

Child Poverty - Young People's Views



healthwatch
Blackburn with Darwen

Background

Blackburn with Darwen Public Health team are developing a child poverty strategy to mitigate the impact of poverty, and working with organisations to reduce the barriers that children, young people and families who live in poverty may experience. Child poverty rates in 2021/22 were 42.2% in the borough, with Blackburn with Darwen being one of the top 20 local authorities with highest child poverty rates.

The Council is committed to challenging child poverty in Blackburn with Darwen, which includes an acknowledgment of the scale and impact of poverty on children, young people and families. Poverty is not just the absence of food, warmth, housing, clothes and toiletries- it is the discrimination and exclusion which people who live with poverty face.

Young people's views and experiences of child poverty are pivotal to shaping the borough's strategy therefore Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen undertook engagement with young people across June 2023 to gather their views.

We carried out two focus groups in both Pleckgate High School (years 9 and 10) and Darwen Aldridge Community Academy (years 7-10) and shared an online survey with schools across the borough for young to complete. We received 780 responses to the online survey from young people attending Pleckgate High School, St Wilfrid's Church of England Academy and Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School, with a range of responses from years 7-10.

The findings from this engagement are included within this report.

Executive Summary

What is Poverty?

Young people's overriding feedback was that poverty means that you cannot afford the basics in life - food, heat and light and housing, in addition to not being able to afford the same things as your peers. They also felt that it led to instability and potentially unsafe living environment. Young people thought that poverty would lead to poor mental and physical health.

Over 80% of respondents felt that people's circumstances had become more challenging in the last year and greatest concerns about money were worrying about money all the time and being in debt.

Impact on Home Life

Key themes of feedback from young people were that it would be a struggle to buy food and clothes, not being able to afford heat and light as well as concerns about debt and not having money. Lack of internet access was considered to be a significant factor that would make young people living in poverty not be able to access the same opportunities and attainment as their peers.

Poor housing was a concern for many as well as the impact on young people's mental health and relationships both with their family and friends. They felt that they would be too embarrassed to invite friends round to their house and could be bullied because they did not have the same things as their peers. Quality and stability of their housing situation were key concerns for young people.

Impact on Education

Young people felt that living in poverty might result in not being able to engage in education due to being tired, hungry and not having clean clothes to wear. They felt that young people living in poverty might also have to take on a greater caring role or part time work which again would impact on their ability to stay in education. Not being able to afford uniform, equipment and books were a concern as was not being able to afford school trips. All of these result in young people not having the same educational opportunities and attainment as their peers, resulting in them being excluded and potentially bullied.

Being bullied and not being able to focus on school work due to being tired and hungry were the two greatest concerns for respondents.

Impact on a Young Person's Life Chances

Not being able to have the same length or quality of education and opportunities/ life chances as their peers were the most common themes in responses from young people. They also felt that this would impact on your health and life expectancy.

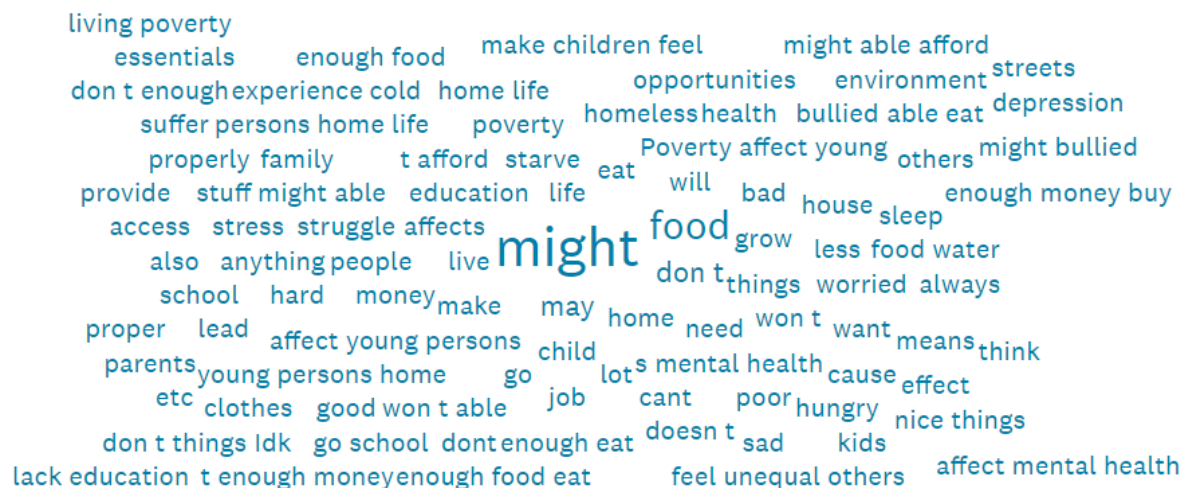
These themes and young people's thoughts on how school and others might support young people living in poverty are explored in greater depth in the body of this report.

