

The (Re)production of (In)equality: Poverty, Social Policy, and Human Development from Conception to Adulthood

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This paper presents a comprehensive conceptual framework to analyze the effect of economic hardship, both permanent and transitory, on the developmental process of children and youth. This framework is an effort at bringing together economics with other social sciences, notably developmental psychology and sociology.

The policy domain in international development is dominated by economics. Enriching the policy dialogue by incorporating well-researched domains from other social sciences has the potential to enable human development policy to become more effective, investments in human development more sustainable, and long-run prosperity more attainable for a larger number of countries in this world, many of which are currently facing wide-spread poverty, high and rising rates of inequality, sluggish economic growth, and the resulting social unrest.

By integrating approaches, concepts, theory and evidence from a variety of disciplines this framework enables a nuanced understanding of factors and contexts that affect human development understood as complex processes of interrelated and interdependent systems and settings. Thus, this conceptual framework allows us to delve deeper into the human developmental process, and outlines and identifies vulnerabilities and protective factors during crucial years of a young person's development, by exploring the domains and developmental milestones that can be in jeopardy when exposed to the challenges caused by prolonged or temporary hardship (eg. economic crises). These years are critical both because of biological developments (e.g., the first three years after conception, the start of adolescence) and because of the high costs of later making-up for lost ground). In addition, recent developments in epigenetic research shows that heritable changes in phenotype or gene expressions can be caused by contextual, non-genetic factors and can remain for the rest of a person's life and even be transferred to the next generation, contributing to the often observed intergenerational transmission of poverty, and possibly rising inequality.

We believe that the context of aggregate economic crisis, such as the Great Recession, can produce a political economy context conducive to introducing "the right" policies. We've been able to observe such developments in several instances, for example Mexico and Colombia. Understanding the political economy of social policy further can inform the design of interventions

to create the public support, and thus, the political viability of such programs (eg. Opportunity NYC).