

**BROADSTREET COVID-19 PROJECT**

**POVERTY AND HOW IT  
AFFECTS CHRONIC  
DISEASE**

**JULIETTE MCKAY**

## INTRODUCTION

Chronic diseases are the leading causes of death globally with many people suffering from diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and asthma. According to the U.S. census, the official poverty rate in 2019 was 10.5% meaning 10.5% of Americans were living below the poverty threshold. As of 2019, about 34 million Americans live in poverty, approximately 4.2 million more than in 2018<sup>1</sup>.

According to the U.S. office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, there is a higher percentage of minority groups living in poverty in the U.S. than white people. People with low incomes have a shorter lifespan and worse health outcomes due to a number of reasons including:

- Poor nutrition because of lack of access to fresh foods
- Contact with toxins such as lead
- Higher levels of stress<sup>3</sup>

People living in poverty also have greater risk of developing chronic disease because they have little to no access to healthcare, no place to safely do physical activities, air pollution from carbon monoxides, gases, particulates matter (dirt, dust, soot, smoke droplets).

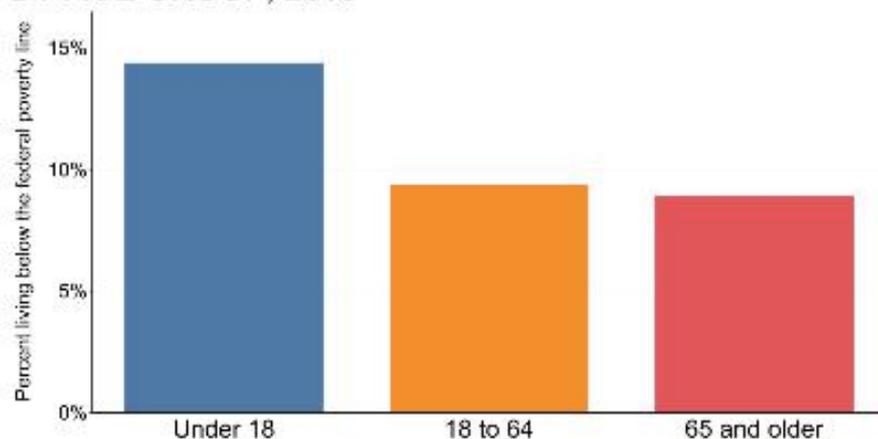
## DISCUSSION

People living in poverty with chronic diseases show us that there is a need to improve their social determinants of health. The conditions in which we are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age - known as social determinants of health- have a profound impact on health<sup>2</sup>. For example, in 2012, 17.7% of people in rural areas were living in poverty, compared to 14.5% of people in urban areas. Poverty affects minority groups at a higher percentage in the U.S.

Children are among the poorest population in the U.S. with more than 21 percent living in poverty as of 2014. Research finds that such economic circumstances are among the greatest threats to a child's health and well-being both before and after birth. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 44% of all U.S. children younger than 18- or more 31 million youth, either lived below the poverty level or just above it in 2014<sup>6</sup>. The health risks associated with childhood poverty range from higher infant mortality risks to inadequate nutrition to a higher incidence of chronic disease, all of which contribute to a child's school readiness, opportunity to learn and future health trajectory. For example, children living in low-income families are more than twice as likely to have asthma, a major contributor to school absenteeism, than children in higher-income families.<sup>7</sup>

More than 10 million U.S. children were officially poor before the pandemic, according to government statistics. In 2019, 14.4 of kids in this country, 10.46 million children were living in poverty as measured by the Official U.S. poverty rate. This is the highest share of adults ages 18 to 64 (9.4%) and higher than the share of those 65 and over (8.9%) who live in poverty.<sup>6</sup> (See chart below)

### **OFFICIAL POVERTY RATES BY AGE GROUP, 2019**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (2018)

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Consider the following facts on poverty:

- Women made up nearly 56% of people who were in poverty in 2019. Of those living in poverty,
  - 14.8% White non- Hispanic
  - 27.9% Hispanic of any race
  - 23.5% Black
  - 4.4% Asian
- Only 16.8% of adults age 25 or older living in poverty had college degrees.
- 26.3% of those living in poverty were under 18- that's more than 10 million children in poverty.
- 12.3% of those living in poverty were aged 65 years or older.
- 11.8% of persons were living below the poverty threshold in 2018<sup>5</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

When it comes to poverty and chronic diseases, it is important to understand that poverty has an extreme effect on the health of people living in it. It is important to understand that many factors affect your chance of being in poverty and developing chronic diseases. Marital status, education, social class, social status, income level and geographic location (e.g. urban vs rural) can influence a household's risk of living in poverty.

To improve the outcomes of chronic disease, it is important to address the problems of poverty and its associated consequences such as access to healthy food, affordable healthcare and the ability to do exercise safely.

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