

THROUGH YOUNG EYES

The Children's Commission on Poverty

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Society

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**By Larissa Pople, Laura Rodrigues
and Sam Royston**

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FOREWORD FROM MATTHEW REED

For over 130 years The Children's Society has worked to help the most disadvantaged children to help them have a good childhood and the opportunity to flourish in life. At the heart of our work is a commitment to listen to children, to hear and respond to their concerns, and to understand first-hand what more could be done to give them a better life.

That's why we have established The Children's Commission on Poverty. The commission will be formed of a panel, led by children, which will work to articulate the realities of life for children living in poverty and to explore what could be done to give them the childhood they deserve. We want to see, and help others see, the experiences of children in poverty through young eyes.

This report, to mark the launch of the commission, forms the first piece of evidence to be submitted to the panel. The findings should worry us all. More than half of children who said that their family is 'not well off at all' reported that their home was too cold last winter and a quarter said their home had damp or mould. Around 14% of these children said that they had been bullied as a result of their family being badly off.

The commission will respond to findings like these, as well as instigating its own original research and analysis, to help tell the story of children's lives. Too often children's voices have been ignored by the people who make decisions about their lives. We are determined to change this. The Children's Society will work together with the children's commission, listening to and supporting them to explore and express their views.

More than 3 million children live in poverty in the UK, and this is predicted to rise in coming years. We believe the commission will offer a fresh and compelling insight to current debates around poverty as it is experienced by children. We hope it will also come up with solutions that adults have not yet considered.

Child poverty is not acceptable, and it is not inevitable. With the support of both children and adults across the country, The Children's Commission on Poverty has a real opportunity to create a better future for disadvantaged children.



Matthew Reed
Chief Executive, The Children's Society

FOREWORD FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS

Yousif, 16, commission member

Child poverty is one of the gravest injustices to face the UK and we, the young people on the panel, have finally gathered together to combat it. The reason why young people should be at the forefront of combatting child poverty is because young people are one of the most creative and imaginative types of people around. They think and analyse things in a completely abstract manner and they comprehensively ignore the status quo. This is why, in the quest to reduce and eradicate child poverty, young people and children can provide a unique insight into the effects and side effects of child poverty.

To take part in a panel that contributes to combating such a horrific issue would humble me personally and cause me great happiness. Also, as a person that was welcomed into the UK as a political refugee from Iraq, I have made it a duty in my life here in the UK to make a positive difference to all people, especially young people, just like they have done for me.

We are here to fight this injustice. Simple as that. We are here to show the country that child poverty is a real issue. Not just an issue of statistics and figures. But a very real issue that affects the most helpless in our communities and it can be overcome.

So we must not be daunted by the task ahead. If we are determined and work together well, we can overcome this injustice, not immediately but definitely.

Gulwali, 19, commission member

It's very important indeed to listen to children and young people on the issue of poverty because they are most affected by it. By listening to their views, concerns and worries we can influence policies and their contribution can be positive in that sense. And hopefully those responsible and able to help will do so because young people have spoken out. The cycle of poverty needs to stop somewhere and children, the worse affected, should be given more opportunities and ways to be supported out of the injustice caused to them through no fault of their own.

As part of the panel I hope to achieve our collective objectives for policy makers, politicians, parliamentarians and shareholders to act on this important issue and make it a priority to make a difference, change the lives of the 3 million disadvantaged children that live in poverty in the UK. I want to bridge the gap between children experiencing poverty and decision makers.

There were many reasons why I joined the panel: because it's such a matter of urgency that we do something about this and I am passionate about representing the views of those whom are not usually represented. I want to make a change to the culture and create awareness that children do live in poverty unfortunately. They are the future of this country and we should give children the childhood they need and deserve.

'I would like to help children and young people in poverty because they have a right to be helped.' Emma, 17, commission member

'It's about our experiences and what we have been through. People need to listen to us and understand us to be able to understand our needs.' Sibgha, 17, commission member

'It needs to be the children in child poverty that are listened to because only they know what it's like.' Cyrus, 13, commission member

'I genuinely want change for children.' Luke, 16, commission member

'When my parents separated, a lot has changed for me and I have experienced what it is to be a child in poverty. Therefore, I would really like to help make a change and help make things better for children in poverty.' Zara, 11, commission member

'All people should have the right to speak no matter what age. Everybody's opinion is valuable.' Caitlyn, 14, commission member

'We are the future of the country, and everyone, no matter how old, should have a chance to be heard. We all have some great ideas and feelings that might help to make a difference.' Lana, 16, commission member

'Only the young person themselves knows what they really need.' Oliver, 16, commission member

'We need to make change for children, to tell adults exactly what they need, and to make children part of the decision, because children are the future.' Hossin, 18, commission member

'I want to be able to help children in poverty and possibly even help change the way people see childhood poverty.' Sasha, 13, commission member

'I think child poverty is a very important issue. I have learnt that in my local community there is child poverty and I have learnt how it affects children's lives on an everyday basis.' Lauren, 16, commission member

1. WHAT IS THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSION ON POVERTY?

There are currently over 3 million children living in poverty in the UK today¹ and living standards are set to be a key battleground in the next general election. Yet the voices of children are largely absent from the debates on poverty, an issue that can dramatically alter the course of their lives.

