

The Childhood Trust: London Child Poverty Report 2021

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The Childhood Trust

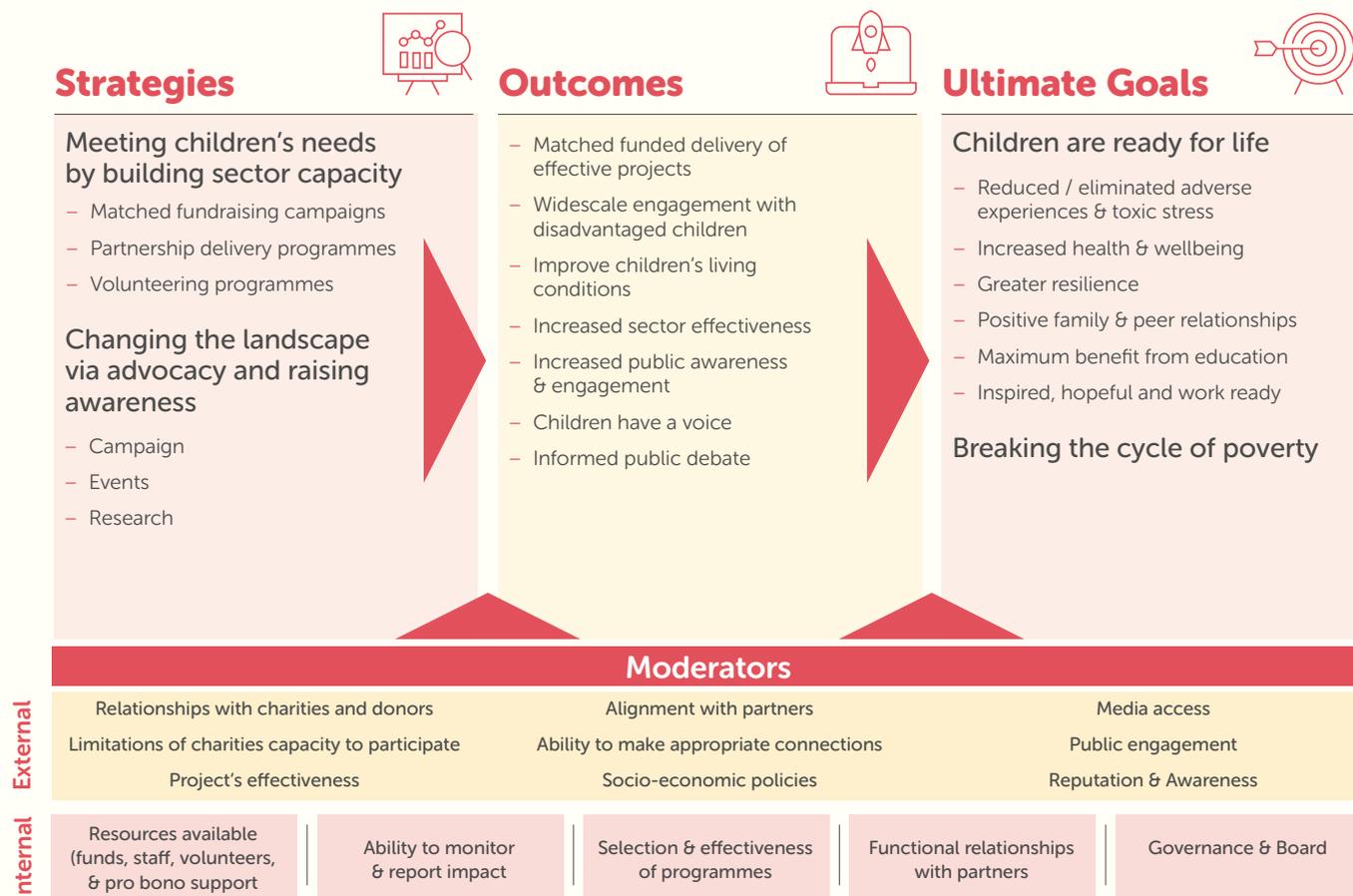
The Childhood Trust is London's child poverty charity, funding the delivery of youth projects and services that support thousands of disadvantaged children and young people in London every year.

We fund the delivery of grassroots projects, run volunteer community support programmes, and produce original research and advocacy to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children in the capital and build capacity in London's child support sector.

Our growing community of corporate supporters, philanthropists, and donors combined with our strong relationships with established children's charities make us well-equipped to direct resources to London's most economically disadvantaged and isolated communities.

Without our financial support, 75% of the projects we fund would not be able to operate. Without these projects, life for many thousands of children trapped in poverty would be dramatically worse.

Our Theory of Change: (How we work to ensure better outcomes for disadvantaged children)



Executive Summary

London has the highest child poverty rate in England.¹ While other cities in Europe have seen their rates of childhood poverty decline, London's has been increasing for the past five years.² As one of the most expensive cities in the world, low levels of household income are compounded by extremely high housing, transportation and childcare costs. Additionally, cuts to benefits and tax credits as part of a larger restructuring of the British welfare state have contributed to higher levels of poverty. As early childhood development has a profound influence on later life outcomes, the situation is in dire need of attention. However, while household income is arguably the most pertinent factor in discussions of child poverty, poverty manifests itself in many different ways. This report will interrogate both the drivers and the impacts of child poverty in London.

Household income and spending have stagnated over the past five years, contributing to increased poverty rates. For the poorest Britons, real incomes were higher fifteen years ago than they are now, largely due to the Great Recession and increased rates of inflation following the Brexit referendum.³ While unemployment levels have decreased in recent years, rates of in-work poverty have increased and the number of people working in zero-hour contracts has hit the highest level on record.⁴ Poverty rates are highest for families in which a parent works in the retail, hospitality or leisure sectors. An inevitable side effect has been an increase in inequality. Despite being one of the world's wealthiest cities, London's wealth is not spread equally.

The "decade of austerity" ushered in by the coalition government beginning in 2010 has been one of the greatest factors in terms of increasing child poverty. Cuts have been made to benefits, local authorities, family support services and countless other social programmes; nearly half of London councils' youth services have been slashed. Despite this, demand for such services is ever present and food bank usage in London has increased over 17-fold between 2011/2012 and 2019/2020.⁵ The policy has suppressed household incomes and hit the poor the hardest. In the capital, one in six parents have children in food insecurity.⁶ Food insecurity is when one is unable to access reliable, sufficient, affordable nutritious food. Additionally, the capital currently has one of the highest proportion of students on free school meals.⁷

Housing, specifically access to safe and affordable housing, can be both a driver and an impact of poverty. In London, housing is especially expensive, with families in poverty spending over half their net income on housing costs.⁸ The current situation is exacerbated by the UK's ongoing housing crisis, as households in poverty can spend a significant portion of their income on housing. Right to Buy, but-to-let and the loss of millions of social homes has been the primary cause of the ongoing crisis. One inevitable outcome of such a crisis is an increase in both children growing up in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping, which has doubled since 2010.⁹

1 Child Poverty Action Group (n.d.) Child Poverty In London Facts and Figures. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

2 Department for Work and Pensions (2020) Households Below Average Income: 1994/95 To 2018/19.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201819>

3 Corlett, A. (2020) New data shows households were struggling even before coronavirus. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/new-data-shows-households-were-struggling-even-before-coronavirus/>

4 Goodier, M. (2020) Zero-Hours Contracts Reach Record Level As 730,000 Jobs Are Lost. Newstatesman.com. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/economy/2020/08/zero-hours-contracts-reach-record-level-730000-jobs-are-lost>

5 Statista (2020) Number of people receiving three days' worth of emergency food from Trussell Trust foodbanks in London (UK) from 2011/12 to 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/382731/london-foodbank-users/>

6 Barker (2020) 400,000 London children 'are food insecure'. Fresh Produce Journal. Available at: www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/180602/400000-london-children-are-food-insecure

7 Department for Education (2019). Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals, Borough. Available at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/pupils-eligible-free-school-meals-borough>

8 Trust for London and WPI Economics (2020) London's Poverty Profile: 2020. Available at: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/lpp2020/>

9 BBC News (2020) Number of children homeless in temporary housing 'highest on record'. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-51280788>

Children who live in deprived areas of the country continue to have lower levels of educational attainment. The situation has been worsened by cuts to education, childcare and youth services that were targeted towards low income families. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to aggravate these disparities.

Poverty has a significant impact on health outcomes for children in London. While life expectancy has notably stagnated in England since 2010, it has declined in some of the most deprived areas.¹⁰ A lack of access to green spaces is correlated with lower health outcomes, and many of London's children are exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution. London's poorest children suffer from both food insecurity and higher obesity rates, likely due to the higher costs of healthier food relative to unhealthy food.¹¹ Additionally, the mental health of children experiencing poverty is worse, primarily because of poor accommodation, parental absence and/or mental health and substance abuse issues at home.¹²

Unfortunately, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate the drivers of poverty and worsen the material living conditions of London's poor residents. School shutdowns have already widened the attainment gap between poorer and wealthier children by at least 46%¹³ and possibly by up to 75%¹⁴. In parallel, unemployment is expected to rise significantly, cramped housing poses an increased risk of infection and there is a heightened risk of hunger among poor children due to a loss of parental earnings.

10 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

11 Barker (2020) 400,000 London children 'are food insecure'. Fresh Produce Journal. Available at: www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/180602/400000-london-children-are-food-insecure

12 The Children's Society (2016) Poor Mental Health: the links between child poverty and mental health problems. Available at: https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/poor_mental_health_report.pdf

13 Sharpe et al., (2020) The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020. National Foundation for Education Research. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_covid_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf

14 Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment. Available at: [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_\(2020\)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_(2020)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf)

For the future of London's children, we must work to ensure the following:

1. **Sweeping welfare state reforms, so benefits reflect need.** This includes lifting the two-child limit on tax credit and universal credit, as well as removing the £20,000 a year benefit cap (£23,000 in London). As it is, the benefit cap does not address the needs of larger families or those living in areas of high rent.
2. **Free childcare must be implemented.** Childcare and housing are two of the most significant costs for working families with small children, with costs of the former having increased by 42% since 2008, twice the rate of inflation.¹⁵
3. **Employment practices need to change, so as to reduce numbers of "working poor".** This includes pushing employment protection laws on zero-hour contracts, part-time jobs and internships. It also includes raising the minimum wage.
4. **The UK government needs to reimplement child poverty targets that were removed in 2016 and amend the definition of child poverty.**
5. **More should be done to tackle food insecurity and childhood obesity.** For example, more children should have access to free school meals for longer periods of time (i.e. also during holidays).
6. **The UK should do more to invest in its infrastructure.** Social housing, subsidised transport and access to information via free or subsidised broadband are crucially needed. The £35 million cuts in council youth services in London (relative to 2011-12) need to be reversed.¹⁶ The government's decision to end free Transport for London travel for under 18s should also be undone.

¹⁵ Child Poverty Action Group (n.d.) Solutions to poverty. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/solutions-poverty>

¹⁶ Centre for Labour and Social Studies (n.d.) The facts and the fixes: austerity. Available at: <http://classonline.org.uk/docs/austerity-final-for-web.pdf>

Children playing at Cardinal Hume Centre,
one of The Childhood Trust's funded projects



Introduction

London has the highest rate of child poverty in England. The latest data for child poverty shows that between the years 2016-17 and 2018-19, 39% of children in London or 800,000 of those aged under 18, lived in poverty after housing costs were taken into account (this figure reflects the number of children living in households with less than 60% of median household income).¹⁷ There are as many poor children in London as there are in South West England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland combined.¹⁸ Additionally, recent analysis has shown that the top 11 local authorities with the highest child poverty rates in the UK are in London, with Tower Hamlets topping the list with 55.4% of children below 60% median income, after housing costs in 2018/19 living in poverty.¹⁹ These figures predate the COVID-19 crisis, which will increase child poverty rates. In England, the Institute for Fiscal Studies expects relative child poverty to increase “under present policies”²⁰ despite government targets (which have since been removed) to end child poverty by 2020.²¹

Relative poverty is defined as the percentage of children living in households below 60% median income every year.²² Absolute poverty is when a household’s income is less than 60% of the median in 2011.²³ These definitions exclude housing costs, meaning that they do not account for the disposable income that families spend on rent or mortgage. Poverty rates that include housing costs more accurately capture how much families live on due to the fact that housing costs are essential.

