

This chapter gives an overall descriptive account of methods of research<sup>1</sup> and ends with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of surveys.

Our first practical object was to estimate the numbers in the population at different levels of living, particularly the numbers living in poverty or on the margins of poverty. Our second was to find what are the characteristics and problems of those in poverty and thus contribute to the development of an explanation for poverty.

Four phases of work were planned: special pilot research into certain minority groups who had not been studied intensively hitherto; preparatory and pilot work on the main survey, the main survey itself and follow-up surveys in poor areas of four parliamentary constituencies: Salford, Neath, Glasgow and Belfast. The pilot research which was carried out between 1965 and 1968 helped to sharpen methods of measuring unemployment and sub-employment, disability and sickness, and styles of living, including amenities at home and in the locality.<sup>2</sup> An international conference was held at the University of Essex in 1967, centring on methods of poverty research.<sup>3</sup> During the autumn of 1967 a questionnaire running to 120 pages, which was planned for the main survey, was applied to 150 households scattered in and around London. The main survey was then launched and ran for twelve months during 1968-9 in each of fifty-one constituencies in the United Kingdom. The fieldwork was completed in the early weeks of 1969. During the same period, four local surveys of a parallel nature were carried out in Salford, Glasgow, Belfast and Neath over a much shorter span, in two waves of a few weeks each in Salford and Glasgow and one wave in Belfast and Neath. Data were successfully collected for 2,052 households and 6,098 individuals in the United Kingdom survey, and for

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix One for further details.

<sup>2</sup> See Marsden, D., *Mothers Alone*, Allen Lane, London, 1969; Land, H., *Large Families in London*, Bell, London, 1969; Sinfield, R. A., 'Unemployed in Shields' (unpublished mimeographed report).

<sup>3</sup> Several members of the team on the research project, Brian Abel-Smith, Christopher Bagley, Adrian Sinfield, Dennis Marsden and Peter Townsend, contributed papers which were later published in Townsend, P. (ed.), *The Concept of Poverty*, Heinemann, London, 1970.

1,208 households and 3,950 individuals in the four local surveys. In total, therefore, there are data, mostly of a very elaborate kind, for 3,260 households and 10,048 individuals.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire (Appendix Ten) runs to thirty-nine pages and comprises nine sections on housing and living facilities, employment, occupational facilities and fringe benefits, cash income, assets and savings, health and disability, social services, private income in kind and style of living. The commentary (Appendix Nine) explains the relationship of its design, section by section, to the purposes of the research. This design attempts to fulfil three basic conditions: (a) that information on the resources received by all individuals in the household should be reasonably comprehensive; (b) that information on styles of living and individual and family characteristics should be detailed; and (c) that the situation and diverse living conditions of social minorities, as well as of 'ordinary' families, should be properly allowed for. Housewives cannot always give reliable information about earnings, and few of them can give reliable information about the working conditions and fringe benefits of other members of the household. We also wanted to ask questions about attitudes to employment. The questionnaire was therefore designed to allow answers from individual income recipients as well as on behalf of the household as a whole. Again, the circumstances of the poor have to be described in the context of exact knowledge about the condition and living standards of other sections of the population, but these circumstances are very diverse and sometimes exceptional. Special methods are necessary to ensure that they can be accommodated in a standard questionnaire.

There are therefore a number of features of the questionnaire which are experimental. One of these is the time-span covered by a range of questions on cash income. The concept of 'normal' income seems to us to be very unsatisfactory for measuring poverty and in some respects also for measuring income. In the Family Expenditure Survey, for example, each employee gives the figure of his most recent pay and is then asked if this is the usual amount. If he says it is not, he is then asked to give an estimate of the usual amount. It seems unlikely that proper account can be taken of earnings which, perhaps because of variations in overtime, regularly fluctuate. Moreover, a man whose earnings have fluctuated and who has just received an increase in pay may say that his latest earnings are his 'usual' earnings, more because that is what he now expects to receive than because that is what he has received in the recent past. Difficulties arise especially when employees have become self-employed or vice versa, or have changed from part-time to full-time work, and when retired or non-employed people have been at work recently. There are other problems. People who are not employed at the time of the survey, and may be temporarily sick or unemployed, are categorized in terms of the earnings last

received.

As the method is applied it is also inconsistent. The difficulties of obtaining earnings for the self-employed are such that they 'relate to the most recent period of 12 months for which information is obtainable'.<sup>1</sup> Income from investments and property relates to the twelve months preceding the interview and, 'Information on occasional bonuses paid during the last 12 months is also obtained in order to improve the informant's personal estimate of his normal earnings.' Yet legacies, payments of life assurance, gambling winnings, sale of houses, Premium Savings Bond prizes, sale of National Savings certificates and sales of stocks and shares and other assets are 'ignored'. As W. F. F. Kemsley comments wistfully, 'Since income is a flow variable it would be convenient to collect the data on earnings and other income as relating to a specific time period, and this would take care of changes in situation.'<sup>2</sup>

It would be absurd to pretend that the difficulties can all be met in a revised approach. The methods adopted in the Family Expenditure Survey and elsewhere are reputable and thorough. But the attempt both to establish last week's income and last year's income, as described and discussed in detail in Chapter 5, seems to avoid the difficulties of the ambiguous compromise which 'normal' income represents. The concept of 'normal' income tends to misrepresent the actual distribution of incomes, both at any single point in time and as averaged over a lengthy time-span. Inequalities are made to seem smaller than they in fact are. This is because wage-earners are more liable to experience temporary unemployment and sickness than salaried earners, and when they do, to receive relatively smaller incomes. Moreover, it is difficult to justify the averaging of occasional bonuses in 'normal' income and not, for example, the 'profit' from purchase and sales of stocks and shares, especially over periods shorter than a year. By distinguishing between current (last week's or last month's) income and income in the last year it is easier to identify households and individuals whose living standards are unstable, some of whom experience short-term or long-term poverty. These conceptual and operational problems become even harder to resolve during periods of high rates of inflation. Many people draw much higher earnings in later months than in earlier months of the year, and none the less cannot be counted among those whose earnings vary for structural reasons. In 1968-9 we ignored inflationary trends. During the twelve months of the fieldwork, earnings increased by 7.5 per cent and retail prices by 5.4 per cent.

