



Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

Working Paper - Analysis Series No.1

The Necessities of Life in Northern Ireland

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Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK

Overview

The Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK Project is funded by the Economic, Science and Research Council (ESRC). The Project is a collaboration between the University of Bristol, University of Glasgow, Heriot Watt University, Open University, Queen's University (Belfast), University of York, the National Centre for Social Research and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The project commenced in April 2010 and will run for three-and-a-half years.

The primary purpose is to advance the 'state of the art' of the theory and practice of poverty and social exclusion measurement. In order to improve current measurement methodologies, the research will develop and repeat the 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. This research will produce information of immediate and direct interest to policy makers, academics and the general public. It will provide a rigorous and detailed independent assessment on progress towards the UK Government's target of eradicating child poverty.

Objectives

This research has three main objectives:

- To improve the measurement of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and standard of living
- To assess changes in poverty and social exclusion in the UK
- To conduct policy-relevant analyses of poverty and social exclusion

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Contents

Abstract.....	4
.....	1
Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK	1
Working Paper: Findings and Analysis Series No.1	1
The Necessities of Life in Northern Ireland	1
.....	1
Grace Kelly, Mike Tomlinson, Mary Daly, Paddy Hillyard, Shailen Nandy, Demi Patsios	1
30 March 2012.....	1
Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK.....	2
Overview.....	2
Objectives.....	2
Contents.....	2
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	10
Consensual poverty approach.....	11
Methodology – stage one.....	12
Perceptions of adult necessities.....	14
Perception of children’s necessities.....	16
Public consensus.....	17
Three way classification.....	28
Heat map.....	33
Conclusion.....	35
Appendix one.....	37
References.....	38

Abstract

This working paper presents the opinions of the general public as to which items and activities are believed necessary in Northern Ireland today to enjoy a decent standard of living. The responses are explored by key socio demographic and economic variables to ascertain the extent of agreement among the general public as to their importance. While there are some differences of opinion between different groups in society, in general a very high degree of consensus on the necessities is evident. The survey findings confirm that the items and activities that are essential to achieve an acceptable standard of living in our society today and which all adults should be able to afford and not have to do without are both material and social in nature.

Key words: poverty, social exclusion, poverty measurement, necessities, public consensus.

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Introduction

This is the first in a series of working papers which reports on the Poverty and Social Exclusion Northern Ireland study (PSENI, 2012). The focus of this paper is to establish public perceptions of what constitute the necessities of life and to investigate any apparent differences in opinion between different social categories and groups in Northern Ireland.

The PSENI study is part of the Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK study (PSEUK, 2012), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. This research is a major collaboration between six universities: Queen's University Belfast, the University of Bristol, Heriot-Watt University, The Open University, University of Glasgow and the University of York. The investigation will update and extend previous Poverty and Social Exclusion research in Britain (PSEGB, 1999) and Northern Ireland (PSENI, 2003) with the advantage of new thinking and developments in the measurement of poverty, and in the concept of social exclusion since then, notably the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM) (Levitas et al., 2007).

The PSEUK project has three main aims:

1. To improve the measurement of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and standard of living.
2. To assess change in the nature and extent of poverty and social exclusion over the past ten years.

3. To conduct poverty-relevant analyses of outcomes and causal relationships from a comparative perspective.

The research is based on a two-stage methodology. Stage One involves an attitudes survey, asked as a component of an Omnibus survey, which seeks to establish public perceptions of what constitutes the basic necessities of life. Stage Two entails a larger main stage survey of a representative sample of the general public to ascertain lack of ownership of these socially established necessities because of a shortage of income. The main survey also asks individuals and households about their resources within a series of 'domains' such as housing and employment. This two-stage approach is similar to the methodology used in the PSEGB 1999 and PSENI 2003 studies. The main survey is a follow up of a sub-sample of the Family Resource Survey in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The wide-ranging information on people's living standards and quality of life collected by the survey will allow us to make detailed comparisons between Northern Ireland, Scotland, Britain, Ireland and other EU countries.

This paper presents an analysis of responses obtained during the first stage of the study regarding public views on necessities in Northern Ireland in 2011. The main focus is in relation to items and activities regarding adults. A separate paper will discuss in greater detail the responses to questions regarding necessities for children.

Consensual poverty approach

The approach upon which this research is based is one of relative poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. It builds on the work of Townsend and the notion that poverty means the exclusion of people from a minimally accepted way of life as a consequence of low income.

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources necessary to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they, are in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend, 1979: 31).

At its foundation, poverty is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, involving a diversity of factors relating to people's standard of living. It is viewed as an inability to meet a minimum standard of living such as diet, shelter, clothing and heating and to participate fully in the social activities, customs and norms which the society views as normal.

Townsend's early work on relative deprivation was based on attempts to identify a 'minimum style of life' in the UK. Townsend's concept of relative deprivation involved the use of measures of different kinds of social activities and material circumstances in order to derive a direct measurement of poverty based on the level of deprivation of these items.

Mack and Lansley (1985) built on Townsend's work by introducing a consensual based approach which considered people's views of the necessities of life thus addressing the criticism that Townsend's list of indicators was prescriptive and chosen by 'experts'. The underlying principle of Mack and Lansley's approach rests in providing a consensual rather than administrative or 'expert' basis for identifying 'an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities' (1985: 39).

The consensual approach was further developed and advanced by Gordon et al (2000) to incorporate indirect (income) and direct (enforced deprivation) measures to establish a poverty threshold. It was upon this work that the Northern Ireland PSE study was designed (Hillyard et al., 2003). The development of best practice continues in this survey with the use of the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM) which has informed the development of the necessities and main questionnaires.

Methodology – stage one

In stage one, a comprehensive list of potentially necessary items and activities was constructed. The list was developed as a result of discussions with 14 focus groups based in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The aim was to establish the views of people in different circumstances (e.g. men and women, households with and without children, employed and unemployed) as to what they considered necessities in 2011 for adults and children, and to negotiate an agreed list of essential items and activities. This resulted in additions and amendments to questions used in previous PSE studies in both GB and NI. Additions covered a number of material items such as 'a table, with chairs at which all the family can eat', a number of more personal and health care items such as 'hair done or cut regularly' and 'all recommended dental work/treatment' and social activities such as 'taking part in sport/exercise activities or classes'.

Amendments included increasing the amount of 'regular savings for rainy days' from £10 to £20 per month. Some items were removed such as a 'vacuum cleaner' and a 'dictionary'.

A list of 32 items and 14 social activities were selected in relation to a minimum decent standard of living for adults. For children, the list included 22 items and 8 social activities. Here too, a number of amendments, additions and omissions were made. Additional children's items included 'a suitable place at home to study or do homework' and 'toddler group or nursery or play group at least once a week for pre-school aged children'. Items which were removed included 'at least 7 pairs of new underpants' and 'comic or magazine once a week'. Revisions included removing the specified amount of '50 pence' from 'pocket money'. In total, 76 items and activities for adults and children were agreed and selected.

The agreed list of items and activities was then included in a module as part of the Omnibus survey in February 2011, to ascertain people's views on the necessities of life. The Omnibus survey is carried out by the Central Survey Unit within the Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency (NISRA). The survey is based on a random sample of addresses, drawn from the Land and Property Services Agency list of private address. This is the most up to date listing of private households and is made available to NISRA for research purposes. A total of 2,200 addresses were selected for interview achieving a response rate of 58% of eligible households.

Everyone in the survey was presented with a set of cards covering 76 adult and children's items and activities, and were asked to sort the items into two piles, 'necessary' and 'desirable, but not necessary'. A 'necessary' item was defined as one which 'all adults should be able to afford and which they should not have to do without'. The cards were shuffled such that the items and activities were presented in a random order.

This procedure differs from the method used in Northern Ireland in 2002/3 in two ways. First, in 2002 respondents were asked to respond with a simple 'yes' or 'no' according to whether they believed items and activities to be necessary or not. Second, the list was administered by way of a computer with the respondent touching the screen to select necessary items. The current (2011) procedure is however, identical to the method used in Britain in 1999 and it is the approach we adopted in order to guarantee complete comparability of data collection across the UK. The procedure will be discussed in more detail in the main report and will be the subject of a methodological working paper to be published as part of this series of working papers.

The findings from the stage one attitude survey will be incorporated into a main survey of a separate random sample of the Northern Ireland population. The main survey will utilise a list of those items and activities which at least 50 per cent of the Northern Ireland general public believe are necessities. The information will be used to ascertain whether the individual adult, or child, or household has, or does not have, the item or activity deemed a ‘necessity’ in stage one. Additional information will be obtained from questions regarding dimensions of deprivation and social exclusion. The information will be used to up-date the findings from the PSE NI 2003.

