



Is the Increase in Poverty Affecting Family Structures?

Aleena Ahmed

A Level Student, Lahore Grammar School Defence, Lahore Pakistan

Date of Submission: 14-10-2021

Date of Acceptance: 29-10-2021

ABSTRACT:

Poverty, as defined by James Chen, is when “a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living” (Chen, 2019). Over the last few decades, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in poverty due to various factors, of which population growth is a major one. According to the United Nations (UN), in 2013, 10.7% of the world’s population sustained their living at or below \$1.90 a day (“Ending Poverty”). In Lahore, slums constitute 30% of the city’s population of over 8 million residents (Sewidan, 2016). With incomes spiraling downward and population trending upward, it is extremely challenging for family units to remain intact as

traditional roles and responsibilities are difficult to maintain. Often, multiple breadwinners working multiple jobs are needed. This phenomenon has a detrimental impact on the family structure, and applies to both developed and developing countries. Moreover, as the pandemic led to an increase in poverty levels worldwide and contributed to stunted economic growth and higher unemployment levels, viable solutions are needed to address this increasingly prevalent issue.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will cover two crucial issues pertaining to the increase in poverty – (1) disruption in family cohesion and (2) disappearance of nuclear families.

II. Disruption in Family Cohesion

This section explores the impact of poverty on family structures, particularly highlighting the strain it places on inter-familial relationships.

One of the leading causes of increase in poverty is the stress of multiple jobs compounded with continued economic uncertainty. These stresses often manifest in erratic, irrational and sometimes violent behavior by parents towards their children, with increased consequential probability of social withdrawal, health concerns, and poor academic performance. These children often end up withdrawing from the abusive parental relationship at an early age, from where unfortunately, the relationship continues to disintegrate.

The most important phase in a person’s life regarding brain development is early childhood, including physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. Further, this early development is directly influenced by the environment in which the child is nurtured and the influence of stress and anxiety on daily family life, often leading to long-

term behavioral issues and learning disabilities. Consequently, many poor families have inherent stresses driven by survival and sustenance. A study carried out by the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy shows that in many poorer households, a child’s brain not only showed stunted development but also high levels of cortisol, a stress hormone. (Thomas, 2016). High levels of this hormone often lead to debilitating health concerns such as diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure (Thorpe, 2017).

Drug and substance abuse tends to be higher amongst parents in low-income households, further tearing apart family structures, endangering the health of children and in many cases, leading to the onset of substance abuse amongst teenagers. As ascertained by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in many cases, poverty traps individuals in a vicious cycle of continued substance abuse as a lack of resources prohibits access to expensive rehabilitation facilities (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). A study conducted on drug addiction in Pakistan



shows that use of drugs from the age of 18 is more common within lower-income households (Aslam, 2015).

In addition to impacting parent / child relationships, poverty is also a leading cause towards the deterioration of relationships amongst siblings. A study by Frida Skog suggests that siblings act as “*resource diluters*” and that the negative effects of siblings are more prominent in poorer households, simply because resources for essentials must be spread across more people (Skog, 2019). This study has also shown how children from low income have to bear greater responsibilities from a younger age. The consequence of these responsibilities proving onerous for the child, especially during early childhood, can have a deleterious impact on their physical and emotional well-being, thus impacting relations between siblings. (Park, Jiyeon & Turnbull, 2002; Ann & Turnbull, 2002).

As the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations suggests, many policies can be implemented to keep

family relationships and dynamics intact in low-income households, such as supporting ‘*fathers’ involvement in childcare and mothers’ ability to be in the labour market*’. (Stock et al., 2014). Not only can such policies reduce poverty but also strengthen relations as they encourage the involvement of parents in the lives of their children and foster equal roles for fathers and mothers. Another potential suggestion is to increase the awareness and use of relationship support, be it for families or partners, as it may help them maintain strength and stability as a unit. It may also encourage them to develop better communication and understanding towards each other, lessening conflict and tension, and supporting a positive family environment. Overall, there are many ways in which a family can be torn apart due to poverty as constant tensions and stresses prevent them from communicating effectively and traditional family roles and responsibilities may not be fulfilled.

