WORKING PAPER NO 1

THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE IN BRITAIN

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Poverty and Social Exclusion
Survey of Britain ●●● ◐

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PREFACE

This Working Paper arose from the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The *1999 PSE Survey of Britain* is the most comprehensive and scientifically rigorous survey of its kind ever undertaken. It provides unparalleled detail about deprivation and exclusion among the British population at the close of the twentieth century. It uses a particularly powerful scientific approach to measuring poverty which:

- incorporates the views of members of the public, rather than judgments by social scientists, about what are the necessities of life in modern Britain
- calculates the levels of deprivation that constitutes poverty using scientific methods rather than arbitrary decisions.

The *1999 PSE Survey of Britain* is also the first national study to attempt to measure social exclusion, and to introduce a methodology for poverty and social exclusion which is internationally comparable. Three data sets were used:

- The *1998-9 General Household Survey* (GHS) provided data on the socio-economic circumstances of the respondents, including their incomes
- The *June 1999 ONS Omnibus Survey* included questions designed to establish from a sample of the general population what items and activities they consider to be necessities.
- A follow-up survey of a sub-sample of respondents to the 1998-9 GHS were interviewed in late 1999 to establish how many lacked items identified as necessities, and also to collect other information on poverty and social exclusion.

Further details about the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* are available at: http://www.bris.ac.uk/poverty/pse/

INTRODUCTION

This is a report on the first stage of a joint survey by a research team from four universities – York, Bristol, Loughborough and Herriot-Watt – and National Statistics, financed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. At this stage a few questions about perceptions on the necessities of life were asked as one component of an Omnibus survey in June 1999 of 1,900 adults. This survey was designed by National Statistics to provide information for different sponsors, including government departments (ONS, 1999).

The second stage of research, involved a separate and more elaborate survey of a sub-sample drawn from the main sample interviewed from the General Household Survey in 1998-99, and interviewed later in 1999 (see Gordon et al, 2000a). The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE) is a nationally representative survey of poverty in Britain in 1999. It is designed to repeat, but also extend, the "Breadline Britain" surveys of 1983 and 1990 (see Mack and Lansley, 1985 & Gordon and Pantazis, 1997).

The questions added to the 1999 Omnibus survey were designed to establish what changes have taken, and are taking, place in public perceptions of what are "necessities". New questions were also added – to clarify doubts that had been raised after the earlier surveys in 1983 and 1990 and check some of the less robust conclusions (based on smaller sample numbers) that had been reached in that work.

The 1983 "Breadline Britain" survey provided the precedent for the research which begun in June 1999. It was the first survey in Britain to capture what "standard of living" is considered unacceptable by society (Mack and Lansley, 1985). Its central brief was:

> *to try to discover whether there is a public consensus on what is an unacceptable standard of living for Britain in 1983 and, if there is a consensus, who, if anyone,*

falls below that standard. The idea underlying this is that a person is in 'poverty' when their standard of living falls below the minimum deemed necessary by current public opinion. This minimum may cover not only the basic essentials for survival (such as food) but also access, or otherwise, to participating in society and being able to play a social role.

The survey established: "for the first time ever, that a majority of people see the necessities of life in Britain in the 1980's as covering a wide range of goods and activities, and that people judge a minimum standard of living on socially established criteria and not just the criteria of survival or subsistence." The 1983 adopted a definition of poverty as a standard of living unacceptable to the majority of the population. The validity of its approach rests on an assumption – that is empirically verifiable – that there are not wide variations in the definition of necessities among different groups of society. Otherwise, the definition of an unacceptable standard of living just becomes contested and the opinion of one group against another argued again and again. The 1983 Breadline Britain survey and the subsequent 1990 survey (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997) confirmed the validity of this assumption by showing that there existed a high degree of consensus amongst different groups in their perceptions of what are necessities:

The homogeneity of views shown by people both from very different personal circumstances and also holding very different political ideologies suggests that judgements are being made on the basis of a cohesive view of the kind of society we ought to live in. There is, it seems, a general cultural ethos about what is sufficient and proper. (Mack and Lansley, 1985)

One of our aims in the 1999 research was to find whether a high degree of consensus still existed.

STANDARD OR STYLE OF LIVING: CONCEPT & METHODOLOGY

Before being able to report the views expressed about particular necessities we had to choose the operational questions to put to them. First, we were obliged to decide how wide-ranging the questions, and therefore the meaning, of the concept of "necessities" should be. There had to be a limit to the list of questions it was possible to ask. Second, we had to decide how the overall meaning of necessities

was to be divided into sub-components or elements, that is into groups of questions and specific questions. Both decisions are of course open to protracted debate and verification.

There is a long history of scientific investigation upon which we have drawn in taking these decisions, going a lot further back than the 1983 and 1990 forerunner studies already described. Thus, Seebohm Rowntree's classic study of York was framed from the very beginning to throw some light upon the "conditions which govern the life of the wage-earning classes…" It was "a detailed investigation into the social and economic conditions of the working classes in York" (Rowntree, 1899. pp.v-vi). Within this framework of conditions and action, poverty was measured as insufficient income "to obtain the minimum necessaries of the maintenance of merely physical efficiency" (Rowntree, 1899, p.86). Charles Booth had also adopted a similar framework in his approach to the conditions of social and economic life, especially in his examination of "the standard life" when investigating the construction of a poverty line in London (Booth, 1892, p.131).

For these pioneers, broad investigation of contemporary conditions of life seemed unavoidable in order to arrive at a list of needs, and then deliberately restrict and interpret those needs to produce a measure of poverty acceptable to the public and to politicians. The fact that Seebohm Rowntree tended to enlarge the meaning he gave to the "necessities" of life in his later work, for example, in re-defining a poverty line in 1936, compared with the definition he had given in 1899 (Rowntree, 1941, pp. 28-31), and in describing the income to surmount poverty as enough to "secure the necessities of a healthy life" (Rowntree, 1937, p.11) only heightens the importance of decisions that have to be made about the scope on investigation as well as the categorisation of its components.

Needs are not self-evident. They have to be fulfilled consciously and unconsciously in accordance with purposes concerned with maintaining and improving human life. It is not just social organisation, or individual biology and physiology, or a

combination of all three, that determine needs but the style of life to which, by their behaviour and feelings, individual members of society are obliged to conform.

"*There is no unitary and clear-cut national 'style of living'. Rather, there are a series of overlapping and merging community, ethnic, organisational and regional styles. By styles of living I do not mean <u>particular</u> things and actions in themselves, but types of consumption and <u>customs</u> which are expressive of social form. Thus, the influence of national government, trading systems, education, the mass media, industry and transport systems, education, the mass media, industry and transport systems will tend towards the establishment of diffuse cultural norms…. Certain practices gradually become accepted as appropriate modes of behaviour, and even when a group performs particular rituals of religious observance or engages in particular leisure-time activity, it shares other customs with many different groups in society. What do need to be distinguished are the customs practised by different minorities and sub-groups.* (Townsend, 1979, p. 249).

