

POVERTY STATUS OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE CONTIGUOUS POOR AREAS OF HUBEI PROVINCE

CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY FROM A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

BACKGROUND

Child poverty is distinct to adult poverty in the way children are vulnerable to various deprivations during the course of their lives, which can have significant impacts on their physical, emotional and social development. A new global agenda, the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* provide a platform to advocate for the eradication of child poverty, with a specific national target of halving child poverty by 2030. In China, the number of children (below the age of 16) living in income poverty is estimated to be 43 million.¹ However, this estimation underestimates the number of children experiencing multiple deprivations. The lack of official data in this area has serious implications on the understanding and awareness of child poverty issues in China. China has the largest number of children in the world and has experienced rapid changes in social structures; therefore, it appears to be particularly important to contribute to the existing knowledge gap by investigating child poverty issues in poor regions of China.

In 2011, the Chinese Government promulgated the National Plan of Action for Children (2011-2020) The outline clearly stated, “We should adhere to the principle of children as a priority, protect children’s

rights of survival, development, being protected and participation, narrow children’s development gap between urban and rural areas, improve children’s welfare level and the overall quality of children, and promote children’s health and comprehensive development.”

Hubei Province is a large province where the most excluded and disadvantaged children are concentrated in four contiguous regions in the rim area of Hubei. The distinct poverty characteristics of these four regions are interestingly representative of the whole country. These four regions cover a large number of impoverished counties (please refer to the map of the locations of the four regions in Hubei Province following). Hence, these regions are the focus of poverty reduction strategies in Hubei Province. The Qin Ba Mountains, Da Bie Mountains, Wu Ling Mountains and Mu Fu Mountains have 4.99 million people living in poverty, in which people in absolute poverty account for 60.9 per cent of the province’s poor population² and they are all located in remote areas with limited social and economic support. At the same time, there are serious deficiencies in resources and public investment in services that support the most excluded and disadvantaged communities.

¹ World Bank (2009). “From poor areas to poor people: China’s evolving poverty reduction agenda – An assessment of poverty and inequality in China”, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department, East Asia and Pacific Region.

² Internal document from Hubei Provincial Poverty Reduction Bureau (2013).

Poverty status of children living in the contiguous poor areas of Hubei Province

This multi-dimensional poverty analysis attempts to focus on children living in the four contiguous regions, and to create a child poverty profile for children living in Hubei Province. The vision is for this analysis to contribute to current programmatic and policy design and implementation process that support the reduction of multi-dimensional child poverty in Hubei Province.

PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS

1. to apply the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) to the situation of children in Hubei's four regions;
2. to analyse the characteristics, disparities and drivers of child poverty in Hubei's four regions;
3. to provide findings that support the design and implementation of programmes and policies that will address child poverty in Hubei Province, in addition to providing a 'model' for inspiring similar applications of child poverty analyses in other provinces.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), "children are defined as anyone under the age of 18 years". Therefore, children aged 0-17 years in rural families of the four areas (Da Bie Mountains, Qin Ba Mountains, Wu Ling Mountains and Mu Fu Mountains) in Hubei Province were selected as the research subjects.

This research adopts the multi-dimensional poverty perspective in the definition and measurement of child poverty. As defined by UNICEF's *State of the World's Children* in 2005, "children living in poverty refer to those who 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 CRC, the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) established a series of dimensions and indicators which were used to evaluate children's basic survival and development. Based on the CRC and MDGs as well as the criteria of the MODA in the development of dimensions and indicators, this research selects the following eight dimensions to measure child poverty in China: nutrition, health, education, information, water, sanitation, housing and protection. These dimensions have significant

Map of the four surveyed Poverty Areas or 'Block Areas' in Hubei Province



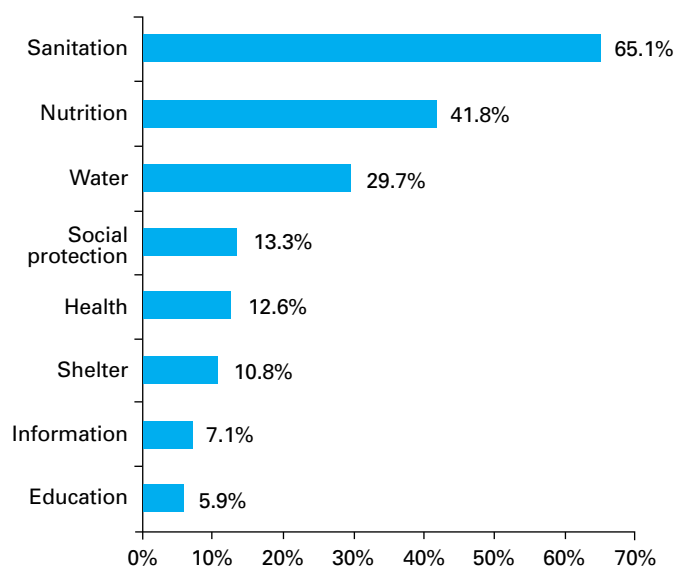
With reference to the Hubei map, the blue, green, and red areas are nationally identified as "battlefields of poverty alleviation", "clusters of poverty stricken counties", or "block areas" (i.e. Da Bie Mountains, Wu Ling Mountains, Qin Ba Mountains block areas). The yellow area (i.e. Mu Fu Mountain block area) is provincially identified as a poverty area.

influence on the survival and development of children. The table following shows the dimensions, indicators and thresholds that were developed for this MODA application for children in Hubei Province.

FINDINGS

By examining each dimension of child deprivation, the most severe problem appears in the dimensions of sanitation facilities, childhood nutrition and access to safe drinking water. In addition, the enrolment rate of pre-school-aged children is also very low.

1. Single Deprivation Analysis



Dimensions, indicators and thresholds for children in Hubei Province

Dimension	Indicators	Thresholds
Nutrition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stunting 2. Underweight 3. Anaemia 	Children are poor if they suffer from deprivations in any two of the three indicators
Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children under two-years-old are not immunised 2. Children aged 1-17 years did not receive any treatment when they suffered from respiratory problems or diarrhoea 	Children are poor in Health if they are deprived in any one of the two indicators
Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children aged 3-6 years did not receive pre-school education 2. Children aged 7-17 years are not in school 	Children are poor in Education if they are deprived in any one of the two indicators
Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No radio, TV, newspaper, computer or Internet 	Children are poor if they don't have any one of the items
Safe drinking water	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children can only use ground water, open well, river or lakes water 2. Children need more than 30 minutes to get water 	Children are poor if they are deprived in any one of the indicators
Sanitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No toilet or use earth open pit 2. No wash place 	Children are poor if they are deprived in any one of the indicators
Shelter	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children live in one room with four or more people together 2. Mud floor or grass roof 	Children are poor if they are deprived in any one of the indicators
Social protection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children under five-years-old did not have household registration status 2. No health insurance 	Children are poor if they are deprived in any one of the indicators

In Hubei's four poor mountain areas, 65.1 per cent of children suffer from severe deprivations of sanitation facilities. This finding implies that the government should prioritize improving children's access to sanitary facilities in the future by establishing flush public toilets in rural villages or within schools. In Hubei's four poor mountain areas, 41.8 per cent of children in Hubei's four mountain areas are still suffering from severe deprivations in nutrition, i.e., either being stunted or underweight or suffering from anaemia. Policy makers should pay more attention to providing effective nutritional programmes.

In Hubei's four poor mountain areas, 29.7 per cent of children still lack access to clean drinking water or spend a long time getting water. In the future, the Government should increase investment in public infrastructures especially to increase public water supply in remote areas, improve the water quality and reduce the time needed for children to access clean drinking water that is critical for their survival and development. In education, the key problem is that young children have a low enrolment rate in pre-school, which signifies that early childhood education should be a focus.

2. Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis

This research investigates the multi-dimensional child deprivation headcount ratio (M_0) with different poverty cut offs (K value). When $K=1$, 86.9 per cent of children suffer at least one deprivation, the average deprivation intensity (A) is 0.269, and therefore, the multi-dimensional child deprivation headcount ratio (M_0) is 0.234. With the poverty cut off increasing, the multi-dimensional deprivation rate declines. When K is greater than five, there are only 35 children who are deprived in at least five dimensions, accounting for 0.8 per cent.

The multi-dimensional child deprivation headcount ratio M_0 can be separated into several components by regional or profiling variables. Using M_0 to make regional comparisons, Mu Fu Mountains had the highest multi-dimensional child deprivation headcount ratio, followed by Wu Ling Mountains, Da Bie Mountains and Qin Ba Mountains. When making comparisons by age, children under five-years-old have a higher M_0 . When looking at gender disparities, there is no obvious difference in the poverty status

between boys and girls. The Mo is higher for children who are left behind at home as a result of their parents migrating. Finally, the Mo disaggregated by ethnicity shows that the Miao people have the highest multi-dimensional child deprivation headcount ratio.

In addition, the multi-dimensional deprivation index Mo can be also analysed by looking at the contribution of each deprivation dimension to the overall ratio. Sanitation deprivation accounts for the greatest proportion, followed by nutrition, water, protection, health, housing, information and education. With the poverty cut off increasing, the rate of multi-dimensional deprivation declines, and the average contribution rates of education and information deprivation increase, whereas nutrition, water and sanitation deprivation contribute less.

3. Drivers of child poverty-risk factor analysis

This research analyses the risk factor of child deprivation from three aspects, namely, person, family and community. At the personal level, the age of the child has great impact on the deprivation rate in all dimensions, and children aged 0-5 years are more likely to suffer from poverty. The children who are left behind have greater risks of being deprived from water or sanitation. Children from Miao are also more likely to be poor. At the family level, type of household, education level of household, family scale, number of children and per capita annual income all have varying influences on both single deprivation and multiple deprivation headcount ratios. At the community level, there are significant differences

between the four mountainous areas in all eight dimensions. Children living in the Mu Fu Mountains have a greater probability of being in poverty.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The analysis presents a number of important findings on the multiple deprivations that children living in Hubei Province face. While further analysis would provide additional evidence on the poverty situation, a set of policy implications can be made based on the findings illustrated in this analysis, as follows:

1. Findings based on Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis for children should be the basis of relevant interventions featured in national and regional poverty reduction strategies.
2. Policy makers should focus on improving access and the quality of essential services for children, and design integrated social protection programmes addressing the needs of the most excluded and disadvantaged children.
3. An institution should be established to measure, implement and monitor the multiple deprivations faced by children and their families.
4. Coordinate with civil society and organizations outside these four regions to enhance cooperation and support between regions.
5. Ensure policies and programmes are inclusive of the most excluded and disadvantaged groups.



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