

**Determinants of Child Poverty and
the Limits of Social Protection in Kazakhstan**

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Abstract

Child poverty in Kazakhstan has been growing — from 1 in 10 children in 2015 to 1 in 6 by 2021, despite economic growth and social reforms. This study examines what household factors are linked to poverty risk, whether government programs actually help, and what stops families from getting support they are entitled to. A survey of 160 households across ten regions of Kazakhstan was analyzed using binary logistic regression in Stata, complemented by five expert interviews with representatives from local, regional and international levels. It is found that 48.1% of surveyed households fall below the national subsistence minimum of 64,155 KZT per capita per month. Having more children is the strongest predictor of poverty, each additional child nearly doubles the odds of being poor. Expert interviews reveal that the TSA cliff effect, registration requirements, and fragmented services are the main barriers stopping families from getting help. The study concludes that tackling child poverty in Kazakhstan requires moving away from narrow income thresholds toward more coordinated, multidimensional support.

Table of content

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1. Definition and Measurement of Child Poverty...	7
2.2. Key Factors Contributing to Child Poverty.....	8
2.3. Child Poverty in Kazakhstan and Government Measures to Address It.....	9
2.4. The World's Practices for Reducing Child Poverty.....	11
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	12
3.1. Research Design.....	12
3.2. Data Collection Methods.....	14
3.3. Data Analysis.....	14
3.4. Ethical Considerations.....	15
CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH FINDINGS	16
4.1. Quantitative Findings: Survey Results.....	16
4.1.1. Poverty Prevalence.....	16
4.1.2. Sample Characteristics and Bivariate Analysis.....	16
4.1.3. Multivariable Logistic Regression: Determinants of Poverty.....	17
4.1.4. Predicted Probabilities.....	18
4.1.5. Effectiveness of Government Assistance (RQ2).....	19
4.1.6. Subjective versus Objective Poverty.....	19
4.1.7. Hypothesis Testing Summary.....	19
4.2. Qualitative Findings: Interview Insights.....	20
4.2.1. How Many Children Are Actually Poor?.....	20
4.2.2. The Existing Support Systems.....	21
4.2.3. Systemic Barriers to Access.....	22
4.2.4. Problems With Data and Information.....	23
4.2.5. What Can Help to Tackle Child Poverty.....	24
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	25
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS	26
6.1. Recommendations.....	27
6.2. Limitations and Future Research	29
REFERENCES	30
APPENDIX A. Survey questions	35
APPENDIX B. List of tables	40
APPENDIX C. List of figures	45

Note: This work was checked in Grammarly and ChatGPT for grammar and spelling. ChatGPT and Claude AI were used to assist in analyzing data findings.

1. Introduction

A considerable percentage of children facing poverty in families mainly have limited access to basic needs such as education, medical care, sanitation, and appropriate nutrition. In Kazakhstan, despite economic growth and social development reforms implemented, there have been no significant changes in the number of children living in poverty (Kudebayeva, 2015). By using comparable methodologies based on income below the subsistence minimum, studies indicate that in 2015, every 10th child was reported to be living in poverty in Kazakhstan (Buribayev et al., 2015). In contrast, the figure in 2021 was every 6th child according to the Soros Foundation (Bauyrzhan et al., 2021). This shows a negative trend in children under poverty in Kazakhstan over this period. The authors also stated that 90% of children facing poverty come from large households with 4 or more children (Bauyrzhan et al., 2021). Also, rural areas are disproportionately affected by poverty, with a 36.7% pattern, while urban poverty is at 19% of the population in late 2001 (Shedenova, 2013). Furthermore, the original causes of child poverty are influenced by various individual and structural factors.

Current social protection programs, especially Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) are weak in their ability to address the complexities of vulnerable families because they are based on old standards and fail to capture the realities of vulnerable families. The main argument arising from this study is that reducing child poverty in Kazakhstan requires a shift from fragmented, income-based approaches toward coordinated, multidimensional support strategies. The findings indicate that while household factors, mainly the number of children, are the strongest predictors of poverty, systemic barriers such as the TSA "cliff effect" and permanent registration requirement discourage support programs from operating efficiently and tackling child poverty in the country.

The research has three objectives. First, to identify household-level predictors of the risk of child poverty in Kazakhstan, including number of children, parent education, place of residence, and others. Second, to determine the extent in which the existing governmental social protection programs can be utilized to reduce poverty by low-income families with children. Third, to investigate the institutional barriers that restrict qualified families from accessing the existing social assistance. The research questions of the study are:

RQ1: What household-level factors – including number of children, parental education, place of residence, and earner structure – are associated with child poverty risk among low-income families in Kazakhstan?

RQ2: To what extent do existing government social protection programs reduce poverty among low-income families with children in Kazakhstan?

RQ3: What structural barriers prevent low-income families from accessing social assistance programs in Kazakhstan?

To answer the research questions and objectives, the study employed a mixed-methods approach that comprised the quantitative survey data of 160 low-income households and based the analyses on the expert interviews conducted with the Zhanuya Family Support Center, UNICEF in Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Office of the Commissioner for Children Rights, and the regional Children's Rights Commissioner.

The importance of this research is the contribution to the development of well-coordinated policies targeting vulnerable families. The study delivers new insights for social protection officials and policymakers for future redesign of strategies or the modification of existing social protection programs. This makes the research both relevant and impactful. In addition, the findings apply to present policy debates regarding the reform of Targeted Social Assistance, the development of the National Fund for Children program launched in 2024, and the Children of Kazakhstan plan adopted in January 2026.

In the next chapter, the theoretical and contextual literature of child poverty is highlighted, the definition of child poverty is regarded as a multidimensional concept, with international child support programs and current social protection policies in Kazakhstan. The chapter on methodology describes the mixed-methods research design and discusses data collection and data analysis processes. The findings chapter introduces the results of the quantitative analysis of the surveys and qualitative results of the interviews. The discussion chapter examines results in connection with the literature, concentrating on the processes of main findings. The final chapter recaps the foundation of findings, and gives policy reform recommendations, considering the weaknesses and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

Despite the remarkable economic recovery that has been observed since independence in 1991 and the consistent expansion of the national social protection system, a significant proportion of Kazakhstani children are still deprived of access to adequate nutrition, quality education, medical care, and decent housing conditions. The Government has made repeated attempts to reverse this situation, but data on the actual impact of these measures on the most vulnerable families remain scarce and scattered.

This chapter engages with three bodies of literature directly relevant to the study's research questions. The first concerns how child poverty is defined and measured – a debate that shapes which households are counted as poor and which factors become visible. The second covers the structural determinants of child poverty – family size, earner structure, parental education, and place of residence – which form the basis for the hypotheses tested in this study. The third examines the effectiveness of social protection programs, both in Kazakhstan and in comparable countries, providing context for evaluating findings on RQ2 and RQ3. Across all three strands, a consistent gap emerges: income-based approaches undercount vulnerability, structural household factors drive poverty risk, and programs frequently fail to protect the families they are designed to reach. Kazakhstan fits this pattern, but with specific institutional features – the TSA cliff effect and the registration barrier – that this study examines empirically.

2.1. Definition and measurement of child poverty

The United Nations adopted an international definition of child poverty for the first time, stating that "children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation, and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of society" (United Nations General Assembly, 2007).

Even with this clear definition, there is no one way of measuring child poverty. The monetary approach, which is based on household income or expenditure, is the most popular. The extreme poverty line in the case of upper-middle-income countries like Kazakhstan is 6.85 per day, according to the World Bank (2022). Although it is a common term in use, some institutions consider poverty to be a phenomenon that cannot be defined as monetary (UNICEF, n.d.; Minujin et al., 2006; Brady, 2019). According to the multidimensional approach, poverty is

not only a matter concerning income, but also access to basic needs and services. Minujin (2006), Gordon et al. (2003), and Alkire and Foster (2011) also note that defining poverty in many respects and not just income is important. Roelen and Gassmann (2014) used this lens on the country of Kazakhstan and found significant differences in the regions, and concluded that income-based averages cannot be used to fully understand the scope of child deprivation. Brady (2019) goes further to suggest that the issue of child poverty must be addressed as a unique phenomenon to be considered through policy-specific responses. Beyond these two dominant approaches, well-being indexes, deprivation-based measures, and rights-based frameworks each capture additional dimensions – from emotional well-being and material shortages to the realization of basic human rights – though their practical application in countries with limited data or weak rights protections remains contested (Sen, 1985; Alkire & Foster, 2011). Each of these approaches captures a different dimension of child poverty, and no single method tells the full story on its own. This study uses the monetary approach as the primary measurement tool, given the availability of a national subsistence minimum as a concrete threshold, while acknowledging that the lived experience of poverty extends well beyond income figures.

