Child poverty map of UK paints a bleak picture

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In some of the poorest areas of the UK, between 40 and 50 percent of children live in poverty, with areas of London featuring heavily.

The "Child Poverty Map of the UK" classified poverty as families claiming out-of-work benefits or in-work tax credits where income is less than 60 percent of the median—£25,000 a year. At below 60 percent of the median income, material deprivation leads to families struggling to meet basic needs like food, heating, clothing and the extra costs of schooling such as school trips.

After housing costs, household bills and general family spending needs will have to be met by approximately £12 or less per family member a day. For those families on benefits, this figure can be substantially less.

The figures used to compile the report by the Campaign to End Child Poverty were taken from tax credit data showing the number of families with children living on low incomes in a given local authority, parliamentary constituency or ward in the UK. It is considered to be an accurate and up-to-date picture of child poverty in the UK as recently as mid-2011.

• Four in 10 children are in poverty in 19 parliamentary constituencies, with 50 to 70 percent of children facing poverty in 100 local wards.

• London has some of the most deprived areas. Tower Hamlets borough, with a population of nearly 238,000, is the worst affected, with 52 percent of children living in poverty. Islington is at number two, with Hackney, Westminster and Camden also in the top 10.

• In other areas of the UK, Birmingham Ladywood, Liverpool Riverside and Belfast West all stand at or above 46 percent in terms of child poverty.

• Manchester came out as third worst in the country, with the Manchester Central constituency recording a child poverty level of 49 percent. In Manchester overall, 40 percent of children are living below the poverty line.

• In Scotland, the Springburn area of Glasgow has 52 percent children living in poverty, and 44 percent in the northeast area of the city.

Campaign to End Child Poverty executive director Alison Garnham said, "The child poverty map paints a stark picture of a socially segregated Britain where life chances of millions of children are damaged by poverty and inequality."

Poverty will shorten lives. It is estimated that a boy in Manchester will live seven years less than a boy in Barnet and a girl from Manchester is expected to live six years less than a girl from Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea.

Poor children are born too small, with low birth weights associated with infant death and chronic diseases in later life. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to leave school at 16 with fewer qualifications. Two percent of couples and 8 percent of lone parents are not able to afford two pairs of shoes for each child.

The UK has one of the highest rates of poverty in the industrialised world, with 4 million (almost one in three children) currently living in poverty. This number has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. In 1979, there were around 1 in 10 children living in poverty. Inner urban areas are generally much higher.

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A statement in the report says, “Parents will often try and shield their children from some of the impacts of financial hardship and the stigma of ‘poverty’.

“Sometimes parents will make sacrifices, such as skipping meals, so that they can send their child off to school with a warm coat, or out to play in the same popular brand of trainers that their friends have.

“They do not want their children to feel excluded, or become bullied. But behind the doors of the home, the hardship is often far more visible and many are deeply trapped in debt.”

The unprecedented austerity programme being imposed by the Conservative Party/Liberal Democrat government, including drastic cuts in social benefit entitlement and wage freezes as well as rises in fuel and food prices, is making it more difficult for families to survive. This trend in increasing poverty and misery for millions of children in the UK is set to rise, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicting that the figure for child poverty will rise by 400,000 by the year 2015, with a couple with two children expected to be worse off financially by £1,250 a year.

The demand on charities that assist poor families in need is increasing. Jan O’Connor, manager of the Manchester-based charity Wood Street Mission, which provides bedding, clothes and toys to families in need, has said, “We saw a nine percent increase in people seeking our help last year, and I feel that more people will end up in poverty as the recession continues.”

The trend in rising child poverty has taken place ever since the election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservatives in 1979, driven by the offensive waged against jobs, wages and welfare provisions. For all Labour’s hand-wringing about the plight of poor families, and Prime Minister Tony Blair’s personal pledge to “end child poverty” in a generation, the gap between the rich and poor reached record levels under Labour’s rule. Even though it was targeted for special attention, child poverty fell just a few percentage points, from a high of 33 percent in 1998, in a period of economic boom. It is now climbing and set to go beyond its previous high.

The Conservative/Liberal government’s policies will throw further millions of people into poverty. The government is currently legislating to cap the total benefit payment that can be received by a household to £26,000 per annum. The cap affects those in areas with high housing costs, with 55 percent living in Central London.

The move amounts to a form of social cleansing. Tim Leunig, the chief economist at the Centre Forum think tank, told the *Observer*, “The worst hit, of course, are large families in the south-east, where rents are higher. Even in Tolworth [in south London], described by the *Evening Standard* as the ‘scrag end of Kingston borough’, a four bedroom house will give you little change from £400 a week. Cutting housing benefit to £100 a week—which is broadly what the cap means if you have four children—makes life impossible. After rent, council tax and utilities, a family with four children would have 62 pence per person per day to live on. That is physically impossible.”

The measure is reported to save £270 million towards the government’s overall target of cutting a massive £18 billion from the welfare bill in the lifetime of the parliament. The *Observer* reported a leaked government memo suggesting that just this one measure will push 100,000 children below the poverty line—an indication of how many will suffer the same fate as a result of overall cuts many times that figure.

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