

## Chapter 8

### Revising the *Breadline Britain* Questions: Relevant Findings from the Group Discussions

Sue Middleton

#### Background

The Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) has undertaken a series of group discussions as part of the development phase for a new survey of poverty and social exclusion in Britain. The groups took place in two phases and participants in each group are described in Table 8.1. Five of the ten groups in the first phase were held in Leicester and the remaining five in Winchester. This was to ensure that differences in the circumstances of people living in urban and rural areas could be taken into account. In the second phase of the research, each of the three groups were mixed in terms of: the family characteristics in Phase 1; sex; and socio-economic group. The aim was to explore whether agreement could be reached about necessities among people in widely differing circumstances.

**Table 8.1: Group discussions**

	Phase 1					Phase 2
	Pensioners	Lone Parents	Couples with Children	Couples without Children	Single	Mixed
Midlands	1	1	1	1	1	3
South	1	1	1	1	1	

Participants were professionally recruited and completed the following instrumentation prior to attending their group discussion:

1. a recruitment questionnaire to collect basic demographic information about the participant and their household;
2. a self-completion diary of items consumed, kept for one week;
3. a self-completion inventory of clothes, furniture and other household equipment.

The main aim of the diary and inventory was to encourage participants to begin to consider their own living standards, so that they could negotiate in the groups on the basis of detailed knowledge.

The groups covered a wide range of topics relating to poverty and social exclusion. A full report of the discussions will be produced at a later date and will also be used to complement reports on the survey data, if it is commissioned. This short report concentrates on findings relevant to the development of the questionnaire.

## Method in Group Discussions

In the first phase of the research (ten groups), participants negotiated and agreed lists of items, activities and facilities which all adults in Britain should be able to have and should not have to go without. Once the lists were complete, the groups were asked to consider whether all items are of equal importance in avoiding poverty or whether some are more important than others. Nine of the first phase groups (80 participants), also completed the first part of the socially perceived necessities question from the previous *Breadline Britain* questionnaire by indicating whether items are necessary or desirable. This was followed by a discussion of items included in the list which should not be there and items not included in the list which should be there. The first phase groups also discussed the dimensions of time and gender in relation to poverty in general terms.

Prior to the second phase of the research (three groups), the list of socially approved necessities was amended to include items which had emerged as strong priorities in the first phase. The second phase groups also discussed the length of time for which households and individuals could go without each item without slipping into poverty and whether more women or children were more likely to go without each individual item.

## Socially Perceived Necessities - Adults

The table below lists existing and suggested new necessities (including some proposals from David Gordon). All new items are in italics and items for deletion or amendment are in upper case. The list has been divided into household and individual necessities (second column) which will be necessary if a questionnaire is to be administered to more than one member of a household. It has also been divided into 'food, clothes, housing', 'furniture and equipment' and social items (although the ordering of these will need to be considered prior to completion of the questionnaire). The first column indicates the length of time for which most participants thought it was acceptable for each item to be gone without and relates to the follow-up question to be asked of those who do not have each item.

<b>Food:</b>	TIME	I or H
Two meals a day	A	I
<i>One good meal and two snacks every day</i>	A	I
Meat or fish or CHEESE every other day	A	I
<i>Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables every day</i>	A	I
A ROAST JOINT OR ITS VEGETARIAN EQUIVALENT ONCE A WEEK		
A PACKET OF CIGARETTES EVERY OTHER DAY		
<b>Clothes:</b>		
A DRESSING GOWN		
Two pairs of all weather shoes	W	I
New, not second hand, clothes	M	I

