

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

Empirical evidence of child poverty and deprivation in Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child poverty
Deprivation
Poverty headcount
Poverty depth
Poverty severity
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Development economists and policy makers have in recent times focused attention on child poverty as a crucial aspect of poverty. The importance of the analysis of child poverty partly lies in the fact that children are the most vulnerable group in every society. This study used two poverty lines and the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke index to analyze extreme and overall child poverty headcount, depth and severity in Nigeria. The study also used the headcount ratio to analyze the extent of child deprivation in education, health, nutrition, child protection, water and sanitation. The study was based on the 2010 Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey (HNLSS) and the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Abuja, Nigeria. The study revealed that 23.22% of children in Nigeria were in extreme child poverty while 70.31% of children in the country were in overall child poverty. The study further showed that there was pronounced child deprivation in education, health, nutrition, child protection, water and sanitation. Both child poverty and child deprivation were more pronounced in the rural sector than in the urban sector and in Northern Nigeria than in Southern Nigeria. Therefore, the Nigerian government should take adequate steps to eradicate child poverty and obliterate all forms of child deprivation in Nigeria – particularly deprivation in basic needs. In taking such steps, more attention should be focused on rural areas and Northern Nigeria.

1. Introduction

A major socio-economic problem afflicting many countries of the world, particularly the developing regions of the globe, is poverty. Interestingly, with the rapid and unprecedented increase in globalization, poverty has reduced significantly in the world both in number and in proportion (World Bank, 2016). Unfortunately, not all regions have made remarkable progress in reducing poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa has lagged behind other regions with regard to poverty reduction (World Bank, 2016). In Nigeria, poverty has increased over the years – for instance, from 27.2% to 69% between 1980 and 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

A crucial aspect of poverty that has attracted the attention of development experts, researchers and policy makers is child poverty. As observed in Chen and Corak (2008), child poverty has continued to increase in its dominance in discussions and analyses of poverty. Several reasons have been given for the crucial importance of a child-focused approach in poverty analysis. These reasons include the following. First, poverty makes it impossible for children to have their fundamental human rights. Severe or extreme poverty which occurs over a prolonged period can stunt and distort children's development and destroy their opportunities for optimum fulfillment in life including the roles they are expected to successively play as they grow older in the family, community and society (Gordon, Nandy, Pantazis, Pemberton, & Townsend, 2003). Second, children are at a higher risk of poverty irrespective of

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place and time; children largely depend on their direct environment for the provision of their basic needs. Given that they are not independent economic actors by themselves, they fully depend on the distribution of resources by their parents or guardians within the framework of household and community arrangement (Roelen & Gassmann, 2008). Third, as children grow up in poverty, they become trapped in the web of the phenomenon, and are most likely to remain in the poverty trap as they become adults; thus, it is said that poverty often presents itself as a vicious cycle, causing children to be trapped in it from birth onwards (Roelen, Gassmann, & de Neubourg, 2010). Fourth, children are affected differently from poverty and deprivation when compared to adults. The basic needs of children are different from those of adults; for instance, the dietary requirements of children are different from those of adults. (Roelen & Gassmann, 2008; Roelen et al., 2010); also the educational requirements as well as other requirements for protection of children are different from those of adults. Thus, children-specific approach in poverty and deprivation analyses can highlight and emphasize those basic needs that are particularly very important for children and their development (Roelen & Gassmann, 2008).

The right to a decent standard of living is recognized globally as an inalienable right of every child irrespective of where he/she resides. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child contains various articles that address virtually all aspects of the rights and well being of children. One of the articles states that governments recognize the right of every child to a standard of living that is sufficient for the child's physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development (Corak, 2005). When children are shielded from experiencing poverty and various forms of deprivation they are most likely to grow and develop optimally, and maximize their full potentials.

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, a major action taken by the country's government that has direct bearing on children's poverty and deprivation was the adoption of the Child Rights Act in 2003; this was done to domesticate the International Convention on the Rights of the Child as designed by the United Nations. The Child Rights Act was intended to guarantee desirable welfare and standard of living for children in Nigeria; it attempted to provide adequate security for children in Nigeria from poverty and various forms of deprivation.