Our attempt to trace income over a twelve-month period meant that certain social variables had to be traced for this period too. The questionnaire incorporates an employment record for each individual - showing the hours and weeks of work and the periods off work for reasons of unemployment, sickness, holidays and other

<sup>1</sup> Kemsley, W. F. F., *Family Expenditure Survey: Handbook on the Sample, Fieldwork and Coding Procedures*, HMSO, London, 1969, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 47-9.

reasons for both the self-employed and employed, including casual and seasonal workers.

The section on occupational facilities and fringe benefits probes the nature and adequacy of the working environment and whether or not industrial welfare benefits are a substantial supplement to earnings for many employees. A large part of adult life is passed at places of work, and we were concerned to find to what extent people experience bad working conditions as well as poor home conditions, and to what extent both are related to low earnings and, more comprehensively, to poverty of resources. A measure of working conditions was tentatively devised. For people working wholly or mainly indoors, ten items were covered: sufficient heating to be warm at work in winter; tea or coffee (whether charged or not); indoor flush W C; facilities for washing and changing, including hot water, soap, towel and mirror; place to buy lunch or eat own sandwiches (whether used or not); place to keep coat and spare set of clothes without risk of loss; place for small personal articles which can be locked; first-aid box or facilities; possibility of making and receiving at least one personal telephone call per day; and lighting which the individual can increase or reduce when necessary (e.g. light over work). Working conditions vary, and any index like this which is used for purposes of comparison should, where possible, be supplemented with accounts of individual firms, industries and groups of industries.

There was a corresponding group of questions about facilities in the home, and also questions about the environment, such as play facilities for children. In addition to measures of overcrowding, inequality in numbers of rooms and possession of a range of basic facilities, such as bath, WC and electricity, there was a measure of household durables or facilities which covers ten items: television, record player, radio, refrigerator, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, telephone, central heating, armchairs, easy chairs or settees for every member of the family plus one visitor, and carpet covering all or nearly all the floor in the main sitting room.

Very few studies of assets have ever been carried out in the United Kingdom. When H. F. Lydall came to report his 1952 survey in 1955, he pointed out that it provided the first detailed study of the distribution of personal liquid asset holdings. 'This is a subject which has been hitherto an almost completely closed book. With the exception of an inquiry undertaken on behalf of the National Savings Committee in 1948, the results of which relate only to national savings, no attempt has been made to discover the distribution of liquid asset holdings amongst persons.'<sup>1</sup> The general section on assets included in our questionnaire attempts to cover the subject more comprehensively than did Lydall. Two concepts were developed of readily and non-readily realizable assets. The former include savings, stocks and shares and money owed. The latter include the value of house, car, other property, including housing, business, farm or professional practice, and personal possessions such as

<sup>1</sup> Lydall, H. F., *British Incomes and Savings*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1955, pp. 1-2.

jewellery, silver and antiques. The purpose of distinguishing between the two is to call attention to the fact that although some assets can be cashed at short notice, and indeed are often cashed for a special purpose or as a method of raising income when families enter periods of difficulty, other assets take a long time to cash and are sometimes looked on socially and psychologically as unexpendable. The distinction is, of course, not very sharp. Some people acquire paintings and jewellery and turn them into cash without compunction. Others pawn their more precious possessions when in trouble. But without asking questions about each type of asset it would be difficult to develop a rigorous classification on empirical grounds rather than arbitrary judgement. Our division follows previous practice in the sense that readily realizable assets are those referred to as 'liquid assets' by economists. Our data can be compared with those in other studies, as for example Lydall's.<sup>1</sup>

Efforts to collect data on non-readily realizable assets have perhaps been inhibited in the past by the difficulty of making valuations. The current values of houses, businesses and cars are sometimes difficult to estimate, and in any survey reasonable procedures to cope with diverse types of information have to be worked out. In the case of owner-occupied housing, for example, we invited the owner to give a valuation. We also asked the interviewer to do likewise and to give any reasons if his figure differed from the owner's. As a third ingredient of information, we asked what was the insured value of the house. In editing, we adopted the informant's estimate if (as in the vast majority of cases) it differed by £500 or less from the interviewer's estimate. If the estimates differed by more, we took into account the area, age of house, facilities (as given in Section 1 of the questionnaire) and the insured value of the house, as well as any information given by the interviewer, in choosing an estimate. In the case of cars, valuation was easier. The owner was asked to estimate a value and if there was any doubt he was asked the make, type and year of manufacture. In editing we consulted standard price lists for second-hand cars.

In valuing net assets, we had to estimate debts. On the one hand, the total figure for readily realizable assets, including savings, stocks and shares and money owed to the informant, might be reduced by the figure representing overdrafts or loans, rent owed, hire-purchase debt and personal debt to arrive at a realistic figure of 'net' liquidity. Information about assets before and after deducting debts might then be given. On the other hand, the figures for non-readily realizable assets might be thought to represent useful data only if debt is subtracted. Some young married couples, for example, may have a car and a house worth £6,000 and yet, because they have only just started to repay substantial loans, their 'real' assets may be calculated as less than £500. The debt on a car, which is generally being paid off through a hire-purchase agreement, can be estimated with a high degree of accuracy.

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of 'personal holdings of liquid assets' in Lydall, *British Incomes and Savings*, pp. 11-14 and 61-104.

