

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES POVERTY MAKE IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN? A Brief Overview of Virginia

Presented to the AAUW-VA Conference on Saturday, March 13, 2021, by:

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What is Poverty?

In a practical sense, poverty is not having enough money to meet basic needs

Poverty rates/income levels

Official poverty measures (OPM), set by gov.

But can be region-specific, too

Lack of economic security: How much uncertainty can be tolerated?

Lack of opportunity, equity, and equality

Affects mental and physical health



How Poverty Affects Women in Virginia

Poverty affects women differently than men

- Women most likely to be the primary caretakers

- Women who work still seen as the “2nd” income

Intersectionality of women

- Age, race, sexual expression, regionally

- Example: Montgomery county, VA, has 3x the poverty rate of NOVA but equal to Richmond’s level of poverty

- Women of color are some of the poorest adults



Effects of Poverty

Health – Mental and physical

Employment - is not enough as poverty creates the struggle to get a job, keep a job, deal with uncertain and inadequate income

Education – Education can be key to alleviating poverty but difficult to get

Stigma – Blaming the victim so many individuals try to hide their poverty

Children – When moms are poor, children are poor

Systemic - Example that mortgage is often less per month than renting

Poverty is a cyclical problem! *Generational poverty*

Myths about Women in Poverty

Myths	Truths
Poor women don't have jobs	Women can be poor despite working multiple jobs
Poor women don't manage money well	Poor women can not budget their way out of systemic barriers
Poor women chose low paying jobs	Women are paid substandard wages for their work, their work is undervalued
Poor women should just get more education	Women now receive more degrees at every level than men
Poor women have children to get more welfare	Poor women do have higher fertility rates but that is tied to earlier marriage, cultural values, limited opportunities

Myths about Women in Poverty (cont'd)

Myths	Truths
Poor women have children to get more welfare.	The amount received in public assistance is not enough to incentivize having more children. ¹
Poor women would rather receive government handouts than work.	Resource limits, benefit cliffs, lack of child care, and income disparity are disincentives to work. ²
Middle-class women do not get battered as frequently or as violently as poor women.	Domestic violence occurs in all socio-economic groups. ³
Poor women are not good mothers; they are more likely to abuse/neglect their children.	Low-income mothers, especially those of color, are more likely to be reported to CPS than their higher income counterparts. Most of these CPS reports are related to "neglect." But is neglect actually lack of resources? ⁴
We all have to live within our budgets. Why can't poor women?	One cannot budget oneself out of poverty. ⁵

Affordable Housing Statistics—VA

KEY
FACTS

246,882
OR
23%

Renter households that are extremely low income

\$27,020

Maximum income for 4-person extremely low income household (state level)

-157,087

Shortage of rental homes affordable and available for extremely low income renters

\$49,167

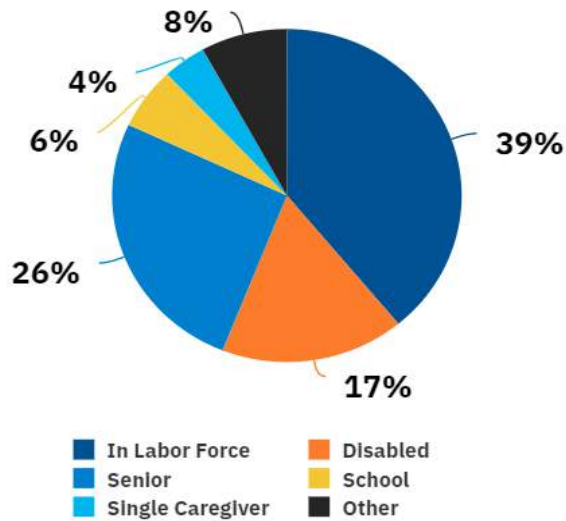
Annual household income needed to afford a two-bedroom rental home at HUD's Fair Market Rent.

70%

Percent of extremely low income renter households with severe cost burden

Affordable Housing Statistics —VA (cont'd)