Children's views are not being heard and they do not have a significant say in decisions that affect their lives. We believe it is time to start listening and to raise the stakes by highlighting the impact that poverty has on children's lives.

Children are not only able to share with us a deep and personal account of their experiences of poverty, but can also suggest powerful ways in which their lives could be improved.

That is why The Children's Society has set up The Children's Commission on Poverty – to make sure children's views are at the heart of the debate on childhood poverty. It will explore children's attitudes to childhood poverty and discover what it means for children to live in families desperately struggling to make ends meet. Importantly, it will begin to ask what can be done to improve living standards for the most vulnerable groups of young people.

The commission will bring a fresh and compelling perspective on what real support should look like, what poverty really means to a range of children and young people, and – we hope – provide much needed ideas as to what needs to change to deliver better futures for children in poverty.

We want the work of the commission to start a fresh debate around childhood poverty that recognises the impact of poverty on the current generation of children and young people. We hope the commission will spark debate at all levels of society – in people's homes, in their workplaces and across their everyday lives, as well as in government and the media.

If we are to tackle childhood poverty, first we must understand it. As a nation, we must learn to see life through young eyes.

Evidence gathering for this report

This report launches the commission with an initial exploration of what we already know about children's experiences of poverty. It presents original research from the first stage of the evidence gathering sessions that will run throughout the commission. It highlights key findings on children's experiences of poverty that provide a starting point for further consideration by the panel.

Methods of evidence gathering used in this report:

1. A survey of around 2000 children aged between 10-17 years old to find out their views on poverty and experiences of it.

The survey asked children whether they consider their family to be well off so that we could separate out the views of those children who consider themselves to be in families that are 'not well off at all'.

This was around 8% of the children surveyed and the average household income² of these families is just £9200 per year – less than half of the income of the average family in the survey.

2. Interviews with individual children and consultations with groups of children from across the country who have experience of poverty.

The role of children and young people in the commission

Members of the commission

The commission will be made up of around 15 young people. They will meet regularly over 18 months to consider evidence on children's experience of poverty, discuss their own perspectives and priorities, and propose ideas for change to help to improve the lives of children living in poverty. They will also direct the research that is carried out and determine the subject matter of all reports published under its name.

Evidence gathering sessions

A nationwide, rolling programme of sessions to gather evidence from a wide range of young people will be run by The Children's Society and a variety of local agencies. The focus of these sessions will be shaped by the commission members and the evidence that they have considered.

Research programme

The Children's Society is setting up a longer-term qualitative study of children living in poverty that follows children over time, in partnership with Professor Tess Ridge at the University of Bath. Although the lifespan of this study is longer than that of the commission, the commission will benefit from the evidence gathered and influence some of the areas we explore.



2. CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY

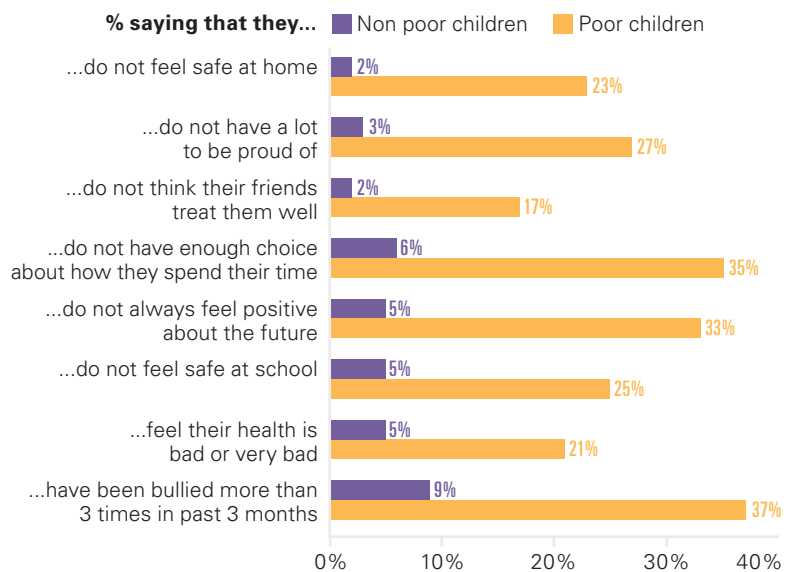
The relationship between childhood poverty and a range of poor outcomes for children are well evidenced. These include lower levels of educational participation and attainment, higher risks of social exclusion, worse housing and neighbourhood conditions, and poorer physical and mental health.³

Recent research by The Children's Society has also explored the links between poverty and different aspects of children's well-being, finding that poor children⁴ are much more likely than other children to report bullying, problems in their friendships, unhappiness with their home, and to have lower self-esteem and lower aspirations for the future.⁵ These findings from our earlier work are shown in Figure 1.

Qualitative research supports these findings and adds further insights into how poverty is experienced by children. Studies that focus on children's own accounts of living in poverty, such as Tess Ridge's landmark study of childhood poverty⁶ and review of 10 years of research with children living in low-income households,⁷ show that the impact of poverty can be felt across all areas of children's lives. It affects their economic well-being, mental and physical health, social relationships and the opportunities and choices that are open to them. To be poor in an essentially wealthy society is a very particular and stigmatising experience, and children are well aware of this.⁸

In this section we look at children's accounts of their own lives alongside survey evidence from children to summarise what we know already about how poverty is experienced by children in the UK.

