Poverty in Jordan: Concepts and Methodologies

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Abstract

This article aims at reviewing and analyzing poverty and poverty research in Jordan. It attempts to identify the factors which have limited the scope of the poverty discourse and provides a scientific discussion of the various approaches and methodologies adopted in the studies reviewed. Due to the difficulties in measuring poverty when defined from a social and psychological perspective, poverty has been defined and measured by the standard of living and/or satisfaction of basic needs. During the period 1987-2002, several studies and research papers (national and international), discussed the poverty problem and calculated poverty lines to distinguish between the poor and the non-poor. The officially adopted studies concluded that poverty in Jordan decreased during the period 1987 – 1997.

Introduction

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Jordan enjoyed relatively high growth rates reflected in an annual growth rate in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 10.9 percent, with an average of 7.5 percent growth rate in real per capita income (Haddad, 1990). This period also witnessed an expansion in the basic infrastructure and welfare services: education, health care, transportation, communication, etc.

The series of economic set-backs which Jordan faced from the beginning of the recession in 1983 to the end of the second Gulf crisis led to the emergence of a new class of urban poor (Al-Saqour et al., 1993). The economic recession, promoted by a decline in regional oil revenues, and workers' remittances resulted in a reduction in the general standard of living (Khasawneh, 2001, pp. 1-2), and led to high unemployment and emergence of poverty as a serious problem to the development efforts. During the recession, the income per capita fell from roughly USD 1,570 per annum in 1985 to USD 980 in 1990 and inflation stood at 26 percent in 1989 and 16 percent in 1990 (Hamaneh (eds.), 1994). Unemployment reached 14.7

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percent and the number of families living below the absolute poverty line reached 18.7 percent (Al-Saqour et al., 1989). However, there are several signs that poverty and poverty alleviation have recently climbed to the top of the agenda of policy makers and practitioners working in the development field in Jordan. The launching of the Jordan Poverty Alleviation Strategy (JPAS) in 2002 under the Patronage of King Abdullah II, and the launching of the Social and Economic Transformation Program in 2001, are indicative of this renewed interest on the part of the government. These efforts aim, among others, at improving the standard of living of Jordanians and the reduction of poverty by addressing issues of health, environment, education, sustainable microfinance, improving economic security of low income working families, and increasing employment opportunities (MoSD, 2002; MoPTC, 2001).

Due to the difficulties in measuring poverty when defined from a social and psychological perspective, poverty has been defined and measured by the standard of living and/or satisfaction of basic needs. Accordingly, poverty was defined as the inability to satisfy the minimum basic needs in a given society. To distinguish between the poor and the non-poor, the total income or expenditure needed to satisfy these basic needs is calculated (poverty line). In Jordan, during the period 1987-2002, several studies and research papers (national and international) discussed the poverty problem and calculated poverty lines to distinguish between the poor and the non-poor. These studies, despite differences in methods to calculate the poverty line, concluded that poverty in Jordan decreased during the period 1987 – 1997, but the estimates of poverty differed quite considerably and ranged between 11.7 percent and 33 percent (Table 1). Therefore, the objective of this research is to discern these studies and provide thorough analyses of the approaches adopted.

**Poverty Definitions in Jordan (1987-2001)**

The poverty estimates and statistics discussed here are based on the 'official' poverty definition developed in 1987 by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) (Al-Saqour et al., 1989), and (Baqer et al., 1999). Both of these definitions derived an abject poverty line ('severe poverty' in the case of Baqer et al.) and an absolute poverty line. Al-Saqour et al. utilized a 'nutrition-based' poverty line to derive both the abject and absolute poverty lines, while Baqer et al., adopted the 'food-energy intake' approach to derive both lines. The money-value of the two poverty lines, the estimates of poverty incidence, and the poverty gap differed quite considerably. The abject or severe poverty lines reflect the total cost of basic food consumption needs, while the absolute poverty lines reflect the total cost of basic consumption needs (food and non-food items). Both lines used a consumption-based approach and utilised Household Expenditure and Income Surveys (HEIS) data on income and expenditure patterns of Jordanian families.
The HEIS are carried-out by Jordan's Department of Statistics (DOS) and they are nationally representative. Since 1979, five surveys (1979/80, 1986/87, 1992, 1997, and 2002/03) were implemented. The HEIS collect raw data from households all over the country, in four rounds through the survey year. Detailed information is collected on household consumption patterns of hundreds of commodities including food and non-food items, types of income components, socio-demographic information (including data on education and health), assets, landholding and other durables, labour force characteristics, quantities and value spent on frequently consumed and purchased items, and place of residence (DOS, 1999a). Thus, HEIS comprises a rich set of data that is essential for research on social and economic issues.