Perceptions of adult necessities

Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents defining the 46 items and activities as ‘necessary’ for adults. The results range from 92% of respondents believing that ‘heating to keep home adequately warm’ is necessary through to only 11% who believe a dishwasher is necessary. More than half of the items and activities on the list (27 out of 46) were considered necessary by 50% or more of the population. Only four of the 46 items lie within a band 5% above or below the 50% majority threshold – in fact, all of them are above the threshold.

Table 1: Percent of people claiming item or activity ‘necessary’

	Necessary
	%
Damp-free home	92
Heating to keep home adequately warm	92
Two meals a day	88
Visiting friends or family in hospital or other institutions	86
Washing machine	84
Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine	80
A warm waterproof coat	80
Celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas	79
Fresh fruit and vegetables every day	78
All recommended dental work/treatment	78
Attending weddings, funerals and other such occasions	75
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	72
Telephone at home(landline or mobile)	72
Enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration	71
Household contents insurance	70
A table, with chairs, at which all the family can eat	68
A hobby or leisure activity	67

Curtains or window blinds	66
Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews	60
Regular savings (of at least £20 a month for rainy days)	57
Attending church, mosque, synagogue or other places of worship	56
Television	55
Taking part in sport/exercise activities or classes	55
Two pairs of all-weather shoes	54
To be able to pay an unexpected expense of £500	51
Replace worn out clothes with new (not second hand) ones	51
Car	50
Replace any worn out furniture	44
A small amount of money to spend each week on yourself, not on your family	44
Friends or family round for a meal or drink at least once a month	43
Presents for friends or family once a year	43
Regular payments into an occupational or private pension	43
An outfit to wear for social or family occasions such as parties and weddings	41
A holiday away from home for one week a year, not staying with relatives	40
A roast joint (or its equivalent) once a week	40
Mobile phone	36
Hair done or cut regularly	36
Home computer	30
Internet connection at home	28
Going out socially once a fortnight (evening meal)	28
Visits to friends or family in other parts of the country 4 times a year	26
A meal out once a month	21
Holidays abroad once a year	20
Going to the cinema, theatre or music event once a month	17
Going out for a drink once a fortnight	17
Dishwasher	11

Note: Percentage of people answering 'not applicable' not shown in table

Perception of children's necessities

Table 2: Percentage of people claiming item or activity as necessary for children

	Necessary
	%
A warm winter coat	93
Three meals a day	93
New, properly fitting shoes	91
Fresh fruit or vegetables at least once a day	91
Celebrations on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or other religious festivals	87
A hobby or leisure activity	87
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least once a day	87
A garden or outdoor space nearby where they can play safely	87
Books at home suitable for their ages	84
A suitable place at home to study or do homework	81
Toddler group or nursery or play group at least once a week for pre-school aged children	78
Children's clubs or activities such as drama or football training (youth club or similar activity)	76
Indoor games suitable for their ages (building blocks, board games, computer games etc)	71
Some new, not second-hand clothes	69
Enough bedrooms for every child of 10 or over of a different sex to have their own bedroom	67
Computer and internet for homework	60
Day trips with family once a month	58
Outdoor leisure equipment such as roller-skates, skateboards, footballs etc.	55
Pocket money	54
Money to save	53
Going on a school trip at least once a term	52
At least 4 pairs of trousers, leggings, jeans or jogging bottoms	52
Construction toys such as Duplo or Lego	51
Bicycle	47
A holiday away from home for at least one week a year	47
Friends round for tea or snack once a fortnight	44
Clothes to fit in with friends	29
Mobile phone for children aged 11 or older	29
MP3 player such as an iPod	10
Designer/brand name trainers	8

Note: Percentage of people answering 'not applicable' not shown in table

Table 2 shows the level of support for children's items and activities. Of the 30 items and activities relating to children, 23 were said to be necessary by 50 per cent or more of the Northern Ireland population. Four items received almost universal support (from 9 or more out of every 10 people), these were 'a warm winter coat', 'three meals a day', 'new, property fitting shoes' and 'fresh fruit or vegetables at least once a day'. The items which were believed to be the least important in terms of necessity for children by 1 or less out of every 10 people were an 'MP3 player such as an iPod' and 'designer or brand name trainers'. Of the additional items which were included in the 2011 list of necessities and which did not feature in the 2002/3 list, 'a suitable place at home to study or do homework' received the largest support with 81 per cent of people believing this was necessary for children.

Public consensus

The underlying principle of the consensual approach to measuring poverty is that there is broad agreement between groups in society about what is necessary for a minimum standard of living. In order to verify the degree of consensus it is useful to investigate the relationship between the responses of different categories and groups, for example the responses of men and women, old and young, urban and rural dwellers. A typical way to explore this type of relationship between two groups is by using scatterplots. A scatterplot provides a visual representation of a large range of statistical information. It positions a series of points onto a graph representing the perceptions of both groups. If low and high scores from one group are coupled with low and high scores from the other group, the points on the graph will be close together along a straight line, indicating a robust positive relationship (in other words, strong agreement). The more scattered the points are on the graph, the weaker the relationship (that is, less agreement). Attention is then drawn to any points positioned a distance away from the line which may require further investigation.

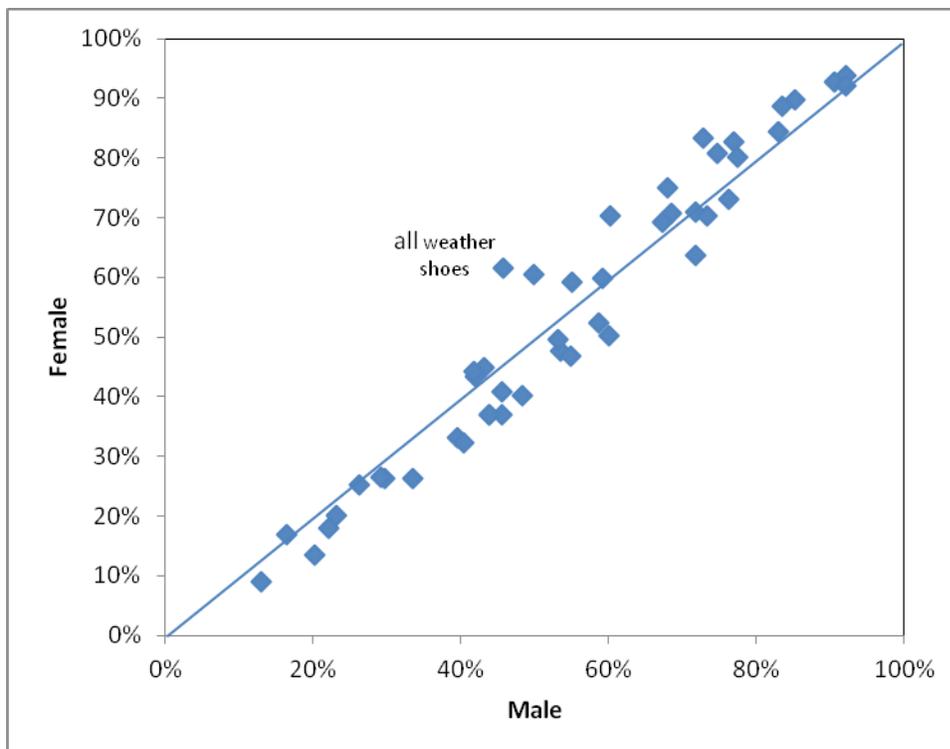
Chi-squared tests were then used to assess whether there were statistically significant associations between the necessities and activities variables and the following demographic variables: gender, religion, age, socio-economic status, education, geographic location (urban/rural) and income (high/low)¹. Further tests were carried out to judge whether or not the size of our sample

¹ Tests of significance are traditionally calculated at either the 95% or the 99% confidence level. Thus, at the 95 per cent confidence level, we can be 95% certain that the results are not due to chance. Significance levels are shown as 5% (0.05), 1% (0.01) and 0.1% (0.001).

would increase the likelihood of finding significant differences, as this can occur when sample sizes are large. Phi values were calculated to measure effect sizes (2x2 tables)².

In figure 1 below, we examine the percentage of women who consider each item to be a necessity of life (on the vertical axis) with the percentage of men (on the horizontal axis). Each item is shown as a point on the graph. Items that appear on the line are those which both women and men strongly agree are necessary. Items above the line are those which more women consider to be necessities. Those items below the line are the things that more men believe to be essential.

