

## **The Changing Nature of Deprivation in Britain - The Inner Cities Perspective**

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### **SUMMARY**

This paper analyses the findings of a survey evaluating the nature and extent of poverty in Britain, and compares them with the results of a similar survey conducted in 1983. It provides readers with insight into social change under the premiership of Mrs. Thatcher, based on an original survey methodology.

In February 1983, Market & Opinion Research International (MORI) conducted the first explicit national survey of poverty for fifteen years, as the basis of the award-winning television series Breadline Britain, made by London Weekend Television (LWT). This survey developed the pioneering approach of Professor Peter Townsend, which argued that poverty is a relative phenomenon which is most appropriately measured by variations in living standards and styles. The two significant developments made in the Breadline Britain survey incorporated the first attempt to reflect the public's own criteria by evaluating which items - from a wide-ranging list covering diet, heating, household amenities, social activities, and clothing - the British public consider to be necessities to which everyone, regardless of economic status, should be entitled. Second, it differed from Townsend's work by distinguishing taste from deprivation per se.

In 1990 the survey was updated. This new survey formed the backbone of a series of television programmes entitled Breadline Britain 1990s, transmitted in April and May 1991. There were three important methodological developments in the 1990 study. First, the list of items was extended, to include a number of luxury goods. Second, the survey explored the adequacy of provision of public services, and the quality of the environment in which respondents live. Third, we included a booster sample of people living in deprived urban areas in order to be able to analyse the findings of particular demographic sub-groups in more detail than the national sample would permit.

The findings reveal a high level of agreement about minimum living standards across all sections of the community, and that the upward trend in living standards in the 1980s has led to higher expectations of what people should be entitled to expect.

The survey also establishes the extent of deprivation in Britain today. In a country with 55 million people some 7 million go without essential clothing, while around 10 million cannot afford adequate housing, due to financial hardship. One person in five lacks three or more of the items which most people consider necessities. The paper describes how the findings have been publicised and have fed in to the debate on the inner cities, and concludes by showing how survey research can play a valuable role in the field of social policy.

## CONTEXT

In 1979 the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, came to office ready to accept increasing inequality: "Let our children grow tall, and some taller than others if they have it in them to do so," she had said in 1975. At the start of her first full year in office she said that her Government's programme " . . . means more inequality, but it means you drag up the poor people because there are more resources to do so". Or, as she put it more graphically the previous day: "No one would have remembered the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions. He had money as well".

In practice this meant cutting public spending and selling government-owned assets, both to reduce state "interference" and to release the money for tax cuts. In 1979 Mrs Thatcher's first public spending White Paper said: "Public expenditure is at the heart of Britain's economic difficulties". The Government's success in cutting public spending is debatable, but it has been a central aim of British economic policy in the 12 years since.

There have been hints of a less stern view. Norman Fowler, the Social Services Secretary responsible for major changes in the social security system in 1985, told the Conservative Party conference that year: "We could take no pride in the rebuilding of a prosperity that remained the privilege of a few".

But while Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister nothing suggested that her Government's underlying attitudes had changed. In 1989, John Moore - at the time the Social Services Secretary and a favourite of Mrs. Thatcher - attacked the relative view of poverty, which allows that people can be materially better off than they were and yet remain impoverished. "By almost every material measure it is possible to contrive," he said, "not only are those with lower incomes not getting poorer, they are substantially better off than they have ever been before".

He rejected criticism from those who have argued for a relative definition of poverty: "Knowing that their motive is not compassion for the less well-off, it is an attempt to discredit our real economic achievement in protecting and improving the living standards of our people. Their purpose in calling 'poverty' what is in reality simply inequality, is so that they can call western material capitalism a failure".

He rejected attempts to define a minimum income based on the lists of things people "need". "I do not see it as my business to start laying down some official list of what people should be spending their money on". And he specifically attacked the arguments of Professor Peter Townsend, based on an analysis of indicators of people's participation in society. "The poverty lobby would, on their definition, find poverty in paradise", Moore concluded.

Officially, therefore, poverty does not exist in Britain. The Government does not define a "poverty line". It argues that an objective definition is impossible, that any attempt to count the poor is doomed because it will depend on the subjective judgments of experts about what it is to be poor.

The two **Breadline Britain** surveys have tried to overcome this criticism, first by turning to the views of society as a whole, and second by asking them to talk about things which no one should have to go without, rather than about "poverty" as such. We asked a national sample to consider a range of items, from video recorders to indoor toilets, and to say of each item if it was necessary, something no-one should have to go without, and which everyone should be able to afford. The word "necessities" is used in this paper to refer to those items which more than half the sample classed as necessities.