The debt on a house is more difficult to estimate. We developed rather elaborate interviewing and editing procedures in an attempt to estimate the debt, exclusive of interest, on a house and deduct the figure from the estimated value of the house. The value of mortgage outstanding had to be worked out on the basis of the term of the mortgage, the number of years still to pay and how much of each monthly payment represented interest and how much represented capital repayments.

In addition to fairly well-tested operational definitions of cash income and assets, the questionnaire incorporated more experimental definitions of private income in kind, fringe benefits and value of free and subsidized social services. Previous experience showed that income in kind is invariably underestimated. We believed that this was because questions are too general and undirected and that if social relationships and exchanges could be explored in a specific and not a general fashion fuller information would materialize. The prospect of adding even more to an already extensive questionnaire deterred us from developing this principle as far as we would have wished. But some attempt was made to obtain information about the kind of personal services, especially from relatives, upon which the household depended, and to check on gifts given as well as received in the context of what was said about the most frequent contacts with relatives.

The value of social service subsidies was explored in a series of questions about benefits received during the previous twelve months - including overnight stays in hospital, consultations with GPs, receipt of free school meals and milk, receipt of cheap welfare milk, schools and colleges attended.

The final section of the questionnaire contains a number of indicators of style of living and explores the attitudes of housewives and chief wage-earners towards poverty and changes in living standards. The intention is to relate resource levels both to behaviour and attitudes, and to find how closely subjective deprivation corresponds with objective deprivation.

One further comment about resources needs to be made. In aiming to arrive at a comprehensive, and reasonably consistent, valuation of the resources or living standards of each household and income unit we were aware from the beginning of the problem of collecting a wide range of data on debts as well as assets and incomes. But the problem of adding up the results made us increasingly aware as time went on of the problem of the *meaning* of different types of resources to various sections of the population. The social and political significance and use of economic resources deserves to attract greater attention from social scientists than it has since 1945.

### **Sampling**

Our desire to examine conditions in considerable detail in a few poor areas, as well as nationally, together with the fact that our resources were not unlimited,

determined the size of the national survey which we could undertake. It was obviously desirable that methods should be adopted to improve the chances of the sample being representative of all income groups in the population, and therefore provide a reliable basis for measuring poverty. Acting on statistical advice<sup>1</sup> we decided to use a multi-stage stratified design in order to draw a random sample of addresses which was likely to yield successful interviews with about 2,000 households.<sup>2</sup> Every household had an equal probability of selection. The sample was drawn from the 630 parliamentary constituencies of the United Kingdom, which were divided into ten regions and grouped into three strata: high income, middle income and low income. The best criterion available for this purpose was found to be the percentage of the electorate who voted Left. For example, we found that this percentage correlated with the percentage of the population who were in industry compared with other occupations; were semi-skilled and unskilled; had left school at 15 years of age or under; lacked exclusive use of a bath in the household; were overcrowded and had relatively low retail turnover. Urban constituencies, accounting for 80 per cent of the population, were grouped into three according to this voting criterion, but rural constituencies were not grouped in this way, partly because they are diverse, include a number of urban districts, and do not display such a strong link between voting behaviour and socio-economic characteristics as urban constituencies, but also because it seemed unnecessary, in view of the fact that they represent only about 20 per cent of the population. Using this sampling frame, fifty-one constituencies were selected.

At the next stage, within these fifty-one constituencies, we adopted a further method of improving the likely representativeness of the sample. Certain wards had to be selected so that interviewing could be undertaken, and it is well known that in some constituencies some wards contain poorer people than others. How could this variation be controlled in the selection of addresses? We needed a criterion by which to divide wards into groups so that addresses could be sampled representatively within these groups. Research into census data showed that the best criterion was the proportion of the population aged 25 and over who had left school at 15 or under. Using census data, percentages were worked out for every ward and county electoral division or group of parishes. Where the percentages varied widely within constituencies, the wards were grouped into two strata and within each stratum

<sup>1</sup> Professor Durbin and Professor Stuart of the London School of Economics acted as consultants and were responsible in particular for the proposal to stratify areas according to voting behaviour.

<sup>2</sup> This number is generally regarded as being about the minimum for purposes of obtaining data which can be regarded as being nationally representative. A survey covering the United States population, for example, was based on a sample of 2,504 households (although there was also a supplementary sample of 296 low income households obtained from the 1960 Survey of Consumer Finances). Morgan, J. N., Martin, D. M., Cohen, W., and Brazer, H. E., *Income and Welfare in the United States*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1962, pp. 449-50.

ranked in descending order of size of population. If the percentages varied little, the wards were treated as a single stratum. A ward or county electoral division was chosen for each stratum of each constituency with probability proportional to size.

Finally, there was the problem of obtaining a full list of addresses from which to sample. The electoral register is normally used for sampling but does not provide a perfect frame of addresses. It tends to become out of date. Even if the sample can be drawn soon after publication of the register, a few months elapse between the compilation of the list and publication. Very new dwellings, dwellings which have been newly converted into two or three parts, and some dwellings occupied by households for only part of the year, as well as some in which households may have failed to make returns of information and have also escaped the careful checks made by registration officers, will not be included in the lists. Dwellings in which people live, none of whom are eligible to vote, are also not included. Gipsies and caravan-dwellers tend to be under-represented in the registers. The total deficiency at any point of time is unknown. Since we had grounds for supposing that people with low incomes were more likely to move frequently and less likely to make returns of information than others, we took the view that if the survey of poverty was to be reliable, exceptional steps should be taken to ensure that itinerants, whether rich or poor, were included in the sampling frame. The Home Secretary gave his permission for us to approach electoral registration officers for access to their records, which usually included 'partly built' as well as 'empty' addresses. In the event, we depended mostly on these basic records, but also, in some constituencies, on rating records. Our sample of addresses was laborious to compile, but certainly more comprehensive and up to date than would otherwise have been possible.

