

## **Britain's Poorest Children: Severe and Persistent Poverty and Social Exclusion**

In September 2003 Save the Children UK held a conference to launch Britain's Poorest Children, a new study they had commissioned from CRSP. The conference was attended by senior civil servants, academics, and representatives of pressure groups and charities. It was a wonderful success, with a great deal of discussion centred around the report's main findings discussed briefly here. In particular, the implications the findings had for the government's review of child poverty policy held centre stage, with contributions from Nick Holgate, Director of Welfare Reform at HM Treasury and Mark Neale, Director of Children, Poverty & Housing Costs at the Department for Work and Pensions.

Britain's Poorest Children is the first study conducted in Britain on severe and persistent child poverty and social exclusion. Although there is a wealth of information about child poverty in Britain, very little is known about the extent of severe child poverty or about the children who are affected. This has important implications for the government's child poverty reduction policies; different policy measures may be required to lift children out of severe poverty. This new study investigates the extent of severe child poverty, its persistence and the overlaps between childhood poverty and social exclusion.

### Severe Poverty: Definitions and Extent

#### Box 1a

#### Using the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain (1999). Measure of Severe Childhood Poverty:

*Child materially deprived AND  
Child's parents materially deprived AND  
Household income below 40% of median*

<b>Severely Poor</b> <i>Poor on all 3 measures</i>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Non-Severely Poor</b> <i>Poor on 1 or 2 measures</i>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Not Poor</b> <i>Not poor on any measure</i>	<b>55%</b>

#### Box 1b

#### Using the British Household Panel Survey (1991-1999) Measure of Severe and Persistent Childhood Income Poverty (over various five-year periods):

<b>Persistent and severe poverty</b> <i>3 or more years in poverty, at least 1 year in severe poverty</i>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Persistent poverty only</b> <i>3 or more years in poverty, no years in severe poverty</i>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Short-term and severe poverty</b> <i>Less than 3 years in poverty, at least 1 year in severe poverty</i>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Short-term poverty only</b> <i>Less than 3 years in poverty, no years in severe poverty</i>	<b>18%</b>
<b>No poverty</b> <i>Not in poverty in any year</i>	<b>50%</b>

### Key Findings and Policy Implications: Child Poverty

#### Extent

- Relatively large proportions of British children experienced severe poverty (Boxes 1a and 1b).

*Policies need to benefit children facing the most severe poverty and the elimination of severe child poverty should be incorporated in official targets and progress monitored.*

#### Benefits

- There was a clear association between receiving Income Support (IS), or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and experiencing severe poverty. In 1999, 87% of children in severe poverty were receiving these benefits.

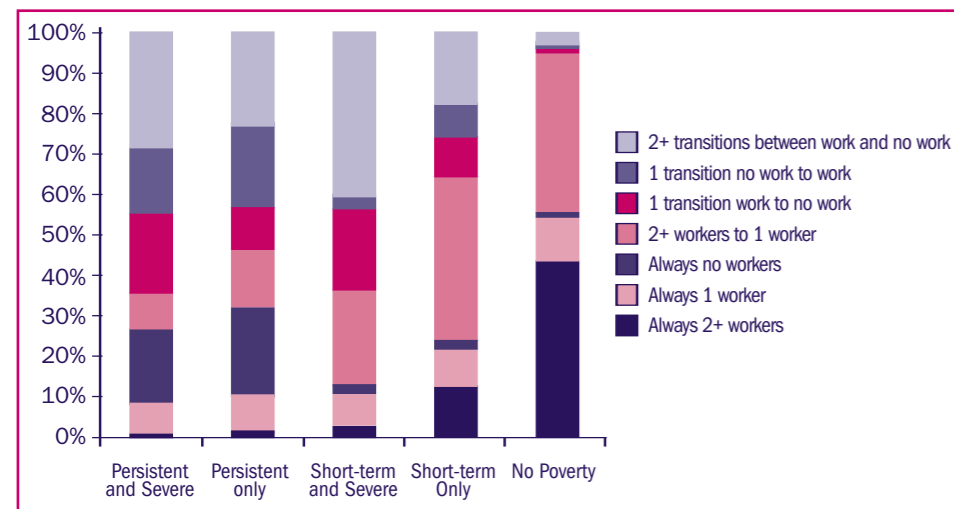
*Benefits must be adequate to keep children out of poverty.*

