte County**

We have already seen that poverty is not evenly distributed across the county. It is also not distributed evenly within the population. Poverty rates among some groups of the population are much higher than others. Figure 1 on the next page shows the distribution of poverty in Wyandotte County by age and gender and Figure 2 shows the distribution of poverty by race and ethnicity. The statistics for these two charts are 5-year estimates taken from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. Five-year estimates (2009-2013) were used to increase the size of the survey sample in Wyandotte County which improves the accuracy of estimates among smaller subgroups in the population. The Wyandotte County values are compared to those for all of Kansas and the United States. In almost every case, the rate of poverty in Wyandotte County is higher.

**Figure 1: Poverty by Age and Gender, 2009-2013**



**Figure 2: Poverty by Race and Ethnicity, 2009-2013**



## Poverty by Age

Figure 1 displays poverty by three age groups: children, working age individuals, and the elderly. The age group with the highest poverty rate is children (persons under 18 years of age).

Approximately 37 percent of children in Wyandotte County – almost four of ten – live in families with incomes less 100 percent of FPL. Children, of course, do not typically have independent incomes; they are poor because they live in families that are poor. The risk of living in a poor family increases with the number of children in the family. Twenty-two percent of families in Wyandotte County with one or two children have incomes below the poverty line, while 66.6 percent of families with five or more children are poor. The risk of living in a poor family *decreases* with the number of people in the family who have paying jobs. In Wyandotte County, 40.6 percent of families that contain no workers are in poverty. In families with one worker, the rate falls to 30.1 percent; and in families with two workers, the poverty rate falls dramatically to only 4.5 percent, a rate that is a mere fraction of the statewide average. Families headed by a married couple are most likely to have two wage earners in them. In Wyandotte County, 38 percent of all families with children are headed by a single female with no husband present; 52.6 percent of these families live below the poverty line. Being a single, female head of household is not in itself the cause of poverty. Other issues such as gender pay disparities, child care opportunities, and a host of other social conditions complicate the ability of the mother or grandmother to find and hold a job that pays an adequate wage.

Working-age individuals (ages 18 to 64) in Wyandotte County have a poverty rate of 20.3 percent. This is the group that many people typically think of when they think of poor people. Losing a job or being forced to accept a cut in pay often forces people in this group into poverty. Nationally, between 40 and 50 percent of all people who become poor live in a family in which the head of the household or another family member lost his or her job.

Poverty for this group is a highly fluid condition. Just as job and income losses can force a person into poverty, a new job or income gain can lift them out of poverty. Most people who are poor do not stay poor for long. Approximately 50 percent of people nationally who become poor get out of poverty in about a year's time, and approximately 75 percent of people who have sunk below the poverty line move out of poverty within four years. In any given year, poor individuals, on average, have a one-in-three chance of escaping poverty. Unfortunately, approximately one-half of those who work their way out of poverty will become poor again within five years. This churning in and out of poverty across the life-course is a feature of life in the U.S. *Every* American has roughly a four percent chance of becoming poor in any year. Approximately half of the U.S. population experiences poverty at some time before the age of 65. (People are more likely to experience poverty at younger ages, either as children or young adults.) The primary reason for churning is because individuals who emerge from poverty often do not move far from the poverty line. They move above 100 percent of FPL, but still earn less than 200 percent of FPL, the widely recognized upper limit for low-income individuals and families.

The age cohort with the lowest poverty rate in Wyandotte County (11.2 percent) is the elderly (ages 65 and older). This low rate is expected to grow. Already among the elderly of Wyandotte

County, 13.5 percent have incomes between 100 and 149 percent of FPL. This group is at prime risk for falling below the poverty line in future years.

A 2010 study at Washington University in St. Louis estimated that nearly one-half of all Americans between the ages of 60 and 90 will experience poverty or “near poverty” for at least one year. Of course, some sectors of the population are at greater risk than others (see Table 2).

Table 2 Risk of Poverty for at Least One Year Between the Ages of 60 and 90	
Risk Factor	Risk Percent
White	32.7
African American	64.6
Unmarried	51.2
Married	24.9
Less than 12 years of education	48.4
12 years or more of education	20.5

The major reasons for the predicted increase in poverty among the elderly are that 1) Americans are living longer, 2) many of them have not saved adequately for retirement and employers have switched pension programs from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans, and 3) the entry of the large Baby Boom cohort to the Social Security system at this juncture in the political and economic life of the country increases the probability of policies intended to control Medicare and Social Security spending.

