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# **The Importance of the Government's Intervention with Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada**

## **Introduction**

An adverse childhood caused by low income status and poverty can act as an unstable base for one's adulthood. The issue of child poverty is surprisingly an ongoing country within high-income countries, such as Canada. In Canada, the demographic most impacted by poverty are the indigenous populations. These specific populations are generally disadvantaged in Canada and thus struggle with providing their families with quality necessities. Quality necessities opposed to basic needs differ because it they allow an individual to thrive and progress in their lives rather than simply get by. For an example, having the financial ability to buy a well balanced meal rather than buying fast food help an individual through its nutritional benefits rather than simply filling up one's hunger. As impoverished families are unable to support themselves and even struggle providing basic needs, this negatively affects their children. Children within impoverished environments are exposed to increased stress, mental, cognitive and physical health issues (Rita et al., 2007).

Health issues caused during childhood attributed by poverty translate into adulthood. Highlighting a child's inability to control such situation raises the question as to who should take responsibility for providing a quality and secure life for them. As the parent has guardianship over the child should the responsibility be placed on them despite their financial issues? Or should the government be responsible for taking care of children who suffer under an impoverished environment as it concerns the overall population health of the residents of their country? My position on the issue of the government's responsibility for child poverty in the indigenous populations of Canada is that they should create more policies and programs to aid children who suffer from these conditions.

## **The Canadian Government's Responsibility in Indigenous Child Poverty**

The following essay will explain why the Canadian government should take a more proactive role in allowing children in poverty a higher quality upbringing. The arguments will outline the negative feedback loop of child poverty, the impact of more quality childhoods on the future of the country's economy, and the lack of fairness in relation to a child's control of their environment. These factors all combine to support the idea that the government invest more into child poverty in Canada as a means to prevent a poverty cycle from continuing.

## **How Children Suffer from the Poverty Cycle**

Children who suffer from poverty are victims of the poverty cycle which is a continuous set of events which can be broken through the aid of intervention of the government. The cycle of poverty is a situation in which individuals who suffer from poverty are more likely to remain in poverty (BBC, 2014). The reason for this is due to the lack of resource availability for them to have the opportunity to advance their situation into a higher position. Lower income families

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which lack these resources are unable to provide for their children and do not receive the chances to do so. This leads to generational poverty. Generational poverty relates to the poverty cycle by viewing it through a broader perspective which looks at how poverty is passed down from generation to generation (Wagmiller and Adelman, 2009).

## **Supporting Evidence**

An imperative example in relation to the poverty cycle and generational poverty is the state of the indigenous people of Canada. The government of Canada has history of oppressing the indigenous people from colonization of their land to residential schools. This history has led this population to their current state where they suffer from the poverty cycle. An article from the BBC states that a report displayed that “40% of indigenous in Canada live in poverty” (BBC, 2013). Indigenous children suffer the consequences of living on reserve and therefore have less resource availability. Evidence from a study by Dahl and Lochner suggests that, generally, a child with lower cognitive and behavioural abilities tends to have parents with a lower income status (Dahl et al., 2012). The second piece of evidence suggests that because of the lack of resources available to indigenous children due to the financial state of their parents they suffer from lower cognitive and behavioural abilities.

## **How the Evidence Relates to the Poverty Cycle**

The issue with the statistic displaying that there is a heightened likelihood of lower cognitive and behavioural abilities in indigenous children is that their environment is preventing them from reaching their full potential. It displays how their environment prevents them from thriving in terms of their mental and physical health. The environmental conditions in which they are subjected to are related to social determinants of health. One determinant that has already been discussed is income status of the parents. Other social determinants of health that contribute to child poverty are their social networks, working conditions, social environments and coping skills thus relating to the socio-environmental model of health (Gillet et al., 2016). If the parents are stressed due to unemployment and low income status, they may turn to coping mechanisms such as drinking and smoking. When children are surrounded by this environment they may often adopt behaviours from their parents or adopt their own negative habits. If there is no communities built around populations suffering from child poverty, it leads to isolation and a lack of support. Majority of the time, the environment of these children will not change as they grow up and they may be exposed to worse conditions thus perpetuating generational poverty. This relates to the life course approach which emphasizes how childhood affects the outcome of one's adult life (Gillet et al., 2016). The government must intervene with such cases because this cycle will be difficult to break without help from a larger community and funding as they could provide more quality resources and support to these children.

## **Long Term Effects of Child Poverty on the Economy**

Canada's intervention in child poverty in indigenous populations has the potential to create a mutually beneficial relationship by improving the economy therefore raising another reason as to why there should be further investment in programs aiding in child poverty among indigenous children. Strengthening the childhoods of indigenous children living in impoverished conditions in Canada would lead to a greater progression of Canada's future economy as well as prevent generational poverty from lingering. By providing programs to improving things such as

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education and food security, it creates a domino effect by improving the psychological and physical health of that population.

