

## An Analysis of the Perceptions of the Consequences of Child Poverty: The Case of Boipatong Township

J.L. Makhalima

School of Economic Sciences, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa  
Email:jabulile.makhalima@nwu.ac.za

M. B. Sekatane

Parliamentary Budget Office, National Parliament, Cape Town  
Email: msekatane@parliament.gov.za

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n21p239

### Abstract

*The need to deal with poverty and child poverty in particular cannot be overemphasised. Children around the world are among the most helpless victims of poverty, more especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the number of children under 18 years of age is a bigger percentage of the population. The need to deal with child poverty becomes an even urgent issue when considering the consequences of poverty in children, both during the childhood days and even when they are in their adulthood. This paper analyses the perceptions of the consequences of child poverty among the households in Boipatong Township. The objective was to analyse the difference in perception, between different groups of people. The results indicate that there are significant differences between females and males in what they perceive to be the consequences of child poverty. A total share of 50% Males and 50% females vastly disagreed on the perception that poor children are likely to get involved in drugs and they also disagreed (that these children are likely to have poor academic outcomes among other things. The study also found differences in the perceptions of the poor vis a vis the non-poor.*

### 1. Introduction

Child poverty is not only bad due to the circumstance the children experience in their childhood, but also because of its impact on their adulthood (Holzera, 2008). There are different arguments as to what are considered the consequences of child poverty. Usually these are perceptions which vary from individual to individual, or society to society. However, the perceptions that individuals or societies have on the consequences of poverty may to a greater extent affect the approach in dealing with the phenomenon of poverty among children (Munjin, 2005). Theories on poverty look at child poverty as they exist in their households as opposed to adult poverty which can be looked at on individual basis. In fact there is very little that has been done to separate poverty from child poverty, hence literature on child poverty is seldom available (Nederland, Mak, & Stavenuiter, 2007). Studies on child poverty have over the years concentrated on the household income where, adult equivalence scales are used in an attempt to make cognisance of child and adult differences (Streak, Yu, & van der Berg, 2008). It is therefore pertinent to look at child poverty separately from adult poverty in that it has different causes and impacts. The effect of poverty during childhood has everlasting effects on children. The distinction between child and adult poverty is thus necessary in order to isolate the consequences that are only coming from childhood poverty (Munjin, 2009).

The life that a person lives as an adult is to a greater extent determined by the childhood they had whether it be in terms of their upbringing, education levels, socialisation, life experiences and choices. The consequences of child poverty are to a great extent derived from the consequences of household poverty as children do not live in isolation. If a child comes from a family where both parents have little or no education, the child is likely to experience poverty (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Meuller, 2007). A child's experience of poverty at an early age differs from that of an adult in that the effects may be deeply entrenched and impede on their development right through into adulthood. A child is helpless and depends on parents or guardians to provide for their needs (Munjin, 2009). Children from poor families are at risk of being exposed to crime due to their circumstances and the communities that they live in (Griggs & Walker, 2008:5). A child is also likely to lose interest in education or advancing themselves due to their poverty situation or due to the absence of role models in their life. Perceptions on what can be blamed on poverty may vary from society to society. Using data collected from Boipatong, a Township in Gauteng Province, South Africa, this study seeks to analyse what is perceived to

be the consequences of child poverty. The rest of the paper is organised as follows; Section 2 reviews the literature on child poverty in general and discusses the possible consequences of child poverty based on literature. Section 3 presents the methodology that was used for data collection and the analysis of the data for the perceptions of the consequences of child poverty. Section 4 presents the results and discussion and section 5 concludes the paper.

## **2. Literature Review**

Chirwa (2009) defined child poverty as a situation whereby a person below the age of 18 years has no access to what is required to fulfil basic human needs. The basic needs in this case may refer to clothing, shelter and food. The definition therefore considers child poverty as something more than simply material deprivation or a lack of income. The definition takes into account the effects of the lack of sufficient productive resources to sustain a child's livelihood, lack of access to basic education good nutrition and the like. Townsend (in Green, 2010) concludes that children can be said to live in poverty when they live in families which lack resources to enable them to participate in the activities similar to those of their well-off counterparts. These activities may be school trips or extramural activities where a poor child may not afford some equipment required to take part. Child poverty therefore does not exist in isolation of household situation but has its roots in the general poverty. Child poverty is a consequence of household poverty For instance lack of good nutrition leads to malnutrition and poor academic performance and insufficient income may also lead to child labour, as children are forced to work, in order to help their struggling parents to support the family (UNICEF, 2005).