These are not the kind of necessities which early investigators of poverty would have recognised: the phone did not even exist, and to begin with it was a luxury only the rich could afford. But today people have different, higher standards. It is true that some - 43% - think that a phone, however desirable, is not necessary; but the majority, do deem it a necessity. (In fact 88% of households have one and 62% say they couldn't do without it.)

Once interviewees had identified the items they deemed necessary, we asked them whether they had the items, and, if not, whether they did not want them, or whether they lacked them because they could not afford them. People who choose to go without things that others regard as necessities are not obviously poor as a result. Nor is it obvious that someone is poor simply because they are forced to go without a single necessity – although those who are have a quality of life which already falls below the standard approved by most people in Britain.

Using additional information from interviewees about their income, health, housing and so on, and a series of statistical tests, we established that there is a clear division in the population between what might be called the haves – who may even lack one or two of the necessities – and the have-nots, who not only lack necessities but a great deal else besides. In this paper we use the words "poor" and "poverty" to describe the circumstances of the have-nots.

Of course, poverty isn't what it used to be. It doesn't kill quite so often as it used to – although the poorer you are, the greater your chances of dying earlier – but it still hurts: today's poor not only go without things that most people believe no one today should have to go without; they are also cut off from normal social activity; trapped in the worst housing, if they have homes at all; and, increasingly, they find themselves with less support from the social security system.

The survey for **Breadline Britain 1990s** is an update on and development of pioneering research carried out for London Weekend Television's series **Breadline Britain**, first transmitted in 1983. The work has been widely quoted, not least in evidence to Parliament's all-party Social Services Committee. And its techniques, building from a consensual definition of deprivation, have since been used by other researchers both in Britain and abroad. Repeating the original survey in Britain means that for the first time we can now also look at how standards change in a society, as well as what they are.

The findings are based on a national sample of 1319 adults aged 16+, interviewed face-to-face in their homes, between 14 and 25 July 1990. Additional fieldwork among households living in particularly deprived areas was carried out between 26 November and 9 December 1990, with 512 interviews conducted face-to-face in home; this research was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Quotas were based on sex, age and working status. Aggregated data was weighted by age, household type, tenure and ACORN housing type to be representative of the population of Great Britain.

## PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF A MINIMUM LIVING STANDARD

To find out whether some people in Britain today have living standards unacceptable to society, respondents were first asked to class items – by “the living standards you feel all adults should have in Britain today” – into those “which you think are necessary, and which all adults should be able to afford and which they should not have to do without” or, on the other hand, those “which may be desirable, but are not necessary”. The process was repeated for certain items which relate only to families with children.

It is important to be quite clear, first, that the items offered as indicators of participation are not, in any sense, a shopping list: no implication is intended, and no one should infer, that poverty would in some way be abolished if everyone in Britain was suddenly presented with a parcel containing exactly the items that they lack. The items are indicators, and sometimes the experience, of poverty; but they are not poverty itself.

It is also true that if the definition of poverty is taken as some arbitrary multiple of average income, say, poverty will always be with us. But the income levels at which people become deprived are not, in our analysis, arbitrary: they are derived contingently from observation of the extent to which people go without items agreed by a majority of those interviewed to be necessities. It is conceivable that there could be a society in which everyone was able to afford all of the items which it was commonly agreed no one should have to go without.

More than three-quarters of the sample thought that 16 of the items were necessities; another 7 items were classed as necessities by more than two in three respondents. Altogether, more than a half classed 32 of the total of 44 items as necessities.

This shows wide agreement in society on what a minimum standard should be. Most of the items considered essential by a majority of people would not have appeared in the subsistence standards of the past. The list also illustrates vividly how standards change as general living conditions improve, even within a relatively brief period. In particular, four of the items which now qualify as necessities failed to reach 50% acceptance in our 1983 survey: a phone, a best outfit, outings for children, and being able to afford having children's friends for tea fortnightly.

The response to some of the items offered for judgment cannot be compared directly with the response in 1983: the description of three items was re-worded slightly (for example, the 1983 item “a roast joint or its equivalent once a week” had the word “vegetarian” added before “equivalent” in 1991, in order to reflect the move away from meat-eating in the 1980s), while other items were added to take account of changing tastes. Most of the items where a direct comparison is possible show a small increase in the proportion of people regarding them as necessities: these higher expectations reflect the upward trend in living standards. Six have increased their score by more than 10%: in order of their perceived importance, these include a fridge (+15%), two meals a day for adults (+26%), toys for children such as dolls or models (+13%), a telephone (+13%), an outing for children once a week (also up by 13 points) and children's friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight (+15%). Other noteworthy increases are recorded on three meals a day for children, carpets, a television, a washing machine, being able to afford presents, and a night out fortnightly.