III. Disappearance of Nuclear Families

The second issue highlights how poverty has contributed to an erosion in the number of traditional nuclear families. Nuclear families are defined as “the family group consisting of the father, mother, and their children” (Shiel, 2018) and are viewed as the quintessential symbol of family cohesion, stability, and security. Several factors, driven by poverty have resulted in a decline in the numbers of nuclear families worldwide.

First and foremost, in addition to adversely impacting parent-child relationships, poverty and the associated financial stress may have consequences such as conflict, hostility, and strain between parents or partners, often culminating in separation or divorce giving rise to the lone-parent family structure. In addition to breaking the family apart, this places even greater burden on one parent as the family is now dependent on a single-source income.

In poorer households, the long-term stability of nuclear families is directly impacted by larger numbers of underage (i.e., below the age of 18) marriages of girls. According to the World Bank, marrying before the age of 18 is nearly twice as likely for females living in low-income families compared to those in affluent households. (Parsons, and McCleary-Sills). As an example, in Pakistan

approximately a third of females are married before the age of 18 (“Child Marriage”, 2017). Such instances of underage marriages are often arranged without the girl’s consent, and studies show that these families had higher levels of domestic violence and long-term stability, leading to higher divorce rates (YUSUFOĞLU2, 2016). Women from poorer households are more vulnerable to remain mired in poverty after separation as it is even more challenging for them to find time for education or work, while caring for their children. This issue is increasingly prevalent now, as the COVID pandemic has contributed towards a deplorable pandemic of domestic violence; in Argentina, calls to the national domestic violence hotline escalated by 39% (Argentina, 2020), while in Mexico, calls reports of domestic violence increased by 53% (México, 2020).

A study conducted by Brian Demidovich, Managing Member of the Demidovich Law Firm, shows that separation may not only lead to a loss in income but has detrimental impacts in other important aspects of their lives, including homeownership. Consequently, difficulty in maintaining mortgage payments, due to lack of finance, pushes them even further into poverty (Demidovich, 2019).

Another cause behind the disappearance of nuclear families is that many people living in poverty have



larger rather than smaller families for various reasons, two of the most prominent being higher child mortality rates in developing countries and limited access to education in poorer households. For example, in Burkina Faso, where the literacy rate is roughly 33%, the average number of children per family is five while in Australia, where the literacy rate is 99%, the average number of children per family is 1.77 (Noakes, 2019). Moreover, women living in poverty have very limited access to contraceptives and thus even if they want to delay starting a family, they are unable to.

The most prominent cause behind the shift away from nuclear families is that poor households depend on multiple family members, including grandparents, parents and children, working in labor-intensive jobs to generate sufficient income for the sustenance of the family. The consequence of this is rise in the number of extended families. In most developing countries, people living in poverty continue to focus on having larger families who can work as laborers (including children). The UN estimates that the global workforce consisted of 281 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 ("World Day Against Child Labour 12 June").

IV. CONCLUSION

Recapitulating the review and analysis from past literature, an increase in poverty is adversely impacting family structures and relationships, making it near impossible for those struggling with poverty to maintain traditional roles and responsibilities, provide basic opportunities for their children, and promote harmony in their households. Simple policies can be implemented to provide poor families with the guidance and incentives to engender stronger relationships between family members and strive towards cultivating deeper bonds. Poverty has also contributed to a reduction in nuclear families due to various factors. This decline can be addressed by creating awareness about the importance of family planning in developing countries together with eliminating child marriages. These measures can be best achieved by enlisting the involvement and active support of religious and community leaders. This research has shown to the immense economic disparity that exists in our world and its detrimental and far-reaching consequences on family life for millions of people. It has also highlighted the impact that poverty has had on the lack of socioeconomic development in developing countries specifically, where basic education and

As stated earlier, a nuclear family structure provides the most nurturing environment for a child. A 2010 research study concluded that in a nuclear family, children are less likely to have learning disabilities or suffer from motivational and behavioral challenges (Blackwell, 2010). As a society, implementing policies to encourage nuclear families must be a priority, especially in poorer neighborhoods. One way to achieve this is to increase awareness and education about contraceptives to curb the population explosion, as many women, especially in rural areas, have limited knowledge of contraceptives. Another way to institute effective change is to employment opportunities together with development of the primary and secondary structure.