A warm waterproof coat	A	I
A "BEST OUTFIT" FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS		I
<i>An outfit to wear for social or family occasions, such as parties or weddings</i>	M	I
<i>Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews</i>	A	I
<b>Housing:</b>		
Heating to warm living areas of the home if it is cold	A	H
Indoor toilet, not shared with another household	A	H
Bath, not shared with another household	A	H
Damp-free home	A	H
<b>Furniture and Equipment:</b>		
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms in the home	M	H
BEDS FOR EVERYONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD		
<i>Mattresses and bedding for everyone in the household</i>	A	H
A television	M	H
Telephone	W	H
Refrigerator	W	H
A car	Y	I
<i>Access to public transport</i>	A	I
A washing machine	A	H
<i>Replacing any worn out furniture</i>	M	H
<i>Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine</i>	W	H
<b>Leisure and Social</b>		
<i>Access to a garden or park</i>	M	H
A night out once a fortnight	M	I
A hobby or leisure activity	M	I
A holiday away from home for one week a year, not with relatives	Y	I
Celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas	M	I
Presents for friends or family once a year	M	I
<i>Visits to friends and/or family once a week</i>	M	I
Friends/family round for a SNACK once a WEEK	M	I
<i>Going to the pub once a fortnight</i>	M	I
<i>Having a daily newspaper</i>	W	I
<i>A small amount of money each week to spend on yourself, not on the family</i>	M	I
<b>Health:</b>		
<i>All medicines prescribed by your doctor</i>		I

## **Amendments to the List**

### **Food**

#### ***'Two meals a day'***

Groups proposed that 'Two meals a day' should be replaced with 'One good meal and two snacks every day'. Two meals a day suggested two large cooked meals which participants felt was not part of the British lifestyle nowadays. However, this is difficult to operationalise because of variations in understanding of 'snack'. Most participants meant breakfast and a sandwich or something similar. However, 'Breakfast, one good meal and a snack' might be open to too much misinterpretation - do we mean a traditional cooked breakfast, for example?

#### ***'Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables every day'***

Participants were unanimous in including this item. Health education messages are obviously reaching their target!

#### ***'A roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week'***

It was suggested that this item should be deleted as it was considered to be irrelevant in people's lives today.

#### ***'Cigarettes'***

The groups reached almost unanimous agreement that this should be excluded.

### **Clothes**

#### ***'A best outfit for special occasions'***

This was thought to be either unnecessary or wrongly worded. It conjured up for participants Victorian images of children in sailor suits. Two alternatives emerged: one related to the need to have appropriate clothing to participate socially, 'An outfit to wear for social or family occasions such as parties or weddings'; and the other to allow people to have the best opportunity of securing work: 'Appropriate clothes to wear for job interviews'.

#### ***'A dressing gown'***

This was only felt to be essential by older women. All other participants felt that it should be excluded from the list.

### **Furniture and Equipment**

#### ***'Beds for everyone in the household'***

This should be replaced by 'mattresses and bedding for everyone in the household'. The justification was that 'beds' are not necessary - a mattress on the floor is adequate. However, sheets, pillows, quilts or blankets are necessary for hygiene and health.

#### ***'A car'***

Access to some form of transport was agreed to be essential. However, most participants in Leicester felt that a car was not essential - access to public transport was

sufficient. In Winchester, a car was considered to be essential largely because of the relative lack of public transport in the rural areas. Operationalising this is difficult. Including 'access to public transport' is likely to cause confusion when people try to answer the 'don't have' questions because the main reason is likely to be 'don't have, doesn't exist', rather than 'don't have, can't afford'. It is suggested that a car is left in and that the issue of transport is explored further through David Gordon's new questions (with amendments - see further below).

***'Replacing any worn out furniture'***

This is an important addition to the list (and emerged as important in the groups), along with a further indicator which I am proposing (also arising from the groups):

***'Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine'***

One of the central thrusts of discussions about poverty in the groups (confirming the findings of other qualitative research, Dobson, *et al*, 1994; Kempson, 1996) was that being poor means never having any money left over to meet emergencies such as broken washing machines and often having to make choices between, for example, paying bills and buying food. The problem with being poor over a long period is having no money to replace things as they become worn out. (See below for further suggestions about exploring this).

**Leisure and Social**

***'Access to a garden or park'***

This was felt to be essential for every individual's mental health and well-being - not simply for families with children.

