

Poor Britain

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Chapter 5: Just Existing

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Just Existing

The impact of deprivation

You query the price of things so much when you go out. Can I afford this? Can I afford that? I like meat, I like vegetables, and things like that. But I've got to query it, I might have vegetables twice a week, I might have meat twice a week, otherwise I've got to live on eggs and things like that and this isn't a standard of living. It's existence. [A disabled woman on supplementary benefit]

The impact of deprivation is more intense for some than others. Among the poor, the types and range of the deprivations suffered vary.

A picture of these variations can be drawn by looking at which of the necessities the poor are most likely to be unable to afford. This will depend on the overall level of deprivation the household faces, that is the overall number of necessities lacked. For both the eighteen necessities identified for adults and the eighteen necessities identified for children (see pp. 106-7), the households lacking necessities have been divided into four groups. First there are those who lack one or two necessities - about 20 per cent of the population. Second, there are those who lack three or four necessities - about 5 per cent of the population. Third, there are those who lack five or six necessities - accounting for a further 4 per cent of the population. Finally, there are those who lack seven or more necessities - a level of intense deprivation that affects about 5 per cent of the population.

Of course, the divisions between people are not that rigid: many households will find that their level of deprivation varies, sometimes even from week to week. But grouping households in this way enables an examination of the form and extent of

deprivation among those with low living standards. Table 5.1 shows, for each of the individual necessities relating to adults, the proportion of households in each of these overall groups who lack that necessity. In Table 5.2, the proportions going without some aspect or other of heating, housing, food, clothing, household goods, social activities and leisure activities are given. Finally, a picture of the deprivations faced by children is given in Table 5.3.

The implications of these tables are discussed in this chapter. This provides a picture of the impact of deprivation; a picture that in turn throws light on the question of the extent of poverty, which is pursued in Chapter 6.

Table 5.1 *The living standards of the deprived*

<i>Deprivations</i>	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>			
	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>
	<i>% of households facing each deprivation</i>			
Inadequate heating	6	20	35	46
No unshared indoor toilet	1	4	17	13
Damp home	9	16	51	42
No unshared bath	1	4	15	15
Not enough beds	1	5	9	4
No warm water-proof coat	5	20	45	65
Less than two pairs of all-weather shoes	9	26	37	88
No refrigerator	2	5	9	13
Not enough carpets	2	7	2	31
No celebrations on special occasions	4	9	13	53
No roast joint each week	8	29	44	48
No washing machine	10	22	25	31
Second-hand clothes	4	13	46	66
No hobby or leisure activity	6	36	35	61
Less than two hot meals a day	3	11	28	28
Meat/fish less than every other day	10	27	33	88
Not enough money to give presents once a year	4	24	18	55
No holiday	47	65	76	96

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

Two factors should be remembered throughout. First, people's lack of each of the necessities is seen only in terms of those who do not have the necessity because they say they cannot afford it and excludes those who go without from 'choice'. This provides a *minimal* measure of the *numbers* of people facing deprivation (see Chapter 4) and it also provides a *minimal* measure of the *extent* of their problems. Second, the study underestimates the differences between those who are deprived and those who are comfortably off because the measures of *quality* are limited. The indicators of deprivation were restricted to simple matters of possession in terms of quantity and regularity. This means that, in describing the living standards of the poor, they will at times be classed as possessing an item when in fact the quality of that item is inadequate.

Even on these minimal measures of the deprivations faced by those with the lowest living standards, the picture that emerges is of a life worn down by not being able to make ends meet. It is a picture that comes disturbingly to life when the poor speak for themselves.

Table 5.2 *The impact of deprivation*

<i>Main areas of deprivation^b</i>	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>			
	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>
	<i>% of households facing each area of deprivation</i>			
Inadequate heating	6	20	35	46
Bad housing	16	34	62	62
Lacking household furnishings and equipment	16	26	38	56
Poor and inadequate clothing	17	48	89	98
Unbalanced and unattractive diet	18	52	64	93
Missing out on important social functions and obligations	7	28	22	72
Cutting out leisure activities	53	85	90	96

^aThroughout. 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

^bThis classification is described in the text under the sections dealing with each of these areas.

Table 5.3 *Deprivation among children*

<i>Areas of deprivation (children)</i>	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>			
	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>
	<i>% of families facing each area of deprivation</i>			
Overcrowding	23	17	16	47
Insufficient food	1	4	17	40
No money for toys and/or leisure equipment	15	46	72	79

^aThroughout 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

Living in a rubbish dump

It's very bad with the damp, the rain coming in through the window, the mice, the rats, the bugs, beasts, the lot. And it's tiny in here. I can't get room to move about, I can't put my child on the floor to play. And if I put her on the floor she goes straight for the door and down the stairs. And when it rains in here, the floor gets soaking wet. And as for repairs, the landlord won't do anything to do with repairs. Nothing at all. It's just ridiculous to have ended up in a rubbish dump, that's what I call it, a rubbish dump.

Pamela lives with her 9-month old baby in an attic flat in a decaying row of terraced houses in inner London. Her flat is privately rented, but her feelings are reflected by many in the public sector of housing. Marie lives with her two children in a council flat in Vauxhall, Liverpool:

It's full of damp. And there are rats and there's all kinds of, well, crawlies all over the place and you can't get nothing done. The corporation, they'll not come out and do a thing for you. The windows don't shut and bins don't get emptied. They just won't do nothing at all. The housing

condition itself is just terrible. It's just rubbish because that's all it is, we're just living in rubbish really.

These neglected council estates of the inner city are a conspicuous form of housing deprivation. For others - the homeless, the overcrowded, those forced to share with friends and relatives - the housing problems may be less visible but they are no less serious. Kathy and her husband are homeless. The council has placed them 'temporarily' in a hotel room. For the last seven months, they have been trying to cope with bringing up their baby son in this one tiny room:

It's dirty. It's noisy. Outside our window there's rubbish and a ten foot brick wall. You can't open the window because all the insects come in. It's so small there's nowhere to cook. I'd rather give him food I'd normally eat but I can only manage packet foods. You know, just boil the kettle and pour it and mix it up. I can't give him normal food because there's nowhere to do it. I mean, you name it - everything's wrong with this place. It's just a dump. (Quoted in *The London Programme*, 20 January 1984, LWT)

Bad housing is the single most serious form of deprivation identified by the *Breadline Britain* survey. Of all the items identified as necessities, five out of the top eleven related to housing conditions: an indoor toilet not shared with another household, a bath for each household, a damp-free home, self-contained accommodation and enough bedrooms for older children to have their own. Each of these housing items was classed as a necessity by over three in four people.

