

## MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY INDICATOR: A CASE STUDY FROM MALAYSIA PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract:

The actual poverty situation in Malaysia is described as unrealistic when the poverty line income (PLI) is used only measures poverty through the income dimension. At the same time, many other dimensions need to be taken into account to describe the actual poverty in the country, even though the original PLI rate has increased from RM 980 (2005) to RM 2,208 (2019). However, the PLI rate is still important to determine who is eligible for assistance. Thus, this article aims to discuss the approach of measuring poverty from Malaysian perspectives. This study uses a qualitative approach that involves data collection methods by documentation and library research. In analysing, this study uses a descriptive approach method. The data collected is then analysed and clarified. This study found that the measurement of poverty indicator in Malaysia use the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by Alkire Foster as the basic framework for measuring multidimensional poverty. This study suggested that poverty needs to be seen holistically, not only depending on income-based measurement but also multidimensional.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Unidimensional, Multidimensional, Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

Efforts to eradicate poverty have been carried out earlier in most developing countries, which on average have lower incomes than developed countries. This effort can be seen through the

cooperation of 192 UN member states in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. It was later replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to zero poverty in any

way and wherever. For example, in Malaysia, poverty reduction performance through the New Economic Policy (NEP) has been successfully reduced from 49.3 percent in 1970 to 0.2 percent in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020).

In Malaysia, studies on poverty have been conducted since 1971. Among the earliest and most important is the study in the 5MP, which defines poverty into two concepts, namely absolute poverty and relative poverty. Both of these concepts are measured based on a poverty line income. One of the concepts refers to income as a sum of cash only. In contrast, the other concept is more comprehensive by considering the value of self-produced products used by households and the value of self-occupied homes. This income-based approach is known as unidimensional measurement.

According to Gopal et al. (2021), the important step to eradicate poverty is how poverty is interpreted. This is because the definition of the concept of poverty differs according to time and country. Defining the concept of poverty is a subjective matter. In fact, nothing is fixed and specific. Moreover, past studies on poverty have been discussed widely by figures and agencies involved in poverty eradication programs. In addition, various reasons contribute to a country's poverty, such as natural disasters, droughts, wars, and so on, which causes the interpretation of poverty to differ.

Therefore, the existing poverty measurement is not able to identify poverty well, which in turn affects the provision of assistance and incentives to those who need assistance. For example, Laily (2017) states that measuring poverty is not an easy task. This is because emerging issues are still debated until now, such as data problems, interpretations in determining the poor, questions about basic needs and income required by a household with a different share of each member, and those living in poverty and vulnerability areas.

Thus, this article will discuss the approach of measuring poverty in Malaysia involving the interpretation of the concept of poverty in general. This discussion also emphasizes the differences in the interpretation of poverty from a unidimensional and multidimensional point of view, as well as from the point of view of had kifayah.

## POVERTY CONCEPT

Poverty is generally defined as a lack in the form of property or money. Moreover, poverty is the inability to make choices and access opportunities (United Nations, 2005). Sen (1999) argues that in addition to the income dimension, poverty should be seen from the aspect of household disability to meet basic needs. In this case, it refers to a situation of an individual who has a low standard of living and is unreasonable when compared to others. In fact, these individuals are not able to buy and meet daily needs. An individual is considered poor when they do not meet the standards in a society, where they are also unable to engage in social and community activities (Mohd Ali & Norzalinda, 2006). Apart from that, Spicker (1999) states among the basic needs that cannot be met due to poverty such as food, drink, health, protection, education, sanitation and information facilities.

The World Bank (2000) interprets poverty as scarcity in multiple dimensions. In addition, the international community at the World Social Development Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 unanimously agreed that the concept of multidimensional poverty consists of the following characteristics:

- i. There is no source of income and no productive source for survival.
- ii. Hunger and malnutrition
- iii. Low level of health
- iv. Lack of access to education and other services.
- v. Increased infectiousness and death from disease
- vi. Being homeless or having less than perfect shelter.
- vii. Environmental threats
- viii. Being discriminated
- ix. Social exclusion results in these individuals being less involved and making shared decisions in social, societal and cultural activities.

