

TECHNICAL BRIEFING NOTE 5: CHILD POVERTY, CHILD RIGHTS, AND CHILD QUALITY OF LIFE

Introduction

Child poverty, according to the UNICEF position on measuring and monitoring child poverty, should be based on child rights. However, not all child rights are constitutive of poverty ([Technical Briefing Note #2](#)). This important conceptual point does not mean that other elements, deprivations, and rights should not be part of the analysis of child poverty (UNICEF, 2005). They can be contrasted, cross-tabulated, correlated, and combined with child poverty which entails measuring them separately.

Why?

It is quite common, when estimating child poverty, to observe debates about including in the measurement of child poverty elements that are not material deprivation¹. However, this would lead to a measure of overall well-being, quality of life, or fulfillment of rights that would largely surpass the confines of child poverty.

In other words, while it is crucial to avoid including non-material deprivations in the measurement of poverty, it is also important to measure these non-material deprivations. Once measured, they provide useful information about the situation of children. This information ought to be analysed alongside and in conjunction with child poverty.

How can the measurement of constitutive and non-constitutive rights be applied in practice?

In [Technical Briefing Notes #1 and #6](#) it is mentioned that monetary and multidimensional poverty are conceptually different. As monetary poverty is indirect, children are not supposed to earn a living, monetary resources are not shared equally within the household, and children's needs are different, it is better to estimate child poverty (multidimensional material deprivations) directly and at the level of the individual child. However, monetary poverty is important so it may be useful to cross-tabulate children living in monetary poor households and children suffering multidimensional poverty (i.e., material deprivations measured directly). When this is not possible, e.g., because no survey has collected both types of data, the two numbers can be **contrasted**, by placing them next to each other.

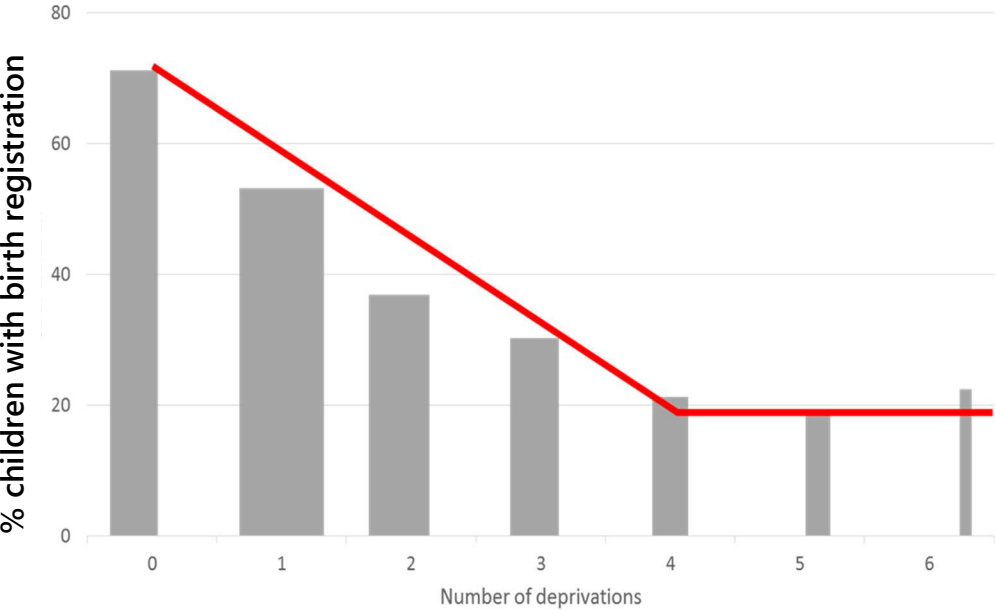
Moreover, given children living in monetary poor households (i.e. in families that do not enjoy income/consumption to satisfy the right to a minimum standard of living) should be measured separately

¹ Even Sen, who throughout his *oeuvre* has worked to expand the notion of poverty being lack of monetary resources, cautions against a definition of poverty that covers too many elements which, while being problems, are not part of the concept of poverty (Sen, 1992).

from child poverty (i.e., children suffering deprivations or shortcomings in the multiple rights that constitute poverty) and given that not all child rights violations constitute poverty, the question arises about how to combine, measure, and present the different types of problems and deprivations. In other words, how to measure child poverty (multidimensional) and other aspects of child well-being which, by relying on the human rights approach to poverty, are excluded from the conceptualization of child poverty.