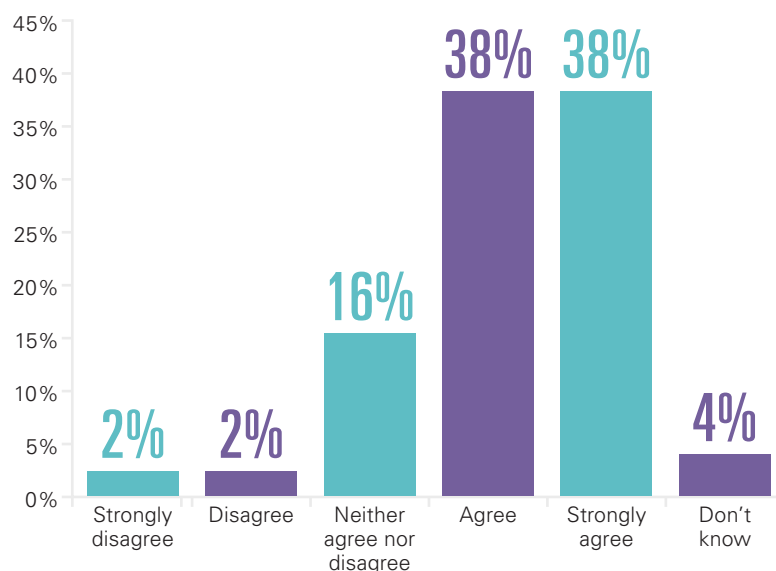
Figure 1: The links between poverty and different aspects of children's lives



Source: 2010-2012 quarterly well-being survey, waves 1 to 8, ages 8 to 15

Figure 2: 'I often worry about how much money there is to go around in my family'

(responses from children who thought their family was 'not well off at all')



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 148

Case study: Natalie

Natalie is 14 years old and lives with her mum in a small village in the South West of England. Her mum works shifts as a care worker and receives Working Tax Credit. Natalie is very proud of her mum for working to support them. However, she sometimes feels lonely and isolated because they live in the countryside and her mum has to work such long hours.

She is aware that they do not have much money. They are able to afford their weekly food shop by going to cheaper supermarkets and cooking big meals to last for a few days.

There are a range of other things Natalie misses out on as she is living in poverty. She has not been on a holiday for four years and she cannot see her friends often as they cannot afford expensive activities like going to the sports centre. School clothes and resources are other expenses that Natalie and her mum find it difficult to afford and she has missed out on school trips.

She thinks more could be done to help those working families living in poverty. She says: 'Give higher benefits to families who do work really hard and are trying really hard but are still falling back on money.'

Money and going without

Research with children confirms that financial resources and material goods are in short supply for children in poor families and, far from being unaware of the family finances, children are extremely anxious about the adequacy of income coming into their homes and whether there is enough for them and their family's needs. Figure 2 shows how, of the children who said they thought their family was 'not well off at all', more than three quarters often had worries about how much money there is to go around in their family.

Poverty in childhood brings a lack of basic items that others take for granted like food, towels, bedding and clothing. Children in poor families can also lack important childhood possessions, like toys, bicycles and games, and when items such as these break, they can stay broken and are not replaced.⁸

These issues chime with what we found when we spoke to children and young people in interviews and consultations. A common theme amongst the children that we spoke to was that times are especially tough at the moment, and that families are feeling the pinch:

'Both my parents have steady jobs, but it is tighter... there is less money, it is getting harder.'

One of the young people that we spoke to who was living independently (in a Foyer⁹) described life as 'just surviving, not living'. This young person, and others living in a similar situation, emphasised how difficult it is to survive on the small amount of benefits that they receive each month, especially if they are lacking essential independent living skills such as how to manage their money:

'At school they should give us living skills – cleaning, cooking, helping to get a job, managing money. I am buggered, I just have debt.'

Their coping strategies centred around helping each other out, and sharing food and clothes:

'Can't buy clothes, I am wearing his clothes... they are too big, I am using a USB cable cos I don't have a belt and I can't buy one.'

Some of the children that we spoke to were affected by debt, either owed by themselves or their families:

'I get paid it goes, it pays debt, I have more debt.'

'A couple of years ago we were in debt, our family helped us. The baliffs used to come knocking on the doors... It's not like that now, but you never know, it might be next month or the month after. Mum tells me not to open the door in the evening if I am here on my own, in case it might be them.'

There were lots of comments about the rising cost of food shopping and the resourcefulness of families that are trying to make ends meet:

'Everything gets harder, everything is more expensive. My parents are struggling to do a weekly shop.'

'We have enough money to buy food, but not much. Mum is clever and buys really cheap stuff, we bought things for 20p and 9p yesterday.'

Some of the children that we spoke to lived in families with at least one adult in paid employment. For these families, employment itself was not enough to guard against poverty:

'[Mum] is working every day. She is doing loads of hours so that we can do something nice. I feel a bit lonely sometimes as I am here on my own...'

When we asked children about spending money and possessions, they demonstrated a keen awareness of the value of money. They emphasised the importance of saving up, not just for things that they themselves wanted, but also to help out other family members:

'I save up in case I need anything. I might need stuff at school. If I save it, it is there if we need it. Mum might need help if she runs out, you never know when you might need it.'

One young man said that he had 'more money than mum' and showed us his moneybox, which had £2.75 in it.

