



## **Resource Guide #4**

# **Poverty and Zoroastrianism**



**December 13th, 2021**

## Introduction

Poverty and financial insecurity often creates untenable conditions where women and/or children must make the decision to stay in an abusive situation so as to not face homelessness and worse. Recent popular media such as the Netflix tv series “Maid” highlight the systemic difficulties those in poverty can face in their struggle to rise out of it. Poverty creates food insecurity, in which the cheapest and most easily accessible food is almost entirely unhealthy, leading to a growing obesity rate. As the coronavirus spread throughout the globe in the past 2 years, with hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations in the US alone, the country has seen that for many a single bout of illness with medical bills and the inability to work can land entire families into poverty. Those who face severe poverty, especially in adolescence, often struggle to recover from its profound impact on mental health even after their financial situation eases considerably. Mental illnesses such as depression that may be easier to treat with therapy and regular medication can be debilitating when one has the money for neither and added financial pressure. ZYNA has compiled the following resources to spur discussion and action within the Zoroastrian community to support impoverished individuals in North America.

## History

Poverty and the exploitation that creates it have been a persistent and growing issue in North America and particularly the USA. Though we can trace its history on this continent from the development of the first colonial and slaver societies on these shores onwards to the great labor battles of the 19th and 20th centuries, most readers will be far more familiar with the dire consequences of the 2008 Market Crash and the Great Recession that came from it. The most impactful economic meltdown since the Great Depression, a large part of it here was caused by banks gambling the funds of its members away and engaging in [predatory subprime mortgage loans](#) which also aided the devastating pop of the so-called housing bubble of the mid-2000s.

The results were devastating with unemployment [reaching approximately 10%](#) at its peak, social services underfunded or outright cut, the [housing market still not rebounding to this day](#), and a massive increase in folks dealing with horrid poverty with a recovery that is still ongoing. If this recent history teaches us anything, it's that we are always one bad decision by a corporation or politician away from poverty and, thankfully, due to the dire situation just a decade ago, many mutual aid networks, financial education systems, and mounting pressure on our political and financial elites have developed. However, poverty and income inequality still threaten North America with the United States having a staggering [11.4% poverty rate in 2020](#) and Canada with [10.1% in 2019](#) with both figures believed to only be increasing.

Out of all those suffering, women, People of Color (POC), and various minority groups including immigrants continue to suffer through the ravages of poverty and income inequality at disproportionate numbers with women at a poverty rate of 12.9% (USA, 2018)/13.8% (Canada, 2016), POC, especially African Americans, Latin Americans, and Native Americans at [21.2%, 17.2%, and 24.2%](#) (USA, 2019) respectively and POC in Canada (2016) are at a [terrifying 20.8% poverty rate](#). If you think that's bad, let's look at kids in the USA where it is estimated that [40% of children](#) will spend at least a year in poverty before turning 18 and where [14.4% \(2019\)](#) and [26% in Canada \(2020\)](#) live in continual poverty without enough to eat or to be able to afford the essentials needed for their upbringing.



Though the past and present may look dismal, the future is still unwritten and in our hands. Only we can shape the history of poverty on this continent and hopefully work towards its radical decrease and, Ahura Mazda willing, its complete elimination.

### **Pressing News - Homeless in Canada**

*The Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey*, released last September, found that 21% of single mothers in Canada raise their children in poverty and that women and gender diverse people experienced widespread housing affordability issues due to income. It was revealed that almost 2/3rds of households looking to live in social housing were subject to wait lists for a minimum of two years and in Toronto, more than 81,000 households were still on wait lists in September of this year ([The Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey](#)).

This pandemic has also greatly affected the services available to those in need. Homeless shelters and centres for women and children escaping domestic violence struggled with capacity limits, lack of funding, and a surge in cases this past year. A national survey by Women's Shelters Canada released last year, stated that 71% of shelters had to reduce their capacity due to COVID-19 and 38% of centers reported a significant drop in donations and funding this past year. Yet, calls coming into the centers were more severe and frequent. 52% of shelters reported seeing clients experiencing somewhat or much more severe violence due to tension over job losses and financial insecurity as a result of COVID-19. 70% of organizations in larger population centers noticed an increase in crisis calls between June and October of 2020 ([Canada-wide survey of women's shelters shows abuse more severe during pandemic; The Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey](#)).

### **Connection to Zoroastrianism**

The Zoroastrian faith stresses the importance of charity and generosity. In the Khordeh Avesta, one of the sins a Zoroastrian can commit after lying is, "not to nourish the poor and the needy in spite of being rich and prosperous." From ancient times, the Zoroastrians placed great emphasis on helping those in need. For example, during the Achaemenid empire, some of the taxes collected were allocated to women to help feed their children. This kindness was also extended to non-Zoroastrians, the most famous example being the liberation of the Jews from captivity in Babylon and allowing them to return to Jerusalem with the resources to repair their temples.