***'Friends or family round for a meal once a month' and 'Visits to friends family once a week'***

Contact with friends and family was emphasised throughout all the discussions of necessities as being vital to survival. Being able to afford to visit friends and relatives was at least as important as friends and relatives coming to visit. Most participants suggested that 'friends/family round for a meal once a month' is not how most people live their lives - the provision of a cup of tea and a snack more regularly is more relevant and important.

***'A hobby or leisure activity'***

Although we should keep this indicator, participants were concerned that it is too general. However, in further discussions men and women could not agree on a more specific indicator. This is central to the exploration of gender poverty (see further below). Two of David's suggested additional indicators provide a partial solution to this problem:

***'Going to the pub once a week' and 'A daily newspaper'***

Evidence from the group discussions and discussions with Jackie Goode and Ruth Lister suggest that these two indicators are good for measuring male exclusion. It is more difficult to find indicators for women who seem to define poverty/social exclusion much more in terms of their children. ***'A small amount of money each week to spend on***

*yourself, not on the family'* seems to be in poorer households what women do not have and men do.

***'All medicines prescribed by your doctor'***

Access to healthcare was one of the priorities in all of the group discussions. As prescription charges continue to rise it would be worth including this indicator. Obviously some respondents will be exempt but analysis could allow for this.

**Time**

The key to the letters in the column is as follows:

- A necessary for people to have all through their lives
- W it wouldn't matter if people went without for a week or two but no longer
- M it wouldn't matter if people went without for a month or two but no longer
- Y it wouldn't matter if people went without for a year or two but no longer

In subsequent discussions with the research team, it was agreed that following-up each item which respondents do not have with a question about the length of time gone without would be too time consuming. It is suggested that we follow up those items marked A which respondents say they go without (necessary for people to have all through their lives) with a question about how long they have been without the item.

**Socially Perceived Necessities - Children**

The children's index, drawn from the *Small Fortunes* survey, was completed by all the groups with children (Middleton *et al*, 1997). Items which participants felt could be removed are in upper case. Items which can be removed because they are covered in the household list are in italics.

Three meals a day
Toys (e.g. dolls, play figures, teddies, etc.)
Leisure equipment (e.g. sports equipment or a bicycle)
Enough bedrooms for every child over 10 of different sex to have his/her own bedroom
<i>A garden to play in</i>
Some new, not second-hand or handed on, clothes
A carpet in their bedroom
A hobby or leisure activity
A holiday away from home at least one week a year with her/his family
Celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas/birthday
COMPUTER GAMES
A 'BEST OUTFIT' FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS
A warm coat

A waterproof coat
<i>A bed and mattress to her/himself</i>
Books of her/his own
A bike, new or second hand
Construction toys such as Duplo or Lego
Educational games
<i>A television set in the home</i>
New, properly fitted shoes
At least seven pairs of new underpants
At least four jumpers, cardigans or sweatshirts
All the school uniform required by the school
At least four pairs of trousers, leggings, jeans or jogging bottoms
Swimming at least once a month
Play group at least once a week for pre-school aged children
Going on a school trip at least once a term for school aged children
At least 50 pence week to spend on sweets
Meat, fish or cheese at least twice a day
Fresh fruit at least once a day
Friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight
COMPUTER SUITABLE FOR SCHOOL WORK

The questions to be asked are similar to the adult variant:

*'On these cards are a number of different items which relate to children's standard of living. Please would you indicate by placing the cards in the appropriate box the living standards you feel all children should have in Britain today? BOX A is for items which you think are necessary which all children should be able to have and which they should not have to do without. BOX B is for items which it may be desirable for children to have but are not necessary.'*

Follow up is similar to the four adult categories: Child(ren) have and couldn't do without, child(ren) have and could do without, child(ren) don't have but don't want, child(ren) don't have because you can't afford.

In *Small Fortunes*, the question related only to the one individual child which was the subject of the survey. However, there is no difficulty with asking it generally about children in the household.