Magnuson (2013) explains that growing up in a household that lacks sufficient financial resources for basic family needs has long-term negative consequences. Studies by Magnuson and Votruba-Drzal (2009) also deduce that even a few years later, poverty can have negative implications for a child's development. What has been concluded from studies conducted in brain science and developmental psychology is that the negative effects of early childhood poverty, from prenatal to age 5 might be especially harmful and long lasting. This is likely because a child's brain develops and rapidly goes through a series of changes during the first few years of life, making young children especially sensitive to environmental influences. Early childhood may be critical also because that is when the family dynamics influences children's everyday lives, a context that differs dramatically by socioeconomic status.

One of the consequences of child poverty ubiquitous in the literature is ill health in children. Hirsh (2008) argues that children from poor families unlike those from well-off families tend to have poor health throughout the different stages of the life cycle. Most of the health problems that a child may encounter may have been caused by the ill health of the expectant mother due to stress and unhealthy diet. Such health impediments help to explain why a child may have a low birth weight which may lead to more health risks later in life. The risks of a child's ill health are associated with facets of children's living conditions. Children living in dilapidated housing are twice as likely to suffer from ill health as other children (Hirsch & Spencer, 2008).

Just as good health is vital for a child's development, so is education. A child's background and family plays a vital role in his or her academic achievements (Usher, 2012). Some children from low income families often tend to be less interested in school work and more often than not require special attention and remedial assistance compared to their well off counterparts. Children of white collar workers are more likely to go to university or any other tertiary institution unlike children of blue collar workers (Griggs & Walker, 2008).

Poor children who are weak in their academic performance tend to have emotional and behavioural problems more frequently as opposed to their non-poor counterparts. Emotional outcomes are often grouped along two dimensions: externalising behaviours which comprise of aggression, fighting, and bullying, and internalising behaviours such as anxiety, inability to socialize, and depression. Children from poor households are likely to have both internalising and externalising behaviours at any point in their childhood whether their poverty situation is of a long or short term nature (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

The poverty situation at home as well as the relationship between children and their parents plays a vital role in a child's behaviour. Parents of higher socioeconomic statuses who have enough money to be comfortable while raising their families are more likely to show more warmth and affection. They communicate and give their children the opportunity to express their opinions. Children in turn experience less emotional and behavioural problems as they are receiving the necessary attention at home. Parents who are experiencing financial difficulties are more likely to be depressed and anxious. Due to their circumstances these parents tend to be harsh, less supportive and more detached from their children (Driscoll & Nagel, 2010)

### 3. Methodology and Data Collection

The paper uses data collected in Boipatong Township in South Africa. In the survey, 300 questionnaires were administered to head of households by 2 field workers in September 2013. Households were randomly selected from the population of Boipatong. Maps were obtained to assist with the sampling. Statements on the consequences of child poverty were used and respondents were to respond based on a likert scale.

The head of households were requested to respond on the scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was “strongly disagree” and 5 was “strongly agree”. A statement to capture a theoretically known consequence was asked to the head of the household, or a respondent that represented the head of the household.

### 4. Results and Discussion

In investigating on the perceptions of the consequences of child poverty among gender groups and between the poor and the non-poor, the study employs cross tabulations and chi square test for significance. The responses of the male and female respondents are cross tabulated against each other to illustrate the different responses from a gender perspective. Table 1 depicts these responses.

**Table 1:** Cross tabulation between perceptions and gender

Perception of the consequences of child Poverty		Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Neither agree/disagree	Do not know
Most girls who resort to prostitution come from poor families	Males	42	47.5	51.6	59.1	47.8	33.3
	females	58	52.5	48.4	40.9	52.2	66.7
	total	<b>48.8</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>1</b>
Children from poor families are likely to get involved in drugs compared to their well-off counterparts	Males	50	40.9	60	57.1	50.7	25
	females	50	59.1	40	42.9	49.3	75
	total	<b>12.8</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Children from poor families are likely to get involved in crime	Males	38.7	47.5	59.4	50	41.3	37.5
	females	61.3	52.5	40.6	50	58.8	62.5
	total	<b>20.9</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Children from poor families are likely to perform poorly at school compared to their well-off counterparts?	Males	36.8	41	54.7	68	43.6	57.1
	females	63.2	59	45.3	32	56.4	42.9
	total	<b>12.9</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>
Children from poor families lack ambition?	Males	51.9	35.6	50.6	44.4	44.6	66.7
	females	48.1	64.4	49.4	55.6	55.4	33.3
	total	<b>17.5</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>3</b>
Children from poor families are unable to socialize and are prone to social exclusion in this community	Males	38.6	40.6	55.6	46.7	49.2	31.3
	females	61.4	59.4	44.4	53.3	50.8	68.8
	total	<b>14.9</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Children from poor families have poor health outcomes compared to children from well-off families	Males	34.3	38.1	53.8	50.7	41.7	45.2
	females	65.7	61.9	46.2	49.3	58.3	54.8
	total	<b>11.8</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>14.1</b>