The procedure in identifying needs becomes easier to understand. "A national style of living has to be defined in operational terms. Many component items, including those specific to age groups, peers, and generations, and to large units, such as regional communities and ethnic groups, have to be identified and examined and the elements common to, or approved by, the majority of the population distinguished" (Townsend, 1979, p.249). This links up with priorities in relation to poverty and social exclusion in the year 2000. "The degree of cultural integration of different groups and communities could then be tentatively assessed and perhaps measured (Ibid.).

Ideally, the aim would be "to cover all activities and events in order to establish standard or majority norms, conventions and customs, so that non-participation, or marginal participation, in those norms, conventions and customs could be identified." (Townsend and Gordon, 1993, pp.57-58). But this would involve a huge exercise in definition, investigation and measurement on a national scale. Resources for such extensive research have not been available in recent years (Ibid., p.56).

Instead, drawing on precedents in social surveys, investigators of poverty and deprivation have covered a wide range of individual and social conditions and activities, generally ignoring, on the basis of everyday observation, and national statistics and customs in which few participate. Through the indirect authority of such methods doubts about the preparatory stages of such investigative research have been set aside.

One practice in recent research has been to adopt one of the primary meanings of "need", that is, "deprivation", and to consider its sub-categories, beginning with the distinction between material and social deprivation, and then examining the sub-categories of material deprivation, related to diet, health, clothing, housing, household facilities, environment and work, and of social deprivation, related to family activities, social support and integration, recreational and educational (Townsend, 1993, chapter 4). The consensual investigative approaches of 1983 and 1990, and the present report of the 1999 survey, have extended that categorisation. The scientist has to "consider deprivation as the darker side of the entire lifestyle of people" (Ibid., p.82). Like both sides of a coin, one cannot be separated from the other, and the comprehension of one side in necessary to the other.

In developing our plans for the new survey, the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University undertook a series of discussions with 13 groups of people in different circumstances. A major object was to negotiate "agreed lists of items, activities and facilities which all adults in Britain should be able to have and should not have to go without" (Bradshaw et al., 1998, p.44). This led to the addition and amendment of questions asked in 1983 and 1990. Among new questions of a primarily "material" kind was "fresh fruit or fresh vegetables every day", "appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews" and "mattresses and bedding for everyone in the household." New questions of a primarily "social" kind were added. They included "visiting friends and/or family once a week," and "going to the pub once a fortnight." In the words of the report "contact with friends and family was emphasised throughout all discussions of necessities as being vital to

survival" (Ibid., p. 47). In addition to group discussions our revised and additional questions were also piloted in a regular omnibus survey carried out by MORI (Ibid., see chapter 9). It was as a result of both preliminary exercises that we arrived at the list of questions to be put in interviews.

RANKING MATERIAL AND SOCIAL NECESSITIES

Our 1999 PSE survey developed and extended the methodology of the 1983 and 1990 studies dealing with indicators of a substantial list of necessities – prompted partly by intervening research into social conditions, consumer behaviour and household interaction. In 1999 respondents were asked substantially more questions about material goods and social activities (84 compared with 44 in 1990 and 35 in 1983). The additional questions are to do mainly with social activities (which were selectively few in number in the first two surveys) and with goods and activities particularly relevant to children. In this Working Paper we will be dealing primarily with adults (see Bradshaw et al, 2000 for the analysis of the children's necessities, and Gordon et al 2000b particularly for comparisons over time).

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of respondents identifying different adult items as "necessary" in 1999. Over 90% of the population in each case perceive "beds for everyone", "heating", a "damp free home", "visits to the hospital", and "medicines" as items which all adults should have in Britain. By contrast, less than 10% of the population sees a "dishwasher", a "mobile phone", "internet access" and a "satellite television" as necessary. It was because we were aware that market goods introduced into the market often start as luxuries and in later years become necessities that we were anxious to test opinion about some minority choices.

Table 1 Percent of people claiming item or activity as necessary

	Necessary	Desirable	D/K
Beds and bedding for everyone	95	4	
Heating to warm living areas	94	5	
Damp free home	93	6	1
Visiting friends or family in hospital	92	7	1
Two meals a day	91	9	1
Medicines prescribed by doctor	90	9	1
Refrigerator	89	11	1
Fresh fruit and vegetables daily	86	13	1
A warm waterproof coat	85	14	1
Replace broken electrical goods	85	14	2
Visits to friends or family	84	15	1
Celebrations on special occasions	83	16	2
Money to keep home decorated	82	17	1
Visits to school e.g. sports day	81	17	2
Attending weddings, funerals	80	19	1
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent	79	19	1
Insurance of contents of dwelling	79	20	1
A hobby or leisure activity	78	20	1
A washing machine	76	22	1
Collect children from school	75	23	3
Telephone	71	28	1
Appropriate clothes for job interviews	69	28	2
Deep freezer/fridge freezer	68	30	2
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms	67	31	2
Regular savings for rainy days	66	32	2
Two pairs of all weather shoes	64	34	2
Friends or family round for a meal	64	34	2
Money to spend on self weekly	59	39	2
A television	56	43	2
A roast joint/vegetarian equivalent weekly	56	41	3
Presents for friends/family yearly	56	42	2
A holiday away from home	55	43	3
Replace worn out furniture	54	43	3
A dictionary	53	44	3
_____			
An outfit for social occasions	51	46	3
New, not second hand, clothes	48	49	3
Attending place of worship	42	55	4
A car	38	59	3
Coach/train fares to visit friends/family	38	58	4
A evening out once a fortnight	37	56	3
A dressing gown	34	63	4
Having a daily newspaper	30	66	4
A meal in a restaurant/pub monthly	26	71	4
Microwave oven	23	73	4
Tumble dryer	20	75	4
Going to the pub once a fortnight	20	76	4
A video cassette recorder	19	78	3
Holidays abroad once a year	19	77	4
CD player	12	84	4

A home computer	11	85	4
A dishwasher	7	88	5
Mobile phone	7	88	5
Access to the internet	6	89	5
Satellite television	5	90	5

Note: weight a (individual weight); analysis excludes those who refused to answer question.

In the previous "Breadline Britain" surveys, items and activities attracting 50% or more support from the population, a "democratic" majority, were considered as socially perceived necessities for the purposes of further analysis.   In 1999 25 out of 54 items in the adult list (Table 1) satisfied this criterion. This is an important finding because, once it is widely reported, public friction about what are and what are not the necessities of modern life might be lessened. It also opens the way to searching investigation of the circumstances of those who lack a number of many of these necessities, and particularly of those who identify them as necessities but do not have them and/or say they cannot offered them.

Two problems about the list in Table 1 might be anticipated. The distinction between "material" and "social" necessities is not always as clear as it may seem and begins to break down on close examination. A "telephone" is a "material" good but its function as a necessary communication is entirely "social." Similarly, a "television" can be a satisfying form of entertainment for the individual but at the same time is a symbol of material prosperity and social status; and it can be a valuable means of shared family custom as well of national and local information. Similar points can be made about diet and clothing. Many items on the list are in fact multi-functional, and are interpreted accordingly by the public.

