



## **Working Paper 26**

A draft of this paper was first presented at The Scandinavian Symposium on Childhood,  
Oslo, June 2005

# **Severe Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland <sup>1</sup>**

**Marina Monteith and Eithne McLaughlin**

---

<sup>1</sup> Research for this paper was supported by SEUPB's Peace II Initiative in Northern Ireland and border counties

## Introduction

For many years Northern Ireland was recognised as one of the most deprived parts of the United Kingdom, hence its Objective 1 regional status within the EU. Prior to 2002, the local administration did not however collect social statistics on poverty measurement nor was an antipoverty strategy in existence.

Within the rest of the UK, there have been two sets of poverty figures; the first comprising household income data from the Family Resources Survey published as the *Households Below Average Income Series* (HBAI) which provides information on the proportions of adults and children living below various income lines. The second set of UK poverty figures is the 'Opportunity for All' annual report which monitors deprivation on three dimensions: household poverty and low income, family life cycle stages, and communities or localities. Neither annual set of statistics has included Northern Ireland, (see Dignan and McLaughlin 2002 for further discussion). During 2003 the first Family Resources Survey commenced in Northern Ireland so data from that source should be available from 2004 onwards<sup>2</sup>.

Within this context it is not surprising that child poverty has received little policy attention in Northern Ireland. At the national and international level, however, child poverty emerged in the last decade as a major policy issue (see also McLaughlin and Monteith, forthcoming, 2005(b)). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the UK is a signatory, recognises the need to protect children who experience a deprived childhood, and requires state parties to ensure all children have an adequate standard of living as a basic right (article 27). The UN recognizes that deprivation during childhood undermines the

---

<sup>2</sup> The 2003/2004 NI data published in the DWP'S regional HBAI report is unweighted; the sample however has a significant underrepresentation of Catholic families and families with 3 or more children. Unweighted NIFRS DATA FOR 2002/2003 is therefore not generalisable to the whole NI population (see McLaughlin & Monteith forthcoming 2005(a)).

fundamental rights which children, as well as adults, should enjoy, including access to key services such as health, education and social services.

In addition the UN recognizes that deprivation during childhood has lifelong adverse effects for those concerned. It restricts and curtails the individual's capacity to develop to their full potential. By preventing the individual achieving maximal personal development childhood poverty and deprivation perpetuates social inequalities across generations within populations and prevents achievement of the necessary conditions for equality of opportunity to exist.

The UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children in May 2002 which included more than 400 children as delegates agreed 8 'Millennium Development Goals' (UNESCO, 2002). One of these was the pledge by 189 Member States to 'eradicate extreme child poverty and hunger' defined as the reduction by half of the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and the reduction by half of the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. The UK's second report to UNCRC was submitted in 1999 and in 2003 the Committee recommended that the UK undertake 'all the necessary measures to the maximum extent of available resources to accelerate the elimination of child poverty' (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2003: Annex 3, paragraph 44). The Committee's concern reflected the UK's poor position in international statistics produced by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. At that time, the UK had the second highest child poverty rate in Europe. In addition while other European countries' child poverty rates over the previous two decades had gone down or steadied, child poverty in the UK nearly tripled from 10% to 26% in the same period, UNICEF (2000).

In 1999, the UK government accepted child poverty as a major policy issue when it pledged its commitment to reducing child poverty in the UK in the new millennium. This pledge included the eradication of child poverty by the year 2020 with interim targets of a reduction by half by the year 2010 and by a quarter by the year 2004. The pledge itself did not define child poverty or how it was to

be measured. More recently the UK government has consulted on how child poverty should be measured and the document produced as a result of this, *Measuring Child Poverty*, DWP (2003) refers to a long term UK target of achieving a child poverty rate among the best in Europe. McLaughlin & Monteith, forthcoming 2005(b) provide a more complete assessment and overview of *Measuring Child Poverty*.

The government's proposal to change the measurement of child poverty caused concern among some commentators and children's organisations including Save the Children. The concern is that a change in measurement and methods may be used as a tactic to make progress towards the government's pledge look better than it is. We return to the issue of measurement of child poverty later in the paper. In examination of child poverty and welfare in Northern Ireland, however, it is self evident we need to consider the broader welfare context and environment within which children are raised, not only the incomes of the households in which they live.

