

Abstract

Over the last decade, there has been a slow but steady decline in poverty rates in the United States. However, the burden of poverty is still very high among certain communities and groups in the US, and it poses a challenge not just to the health of those affected but to the entire country's health. This owes majorly to certain socio-economic factors and other determinants of health. "The official poverty rate in 2021 was 11.6 percent, with 37.9 million people in poverty". (United States Census Bureau,2022).

Social determinants of health and poverty have a very great and broad impact on health outcomes globally. However, we will be looking more closely into the health gap created by the negative aspects of these determinants in the United States of America and what can be done to tackle them effectively and efficiently to bring about healthier individuals, society, and country.

Introduction

Black and Laughlin (1996) described poverty as a determinant of health that restricts the financial conditions of daily living by limiting access to the necessary tools needed to ensure good health such as access to good food, safe and portable water, adequate housing, and an opportunity to contribute to society.

Poverty makes it more difficult for certain individuals to make healthy life choices, have access to health coverage, live in good neighborhoods, or gain the necessary skills needed through education and job security to contribute effectively to society. Dissimilar health outcomes are driven mostly by poverty and other social determinants of health that disproportionately affect certain groups of individuals more than others.

(Hood et al., 2016) estimated in their study that one-fifth of the country's differences in health outcomes are from clinical care while social determinants of health account for half of the differences in health outcomes. There has been an increase in the study and publicity of the social determinants of health (SDOH) and how it affects health and quality of life. (Healthy People 2030). Although this is important, understanding the various ways in which social determinants of health affect health outcomes can help provide a better approach to improving health care and addressing the health gap it has created.

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Methods and Materials

Qualitative research was done based on secondary data analysis. Research materials were retrieved and downloaded from PubMed, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Public Health databases, including articles, scholarly literature, and publications.

Purpose: This paper seeks to briefly outline 2 broad determinants of health, their impact on health outcomes, and how this can be mitigated and controlled in the United States. They include:

1. Social determinants of health (SDOH)
2. Poverty

For this to be fully understood and addressed, the following issues will be addressed.

- What is poverty and what are the poverty rates in the US?
- What are social determinants of health and how do they impact the health of people living in the United States
- What can be done to mitigate and alleviate these issues to ensure a healthier society in the US?

Results

Poverty rate in the United States from 1990 to 2021

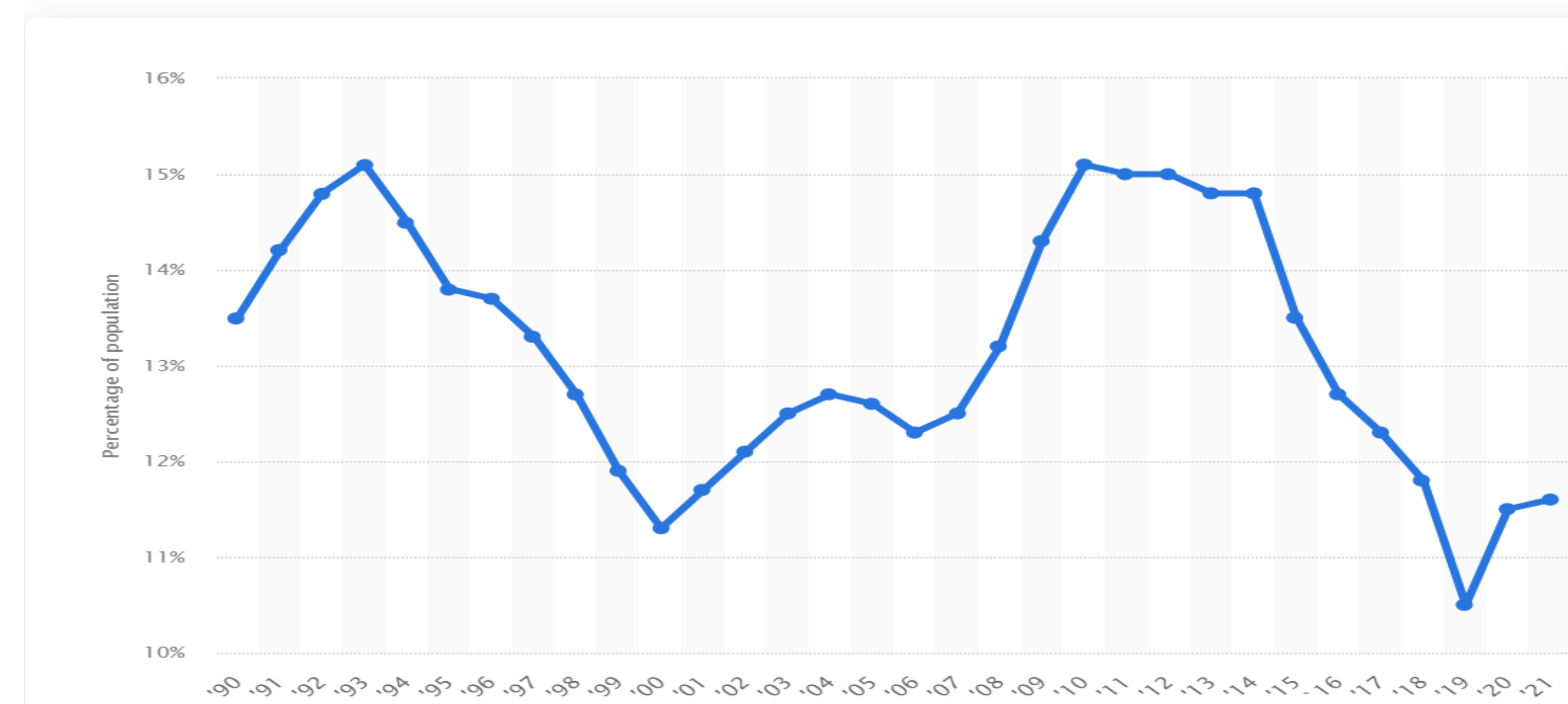


Figure 1. (Statista,2022) Poverty rates in the United States from 1990-2021

Discussion

Poverty is a complex issue that impacts health outcomes because it can be viewed as both a "cause" and an "effect". For instance, poverty can be caused by illnesses, climate change, crime, disasters, economic inequality, etc. Yet, these same issues can occur because of poverty. People faced with the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty are more prone to making poorer health choices, affecting their quality of life.

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are "conditions in the social environment in which people are born, live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks". (Healthy People 2030).

Every individual must interact with their environment to function fully, optimally and meet their needs. However, the conditions in which people live their lives can be directly proportional to their health outcomes. SDOH is summarized in the picture below.



Figure 2.(Healthy People, 2030) Five domains of Social Determinants of Health

Conclusions

Global health priorities are determined by key policymakers which means that whatever health issue they choose to tackle becomes a "global health issue". Unfortunately, the marginalized and disenfranchised who are most affected are left out of critical decision-making processes. We must all understand that no one is healthy until we are all healthy especially with the emergence of globalization, travel, trade, etc..

With the direct link between health and wellness, policymakers must shift their focus and priorities to promoting wellness by tackling poverty and other determinants of health at the grassroots. Achieving zero hunger, just like solving any other health crisis, may seem like a herculean task, but it can be done if the right strategies and tactics are employed.

References

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