

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF UNDERSTANDING FOR CHILD POVERTY

Rumiana Budjeva

Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
r.budjeva@gmail.com

Abstract: The problem of defining the concept of "child poverty", despite its significance, has so far not really been on the agenda of socio-economic and sociological theory. The concept of "child poverty" is used in various aspects, but without giving a single definition of its nature and scope. The definition of child poverty presupposes a preliminary clarification of the existing conceptual approaches to this phenomenon. There are a number of international analyzes and studies available in the specialized literature, clarifying the nature of the problem of child poverty to varying degrees and from different countries. What should be borne in mind, however, is that, in most cases, the available definitions and analyzes of child poverty are characterized by a certain degree of fragmentation and self-determination, consistent with a pre-defended thesis, idea or European trend. In attempting to include more different dimensions of child poverty, there is a danger of blurring the essence of the concept, and it is mainly associated with material deprivation. Lack of hearing their opinions, physical abuse, family sections, poor environmental conditions and others are serious obstacles to the full childhood experience and the adequate development of children, but they are not necessarily poverty, nor are they related to lack of income or basic needs. This article discusses how different organizations - academic, public, private, local and international - define and measure child poverty; what are their suggestions for responding to the specific needs of children and how it could reduce the impact of poverty on them. The main purpose of the report is to clarify the views of the debate on poverty and to focus attention on children living in poverty. In this way, it will be possible to reveal the specificity of child poverty, which is not only an economic, moral and ethical problem for the countries of Europe and the world, but it is also the first step on the way to reducing this phenomenon. Child poverty is not just a general violation of children's rights. In the long run, it also leads to poverty among adults through the so-called "A vicious circle of poverty". However, in order to ensure fully childhood and development of children and to realize their rights in practice, poverty reduction strategies must take into account the specific needs and needs of children. The conceptual approaches discussed in this report cannot be considered as a comprehensive exposition of the existing definitions. However, they share common elements: voting rights, participation, multidimensional, etc. They recognize that poverty is a phenomenon with many faces and dimensions and cannot be reduced to monetary measures. Organizations that work directly on child poverty issues without exception consider it a multifaceted problem that requires complex strategies to address its manifestations.

Keywords: child poverty, deprivation, child rights, "vicious circle of poverty"

1. INTRODUCTION

Child poverty is widespread in most European countries. There are a number of statistically internationally comparable surveys, reports and opinions that outline the scope, dimensions and different quantitative and qualitative aspects of this phenomenon. Such studies are, for example, studies of SILC [1], UNICEF [2]; the study of Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson [3]; the study of Baschieri and Falkingham [5]; a study by the European Commission [6], as well as the study on poverty and social exclusion made by Eurobarometer [7]. According to Eurostat data in 2007, the relative share of children living in poverty in the European Union (EU 27) is 19%. The lowest levels were recorded in countries such as Denmark, Finland and Slovenia, and respectively the highest in Italy, Romania, Spain, and Portugal. For Bulgaria, child poverty for the same period is 18% [8].

As it can be seen, poverty is a serious social problem for Bulgaria. One of the most important consequences of poverty is that it leads to social exclusion, which in turn is a prerequisite for increasing poverty. In essence, social exclusion binds material deprivation with participation in social life and the enjoyment of social rights. Poverty isolates people and prevents them from taking an active part in public life. That is why poverty and social exclusion go hand in hand. Social isolation occurs when, for a number of reasons, individuals and groups fail to gain access to or take advantage of the opportunities offered by societies and economies.