Pamela, like many in privately rented accommodation, lives in a multi-occupied block sharing basic facilities. She finds it particularly difficult to ensure that baby Emma's conditions are hygienic:

There's twelve altogether living in the house and we have to share one bathroom between the whole house. Three

toilets. Sometimes the toilets don't even work. They get blocked up so it starts overflowing and gets all over the place. But there's only one bath in the whole house. I can't put her in the big bath because it's too disgusting because people wash their clothes there. They do everything in there and they never think to clean it afterwards. So I have to bath her in this small bath but I haven't got water up here so I take a bucket from the kitchen, go down to the bathroom, fill it up with hot water and then take it back up here.

Lack of such basic facilities is concentrated among those with the lowest living standards (see Table 5.1). Of those who lack three or four necessities, only 4 per cent are forced to share an indoor toilet and 4 per cent a bath, whereas, of those lacking five or six necessities, 17 per cent share an indoor toilet and 15 per cent a bath, and, of those lacking seven or more necessities, 13 per cent share a toilet and 15 per cent a bath. Lack of these basic facilities is concentrated in the privately rented sector. This means that, while in general it is the poor who are likely to be in the worst privately rented blocks, these tenants are not necessarily among the very poorest.

Although a minority of the poor still lack these basic facilities, the situation has improved considerably since the war. Access for all to these basic housing conditions has been a key aim of postwar housing policy and in these limited terms it has had some success. Improvements in this area continued throughout the 1970s: according to official figures, the proportion of dwellings lacking one or more of these basic facilities fell from 11 per cent in 1975 to just over 2 per cent in 1981. The *Breadline Britain* survey found that the lack of these basic facilities remained about the same in 1983 but, as Table 5.1 shows, this lack is heavily concentrated among those who are multiply deprived.

Ending overcrowding has also been an important aim of housing policy and again has met with some success (Lansley, 1979, p. 76). However, among the poor it still remains a problem. In the *Breadline Britain* survey, overcrowding was measured only for families with children, who were asked

whether they had sufficient bedrooms for each child of a different sex over the age of 10 to have their own. Table 5.3 shows that this is most concentrated among those with the very lowest living standards: nearly half of the families who lack seven or more necessities are living in overcrowded conditions. Outside this intensely deprived group, there does not seem to be an overlap between overcrowding and the extent of lack of other necessities.

In other areas of housing, problems have remained more widespread. In particular, there has been a continuing problem of damp. Elaine and her husband Roy live on a pre-war, inner city council estate with their three young children, Michael and Darren who attend the local infant school and Melanie, aged 3:

There's damp in the living room and bedroom. They did that two years ago but it just came back. They just, I don't know, they just don't seem to care. It's as though they think oh, she's got repairs, we'll do them eventually. I mean, it's so cold and damp and we can't get the house warm. It's been affecting Melanie's health. She's had bronchial pneumonia. She went to the hospital and a fortnight later she got it again. So she went back to the hospital and they said the dampness in the house wasn't helping her health. But even then, they refused to do it, to come and sort out the damp.

Faced each year with thousands of requests for repairs and thousands of older properties needing substantial improvements, councils have been unable to keep up with the investment needed to sustain the fabric of the council stock. This means that many properties are in need of major structural repairs and as a consequence tenants face problems, in particular that of damp. Such problems are not confined to older estates, however. The council block that Marie and her two children live in was built in the late 1960s:

The rooms are soaking with damp. I dread the winter coming. The poor child will end up with pneumonia when

the winter comes because they're so full of damp. You get that back kitchen, even in the hall, damp just falls off the walls.

Among the estates built in the 1960s and 1970s, a small but nevertheless significant proportion turned out to have structural problems that led to persistent dampness and condensation. For these reasons, the problem of damp is concentrated in the council sector: 14 per cent of council tenants in the survey faced the problem of damp compared to 5 per cent of those buying their home on a mortgage.

This, in turn, means that the problems of damp housing have remained closely associated with low income. Since the First World War, successive governments have implemented a number of measures with at least the partial aim of improving the access of the poor to decent housing at reasonable cost. The most important of these measures has been the building of local authority housing. So failures to maintain this stock have a very direct effect on the living conditions of the poor. Table 5.1 shows that the problem of damp is faced by over half of those who lack five or six necessities and 42 per cent of those who lack seven or more necessities. This compares with 9 per cent of those who lack one or two necessities.

The last of the housing necessities - self-contained accommodation - was not found to be correlated with income (see Chapter 4). It is not surprising therefore that lack of self-contained accommodation is not so concentrated among those with the lowest living standards as are the other aspects of housing deprivation. Of those who lack seven or more necessities, only 8 per cent share accommodation, although 21 per cent of those lacking five or six necessities face this problem. Accommodation is shared by 9 per cent of those who lack three or four necessities and 2 per cent of those lacking one or two necessities.

Overall, however, housing deprivation is concentrated among those whose living standards are low in other respects. Table 5.2 shows these five housing items grouped together. One-third of those who lack three or four necessities, over 60

per cent of households lacking five or six necessities, and 60 per cent of households lacking seven or more necessities, live in bad housing.

It is interesting, none the less, that housing problems are not as sharply concentrated among those with multiple deprivations as are other aspects of living standards. This is because council housing has to some extent reduced the link between lack of money for basic necessities and bad housing (Lansley, 1979, ch. 3; Murie, 1983). Table 5.2 shows that those who are intensely deprived (lacking seven or more necessities) are in the main less likely to face housing problems than other problems. As a result of the postwar public housing programmes, there are some who are multiply deprived in all other aspects of life who nevertheless live in decent housing. That said, the findings suggest that the poor tend to live in the worst housing.

These five items do not, of course, give anything like a complete picture of what it is like to suffer from inadequate housing. The list excludes other standard amenities such as a sink, washbasin or an adequate hot and cold water supply. It does not include poor structural conditions other than dampness. In a separate section of the survey, some of these aspects were covered. Respondents were asked if their present home had broken windows, a poor heating system, or poor decoration inside and outside. On the basis that the findings on necessities can be seen as a guide to the kind of standard of living regarded as minimal for living in Britain today, these items too could be seen as deprivations. Again, those who in other respects have low living standards are also the most likely to face these problems, as Table 5.4 shows. Again, however, bad housing is seen to be less closely tied in to generally low living standards than the other aspects of living standards are tied in to each other. Again, too, these problems are heavily concentrated among council tenants. For the poor, their housing conditions are, in effect, out of their control. They cannot afford to buy their way out of the council sector and so the standards of their housing conditions will depend above all on public housing investment and improvement programmes. Often the poor are concentrated in 'dump estates' where not

Table 5.4 *A broader view of housing deprivation*

	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>				
	<i>0</i>	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>
	<i>% facing additional housing problems</i>				
Broken windows	4	10	10	23	18
Poor heating system	12	28	37	48	54
Poor decoration inside	4	10	9	14	34
Poor decoration outside	8	13	15	2	13
1 or more of these four problems	22	42	52	72	66

^aThroughout 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

just the housing conditions will be bad but also the whole environment. Marie's estate in Vauxhall, Liverpool, though it was built twenty years ago, has now decayed through neglect. It is almost literally sinking into filth:

When the flat opposite came empty all the sewerage was coming out of the front door. It was seeping across into the next door flat and the two children there ended up with dysentery and the family had eventually to be moved out because it was so bad. The corporation wouldn't go in, the health wouldn't go in, nobody would go in the flats. Then we couldn't get the bins emptied at all then because nobody would come in. Nobody would come in the block because the smell was that bad, In the end the firemen stopped it, I don't know how.

