



Department  
for Education



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation on Better Measures of Child Poverty

## Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15  
February 2013

Your comments must reach us by that date.

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**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

Reason for confidentiality:

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If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can telephone: 0370 000 2288 or e-mail: [Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk)

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the CYPFD Team by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's ['Contact Us'](#) page.

Please select the category that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector	<input type="checkbox"/> Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Practitioner working with children/families
<input type="checkbox"/> Central Government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research body/academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Public bodies and named partners in the Child Poverty Act
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/organisation representing families and children	<input type="checkbox"/> Social enterprise	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Please Specify:

Independent think-tank

## SECTION TWO: POTENTIAL DIMENSIONS

1 Are there dimensions, other than those proposed in the consultation document, we should consider for inclusion in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

The Centre for Social Justice's (CSJ) research has identified five key and interconnected features of social breakdown, which we call the 'pathways to poverty'. These are **family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency and worklessness, addiction and serious personal debt**. Through our work we have seen how these pathways create poverty, but how they are also its consequences. As single or one-off characteristics in life these pathways are damaging, but as a combination they create a 'perfect storm' in which entering poverty becomes far more likely, if not a certainty. They are foundational to developing a new understanding of poverty and should be central to any new measure. We therefore welcome the Government's inclusion of these indicators in its consultation document and do not wish to suggest any further dimensions.

### DIMENSION 1: INCOME AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

2 a) How should we measure income as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Comments:

It is important to measure how much of a household's income is actually spent on the child. One way of doing this would be to use school-readiness surveys. For example, does the child have a uniform and shoes that fit?

However the CSJ believes that whilst the level of a family's income matters, the **source** of that income matters more. The Government's own research has found that income source is more important than either income level or home ownership in determining levels of social exclusion.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore crucial that the measure distinguishes between income which has been earned through employment and that which has been obtained through welfare payments. A person whose sole income stream is derived from welfare cannot escape poverty, whereas someone who is in work has the opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty.

Given that incomes can fluctuate over time, **consumption** might be a more suitable dimension than income. A family may experience a temporary drop in earnings which sees their income fall below the poverty line, signifying that they are officially 'in poverty'. However a high level of resources or assets may mean that they are able to smooth their consumption and maintain similar living standards in the short-term. There is a risk therefore that relying on income as a 'snapshot' measure of individuals' circumstances will make temporarily low income families appear to be in poverty under the current measure. By contrast, as consumption decisions are normally based on permanent income rather than transitory income, temporarily income-poor households may not be classed as poor if household consumption was made a proxy for child poverty.

Another alternative to income would be an individual's **ability to save**. This is a good predictor of being able or unable to afford particular goods and services. It also implies that they have developed strong financial capabilities. This financial security is likely to have a positive impact on a child in the household.

2 b) How important is relative and absolute income?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

<sup>1</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, *The dynamics of deprivation: the relationship between income material deprivation over time*, DWP Research report No. 219, 2004, table 6.6, p72

Comments:

There are numerous problems with using relative or absolute income as a measure of poverty. The first is that income by itself **does not tell us the whole story**. The CSJ agrees with the Government that income measures of poverty cannot show what it is like for a child to grow up in a 'broken' home, a workless household, or with parents weighed down by serious personal debt. It is these factors which seriously and unequivocally blight the life chances of children and must be central to any measure of child poverty. Not all children living in circumstances similar to those described above will necessarily live in households which fall below the current income-related targets.

The second problem with the current relative income measure of child poverty is that it results in **misleading statistical outcomes**. As the most recent child poverty statistics revealed, in 2010-11, 300,000 children were moved above the poverty line and out of relative income poverty. Yet, as median incomes fell (largely due to the recession), the level of household income which defines a child to be 'in poverty' fell from £259 a week in 2009-2010 to £251 a week in 2010-11. This means that, somewhat bizarrely, thousands of families have supposedly 'escaped' poverty without any actual change to their individual income and/or circumstances. The CSJ strongly believes that this makes it an unreliable and inaccurate measure of child poverty.

