

Need for Quantification of Feminization of Poverty

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Abstract

In India, poverty is a major issue among policymakers. World Bank describes that the world had 872.3 million people below the poverty line according to the new methodology based on the revised poverty line as \$1.90, of which 179.6 million people lived in India. It states that India had 21% share of the world's poorest, with 17.5% of the total world's population in 2011 (Poverty and Equity Data, World Bank). The rank of India in the 2017 global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was found out to be 37th out of 103 nations (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative) and ranks 100th out of 119 countries in Global Hunger Index which show that there is an immediate need to look into this matter. Women play multiple roles at the household and community level since they are the primary caretaker of the household. Their work is mostly unpaid and largely ignored. It had been evident that the burden of poverty is largely borne by women in the society due to denied access to resources such as monetary credit, land and inheritance, lack of health care, nutritional needs, decision-making power, and access to education and support services. Women and girls are more vulnerable to poverty than men and boys because of gender inequalities. Therefore, a need arises to quantify the feminisation of poverty that may help policymakers to develop target-based policies.

Keywords: poverty, feminization, gender inequality, multi-dimensional poverty, unpaid work

Introduction

World Bank Organization describes poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read. In addition to lack of money, poverty is a multi-dimensional concept that includes social, economic and political elements. In addition to lack of money, poverty is a multidimensional concept that includes social, economic and political elements. World Bank describes that the world has 872.3 million people below the poverty line according to new methodology based on revised poverty line as \$1.90 in 2015. More women than men live on less than \$1.90 a day. The major concern for the society is how women and men face poverty differently and to what extent. The problem arises when there is an unavailability of data which is sex-disaggregated. While measuring poverty, usually the information is based on household surveys and related to money income or assets or consumption by the household as a unit and not all individuals are always included. This does not account for some issues such as intra-household disparities related to income distribution, consumption patterns and asset ownership. It is noticeable that there are differences between men and women based on age, education, employment opportunities, income generation and other aspects. Therefore, it is important not to generalize the results solely depending upon the household data in case of poverty estimation. This results into invisible estimation of gender differences in poverty.

Diana Pearce had coined the term 'Feminization of Poverty' in 1970s, when she noticed that large number of women were facing poverty as compared to men; globally. Further, it was also stated that the trend of a disproportionate percentage of poor women is deepening. There is continuous and increasing burden on women due to poverty. Various efforts had been made to cope up with the issue of gender inequality but women are still in an underprivileged situation and therefore at higher risk of poverty. Women who are facing poverty are exposed to double-edged risk and injustice of gender inequality and poverty simultaneously. There is a need to change the world

so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and to have their voices in society and decision-making. Observing gendered aspects of poverty will help to understand the gender-specific needs better with the effect of poverty. This will further help in effective policy-making for women and society.

If the national as well as global Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal number 1 to end poverty in all forms everywhere and goal number 5 for gender equality and empowerment have to be met (UN Women, 2015), it is necessary to reduce the vulnerability of women to poverty and provide them with opportunities for education, economic and political participation.

Why is it important to focus on feminization of poverty?

Women in developing countries play multiple roles as providers, cultivators and care givers to the family members by performing the triple functions of reproduction, production and the household. In addition, women are also responsible for food, nutrition and health security of their families. Rural and poor urban women are also the prime procurers and a manager of 5F's which are, resources such as freshwater fuel, food, fodder and other forest products in developing and less developed countries. In order to meet all the above Practical Gender Needs (PGNs), women have to incur substantial physical (labour and energy), temporal (time), affective (negative feelings and attitudes) as well as cognitive costs (forego opportunities of education, skill and intellectual development). Due to high rate of male out migration to look after economic necessities, there is increasing feminization of agriculture and allied activities making women increasingly vulnerable to poverty. The burdens on women left behind are greater than normal as women are required to assume the roles played by the male members, including that of primary income earners.

Women play different roles at the household and community level. Their work is mostly unpaid and largely ignored. They own very limited control in decision-making processes of the household. They face many limitations in gaining education, employment opportunities and health care facilities. It had been evident that the burden of poverty is largely borne by women in the society due to denied access to resources such as monetary credit, land and inheritance, lack of health care, nutritional needs, decision-making power, and access to education and support services. Widows/ Single mother or female-headed households raise these problems further.

Evidence from literature

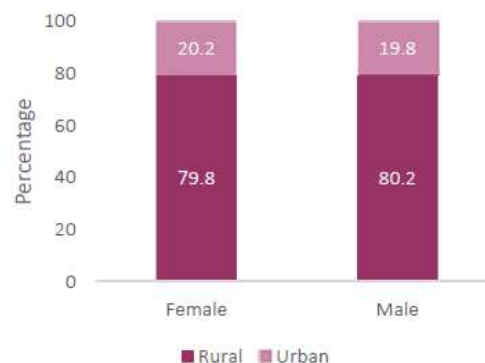
According to the latest report of the World Bank Group, 2018; gender differences in poverty were studied using the World Bank's Global Monitoring Database on household surveys from 89 countries. The report concluded that girls and women of reproductive age are more likely to live in poor households (below the international poverty line) than boys and men. Also, 122 women between the ages of 25 and 34 live in poor households for every 100 men of the same age group. Women and girls are more vulnerable to poverty than men and boys because of gender inequalities (World Bank, 2011).