#### Work

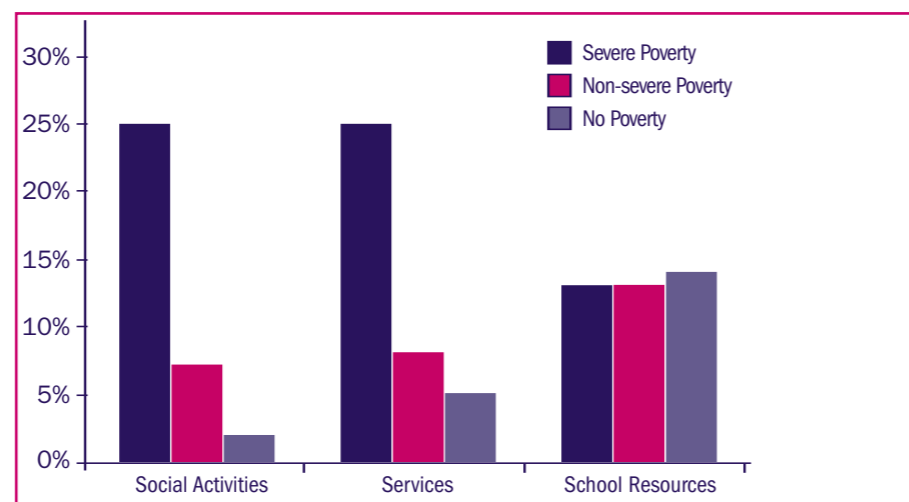
- Paid work provides the best protection from poverty. For example, in 1999 almost all non-poor children lived in households with at least one worker and approximately 70% had two or more workers. Over a five year period, around 20% of children in persistent poverty (with or without an experience of severe poverty) had lived in a household without workers in every year.
- BUT work did not always protect from poverty, particularly in households where there was only one worker. For example, over a five year period, 81% of children in persistent and

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**Figure 1 Household Work Transitions Experienced by Children over 5 years**

Source: British Household Panel Survey 1991-1999. Authors' calculations.

**Figure 2 Exclusion from Social Activities, Services and School Resources**

Source: Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain 1999. Authors' calculations.

severe poverty had a worker in the household in at least one year.

Policy must recognise that work is not possible for all parents at all times and, therefore, that benefits must be adequate to protect children from poverty at times when work is not an option.

#### Work and Benefit Transitions

- Transitions between having workers and no workers in the household, and between receiving and not receiving benefits were associated with children experiencing persistent and severe poverty. For example, over a five-year period, 57% of children in persistent and severe poverty and 42% of those in persistent poverty only had made at least one transition between receiving and not receiving IS or JSA, compared with only 21% of children who experienced no poverty. 65% of children in persistent and severe poverty had experienced at least one transition between having workers and no workers in the household, compared with 53% of children in persistent poverty only and 5% of children who experienced no poverty. (See Figure 1)

Protection needs to be increased for families during transition from benefits to work and from work to benefits. Policies must also support job retention.

#### Family Transitions

- Five years spent with a lone parent increased a child's chances of persistent poverty only. But experiencing change, from living in a couple family to a lone parent family for example, was particularly associated with persistent and severe childhood poverty. Over a five-year period, only 24% of children in persistent and severe poverty were in a lone parent family every year, compared to 42% of children in persistent poverty only.

Families need to be protected from poverty at times of change.

#### Key Findings and Policy Implications: Child Social Exclusion

##### Extent

The research explored three possible dimensions of social exclusion that might be expected to affect children's lives:

- children's own experiences of social exclusion;
- exclusion experiences that would affect the whole household;
- parents' experiences of exclusion.

Each of these dimensions included a number of measures which, in general, showed clear associations between poverty and social exclusion in childhood. A small number of examples are provided here.

