

WORKING PAPER NO. 3

CHANGING NECESSITIES OF LIFE, 1983-1999

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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

A primary purpose of the *Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* was to establish what possessions and activities the public perceived as necessities. The 1983 *Poor Britain Survey* was the first to establish what 'standard of living' was considered unacceptable by society as a whole. Its central idea was:

"The survey's first, and most important, aim is 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."

A major achievement of the 1983 *Poor Britain* study was that it established: *"for the first time ever, that a majority of people see the necessities of life in Britain in the 1980s 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 consensual deprivation approach defines poverty in terms of a standard of living unacceptable to the majority of the population. The validity of this approach rests on the assumption that there are not wide variations in the definition of necessities amongst the different groups in society. Otherwise, the definition of an unacceptable standard of living just becomes the opinion of one group against another. The 1983 *Poor Britain Survey* 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."

Similarly, the 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey* found that there was “a high degree of consensus, across all divisions in society, on the necessity of a range of common possessions and activities. Society as a whole clearly does have a view on what is necessary to have a decent standard of living.”

The 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey* developed and extended the methodology of the 1983 study. Respondents were asked about their attitudes to a greater range of possessions and activities (44 items in 1990 compared with 35 items in 1983) and new sections were added on the desirability of a range of public services. Similarly, the *Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* has built upon the success of the 1990 Survey. The number of items has been increased to 84, including 30 children’s items the results of which are reported in Bradshaw *et al* (2000). This report focuses on the remaining 54 items, which were asked of all adults over sixteen. Three items, which had been asked in the 1983 and 1990 studies have been omitted:

- An Inside toilet not shared with another household
- A Bath not shared with another household
- A Pack of cigarettes every other day.

The first two (toilet and bath) were dropped since almost all households now possess these housing amenities. These were very good questions for identifying poverty in the 19th Century when Charles Booth was conducting his original poverty surveys. However, a century of social and housing policy has effectively eliminated these scourges, the ‘poor’ no longer have to live without adequate sanitation and washing facilities. The question relating to cigarettes was omitted as these have been demonstrated to be an addictive drug and are therefore not a good indicator of poverty.

The new questions come from a wide range of sources including discussions amongst the team, analysis from the focus groups, *European Community Household Panel Survey*,

Harmonised Question Set (consumer durables), *Small Fortunes: National Survey of the Lifestyles and Living Standards of Children*, the *Swedish Living Standards Survey* and the *Lorraine Panel Survey*.

THE JUNE 1999 OMNIBUS SURVEY

The 'necessities of life' questions were asked in the June 1999 Office for National Statistics *Omnibus Survey*. Respondents were interviewed in their own homes and given sets of shuffled cards and asked:

"On these cards are a number of different items which relate to our standard of living. I would like you to indicate the living standards you feel all adults should have in Britain today by placing the cards in the appropriate box. BOX A is for items which you think are necessary; which all adults should be able to afford and which they should not have to do without. BOX B is for items which may be desirable but are not necessary."

A sample of 3,000 addresses was selected from the Postcode Address File of 'small users'. The sample from 100 postal sectors was stratified by:

REGION

- Proportion of households renting from Local Authorities
- Proportion of Households with heads in the professional, employer or manager socio-economic groups (SEG 1-5 & 13).

The 100 postal sectors were selected with probability proportionate to size and within each sector, 30 addresses were selected at random. If an address contained more than one household, the interviewer used the standard ONS procedure to randomly select just one household. Within each household, with more than one adult member, just one person aged 16 or over was selected using random number tables. All interviews were

carried out face-to-face with the selected respondent and no proxy interviews were allowed.

The response rate was 69% as shown below:

	Number	Percent
Selected addresses	3,000	100
Ineligible addresses	323	11
Eligible addresses	2,677	89
<i>Refusals</i>	588	22
<i>Non-contact</i>	234	9
Interviews Achieved	1,855	69

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that thought items were necessities, thought items might be desirable but not necessary or did not know. The item that the greatest proportion (95%) thought was a necessity was a housing item 'Beds and Bedding for everyone in the household'. The second and third ranked items are also housing related 'Heating to warm living areas of home if it is cold' (94%) and a 'Damp-free home' (93%). However, the fourth ranked item is a social activity 'Visiting friends and family in the hospital or other institution' (92%). The phrase 'other institution' was added to cover people who need to visit relative or friends in old age peoples homes, prisons, etc. The item the least number of respondents (5%) thought was a necessity was 'Satellite Television'. It should be noted that the majority of the lowest ranked items are consumer durables and information needs, whereas in general items relating to clothing, heating, housing, food, social activities and children tend to be ranked

higher. However, certain consumer durables, such as a refrigerator are clearly perceived by the overwhelming majority (89%) to be a necessity of life in modern Britain. Similarly, and somewhat surprisingly, a greater proportion of respondents (85%) thought it necessary to have sufficient money to replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine' than thought it was a necessity to have enough money to keep the 'home in a decent state of decoration' (82%).

Table 1: Perception of adult necessities (% claiming item or activity as necessity)

	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 equiv	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

TYPES OF NECESSITY

Most people find it very difficult to identify quickly the key patterns in a data set when data are presented in the form of large tables, such as Table 1. Even 'experts' find 54-row tables, with several columns, hard to examine. Therefore, as an aid to interpretation, Table 2 shows the results grouped by type of necessity. Over 95% of respondents thought that at least one social activity was a necessity of life. Social activities as a whole are considered to be important by more respondents than are housing conditions, diet, clothing, possession of consumer durables, health needs, financial concerns or access to information. Grouped analysis of this nature need to be examined with some caution since each grouping of necessities contains different numbers of items. In particular, there is only one item (all medicines prescribed by your doctor) in the health grouping. However, this analysis lends considerable support to

Townsend's (1979) contention about the needs of people to be able to afford to participate in the 'normal' social activities sanctioned by their society.