The most accurate definition of child poverty, according to The Childhood Trust, is sociologist Peter Townsend’s: “Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and the amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong.”²⁴

It is worth noting that not everyone is equally affected by child poverty. Indeed, the poverty rate for Bangladeshi children in London is 60% compared with 26% for white children (2016-17 figures, three year rolling average).²⁵ Child poverty for ethnic minorities is far worse than for British whites, which has resounding policy implications.

Whilst child poverty has decreased in the European Union (EU) between 2017 and 2019^{26,27}, it has risen in all London boroughs in the past five years.²⁸ This is because the capital is one of the most expensive places in the country in terms of housing, childcare and living costs. Low pay is an additional factor as nearly three quarters of children in poverty live in working households.²⁹ Furthermore, cuts in the UK welfare system amounting to £39bn since 2010 – also known as the “decade of austerity” – have compounded the impact of poverty, by reducing families’ incomes further. This is in addition to the effects of the 2008-09 recession and the economic consequences of the Brexit referendum. Finally, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating child poverty. As schools and youth centres shut for months, differences in livelihoods between poorer children and

17 Department for Work and Pensions (2020) Households Below Average Income: 1994/95 To 2018/19. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201819>

18 Ibid.

19 Hirsch, D. and Stone, J. (2020) Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2018/19. Loughborough University. Available at: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty-in-your-area-201415-201819/>

20 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

21 Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Education and HM Treasury (2020) The Child Poverty Unit. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/the-child-poverty-unit>

22 Hirsch, D., (2020) Local child poverty indicators 2018/9 – distribution and trends. Loughborough University. Available at: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Local-child-poverty-indicators-2020-summary-004.docx>

23 Child Poverty Action Group (n.d.) Measuring Poverty. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/measuring-poverty>

24 Townsend, P., (1983) Poverty In The United Kingdom. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

25 Khan, O., (2020) The Colour of Money. How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy. Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>

26 Eurostat (2017) EU children at risk of poverty or exclusion. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20171120-1>

27 Daly, M., (2019) Fighting Child Poverty. European Parliament. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/638429/IPOL_BRI\(2019\)638429_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/638429/IPOL_BRI(2019)638429_EN.pdf)

28 Department for Work and Pensions (2020) Households Below Average Income: 1994/95 To 2018/19. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201819>

29 Ibid.

those more well off have heightened, leaving thousands even more vulnerable than they were before the pandemic.

Child poverty manifests itself in many ways, not just through a lack of income. Early childhood matters for later life outcomes. The 2020 Marmot Review states that “positive experiences early in life are closely associated with better performances at school, better social and emotional development, improved work outcomes, higher income and better lifelong health including longer life expectancy”.³⁰ Poverty in children increases the risk of unemployment and low pay in adulthood as well as lower savings, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It may even harm a child’s brain development in its early days.³¹

The aim of this report is to detail the complex causes and consequences of child poverty in London. It also presents testimonial case studies from partner organisations that the Childhood Trust supports and, importantly, analyses the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable children. Finally, the report sets forth recommendations to tackle the causes of child poverty in London and improve disadvantaged children’s lives.

30 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

31 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) What is poverty? Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/our-work/what-is-poverty>

Drivers of Child Poverty

Employment and Income

Income is viewed as one of the most relevant indicators for measuring living standards and changes in poverty levels. From the 2000s onwards, progress was initially made in reducing poverty levels among those considered most at risk, namely pensioners and children.³² However, in recent years, due to the Great Recession and economic fallout from the Brexit referendum, this trend has been reversed, with poverty levels increasing. The consequences of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are likely to accelerate this reversal.

Additionally, overall poverty levels – measured by income – have remained relatively unchanged over the past two decades. Within the UK, there are both regional variations in poverty levels and various structural factors, such as whether a family member has a disability, that make a household more likely to experience poverty. This section will explore these recent trends in employment, income and inequality, and will interrogate the disparities in poverty levels between different classes, and social and ethnic groups.

Income deprivation is higher in London than in any other region or constituent country of the UK. As of this year, an estimated 22% of the population of England lives in poverty. But in London, that figure is 28% – around 2.5 million people.³³ Compared to five years ago, this is a slight increase of around one per cent. By far the biggest disparity between London and the other parts of the UK is the cost of living, which is between 15% and 58% higher, depending on the comparative region in question.

Further statistics reveal a bleak picture. 56% of London's children cannot afford to go on holiday for at least one week a year, and 18% cannot afford weekly after-school organised activities.³⁴

Another way to measure the current living standards of households is by analysing household spending data. Similar to poverty reduction levels, household spending has stagnated over the past five years.³⁵ The average weekly household spending in 2018/19 was £586, which is only up £4 from two years ago. These figures, combined with other revealing data on overall poverty levels, reveal a situation primarily resulting from a stagnation of income growth in the UK.

Across the whole of the country, median household income was £26,800 per annum in 2018/19, the same since 2015.³⁶ However, the lack of growth has not been evenly distributed. For those under the age of 60, there has been a growth rate of only 0.2% over the course of the decade following the Great Recession.³⁷ For those over 60, it's only slightly higher, at 0.9%. But among the poorest fifth of households in the country, income has fallen 3% in real terms since 2017. This fall followed negative growth the previous year. Altogether, for the poorest in the country, real incomes were higher in 2004/05 than in 2018/19.³⁸ As put by Adam Corlett for the Resolution Foundation, "that is an awful position from which to be entering a new recession."

32 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

33 Trust for London and WPI Economics (2020) London's Poverty Profile: 2020. Available at: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/lpp2020/>

34 Ibid.

35 Rahman, F. (2020) Family spending before the coronavirus crisis helps us to understand its potential impact. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/family-spending-before-the-coronavirus-crisis-helps-us-to-understand-its-potential-impact/>

36 Trades Union Congress, (2019) Getting It Right This Time: Lessons From A Decade Of Failed Austerity. Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/Lessons_from_a_decade_of_failed_austerity.pdf

37 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

38 Corlett, A. (2020) New data shows households were struggling even before coronavirus. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/new-data-shows-households-were-struggling-even-before-coronavirus/>

The primary culprit has been inflation brought on in part due to the depreciation of the pound following the Brexit vote.³⁹ In other words, increases in both overall employment levels and increases in nominal earnings over the past three years were offset by the rise in inflation. However, one concerning phenomenon has been a rise in in-work poverty, as increases in employment post-recession were matched by corresponding rates of in-work poverty.

Historically, work has been considered a route out of poverty. This is no longer the case. In 1997/98, the percentage of workers who were in poverty was 9.9%. Last year, despite a declining unemployment rate, that figure was up to 12.7%. Overall, a majority (56%) of people in poverty are actually in-work. Further, seven in ten children in poverty live in a household where at least one parent works. However, in-work poverty varies greatly by a variety of factors. Workers with disabilities, BAME workers, workers in families with children and single-adult families are at a higher risk of experiencing in-work poverty. It also varies by sector.⁴⁰

Relative poverty among workers in retail, hospitality and leisure is at 19%, more than double the national average.⁴¹ It is 10% for workers in other sectors. These service industry sectors comprise a large portion of the 'gig economy'. The number of workers in zero-hour contracts, common in the gig economy, has risen to a total of 896,000.⁴²

Despite this increase, workers in zero-hour contracts have seen a decline in the average number of hours worked. For some, this is due to the cost of transportation and a lack of availability of childcare services, which restricts the number of hours one can work. However, for many, this is not a choice – 18% of workers in the bottom fifth of hourly wage rates report that they would like to work more hours, but they are not available.⁴³ That's 10% higher than workers in all other wage rate percentiles.

While a lack of hours is a contributing factor, experts agree that the largest driver of in-work poverty has been a decline in in-work benefits and tax credits that have coincided with a rise in the cost of living. There has been a 7% fall in non-pensioner benefits and tax credits that has reduced average income by 3% overall.⁴⁴ In addition to policy changes such as the benefits freeze, introduced in the 2016 Welfare Reform and Work Act, the aforementioned nominal increases in employment income have made some families ineligible for means-tested benefits, meaning household budgets are even more tightly squeezed. As the wealth held by the poorest declines, the result is an increase in inequality in London and the rest of the country.

The Gini coefficient, which measures income distribution and inequality, reveals a slight uptick in inequality since the previous year.⁴⁵ When placed in the context of decades-long trends, national inequality levels have been relatively flat since the 1990s after a dramatic spike beginning in 1980. Nonetheless, the difference in income between the rich and the poor is stark. In 2018/19, the 90:10 ratio, which represents how many times larger income at the 90th percentile (i.e. top 10% of the population) is compared to the 10th percentile (bottom 90%), was at 4.1.⁴⁶ While incomes have stagnated over the past five years for everyone else, the top 10% have seen their income grow 6% in real terms.

39 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

40 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

41 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

42 Trades Union Congress, (2019) Getting It Right This Time: Lessons From A Decade Of Failed Austerity. Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/Lessons_from_a_decade_of_failed_austerity.pdf

43 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

44 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

45 Corlett, A. (2020) New data shows households were struggling even before coronavirus. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/new-data-shows-households-were-struggling-even-before-coronavirus/>

46 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

Despite accounting for around a quarter of the UK's total economic output, the wealth generated in the capital is not distributed equally. The richest 10% of London's residents take home around 31.7% of the net income, while the share held by the poorest is only 1.8%.⁴⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to not only increase inequality, but also the material deprivation of the poorest in London and the rest of the country. The sectors already with the highest rates of in-work poverty are the same sectors that have been shut-down and whose workers are incapable of working remotely. While some may see their income maintained or (by some measures) see a slight increase due to temporary benefit increases, the long-term consequences in the form of career disruption are likely to be damaging.⁴⁸

Additionally, although mass joblessness has so far been largely prevented, future losses are predicted to be concentrated in the lowest paying sectors.⁴⁹ The pandemic has disproportionately affected London's BAME and disabled populations, who already suffer from disproportionate levels of poverty.

47 Trust for London and WPI Economics (2020) London's Poverty Profile: 2020. Available at: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/lpp2020/>

48 Bourquin, P., Joyce, R., and Norris Keiller, A. (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

49 Rahman, F. (2020) Family spending before the coronavirus crisis helps us to understand its potential impact. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/family-spending-before-the-coronavirus-crisis-helps-us-to-understand-its-potential-impact/>

Intersectionality

The term “intersectionality” was first coined in 1989 by black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how an individual’s multiple social and political identities, such as gender, race, or class, can together lead to discrimination or privilege. Whilst originally used in a feminist perspective, intersectionality as a framework is now applied in many fields, including in studies relating to poverty.

For example, child poverty rates are significantly higher for BAME groups, who face “extensive and persistent economic inequality”.⁵⁰ Amongst the most affected, over half of Pakistani children live in poverty in the UK.⁵¹ However, it is important to note that the acronym BAME is problematic in itself in that it does not differentiate the lived experiences of individuals within those groups. Inequalities vary by ethnic group and are worse for Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups than they are for Chinese and Indians.⁵²

Housing affordability and availability

There is a fundamental link between housing and poverty: the level of poverty a person finds themselves in affects their housing circumstances, and (albeit to a lesser extent) a person’s housing circumstances can also affect their level of income and the extent of their poverty. Thus, housing plays a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating poverty levels.

This is apparent when one examines the difference between poverty levels Before Housing Costs (BHC) and After Housing Costs (AHC). For example, 11% of children BHC were found to be in ‘persistent low income’ from 2013-17.⁵³ AHC, the number of children roughly doubles to 20%. Further, children who live in single-parent households are found to have the highest rates of persistent poverty, with a total of 35% affected.⁵⁴

50 Khan, O., (2020). The Colour of Money. How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy. Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Department for Work and Pensions (2019) Income Dynamics: Income movements and the persistence of low incomes. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789100/income-dynamics-income-movements-and-persistence-of-low-incomes-2016-17.pdf

54 Ibid.

Children playing at a project funded by The Childhood Trust.



