Socially perceived needs across time and space

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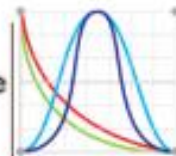Visiting Fellow, The Open University
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Setting a minimum acceptable way of life

Measures need to:

- Go beyond income to look at deprivation
- Reflect the experiences of the poor
- Reflect the society to which they are applied
- Have appropriate age-related standards
- Provide a clear justification for why these indicators have been chosen
- Are applicable to low, middle and high income countries
- Enable some level of international comparisons

Relative deprivation

"… their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary patterns, customs and activities."

Peter Townsend*, Poverty in the UK, 1979, p. 31*

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/townsend-book-pdfs/PIUK/piuk-chapter01.pdf

The problem with the norms-based approach

That something is commonly done does not make it important

"The term poverty carries with it a moral imperative that something should be done about it"

David Piachaud*, Peter Townsend and the Holy Grail, 1981*

That something is not commonly done does not make it unimportant

"material objects cannot be evaluated in this context without reference to how people view them"

Amartya Sen*, Poverty and Famines, 1981*

The concept of socially perceived necessities

- These are identified by public opinion and not by, on the one hand, the views of experts or, on the other hand, the norms of behaviour per se.

- Those items seen by a majority to be essential are classed as socially-perceived necessities. It seeks to find a consensus of what is essential for a minimum standard of living.

- Those who have no choice but to fall below this minimum level can be said to be 'in poverty'.

Mack and Lansley, Poor Britain,1985

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/poor_britain_book/poor-britain-chap02-Mack-Lansley.pdf

Breadline Britain survey, 1983

The necessities question

Using shuffle cards participants were asked for each item and activity to distinguish between:

"items which you think are necessary – which all adults should be able to afford and which they should not have to do without and items which may be desirable but are not necessary."

Breadline Britain survey, 1983

Items tested

- Focus groups in different parts of the country were held to develop indicators of deprivation in tune with people's perceptions of what was necessary for living in Britain in the early 1980s.

- A wide range of items and activities were covered from basic items such as food and heating to consumer goods, leisure activities and social participation

- It included a number of more discretionary items to ensure distinctions were being made.

The items can be found on here.

Follow-up surveys

Breadline Britain survey, 1991,

Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain, 1990

Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland, 2002/3

Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK, 2012

- Many items and activities are the same in all years.
- Some have been excluded as no longer seen as important or ownership nearly 100%
- Some have been introduced to reflect changing the priorities

You can view all the surveys at:

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/questionnaires

The PSE 2012 findings

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/attitudes-adult-necessities-uk-2012

25 of the 46 items and activities for adults were seen as necessary

Highest ranked	% seeing as necessity
Heating	96
Damp-free home	94
Two-meals a day	91
Lowest ranked	% seeing as necessity
Going out for a drink fortnightly	17
Going to cinema etc monthly	15
Dishwasher	10

Socially perceived necessities across time and space

Beyond basic needs

Social activities and consumer goods	Percentage seeing item as necessity
Visit friends or family in hospital or other institutions	90%
Celebrations on special occasions	80%
Attend weddings, funerals and other such occasions	79%
Replace or repair electrical goods	86%
Washing machine	82%
Telephone	77%
Household contents insurance	70%

A widespread consensus

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/attitudes-necessities-groups-uk-2012

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/attitudes-necessities-scatterplots-uk-2012

The survey finds that across all groups there are very similar views on the relative importance of different items and activities.

There is a very high overall level of agreement.

PSE 2012 necessities – key findings

The survey finds the public:

- are relativists rather than an absolutists

- believes that a minimum standard is not simply about subsistence

- backs contemporary standards

- thinks people should be able to participate in the society in which they live

- Strong consensus across all groups

Socially perceived necessities, 1983 to 2012

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/trends-attitudes-necessities-1983-2012

- There is a core group of items and activities considered necessities across all five surveys, connected to basic needs

- Heating and a damp-free home have been the top two necessities throughout this period

New needs arise

- New technologies bring new consumer goods.

- As these goods become more widespread they have become embedded into how we, as a society, operate.

- There comes a moment when lack of the item means the person can no longer participate fully.

Tastes and fashions change

Consider the role of the 'roast joint':

- This has sunk from 57% seeing it as a necessity in 1983 to a mere 36% today.

- And the support that remains comes from the older generation – 59% of those aged 65 compared to just 23% of 16 to 24 year olds

Minimum standards reflect overall living standards

- Generally between1983 and 1999, the percentage seeing an item as a necessity increased, reflecting a rise in overall living standards.