Table 2: Perception of necessities (grouped) (%)

	Percent (n=1855)
Social	95.1
Housing	94.8
Food	94.5
Clothing	92.7
Consumer durables	91.4
Health	90.0
Financial	88.4
Information	83.2

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that there are “*necessary*” social customs, and activities, which, like material needs, majorities of the population also perceive to be necessary. Among the customs are celebrations of special occasions, like birthdays, Christmas, weddings and funerals. There are presents at least once a year for family and friends. There are customs to do with food, like a Sunday joint or the vegetarian equivalent, which extend dietary needs way beyond the provision of the minimal calories for physiological efficiency. The indicators of clothing needs extend provision beyond basic cover to things like a warm waterproof coat, and two pairs of all-weather shoes.

“*Necessary*” activities 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. They include joint activities with friends and within families. They involve reciprocation and care of, or service for, others. People recognise the need to have friends and family round for meals, and for children's friends to visit the home.

CHANGE OVER TIME

Gordon and Pantazis (1997), writing about the 1990 Survey, argued that:

“the relative theory of poverty predicts that, if a society gets richer, the number of people who perceive common possessions and activities as necessary will increase. Since the real income of average households increased between 1983 and 1990, we would expect that number of respondents considering items to be necessary would also have increased between 1983 and 1990.... this is true for 30 out of 33 items. There has clearly been a large shift in public attitudes between 1983 and 1990, with greater numbers in 1990, perceiving as necessities, a whole range of common possessions and activities.”

However, analysis of the pilot survey for this study led Gordon and Pantazis (1998) to modify this proposition. Consensual poverty surveys in Finland (Kangas and Ritakallio, 1998) and Vietnam (Davies and Smith, 1998) found that over 90% of respondents consider having ‘all medicines prescribed by their doctor’ to be a necessity. Gordon and Pantazis (1997) have argued that the relative theory of poverty predicts that if a society gets richer, the number of people who perceive common possessions and activities as necessary will increase. Goods and services that are luxuries at first become generally available as a result of mass production. So it is surprising to find that a greater percentage of the Vietnamese population consider ‘all medicines prescribed by their doctor’ to be a necessity than do British people. Since Vietnam is a far ‘poorer’ country than Britain. The explanation for this apparent paradox lies in the greater consequences of not having access to necessary medicines in Vietnam compared with Britain. Lack of access to medicines is a major cause of suffering and premature morbidity and mortality in Vietnam at present. The 1998 World Health Report (WHO, 1998) estimates that only about 50% of the Vietnamese population has ‘regular access to essential drugs’ compared with almost 100% of the British population. The consequences of not being able to get hold of medicines are more obvious to the average Vietnamese person than to the average Briton.

Cultural factors are also important when comparing the perception of necessities between different countries and communities; for example France has a relatively high level of medicinal drug use compared with other European countries (Bradshaw per com). Since Vietnam was a French colony until the 1950s some of the Vietnamese population may have been influenced by French cultural attitudes to medicinal drug use.

Since, on average the British population has become richer throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it would be expected that on average a greater proportion of people would consider common possessions and activities to be necessities in 1999 than in 1990 or 1983.

Table 3: Proportions deeming items a necessity in 1999, 1990 and 1983

Item	1999	1990	1983
A damp free home	94	98	96
An inside toilet		97	96
Heating to warm	95	97	97
Beds for everyone	95	97	97
Bath not shared		95	94
A decent state of decoration	83	92	
Fridge	89	92	77
Warm waterproof coat	87	91	87
Three meals a day for kids	91	90	82
Two meals a day for adults	91	90	64
Insurance	80	88	
Fresh fruit	87	88	
Toys for kids	84	84	71
Separate bedrooms for 10+	80	82	77
Carpets	68	78	70
Meat and fish every other day	81	77	63
Celebrations on special occasions	83	74	69
Two pairs of all weather shoes	67	74	78
Washing machine	77	73	67
Presents for friends/family	58	69	63
Out of school activities		69	
Regular savings	67	68	