Very few of the children that we spoke to had been fortunate enough to have a holiday away from home in recent years, and for those that had been on holiday in the past, these were no longer a feature of family life:

'We haven't had a proper holiday in years, we normally go camping once every other year, but that hasn't happened for a few years.'

'I want to go on holiday because I've never been. I'd like to see what's there.'

The same was true of day trips and other activities with family and friends. Children were keenly aware of the cost of leisure activities, and a lot of the time these costs were prohibitive.

Christmas and birthday presents and celebrations were also beyond the means of some of the children that we spoke to, especially the young people that were living independently:

'I am dreading Christmas, I feel bad that I can't afford my own rent so can't afford to give presents, I feel ashamed.'

Case study: Growing up in bad housing

We consulted with a group of young people living in temporary accommodation or bad housing in the South West. Many of the young people were facing overcrowding and their homes were not in a good state of repair:

‘Not enough space, needs more rooms so I can sleep’

‘Kitchen is way too small, toilet is absolutely tiny’

‘Hole in floorboards in living room, windows let in cold air even though they are double glazing’

Some of the young people also did not like their local area, finding it too noisy and intimidating:

‘Scary at night’

‘Rough area’

‘Too loud’

Some of the younger children also reported having very few toys to play with, or limited space to play. This problem was particularly acute for the group of children that we spoke to who were living in temporary accommodation:

‘No things to play with.’

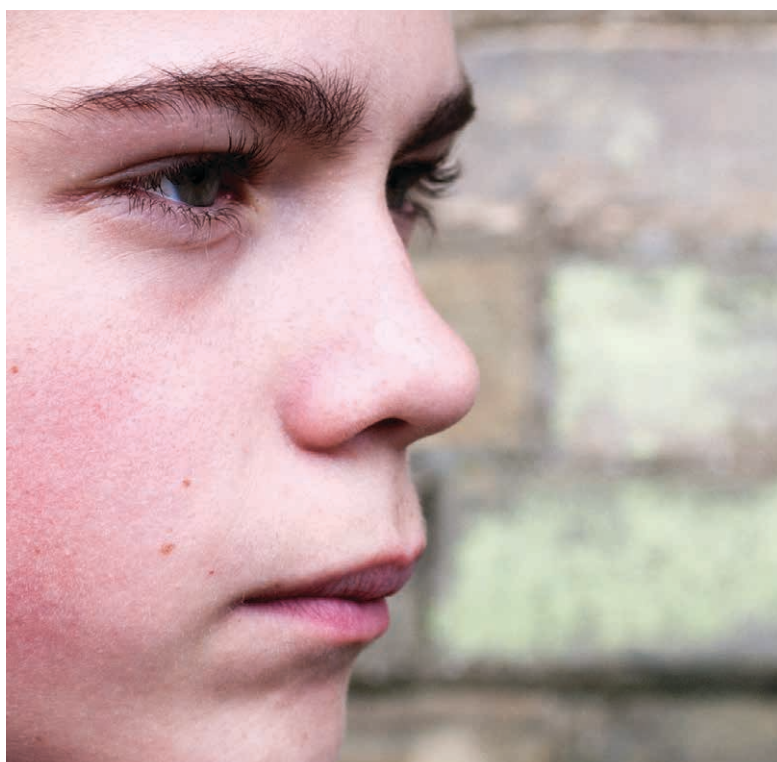
‘We don’t have nowhere to play. It’s all cracked pavement and we’ve only got a tiny bit of pavement.’

Housing, transport and the local area

Growing up in poverty often means living in poor quality housing and in deprived neighbourhoods. This can have a detrimental impact on children’s health, well-being and education, for example, if they have no space to do homework at home, or live in damp or decaying housing that leads to respiratory problems.¹⁰

Children in urban areas may experience run-down, degraded and degrading environments, poorly served by services, shops and public transport. On the other hand, low-income children in rural areas may find themselves isolated and marginalised within their small villages and towns, and experience a severe lack of social opportunities and activities compounded by expensive and inadequate public transport.¹¹

We surveyed children about the issues that they faced in their home and in their local area, focusing in particular on the group of children who said that their family was ‘not well off at all’ (see Figures 3 and 4). When asked about their homes, over half (53%) of this group of children said that they do not have enough space, while damp or mould was an issue for just over a quarter (26%).



In respect of their local area, children’s greatest concerns related to cleanliness, with 57% saying that dog or cat mess and 45% saying that rubbish is a problem. Safety was another key issue with 42% of children reporting people using or dealing drugs and 39% reporting people being drunk or rowdy in their local area.

We also asked children about the level of warmth in their homes during the winter. Over half of children saying that their family is ‘not well off at all’ (54%) said that their homes were much or a bit colder than they would have liked.

For many young people living in poverty, the cost and accessibility of transport is a key issue for studying or working and for getting to leisure activities. This is especially true in rural and suburban areas. Travelling to school or college and meeting friends were particular issues:

‘There’s no cheap buses, it used to be £1.50 for me to get home from college in town but now its £2.10.’ Lucy

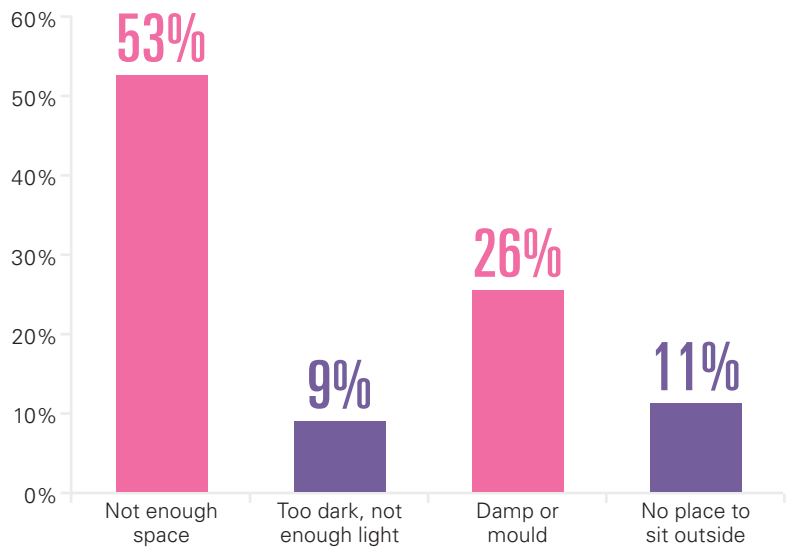
‘It’s hard to meet up [with friends] because they live in [the nearby town], it’s really expensive to get there.’ Rhiannon

Education and aspirations

Research with children highlights the importance of school both academically and socially. However, children’s accounts of their school lives indicate that they experience considerable disadvantage within their schools, with many reporting feeling bullied, isolated and left out of activities and opportunities. Sometimes, children exclude themselves from school activities because they know their parents cannot afford them. Furthermore, poverty may also make children uncertain and fearful about their futures, which is a difficult burden to carry in childhood.⁸

Figure 3: Do you have any of the following problems in your home?

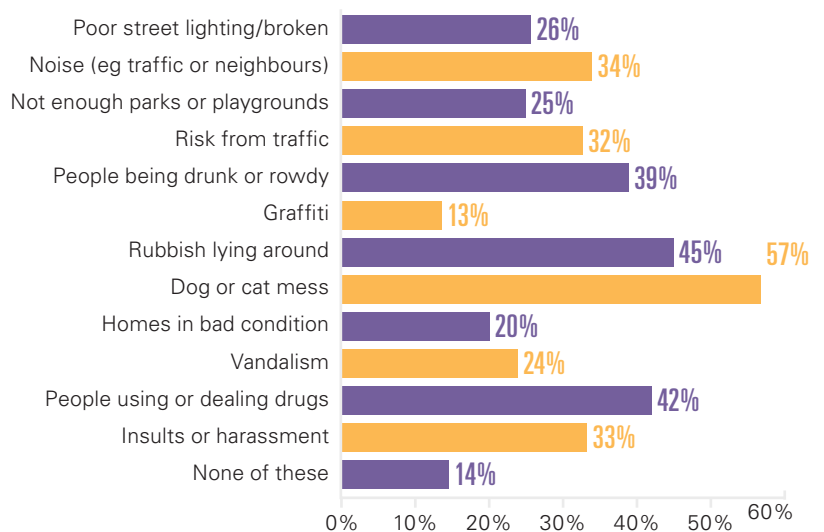
(responses from children saying that their family is ‘not well off at all’)



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 148

Figure 4: Do you think that any of the following things are a problem in your local area?

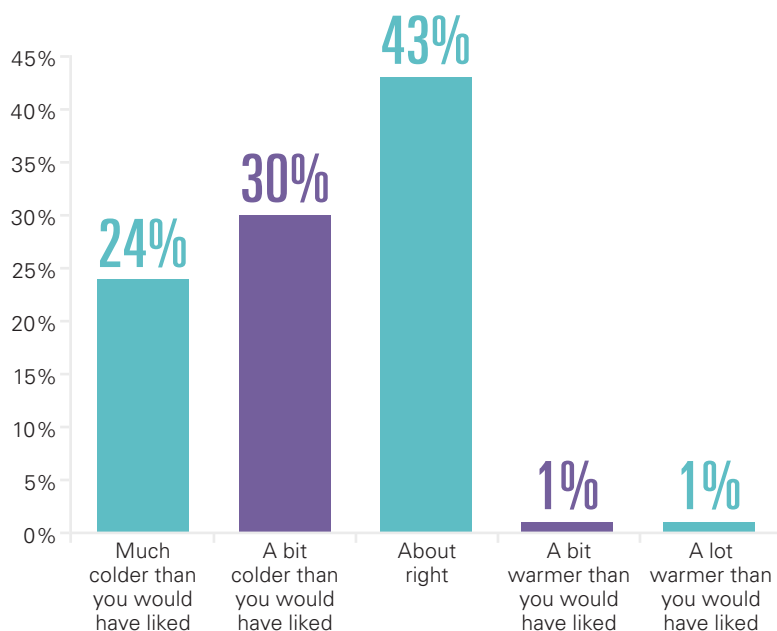
(responses from children saying that their family is ‘not well off at all’)



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 148

Figure 5: Which sentence below describes the overall level of warmth in your home last winter?

(responses from children who thought their family was 'not well off at all')



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 148

Case study: The Smith family

Jade, aged 15 and her brother James, aged nine and sister Kelly, aged seven live with their mum and dad and younger sister Sarah aged three. The six of them live in a two bedroom house.