Young people also referred to the impact of poverty on people's mental health, "Poverty means when someone is living in stress because of them struggling through the cost of living crisis."

Feedback from young people engaged in our focus groups was similar and people talked about lack of money to afford basics like food, heating and lighting. However, greater reference was made to 'not having the same things as other people' - which included TV subscriptions and internet access.

There was also reference to the impact on people's physical and mental health. "We wouldn't cope if we had to pay huge amounts of money for health services like in the US."

How does poverty affect a young person's home life?



Lack of access to food was the most significant issue raised by young people in response to this survey question with references to people being hungry and malnourished. They also made reference to the impact on a young person's education but expanded on this in the following question. Hunger and tiredness were felt to impact on a young person's wellbeing and educational attainment.

"They don't get enough food that they need to live so they may always be tired hungry and may find it hard to do any exercise."

"A young person might not be able to be fed at home if they are in poverty"

However, the responses to this question were far ranging amongst young people.

Living conditions were raised as an issue both from a health perspective but also being embarrassed to bring friends round because of the state of their home. This also impacts on their mental health.

“It affects a young person’s home life because they may live in cold houses and may be that they have no food.”

“They can develop an illness due to living in cold, dirty and rough homes”

“It makes the child feel stressed. They may feel pressured that they house isn’t a certain way.”

“Living in poor households can make children feel unequal to others.”

Young people also made reference to the lack of stability in living conditions and being unable to keep up with rent payments which would impact on a young person’s emotional wellbeing and family life. This also impacted on their feelings of safety.

“Scared you might not be able to live in a house”

“It can make them lose their house”

“They might not be living in a safe environment”

Young people felt relationships within the home would be impacted negatively by living in poverty.

“There could be a lot of stress and tension in the house which disregards a person’s safe environment.”

“Furthermore they might feel angry at their parents or family members. They could feel jealous or upset of their life compared to others.”

“It might cause their parents to be stressed a lot resulting in them acting in anger”

“Always worrying if you’re asking for too much from your parents. Neglecting your needs.”

They also felt that they would not have the same freedom and opportunities as their peers as a result of living in poverty. This also impacted on their ability to achieve as well in school because they would not be able to do homework.

“They won’t have the same things and opportunities as a wealthier person they would miss out on lots of stuff.”

“Can’t do anything”

“Hard, difficult to live in, feeling as if they’re different to everyone else etc”

“They don’t experience the normal kid life”

“No internet, no equipment, no money meaning they can’t do homework”

All of these factors were deemed to impact a young person’s mental health negatively.

“It would have a big impact on their mental health therefore, being more upset and angry, aggressive.”

“They don’t have a good childhood which could result in mental health problems”

Feedback from young people engaged in our focus groups was similar, however there was a greater sense that young people would be bullied for their circumstances and that they would be excluded from activities with their peers and lose friendships as a result.

