

Child Poverty in the UK

Some 27% of children (3.5 million) were living in low-income families in 2013. Two-thirds (66%) 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 terms of reading, writing and mathematical ability.



Child poverty in the UK

Child poverty in the UK remains higher than in most of the other countries of the European Union. Around 27% of all children in the UK were living in poverty in 2012-13. 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 are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK today. That's 27 per cent of children, or more than one in four.
- There are even more serious concentrations of child poverty at a local level: in 100 local wards, for example, between 50 and 70 per cent of children are growing up in poverty.
- Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one member works.
- 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.
- Child poverty imposes costs on broader society – estimated to be at least £29 billion a year. Governments forgo prospective revenues as well as commit themselves to providing services in the future if they fail to address child poverty in the here and now.
- Child poverty reduced dramatically between 1998/9-2011/12 when 1.1 million children were lifted out of poverty (BHC). This reduction is credited in large part to measures that increased the levels of lone parents working, as well as real and often significant increases in the level of benefits paid to families with children.
- Under current government policies, child poverty is projected to rise from 2012/13 with an expected 600,000 more children living in poverty by 2015/16. This upward trend is expected to continue with 4.7 million children projected to be living in poverty by 2020.

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. In 2009/10, families living in the capital were one and a half times more likely to live in poverty than families living outside London.





The impact of poverty

Poverty damages. It damages childhoods; it damages life chances; and it damages us all in society.

In 2013 a report estimated that child poverty costs the UK at least £29 billion each year.¹ Of this £20.5 billion is a direct cost to government resulting from additional demand on services and benefits, as well as reduced tax receipts.



Education

- Children from poorer backgrounds lag at all stages of education.
- By the age of three, poorer children are estimated to be, on average, nine months behind children from more wealthy backgrounds.
- According to Department for Education statistics, by the end of primary school, pupils receiving free school meals are estimated to be almost three terms behind their more affluent peers.²
- By 14, this gap grows to over five terms.
- By 16, children receiving free school meals achieve 1.7 grades lower at GCSE.



Health

- Poverty is also associated with a higher risk of both illness and premature death.³
- Children born in the poorest areas of the UK weigh, on average, 200 grams less at birth than those born in the richest areas.
- Children from low income families are more likely to die at birth or in infancy than children born into richer families.
- They are more likely to suffer chronic illness during childhood or to have a disability.
- Poorer health over the course of a lifetime has an impact on life expectancy: professionals live, on average, 8 years longer than unskilled workers.



Communities

- Children living in poverty are almost twice as likely to live in bad housing. This has significant effects on both their physical and mental health, as well as educational achievement.⁴
- Fuel poverty also affects children detrimentally as they grow up. A recent report showed the fuel gap has increased from was £256 in 2004 to £402 in 2009, and that low income families do sometimes have to make a choice between food and heating.⁵
- Children from low income families often forgo 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.
- While studies show that there are more play areas in deprived areas, their quality is generally poorer. Vandalism, playground misuse and danger of injury all act as deterrents to using what otherwise might be good facilities.⁶



Child poverty's consequences are wide-ranging and long-lasting. Children from low-income families are less likely to do well in school, and more likely to suffer ill-health and to face pressures in their lives that help to explain an association with anti-social behaviours and criminality.

These consequences cost society: in the money that government spends in trying to counter the effects of child poverty, and in the economic costs of children failing to reach their potential.

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

Last summer's 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/>