CHILD POVERTY IN THE UK: MEASURES, PREVALENCE AND INTRA-HOUSEHOLD SHARING

Gill Main(1) and Jonathan Bradshaw (2)

(1) School of Education, University of Leeds
(2) Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

Abstract

There is broad cross-party agreement on the urgency of addressing child poverty in the UK, but less consensus on how best to define and measure it, and how to understand its causes and effects. The conservative/liberal coalition government's policy and rhetoric tended to favour individual explanations for poverty, portraying poor parents as making bad spending decisions which are not in their children's interests, and transmitting the attitudes and behaviours which result in their own poverty passing on to their children. This article draws on the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion survey (PSE2012) to examine how far the realities of life for poor children and their families match the picture that emerges from this policy rhetoric. Analysis covers four strands: the prevalence of child poverty; the demographics of poor children; the experiences of poor children; and how parents in in poverty allocate household resources. Little evidence is found to support this 'culture of poverty' theory, and parents who are themselves in poverty are found to engage in a range of behaviours suggesting that rather than prioritising their own needs, they sacrifice personal necessities in favour of spending on children.

Key words: child poverty; intra household sharing;

Background

Policy context

In 1999 Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair made a commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Subsequently the Child Poverty Act was passed in 2010 with cross-party support. This Act committed the UK government to 'eradicating' child poverty by 2020[1].

[1] Defined as:

- Fewer than 10% of children in *relative poverty* (equivalised household income <60% national median, before housing costs);
- Fewer than 5% of children in *combined low income and material deprivation* (equivalised household income <70% national median before housing costs, and material deprivation (having a score of 25 or less on the Households Below Average Income child material deprivation measure – see Carr et al, 2014 for more details.);
- Fewer than 5% of children in *absolute poverty* (equivalised household income <60% national median of the base year (2010/11), fixed in real terms).
- Fewer than 7% children in *persistent poverty* (equivalised household income <60% national median for three out of the previous 4 years; target set October 2014).

Prior to the Act receiving Royal Assent, the Labour government had already enacted a range of policies aimed at increasing the incomes of poor families through a minimum wage, real increases in cash benefits, extra spending on education, health and childcare services and activation measures designed to increase parents' employment and earning potential. However both before and after the 2010 election the Labour leadership were extraordinarily reticent about drawing attention to this record and its achievements but Bradshaw (2011), Piachaud (2012) and the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion Review (Lupton et al 2013) reviewed the Labour government record and concluded that they had made substantial progress in tackling child poverty and improving children's outcomes and that their broad strategy had been effective. Lewis (2011) noted a broad political consensus on the 'pillars' forming the basis on which eradicating child poverty would be achieved, these being redistribution, activation/work intensification and upskilling workers.

However, policies enacted under the Conservative/Liberal Coalition government elected in May 2010 demonstrated a change in emphasis both in activity on these pillars and in overall approach. The policies initiated by Labour aimed to increase work intensity and 'make work pay' through the minimum wage and improvements in child benefits and child tax credits, in contrast, the Coalition abolished some benefits, froze child benefits and cut the real level of tax credits, as part of their austerity measures. While Labour had pursued broadly anti cyclical policies since the start of the recession in 2008, the coalition government pursued austerity cuts despite very high levels of unemployment and falling real wages. Real wages went on falling until mid-2014.

They have sought to justify this with rhetoric around 'overly-generous' benefits 'trapping' poor families into dependence (see Joint Public Issues Team, 2013). Thus, the role of redistribution in addressing child poverty declined under the Coalition government. A number of reviews have now been published assessing the Coalition record on child poverty (Bradshaw 2015, Social Mobility and Child poverty Commission 2014) and a number of analyses have explored the distributional consequences of these measures (Cribb et al 2013, Office of the Children's Commissioner 2013, Lupton et al 2015, Reed and Portes 2014) have concluded that the main losers from this austerity strategy have been low income families with children.

The latest official child poverty statistics for 2013/14 show that child poverty is on the increase and with a further £12 billion cuts to working age benefits envisaged in the Conservative Government's election manifesto it is expected to that all the child poverty reduction since 1999 will be swept away.

The decline in the emphasis on redistribution as a means for addressing poverty reflects a (further) shift towards individual and cultural explanations of poverty over structural explanations (Harkness et al, 2012). Whilst such an approach was evident in Labour's focus on activation (a supply-side approach to poverty reduction which assumes unemployment to be a result of a deficit in skills rather than a deficit in the number and quality of jobs available – see Lewis, 2011), it was far more dominant in Coalition policy. Policy changes introducing caps to benefit entitlements and increased conditionality have been matched with rhetoric which positions poor people as 'troubled' (Casey, 2012) 'skivers' (Osborne, 2012) who need motivating to 'take responsibility' (Duncan Smith, 2012). Whilst individual explanations of poverty are more easily (although no

more accurately – see Harkness et al, 2012) applied to adults than to children, the positioning of child poverty as a result of the 'feckless' (Duncan Smith, 2011) behaviours of parents who then 'transmit' (Clegg, 2011) poverty to children transforms child poverty from a problem best addressed through providing additional resources to poor families, to one best addressed by helping poor parents to overcome personal shortcomings.

