

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE IN THE RESEARCH OF POVERTY

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Abstract

The article highlights and describes two conceptual approaches to the definition of the phenomenon of poverty - absolute and relative. Separate historical stages of the study of poverty, as well as psychological and value bases of the poor subculture are considered. The article analyzes the experience of recent research in this area and new approaches to the fight against poverty.

Keywords: Problem of poverty, absolute poverty, deprivation, culture of poverty, psychology of poverty, stress, neuroplasticity, coaching, unconditional basic income.

Poverty — is a lack of character.

Margaret Thatcher

Poverty is not a lack of character, but a lack of money.

Rutger Bregman

End poverty in all its forms everywhere is the first of 17 global sustainable development goals (SDGs), adopted by 193 countries at the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015. Eradicating poverty must go hand in hand with efforts to boost economic growth and address the challenges of education, health, social protection and employment. It is planned to end poverty by 2030 [1]. Figuratively speaking, the eradication of poverty becomes a matter of honor for each state separately and for all mankind as a whole.

The topic of poverty is not new, however, all attempts to approach it have so far been unsuccessful. The key to the solution is not only looking for economists, but also philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, educators, political scientists, neuroscientists, health professionals. Therefore, there is now a steady growth of scientific and public interest in the problem of poverty as a complex problem that requires taking into account many factors on the basis of polydiscursive methodology.

In the post-Soviet space, scientific circles began to think about this seriously in the 90s of the last century, when society began to stratify in terms of income. In the old days, the difference in income was insignificant, while all citizens of the USSR were provided with acceptable living conditions by the state. Education and medicine, libraries, hobby groups and sports clubs were free; cultural events, museums, recreation and all types of transport throughout the vast territory are accessible. Accordingly, the level of deprivation, i.e. reduction or complete deprivation of the ability to meet basic needs in society was minimal. However, the spontaneous transition to the market showed that the majority of people were not ready for new economic relations. An all-encompassing revolution of public consciousness took place: value orientations changed, an ideological vacuum arose, feelings of confusion and uncertainty about the future prevailed. The growth of individualism in all its manifestations has become predominant. Against this background, property inequality grew rapidly. The society was going through a very painful period. Only decades later did society manage to more or less adapt to market realities. However, new problems arose at full height, which hitherto remained outside the circle of public attention. One of them is the problem of poverty.

There are different approaches to the interpretation of this concept. The simplest of these is associated with absolute poverty, which is characterized by the minimum amount of money necessary for the survival of an individual. Absolute poverty is linked to the concept of a poverty line. The poverty line is the level of disposable income or consumption, below which poverty occurs. To date, the World Bank has designated \$ 1.90 per day as such a threshold. This is a very conditional figure that gives only an approximate quantitative characterization of poverty and poverty in the world. It is not clear, for example, to which category those who survive on \$ 2.0-2.5 a day should be classified. Of course, they cannot be called rich, but they do not even reach the average level. Take Russia, for example. "Considering the indicator of the subsistence minimum in Russia in 2016, which includes the means necessary for living in the amount of 9828 rubles (about \$ 140, G.F.), it can be argued that, in fact, this indicator corresponds not to the poor class, but to the class beggars. Such income is hardly sufficient for normal living and corresponds to extreme, physiological poverty" [2, p.8]. This method does not take into account the level of inequality.

In the 70s. XX century, the concept of relative deprivation is taking shape. Much credit for its development belongs to P. Townsend, he outlined its foundations in the book "Poverty in Great Britain". The researcher argues that poverty can be objectively defined only in terms of relative deprivation. This approach was called deprivation because the poor person is in deprivation, i.e. he lacks the resources to provide, for example, different types of diet, the creation of normal living

conditions, the arrangement of life and the use of amenities that are widely accepted in a given society. The resources of the poor are so small that they are virtually excluded from the usual patterns of life [3]. Thus, P. Townsend brought the concept of poverty to a fundamentally different level of understanding and measurement. They began to take into account not only the physiological needs of a person, but also social ones. And poverty has become multidimensional and multidimensional. With this understanding of poverty, it is not the indicators of the population's income that are primarily considered, but consumption. Evaluating poverty as a discrepancy between living conditions and the quality of consumption with generally accepted standards, one can come to an understanding of how it affects the psyche.

