

Child Poverty in the UK

Government figures showed over four million children in the UK were living in relative poverty in 2018. That's one in three. More than two-thirds of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person works.

Charities such as the Child Poverty Action Group and End Child Poverty have identified a number of consequences of poverty that particularly blight the lives of children. For example:

- Poor children are born too small; birth weight is on average 130g lower in children from poor families compared with children born to better-off families. Low birth weight is closely associated with chronic diseases in later life.
- Poverty often influences the educational development of children. Before reaching two years old, a child from a poorer family is more likely to show a lower level of attainment than a child from a better-off family. By the age of six, a less able child from a rich family is likely to have overtaken an able child born into a poor family in



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Poverty affects more than one in four children in the UK today. When kids grow up poor they miss out – and so do the rest of us. They miss out on the things most children take for granted: warm clothes, school trips, having friends over for tea. They do less well at school and earn less as adults. Some groups of children are particularly vulnerable to severe hardship, including homeless children, those with disabled parents, children from Pakistani and Bangladeshi households, and children from marginalised groups like asylum seekers and Gypsies/Travellers.

Child poverty is a serious problem. Hirsch (2006) points out that poverty causes material and social hardships for children, affects their educational achievement, and has lasting effects on their health and psychological development, and leaves them facing greater risks of poverty as adults. Child poverty can also generate wider social problems, such as crime and anti-social behaviour. Hirsch points out that poor children suffer because they cannot afford the everyday things that their friends take for granted. For example, they cannot afford the toys and clothes others have, creating a stigma and possible consequences like the risk of bullying and ridicule at school.

Hirsch suggests the underlying factors influencing the high levels of child poverty in the UK include:

- *Lone parenthood*: a high number of children in poverty live with lone parents, a substantial proportion of whom are not in paid employment, and many have low qualifications, weakening their position in the job market.
- *Lack of work or low pay of parents*: unless all adults in the family are working, and at least some of them full-time and in a reasonably well-paid job, the risks of a child being in poverty are substantial. Many poor children live in working households where one or both parents have low pay.
- *Disability* undermines parents' ability to find employment, and particularly well-paid work. Around one in four children living in poverty has at least one parent living in poverty.
- *The inadequate help available through the tax and benefit system.*
- *Inadequate policies supporting childcare and flexible working*, making it difficult for those parents who both work to support their children.

Child poverty facts and figures

- There were 4.1 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2017-18. That's 30 per cent of children, or nine in a classroom of 30.
- There are expected to be 5.2 million children living in poverty in the UK by 2022.
- 47% of children living in lone-parent families are in poverty. Lone parents face a higher risk of poverty due to the lack of an additional earner, low rates of maintenance payments, gender inequality in employment and pay, and childcare costs.
- Children from Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty: 45 per cent are now in poverty, compared with 26 per cent of children in White British families.
- London has the highest rate of child poverty in the country. You can see local child poverty rates on the End Child Poverty website.
- Child poverty reduced dramatically between 1998 and 2012 when 800,000 children were lifted out of poverty.
- Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. 70 per cent of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one person works.⁶
- Children in large families are at a far greater risk of living in poverty – 43 per cent of children living in families with 3 or more children live in poverty.
- Childcare and housing are two of the costs that take the biggest toll on families' budgets. When you account for childcare costs, an extra 130,000 children are pushed into poverty.
- People are poor for many reasons. But explanations which put poverty down to drug and alcohol dependency, family breakdown, poor parenting, or a culture of worklessness are not supported by the facts.
- Child poverty blights childhoods. Growing up in poverty means being cold, going hungry, not being able to join in activities with friends. For example, 61 per cent of families in the bottom income quintile would like, but cannot afford, to take their children on holiday for one week a year.
- Child poverty has long-lasting effects. By 16, children receiving free school meals achieve 1.7 grades lower at GCSE than their wealthier peers. Leaving school with fewer qualifications translates into lower earnings over the course of a working life.

Families with children - Families with children are more likely to be poor than people without children. This makes sense: costs go up with the birth of a child at the same time as family income goes down with parents cutting back on work or paying for childcare. In 2009/10, 53 per cent of those living below the poverty line had children.

Lone parents - Lone parents are more likely to experience poverty than those in a couple. In 2009/10, lone parent families were almost twice as likely to live in poverty than two parent families.

Certain ethnic minorities - Certain ethnic minorities are also more likely to live in poverty. As with people with disabilities, discrimination in the workplace clearly plays a role in depressing incomes. In 2009/10, people from ethnic minorities were 64 per cent more likely to live in poverty than average.

Workless families or households - Households where only one adult works are at a much higher risk of poverty than average. When benefits are set at too low a level they fail to act as a safety net for these families. In 2009/10, families with one or more workless parent were seven times more likely to live below the poverty line than those where both parents had jobs.

Those living in Inner London - The high costs of living and especially housing in London puts extra pressure on low income families. Families living in the capital are one and a half times more likely to live in poverty than families living outside London.





The effects of child poverty

Research has shown that family income impacts on children's lives and development in a variety of ways. Living on a low-income increases parents' stress levels, in turn affecting relationships and family dynamics. Increases in family income can boost children's educational achievements, and emotional and physical wellbeing. Parents worry about the impact poverty has on their children, particularly that they may be bullied. Children living in poverty frequently report feeling excluded and embarrassed, citing it as a 'key source of unhappiness', and worry about their parents in turn. All areas of a child's life are adversely affected by poverty: home, school, friendships and more. The most visible aspect is that they do not have what their friends have. Child poverty impacts on children's ability to enjoy their childhoods and achieve their aspiration.



Education

Children who have lived in persistent poverty during their first seven years have cognitive development scores on average 20 per cent below those of children who have never experienced poverty. Gifted children from the most deprived families begin school on a par with gifted children facing least deprivation, but their performance falls away by the age of 16. In 2015, 33 per cent of children receiving free school meals obtained five or more good GCSEs, compared with 61 per cent of other children.



Health

In the most deprived areas, boys can expect to live 19 fewer years of their lives in 'good' health, and girls 20 fewer years, than children in the least deprived areas. Children living in overcrowded inadequate housing are more likely to contract meningitis, experience respiratory difficulties and have mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. The Millennium Cohort Study shows that poor children are four times more likely to develop a mental health problems by the age of 11.



Communities

People living in poverty are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. Children from low income families often miss out on events that most of us would take for granted. They miss school trips, can't invite friends round for tea, and can't afford a one-week holiday away from home.



RECENT DOCUMENTARIES ON CHILD POVERTY IN BRITAIN:

Breadline Kids - C4 Dispatches

Over 300,000 children were given food aid in the UK in 2013. While politicians continue to argue about why so many kids are experiencing food poverty, Channel 4 Dispatches asked three children to reveal how it feels when the cupboards are sometimes bare.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJDhnuvNgEg>

Poor Kids - BBC 1

Documentary telling the stories of some of the 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK. It is one of the worst child poverty rates in the industrialised world, and successive governments continue to struggle to bring it into line.

Watch in 4 parts on youtube from part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9aSp9bFmMg>

Growing up poor – BBC3

These two documentaries follow follows six very different teenagers all on the cusp of adulthood and dealing with the pressures of growing up with one similarity – they are all surviving on under a tenner a day.

Girls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhB5Ry8YNIU&safe=active>

Boys: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy_bBVUFOZs

ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR INFORMATION ON CHILD POVERTY IN THE UK:



<http://www.barnardos.org.uk/>



<https://www.jrf.org.uk/people/child-poverty>



<http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/>



<http://poverty.ac.uk/>