2.2. Key factors contributing to Child Poverty

The literature identifies three main groups of factors: economic, socio-demographic, and cultural. One of the major causes of child poverty is economic instability. Lack or very low income levels of parents directly deny children access to basic needs, balanced nutrition, housing, self-development and proper medical treatment (Bradshaw, 2006). A well-developed social protection system can reduce these risks through targeted distribution of child benefits. Unsatisfactory housing and living conditions, in turn, often result in poor academic performance of children and health problems (UNICEF, 2020). Green et al. (2021) confirm this thesis, pointing out that children from families who are often forced to change rented housing are at increased risk of poverty: parents spend a significant portion of the budget on rent payments to the detriment of investments in their children's health, education and future. Meanwhile, in the process of the analysis of economic factors, the aspect that should be considered is that the indicator of GDP per capita does not always correlate with child poverty level. As an illustration, the GDP per capita value in Spain and Slovenia is similar, and they rank among the last countries in the EU and OECD in this indicator, yet the rate of child poverty is 10 in Slovenia and 28 in Spain (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023).

Socio-demographic factors such as family structure, place of residence, level of education of parents, social exclusion, and inequality also have a significant impact on the prevalence of child poverty. Harkness et al. (2008), UNICEF Innocenti (2023), and Bradshaw et al. (2015) agree that children from single-parent families are most at risk of falling into poverty. The rural families also have a higher chance of being poor because they do not receive the same wages, access to quality healthcare, and education (Brady, 2019). Duncan (1997), in his book, says that low educational attainment of parents is a key factor that leads to child poverty. Moreover, ethnic minority or migrant children have higher chances of being exposed to poverty due to the issues related to access to education, health care, and social services (Haour-Knipe, 2009). In terms of cultural elements that demonstrate the significance of traditional elements like family, where the breadwinners are women, faith-based, and community participation, it is linked to increased child poverty (Ranjith et al., 2014). On the whole, these aspects demonstrate that child poverty is influenced by a set of economic, socio-demographic, and cultural forces, which interact with each other. This study focuses primarily on economic and socio-demographic determinants, as these are most directly measurable through household survey data and most relevant to the policy context of Kazakhstan.

2.3. Child Poverty in Kazakhstan and Government Measures to Address It

Menchini & Redmond (2009) argue that the transition from a central economy to a free market economy increased child poverty across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Muller (2003) conducted a detailed critique of the social policy changes in the post-Soviet years with a special focus on Kazakhstan. Although, as Roelen & Gassmann (2014) point out, national data show little variation in child well-being according to residence among children born between 1993 and 2008, children who live in rural areas fare worse, particularly in terms of poverty and social measures. The authors suggest that child support programs should be implemented in rural areas.

Against this backdrop, the current scale of child poverty remains substantial. According to Buribayev et al. (2015), 562.6 thousand child families in Kazakhstan earn below the income range, meaning they cannot afford basic food supplies. The researchers concluded that every 10th child in Kazakhstan is not supplied with the income that would allow them to purchase monthly basic food. A nationwide study conducted with the assistance of UNICEF suggests using the European Child Deprivation Index as a tool for assessing child poverty and records that every fourth child in the country, or 28.5%, faces multidimensional poverty (UNICEF

Kazakhstan & Bureau of National Statistics, 2023). Kudebayeva (2015) and Chulanova et al. (2024) complement this picture: the authors found that the longest stay in poverty is typical for single-parent families, as well as for married couples raising children. In addition to diverse household conditions, 90% of poor families in Kazakhstan have more than 4 children (Satpayeva, 2023; Shedenova, 2013). Pressman (2011) puts forward a case that universal child allowances can be more effective than means-tested solutions in developing nations such as Kazakhstan where current poverty solutions have not been effective.

However, it should be noted that Kazakhstan's government has executed several strategies, mainly cash benefits to tackle the child poverty issue with limited success. Along with the long-term programs, the National Development Strategy (2030), TSA program (2005), and Children of Kazakhstan programs (2006) exist, which are aimed at improving the standard of living of children (Gavrilovic et al., 2009). In 2006, the Law "On State Benefits to Families with Children" was adopted in the country, creating a unified system of cash payments in the form of a one-time birth allowance, monthly childcare allowance of children to the age of one year, monthly benefit of children of low-income families and support to parents with children with disabilities. The law, which became effective July 1, 2006, introduced a childcare allowance upon attainment of the age of one year (even when the family income is below the cost of the food basket) and to children under 18 years in low-income families that signifies the range below the cost of the food basket. There is a one-time allowance for the birth of a child, however, it is still insufficient to cover the full expenses of raising a child (Temirbayeva, 2019). The amount for 2026 is 164 thousand tenge for the first, second, and third child, and 272 thousand tenge for the fourth and more child, demonstrating a 38% increase over the previous three years.

After several strikes by mothers that began as a result of the fire in Astana in 2019, which claimed the lives of 5 children of the same family whose parents worked the night shift, the state took some measures to support low-income families. The amount of the TSA for each child from a low-income family was fixed at 20,789 tenge or 70% of the subsistence minimum. In 2019, President Tokayev instructed the introduction of a guaranteed social package for children from low-income families. According to the new rules, large families, regardless of income and social status, began to receive a monthly allowance from 42,496 tenge for four children to 74,388 tenge for seven or more children. From April 1, 2019, an allowance in the amount of 21,000 tenge was issued for each child from large, low-income families. Then, from January 2020, the TSA began

to be assigned, taking into account the allowance for large families, to those families in which, taking into account all payments and benefits, the income for each family member was below the poverty line. Then, the representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection said that the state does not have the money to pay 21,000 tenge for each child in Kazakhstan (Zhoyamergen, 2020).

In 2024, conditional monetary assistance was provided to low-income families with an able-bodied member, including individuals who are payers of a single aggregate payment. A monthly additional payment of 5,538 tenge per child was provided to children from low-income families aged 1 to 6 years (Egov Kazakhstan, 2024). There was an incremental payment amounting to 1.6 billion tenge to 96.2 thousand preschoolers included within the group of recipients of the TSA in 2024.

Since 2023, every student of primary schools, and 1.5 million students of families with low income, have received free hot meals (Tengrinews.kz, 2023). Additionally, under the National Fund for Children program, which was launched in the same year, half of the annual incomes of the National Fund of the Republic of Kazakhstan are allocated among Kazakhstani children who were born in 2006 and onwards (Unified Accumulative Pension Fund, n.d.). The first receipts to children's accounts were made in February 2024. Accordingly, even these policies have not been sufficient to substantially respond to the financial demands of the low-income families, as the sums are still not enough to lift families out of poverty.

2.4. The World's Practices for Reducing Child Poverty

Cash transfers are more effective than in-kind benefits, as they allow families the opportunity to decide on their own what to use the funds received based on their own priorities and needs (Ghatak et al., 2016). Social protection programs – cash payments, health insurance, free education, and maternity benefits – can act as an effective tool for preventing child poverty (UNICEF, n.d.). In all OECD countries except the USA, benefits do not require the fulfillment of work conditions, which is important for poor families with unstable incomes. The regular payments are better than the single transfer, and programs intended to support the household incomes are far more efficient than the ones intended to boost parental employment (Pressman, 2011; UNICEF Innocenti, 2023). This is also apparent in the United States, where welfare initiatives like SNAP and the Earned Income Tax credit are proven to enhance the health, education, and future outcomes of children (Duncan, 2021).

Poland and Slovenia are examples of countries that have made big reductions in child poverty. UNICEF (n.d.) says that Poland, Slovenia, and Latvia were able to decrease child poverty by 37.6, 31.4, and 31.0 percent between 2014 and 2021. In 2016, Poland started the family 500 + program that offers monthly payments of 126USD per child, with the specificity of being extended to all children under 18 years old beginning in 2019, regardless of family income. Slovenia (also) has an equivalent outcome with the increase of the minimum wage and adoption of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan (La Porte, 2022).

In the list of post-Soviet upper-middle-income countries, the picture is more relevant to Kazakhstan. In Russia, maternity capital and child benefits have led to some improvements, but remain inefficient due to improper selection of recipients and low payment amounts (Razumov & Selivanova, 2023; Kartseva et al., 2024). In Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan, benefit amounts do not meet even the basic needs of the child. The Kyrgyz "Uy-bulogo komok" allowance is \$13.8 per month, while childcare allowances in Azerbaijan reach only \$20 per month (24.kg, 2024; DOST, n.d.). These cases suggest that the problems Kazakhstan faces – low benefit amounts, targeting errors, and insufficient coverage – are common across the region.

