

Youth and Arab Revolutions*

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Introduction

The UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports identified three major deficits at the start of the new millennium – gender, democracy and knowledge – which continue to plague Arab countries and are the root cause for frustration and disillusionment among youth. Faced with increasing marginalization many Arab youth resort to migration which results in an increasing loss of human capital. Hesitation on the road to democracy imperiled stability and created a new generation that lacks trust in the state and therefore can foment extremist sentiment and radical behavior which are the options of those who feel excluded.

Arab Spring refers to the democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.

1. Factors deriving Arab uprising

Factors deriving Arab uprising led by youth are inequality in opportunities, unemployment and social protection, and poverty, employment and education vicious circle.

Countries that experienced revolution suffer from corruption (see table 1), bad governance, unequal opportunities, lack of freedom, violation of human rights as well as high level of unemployment especially among youth.

1-1 Inequality in opportunities

In November 2010, the Human Development Report (HDR) highlighted the achievements of six Middle Eastern countries in human development by placing them in the list of the top-ten countries with fastest improvement in their Human Development Index (HDI) over forty years.

* This is based on the lecture given by Prof. El Laithy on 21 November, 2011 at Hitotsubashi University when she was invited to Japan as a fellow of the Invitation Fellowship Programs for Research in Japan by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).

Achievements have been made towards sustainable development covering the economic, social and environmental areas with clear implications in the daily life of Arab citizens in terms of health, education and economic conditions.

Within weeks of these important recognitions, Tunisia, one of the best performer was in full-scale popular revolt. In light of Tunisia's undeniable success in education, health, and economic growth, the three pillars of HDI calculus, inequality of opportunities was one of the reasons behind this uprising.

Although Arab countries have achieved remarkable progress in most social indicators due to universal provision as well as quality of services, above mentioned advancements have by no means been universal, though it is available to all citizens, millions of citizens across the region were left out. There is a great need of fine tuning social protection systems. It is not sufficient to make services available for all citizens, there are some segments of population who need special assistance to help them benefiting from the available services. In fact this is the heart of good social protection systems.

HDR 2010 introduced an adjusted HDI that takes into account inequality in each dimension, see table 2.

All Arab countries suffer from declining HDI due to inequality, exceeding 10 percent losses because of substantial inequality across all three dimensions. The average loss in the HDI due to inequality in all Arab countries is about 27.3 percent. Among Arab countries, losses range from 19.2 percent for Jordan to 34.2 percent for Yemen. Yemen is followed by Egypt which lost more than 25 percent.

Arab countries show the highest inequality in education dimension, followed by income dimension. Health dimension shows the least losses. Losses in education dimension ranged from 25.1 percent for Jordan to 49.8 percent for Yemen, and 43.6 percent in Egypt.

1-2 Unemployment and social protection

Employment to population ratio

Employment to population ratio, in 2008, the for the region was 53.5 percent, the highest being in GCC at 60.9 percent (see table 3). There is a weak link between real growth of GDP and employment generation in the region. Such weak link is manifested in an inelastic response of employment to real growth resulting in "jobless growth".

As a result, the 'informal sector' has become a "dumping ground" for the 'surplus' urban workforce, composed mostly of unskilled and unprotected labourers. Underemployment due to small working hours constitutes another major challenge for the region.

The state of unemployment

Unemployment is a major development challenge in most Arab countries. Unemployment is a major source of economic insecurity in most Arab countries. Data from the Arab Labour

Organization (ALO) show that the overall average unemployment rate for the Arab countries was about 14.4 percent of the labour force compared to 6.3 percent for the world at large.

While national unemployment rates vary considerably, ranging from about 2 percent in Qatar and Kuwait to about 22 percent in Mauritania, youth unemployment is a serious challenge common to many Arab countries.

ALO estimates show that youth unemployment rates in the region vary from a high of about 46 percent in Algeria to a low of 6.3 percent in the United Arab Emirates. With the exception of the latter, high income Arab countries suffer from double digit youth unemployment rates.

Overall, the unemployment rate among the young in the Arab countries is nearly double that in the world at large. The unemployment among those with university education is the highest with 56 percent in Saudi Arabia and 30.2 percent in Jordan, see table 4.