Figure 1: Differences between men and women



We can see from figure 1 that the points on the graph are close to the line, indicating a considerable degree of agreement between men and women in what they consider to be necessities. However, there are some notable differences. For example, the most significant difference between men and women were 'two pairs of all weather shoes' with more women saying this was a necessity. This may be because men make more journeys by car than women while women make more use of public transport (NISRA, 2008) thus making all weather shoes essential.

² Phi values of less than .20 are generally considered a weak association, values between .20 and .49 are considered medium and values of more than .50 are considered strong (Acock, 2006).

Smaller scale studies have also shown that if there is one car in the household, the tendency is for men to take the car to work (Delphy and Leonard, 1992).

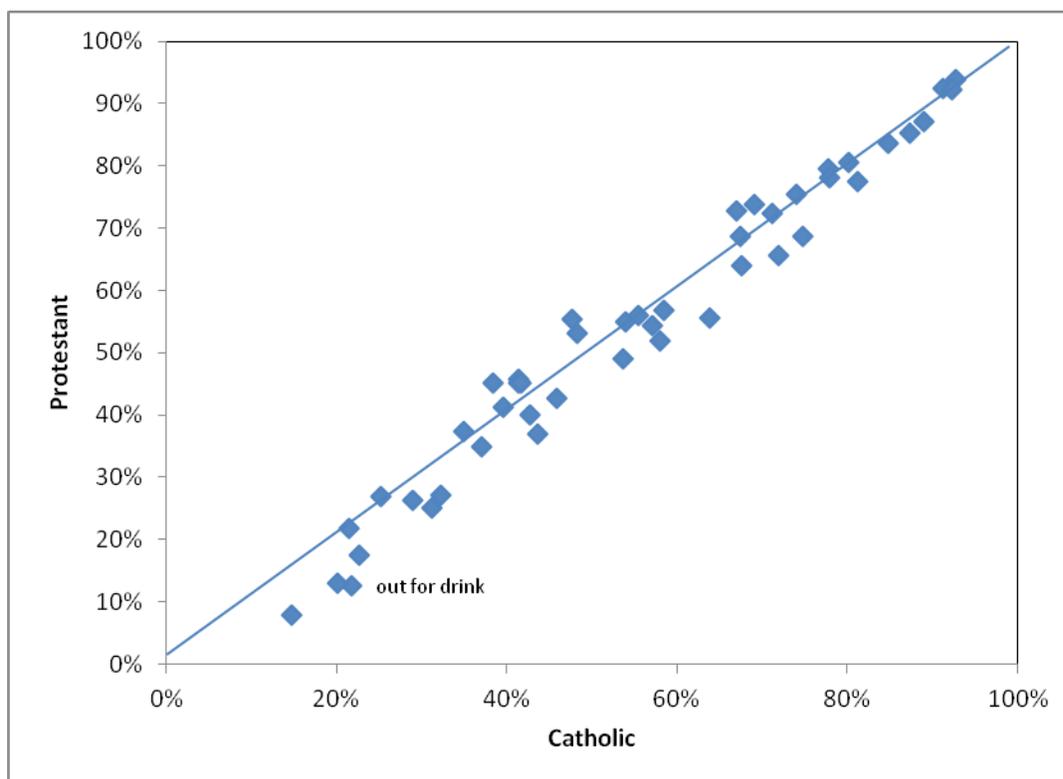
Women were also more likely than men to believe items relating to the household were a necessity. Analysis showed that more women reported 'curtains or window blinds', 'fresh fruit and vegetables every day' and 'attending church, mosque, synagogue or other places of worship' as necessary. On the other hand, more men thought 'taking part in sport/exercise activities or classes' was essential. These findings were statistically significant at the <0.001 level, however the association was not strong ($<.20$).

These results confirm findings from our previous study (McAuley et al., 2003) and earlier studies in Great Britain and Ireland which illustrate close agreement between women and men but with some important differences in perceptions of the necessities of life (Pantazis et al., 1999). The fact that more men perceive items that are associated with personal consumption (like having a hobby or leisure activity) as opposed to household consumption as necessary has been borne out in previous research (Cantillon and Nolan, 2001).

Figure 2 below, sets out the differences in perceptions of Catholics and Protestants as to what are necessities in 2011. Once again, there is very strong agreement between the two groups. For example, there is universal agreement on the need to be able to 'replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine' (80% of Catholics agreed this was essential as did 81% of Protestants) as there is for 'heating to keep home adequately warm' (both 92%). This is similar to our findings in 2002/03.

However, there are a few interesting differences which, while not strongly associated, are nevertheless statistically significant.

Figure 2: Differences between Catholic and Protestants



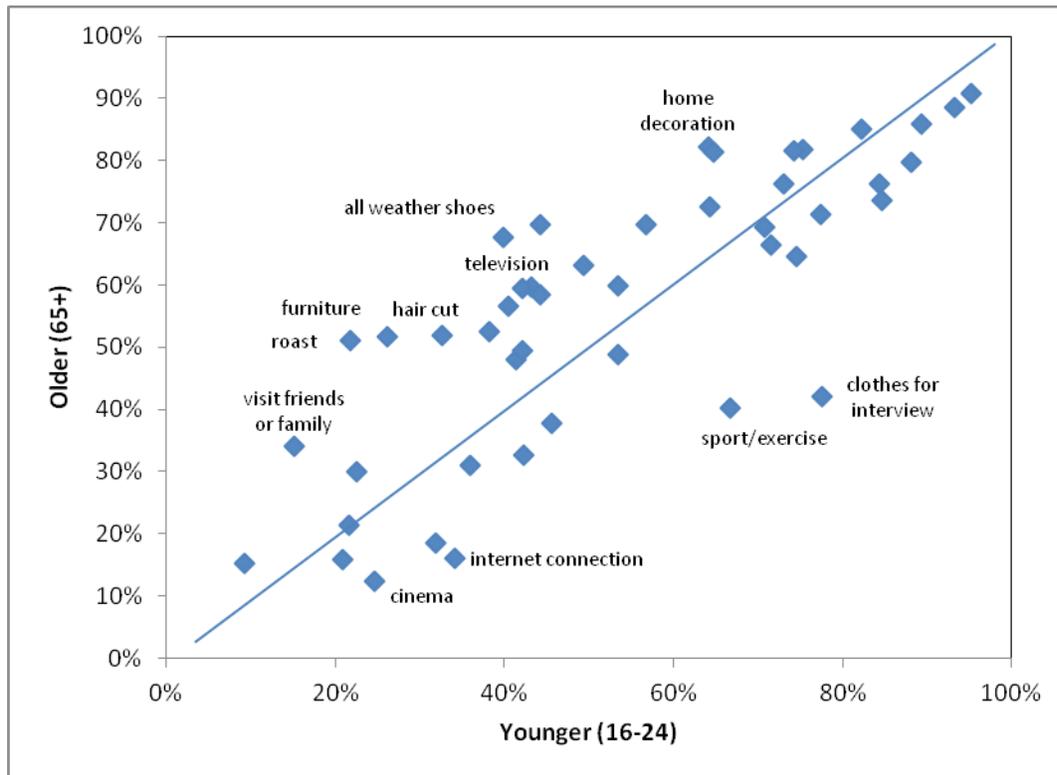
In relation to social activities, 22% of Catholics said ‘Going out for a drink once a fortnight’ was essential compared to 12% of Protestants (significant at the 0.001 level) although in neither group did a majority of respondents think this was a necessity. More Protestants (55%) than Catholics (48%) believed ‘To be able to pay an unexpected expense of £500’ was a necessity (significant at the .05 level but weakly associated).

The cultural relevance of religion and its interaction with economic behaviour is an established sociological concept (Weber, 1904) that continues to hold both academic interest (there is a large volume of work attempting to trace the effects, if any, of Weber’s “Protestant ethic” see for example Cantoni, 2009, Gough, 2005) and media interest (see for example Kenny, 2011).

As with our earlier findings in 2002/03, the greatest degree of difference existed between younger and older people.

Figure 3 below looks at the differences in the perceptions of what constitutes necessities between younger people (aged 16-24 years) and older people (65+ years).

Figure 3: Differences between younger and older people



From Figure 3 we can see that there is strong consensus on many items such as ‘A damp free home’ and ‘Heating to keep home adequately warm’. However, there is much more variation in opinion between younger and older people than any other social groups and categories. In some cases, the disagreement is quite stark. This is demonstrated by the number of points that lie a distance from the centre line - the further away from the line, the greater the disagreement. The largest difference in opinion is ‘Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews’, with 42% of older people saying this was a necessity compared to 78% of younger people. This finding makes sense and is somewhat obvious. However, given government plans for earlier phasing in of an increase in pension age from 60 to 65 for women by 2018 instead of 2020, the rise in retirement age for both men and women to 66 by 2020, coupled with the harsher benefit regime introduced by recent welfare reform legislation, this is one of those items that is likely to change in the next few years as people are forced to work longer and more people will find themselves ineligible for welfare benefits. Large differences existed in perceptions of ‘A roast joint (or its equivalent) once a week’ with 51% of older people believing it a necessity compared to 22% of younger people. This was similar to our findings in 2002 and again, we believe this is more sym-

bolic of a traditional custom whereby it provides an opportunity for the family/extended family to come together at least once a week.