If we proceed from this point of view, then poverty in advanced economies will, of course, differ from countries with developing economies. In advanced countries in terms of income, the poor do not have access to, for example, treatments in the best clinics, prestigious education, cultural development, travel. But food and clothing are more or less available. In developing countries, the picture is different. Here, for the poor, in addition to high-grade food products, even normal drinking water may be inaccessible, as, for example, in some African countries. But the main thing that defines and unites all people in the zone of deprivation, in any society, any state, any economy, is the feeling of certain inferiority, isolation from the rest of society. Their thoughts are forced and constantly focused on basic life needs, on things that are not a subject of concern for wealthy people: on issues of food, buying the necessary shoes and clothes, medicines, paying for housing and education. Moreover, many of them have debts that need to be repaid. Therefore, poverty is, first of all, stress, constant and uncontrollable.

The background to the famous epigraph by Margaret Thatcher dates back to 1959, when the book of the American anthropologist and ethnologist Oscar Lewis was published, *Five Families: A Study of Selected Mexican Examples of a Culture of Poverty*. It concluded that the values of people in poverty play a significant role in perpetuating their plight and sustaining the cycle of poverty between generations. The concept of “culture of poverty”, introduced by the author into scientific circulation, implied the way of collective life of the poor, who exist in their own environment, raise children in their own way, and each next generation, as a rule, continues the same way of life, recreating the same culture. Within this concept, he tried to explain why poverty persists despite all efforts to combat it. “The subculture of the poor develops mechanisms that tend to perpetuate it, especially because of what happens to the worldview, aspirations and character of the children who grow up in it” [4, p.199].

The works of O. Lewis caused a violent and controversial reaction, were widely discussed until the early 2000s. Within the framework of economic psychology, such a direction as the psychology of poverty began to be developed. In the 70s. XX century popularizer of the theory of O. Lewis in Great Britain was Sir Keith Joseph, Minister of Health and Welfare. In 1972, he proposed the idea of a cycle of deprivation, according to which poverty will breed poverty. In his opinion, parents who have not achieved significant success in life cannot instill in their children values and behavior oriented towards success. Therefore, their children will not be able to provide financial support for themselves and their children in the future. And so it is repeated from generation to generation. In other words, a person falls into the “poverty trap”. A similar expression - "development trap", has come to be applied to poor countries.

With prolonged or repeated stress, emotional arousal can stagnate, and the functioning of the body can go wrong. The latest research by leading neuroscientists in the USA, Singapore and the UK has shown that stress affects the limbic system, which triggers the release of special hormones, primarily cortisol, which is a glucocorticoid group. These hormones, at the genetic level, affect the development and functioning of the whole organism. Consequently, stress changes us, including our brain. Several major areas of the stress response are at risk. This is, firstly, the hippocampus, which is responsible for cognitive functions and memory. Under the influence of stress, cells die in it, while the learning process, on the contrary, enlarges the hippocampus even in the elderly. Second, it is the median area of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for planning, cognition, and control of actions and emotions. Under the influence of glucocorticoids, the number of neural connections is reduced here. This leads to rigidity (inertia, stubbornness) of cognitive abilities. High rigidity limits the flexibility of thought processes, reduces adaptability to new things. But, at the same time, it is also a way of responding to a stressful situation when concreteness and unambiguity of thinking are important. Thirdly, it is the orbitofrontal cortex of the brain. Under stress, the number of connections in it increases. This area of the brain is still not well understood, but it is believed that the increase in the number of connections in it, in all likelihood, is caused by the need to remain attentive, alert and provide habituation to new reward mechanisms. Finally, there is the amygdala, which is part of the limbic system. Under stress, it works very intensely, and if stress is chronic, then it practically does not leave the active regime at all, increasing anxiety and general emotional reactivity [5; 6].

The stress response was initially adapted to abrupt changes: it is designed to mobilize the body to effectively implement the fight-or-flight strategy. However, in a situation of chronic stress, this

strategy is detrimental. Since our body is able to maintain homeostasis (self-regulation) even in the most extreme conditions, even with prolonged stress, it continues to function, but at the same time it is significantly rearranged to ensure balance. Therefore, the temporary limitations of cognitive functions, anxiety and impulsivity, necessary at the moment of danger, become permanent. This state of the subject physically excludes his ability to concentrate, adequately make plans, calculate actions and make responsible decisions. The brain is deprived of the potential for full-fledged work; its abilities in the field of long-term planning and control are limited. In short, poverty affects the way we analyze problems and set goals.

Poverty factors have a particularly negative impact on child development. The environment, and the emotional state, and the nature of the speech of others, and the eating habits, and the variety of toys have an influence. All these factors influence the structure and function of the growing brain. Studies by American scientists have shown that adult family members with an income within one and a half values of the federal poverty level, the brain volume is 3-4 percent less than normal. In their children, this lag is already 10 percent. It has been established that the hardships of the financial situation of children, first of all, are reflected in the development of the frontal lobe (controls attention, is responsible for the regulation of emotions and learning processes); the temporal zone (mastering speech) and the hippocampus (processing and memorizing information). Moreover, the stressful state of the mother begins to affect the functioning of the infant's brain while in the womb. Such children already at the initial level of development lose their self-control mechanisms. Growing up, they become overly impulsive, more prone to inappropriate behavior and nervous disorders than their peers. "Dependence" on the past prevents them from making the right choice in life. But observations have also shown that measures to improve the living environment of children can have a positive effect on the link between child poverty and cognitive decline [7; 8].