Samples were also drawn from four poor areas. We aimed to select four compact areas which could legitimately be regarded as being among the poorest in the country. For convenience of interviewing, we started with the fifty-one constituencies already chosen for the national survey and picked four, using criteria indicating that the proportion of low-income households would be well above the national average, but also giving a 'spread' geographically and in nature of the problems of poor areas. Within these four constituencies we obtained information from the census and the local councils about wards. Using criteria such as the percentage of adults leaving school at 15 years of age or younger, the percentage of children getting free school meals and average rateable value of dwellings, we selected the poorest wards of these poor constituencies from which to draw samples of addresses.

Because novel and rather elaborate methods of sampling were adopted, a full account is given in Appendix One of the procedures followed.

## Interviewing

In the year before the national survey was launched, we endeavoured to commission, or develop, a research organization capable of handling a questionnaire of the demanding and complex kind which we had adopted. Other than the Government Social Survey, no research organizations in the United Kingdom had had experience, up to that time at least, of handling such detailed inquiries about incomes. Moreover, the survey methods of research organizations had been designed for surveys of the general population rather than of minority groups, and this affected design of questionnaires and field organization, and even attitudes of interviewers. Surveys which seek to establish the behaviour and attitudes of the great majority of the population can clearly be conducted according to simpler principles than surveys which seek reliable information about a variety of different minority groups.

The Government Social Survey was at that time under considerable pressure to expand its work for government departments and could not undertake fieldwork on our behalf. Instead, we developed our own organization. In the event this proved to be a more herculean task than we had anticipated. National and regional organization of a highly developed kind is required to handle interviewing based on separately issued samples for each quarter of the year for fifty-one separate constituencies, and this is difficult, and expensive, to build up from scratch for a single survey. This lay behind the organization of a very elaborate pilot survey in the late summer and autumn of 1967, and the holding of a succession of unusually lengthy briefing conferences nationally in London and regionally in places such as Belfast, Manchester and Glasgow for the interviewers.<sup>1</sup>

Ideally we would have wished to employ the smallest possible number of interviewers, in order to maintain uniformly high standards of interviewing and a high response rate. In practice, over four fifths of the interviews were carried out by a group of about twenty-five interviewers, upon whom we depended throughout the twelve months. But there was considerable turnover among other interviewers, partly because, though often experienced in survey work, they found the interviewing protracted, uncongenial or difficult. There were also problems administratively of fitting occasional and part-time interviewers into our quarterly schedules, when they were employed part-time or full-time by other research agencies. Many of our difficulties arose because of a shortage of really skilled interviewers in the more remote parts of the country. The fact that interviewing was carried out in each of the constituencies in all four quarters of the year added to these problems and increased costs. We came to the rueful conclusion that, while

<sup>1</sup> The pilot questionnaire covered 140 duplicated pages, and considerable study and training was involved in reaching the point at which interviewers could confidently use the final questionnaire. An interviewer was also normally expected to complete three trial interviews with the final questionnaire before he began work in the survey.

our response rate was high, it would have been significantly higher if the interviewing had been concentrated in one period of the year, or concentrated for groups of the fifty-one constituencies in different periods of the year, in a kind of 'roving' programme, utilizing a small team of interviewers, who could go from one remote area to the next, as well as local interviewers.

A chief fieldwork organizer and a deputy organizer were based on London, and regional organizers were also appointed. These included some of the most highly skilled and experienced interviewers in survey work in the country, and if they had not been so devoted in giving up their spare time to training new interviewers and trudging to remote addresses, the survey would have failed. Among their duties was that of attempting to persuade householders who had initially refused to give an interview to do so. This improved the response rate by 3 or 4 per cent, and we concluded that if our resources had been greater in certain areas we could have improved it by a lot more.

Interviewers were instructed to interview the housewife and all wage-earners (and other income recipients) in the household. An average of two people was interviewed in each household, sometimes on the same occasion (separately or together) though often on one or more subsequent occasions. This means that nearly two thirds, or just over 4,000, of the 6,098 individual members of households were interviewed, most of the remainder being children. Table 3.1 shows the number of people in households who answered at least some sections of the questionnaire, compared with the number who should, ideally, have been seen. Altogether, 93 per cent of the individuals in responding households who ought properly to have been questioned directly about their incomes or other topics were in fact so questioned.

**Table 3.1.** Percentages of households, according to number of people eligible for interview and actually interviewed per household.

<i>National Survey</i>		
<i>Number of people</i>	<i>Eligible for interview</i>	<i>Interviewed</i>
1	19	25
2	58	57
3	15	12
4	6	4
5	1	1
6 or 7	0.3	0.1
Total	100	100
Number	2,024 <sup>a</sup>	2,024 <sup>a</sup>

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Twenty-eight unclassifiable. In subsequent tables, numbers of households or of individuals will normally be given and, except in the case of sub-groups, any difference between the number given and the sample total is due to lack of information on one or other of the variables on which the table is based.

Although many interviewers adopted the practice of working in the early evenings or at weekends, so that both husband and wife, for example, could be interviewed during the same call, many return visits had to be paid to interview wage-earners about incomes and conditions of work. If a return visit was difficult to arrange, or, say, a wage-earner was unlikely to be available, a special form could be left for him to complete in confidence and return. It was possible only to complete 47 per cent of questionnaires during the first call, and a further 30 per cent during a second call. As many as 23 per cent could be completed only at a third or subsequent call.

A record was kept of the total time taken up in interviewing. Table 3.2 shows the distribution. The questionnaires were completed for only 1 per cent of the households (nearly all of them being retirement pensioners living alone) in under three quarters of an hour, and only a further 17 per cent in less than an hour and a quarter. For most households, the time required was between one and a quarter and two and three quarter hours, and the mean was just over two hours. Interviews took over three hours with 12 per cent, and over six hours with some of these. The average household comprised three people.

