Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 574

Cognitive testing: British Social Attitudes child poverty questions

Margaret Blake, Elizabeth Clery, Joanna d'Ardenne and Robin Legard

A report of research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Acknowledgements

The Authors

Margaret Blake is a Research Director within the Questionnaire Development and Testing (QDT) Hub at NatCen.

Elizabeth Clery is a Senior Researcher on the *British Social Attitudes* survey.

Joanna d'Ardenne is a Researcher within the QDT Hub at NatCen.

Robin Legard is a Senior Researcher now based in the Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen, but carried out the research when he was based in the QDT Hub.

Abbreviations

BSA	*British Social Attitudes* survey
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
NatCen	National Centre for Social Research
QDT Hub	Questionnaire Development and Testing Hub, within NatCen
UK	United Kingdom

Glossary

Card Sort	Respondents are asked to sort cards (usually 10-12) into a number of piles. This helps researchers understand what respondents would include within a concept or how they categorise issues. This technique can be used as a tool for cognitive testing or can be implemented in a survey.
Cognitive testing	A technique drawn from psychology and applied to social research. The aim is to understand how respondents go about answering questions and to identify comprehension, recall and response problems.
Core team	NatCen's team of specially trained cognitive interviewers.
Probing	Questions directed to respondents during cognitive interviewing to find out how they went about answering a question.
Think aloud	A technique used in cognitive testing whereby respondents vocalise their thought processes as they answer a question or complete a task.
Vignettes	Scenarios described to respondents to help define the concept that they are being asked about using a concrete example. This technique can be used as a tool for cognitive testing or can be implemented in a survey.

Summary

Aims and objectives

This research was carried out by researchers on the British Social Attitudes team and in the Questionnaire Development and Testing Hub (QDT Hub) at NatCen to test questions on attitudes to child poverty for use on the *British Social Attitudes* survey (BSA). The objectives were to:

• explore the effectiveness of existing survey questions regarding poverty generally; and

• develop and test a new set of questions exploring public attitudes to child poverty.

These new questions were designed to measure, among other things, whether the public believes child poverty exists in Britain, what child poverty is, who should be responsible for tackling it and how they should go about it. The intended outputs of the research were:

• a revised set of questions about poverty in general (identifying the most effective existing BSA questions and modifying as required); and

• a new set of questions on attitudes to child poverty, to be included in BSA.

Methodology

Cognitive interviewing methods were used to test existing BSA questions on poverty in general and new questions on child poverty in January 2008. Cognitive interviewing draws on ideas from cognitive psychology to understand how respondents go about answering questions. The technique focuses on four main processes involved in answering survey questions[1]:

• understanding and interpretation of the question;

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[1]	Tourangeau, R. (1984), Cognitive science and survey methods in Jabine, T., Straf, M., Tanur, J., and Tourangeau, R. (Eds), Cognitive Aspects of Survey Design: Building a Bridge Between Disciplines: Washington: National Academy Press.

- ability to recall information needed to answer the questions;
- judgements involved in deciding on an answer; and
- use of response categories to answer the question.

Respondents are asked the survey question and are either asked to 'think aloud' while answering or are asked a series of 'probe' questions by the interviewer once they have answered the survey question. Both techniques were employed in this project. As a result of cognitive testing it is possible to identify problems with survey questions, which would not be revealed in a standard field pilot, and make recommendations for changes which should overcome those problems.

Cognitive interviewing is a qualitative technique and so samples are purposive and designed to represent the diversity of views relevant to the questions, rather than being statistically representative. For this project 20 interviews were carried out with respondents selected to include men and women of a range of ages, of both lower and higher socio-economic status, from households with and without children and including respondents from ethnic minority groups. Respondents were recruited and interviewed by NatCen's core team of specially trained cognitive interviewers.

Questions tested

The test questionnaire included questions on the following topics:

- perceptions of poverty, in general, in Britain;
- perceptions of child poverty in Britain (using modified existing questions, vignettes and card sorts);
- views on government priorities for spending, policies to tackle child poverty and policies for getting lone parents into work; and
- knowledge of government targets for child poverty.

Respondents' conceptions of poverty

An important finding from the testing was that respondents' conceptions of poverty varied. This affected the way in which they answered the survey questions and what lay behind their answers. Respondents with very different conceptions of poverty could give the same survey answers with differences revealed only by think aloud and probing. Any questions looking at the issue of child poverty need to be able to capture and reflect these differing ways of conceptualising poverty so that respondents with different views can be identified from the survey data.

Absolute and relative poverty

There were two main conceptions of poverty expressed by respondents:

• poverty as **absolute**, involving a lack of essentials or basic needs; and

• poverty as **relative**, meaning lacking things that others take for granted.

Respondents differed in terms of whether their reference point was confined to Britain or was worldwide, and whether they were thinking of the situation in the past or the present. This was reflected in what they regarded as basic needs. For respondents, meeting a basic need for housing could be:

• having somewhere to live; or

• having a place to live which is warm and not overcrowded.

For respondents, what other people take for granted could be:

• standard electrical goods (e.g. television or microwave); or

• luxury items (e.g. designer clothes, expensive food and holidays abroad).

Reasons for lacking items

The idea of not being able to afford something was an important aspect of poverty for respondents. If people lack items through choice (prioritising) or through mismanagement of income then this was not considered to be 'poverty'. On this issue, respondents were not always able to distinguish between 'child poverty' and family poverty'. Therefore, even if the choice not to have an item was the parent's rather than the child's, respondents still considered the child **not** to be in poverty.

Perceptions of poverty in general in Britain (Section 2.1)

Respondents were asked three existing BSA questions about whether they would classify different types of people as being in poverty. Respondents' understanding of 'things they really needed' and 'things most people take for granted' differed meaning that respondents answered the questions in inconsistent ways. The most effective question in the set was the third question which asked whether someone was or was not in poverty if they 'had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt' since respondents had more consistent understandings of what was meant. We recommend that the third question is retained together with a modified version of the first question with examples included.

Perceptions of child poverty in Britain

Adapted BSA questions (Chapter 3)

Respondents were asked how much child poverty there is in Britain today, whether this has been increasing or decreasing over the last ten years and what they think will happen over the next ten years. These were adapted from existing BSA questions which asked about poverty in general. The cognitive interviewing process led to some useful insights into the way in which the public conceives child poverty in terms of whether it is an absolute or relative concept and how it relates to poverty in general. However the question about how much child poverty there was in Britain today, as administered in a survey would not capture that information since those who answered 'very little' included people with diverse views on poverty depending on their point of reference (Britain or worldwide, present or past). Providing a definition of what is meant by child poverty in the context of this question could help overcome this problem. The first question about the situation today did not allow respondents to say that there is no child poverty in Britain today and this answer category should be added to the question.

Vignettes (Chapter 4)

Interviewers described the situation (housing, social and ability to take part in activities) of three fictional children. Respondents were asked to say whether each child was or was not in poverty and whether this was 'definitely' or 'probably'. Respondents liked this approach to looking at child poverty. They used two main strategies in deciding their answer, whether:

• an item the child was lacking was 'essential'; and

• an item was 'cheap' and only the poorest would not be able to afford it.

Respondents used assumptions to fill in missing details, for example about whether their accommodation was privately or local authority owned. Since respondents made differing assumptions this sometimes made the basis of their answers inconsistent. Some respondents queried whether the details given in the vignettes were plausible. Vignettes are recommended for inclusion in the main questionnaire but with modifications to make the examples more detailed and more plausible.

Card sort (Chapter 5)

Respondents were given a set of 11 cards with statements such as 'Family cannot afford a TV', or 'Family cannot afford for child to go on school trips'. They were asked to sort them into three piles to indicate whether, if the child was in this situation through not being able to afford it, the child is 'definitely living in poverty', 'possibly living in poverty' or 'not living in poverty'. The lack of detail given on the cards and associated variation in assumptions made by respondents meant this section worked less well than the vignettes, particularly since it is not an individual factor such as not having a TV that determines whether a child is in poverty,

but rather their overall situation. The result of differing assumptions was that respondents could give similar answers but have a very different conception of child poverty. This approach is not recommended for the main questionnaire but was a useful tool for exploring respondents' conceptions of poverty in cognitive interviews.

Views on government spending priorities and policies

Priorities for spending on social benefits (Section 2.2)

Respondents were provided with a list of benefits such as retirement pensions, benefits for single parents and benefits for families in poverty and were asked to rank which they thought should be the highest priority for extra spending. The main problems faced by respondents in answering this question were:

• lack of understanding of the task;

• difficulties in deciding on priorities (and a tendency for their priorities to reflect their own interests, e.g. older people tended to prioritise retirement pensions);

• lack of understanding of the benefits system and the types of benefits listed and the distinctions between them; and

• a desire for spending to be based on individual circumstances.

The option of 'benefits for families in poverty' was often selected because it was regarded as benefiting the most people and being the broadest category. This category should be dropped or redefined to avoid overlap with other categories. The task needs to be simplified by asking respondents to code all that apply before ranking and by providing definitions for terms such as 'tax credits'.

Impacts of policies to remove children from poverty (Section 5.3)

A series of three questions asked about the impacts of the following government policies on child poverty:

• providing employment opportunities to parents of children in poverty;

• giving financial help to parents of children in poverty; and

• providing help targeted directly at children in poverty.

Respondents were able to answer these but pointed out that the effectiveness of policies depended on the age of the child and the time scale being considered. For example, for younger children help to parents is likely to be more effective whereas for older children providing children with skills for employment may be appropriate. These questions would be improved by specifying a timeframe and age of child to be considered.

Benefits and employment policies for lone parents (Chapter 6)

Respondents were asked their views on government policies and priorities for lone parents, specifically looking at whether a lone parent with a one year old child should be required to look for work as the child gets older and at what age. The questions were understood as intended and captured differences in attitudes. The main problem was that the question asked respondents to give the age of the child when the parent should be required to look for work whereas the responses given by respondents were in terms of life stages (e.g. when starting school). The question would be more effective if respondents were asked about life stages rather than age.

Knowledge of government targets (Section 5.2)

The questionnaire included three questions about respondents' knowledge of government targets to reduce and eventually eradicate child poverty in Britain. Respondents were asked about the target for 2010 and the target date for ending child poverty and whether they had previously been aware of these targets. The cognitive interviews revealed a general lack of knowledge among respondents. Three main strategies were used by those who did not know the answer:

• **Prescriptivism.** Respondents reported what they felt **ought** to be the case rather than what they actually believed the target to be (e.g. poverty should be eliminated soon and so the target should be to end poverty by 2010).

• **Realism.** Respondents would guess the targets by thinking about what they personally thought was realistic and obtainable (e.g. The target for eliminating child poverty is 2015 as 2010 is too close and 2020 too far away).

• **Guesswork.** Respondent would make a complete guess as to the answer (e.g. go for 2010 as it was the middle option).

There appeared to be no link between reported previous knowledge of the targets and ability to answer the knowledge questions correctly. These questions are not an effective measure of knowledge and are not recommended for inclusion in the BSA.

1   Background

1.1   Background of this project

The *British Social Attitudes* survey (BSA) is an annual survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The survey started in 1983 and is designed to chart, describe and analyse trends in public attitudes to a range of social policy questions. The survey has a wide range of funders including government departments, academic bodies and charities.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is one of a number of long-standing funders of questions on the BSA. Each year, it funds a module consisting of new questions (focusing on areas of interest that have not been examined previously by the survey) and repeat questions (to explore how attitudes about particular issues have changed over time).

