

Conceptual note No.2

The inclusion of child poverty in the PSE Survey UK

Gill Main, University of York, March 2012

Child poverty has firmly established links to a wide range of poor outcomes for children, and as a result has gained prominence on the policy agenda (Blair's commitment in 1999 to end child poverty within a generation has been consistently supported by subsequent governments, resulting in the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy (DWP, 2011)). However, much debate exists around the mechanisms which cause children from poor families to face life-long disadvantage (this is particularly evident in the Child Poverty Strategy which, taking its cue from Field (2010), takes the position that cultural processes, rather than economic and material deprivation, result in poor children becoming poor adults), and there remains much to be discovered about the relationship between child poverty and child well-being. There is also significant debate around how best to measure child poverty (for example see Veit-Wilson, 2006 and Spicker, 2008), and whether children's situations can be accurately extrapolated from the situation of the family in which they live (for example see Bradshaw, 2002 and Tomlinson et al, 2008). The inclusion of various measures of child poverty in the PSE, alongside measures relating to other areas of children's and families' lives, is therefore valuable to contributing to our understanding of the outcomes and correlates of child poverty; of the implications of different measurement methods; and of the relationship between children's situations and those of the families in which they live.

Links between child poverty and child outcomes

Child poverty has well-established links to a wide range of poor outcomes. Children growing up in poor families are more likely to die in infancy, to suffer from mental health problems (Bradshaw and Keung, 2011) and to suffer from a wide range of physical health problems including long-standing illness (Bradshaw and Bloor, 2011). They have lower levels of educational attainment, and are more likely than their non-poor peers to have a statement of special educational needs (Keung, 2011). Children from poor households are more vulnerable to physical abuse and neglect (Hooper, 2011), and growing up poor is associated with a higher risk of remaining poor in adulthood (Bradshaw, 2011). Much of the focus of research has been on the links between poverty and child well-*becoming* (that is, children's welfare once they reach adulthood, rather than their welfare in the here-and-now). Ridge's (2002) study of children's experience of growing up in poor households also points towards strong links between child poverty and the well-*being* of children - interviews revealed feelings of stigma, exclusion and shame associated with an inability to have the kinds of possessions and experiences felt to be normal amongst peers. Redmond's (2008) research, suggesting that children experience poverty as social exclusion, affirms this finding. This may explain the lack of or very small associations between household income and children's subjective well-being found in analysis of Understanding Society data (Knies, 2011) and in

surveys conducted by the Children's Society (Rees et al, 2011); when measures of child deprivation derived from children themselves are used, a much stronger association is found (Main and Pople, 2011).

The value of measuring child poverty in the PSE

The links between child poverty and child outcomes, then, are well supported but have stronger evidence bases in some areas than others. Even where there is a good evidence basis, the potential for changes in wider society to impact on the relationship between poverty and child outcomes indicates a need for ongoing investigation. Particularly in light of the growing debate in policy circles around the mechanisms by which poor children's well-being is impacted, the measurement of child poverty in the PSE offers a timely means to further explore and illuminate relationships between family poverty, family behaviours, and child poverty.

The use of deprivation as a measure of poverty is discussed further below, but an additional important contribution of the PSE is in the development and refinement of deprivation indicators. Current policy measures draw on data from the 1999 PSE, when the economic climate was very different and since when some aspects of life, particularly technological developments, have shifted considerably. Items included in 1999 also faced the criticism of being almost universal – very few children lacked any of the deprivation indicators, making investigation into the depth of deprivation difficult. The inclusion of a range of children's deprivation items in the PSE is therefore greatly valuable in terms of rebasing items included in current policy measures, developing items that may be more suitable as today's socially perceived necessities, and furthering our understanding of the relationship for children between income poverty and material deprivation, and living standards.

Types of poverty measurement in the PSE

There is a great deal of academic debate around the measurement of child poverty. Whilst it is increasingly acknowledged that poverty is a multi-dimensional problem (Tomlinson et al, 2007), many if not most policy and academic measures continue to use the single dimension of income poverty. The PSE provides the opportunity to gain a more nuanced picture of child poverty, drawing on three different measurement approaches which can be investigated individually and/or combined to form composite measures. These approaches include:

- ***Income poverty***

Income poverty offers important insight into child poverty – many of the relationships between poverty and child outcomes detailed above use income as their measure, and income has the advantage of providing a single, simple and comprehensible measure (see Laderchi et al, 2003). Data on income will be obtained through linking the data gathered in the PSE to FRS data, and recording any changes since the FRS interviews through additional questions. Data will be available on the number and ages of people in each household, enabling equivalisation (ie. income can be adjusted to reflect the composition of the household); and income poverty can be investigated through the use of policy thresholds (such as the 60% median income which provides one of the headline figures for child poverty measurement in the UK) and through an examination of the whole income distribution.

- **Deprivation**

Material deprivation, measured using socially perceived necessities, arguably has the capacity to provide a more realistic assessment of living conditions since compared to income it is less vulnerable to the influence of short-term fluctuations (Lister, 2004; Gordon and Nandy, 2011), and is often considered a more direct measure than income: material deprivation offers insights into living standards that income may or may not translate into (Willitts, 2006; Hallerod, 1995; Alcock, 2006). Whilst income can provide a household- or family level indicator of living standards, deprivation indicators that are specific to children have the advantage of being able to offer insight into intra-household distributions. Given Ridge's (2002) findings that many parents make efforts to protect children from the worst impacts of income poverty, and that many children make efforts to hide the impacts of poverty on their lives from their parents, this enables an investigation of the existence of non-deprived children in income poor households (ie. children who have been protected from poverty by parental sacrifice) and deprived children in non-income-poor households. Deprivation indicators, alongside indicators that do not meet the criteria for socially perceived necessities¹, can also offer insight into where poor families cut back and how different types of people prioritise spending (Alcock, 2006, discusses the finding that households deprived of 'necessities' often do possess several items deemed by the PSE methodology to be 'non-necessities').

Items and experiences derived from the 1999 PSE survey, from other surveys, and from research with children themselves will be included in the PSE. These items will include many that meet the criteria of socially perceived necessities, but additionally some that are not deemed necessary by more than 50% of the population. This will allow for the creation of a scale of material deprivation, a re-basing of items deemed to be necessities, and an exploration of ownership of items according to different social groupings.

- **Social exclusion**

As stated above, Redmond (2008) makes a strong case for social exclusion as a measure of poverty that captures the meaning poverty has for children themselves. Ridge's (2002) qualitative study of children in low income families found a similar focus on an inability to fit in with peers to be one of the most important and distressing impacts of poverty on children's day-to-day lives. Questions relating to deprivation will also reflect children's social inclusion – ownership of items and access to activities will help to assess how far the child is able to participate in socially normal activities and experiences. In addition, several questions ask parents to assess not only availability but adequacy of services for children, and whether inadequacy or unavailability prevents use of services that other children may take for granted. Other aspects of children's day-to-day lives, including school and other educational experiences, parenting, accidents and injuries, and leisure experiences, also feed into the measurement of children's social exclusion.

¹ That is, items which are deemed necessary by 50% or more of the population

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