

THROUGH YOUNG EYES

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The Children's Commission on Poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

There are currently over 3 million children living in poverty in the UK today and living standards are set to be a key battleground in the next general election. Children and families are among those hardest hit by a decline in living standards, with childhood poverty rates set to rise. Yet the voices of children are largely absent from the debates on poverty, an issue that can dramatically alter the course of their lives.

The Children's Society believes it is time to start listening and to raise the stakes by highlighting the impact of poverty on children's lives. **That is why we have set up The Children's Commission on Poverty – to make sure children's views are at the heart of the debate on child poverty.**

A panel of 15 young people will explore children's attitudes to poverty and discover what it means for children to live in families desperately struggling to make ends meet. Importantly, it will ask what can be done to improve living standards for the most vulnerable groups of children.

Through Young Eyes launches this commission with an exploration of what we know about children's experiences of poverty. It is also the first piece of evidence to be submitted to the panel. The findings are based on some initial interviews and consultations with children and young people, and a survey of around 2000 children aged 10-17 years old to find out their views on poverty and experiences of it. It includes some stark findings.

Of children who said their family was 'not well off at all':

- **Three quarters (76%) said they often worried about how much money their family has**
- **More than half (53%) said their home was too cold last winter**
- **One in four (26%) said their home suffered from damp or mould.**

Overall:

- **Almost half of all children (49%) thought that childhood poverty had increased over the last 10 years**
- **Four in 10 children (41%) thought that childhood poverty would increase over the next 10 years while less than one in 10 thought it would decrease.**

2. CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY

The relationship between childhood poverty and a range of poor outcomes for children are well evidenced. *Through Young Eyes* looks at children's accounts of their own lives alongside survey evidence from children to examine how poverty is experienced by children in the UK.

We found:

Money and going without

Of children who said they thought their family was 'not well off at all', three quarters (76%) said they often worried about how much money there is to go around in their family.

'Both my parents have steady jobs, but it is tighter... there is less money, it is getting harder.'

Housing

Over half (53%) of children who said their family is not 'well off at all' said that they do not have enough space, while damp or mould was an issue for just over a quarter (26%).

We also asked children about the level of warmth in their homes last winter. Over half of children who said that their family is 'not well off at all' (54%) said that their homes were much or a bit colder than they would have liked.

Poverty and stigma

Children's accounts often highlight their inner worries and fears of social difference and stigma. The children that we consulted with talked about feeling embarrassed about having less than others and feeling judged by their peers.

'We are still judged on it now sometimes, some people say 'oh it's a council house kid''

In our survey, we asked children if they had ever felt embarrassed or experienced bullying because their parents do not have enough money. Over a half (55%) of the children who said that their family is 'not well off at all' said they had felt embarrassed and 14% of them had experienced some form of bullying as a result.

Fears for the future

Large proportions of children in our survey thought that childhood poverty had increased over the last 10 years (49%) and would continue to increase over the next 10 years (41%). Economic forecasts also suggest that childhood poverty will rise over the next decade.

3. CONCLUSION

Through Young Eyes is a wake up call, highlighting the experiences of children in poverty in the UK. More than half of children who think their family is 'not well off at all' said their home was too cold last winter and a quarter said that their home had damp or mould.

However, we have barely scratched the surface of the problem. As a result, it is not the intention of this report to make recommendations for change in policy and practice. Instead the report demonstrates the context in which we launch The Children's Commission on Poverty and raises many issues which we believe require additional exploration and debate.

What next?

By drawing on the findings of this report, through gathering evidence with children and young people across the country, and through commissioning additional research and analysis, the panel of young people will dig deeper into the realities of life for children in poverty. This will enable them to develop their own conclusions based on hard evidence and make recommendations for change.

The Children's Society will work with the commission to keep the public in general, and young people in particular, updated on developments in their work. Together we will also provide opportunities for everyone in society to comment on and debate the issues being raised and considered by the commission.

By seeing childhood poverty through young eyes, The Children's Commission on Poverty has a chance to make a real difference for disadvantaged children across the UK.

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Please stay in touch, to follow the young commissioners on their journey, hear about findings and see life through young eyes.

www.childrenscommission.org.uk Text 'See' to 81400 to join in.

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