The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City

Latest findings from the Poverty Tracker

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Launched in 2012 to capture a more complete picture of poverty and disadvantage in New York City and to track long-term trends and dynamics.

Surveying a representative sample of more than 3,000 New Yorkers every three months for up to four years.

Measure more than just poverty. Annual measure rates of income poverty, material hardship, health problems. Also regularly collect data on factors related to disadvantage, such as mental health, life satisfaction, assets and debts, employment, among others.
Poverty and disadvantage in New York City are widespread and citywide rates mask stark disparities.

In 2020, the city’s poverty rate was well above the national average.
Roughly half of New Yorkers faced at least one form of disadvantage (poverty, material hardship, or health problems) in 2020.

Economic disadvantage was disproportionately borne by Asian, Black, and Latino New Yorkers.

Addressing the underlying policy drivers of these disparities is key to an equitable recovery from the pandemic.
The economic shocks of the pandemic are tied to ongoing mental health struggles.

2020 worsened New Yorkers’ mental health.

Share of adults facing serious psychological distress rose from 9% to 11%.
But declines in mental health were most acute for New Yorkers facing economic disadvantage.

Among those facing multiple disadvantages, it rose from 24% to 28%

While remaining relatively stable for those not facing economic disadvantage.

Policy reforms can have a substantial effect on the economic hardships and disadvantages that New Yorkers face today.
In a typical year, roughly 30% of New Yorkers live in poverty before accounting for the role of government policies like the EITC, SNAP, UI, and housing subsidies.

And in a typical year these policies reduce the poverty rate by roughly 10 percentage points, moving close to 1 million New Yorkers above the poverty line.
In 2020, as millions of New Yorkers lost work or income, we saw a sharp increase in the poverty rate before accounting for government policies.

2020 also saw temporary reforms made all levels of government to strengthen the safety net and stabilize incomes in uncertain times.

- Temporary expansion to Unemployment Insurance benefits
- Economic Impact Payments or “stimulus checks”
- Expanded SNAP benefits
- Pandemic EBT
- Eviction moratoria
Due to these policy expansions, the poverty rate in New York City actually fell between 2019 and 2020 and 1.9 million New Yorkers were kept above the poverty line by government policies.

Altogether ...
• highlight the high rates of disadvantage in New York City
• economic disadvantage and mental health, and
• the effects of policy reforms

• Single metric vs. multi-dimensional measures
• Multitude of social forces affecting well-being and economic security
• The potential of policy reforms in addressing these multiple and varying challenges
Thank you!

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