Second, some items are easier to ask questions about and verify the answers, than others. Usually few doubts arise about material goods – like refrigerators and telephones. The goods may be broken, unworkable or unused but rarely difficult to define and locate. However, the meaning of a "damp free" home or "two meals a day" may be less easy to agree. The meaning of what are usually described as "social" necessities – like "visiting friends or family in hospital" and "having

friends and family round for a meal" – can also pose problems. Questions abound. Should nursing and residential homes count as "hospitals?" The evidence from this survey is very strong but has to be verified and updated as society itself evolves.

CHECKING THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON NECESSITIES: SCATTER PLOTS

The consensual approach to poverty assumes that there are few differences within the population on what are the necessities of life. How far did this assumption hold true in the 1999 survey? The question has to be examined carefully by assembling information about different sub-divisions of population. There is clearly a problem in reproducing a range of statistical data. We decided to present a series of scatter plots – which are easy to assimilate – but also to present detailed table in an appendix (see Appendix 1).

Figure 1 compares the percent of men who considered an item to be a necessity (on the vertical axis) with the percentage of women (horizontal axis), showing each item as a dot. If a line were to be drawn at a 45 degree angle from the bottom left to the top right of the chart, points lying on it would have equal proportions of men and women citing items as necessities. Any items that were to the left and above the line would be those which would be considered as necessities by more men than women, whilst those items to the right and below the line would be seen as necessities by more women. If there was no agreement between women and men about the necessity of different items, then we would expect to find a random scatter of points on the graph. A statistical technique can be used to 'fit' a line through the points which minimises the total distances between the line and the individual items. This is the middle line on the diagram. This confirms that there are few differences in the perception of what are necessities between men and women, although men generally tend to perceive many more items and activities as essential. The most significant differences among men and women are:
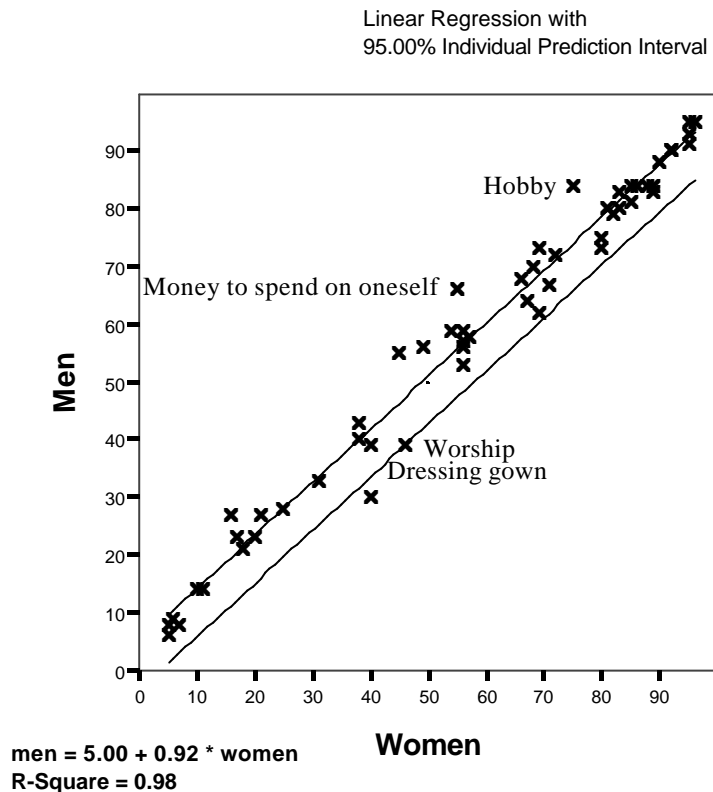
money to spend on oneself weekly

dressing gown

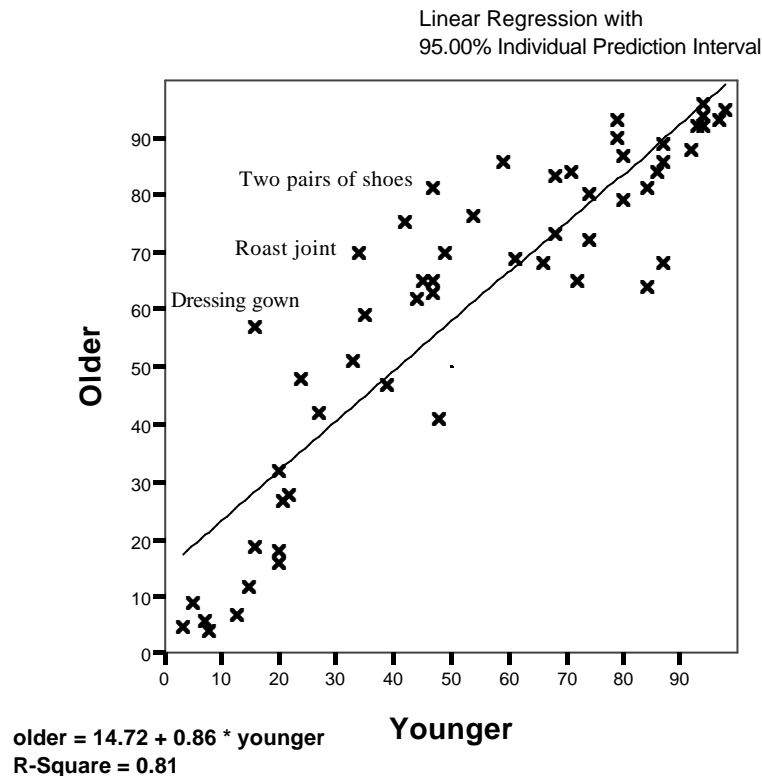a hobby or leisure activity

Attending place of worship

More men than women see these items and activities as essential with the exception of a "dressing gown" and "attending a place of worship". These results confirm findings from the earlier 1990 Breadline Britain Survey, as well as other British and European studies which illustrate that despite close agreement, there are important gender distinctions regarding what are the necessities of life (Nyman, 1996, Payne and Pantazis, 1997). Gender differences, in particular, become apparent in relation to those items and activities which fall under the heading of "personal" consumption as opposed to "household" consumption (Goode et al 1998). Thus, many more men than women consider items that directly satisfy their own personal use as essential – items such as "new clothing", a "hobby" and "money to spend on oneself." If men are more likely to see personal consumption items as essential, we know from other studies, that in contrast women are much more likely to put their own needs second to that of their children and partners, to the extent that they often go without essential items (Goode et al 1998).

Figure 1 Perception of necessities: comparing women and men

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

men = 5.00 + 0.92 * women
R-Square = 0.98

There is more disagreement on which items constitute the necessities of life when we examine differences among younger people and the older people, although there still remains a consensus. Some items have attracted strong disagreement (e.g. a "dressing gown", a "roast joint or vegetarian equivalent", or "two pairs of shoes" (see Figure 2) . All three items are more likely to be seen as essential by people aged over 65 than those aged between 16 and 24.