### The Context of Children's Lives in Northern Ireland

Children's lives are shaped by their status as children, their social identities, and their familial circumstances as well as by wider social, economic, political, cultural and economic contexts and historical forces, figure 1 represents this visually. These contexts, while having some similarities across societies, are particular to each place and time. In Northern Ireland the particular circumstances within which children experience wellbeing or harm are those of a society in reconstruction, emerging out of three decades of overt political conflict (Boyce, 2004) and carrying substantial levels of inequalities between social groups and classes. The presence of the territory's history within individuals' biographies and life courses remains a particularly key feature of growing up in this society. In addition, children constitute a larger proportion of the territory's overall population (27%) than is the case in the rest of the UK and Europe. As such children and young people are key stakeholders in the future of Northern Ireland. Securing a better future for this generation of children and young people

growing up in Northern Ireland lies at the heart of peace building and conflict resolution processes. Guaranteeing the protection of and respect for children's rights is therefore not a marginal social luxury to be indulged when resources are not under too much stress. Rather the children's agenda is an essential element in securing a better future for Northern Ireland itself. Our history of conflict has given rise to high levels of social deprivation. Poor majority-minority group relations are highly concentrated in those localities which have suffered the greatest levels of the conflict (Chamberlain, 2003, see also Hillyard et al, 2004). Government policies to tackle child poverty and secure the wellbeing of children and young people need to consider the impact of all the environmental contexts which shape children's lives, not only those of the family and immediate caregivers. Regrettably in Britain and Ireland the education and training of most child welfare workers focuses almost entirely on the latter to the neglect of the former. Figure 1 shows Waldman's visualization of the full range of social environments which frame the lived experiences of children and young people today.



*Figure 1 the context of children's lives/ welfare? (Waldman, 2003)*

## Anti- Poverty and Child Welfare Policies in the UK

The UK government's anti poverty strategy to date has involved policies to increase the incomes of poor families through new types and improved levels of child-related benefits and tax credits which cross the in-work/out of work boundary. The introduction of a national minimum wage, and other welfare to work and activation policies have attempted to reduce levels of worklessness among parents. The Sure Start initiative and the National Childcare Strategy in Britain have sought to develop early years services and begun to provide public support for affordable childcare provision for working parents. Differences between Northern Ireland and Britain in the availability of affordable childcare both purely market and publicly supported for working parents continue between the countries and regions of the UK. The operation and funding of SureStart has also been territorially diverse. Finally the additional service support for families and carers made available in England and Wales on foot of *Every Child Matters* (2003) has not been replicated in Northern Ireland. The result is a further widening of the considerable deficit which already existed in the quantum of public services for families and children between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. It is hoped that the development and implementation Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy and the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People will begin to tackle some of these anomalies in the funding of key family child focused. Both these government strategies were in draft at the time of writing (see also McLaughlin, and Monteith 2005a).

As Bradshaw (2001) and others have indicated (Stewart & Hill, 2005) achieving the Government's interim child poverty reduction target may be easier than reaching subsequent targets. Anti-poverty measures float those closest to the poverty line out of poverty first. These are generally the families most able to participate in the labour market. Bradshaw shows that children in the poorest 10 percent of households have become worse off due to policy changes by the Labour government over the 1999-2001 period. Increasing pressures to limit public spending could also make it difficult to maintain the financial effort required to tackle very low family incomes and in particular to address the poverty faced

by workless households. Workless families have not benefited significantly from the more generous family fiscal policies. Falling joblessness and unemployment, and increased earnings through the support of tax credits have helped many families but will not be sufficient on their own to eradicate child poverty in the UK and especially not in Northern Ireland where maternal employment rates in particular especially those among the minority population and lone mothers are lower than in the rest of the UK.

*Measuring Child Poverty*, however, emphasised the need for measures 'to help people lift themselves out of poverty through work' and set a target of 70% of lone parents in the UK in work by 2010. As Nolan states: even if that target is met, the challenge for government will remain how to proactively redistribute resources in favour of children living in households on the lowest incomes (Nolan, 2000).