This situation is exacerbated by the current housing market. The UK is in the midst of a housing crisis, with an estimated 8.4 million people in England living in unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable housing.⁵⁵ In the country, housing prices increased 178% from 2000 to 2018, from an average of £102,000 to £283,000.⁵⁶ During the same period, nominal average weekly earnings have only increased by 67%. However, this increase has not been shared equally. Costs for mortgage payers and homeowners have remained flat, but housing costs have increased significantly for private and social renters.

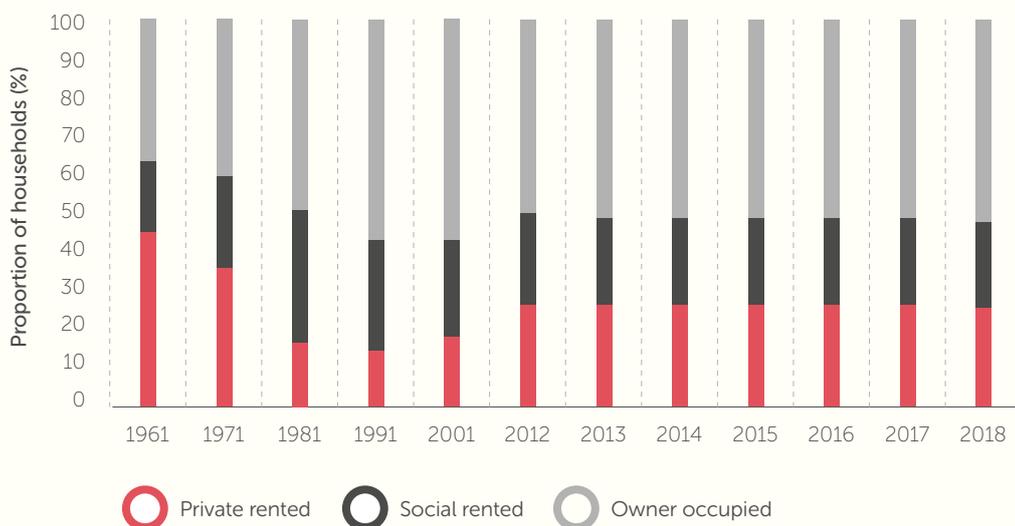
The affordability of housing has one of the most direct impacts on material deprivation affecting families. Housing costs vary significantly by region, but are the most expensive in London, the Southeast and East of England.⁵⁷ On average, households in London spend 18% of their income on housing.⁵⁸ For households in poverty, that increases to 56%.⁵⁹ Among housing cost increases in London, the sharpest rise has been in private renting, with a 29% increase since 2008.⁶⁰

This is particularly relevant because an increasing number of those in poverty are private renters. In 2007/08, for Londoners in poverty, 43% socially rented, 24% privately rented and 33% were owner-occupiers. By 2017/18, 37% socially rented, 39% privately rented and 24% were owner-occupiers.⁶¹ As a result, an increasing number of families have been pushed into unsafe and unaffordable housing arrangements, as roughly half a million London homes do not meet the Government’s Decent Homes Standard for quality housing.

London’s high housing and living costs, if left unchecked, will have a particularly negative impact on future generations. The crisis is already preventing young people from leaving home. Many are currently living in ‘concealed households’, which is when one or more young adult children live with parents or relatives. More than a third those aged 20 to 34 live with parents or a legal guardian, up from one fourth 20 years ago.⁶²

Proportion of London households by type of tenure over time (1961-2018)

Census data (1961-2011)



55 BBC News (2019) Housing crisis affects estimated 8.4 million in England – research. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49787913>

56 Centre for Labour and Social Studies (2019) The facts & the fixes: Housing. Available at: <http://classonline.org.uk/docs/housing-2.pdf>

57 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

58 Trust for London and WPI Economics (2020) London’s Poverty Profile: 2020. Available at: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/lpp2020/>

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

Pre-Covid-19

The coronavirus pandemic caused many of the Childhood Trust's partner organisations to close their doors during the lockdown.

Solidarity Sports is an organisation in West London that gathers children around sports, the arts, mentorship and adventure and is viewed as a lifeline for their beneficiaries. One woman, who fled from her native country and abusive husband with her five year-old daughter, received much needed help after being placed in unsuitable temporary housing by the council. The mother describes the housing as "filthy, with syringes, vermin and piles of litter. The flat was covered in mould and a pipe was leaking.

The flat above was used for prostitution", keeping the daughter up at night. "One day, she was almost raped in the alleyway. After she was attacked, she had night terrors. I knew we had to leave again. I told the council, but they said I had to wait 12 years". However, with the help of Solidarity Sports who contacted the housing association, the council and the local MP, the family has since been relocated to a safe and clean flat. The mother thanked the charity saying "I don't know what I would do in my life without you. You are angels. I am so happy with my new flat. My nightmare is over".

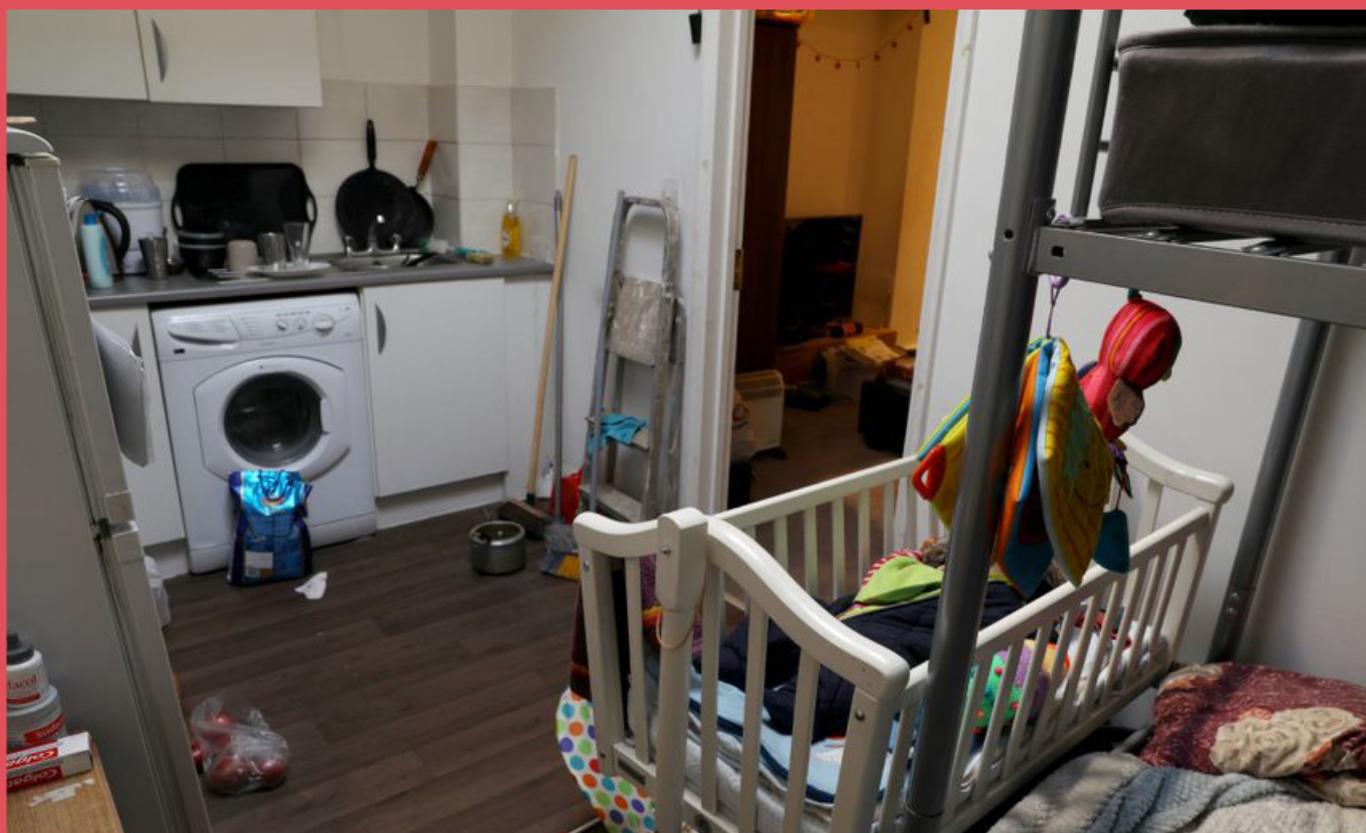


Photo by Katie Wilson featured in The Childhood Trust's Bedrooms of London exhibition, which made visible the living conditions of some of the 700,000 children in poverty in London.

According to the New Economics Foundation (NEF), this housing crisis has largely been brought on by bad housing policy.⁶³ During the post-war period, a stable housing system was achieved by providing the working class with social housing, while the needs of the middle class were met through homeownership. This system was largely abandoned in the 1980s, for the Right to Buy system, which encouraged social renters to purchase their homes, thus increasing individual homeownership and leading to an overall reduction in available social housing stock. Ultimately, an overreliance on the private market and the loss of millions of social homes has led to the current crisis.

Social housing is viewed as a way to provide lower income individuals and families with affordable housing and security, thus offering a way to address the housing crisis. By offering affordable rents, renters are able to save significantly more spare income.⁶⁴ Additionally, affordable rents are more likely to offer security and less frequent moves, meaning renters are able to build relationships with the neighbours and communities and invest in their homes. Nonetheless, there has been a sharp fall in the percentage of the population living in social housing. In 1981, 32% of the British population lived in social housing, whereas in 2018, only 17% did.⁶⁵

This can largely be attributed to the dramatic decline in social housing stock. In 1979, local councils owned 5.2 million social properties, but by the 1990s, that number had fallen to under 1.6 million.⁶⁶ In 2018-19, only 6,287 new socially rented homes were built. This is far short of the current demand. As of 2019, there are over a million families on waiting lists for social housing, and it is estimated that the real current social housing need is roughly 3.1 million.

An increase of families in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping is an inevitable result of the state's failure to provide adequate and affordable housing for low-income households. The NEF estimates that new homeless families outnumber new social homes at a rate of 8 to 1. Across the country, the rate of rough sleeping has doubled since 2010.

London currently has the highest concentration of homeless children, with roughly 88,000 homeless and in temporary accommodation as of early 2019.⁶⁷ This astonishing figure is equivalent to one in every 24 children. Because these children are not rough sleeping, the challenges they face are less visible and thus often underestimated by many people. However, there are currently no regulations around the quality of housing or the length of stay within temporary accommodation, and many children lived in cramped and inadequate living spaces.⁶⁸

In the wake of this crisis, government response has centred on promoting 'affordable' housing, an umbrella term that includes social housing, but is increasingly delivered through the so-called 'planning system'. This is where new developers are required to build a certain number of 'affordable' homes as a condition of planning permission. Not only does this often fail to meet demand, especially with developers frequently using legal loopholes to dodge requirements, but the definition of 'affordable' can be up to 80% of market rents.⁶⁹ While social housing is still being built, local councils are often dependent on central government funding, which has been significantly scaled down in favour of the aforementioned 'planning' approach. Thus, the share of actual social housing within the affordable umbrella definition has fallen steeply, from 75% in the early 1990s to 11% last year.

63 Beswick, J., McCann, D. and Wheatley, H. (2019) Building The Social Homes We Need: Solving The Land And Capacity Challenges. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/11/building-the-social-homes-we-need>

64 Mattinson, D., Knox, A., Downes, N., Nichols, C., Van der Steeg, S., Wilson, D., Langdale, E. and Robinson, A. (2019) Social Housing In England After Grenfell. BritainThinks. Available at: https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1642655/Britain_Thinks_final_report.pdf

65 Centre for Labour and Social Studies (2019) The facts & the fixes: Housing. Available at: <http://classonline.org.uk/docs/housing-2.pdf>

66 Beswick, J., McCann, D. and Wheatley, H. (2019) Building The Social Homes We Need: Solving The Land And Capacity Challenges. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/11/building-the-social-homes-we-need>

67 Butler, P. (2019) At least 135,000 children in Britain to be homeless at Christmas. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/dec/03/at-least-135000-children-in-britain-will-be-homeless-at-christmas?CMP=share_btn_link

68 Rosenthal, D.M., Ucci, M., Heys, M., Hayward, A., and Lakhanpaul, M. (2020) Impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable children in temporary accommodation in the UK. The Lancet Public Health, 5 (5).

