

Editorial

New Approaches to the Study of Social Inclusion of Poor Children and Youth

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Abstract

This thematic issue seeks to bring the field of science on poverty and social inclusion/exclusion of children and youth beyond the state-of-the-art, empirically, theoretically, and methodologically. This editorial briefly presents the topic and summarizes the different articles published in the issue.

Keywords

childhood; consumption; poverty; social inclusion

Issue

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1. Introduction

Poverty, often passed from one generation to another, is associated with an increased risk of being marginalized and socially excluded in childhood and adult life. Why some poor children connect to their surroundings while others do not is, however, insufficiently understood, diminishing our chance to develop efficient policy measures aiming to reduce social inequality and increase social mobility.

This thematic issue seeks to bring the field of science on poverty and social inclusion/exclusion of children and youth beyond the state-of-the-art, empirically, theoretically, and methodologically. It includes six articles and one commentary addressing social inequality amongst children from different parts of the world: Europe, Canada, and China. Most contributions are studying economic and material deprivation from a child’s perspective, emphasizing the experiences and challenges children and youth (0 to 24-year-olds) are facing in different arenas—in education, family, care, research, law, and policy. All articles present a new approach to the study of children and youth, yet the way in which they are novel varies. Let us hereby briefly introduce the articles

by pointing at some of these novelties and the articles’ main results.

In “Education Aspirations and Barriers to Achievement for Street-Involved Youth in Victoria, Canada,” Vetrone et al. (2022) conduct qualitative interviews of a social group that rarely has been studied before: street-involved youth who were partly or fully disengaged from school. The study indicates that these youths like school and find education important but are facing too many barriers in everyday life hindering them to take part in the educational system.

Also in “Exploring Children’s Views and Experiences in the Frontline of Poverty in Catalonia: A Qualitative and Participatory Approach,” Narciso et al. (2022) report qualitative research on social groups that have seldom been the subject of research: poor children and youth and social intervention staff aiming to enhance their situation. The article indicates that material deprivation plays a role in youth’s life and that their understanding of social inequality and poverty, as well as coping strategies, vary.

In “Economic Abuse From Child and Youth Perspectives: A Review of the Literature,” Bruno (2022) does not focus on an underexamined social group but on a social

phenomenon that only in exceptional cases has been examined before: economic violence from a child and youth perspective. The research encompasses both economic violence conducted against children directly and indirectly via the economic abuse of one of the parents, usually the mother. The article is based on a scoping review. Although Bruno makes an effort to map what we know about economic violence from a child and youth perspective today, the review shows that the lack of knowledge in this field is striking.

The article “Immigrant Children’s Connections to People and the World Around Them: A Critical Discourse Review of Academic Literature” by Borch (2022) uses another type of review—the critical discourse review—to conclude that highly cited literature on immigrant children’s connections to people and the world around them tend to be published by psychologists inclined to ignore the material conditions of children’s connections.

In “Court Cases on Poor Children’s Access to Normalcy,” Näsman and Fernqvist (2022) question how children and youth are treated in the court system. The focus is on how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is practiced within this system in cases where parents have applied for social services for financial aid and appealed the rejection of the application to the court. The research shows that the court system tends to use the opportunity to foster and discipline parents and to give them incentives to become self-sufficient mostly rather than ensuring a safe childhood for all.

In the last article of this thematic issue, “Mixed-Methods Inquiry of Socially Inclusive e-Learning: A Policy Document Analysis and Rapid Survey Study,” Liu et al. (2022) uses a mixed-method approach to study social inequality and policy measures related to the new and fast-growing research field addressing the after-effects and lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. The research shows how students’ accessibility to technical equipment like personal computers and smartphones—and, hence, their learning experience during the pandemic—varied. Political measures aiming to overcome these potential sources of social inequality are suggested.

The thematic issue closes with a commentary by Mari Rysst, professor at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (HINN) and research professor at OsloMet. Rysst (2022) critically evaluates this thematic issue and argues that the novelty of published articles is, for the most part, empirical and to a less extent theoretical

and methodological. She illustrates her argument by describing an ongoing project based on research techniques that are seldom used in research on children and poverty today.

Overall, this thematic issue confirms the importance of keeping on focusing on children and youth and the economic and material conditions of their lives. In this turbulent time characterized by multiple crises related to climate, energy, armed conflicts, economic crisis, and the Covid-19 restrictions, addressing social inequality and poverty among children and youth may not be a prioritized area of research. The individual and societal costs of downgrading this area are, however, considerable in the form of dropouts from school and future unemployment, disablement, and low income.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Anita Borch is a sociologist from the University of Oslo and took her PhD degree at the University of Helsinki on gambling and gambling problems in households. Today, Borch holds a position as research professor at Consumption Research Norway (SIFO) at OsloMet. She is also the project leader of the research project BELONG with the full title “Practices and Policies of Belonging Among Minority and Majority Children of Low-Income Families” (2021–2025) financed by the Research Council Norway. Borch has been working at SIFO since 1994 and has studied several subjects throughout her career, including obesity, food insecurity, environmental sustainability, responsible research

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Kirsi Laitala is a senior researcher at Consumption Research Norway (SIFO), at OsloMet, where she has been working with consumer research since 2001. Her main research areas are sustainability, clothing consumption and vulnerable consumers, and sufficiency connected to standards of living. She uses interdisciplinary research methods based on her educational background in textile engineering (MSc), PhD in product design, and long experience working with social science research methods.