

## Social Exclusion in Georgia: Perceived Poverty, Participation and Psycho-Social Wellbeing

By Natia Mestvirishvili, Tbilisi

### Abstract

This article examines the extent of perceived poverty in Georgia and shows how it relates to participation in a wide range of social activities, as well as individuals' physical and psycho-social health. It uses quantitative data from an annual nationwide survey conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in 2011 to explore: 1. the general situation in terms of people's economic well-being in Georgia based on subjective and objective indicators, 2. the relationship between people's perceived economic situation and their participation in socio-cultural activities, as well as political perceptions and 3. the relationship between perceived poverty and individuals' physical and psycho-social health. The data show that the subjective feeling of poverty in Georgia is negatively associated with an active and healthy lifestyle and psycho-social well-being.

### Introduction

A socially inclusive society is usually defined as a society in which all members feel valued, their basic needs are met and their differences are respected (Cappo, 2002). The notion of social exclusion is closely linked to the concept of participation; a socially inclusive society provides its members with equal opportunities for participating in ongoing economic, political and social activities. Poverty is often understood as a primary reason of social exclusion, yet two issues need to be mentioned here. First, it is important to acknowledge that poverty can be not only the cause of social exclusion, but may also be its result. People who live in poverty are often at risk of social exclusion. On the other hand, people who are socially excluded from society based on their ethnicity, education, religion, sexual orientation or other factors are at a greater risk of poverty. Second, the measurement of poverty is oftentimes based on objective indicators which do not accurately reflect a subjective feeling of poverty or perceived poverty by individuals. Being poor does not always mean feeling poor and vice versa.

This article examines social exclusion in Georgia with a particular focus on perceived poverty and its relationship with social participation and psycho-social well-being in three sections. The first section gives an overview of the general situation in Georgia in terms of poverty. The second section is focused on social activities and how they are related to individuals' perceived poverty and the third section looks at the relationship between perceived poverty and physical and psycho-social health. The article employs data from the 2011 Caucasus Barometer (CB) survey conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in Georgia. The CB is based on a representative nationwide sample excluding territories affected by military conflicts and uses multistage cluster sampling with preliminary stratification on nine geographically defined units. The num-

ber of primary sampling units in each stratum is proportional to the population of these strata. In 2011 the number of individual interviews in Georgia was 2,287.

### Poverty in Georgia

Since independence in 1991, the transition to a market economy in Georgia has been painful and dramatic. Even though economic growth in Georgia has been impressive during the last five years, it has not had the desired effect on employment and poverty thus far.

According to CB data, 27 percent of households in Georgia do not have enough money for food. 38 percent of households report having enough money for food but not for clothes, and 29 percent said they had enough money for food and clothes but not for expensive durables (e.g., a washing machine or refrigerator). Only 5 percent of the households in Georgia can afford to buy expensive durables and 1 percent has enough money for everything.

CB also asks Georgians how often they did not have enough money to buy food for themselves or their families during the last year. 2 percent of Georgians say this has happened every day, 4 percent—every week and 18 percent—every month. 41 percent of Georgians say this happens less often and 35 percent have not experienced this during the last year.

Speaking in terms of more objective measures of poverty, 11 percent of Georgian households report their monthly monetary income in 2011 to be less than 50 USD. Over half of households in Georgia (53 percent) say their monthly monetary income is between 51 and 100 USD, 31 percent—101–400 USD and only for 4 percent of Georgian households the income is more than 400 USD. However, it should be mentioned that this is a very sensitive and personal question (9 percent refused to answer) and these numbers may not accurately reflect the reality. This picture is not much dif-

ferent from what we get using the indicators discussed above: 24 percent of Georgians find themselves in a situation when they do not have enough money to buy food for themselves and their families at least once a month and over half of Georgian households cannot afford to buy food and clothes.