Thirdly, despite the complex nature of poverty, the use of a relative or absolute income poverty line creates a **simplistic and arbitrary distinction between those classed as poor and those that are not**. There is, for example, no clear evidence as to why the relative poverty line is set at 60 per cent of median incomes. Measuring poverty in this way also fails to distinguish between those furthest away from the poverty line and those just below. As a result, the depth of poverty is not properly reflected, meaning that improvements in living standards raising children from far below the poverty line to just below are not captured.

Moreover, this has led to a political fixation by previous governments with lifting certain groups of people, particularly those just below the poverty line, out of income poverty through the welfare system. In the CSJ's view, giving a family just below the poverty line a very small amount of welfare payments in order to push them just above it does almost nothing to help them escape poverty. Many of their deeper social problems will remain. A marginally increased income does not solve the root causes of poverty: family breakdown, economic dependency and worklessness, educational failure, addiction and serious personal debt. Instead, this approach has served to further entrench dependency on the state and created static low income areas, from which it is very difficult for people to progress.

In summary, relying on income as a measure of child poverty reveals very little about the reality of life in low income communities, and offers no explanation or

understanding about the root causes of poverty.

3 How does the ownership of assets such as a house affect our understanding of poverty?

Comments:

In whichever area of social policy the CSJ researches, it is primarily concerned with how the most vulnerable in society are affected. Families who own their own homes are normally less deprived than those who do not, and so would not be our primary focus. However, this group can sometimes be very close to financial problems, especially older homeowners with significant mortgage debt as they enter retirement. Preventing them from sliding into serious financial poverty is therefore important.

4 How can an income dimension in a multidimensional measure of child poverty avoid the drawbacks associated with a simple income threshold?

Comments:

In order to avoid the drawbacks associated with a simple income threshold, the income dimension should not dominate within the measure. Rather, it should form part of a multidimensional measure with other factors included, such as those outlined in the consultation document.

## DIMENSION 2: WORKLESSNESS

5 How important is worklessness as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

### Comments:

Being part of a working household is the **best and most sustainable route out of poverty**. We know this because only five per cent of children living in households where both parents are in full time work fall below the income poverty line.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the majority of persistently workless households live below the relative income poverty line.<sup>3</sup>

Work has a number of advantages for families and children. Firstly, it is **good for the individual**. In addition to the obvious financial benefits of receiving an income, there is a strong evidence base which shows that work is good for physical and mental health and well-being.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, worklessness is associated with 'scarring effects' such as poorer physical and mental health. For example, those who lose their job are three times more likely to develop a mental health problem than those in work, and face greater probability of marriage and relationship breakdown.<sup>5</sup> This can have a seriously negative impact on children.

Work also impacts directly on the **wellbeing of children**, most obviously because a working household is less likely to be in poverty, but also because living in a working household can help children 'fit in' with their peers and reduce potential stigma.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps most importantly, poverty and worklessness are often intergenerational. Hence, a child growing up in poverty is more likely to suffer poverty and social exclusion as an adult than a child that has not

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children, 'Welfare reforms to hit poorer working women, pushing 250,000 children deeper into poverty', [accessed via: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/2012-03/welfare-reforms-hit-poorer-working-women-pushing-250000-children-deeper-poverty> (28/01/13)]

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, *Intergenerational transmission of worklessness: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort and the Longitudinal Study of Young People In England*, London: Institute of Education & National Centre for Social Research, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Economic Dependency and Worklessness*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

<sup>5</sup> The Centre for Public Service Partnerships, *Personalisation, Innovation and Economic Growth - the essentials for tackling long-term unemployment*, London: The Centre for Public Service Partnerships, 2011

<sup>6</sup> Graham J, Tennant R, Huxley M and O'Connor W, *The Role of Work in Low Income Families with Children - a longitudinal qualitative study*, London: Department for Work and Pensions, 2005

grown up in poverty: a child's circumstances often dictate their future life chances.<sup>7</sup>

Relying on welfare as opposed to income through work has negative long-term consequences. For instance, a University of Michigan study demonstrated that, holding constant for race, parental education, family structure and a range of other social variables, the more welfare income received by a family while a boy was growing up, the lower his earnings as an adult.<sup>8</sup> If we continue trying to end poverty through the provision of benefits, it will become more entrenched and cost the government more in the long-term.