The number of unemployed seeking work for the first time is also frightening as the number reached 98 percent in Libya in 2007 and 93 percent in Egypt, 80 percent in Kuwait (for citizens only) and 70 percent in Saudi Arabia in 2009. The rate of the employed seeking work for longer than a year was also high at 69.5 percent in Morocco, 66.4 percent in Algeria and 64 percent in Kuwait but much lower in Saudi Arabia at 19 percent.

Trends in unemployment, coupled with population growth rates, indicate that Arab countries will need about 51 million new jobs by 2020. Most of those jobs will be essential to absorb young entrants to the labour force.

Unemployment also often wears a female face. Unemployment rates for Arab women are higher than those for Arab men, and among the highest in the world; 25 percent of the male labour force compared to 31.2. This reflects more than the failure of Arab economies to generate sufficient jobs; it points as well to entrenched social biases against women.

Worrisome as the unemployment figures are, they may not fully capture the seriousness of the problem in countries where citizens seize on any means of making a living when they cannot find decent and permanent jobs.

The rate and size of employment in the informal sector are also large, where workers lack contracts and benefits. The most recent UNDP figures available show that Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have very large informal sectors, comprised between 40 percent and 50 percent of the nonagricultural employment.

Thus, only 30 percent of the region's labour force is currently enrolled in some pension scheme, for instance the Jordanian social security system, in 2007 covered only around 50 percent of the formal private sector workforce, in Egypt only 34 percent of employed persons are covered by social insurance (some on voluntary basis).

Pensions' value at least in middle income countries and least developing countries is very low and its pace of change does not match with inflation, pointing to the vulnerability of pensioners.

Reasons for unemployment

1. The neglect of the agricultural sector which caused the migration of population from rural to urban areas
2. A failure to adopt balanced growth with a focus on limited areas, mainly the capital and surrounding areas
3. A failure to integrate the private sector into economic activity despite two decades of reform in the sector
4. A failure to link education output with market requirements
5. A paucity in vocational training and the reluctance of job seekers to acquire new skills that meet the market's needs
6. A failure to adopt an efficient mechanism to link between job seekers and available job opportunities
7. A weakness in addressing the manufacturing industry which generates job opportunities
8. A failure to take advantage of foreign direct investments that offer job opportunities
9. A weakness in adopting policies to encourage small and medium industry considered an important source of employment
10. A weakness in regional economic complementarities given a number of Arab countries have a surplus workforce while other have a shortage and are thus labor importers

In short, high unemployment rates in the Arab countries are a natural outcome of growth strategies and the policies adopted to implement them.

Active labour market programmes in the region have limited outreach and impact. Within the category of active labour market programmes fall measures such as labour-intensive public works (workfare), training and retraining, employment services, support for self-employment, credit for micro-enterprises, wage subsidies and so on. Practically all Arab countries have at least some of these programmes.

Unemployment insurance is generally lacking in the region yet, like all forms of properly designed social insurance. At present, only Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria and Tunisia have, or are introducing some form of unemployment insurance.

1-3 Poverty, employment and education; vicious circle

Poverty presents a major hurdle to sustainable development and to economic growth. It represents a threat to security, as well as to political and social stability, since it provides a fertile ground for fanaticism and extreme opposition to the state itself. Over the last two decades there has been widespread acceptance of the view that poverty is more than a lack of material resources; material resources are necessary but not sufficient to escape poverty. In the words of Amartya Sen (1999) 'income is only a means to reduce poverty and not the end of it'.

Youth poverty is usually conceived of as the poverty experienced by youth. It differs from

adult poverty in that it can have different causes and effects. Two main sets of causes can be identified. First, life-course events (e.g. leaving school, starting work, getting married, having children) play a significant role in shaping vulnerability to poverty. These 'life events' are more likely to occur during the 18-29 age interval. Second, intergenerational transmission experienced by youth is often linked to the poverty status of their households and childhood deprivation, and can in turn affect their well-being and the well-being of their children. The impact of youth poverty on long term human capital accumulation is well recognized because youth capacity for learning is greater than for older ages; thus youth poverty represents missed opportunities to acquire skills in school or on the job, or good health habits and these problems can be extremely difficult to remedy.

