

What Is the Difference Between Poverty & Abject Poverty?

By John Willis

The term "poverty" is inherently subjective and in most cultures it is not used as an absolute measure of well-being, but a measure of well-being relative to another person. Poverty isn't a measure of wealth. It's a measure of the deficit between a person's basic needs and what they actually have. Need is also subjective and measured differently in different cultures. But a person who lives in abject poverty is lacking more than a person who is lacking basics, he is barely surviving.

Necessities

In a country as prosperous as the United States, many people aren't forced to think about necessities because they have more than what is necessary for survival. Necessities are those things required to survive: food, shelter and clothing. It may include things that are necessary to acquire them too. For example, to have a job, you must be able to travel to your job. Necessity may require you to walk, ride a bicycle or take a bus.

Relative Measures

Considering some of the poorest countries in the world is an easy way to understand just how relative the measures of poverty are. For example, according the BBC, Tanzania's income per capita is \$500 per year---less than 1/20 of the U.S. poverty threshold . Consider that for the income per capital to be \$500 a year, many Tanzanians must earn far less. While their economy is different and many goods may cost less there, most Tanzanians cannot afford items Americans have come to expect as normal.

-

Government Measures

The U.S. Census Bureau tracks poverty statistics and so does the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The HHS guidelines indicate someone in a one-person household earning less than \$10,890 a year is living in poverty. This is much higher threshold than defined by other countries. But, the higher threshold doesn't necessarily mean a person earning \$10,000 a year is living in abject poverty because abject poverty refers in part to a person's frame of mind.

Poverty and Hopelessness

While abject poverty is an informal term, it often refers to a lack of hope, not just a lack of wealth. It is far easier to endure financial hardship if a person has hope for the future. Hope often comes in the form of visualizing an opportunity to create greater abundance for yourself and your family.