YOUNG LIVES RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND POVERTY

Childhood Poverty

Multidisciplinary Approaches

Edited by
Jo Boyden and Michael Bourdillon

Oxford Department of International Development

Childhood Poverty

Palgrave Studies on Children and Development

Series editors:

Michael Bourdillon, Emeritus Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe.
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There has been increased attention to children and development, and children's development, in international policy debates in recent years, reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the child-centred focus of United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. This is based first on the interests of children according to their human rights, and second, a recognition of the importance of children for societal development. However, despite this increasing focus on policies and programmes (and budgets) to support children, relatively little has been written to draw together the lessons of development policy and practice as well as research into children's development over the life-course.

This series will start off with a mini series of three books from Young Lives, a unique 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in developing countries. It will also incorporate other edited or single-author volumes, from a range of disciplines, which relate to and reflect the work being done by Young Lives on children and development, but broaden debates into the wider childhood studies field. A particular strength will be the ability to bring together material that links issues from developed and developing countries, as they affect children. As such the series will present original and valuable new data for an important and growing field of scholarship.

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and

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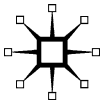
Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty



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Introduction

Michael Bourdillon

This book is the first of a series of three books arising from, *Young Lives Research on Children and Poverty*, a Young Lives study on how poverty affects children's lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century, both their current experience of it and the way it will shape their future life trajectories. At least since the work of Amartya Sen in the early 1980s, it has been accepted that poverty cannot be understood simply in terms of income. Adequate livelihood includes people's 'entitlement' to necessary goods and empowerment to exercise some control over their own life. Crises that damage lives and result in inadequate livelihoods affect people differentially, and may continue to affect them years after the initial shock. Analysis that can effectively guide policy towards enabling poor people to improve their circumstances and opportunities must disaggregate poverty and examine the detail of who is affected and how, as well as the factors that promote or constrain personal and/or structural change.

According to UNICEF, a billion children are severely deprived of at least one of the essential goods and services they require to survive, grow, and develop.[1] Further, children are generally more vulnerable, and the effects of poverty in childhood are frequently lasting, sometimes permanently affecting children's growth and cognitive development (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). The children of poor families are more likely to end up being poor, for these reasons and on account of factors in the social environment that put them at a disadvantage. So giving priority to children and the alleviation of childhood poverty is not just about reducing suffering; it is about breaking poverty cycles that trap whole families, communities, and countries in the long term.

There has been considerable growth in recent years in research into the different ways in which children experience poverty, the mechanisms by which this may have long-term detrimental effects on their

lives, as well as the protective factors that can promote their resilience. Despite the welcome growth in child poverty research, most studies have limited ability to address fundamental questions by virtue of their narrow geographical focus (notably poverty in rich societies), by their specific methodologies (ranging from large-scale surveys through to in-depth ethnographies), and by their design (most often cross-sectional accounts of poverty at the time of data collection).

The Young Lives study is a step towards filling this lacuna and establishing this priority, by following two cohorts of children in poor communities in four developing countries over a period of 15 years.

The volume introduces issues of central concern to Young Lives through a number of chapters by distinguished scholars who have researched and published on them. It also shows how some of these issues appear in practice through essays reporting on early rounds of the Young Lives research and related research in other contexts and countries. This first book of the Young Lives research series covers the earliest phases of data collection, when the two Young Lives cohorts were growing through early and middle childhood (up to age 12). Future volumes in the series will look at later phases of the life cycle, including the outcomes of poverty in early adulthood.

Children and poverty in a historical context

In nineteenth-century Europe and North America, there was growing concern for children of the poor, together with attempts to provide them with education to enhance their constructive role in society. Early in the twentieth century, Eglantyne Jebb inspired the globalization of the 'child-saving' movement, and since then there has been growing attention to children in international policy debates, reflected in recent decades by the International Year of the Child in 1979, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. This has resulted in a greater focus on children in development cooperation, massive investment in services for children in developing countries, and the establishment of a children's rights framework. There are two aspects to this attention: one is the interests of children according to their human rights; a second is recognition of the importance of children for societal development.

Rights and protection

A key step in this process was the acceptance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 and its rapid

ratification by virtually every country in the world. Although Young Lives was conceived within this context, it was designed as a study concerned with childhood poverty rather than directly with child rights: analysis and conclusions are based on empirical data collected, rather than on predetermined norms. Poverty, however, directly impinges on many fundamental rights, such as rights to nutrition, shelter, and education.

