Review of Income and Wealth
Series 39, Number 1, March 1993

A FEMINISATION OF POVERTY IN GREAT BRITAIN? A CLARIFICATION

BY ROBERT E. WRIGHT

University of Glasgow and Centre for Economic Policy Research

In a recent paper in this *Review*, I examined the relationship between gender and absolute poverty in Great Britain in the period 1968 to 1986 (Wright, 1992). Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (1984) poverty measures, based on three poverty lines, were calculated using data from the *Family Expenditure Survey*. The analysis supported two main conclusions. The first is that poverty rates are higher for women compared to men. The second is that there has not been an increase in the female share of poverty. The latter finding was interpreted as evidence *contrary* to the so-called feminisation of poverty hypothesis—the belief that the incidence and intensity of female poverty is increasing.

With respect to formally testing the feminisation of poverty hypothesis I write:

> Clearly, if the poverty experience is shared equally between males and females, then $S(\alpha)_f = S(\alpha)_m = 0.5$. On the other hand, if $S(\alpha)_f > S(\alpha)_m$ then poverty is not equally shared, with females being over-represented in the ranks of the poor. It follows that an increase in $S(\alpha)_f$ over time is indicative of a feminisation of poverty. (Wright, 1992, p. 21)

This method is strictly not a valid test of this hypothesis. In terms of the FGT poverty measure, $S(\alpha)_f$ and $S(\alpha)_m$ are the female and male "shares" of total poverty, respectively. It is only correct to say that poverty is "shared equally" between men and woman if $S(\alpha)_f = S(\alpha)_m = 0.5$ when the relative population shares of women and men are also equal. That is, when: $(n_f/n) = (n_w/n) = 0.5$. In addition, if the population share of women is changing over time, then changes in the female share of poverty, $S(\alpha)_f$, does not necessarily mean that female poverty is increasing relative to male poverty. This interpretation is only correct when the population share of women is also not changing.

Due to well-known demographic processes (mainly mortality differences), the population shares of men and women are not equal in nationally-representative samples, such as the *Family Expenditure Survey*. More specifically, these data indicate that the female population shares are: 52.3 percent in 1968; 52.7 percent in 1977; and 52.3 percent in 1986 (see Table 1). Clearly, the female share of the British population is significantly larger than the male share. Furthermore, the female population share is not the same at these three points in time.

If poverty is shared equally between women and men, then their poverty shares would equal their population shares. That is: $S(\alpha)_f = (n_f/n)$ and $S(\alpha)_m = (n_m/n)$. Therefore, a more accurate description of how "over-represented" women

Note: The comments of Cheryl A. Raabe are gratefully acknowledged.

TABLE 1

FEMALE POVERTY SHARE/POPULATION SHARE RATIOS: GREAT BRITAIN

$S(\alpha)_f =$			$S(0)_f$			$S(1)_f$			$S(2)_f$		
Year	n_f/n	$\rho =$	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.6
1968	52.3		1.05	1.03	1.05	1.06	1.04	1.04	1.05	1.05	1.04
1977	52.7		1.02	1.02	1.01	1.02	1.01	1.00	1.03	1.03	1.01
1986	52.3		1.05	1.06	1.02	1.00	1.03	1.03	0.98	1.00	1.01

Notes:
(1) The table entries are: $S(\alpha)_f/(n_f/n)$.
(2) $S(\alpha)_f$ is the female share of poverty.
(3) The poverty line is $y^* = p \cdot y$ where $\bar{y}$ is the mean level of equivalent income in 1986.
(4) α is the specific version of the FGT index employed.
(5) n_f/n is the female population share expressed as a percentage.
(6) For further details see Wright (1992).
Source: *Family Expenditure Survey.*

are in poverty is simply how much their poverty share exceeds their population share. A convenient way of summarising the magnitude of this disadvantage is the ratio of the female poverty share to the female population share. That is: $Ratio = S(\alpha)_f/(n_f/n)$. If this ratio is greater than 1, then women are "over-represented" amongst the poor. It follows that increases in this ratio, not necessarily increases in the female share of poverty, are indicative of a feminisation of poverty.

More generally, these poverty shares describe what may be termed the "distribution of poverty." If the poverty burden is shared equally across all population groups (for example, between men and women), then each group's poverty share would equal its population share. If this is not the case, the poverty share/population share ratios provide valuable information concerning which groups are over-represented in the ranks of the poor.

Table 1 shows the female poverty share/population share ratios calculated for all the poverty estimates given in my earlier paper. Turning first to the ratios based on the index that measures the *incidence* of poverty (i.e., the FGT measure with $\alpha = 0$), there is no clear pattern of increase or decrease. Likewise, when the ratios based on the index that incorporates information about the *average deprivation* of the poor are considered (i.e., the FGT measure with $\alpha = 1$), no clear pattern of change is found. Finally, the ratios based on the poverty index that captures the *relative deprivation* of the poor (i.e., the FGT measure with $\alpha = 2$), appear to be *decreasing*. For reasons discussed above, such a trend is contrary to the feminisation of poverty hypothesis. In other words, when these more informative ratios are examined, my original conclusion of little support for the feminisation of poverty hypothesis in Great Britain is confirmed.

REFERENCES

Foster, J., Greer, J., and Thorbecke, E., A Class of Decomposable Poverty Measures, *Econometrica*, 52, 761-766, 1984.

Wright, R. E., A Feminisation of Poverty in Great Britain?, *Review of Income and Wealth*, 38(1), 17-25, 1992.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JOURNAL EXCHANGE

STATISTICAL JOURNAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (SJU)

This journal is published in volumes of four issues. It covers five major areas of statistical work:

1. Regional and international statistical co-operation
2. Organization and operation of statistical services, including problems of electronic data processing
3. Methodological development and harmonization of economic statistics
4. Methodological development and harmonization of social and demographic statistics
5. Development and harmonization of environment and related statistics.

Reports on novel methodological approaches, analytical papers with a clear statistical content, and conceptual proposals for the solution of existing difficulties are typical subjects of contributions in each of the major work areas.

Prospective contributions should be addressed to the Editor-in-charge.

Editor-in-charge

Andreas Maurer, Statistical Division, Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, CH-1211/Geneva 10, Switzerland

Subscription Information

IOS Van Diemenstratt 94, 1013 CN Amsterdam, Netherlands

Recently published papers: Volume 9, Numbers 1 and 2, 1992

M Pesut: Statistics of the hidden economy and informal activities inside the production boundary of the national accounts. An overview of national practices

A. Bélanger, D. Larrivée: New approach for constructing Canadian working life tables, 1986–1987

K. H. Alfsen: Use of macroeconomic models in analysis of environmental problems in Norway, and consequences for environmental statistics

P. van Der Laan: Socio-economic accounts in the Netherlands and the interrelationship with statistics of income distribution and national accounts

R. Friberg: Surveys on environmental investments and costs in Swedish industry

J. Schiepers: On the choice of equivalence scales

S. Laaksonen: Adjustment methods for non-response and their application to Finnish income data

B. Sundgren: A proposal for a survey-oriented metainformation system

JOURNAL OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

An International Review Published by Statistics Sweden

JOS is a scholarly quarterly that specializes in statistical methodology and applications. Survey methology and other issues pertinent to the production of statistics at national offices and other statistical organizations are emphasized. All manuscripts are rigorously reviewed by independent referees and members of the Editorial Board.

Recently published papers: Volumes 7 and 8

David A. Binder: A framework for analyzing categorical survey data with non-response

Roderick J. A. Little: Inference with survey weights

György Szilágyi: Cluster analysis in international comparisons

Mats Hagnell: A multivariate time series analysis of fertility, adult morality, and real wages in Sweden 1751–1850: A comparison of two different approaches

Pekka Myrskylä: Census by questionnaire—Census by registers and administrative records: The experience of Finland

Joseph L. Schafer: A Comparison of the missing-data treatments in the post-enumeration program

Lindy H. Ingham: Natural resource and environmental accounting in the national accounts

Judith M. Tanur and Stephen E. Fienberg: Cognitive aspects of surveys: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow

Adam Chu, Donna Eisenhower, Michael Hay, David Morganstein, John Neter, and Joseph Waksberg: Measuring the recall error in self-reported fishing and hunting activities

Clyde Tucker: The estimation of instrument effects on data quality in the consumer expenditure diary survey

Mick P. Couper, Lisa Holland, and Robert M. Groves: Developing systematic procedures for monitoring in a centralized telephone facility

Linda L. Golden, Patrick L. Brackett, Gerald Albaum, and Juan Zatarain: The golden numerical comparative scale format for economical multi-object/multi-attribute comparison questionnaires

Patricia M. Guenther: Effects of procedural differences in the nationwide food consumption survey

Carolyn M. Boyce and Marilyn C. Mauch: Evidence of anchoring in a survey recall task

D. Holt and T. Farver: The use of composite estimators with two stage repeated sample design

Hüseyin Göksel, David R. Judkins, and William D. Mosher: Nonresponse adjustments for a telephone follow-up to a national in-person survey

Richard Valliant: Smoothing variance estimates for price indexes over time

Michael F. Weeks: Computer-assisted survey information collection: A review of CASIC methods and their implications for survey operations

James P. M. Ntozi: Training of African statisticians at a professional level

Rich Allen: Statistical defensibility as used by U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service

William P. O'Hare: The United States Decennial Census: Problems, possibilities, and prospects

All inquiries about submissions and subscriptions should be directed to the Chief Editor:

Lars Lyberg, R&D Division, Statistics Sweden, S-115 81 Stockholm, Sweden.