

NSPCC Policy Summary Child Poverty

Objective

To support initiatives to reduce and to eradicate child poverty.

To ensure that the debate about child poverty includes practical developments in social policy to reduce the risk of child maltreatment by focusing on the known associations between maltreatment and poverty.

Children's Rights

Child poverty can affect the extent to which the government fulfils the rights contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). These include:

Article 19 States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of...neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation...while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 24 States Parties recognise the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

Article 26 States Parties shall recognise for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.

Article 27 States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Key Points

Child cruelty will not be eradicated unless child poverty is ended. The NSPCC is a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition and supports the government's commitment to halve child poverty by 2010 and to end child poverty by 2020.

Although it is clear that most parents living in poverty do not maltreat their children, there is a known association between poverty and some forms of child maltreatment. Child abuse occurs across all classes and its actual causes are complex. Nevertheless, most children on child protection registers are from low-income families and the most commonly identified stress factors in all registered cases of child abuse are unemployment and debt, which are closely related to poverty.

The pressures involved in coping with inadequate income cause stress, which can exacerbate the health problems associated with poor diet, inadequate heating and poor housing. Such pressures also increase the likelihood of family tension and breakdown. In such circumstances, emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect are more likely. Child abuse rates tend to be higher in deprived neighbourhoods, where poverty is concentrated, support services are inadequate and social exclusion is marked.

Research, including *Living with Hardship 24/7* has found that “the stresses of poverty were inevitably part of the background either of the abuse or its aftermath.” The link between poverty and child maltreatment is well illustrated in the report, which shows:

- The strain that living in poverty places on families makes coping with challenging situations harder
- A significant number of the families in the research sample found themselves in poverty as a direct result of domestic violence
- The links between experiencing child maltreatment and experiencing poverty as an adult
- The lack of the protective factor of family support when there has been a history of abuse
- The lack of respect that adults living in poverty experience in other areas of their lives can make it difficult for them to manage behaviour positively The increased risk of bullying of children whose poverty is visible.
- The lack of services available to families in need compounds the problem
- Previous negative experiences of contact with professionals may mean that asking for help is harder.

Living with Hardship is a powerful reminder that we will not end cruelty to children without ending child poverty. Poverty affected people’s lives in numerous ways in the study – it was even a source of stress for children as young as five. An eight year old girl told the researcher why she was worried about money “because if we don’t have much money then we won’t be able to buy food and then Melissa will die” The report concurs with other studies that recommend a change in government policy in order to meet the government’s own child poverty target.

The research also has implications for how family support services are delivered. It shows the importance of providing services which support family members as individuals, but also considers the wider needs of the whole

family. There are clear policy and practical issues in the type of interventions that are provided and how these services are delivered to socially excluded families that could increase protective factors and reduce risk factors. The debate about child poverty must include practical developments in social policy that reduce the risk of child maltreatment by focusing on the known risk factors.

The harmful effects of poverty on children are well documented

- From a children's rights perspective, poverty can prevent children being able to reach their full potential and achieve the positive outcomes set out in Every Child Matters and the equivalent children's outcomes frameworks in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It can have an impact on their health, their well-being, their chance to enjoy and achieve, their opportunity to be a positive contribution to society.
- There is an established association between poverty and perinatal and infant mortality, malnutrition and ill-health. This disadvantage is very often reinforced across generations.
- Black and minority ethnic children are particularly disadvantaged and are disproportionately represented in the poorest fifth of the UK population.
- Poverty contributes to inequalities and social exclusion.
- It can prevent children having access to the opportunities available to other children in areas such as health, education, employment and housing.

External factors

The recently established Child Poverty Unit brings together officials from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop policy, to conduct poverty impact assessments on policies from other departments and to develop what they are referring to as a "road map to eradicate child poverty". The NSPCC welcomes the establishment of the Child Poverty Unit and is actively involved as a member of its stakeholder group.

NSPCC Recommendations:

In order to reduce and to eradicate child poverty, and to fulfil its responsibility to UK children in all jurisdictions, the Government should:

- Invest the £3 billion required to lift children out of poverty
- Develop a set of Child Well-Being Indicators, building on existing poverty indicators, to describe the condition of children, to help monitor performance and to inform future policy development. The indicators should include specific targets for reducing child abuse.
- Set targets for each Children's Trust to develop a strategy for reducing child poverty
- Ensure the provision of universally available, high-quality child care. This should include re-assessing the need for social services daycare facilities and ensuring adequate provision of black and ethnic minority childminders.

- Introduce an improved system of financial support for all children and young people. This should include:
 - an established minimum income standard necessary to maintain the health and well-being of children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - an end to discrimination against young people in the benefits system
 - extending access to passported benefits for families on a low income
 - introducing an education grant to cover the cost of school uniforms and school essentials
 - reforming the Social Fund to give families access to grants to pay for essentials such as beds and cookers and to alleviate the problems created by debt
 - increasing maternity and paternity benefits and paid parental leave
 - extra support for large families and for families with a disabled child.

Children's voices are easily lost in the allocation of public spending. If we are to redress the situation where one in four children in our country live in poverty, we need to commit the necessary public resources to this issue.

Related policy summaries

Family support

Domestic violence

Useful websites

www.endchildpoverty.org.uk

www.cpag.org.uk

Supporting documents/research

DWP, HM Treasury, DCSF (March 2008) *Ending Child Poverty: everybody's business*.

Harker L , November 2006 , Delivering on Child Poverty: What would it take? DWP

Hirsch D (July 2007), *What will it take to end Child Poverty? - Firing on all cylinders*, JRF

London Child Poverty Commission Final Report (February 2008) *Capital Gains*, London Child Poverty Commission.

NSPCC/ University of York/Frank Buttle Trust *Living with hardship 24/7- The Diverse Experiences of families In Poverty*, November 2007

NSPCC Submission to the Social Exclusion Task Force Families at Risk Review,
April 2007

NSPCC evidence for the Treasury Select Committee, January 2007

Strelitz J (November 2007), *Living Under The Radar – Severe Child Poverty in the UK*, Save the Children.

UNICEF, 1989. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. New York:
UNICEF.

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