Concerns about children's poverty are consequently closely linked to concerns about children's rights, which therefore must be central to the work of Young Lives. The programme's approach to understanding childhood poverty draws on the four guiding principles of the CRC: the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all matters concerning children; their rights to life, survival, and development; no unjustified discrimination; and respect for the views of the child.

The interpretation and application of the CRC influence the design and impact of rights-based interventions in the lives of children and their families. While human rights are universal, the CRC also emphasizes the importance of traditions and cultural values. Young Lives is in a particularly strong position to evaluate how policies and their application based on particular interpretations of children's rights affect the lives of children in specific contexts. This will encourage interventions based on evidence rather on than assumed norms.

Concern for the rights of children also affects how research is conducted, as discussed in the chapter by Virginia Morrow (Chapter 2). In particular, Young Lives places children's views at the centre of its research and recognizes children as active social agents. The Young Lives study highlights questions of children's experiences, well-being, and the inequalities between different groups of children.

Children and societal development

Attention to children is crucial to the development of a productive society. If their physical development is impeded, the productive capacity of the future workforce will diminish, and society is likely to incur additional costs. Similarly, impeding children's cognitive development diminishes their life chances and future productivity, especially in contemporary economies that are increasingly reliant on ever more complex technology (see Qvortrup 2001). As populations expand and cultures mingle, it can no longer be taken for granted that children will pick up the social skills necessary for constructive interaction from their immediate environment. Since many parents do not have all the resources necessary to ensure that their children achieve their full

potential, attention to children of poor families becomes a key issue in societal development.

Much public attention and literature, however, has focused on policy (World Bank 2007; UNICEF 2007). There has been less attention to understanding the situations of children in particular contexts and the political economy of these contexts. Although support has been provided for education and health and some child welfare, these involve government ministries with little control over finance, and even this is threatened by the current global economic crisis. The MDGs have indeed improved the volume and quantity of international aid, but questions remain about how appropriate and sustainable this is, and how we should address fundamental inequalities that persist. The emphasis of the MDGs on increasing coverage has not been matched by attention to quality: in particular, the health and education services available to poorer children are often of an inadequate standard, and attention has largely focused on areas that are relatively easy to assess and address, such as health for children under 5 years old and primary education for those aged 6 to 12. Gains in child survival have been dramatic and important but a narrow focus on survival, protection, and schooling neglects other dimensions of children's lives and development. A further challenge is to move beyond the critical threshold: reaching the last 20 per cent of children costs as much as providing for the first 80 per cent, and is far more complex. Related to this is frequent failure to deal adequately with bias towards urban areas or with gender inequalities.

The MDGs are a form of high-level monitoring of macro trends. But because they are about incidence and averages, they miss vital information about inequality and how the poorest and most vulnerable populations are doing. Elaborate research tools monitoring macro-level inputs and outputs rely heavily on broad and general indicators that often miss the specific situations of children in poor communities. And specific issues facing children are often lost when national data sets are used that consider only households, and fail to consider inequalities within them (see, for example, Saporiti 1994). The dominance of cross-sectional studies of 'vulnerable' groups gives little sense of life trajectories and the processes by which people live with risk and respond to adversity. Similarly, large-scale studies often neglect the ways in which different cultures mediate decisions and expectations concerning children, children's own beliefs, aspirations, and decisions, and the way 'modern' childhoods co-exist with more traditional influences.

To support development interventions and policy, research is needed that links the daily situation of poor communities to macro-economic and political structures, in order to identify the causes and effects of poverty within a life-course framework. Research must take into account the complex processes, dynamics, and multiple influences in children's lives, learning from the children's own knowledge and perspectives. Such research can provide a bridge between generalized analysis of large-scale data and specific interpretations appropriate to the contexts in which children live, which in turn can feed into policies that might help to break cycles of poverty.

Young Lives

Young Lives[2] is a study 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 to reducing the inequality that underpins poverty. It is designed to provide credible evidence to inform the development and implementation of future policies and practices for children.

