

Population Association of America 2005 Annual Meeting
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 31-April 2, 2005, Philadelphia Marriot

Session 803: Population and Poverty

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TOPIC: Demographic Effects and Poverty: Evidence from Studies in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents some of the findings from the Participatory Poverty Assessment of Thailand, funded by the Asian Development Bank from August 2001 to August 2002, and from the Ultra Poor in the Southern Thailand, funded by Thailand Research Fund, from January to December 2000. The former research project, with qualitative, focus group-based study conducted nationwide covering six regions of Thailand, was a further study from the latter conventional quantitative-approached which aimed to survey the socioeconomics of the poor households in the south of Thailand. Though different approaches were used, both studies' common objectives were to survey and assess the causes and impacts of poverty, the poor households' responses to poverty, government and other agencies measures toward poverty. Recommendations on policies to best address the needs of the poor were

The findings revealed that poverty and population were interrelated, both at individual and household levels. Caused by lack or insufficiency of resources of production, education and skills; possessing of debts and large number of family members; being old and unhealthy; and vulnerability to external uncontrollable forces, poverty forced the poor households and individuals to respond in any surviving ways. Resulting in migration from the rural to the urban areas of younger members of the households, especially young girls, to enter the job markets, in some cases, eventually led to prostitution. More migrating younger poor were found to have sexual relationship without marriage. High fertility and unwanted pregnancy were therefore followed and contraceptives use was not prevalent. At the same time, young members of the poor households, both living in rural homes, and migrating to work in cities, were likely to get married at young age. This marriage pattern expanded the reproductive health period of the poor households. For the married couples, migration resulted in family breakups, divorce and desertion. Some works, like commercial fishing and labor working in foreign countries, demanded long period of absence from home. The possibility of desertion was then higher. Female single-parent family became an increasing phenomenon as results of desertion and premature death of male heads of households. Poor health and prolonged illness from poverty caused inability to pay health expenses as well as premature death and therefore single-parent families. The impact of social programmes and public policy on demographic outcomes were also assessed.

Policy recommended in order to alleviate the negative demographic effects of the poverty is those aiming to increase opportunities and potential of the poor, so they will be better off and develop better standard of living for themselves and their families. Macroeconomic policies toward creating employment and economic security for the poor are also necessary.