Figure 2: Perception of necessities: Comparing younger and older people

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

older = 14.72 + 0.86 * younger
R-Square = 0.81

Whilst attitudes towards fashion may explain some of the difference with regard to why there is greater support among the older population for a "dressing gown", the fact that older people feel the cold more may also be important. Similarly, cultural attitudes may explain why a greater proportion of older people view a "roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent" as essential.

Notwithstanding the specific reasons why people aged 65 and over view particular items as essential, there may be strong cultural shifts which account for why the younger population tends to take a less generous view of what items and activities may constitute the necessities of life. Gordon et al, 2000b explore the so-called "Thatcher's Children" effect in depth in Working Paper 3.

The extent of consensus on the items that constitute the necessities of life among different ethnic populations is revealed in Figure 3. Because the numbers of Black and of Asian respondents in the sample were small we had to combine them to

reach statistical reliability. However, this procedure has to be treated causiouly (see Modood et al, 1997). There are likely to be differences between Black and Asian people, and as there are only 72 respondents from this group, there are still problems relating to reliability (see Modood et al, 1997). Nevertheless the data in Figure 3 are not randomly dispersed but approximate to a 45° line, although with some scatter. Some interesting patterns emerge. More White than Black and Asian people consider having a "holiday away from home" as a necessity (57% compared with 40%), but Black and Asian people are more likely to view "holidays abroad" as essential (44% compared with 18%). This may simply reflect a greater need on their part to travel overseas to visit family and friends. The biggest difference between the ethnic groups relates to "attending a place of worship". Over three quarters of the Black and Asian group saw this as essential in comparison to only 41% of White people.

Figure 3: Perception of necessities: comparing the White and the Black/Asian populations

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

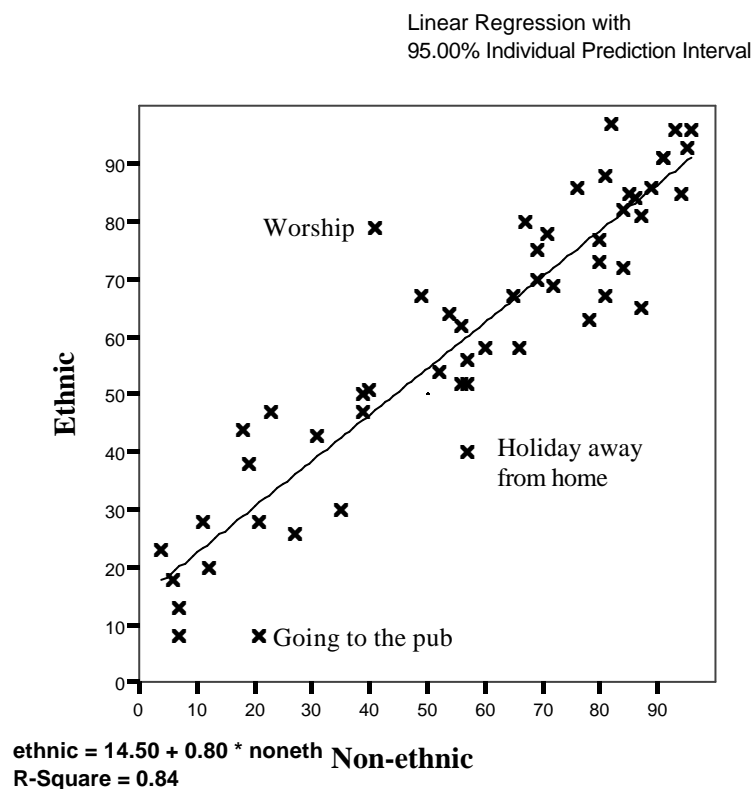ethnic = 14.50 + 0.80 * noneth
R-Square = 0.84

Figure 4 shows variations in perception of necessities by occupational class. For purposes of broad comparison we grouped Social Classes I/II and IV/V. There are small differences in the perceptions of social classes - at least in comparing Social Class I/II with IV/V. The general trend is for more of the poorer classes to specify as necessities - as might be expected. However, this still means that substantial proportions of the former have similar perceptions. The most significant differences are in relation to "carpets" and a "television".

Possession of a television turned out to be a perceived necessity in 1983, 1990 and 1999 (i.e. by applying the 50% convention). Nonetheless there are population differences concerning this item. More of the poorer social classes have consistently perceived a television as an essential item. In 1999 66% of people in Social Classes IV and V saw a "television" as essential compared with only 46% of people in Social Classes I and II. The reasons can be easily understood. Pamela, a lone parent with a nine-month old child living on Supplementary Benefit in an attic flat, who was interviewed in the 1983 study put it succinctly:

> *I watch TV from first thing in the morning till last thing at night, till the television goes off. I sit and watch it all day. I can't afford to do other things at all. The only thing I can do is sit and watch television. I can't go anywhere, I can't go out and enjoy myself or nothing. I should be able to take my daughter out somewhere. I would take her to the zoo and things like that. Places she's never been, or seen, and half the places I haven't seen in London myself. Things that I can't afford to do."* (Mack and Lansley, 1985)

The fact the poorer social class groups specify "carpets" as essential is related to their lack of affordable alternative floor coverings - such as polished floorboards, cork tiles, rugs, etc. A floor covering of some kind becomes similarly important, particularly for families with young children (you cannot put a baby down on rough floorboards).