The study is based in four countries: Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru, and Vietnam. In each country, 20 sites were selected to reflect diversity, including urban and rural areas, communities with different livelihoods, and sites with different ethnic groups. Although the study sites include a range of wealth levels, the focus is on relatively poor communities and therefore the sample is not representative of the country as a whole. In each site, roughly equal numbers of randomly selected boys and girls participate. In each country, the study incorporates two cohorts of children: 2,000 children born in 2001–02, and 1,000 children born in 1994–95. The study will have five major survey rounds following the children at three-year intervals. Survey questionnaires were designed to provide material that can easily be compared both between the four countries and over time. They collect a wide variety of indicators on these children's well-being over time, as well as information on their caregivers and the circumstances they face. The first survey round took place in 2002, Round 2 in 2006, and Round 3 in 2009, which was being analysed as this book was being compiled. Two further rounds are planned for 2013 and 2016.

Soon after the study started, it became clear that more intensive qualitative research was needed to complement the quantitative survey data. Starting in 2007, detailed studies have been carried out in selected sites, and sub-studies prompted by questions raised by the survey data.

Research thus incorporates methods from different disciplines, including both numerical analysis of survey data (dominant in economics and some psychology) and detailed studies of children and communities using ethnographic and related techniques. The next chapter in this volume (Chapter 1), by Brock and Knowles, outlines the methodology of Young Lives.

A feature of this research programme is its multidimensional view of poverty and holistic understanding of children's well-being and development. Many studies focus on particular aspects of life, such as nutrition, health, education, income, or psychological development. Such approaches are facilitated by the fact that each dimension is largely the interest of a particular discipline, with its appropriate methodology; but they can easily miss the connections between the domains of children's development or aspects of their lives. Bringing the different dimensions together, however, requires combining disciplines with their sometimes very different methodologies and different forms of expression and communication: in particular, it is a challenge to make numerical data analysis accessible to those used to more observational research methods.

Emerging narratives

Although only half the expected survey rounds have been completed at this stage, there are four key narratives emerging from the ongoing research.

The first concerns the *multifaceted outcomes of deprivation in early childhood*. Negative effects of undernutrition and other adversities early in childhood are persistent (to at least the age of 12) across diverse domains of children's development: these include physical growth, cognitive development (especially as measured by school performance), and factors relating to psychosocial well-being (such as a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem). While this persistence is well known and widely researched (see chapters by Engle (Chapter 8), Wachs (Chapter 9), Behrman (Chapter 6), and Hoddinott (Chapter 3) in this volume), Young Lives is looking at links between developmental domains that have received little, if any, attention elsewhere: for example, Stefan Dercon and Alan Sanchez (forthcoming) link early nutrition problems, as reflected in stunting, with later impairment in cognitive skills and psychosocial competencies – in this case self-efficacy, self-esteem, and educational aspirations.

Second, in relation to *informal and formal learning*, Young Lives researchers are tracing important processes that focus on competencies

such as social skills, life skills, and collective morality, recognizing that these informal processes offers a more holistic picture of children's learning and development than would come from studying their formal learning alone. At the same time, Young Lives research reveals just how significant formal school learning has become during the first decade of the twenty-first century, in terms of near universal access to primary school for most of the sample. The importance of tracking the implementation of MDGs and Education-For-All goals within the sample is reflected in priorities for data collection, which now includes a further component to assess the features and quality of schools attended by Young Lives children. The school data will combine with household data, including child interviews and cognitive and educational achievement tests to provide a rich mine of education data, comprehensively capturing the changing and varied role of school in the lives of children and families. Parents' hopes for their children's education are remarkably high, but with a wide gulf between aspirations, the poor quality of schools that many are able to access, and the consequent variability in learning outcomes. Commitment to school attendance incurs financial costs for households, even where children attend government schools. Children also face dilemmas, as they struggle to keep up with family and work alongside their schooling. The evidence around these struggles and issues of school quality highlights the dilemmas for many children and families, around how far investing in school will deliver the promise of 'a better life'. These dilemmas also raise the question how far spending the precious years of childhood in inadequate or inappropriate formal education may be de-skilling children, by weakening their knowledge of traditional livelihoods while failing to deliver skills needed for modern economies, especially where there are limited employment opportunities.