As we will show below, in the UK and Northern Ireland those living on the lowest incomes are increasingly children living with a lone parent and/or whose parents are disabled or long term ill see also (Dignan, 2003). Anti-poverty lobbyists in Northern Ireland have questioned whether a sufficiently extensive jobs and child care infrastructure can be put in place in less than a decade to permit Northern Ireland to meet the UK 2010 targets for the reduction of child poverty via higher employment rates of parents (see also Monteith & McLaughlin 2005). A scoping exercise on child poverty carried out recently by Save the Children suggests that initiatives to provide child care in areas of deprivation e.g. SureStart are insufficient for the demand that exists; the hours of substitute care which may be provided per child per week was restricted to a maximum of 20 by funders in NI unlike the SureStart program in GB which had a maximum of 35 hours a week. The public childcare infrastructure in Northern Ireland remains rudimentary (see also McAuley, forthcoming 2005). The needs of children and their families in deprived areas in Northern Ireland remain weakly served by public services. Piecemeal and fragmented funding of child care has resulted in a community sector struggling to cope with the basic needs of families in their areas and a lack of leadership, strategic direction and planning from key

government department(s). The decision on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005 to appoint a Junior Minister for Children for Northern Ireland may help to address these issues through the coordinated implementation of The Ten Year Northern Ireland Strategy for Children and Young People. Without significant additional public expenditure dedicated to public services for children and parents however it is difficult to see how a common platform of citizenship and social rights can be said to exist for children and young people in Northern Ireland and GB.

### Measuring Child Poverty

As noted above the UK government set targets in 1999 for the eradication of child poverty by 2020. A method of measuring child poverty was not however agreed until 2003. '*Measuring Child Poverty*' (DWP, 2003) concluded that traditional UK government practice in the field of poverty measurement was no longer adequate. UK practice prior to this has been to use measures of relative household income only as the measure of poverty. That approach has many limitations (see Dignan and McLaughlin (2002) for an extended discussion. Internationally it is now accepted and recognised that better measures exist (McLaughlin & Monteith, 2005(b) and Hillyard et al (2003) review these measures. Better poverty measures combine income data with data on deprivation or its absence. McLaughlin and Monteith 2005 (b) review the measurement of child poverty in more detail. Here we summarise the key policy change which has occurred in this field in the UK before reporting some results on the prevalence and composition of severe child poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland.

In *Measuring Child Poverty*, the UK government announced its intention to measure child poverty in the future through a combination of low income and indicators of deprivation. The government's new measure of child poverty will consist of three tiers or elements:

- *Absolute low household income* – to measure whether the poorest families are seeing their incomes rise in real terms.

- *Relative low household income* – to measure whether the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.
- *Material deprivation and low household income combined* – to provide a wider measure of living standards.

Using this measure, poverty will be judged to be falling when all three indicators are moving in right direction (DWP, 2003). *Measuring Child Poverty* refers to the use of household income statistics before housing costs but this it should be noted that this has been criticised by the House of Commons Select Committee (2003/2004).

The House of Commons Select Committee on Work and Pensions, (2003-2004) recommended that household income figures should be derived using the 60% of median household income after housing costs as before housing costs figures 'mask the true extent of child poverty' ( ibid para. 68).

Whilst issues of poverty measurement are undoubtedly technical and in that sense off-putting for the general reader, the overall level of poverty recognised as existing in society and evaluation of the success or failure of governments in addressing it vary considerably depending on the measure adopted, as Hillyard et al (2003), Bradshaw and Finch (2003), Micklewright and Stewart (2000) and McLaughlin & Monteith, forthcoming 2005(b) all show. Above all, as McLaughlin & Monteith, forthcoming 2005 argue measurement must be fit for purpose. In evaluating progress towards a target, this means that stability of the measure over time used must outweigh considerations of the intrinsic value of one measure over another.

### Measuring Child Poverty in Northern Ireland

The Poverty and Social Exclusion surveys in Great Britain (Gordon et al, 2000) and Northern Ireland (Hillyard et al, 2003) used the kind of mixed poverty measure now recommended by the UK Government. In Gordon et al's approach, deprivation indicators are selected on the basis of public opinion and consensus

together with statistical testing. The Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Northern Ireland survey<sup>3</sup> was first reported in '*Bare Necessities*' (Hillyard et al 2003).

