



Children's experience of multidimensional deprivation: Relationship with household monetary poverty



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Young Lives, India

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ABSTRACT

Using longitudinal data set from Young Lives this paper aims to measure multidimensional childhood deprivation in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. In this paper we employ Alkire and Foster (2011) counting approach to estimate multidimensional childhood deprivation. We use household and child related data of 975 children in two different age points (12 and 15 year) and seek to establish the fact that childhood deprivation is not confined only to monetary poor households. Our analysis is based on 15 indicators cutting across 4 major dimensions – education, health, housing quality and subjective well-being. Comparison has been made between households who have been consistently in the bottom most quartile (*chronically poor*) and top most quartile (*least poor*) of monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) in the two rounds of survey conducted in 2006 and 2009. Amongst the child related indicators, schooling, ability to read and write, thinness and nutrition have emerged in general as important contributors towards children's total deprivation. Overall child deprivation is higher for *chronically poor* households across all the indicators, as compared to those belonging to the *least poor* in our sample. However, 95% of children belonging to least poor households face one or more deprivation at age 12 and 15. The estimates have also been decomposed by rural and urban location as well as by gender. Rural children in *chronically poor* as well as *least poor* households experience higher deprivation which remains static across rounds. Boys at age 12 are more deprived than girls in the *chronically poor* households, though boys show substantial decrease in deprivation over time. An ordered probit model also confirms that rural children are significantly more likely to be deprived than urban children, though we do not find significant difference between boys and girls.

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1. Introduction

It is increasingly noted that monetary measures of income or expenditure provide only partial insights into standards of living or wellbeing. Many researchers have noted that poverty is multi-dimensional, reflecting a range of deprivations (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003; Foster, 2009) and monetary measures are merely one-dimensional (Sen, 1983). Sen (1999) further developed this argument by emphasising that 'real' poverty can be sensitively identified in terms of 'capability deprivation', which refers to deprivation of opportunities, choice and entitlements. The sole use of monetary measures of poverty have been criticised for 'poverty of measurement' (Greeley, 1994) and researchers have highlighted

the need for not relying on simple 'basic needs' measures and rising to the challenge by combining methods, indicators and thresholds (Streeten, 1994).

India has witnessed a sustained economic growth that has been notable, particularly when the economic downturn negatively affected economic growth in some of the most developed countries. The Planning commission based on the 66th round of the National Sample Survey (2009–2010) data on household consumer expenditure survey estimates that the number of poor in India was 29.8% in 2009–2010, down from 37.2% in 2004–2005. However, a large number of Indians continue to live in poverty and disparities in income and human development are on the rise.

As debates about the development agenda after 2015, following the expiry of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) take place, it is increasingly clear that general indicators measuring macro-level development, which remain the focus of large national and state datasets, miss vital information about inequalities between and within households. Missing from these datasets

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are child-specific data based on location, gender and indicators relevant to children's non-monetary quality of life. Very poor children suffer from the negative consequences of being exposed to multiple risks, as a result of the interaction of multiple deprivations, while less poor children may suffer from limited access to services and resources and face deprivations in specific domains.

1.1. Children and poverty

According to The State of the World's Children (UNICEF, 2005), the lives of over 1 billion children are blighted by poverty, despite the wealth of nations. The report warned that not one of the Millennium Development Goals – those idealistic objectives of the international community will be attained, if childhood continues under the current level of attack. UNICEF in the report set out a working definition of child poverty inspired by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC):

Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual, and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.

The importance of studying childhood deprivation has grown in recent years due to the evidence that childhood poverty has lifelong consequences, as also because it differs from adult poverty (Bradbury, Jenkins, & Micklewright, 2001; Children's Health Insurance Programme, 2004; Grantham-Mc Gregor et al., 2007; Minujin, 2009; UNDP, 2004).