At every opportunity, we must deliver kindness to those who are less fortunate. Even if we are not wealthy, we can donate our time or services to a worthy cause, charity, or organization. Such acts are in line with the path of Asha, and will be duly noticed by the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda.

### **What can we do as allies?**

We have listed resources to help, book recommendations, social media accounts, podcasts, and other content for Zoroastrians to consume and educate themselves and their communities on these issues. As well, we have listed organizations and causes to donate to help impoverished folks in North America, which is especially critical as we approach the holidays.



## Charities to Donate To

- [FEZANA's Welfare and Unity Committee](#) - A national Zoroastrian organization which provides welfare aid and critical and medical assistance to Zarathushtis in North America and all over the world
- [No Kid Hungry](#) - A national campaign run by Share Our Strength, a nonprofit working to solve problems of hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world
- [The Hunger Project](#) – Organization with the mission to end hunger and poverty by pioneering sustainable, grassroots, women-centered strategies and advocating for their widespread adoption in countries throughout the world
- [National WIC Association](#) – The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a short-term intervention program designed to influence lifetime nutrition and health behaviors in a targeted, high-risk population
- [OXFAM](#) - A global organization that fights inequality to end poverty and injustice. We offer lifesaving support in times of crisis and advocate for economic justice, gender equality, and climate action
- [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) - By applying research and data to arrive at solutions, the Alliance works at a federal and local level to create policy and resources that ensure its mission.
- [Coalition for the Homeless](#) - The Coalition for the Homeless is the US's oldest advocacy and direct service organization helping homeless individuals and families

## To Read

- [Poor Economics](#): A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo
- [More Than Good Intentions](#): Improving the Ways the World's Poor Borrow, Save, Farm, Learn, and Stay Healthy by Dean Karlan

## Social Media

- Oxfam ([@oxfamamerica](#)) - an organization that works to reduce poverty by providing grants to build infrastructure for the poor, encouraging donations, and helping communities recoup after disasters
- World Bank Poverty ([@WBG Poverty](#)) - Follow the World Bank's work to help countries reduce poverty and close gaps in income and opportunity for the less well-off

## Podcasts

- The Poverty Podcast features poverty specialists as they explore the latest data and research on poverty reduction, shared prosperity, and equity around the globe.  
[Apple Podcasts](#) | [Amazon](#) | [Spotify](#)
- The Poverty Research & Policy podcast features interviews with researchers about poverty, inequality, and policy in the United States.  
[Apple Podcasts](#) | [Stitcher](#) | [Spotify](#)
- Poverty Unpacked explores how poverty affects the mind, relationships, emotions and society as a whole, and what can be done to change it.  
[Apple Podcasts](#) | [Soundcloud](#) | [Spotify](#)



## **Volunteer and Take Action**

- Find local food pantries, soup kitchens, etc to volunteer, shelve food, donate, etc with [Foodpantries.org](http://Foodpantries.org)
- Find outreach and volunteer opportunities on poverty with [results.org](http://results.org)
- Help homeless Canadians with [Engage and Change](http://EngageandChange.org) a charity that was created to foster good citizenship and encourage healthy communities by giving back

## **About Zoroastrians**

Zoroastrians are followers of one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions founded by the prophet Zarathushtra more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Iran. Zoroastrians have long served as bridge builders in interfaith dialogue, believing in truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence, respect and care for the environment, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sassanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

## **About FEZANA**

Founded in 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) represents a diverse and growing Zarathushti community in the western diaspora. Guided by the blessings of Ahura Mazda and the teachings of prophet Zarathushtra, the non-profit federation serves as the coordinating body for 27 Zoroastrian associations and 14 corresponding groups in Canada and the United States. The activities of FEZANA are conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and unity among all member associations, and with due regard for the Zarathushti principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust, and charity toward all mankind. Visit [www.fezana.org](http://www.fezana.org) and follow FEZANA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook @TheFEZANA.

## **About ZYNA**

The Zoroastrian Youth of North America (ZYNA) is a FEZANA committee dedicated to advancing thought leadership, engagement, and active participation among next-generation Zarathushtis. ZYNA aims to increase the civic engagement and involvement of youth in the Zoroastrian community through an established infrastructure. By working to educate and provide community engagement opportunities for young Zarathushtis in Canada and the United States, ZYNA is creating a sustainable footprint for future generations to advance Zoroastrian interests throughout North America.



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