Even if this envisioned future does not occur, the recent past suggests that the growing number of elderly will face serious problems. According to a 2010 study by the AARP Public Policy Institute, 57 percent of all adults age 65 and older are women, but women comprise 70 percent of the elderly poor. Because married women are usually younger than their spouses and women have longer life expectancies than men, many of them will live alone in their declining years. Thirty-three percent of all elderly adults live alone, but 58 percent (almost double) of poor elderly adults live alone. Finally, Social Security contributes 78 percent of all income for families with income below 100 percent of FPL that are headed by a person age 65 or older; Social Security contributes 77 percent of the income for families with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of FPL. Across all families headed by an elderly individual, the Social Security contribution is 34.7 percent.

### **Poverty by Race and Ethnicity**

Long-standing racial and ethnic disparities in poverty persist in Wyandotte County (see Figure 2). Approximately one in *three* Black, American Indian, and Hispanic residents of the county have incomes below 100 percent of FPL as do those who claim more than one race. One in *four* Asian residents of the county and those who claim “another race” live below the poverty line.

Approximately one in *five* White residents of the county also live in poverty; despite having the lowest poverty rate of the major racial and ethnic groups, Whites constitute the largest population of poor individuals in Wyandotte County. Poverty rates are higher in neighborhoods where Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents are more concentrated.

The persistence of racial and ethnic disparities in the face of the growing diversity of American life and advances in civil rights and anti-discrimination law was highlighted in the recent publication by the Urban League of Greater Kansas City and the REACH Healthcare Foundation of *2015 State of Black Kansas City: Picture of Health*. The book compares the performance of Blacks and Hispanics to Whites for a variety of social indicators among the domains of economics, health, education, social justice, and civic engagement, and calculates a cumulative Equality Index. Overall, the Equality Index has changed little since it was first collected in 2006. The two areas of greatest disparity are economics and social justice.

### **Poverty by Other Characteristics**

Fundamentally, poverty is the absence of the ability to acquire the necessities of life. In developed cultures, the ability to acquire the necessities of life requires, in most cases, money to purchase them, and money is obtained through gainful employment. The discussion will now turn to employment in Wyandotte County and its relationship to poverty among county residents.

**Employment:** In Wyandotte County, 10.4 percent of the population 16 years and over that live below the poverty level worked at full-time jobs in the previous 12 months; 34.3 percent worked at part-time jobs or part of the year. The balance (55.3 percent) that did not work also includes individuals age 65 and over, who typically are not in the labor market. That roughly half of poor adults in Wyandotte County work at least a portion of the year, speaks to the quality of jobs that many of them have. Many of the jobs available to the working poor are considered “bad jobs.” They are either low-wage or low-income jobs. Low-wage jobs pay their workers at or close to the minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour); the full-time annual pay rate at minimum wage before withholding is \$15,080. Low-income jobs may pay more than minimum wage, but they are either permanent part-time jobs or are jobs of uncertain duration (day-labor, temporary help agencies, independent contracting as either an hourly worker or self-employment) which may not produce a livable income.

The recent decline in the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy and the increases in the service sector have had a negative impact on workers with low skills. Service sector jobs typically offer lower wages and part-time positions, and they provide fewer opportunities for career potential and upward mobility than those historically provided by the manufacturing sector. Among the leading employers in Wyandotte County (those with more than 200 employees) only two are unambiguously manufacturers (General Motors and Owens Corning).

By independent measures, Wyandotte County *should* be a good place to find a good job. The county employment residence ratio (the total number of workers in a county divided by the number of workers living in the county) for Wyandotte County is 1.23; it is the second highest rate in the state. A rate above 1.0 indicates that the county attracts workers to it from other counties. In 2013, the average full- and part-time average annual wage per job in Wyandotte was



\$46,352; only four other counties in Kansas had a higher rate. Certainly, the ability to draw workers into the county from surrounding counties is due to the existence of the University of Kansas Hospital and the University of Kansas Medical Center, the number 1 and number 2 leading employers in the county responsible together for 10,350 jobs. A number of these jobs require advanced educational certification. Nevertheless, the disparity between the county employment residence ratio and the unemployment rate of Wyandotte County is a major concern: Why don't local residents benefit from this surfeit of jobs?