Going to bed to keep warm

I put the gas fire on after supper because I only have one 50p to put in it each day. There's no more fifty pences, just that one for the simple reason that I can't afford any more in the gas. If I was to run it properly you're talking about £2 a day and this gas fire is the only heating we have got in the

house. There's nothing upstairs. So when that goes we go to bed because we keep warm in bed. Last winter we were freezing. You find that fifty pence doesn't last very long in winter - it was cold all the time. I mean, it was so cold, there were three of us in one bed to keep warm.

Tricia is a single parent bringing up two children on supplementary benefit. Like many single parents in this situation, she cannot afford to heat her home properly. Inadequate heating is sharply concentrated among the very poorest: nearly half of those who lack seven or more necessities cannot afford heating, compared to only 6 per cent of those who lack one or two necessities (see Table 5.1).

Heating, which in the public's perception of necessities was top of the list, is an aspect of living standards that people struggle to afford, even at the expense of cutting out other important aspects. Among those with the very lowest living standards, the proportion lacking heating is lower than the proportion who cut back on other aspects of life (see Table 5.2).

A household's ability to afford heating by cutting back on other areas will, however, depend in part on the intrinsic costs of heating their home. Some methods of heating are more expensive to run than others, and some houses are more expensive to heat - for example, those that are drafty or have inadequate insulation. In general, these problems are concentrated on council estates (Bradshaw and Harris, 1983). Many prewar estates have inadequate heating systems, and many remain unmodernised. The problem has been further compounded by disastrous design blunders in public sector house building during the 1960s and 1970s. The legacy of cheap-to-install and expensive-to-run heating systems hangs over many tenants. The *Breadline Britain* survey found that more than one-third of council tenants thought their accommodation had poor heating. These problems are often further aggravated by inadequate ventilation: two in five council tenants in the survey complained of condensation.

Households with heating costs they cannot afford face

intolerable choices. Some, like Tricia, cut back on heating. But this leads to coldness and condensation, and sometimes to health problems. Anne, whose husband is unemployed, has a son with bronchial asthma:

We can't afford to heat upstairs. It's very cold upstairs for him. He has to have two pillows to prop him up at night-time, because, if he's got bronchitis, he's coughing most of the night. Some nights he's crying all the night with the cough 'cause it's hurting that much to cough. Some nights he's slept with me when he's been that bad, and his dad's slept in his room. All last year when he was bad, he really got us worried.

If the heating is not turned off, the debts mount. Debt, in turn, leads either to borrowing or to turning the heating off to pay the bill, either voluntarily or through disconnections. Mavis - blind, partially deaf and disabled - had mounted up a gas bill of £80 in one quarter from using the central heating in her north-facing council flat. Because she knew that she could not pay the bill, she turned the gas central heating off. Throughout the winter months, she relied, instead, on a small and ineffective electric heater:

I very often go to bed during the day to keep warm. Pile on as much as I can find maybe a couple of old coats 'cos I've only got one blanket and a sleeping bag that I've had for years. And I just stay there. Sometimes I fall asleep and I wake up about 7 p.m. I get up and I see what I've got to drink and eat and then I come quickly back again. And that works out my day.

While the problem of 'fuel poverty' is hardly new, it is becoming increasingly serious. This is in part because of the design faults on council estates, but it also stems from the end of cheap fuel a decade ago (Cooper, 1981). Since 1979, the problem has been aggravated by moves towards the 'economic

pricing' of energy, leading to sharp increases in the price of fuel. Those on low incomes have become increasingly vulnerable to having to live without adequate heating.

Overall, the consequence of these pricing policies and housing failures has been that heating has remained a serious problem for the poor. Fifteen years ago, Townsend found in his survey of poverty in Britain that 5.2 per cent of the population did not have adequate heating. The *Breadline Britain* survey found that, if anything, the problem had grown: 6 per cent of the population could not afford heating in the living areas of their homes.

Eggs, eggs, and more eggs

Eggs this week. I had one on Sunday for lunch, and I had some tomatoes on toast for the evening meal. What did I have yesterday - just plain bread and butter and toast. At the moment, an egg on toast. I shall look like an egg by the end of the week.

For Mavis, living on her own on supplementary benefit, her diet has an endless monotony: eggs, eggs, and more eggs. It is a monotony shared by many of the poor. Elaine's husband works the night-shift in a local factory but she too finds that eggs provide the staple meal for them and their two children:

It's very rare we have meat whereas at one time it was meat every night of the week but now you just can't afford it. We've had to give that up. We more or less live on chips and eggs and something cheap like that. There's just no way I can give the kids a varied sort of diet 'cos I just can't afford it. And Sunday is terrible. I mean at one point we had a joint every week but now we can't afford it.

The extent to which the deprived go without food is striking. Table 5.2 shows a summary measure of how people's eating patterns are affected in terms of the three food items in the list of necessities. Over half of those who lack three or four

necessities and 93 per cent of those who lack seven or more necessities cut back on food in some way or another. It is interesting to compare this summary measure of eating standards with each of the food items separately (see Table 5.1). This shows that as people's living standards worsen they find that they are forced to cut back not just on one or other aspect of food but on many: nearly nine out of ten of the households that lack seven or more necessities cut back on meat or fish alone, and half cut back on a roast joint once a week. At this level of deprivation, the adequacy of food for children can also be affected. Table 5.3 shows that, among those families who lack seven or more necessities, 40 per cent cannot afford three meals a day for children.

These items are not, of course, a comprehensive list of all the problems that the poor face in simply feeding themselves. Those who are so short of money that they are having to cut back on meat are likely to cut back also in other areas. The variety of their diet will be affected in all sorts of ways. Mavis's diet, for example, is monotonous not only in that she can seldom afford meat but also in many other ways:

Sometimes somebody will give me an apple which is always attractive. But I make do with what I've got: a piece of bread, I may have some cottage cheese which is rather nice on toast though that's a bit expensive.