- In 2012, following the fall in real wages after the 2008 financial crash, some items which had had strong support in all past surveys dropped back (eg hobby or leisure activity) and some items with majority but not universal support previously, moved from being seen as 'necessities' to being 'non-necessities' (eg holiday away from home one week a year)

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

The rise and fall of leisure activities
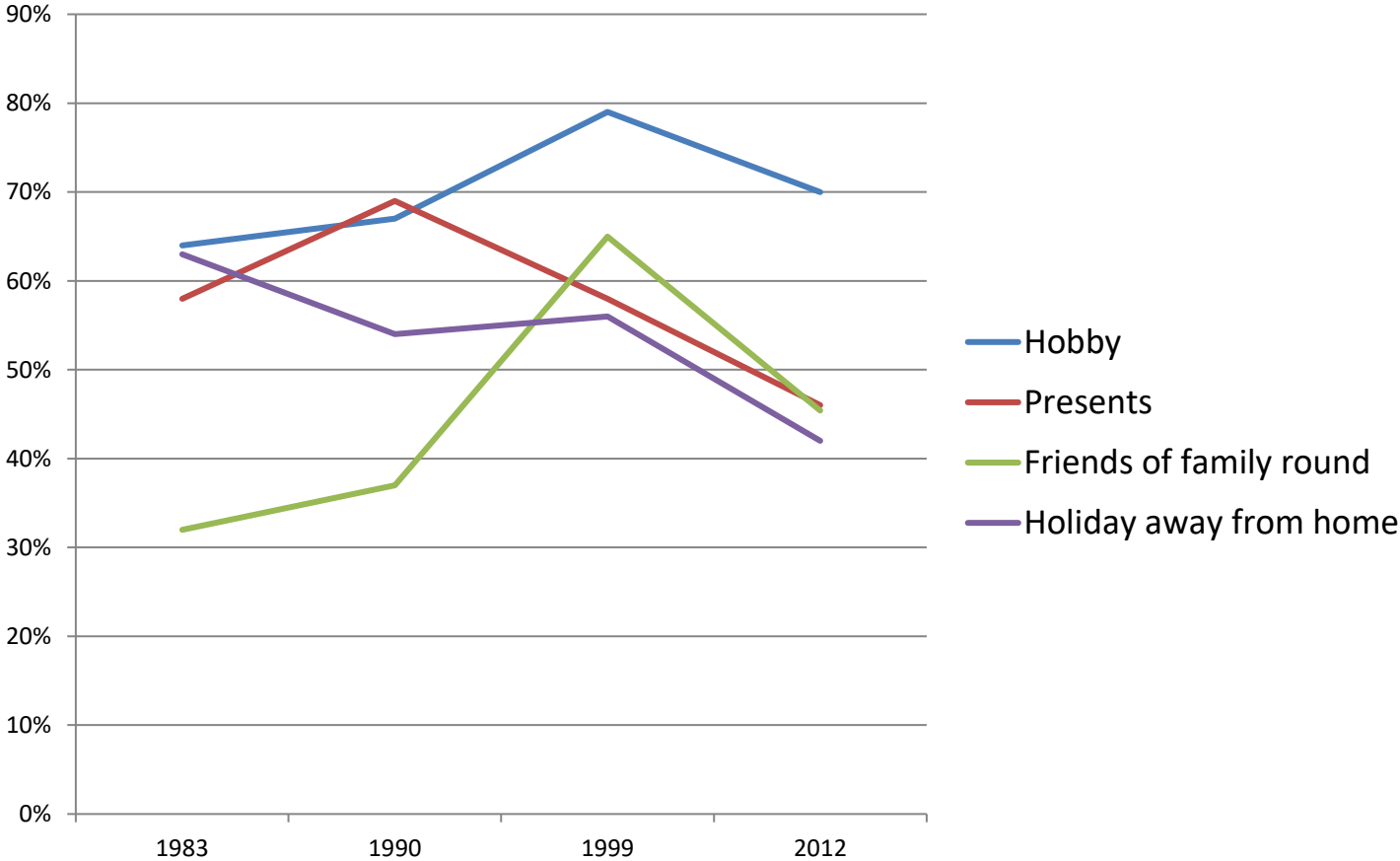
Socially perceived necessities over time - conclusions

- Very strong support for the concept of a minimum standard of living

- The core as to what people see as essential to a minimum standard remains consistent across the years

- Minimum standards reflect the society in which we live and change over time

- Minimum standards adjust to reflect the rises and falls in people's expectations and shifting attitudes to remain relevant and realistic.