Younger people were also more inclined to favour communications technology items such as 'Home computer' and 'Internet access from home' as being essential. On the other hand, for older people a 'Television' was more important. This finding is supported by recent market research which describes the growing importance of the television for older people and younger people's heavier computer and mobile phone use. Ofcom's Communications Market Report (Ofcom, 2010) confirms that television viewing has grown more in significance for older people with nearly three in five older adults (57%) saying television would be the most missed activity if they were to be deprived of it, compared to two in five in 2005 (47%). It also sets out how average daily media and communications use differs substantially by age group, with people aged 16-24 spending over nine and a half hours a day in total; this was one fifth (22%) more than adults aged 55 and over, who engaged in the lowest volume of communications activity every day. This is not to say that older people do not use the internet or computers, it merely reflects younger people's greater reliance on technological communication and therefore their inclination to assess these items as absolutely necessary for everyday life, as opposed to simply desirable. 'Enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration' and 'Curtains or window blinds' was 2 items where differences between older and younger people were noticeable. This can be explained by the low numbers of young people with their own home. In the most recent NIHE's House Conditions Survey, only 4% of household reference persons were aged between 17 and 24 (NIHE, 2006).

A series of research projects were carried out to improve the measurement of deprivation for older people (McKay, 2008; Legard, 2008). This work recommended the inclusion of new questions in the Family Resource Survey (FRS) which the researchers believed would be more applicable to older people's lives. One such question was 'Do you have your hair done or cut regularly?' Figure 3 above, shows that 'Hair done or cut regularly' is considered much more of a necessity by older people than it is by younger people (52% compared to 26%) and validates both the use of this question in the FRS and our inclusion of it in the survey.

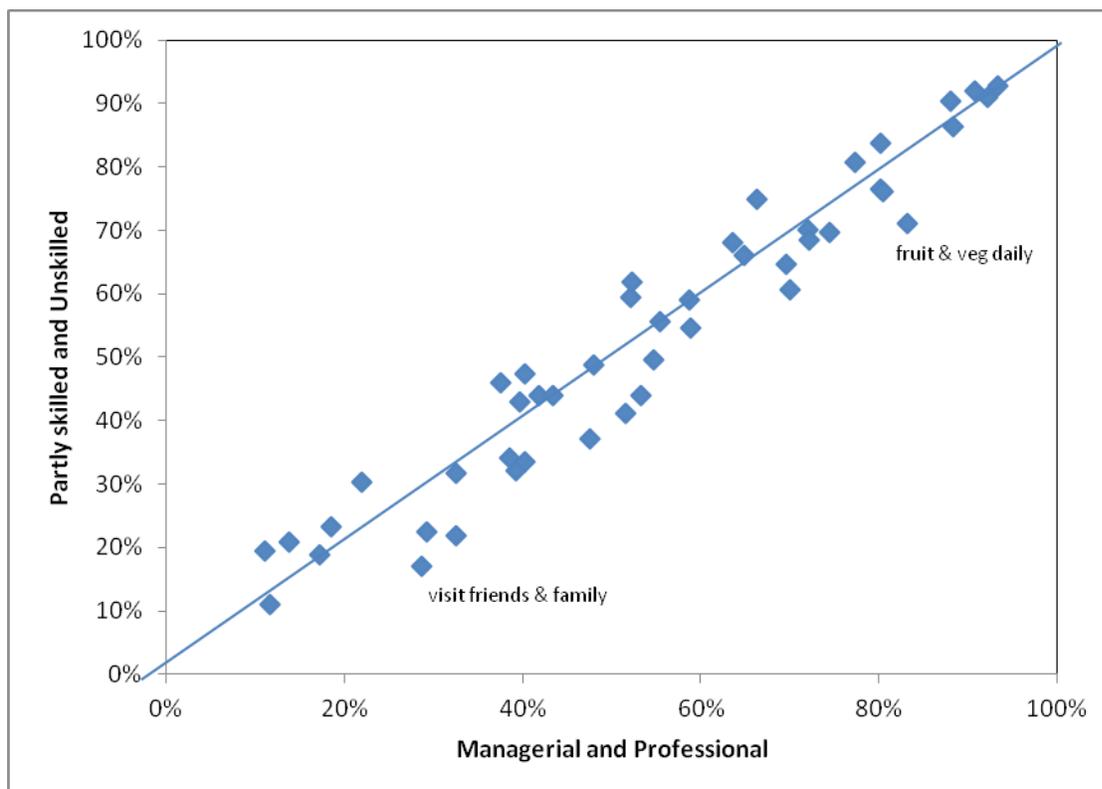
There were differences of opinion regarding whether 'Two pairs of all weather shoes' was a necessity or not. More people aged over 65 were more likely to say this item was essential (there was a 28% point difference). This may be attributed to fashion trends but could also be related

to the physiological changes of ageing for example and the prevalence of foot and ankle problems in the elderly and older people, making appropriate functional footwear a necessity.

Many of the apparent differences are obvious like more older people choosing 'Attending church, mosque, synagogue or other places of worship' (70% as opposed to 44% of younger people) and more younger people opting for 'Taking part in sport/exercise activities or classes' (67% compared to 40%). Not so obvious was the higher number of older people saying 'A holiday away from home for one week a year, not staying with relatives' was a necessity (52%) compared to the younger group (33%).

It is common practice to classify occupations in terms of their skill level and content. Such information is used in various ways including the development of government labour market policies. For comparative purposes we grouped together people in managerial and professional occupations and grouped people working in partly skilled and unskilled manual occupations together and examined the responses of these two groups for any existing differences.

Figure 4: Differences between socio-economic status

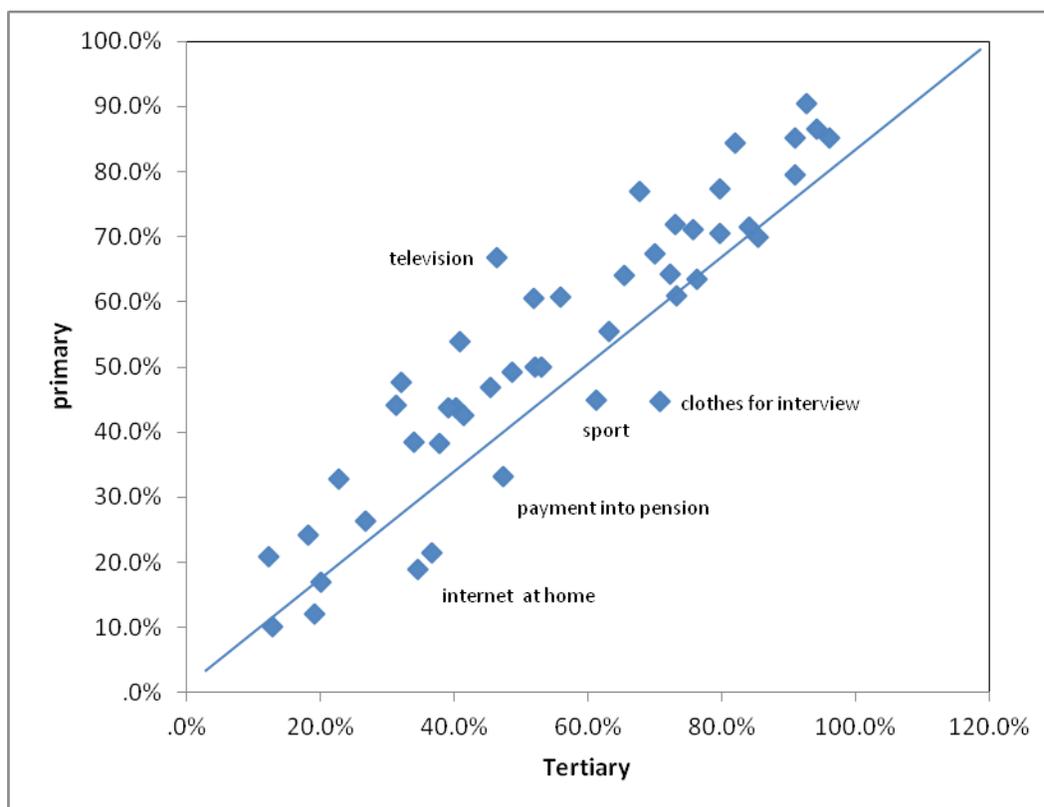


It is reassuring to note that a good degree of consensus exists between people in very different occupational groups. However, there was a notable inconsistency in responses to 'Fresh fruit and vegetables every day' with those in a managerial or professional job believing it was much more necessary (83% compared to 71%). The government has campaigned vigorously to encourage healthy eating and increased consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. While the factors which influence dietary intake are very complex, the price of fresh nutritional food is often high making healthy choices more difficult for people on low income. For example, the recent rise in the Consumer Price Index rate of inflation was caused by an increase in price of a wide range of food products, most notably from fruit and meat. Fruit prices rose by 4.7% in May 2011 compared with a fall of 0.4% the previous year (ONS, 2011). In fact, given the decrease in mortgage interest rates and dramatic rise in the price of food and fuel, poorer households have experienced higher inflation on average than richer households over the past decade but in particular, since 2008-2010 (IFS, 2011).

