

SURVEY OF POVERTY

University of Essex and London School of Economics

Summary of Progress to Date

In 1964 the Trust agreed to grant a sum of £32,000 for the research project on poverty to be completed in 1968. An advisory group to steer the project was set up and this group now includes Professor Richard M. Titmuss (LSE), Chairman; Miss Jean Rowntree and Mr. Ford Longman (Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust); Professor David Marsh (University of Nottingham); Mr. Leonard Nicholson (Central Statistical Office); Sir Donald Sargent (Ministry of Social Security); Professor John Yudkin (Queen Elizabeth College); Professor Brian Abel-Smith (LSE) and Professor Peter Townsend (University of Essex).

Towards the end of 1964 two Research Officers (Mr. Dennis Marsden and Mr. John Veit Wilson) and one Research Assistant (Miss Hilary Land) were appointed, and work got under way in 1965. Mr. Adrian Sinfield, Assistant Lecturer at the University of Essex from October 1965, and previously Research Assistant to Professors Abel-Smith and Townsend, also played a substantial role in the work. In the initial stages the team aimed to review existing information and methods of measurement, carry out pilot studies of certain minorities in the population about whom little was known and simultaneously develop research techniques which could be applied in the subsequent national survey. More recently the preparation of the research programme for the national survey has been strengthened by the appointment of another Research Officer (Mr. Christopher Bagley) and an Administrative Research Secretary (Miss Sheila Benson).

As a result a substantial volume of work has been published or is in draft, namely,

1. Abel-Smith, B., and Townsend, P., The Poor and the Poorest, London, Bell, 1965
2. Townsend, P., "Measures of Income and Expenditure as Criteria of Poverty", paper to Seminar on Poverty Research, Paris, September 1965 (to be published)
3. Abel-Smith, B., "Low Income Levels in Britain", Low Income Groups and Methods of Dealing with their Problems, OECD, Paris 1966
4. Townsend, P., "Notes on Concepts and Measurement of Poverty", paper given to International Congress of Sociology, Evian, September 1966 (to be published)
5. Sinfield, A., Unemployed in Shields (ready for press March 1967, approx. 150 pages)
6. Sinfield, A. & D., "Out of Work in Syracuse and Shields", in Among the People; Encounters with the Urban Poor, Deutscher, I. (ed), Basic Books, New York, 1967
7. Land, H., "Provision for Large Families", New Society, 24th November 1966
8. Land, H., London Families with Five or More Children (draft in advanced stage, completion Spring 1967)

9. Marsden, D., Fatherless Families in Huddersfield and Essex (draft in advanced stage, completion Spring 1967)
10. Marsden, D., "School Children in Poverty", Where, (to be published)
11. Veit Wilson, J., The Long Term Sick and their Families in Essex, (draft in advanced stage, completion Spring 1967)
12. Bagley, C., "Cost Equivalence Ratios" (to be published)
13. Abel-Smith, B., and Bagley, C., "The Problem of Establishing Equivalent Standards of Living for Families of Different Composition" (paper to be given to International Seminar on Poverty, Colchester, Essex, April 1967)

The National Survey: Reasons for Putting Forward a More Ambitious Plan

The original application to the Trust contained no detailed proposals for the final stages of the project. The aim as stated then was to collect information about living standards from a national sample of 5,000 households and further information about certain minorities by re-visiting small sub-samples. Two general points were made: that new definitions and measures of need would have to be explored, and that the circumstances and problems of the poor could be explained properly only in relation to the circumstances of the rest of society. Special information about the poor would have to be set against general information about those who were living in more prosperous conditions.

As the pilot work progressed it became clear that a much bigger survey was needed if accurate estimates were to be made of the size and characteristics of certain minority groups in the population who were in poverty. Secondly, the procedures for obtaining a national sample would have to be modified to make sure that certain minorities of the population who frequently moved, such as caravan-dwellers, were adequately represented. Thirdly, our pilot work and other studies showed that the interviews would have to be longer and more complicated than originally conceived to ensure the reliability of information which was collected about income and other resources. Two-fifths of the households in Britain have two or more earners and it is not always possible to rely on information supplied by the housewife about earnings and other income entering the household. Finally, our pilot work showed that rather more time than earlier anticipated would have to be spent on interviewing in order to identify some groups critical to the success of the project.