In 2007, DWP identified a need to undertake a full review of its module of questions on the BSA. The aim of this review was to ensure that the module has a strategic focus; reflecting, and enabling a benchmark for DWP's Strategic Objectives. By ensuring that the structure and content of the module reflects departmental strategy, it is hoped that the BSA will be promoted as the key quantitative measure of public attitudes.

One of the key elements of the DWP module review relates to the department's strategic objective to 'Reduce the number of children living in poverty'. While the DWP has funded a number of long-standing questions on the BSA on poverty in general, to date there has been no specific consideration of child poverty. To explore how this subject area could be addressed effectively in future surveys, DWP commissioned the National Centre for Social Research in 2007 to undertake a detailed review, involving cognitive question testing, focusing on poverty in general and child poverty in particular.

1.2   Objectives

The objectives of the review are two-fold:

A   To explore how effectively existing survey questions on poverty are working

DWP are interested in finding out how well respondents understand the existing BSA questions focusing on poverty, what issues they have in mind when responding to these questions and whether the questions are tapping into the dimensions the Department is interested in measuring. As the questions on poverty have been repeated on a number of occasions over the past two decades, there is a reluctance to undertake extensive revisions of them. Any changes would involve losing a time series that is used to explore long-term attitudinal change.

This review has three objectives:

- to establish which of the existing questions are most useful in serving DWP's purposes and which should consequently be fielded in 2008 and beyond;

- to identify minor changes to question formats or wording that could be reconsidered and piloted to measure attitudes to poverty more effectively;

- to assess the effectiveness of existing poverty questions, which could inform the design of the new question set on child poverty? For instance, DWP may wish to replicate question formats for poverty and child poverty to measure how attitudes to these two phenomena differ.

B   To develop and test a new set of questions exploring public attitudes to child poverty

DWP are keen to develop a set of questions that enable the collection of data in relation to a series of high-level questions that feed into their overarching strategic objective to 'reduce the number of children living in poverty'. These high-level questions are the following:

- Does the public believe that child poverty actually exists in the UK?

- What do they think child poverty is?

- Who do they think should be responsible for tackling child poverty?

- Do they think that tackling child poverty should be a high spending priority?

- Are they aware of the Government's 2020 target to eradicate poverty and their attitudes to this?

- How should children be best removed from poverty e.g. through work, benefits or education?

- Given that over 40 per cent of children living in poverty are in lone parent families, should more be done to help them?

In developing and cognitively testing questions designed to measure these issues, there are a number of underlying themes to address:

- Whether the public can consider child poverty separately from poverty in general. If the public does not distinguish between the two it may be necessary to consider only focusing on one of these issues or locating the two sets of questions separately within the module.

- How the public understands the term 'child poverty' and under what circumstances a child is perceived to be living in poverty. It will be important to establish to what extent the understanding of 'child poverty' is consistent among the public, as this will impact the quality of the data that can be obtained.

- In terms of consistency between child poverty definitions, there are two particular issues that need to be explored. Firstly, the review will need to establish if definitions of child poverty differ for children in different age groups. Secondly, it will need to consider if items or facilities that a child owns or has access to, including items a child's parents have chosen/not chosen to buy for them, is of primary importance.

The intended outcome of this review is to develop a detailed understanding of how the public perceives and responds to survey questions about poverty and child poverty. This will enable DWP to agree to an effective set of questions measuring attitudes, with the ultimate aim of enabling the measurement of progress against their strategic objective to 'reduce the number of children living in poverty'.

1.3   Research design

The cognitive testing questions were selected from existing BSA questions on poverty while new questions on child poverty were developed through consultation between DWP, the BSA team and the Questionnaire Development & Testing Hub (QDT Hub).

Cognitive testing was undertaken by the QDT Hub, which is located within NatCen's Survey Methods Unit (SMU). One round of cognitive testing, including 20 interviews, in four areas of England was carried out. Four members of NatCen's trained core team of cognitive interviewers carried out the interviews using a standard questionnaire and probe sheet. The sample was designed to include a range of respondents and was selected by door step screening (greater detail is given in Section 1.5).

1.4   Research methodology

Cognitive interviews were used for this project since the aim was to test survey questions and understand how people go about answering these questions. Cognitive interviews can involve the use of techniques such as vignettes and card sorts, either as a testing tool or to test their use as part of a questionnaire. Cognitive interviews, which are qualitative in nature, help reduce measurement error by

aiding question design, assisting in the creation of questions that respondents understand and are willing and able to answer. They make use of techniques drawn from cognitive psychology to uncover aspects of the survey response process that are usually hidden. For example, a respondent may answer 'yes' to a survey question and show no visible signs of confusion, but may be conceptualizing the question differently from the question designer. This would not be revealed in a standard field pilot test.

Specifically, cognitive interviewing techniques focus on four processes[2]:

• how respondents understand and interpret survey questions;

• how they recall information that applies to the question;

• the judgements they make about what information to use when formulating their answer(s); and

• how they respond to the question.

These techniques enable researchers to examine the question-and-answer process, identify problems and suggest solutions. The two most frequently used cognitive interviewing techniques are Think Aloud and Probing, both of which were used for this project. In the Think Aloud technique, respondents are asked to say out loud what they are thinking as they answer a question; this was used for the card sort exercise (this is explained more in Chapter 5). In Probing, the interviewer asks specific, usually scripted, questions to explore what the respondent thinks the question means, what information they are drawing on to answer the question, what decisions they make about what the question means or what information is required to answer it and how they provide their (final) answer to the question. Probing can be carried out immediately after the respondent has provided an answer to each question, or retrospectively after all questions have been asked. For this project, probes were asked after each survey question.

1.5   Sampling and recruitment

Since cognitive interviews are qualitative in nature, purposive samples are used. A purposive sample is not designed to be statistically representative of the target population. The aim of a purposive sample is to identify all the key sampling variables (characteristics) that are likely to be present in the target population and to select respondents on the basis of these characteristics. This is done to capture the full range and diversity of views and experiences within the target population. This means including people who will give an array of responses, but who will also

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[2]   Tourangeau, R. (1984). *Cognitive science and survey methods*. In T. B. Jabine, M. L. Straf, J.
M. Tanur & R. Tourangeau (Eds.), *Cognitive aspects of survey methodology: Building a bridge between disciplines* (pp. 73-100). Washington DC: National Academy Press.

approach the question in different ways. Thus, the sample design is driven by the subject of study and the types of questions being tested.

Since the questions being tested for this project are intended for a general population sample it was important to include men and women of different ages. These characteristics were interlocked so that, for example, we included a certain number of men from a particular age group, rather than solely setting quotas for men and women and each age group separately.

Given that the research topic was attitudes to child poverty, it was important to include people from various socio-economic backgrounds and at least some respondents with children. We also decided to include some ethnic minority respondents since it is possible that they would have different attitudes to child poverty.

Quotas were set so that the sample met the previous criteria. The characteristics of those interviewed are shown ahead. Twenty interviews were carried out in four areas of England: Essex, Birmingham, Nottinghamshire/Lincolnshire and Manchester.

Table 1.1   Characteristics of the achieved sample

Characteristics		No. with characteristic
Gender	Male	9
	Female	11
Age	18-29	6
	30-49	7
	50+	7
Socio-economic status	Lower	10
	Higher	10
Children in household	Yes	7
	No	13
Ethnic group	Ethnic minority	4
	Non-ethnic minority	16

1.5.1   Recruitment

Recruitment was conducted by the cognitive interviewers working on the study. Interviewers carried out a screening and recruitment procedure that involved knocking on doors to identify suitable respondents and administered a screening and recruitment sheet, which included questions on gender, age, number of people in the household, other household members (including children), ethnicity and socio-economic group. The question used to identify socio-economic group is shown ahead. This question had previously been used in pilots for BSA. Although the final sample included people from various socio-economic groups as intended,

the interviewers reported that they found the screening question about socio-economic status something of a 'blunt instrument' and, on occasion, misleading. For example, one woman who had worked for a few years as a clerical assistant in the civil service, but had since lived on benefits, was coded as having a higher socio-economic status than an electrician who lived in a large house and had a higher income.

Please tell me the sort of work you do, or that you did in your last job.

RECORD VERBATIM: _____

b. INTERVIEWER CODE ONE ONLY:

Professional occupations 1
such as: teacher – nurse – physiotherapist – estate agent – social worker – welfare officer – clergy – artist – journalist – police officer (sergeant or above) – army officer (above Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO)) – civil service executive officer – accountant – solicitor – medical practitioner – scientist – civil or mechanical engineer – IT professional – software designer

Clerical and intermediate occupations 2
such as: secretary – personal assistant – clerical worker – office clerk – wages clerk call centre agent – building inspector – insurance broker – civil service or local government administrative or clerical officer – nursing auxiliary – nursery nurse – police officer (below sergeant) – armed forces (NCO or below) – fire-fighter – air traffic controller

Senior managers 3
such as: finance manager – chief executive – senior public sector manager

Middle or junior managers or proprietors of small businesses 4
such as: office manager – retail manager – bank manager – restaurant manager – warehouse manager – publican – proprietor of a shop, garage, hairdresser/barber etc

Technical and craft occupations 5
such as: motor mechanic – fitter – inspector – plumber – printer – tool maker – electrician – gardener – train driver

Semi-routine and routine manual and service occupations 6
such as: postal worker – machine operative – security guard – caretaker – farm worker – catering assistant – receptionist – sales assistant – hairdresser – Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) driver – van driver – bus driver – taxi driver – cleaner – porter – packer – sewing machinist – messenger – labourer – waiter/waitress – bar staff – child minder – teaching assistant – building worker – painter or decorator

Never had a job 7

Each interviewer recruited respondents in accordance with a pre-assigned quota given to them. Respondents who were eligible and agreed to take part were given a letter with details of the project and an interview appointment was made.

1.6   Fieldwork and analysis

Fieldwork was carried out between 11th and 30th January 2008. The interviews were carried out by four members of NatCen's core team of cognitive interviewers who are highly trained in cognitive interviewing techniques. These interviewers were briefed and debriefed in person.

Interviews, which were carried out in respondents' homes unless otherwise specified, were recorded with the respondent's consent and lasted around one to one and a half hours.

The interviewers listened to a recording as soon as possible after each interview to create detailed notes on a standard template provided by the research team. These notes, interview recordings and the completed test questions were all used during analysis.

Analysis was carried out using an adapted version of *Framework* – an analytical tool devised by the Qualitative Research Unit (QRU) at NatCen. The process consists of transferring the data verbatim on to a series of thematic matrices (or 'charts'). Each chart consists of columns and rows. The columns each represent a particular theme identified from the research, while each row is allocated to a specific interview. In this way, the data from an interview is entered under the appropriate thematic heading, but in the same row, across all the charts. This process permits detail within case and across case analysis.

1.7   Structure of the report

The report follows the order of the questions tested and reports on the findings for each question in turn (Chapters 2-6). Recommendations are included where appropriate in boxes located with the findings for each question. At the end of the report a conclusions and recommendations, Chapter 7, brings together the main findings, particularly those which cut across questions and highlights the key recommendations.