The estimates of poverty incidence using the absolute poverty lines range from 11.7 percent (WB, 2001) to 33 percent (Bager, 1999). Even though most of the studies carried out during the period 1989-2001 used the consumption-based absolute poverty lines (Khasawneh, 1998; Bager, 1999; WB, 1994 and 2001, etc.), the difference in the estimates obtained indicates lack of agreement on the definition of the absolute poverty line and the items deemed necessary for the poor (Table 1).

### Table 1
Summary Findings of the Poverty Studies during the period (1987-2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Poverty line (JD/person)</th>
<th>Incidence (%)</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Study type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pockets of poverty</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>Al-Sagoff, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>Al-Shanbat, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Khawarzmn, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>28.12</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>Shaban, 2001</td>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimate of the absolute poverty line for families that do not have to pay rent. Also, the report indicated that poverty incidence has declined to 18.3%. The decrease was due to the increase of public employees' monthly salaries by JD 10.

** Estimates are based on 1997 figures, and derived for the absolute poverty line only.
The adoption of the updated WB (2001) absolute poverty line as the ‘official’ poverty line by the state in 2001, as opposed to that of Baqer’s et al. (1999), reflects the state orientation in addressing the problem of poverty. In 2001, the NAF revised its benefit scales and based them on this line. The adoption of the WB poverty line by the NAF breaks away from the haphazard approach it used previously in setting national assistance scales.

**Consumption-Based Poverty Lines in Jordan**

The derivation of the ‘official’ poverty lines for Jordan in 1987 and 1993 was grounded in the work of a national team of experts entrusted with defining and setting poverty lines for the country as a whole. The absolute and abject poverty lines were derived in 1987 for the first time, and updated in 1993 by a team headed by Al-Saqour and by the WB in 2001. During the last decade there had been numerous poverty estimates for Jordan relying primarily on nutrition-based absolute poverty lines (Al-Saqour et al. 1989 and 1993), and on food-energy intake absolute poverty lines (Baqer et al., 1999). However, the consensus on the use and the derivation of the absolute poverty line determinants remains a contentious issue. The estimates obtained vary considerably both in terms of the incidence and depth of poverty.

Nevertheless, both of these approaches are considered ‘objective’ poverty lines. The main idea here is to set a poverty line at a level that enables individuals to obtain basic consumption needs. The most widely used methods to estimate the poverty lines are (a) the nutrition-based method (food basket) and (b) the food-energy intake method (the actual consumption methods). The first method is based on a basket of foods that provide nutritional requirements at the lowest price levels, while the latter is based on the average daily per capita calorie intake for each expenditure group (Baqer et al., 1999, p.18).

**A) The Nutrition-Based Poverty Lines**

The nutrition-based poverty line method is defined in Jordan as the abject poverty line, and it is constituted by the total cost of basic food consumption needs. The absolute poverty line is estimated as the sum of the cost of the food basket with an adequate nutritional intake, as well as the cost of other non-food ‘basic needs’, such as education, health, shelter, clothes, and transportation (Al-Saqour et al., 1989, pp. 106-7). The nutritional-intake was based on the established Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) tables for various age-sex groups of the population and for individuals with moderate activity levels (Ibid.). Jordan’s poverty team considered the minimum daily-required nutritional intake to be 2,224 calories of energy and 40.5 grams of protein, which is within the range of comparable minimum nutritional intakes adopted in other countries for the establishment of the poverty line (for example, Egypt 2,510 calories, Somalia and Mauritania
2,310 calories, and 2,180 calories in rural Malaysia) (Ibid., p. 104). Moreover, based on the calorie contents of the various food items, several food baskets were constructed. The selected food baskets contained a combination of eleven main items (rice, sugar, milk, oil, tomato, bread, meat, eggs, leaf vegetables, legumes, and flour). The items in the food baskets were then priced at the minimum prevalent prices in various governorates, taking into account local consumption habits. In 1987, the average cost of meeting the minimum energy and protein required for individuals was estimated at JD 67.5 annually, implying a JD 486 for a family of 7.2 persons (Ibid., p. 57).