Based on this scenario, "poor" refers to individuals who meet some criteria mentioned above. According to Kamus Dewan Fourth

Edition (2005), the term ‘poor’ is a person who has no property and lives in a state of deprivation to obtain the necessities of life. Norzita & Siti Hadijah (2014) stated that identifying a poor household is based on the characteristics of deficiencies or problems encountered. The characteristics of this deficiency consist of “deficiency dimensions” in addition to income such as food, shelter, clothing, asset ownership, education, health and living standards. Each of these dimensions is considered accurate to identify poor households. It is not influenced by a particular price rate and can be applied to the overall composition of households in Malaysia regardless of where the household is located. Overall, the poverty line is needed to measure the value of the minimum requirement for enjoying a comfortable and perfect standard of living (Ngah, 1987). In this case, the poverty line is a complement and yardstick for each dimension of poverty deficiency.

### THE CONCEPT OF UNIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY

Unidimensional poverty is seen or measured using one dimension, which is the economic dimension. In the context of poverty, this dimension only measures in terms of production and income. According to (UNDP, 2018),

poverty is those who live on less than \$ 1.90 or the equivalent of RM 7.95 a day. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), these people are unable to meet the basic necessities of life and are called poor in terms of income. On the other hand, according to Sachs (2005), poverty is the result of corrupt leadership and a backward culture, which hinders modernization development.

As contained in the 5th Malaysia Plan, absolute poverty and relative poverty are the poverty found in Malaysia. The state of the inability of an individual or household to obtain basic daily necessities in order to enjoy a minimum and reasonable well-being of life refers to absolute poverty. These basic needs consist of food, clothing, shelter, education and medicine (Norzita & Siti Hadijah, 2014). Meanwhile, Laily and Sharifah (2010) also stated that absolute poverty is measured based on the poverty line income (PLI). The method is measured based on the income of a household. A household is categorized as poor when its income is below the poverty line. However, if the income is above the poverty line, then it is not categorized as poor. The concept and method of PLI are determined based on the food and non-food needs of each household member at a minimum level (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020).

Table 1: Dimensions of PLI 2019

No.	Dimension	Items
1.	Food PLI	Vegetables and Fruits Rice, other grains, grain-based products (preferably wheat) and tubers Legumes, fish, chicken, meat or eggs Milk and other dairy ingredients Reduce intake of fat, greasy foods, sugar and salt Housing clothing and footwear
2.	Non-food PLI	Utilities (water, electricity, gas and fuel) Home appliances Health Transportation Education

	Communication and culture
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This is in contrast to the concept of relative poverty, which considers the relationship between the economic status of individuals in society, especially the context of the income distribution. For example, the low-income distribution below living standards causes a person to be considered poor in certain social contexts (Kartini, 2016). In other words, relative poverty compares the living conditions of one group of people with that of a better group of people. For example, the standard of living of the middle class is compared to the upper class, so of course, the standard of living of the middle class is seen as poorer than the upper class (Siti Hadijah & Roslan, 2011). In this case, there are similarities between absolute poverty and relative poverty that emerge from poverty measurement using the income or financial dimension by comparing the income level of an individual with the poverty line income (PLI).

## THE CONCEPT OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY

Most poverty-related studies assume that measuring poverty based on one variable does not reflect an actual household's well-being and standard of living and thus provides less accurate indications of poverty. Nowadays, human well-being depends not only on income but also on various other dimensions such as health, spirituality, education, social, and others. This coincides with Chamsuri's (1988) view that the concept of poverty has multiple dimensions.