Further, these measures give little indication of quality. Those who have difficulty in affording a roast joint each week but manage it by cutting back on meat at other times will be buying only the cheapest cuts. Anne, with her husband unemployed and three school-aged children, shops around very carefully:

Most of the week we have chips and sausage, or eggs and chips. I have meat twice a week. I go down to the cheap butchers and we have liver and belly draft which are cheap. I mean we do have a joint at the weekend either a shank of lamb or a piece of pork or a chicken. It's much cheaper than

beef. I think beef is over £2 a pound and to feed the five of use it would be too expensive. We haven't had a joint of beef now for two years.

In buying food, as in all areas of regular expenditure, the poor find they are juggling around with not enough money to cope adequately. In general, the findings suggest that people put a high priority on food. Those who are only on the margins of poverty, lacking only one or two necessities, are much less likely to cut back on food than they are on leisure activities. It is only when money is very short and things like holidays have already been cut out that, in general, people start cutting back on food. In particular, families place a high priority on giving their children enough food: only 4 per cent of families who lack three or four necessities cut back on three meals a day for their children; in general, it is only when many other aspects of expenditure have already been cut back that families reduce the quantity of food given to children.

Without enough money to eat properly, the particular ways each household copes will vary from circumstance to circumstance - Anne has a cheap butchers round the corner; Mavis is blind and cannot shop around. Among those who lack a number of necessities the particular ones they lack will vary according to their situation, and may vary from week to week. At times a household may be managing to have meat two or three times a week and a roast joint at the weekend, then the electricity bill comes in or the children need a pair of shoes and so they will cut back on food.

Often, problems in one aspect of life lead to problems in other areas. Pamela, like many single parents, puts her priority on feeding her child. Her situation, however, is made worse by the fact that her fiat is so unhygienic that she cannot cook at home. She goes to the local cafe to eat but it costs more. With just supplementary benefit to live on, she ends up cutting out meals:

I come in here every day of the week. At the beginning of the week when I get paid, I have like a ham salad or

something. During the week I'll have a cheese roll and a cup of tea. That's all I'll have all day. Then at the end of the week, sometimes I just don't have anything at all. Sometimes I have to go hungry, in order to feed the child, to buy her nappies and her milk. For two or three days, I go without food. I just drink a cup of tea. That's all I'll do.

Living in other people's cast-offs

The raincoat, somebody found it for me but they didn't realise it was split in the first place and it's not waterproof anymore and the sleeve linings are going and it's split in both sleeves. Whether somebody wore a lot of woollies and split it I don't know, but it lets in water and if I've been caught out in heavy rain I've got very wet shoulders. That's the only one I've got, I can't afford another one.

Many of the poor will live in other people's cast-offs. For Mavis, this means her coat is neither warm nor water-proof. For others it will mean a loss of dignity in knowing that all their clothes come from jumble sales.

The poor find that clothing is a constant problem. Table 5.2 gives the proportion who lack at least one of the three clothing items in the list of necessities (a warm, water-proof coat; new, not second-hand, clothes; and two pairs of all-weather shoes). Around half of those who lack three or four necessities have problems with some aspect of clothing, and of those who are multiply deprived virtually all find they cannot afford to clothe themselves adequately.

Comparing this summary measure of clothing standards with each of the clothing items separately (Table 5.1) presents a similar picture to that found for food. For those lacking three or four necessities, the proportion cutting back on clothing in general is far greater than that cutting back on any specific aspect. They cannot afford to clothe themselves adequately but there remains some discretion. As living standards worsen, however, any remaining degree of choice goes. Households find that it is not enough just to cut back, everything begins to

go. Of those who lack seven or more necessities, 88 per cent cannot afford two pairs of all-weather shoes, 66 per cent cannot afford new clothes and 66 per cent cannot afford a warm, water-proof coat. There is also a sharp distinction in the clothing standards of those who lack only one or two necessities and those who lack three or four: under one-fifth of the former group cut back on clothing compared to around one-half of the latter group.

The problem of clothing is often particularly acute for those with children. Mary is a single parent with a school-aged son living in a small village in a rural area of the West Country:

I cannot go for a job interview even if I could get one, as after three years of unemployment my clothes are virtual rags, and I cannot buy any more, as it costs so much to keep my son decent - scruffy children have their lives made a misery at school and whatever else I do without, he will *not* have to go through that.

Shoes, in particular, are a problem for children. They wear them out quickly, they cannot be bought second-hand and they are expensive new. Sandra has three children to bring up on the low wages her husband brings home:

I used to walk the youngest 100 yards to school but that one closed and now I've got to go right the way down Moss Lane. It's alright in summer but you bring them in the cold weather then you get to school and they say you mustn't keep those damp shoes on. You've got to take two pairs of shoes. Sometimes you can't afford two pairs of bloody shoes. And you can't put the children into them plimsols. They say don't bring those things in they're bad for their feet. You can't afford it all the time.

Furnishing the home from the rubbish tip

I found the front room carpet in the rubbish bin. There's a big bin there. I felt it and it felt fairly good to me so I

thought, oh, we're having some of that. So I decided to take it in. I've got to negotiate it, three steps with the carpet dragging, dragging the carpet round the corner and along and in. Then I've got to lay it. I did this all by my own, though somebody very kindly did that bit in the bathroom for me and they cut it to fit. That was found in the bin as well, though I didn't bring that in at the same time.

Mavis, despite her blindness, laid the carpet in her sitting-room - a carpet that someone else placed in the communal rubbish bin.

In general, those with low living standards are more likely to have household goods than other items. Table 5.2 gives a summary measure of the lack of household furnishings and goods, in terms of those who cannot afford at least one of the four household items in the list of necessities (beds, carpets, a refrigerator and a washing machine). Only among those who lack seven or more necessities does the proportion lacking household furnishings reach one-half. There are a number of reasons for this. These household goods are often easier to pick up second-hand than more personal items and are more likely to be handed on from family or friends than day-to-day purchases. Often, such goods will have been bought when times were better and there was some spare cash around.

When times are worse, these goods are still there - although their quality diminishes. Carpets become threadbare. Washing machines break down. For those whose living standards are in other respects low this causes particular problems. Tricia, a single parent, has an 8-year old son:

Tony's only got one pair of school trousers and when he gets them dirty they've got to be washed and dried for the next morning. I did have a washing machine but it's now broke and the only way of doing my washing is in the sink. It does cause problems with the drying because though I can squeeze them out it's not as good as putting them in a spinner. If you put them in a spinner they come out almost dry; where you're ringing them by hand they're dripping

wet, you just can't get them any drier than that. It's very difficult to get things dry especially if it's raining. The only way I can get things dry when it's raining is putting them in front of the fire.

