

Gender-Differentiated Poverty among Migrant Workers

Subjects: **Development Studies**

Contributor: Jiquan Peng , Juan Chen ,

Poverty describes a state in which humans lack access to those resources necessary for providing basic material needs. Poverty has a complex and dynamic nature. First, it exists pervasively yet contextually. Pervasively, the phenomenon of poverty exists in numerous countries, including both lower-income/higher-income and developing/developed countries. Regarding its diversification, poverty occurs in situ, alongside inequality, across population groups in different countries, regions, regimes, and societies.

relative poverty

migrant workers

gender differences

1. Definitions, Features, and Measurements of Poverty

Poverty describes a state in which humans lack access to those resources necessary for providing basic material needs [1][2][3]. Therefore, researchers have evolved a better understanding of poverty by defining more precisely what those vital-for-human-lives resources are. Baulch summarized the concepts related to poverty in a pyramid-like format [3], in which the narrowest definition of poverty (the consumption/income approach) emphasizes humans' private consumption, which is dependent on their income. In comparison, the broadest definition of poverty (the human development approach) extends the concept of poverty to include other essentially important things, such as common property resources, public provisions, and human dignity and autonomy [2][4][5]. Other approaches to understanding poverty have also emerged. For example, by emphasizing the accessibility/exclusion of social networks vital for sustaining livelihoods [1], the social exclusion approach has offered a valuable complement to the conceptualization of poverty.

Poverty has a complex and dynamic nature. First, it exists pervasively yet contextually. Pervasively, the phenomenon of poverty exists in numerous countries, including both lower-income/higher-income and developing/developed countries. Regarding its diversification, poverty occurs in situ, alongside inequality, across population groups in different countries, regions, regimes, and societies [4][6][7]. For example, Alkire and Seth found that reducing national poverty does not necessarily mean a uniform reduction in all population groups [8]. Second, poverty interacts with other social phenomena, not limited to migration, feminist activity, urbanization, and population aging [2][9][10][11][12]. Third, poverty develops dynamically. Microscopically, the deprived, rather than being passive victims waiting for handouts, are agents struggling to cope with poverty with whatever resources they possess [1][13], thus leading to the macroscopic poverty index of a specific population constantly being transformed [13].

The complex and dynamic nature of poverty has caused the measurement of poverty to evolve from absolute to relative and from unidimensional to multidimensional measures. All poverty measurements are founded essentially on the basis of comparing available resources to basic human needs: a person/family is identified as poor if their resources fall short of the poverty threshold [5][7]. However, a relative poverty threshold (a cutoff level depending on specific resource distribution) is increasingly replacing the conventional absolute threshold (a fixed cutoff level, or the so-called poverty line, being applied across all resource distributions) [5]. At the same time, the conventional unidimensional measure of poverty (i.e., private consumption/income) has been altered by the multidimensional poverty structure, which could include a variety of dimensions/indicators, including nutrition, clothing, housing, public facilitation, psychological well-being [4][8], etc. Accordingly, several methodologies for such multidimensional poverty measurement have been proposed, grouped broadly into axiomatic and information theory approaches, fuzzy set theories, and latent variable methods [14].

2. Poverty Realities of Migrant Workers

Migration is usually understood as a spatial separation between the location of a person's/household's place of residence and that of the place where they are engaged in activities to sustain their livelihood [15]. Migration essentially involves the mobility of labor, together with a person's/household's experience, skills, education level, and health status [12]. There are multiple migration types, which play various roles in reducing poverty: while poverty seems to act as a constraint on international migration (i.e., migration across national borders), it acts as a push factor for internal migration (i.e., migration within national borders, of which rural–urban migration for the purposes of working is a typical form) [2][15][16].

Regarding internal migration, the urbanization process has promoted large-scale rural–urban worker migration in many developing countries in recent decades. The ranks of rural–urban worker migration (hereinafter referred to as worker migration) have swelled, which has aroused the attention of poverty researchers in several countries [17][18][19][20][21]. This type of migration contributes positively to poor people achieving secure livelihoods and constructing pathways for themselves out of poverty [15]. However, migrant workers may now constitute "new" poor communities in urban areas [20][22] for several reasons. First, migrant workers are in a relatively weak position in the labor market: for example, migrant workers work longer hours, with much lower hourly wages, than local residents. Moreover, significant differences in the non-income welfare earned by migrant workers and local residents exist, such as housing conditions and access to social insurance programs as a result of inequalities in the distribution of urban infrastructure (both private and public) and basic services across the length of local stay [20].