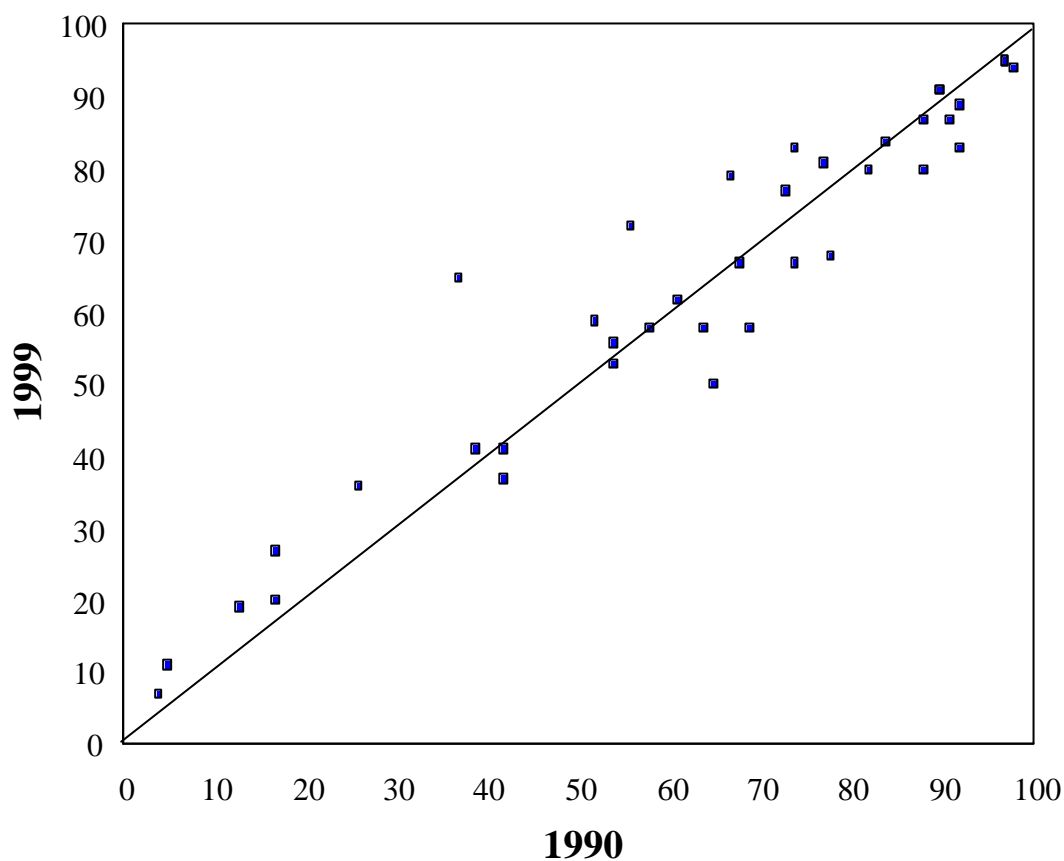
Hobby or leisure activity	79	67	64
New not second hand clothes	50	65	64
A roast joint or equivalent	58	64	67
Leisure equipment	62	61	57
TV	58	58	51
Phone	72	56	43
Annual weeks holiday	56	54	63
A best outfit	53	54	48
Outing for kids weekly		53	40
Children's friends round	59	52	37
A dressing gown	37	42	38
A night out fortnightly	41	42	36
Fares to visit friends	41	39	
Special lessons		39	
friends/family for a meal	65	37	32
Car	36	26	22
Pack of cigarettes		18	14
restaurant meal	27	17	
Holidays a broad	20	17	
Video	19	13	
Home Computer	11	5	
Dishwasher	7	4	
Dictionary	55		
Replace broken electrical goods	86		
Visits to friends/family	85		
Visiting friends/family in hospital	92		
Deep freezer/fridge freezer	55		
Microwave	24		
Mobile phone	8		
Tumbler drier	20		
Satellite TV	5		
CD Player	12		
Deep freeze/fridge freezer	69		
Appropriate clothes	70		
medicines	91		
Internet	6		
Money for self	61		
Daily newspaper	32		
Visits from friends/family			
Pub fortnightly	22		
Weddings /funeral	81		
Worship	44		
Collect children from school	76		
Visits to school	81		

Note on table: Don't knows, etc coded as missing

However, the results shown in Table 3 demonstrate a much more complicated picture. In 1999, a slightly smaller proportion of respondents considered the highest ranked items to be necessities than did respondents in either 1990 or 1983. For example, in 1999, 94% of respondents considered a damp free home to be necessary whereas, in 1990, 98% and, in 1983, 96% of respondents believed this. However, when it comes to the lower ranked, more luxury items such as videos, dishwashers and cars a greater proportion of respondents considered these to be necessities in 1999 than in 1990 or 1983. Similarly, many social and leisure activities such as celebrations on special occasions and being able to afford a hobby or leisure activity were thought to be a necessity by more respondents in 1999 than in the two previous surveys. This was also true for certain consumer durables such as telephones and washing machines.

This pattern can be clearly seen in the attitudinal scatter plot shown in Figure 1. In 1999 a greater proportion of respondents considered the less important items (e.g. those considered not to be necessities by more than 50% of the population) to be necessities than in 1990 (i.e. those shown in the lower left hand corner of the graph). Whereas, the pattern amongst the more important items (those shown in the top right hand corner of the scatter plot) is much more complex with some items considered to be necessities by more respondents in 1999 and some items seeming to have declined in importance.

Figure 1: Attitudinal Scatter Plot comparing perceptions of necessities in 1990 and 1999



There are a number of possible explanations for these findings. Firstly, some of the changes may result from the differences in the sampling methods used in the surveys. As described above, the *Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* used highly accurate random sampling to select respondents, whereas the 1990 and 1983 Surveys used less accurate (but less expensive) quota samples, with booster samples in 'poor' areas. These quota samples were then weighted to match the national population profile. However, the 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey* found that groups of people who had direct experience of poverty (in the present or the past) were slightly more likely to consider most common possessions and activities to be necessities than did groups of people who had no

personal experience of living in poverty. Since no weighting scheme is perfect, the 'poor' area booster samples may have resulted in a 1990 and 1983 Surveys containing a slight bias and yielding slightly over inflated results on the proportion of people who considered various items to be necessities. Another part of the explanation for some of these results may be due to continuing demographic changes. For example, it is not surprising that the perceived importance of having 'a roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week' has declined at the household level between 1983 and 1999 given the marked reductions in average household size that has occurred over this period. There are simply fewer people within households in 1999 to eat a 'special' meal with than there were in 1983.

However, some more fundamental explanation is required in order to understand the surprising results shown in Figure 1 and Table 3. It is possible that the predictions made from 'relative poverty' theory by Gordon and Pantazis (1997) are incorrect and that it does not follow that as a society becomes wealthier "*the number of people who perceive common possessions and activities as necessary will increase*". However, given the weight of survey evidence from both Britain and around the world, this seems unlikely. An alternative explanation for these changes in perceptions of necessities is that the profound socio-economic and cultural changes which resulted from the policies of successive Conservative governments over the 1979 to 1997 period have changed public attitudes so fundamentally that the results can now be detected in a relatively small sample survey.

Between 1979 and 1996, the income of the British population rose on average by 43%, from £9,620 per year (£185 per week) to £13,728 per year (£264 per week), at April 1998 prices. However this increase in incomes was not shared equally. The median incomes of those in the bottom 10% of the income distribution fell between 1979 to 1996, from £4,212 per year (£81 per week) to £3,692 per year (£71 per week) whereas the median incomes of those in the richest 10% increased from £18,044 per year (£347 per week) to

£30,264 per year (£582 per week). Over the 18 years of Conservative government, the poorest became £520 per year poorer, whereas the richest saw their median incomes more than double, a gain of £12,220 per year.