This has implications for how child poverty should be measured. The Coalition's attempt to redefine child poverty to incorporate broader measures, with a strong focus on parental skills and behaviours (see DWP, 2012), was widely criticised (Bradshaw, 2012; Bailey and Tomlinson, nd; Veit-Wilson, 2012) and eventually abandoned. However, the contrast between the Child Poverty Act measures, which rely heavily on income, and the broader measures proposed in the Consultation, reflects a longstanding academic debate around how best to measure poverty.

The last government published its latest three-year child poverty strategy for consultation in June 2014 (HM Government 2014). The strategy proposed 'tackling poverty now', which focusses on supporting families into work and increasing their earnings; 'improving living standards', which focuses on small interventions to reduce living costs; and 'preventing poor children from becoming poor adults', which focusses on educational attainment. Specific policies included universal free school meals for infant school children and an increase in childcare support under universal credit to 85%.

Measuring (child) poverty

Academic conceptions and measures of poverty vary in terms of the depth of deprivation at which poverty is diagnosed (ie. whether relative or absolute measures are preferred[2]), and the breadth of domains which are considered to be part of the condition (ie. where the focus fits in a range from narrow conceptions concerned with income or material resources, as in the 2010 Child Poverty Act measures, to broad conceptions concerned with well-being and the realisation of non-material human rights, as in Sen's Capabilities Approach (see, for example, Sen, 1999)). Townsend's (1979) definition has been influential in policy and academic definitions, in which:

> *"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities"* (Townsend, 1979).

Here, poverty is inherently relative to the society in which an individual lives, is (potentially) applicable at a range of levels (ie. individuals, families and groups), and is concerned with resources which may include but are not limited to income. This conceptualisation of poverty has been central in the development of the *consensual approach* to poverty measurement, used in Mack and Lansley's (1985) Breadline Britain

[2] Although in line with Townsend's (1979) perspective, it is noted that distinctions between truly 'absolute' and 'relative' measures do not stand up to scrutiny.

study and further refined in the 1999 (see Pantazis et al, 2006) and 2012 (see Gordon et al, 2013, for early findings) Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) studies. Within this approach, indicators of deprivation are selected subject to popular consensus, and are used alone and in combination with measures of income to produce poverty measures. A strong advantage of this approach is that these measures can be used to examine poverty at the level of the household or the individual, as deprivation indicators can be based on individual rather than collective ownership/access. Where children are concerned, specific age-appropriate deprivation indicators are used, enabling an examination of the relative positions of children compared to adults within households, as well as a comparison of children between households. Such examinations are increasingly acknowledged as important as a result of feminist and (more recently) age-based critiques of the assumption that resources are shared equitably within households, detailed in the next section.

Intra-household sharing

Studies of intra-household poverty and distributions attempt to open the 'black box' of sharing within the household (Fritzell, 1999). Daly et al (2012) note that intra-household sharing has been conceptualised mainly in relation to gender inequality, with power imbalances between men and women shaping the distribution of resources, and Redmond (2014) notes that assumptions about intra-household sharing rely largely on theoretical models rather than empirical data. Pahl's (1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2005) research helped to demonstrate gender disparities in how resources were distributed and finances managed between (adult) men and women within UK households. However, Daly et al (2012) also note that such power imbalances may impact the resources available to children. Previous research has found that where women have more control over household finances, a greater proportion is spent on children than when men have such control (see, for example, Middleton et al, 1997; Grogan, 2004; Lundberg et al, 1997). The use of household income measures and equivalence scales to account for children as a fraction of 'adult equivalents' is criticised by Cockburn et al (2009), on the grounds that it assumes household resources are equitably shared; a linked criticism is that power (and responsibility) differentials between parents and children might mitigate against equitable distribution of resources – parents may act protectively, going without themselves in order to provide for their children; or, again as noted by Cockburn et al (ibid), they may sacrifice the needs of some (or all) children in order to provide for other children (or adults). Additionally, children have differing needs (both compared to adults and across different stages of childhood), and the capacity to contribute to as well as detract from household resources (for example through part-time working or through unpaid domestic work – see Ridge, 2002). These issues pose challenges to the common practices of treating children simplistically as a net drain on household resources, and of assuming equitable distributions of resources within households, both between genders and between generations. As White (2002) notes, whilst some progress has been made in terms of studying inter-generational distributions within households, the field remains under-developed. One aim of this paper is to contribute towards knowledge about this.