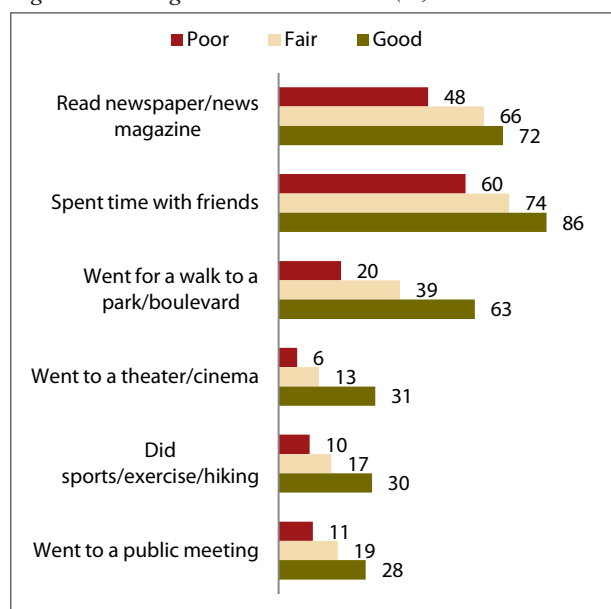
The economic variable considered in this study is a household's perceived economic situation. The CB asks Georgians, "Relative to most of the households around you, would you describe the current economic condition of your household as...?" Respondents can choose between five options: very good, good, fair, poor and very poor. 24 percent of Georgians rate their households' economic condition relative to most households in Georgia as poor or very poor, 68 percent say it is fair and only 8 percent rate it as good or very good. This question is distinct from others as it measures perceived relative poverty based on social comparison. Thus, it refers to the subjective dimensions of poverty which cannot be captured by objective indicators. In other words, with the same objective indicators (e.g., income) individuals may feel different about their economic state. Since this question asks about the relative perceived economic condition of the household compared to most households in Georgia, the answers reflect this subjective feeling of poverty better than questions that ask for a household's monetary income or other objective indicators (which also include a high risk of inaccuracy). Moreover, since the question measures relative poverty the answers are meaningful even without knowing the general economic context in the country. Perceived poverty may reflect objective poverty to a certain degree but they are not necessarily the same.

Inability to access basic necessities (e.g., food and clothes) is only one of many effects poverty has on individuals. Other consequences may include limited participation in political, economic and social activities as well as worsened health and psycho-social well-being.

### Perceived Poverty and Participation

Perceived poverty is negatively associated with a wide range of social and cultural activities such as spending time with friends, going for a walk, visiting a cinema or theater, participating in sports or attending a public meeting. CRRC data show that Georgians, who perceive themselves as poor compared to most other households in Georgia, are less likely to spend time with friends, participate in different social and cultural events or follow a healthy life style (sports, exercise, hiking, etc.) than those who describe their economic condition as fair or good (Figure 1). However, it is important to consider the general picture in Georgia in terms of these activities while interpreting these results. Even though a majority

Figure 1: During the Past 6 Months... (%)



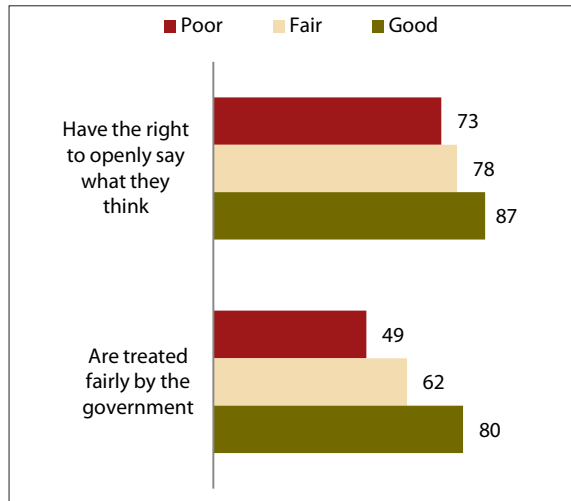
Source: CRRC

of Georgians spend time with their friends, they are not involved in cultural, public and sports events very much. Thus, CB data show that people, who perceive their economic condition as good, are forerunners in adopting a healthy life style and are much more involved in social and cultural activities than their co-nationals who perceive themselves as poor. In the case of going to a theater or cinema, the low level of activism among Georgians who perceive themselves to be poor can be attributed to limited material resources. Yet many other activities, such as going for a walk, visiting with friends or exercising, require less money. Moreover, exclusion from these activities may have important consequences on an individual's physical and psycho-social health which will be examined in the next section.