The third narrative emerging is about persistent poverty and inequality (Dornan 2010a, 2010b; Pells 2010). The early rounds of research covered periods of macro-economic growth (2002–2007), when the whole sample benefited (to some degree) from improved services and infrastructure. Nevertheless, inequality persists and households with certain characteristics are becoming increasingly trapped in poverty. Differences based on ethnicity and caste, urban or rural residence, region, and family wealth affect children's life-chances and the effectiveness of policy in delivering better outcomes for all children. Young Lives research is producing considerable information about the processes whereby inequality becomes perpetuated across life cycles, domestic cycles, and generations. In Vietnam, for example, households with

low maternal education are becoming increasingly concentrated among the poorest quintile (Le Thuc, 2008: vii). In this volume, Santiago Cueto et al. (Chapter 15) show how indigenous language speakers are disadvantaged in Peru's education system, which overlaps with disadvantages experienced by people in rural areas. Jo Boyden and Gina Crivello (Chapter 10) consider disadvantages relating to tribe and caste in Andhra Pradesh; they show that relations of power affect experiences of risk; and rural–urban inequalities in Ethiopia appear in the chapter by Tassew Woldehanna (Chapter 7). Round 3 data will add to this a discussion of the impacts of the recent and current global economic crisis.

Fourth, there is a growing narrative on the relationship between poverty and other forms of risk. In this volume, Theodore Wachs (Chapter 9) shows in general how poverty can result in cumulative risk with detrimental consequences for children, and Jo Boyden and Gina Crivello (Chapter 10) examine risk in Andhra Pradesh, relating it to structures of power and considering children's experiences and responses. This important narrative will receive more attention in future rounds, paying attention to levels of both household and individual children. Poverty and related deprivations comprise significant sources of risk for children worldwide. Poorer households in the Young Lives sample experience a higher burden of risk and a greater diversity of forms of risk than those that are better off: in particular, they suffer more frequently and more seriously from illness (which sometimes results in the death of a parent), and are more vulnerable to environmental hazards. Often the development and well-being of poor children is doubly compromised by the interaction of multiple hardships. Household risks clearly interact with and exacerbate poverty, and Young Lives data can establish some causality in this process. At the same time, research can assess whether social protection has beneficial effects and in what ways. We shall also be looking at whether household risk correlates significantly with child protection concerns, although the latter can only be analysed through qualitative research.

Key themes

The Young Lives programme has identified three major areas of focus that provide structure to the research and policy analysis, and indeed to this volume. The themes are not mutually exclusive. Many topics and research projects impinge on more than one of them, and each incorporates a variety of disciplines and methodologies. But they do focus on different levels of analysis, and different areas of policy and intervention.

The first theme is *poverty dynamics and mobility,* introduced and illustrated in the second part of this volume. The theme includes measuring different dimensions of poverty and examining correlations and interactions between them, focusing on the levels of family and community rather than that of the individual. It considers how households become trapped in or escape from poverty, and the importance of social protection measures. Survey data and statistical analysis are the dominant methods in this theme, although as the chapter by Stefan Dercon (Chapter 4) illustrates, surveys and their analysis need to be informed by detailed qualitative research.

The second theme, *children's experiences of poverty,* the subject of Part III, explores the outcomes of childhood poverty at the level of the children themselves. It looks at how poverty and risk affect their physical and psychosocial well-being. However, the well-being of children is not simply about the presence or scarcity of material resources. The social environment influences how available resources meet children's expectations, and how children learn to make the best use of what resources are available. This theme therefore includes children's responses to poverty. Understanding their experiences of poverty requires detailed knowledge of their lives and their worlds; it also requires researchers to find ways of encouraging the children to express their own perspectives. The illustrative chapters on this theme show detailed ethnographic research, often supported by survey data, which indicate the prevalence of issues raised.

The third theme is *learning, time use, and life transitions*. Much of the data on this theme recount children's progress through formal systems of pre-school and school, but the theme includes other activities that contribute to social and cognitive development and learning various life skills. The theme also examines how the choices made by children and their families around children's use of time affect their transitions through childhood and into adulthood. There are four chapters in the fourth section of this book on this theme, which will receive more emphasis in later volumes reporting on children as they grow older and move through school.

Policy

Research into children's poverty is of little use if it is unable to influence policy and intervention. For this, it must produce evidence that is convincing and accessible both to policymakers and to the general public, and that responds to their current interests and priorities. Young Lives

research spans aspects of children's lives that are key priority areas for international and national policy, and the programme is concerned to bring its findings to the attention of policymakers, particularly when they challenge orthodoxies and open up new questions for debate.