This research

Previously (REFERENCE REMOVED FOR ANONYMOUS REVIEW), we drew comparisons between the PSE2012 and PSE1999 survey results, finding little evidence to support Coalition claims that standards have increased to unrealistic levels over this time frame. Here, we present a more detailed analysis of the PSE 2012 data to address four research questions: how do poverty rates vary between adults and children; how do poverty rates and the composition of poor children vary according to socio-economic characteristics such as household employment status; and are resources shared equitably between different household members in households with children, and if not who goes without?

Basically what we are seeking to do is to reflect evidence on individualised explanations for poverty and the assertions that child poverty is a function of a culture of laziness, neglect, dependency and so forth.

The analysis draws on the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion study, the largest-scale survey of its kind in the UK to date. As noted above, the study draws on the consensual approach to poverty measurement: indicators of deprivation are developed in consultation with the population, and are selected based on the majority of the population seeing them as necessities (both an overall majority and high levels of consensus between sub-groups of the population is required – see Mack et al (2013) for more details). Focus groups to help in the development of deprivation indicators were followed (Fahmy et al, 2013) by an omnibus survey in which adults identified *socially perceived necessities* (items/activities seen as necessary by 50% of more of the population) (SPNs). Different lists of SPNs were developed for adults and children, reflecting children's differing life stage and needs. Finally, a main-stage survey asked a range of questions concerned with poverty and social exclusion[3]. This article draws on data from the main-stage survey, which covered 12,097 individuals and 5,193 households in the UK. 3,101 children were living in participating households, about whom data was provided by a suitable adult. More details of the survey and working papers containing methodological details and findings can be found at www.poverty.ac.uk.

Two measures of poverty are used in this paper:

- Income poverty: this household-level measure captures people living in households in which the equivalised[4] income after housing costs is below 60% of the national median.
- PSE poverty: this individual-level measure incorporates household income, household deprivation and individual deprivation – individuals are PSE poor if they live in households with a limited income and lack three or more household and/or individual necessities. Thus the measure reflects the combined role of household and individual resources in determining living standards. For details on the methodology used to establish this measure, see Gordon and Nandy, 2012.

The purpose of using these two measures is twofold: to test whether results are robust to different approaches to poverty measurement, and to establish whether different

[3] Full details can be found at www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/living-standards-survey-uk-2012.
[4] Equivalisation was performed using a PSE equivalence scale, drawing on research into Minimum Income Standards for households of various compositions.

conceptions of poverty and levels of measurement (ie. household versus individual measures) result in different findings. The individualised measure enables a study of intra-household distributions (see above), a key aspect of the analysis presented later in this article.

Findings

The prevalence of child poverty

Table 1 shows poverty rates overall, for children, and for adults. Rates amongst adults are shown overall and comparing adults in households without children to those in households with children. Based on income poverty and the PSE poverty measure, the child poverty rate is higher than the overall poverty rate and much higher than poverty rates amongst adults in households which do not contain dependent children. Adults living in households with dependent children have slightly lower income poverty rates than children (which is a function of there being on average more children than adults in such households), but have higher rates of PSE poverty at 32% compared to 27% for children.

Table 1: Rates of poverty for the three measures

	Income poverty	**PSE poverty**
Overall	25%	22%
Adults (all)	23%	21%
Children	**33%**	**27%**
Adults (no children in HH)	20%	15%
Adults (children in HH)	**30%**	**32%**

This analysis indicates that overall poverty rates obscure large variations between adults and children, and between adults based on their family situation. Additionally, the exclusive use of household-level measures such as low income may not capture the complexity of poverty within (rather than between) households, as shown by the higher rate of PSE poverty amongst adults living in households with children than amongst children themselves. This links to the later section concerned with intra-household distributions and the economising behaviours of adults living in households with children. Next, the characteristics of children living in poverty are examined.

The characteristics of poor children and their families

It is well-established that certain demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are associated with increased chances of children experiencing poverty (Carr et al, 2014). Children living in households with no or limited income from paid employment are more likely to be in poverty, as are children from lone-parent families and those from certain minority ethnic groups (ibid). Based on the PSE data, poverty rates were highest in households where all adults worked part-time, or where no adults worked (due to unemployment or inactivity); in lone-adult households (although households with two adults and more than three children also had relatively high rates); for Black (African, Caribbean or mixed) or Pakistani/Bangladeshi children; and for children living

in rented accommodation (social or private rented). However, increased *rates* of poverty for these groups often leads to fallacious assumptions that the *composition* of poor children consists primarily of children from higher-risk groups. As table 2 demonstrates, this is not the case. The majority of poor children (across the two measures) come from households where at least one adult works, live in two-adult families, and are white-British. This is a key finding and one repeatedly ignored by Conservative spokespersons on poverty. Child poverty is not merely the consequence of family breakdown or worklessness - most poor children are living with two employed parents.

