

Serina Duran
IM5
6/9/2021

Poverty Online Simulation Reflection

Though I had grown up far from wealthy, I was surprised to learn just how prevalent poverty in America is and to the extent that it affects families and especially children. The two virtual simulations of penny pinching to get through the month as a struggling parent with low income was eye opening. It made me realize just how hectic life can be especially when it throws you curveballs and you are unable to afford them. In real life, I have car insurance and would never commit a hit and run especially because it is highly illegal and immoral. However, being in the virtual simulation of someone who does have children and is desperate for money as is, it was easy to reconcile that you have to forego some “morally right” choices in order to make do and just survive. The impact of losing money intensifies as well when you are not only responsible for keeping yourself alive, within shelter and means of food, but also responsible for children.

The PBS documentary Poor Kids was also surprising to watch as I remember when I was the age of some of the children, less than 10 years old, I had no concept on what items cost much less, what bills were, or the monthly cost they amounted to. I also had no idea at that age what rent was, nor did I seek ways to prematurely provide for my family in my free play time. It was also surprising to me that these children had no food choices and were not allowed to be picky lest they starve. It was disheartening to hear how the children’s minds were often preoccupied with thought of when they would be able to eat their next meal. I also had no concept at the age of ten of what the “worst case scenario” would be for my family in losing our house and potentially becoming homeless. Watching these kids having to live in a constant state of instability really showed how it had developed them into maturity faster than peers of their age emotionally and mentally. The documentary’s jump cut into the future really startled me as when it had last ended the children were hopeful despite their current instability and financial status. However, when the documentary picked up on the same individuals’ years later, they all seemed to still

be in a state of living below the poverty line either from having children in their teens, or dropping out of school to provide for their families. One such child who had football aspirations ended up with a brief stint in jail and his dreams effectively put on hold due to bad choices. This really showed me just how cyclical poverty is in families and especially for the children growing up in it.

The TED talk was especially eye opening in how it showed a scientific link to children who grew up with multiple adverse childhood experiences and a significant risk for precipitous future medical health complications. It was interesting to learn that exposure to such adverse events in childhood changed the way the child's brain develops as a result of coping and a perpetual mental state of survival mode. This neural development in combination with adverse coping habits the individual may develop also increase the affected individual's future risks for developing certain cancers or heart disease. It was interesting to learn that the prefrontal cortex's decision-making center is also altered in brains exposed to even just one adverse childhood experience. Even my score for the ACE questionnaire shocked me as I would have previously thought I had zero adverse childhood experiences yet, I actually had a score of one. This went on to open my eyes as to just how prevalent adverse childhood experiences are, even in children who are not necessarily living at or below the poverty line.

As a future nurse this lesson has impacted me to be more empathetic to future patients who might not outwardly display signs of past trauma or abuse. This lesson has also taught me the importance of getting to know the patient's history as it affects what type of medical screening they may need to receive or what pertinent education I could teach them. This has also showed me the importance of the nurse's roll as patient advocate. As a patient advocate, I need to account for patients who may not have insurance, money, provisions, or transportation. As the nurse, it is my job to be informed on local and state resources so that I may steer my patient toward the appropriate help that is needed for them. This could come in the form of navigating a carless patient toward a free hospital shuttle service, food assistance, free available resources for their infants and children, or even finding programs that could house and help them.