The literature reviewed in this chapter points to several consistent findings. Child poverty is rarely attributable to a single factor – family size, parental employment, educational attainment, and place of residence all interact and reinforce one another. Monetary thresholds are insufficient for measuring it. Countries that have achieved tangible results have relied on regular and sufficiently generous payments. The experience of post-Soviet countries reveals the same problems as in Kazakhstan – programs exist, but the amounts are too small, and coverage is incomplete. The following chapters test this empirically using data from Kazakhstan.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach, covering both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods. The quantitative part addresses the first two research questions by identifying statistical predictors of poverty. RQ3 was addressed via qualitative and quantitative components by providing analysis on program implementation, barriers, and reform priorities. A survey covered questions based on household incomes, geographical distribution, nutrition, and

access to education, healthcare, social services, family employment status, attitudes toward existing child support programs, obstacles when accessing social services, and whether government measures are sufficient. For qualitative analysis, key stakeholders were selected based on their institutional roles and expertise in Kazakhstan's system of child protection with the Deputy Director of Astana's "Zhanuya" Family Support Center, representative of UNICEF Kazakhstan (international development perspective), the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (regulatory and government perspective), Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights (oversight and legislative advocacy), and Children's rights commissioner in the regions. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Based on existing literature and research questions of the study, the quantitative analysis tests the following hypotheses.

H1: Child poverty risk is positively related to having many children in the family. Families with four children or more are the largest among the poor in Kazakhstan (Bauyrzhan et al., 2021).

H2: High value of parental education reduces child poverty rate. Education has been linked to direct access to labour markets, higher wages, and better job security, which is a main protection factor against poverty (Haveman and Wolfe, 2018).

H3: Multiple earner households are less likely to experience poverty among children than single earner households. Dual/Multi earner households arrangements reduce the dependence on one earner by diversifying incomes.

H4: Urban living relates to a lesser risk of child poverty than rural living. City regions of Kazakhstan tend to have more access to labour, social services, and infrastructure (Kaztubaeva & Kadyrzhanov, 2019).

H5: The age of the respondents is not assumed to be a key predictor of child poverty since the concentration of the sample is in working-age adults, and the age difference among them might not result in a significant difference in household income.

H6: Home ownership helps diminish the risk of child poverty. Homeless households are more materially deprived and can spend a higher proportion of their income on housing expenses, becoming more vulnerable to poverty.

H7: There is no risk-reduction of poverty with the current level of government assistance. It is theorized that the present-day transfers are well-placed in poor households, but are inadequate to push families above the poverty line.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Initially, the survey was distributed online through Google Forms across Kazakhstan. Because of low response rates in each region, paper-based questionnaires were distributed in Astana, mainly in Zhanuya Family Support Center; the primary city institution for social assistance recipients and families in crisis; the Aviator dacha settlement; and a local shopping center. The final dataset consisted of 160 respondents from 10 regions of Kazakhstan. Whereas, in-person interviews were carried out in Astana, except one, which was conducted by a Zoom video call. Interviews were conducted in Russian and Kazakh, depending on which was most convenient for the participants. All interviews took place for durations of 38-60 minutes.

3.3 Data Analysis

Stata software was used to analyze the quantitative data. This analysis was undertaken in three phases in descriptive statistics and frequency Tabulars, bivariate relationships with chi-square tests and independent samples t-tests and multivariate logistic regression to estimate the net relationship between household characteristics and poverty status.

A dependent variable is a binary measure of poverty (*poor_sm*), that is 1 when per-capita household income is below the national minimum subsistence level of 64,155 KZT monthly, and 0 when it is not. The per capita income was estimated by taking the midpoint of income range of households reported divided by the midpoint of household size range, which is reported. Four sequential logistic regression models were estimated with each addition of a conceptual block of predictors, Model A includes number of children and parental education as baseline predictors. Model B adds urban/rural residence. Model C further adds household earner structure. Model D adds home ownership. Model C is retained as the preferred specification, as it achieves the best balance between model fit (Pseudo $R^2=0.200$) and parsimony. Adding home ownership in Model D yields no meaningful improvement (Δ Pseudo $R^2=0.001$, $p=0.857$). A Pseudo R^2 of 0.20 indicates good model fit, consistent with McFadden's benchmark of 0.20–0.40 for excellent fit.

Model C:

$$\text{logit}(P(\text{poor_sm} = 1)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{kids_n} + \beta_2 \text{education} + \beta_3 \text{urban} + \beta_4 \text{earner_cat} + \beta_5 \text{home_ownership} + \varepsilon$$

where $\text{poor_sm} = 1$ if per-capita household income is below 64,155 KZT, and 0 otherwise. The independent variables are number of children, level of parental education (binary e.g. higher vs non-higher), urban/ rural living, household earner structure (no earners, one earner, multiple earners), and home ownership. The gender of the respondent was not taken into consideration since the majority (66 percent) of the survey participants were women based on the focus of the survey provided directly to primary caregivers and the household earner structure was taken as a more reliable variable of income generating ability.

Region was not included as a predictor due to insufficient observations per region for stable estimation. Standard logistic regression was used throughout; no quasi-complete separation issues were detected under the updated poverty threshold and variable specification.

Two additional models were estimated to address RQ2: Model G1 examined whether type of government assistance predicts poverty controlling for household characteristics; Models G2 and G3 examined predictors of subjective poverty and perceived program sufficiency respectively (Appendix B, Table 8).

In the qualitative part of the paper, data from expert interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Accordingly, the interview was audio-recorded, and then coding interview transcripts and analyzing transcripts from five semi-structured expert interviews was done. Following the coding, inductive methods revealed the repetitive ideas and issues mentioned by several respondents. The study revealed main themes about systemic barriers, including the TSA ‘cliff effect’, registration requirements, and fragmented services, which prevent effective program delivery. This analysis relied on an organized framework with the objective of providing a general trend and personal perceptions surveyed. To a certain extent, these results aided in developing evidence-based policies to contain child poverty and guarantee sustainable life for children. Qualitative patterns explanations together demonstrate the need for coordinated, multidimensional support systems. Also, data analysis of the qualitative part helps to answer the second and third research questions.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This study controlled standard ethical protocols for research concerning human participants. All interview and survey participants were notified about the purpose of the research and the voluntary participation. Written informed consent was received from all participants before the data collection process. For expert interviews, participants were given the

choice to be recognized by institutional cooperation or to stay anonymous. Interview transcripts were anonymized. The research received ethical approval from the university before data collection.

4. Findings

4.1. Quantitative Findings: Survey Results

This section presents empirical research results based on data from an initial survey (N=160) regarding research questions 1 and 2. The analysis is based on the binary poverty indicator (poor_sm), defined as per capita income in a household below 64 155 tenge per month – the national living wage, published by the National Committee on Statistics Kazakhstan for the first quarter of 2026. This threshold was preferable to the international poverty lines, as it reflects the official instrument used by the Government of Kazakhstan to determine eligibility for social assistance programs, which makes it directly relevant to the political focus of this study. Per capita income was calculated by dividing the average value of the range of reported household income by the average value of the range of reported household size. The use of averages for both variables entails an approximation error, which should be taken into account when interpreting individual poverty classifications. This section presents descriptive statistical data, two-dimensional relationships, multidimensional logistic regression results, and predicted probabilities, followed by a systematic evaluation of the research hypotheses.

4.1.1 Poverty Prevalence

77 out of 160 respondents fall below the national subsistence minimum of 64,155 tenge per capita per month – that's 48.1%, classified as poor. The remaining 83 respondents, or 51.9%, are above this threshold. One pattern stands out. Poor households had more children on average: 2.96 (SD=1.12) versus 2.23 (SD=1.02) in non-poor households. The difference is visible and significant ($t=-4.34$, $p<0.001$). Age is believed to be almost identical across both groups about 41.5 years in each case, with no significant difference in ($t=0.02$, $p=0.988$).

4.1.2 Sample Characteristics and Bivariate Analysis

Table 1 in Appendix B shows the distribution of key variables among the sample.

Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were used to examine the relationship between poverty status and key explanatory variables. The results are visible in Table 2 of Appendix B.