Figure 2. Poverty rates and geographic distribution of the poor by sex

2.a. Poverty rate geographic area and sex



2.b. Geographic distribution of the poor by sex



Source: WB Staff's calculations based on GMD. (Total sample 89 countries)

In South Asia, it was found that gender differences were statistically significant, where female poverty rates are 15.9 percent, compared to 14.7 percent for males. The study found that there are 104 women living in poor households for every 100 men worldwide. But in South Asia, 109 women live in poor households for every 100 men. The reasons behind disproportionate figures were found to be early marriages, widowed at an early age, differences in labor force participation and employment, educational level, household composition type, economic household composition.

The feminisation of poverty in India occurs as a result of societal and cultural norms, patriarchal hierarchies, socially as well as within the family and the roles played by them as a part of their 'responsibilities' led to women bearing a disproportionate part of the burden. In a survey conducted in Bihar, it was found that there were extra unpaid work burdens on women; they have decreased earnings than men, women cut down their consumption of food and ignored their health issues because of the lack of money. Several studies also revealed that intra-household discrimination in education against girls results in possessing less skill than boys, which contributes to fewer economic opportunities for women resulting in higher poverty. Socio-Economic indicators have also indicated that women perform poorly as compared to men.

Need for Gender Differentiated Poverty Index

Since women are so vulnerable to poverty and face risks, it is necessary to quantify the gender-differentiated poverty, especially for developing and less developed countries with huge, diverse level of resources, human development, socio-economic development as well as attainments of women vis-à-vis men in different domains of attainment.

There are several measures to calculate poverty and generally primacy is given to monetary status, which does not provide a holistic picture. None of the poverty estimates differentiates the extent and incidence of poverty on men and women separately. Therefore, there is a need to have Gender Differentiated Poverty Index. Indices are useful tools used in research. This is because many socioeconomic phenomena cannot be measured using a single descriptive indicator and therefore should be represented with multiple dimensions. Indices are useful tools which can be used to examine performance and change over different periods of time. They have, however been criticized since it is difficult to choose components and sub-components for construction of indices. In addition to this there is loss of data by aggregation and difficulties of data availability at the required scale. Despite these limitations indices continue to be used widely across different disciplines. Many gender based indices have been devised overtime in order to measure gender parity and women's position in society.

Women play several roles in different sectors that are different from men, and hence they are more vulnerable to poverty, especially rural and urban poor women. In order to quantify the risk faced by women due to poverty, an

extensive review of existing indices related to poverty and gender along with their components, was undertaken. One of the earliest gender-based index was formulated by Socialwatch in 1996 and termed as Gender Equity Index (GEI). The main components of this index were gaps in education, gaps in economic activity and empowerment gaps. In 2006, the World Economic Forum developed the Gender Gap Index (GGI) in order to analyze the changing patterns of gender equality across regions and income groups. The index takes into consideration gender gaps in economic, political, educational and health criteria.

In 2010, UNDP formulated Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures inequality in three dimensions of health, empowerment and labor market. However, the sub-components do not capture gender inequality entirely. For example, in empowerment, the use of national parliamentary representation does not include the participation of women at the local government and community level. Many components such as gender based violence; asset ownership and community participation have not been captured due to limited availability of secondary data. Other index studied is Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) which was developed in 2010 to measure poverty. It is calculated for 105 countries in total. It reflects both the incidence or headcount ratio (H) and the average intensity (A) of poverty i.e. the proportion of the population that is multi-dimensionally poor and the average proportion of indicators in which poor people are deprived. It takes 10 indicators in three dimensions: education, health and living standards. It does not account for gender inequality too.

A review of the indices shows that they do not address the role and needs of women adequately while assessing inequality and poverty separately. Since women residing in developing countries are facing gendered differentiated poverty because of their low levels of income, it is important to have a more holistic index that can assess the differentiated impacts of poverty on men and women.

Conclusion

It is evident that benefits go beyond the individual when there is empowerment of women with equal income opportunity, health care and education. There are increased chances of families, communities and nations to be better off. Also, there will be slowdown of population growth, strength of economy increases and countries become more capable which leads to increased access to available resources and make choices that favour sustainability. Gendered Poverty Index will serve as a tool to assess the incidence and intensity of poverty faced by men and women differently. This will help policymakers to build such programmes that will direct the nations to improve the status of women and enable them to address the issues in which they are lacking in their respective poverty alleviation plans.

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