International Journal of Academic and Applied Research (IJAAR)
ISSN: 2643-9603
Vol. 10 Issue 1 January - 2026, Pages: 302-309

Beyond the Price Tag: Deconstructing the Persistence of Material Deprivation in the Shadow of Affordable Goods

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Abstract: ***Background:*** *Despite unprecedented declines in consumer goods prices driven by globalization and technological advances, material deprivation remains widespread across diverse socioeconomic contexts, creating a paradox that challenges conventional poverty frameworks focused on price and income levels.* ***Objective:*** *This study examined the persistence of material deprivation amid affordable goods by identifying structural, economic, and social mechanisms that create barriers to consumption beyond retail price considerations, with specific focus on expenditure patterns, income volatility, and market access inequalities.* ***Methods:*** *A mixed-methods convergent parallel design was employed between March and October 2024 across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. The quantitative component surveyed 420 households recruited through stratified random sampling (sample size calculated for 80% power to detect medium effects at $\alpha = 0.05$), measuring income volatility, expenditure patterns, material deprivation indices, and structural barriers through structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression, structural equation modeling (SEM), multinomial logistic regression, and spatial analysis. The qualitative component comprised 36 in-depth interviews analyzed through thematic analysis, with integration occurring through joint displays and narrative weaving.* ***Results:*** *The hierarchical regression model explained 46.8% of variance in material deprivation ($F(12, 407) = 36.24$, $p < 0.001$), with non-discretionary expenditure burden ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), income volatility ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), and financial exclusion ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) emerging as strongest predictors. Significant interactions indicated that income volatility effects intensified at higher essential expenditure levels ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.006$). The SEM demonstrated complete mediation of goods affordability effects (CFI = 0.961, RMSEA = 0.041), whereby potential benefits of declining prices were entirely offset by indirect pathways through increased non-discretionary burdens ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.002$), income instability ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.017$), and structural barriers ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.003$). Multinomial logistic regression revealed dose-response relationships across deprivation severity levels (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.542$), with households facing combined disadvantages of informal employment, housing costs exceeding 40% of income, and financial exclusion showing approximately 29-fold increased odds of severe deprivation. Qualitative findings illuminated lived experiences of financial trade-offs, revealing how unpredictable income streams prevented effective budgeting and how spatial and digital barriers excluded households from affordable goods markets despite nominal accessibility.* ***Conclusions:*** *Material deprivation persisted amid affordable goods through three interconnected mechanisms: escalating non-discretionary expenditure burdens that consumed disproportionate budget shares, income volatility that undermined purchasing capacity regardless of prices, and structural barriers that prevented market access. The same economic forces producing affordable consumer goods—globalization, labor market flexibility, and market efficiency—simultaneously increased essential costs, employment precarity, and access inequalities, creating a two-tiered economy where discretionary goods cheapened while necessities became prohibitively expensive for vulnerable populations. Addressing contemporary poverty requires comprehensive interventions targeting housing affordability, employment security, and market access equity rather than price-focused policies alone, recognizing that material well-being depends on the complex economic landscapes households navigate with constrained resources.*

Keywords: Material deprivation, poverty persistence, income volatility, non-discretionary expenditure, structural barriers

Introduction of the Study

In an era characterized by unprecedented consumer choice and declining real prices for many goods, a paradox emerges that challenges conventional understanding of poverty and material well-being. Despite the proliferation of discount retailers, e-commerce platforms, and globalized supply chains that have made consumer goods more accessible than ever before, significant portions of the population continue to experience material deprivation (Dam & Dam, 2021; Supriyanto et al., 2021). This phenomenon reveals a critical disconnect between affordability in absolute terms and actual access to essential goods and services. The persistence of material deprivation amid falling prices suggests that poverty is not merely a function of commodity costs, but rather a complex interplay of structural inequalities, income volatility, consumption patterns, and systemic barriers that extend far beyond the retail price tag (Ariyo et al., 2024; Irumba, Mugabi, & Akankwasa, 2023; Yıldız & Göktepe, 2023). This study seeks to deconstruct the mechanisms through which material deprivation persists despite increased affordability of goods, examining the hidden costs, structural constraints, and socioeconomic factors that create barriers to consumption. By moving beyond simplistic price-based analyses, this research aims to illuminate the multifaceted nature of economic exclusion in contemporary consumer societies and contribute to more nuanced policy approaches addressing material poverty.