Subsequent research commissioned by Save the Children (Monteith and McLaughlin, 2004) used the PSENI dataset to examine the extent of severe child poverty in Northern Ireland using the PSE (NI) dataset and comparing it with data from the equivalent survey in Britain. In the remaining two sections of this paper we outline the key results of that analysis and in the final section return to consider its policy implications.

Given the high overall level of child poverty in the UK, it is perhaps inevitable though not necessarily advisable that policy attention should start with those in greatest poverty. The DWP Select Committee recommended that '*the national strategy on child poverty develops immediate policy initiatives to assist children in severe and persistent poverty and create an explicit indicator against which progress can be measured*' (para. 89). Adelman et al (2003) measured severe and persistent child poverty in Great Britain for Save the Children while Monteith and McLaughlin (2004) did so for Save the Children Northern Ireland.

### The Extent of Severe Child Poverty in Northern Ireland

Adelman et al (2004) used three measures of poverty, child deprivation, parental deprivation and income poverty, to calculate 8 permutations of poverty, and then examined the proportions of children who were poor on combinations of these measures. Severe child poverty was defined by Adelman et al (2003) in 'Britain's Poorest Children' as those who were poor on all three measures. The methodology used by Adelman et al was replicated by Monteith and McLaughlin using the PSE (NI) dataset. Monteith and McLaughlin (2004) found that the same proportion of children (8%) in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain were severely poor. Nonetheless, there were a number of significant differences

---

<sup>3</sup> The PSENI was directed by Professors Paddy Hillyard and McLaughlin and Mr Mike Tomlinson (of The Queen's University of Belfast) It was co- funded by OFMDFM and the UK exchequer under the latter's evidence based policy initiative

between the prevalence and distribution of poverty among children in Northern Ireland and Britain.

One child in every twelve in Northern Ireland was living in severe poverty in 2002/3 (8% of all children). Children who were living in severe poverty were most likely to be living in households with no workers (70%), living with a lone parent (51%), living in public sector housing (57%), whose parents have no qualifications (54%), living in large families (24% of severely poor children lived in families with 4 or more children), have parents with health problems or disabilities (27%) or were disabled children (14%).

More children (50%) in Northern Ireland were considered poor, that is they were poor on at least one of the three measures, compared to 45% of children in Great Britain. Among those children who were counted as poor on only one measure (21% in both GB and NI), there were interesting differences between Great Britain and Northern Ireland regarding the poverty measure on which they were poor. In Northern Ireland, 11 percent of children were considered poor on the child deprivation measure only and a further 8 percent were considered poor on the parental deprivation measure only, while in Great Britain 17 percent of children were poor on the parental deprivation measure only.

Over one third (38%) of children living in Northern Ireland in 2002/3 were identified as deprived of one or more child necessities compared to 20 percent of children in Great Britain who were lacking one or more child necessities in 1999. Slightly fewer children in Northern Ireland (36%) were likely to be poor through parental deprivation compared to children in Great Britain where 40% of children had parents who were deprived. The child and parent necessities list differed slightly in Northern Ireland compared to the list consensually agreed in Great Britain. However, these were the lists of items which were deemed 'necessities of life' and in Northern Ireland almost two in five children lack at least one item which was deemed a necessity. Using the below 40 percent of median equivalised household income before housing costs (as used by Adelman et al,

2003), 14 percent of children in Northern Ireland were defined as poor compared to 17 percent of children in Great Britain.

From the analysis of each of the three measures of poverty described above, that is, child deprivation, parental deprivation and income poverty, it can be seen that different proportions of children were counted as poor using each measure. In addition, there were important differences between the proportions of children in Northern Ireland (in 2002/3) considered poor under each measure compared to children in Great Britain (in 1999). While in Great Britain, a larger proportion of children were living in households where their parents were deprived compared to the proportion of children who were deprived themselves, this was not the case in Northern Ireland. Almost two fifths of children in Northern Ireland were themselves deprived while 36 percent of children lived in households where their parents were deprived.

In summary, in Northern Ireland, using this definition of severe child poverty, 8 percent of all children were living in severe poverty in Northern Ireland in 2002/3 with a further 42 percent of children living in non-severe poverty. Extrapolating this to the whole population of children in Northern Ireland who are under 16 years, this would indicate that approximately 31850 thousand children are living in severe poverty and a further 167180 thousand are living in non-severe poverty.