The problem of wealth and poverty, as two antipodes in the system of social differentiation, is of utmost importance for sociology as a science. The essence of the notion of poverty, from a sociological point of view, suggests that there is a social differentiation in terms of living conditions. This differentiation has different sides: income, wealth, form of economic activity, educational, professional, gender, age, ethnicity, regional etc. Poverty as a reflection of a certain state or process affecting a part of society or society as a whole is associated

not only with the lack of resources to meet basic human needs but also with limited access to social services such as education, healthcare, social protection and free participation in civil society, social isolation and violated or unrealized rights. However, child poverty is not just a violation of children's rights. In the long run, it also leads to poverty among adults through the so-called "A vicious circle of poverty". However, in order to ensure full childhood and development of children and to realize their rights in practice, poverty reduction strategies must take into account the specific needs and needs of children. The conceptual approaches discussed in this report cannot be considered as a comprehensive exposition of the existing definitions. However, they share common elements: voting rights, participation, multi-dimensionality, etc. They recognize that poverty is a phenomenon with many faces and dimensions and cannot be reduced to monetary measures. Organizations that work directly on child poverty issues without exception consider it a multifaceted problem that requires complex strategies to address its manifestations.

2. THE NEED FOR DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD POVERTY

Child poverty belongs to the circle of the most painful problems facing Bulgaria in terms of the particular place and importance that this category of population has for the future development of society. In recent years our country has been characterized by a deteriorated demographic structure, consisting in a permanent decrease in the population of under-working age, increased migratory processes and a progressive increase in the share of persons in over-working age. The problem of aging is relevant for all EU countries, but it is particularly acute in Bulgaria. That is why it is extremely important to pay special attention to children as well as to study the situation in which they grow and develop; on the relationship between poverty and the possible deviations in their socialization, behavior and future that it causes.

The problem of defining the concept of "child poverty", despite its significance, has so far not really been on the agenda of socio-economic and sociological theory. The concept of "child poverty" is used in various aspects, but without giving a single definition of its nature and scope. The definition of child poverty implies a preliminary clarification of the existing conceptual approaches to this phenomenon. There are a number of international analyzes and studies available in the specialized literature, clarifying the nature of the problem of child poverty to varying degrees and from different countries. In this regard, it must be acknowledged that the greatest merit of defining the concept of child poverty is the efforts of various organizations around the world who work most broadly in the area of well-being and protection of children's rights: UNICEF, The Christian Children's Fund (CCF), Save the Children UK, Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC), Save the Children Sweden, The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), etc. The published studies, analyzes and articles constitute a significant part of the literature, interpreting the concepts of "child poverty", "deprivation", "vulnerability" and others. What should be borne in mind, however, is that, in most cases, the available definitions and analyzes of child poverty are characterized by a certain degree of fragmentation and self-determination, consistent with a pre-defended thesis, idea or European trend. In attempting to include more different dimensions of child poverty, there is a danger of blurring the essence of the concept, and it is mainly associated with material deprivation. Lack of voice, physical abuse, family sections, bad environmental conditions, etc. are serious obstacles to the full childhood experience and the adequate development of children, but they are not necessarily poverty, nor are they related to lack of income or basic needs. This report discusses how different organizations - academic, public, private, local and international - define and measure child poverty; what are their suggestions for responding to the specific needs of children and how it could reduce the impact of poverty on them. The main purpose of the report is to clarify the views of the debate on poverty and to focus attention on children living in poverty. In this way, it will be possible to reveal the specificity of child poverty, which is not only an economic, moral and ethical problem for the countries of Europe and the world, but it is also the first step on the way to reducing this phenomenon.

3. MONETARY APPROACH TO MEASURING POVERTY

Measuring child poverty is not a simple task. The multidimensional nature of poverty includes quantitative measures (such as income, consumption and access to basic services), but it also includes quality variables that are often difficult to measure - for example, the opportunity to participate in public life without the risk of discrimination [9]. Because of these complications, it is often relied on the monetary approach to measuring poverty through the poverty line. The monetary approach is one of the most widely used for identifying and measuring poverty. It focuses on strategies to reduce poverty and raise the incomes of individuals [10]. However, this approach measures poverty only partially and in many ways is unproductive. This is because this approach:

- Ignores the multidimensional nature of poverty;
- Uses a single income based on the poverty line to identify the poor, often ignoring the different characteristics of households;
- Ignore the different needs of people - for example, people with disabilities need more resources than non-disabled to carry out the same tasks;
- Does not take into account the importance of public services, public goods, and the environment, such as education, health care, access to drinking water, sanitation, and so on;
- Focuses on anti-poverty strategies to increase the individual's level of income rather than investing in public services.