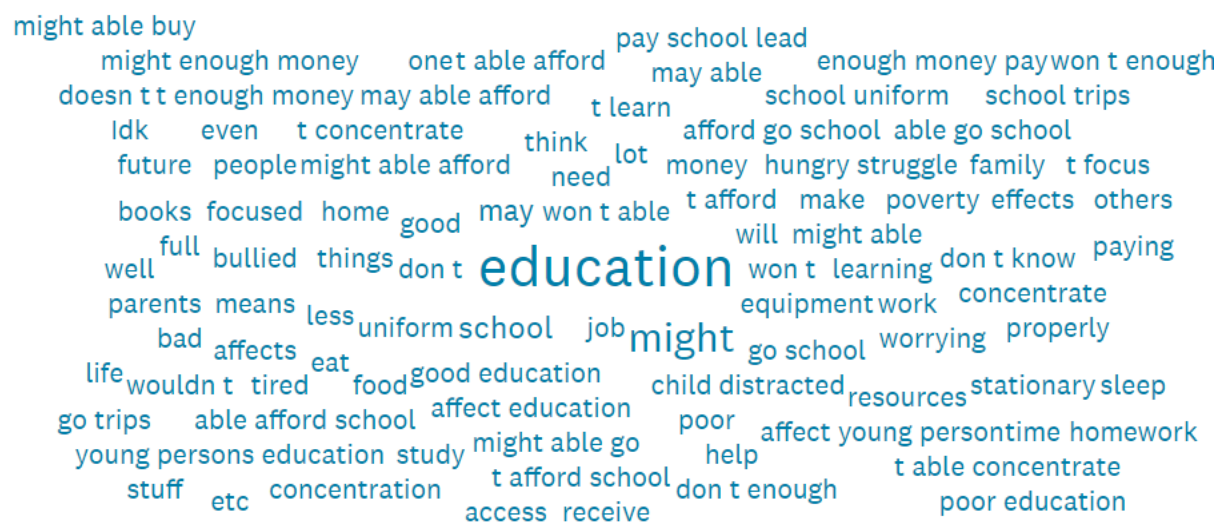
“You’d probably get bullied online as well as at school.”

The same themes of struggling to buy food and clothes and not being able to afford heat and light came through in discussions as well as concerns about debt and not having money. Lack of internet access was considered to be a significant factor that would make young people living in poverty not be able to access the same opportunities and attainment as their peers.

However some young people felt that you would only know that your parents were struggling money wise if there was a change in circumstances or if their parents were open with them about it.

“If you were always living in poverty I don’t think you’d know.”

How does poverty affect a young person’s education?



Several young people felt that young people living in poverty simply would not be able to afford to go to school.

“They may not be able to afford education and as such may struggle in their later years.”

The main reasons for this were not being able to afford uniform, supplies and equipment. Young people felt that living in poverty meant that you would not have

the same access to learning materials (books and online) and as a result your educational attainment would suffer.

“you might not have any books or tech to learn in so education could decrease for a young person in poverty.”

Equally not being able to afford school trips and have the same opportunities as their peers was raised as an issue.

“it affects education can’t afford trips uniform and may feel left out and embarrassed.”

Lack of ability to study due to hunger, tiredness and thinking about their situation at home was also a common theme in responses.

“If they are starving then they may be tired at school and struggle to concentrate in class.”

Taking on a caring role at home or having to work were also considered to be factors that might affect young people’s education if living in poverty.

“It prevents them from learning due to fear and having to worry about financial issues and might be taking up a larger role at home.”

Being bullied at school because of their home circumstances was also raised as a concern for young people living in poverty.

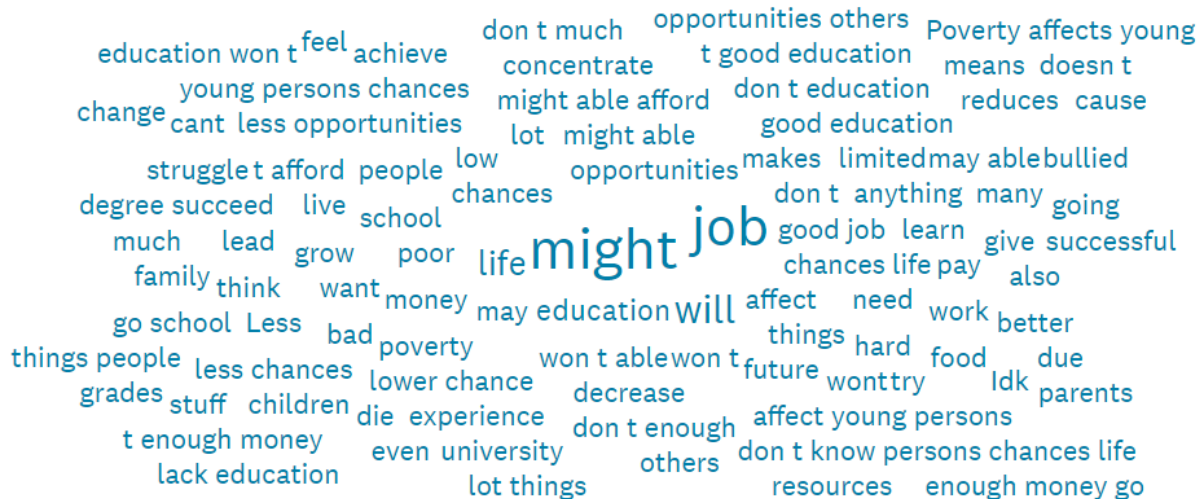
“They might be bullied if they have dirty clothes or have no friends”