## **Gender Poverty**

### **Background**

There are difficulties in 'unpacking the black box' of intra-household differences in the experience of poverty and social exclusion, particularly between men and women (see, for example, Cantillon and Nolan, 1998 and Chapter 3, this volume). In addition to exploring the group discussions transcripts and returning to some of the earlier literature and questionnaires, discussions have been held with Jackie Goode and Ruth Lister, (Goode *et al*, 1998).

The central issue is 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. There are three main areas of difficulty: first, men and women seem to have a different understanding of poverty and of the things which are necessary to avoid poverty; second, some men seem to find it difficult to recognise that they have personal spending money, or their partner buys things which are for the man's personal use but which are not classed as 'personal' expenditure. Men often see money which their partner spends on the children as being the woman's own personal spending money. Third, it is almost impossible to unpick these differences when partners are interviewed together.

### **Individual questionnaires**

It is proposed that the new survey will include a second, shorter, questionnaire for 'partners'. The problem will be to try and interview respondents separately wherever possible. One suggestion which has been made, 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.

### **Possible questions**

There are a number of ways of assessing financial management strategies within households. The first and simplest might be to ask:

*Who has the main responsibility for making ends meet in your household/family?*

*Partner - male*

*Partner - female*

*Equal responsibility*

*Other*

The preferred alternative would be to use the question from the SCOLI study:

*People organise their household finances in different ways. Which of the methods on this card comes closest to the way in which you organise yours? It doesn't have to fit exactly - you should choose the nearest one.*

*I look after all the household's money except my partner's personal spending money.*

*My partner looks after all the household's money except my personal spending money.*

*I am given a housekeeping allowance. My partner looks after the rest of the money.*



*My partner is given a housekeeping allowance. I look after the rest of the money.*

*We share and manage our household finances jointly.*

*We keep our finances completely separate.*

*Other (write in)*

The following suite of questions are suggested to explore differences in living standards between men and women:

*Which of the things on this list do you personally go without when money is tight? (READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY)*

*Clothes*

*Shoes*

*Cigarettes*

*Alcohol*

*Food*

*Occasional nights out with friends*

*Spending on a hobby or sport*

*Visits to the pub*

*A holiday*

*Never go without*

*Money never tight*

*Which of the things on this list would you personally find really difficult to give up even if money was tight? ( READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY)*

*Clothes*

*Shoes*

*Cigarettes*

*Alcohol*

*Food*

*Occasional nights out with friends*

*Spending on a hobby or sport*

*Visits to the pub*

*A holiday*

*Never go without*

*Money never tight*

*And could you tell me HOW OFTEN you personally have gone without each of these things in the last year because of shortage of money? READ OUT.*

*All year      Often      Sometimes      Never*

*Clothes*

*Shoes*

*Occasional nights out with friends*

*Cigarettes*

*Alcohol*

*Food*  
*A hobby or sport*  
*Visits to the pub*  
*A holiday*

**ASK IF PARTNER LIVES IN HOUSEHOLD**

*And what about your partner, how often has he/she gone without each of these things in the last year because of shortage of money? READ OUT.*

*All year      Often      Sometimes      Never*

*Clothes*  
*Shoes*  
*Occasional nights out with friends*  
*Alcohol*  
*Cigarettes*  
*Food*  
*A hobby or sport*  
*Visits to the pub*  
*A holiday*

*And what about your child(ren), how often has he/she/they gone without each of these things in the last year because of shortage of money? READ OUT.*

*All year      Often      Sometimes      Never*

*Clothes*  
*Shoes*  
*Food*  
*A hobby or sport*  
*School trips or holidays*  
*A holiday not with school*

*How often do you go out in the evenings without your partner on average?*

*Every evening*  
*At least two or three times a week*  
*Once a week*  
*Once a fortnight*  
*Once a month*  
*Once every two or three months*  
*Once every six months*  
*Once a year*  
*Less than that*  
*Never*