While a lot of literature has been generated regarding child poverty and deprivations in developing countries, very little has been written regarding the same in the Indian context, even though children under the age of 18 years constitute more than a third of the population (Census, 2011). The way 'childhood poverty' is defined and understood, has tremendous bearings on how it is measured and analysed. Feeny and Boyden (2003) point out that poverty is a deeply relational and relatively dynamic, and view child poverty as embracing three interrelated domains (i) deprivation (a lack of material conditions and services generally held to be essential to the development of children's full potential), (ii) exclusion (the result of unjust processes through which children's dignity, voice and rights are denied, or their existence is threatened) and (iii) vulnerability (an inability of society to cope with existing or probable threats to children in their environment).

A common approach adopted to deal with the multidimensionality of poverty has been the use of aggregated indices. Foster (2009) proposed a class of chronic poverty indices that rely on aggregation across time. He introduced the concept of duration sensitivity to identify chronically poor based on the number of periods an individual is poor. While some of the poverty research has combined monetary indicators with deprivation indicators, others have discussed monetary poverty as related but conceptually distinct from deprivation (Bradshaw et al., 2012). Bastos (2001) emphasised that child poverty concept cannot assume the classic form of the poverty concept, founded on a threshold of monetary poverty and that the concept of child poverty must be based on the analysis of the child's living conditions and not on the family level of income.

In line with this and for clarity of expression, we use the term 'poverty' when referring to monetary measures and 'deprivation' to capture a broader sense of the multidimensional impacts on children. Despite various perspectives on childhood poverty and deprivation and varied approaches adopted, there is a consensus that the two concepts of childhood poverty and deprivation are inter-linked. The most important global attempt to measure

childhood poverty with a focus on rights was conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (Gordon, Nandy, Pemberton, Pantazis, & Townsend, 2003), using a methodology of measuring deprivation known as the Bristol Methodology or the Bristol Indicators. The study measured absolute poverty amongst children by defining eight threshold measures of severe deprivation of basic human need encapsulating food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, information and access to services. Using these eight severe deprivations, the Bristol approach estimated a 'poverty headcount' and the term 'absolute poverty' was used in instances where children experienced two or more deprivations. The study highlighted that the distribution of income amongst members of a household is not always fair and does not always obey the controversial principle of 'equal sharing' assumed by equivalence scales and therefore poor children do not necessarily live in (monetary) poor households. This may well be because children have some needs that are specific to them and the forms of deprivations which affect them may be different from those affecting adults (Bastos, 2001). Pierre and Dodzi (2009) developed a Composite Poverty Index (using five dimensions of nutrition, potable water, health, education and lodging), and explored explanatory factors of child multidimensional poverty and put it in relation with the poverty status of the households to which they belonged. They believed that although a relationship may exist between child poverty and household poverty, the two phenomena can be studied independently. Their study of children less than 5 years old in Cameroon demonstrated that though the correlation between child poverty and household poverty is very strong, 27.6% of children living in least-poor households are also affected by childhood poverty.

The recently developed Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (Alkire & Santos, 2010) which particularly incorporated a few child specific indicators in the context of multidimensional deprivation, ranked India 74th amongst 104 countries with a MPI value of 0.29 (UNDP, 2010). It is interesting to note that research in developing countries has revealed that one child out of two is considered to be poor (Minujin, 1999). On the other hand, the recently published UNICEF-Institute of Human Development report (Rustagi, Mishra, Mehta, & Subrahmanian, 2012) on India reports that 62% of the children experience at least two forms of deprivation. It also notes that the difference in deprivations of children living in households in the middle wealth quintiles and those in the bottom quintiles is not very significant.

Despite the growth in child poverty research, most studies are focused on developed countries and are most often cross-sectional, which do not allow for consideration of life trajectories and the way in which individual child's own beliefs, expectations and resilience play a critical role.

Drawing upon previous work done by UNICEF and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), this paper analyses childhood deprivation, utilising longitudinal data collected by Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh, India.¹ The theoretical underpinning of this paper is that monetary income alone is insufficient to provide us a complete picture of children's lived experiences since it fails to take into consideration unequal sharing of material resources amongst family members as well as locational, social and persisting gender bias. While majority of the research on child deprivation and poverty have utilised cross-sectional data, we believe that child poverty is not static, since families also

¹ Young Lives is a longitudinal study in four countries (Peru, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Andhra Pradesh, India) that seeks to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and of the factors that contribute to breaking cycles of poverty and reducing the inequality that underpins poverty.

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