Siong (1988) looked at poverty from the dimensions of health and nutrition. According to him, the low income of a household affects the pattern of food and health care spending and ultimately leads to malnutrition and hunger. This malnutrition problem is a condition where children do not get adequate nutrition through a balanced nutritional diet. This is also supported by a report from the United Nations Children's Fund (2018), which states that 97 percent of households are affected by rising prices of goods that result in them not providing nutritious food for their children. This suggests that urban poverty has a significant impact on children's daily nutritional needs. Although a household's spending or food aid income increases, it still cannot adequately

meet daily nutrition.

The State of Household II report released by Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) (2016) estimates that the minimum daily cost to buy adequate, balanced, and healthy food according to the Malaysian Diet Guidelines (MDG) is between RM25.21 and RM38.45. This study takes into consideration five household members living in several major cities in Malaysia. The comparison between expenditure to meet the MDG requirements proposed by the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) and the Poverty Line Income (PPLI) was found to be beyond the means of Malaysians in urban areas, especially for households earning close to PGK. Thus, apart from income factors, other factors such as demographics and level of awareness in Malaysia also affect the level of health and nutrition of an individual.

Sutrahman (1996) also sees poverty from a spiritual dimension. According to him, today's poverty focuses greatly on material poverty, and only Islam focuses on spiritual poverty. Here, the poor refers to an empty soul. The poor soul makes an individual vulnerable to various threats such as corrupted faith, breach of ethics and morals, disturbed mind, deterioration of family institutions, society and country. This is because material poverty is seen as a big problem of life in neglecting spiritual practices leading to the eternal afterlife.

Moreover, Siti Masayu and Narimah (2017) argue that poverty is related to education. This is because low levels of education are often due to poverty. Based on a case study conducted in Bachok District, Kelantan, financial factors are the main cause that affects the level of primary education in rural areas. This is because the background of low-income and low-educated family members also have implications for their children's educational achievement.

In addition, girls are among the youths from poor families who are often left behind in school. This is because women often have barriers from family members to obtain an education. For example, these women had to drop out of school to assist their ill family members (Katty et al., 2011). According to a report released by UNICEF, children aged five

to six do not attend preschool education, four out of 10 do not have toys, three out of 10 do not have any books, and the majority do not have comfortable space to learn. This indicates that the children and youth in Malaysia are more at risk of being exposed to poverty.

However, Suryawati (2005) argues that the social dimension also causes poverty. This refers to the state of lack of access to social networks capable of helping increase an individual's productivity. Usually, cultural factors become an obstacle for some people to make changes. This is because, in culture, there are norms that must be adhered to by society, especially in marriage, birth, and death. As a result, there are times when culture causes the community to be continuously plagued by poverty.

Thus, it is clear that most researchers agree that poverty is a form of deprivation experienced by an individual in a society and a country. Measuring poverty using only income indicators as the basis for measuring the multidimensional poverty line is less accurate for identifying the actual poverty level in a society. This is because poverty is a form of deprivation in multiple dimensions. Existing income and expenditure indicators do not provide specific information on the source of distribution between households and only measure the level of poverty at the household level (Muhammad Fuad et al., 2019). Therefore, multidimensional poverty measures are another alternative to replace existing poverty measures (Norzita &

Siti Hadijah, 2014).

Based on the OPHI standard, multidimensional poverty measurement has used the Alkire Foster method developed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster in 2007. In 2018, OPHI and UNDP developed a new version of multidimensional poverty measurement, which still retains the Alkire Foster method and is only adapted to sustainable development goals (SDGs). This measure of poverty uses three main dimensions, namely health, education and living standards. It is then broken down into ten smaller indicators, namely two indicators for health and education, respectively, while six indicators for living standards.