As she has only 50 pence a day to spare for the gas meter, that, in turn, causes problems.

The poor are vulnerable. When a problem comes along they have no resources to fall back on and it is difficult to cope. Mary, a single parent with a 5-year old son, lives on supplementary benefit:

He wets the bed and has to wear nappies. His sheets and bedding must still be washed every day. When my washer broke, I asked if the DHSS could help, and was told that the washer was not regarded as a necessity, and I should use the laundrette. As this is 9 miles away and there is no bus service, this is ludicrous. I borrowed £100 for the repair, and pay £15 a month for that.

Santa is dead

He has not had either birthday or Christmas presents since he was 2. He asks for Lego and cars from Santa, but Santa is dead in this house; how does one explain that to a child of 5?

Mary and her son have been living on supplementary benefit for the last three years. She now finds that it is impossible to manage anything other than day-to-day essentials. Table 5.3 shows that, among families with the lowest living standards, an overwhelming majority cannot afford either toys or leisure equipment for their children: 79 per cent of those lacking seven or more necessities, and nearly a half of those lacking three or four necessities - a sharp contrast once again with those who lack one or two necessities. Overall, about 11/2 million children go without toys or, for older children, leisure equipment.

Alongside the problem of not having enough money for toys is the problem of Christmas and of birthdays. Roy, father of three, has been unemployed for three years:

It was my son's birthday three months back, he's still waiting for his present. It was my wife's last month and she's still waiting for hers. You know, they're going to mount up and mount up and if and when I do get a job, I'm going to spend the first few months just getting presents - just the backdated ones.

Table 5.2 shows the problems that those with low living standards have in meeting these social obligations of Christmas and giving presents, although it is a problem in the main for the poorest of the poor: 72 per cent of those lacking seven or more necessities could not afford at least one of these social obligations, but only around one-quarter of those lacking three to six necessities.

None the less, most of the poor find that in some way or another their life outside the immediate day-to-day personal and household needs is diminished. In particular, the poor cut back on leisure activities (a holiday and a hobby). Indeed these are the first areas to go: over half of those who lack only one or two necessities, as many as 85 per cent of those who lack three or four necessities, and virtually all of those who are multiply deprived cannot afford leisure activities. Among those with some financial difficulties, most will cut back in these areas to ensure minimum standards in other areas, although a few will trim back elsewhere to ensure a holiday. For those facing intense deprivation, however, such choices are a long gone luxury: they have already cut back on holidays and leisure activities to pay for food and clothing; now they also cut back on food and clothing. There is no way they can cut back further on these day-to-day items to go on holiday or pursue a hobby.

These problems of not having enough money to do anything interesting are again most concentrated among families. Elaine's children are aged 7, 5 and 3:

The children have never had a holiday. They don't know

what it's like to have a holiday. They go out with the school. When the school holidays come, we go down to the playscheme, we go out for days. But they don't know what it's like for a proper holiday.

And during the school holidays, Roy's three children just have the local park in their district of inner Birmingham:

They get a bit frustrated and bored because we can't take them anywhere during the holidays. They have to stay around this area 52 weeks of the year. They don't get out of it on nice days. You'd like to take them out somewhere but you just can't afford to. They get a bit frustrated when I say you can't go, we haven't got the money. They go off sulking somewhere, or crying. And it makes you feel rotten.

Part of the problem is the cost of public transport. Roy's wife Anne explains:

When we all go out we walk. We walk a lot. It's very rare we use buses. Cost of coaches, the trains, they're all expensive. I think it's important for kids to get out of the city so they can see the things they probably wouldn't see otherwise, like wild flowers. I mean when I was a kid, we used to go bluebell picking in the woods and that. But it's just impossible.

A lonely living

What do I do most of the time? Try and clean the flat. Put the radio on and get fed up with it, turn it off. Put the talking book on, get fed up with it, turn it off. Put my coat on, go out for a walk. Can't do that if it's cold. What else do I do? Sit here and think - think about the past quite a lot and I shouldn't be doing that at my age I know. Sit here and wish that somebody would ring me up or knock on my door to come and visit me. Get very lonely. And that's about all I

do. You wish you had more money so that you could get out an' perhaps take yourself for a meal or something like that. Ah, just I don't know, get very, very lonely.

Mavis, being blind and partially deaf, is more at risk of social isolation than others, but it is her acute lack of money that in the end completely cuts her off from society. For the poor struggling to afford the basic necessities, there is no spare money for just socialising. While this in itself is not, on the methodology adopted in this study, a mark of deprivation - in general, the survey found that those aspects of our standard of living that relate specifically to social relationships were classed as only 'desirable' and not as 'necessities' - it does mean that those who are deprived are also socially isolated. Mary and her 5-year old son live in a rural area of Cornwall:

I have no chance of getting out to meet people; a baby sitter here costs £1.50 an hour, and even then there is nowhere I can go as I don't have transport and there is no bus service. A night out alone at the cinema would cost me over £20, and yet my doctor tells me I must get out at least once a week. I have no relatives to help out, and since I can no longer entertain or go out I have literally no friends. So I spend every day alone and every night.

The poor become cut off from the rest of society in that they cannot afford to meet people socially, either at home or out. They are also to some extent excluded from the mainstream of society by their unacceptably low standard of living in itself. The diversity of lifestyles in society does not apply to these basic aspects of living. Once people have a way of life that excludes them from a number of these basic necessities, then they do stand out as different. The poorest tend, as a consequence, to be ashamed about their living conditions. This can lead to a reluctance about inviting people in. The house may be cold, the carpets may be threadbare, there may be embarrassment about offering only a cup of tea. The poor are

thus often isolated and lonely.

Yet more problems

I sat down and worked out, roughly, what you spend per week. And now you've got washing up liquid, you got toilet paper, you got soap to wash with, you've got to keep yourself clean, you want disinfectant, or anything like that. Well what is it, you go out and you think to yourself, now if I buy washing up liquid I can't have a loaf of bread. Which do you do? Buy the loaf of bread or the washing up liquid? You've got to keep yourself clean and you've got to eat. So which way do you sway?

Mavis has to juggle her money between not just the necessities specifically examined but also a host of other important goods. While the picture presented has given an insight into the main consequences of deprivation, the necessities identified are not a comprehensive list of a person's needs. Those who are unable to eat properly or to clothe themselves decently are likely to suffer problems in the other areas of life that depend on day-to-day expenditure. If a more comprehensive list of indicators had been used, a fuller picture of the problems faced by those who have anyway been seen to be surrounded by problems could have been presented.