#### Social Activities, Local Services and School Resources

- Children in severe poverty were much more likely than other children to be excluded from social activities because their parents could not afford them. Children in severe poverty were also more likely to be excluded from local services because the service was not available or not suitable, or it could not be afforded. However, exclusion from leisure services (particularly those for which charges are made) was far more common than from free, publicly provided services – almost all children had access to education and health services. Similarly, a lack of school resources was not related to experiences of poverty. (See Figure 2)

Access to leisure and social activities is critical to a child's quality of life, and the disadvantages that poor children face, in particular those in severe poverty, need immediate attention.

#### Housing and Local Area

- Problems with housing, such as shortage of space, damp walls or floors and lack of adequate heating, were much more likely to be experienced by children in poverty, severe or otherwise.

Improvements to housing quality should continue to be a high policy priority.

- Problems with the local area, such as noisy neighbours and vandalism, were, however, much more likely to be experienced by severely poor children than children in non-severe poverty, who, in turn, were much more likely to experience problems than non-poor children.

Government is right to emphasise policies aimed at improving specific localities.

#### Money, Savings and Debt

- Children in severe poverty were much more likely than other children, non-poor children in particular, to live in households: in which no adult had a bank or building society account; which, in the previous 12 months, had been seriously behind with utility and housing bills; and, which had borrowed money from sources other than a bank or building society.

Further policy attention is needed in terms of access to financial services and levels of debt among poorer households.

- The type of debt that parents had varied; parents of persistently poor children were far more likely to have mail order and social fund debts than parents of non-poor children. However, whilst 13% of persistently poor children had parents with social fund debts, just 4% of children in persistent and severe poverty did so.

This relatively low take-up of social fund loans suggests the need for an urgent review of the Social Fund.

- Over a five-year period, parents of children in persistent poverty were far more likely to have been unable to save in any year than parents of non-poor children. But it is encouraging that even among children in persistent and severe poverty, 42% had parents who had saved in at least one of the five years.

There is a need for flexible savings plans that families can pay into in 'good' years and take payment holidays in bad years without penalties.

#### Implications for Measuring Child Poverty

The analysis highlights a number of ways in which the measurement of child poverty can better meet policy makers' requirements:

- Deprivation-based measures of poverty need to be included in longitudinal surveys in order to understand the circumstances under which income becomes inadequate to provide necessities and, in turn, when income becomes adequate to do so.
- Including child-based measures of poverty (and social exclusion) is crucial for an understanding of children's circumstances.
- Childhood poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional and their manifestations need to be measured in the same survey in order to understand their inter-relationships.

Given the extent of the interest in the findings, it is CRSP's and Save the Children's intention to continue to develop and extend this work to inform policy in relation to Britain's poorest children.

**Project Team:** Laura Adelman, Sue Middleton, Karl Ashworth.

The summary and full report are available on Save the Children's website: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>

The report (price £12.95 plus p&p) is also available from:

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## Marriage in the 21st Century

### Introduction

Much research in the sociology of relationships and the family has focussed on fragility of modern relationships and, in particular, the nature and causes of divorce, and there is now a rich literature on this subject. However, less is known about marriages that remain intact over time and which factors, behaviours or attitudes might facilitate sustaining a marriage. In early 2003, the charity Care for the Family (CFF) commissioned the Centre for Research in Social Policy to conduct an exploratory study of the nature of marriage in the 21st Century and to shed some light onto the question 'what makes marriages last'. It aimed to accomplish this through collecting the views of married people about intra-marital behaviour and attitudes, which might contribute to the stability and duration of marriages in the present day.

### Methodology

To help in answering this question and to identify areas for further, in-depth exploration, CFF asked CRSP to undertake eight focus groups with married men and women, most of whom were in their first marriage. Only one partner of a married couple was recruited to the groups, both to facilitate recruitment and create greater openness among participants, whose contributions would not be compared to those of their husbands or wives. The objective of greater openness was also the reason for setting up separate groups for men and women.