The extent to which parent's poverty is transmitted to their children is affected by parents' investment in children – in terms of education and training, health and nutrition, and general care. We address these links in Egypt.

Youth are more likely to experience poverty than older age groups and 'younger young' are at substantially higher risk of poverty than the 'older young'. Poverty rates peak dramatically for teenagers between 15 to 17 years, rising to almost 29 percent and almost 27 percent for young adults between 18 and 20 years. The younger working-age adults between 27 and 29 years (17 percent) have the lowest incidence of poverty, see figure 1.

Low education is a key factor to transmitting poverty across generation. Evidence also shows that the most deprived children are those in lowest parental wealth quintile, who have illiterate father and mother and lives in rural Upper Egypt.

Youth in poor households were highly disadvantaged in literacy, with large regional and gender gaps. For youth illiterate, poor persons in Egypt ranged from two to three times the rate of non-poor persons. Illiteracy rate increases as age increases for both the poor and non poor, reflecting improvements in access to basic education, see figure 2.

Net enrollment rate reached 29.7 percent for non poor and 13.9 percent for poor youth aged 18-24 years. At the age of 20 years, 11.7 percent of poor females and 13.6 percent of poor males were enrolled in education, compared to 31 percent of females and 36.7 percent of males in non-poor households.

This is a large gap in school enrollment between urban and rural areas, rural poor being the most disadvantaged. Low education status of poor youth and low enrollment rate is often a key constraint to Egyptian youth present and future livelihoods opportunities.

Among employed youth, 72 percent have permanent work, 9.2 percent have temporary work, 0.8 percent have seasonal work and 18 percent have casual work. More than one third of poor employed youth have no permanent jobs compared to less than a quarter of the non poor. Casual workers are more represented in the poor group (by 17 percentage points).

Unpaid workers are more common among the poor than the non poor. The share of unpaid workers in total employment at 24.7 percent and 19 percent for the poor and non poor. This

may be due to the fact that rural residents are engaged primarily in agriculture and poverty is more prevalent in rural areas, see figure 3.

Almost one out of three youth, (33.1 percent representing 5.9 million youth), experienced one or more deprivations ('severe deprivation'). One youth out of four (23.6 percent or 4223 thousand youth) suffer from only one severe deprivation. These percentages decrease to 2.4 percent for youth who suffer from three or more types of severe deprivations, see figure 4.

2. Review of Arab Spring

2-1 Youth played a central role in sparking Arab Uprising

Instead of young men joining the ranks of existing, violent movements, we're seeing an outpouring of young activists - both men and women - who in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere are using strategic non-violence as their strategy for change.

There are a number of reasons for this. Young people in the Middle East, especially the growing urban youth population, have been hurt by low wages, high unemployment and high food prices that have exacerbated their existing discontent. Just as significant, this generation's global interconnectedness through media and technology has exposed them to images of possibilities besides their current governments. These factors, among other conditions, combined to give youth both the will and the vision to lead the cause for change.

The result of Arab Spring: Three gone, two holding on. Ben Ali, who had ruled Tunisia since taking power in a coup in 1987, fled to Saudi Arabia three weeks later, on January 14. He was tried in absentia for corruption, and sentenced to 35 years in prison.

Hosni Mubarak was the next to lose his grip on power as unrest spread into Egypt and tens of thousands of Egyptians set up a protest camp in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Hundreds were killed and injured as those calling for Mubarak – president since 1981 – to resign and leave the country clashed with pro-government forces.

After initially refusing to hand over the reigns of power, Mubarak finally stepped down on February 11. He is currently on trial for corruption and the killing of more than 800 protesters. The latest casualty of the Arab Spring was Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Despite being the leaders of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, youth generally hold less power in any political system than adults or elders. Moreover, the way in which these movements emerged was through widespread, decentralized grassroots participation. The youth movement does not represent one homogeneous group. Young people are not all the same, and the youth movements represent many different interests and goals for the new Egyptian and Tunisian states.