**Table 3.2.** *Percentages of households, according to time taken in interviews.*

Less than	$\frac{3}{4}$ hr	1
	$\frac{3}{4}$ -1 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs	17
	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -1 $\frac{3}{4}$ hrs	26
	1 $\frac{3}{4}$ -2 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs	24
	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ -2 $\frac{3}{4}$ hrs	14
	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ -3 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs	8
	3 $\frac{1}{4}$ -4 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs	6
	4 $\frac{1}{4}$ -5 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs	2
	5 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs+	1
	Total	100
	Number	2,052

The sample of addresses was divided into four, and each quarter was issued separately to interviewers during the year. Interviewing could not begin in some constituencies until several weeks of 1968 had elapsed. The final stages of interviewing were completed during the first quarter of 1969. There was no month of the twelve months in which fewer than about a hundred interviews were completed. The interviews were distributed as follows:

1968 first quarter	23.5 per cent
second quarter	23.2 per cent
third quarter	22.4 per cent

fourth quarter	22.3 per cent
1969 first quarter	8.6 per cent

The interviewing in the follow-up surveys which were carried out in Belfast, Glasgow, Neath and Salford was concentrated in waves. Originally two waves of interviewing from two samples of addresses in each area were contemplated, but in practice our resources did not permit a second wave of interviewing in Belfast and Neath. In Belfast and Glasgow, we commissioned Spencer Marketing Research Services to undertake the interviewing. In Neath and Salford, we organized our own teams. A special 'screening' questionnaire was used to establish whether or not households in the follow-up surveys belonged to any of a number of minority groups. If they did belong to these minority groups (about two fifths), the first interview was terminated and permission was sought for a second, at which the main questionnaire which was being used nationally was completed. If they did not belong to any minority group, an interview lasting about half an hour and designed to obtain basic information about employment, social class, health and income was completed.

### Response

By the standards of income or expenditure surveys, the overall response rate was high. Nearly 76 per cent of households gave complete information, and altogether 82 per cent cooperated completely or substantially. In 1968, households cooperating in the Family Expenditure Survey represented 69 per cent, and in 1969, 67 per cent, of the effective sample (the rate being 68 per cent in 1972 and 1973 and 71 per cent in 1974).<sup>1</sup> As Table 3.3 shows, the response rate was lowest in the South-East and highest in Anglia and the East Midlands, but even in the South-East and Greater London was 72 per cent or better for interviews complete in all respects.

Because non-response in surveys of income tends to be substantial and may affect the reliability of the results, we asked interviewers to do their best to complete a special form giving limited information about those who refused an interview. We could not supervise the completion of these forms as efficiently as we would have wished, and had to give priority to supervising the main interviews. None the less we reached the conclusion that this exercise would be more than justified in surveys in which claims to representativeness are particularly important. With better prior planning, interviewers *could* have obtained enough information through observation, or politely by interview, to permit all major doubts about non-response to be cleared up. As it was, we were able to obtain information about the great majority of the 388 households refusing an interview.

<sup>1</sup> Reports of the *Family Expenditure Survey*, HMSO, London, for the years specified.

**Table 3.3.** *Response in the survey.*

Region	Total number of households at effective addresses	Complete interviews	Incomplete interviews <sup>a</sup>		Refusals	Non-contact	Lost <sup>b</sup>	Response (complete and incomplete interviews) (%)
			A	B				
Greater London	376	271	9	9	75	12	-	76.9
South-East Anglia and East	402	292	8	8	90	4	-	76.6
Midlands	211	162	8	19	20	2	-	89.5
North-West	290	226	8	7	42	6	1	80.9
Northern, Yorks and Humberside	298	225	6	15	45	5	2	84.8
West Midlands	298	227	7	26	32	6	-	87.2
South-West and Wales	286	214	8	14	40	9	1	82.5
Scotland	230	182	5	6	32	2	3	83.9
Northern Ireland	104	87	1	2	12	1	1	86.6
Total	2,495	1,886	60	106	388	47	8	82.3
Percentage	100	75.6	2.4	4.2	15.6	1.9	0.3	-

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Column A means that information is complete for one or more but not all income units in the household. Column B means that information on income and assets is not complete for any income unit in the household, although other information has been given.

<sup>b</sup>Eight questionnaires were completed but could not be traced at coding stage.

For example, we were able to establish the tenure of 323 of the 388 households. Owner-occupiers accounted for 54 per cent, council tenants for 31 per cent and private tenants for 15 per cent, the first two groups being rather larger, and the third smaller than the corresponding groups among responding households. Approximately 10 per cent shared the dwelling with at least one other household (compared with 8 per cent among respondents). For 17 per cent of households, there was a flight of at least four steps to the dwelling entrance - a percentage identical with that of respondents. The household composition of respondents and those who refused, where known, is compared in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4.** Household composition in relation to response.

	<i>Refusals (%)</i>	<i>Respondents (%)</i>
Single person over 60	15	12
Single person under 60	6	6
Man and woman	34	26
Man, woman and children	23	24
Others with children	7	13
Others, adults only	16	19
Total	100	100
Number	286	2,027

In a number of other respects we gained information about households who refused an interview, to compare with households granting an interview or interviews. Rather fewer moved into the dwelling recently, only 6 per cent having lived there less than a year and another 5 per cent less than two years, compared with 10 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. Thirty-six per cent (compared with 30 per cent) had lived there all their lives or for fifteen or more years. Fewer chief wage-earners and housewives among refusals than among respondents were under 50. Thus 40 per cent were under 50 (compared with 55 per cent) and 25 per cent were aged 65 and over (compared with 18 per cent). Finally, we established the social class of the head of household in about half the cases where there was a refusal. (Among the others the distribution by housing tenure corresponded with the distribution given above.) We compared the distribution of occupations with that of respondents, using the Registrar General's classification. Manual occupations accounted for 55 per cent, compared with 57 per cent. Professional occupations accounted for 6 per cent (compared with 3 per cent); managerial and higher supervisory non-manual occupations 21 per cent (15 per cent); other non-manual 18 per cent (25 per cent); skilled manual 29 per cent (23 per cent); partly skilled manual 20 per cent (25 per cent); and unskilled manual 6 per cent (9 per cent). However, these more detailed figures should be treated with caution. Queries about exact occupations could not be pursued in some cases.

All in all, our evidence suggested that proportionately *more* late middleaged and older people, and couples without children, including more in the upper non-manual classes, had refused than had granted an interview. Proportionately *fewer* young adults, including fewer with children, had refused than had granted an interview. None the less, bearing in mind the respective magnitude of the numbers of refusals and numbers of respondents, the survey findings cannot have been seriously distorted. Differences in the distributions quoted would not have necessitated other than marginal corrections.

Response in the special follow-up surveys in Belfast, Glasgow, Neath and Salford

**Table 3.5.** *Response at first and second stages in surveys in four areas.*

Response	Belfast		Glasgow		Neath		Salford		All four areas	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Refusing at first stage	5.9		9.8		12.0		12.7		10.3	
Non-contacts	3.0		8.6		1.1		5.5		5.2	
Interviewed, not approached 2nd stage	47.7		47.4		53.8		43.5		47.4	
Interviewed, approached 2nd stage	43.4		34.2		33.1		38.4		37.1	
Refusal at 2nd stage		9.1		12.3		17.5		5.7		10.3
Non-contact at 2nd stage		6.1		1.2		0		2.3		2.5
Interviewed, complete information		81.8		81.0		75.9		88.6		82.8
Interviewed, incomplete information		3.0		5.6		6.6		3.4		4.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	304	132	477	163	275	91	458	176	1,514	562

was also good. As Table 3.5 shows, between 82 and 91 per cent of households approached (including those not contacted) in the four areas for a screening interview agreed. Rather less than half of them were approached at a second stage for a long interview, and between 82 per cent and 92 per cent agreed. At the second stage the questionnaire which had been used in the national survey was used in all four areas. Relatively more of the households cooperating in the second stage of the survey in the four special areas than in the national survey provided complete information on income and assets. The number of people eligible for interview in households tended to be larger than in the national survey, and the proportion interviewed corresponded closely with the results given in Table 3.1. Information took rather longer to collect from households, and the average time given up to interviewing was nearly two and a quarter hours.

**Table 3.6.** *Response rate by region, Poverty Survey and Family Expenditure Survey.*

	<i>Response rate (per cent)</i>		<i>Percentage of cooperating house- holds</i>			
	<i>Poverty survey<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>FES (1967)</i>	<i>Percent- age of electorate (March 1966)</i>	<i>Percent- age of population (mid 1967)</i>	<i>Poverty survey<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>FES (1968)</i>
Greater London	72.0	61.2	15.1	14.6	14.4	13.0
South-East Anglia and East Midlands	72.6	73.2	16.4	16.9	15.3	16.9
North-West	76.7	72.5	8.7	8.9	9.4	9.0
Northern, Yorks and Humberside	78.0	69.5	12.4	12.3	12.0	11.6
West Midlands	76.0	71.2	14.9	14.8	25.1	16.1
South-West and Wales	78.1	71.7	9.0	9.2		
Scotland	74.9	73.6	11.6	11.6	11.7	12.3
Northern Ireland	79.0	73.4	9.3	9.4	9.6	9.7
Ireland	83.7	-	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.2
Total	75.6	70.5	100	100	100	100
Number	1,886	7,201	35.85m	55.00m	2,052	7,023

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>For purposes of comparison with the FES, only cooperating households who provided information about both incomes and assets are counted.

<sup>b</sup>Households providing incomplete information are included, although the regional distribution is scarcely affected by their inclusion. For purposes of comparison the figures have been recalculated to take account of the deliberate over-sampling of households in Northern Ireland. As described in Appendix One, the rural areas of the Northern, Yorkshire, Humberside and West Midlands regions were amalgamated for purposes of sampling.

SOURCES: Kemsley, W. F. F., *Family Expenditure Survey*, HMSO, London, 1969, p. 29; Department of Employment and Productivity, Report of the Family Expenditure Survey for 1968, HMSO, London, 1969, p. 81; *Social Trends*, No. 1, 1970, p. 62.

## Representativeness

The sample can be regarded as providing on the whole a reasonable representation of the population of the United Kingdom. Table 3.6 shows that the proportions of cooperating households in different regions correspond well with the proportions both of the electorate and the population as a whole. The response rate even for households in the sample providing complete information on income and assets compares favourably with the Family Expenditure Survey.

The distribution by age of the sample is compared with the estimates of the Registrar General in Table 3.7. More detail will be found in Appendix Two. There is a slight over-representation in the sample of population aged under 15 and a slight

**Table 3.7.** *Percentages of non-institutionalized population and of sample, by age.*

Age	Population of the UK (1969)	Poverty survey
0-14	24.3	25.3
15-29	21.1	20.6
30-39	12.0	12.4
40-49	13.0	12.4
50-59	11.9	11.7
60-69	10.4	10.3
70+	7.4	7.3
Total	100	100
Number	54,395,000	6,045

SOURCE: See Appendix Two, Table A2.1, p. 955.

under-representation of those aged 15-29, but the distributions are on the whole very similar. Certainly the poverty survey achieved better representation by age than has the Family Expenditure Survey. In 1969, 28.4 per cent of those in households cooperating in the FES were under 16 and only 11.4 per cent 65 and over. Response in the FES appears consistently to under-represent older age groups.<sup>1</sup>

The distribution of households by number of persons is shown in Table 3.8. By comparison with the census of 1966, one-person households in both the poverty and Family Expenditure surveys are slightly over-represented and three-person households slightly under-represented. Households of other sizes are fairly closely represented. But there were differences between the poverty survey and the census

<sup>1</sup> A special analysis of response in 1971 concluded, 'Much the most striking result to come out of this analysis is that of variation with age. It is clear ... that there is a fairly consistent decline of response with age' - Kemsley, W. F. F., 'Family Expenditure Survey: A Study of Differential Response Based on a Comparison of the 1971 Sample with the Census', *Statistical News*, November 1975. See also Appendix Two.

in the definition of 'household', with a consequence that in the survey relatively more of the population were allocated to one-person households.