One option is to show how the analysis becomes interesting and policy-relevant by **cross-tabulating** child poverty with other child rights issues rather than trying to include everything under the child poverty measurement. In Figure 1, child poverty is associated to birth registration. It can be observed that multidimensionally poor children are registered at a lower rate than non-poor children. Moreover, the deeper their poverty (i.e., higher number of simultaneous deprivations), the lower the chances of births being registered. The line shows the “path” of decline in the probability of the birth being registered the poorer the child is (in terms of suffering more deprivations simultaneously). It also shows the approximate gradient when confidence intervals are taken into account (i.e., when the bars are statistically significant from each other there is a slope, otherwise the line is flat).

Figure 1: Percentage of children whose births are registered according to the number of deprivations (child poverty profile).



Source: This and the following graphs are based on real country data (from various regions and different number of countries in each case). As they are not official data and the purpose is to illustrate how to present data, not to show substantive results, there is no need to disclose the specific country or countries.

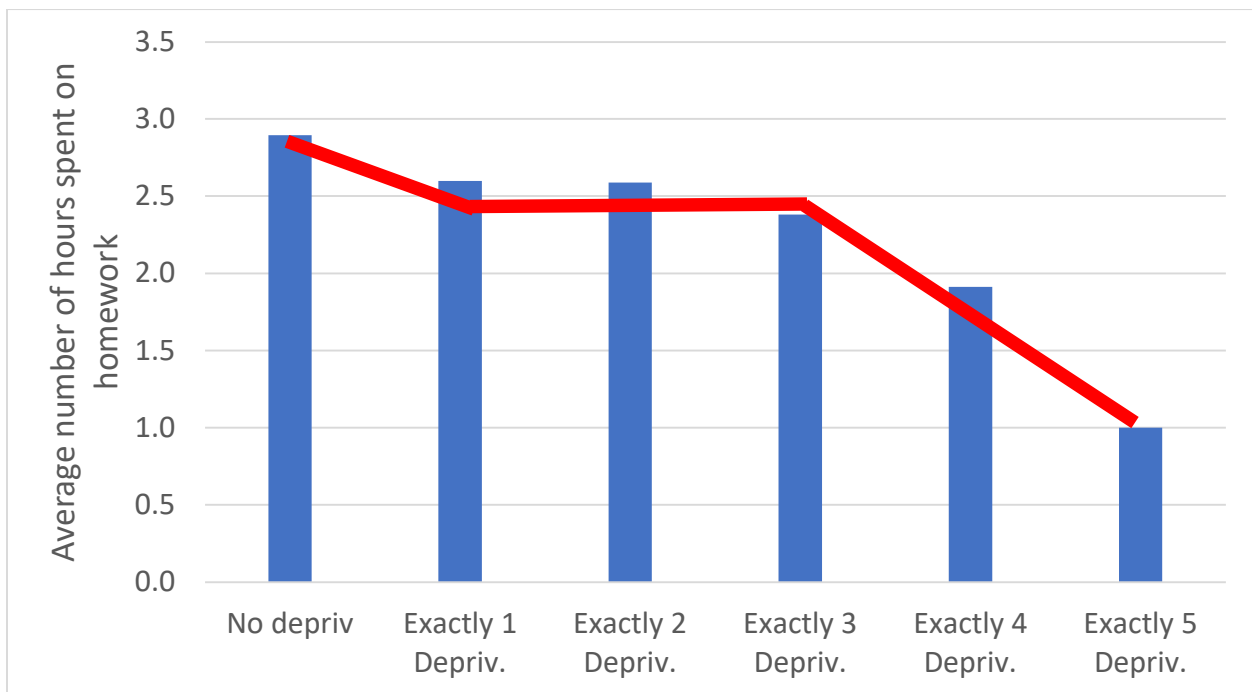
Unlike typical bar graphs and child poverty profiles (see [Technical Briefing Note #4](#)), each vertical bar is of a different width. This is done to represent the proportion of children suffering each specific number of deprivations (i.e., suffering one and not more than one deprivation, two and not more than two

deprivations, three and not more than three, etc.). This additional information can help to pursue the analysis beyond cross-tabulation and explore the **correlation** between the two indicators.

