2020

Assessing Refugees' Multidimensional Poverty in the United States

Mitra Naseh
Portland State University, mitra.naseh@pdx.edu

Miriam Potocky
Florida International University

Shanna L. L. Burke
Florida International University

Paul H. Stuart
Florida International University

Fatma Huffman
Florida International University

Assessing Refugees' Multidimensional Poverty in the United States

Mitra Naseh[1], Miriam Potocky[2], Shanna Burke[2], Paul Stuart[2], Fatma Huffman[2]

1. Portland State University, 2. Florida International University

Introduction

1 in every **97** human beings around the world was forced into displacement by the end of 2019 (UNHCR, 2020).

Among the **79.5 million forcibly displaced** people worldwide, **26 million** were officially recognized as **refugees** (UNHCR, 2020).

- The main reason for the forced displacement of refugees is war and conflict
- All current ongoing conflicts around the world are worsening or unchanged (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

More people will be forced to flee conflict-affected areas in the future, adding to the population of refugees

- Refugees' escape is often abrupt and unplanned
- They spend their last resources on paying smugglers to reach safety
- They often arrive to safety after an arduous journey
- They might experience racial and cultural discrimination in host countries
- They might not be familiar with the language of the host country
- They might arrive in the host countries with interrupted education due to displacement

Refugees are among the most at risk groups to experience poverty

Objectives of the study

➢ Determine the income poverty rate and the multidimensional poverty rate among refugees in the U.S.

➢ Examine the relationship between the two types of poverty indices

Conceptual Framework

- Monetary and capability approaches to poverty (Laderchi et al., 2003 ; Sen, 1988; 1999).

- Person-in-environment framework (Cornell, 2006) .

Methods

Dataset: The 2016 Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR)

Outcome variables:

- Multidimensional poverty (binary: poor, not poor), calculated based on the aMPI (adjusted version of the global Multidimensional Poverty Index) score

- Income poverty (binary: poor, not poor), calculated based on a comparison between household income and federal poverty lines

The **Receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves analysis** was used to calculate the optimal income poverty lines that best discriminate poor- and non-poor households as defined by multidimensional poverty.

Table 1. aMPI analysis

Domain	Indicator	Poverty line: Deprived if… Weight	weight
Education	School attainment	A member has not completed 11 years of schooling	33%
Health	Self-reported health	A household member reported a chronic health condition	16.5%
		A household member was not able to work due to poor health condition	16.5%
Standard of living	Enrollment in government assistance programs in the past 12 months	A household member received Food Stamp	5.5%
		A household member received Refugee Cash Assistance	5.5%
		A household member received Supplemental Security Income	5.5%
		A household member received income through General Assistance	5.5%
		A household member received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	5.5%
		A household was living in a housing project at the time of the interview	5.5%
aMPI score		aMPI = or > 33% multidimensionally poor aMPI< 33% not poor	

Source: Jahan et al., 2015

Result

Around **24%** of the refugee households **(n= 353)** were **income poor**
Around **66%** (n=983) of the households were **multidimensionally poor**

The ROC analysis showed that:

- The area under the curve is less than 0.5 for all household sizes

- Extremely high income poverty levels (i.e. USD 72,241 for households with one member) to correctly label multidimensionally households

Income is not a good predictor of multidimensional poverty

Table 2. Characteristics of the surveyed households

Characteristics	Subgroups	Distribution % (#)
Cohort of arrival in US	2011 to 2012	36.5% (547)
	2013 to 2014	43.6% (654)
	2015	19.9% (299)
Number of household members	1	24.0% (361)
	2	17.1% (257)
	3	16.6% (248)
	4	17.4% (261)
	5 and more	24.8% (372)
Age of the head of the household	18 and under	0.5% (5)
	19 - 30	19% (288)
	31- 40	34.5% (516)
	41- 50	20% (299)
	51- 60	11% (170)
	61- 70	5% (78)
	71 and above	10% (144)
Sex of the head of the household	Male	73% (1,096)
	Female	27% (404)

Characteristics	Subgroups	Distribution % (#)
Country of birth	Burma	22.93% (344)
	Iraq	21.99% (330)
	Bhutan	15.82% (237)
	Somalia	9.67% (145)
	Other	9.61% (144)
	Cuba	9.23% (138)
	Iran	5.18% (78)
	D. R. of the Congo	3.73% (56)
	Thailand	1.05% (16)
	Nepal	0.68% (10)
	United States	0.06% (1)
	Don't know	0.05% (1)
Marital status of the head of the household	Never married	24% (364)
	Divorced or legally separated	6% (94)
	Widowed	4% (57)
	Married	64% (964)
	Other	2% (21)

Table 3. Households' multidimensional poverty in each of the dimensions of the aMPI

Dimension	Poor if	% Poor (# of households)
Education	At least one member had not completed 11 years of schooling	61% (921)
Health	At least one member reported a chronic health condition	31% (461)
	At least one member was unable to work due to health or disability	21% (320)
Standard of living	At least one member received food stamps	55% (827)
	At least one household member received RCA	4% (54)
	At least one household member received SSI	18% (275)
	At least one member received income through GA	2% (26)
	At least one household member received TANF	5% (70)
	A household was living in a public housing project	18% (263)

Discussion and Conclusion

- Concerning poverty rates

1 in every 4 households was income poor **more than half** was multidimensionally poor

- Income is not a good indicator to identify deprivation among refugee households

- Deprivation in education was concerning (over 60%)