Number of children and poverty (RQ1). The number of children shows a strong and statistically significant relationship with poverty status. Poor households have, on average, more children (2.96) compared to non-poor households (2.23), and the difference is statistically significant ($t = -4.34$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that larger family size is closely associated with higher poverty risk.

Education and poverty (RQ1). Education makes a real difference. In households where nobody has a university degree, 61.7% fall below the poverty line, households with at least one person involved, it drops to 34.2%. The gap is hard to ignore here ($\chi^2=12.16$, $p<0.001$).

Earners structure and poverty (RQ1). This one stood out the most. Income structure showed the strongest link to poverty out of everything measured ($\chi^2=24.09$, $p<0.001$). When nobody in a household works, 81.3% are poor – that's an overwhelming share. With one income source, it's 59.3%. Add more sources, and the rate falls sharply to just 25.4%. More income streams clearly help families stay above the line.

City vs. village (RQ1). Urban and rural households were being considered similar – 49.6% and 44.2% poverty rates. That small gap wasn't statistically valuable ($\chi^2=0.37$, $p=0.545$), so where people live doesn't seem to have changed on its own.

Owning a home. Homeowners are thought to have a lower poverty rate (37.8%) taking into account those who rent accommodation or have no property (52.2%). A significant difference, but was statistically insignificant ($\chi^2=2.69$, $p=0.101$) and hence we cannot make a strong conclusion using it.

Government assistance and poverty (RQ2). The type of state support a household receives is tied to poverty status ($\chi^2=8.83$, $p=0.032$). Here's the part worth paying attention to: households getting no assistance at all had the lowest poverty rate – just 29.0%. Meanwhile, those receiving universal child benefits sat at 57.4%, income-verified aid at 46.2%, and targeted transfers at 60.0%. That might sound backwards at first. It's not a flaw in the system – it's a selection effect. Aid is reaching the right people. The problem is it's not lifting them out of poverty. They stay poor, just with some support. That's a key takeaway for RQ2.

4.1.3 Multivariable Logistic Regression: Determinants of Poverty

RQ1 required a sequential approach. Four sequential logistic regression models were estimated as described in Section 3.3. Results are reported as odds ratios and presented in Table 3

(Appendix B). The dependent variable is *poor_sm* - a binary variable, when 1 means a poor household and 0 a non-poor household. Findings are assumed to be odds ratios (OR).

The predictor with the greatest predictive significance in all models being run is the *Number of children in a household* which remains such a predictor consistently (OR=1.906, $p<0.001$). Adding an extra child increases the odds of poverty by about 90%, holding other factors constant.

Higher education is a significant protective factor In Model A (OR=0.323, $p=0.001$) and Model B (OR=0.294, $p=0.001$). However, this effect attenuates when household earner structure is introduced in Model C (OR=0.500, $p=0.089$), suggesting that education's protective effect operates partly through its association with dual-earner household arrangements – an important pathway finding in relation to RQ1.

Household earner structure is a powerful independent predictor. Households with multiple income sources have 71% lower odds of being poor compared to those with just one earner (OR=0.287, $p=0.006$). That's a striking difference – and a statistically solid one. Households where nobody works show roughly 3.9 times higher odds of poverty (OR=3.851, $p=0.067$). The result didn't cross the standard significance threshold, but that's most likely a sample size issue – only 16 households fell into this group.

Urban residence shows a consistent protective trend across Models B–D (OR $\approx$ 0.42) approaching but not reaching statistical significance ($p\approx 0.06$).

Home ownership doesn't predict poverty in any meaningful way here (OR=0.923, $p=0.857$). Model D adds home ownership but yields no meaningful improvement ($\Delta R^2 = 0.001$, $p = 0.857$), confirming Model C as the preferred specification.

4.1.4 Predicted Probabilities

To illustrate the substantive magnitude of key effects, predicted probabilities were computed from Model C and are summarized in Appendix B (Tables 4 and 5). Key results are as follows.

By number of children, the predicted probability of poverty rises from 28.5% for households with one child to 66.8% for households with four or more children. By earner structure, households with no earners face a predicted poverty probability of 80.8%, compared to 56.1% for single-earner and 30.1% for multiple-earner households.

Moving from a single-earner to a multi-earner household is associated with a reduction in predicted poverty probability of approximately 26 percentage points. Each additional child adds around 13 percentage points to the predicted probability of poverty.

4.1.5 Effectiveness of Government Assistance

To address RQ2, Model G1 tested whether the type of government assistance predicts poverty status, with education, number of children, urban residence, and earner structure held constant. None of the assistance categories showed a statistically significant association with poverty relative to receiving no assistance: universal child allowance (OR=1.530, $p=0.421$), means-tested assistance (OR=2.033, $p=0.197$), and categorical transfers (OR=1.725, $p=0.506$).

Predicted probabilities further illustrate this finding (Appendix B, Table 6). Households receiving no assistance show the lowest predicted poverty probability at 40.5%, while all assistance recipient groups show higher predicted rates. This does not mean assistance makes things worse. It reflects a selection effect – aid is reaching the right households, but the amounts are too small to push families above the poverty line. This finding speaks directly to RQ2 and gives quantitative grounding to the qualitative evidence on TSA limitations discussed in Section 4.2.

4.1.6 Subjective versus Objective Poverty

A notable finding is the gap between objective and subjective poverty measures. Among the 160 respondents, four groups were identified based on the alignment between self-assessed poverty status and income-based classification (Appendix B, Table 7).

25 respondents (15.6%) fall below the poverty line by objective measure yet do not consider themselves poor. This matches what the literature describes as hidden poverty – a gap between actual and perceived poverty status.

Logistic regression (Model G2) shows that objective poverty status (OR=2.748, $p=0.004$) and financial deterioration over the past year (OR=3.447, $p=0.001$) are the two strongest drivers of self-assessed poverty. A separate model (G3) finds that awareness of available programs is the only significant predictor of viewing government assistance as adequate (OR=2.374, $p=0.019$). Actual poverty status plays no role here ($p=0.884$). Whether someone sees programs as sufficient depends on what they know about those programs – not on whether they are poor themselves.

4.1.7 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Below, the quantitative results are matched against the study's seven hypotheses.

H1 – confirmed. Family size and poverty are related. Across all models, each additional child raised poverty odds by a factor of 1.9. No other variable was this stable or this strong.

H2 – partially confirmed. In Models A and B (OR=0.323, p=0.001), higher education has a large positive effect on reducing the risk of poverty, but this effect is dampened when earner structure is held constant (Model C, p=0.089), indicating that the protective role of education is partially mediated by its relationship with dual-earner household structures.

H3 – confirmed. Multi-earner households are less likely to be poor by 71% than single earner households (OR=0.287, p=0.006), supporting the hypothesis that household earner structure is a significant predictor of poverty risk.

H4 – not confirmed. Urban residence haven't shown a significant relationship with poverty being involved ($\chi^2=0.37$, p=0.545). A trend has appeared in multivariable models (OR=0.420, p=0.062), but has been stopped short of statistical significance.

H5 – confirmed. Age had no bearing on poverty status (t=0.02, p=0.988).

H6 – not confirmed. Home ownership lost its relevance once other household characteristics were introduced into the model. The first bivariate association did not work (OR=0.923, p=0.857), suggesting some confounding (but no independent protective role of ownership).

H7 – confirmed. No type of government assistance is significantly associated with reduced poverty odds in multivariable analysis (all p>0.19). Predicted probabilities show that recipients of all assistance types have higher poverty rates than non-recipients, but the amounts are insufficient to lift families above the poverty threshold. This directly answers RQ2 and provides quantitative support for the qualitative TSA evidence in Section 4.2.

4.2 Qualitative Findings: Interview Insights

This section incorporates research findings from interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Kazakhstan's child protection and social support system, including representatives of the UNICEF, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Center for Support of the Family Institute 'Zhanuya' in Astana, and the Children's rights commissioner. The ideas of interviewers are arranged thematically to provide an understanding of child poverty, its measurement, barriers, challenges, and reform suggestions.