Other examples

The cross-tabulation and correlation could be carried out with any type of child rights violation and elements affecting child well-being. These could range from children suffering violence (disciplinary at home or other types), child labour, parental neglect, life satisfaction (in general or in specific ambits as satisfaction with families or friends), knowledge about HIV/AIDS or other issues, breastfeeding, child marriage, etc. The examples below show some of these in different realms such as time-poverty (Figure 2), obesity (Figure 3), and child labour (Figure 4). It is important to notice that the patterns of impact (both in terms of levels of poverty and the gradient associated with the child poverty profile) are starkly different².

Figure 2: Child poverty profile and time poverty (proxied by amount of time spent on homework³)



² This point is important but not surprising. However, it brings to the fore the issue of estimating confidence intervals and calculating correlations across the various indicators.

³ This is only one aspect of time-poverty (Antonopoulos and Memis, 2010), which can also be assessed in terms of time devoted for playing and engaging in recreational activities, resting, spent with friends and peers, and interacting with parents and caregivers (in particular the younger ones).

Figure 3: Child poverty profile and obesity

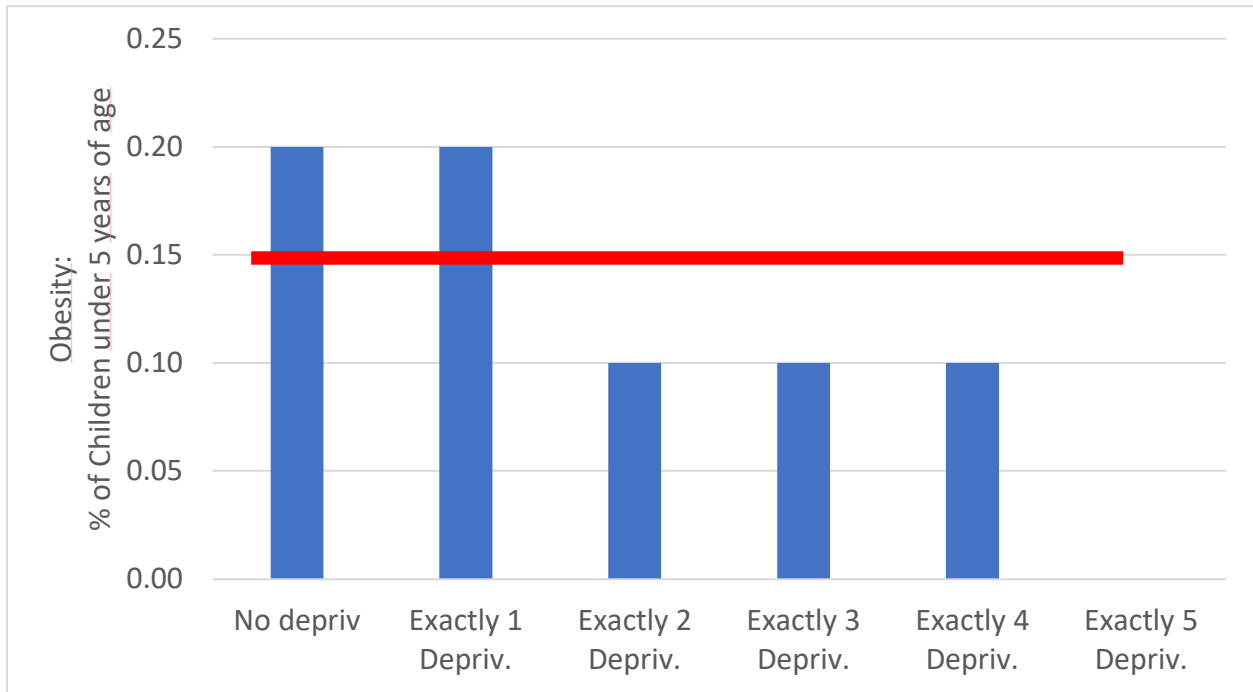
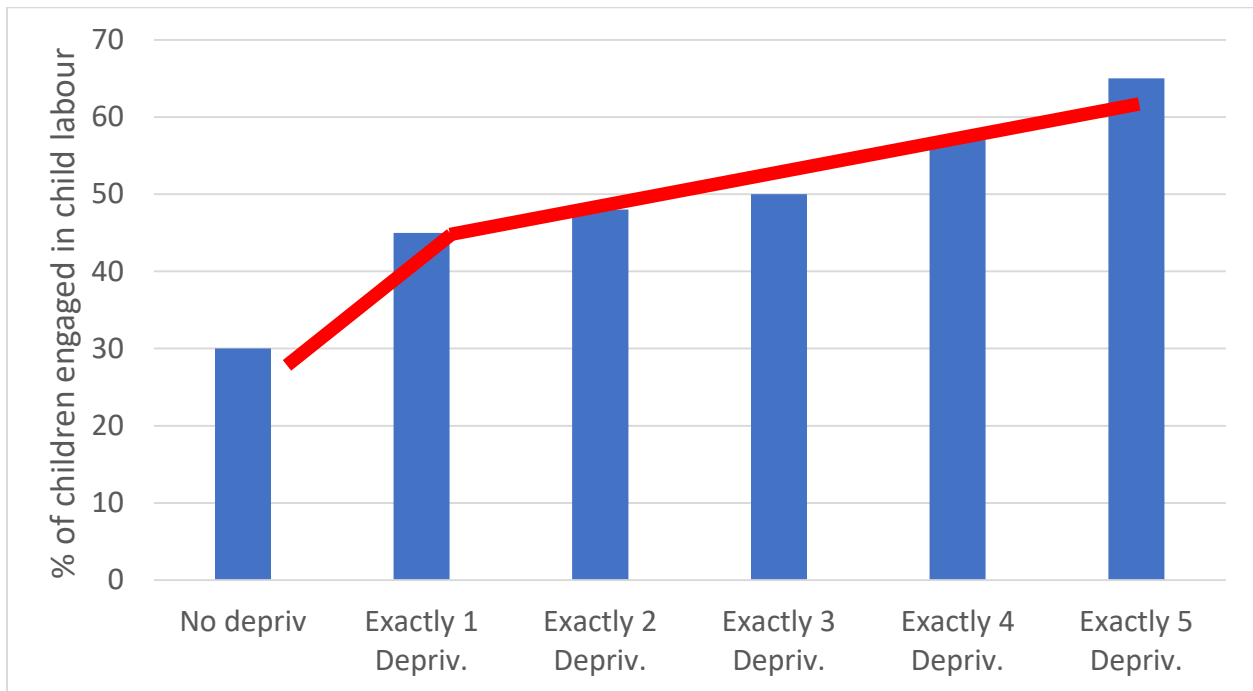


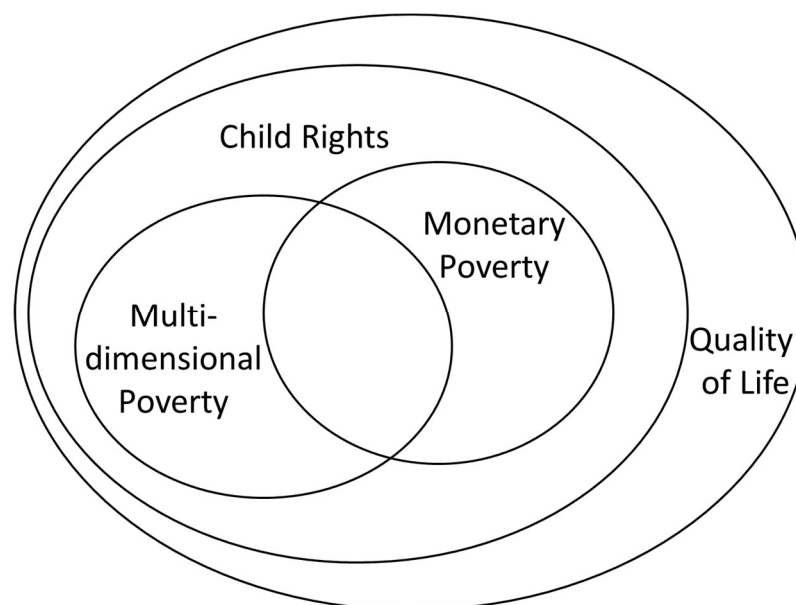
Figure 4: Child poverty profile and child labour



Is it possible to combine child well-being, monetary poverty, rights constitutive of poverty, and other right violations?