**IF EVER GOES OUT ALONE**

*And when you go out without your partner what do you do? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)*

- Visit friends/relatives*
- Go to the pub alone*
- Go to the pub with friends/relatives*
- Take the children out somewhere*
- Go to a social club/community centre*
- Go to the cinema/theatre*
- Go to a restaurant/cafe*
- Go to a night-club*
- Go to child's school*
- Go to church/temple/mosque/synagogue/other religious*
- Go to night school/hobby*
- Go to watch sport*
- Go to play sport*

### **Absolute and Overall Poverty**

One of the aims of the development phase for the survey was to explore further the operationalisation of the United Nations definition of absolute and overall poverty. The questions developed by Jonathan Bradshaw, Peter Townsend and David Gordon were completed in all except one of the 13 group discussions (103 people). Participants were asked to complete the instrument quite early in the discussion, usually following an introductory discussion of poverty in Britain. In the first phase of the groups the instrument used was as follows:

*The United Nations and the Government of 117 countries wish to prepare national plans to get rid of poverty. They have agreed that poverty can be defined in two ways: absolute poverty and overall poverty. The definition of absolute and overall poverty are given on the next page - please read them to yourself then answer the questions below.*

**B1** *How many pounds a week, after tax, do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in, out of ABSOLUTE poverty?*

£  per week

**B2** *How far above or below that level would you say your household is? Please tick one box only*

- A lot above that level of income*
- A little above*
- About the same*
- A little below*
- A lot below that level of income*
- Don't know*

B3 *How many pounds a week, after tax, do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in, out of OVERALL poverty?*

£  per week

B4 *How far above or below that level would you say your household is? Please tick one box only*

*A lot above that level of income*

*A little above*

*About the same*

*A little below*

*A lot below that level of income*

*Don't know*

### **ABSOLUTE POVERTY**

*Absolute poverty means being so poor that you are deprived of basic human needs. In order to **avoid** ABSOLUTE poverty, you need enough money to cover all these things:*

1. *adequate diet*
2. *housing costs/rent;*
3. *water bills;*
4. *adequate sanitation facilities (sewage disposal, flushing toilet, etc.);*
5. *access to clean water;*
6. *access to basic health care;*
7. *access to education/schooling.*

### **OVERALL POVERTY**

*In order to avoid OVERALL poverty, you need to have enough money not only to cover all things mentioned in the ABSOLUTE poverty list above, but enough money to ensure that you are able to:*

1. *live in a safe environment/area;*
2. *have a social life in your local area;*
3. *feel part of the local community carry out your duties/activities in the family and neighbourhood, and at work;*
4. *meet essential costs of transport.*

## The Definitions

In general, participants felt that the definitions were good. Most interpreted the definitions 'correctly', that is, the overall poverty line was seen as representing a higher standard of living than the absolute poverty line. However, there was disagreement about which of the definitions had relevance for Britain. Some groups identified the absolute poverty definition with 'third world' poverty which did not happen here, whereas overall poverty was recognised as occurring in Britain. It was said that absolute poverty is 'not allowed' to occur in Britain because of State intervention. This was particularly so in two of the groups, each of which included one person who had lived and worked in Africa. Participants in the Winchester groups were also less likely to accept that absolute poverty exists in Britain, particularly in their area. Other groups felt that the definition was very relevant to Britain. For some groups the absolute definition represented those who are at the 'bottom of the pile' and who have little hope of 'bettering themselves'. Overall poverty is a stage at which people have a chance of moving out of poverty altogether. One group, the Leicester lone parents, saw absolute poverty as how they were living at the moment and overall as how they would like to be able to live.

Participants identified some elements as missing from the absolute definition. All groups said that clothing and heating had to be added to the list in order for people in Britain to avoid absolute poverty.

The majority of groups felt that meeting the essential costs of transport should be moved from the overall to the absolute definition. Absolute poverty could not be avoided if people were unable to get to shops to buy food, to doctors and hospitals for healthcare and to schools and colleges for education.

