

# **Economic, social and material deprivation of children in the UK - from a child's perspective**

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# What do we know from UK children about poverty?

- Poverty permeates every area of children's lives:
  - At home, in neighbourhoods, at school, and in towns and cities
- It affects children in many different ways:
  - Economic and material
  - Social relationships and participation
  - Homes and neighbourhoods
  - Schools
  - Family life
  - Personal well-being

## Economic and material deprivation

- Anxiety about family well-being and adequacy of household income
  - Concerns about debt
  - Lack of experience of handling money eg pocket money
  - Early employment to gain access to money
- Lacking material goods
  - Basic goods like food, towels, bedding, heating
  - Childhood goods: toys, clothing, bicycles and games
  - Transport

## Social deprivation

- Social aspects of poverty are very important for children
- Making and sustaining friendships vital
  - Friendships and social networks
  - Bullying
- Childhood increasingly commodified
- Participation severely compromised for low-income children
  - Access/ cost/ transport/materials and equipment
- Fitting in and joining in

*'You can't do as much and I don't like my clothes and that. So I don't really get to do much or do stuff like my friends are doing... I'm worried about what people think of me, like they think I am sad or something'*

*(Nicole in Ridge, 2010)*

## Deprivation at school

- School as a social environment
- Institutional processes
- Economic barriers
- Stigma
- School trips and outings
- Relationships with teachers and peers

*'I don't usually go on trips "cos they are expensive and that...At our school they do loads of activities and they go to loads of different places...I don't bother asking'*

*(Martin in Ridge, 2010)*

## Neighbourhood deprivation

- Degraded and unsafe environments
  - Lack of safe space for play and affordable activities
- Children are at risk from among others:
  - aggressive adults/other children and gangs/traffic
- Rural children also lack social opportunities
  - Transport inadequate and costly
  - Lack of affordable shared peers group opportunities
  - Children feel contained and visible within their rural neighbourhoods

## Housing and homelessness

- Poor quality housing and temporary accommodation have a deep impact on children's lives
  - Health and sleep
  - Social relationships and friendships
  - Play and participation
  - School work and study
  - Privacy and reciprocity
- Homelessness had a significant impact on children's everyday lives at a social and personal level. With particularly high costs for their health and wellbeing, their education and their social relationships.

## Family life and personal well-being

- Children express concerns about family well-being
  - Income adequacy, debt, parental employment and health
- Support and care but also sometimes tension and stress
- Children moderate needs and manage expectations
- They contribute to the household in cash and kind
  - Additional responsibilities, caring, housework, paid work
- Personal and more hidden aspects of poverty
  - Shame and sadness
  - Anxiety and uncertainty about their futures
  - Fear of bullying
  - And the fear of stigma and difference

*'Well I don't like asking Mum for money that much so I try not to. Just don't really ask about it...It's not that I'm scared it's just that I feel bad for wanting it. I don't know, sounds stupid, but, like sometimes I save up my school dinner money and I don't eat at school and then I can save it up and have more money. Don't tell her that!'*

*(Courtney in Ridge 2010)*

## Final thoughts

Children who experience poverty are not a homogenous group

- Different factors lead to poverty and marginalisation
- Age, gender, health and disability are factors
- Ethnicity and culture are important
- Time and timing can be significant

They are not passive victims of poverty many employ coping strategies

- Taking work, caring and moderating needs

Children are active social agents but their lives are heavily constrained by the economic and social restrictions and demands of poverty

## References

- Ridge, T (2009) *Living with Poverty: A Review of the Literature on Children's and Families' Experiences of Poverty*. Research Report No 594, Department for Work and Pensions, HMSO: Norwich
- Ridge, T. (2002) *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a Child's Perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press.