Participants in the focus groups had been married for different lengths of time, which allowed researchers to explore and compare differences in attitudes towards marriages, the effects of time-varying social and cultural influences and changing

pattern of behaviours inside marriage. They also came from households with varying incomes to reflect potentially different levels of need and of financial dependence between partners, and different cultural values, which might have affected their marriages and their perceptions of marriage.

Sixty participants were selected, (32 men and 28 women). Low-income households were defined as a household with a total annual income of no more than £10,000. Thirty three participants came from households with income above £10,000 (Table 1). Participants were married for between five and over 50 years. Those married for 5-10 years or 10-30 years, and those married for 10-30 years or more than 30 years were paired in individual focus groups.

Focus Group Composition					
Gender	Income Group		Length of Marriage		
	Low Income Group	Medium/High Income	5-10 yrs	10-30 yrs	More than 30 yrs
Male	14	18	6	18	8
Female	13	15	4	14	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>

### Main Findings

- Participants perceived marriage to be a very important institution and mutual expression of commitment to them personally. However, they also noted that, for many in today's generation, marriage had obtained a lesser status than for those married in the 1960's or 1970's.
- Marriage in the 21st century was perceived to be changing mainly due to increased opportunities and expectations. The rigid norms that structured society 30 or 40 years ago constrained choice and opportunity, in particular for women, had broken down, which has resulted in more fluid roles for both men and women within the home and has brought about new forms of conflict, requiring patience, tolerance and negotiation, if marriages are to survive.
- This exploratory study produced evidence to suggest that younger married men and women continue to learn from, or at least be influenced by, their parents' values, which stress the importance of marriage as an institution and of commitment as the means to maintain one's marriage.

- At the same time, the study found that older generations, in particular women, also recognised that there were lessons, which they could learn from younger generations. Renegotiating domestic responsibilities, learning to acknowledge the presence and to support the identity and independence of the partner, and talking about, rather than ignoring or hiding, problems were most participants' ambitions, if not practices, in and for their marriage.

A number of key themes emerged from this study, which may offer anchor points for future investigations. They include (a) the effect of the life cycle on the 'management' of marriages; (b) the impact on changing societal norms and values on the management of a marriage; (c) gendered perceptions of, and gendered positions of influence and power inside marriage; and (d) the use of verbal and non-verbal communication, including gestures, threats and manipulation, to achieve personal objectives and marital stability.

**Project Team:** Andreas Cebulla, Liz Sutton, Sue Middleton.

## Drugs and Alcohol Misuse as Barriers to Employment

Government policy to help the unemployed into work increasingly focuses on the needs of particular vulnerable groups. *Progress2work* is the latest innovative programme designed to assist former drug users to regain a hold in the labour market. Efforts are also underway to provide targeted assistance to the unemployed for whom past alcohol addiction has prevented a return to work. Research at the Centre for Research in Social Policy, commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), has identified barriers that drug and alcohol users experience in obtaining paid employment.

The study identified some 30 specialist employment service programmes for drug and/or alcohol users, most of which were integrated with, or closely connected to, treatment services. Although few of these programmes had been evaluated, some common lessons for the effectiveness of these interventions emerged. Most importantly, employment service programmes sought a high level of inter-agency co-ordination, collaboration and communication, not least to ensure a climate of trust between treatment and employment support service providers as well as between providers and substance users. Support for substance users involved one-to-one case management, continuity of support after placement, relapse prevention and referrals to other support services (e.g. benefits/financial; childcare; transport).

Interviews with substance users and treatment support service providers reinforced the perception that, in order to be successful and trusted, employment service providers ought to work closely with treatment service providers. Substance users and treatment service providers emphasised the need for employment service providers to understand the multiplicity and diversity of problems faced by (former) substance users, and the benefits of case management. Treatment service providers also pointed out that employment service providers needed to be aware that customers might misunderstand the advisors' roles, responsibilities and their intentions. Likewise, substance users might have an incorrect, typically positively biased, perception of their own behaviour and, in particular, their ability to work. For these reasons, service providers needed special training in understanding and anticipating potentially erratic behaviour and highly sensitive perceptions and reactions of substance users so to avoid a collapse in communication and to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of support services.