2 Poverty and benefits questions

2.1 Defining who is in poverty

Question 1a, b and c (below) were originally designed to investigate how respondents judge if an individual is in poverty in Britain today and have been fielded in the *British Social Attitudes* survey (BSA) on a number of previous occasions. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were interested in exploring how well these questions are working in practice. Cognitive interviewing techniques were used to examine if respondents had any difficulties answering the questions, why these difficulties arose and to explore how respondents understood the terminology used in the questions.

I would like to start by asking you some questions about poverty in Britain today.

Q1

a) Would you say that someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty if…they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but **not** enough to buy the things most people take for granted?

 1 Was in poverty

 2 Was not in poverty

b) (Would you that say someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty)…if they had enough to eat and live, but **not** enough to buy other things they needed?

 1 Was in poverty

 2 Was not in poverty

c) (Would you say that someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty)…if they had **not** got enough to eat and live without getting into debt?

 1 Was in poverty

 2 Was not in poverty

2.1.1 Issues arising from question 1a

The way in which respondents answered this question hinges on their interpretation of the terms 'really needed' and 'take for granted.' The cognitive interviews therefore explored how participants interpreted these terms, and assessed how easy it was for respondents to answer the questions.

Conceptions of basic needs

On the whole, respondents had a consistent understanding of the phrase 'things people really needed'. Things people really needed were considered to be the following:

- food;
- clothing;
- healthcare;
- accommodation;
- utilities (water, gas, electricity).

Respondents took this phrase to be interchangeable with the concept of the bare living essentials. People who did not have these essentials were considered to be in poverty. However, it should be noted that respondents held different views on the quality for the above essentials to be considered necessary. For instance, some respondents stated that all that was required was, 'a roof over their heads', whilst others specified accommodation that was warm, not overcrowded, and so forth.

Interpretations of things taken for granted

Respondents voiced some concerns over the phraseology of 'things most other people take for granted.' This term was considered by some to be ambiguous and subjective.

> *'That's a bit difficult as what I take for granted may not be what other people take for granted.'*
>
> (Female, 38)

The subjectivity of the term 'take for granted' is demonstrated by the eclectic spread of commodities and services that respondents thought of as things most people take for granted. These items ranged from standard electrical goods (e.g. televisions, microwaves) to luxury items (e.g. designer clothes, expensive food and holidays abroad). Other examples of things most people take for granted included:

- cigarettes;
- furniture;
- cars;

- new technology;

- sports; and

- nights out.

Respondents expressed the view that young people particularly took too many things for granted, such as computer games and DVD players.

Implications of considering concepts of poverty

When answering this question, respondents had to judge if someone was impoverished by considering if they could afford certain items. However, the items respondents considered in answering this question were dependant on what they thought the term 'take for granted' referred to in the question. It is unsurprising that respondents who interpreted the items that one might 'take for granted' as luxury goods, did not consider people without said goods as being in poverty. If people do not consider similar commodities when answering this question, its validity as a measure is questionable. Respondents may be more consistent in their understanding of the task if they do not consider luxury items or other high expense commodities when answering.

> ### Recommendations
>
> Include examples of the type of commodities to which the question is referring to help ensure that respondents understand the concept consistently. Example: Would you say that someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty if…they had enough money to buy the things they really needed, but **not** enough to buy the things most people take for granted (e.g. televisions or microwaves)?
>
> Another approach would be to ask people about items 'you take for granted'.

As this is a long-standing series of questions, the impact of any changes to question wording and format on the question's potential to enable time series analysis must be considered. For instance, if an amended version of wording is required, the old and new question versions could be run with split samples on the next survey in order to gauge the likely impact of any changes on the responses provided.

2.1.2   Issues arising from question 1b

The cognitive interview examined what respondents understood by the terms in the question including: 'other things they needed' and 'eat and live'. Respondents were also probed on how they went about answering the question.

Respondents found this question more difficult to answer than question 1a. It was considered that if a person was without an item they genuinely needed they were in poverty, but ambiguity remained over what might constitute a genuine need beyond items necessary to eat and live. The term 'to live' was considered broad and potentially ambiguous, covering a range of meanings from 'staying alive' to 'having a specific quality of life'.

It was clear that there were variable interpretations about what it meant 'to need' something. People can conceive 'need' as an absolute term (you either need something or you do not), or they can conceive 'need' as a relative term (you can have different levels of need above and beyond the bare essentials).

Conception of 'need' as absolute

The terminology used in Question 1b led to some confusion among the respondents. The phrases 'enough to eat and live' and 'things they needed' could be taken as synonymous.

> *'If they've got enough to eat and live what else do they need?'*

> (Male, 20s)

If respondents take the two terms used in the question to be interchangeable then logically one must follow the other; if one has enough to **live**, one must have what one needs. Emphasis was placed on the distinction between needing an item as opposed to merely wanting it. If a person is able to 'live' without an object, then by definition they do not 'need' it, even if they want it.

Conception of 'need' as relative

Some respondents felt there was a difference between absolute and relative need, and could suggest things that people need beyond the necessities of eating and living. Respondents found it more difficult to suggest items that might fall under the bracket of 'other things they needed' compared to the previously discussed 'things other people take for granted.' Suggestions included functional clothing, useful items (details unspecified), access to a car or money for public transport, furniture, variety in diet and trips away for the children.

There was some overlap between items thought to be 'things people take for granted' and 'other things they needed.' For instance, owning a car and furniture were examples brought up under both questions 1a and b. Some respondents stated that they could not understand the difference between the two questions. A further consideration was that needs differ between individuals, e.g. babies require nappies; school children require uniforms, and so forth.

Implications of investigating attitudes on poverty

Respondents found this question even more complicated than question 1a. There was a perception that the two questions were actually measuring the same thing (particularly if the aforementioned constraints are put on question 1a). It was therefore considered unnecessary to ask both questions.

Recommendations

Consider omitting question 1b from the study as it is difficult for the respondents to understand and overlaps with question 1a.

2.1.3 Issues arising from question 1c

The objective of the cognitive interview was to discover what respondents understood by the term, 'get into debt' and how they made their decision about whether or not a person was in poverty if they could not afford to eat and live without getting into debt.

Conceptions of being in debt

The respondents exhibited no real difficulties in answering this question. Respondents held similar understandings of the concept of being in debt. By and large the term 'get into debt' was conceptualised as a person spending more than they could afford to or more than their income. Ways of getting into debt included borrowing on bank or credit cards or not paying utility bills. Some uncertainty arose over whether or not debt could also refer to borrowing from friends and family. However, this was not considered the same as owing money to financial institutions and was not prominent in the minds of the respondents when they answered the question.

Debt as an indicator of poverty

Debt per se was not necessarily equated with poverty. Respondents explained that one can be in poverty without being in debt, and one can be in debt without being in poverty. Debts were seen as being either manageable or unmanageable; the latter describing circumstances in which the amount owed continued to accrue over time. Manageable debts that could be paid off were not considered a precursor to poverty. Debts could also be construed as overspending on non-essentials and extravagances or when a person lives beyond their current means. Such profligate debts were not seen as an indication of poverty, although they could result in poverty. However, the question specifically looked at people who could not afford enough to 'eat and live' without getting into debt. In line with the question, this was generally taken as being an indicator that a person was in poverty.

> #### Recommendations
>
> As respondents had no real difficulty understanding or answering this question, no alterations are considered necessary.

2.2 Spending on social benefits (Q2a-d)

The objective of questions 2 a-d was to establish the respondents' priorities for allocating areas on which additional spending on social benefits should be spent. Question 2a is detailed ahead. This series of questions has been included previously on the BSA; however, for the purpose of this exercise, the term 'benefits for families in poverty' was added as a possible response option, to see whether respondents could differentiate between this and the original options and to what extent it altered the profile of responses. Question 2 b-d followed an identical format with

question 2b asking for respondents' **second** highest priority, question 2c asking for respondents' **third** highest priority and question 2d asking for respondents' **fourth** highest priority.

Q2.

SHOW CARD A

a) Thinking now only of the government's spending on social benefits like those on Show Card A, please tell me which, if any, of these would be your highest priority for extra spending?

1 Retirement pensions

2 Child benefits

3 Benefits for the unemployed

4 Benefits for disabled people

5 Benefits for single parents

6 Benefits for families in poverty

7 Benefits for those in work on low incomes, e.g. tax credits

8 (None of these)

Respondents demonstrated varying levels of ability when completing this task. Some participants were able to prioritise their first, second, third and fourth choices for additional social benefits spending, and rationalise their reasons for doing so. However, other respondents found the question difficult to answer for a variety of reasons. The main difficulties encountered when completing the question are outlined ahead.

2.2.1   Difficulty in comprehension of task structure

Some participants did not pick up the fact they were expected to prioritise their answers and instead tried to code all possible answers that they felt required more funding.

2.2.2   Difficulty in prioritising spending

All options as equally deserving

Respondents said it was difficult to decide where more spending on social benefits should be allocated. In some cases this was because respondents thought that all the options were worthy of additional funding and they could not choose between them in terms of worthiness.

Personal experience as influential in prioritising spending

There was a tendency for respondents to select a response based on their own lifestyle, personal circumstances and viewpoint. For instance, retired people tended to prioritise higher spending on benefits for pensioners. Likewise, people who had experience with unemployed or disabled family members were more likely to rank these more deserving funding. People with no personal experience of receiving benefits found it more difficult to prioritise spending than those who could relate the question to their personal experience.

Lack of firm opinion on spending priorities

Greater difficulties were experienced when respondents came to selecting their third and fourth choices about spending priorities. Respondents had already 'used up' the options they felt strongly about and were left to pick remaining items from the list. For example, one respondent admitted that for his fourth choice of spending he did not know why he had chosen it; he had merely selected it as he didn't know, 'where to go.'

In the absence of strong opinions, there was a potential for respondents to code option 6 (benefits for families in poverty) because the focus of the interview was poverty and therefore the subject was more salient in their minds. Furthermore, option 6 was considered to be all-encompassing and some respondents selected this answer on the utilitarian basis that would provide help for the most people, including those who are entitled to the other benefits mentioned (see also Section 2.2.4 for further discussion on the lack of differentiation between the benefits listed).

> ### Recommendations
>
> As respondents had some difficulty understanding the task, the following procedure might be used as an appropriate alternative:
>
> - get respondents to select all answers they think require additional funding, i.e. **Code all that apply**;
>
> - respondents can then be asked to rank the answers they have previously selected in terms of the most important.
>
> Formatting the question in this way should also prevent respondents placing an artificial ranking on items for which they have no opinion for the sake of survey completion.

2.2.3   Variable understanding of the current benefits system

Variable understanding of the term 'benefits'

Respondents varied in their understanding of the term 'benefits.' Benefits could be understood as purely financial aid in the form of 'cash handouts.' However,

some respondents took the term broadly, including free prescriptions, free school dinners, housing provision and tax relief.

The difference between these two concepts may be important because a common concern amongst respondents was that cash benefits may not be put toward the intended use. If respondents are concerned that money allocated for child benefits is going to be misspent (for instance if it is going to be spent by the patents on cigarettes or alcohol), they may not place a high priority on increasing cash handouts for these benefit. However, if respondents interpret 'benefits' to encompass voucher schemes and so forth, their allocation priorities might change.

Some confusion was raised by respondents about the meaning of the term 'tax credit', with some respondents clearly understanding the term and others admitting no knowledge on the subject. It was noted by the respondents that tax credits for people on low income could be an important way of increasing motivation to work rather than living off 'handouts.'