In order to understand how breathtakingly regressive and reactionary these increases in inequality were it is necessary to view them from a historical perspective. Rubinstein (1986) has shown that, from the end of the 17th Century, which is the earliest period from which there is reliable evidence, income has become progressively more equally distributed in Britain. Furthermore, the rather sparse evidence available from earlier periods indicates that there has been a trend of a slow but progressive increase in income equality since the 15th Century (Wedgwood, 1929; Soltow, 1968). From this historical perspective, what the Thatcher Governments attempted to do was reverse a half a millennium trend of increasing income equality (Gordon, 2000). It is therefore no surprise that their most obvious inequitable policy – the ‘Poll Tax’ – resulted in the largest social protest movement¹ and acts of civil disobedience in British history (Burns, 1992; Reynolds, 1992).

This massive increase in inequality and social polarisation was accompanied by continued attacks on various groups of ‘poor’ people by both the government and the media as ‘scroungers’. The ‘underclass’ debate even revived the ‘undeserving poor’ and the ‘transmitted deprivation’ theses for a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is possible that these profound socio-economic changes have resulted in attitudinal changes on the minimum standard of living that *“all adults should have in Britain today”* and be able to afford. If this explanation is correct then the most profound changes in attitude would be expected amongst the younger age groups, the ‘Thatcher’ generation.

¹ In terms of the number of people involved.

PICTURES OF CHANGE

It is difficult to examine such a complex pattern of change over time in a large table such as Table 3. The same results grouped into areas of necessities are displayed in Figures 1 to 7 below in which the 1999 results are represented by a ? symbol, the 1990 results by a ? symbol and the 1983 Survey results by a ? symbol:

Figure 2 clearly illustrates that in 1999 a smaller proportion of respondents than in 1990 thought that clothing items were necessities of life. This is true for all clothing items. The 1999 results are in general more similar to those from the 1983 Survey than the 1990 Survey. However, the percent of respondents that consider that there is a need to have two pairs of all weather shoes has steadily declined from 78% in 1983, to 74% in 1990 and 67% in 1999. This may reflect cultural and commercial changes in the footwear market, particularly the growth in popularity of trainers over the past 16 years. There has similarly also been a marked reduction in the percentage of respondent that think 'new, not second hand, clothes' are a necessity (from 65% in 1990 to just 50% in 1999).

Figure 2: Trends in perception of necessities: clothing items

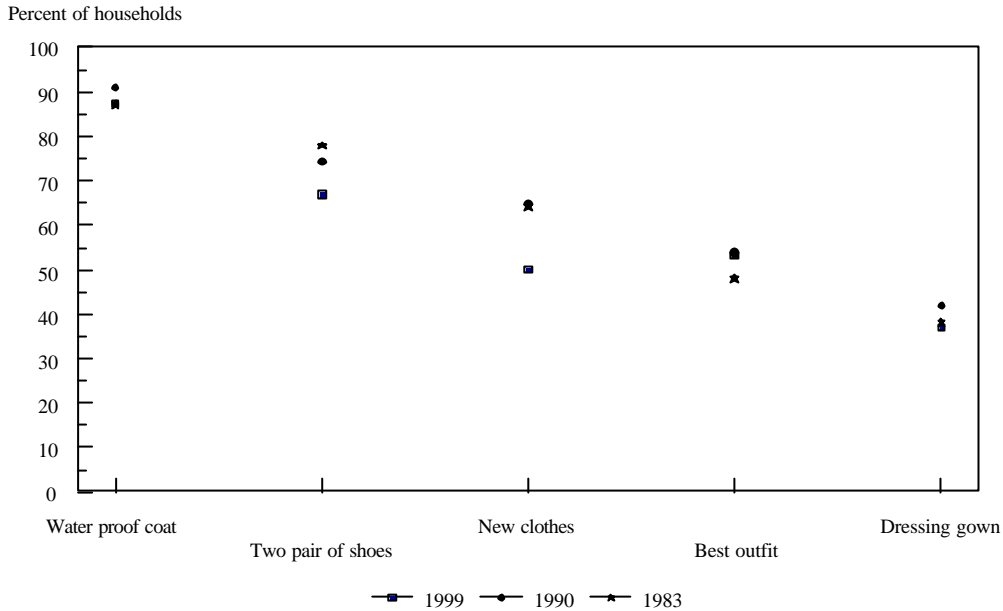
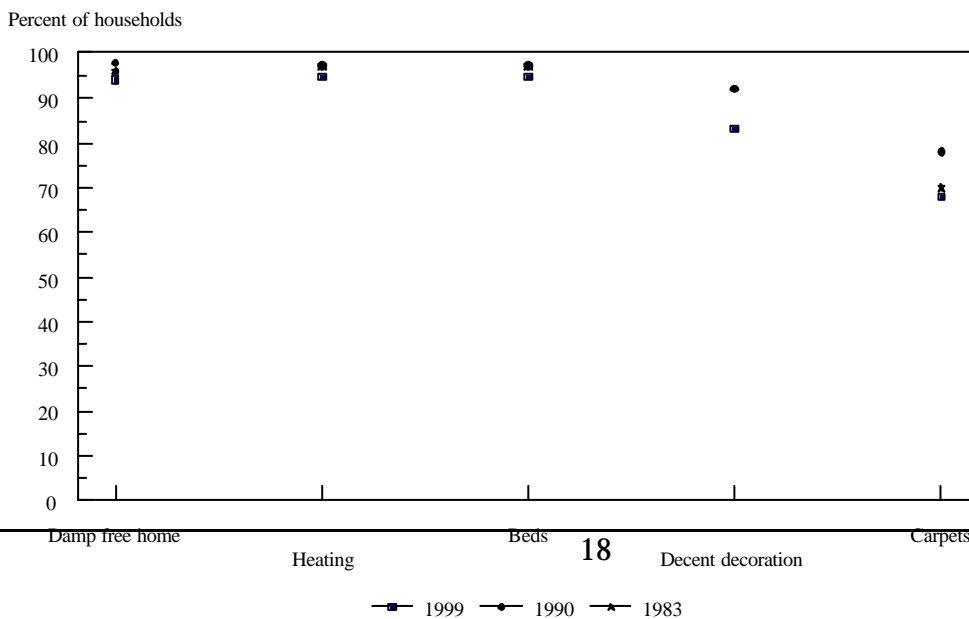