This puts the youth movements at a major disadvantage as they compete against well-established institutions and opposition parties for control over their countries' future. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition movements in Egypt all had an interest

in rallying behind the youth movement in overthrowing Mubarak. Now that power is up for grabs, the more established parties have the leadership and experienced political machinery to direct the process of state-building for their own goals.

2-2 The revolution has just started but there is still a long way

Looking at the revolutions a few months out - it is clear that youth activism is just the starting point for young people to have a voice in their societies. There has to be a group of those still holding some power that is willing to keep listening to young people and address the substantive issues they are fighting against.

We're already seeing that problems like unemployment are not solved overnight, as young Tunisians flood the shores of Europe, still thinking that their best chance at success is to get out.

In Egypt, it seems that the old guards has managed to kidnap the revolution. Moreover, the civil society is weak and not well organized. The army was able to jump because there was no substitution. The former opposition movements were unable to contain or represent these movements and therefore the army had the space to step during the transition period.

Fanaticism grows in the soil of poverty, deprivation and illiteracy, but the middle class people know about this and they try to fight against it. Thousands protest in Tahrir Square over slow pace of reform since Mubarak was removed from power. Youth intend to protest again and again till their demands are met. Development in Tunisia have been more progressive than in Egypt. Tunisia held its first post-revolution elections two weeks ago.

With regards to education and especially the tertiary education matter, education isn't about to only train people to be employed. Employability doesn't mean to design the tertiary education system to meet the need of existing firms and the demand of existing firms.

We also should train for future jobs and for future firms. Universities and schools are all supposed to contribute to the production of knowledge which means an improvement in the techniques and methods of the producer and that of course isn't demanded by current firms.

National savings will need to be converted efficiently into sizeable investments for expanding health, housing and labour markets in order to cater for the needs of this young workforce and provide it with the facilities to increase productivity.

A special effort is required to remove entrenched social barriers to women's entrance to high productivity jobs. In many of these policy shifts, private-public partnerships offer the best option for mobilizing resources, transferring skills and creating new jobs.

Private, public and civil society sectors should work together to promote large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship and access to skills development services for young people across the Arab world.

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Table 1: Index of unrest and corruption for some Arab countries

Country	Unrest Index	Corruption	Poverty	Median Age	Literacy
Yemen	86.9	146	41.8	17.9	61
Libya	71	146	n/a	24.2	88
Egypt	67.6	98	16.7	24	66
Syria	67.3	127	n/a	21.5	n/a
Saudi Arabia	52.8	50	n/a	24.9	n/a
Algeria	51.3	105	22.6	27.1	73
Jordan	50.3	50	14.2	21.8	92
Tunisia	49.4	59	7.6	29.7	78
Morocco	48.2	85	19	26.5	56
Bahrain	37.7	48	n/a	30.4	91

Source: SHOE-THROWER'S INDEX FROM THE ECONOMIST, TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL 2010 CORRUPTION INDEX (HIGHER NUMBER = GREATER CORRUPTION), WORLD BANK, CIA WORLD FACTBOOK, UN

Table 2: Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index

		Human Development Index (HDI)	Inequality-adjusted HDI		Inequality-adjusted life expectancy at birth index ^a		Inequality-adjusted education index ^b		Inequality-adjusted income index ^c	
		Value	Value	Overall loss (%)	Value	Loss(%)	Value	Loss (%)	Value	Loss (%)
HDI rank	Country	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010	2010
32	United Arab Emirates	0.815	..	..	0.846	7.4	..	..	..	..
38	Qatar	0.803	..	..	0.820	7.4	..	..	..	..
39	Bahrain	0.801	..	..	0.816	8.1	..	..	..	..
47	Kuwait	0.771	..	..	0.850	7.3	..	..	..	..
	Oman	0.755	0.584	22.7	0.803		0.428	34.3	0.579	25.6
53	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	0.755	..	..	0.759	12.1	..	..	..	..
55	Saudi Arabia	0.752	..	..	0.736	12.7	..	..	..	..
81	Tunisia	0.683	0.511	25.2	0.751	12.7	0.378	38.7	0.469	21.8
82	Jordan	0.681	0.550	19.2	0.730	13.3	0.508	25.1	0.450	18.7
84	Algeria	0.677	..	..	0.688	17.9	..	..	..	..
101	Egypt	0.620	0.449	27.5	0.641	19.8	0.304	43.6	0.465	15.9
111	Syria	0.589	0.467	20.8	0.769	11.1	0.312	31.5	0.424	18.3
114	Morocco	0.567	0.407	28.1	0.671	18.3	0.246	42.7	0.409	20.7
133	Yemen	0.439	0.289	34.2	0.477	31.2	0.149	49.8	0.341	17.6
147	Djibouti	0.402	0.252	37.3	0.338	41.0	0.144	47.0	0.329	21.3
154	Sudan	0.379	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
	Iraq	..	..	..	0.611	20.4	0.314	33.0	..	..
	Lebanon	..	..	..	0.710	14.5	..	..	..	..
	Occupied Palestinian Territories	..	..	..	0.752	12.0	..	..	..	..
	Oman	..	..	..	0.809	9.0	..	..	..	..
	Somalia	..	..	..	0.238	50.6	..	..	..	..
	Arab States (RB)	0.593	0.429	27.3	0.623	21.3	0.289	..	0.432	17.7