69 Beswick, J., McCa Beswick, J., McCann, D. and Wheatley, H. (2019) Building The Social Homes We Need: Solving The Land And Capacity Challenges. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/11/building-the-social-homes-we-need>

Child playing at Jamie's Farm, one of The Childhood Trust's funded projects



Austerity and Social Welfare

The ten years (2010–2020) since the start of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government have been marked by cuts in social services and is often called the “decade of austerity”. A 2019 analysis from the New Economics Foundation (NEF) found that “deliberate policy from government over the past nine years has had the standalone effect of suppressing incomes and expenditures in the economy by under £1,500 per person and more than £3,600 per household”, hitting the poorest the hardest.⁷⁰ In 2018, the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, wrote a scathing report on the UK’s austerity policies, stating that UK austerity measures were in breach of four UN human rights agreements.⁷¹

Austerity measures relevant to child poverty include cuts in funding to local authorities and changes in social service provisions and benefits. As child poverty is on the rise, cuts in funding for family support services have also increased in England.⁷² Between 2010/11 and 2017/18, children and youth services funding for local authorities decreased by nearly a third. Up to 1,000 Sure Start Children’s Centres have closed and hundreds of libraries have shut.⁷³ These centres were created to improve outcomes for disadvantaged families by offering parental health, early childcare and family support.

Since 2011–12, nearly half of London council youth services have been defunded.⁷⁴ As a consequence, more than 100 centres and projects have closed down and the additional £1 million planned cuts for the 2019–20 financial year would “devastate services for young people in London”.⁷⁵ Not all boroughs are affected equally – whilst Kensington and Chelsea face the most cuts for 2019/20 (losing over £1m), a handful of councils such as Newham are increasing their youth budgets.⁷⁶ Youth centres are important and can help keep children stay away from violence. Evidence suggests that young people are most likely to be stabbed two hours after school, when youth clubs would be at their busiest.⁷⁷ Yet, youth clubs are closing at an alarming rate and the number of teenagers stabbed to death in the capital has reached its highest level since 2008.⁷⁸

In parallel, food banks have sprouted all over the country. In 2018, food bank use almost quadrupled, compared with 2012 and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and economic recession that may follow will only worsen these figures.⁷⁹ London’s funding gap is expected to be one of the worst despite the acknowledgement that the funding has been “insufficient to address need” for a decade.⁸⁰ This was before the coronavirus pandemic, which wiped local authorities’ financial reserves, causing them to near bankruptcy.⁸¹

70 Stirling, A., (2019) Austerity is subduing the UK economy by £3,600 per household this year. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/02/austerity-is-subduing-uk-economy-by-more-than-3-600-per-household-this-year>

71 Alston, P., (2018) Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

72 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

73 The Sutton Trust (2018) Stop Start? Survival, decline or closure? Children’s centres in England. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/StopStart-FINAL.pdf>

74 Berry, S., (2019) London’s lost youth services: 2019. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sian_berry_am_london_youth_services_2019.pdf

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Campbell, D., (2018) Knife crime: stagger school leaving times, say London doctors. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/06/knife-stagger-school-leaving-times-say-london-doctors>.

78 Mackintosh, T., and Lee, S., (2019) London knife crime: Number of teenagers stabbed to death hits 11-year high. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-50507433>

79 The Trussell Trust (2018) End of Year Stats. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-yearstats/>

80 Arnold, S., (2019) Updating the Local Authority funding gap. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/10/updating-the-local-authority-funding-gap>

81 BBC News (2020) Coronavirus: UK councils fear bankruptcy amid Covid-19 costs. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53069772>

Second, the reform of the benefits system – which saw six key benefits under the old benefits system simplified into one payment under the new system of Universal Credit – was a large component of the government’s welfare reforms. Yet, many households are worse off under Universal Credit, experiencing worse finances, mental health and career prospects.^{82,83} For example, many struggle to make ends meet during the five-week delay in receiving their first payment and may take out an advance payment to help them make ends meet during this time, beginning their benefit claim in debt. Additionally, accessing benefits is done entirely online, yet the most vulnerable are often less digitally literate, as 1.9 million households in the UK do not have access to Internet due to non-affordability⁸⁴ and 16% of the population is unable to fill out an online application form.⁸⁵ Libraries, increasingly closing down, have also become crucial to the many who need assistance in filling out Universal Credit applications, including those who do not speak English. Local charities often step in to help claimants apply.

The far-reaching austerity measures introduced by the coalition government as a result of the global recession still have repercussions today. Analysis by the NEF shows that as of 2019, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (the monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a country in a given time period per inhabitant) was still lower than 2008 levels.⁸⁶ In other words, average living standards in the UK have yet to recover from pre-recession levels. The impact of coronavirus in the long-term will be even more detrimental.

Finally, the impact of austerity in the UK has a disproportionate effect on the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities, single parents, children and the disabled.⁸⁷ Often households in poverty meet all those criteria.

82 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2019) Where Next for Universal Credit and Tackling Poverty?. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/where-next-universal-credit-and-tackling-poverty>

83 Cheetham et al. (2018) 'It's hitting people that can least afford it the hardest'. The impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in two North East England localities: a qualitative study. Gateshead Council. Available at: https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/10665/The-impact-of-the-roll-out-of-Universal-Credit-intwo-North-East-England-localities-a-qualitative-study-November2018/pdf/Universal_Credit_Report_2018pdf.pdf?m=636778831081630000

84 DevicesDotNow (2020) Interim Impact Report #2: 24 March – 26 June. Available at: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/interim_impact_report_2_devicesdotnow_29_june_2020_0.pdf

85 Lloyds Bank (2018) UK Consumer Digital Index 2018. Available at: <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-withus/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.asp>

86 Stirling, A., (2019) GDP per head today is still £128 below 2008 levels. New Economics Foundation. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/09/when-adjusted-for-the-lived-experience-of-inflation-gdp-per-head-today-is-still-128-below-2008-levels>

87 Alston, P., (2018) Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

Child playing at Cardinal Hume Centre,
one of The Childhood Trust's funded projects



Impact of child poverty

Education

Attainment and Exclusion:

Socioeconomic inequalities persist in education, with young people in more deprived areas continuing to have significantly lower levels of attainment during secondary school.⁸⁸ According to the Mayor of London's Office, by the age of 16, the most disadvantaged are on average one year behind their peers. Additionally, London hosts a very high proportion of England's disadvantaged students, with over a sixth of pupils qualifying for free school meals (FSM).⁸⁹ These students do markedly worse than their peers who do not receive FSM.⁹⁰ Among the groups with the highest poverty rates are minority ethnic groups. Black and Gypsy/Roma populations are particularly behind in terms of educational attainment. Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) also do worse across educational markers, alongside a general underfunding and lack of support for SEND education.⁹¹

There are also inequalities in education exclusion. In 2012, the Department of Education found that those eligible for school meals were four times more likely to be punished with a permanent exclusion than those who were not.⁹² This not only results in more deprived children losing out on education, but also results in stunted socio-emotional development, poor health outcomes, lower rate of employment, and a higher chance to become a victim or perpetrator of crime.⁹³ Furthermore, 42% of prisoners have a history of permanent exclusion from school, and 1/5 children in custody struggle with learning difficulties.⁹⁴

88 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf

89 Department for Education (2019). Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals, Borough. Available at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/pupils-eligible-free-school-meals-borough>

90 Education Policy Institute (2017) Closing the gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage. Available at: https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Closing-the-Gap_EPI-.pdf

91 Ibid.

92 Institute for Fiscal Studies (2019) 2019 annual report on education spending in England. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14369>

93 Ibid.

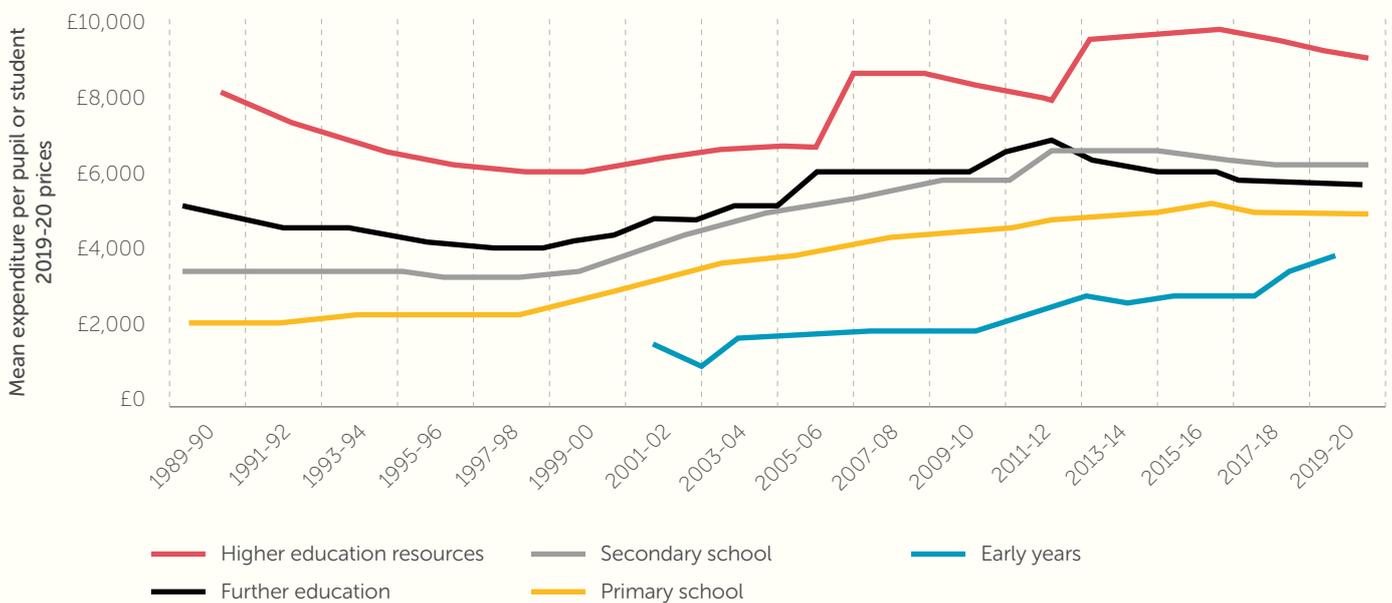
94 Capita-One (2016) Exploring the link between poor educational outcomes and youth crime. Available at: <https://www.capita-one.co.uk/resources/blog/exploring-link-between-poor-educational-outcomes-and-youth-crime>

Spending and Austerity:

Exacerbating these issues, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report has shown that there were cuts of 8% per pupil in secondary education in England between 2009/2010 to now, as shown below⁹⁵. This includes a 57% cut from local authorities. This is partly due to class size, which saw a 17% increase.

Childcare and youth services are essential for young children and their parents. However, in recent years, there has been a shift from targeted support of low-income families, with local spending on early years services slipping from 45% in 2007-08, to only 27% of spending in 2019-20. Spending shifted from early childhood development programmes such as Sure Start to safeguarding and crisis intervention.

Spending per pupil or student per year at different stages of education: actual and plans (2019-20 prices)



95 Ibid.

Health

Poverty engenders health outcomes for children in the capital, with stark inequalities present across income and ethnicity. As detailed in the Health Equity in England⁹⁶ report by the Institute of Health Equity, life expectancy in England has stalled since 2010. Furthermore, figures followed a steep social gradient. Life expectancy has fallen in the most deprived areas. Poverty is also worse for children with intersecting needs. For example, 4 in every 10 children with disabilities in England are in poverty⁹⁷, and families which include a disabled person are 54% more likely to be in poverty than those without⁹⁸.