The structures of the brain are plastic, i.e. the brain is able to change, and this, accordingly, entails changes in the functioning of the whole organism. However, the brain appears to fully manifest its plastic potential only if the newly acquired knowledge changes behavior. That is, for physiological changes in the brain, changes in behavior are necessary. In other words, new knowledge must be practically implemented.

Through self-induced mental practice and mental images, it is possible to restore lost functions. This type of therapy uses neuroplasticity to reactivate damaged areas of the brain or deactivate overactive ones. Today, researchers are studying the effectiveness of such forms of therapy for people suffering from various emotional disorders, chronic pain, psychopathies and social phobias [9]. Therefore, in recent years, in the fight against poverty, coaching has been increasingly used - a

training method in the process of which a person called a "coach" helps a student to achieve a certain life or professional goal. This technique is common in the West, especially in the United States, and has already proven its effectiveness. An example is the EMPATH Global Learning Network (Economic Mobility Pathways, Boston, USA). Its motto is Brain Science Mentoring. EMPATH has eminent specialists in the fields of psychology and philosophy, medicine and healthcare, and the Board of Directors includes representatives of leading research organizations and major corporations. This testifies to the serious interest of society in looking for new ways to overcome poverty and achieve economic independence for people with low incomes. Psychology is becoming one of the most important tools here.

In August 2013, Science published an article entitled "Poverty inhibits cognitive function." It presents the results of two studies that support the hypothesis that poverty directly interferes with cognitive function. Experimentally evoked thoughts about the upcoming significant cash spending reduced cognitive abilities in the poor, while in the wealthy participants they remained at the same level. In addition, the cognitive functions of Indian farmers were studied during the agricultural cycle. The same farmers were found to show cognitive decline before harvest, when money was scarce, compared to the post-harvest period, when money was plentiful. It was found that the consequences of living in poverty entail a decrease in the intelligence quotient (IQ) by 14 points. This is comparable to the effects of sleep deprivation or alcoholism. The phenomenon was not correlated with the difference in the amount of free time, the quality of food and the intensity of workloads. It turned out that poverty itself reduces cognitive ability. The problems it causes require the expenditure of significant intellectual resources, leaving only a minimum for solving other problems. These data allow for a new assessment and explanation of the behavior of the poor [10].

After the publication of the article, a discussion on the topic of unconditional basic income (UBI), which is sometimes also called the dividend of freedom, erupted with renewed vigor. The highlight of the event was a speech by a staunch BBD supporter Rutger Bregman at TED Conferences 2017 *. In his report, he referred precisely to this study, which served as the impetus for his subsequent three-year research on poverty.

*TED Conferences LLC (Technology, Entertainment, Design) - is an American media organization that publishes speeches on the Internet for free access under the slogan "Ideas Worth Spreading". TED Talks are watched online by about a million people a day.

In his speech, R. Bregman gave interesting statistics. For example, the losses from child poverty alone in the United States are estimated at \$ 500 billion, which is spent annually due to increased health care costs, high school dropout rates and high rates of crime. Based on the available estimates of economists, he concludes that the introduction of the UBD will cost a net circulation cost of \$ 175 billion - a quarter of the US military budget, or one percent of GDP. At the same time, it will be possible to pull all impoverished Americans out of poverty, effectively eradicating it. "I suddenly realized why so many poverty alleviation programs are failing. Investment in education, for example, is often completely useless. Poverty is not a lack of knowledge. <...> I am quite sure that the hour of fundamentally new ideas has come, and the basic income is much better than another strategy invented by politicians. It is also a complete rethinking of what work really is. <...> We all need to change our worldview, because poverty is not spinelessness. Poverty is a lack of money "[11]. As a psychologist, I would like to add that the ultimate task is not to distribute money equally to everyone, but to ensure that everyone lives no worse than their neighbor.

As we can see, psychological research has again served as an impetus to the revival of discussions about BDB. The discussion continues and experiments are being carried out. It is too early to draw any conclusions. In the age of systems, we look for solutions outside and only when we fail, we go inside. But there is no doubt that humanity has sufficient intellectual and material resources to solve the problem of poverty. There is no doubt that psychological science is called upon to play a crucial role in this. We just do not yet fully understand how to properly take advantage of the available opportunities.

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