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

Consensual method surveys across the world

Europe:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Rep, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK

Africa:

Benin, South Africa, Uganda

Asia:

Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea

Oceania:

Australia, Tonga, Soloman Islands, New Zealand

See: https://www.poverty.ac.uk/world

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

Is there a common view of necessities: Europe

Percentage thinking item 'absolutely necessary': Adult and household items

Eurobarometer 2007 results

Click on column headings to sort	All	OS15	NS12	BE	BG	CZ	DK	D-E	DE	D-W	EE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	CY	LT	LV	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	HR
Medical Care when needed	77	77	78	76	82	79	85	87	83	82	81	92	73	72	63	68	92	60	75	80	85	81	78	84	75	81	77	85	77	80	87	78	82
Buying medicine when needed	74	74	76	75	81	76	78	83	80	79	75	91	72	70	64	70	91	58	73	82	83	78	68	80	72	82	79	87	69	77	82	71	77
An indoor flushing toilet for sole use of the household	69	70	66	67	58	70	48	69	69	69	66	87	64	71	69	69	90	42	62	78	75	73	69	77	65	74	65	82	69	59	60	75	75
No leaking roof, damp walls, floors, foundation	68	68	67	69	74	64	61	80	74	73	78	81	56	69	68	62	74	55	71	68	54	82	75	65	69	76	75	70	75	78	72	71	
Bed + bedding for everyone	68	67	70	65	80	72	64	82	75	73	74	86	53	69	62	64	85	56	70	81	80	83	58	68	65	79	71	71	73	69	78	66	72
A place to live with hot, running water	67	67	65	62	51	64	49	63	66	67	52	86	59	74	62	64	82	41	55	71	73	62	59	80	62	74	74	81	68	60	65	71	72
Buying medical equipment when needed	66	66	66	64	73	66	73	75	70	68	69	83	68	66	60	57	81	49	67	77	72	72	59	77	62	74	70	79	65	67	79	63	70
A warm winter coat	65	63	71	61	84	63	64	69	68	82	73	88	60	66	64	56	67	46	61	79	77	32	45	71	68	71	80	63	76	73	71	58	70
A place to live with its own bath or shower	63	63	63	57	58	65	35	59	59	59	58	87	62	63	65	66	90	42	59	72	72	66	49	75	61	71	66	80	66	50	53	89	71
To be able to keep one's home adequately warm	62	62	61	61	64	50	55	73	68	67	64	83	53	64	62	70		45	68	70	78	39	54	81	61	59	58	75	59	69	55	64	68
Regular medical and dental checkups	62	62	65	55	70	63	68	72	67	66	63	81	61	59	58	57	79	46	64	68	68	66	43	72	63	73	69	78	65	56	61	62	68
Refrigerator	58	56	66	50	75	62	54	65	64	63	60	87	58	55	54	48	89	50	60	75	69	84	35	72	62	78	77	77	72	61	70	43	70
2 pairs of shoes suitable to the climate	58	55	68	49	79	59	60	66	63	62	64	88	55	58	61	49	79	46	67	74	71	43	35	67	65	67	77	63	73	58	70	44	68
A place to live where one doesn't risk being forced to leave	57	55	64	55	66	50	38	50	47	47	75	71	61	59	62	57	68	44	60	63	73	55	39	63	59	61	79	61	54	63	42	58	67

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/poverty/eurobarometer_heatmap.html
https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/poverty/eurobarometer_map_heatmap.html

Does the consensual approach work outside high-income countries?

'it is possible to imagine a society in which the majority of people do not have access to a standard of living that is generally judged to be a minimum'.

Mack and Lansley, Poor Britain,1985, p67

https://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/poor_britain_book/poor-britain-chap03-Mack-Lansley.pdf

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensual Approach?
Evidence from South Africa - 1

The concern

Widespread lack of material possessions and poor access to services – as in South Africa – could result in items being regarded as 'less necessary', which in turn could artificially deflate the definition and subsequent measurement of poverty using this approach.

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensus Approach?
Evidence from South Africa - 2

28 of the 36 SPNs were possessed by a smaller % of the population than the % defining each item as essential.

Six of the SPNs were possessed by less than half the respondents (police on streets, ability to afford medicines prescribed by doctor, regular savings for emergencies, bath/shower in house, burglar bars and meat/fish/vegetarian equivalent every day).

