

Studying Perceived Stigma, Economic System Justification and Social Mobility Beliefs of Socially Vulnerable (Poor) People: The Case of Georgia

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Abstract : The importance of studying the social-psychological features of people living in poverty is often emphasized in international research. Building a multidimensional economic framework for reducing poverty grounded in people's experiences and values is the main goal of famous Poverty Research Centers (such as Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab). The aims of the proposed research are to investigate the following characteristics of socially vulnerable people living in Georgia: 1) The features of the perceived stigma of poverty; 2) economic system justification and social justice beliefs; 3) Perceived social mobility and actual attempts at upward social mobility. Qualitative research was conducted to address the indicated research goals and descriptive research questions. Conducting in-depth interviews was considered to be the most appropriate method to capture the vivid feelings and experiences of people living in poverty. 17 respondents (registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable families) participated in in-depth interviews. According to the research results, socially vulnerable people living in Georgia perceive stigma targeted toward them. Two sub-dimensions were identified in perceived stigma: experienced stigma and internalized stigma. Experienced stigma reflects the instances of being discriminated and perceptions of negative treatment from other members of society. Internalized stigma covers negative personal emotions, the feelings of shame, the fear of future stigmatization, and self-isolation. The attitudes and justifications of the existing economic system affect people's attempts to cope with poverty. Complex analysis of those results is important during the planning and implementing of social welfare reforms. Particularly, it is important to implement poverty stigma reduction mechanisms and help socially vulnerable people to see real perspectives on upward social mobility.

Keywords : coping with poverty, economic system justification, perceived stigma of poverty, upward social mobility

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