Figure 4: Perception of necessities: comparing Social Classes I/II and IV/V

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

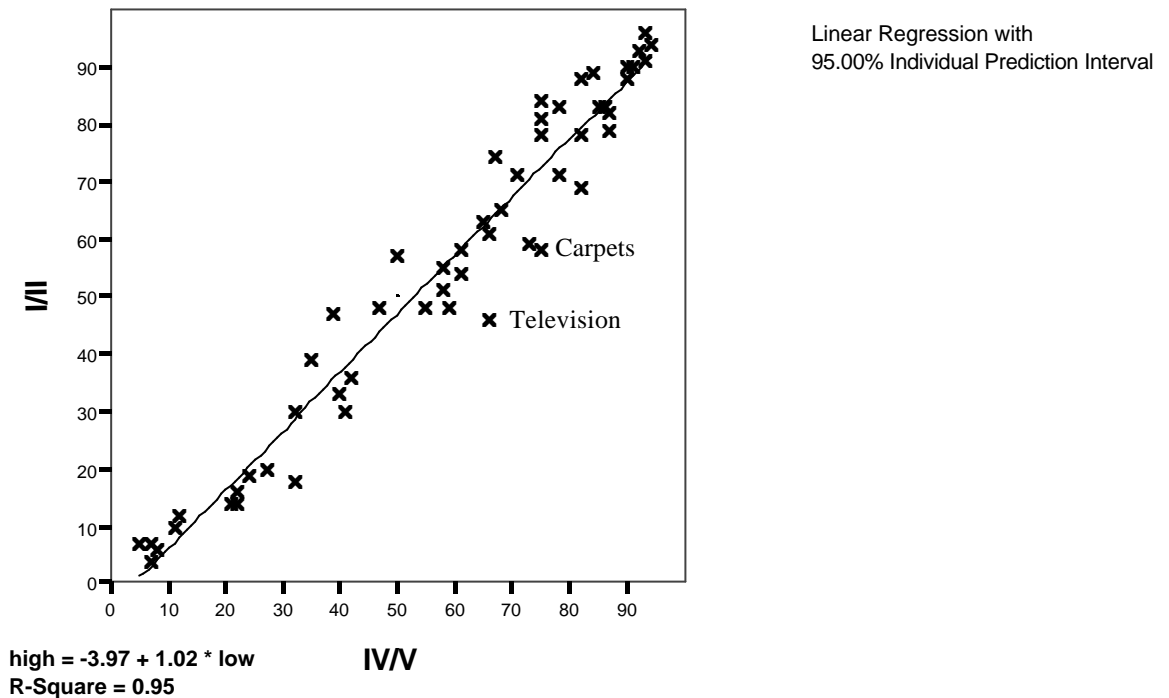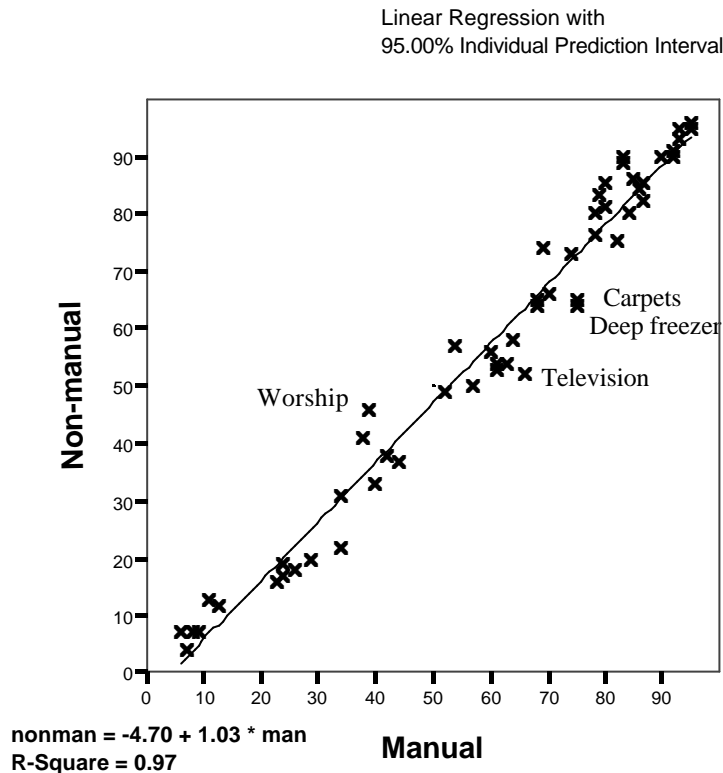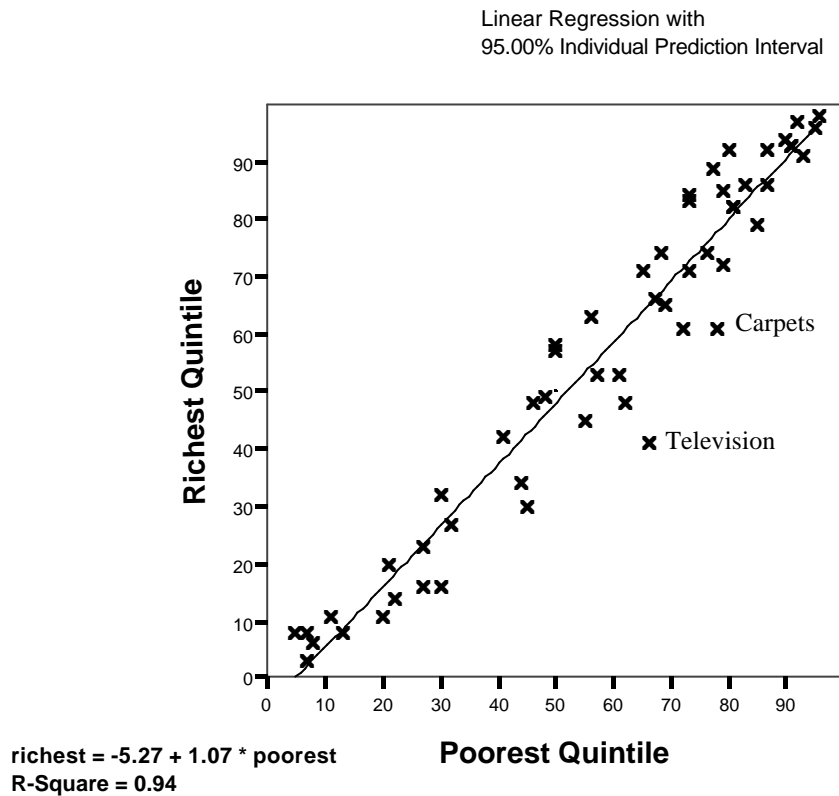high = -3.97 + 1.02 * low
R-Square = 0.95

Figure 5 shows that there is similarity close agreement between manual workers and non-manual workers about what are the necessities of life. The most significant difference relates to a "television" where many more manual workers than non-manual workers perceive this as an essential item (65% compared with 52%). More of manual workers than of non-manual workers also perceive the "deep freezer/ fridge freezer" as essential (75% compared with 65%). This may reflect their tendency to purchase and consume many more frozen food items because of the relative cheap cost. On the other hand, non-manual workers perceive "attending a place of worship" as essential (46% compared with 39%).

Figure 5: Perception of necessities: comparing the manual and non-manual workers

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval
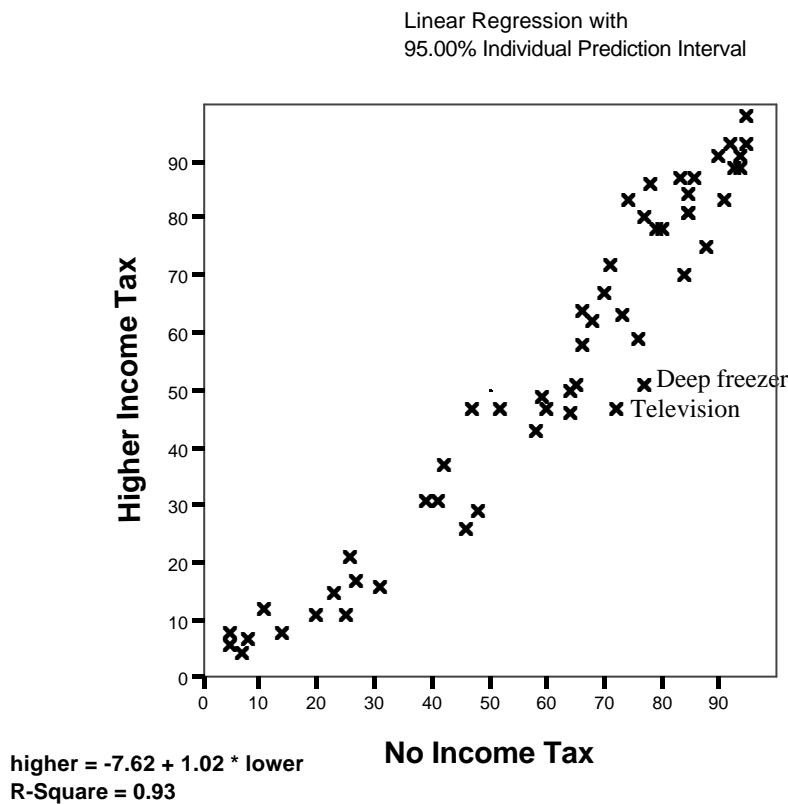