4.2.1 How Many Children Are Actually Poor?

Kazakhstan's child poverty problem is characterised as a multidimensional vulnerability problem, combining low and irregular incomes, less access to services, expenses related to disability conditions, and household debt, rather than as a narrow understanding of 'below-subsistence' income problem. The interviews demonstrated different methods of measuring child poverty. First, official monetary poverty, where the government measures poverty by comparing family income to the subsistence minimum. According to the Commissioner's Office, the overall poverty level in Kazakhstan decreased from 18.2% of the population in 2006 to 5% in 2022. Nonetheless, the poverty rate of children is greater. Conversely, according to UNICEF, 28.5% of children in Kazakhstan are subject to multidimensional poverty. This implies that they are facing numerous health, education, and living standards deprivation, not only because of poor income (UNICEF, 2026). Similarly, families with disabilities face the same pattern of poverty, where Kazakhstan has about 755,000 persons with disabilities, including about 120,000 children, with elevated financial burdens according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Also, over-indebtedness and sudden health problems can push stable families into poverty ("Zhanuya" Family Support Center, 2026). So, overall the disparity between official income-based poverty measures and multidimensional poverty measures by UNICEF indicates that the existing policy frameworks, which mostly use income levels to delimit poverty, are likely to both underestimate and fail to serve children who are deprived in a variety of aspects.

4.2.2 The Existing Support Systems

Kazakhstan has built a system of support for families. According to the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the RK, over two million families receive some form of state support demonstrating that the social protection programs operate to tackle the problem. The main support includes 'cash payments' when a baby is born, monthly payments until a child turns 18 months old, and special payments for families with four or more children. Second is Targeted Social Assistance (TSAs), which helps families with very low incomes, mainly family's average income must be below 35% of the median income but not lower than 70% of the regional subsistence minimum. 'About 270,000 people obtain this help, with an additional 2.8 billion tenge paid out in additional benefits for children in these families', - mentioned the Commissioner's Office. The third is 'Services', where there are more than 49 types of support, including social taxi services, psychological help, and rehabilitation for children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the "Zhanuya" Family Support Center in Astana works directly with struggling families. In the past year, about 50,000 people contacted the Center for help with state benefits. However, not everyone receives intensive help, only families with complex problems are taken on under "social accompaniment". Last year, the Center accepted 128 families for support and successfully helped 148 families. Currently, they work with 118 families, representing about 500 people ("Zhanuya" Family Support Center, 2026).

In addition, the Committee Chairperson mentioned "Digital Family Card" and the "Socium" digital programs, which operate by identifying eligible vulnerable families and offering governmental support. To date, the Centralized Database System (CDS) has collected information on 19.5 million citizens of Kazakhstan, or 6.3 million families (Committee Chairperson, 2026). The digital tool reduced the number of TSA recipients in Astana from 5,000–8,000 families to about 3,000 families. These tools help find "social fraud" cases where people hide income, divorce on paper to qualify for social benefits, or pretend to live separately to get housing assistance. The Committee Chairperson noted that “Some individuals try to get as much as possible from the state without contributing through taxes” (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2026). So, because of fraud cases, the eligibility requirements for support programs become strict. However, the UNICEF representative highlighted the unfavorable effect of digital tools that “Shifting government services to online causes problems for elderly people and those in areas with poor internet access. The "digital divide" means some families are left behind” (UNICEF, 2026). This points out, although Kazakhstan has established support mechanisms, digitalization that aims at enhancing efficiency and minimizing fraud has posed an access barrier among vulnerable groups.

4.2.3 Systemic Barriers to Access

The main systemic barriers were identified via the interviews, which answer the study's third research question. Several stakeholders have highlighted a problem in the calculation of TSA. The Commissioner's Office clarified that if a family's income surpasses the eligibility threshold by a small amount, for example, by 200–300 tenge, they will lose the social assistance. This creates a "cliff" effect: the family's situation hasn't actually improved, but they unexpectedly lose support from the government because of restrictions. The UNICEF representative added a more fundamental comment: ‘The main requirement for TSA is that able-bodied adults must work or be looking for work. But most poor people are children, who are not able to work. So,

the main anti-poverty tool focuses on adults while doing little directly for children' (UNICEF, 2026). This analysis highlights a misalignment between program design and the demographic reality of child poverty in Kazakhstan.

Another problem is the lack of official permanent registration as the biggest barrier to getting help identified by the 'Zhanuya' Family Support Center. Without registration in Astana, families cannot get TSA, join housing queues, or receive full support. The Center said, "We have families who have lived here for years but don't have registration. This difficulty with obtaining permanent registration prevents us from providing all entitled support measures. Even the 'Akimat' or other state bodies can not help with registration".

The UNICEF expert gave another example of poor policy coordination between labor and social protection policies: "The Labor Code allows parents to take unpaid leave until a child turns three years old. But the social benefit system only pays childcare allowance until the child is 18 months old. This leaves a year and a half where parents are legally allowed to stay home with their child but receive no income support" (UNICEF, 2026). This disparity forms a foreseeable window of increased vulnerability to families who have young children, but the current policy models cannot seal this gap.

Moreover, the UNICEF representative provided an example of a mother with young children who wanted to work but was not able because of not availability in a public kindergarten, and she could not afford a private one. To qualify for Targeted Social Assistance, she was required to either work or be listed in employment programs. However, the problem is, there is no one to care for her children, and she cannot work with the baby. Neither system tried to adjust to her condition. She was not able to be listed in crisis services because she was not a victim of violence and even she can not be qualified for the "House of Mom" program because her children were not infants. This example illustrates how strict rules and poor coordination between systems cause inefficiency in programs for families. So, systemic barriers exist at several levels where program design, the needs of registration, policy, and information access generate an access deficit which disproportionately impacts the poorest families.

4.2.4 Problems With Data and Information

Despite the progress, UNICEF identified the real problem with poverty data, which is too late publication of cases. For example, the report of "Children of Kazakhstan" for 2000–2024 was published only in 2025. This caused delays for policymakers to take action on time to

address emerging poverty problems because of a big time lag. On the other hand, the Commissioner for Children's Rights stated that they walk around the apartments and gather information through direct contact with families covering more than 80 towns, villages, and 500 institutions by visiting almost all regions of the country. According to analyses, it was known that families have trusted this institution because the number of people asking for help from the Office has doubled. The main motives individuals reach the Office are psychological support, child support disputes, education problems, health issues, and violence. This highlights the fact that delayed centralized data is contrasted with the direct engagement model of the Commissioner's Office indicates that administrative data systems may not be timely or sufficient to monitor poverty and respond effectively.

4.2.5 What can help to tackle child poverty

The second research question will be answered in this section by stakeholder's views on the reform priorities. Although the preceding sections have outlined systemic barriers, this section summarizes recommendations by experts that can enhance program design, coordination, and delivery. UNICEF supports introducing a universal child benefit, giving every child a regular payment regardless of family income. They reported that "Such programs reduce poverty more effectively than means-tested ones. To run such a function there is no need for expensive screening to determine who qualifies. Also, it will not cause a "cliff effect". To address cost concerns, we are suggesting starting with children under 3 years old and excluding only the wealthiest families (as Canada does)" (UNICEF, 2026). UNICEF noted that Kazakhstan already gives universal payments to 600,000 large families, so this isn't a new idea. The UNICEF representative dismissed concerns that parents would waste the money, citing international research showing parents spend such payments on their children. The Committee Chairperson was more skeptical, noting about fraud and how parents will manage this money, using it for loans or weddings instead of for children (Committee Chairperson, 2026). The analytical insight that can be drawn here is whether to focus on the effectiveness of poverty reduction or behavioral conditionality.

UNICEF recommends linking benefit increases to actual inflation, not predicted inflation. They reported, "When the government predicted 7-8% inflation for 2025 but actual inflation hit 12.3-12.5%, benefits lost value. In real terms, families received less help than intended (UNICEF, 2026). UNICEF advocates combining cash with guaranteed services in healthcare,

education, and social work. Money alone is not sufficient to combat poverty. A family may receive financial support, but if a child doesn't have abilities to attend school, a doctor appointment, or get help from a social worker, the money cannot solve the problem related to physical and mental circumstances. However, in order to work efficiently, different government agencies need to cooperate and share data between each other about vulnerable families.

Furthermore, the Commissioner's Office mentioned the creation of a new 'National Plan' initiative, adopted in January 2026. They report, "It includes 158 measures to strengthen child protection, including automatic benefits such as families won't have to collect documents, benefits will come automatically including free transport for all children, better support for disabled children, such as more rehabilitation tools and a unified support system for children with amputations" (Commissioner for Children's Rights, 2025).

The Committee Chairperson strongly believes that helping parents find work is more effective than just giving cash. He noted, "There are about 4,000 job vacancies in Astana and free training courses available. The problem is often that unemployed people want high salaries but lack the skills to earn them" (Committee Chairperson, 2026). In addition, the Commissioner's Office has been particularly effective at turning individual cases into legal adaptations. Since 2023, they've developed over 120 amendments to laws. Out of these, 49 amendments were included in the 2024 law on women's rights and child safety, strengthening punishment for child violence and child protection systems. Overall, qualitative findings offer analytical insight into a design flaw: programs are often structured in a way that their categorical eligibility criteria fail to address complex, overlapping needs.

