



Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

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Public Perceptions of Poverty and Social Exclusion: Final Report on Focus Group Findings

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Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

Overview

The Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK Project is funded by the Economic, Science and Research Council (ESRC). The Project is a collaboration between the University of Bristol, University of Glasgow, Heriot Watt University, Open University, Queen's University (Belfast), University of York, the National Centre for Social Research and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The project commenced in April 2010 and will run for three-and-a-half years.

The primary purpose is to advance the 'state of the art' of the theory and practice of poverty and social exclusion measurement. In order to improve current measurement methodologies, the research will develop and repeat the 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. This research will produce information of immediate and direct interest to policy makers, academics and the general public. It will provide a rigorous and detailed independent assessment on progress towards the UK Government's target of eradicating child poverty.

Objectives

This research has three main objectives:

- To improve the measurement of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and standard of living
- To assess changes in poverty and social exclusion in the UK
- To conduct policy-relevant analyses of poverty and social exclusion

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Summary of Findings

Aims and methods

This report describes the results of focus groups research conducted in 2011 examining public perceptions of poverty, social exclusion and living standards in our society today. It investigates the items and activities considered by the general public in Britain and Northern Ireland to constitute living standards which all people living in our society today should be able to have. This work informs the design of a survey module on public perceptions of necessities delivered as part of the *ONS Opinions Survey (Spring 2012)* as well as the subsequent main-stage *2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey*¹ in Britain and Northern Ireland.

A total of 14 focus group interviews were conducted in November and December 2010 in five different locations across the UK. Separate group interviews were conducted amongst low income, non-low income, and mixed income samples, and groups were also stratified by household type and ethnicity. Groups typically comprised 6 to 10 participants and lasted 2.5 hours in total. Participants' views were sought on the nature and consequences of poverty and social exclusion on the basis of general discussion and more structured tasks and activities. Participants were invited to comment on different definitions of poverty, and to agree upon a set of essential items and activities which everyone should be able to afford if they want them in our society today. Participants were also asked to expand on what it means to be able to fully participate in society, and to suggest indicators of wider social inclusion/exclusion on this basis. To facilitate discussion of social exclusion participants were asked to consider a range of hypothetical scenarios or 'vignettes' intended to illuminate participants' decision-making and judgements.

Understanding poverty

Participant understandings of poverty tended to broaden spontaneously as discussion developed, moving from subsistence definitions focusing on deprivation of 'basic' needs, to discussions of relative deprivation and its effects on social participation, social networks and support, living conditions, health, quality-of-life and wellbeing. Whilst there was widespread agreement that subsistence needs are most 'fundamental', this did not imply an assumption that other material and social needs can be discounted in defining poverty.

¹ The 2011 PSE-UK survey is known in the field as the '2011 Living Standards in Britain' and '2011 Living Standards in Northern Ireland' surveys

Poverty was widely understood as relative to prevailing living standards in our society and how these have changed over time, as well as being relative in terms of international comparisons. Participants made many new suggestions in terms of specific items for potential further consideration focused in various ways on security (e.g. long term financial security, insurance against risks, hazard prevention), housing quality (e.g. insulation/energy efficiency, ventilation, daylight, communal space, good physical repair), and child well-being (e.g. developmental opportunities, school-related activities, education, physical safety). We can only speculate as to the wider significance of these items, but these suggestions may reflect increased financial insecurity and its impacts for UK households, greater awareness of environmental concerns, and changing attitudes to childhood and children's entitlements.

These data suggest that any distinction between 'social' and 'material' necessities has little basis in participants' own reflections. Perceptions of material necessities emphasised their wider social significance in the performance of social roles, and in the avoidance of shame and stigma. In many cases, participants experiencing poverty reported going without basic material necessities themselves in order to meet wider social expectations (e.g. as good parents). These accounts do not therefore support the assumption of an implicit hierarchy of needs which might usefully inform anti-poverty policies. At the same time, they also highlight the negative consequences of contemporary consumerism for the capacity of many people to meet the rising expectations this generates.

Participants emphasised that rising living costs, high unemployment, and the general climate of economic uncertainty made the financial situation of many households increasingly precarious, even for groups traditionally seen as relatively affluent. Participants recognised that vulnerability to poverty reflected wider social inequalities of social class, educational attainment, gender, age, and ethnicity, and that people living on a low incomes had been hardest hit by the economic recession. However, for many, discourses of a 'squeezed middle' resonated with the increasing difficulties faced by working households in making ends meet.

Participants disagreed about the causes of poverty with views divided between broadly individual and structural explanations. Some participants expressed strong views on a perceived 'culture of poverty' and the associated intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Whilst these accounts drew upon deep-rooted moral distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, other participants referred to the role of persistent structural inequalities, for example by emphasising the role of educational attainment and access to learning and job opportunities in shaping vulnerability to poverty.

Consideration of what is 'reasonable' or 'adequate' was central to participants' decision-making reflecting social judgements relating to norms of self-presentation, the avoidance of shame, and the value of social connections and norms. Participants' decisions on the 'necessities of life' also reflected judgements about the availability and

cost of items, and social trends in ownership and consumption of certain items. Moreover, the social pressure to 'keep up' with contemporary patterns of consumption (however extravagant) was acknowledged to create the potential for new social distinctions and processes of exclusion to emerge.

Living standards and social exclusion

At its most basic, for most participants a good standard of living involved sufficient income not only to afford the 'basics', but also to afford discretionary spending on luxuries either as a reflection of social status and/or as a means of promoting personal fulfilment and happiness. However, further discussion of what constitutes a 'good' standard of living revealed a more complex set of priorities focusing as much upon personal well-being, development, and security, and upon stable family and social relationships, as upon consumption as a signifier of status.

Participants emphasised the interconnections between living standards and personal autonomy, well-being and quality of life. Understandings of social exclusion are best viewed in this light as factors preventing people from being able to fully participate in activities and lifestyles which are widely enjoyed, or at least condoned, within wider society. Participants' understandings of social exclusion were therefore inextricably intertwined with wider perceptions of what constitutes 'the good life' in our society today, both with regard to material living standards, the opportunities and choices which a good standard of living affords, and their impacts for social and psychological well-being and personal happiness. At the same time, participants also emphasised the importance of community-based perspectives on social exclusion, and the crucial role of good quality local services and amenities in sustaining a sense of community cohesion.

Participants' definitions of exclusion focused upon experiences of 'unfairness', 'being left out' and a lack of 'belonging' arising, for example, as a result of material deprivation, social isolation, discrimination, or poor health. Poverty was integral to many participants' accounts of 'social exclusion' with many participants commenting on the overlap between these concepts. Nevertheless, social exclusion denoted a very much wider range of disadvantages than those associated with limited material resources in the minds of participants.

Participants' understandings of social exclusion were explicitly multidimensional according weight to social networks and personal wellbeing alongside economic participation. As such, they did not accord with dominant constructions of 'social exclusion' in terms of worklessness and benefit dependency within contemporary policy debates.

Perspectives on social exclusion were often explicitly intergenerational. In reflecting on personal experiences of exclusion from opportunities, choices, and life chances, participants emphasised how this contrasted with their elevated expectations for their own children and grandchildren - and for the kind of society needed to promote genuine

inclusion in future.

Nevertheless, contrasting views were very evident on the role played by personal agency and choice in explaining exclusion. These views also informed participants' accounts of just desserts and entitlements in determining what might constitute an acceptable level of social inclusion for people in different circumstances. Participants highlighted a wide range of issues associated with the multi-dimensional experience of exclusion relating, for example, to labour market participation, crime and social harm, the impact of troubled personal histories, housing problems, bereavement, and social networks and support.

Determining the 'necessities of life'

Our research suggests that some established indicators of deprivation may be of declining salience in public perceptions of the 'necessities of life' in our society today as a result of changing lifestyles and patterns of consumption. This does not imply that such indicators are no longer valid measures, but they may no longer be good discriminators of poverty status.

The group discussions reveal frequent disagreements between participants on the items and activities necessary to avoid poverty and social exclusion. Although focus groups aim to achieve general agreement, in some cases a simple majority decision was unavoidable and the extent to which the outcomes of deliberations involving 'democratic' procedures can be described as constituting 'consensus' is uncertain.

However, despite the diversity of views expressed our research uncovers little evidence of consistent variations in perceptions of the 'necessities of life' on the basis of household type, ethnicity, or income status. Whilst there is some evidence that people adapt their individual preferences to fit their circumstances, and therefore that people experiencing poverty may minimise their needs, these data do not suggest that this necessarily influences wider perceptions of what the UK public as a whole should be able to afford.

Moreover, this research highlights a range of potential cognition issues in participants' deliberations on the 'necessities of life'. Some participants also expressed concerns about the interpretation of the term "necessity" to denote items or activities that all people *should not* have to do without, rather than to denote those items and activities people simply *cannot* live without. References to what households and individuals 'should' be able to afford are potentially ambiguous in referring both to a normative judgement about entitlements, as well as to evaluative judgements concerning what households and individuals are in fact likely to be able to afford and need.

Some participants had difficulty in making judgements in the absence of the contextual information needed to determine need for households in different circumstances. Contextual information was also important in shaping participants' normative

judgements concerning entitlements with some participants drawing normative distinctions between the 'working' population and the 'poor', and between what we expect for ourselves and for others, in determining the 'necessities of life' in our society today.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This report describes the results of a series of fourteen focus groups conducted in 2011 as part of development work for the *UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey*². The research upon which this report is based investigates public perceptions of poverty, social exclusion and living standards in the UK today. It seeks to ascertain those items and activities considered by the general public in Britain and Northern Ireland to constitute living standards which all people living in the UK today should be able to have. This qualitative development work is intended to inform the design of a survey module on public perceptions of necessities delivered as part of the ONS Opinions survey. It will also inform the design of the subsequent main-stage Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey to be conducted separately in Britain and Northern Ireland in Summer 2012.

In this section we begin by summarising findings emerging from existing qualitative studies conducted in the UK on public understandings of poverty and social exclusion, and the items and activities needed to achieve an adequate standard of living. In this section we also describe the design of the study including sampling strategy and data collection methods.

In Section 2 of this report we outline main findings relating to participants' general perceptions of poverty, social exclusion and living standards in the UK today based on a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. In Section 3, we focus on participants' views of the 'necessities of life', that is those items and activities which everyone should be able to afford to have or do in our society today and should not have to go without. Section 3 also examines and summarises participants' suggestions on indicators of social exclusion and inclusion based upon group discussion and related tasks and activities. Our overall conclusions and recommendations are summarised in Section 4.

1.2 Background

Empirical research into poverty and social exclusion in the UK has for the most part focused on the applications of survey methods and quantitative approaches in estimating the extent, dynamics and social distribution of vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion. However, recent years have witnessed a growing appreciation in the UK and internationally of the potential of qualitative methods in understanding public

² The 2011 PSE-UK survey is known in the field as the '2011 Living Standards in Britain' and '2011 Living Standards in Northern Ireland' surveys

perceptions of poverty and social exclusion, and in documenting the experience and impacts of poverty and social exclusion. In this section, we therefore summarise recent qualitative work undertaken in the UK focusing on public perceptions of poverty and social exclusion and the items and activities considered by the public to constitute minimally adequate living standards in our society today.

This review seeks to identify existing evidence, in order to better understand public definitions of poverty and social exclusion and the underlying logic and values that guide the selection of items and activities viewed by the public as necessary to avoid poverty and social exclusion. The evidence reviewed below falls into two main areas: a) research seeking to advance understanding of public perceptions of the nature and meaning of poverty and social exclusion, and; b) research focusing on public perceptions of the items and activities necessary for individuals and households to avoid poverty and social exclusion. This review represents a sketch of what is known about 'lay' (as opposed to expert) understandings of poverty and social exclusion, as well as seeking to identify possible omissions and gaps in the existing evidence base. In this review we focus on adults' views on poverty and the necessities of life for all households in our society today but children's views on the experience of poverty and exclusion (see for example Ridge, 2002, 2009, 2011; Crowley and Vulliamy, 2007; Sutton, 2007; Walker et al., 2008).

The nature and meaning of poverty and social exclusion

Since the 1990s, growing recognition of the importance of involving low-income citizens in research on poverty has resulted in an increasing number of studies examining the experience of poverty often by adopting a participatory research approach. These studies have considerably advanced understanding of the nature and meaning of poverty and its material, social and psychological consequences from the perspectives of the 'real experts', namely, people experiencing poverty and exclusion. However, such studies do not in general provide unambiguous empirical support for the existence of a public consensus regarding the meaning and definition of poverty. Rather, they demonstrate the *plurality* of public conceptions of poverty, for example, with regard to preferences for 'absolute' versus 'relative' interpretations. For example, Beresford et al.'s (1999) research based upon discussion groups with low-income citizens asked participants to reflect upon competing definitions of poverty drawn from the *1995 British Social Attitudes* survey reflecting different interpretations of the scope of the term. Whilst all groups agreed unanimously that an irreducible 'absolute' interpretation based on physiological functioning constituted poverty, views differed markedly on wider interpretations based upon relative deprivation of material and social needs.

When participants are asked to define what poverty means to them a range of conflicting responses is evident. Within Beresford et al.'s (1999) study, participants' own definitions of poverty reflected a range of perspectives associated with financial and material constraint, restricted behaviours, and psychologically and spiritually based definitions. Similarly, research based on participatory methods with women across

Britain by the Women's Budget Group (2008) suggests considerable plurality of approaches to understanding poverty which emphasise both the material and relational dimensions of poverty. Thus poverty is understood both in terms of financial and/or material constraint, and with regard to social isolation, diminished citizenship, stigmatisation, denial of rights, and restricted ability to meet normative expectations.

The extent to which such understandings of poverty are differentiated by poverty status has been a focus of considerable interest, for example, whether people experiencing poverty have different views on the definition of poverty and of the items and activities needed to avoid poverty in comparison with 'non-poor' individuals. Research conducted by Dominy and Kempson (2006) with older people suggests that participants' responses indeed appear to be partly determined by considerations of financial and material well-being. These authors found that better-off participants tended to adopt a broader understanding of poverty related to financial insecurity during retirement and an inability to participate in chosen social activities due to a lack of money. In comparison, low-income participants tended to view the experience of poverty in more restrictive terms, associated with more 'extreme' forms of marginalisation such as homelessness and deprivation of basic necessities. These findings seem to contradict large-scale survey evidence on public perceptions of necessities which suggest that poor households have a more generous interpretation of the living standards which should be available to all (e.g. Pantazis, 2005, 2000).

A recurring theme in research with low-income participants is the tendency for participants to define poverty in absolute terms in ways which sometimes discount their own experiences of deprivation. For example, Crowley and Vuillamy's (2007) study described young people making references to 'tramps and the homeless as poor or as living in poverty, alongside those in developing countries' (see also Save the Children, 2011). Flaherty (2008) similarly found that low-income citizens often associate poverty with living conditions in developing countries, though participants accepted that deprivation also exists in the UK. Moreover, participants in Flaherty et al.'s study were more comfortable applying the term 'deprivation' to nearby estates and areas. His research also shows that people experiencing poverty sometimes tailor their expectations in ways which underplay their own experiences of disadvantage and deprivation.

These findings suggest that a tendency to discount personal experiences of poverty may constitute a strategy for coping with life on a low income as well as reflecting the social stigma associated with poverty. The sensitivities of research in this area in the context of the wider social stigma attached to poverty means that people are often understandably reluctant to identify themselves as 'poor' (e.g. Corden, 1996; Dean and Melrose, 1999; Novak, 2001). Moreover, as Sen (1995) argues, it is perhaps therefore unsurprising that people living on low-income may also reduce their expectations as a means of adapting to their situation. The phenomenon of 'adaptive preferences' is well documented in several qualitative studies. For example, Smith et al (2004) note that it is often difficult for many participants to look beyond immediate 'survival' needs, and that people experiencing poverty tend to rationalise and restrict their expectations as a

means of coping with severely limited resources. This tendency is also evident in research with older participants. Scharf et al (2006) observed that the stoicism and modest expectations that characterised many participants' accounts arose from comparisons participants made with living standards experienced in earlier life which were often marked by profound hardship. Where people have adapted over time to living within very modest financial means, views of what constitutes a necessity tend to be more limited and participants in Scharf et al.'s study tended to rationalise their situation on the basis of comparisons with other older people less fortunate than themselves.

To date, qualitative evidence on public perceptions of social exclusion has been much more limited. Richardson et al.'s (2002) study based on discussion groups with residents of 'deprived' neighbourhoods revealed that participants tended to define social exclusion in terms of an inability to fully participate in the kinds of activities which are considered 'normal' (or at least widely approved) within the wider society. These authors' findings also demonstrated the centrality of communication skills as key social activities in their own right, as well as highlighting the importance of publicly funded and provided services and the consumption of public goods, such as a safe neighbourhood environment, in avoiding social exclusion. Participants' accounts also emphasised the importance of personal agency and choices by making a clear distinction between people viewed as being at least partly responsible for their own exclusion, and people excluded as a result of the actions of others.

In contrast, Flaherty (2008) discovered a greater ambivalence towards the concept of social exclusion and very limited awareness of the term itself. Consequently, participants were bemused about being viewed as 'outside of the society of which they subjectively felt within', in part because they were proud of getting by and were able to draw on local networks providing strong material and emotional support. Whilst many participants experienced the consequences of social exclusion, Flaherty argues that this was not a 'lived concept'. Participants own definitions of social exclusion emphasised processes of extreme marginalisation for example as experienced by specific excluded groups (e.g. the homeless, prostitutes, drug addicts) rather than drawing attention to more ubiquitous forms of exclusion within the wider society of which they very much felt part. Strong social networks have long been recognised as a key resource for households in managing on a low income, and especially in mitigating the impacts of deprivation and disadvantage in poor areas (e.g. Vincent, 1991; Coates and Silburn, 1970). Flaherty's findings thus suggest that it is the loss or absence of these personal support networks which precipitate episodes of deep exclusion in participants' accounts.

Determining the 'necessities of life'

The above observations concerning public perceptions of poverty are also reflected in the public's judgements concerning the items and activities considered necessary to avoid poverty. Focus group methods were conducted by Middleton et al. (1999) as part of development work preparatory to the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of*

Britain in order to explore perceptions of the necessities of life. Middleton and her team conducted a series of focus groups with the aim of exploring whether agreement could be reached on those items and activities which all people living in Britain should be able to afford and should not have to go without. Participants negotiated and agreed lists of necessities which had been developed on the basis of earlier findings derived from the *1990 Breadline Britain Survey* (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997). Participants were also asked to consider the relative importance of different items and activities and the length of time individuals or households could go without them without falling into poverty.

Middleton et al (1999) found substantial variation in public perceptions of the nature and extent of poverty in Britain with notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' (poor) being a persistent theme. Discussion also focused on perceived differences between absolute and relative definitions. Whilst views differed on the extent of absolute poverty in Britain (with participants from wealthier areas tending to underestimate the extent of poverty), a distinction between this concept and relative definitions was widely accepted. Relative poverty was described variously as 'allowing people a life rather than just an existence', 'giving more than just survival', and 'social poverty'. The ability to keep in contact with friends and relatives was felt to be the crucial element of relative definitions of poverty and the importance of social contact and relationships based on mutual support and reciprocity was emphasised by the groups.

In recent years several studies drawing upon budget standards approaches have also used focus group methods extensively in order to develop lay consensual approaches to budget setting. In 2008, a major research study using these methods established a minimum income standard for Britain based upon public perceptions of the items and activities needed to maintain minimally acceptable living standards (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Discussion groups were conducted in order to agree a working definition of what constitutes a 'minimally acceptable' income and to deliberate upon the household budget needed by households of different types to achieve this standard. These minimum income standards have been subsequently updated on a regular basis to take account of changing perceptions of what constitutes an 'adequate' living standard (e.g. Hirsch et al 2009, Davis et al 2010).

Hirsch and Smith (2010) investigated parents' views on the 'necessities of life' for families with children in order to inform the selection of items for inclusion in subsequent survey questionnaires on this topic. Again, this research adopted a consensual approach to budgeting by convening a series of discussion groups to establish budget standards for households of different types. On the basis of a consideration of the situation of different hypothetical families, participants deliberated upon the items and activities which all families need be able to afford in order to achieve minimally acceptable living standards in Britain today. However, Hirsch and Smith's study also demonstrates the challenges involved in establishing a consensus on the items and activities considered to be necessities of life in Britain today. Participants in this study had difficulty in determining the extent to which lacking specific items constituted 'identifiable hardship' in the absence of information on the wider basket of goods and services available to households. Often such considerations involved a distinction

between items which households ought to have, and those which it would be harmful for them to lack. A key criterion here often involved judgements on whether specific deprivations constituted more than simply a matter of convenience or comfort and also involved consideration of the likelihood of long term negative consequences for individuals and families. In particular, the likely impacts of potential deprivations on children's long-term prospects and life chances was an important motivating factor in the inclusion of many children's items such as a PC, access to the internet, money for classes and out-of school activities, etc.

Qualitative research with specific population groups also demonstrate the extent to which perceptions of need depend upon the composition and circumstances of households such that no single basket of items and activities is likely to be adequate for all households in characterising their living standards. A specific focus on different populations thus reveals different sets of preferences regarding necessities of life, for example for disabled people (Smith et al., 2004), families with children (Middleton et al., 1994), and households in rural areas (Smith et al, 2010). For example, access to a car is a widely perceived as a necessity of life for households living in more remote rural areas, and for households with young children, and this draws attention to the importance of contextual information about households' circumstances in public judgements concerning household need.

