

Abstract

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Child poverty, trends, causes and policy responses - an OECD perspective

Child poverty is firmly on the policy agenda in many OECD countries. One of the main issues in the debate is the appropriate balance between the so-called “benefits strategy” (increasing the adequacy of benefits for low-income families with children) and the so-called “work strategy” (promoting policies to increase employment among poor families).

This presentation initially outlines the range of work being undertaken in the OECD on child well-being, but then focuses on recent trends in child poverty in OECD countries. It is found that in nearly all OECD countries child poverty rates are significantly higher for jobless families than for families with at least one parent in employment, and are higher in single-earner families than in two-earner families, and in sole-parent households compared to two-parent households. While jobless families are nearly everywhere the most disadvantaged among the poor, the analysis finds, however, that on average across OECD countries only around one-third of poor families with children are jobless, although this ratio varies widely – from less than 20 per cent (Austria, Greece, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Portugal, Turkey and the United States) to 60 per cent or more (Australia, the Czech Republic, Germany and Norway).

The presentation discusses possible policy directions for OECD countries. The fact that all countries with very low child poverty rates (less than 5 per cent) combine low levels of family joblessness and effective redistribution policies supports the view that successful anti-poverty strategies should seek a balanced approach combining improved benefits where necessary and improved incentives to work. The presentation assesses the extent to which child poverty can be reduced by policies which successfully promote higher parental employment and more effective benefit systems, identifying wide variations across countries in the effectiveness of different policy approaches.

Abstract

Petra Hoelscher

Changing Perspectives. Researching Child Poverty and social Exclusion in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Despite widespread economic growth and progress in poverty reduction across the CEE/CIS region, children remain the most vulnerable population. They have the highest risk of living in poverty while in some countries basic indicators on child well-being are stagnating or even deteriorating. Children are missing out on economic development and in most countries they are not high on the political agenda. One of the reasons is that routine data and economic analysis in transition countries do not effectively capture the well-being of children. Based on UNICEF experiences in the region this presentation explores how a change in perspective can provide better information on child poverty and social exclusion. The example of a child well-being index for the CEE/CIS shows, how a child-centred approach helps to better understand the situation of children in different dimensions and offers governments a tool to better

exploit available data. Regarding primary research the presentation argues for participatory approaches that involve all stakeholders, particularly children and young people. Participatory research is demanding as it shifts the balance between researchers and participants and requires a careful research design and consideration of ethical issues. However, it is closer to the reality of children and their families and can thus lead to better targeted responses in policy and service development.

Abstract

Mona Sandbæk, NOVA, Norway

Images of children in low-income families

Based upon data from a Norwegian survey "Children's level of living- the impact of family economy on children's lives" (NOVA/N.K.S.), the paper discusses the distribution of resources within the family and the impact of research design on images of child poverty. The study consists of two representative samples, a low-income sample of children in families with 60 per cent below the median income and a smaller control sample of children in families mirroring all income groups. The aim of the study is to compare the two samples with regard to children's level of living in their everyday life. In 2003 and 2006 parents and children were interviewed, using computer assisted methods. (2003: 1937 parents and 769 children, aged 10-12, 2006: 1303 parents and an equal number of children aged 10-15). In 2003 qualitative interviews were also conducted with 26 parents and children. While we found distinct differences between the parents in the two groups in disfavor of the low-income parents, the differences between the children in the two samples were less obvious. However, all differences identified were in the disfavor of the low-income children. The qualitative interviews displayed economic constraints and exclusions mechanisms of the low-income children more in detail.

Abstract

Spyros Spyrou

What children from single parent families have to say about their lives: Poverty, social exclusion and policy implications from a transnational, comparative project.

This presentation will address the key findings of a project which seeks to integrate the perspectives of children from single parent families in policy-making with the ultimate aim of combating the poverty and social exclusion which significant numbers of them experience. In this two-year transnational project which is funded by the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion, 2002-2006, three countries--Cyprus, the UK, and Greece—are collaborating in an effort to provide a voice for children in single parent families whose needs, interests, and opinions are almost entirely ignored when formulating policy. The project highlights the utility of using a qualitative approach which allows children to express their concerns from their own perspectives and investigates the extent to which their views can form the basis for policy recommendations. The role of key social institutions such as the family and the school together with societal attitudes towards single parent families provides

the context in which the study seeks to understand the role that children play or can play in informing policy-making. The presentation will briefly outline the main findings of the project, discuss some of the methodological issues which arose from using a child-centered, qualitative approach, and finally address the policy dimension of the study as it relates to Cyprus.

Abstract

Angela Abela

How some children and their families cope with living in poverty and how some manage to get out of the poverty trap

I plan to present a literature review about the above mentioned topic. A family resilience framework has become an important paradigm in mental health theory in the last twenty years (Walsh 2003; Rutter 2000). This approach challenges the idea that traumatic experiences are inevitably damaging. Rutter (1999) noted that irrespective of the risk involved more than half of the children effected by trauma did not suffer from any particular disorder. Resilience is very much influenced by people's patterns of interpersonal relationships (Rutter 1999). Risk is mitigated by protective factors involving individuals, the family and larger systems such as the school and the community. This way of working will be highlighted during the presentation. A small number of interviews with Maltese children and their families who survived poverty will serve to illustrate explore the dynamics at play

Abstract

Dagmar Kutsar, University of Tartu

How children perceive poverty, relative deprivation and exclusion: on studies in Estonia

The research on wellbeing of children and how children perceive poverty, relative deprivation and exclusion in particular goes back to 1997 when Living Conditions Survey among Children was carried out (1568 resp from the 8th forms of the ordinary schools – 14-15 years of age). Among many other items, the survey contained questions about children's perceptions and estimations of their household economic performance and it also tested the child's perceived relative deprivation and social exclusion. The data analysis applied welfare deficits' approach by Kutsar (1997) and the new paradigm of childhood. The same analytical framework was used in two additional small-scale quantitative surveys among children on their social exclusion from peers in 2004 (Kutsar & Vetemäe; 330 resp 12-13 years of age) and children's perceived ignorance of personal needs in 2005 (Kutsar & Viira; 291 resp of the same age).

