My Experience Researching Poverty over the Past 35 Years

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Abstract

This article aims to give an overview of changing public perceptions of poverty and attitudes towards the causes of poverty based on my research experience on poverty over the past 35 years. The discussion further explains how and why changing public perceptions of poverty exist in Hong Kong, and discusses the underlying values of Hong Kong’s welfare provisions for tackling poverty.

1. Introduction

Professor Peter Townsend was my mentor when I carried out my first study on poverty 35 years ago. In 1979, I was commissioned by the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong Government to carry out a study on how to improve the public assistance program for the poor. At that time, I happened to get hold of a book by Professor Peter Townsend and it was a report on the poverty situation in the United Kingdom. The book, over a thousand pages, was published by Penguin and it took me more than a month to go through it thoroughly. Three approaches to defining poverty include subsistence, a relative income standard, and

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