In practice, however, there is no single approach to defining, identifying or measuring poverty. The debate on poverty generally focuses on the various potential causes of its occurrence and the ways in which it can be measured and compared at national and international level. Many researchers see poverty as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be defined, measured or overcome solely by the presence or lack of cash and going beyond the monetary approach. "Children's well-being should not be judged solely on family income. Apart from the material aspect, this includes the deprivation, the housing problem, the education, the health care, the child's ability to participate in decision-making are of utmost importance. You should look at the child as a subject of rights, not just as part of the family. Ultimate poverty not only degrades the health of the people, but also restricts the minds of their children and gives them a vow for generations to live in this way. Such is the poverty of people living below the poverty line in Bulgaria, even some of the people who are above it." [11].

4. UNICEF AND CHILD POVERTY

Child poverty is commonly perceived as the conditions of disadvantage and deprivation in which children and young people live. It differs from adult poverty in that child poverty has different causes and also various consequences and these effects can have a lasting impact on children [12]. Even short periods of deprivation can affect the long-term growth and development of children, as UNICEF describes this process as follows: "Children in poverty live in an environment that is detrimental to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development. It is therefore particularly important to broaden the definition of child poverty that goes beyond traditional conceptualizations such as low household incomes or low levels of consumption. However, child poverty rarely differs from poverty as a whole, and its specific dimensions are rarely recognized." [13].

Based on the human rights approach and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF defines child poverty as follows: "Children living in poverty are those who lack the material, spiritual and emotional resources they need to survive, develop and thrive. These deprivations make them unable to take advantage of their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society." [14]. In essence, the UNICEF definition emphasizes the multidimensional and interconnected nature of child poverty. This definition also suggests that economic security is just one of the many components in the fight against child poverty. "Other aspects of material deprivation such as access to basic services as well as discrimination and social exclusion issues that affect children's self-esteem and psychic development are also essential to the definition of child poverty." [9], [15].

5. UNDERSTANDING THE CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND FOR CHILD POVERTY

The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) also contributes to the definition of child poverty in order to facilitate the process of policy-making to reduce it. According to the CCF, the generally accepted concept of poverty at that time, understood as: "A state of lack of the usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material goods"[16], gives rise to the formulation of two concepts that are important for rethinking the definition and measuring child poverty. The first is that poverty is relative, as it has specific time and socio-cultural dimensions and characteristics. The second is that "... poverty is due to the inability to buy goods or services (lack of socially acceptable amount of money) or to own property (tangible goods)" [17]. These two concepts lead to the widespread practice of poverty to be defined and measured by the monetary poverty line. However, this approach is not always considered adequate as children have neither access nor control over household incomes. Therefore, judging their well-being on the level of household consumption would be wrong because it ignores the fact that children do not always benefit proportionally from income or consumption. It is precisely in order to compensate for this inaccuracy that the modified equivalent scale of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) has been created, according to which household members are attributed a specific weight (weight) to which the household consumption is recalculated (weighing 1.0 first adult, 0.5 for

other persons aged 14 or over who live in the household and 0.3 for each child under the age of 14). Another aspect is that, as mentioned, the monetary approach focuses exclusively on the physical aspects of child development and neglects such important non-material aspects of poverty as the feeling of insecurity, lack of freedom, domestic violence, harassment and abuse, and social exclusion [17]. In this way, the Christian Children's Fund sees child poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of both tangible and intangible components - a concept that provides a significant impetus to the contemporary definition of child poverty. In the process of seeking out a conceptual framework of child poverty, its implications and ways of alleviating the situation of children, the CCF defines three distinct but closely interrelated areas or spheres that allow a comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of the ways in which poverty affects children.

