

Increase in social deprivation hits tens of thousands of children in UK

Liz Smith
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Hundreds of thousands of children and their families in some of the UK's largest cities are suffering from staggering levels of social deprivation.

New data released by the End Child Poverty coalition, on which they base a "Child Poverty map of the UK," demonstrates that "some of the most deprived areas of the UK have seen the biggest increases in child poverty since the coalition's last local child poverty figures for December 2015." The coalition adds, "Increases of 10 percentage points in some areas demonstrate the growing crisis of child poverty in the UK."

The map shows that there are constituencies where more than half the children are growing up in poverty. The average population of a constituency in England is 72,400, in Scotland 69,000, in Northern Ireland 66,800 and in Wales 56,800.

A child is classed as in poverty if they are in a family living on less than 60 per cent of median household income. According to the latest official statistics, 60 per cent of median income, after housing costs, was around £248 per week.

The map breaks down its data into figures for separate local authorities and wards within them. The child poverty local indicators cover the period up to September 2017.

The top four constituencies with the highest levels of child poverty are in the UK's two largest cities, London and Birmingham. In Bethnal Green and Bow in east London 54.18 percent of children are in poverty, in Ladywood, Birmingham (53.06 percent), in Poplar and Limehouse, London (52.75 percent) and Birmingham, Hodge Hill (51.46 percent).

The ten constituencies with the most child poverty are in the east end of London, central Birmingham, central Manchester, Bradford and Oldham West. The

remaining 15 include other London and Birmingham boroughs and constituencies in Leeds, Newcastle, Leicester and Blackburn.

The UK local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty, after housing costs, are in London. Tower Hamlets at 53.40 percent has the highest level of child poverty in the UK. Child poverty is rocketing in many other cities, including Oldham, Leicester, Blackburn, Bradford, Middlesbrough, Nottingham—all in the top 15.

Fourteen of the 20 constituencies with the fastest growing child poverty also have poverty rates in the top 20—with the increase from December 2015 as high as 11 percentage points.

When the analysis is broken down to a more local level, there are 87 electoral wards where more than 50 percent of children live in poverty after housing costs. This figure has quadrupled since 2015 when only 21 wards had at least 50 percent. In terms of households, this is an increase overall from 2.3 million in 2014 to 2.7 million in 2016. Coldhurst ward in Oldham West, in the northwest of England, has a staggering 62.11 percent of children in poverty.

The authors were able to gain a more accurate picture of the prevalence of child poverty as researchers have changed the way it is estimated. Historically, this was calculated on HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) figures, which in more recent years have been distorted by over-counting out-of-work poverty and undercounting in-work poverty. According to the Household Below Average Income research, the latter group has 63 percent of children in poverty whereas HMRC would estimate this at 21 percent.

The End Child Poverty researchers point out that the relative share of in-work poverty has grown from under a half to nearly two thirds in the past decade.

Professor Donald Hirsch of Loughborough University, who carried out the End Poverty Coalition research, said it pointed to an even greater growth in poverty to come. He told the *Guardian*, “Child poverty is going up tremendously in the next three years, and areas which have high dependency on the state income are going to be really, really hit.”

The largest group living in relative poverty is the “working poor.” While children living in households where no one works are five times more likely to be living in poverty, the low-wage economy means that the greatest proportion of poor children now live in families with one wage earner.

This was highlighted last month by a Trades Union Congress report estimating that one in seven children of public sector workers will be living in poverty by the end of this month. This translates to 550,000 children, mainly due to the pay freeze since 2010 and cuts to in-work benefits. Most affected were workers in the southwest, northwest and east Midlands regions of England.

The distress this causes for millions of children and their families is an indictment of the trade unions and the Labour Party. Labour was in office in 2008 and carried out a £1 trillion bailout of the banks. To claw this back, they began the mass austerity programme that has been continued by the Tories.

That so many are in poverty is a result of the unions’ refusal to oppose successive governments, as they have enforced their austerity and pay freeze agendas without any serious challenge.

A central factor in the surge of child poverty has been the gutting of children’s services—which support children and families in distress. These have seen their budgets slashed and even destroyed entirely.

A recent survey by three children’s charities, Action for Children, The Children’s Society and the National Children’s Bureau, revealed that, since the start of the decade, referrals to children’s services increased from 603,700 in 2010 to 646,120 in 2017. The number of children in need (resulting from an assessment) increased by four percent. Children subject to child protection plans saw a 31 percent increase in their number from 39,100 in 2010 to 51,080 in 2017. This increase was in areas that almost mirror the areas most affected by child poverty increases.

A joint report produced by The Children’s Society,

Action for Children and National Children’s Bureau charities, *Turning the Tide*, draws attention to the fact that “the most deprived areas have seen the highest fall in early intervention funding across any quintile.” Due to government cuts in the first part of the decade, local authority spending power fell by around 24 percent in real terms. Funding has been reduced by £2.6 billion. *Turning the Tide* states: “The most deprived LA’s [Local Authority] have seen a fall in spending on children and young people’s services more than 6 times as large as the least deprived councils. This reduction in spending by levels of deprivation mirrors wider trends. More deprived LA’s have seen higher reductions in spending than the least deprived areas across council services.”

Poverty among children causes ill health from an early age. Last December, the Nuffield Trust—a health policy research body—published research showing that children from the poorest areas are consistently more likely to go to A&E (Accident and Emergency department) and to need emergency hospital treatment.

It found that the most deprived overall were 58 percent more likely to go to A&E with infants, 50 percent more likely with pre-schoolers and 70 percent with teenagers. The report points out, “Deprivation is linked to higher incidence of poor health. Like A&E attendances, overall emergency hospital admissions are correlated with inequality.”



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