

The 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey

Technical Summary

Introduction

The Poverty and Social Exclusion of Britain was carried out by Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics and was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This report describes the survey design, sampling, data collection and fieldwork procedures and the processing of the survey. It also includes a comparison of responding and non-responding households.

Background and Aims

The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain (PSE) was designed to update the Breadline Britain surveys which were conducted by MORI in 1983 and 1990 (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997) and to improve the methodology, particularly by the use of probability sampling. There were two parts to the PSE survey. First, a representative sample of the population of Great Britain was asked for their views on what constitute the necessities of life in present-day Britain.

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 similar question was asked with regard to necessities for children. Full details can be found on the web at URL, <http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/surveys/pses/psesintro.htm>

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:

- 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

The follow-up to the General Household Survey

A specially selected sample was drawn from respondents to the 1998/9 General Household Survey, and interviewed in detail about their circumstances and their views on a range of issues associated with poverty and social exclusion. The aims of the survey were:

- To update the Breadline Britain surveys;
- To estimate the size of groups of households in different circumstances;
- To explore movement in and out of poverty;
- To look at age and gender differences in experiences of and responses to poverty.

Although the survey is primarily concerned with the experience of people living in Britain, it is planned that similar surveys will also be carried out in other countries, using a questionnaire based on that developed for the PSE.

The Survey Design

The PSE was designed as a follow-up survey of respondents to the 1998/9 General Household Survey (GHS). This design made it possible to select a sample with known characteristics. It also meant that one person in each selected household could be sampled prior to fieldwork. Information from the original survey allowed the characteristics of PSE non-responders to be identified, allowing analysis of the effects of non-response bias.

Sample Design

The sample design was influenced by three main considerations:

- Sufficient cases were required for the analysis of key variables by sub-groups.

- Sufficient cases were required for separate analysis of households and individuals in Scotland.
- Sufficient cases of low-income households and respondents were required to examine their characteristics.

The sample design therefore gave a greater probability of selection to people in lower income groups and Scotland. Households in the lower income groups were identified by using a measure of equivalised income; that is, a measure of household income which takes account of household size and composition.

Selecting Households from Lower Income Groups: Equivalised Income Measure

An equivalised income measure was developed by Jonathan Bradshaw and Sue Middleton in conjunction with the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The McClements equivalence scale, which is used as the standard by ONS (Government Statistical Service, 1998), was felt not to be appropriate for the PSE, as it does not assign sufficient weight to children, particularly young children. The scale used for the PSE was designed to take account of this. Each member of the household was assigned a value, shown in Table AS1:

Table AS1: Equivalised income scale

Type of household member	Equivalence value
Head of household	0.70
Partner	0.30
Each additional adult (anyone over 16)	0.45
Add for first child	0.35
Add for each additional child	0.30
If head of household is a lone parent, add	0.10

The values for each household member were added together to give the total equivalence value for that household. This number was then divided into the gross income for that household. For example, the equivalence value for a lone-parent household with two children is $0.7 + 0.35 + 0.3 + 0.1 = 1.45$. If the household's gross income is £10,000, its equivalised income is £6,897 ($=£10,000/1.45$).

Equivalised income was grouped into quintiles, with the bottom quintile comprising households with the lowest incomes and the top quintile those households with the highest incomes. The quintiles were then sampled in the following proportions, as set out in Table AS2:

Table AS2: Probability of selection for income quintiles

Quintile group	Proportion sampled
Bottom quintile (lowest income)	40%
Fourth quintile	30%
Third quintile	10%
Second quintile	10%
Top quintile (highest income)	10%

Selecting Areas, Households and Individuals for Interview

Identifying individuals for interview involved a three-stage process. First, a number of areas was selected from all of those used for the 1998/9 GHS. Second, a number of households was selected from each of the areas; third, one individual was chosen from each sampled household. To allow for variation in income within areas the list of primary sampling units (PSUs) was sorted on area and quintile group before any selections were made.

Areas

The 1998/9 GHS sample was selected from 576 PSUs based on postcode sectors. In order to ensure sufficient representation of the population in the PSE sample, 70% of GHS areas in England and Wales were selected (360 areas from a total of 518¹). All of the 54 Scottish areas were sampled to provide sufficient cases for separate analysis of the Scottish data.

Table AS3: Number of areas sampled for the PSE

Area	GHS 1998 N	PSE 1999 N
England and Wales	518	360
Scotland	54	54
Total	576	414

Households

A sample of households was taken from each selected area.