CB data show that people who perceive themselves as poor are less likely to read newspapers and/or news magazines. Only 48 percent of those who feel themselves poor compared to most households in Georgia read newspapers or news magazine. This share increases to 66 percent for Georgians who describe their household's economic situation as fair and to 72 percent for those who think their households are doing good in terms of economic condition (Figure 1).

The CB also asked Georgians whether they agree or not with the statements that, "Today in Georgia people like myself have the right to openly say what they think" and "Are treated fairly by the government". The data show that people who perceive themselves as poor are more likely to disagree with both statements (Figure 2). In the first case regarding the freedom of expres-

Figure 2: People Like Myself in Georgia... (%)



Source: CRRC

sion, the difference between the three groups is not very big—overall, most people in Georgia agree that they can openly say what they think, but those who consider themselves as economically strong compared to others are slightly more likely agree.

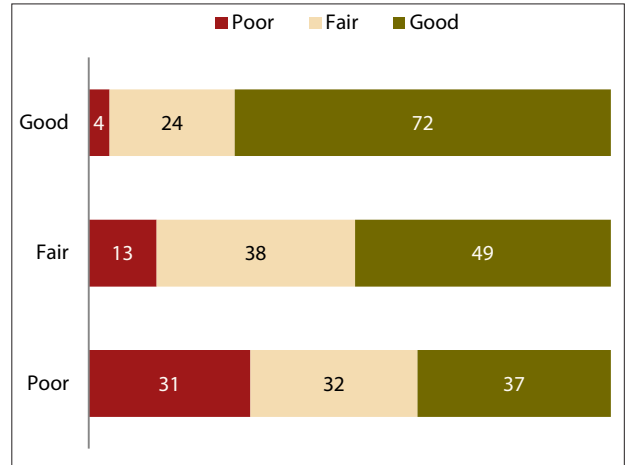
On the other hand, there is a larger difference between these three groups in terms of how they feel they are treated by the government. Nearly half of Georgians (49 percent) who feel they are in poverty agree with the statement that people like themselves are treated fairly by the government, while this share significantly increases (to 62 percent and 80 percent, respectively) among those Georgians who perceive their economic state as fair or good. These results indicate that even though a majority of people in Georgia think that they can openly say what they think (irrespective of their level of perceived poverty), many Georgians who do not perceive themselves as poor view the government as more just.

### Perceived Poverty and Psycho-Social Well-being

The CB data indicate that perceived poverty is negatively associated with physical health and psycho-social well-being in Georgia. One third of Georgians with a subjective feeling of poverty rate their health as poor. This share decreases to 13 percent and 4 percent in Georgians with fair and good economic condition (Figure 3).

Perceived poverty is negatively associated not only with physical health, but also individuals' psycho-social state. Unsurprisingly, Georgians who consider themselves as poor are far less likely to be happy and satisfied with their life as a whole (Figure 4 and 5). They have also low levels of interpersonal trust and tend to believe that one cannot be too careful in dealing with people (Figure 6).

Figure 3: Overall, How Would You Rate Your Health? (%)

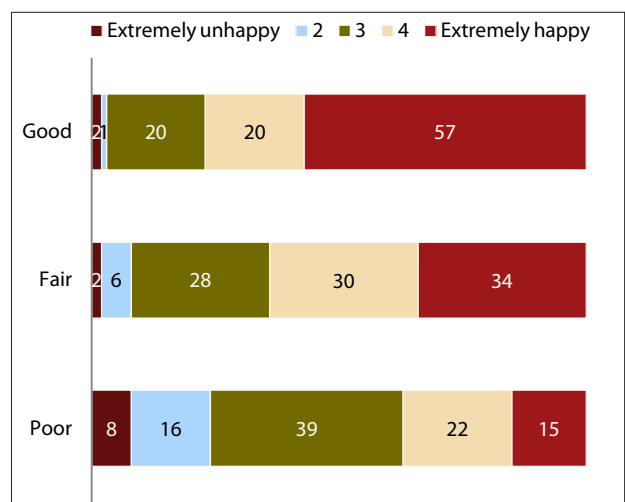


Source: CRRC

The differences in psycho-social wellbeing between “poor” and “rich” are further confirmed by the following data: CRRC asked Georgians about whether or not they agree with the following statements: 1. “There are enough people to whom I feel close” 2. “There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems” 3. “There are many people I can trust completely” 4. “I experience a general feeling of emptiness” 5. “I often feel rejected”. The analysis revealed that perceived poverty is negatively associated with having enough people to whom one feels close and can trust and rely when having problems. Respectively, it is positively associated with the feeling of emptiness and feeling of rejection.

