

## **How Does Income Poverty Relate to Material Hardship? Evidence from a New Household Survey**

Beginning in fall of 2012, Columbia University began conducting a biennial survey of 2,000 New York City residents based on random digit dialing of a phone sample of all residents, which oversampled poor neighborhoods (city population sample) and an in-person respondent driven sample of 250 beneficiaries of Robin Hood Foundation philanthropic services and their acquaintances (agency sample). The biennial surveys provide assessments of income poverty (including virtually all measures necessary to calculate a Supplemental Poverty Measure), material hardship, and child and family well-being together in one survey. This paper presents preliminary results comparing official and SPM “poor” families along multiple dimensions of material hardship. We will compare these associations for families with children and families without children, as well as look at demographic differences in these associations. Results will shed light on what the SPM tells us about the contours of material hardship in a high-cost city relative to alternative existing measures.

Briefly, the Robin Hood survey of the well-being of New Yorkers will bring together for the first time measures of these three key constructs: income poverty, material hardship, and child and family well-being. The income poverty questions will allow us to calculate both official and SPM poverty. The material hardship questions will allow us to measure food insecurity, housing insecurity, and medical care insecurity. And the child and family well-being questions will capture, in a developmentally appropriate way, child health, school achievement, and behavior and social/emotional development, as well as parental involvement in learning

activities, mental health, and financial stress. With these data we will be able to go beyond traditional reporting on income poverty to further distinguish policy-relevant groups such as the following:

☐ income poor and experiencing material hardship, versus income poor but not experiencing material hardship

☐ income poor or income near poor and experiencing material hardship, versus neither poor nor near poor and experiencing material hardship

☐ income poor and experiencing poor child and family well-being, versus income poor but not experiencing poor child and family well-being

☐ experiencing material hardship and poor child and family well-being, versus experiencing material hardship but not poor child and family well-being

Moreover, each of these comparisons can be further elaborated for different measures and levels of poverty, specific types and extent of hardship, and specific types and extent of child and family well-being. For poverty, we can distinguish between poverty using the official definition and using the supplemental poverty measure (SPM) definition. We can also distinguish between poor vs. non-poor as well as compare those at different points in the income/poverty distribution (e.g. those below 50% of poverty, between 50-99% poverty, 100-149% poverty, 150-199% poverty, and so on). For material hardship, we can identify families that are experiencing food insecurity or very low food security using the official Census definition (as well as finer gradations, e.g. any problems with food security, food insecurity, or very low food insecurity), families experiencing any housing or utilities hardship, and families experiencing any medical hardship. It is also possible

to create a composite material hardship index whereby a family would be coded as experiencing hardship if they experienced one or more of the specific types of hardship. Such an index could be defined in advance based on agreement about what families should have or experience, or could be defined empirically based on the distribution of hardships within the sample. This paper will provide initial estimates from the first wave of the survey examining the relationship between income poverty and material hardship, as well as demographic differences in these relationships in the city of New York.

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