People in more highly paid managerial and professional occupations also considered 'Visits to friends and family in other parts of the country 4 times a year' more of a necessity than those in lower paid employment (12% point difference). This could be accounted for by the greater spatial opportunity available to those with higher incomes and their ability to move to different parts of the country in comparison to those who are more dependent on the support which social and family networks might provide.

Responses to necessities between different educational qualification levels of respondents are examined in figure 5.

Figure 5: Differences in levels of education qualification

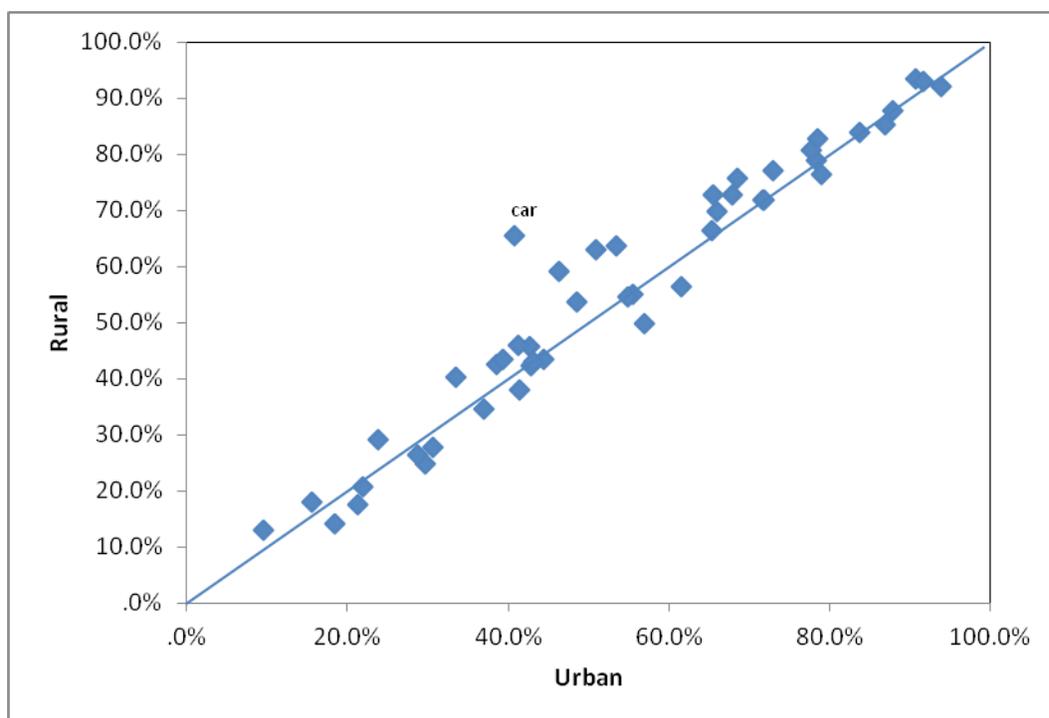


Educational attainment is often an indication of income level and socio economic status. In Europe, average earnings of those with qualifications at tertiary level are at least twice and in some countries three times as high as employees with a basic level of education (Eurostat, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the differences in agreement on necessities are similar to that of socio economic status, for example more people with a primary level of education perceived a ‘television’ and ‘enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration’ to be essential items. However, some disparities require attention. The largest difference of opinion existed in the necessity of having ‘Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews’ - 71% of people with third level qualifications said this item was necessary compared to 45% of those with basic level qualifications. The pattern of this recession has seen job losses in more highly paid sectors than in previous recessions. This suggests a heightened awareness among the higher qualified of the prerequisites for job seeking and the greater need for occupational pension provision. ‘Taking part in sport/exercise activities or classes’ was viewed a necessity by 61% of people with higher level qualification compared to 45% of those without third level qualifications. Prior to the recession higher income groups were more likely to participate in sports (DCMS, 2008) and research suggests an increase in this association with participation rates of

popular but relatively expensive sporting activities such as going to the gym and exercise classes showing a marked decrease in use by young adults in lower socio economic groups (ESRI, 2008).

Figure 6 below looks at the perceptions of necessities comparing people living in urban and rural areas in Northern Ireland. The graph indicates a strong positive relationship and it is clear there is a large degree of consensus on items and activities that constitute the necessities of life.

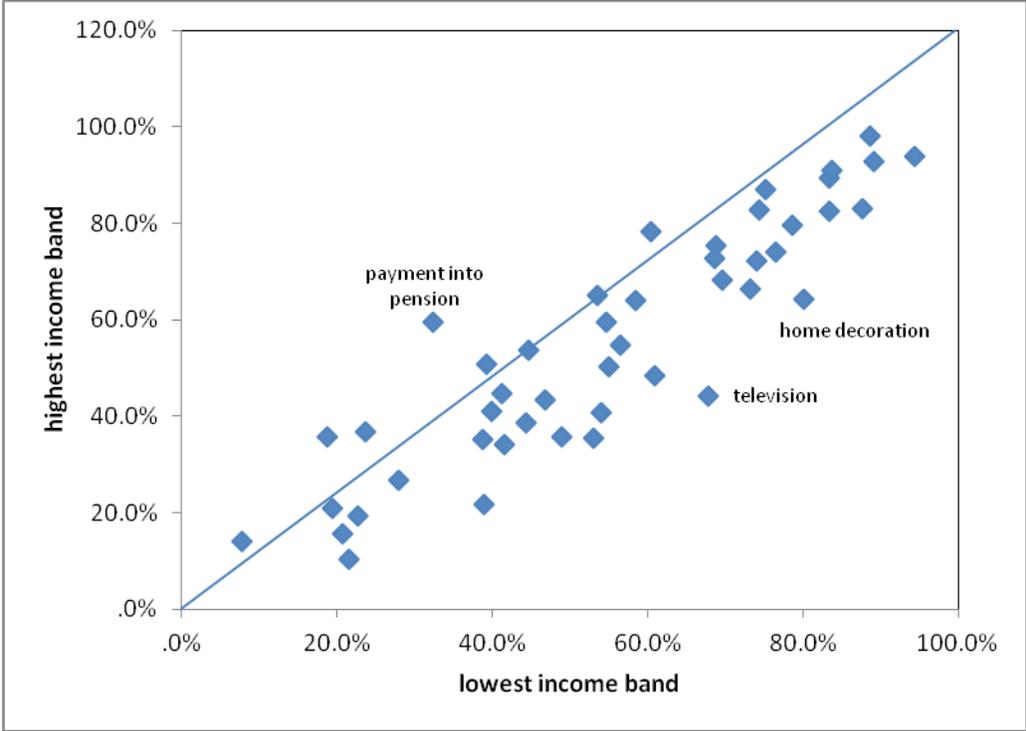
Figure 6: Differences between urban and rural dwellers



The largest and most significant difference was a 'Car', with 66% of rural dwellers saying this was a necessity compared to 41% of people living in an urban location. This is both consistent with previous findings (McAuley et al., 2003) and logical given the more isolated location and infrequent public transport service. 'To be able to pay an unexpected expense of £500' was believed to be essential by more rural dwellers (59%) than people living in an urban area (46%). This may be an expression of the need for forward planning in response to the unpredictability of farm incomes. However, the strength of the difference here was not so strong.

To investigate any existing differences of opinion between people with high and low income we compared the responses of people in the highest 20 per cent income group with those in the lowest 20 per cent income group. Figure 7 illustrates those findings.

