



SRA Education: Beyond the SUCCESS SEQUENCE

A Closer Look at the *Real* Cost of Poverty on Children, Families, and Society

Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) education promotes the compelling research that if a young person: a) graduates, b) secures some post-secondary training, c) gets a full-time job and d) waits to be married before having children, the likelihood of living in poverty is approximately 2%. This now well-known research from the Brookings Institute¹ has become an intentional focus of SRA programs in the context of empowering youth to avoid sexual risk, build healthy relationships and achieve academic success. But often lost in this straightforward, anti-poverty message is a sobering consideration of the *real* costs of poverty on children, families and society. ***Pulling the curtain back for a closer look at what it means for the health and well-being of individuals and families when poverty is a reality, shows us a more poignant view of why this information, shared in SRA programs, is so important for teens as they navigate toward adulthood.***

Children Living in Poverty Fare Far Worse on Almost Every Indicator of Health and Well-being²:

- Lower overall physical health
- Impaired cognitive ability and language development
- Negative emotional and behavioral outcomes
- Lower school readiness/achievement
- Increased toxic stress
- Impaired self-regulation
- Decreased relational health and family connectedness
- Increased Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)
- Increased substance abuse; teen childbearing; violence
- Higher school drop-out rates

Societal Cost of Poverty:

“Cost-measurement analysis indicated that the annual aggregate cost of U.S. child poverty is \$1.0298 trillion, representing 5.4% of the gross domestic product. These costs are clustered around the loss of economic productivity, increased health and crime costs and increased cost as a result of child homelessness and maltreatment. In addition, it is estimated that for every dollar spent on reducing childhood poverty, the country would save at least seven dollars with respect to the economic cost of poverty.”⁵

Family Structure Matters:

Children are much more likely to be poor if they live in a single-parent family rather than a married-couple family. In 2016, 42% of children living in a single mother [sic] home

were impoverished compared to only 8% of children in married households. This outcome holds true for Black, White, Hispanic and Asian Children.³

Parental Education:

Parental educational achievement is strongly correlated with poverty. The higher the educational attainment of a parent, the lower the likelihood that a child will live in poverty. Among children with at least one parent with some college or additional education, 13% are poor and 31% are low income. Among children whose parents have less than a high school degree 57% are poor and 86% are low income.⁴

Poverty’s Lifelong Impact:

Experts agree that when a child grows up in poverty, the disadvantages experienced regarding physical and emotional health often follow those affected into adulthood. Increased issues of poor health, chronic illnesses, substance abuse, relationship instability and other persistent problems have been shown to start at a very young age for those growing up in poverty. These life-long impacts often become part of a perpetuating cycle among generations.

The Importance of SRA’s Holistic Approach:

Because sex is always about more than sex, SRA educators are committed to a discussion with teens regarding their sexual choices and the impact those choices can have on health and future life success. Becoming a teen parent can have a direct impact on academic success and career goals. Less than half of teen mothers graduate from high school, are more likely to live in poverty and to have children with poorer educational, behavioral and health outcomes.⁶ Empowering teens to consider their choices about sexual behavior in the context of long-term life impact is central to the SRA message. ***In developing a healthy understanding of sex as a natural part of human development, ALL teens deserve to hear the overwhelming advantages of marriage as the optimal context for sex.***

¹ Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill, *Creating an Opportunity Society* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009)

² John M. Pascoe, David Wood, James H. Dufee, Alice Kuo *Mediators and Adverse Effects of Child Poverty in the United States*; *Pediatrics*, April 2016 Vol. 137/Issue 4

³ Data for 2002–2016: U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *CPS Table Creator* [Data tool]. <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html>.

⁴ Jiang Y, Ekono M, Sinner C. *Basic Facts About Low-Income Children: Children Under 18 Years, 2013*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University; 2015

⁵ McLaughlin M., Rank M. *Estimating the Economic Cost of Childhood Poverty in the United States*; *Social Work Research*, Vol. 42, Issue 2 1 June 2018

⁶ Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Kids having kids: economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press