

Chapter 3

Gender and Poverty in the New *Breadline Britain* Survey

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Breadline Britain in the 1990s included a chapter which focused specifically on the relationship between gender and poverty and explored the extent to which the data collected had helped to measure the different experience of poverty and deprivation for men and women (Payne and Pantazis, 1997). We were able to look at current and life-long experience of poverty, for each sex, and also at the ways in which perceptions of necessities differed for each sex. (See also Chapter 8 of this volume which deals with the results of the group discussions relating to gender poverty).

The results were interesting. The question on history of poverty and present experience of poverty revealed that women were more likely to report themselves as having experienced poverty in the past and also that more women than men reported themselves as poor at the time of the survey. However, these were questions relying on self-reporting of being poor, rather than poverty measured using the *Breadline Britain* index.

The questions concerning items seen as necessities found that there were significant differences between men and women in the perception of what is seen as necessary in modern Britain. Women were more likely than men to see as necessities items which related to their childcare and domestic responsibilities, whilst men were more likely than women to see as necessities items which related more to leisure and to luxury goods.

The most obvious gap in the 1990 Survey, as a result of the methodology adopted, is that the data on levels of poverty experienced, measured by the index on necessities, refers to households and not to individuals and this remains restricted by what Pahl (1989) has described as the economists 'black box' vision of intra-household behaviour. We know whether a household is 'poor', using this measure, but not whether people within the household suffer different levels of deprivation. However, research which has unpacked the 'black box' suggests that assumptions of inequality within the household are false and failing to go beyond the household as the level of investigation prevents an exploration of these inequalities (Land, 1983; Pahl, 1989; Wilson, 1987; Brannen and Wilson, 1991). Food, in particular, has been shown to be shared unequally within households, where resources are constrained (Charles and Kerr, 1987; Graham, 1993). Women report not heating a home while they are on their own, especially during the day (Craig and Glendinning, 1990). Private transport is more frequently used by men than their partners (Payne, 1991).

Going back to the *Breadline Britain* questions, this problem mainly relates to Q11 (old survey) where the respondent is asked to say whether they have a list of items, with four different shuffleboard responses possible. However, looking at these items shows that in fact the list includes a mixture of items which are household items and which could not sensibly be asked of each individual - the refrigerator, for example, is a not owned by an individual but shared within the household and we do not need to

worry about differences within the household. A number of other items - two meals a day, for example, or a warm waterproof coat - are more obviously individually consumed. In the original wording of Q11, there is no mention of who the respondent is answering for - if three out of four people in the household have a warm coat, is the answer yes or no? Whilst it is likely that respondents thought of their own experience, this may not be true either for every respondent or even for the same respondent throughout the questionnaire. Thus, a respondent might switch from talking about herself (in relation to the coat, for example), her children (in relation to new clothes) and her partner, in relation to the questions on food.

In the next *Breadline Britain* survey, the question can be phrased so as to make it clear that the respondent is to give her or his own experiences, rather than think of others within the household. It may be simpler to re-order the list so as to divide them into 'individually consumed' and 'shared' items. Two questionnaires will be used where the initial respondent has a partner and this means that in each case it can be clear that the questionnaire is asking about their own experience.

In addition, the question of car ownership and car use requires a slightly different approach, as the way in which a car is shared in the household is complex. Research shows that women are less likely to have access to private cars even within car-owning households. For some women, this is because of not having a driving licence but this applies more often to older women. Amongst younger age groups, a greater proportion of whom can drive, the car is less often available to them at times when they may want to use it because the car is used by their partner for travelling to work. It is availability of private transport when it is required that allows participation in social activities and leisure but also which enables some childcare and domestic work to be carried out more easily. In the next survey it is this availability which should be stressed and, although the original question on having a car should be retained, a further question inserted later asks about access to a car to develop this point.

However, there are further gender differences in the experience and impact of poverty. The central issue seems to be that survey methods used to date have been largely unsuccessful in capturing differences in the intra-household experience of poverty which have been demonstrated by qualitative research such as the work of Pahl (1989). There are three main areas of difficulty. The first - that men and women seem to have a different understanding of poverty and of the things which are necessary to avoid poverty - has been discussed above and follows on from the 1990 study.

The second difficulty relates to household division of financial resources. Some men seem to find it difficult to recognise that they have personal spending money or that things are bought by their partner which are for the man's personal use. Men often see money which their partner spends on the children as being the woman's own personal spending money. In addition, research has demonstrated an important difference between responsibility for managing resources when funds are short, which is more often women's responsibility within the household. Conversely, when resources are less constrained, it is more often men who have power to decide on purchasing. In order to study this in more depth, a new set of questions have been developed which focus on household divisions of money and responsibility for money and these will be included in the second, shorter, questionnaire for 'partners'.

The third element of this gendered experience is that women and men may each behave differently in times of shortage and women in particular may be more likely to go without certain necessities in order that the household's needs are met. Rather than complicate the question on necessities early in the study with further detail about this, a new set of questions have been devised which ask respondents to indicate which out of a list of key times they would go without if money was tight and which they could least do without. Respondents are also asked which of these items they have gone without recently (see Chapter 9). By asking this of both respondents in a two-person household, we can explore the gendered differences in what is given up in order to make ends meet.

There remains a difficulty in that it can be hard to unpick these differences when partners are interviewed together and the problem will be to try and interview respondents separately wherever possible. One suggestion which has been used successfully in other surveys is that interviewers could work in pairs. In this way, they can often get both interviews done at the same time in different rooms.

The 1990 Survey also included a question on provisions of an occupational pension but this could not be used in the analysis of gender differences due to the wording of the original question. Pension provision is a vital aspect of poverty risks in old age and women are less likely to have such provision on their own account (Joshi and Davies, 1992). This increases women's financial dependence on their partners and increases women's risks of poverty in old age both as a result of relationship breakdown or where their partner's pension turns out to be inadequate. The question on occupational pension in the new survey has been altered to ask about the respondent's own pension provision and their partner's pension provision but remains quite straightforward.

Finally, in order to be able to measure the numbers of men and women, as opposed to households of different kinds, living in poverty as measured by the *Breadline Britain* index, we need to extend the demographic questions at the end of the survey. In the earlier version, the demographic questions focused on household type but information was not collected on number of male and female adults in each household. Such information would allow comparison on the data from this survey with others and would allow estimates of the proportion of adult women and men nationally living in circumstances of poverty.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that this survey is not an ideal tool for measuring women's experience of poverty and deprivation and the ways in which this might differ from men's experiences, as this would require more complex questions. However, fairly simple changes to the existing questionnaire would facilitate greater comparison with other surveys, both here and abroad, while retaining comparability with the 1990 version.

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