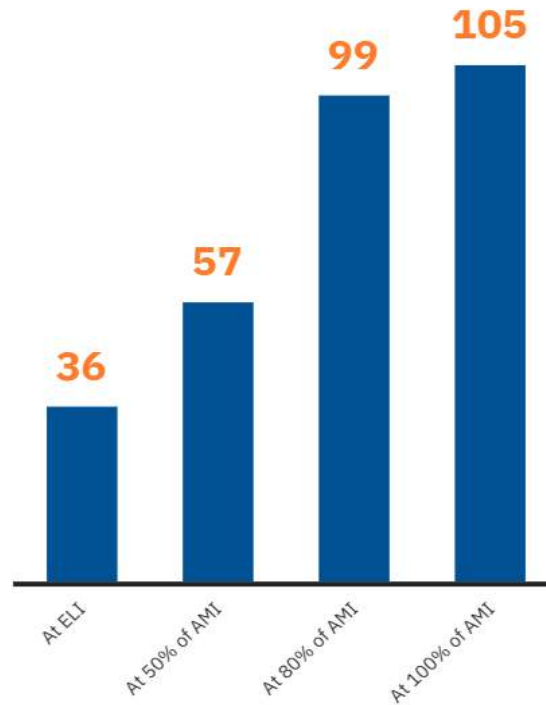
EXTREMELY LOW INCOME RENTER HOUSEHOLDS



Note: Mutually exclusive categories applied in the following order: senior, disabled, in labor force, enrolled in school, single adult caregiver of a child under 7 or a person with a disability, and other. Fifteen percent of extremely low income renter households include a single adult caregiver, more than half of whom usually work more than 20 hours per week. Eleven percent of extremely low-income renter households are enrolled in school, 48% of whom usually work more than 20 hours per week.

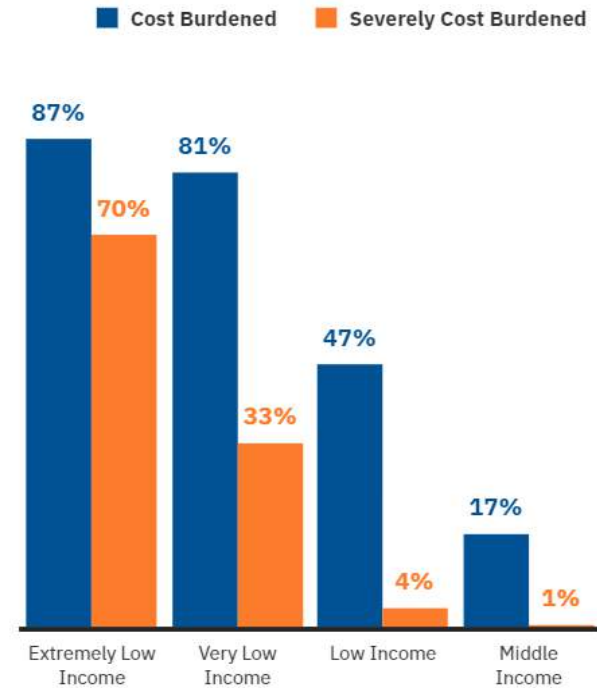
Source: 2018 ACS PUMS.

AFFORDABLE AND AVAILABLE HOMES PER 100 RENTER HOUSEHOLDS



Source: NLIHC tabulations of 2018 ACS PUMS

HOUSING COST BURDEN BY INCOME GROUP



Note: Renter households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs and utilities are cost burdened; those spending more than half of their income are severely cost burdened.

Source: NLIHC tabulations of 2018 ACS PUMS



Economic Trauma

What IS Economic Trauma?

It is the sustained stressful impact or emotional pain of one's experience with lack of financial opportunities and poverty.

-2019 issue brief for the Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia by Meghan Resler, MSW, Senior Research Associate, <http://www.fact.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FACT-Issue-Brief-Economic-Trauma-FINAL-11.19.191.pdf>



Economic Trauma (cont'd)

Stress is a regular bodily function.¹ Most of the stress we encounter on a day-to-day basis is tolerable; we have the coping skills and supportive relationships to endure it.

But...with long-term and constant exposure, stress can become toxic because there is a constant stream of stress hormones flooding the body and no opportunity for our systems to regulate back to “normal.”

Most of us are aware of the physical results of stress². But living in low-income communities and poverty-stricken households often causes stress in and of itself. Living in poverty can exacerbate trauma caused by other stressors while also being a barrier for seeking services and help for trauma exposure. Poor individuals and families do not have the resources or time to address the trauma or heal.³

COVID-19



- Burden of household management and childcare on women, but the pandemic increased that burden with additional demands to oversee their children's education, manage scarcity of resources, and attend to the healthcare needs of family members (Hsu, 2020).
- Significant number of women have had to leave work just to manage during pandemic: 5.4 million (Boesch, D. and Phadke, S., 2021).
- Congresswoman Katie Porter (2020) summarized it best when she said that “No matter how one looks at the economic data – by race, by sector, by income – the story is the same: The burden of the coronavirus pandemic is falling hardest on women.” (p.2).