Figure 3 illustrates how perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to housing have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. There are a number of housing related items that almost everybody has agreed are necessities throughout the past 20 years. For example, having a 'damp free home', being able to afford enough 'heating to warm the living

Figure 3: Trends in perception of necessities: housing items



areas of the home if it is cold', and enough 'beds and bedding for everyone in the household'. The small percentage changes in these items are not significant and almost certainly result from sampling variations. However, two housing related items show a significant decline between 1990 and 1999 in the proportion of respondents that consider they are necessities. Having 'enough money to keep your home in a decent state of decoration' fell from 92% in 1990 to 83% in 1999. Similarly having 'carpets in living rooms and bedrooms in the home' fell from 78% in 1990 to 68% in 1999, which is less than it had been in 1983 (70%). These attitudinal changes may result from cultural changes that occurred during the 1990s. Analysis of the perceptions of necessities questions in the 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey* found evidence for a SPOOLA effect (Striped Pine, Olive Oil and Laura Ashley) with regard to carpets. Having 'wall to wall' carpets no longer seem to be considered to be as necessary as it once was – particularly given the continuing growth in the proportion of houses with modern central heating systems. However, there has been no obvious similar cultural change that can explain the 9% decline in the proportion of respondents considering decent decoration to be a necessity!

Figure 4 illustrates how perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to food have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. There has been widespread agreement for sixteen years on the necessity for adults to have at least two meals a day and 'fresh fruit and vegetables every day'. The proportion of respondents that consider that it is necessary for all adults to have 'meat/fish or a vegetarian equivalent every day' has increased steadily over the 1980s and 1990s, from 63% in 1983, to 77% in 1990, to 81% in 1999. Conversely, the proportion of respondent that consider 'a roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week' has steadily decreased over the past sixteen years as discussed previously.

Figure 4: Trends in perception of necessities: food items

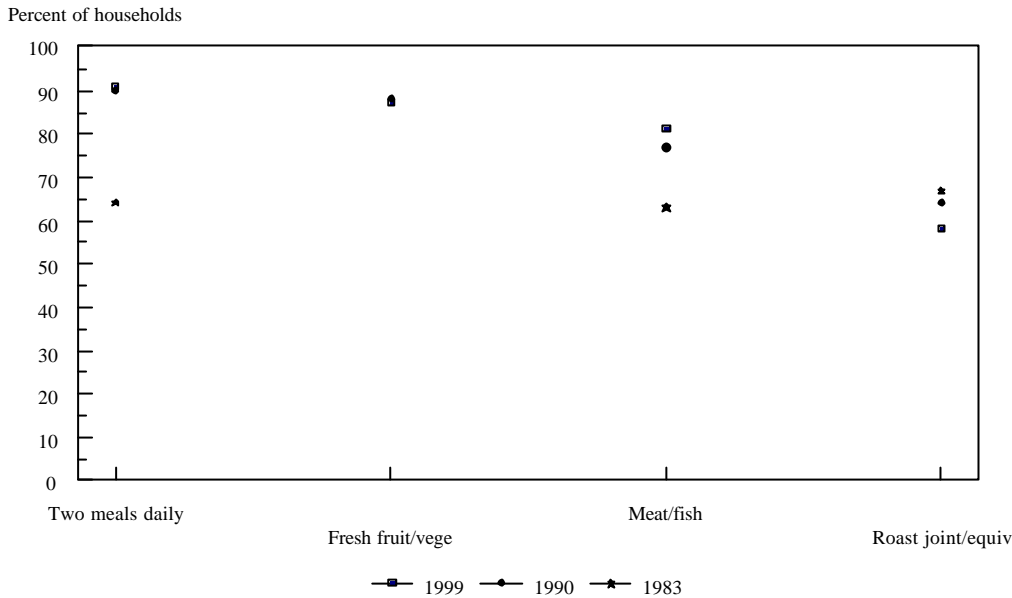


Figure 5 shows how perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to the possession of consumer durables have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. The pattern clearly seen in Figure 5 is very different from that in Figures 2 to 4. For almost all consumer durables there has been a steady increase in the proportion of adults who consider them to be necessities over the past sixteen years. The GHS records that the ownership of washing machines, cars, VCRs, home computers and dishwashers has increased over the past sixteen years. As ownership levels have increased so has the perception that these items are necessities of life. Ownership of fridges has remained unchanged since almost all households have had one since the early 1970s. By the 1990s, approximately 90% of adults in Britain considered a fridge to be necessity that all adults in Britain should not have to do without and this perception has remained unchanged.