The three girls are in one bedroom, James is in his own room, their mum sleeps on the sofa in the living room while their dad sleeps on the floor.

Education was very important to the young people we spoke to and many of them had clear ambitions for the future. They expressed a determination to work hard and succeed despite their disadvantaged backgrounds:

'I am working hard at school as I want to do well... I want to get a good job and have money and for it not to be difficult. I want to do child psychology, I want to get a job and save up for Uni, but it is so expensive so I will have to save lots.'
Nancy

However, many of the young people we consulted with raised the issue of the costs associated with education. From school uniform and educational trips to buying text books, children and families in poverty struggle to afford the necessary additional expenses for school or college. As one young person said:

'They say they are free schools, but they are not really, you have to buy all the right things, and if you can't or you don't have it then they won't let you go, so it's not really free.'
Callum

The cost of school uniform was a particular challenge highlighted by the young people we consulted, especially for those with multiple siblings and those in secondary schools:

'School uniform has got so expensive now... like the jumpers and stuff, they are not very well made and break quite easily, so I have to be careful and make them last.'
Kara

'Uniform is ridiculous. We have to wear a blazer on top of a jumper it all has to have [their school] logo, blazer costs £40, PE jumper is £30, skirt is £20.'
Rachel

The cost of school trips including educational day trips and longer visits abroad were also raised as an issue. The children who cannot afford to go on these trips miss out on the educational benefits and can feel excluded if they are left behind:

‘There was a school trip at my old school to Germany, I couldn’t go as it was so expensive.’ Nancy

‘There are trips in Year 7 and Year 9 you have to go on, if you don’t you are in isolation.’ Callum and Alison

Another issue the young people raised was the cost of stationery and other resources required to support their learning:

‘We have had to buy revision books, they are £5 each, we have bought two so far.’ Nancy

‘They don’t provide you with work books, they don’t really provide you with anything in sixth form.’ Flora

Another issue was that some of the young people we consulted with were living in poverty but were not entitled to free school meals. Our Fair and Square campaign highlights that as many as 700,000 children in poverty are currently not entitled to free school meals as their parents are working.¹² These young people found the costs of school food were an added expense:

‘The prices of food has gone up, it used to be £1.70 for food and then it was £1.90 and now its £2, then I remember in Year 7 you could get these slices of pizza for 20p and now if you want a bit of bread it’s like 80p.’ Steven

‘I would take them [free school meals] if we had them.’ Kara

Case study: Olivia

Olivia is 16 years old and lives with her parents and her older brother. Even though both her parents work, Olivia has noticed money is getting tighter.

She has just started sixth form college and finds it more expensive than school as she has to pay for more resources. She has had to use the money her granddad left her to pay for some of these things like stationery, work books and text books for revision.

Her parents used to be able to pay for Olivia to go on school trips and they used to go camping once a year. However, the family can no longer afford this.

She is looking for a job to help pay for her college costs and buy some new clothes but she can’t find anything at the moment. She feels stressed, worries about money and can feel depressed at times.

Friendships and social networks

Research with children highlights the significance of friendships for all children, but also the ways in which poverty makes it harder to make and sustain these all-important social connections. Transport and participation costs often conspire to leave children feeling excluded from many of the social and leisure experiences that their more affluent peers take for granted. Some of the things that can help deepen relationships, such as sleepovers or sharing lifts are impossible if you have very little home space, a cold or damp home, or no private transport.⁸



Clothing expectations and taking part in shared leisure activities affect children's relationships in ways that adults do not always recognise. Having the right clothes are an important badge of belonging and children often express a high degree of anxiety about maintaining their social status against the perils of being seen as different or 'poor'. Many low-income children report having been bullied at some point and this can have a marked effect on how they feel about their schools and in some cases, about themselves.⁸

These findings are similar to what we found in our interviews with children, many of whom described not being able to afford new clothes and finding it difficult to keep up with their classmates on 'mufti' (non-uniform) days:

'Mum normally deals with [clothes] as I don't have the money, I normally get hand me downs.' Flora

'If my trousers are too short then people notice and call it ankle biters, I feel self-conscious then... Mufti days can be a problem as people come in their designer clothes and then I feel bad.' Kara

The cost of leisure activities was also an issue for the children that we spoke to. Some felt they had nothing to do in their local area with their friends and some could not afford the activities that were available:

'Nothing for us kids to do!' Ben

'I do go out with my friends, go to the park, we don't pay for stuff usually, cinema, sports centre is all too expensive. We spend time at each other's houses or at the park.' Kara

'If you don't have enough money you can't do all the stuff you want. I like fishing but maggots cost £1 so in a week that costs £7.' Tom

Poverty and stigma

Children’s accounts often highlight their inner worries and fears of social difference and stigma. Experiences of poverty affect self-esteem, confidence and personal security. Children often attempt to protect their parents from the impact that the social and emotional costs of poverty has on their lives. This can take many forms, self-denial of needs and wants, moderation of demands and self-exclusion from social activities and school trips and activities. In some cases, parents may be aware of their children’s strategies and reluctantly accept them because they have few alternatives. In others, children are regulating their needs more covertly.⁸