### The Nature of child deprivation

In Northern Ireland, children are going without some very important items deemed as necessities by parents due to a lack of money. Worryingly high proportions of children who were poor on all three measures were lacking (because of a lack of money rather by choice), what might be described as the most basic necessities of:

- meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least twice a day (22%)
- fresh fruit and vegetables (20%)
- three meals a day (14%)

- a comic/magazine once a week (52%)
- educational games (23%)
- new clothes when needed (42%)
- new not second hand clothes (29%)
- at least seven pairs of underpants/knickers in good condition (19%)

Comparing children who are poor in Northern Ireland to children who are poor in Great Britain, the most stark difference is that children in Northern Ireland are much more likely to be nutritionally deprived; 14 percent of severely poor children in Northern Ireland go without three meals a day compared to 8 percent of such children in Great Britain. Basic food stuffs and cooking fuel are more expensive in Northern Ireland than Great Britain (DWP Select committee 2003-2004). Welfare benefit and tax credit levels however are the same and this may contribute to additional difficulties for Northern Irish parents in meeting children's nutritional requirements. These findings may go some way towards helping us understand the epidemiology of adult health inequalities, morbidity and premature death rates in Northern Ireland (see O'Reilly and Stevenson, 1998; O'Reilly and Browne, 2001).

### The Nature of Parental Deprivation

Parental deprivation was highest for housing related items and for items associated with personal finance (access to a decent pension, regular savings and a small amount of money to spend on yourself). Many severely poor children had parents who lacked enough money to replace worn furniture (93 percent of severely poor children), or to replace or repair broken electrical goods (93%). Similarly a lack of finance meant that many children who were severely poor had parents who did not have regular savings (92%), access to a decent pension (75 percent), or a small amount of money to spend on themselves (92%).

Parents of severely poor children were also likely to go without home contents insurance (61%), a car (49%), new not second hand clothes (46%), two pairs of shoes (48%), good clothes to wear to an interview (58%), enough money to pay heating, electric and telephone bills (59%), enough money to keep their

home in a decent state of decoration (50%) and fresh fruit and vegetables every day (30%). In comparison to Great Britain, such parents were more likely not to have suitable clothes for an interview, have a telephone, or enough money to replace or repair broken electrical goods or enough money to replace worn furniture, or to have two pairs of shoes.

### Subjective Child Poverty

Over one quarter (26%) of children who were severely poor lived in households where the parents believed that they had been living in poverty either often or most of the time. This figure is slightly higher to that found for such children in Great Britain (24%). While parents in Northern Ireland were more likely to report living in poverty long term (i.e. often or most of the time), parents in Great Britain were more likely to report that they lived a lot below a self-defined poverty income line. Almost two thirds of severely poor children in Northern Ireland (62%) lived in households where parents thought they lived a lot below the self-defined poverty income line compared to 67% of children who were severely poor in Great Britain.

### Defining and Measuring Childhood Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is still a relatively new term in UK policy debates (its usage in continental European social policy has a longer history). In 1997 the UK government set up the Social Exclusion Unit based in the Cabinet Office and reporting to the Prime Minister. Its aim was to co-ordinate and improve policies tackling the inter-related problems of unemployment, crime, poor health, housing and education and poor neighbourhoods. In Northern Ireland the pre devolution TSN policy (see Quirk and McLaughlin, 1996) continued with a new subcomponent of Promoting Social Inclusion in recognition of UK developments on social exclusion. Issues of unemployment, crime, poor health, housing, low educational attainment and poor neighbourhoods have been packaged together as dimensions of 'social exclusion' the government's definition refers to social exclusion as 'a short hand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low

incomes, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Social exclusion is a concept closely related to poverty but attending to additional dimensions of social deprivation and discrimination rather than the focus on material deprivation and low income alone characteristic of definitions and measurement of poverty in the past. The concept of social exclusion in relation to adults, however, tends to focus very much on access to labour markets, not something of direct relevance to children themselves. Theorisation of social exclusion and indeed of (in) equality in relation to children remains weak. This may be partly attributable to a desire not to reify culturally specific concepts of childhood, but it does mean that social exclusion in relation to children and young people tends to be theorised and measured indirectly through their parents' statuses and circumstances. As Baker et al (2004) point out equality and social inclusion for children is more dependent on the social construction of and support for high quality care giving and social solidarity and on access to high quality social and educational services than it is on traditional equality measures in the labour and other markets. On the other hand, the positioning of children as dependents and care recipients rather than as consumer or worker citizens, may render them vulnerable to inappropriate assumptions of passivity and silence their voices in both social research and policy-making. Consideration of how to create child focused equality and social (in)clusion agendas which satisfy both children's needs and embrace children's rights and agency has only just begun.