For these reasons we reluctantly came to the conclusion that if the project was to achieve its objectives and contribute to society's understanding of the problems of the poor, it would have to incur substantially larger costs.

There was also the problem of administering a national survey. There is as yet no survey organisation attached to any university in Britain which is capable of handling a large sample survey (although the Social Science

Research Council has now agreed to finance the initial costs of establishing a Social Science Research Council Survey Data Bank at the University of Essex). There were three alternative solutions (i) to commission the Government Social Survey or a research agency to do the interviewing for the poverty survey, while seeking joint responsibility for the selection and briefing of interviewers; (ii) to recruit staff and undertake the interviewing ourselves; or (iii) collaborate with an outside agency so that the agency and ourselves each carried out about 50 per cent of the interviewing.

A paper discussing some of these problems was laid before the Advisory Group at its last meeting on 27th September 1966. The Group doubted the capacity of any external research agency to complete satisfactorily a project of the kind proposed and expressed sympathy with the need to enlarge the sample in order to estimate minority problems more accurately.

Since that meeting a great deal has been done to clarify the type of questionnaire and range of interviewing techniques that would be needed to carry out the project; develop new methods of sampling; estimate the appropriate number of households to be included in the sample, and explore what administrative alternatives there might be for handling a large number of interviews throughout the country. To develop an ad hoc national survey organisation from scratch, for example, was an enormous administrative task and could not be treated lightly. We had a series of meetings with the Director of the Government Social Survey, Ministers and officials of the Ministries of Social Security and Labour, and independent experts in statistics and surveys. The following summarises the conclusions we reached as a result of these meetings.

The National Survey: Summary

Two random samples consisting of about 4,500 and 7,000 households respectively throughout the United Kingdom would be drawn, starting in the early autumn of 1967. Information from the first sample would allow the distribution of income and resources of a cross section of households throughout the United Kingdom to be described. Information from the second sample would supplement that from the first about households with characteristics which are believed to be associated with poverty.

The first survey of 4,500 households, allowing for refusals and no-contacts, would aim to produce data from about 3,000 interviews. The information would differ from that obtained in the present Ministry of Labour Family Expenditure Survey in three respects: (i) there would be detailed information about resources other than income. The emphasis would be on income in the broadest sense rather than expenditure; (ii) there would be a substantial amount of information about housing, education, employment and the use of social services; and (iii) there would be information about the degree of well-being or disability of each individual in the household.

The second survey of 7,000 households, in which it is assumed in

practice that interviews would be granted by 4,500 to 5,000 households, would proceed rather differently. An adult representative of each household would be approached and for the first thirty minutes of an interview information would be obtained about the age, marital and social status, employment status and period of present employment, last and main occupation, education, ethnic origin, and degree of well-being or disability of each individual member of the household. This information would allow the interviewer to characterise those households for which further information is required, e.g. large families, fatherless families, families with unemployed adult men, and families in which there are children with severe mental handicaps. At this point the interviews in 2,500 to 3,000 households could be terminated. The remaining 2,000 households would cover groups with various kinds of problem, most of which are listed on a later page. These interviews would be extended to cover income and other resources, taking approximately a further hour to complete. It is expected that about 750 households in the first sample of 3,000 will also fall into these special groups.

In both surveys it is unlikely that reliable information about income and other resources can be obtained without also interviewing any other adult who happens to be an earner. This is likely to involve a further 2,500 to 3,000 interviews (many of them in evenings and weekends).

Altogether, then, we aim to complete 3,000 short and up to 8,000 second and extended interviews in the main stage of the inquiry, covering a total of 11,000 interviews in 8,000 households. The numbers are set out in Tables I and II. The total cost would be around £42,000. The objects and methods of procedure are described step by step in subsequent paragraphs.