Figure 5: Trends in perception of necessities: consumer durables

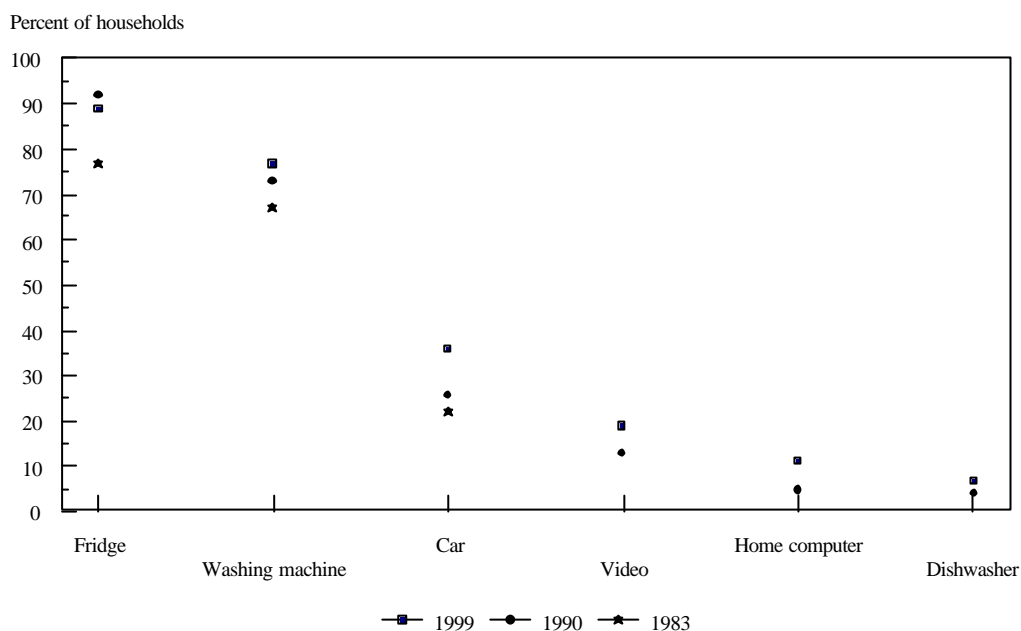


Figure 6 illustrates how perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to financial and information have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. There is a distinctly different pattern for these two areas. Perceptions about the necessity of the two items that relate to financial security ('insurance of contents of dwelling' and 'regular savings of £10 per month for a rainy day or retirement') have declined slightly over the 1990s. This is particularly surprising with regard to insurance given the increase in the number of burglaries over the 1990s. By contrast, there has been a remarkably rapid increase in the proportion of respondents that consider a telephone to be a necessity, from 43% in 1983, to 56% in 1990, to 72% in 1999. There has been a similar, but smaller increase in the percentage that consider a television to be a necessity, from 51% in 1983 to 58% in 1990 and 1999.

