

In modern society poverty is understood not as a state of absolute economic deprivation but as an extreme case of social inequality, as “poverty in affluence”, and the concept of poverty is multidimensional, containing subjective and objective dimensions as well as multiple deprivations. As poverty is often associated with stigmatisation and social exclusion one may therefore assume that the poor are socially isolated.

Arguments supporting a relation between social isolation and poverty come from poverty and segregation research and from theories of social exclusion and social closure. Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) the author shows that poverty leads to loneliness and that the poor are restricted in the realisation of certain social contacts. Among the poor subgroups can be identified whose social integration is precarious and the transition to social isolation fluent. People who cannot cope with economic hardship as well as those in persistent poverty are more likely to be affected by the consequences of poverty on social relationships than others and this is especially true for the poorest among the poor. Although the findings do not suggest that poverty directly leads to social isolation, they demonstrate that the poor face a high risk of being isolated and that certain aspects associated with poverty (i.e. persistence of poverty) may lead to complete and ongoing isolation.