The contexts for policy in each of the four study countries, as well as internationally, are constantly evolving over the 15-year life span of the Young Lives study. The context of economic growth in the early rounds of research raised questions about inequality. Two rounds of research later, the study countries, along with much of the rest of the world, are experiencing the shocks of a global financial crisis with ramifications for food prices, household incomes, aid budgets, and public spending. Round 3 is revealing that overall conditions for children have continued to improve despite the crisis, but inequality remains (and is growing in some cases) and vulnerability to shocks is very evident – with possible long-term consequences. Nevertheless, new questions arise. What are the impacts of this global crisis on children and young people? How will it affect global targets for poverty reduction over the medium and longer term? To be useful, collection and analysis of the data must respond to these shifting conditions, and to the priorities that they demand.

The timeframe of the Young Lives research mirrors that of the MDGs and the global targets of the movement to provide Education For All. By taking a multi-sector approach, the programme collects evidence that can both challenge and support progress in many of these global priority areas, as well as highlighting vital interconnections that are often missed.

From addressing child malnutrition and mortality, to improving education quality, a consistent message arising from the Young Lives research is that a focus on children and equity, along with a multidimensional understanding of poverty, can help to tackle overall poverty and move towards more equitable development and growth.

Part I: methodology

The volume begins with four chapters on methodology. In Chapter 1, Karen Brock and Caroline Knowles explain how and why the approach of Young Lives was constructed.

While much attention has been given to developing ethical guidelines for research, there is little literature on their practice. In Chapter 2, Virginia Morrow recounts difficulties that arose when accepted ethical guidelines were applied in the Young Lives field research. She shows that ethics need to be applied contextually. Misunderstanding between

researchers and informants, together with changing circumstances in the communities, mean that approaches must be constantly adapted between rounds.

There are so many dimensions of poverty impeding all spheres of child development that it is difficult to determine causal relationships between an early privation and later growth. In Chapter 3, John Hoddinott discusses statistical techniques that can help to establish such relationships, and in particular, how they have enabled researchers to draw conclusions from past studies about the deleterious effects of early childhood under-nutrition.

Before moving into dynamics of childhood poverty, we consider the methodological problem of measuring poverty, which is more difficult than the uncontroversial nature of the concept might suggest. It is relatively simple to estimate formal income, by counting, for example, those openly receiving less than $1.25 a day – one of the measures used by the World Bank. However, informal or illegal income is often omitted from such counting; indeed it is often deliberately kept hidden. Besides, earnings do not always reflect consumption and are not therefore a reliable guide on whether or not children are deprived in any way. The last argument applies also to measurements of wealth or assets. Initially, Young Lives developed an index of poverty based on assets, which it still uses in some analysis; but the relevance of assets is not readily comparable between countries nor between, say, rural and urban areas. So Young Lives, has largely replaced this measure of wealth by attention to household consumption and expenditure as a more appropriate indicator of poverty. This is calculated as the sum of the estimated value of food and non-food items (including what is bought and home-grown, and gifts and exchanges, but excluding capital items and one-off expenditures); the total is divided by the number of people in the household. Even this calculation takes little account of experience and expectations, of inequalities within households, and of dimensions of agency by which people can control and improve their lives. Measures of income or expenditure can provide a gross indication of progress (or lack of it) in fighting poverty, but poverty has many dimensions, and counting by any one dimension excludes some people who are deprived in other ways.

In the fourth methodology chapter, Stefan Dercon uses Young Lives data to argue that even complex multidimensional measures are unreliable for purposes of policy or intervention. If many dimensions are included, the target population becomes too large; if dimensions are limited for counting purposes, some people in need of support are excluded. In particular, children's experiences and perceptions of

poverty comprise important dimensions for the outcomes of poverty; they are difficult to count and do not correlate exactly with dimensions that are easier to count. Multidimensional data such as those collected in Young Lives research are essential to understanding the interaction between dimensions, which in turn can indicate where policy and intervention might focus; but target groups need to be identified by more focused measures, which are also needed for accurate monitoring.

Notes

1. http://www.unicef.org/mdg/poverty.html (accessed 26 January 2011).
2. Young Lives is located within the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford. It is a consortium of research partners in the four study countries, supported by an international advisory board of experts.

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Part I
Methodology