

Establishing a Minimum Income Level for Local College Students

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Introduction

The basic needs approach to measuring poverty has been around since 1976 (Rudra, 2009).

This approach bases the poverty line on people's ability to meet the "basic needs" of themselves and their family like clean drinking water, adequate food and healthcare, and a stable place of shelter (Rudra, 2009).

A household with an income that is insufficient for meeting those needs would be considered in poverty (Rudra, 2009).

A person's basic needs can generally be described as all of the necessities in their life, but there isn't one exact measurement for what qualifies as a necessity (Baxter & Moosa, 1996).

Research question

There are many different approaches to measuring and defining poverty, so which one would be best?

Would a local, context-specific definition of poverty be the best definition to apply to college students in the county?

Background and Lit Review

There are many different approaches to measuring and quantifying poverty, leading to vastly different definitions of the poverty line that work to varying success.

Relative definitions derived from fixed percentages of national median income do not properly anchor poverty lines to social context (Niemetz, 2010).

Subjective poverty line definitions are susceptible to a bias towards underestimated responses to income evaluation questions if surveys are not designed properly. These problems lead to inaccurate information being collected, which then leads to biased poverty lines being calculated (Kapteyn et al, 1988).

Researchers have found that it is a good idea to handle anti-poverty efforts on a case-by-case basis. Local contexts matter, and the poor within that context will have the best handle on their situation (Bastiaensen et al, 2005).

Methods

A survey will be administered to 200 college students at Stanislaus County schools to determine what students within the county deem to be their basic needs.

Participants will also be asked to list the amount of money that they generally spend on each of these goods and services within a month.

The second half of the research will involve determining the minimum annual income level required to fulfill these basic needs.

This income level will be derived in part from individual responses regarding the income spent meeting these basic needs and in part on average prices for these basic needs items in the county.

Expected Results

A local, basic-needs oriented definition of the minimum income level for college students will be a better fit as a poverty threshold for this group than the current poverty line in the U.S. for single-person households.

Significance

Ensuring that people can meet their basic needs is a relevant topic for policymakers at any level of government and finding a working definition of basic needs is essential in planning such policies out.

This poverty line definition could potentially be applied to other schools in neighboring counties or the 18-29 age group as a whole in Stanislaus County, and the methods used to find this definition could hopefully be applied anywhere if successful.

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