## 6 How should worklessness be measured?

Comments:

The CSJ would recommend the following indicators:

- Children living in households where no one works;
- Children living in households where an adult has only worked for four of the past five years / nine of the past ten years;
- Children living in households where no one has ever worked;
- Underemployment – reflects inability to build economic independence through extra hours

## 7 Does the length of time for which a household is workless matter for measurement?

Yes

No

Not Sure

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 'Briefing February 2007: The intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and advantage', 2007, [accessed via: <http://bit.ly/XiuwCq> (06.02.13)]

<sup>8</sup> Cited in 'A better way to help the low paid, US lessons for the UK tax credits system', Rupert Darwall, Centre for Policy Studies, 2006, p5

Comments:

Whilst any length of worklessness is undesirable, a number of studies have shown that being long-term workless has particular '**scarring effects**'. For instance, one study showed that six months of unemployment at a young age was estimated to lead to wages 13 – 21 per cent lower nearly twenty years later.<sup>9</sup> Another study finds lower wages and lower happiness over thirty-five years after a prolonged spell of youth unemployment, with greater scars the longer the person was unemployed.<sup>10</sup>

What is more, the longer a household remains workless, the more likely it is that worklessness becomes normalised within that household. This can have an effect on how children view work and their attitude towards it.

### DIMENSION 3: UNMANAGEABLE DEBT

8 How important is unmanageable debt as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

<sup>9</sup> Gregg, Paul and Tominey, Emma, *The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment*, CMPO, University of Bristol, 2004

<sup>10</sup> Bell, David and Blanchflower, David, *Youth Unemployment in Europe and the United States*; IZA Discussion Paper No. 5673, 2011

Comments:

Unmanageable debt in the UK has reached shockingly high levels. The most recent figures show that outstanding personal debt stands at £1.420 trillion.<sup>11</sup> Unmanageable debt is a particular problem for low income families; with little savings to fall back on and around 1.5 million individuals with little or no access to mainstream banking facilities, they are more vulnerable than other income groups to unexpected changes and more likely to use high-cost forms of credit. Servicing these debts can leave families with insufficient income to meet their children's most basic needs.

However, unmanageable debt is not just a financial problem. It is also a major **driver of mental ill-health**. One in four adults with a mental health problem is living with debt or arrears.<sup>12</sup> Research by the Centre for Mental Health found that debt problems can lead to stress, anxiety or depression.<sup>13</sup> An increase in the level of household debt is associated with an increase in the overall level of mental health disorder, neurosis, psychosis, alcohol and drug dependency, even when income and other socioeconomic factors are controlled for.<sup>14</sup>

Unmanageable debt is also a **driver of family breakdown**. Financial worries are a common cause of relationship tension. Relate have found that money rates as the top cause of arguments among couples.<sup>15</sup> This tension can lead to relationship and family breakdown, which can make financial problems worse as money has to stretch further. The impact of family breakdown on children can be catastrophic. Please refer to section seven for further details on this.

Unmanageable debt can also act as a **barrier to work**. As the consultation document indicates, debt can make the costs associated with job search less affordable, a bad credit rating can limit employment opportunities, and can further reduce the incentive to work if it means having to repay more debt.<sup>16</sup>

More broadly, the CSJ's polling found respondents who had suffered being out of work, substance abuse, criminality, educational failure and family breakdown - all associated with poverty - were more likely to have experienced unmanageable debt than other respondents.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Credit Action, 'January 2013, UK Personal Debt' [accessed via: <http://www.creditaction.org.uk/helpful-resources/debt-statistics.html> (28/01/13)]