The findings indicate that people in Britain in 1990 have rejected an "absolute" definition of poverty. This is no longer seen in terms of the bare necessities of life. Most appear to hold a "relative" view of what constitutes poverty. This is an important finding, which underlines the importance of adjusting minimum living standards in line with changes in general living conditions. The public implicitly accept that everyone, including the poor, is entitled to a living standard which reflects the standards of the times they live in, not those of the past. **People are in effect saying that the poor should not be excluded from the rise in national prosperity during the eighties.**

Two items show a loss of support (although neither has, yet, dropped below 50%): an annual holiday - down by 9% - and two pairs of all-weather shoes, which registers a decline of four percentage points.

A pilot survey provided valuable information on the supplementary list of items to be added to those asked about in 1983. It showed, for example, that the public makes relatively little distinction between the importance of fresh fruit on the one hand and fresh vegetables on the other; that the public believes every child over seven of different sex should be entitled to have his or her own bedroom; that it was more appropriate to ask about quarterly than monthly visits to friends in other parts of the country; that the item "a freezer" caused confusion in the minds of people owning fridge freezers; that there was unanimity on the importance of having sufficient locks and other devices to keep their home secure; and that it was felt more appropriate to ask about regular savings of £10 rather than £20 per month.

Table 1 shows the proportions regarding each item in the 1990 list as a necessity, with equivalent figures for 1983. Of the items added in 1990, following the pilot survey with a longer list, nine in ten consider a decent state of decoration in the home, home contents insurance, and fresh fruit/vegetables daily to be necessities, while at the other end of the scale items which reflect some of the social changes of the past decade are felt to be desirable rather than essential - most notably a dishwasher, a home computer, a video, an annual holiday abroad and a meal in a restaurant once a month, none of which is considered essential by more than one in six of our sample.

To gauge the strength of feeling with which people hold their views, we asked people if they would be willing to pay an extra 1p in the £ income tax to enable everyone to afford the items they class as necessities. Three out of four people, 75%, said they would, and 18% would not. These are almost exactly the same proportions as in 1983 (74% and 20% respectively). Respondents were also asked about an extra 5p in the £. In 1983 25% of the population said they would be willing to pay that much, but 59% would not. Now the interviewees are evenly divided - 44% would and 44% would not.

Part of the increased support for higher taxation is probably due to the fact that in 1983 the basic rate of income tax was 30p in the £, compared with 25p in 1990. Nevertheless, the response is clear: people believe, more strongly than in 1983, in the necessity of the items they have listed and say they are willing to back a minimum standard for all even at their own expense. In practice a simple tax rise would make little sense: many of the worst off would end up paying more extra tax than they would gain in other ways. Leaving that aside, however, what remains is a strong indication of popular support for government intervention designed to improve the living standards of the worst-off.

TABLE 1 - PERCENTAGE DEEMING ITEMS TO BE NECESSARY

	1983	1990	Change
	%	%	% +/-
A damp-free home	96	98	+2
An inside toilet (not shared with another household)	96	97	+1
Heating to warm living areas of the home if it's cold	97	97	0
Beds for everyone in the household	94	95	+1
Bath, not shared with another household	94	95	+1
A decent state of decoration in the home	-	92	-
Fridge	77	92	+15
Warm waterproof coat	87	91	+4
†Three meals a day for children	82	90	+8
Two meals a day (for adults)	64	90	+26
Home contents insurance	-	88	-
Fresh fruit/vegetables daily	-	88	-
†Toys for children eg dolls or models	71	84	+13
†Separate bedrooms for children over 10 of different sexes	77	82	+5
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms in the home	70	78	+8
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	63	77	+14
Celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas	69	74	+5
Two pairs of all-weather shoes	78	74	-4
Washing machine	67	73	+6
Presents for friends or family once a year	63	69	+6
†Out of school activities, eg sports, orchestra, Scouts	-	69	-
Regular savings of £10/month for "rainy days" or retirement	-	68	-
Hobby or leisure activity	64	67	+3
New, not secondhand, clothes	64	65	+1
A roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week	67	64	-3
†Leisure equipment for children eg sports equipment/bicycle	57	61	+4
A television	51	58	+7
Telephone	43	56	+13
An annual week's holiday away, not with relatives	63	54	-9
A "best outfit" for special occasions	48	54	+6
† An outing for children once a week	40	53	+13
†Children's friends round for tea/snack fortnightly	37	52	+15
A dressing gown	38	42	+4
A night out fortnightly	36	42	+6
Fares to visit friends in other parts of the country 4 times a year	-	39	-
†Special lessons such as music, dance or sport	-	39	-
Friends/family for a meal monthly	32	37	+5
A car	22	26	+4
Pack of cigarettes every other day	14	18	+4
Restaurant meal monthly	-	17	-
Holidays abroad annually	-	17	-
A video	-	13	-
A home computer	-	5	-
A dishwasher	-	4	-