Poor mental or physical health were identified as substance users' main barriers to employment. However, many also suffered from eroding social networks, homelessness, living in adverse social environments, low confidence or fluctuating motivation to resist addiction and to take steps to change one's lifestyle. Interrupted work histories, gaps in CVs, and the need to disclose health problems and criminal records to employers were perceived as the greatest obstacles to obtaining work.

Most substance users participating in this research had moderate and, for this reason very likely, realistic expectations of their future employment. Their main ambition was to return to the type of work they had previously pursued or to update their job skills through training. They also would have liked to start their entry or return to work by taking on low-skilled jobs in order slowly to develop the daily routines, which are required for successfully holding down a job. To assist substance users in achieving these ambitions, both they and treatment service providers argued for a step-wise (re)integration into the primary labour market, involving the private, public and voluntary sectors. Some substance users noted the benefits of starting this process by working part-time and in relatively low-stress environments so to learn, over time, to cope with the social, physical and mental pressures associated with employment.

It was estimated that approximately 270,000 recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance or sickness or disability benefits engage in *problematic*<sup>1</sup> drinking, while some 40,000 individuals who, based on their reported economic activity, were assumed to be claiming social security benefit, were Class A drug users. Both estimates referred to individuals living in private households. Estimates of drug users produced on behalf of the Home Office (HO) have suggested that some 270,000 unemployed individuals are drug users<sup>2</sup>. The HO estimate was, therefore, substantially higher than that produced by this study. However, unlike the latter, the HO estimate referred to individuals who typically lived in communal establishments. Although it was likely that both drug user estimates partially overlapped, they should best be seen as complementary. On this basis, the total number of benefit claimants with drug problems in Britain would be closer to 300,000. There are currently no estimates of benefit claimants with alcohol problems living in communal establishments. However, it is likely that many alcohol users among benefit claimants live in such establishments or, in fact, are homeless.

**Project Team:** Andreas Cebulla, Noel Smith, Liz Sutton, Jill Vincent, Claire Heaver.

1. Problematic drinking was defined as consuming over 50 units of alcohol (men) or over 35 units of alcohol (women) per week.

2. Godfrey, C., Eaton, G., McDougall, C., and Culyer, A. (2002) The economic and social costs of Class A drug use in England and Wales, 2000. Home Office Research Study 249. London: Home Office.

## Businesses' Responses to the Disability Discrimination Act

### Background

For more than 30 years disabled people in Britain have been calling for legislation which protects them from various forms of discrimination and which entitles them to the same rights as other members of society.

### The Disability Discrimination Act

Under Part II of the Disability Discrimination Act, which came into force on the 2nd December 1996, it is unlawful for employers covered by the Act to discriminate against employees or job applicants on the grounds of disability. As part of the protection offered by the Act employers may have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to their recruitment arrangement and/or premises so that disabled people are not at a substantial disadvantage compared to other people. At that time the Act applied to employers with 20 or more employees. On the 1st December 1998 the exemption threshold was reduced to 15. The Government intends to remove it in October 2004 and cover most currently excluded occupations.

Part III of the Act places specific requirements on the way goods, facilities or services are offered to disabled people. It is unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability or impairment and reasonable adjustments must be made. This includes the provision of auxiliary aids or services by alternative methods, as well as overcoming physical barriers by providing the service using a reasonable alternative method.

On 1st October 2004 the final stages of the access duties in Part III of the DDA will come into force. Part III will then require service providers to remove, alter or avoid physical barriers or provide alternative means of using the service, where physical features of their services make access for disabled people unreasonably difficult or impossible.

### Research aims and methods

The research explores how employers and service providers are responding to both previous and forthcoming provisions of the DDA. The report presents findings based on around 2000 telephone interviews and case studies of 38 employers and service providers.

#### The research objectives are:

- To explore how employers and service providers have responded to existing requirements of the DDA, in particular policies and practices on:
  - Recruitment
  - Employment
  - Service provision

#### Specifically, to examine:

- Awareness of the Act
- Awareness of sources of advice and information
- Adjustments made and planned

#### To explore whether, and if so, how:

- Service providers are preparing for new access duties to be introduced in October 2004
- Employers are preparing for the abolition of the 15 employee exemption threshold in October 2004

To investigate whether organisations (acting as employers and service providers) are adopting a holistic approach to the requirements of the Act.