As Adelman et al (2003) point out there is surprisingly little evidence about the relationship between child poverty and childhood social exclusion despite the importance of social exclusion in policy debates. While the emphasis on inclusion in or exclusion from the labour market makes these concepts not especially relevant to the childhood phase of the lifecycle, the PSE (GB) and the PSE (NI) can be used to examine other dimensions of social exclusion and the overlap with child poverty and in particular severe child poverty. Although these dimensions are by no means exhaustive of childhood social exclusion, they do provide an opportunity to measure social exclusion among children and young

people for the first time in Northern Ireland. These dimensions include measures of direct social exclusion of children (e.g. exclusion from social activities) and also household or parental based measures of social exclusion which are likely to impact on children's lives (e.g. housing problems, neighbourhood problems and financial problems). These dimensions provide a very useful starting point for the further development and theorisation of measures of social exclusion in childhood. Ideally, a child centred approach would include dimensions of social exclusion which children themselves had voiced. However, as only adults were interviewed in PSE NI we rely below on dimensions of social exclusion for children as defined and reported by adults.

### Child Poverty and Childhood Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland

One dimension of social exclusion for children is that of exclusion from social activities which at least half of parents in Northern Ireland thought were necessary for children. Monteith and McLaughlin (2004) examined which social activities, and how many activities, children were excluded from, as reported by their parents.

As in Great Britain (Adelman et al, 2003), there was a strong relationship between exclusion from social activities by poverty status. For each of the 9 social activities included in the Northern Ireland analysis, the likelihood of exclusion was greater for those children living in non-severe poverty compared to children not living in poverty, and was even greater again for children living in severe poverty. Over two thirds of children living in severe poverty (68%) and almost half of children living in non-severe poverty (45%) were unable to have a holiday away from home for one week in the year. Many of these children were also missing out on family day trips because their parents could not afford them (50% of children in severe poverty and 12% of children in non-severe poverty).

Children living in severe poverty in Northern Ireland were four times as likely to be excluded from going on family day trips, three times as likely to be unable to have friends round for tea or a snack fortnightly, twice as likely to lack a hobby or leisure activity or to have sports gear or leisure equipment and almost

twice as likely to miss out on an annual holiday away from home compared to children living in non-severe poverty. Compared to children living in no poverty, these differences are much greater.

Examining the provision of services, of particular concern was the exclusion experienced by severely poor children from a range of vital children's services such as safe play areas, after school clubs and youth clubs which were lacking for 37 percent, 23 percent and 12 percent of severely poor children respectively.

### Child Poverty and Household Exclusion in Northern Ireland

Housing quality provides an environment based indicator of social exclusion which is clearly essential to a child's well-being. The problems with accommodation which the parents of severely poor children were most likely to report in the PSE (NI) survey were a shortage of space (30%), damp walls and floors (18%) and rot in window frames or floors (17%). A strong relationship was found between being poor and the likelihood of experiencing these accommodation problems. For seven out of the 11 housing problems surveyed the pattern was one where children who were severely poor were more likely to live in accommodation experiencing these problems than children who were non-severely poor who were in turn more likely to live in a home with these problems than children who were not poor.

The local environment in which children grow up is largely out of the control of their parents and yet this may have a major influence over their childhood experiences. Almost one in ten severely poor children in Northern Ireland live in an area viewed by their parents as a bad place to live, compared to one in sixteen non-severely poor children and one in a hundred non-poor children. The main problems reported as a major problem in the area were the speed/volume of traffic (13%), underage drinking (13%), dog mess (12%), teenagers hanging around on the streets (10%), rubbish and litter (9%), drunkenness (8%), vandalism (8%), vehicle theft (8%), joy riding (7%) and graffiti (6%). These are all problems which affect the lives of children whether they are

directly involved (e.g. underage drinking, joyriding) or at risk (e.g. speeding traffic, dog mess). Children who were severely poor were more likely to live in areas where these problems were reported as a major problem than non-severely poor children or children who were not poor.