In addition, those suffering deprivations that stem from lack of income are also the most likely to be deprived in other ways. The poor are likely to live in the worst environments; and the very poorest are concentrated in the decaying areas of the inner city. The schools and the general practitioner service in these areas are likely to be worse than elsewhere. The leisure facilities are often inadequate. Marie, in Vauxhall, Liverpool, finds that the decay of the area and the lack of opportunities have their effects on the local children:

The kids just more or less end up running wild sometimes because there's nothing for them to do and nowhere for

them to go. The kids get bored so the next thing you know the windows in the empty houses - there's that many empty houses around - get smashed. Teenagers do it but the little ones see the teenagers doing it, so the little ones then tend to do it themselves. So like, it's only babies more or less of about 5 kicking stones up and lashing them at the empty windows.

A vicious circle is thus set up whereby a bad environment becomes worse.

Although such factors are an important aspect of a person's quality of life, their investigation was outside the scope of the survey. Instead, we concentrated on those deprivations that stem more directly from lack of money rather than from inadequate services. This chapter has so far examined the direct consequences of these deprivations. The problems that people face have been seen to be great, but the cumulative effect of all these problems has many other consequences for people's lives.

Failing to make ends meet

You are just living from day-to-day. We can't live from week-to-week, it's day-to-day. Because the money's just so tight. We just can't manage on the wages Roy is bringing home.

Even though Roy works the night-shift to try and push up his wage, his wife Elaine finds that with a family of three young children she cannot manage. Though they cut back on their living standards, they still have difficulty in making ends meet.

Each week, the poor find that they are down to their last pound. There is no leeway if for one reason or another their money one week is late. When Mavis's supplementary benefit Giro does not arrive, she is down to literally a penny ha'penny in her purse and a few slices of stale bread and some eggs in the house:

It's alright when your book comes through and you can go to the post office and get your money. But when it's like this, the end of a book or they're adjusting your money and you're waiting for your money and they say they're going to send you a Giro and it's in the post and that's it. You try and scrounge but there aren't any neighbours round here that I can scrounge off. In any case, I don't like knocking on doors and saying 'please can you let me have some of this' and 'please can you let me have some of that'.

When money runs so low each week, any delay in benefits arriving, any unexpected drop in earnings or, on the other hand, any unexpected expenditure can cause immense problems.

To investigate the extent to which people run out of money, the survey asked respondents whether there had been any time in the last year when they did not have enough money to buy food that they, and their family, needed. Table 5.5 shows that those who have to cut back on a range of necessities are also vulnerable to running out of money altogether and so simply missing out on meals: while virtually none (3 per cent) of those

Table 5.5 *The consequences of failing to make ends meet*

	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>					<i>Income:</i>	
	<i>0</i>	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>	<i>Bottom decile</i>	
Missing out on meals; not buying food	3	19	33	44	68	37	
Borrowing from family/friends for day-to-day needs	7	22	40	47	69	28	

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

who had all the necessities had experienced running out of money for food, one-third of those who lack three or four necessities had faced this problem. This vulnerability rises sharply for those who are multiply deprived: over two-thirds of those who lack seven or more necessities had experienced running out of money for food.

Faced with such problems, many find that they are forced to borrow from family and friends in order to pay for their day-to-day needs. This is also shown in Table 5.5. However, borrowing provides only a temporary solution, as Pamela, the single parent with a 9-month old baby living on supplementary benefit, explains:

Sometimes in the middle of the week I've got no money and I've got to go and find some money in order to buy nappies for her. So I have to go and ask people. If I haven't got the money I have to borrow the money from friends and that. And I have to give that back when my next pay comes so that leaves me short again.

On top of the problems of simply getting through the week, there is the constant problem of how bills will be paid. Ernie, a 79-year-old pensioner, often pores over the stack of bills he's faced with:

That's the telephone bill - £19.59, I haven't had that no time. £168 - that's the gas bill, it's fantastic. What's this one - £23, I can't account for that. Talk about being bamboozled ... This has to be paid £20. Oh golly, they're a headache to me.

Confronted with bills they cannot pay, the poor are faced with either cutting back further on their living standards or running into debt. Mavis, the blind, partially deaf and diabetic claimant, finds this an impossible choice:

To make ends meet is terrible. It really is, You have it in one hand and it's out with the other. Your electricity's got to be paid for to start with, so you either eat or you pay the electricity? What do you do? You just can't make things

balance. You can't do it. You're below the breadline.

Mavis, like many others in this situation, has fallen into debt. Table 5.6 shows that over half of those who lack seven or more necessities and one-third of those lacking three or four necessities are in debt, a sharp contrast to those households lacking none of the necessities, of whom only 7 per cent are in debt. The incidence of debt is thus sharply related to lack of necessities. In general, people do not run into debt out of extravagance; indeed, those most likely to fall into debt are those who have already cut back to the extent that their living standards fall below minimum levels.

Interestingly, debt is more closely related to low living standards than it is to low incomes. The last three columns in Table 5.6 show the incidence of debt for those on the lowest incomes. Those with low incomes do, of course, overlap considerably with those with low living standards (see Chapter 4) and, not surprisingly, many of those in the bottom decile are in debt: about 40 per cent. However, over 30 per cent of households in the second and third deciles are also in debt. The combination of the concentration of debt among those with low living standards and the spread of debt among the lower

Table 5.6 *The distribution of debts*

	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>					<i>Income:</i>		
	<i>0</i>	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>	<i>Bottom 10%</i>	<i>Next 10%</i>	<i>Next 10%</i>
	<i>% seriously in debt during past year</i>							
Rent	2	7	25	28	39	22	15	11
Gas	2	3	22	10	36	14	15	12
Electricity	2	9	20	22	42	22	11	11
Goods on HP	1	4	6	6	19	11	3	5
Mortgage	1	3	3	3	-	3	2	1
Rates	3	3	5	14	5	7	3	5
At least one debt	7	19	32	43	56	40	36	31

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

income groups suggest that debt is an important reason why some who are not on the lowest incomes are nevertheless among those with the lowest living standards. These debts may stem from past periods when the household income was lower; the effects carry over so that living standards continue to be low, even when the household income is somewhat higher.

For Elaine and Roy and their three children their problems really started when Roy was put on short-time:

About three years ago Roy went on short-time working and the wages were cut by half. No warning, he just went into work one night after his holidays, and came home the following day and said they was on short-time. At that time I had a gas bill of over £100, and other bills as well. And we went all over the place trying to get help with paying the bill, the gas bill; they had cut me gas off, and I was three months without gas. We went down to the social security, and they said, when we first went down, they said yes, you're entitled to help, and then they said no, we were not entitled to help. And we got into arrears with the rent.