Source: HDR 2010

Table 3: Employment-to-population ratio (%)

	2008			2010		
	15+	15-24	25+	15+	15-24	25+
Algeria	38.2	22.8	44.7	38.6	21.8	45.2
Bahrain	64.9	32.3	72.3	64.9	32.3	72.3
Comoros	52.9	34.7	61.8	53.4	34.3	62.3
Egypt	44.2	25.3	52.3	44.2	24.8	52.1
Iraq	33.6	17.7	42.1	42.2	35.8	20.3
Jordan	35.8	20.3	44.1	36	19.5	44.7
Kuwait	66	30.4	75.6	66.2	31.1	75.6
Lebanon	41.5	23.2	47.4	41.7	22.8	47.6
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	49.1	29.2	56.7	49.2	28.9	56.2
Mauritania	35.5	16.2	45.3	36	16.3	45.8
Morocco	45.8	31.7	51.4	45	29.9	50.6
Occupied Palestinian Territory	31.7	16.8	40.3	30.7	15.9	39.4
Oman	53.2	30.9	63.8	54.9	31.6	65
Qatar	85.1	66.1	89.1	85.8	65.9	89.9
Saudi Arabia	47.9	12.3	60.8	47.3	11.5	59.9
Somalia	52.7	39.2	59.4	52.6	39	59.6
Sudan	48.5	27.3	59	48.6	27	59.2
Syrian Arab Republic	39.2	25.3	46.4	38.8	24.1	45.8
Tunisia	40.2	22.7	46.5	40.7	22.7	46.7
United Arab Emirates	75.3	43.3	83.5	75.9	43.1	83.8
Yemen	40.6	26	50.6	41.5	26.5	51.4

Source: ILO Database

Table 4: Unemployment rate

Country	Youth unemployment rate (%)		Adult unemployment rate (%)		Share of youth unemployed in total unemployed (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Jordan	22.8	48.9	6.3	17.1	-	-
Morocco	19.1	16.1	6.8	8	43.7	36.5
Occupied Palestinian Territory	38.8	47.3	22.6	17.1	35.3	43.9
Saudi Arabia	23.6	45.8	1.7	8.4	57.3	43.4
Syrian Arab Republic	17.2	47.6	5.7	16.5	47.6	48.5
United Arab Emirates	7.9	21.8	1.2	9.5	46.6	36.3