The first sphere is adequate access to basic social services and satisfactory material conditions for a normal and decent life. It is perceived that this sphere is associated with the concept of deprivation. According to the CCF, the proper development of children is strongly influenced by the daily manifestations of discrimination and their sense of exclusion based on their age, gender, class, caste, etc. That is why social isolation becomes the second area that CCF considers. Finally, as children (and women, from a certain point of view) are the most vulnerable social category, especially in times of crisis - from natural disasters, military conflicts to economic crises, vulnerability is the third area in which the effects of poverty according to CCF.

Therefore, CCF considers child poverty as a combination of these closely interrelated spheres defined in the following way [18]:

- **Deprivation:** the lack of material conditions and services that are essential to the development and achievement of the full potential of children;
- **Social exclusion:** the result of discrimination through which children are deprived of dignity, voice and rights, or their existence is directly or indirectly threatened;
- **Vulnerability:** Inability of society to deal with existing or potential threats to children.

In its document "Children and Poverty - Answers to Some Questions", the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Center (CHIP) [12] proposes the following definition of child poverty: "Child poverty means children and young people grow up without access to different types of resources that are vital to their well-being and realize their potential. By "resources," we understand economic, social, cultural, physical, environmental and political resources. "[12] In particular, this definition implies that child poverty is growth in the absence of any of the following factors:

- **Sufficient food resources** - the financial and nutritional resources needed for survival and development (economic, physical and environmental resources);
- **Opportunities for development** - including access to quality education and life skills, good health, water availability / sanitation (social, cultural and material resources);
- **Family and community structures to care for and protect children** - parents / guardians with sufficient time or abilities / willingness to care for them; an extended family / community that can cope if parents and guardians are unable (or physically) not to be present, or a community that cares and protects the younger generation (social and cultural resources);
- **Ability to hear the voice of children** - helplessness and lack of voice (political resources) are often the basis of other aspects of poverty (this also applies to the elderly).

6. CHILD POVERTY AS AN INFRINGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Another concept for defining child poverty is the human rights based approach. The essence of this approach is that it seeks to integrate human rights concepts, different analyzes, values and language into the poverty reduction dialogue. According to this approach, European poverty reduction strategies must be guided by the principles, values and human rights laws [19]. Since international human rights law has been officially recognized by almost all countries and reinforced by legal obligations, the human rights-based approach provides a convincing and clear regulatory framework to guide national and international policies and programs to combat poverty [19].

One aspect of this approach to poverty is the empowerment of the poor. The concept of rights gives the poor the opportunity to demand from their government policies that improve their lives. Thus "Reducing poverty becomes more than charity, more than a moral obligation - it becomes a legal obligation." [19]. This approach has important implications for the way policies and implementation of poverty reduction programs (such as universality, avoidance of clientelism, etc.) and budget allocations without which the laws are just dead letters on a piece of paper. The approach to human rights and the empowerment of the poor has several important contributions and features: it focuses on accountability, non-discrimination and equality principles and the

principle of decision-making. These features aim to ensure that Poverty Reduction Strategies are more than a proclamation that marginalized groups are not excluded and that the poor are involved in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies. This is a holistic approach. When their civil and political rights are guaranteed, the poor will have a better chance (alone or through political alliances) to influence their governments to adopt anti-poverty strategies that will help them live a dignified and independent life. Thus, these rights are considered "instrumental", i.e. rights that help fight poverty, although their absence does not define and represent poverty in general. For the purposes of measuring and analyzing, as well as identifying the poor, the human rights approach uses the most basic and essential human rights - those rights without which a person is considered to be poor. The list of these rights, of course, may vary from country to country, but based on empirical observations by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a list of common rights applies to most countries. Some of these rights are every person:

- To be fed;
- Be able to avoid preventable morbidity or premature death;
- To be sheltered;
- Have basic education;
- Be able to appear in public places without shame;
- Be able to earn a living;
- Be able to take part in the life of the community, etc.