<sup>12</sup> Mind, *Still in the Red*, London: Mind, 2011

<sup>13</sup> The Smith Institute, *A Nation Living on the Never-Never: Policy Solutions to Reduce Britain's personal debt mountain*, London: The Smith Institute, 2011

<sup>14</sup> Jenkins et al, 'Debt, income and mental disorder in the general population', *Psychological Medicine*, 2008, 38, pp1485–1493

<sup>15</sup> Journal of Accountancy, 'Financial matters are top cause of couples' spats, survey shows', [accessed via: <http://www.journalofaccountancy.com/News/20125634> (06.02.13)]

<sup>16</sup> Manchester City Council, *Out of Work and Out of Money*, Manchester City Council, 2010

<sup>17</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Breakdown Britain: Indebtedness*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2006

9 What aspects of unmanageable debt should we be most concerned about capturing?

Comments:

It is important to distinguish between debt (having outstanding money to pay) and unmanageable or 'problem' debt (where a person falls behind with payments, bills or other commitments).<sup>18</sup> It is the latter of these which is of greatest concern.

The CSJ would suggest that unmanageable debt could be measured using a combination of indicators such as:

- Cost of servicing debt – we suggest a threshold set at around 50 per cent or more of gross monthly income spent on unsecured repayments (13 per cent of respondents in the latest BIS/YouGov over-indebtedness survey had more 30 per cent on income on unsecured credit repayments)<sup>19</sup>
- Debt relief orders - the terms of these virtually ensure a person is living close to poverty in income and asset terms making them vulnerable to tipping over
- Individuals in arrears on a credit commitment or domestic bill for more than three months
- Repossessions
- Access to mainstream banking facilities

#### DIMENSION 4: POOR HOUSING

10 How important is poor housing as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

<sup>18</sup> The Smith Institute, *A Nation Living on the Never-Nevers: Policy Solutions to Reduce Britain's personal debt mountain*, London: The Smith Institute, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Department for Business Innovation and Skills, *Credit, Debt and Financial Difficulty in Britain 2011*, London, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012

## Comments

Poor housing can have a significantly deleterious effect on the physical and mental health and educational achievement of children, as well as put pressure on the strength of the family unit.

In terms of **physical health**, poor housing conditions increase the risk of severe ill-health or disability by up to 25 per cent during childhood and early adulthood. Children living in overcrowded housing are up to 10 times more likely to contract meningitis, and as many as one in three people who grow up in overcrowded housing have respiratory problems in adulthood.<sup>20</sup>

For **mental health**, a link has been demonstrated between unfit and overcrowded housing and psychological distress in eight- to 11-year-olds. Living in such conditions, children may have difficulty coping, feel angry, anxious or depressed, or have difficulty sleeping.<sup>21</sup>

In relation to **educational achievement**, research shows that 12 per cent of school-age children who persistently lived in overcrowded accommodation did not have a quiet place at home to do homework compared to 6 per cent who lived in overcrowded accommodation on a short-term basis.<sup>22</sup>

The lack of security associated with poor housing can debilitate the health of a **family structure**: the constant moves, the bed-and-breakfast accommodation, the children forced to move school, families (and particularly children) unable to put down those crucial community roots.<sup>23</sup>

11 What aspect of poor housing should be captured in a measure?

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<sup>20</sup> Shelter, *Chance of a Lifetime: The Impact of Bad Housing on Children's lives*, London: Shelter, 2006

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> National Centre for Social Research, *The Dynamics of Bad Housing: The Impact of Bad Housing on the Living Standards of Children*, London: National Centre for Social Research

<sup>23</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *State of the Nation: Fractured Families*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2006

Comments:

The CSJ suggests the following measures:

- Unreasonable state of repair
- Unreasonable degree of thermal comfort
- Overcrowding
- Homelessness / temporary accommodation

12 How can we consider the impact of where children grow up when measuring child poverty?

Comments:

The chances of a child growing up in poverty, and their experiences of poverty, will vary greatly between places and communities. For example, one local area may suffer from acute family breakdown whilst another has particularly high levels of worklessness. Even at the ward level, there can be a community which is suffering directly next to one which is not. There are also important distinctions to be made between the nature of rural and urban poverty. These factors should be considered and built in to any measure of child poverty.

