

Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) Background Paper **on Child Poverty**

Introduction

Child¹ poverty has long been recognised as having an adverse impact on children's physical and mental health. The articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underpin the requirement that world governments must meet children's basic needs and help them reach their full potential. In particular, two articles relate to poverty, Article 6 states that children and young people have the right to survive and develop and Article 27 the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Some Facts

Over 4 million children live in a low-income family in UK. This means nearly 1 in 3 children live in households with incomes below 60% of the median, after housing costs 70% of children living in poverty have at least one parent in paid work, highlighting the issue of in-work poverty.

1 in 5 key worker households have children living in poverty.

49% of children in single-parent families are in poverty.

47% of children in families with three or more children live in poverty

There are very high poverty rates for some groups in the UK e.g. 67% Bangladeshi children, 58% Pakistani children and 51% Black children are living in poverty (from Child Poverty Action Group statistics).

Poverty means that children go without basics, they may be hungry, they may not have a bed, they have reduced opportunities to develop interests and talents.

Poverty is often linked with poor housing and homelessness, Joseph Rowntree Foundation have long recognised that poverty and low incomes prevent people from accessing potential housing options. Shelter England state that children living in poor or overcrowded conditions are more likely to have respiratory problems, to be at risk of infections, and have mental health problems.

The impact on child health is well recognised and detailed e.g. in Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health resources, for example children born to parents living in poverty are more likely to have low birth weights; are less likely to survive the first year of life; are more likely to have asthma and more likely to have poor mental health.

¹ The term child/children is used to describe infants (including neonates), children and young people up to the age of 25 years

Families with children who have disabilities or health needs find it more difficult to work (especially full-time hours) due to increased difficulty in arranging childcare and have extra demands on their time such as managing additional health and care needs, providing direct care and therapies, and attending appointments.

Current UK Activity

The UK government established a Child Poverty Taskforce (17 July 2024), launched by the Prime Minister. The Ministerial Taskforce is being led by the Work and Pensions Secretary of State and the Education Secretary. The Taskforce aims to kickstart work to address child poverty. The Child Poverty Unit, based in the Cabinet Office, and will report to the Taskforce. The focus of work will be on how to use levers related to income, employment, housing, child health, childcare and education to alleviate child poverty and to ensure the Government's manifesto commitment that "no child should grow up in poverty" is achieved. Much of the data on poverty relates to the UK rather than England specific information, although government websites in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales do have country specific data..

The Scottish government places a strong emphasis on addressing child poverty through various measures and legislation. Key initiatives include the Scottish Child Payment which was increased to £25 per week, benefiting over 300,000 children. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets targets to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030, aiming for less than 10% of children to be living in relative poverty.

The Welsh government's approach to tackling child poverty is laid out in the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2024). It sets the direction for Welsh Government actions to tackle child poverty over the next decade or more and to meet the ambitions for children and young people in Wales, no matter what their circumstances or background. It also provides a framework to maximise the levers to eradicate child poverty. It highlights that 28% of children in Wales, or approximately 190,000 under-19s, live in relative income poverty after housing costs. The Welsh Government also underscores its commitment to children's rights, aligning the strategy with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Northern Ireland government recognises child poverty as a significant issue. There are 444,000 children in Northern Ireland 103,400 of these children live in poverty Most children in poverty in Northern Ireland (about 61%) are in households where at least one parent is employed.

Lord Darzi's Report 'Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England' highlights significant concerns about child poverty and its impact on health. It identifies a strong link between poverty and poor health outcomes, particularly among children. For example, children in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to suffer from obesity by age five and three times more likely to be obese by age 11. These groups of children also face greater risks of mental health problems

and developmental issues due to reduced access to health services. The report emphasizes that child health has been declining over the last 15 years, with rising hospital admissions for conditions like eating disorders and lengthy Emergency Department waiting times for young children. This 'silent crisis' is particularly severe among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, exacerbating inequalities in health outcomes. The report calls for urgent investments in community services and early intervention programs to tackle these disparities, to improve access to care, and to prevent long-term negative impacts on children's health and life chances

Sources

[Barnardo's](#)

[Council for Disabled Children](#)

RCPCH [website](#).

Child Poverty Action Group [website](#).

[Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

[Shelter](#)

[Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission](#)

[Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy 2024](#)

[Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland \(NICCY\) website](#)

[Lord Darzi's Report 'Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England'](#)

September 2024