These studies also emphasise the centrality of social norms surrounding the fulfilment of social roles (e.g. as parents, spouses, employees, citizens) in shaping participants deliberations. Bradshaw et al (2008) note the importance of opportunities for social participation, and of the maintenance of social networks, in shaping participants' deliberations. Moreover, social participation is often considered fundamental in promoting emotional well being, and included a range of social and cultural activities, informal support networks and opportunities for economic participation through paid work for those able to do so. More fundamentally, participation was viewed as important in terms of self-presentation and the avoidance of shame through, for example, being able to afford appropriate dress, to entertain within the home, and being able to afford to participate in social activities undertaken or valued by peer groups. The importance of social relationships within families is also highlighted within participants' accounts. Although many participants within Hirsch and Smith's 2010 study emphasised that quality of family life cannot be equated in a simplistic way with command over resources, an inability to afford specific items and activities can nevertheless undermine family functioning, for example, as a result of being unable to afford a table and chairs so that all family members can eat together, family outings and holidays, and a night out for adults. Nevertheless, as Hirsch et al (2010) note, determining *how much* social participation is necessary, for example with regard to consideration of duration, intensity and frequency of participation, was much more difficult to establish consensus upon.

The above studies also demonstrate the importance of social change in determining participants preferences regarding the items and activities needed to avoid poverty, for example as a result of technological innovation, and changing tastes and patterns of

consumption. The changing role of information and communication technologies in people's lives (e.g. mobile phones, computers, internet access) has been a distinctive feature of participants' discussions of socially perceived necessities in all the above studies, as a result of the proliferation of consumer electronics within contemporary patterns of consumption. Nevertheless, whilst a public consensus appears to be emerging concerning the centrality of consumer electronics in contemporary social life and patterns of participation, the extent to which such items are considered necessary for different population groups and for people in different circumstances remains contested. As Hirsch and Smith (2010: 38) note:

Who needs what continues to be an issue of dispute...[this] level of disagreement appears to reflect the fact that the use of technology is still in transition, and some people retain attitudes about them not being necessary, which are attitudes that may eventually disappear

A further point of contention in determining public perceptions of the necessities of life involves considerations of *quality* in the items and activities considered to be necessities. Whilst making distinctions regarding the quality of items and activities viewed as necessities is often extremely difficult, such qualitative judgements are often decisive as social signifiers of status in the UK today perhaps reflecting the prevalence of consumerist attitudes within society (e.g. with regard to where people live, shop, take holidays, etc). This suggests that the capacity for some degree of *choice* in making consumption decisions appears to be an important factor in group discussion of items necessary to avoid poverty for example with regard to diet, clothing, leisure activities, etc. Bradshaw et al (2008) thus identify choice as a principal guiding participants' decisions making such that 'as a minimum, people should have some choice over what they eat, wear and do'.

To date, recent studies suggest that the current economic recession appears to be having little discernible impact on attitudes towards necessities, for example by encouraging more restrictive definitions of need. However, within Hirsch et al.'s 2009 study attitudes towards austerity varied across age groups with younger participants sensing that 'the party's over', parents welcoming a perceived decline in societal pressures to consume, and pensioners viewing the changed economic climate as validation of 'traditional' economising behaviours. At the same time, Hirsch et al. (2009) argue that there are some initial signs that additional items including occasional treats and comforts may be viewed by the public as increasingly important given the bleak economic outlook and the stresses this gives rise to. It is also likely that there is a 'lag effect' involved here such that it may take a number of years before such changing in economic circumstances feed through into public attitudes on this topic.

1.3 Research methods

Sample design

Whilst the 1999 PSE revealed a high degree of consensus in public perceptions of necessities, such perceptions clearly also depend upon household circumstances and expectations (Pantazis et al., 2000, 2006). For example, the needs of pensioner households differed from those of households with children. Similarly, high income households tended to have a more restrictive interpretation of the necessities of life compared with households enjoying higher standards of living. Perceptions of the necessities of life also varied by age group and ethnic origin.

Since the aim of focus groups is generally to achieve consensus amongst participants, variability in public perceptions of the necessities of life needs to be taken into account in the recruitment of participants. The recruitment plan used in this study was therefore based on a quota sample design which aimed to promote homogeneity in group composition with regard to key factors relevant to participants' views, including: income status, household type, and ethnic origin (primary strata), gender, age, housing tenure, employment status, age of children (secondary strata) .

A total of 14 focus group interviews were conducted in November and December 2010 in five different locations, including in each of the four territories comprising the UK: Bristol, Cardiff, London, Glasgow and Belfast. Separate group interviews were conducted amongst low income samples (5 groups), non-low income samples (5 groups), and mixed income samples (4 groups). These groups were also stratified by household type (11 groups) and minority ethnic status (3 groups). The profile of the achieved sample is described in Figure 1 (overleaf).

Three focus group interviews typically with between 6 to 10 participants were conducted in each location (two in Glasgow), with each group lasting approximately 2.5 hours in total. Participants were professionally recruited and all participants received a one-off gift payment of £35 plus travel expenses in recognition for their contribution to the research. Prior to attending their group discussion, participants completed the following instrumentation:

A recruitment survey collecting basic respondent socio-demographic data

A brief open-format questionnaire on deprivation, living standards and social exclusion

The main aim of the pre-group instrumentation was to encourage participants to begin to think in advance about suitable indicators of deprivation and indicators of wider living standards in the UK today.

The recruitment survey also provided useful contextual information on the socio-demographic profile of the fourteen groups. A fuller description of the sample is

provided in the Appendix. In total, 114 participants took part in the 14 group interviews of whom 54% were female and 46% male. Over half (55%) of respondents reported monthly gross incomes of less than £1,500, and exactly half the sample were owner occupiers. Single person households comprised 30% of the sample, and well over half (57%) of respondents cared for dependent children.

Figure 1: Summary profile of focus groups

ID	Group Profile	N	Location
BRS1	Working age, no dep. children: non-low income. Older owner-occupiers living in detached homes, mixed sex group	8	Bristol
BRS2	Working age, no dep. children: non-low income. Mixed age group owner-occupiers, predominantly male	9	Bristol
BRS3	Pensioners: low income. Owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	9	Bristol
CDF1	Pensioners: low income. Owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	8	Cardiff
CDF2	Couples with dep. children: non-low income. Younger owner occupiers living in mixed dwelling types, mixed sex group	9	Cardiff
CDF3	Single parents: non-low income. Mixed aged group renters living in semi-detached homes, predominantly female	9	Cardiff
LDN1	Ethnic minority: mixed income. Mixed age group renters living in mixed dwelling types, mixed sex group	9	London
LDN2	Ethnic minority: low income. Mixed age group LA/HA renters living in terraced houses and flats, mixed sex group	8	London
LDN3	Ethnic minority: non-low income. Younger mixed tenure group living in varied dwelling types, mixed sex group	8	London
GLS1	Working age, no dep. children: mixed income. Younger mixed tenure group, all male group	3*	Glasgow
GLS2	Single parents: low income. Younger private renters living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	6*	Glasgow
NI1	Couples with dep. children: mixed income. Younger private renters living in semis and terraced dwellings, mixed sex group	9	Belfast
NI2	Single parents: low income. Mixed age group renters living in mixed dwelling types, predominantly female	9	Belfast
NI3	Couples with dep. children: mixed income. Mixed age group owner occupiers living in semis and terraced dwelling, predominantly female	10	Belfast

* Participant recruitment was affected by inclement weather conditions and transport disruption. As a result it was necessary to cancel one further group with pensioners in Glasgow

Data collection

In all of the discussion groups, participants' general views and opinions were sought on the nature and consequences of poverty and social exclusion on the basis of a general discussion of these concepts, as well as through more structured tasks and activities. In all groups, participants were asked to comment on different definitions of poverty as a basis for subsequent discussion (see *Appendix 1*). Participants were also invited to comment on what it means to be able to fully participate in society especially with regard to the opportunities and choices that this implies. To facilitate discussion of different aspects of social exclusion participants were asked to consider a range of hypothetical scenarios or 'vignettes' intended to illuminate participants' decision-making and judgements. More information on the specific questions and their wording based on an example of the interview topic guide is contained in the Appendices (see *Appendix 1*).

Research was conducted in two overlapping phases. In Phase One groups, participants were asked to suggest potential indicators of deprivation in a relatively unstructured way. Our aim here was to generate a consensus within groups on possible indicators based primarily upon participants own suggestions with some supplementary prompted items drawn from earlier survey studies of public perceptions of the necessities of life. Participants were asked to deliberate upon those items and activities which they considered to be necessities for a 'typical' family with children in the UK today based upon the situation of a hypothetical family comprising a couple with two children. Sessions began by soliciting participant feedback on a selection of prompted items drawn from previous studies arranged thematically and relating to households' accommodation, diet and clothing, household items, social and family life, and children's items. Participants were then encouraged to add freely to and amend items as appropriate using brainstorming methods. In each case, our objective was to seek consensus within each group on those items which everyone should be able to have or do in the UK today and should not have to go without because they cannot afford them. The dynamics of participant interactions within focus group mean that in practice group decisions on many items were made on the basis of universal or near universal agreement amongst participants. However, where strong differences of opinion existed, a majority decision was recorded where more than half of group members agreed with inclusion of the item as a necessity.

Drawing on participants' suggestions in the Phase One groups, the objective in the Phase Two groups was to 'test' the new and prompted items agreed by Phase One groups, as well as to explore perceptions of wider living standards in the UK today, including things which might be viewed as desirable but non-essential, and things which might be viewed as 'luxuries'. To do so, a number of additional items and activities were selected based upon findings from earlier studies conducted by Gordon et al. (2001) and Hillyard et al. (2003) are *not* widely viewed as necessities by the UK public. These items were added to the Phase One results and participants were then asked to sort the combined items into three categories using card-sort methods, as follows:

- **Necessities:** things which are essential and which everyone should be able to afford if they want them in our society today
- **Desirables:** things which many or most people have access to in the UK today but which are not essential in our society today
- **Luxuries:** things which are quite costly and exclusive and which fewer people have in our society today

The group observer recorded the outcome of group deliberations, noting whether general agreement existed. In some cases where discussion did not resolve the issue at hand a majority verdict was sought from participants and duly noted.

Our expectation is that a wider public consensus may exist where, using different research instruments, Phase 2 groups independently classified broadly the same subset of items and activities as 'necessities' as those initially suggested in the Phase 1 groups. It should be noted that the interpersonal dynamics of focus group interactions tend to towards consensus (though as we shall see this term is open to interpretation) and this may limit the diversity of participants' responses or the intensity of their views. At the same time, the impact of dominant individuals in shaping group dynamics and decisions can be significant in 'manufacturing' agreement. For these reasons, variability in public perceptions needs to be reflected in sample design by recruiting groups which are relatively homogenous with regard to key factors known to be relevant to public views on this topic (e.g. income, household type, etc). The focus on group processes and outcomes means that the primary unit of analysis here is the group interaction rather than individual participants' preferences, and in the following analyses the extent of differences in response between groups (e.g. as a result of differences in social composition) are considered alongside discussion of within-group differences in participants views and perspectives. General consensus in this context therefore refers both to the extent of within-group agreement *and* the absence of substantial between-group differences in perceptions of the necessities of life in our society today.

2. Definitions of Poverty and Social Exclusion

2.1 Definitions of poverty: participant perspectives

In all of the focus groups, participants were invited to reflect upon what it means to be poor in the UK today, and how poverty is best characterised and understood. Participants were first asked how they would define poverty 'in their own words'. During the brainstorming sessions participants' conceptions of poverty tended to broaden as the discussion developed in both low-income and non low-income groups. In line with previous research with low-income participants (e.g. Crowley & Vulliamy 2007, Flaherty 2008), participants initially provided 'absolute' definitions by citing examples of extreme poverty and marginalisation both in developing countries and in the UK. However, the scope of subsequent discussion relating to the restrictions which poverty places upon people often broadened spontaneously to include also discussion of the effects of material deprivation on social participation, social networks and support, living conditions, health, quality-of-life and wellbeing.

Participants across all groups referred to the material and financial dimensions of poverty:

GLS1 RM: Probably to me it's somebody who doesn't have that much money and [is] living on the crumbs...

However, many participants took a broader perspective on poverty which encompassed also its relationship with forms of social participation, and social networks and support. Others referred to the centrality of normative expectations associated with performance of social roles, for example as a parent in being able to provide children with opportunities to participate in normatively valued social activities:

N11 RF: A support network too I think is very important and if you're lacking that too, I mean people on your door step who you know have a pension and whose houses are well heated but they just have a lack of footfall and visitors, and they themselves would probably view themselves as being in poverty.

CDF3 RM: Being able really to have some sort of social life. You don't want to miss out on anything really. You want to go into town if you want you know.

CDF3 RF: Struggling to do everyday things, because I've been on both sides of managing and struggling with children, and being able to take them places, looking for where you can sort of take them where you don't have to spend too much money which is not very many places.

GLS2 RM: To be able to give your children a decent standard of life, diet and things like that, school, as well as socially.

GLS2 RF: Not being able to give your kids what you want to.

Others drew attention to environmental and neighbourhood problems, poor housing, and poor health, which were perceived to be associated with poverty and the adverse impacts these can have on wider quality of life and wellbeing:

BRS3 RM: Living in an area...where you've got no greenery, fields; it's all concrete and crammed in...It could well be they're on a very low-income and can't afford anything else, but it's just not very, everything's grey around you, everything concrete, it must be just closed in and very depressing. And usually going back to that sort of area you may well have a very high crime rate as well.

BRS3 RF: But it must be hard if you are on the poverty line, because you're not getting a proper diet as well, and maybe even having to live in one of these high rise flats which are absolutely dreadful, no garden or anything for the children, it must be awful.

LDN1 RF: I think poverty primarily is used as a word to define people's financial standing, but for me it's a state where financial standing can lead into other parts of your life. So because you don't have a certain sort of income, whether you're on benefits or whether you're employed, the whole gamut of your life is now affected by the financial clout that you have. So then it inputs into your social life and also your health, and whether you can have holidays and afford luxuries and the food you eat and the people you socialise with.

LDN2 RF: And then there's a lot of people then that ... can't eat adequately ... and then a lot of people getting depressed, they're getting depressed because they can't do nothing for themselves, they can't get a job, they can't better themselves. The children will go to school and all their friends have got the latest things and they can't afford it, they can't afford the latest gear and things like that. It's like a vicious circle, it's affecting them mentally as well you see.

NI3 RF: Poor housing, poor health, people who are, you know, they're just unable to look after themselves because they can't afford maybe even dental care because you have to pay for that now, you know, that is an incredibly big thing.

It is interesting to note in the context of subsequent discussion that participants' *initial* reflections often suggested quite restrictive interpretations of poverty in both low income and non-low income groups. Some participants drew attention to what one participant termed 'absolute poverty' held to exist in other parts of the world. Others highlighted examples of extreme hardship (including homelessness) in their local area:

GLS1 RM: When I think of poverty, I do think like absolute poverty...I think that's the thing that pops up into my head, rather than poverty which I know that there is over here

NI1 RM: It's a thin line...and dependent on where you live, like as in what country. I mean you see poverty when you see them doing these programmes on TV trying to raise money for children who I would say live in poverty, who don't know where the

next meal comes from. I don't think we're at that stage but the thin line may be not far from it.

BRS1 RM: Thinking of extremes there's homelessness which you see in Bristol city centre, because that's where you'd start first and foremost.

CDF2 RM: You see loads of those [homeless people] outside the station every day. Maybe it's not through their own choice but, you know, they've got nothing, all they've got is a bottle of gin or whatever...Most they've got is a sleeping bag or a blanket.

The absolute/relative dichotomy across counties or within cities or local areas was further explored as participants expanded on their conceptions:

LDN2 RF: Poverty's relative to the country you're living in. What is called [poverty] in the UK today might be a wealthy environment for somebody from another part of the world, like India or Africa

GLS1 RM: Everything's relative to circumstances around you. I mean you could be living in the very kind of richest suburb in Glasgow and be the poorest person in that neighbourhood, think of yourself as poor, when by kind of national standards you're nowhere near it. And you could be living in the poorest area in Glasgow but because [...] you get a job or something like that you could be the richest person there

LDN2 RM: What makes a person poor in a rich society, a society that is considered the fourth richest in the world, where you still have the underbelly, those who live on the baseline of the society [...] poverty is a relative thing yes

BRS2 RM: Probably there's a big envelope if you've got someone on the street who's got nothing, they're in poverty, you've got someone who's living in council accommodation with a couple of kids, just got a few pennies to scrape by, you could say they're in poverty, and then you've got people that's living in mansions and all the rest of it they plead poverty as well.

However, understanding poverty as relative to contemporary living standards and social norms can also have implications for peoples' perceptions of their own circumstances. Where poverty is widespread some participants suggested that this may lead people to minimise the hardships they face in struggling to make ends meet. The social stigma associated with poverty may also make it difficult for people to acknowledge the difficulties they face. For example, one participant reasoned that:

GLS1 RM: It [poverty] doesn't strike me as the type of thing that you would class yourself as [...] because you would always compare it to those around you and you would never actually realise unless it was blatantly obvious you're on the street or something like that [...] people would be wary of classing themselves as being in poverty.

During discussions of perceptions of poverty with low-income groups there were many

participants who provided personal testimony of the difficulties involved in struggling to get by on a low income, including reference to the social-psychological impacts of deprivation and low income. However, in line with earlier research (e.g. Flaherty, 2008), not all participants were comfortable in acknowledging their own circumstances in the context of group discussion. As a result, some tended to favourably compare their situation to others they regarded as worse off, or to adapt their preferences based on their own experiences and/or personal reference groups (typically the local neighbourhood or estate).

Nevertheless, participants often also defined poverty as having to go without the 'necessities of life', or having to forgo items and activities which are commonly taken for granted by people living in the UK today. Several participants provided examples of the difficulties of managing on a low-income, sometimes by referring to personal experiences:

NI3 RF: I think like living on the breadline is like poverty to me, just things being very tight and just barely keeping your head above water, you know, maybe just necessities rather than luxuries.

CDF2 RMI: Living on the breadline. They have [...] a roof over their heads but little sort of spare resources...You've just got the bare necessities; no luxuries. That's it, just getting through.

CDF3 RF: Having to think twice about whether you can put the heating on or not. Some people can just go and turn the heating on, some have to think is it cold enough and things like that, things a lot of us take for granted.

LDN3 RF: I think it's where you don't meet the basic needs of common living, like food, you can't provide three square meals for your kids and for the family, you're worried where is the next meal coming from, and I think that's the most important thing for me

BRS2 RF: Not having the basic necessities of life. I think there's different extremes of not being able to have like the latest technology and that sort of thing, it's not necessarily poverty, you might be excluded from a like certain society but you've still got the basic things.

CDF3 RF2: Not being able to make ends meet by doing things that you should really be able to afford to do every day.

For some participants poverty could be equated to not having the 'bare necessities', but for others the inability to afford the occasional treat or luxury item appeared to be an important characteristic of deprivation.

2.2 Absolute poverty and relative deprivation

Following this initial brainstorming exercise, participants were invited to comment on

different existing approaches to the definition of poverty with a view to their relevance for people living in the UK today (see *Box 1, below*). These examples were selected to represent a range of approaches to defining poverty in order to stimulate discussion around their relevance in the UK today:

Box 1: Definitions of poverty

Subsistence

“They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs for food, shelter, warmth, light and sanitation for all members of the household”

Basic Needs

“They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs and lack access to education, information, and health and social care for all members of the household”

Relative Poverty

“They do not have sufficient resources to fully participate in activities and living patterns which are widely available in the UK today”

Participants had different views on the intensity of deprivation represented in the different definitions they were asked to comment upon. Many felt that the three definitions were ordered in decreasing levels of intensity with ‘absolute poverty’ representing the most extreme forms of disadvantage:

BRS1 RMI: One [absolute poverty] is definitely very poor and definition two [basic needs] that is certainly not well off at all, so they’re...it’s just a little bit higher up the social ladder if you meet the basic needs. And definition three [relative poverty] [...] well that’s just a little bit higher standard. So it’s graded

BRS2 RM: To me they all seem like a level of poverty, but I suppose the first one is like a tramp living on the side of the road, he’s got nothing, he’s in poverty. The second one, meet physical needs, [...] [is] someone living in council’s whose got no money, haven’t got a car, live too far away from the school [...] something like that, can’t afford the kids’ clothes, that’s poverty

‘Absolute poverty’ and ‘basic needs’ definitions were those most readily understood and preferred by participants. ‘Absolute poverty’ here referred to an inability to meet physical needs for food, shelter, warmth, light and sanitation, and these items were viewed as constituting the most basic level of subsistence necessary for life in the UK today (and elsewhere):

BRS2 RM: I think it’s definition one [absolute poverty]. I think everyone should have resources for food, that’s a priority. I mean whether you’ve got children or not, it’s probably the main thing, and shelter

CDF2 RM: Number one [absolute poverty], it’s the basics of life ain’t it? [...] There’s no point having education and health [...] socialising, you’ve got to eat!

However, the complexity of such judgements is also revealed in participants' accounts. Whilst there was widespread agreement that subsistence approaches represented the most 'fundamental' needs to be satisfied, this did not necessarily imply an assumption that other material and social needs should be discounted in defining poverty but simply referred to a widely held ontological hierarchy informing participants' views on indicators of poverty. For example, whilst many participants preferred a 'basic needs' approach incorporating access to education, information, and health and social care services in addition to these subsistence needs, their explanations often drew attention to a wider range of social and material needs, as well as to wider societal norms and expectations, under this heading:

BRS3 RM: I think number two, basic needs [...] that's poverty [...] sufficient resources to meet your physical needs, which is warmth and cleanliness and food. And local access to education, information and health and social care, all we're talking about is going out to social clubs, it encompasses the whole lot really, to say that you haven't got the money to go to social clubs, and I think sort of that's basic needs.

BRS3 RF: I think the second one but there's a lot of people that start off all right and then they, when they're out of work they lose their homes, then they end up in bed and breakfast, and then they're put into somewhere where it's not so nice for what they're used to. I think that's what you'd call poverty as well.