## DIMENSION 5: PARENTAL SKILL LEVEL

13 a) How important is parental skill level as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Comments:

The skills a parent possesses can have a significant bearing on the future outcomes of a child. At the heart of this are good parenting, numeracy and literacy skills.

The nature of the **parenting** a child receives is a key predictor of their future outcomes. Neuroscience shows that an infant's brain is still developing in the first few years of their life.<sup>24</sup> A child's early experiences, and in particular the family environment in which they grow up in, has a direct and long-term impact on their future life chances. Positive experiences – strong parent-child attachment, a nurturing, loving family environment – promotes the development of the pro-social systems in the brain. However, negative experiences – poor attachment, a chaotic, dysfunctional, abusive or neglectful family environment – hampers the development of these foundational psychological systems.<sup>25</sup>

**Numeracy and literacy** skills are also vital. Research shows that one of the most important things a parent can do to help their child acquire language skills and prepare them for school is to read to them.<sup>26</sup> If a parent is unable to do this then it is likely to negatively impact on their development. Similarly, if a child is not taught to count because their parent is numerically illiterate themselves, then this means they are likely to struggle with basic tasks.

Knowing how to ensure children feel loved does not come naturally to all parents. This is particularly true of a parent who brought up in care and so has not experienced first-hand what it is like to parent a child in a family context.

Also, stressors like couple conflict, unresolved issues from their own childhoods and poverty (e.g. struggling in poor housing and trying to cope on a low income) can make it much harder for parents to overcome difficulties they face in providing a nurturing and supportive environment.

13 b) What level of skills matter?

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<sup>24</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2008

<sup>25</sup> For a full discussion and literature review see: Centre for Social Justice, *The Next Generation: A policy report from the Early Years Commission*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2008

<sup>26</sup> PSVschools.net, 'The Importance of Reading to Children' [accessed via: <http://www.pvschools.net/speced/pdfs/Importance-of-Reading.pdf> (29/01/13)]

Comments:

The CSJ suggests the following are important indicators of parental skill level:

- Numeracy of parent
- Literacy of parent
- Numeracy and literacy of child (transmitted from parent)

14 How can we best capture parental skill level in a new child poverty measure?

Comments

Central to good parenting is ensuring that children are 'school ready', enabling them to take full advantage of their 11 years of schooling to develop, rather than be in permanent and unsuccessful 'catch-up'.<sup>27</sup> We suggest the Government explores proxies such as a child's ability to dress themselves, be toilet trained and respond to their name and their level of nutrition. In terms of the numeracy and literacy skills of a parent, we suggest the Government looks at the level of qualifications of a parent or of the child when they start school. It would also be useful to note whether or not the parent was brought up in the care system.

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<sup>27</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2010

## DIMENSION 6: ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

15 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's experience of poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Some impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Little impact
<input type="checkbox"/> No impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Comments:

While education can transfer opportunity and wealth across society and between generations, our most disadvantaged children are being left further behind.<sup>28</sup> There is, as Ofsted Chief Michael Wilshaw highlights, still a 'stubbornly wide' gap between the achievements of poor pupils and their richer classmates.<sup>29</sup>

The combination of financial poverty and a poor school can severely narrow the horizons of a child. In addition, for a child living in poverty, a good school is even more crucial as the school can often take on some of the responsibilities of a parent.

