

Falling below minimum standards

At a glance

PSE: UK 2012 is the most comprehensive survey of poverty and social exclusion ever undertaken in the UK. The research finds that about a third of households in the UK today face significant difficulties, specifically:

- Around 4 million people are not properly fed by today's standards.
- Around 2.5 million children live in homes that are damp.
- Around 2.3 million households cannot afford to heat the living areas of their homes.
- Over 30 million people suffer from financial insecurity.

The public sets the minimum living standard



The **Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE)** research measures the numbers of people who fall below what the population as a whole think should be a minimum standard of living.

This is the only measure looking at both: what the majority think are necessities for life in the UK today, and actual living standards (rather than just income).

The PSE 2012 survey builds on similar surveys carried out in 1983, 1990 and 1999 in Britain and 2002/3 in Northern Ireland.

Find out about the two PSE surveys

This first PSE Facts and Findings looks at the numbers lacking necessities in 2012. PSE **Facts and Findings 2: Going backwards**, looks at what has changed over 30 years.

How many lack the basics?

Housing

The top two necessities for all households are heating and a damp-free home. Nearly everyone agrees on this. Yet in the UK today:

- 2.3 million households, in which 1.5 million children live, cannot afford to heat the living areas of their home
- 2.7 million households, with 2.5 million children, live in a damp home
- 600,000 children live in a home that is **both** damp **and** which the household cannot afford to heat: one in 20 children

In addition: a fifth of adults don't have enough money to keep their home in a decent state of decoration.

19%
of children live in homes that are damp
that's nearly one in five

Overcrowding

Many children are growing up in overcrowded conditions with no place to play outdoors:

- 11% of children aged 10 or over live in households which don't have enough bedrooms for every child aged 10 or over of a different sex to have their own room: 600,000 children
- 5% of children don't have a safe place to play outside: 600,000 children



Renée and her family describe how hard it is, living in a damp, overcrowded flat.

Food

There is very widespread agreement on what we need to eat properly.

For children, over 90% agree it means: three meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day.

For adults, over 75% agree this includes: two meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables every day; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every other day.

Yet, significant numbers lack at least one of these items:

- Well over half a million children live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly
- Over 3.5 million adults cannot afford to eat properly

In nearly all of the households where there are children going without one or more of the food items, adults in the household are cutting back on their own food: in 93% of these households at least one adult 'skimps' either often or sometimes on their own food.

"I do without for the children so they have proper meals. I can live on one meal a day."

Jennie (lone parent)

Clothing

97% of people agree that children need a warm winter coat, with new, properly fitting shoes close behind (93%). Most also agree that children need some new (not secondhand) clothes and at least four pairs of trousers, leggings, jeans or jogging bottoms. Yet at least 1 million children go without one or more basic clothing necessities.

There are three essential clothing items for adults: a warm, waterproof coat, two pairs of all-weather shoes and appropriate clothes for job interviews, yet:

- 5.5 million adults go without one or more basic clothing necessities
- 12% of young people aged 18 to 25 and 21% of the unemployed cannot afford appropriate clothes for a job interview

“

I've still got my prom suit upstairs from school and it still fits me, that's the only way I've got job interview clothes.

”

Marc, (young job seeker, Redcar)

How many go without other necessities?

Views of what we need don't just cover basic essentials like food. Necessities also include maintaining the home, education and leisure activities, and taking part in social activities.

Around the home

For adults, household goods seen as necessities include a washing machine, phone, curtains or window blinds, table and chairs. Fewer people lack these one-off purchases than other necessities. Some who are currently struggling will have been able to afford these items in the past.

Even so, 7% of households (1.9 million) cannot afford at least one of these four items. More problematic are things that require regular or significant spending: 26% of adults (11.7 million) cannot afford to replace or repair broken electrical goods. Looking at all these household items, 14 million people can't afford them.

Children's education and development

Many children are missing out on items the public believe are necessities for education and development. Of school-age children:

- Around 700,000 can't go on school trips once a term
- Around 500,000 have no place to study
- Around 500,000 are forced to cope with homework without a computer

Other items considered essential for children's development include books, indoor games and construction toys. Looking at all six child development items: around 1.6 million school-age children (18%) miss out on important development items and activities.

14 million
adults can't afford to purchase or repair household basics

8%
of children miss out on school trips

What necessities are most out of reach?

Financial security

The necessities most likely to be out of reach are those requiring either ready cash or regular amounts of money for longer term financial planning:

- 33% of adults (16.5 million) can't pay unexpected costs of £500
- 31% of adults (14 million) cannot afford to save at least £20 each month for rainy days
- 30% of working age people aged 18-65 years (11 million) can't afford regular payments to a pension

In addition: 12% of households (3 million adults) cannot afford household insurance.

Overall, levels of insecurity are extremely high: over 30 million people, nearly half the population, suffer from financial insecurity.

Social and family activities

In the 2012 survey the social activities seen to be necessities by the majority are a hobby, celebrations on special occasions, attending wedding and funerals and similar occasions, being able to make hospital or other such visits, and being able to take part in sport and exercise. Almost 12 million people are too poor to engage in these common social activities considered necessary by the majority of the population.

Families are also cutting out on key family activities (see Table 1.1). As with adults, meeting these necessities requires money to spare after the weekly bills have been met. Children are also most likely to go without items related to financial independence, now or in the future.

Table 1.1: Millions of children miss out on financial independence and family activities

Necessities	% of children	numbers of children
No money to save	32% (aged 5 or over)	2.8 million (aged 5 or over)
No pocket money	16% (aged 5 or over)	1.4 million (aged 5 or over)
No holiday away from home for a week a year	26%	3.3million
No family day trips	20%	2.6 million

1.9 million children have neither holidays nor day trips with their families

Overall multiple deprivation

The overall multiple deprivation count identifies how many households cannot afford these necessities to a point that affects their whole way of life. Looking at those who cannot afford these necessities:

- 33% of households lack three or more necessities
- 31% of children go without at least two necessities, that's almost 4 million children

Looking directly at those who can't afford necessities provides a picture of what people miss out on and the impact this has on their lives. Because it is based on the 'consensual' approach, what we agree people should have, it also tells us who falls below what is acceptable in our society. Millions of adults and children in the UK today face significant difficulties with living standards that are unacceptable low.

4 million
children lack at least two

“

I feel bad as a parent you know, that I should be providing for my children and at times I can't because I just don't have the money to.

”

Unemployed lone parent, Belfast

Coming up



Explore the data

The first PSE UK tables of data are available in the 'Explore the data' section.

Detailed PSE UK papers on the lack of necessities will also be published soon. These papers will also explore if money is the only reason for going without. The PSE survey also finds out about people who lack items and activities because they 'don't want' them and those who want to take part but can't for other reasons than lack of money. There will be further analyses of the barriers to participation later in the year.

About the surveys

The PSE:UK 2012 research draws on two surveys both carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in Britain and by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in Northern Ireland.

- The 'living standards' survey was carried out between March and December 2012 and covered 5,193 households (4,205 in Britain and 988 in Northern Ireland) in which 12,097 people were living (9,786 in Britain and 2,311 in Northern Ireland).
- The 'Necessities of Life' survey was carried out between May and June 2012 and is based on a sample of 1,447 adults aged 16 or over in the Britain and 1,015 in Northern Ireland.

Read more about the research approach [here](#).

See also the PSE: UK team's first report '[The impoverishment of the UK](#)'.

Author/s: PSE Team

Publication date: Thursday, March 28, 2013