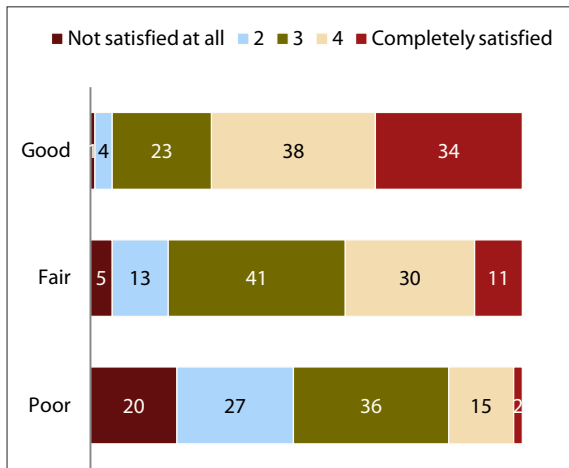
The 2011 CB data show that 34 percent of Georgians who perceive their households as poor say they

Figure 4: Overall, How Happy Would You Say You Are? (%)



Source: CRRC

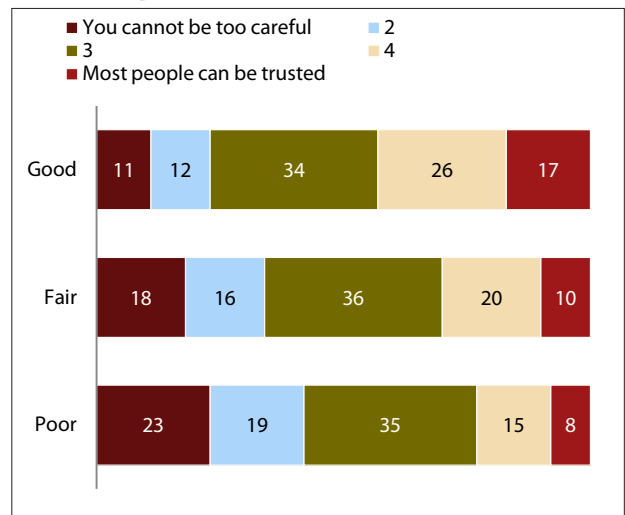
Figure 5: Overall, How Satisfied Are You With Your Own Life As A Whole Nowadays? (%)



Source: CRRG

have many people to whom they feel close. This share increases to 56 percent in individuals who perceive their households' economic situation as good. Likewise, 29 percent of those who describe their households as poor agree with the second statement while this share is higher in the second and third groups (39 percent and 48 percent). Also, Georgians who consider themselves as poor are less likely to agree that they have many people they can trust completely. Moreover, the general feeling of emptiness is reported only by 7 percent and 10 percent of Georgians who do not consider themselves as poor, while this share doubles in those who have the subjective feeling of poverty (20 percent). And finally, perceived poverty is positively associated with the feeling of being rejected. 14 percent of Georgians who feel poor compared to most households in Georgia say that they

Figure 6: Most People In Georgia Can Be Trusted Versus You Can Not Be Too Careful In Dealing With People (%)