16 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's life chances?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Some impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Little impact
<input type="checkbox"/> No impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

<sup>28</sup> Institute of Education, *University access for disadvantaged children: A comparison across English speaking countries*, London: Institute of Education, 2012

<sup>29</sup> The Telegraph, 'More than two million children taught in under-performing schools, Ofsted warns', 27 Nov 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/9705195/More-than-two-million-children-taught-in-under-performing-schools-Ofsted-warns.html> (29/01/13)]

Comments:

Failing at school is connected with almost every other type of social breakdown. For instance, our polling shows that 73 per cent of young offenders described their educational attainment as nil.<sup>30</sup> 32 per cent of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved with drug dealing.<sup>31</sup>

A good school will ensure its pupils are equipped with the appropriate skills and qualifications to succeed in life. Over the course of a school year, pupils gain 1.5 years' worth of learning with very effective teachers compared with 0.5 years' worth with poorly performing teachers.<sup>32</sup> For a child leaving the education system without basic skills, securing and holding down a job can be particularly difficult. Research shows that underachievement at school affects future employability, future wage levels and future health (which further affects employment chances).<sup>33</sup> The UK spends billions on sustaining a welfare system to support the casualties of this educational failure.

A good school will also identify children not reaching their potential. Many disadvantaged children have a small vocabulary and fewer skills than their better off peers. This means that they are catching up before they even start formal learning. Many of these pupils are identified too late and for the ones who are recognised as needing early intervention support they never catch up throughout their whole educational journey as the trend continues to accelerate throughout the course of primary school where students are expected to achieve at least level 4 by the time they leave at 11 years old.<sup>34</sup>

A good school will also identify children with SEN and be able to effectively support their learning needs, spend its Pupil Premium allocation effectively, be better equipped to deal with truancy, and ensure effective transitions from primary to secondary school.

17 How should access to quality education be measured?

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<sup>30</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *A Review of Education and Supporting Arrangements within Units for Juveniles managed by HM Prison Service*, 2002

<sup>31</sup> Ruth Kitching, *Violence, Truancy and School Exclusion in France and Britain*, London: Franco-British Council, 2001

<sup>32</sup> The Sutton Trust, *Improving the impact of teachers on pupil achievement in the UK – Interim Findings*, London: The Sutton Trust, 2011

<sup>33</sup> Prince's Trust, *The Cost of Exclusion: Counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK*, London: Prince's Trust, 2010

<sup>34</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Educational Failure*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

Comments:

Access to quality education can be measured by the number of children who attend schools judged to be inadequate. Indicators for this could include:

- Examination results (number of students getting good passes and value added)
- Destinations of pupils (e.g. how many started university or secured employment)
- Level of absenteeism / truancy
- Quality of teaching (Ofsted ratings, examination results)
- Parental engagement

## DIMENSION 7: FAMILY STABILITY

18 How important is family stability as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Comments:

A child's family lays vital foundations for the whole of their life. Children's outcomes are directly linked to their family experience and any serious measure of poverty must reflect this.

The absence of a stable, nurturing family environment has a profoundly damaging impact on a child. When parents separate, upheaval and major life changes occur, resulting in many children suffering feelings of guilt, anger, abandonment and deep seated pain with no outlet, leading directly to depression and anxiety.<sup>35</sup>

Beyond this, children of separated parents (in comparison with those whose parents remain together) are at increased risk of growing up in poorer housing, experiencing behavioural problems, and performing less well in school and gaining fewer educational qualifications.<sup>36</sup> Children in lone parent families have

<sup>35</sup> Palmer S, *Toxic Childhood*, London: Orion, 2006

<sup>36</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012

a much higher risk of living in financial poverty than children in couple families. 41 per cent of children in lone parent families live in households with the poorest 20 per cent of incomes, compared to 22 per cent of children in couple families’.

Incidences of child abuse are much higher where there has been family breakdown.<sup>37</sup> Children growing up in lone parent or broken families are 3 to 6 times more likely to suffer serious abuse than children growing up with both biological parents.<sup>38</sup>

Family breakdown also has negative mental health consequences for children.<sup>39</sup> Children of lone parents (whether single or widowed) are about twice as likely to have a mental health problem than those living with married or cohabiting couples, that is 16 per cent as opposed to 8 per cent.<sup>40</sup>

Poor attachment, inappropriate parenting and high conflict relationships appear to characterise the background of those who end up as young offenders. Studies also show that youth delinquency and substance abuse is associated with family dissolution, or being raised in the care system.