Table 2: Poverty rates and composition of poor children by socio-demographic characteristics (%)

		Income poverty		PSE poverty		Total composition
		Rate	Composition	Rate	Composition	
Household employment status	All FT	11	8	13	12	**23**
	Some FT, some PT	25	12	21	12	**15**
	Some FT, no PT	27	27	16	19	**30**
	All PT, no FT	43	9	43	11	**6**
	Some PT, no FT	35	9	18	6	**8**
	No work, unemployed	77	8	47	6	**3**
	No work, inactive	57	27	60	34	**14**
Family type	One adult, one child	51	9	44	9	**6**
	One adult, two children	45	10	39	11	**7**
	One adult, 3+ children	67	14	80	20	**7**
	Two adults, one child	24	12	18	10	**16**
	Two adults, two children	24	23	18	22	**32**
	Two adults, 3+ children	40	25	30	22	**21**
	Other	21	7	15	6	**11**
Age of child	0-1	31	10	22	9	**11**
	2-4	36	20	28	18	**18**
	5-10	36	35	30	36	**32**
	11-15	32	27	29	29	**28**
	16-17	23	8	19	7	**11**
Ethnicity	White British	31	75	27	78	**80**
	White other	27	3	30	5	**4**
	Black Caribbean/mixed	45	3	44	3	**2**
	Black African/mixed	52	4	44	5	**3**
	Asian Indian	38	3	9	1	**3**
	Pakistani /Bangladeshi	54	6	43	5	**3**
	Asian other	34	3	16	2	**3**
	Other	48	2	28	2	**2**
Tenure	Owner	17	30	10	22	**58**
	Social renter	59	47	57	55	**26**
	Private renter	49	23	42	23	**15**
	Other	4	0	10	0	**1**

Total rate	**33**		**27**		

Shaded cells indicate <20 unweighted cases.

Table 3 shows the results of logistic regression models examining the odds of poverty (1.00 is odds of a base case, >1.00 is increased odds, <1.00 is reduced odds on the two measures for children when all the socio-demographic characteristics in table 2 are controlled for. Household employment status and family type are much more consistently and strongly associated with income poverty than with PSE poverty. The PSE poverty measure appears to be more sensitive to the impact of multiple children in the household, with lone adults with three or more children significantly more likely to be PSE poor than lone adults with only one child, and children in two-adult households with multiple children no less likely to be poor than children living in lone-adult families. Asian Indian children are more likely than White British children to be living in poverty under the income poor definition, but are no more likely to be in poverty under the PSE poor definition; Pakistani/Bangladeshi children are more likely to be poor based on both measures. Children living in rented accommodation, whether private or social, are more likely to be poor on both measures.

Table 3: Logistic odds of being poor controlling for socio-demographic factors

		Income poverty		**PSE poverty**	
		Odds	Sig	Odds	Sig level
Household employment status	All FT	1		1	
	Some FT, some PT	5.3	*	2.9	*
	Some FT, no PT	4.8	*	1.6	NS
	All PT, no FT	3.4	*	2.3	NS
	Some PT, no FT	8.2	*	1.9	NS
	No work, unemployed	24.9	*	2.9	NS
	No work, inactive	7.1	*	4.8	*
Family type	One adult, one child	1		1	
	One adult, two children	0.7	NS	0.8	NS
	One adult, 3+ children	0.9	NS	3.9	*
	Two adults, one child	0.2	*	0.4	*
	Two adults, two children	0.3	*	0.5	NS
	Two adults, 3+ children	0.5	*	0.9	NS
	Other	0.2	*	0.3	*
Age of child	0-1	1		1	
	2-4	1.0	NS	1.2	NS
	5-10	1.0	NS	1.5	NS
	11-15	1.1	NS	1.7	NS
	16-17	1.0	NS	1.3	NS
Ethnicity	White British	1		1	
	White other	0.8	NS	1.7	NS
	Black Caribbean/mixed	1.8	NS	2.1	NS
	Black African/mixed	1.4	NS	1.1	NS
	Asian Indian	3.1	*	0.5	NS
	Pakistani/Bangladeshi	3.2	*	3.0	*
	Asian other	1.6	NS	0.6	NS
	Other	2.3	NS	1.4	NS
Tenure	Owner	1		1	
	Social renter	4.0	*	7.5	*
	Private renter	3.6	*	4.7	*

	Other	0.2	NS	1.5	NS

Here and elsewhere * indicates a statistically significant association at the p<0.05 level.

The experiences of poor children

That children growing up in poverty face a range of disadvantages through childhood and over their life course is not in question (for an overview see Griggs and Walker, 2008). In addition to missing out on resources provided by and within households, table 4 shows that children are also more likely to miss out on a range of services. Hereafter, results are based on PSE poverty as this is found above to be a better measure of child (specific) poverty than low income.

Table 4: Child exclusion from services

	% excluded overall	% excluded if PSE poor	Odds of exclusion if PSE poor	
Facilities to safely play/spend time nearby	27%	41%	2.6	*
School meals	12%	17%	1.9	*
Youth clubs	26%	34%	1.8	*
After school clubs	12%	20%	2.4	*
Public transport to school	13%	15%	1.3	NS
Nurseries/playgroups/mother and toddler groups	6%	17%	11.4	*

Based on the Coalition's approach to child poverty outlined above, it might be expected that a further domain of children's lives in which poor children miss out relates to parenting activities. However, an examination of such activities comparing the parents of poor children to those of non-poor children, presented in table 5, does not support this – there are few significant differences between the parenting activities of parents of poor children compared to those of non-poor children, and where there are differences it is not always the case that parents of poor children are less likely to engage in parent-child activities than parents of non-poor children. The parents of poor children are less likely to attend parents' evenings and do sporting activities (although the majority of poor parents – 92% and 61% respectively – do engage in these activities), but more likely to watch TV with their children, which is also less costly. Parenting activities and the relationship between poverty and parenting among lone parents in the PSE2012 are discussed in more detail by Dermott and Pomati (2014).

Table 5: Parenting behaviours comparing parents of poor and non-poor children

	% excluded overall	% excluded if PSE poor	Odds of exclusion if PSE poor	
Attending parents' evening once a term	4%	8%	3.6	*
Reading with children	15%	17%	.8	NS
Playing games with children	21%	19%	.8	NS
Doing sporting activities with children	31%	39%	1.6	*

Watching TV with children	6%	3%	.3	*
Eating a meal with children	5%	2%	.4	NS
Helping children with homework	10%	9%	1.0	NS

Intra-household sharing and economising behaviours amongst families with children

Whilst the PSE method allows for the examination of differences between adults and children, and between adult household members, it does not allow for disaggregation to individual children (adult respondents are asked to class all children as deprived of SPNs if any child in the household lacks them). However, as a result of age adjustments for certain SPNs (for example those which are only applicable to school-aged children - see Main and Bradshaw, 2014), it is possible that different children within the same household are classified differently. Given that this is an artefact of the methodology rather than a genuine reflection of difference, in the remaining analysis children are classed as poor if 50% or more of the children within their household are poor. The resulting four classifications are termed by Main and Bradshaw (forthcoming) as congruous non-poor (neither children nor adults are poor); congruous poor (both adults and children are poor); incongruous protected (children are not poor, adults are poor); and incongruous exposed (children are poor, adults are not poor). This terminology will be adopted here. Table 6 shows the proportions of children living in a range of situations based on their own poverty status (PSE poverty) and that of the adults they live with. In the second and third rows of the table, children living with no poor adults are contrasted to those living with any poor adults; and in the fourth and fifth rows, children living with any adults who are not poor are contrasted to those living in households where all adults are poor.

In both scenarios, the two largest groups of children are in congruous situations: most are congruous non-poor, and the second largest group are congruous poor. Given that the PSE poverty measure draws on household income and some shared household resources, it is unsurprising that the poverty status of most children is congruent with that of the adults they live with. However, the third largest group are children in incongruous protected situations. This accounts for 16% of children in the first scenario, and 7% of children in the second scenario. Only 1% of children could be identified who were themselves poor but lived with no adults who were poor. A somewhat larger but still very small 5% of children were themselves poor lived in households where any adult was not poor. Whilst this is only a small proportion of children, this finding indicates a need for further research to facilitate an understanding of intra-household distributions in different kinds of household, ideally incorporating children's own perspectives and reports as well as those of the adults who they live with.

Table 6: Child and adult poverty within households

	Children not poor	Children poor
No adults poor	56%	1%
Any adults poor	16%	27%
Any adults not poor	65%	5%

All adults poor	7%	23%

Table 6 demonstrates that for a significant minority of children living in households where there is poverty, they themselves are not directly exposed to this poverty– that is, some or all of the adults in the household are poor, whilst children are not poor. This is not to say that children in this situation do not experience any of the effects of poverty; Ridge (2002), for example, found that children living in poor households were very much aware of financial stress and that both parents and children in these circumstances made efforts to protect one another. These children are living in households whose incomes and resources are insufficient to maintain the material living standards of all members, and shared resources such as income and household necessities may be lacking. But children's own resources are maintained – potentially through adults prioritising spending on children's needs rather than their own. Main and Bradshaw (2014; forthcoming) found that where comparable SPNs existed for adults and children, adults were more likely to view these as necessities for children than for themselves, and children were less likely than adults to go without, both overall and within households where either children or adults lacked them. This tallies with existing research indicating that adults tend to protect children from the worst impacts of poverty, often by going without themselves (eg. Middleton et al, 1997; Ridge, 2002). However, the presence of *any* poor adults in households containing poor children did not necessarily indicate that *all* adults in households containing poor children were themselves poor. This is illustrated by the higher proportion of poor children in households where any adults were not poor, compared to where no adults were poor, in table 6. Whilst a significant proportion of adults in households where some adults are poor but children are not poor are likely to be going without, not *all* adults in these situations are going without. The implication of this is that not only do intra-household distributions work in favour of children, they are also not evenly distributed between adults. The literature cited above on intra-household distributions suggests that gender may be a key dimension on which such distributions are based, with women more likely to go without and to favour spending on children over spending on themselves.

Table 7 presents an examination of the characteristics of adults who are themselves in poverty and who live in households where children are not in poverty. This includes poor adults in households where all adults are poor, and those who are poor but who live with other adults who are not poor. These adults are described here as sacrificing their own needs to protect the children they live with. It is acknowledged that various alternative interpretations are possible (for example, children may acquire resources from extra-household sources such as grandparents or part-time employment). However, the adults who children live with retain primary responsibility for providing for them, and previous research (for example Middleton et al, 1997; Ridge, 2009) has found that many parents do sacrifice their needs to provide for their children, lending credibility to this interpretation.

An unweighted total of 470 adults were identified who lived in households containing non-poor children and at least one poor adult; 333 of these were identified who met the criteria for sacrificing their needs: i.e. they were in poverty. Parents, women, those aged 30-39, main carers for children, and those who were not in full-time work or self-employed had somewhat higher rates of sacrificing. Very little difference was found based on ethnicity (although due to small numbers it was only possible to compare

white to non-white respondents). Overall, 74% of adults living in these circumstances were themselves poor – that is, only 26% of adults living in households where any adults are poor and where children are not poor, avoided poverty. In terms of the composition of sacrificing adults, these were overwhelmingly parents; a small majority were women, and most were aged under 50. Most were in some form of employment (62%).

A logistic regression model, also shown in table 7, was used to see whether statistically significant differences were found based on these characteristics when they were all controlled for. Only two characteristics – being aged 30-39 compared to being aged 18-29, and being the main carer for children, were statistically significant, and in both cases people in these situations were more likely to sacrifice their own needs. Main carers had the highest odds of sacrificing their needs – at 4.6. Neither sex nor being a parent were significantly associated with higher odds of sacrificing[5], although some caution is indicated in interpreting results for parents due to the low numbers of non-parents in this sub-sample.

Table 7: Characteristics of adults who sacrifice their needs for children (%)

		Rate	Composition	Logistic odds	sig	Total composition
Parent	No	55	8	1.0		50
	Yes	76	92	2.6	NS	50
Sex	Male	68	43	1.0		48
	Female	80	57	1.9	NS	52
Age group	18-29	70	28	1.0		25
	30-39	86	36	2.8	*	33
	40-49	68	30	0.9	NS	32
	50-59	77	6	1.5	NS	9
	60+	19	0	0.1	NS	2
Main carer	No	63	47	1.0		75
	Yes	88	53	4.6	*	25
Employment status	Full time work	76	40	1.0		50
	Part time work	89	18	2.6	NS	16
	Self employed	68	4	0.7	NS	5
	Unemployed	85	12	1.7	NS	7
	Looking after family	87	19	2.1	NS	13
	Other	90	7	2.8	NS	8
Ethnicity	White	75	76	1.0		79
	Not white	72	24	0.9	NS	21
Total rate		74				

[5] Separate models testing these predictors in bivariate regressions and testing interactions between gender and being the main carer were run, and associations remained non-significant. However, too few cases of non-parents who were the main child carer existed within the sample of 470 for this interaction to be properly investigated, indicating the need for further research on a larger sample.

A lack of socially perceived necessities does not necessarily capture the full range of economising behaviours that adults might engage in to conserve limited resources. The PSE2012 survey included a suite of questions concerned with economising behaviours; adults were asked: 'In the last 12 months to help you keep your living costs down have you…':

- Skimped on food so others would have enough to eat
- Bought second hand clothes instead of new
- Continued to wear worn-out clothes
- Cut back on visits to the hairdresser or barber
- Postponed visits to the dentist
- Spent less on hobbies
- Cut back on social visits, going to the pub or eating out.