## **Supporting Evidence**

To further explain this point, Japan can be used as an example to illustrate the government's focus on improving certain areas positively affects their health, leading to a better economy. Japan is a country with one of the highest life expectancies. A report stated that the average life expectancy of Japan was 83 (Ikeda, 2011) which was achieved through focus on lowering communicable diseases and stroke mortality rates (OECD). Japan's life expectancy displays that the country's healthcare is adequate enough for its citizens to live to such an age. Such healthcare cannot be achieved without quality and high education rates. According to the Guardian, Japan ranked 5th in reading, 4th in math and 2nd science among a number of countries as displayed by data from the OECD (Shepherd, 2010). Japan's life expectancy and education rankings exemplify a society's positive progress which contributes to their economy. There has been evidence tying better education rates to economic growth. (Hanushek, 2005). The opposite has also been shown by displaying that areas with lower education rates for girls are positively correlated to a slower economic growth.

## **How the Evidence Relates to Economic Growth and Child Poverty**

The reason that the information about Japan is relevant to the topic on child poverty of indigenous children is that it proves the correlation between an improved life quality and economy. It displays that when countries decide to focus on improving and capitalizing on certain areas, such as education and health, it improves the overall economy. This was reflected by Japan's focus on reduction in communicable diseases leading to a higher life expectancy.

If Canada were to invest more into funding programs for indigenous children in poverty then it would help them break out of the poverty cycle. This would push Canada from a liberalist society to following social democratic societies. Canada is known as a liberalist society which means that not much funding is put into redistributive policies (Gillet et al., 2016). Social democratic societies place more emphasis on funding redistributive policies which in turn have shown improved overall health of the population (Gillet et al., 2016). Therefore if more funding was put into indigenous child poverty then they would have more resources to improve their health and education. As they grow up, these resources could help them find better jobs, leading them to be able to support their future families thus breaking the generational poverty cycle. Once they are able to break out of the cycle, they would be able to positively contribute back into the Canadian economy. This displays how the government's intervention could allow these children to gain control in an environment they have no control in through creating more policies and programs to support them.

## **The Unfair Gap in Childhood Life Quality Between Indigenous and Other Populations**

As a child lacks the control of regulating their environmental conditions, it is unfair they should suffer from the consequences of their family's lack of economic stability and income; therefore

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more investment should be put into mitigating indigenous child poverty. Being born into a certain financial situation is by chance and not choice. Individuals who are more privileged tend to have better health due to their resources while individuals who suffer from poverty experience the opposite. The disparity between these experiences is unfair in relation to children as they have no control over financial status and resource availability.

## **Supporting Evidence**

Research has supported that there is a negative feedback loop keeps individuals in an unfair cycle where people in poverty are unable to escape (Kim et al., 2013). As discussed, the only way to alleviate this burdensome cycle is through government intervention which has been proven to work. Programs have been put in place which have been proven to improve a child's academics, however, these programs lack the funding to continue running (Vinopal, 2001).

## **How the Evidence Relates to the Unfair Health Disparities between Children**

If these programs have shown results then investing into them would make sense. However, by avoiding funding redistributive policies, the government creates a larger gap between the rich and the poor of this country. This can be viewed as extremely discriminatory because most of the individuals from low income neighbourhoods tend to be people who are generally disadvantaged by society by their individual determinants of health. The individual determinants of health are things about a person which cannot be changed (Gillet et al., 2016). In the case of indigenous children, their individual determinants of health are developmental and constitutional (Gillet et al., 2016). Under the constitutional determinants is their ethnicity as it is genetic while their developmental determinant is their age (Gillet et al., 2016). Their ethnicity ties them to their history of oppression from the Canadian government which has constantly neglected them and still continues to do so. Meanwhile, the young age of the indigenous children contribute to their lack of control of their lives because they are unable work and vote thus being unable to support themselves. These factors combine together to overall negatively impact their health. This disadvantage that they face should usher the government to aid their situation as most Canadian children do not face the same difficulties, pointing to the lack of fairness in terms of the issue of indigenous child poverty in Canada.

## **Conclusion**

This essay discussed the reasons why the Canadian government should put more effort into supporting indigenous children who suffer from poverty. Individuals in poverty generally suffer from its cycle because how does someone improve their health if they don't have the resources to do so? Poverty is already an issue within itself, however, the added layer of being an indigenous person as a child makes the issue much more difficult as it places them lower in terms of privilege. For an example, if white young adult were to suffer from poverty in Canada then it would be easier for them to access resources than an indigenous child suffering from poverty. If the most disadvantaged groups are financially supported by the government then they would have an increased likelihood to contribute more to society which could lead to increased economic growth. It is the government's responsibility to take care of its country so it should do that by placing more emphasis on the individuals who are most disadvantaged.

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