To determine who is poor, a dimensional dividing line is used. The poverty dividing line is used to determine who is deprived enough to be classified as multidimensionally poor. Meanwhile, the weighting dimension is used to describe the relative importance of each deficiency in different dimensions. This method is also believed to be able to determine who is poor and, in turn, will be able to solve the problem of poverty faced (Alkire & Foster, 2011). According to UNDP (2018), an individual or household is categorized as multidimensional poverty when its weightage amounts to 30 percent or exceeds one dimension. The following dimensions, indicators and measurements are described in detail:

Table 2: Dimensions of the Alkire Foster Multidimensional Poverty Index

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	<i>Weightage</i>
<i>Health</i>	Nutrition	There are 70-year-old household members and below or malnourished children.	1/6
	Death Rate	Any child who dies under the age of 18 in the previous five years of review.	1/6
	Completed school	Households of 10 years and above whom have not completed six years of schooling	1/6

<i>Education</i>	School Registration	Preschool children who do not go to school	1/6
	Type of kitchen	Using feces, wood, charcoal or coal	1/18
	Sanitation system	Poor sanitation facilities (based on SDG guidelines) or shared with other households.	1/18
<i>Standard of Living</i>	Sanitation system	Poor sanitation facilities (based on SDG guidelines) or shared with other households.	1/18
	Drinking water	No water facilities or access to clean drinking water 30 minutes walk from the house.	1/18
	Electricity	No electricity	1/18

Source: OPHI, 2020

The Alkire Foster method is a flexible approach whereby different dimensions can be selected and adapted to various institutions and policy needs (Alkire, Kanagaratnam & Suppa, 2020). However, Alkire (2007) stressed that in determining the dimensions and indicators to be used, researchers must have their own justification. For example, in Indonesia, multidimensional poverty measurement indicators have changed after going through several references from experts who are knowledgeable in the issue of poverty in Indonesia (PRAKARSA, 2020).

In Columbia, five dimensions are used, namely the level of household education, the condition of children and youth, health, employment and housing conditions, as well as access to public services. This 5-dimensional measurement involves 15 indicators (Alkire et al. 2020). In addition, the study conducted by Siti Hadijah et

al. (2012) in Baling, Kedah have used four dimensions and 14 indicators. Meanwhile, Mohd Khairi et al. (2017) have added two additional dimensions, namely environmental and psychological dimensions, in comparing poverty between the participants of the Gahai Agropolitan Project, Lipis and rubber smallholders..

In the context of Malaysia, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) states that the Multidimensional Poverty Index in Malaysia uses four main dimensions and 11 indicators. The selection of dimensions and indicators is in accordance with the context of the socio-economic development of society in Malaysia. The dimensions comprise education, health, living standards and income. All dimensions have indicators and dividing lines that are standards to indicators. This is to determine the exclusion of a household.

Table 3: Dimensions of MPI Malaysia

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Dividing Line</i>
	Total school years	All household members between the ages of 13 and 60 have less than six years of schooling.

Education	Attendance to school	Children between 6 and 12 years old do not go to school
	Access to health services	The distance to the health facility is more than 5 km, and no mobile health service is available
Health	Access to clean water supply	Apart from the supply of treated tap water in the house and public water pipes or public taps
	Conditions of residence	Bad or starting bad
	Room density	More than two household members per room
	Home toilet facilities	Apart from pull-out toilets and flush toilets
	Access to garbage collection facilities	No scheduled garbage collection
Standard of living	Use of transportation facilities	All household members do not use private transportation facilities or public transportation facilities
	Access to basic communication equipment	No landline or cell phone
Income	Household rough monthly income	The gross monthly household income is less than the household PLI

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the interpretation of poverty given, it can be concluded that poverty is a state of deprivation, especially basic needs such as food, health and others due to low household income levels. Overall, most countries, including Malaysia, use the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by Alkire Foster as the basic framework for measuring multidimensional poverty. However, the indicators, dividing lines, and weighted values developed differed from one country to another. This is because each country has a different degree of poverty. Therefore, poverty needs to be seen holistically, not only depending on income-based measurement but also multidimensional.

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