Table 1 depicts the responses of males and females as to what they perceived to be the consequences of child poverty. From the sample, 48.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that “girls from poor household resort to prostitution”. Of those that strongly disagreed, 58% were female and 42% were males. This indicates that even though both males and females disagreed, females are more likely to disagree as the statement is gender biased. When asked if they perceived children coming from poor families to be involved in drugs, 46.1% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Of this percentage, the majority were females at 59.1%. On the other hand, 40.9% of males strongly agreed with the statement. However, the chi square test result with a p-value of 0.95 shows that there is no significant difference in the response of males and females

According to research done by Griggs and Walker (2008) children from poor households have a greater likelihood of parent reported disobedience, such as being involved in crime compared to their well-off counterparts. The results in

this study show that from the sample, 59.4% of males and 40.6% of females agreed that poor children are likely to get involved in criminal activities. From the sample, 62.3% of the female strongly disagree with the statement compared to the 38.7% of the male respondents.

A total of 63.2% female correspondents strongly disagreed that children coming from poor household have a poor academic performance. On the opposite extreme, 68% of the male respondents strongly agree with the statement. A p-value of 0.95 implies that there is no statistically significant difference between the male and female responses. This is an important observation as the statement itself is strong. There may be a variety of reasons for these outcomes. Females may have responded in that manner as they feel that poor children want to improve their situation by doing well at school (Horgan, 2007). While males may feel that children lack the concentration at school due to their domestic situation and this may undermine their academic achievement (Engle & Black, 2009).

A total of 28.6% of the respondents agree that children from poor households lack ambition. Based on the weight of the statement, this can be considered to be a large percentage of the sample. More female respondents (55.6%) strongly agreed with the statement compared to that of the male respondent (44.4%). More females (61.4%) than males (38.6%) strongly disagreed that children from poor families are unable to socialise and are prone to social exclusion in the community. This may mean that females feel that a child should not be socially withdrawn or excluded due to their poverty situation. On the other hand a greater percentage of males (55.6%) than females (44.4%) agreed to the statement. This may be that males feel that poor children find it difficult to fit in with society due to their poverty situation. Conger et al. (2002) has also shown that poor children have difficulties relating and interacting with their peers. They often display disobedient behaviour which influences their social alienation from the rest of society (Moore et al., 2009).

Health status of a person is a function of a number of things. The statement that poverty status would affect health status therefore should be considered in the light that it does not mean exclusively. The results from the study shows a clear split between males and females. A greater percentage of male respondents agreed (53.8%) and strongly agreed (50.7) compared to female respondents (46.2% and 49.3% respectively) that children from poor families have poor health outcomes compared to their well-off counterparts. When aggregated, 26.3% of the sample agreed to the statement that being in a poor family poses health hazards to a child. A study done in the United States also showed that poor children are most likely to have poor health outcomes compared to children from wealthier families (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The results from the discussion therefore show that males and females have different views about the perceptions of the consequences of child poverty based on the responses they gave.

The residents of Boipatong Township were also interview based on their household poverty status regarding their perceptions of the consequences of child poverty in the Township. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Cross tabulation of perceptions and poverty status

Perception of the consequences of child Poverty		Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Neither agree/disagree	Do not know
most girls who resort to prostitution come from poor families	Poor	40	48.2	32.8	27.3	39.1	66.7
	Non-poor	60	51.2	67.2	72.7	60.9	33.3
	<b>total</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>1</b>
Children from poor families are likely to get involved in drugs compared to their well-off counterparts	Poor	42.1	42.3	28	50	31.6	50
	Non-poor	57.9	57.7	72	50	68.4	50
	<b>total</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Children from poor families are likely to get involved in crime	Poor	41.9	39	36.9	37.5	37.5	50
	Non-poor	58.1	61	63.1	62.5	62.5	50
	<b>total</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Children from poor families are likely to perform poorly at school compared to their well-off counterparts?	Poor	55.3	37.3	34.4	36	35.4	42.9
	Non-poor	44.7	62.7	65.6	64	64.6	57.1
	<b>total</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>
Children from poor families lack ambition?	Poor	46.2	40.7	34.1	40.7	36.9	33.3
	Non-poor	53.8	59.3	65.9	59.3	63.1	66.7
	<b>total</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>3</b>
Children from poor families are unable to socialize and are prone to social exclusion in this community	Poor	36.4	49.2	32.1	36.7	34.4	56.3
	Non-poor	63.6	50.8	67.9	63.3	65.6	43.8
	<b>total</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Children from poor families have poor health outcomes compared to children from well-off families	Poor	68.6	52.4	29.5	38.2	16.7	33.3
	Non-poor	31.4	47.6	70.5	61.8	83.3	66.7
	<b>total</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>14.1</b>