Elaine would have been entitled to rent rebate but did not know that. The debts mounted and, although Roy is back on full-time work and takes home about £80 a week, the problems continue, as Elaine explains:

We are trapped by our debts, if we could get rid of the debt and start off with a clean slate, we'll probably be a lot happier and the children would probably be a lot happier as well. But there's no way I can do it. We are just doing it slowly which isn't very easy. Once you get into debt it's very hard to get out of it.

For those who accumulate debts but find that their income remains at the level that led to the debts, the problems are even worse. Living standards drop even further and the problems of debt, in turn, become worse. Table 5.7 shows that, among

Table 5.7 *Sinking deeper into debt*

	Lack ^a of necessities				
	0	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 or more
	% owing multiple debts during past year				
At least one debt	7	19	32	43	56
Two or more debts	2	6	24	22	44
Three or more debts	-	3	19	11	29

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

those who lack seven or more necessities, 44 per cent have more than one outstanding debt. Mavis got into debt with the gas and, in trying to pay off that, she built up other arrears. Money for these debts is now being deducted from her supplementary benefit:

I get a total of £29.05. What am I supposed to do with it? They're deducting £1.65 for this and £1.90 for that and so it works out. And I'm supposed to live on it. Oh well.

Feelings of despair

I'm just fed up with the whole thing and the money is ridiculous. I can't cope on the money and I can't cope in living here. I can't sleep at night, and she's up all night. I nearly went through a nervous breakdown because of the conditions. You know, I can't cope anymore.

Pamela finds that bringing up a 9-month old baby on the money she gets from supplementary benefit in an unhygienic, decrepit attic flat is just getting too much for her. In the long run, poverty affects a person's well-being both psychologically and physically. Because of the constraints of time and money, the *Breadline Britain* survey did not explore whether those with low living standards suffered worse health as a consequence.

The one question on health that was asked related to long-term illness, and this is as much a cause of poverty as it is a consequence; this is discussed in Chapter 6.

However, the survey did explore whether people *felt* that their lack of money was affecting their emotional well-being and personal relationships. Table 5.8 shows that those with low living standards experience a whole range of worries. The contrast between those well below minimum living standards and those firmly above is sharp: 90 per cent of those lacking seven or more necessities are faced with worries compared to 28 per cent of those who lack none of the necessities. Comparing the experiences of those with different levels of deprivation shows that the financial concerns of those lacking three or four necessities are as great as those lacking five or six necessities and significantly greater than those lacking one or two necessities: about 80 per cent of those who lack three to six necessities experience regular worries stemming from lack of money compared to just over 50 per cent of those who lack one or two necessities.

Table 5.8 *The personal consequences of deprivation*

	Lack ^a of necessities					
	Income:					
	0	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 or more	Bottom decile
	% facing worries during past month owing to lack of money					
Been depressed	10	21	55	50	54	29
Worsened relations with friends	2	2	7	3	12	9
Worsened relations with family	2	9	11	8	28	14
Been bored	9	20	31	35	40	17
Worried about not having enough money for day-to-day living	7	19	47	47	75	41
Felt looked down upon by others	1	5	16	14	18	13
Felt a failure	3	8	17	12	36	16
Lacked hope for the future	12	25	39	40	62	36
Felt your family was let down	4	14	29	14	34	25
At least one worry	28	57	81	79	90	69

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

Throughout this chapter it has been seen that those who lack three or four necessities are distinguished from those whose lack is less by the extent to which their lives are affected by their lack of money. The greater concentration of worries among those lacking three or four necessities reinforces the findings that their deprivations are of a far more wide-ranging nature and, moreover, suggests that the problems they face are, in general, more similar to those who are more deprived.

For some, the lack of money for day-to-day living puts a strain on relationships. When there is not enough money to go round, it adds a sharp intensity to general bickering about money. Parents can even find that never being able to escape from the constant problems that surround them damages their relationship with their children. A single parent explains:

I get so angry I take it out on my daughter, because I can't go out. I end up taking it out on her. Instead of me taking it out on myself, I end up taking it out on her. I get so angry with her sometimes when she starts crying. I just can't be bothered, I just leave her.

Others feel that they are letting their families down because their living standards are so low. Some, as a consequence, feel a failure, others that they are looked down upon. Roy, during his three years of unemployment, has experienced a mixture of these emotions:

I get so frustrated, knowing I'm stuck at home, feeling useless, that's how you feel, useless. You can't feel like a man. They won't let you, the system won't let you feel like a man. So until I get a job I have just got to sit down and suffer, what's the word, the indignities of being out of work 'cause you're looked down upon. Yes that's it, you are looked down upon as idle - you don't want a job, you're happy the way you are. Well, I'm not. I want to get back out there and feel useful again. You feel like an outcast.

Three concerns come through above all: a constant worrying about lack of money, depression and lack of hope for the future. Table 5.8 shows that nearly half of those who lack three to six necessities and three-quarters of those who lack seven or more necessities are worried about not having enough money for day-to-day needs. Roy, the night-shift worker, has tried doing a second job during the day to pay off their debts. But that just made him ill. So he is left with just worry:

I do worry about money but I just don't like to show that I do worry. I more or less keep it to myself and try and work it out and try and make ends meet.

For Ernie, coming up to the age of 80 and with no hope of earning any extra money to help out, the bills he is faced with have become oppressive:

I worry at night. I can't sleep. I go to sleep when it's daylight thinking how it's going to be done. I know I shouldn't worry because I'm too old to start worrying now about them. But I've still got to get by ... in fact I don't know how I get by.

Worries about money and inadequate living standards lead in turn to depression. Table 5.8 shows that over half of those who lack three or more necessities have felt depressed in the last month. Roy, the unemployed father of three:

Some days I'm alright and some days I just go into a black mood and I will not let anybody come near me. I just sit up the corner and just bang my head against a wall. And say why me?

Lack of hope is also widely shared, although this feeling is somewhat more concentrated among the very poorest: 62 per cent of those lacking seven or more necessities have felt this way compared to about 40 per cent of those lacking three to six necessities. For many of the poor their income is effectively out

of their control and so there is very little they can do to improve their living standards. For those on supplementary benefit the levels are set by the state and any income the claimant earns above £4 is deducted from their benefit. For the low-paid, there is the trap of the tax-benefit system. Roy works in a local factory on the Trafford Park estate, Manchester, on the night shift to try and push up the money he takes home for his wife and three children. But he's beginning to wonder if there is much point:

It's disheartening, any way you turn, you lose most of it with tax and insurance but you also lose your benefits as well for rebates and other small things. It makes me feel trapped 'cos it's not worth doing the overtime at all. Bar another job and more pay and that, to raise my standard of living, I don't think I'll ever get out of the trap. I might be lucky but I don't think I will. For the simple reason that there's the unemployment nowadays. I don't feel very optimistic about it all, or very hopeful about anything really nowadays.