Figure 7: Differences between the highest and lowest income quintile



The most striking difference between people in the top and bottom income bracket was found in the responses to whether or not ‘Regular payments into an occupational pension or private pension’ is a necessity – 59% of those in the highest income band believed this was essential compared to 32% of those in the lowest income band. This is followed by the response to whether a ‘Television’ is a necessity. There was a 24% point difference with 68% of people in low income saying a television was a necessity compared to 44% of those in the highest income group. This is similar to the differences in opinion between groups of different educational qualification levels and socio economic status. Interestingly, while a television emerges strongly as an essential item for people on low income, in this case it is not considered a necessity by a majority of those with higher incomes (that is, it did not reach the threshold of 50% required to designate it as a necessity). Similarly, while ‘Regular payments into an occupational pension or private pension’ emerges strongly as a necessity for people in the highest income bracket, it is not thought of as necessary by a majority of respondents in the lowest income group.

'Enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration' is another item where apparent differences appear (80% in the lowest income group agreed that this was an essential item compared to 64% of people in the highest income group). There have been numerous studies investigating the susceptibility of poor children to consumerist peer pressure. Much less attention has been focused on its effect on adults. It could be that the burgeoning array of home 'makeover' programmes are putting pressure on poorer people to 'fit in' or 'keep up appearances' (Daly and Leonard, 2002). On the other hand, it could be simply that home decorating is carried out with cheaper materials that require frequent maintenance.

Three way classification

Using a three way classification function is another way of demonstrating the level of agreement (or lack of it) of different groups in society regarding what constitutes the necessities of life. For example, in figure 8 (a, b and c) below, the item which received the highest agreement, a 'Damp free home' at 92%, is shown taking age, respondent sex and area (Urban/Rural) into consideration across the lowest and highest household income quintiles. This shows little difference in opinion across income, age group, between men and women and living in an urban or rural area. Where differences do occur, they are most apparent between richer and poorer older people with more pensioners in a higher income group saying a 'Damp free home' is a necessity.

Figure 8a: Damp free home (age group)

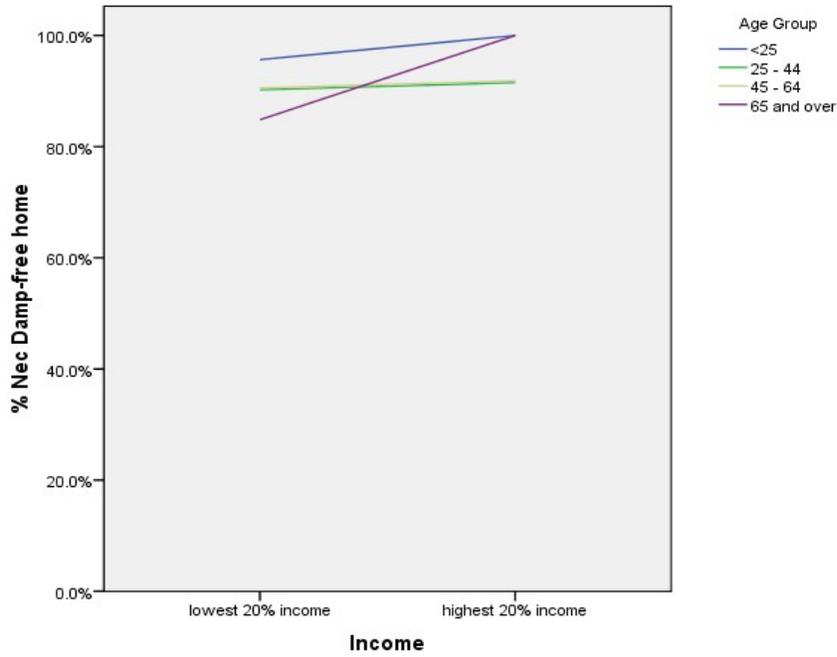


Figure 8b: Damp free home (sex of respondent)

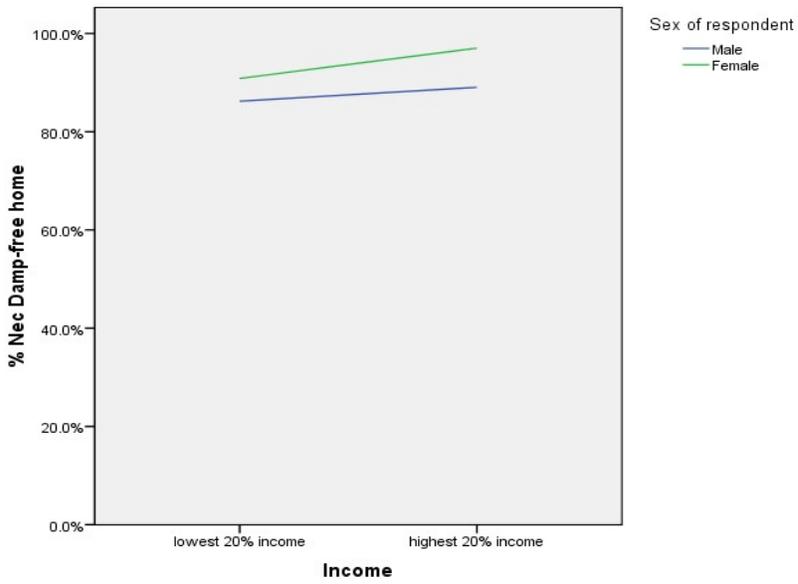
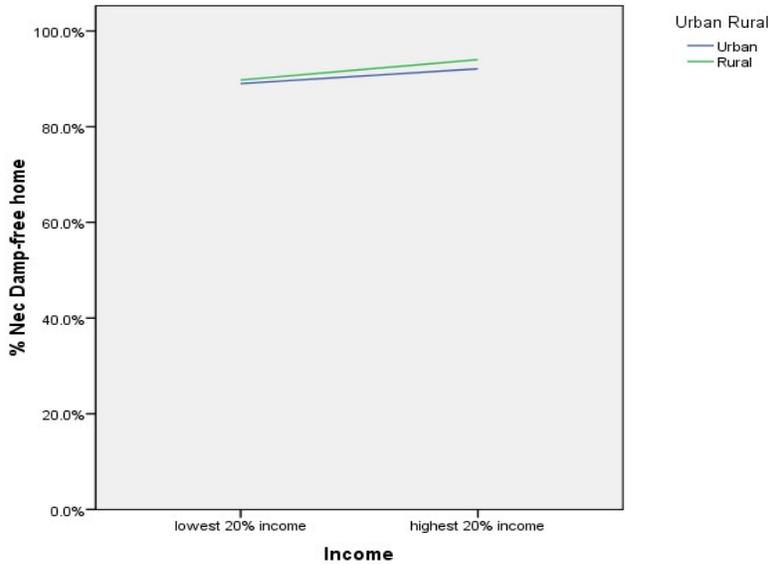


Figure 8c: Damp free home (Urban/Rural area)



These charts are also useful for showing where differences in support for particular items may exist. For instance, a television was considered essential by 55% of the overall population. However, in figure 9a below we can see how a television is of much less importance to those in managerial and professional occupations (across all ages but in particular the youngest age group aged 25 or younger) than it is for people in lower paid jobs.

Figure 9a: Television (age group)

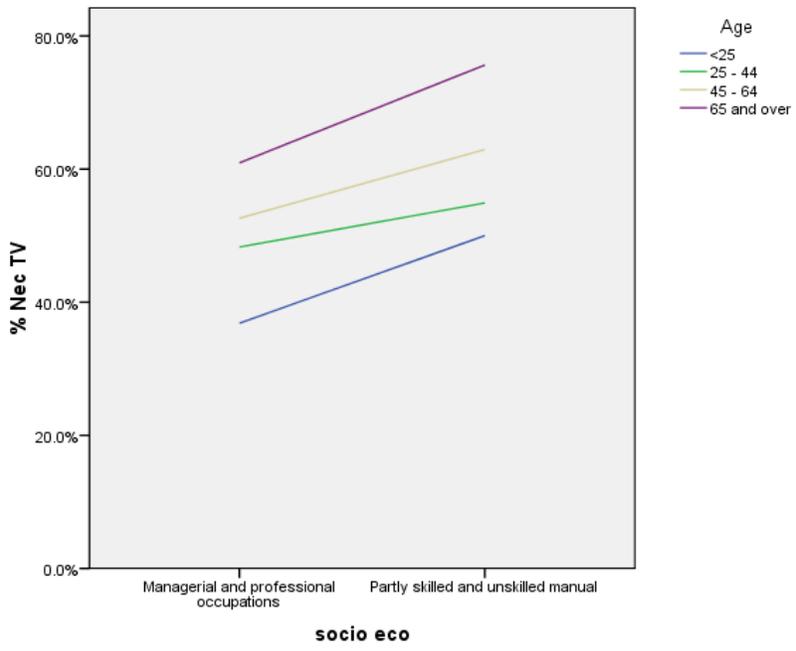


Figure 9b below shows that with regard to opinion on the necessity of a television, the greatest difference in attitudes is between men and women in partly skilled and unskilled manual occupations. Figure 9c shows very little difference of opinion between people living in urban and rural areas regarding their thoughts on a television being an essential item and it is still the case that this item is of more relevance to people in lower paid occupations.