† For families with children

Vegetarian option added in 1990

Two hot meals in the 1983 survey

## HOW MANY GO WITHOUT?

The survey also investigated the living standards of the interviewees themselves: which items from the list they have; which they choose to do without; and which they would like but can't afford. The proportion of people who report that they lack items because they can't afford them is shown in Table 2.

To get an idea of what this means in terms of living standards, we grouped related items together and counted the people who lack one or more items from each bundle. Using our sample figures we estimate that in the population of 55 million people in Britain as a whole:

- Roughly 10 million people cannot afford adequate housing: for example, their home is unheated, damp or the older children have to share bedrooms.
- About 7 million go without essential clothing – such as a warm waterproof coat – because of lack of money.
- There are approximately 2½ million children who are forced to go without at least one of the things they need, like three meals a day, toys, or out of school activities.
- Around 5 million people are not properly fed by today's standards – they don't have enough fresh fruit and vegetables, or two meals a day, for example.
- About 6½ million people can't afford one or more essential household goods, like a fridge, a phone, or carpets for living areas.
- At least one of the necessities which many consider make life worth living – hobbies, holidays, celebrations etc – are too expensive for about 21 million people.
- More than 31 million people – over half the population – live without minimal financial security: they say they cannot save £10 a month, or insure the contents of their homes, or both.

But the research goes further, to identify and count the poor in Britain today. Other researchers have made their own estimates of the numbers in poverty (and their findings are remarkably consistent with ours). What makes this survey unique is that the poor can be identified on the basis of standards approved by society.

The results show that some of the people who cannot afford one or two of these necessities are not on low incomes and do not seem to be deprived in other ways. However a series of statistical tests shows that those who lack three or more are heavily concentrated among those with the lowest incomes and who are deprived in other ways.

On this basis, 11 million people in Britain today – one in five of the population – are poor. The total includes more than 3 million children. Upward of 6 million people, one in 10, cannot afford five or more necessities, a level of deprivation that affects their whole way of life. And more than 3.5 million lack seven, or in many cases many more, necessities: theirs are lives of intense poverty.

TABLE 2 - PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS LACKING ITEMS

	1983	1990	Change
	%	%	+/-
A damp-free home	7	2	-5
An inside toilet (not shared with another household)	2	†	-2
Heating to warm living areas of the home if it's cold	5	3	-2
Beds for everyone in the household	1	1	0
Bath, not shared with another household	2	*	-2
A decent state of decoration in the home	-	15	-
Fridge	2	1	-1
Warm waterproof coat	7	4	-3
†Three meals a day for children	2	*	-2
Two meals a day (for adults)	3	1	-2
Home contents insurance	-	10	-
Fresh fruit/vegetables daily	-	6	-
†Toys for children eg dolls or models	2	2	0
†Separate bedrooms for every child over 10 of different sexes	3	7	+4
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms in the home	2	2	0
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	8	4	-4
Celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas	4	4	0
Two pairs of all-weather shoes	9	5	-4
Washing machine	6	4	-2
Presents for friends or family once a year	5	5	0
Out of school activities, eg sports, orchestra, Scouts	-	10	-
Regular savings of £10 a month for "rainy days" or retirement	-	30	-
Hobby or leisure activity	7	7	0
New, not secondhand, clothes	6	4	-2
A roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week	7	6	-1
†Leisure equipment for children eg sports equipment or bicycle	6	6	0
A television	†	1	+1
Telephone	11	7	-4
An annual week's holiday away, not with relatives	21	20	-1
A "best outfit" for special occasions	10	8	-2
†An outing for children once a week	9	14	+5
†Children's friends round for tea/snack fortnightly	5	8	+3
A dressing gown	3	2	-1
A night out fortnightly	17	14	-3
Fares to visit friends in other parts of the country	-	19	-
†Special lessons such as music, dance or sport	-	20	-
Friends/family for a meal monthly	11	10	-1
A car	22	18	-4
Pack of cigarettes every other day	6	5	-1
Restaurant meal monthly	-	22	-
Holidays abroad annually	-	32	-
A video	-	10	-
A home computer	-	16	-
A dishwasher	-	18	-

Items are listed in the order of importance

\* = less than 0.5%

† Percentage of families with children

These are much higher than the equivalent figures for 1983, when our research showed 7.5 million people living in poverty, including 2 million children. The 1990 findings present a stark alternative to images of universal gains in prosperity over the past decade.