nonman = -4.70 + 1.03 * man
R-Square = 0.97

There is a close consensus on what items constitute the necessities of life when we compare the poorest 20% of the population with the very richest quintile (see Figure 6). In general more of the poorest quintile than of the richest considers certain items to be necessary. The items attracting the most significant differences are "carpets" and a "television". There were also large differences in relation to a "dressing gown", "tumble dryer" and "money to replace worn out furniture" - these items attracted greater support from people in the poorest group (see Appendix 1). The importance of a "dressing gown" is most probably related to the disproportionate representation of the elderly in the bottom income quintile (since treating a dressing gown as essential is strongly correlated with age). Specification by more of them of a "tumble dryer" may be linked with their lack of space (in terms of a garden or spare room) to dry clothes as well as their greater difficulty in keeping their homes warm.

Figure 6: Perception of necessities: comparing the richest and poorest quintile groups

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

richest = -5.27 + 1.07 * poorest
R-Square = 0.94

The same is true of higher and lower income tax-payers, especially of those who pay high tax and those who pay no tax (e.g. pensioners, the unemployed, the sick and the disabled and students) and those taxed most heavily. Figure 7 shows that whilst there is close agreement on items and activities that constitute the necessities of life, people who pay no income tax are more likely to perceive items as necessities than people who are taxed heavily. The most significant differences are in relation to a "deep freezer" and a "television".

Figure 7 Perception of necessities: comparing the higher income tax and no income tax groups

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

higher = -7.62 + 1.02 * lower
R-Square = 0.93

The perception of necessities of those who left full-time education at the age of 16 or younger were also compared with those who left after the age of 16. "Attending a place of worship" was the only activity to attract a significant difference in support. Fifty percent of people leaving full-time education after 16 considered this activity as essential compared with only 39% of those who left at the age of 16 or younger.
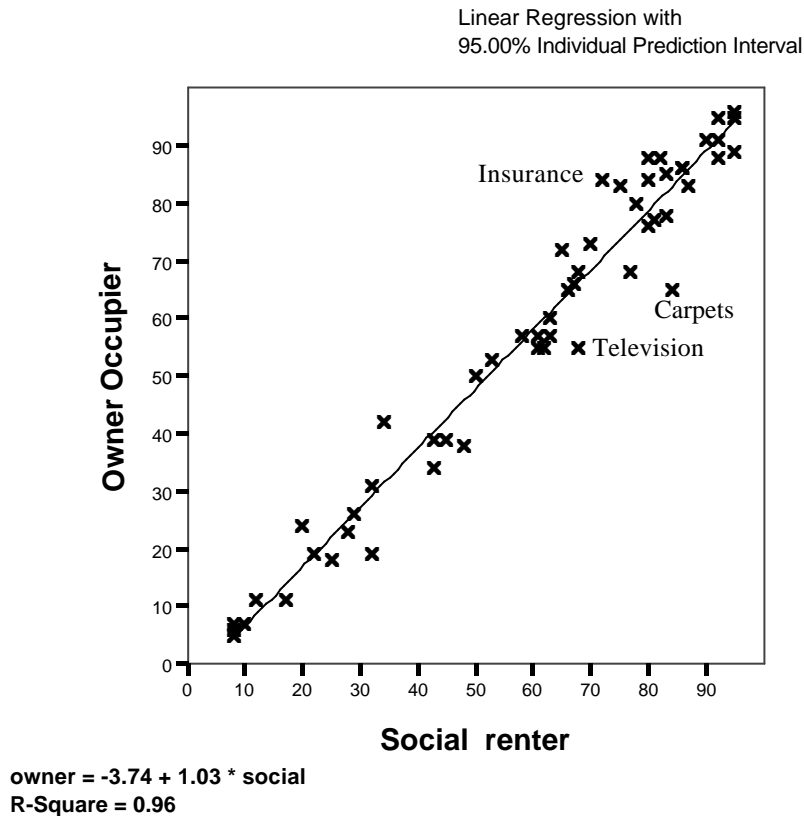
Figure 8 Perception of necessities: comparing those who left full-time education at the age of 16 or younger and those who left after the age of 16.
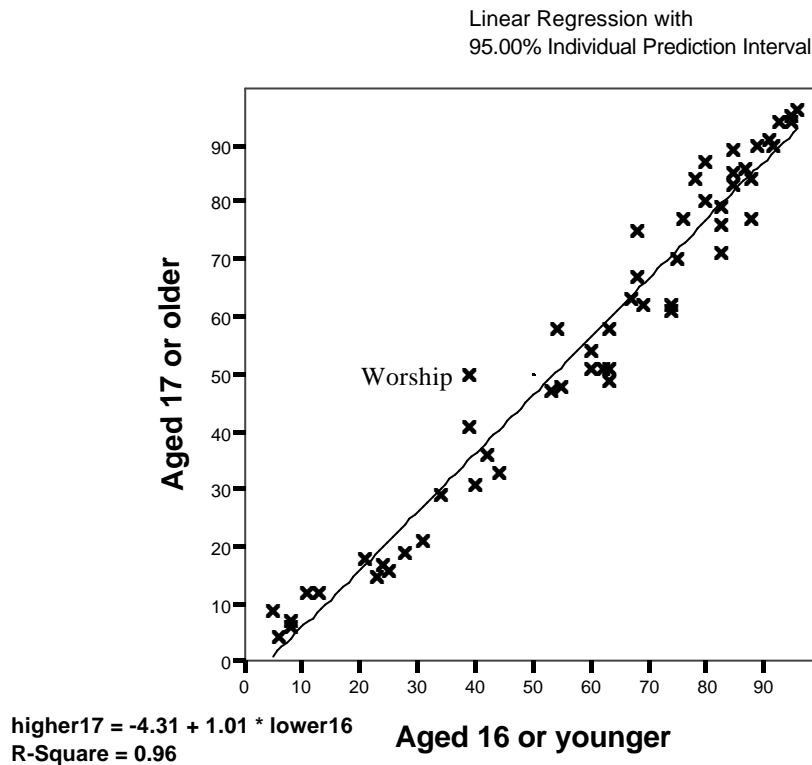
Differences between occupiers and social housing renters are set out in Figure 8. The last 20 years or so has seen the twin processes of residualisation and marginalisation gain increasing prevalence within the social housing sector so that social housing now provides safety-net accommodation for those in the poorest groups (Lee and Murie, 1997). Surprisingly, the variations between those two housing sectors are few, with only three items standing out as having significantly different levels of support: "carpets", a "television" and "insurance for contents of dwelling". "Carpets" are specified more often by social housing tenants than by occupiers (84% compared with 65%) perhaps because their accommodation is likely to have concreted floors. A "television" is also specified more often. On the other hand, household insurance is seen as essential by more than four-fifths of owner-occupiers and this may reflect that they have more possessions and possessions of greater value than social housing tenants. An additional factor impacting on the perception of social housing tenants is that insurance may simply not be available to
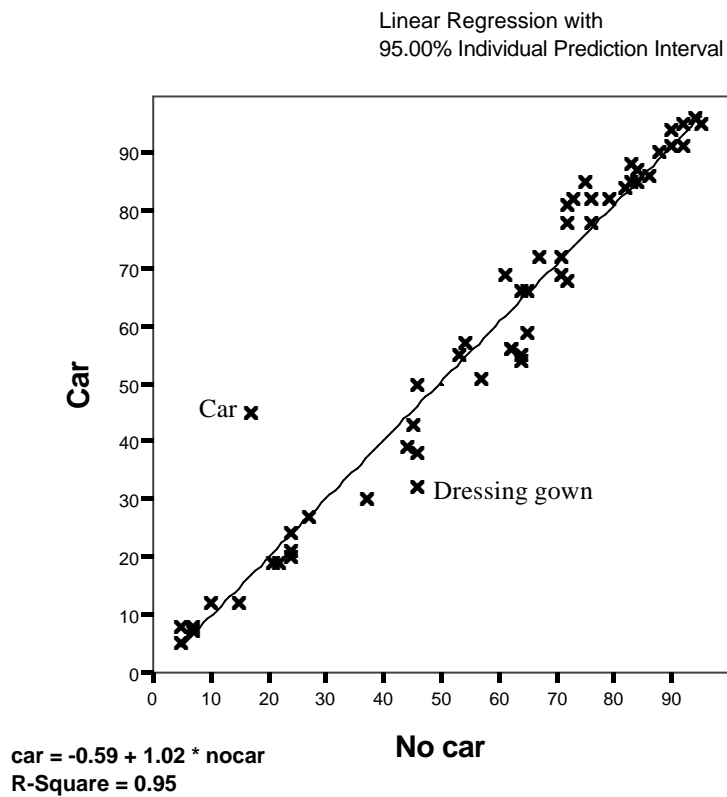
them because where they live is deemed as "too" high risk by insurance companies (Whyley et al., 1998)