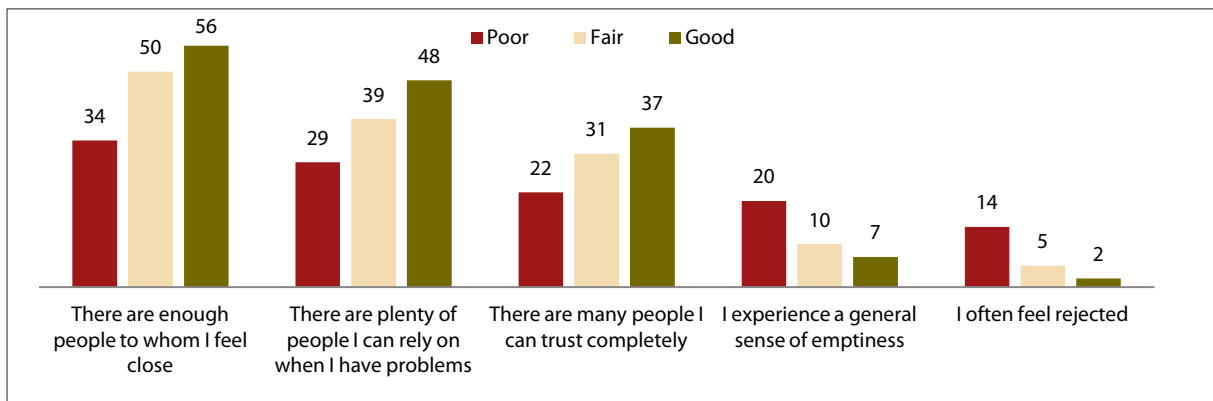
Source: CRRG

often feel rejected. Even though this is not a high number in itself, it is higher compared to the second (5 percent) and third (2 percent) groups (Figure 7).

To sum up, the 2011 CB data show that nearly a quarter of Georgians perceive themselves as poor or very poor compared to most households in Georgia. This part of Georgian society is less likely to participate in a wide range of socio-cultural activities and enjoy good physical and psycho-social health. They have stronger feelings of being rejected and treated unfairly by the government than those who perceive their economic state as fair or good. These are all indicators of social exclusion and reinforce a cycle of poverty in Georgia.

*Information about the author is overleaf.*

Figure 7: Trust in People



Source: CRRG

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## Social Exclusion of Women in Azerbaijan

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### Abstract

This article discusses the issue of female social exclusion based on two nationally representative surveys conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in Azerbaijan in the years 2011 and 2012. The surveys provide insight into Azerbaijani attitudes towards gender roles, division of labor and the participation of men and women in domestic and public life. The results show that women in Azerbaijan are more limited in their opportunities to get involved in social, economic and political spheres than men.

### Introduction

As in some other parts of the world, social exclusion of women is pervasive in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan has been characterized as a country where women are systematically excluded from participation in some social activities, as well as economic and political life. The absence of the female population in these areas has implications not only for women themselves, but also for society as a whole, thus exacerbating poverty and maintaining disparities in health, education, and economic achievement. Beyond that, Azerbaijan has the third highest rate of sex-selective abortion in the world.<sup>1</sup> These forms of marginalization makes it difficult to achieve society-wide goals, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) identified by the United Nations as a benchmark for recognition to women's rights in 1995.

Women's status and rights in Azerbaijan are underlined by the interaction of gender, traditions and culture. Patriarchal traditions and patterns persist in Azerbaijan, thus affecting attitudes about the division of roles among women and men in the domestic and public spheres.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, male predominance may become grounds for unequal treatment and social exclusion of women. These factors contribute by establishing an unequal power distribution between men and women and in creating a strong basis for female social exclusion.

It is important to note that Azerbaijan is set apart from other predominately Muslim countries around the world that may exhibit different aspects of female social exclusion in a variety of ways. Azerbaijan is one of the predominately Muslim countries (along with the five Central Asian countries) that was a part of the Soviet Union and which has a secular state. Thus, modern-day Azerbaijan has been influenced by its history of Soviet education, formally-atheistic Soviet state ideology, and various other social, political and economic campaigns intended to sculpt Soviet citizens.<sup>3</sup> While this past has arguably provided advantages and disadvantages for the country, today education plays an important role for both girls and boys and school attendance is mandatory for everyone in Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup>

Exclusion appears in many of the obstacles adolescent girls encounter during the transition to adulthood, including finding work, learning life skills or participating in civic life. By denying women access to resources, markets and decision making, social exclusion may maintain poverty at the individual and household levels.<sup>5</sup>

1 Economist, 2010. Gendercide: The worldwide war on baby girls. *The Economist*, March 4, 2010.

2 Azerbaijan Human Development Report. (2007). *Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and Challenges*.

3 Martin, Terry. (2001). *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

4 Thus, female participation in tertiary education is high, as 46% of the students in Azerbaijani universities are women; cf. The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2010/11). Retrieved from <http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/education/en/index.shtml> on 06/06/2012.

5 Hills, John; Le Grand, Julian & Piachaud, David. (eds.) (2002). *Understanding Social Exclusion*. Oxford: University Press.