“They could start falling asleep in class, having panic attacks, getting bullied for wearing the same clothes everyday, and being skinny shamed.”

The same concerns were raised by young people in our focus groups. However, young people felt that close friends would look after each other, therefore whether someone was bullied for being poor depended on the quality of the friendship.

They also felt that young people living in poverty might have to skip school if they do not have clean clothes, have not slept properly or could not function well because they had not had enough food.

How does poverty affect a young person's chances in life?



Not being able to have the same length or quality of education and opportunities/life chances as their peers were the most common responses to how poverty would affect a young person's chances in life.

“negative impacts on children's health, social, emotional and cognitive development, behaviour and educational outcomes”

“It may put them at a disadvantage. Their education may be limited to college as they cannot afford the costs of university.”

Not only would it affect their access to the same opportunities as their peers, young people felt it would limit their ability to get a good job.

“They have a lower chance of becoming what they want to be just because of a lack of money.”

“Poverty affects a young person's chances in life as they might struggle to get a career in the future, might not be able to provide for their family, and doesn't have a salary to provide for themselves etc.”

However, some respondents felt that resilience was a key factor in whether poverty would impact on your life chances.

“It doesn't really affect a young person's chances as long as the young person has the intention to gain knowledge then he will become successful”

“It affects the person depending on how strong they are”

More widely, young people felt that poverty would impact on people's health - both physical and mental and their life expectancy.

“Denies the chances of getting a job and opens chances of depression and bad mental health”

“It can affect them in the long run and not being able to have a long life”

“Challenging because poverty includes high stress levels as well as health issues.”

The main challenge expressed by young people attending our focus groups was the ability to afford university, which might then impact on your future employment opportunities. Inability to travel for work was also raised as a barrier to employment opportunities. Young people felt that it would impact on where they could work - travel on public transport and learning to drive might be too expensive.

What can we do to address child poverty?

We asked young people in our focus groups what we could do collectively to tackle child poverty.

School

Uniform

“School has a uniform shop and shoes have to be non-branded which stops people knowing if people can’t afford big brands.”

“There’s no non-uniform school days which although we would want them is because it stops people comparing clothes and how much money people have.”

Equipment

“School could help out with internet at home so people don’t have to miss out on breaks because they have to get homework done whilst in school e.g. internet dongles.”

“School gives everyone an ipad so that helps.”

Food and Water

“Breakfast bars are available from tutors and if you’re missing a meal at home school can help out.”

“Free school meals for everyone to avoid stigma.”

“There are water taps in school to save you paying for water.”

Period Poverty

“The school could do more to address period poverty - a girl in our year is talking with teachers about this to see what the school can do. They are looking at free

vending machines or a basket in the toilets. Raising awareness of period poverty in school would be important too.”

“School provides period products for girls who can’t afford them.

Someone to talk to

“Counsellors for young people in school.”

You could talk to whichever teacher you feel most comfortable with about the issues you’re experiencing.

“You could have mentor support from peers or from a teacher you feel comfortable talking to.”

Friends

“You could help friends out buying things for them like food. Friends would look after each other.”

“We could all help each other by not bringing other people down. We could help each other out and get friends help through teachers.”

Council and Wider Society

“The Council could help people in poor housing.”

“Transport should stay at £2 for buses.”