Such a list of fundamental rights can be used as a tool for identifying the poor, learning more about their needs and needs, and generalizing the success of poverty reduction strategies. Moreover, a key point in the definition of poverty based on human rights abuses is the assumption that governments have legal obligations to implement these rights, as they are their carriers and the ultimate authority.

7. CONCLUSION

Not many organizations have dealt directly and purposefully with defining child poverty. Only some of them were mentioned here. The conceptual approaches discussed in this report cannot be considered as a representative sample of existing definitions. However, they share common elements: voting rights, participation, multidimensional, etc. They recognize that poverty is a phenomenon with many faces and dimensions and cannot be reduced to monetary measures. Organizations that work directly on child poverty issues without exception consider it a multifaceted problem that requires complex strategies to address its manifestations. It should be recognized that all of the above definitions are too broad and sometimes not well-focused. In attempting to include more different dimensions of child poverty, there is a danger of blurring the essence of the concept, and it is mainly associated with material deprivation. Lack of voice, physical abuse, family sections, bad environmental conditions, etc. are serious obstacles to the full childhood experience and the adequate development of children, but they are not necessarily poverty, nor are they related to lack of income or basic needs. Child poverty is not just a general violation of children's rights. In the long run, it also leads to poverty among adults through the so-called "A vicious circle of poverty". However, in order to ensure full childhood and development of children and to realize their rights in practice, poverty reduction strategies must take into account the specific needs and needs of children.

LITERATURE

- [1] EU – SILC, 2005, 2007, Community statistics on income and living conditions
- [2] UNICEF, 2006, Innocenti social monitor: Understanding Child Poverty on South- Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
- [3] Bradshaw J., Hoelscher P. and Richardson D., 2006, An Index of Child Wellbeing in the European Union, Journal of Social Indicators.
- [4] Bradshaw J., Ritskallio R. 2004, Child Poverty in the European Union, UNICEF
- [5] Baschieri A. and Falkingham J. 2005, Non-Income dimensions of Child Poverty in CIS and CEE CIS and South Eastern Europe. First complete draft. Southampton Statistical Sciences research Institute at University of Southampton.
- [6] European Commission, 2005, Thematic Study on Policy Measure Concerning Child Poverty.
- [7] Евробарометър, 2009, Изследване на бедността и социалното изключване, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_321_en.pdf <Посетен на 27.04.2018>
- [8] Петкова К. 2012, Европейски измерения на детската бедност, в: Българските национални ценности, Статистика и динамика в евроинтеграционния процес, ИИОЗ – БАН.

- [9] Sen, A, 1999, Development as Freedom, Random House, New York;
- [10] Vandemoortele, J, 2000, Absorbing social shocks, protecting children and reducing poverty, UNICEF, New York;
- [11] Минев, Д, България върви към хуманитарна криза, Интервю във в. „Марица“, <http://marica.bg/show.php?id=36494> <Посетен на 28.04.2018>
- [12] CHIP, 2004, Children and poverty – some questions answered, In: Children and Poverty, CHIP Briefing 1, London.
- [13] UNICEF, 2005(a), “Defining child poverty”, accessed 21 February 2005 at <http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/povertyissue.html>. <Посетен на 28.04.2018>
- [14] UNICEF, 2005(b), The State of the World of the Children 2005 – Childhood under Threat“, UNICEF, New York.
- [15] Minujin, A., 2005, Constructing a definition and measurements of children living in poverty, GPS contribution to IRC meeting on Child Poverty in CEE/CIS, 24 January 2005, Florence, Italy.
- [16] Kanbur, R. and Squire, L. 1999, The evolution of thinking about poverty: exploring the interactions, World Bank Paper cited in Feeny and Boyden, 2003.
- [17] Feeny, Thomas and Boyden, Jo., 2003, Children and poverty: a review of contemporary literature and thought on children and poverty, in Children and Poverty Series, Part I, Christian Children’s Fund, Richmond.
- [18] CCF, 2004, “Understanding how children experience and respond to poverty”, Christian Children Fund presentation at UNICEF, New York;
- [19] OHCHR, 2002, Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies, UN, New York.