Background of the Study

The latter half of the 20th century and early 21st century witnessed remarkable transformations in global production and retail systems. Technological advances, offshore manufacturing, and innovations in logistics have dramatically reduced the cost of producing and distributing consumer goods. Real prices for electronics, clothing, and household items have declined substantially, while discount retail chains and online marketplaces have intensified price competition (Brivah & Enock, 2024; Nguyen & Nagase,

2019; Sohaib et al., 2023). These developments have led some observers to suggest that traditional poverty measures may overstate hardship in modern economies, given the increased purchasing power of limited incomes. However, empirical evidence paints a more complex picture. Research consistently demonstrates that households across developed and developing nations continue to experience material deprivation—the enforced inability to afford goods and services considered necessary for adequate participation in society. Food insecurity persists alongside abundant supermarkets, digital exclusion remains widespread despite affordable devices, and housing inadequacy coexists with construction booms (Branch et al., 2023; Ilyas et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2024). This persistence occurs within contexts of stagnant real wages, rising costs for essential but inelastic goods such as housing, healthcare, and education, and increasing income inequality that concentrates purchasing power among affluent consumers (Akampurira et al., 2023; Irumba, Mugabi, & Nelson, 2023; Julius & Henry, 2024; Sarah & Gibson, 2024). Theoretical frameworks from economics, sociology, and consumer studies suggest that material deprivation results from intersecting factors including income inadequacy and volatility, the rising relative cost of non-discretionary essentials, spatial and informational barriers to market access, financial exclusion limiting purchasing strategies, and social and psychological costs of poverty that constrain consumption choices (Julius & Geofrey, 2025a; Julius & Godfrey, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025b). Additionally, the shift toward subscription-based services, digital infrastructure requirements, and quality-price trade-offs in discount goods creates new forms of economic exclusion that are invisible in aggregate price statistics. Understanding material deprivation therefore requires examining not only what goods cost, but also how individuals navigate complex economic landscapes with limited and unstable resources.

Problem Statement

Despite significant declines in the nominal and real prices of many consumer goods over recent decades, material deprivation remains a persistent and widespread phenomenon across diverse socioeconomic contexts. Conventional approaches to understanding poverty often emphasize income thresholds and price levels, yet these frameworks fail to adequately explain why affordable goods do not translate into improved material well-being for economically vulnerable populations (Julius & Geofrey, 2025b; Julius & Milly, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025a). The gap between theoretical affordability and actual consumption reveals fundamental limitations in how researchers, policymakers, and practitioners conceptualize and measure poverty in modern economies. The problem is compounded by several interconnected challenges. First, while discretionary consumer goods have become cheaper, the costs of essential services and goods with limited substitutability—particularly housing, healthcare, childcare, and transportation—have risen substantially, absorbing increasing shares of limited household budgets and constraining spending on other items regardless of their affordability (Anitah, 2024; Mihardjo et al., 2019; Perez-Vega et al., 2021). Second, income instability and precarious employment create unpredictable cash flow patterns that prevent effective planning and purchasing, even when goods are nominally affordable. Third, spatial inequalities in retail access, digital divides, and financial exclusion create systematic barriers that prevent economically disadvantaged individuals from accessing the same markets and prices available to more affluent consumers (Agarwal & Dhingra, 2023; Sarah & Gibson, 2024). Without a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms sustaining material deprivation beyond price considerations, efforts to address poverty remain incomplete and potentially misdirected. Policies focused exclusively on income supplementation or price controls may fail to address structural barriers, while poverty measures based on outdated consumption assumptions may misidentify need and misallocate resources. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining the complex relationship between goods affordability and material deprivation, identifying the hidden costs and structural barriers that perpetuate economic exclusion in contemporary consumer societies.

Main Objective of the Study

To critically examine and explain the persistence of material deprivation despite increased affordability of consumer goods, identifying the structural, economic, and social mechanisms that create barriers to consumption beyond retail price considerations.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the relationship between household budget allocation patterns and material deprivation outcomes, with particular emphasis on how rising costs of non-discretionary essentials constrain access to affordable discretionary goods among economically vulnerable populations.
2. To identify and evaluate the structural and systemic barriers—including spatial inequalities, financial exclusion, digital divides, and information asymmetries—that prevent economically disadvantaged individuals from accessing affordable goods available in mainstream markets.
3. To assess the role of income volatility and employment precarity in mediating the relationship between goods affordability and consumption capacity, examining how unpredictable cash flows constrain purchasing decisions regardless of nominal price levels.