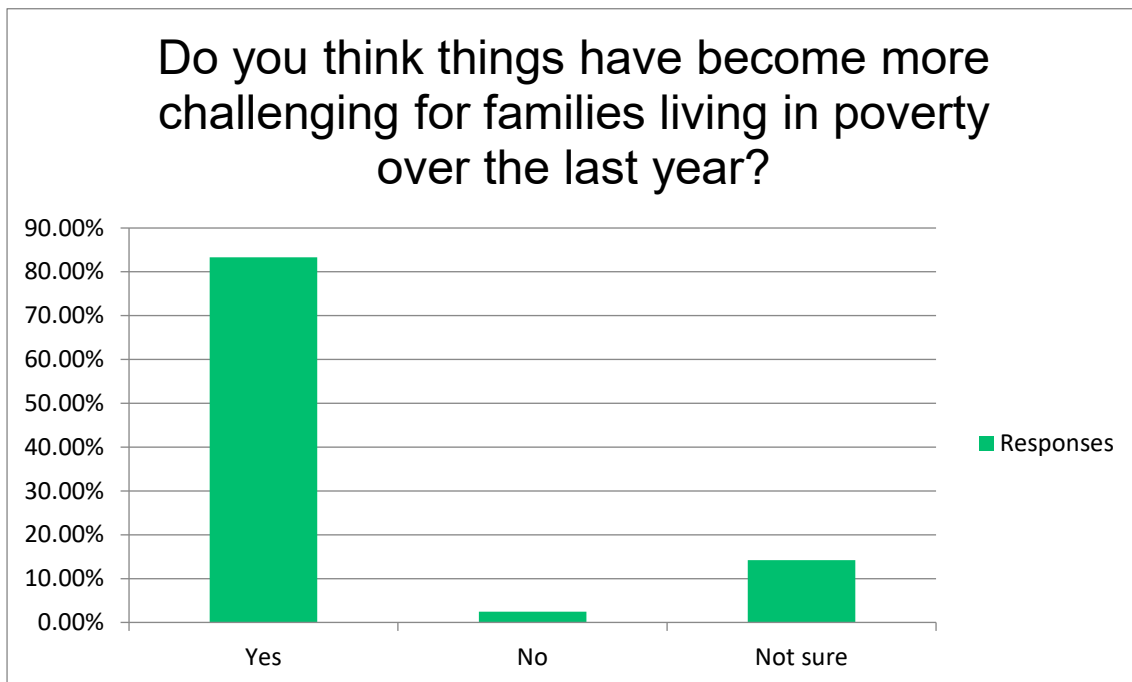
“Reduce taxes!”

“Help with wifi would help some people.”

“Foodbanks are helpful for people.”

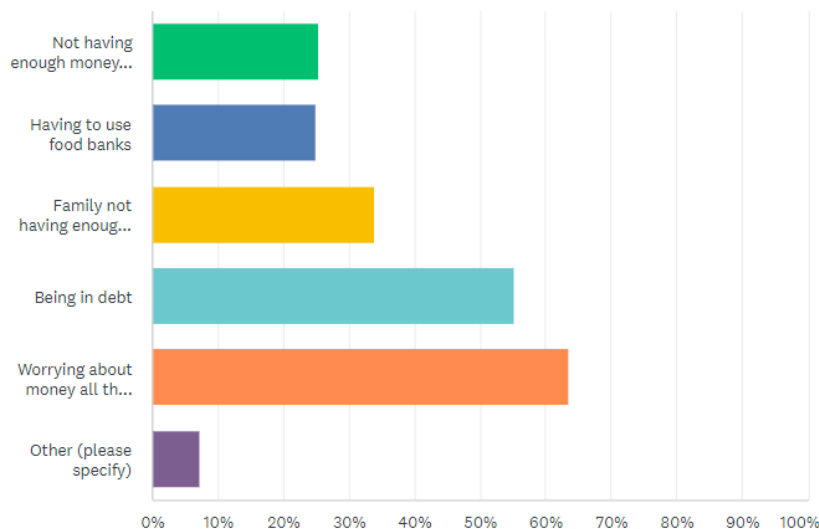
Further Survey Responses

We asked the following further questions in the online survey.



