

**The Double Disadvantage: How Family Structure and  
Gender/Economic Inequality Shape Child Poverty  
In Cross-National Perspective**

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## **Thematic Importance**

Our research expands on children's rights and opportunities in an unequal world by identifying connections between gender and economic inequality, family structures, and child poverty. This project aligns with the conference theme "child poverty, inequality and child welfare research" and subtheme "poverty, deprivation, material well-being and inequality," while touching on "cross-country approaches to child well-being and indicators."

## **Introduction and Objectives**

Poverty threatens children's well-being and development, with those not living with both parents being especially vulnerable. However, country-level factors, including economic and gender inequality, may moderate this relationship. This study investigates potential interactions to clarify the experiences of children. Specifically, we offer two hypotheses:

H1. Children living with both parents will experience less poverty than other children.

H2. Economic inequality will increase the poverty risk associated with family structure.

H3. Gender inequality will increase the poverty risk associated with family structure.

## **Methods**

The sample includes 35,198 children, aged 8 to 14 years ( $M = 11.1$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ) and 49.98% female, from 15 countries participating in wave 2 of the Children's Worlds project ([www.isciweb.org](http://www.isciweb.org)). Respondents were selected using school-based stratified sampling.

**Child poverty** was represented by a deprivation measure, summing children's access (0) or lack of access (1) to eight material resources. Higher values indicate greater deprivation.

**Family structure** reflected participants' reports of their living arrangements (0 = not living with both parents, 1 = living with both parents).

*Economic inequality* was represented by national Gini coefficient, imported from Global Families data.

*Gender inequality* scores for each country were imported from Global Families data. Higher values indicate greater inequality.

*Control variables* included number of homes children regularly sleep in, age (and square), gender, native birth, living arrangements, safety index, and children's satisfaction with their area and house.

### **Analytic Plan**

We used Stata 17 to estimate survey adjusted, multiply imputed linear regression models with country fixed effects.

### **Results**

In line with prior research, children in all 15 countries who lived with both parents experienced less poverty (i.e., lower deprivation) than those in other family structures ( $b = -0.32$  [0.03],  $p < .001$ ). However, this gap changes with country context. Differences in poverty between children in two-parent households and others rose as economic inequality increased ( $b = -0.01$  [0.00],  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, higher gender inequality widened poverty gaps by family structure ( $b = -0.49$  [0.16],  $p < .01$ ). The overall patterns demonstrate that child poverty difference by family structure increase as gender and economic inequality worsen.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Family instability, prominently increasing in most countries, places children at heightened risk of deprivation and poverty. Using diverse, international data, we find this risk intensified for children living in societies with greater gender and economic inequality. These complex relationships suggest integrated approaches to promoting children's rights and

opportunities are necessary to support efforts to mitigate poverty and its effects. Research should prioritize the interactive relationships surrounding child poverty to clarify the challenges and opportunities facing families, governments, and organizations seeking children's welfare.