Research Questions

1. How do household expenditure patterns on non-discretionary essentials (housing, utilities, healthcare, transportation) mediate the relationship between the declining prices of discretionary consumer goods and the persistence of material deprivation among low-income households?
2. What structural barriers and market access inequalities prevent economically vulnerable populations from benefiting from affordable goods available through mainstream retail channels, and how do these barriers vary across different demographic and geographic contexts?

3. In what ways does income instability and employment precarity affect the consumption capacity of economically disadvantaged households, and how do these effects persist independently of the nominal affordability of consumer goods?

Methods.

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design to examine the persistence of material deprivation amid affordable goods, conducted between March 2024 and October 2024 across urban and peri-urban areas in three regions representing diverse socioeconomic contexts. The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey of 420 households, with sample size calculated using G*Power 3.1 to detect medium effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.15$) with 80% statistical power at $\alpha = 0.05$, accounting for a 10% non-response rate. Participants were recruited through stratified random sampling from census enumeration areas, stratified by income quartiles and geographic location, with inclusion criteria specifying household heads or primary financial decision-makers aged 18 years and above experiencing income below 150% of the national poverty line. Data collection employed structured questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviews, capturing detailed information on household demographics, income patterns and volatility (measured using coefficient of variation in monthly income over six months), comprehensive expenditure patterns across housing, utilities, healthcare, transportation, food, and discretionary goods, material deprivation indices based on enforced lack of essential items, spatial access to retail outlets (measured by distance and transportation time), financial inclusion indicators, and digital access capabilities. The quantitative analysis utilized multiple analytical approaches: hierarchical multiple regression models examined the independent and interactive effects of income volatility, non-discretionary expenditure burdens, and structural barriers on material deprivation scores while controlling for demographic covariates; structural equation modeling (SEM) assessed mediation pathways through which rising essential costs and income instability mediated the relationship between goods affordability and deprivation outcomes; multinomial logistic regression analyzed factors predicting membership in distinct deprivation profiles identified through latent class analysis; and spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapped retail access inequalities and their correlation with deprivation levels (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). The qualitative component consisted of 36 in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled participants representing maximum variation in deprivation experiences, employment types, and household compositions, exploring lived experiences of financial decision-making, trade-offs between essential and discretionary spending, barriers to accessing affordable goods, and coping strategies during income shortfalls. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, with all participants providing written informed consent, and data confidentiality maintained through anonymization and secure storage protocols, while reliability and validity were enhanced through pilot testing of instruments, inter-rater reliability checks for qualitative coding (Cohen's kappa > 0.80), and triangulation across data sources and methods.

Results

Table 1: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Material Deprivation Scores (N = 420)

Variable	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)	Model 3 (B)	SE	t	p
Block 1: Demographics							
Household size	0.18**	0.14**	0.12*	0.87	0.31	2.81	0.005
Income quartile	-0.31***	-0.22***	-0.15**	-1.42	0.48	-2.96	0.003
Region (Urban=ref)							
- Peri-urban	0.09	0.06	0.05	0.68	0.52	1.31	0.192
- Rural	0.16**	0.11*	0.09*	1.34	0.61	2.20	0.028
Block 2: Main Predictors							
Income volatility (CV)		0.28***	0.21***	8.45	1.82	4.64	<0.001
Non-discretionary burden (%)		0.35***	0.26***	0.18	0.03	6.02	<0.001
Retail access barriers (distance, km)		0.19***	0.14**	0.42	0.13	3.23	0.001
Financial exclusion index		0.24***	0.18***	2.31	0.54	4.28	<0.001
Digital access score		-0.17**	-0.12*	-0.76	0.29	-2.62	0.009
Block 3: Interactions							
Income volatility × Non-discr. burden			0.16**	0.11	0.04	2.75	0.006
Retail barriers × Income quartile			-0.13*	-0.35	0.16	-2.19	0.029
Model Statistics							
R^2	0.146	0.427	0.468				
Adjusted R^2	0.138	0.417	0.455				
R^2 change		0.281***	0.041**				
F-statistic	17.82***	41.56***	36.24***				

Note: β = standardized coefficient; B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Statistical Interpretation

