



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Public Views on Child Poverty: Results from the first polling undertaken as part of the Measuring Child Poverty consultation

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Introduction

For many years the principal measure of child poverty has been based on relative income¹. In times of recession the relative poverty line tends to fall. Between 2009-10 and 2010-11, 300,000 children moved out of relative poverty largely due to reductions in median incomes. At the same time absolute poverty² remained unchanged, implying that the living standards of children did not improve over this period.

Following the publication of the most recent child poverty statistics in June 2012³, the Government set out its intention to run a consultation to identify better measures of child poverty. This consultation started 15 November 2012 and ends 15 February 2013.

The consultation proposes that new measures of child poverty should be developed which would provide a better understanding of the real experience of child poverty in the United Kingdom.

In the consultation document⁴ it was clearly stated that a key criteria for a new child poverty measure is that it should be widely accepted by the public as being a fair representation of those children growing up in poverty. As part of the wider consultation, a survey has been undertaken to get an informed understanding of the views of the public. The first of these took place in December and the results of this first survey are reported here. This initial survey asked a single question where the respondents were asked what they thought was important in deciding whether someone was growing up in child poverty.

Methodology

In the first round of polling a single question with the potential for multiple responses was added to the NOP GfK Omnibus Survey⁵. The polling took

¹ On the relative income measure a child is considered to be living in poverty if they live in a household with income below 60 per cent of equivalised median household income.

² On the absolute poverty measure a child is considered to be living in poverty if they live in a household with income below 60 per cent of equivalised 1998/99 median household income held constant in real terms

³ Department of Work and Pensions (2012) *Households Below Average income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994/5 – 2010/11*. http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2011/pdf_files/full_hbai12.pdf

⁴ Department of Work and Pensions (2012) *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/m/measuring%20child%20poverty%20consultation%20document%20final.pdf>

⁵ The survey sample is designed to be representative of all adults in telephone owning households in the UK. Interviewing is carried out using fully trained and supervised market research interviewers using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Respondents are selected using random digit dialling. Quotas are set in terms of region, sex within age and class. The data is weighted to bring it into line with national population profiles.

place by telephone between 7 and 10 December 2012 with responses recorded from 967 adults. The survey was representative and covered the United Kingdom.

The question asked was:

“Could you please tell me how important you think each of the following are when deciding whether someone is growing up in poverty:

- A child having parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol
- A child living in a home that is damp or cold
- A child having to care for a parent
- A child’s family not having enough income
- A child living in a local area which is not safe
- A child growing up in household with unmanageable debts
- A child growing up in a household where no one works
- A child experiencing family breakdown
- A child going to a failing school
- A child whose parents lack qualifications and skills for employment
- A child living in an area that is isolated from services like shops, GPs or public transport
- A child growing up in a household with no savings or assets”

The question order was randomised in the survey.

Results

Table 1. shows the results of the survey. The respondents were allowed four possible answers that rated how important they thought the situation to be in deciding whether someone is growing up in child poverty. These were: very important, important, quite important or not important along with don’t know.

The situations are ordered by the sum of the very important and important categories.

Table 1. Factors reported as important in determining child poverty (per cent)⁶

	Very important	Important	Quite important	Not important	Don't know		Very important/important
A child having parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol	74	16	7	2	1		90
A child living in a home that is damp or cold ⁷	55	26	15	3	*		81
A child having to care for a parent	57	24	15	3	1		80
A child's family not having enough income	53	26	15	4	1		79
A child living in a local area which is not safe	50	25	18	6	1		75
A child growing up in household with unmanageable debts	49	25	19	5	1		75
A child growing up in a household where no one works	48	21	19	10	2		69
A child experiencing family breakdown	40	28	20	10	1		68
A child going to a failing school	36	28	19	16	1		64
A child whose parents lack qualifications and skills for employment?	26	28	24	21	2		53
A child living in an area that is isolated from services like shops, GPs or public transport	23	27	23	26	1		50
A child growing up in a household with no savings or assets	24	25	24	26	1		49

⁶ Not all the rows add up to 100 due to rounding.

⁷ There were too few don't know responses to record.

The results are consistent with the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey which included a similar question asking the respondents to consider the reasons for child poverty⁸. In that survey similar reasons came out as being important with parental alcohol and drug addiction being considered the main reason.

Next Steps

Further responses on views on child poverty measurement will be received as part of the wider consultation to 15th February. A second wave of public polling will take place before the consultation closes.

⁸ [NatCen | Study | British Social Attitudes 28th Report](#)