

Title: Child Poverty in the Developing World

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Short Abstract: Researchers from the University of Bristol and LSE have produced the first scientific estimates of child poverty in the developing world, which shows over one billion children are severely deprived of basic human needs.

Keywords: child poverty; developing world; DHS data; UNICEF

Abstract:

A recent UNICEF-funded study has produced the first scientific measurement of child poverty in the developing world based on the internationally agreed definition of absolute poverty adopted by the governments of 117 countries at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. Absolute poverty was defined as “*a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services*”.

Severe deprivations of basic human need are highly likely to have serious adverse consequences for the health, well-being and development of children. Severe deprivations harm children in both the short term and the long term. Many of the absolutely poor children surveyed will have died or had their health profoundly damaged as a direct consequence of their appalling living conditions. Many others will have had their development so severely impaired that they may be unable to escape from a lifetime of grinding poverty.

The report *Child Poverty in the Developing World* by the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol uses data from recent Demographic and Health Surveys for 46 developing countries. The final sample included data on nearly 1.2 million children, one of the largest and most accurate survey samples of children ever assembled.

Main findings

- Over 1 billion children – more than half the children in the developing world – suffer from severe deprivation of basic human need, and over one-third (674 million) suffer from absolute poverty (two or more severe deprivations).
- Over a third of children have to live in dwellings with more than five people per room or which have mud flooring.
- Over half a billion children (31%) have no toilet facilities whatsoever.
- Almost half a billion children (25%) lack access to radio, television, telephone or newspapers at home.
- Over 20% of children (nearly 376 million) are using unsafe (open) water sources or have more than a 15-minute walk to water.
- Over 15% of children under-five years in the developing world are severely malnourished, over half of whom (91 million children) are in South Asia.
- 265 million children (15%) have not been immunised against any diseases or have had a recent illness causing diarrhoea and have not received any medical advice or treatment.
- 134 million children aged between 7 and 18 (13%) are severely educationally deprived - they have never been to school.

- There are differences both *between* and *within* regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of severe deprivation with respect to four of the seven indicators - severe shelter, water, educational and health deprivation. However, within the region, severe water deprivation ranges from 19% to 90%.
- Children in rural areas are much more likely to be severely deprived than urban children. This is particularly the case with respect to severe sanitation deprivation.
- There are significant gender differences with girls more likely to be severely educationally deprived, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where they are three times more likely than boys to have never been to school.

Anti-poverty strategies need to respond to local conditions; blanket solutions to eradicating child poverty will be unsuccessful. Many of the UN Millennium Development Goals are unlikely to be met, given declining international commitments to development aid. The study findings indicate that considerably more emphasis needs to be placed on improving basic infrastructure and social services for families with children, particularly with regards to shelter and sanitation in rural areas. An international investment fund for payment towards national schemes of child benefit in cash or kind would help also to provide the impetus for rapid fulfilment of children's fundamental rights to social security and an adequate standard of living.

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