What do you think the most challenging things about living in poverty for children and young people are when it comes to MONEY? Please tick TWO statements from each of the categories below.

Answered: 774 Skipped: 6



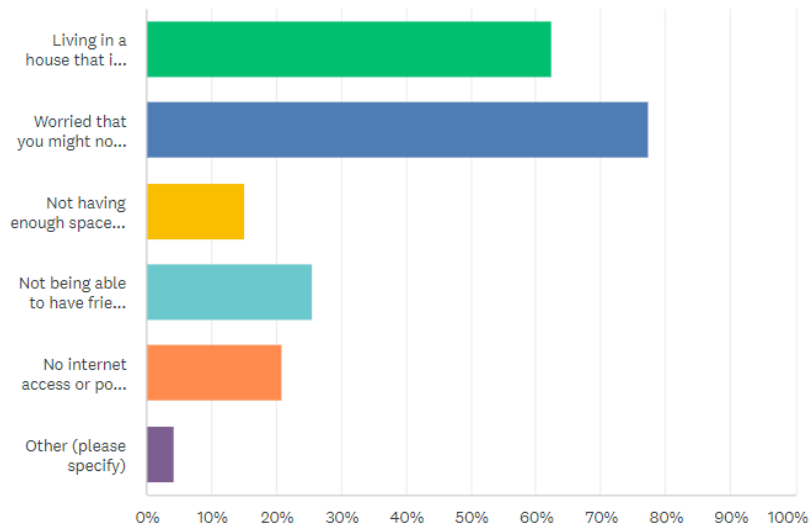
The first category is not having enough money for the things you would like.

Responses to 'other' included being bullied, not being able to afford the basics, lack of education, cost of living crisis, not being able to have hot water at home

(and associated lack of cleanliness) and struggling with work in school because cannot afford a school ipad.

What do you think the most challenging things about living in poverty for children and young people are when it comes to Home life ? Please tick TWO statements from each of the categories below.

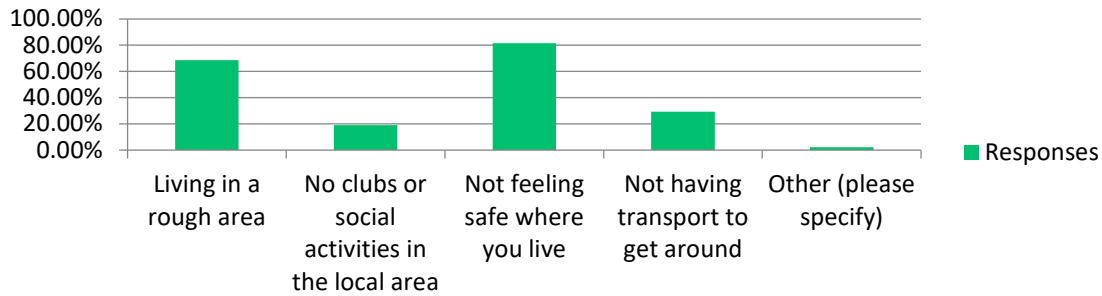
Answered: 768 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Living in a house that is cold and damp	62.50% 480
Worried that you might not be able to stay where you're living due to cost of rent	77.34% 594
Not having enough space to do things like homework or chill out	15.10% 116
Not being able to have friends over because you're embarrassed	25.65% 197
No internet access or poor internet access	20.96% 161
Other (please specify)	Responses 4.17% 32
Total Respondents: 768	

Answers to 'other' included family issues, living in a unsafe environment or not having a home, mental health issues, lack of food and sleep and lack of luxuries.