**Table 3.8.** *Percentages of households of different size (census, poverty survey and FES compared).*

Number of persons	Britain		UK	UK
	(Census 1966)	(Census 1971)	poverty survey	FES (1969)
1	15.4	18.1	17.7	16.1
2	30.2	31.5	29.8	31.2
3	21.2	18.9	18.9	19.8
4	17.7	17.2	17.5	18.1
5	8.8	8.3	9.1	8.3
6	4.0	6.0	4.1	3.7
7 or more	2.6		2.9	2.8
Total	100	100	100	100
Number	17.0 mil.	18.3 mil.	2,050	7,008

A large number of comparisons with official and other statistics will be found elsewhere in this book. The representativeness of the sample is further discussed in Appendix Two. For example, the census of 1966 shows that 95 per cent of the population, compared with 94.8 per cent of the sample, were born in the UK, 1.4 per cent in the Republic of Ireland, compared with 1.4 per cent of the sample, and 1.6 per cent in the West Indies, India, Pakistan and Africa, compared with 2.1 per cent.

The average rate of unemployment during 1968 as published by the Department of Employment and Productivity was 2.4 per cent, compared with 2 per cent in the survey. Altogether official returns show that 4.9 per cent of the population was dependent in part or whole on supplementary benefits in 1969,<sup>1</sup> compared with 5 per cent in the survey. Households living in privately rented accommodation were (as in the Family Expenditure Survey) slightly overrepresented, but the representation of other tenure-groups resembled the distribution portrayed in the census of 1966. Finally, the distribution by social class of adult males in the sample resembled the census distribution.

In many different parts of the book results are compared with data from administrative and other sources. Thus estimates of the numbers employed in the population are compared with estimates by the Department of Employment (p. 590); numbers unemployed with those registered as unemployed (p. 595); numbers of one-

<sup>1</sup> *Social Trends*, No. 1, 1970, p. 100.

parent families with estimates by the Department of Health and Social Security (p. 754); distributions of earnings with those derived from the New Earnings Survey and Family Expenditure Survey (p. 621); and many more. We consider that all these comparisons help to demonstrate the overall representativeness of the survey data.

### **Limitations of Research**

The limitations of the research are both technical and conceptual. In general, the efforts to ensure that the sample would include representative numbers of rich and poor seem to have been reasonably successful, though obviously reservations have to be made about non-response. The fact that 16 per cent of households refused an interview, and another 7 per cent were unable to provide complete information on incomes and assets, must introduce a margin of error, quite apart from ordinary sampling errors, into the results. This is why we have endeavoured in this book not only to produce, in this chapter and in an appendix (pages 955-8), a full discussion of the question of representativeness, but also comparable evidence whenever possible or appropriate.

The question is not just whether the sample who were successfully interviewed represent the population, but whether the information provided by them was of uniformly reliable quality. This is affected by the design of the questionnaire and the emphasis given to different subjects by the interviewers. Some general questions cannot always be divided up into appropriate sub-questions. There was a difference, for example, between our approach to cash income and our approach to fringe benefits and income in kind. In the former we asked numerous questions about earnings, social security benefits, income from investments, annuities and so on. In the latter some detailed questions were asked but the sources of fringe benefits and income in kind could not be explored so exhaustively. At various points in this book, therefore, we suggest that certain figures should be treated as slight underestimates of the true figures. Thus, although a general question was asked, with prompts, about employer benefits other than occupational pensions, sick pay and subsidized meals and travel, it is likely that this procedure did not help employees to recollect some unusual types of benefit. Moreover, many people are ignorant of some benefits like sums assured on their lives or houses, or sums expected on retirement. This is, of course, partly due to the relative secrecy in which some institutions operate - because of a fear of their competitors, fragmentation of organization and even unconscious self-deception about privilege. To take a different example, the proportion of the population saying they had frequent contacts with relatives in comparison with the proportions shown by intensive studies of the family, which have been carried out in various parts of Britain, is almost certainly an

underestimate - due partly to the impossibility in a survey as wide-ranging as this one of asking questions systematically about different kinds of relatives.

In general, the design of the questionnaire and the style adopted by the interviewer 'structures' the information that it is possible to collect in a survey. Attitudes provide another example. The questionnaire contains relatively few questions about attitudes and we have endeavoured to follow the principle that useful information about attitudes can only be collected in the context of extensive information about social conditions and behaviour. Even so, the scope of the survey made difficult the design of these questions. The attitudes of men and women of all age-groups and incomes, who live in every part of the country, are not easy to explore if standard questions have to be used. Some data on desire for work and satisfaction with work, feelings of tiredness, help from relatives, subjective definitions of class, subjective deprivation and attitudes to the poor and to poverty must therefore be examined very carefully in relation to social structure and recognized to be responsive, at least in part, to the interview situation.

Because the data actually collected from interviews are structured, both by the initial preconceptions of the research workers and the social situation of the interview itself, special care has to be taken in analysing them not to bias or restrict them further, or at least to allow them to be expressed and built up in alternative ways. Attempts to set up rigorous theoretical models are sometimes inspired by the desire to compress data into forms which lend themselves to particular types of sophisticated analysis, such as linear or multiple-regression analysis.