Figure 6: Trends in perception of necessities: financial & information items

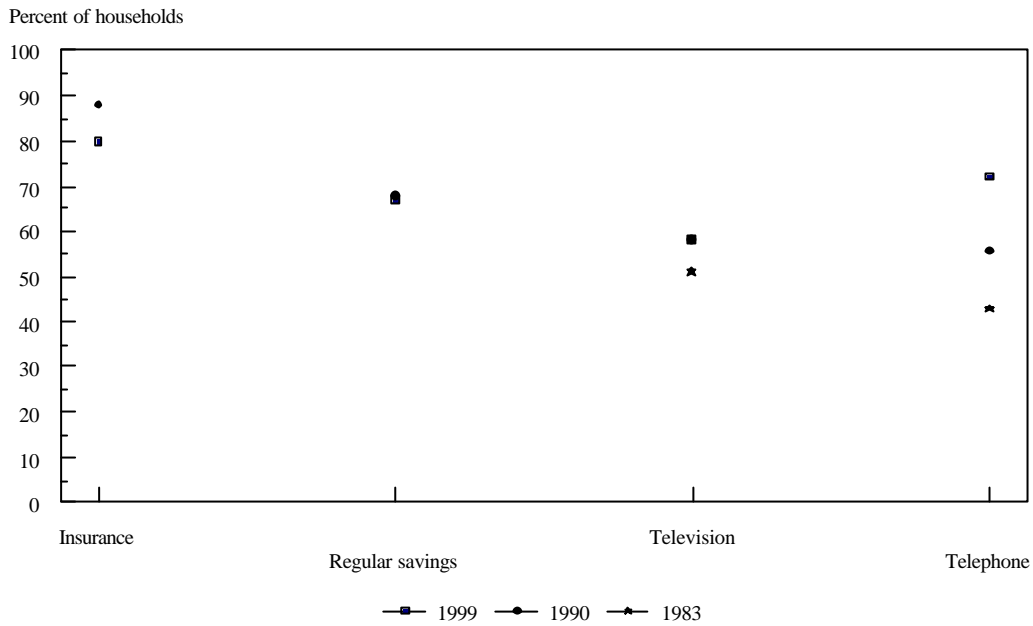


Figure 7: Trends in perception of necessities: children's items

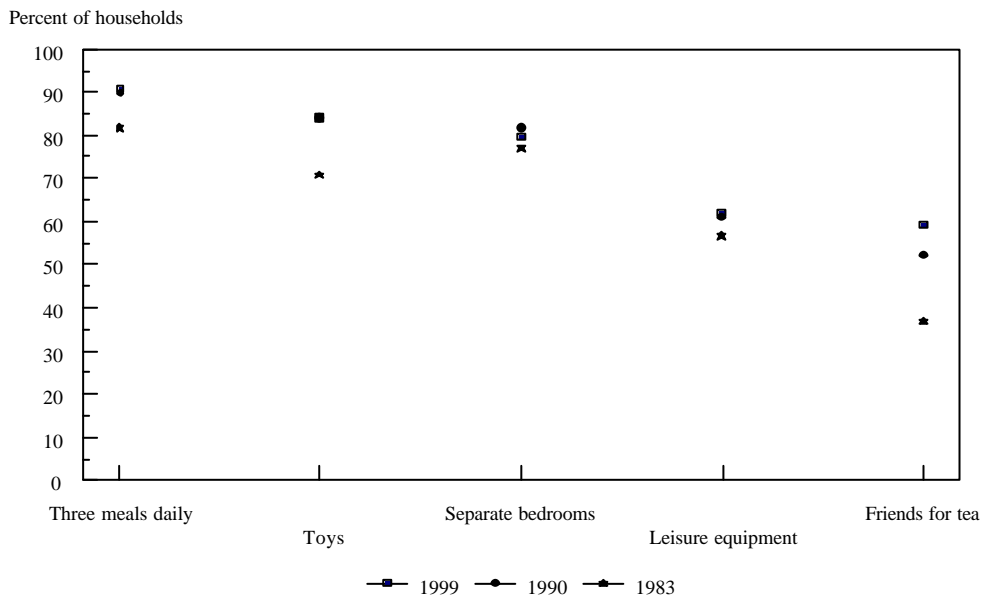
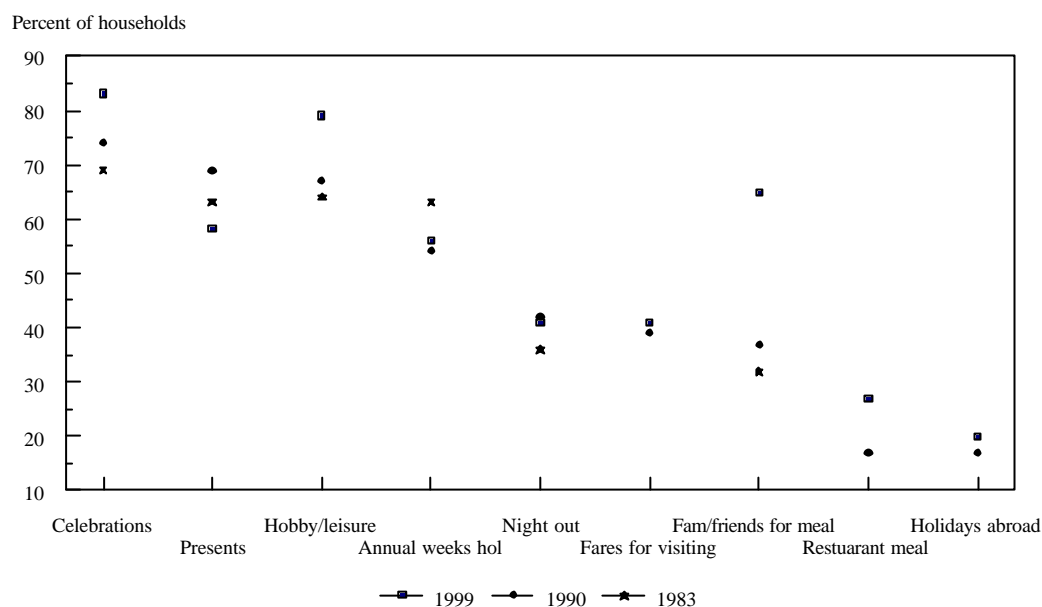


Figure 7 shows that perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to children's possessions and activities have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. The pattern is similar

to that for consumer durables, with similar or slightly greater proportions of respondents considering most of these items to be necessities in 1999 than previously. In particular, the proportion considering that having children's 'friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight' has increased markedly, from just 37% in 1983, to 52% in 1990 and 59% in 1999.

Figure 8 illustrates the complex way that perceptions of the necessities of life that relate to social activities have changed over the 1980s and 1990s. There have been marked increases in the proportion of people that consider it necessary to be able to invite family and friend round for a meal, be able to afford a hobby or leisure activity or have celebrations on special occasions like Christmas. There have been lesser increases in the proportions of respondents that consider it a necessity to have a holiday abroad once a year, a meal in a restaurant/pub once a month and coach/train fares to visit family or friends in other parts of the country four times a year. Conversely, fewer people now think it is necessary to be able to give 'presents to friends or family once a year'. With regard to presents, the British population seems to have become more mean-spirited over the past sixteen years. This could be due to the increased commercialisation of traditional present giving festivals, such as Christmas, but this is just speculation.

Figure 8: Trends in perception of necessities: social activities



IS THERE A THATCHER GENERATION EFFECT?

What is the explanation for these complex patterns of change in the perception of necessities over the past sixteen years? Why has the prediction of Gordon and Pantazis (1997) that as “a society gets richer, the number of people who perceive common possessions and activities as necessary will increase” proved to be over simplistic. There are two possible complimentary reasons, firstly the ‘Thatcher’s’ children generation may be less generous than previous generations in their views on what standard of living every person in Britain should be entitled to. Secondly, due to the growth in the inequality in living standards between rich and poor over the last two decades. During which period the poorest 20 % have experienced no change or even a fall in their real incomes after tax. There may now be minorities who may have become resigned to low material standards and no longer perceive them to be necessary.

Several commentators have remarked that the children who grew up knowing only Conservative 'rule' may as adults have rather more 'conservative' views than their parents who grew up during the 1960s and 1970s. However, it must be noted, that there has been little other than anecdotal evidence to support this view.

The 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey* found that there were only a few differences in the perceptions of necessities by age. Older people were more likely to consider items such as a dressing gown, two pairs of all weather shoes, a telephone and having a 'roast joint of its vegetarian equivalent once a week' to be necessities than did adults aged 16 to 24. Conversely young adults were more likely than pensioners to consider that leisure activities and items relating to going out and meeting friends were necessities. These differences were as expected and are relatively unremarkable. In other areas there was little difference in the perception of necessity by age.

Table 4 shows the perception of necessities broken down by age group in 1999. Items have been marked in bold where there are marked difference in how severely respondents in the younger age groups have judged items to be necessities compared with respondents in older age groups.

Table 4: Perception of necessities by age group (%)

	16-24 (n=246)	25-44 (n=683)	45-54 (n=312)	55-64 (n=267)	65-74 (n=204)	75+ (n=142)
Two meals a day	97	91	88	89	94	91
Meat, fish or vegetarian equiv	74	84	81	77	85	73
Heating to warm living areas	94	95	93	93	96	96
A dressing gown	16	28	35	43	51	66
Two pairs of all weather shoes	47	62	65	73	82	79
New, not second hand, clothes	35	44	57	55	58	60
A television	42	53	50	64	76	74
A roast joint/vege equiv weekly	34	55	62	63	72	68
Carpets in living rooms and bedrooms	68	72	64	62	75	71
Telephone	59	67	68	82	88	84
Refrigerator	92	91	89	86	89	87
Beds and bedding for everyone	98	97	94	95	95	94
Damp free home	94	95	93	93	96	91
A car	27	39	38	47	50	29
A dictionary	44	52	57	60	60	65
Presents for friends/family yearly	49	57	53	54	68	72
A warm waterproof coat	79	86	85	86	93	92
A washing machine	68	76	77	83	88	74
A dishwasher	7	7	11	7	5	8
Regular savings for rainy days	66	69	62	68	73	61
A video cassette recorder	16	20	20	24	21	16
Money to keep home decorated	79	81	84	83	92	88
Insurance of contents of dwelling	71	79	82	85	85	83
Fresh fruit and vegetables daily	80	89	88	87	90	82
A home computer	13	13	15	10	9	5
An outfit for social occasions	45	44	51	63	63	67
Microwave oven	20	19	21	32	36	25
Mobile phone	5	7	8	7	9	10
Tumble dryer	21	17	25	21	27	25
Deep freezer/fridge freezer	74	71	58	72	73	70
Satellite television	3	5	6	8	5	5
CD player	15	12	11	11	11	15
Replace worn out furniture	47	54	60	55	67	57
Replace broken electrical goods	87	85	84	86	89	88
Appropriate clothes for job	72	74	74	67	66	63