**Relationship of Education to Employment:** Education is a key determinant of employment and poverty (see Table 3). Not only does education affect one's ability to obtain and keep a job, it also affects the type of job one gets. The Federal Reserve Board of San Francisco in 2014 estimated that there is an \$830,000 lifetime earnings difference between those with a college education and those with just a high school education.

<b>Table 3</b> <b>Relationship of Educational Attainment to Employment</b> <b>And Poverty in Wyandotte County, ages 25-64 years</b>		
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	<b>Poverty Rate</b>
Less than high school graduate	13.5%	32.0%
High school graduate (including equivalency)	13.2%	18.1%
Some college or associate's degree	10.6%	12.8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	5.4%	6.5%

Although college is not appropriate for everyone, 21.8 percent of Wyandotte County residents ages 25 and over have not attained a high school diploma and 33.2 percent have obtained only a high school education or its equivalent. Together, the 55 percent of Wyandotte County residents over age 25 with a high school education or less are at greater risk for becoming poor and cycling in and out of poverty over their lifetimes.

**Relationship of Disability to Employment:** A severe health problem or a disability can affect a person's ability to work or the types of jobs one can take. In Wyandotte County, 55.3 percent of the 12,758 people with a recognized, declared disability are no longer in the workforce. The unemployment rate among those remaining in the workforce is 19.2 percent. The poverty rate (100 percent of FPL) in Wyandotte County of noninstitutionalized people age 16 and over with a disability is 24.9 percent, compared to 18.2 percent for the same population without a disability. An additional 14.1 percent of persons with disabilities in Wyandotte County live between 100 and 149 percent of poverty in comparison to the 10.8 percent without a disability.

Many children with disabilities do not graduate from high school or go further in their education. Approximately 28 percent of persons with disabilities in Wyandotte County have less than a high school education compared to 20 percent for those who do not have a disability. The presence of one or more disabled children in a family negatively influences the paid employment of mothers.

**Relationship of Immigration to Employment:** Wyandotte County is home to a sizeable community of immigrants: 14.6 percent of the population is foreign born, more than double the rate of Kansas as a whole (6.7 percent), but closer to the rate for the entire U.S. (12.9 percent). Almost eight out of ten (79.2 percent) immigrants to Wyandotte County are Hispanic; 13.3 percent are Asian. Approximately 58 percent of immigrant households are married-couple families compared to 48 percent of native households. At 3.9 persons, the average household size of immigrant households is 54 percent larger than native ones. More than 85 percent of the foreign born population falls between the ages of 18 and 64, compared to 57 percent for the native born population. The children of all immigrants born in the U.S., of course, are citizens of the United States. Approximately one-fifth (19.3 percent) of foreign born residents of Wyandotte County are naturalized citizens.

Seven of ten immigrants (69 percent) in Wyandotte County report that they speak English less than “very well.” Almost six of ten (57.2 percent) have less than a high school education and 25.9 percent have only a high school education or its equivalent. Despite these two barriers, the unemployment rate of immigrants in the labor force is slightly lower (8.1 percent) than the rate for the native population (8.9 percent). The poverty rate, however, is much higher (33.5 percent) for immigrants than for native residents of the county (22.3 percent). This might be attributable to the fact that many of the jobs immigrants are able to obtain with low English proficiency and limited education are low-wage (e.g., fast food) or low-income (e.g., day labor or seasonal) jobs.

The longer immigrants are in the U.S., the better their economic prospects become. Even though foreign born residents of Wyandotte County who have become naturalized citizens still have low rates of educational attainment (45.2 percent have less than a high school education and 29.1 percent have only a high school diploma) and over half (53.4 percent) of them say they speak English less than “very well,” their median household income is 64 percent greater than foreign-born residents of the county who are not citizens; and their poverty rates are less than half the rate of non-citizen foreign-born residents (17.6 percent versus 37.3 percent). However, many immigrants who have become citizens still live close to the margin: 30.6 percent have incomes between 100 and 199 percent of poverty.