The studies showed that children who viewed the economic performance of their household as poor more often perceived economic, social and psychological relative deprivation if compared to their peers with better economic opportunities. Children from poorer households set lower standards to their needs, express less interest in leisure activities and are less active in looking for coping strategies with the situation than children from well-off families. Feeling excluded is not determined by gender, family structure, type of settlement but is determined by perceived less opportunities and lack of choices (different types of deprivation).

These studies have had indirect policy relevant impact as additional evidence to confirm the situation of a child as the subject of being at the highest risk of poverty. The main policy effect can be drawn from poverty studies (see: Kutsar & Trumm, 1999). However, the methodological approach of child social exclusion/inclusion, supported by the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and Estonian Child Protection Law Act has gained much attention among the NGOs (political pressure groups) who deal with children's issues (Child Welfare Union; Child Support Centres, etc) and is reflected in several regulations of educational and family policy.

References

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Abstract

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Childhood in poverty and the coping strategies of children

Child poverty is an increasing social problem in the developed countries of Western and Eastern Europe. In the wake of social transformation and radical social change, new forms of poverty are emerging in all these countries, poverty which affects children in particular. One essential feature with these new forms of poverty is that, at first glance, they are not conspicuous. Survival as such is not under threat; integration into society is.

What does it mean to children who live in an affluent society to grow up in poverty? How do they perceive their disadvantaged life situation? How do they cope? In what way does poverty have an effect on the children's sense of well-being now and on their development prospects for the future? It is these specific questions that poverty researchers and child development researchers in Germany have recently been (re)-addressing. To look at these questions, empirical studies are required that attempt to assess the problem from the perspective of the children themselves. The survey and interpretation methods used should place the statements of the children concerned at the centre of the investigation.

In my paper to the work shop, I will give a short overview of the recent findings of child poverty research in Germany, I will discuss the methods used in the field of qualitative research with children and some political impacts. Furthermore I will be drawing on the results of two long-standing research projects I conducted.

Abstract

Dr Tess Ridge, Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath, Bath, E-mail: T.M.Ridge@bath.ac.uk

Hearing the voices of low-income children: what can children tell us that can help to shape better policies to improve their lives.

Tess Ridge will speak about the value of developing a child-centred understanding of childhood poverty and social exclusion. To do so she will highlight the importance of understanding how poverty impacts on children's lives through an exploration of what poverty and social exclusion might mean for children, in childhood amongst their peers. Low-income children are active social agents, constructing and reconstructing their lives in dynamic and imaginative ways, but their lives are also organised around the constraints of poverty and disadvantage. To gain an insight into these issues and to understand the concerns of children who are poor it is important for researchers and policy makers to engage directly with children themselves. To illustrate some of these issues she will draw on findings from various child-centred research studies conducted with children who are experiencing poverty in the UK. In particular she will look at her recent research into the educational experiences of low-income children and research carried out with low-income children living in working lone mother households. She will discuss some of the methodological issues arising from conducting research with children and explore the importance of locating and understanding the experience of poverty in childhood. She will end with some reflections on what child-centred research can add to policy and the implications of incorporating a child's perspective on poverty into policy and practice.

Abstract

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Children in National Action Plans for Social Inclusion in the selected EU member states

The Rights of the Child have been on the EU agenda for many years, but only recently decisive steps have been taken to establish a comprehensive EU strategy to promote and effectively implement the rights of the child in internal and external EU policies. In July 2006 the Commission released the Communication "Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child", which gives effect, among other commitments, to the European Council's request to the EU member states "to take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background" (March 2006). Child poverty has gained a high priority under the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and according to the Joint Report on Social protection and Social Inclusion 2007, the "Member States have responded to the Spring 2006 European Council challenge to reduce child poverty with clear commitments to breaking the cycle of deprivation". Far from being comprehensive and exhaustive, the conference presentation will discuss some challenges related to these commitments in the new EU member states related mainly to the lack of systemic research, lack of administrative and technical capacity, and in some cases, to lack of a political will to fully recognize and implement the UN concept of the rights of the child.

Abstract

Mona Sandbæk, NOVA, Norway

The Council of Europe's Work to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion

Council of Europe works on a broad basis to promote social cohesion and thus to prevent social exclusion, cfr. A new strategy for social cohesion. A common denominator is seeing people as responsible agents in their own life, enabling parents to provide for their families and children to be aware of and able to access their rights. The presentation will not exhaust all the organisation's strategies, but focus on three complementary approaches to combat child poverty. 1) A partnership has been established between the Council of Europe and the European Commission, (IRIS) enhancing co-operation between international networks representing different ethical and solidarity-based finance initiatives, fair trade and responsible consumption. 2) Through numerous initiatives the Council of Europe offers children and young people opportunities to understand and practice human rights. Some of the instruments address young people in general, but the attention is often directed towards children in marginal situations and/or disadvantages areas, enhancing their rights to integration, education and health services. 3) The Council of Europe emphasizes that actions directed towards families and children who find themselves in situations of social exclusion, must avoid stigmatization and ensure access to fundamental rights such as employment and housing. Children's access to high quality day-care and after school facilities must be guaranteed, as well as free access to educations and leisure activities. School curricula must be designed with a view of reducing social inequalities and school failure.