POVERTY IN TIME: EXPLORING POVERTY DYNAMICS FROM LIFE-HISTORY INTERVIEWS IN BANGLADESH

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Aims

- Part of a study of social policy in development contexts
- Used Gosta Esping-Anderson’s (1990) idea of a welfare regime as a starting point
- Included a concern for informal forms of social protection, NGOs, international migration etc.
- Included a study of patterns of crisis, coping, opportunity and life trajectories
Context and Methods

- 6 villages and 3 towns in Kushtia district in Bangladesh
- 20 individuals from each site selected for life history interviews
- Household resource profiles (income, assets, other power-resources)
Case-based verses variable based

- case based
  - few cases, many variables, many moments

- variable based
  - e.g. panel surveys
  - many cases, few variables, few moments (usually)
Life history interview approach

- talked about people’s general well-being (*obosta*)
- high level of historical and contextual detail sought
  - signalled initially by collecting family history information: births, deaths, marriages etc.
  - led into a conversation about dowry, illness, loans, employment, business, land, education, court cases etc.
  - mapped onto a template with national events
  - as information builds up cross-checking can occur
  - memory stimulation is important: sequencing, cross checking and a relaxed setting
  - people’s own interpretation of causality
Terminology

- event
- episode
- trajectory
- transition
- passage
- life stage
- cohort
- era
Trajectories

- improvements usually happen gradually
- declines are often more sudden
- trajectory patterns emerge
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>trajectory direction</th>
<th>trajectory pattern</th>
<th>depiction</th>
<th>number of cases (out of 90)</th>
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</table>
Trajectory patterns

- smooth
  - improving
  - level
  - declining
- saw-tooth
  - improving
  - level
  - declining
- single step
  - declining
- multi-step
  - declining
Improving smooth: Jehangir

- 1971 war
- Married in 1980
- Started work with NGO in 1988
- Sister married in 1995
- Parents and all five brothers contributed to costs
- Fairly secure job with NGO
Declining smooth: Sukur Ali

- Partition 1947
- Independence war 1971
- Father ill 1962-1977
- 15 bighas of land sold 1977
- Nursery destroyed in flood 1998
- Four children died 1974-1984
- Brother has TB from 1993
- Daughter married, dowry paid over 1 year 1985
- Working as a rickshaw driver in Kushtia 1950-1979
- Wife ill for one year 1974
- Working as a chowkidar 1979-present – bribes needed to get paid
- Father died 1977
- Daughter married, dowry paid over 1 year 1985
Declining smooth: Anwar Hossian

- Independence war 1971
- Land owned: 25 bigha, 20 bigha, 10 bigha, 4 bigha, 2 bigha, 1.25 bigha
- Mother died
- Daughters married
- Attempt to murder case against respondent 4 bigha land sold to pay for case
- Travelled to Calcutta for medical treatment
- Illness 1978-2001
- Daughter married 2001 Tk. 21,000 total cost
- Daughters married
- Mother died
Low level smooth: Nasima

1968 husband died from TB

1971 war
Low level saw-tooth: Moznu

- born in 1971
- sister’s dowry 1990
- grandmother’s death 1990
- sister’s dowry 1994
- father’s medical expenses and death 1997
- daughter drowned 2001
- working as day labour
- working as carpenter

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- Moznu's sister's dowry in 1990
- Grandmother's death in 1990
- Sister's dowry in 1994
- Father's medical expenses and death in 1997
- Daughter drowned in 2001
- Born in 1971

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- Moznu's low level saw-tooth pattern
- Events and milestones over time
Low level saw-tooth: Fuljan

1971 war
- father died during 1974 famine

married in 1981
- mother-in-law’s medical treatment 1984
- ill after baby died in womb
- brothers divided property
- marriage of daughter Tk. 14,000 total costs
- son also working
- husband working with handloom
- Eye problems Tk. 4000

husband working
- husband working with handloom
Declining saw-tooth: Selim

crops destroyed in flood in 1971

1971 war

1985 fighting in village

1988 crops destroyed in flood

ill with jaundice, unable to work 1987

1990-1999 court case from 1985 village conflict

village conflict 1990, throat cut

1990-1999 court case after 1990 village conflict

wife sick after delivery 1995

flood in 1998 destroyed rice crop

5-year-old son suddenly died in 2000 from mystery illness
Declining saw-tooth: Amir Hossain

- **1965-66**: 10 bigha of land, trees and 4 cows stolen
- **1971 war**: 5 kata land with gift from sosur bari
- **1979**: Father ill from 1979 and died 1982
- **1982**: Wife ill over 2 years
- **2000**: Brother died in accident
- **2001**: Mother died from hep. b tk. 15,000 cost
- **2001**: Started a new business from mortgaged land
Improving saw-tooth: Rena

1971 father fell from a tree and died 6 months later

1971 war

husband began to threaten her

left husband in 1983 with 3 month old son

married 1980 to a wealthier man

1986 married again

mother ill for 10 years 1990-2000, contributed Tk. 200 per month for medical costs

sister married, contributed to dowry

son started working

married 1990-2000, contributed Tk. 200 per month for medical costs
Improving saw-tooth: Yasa

- Born in 1971
- Didn’t go to school, looked after goats and cows instead
- Worked on father’s land and as day labour, 1981-1991
- Married secretly, had to leave family, 1991
- Fighting over crop eaten by cows, 1990, court case for 1.5 years, tk. 3000 cost
- Got a permanent job in Kushtia, 1996
- Leg infection, 1995 - couldn’t work for one month
- Court case, accused of murder after conflict, tk. 6000 total cost
- Onion crop ruined in hailstorm, 1998
- Operation for wife, tk. 15,000
- Operation for wife, tk. 15,000
- Got a permanent job in Kushtia, 1996
Declining single step: Sephali

1971 independence war

1991 husband poisoned

2001 husband died
Declining single step: Ayesha

- Land bought in 1978
- Court case over land dispute (1980-1985)
- Case lost and husband dies from heart attack (1985)
- Ayesha survives by begging (1985-2001)
Declining single step: Allauddin

war 1971

eye injury leading to loss of left eye in 1993

medical costs and lack of work

unable to work due to pain associated with loss of eye and general weakness 2001
Declining multi-step: Jasmin

- War 1971
- Marriage 1972
- Father died 1973
- Divorce 1975
- Court case
- Marriage 1978
- Divorce 1984
- Violent attack
Declinging multi-step: Badsha

- marriage and separation of property 1978
- became ill with leprosy 1980
- abandonment by wife and theft of property 1988
- war 1971
Declining multi-step: Amit

- War 1971
- House burglary 1983
- Court case and kidnapping 1977
- Operation 1994
- Marriage of daughter #1 1990
- Marriage of daughter #2 1997
Causality

1) **Multiple causation**
   - Multiple distinct events coincide in time to produce a single outcome. Single causes can also have multiple effects.

2) **Cumulative causation**
   - A prior event produces an interim outcome which changes or reinforces the effect of a following event.

3) **Sequence effects**
   - The order of a series of events affects the final outcome

4) **Interaction effects**
   - When events interact due to proximity in time, or for other reasons, a unique outcome is produced

5) **Threshold effects**
   - When a threshold is reached a magnified effect is triggered

6) **Duration of cause and effect**
   - Causes and effects can be of short or long duration. This creates a variety of combinations of cause and effect in time.
Structured disadvantage

- Exposure
- Insurance
- Vulnerability
- Resilience
Concluding remarks

- Nature of the interview
- Nature of analysis
- Uncovering people’s interpretations of causation
- Scope for qual/quant combinations