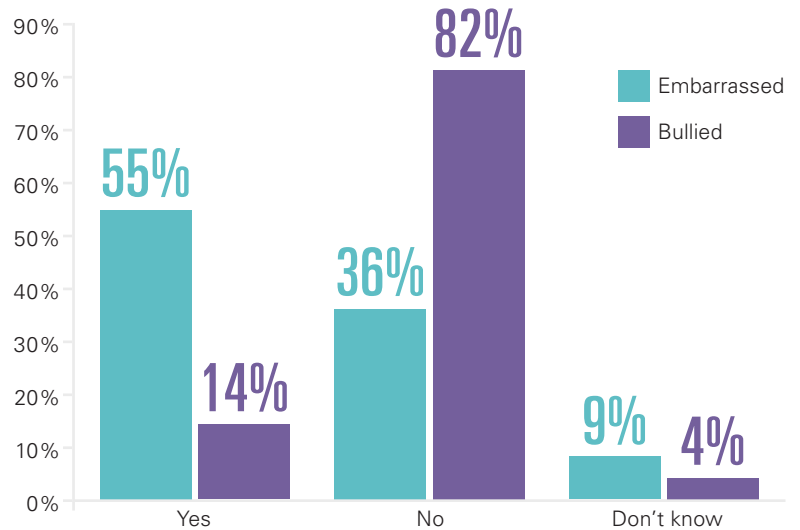
‘In my own experience, through no fault of our own, my mum and me are in a place where we wear clothes and shoes that nobody else wants (charity shops), eat the left-over food that nobody else wants (supermarket markdowns) and have people judging us because we live on benefits in a council house.’ Alice, 16, commission member

The children that we consulted with talked about feeling embarrassed about having less than others and feeling judged by their peers:

‘We are still judged on it now sometimes, some people say ‘oh it’s a council house kid’... they judge on their appearance or how clean they are. I just think maybe they are struggling or their shower is broken. It makes me feel quite angry, maybe their family hasn’t got enough to buy them clothes straight away, maybe they can’t afford the water bill.’ Kara

Figure 6: Have you ever felt embarrassed or bullied because your family doesn’t have enough money?

(responses from children who thought their family was ‘not well off at all’)



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 148

Case study: Dan, Ryan, Amy and Mark

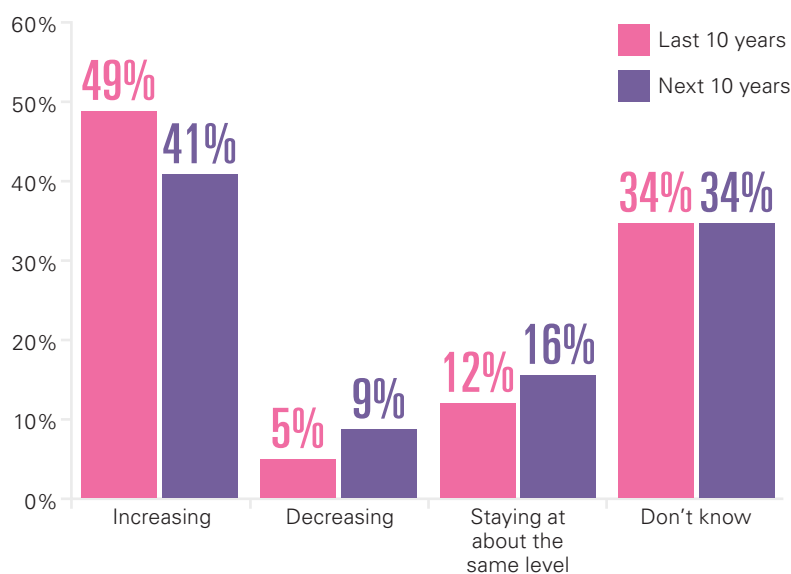
Dan, Ryan, Amy and Mark are all 18 and live in supported housing. They are living on benefits of around £110 a month. They are all finding it difficult to afford the basics including rent, electricity and other bills, food and clothes, etc. They are all concerned about managing money and are struggling with debt.

They survive by helping each other out, for example by sharing clothes and food where they can. But they have still had to use food banks when they have run out of money. The young people feel ashamed about this as they think it means they can’t look after themselves.

‘It’s stressful living by yourself... You can’t just go to your mum and dad to help you.’

‘Some people here have no one.’

Figure 7: Over the last 10 years, do you think that the proportion of children in poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing, or staying at about the same level?



Source: 2013 survey, ages 10 to 17, n = 2009

In our survey, we asked children if they had ever felt embarrassed or experienced bullying because their parents do not have enough money. Over half (55%) of the children saying that their family is 'not well off at all' said they had felt embarrassed and 14% had experienced some form of bullying.

Fears for the future

Children's hopes are low with regard to action on poverty. Large proportions of children in our survey thought that childhood poverty had been increasing over the last 10 years (49%) and would continue to increase over the next 10 years (41%).

Notably, children who told us their family were 'not well off at all' were significantly more likely both to think that childhood poverty had increased, and that it would continue to increase, compared to other children.

Economic forecasts also suggest that childhood poverty will increase over the next decade. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has projected that 800,000 more children will live in poverty in the UK by 2020 compared to 2013.¹³



3. CONCLUSION

When we discuss childhood poverty in the UK, it is too regularly without any reference to the lives of children themselves. This is a gap that we are determined the commission will fill.

This report is a stark reality check, providing an insight into the experiences of children in poverty in the UK. More than half of children who think their family is 'not well off at all' said their home was too cold last winter and a quarter said that their home had damp or mould.

