The gap between the rich and poor

Social problems are hard to define as they vary through time and place. A social problem may be defined as something that hurts society or people in that society. One main factor that constitutes a social problem is a condition that causes psychic or material suffering for a category of people. In the United States economical inequality seems to be that ever growing condition. The gap between the rich and the poor, and the societal institutions contributing to that gap, is the biggest social problem that Americans face.

To understand how the gap between the rich and the poor is a major social problem in the United States, it is important to have knowledge of the basic statistics. The concentration of wealth between the rich and the poor is one of the best indicators to how big the gap has truly become over the years. “In 2006, for the first time in U.S history, all of the 400 richest people in the United states were billionaires… 37 million Americans were living below the poverty line in 2005” (Eitzen,Zinn,Smith, 2009:36). Four hundred billionaires is a shocking statistic, when taking into consideration that 1 out of 8 Americans are poor. This only illustrates that the gap between the rich and the poor is still a problem that needs to be fixed.

In addition, the health insurance in the United States has reflected the consequences of the gap between the rich and poor. “The number of Americans without health insurance rose to 46.3 million last year” (The Associated Press, 2009). Without health insurance 46.3 million members of society, including children, cannot receive adequate health care to live healthy lives. After looking at the extent of the health care crisis, some can only view health care as a luxury given to the wealthy, the members of society who can afford to live longer and healthier lives.
On the other hand, societal institutions are contributing to the suffering of the disadvantaged individuals. In an online article from Forbes, *Healthier Foods Harder to find in Poor neighborhoods*, researched showed that “stores in poor neighborhoods were much less likely to offer healthy foods than those in the wealthier parts of town”. Not only are the poor dealing with the higher costs of healthier foods but they must also deal with not being given the option of choosing healthier foods their household. The poor health among the disadvantaged is a known fact in society, and many can only assume that the poor choices available for diet may be a contributing factor.

Furthermore, institutions are making poor decisions concerning this problem. The New York Times reported on a story of the popular retail stores, Wal-Mart and H&M, throwing out not purchased clothing. A third of the population in New York is poor, yet unworn clothing is being destroyed (Dwyer, 2010). This story was uncovered during winter in New York, leaving many homeless and poor without adequate clothing to keep warm. The example shows that the problem of economical inequality is not created by the rich and poor themselves but the institutions that do not take the gap seriously.

Additionally, the shift from manufacturing jobs to service sector jobs and the decisions made by those in power have continued to widen the gap. The decisions for the people in charge of workers in numerous labor markets to outsource their jobs to decrease the wage minimum has resulted in a loss of jobs for many working and lower class families. “At the upper end, corporate executives added handsomely to their incomes while downsizing their domestic workforces” (Eitzen 38). The poor are now faced with losing jobs that would provide more financial stability on the shift to service jobs and the decision of the wealthy to become richer at the costs of the less fortunate.
Lastly, there are many factors that have helped the gap between the rich and the poor widen. The government is one of the biggest contributors to the social problem that has continued for decades. Presidential elections give society an opportunity to see what can be done about current social problems, giving the 1 out of 8 Americans who are poor hope that their current situations can change. “McCain’s tax cuts would primarily benefit those with very high incomes, almost all of whom would receive large tax cuts that would, on average, raise their after-tax incomes by more than twice the average for all households.” (Burman et al, 5). Though Senator John McCain did not win the presidential election it reflects the power the government has had and can continue to have on making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

In conclusion, the economic inequality between the rich and the poor in the United States is a social problem that keeps growing throughout each year. The basic statistics, decisions of societal institutions and the ongoing gap between the rich and the poor have given the less fortunate members of society little hope of change. Change cannot happen without the help of the government, societal institutions, the poor, and the wealthy. It took a society to create this problem and it will take a society to fix it.