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed significant predictors of material deprivation across three sequential models, with the full model (Model 3) explaining 46.8% of the variance in material deprivation scores ($F(12, 407) = 36.24$, $p < 0.001$). The

addition of main predictors in Model 2 produced a substantial R^2 change of 0.281 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that structural and economic factors explained considerably more variance than demographic characteristics alone. Model 3, which incorporated interaction terms, yielded an additional R^2 change of 0.041 ($p = 0.002$), suggesting meaningful moderation effects. Among the main predictors, non-discretionary expenditure burden emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), followed by income volatility ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and financial exclusion ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction between income volatility and non-discretionary burden was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.006$), indicating that the effect of income instability on material deprivation was amplified at higher levels of essential expenditure burden. Similarly, the interaction between retail access barriers and income quartile ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.029$) suggested that spatial barriers had differential impacts across income levels, with lower-income households experiencing more pronounced deprivation effects from retail inaccessibility.

Discussion of Findings

These findings provided compelling evidence that material deprivation persisted not merely due to insufficient income, but through complex mechanisms involving expenditure constraints, income instability, and structural barriers to market access. The predominant effect of non-discretionary expenditure burden (with each percentage point increase in essential spending associated with 0.18 additional deprivation points) demonstrated that rising costs of housing, healthcare, utilities, and transportation created a "poverty trap" whereby households were unable to access affordable discretionary goods despite their nominal cheapness. This confirmed theoretical propositions that poverty in contemporary economies was increasingly characterized by a squeeze between stagnant incomes and inflating essential costs, leaving minimal resources for other consumption regardless of price declines in non-essential sectors. The substantial effect of income volatility further illuminated how employment precarity and unpredictable cash flows prevented effective budgeting and purchasing, even when goods were affordable in aggregate terms. The significant positive interaction between income volatility and non-discretionary burden was particularly revealing, suggesting that households facing both high essential costs and unstable incomes experienced compounded disadvantage, as irregular income streams made it impossible to manage already constrained budgets effectively. The significant effects of financial exclusion and retail access barriers, even after controlling for income levels, underscored how structural inequalities in market access created parallel forms of economic exclusion. Households without access to banking services, credit facilities, or bulk-purchasing opportunities were unable to employ cost-minimizing strategies available to more affluent consumers, while spatial distance from affordable retail outlets imposed additional transportation costs and time burdens that effectively negated price advantages. The negative interaction between retail barriers and income quartile suggested that while spatial inaccessibility affected all households, its impact was most severe among the poorest, who lacked resources to overcome distance through private transportation or delivery services.

Table 2: Structural Equation Modeling Path Analysis - Mediation Effects on Material Deprivation

Path	B	SE	β	z	p	95% CI
Direct Effects						
Goods affordability index → Material deprivation	-0.42	0.18	-0.12	-2.33	0.020	[-0.77, -0.07]
Income volatility → Material deprivation	5.23	1.14	0.19	4.59	<0.001	[3.00, 7.46]
Non-discretionary burden → Material deprivation	0.16	0.03	0.24	5.33	<0.001	[0.10, 0.22]
Structural barriers → Material deprivation	1.87	0.38	0.21	4.92	<0.001	[1.12, 2.62]
Indirect Effects (Mediation Paths)						
Goods affordability → Non-discr. burden → Deprivation	0.28	0.09	0.08	3.11	0.002	[0.10, 0.46]
Goods affordability → Income volatility → Deprivation	0.19	0.08	0.05	2.38	0.017	[0.03, 0.35]
Goods affordability → Structural barriers → Deprivation	0.33	0.11	0.09	3.00	0.003	[0.11, 0.55]
Income level → Non-discr. burden → Deprivation	-0.52	0.14	-0.15	-3.71	<0.001	[-0.80, -0.24]
Income level → Income volatility → Deprivation	-0.38	0.12	-0.11	-3.17	0.002	[-0.62, -0.14]
Total Effects						
Goods affordability → Material deprivation (total)	0.38	0.21	0.11	1.81	0.070	[-0.03, 0.79]
Income level → Material deprivation (total)	-2.14	0.31	-0.38	-6.90	<0.001	[-2.75, -1.53]
Model Fit Indices						
χ^2 (df = 142)	186.34				0.008	
CFI	0.961					
TLI	0.954					
RMSEA	0.041					[0.025, 0.055]
SRMR	0.048					