These findings challenge the assumption that children are protected from a family's 'money worries'. More than three quarters of children who thought their family was badly off, said they often worried about the amount of money there is to go around in their family. The children we consulted with talked about feeling embarrassed about having less than others and described their attempts to moderate and hide this from their parents.

Although providing us with some insight, this report does not attempt to cover the range of different circumstances and experiences that children face. Children living in poverty are not all the same. Their experiences vary according to their individual circumstances, social relationships and the particular environments in which they live. Much more needs to be understood about how gender, ethnicity, disability, geography, family circumstances, and other factors affect children's experiences of poverty.

There is also much to learn about how the dynamic nature of poverty and the dynamic nature of childhood intertwine. The impact of poverty on children will be different according to the age and stage of life. Some children fluctuate in and out of poverty, while others experience poverty throughout their childhoods. Meanwhile, expectations of what is an acceptable standard of living for children are constantly changing, and so children will experience poverty differently according to the expectations of their time.

This report barely scratches the surface of children's experiences of poverty in the UK today. For this reason it is not the intention of this report to make recommendations for change in policy and practice. Instead the report demonstrates the context in which we launch The Children's Commission on Poverty and raises many issues which we believe require additional exploration and debate:

- **Many children in poverty are missing out on the basics and key experiences, for example, having to scrape by on the bare essentials for the weekly food shop or not being able to afford a holiday or buy new clothing.**
- **Some children living in poverty are living in areas they find dirty, intimidating and unsafe.**
- **A large proportion of children who say their family is 'not well off at all' are living in cold and damp homes.**

- **Travel to see friends and get to school or work can be too expensive and inaccessible for children in poverty.**
- **The costs of a so called ‘free’ education are an issue for many children living on a low income especially school uniform and school trip costs.**
- **Some children can feel embarrassed and ashamed of living in poverty and sometimes children can be called names and bullied because they are poor.**
- **A high proportion of children think that childhood poverty has increased over the last 10 years, and also that it will continue to increase in the next 10 years.**

What next?

This report provides the first comprehensive evidence to be submitted to The Children’s Commission on Poverty. By drawing on the findings of this report, through gathering evidence with children and young people across the country, and through commissioning additional research and analysis, the commission will dig deeper into the realities of life for children in poverty. This will enable the commission to develop their own conclusions based on hard evidence and make recommendations for change.

The Children’s Commission on Poverty, and the qualitative longitudinal study that will run alongside it, seeks to address gaps in our knowledge of how poverty is experienced and interpreted by children in the many different contexts in which they live. The project will place children’s voices at the heart of discussions about changes that need to be made to improve the lives of children in poverty.

The commission aims to produce a final report, bringing together all its findings and recommendations at the beginning of 2015. We also anticipate that the commission may choose to bring out one or more interim reports during 2014, possibly focusing on particular aspects of the impact of poverty on young people.

The Children’s Society will work with the commission to keep the public in general, and young people in particular, abreast of developments in their work. Together we will also provide opportunities for everyone to comment on and debate the issues being raised and considered by the commission throughout the project.

By seeing childhood poverty through young eyes, The Children’s Commission on Poverty has a chance to make a real difference to the lives of disadvantaged children across the UK.

NOTES

1. There are currently officially 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK. Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2013) Households Below Average Income 2011/2012. Figures are according to the relative low income measure, and are based on income after housing costs.
2. Equivalised to take account of household size.
3. Bradshaw, J. (2011) *The well-being of children in the United Kingdom*, Bristol: Policy Press.
4. We defined children as being ‘poor’ if they lacked 5 or more items on our 10-item index of deprivation, and ‘non-poor’ if they lacked 0 or 1 item. For more details of this index, see Main & Pople (2011) *Missing out: A child centred analysis of material deprivation and subjective well-being*, London: The Children’s Society.
5. The Children’s Society (2013) *The Good Childhood Report 2013*, London: The Children’s Society.
6. Ridge, T. (2002) *Childhood poverty and social exclusion: from a child’s perspective*. Bristol: Policy Press.
7. Ridge, T. (2009) *Living with poverty: a review of the literature on children’s and families’ experiences of poverty*. Leeds: Department for Work and Pensions.
8. Ridge, T. (2013) ‘Poverty and the experience of children’ in *The Heart of the Kingdom: Christian Theology and children who live in poverty*, London: The Children’s Society
9. A Foyer is an integrated learning and accommodation centre providing safe and secure housing, support and training for young people aged 16-25.
10. Shelter (2006) *Chance of a Lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children’s lives* http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/39202/Chance_of_a_Lifetime.pdf
11. Davis, J. & Ridge, T. (1997) *Same Scenery, Different Lifestyle*, London: The Children’s Society.
12. Currently if a single parent is working over 16 hours or a couple are working over 24 hours then their children are not entitled to free school meals, despite them being on a low income. Royston, S, Rodrigues, L and Hounsell, D (2012). *Fair and Square: A policy report on the future of free school meals*. The Children’s Society: London
13. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2013) *Child and Working-Age Poverty in Northern Ireland from 2010 to 2020 – poverty line of 60% of median income after housing costs are deducted*. www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/fair_and_square_policy_report_final.pdf

Please stay in touch, to follow the young commissioners on their journey, hear about findings and see life through young eyes.

www.childrenscommission.org.uk

Text 'See' to 81400 to join in.

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