There are a number of problems in submitting to this. Different disciplines offer different encouragement. Econometricians, for example, are used to the problems of applying highly specific theoretical models and concentrate on the problem of estimating values of the parameters within their causal structures. Sociologists usually work with much more generalized theoretical models and tend to regard empirical research principally as a means of gaining more information about possibly relevant variables. There is the problem of deciding the variables which may be relevant to a particular social condition, such as poverty. A long list may be reached, not all of which it may be possible to investigate in any single type of research. Moreover, the possibility always has to be faced that some in the list may in fact be dependent variables of independent variables so far undetected. There is the problem of clearly distinguishing the variables and finding to what extent they are intercorrelated. There is also the problem of finding whether they can be converted to some common denominator so that they can be measured and weighed in importance. Sociologists have in recent years become acutely aware of the different restrictions imposed by different types of analysis, and there have been some instructive debates about particular inquiries. For example, in the course of defending the analysis he had followed in a report on equality of educational opportunity, James Coleman admitted, '... if I were doing such a study now, I would

seriously consider the use of multivariate cross-tabulations, with an even more open perspective toward theoretical models, in place of much of the multiple-regression analysis we used. For in the early stages of the search for knowledge about processes in a given area, it is important to use relatively open models, in which the peculiar quirks of the data that may be highly informative are not lost.<sup>1</sup> At an earlier stage there was a tendency to swamp the reader with cross-tabulations, each with its chi-squared test of significance. Most lately there has been the tendency to confuse him with unnecessarily complex path analysis.<sup>2</sup> Although sociologists increasingly employ formal methods of reasoning,<sup>3</sup> there is considerable disquiet among them about the theoretical value assumptions embedded in superficially innocuous quantitative techniques,<sup>4</sup> about the oversimplification and therefore distortion of reality which the adoption of those techniques implies, and about the problems of using such techniques in communicating the results of sociological work to more than an infinitesimal fraction of the population.

In setting out the results of the poverty survey in the following pages we have tried to reveal some of the quirks of the data by describing in some detail individual variables and their distribution, and by using a large number of straightforward cross-tabulations to bring out some of the basic interrelationships between variables. The rule we have tried to follow is not to run before we have learned to walk. In the context of this survey, this means that there is much worth discussing about the conceptualization, operational definition and descriptive measurement of different variables in order to show the factors that are present in certain states of poverty before relevant causal models can begin to be developed.

### The Survey Method

In a study such as this it is also important to express reservations about the survey method itself. Complementary methods will have to be used in order to develop knowledge about poverty and theories about its causation. Studies of the

<sup>1</sup> Coleman, J. S., 'Reply to Cain and Watts', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 35, No. 2, April 1970, p. 243. See also Cain, G. G., and Watts, H. W., 'Problems in Making Policy Inferences from the Coleman Report', and Aigner, D. J., 'A Comment on Problems in Making Inferences from the Coleman Report', in *ibid.* The report discussed is Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. F., McPartland, J., Mood, A. M., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, US Office of Education, Washington D C, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Boris Allan, G. J., 'Simplicity in Path Analysis', *Sociology*, May 1974.

<sup>3</sup> For a distinctive and coherent recent account, see Boudon, R., *The Logic of Sociological Explanation*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> The controversies following the publication of Blau, P., and Duncan, O., *The American Occupational Structure*, John Wiley, New York, 1967, are a case in point. See Crowder, N. D., 'A Critique of Duncan's Stratification Research', *Sociology*, No. 1, January 1974.

mechanisms which control the structure of differentials in the wage system and the production process from which the wage system derives, the shifts of manpower between economic dependency and economic activity, and the allocation to different sectors of public expenditure, will have to be undertaken. We need to know more about the different institutions which have powers to distribute resources and about the interrelations between them. We also need to know about the interrelations between national, community, 'ethnic' and class styles of living, and the ways in which political leadership and the mass media can foster mistrust, scorn and inequitable treatment.

The survey method has certain defects because it is highly individualistic. The network of contacts in the community and at work tends to be played down and the overlapping nature of 'group' consumption is ignored. Not only is the individual in one sense an 'island' of income and spending, even within the income unit or household, but he is also, in another sense, a member of even wider 'groups' of recipients and consumers of resources - the income unit, the household, pairs of households (e.g. telephone party-lines), streets or blocks of flats (e.g. electricity, water, caretaker services, laundry, garden and play facilities), parishes and councils (rate support grant), unions (strike pay and sick pay), industries (government loans and assistance, such as agricultural support) and regions (e.g. regional employment premiums).

The survey method is also restricted because it provides a snapshot in time rather than an account of organic change, and tends to be based on assumptions about cultural homogeneity. Survey directors assume, for example, that every section of the population will understand approximately the same questions and provide an appropriate range of answers.<sup>1</sup>

These limitations have to be stated clearly, if only for the purposes of getting a little nearer to scientific rigour. The defects of any research method have to be spelt out so that modifications can be introduced into research, and its results properly evaluated. The limitations of the survey are very real and could profitably be discussed in relation to any major survey that is carried out. But corresponding advantages should not be forgotten. The survey method represents an attempt to extend bases of comparison to wide sections of the population, and 'therefore to pose questions about variation in the human condition which requires some kind of coherent explanation. The human condition is, in a sense, given priority and, within the scope of a survey individuals are accorded approximately equal rights to

<sup>1</sup> 'The survey method favours a society with a slow rate of change and little internal conflict, highly individualistic, inner-directed and mobile, and with a high degree of correspondence between thought, word and deed. Even within such a society, the survey method is more applicable downwards than upwards, and for that reason better as an instrument of control of underdogs than of topdogs' - Galtung, J., *Theory and Methods of Social Research*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1967.

representation in the analysis and description of the results. Fundamentally, then, a value is asserted. In exploring a problem and searching for an explanation for its existence, the survey director is implicitly giving priority, even over organizations, political power and process, to the human situations and predicaments of a cross-section of the population.