It is interesting, in the light of all these worries, to look at people's feelings of satisfaction as regards their living standards. Table 5.9 shows that the lower a person's living standard the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with it. Among those with very low living standards (lacking seven or more of the

Table 5.9 *Satisfaction with living standards (percentages)*

<i>Feelings about standard of living</i>	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>					<i>Income: 7 or Bottom decile</i>	
	<i>0</i>	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>decile</i>	
Satisfied	84	66	61	47	19	45	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7	12	6	4	2	7	
Dissatisfied	9	20	34	48	79	46	

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

necessities), dissatisfaction is high: 80 per cent are fairly or very dissatisfied, with a half being very dissatisfied. In other respects, however, the results are very surprising. They show a widespread satisfaction among those who objectively have some of the worst living standards in society: some 60 per cent of those who lack three or four necessities and nearly half of those who lack five or six necessities are satisfied, and even among the most deprived nearly 20 per cent are satisfied. This picture of satisfaction also holds for those with the lowest incomes: nearly half of those in the bottom decile are satisfied.

On the other hand, a large majority of the very same people who express satisfaction with their living standards are worried in one way or another about problems stemming from lack of money. Their standard of living is in key respects being cut back because they cannot afford more. To view one's standard of living with satisfaction in these circumstances suggests a high degree of resignation to one's situation and low personal aspirations. Maybe the answer is that the 'contented poor' exist not just in social science textbooks but also in reality.

Feeling poor

I do feel poor. I'm not ashamed to admit it.

Roy's three years of unemployment have resulted in the family going without many necessities. The family is poor by the standard's of today - and they themselves feel poor. It is sometimes suggested, however, that the poor do not recognise their plight - a suggestion that is given some backing by the finding that some of the poor are satisfied with their standard of living, despite all their problems. On the other hand, it is possible that the poor may be relatively satisfied and yet realise that compared to others they are doing relatively badly. The judgement of satisfaction is essentially inward-looking, whereas feelings of being poor involve explicit comparison with others.

So, do those who are deprived by the standards of today feel poor? The *Breadline Britain* survey asked people whether

they could 'genuinely' say they were 'poor' always, sometimes or never. The results show a remarkably high degree of consistency between the socially defined measures of deprivation and the self-perception of being poor (see Table 5.10). The greater the number of necessities a person lacks, the more likely they are to see themselves as poor all the time, while the fewer necessities a person lacks the more likely they are never to regard themselves as poor. At the extremes, only 3 per cent of those who have all the necessities they want always feel poor, while only 9 per cent of those who lack seven or more necessities never feel poor.

Although a person's self-perception of their situation does not provide an adequate answer to the question of whether they are too poor, a high degree of overlap between the objective and subjective measures is not insignificant. It suggests that the objective measures are reflecting people's feelings about their situation and tapping something that is recognised by people as being of importance to them.

While those who lack necessities are more likely to feel poor than others, these feelings become notably more common once deprivation reaches the level of lack of three or more necessities: only 18 per cent of those lacking three or four necessities never feel poor. As living standards slip further, the regularity with which people feel poor increases: around three-

Table 5.10 *The self-perception of being poor (percentages)*

<i>'Do you think you could genuinely say you are poor now all the time, sometimes or never?'</i>	<i>Lack^a of necessities</i>				<i>Income:</i>	
	<i>0</i>	<i>1 or 2</i>	<i>3 or 4</i>	<i>5 or 6</i>	<i>7 or more</i>	<i>Bottom decile</i>
All the time	3	13	38	49	73	39
Sometimes	23	38	41	40	18	34
Never	72	47	18	11	9	27
Don't know	2	2	3	-	-	-

^aThroughout, 'lack' is taken as those who do not have an item because they cannot afford it and excludes those who do not have it because they do not want it.

quarters of those lacking seven or more necessities feel poor all the time. Mavis is among those whose living standards are of the very lowest:

I feel destitute, not poor.

It is interesting to compare the feelings of those with low living standards with those on low incomes (see Table 5.10). Those who lack three or four necessities are slightly more likely to feel poor than those in the bottom decile and those who lack five or more are distinctly more inclined to feel poor. This suggests that people judge their situation by their standard of living as much as by income *per se*. This point may seem rather obvious, but it is of interest because most measures of poverty have been based on income; this study is unusual in placing its primary emphasis on the consequences and results of an inadequate income instead.

Just existing

The lives of all those who lack the necessities for living in Britain in the 1980s are diminished, even demeaned. An 'enforced lack of socially perceived necessities' is not just an academic description of deprivation but represents real problems for the poor.

Although there are no sharp divisions between those lacking necessities, those who lack at least three necessities have been seen to be likely to experience deprivation in many of the key areas of life. Most cut back on food, some cut back on clothing, some on heating and some on their social obligations; others live in bad housing; nearly all cut out leisure activities. All cut back in more than one of these ways; some in all of these ways. By contrast, of those who lack one or two necessities, the only areas that a majority cut back on is leisure activities: primarily a holiday - a deprivation by the standards of today, albeit on its own relatively minimal. Their lives are affected, but not in such a pervasive way. This is of importance when considering the measurement of poverty and is discussed in the next chapter.

For the poor, there is a constant balancing act between different sets of needs. It is a balancing act that never works. Impossible decisions have to be made about what needs will be left unmet. These decisions depend on a variety of factors, from personal ones such as health to the numerous differences in social circumstances. And, of course, people's personal priorities differ: for example, some may cut back on basic aspects of clothing to ensure that they eat properly, while others may put up with an unvarying diet so that their standards in the more visible aspects of life are acceptable. For such reasons, some of the poor will cut back in one area and others elsewhere. As living standards slip further and further below the minimum, even this limited degree of choice slips away.

Among the most intensely deprived the situation is desperate. There is little but worry about making ends meet. There is rarely any spare cash to enable a break, even for a few hours, from the monotonous and depressing routine.

Mary, the single parent living an isolated and lonely life with her 5-year-old son, has reached the depths of despair:

There is no way out of this for me now. Work goes to kids on 'schemes' as they can be paid slave-labour rate - no-one wants a 43-year-old experienced office worker to whom they would need to pay £100 a week, so here I stay. My life is virtually at an end and I know that if I did not have my son, I would have taken my own life long before now rather than live like this; it is mere penurious existence.