### **Understanding Poverty**

The causes and consequences of poverty have been debated for at least the last century and a half. A complex topic, poverty can be viewed from many perspectives, including various academic disciplines such as economics and sociology, political ideology, and religion. The discussion which follows is a very brief summary of a vast literature on the topic. It begins with a short presentation of the theoretical arguments of those who claim that poverty is caused primarily by culture and the behavior of poor individuals and those who claim that poverty is caused by structural elements in society at large. A relatively new theory, but one gaining increasing acceptance in the human development community internationally, will also be introduced. It views poverty as “capability deprivation.” After that the focus shifts to two important characteristics of poverty, situational and intergenerational poverty and a brief discussion of their similarities and differences.

## Causes of Poverty

The debate between policy-makers and poverty theorists has tended to split into conservative and liberal camps, with conservatives favoring the cultural/behavioral thesis and liberals favoring structural arguments. However, there is enough truth in both theories to suggest that a workable bridge can be built between them.

**The Culture of Poverty:** It has been maintained in the U.S. for almost 60 years that there is a culture of poverty – that as an adaptation to persistent poverty, a subculture has developed among the poor that features values and behaviors of vulnerability, dependency, and marginality that are transmitted to future generations and perpetuate poverty. In other words, poverty is the result of social and behavioral deficiencies which make the poor less able to function in the dominant culture. This approach focuses on individual behavior and social deviance. From the beginning, it has been criticized as “blaming the victim.” Still, it is an idea that stubbornly persists, and is used today by some to separate “the deserving poor” from the “undeserving.”

Not all adherents of the culture of poverty view it through the lens of social dysfunction. Michael Harrington and Ruby Payne, for example, also talk about the culture of poverty, but in less judgmental terms. In some ways, the culture of poverty is less about culture itself (i.e., values, norms, language, and symbols) than it is about the *mechanisms of culture* – the underlying beliefs or lack of beliefs that help shape the elements of a culture. For example, many poverty theorists have noted aspirational limitations among the poor. (Adam Smith, as early as 1776 said, “The real tragedy of the poor is the poverty of their aspirations.”) Research has shown that aspirations are highly correlated (but not necessarily determinative) with their respective behaviors. Aspirations can be divided between the “real” and the “ideal”: what one thinks might be attainable and what one hopes might be attainable if all goes well. The social deprivation of poverty has a significant effect on one’s level of aspiration. Lack of achievement among the poor, therefore, is not so much the result of a cultural value or belief as it is the absence of a mechanism that serves as the precondition for achievement.

**Structural Causes of Poverty:** This theory claims that the economy (production and markets) and institutional environments (political institutions for policy-making, regulation, and adjudication, and socio-cultural institutions that influence informal norms) tend to discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, and gender. Discrimination in employment, education, housing, and social justice results in both poverty and the concentration of poor populations in self-reinforcing, socially isolated enclaves in inner-cities and some rural areas. One new feature of this “structural” school of thought focuses on the previously mentioned shift of the American economy from manufacturing to service industries. Advocates claim that this new service sector is really two distinct sectors, one for relatively well paid jobs in disciplines such as information and financial services, and the other for low-wage and part-time jobs in retail, hospitality, and personal service industries. In the decades when manufacturing dominated and unions effectively bargained on behalf of workers, it was possible for people with limited educations to improve their status within a company, moving from line worker, to supervisor, to manager, and beyond. In the new bifurcated service economy, there is little opportunity to move from the low-paying part to the high-paying part. While a good job is the best path out of poverty, in the new

economy, many poor families are finding it increasingly difficult to escape poverty. Many of those who are more successful merely climb into the ranks of the “near-poor,” a position that is neither stable nor adequate to reverse many of the developmental and structural barriers of poverty.

**A Synthesis:** Clearly, racial and ethnic discrimination exists and the transition to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy is having social effects as profound in their way as those of the Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At the same time, many compassionate observers concede that elements of a distinct culture exist among *some* poor individuals, families, and neighborhoods. One possible bridge between these two points-of-view is the capability approach (CA) of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which is a human development concept that has been widely embraced by the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the World Bank among others. CA recognizes that intergenerational poverty exists in the context of structural forces but suggests that while low income “is a strong predisposing condition for an impoverished life,” poverty must be defined in terms of the *deprivation of basic capabilities*. This deprivation can result from individual, cultural or other social influences. In this view, “basic capabilities” are considered the necessary building blocks for developing more advanced capabilities that enable individuals to achieve greater agency to attain “the kinds of lives they have reason to value” and begin to break the cycle of poverty. The capability approach implicitly suggests that increasing income alone may not improve the well-being of poor individuals, and that culturally transmitted incapability may be overcome by effective interventions that permit individuals to pursue the goals or values they regard as important. The CA will be discussed more fully in the next planning paper.