To identify the development of best practice and sources of information.

### Key findings

- Employers (particularly small employers and/or those who have not employed a disabled person) are lacking in knowledge of disability and do not have as broad a perception of disability as the DDA. Disability still carries connotations of physical and visible impairments and there are misunderstandings and prejudices around mental illness.
- Knowledge of the employment provisions (Part II) of the DDA was higher among larger organisations, and in public and voluntary sector organisations, as well as among employers at workplaces where there had been disabled employees. Smaller employers in particular (those with fewer than 15 employees) were unsure of the implications of the Act for their organisation.
- Knowledge of the forthcoming changes concerning the provision of services (Part III) was usually higher in organisations within the public and voluntary sector.
- Nearly all employers (94 per cent) stated that their workplace always sought to recruit the best person for the job, regardless of any disability. Yet many (33 per cent) felt that taking on a disabled person is a major risk for an employer, and/or that their workplace would find it difficult to retain an employee who became disabled (47 per cent). Workplaces which had employed people with disabilities were likely to report that it is easy to employ a disabled person.
- Over four fifths of employers that have had disabled employees (83 per cent) and nearly three quarters of service providers said that adjustments to assist disabled people had been made or were planned. However, adjustments made by service providers tended to be for customers with physical impairments.
- The cost of making adjustments was of concern to some employers, especially small ones, in the case studies. However, 72 per cent of employers in the survey who had made changes said that it had been easy to make the adjustments while only 14 per cent said it had been difficult.
- The case studies indicated that the DDA had acted both as a driver and a 'road map' for those organisations where a commitment to disabled people was already a core value.

The study was carried out in collaboration with British Market Research Bureau (BMRB).

**Project Team:** Dr. Simon Roberts, Claire Heaver, Katherine Hill, Joanne Rennison, Dr. Bruce Stafford.

### Farewells

CRSP said goodbye to:

- Karl Ashworth, Head of Statistical Resources, left in August 2003 to take up a post at the Office for National Statistics in Cardiff.
- Siobhan Macdonald, CRSP's Social Policy scholarship student, left in June 2003 to complete her final year at Loughborough University.
- Rita Khatri, Project Administrator, left in October 2003 to take up a post at Alliance and Leicester Head Office.
- Andreas Cebulla, Assistant Director of CRSP, left in December to undertake a Research Director position at the National Centre for Social Research in London.

### CRSP Welcomed

- Sandra Reyes De-Beaman who joined as a Research Fellow on 3 February 2003.
- Antonia Ivaldi who joined as a Research Associate on 8 September 2003.
- Line Predelli who joined as a Research Associate on 1 October 2003.
- Elspeth Pound who joined as a Research Fellow on 1 October 2003.
- Kate Ashton-Brooks, CRSP's Social Policy scholarship student on 1 October 2003 for 9 months.

### Congratulations to

- Barbara Dobson and Roger Goodwin on the birth of Rory Pádraig Goodwin on 18 June 2003.

### News

CRSP will be holding a one day conference on 17th September 2004, at Loughborough University to celebrate 21 years of social policy research in the Centre. The conference will provide an opportunity for those involved in social policy making, including Government and the research community to come together to examine the role of research in the development of policy over the past two decades and explore future directions focusing on the related themes of work and life transitions, poverty and social exclusion, and the delivery of welfare services.

Further details will be available from Emma Gregory (E.Gregory@lboro.ac.uk) on +44 (0)1509 223372 and placed on our website [www.crsp.ac.uk](http://www.crsp.ac.uk) within the next couple of months.

CRSP is an autonomous research centre based in the Social Sciences Department at Loughborough University. The Centre was founded in 1983 by Professor Adrian Webb. Dr Bruce Stafford and Sue Middleton are Directors.

For further information about the research papers described here, to order Working Papers, to receive back issues of Briefings or our latest Annual Report, or to be added to the CRSP mailing list, please contact:

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