An additional question about economising on pensions contributions was omitted from this analysis due to a very large proportion of respondents (55.4% overall, 49.0% of those with children in their households) indicating that the question was not applicable.

Table 8 shows the proportion of adults living in households with children, broken down according to whether children are PSE poor or not, who 'often', 'sometimes' or 'never' engage in these economising activities. The last two columns show the proportion who economise either 'sometimes' or 'often', and compares the odds of those in households with poor children economising to those in households where the children are not poor. For each activity, adults living in households with poor children are significantly more likely to engage in economising behaviours. Cutting back on social activities is almost universal amongst adults in households with poor children, with 92% of adults economising on this. 69% of adults in households with poor children skimp on their food in order to ensure others have enough to eat – making them five times more likely to do so than adults in households where the children are not poor.

Table 8: Economising behaviours amongst adults in households with poor and non-poor children (%)

		Often	Sometimes	Never	Any	Odds (any)	
Skimped on food	Children not poor	7	23	69	**31**	1.0	
	Children poor	27	42	31	**69**	5.0	*
Second hand clothes	Children not poor	9	22	69	**31**	1.0	
	Children poor	24	32	44	**56**	2.8	*
Worn-out clothes	Children not poor	13	44	43	**57**	1.0	
	Children poor	43	39	18	**82**	3.3	*
Hairdresser/barber	Children not poor	21	33	46	**54**	1.0	
	Children poor	45	21	10	**66**	4.3	*
Postponed dentist	Children not poor	16	21	62	**38**	1.0	
	Children poor	35	23	41	**59**	2.3	*
Spent less on hobbies	Children not poor	26	44	30	**70**	1.0	
	Children poor	60	27	13	**87**	2.9	*
Social visits etc	Children not poor	33	42	25	**75**	1.0	
	Children poor	68	24	8	**92**	3.6	*

As above, in addition to looking at the behaviours of adults in households containing poor children, economising behaviours of 'sacrificing' adults (who themselves are poor but live in households where children are not poor) are of interest in relation to intra-household distributions. Multiple 'sacrificing' adults may live in a household – ie. any adult who is poor and living with children who are not poor is classed as 'sacrificing', irrespective of whether other adults in their household are 'sacrificing' or not. Economising behaviours amongst these adults may be a further method used to protect children from poverty. Table 9 shows that amongst these adults, rates of economising are at similar levels to those amongst adults who live in households where children are poor (Table 8), and in some cases are even higher – for example 85% compared to 66% of adults living with poor children cut back on visits to the hairdresser/barber; and 95% compared to 92% cut back on social visits. A smaller proportion – 58% compared to 69% - skimped on food, and 55% compared to 59% postponed visits to the dentist.

Comparing 'sacrificing' adults to adults in the same households who are not poor, rates of economising are higher across the board for sacrificing adults; but the association is only statistically significant for cutting back on visits to the hairdresser/barber, spending less on hobbies, and cutting back on social visits.

Table 9: Rates and odds of economising amongst 'sacrificing' adults

	Rate (non-sacrificing)	Rate (sacrificing)	Odds	
Skimped on food	38%	58%	2.3	NS
Second hand clothes	41%	52%	1.6	NS
Worn-out clothes	63%	80%	2.3	NS
Hairdresser/barber	54%	85%	4.7	*
Postponed dentist	49%	55%	1.3	NS
Spent less on hobbies	66%	87%	3.4	*
Social visits etc	69%	95%	9.3	*

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to address four research questions, detailed above, which will now be examined in turn.

How do poverty rates vary between adults and children? Using both income poverty and the PSE poverty measure which combines income, household deprivation, and individual deprivation, rates of child poverty were higher than overall population- and adult poverty rates – in line with official poverty statistics (see Carr et al, 2014). However, using the PSE poverty measure it is possible to disaggregate poverty rates amongst adults and children in households containing both[6]. Such analysis reveals that the highest poverty rates are amongst adults living in households with children, followed by children themselves; the lowest rates are amongst adults living in households which do not contain children (but further disaggregation amongst this group, for example according to age, ethnicity, etc, would undoubtedly reveal similarly large variations amongst this group of adults).

[6] As noted above, whilst figures for children and adults in households with children are presented for low income, this is an artefact of the numbers of children and adults living in households containing children, rather than a meaningful breakdown between these categories of people.