Environmental Health:

Green spaces are positively linked to a number of health markers. These include, but are not limited to, healthy weight (Liu et al, 2007) and increased physical activity⁹⁹, improved cognitive function and memory¹⁰⁰ and a decrease in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cancer.¹⁰² This coincides with a general decrease in expected health problems over a five year period.^{103 104}, They also create significant improvements in mental health and are linked to¹⁰⁵ improved social interactions, sense of identity and belonging¹⁰⁶ and positive mood.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, for children in poverty, green spaces can mediate health inequalities that result from low-income and lower healthcare access¹⁰⁸; however, access to green spaces is unequal, with those in poverty less likely to have access, which results in further inequality. According to the National Children's Bureau¹⁰⁹, children in poverty are nine times less likely to have access to green spaces in their neighbourhood.

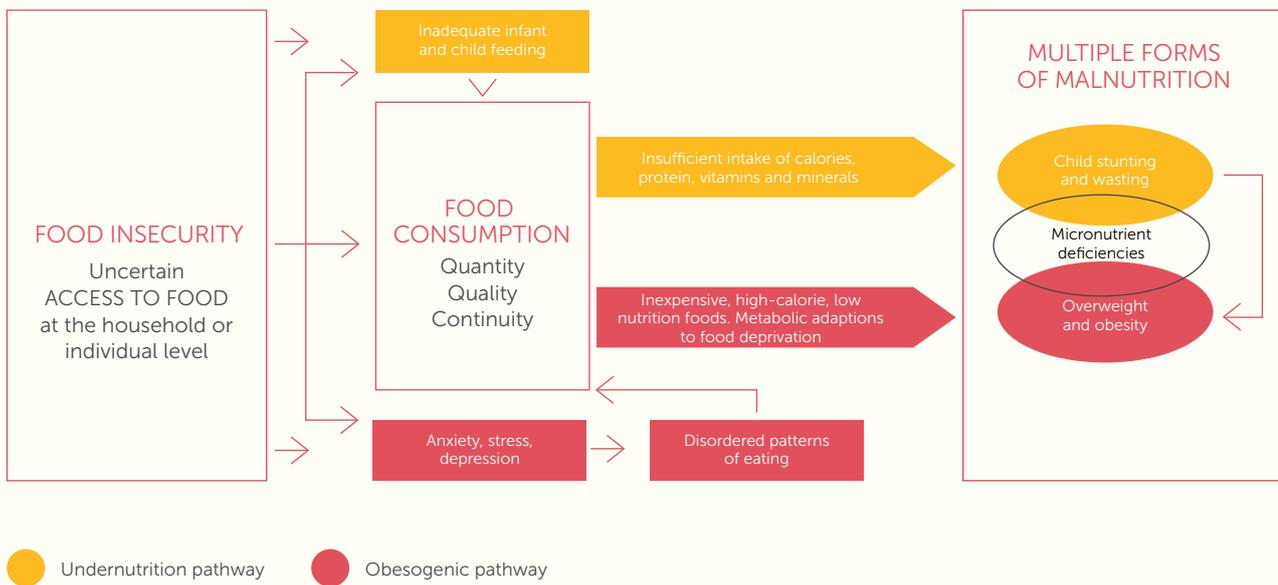
Unfortunately, even if London's children living in poverty have access to green spaces, they are exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution. Although air pollution is being reduced steadily¹¹⁰, it still contributes to roughly 40,000 deaths per year and damages the health of millions more.¹¹¹ This impacts children on a daily basis, particularly in areas of lower income and higher population density. A recent study from the Mayor of London's¹¹² office monitored air quality exposure of 250 children on their way to school, revealing that pollution is roughly five times higher on the journey to school than during lessons.

- 96 Institute of Health Equity (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. Available at: https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Health%20Equity%20in%20England_The%20Marmot%20Review%2010%20Years%20On_executive%20summary_web.pdf
- 97 The Children's Society (n.d.) 4 in every 10 Disabled children living in poverty. Available at: https://www.childrengroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/4_in_10_reportfinal.pdf
- 98 Trust for London (2020) Disability and Poverty Data. Available at: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/disability-and-poverty/>
- 99 Coombes E, Jones AP & Hillsdon M (2010) 'The relationship of physical activity and overweight to objectively measured green space accessibility and use'. *Social Science & Medicine*, vol 70, no 6, pp 816–22.
- 100 Lee ACK & Maheswaran R (2010) 'The health benefits of urban green spaces: a review of the evidence'. *Journal of Public Health*.
- 101 Flouri, Papachristou & Midouhas (2018) The role of neighbourhood greenspace in children's spatial working memory. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(2).
- 102 Department of Health (2012) 'Resources for commissioning Let's Get Moving interventions'. Department of Health website. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/let-s-get-moving-revised-commissioning-guidance
- 103 Groenewegen PP, de Vries S, Verheij RA, Spreeuwenberg P (2003) 'Natural environments – healthy environments? An exploratory analysis of the relationship between greenspace and health'. *Environment and Planning*, 35 (10), p 1717–31.
- 104 Takano T, Nakamura K, Wantanabe M (2002) 'Urban residential environments and senior citizens' longevity in megacity areas: the importance of walkable green spaces'. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, vol 56, no 12, pp 913–18.
- 105 Maas J, Verheij RA, Groenewegen PP, de Vries S, Spreeuwenberg P (2006) 'Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation?' *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol 60, no 7, pp 587–92.
- 106 Pinder R, Kessel A, Green J, Grundy C (2009) 'Exploring perceptions of health and the environment: a qualitative study of Thames Chase Community Forest'. *Health & Place*, vol 15, no 1, pp 49–56.
- 107 White MP (2013) 'Would you be happier living in a greener urban area? A fixed-effects analysis of panel data'. *Psychological Science*, vol 24, no 6, pp 920–8.
- 108 Mitchell R, Popham F (2008) 'Effect of exposure to the natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study'. *Lancet*, vol 372, pp 1655–60.
- 109 National Children's Bureau (2013) Greater Expectations: Raising aspirations for our children. London: National Children's Bureau. Available at: www.ncb.org.uk/12976
- 110 Mudway, Dundas, Wood, Marlin... (2019) Impact of London's low emission zone on air quality and children's respiratory health: a sequential annual cross-sectional study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 4(1).
- 111 Taylor (2019) 'It is so scary': how the UK's filthy air is sending children to A&E. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/05/you-can-see-her-struggling-the-family-thinking-of-moving-countries-to-avoid-the-uks-filthy-air>
- 112 Mayor of London (2019) London kids exposed to 5 times more air pollution on school run. Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/walking-to-school-on-back-streets-halves-pollution>

Nutrition and Food Security:

Research leading up to the first London Children’s Food Insecurity Summit found that 17% of parents have children in food insecurity. This number is higher for single parents (36%) and Black parents (32%). An additional 16% of households are unable to provide balanced meals due to low income.¹¹³ Food insecurity leads to a number of adverse impacts, as detailed by the graphic below from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.¹¹⁴

Relatedly, 37% of children are overweight or obese. These numbers are heavily influenced by poverty and marginalisation. In fact, obesity rates are three times higher in the poorest boroughs, likely due to healthy food in England costing three times more than unhealthy food.¹¹⁵ These issues, in turn, are linked to coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and many forms of cancer later in life.¹¹⁶



113 Barker (2020) 400,000 London children 'are food insecure'. Fresh Produce Journal. Available at: www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/180602/400000-london-children-are-food-insecure
 114 FAO, UNICEF, IFAD, WFP & WHO (2018) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World. Rome, FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/I9553en.pdf>
 115 Ibid.
 116 Steel et al. (2018) Changes in health in the countries of the UK and 150 English Local Authority areas 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. The Lancet, 392(10158).

A boy receiving a hot meal at a project funded by The Childhood Trust.



Mental Health:

“Mental health problems” range from mild, moderate to severe and ensuing conditions. These include Common Mental Disorders such as Major Depressive Disorder (depression), to more serious conditions such as schizophrenia. Regardless of categorisation, children in poverty are more significantly impacted. A study by the Children’s Society showed that, amongst adolescents in poverty, 29% do not feel optimistic, 22% do not feel useful and 20% feel like a failure¹¹⁷. This is mutually reinforced by feelings of stigmatisation, classism, and being bullied for – or feeling embarrassed by – their socio-economic standing. Furthermore, Mind has shown that stigma leads to further symptoms of mental health issues, such as loneliness and loss of confidence¹¹⁸.

There are knock-on effects in other areas, as well. For example, in a study from UCL Institute of Education, the Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Rand Corporation¹¹⁹, children and young people who suffer from mental health issues struggle in their employment prospects, it was found that adults who struggled with mental health issues as children work fewer hours for less money and are more likely to be unemployed. More generally, people with mental health issues are more likely to be in debt, live in areas with higher crime, live in areas of environmental neglect, or poor housing.¹²⁰

117 The Children’s Society (2016) Poor Mental Health: the links between child poverty and mental health problems. Available at: https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/poor_mental_health_report.pdf

118 Rethink Mental Illness & Mind (2013) Time to Change: Children and Young People’s programme Interim pilot evaluation results, April 2012 to September 2013. Available at: <https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/sites/default/files/ttc-children-yp-programme.pdf>

119 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013) Does money affect children’s outcomes? Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/does-money-affect-children%E2%80%99s-outcomes>

120 Boardman, Dogra & Hindley (2015) Mental health and poverty in the UK – time for change?. BJ Psych International, 12(2), pp 27-28.

COVID-19's Impact on Child Poverty

At the time of writing, the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on child poverty in London are still unclear. However, some trends have emerged as a result of the lockdown and the virus.

Education

The lockdown forced schools to shut their doors to most pupils. The attainment gap between poorer and wealthier children has widened by at least 46%¹²¹ and possibly by up to 75%.¹²² Research has shown that students in private schools are twice as likely to have weekly online lessons than those in state schools.¹²³ Further, many students in poorer households faced the additional challenges of the digital divide and finding an adequate study space. Additionally, summer holidays, coupled with social isolation and hunger and/or poor diets will have a negative effect on the educational levels of low-income children. Spelling and mathematics are subjects that are at risk. Indeed, in normal circumstances, children can take up to seven weeks to make up loss of learning during the summer break.¹²⁴

However, the government has announced a £1bn catch-up fund to support pupils who have been out of school because of the pandemic. It includes £650m funding for the National Tutoring Programme to offer tuition through schools with additional support for students who missed out the most. This is encouraging given that work undertaken in the past decade in closing the attainment gap could be undone because of school closures.¹²⁵ However, some have pointed out that catch-up funding for pupils in England is “badly targeted” and may not prevent further widening of the attainment gap. Before the pandemic, the Education Policy Institute found that poorer students’ learning was 18 months behind by the time they obtained their GCSEs, yet the same amount of catch-up funds will be allocated to students in affluent areas as in the poorest areas which serve the most disadvantaged.

Still, the pandemic could damage children’s prospects in life, according to a recent London School of Economics study.¹²⁶ Young people under the age of 25 face declining social mobility in a context of declining “absolute mobility”: falling real wages, fewer opportunities and stagnant or declining living standards”.¹²⁷ The pandemic has worsened already existing inequalities.

121 Sharpe et al., (2020) The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020. National Foundation for Education Research. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_covid_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf

122 Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment. Available at: [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_\(2020\)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_(2020)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf)

123 Cullinae, C., and Montacute, R., (2020) COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown. The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>

124 Forsey, A., (2017). Hungry holidays: A report on hunger amongst children during school holidays. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger.

125 Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment. Available at: [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_\(2020\)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_(2020)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf)

126 Major, L. E., and Machin, S., (2020) Covid-19 and social mobility. A CEP Covid-19 analysis. Paper No.004. Centre for Economic Performance. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/e-May-20/COVID-generation-faces-dark-age-of-low-social-mobility>

127 Ibid.

A boy painting at the Loughborough Community Centre, one of the projects funded by The Childhood Trust's COVID-19 emergency response campaign, Champions for Children.



A boy supported by Camp Simcha, a project funded by The Childhood Trust, sharing his art with a youth worker over video



Employment

To prevent mass unemployment, the government announced a furlough scheme, which allowed up to 9 million employees to keep their jobs whilst their salaries were partly paid by the government.¹²⁸ Despite this, many were still made redundant and many more risk losing their jobs before the furlough scheme ends in October.