### **Characteristics of Poverty**

In the earlier sections of this planning paper we discussed who is at risk of becoming poor and some of the reasons why. In this section we make a distinction between *situational poverty* and *chronic*, potentially *intergenerational*, poverty. These distinctions are made because the Wyandotte Health Foundation might choose to devote its scarce resources to investments that have the greatest long-term return – the biggest bang for the buck. In order to make such a choice, it is useful to know as much as possible about the different characteristics of poverty.

**Situational Poverty:** The concept of situational poverty was introduced above in the section on poverty among working age adults. Situational poverty occurs as the result of a life event – losing a job, business failure, disaster, death, divorce, desertion or separation, illness or disability, and so on. It is usually relatively short in duration, but in many cases people who experience situational poverty once, cycle in and out of poverty throughout their lives. This churning occurs because the vulnerabilities that led these individuals to situational poverty the first time continue to plague them over the course of their lives. Correction of some of these vulnerabilities, such as education, job training, and drug rehabilitation, are the focus of some anti-poverty programs aimed at breaking the cycle. The success of these efforts varies widely.

In the U.S., there are two units of measure for poverty: individual poverty and family poverty. Although children have the highest rates of poverty, they become poor as a result of the life

events of their parents. Few children who are poor for multiple years have a single uninterrupted spell of poverty. An adult may cycle out of situational poverty with no lasting harm, but children may not be so lucky. Because children are extremely vulnerable *to even short spells* of poverty, situational poverty that is not repeated can have lasting effects on them increasing their probability becoming poor themselves as adults.

**Chronic and Intergenerational Poverty:** Chronic poverty occurs when an individual, for whatever reason or reasons, slips below the poverty line and is not able to rise above it. Intergenerational poverty, as the name suggests, is a cycle of poverty that passes from generation to generation within a family: being a poor child increases the risk of becoming a poor adult. According to a 40-year study reported by the Urban Institute in 2010, children who were never poor are the least likely to become poor as adults. Only one percent of children in the study who were never poor spent more than half of their young adult years (25-30) in poverty, while 32 percent of children who were poor for nine or more years did. The means by which poverty is transmitted across generations are complex and multidimensional.

The Chronic Poverty Research Centre (UK) suggested in 2007 that the factors that influence the transmission of intergenerational poverty include adolescent pregnancy, early child care and development practices, domestic violence, household income, household and individual assets, household decision-making, livelihood and survival strategies, service uptake, exposure and vulnerability to risk, resilience or the ability to cope, and a host of other household and neighborhood factors. *In utero* and early childhood malnutrition are risk factors for permanent limitations to physical and cognitive development, affecting school performance and adult health (e.g., obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke), which, in turn, may affect the ability to obtain and keep a good job. The National Poverty Center also reported (2009) that “factors that are ostensibly unrelated to race...nonetheless contribute to racial inequality.”

[D]isparities in household resources, parenting time, and stressors [produce] a substantial racial and ethnic achievement gap before children even enter school. Black and White children enter kindergarten with very different levels of preparedness, while Asian and Hispanic achievement levels are lowered by the high proportion of parents who lack English skills. These initial differences are exacerbated by class differences, ability grouping, and teacher attention. By fourth grade, Black children score more than 25 points lower, Hispanic children about 15 points lower, and Asian children 5-10 points lower than White children on reading and math tests. Second language learners of any race lose roughly 20 points more on reading and 15 points more on math.

Exposure to any one of these risks may not present a substantial challenge to a child, however, exposure to three or more adverse childhood events have a cumulative effect and are significantly more harmful to children across the life course.

## **Why Should We Care?**

The concept of *social determinants of health* recognizes that one's level of income affects one's health. Health and longevity both decrease as income decreases. Other social determinants such as education and the physical environment (e.g., housing, the built environment, industrial pollution) tend to be highly related to income. How social determinants affect health will be discussed more fully in the next planning paper in this series.

The Wyandotte Health Foundation's major concern is health, but because poor health is inextricably linked to poverty, WHF should also be interested in poverty. *The key to population health improvement in Wyandotte County lies in improving the understanding of the impact of poverty on health and in supporting effective interventions to interrupt the mechanisms responsible for poorer health and preventable diseases and injury.*