Overall poverty was described variously as 'allowing people a life rather than just an existence'; 'giving more than just survival'; and 'social poverty'. The ability to keep in contact with friends and relatives was felt to be the crucial element of this definition. (This emphasis on the importance of friends and relatives emerged throughout the discussions.) People were less sure about 'having a social life in your local area', particularly if this meant 'being able to go down the pub every night'. Despite not considering themselves as living in overall poverty, many of the Leicester participants in particular felt that they did not have a social life in their local area, which they interpreted as referring to the specific neighbourhood in which they lived rather than the City as a whole. For some, this was because they had little contact with neighbours or because there was said to be no social life in their area. Others referred to the need for a social life as a matter of personal choice which not everyone wanted. The part of the definition referring to 'feeling part of the local community' seemed to have no resonance whatsoever. People did not understand what it meant and it formed no part of their thinking in setting the poverty lines.

Participants differed in their interpretation of 'living in an area where you feel safe'. Some thought that this meant living in an area which was free from crime or where people could go out without fearing crime. This was particularly strong for people who had themselves experienced crime (burglary, mugging, vandalism) or who feared that they would be the victims of crime. However, some participants defined 'safety' as freedom from war or natural disasters such as earthquakes. For others, safety meant living in houses which were structurally sound and had 'safe' gas and electricity supplies.

## Answering the Questions

It took most respondents a long time to complete these questions, an average of approximately five minutes. Their difficulties arose for three main reasons. First, and crucial was the difficulty of dealing with housing costs. Some respondents simply included their current housing costs. Others were unsure about this, saying that they would not be able to afford their current housing if they were simply avoiding absolute poverty. Participants who felt that they did not live in an area where they felt safe were unsure whether to include the costs of being able to move to a safe area in their overall poverty line. Those who owned their homes outright, mainly retired participants, discussed whether they should include elements for notional 'rent' and maintenance.

Second, the approach to answering the questions differed. Some simply worked out approximately what their current outgoings were and either equated this with avoiding absolute poverty or reduced the amount by a sum which they felt represented 'luxury' spending in their budgets. Debates developed about whether the costs of insurance, running a car and buying food at the more expensive supermarkets should be included. Others admitted to simply plucking a figure out of the air. A few who were on Income Support or who had a good idea of current benefit levels for families like theirs used these amounts. They focused on the difficulty of allowing sufficient for the 'unexpected' such as the washing machine breaking down. In setting the overall poverty line, most simply added a sum to the absolute poverty line with very little thought about the amount or how it was made up.

Finally, those who tried to work out their current outgoings before answering the question found it difficult to come up with weekly or monthly figures for infrequent expenditure such as on clothing or water rates.

## Analysis of Responses

The number of respondents who either did not or could not complete the four questions is shown below. Non-response, whilst low, apparently increased as they worked through the questions.

**Table 8.2: Non-response**

	N
B1 (Absolute Poverty Line)	4
B2 (Own Income in relation to B1)	7
B3 (Overall Poverty Line)	11
B4 (Own Income in relation to B3)	15

A comparison of responses to the absolute and overall poverty line questions shows that most responses were in the anticipated direction, that is with the overall poverty line set higher than the absolute. However, a small but significant minority of respondents either

set the absolute and overall lines at an equal figure or set the absolute poverty line at a level above the overall.

**Table 8.3: Comparison of absolute and overall poverty lines**

	N	%
Absolute less than overall	80	85
Absolute equal to overall	9	10
Absolute greater than overall	5	5

### **Recommendation for Questionnaire/Piloting**

In amending the questions, I have tried to reach a compromise between needing to keep a standard definition which could be used in other countries and producing questions which respondents are able to answer more easily and, hopefully, more meaningfully. Adequate sanitation facilities and access to clean water have been excluded from the absolute definition since we can assume that everyone in Britain has these and would not be able to put a cost on them. Clothing, heating and transport have been added. 'Feel part of the local community' has been excluded from the overall definition.