It is possible to **combine** information about child poverty, children in monetary poor households, and broader measures of child well-being or Quality of Life, as they are related and overlap. The larger framework is Quality of Life⁴. It covers all the rights in the CRC as well as elements which are not there (e.g. subjective well-being, happiness, or time-poverty). As discussed in [Technical Briefing Note #2](#), the CRC includes rights (e.g. privacy, identity, neglect, prohibition of capital punishment, or freedom from physical abuse) which are not constitutive of poverty (as their realization do not require owning or using objects). Nevertheless, both monetary poverty (right to a minimum standard of living) and multidimensional poverty (rights constitutive of poverty) are included within the CRC. Moreover, a child could be simultaneously suffering from multidimensional poverty and live in a monetary poor household or only one of these challenges (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Individual child poverty and children in monetary poor households in the context of child rights and quality of life



⁴ UNICEF has long been measuring child well-being (in particular in OECD countries) beyond poverty. For instance, (UNICEF, 2007, 2013 and 2020). Similarly, since 2001 a Child Well-being Index (CWI) with 7 domains has been compiled for the United States, disaggregated geographically and along other axes of disparity and used to estimate time trends (Land et al., 2001). In emerging, transition, and developing country contexts, Born et al. (2019), Hoelscher et al. (2012), Tonon (2016), and Watkins Fassler (2014) calculated different indices of child well-being and quality of life.

For a special focus on early childhood and adolescence see

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/adolescent-country-tracker/> and <https://data.unicef.org/resources/countdown-to-2030-ecd-country-profiles/>.

Another way to look at this issue is to think of the components of Quality of Life⁵ (i.e. the domains) which are outside of the child poverty measure and explore how they can be combined in practice⁶. However, a few further words about Quality of Life may be in order.

Quality of Life is a concept both harking back to Greek philosophy and present in non-Western philosophies⁷. Quality of Life⁸ embraces numerous material and subjective (individual and social) elements that constitute a Good Life (Hagerty et.al., 2001; Helliwell, 2008; Sirgy et.al., 2006). Besides material aspects (like access to health and housing, included in the child poverty concept) it includes happiness and individual aspirations, participation in communal and social affairs, friendships and family connections, or being safe (in all aspects from physical to emotional and monetary aspects).

One possible way to combine these material and non-material aspects of well-being is to measure child poverty (multiple material deprivations) and, similarly, identify and count the children who suffer at least one (or two) non-material deprivations (Cid Martinez et.al., 2021). The table below captures the most widely used Quality of Life domains (in a burgeoning literature) in the first column as well as the way they could be measured in Multiple Indicator Clusters Surveys (MICS)⁹. This information can be combined in a pie chart (Figure 6) to represent the combination (both overlapping and singly) of children suffering child poverty and non-material deprivations¹⁰.

⁵ And child rights

⁶ As it will be seen below, in this case, combining is different from contrasting, cross-tabulation, and correlation.

⁷ E.g. in Asian traditions incorporated in the Happiness index and in the Andean “Living Well” perspective. Among others see: Guendel (2012) and Michalos (2014).

⁸ Other paradigms, (capabilities, POZE, social exclusion, human flourishing, deep ecology, etc.) exist and can also be said to be larger than the child rights framework. Among many others see: Boltvinik (2003), Gough and Doyal (1991), Næss (1986), Nussbaum (2001), Redmond (2014), Rees (2017), Ridge (2002), Trani and Biggeri (2013), and Walther (2020). Without an attempt to paper over the differences or minimize their contributions, they share similar non-material domains to Quality of Life. Most importantly, for the purposes of this Technical Briefing Note, their non-material domains could be combined with child poverty the same way as it is described for Quality of Life.

⁹ A good description of MICS can be found in Khan, S. and A Hancioglu (2019). Also, <https://mics.unicef.org> can be visited.

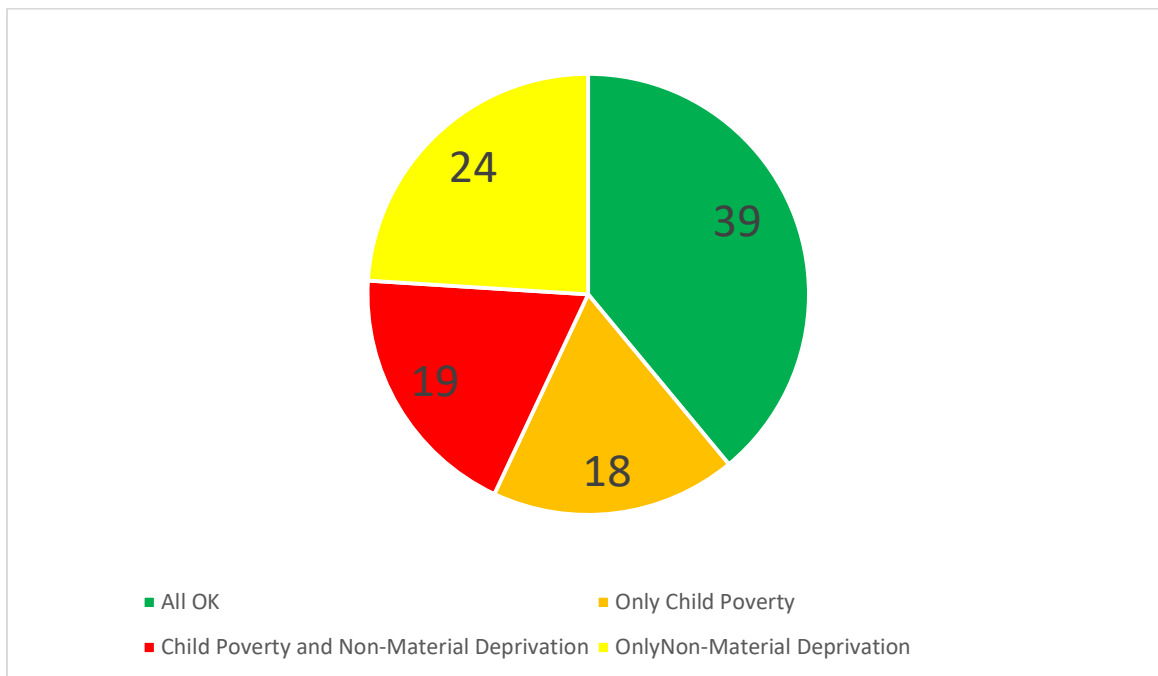
¹⁰ The same information can be combined and further analyzed using a child poverty profile.

Table 1 Non-material domains of Quality of Life commonly found in Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Domain	Deprivation Definition
Community strength/ Engagement	Children without a birth certificate
Family Relationships (Neglect, inadequate care)/Safety	Children left alone or with another child for more than one hour at least once during the past week
Recreation /Family Relationships	Adult household members have engaged in less than 4 activities with the child during the last 3 days
Family (Interaction)	Child was not supported with homework (among those children who have been assigned homework)
Safety, security, and violence	Children who experienced any violent discipline method (physical or psychological) during the last one month
Emotional well-being/Life satisfaction	Children who answer being neither happy nor unhappy, somewhat unhappy, or very unhappy on a 5-points scale of happiness

Note: As with the material deprivation indicators, the indicators in this table are often collected for different age groups.

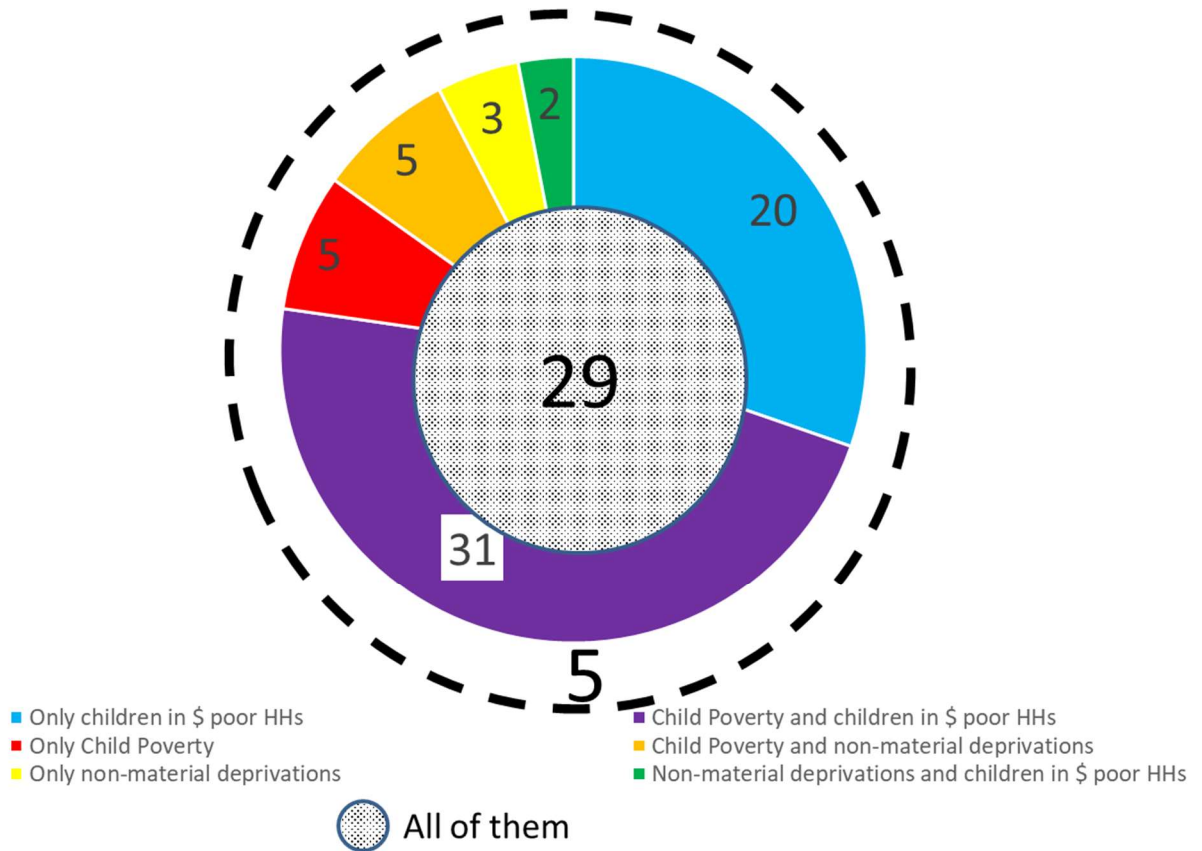
Figure 6: Child poverty and non-material aspects of child quality of life combined



It is also possible to combine information about child poverty and children in monetary poor households with the non-material aspects of child well-being. For instance, a modified pie chart could be used (Figure 7). In the basic part of the chart, the percentage of children in all the three possible two-way combinations between child poverty, children in monetary poor households, and children suffering non-material deprivations are distributed (in addition to those experiencing deprivation in one of three types of deprivation). In the center, the percentage of children experiencing all three deprivations are depicted.

The area between the larger (dotted) circle and the pie chart represents the percentage of children not suffering deprivation in any of the three realms.

Figure 7: Combining child poverty, children in monetary poor households, and non-material domains of quality of life (including rights not constitutive of poverty)



Conclusion

While child poverty is about material deprivation, several strands of literature include non-material deprivation in their analysis of poverty. It is important, in order to avoid a metric that includes so many disparate elements that the final number means nothing to measure separately child poverty (material deprivation) from the other elements, to avoid lumping everything up and obtaining a number that has no practical meaning. However, this separation should not entail disregarding the other important issues that matter in the life of children.

Thus, once child poverty is measured, it can be contrasted, cross-tabulated, correlated, and combined with the other child-right issues. This comparison can be done with a single topic (e.g., child poverty and violence against children or child poverty and obesity) or by combining the non-material aspects in a multidimensional metric to be portrayed next to (or overlapping with) child poverty.

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