

Study shows impact of poverty and gender on children's welfare

October 7 2015, by Amy Mcsweeny



A new research paper by a Plymouth University academic shows that children all over the world are more likely to be at risk if they're female and below the poverty line.

Associate Professor Penelope Welbourne explains that "ideas about

gender and the role of women in some societies may place girl children in added danger from birth, compared with male children," in *Child protection and welfare: cultures, policies, and practices in the European Journal of Social Work*.

Working with Professor John Dixon from The Middle East Technical University in Turkey, Dr Welbourne draws on analyses from a variety of countries to conclude how all children are ultimately at risk in most cultures. However, she adds that the "cumulative effect of poverty, the lack of opportunity associated with poverty, and cultural expectations concerning women may create particular vulnerability for girl children, although the suffering experienced by male children in many poor households is also severe."

The paper also addresses how the breakdown and dispersal of extended family can put children at risk.

Dr Welbourne said: "The UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) constitutes a statement on what governments have a duty to do to protect children's convention rights, but its application even in principle is not consistent between countries. The gender of a child appears to shape the way their life chances are affected by poverty, including their life expectancy and their chances of continuing with their education beyond elementary schooling."

A senior lecturer in [social work](#) from the School of Health Professions at the University, Dr Welbourne conducted the research to explore the ideal of the UNCRC that childhood should be universally protected; along with the suggestion by renowned child studies expert Professor Jill Korbin that there is a universally accepted core of 'good parenting' behaviour applicable in all cultures.

As a former social worker herself, Dr Welbourne's passion for child

welfare has been a prevalent feature in her study since her return to academia.

She added: "Challenges faced are brought about by a combination of economic deprivation and cultural expectations... countries can enact laws intended to protect girl children, but they may be ineffective against entrenched social attitudes when only limited resources can be provided to implement and enforce them. This is the ultimate challenge that the international community must address if the vision of the UNCRC is to be realised."

More information: "Child protection and welfare: cultures, policies, and practices." *European Journal of Social Work*, [DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2015.1084273](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1084273)

Provided by University of Plymouth

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