UK childcare is expensive relative to the European average¹²⁹ and could partly explain why 40% of women in the country work part-time.¹³⁰ In the first 11 weeks of the pandemic, part-time employment – of which women represent three quarters – fell by 70%.¹³¹ This decline is likely to affect lower-income earners and women, propelling many deeper in poverty and precarity. When compared on an hourly basis, average part-time wages are nearly 20% lower than full time ones.¹³²

Mothers are nearly twice as likely to lose their jobs than fathers, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies.¹³³ On top of this, they do significantly more unpaid emotional and affective labour at home, such as taking care of children and cooking.¹³⁴ During lockdown, they are spending an additional hour every day than fathers taking care of children, worsening the existing gender childcare gaps.¹³⁵

These factors, as well as the fact that women typically work in lower-paid jobs, may contribute to a worsening gender pay gap in the near future.

In addition to experiencing higher rates of child poverty than their white British counterparts, BAME women are also more likely to be employed in low-paid work and live in poor housing conditions. For example, 30% of Bangladeshi households and 15% of Black African households are overcrowded versus 2% for white British.¹³⁶ This, alongside the fact that ethnic minorities have higher rates of illnesses compared to white British has resulted in ethnic minorities being more vulnerable to coronavirus. Additionally, BAME groups are on average twice as likely to be unemployed and be in low skilled and low paying occupations.¹³⁷ Differences in employment can explain some of the variation in child poverty rates for ethnic minorities compared with white British groups. Finally, these differences show that BAME groups are more vulnerable to coronavirus induced economic shocks.

128 Verity, A., (2020) Coronavirus: More than 9 million expected to be furloughed. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52209790>

129 BBC News (2018) Childcare: Do UK parents pay the most in the world? Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42966047>

130 Devine, B., F., and Foley, N., (2020) Women and the Economy. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06838/SN06838.pdf>

131 Sangster, K., (2020) Coronavirus: Part-time jobs plummet by almost 70%. Yahoo News. Available at: https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/coronavirus-jobs-plummet-by-almost-70-154315358.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLmNvbS88guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACuD557HjGZOT_rcc2B2gXAgg-jXEj7PJ0oIDEnIFRksgLaTqXEmecPuNJPAbXr3fkKqQuGkblxZylqmZ-U2wHrPuTGXH-eQ_HnqyNAmfa-S4VjVuq-hCCUXXzQshEzDNz1KEjJsrqgOb0KF68-2FMDIsnihmFoenoLh4gB8ICB

132 Women's Budget Group (2019) Women, Employment and Earnings. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EMPLOYMENT-2019.pdf>

133 Andrew, A., et al. (2020) Parents, especially mothers, paying heavy price for lockdown. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14861>

134 Ferrant, G., et al. (2014) Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. OECD. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

135 COVID Inequality Project (2020) Available at: <https://sites.google.com/view/covidinequality/home>

136 Haque, Z., (2020) Coronavirus will increase race inequalities. The Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/coronavirus-will-increase-race-inequalities>

137 Cabinet Office (2017) Race Disparity Audit. Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

The highest age standardised diagnosis rates of COVID-19 per 100,000 population were in people of Black ethnic groups

Females

486

Male

649

and the lowest were in people of White ethnic groups

Females

220

Male

224

An analysis of survival among confirmed COVID-19 cases shows that, after accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared to people of White British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Black Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British. Death rates from COVID-19 were higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups. This is the opposite of what is seen in previous years, when the all cause mortality rates were lower in Asian and Black ethnic groups.

Therefore, the inequality in COVID-19 mortality between ethnic groups is the opposite of that seen for all causes of death in previous years. Comparing to previous years, all cause mortality was almost 4 times higher than expected among Black males for this period, almost 3 times higher in Asian males and almost 2 times higher in White males. Among females, deaths were almost 3 times higher in this period in Black, Mixed and Other females, and 2.4 times higher in Asian females compared with 1.6 times in White females.

These analyses were not able to include the effect of occupation. This is an important shortcoming because occupation is associated with risk of being exposed to COVID-19 and we know some key occupations have a high proportion of workers from BAME groups. These analyses were also not able to include the effect of comorbidities or obesity. These are also important factors because they are associated with the risk of death and are more commonly seen in some BAME groups. Other evidence has shown that when these are included, the difference in risk of death among hospitalised patients is greatly reduced.”

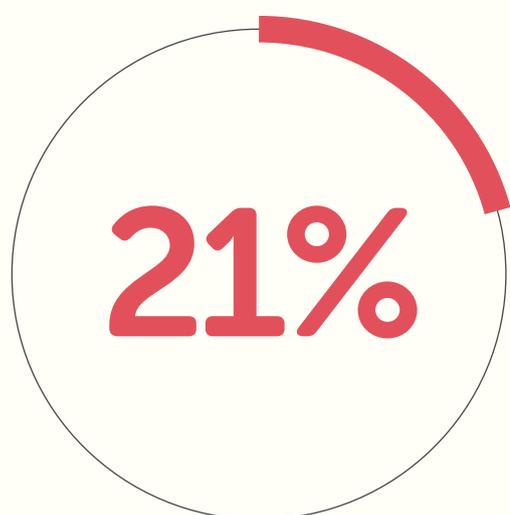
Source: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908434/Disparities_in_the_risk_and_outcomes_of_COVID_August_2020_update.pdf

Comorbidities: Among deaths with COVID-19 mentioned on the death certificate, a higher percentage mentioned diabetes, hypertensive diseases, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and dementia than all cause death certificates. Diabetes was mentioned on 21% of death certificates where COVID-19 was also mentioned. This finding is consistent with other studies that have reported a higher risk of death from COVID-19 among patients with diabetes. This proportion was higher in all Disparities in the risk and outcomes from COVID-19 8 BAME groups when compared to White ethnic groups and was 43% in the Asian group and 45% in the Black group. The same disparities were seen for hypertensive disease (same source as above).

Housing

The pandemic poses many additional problems to those living in cramped housing. Not only is social distancing difficult due to overcrowding and shared spaces, hygiene measures are also challenging to implement because of limited access to soap, water and bathrooms. In addition to this, parental mental health issues increase, notably for single mothers who are at an increased risk of depression linked to housing instability.¹³⁸

Diabetes was mentioned
on 21% of death certificates
where COVID-19 was also
mentioned



138 Marcal, K., (2017) Timing of housing crises: Impacts on maternal depression. *Social Work in Mental Health*, 16(3), pp.266-283. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30245596/>

Welfare

As of mid-May, almost two million people had signed up to universal credit.¹³⁹ Low-paid workers are those who have been the hardest hit by the pandemic with almost a third losing their jobs or being furloughed.¹⁴⁰

Newly unemployed individuals and families will see their finances stretched. A couple with two children is entitled to £266 a week. For comparison, the median private rent for two bedrooms in London is £1,400 per month or £350 per week¹⁴¹, with rents in Zones 1 and 2 being substantially more expensive. Moreover, apart from the summer holiday Free School Meal scheme detailed below, no interventions were made within the social security system that were directly targeted at children and families.

Hunger

A Childhood Trust survey with 64 of its partner organisations conducted in March found that 84% believed that children would go hungry due to loss of parental earnings. During lockdown, the number of households with children going hungry has doubled, reaching news highs: nearly 20% went hungry.¹⁴²

In 2019, over one in six school children were eligible for Free School Meals in London.¹⁴³ This figure is set to rise due to COVID-19. Frontline charities and community groups helping feed the hungry have tripled in number since the beginning of the lockdown.¹⁴⁴ Charities have announced a surge in food bank use in April. The Independent Food Aid Network recorded a 175% increase in food parcels in April 2020, compared to a year earlier and twice as many families with children received food parcels in that same time period.¹⁴⁵

These figures paint a sad picture as families struggle to put food on the table.

For now, and for long before the pandemic, food banks and the third sector have been able to step in and fill a gap, this has been with stretched resources which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, the Trussell Trust, the largest network of foodbanks in the UK, has warned that food banks will be unable to keep up with exponential demand related to the pandemic and subsequent financial hardship. The charity stated that food parcels were no substitute to increased benefits for low-income families, the suspension of the two-child limit on benefits and benefits cap.¹⁴⁶ The Trussell Trust also urged the government to “reduce the flow of people who need food banks rather than increasing the levels of support we are able to meet within these food banks”.¹⁴⁷

The government was slow to address concerns about children going hungry during the summer. A public campaign by a footballer – Marcus Rashford – forced Number 10 to make a U-turn on its summer Free School Meals policy. The £15-a week voucher scheme over the summer prevented some children from going hungry.¹⁴⁸ Yet for many, living on the breadline does not guarantee a healthy diet as many may lack time and kitchen facilities to cook healthy meals from scratch. Through a complex relationship, obesity is linked to poverty. In England, the poorest 20% ten-year old boys are twice as likely to be obese as the richest; London, in comparison with “peer global cities”, has the highest rate of child poverty at 22%.^{149, 150} This can be explained by a number of factors including low incomes and associated financial strain as well as a higher density of fast-food outlets and corner shops in deprived urban areas.¹⁵¹

139 Butler, P. (2020) Food banks' stark warning to government: we can't do this alone. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/15/food-banks-warning-government-poor-families-coronavirus?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

140 Gardiner, L., and Slaughter, H. (2020) The effects of the coronavirus crisis on workers. Resolution Foundation. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-effects-of-the-coronavirus-crisis-on-workers/>

141 Mayor of London (2020) London Rents Map. Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/improving-private-rented-sector/london-rents-map>

142 Iqbal, N. (2020). Exclusive: almost a fifth of UK homes with children go hungry in lockdown. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/03/exclusive-fifth-of-uk-homes-children-hungry-lockdown>

143 Department for Education (2019). Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals, Borough. Available at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/pupils-eligible-free-school-meals-borough>

144 Smithers, R., (2020). Hundreds of charities in UK added to waiting list for food redistribution. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/21/hundreds-of-charities-in-uk-added-to-waiting-list-for-food-redistribution-fareshare-coronavirus?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

145 Butler, P. (2020). Record numbers used UK food banks in first month of lockdown. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/03/record-numbers-used-uk-food-banks-in-first-month-of-lockdown>

146 Butler, P. (2020) Food banks' stark warning to government: we can't do this alone. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/15/food-banks-warning-government-poor-families-coronavirus?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

147 Ibid.

148 Syal, R., et al. (2020) Johnson makes U-turn on free school meals after Rashford campaign. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/16/boris-johnson-faces-tory-rebellion-over-marcus-rashfords-school-meals-call>

149 Public Health England (2020) National child measurement programme (NCMP): trends in child BMI. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-child-measurement-programme-ncmp-trends-in-child-bmi-between-2006-to-2007-and-2018-to-2019/national-child-measurement-programme-ncmp-trends-in-child-bmi>

150 Guy and St Thomas' Charity (2018) Bite Size: Breaking down the challenge of inner-city childhood obesity. Available at: https://www.gsttcharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/Bite_Size_Report.pdf

151 Guy and St Thomas' Charity (2018) Bite Size: Breaking down the challenge of inner-city childhood obesity. Available at: https://www.gsttcharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/Bite_Size_Report.pdf



Physical and mental health

Despite the virus not affecting children as severely as adults, its disruptive impact on ethnic minorities and their families is worth noting. Ethnic minorities are at greater risk of coronavirus than white British groups. In particular, Black British Africans and British Pakistanis in English hospitals were overrepresented by a factor of 2.5 relative to the white population in May. Further, nearly twice as many Black Caribbean people had died from the virus than white Britons, research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed.¹⁵² There are a number of possible explanations for this, including an overrepresentation of Black Africans in key worker roles and prevalent underlying health conditions in older Pakistani or Black Caribbean background people. Ethnic minorities constituting the acronym “BAME” have different socio-economic vulnerabilities. For example, Bangladeshi men are four times more likely to work in shutdown industries compared with white British men whereas Indians do not face as significant economic risks.¹⁵³

Additionally, there are correlations between increased air pollution and COVID-19 infections and hospitalisation. Air pollution is worse in poorer areas, which are also predominantly inhabited by minorities.¹⁵⁴ This is illustrated by the fact that waste incinerators are three times as likely to be close to deprived and ethnically diverse areas in the country.¹⁵⁵

Lockdown and the coronavirus crisis are causing emotional distress to young people, who are at a high risk of suffering from mental health issues. Most young people between 16 to 24 year olds with pre-existing mental health problems and four in ten without mental health problems reported higher levels of stress as a result of the lockdown, a recent study shows.¹⁵⁶ Almost half surveyed also said they were overeating as a coping mechanism.