Almost 9 out of 10 severely poor children in Northern Ireland have parents who worry all the time about household finances (compared to 1 in 2 non-severely poor children and 1 in 10 non-poor children). Similarly, almost 9 out of every 10 severely poor children and 2 out of 5 non-severely poor children lived in households where there the household income was viewed as not adequate to meeting basic needs (compared to 1 in 14 non poor children). Children living in severe poverty (41%) were also three times as likely to live in households which had been disconnected from utilities as non-severely poor children (14%) and almost fifteen times as likely as children who were not poor (3%).

### Conclusions and Policy Implications

In conclusion, in Northern Ireland, 8 percent of all children are living in severe poverty with a further 42 percent of children living in non-severe poverty. Extrapolating this to the whole population of children in Northern Ireland who are under 16 years, this means that approximately 31850 thousand children are living in severe poverty and a further 167180 thousand are living in non-severe poverty. Children who were living in severe poverty in 2002/3 were most likely to be living in households with no workers (70%), living with a lone parent (51%), living in public sector housing (57%), whose parents have no qualifications (54%), living in large families (24% of severely poor children lived in families with 4 or more children), have parents with health problems or disabilities (27%) or were disabled children (14%).

One fifth of children living in severe poverty in Northern Ireland went without essential nutritional items including meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least twice a day (22%) and fresh fruit and vegetables (20%) while 14 percent of severely poor children did not have three meals a day. These children were also much more likely to experience social exclusion than children living in non-

severe poverty who in turn were more likely to experience social exclusion compared to children who were not poor. Over two thirds of children living in severe poverty (68%) and almost half of children living in non-severe poverty (45%) were unable to have a holiday away from home for one week in the year. Many of these children were also missing out on family day trips because their parents could not afford them (50% of children in severe poverty and 12% of children in non-severe poverty). In addition, children who were severely poor were more likely to live in poor quality accommodation located in an area which experienced many social problems. They were also likely to have parents who experienced financial problems and constant worries about money. These research findings indicate the extent and nature of severe child poverty in Northern Ireland and the need for government departments to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency. The Northern Ireland Children's Strategy and a Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy offer important new opportunities for doing so.

There are a number of major policy implications for children living in severe poverty in Northern Ireland including:

- the immediate need for the implementation of policy initiatives to tackle severe child poverty and support those children living in severe poverty;
- the development of child poverty measurements to include severe child poverty including the use of combined poverty measures;
- the inclusion of an analysis of progress in Northern Ireland regarding child poverty reduction targets (including severe child poverty) in the next UK report to the UNCRC;
- the need to address the financial hardship experienced by families of children living in severe poverty;
- the need to help parents meet the nutritional needs of children living in severe poverty;
- the improvement of the environmental quality of the areas which severely poor children live in, ensuring children's services are retargeted towards severely poor children;

- the need to analyse the extent and experience of poverty, including severe child poverty, for children aged 16 and 17 who were not included in the definition of children used in the PSE (NI) survey;
- a coherent approach to the development of universal and targeted strategies to tackle child poverty (including severe child poverty), poverty measurement and target setting/monitoring, with a shared agenda and timetable on child poverty shared between the Children's Strategy and the Anti-Poverty Strategy. This should include the measurement and monitoring of progress in tackling severe child poverty;
- that the new NI Minister for Children take forward the implementation of the children's strategy and co-ordinate all relevant agencies to ensure that children's rights are met, including their right to live free from poverty. This should include the ring-fencing of resources for children and young people as well as ensuring accountability of key government departments;
- the Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland should monitor closely the implementation of both the NI Anti-Poverty strategy and the Children's Strategy with particular regard to the setting and achieving of reductions in child poverty (including severe child poverty) and hold the NI Minister for Children accountable for ensuring government departments meet short, medium and long term targets in moving towards the eradication of child poverty.