The CSJ believes the best way to ensure family stability is through supporting and emphasising the importance of **marriage**. This belief is firmly rooted in the available evidence. For example, 97 per cent of all couples still intact by the time a child is 15 are married.<sup>41</sup> Our research shows that children who grow up in stable, two-parent and, in particular, married couple families have better mental and physical health outcomes than those who do not. They do better in school and are less likely to be involved in crime or substance abuse.<sup>42</sup>

19 How important is the long-term involvement of both parents to their child's experience of poverty and life chances?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

<sup>37</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Green Paper on the Family*, London, Centre for Social Justice, 2010

<sup>38</sup> NSPCC, *Child maltreatment in the family: the experience of a national sample of young people*, London: NSPCC, 2002

<sup>39</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

<sup>40</sup> Meltzer et al, *Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain ONS Analysis of Census data*, 2005,

<sup>41</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families? The Vanishing Agenda*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012

<sup>42</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

Comments:

The advantages of long-term involvement of both a child's parents, particularly when married, are outlined in our response to the previous question. To summarise: children growing up in lone parent households are more likely to have poorer mental and physical health, be involved in crime, substance abuse, live in poorer quality housing, experience behavioural problems, do worse at school, live in financial poverty and suffer from abuse. All of these factors have a serious impact on a child's quality of life and future life chances.<sup>43</sup>

It is worth underlining here that when referring to 'both parents', a distinction should be drawn between cohabitation and marriage. They are not the same thing. Although cohabiting parent families are likely to lead to improved outcomes for children compared with their single parent counterparts, cohabitation does not lead to the same degree of improvement as marriage.<sup>44</sup>

20 How important is the presence of a father to a child's experience of poverty and life chances?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Green Paper on the Family*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2010

Comments:

Most single parents bring up their children well under difficult circumstances. Yet fatherless families can be problematic contexts for raising a child. Our polling found that 75 per cent think fatherlessness is a serious problem.<sup>45</sup>

There is, for example, a direct relationship between children's behaviour problems and the amount of contact time they had with their biological father.<sup>46</sup> Our research shows that fatherlessness is also a key driver of gang culture.<sup>47</sup> In the absence of a male role model at home, gangs fill this vacuum to provide the belonging, loyalty and 'unconditional love' a child yearns for. To illustrate this, in London, four of the five most gang-impacted boroughs have 50 per cent or more lone-parent-headed households.<sup>48</sup>

21 Which experiences associated with family stability should be captured in a measure?

Comments:

The CSJ suggests the following experiences should be captured:

**Marital status of parents:** the rise in unmarried parenthood has been accompanied by an escalation in family breakdown. Our research has shown that these trends have hit the poorest hardest. Marriage is no panacea, but when combined with real early intervention, reform of the benefits system, and general couple support, it plays a crucial role in tackling social breakdown.

**Child living with only one biological parent**

**Contact with father:** we have outlined the importance of a father's involvement in our response to the previous questions.

**Number of transitions children go through:** this seems to be where problems are most pronounced: 'We know that the more transitions, [from one de facto step-family arrangement to another] that children have, the more detrimental it is to their wellbeing'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Strengthening the Family and Tackling Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

<sup>46</sup> University of Bristol, 'Children's Behaviour is Linked to Contact with Real Father' [accessed via: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/alspac/documents/fathers.pdf> (29/01/13)]

<sup>47</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Dying to Belong*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2009

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> The Times, 'Unmarried families are more likely to fall apart' 5 February 2005 [accessed via: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article1931929.ece> (06.02.13)]

## DIMENSION 8: PARENTAL HEALTH

22 How should we recognise young carers in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Comments:

Our research has found that young carers, particularly those caring for relatives with drug or alcohol problems, are vulnerable to educational difficulties.<sup>50</sup> In fact, nearly one-third of young carers of secondary school age are experiencing educational difficulties.<sup>51</sup> This can be in a formal sense, i.e. not able to attend school, but also in an informal sense, i.e. unable to take part in recreational activities with friends which could be of educational value. Being a young carer can also lead to friendship difficulties and make the transition to adulthood more problematic.<sup>52</sup>

