

*Stew without bread, or bread without stew*

## Children's understandings of illbeing and poverty



*Laura Camfield*

University of East Anglia

**Young Lives**   
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

## What the paper does

- Reviews qualitative studies on children's understandings of poverty, mainly US/Eur
- Explores whether social exclusion, inequality and stigmatisation are also defining features of children's experiences of poverty in Ethiopia
  - psychosocial effects of relative poverty vs. material effects of absolute poverty
  - perceived importance of material deprivation

Group & individual interviews with children aged 5-6 and 11-13 in five urban & rural communities ( $n=100$ )

# “joining in” & “fitting in”

## *Psychosocial impacts of child poverty*

- Participation in education & recreation
- Inclusion (“subtle badges of poverty”, Willow 2001)
- Self-esteem (“standing equal with others”, Tekola 2009)
- Lowering expectations, moderating demands
- Stigma and shame
- Experiences of discrimination & visible inequalities

## Social exclusion in urban Ethiopia

Endale describes how sad he becomes when local children exclude him from their football matches because he only has a ball made from discarded plastic bags

*they play with their own ball - the big one - and when they refuse to let me in I say to them 'didn't I allow you to play with my plastic ball' and they would say that my plastic bag ball did not compare with their big ball and would refuse to let me in*

(Tekola 2009, p76)

# Relationships, competencies, inclusion

– Literature from development studies emphasizes the importance of ‘social capital’ for adults, with some caveats (Harris & De Renzio, 1997; Putzel, 1998; Wood, 2000; Hickey and Du Toit, 2007)

- Measurement challenges – quality vs. quantity
- Dynamic and interactive - not ‘bankable’
- Intra-hh distribution of effects – not always +
- Double-edged, e.g. ‘adverse incorporation’
- Politically charged – exclusion rarely accidental

– New childhood studies literature emphasises the importance of children’s relationships, but focuses on their intrinsic value and peer friendships

# Empirical studies

*e.g. Heissler in Bangladesh, Cooper in Kenya, Mann and Evans in Tanzania, Tekola, Abebe, Poluha et al. in Ethiopia*

– In Ethiopia children's networks extended, complex & functional (food, work, education, 'follow-up'), e.g.

- Parents, esp. mothers
- Siblings, resident and non-resident
- Peers at school, locally
- Neighbours
- Extended family, esp. grandparents

But in contexts of poverty can be a source of obligation and threat (e.g. early work – Boyden, 2009; marriage)

Quantitative:  
4 countries  
x 3000 children  
20 sites  
2 cohorts  
Rounds 1 & 2



Policy and  
Communications  
Component  
e.g. Child Budget &  
Policy Monitoring,  
Participatory



Qualitative:  
4 or 5 sites per country  
20 children per site  
Born 1994-5 & 2000-1  
Qual-1 2007 & Q-2  
2008



# Qualitative methods



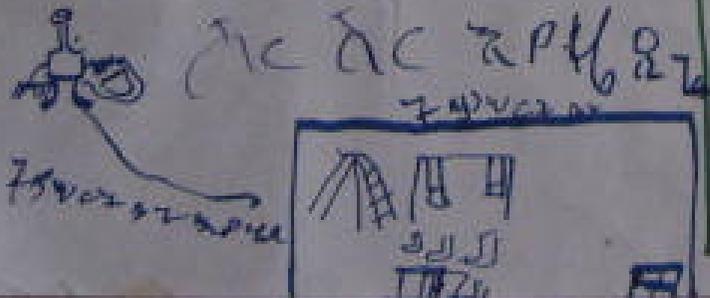
- Group-based participatory methods with children, caregivers & other stakeholders
- In-depth case study interviews with YL children, caregivers & other stakeholders
- Child-focused observation in home, school, & community

# ፍፋ ህድገት የግጥም

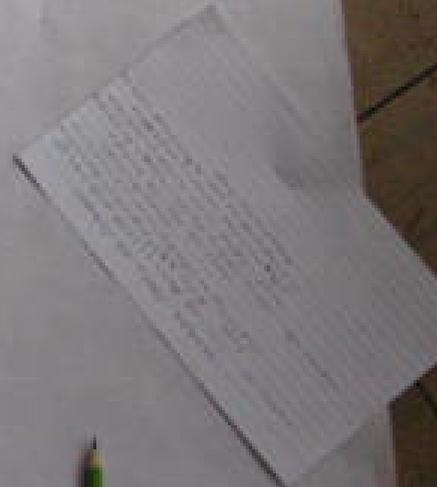
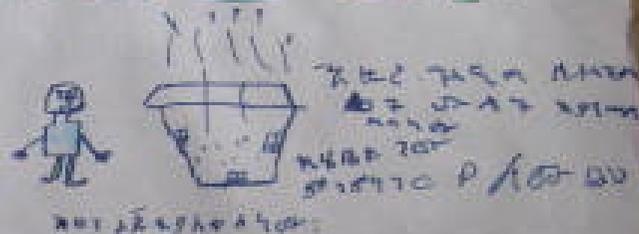


ፍፋ ህድገት የግጥም

ፍፋ ህድገት የግጥም



# ፍፋ ህድገት የግጥም



# Wellbeing exercise

*He has both parents. He has a house with many rooms, CD [player], and TV. He has a good variety of food prepared for him by his parents. The child goes to entertaining places with his parents. He goes to a school that has a field and equipment for kids to play on [...] not far [from his home], it has good classrooms and clean toilets for boys and girls separately; and it also has a library*

*Having no parents and living alone. The roof of his house has holes so during the rainy season, water goes into the house and as a result the boy gets sad and cries. He doesn't go to school and does not have any food to eat because his parents are dead*

# Wellbeing exercise

## **Why isn't he helped by relatives or neighbours?**

*People do not get close to him because he has dirty clothes*

## **Why can't he do paid work such as shoe shining?**

*There is no-one to buy the boy polish for the shoe shining*

## **Why can't he get help from an NGO?**

*No-one gets close to him so he doesn't have any access [...] no-one can prove his problems to the Kebele or NGOs*

## **Why doesn't the child who is doing well have a school bag to carry his books?**

*Does living well mean being rich? No, living well does not mean being rich*

## Differences in understandings

### *Younger cohort only*

**Sleeping on a bench rather than a bed**

**Having to work (herding, caring for siblings)**

**No friends (they are quarrelsome or disobedient)**

### *Urban only*

**Being an orphan**

**Psychosocial illbeing - ranked highly**

### *Boys only*

**Land and livestock - ranked highly**

### *Older cohort only*

**Land (boys only)**

**Govt. rather than private schooling**

**'Basic needs' (government or NGO discourses?)**

### *Rural only*

**Healthcare**

**Land and livestock**

**Appearance and food shortages – ranked highly**

## Reaching consensus on *priorities and thresholds*

**Ranking** *For Teferi losing parents is the first important indicator of ill-being, for Negassi it is lack of proper follow up from family, for Belayneh it is lack of proper education - a child who does not learn will finally be a thief, [...] for Tessema all are equally important, etc [for two & a half hours...]*

**Setting thresholds** *Rahnia again suggested that since teachers have responsibility to teach students, they have to teach students in a good way whether they are working in government or private school. However, Mariam maintained that private school teachers teach students in a proper way, unlike government school. Rahnia added that the only difference between the two schools is that the private school's fee is expensive*

# Main indicators of Illbeing/ Poverty

## Appearance; Clothing; Education; Food; Housing

### *Clothing and Appearance*

**Clothing** Children “couldn’t work without clothes” (*Bale*)

**Appearance** Four of five main indicators for girls in *Angar* (being thin, having dry & undressed hair, wearing torn, old clothes, having a dirty body because they couldn’t afford soap)

**Stature** Boys with “thin, spindly legs” and girls who “look hungry” (*Aksum*)

**Cleanliness** Being dirty = being ugly and not having friends because of their appearance (*Debre*)

**Fitting-in** Younger boys going to school without trousers and wearing “something weird on top” (*Aksum*)

# Outcomes for child poverty indicators

Indicator	Bottom expenditure quintile (poor)	Top expenditure quintile (non-poor)
Households without a roof made of iron	54.6%**	17.8%**
I receive lots of time and attention from my parents (agree or strongly agree)	82.5%	84.4%
I always feel loved by my parents (agree or strongly agree)	92.9%	95.4%
Self efficacy index (score 1-4)	1.23*	1.14*
Self esteem index (score 1-4)	2.56	2.57
Perceptions of respect index (score 1-4)	2.77	2.82
Position on ladder in 4 yrs time (score 1-9)	5.53**	6.34**
Others include me in their games	58.3%	53.6%
Someone can help me if I had a problem	98%	96.9
No: of food groups eaten in last 24 hrs	3.97**	5.59**
No: of times eaten in last 24 hrs	3.67**	3.92**
Missed more than 1 wk of school in last yr	14.6%	16.4%
Mean grade	3.86**	4.82**
School enrolment	97.8%	95.8%
Lost one or more parents	17.9%	20.1%
Lost both parents	1.5%	6.6%

**Outcomes for selected child poverty indicators for older children in the top and bottom expenditure quintiles (*Young Lives Round 2 Child Questionnaire, n=392*)**

**\*\* p = < 0.001 \* p = < 0.05**

## Outcomes for child poverty indicators

- **Highly statistically significant differences on sense of optimism about the future (-), food sufficiency (-), dietary diversity (-), roof type, and current school grade (-)**

- **Quantity of food similar, but range of foods limited**

*it's potato stew without injera [bread], or injera without wot [sauce]*

- **Significantly more likely to feel self-efficacious = 'steeling' effect? (e.g. Feeny and Boyden, 2003)**

## Outcomes for child poverty indicators

- **Some valued indicators map to differences in expenditure**
- **Others don't - *respect and friendship***
- **Or in opposite direction to expectations - *being an orphan***
- **Couldn't map all indicators,**
  - **e.g. *quality of clothing*****But conventional indicators still useful**
  - **e.g. *food sufficiency***

## People will belittle them...

*There are rich families in the community and they **can do anything they want**, but poor families cannot do those things, and they **expect others to support them**. Thus the **children feel lower**. [...] If a friend of one person dresses well on holidays and on occasions, and **if the friend cannot dress like that they will feel inferior**. [...] If families cannot do as their neighbors [e.g. slaughtering a sheep, changing their clothes on holidays, they **feel inferior*** Akiltit Tera, Addis Ababa (urban)

## What does it mean to belong to a rich family?

### **Akiltit Tera, Addis Ababa** (urban)

- Getting everything that is useful for your future
- Going to a special school - he might be taught computer
- Being able to play in a compound, not on the street
- Their parents save money for them and take care of them very much

### **Leku, SNNPR** (urban)

- Children from a rich family learn in private schools
- They use cars to go to school
- He will have inheritance from his parents, even if he does not succeed in his education
- She does not eat one kind of food more than once [a day]

## What does it mean to belong to a rich family?

### ***Tach meret, Amhara***

- *Children get better clothes like jeans, etc.*
- *Educated parents know how to take care of their children, even if they are not rich*
- *Rich children do not worry about anything*
- *Parents do not have more than two children, no matter how wealthy they are*

### ***Semhal, Tigray***

- *A wealthy child is free from worry and depression and able to concentrate on their schooling*
- *They can play and relax as they don't have to work*
- *His family encourages him to study, even at night*
- *Rich girls marry early*

## How does society regard poor children?

**Akiltit Tera, Addis Ababa**  
(urban)

- The people in the community do not greet him well as they do children from rich families. They do not show attention and love to a child from a poor household

- Teachers treat both kinds of children equally. But the students from a better background want to show the difference

**Leku, SNNPR** (urban)

- The community does not care about the child if he/she does not have parents ... [they] might abuse the labor of children from poor households

- There are some good people who might teach the children of poor people, but this is rare

## How does society regard poor children?

### ***Tach meret, Amhara***

- *They might give them money if they beg or advise them to work ... rich people look down on them and might label them as thieves.*
- *In the school there is discrimination, it is children from rich households that are nominated to be monitors [and] involved in the clubs that are found in the school*
- *Better off children might belittle those from poor families because of their clothing*

## Discussion

- Children's conceptions of poverty are profoundly social and context-specific
  - Importance of appearance and clothing as resources for social participation
  - Importance of being able to relate to others, and having robust others to relate to (Garbarino, 2005; Bird, 2009)
- Moral dimension of poverty – culture of poverty?

# Discussion

- Themes of stigma, dependency, fragility of benefit, continual tension and distraction
- Calculations required to engage in any activity
  - You are enrolled in school, but can you be spared from work to go?
  - You go to school, but do you any have school materials; if so, are they as good as your friends? Have you had breakfast, will you have lunch?
  - Is your school government or private?
  - If it is private, do you have the time and extra resources to take advantage of this? (for example, by going on school trips)
  - Or do you actually feel much worse because you are visibly poorer than the other students?

# Conclusions

- Respect as important to children as adults, possibly even more - '*standing equal with others*' (Yared)

*On one level, it is a struggle to make ends meet, to make it through another day, and, ultimately, to survive. On another level, one that is arguably as or more important to children themselves, it is a struggle to assert one's humanity, to remain a person and to not become the lesser being that they believe the host society sees them to be* (Mann,2009:9)

# Conclusions

- Experiences of relative poverty are as common and corrosive in contemporary Ethiopia as USA and Europe

*While a child who goes without food is said to be more seriously deprived than the child who is unable to participate in the world around them [...] the long-term effect of being deprived of food for a short period during childhood could be less serious than the effect of being denied access to the means of development and participation throughout childhood* (Middleton et al. 2007:53)

# Acknowledgements

The author thanks *Young Lives* participants and researchers, in particular Yisak Tafere and Workneh Abebe, and Virginia Morrow and Gina Crivello who provided invaluable comments on an earlier draft.

*Young Lives* is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and based on a collaborative partnership between the University of Oxford, Save the Children UK, the Open University and a series of prominent national research and policy institutes in four study countries. It receives partial funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

# Understandings of Illbeing/ Poverty 1

*Younger cohort*

**1st Housing** (old, no kitchen, no bed)

**2nd Appearance** (not being clean, having neat, well oiled hair, clean clothes and shoes)

**Education**

**Food**

**Working** (looking after siblings, herding)

**Not having friends**

**Being an orphan** (urban)

*Older cohort*

**1<sup>st</sup> Food** (going to school without breakfast, hunger pains)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Education, Clothing**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Housing**

**4<sup>th</sup> Appearance, behaviour** (pestering parents, not 'in peace' with neighbours)

# Specific research questions

- How do understandings of ill-being differ between different types of community and children within those communities?
- What is the place of material poverty in children's understandings?
- Are there statistically significant differences in child poverty indicators identified by respondents by socio-economic status?

Group & individual interviews with children aged 5-6 and 11-13 in five urban & rural communities ( $n=100$ )

# Participatory group methods