Many participants compared their own situation to those living in the global 'South' when evaluating different definitions of poverty. The basic needs definition was also more relevant for participants who expressed a view that a subsistence definition was not applicable in the contemporary UK context, due to the accessibility of state education and health and social care service provision:

LDN1 RM: I think number two, because number one I think yeah, because it's about the state, everybody has his basic needs met in this country, but number two I think is the one that affects a lot of people ... if they're on a low wage, number two is obviously relevant to a lot of people. Number one is I think mostly, 80% of the time most of these needs in this country are met.

BRS3 RF: Because they can get the benefits I don't think that there's many people that would come into that first one [subsistence], that hasn't got enough, they get money so they've got a roof over their head, food, I don't think that first one would come into it so much because they do get benefits don't they?

However other participants disagreed with these views, drawing attention to issues such as the existence of homelessness in the UK, the inequality of access to some services, or the lack of information with regard to service or welfare provision:

BRS3 RM: I think there's quite a lot of people who haven't got a roof over their heads.

LDN3 RF: Everybody has access, if you know where to go for access...But it's how you get that access. It's whether people know about it. A lot of people don't know

what's out there, what they can get and what they can't get.

CDFI RM: There's plenty of things around, but number three they do not have sufficient, but it's having the...access to knowing where they come from. I mean if you've got quite a few friends, you get a lot more information than if you're an old lady sat in the flat on your own and you don't know about these centres

Some participants compared their own situation to those living in the global 'South' when discussing the concept of relative poverty. Again, this did not necessarily imply a discounting of the experience and impacts of poverty in the UK but rather that the nature of poverty in the UK is simply different from that experienced in 'developing' countries:

LDN3 RM: When I think of some of the countries like India or some of the countries in Africa, and you see people that really just cannot feed their families more than once a day if they're lucky, or some of the parents might have to go without food just to feed their children. And I think relative poverty is that, it's relative poverty, it's not nice when the pressure we feel on the children say who want these Reebok trainers or they want to go on these trips, it's not nice. We feel we have to do it but when you compare it to some people who just don't have food in the world, then I think it is relative poverty

However, drawing on their own life experiences many participants referred more widely to the implications of rising living standards for our understanding of poverty and the items and activities which everyone living in the UK should be able to afford. This understanding of poverty as relative to prevailing contemporary living standards and lifestyles was emphasised by several participants:

CDFI RM: Things have changed in my generation in as much as we used to have lino to keep the fire going now when I was a kid, whereas now you'd expect central heating

NI2 RFI: I do see it as relative, I mean I'm in the situation at the moment where the twins, they're both doing their GCSEs...What they really need is a laptop each, and 10 years ago, 15 years ago, people would have laughed at you if you said I think I'm poor because I can't afford laptops for my girls

Other participants favoured this definition viewing it as broader, encompassing aspects of social deprivation, and highlighting the importance of being able to participate in social activities:

NII RM: Poverty's not just about money and possessions now, it's about being able to participate in activities and have information about health and social care. It's not just about the financial aspects of it anymore, so the definition has broadened an awful lot. These things are seen as basic rights now - education and information.

BRS3 RM: If a person hasn't got a vast or sufficient income then they can't participate in activities. They're excluded from communities if you like. They're

frightened to get involved with neighbours in case the neighbours say well let's go down the pub tonight, and then they've got to open up and say sorry I can't, I can't afford it. So they're excluded...If you've got children going to school, exchange, trips, can't really afford it and there are people who really have to save hard just to send their children. And the parents go without I think rightly so that your child doesn't get...they should have sufficient to live and live properly, not have to say oh can't afford to do that.

NI2 RF: There's the psychological, emotional wellbeing thing...You may be covering your basic needs, but there's this underlying sense of low self-esteem, you know, guilt that kind of can be quite serious really in a way

In some cases participants described the relative poverty definition as equating to social exclusion:

BRS3 RM2: If you haven't got the money you can't indulge in things like holidays, for example, or transportation...You can't afford to go on holiday, can't do the normal things that most people who have got money do. So in a way you're socially excluded from that aspect of things.

NI2 RF1: It's important to feel part of something, part of your community, to be involved in activities and things that are going on...When my twins were babies social exclusion wasn't a phrase, I just remember feeling really lonely because I was on my own and they were so young I couldn't go out or do anything

2.3 What does poverty stop people doing?

There was considerable debate as to what was meant by the term "activities and living patterns" in relation to definitions of poverty based upon relative deprivation. Considerations of relative cost (e.g. in relation to dance classes), individual preferences (e.g. in relation to socialising), and wider social norms (e.g. in relation to holidays) were variously identified as important factors in shaping understandings of contemporary living patterns and activities:

CDF3 RF: If it means like sort of extra things like dance lessons or swimming lessons and things, then they can be quite expensive, so I wouldn't necessarily class someone living in poverty if they couldn't afford to send their child to dance lessons

BRS2 RM: It's down to the individual whether they want to go out and mix with other people or whether they want to stay at home and ...

BRS1 RM: Things like holidays and living patterns, I mean it might be the majority of people go on holiday but there are many that still can't afford to go on holiday, and they might consider themselves to be in poverty because they are, they can't afford that.

The question of what restrictions are placed upon people's capacity to fully participate in

society was explored further by asking participants 'What does poverty stop people doing?' An inability to afford an adequate diet and to maintain adequate warmth within the home were identified as central both in maintaining 'physical efficiency' and in meeting wider social expectations and cultural pressures:

BRS1 RF: Perhaps parents wouldn't have enough money to heat the house properly so they'd feel very cold. They would be noticing that...what they're being fed on would be very different than their friends perhaps who are a little bit more well off...There's lots of elements there where the children are going to feel poor, with the parents feeling guilty that the children are put in this position

CDF3 RF: You can buy sort of things that taste nice, like a packet of frozen chicken nuggets really cheaply, but inside them it's...parts of the chicken you really wouldn't want to know they're eating and it's all rubbish in there, it's not healthy food. But it's cheap and the kids like it, so people on that budget are going to buy things like that

LDN3 RF: I've got a lot of people around me who...[are] living on basic, just chips and junk food because they haven't got the money to buy good food or healthy food. I know one of the families...go and purchase all their stuff from Oxfam and stuff like that

The above quotes indicate that perceptions of material necessities emphasised their wider social significance in the performance of social roles (e.g. as good parents) and in the avoidance of shame and stigma. Other participants mentioned the difficulties people face in meeting the social obligations associated with family life as a result of an inability to afford appropriate dress or gifts on special occasions:

CDF2 RF: If you was on the breadline and you were invited to a wedding or a christening, you wouldn't be able to go, because you wouldn't be able to afford an outfit for yourself, your children and presents...Birthday parties, if the children were invited to birthday parties they wouldn't be able to go

One participant explained how an inability to participate socially can lead to feelings of shame, drawing on personal experiences of being unable to attend a family event due to the cost:

NI2 RF: When you get invited to weddings, people don't seem to realise you're not going, you make up some excuses but the reality of it is you just can't afford it...but keep up with the Jones' for want of a better word and just don't go because you can't afford it. But within the family or whatever I think it's very rude that you didn't go because you have that sense of pride that you didn't go ... you can't afford it yeah, but you make some kind of excuse...

However, participants also referred to the significance of social participation itself in the performance of social roles and conformity to the normative pressures placed upon individuals and families, for example being able to afford family holidays, regular exercise, and participation in sporting or cultural events widely taken for granted in the UK today. Interestingly, however, these items and activities are not necessarily viewed as necessities despite their evident wider social significance:

CDF3 RF: Well yeah, you can't go on holiday can you? I mean I know it's not a necessity but I think all children should experience some sort of a holiday within a family unit. You know, I think every family should be able to do some sort of activity together, and be able to afford to do that.

BRS3 RF: Yes. Social life, they don't have any do they. They've got no money to be able to go swimming or go to the cinema. That's the sort of things they have to stop because finance won't stretch to that.

Restrictions on spending and the difficulties and strains this creates in managing stretched households budgets were discussed by some low income participants. This was an especial issue for parents in view of societal expectations of what parents should be able to provide for their children and the concomitant feelings of guilt and shame for parents unable to do so as a result of a lack of money. In many cases, participants felt that parents go without basic necessities themselves (or accumulate unaffordable debt) in order to ensure that their children do not experience bullying or exclusion as a result of an inability to afford the items and activities valued by their peers. As in existing studies (Middleton et al, 1994, 1997; Beresford et al., 1999; Hirsch and Smith, 2010), children were prioritised particularly in terms of their educational and dietary needs:

NII RF: I think it's very stressful because you're continually having to balance, trying to balance money, trying to balance everything all the time and watching the prices of things all the time, and that is a constant stress.

LDN 3RF: Most parents who have children give priority to their children rather than look after themselves or buy something for themselves

BRS1 RF: If you've got children you really need it [access to the internet] at home because they're disadvantaged

BRS1 RF: Well if you've got children you probably would make sure the children had the proper diet, are well fed, and go without yourself, but make out to them that you've actually eaten earlier

Nevertheless, participants in the low-income groups described their difficulties in being able to afford club memberships and other associated 'extras' for their children, highlighting the feelings of guilt experienced by parents struggling to protect children from the stigma associated with poverty:

BRS2 RF: There's pressure as well on parents with children with school activities, the amount of money they've got to pay. If parents can't afford it and they think well, you know, my child's going to get picked on if he doesn't go; 'you're poor', attitudes like that with children...Some parents do forego their basics to let the children do what they want

GLS2 RF1: I actually talk my kids out of doing that [joining clubs]. It sounds terrible but I just can't afford it. I can't afford to take the kids to travel to the clubs, to pay for them at the clubs, and continue that every single week, I just can't afford it. And

to talk them out of it is, it makes you feel so bad.

GLS2 RF3: I have never said to my children I can't afford it, I would put it in another way, you know, if they have this they were very lucky to have this, so really put this off until a later date...you've got to put it in another way rather than tell them the facts of life that you're...They're still children...

GLS1 RM: Parents will do anything to get their kids that additional luxury, because kids who are better off, you know, they don't want their kids not to be same...and that's where things, parents will do anything they can...they would lose out themselves rather than actually see their kids worse off than others.

Restricted opportunities for social interaction due to a lack of money were viewed by some participants as undermining people's ability to maintain relationships and build new social ties both instrumentally (e.g. in relation to developing networks) and as an end in itself (e.g. in relation to family life and friendship networks):

BRS2 RF: Building friendships by going to the pub. I don't know, you just get chatting to the bloke stood next to you...so it prevents you from building new relationships, friendships, that type of thing.

CDF2 RM: The whole social structure is built on meeting people and networking with people and talking to people. And that's how I suppose society is based on...So if you don't have that interaction I suppose...you can become isolated and obviously devoid of social direction

NII RM: That definitely has an effect on your home life...relationship with your wife and your kids, you become more stressed out, short tempered and a bit ratty and all the rest of it. There's nothing to distract you from those things if you can't go out

Nevertheless, some participants reflected on the negative consequences of contemporary trends in consumption for the capacity of many parents to meet the rising expectations this generates. These quotes illustrate the unease expressed by some participants about the role that consumer driven preferences potentially could play in shaping notions of deprivation:

BRS3 RF: It doesn't stop with holidays does it, because now the youngsters they've got to put on the biggest and the best birthday party for their child; they've got to have themed parties now. It runs into thousands. What is this all about?

GLS1 RM: If you go back when you were younger yourself, you know, it is much different and parents would do even more so for their kids now than what they would have done back then. You know, going outside and playing and whatever it might be, things when you were younger didn't cost money, everything has to cost money now

2.4 Vulnerability to poverty in the UK today

As noted above, participants gave various examples of extreme marginalisation associated for examples with experiences of homelessness and destitution. However, participants also identified various social groups they considered to be especially vulnerable to wider forms of poverty, with families with children (especially large families) and older people being frequently mentioned. Participants talked about the additional costs associated with providing children with even basic items such as school uniforms and shoes and also about experiencing pressure to buy other more expensive items such as designer clothing in order to protect children from feeling excluded. Single parent families were thought to be particularly vulnerable by some. Other issues mentioned included a lack of jobs for school leavers and the consequences of recent policy changes such as curtailing of Educational Maintenance Allowance:

CDF3 RF: And school leavers, because if they didn't do well in school and they don't go to college, they can't claim benefits until they're 18...having to struggle if you are earning and you've got to, they can't claim that EMA, then you're under pressure and that's another way that people are in poverty

One participant talked about the particular difficulties experienced by children leaving the care system:

CDF3: RF: I think sometimes children who have been through the care system, foster care and, obviously if they get good foster parents then it's different, but if they're back and forward between foster parents and in homes I think they tend to do quite, not well in life, particularly at the beginning because once they become is it 18 and they're not in care anymore they're out rather than having that support from home, being able to live at home ... Because of that, and then they're out of the care system and they're in bed and breakfasts or somewhere.

A number of participants viewed older people as being more susceptible to poverty, often highlighting the impact rising costs of living, and in particular difficulties meeting the cost of fuel bills:

BRS2 RM: Pensioners, especially those who live on their own. They haven't got access to social networks. They can be very vulnerable health wise, financially, so a downward spiral.

GLS2 RF: Because when you work you get an income, but then when you retire your income's cut, but you've still got to eat and bills and everything.

CDF1 RM: It's a form of poverty. I mean being old, as you get older, it's a form of poverty because you've got to pay the same bills as someone who's out working

However one of the participants in a group for low-income older people disagreed, relating her experience of learning to go without, possibly demonstrating the existence of adaptive preferences:

CDI RF: I think it's less ... Because we know how to economise, you know, make a meal out of nothing.

Several participants also commented on the vulnerability of ethnic minority groups to poverty. The potential impact of locality and length of settlement in the UK were noted as contributory factors in explaining ethnic differences in vulnerability to poverty:

GLS1 RM: Ethnic minorities coming into the country could be at risk...probably because it's hard to socially integrate...and perhaps the chance of them getting jobs could be harder

LDN3 RF3: It depends again on the length of their settlement...in the UK. If you look at some of the ethnic minorities who have just arrived, who are just trying to settle, it can be difficult

Other groups thought to be more likely to experience poverty included disabled people, people with mental health problems, people with chronic illness, people providing unpaid care for children, older or sick people, and people poor literacy and basic skills:

BRS1 RF2: Their time needs to be taken up caring for the children or the elderly, so it doesn't give them any time to go out to work, or even if they did have work how are they going to care for the children?

BRS2 RF: Equally people with mental health issues...not being sort of accepted in society and knocking their confidence, therefore not able to get a job because they don't feel confident enough in interviews and that type of thing.

BRS2 RM: There's going to be a lot more people that don't meet the criteria [for disability benefits]. Although they are disabled, they can't work, they can't get about

NI2 RM: If you're in the situation where you haven't been educated well enough to read and write properly, I think that can lead to economic poverty anyway. If you're cut off from society around you, if you can't do the things that other people take for granted

The unemployed, the low paid, and households reliant upon social benefits were identified as especially vulnerable to poverty:

LDN1: RF: People on benefits, not like child benefits but benefits, probably not able to get a job. Those benefits are just I guess, prevents you from having no sort of income really it could be people who work, could be minimum wage or extremely low wages.

CDF2 RM: Well, no employment in the household whatsoever, I define living on the breadline.

However, participants in employment also recognised that whilst they might be regarded as a group who would be less likely to experience poverty, rising living costs, high unemployment, and the general climate of economic uncertainty made the financial

situation of many working age people increasingly precarious, even for groups traditionally seen as relatively affluent:

BRS1 RM: Well that could be any age...it's probably less likely for people sort of around my age, people who've been working all their life, but I mean it could happen, I got made redundant 18 months ago, my income dropped dramatically so I had to change our life. You have to adjust to it or it could happen, and especially now with the changes there are now, people losing jobs, drastic cutbacks.

BRS2 RM: Less, it should be less because they should be able to get a job, but I don't know if that's actually the case. You're either too young and they never get a job, and people are too old and retired and they've got nothing, then they're stuck aren't they. So in theory you think people of working age should be okay. Reality I think is probably somewhat different right now.

BRS2 RF: In 50 years' time there could be more sort of middle class people who find themselves in poverty. I think to myself like a graduate leaving university and then come out with debt and not able to get a career based job, and we're paying off debts and then not able to like get a mortgage. So by the time you're 70 and retired, am I going to be able to, have I been able to put by sufficient money because by the time I retire there's probably going to be no state pension anymore...how will I be able to support myself for the rest of my life?

2.5 Agency, choice and lifestyles

The role of agency and choice in relation to poverty was discussed by participants, and this was sometimes linked to considerations of mobility, with some participants from low-income groups highlighting the role of education in helping people to avoid poverty:

NI2 RM: You hear quite a lot about intellectual poverty, you know...if you're in the situation where you haven't been educated well enough to read and write properly, I think that can lead to economic poverty anyway

From a 'basic needs' perspective on poverty, access to education was seen by participants as vital in promoting social mobility and avoiding or escaping from 'material' poverty:

CDF3 RM: Everybody needs a decent education like. They'll probably grow up then to live in poverty as well without a decent education

LDNI RF: I've always been taught by my parents that...poverty is a state of mind, you might not have money today, it means you're broke, it doesn't mean that you're poor, it's just a state of mind. If you believe you're poor, not having enough information, not having any education...it makes you feel like you're boxed in, you're stuck...but if you're educated and you've got information you're able to go out there and actually reach out and do something for yourself

More fundamentally, participants highlighted the impact of poverty in restricting the

ability to make choices in life, for example in choosing where you live in or the school that your children might attend:

LDN2 RM: Even just sending your child to a particular school, you know, sometimes poverty can keep you from doing that ... But because you find yourself in a particular neighbourhood you do not have the means to say okay my child is not going to go to that school because of its record. So for me poverty is a limiting factor, it can really push you to the edge where you don't have choices...You don't have choice, you can't make choice.

BRS1 RM: Lack of opportunities in jobs, and also generally you're not meeting the people that we meet through education, through the workplace, that might actually mean you move up the ladder, the social ladder, and have job opportunities, so lack of opportunities as well

One participant from the low-income ethnic minority group held in London drew associations with Sen's (1985) theories of capability deprivation in relation to poverty citing the inability to maintain complete functionings due to a lack of material resources:

LDN2 RM: Sometimes I look at poverty as deprivation of one's capabilities...it's more than just an idea of money, it also entails whether I am able to do or to function because there is availability of funds for me to become all that I have to become. So I'm looking at it from that dimension as well

In contrast to Richardson and Le Grand's (2002) findings, there was disagreement within groups as to the extent of influence of personal agency on exclusion. As in earlier discussions, some participants expressed strong opinions on an apparent 'culture of poverty' and the supposed intergenerational transmission of disadvantage as a result of lifestyle choices rather than structural factors:

CDF2 RF: If one generation is poor it does seem to follow through that the generations after them live within the same way as their parents, grandparents have all lived...So in a way they don't want to help themselves. I don't know how you would retrain that to get the younger generations in these families to want to help themselves, to not be like their generations above them

These accounts drew upon deep-rooted moral distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, for example as reflected in the mainstream media's construction of homelessness. The following excerpts highlight some participants' views on the role of personal choices as a contributory factor in homelessness. It also highlights wider traditional moral distinctions between the honest, hardworking (deserving) poor and the feckless, lazy and/or dishonest (undeserving) poor which continue to shape public responses to poverty in the UK today:

GLS1 RM: You see people without these things, like people on the streets or whatever, and I appreciate it's almost kind of wrong to say it but there's an element of choice in it...be it drugs and alcohol or whatever else, it's almost kind of up to them

BRS3 RM2: We hear so many times in the local news or chitter chatter around the

local town of 'dropouts' and they can be in the town centres, and then they...go off around the corner and get in a motor car and drive home! They've always got dogs with them. Now if you can feed a dog surely you can feed yourself and your family

GLS2 RF3: There's obviously people getting the same amount money as us, and you see them walking about the street begging and smoking

CDFI RM3: I've worked, I've grown up with people who've never worked, they drink, betting and everything, and they've got the best of everything now, whereas I've got a small pension

BRS3 RF2: It's alright if it's brought on themselves where they're either drinking all their money or smoking it all or wasting it all, and perhaps don't even bother to earn it in the first place. I'm hard I just think they deserve what they get. But the person that's had a job and has tried really hard and then loses it through no fault of their own...that's the one I have sympathy for, who needs help, not the ones who are fit and able but can't be bothered to work.

2.6 Determining the 'necessities of life' in the UK today

Critics of the consensual approach have raised methodological concerns about the nature of the 'consensus' achieved in sample surveys of perceptions of necessities, for example by highlighting the conceptual and methodological difficulties in establishing a "valid" consensus on the basis of individualised survey responses (e.g. Walker 1987). From a methodological viewpoint, focus group methods encourage consensus through the investigation of inter-subjectivities arising from the dynamics of group dialogue. It is difficult to make definitive statements concerning the impact of such forms of 'collective reasoning' on the selection of items. However, it is nevertheless instructive to look at how the process of deliberation operates in achieving consensus within a group discussion context, and at how these processes may differ from the response process undertaken by individual survey respondents in selecting items within a household social survey. This section explores these issue by examining participants' strategies for making decisions on the 'necessities of life' in the qualitative group discussions and by considering the light these issues can shed on the nature of survey response on this topic for example with regard to issues of cognition, judgement, recall and sensitivity.

Cognition issues

The first comment made by one female participant revealed that some group members appeared to interpret the task as being asked to suggest items that people would be likely to prioritise if they were experiencing poverty, rather than the items all people should be able to afford and should not have to go without in our society today (i.e. in a normative sense):

BRS1 RF: The only thing with insurance is if you were on the poverty line insurance is probably one of the things that you'd let go

A range of related potential cognition issues were highlighted in participants responses. Firstly, some participants' judgement of specific items implied an evaluation whether the item was important in avoiding poverty in a definitional sense. For example, when asked if all adults should be able to afford some new clothes one participant remarked:

BRS1 RM: I'm going to say no. I don't think having new clothes is what takes you out of poverty personally.