## IDENTIFYING THE POOR

The survey found that the poor, those lacking three or more necessities, fall into five groups: the unemployed; single parents; families where someone is infirm or disabled; pensioners; and low-paid workers.

Among these, the two groups most at risk, as in 1983, are single parents and the unemployed. Two-thirds of single parents, and more than a half of the unemployed, lack three or more necessities. The next two most vulnerable groups consist of households where someone is infirm or disabled, and the retired. The research suggests that one reason pensioners may appear to be less at risk is that they are more likely to expect less out of life: they are happier to forgo necessities than the rest of the population. Pensioners who are single, particularly women, are more likely to be deprived.

Families where one or two people are in work are the least likely to end up poor. But there are many families with a single wage-earner where the income is too low to give children the start that society thinks they need.

Among those in work there are a few who have been unemployed during the previous year, nearly half of whom lack three or more necessities. Although recent unemployment leaves people at great risk of being poor, they account for a small proportion of the total in poverty. Of those who lack three or more necessities a third are in full-time work, twice as many as are unemployed and seeking work, and a fifth are retired. Of course, some of the categories overlap: some people are single parents and employed, disabled and pensioners.

There is one group which the survey does not cover. The homeless without fixed addresses are excluded – one more way in which poverty excludes its victims from society. No one knows how many people are involved; estimates have varied wildly. But there is visible evidence that the number has grown in the last decade. Among other things, that means that our survey underestimates the real growth in poverty over the period.

The survey tells us a great deal about the poor. They are two and a half times more likely to live in council houses than the population as a whole, a figure that seems likely to go on increasing while council houses are sold to tenants – inevitably to the tenants who can best afford it. This has important consequences for the distribution of wealth, as opposed to income, and particularly therefore for the children of the poor. It also means that council housing is increasingly provided only for the most deprived in the population.

In households lacking three or more necessities, 32% report that they didn't have enough money for food at some time during the previous year, and the proportion was even higher, 37%, in households with children under 16 (among the sample as a whole the figure is 11%). For 47% of the poor, and 53% in households with children, lack of money left them feeling isolated during the previous year.

People going without necessities can take limited advantage of credit to ease their circumstances – inevitably, bills go unpaid: 22% had been seriously behind with the rent, 16% with the gas bill, 21% with electricity.

More than a third of households lacking three or more necessities admitted that they failed to make or keep up their poll tax payments: although non-payment and arrears are by no means confined to the very poorest - Mr Major described it as uncollectible before deciding to abandon the poll tax - the admitted non-payment rate among households which lack none of the necessities was a mere 6%.

Altogether, 56% of poor households had been seriously behind with one or more bills, compared with 10% of households which lack none of the necessities.

It is not surprising, then, that 42% of this group felt depressed by their lack of money in the month before the survey; that 18% had worried about being a failure; and that 29% lacked hope for the future.

And although the poor are no more (or less) likely to be burgled, mugged or assaulted than the better off, they are almost three times as likely as those who lack none of the necessities to say that they feel unsafe in their neighbourhood.

## PRIVATE AFFLUENCE, PUBLIC SQUALOR?

One of the criticisms of the 1983 survey was that, by focusing on material deprivation, it overlooked the public services dimension which is such an important contributor to people's quality of life. Professor J K Galbraith's stricture about private affluence amidst public squalor was felt by some critics to apply to the first Breadline Britain survey. The 1990 study responded by examining the perceived importance, adequacy, and usage of a range of public services, based on a series of questions which paralleled those asked about individual household items. We asked about five services for the public as a whole, three services relating to families with children, and about three services targeted at pensioners or at people with disabilities.

As Table 3 shows, a high degree of importance is attached by the public to all the services asked about. For ten of the eleven services, an "essential" rating is given by at least four in five respondents, including six considered essential by nine in ten or more. The exception to the overall pattern relates to museums and galleries, on which the public is divided.