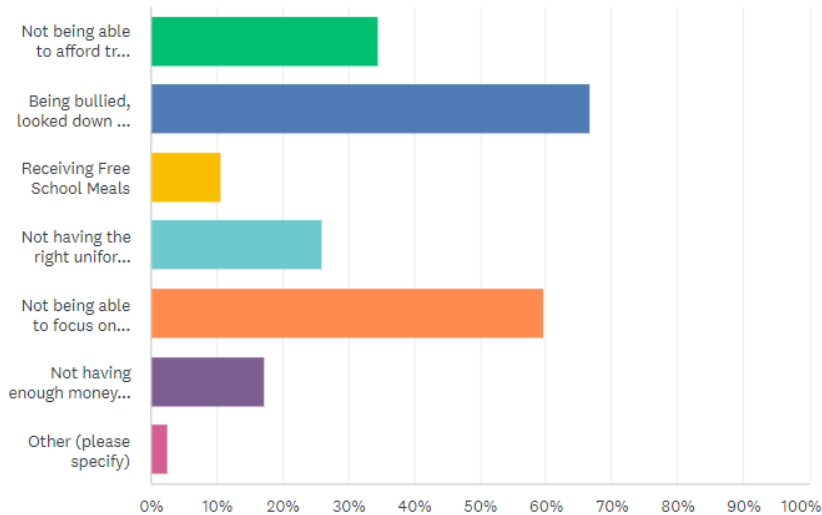
What do you think the most challenging things about living in poverty for children and young people are when it comes to the Community ? Please tick TWO statements from each of the categories below.



Responses to ‘other’ included being judged by others or seeing what other people have and not being able to afford it and not being able to afford things because of the significant increase in prices.

What do you think the most challenging things about living in poverty for children and young people are when it comes to the School life? Please tick TWO statements from each of the categories below.

Answered: 771 Skipped: 9



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not being able to afford trips or activities and feeling left out	34.63%	267
Being bullied, looked down on or made fun of	66.67%	514
Receiving Free School Meals	10.64%	82
Not having the right uniform, games kit, books	25.94%	200
Not being able to focus on school work because of being tired, worried or hungry	59.79%	461
Not having enough money to buy breakfast or break time	17.25%	133
Other (please specify)	Responses 2.59%	20

Responses to 'other' included:-

“Unable to have friends because of lack of knowledge in social media trends, e.g tiktok.”

“Being compared to other people about what you have and don't”

“too poor to buy equipment, and buying foods for break time at school”

“No friends”

Appendices - Summaries of Focus Groups in Schools

DACA - 8 young people from years 7 to 9

What does poverty mean to you?

It means not having any money.

Not having nice things like a TV or subscriptions for things like Sky or Netflix

It impacts on your health - both physical and mental. We couldn't cope if we had to pay huge amounts of money for health services like in the US. Though we do pay our taxes.

Impact on home life

Struggling to buy food. Or having rationed food.

You could go to places like the Foodbank for help but you'd be a bit embarrassed about doing so.

Might have caring responsibilities so you wouldn't have much of a social life

You wouldn't be able to do as much out of school and end up getting excluded from activities like going shopping or to the cinema so lose friendships because of it.

Not having suitable clothes to wear in winter.

Not having heating or lighting on when you need it.

Not being able to cook properly to save money.

Impact on school life

Not having breakfast would affect your ability to concentrate. Not have as many friends. Might have to skip school if don't have clean clothes or can't sleep properly or function well because not had enough food.

Impact on future opportunities

It has a massive impact on your future - you could not have any qualifications because you've missed out on education. Might not be able to get a bank account with no ID.

What could we do to help?

School has a uniform shop and shoes have to be non-branded which stops people knowing if people can't afford big brands. Breakfast bars are available from tutors and if you're missing a meal at home school can help out. School provides period products for girls who can't afford them.

There are water taps in school to save you paying for water.

There's no non-uniform school days which although we would want them is because it stops people comparing clothes and how much money people have.

You could talk to whichever teacher you feel most comfortable with about the issues you're experiencing.

DACA - 9 young people from year 10

What does poverty mean to you?

Not being able to afford to live comfortably. Not having enough money to do things you would like and not having enough for basics like food, heating and lighting. Not having internet at home.

Impact on home life

Struggling to buy food and would have to go to food banks.

Living in unhygienic conditions - cold, damp, dirty - which would impact on your health.

You only really know if your parents are struggling money wise if they're open about it or if you've experienced a change in circumstances like with the cost of living crisis with the fuel bills going up. If you were always living in poverty I don't think you'd know.

You'd probably get bullied online as well as at school.

Impact on school life

Affects your mental state - you would have poor mental health which would affect your ability to study and friendships. People would get bullied at school - they'd know you're poor because of the way you dress and how you come across. You'd be excluded from activities.