Insufficient information on current benefit allocation

Respondents who found it difficult to prioritise extra spending on social benefits stated that their indecisiveness partially arose from a lack of knowledge of the current spending patterns.

> *'I don't know how much support they are getting at the moment. You talk about extra spending, but there's not too much information on what they are on.'*

(Male, 30s)

Although able to answer the question, it is possible that respondents would allocate funding differently if they had more information about current financial allocation.

Recommendations

Some respondents did not understand the term tax credit and thought of this as a form of tax relief:

• Define tax credits.

2.2.4   Lack of differentiation between types of benefits listed

One key problem uncovered by the cognitive interviews was the fact that distinctions between benefit types were sometimes unclear. Particular ambiguities were discussed regarding option 6, 'benefits for families in poverty.' This option was sometimes picked by respondents because it was seen to be all-embracing. For instance a family in poverty could be: a single parent household (option 5) in which the primary earner works on low income (option 7) or is unemployed

(Option 3). Additionally, some respondents considered options 6 and 7 to be the same and therefore found it hard to prioritise one over the other.

Other difficulties with Option 6 arose from how one should define a 'family in poverty.' As previously discussed, respondents held divergent views about the term poverty. Furthermore, there was some disagreement on what constitutes a 'family.' One respondent wanted to know whether a pair of married pensioners could be considered a 'family' and if so whether they would be entitled to benefits. Again, if family is considered to be an all-embracing term, respondents might be more likely to code this option over the others. Clarification of who is entitled to each type of benefit might aid respondents in coding, rather than choosing the option that they presume is open to everyone.

Recommendations

Option 6 (more benefits for 'families in poverty') proved problematic. This item was considered too broad. Because it included other categories on the list, respondents chose it as a priority despite not fully understanding what it was. It is recommended that either:

- Option 6 is not added to the standard survey question;

- Option 6 is added to the standard survey questions and all options should give clear examples of what the benefits entail and all options are shown to be mutually exclusive.

2.2.5 Difficulties in allocation arising from consideration of individual circumstances

In addition to the previous recommendations, it was noted that respondents thought that benefits allocation should focus on individual cases. For instance, when talking about family poverty, respondents wanted to know why the families were in poverty. Respondents stressed that additional cash should not be handed out to families who did not apportion the money they were already receiving in an appropriate way. For instance, if their children were going without basic commodities because parents chose to spend benefits on cigarettes or alcohol, further funds should not be made available to them. Similarly, respondents stated that additional benefits should not be available for the willfully unemployed, but should be for those who are genuinely seeking work.

3   Child poverty

3.1   The purpose of Question 3

Questions 3a, b and c (below) utilise a format and wording from existing *British Social Attitudes* survey (BSA) questions that focus broadly on poverty. Their aim is to capture respondents' beliefs about the specific prevalence of child poverty in Britain today, as well as examine respondents' beliefs about whether child poverty rates are changing over time and, if so, how. Cognitive interviewing techniques were used to explore what people understood by the term 'child poverty' and how they would go about answering questions on its prevalence.

Q3

I would now like to ask you some questions about **child** poverty in Britain today.

a) Some people say there is very little **child** poverty in Britain today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which come closest to **your** view…? READ OUT …

1 … that there is very little real poverty in Britain

2 or, that there is quite a lot?

b) Over the **last** ten years, do you think that child poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing or staying at about the same level?

1 Increasing

2 Decreasing

3 Staying at same level

c) And over the **next** ten years, do you think that child poverty in Britain will increase, decrease, or stay at about the same level?

1 Increase

2 Decrease

3 Stay at about the same level

3.1.1 Defining child poverty

Respondents had some difficulty answering these questions. Several issues were raised concerning the definition of child poverty, with respondents holding disparate views on what the term meant. Respondents' comprehension of the term 'child poverty' can be grouped into the following three categories.

Child poverty as extreme deprivation

These respondents viewed 'child poverty' in terms of extreme deprivation, in which the basic necessities of survival (food, clothing, shelter) were limited or absent. Additional concepts of child poverty mentioned by these respondents included having no access to education or healthcare. These respondents associated the concept of child poverty with developing countries or as part of Britain's past, such as workhouses, slums or post-war Britain.

Child poverty as relative deprivation

These respondents held less extreme ideas of what child poverty meant. Some described it as being in care, having shabby clothes, having a poor diet, not being properly educated, or living in poor housing. This type of child poverty was sometimes viewed as resulting from parental neglect. Children could be in poverty if their parents misappropriate the family income or child benefit(s) for personal use, for instance by using it to pay for alcohol or cigarettes.

Child poverty as inseparable from poverty in general

Respondents with this concept held that child poverty was indistinguishable from poverty in general as children are always dependant on others for their income. These respondents found it difficult to view child poverty as distinct from familial poverty, or coming from an impoverished household.

Implications arising from the variation of conceptions regarding child poverty

As respondents differed in their perceptions of the term child poverty, they answered the question in different ways. For instance, respondents who understood child poverty as extreme deprivation thought that it was non-existent in Britain. Therefore, these participants could not answer the question as there was no 'none at all' option. Moreover, it proved difficult to continue questioning when respondents thought that there was no child poverty.

Since respondents held such divergent beliefs about the term child poverty, it is worth considering the provision of definitions before proceeding with further questions. Opposing interpretations of the term child poverty would mean that respondents are not thinking about the same concepts when answering, thus raising concerns about the questions' validity.

Clarification of the term could go some way to focus participants' attention on a consistent definition of poverty, relevant to Britain today. Similarly, a definition could be used to highlight the distinction between child, family and/or adult poverty.

> ### Recommendations
>
> It is suggested that some definition of 'Child Poverty in Britain' may be beneficial to prevent respondents from focusing exclusively on extreme deprivation, which they do not believe exists in this country.
>
> An additional option should be included to allow participants to state that child poverty in Britain does not exist.

3.1.2   Issues arising from question 3a

The cognitive interviews investigated how respondents understood the terms 'very little child poverty' and 'quite a lot' and how easy it was to answer the question. The reasons respondents faced difficulties answering the question are discussed ahead.

Responses constrained by limited options

The response options did not always match the respondents' needs. Respondents requested 'middle of the road', 'relatively little' or 'some' options, in addition to a 'very little' and 'quite a lot'. As previously noted, others asked for a 'none at all' option. Unless the intention is to force respondents into one of two options, it is suggested that additional options covering the middle ground and 'none' should be included to better represent respondents' views.

Divergent understanding of response options

Respondents found further difficulty in answering this question because they were not sure about the terms, 'very little' and 'quite a lot'. When asked, respondents described these terms in different ways. For instance, one respondent took 'quite a lot' to mean to 1 in 10,000, whereas another respondent took it to mean ten per cent. One respondent suggested it would be better if the answer was expressed as the percentage of children who live in poverty.

Poverty as relative

The idea of poverty being relative was also raised. For instance, one respondent claimed there was 'very little' child poverty in Britain compared to Africa and 'quite a lot' compared to Switzerland. Another respondent viewed the term as comparative, i.e. there is quite a lot of poverty compared to what there ought to be, as opposed to quite a lot in general.

Respondents having little direct experience of child poverty

Further response difficulties arose from respondents claiming they had not directly observed instances of child poverty because it was not an issue in their neighbourhoods. Instead, these respondents based their views on what they had seen in the media: in newspapers, documentaries or charity drives such as Comic Relief. However, other respondents claimed that there was little about poverty in Britain in the media; therefore respondents expressed a lack of confidence in their answers. For this reason it may be appropriate to consider the addition of a 'don't know' option.

Recommendations

It is recommended that additional response options should be inserted as respondents are currently constrained by the existing options. These should include:

- There is no real child poverty in Britain.

- There is some child poverty in Britain.

- 'Don't know'.

3.1.3   Issues arising from Question 3b

The cognitive interviews examined the time period on which respondents were focusing when they answered the question, as well as general ways respondents answered the question.

Issues surrounding the question timeframe

Although the question asks about changes 'in the **last ten years**,' respondents claimed they were considering the past in general when responding. Younger participants, for instance those in their early 20s, found it hard to use the ten year time frame as they were only children themselves ten years ago. Conversely, older respondents thought back further, for instance 20 years, when answering the question. One strategy used by respondents to think more accurately about the time period was using personal landmarks that occurred around the start date. For instance one respondent used the landmark of when she first moved to the UK (ten years ago) to fix the time period in her head. It should also be noted that some participants thought it would be better to consider a larger time frame in relation to this question (up to 20 years), as then any changes would be more obvious and thus easier to report.

> ### Recommendations
>
> As some respondents thought the ten year time period was too long, while others thought it was too short, there were no obvious advantages to altering the timeframe.
>
> Alter the question from, 'Over the **last** ten years, do you think that child poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing or staying at about the same level?,' to, 'Over the **last ten** years, **since 1998**, do you think that child poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing or staying at about the same level?' This should encourage respondents to landmark the year mentioned. Obviously , the year would need to be altered for each subsequent year of the survey.

Ambiguities between the quantity and extent of children in poverty

One respondent voiced a concern about the question, stating they did not know if it was asking about the number of children in poverty or the relative extent to which children are in poverty.

> *'I don't know if you mean the number of children or the actual level of poverty. I think the number of children is probably stable.'*

(Female, 50s)

> ### Recommendations
> • Alter the first part of questions 3b and c from, 'do you think that **child poverty…**' to 'do you think **the percentage of children in poverty…**'

Respondents having little direct experience with child poverty

As previously discussed, some respondents claimed it was difficult for them to answer the question as they had little direct experience of childhood poverty. Respondents claimed that, because they had no experience of child poverty at all over the last ten years, they were obliged to say they had seen no change in levels of child poverty, even if they thought child poverty did not exist in this country at all. Additionally, in the absence of evidence, respondents answered what they hoped to be the case rather than what they thought to be the case. Providing a 'Don't know' option on future questionnaires might prevent this from happening.

> ### Recommendations
> Provide a 'don't know' option.

3.1.4 Issues arising from question 3c

As with question 3b cognitive interviews investigated what time period respondents were focusing on when they answered the question and what processes were involved in generating their answer.

Issues surrounding the question timeframe

Again, although the question asks respondents to speculate on the prevalence of child poverty, 'over the **next ten years**,' respondents raised two issues. Firstly it was difficult to predict that far into the future. Secondly, when answering the question they were thinking in the future generally rather than confining their thoughts to ten years specifically.

> *'I suppose there is a certain element I was just thinking 'at some time.' I suppose it may happen in ten years, it may happen in 50 years.'*

> (Male, 30s)

Respondents who had a fixed reference point in time where more likely to constrain their speculations to the specified time period. For instance, one respondent stated they were thinking about roughly ten years as they were thinking of the run up to the London Olympic Games (although in fact that will be in five years).

In addition, respondents reported that ten years was a long time to think about child poverty continuing to exist. Respondents' beliefs about the future prevalence of child poverty were informed by their beliefs relating to various contextual factors such as inflation, outsourcing overseas, immigration and crime. For instance, with inflation it was thought the cost of living would go up, leading to the poorest families becoming poorer.

Respondents stated that, because of these other concerns, the issue of future child poverty does need to be addressed and that, as ten years was a long way to think into the future, more short-term goals need to be set. Respondents stated that as a lot should change over the next five or six years this is a more appropriate timeframe to look at.