Figure 9b: Television (Sex of respondent)

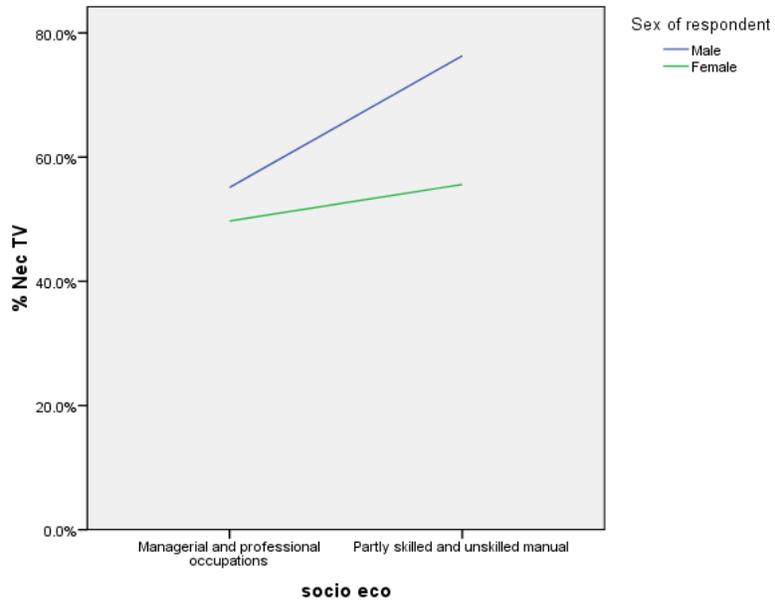
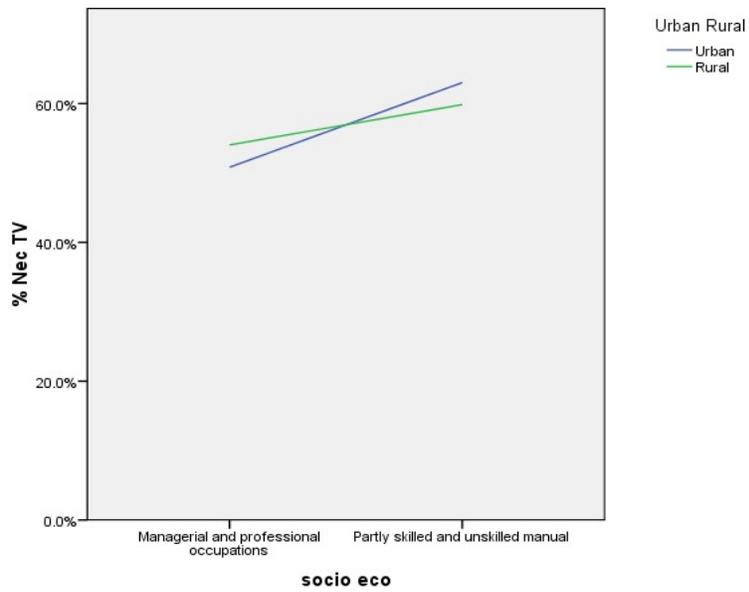


Figure 9c: Television (Urban/Rural location)

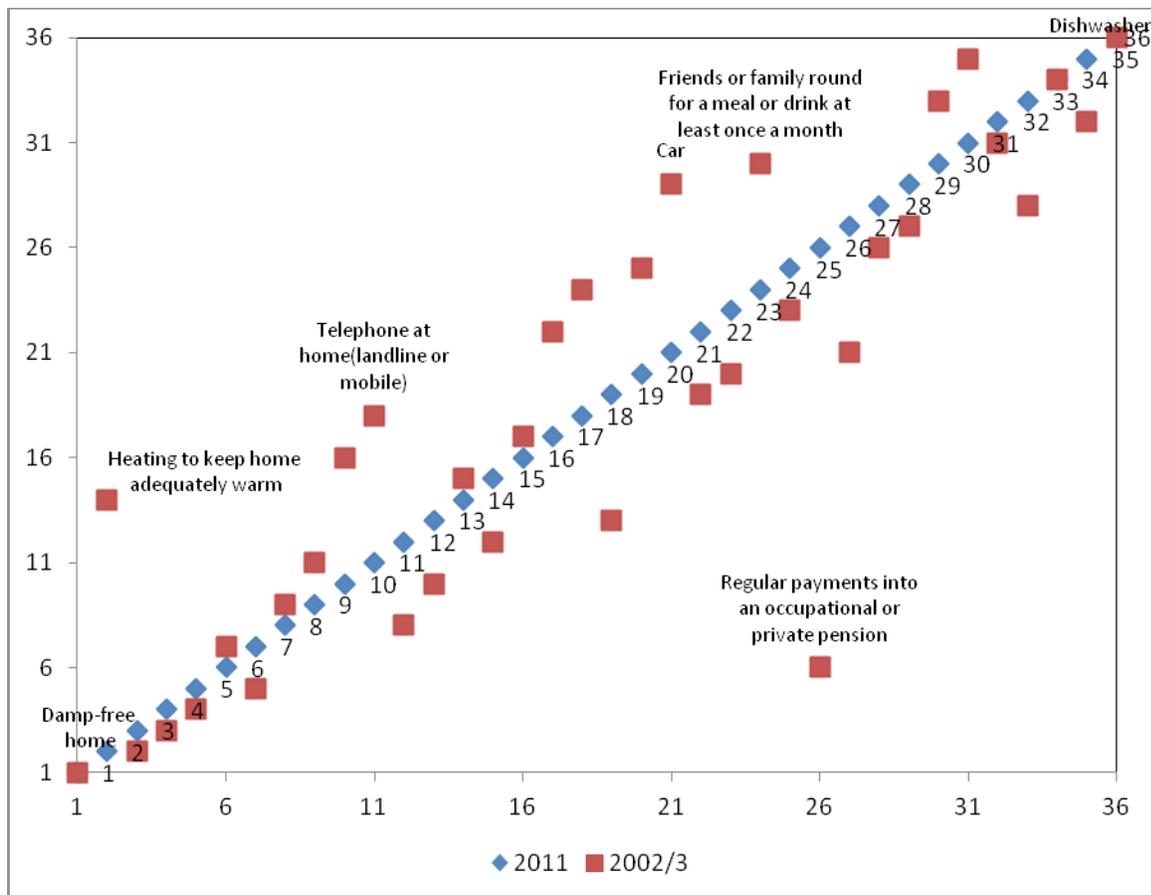


Heat map

A heat map is an alternative way to graphically display the individual necessities score values using colour to indicate various strengths of agreement. Items which received the highest agreement by particular groups in society in terms of their necessity are represented by orange, fading to yellow to indicate items which received less support and eventually the items and activities believed to be the least important are represented by dark green (see Appendix One).

Finally, we examine the extent to which the most recent public perception of necessities corresponds with our earlier findings. In order to consider the strength and direction of the relationship between the public's views of necessities in 2002/3 with those in 2011, the items and activities from each of those years were ranked in order of necessity (with 1 representing the item or activity deemed most necessary). Figure 10 below shows a scatterplot based on this ranking.

Figure 10: Differences between 2002/3 and 2011



Notice the closeness of the points on the graph from 1 to 25 (bottom left corner) – indicating strong agreement on the most essential items and activities over the time period such as a ‘Damp free home’, ‘Visiting friends or family in hospital or other institutions’, ‘Attending weddings, funerals and other such occasions’. A similar pattern is evident for those items thought to be the least necessary (top right corner) such as a ‘Dishwasher’ and ‘Holidays abroad once a year’. The points furthest away from the central line indicate areas of greatest disagreement. For example, more people in 2011 ranked ‘Regular payments into an occupational or private pension’ further down the list of necessities than people in 2002/3. We believe this is most likely attributable to the difference in question wording – in 2002/3 the question was ‘Access to a decent pension’. Although, as we have seen above, differences in opinion on this item are also related to income and occupational status.

