



PSE UK

Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

Developing poverty and social exclusion measures: focus groups and cognitive interviews in the 2012 PSE-UK survey

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Presentation at 3rd Peter Townsend Memorial Conference: 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK', London - 19th-20th June 2014





Web links to PSE-UK development work

- **Public Perceptions of Poverty, Social Exclusion and Living Standards: Preliminary Report on Focus Group Findings**

<http://poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/WP%20Methods%20No.12%20-%20Focus%20Group%20Findings%20-%20Preliminary%20Report%20%28Fahmy%2C%20Pemberton%20%26%20Sutton%29.pdf>

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

http://poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/WP_Analysis_No3_Focus-groups_Fahmy-Pemberton-Sutton.pdf

- **Cognitive Testing of the 2011 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey**

<http://poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/WP%20Methods%20No.17%20-%20Cognitive%20Testing%20Report%20%28Fahmy%2C%20Pemberton%2C%20Sutton%29.pdf>



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Aims and objectives

AIMS:

- To contribute to question development in the *NatCen Omnibus* (spring) and *PSE Main Stage* (autumn) surveys using qualitative piloting methods
- To update and advance the 'state of the art' in the measurement of PSE beyond the *1999 PSE*

OBJECTIVES:

- **Focus groups:** To explore public perceptions of deprivation, living standards and social exclusion in the UK today to inform the *NatCen Omnibus* and *PSE Main Stage* surveys
- **Cognitive interviews:** To undertake qualitative pre-testing of selected indicators for potential inclusion in the *PSE Main Stage* survey



Focus group sampling

Sampling considerations:

- 1999 ONS Omnibus showed variation in public perceptions of 'necessities' by:
 - household income
 - household type
 - age
 - gender
 - ethnicity*
- Important to take account of these social differences in public perceptions of necessities in recruiting study participants

Quota sample design:

- Separate groups recruited by:
 - household income
 - household composition
 - ethnic origin (min ethnic booster)
- Within groups, respondents were then recruited by: gender; age; tenure; and; (where relevant) employment status and; age of oldest child
- In total, 14 focus group interviews with 114 participants were conducted in: Bristol, Cardiff, London, Glasgow and Belfast

* Pantazis et al., 2000, 2006.



Focus group research design

Format:

- Groups comprised 6-10 participants lasting 2.5 hours each. Research comprised two phases...

Phase One:

- Unstructured approach using *brain-storming* methods
- Aims to elicit participant suggestions on basis of group consensus
- *All* participants' asked to consider situation of hypothetical couple with two children

Phase Two:

- Sought to 'test' items agreed by Phase I groups, and also explore wider indicators of living standards based on *card sort* methods
- Participants sorted items into three groups:
 - **Necessities:** essential things which everyone should be able to afford if they want them
 - **Desirables:** things which many/most people have but which are *not* essential
 - **Luxuries:** things which are costly and exclusive and which fewer people have



Necessities of life items: Items agreed (non-99 PSE items)

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**

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 veg. at least daily/twice daily
- **Milk daily**

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**

Family outings

- 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**

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/blinds**
- **Access to an outdoor space within accommodation**
- Books within the home
- Home computer
- TV
- Radio or music player

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**



Focus group findings: definitional issues

“Necessities: Things which are essential and which everyone should be able to afford if they want them in our society today”

Conceptual issues:

- Defining ‘necessities’:
 - *cannot vs. should not*
- Participants’ living standards & views:
 - ‘me’ vs. ‘everyone’
- Changing norms and preferences:
 - ‘taken for granted’ items:
‘an indoor toilet’
 - ‘non-salient’ items:
‘cooked breakfast’ (‘fresh fruit & veg. daily?’)

Contextual factors:

- Household/personal circumstances and perceptions of *need*: ‘a hairdryer’
- Affordability and availability: ‘local amenities and services’
- Affordability and social resources: networks, support, care

Caveats:

- Overt vs covert response problems
- Investigating interview effects



The pitfalls of survey design: a cautionary example

Drinking Water Perception Survey

11 If a bottle of water costs you three times more, would you continue buying it?

12 If not, what would you do?

I will drink regular tap water

I will drink filtered tap water

Other, please specify

13 Are you aware of the steps used to process a generic bottle of mineral water?

14 Do you believe that bottled water can be more expensive than oil?

15 When travelling overseas, do you find it easy to find your preferred bottled water brands?

If no, please explain.

20 How much importance do you give to drinking water on daily basis?
Select 1(low)-10(high)

21 How concerned are you that there may be water problems, including water shortages, around the world? Select 1(low)-10(high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

22 Please specify any global water issues or concerns you are aware of?

23 Have you taken any steps to help alleviate any water problems around the world? Please specify

24 Thank you for your participation. Please share any additional comments related to bottled water, tap water, and global water issues.

Cognitive interviewing: strengths and weaknesses

STRENGTHS

- Reveals overt and covert problems
- Identifies cognition problems (task, syntax, words)
- Identifies recall problems
- Identifies problems of respondent judgment and response
- Can improve layout and sequence of survey items
- Can help clarify research objectives

WEAKNESSES

- Not based on random sample methods:
 - Cannot indicate extent or severity of problems
 - Cannot identify all potential problems that may exist
- Cannot fully replicate survey conditions (context, item ordering)
- Identifies problems not solutions: revised wording may generate further survey response problems!
- Does not fully encompass assessment of *interviewer* effects



Cognitive testing of PSE-UK question items

Cognitive methods in question testing

- Investigates *covert* problems of cognition retrieval judgement and response
- Based on respondent verbal reports using
 - ‘*think aloud*’ method
 - (interview) ‘*prompting*’ methods
- Qualitative analysis of transcripts

Fieldwork schedule

- Summer 2011: 20 one-to-one interviews in Bristol to inform PSE2011 Main Stage survey
- Inter-locking quota sample by age/sex, income and household type
- 60-70 min interviews covering a *sub-set* of PSE-UK Q items
- Qualitative framework analysis of interview transcripts



Cognitive testing of PSE-UK question items: concluding remarks

“Even after years of experience, no expert can write a perfect questionnaire...If you do not have the resources to pilot-test your questionnaire, don't do the study”

Sudman S, Bradburn N, 1982: 283

- Findings based upon small sample of interviews. Generalizability of sample is uncertain
- Problems with question wording can be identified but it is not always obvious that a better alternative is available.
- Any suggested changes may result in new item response problems which may be more serious than the original problem being addressed
- Other considerations such as comparability with existing sources, and time implications of question revisions, should be considered



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