TABLE I
Size of Samples

	<u>Random Sample A</u>	<u>Random Sample B</u>
Households selected	4,500	7,000
Households responding	3,000	5,000
Households in special groups	750	2,000

Total households in special groups :

Sample A	750
Sample B	2,000
	<u>2,750</u>

TABLE II
Number of Interviews

	<u>Sample A</u>	<u>Sample B</u>
(a) First interview (long)	3,000	
(b) Screening (short)		2,500-3,000
(c) Screening and interviewing (long)		2,500-2,000
(d) Second interview	1,800	1,200
	<hr/> 4,800	<hr/> maximum 6,200

1. Special Minorities and the Size of the Sample

There are two major objectives. The first is to estimate the scale of poverty and relative deprivation in the United Kingdom. The second is to identify some of the household or family groups who are particularly liable to poverty and to describe their characteristics as a first step towards "explaining" why so many of them live in depressed circumstances.

Our pilot studies have aimed to collect preliminary information about four groups: fatherless families, families with five or more children, families with a head who has been sick for three months or more and families in which the head is unemployed. These studies have been much more ambitious methodologically as well as substantively than originally planned. We hope that the reports, when published, will add considerably to knowledge about the circumstances of life of some of those living on low incomes. However, the information which has been collected is not representative for the population as a whole and the studies have called attention to the need to explore certain special topics. We would therefore wish to devote sections of the eventual major report on poverty in the United Kingdom to each of these groups. But we would also wish to devote sections of a report to other minorities, namely the families in which there are adults with earnings which are markedly low (e.g. less than 60 per cent of the average industrial earnings of either men, or women, as the case may be), the bedfast and housebound aged; families including at least one adult who is disabled; families including at least one child who is disabled or handicapped; immigrant families; and families experiencing frequent interruptions of employment.

The following list gives estimates of the numbers of certain kinds of households we expect to identify in the two surveys. The numbers are low in certain instances, e.g. families with an unemployed adult, but we will supplement our information from other sources to strengthen the particular section of the report.

	<u>No.1 survey</u> achieved sample of 3,000 households	<u>No.2 survey</u> "screened" sample of 4,500 to 5,000 households	<u>Total</u>
1. Families in which one parent is absent	90	150	240
(a)(i) mother absent, father separated (or divorced)	(40)	(67)	(107)
(ii) " ", others	(30)	(50)	(80)
(b)(i) father absent, mother separated (or divorced)	(15)	(25)	(40)
(ii) " ", others	(5)	(8)	(13)
2. Families in which an adult or adolescent has been unemployed two months or more	40	67	107
3. Families in which an adult has been sick for three months or more	90	150	240
4. Families in which an adult under 65 is disabled	110	185	295
(a) War disability (30% disable- ment)	(40)	(67)	(107)
(b) Industrial injury (30% disablement)	(20)	(33)	(53)
(c) Other	(50)	(85)	(135)
5. Families in which a child is disabled or handicapped or has been sick for three months or more	50	85	135
6. Families with aged person	280	467	747
(a) Bedfast or chairfast	(40)	(67)	(107)
(b) Otherwise housebound or disabled	(240)	(400)	(640)
7. Families with five or more children	60	100	160
8. Immigrant families	90	150	240
9. Residual households with earners with low wage (or non-earners with low total income)	150	250	400
TOTAL	960	1,604	2,564
10. Provision for interviewing other minorities shown from the pilot work and first stages of the main survey to be prone to poverty	240	396	636
GRAND TOTAL	1,200	2,000	3,200

2. Sampling for National Survey

Obtaining a representative sample of the population for the purposes of research on poverty has always posed special problems. A tiny minority of the population, e.g. itinerant caravan dwellers, tends not to be represented at all on electoral and rating registers. A larger minority, while finding their way on to registers, are not in fact interviewed in surveys because they have moved in the period between compilation of the register and the selection of names and addresses for the survey. It is known that these two minorities contain disproportionately large numbers of low-income households.

Both samples of the United Kingdom population will be drawn on the same basis. The provisional plan is to base the sample on constituencies. The first stage will be to select twenty to twenty-five pairs of constituencies which are close enough together for the same interviewers to be able to operate in both from the same base. The constituencies can be so chosen to contain a higher than average proportion of households with low income. One possibility is to apply statistics of the percentage of the vote going to the Labour Party in the last election - a method believed to be superior to the juror's index, which is commonly used for this purpose. Most of the distortion introduced by deliberately selecting areas with a higher than average proportion of households with low income can be removed by feeding appropriate corrective data into the computer before the analyses are run off.