3. Gender-Differentiated Poverty

Women are more likely to live in poverty than men in various parts of the developing world, as reported by the Key UN Entity Focused on Development (United Nations Development Programme) in 2017. Along with "gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" being included as a stand-alone goal among the set of

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030), gender-differentiated poverty has attracted much research interest [9][23][24][25].

Does poverty actually have a “female face”? There are quite a few studies (see, for example, in ten developing countries [26]; in Nicaragua [27]) that empirically challenge the universal acknowledgment of the feminization of poverty (which, however, is still being supported by cross-regional data presented at the United Nations [28] and by data for 26 diverse Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) countries [23]). Accordingly, researchers have begun to advocate a more nuanced and complex analysis for validating gender-differentiated poverty [26][29]. Nevertheless, despite the fact that researchers have identified “structural poverty,” or a multiplicity of gender-biased social processes and structures [9][25][26], as a component of “transitory poverty” as random shocks and shortfalls in social support in times of emergencies (Casper et al., 1994; Gornick and Jäntti, 2010) [23][30], proper tools and methods that would enable more in-depth empirical examinations of the causes of poverty are still lacking [9].

4. Gender-Differentiated Poverty among Chinese Migrant Workers

China is among those countries experiencing issues related to both the relative poverty levels resulting from worker migration and gender-differentiated poverty. Having generally eliminated absolute poverty by the year 2020 (ten years ahead of the target date for achieving the poverty reduction goal set by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), China is now facing some of the most crucial relative poverty issues and has placed the alleviation of relative poverty into its future developing blueprint plans (see, for example, the proposal of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of China's Communist Party, 2019). In addition to the historically urban-rural difference in poverty, newly emerging phenomena of differentiated poverty, such as differences between urban residents and urban migrants and between male and female population groups, now play a major role concerning relative poverty.

Several researchers have explored the poverty levels among Chinese migrant workers [31][32][33][34], and while some researchers have demonstrated relative poverty inequalities among different subgroups (see, for example, different occupations [35]; different ages [36]), gender differences have rarely been examined empirically (with a few exceptions, such as that by [37]).

To sum up, the gender-differentiated poverty of migrant workers is an important research topic for developing countries with a high degree of population mobility (such as China) but has so far received little empirical investigation.

References

1. Chambers, R. Whose Reality Counts? IT Publications: London, UK, 1996.

2. Xu, D.; Deng, X.; Huang, K.; Liu, Y.; Yong, Z.; Liu, S. Relationships between labor migration and cropland abandonment in rural China from the perspective of village types. *Land Use Policy* 2019, 88, 104164.
3. Baulch, B. The New Poverty Agenda: A Disputed Consensus. *IDS Bull.-I Dev. Stud.* 1996, 27, 1–10.
4. Anand, S.; Sen, A. Concepts of human development and poverty! A multi-dimensional perspective. In *Poverty and Human Development: Human Development Papers 1997*; United Nations Development Programme: New York, NY, USA, 1997; pp. 1–20.
5. Foster, J.E. Absolute versus relative poverty. *Am. Econ. Rev.* 1998, 88, 335–341.
6. Alkire, S.; Roche, J.M.; Ballon, P.; Foster, J.; Santos, M.E.; Seth, S. *Multi-Dimensional Poverty Measurement and Analysis*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
7. Sen, A. Poverty: An ordinal approach to measurement. *Econometrica* 1976, 44, 219–231.
8. Alkire, S.; Seth, S. Selecting a targeting method to identify BPL households in India. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 2013, 112, 417–446.
9. Bradshaw, S.; Chant, S.; Linneker, B. Gender and poverty: What we know, don't know, and need to know for Agenda 2030. *Gend. Place Cult.* 2017, 24, 1667–1688.
10. Crimmins, E.M.; Kim, J.K.; Seeman, T.E. Poverty and biological risk: The earlier “aging” of the poor. *J. Gerontol. A-Biol.* 2009, 64, 286–292.
11. Xu, D.; Guo, S.; Xie, F.; Liu, S.; Cao, S. The impact of rural laborer migration and household structure on household land use arrangements in mountainous areas of Sichuan Province, China. *Habitat Int.* 2017, 70, 72–80.
12. Massey, D.S.; Gross, A.B.; Shibuya, K. Migration, segregation, and the geographic concentration of poverty. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 1994, 59, 425–445.
13. Moser, C.O. The asset vulnerability framework: Reassessing urban poverty reduction strategies. *World. Dev.* 1998, 26, 1–19.
14. Alkire, S.; Foster, J. Counting and multi-dimensional poverty measurement. *J. Public Econ.* 2011, 95, 476–487.
15. Ellis, F. A Livelihoods Approach to Migration and Poverty Reduction. Paper Commissioned by the Department for International Development (Contract No: CNTR 03 4890). 2003. Available online: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.553.5678&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (accessed on 10 June 2021).
16. Stecklov, G.; Winters, P.; Stampini, M.; Davis, B. Do conditional cash transfers influence migration? A study using experimental data from the Mexican PROGRESA program. *Demography*

2005, 42, 769–790.

