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