BRS1 RM: I don't doubt that [*lots of people prefer new*] but I don't think that's what we're asking, I don't think it's a preference issue, I think it's...is that poverty? And I don't think it is, because I think you can have anything if you actually put your mind to it

After further discussions on the comparative costs of, or people's preferences for, new or second-hand clothes and dietary items these issues were still evident. Despite prompts from the researcher, participants in this group understood the task to involve selecting items necessary for people experiencing poverty rather than those items needed to live decently:

Int: Do you think fresh fruit or vegetables daily are important?

BRS2 RM: Not a necessity, no...In an ideal world yeah, everyone loves a bit of meat and a bit of fish and some, but surely if you're on the poverty line a bowl of porridge would just see you through

In some groups the terminology used in consensual research methods was also questioned, with participants expressing concerns about the interpretation of the term "necessity" to denote items or activities that all people should be able to afford, rather than to denote those items and activities people simply cannot live without:

GLS1 RM: There's a difference between what that family should be able to afford and what a necessity is...Maybe changing necessity to affordability, I think that's the word you're missing. I would say a TV is absolutely 100% this family should be able to afford, but it's not a necessity so it's difficult

NI3 RF: Well the way I would have to look at necessity is can you survive without it

Some participants also made distinctions between an item's economic costs and its social benefits in ways which again draw attention to the normative dimensions of the interpretation of necessities within consensual approaches to poverty measurement:

GLS1 RM: Because if we're asking the question do we think this family should be able to afford it? Then that's an economic question. Do I think it's socially beneficial for them to have this? Then yes.

To this extent, references to what households and individuals 'should' be able to afford are potentially ambiguous in referring both to a normative judgement about entitlements, as well as to evaluative judgements concerning what households and individuals are in fact likely to be able to afford and need. The latter interpretation of 'necessities' as items that are both affordable and widely enjoyed, and also impossible to do without in our

society today, was one widely supported within these discussion groups.

Need, entitlement and the abstract individual

As noted above, participants were provided with a hypothetical scenario or 'vignette' to facilitate group decision-making on 'necessities of life' items. However, some participants nevertheless had difficulty in making judgements on whether an item was a necessity due to a lack of contextual information to aid their decision-making such as the family's level of income or issues related to the contemporary costs of living for households in different circumstances:

GLS2RF: It depends how much he's earning first and foremost...Is he one of the management, part of the office staff or is he a nurse?...it just really depends

LDN2 RM: What sort of accommodation would he able to afford? Are they social housing, are they private housing?...In one of my comments I said why can't the wife go out and take some part time job to have some extra money coming into the family, I mean these days...both parents work in order to survive
BRS1 RM: It depends on where they live of course...if you live in a big city a car's just a nuisance.

BRS1 RM: I'd say car only if public transport not available.

NII RM: Yeah, I think it depends where you work and where your schools are

Such contextual information was also perceived to be important in shaping participants' normative judgements concerning entitlements often based upon underlying moral distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Reference was made in many groups to the entitlements that were perceived to arise from fulfilment of social roles as workers (in terms of labour market participation) and as parents (in maintaining 'respectable' family life). Participants made provisos in terms of entitlement, for example highlighting reasonable expectations for a 'sensible' working family:

BRS3 RM: This family obviously are a sensible family, the man goes to work, he's got a couple of kids, if he can't afford to own a car then he won't - that will probably be the first thing to go. But if he can afford it you'd expect to have a car.

LDN3 RM: Well they should be able to afford to go out...If you're saying there's nobody working in the house then I'd say no way, but you've got a working household you would hope in this country that people could go out for a meal.

GLS1RM: I would be disappointed to know of a family where the husband works full time with two kids and he couldn't afford something to wear.

There were, however differing opinions expressed on issues of eligibility for people living on a low income or who were perceived to be 'welfare-dependent'. Whilst some referred to notions of universal entitlement, other accounts make distinctions between the 'working' population and the 'poor', and between what we expect for ourselves and for others:

LDN2RM: Everybody should own a car. I don't see why you should deprive the poor people of the use of a car...

CDF2 RF: I'm not being horrible to poor people but why should they be allowed to have double glazing when people who are working can't afford it.

BRS3 RF1: But it's all about buying second-hand clothes...I wouldn't like to see my grandchildren going to a charity shop and buying second-hand clothes when you can buy new at the supermarket.

BRS3 RF2: This is the [hypothetical] family that we're thinking of, we're not thinking of our grandchildren. We would buy for ours.

Whilst the terminology of need and necessity was often used by participants, the reasoning behind participants' statements was not always clear and it was not possible to follow-up all comments in the context of the group. However, in some instances participants elaborated by making reference to contemporary living standards and consumption norms within society. For example, in discussing domestic living arrangements, one participant explained his thinking by citing the social importance of family space relating to family cohesion. Another referred to the *social* significance of nutrition for example as a 'treat' for children aside from (and possibly detrimental to) any perceived nutritional value as part of a balanced diet.

Need and changing social norms

Participants' decisions on the 'necessities of life' also reflected judgements about the availability and cost of items, and social trends in ownership and consumption of certain items. To this extent, 'need' is socially constructed in relation to participants' perceptions of prevailing norms within contemporary society:

BRS1 RF: Most people have got a dressing gown.

CDF1 RF: Most of them [children] have got bikes haven't they?

NI2 RF: I think that it is really [a necessity], I think for a child not to have internet access in their house is unusual. You know, it's unusual nowadays.

The importance of new technologies (e.g. computers, mobile telephony, and internet access) in contemporary UK lifestyles provoked some interesting debates in this respect. Many participants emphasised the importance of keeping pace with changing technology and associated changing social norms. Having a computer and (high-speed) internet access was mostly viewed as a necessity in a contemporary UK context, particularly in terms of children's educational needs, but also for social contact, with evidence of the increasing importance of access to social networking sites:

NI2RF: I find it really helpful for Christmas shopping and things...I do think it is a necessity in today's society because it's such a major communication...

NI2 RF: I think [the internet]'s a necessity, just even for adults...I think just email as you say for shopping and looking for bargains and all that kind of thing...it's just part

of society now

NI2 RM: I don't have the internet, so I mean that's partly, I mean I'm a bit of a technophobe, but XXX has, I mean he has computers at school, goes to the library and gets it for free there if he really needs something for his homework. But he's not, he's 10 and coming 11, and so he's just getting to the stage where Facebook thing, so I can see myself having to cave in there.

Consideration of what is 'reasonable' or 'adequate' was central to participants' decision-making reflecting social judgements relating to norms of self-presentation, the avoidance of shame, and the value of social connections and norms:

LDN2 RF: It makes you feel you have a home. Home is where the heart is, what do they say in English, your home is your castle. So you have to have it in this sense because a family might come in for a cup of tea, you don't want them to go back "Oh my goodness, did you see those? Oh my goodness"

RN11 RF: [An evening out once a fortnight is] a necessity because otherwise you can't keep in contact with your friends, can't keep in contact with family. You know, we're talking about one night out every two weeks.

LDN2 RM: It is important that sometimes they forget about the children and go out somewhere and view their marriage and have time one for another.

Nevertheless, the social pressure to 'keep up' with contemporary patterns of consumption (however extravagant) was acknowledged to create the potential for new social distinctions and processes of exclusion to emerge. For example, the spiralling consumption of new technologies was also viewed as producing new forms of stigma in the form of digital exclusion with potentially damaging effects especially for children:

CDF1 RM: If you've got young children you're going back to the stigma thing now aren't you, if those two children haven't got a computer...they're in for a bashing when they go into school.

CDF3 RF: Kids these days if they haven't got a phone by a certain age, you know, when they're teenagers, then they get excluded as well

CDF3 RF: It's not that it's a necessity but they've all got one, and if they haven't then they stand out

However, as Hirsch and Smith (2010) found, participants' accounts of their decision-making sometimes also referred to estimations of how difficult it would be to do without the item in question, and therefore of the extent to which items and activities may be seen as 'luxuries' - however inexpensive they may be and regardless of how widely enjoyed such items are within our society today:

NI2 RF: It would be really awful not to have it [outfit for special occasions], it would be grim I think.

LDN3 RM: Is it really a necessity to have a DVD player? It's not about the price

because if something is cheap it doesn't mean you should go out and buy it. But if it's available and you can definitely do without it then I don't see it as a desirable or a necessity but as a luxury

Some participants presented similar arguments in relation to new technologies. Whilst acknowledging the social pressures driving consumption of such technologies and their widespread usage in the UK today, one participant argued that such items should not be considered as 'necessities' from the viewpoint of basic needs:

LDNI RF1: I struggle with people's definitions of what a luxury is and necessities, and there's certain objects for me like Wii or DVD players...people now feel that these things are necessities and, you know, basics that they should have, they think that they need to have that item which is not exactly very key to their sort of core life, and that's why I say that certain objects are luxuries

Thus a distinction appears to be drawn items and activities that are perceived to be key to human flourishing and those that are perceived to be driven by consumerist impulses.

2.7 What is a 'good' standard of living?

Participants were next invited to consider what having a good standard of living would mean to them. As part of this exercise, participants' were asked to comment on an existing definition of a minimum standard of living developed by Bradshaw et al (2008) and to reflect on what 'the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society' means in the UK today³. For most participants, a good standard of living involved sufficient income not only to afford the 'basics' such as adequate accommodation, transport, social life, or paying the bills, but being able to afford discretionary spending on luxuries as a reflection of social status and/or as a means of promoting personal fulfilment and happiness.

Amongst those participants themselves experiencing 'good' living standards this was sometimes viewed by participants as a reward for their own past hard work (and sometimes financial acumen), with anticipated future rewards understood in terms of overseas holidays, leisure pursuits, a good car, material comfort and financial security. Implicit within these statements is a normative sub-text within which these rewards are viewed as the 'just deserts' for hard work:

CDF1 RF1: I've worked all my life, so my standard of living is quite comfortable....I don't have to really worry about much...but I've worked all my married life as well so...

BRS3 RF3: I've worked seven days a week all my life, so we've never spent much, not had any holidays until we retired 10 years ago. And now, yes we're comfortable, we

³ "A minimum standard of living in Britain today includes more than just food, clothes and shelter, it's about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society" (Bradshaw et al., 2008)

can go abroad maybe once a year, I can afford to play golf...I can afford to go out for a meal once a week. And I think I'm lucky now, I've got everything that I need

BRS2 RM: I've got a nice car, I've got a decent job, I've got my own house, I've got a lodger that lives with me but I need that to get by...I'm quite happy with the standard of living that I've got. I don't go, you know, everyone would like to go to the Seychelles every six weeks on holiday, but I can't afford that

However, a more abstract discussion of what constitutes a 'good' standard of living revealed a somewhat more nuanced set of priorities focused as much upon well-being, personal development, security, stability, family life and wider social relationships as upon consumption as a signifier of status:

LDN2 RM: A good standard of living is the ability to have a roof over my head, to have a family to talk with, and also to be able to provide for their basic necessities...and [the] ability to have things that would make them happy

LDN1 RF: A good standard of living is debt free...earning more than enough...you have a surplus and you're not just making ends meet. You've got a surplus of funds, you can save a reasonable amount per month...

LDN1 RF: I'm not really where I want to be in terms of my ability to do everything I want to do...It's not material objects I'm chasing...More money would enable be to possibly do more, develop myself intellectually more and have social pursuits which I know that other people in this system are having

BRS1 RM: Food on the table, extras, that you can feed your family, have a car, house is warm, clean and got chance to perhaps eating out regularly, theatre...

Beyond a discussion of specific material indicators of living standards, participants were also keen to discuss the interconnections between living standards and personal autonomy, well-being and quality of life. In particular, participants emphasised the importance of having quality time with friends and family as contributing to their well-being and that this sometimes conflicts with financial priorities:

BRS1 RMI: [Being] able to do what you want to do without having the worries that maybe you used to have

BRS1 RF: [to] meet all your bills and your needs fairly easily, and then still to have some money left over to have a choice of what we do with it

LDN1 RM: Because there are two sides to happiness; one is the physical side and one is the emotional side. The physical side is the food, shelter and clothing. The emotional side is your family, your friends, your circle, your spirituality, your holidays, your friends...to live in comfort is the balance of two...without thinking that you have to borrow in order to live within your means

LDN3 RM: Number one is having time for yourself and your family, being able to afford to have that time. And then number two being able to afford what you wouldn't normally be able to afford under normal circumstances

Others participants made connections between the physical and psycho-social aspects of individual well-being and the perpetuation of wider societal inequalities and barriers to opportunities:

BRSI RM: People are not as happy when they feel that society doesn't treat them fairly, when they feel that they are alone...it then does have a knock-on effect on the mental wellbeing of an individual, on the physical wellbeing of an individual, and then has an effect on the rest of us around it, because it creates that inequality in society

BRSI RM: If you've got the same opportunities and choices as those around you, then you can argue that is a fair society, and that creates a better society and a happier society.

Opportunities for a good education including opportunities for life-long learning and personal development were identified by participants as key resources – and their absence as key barriers to realising people's potential:

NI2 RF2: Simply because of money, why can they not develop their skills, enhance their full potential so that they're participating in society?

NI3 RF1: I think maybe the opportunity to upgrade your education if you want to, something like continuous education.

GLSI RM: Having a certain choice over what employment you take...not having to do a job you hate

NI3 RF3: For people who have maybe come out of school without qualifications and they get to a certain level and think actually I can't help the kids with their maths...Access to maths and English and stuff that, you know, they don't necessarily want to do something as big as going to the university

Some participants however prioritised opportunities for children in terms of education and participation in extra-curricular learning not simply as an instrumental good in promoting 'human capital' but as an end in itself in promoting personal development and well-being:

CDF2 RF: It's part of learning and like bringing up your children into...they're saying that children are sort of ASBOs and everything, but if you haven't got the opportunities to take them and show them there's better things to do than be hanging around on the streets...

BRSI RF1: A good wellbeing, making them feel that they're safe and they can grow, and the happier they get the more they'll grow.

BRSI RF2: It [education] makes them feel a worthwhile member of society instead of worthless

2.8 Perceptions of social exclusion

In the latter half of the group discussions, participants were asked about their

understanding of the term social exclusion and what it meant to them to be able to fully participate in society. These questions revealed mixed comprehension and familiarity with the terminology of 'social exclusion'. Some were not familiar with the term itself, or at least with its meanings and applications. However, in contrast to Flaherty's (2008) work, many others were familiar with the term 'social exclusion' and its common usage in public debates relating, for example, to disadvantage, deprivation, and the 'underclass'. Participants definitions ranged from relative deprivation of material goods, to those describing lack of social participation, autonomy, and security, the later being areas aligning more closely to the definitions provided by participants within Richardson et al.'s 2002 study.

Participants offered definitions encompassing what they termed as 'unfairness' and 'being left out' in everyday life. A few participants provided a more expansive definition of inclusion in society which included an emphasis on 'belonging', for example, as part of a wider community or society:

CDF3 RM: It means not fitting in really isn't it? If people don't fit in you feel socially excluded

CDF2 RM: Well, being socially accepted isn't it really, belonging isn't it?

BRS1 RF: I think it's kind of a feeling that you're useful in society as well, so even if that's, you might feel useful in different ways, like even if you're just looking after children or if you're at work or if you're volunteering in certain things. It doesn't mean you've got to have like a high powered job...just feeling that you're part of something.

Others drew attention to wider societal processes of exclusion associated with the persistence of poverty and class-based inequalities in shaping perceptions of individuals and neighbourhoods:

BRS2 RM5: Social exclusion is almost like a class thing. You've got like working class people and upper class people, that's like social exclusion as well isn't it?

NI3 RF: Well you could be excluded by class, even though we're not supposed to have a class system there still is a class system. So somebody from an estate with a bad reputation could be socially excluded in terms of jobs. Somebody sees that they're from that particular area, they won't employ them.

LDNI RF: Someone's income level determines how they value themselves and how they feel they can manoeuvre socially and where they want to go and who they want to be with and how they want to dress...and the newspaper they read... people draw inferences and they quantify you by the amount of money they think you have

The impact of locality, and neighbourhood disadvantage and stigma on people's choices and opportunities is especially prominent in participants' accounts, alongside concerns about declining community cohesion and fears of social isolation:

NI2 RF: Sometimes it can be as simple as the area, the neighbourhood that you live in. It could have a stigma attached to it and 'oh, they're from there, they're that kind of person'.

BRS3 RM: Another thing that has happened in our sort of lifetime, adult lifetime, and certainly happened in the present day for people younger than ourselves, is that people have got a lot more opportunity to go away from the place of birth or town where they grew up with all their friends. They leave school after five or six years and they're off. They get married, they're off the other end of the country, wherever, and unless you're a sociable person who will mix you're going to be so isolated, and this community thing becomes harder to build.

The impact of exclusion on children was once again highlighted. Some participants talked about unfairness, being "left out", or not fitting-in in educational settings, by referring to examples such as bullying at school (or for adults in the workplace) which might lead to exclusion. Others highlighted the social impacts of health problems and conditions which might prevent someone from being able to participate fully in society, including as a result of the prejudices and a lack of provision:

CDF2 RF1: I've heard it in like the terms of being bullied, when maybe we all discussed about children in an environment where a child is excluded for something.

GLS2RF: My son suffers from social exclusion in an autistic spectrum and suffers terribly...It's just how people treat him. To look at him you would never think he has Asperger's but he struggles with life in general, and it's the way he's been treated, it's just most of his life

LDN3 RM: My son was born prematurely...sometimes we think he's socially excluded at school, so even though financially he might have everything he wants, sometimes children find it difficult to talk to him...other friends of ours, one daughter has got cerebral palsy, she's only five and she's been bullied at school, so her parents ...financially they've got their own home, they've got all the material car...but the daughter's being bullied at school because of her special needs. And society doesn't get it

LDN3 RF: If you've got a disability...you're obviously excluded because the perception is that you aren't able to do things that normal people are allowed to do or are capable of doing...a lot of perceptions around disabled people is that they haven't got a good level of education or because they're physically disabled they can't do the things that we would want to do, get on a tube and travel to work and things like that

Participants who focussed on material aspects of social exclusion, in addition to basic necessities, also mentioned not being able to afford consumer goods such as cars, clothes - in particular designer brands - and items of technology. Generally, participants felt that children and young people were particularly vulnerable to stigma as a result of an inability to 'keep up' with the latest fashions in consumer electronics and fashion. For example, having a mobile phone, or access to social networking sites via the internet, was seen by some to be crucial for children and young people in particular:

CDF3 RF: If they can't go to the cinema when all their friends are going to the cinema, if they haven't got a mobile phone because they're all texting each other

every 30 seconds, then if they haven't got access to whatever their friends do as a group then they get excluded because they haven't got all that.

GLS1 RM: Social exclusion for me is if they're at school...and they're not able to socialise, that's how I looked at it...If they didn't have a hot shower to wash and things like that, that would exclude them, even things like...if they didn't have a PlayStation or something like that you could be excluded from the other kids because they didn't have the games and stuff like that, or even if they didn't have a new pair of trainers or something like that, you could be excluded that way because he was poor

NII RM: If all the kids in the school know that you're clothes aren't new or aren't yours first hand, you'll get slagged about it and there's a certain amount of bullying and battering that goes on at schools. And I think that also happens for things like iPods and mobile phones, what type of brand of shoes you wear...

GLS2 RF1: I've seen it first hand, if you've not got the latest things and the latest gadgets, the latest this, you're just excluded, it's as simple as that, and it's a shame

2.9 Is social exclusion different from poverty?

Participants were asked for their views on the relationship between social exclusion and poverty, with many participants seeing the two concepts as closely linked in various ways. Accounts draw attention to the conceptual 'overlap' between these terms, with poverty being viewed variously as a driver of social exclusion and as a consequence of exclusion:

NII RMI: If you draw two circles there's a big overlap between the two of them

LDN1 RM: I would say poverty is the bedrock or is the basis for exclusion...

LDN2 RM: Once you are socially excluded you are going to be poor

Nevertheless many participants believed that social exclusion was not only experienced by people living in poverty, but was related both to individuals' personal characteristics, including sociability and health status, as well as to the experience of gender, racial and disability discrimination:

CDF1 RF2: You don't have to be poor to be - how can I put it - a recluse.

BRS3 RM: Just because you've got income and you're fairly well looked after, if you like, you could also go into depression.

BRS2 RF: [It's] nothing to do necessarily with how much money you have. You can be excluded from activities because through race or through gender or if you're disabled... You have lots of money but you could be like a lonely old woman stuck in her flat with like no family or anything

Interestingly, despite the strong association between poverty and social exclusion in

participants' minds, one participant noted that people struggling on a low-income are in many cases nevertheless able to fully participate in society, often as a result of social resources linked to long-standing social networks in some economically disadvantaged communities. Interestingly, this comment also draws attention to the limitations of paid work as a framework for understanding exclusion:

CDF3 RF: It depends what your circle of friends, what they do. I've got a friend who's never worked, she's my age...she's never worked in her life, she's never wanted to work and she hasn't, she's on the dole. She's got three kids which she's brought up, and she lives in a council house in one of the roughest areas in Swansea...but...she's not excluded because she plays darts with all the people from her area, she's in the darts team. She goes out and does things like that - because she doesn't work she goes out in the daytime and meets them all for coffee in a local cafe and things like that. She's not actually socially excluded.

In part this may reflect an understandable reluctance on the part of participants to identify themselves with social labels which often have highly pejorative connotations, and reflexivity in research practice is therefore essential if researchers are to avoid unintentionally reinforcing the 'othering' of people experiencing disadvantage. Nevertheless, the above comment demonstrates that participants may not always subscribe to dominant public and policy discourses on 'social exclusion' centred upon inclusion through paid work.

2.10 Social exclusion vignettes

To facilitate further discussion of different aspects of social exclusion participants were next invited to discuss a number of hypothetical scenarios. These 'vignettes' were constructed in order to explore participants' decision-making and judgements by probing the factors which were salient in group discussions of each scenario, including manipulation of the vignette descriptors to test the impact of participants' judgements. Using social exclusion vignettes proved to be fruitful in facilitating more expansive discussions by providing group members with more concrete instances upon which to exercise judgement and deliberation than less structured brainstorming methods.

Whilst poverty was, to varying degrees, integral to many participants' accounts of 'social exclusion', this latter term denoted a very much wider range of disadvantages than those associated with limited material resources. However, contrasting views were evident on the role of personal agency and choice in explaining exclusion and these views also informed participants' accounts of just desserts and entitlements in determining what might constitute an acceptable level of social inclusion for people in different circumstances. These issues warrant further examination, and in much greater depth than is possible in a focus group setting.

Participants highlighted a wide range of issues associated with the multi-dimensional experience of exclusion relating, for example, to labour market participation, crime and social harm, the impact of troubled personal histories, housing problems, bereavement,

and social networks and support. In the discussion that follows we highlight some of the wider issues arising from participants' responses to the individual vignettes relating to: work and social integration (the case of Brian); complex personal histories (the case of Jimmy); disability and care (the case of John), and; isolation, social support and community (the cases of Barbara and Jo).

Work and social integration

Brian is a 50 year old divorcee. Since finishing his apprenticeship, Brian worked most of his life as a sheet metal worker. Five years ago he was made redundant, and since then he has found it difficult to find work using his skills. He currently works two jobs, as a cleaner at a local hotel and as a barman in the local pub in order to make ends meet. He lives alone in a rented flat and rarely sees friends and family due to long working hours. His main social contacts are with people he works with. He is interested in sport and enjoyed following his local football team, although he now rarely attends matches due to the cost.

Most participants thought that Brian was experiencing social exclusion as a result of significant life changes associated with redundancy and relationship break-up and that this had had a major impact on his ability to fully participate in society. Participants' accounts referred to the impact of long, unsocial working hours for low pay in preventing Brian from maintaining social networks and friendships. The adverse psychological impacts of exclusion were also noted, including the effects on personal identity and self-esteem which might also influence sociability:

BRS3 RM: He knows what he needs but he's got his life slightly upside down. He's having to work enormous hours to meet the end product, but at the cost of friendship and community. He hasn't got quite enough, you know, he's isolated himself really. He's working day time, evenings, long hours. He's seeing people but he's not seeing them on a one-to-one basis or as friendships. He's seeing them in the bar where he works, talks to them that way but his actual life hasn't got anything

LDN3 RF: Yeah, he's not able to mix with family and friends. He isn't able to enjoy time with them, which is a form of leisure or relaxing thing for him. He's working all the time and his life's not balanced and that can have other effects on him.

Participants across all geographical areas viewed Brian's situation as typical of many men of his age, arising both from long-term industrial decline since the 1980s and the worsening contemporary economic climate. The importance of opportunities for retraining, learning new skills, and continuing education was emphasised in participants' accounts, with age and ageism identified as prohibitive factors in the re-skilling of older workers in the UK:

BRS1 RM: This reflects the lifestyle of a lot of people unfortunately who have been made redundant and have had no choice but to take on a number of jobs, more than one job, and have literally not the same choices that we're all maybe used to

GLS2 RM: Typical today, very much so, a lot of men come through, finish school, have been brought up in the shipyard jobs, like heavy industry jobs, or just put in for apprenticeships. There's not very many apprenticeships left at all. And then coming to that age where there's no real sort of manufacturing industry left in Britain

GLS2 RM: So all these factories are all closing down, and guys like Brian are being turfed out, 50 years old, he's maybe too old to retrain for something else and people look and thinking well what's the point he's nearly at retirement age

Other participants made important qualitative distinctions between social interactions at work and those existing within wider friendship and family networks. The importance of friendship or family relationships *outside work* in terms of the social support and mutual trust these provide is also emphasised:

CDF2 RF: If he's working behind a bar, if there's something wrong he's not going to open his heart up to the customer across the bar is he?

CDF3 RM: He may be meeting them in work, but he is working so he's not really able to spend time sort of integrating with his friends. Over the bar yeah, but...he's not sitting down and having conversations

LDN3 RF: You can form a friendship and get on very well with your co-workers but that cannot take the place of your family...they have a special place in your life and you cannot replace them

Most participants diagnosed working long unsocial hours in poorly paid employment as Brian's main problem which severely limited his social and leisure time. However, views on the role of personal agency in Brian's situation differed with some participants viewing his position as a result of choices he had made or a perceived lack of 'effort'. One participant noted that long working hours and limited social life are realities for many people in the UK today and not necessarily symptomatic of a wider feeling of 'exclusion' from society:

BRS1 RF: Well he's got a job, he's got a flat, he's got two jobs, but I believe that he could make a bit more effort if he really wanted company. I think he could make an effort to be able to do that

BRS1 RF: Some people are excluded because people have prejudice against them, so like race, sexuality and things like that, but no one would be prejudiced against this person. So even though he works all these hours the opportunities are there for him if he wants them...It sounds a bit like my life actually, I don't really go out and I'm at work but I don't feel excluded from anything

Nevertheless, most participants were highly sympathetic to Brian's situation, especially with regard to the 'work ethic' which this case was viewed as representing. For these participants, social exclusion was mainly a product of circumstances and necessity rather than personal choices. Indeed, Brian was perceived to be meeting his obligations to society understood by participants in terms of economic 'independence' through paid employment but was nevertheless excluded from many of the perceived

benefits that economic inclusion confers:

LDN3 RM: I'd say this is a person who's fulfilling his responsibility in life against trying circumstances which sometimes we all have to do. So good for him I'd say, he's meeting his responsibilities...he's not a burden on the country, he's got two jobs

GLSI RM: I feel actually sorry for this guy because he's doing all he can, and he's living along sort of norms of society but he's still socially excluded. And referring to this that he wants to see his friends and he wants to see his family, he wants to go and see the football, and he can't do these things. It's not through him being lazy or whatever else, it's just through circumstances

Complex personal histories

Jimmy is 21 years old. Since the age of 12, Jimmy has regularly consumed alcohol and recreational drugs. In his late teens, he became heroin dependent. In order to maintain his habit, he became involved in shoplifting and burglary. At the age of 17 he was convicted of his first offence and spent six months in a young offender's institution. Since then Jimmy has been sentenced repeatedly for offences relating to his drug dependency. Jimmy has found it difficult to maintain regular paid work with few qualifications and a criminal conviction. He currently lives in a hostel.

All the groups felt that Jimmy was excluded, although participants held varying views on the degree of personal agency, and in some cases culpability, in contributing to Jimmy's situation. This extract from the second Bristol group demonstrates the diverse views held by participants:

BRS2 RMI: Well I know it's a bit judgemental really...but I think there is places out there that don't cost anything...and they'll sort you out. But you've got to want to do it...if someone stays in that sort of lifestyle for years and years and years then if they're given the chance time and time again to get out of that situation...and they choose not to, then I would just leave them alone and let them get on with it

BRS1 RMI: You're in a no win situation because someone who's heroin dependent or anything like that, hasn't got a job, hasn't got any funds to buy that sort of thing, and the only way they can keep their habit is by nicking something. And they get themselves stuck in that circle until someone comes and rescues them

However, whilst recognising troubled personal histories as contributory factors in understanding Jimmy's situation, several participants maintained that Jimmy has made his own choices. The perceived availability of specialist support services are here used as a device to shift responsibility to Jimmy: it is assumed that such specialist services are available, adequate and effective 'cures' for social problems; it is also assumed that Jimmy therefore has chosen not to use these services:

BRS2 RM: There's help out there for people that's been abused and if he chose not to take it, chose to go down the alcohol and drug route, then he's excluded himself

Other participants thought that Jimmy may have made an initial choice to indulge in drinking alcohol and taking drugs, but recognised the power of addiction and associated difficulties in breaking free from heroin dependency, as well as the ensuing adverse impacts of a criminal history and homelessness on prospects for rehabilitation:

GLSI RM: It was a choice thing, he chose to drink alcohol, he chose to take drugs, therefore the choice was his at the start, he could have said no...most people take heroin always go back for more because of the kick that they get from it. And therefore once you're into it, it's much more difficult to...get out of

GLSI RM: At the age of 17 he was convicted of his first offence and spent six months in a young offenders' institution, and then it seems like he kind of spirals from there...the young offenders institution [has] perhaps socially excluded him to some extent...when you get in this kind of spiral of crime and offending and incarceration then it's very difficult to get out

BRSI RF: Living in a hostel isn't exactly encouraging him to get out and meet other people...because presumably he's just, his self-esteem is rock bottom

Disability and care

John is 38 years old and is married with two children. He is well qualified and has a university degree. John is a wheelchair user, and whilst his wife is at work, John's daughter cares for him. For the past three years, his daughter has returned home from school early, meaning that she has had to withdraw from her music lessons and the school netball team. Although, John is very well qualified and experienced in his job, he has had several unsuccessful job interviews. John is a keen sportsperson and swims regularly at the local sports centre. He also enjoys the arts, particularly cinema, although he experiences difficulties in accessing venues.

Participants' responses to the situation of John were in general less sympathetic to the subject's circumstances, viewing John's care needs as contributing to the exclusion of other family members acting as informal carers. Some participants felt that John might be experiencing disability discrimination within the labour market both with regard to recruitment practices and employers' obligations to make reasonable adaptations to facilitate the employment participation of disabled people:

CDF RM: And also balance unsuccessful job interviews that might be discrimination because he's a wheelchair user.

NII RM: Especially if they're going in the smaller companies, because smaller companies, make them wheelchair accessible with ramps and bars and disabled loos and all that sort of stuff, and that probably wouldn't be up for him.

However, in all groups participants felt that John's daughter was experiencing social exclusion, as a result of the impact of caring responsibilities for her and other family members wider activities and networks. At the same time some participants acknowledged a lack of institutional support services as a key driver in placing what

were viewed to be unreasonable caring demands on family members:

CDF2 RF: His daughter's the one who's being socially excluded mainly...because he still goes swimming and different things, but obviously she's got to give up things in her childhood to come home and care for him

NII RMI: I suppose the person who's excluded in all this is the daughter. She's not getting access to the after school club that she used to

NII RF: Yeah, he's not getting the help from health and social care. He's not getting like a home help so that his daughter can actually stay at school and do her things.

However, as with the case of Jimmy (above), participants' accounts make implicit assumptions about the availability of specialist support services, and about the perceived generosity of benefits payments, which serve to de-legitimize the unmet needs of the subject and blame the subject for the impacts of caring on other family members:

CDF2 RM: They have a level of standard of living they're happy with, so are they using the social exclusion of their daughter from school to keep the active lifestyle of living? And it looks like they are. I'm sure that he may be able to get benefits or get more benefits and he could be able to have a carer come in and look after him

NII RF: He's still getting out and he's still going to the cinema, and I think you're right, I think the daughter is the one who's...keeping up that rich lifestyle that he's used to, but she's losing out on...these classes or her netball team or whatever, and I think it's really important for a child to develop those at that age

CDF2 RM: It could be his own sort of attitude, he might be resentful...You don't know the extent of why he's in a wheelchair as well, why his daughter's got to come home to look after him.

Isolation, social support and community

Barbara is 75 years old. She is a single pensioner living on her own in a housing estate flat rented from her local housing association. She receives the basic state pension as well as housing benefit. She recently moved into her flat, having lived for many years with her husband who passed away two years ago. She has a son and daughter but they moved out of the area to seek work. Although there are some local shops, she uses public transport to attend the day centre run by the council, and to visit her GP and friends. She is currently in good health but sometimes feels lonely and worries about what would happen if she fell ill. She avoids going out at night because she does not feel safe going out on her own.

Where this scenario was discussed, participants tended to empathise with Barbara's situation and felt that recent major changes in her life clearly had had a detrimental impact on her situation. Although participants mostly did not refer explicitly to the terminology of 'exclusion', the death of Barbara's husband in addition to an enforced

move to an unfamiliar neighbourhood were widely viewed by participants as having adversely affected her opportunities for social participation and potentially also undermined her social confidence. It was recognised that it might be difficult for someone in Barbara's situation to reintegrate following such major upheavals in her life:

CDF1 RF: I think she lacks confidence with going out and different things

BRS3 RF: I'm a widow, I lost my husband, but I had to go out and find things; it doesn't come knocking on the door...Well now I do [have confidence], but I didn't when I had first to do it. I found it very difficult to walk into the library on my own; we'd always gone together

Similarly, although many older (especially female) participants shared Barbara's fear of going out at night this was not linked within participants' accounts with wider notions of 'exclusion':

CDF3 RF: I don't go out at all when it's dark no. I mean now [6.30pm] I wouldn't be out this late now, and I'll go from here now in onto the drive when in, lock the door and that's it

Many participants highlighted the perceived opportunities for social participation open to Barbara which might facilitate her social participation, for example through day centres, social clubs for older people and volunteering opportunities:

BRS3 RF1: She attends a day centre. You would think attending that day centre she would make friends with the people attending there.

BRS3 RF2: Plus the fact in our area there's an over 50s club, and some people that are going there are 90-odd, so she should be able to go out into the community and find something.

However, again whilst acknowledging and sympathetic to the circumstances of the subject contained within the vignette, participants' accounts did not situate this within a wider societal context which might constitute such experiences as 'social exclusion'. As a result, and in marked contrast to some of the vignettes discussed above (specifically Brian and Jimmy), the discussion of this vignette was individualised in ways which presented a narrative centred upon personal tragedy rather than being indicative of any wider social problems.

The final scenario (*below*) raised some similar issues in terms of social isolation and access to social support:

Jo is 28 years old. She is a single parent and has two children aged 2 and 5. She has not been in paid work since the birth of her first child. Social security payments and maintenance payments from her former partner are her only sources of income. She is unable to work due to the lack of affordable childcare, as her parents no longer live in the area. She feels isolated as she rarely has the opportunity to go out without her children. She lives in a flat on a local council housing estate in a small town. There are a few local shops but few safe play areas for children.

Where discussed, all participants strongly agreed that this subject was socially excluded. Participants' accounts of Jo's exclusion referred to a lack of social contact and support. Some participants felt that it was sometimes difficult to obtain sufficient practical support such as babysitting to facilitate paid work as a result of perceived generational changes in family solidarity and support. The impact of low income on opportunities for social participation was also noted as contributing towards social exclusion. Participants agreed that access to education, transport and support services were vital for single parents, particularly for those living in rural areas or without a car in order to combat social exclusion:

CDF3 RF2: To have someone to help her with the children and...the childcare and having...adult conversation

CDF3 RM: She'd be socially excluded because she can't afford to go anywhere

GLS2 RF2: I had more of a social life when my youngest one was at nursery because I was involved with the nursery...so I think it's what you make it as well

GLS2 RF4: There's quite a lot in my area anyway, but to pack up and go, these kind of places are far out so you need a car, you need transport to get to these places

At the same time, wider social expectations based on assumptions of stable, couple relationships were viewed by one participant as contributing to the exclusion of single people including (and perhaps especially) single parents:

CDF3 RF3: Yeah, socially excluded. I am as a person, as a single parent, you just don't get invited to things that married couples I know

However one participant remarked that despite Jo's situation being very similar to her own she had not considered herself to be excluded:

GLS2 RF: She probably doesn't even know she's socially excluded because I've never thought like my life the way, would never have dreamed, there's probably loads of people that are socially excluded for things and they don't know it.

The above comment again demonstrates that participants may not always subscribe to dominant policy discourses of exclusion which identify paid work as central to wider inclusion in society, and may not view their situation as one characterised by exclusion. It is important therefore that such debates are informed by public perceptions of what it means to be excluded, and specifically of the extent to which individuals' experience of disadvantage are framed within the context of exclusion from society, in order to avoid further reinforcing the discursive marginalisation of disadvantaged groups as 'other'.

2.11 Social differences in perceptions of poverty and social exclusion

It is not possible on the basis of these data to draw robust inferences about the impacts of social differences in shaping wider public perceptions of poverty and social exclusion. Our findings are based upon a relatively small, quota sample and as such are not

intended to be statistically generalisable, but rather to represent the range of circumstances thought to influence perceptions of poverty and the necessities of life including income, gender, household type, and ethnicity. The intersection of these characteristics means that it is also not possible to meaningfully isolate their effects within these analyses. Rather we seek to provide a more holistic account of the impact of social differences in shaping participants' perception of poverty and social exclusion.

Whilst any conclusions in this area are therefore necessarily tentative, there is nevertheless some evidence that perceptions of poverty and exclusion within this study may be influenced by social differences within the sample. Certainly, participants in the non-low income groups tended to suggest a somewhat wider range of items and activities as 'necessities of life' in comparison with participants in the low income groups. For example, in relation to the accommodation itself these groups made a number of additional suggestions including 'adequate natural light', 'a dining table and chairs', and 'draught-free, insulated home' not referred to by low income groups. Similarly, 'an outfit for a special occasions', 'adequate nightwear' and 'non-prescription medicines' were referred to in non-low income groups only. A wider range of social activities and children's items were also suggested by the non-low income groups in comparison with the low income groups, including for example, 'family outings', 'being able to celebrate special occasions', 'cinema/theatre and cultural activities', 'a treat on special occasions for children', and 'a hobby or leisure activity for children'. These findings appear to conflict with existing survey evidence suggesting that poor households identify a wider range of items and activities as necessities (e.g. Pantazis et al., 2000, 2006). Nevertheless, these findings would be consistent with adaptive preferences theories which suggest that poor households may modify their expectations in the light of resource constraints.

However, suggestions of social distinctions in responses to social exclusion are perhaps more compelling. Amongst discussion groups comprising families with children and older people, the importance of accessible, affordable and high quality local services was particularly emphasised. Amongst these groups, local services and infrastructure were viewed as important in sustaining thriving communities and in supporting their residents. Especially for older participants, the role of local services in sustaining a 'sense of community' was also acknowledged, and for both groups having a genuine say in local decisions was viewed as an important aspect of inclusion.

This 'communitarian' agenda might to some extent be contrasted with an emphasis upon individual experiences of exclusionary processes and their outcomes amongst ethnic minority participants, and amongst participants without children. The importance of good English language and communication skills was emphasised by ethnic minority participants, alongside a recognition of immigration and citizenship status as key dimensions of exclusion in our society today. For both participants without children and ethnic minority participants, a lack of confidence, esteem and social skills was seen as an important driver of exclusion, alongside recognition of deeper structural inequalities associated with unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence, and the impacts of crime. Although it would be easy to overstate these differences in view of the

substantial continuities in participants' accounts, the importance of community perspectives and local provision of services and infrastructure appeared to play a more salient role in the accounts of older participants and those with children, in contrast with participants without children and for ethnic minority participants whose accounts tended to emphasise structural factors associated with exclusion at an individual level.

2.12 Poverty, social exclusion and the impacts of recession

In view of participants' prioritisation of the provision of good public services in enabling participation, further exploration of the impact of current cuts in service provision is important in advancing understanding of social exclusion in our society today. The current economic climate and the perceived rising cost of living was mentioned by some participants as having implications for many people experiencing poverty in the UK, with some drawing on their personal experience:

GLS1 RM: I would say it [poverty] has slightly increased...people are feeling more poverty stricken because of...change of economic climate, and not everybody's affected I don't think...it has affected people slightly differently

LDN2 RF: Nowadays we've had the credit crunch...you've still got to do that penny pinching, you've got to count your pennies...you've still got to think well can I afford it, can I not afford it...It's just basic things you can't afford, if you're like myself I'm on benefits, I can't afford to go out and splash out, even Christmas I can't afford to splash out and buy something fantastic

Some participants appeared to conclude that those living on a low income had been hit the hardest by the economic recession, whilst others referred to discourses of a 'squeezed middle' in describing the situation of working households increasingly struggling to make ends meet. Several participants drew attention to the day-to-day difficulties of managing on stretched household budgets as a result of rising costs for basic necessities including food, heating and other utilities and services. As the Women's Budget Group (2008) note, an absence of security is identified by the public as central to the definition of poverty. Possibly as a result of the deteriorating economic climate of the period, this research also suggests that long term financial security, insurance against risks, and hazard prevention, were key priorities for participants, often reflecting pessimistic assessments of the prospects for future public welfare provision including during retirement:

N11 RM: [you] should have some sort of pension...because the pension, state pension won't be worth tuppence by the time you've retired.

N12 RF: I have absolutely no security for the future...I don't have any cash, my wage comes in and I don't have any security beyond that, so I think about that quite a lot

N12 RF: I'm only 30 but I think by the time I come to retirement there won't be a state pension

However, participants often explained that items such as pension contributions and insurance were one of the first things that people forgo when finances are tight. Several participants admitted that their home was not insured and that they were currently unable to afford to save or deposit money into a pension fund. These findings might therefore suggest that financial insecurity and increasing precarity are likely to be an increasing concern as a result of the 2008 economic crisis and ensuing recession.

3. Indicators of Poverty and Social Exclusion

In this section we summarise participants' views on the 'necessities of life', that is, those items and activities which everyone should be able to afford to have or do in our society today and which no-one should not have to go without. We also examine and summarise participants' suggestions on indicators of social exclusion and inclusion based upon group discussion and related tasks and activities. As noted above (*Section 1.3*), research was conducted in two overlapping phases. In Phase One, focus group participants' views on potential indicators of deprivation and social exclusion were sought using relatively unstructured 'brainstorming' methods. Our aim here was to generate a consensus within groups on possible indicators, and drawing on participants' suggestions in these groups, our objective in the Phase Two groups was therefore to 'test' the items agreed by Phase One groups. In the discussion that follows we therefore begin by summarising participants' suggestions regarding the necessities of life and indicators of social exclusion separately for Phase One and Phase Two groups, before going on to consider the definitional and measurement issues these findings raise for the survey work in this area.