Finally, in many developing countries, the help of religious and community leaders must be enlisted to educate the population about the importance of family planning and family structures.

healthcare remain a privilege rather than a right and why dramatic changes in policy formulation and implementation are needed to deal with the issue, especially given continued population explosion. An in-depth analysis has shown how families stuck in poverty can be destroyed through heightened levels of domestic violence, substance abuse, childhood mortality, and tearing apart of family bonds.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Argentina, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, Statistical information, (2020). "Number of communications for gender violence received". Available at <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/generos/linea-144/informacion-estadistica>.
- [2]. Aslam N (2015) Horrendous Situation of Substance Abuse in Pakistan: A Bird's Eye View on Socio-Demographics. *J Alcohol Drug Depend* 3: 201. doi:10.4172/23296488.1000201
- [3]. Bakilana, Anne, and Rifat Hasan. (2016) "The Complex Factors Involved in Family Fertility Decisions." *World Bank Blogs*, blogs.worldbank.org/health/complex-factors-involved-family-fertility-decisions.



- [4]. Blackwell DL. (2010) Family structure and children's health in the United States: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey, 2001–2007. National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Health Stat* 10(246).
- [5]. Chen, James. (2019) "Poverty." Investopedia, www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty.asp.
- [6]. "Child Marriage." (2017) UNFPA Pakistan, pakistan.unfpa.org/en/topics/child-marriage-4.
- [7]. Demidovich, Brian. (2019) "1 In 5 Women Experience Post-Divorce Poverty." The Law Corner, www.thelawcorner.com/1-5-women-experience-post-divorce-poverty/.
- [8]. "Ending Poverty." United Nations, United Nations, www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/poverty/.
- [9]. México. (2020) Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, *Violencia contra las mujeres. Indicadores básicos en tiempos de pandemia*, p. 8. Available at <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/558770/vcm-indicadores911.pdf>.
- [10]. Noakes, Zoe. (2019) "Why Do the Poor Have Large Families?" *Compassion Australia*, www.compassion.com.au/blog/why-do-the-poor-have-large-families.
- [11]. Park, Jiyeon & Turnbull, Ann & Turnbull, H.. (2002). Impacts of Poverty on Quality of Life in Families of Children with Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*. 68. 10.1177/001440290206800201.
- [12]. Parsons, Jennifer, and Jennifer McCleary-Sills. "Preventing Child Marriage: Lessons From World Bank Group Gender Impact Evaluations". *Worldbank.Org*, <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/enGENDER%20IMPACT%20-%20Research%20Brief%20Early%20Marriage%2008.07.pdf>.
- [13]. Sewidan, Nada. (2016) "Poverty in Lahore, Pakistan." The Borgen Project, Borgen Project https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/The_Borgen_Project_Logo_small.Jpg, borgenproject.org/poverty-lahore-pakistan/.
- [14]. Shiel, William C. (2018) "Definition of Nuclear Family." *MedicineNet*, www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=33095.
- [15]. Skog, F. (2019) Sibling Effects on Adult Earnings Among Poor and Wealthy Children Evidence from Sweden. *Child Ind Res* 12, 917–942 . <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9557-0>
- [16]. Stock, Laura, et al. (2014) *Personal Relationships and Poverty*. Tavistock Institute , pp. 29–76, *Personal Relationships and Poverty*.
- [17]. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (September 4, 2014). *The NSDUH Report: Substance Use and Mental Health Estimates from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Overview of Findings*. Rockville, MD.
- [18]. Thomas, Brandi. (2016) "How Living in Poverty Affects Children's Brain Development." *Duke Today*, today.duke.edu/2016/10/how-living-poverty-affects-children%E2%80%99s-brain-development.
- [19]. Thorpe, Matthew. (2017) "11 Natural Ways To Lower Your Cortisol Levels". *Healthline*, <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/ways-to-lower-cortisol#section1>.
- [20]. "World Day Against Child Labour 12 June." *United Nations, United Nations*, www.un.org/en/events/childlabourday/background.shtml.
- [21]. YUSUFOĞLU2, Ömer Şükri, and Zahir KIZMAZ3. (2016) The Aspect of Poverty in Broken Families: A Case of Elazığ. *Firat University Journal of Social Science*, pp. 212–213