5. Discussion of Findings

The overall pattern of results is internally coherent, but several findings warrant closer examination – either because they run counter to expectations or because the mechanisms behind them are not immediately obvious. The most unexpected finding concerns urban residence. The literature consistently links rural location to higher poverty risk in Kazakhstan, yet urban residence showed no protective effect in this sample. This is not a contradiction – it reflects the composition of the sample. The urban households surveyed were predominantly internal migrants, informal settlement residents, and families without registration. These are not the

secure urban households the literature typically contrasts with rural poor. The finding suggests that urban poverty in Astana can be just as severe as rural poverty, but less visible – and actively excluded from support by administrative barriers. The city, in this case, offered proximity to services without access to them.

The non-confirmation of home ownership is similarly instructive. In bivariate analysis, it appeared protective, but this association disappeared once other household characteristics were controlled. The reversal of signs in the multivariate model indicates the presence of the confounding effect of ownership, which was associated with reliable conditions and did not necessarily decrease the poverty risk. It is important to policy: home ownership has been used as a proxy to material stability, but these results indicate that it is too imprecise a measure to effectively reflect the housing instability experienced by vulnerable families.

The education finding also requires careful interpretation. Education is protective, but its effect attenuates when earner structure enters the model. This suggests that education reduces poverty partly by enabling dual-earner arrangements – not through a direct income effect alone. The implication is that education policy and employment policy need to work together, particularly for mothers who face childcare barriers that prevent them from converting educational attainment into labor market participation. Perhaps the most policy-relevant finding is the non-significance of government assistance in the multivariate models. At first glance, this seems to suggest targeting failure. In fact, it reflects the opposite – programs are reaching poor households, which is a targeting success. The problem is that benefit amounts are insufficient to move families above the poverty line once structural pressures, particularly household size, are accounted for. The qualitative evidence explains why: the cliff effect, registration restrictions, and fragmented service delivery mean that even correctly targeted support cannot function as genuine protection. Support exists on paper but does not translate into poverty reduction in practice.

6. Conclusions

This research consists of survey data from 160 households and expert interviews to assess and examine what causes child poverty in Kazakhstan and whether existing programs are effectively run. On RQ1, as it stands the number of children in a household is the strongest cause

of poverty and each additional child nearly doubles the odds of being in child poverty. Earner structure ranks second: households with multiple earners face 71% lower poverty odds than single-earner households. Parental education is protective, though its effect operates partly through its association with dual-earner arrangements. Urban residence and home ownership showed no significant independent effect, which reflects the sample's composition – many urban respondents were internal migrants excluded from services due to the registration requirement. It is worth adding that it is impossible to make a causal conclusion because the study is cross-sectional: although family size is highly related to poverty, the data cannot determine whether bigger families experience poverty or whether poverty impacts family size choice. Longitudinal data would be required to resolve this.

On RQ2, government assistance does not reduce poverty odds in any model. This reflects two compounding problems. First, a selection effect: programs do reach poor households, which is a targeting success. Second, and more critically, benefit amounts are insufficient – families receive support but remain below the poverty line. This is enhanced by the TSA cliff effect, which cuts off support when income rises slightly above the line and punishes households that make small increases in income without significantly changing their condition.

The primary structural issues in RQ3 include the TSA cliff effect, registration policies, lack of awareness about the program, and the disconnect between childcare policy and employment conditionality. The wider implication is that child poverty in Kazakhstan cannot be addressed through income thresholds alone. Family size creates a dependency burden that cash transfers, at current levels, cannot offset. The system is correctly targeted but underfunded. Until benefit levels are raised, the cliff effect is replaced with a gradual phase-out, and registration barriers are removed, the system will continue to reach the right households without meaningfully improving their situation.

6.1. Recommendations

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, five recommendations are proposed. Each is directly grounded in the evidence presented in the findings chapter.

Recommendation 1: Raise TSA Benefit Amounts and Replace the Cliff Effect with a Gradual Phase-Out

Quantitative findings show that government assistance does not reduce poverty odds in any model, not because programs fail to reach poor households, but because benefit amounts are

insufficient to move families above the poverty line. This selection effect is one of the central findings of the study. Qualitative evidence from the Commissioner's Office confirms that the TSA cliff effect discourages formal employment and penalizes marginal income gains. Both problems must be addressed together by benefit levels needing to increase, and abrupt withdrawal must be replaced with a gradual phase-out tied to income growth.

Recommendation 2: Remove the Registration Barrier for Long-Term Urban Residents

Families who have lived in the city for years, paid taxes, and enrolled children in local schools cannot receive TSA without formal registration. This finding is directly consistent with the quantitative result showing no urban protective effect, mainly because internal migrants were systematically excluded from the programs that should serve them. Alternative residency pathways based on utility records, employer documentation, or school enrollment should be established to make these families visible to the state system.

Recommendation 3: Integrate Childcare and Employment Support

Quantitative analysis revealed earner structure was the second-best predictor of poverty, with multiple-earner households having 71% less poverty odds as compared to single-earner households. However, qualitative research found that there was a structural contradiction in that TSA conditionality demands that able-bodied adults work, and yet affordable childcare is not available to many families, especially those with small children and those with children with disabilities. Families with no income support during a year and a half were one of the gaps pointed out by the UNICEF representative, who emphasized that the childcare allowance expires when the child is 18 months old, whereas the parental leave is legally allowed until a child is three years old. The employment assistance should be coupled with assured preschool and the option of flexible work to be practical.

Recommendation 4: Expand the Cash Plus Model

Findings from the Family Support Center show that financial assistance combined with social accompaniment: legal support, psychological help, and employment navigation produces better outcomes than cash alone. This is consistent with the quantitative finding that poverty is shaped by multiple overlapping factors, none of which income transfers alone can address. Kazakhstan is recommended to intensify the Cash Plus model by associating receipt of benefits with case management and ensuring access to health, education, and social work services.

Recommendation 5: Improve Time Lag of Poverty Data

UNICEF found that there were major delays in publishing the data on poverty. Such a lag does not allow timely responses to policies. The Bureau of National Statistics needs to strive to release data three to six months after data collection, broken down by age group, family type, and region. More detailed data would enable programs to be more specific to the vulnerabilities found in this study, such as large families, single-parent families, and families with disabled children.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in the research design. First, the survey is cross-sectional, which does not allow for causal inference. Since data were collected once, it is possible to determine the relationship between household characteristics and poverty risk, but not the causal direction. For example, the number of children is strongly related to poverty; based on such data, we cannot tell whether poverty leads to a larger family size or vice versa. Longitudinal data tracking the same households over time would be needed to answer this question. Second, the sample size (n=160) is rather limited for quantitative analysis, which can impact the significance of regression models and the precision of estimation. Although the sample was selected in 10 regions in Kazakhstan, 56 percent of all the respondents are in Astana, indicating regional inequalities. Third, self-reported income data causes measurement error and biased responses. The number of people living in a household was also reported in intervals, and this could also have an impact on the individual classification of poverty. Fourth, the official subsistence minimum does not take into consideration the costs of housing as a distinct expenditure. Since 72% of households surveyed indicated not owning their own home and incur high costs of renting, the poverty level might be grossly underestimating the economic distress of this group. Fifth, self-reported answers might also be influenced by the social desirability factor, as the respondents can either under- or over-report their financial status depending on their perceptions. Lastly, the qualitative part depends on five expert interviews that, although rich in institutional information about institutional barriers and concerns of implementation, are not statistically generalizable. This should be supplemented by future research with interviews of social workers, medical professionals, and families dealing with poverty directly, and extended to a regional analysis, relative to Kazakhstan, taking into consideration the variation in local labor markets, access to services, and subsistence minimum.

