

## FROM RELIEF TO RESILIENCE: A SCOPING REVIEW ON MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS

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### Abstract

The United Nations has identified eliminating poverty as the first goal in the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of Canada defines poverty as a condition where someone is deprived of the necessary resources, means, choices, and power to have and maintain a basic standard of living and participate in society. As of 2023, 10.2% of Canadians were living in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2025). A contributing factor to the growing rates of poverty in Canada is the number of youths not in employment, education, or training (NEET), which as of 2025, included approximately 1 in 10 Canadian youth. Unemployment amongst Canadian youth has been rising since January 2024 and, as of May 2025, was 14.2% (Statistics Canada, 2025). Given that one-third of these youth reported that it was difficult to support themselves and that they are less satisfied and hopeful about the future (Statistics Canada, 2025), the Government of Canada began to conduct several programs ranging from financial support to education and training to help prevent poverty amongst NEET youth. The present study sought to conduct a scoping review of similar programs to assess their impact on alleviating poverty. A trained librarian implemented the search strategy for this review and included the following databases: SocINDEX @ EBSCOhost, Social Work Abstracts @ EBSCOhost, and EconLit @ EBSCOhost. Those databases were searched on September 9, 2024 and 12 studies met inclusion criteria for review. Programs included had at least two different elements that were meant to alleviate poverty, with 75% that incorporated financial assistance, 75% incorporated education either such as job training, 66.7% provided mentorship and group support, and 58.3% focused on entrepreneurship to in in self-sufficiency. Overall, 68% (8 programs) identified improvement in participants' financial situation as well as the development of a greater sense of autonomy and financial literacy, which led to improved ability of participants to support themselves and their families. Interestingly, one program did lead to any improvement, as participants reported not receiving ample training in the program, coupled with environmental complications that hindered their income generation. Taken together, these results indicate that the incorporation of a form of support and/or mentorship amongst peers and program leaders, development of financial literacy and money management skills, as well as education/training are all beneficial to helping lift people out of poverty.

**Keywords:** *Anti-poverty programs, youth not in employment, education, or training, scoping review.*

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### 1. Background

Young adulthood (20-24 years of age) is a period of transition, which involves making decisions to engage in postsecondary education and employment opportunities. Compared to Canada, a greater percentage of young adults in New Brunswick (NB) are not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET). Currently, approximately 8,700 NB residents in this age group are unemployed and only 30% are in postsecondary education. NEET status during young adulthood is associated with poor employment outcomes, lower wages, more precarious work, such as part-time and temporary employment, and an increased risk of poverty. Education and training are drivers of employment success as most new jobs in NB require post-secondary education or apprenticeship training and helps to support individuals through the transition of young adulthood. Programs aimed at providing education or employment help to ensure young adults with NEET status have education and training opportunities that sets them up for success and can remove them from the risk of poverty. Thus, the purpose of this scoping review is to examine the existing literature on multi-dimensional and sustainable poverty alleviation programs to better understand their core components and limitations, thus potentially identifying strategies that can be implemented to support young adults with NEET status.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Concept

Only peer-reviewed published research papers in English from 2007 to present and described and reported the results of a program designed to alleviate poverty were included. Papers that were published before, or used data from 2007 and earlier, relied on agricultural interventions, or provided financial aid through bursaries, grants, or tax-benefits were excluded.

### 2.2. Search strategy

A multi-step approach was implemented by a librarian (RW) in the development of the search strategy for this review. First, an exploratory search was performed in SocINDEX @ EBSCOhost and an analysis of the text words contained in the titles, abstracts, and subject descriptors was performed. Second, the search terms identified in step one were tested in SocINDEX in a variety of combinations and search fields until it was determined that the search results completely reflected the scope of the research available on this topic and avoided unnecessary noise from irrelevant results. At this stage, the search strategy was also reviewed by librarian (BC) using the Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies (PRESS) guidelines (McGowan et al., 2016). Recommended adjustments were made and the search strategy was finalized. Lastly, the search was adapted and implemented across the 3 databases included in this review: SocINDEX @ EBSCOhost, Social Work Abstracts @ EBSCOhost, and EconLit @ EBSCOhost. The databases were searched on September 9, 2024. We also carried out backwards and forwards citation searches to identify additional studies by searching the reference lists of included documents and using [Google Scholar or Scopus] to identify and screen materials studies citing them.

### 2.3. Screening, study selection and data extraction

Upon completion of each search, the results were exported as RIS files and were uploaded into Covidence software (Covidence, Melbourne, Australia). Two reviewers independently screened out irrelevant titles and abstracts, full-texts, and finally extracted data from the records with a data extraction tool that was developed by the research team in Covidence. Extracted data included specific information about the location of the study, information about the population, context and key findings related to the scoping review's objective.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Search results

Database searches unique 15,551 titles. 15,095 full-texts were then excluded as they did not meet inclusion criteria, leaving 456 full-texts for review. During this process, they excluded 444 studies. A total of 12 studies were included in this scoping review (Abdul Azeez & Subramania, 2019; Cai, 2022; Hameed et al., 2017; Hammad & Tribe, 2020; Hassan et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2019; Levy & Freiberg, 2022; Maldonaldo et al., 2024; Prinsloo & Pillay, 2014; Rahman et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2022).

### 3.2. Characteristics and description of programs

Ten programs provided financial aid as part of their poverty alleviation program. Nine incorporated educational programs and job training, which included social support and mentoring. Seven promoted entrepreneurship amongst participants and helped participants start their own business to sustain themselves. Six incorporated information about health and hygiene, including access to healthcare. Five programs included teaching financial literacy, helped participants with navigating resources, and providing nutritional support through food vouchers, or access to food. Four programs helped participants with financial planning, and finally two programs helped provide subsidized housing or housing relocation to areas with greater services.

### 3.3. Impact

Of the 12 programs, 10 were reported improvements to the financial status of participants and thus, helped to lift them out of poverty. Of those that did not work, researchers argued that limited support for program delivery and to aid participants was a barrier to success. Low enrollment and engagement rates for programs, could also lead to nonsignificant results. Of those that lessened poverty, researchers cited economic empowerment, prosocial connections through creating a sense of community, and providing a community space to address participants' needs as key factors impacting the success of these programs.

#### 4. Discussion

Overall, the findings of this scoping review highlight the importance of capacity-building interventions in acquiring the necessary education and skills to help lift people out of poverty. Through providing mentorship, targeted education, financial and job training, as well as social and financial support, individuals can develop and enhance their money management skills, financial literacy, and understanding in hygienic, financial, and entrepreneurial planning. Therefore, to help alleviate poverty in Canada, the Government of Canada must continue implementing financial and capacity-building interventions that focus on providing support, education, and training to individuals, especially youth, across Canada.

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