### **Revised Question**

*'Poverty is sometimes divided into two types: absolute and overall poverty.*

*In order to keep you and your family out of absolute poverty you need to have adequate housing, food, water, clothing, heating, lighting, cooking facilities, basic health care, access to education/schooling and to transport.*

1 *Ignoring housing costs, how many pounds a week do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in out of ABSOLUTE poverty?*

2 *How far above or below that level would you say your household is?*

*A lot above that level of income*

*A little above*

*About the same*

*A little below*

*A lot below that level of income*

*In order to keep your family out of overall poverty you need to have all of the things which keep you out of absolute poverty AND live in an area where you feel safe from crime; have a social life if you want one; be able to visit friends and relatives if you wish to.*

3 *Ignoring housing costs, how many pounds a week do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in out of absolute AND overall poverty?*

4 *How far above or below that level would you say your household is?*

*A lot above that level of income*  
*A little above*  
*About the same*  
*A little below*  
*A lot below that level of income*

## **Social Networks and Social Support**

The following is based on (and extended from) a questionnaire which we have used on a number of occasions in recruiting participants for group discussions. It also draws on findings from the groups about the importance and types of social contact which people have.

*Do you have a relative living?*

*In the same street*  
*Within walking distance*  
*A short bus/car journey away*  
*Further than this*  
*No (known) relatives*

(If has relatives)

*How often would you say you meet up with a relative (other than those living with you)?*

*Once a day*  
*Two or three times a week*  
*Once a week*  
*Two or three times a month*  
*Once a month*  
*Less often*  
*Never*

(Those who meet up with relatives sometimes)

*What do you usually do when you meet up with relatives?*

*Visit them in their homes*  
*They visit your home*  
*Go shopping*  
*Go to the pub*  
*Go out for a meal*  
*Go to a club/other social venue*  
*Go to church/temple/synagogue/mosque/other place of worship*  
*Other (Specify)*

*Would you like to meet up with relatives more often or not?*



Yes    *ANSWER NEXT QUESTION*  
No

*What is the main reason which prevents you from meeting up with relatives more often?*

*Lack of time*  
*Lack of transport*  
*Lack of money*  
*Other (Specify)*

*And how often, if ever, do you speak to relatives on the phone?*

*At least once a day*  
*Two or three times a week*  
*Once a week*  
*Two or three times a month*  
*Once a month*  
*Less often*  
*Never*

*And do you have friends living?*

*In the same street*  
*Within walking distance*  
*A short bus/car journey away*  
*Further than this*  
*No friends*

(If has friends)

*How often would you say you meet up with a friend or friends?*

*Once a day*  
*Two or three times a week*  
*Once a week*  
*Two or three times a month*  
*Once a month*  
*Less often*  
*Never*

(Those who meet up with friends sometimes)

*What do you usually do when you meet up with friends?*

*Visit them in their homes*  
*They visit your home*  
*Go shopping*  
*Go to the pub*  
*Go out for a meal*

*Go to a club/other social venue*  
*Go to church/temple/synagogue/mosque/other place of worship*  
*Other (Specify)*

*Would you like to meet up with friends more often or not?*

*Yes*    ANSWER NEXT QUESTION  
*No*

*What is the main reason which prevents you from meeting up with friends more often?*

*Lack of time*  
*Lack of transport*  
*Lack of money*  
*Other (Specify)*

*And how often, if ever, do you speak to friends on the phone?*

*At least once a day*  
*Two or three times a week*  
*Once a week*  
*Two or three times a month*  
*Once a month*  
*Less often*  
*Never*

*Has there been one or more days during the past week when you have not had a conversation with another adult?*

*Yes*  
*No*

## **Social Support**

A new section on social support in the questionnaire would give us the opportunity to explore in detail the help which households get from and give to other family members and friends. The importance of such support and, crucially, of reciprocity was emphasised by the groups.