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

Statistical Interpretation

The structural equation model demonstrated acceptable to good fit across multiple indices (CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.048), indicating that the hypothesized mediation model adequately represented the relationships among variables. While the chi-square test was statistically significant ($\chi^2(142) = 186.34$, $p = 0.008$), this was likely attributable to the large sample size, and other fit indices suggested satisfactory model specification. The direct effect of goods affordability on material deprivation was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.020$), indicating that increased affordability was associated with reduced deprivation when controlling for mediators. However, the total effect of goods affordability on deprivation was non-significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.070$), suggesting complete mediation whereby affordability's benefits were entirely offset by indirect pathways through increased non-discretionary burdens, income volatility, and structural barriers. All three indirect pathways from goods affordability to material deprivation through mediators were statistically significant: through non-discretionary burden ($\beta = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.46], $p = 0.002$), through income volatility ($\beta = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.35], $p = 0.017$), and through structural barriers ($\beta = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.55], $p = 0.003$). These positive indirect effects indicated that paradoxically, contexts with greater goods affordability were also characterized by higher essential cost burdens, greater income instability, and more pronounced structural barriers, which collectively negated affordability's direct benefits.

Discussion of Findings

The mediation analysis provided critical insights into the paradox of persistent material deprivation amid affordable goods, revealing that affordability existed within broader economic contexts that systematically undermined its poverty-reduction potential. The complete mediation of goods affordability's effect through negative pathways illuminated why declining prices for consumer goods had failed to substantially reduce material deprivation among economically vulnerable populations. Specifically, the significant mediation through non-discretionary expenditure burden suggested that the same economic forces producing affordable consumer goods—globalization, technological efficiency, and competitive markets—had simultaneously contributed to rising costs in less elastic sectors such as housing, healthcare, and essential services. This divergence created a two-tiered economy where discretionary goods became cheaper while necessities became more expensive, effectively trapping low-income households in deprivation despite apparent affordability improvements. The economic restructuring associated with globalized production had often been accompanied by housing market speculation, privatization of essential services, and weakening of labor protections, all of which increased the share of household budgets consumed by non-discretionary expenses. The mediation through income volatility revealed another crucial mechanism: the labor market conditions that enabled cost reductions in consumer goods—including casualization, gig economy expansion, and reduced worker bargaining power—simultaneously increased income instability for workers in these sectors. Consequently, even as goods became more affordable in price terms, workers' capacity to plan purchases and manage budgets deteriorated due to unpredictable income streams. The structural barriers mediation pathway underscored how market segmentation and inequality in access to affordable goods channels prevented economically disadvantaged populations from realizing affordability benefits. Discount retailers and e-commerce platforms often located in areas with lower rent costs that were spatially distant from low-income communities, while digital purchasing required internet access and financial infrastructure that excluded the most vulnerable. The significant negative indirect effects from income level through both non-discretionary burden and income volatility to deprivation confirmed that lower-income households experienced disproportionate exposure to these mediating mechanisms, facing simultaneously higher essential cost burdens and greater income instability that compounded their material deprivation beyond what income levels alone would predict.

Table 3: Multinomial Logistic Regression - Predictors of Material Deprivation Profiles (N = 420)

Predictor	Low Deprivation vs. No Deprivation	Moderate Deprivation vs. No Deprivation	Severe Deprivation vs. No Deprivation
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Demographic Factors			
Household size	1.28* (1.04-1.58)	1.42** (1.14-1.77)	1.68*** (1.31-2.15)
Income quartile (per level increase)	0.52*** (0.39-0.69)	0.38*** (0.27-0.53)	0.22*** (0.14-0.35)
Rural location (vs. urban)	1.86* (1.09-3.18)	2.34** (1.32-4.15)	3.42*** (1.78-6.57)
Economic Instability			
Income volatility (per 0.1 increase in CV)	1.52** (1.16-1.99)	2.08*** (1.56-2.77)	2.89*** (2.08-4.02)
Months of income disruption (past year)	1.18* (1.03-1.35)	1.34** (1.15-1.56)	1.62*** (1.36-1.93)
Informal employment (vs. formal)	2.14** (1.28-3.57)	3.45*** (1.98-6.01)	5.78*** (3.02-11.06)
Expenditure Patterns			
Non-discretionary burden (per 10% increase)	1.73** (1.23-2.43)	2.56*** (1.78-3.68)	4.21*** (2.71-6.54)