Through Advocacy, Education, Litigation

*The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) breaks
down systemic barriers keeping low-income
Virginians in the cycle of poverty*



VPLC

Virginia Poverty
Law Center



VPLC Issues of Concern

2021 Virginia bills and recent laws:

- Effective 1/1/2021, the 2020 Virginia Fairness in Lending Act changed the landscape of Virginia's small lending market by providing for affordable payments, enough time to repay, fair prices borrowers and lenders alike, widespread access to credit, and at least \$100,000,000 back in borrowers' pockets.¹
- [HB2014](#) (Delegate Price) expands the right of tenants to pay all that is owed to avoid eviction.
- [HB1889](#) (Delegate Price) gives families more time to pay rent and stay housed.
- [SB1215](#)/[HB1900](#) (Senator Ebbin/Delegate Hudson) would stop illegal evictions.
- [HB1820](#) (Delegate Helmer) makes 25,000 Virginia families newly eligible for food assistance funded by the federal government due to increased gross income test and removal of asset test. Their children will be directly certified for free school meals, as well.
- In 2020, VPLC helped get a 15% increase in TANF benefits passed. That was the highest increase in Virginia's history.²



VPLC Issues of Concern (cont'd)

2021 Virginia bills and recent laws:

- In 2019, VPLC helped pass a law that presumes that a person is unable to pay court fees to file for a no-fault divorce if they are a current recipient of a state or federally funded public assistance program or are represented by a legal aid society. Also, in 2019, VPLC supported a law that establishes the factors the court must consider in order to determine a person's indigency for the purpose of paying fees or costs in a civil action.
- [HB1911](#) (Delegate Hope) removes the corroborating witness requirement to obtain a no-fault divorce
- [HB2002](#) (Delegate Samirah) ensures that parents getting child support receive information on Medicaid/FAMIS so they can get public health coverage if they qualify rather than having to put their own resources toward insurance.
- [HB2124](#) (Delegate Lopez) covers COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination through emergency Medicaid services for financially eligible, uninsured immigrants IF temporary federal programs for the uninsured end.
- In 2019, after 6 years of advocacy, Virginia expanded Medicaid for low-income adults with incomes < 138% of the FPL, which means that today, almost 525,000 Virginians (55% women) are enrolled in comprehensive coverage.

What Can YOU Do?

Advocate for policy change:

- Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)¹
- Minimum wage increased to \$15/hr
- Redo the Federal Poverty Level calculations (even more outdated than the minimum wage); Poor People's Campaign is leading this effort.
- Paid family leave, paid sick leave
- Childcare
- Child Tax Credit²
- Earned income tax credit³
- TANF: include monthly allowance to cover menstrual supplies ([SB 715](#) (Senator McClellan) failed in 2020)
- Universal basic income⁴

What Can YOU Do? (cont'd)

Financial literacy:

- Understanding the systems: SSI, 401K, benefits
- Financial therapy
- **Federal Trade Commission** – For help with identity theft issues, consumer scams, and unwanted solicitations. Complaints can be filed.
- **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau** – Find consumer information and tips around financial products and file complaints against financial institutions treating consumers unfairly or illegally. This can include banks, credit unions, consumer lenders, payday and car title loans, loans over the internet, student loan servicers, and debt collectors.

Post-COVID, a call for a Marshall Plan for Moms:
<https://www.marshallplanformoms.com/>

What VPLC can help Clients with:

- **Legal Assistance to Victim-Immigrants of Domestic Abuse (LA VIDA):** for information about the program or its founding, 804-351-5274/susheela@vplc.org; to complete an intake for a potential client, 804-351-5256 (Fabian Wadle, LA VIDA's Paralegal/Project Coordinator)
- **Online Divorce:** do-it-yourself, online, guided interview to print out no-fault divorce forms to file in court without having to hire an attorney, <https://www.valegalaid.org/divorce>
- **Eviction Hotline:** 1-833-NOEVICT (1-833-663-8428)
- **Senior Legal Helpline:** 1-844-802-5910
- **Predatory Loan Helpline:** 1-866-830-4501
- **Enroll Virginia:** 1-888-392-5132, <http://www.enrollva.org/get-help/> for information about and help in applying for health insurance
- **Brainstorming, Trouble-Shooting, Problem-Solving!** 1-800-868-8752; 804-782-9430



Statistics on Women and Poverty

Most recent statistics:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/08/03/488536/basic-facts-women-poverty/>

Poverty income trends in Virginia:

<https://www.nbc12.com/2019/10/04/data-show-poverty-income-trends-virginia/>

Global information on women and poverty:

<https://opentextbc.ca/womenintheworld/chapter/chapter-1-women-and-poverty/>

Job losses and leaving jobs due to COVID-19 Pandemic:

https://porter.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final-women_in_the_workforce.pdf

Thank You

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