Individuals

One adult aged 16 or over was selected at random from each sampled household, using a Kish grid. This was done in preference to interviewing all eligible adults because individuals in households tend to be similar to one another. Where households differ markedly from one another, the resultant clustering can lead to a substantial increase in the standard error around survey estimates. This is

¹ There were 522 GHS areas in England and Wales in 1998; 518 were used to select the PSE sample, as four had been used for the pilot study.

particularly true when asking opinion questions where household members may influence each other's answers. Only those who had given a full interview in 1998/9 were eligible for selection. Partial interviews and proxies were excluded from the eligible sample. In keeping with the aim of ensuring that sufficient interviews were carried out for analysis purposes, some reserves were selected, to be used if necessary.

If the selected adult was no longer resident in the household interviewers were instructed not to substitute another household member for the sampled person, as that would adversely affect the representativeness of the sample. When the selected adult had moved house since the GHS interview, interviewers traced them to their new address if it was nearby and asked for an interview. Otherwise, the respondent was coded as having moved. In those households where the sampled individual agreed to the follow-up interview, interviewers updated the household composition, recording members who had moved out or died, and adding new members who had been born or moved into the household since the GHS interview. Table AS4 shows changes in household composition in responding households.

Table AS4: Changes to household composition of PSE responders

Changes to household composition	Number	(%)
Still in household	3329	95.7
Moved out (including deceased)	58	1.7
New to household (including births since GHS)	82	2.4
Missing	8	0.2
Total (all household members)	3477	100.0

Questionnaire Content

As one of the aims of the PSE was to update the Breadline Britain surveys, questions which had been used in the previous surveys were repeated where possible, to maintain continuity and allow comparisons over time. The PSE survey did, however, aim to measure a variety of concepts of poverty and social exclusion and this involved some redesign of the questionnaire and the development of new questions.

For example, new questions were included to measure respondent's assessments of absolute and overall poverty, as defined at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995. The survey also tried to measure intra-household poverty.

The main topics covered in the questionnaire were:

- Housing (including the condition of accommodation and satisfaction with accommodation)
- Health (including disability, isolation and depression)
- Time (time poverty)
- Social Networks and Support
- Necessities (these questions were conducted as a card sorting exercise)
- Finance and Debts

- Intra-Household Poverty
- Poverty over time
- Absolute and Overall Poverty
- Area Deprivation
- Local Services
- Crime
- Child's School
- Perceptions of poverty
- Activism

Choosing a survey design based on a follow-up of the GHS meant that detailed information was already available on those topics covered by the GHS interview and questions did not have to be included in the PSE. As the follow-up interviews took place between six and 18 months after the original interview, a small number of follow-up questions was included in the PSE questionnaire to record changes to the household composition, employment and income.

Ten PSE interviewers each wrote a short report on how the questionnaire worked in the field. They reported that respondents found the subject matter of the survey interesting. Those who agreed to take part were enthusiastic and hopeful that the results of the survey would be put to good use. Some respondents used the questionnaire as an opportunity to air their problems (such as loneliness or problems with their local area).

The sections that the respondents found most difficult to answer were those on absolute and overall poverty, social networks and support, local services and the necessities questions which involved the card-sorting exercise. For some sections of the questionnaire, problems arose because respondents were being asked to think about things they would normally take for granted, such as the goods or services they owned or had access to. For other sections, respondents were being asked to think about things they would not usually consider, such as how much money they would need to keep their household out of poverty and some found this very difficult to do.

Interviewers reported that respondents found the questions on local services repetitive and became bored and irritated. The crime section made some elderly respondents feel uneasy.

Data Collection and Fieldwork Procedures

Advance Letters

Advance letters were sent to sampled individuals, reminding them of their participation in the GHS, explaining the purpose of the PSE and asking for their co-operation with the follow-up interview. As a named respondent had been selected before the interview, the advance letter was addressed to the selected respondent by name. Where a name had not been provided by the respondent during the GHS interview, the advance letter was addressed to 'the resident'.

Contacting the Respondent

Where contact telephone numbers were available, interviewers made initial contact with the respondent by telephone. This method of contacting respondents was used to reduce costs. Once an appointment was made with the respondent, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. In the event of a broken appointment, interviewers were instructed make a maximum of two visits at an address

before recording a non-contact, unless they were already in the area and could make an extra call without driving out of their way.

Respondents who had moved house since taking part in the GHS were traced by interviewers if they had moved within the same area. Interviewers requested authorisation from their office-based supervisor before tracing respondents who had moved.

Data Collection

Fieldwork took place throughout September 1999. There were three types of data collection: face-to-face interviews, a self-completion module and a card-sorting exercise.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Interviewers recorded respondents' answers on laptop computers which had been programmed using Blaise software. Where applicable, a limited amount of proxy information was collected about the respondent's partner and child.

A Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) module was used to collect answers to sensitive questions, such as those on crime and for some questions on self-reported health. Where the respondent was reluctant or unable to complete the self-completion section on the lap-top the interviewer asked the respondent's permission to ask these questions.