3.1 *The necessities of life*

Table 1 (*below*) lists all those items considered and agreed by participants in one or more of the Phase One groups as 'necessities of life', that is, those items and activities which everyone should be able to afford to have or do in our society today and no-one should not have to go without. It should also be noted that the items as agreed in different groups varied (sometimes considerably) in their wording from those detailed in Table 1 (*below*). The detailed comments and recommendations arising from the groups relating to specific indicators are outlined in Appendix 2.

Participants' suggestions are of course varied and wide-ranging, and the general conclusions emerging from discussions with participants' need to be interpreted within the wider context of the more detailed thematic analysis of transcripts presented in Section 2 (*above*). However, a number of general points are worthy of brief note here. Firstly,

participants' suggestions are generally similar to existing indicators included within earlier consensual poverty surveys conducted in Britain in 1999 (Gordon et al., 2000) and in Northern Ireland in 2003 (Hillyard et al., 2003). Nevertheless, there are some signs that certain 'traditional' indicators, for example, those associated with diet, clothing, and family life, are of declining salience in public deliberations on the 'necessities of life'. Similarly, participants' suggestions often indicated a strong consensus in favor of electronic and communication equipment which undoubtedly reflects wider technological and social changes.

Secondly, participants made many new suggestions in terms of specific items for potential further consideration. These were inevitably diverse but those agreed by group participants often focused in various ways on security (long term financial security, insurance against risks, hazard prevention), housing quality (insulation/energy efficiency, ventilation, daylight, communal space, good physical repair), and children's well-being and development (social and school activities, education, safety). In line with work by Hirsch and Smith (2010), participants' decision-making appeared to reflect the continuing importance of social relationships within families in defining those items and activities which all people should be able to have or do. Several items (e.g. a communal area, dining table and chairs for all household members, family and friends around for a meal, and family outings) reflected participants' emphasis on the importance of 'quality' time together for families. Thirdly, and aside from the general definitional issues discussed further below, participants' responses and queries suggest various (overt) response problems associated with specific items. These relate to participants' decision making processes, and specifically to processes of item cognition, judgment, and response, and are outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

Table 1: The necessities of life

ACCOMMODATION

- A damp free home
- Heating to warm living areas of the home
- Insurance of home contents
- Money to keep home in decent state of decoration
- Separate bedrooms for boys and girls aged over 10
- Separate bedrooms for all adults and for parents/children
- A communal area for whole household
- Adequate natural light
- Enough space for all household members
- Bath or shower facilities
- Sole use of household facilities
- Adequate ventilation and insulation
- Draft free windows
- Smoke/carbon monoxide alarm

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

- Washing machine
- Mobile phone
- Access to internet
- Microwave
- Fridge/freezer
- An iron
- Kettle
- Hairdryer
- Money to replace/repair broken electrical goods
- Sofa and/or easy chairs for household members
- Dining table and chairs for all household members
- Money to replace worn out furniture
- Bed, bedding, mattress for all household members
- Curtains and blinds
- Access to an outdoor space within accommodation
- Books within the home
- Home computer
- TV
- Radio or music player

DIET AND CLOTHING

- Two meals a day for adults
- Meat, fish or veggie equivalent daily
- Fresh fruit and veg. on a daily basis
- An adequate balanced diet (including meat, fish, vegetables and carbs)
- Money for a week/month's household food budget
- Warm waterproof coat
- Two pairs of all weather shoes
- New, not second hand, clothes
- An outfit for special occasions
- Three complete outfits for every household member
- Adequate nightwear
- Clothes in good/clean condition
- Adequate clothing and footwear for all seasons
- Non prescription medicines

SOCIAL AND FAMILY LIFE

- Holiday away from home once a year, not with relatives
- Family or friends around for a meal
- Visits to friends or family
- An evening out once a fortnight
- A car
- Local bus or rail fares

- Access to affordable local public transport
- Family outings
- Money for local sporting activities or classes
- A family meal together once a day
- Money to celebrate special occasions
- Theatre, concert, museum, cinema visits
- Personal time for adults away from family responsibilities

FINANCIAL

- Paying rent/mortgage and household bills without getting into debt
- Regular savings for rainy days
- Small sum of money to spend on self weekly
- Life insurance for mortgage-holders
- Regular payments into a private or occupational pension plan

CHILDREN'S ITEMS

- Three meals a day for children
- Meat, fish or veggie equivalent daily for children
- A garden for children to play in
- Books for children of their own
- Toys (e.g. dolls, teddies)
- Friends round for tea/snack fortnightly
- Leisure equipment for children
- School trips at least once a term
- Access to a safe outside area to play
- Fresh fruit or vegetables at least daily/twice daily
- Milk daily
- New, properly fitted shoes for children
- Some new, not second-hand clothes for children
- School uniform for children
- Hobby or leisure activity
- Toys for personal development/education
- Toys (e.g. dolls, teddies)
- Sports equipment for children
- A mobile phone for older children
- Money for after school clubs
- Treats for children on special occasions
- Money for children's clubs, societies and related activities

In the four Phase Two groups participants were asked to classify a range of different

items using card sort methods into 'necessities', 'desirable' and 'luxury' items. Items for consideration in Phase Two comprised included those items selected by Phase One groups as 'necessities' and additional items drawn intended to measure relative affluence. Table 2 (*below*) summarises results for those items which were universally agreed by all four groups as necessities (Col 1), for items viewed as necessities by a majority of the groups (Col 2), and for those identified by most groups as 'desirable' (Col 3) or 'luxury' (Col 4) items.

In general, there is a close correspondence between items universally agreed as necessities within Phase One groups and those universally classified as necessities in Phase Two. Groups of course sometimes reached different conclusions and where this is so we distinguish between universal agreement across groups (Col 1) and those classified as necessities in a majority of groups (Col 2). As might be expected given the absence of universal agreement across groups, the latter category includes many items which evoked a more equivocal response in the Phase One groups. These items (Col 2) in conjunction with items identified by most groups as 'desirable' (Col 3) are likely to prove the most discriminating indicators in terms of identifying a deprivation threshold.

Table 2: Participant classification of phase 2 standard of living items

NOTE: Parentheses indicate item scoring across groups. For each group, items are scored as follows: necessity (universal agreement)=1; necessity (majority decision)=0.5; desirable=0.25; luxury=0. Item scores were summed across the four groups to provide a crude ranking of participant decisions across groups.

1. NECESSITIES (universally agreed)

- Adequate nightwear (4)
- Non prescription medicines (3.5)
- Communal area for all household members (3.3)
- Three complete outfits for every hhld. member (3)
- Local bus or rail fares (3)
- A car in an area with poor public transport (3)
- Being able to celebrate special occasions (3)
- Milk daily for children (3)
- School uniform for children (3)
- A smoke/carbon monoxide alarm (2.6)

2. NECESSITIES (consensus)

- Attending local sporting or leisure classes (3.25)
- Draft free windows (2.75)
- Digital TV (2.75)
- An evening out once a fortnight (2.75)
- A treat on special occasions for children (2.75)
- Visits to cinema/theatre or other cultural event at least every three months (2.5)
- Leisure equipment (e.g. sports equipment, bike) (2.5)

A mobile phone (2.25)
Access to the Internet (2.25)
A family outing once a month (2.25)
Toys for personal development (2.25)

3. DESIRABLE ITEMS

An outfit for social or family occasions (1.75)
A home computer (1.75)
Microwave (1.75)
Dining table and chairs for all hhd. members (1.5)
A DVD player (1.25)
Enough space or privacy to read, write or listen to music (1.25)
Small sum of money to spend on self occasionally (1.25)
A music system or hi-fi (1)
A garden to play in (1)

4. LUXURY ITEMS

- Membership of a gym or sports club (0.5)
- An iPod or MP3 Player (0.25)
- A school trip abroad once a year (0.25)
- A dishwasher (0)

3.2 Social exclusion

In ten Phase One groups, participants were introduced to the topic of social exclusion by asking them to consider what it meant to them to be able to fully participate in society. A vignette exercise was then undertaken where participants were presented with imaginary scenarios describing the situation of people experiencing different forms of social exclusion. Participants were subsequently asked to suggest the kinds of disadvantages which they thought would make it difficult for people to fully participate in society with researchers recording their suggestions on cards which were then placed on display boards.

In practice the items suggested by participants were not only those which they viewed as detrimental to participation (e.g. discrimination), but also those which facilitate participation (e.g. access to good public/private services), so that the suggested items had both negative and positive connotations. Participants' wide-ranging suggestions included items across the various themes and domains described by the *Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix* [B-SEM] (Levitas et al., 2006) intended to guide the operational measurement of social exclusion with the main PSE-UK survey. Table 3 (*below*) lists the items suggested by participants across the ten Phase One groups grouped under the relevant domains of the B-SEM framework. It is recognized that some of these items cross-cut these themes e.g. working long or unsocial hours is related to both economic

and social participation, and may also have an impact on health and well being. Participants also provided some new suggestions including having good social skills, a feeling of belonging, and a 'healthy' spiritual life, that do not easily 'fit' within the B-SEM framework.

Table 3: Social Exclusion Items – Phase I Participants' Suggestions

HEALTH & WELLBEING

- Good physical and mental health
- Disabilities
- Mental illness
- Life limiting illness

LIVING ENVIRONMENT

- Good neighbours
- Good warden-assisted accommodation
- Homelessness
- Neighbourhood Watch area
- Safe park
- Community spaces

CRIME, HARM & CRIMINALISATION

- Living in a high crime area/area with a reputation for crime and ASB
- Being unable to insure your home
- Being afraid to go outside/go out at night
- Feeling safe
- Discrimination: homophobia, racism, sexism, ageism, disability, religion
- Bullying/harassment
- Domestic violence
- Not having sufficient visible policing
- Good criminal justice system
- Having a criminal record
- People in prison

MATERIAL/ECONOMIC RESOURCES

- Poverty
- Adequate level of income
- Able to save
- Debt (manageable debt)
- Local bank/credit union
- Bank account
- Information on finance for young people
- Sensible state pension

- Not being able to afford social activities (adults and children)
- Funding for charitable/voluntary services
- Living on social benefits
- Not owning your own home

SOCIAL RESOURCES

- Low confidence and self-esteem, shyness
- Lack of social contacts
- Not living close to family/friends
- Good(ish) relations with neighbours
- Support networks (e.g. family)
- Older people who lack support
- No one to turn to in a crisis
- Social networks/contacts

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

- Unemployment
- Few career opportunities in the labour market
- Long and/or unsocial working hours
- Working in a high stress environment
- Harassment or bullying at work
- Being in debt (employment – pre check)
- Good contributory pension scheme
- Caring responsibilities

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

- Cultural differences
- Loneliness and isolation

POLITICAL & CIVIC PARTICIPATION

- Feeling unable to influence decision-making
- Having a say about your local area
- Community involvement
- Immigration and citizenship status
- Political participation
- Lack of community spirit

CULTURE, EDUCATION & SKILLS

- Poor education
- Qualifications/skills/job experience
- Access to lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Poor English language

- Good communication skills

OTHER

- Good social skills
- Feeling of belonging
- 'Healthy' spiritual life

ACCESS TO PUBLIC/PRIVATE SERVICES

- Access to healthcare incl. emergency care
- Affordable dental care
- Access to GP/health centre
- Home care services, district nursing
- Access to local shops
- Library
- Local schools and adult education
- Breakfast and after-school clubs for children
- Playgroups/nurseries
- Children's and youth centres
- Leisure centres/sports facilities
- Café
- Pub
- Post office
- Emergency services
- Refuse collection
- Church/place of worship
- Accessible community centre
- Good, regular, affordable transport links
- Sufficient funding/resources for local services
- Funding for community groups/facilities
- Info and publicity about community services
- Mobile phone and internet access

In the Phase Two groups, participants were asked to classify a range of different social exclusion items using card sort methods into those that were either 'essential' or 'desirable' for avoiding social exclusion. Some of the items discussed were derived from previous survey work in this area in Britain (Gordon et al., 2001) and Northern Ireland (Hillyard et al., 2003), and others were these suggested by Phase One group participants. These new items included full UK citizenship, good English language skills, and manageable debt. Interestingly, across the four Phase Two groups there were no items that were universally thought to be essential for avoiding social exclusion by all participants. The items that received greatest support were regular contact on most days with friends, workmates, or neighbours, help with caring responsibilities, and good English language skills. Table 4 (*below*) details the classification of the social

exclusion items by Phase Two group participants.

Table 4: Participant classification of Phase 2 social exclusion items

Essential to avoid social exclusion (majority)

- Regular contact on most days with friends, workmates or neighbours (0.83)
- Help with caring responsibilities (0.83)
- Good English language skills (0.83)
- Manageable debt (0.67)
- Confidence and self-esteem (0.67)
- Freedom from harassment/bullying at work (0.67)
- Good publicity about community services (0.67)
- Freedom from longstanding illness which limits your daily activities (0.66)
- Someone to turn to in a crisis (0.66)

Desirable to avoid social exclusion (majority)

- Good access to services (0.58)
- Good education (some qualifications/skills) (0.58)
- Feeling safe walking alone after dark in your local area (0.58)
- Freedom from verbal/physical abuse on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion (0.58)
- Freedom from verbal/physical abuse from another member of your household (0.55)
- Good mental and physical health (0.44)
- Work that is rewarding or socially valued (0.42)
- Good relations with neighbours (0.42)

Desirable but not necessary to avoid social exclusion

- Full UK citizenship (0.33)
- Good career opportunities in the job and/or labour market in your area (0.25)
- Feeling able to influence decisions in your local area ((0.25)
- Owning your own home (0.22)
- Having no criminal record (0.22)
- Living in accommodation free from air pollution or heavy road traffic (0.17)
- Being involved in local community groups or activities in your area (0)

For each group, items are scored as follows: essential (universal agreement)=1; essential (majority decision)=0.66; desirable (majority)=0.33; desirable (universal)=0; Item scores were summed across the four groups to provide a crude ranking of participant decisions across groups.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In this section we summarise our main findings relating to participants' perceptions of poverty, social exclusion and living standards, and the items and activities considered to be 'necessities of life' in the UK today. We also discuss the implications of these findings for our understanding of poverty and social exclusion and for their definition and measurement within social surveys. Participants' specific suggestions concerning the necessities of life and possible indicators of social exclusion are broad in their scope. Nevertheless, our analyses raise some important issues with regard to the nature and scope of participants own recommendations (addressed in Section 4.1), and conceptual and measurement issues in determining the 'necessities of life' (addressed in Section 4.2).

4.1 Participants' suggestions and recommendations

The necessities of life

Participants' comments and suggestions were varied and diverse and specific recommendations relating to individual items and activities are contained in Appendix 1. However, despite the scope of participants' suggestions, our research suggests that some established indicators of deprivation, for example, associated with adequate diet, clothing, and family life, may be of declining salience in shaping public's perceptions of the 'necessities of life' in the UK today. This does not imply that such indicators are no longer valid measures. However, the extent to which indicators are good *discriminators* of poverty status is an important consideration, and this will of course vary over time as a result of changing lifestyles and patterns of consumption. For example, no access to an indoor toilet clearly remains a valid measure of deprivation, but in the contemporary UK context it is unlikely to substantially improve our capacity to predict poverty status, nor due low prevalence rates is this an item which is likely to be salient in public perceptions of the necessities of life.

Focus group methods can therefore make a useful contribution to the development of discriminating indicators of poverty because participants' suggestions tend to reflect prevailing public perceptions of the items and activities which are important in the UK today in determining status and as signifiers of social distinctions between 'poor' and 'non-poor' households. Whilst participants' initial definitions of poverty were often restrictive, their deliberations on the necessities of the life in our society today reflected much broader conceptualisations of poverty as relative deprivation. As a result, participants' own suggestions rarely included items which are widely taken for granted by most households in the UK today (e.g. a refrigerator, electricity supply, clean running water, etc), even though deprivation of such items would clearly constitute extreme disadvantage relative to prevailing living standards and lifestyles - and was viewed as such by participants. In identifying an optimal poverty threshold it is therefore important

to consider items which are located close to the threshold between 'necessities' and 'desirable' in the minds of participants. Those items identified as 'necessities' on the basis of a majority verdict, and those classified by participants as 'desirable but non-essential' are likely to prove useful discriminators of poverty status because they are close to the threshold between discretionary and essential expenditure in the view of members of the public (see *Table 4, above*). It is recommended that particular emphasis is given to 'threshold' indicators of this type in subsequent survey work on public perceptions of necessities.

Participants' own suggestions concerning the 'necessities of life' often indicated a strong consensus in favor of consumer electronics and mobile communication technologies which undoubtedly reflects wider technological and social changes. The increasing availability of these items (mobile phones, high speed internet access, flat screen multi-channel TV, etc) opens up a new arena within which social distinctions are reproduced and 'the poor' constituted as different from, and separate to, 'mainstream' society. Overall, participants made many new suggestions in terms of specific items for potential further consideration and those agreed by group participants often focused in various ways on: security (e.g. long term financial security, insurance against risks, hazard prevention); housing quality (e.g. insulation/energy efficiency, ventilation, daylight, communal space, good physical repair), and; child well-being (e.g. developmental opportunities, school-related activities, education, physical safety). Any wider inferences we might wish to draw concerning the underlying significance of such suggestions are of course highly speculative, but it may be that these suggestions reflect increased awareness of global financial insecurity and its potential impacts for UK households, greater awareness of environmental concerns (especially relating to energy efficiency in the context of rising energy prices), and heightened concern for child well-being and development in the context of deepening social inequalities and declining social mobility in the UK and elsewhere. It is recommended that special consideration is given to possible inclusion of items in these topic areas.

Social exclusion

Participants' familiarity with the concept of social exclusion was more mixed to the extent that for many participants the concept remained an abstract idea rather than being experienced as a 'lived reality' in the same way as poverty. Whilst most participants were familiar with the term's usage for example in public debates on disadvantage and the 'underclass', views differed quite widely on how social exclusion is best understood and measured. Definitions offered ranged from material deprivation, to social isolation, lack of social participation, lack of autonomy, insecurity and diminished well-being. Notions of belonging and being 'left out' or 'shut out' were important themes in participants' accounts. These were accompanied by narratives focusing on recognition of injustices arising from class-based inequalities and discrimination based upon age, gender, ethnicity, and disability as key drivers of exclusion. It is also important to recognise that participants' own understandings of social exclusion were multidimensional according weight to social networks and

personal wellbeing alongside economic participation. As such, they did not accord with dominant constructions of 'the socially excluded' in terms of worklessness and benefit dependency within contemporary policy debates. At the same time, perspectives on social exclusion were often explicitly intergenerational. In reflecting on their own experiences of exclusion from opportunities, choices, and life chances, participants emphasised how this contrasted with their elevated expectations for their own children and grandchildren - and for the kind of society needed to promote genuine inclusion in future.

At the same time, participants' understandings of social exclusion were inextricably intertwined with wider perceptions of what constitutes 'the good life' in our society today, both with regard to material living standards, the opportunities and choices which a good standard of living affords, and their impacts for social and psychological well-being and personal happiness. To this extent, defining what it means to be *included* in society was a task with which participants were often more comfortable than defining social exclusion. This suggests that a degree of public consensus may exist in relation to defining what it means to be able to fully participate in society which is perhaps less evident in understanding social exclusion, perhaps as a consequence of the diverse nature of the processes associated with exclusion.

However, whilst there was a clear recognition of the 'overlaps' between poverty and social exclusion, for participants identifying what it means to be able to fully participate in society extends far beyond a consideration of household budgets to encompass also the provision of public goods and the wider dimensions of social inequality. In particular, a fully functioning and inclusive community appeared to be used by many of the participants as a proxy for a healthy and inclusive society. The following factors were suggested and agreed by participants as desirable in avoiding social exclusion: home ownership, access to information and good quality local services, social contact and support, personal confidence and inter-personal skills, good educational provision, good career opportunities, rewarding or socially valued work, full citizenship, an ability to influence local decisions, good physical and mental health, good environmental quality, and freedom from violence, harassment and discrimination.

4.2 Conceptual and measurement issues

Despite the widespread adoption of consensual approaches to poverty measurement in the UK and elsewhere in recent decades, long-standing critiques of this approach are of continuing relevance in poverty measurement. Lister (2003) for example argues that 'studies that are genuinely consensual, in the sense of reaching a consensus through deliberation are rare'. The construction of 'consensus' using survey methods has also been challenged as creating 'consensus by coincidence' (Walker, 1987) or 'some kind of social consensus' (Halsey, 1985). Veit-Wilson (1987) for example argues that 'purists might claim that their approach is majoritarian and not consensual, since a consensus implies there are no objectors'. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge that general agreement about the designation of specific items and activities as 'necessities' need

not imply consensus about the rationale for such decisions and this should be borne in mind in interpreting the results of future surveys.

Nevertheless, despite the diversity of views expressed across this sample as a whole, our research uncovers little evidence of consistent variations in perceptions of the 'necessities of life' across social groups for example on the basis of household type, ethnicity, or income status. Groups were recruited with the aim of maximising within-group homogeneity with regard to key factors relevant to views on this topic, including income status, household type and ethnic origin. Nevertheless, it is the consistency of responses across groups that is most striking: with regard to income, household type, and ethnicity, there is general or widespread agreement (consensus) on the necessities of life in the UK today. In line with existing work on adaptive preferences, there is certainly some evidence that people adapt their individual preferences to fit their circumstances, and therefore that people experiencing poverty may minimise their needs. However, these data do not suggest that this necessarily influences general perceptions of what the UK public as a whole should be able to afford to have or do. Nevertheless, the group discussions do reveal frequent debate and sometimes disagreement between individual participants on the items and activities necessary to avoid poverty and social exclusion. Although focus groups generally aim to achieve general or widespread agreement, in some cases a simple majority decision was unavoidable. Whilst consensus need not as Veit-Wilson (1987) argues imply unanimity, the wider point he makes is important in understanding whether the outcomes of deliberations involving 'democratic' procedures constitute consensus.