*In the last twelve months which of the following have you done for family members (not living with you) or friends?*

	<i>Other family members</i>	<i>Friends</i>
<i>Given them money</i>		
<i>Lent them money</i>		
<i>Given them food</i>		
<i>Lent them food</i>		
<i>Given them other things (specify)</i>		
<i>Lent them other things (specify)</i>		

*Taken them out for an evening  
Baby-sat in the evenings for them  
Looked after their children in the daytime*

*And in the last twelve months which of the following have members of your family (not living with you) or friends done for you?*

*Other family members*

*Friends  
Given you money  
Lent you money  
Given you food  
Lent you food  
Given you other things (specify)  
Lent you other things (specify)  
Taken you out for an evening  
Baby-sat in the evenings for you  
Looked after your children in the daytime*

### **Attitudes Towards Poverty**

The concept of 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' was very strong in the groups' discussions of poverty and social exclusion. It would be valuable to include some questions on which groups of people are most likely to be poor and which are 'most/least deserving'. The following is a combination of my own questions, based on findings from the group discussions and adaptations of questions from Wim Van Oorschot's survey of Dutch Public Opinion on Social Security.

*I'm going to read you a list of people in different circumstances. For each could you tell me how likely you think it is that people in those circumstances will be poor in Britain today? Please take your answer from this card. (ALLOW DON'T KNOW)*

#### **SHOWCARD**

*Very likely  
Likely  
Neither likely or unlikely  
Unlikely  
Very unlikely*

*How likely is it that \_\_\_\_\_ will be poor?*

*Families on low wages with children  
Families on low wages without children  
Pensioners  
Young single men  
Young single women  
Disabled people  
Divorced mothers living alone  
Immigrants  
Children*

*Young single mothers living alone*  
*Unemployed men*  
*Unemployed women*  
*Refugees or asylum seekers*  
*Widows*

*And thinking about the same groups of people, for each should the government increase benefits, decrease benefits or keep benefits at the level they are now? (ALLOW DON'T KNOW).*

### **Children and School**

Findings from the *Small Fortunes* survey show the extent to which parents experience repeated requests for money from schools. An average of almost £6 per week was being spent by parents of secondary aged children. The evidence also suggests that all parents, whatever their economic circumstances, seek to meet these requests in order to ensure their child(ren)s full participation in school life. As part of the proposed new section on children's education, I suggest that a question is asked about the extent to which parents meet requests for money from schools.

*Approximately how often do you receive requests for money from the school(s) which your child(ren) attend? (PROMPT if necessary, I mean for things such as books, school trips, charity donations and so on.)*

*Almost every day*  
*Every two or three days*  
*At least once a week*  
*Every two weeks*  
*At least once a term*  
*Less often than that*  
*Never*

### **IF EVER RECEIVE REQUESTS**

*And how often, if ever, do you turn down these requests because you can't afford to pay?*

*Always*  
*Often*  
*Sometimes*  
*Never*

### **Conclusion**

The group discussions have provided some useful insights into how people understand poverty in Britain today and have been invaluable in assisting the redesign of the questionnaire. In depth analysis of the transcripts is ongoing and will be reported at a later stage.

## References

- Cantillon, S. and Nolan, B. (1998) Are Married Women More Deprived than their Husbands? *Journal of Social Policy* 27, 2, 151-171.
- Dobson, B., Beardsworth, A., Keil, T. and Walker, R. (1994) *Diet, Choice and Poverty*. London, Family Policy Studies Centre.
- Goode, J., Callender, C. and Lister, R. (1998) *Purse or Wallet: Gender inequalities and income distribution within families on benefit*, London, Policy Studies Institute.
- Kempson, E. (1996) *Life on a Low Income*. York, YPS/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Middleton, S. (1997) *Household Budgetary requirements in Jersey*, CRSP Working Paper No 296a, Loughborough University.
- Middleton, S., Ashworth, K. And Braithwaite, I. (1997) *Small Fortunes: Spending on children, childhood poverty and parental sacrifice*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation