

## ISSUES OF POVERTY TO WOMEN IN THE THIRD WORLD COMPARED TO WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPED WEST

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### **Abstract**

*This work presents specific issues of women and poverty in the developing world and developed west. It deals with a comparative assessment of literature on women who are found to be in poverty in the developing and developed nations based on some issues of evolution/health, standard of living, level of lack in resources (measured in terms income), and other deprivation indicators. The general case here is that women bear mostly the burden of poverty, but the issues appear different compared to whether it is the developed or developing part of the world. Whichever way it takes, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It equally means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society, which creates insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It generally means susceptibility to violence and living on marginal or fragile environments, especially in the developing rural part of the world. The review suggests severe eradication measures in reducing absolute poverty in the global south.*

**KEYWORDS:** Poverty, women Third world, developed west.

### **INTRODUCION**

Gender equality and women's development are human rights that lie at the heart of development and achievement of the millennium development goals. Despite the progress that has been made, six out of ten of the world's poorest people are still women and girls, less than 16 percent of the world's parliamentarians are women, two third of all children shut outside the school gates are girls (Nadah, 2010). This shows that feminization of poverty, the gender disparities in economic power sharing is one of the factors to poverty of women. Migration, globalization and consequent changes in family structures have placed additional burdens on women, especially those who provide for several dependents. Poverty has various manifestations which include; lack of income and productivity resources that is sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition, ill health, limited or lack of access to education and other

basic services, increase morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing and unsafe environment.

### **WOMEN AND ISSUES OF POVERTY(GENERAL OVERVIEW)**

Poverty is defined as the inability for an individual to attain a minimum standard of living, which according to World Bank is measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required for satisfying basic needs (Kehler, 2001). Thus poverty in its simple form is the inability of individual households or entire community to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. It often goes hand in hand with hunger, malnourishment, poor health, high mortality and morbidity rates, insufficient education and precarious and unhealthy housing (Kehler, 2001).

MCFerson (2010) observed that globally women account for the highest population of the poor persons, identifying that over 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty are women. Research suggests that in most countries of the world women are more likely to experience poverty than men, in Britain government figure on households below average income between men and women information in 2001 and 2002 revealed that 18 percent of men and 21 percent of women were in poverty(Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Similarly in Africa, rural women make up the highest population of the poor for instance in South Africa as of 1999, 56 percent of the women were unemployed as compared to 44 percent of men that were unemployed (Kehler, 2001). The economic crises, structural adjustment programmes, armed conflicts and drought have led to the feminization of poverty (the over representation of women in poverty statistics) (FAO, 1999).

The poverty level of women in any given society is based on the relations of class, race and gender based access to social resources and opportunities as well as women's unequal access to resources and opportunities. In other words women's level of poverty is based on the fact of social seclusion, lack of educational opportunities, to being gainfully employed in paid jobs.

Poverty among women in the developing world tend to be absolute, which is being incapable of meeting the basic needs to enable them survive. This is in part due to gender role expectations with regard to traditional beliefs and practices relating to religion, cultural norms and politics, large family size, polygyny, early marriage and lack of education(Townsend, 1981). While poverty among women in the developed countries tend to be that of relative poverty (suppose to be a household income below a given percentage of average national income(Dormerkpo,2015). It is also important to mention here that women living in poverty whether in the western or developing world could be teenage mum, lone parent or in a relationship. They are not all the same, and have different ideas, needs and circumstances which may require different policies to help them out of poverty (Women budget group, 2005).

### **THE ROOTS OF POVERTY AMONG WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRIZED COUNTRIES**

Flaherty et al (2008) identified a number of reasons why women in the industrial societies are likely to be poor:

- Lack of opportunities to work: Most women in industrial societies are less likely to be in paid job because of the issue of ideal gender role norm and social exclusion. According to one of liberal feminist Mary wollenstone, this lack of opportunities stem from the fact that women lack education necessary for employment because of the way they have been socialized to find fulfillment in their children and husbands or to accept the false gender role, and that only education can liberate women from poverty (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

- **Unequal Pay Gab:** There is gender pay gap, which means that women earn less than men in the comparable jobs.
- Disruption of family life which could lead to lone parenthood could be associated with a fall into low income and tend to place a considerable strain on lone mothers responsible for children.
- Many mothers are unable to work because of their responsibilities, and the benefit for carers are very low
- **Women are more in Part Time Work:** Most part time job like receptionist, teaching and nursing are women, because it gives them time to combine work with childcare. Part time work tend to be lower paid than full time work and offer fewer opportunities for career advancement.
- Women are more likely than men to have low paid jobs. For example, women are more likely to be home workers, who tend to be particularly low paid, it has be estimated that more than two thirds of those earning less than minimum wage in U K are women.
- The responsibility of childcare, and care for the sick and other vulnerable group help to increase the risk of poverty among women. Career break to fulfill such obligation can reduce the prospects of career advancement and lead to low wages.

#### **EFFECT OF POVERTY ON WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD**

- **Loss of Care of their Children:** Many mothers in poverty in the developed world often release their children to the care of social welfare services since they lack the sufficient resources to raise their children (women budget group, 2005).
- **Mental Health and Low Morals:** The stress of poverty undermines parental/maternal capacity to perform an effective parenting role, which is identified by the government as crucial to its child poverty strategy. In addition women carry the strain of budgeting inadequate material resource, in so doing they draw on personal resourcefulness and social resources that derive from social networks. Thus leading to depression and low morale especially among poor lone mothers in the western world (Women budget group, 2005).
- **Low Paid Job:** Women in poverty in the western world tend to be in low paying jobs because they lack necessary qualification needed to be in high paid jobs (Women budget group, 2005).
- **Lack of Opportunities to Learn:** Lack of quality education and training among women of the industrialized world is due to poverty. It is argued that skills are increasingly important in the contemporary labour market and without it there is high risk of unemployment, and most women are poor thus unable to get the necessary skills needed to be employed (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).
- **Lack of Decent Housing:** Poverty among women in the western world often result to living in a low standard houses that can be prone to health problems (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

- **Living in a Disadvantaged Neighborhood:** Due to poverty, lone parents tend to live in some problem areas such as high crime, poor services and poor health conditions which can make individual problems worst (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

### **POVERTY AMONG WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

There are various factors that contribute to poverty among women of developing world and these include:

**Gender and Property:** The economic vulnerability of poor women in developing nation especially Africa flows mostly from their weakly defined property rights to major productive assets, such as land, cattle which is mostly influenced by custom and traditions. This seems to restrict their ability to own and manage land, even though rural women are the main cultivators, undertaking about 80 percent of the work in food storage and transportation, 90 percent of the work of hoeing and weeding and 60 percent of harvesting and marketing yet they are not allowed to own land for instance in Kenya only five percent of the women are registered land owners. The consequences of weak property rights are clearest in the event of divorce or widowhood, where often women are stripped of the right to use their husband's landed properties and other assets, which they may have tended for years thus losing their main source of income (MCFerson, 2010). The radical feminist explain this lack of property right from the fact that the society is in the patriarchal structure where men dominate and suppresses women thus they use force, unpaid work, tradition and custom in form of property right to keep women subordinated to them. For instance Stanko a radical feminist pointed out that, men use sexual harassment to intimidate women who seek to enter areas of men dominated profession thus combining to increase their poverty level (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

**Gender and Time:** the issue of time adds an important dimension to the gender and poverty paradigm in developing nations. Time poverty impacts particularly poor women and girls, who are required to contribute time and laboring to various tasks and as a result forgoing education. Time poverty makes income and asset poverty worsen in several ways; low productivity in many non-market tasks renders them time and labour intensive, thus reducing the availability of time to participate in more economically productive activities. Secondly, due to gender division of labour that causes poor substitutability of labour, allocation in non-market work, individuals, particularly women, are unable to take full advantage of economic opportunities and participate in income generating activities.

Thirdly, time poverty also impedes individuals' ability to expand capabilities through education and skills development, thereby enhancing economic returns in the market place. More over time scarcity severely limits women participation in collective actions which are time intensive but crucial to improve their economic condition and therefore lead to additional household tasks (fetching water, fuel, fodder and carrying produce to the market) to young girls, thus impacting their schooling and future life chances. In addition time poverty also prevent women from having equal access to labour, educational training, experiences and farm inputs like the average male farmers, added with discriminatory attitude towards women in the society without which women crop yield can increase by 25 percent when rural women obtain equal opportunities with their male counterpart (MCFerson, 2010).

**GLOBALIZATION/POOR WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN:** Although the growth in developing economics has created opportunities for people, but women are worst affected in this new economic growth in that their positions are jeopardized with the introduction of mechanization and technology. Additionally women are often the first to lose their jobs due to gender inequalities that is created by the patriarchy nature of most societies, ILO stated that

the global unemployment rate for women could reach 7.4 percent compared to 7.0 for men (Nadah,2010). In addition studies have shown that current trends of globalization, economic reforms and global cut in social spending are only a few of the determining factors which will decrease women participation in the workforce and increase their poverty. Since women are the most vulnerable in the workforce, retrenchments will affect them long before their male counterparts will be affected by it. The privatization of public services have greater impact on women, since they are defined through their multiple reproductive and caretaker roles. And the cut back in spending of social services will impact tremendously on women as well as their reproductive roles, thereby translating into feminization of poverty rather than women's socio economic empowerment and upliftment (Kehler, 2001).

Dormerkpor (2015), pointed out that women poverty is aggravated more by lack of decision making and mothering roles because of restrictions these gender imperatives impose on their ability to earn income. And even when women are involved in income earning activities, their work is disrupted, especially in informal sector; this is due to burdens on their personal time arising from pregnancy, childbirth, childcare and other domestic related responsibilities. Hence black women are susceptible to exploitation which promotes women's unpaid work in the household, and capitalism, a system that uses them for cheap labour. Thus the experiences of mothers in developing world make them to lose out on education and income.

**Prostitution/Begging:** Most women and girls go into prostitution to be able to meet their basic needs like food, clothe and housing since they lack financial support from their family. A study has proven that most women and young girls involved in prostitution are largely influenced by poverty (Adiukwu and Adiukwu, 2015). Similarlymoghadam (2005) noted that poverty on women in developing world often result to prostitution and trafficking in women, which is a major violation of women's human rights. Prostitution may sometimes result in HIV/AIDS as Africa women account for 30 percent of death resulting from HIV/AIDS.

**Early Marriage:** Poverty is also a contributing factor to early marriage and early pregnancy in developing world which poses a health challenge to women. In some countries, half of all girls under the age of 18 are married, often in response to poverty so that the prospective in-law can assist the family financially or reduce the amount of mouth they need to feed. When this happens education of the girl child may be in jeopardy coupled with the HIV risk because of their reproductive structures. Most of these men are older and sexually active before marriage, it is likely to infect the young girls with HIV/AIDS and other sexually trasmitted diseases (Moghadam,2005). In addition World Youth Report (2003), reported the high prevalence rate of early marriage between the ages of 15 – 19 years in these countries; Democratic Republic of the Congo (74 percent), Niger (70 percent), Afghanistan (54 percent) and Bangladesh (51 percent), and is mostly in response to poverty. This early marriage is often associated with early pregnancy which carries a high risk of illness and death. Girls, aged 10 – 15 years are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women between the ages of 20 and 24.

**High School Dropout Rates for Girls:** In most developing nations of the world poverty may translate into, intra – household inequalities which may take the form of gender differentiated decisions due to poverty where the girls are asked to drop out of school in favour of boys to complete their secondary and higher education. Hence the girls stay back to raise money for their brother education. In addition people living in poverty may not be able to attend school because there may not be able to afford the necessary school requirements (Moghadam, 2005). It is estimated by UNICEF that two- third of Africa illiterates are women and this may be due to poverty which is endemic in Africa especially in rural areas (Makama, 2013). similarly it is

noted in Viet Nam and China, that economic reforms and rising prices resulted in declining school enrollments, especially among girls in poor households. China floating population includes numerous migrant workers with no access to schools, healthcare and other necessary social and economic services (Moghadam, 2005).

**Maternal Mortality:** The high rate of mortality of women in developing nation is attributed to lack of nutrition, resources to maintain a healthy living environment, water and lack of hygiene due to poor housing. In Africa, women in poverty suffer from very easily preventable diseases, or diseases which can be preventable with good nutritious food which has the ability to fight off diseases. Malaria in particular is one of the main causes of death among young Africa girls due to poor sanitary conditions. Another problem is number of women who die giving birth due to malnutrition, heamorge, sepsis, obstructed labour and abortion. These factors are common in the developing countries because of high rate of poverty and lack of medical services (Social and economic research for everyone, 2013).

**Malnutrition:** People living in poverty rarely have access to highly nutritious foods. Even if they have access to these foods, it is unlikely that they can purchase them. For women in developing world quality is a luxury. A total of 14.3 percent of people in developing world mostly women face hunger and about 25 percent of sub-Saharan Africa is considered malnourished.

**Gender Base Violence:** A study by World Bank revealed that violence is one of the worst aspects of poverty that affect women. When looking for a job, when asking for loan, they always face the risk and humiliation of sexual abuse which sometimes result in rape, unwanted pregnancy and other psychological and physical injuries and low self-esteem (social and economic research for everyone, 2013).

**Shock Absorbers:** In some low income households women are more deprived than other family members. For instance mothers frequently go without food, clothing and warmth in order to protect children from the impact of an inadequate income. Shielding children from the worst effects of poverty is not just attempting to mitigate their deprivation; it also involves trying to shield children from the stigma and mothering all often associated with poverty.

### **COMPARALISM OF THE EFFECT OF POVERTY ON WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.**

From the discussions above one will deduce that there are certain differences in the way poverty affect women in the developed and developing world and these include:

- Poverty among women in the developed world tend to be relative while poverty among women in the developing world is absolute.
- Poverty among women in developing world is mostly due to lack of inheritance rights while poverty among women in developed world is due to unequal pay and social seclusion.
- Women poverty in the developing world tend to result to hunger, malnourishment and high mortality rate among women and children while poverty among women in the developed world often results to loss of child care to social welfare services.
- Poverty in the developed world often result to women being in low paid job while poverty among women in the developing countries often result to child labour, early marriage, prostitution, gender based violence and human trafficking.

### **GENERAL SUGGESTIONS**

Poverty is a condition that is likely to affect women more than men due to social exclusion and lack of opportunities and their pattern of effect depends on the level of development of that

country. Thus it is appropriate for policy to be channeled towards eradication of poverty among women depending on the pattern of poverty; therefore it is important to consider ways of reducing the deprivation experienced by poor women and the greater difficulties women face in lifting themselves, and children, out of poverty across the globe. These will include well designed social programs such as distribution of land, training programs, job creation, employment services, access to housing; childcare facilities and reform of discriminatory laws and social welfare mechanisms need to be strengthened for all.

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