We have not yet decided whether it is preferable to weight both samples in this way or only the second. There are arguments for both courses and we are consulting advisers. The latter alternative might mean replacing a number of constituencies, say five pairs, in drawing the second sample.

Within each constituency random samples of the population will be drawn from the electoral register. It is hoped to be able to use the registration data collected by July 1967 even though the new registers will not yet be published. Permission will be sought from the Home Office and local authorities. Special techniques are being explored to enable such groups as caravan dwellers and new immigrants to be correctly represented in the samples even though they may not have been included in the new draft electoral registers.

These provisional plans for sampling have been suggested to us by Professor Alan Stuart of the London School of Economics and may be revised in further discussions with him and Professor Durbin.

3. Administrative Organisation of Survey

Since from the start we aimed to undertake at least a substantial proportion of the interviewing ourselves we have given considerable thought to the problem of organisation. Professor Townsend had earlier directed a national survey of some 2,400 elderly patients and residents in 128 hospitals

and other institutions and for this purpose seventeen interviewers had been recruited for different periods of 1963. Miss Sheila Benson, who was in charge of the management, coding and analysis of that survey, has now been appointed to manage the present survey. The Director of the Government Social Survey has offered his help with the recruitment, training and supervision of interviewers and we hope that difficulties that may arise in any particular areas can be met with his help.

We propose to recruit a group of 25 to 30 interviewers during the late spring and early summer of 1967. This will be done partly by advertisement, partly by contact with universities and research agencies. Candidates will be interviewed and asked to complete trial interviews both alone and under supervision. It is likely that a large proportion will fail to surmount the various hurdles. Eventually the team will be composed of both full-time and part-time staff, who will be employed from October 1967. In principle we will seek to appoint four interviewers for each sub-group of four pairs of constituencies, aiming to proceed from each pair of constituencies to the next pair during the four quarters of the year.

Control of the quality of data collection will be effected by

- (i) interviewer recruitment procedures similar to those of the Government Social Survey and, if possible, tied in with their general training schemes;
- (ii) trial interviewing under supervision; (iii) a pilot survey carried out in the summer of 1967; (iv) briefing meetings of interviewers in London and the North immediately before the survey is launched in the autumn of 1967;
- (v) supervision of interviewing and scrutiny of completed questionnaires by Miss Benson, supported, wherever possible, by the regional organisation of the Government Social Survey.

By spreading the fieldwork over a period of twelve months we have the opportunity of restricting data collection to a much smaller number of personnel than is usual in a national survey.

4. Supplementary Studies

Originally we intended to undertake follow-up studies of four groups: fatherless families, the chronic sick, large families and the aged. Our pilot studies of three of these groups have in practice covered much of the necessary ground. The Ministry of Social Security has itself also studied in recent years the financial circumstances of both old people and families with two or more children. For these and the reasons advanced earlier we have modified our plans in two ways. First, we have chosen to increase the number of minorities who can be studied intensively by developing a second survey dependent on a "screening" interview. A more comprehensive report can be prepared. However, the scale of our survey provides an opportunity for subsequent study of these and other minorities who are rarely studied. It is difficult for research workers to obtain representative samples of names and addresses. We therefore propose to retain provision

in our application for at least two follow-up studies of groups whom it would be desirable to study more intensively, perhaps with the help of the Ministry of Social Security.

In this context we should report that Mrs. Margot Jefferys is undertaking a major study of disability from Bedford College, London, and we have had consultations with her about the possibility of providing a sample of names and addresses for further study. We have also had consultations with the Disablement Income Group, who hope to secure a grant to allow a sub-sample of disabled persons under the age of 65 to be visited a second time. Their aim would be to explore the relationship of the disabled with the social services, particularly the Ministry of Social Security. In principle we would be glad to co-operate with other responsible groups wishing to undertake research into special groups within the population.