



The Impoverishment of the UK

In the UK today:

- Over 30 million people (almost half the population) are suffering some degree of financial insecurity.
- Almost 18 million people cannot afford adequate housing conditions.
- Roughly 14 million cannot afford one or more essential household goods.
- Almost 12 million people are too poor to engage in common social activities considered necessary by the majority of the population.
- About 5.5 million adults go without essential clothing.
- Around 4 million children and adults are not properly fed by today's standards.
- Almost 4 million children go without at least two of the things they need.
- Around 2.5 million children live in homes that are damp.
- Around 1.5 million children live in households that cannot afford to heat their home.

These are just some of the stark findings of the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Project, published today in its first report '*The Impoverishment of the UK*'. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, this is the largest and most authoritative study of poverty and deprivation ever conducted in the UK.

The PSE approach – now adopted by the UK Government and by a growing number of rich and developing countries - identifies people falling below a publicly-determined minimum standard of living. This method of measuring poverty was pioneered in 1983 and repeated in studies in 1990, 1999, 2002/03 and 2012. The project thus provides detailed, robust and definitive trends over 30 years.

'The results present a remarkably bleak portrait of life in the UK today and the shrinking opportunities faced by the bottom third of UK society. About one third of people in the UK suffer significant difficulties and about a quarter have an unacceptably low standard of living' said Professor David Gordon of the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research in Bristol – and head of the project. *'Moreover this bleak situation will get worse as benefit levels fall in real term, real wages continue to decline and living standards are further squeezed.'*

Today 33% of the UK population suffers from multiple deprivation by the standards set by the public.

It was 14 % in 1983.

For a significant and growing proportion of the population, living conditions and opportunities have been going backwards. Housing and heating conditions, in particular, have deteriorated rapidly.

- One in three people could not afford to adequately heat their homes last winter and 29% had to turn the heating down or off or only heat part of their homes. The number of households unable to heat the living areas of their homes is at a record high – now 9% compared to 3% in the 1990s and 5% in 1983.
- Overcrowding is as high as it was in 1983: today 9% of households cannot afford enough bedrooms for every child aged 10 or over of a different sex to have their own bedroom (back up from 3% in 1999).
- The number of households unable to afford damp-free homes has also risen since 1983 – from 6% to 10%.
- One in five households can't keep their home in an adequate state of decoration – up from 15% in the 1990s.
- Overall, across all these aspects of housing, around 13 million people (aged 16 and over) in Britain cannot afford adequate housing conditions, up from 9.5 million in 1999

Increasing numbers of children also lack items considered essential for a stimulating environment and for social participation and development.

- The proportion of school age children unable to go on school trips at least once a term has risen from 2% in 1999 to 8% today.

'Levels of deprivation today are worse in a number of vital areas – from basic housing to key social activities - than at any point in the past thirty years', added Joanna Mack from The Open University, who, with Stewart Lansley, devised the study method in 1983. 'These trends are a deeply shocking indictment of 30 years of economic and social policy and reflect a rapid growth in inequality. This has meant that, though the economy has doubled in size during this period, those at the bottom have been increasingly left behind.'

There is widespread public agreement on what constitutes a minimally acceptable diet. Over 90% agree that, for children, this means: three meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day.

- Yet well over half a million children live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly.

*'I go without for the children so they have proper meals.
I can live on one meal a day.'* Jennie, single parent of 3 children

Our research shows that, in households where children go without one or more of these basic food necessities:

- In 93% at least one adult skimp on their own food 'sometimes' or 'often' to ensure others have enough to eat.

'It is not as a result of negligence but due to a lack of money that so many children are going without adequate food', comments Professor David Gordon.

In the study overall, more than one in four adults (28%) have skimped on their own food in the past year so that others in the household may eat.

'As soon as the rent is paid, council tax is paid, I'm left with little to nothing to survive on. You have to scrimp and buy little bits here, little bits there,' Renée, low paid worker

Significant proportions of the population find it difficult to cope on their current incomes:

- One in four adults have incomes below what they consider is needed to avoid poverty
- More than one in five have had to borrow in the last year to pay for day to day needs
- One in three can't afford to save
- One in four can't afford to replace or repair broken electrical goods (12% in 1999).

Overall, people feel poorer:

- More than one in three adults today say they genuinely feel poor some or all of the time compared to 27% in 1999

The first results from this study will be broadcast on ITV at 7.30pm on Thursday, March 28th in a special Tonight programme on 'Breadline Britain'.

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SURVEY DETAILS: The PSE study is based on two surveys conducted in 2012. The 'Necessities of Life' survey was carried out between May and June 2012 and is based on a sample of 1,447 adults aged 16 or over in the Britain and 1,015 in Northern Ireland. The living standards survey interviewed 5,193 households (4,205 in Britain and 988 in Northern Ireland) comprising 12,097 people (9,786 in Britain and 2,311 in Northern Ireland).

The full Living Standards questionnaire can be [downloaded](#) from the PSE website: www.poverty.ac.uk.

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