Table 2 illustrates the responses of the poor and non-poor households as to what are the perceived consequences of child poverty. A total of 48.7% of the poor and non-poor respondents strongly disagree that most girls from poor families resort to prostitution. Of that total, 60% were non-poor and 40% were poor. A greater percentage of non-poor (67.2%) than poor (32.8%) respondents agreed to the statement. This shows that non-poor households perceive that girls resorting to prostitution are more likely to be poor.

Both poor and non-poor households strongly agree (50% concurrently) that children from poor families are likely to get involved in drugs compared to their well-off counterparts. However, 57.9% of the non-poor respondents strongly disagree with the statement compared to that of poor households (42.1%). A total of 46.6% of the sample disagreed with the statement. This essentially indicates that a child's poverty status does not necessarily necessitate the use of drugs.

When asked whether they perceived children from poor families are likely to get involved in crime, a total of 62.5% of non-poor households strongly agreed with the statement compared to a smaller percentage of poor respondents (37.5%). A total of 21.8% of the sample agreed to the statement. With regards to the statement, this is a large percentage as this may also imply that non-poor households perceive that poor children may resort to crime to survive.

A larger portion of poor respondents at 55.3% compared to the non-poor respondents at 44.7% strongly disagreed that children from poor households have a poor academic performance compared to their well-off counterparts. On the other hand, a larger portion of the non-poor respondents (64%) strongly agreed with the statement compared to the non-poor respondents (36%). This shows that non-poor respondents perceive poor children to have a poor academic performance due to their poverty situation. A study done by Reardon (2011) concluded that children from low income households were more likely to have a poor academic performance as opposed to those from high income families.

Non-poor households strongly agreed (59.3%) that children from poor households lack ambition. Only 40.7% of the poor households agreed with the statement. Non-poor households felt otherwise. A total of 27.3% of the sample agree that children from poor families are unable to socialise and are prone to social exclusion in the community. Of those who strongly agreed, 63.3% were non-poor respondents and 36.7% were poor respondents. From this observation, it can be assumed that non-poor respondents perceive poor children to either be socially side lined because they are poor or because these children feel as though they do not fit in due to their poverty status.

Non-poor residents strongly agreed (61.8%) when asked if they perceived children from poor families to have poor health outcomes compared to their well-off counterparts. Poor households on the opposite extreme, strongly disagreed (68.6%) with the statement. Table 3 shows the chi-square test results. A p-value of 0.00 shows that there is a significant difference between what the poor and non-poor respondents perceived about the health outcomes of poor children. The poor respondents do not agree with the statement for the palpable reason that they too are poor and those children may be coming from their households.

**Table 3:** Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi Square	25.271	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	25.917	6	.000
Linear-by-linear Association	10.572	1	.001

The results based on table 3 also show that there is a statistically significant relationship between a child's poverty status and their perceived health outcomes according to the poor and non-poor households. The poorer a child, the greater the likelihood of poor health outcomes.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse the perceptions of the consequences of child poverty at household level. Using cross tabulation and chi-square test for group difference, statements on perceived consequences were tested between gender and poverty status. It can thus be concluded that both males and females, and poor and non-poor responses show that poor children are at risk of being exposed to the consequences. The results indicate that there is a general agreement in the perceptions that poor children are likely to resort to prostitution, get involved in drugs, crime, perform badly at school, lack ambition and struggle to socialise due to their poverty situation. The agreement is apparent in the results from the Chi2 test which did not show a statistically significant difference. There was however a clear difference in the perceptions between the poor and non-poor in their perception on health outcomes. The non-poor felt that poor children are more likely to have poor health outcomes whereas the poor disagreed. The poor felt strongly that the health circumstance of their children does not entirely depend on their economic wellbeing.

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