Once the abject poverty line had been derived, the cost of non-food needs is added to it to derive the absolute poverty line. The cost of non-food needs was calculated based on the proportion of food in the expenditure of lower-income households. In 1987, the food share in the expenditure formed 40.2 percent of the total expenditure on food and services, which means the total expenditures on non-food items accounted for 59.8 percent of total expenditures. In calculating the final figure for the cost of non-food items, the expenditure on recreation, personal care, culture, tobacco, alcohol, and taxes were deducted from the total expenditures, as they were considered to be ‘unessential for lower-income groups’ (Ibid., p. 83). Therefore, the food share in the total expenditure was revised to reflect these changes; hence the new food share was 45.6 percent of total expenditures, and non-food items 54.4 percent. Furthermore, since the total monthly expenditures on food amounted to JD 40.5, the monthly expenditures on non-food would equal JD 48.3. Thus, the monthly absolute poverty line for a family of 7.2 persons was JD 89 (Ibid.).

To complete the equation, expenditures on the various variables, besides food, that make up the absolute poverty line (i.e., housing, education, clothes, health, and transportation) were derived based on the proportion of each of these variables in the total average expenditure in the HEIS. Housing, including water and electricity cost, accounted for 32 percent (JD 28.5), clothes 7.6 percent (JD 6.8), education 3.9 percent (JD 3.5), health 2 percent (JD 1.8), and transportation 9 percent (JD 7.9) per month. This methodology was adopted in the 1993 study as well. The only difference between the 1987 poverty line and that of 1993 is the inclusion of rent in the second absolute poverty line. The 1992 study derived two absolute poverty lines, one for those who pay rent (JD 119) and the other for those who do not pay rent (JD 97).

Although many later studies adopted this methodology in measuring poverty (Al-Saqour, M. et al, 1993; Khasawneh, 1998; WB, 1994 and 2001), the contents of the food basket, the amount of calorie intake, and the exclusion of other non-food items, were viewed as problematic, leaving a wide margin for personal judgement. For example, Bager et al. (1999) indicates that the food baskets contained only eleven items (mentioned
above) and excluded other important dietary items, such as fruit, fish, nuts, spices, tea, coffee, etc., and no allowance was made for lost food during cooking, eating and storing, which he accounts for in his study. The expenditures on recreation, culture, personal care, taxes, and other items were not included, and no allowances were made for pregnant and breast feeding women. Moreover, and lastly, children and adults were given the same weight when calculating the cost of the food basket, which introduced a downward bias in the estimates (Ibid.).

B) The Food-Energy Intake Method

The food-energy intake method aims at finding the ‘consumption/expenditure (or income) that allows the household to obtain enough food to meet its energy level’ (WB, 2002). Baqer et al. (1999) adopted this approach to estimate the absolute poverty line. The ‘food-energy intake’ approach estimated the absolute poverty line relying on actual food patterns in HEIS (1992) data. The actual food consumption was based on the average daily per capita calorie intake for each expenditure group, which was calculated from the actual food consumption for each group. The total expenditure that corresponds to the recommended calorie intake is then estimated and is considered to be the poverty line. The food-energy intake can be taken as an increasing function of per capita expenditure/income. This method is based on actual food consumption and the food cost is estimated on the basis of actual prices paid by households near the poverty line and not by the lowest prices for each individual food item (Baqer et al., 1999).

The poverty line was derived from the caloric contents of 145 main food items (Baqer et al., 1999, p. 21) that comprised the overall consumption of Jordanian families. The average calorie intake for individuals was derived (2,440 calories per capita per day) and the consumption level parallel to it was calculated (Ibid., p. 23). The annual per capita poverty line was estimated at JD 478 in 1997. However, in calculating the poverty line, other expenditures were added to the family consumption basket, including rent for those who own homes, gifts received from others, allowances for food lost during cooking, eating and storing (including food sticking on utensils, leftovers, and food thrown away).

A comparison between the methodologies used in deriving the poverty lines for 1987 and 1992/3 and that of Baqer et al. (1999) indicates the difference in the definitions adopted by each study and of the needs deemed essential to the poor. The differences between the two definitions stem from three main factors. First, while the 1987 and 1992/3 studies assumed a daily calorie intake of 2,224 calories, Baqer et al., (1999) used 2,440 calories. Second, in contrast to all other poverty studies in Jordan, Baqer et al., included items such as recreation, culture, personal care, etc., emphasising that these items are essential for the poor and non-poor alike. And third, Baqer et al., added an allowance for food lost during cooking, eating, and
storing, estimating the loss due to cooking and spoilage of food at 10 percent of food acquired by households. Given the various differences in the approaches discussed above and in the variables deemed necessary for the derivation of the poverty line, it becomes clear why the various studies obtained different estimates of poverty.

Estimates of the Incidence and Depth of Poverty

Once the poverty lines are determined, various overall aggregate measures of poverty (indices) can be estimated in order to measure poverty at a national level. These measures are used for summarising information on the well-being of the poor. These measures include the head-count index, the poverty gap index, and the severity of poverty index. The head-count index is by far the most widely used measure, which represents the percentage of individuals below the poverty line to the total population, and draws attention to the extent and spread of poverty among the population. However, this index treats all households below the poverty line equally, regardless of the differences in their income. The weakness of this measure is that it does not take into account the intensity of poverty, i.e., how poor the poor are, and hence does not change if people below the poverty line become poorer (PNA, 1998). Therefore, this index does not properly register the effectiveness of anti-poverty programs that aim at poverty alleviation. Here it becomes important to use the poverty gap index.

The poverty gap index adds up the extent by which individuals fall below the poverty line, and expresses it as a percentage of the poverty line. In other words, it gives the percentage by which the income of the poor is below the poverty line, without specifying where poverty is concentrated most (ibid.). Therefore, measuring the poverty gap indicates the magnitude of the problem in money terms. The poverty gap increases as household income falls below the poverty line, and decreases for any improvement in household income. The absolute magnitude of the total poverty gap equals the money needed to completely erase poverty, assuming it is perfectly targeted and each poor individual is given exactly the amount of his/her income shortfall below the poverty line. This index thus reflects the maximum cost for eliminating poverty and can be used as a measure to assess the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs. However, since this index is concerned with the total depth of poverty (overall poverty gap), it does not measure income inequality among the poor, thus raising the need for the poverty severity index.

The poverty severity index, better known as the ‘squared poverty gap index’, is used as a measure of both the size of the poverty gap and the income inequality among the poor. It is a weighted sum of poverty gaps (as a proportion of the poverty line), where the weights are the proportionate poverty gaps themselves. By squaring the poverty gap index, the measure
puts more weight on cases that have income at the bottom of the poverty line (WB, 2002). Since this index is sensitive to the distribution of income below the poverty line, the numerical value of it is not easy to interpret, and therefore, it is not widely used (Baqer et al., 1999). The basic estimates of those indices are summarised in Table 2.

**Table (2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Poverty in Jordan between 1987 and 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty incidence (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty gap (% of poverty line)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total poverty gap (ID Mil.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty severity index (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of poor people (thousands)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Official’ refers to Al-Saqour et al. poverty estimates.

** Estimate for people who pay rent.

The table shows the estimates of poverty levels in Jordan between 1987 and 1997, as estimated by different studies. Most important in these studies is the difference in the estimates of the poverty gap and in the number of people living in poverty. According to Baqer et al. (1999), the total poverty gap was ID 185 million in 1997, compared with ID 36.6 million in the WB (2001) study for the same year, implying a difference of approximately ID 150 millions annually. According to Baqer et al., (1999) the number of poor people is estimated at 1,520 thousands, while the WB (2001) estimate is approximately one-third of that, 536.3 thousands. It is evident that these estimates would imply different policies and resources to alleviate poverty.

Second, the 1989 and 1993 poverty lines were constructed based on the lowest prices available at the time, without accounting for the dietary contents of the products. This means that the lowest qualities of certain items were selected for the food basket, based on personal judgement. For example, rice was part of the food basket, and since there are many varieties of rice in the market, such as Egyptian rice, American rice, etc., the brand with the lowest price was picked to represent the actual diet of poor families, without considering the actual dietary benefits of the item selected.

And third, the poverty lines were constructed for the average household without any adjustment for household size or composition. It was assumed that household members share resources equally. Therefore, a child was
given the same weight as an adult without any account for economies of scale in consumption or income. Atkinson (1991) indicates that lack of adjustment in household consumption leads to errors in the estimation of households’ poverty lines. The alternative is to base poverty measures on expenditure/income per adult rather than per capita. This method has been used in OECD countries and some developing countries. It allows for household economies of scale in which the first adult is given a weight of one, every adult afterward is given a weight of 70 percent, and children are given 50 percent (Strengmann-Kuhn, 2002, p. 4). This scale would correct a bias in the estimation of poverty measures.

The Geographic Distribution of Poverty

Geographic distribution of the population varies significantly across Jordan. 72 percent of Jordan’s population live in the three most populated governorates (Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid), and 28 percent live in the remaining nine governorates (Khasawneh, 2001, p. 8). The percentage of the population in rural areas in poverty was markedly different from that in urban areas. The data on the socio-economic indicators in 1992 and 1997, at the urban, rural and governorate levels, give a clear ranking on the distribution of poverty in the country. In 1992, 77.36 percent of Jordanians lived in urban areas compared to 78.7 percent in 1997, and 22.64 percent in rural areas compared to 21.01 percent in 1997, respectively (DoS, 1999c and 2002). Therefore, the distribution of the population between urban and rural areas did not change considerably over this period, implying little migration. However, in both 1992 and 1997, the incidence and depth (refers to the size of the poverty gap) of poverty were higher in rural areas than urban areas. The incidence of poverty in rural areas in 1992 was 21.15 percent and the depth of poverty was 5.07 percent, compared with 18.16 percent and 4.01 percent, respectively in 1997.

On the other hand, in 1992, the incidence and depth of poverty in urban areas was 12.45 percent and 3.15 percent, and 9.98 percent and 2.15 percent, respectively in 1997 (Al-Saqour, 1998). Although a larger number of poor people live in urban areas, the proportionate incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas. The high incidence and depth of poverty in rural areas reflect the uneven distribution of income and resources in the countryside. The reason for the uneven distribution lies mainly in the concentration of industrial and service bases around urban areas, particularly Amman, Irbid and Zarqa. The other rural governorates, such as Karak and Mafraq, depend primarily on the traditional agricultural sector for their livelihood. This sector suffers from low productivity, shortages of water, the absence of suitable grazing land for animals, inadequate marketing, etc. (Ibid.).
On a governorate level, poverty is geographically distributed among five main urban governorates, Amman (by far exhibited the lowest incidence of poverty), Jerash, Irbid, Ajloun and Madaba. Although the WB (2001) indicates that 63.9 percent of the poor live in these five governorates, the DOS (2002, p. 34) show that 63.3 percent (65.3 percent in 1997) of the population live in these same governorates. Consequently, while the ratio of poverty is higher in rural than urban areas, only a third of the poor are in rural areas. The three largest governorates have the lowest ratio of poor residents, even though they have larger numbers of poor people. Ma'arqa, Balqa, and Karak have the highest concentration of residents in the low-income groups. A resident in Ma'arqa is nearly six times more likely (31.3 percent) to be in the lowest deciles than a resident of Amman (5.5 percent) (Ibid.). Hence, the poor in Jordan are clustered around Amman and the areas to the north. The severity of poverty may also be graver in these governorates where the poor are over-represented.

However, governorate-level comparisons conceal the disparities of poverty within governorates, thus overlooking certain pockets of poverty. For example, one might find more poverty in squatter areas around the main cities, than in other better-off areas, thus an average poverty line for a governorate does not show the intra-governorate disparities.

**Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of the Poor**

There are other important characteristics of poverty in Jordan to be considered. The level and trends of poverty over time vary by demographic characteristics (such as household size, composition, and marital status) and socio-economic characteristics (such as education, health and employment). These characteristics should be ascertained priori, in order to devise effective policies and programs that aim at poverty alleviation.

Education has a strong negative correlation with poverty. In 1997, approximately 42 percent of the adult poor were illiterate, while illiterate adults represent only 15 percent of the population (WB, 2001, p. 48). Households with an illiterate head have the highest rates of poverty. According to the World Bank (2001, Table AIII:1A), in 1997 the incidence of poverty among households whose head was illiterate was 21.2 percent, compared to 6.04 percent for households whose head has a secondary education (27.89 percent and 4.89 percent respectively in 1992), and 2.7 percent for households whose head has a BA (2.58 percent in 1992) (WB, 2001). A remarkable drop in poverty occurred when the household head has gained vocational training (2.24 percent) compared with having elementary education (14.79 percent). A comparison between the 1992 and 1997 estimates indicate that heads of poor families had attained a slightly higher level of literacy by 1997. Thus, it is clear that poverty decreases with the increased educational level of household heads.
Female-headed households constituted 12.63 percent in 1992 and 6.27 percent in 1997 of poor household heads, compared with 14.53 percent and 12.08 percent for male-headed households. In both 1992 and 1997, the incidence of poverty among female-headed household dropped by one-half from the 1987 rates. Part of the explanation lies in the NAF's eligibility criteria that exclude male-headed households below the age of 60 years. Female-headed households are automatically eligible to receive benefits from the NAF (including widows, divorced, and 'deserted' women) regardless of age, given that they do not have any other source of income that is equal to the benefits level (NAF, 2001).

The incidence of poverty among unemployed heads in 1997 was 26.25 percent for unemployed heads, and 24.06 percent among those unable to work (i.e., disabled). Also, poor families with household heads employed in the private sector exhibited the highest incidence and depth of poverty (12.04 percent), followed by heads working in the public sector (9.84 percent). Therefore, higher poverty levels are associated with both unemployment and low wages.

Furthermore, according to Suuyagh (1999), female marginalization and impoverishment is a feature of the problem of poverty in Jordan. In spite of the growth in Jordanian women's participation in the labour force, from 6.7 percent in 1979 to 12.5 percent in 1997 (DoS, 1997, p. 58), women's participation levels are low by regional standards. While Jordan possesses the second highest female literacy rate (79 percent) among countries in the region, it is ranked eighth for its women's share of the adult labour market (11 percent). Although current government policies generally do not discriminate against women, the number of institutional or systemic barriers imposes severe limitations and constraints on their participation in the labour market (ibid.).

There is also a strong positive correlation between household size and poverty. A household of twelve members is almost five times more likely to be in poverty compared to a household of six members. Khasawneh (2001) indicates that poor families were found to be on average three persons larger than the average family size (nine members on average vs. six members for the national average) (p. 13). The highest incidence of poverty occurred in the 41-50 year age range for household heads, and exhibited the highest average economic-dependency ratio. In 1997 the rates of poverty for married heads of household (12.09 percent) and depth (2.26 percent) were highest, followed by those whose heads 'never married'. In 1992, the relative position for households whose heads were widowed had the highest incidence of poverty (15.51 percent) followed by married (14.5 percent) and divorced or separated (11.4 percent) (WB, 2001).
To summarise, in 1997 (compared with 1992), poverty increased among the unemployed people, employed working in the private sector, married and disabled head of households, families with high economic-dependency ratios, and large families. It decreased among those with higher educational levels, and among female-headed households from 1992 levels. The WB (2001) study characterizes poverty in Jordan as being ‘pervasive and shallow’ and cautions that in the event of crises in Jordan’s economy, a substantial segment of the ‘lower-middle class’ would fall below the poverty line (p. ii).

Baqar et al. (1999) contend that the problem of poverty has become severer during the period 1992-1997, and the income inequality among the population as a whole increased during the same period.

The results described in the above two sections are largely in accordance with familiar perceptions of what characterises the poor. Given the findings from the above mentioned studies, it comes as no surprise that poverty is concentrated among certain groups, such as large families, the elderly, poorly educated people, single-parent families, unemployed and low-wage personnel, rural residence, and mediocre occupation. However, it should be emphasized that the poverty profile gave us rates of poverty among individuals and families with particular characteristics, and no one characteristic is decisive in determining poverty or non-poverty. Of those with a given attribute, therefore, many are poor and many others are not. This conclusion implies that in order to make dent on poverty, development efforts and resources must target poverty groups with rather specific instruments. The use of the wrong instruments will exclude many who need assistance while helping others who are outside the target group, and here poverty mapping becomes important. By and large, conducting a detailed poverty mapping of the country serves to focus attention to specific sectors, regions, or groups of the poor.

**Research on Poverty in Jordan**

Research on poverty in Jordan is fairly recent, compared to research on other countries in the region. There are few studies on the subject that have examined poverty levels and the characteristics of the poor. Although poverty is a major problem in the society, it has not been a given enough attention in terms of research, neither from the state nor from the few independent researchers in this field. The few studies that are available, although generating some debate among researchers working in this field, did not attract national attention, nor did it attract new researchers. This is mainly due to the political sensitivity of the poverty problem, and the inability of some independent researchers to obtain the necessary permits to carry out field research on poverty-related issues. In fact, a researcher would have to obtain permits from approximately nine government departments, before being able to conduct his/her research. Exceptions to this rule are government-related studies, or studies by some international organizations.
Most of the studies that are available, except that of Al-Saqour et al. (1989), used secondary data for their analysis (Al-Saqour et al. 1993; Al-Shahattet et al., 1992; WB 1994a and 2001; Maryam and Takriti 1998; Baqer et al., 1999; and Khasawneh et al., 1998). Furthermore, the methodologies used in those studies are similar to that in the study of Al-Saqour et al. (1989) except those by Baqer (1995 and 1999) discussed above. Al-Saqour et al.'s (1989 and 1992/3) studies are government-sponsored studies, and, therefore, represent the ‘official’ orientation of the state in defining and measuring poverty, and the WB (2001) study represents an update of these studies. On the other hand, Baqer’s ‘Measurement and Analysis of Poverty in Jordan’, (1999), is an aberration from the traditional definition of poverty and incorporates non-material needs in the definition.

The studies on poverty in Jordan have been mainly concerned with developing poverty lines for the country as a whole and on governorate levels. The focus has been on developing operational definitions that are practical and feasible, given the country’s limited resources. Therefore, the studies were concerned with narrow concepts of poverty, based on the absolute approach. The absolute ‘lack-of’ concept limits and confines the definitions of poverty to food and some non-food necessities, and ignores other essential non-material needs, such as employment, participation, and political liberty. The rationale for adopting such an approach lies in the implementation of practical programs which aimed at poverty alleviation that primarily corresponds to the country’s particular needs and capacities. The broader definitions and, therefore, more substantial estimates of poverty levels, have their own implications for the state and require allocation of resources beyond the country’s capabilities. The narrow definition approach (absolute) relieves governments from addressing other crucial issues that touch upon democratization and civil liberties, and hence political stability. As Kanbur and Squire (1999) indicate, the importance of a precise measure of poverty increases when it comes to designing specific poverty-reduction policies.

The research in this field has been primarily quantitative in nature, and few studies (especially by UN agencies) have utilised the qualitative approach in investigating poverty on a national level. Poverty researchers in this field do not utilise the qualitative method in their investigation of poverty; however, some anthropologists in Jordan have been employing this method in their research. At present, these anthropologists are carrying out studies in remote areas in the southern part of Jordan, primarily focusing on coping strategies of the poor. These the studies, when available, might enhance and complement the quantitative approaches by bringing specific case studies to the wider arena of society. Such a complementary approach may entice concerned parties to look deeper than just the statistics.
Suggestion for further research:

This study of poverty in Jordan shows that much further research is needed to understand the various dimensions of poverty. The available studies fall short of identifying the actual causes of poverty and the correlation or association between poverty and its determinants. In particular, further research is needed to examine the links between poverty and unemployment, poverty and education, poverty and health, poverty and disability and the impact of these families’ employment and needs, the impact of social assistance on the poor, the effect of sales taxes on the poor, and the need for well-chosen cross-national comparison of poverty. These areas and others are all major components of the poverty discourse, which could be used to guide policy making.

Conclusion

In conclusion, poverty is a problem in Jordan, which is well recognised by officials and practitioners in the field, but remains largely unexplored. This is because the available data for measuring and tracking poverty changes over time is lagging behind, and much work is still needed to improve the mechanisms related to poverty measurements and to producing the data in a uniform and consistent fashion. Poverty in Jordan is a social, economic, and a political phenomenon. However, the political dimension has not been investigated thoroughly (if at all) and this is partly due to the government’s rigid policies when it comes to political ‘thin-line’ issues. State policies are produced within particular political, economic and ideological constraints, and within Jordanian society policies which clearly operate more to the benefit of some sections than others. More studies on poverty and poverty-related issues are needed in Jordan in order to learn more about the characteristics of the poor, where they live (intra-governorates), and what the causes of poverty are. Exploring the dynamics of poverty will require carrying out sample surveys on a periodic basis in rural and urban areas over an extended period of time, rather than conducting surveys on an ad hoc basis. The measurement and monitoring of poverty on regular bases will most likely improve designing programs aiming at poverty alleviation and targeting the most needy.
الفقر في الأردن: مفاهيم وطرق قياس

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ملخص


وقد خلص البحث إلى أنه وعلى الرغم من اعتماد هذه الدراسات والتجارب على مفهوم ثقبي الاحتكادات الأساسية لتعريف الفقر (المنشور الاقتصادي والفلوس للتعليم)، وإقليميا الإيجاد الأول (الإيجاد الاجتماعي والثقافي، صناعة الأسلوب)، إلا أنه تم توثيق في طرق قياس خط الفقر، الذي تجاوزت نسبة الفقر التي تراوحت بين 11.7% و33%. فقد استخدم بعض هذه الدراسات وطرق قياس الفقر كجميلة لحساب قيمة خط الفقر، في حين استخدم البعض الآخر طريقة النحو الديموغرافي.

وأوصى البحث بضرورة اعتماد تعريف موحد لفقر يعمل بين الافتراض الإيجاد الاجتماعي والثقافي وغير المنسجية، كالقدرة على العمل والمشاركة في الحياة الاجتماعية والسياسية، وليس فقط البد العاطفي الذي كان على القدرة على ثقافة الاحتكادات الأساسية المادية (الغذاء، والسكن، والمدارس، والتعليم، والصحة، والوظائف). كما أوصى البحث بضرورة اجتهاد المزيد من الدراسات المتخصصة حول أسباب الفقر وأماكن إكتظازه، وعلاقته بالتعليم والصحة والعمل، وذلك من خلال تنفيذ مسح ميداني مختص لدراسة ظاهرة الفقر، يتم من خلاله التعرف على خصائص الفقر ومجتمعاته.
Bibliography


End Notes

a POVERTY MEASURES

1. Headcount ratio \( H = \frac{q}{n} \)

   Where \( q \) = number of people deemed poor and \( n \) = population size.

   This index is widely used and easily understood. However, the headcount ratio is insensitive to distribution below the poverty line. If a poor person becomes poorer, \( H \) remains unchanged.

2. Poverty gap index \( PG = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{z - y_i}{z} \)
Where \( y \) is income/consumption, \( z \) is the poverty line, \( q \) is the number of poor, and \( n \) is the population size.

Though \( PG \) reflects depth of poverty, it is insensitive to the severity of poverty. This can be interpreted as the potential saving to the poverty alleviation budget from targeting because it is equal to the ratio of minimum cost of eliminating poverty (x-mean income of the poor)*q to the maximum cost of eliminating poverty \( z*q \).

\[
\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left( \frac{z - y_i}{z} \right)^2
\]

3. Squared poverty gap index \( SPG = \)

\( SPG \) is sensitive to differences in both the depth and severity of poverty. This can be stated as the poverty gap with weights to each poor person equal to his/her poverty gap.

b  This figure was estimated based on the number of Jordanian families in 1992 (571,700), the percentage of poor families estimated in Al-Saqour et al. (1992/3) study, and the average size of a poor family estimated by DOS in 1992.

c  Economic-dependency ratio is the percentage of non-working members of households to working members.