Figure 8 Perception of necessities: comparing owner-occupiers and social renters

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

owner = -3.74 + 1.03 * social
R-Square = 0.96

Car ownership is often used in studies of deprivation as a proxy for poverty. In Figure 9 we compare those people with access to a car or a van with those without to see what possible differences there might exist in their perceptions of necessities. There are only two items standing out as having significantly different levels of support among car owners and non-car owners. The greatest difference is in relation to a "car" where unsurprisingly many more people who currently have access to this item also see it as essential (45% compared with 17%). The other large difference relates to a "dressing gown" with non-car users likely to see this item as essential clothing. This may reflect a disproportionate representation of elderly people in the non-car group, since age and possession of a "dressing gown" are closely correlated.

Figure 9: Perception of necessities: comparing ca/van owners with non car/van owners

Linear Regression with
95.00% Individual Prediction Interval

car = -0.59 + 1.02 * nocar
R-Square = 0.95

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Table 2 shows the extent of variation across different regions. On the whole people living in Wales are less likely, and people in London and the South-East more likely, than elsewhere tend to consider items as necessities.

Table 2 Perception of adult necessities by region (%)

	North (n=501)	Midlands & East Anglia (n=498)	London (n=177)	South East (n=258)	South West (n=157)	Wales (n=99)	Scotland (n=165)
Two meals a day	93	92	96	91	91	75	91
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent	78	82	86	83	80	76	80
Heating to warm living areas	94	95	99	94	96	89	95
A dressing gown	35	33	37	34	38	42	34
Two pairs of all weather shoes	63	65	73	62	66	68	71
New, not second hand, clothes	56	47	45	49	41	57	46
A television	60	55	59	56	46	60	59
A roast joint/vegetarian equivalent weekly	61	57	58	52	62	72	42
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms	75	67	66	66	53	77	70
Telephone	68	73	77	76	73	69	69
Refrigerator	87	89	93	92	91	80	91
Beds and bedding for everyone	95	96	98	96	98	85	97
Damp free home	95	92	92	94	98	90	98
A car	36	47	20	51	38	42	27
A dictionary	50	53	66	58	56	58	55
Presents for friends/family yearly	61	52	67	63	55	46	50
A warm waterproof coat	82	86	90	86	89	81	92
A washing machine	83	75	67	76	76	80	82
A dishwasher	6	6	10	12	3	14	7
Regular savings for rainy days	64	69	70	71	69	65	61
A video cassette recorder	22	18	20	25	13	23	15
Money to keep home decorated	84	83	86	86	83	72	83
Insurance of contents of dwelling	82	82	68	83	79	75	82
Fresh fruit and vegetables daily	86	86	89	90	90	76	85
A home computer	11	12	14	16	9	15	9
An outfit for social occasions	54	49	58	50	52	53	54
Microwave oven	27	21	23	25	20	28	23
Mobile phone	7	7	6	9	7	10	7
Tumble dryer	23	22	20	22	15	27	20
Deep freezer/fridge freezer	70	70	65	74	70	63	69
Satellite television	5	5	8	5	2	9	6
CD player	12	12	15	16	5	18	12
Replace worn out furniture	62	53	54	54	58	51	53
Replace broken electrical goods	86	85	88	90	84	83	86
Appropriate clothes for job interviews	67	72	77	77	70	66	69
Medicines prescribed by doctor	92	91	94	90	91	79	92
Access to the internet	6	6	8	8	9	7	4
Money to spend on self weekly	59	63	71	61	58	49	53
Having a daily newspaper	25	29	43	30	28	40	47
A evening out once a fortnight	40	41	48	39	38	43	35

A hobby or leisure activity	78	81	78	83	79	77	77
A holiday away from home	56	59	54	59	55	55	51
Celebrations on special occasions	83	82	91	89	86	74	85
A meal in a restaurant/pub monthly	29	27	29	27	22	26	20
Holidays abroad once a year	22	18	26	19	15	21	17
Coach/train fares to visit friends/family	40	39	51	44	36	34	33
Friends or family round for a meal	65	63	70	72	63	60	62
Visits to friends or family	84	83	88	90	86	84	82
Going to the pub once a fortnight	23	20	21	22	14	24	19
Attending weddings, funerals	81	82	81	88	73	79	80
Visiting friends or family in hospital	92	94	92	96	95	83	94
Attending place of worship	44	37	57	40	39	53	46
Collect children from school	79	75	79	81	75	68	71
Visits to school e.g. sports day	84	84	88	84	80	67	78

Note: weight a (individual weight) ; Analysis excludes don't know/refused/not asked. Unranked.