As mentioned in the introduction, a representative sample of the population took part in the first part of the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain in July 1999, carried out on the ONS Omnibus Survey. Respondents to that part of the survey were given a set of cards, on which were listed a number of items (one item per card), and were asked to say which of the items they considered were necessities in present-day Britain. Respondents to the GHS follow-up were asked to carry out a similar card-sorting exercise. In this case, the respondent was asked to place each card in a pile depending on whether they had the item; did not have it and could not afford it; or did not have the item and did not want it. Where problems with literacy or manual dexterity prevented the respondent from completing this exercise, the interviewer was permitted to read the cards and place them in the correct pile according to the respondent's answer.

Length of Interview

The average length of interview was 60 minutes. With older respondents or those who had literacy problems, it took about 90 minutes. Questions requiring a lot of thought or those involving difficult concepts, such as assessments of absolute and overall poverty, were particularly taxing for some elderly respondents, a number of whom became quite tired during the interview.

The length of the questionnaire affected the response rate. ONS interviewers are required to give an assessment of how long the interview is likely to take when making an appointment, to ensure that respondents set aside sufficient time. Some sampled individuals refused to take part on hearing that the interview was likely to last for an hour. Because of the relatively short field period (a month), interviewers also did not have sufficient time to call back on many households to attempt refusal conversion.

Response

Table AS5 shows the response to the PSE follow-up interview. Of the 2,846 individuals selected, 415 (15%) were ineligible because the sampled individual had moved or died, because the household could not be traced so it was not known whether the whole household had moved or because it was a reserve which was not issued to an interviewer.

Table AS5: Response to the PSE follow-up survey

Response category	Number of cases	Percentage of set sample	Percentage of eligible sample
<i>Set sample</i>	2846		
<i>Ineligible</i>			
Household not traced	210	7.4	
Selected adult no longer resident	83	2.9	
Selected adult deceased	19	0.7	
Other ineligible	103	3.6	
Total ineligible	415	14.6	
<i>Total eligible sample</i>	2431	85.4	
Full interview	1530		62.9
Partial interview	4		0.2
Total co-operating	1534		63.1
<i>Non-contact</i>	180		7.4
<i>Refusals</i>			
Refusal to HQ	85		3.5
Refusal by household	113		4.6
Refusal by selected individual	470		19.3
Incapable of taking part	49		2.0
Total Refusals	717		29.5

Of the 2,431 eligible individuals, 1,534 (63%) were interviewed, the vast majority completing a full interview. This response rate is disappointing and may reflect some of the factors outlined above. However, the availability of information about non-responders means that it is possible to compensate for non-response by weighting (see Section 7).

Where a refusal to the survey was given, the interviewer recorded the main reason given, which is shown in Table AS6. The most common reasons for refusal were 'Can't be bothered' (20%), 'Genuinely too busy' (14%) and 'Too old or infirm' (12%).

Table AS6: Reasons for refusal (first reason given)

Reason for refusal	(%)
Doesn't believe in surveys	1.5
Invasion of privacy	3.4
Concerns about confidentiality	0.4
Can't be bothered	19.6
Bad experience with previous surveys	4.2
Disliked survey matter	0.6
Genuinely too busy	14.2
Temporarily too busy	6.2
Personal problems	5.5
Refusal to HQ	0.2
Late contact insufficient time	2.1
About to go away	1.7
Too old/infirm	12.3
Not capable	0.2
Broken appointments	6.0
Other reason	11.9
No reason given	9.8
<i>Base</i>	583

Response to the self-completion section is shown in Table AS7. Fifty-five per cent of respondents completed the section themselves on the laptop, while an additional 45% were asked the questions by the interviewer. The level of self-completion is lower than is normal on surveys of this type. The Health Education Monitoring Survey (HEMS), for example, regularly asks respondents to key their answers in on the laptop and about 85% of eligible respondents do so. The low proportion self-completing this section of the PSE may reflect the age profile of the PSE sample. Other surveys requiring self-completion often have an age cut-off; the HEMS only asks those aged 16-54 to self-complete. Problems with eyesight, which are more common among older people, are often cited by those who decline to use the laptop. Willingness to self-complete could also have been affected by the position of the section at the end of the questionnaire, by which time respondents may have become fatigued. Evidence from interviewers suggests that this was the case, particularly for the elderly respondents.

Table AS7: Response to the self-completion module

	Number	(%)
Respondent completed the section	844	55
Interviewer completed the section	683	44.5
Section refused or not completed	7	0.5
<i>Base</i>	1534	100

Weighting Procedures

As noted earlier, the PSE interviewed one person per household, oversampled households in Scotland and oversampled households in the lowest quintile groups of equivalised income. Several weights were therefore calculated to allow for the probability of selection and also to compensate for

non-response. Care must be taken to use the correct weight for the chosen analysis unit. Details of each of these elements and the weighting procedure is available from the authors.