Housing cost burden >40% of income	2.38** (1.42-3.99)	3.67*** (2.11-6.38)	6.24*** (3.28-11.87)
Healthcare out-of-pocket >15% of income	1.92* (1.14-3.23)	2.78*** (1.59-4.86)	4.15*** (2.21-7.79)
Structural Barriers			
Distance to affordable retail >5km	1.67* (1.08-2.58)	2.43** (1.51-3.91)	3.84*** (2.19-6.73)
No bank account	1.89** (1.21-2.95)	2.94*** (1.82-4.75)	5.12*** (2.89-9.07)
No internet access at home	1.54* (1.02-2.33)	2.31** (1.47-3.63)	3.67*** (2.18-6.18)
Cannot access bulk discounts	1.43* (1.01-2.03)	2.18** (1.48-3.21)	3.42*** (2.15-5.44)
Model Statistics			
-2 Log Likelihood	1142.67		
χ^2 (df = 42)	324.58***		
Pseudo R^2 (Nagelkerke)	0.542		
Classification accuracy	68.3%		

Note: OR = Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. Reference category: No Deprivation (n=94). Low Deprivation (n=118), Moderate Deprivation (n=132), Severe Deprivation (n=76). *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Statistical Interpretation

The multinomial logistic regression model examining predictors of material deprivation profile membership demonstrated strong overall fit ($\chi^2(42) = 324.58$, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.542$), with 68.3% correct classification across the four latent classes. The model revealed systematic gradients in odds ratios across deprivation severity levels, with all significant predictors showing progressively stronger associations from low to moderate to severe deprivation categories. Income volatility exhibited particularly steep gradients, with each 0.1 unit increase in the coefficient of variation associated with 52% increased odds of low deprivation (OR = 1.52, 95% CI [1.16, 1.99]), 108% increased odds of moderate deprivation (OR = 2.08, 95% CI [1.56, 2.77]), and 189% increased odds of severe deprivation (OR = 2.89, 95% CI [2.08, 4.02]) relative to no deprivation. Non-discretionary expenditure burden showed similarly escalating effects, with each 10% increase in essential spending burden associated with 73% higher odds of low deprivation, 156% higher odds of moderate deprivation, and 321% higher odds of severe deprivation. Structural barriers demonstrated multiplicative disadvantage patterns, with households lacking bank accounts showing 89% increased odds of low deprivation, 194% increased odds of moderate deprivation, and 412% increased odds of severe deprivation. The combination of informal employment, high housing cost burden (>40% of income), and lack of bank account collectively increased the odds of severe deprivation by approximately 29-fold relative to households with formal employment, moderate housing costs, and financial inclusion, illustrating the compounding nature of multiple disadvantages.

Discussion of Findings

The multinomial logistic regression analysis revealed that material deprivation was not a unidimensional continuum but rather comprised distinct profiles characterized by different constellations and intensities of risk factors. The consistent dose-response relationships, whereby each predictor showed progressively stronger associations with more severe deprivation categories, indicated that material deprivation represented cumulative disadvantage rather than isolated deficits. Households experiencing severe deprivation were distinguished not merely by greater intensity of single factors but by exposure to multiple, reinforcing vulnerabilities across income instability, expenditure constraints, and structural barriers. This finding had important implications for understanding poverty persistence amid affordable goods: severe material deprivation resulted from intersecting disadvantages that collectively overwhelmed any benefits from declining consumer goods prices. The particularly strong effects of income volatility and informal employment across all deprivation levels underscored the centrality of employment precarity in contemporary poverty dynamics. Households with unstable incomes faced not only lower average earnings but also diminished capacity for financial planning, reduced access to credit and bulk-purchasing strategies, and heightened vulnerability to income shocks that could precipitate cascading deprivation. The fact that income volatility effects exceeded those of income level itself for moderate and severe deprivation categories suggested that stability of resources was as critical as their quantity for avoiding material deprivation. The escalating odds ratios for non-discretionary expenditure burdens, particularly housing and healthcare costs exceeding conventionally affordable thresholds, provided quantitative confirmation of the "essentials squeeze" mechanism identified in the mediation analysis. Households dedicating more than 40% of income to housing or more than 15% to healthcare were systematically locked out of discretionary consumption regardless of how affordable such goods had become, as residual income after essential expenses was insufficient for even nominally cheap items. The multiplicative disadvantage observed when households faced combined barriers—such as informal employment plus financial exclusion plus spatial distance from affordable retail—illuminated why material deprivation persisted so stubbornly: no single intervention addressing one barrier could substantially improve outcomes when households faced multiple, interlocking constraints. These findings suggested that policies focused solely on income supplementation or price controls would likely prove insufficient without concurrent interventions addressing employment security,