While more rate these public services as adequate than consider them inadequate, they do not receive a ringing endorsement in terms of their perceived level of quality of provision. More parents with children under five consider local play facilities to be inadequate or unavailable than rate such facilities as adequate. One in three users of buses, a service which has been deregulated and privatised during the past decade, consider the service inadequate.

Other research has shown increased concern over the past decade about issues affecting people's quality of life. The Government, under a new Prime Minister, has explicitly recognised this, most recently in its proposal for a "citizens' charter" which would lay down criteria for the performance of a wide range of public services, and provide redress for citizens where those standards are not met. Our findings suggest that there is a measure of truth in Professor Galbraith's observation about declining public services at a time of increased personal affluence, while at the same time pointing to a possible model for evaluating public services under a "citizens' charter".

TABLE 3 IMPORTANCE AND ADEQUACY OF PUBLIC SERVICES

	Essential %	Use - adequate %	Don't use - inadequate %	Don't use - unavailable %
Frequent and regular bus services	96	46	21	4
Access to home help	96	8	2	2
Special transport facilities for those with mobility problems	95	8	2	3
Access to meals on wheels	93	4	1	2
Play facilities for children to play safely nearby	92	35	27	15
Childcare facilities such as nurseries or playgroups	90	42	18	8
Good quality school meals	87	40	12	5
Libraries	79	56	8	2
Public sports facilities eg swimming pools	79	44	10	4
Evening classes	70	19	4	5
Museums and galleries	52	32	7	8

In order to be able to cross-analyse the findings by whether or not people were disabled or had a disabled member of the household, as well as to provide useful information on deprivation in terms of personal health, we asked some new questions in the 1990 survey to provide a better understanding of the inter-relationship between poverty and poor health.

One in three households contain a person with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity; the proportion rises to nearly one half among those aged 55 plus. While 47% of those who feel poor all the time live in households where at least one member has a long-standing illness or disability, the figure amongst those who feel poor sometimes is 37%, and it drops to 28% amongst those who say they never feel poor. One in four (24%) of those who feel poor have consulted a doctor about problems relating to their health in the previous year, over twice the percentage of those who sometimes feel poor (10%) and four times the level among those who never feel poor (6%). The poor are also more likely to have required hospital treatment over the past year than the sample as a whole. Overall, one respondent in ten lives in a household where someone has been on a hospital waiting list for more than six months.

In terms of the environment in which they live, one in four say their local area is dirty and unpleasant (26%), and that there is a lack of clean and open spaces in easy reach (24%). Furthermore, one in six say there are houses boarded up or with broken windows nearby (16%). How do these findings compare with those from the inner city booster sample?

## THE INNER CITY PERSPECTIVE

After her victory in the 1987 General Election, Mrs. Thatcher highlighted the problems of the inner cities as the major issue facing the Government. This was to some extent a repeat of the commitment made in the wake of the Brixton and Toxteth riots of 1981 when Michael Heseltine, Minister of the Environment, proposed partnership initiatives between the public and private sectors to address the economic and social problems facing the inner cities. Inter-departmental

wrangling has been partly responsible for the lack of a coherent strategy by the Government since 1987, while Mrs. Thatcher's personal interest in this domain appeared to wane. The problems facing the inner cities have led some sociologists to suggest that the fabric of society itself may be seriously threatened by the year 2000. How do those living in the inner cities view their quality of life?

Exactly half believe that their local area is dirty and unpleasant, while only slightly fewer (44%) think there is a lack of pleasant open spaces within easy reach. One in four (26%) feel unsafe in their local neighbourhood, and one in ten have had their homes burgled in the past year. Violent crime has affected 5% of inner city households in the past year.

In terms of their housing, three quarters (75%) rent from a local authority or housing association. One in six (17%) describe the condition of their home as poor and twice as many as no more than adequate (34%). For 79% of those describing the state of repair of their home as poor, the reason given for this is that the landlord has failed to make the necessary repairs. More than one in three (37%) say that there are houses boarded up or with broken windows nearby. One in ten say their homes are damp and 6% that their homes are not properly heated if it's cold. One in eight do not have enough rooms to give older children their own bedrooms. As many as one in four say they lack the money to keep their home in a decent state of decoration, while the same proportion cannot afford to insure the contents of their dwelling. One in five have been seriously behind in paying for their rent over the past year and two in five in paying their poll tax.