17. Wang, Q.; Su, M.; Li, R. Toward to economic growth without emission growth: The role of urbanization and industrialization in China and India. *J. Clean. Prod.* 2018, 205, 499–511.
18. Haan, A.D. Rural-urban migration and poverty: The case of india. *IDS Bull.-I Dev. Stud.* 1997, 28, 35–47.
19. Xu, D.; Peng, L.; Liu, S.; Su, C.; Wang, X.; Chen, T. Influences of migrant work income on the poverty vulnerability disaster threatened area: A case study of the Three Gorges Reservoir area, China. *Int. J. Disast. Risk Reduct.* 2017, 22, 62–70.
20. Zizza, A.; Carletto, G.; Davis, B. Moving away from poverty: A spatial analysis of poverty and migration in Albania. *J. South. Eur. Balk.* 2005, 7, 175–193.
21. Lokshin, M.; Bontch-Osmolovski, M.; Glinskaya, E. Work-related migration and poverty reduction in Nepal. *Rev. Dev. Econ.* 2010, 14, 323–332.
22. Foulkes, M.; Schafft, K.A. The impact of migration on poverty concentrations in the United States, 1995–2000. *Rural Sociol.* 2010, 75, 90–110.
23. Gornick, J.C.; Jäntti, M. Women, poverty, and social policy regimes: A cross-national analysis. In Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Working Paper Series; LIS: Luxembourg, 2010; No. 534.
24. Murphy, S. Glass ceilings and iron bars: Women, gender, and poverty in the post-2015 development agenda. *Glob. Justice Theory Pract. Rhetor.* 2015, 8, 74–96.
25. Nieuwenhuis, R.; Munzi, T.; Neugschwender, J.; Omar, H.; Palmisano, F. Gender equality and poverty are intrinsically linked: A contribution to the continued monitoring of selected sustainable development goals. In Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Working Paper Series; LIS: Luxembourg, 2019; No. 759.
26. Quisumbing, A.R.; Haddad, L.J.; Peña, C. Gender and poverty: New evidence from 10 developing countries. In Food Consumption and Nutrition Division Discussion Papers; International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI): Washington, DC, USA, 1995; No. 583-2016-39551.
27. Montoya, Á.J.A.; Teixeira, K.M.D. Multidimensional poverty in Nicaragua: Are female-headed households better off? *Soc. Indic. Res.* 2017, 132, 1037–1063.
28. Marcoux, A. The feminization of poverty: Claims, facts, and data needs. *Popul. Dev. Rev.* 1998, 24, 131–139.
29. Chant, S. New Contributions to the Analysis of Poverty: Methodological and Conceptual Challenges to Understanding Poverty from a Gender Perspective; Economic Commission for Latin America: Santiago, Chile, 2003.

30. Casper, L.M.; McLanahan, S.S.; Garfinkel, I. The gender-poverty gap: What we can learn from other countries. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 1994, 59, 594–605.
31. Jiang, N.; Zheng, W. Multi-dimensional poverty measurement for Chinese rural migrant workers that return to poverty. *Chin. Rural Econ.* 2017, 33, 58–69.
32. Wang, Q.; Liu, S. Multidimensional poverty and inequality of migrant workers in urban areas. *J. Quant. Tech. Econ.* 2020, 37, 83–101.
33. Cao, M.; Xu, D.; Xie, F.; Liu, E.; Liu, S. The influence factors analysis of households' poverty vulnerability in southwest ethnic areas of China based on the hierarchical linear model: A case study of Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture. *Appl. Geogr.* 2016, 66, 144–152.
34. Wu, L.; Luo, C. Mental health and the multidimensional poverty of migrant workers in cities. *J. South China Agric. Univ.* 2021, 20, 84–95.
35. Peng, J.; Zhang, L.; Chen, S. Study on the intergenerational differences of relative poverty among migrant workers in cities—Decomposition method based on RIF Unconditional Quantile Regression. *Collect. Essays Financ. Econ.* 2020, 20, 3–12.
36. Peng, J. Measurement and decomposition of migrant workers' multi-dimensional poverty from the perspective of industry heterogeneity. *Stat. Decis.* 2021, 37, 57–62.
37. Kuai, P.; Zhang, L. Gender wage differentials of migrant workers and its origins: Would discrimination make a notable difference? *Issues Agric. Econ.* 2016, 37, 43–50+111.

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/56399>