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Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Section 1: Basic Information

1. What is your age category?
☐ 18–24 ☐ 25–34 ☐ 35–44 ☐ 45–54 ☐ 55+
2. Gender
☐ Female ☐ Male
3. What is your marital status?
☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
☐ Secondary school ☐ Vocational school ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ Doctoral degree (PhD or equivalent)
5. What is the highest level of education your spouse has completed?
☐ Not applicable / No spouse ☐ Secondary school ☐ College / Vocational school ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ Doctoral degree (PhD or equivalent)
6. What language do you primarily speak at home?
☐ Kazakh ☐ Russian ☐ Other
7. Place of living
☐ Urban ☐ Rural
8. Region (current)
☐ Astana ☐ Almaty ☐ Shymkent ☐ Akmola ☐ Aktobe ☐ Almaty region ☐ Atyrau ☐ East Kazakhstan ☐ Zhambyl ☐ West Kazakhstan ☐ Karaganda ☐ Kostanay ☐ Kyzylorda ☐ Mangystau ☐ Pavlodar ☐ North Kazakhstan ☐ Turkistan ☐ Ulytau ☐ Abai ☐ Zhetysu

Section 2: Household Composition

9. How many people live in your household (including children)?
☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5–6 ☐ More than 6
10. How many children under 18 live in your household?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more

Section 3: Income & Employment

11. What is your household's main source of income?
- ☐ Salary ☐ Social benefits ☐ Pension ☐ Family support ☐ Other
12. Who in your family is currently working? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ Myself (the respondent) ☐ My spouse ☐ Other adult relatives ☐ No one is working
13. What is your total household monthly income?
- ☐ Less than 100 thousand tenge ☐ 101–200 thousand tenge ☐ 201–300 thousand tenge ☐ 301–400 thousand tenge ☐ 401–500 thousand tenge ☐ 501–600 thousand tenge ☐ 601–700 thousand tenge ☐ 701–800 thousand tenge ☐ 801–900 thousand tenge ☐ 901 thousand – 1 million tenge ☐ More than 1 million tenge
14. What is your current employment status?
- ☐ Employed full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ Unemployed ☐ Informal work ☐ Other
15. Does your household receive any financial or in-kind assistance from the government? (Select all that apply):
- ☐ Child allowance
- ☐ Targeted Social Assistance (TSA)
- ☐ Pension (old age or survivor's benefit)
- ☐ Disability benefit
- ☐ Unemployment benefit
- ☐ Food packages
- ☐ Housing subsidy (e.g. rent support)
- ☐ Free or subsidized housing from the government (e.g., through the akimat)
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
16. If your household does not receive any of the above, please check below:
- ☐ No, we do not receive any government assistance
17. Does your child work or help earn income for the family (e.g., selling, collecting, farming, etc.)?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 4: Living Conditions

18. Do you own your home?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

19. How many rooms are in your home?

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4+

20. Does your child/children have a separate bed?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 5: Food Security

21. In the past 12 months, have you had no money to buy food?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

22. How often do you run out of food before you can afford more?

- ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

23. Have you ever borrowed money to pay for food or children's needs?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

24. How often do your children eat meat, or fish?

- ☐ Daily
☐ A few times per week
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

25. How often do your children eat fresh fruits or vegetables?

- ☐ Daily
☐ A few times per week
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

Section 6: Health

26. Do your children have access to medical services when needed?

- ☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

27. When was your child's last medical check-up?

- ☐ Less than 6 months ago ☐ 6–12 months ago ☐ Over 1 year ago ☐ Never

28. Has your child visited a dentist in the last year?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

29. Have you ever skipped buying medicine for your child due to cost?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

30. Are you enrolled in public health insurance?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Section 7: Education & Development

31. Does your child attend kindergarten?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable (no preschool-aged child)

32. Is your child currently enrolled in school?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable (no school-aged child)

33. Does your child have all necessary school supplies?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

34. Does your child have a school uniform?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

35. Do you have difficulty paying for school-related expenses?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

36. Does your child participate in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, etc.)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 8: Social Support Participation

37. Do you receive help from NGOs or charity organizations?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

38. Have you participated in any free training or educational programs?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

39. Have you ever received counseling or services from a Family Support Center?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 9: Access and Information

40. Do you know where to get information about social support programs?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

41. How easy is it to get information about support programs?

- ☐ Easy ☐ Difficult ☐ Don't know

42. What is the biggest challenge in accessing social assistance?

- ☐ Paperwork ☐ Lack of info ☐ Not eligible ☐ Other

Section 10: Perceptions & Well-being

43. Do you consider your family to be living in poverty?
☐ Yes ☐ No
44. Has your financial situation worsened in the past year?
☐ Yes ☐ No
45. Do you believe government support is sufficient for low-income/vulnerable families?
☐ Yes ☐ No
46. Has poverty negatively impacted your child's well-being?
☐ Yes ☐ No
47. Are you able to cover emergency expenses (e.g., sudden medical bill)?
☐ Yes ☐ No
48. What kind of support would be most helpful to your family?
☐ More financial aid ☐ Better access to education ☐ Improved healthcare ☐ Job opportunities ☐ Affordable housing ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Appendix B
List of tables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for key variables (N=160)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Poverty status	Poor (below 64,155 KZT)	77	48.1%
	Not poor	83	51.9%
Education	Higher (Bachelor's or above)	79	49.4%
	Non-higher (Vocational/High school)	81	50.6%
Residence	City	117	73.1%
	Village	43	26.9%
Home ownership	Does not own	115	71.9%
	Owns home	45	28.1%
Earners structure	No earners	16	10.0%
	One earner	81	50.6%
	Multiple earners	63	39.4%
Gov. assistance	No assistance	38	23.8%
	Child allowance	68	42.5%
	Means-tested (TSA/food/housing)	39	24.4%
	Categorical (disability/pension)	15	9.4%

Table 2. Bivariate associations with poverty status (N=160)

Variable	Test statistic	p-value
Education (higher vs non-higher)	$\chi^2=12.16$	<0.001
Household earner structure	$\chi^2=24.09$	<0.001
Number of children	$t=-4.34$	<0.001
Type of government assistance	$\chi^2=8.83$	0.032

Self-assessed poverty	$\chi^2=9.42$	0.002
Home ownership	$\chi^2=2.69$	0.101
Urban residence	$\chi^2=0.37$	0.545
Age	$t=0.02$	0.988

Table 3. Logistic regression results – odds ratios (sequential models, N=160)

Variable	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D
Higher education	0.323***	0.294***	0.500†	0.507
	(p=0.001)	(p=0.001)	(p=0.089)	(p=0.101)
Number of children	1.856***	1.913***	1.906***	1.903***
	(p<0.001)	(p<0.001)	(p<0.001)	(p<0.001)
Urban (City)	–	0.663	0.420†	0.416†
		(p=0.325)	(p=0.062)	(p=0.060)
No earners (vs one earner)	–	–	3.851†	3.795†
			(p=0.067)	(p=0.072)
Multiple earners (vs one earner)	–	–	0.287**	0.288**
			(p=0.006)	(p=0.006)
Owens home	–	–	–	0.923
				(p=0.857)
N	160	160	160	160
Log-likelihood	–96.497	–96.007	–88.592	–88.576
Pseudo R ²	0.129	0.133	0.200	0.201

† $p<0.10$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

Table 4. Predicted probability of poverty by number of children (Model C, N=160)

Children	Predicted Pr(Poor)	95% CI
1	28.5%	[17.5%, 39.6%]
2	40.7%	[32.6%, 48.9%]
3	54.0%	[45.9%, 62.1%]
4 or more	66.8%	[55.4%, 78.3%]

Table 5. Predicted probability of poverty by household earner structure (Model C, N=160)

Earner structure	Predicted Pr(Poor)	95% CI
No earners	80.8%	[61.7%, 100%]
One earner	56.1%	[45.1%, 67.1%]
Multiple earners	30.1%	[17.6%, 42.6%]

* Upper bound truncated at 100% due to model constraints.