Those living in the inner cities are disproportionately likely to be affected by unemployment. As many as 28% are currently unemployed, and two thirds have been so for over a year. Moreover, one in five of those not currently unemployed have previously been so in the past year. And looking back over the past decade, only a third have not experienced unemployment at some point, while nearly half have spent more than one year unemployed. One in three households receive income support and slightly more receive housing benefit.

There is considerable evidence linking poverty and poor housing on the one hand, with poor health on the other. One in five of those living in inner cities say they have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity; and one in five have other household members who have been similarly troubled. One in six (17%) specifically attribute health problems to their poor housing conditions.

Education, the escape route from deprivation for some inner city children, is facing increasing problems arising from constrained resources in Britain. Two in five parents with school-aged children who live in the inner cities have experienced problems related to lack of resources at school: for example, one in six has missed classes because of a teacher shortage, and a similar proportion have had to share school books in key subjects (16% and 15% respectively).

The cumulative impact of this environmental, material, health and employment deprivation is marked in terms of the psychological well-being of those living in the inner cities. Three in five say they feel poor all the time (20%) or sometimes (40%). Fully 50% feel that, looking back over their adult life, they have lived in poverty by the standards of that time. One in three feel depressed due to lack of money, and one in five express a lack of hope for the future. One in three (32%) say there have been times in the past year when they have felt isolated and cut off from other people because of lack of money.

## THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

How do the British findings compare with parallel questions asked across the member states of the European Community? As Table 4 shows, public expectations in the UK are markedly lower than those across the EC in the case of seven of the twelve items asked about in a EuroBarometer survey published in March 1990.

The same survey showed that the proportion in the UK rating their standard of living as very good (20%) is well below the EC average of 32%. The UK finding is higher than the figures for Spain (7%), Greece (9%) and Ireland (17%), but substantially below those for the Netherlands (71%), Luxembourg (69%) and Belgium (52%). Indeed the percentages answering "very good" are consistently lower in the UK than across other members of the European Community; for example in terms of their income, the food they eat, their social entitlements in the event of illness, and travel facilities.

TABLE 4 - UK AND EC PERCEPTIONS OF NECESSITIES

Q Among the following things, which ones seem to you to be absolutely necessary to live properly today, and which ones don't seem to you to be absolutely necessary to live properly today?

	UK %	EC %
Having running water, electricity and one's own indoor toilet	93	94
To be able to benefit from social welfare when needed, such as in the case of unemployment sickness, handicap, old age	84	92
Having a good education	82	81
Having a healthy diet	79	80
Having sufficient accommodation so that everyone can have space to themselves	71	79
Having basic equipment such as refrigerator or television set	51	71
Being able to go out with friends or family	57	61
Seeing your doctor regularly	46	59
Having sufficient leisure time and the means to enjoy it	60	56
Having friendly neighbours	47	56
Having at least one good holiday a year	31	43
Having a car available	20	35

It is interesting to note that the same survey finds that 70% of UK respondents feel that the country's public authorities do not do enough to help poor people - above the EC average, if behind the equivalent figures for Italy, Spain and Portugal. Willingness to donate both money and time to help poor people is higher in the UK than across the EC as a whole. And the UK records the second highest proportion believing that, "in our society the rich get richer and the poor get poorer". Four in five UK respondents (80%) align themselves with this view, compared with an EC overall figure of 70%; only Ireland, where 85% believe this to be the case, exceeds the UK finding.

## TELEVISION'S USE OF THE SURVEY

The Breadline Britain 1990s series looked at poverty in Britain through the lives of eight people and families in five different cities, in the five groups identified by the survey as likely to be vulnerable to poverty. The programme was made by Domino Films, an independent production company set up by the director of the 1983 Breadline Britain series.

The comments of the people interviewed for the television series bring to life the statistics analysed above.

**"It's hard to explain till you've been there. Sometimes you just feel like throwing in the can, you've just had enough"**  
Jimmy, disabled, Liverpool

**"When I was working, life was difficult, but I could just about manage. Now, you just exist . . . not even from hand to mouth, it's from hand to bill. And it is very hard"**  
Yvonne, separated with three children, Birmingham

**"I don't think I can take much more of this. It's just really getting me down"**  
Alison, 21, single parent, London

**"To be poor, it's . . . it's not very nice. It's a thing that we've all got to come to, old age, so why can't we have just a little bit of comfort in our old age?"**  
Julie, 77, Birmingham

The series integrated the findings from the survey at appropriate points, blending the statistical with the illustrative examples of the eight people.