interviews						
Medicines prescribed by doctor	94	91	88	90	93	90
Access to the internet	8	8	7	5	3	6
Money to spend on self weekly	54	51	62	69	78	72
Having a daily newspaper	24	25	28	40	47	48
A evening out once a fortnight	48	38	37	42	41	40
A hobby or leisure activity	80	75	84	84	82	76
A holiday away from home	47	52	58	62	70	59
Celebrations on special occasions	86	83	86	84	86	81
A meal in a restaurant/pub	22	26	26	33	27	28
monthly						
Holidays abroad once a year	20	20	21	19	19	18
Coach/train fares to visit	39	38	37	40	53	37
friends/family						
Friends or family round for a meal	61	64	64	71	71	65
Visits to friends or family	87	84	86	85	89	82
Going to the pub once a fortnight	20	21	19	24	24	15
Attending weddings, funerals	84	79	79	87	86	74
Visiting friends or family in hospital	93	93	92	96	94	89
Attending place of worship	33	41	41	49	50	54
Collect children from school	84	82	73	77	69	56
Visits to school e.g. sports day	87	88	85	81	73	61

Note: weight a ; Don't know/refused/not asked=missing

The results shown in Table 4 are very different from those found by the 1990 *Breadline Britain Survey*. For almost every possession and activity, there are fewer respondents in the 16 to 24 age group that consider them to be necessities than in any other age group. In particular, the younger generation are particularly ungenerous with regard to all the clothing items:

- A dressing gown,
- Two pairs of all weather shoes,
- New, not second hand, clothes,
- An outfit for social occasions,
- A warm waterproof coat.

They also have similarly harsh views on the necessity of:

- A television
- Telephone
- A washing machine
- A car
- A dictionary
- A roast joint or vegetarian equivalent weekly
- Money to spend on self weekly
- A holiday away from home
- Presents for friends/family yearly
- Attending church/ mosque/ synagogue or other place of worship

Table 5 shows how the perceptions of necessities of the 16 to 24 age group have changed between 1990 and 1999 compared with the adult population as a whole. The possessions and activities are highlighted in bold where there is a marked difference between the perceptions of 16 to 24 age group in 1999 and both all adults in 1999 and the 16 to 24 age group in 1990.

Table 5: Thatcher's children?

Item	16 to 24 1999	16 to 24 1990	All Adults 1999	All Adults 1990
A damp free home	94	95	94	98
Heating to warm	94	97	95	97
Beds for everyone	98	95	95	97
A decent state of decoration	79	91	83	92
Fridge	92	92	89	92
Warm waterproof coat	79	85	87	91
Three meals a day for kids	94	93	91	90
Two meals a day for adults	97	95	91	90
Insurance	71	87	80	88
Fresh fruit	80	87	87	88
Toys for kids	83	90	84	84
Separate bedrooms for 10+	72	77	80	82
Carpets	68	82	68	78

Meat and fish every other day	74	70	81	77
Celebrations on special occasions	86	77	83	74
Two pairs of all weather shoes	47	63	67	74
Washing machine	68	68	77	73
Presents for friends/family	49	72	58	69
Regular savings	66	68	67	68
Hobby or leisure activity	80	67	79	67
New not second hand clothes	35	59	50	65
A roast joint or equivalent	34	55	58	64
Leisure equipment	56	62	62	61
TV	42	53	58	58
Phone	59	45	72	56
Annual weeks holiday	47	46	56	54
A best outfit	45	54	53	54
Children's friends round	61	50	59	52
A dressing gown	16	24	37	42
A night out fortnightly	48	50	41	42
Fares to visit friends	39	31	41	39
friends/family for a meal	61	35	65	37
Car	27	22	36	26
restaurant meal	22	13	27	17
Holidays a broad	20	23	20	17
Video	16	17	19	13
Home Computer	13	4	11	5
Dishwasher	7	4	7	4

There is clear evidence in Table 5 that the 16 to 24 age group in 1999 considers that all clothing items are less important than do all adults in 1999 or did the 16 to 24 age group in 1990. Similarly, surprisingly few respondents in the 16 to 24 age group in 1999 thought Insurance for the contents of dwellings, fresh fruit and vegetables every day, presents for friends and family once a year and a roast joint or the vegetarian equivalent once a week were necessities. The consensus between age groups on the necessities of life that all people in Britain should be able to afford and should not have to do without, appears to have broken down particularly in relation to basic clothing requirements.

However, before a 'Thatcher's Children' effect can be confirmed a number possible confounding factors need to first be examined. Young men and women suffered from profound adverse socio-economic changes during the 1990's, which resulted in fewer young people being employed in full-time jobs in 1999 than in 1990. Large numbers of

young men and women now enter post school education and training schemes than was the case in 1990. This relative impoverishment of youth may be as important a factor in explaining the change in attitudes amongst the younger cohort than any cultural effect of 18 years of Conservative rule. In order to distinguish the relative importance of these different effects, it is necessary to undertake a multivariate, longitudinal quasi-cohort analysis.