Source: ILO Database

Figure 1: Egypt's income poverty rates by age

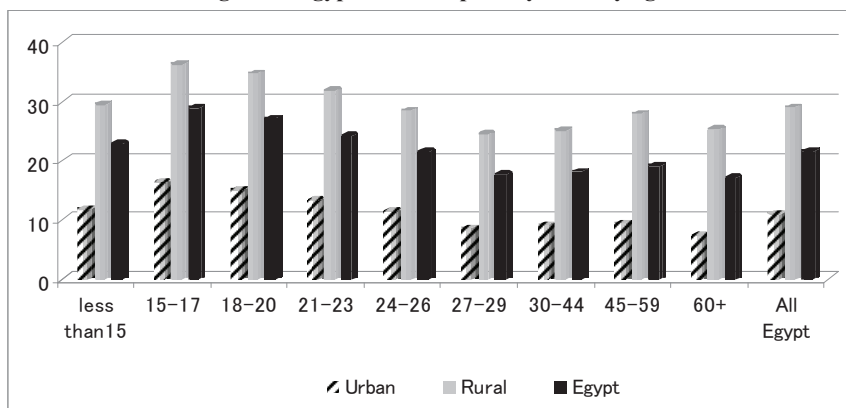


Figure 2: Enrollment rate of youth by age, Egypt

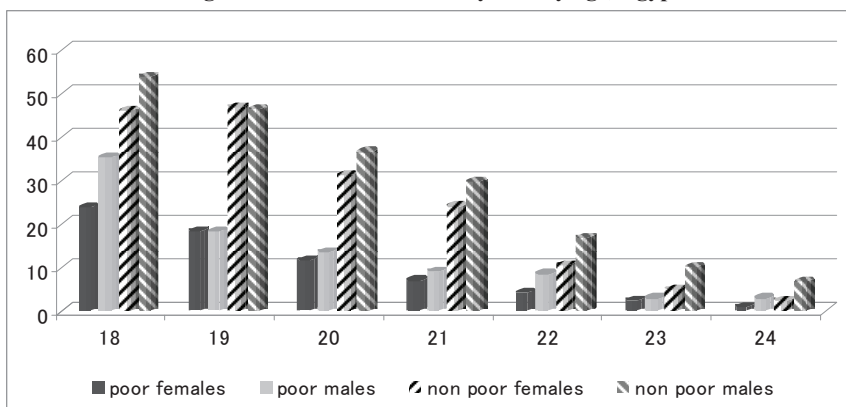


Figure 3 A: Percentage of permanent employment by age (above)
B: Percentage of unpaid workers by age (below)

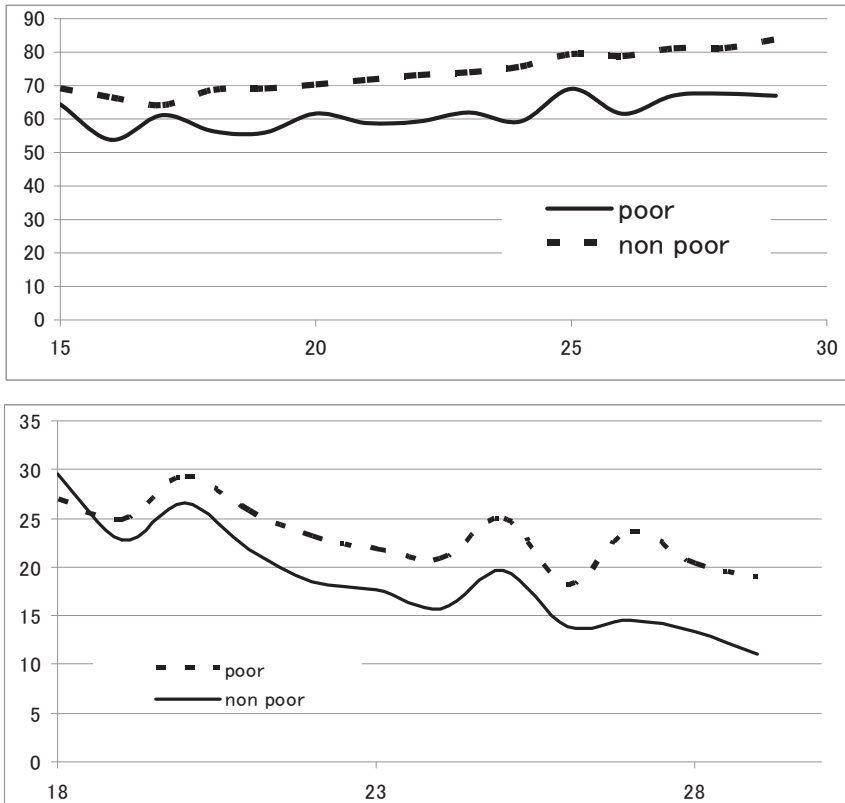


Figure 4: The incidence of multiple deprivations among youth