Whatever other people say about them, those whom we have defined as poor are likely to feel poor: one in three (32%) feel they are "genuinely poor" all the time, compared with 1% of those who lack none of the necessities; and another 44% sometimes feel poor (compared with 16%): a total of 76%. In 1968, when standards of living were generally lower but with much lower unemployment, 8% said they felt poor "all the time" and 18% "sometimes"; in 1990 the comparable figures are 10% and 25% respectively.

The integration of the statistics, which provided a national context, and of the illustrative examples of individuals living in poverty, provided much of the power behind the television series. The television critic of the Observer newspaper, John Naughton, reviewed the series in the following terms:

**"The credibility of this series obviously stands or falls on the accuracy of the survey research, but since it was conducted by a reputable firm (MORI) and involved a nationwide sample of 1,800 people, one assumes that it probably provides an accurate picture. If so, then Breadline Britain is a devastating indictment of the Thatcher years".**

The survey findings not only helped to guide the programme makers in the shaping of the series, but also helped gain publicity for the series, and have been widely used in the renewed debate on poverty in Britain in the run-up to the General Election and in the wider debate on the nature of society in the 1990s.

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO THE POOR

There are many theories about why people are poor in an affluent society. The popular view is that "there is much injustice in our society", an answer given by 40% of respondents (compared with 32% who gave that answer in 1983 and 16% in 1976). Roughly 10% put it down to bad luck, while 20% blame modern progress. "Laziness or lack of willpower" is the favoured explanation of 20% (compared with 22% in 1983 and 43% in 1976). The more that interviewees lack necessities, the more they are likely to blame injustice and the less likely they are to blame laziness.

TABLE 5 - CAUSES OF POVERTY

Q	Why in your opinion are there people who live in need? Here are four opinions - which is closest to yours?			
	1976	1983	1990	Change
	(UK) %	(GB) %	(GB) %	1983-90 %+
Because there is much injustice in our society	16	32	40	+8
Because of laziness and lack of willpower	43	22	19	-3
It's an inevitable part of modern progress	17	25	19	-6
Because they have been unlucky	10	13	10	-3
None of these	4	5	3	-2
Don't know	10	3	8	+5

Source: EEC (1976), Breadline Britain (1983), Breadline Britain 1990s (1990)

The Government's role in helping the poor comes in for increasing criticism too: 70% now think it is doing too little to help those who lack necessities (in 1983 the figure was 57%) and only 5% (6% in 1983) too much. Earlier we reported figures indicating people's willingness to pay additional taxes to enable everyone to afford the items classed as necessities. A 5p increase in income tax at the last Budget - restoring the 1983 rate, but still 3p below the rate in 1979 - would have allowed the Government to put together a substantial anti-poverty package. Pensions and disability benefit could each be increased by 22.5%, child benefit increased to £10, and benefits restored for people under 25.

Such a package would fall far short of eliminating poverty: we estimate that of the 11 million found to be in poverty, 40% would be lifted out altogether and its severity would be reduced for the remaining 6.5 million - slightly better than things were in 1983.

After more than a decade in office, Mrs. Thatcher restated her view - often referred to as the "trickle down theory" - that "It is only through the creation of wealth that poverty can be assisted". In the previous year she had said in Parliament that the latest statistics on low-income families confirmed that people at all levels of income had been getting better off: in particular

the figures showed that those on low incomes had done better than the population as a whole - solid confirmation that the trickle-down theory worked.

But the figures proved flawed and had to be withdrawn. Johnson and Webb, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, found that the poorest 10 per cent gained 2.3 per cent in real income between 1981 and 1987, compared with an average gain of 19.8 per cent. Their analysis was accepted by the Government.

Professor Peter Townsend has now used official data to examine income trends between 1979 and 1989 and his conclusions are even more wounding to the trickle-down theory: the income of the poorest fifth of the population fell, on average, from £3,442 to £3,282, while the average had increased from £10,561 to £13,084 and the income of the richest 20 per cent increased from £20,138 to £28,124 (all figures at 1989 prices). He adds that the official figures probably underestimate the real fall in the incomes of the poorest households. These figures lie behind the changes over the past decade which the Breadline Britain 1990s series so clearly revealed.

Whether all the poor can be lifted above the minimum standard laid down by the findings of this survey depends ultimately on the generosity of society as a whole and the willingness of Government to act on it.

Although the Government continues to refuse to talk about "poverty", John Major, in one of his earliest speeches as Prime Minister, said he wanted "a country that is prepared and willing to make the changes necessary to provide a better quality of life for all our citizens." This survey provides him with direct evidence on how far millions of Britons have to go to achieve what is today regarded as a minimal quality of life.

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