23 How should we recognise parental drug and alcohol dependence and mental health conditions in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

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<sup>50</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *No Excuses, A Review of Educational Exclusion*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

<sup>51</sup> Dearden C and Becker S, *Young Carers in the UK: the 2004 report*, London: Carers UK, 2004

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

Comments:

Drug and alcohol dependence ruins lives, fuels crime and destroys communities. The impact on a child of an addicted parent is particularly tragic. Consequences can be physical (e.g. blood-borne virus infections), material neglect, exposure to drug use, violence and crime, educational failure and unemployment.<sup>53</sup>

Poor mental health is both a cause and effect of social breakdown. The consistent thread running through our analysis of the problems associated with, for example, family breakdown, poor housing and children in care is the high level of mental ill-health in our poorest and most disadvantaged communities.<sup>54</sup> Children and adults from the lowest quintile (20 per cent) of household income are three times more likely to have common mental health problems (than those in the richest quintile) and nine times as likely to have psychotic disorders.<sup>55</sup> Children's future relationships, their ability to fulfil their potential both educationally and in the workplace as well as their basic quality of life are all threatened by mental illness and unmet emotional needs.<sup>56</sup>

24 How can parental disability and general poor parental health be reflected in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

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<sup>53</sup> Centre for Social Justice: *Breakdown Britain: Addicted Britain*, London, Centre for Social Justice, 2006

<sup>54</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Mental Health: Poverty, Ethnicity and Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

<sup>55</sup> Marmot M et al, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post 2010*, The Marmot Review, London, 2010

<sup>56</sup> Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

Comments:

The CSJ suggests the Government uses the following indicators:

- Addiction to alcohol
- Addiction to controlled substance
- Dependence on a substitute opioid prescription
- Prevalence of mental health condition

### SECTION 3: CREATING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURE

25 Are there criteria, other than those listed in Section 3 of the consultation document, that we should evaluate a new measure against?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

No comments

26 In creating a new measure should any dimension be a gateway?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

All of the measures are important. The problem with having income as a gateway dimension is that some families might be materially well-off but their circumstances are still a grave cause for concern.

27 Should the indicators be weighted and, if so, what factors should influence the choice of weighting?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

To have different criteria by which the severity/complexity of a problem might be judged would seem sensible (e.g. different measurements of success/failure at school) but weighting issues against each other (e.g. drug/alcohol dependency as more serious than long-term worklessness) would be arbitrary. A lot of this data is already collected at the local level. ONS data would be one example.

28 Which indicators should be weighted more or less?

Comments:

All of the suggested indicators have the potential to seriously blight the life chances of a child. However the CSJ's view is that family breakdown, worklessness and educational are, on balance, the lead indicators which should be weighted more.

29 How could we measure child poverty at the local level?

Comments:

Factors which are unique to a specific geographical area often have a particular bearing on the life chances and opportunities of young people. Examples include access to a good school and the employment prospects in an area. We suggest the Government explores the possibility of allowing local areas to decide on a set of indicators relevant to child poverty at a local level.

30 How should we check the robustness and simplicity?

Comments:

No comments

31 What would you use a multidimensional measure of child poverty for?

Comments:

The child poverty measure should be used to hold individual Government Departments and the Government as a whole to account in its efforts to reduce child poverty. Rather than simply using small-scale survey data and extrapolating the findings to estimate the scale of child poverty, it would be of far greater value to be able to pinpoint exactly where these children are so that appropriate resources and services can be channelled to them. A detailed breakdown of the figures should be published regularly. The end goal would be to develop greater data on children from different backgrounds over time.

32 Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make.

Comments:

No comments

33 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.).

Comments:

No comments

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply X**

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes  No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

Responses should be emailed to the relevant consultation email box. However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Carole Edge, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: [carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 February 2013.

Send by post to: CYPFD Team, Department for Education, Area 1C, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2GJ or email to: [Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk)