

PSE 2011 Second Townsend Conference

What is poverty? International perspectives

Julio Boltvnik

Well I like to define poverty like the incapacity of a household or a person to satisfy its human needs. The distinction between needs and wants is that if you don't have what you want, nothing happens, you are not damaged. When you lack what is required for satisfaction of needs, you are damaged. If you don't have enough food, you are undernourished. If you don't have enough shelter and heating, you might die from low temperatures, and so on.

Björn Halleröd

When people are shut off from mainstream society because they don't have the economic resources to participate then it's poverty to me. In a way, you say that there is an absolute poverty because people die of it. And there is some kind of relative poverty, which people can endure and live with. That's not really true either because, actually, poverty kills all the time. There is dramatic differences in life expectancy and so on, in different income levels of society. So poverty is a kind of a lethal disease wherever it occurs in society.

Brian Perry

Poverty for me – it's about not being able to properly participate in society. If the kids don't have, you know, a decent raincoat, decent shoes, they ... the kids themselves are aware that they're different, very different from most of the rest. So they're excluded from the normal way of life of other children because of the very limited resources at home.

Maidor Fall

First of all, poverty is a lack of resources and after that you have many deprivations: deprivation on shelter; deprivation on equal rights; deprivation on education, and that's the multiple facet I think of poverty.

Aye Abe

Until very recently, until 2008, I think the government and also the society was in a flat denial that people, you know, that Japan had any kind of poverty at all. But that is because they had this notion of poverty as impoverishment. And now we've started to look at things differently, people begin to see what is important in their lives and it's just not, you know, being able to eat and being able to sustain their, you know, bodily functions, but it's being able to participate in society, have friends and have relatives and families. So it's just much more than just impoverishment.

Pedro Sainz

Poverty is a disequilibrium between resources and basic needs or necessities, so you need to measure resources and you need to measure necessities. But this is

generally an abstract. In each country, in each region, there is norms of the society that have a big influence in what are the necessities.

Maidor Fall

I think people are very realistic. They know what kind of deprivation they have to face. Developing countries' priorities is food. And if you don't have enough resources for food, you don't think about the other kind of things.

Pedro Sainz

There are necessities that are easier to measure. For example, there are nutritional standards that have been developed by UN organisms working with food. There are other necessities that have a much more social structure that are not so easy to measure. So, therefore, you must start asking people what are their other necessities that are the most important ones.

Aye Abe

We are going for the publicly perceived necessities and publicly perceived poverty. Certainly what the public thinks is necessary is different from society, in society. I think kind of things that would come up more in Japanese context is that social activities, social engagement of relatives, like, for example, to go to a wedding of a cousin whom you only met once in your lifetime, but is considered to be required thing to do.

Björn Halleröd

The work I've done in Sweden is very much inspired by the work that's been done in Britain and is also for the current poverty research, is that we actually have to see what kind of goods and services do people need to feel integrated in the society. What can they do without and what do they need? And then what kind of resources do they need to actually achieve that kind of consumption standard?

Pedro Sainz

Coming to agreements about what we consider poverty is very important because you can explain the whole country what the problem is – its components. And if you want to solve something, you must start to know what the problem is.