## References

- Adelman, L., Middleton, S. and Ashworth K. (2003) *Britain's Poorest Children: Severe and Persistent Poverty and Social Exclusion*. London: Save the Children.
- Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S., Walsh, J. (2004) *Equality From Theory to Action*, London: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Boyle, S. (2004) *Closing the gap – Child Rights Standards and Local Realities*. Belfast: Children's Law Centre/Save the Children.
- Bradshaw, J. (2001) 'Child Poverty Under Labour', in Fimister, G. (ed) *Tackling child poverty in the UK: an end in sight?* London: Child Poverty Action Group.
- Brewer, M. (2004) *Will the government hit its child poverty target in 2004/5?* London: Institute of Fiscal Studies (Briefing Note No. 47).
- Chamberlain, S. (2003) *No 25% discount – children's rights are not on sale*. Belfast: Children's Law Centre/Save the Children.
- Department of Work and Pensions (2003) *Measuring Child Poverty*. London: Department of Works and Pensions.
- Dignan, T. and McLaughlin, E. (2002) *New TSN Research: Poverty in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- Gordon, D., Adelman, L., Ashworth, K., Bradshaw, J., Levitas, R., Middleton, S., Pantazis, C., Patsios, D., Payne, S., Townsend, P. and Williams, J. (2000) *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Gordon, D. (2000) 'The Scientific Measurement Of Poverty: Recent Theoretical Advances'. In Bradshaw, J. & Sainsbury, R. (eds) *Researching Poverty*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hillyard, P., Kelly, G., McLaughlin, E., Patsios, D. and Tomlinson, M. (2003) *Bare Necessities: Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland – Key Findings*. Belfast: Democratic Dialogue.
- Select Committee on Work and Pensions (2004) *Second Report: Child Poverty*. London: House of Commons.
- Joint Committee on Human Rights (2003) *The Tenth Report: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. London: House of Lord/House of Commons.
- McAuley, C. (forthcoming 2005) *Who's caring for the kids? Equality and Social Inclusion in Ireland Working Paper 12*.
- McLaughlin, E. (2005) 'Governance and Social Policy in NI the devolution Years' IN Powell, M., Bauld, L., Clarke, K (eds), *Social Policy Review No. 17*, Bristol: SPA and The Policy Press
- McLaughlin, E. and Monteith, M 2005 (a) *Child and Family Poverty in Northern Ireland, Belfast: OFMDFM Equality and Social Need Research Unit*

McLaughlin, E & Monteith, M. (forthcoming 2005 (b) *Measuring Child Poverty, Equality and Social Inclusion in Ireland Project Working Paper X*

Micklewright, J. and Stewart, K.(2000) *The Welfare of Europe's Children, Are EU member states converging?* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Monteith, M. and McLaughlin, E. (2004) *The Bottom Line: Severe Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Save the Children

Quirk, P. and McLaughlin, E. (1996) 'Targeting Social Need', in E. McLaughlin and P. Quirk (eds) *Policy Aspects of Employment Equality in Northern Ireland*. Employment Equality in Northern Ireland Vol II. Belfast: Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

Noble, M., Smith, G., Wright, G., Dibben, C. and Lloyd, M. (2001) *The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2001*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Nolan, B. (2000) *Child Poverty in Ireland*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with Combat Poverty Agency.

OFMDFM (2005) *Draft Strategy for Children and Young People*. Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

OFMDFM (2004) *New TSN: the way forward towards an anti-poverty strategy*. Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

O'Reilly, D., and Browne, S. (2001) *Health and Health Service use in NI: Social Variations*. Belfast: DHSSPS.

O'Reilly, D. and Stevenson, M. (1998) 'The Two Communities in Northern Ireland: deprivation and ill health'. *Journal of Public Health Medicine*, Vol. 20 No.2 pp 161-168.

Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Preventing Social Exclusion: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: The Cabinet Office.

Tomlinson, M. (2001) 'Unemployment and Inactivity: Comparing Ireland, North and South', in N. Yeates and G.P Kelly, *Poverty and Social Security: Comparing Ireland North and South*. Belfast: Department for Social Development.

UNICEF (2000) *A League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations*. Innocenti Report Card No.1, Florence: Innocenti Research Centre.

Waldman, J. (2003) *Child Welfare Across the Borders*.

<http://www.sws.soton.ac.uk/cwab/index.htm>