In considering the consensual measurement framework adopted by Mack and Lansley (1985) in their landmark *Poor Britain* survey, Walker (1987) argues that these authors 'say little about the criteria people employ in judging whether something is a necessity', and goes on to argue persuasively that this raises fundamental questions about how people interpret the concept of 'necessity' and how people make judgments on 'necessities' for example with regard to the information needed to make informed decisions, the reference groups and contextual information people refer to in reaching a decision, and the consistency of responses derived using deliberative methods in comparison with more structured (and arguably individualised) survey methods. This research seeks to advance understanding of the deliberative processes shaping participants' responses in a qualitative context. In doing so, it also aims to facilitate better understanding and interpretation of survey data on the 'necessities of life'.

Our findings suggest some important definitional issues with regard to participants' views on the 'necessities of life'. Firstly, for some participants the term 'necessity' was itself problematic insofar as participants frequently understand this to refer to items and activities which households *cannot* do without, rather than being understood normatively to refer to things that all households *should* not have to do without. Understandings of 'necessity' here referred to a general conception of satisfying basic (absolute) needs rather than being constructed in terms of social desirability. For some participants, 'necessity' therefore implied a much more minimalist conception than that which they associated with poverty where the latter refers to an inability to afford a 'decent' or at

least minimally adequate lifestyle. Some participants felt that it was difficult to distinguish between items and activities that all households 'should' be able to have, and those which low income households 'could' in fact afford. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given to minimising reference to 'necessities' since respondents' understandings of this term vary significantly and do not always accord with the PSE interpretation.

Secondly, participants' ability to make decisions with confidence on these items depends partly upon the contextual information provided. In this study, participants' deliberations focused upon a hypothetical vignette describing a 'typical' family with children. Group decisions partly reflected participants' interpretations of this family's circumstances in terms of implicit moral judgments concerning eligibility, but also in the more specific sense that for many participants the importance (need) for an item depends upon individual and household circumstances, as well as the other resources they are able to draw upon (i.e. their substitutability). Normative judgments about what people should be able to afford therefore also involves consideration of what items and activities constitute basic needs for different groups in order to distinguish between items viewed as simply 'desirable' and those deemed 'necessary'. As such, it is difficult for participants to make reliable judgments on specific items in the absence of detailed contextual information which can be used to infer specific households needs, and in the absence of information on the wider basket of goods, activities, and services to which the household and its members have access.

Thirdly, participants' deliberations inevitably raised questions about the extent to which the availability of public goods and services is important in shaping participants' decisions on necessary items and activities. This is reflected in the importance attached to local services and amenities by participants in shaping decisions about what households should be able to afford (i.e. the extent to which items may be substitutable). For example, for many participants the importance of having access to a car depends on the availability of suitable public transport. More generally, participants' suggestions in relation to social exclusion identify a much wider array of *societal* processes (e.g. associated with restricted opportunities and choices) in preventing individuals' full participation in society and in undermining personal well-being. It should be noted therefore that social exclusion as discussed by participants in this study was not understood solely in terms of the circumstances of isolated individuals but also as a characteristic of the 'social quality' of societies.

In addition to the above conceptual issues, our discussions with participants revealed a number of measurement issues associated with participants' decision-making process primarily relating to item cognition and response. It should be noted that we are only able to comment here upon *overt* problems associated with item wording on the basis of queries and comments volunteered by participants. We do not exclude the possibility that further *covert* problems may exist for some items, and we recommend that these and similar deprivation items are subject to full cognitive testing in future work in this area. We present elsewhere a review of evidence based upon cognitive testing of selected items for potential inclusion in the *Living Standards in Britain* survey (Fahmy et

el., 2011).

Firstly, as discussed above, many participants felt that determining which specific items and activities should be considered 'necessities of life' depends upon knowledge of a range of other contextual factors concerning the household's circumstances, including wider living standards and household composition. For this reason, participants were asked to consider the situation of an exemplar household comprising a couple with dependent children in making their deliberations. Nevertheless, in rendering the decision-making process more concrete this inevitably is also a significant factor in interpreting participants' responses. It is important to emphasise that these findings relate to the circumstances of a 'typical' family with children, and the extent to which they can be generalised to all people living in the UK is uncertain. Indeed as noted above participants often had difficulty in making decisions without such contextual information. The extent to which survey respondents can therefore make informed decisions about the 'necessities of life' in the absence of contextual information remains uncertain, and these issues clearly therefore have important implications for the ways in which the survey questions on this topic are understood by participants and interpreted by researchers.

Item cognition issues were identified with a variety of items and further details on specific problems are outlined in Appendix 1. Problems were identified with some items where wide variations exist in the quality of items available and with the associated costs. In the absence of sufficient information which might allow participants to make informed judgments about the relevant costs involved it can be difficult for participants to deliberate on the importance of different items. Some instances where this was an especial issue includes 'iPod or MP3 player', 'holidays', and 'outings' where cost implications are unclear and highly variable. It is recommended that consideration is given to providing an estimate of cost for some items where these are difficult for participants to estimate. In order to aid participants' decision making consideration could also be given to more provision of suitable examples - as well as ensuring that these are generally comparable. Similarly, the use of adjectives such as 'adequate', 'appropriate' and 'decent' caused difficulties for participants. This was highlighted by participants' contrasting opinions on the elements that constituted the item in question. It is recommended where possible to avoid the use of such adjectives.

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APPENDIX 1: Data and methods

Table A1.1: Selected respondent characteristics

Age group	N	Col%
lt 30	20	18
30-44	36	32
44-59	23	20
60+	22	19
TOTAL	101	89

Sex	N	Col%
female	61	54
male	53	46
TOTAL	114	100

Household type	N	Col%
couple with dep children	40	35
couple no dep children	13	11
pensioner hhld	18	16
single parent	23	20
other	13	11
single non-pensioner	7	6
TOTAL	114	100

Hhld income per month	N	Col%
Less than £750	17	15
£750-1,500	45	40
£1,500-2,500	25	22
more than £2,500	27	24
TOTAL	114	100

Housing tenure	N	%
owner occupier	57	50
social rental (LA/HA)	18	16
private rental	36	32
other	3	3
TOTAL	114	100

Dwelling type	N	Col%
detached house	23	20
semi-detached house	37	33
terraced house	33	29
flat	18	16
other	3	0
TOTAL	114	97

Table A1.2: Group composition by selected respondent characteristics (column percentages)

GROUP:	Bristol			Cardiff			Glasgow		London			Belfast			All
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	-
INCOME															
Less than £750	11	38	..	11	..	67	11	38	..	11	22	10	15
£750 to £1,500	25	33	56	63	22	11	33	17	33	63	13	56	67	50	40
£1,500 to £2,500	38	22	22	..	33	44	..	17	22	..	25	33	11	20	22
More than £2,500	38	44	11	..	44	33	67	..	33	..	63	20	24
TENURE															
Owner occupier	63	67	89	75	89	33	33	17	22	25	50	11	33	70	50
Social renter	0	22	0	13	0	22	33	33	33	63	0	11	0	10	16
Private renter	25	0	11	13	11	44	0	50	44	13	50	78	67	20	32
Other	13	11	0	0	0	0	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
DWELLING TYPE															
Detached	50	33	78	13	56	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	22	0	20
Semi-detached	13	22	0	50	0	67	33	33	33	0	50	44	44	60	33
Terraced	13	44	11	25	33	33	0	33	11	38	13	56	33	40	29
Flat	13	0	0	13	11	0	67	33	56	38	38	0	0	0	16
Other	13	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	3
AGE															
Less than 30	13	33	0	0	22	60	67	50	11	33	0	33	13	0	20
30-44	25	22	0	0	56	0	33	50	44	17	71	67	38	63	36
45-59	50	11	0	0	22	40	0	0	44	17	29	0	50	38	23
60+	13	33	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	0	0	0	22
SEX															
Female	50	22	67	63	56	89	0	67	44	38	38	44	78	60	54
Male	50	78	33	38	44	11	100	33	56	63	63	56	22	40	47
N	8	9	9	8	9	9	3	6	9	8	8	9	9	10	114

Box A1.1: Definitions of Poverty

Looking now at the definitions of poverty shown on Show Card A, we'd like you to think about which definition of poverty comes closest to your views. Is there one definition you prefer?

Which of these definitions do you think is most relevant to the situation of people living in our society today?

Box A1.1: Poverty Definitions

Households living in the UK today are poor if:

Subsistence

"They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs for food, shelter, warmth, light and sanitation for all members of the household"

Basic Needs

"They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs and lack access to education, information, and health and social care for all members of the household"

Relative Poverty

"They do not have sufficient resources to fully participate in activities and living patterns which are widely available in the UK today"

Appendix A1: Focus Group Topic Guide (Phase 1)

OPENING COMMENTS

My name is XXX and I am a researcher at the University of Bristol. I will be leading today's discussion. Before we begin I'd like to start by saying a little more about the research.

There's a lot of talk about poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and wealth in the media and politics. Journalists and politicians have a lot to say about it, but we're interested in finding out the views of the public. Today we will be talking about what YOU think are the "necessities of life" for people living in our society today – things that you think everyone should be able to have or do if they want to, and should not have to do without. We're especially interested in your opinions about what exactly we mean by poverty and social exclusion, and the things you think people really need to be able to have, or to do, to avoid them. We often do not hear the views of the public on these issues so the aim of this project is to give you a chance to have your say!

When we're discussing the topics today you may want to talk about your own standard of living and personal experiences, but you do not have to tell us anything that you do not want to. We'll be putting together a report based on what is said in the group discussions and to make this possible we'd like to record what is said. We will of course treat this discussion as confidential, and will not use your real names anywhere in the transcripts or report. It's also important that *everyone* taking part also agrees to treat what is said today by others in confidence. Is this all OK and clear?

We want to encourage as much open discussion as possible, so if there is something you want to say please don't hold back. If there are things which we haven't thought of, or which you'd like to talk about, that's OK too. So that we can accurately record what you have said we would be grateful if you could please talk one at a time and of course be respectful of other people's opinions. Is this all OK and clear?

INTRODUCTION

Q1: I'd like to start by asking you all to introduce yourselves and say a little about yourself – things such as the area where you live, who you live with, and how you spend your time.

PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

Poverty means different things to different people. We'd like to get your views and ideas about what poverty means to you, and what you think it is like to be poor in our society today.

Q2: How would you define "poverty" in your own words? What does it mean to you?

Households living in the UK today are poor if:

Definition 1. Subsistence

“They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs for food, shelter, warmth, light and sanitation for all members of the household”

Definition 2. Basic Needs

“They do not have sufficient resources to meet their physical needs *and* lack adequate access to education, information, and health and social care for all members of the household”

Definition 3. Relative Poverty

“They do not have sufficient resources to fully participate in activities and living patterns which are widely available in the UK today”

Q3: Looking now at the definitions of poverty shown on Show Card A, we’d like you to think about which definition of poverty comes closest to your views. Is there one definition you prefer?

Q4: Which of these definitions do you think is most relevant to the situation of people living in our society today?

Q5: Are there things which you think being poor stops people doing?

Q6: Do you think (GROUP TYPE) are more or less likely to experience poverty than other people, or does this make no difference?

THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Thank you for completing the questionnaire that we sent you. We’ve asked you to complete these because it will be useful now in talking about what we think are the necessities of life in the UK today. By ‘necessities’, we mean things that everyone should be able to afford if they want them, and should not have to do without.

We do not want to discuss what you personally need, but rather the things you think everybody should be able to have or do if they want to. Remember that we used the following example of an imaginary household:

SCENARIO 1: Tom (aged 38) and Jenny (aged 35) are a married couple with two children, Jack (aged 12) and Lizzie (aged 8). They live in the suburbs of a large city. Tom works at a local hospital and is the sole wage earner within the household. Both parents are in good health.

FAO: Couples with children

We’d like you to think of the situation of this household when doing this exercise. We’d like first to look at a list of items which has been used in earlier studies on this topic, and then look at your suggestions based on Exercise 1 (*‘Necessities of Life’*).

Q7: Looking at Show Card B, are there any items for adults that are not ‘necessities of life’? What about the items for children?

We asked you to think in advance about the kind of things that you think are necessities of life and to write these down (*Doc B*). We would now like to add to this list by going through your suggestions to see if we can reach agreement between us on what we think are the necessities of life in our society today.

Begin with free discussion. Note participant suggestions on blank cards and add to agreed listed items (Show Card B). Note degree of consensus.

Q8: Thinking about this household's accommodation, what kind of home would they need to be able to have to avoid poverty?

Q9: Thinking now about this household's basic lifestyle, things like their diet, footwear and clothing, what kind of things do you think are necessities of life for them in our society today?

Q10: Now let's talk about this household's living conditions and what is in their home. What kind of things would they need to have around the home to avoid poverty, for example, electrical goods, furnishings, and household connections and services?

Q11: There are lots of different social activities that are normal for people of all ages in our society today. What kinds of social activities should this household be able to do if they want to in our society today?

Now let's see if we can agree on a list of things which this household need to be able to have if they are to avoid poverty.

Compile and group participants' suggestions into main categories.

Q12: Could you cut out anything from this list? If not, why not? If so, what?

Q13: Imagine now you personally experienced an unexpected big cut in your household's income which meant you had to cut back on spending, for example as a result of losing a job. Which if any of these things do you think you would try to economise on first?

Q14: And which of these things would be your most important priorities in making sure that you could still afford them?

STANDARD OF LIVING

We've looked at the everyday items and activities that we think are necessities of life. However, we're also interested in the things which we might think of as luxuries. By a 'luxury' we mean something that is quite costly and exclusive which may be desirable

for people to have but which many or most people go without in our society today.

Begin with free discussion. Note participant suggestions on flipchart. Probe how important various factors are in reaching a collective decision.

Q15: What do you think it means to be wealthy in our society today?

Q16: In terms of your overall standard of living, what things do you think the wealthy have access to which you do not but might want to?

We'd now like to talk with you more generally about 'living standards' in our society today.

Q17: Overall, how would you rate your standard of living?

Minimum Standard of Living

"A minimum standard of living in Britain today includes, but is more than just, food clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society."

Q18: Some recent research in 2008 came up with this definition of a minimum standard of living. The definition here mentions opportunities and choices. Do you think that these are important too? In what ways?

Q19: What does a minimum adequate standard of living mean to you? And what does a good standard of living mean to you?

Q20: Imagine now that you experienced a long-term rise in your regular income, for example by getting a job, or a big rise in your pay or pension. What kind of things would you use this money for?

Q21: How important do you think standard of living is for people's overall sense of well-being and quality of life?

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In addition to poverty, we're also interested in looking at other types of disadvantage which make it difficult for people to fully participate in society. Some people call this 'social exclusion'.

Q22: What does it mean to you to be able to fully participate in society?

Q23: What, if anything, does the phrase 'social exclusion' mean to you?

Q24: Do you think that social exclusion is different from poverty? Could someone be poor without being socially excluded? Could they be socially excluded without being poor?

VIGNETTE EXERCISE

We'd now like you to look at some imaginary scenarios which describe the situation of people experiencing different forms of social exclusion in their daily lives (*Doc E*).

Q25: Looking at the first example (*Case Study X*), do you think that this person is experiencing social exclusion in any ways?

Q26: Thinking now about the second example (*Case Study Y*), do you think that this person is experiencing social exclusion in any ways?

EXERCISE 2: BRAINSTORMING

Before coming to today's discussion, we asked you all to think about the kind of things that might mean that someone is experiencing social exclusion, and to write these down.

We'd now like to go through your suggestions and see if we can reach agreement between us on the kinds of disadvantages which make it difficult for people to fully participate in society and to enjoy the lifestyles, opportunities, and choices which are widely available in our society today.

Begin with free discussion. Note participant suggestions on flipchart. Probe how important various factors are in reaching a collective decision.

Q27: Let's think first about people's general standard of living. Apart from poverty, what kinds of disadvantages might make it difficult for people to fully participate in society?

Q28: What about people's personal relationships and the emotional and practical support available to them – what kind of things might mean someone is likely to experience social exclusion?

Q29: Turning now to people's working lives, what kind of things might mean someone is likely to experience social exclusion?

Q30: Let's look now at people's social lives and community involvement. What kind of things might make it difficult for people to fully participate in society?

Q31: Finally, thinking about people's wellbeing and quality of life, what kind of

things might mean someone is vulnerable to socially exclusion?

Now let's see if we can agree on a list of things which make it difficult for people to fully participate in society and to enjoy the lifestyle, choices and opportunities available to most people in the UK today.

Compile and group participants' suggestions into main categories.

Q32: Could you cut out anything from this list? If not, why not? If so, what?

Q33: Are there any things which you think are especially important for (GROUP TYPE)?

CLOSING THE GROUP

OK, before we finish our discussion we would like to give you a chance to raise any issues that you think we have not covered on this topic but which are important to you.

Q34: Are there any other topics that you would like to raise which we have not already covered?

Thank you very much for agreeing taking part in this research. The information you have provided is extremely useful to us and will help us greatly in putting together a report on the public's views on the necessities of life in the UK today. In the meantime do please contact us if there's anything you forgot to mention today but which you think is important.

The information you've provided will be treated in confidence, and we won't use your real names in any work connected with this project. We'd also like to remind you all to keep what was said by everyone taking part in today's discussion in confidence.

Finally, you should all have received an expenses form to cover the costs of taking part in today's discussion, as well as one-off gift payment in recognition of your contribution to the project. If you have any questions about this do please let us know after the session.

THANK PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX 2: Comments and recommendations on specific indicators

Table A2.1: Accommodation

ITEM (See note)	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<u>A damp free home</u>	This item was universally agreed to be a necessity and basic standard that all accommodation should meet.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Heating to warm living areas of the home</u>	This item was universally viewed as a necessity. With rising energy prices, energy efficiency and insulation were important considerations in participants thinking since poorly insulated homes are costly to heat. Participants suggested a number of related items, incl 'loft insulation', 'double glazing', 'adequate insulation', etc.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes. Alternative items focusing on energy efficiency could be considered, such as 'a draft free home' or 'an adequately insulated and ventilated home'. It is recommended that a new item be included 'an adequately insulated and ventilated home'
Draught free windows	The item was widely viewed as a necessary. Participants drew on their experience of living in poorly glazed homes and the associated additional heating costs.	
Adequate ventilation and insulation	The item was viewed as essential in maintaining thermal comfort. Participants drew on their experience of living in poorly insulated homes and the associated costs (incl health costs)	
Adequate natural light	Some participants felt that adequate natural light as a feature of basic accommodation was a necessity. Participants suggested the importance of this item for well being and the enjoyment of their living environment.	It is recommended that new item be included 'good levels of natural light'.

<u>Money to keep home in decent state of decoration</u>	This item provoked considerable discussion with regard to how the item should be understood esp what 'decent' decoration entails (i.e. cognition problems). Some participants felt this could be interpreted as being able to follow the latest consumerist trends in household furnishings which did not qualify as a necessity. Others suggested 'a decent state of <i>repair</i> ' (rather than decoration). This rephrasing seemed to address participants' concerns incl the need to ensure the home is hazard free.	It is recommended that this item be included subject to rewording 'Money to keep home in a decent state of repair and decoration'.
Smoke/carbon monoxide alarm	Participants universally viewed both a smoke detector and carbon monoxide alarm as being a necessity. Again, this is underpinned by a broader concern with maintaining a safe living environment.	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'a smoke detector and carbon monoxide alarm'.
Separate bedrooms for all adults and for parents/children	All participants felt that separate bedrooms for adults was a necessity where needed, and that parents should not have to share a bedroom with their children.	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'Separate bedrooms for adults'
<u>Separate bedrooms for boys and girls aged over 10</u>	This item was widely viewed as a necessity for children after the age of around 10 years old for reasons of privacy and space.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Bath or shower facilities	Some participants suggested bath and/or shower facilities within the home as a necessity and this was universally agreed. For many this was a 'taken for granted' item in contemporary society.	This item was widely viewed as a necessity and could be included. However, it may not be a sensitive measure and was not salient in participant accounts.
Enough space for all household members	Participants referred to the need for individuals to have a space that they could enjoy away from other members of the household. This was viewed as important in terms	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'Enough space or privacy to read, write or listen to music'. This wording was tested in Phase 2. It should be noted

	of privacy, but also for personal development, such as a space to read, listen to music or to do homework.	that these groups considered this to be a desirable item, therefore this may be a useful threshold item.
A communal area for all household members	Participants emphasised the importance of a shared social space in maintaining normal social and family relationships. Participants also referred to lifestyle changes assoc with more informal living patterns which make this item essential.	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'A living room for all household members to share'.
Sole use of household facilities	There was widespread agreement that households should not have to share household facilities. Participants felt that sole use of facilities, such as a kitchen and bathroom, are necessary to ensure privacy and well being. Some participants noted that for some groups such as university students, communal living may be seen as a desirable choice.	It is recommended that this item be re-worded: 'Sole use of household facilities including kitchen and bathroom'.
<u>Insurance of home contents</u> (PSE99: '~contents of dwelling')	This item was widely agreed by participants as a means of safeguarding against unpredictable risks. Where proposed, buildings insurance was also seen as important for home-owning households. Some participants noted the increased risk of flooding as a further hazard that households should be able to insure against.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised wording: 'insurance of home contents'.

NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item

Table A2.2: Diet, clothing and footwear

ITEM	COMMENT	RECOMMENDATION
<u>Two meals a day for adults</u>	Diet related items provoked much discussion about how a 'meal' is understood (main meal, snack, etc) (i.e. poss cognition issue), and how this related to changing lifestyles (less regular meals, snacking, eating out etc). Participants perceptions of an acceptable minimum also varied with some participants suggesting 'three meals a day', and others proposing an adequate and/or balanced diet as an alternative.	These items make assumptions about the desirability of specific dietary regimes which were not always shared by participants. Participants' definitions of a 'meal' also varied widely. 'Two main meals could be an alternative. Another alternative could be a new item 'an adequate balanced diet'. However, any changes may introduce other <i>more</i> substantial problems of interpretation and could conflict with other indicators. It is therefore recommended that these items are included without changes.
<u>Meat, fish or veggie equivalent daily</u>	Whilst there was widespread consensus on the importance of this item the frequency was questioned with some participants suggesting 'every other day' was adequate. Others thought that an adequate and/or balanced diet would be a better.	
<u>Fresh fruit and veg. on a daily basis</u>	There was universal agreement amongst participants that this item is a necessity. Some participants proposed amending the frequency to 'at least daily'.	
An adequate balanced diet (including meat, fish, vegetables and carbs)	Some participants felt that diet items were too specific and 'an adequate and/or balanced diet' (or similar) would be preferable. Some participants suggested further explanation in brackets - 'including meat, fish, vegetables and carbohydrates'.	It is recommended that this new item is not considered for inclusion (see above).
Non prescription medicines	Some explanation on the definition of this item was given by interviewers referring to over-the-counter medications (analgesics etc). Participants then easily reached a consensus that this item is a necessity.	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'non-prescription medicines such as flu remedies, ointments, drops or painkillers'.
<u>Warm waterproof coat</u>	There was universal agreement amongst participants that this item is a necessity.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Two pairs of all weather shoes</u>	This item was widely agreed as a necessity. However, some explanation was required suggesting possible cognition	It is recommended that this item is included subject to changes in item wording: 'shoes for both winter and

	problems with regard to what was meant by 'all weather'.	summer use'.
Adequate clothing and footwear for all seasons	Some participants suggested a change to 'adequate footwear'. Others suggested clothing and footwear items be combined in one item 'adequate clothing and footwear for all seasons'. However, interpretations of what constitute 'adequate' varied so widely that generic questions of this type are likely to be of limited use.	It is recommended that this new item is not considered for inclusion.
<u>New, not second hand, clothes</u>	Some participants noted changes in the public acceptability of second-hand clothes esp. charity shops bargains targeted by middle class customers. Others noted that new clothing may now be cheaper than second-hand clothing. Some participants suggested the item should be amendments including "some new not second-hand clothes".	It is recommended that this item is included subject to changes in item wording: 'some new not second-hand clothes'.
<u>An outfit for special occasions</u>	Whilst there was general agreement this item might be a useful threshold indicator as viewed were quite mixed. Participants emphasised the importance of social expectations and roles as well as the stigma of being single out or excluded.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to changes in item wording: 'an outfit for special occasions such as a family wedding or job interview'. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be a desirable item, so it may be a useful threshold item.
Three complete outfits for every household member	This item was widely suggested but consensus was difficult to establish partly for definitional reasons relating to the term 'outfit' (which was interpreted as meaning matching clothing by some participants).	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'three complete sets of clothing for every household member'.
Clothes in good/clean condition	Participants thought that going into detail on separate clothing items was unproductive and a general descriptor of clothing quality would be preferable. Participants suggestions included 'clothes in good condition', 'adequate clothing and footwear for all seasons', 'clean clothing' and 'appropriate clothing for season in good condition'.	It is recommended that further consideration be given to this new item subject to revised wording: 'appropriate clothing for all seasons in good condition'.
Adequate nightwear	Where discussed there was general agreement on this item. Discussions focused on cognition	It is recommended that this new item be included subject to changes in item wording:

	problems in interpreting 'adequate' and also whether this referred only to clothing specifically designed for this purpose. This item might be important if a hospital stay is needed, or for children attending sleepovers.	'pyjamas or night dress'.
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NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item

Table A2.3: Household items

ITEM	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<u>Mobile phone</u>	There was widespread agreement that access to a phone at home was a necessity. For many, this meant either a mobile or landline. However, some groups and participants also felt that in addition to a landline, all adults should be able to have a mobile phone in the UK today to maintain social relationships, meet social obligations (incl work), and to keep themselves and others safe. Others noted that a mobile phone is in many cases also cheaper than a landline.	It is recommended that two new items be considered: 'access to a phone (incl mobile) at home' and 'a mobile phone'. Participant decisions about whether a landline and mobile phone are necessities were sometimes inter-related. This suggests a need for some modification of existing items.
<u>Access to internet at home</u>	Internet access was widely identified as a necessity in the UK today in a variety of contexts (e.g. seeking work, education, maintaining social networks, accessing information and services). Internet access for families with children was identified as especially important, and agreement on this item for adult-only households was less pronounced. Some participants noted that internet access via public libraries, etc might be an alternative but accessibility issues (and assoc indirect costs) were decisive here. Some participants felt that 'high-speed internet access' was important. However, the consensus was that basic access today usually in practice meant broadband access which was considered adequate.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes. This item suggesting it may be a 'good' (sensitive) threshold indicator.
<u>Microwave</u>	A microwave was suggested by some participants <i>in addition</i> to use of a standard oven/hob. The substitutability of items (cooker/microwave) is an issue here (i.e. possible decision-making problem). Additional convenience (esp for families with children), energy saving, and low cost were decisive factors in participants decisions.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be a 'desirable' item, so it may be a useful threshold item.

<u>Fridge/freezer</u>	A fridge/freezer was suggested and quickly agreed by participants on the basis of universal agreement. No cognition or decision making issues were evident.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
An iron	Where discussed, an iron was suggested and quickly agreed by participants on the basis of universal agreement. No cognition or decision making issues were evident.	It is recommended that this item is not considered for inclusion. Whilst universally agreed to be a necessity in one group, it was not salient in most groups' discussions suggesting that it is unlikely to be a good discriminating indicator.
Kettle	Where discussed, kettle was suggested and quickly agreed by participants on the basis of universal agreement. No cognition or decision making issues were evident.	It is recommended that this item is excluded. Whilst universally agreed to be a necessity in one group, it was not salient in most groups' discussions suggesting that it is unlikely to be a discriminating indicator.
Hairdryer	This item was suggested by some participants and provoked some discussion focused on whether this item is essential for <i>all</i> people/households (gender being decisive here!). However, there was a consensus that households (incl the exemplar) should be able to have this item if they need it.	This item is recommended for further consideration by the research team. This item could be useful in identifying gender differences in the experience of poverty.
<u>Money to replace broken electrical goods</u>	This item was discussed some participants resulting in a clear consensus across groups. Some participants emphasised the importance of safety consideration (esp for hhlDs with young children). Others suggested that given the relative costs of repair/replacement, households should be able to replace broken/unsafe items (rather than repair)	It is recommended that item is included subject to revised item wording: 'Money to replace broken or unsafe electrical goods'.
Sofa and/or easy chairs for household members	Participants emphasised the importance of a shared living space for household social interaction. Having somewhere quiet and comfortable to rest and relax was also seen as important for personal well-being	It is recommended this new item be included 'Sofa and/or easy chairs for household members'.
Dining table and	Many participants emphasised the	It is recommended that a

chairs for all household members	importance of a communal living space for household social interaction. Some participants observed that changing lifestyles mean that this is less relevant today for them and others. Others noted that although they may be able to afford it, not all households have sufficient space - the complementarity of items is an issue.	new item is included based upon revised wording: 'A table and chairs for all household members'. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be a 'desirable' so this may be a useful threshold item.
<u>Money to replace worn out furniture</u>	This and related items were very widely proposed and agreed as a necessities by many participants (i.e. no decision-making problems). However, considerable discussion focused on item wording (cognition problems). Some suggested that replacement furniture should not be interpreted to mean <i>new</i> furniture but simply 'functional' or 'in a good state of repair'. Others felt that it was necessary to repair 'broken' furniture rather than simply 'worn out' furniture.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording: 'money to replace broken or worn out furniture'.
<u>Bed, bedding, mattress for all household members</u>	This item was suggested and quickly agreed by participants in a number of groups on the basis of universal agreement. No cognition or decision making issues were evident.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Curtains/blinds	This item was suggested and quickly agreed by participants in a number of groups on the basis of universal agreement. No cognition or decision making issues were evident. Participants emphasised the importance of privacy as well as energy-efficiency savings	It is recommended that this new item be included 'Curtains and/or blinds'.
Access to an outdoor space within accommodation	This and related items were widely suggested and discussed. Participants emphasised the importance of open space within the accommodation for children to play (see children's items), and access to fresh air outside for all household members. Some participants noted that <i>availability</i> of suitable accommodation can be an issue [e.g. in London] - as a minimum households should have access to a outside balcony, terrace or small	It is recommended that this item be given further consideration in relation to standard of living items & soc exclusion (garden, area for children to play, parks/rec areas).

	yard	
Books within the home	This item was widely agreed by participants. Participants emphasised the item's cultural, social and educational importance. Some participants emphasised that <i>second-hand</i> books were very cheap and should be within reach of all. How many books households should be able to afford depended on need.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording: 'books (incl second-hand) within the home'.
<u>Home computer</u>	This item was suggested and discussed by participants less frequently than internet access. Where discussed participants emphasised the importance of a home PC/laptop for children's education, and its role in accessing the internet for all household members.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be a desirable item, therefore this may be a useful threshold item.
<u>TV</u>	This item was widely agreed by participants. Participants emphasised cultural, social and educational importance. Some participants suggested a <i>digital TV</i> provoking a long (and somewhat technical) discussion and suggesting a possible cognition problem. However, 'digital TV' is likely to generate other more substantial problems of cognition.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Radio or music player</u>	Participants emphasised social/cultural significance and the need for (cheap) recreation and entertainment. Discussion focused on <i>quality</i> issues with alternative suggestions including a 'hi-fi', 'CD player', 'music system', etc. (i.e. possible cognition problems)	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording: 'A music system or hi-fi' NB) This revised wording was tested in Phase 2 and was generally viewed as a desirable item, so it may be a useful threshold item.
<i>DVD player</i>	This item was introduced in phase 2, participants did not consider this item to be a necessity, although participants did note that these devices could be purchased at relatively low cost. For some participants a DVD player provided 'cheap' entertainment.	It is recommended that this item is included. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be 'desirable', so it may be a useful threshold item.

NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item

Table A2.4 Social and family life

ITEM	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<u>Holiday away from home once a year, not with relatives</u>	This item was widely agreed as a necessity. Some participants queried whether this item should specify domestic or overseas holidays. Others found the sub-clause 'not with relatives' confusing (i.e. poss cognition issue).	It is recommended that the item is included subject to revised wording 'holiday away from home once a year'.
<u>Visits to friends or family</u>	This item was widely agreed as a necessity in promoting and sustaining social relationships.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>A car</u>	This item was strongly contested within groups. The availability of affordable (and suitable) local transport was a decisive factor here. A car was widely viewed as a necessity in areas lacking good public transport (incl rural areas) (i.e. poss substitutability problem), as well as for all families with children. Adequate access to suitable transport was viewed as vital in accessing jobs and services, and in ensuring personal autonomy.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Local bus & rail fares</u>	This item was widely agreed as a necessity.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Money for local sporting activities or classes	This item was widely viewed as a necessity in maintain good health and well-being. Many participants distinguished between public and private facilities, the latter often being considered a luxury. Others participants considered 'leisure' in broader terms to incorporate evening classes and/or sporting activities, including as a spectator. Others noted that participation also depends upon <i>availability</i> issues (i.e. poss definitional issue).	It is recommended that consideration be given to a new item 'money to take part in local sports activities or classes'. Separate additional items 'money to attend evening or adult education classes' and 'money to attend sporting events' could be considered.
<u>Money to celebrate special occasions</u>	This item was widely agreed as a necessity. Participants generally discussed this issue in relation to the performance of social roles as a parent or family member (present giving for children at Xmas).	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Family or</u>	This item was widely agreed as a	It is recommended that this

<p><u>friends around for a meal</u></p>	<p>necessity in promoting and sustaining social relationships. Some participants queried the frequency for this item (i.e. poss response problem), suggesting 'once a month' was sufficient.</p>	<p>item is included without changes.</p>
<p><u>An evening out once a fortnight</u></p>	<p>Participants were equivocal about this item. For some older participants, it was less applicable due to safety concerns after dark. In the main, discussion focused on <i>frequency</i> issues (i.e. poss response problem). Some participants suggested that this should be extended to 'once a month'.</p>	<p>It is recommended that this item is included without changes.</p>
<p>Theatre, concert, museum, cinema visits</p>	<p>This item was widely agreed as a necessity in order to take part in 'normal' social activities, as well as for personal development. Participants disagreed on <i>which</i> activities should be included given different costs. Others suggested an estimate of <i>frequency</i> is needed (monthly or quarterly)</p>	<p>It is recommended that this new item is included subject to revised item wording: 'a trip to a theatre, cinema, museum or exhibition once a month'.</p>

Table A2.5 Financial issues

ITEM	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<u>Paying rent/mortgage and household bills without getting into debt</u>	Where discussed there was widespread support for the inclusion of this item. Participants believed the accumulation of debt to significantly compromise individual autonomy and choices.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Small sum of money to spend on self weekly</u>	This item received a mixed response with some participants interpreting this item as being by definition 'non-essential' (i.e. poss definitional issue). However, for most participants this item was seen as essential for the personal autonomy of individual household members. Some participants suggested the frequency of the item could be amended to 'once a month' to reflect the reality of household budgeting.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to changes in item wording: 'Small sum to spend on self monthly' NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be 'desirable' so it may be a useful threshold item.
Life insurance for mortgage-holders	Where discussed this item was widely supported. Participants suggested that such insurance policies served to protect households against the decline in income experienced following bereavement.	It is recommended that this item be excluded. This item was not salient in most groups' discussions suggesting that it is unlikely to be a good discriminating indicator.
Regular payments into a private or occupational pension plan	Where discussed this item was widely supported. Participants suggested that such pension plans had become increasingly significant as the value of state pensions decline. Therefore, the opportunity to set aside funds for retirement broadens the choices individuals have in later life.	It is recommended that a new item be included: 'regular payments into a private or occupational pension plan'.
<u>Regular savings for rainy days</u>	Where discussed this item was widely supported. Participants believed the opportunity to save as an insurance against possible future risks should be afforded to all members of society.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.

NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item

Table A2.6 Children's items

ITEM	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<u>Three meals a day for children</u>	This item was viewed as less problematic than its adult equivalent, most groups easily reaching a consensus. Some participants suggested that "minimum" be added.	See adult items.
<u>Meat, fish or veggie equivalent daily for children</u>	Some participants suggested that for children this should be amended to "at least twice daily".	
<u>Fresh fruit or vegetables at least daily</u>	This was debated in conjunction with the adult item above with the vast majority of participants easily agreeing it to be a necessity.	
Milk daily	Debate focused on the availability of milk in children's diets (free school milk) and its importance.	It is recommended that this item be excluded. This item <i>is</i> clearly viewed as a necessity and could be included on this basis. However, this may not be a sensitive measure and was generally not salient in participant discussions.
<u>New, properly fitted shoes for children</u>	Groups easily reached a consensus that this item is a necessity.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Some new, not second-hand clothes for children</u>	As with the adult item above this provoked much debate. Participants discussion distinguished between <i>handed down</i> clothing (from siblings etc) and <i>second-hand</i> clothing (i.e. poss cognition issue). The former was viewed as acceptable, though some participants noted that cost comparisons sometimes mean second-hand is not always cheaper (i.e. poss definitional issue). However, for most participants the importance of peer group acceptance meant that children should have at least some new clothes.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
School uniform for children	This item was suggested by participants and where discussed there was a clear consensus. Participant responses	It is recommended that this item is included without changes. A further new item 'suitable sports kit for school

	emphasised social expectations and desirability.	use' should be considered further.
<u>A garden for children to play in</u>	Most participants felt that this was probably a desirable item, rather than a necessity given accessibility issues (children living in inner city areas). However, it was widely felt that all children should have access to a safe outside area to play close to home' (below).	It is recommended that this item be included without changes. NB) Phase 2 groups considered this to be 'desirable', so it could be a 'good' (discriminating) indicator.
Access to a safe outside area to play close to home	Item proposed by P1 groups (see above). Item confirmed as necessity in P2 groups.	It is recommended that this new item is included.
<u>Books for children of their own</u>	A few participants suggested that access to a library is sufficient, though others questioned their accessibility and practicality for young children. A general consensus was reached that all children should have access to at least some books which are their own.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
<u>Toys (e.g. dolls, teddies)</u>	A general consensus was easily reached across groups that this item is a necessity.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Toys for personal development and education	Some participants felt that it is important that children should be able to have toys that are educational or stimulate development. However, participants were not always clear on what this meant (i.e. poss cognition issue) and concrete examples would help here. A number of specific suggestions were 'Educational toys' and 'Toys for personal development'.	It is recommended that further consideration is given to this new item subject to suggestions on suitable examples.
<u>Leisure equipment for children</u>	This item provoked significant definitional queries (i.e cognition problems) incl what is meant by 'equipment' and the scope of 'leisure' (incl sports, recreation, etc). Some participants suggested inserting the term 'basic'. It was widely agreed that concrete examples should be included (e.g. 'rugby ball', 'skipping rope', 'bike' etc).	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording 'leisure and sports equipment for children such as a bicycle, ballet shoes or a guitar'
Sports	See above item.	See above.

equipment for children		
<u>Hobby or leisure activity</u>	Participants suggested and agreed that hobbies or leisure activities were important for children's personal development. Where discussed, participants quickly reached agreement on this item	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Money for children's clubs, societies and related activities	Participants suggested and agreed that money for children social and leisure activities was important for their personal development. Where discussed, participants quickly reached agreement on this item	It is recommended that a new item is included 'money for children's clubs and activities such as guides or football training'.
Money for after-school clubs	Some participants suggested and agreed that money for after-school clubs was important for children's personal development. Where proposed participants quickly reached agreement on this item. Nevertheless, it is possible that cognitions problems exist with some participants interpreting this broadly to include out-of-school recreational activities.	It is recommended that this new item is not included.
<u>School trips at least once a term</u>	This item provoked considerable debate focusing on the cost of the trip and whether the trip's purposes were educational. Participants also discussed the frequency of trips (i.e. poss response problems) with the term 'at least' suggested. Other participants suggested 'reasonable cost' and 'educational (school trips)'.	It is recommended that this new item is included 'money to pay for school trips at least once a term'.
Family outings	This item was widely agreed as a necessity in order to take part in 'normal' social activities today. Participants queried the nature (and cost) of activities involved (i.e. poss cognition problem), as well as their <i>frequency</i> . Some examples may be helpful here. Some participants may interpret this item to apply to <i>all</i> households not only those with children (i.e. poss cognition issue).	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording 'Family outings at least once a month, for example, to the seaside or zoo'. An additional new item [e.g.] 'a special day out once a month' could be considered for adults.

<u><i>Friends round for tea/snack fortnightly</i></u>	This item was universally considered a necessity but as with the previous item, the frequency provoked debate (i.e. poss response problems). 'Fortnightly' was thought outdated by some participants suggesting 'occasionally'. However, 'occasionally' is likely to create additional, more substantial cognition problems.	It is recommended that this item is included without changes.
Treats for children on special occasions	This item was suggested by participants though the meaning of 'treats' varied between groups (i.e. poss cognition problems), to include food, sweets, etc as well as trips or cultural events. This item could also be interpreted to include treats on birthdays, Xmas, etc.	It is recommended that this item is not considered for inclusion without further clarification of question meaning.
<u><i>A mobile phone for older children</i></u>	This item provoked much debate with opinion remaining divided in some groups. Many participants viewed this item as a necessity for older children for reasons of personal safety and as a social networking tool. Views varied on the age that children should own a mobile phone with most participants in the range 10 to 14.	It is recommended that this item is included subject to revised item wording 'a mobile phone for children aged 11 and over'.

NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item

Table A2.7 Luxury items

ITEM	COMMENTS	RECOMMENDATION
<i>Membership of a gym or sports club</i>	Participants easily reached agreement that membership of a gym or sports club is a luxury. There was some discussion of the importance of participation in physical/sporting activities, esp in view of anti-obesity health messages, but it was felt that this could be achieved by participation in other activities (e.g. local leisure classes).	It is recommended that this item is given consideration. This might be a 'good' (i.e. discriminating) indicator of living standards at the upper end of the distribution.
<i>An iPod or MP3 Player</i>	Participants noted that purchase costs differ widely between a top of the range iPod and a basic MP3 player, which can be purchased at relatively low cost. When asked to come to a decision, however, the majority of participants defined this item as a luxury.	In view of the problems with cost differentiation it is recommended that consideration is given to a guide valuation 'An iPod or MP3 player costing more than £75'.
<i>A school trip abroad once a year</i>	Discussion of this item included debate on educational value, cost ec. The potential for social exclusion if children/young people are unable to participate in such a trip was recognised by participants, however a majority regarded this item as a luxury.	It is recommended that this item be considered in conjunction with the item "A school trip at least once a term" (see Phase 1). It might be a good (discriminating) indicator.
<u>A dishwasher</u>	This item was not discussed by Phase 2 groups as the majority of participants in Phase 1 groups had viewed it as a luxury item rather than a necessity.	It is recommended that this item is given consideration. This might be a 'good' (i.e. discriminating) indicator of living standards at the upper end of the distribution.

NOTE: *italicised items*: item prompted by interviewers; underlined items: existing 99PSE item