A separate study of young people aged 13 to 25 found that nearly 90% of them felt lonely or isolated.¹⁵⁷ Many teenagers would have become stressed due to the uncertainty around their futures, including online university teaching and a greater risk of unemployment. The coronavirus pandemic has hit children hard, but there are differences in who is affected the most. BAME youth’s mental health is deteriorating more than their white peers.¹⁵⁸ For example, figures for BAME children seeking help for stress or anxiety via a free counselling website were four times higher this year (March-May 2020) than for white children, relative to 2019.

Additionally, the lockdown took a physical toll on those unable to access green spaces. Playtime is an essential time for wellbeing, mental and physical for children of all ages. Children were at high risk of social isolation and loneliness, issues which are known to have physically detrimental consequences impacting sleep, health, emotional wellbeing, cardiovascular and inflammatory functions.¹⁵⁹ However, the long-term effects of lockdown-induced isolation on children is yet to be fully understood.

Finally, the lack of access to regular support services poses a threat to children and parents alike. This also includes face-to-face contact with doctors and health outreach services who provide early identification of needs and risks, as well as parenting support.

152 Platt, L., and Warwick, R. (2020) Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others? The Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/chapter/are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-covid-19-than-others/>

153 Ibid.

154 Carrington, D. (2020) ‘Compelling’ evidence air pollution worsens coronavirus – study. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/13/compelling-evidence-air-pollution-worsens-coronavirus-study>

155 Roy, I. (2020) UK waste incinerators three times more likely to be in poorer areas. Unearthed. Available at: <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2020/07/31/waste-incinerators-deprivation-map-recycling/>

156 You-COPE (2020) Youth COVID Response Personal Experience : Tracking health and wellbeing amongst 16-24 year olds in the UK during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/child-health/research/population-policy-and-practice-research-and-teaching-department/covid-19-studies/you-cope>

157 Young Minds (2020) Mental health ‘much worse’ for many young people with mental health needs – new report. Available at: <https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/mental-health-much-worse-for-many-young-people-with-mental-health-needs-new-report/>

158 Cambell, D., (2020) Covid-19 affects BAME youth mental health more than white peers – study. The Guardian Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/21/covid-19-hits-bame-youth-mental-health-worse-than-white-peers-study>

159 Singer, C., (2018) Health Effects of Social Isolation and Loneliness. Journal of Aging Life Care. Available at: <https://www.aginglifecarejournal.org/health-effects-of-social-isolation-and-loneliness/>

SHE SEES ME BUT DOESN'T KNOW ME.
SOMETIMES I HATE HER.

IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS.



OF COURSE, I LOST IT WITH HER...



SHE TRIES, I SUPPOSE, BUT I'M JUST
HAPPY PLAYING GAMES ON THE SCREEN,
PLAYING GAMES IN MY HEAD.

HER LIFE IS CHAOS, MAYBE MINE IS TOO,
BUT IF SHE LEAVES ME TO PLAY, I'M SAFE,
BUT IF SHE STOPS ME...



BEFORE THE VIRUS SHE DIDN'T DRINK,
NOW SHE TALKS TO THE BOTTLE
LIKE A LOVER.



I FEEL LIKE THE GAME MIGHT GET REAL.



MAYBE THE VIRUS HAS CHANGED
EVERYTHING FOREVER.

A 9-year-old's story' by Harrison Edwards, represented by the JSR Agency. This illustration was produced by JSR Agency pro-bono in support of The Childhood Trust' Champions for Children campaign.



Risk of exploitation and abuse

Lockdown and isolation are what the former chancellor Sajid Javid called “the perfect” storm for child sexual abuse.¹⁶⁰ Most children are spending more time online as they are out of school and are more vulnerable to online grooming. The National Crime Agency stated that “our pursuit of high-risk online offenders has been unrelenting during lockdown” but that the “the full scale will only be revealed once children return to schools and have more access to trusted adults, and the tech industry brings back human moderators”.¹⁶¹

As most face-to-face services stopped during the lockdown, health visitors were no longer able to visit children in their homes. Children living in homes with domestic abuse were no longer monitored properly. Yet, witnessing domestic abuse can have “a huge impact on their future and mental health”. Refuge, a national charity providing support for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, saw a 700% increase in website views in a day after news outlets reported on increased risks of domestic violence during the lockdown.¹⁶² The London Metropolitan police saw an increase of around 380 calls per week regarding domestic violence.¹⁶³

Since the beginning of the lockdown, “a charity that supports disadvantaged state school pupils reported a sevenfold increase in its child-protection referrals”¹⁶⁴ reads a Guardian article from May 2020. Figures are increasing as children are not being seen in schools.

Post-COVID-19 economic recovery

It is disappointing to hear that the Chancellor, in his economic recovery plans announced in July, did not lay out propositions to prevent more children from slipping into poverty. Campaigning groups such as the End Child Poverty coalition had asked for increased child benefits, an end to the benefit cap and two-child limit and “increases to the child element of universal credit and tax credits”.¹⁶⁵ Other government decisions such as stopping free travel for under-18s on Transport for London will impact the poorest the most.¹⁶⁶

Additionally, the UK charity sector will lose a significant proportion of its income in 2020. Without support, many charities working with children are at risk of closing. Indeed, three quarters of those surveyed by the Childhood Trust in March found that the virus would force them to cancel or reduce the scale of their programmes whilst demand for those same services would increase.

160 BBC News (2020) Coronavirus lockdown ‘perfect storm’ for abused children – Sajid Javid. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52876226>

161 Staufenberg, J., (2020) Sharp increase in UK child sexual abuse during pandemic. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jul/08/sharp-increase-in-uk-child-sexual-abuse-during-pandemic>

162 Refuge (2020) Refuge sees online traffic to its National Domestic Abuse Helpline website rise by 700%. Available at: <https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-sees-700-increase-in-website-visits/>

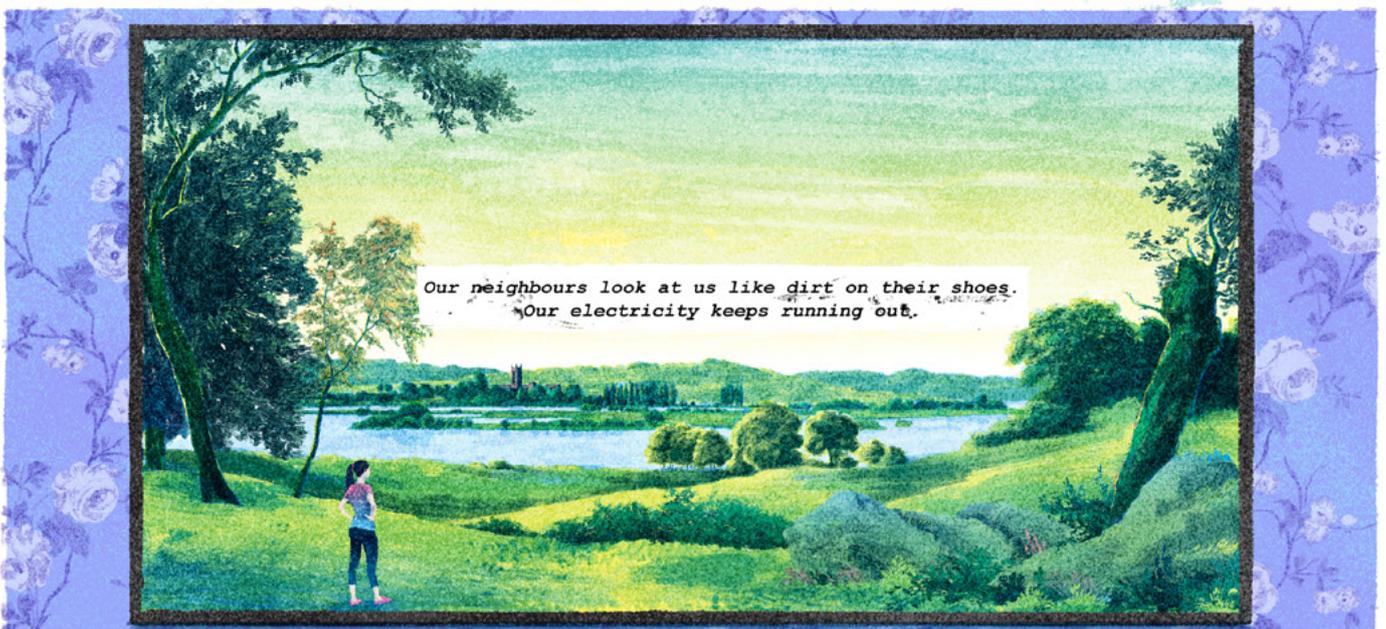
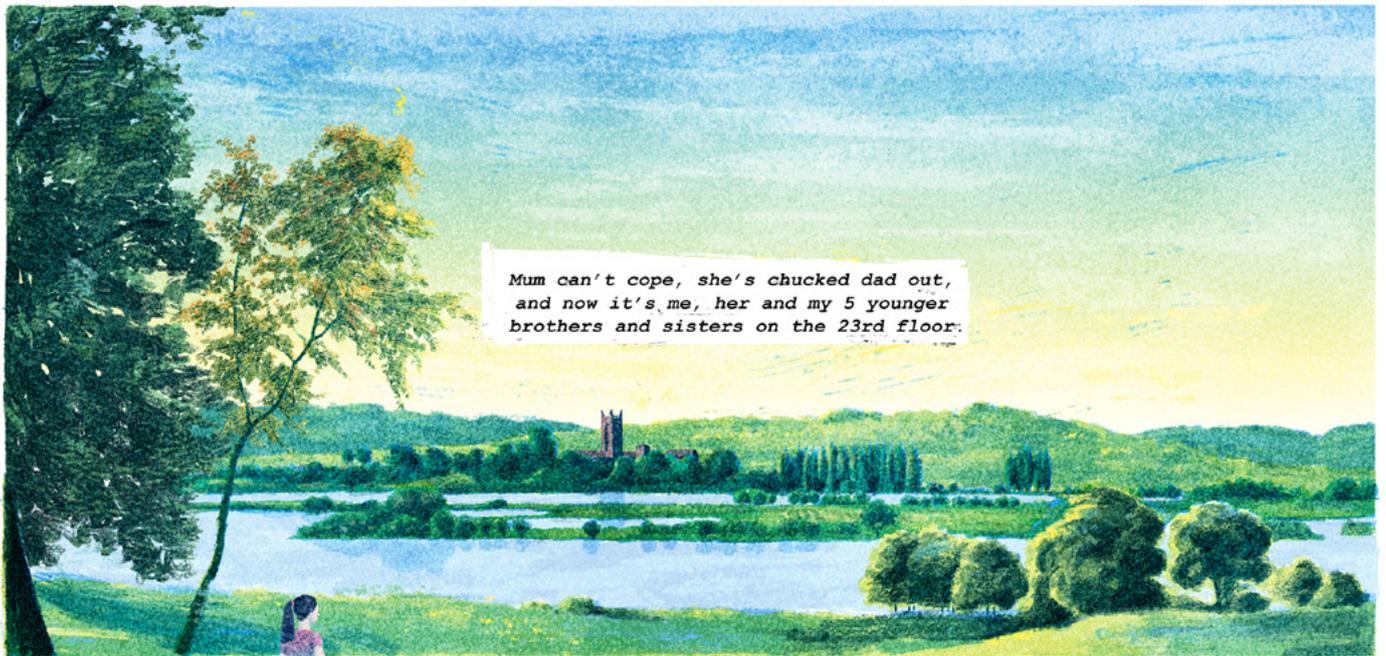
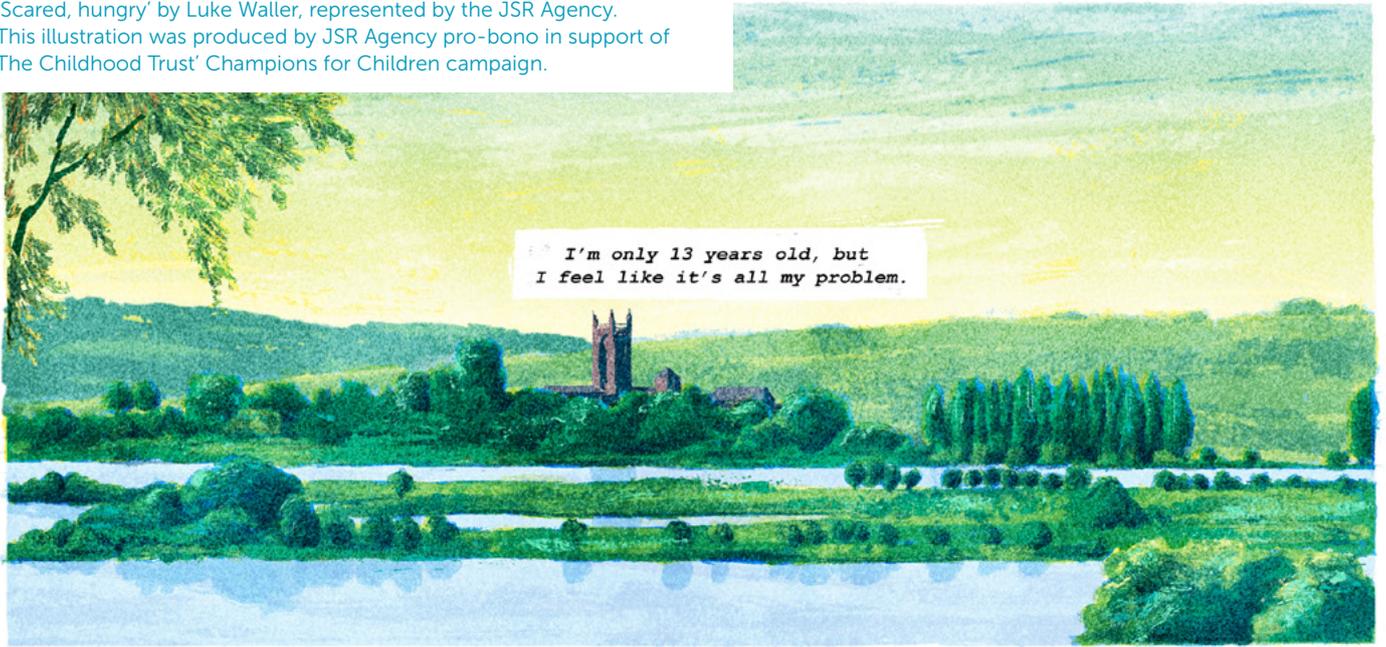
163 Ivandic, R., and Kirchmaier, T., (2020) Domestic abuse in times of quarantine. Centre for Economic Performance. Available at: <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cp578.pdf>