You would be tired all the time - you need 500 calories for your brain just to work so if you're only having one meal a day you'd struggle to think properly.

You'd get to know if your closest friends are living in poverty when visiting their houses.

Impact on future opportunities

You wouldn't have the same life chances because you couldn't do things outside of school and wouldn't have the opportunity to go to university.

What could we do to help?

Free school meals for everyone to avoid stigma.

Cost of uniform is an issue but the school uniform shop where you can loan clothes or pay less over a period of time helps.

You could help friends out buying things for them like food. Friends would look after each other.

If you've not got enough money on your school food card they take food off you - you could have a discrete chat with a teacher and they could help out if clear that living in poverty.

School could help out with internet at home so people don't have to miss out on breaks because they have to get homework done whilst in school e.g. internet dongles.

You could have mentor support from peers or from a teacher you feel comfortable talking to.

Pleckgate High School - 11 young people from year 9

What does poverty mean to you?

Living on a council estate

Being poor- not having the same things as everyone else. Not having any money. Not being able to enjoy life because you can't afford things or activities.

Impact on home life

Being bullied because you're poor - people would definitely know if you were. You wouldn't be able to afford things like computers, games or other things that your friends have.

The group were most concerned about not having any internet access or having poor internet access if they were living in poverty.

The group were most concerned about not feeling safe where you live if poverty impacted on their local community. Not having transport to get around was also a significant concern.

Impact on school life

You wouldn't have the same opportunities as your friends. It would impact on your ability to stay in school and concentrate on your work.

The most challenging thing the group felt about school life if they were living in poverty would be being bullied. Not having the right uniform and being too tired to focus on school work were other concerns.

Impact on future opportunities

It would be harder to get jobs because you wouldn't be able to go to university and you might not do as well in school.

What could we do to help?

Counsellors for young people in school.

Free school meals for everyone. Foodbanks are helpful for people.

The school could do more to address period poverty - a girl in our year is talking with teachers about this to see what the school can do. They are looking at free vending machines or a basket in the toilets. Raising awareness of period poverty in school would be important too.

School helps with uniform - there's a uniform shop and Year 11s leave their uniform.

School gives everyone an ipad so that helps.

Reduce taxes!

We could do a charity event to help out young people at school who are living in poverty.

Transport should stay at £2 for buses.

Pleckgate High School - 12 young people from year 10

What does poverty mean to you?

Not being able to afford basic necessities - we think these are food, warmth, warm food, shelter, water and period products.

Not having the same things as other people

Impact on home life

No heating or warmth. Not having the same opportunities as your friends. Not having any electronics to be able to contact people with. You might be excluded from social activities because you can't afford the same clothes or be able to go shopping or to the cinema.

The two things the group thought would be most challenging when it came to money would be being in debt and worrying about money all the time.

The one thing that the group found would be most challenging about home life in poverty was not having internet access or poor internet access. They also felt living in a house that was cold and damp would be a significant issue.

The group were most concerned about not feeling safe where you live if poverty impacted on their local community.

Impact on school life

You might not be able to go on trips and activities like everyone else. It would affect your ability to concentrate and your mental health so you might not achieve as well as your friends. Uniform is expensive so you would have to ask for support to buy it. It might affect your friendships and getting bullied - depends on the friendship though because close friends would look after each other.

The most challenging thing the group felt about school life if they were living in poverty would be not being able to focus on school work because of being tired, worried or hungry. Being bullied was also considered to be a significant issue.

Impact on future opportunities

The group felt that it would impact on where they could work - travel would be expensive and learning to drive might be too expensive. You wouldn't be able to afford university fees so wouldn't have the same life chances.

What could we do to help?

Free school meals for everyone to avoid stigma.

The school could do more to address period poverty - a girl in our year is talking with teachers about this to see what the school can do. They are looking at free vending machines or a basket in the toilets. Raising awareness of period poverty in school would be important too.

School helps with uniform - there's a uniform shop.

Help with wifi would help some people.

The Council could help people in poor housing.

We could all help each other by not bringing other people down. We could help each other out and get friends help through teachers.