It is regrettable to observe here that despite the adoption of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria, there are indicators that show that many children in the country still wallow in poverty and suffer various forms of deprivation. For instance, the rates of infant and under-five mortality as well as the levels of stunting, wasting and underweight among children have remained high over the years (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005; UNDP, 2015, 2016; UNICEF, 2015, 2016; World Bank, 2016). Thus, there is need for a more concerted effort and paradigm shift to ensure that child poverty and child deprivation are vigorously tackled and tremendously reduced or even eliminated. To pave the way for the country to achieve this, there is urgent need for adequate child-focused approach in the analysis of poverty and deprivation.

Conceptually, it is pertinent to note that child poverty is usually associated with household poverty. This is largely because children live mostly in households and depend mainly on the conditions in the households (Lewit, Terman, & Behrman, 1997). Child poverty is popularly defined as all persons below a certain age, usually 18 years, living in low income, low consumption or low expenditure households as a proportion of all children below the stated age living in various households (Roelen & Gassmann, 2008; UNICEF, 2012). Child poverty may also be defined at individual level. A person below a certain age, usually 18 years, whose individual-equivalent income, consumption or expenditure is less than a predetermined minimum acceptable level is said to be in child poverty (Chen & Corak, 2008; Corak, 2005; Gordon et al., 2003; Roelen & Gassmann, 2008). It is worth noting that given the fact that little is known about the income, consumption or expenditure needs of children in most developing countries and that these needs may vary by age, gender and location, it then follows that any income, consumption or expenditure threshold for children would have to be set at an arbitrary level (Gordon et al., 2003). Gordon et al. (2003) further noted that household-based income, consumption or expenditure poverty analyses are usually based on the assumption that there is equal sharing of resources within a household. But this assumption is most unlikely to be correct for many poor and non-poor households with children. In many poor households, parents usually sacrifice their own needs in order to ensure that their children have some of the things they (the children) need; thus, in such households, children are usually allocated a higher or disproportionate share of household resources. On the contrary, in many non-poor households, parents may spend less than expected on their children in order not to corrupt the children (Gordon et al., 2003). Despite the shortcomings associated with child poverty analyses based on money-metric approach, such approach has remained very popular (Chen & Corak, 2008; Corak, 2005; Roelen & Gassmann, 2008; UNICEF, 2012). In measuring child poverty, it is popular to set the poverty line as 50% of median real income per capita or per adult equivalence or individual equivalence income, consumption or expenditure for all persons in a country (Chen & Corak, 2008; UNICEF, 2012). The poverty line in child poverty measurement can also be made to coincide with the official poverty line of a country (Dickens & Ellwood, 2003; UNICEF, 2005). Child poverty can also be assessed by considering the extent of children's deprivation in basic needs such as food, shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, education, information and other basic social services (Gordon et al., 2003; Minujin, Delamonica, Davidziuk, & Gonzalez, 2006; Roelen & Gassmann, 2008).

It is instructive to state here that the concepts of poverty and deprivation are tightly linked. However, there appears to be a consensus among scholars that the concept of deprivation covers the various conditions – independent of income – experienced by people who are poor, while the concept of poverty refers to lack of income and other resources which make those conditions inescapable or at least highly likely (Gordon et al., 2003).

Studies on Nigeria that relate to child poverty and child deprivation are very scanty. They include Bamiduro and Ogwumike (2009), Aliyu and Garba (2012); Adetola and Olufemi (2012). Bamiduro and Ogwumike used a deprivation based approach in analyzing child poverty in Nigeria; the study focused on children's access to nutrition, education, shelter, information, water and sanitation. The study utilized various data sets such as Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 1990 and 2003, and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of 1999 and 2007. The study revealed that there were pronounced deprivation in the various basic needs for children in Nigeria. Aliyu and Garba (2012) analyzed children's deprivation in various basic needs associated

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