Most people who lacked the purchasable SPNs said they did not have them due to lack of resources (i.e. not out of choice)

Socially perceived necessities in South Africa - views of the population', Gemma Wright, CASASP, working paper 9, 2011
Socially perceived necessities in South Africa - patterns of possession', Gemma Wright, CASASP, working paper 10, 2011

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensual Approach?
Evidence from South Africa - 3

Item	All % Saying Essential (n=2904)	Black African % Saying Essential (n=1834)	Coloured % Saying Essential (n=480)	Indian/ Asian % Saying Essential (n=279)	White % Saying Essential (n=310)
*Mains electricity in the house	92	90	96	97	99
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91	92	89	94	87
*A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	90	88	97	99	99
*Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89	87	96	99	96
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area	87	87	86	93	87
A fridge	86	85	84	96	93
*Street lighting	85	83	91	98	95
*Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82	84	75	80	75
*Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82	79	85	96	91

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensual Approach?
Evidence from South Africa - 4

Proportion of the total population and a selection of subgroups that fall into the 'two tiers' of possession		
	% possessing 1-24 socially perceived necessities	% possessing 25 or more socially perceived necessities
Total population	58	42
Black African	70	30
Coloured	33	67
Indian/Asian	4	96
White	7	9

Socially perceived necessities in South Africa - patterns of possession', Gemma Wright, CASASP, working paper 10, 2011

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensual Approach?
Evidence from Uganda - 1

Child item	Essential %	Don't have, can't afford %
A desk and chair for homework	55%	45%
A visit to the health facility when ill and all prescribed medication	97%	33%
All fees, uniforms of correct size and equipment	88%	34%
Books at home for their age	71%	59%
Bus/taxi fare or other transport	68%	41%
Educational toys and games	53%	44%
Own bed	81%	74%
Own blanket	85%	66%
Own room for children over 10 of different sexes	76%	17%
Presents for children once a year on special occasions	54%	70%
Some new clothes	70%	63%
Three meals a day	96%	48%
To be able to participate in school trips	69%	38%
Toiletries to be able to wash every day	93%	29%
Two pairs of properly-fitting shoes	79%	71%
Two sets of clothing	94%	17%

Does Widespread Lack Undermine the Consensual Approach?
Evidence from Uganda - 2

Household item	Essential %	Don't have, can't afford %
To be able to make regular savings for emergencies	92%	59%
Enough money to repair a leaking roof for main living quarters	86%	44%
To be able to replace broken pots and pans for cooking	84%	41%
Have your own means of transportation	79%	62%
Enough money to repair or replace any worn-out furniture	78%	66%
Enough money to repair or replace broken electrical goods	56%	66%

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

Is there a common view of necessities: a range of countries

Percentage thinking child items necessary/essential					
		UK	Tonga	Japan	Uganda
Food	Three meals a day	93	98	89	96
	Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent daily	90	98		
	Fresh fruit and vegetables daily	96	96	79	
Clothes and shoes	Some new (not second-hand clothes)	65	97	23	69
	Two sets of clothing				94
	Properly fitting shoes [1]	93	98	42	78
Furniture	Beds and bedding [2]	67	97		81
	Suitable space to do homework [3]	89	97		55
Education	School Uniform and equipment		98		88
	Books suitable for their age	91	94	61	63

Notes: (1) Shoes: UK, Japan, new properly fitting shoes. UG Two pairs of properly fitting shoes including all weather shoes. (2) Beds UK Beds and bedding for everyone, Eurobarometer, 2007; Tonga, for all children aged 10 or older;

Socially-perceived necessities across time and space

An enforced lack of necessities: Tonga, Uganda, UK

Items for children	Tonga	Uganda	UK
	Percentage who can't afford item		
Three meals a day	8%	48%	1%
One meal with meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent daily	8%		3%
Enough beds for every child in the household	11%	75%	
Own room for children over 10 of different sexes		60%	11%
A suitable place to study or do homework²	10%	76%	5%
New properly fitting shoes¹	12%	71%	4%
Some new not second-hand clothes	15%	63%	4%
All school uniform and equipment required³	6%	56%	
Participate in school trips and school events that costs money	11%	64%	8%
Celebration on special occasions	17%	70%	1%

¹ Uganda - Two pairs of shoes, ² Uganda - Desk and chair for homework, ³ Uganda - All fees and uniform

Socially-perceived needs across space

The surveys suggest that:

- The concept of socially-perceived needs is applicable to low-, medium- and high- income countries

- People are able to distinguish between needs and norms

- A striking level of agreement between different sub-groups even though they had very different standards of living

- The inclusion of services is very important in developing countries

- Reflect the society to which people live

- Are not heavily influence by adaptive preferences

- Does not impose minimalist standards on low-income countries

Are there universal human needs?

The surveys suggest there is universal agreement on the need for:

- Adequate levels and variety of food – two/three meals a day, meat/fish etc

- Adequate levels of housing – enough beds/bedrooms, study area; heating – in colder countries; weather/wind proof housing

- Adequate levels of clothing – two pairs of shoes, replacing worn out clothes

- Access to health care – being able to afford medicines and medical care

- Education – school uniforms, school trips,

- Social obligations – visiting friends/family in hospital

- Some leisure activities seen as necessities in some cultures/countries