People in Wales are less likely to consider certain items and activities as essential. These cover items to do with housing (e.g. "beds for everyone", "heating to warm living areas"), food (e.g. "two meals a day", clothing (e.g. "appropriate clothes for job interviews"), as well as social activities (e.g. "presents for friends and family", or "having friends round for a meal"). On the other hand, they are more likely to judge a "dressing gown", "weekly roast or vegetarian equivalent" or "carpets for the living room" as essential. In contrast people from London tend to consider many more items as necessities – including "two meals a day", "telephone", "money to spend on one self", "celebrations", "dictionary", and "attending place of worship". The disproportionate number of ethnic minority people living in London, whose first language is not English, probably accounts for the higher support for the "dictionary". The higher level of support found in London for "attending a place of worship" may also be similarly related. The fact that London's population consists of a high proportion of people who migrate from other cities may explain why the "telephone" is regarded as essential by more Londoners, whereas the relative extensive availability of public transport may explain why Londoners are least likely to consider a "car" as essential. People in the South East are particularly

likely to perceive social activities as essential items – including "friends or family round for a meal", "visits to friends or family", "going to the pub", "attending weddings and funerals", and "visiting friends and family in hospital".

CONCLUSION

1. The general public holds ideas about what are the necessities of life that are more wide ranging, or multi-dimensional, than are ordinarily represented in expert or political assessments. As much importance is attached to some social activities as to some consumer goods. That is the first striking conclusion from the national survey of June 1999, confirming conclusions drawn from previous but less elaborate surveys carried out in 1983 and 1990.

People of all ages and walks of life do not restrict their interpretation of "necessities" to the basic material needs of a subsistence diet, shelter, clothing and fuel. There are social <u>customs</u>, <u>obligations</u> and <u>activities</u>, that substantial majorities if the population also identify as among the top necessities of life. Among the <u>customs</u> are "celebrations on special occasions" (83%), and "attendance of weddings and funerals" (80%). There are "presents at least once a year for family and friends" (56%). There are regular events to do with food, like a "weekly joint or the vegetarian equivalent" (56%), which extend our ideas of dietary needs way beyond the provision of minimal calories required of physiological efficiency. And the expression of clothing needs extend ideas about basic cover to include a "warm waterproof coat" (85%), and "two pairs of all-weather shoes" (64%).

Among obligations and activities described as necessary are not just those which seem on the face of it to satisfy individual physiological survival and individual occupation - like a hobby or leisure activity (78%). They include joint activities with friends and within families, such as visits to friends or family (84%, and in hospital 92%). And they involve reciprocation and care of, or service for, others. People recognise the needs to have friends and family round for meals (64 %), for example.

2. What is striking, second, is the strength of public acknowledgement that a range of social activities, roles and relationships take their place among the "necessities" of life. Our questions on social activities were designed to build on the relative few that had been asked in the pioneering surveys in 1983 and 1990. Substantial majorities of the population represented in the survey were found to believe that visiting family and friends, especially when they are in hospital, collecting children from school, paying visits to the children's schools, for example in sports days, and attending weddings and funerals, compose a necessary part of everyday life. Using a lager number of indicators, the 1999 survey showed slightly more people specified one or more social activities among the necessities of life (95%) than those specifying one or more items to do with housing food, clothing, and consumer durbales, for example (see Appendix 2).

The "Breadline Britain" surveys of 1983 and 1990, had already confirmed that perceptions of "necessities" were more broadly based than the corresponding assessments made by many economists, and by governments in their policies and legislation. But because of doubts about methodology and sponsorship, the evidence they unearthed was treated with scepticism in some quarters. And perhaps because indicators of social deprivation were relatively few, compared with those of material deprivation, the implications of the conclusions may have seemed smaller than they were.

The degree of consensus found between people of different age and gender, and among different groups, was surprisingly strong. There is little doubt that perceptions of necessities related to individual circumstances at the time of asking, and to the changes in privation and prosperity that individuals may have experienced in the past. Nonetheless, many more people than might have been expected reflect a sensitive awareness of developments that have taken place

nationally in living standards. There was greater consensus about national living standards than there was common experience of those standards.

There were of course some important differences between sections of the population. More of the poor than of the rich considered certain items to be necessities: there was a marked difference, for example, in the case of "carpets", and a "television". But such differences seem to be partly explained by circumstances - more of the rich than the poor live in accommodation with alternative floor coverings, and more of the rich similarly have alternative forms of entertainment.

3. The third striking conclusion therefore is that the public's perception of necessities reflects the conditions and dependencies of contemporary life - whether these are created by what is available in the market or by developments in social structure and interaction. They are relative to contemporary conditions. The evidence for this conclusion comes primarily from the comparative analysis of the successive surveys of 1983, 1990 and 1999. Another report in this series of Working Papers deals with the changes revealed over a period of 19 years (Gordon, Pantazis and Townsend, 2000). One example of the way in which perceptions become updated is easy to understand. Technology and mass production throw up examples as the years pass. Ownership of a "telephone" has spread, and the percentage of the population finding a "telephone" a necessity of life has grown. Although still far from becoming a majority the proportions of the population finding a "car", a "video recorder" and a "home computer" a necessity have also grown. Such examples are of course individual examples of economic growth - and the familiar technological cycle from invention to prototype to mass production to scrapyard.

The number of things judged by a majority of the population to be material necessities turns our to be larger than in earlier research, and also reflective of industrial society - "medicines prescribed by a doctor", "clothing appropriate for job interviews", "replacements of worn-out furniture" and "electrical goods", and

"deep freezers", to give examples drawn from interviews. But there are two other changes from the 1999 evidence. One follows directly from the spread of new forms of technology. Communications and the fulfilment of social obligations can be maintained at a distance; and consumer goods, even subsistence goods, serve functions that are simultaneously material and social. This applies to food and clothing as much as technical gadgets. Included in conventional interpretations of dietary needs are foodstuffs like "meat or fish every other day", and foodstuffs known to be good for health - like "fruit and vegetables daily". But food stuffs in crude or "organic" forms may become increasingly scarce, as many people understand. The nature of the foodstuffs available of the market may depend on added ingredients, preparation, packaging and advertising and can be habit-inducing and socially sought-after as well as expensive. Food as a social product or custom or as a social experience is very different from food as minimally providing the basic elements of nutrition. Like other supposedly "material" necessities it has social functions too.

Another change is in social customs and exchange. The survey found increases in the percentages of the population who name "celebrations on special occasions", a "hobby or a leisure activity", among "necessities" of life. More wide-ranging communication may also have brought an increase too in the number of kinds of social activities perceived by people to be necessary.

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