

# Charity launches first-ever appeal for British children living in poverty

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Save the Children last month launched its first ever appeal based on a report on children living in poverty in Britain.

Originally founded in London in 1919 to alleviate the starvation of children in Germany and Austria-Hungary, Save the Children is usually associated with fund raising appeals for children in so-called developing countries.

That the charity now considers it necessary to address poverty among children living in the sixth largest economy in the world underscores the terrible impact of the austerity measures being imposed by the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat government.

“It Shouldn’t Happen Here—Child Poverty in 2012”, is based on two large-scale surveys (one of parents and one of children). It estimates that around 3.5 million children are currently living in poverty across the UK. This figure is expected to rise by another 400,000 by 2015.

These are probably conservative estimates, but would still consign approximately a third of all British children (under 16 years of age) to below the official poverty line.

Even in their raw statistical form, the main survey findings paint an appalling picture of the daily conditions of life of many children and their families. Fully 80 percent of parents have had to borrow money to pay for essentials, such as food and clothes, in the past year, and 61 percent of parents in poverty say they have had to cut back on food. Twenty six percent say they have missed meals in the past year so their children can eat

“A lack of jobs, stagnating wages, increased living costs and spending cuts are placing enormous pressure on families up and down the UK”, it states.

But in addition, “Behind the projected increases in

child poverty are the day-to-day struggles of families on low incomes—many of them in work, but still in poverty.”

The growth of the “working poor” is staggering. Whereas in the mid-1990s, 45 percent of children in poverty had working parents, today the figure is 61 percent.

Children are aware of the economic pressures being exerted on their parents. “Parents are stressed by lack of money and, despite their best efforts, many children are sharing this burden,” said the report.

Some 58 percent of all children surveyed thought it is getting harder for their families to pay for everyday things and 52 percent said that not having enough money makes their parents unhappy or stressed. More than 4 in 10 children in poverty (or 43 percent) “agree” or “strongly agree” that their parents are cutting back on things for themselves, such as new clothes and food.

Under the section “Feeling the Pinch”, the report highlights some of the glaring social inequalities being faced by poorer families in the age of austerity.

“Things like rising living costs are most damaging to those living in poverty, with the poorest 10 percent of households spending a much greater proportion of their income on items such as food and utility bills... Low income families are also bearing the brunt of austerity, with spending cuts hitting the poorest tenth of the population 13 times harder than the richest tenth.”

Forty-four percent of families in poverty say that they are short of money every week, and 29 percent say they have nothing left to cut back on.

The report appears after a whole period in which pay freezes and pay cuts have become the norm for most workers. This has been accompanied by an unprecedented rise in the cost of living, especially for food.

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It is here that the methodology used by the report must be called into question. At least 5,000 parents responded to the survey, and answered a series of arbitrary questions relating to their income. From this, the researchers broke the results down into three income groups: those on annual incomes of up to £16,999 (referred to in the report as living in poverty/being on a low income; those on annual incomes of £17,000-£29,999 (modest incomes); and those reporting annual incomes of £30,000 and above (defined as better-off/more affluent households).

But a further graph showed that 39.5 percent of low-income, 23.8 percent of modest income and 10.9 percent of better-off households have missed paying bills. Some 43.7 percent of low-income households, 42.3 percent of modest income and 27.1 percent of the better-off have got into debt or borrowed money; and 25.5 percent of low income, 18.8 percent of modest income and 6.5 percent of the better-off skipped meals because they could not afford food.

A second graph revealed that 60.8 percent of low-income, 63.6 percent of modest income and 54.5 percent of better-off households have cut back on how much they spend on food.

Similar examples can be found throughout the report. They reveal that the daily struggle for *most* families, in terms of the very basics, is increasingly difficult. It would be more appropriate to re-designate the three income groups used in the report as: those living in "severe poverty", those in "poverty" and, even in a swathe of the third group, those who are "struggling" rather than "affluent".

It is customary for such reports to end with a humble appeal for modest government prescriptions to redress this state of affairs. Save the Children urges the government to "stick to the 2020 child poverty targets", "encouraging more employers to adopt the living wage", and to protect "children in poverty from any further public spending cuts" and "rising living costs".

In reality, the report came as the government is preparing to announce a further £10 billion cut in welfare spending, on top of the £18 billion underway, and even greater austerity measures. Resolving the conditions outlined in the report will not be through appeals to government but only as a result of the

mobilisation of working people against the government and the entire profit system.



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