How do poverty rates and the composition of poor children vary according to socio-economic characteristics such as household employment status? In line with previous research (see Carr et al, 2014), factors such as household employment status and family structure impacted child poverty rates. However, also in line with such research, higher rates of poverty amongst some groups, such as children in workless households and lone-adult families, did not translate into poor people being primarily composed of such children. Far more socio-demographic factors significantly predicted income poverty than predicted PSE poverty, the latter providing a more accurate reflection of actual living standards.

Do the behaviours and experiences of poor children (and their parents) support individualised explanations of poverty and the 'cultures of poverty' theory? Poor children face disadvantage not only in terms of the resources available to them individually and within their households, but also in terms of access to services and communal resources – such as youth groups and safe outdoor spaces. This suggests a need for greater public investment in such resources, an unlikely proposition in the current political climate where the cutting of public spending on both benefits and services is hitting poor people, and families with children, hardest (Reed and Portes, 2014). Very few significant differences were found between the parents of poor children and those of non-poor children, and where there were differences the direction of the effect was not consistent – that is, in some cases better-off parents engaged more in parenting activities, and in other cases (watching TV and eating a meal) worse-off parents engaged more in such activities. No support was found for the idea that poor parenting is more common amongst poor parents.

Are resources shared equitably between different household members in households with children, and if not who goes without? As noted above, comparisons of rates of poverty when individual-level measures were used revealed more poverty amongst adults in households containing children, than amongst children themselves, suggesting unequal intra-household distributions which favour children. Further examination of this was undertaken based on two groups of adults – adults who lived in households containing poor children, and 'sacrificing adults', who were themselves poor who lived in households where children were not poor. Strong evidence was found suggesting that where resources are limited, adults prioritise children's needs – children were less likely to go without than adults, and where children were in poverty, adults were much more likely to both be poor themselves and to engage in economising behaviours. Some such behaviours were specifically aimed at protecting others in their households – such as skimping on food so that others could have enough. This is in line with previous research findings suggesting parental prioritisation of children (Middleton et al, 1997; Ridge, 2009). However, unlike previous work (for example Pahl, 1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2005) women were not found to be more likely to make sacrifices than men; rather, adults identified as the main carer for children were more likely, irrespective of gender.

Implications

There has always been both academic and policy debate around how best to measure poverty. Current policy measures rely primarily on income, with some limited incorporation of deprivation (although the extent to which child-specific deprivation is included is very limited – see Bailey, 2014). Coalition criticisms (echoing wider

criticisms of income-based measures) include that they are too narrow in focus – a criticism which finds support in this analysis, since household-level income measures were found to obscure intra-household variation in exposure to poverty. That is, if policy approaches to poverty are concerned with raising living standards, primarily income-based measures are likely to misclassify some poor people as non-poor, and some non-poor people as poor. However, the rationale for the changes that were proposed by the Coalition are not supported by this research. The majority of poor children do not live in workless households (echoing official statistics – see Carr et al, 2014); and the majority of adults living in households containing poor children go without themselves and engage in a range of economising behaviours including not only going without socialising opportunities but also having inadequate food themselves in order to provide for others. Whilst broader measures than income are indicated, therefore, there is little support for the incorporation of what Coalition rhetoric (cited above) and the broader public (DWP, 2013) *perceive* to be common experiences of poor families (see Bailey and Tomlinson, nd). The consensual approach to poverty measurement, which incorporates deprivation indicators perceived to be necessities by the majority of the population, provides a method for incorporating public perceptions of appropriate standards of living into poverty measurement without conflating values with facts.

The conflation of values with facts in poverty measurement, and the difficulty of examining intra-household distributions using primarily income-based measures, has the potential to impact not only assessments of poverty rates, but also which policies are deemed suitable in addressing poverty. The finding of higher poverty rates amongst adults in households with children than amongst children themselves, and of a range of economising behaviours which adults engage in to provide for others, supports previous research findings (for example Ridge, 2009; Middleton et al, 1997) and, as already noted, challenges Coalition rhetoric. The findings presented here that main carers are more likely than other adults in households with children to sacrifice their own needs to protect their children supports research that intra-household distributions amongst adults in households with children may be inequitable, and indicates that children's living standards may be negatively impacted by the decision to pay Universal Credit (the Coalition's flagship change to the UK benefits system) to the head of household rather than to the children's main carer. More recent announcements that pre-paid benefits cards will be trialled in order to protect the well-being of families (Duncan Smith, 2014) are also called into question, given the lack of evidence that parents living in impoverished circumstances prioritise their own needs. Indeed, limiting what parents can spend their money on may hamper, rather than help, their efforts to protect their children at their own expense. That parents are having to make such sacrifices additionally indicates a need to focus on poverty amongst parents, as well as amongst children – both to help ensure decent living standards for all, and because children are likely to be aware of and suffer as a result of their parents going without even if they themselves are provided for (Ridge, 2002).

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