housing affordability, financial inclusion, and market access inequalities that collectively maintained material deprivation across diverse household contexts.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively examined the paradox of persistent material deprivation amid increasingly affordable consumer goods, revealing that poverty in contemporary economies operated through complex mechanisms that extended far beyond retail price considerations. The findings demonstrated that material deprivation persisted not due to the absolute cost of goods, but through the interplay of three critical mechanisms: the escalating burden of non-discretionary expenditures that consumed disproportionate shares of limited household budgets, income volatility and employment precarity that undermined purchasing capacity regardless of nominal affordability, and structural barriers including financial exclusion, spatial inequalities, and digital divides that prevented economically vulnerable populations from accessing mainstream affordable goods channels. The hierarchical regression analysis established that non-discretionary expenditure burden, income volatility, and structural barriers collectively explained 46.8% of variance in material deprivation, with significant interaction effects indicating that these factors compounded rather than simply added to disadvantage. The structural equation modeling revealed complete mediation of goods affordability effects, whereby any potential benefits of declining prices were entirely offset by simultaneous increases in essential costs, income instability, and market access barriers embedded within the same economic restructuring processes that produced affordable consumer goods. The multinomial logistic regression further illuminated how severe material deprivation resulted from cumulative exposure to multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities, with households facing combined disadvantages of informal employment, housing cost burdens exceeding 40% of income, and financial exclusion experiencing approximately 29-fold increased odds of severe deprivation compared to those without these constraints. These findings fundamentally challenged simplistic narratives suggesting that falling consumer prices should alleviate poverty, demonstrating instead that material deprivation was sustained through structural inequalities, precarious labor markets, and the divergent cost trajectories between discretionary and essential goods. The study underscored that addressing contemporary poverty required moving beyond price-focused interventions toward comprehensive policy frameworks targeting employment security, housing affordability, financial inclusion, and equitable market access, recognizing that material well-being depended not merely on what goods cost but on the complex economic landscapes that households navigated with constrained and unstable resources.

Recommendations

Implement Integrated Housing and Essential Services Affordability Programs: Policymakers should prioritize interventions that directly address the non-discretionary expenditure burden by implementing rent control mechanisms, expanding social housing provision, subsidizing essential utilities for low-income households, and establishing universal healthcare coverage that eliminates catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenditures. Given that non-discretionary burden emerged as the strongest predictor of material deprivation ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) and that housing costs exceeding 40% of income increased odds of severe deprivation six-fold, policies must focus on reducing the share of household budgets consumed by essentials rather than solely supplementing incomes, as income transfers prove insufficient when essential costs continue to escalate and absorb any additional resources provided.

Establish Employment Security and Income Stabilization Mechanisms: Governments and employers should develop policies that reduce income volatility and employment precarity through strengthening labor protections for informal and gig economy workers, mandating minimum hour guarantees and predictable scheduling, creating income smoothing programs that provide bridge financing during income disruptions, and expanding unemployment insurance to cover non-traditional employment arrangements. The finding that income volatility showed dose-response relationships with deprivation severity (with severe deprivation odds increasing 189% per 0.1 CV increase) and that informal employment increased severe deprivation odds nearly six-fold indicates that employment stability is as critical as wage levels, necessitating interventions that provide workers with predictable, secure income streams rather than simply raising minimum wages without addressing underlying precarity.

Develop Comprehensive Financial Inclusion and Market Access Infrastructure: Stakeholders should invest in eliminating structural barriers through expanding no-fee banking services and alternative financial institutions in underserved communities, subsidizing transportation or establishing mobile retail units to serve spatially isolated populations, providing subsidized internet access and digital literacy programs to bridge digital divides, and creating community purchasing cooperatives that enable bulk-buying and collective bargaining power for low-income households. The multinomial regression demonstrated that structural barriers such as lack of bank accounts, distance from affordable retail, and absent internet access independently increased severe deprivation odds by 300-400%, with multiplicative effects when combined, indicating that market access inequalities create parallel systems of economic exclusion that cannot be addressed through income or price interventions alone but require deliberate infrastructure investments to ensure equitable access to affordable goods channels.

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