Table 6. Predicted probability of poverty by type of government assistance (Model G1, N=160)

Type of assistance	Predicted Pr(Poor)	95% CI
No assistance	40.5%	[25.5%, 55.5%]
Child allowance	48.4%	[37.5%, 59.3%]
Means-tested (TSA/food/housing)	53.8%	[40.2%, 67.4%]
Categorical (disability/pension)	50.7%	[25.2%, 76.1%]

Table 7. Subjective versus objective poverty alignment (N=160)

Category	Frequency	Percent
Both objective and subjective: not poor	47	29.4%
Both objective and subjective: poor	52	32.5%
Hidden poor (objective poor, not self-identified)	25	15.6%
Subjective poor only (above threshold)	36	22.5%

Table 8. Logistic regression results — supplementary models (N=160)

Odds ratios; standard errors in parentheses; p-values below

Variable	Model G1 Objective poverty (poor_sm)	Model G2 Subjective poverty (self_poor)	Model G3 Program sufficiency (gov_sufficient)
<i>Type of assistance (ref: no assistance)</i>			
Child allowance	1.530 (0.809) p=0.421	—	—
Means-tested (TSA/food/housing)	2.033 (1.117) p=0.197	—	—
Categorical (disability/pension)	1.725 (1.415) p=0.506	—	—
<i>Objective poverty (ref: not poor)</i>			
Poor (poor_sm)	—	2.748** (0.960) p=0.004	0.950 (0.338) p=0.884
<i>Subjective / awareness variables</i>			
Financial situation worsened	—	3.447** (1.289) p=0.001	0.916 (0.346) p=0.816
Poverty affected child wellbeing	—	1.897† (0.663) p=0.067	—

Knows about programs	—	—	2.374* (0.871) p=0.019
Receives any assistance	—	—	1.283 (0.593) p=0.590
<i>Controls (included in G1)</i>			
Higher education	0.575 (0.246) p=0.195	—	—
Number of children	1.917*** (0.337) p<0.001	—	—
Urban residence	0.437† (0.204) p=0.077	—	—
No earners (vs one earner)	4.280† (3.229) p=0.054	—	—
Multiple earners (vs one earner)	0.289** (0.139) p=0.010	—	—
Constant	0.392 (0.306) p=0.230	0.200*** (0.087) p<0.001	0.297** (0.134) p=0.007
N	160	160	160
Log-likelihood	-87.732	-97.081	-96.528
Pseudo R ²	0.208	0.118	0.036

Note: Odds ratios reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

† p<0.10 * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

G1: dependent variable = poor_sm (objective poverty); reference category for assistance = no assistance; reference for earner structure = one earner.

G2: dependent variable = self_poor (subjective poverty).

G3: dependent variable = gov_sufficient (perceives programs as sufficient).

Dashes (—) indicate variable not included in that model.

Appendix C

List of figures

Figure 1. Poverty Prevalence (N=160) — pie chart

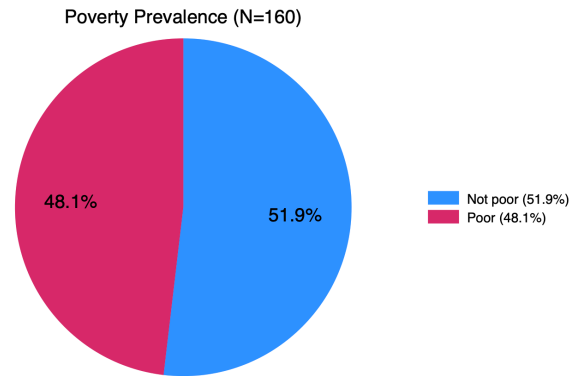


Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Poverty by Number of Children (Model C)

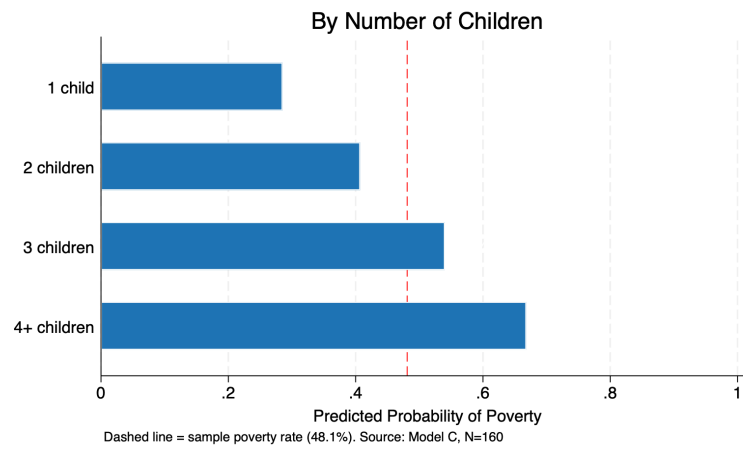


Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Poverty by Household Earner Structure (Model C)

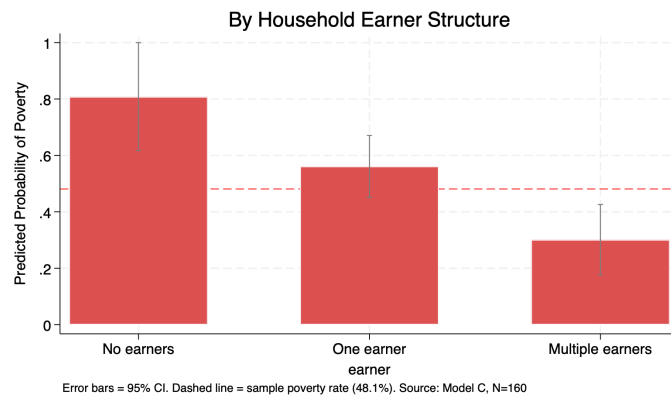


Figure 4. Poverty rate by type of government assistance

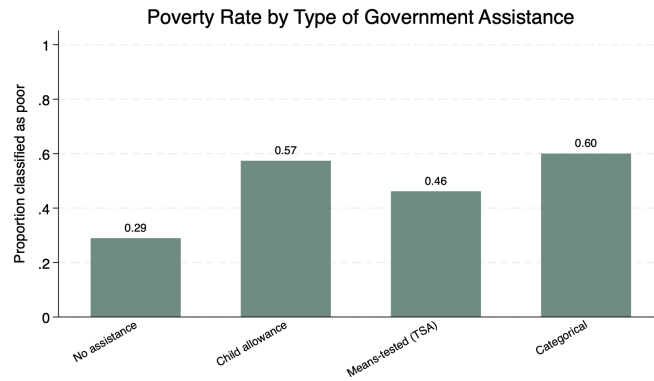


Figure 5. Subjective vs Objective Poverty Alignment (N=160)

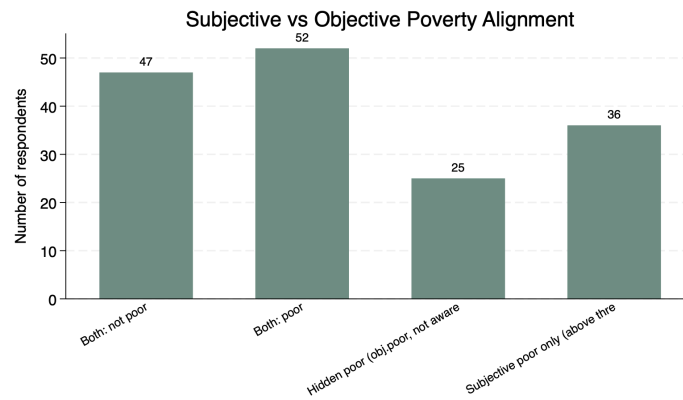


Figure 6. Poverty Rate by Education Level

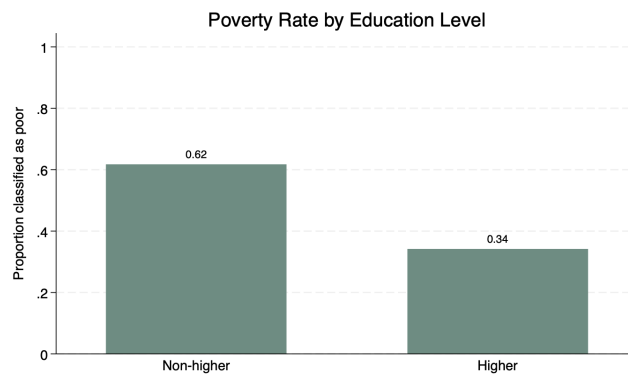


Figure 7. Poverty Rate by Household Earner Structure

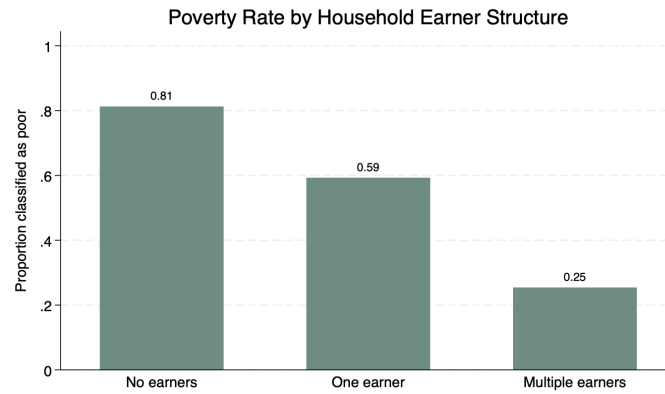


Figure 8. Main Barriers to Accessing Social Assistance