People in 2002/3 placed ‘Heating to keep home warm’ further down the list. In 2011 this item, along with ‘Damp free home’, is the most essential necessity of life for people in Northern Ireland. This is not an unexpected finding. Some progress was made in reducing the levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland from 2001-2004 (from 27% to 23%). This was aided by the introduction of energy efficiency measures for low income households and the introduction of help for older people through Winter Fuel Allowances and Cold Weather Payments and – most importantly - fuel prices at that time were relatively low. Since then, fuel prices have increased substantially and by 2006 the rate increased to 34%. Information from the 2009 House Conditions Survey show 44% of households in Northern Ireland now have to pay more than 10% of their income on energy costs (NIHE, 2010). While the situation is more acute in Northern Ireland, the rise in fuel poverty has been experienced UK wide. In 2009, there were around 5.5 million fuel poor households in the UK, up from 4.5 million in 2008 (DECC, 2011).

The ‘Mobile phone’ difference may simply be related to duplication - in 2011 a ‘Telephone at home (landline or mobile)’ was a potential item together with a separate item of a ‘Mobile phone’.

The relationship between the ranked order of the items and activities in both years was explored further using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.³ There was a strong, positive correlation between the two sets of variables of .868 which was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

³ Correlation coefficient takes on a value ranging from -1 to +1 indicating whether a negative or positive association exists and the strength of that association. A correlation of +1.00 would be a perfect positive relationship; a correlation of 0 would indicate no relationship and a correlation of -1.00 would represent a perfect negative relationship.

Conclusion

The stage one survey has shown the broad consensus among the general public within Northern Ireland on the necessities of life for a minimum decent standard of living in 2011. While there are some important differences of opinion between different groups in society just as there was in 2002/3, these are not extensive and understandably some groups give more preference to particular items and/or activities than others. What is evident is the high degree of consensus on the necessity of basic material needs such as a 'Damp free home' and a 'Washing machine' but also the huge importance attached to carrying out social roles and responsibilities like 'Visiting friends or family in hospital or other institutions'; 'Attending weddings, funerals and other such occasions' and having a 'Hobby or leisure activity'. Similarly, the children's items and activities which received the largest support from the general public in Northern Ireland were associated with basic health and nutritional needs of children such as 'three meals a day' and 'new, properly fitting shoes'. The significance of social activities that children can engage in is clearly evident. This is demonstrated by the high-ranking given to activities such as 'celebrations on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or other religious festivals' and 'a hobby or leisure activity'.

The universal agreement and significance of the need to be able to afford 'Heating to keep home adequately warm' is reflective of the high rates of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland in 2011.

Some groups had a greater degree of difference of opinion than others – the greatest differences occurred between young people (18-24 years) and older people (65+ years). Notwithstanding a very small number of differences, Catholics and Protestants and people living in urban and rural areas were closest in agreement. Differences between men and women revealed the propensity of men to favour more personal consumption items as necessary as opposed to household items but while significant, the strength of this association is not very strong.

As expected, the number of people who said a 'Home computer' and 'Internet connection from home' increased greatly, though not as much as we had anticipated. This may be linked to the more restrictive definition of necessity used in the survey but the fact that it featured in differences between young and older people, educational level and socio-economic status suggests it relates to structural circumstances of a generation and income gap.

The decision on the additional items included in the survey was validated by the high degree of consensus among the general public as to their significance in 2011. For example, 68% of people agreed that 'A table, with chairs, at which all the family can eat' was necessary.

The additional item which received the most accord as to its necessity was 'All recommended dental work/treatment' with 78% agreement. This is a notable finding because oral health in Northern Ireland is among the worst in the UK with a clear socio economic gradient in dental health (NHS, 2011a, 2011b). This socio-economic gradient is also apparent for children as well as adults. While the majority of people in Northern Ireland still receive dental treatment under the NHS, the number of dentists opting out of the NHS to go into private practice is increasing significantly. In fact, there is now growing public concern about the risks posed by the lack of accessibility to NHS dental care, especially for those more vulnerable groups in society (PPC, 2011).

The survey findings confirm and reinforce the conclusions from 2002/3 of a broad consensus of opinion on what constitutes necessities for a minimum standard of living. Those necessities are both material and social in nature. It further updates the actual items and activities that are essential to achieve that minimum standard.

Appendix one

	Male	Female	Younger (16-24 years)	Older (65+ years)	Managerial and professional occupations	Partly skilled and unskilled manual	Tertiary	Primary	Catholic	Protestant	Has disability	No disability	Has dependants	No dependants
Damp-free home	91%	93%	93%	89%	91%	92%	94%	87%	91%	93%	91%	92%	94%	90%
Heating to keep home adequately warm	92%	92%	89%	86%	93%	93%	96%	85%	92%	92%	90%	93%	96%	90%
Two meals a day	85%	90%	82%	85%	88%	91%	91%	85%	89%	87%	89%	88%	91%	86%
Washing machine	83%	85%	74%	82%	80%	84%	82%	84%	85%	84%	86%	83%	88%	81%
Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine	77%	83%	75%	82%	80%	77%	80%	77%	80%	81%	77%	81%	79%	81%
A warm waterproof coat	79%	80%	59%	85%	83%	77%	82%	79%	80%	81%	82%	79%	79%	80%
Fresh fruit and vegetables every day	73%	83%	73%	76%	83%	71%	85%	70%	78%	80%	75%	79%	83%	76%
All recommended dental work/treatment	75%	81%	78%	71%	80%	76%	80%	71%	78%	78%	77%	78%	81%	76%
Telephone at home (landline or mobile)	73%	70%	65%	82%	72%	70%	73%	72%	71%	72%	75%	71%	71%	72%
Keep home in a decent state of decoration	72%	71%	64%	82%	66%	75%	68%	77%	69%	74%	74%	71%	67%	75%
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	68%	75%	72%	66%	72%	69%	76%	64%	75%	69%	70%	72%	77%	68%
Household contents insurance	69%	71%	64%	73%	70%	61%	70%	68%	67%	73%	72%	69%	70%	69%
A table, with chairs, at which all the family can eat	67%	69%	71%	69%	70%	65%	72%	64%	72%	66%	67%	69%	72%	66%
Curtains or window blinds	60%	70%	57%	70%	64%	68%	65%	64%	68%	64%	72%	64%	67%	65%
Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews	59%	60%	78%	42%	59%	59%	71%	45%	64%	56%	49%	62%	61%	59%
Regular savings (of at least £20 a month) for rainy days	55%	59%	53%	60%	59%	55%	63%	56%	59%	57%	53%	58%	59%	57%
Television	59%	53%	49%	63%	52%	62%	46%	67%	57%	54%	67%	53%	53%	57%
Two pairs of all-weather shoes	46%	62%	40%	68%	52%	60%	52%	61%	54%	55%	59%	53%	55%	54%
To be able to pay an unexpected expense of £500	53%	50%	44%	59%	53%	44%	53%	50%	48%	56%	52%	51%	50%	52%
Car	54%	48%	42%	59%	52%	41%	52%	50%	48%	53%	48%	51%	52%	49%
Replace worn out clothes with new (not second hand) ones	55%	47%	41%	57%	48%	49%	49%	49%	54%	49%	51%	51%	49%	52%
A small amount of money to spend each week on yourself, not on your family	48%	40%	43%	60%	40%	43%	41%	54%	41%	46%	50%	42%	33%	51%
Replace any worn out furniture	43%	45%	38%	52%	40%	48%	46%	47%	46%	43%	44%	44%	42%	46%
Presents for friends or family once a year	46%	41%	41%	48%	42%	44%	40%	44%	41%	45%	43%	43%	40%	45%
Regular payments into an occupational or private pension	42%	43%	46%	38%	48%	37%	47%	33%	38%	45%	34%	45%	40%	45%
An outfit to wear for social or family occasions such as parties and weddings	46%	37%	42%	49%	39%	34%	39%	44%	43%	40%	44%	40%	37%	44%
A roast joint (or its equivalent) once a week	44%	37%	22%	51%	38%	46%	32%	48%	40%	41%	48%	38%	41%	40%
Hair done or cut regularly	41%	32%	26%	52%	39%	32%	38%	38%	35%	37%	39%	35%	34%	37%
Mobile phone	40%	33%	42%	33%	33%	32%	34%	39%	37%	35%	33%	37%	34%	37%
Home computer	34%	26%	32%	19%	33%	22%	37%	21%	32%	27%	24%	31%	33%	27%
Internet connection at home	30%	26%	34%	16%	29%	23%	35%	19%	31%	25%	22%	29%	31%	26%
Dishwasher	13%	9%	9%	15%	12%	11%	13%	10%	15%	8%	11%	11%	11%	11%

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