164 Ferguson, D., (2020) Vulnerable children ‘suffer alone’ in UK lockdown with schools shut. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/23/vulnerable-children-suffer-alone-in-uk-lockdown-with-schools-shut?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

165 End Child Poverty (2020) Children in poverty invisible as chancellor misses opportunity to put them at heart of economic recovery. Available at: <https://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/children-in-poverty-invisible-as-chancellor-misses-opportunity-to-put-them-at-the-heart-of-economic-recovery/>

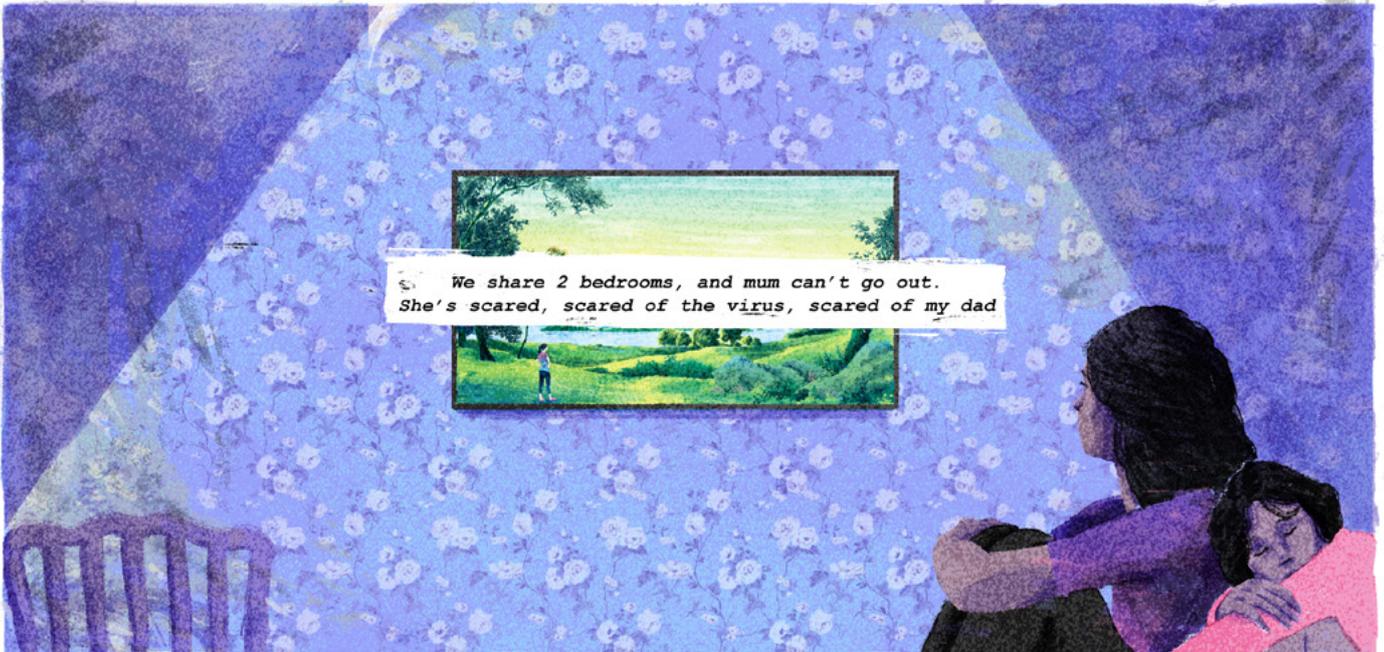
166 Department for Transport and Shapps, G., (2020) Transport for London extraordinary funding and financing. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/transport-for-london-extraordinary-funding-and-financing>

'Scared, hungry' by Luke Waller, represented by the JSR Agency.
This illustration was produced by JSR Agency pro-bono in support of
The Childhood Trust' Champions for Children campaign.





Our fridge is empty.
We don't have enough nappies for the baby.



We share 2 bedrooms, and mum can't go out.
She's scared, scared of the virus, scared of my dad



scared that if she goes out, she won't come back.
And we are all scared too.

Policy Recommendations

With the right policies, child poverty in London can be eliminated. The following policy recommendations have been collated in line with existing evidence and data.

It is important to focus on the impact any policy will have on groups that are more vulnerable, such as BAME communities and those with disabilities. Concretely, this means that any reforms should tackle racial inequalities and also assess “whether ethnic minorities (or other groups) are more or less likely to share the characteristics of those most likely to benefit” from the reforms, as the Runnymede Trust recommends, as well as monitoring progress.¹⁶⁷

First, the UK’s welfare state requires reform. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) stipulates that “benefits must reflect need”. As such, they call for increased benefits and tax credits, including increased child benefits “to make up for inflation since 2010 – otherwise it will have lost 23% of its real value by 2020”.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, CPAG and many other groups advocate for lifting the two-child limit on Tax Credits and Universal Credit, as well as the £20,000 a year benefit cap (£23,000 in London).

Second, CPAG recommends an overhaul of the administration of the benefits system as currently, sanctions and errors push many into destitution. A first Universal Credit payment should come within two weeks, instead of the current five. There should also be more staff to support claimants and help them meet requirements. The government’s “test and learn” strategy regarding universal credit needs to be sped up as its completion date has already been postponed from 2017 to 2023.

Third, free childcare needs to be rolled out. Childcare and housing are two of the most significant costs for working families with small children, with costs of the former having increased by 42% since 2008, twice the rate of inflation.¹⁶⁹ CPAG advocates that 30-hour fully funded childcare should be made available to all families. Additionally, more funding should be allocated to children’s centres and after school clubs, including during holidays.

Fourth, considering the very high rate of in-work poverty, employment practices need to change. Zero-hour contracts and part-time jobs “evade employment protection laws”¹⁷⁰ such as occupational sick pay. The UK needs better-paid, permanent jobs. This also means increasing the minimum wage to a living wage. Furthermore, if the universal credit taper rate – the amount of benefits claimants lose for every pound they earn – is reduced from 63% to 55%, 200,000 children in working families would not be in poverty, according to CPAG.

Fifth, the UK government needs to reimplement child poverty targets that have been removed in 2016.¹⁷¹ The Runnymede Trust also recommends that the definition of child poverty is amended.

It states that the current definition, taking into account factors such as divorce, alcohol abuse and educational attainment, “results in the perverse conclusion that because Bangladeshi children are doing better in school and their parents are less likely to drink or divorce these children are therefore less likely to be poor”.¹⁷²

167 Khan, O., (2020) The Colour of Money. How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy. Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>

168 Child Poverty Action Group (n.d.) Solutions to poverty. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/solutions-poverty>

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 UK Public General Acts (2016). Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/7/contents/enacted>

172 Khan, O., (2020) The Colour of Money. How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy. Runnymede Trust. Available at: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>

Sixth, food security in the capital needs strengthening.

This means implementing the government commissioned National Food Strategy's recommendations¹⁷³, as advocated by a taskforce of businesses, supermarkets and charities formed by Marcus Rashford. These recommendations include: expanding eligibility for free school meals to those on Universal Credit, offering food to all children on free school meals in England during holidays, and to increase Healthy Start vouchers which help parents with young children and pregnant women purchase basic food and expanding it to all of those on Universal Credit.

Seventh, children in London need access to healthier

foods. London has the highest level of child obesity in England.¹⁷⁴ Children in the poorest areas are twice as likely to leave primary school obese compared to their counterparts in the wealthiest areas.¹⁷⁵ Efforts in making healthy food more affordable need to be deployed at scale and targeted towards those most at risk of obesity and/or malnutrition.

Finally, the UK should do more to **invest in its infrastructure** that will benefit the least well off, as the Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS) states.¹⁷⁶ **Social housing, subsidised transport and access to information via free or subsidised broadband are crucially needed.** The £35 million cuts in council youth services in London (relative to 2011-12)¹⁷⁷ need to be reversed. Lastly, the government's decision to end free Transport for London travel for under 18s should be reversed as it will impact disadvantaged students who will be unable to travel to school come September.

173 Dimbleby, H., (2020) National Food Strategy Part One. Available at: <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NFS-Part-One-SP-CP.pdf>

174 Greater London Authority (2018) The London food strategy. Healthy and sustainable food for London. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_london_food_strategy.pdf

175 Ibid.

176 Centre for Labour and Social Studies (n.d.) The facts and the fixes: austerity. Available at: <http://classonline.org.uk/docs/austerity-final-for-web.pdf>

177 Berry, S., (2019) London's lost youth services: 2019. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sian_berry_am_london_youth_services_2019.pdf

Conclusion

Child poverty has risen in all London boroughs in the past five years. The capital is one of the most expensive places in the country in terms of housing, childcare and living costs; nearly three quarters of children in poverty live in working households. 2010-2020, otherwise known as the “decade of austerity”, has worsened poverty rates as funding cuts continued.

Early childhood matters for later life outcomes. The 2020 Marmot Review states that “positive experiences early in life are closely associated with better performances at school, better social and emotional development, improved work outcomes, higher income and better lifelong health including longer life expectancy”. As detailed above, we see knock-on effects in education, employment, and physical, mental and environmental health. These are felt even stronger by at-risk groups, such as children with unstable immigration status, disabilities or those from BAME backgrounds.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is also exacerbating child poverty. As schools and youth centres shut for months, differences in livelihoods between poorer children and those more well off have heightened, leaving thousands even more vulnerable than they were before the pandemic.