Recommendations

Change the period of time involved from ten years to five years.

Include a landmark year in the question, e.g., 'Over the **next five years, up until 2013**, do you think that child poverty in Britain will increase, decrease or stay at about the same level?'. Obviously, the specified year would need to be altered on a year by year basis.

---

4   Vignettes

4.1   The exercise at question 4

Respondents were presented with three vignettes which each described the hypothetical situation of a particular child. For each vignette in turn respondents were asked to say whether the child was:

(1) definitely in poverty;

(2) probably in poverty;

(3) probably not in poverty; or

(4) definitely not in poverty.

In the study of attitudes to child poverty, vignettes can provide useful insights since they provide a more concrete basis for thinking about and responding, rather than leaving respondents to think of the vaguer and more subjective concept of 'child poverty'. They also give an insight into how respondents answer questions on the topic and they show what information is used for determining how respondents answer a question. In answering survey questions, implicit social knowledge is employed by respondents (Gerber, 1996). By using vignettes, this knowledge can become explicit and can assist in further understanding how respondents approach questions on the topic. In this particular case, by using three graded examples, vignettes show what factors respondents thought would determine whether or not a child was in poverty.

ASK ALL

Q4.

I am now going to describe the situation of three children and would like you to tell me whether you think each one is, or is not, living in poverty.

SHOWCARD B

a) Billy is seven years old. He lives with his family in a small house, sharing his bedroom with his younger brother. The house is kept warm in winter and Billy has the clothes and shoes he needs. He usually has a proper meal each day, but the cooker broke two weeks ago and his parents can't afford to repair it at the moment. Billy sometimes goes swimming with his friends, but can't go every month, as his parents can't afford it.

SHOWCARD C

b) Sharon, who is 12, lives with her parents and her older brother in a three bedroom flat on a new estate. The flat is generally in a good condition. When the fridge broke down last week, her parents replaced it by claiming on the insurance. Sharon plays in a netball team each weekend. When her friends come round for a snack, Sharon gets embarrassed as some of the furniture is worn out. The family can't afford to go on holiday every year, but manage to go away every couple of years.

SHOWCARD D

c) Tom, aged 11, lives with his family in a small two bedroom flat. Tom shares a bedroom with his two sisters aged 14 and 16. The flat is in a poor state of repair, and the heating system does not function properly. Tom can't invite his friends round for tea as his parents can't afford it. He also usually can't go on school trips or out with friends because it costs too much.

Would you say that Tom/Sharon/Billy…READ OUT…

1 …is **definitely** in poverty,

2 Is **probably** in poverty,

3 Is **probably not** in poverty,

4 Is **definitely not** in poverty?

4.2   Ability and willingness to answer

Respondents said that they liked this question and felt able to decide whether each child was or was not in poverty. The vignettes were referred to as stories by respondents and as conjuring up a picture. It seemed that they found it useful to have each vignette displayed on a card so that they could refer back to it as they thought through their answer. Opinion was divided on whether it would have been helpful to have answer options also shown on the card.

All respondents were able to answer all three vignette questions and to choose one of the categories given, even where they would have preferred a category which was not provided as an option. For example, one respondent would have liked a 'slightly in poverty' category but was quickly able to choose 'probably in poverty' as being closest to the answer he wanted to give.

4.3   Defining whether each child was in poverty

Respondents gave varied answers to all three vignettes, however even where respondents applied different answers to the same vignette, the relative position of the three vignettes was the same. For example, one respondent might answer that Billy is probably not in poverty, that Sharon is definitely not in poverty and that Tom is probably in poverty. Another respondent could answer that Bill is probably in poverty, Sharon is probably not in poverty and Tom is definitely in poverty. Although all their answers were different the relative position of Billy, Sharon and Tom in terms of their probability of being in poverty is the same for both respondents. Sharon was considered to be best off and Tom worst off with Billy in the middle.

In earlier parts of the questionnaire (see Chapter 3), although there were discussions of relative versus absolute poverty and the level of need, when asked to define child poverty, respondents had thought about the same types of items, mentioning lack of food, warm clothing and footwear and in some cases education and decent housing. Giving examples within the vignettes helped respondents to think about other potential aspects of child poverty that they had not considered at earlier questions. The vignette questions helped explore further the rationale behind answers given by respondents who felt there to be very little child poverty in Britain today, thus uncovering more subtle differences in their attitudes.

4.3.1   The deciding factor and respondents' assumptions

As demonstrated by their answers to the question and their responses to the probes, it was the example of Billy which discriminated most between respondents as all the four answer options were used for that vignette, whereas Sharon was not regarded as being in poverty by any respondents. Respondents who described Billy as being in poverty, tended to focus on the fact that the cooker was broken and could not be repaired as the basis for their answer. Respondents who considered him not to be in poverty focused on the facts that he was well fed, clothed and housed and that the problem with the cooker was temporary and could be overcome by using a microwave determined their answer. These factors were also used to place him 'probably' rather than 'definitely' in poverty for some respondents.

There was general agreement that Sharon was not in poverty. The worn out furniture and lack of a holiday every year were not felt to be markers of poverty. In the case of Tom the fact that he shared a room with two older sisters was the main deciding factor placing him in poverty. For those respondents who said he

was not in poverty it was the fact that he was fed himself even if he could not provide food for friends to visit which placed him out of poverty.

The vignettes worked well because, although one particular aspect of each example tended to determine whether respondents felt the child to be in poverty or not, the other details were used to determine whether the respondent felt this to be 'probably' or definitely' the case. For example, the fact that the broken cooker in Billy's home was a temporary situation placed him in the 'probably' rather than 'definitely' category for some respondents.

There was a feeling that more detail could have been given to further assist respondents in formulating their answers. Where respondents did not request further detail this was sometimes because they had made assumptions about the missing information. For example the vignettes did not indicate the tenure of the accommodation, and where assumptions were made Sharon was assumed to be in private accommodation, sometimes a new house because of the reference to 'new estate' and Tom in council accommodation. One respondent assumed that Tom's family might only be temporarily in their current accommodation and therefore placed him 'probably' rather than 'definitely' in poverty.

Details were not given about the type of holiday or type of school trip which were being considered. For example definitions of a school trip mentioned by respondents ranged from 'luxury' to 'not the expensive school trips but the basic school trips'.

Respondents also varied in their interpretation of the flat being in a poor state of repair. The respondent who understood it to mean the carpets were worn out placed Tom as probably not in poverty whereas the respondent who took it to mean 'he has not really got a functional roof over his head' placed him definitely in poverty.

Similarly for heating, views differed as to whether it meant there was no heating at all or that it was just not reliable or as warm as the family would have liked. Because the vignettes conjure up a picture for respondents it is inevitable that the details not mentioned will be assumed as they complete their picture of the situation. Furthermore the assumptions they made themselves sometimes reflected their attitude to poverty.

This behaviour was also identified by Gerber (1996) in research in the United States (US) on the issue of co-residence. She reported that respondents often asked questions of the interviewers and where no answer was forthcoming made assumptions based on age gender, marital status and other characteristics of the person in the vignette. In this research, findings about the missing information can be used to inform the details provided in vignettes to be used in the survey.

4.4 Mismanagement of finances and parental neglect

An issue which emerged during the course of the probing and recurred throughout the questionnaire (Sections 2.1.3 and 2.2.5) was that some children may be in the situations described because of mismanagement of finances or neglect by their parents. The impact this had on answers given varied among respondents, depending on whether they considered poverty to be about having a low income, or about children not having certain things they need. However, there was a general consensus that where unmet needs resulted from mismanagement of money, this could not be regarded as poverty. This was also linked to the fact that respondents did not always distinguish between child and familial poverty. Therefore, respondents did not express the view that a child could live within a family which was not in poverty but be in poverty because of poor parental choices or neglect. For example, one respondent suggested that the reason Billy's parents could not repair the cooker was because his father's unemployment pay had been spent on gambling and if this was the case he would not be in poverty. This theme also emerged in the card sort (Chapter 4) where respondents reported that if children lacked items when their parents could afford them, this would not be poverty. The defining feature of poverty was not being able to afford things rather than choosing not to have them and spending income on other items.

4.5 Vignette credibility

Although the vignettes worked well as a whole, the validity of some of the assumptions made in the scenarios were questioned. For example:

• Billy cannot swim every month but in some parts of the country swimming is free for those who cannot afford it/are on benefits.

• Tom shares a bedroom with his sisters. Particularly among those who assumed he was in council accommodation or on housing benefits, remarks were made that this was 'illegal' and would not happen.

• Tom cannot go on school trips and yet schools are not allowed to make compulsory charges for trips.

• Billy's parents cannot afford to repair the cooker but social fund grants are available to people who need this type of thing.

Where these things were mentioned the respondent assumed the families would be eligible for these types of benefits and help.

4.6 Consistency and order effects

Respondents were provided with the scenarios one at a time and were asked to answer for each before being shown the next one. Respondents tended to try and maintain consistency in their answers to the three examples and did see that they were examples along a continuum. One reason mentioned by those who

placed Tom 'probably', rather than 'definitely in poverty' was that there might be another example in which a child was not properly fed or clothed (a 'simply terrible' scenario) and 'definitely' needed to be saved for that. If all three examples had been presented before respondents had to give an answer, their answers may have been different. However, if the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is interested in how respondents answer based on the information provided for each vignette we would advise asking them one by one as they are. The fact that some respondents did choose 'definitely in poverty' for Tom and others chose 'probably' shows that the vignette is useful in discriminating between respondents' attitudes.

Recommendations

Use vignettes as a main stage survey instrument.

Three is a good number of vignettes, if they were reduced; Billy and Tom were most useful. If they were increased, an example between Sharon and Tom should be used – it is in this 'middle ground' that differences in attitudes are most likely to be uncovered.

Details given for each vignette need to be considered and made realistic and accurate.

Provide more details about relevant aspects of circumstances.

Use cards for the vignettes and include answer choices on each card as well.

---

5 Card sort

5.1 The exercise at question 5

The respondents were also asked to undertake a card sort exercise. Card sorts can be used to investigate how respondents organize concepts and what they consider it to include or exclude (Willis, 2005). In this case it was used to understand what the respondent considered child poverty to mean, in terms of access to possessions or activities. The primary intention was not to design a card sort that can be used in the main-stage survey, but to further uncover conceptions of child poverty, to influence the design of the whole series of questions.

Respondents were given twelve cards and asked to sort them into one of three piles, to show whether they thought the information in the card would place a child:

(1) not in poverty;

(2) possibly in poverty; or

(3) definitely in poverty.

They were asked to think aloud as they did this. The aim was to gain a greater understanding of what respondents consider contributes to child poverty.

Q5. SORT CARDS

a) I would now like you to sort this pack of cards into three piles. As you are doing so, please say out loud what you are thinking. I will demonstrate what I mean.

⇨INTERVIEWER DEMONSTRATES THE 'THINK ALOUD' PRINCIPLE USING THE EXAMPLE OF SORTING OUT THE MORNING POST FOR THE HOUSEHOLD.

Each of these cards has an item written on it, which might mean that a child is living in poverty. Please sort the cards into three piles to show whether you think the item indicates that the child is **'definitely living in poverty**', **'possibly living in poverty'** or **'not living in poverty'**. Remember to say out loud what you are thinking as you decide which pile to put each card on.

A Family cannot afford a holiday away from home for at least one week per year.

B Family cannot afford sports equipment or a bicycle for child.

C Family cannot afford a mobile phone for child.

D Sharing a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex (for child over ten).

E Family cannot afford to keep house warm enough in winter.

F Family cannot afford a computer at home.

G Family cannot afford a celebration on occasions like birthdays and religious festivals.

H Family cannot afford new clothes, so child's clothes are second hand.

I Family cannot afford a TV.

J Family cannot afford to replace or repair major electrical goods such as a refrigerator or a washing machine, when broken.

K Family cannot afford for child to go on school trips.

L Family cannot afford to have hot water every day.

5.2 Ability and willingness to complete the exercise

Although respondents were able to complete this task, with the exception of one older respondent who started but could not finish, information from the think aloud and probing shows that this question worked less well than the previous vignette format.

5.2.1 Lack of information about context

There was a feeling that there was not enough information on each card to enable respondents to make a decision: respondents did not know what the family's income was and what other things they were or were not spending their money on. Some families might have the money but not spend it on their children or on things which children require. Others might prioritise and choose second hand clothes or go without an annual holiday in order to pay for other things for the benefit of the children. What the respondent assumed about this affected the way they answered. While this may not be the intention of the question, the fact that respondents are making assumptions about other aspects of the situation means that some answers reflect not so much what respondents think the lack of the specific item means so much as what they assume about the rest of their situation.

There was a feeling that some people without this item or who were unable to afford it would be in poverty but others would not. Just considering an individual item is not enough to decide whether a child is in poverty.

5.2.2 Lack of information about items on the cards

Respondents also would have liked more detail about the items being asked about. The specific items which respondents considered were lacking in information were:

- Card A – whether the holiday was abroad or just a week of camping in the UK.

- Card B – what type of bicycle and equipment was meant and whether it could be second hand.

- Card G – celebrations which could involve excessive expenditure or a small get together with a cake and some sandwiches.

- Card J – whether the inability to replace or repair an item was permanent or temporary and the fact that respondents would give a different answer for a fridge and a washing machine, meaning respondents tended to choose possibly rather than definitely for this item.

- Card K – school trips which could be a low cost local day trip or an expensive skiing trip costing over £1,000.

Some of the differences in answers for these items are in part owing to the fact that, given a lack of information, respondents were making different interpretations.

5.2.3 Main strategies

Respondents employed two main strategies throughout the card sort exercise, to enable them to decide in which pile to place each item. These strategies fall into two main categories:

• considering whether something was an essential or not;

• considering the cost of the item and what this indicated about spending power.

Some respondents used both strategies, sometimes even on the same item.

(1) 'Not an essential'

Respondents considered whether the item was essential. If the item was considered non essential then they placed it in the not in poverty pile on the basis that the child did not need it anyway. Those who approached the task in this way tended to list a larger number of items as not indicating a child was in poverty.

(2) 'If they can't even afford that'

The second approach was to estimate the cost of the item and then to consider what it meant to be unable to afford to buy it, specifically what this indicates about family income. So for example, new clothes are now cheap if bought in a supermarket or cheap clothing chain (e.g. Primark). Additionally, bicycles can be bought cheaply second hand and therefore if a family cannot even afford those items they must be in poverty.

Some respondents employed both approaches, mainly by using one approach for some items and the other approach for other items. This was most likely to happen where a respondent generally used the 'if they can't even afford that' approach but for some expensive items such as children having their own bedroom, keeping the house warm and having hot water, the fact that they considered the item to be a essential meant they placed being unable to afford that in the definitely in poverty pile, regardless of its cost. Some people sometimes considered both approaches for the same item, particularly during the course of think aloud, which could lead to them changing their answer.

Where the respondent used the 'if they can't even afford that' approach and was also tending to think of a cheaper way of obtaining the item, this was particularly associated with considering not being able to afford the item as a mark of poverty. Examples of this were thinking of a camping holiday, a second hand bike, a second hand TV, birthday cake and a drink for a celebration and a local day trip from school.

5.2.4 Additional considerations – other 'impacts' on children

Even though some items were considered 'non-essential', respondents did not necessarily place them in the 'not in poverty' category. In these cases they employed

a further stage of consideration, and this applied to respondents regardless of the main approach they used. This was the impact that not having a particular item might have on children. Some items which may not be considered as essential, such as new clothes and televisions, may nonetheless mark out a child who does not have them.

5.2.5 Non-essential items

Respondents were in agreement that mobile phones and computers were not essential as children either did not need them at all (mobiles) or could access them elsewhere (computers in a library) and furthermore these items could be expensive.

5.3 Number of answer categories

Another issue which is clear from the analysis is that the vignette employed a four point scale:

(1) definitely in poverty;

(2) probably in poverty;

(3) probably not in poverty;

(4) definitely not in poverty).

The card sort exercise employed a three point answer scale allowing for (1) not in poverty, (2) possibly in poverty and (3) definitely in poverty. From discussion during probing it is clear that both respondents and interviewers were confusing 'probably' and 'possibly' and interpreting the 'possibly' in this question in the same way as 'probably' in the previous question. Also where respondents were unsure what they thought, they wanted to use an answer including the word 'possibly'. Since there was only a 'possibly in poverty' and not a 'possibly not in poverty' pile this meant more items were classified into the possibly in poverty pile than might have been the case if there had been a 'possibly not in poverty pile'.

5.4 Age of children and whether affordability mattered

Children's age was not generally considered to be an issue and thinking about a different age of child would not affect responses. Where age of the child would affect responses, this occurred for specific items such as mobile phones. Most of the card sort items referred to the fact that the family could not afford the item. This was very important in the way respondents interpreted the question and if the word 'afford' had not been mentioned their answers would have been different.

The problems with the question highlighted previously, captured through cognitive testing show that this question would be very difficult to analyse as part of a quantitative survey. On the face of it, asking about specific items appears to allow respondents to be thinking of the same thing in a way that a question about 'child

poverty' in general does not. However, respondents' different assumptions about the items and surrounding circumstances mean very different scenarios are being envisaged. Two respondents can give the same answer but have very different conceptions of child poverty.

Recommendations

Do not use the card sort exercise in its current form as part of the survey; the vignettes approach is better as it allows respondents to consider more than one factor at a time and thus the interplay between these factors.

If this a card sort approach is considered, some background information about the general circumstances of the family (number of children, whether working/on benefits etc) should be provided to ensure respondents are thinking consistently about the same situation.

Provide more details about some of the items to enable respondents to anchor their thinking to a specific situation, for example do not just ask about a holiday, describe the holiday (e.g.: a week in self-catering accommodation in the United Kingdom (UK) during the school holidays) so that respondents are thinking of the same/a similar thing when answering the question.

If the card sort exercise is used, consider a follow up or linked question to address the issue of whether what matters to the respondent is whether an item is essential or not, or whether it is the cost which matters in determining whether someone without the item is in poverty.

6 Government policy and targets

6.1 Who is responsible for tackling child poverty (question 6)

Question 6 (below) was designed to capture the respondents' views about where the responsibility for tackling child poverty lies.

Q6.

SHOWCARD E

Please say from this card who you think should be **mainly** responsible for tackling child poverty? CODE ONE ONLY

1 Central government

2 Local government

3 Individuals/families

4 Charitable organisations

5 Other

PLEASE SPECIFY_____

Cognitive interviewing was used to establish how respondents decided who should be responsible for tackling child poverty and in what way. Additionally, respondents were asked what roles, if any, were available for the organisations they had not selected.

6.1.1 Issues concerning who is responsible for tackling child poverty

Respondents were able to answer the question and provide suitable reasons for their chosen answer. The main concern regarding this question was that respondents sometimes had difficulty choosing one option to code, when they thought two or more should be partially responsible for tackling child poverty.

> *'I don't think it should be mainly anybody, it should be all of them. But I suppose you would have to say central government because that is where it is all initiated from.'*

(Female, 30s)

Code 1 (Central government) was the most frequently selected answer because ultimately it is central government that sets initiatives and allocates resources, particularly funding. Another reason for choosing central government as the main organisation responsible was so that there is a standardisation of services across the country when it comes to tackling child poverty.

Options 2-5 were also considered as important when tackling child poverty, but only as a downstream effect from central government. For example, local government was viewed as being better equipped to target specific areas of poverty, provide social care and hands on assistance where it is most required, but to do this they rely on funding from Central Government. Charitable organisations were seen as providing an important role but not as an alternative to central government. It was suggested that central government should make use of charitable organisations as advisory bodies when forming policies on child poverty. Finally, although respondents thought that individuals and families themselves should hold some responsibility to get themselves out of poverty they would still require funds to do so. It was an individual's responsibility to spend their benefits wisely after they had received them from central government.

Respondents were asked whether any other people or organisations might have a role in tackling child poverty. Few suggestions were forthcoming about who else could be held responsible. When asked directly about the potential role of the private sector there were few suggestions about how they could be involved. It was suggested that the private sector could make a difference by ensuring they provide sufficient wages and/or by donating to charitable organisations. However, the private sector was not generally thought of as responsible for tackling child poverty. Furthermore, some respondents thought that charitable organisations could be classed as the private sector.

Recommendations

The question doesn't capture respondents' awareness that many different organisations play a part in tackling child poverty. Therefore the following might be considered as appropriate alterations:

Have the question as a **code all that apply** question first, and then ask who the organisation most responsible should be. However if the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is really only interested in the main organisation the current question works.

Provide a 'don't know' option for participants who choose between two equally important options.

Should questions about private sector involvement be included in future surveys, a definition or examples of what constitutes the private sector will need to be given.

Issues arising from comprehension of terms

For the most part respondents had little difficulty in terms of comprehension when answering this question. The respondents found little difficulty in describing the difference between central and local government. Central government was described as being 'Westminster,' the 'Prime Minister and all his departments,' and was viewed as a national body. Local government was described as being the 'council' and a regional body. However, one respondent claimed they felt uncertain about the distinction between the two types of government.

There was also some ambiguity concerning what was meant by option 3, 'Individuals/families' referred to in this question. Some respondents took it to mean the family that was itself in poverty taking personal responsibility to get out of its own condition. However, other respondents read the option as family members of other people in poverty stepping in to help them out of their financial difficulties.

Recommendations

Give examples of central and local government in the question e.g. 'Central Government **(Parliament, national organisation)**,' 'Local Government **(The town council, regional organisation)**.'

Clarify what is meant by the item 'Individuals/families.'

6.2 Targets for eradicating child poverty (question 7)

Question 7 (below) was designed to assess levels of awareness of government targets of tackling child poverty.

Q7.

SHOWCARD F

a) The government has a number of targets relating to child poverty in Britain. What do you think the government's target for 2010 is?

1 To ensure child poverty in Britain does not increase

2 To reduce child poverty in Britain by a quarter

3 To reduce child poverty in Britain by half

4 To reduce child poverty in Britain by three-quarters

5 To reduce child poverty in Britain to nothing

6 (Don't know)

SHOWCARD G

b) The government has a target to end child poverty in Britain. What do you think the target date for ending child poverty is?

1 2010

2 2015

3 2020

4 2025

5 2030

6 (Don't know)

SHOWCARD H

c) Before this interview, how aware were you of the government's target to end child poverty in Britain?

1 Very aware

2 Quite aware

3 A little aware

4 Not at all aware

5 (Don't know)

Generally, respondents displayed a low level of awareness of targets for ending child poverty.

6.2.1   Issues arising from questions 7a and b

Respondents lacked confidence in answering these questions and would frequently change their answers whilst talking aloud to the interviewer. Respondents claimed that they had not heard anything about government targets for tackling child poverty, and those who thought they had heard that targets existed stated they did not know specifically what the targets were. However, despite this respondents who felt they did not know the answer did not always code option 6 (don't know) as their answer. Instead, respondents tried to select an answer from one of the other options using a variety of strategies.

Devices used by respondents to answer the questions when they did not know the answer included the following:

• **Prescriptivism**. Respondents gave the answer on what they felt ought to be the case rather than what they actually believed to be the target (e.g. poverty should be eliminated as soon as possible and therefore the target should be to eliminate all poverty by 2010).

• **Realism**. Respondents would guess the targets by thinking about what they personally thought was realistic and obtainable (e.g. The target for eliminating child poverty is 2015 as 2010 is too close and 2020 too far away).

• **Guesswork**. Respondent would make a complete guess as to the answer (e.g. go for 2010 as it was the middle option).

Respondents were able to answer the questions on targets correctly using the previous techniques. However, as the respondents objectively stated they were unaware of targets, the fact they gave correct answers cannot be used as indicative of them being familiar with government policy. Of course some respondents were aware of the targets but they were in a minority.

Timeframes under consideration were also an issue when answering this question. Most respondents presumed that targets must have been set recently when in fact they were set back in the 1990's. For this reason respondents wrongly presumed that the answer for question one be must be answer a or b, as the other options seemed too much to achieve in a timeframe of just two years. One respondent noted that when government set targets about the distant future (e.g. 2020) they are less likely to take on board what they are saying as it is not, 'an issue for today.' It should therefore be noted that even if respondents have heard the targets they may be unable to recall any details about them as the details are not considered as important enough to be stored in long-term memory.

6.2.2   Issues arising from question 7c

Question 7c was designed so respondents could rank how they would rate their own levels of awareness on government targets. Respondents ranked their levels of awareness from 'not at all aware' to 'quite aware'. How respondents rated their own awareness did not necessarily reflect their performance at the task. In some cases, participants who got the answer to questions 7a and b correct stated they had no awareness of the targets but had drawn their conclusions from reasoning and guesswork. Some respondents who did not answer correctly the first part of the question ranked themselves as, ' a little aware,' or, 'quite aware.' Respondents stated the reason they answered as they did was because they had some awareness of the issue of childhood poverty in general, or that they knew targets had been set despite not knowing what the targets were.

Respondent understanding of the phrase 'to end child poverty'

The phrase 'to end child poverty' was understood in a consistent way by respondents to mean that children would have their needs met in terms of clothing, housing, food, education and health. There was some reference to the fact that the government's view might be different from their own view – one respondent said she thought the government meant it to mean children could afford to go out three times a week but her own definition was similar to other respondents. It was also mentioned that if one takes a relative view, (for example, comparing poverty here with poverty in Africa), child poverty has already been ended in Britain.

Another issue raised was that if the government prioritised spending and did not waste money on salaries and 'jollies' they would be better able to meet the target.

Implications of poor success and subjective self ranking system rate

Question 7a-c failed to capture the respondents' awareness of government targets. In questions a and b respondents were reluctant to code the 'don't know' option, leading to a number guessing the correct answers by chance. In question 7c performance on the task was purely subjective, with no relationship between how well respondents had performed in the first two sections and how well they rated their own knowledge of targets. Specific recall of targets was markedly absent.

Recommendations

Drop question entirely.

If question is required the term 'to end child poverty' can be retained as it is understood.

6.3 Ways to help remove children from poverty (question 8)

6.3.1 Issues arising from question 8

Questions 8a, b and c (below) were designed to investigate how respondents respond to different initiatives on how to tackle child poverty. Cognitive interviewing was used to gauge how respondents understood the terms and examples used in each section of the question and how they went about deciding if each example was a useful way of removing children from poverty.

Q8.

SHOWCARD I

a) There are a number of possible ways in which the government could help to remove children from poverty.

First of all, they could help improve **employment opportunities** for the parents of children in poverty. This might include helping parents to find jobs or providing more affordable childcare.

What impact do you think the government helping to improve **employment opportunities** for parents of children in poverty would have on child poverty?

1 A great deal

2 Quite a lot

3 Some

4 Not very much

5 None at all

6 (Don't know)

SHOWCARD I AGAIN

b) The government could also help to remove children from poverty by **giving financial help to their parents**. This might involve having more tax credits available to parents on low incomes, increasing the provision of affordable housing or increasing benefits for families in poverty.

What impact do you think the government **giving financial help to parents** of children in poverty would have on child poverty?

1 A great deal

2 Quite a lot

3 Some

4 Not very much

5 None at all

6 (Don't know)

SHOWCARD I AGAIN

c) The government could help remove children from poverty by **providing help targeted directly at these children**. This might include encouraging children in poverty to acquire skills for future employment or ensuring that fruit and milk is available to all children at school.

What impact do you think the government **providing help targeted directly at children in poverty** would have on child poverty?

1 A great deal

2 Quite a lot

3 Some

4 Not very much

5 None at all

6 (Don't know)

Issues arising from question 8a

Respondents were able to understand and respond to this question. Adequate response options were provided. Providing employment opportunities was seen as having some impact on child poverty. However, certain caveats were placed on its usefulness as it was dependent on people being willing to work. In some cases it was thought that people would be financially better off on benefits compared to being in work. If this was the case improving access to work would make no difference on the uptake of employment. Providing financial help with childcare was seen as one way of getting around this problem, and generally considered a good idea.

One further way of helping people into employment voiced by respondents was the idea of employment education and job skills training. It was thought that by helping parents to acquire these skills their employment prospects would be improved and they would be more likely not only to find work, but also to find work where they would be better paid thus making their future prospects brighter. Therefore, another potential example of improving employment opportunities could be providing skills training.

> ### Recommendations
>
> If the question's aim is for respondents to have a broad understanding of 'improving employment opportunities' skills training could be added as another suitable example.

Issues arising from question 8b

This question created several problems for the respondents. Firstly, too many examples of what constitutes financial aid were given, with respondents feeling positive about some and negative about others. The idea of giving out financial help without recipients having to do anything in return was viewed as being negative, whereas improving help for those who were willing to work was considered as having a positive impact positive. Providing money to unemployed families was viewed as a short-term fix as it provided people with no incentives to learn to become self-reliant. However, providing more affordable housing was seen as a having a positive impact on child poverty. With these conflicting ideas in mind it became difficult for respondents to answer the question as they saw fit.

Additionally, there were some problems surrounding comprehension of the terms used in this section. Not all respondents understood what was meant by the term 'tax credits'. There was also some discrepancy in understanding what was meant by affordable housing. One respondent took it to mean that families in poverty would be allocated to houses rather than flats.

> ### Recommendations
>
> Consider rewording the question to include fewer and more similar examples. Alternatively, ask the question more than once with specifying different types of financial help each time (though the burden on respondent and interview length needs to be considered).
>
> Define tax credits.
>
> Change 'affordable housing' to read 'affordable accommodation.'

Issues arising from question 8c

Respondents had some problem in answering this question as they saw fit. The main problem was that respondents held differing views on the impact of the two examples given, i.e. the provision of milk and fruit and the provision of opportunities for skills acquisition. The milk and fruit example was seen as aimed at primary school children whereas the skills for future employment as construed as being for older children (14 years and upwards). Respondents felt that they were actually being asked two disparate questions to which they could only provide one answer.

Additionally, respondents questioned whether it was fair to target only children in poverty when providing these services. It was suggested that employment skills training should be made to children regardless of their background. Likewise, only providing free milk and fruit to poor children might not be appropriate as it might embarrass them if they are picked out for special attention. Targeting the children directly in the manner discussed was only seen as beneficial in the long-term, but was not seen sufficient when addressing the more immediate short-term needs of children.

> ### Recommendations
>
> Consider asking about the two ways of targeting help at children (milk and fruit as opposed to employment training) separately.

6.3.2 Issues arising from question 9

The objective of question 9 (below) was to establish if respondents understood the different strategies for removing children from poverty that were mentioned in the question 8. It was also used to see whether respondents would draw a distinction between helping parents and helping children directly.

> ### Q9.
>
> SHOWCARD J
>
> And if the government **had to choose** between the three different types of help, which do you think it should choose?
>
> 1 Increasing and improving employment opportunities for the parents of children in poverty.
>
> 2 Providing increased benefits or financial assistance for the parents of children in poverty.
>
> 3 Providing help targeted directly at children.

In general, respondents had no real difficulty in understanding or responding to this question. However, a few key issues arose.

Issues surrounding prioritisation of different types of help

Option 1 (increasing and improving employment opportunities) and option 3 (providing help targeted directly at children) were the most frequently selected options chosen by the participants. However, some difficulty was voiced when choosing between the options as both were viewed as more or less helpful depending on the timeframe in question.

Improving employment opportunities was seen as being a good short-term solution (as a wage would provide immediate financial assistance) and a good long-term solution (if work is found the whole family will be raised above the poverty line and the cycle of families being on benefit would be broken). It was noted that providing employment would both reduce adult poverty and child poverty which is also important.

> *'Life isn't finished for them (the parents). I think that if they can be directed through education into employment they can have a fulfilled life and the kids will benefit.'*

> (Male, retired).

However, it was arguable that even with increased opportunities to work not all parents would be able or willing do so. Furthermore, even if parents do gain extra money by working, it will only reduce child poverty if the additional money received is spent appropriately. Therefore, when respondents selected this option as being the best way of improving child poverty they did so with certain caveats in mind.

Providing help directly targeted at children was considered important. However, it was also noted as only being a long-term solution. It would not take the children out of immediate poverty. Some respondents felt that assisting with parental employment would be the most appropriate option when the children were younger as they need immediate help above and beyond milk and fruit. However, teaching employment training and skills to the children of lone parents (one of the examples given of help directed at children) might be the most appropriate form of help when children are older (14 years or more) as then they are more independent and can start to work towards earning a living and improving their own condition.

With these factors in mind some respondents had difficulty answering the question.

> *'For immediate improvement I would go for number one, for long-term improvement three.'*

> (Males, 20s)

Choosing the most appropriate way of tackling child poverty depends on whether respondents are viewing the problem as short-term or long-term and whether considering young or older children.

> ### Recommendations
>
> Provide a don't know option for respondents who can't decide between options.
>
> Specify in the question which age group and timeframe is under consideration. This would require the question being asked more than once to cover all options. For example 'If the government **had to choose** between the three different types of help, to help short-term, which do you think it should choose? and if the government **had to choose** between the three different types of help, **to help long-term**, which do you think it should choose? As this would imply four questions instead of one, the priority for the question needs to be considered, for example focus on either short or long-term and then ask about two age groups.'

Issues surrounding comprehension of the type of help involved

Few issues of comprehension were raised during this question. Respondents were able to distinguish between targeting help at parents and targeting help at children directly. Most respondents took on the examples from the previous question to aid them in answering. One exception to this was that that some respondents took Option 3 (providing help targeted at children) to mean giving children money directly which as not viewed as appropriate. Therefore, it might be worth reiterating what help targeted at children may consist of.

> ### Recommendations
>
> Include an example of help provided by targeting children, e.g. 'Providing help targeted directly at children (provide skills training for future employment).'

7   Lone parents

7.1   Question 10 about lone parents

Respondents were asked to consider the situation of a lone parent with a one year old child and were asked whether the parent should be required to look for work as their child got older. The purpose of this question was to find out whether people thought the government should require people to work or pay them to stay at home to care for the child and to find out the impact of the child's age on their views.

10a) Imagine a lone parent with a one year old child. The parent is living on benefits while they stay at home to look after the child.

As the child gets older, do you think the parent should be required to look for work at any stage?

1 Yes   GO TO Q10b

2 No   ASK PROBES FOR Q.10 THEN END

IF Q10a = YES ask B

b) How old do you think the child should be before the parent is required to look for work?

ENTER AGE: _____

7.2   Considerations involved in answering the question

Respondents found this question relatively easy to answer and seemed to have clear views on the issue. Some respondents understood the question to be about looking for work but there were others who understood the question as being about the parent being 'required to work'. Respondents felt the question was asking about parents being 'forced' to work or look for work and that this would be enforced through the benefits system, although there were some respondents who did not know how such a requirement could be enforced.

The considerations which were relevant to how they answered were the child's welfare, the availability of alternative care for the child, the parent's welfare/career and the cost to the state.

7.2.1   The child's welfare

Respondents took the view that children need their parent to care for them and that this was the main consideration.

> *'The needs of the child need to be foremost.'*

> (Male, 41)

Respondents fell into three main groups when thinking about the age at which the child can be separated from the parent: two to three (nursery age), four to five (school age), 16 (when an adult and able to work themselves). The idea that the child needs to bond with the mother and family was very important, particularly in the first year or two. The only exception is if the parents are children themselves and incapable of looking after the child properly. If the family is in a difficult situation it was felt wrong to make it worse by threatening the bond between the baby and the family.

> *'Just because their situation is bad I don't think they should have to neglect looking after their child.'*

> (Female, 20)

There was also a view that teenagers need their parents and that without a parent at home for them they may be vulnerable to bad influences or they would not be able to look after themselves when ill. This did not necessarily mean the parent should not work, just that they should not be required to work.

In specific circumstances, the children's needs would affect the age at which a parent should be required to work, so a child with learning difficulties or health problems might need a parent at home for longer. However, this issue did not prevent respondents selecting an age for the second part of the question.

7.2.2   The availability of alternative care

Respondents were aware that if a parent worked childcare would be required, either from a trusted adult, from a nursery or from school. There is also an issue of the cost of childcare. Where respondents assumed that the mother would not earn enough to pay for pre-school childcare they suggested age four to five years (school age) as the point at which the parent should be required to look for work or age 2.5-3 years when some free childcare is available. Another view was that if the parent can only earn enough to pay for childcare and nothing more it would be better to stay at home to look after the child. Respondents recognised that if parents were required to work when children were four to five or six to seven then either they would need a flexible part-time job or the government would need to provide pre and after school and holiday care.

7.2.3 The parent's welfare

This was a less important consideration but respondents mentioned that it was hard to get back into the workforce after a long break. Respondents also thought that parents need to work for their own independence or to give themselves a better standard of living. Others mentioned that the requirement needs to be flexible as it may be hard to get back into work if the necessary skills have changed.

The question wording was that the *'parent should be required to look for work'* which respondents interpreted to mean benefits would be taken away or they would be forced to. Parental choice was mentioned by respondents; before being required to work there could be a period when they would be encouraged to and given support or child care.

7.2.4 The cost to the state

It was acknowledged that if parents cannot look after their children and cannot earn enough to pay for childcare, the state will need to pay. In this case it was felt it would be better to pay for the mother to stay at home. Once the child is at school there was a feeling that the parent would be sitting at home with time on her hands and should be required to work.

7.3 At what age should the parent be required to look for work? (question 10b)

When asked to give an age at which the parent should be required to look for work, respondents, instead of giving an age in years, tended to describe a life stage such as:

• starting infant or nursery school;

• when at school full time and having dinner;

• when old enough to go to nursery; or

• until they are an adult/can work.

When an age was later mentioned, the age given was not necessarily consistent with the life stage mentioned by the respondent. So for example, the age given for starting school varied from four to seven years which means that the although respondents meant the same (when the child starts school), their answers look different because they had to give the response as an age in years.

Recommendations

- Keep the first part of the question as it is as it worked well; respondents understood the purpose and were able to answer it.

- The question about the age at which the parent should be required to look for work should be altered so that it refers to life stages as that is how respondents think about it, while also retaining the age reference:

  – Infant or baby (less than two)

  – Pre-school/nursery age (2-3)

  – Starting primary school age (4-5)

  – During infants stage of primary school (6-7)

  – During juniors stage of primary school (8-10)

  – Starting secondary school (11-12)

  – During secondary school (13-15)

  – Adult/working age (16-18)

8   Conclusions and recommendations

8.1   Summary of cognitive findings

8.1.1   Background

The cognitive testing highlighted a number of issues with the questions tested, resulting in recommendations for altering some questions and dropping others altogether. Although reference has been made in the report to the issue of time series and the need to consider the implications of changing questions which have been asked in past rounds of British Social Attitudes survey (BSA), the final decision on such matters lies with the researchers on BSA. The purpose of this report is to make recommendations for individual questions based on the findings from the cognitive testing. This section gives a summary of the main findings and recommendations. Anyone wishing to use the findings of this report to make changes to questions should refer to the main part of the report where full details of the recommendations are given.

The cognitive testing revealed that respondents had varying attitudes to child poverty. Some people viewed it in absolute terms as being where very basic needs such as food and shelter are not met. Others viewed it in a relative way as being when people are living in a very poor way compared to others. For those taking a relative view their point of comparison affected how they regard poverty. Comparisons were made with people in other places (e.g. Africa), people in other times (when the respondent was a child) and people in Britain today. These differences in view affected how respondents answered the questions. Since the purpose of the questions is to capture these different attitudes, it is important that the questions included in the survey are able to discriminate between these different views. For some of the current questions this did not happen and respondents giving the same answer could hold very different views.

8.1.2   Defining who is in poverty

The first three questions in the questionnaire asked about poverty in general (rather than child poverty specifically) and were used to assess how respondents judged whether someone was in poverty or not. The main issues identified were that the first two questions overlapped and that respondents had differing understanding of the terms used in the questions. On balance the question which asked about 'someone who has enough to buy the things they really needed' worked best of the first two. Alterations to the wording to provide examples of the types of things being considered were suggested, although the implications of this for comparability should be borne in mind as should the implications of changing the wording to refer to what 'you take for granted' rather than what 'people take for granted'. The third question which asked about someone 'who had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt' was felt to work well without alteration.

8.1.3   Government spending on social benefits

These questions sought to identify what the respondent thought the government's spending priorities should be. This was an existing BSA question with the addition of a new category for 'benefits for families in poverty'. The addition of the new category did not work particularly well as the category overlapped with existing categories and was selected by respondents since it was regarded as the category which could potentially help most people. The recommendations are either to drop this category or to drop the category of benefits for single parents and alter the wording of the families in poverty category. Another main finding was that the format of the question did not work well as respondents did not fully understand the task from the outset. It would work better if respondents were allowed to mention all the items which they would consider a priority and then ask them to put them in order so that people are not forced to prioritise four and so that the task is clearer. Respondents who lacked an overall knowledge or understanding of the issues tended to answer the question from their own experience or perspective, so older people were more likely to prioritise spending on retirement pensions.

8.1.4   Attitudes to child poverty

These questions were existing BSA questions about 'real poverty' altered to refer to 'child poverty'. They sought to identify whether respondents thought there was a lot or very little child poverty in Britain today and whether they felt it had been increasing or decreasing and what they felt would happen in the future. For the question about the respondent's current views of the amount of child poverty, the answer categories did not cover the range of answers respondents wanted to give so recommendations for increasing these have been made. Furthermore, cognitive probing revealed very different attitudes to child poverty among respondents which were not reflected in the answers they gave. In the retrospective and prospective questions it was clear that respondents did not keep to the time frames, so recommendations have been made to highlighting the time

frame more clearly. Respondents could be given more direction about what child poverty is, either by definitions being provided, or by placing the questions after questions which help respondents to think about child poverty and what it might include. However, there are potential problems with this which are discussed in the main part of the report.

8.1.5 Vignette questions

These questions gave respondents three examples of children living in different scenarios and asking them to state whether or not they were in poverty and whether this was 'definitely' or 'probably'. These questions were successful in that respondents understood and enjoyed answering them and their answers revealed differences in their attitudes which had been hidden in the questions about child poverty in the previous section. Recommendations for these questions related to providing more detail, leaving less room for differing respondent assumptions to affect their answers, and also ensuring the details provided are consistent and realistic.

8.1.6 Card sort of items which could determine whether a child is in poverty

Respondents were given a series of cards with items which a child might or might not have. They were asked to sort them according to whether or not the lack of an item through not being able to afford it would mean a child was definitely in poverty, possibly in poverty or not in poverty. This worked much less well than the vignette questions since it is not one factor which respondents felt defined poverty, it depended on the rest of the context. Furthermore, the imbalanced answer options which favoured placing a child in poverty and inconsistency of terms (possibly compared with probably in the previous question) made it difficult for respondents to answer.

The cognitive testing did show that respondents, approached the task in different ways according to whether they were looking at poverty being a lack of basic needs or whether they were looking at it in terms of having a low income and not being able to afford the things most people had. However, this would not be revealed when the question are administered in a standard survey format. It is recommended that these questions are dropped.

8.1.7 Government policy and targets

These questions about respondent knowledge of government child poverty reduction targets revealed a lack of knowledge. Even where correct answers were given this was often based on educated guesswork rather than knowledge. The recommendations of the cognitive testing are that these questions should be dropped. However, if the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) needs questions on these topics, these questions would seem to work as well as any other questions would, but analysis should take into account the amount of guesswork involved in answering them.

Respondents were able to answer the questions about how the government should tackle child poverty, although the question about help targeted directly at children caused some confusion because two very different examples were given, the age of the child affects the impact and it depends on whether a long or short-term view of tackling child poverty is being taken.

8.1.8 Children of lone parents

These questions sought to identify whether respondents thought that lone parents living on benefits should be required to look for work and when this should happen. The questions were well understood and revealed differences in attitude. The question asked about the age of the child when the parent should be required to look for work but answers showed that respondents were thinking of child life stages rather than years of age so the question would be better framed in terms of child life stages.

Appendix A

Study documents

![NatCen – National Centre for Social Research logo]

<div style="border:1px solid">

P. 2778 BSA child poverty questions
Test Questionnaire and probe sheet

</div>

Serial Number: _____

Date of interview: ___/___/2008

Interviewer name _____

Interview number: _____

Introduction to the study

- Introduce yourself, the National Centre, and the study

- We are doing this study on behalf of the Department for Work & Pensions who would like to include some questions about child poverty in a survey which NatCen carries out each year – the British Social Attitudes survey. It is vital to test out the questions to see if they work properly

- Explain that you will be asking them a series of survey questions and at various points throughout the interview/questionnaire you will then be asking them to tell you how they went about answering the survey questions.

- We are not just interested in the answers they give but also in what they understand the questions to mean and the process by which they arrive at their answer

- Stress the confidentiality of the process; all the findings will be reported anonymously. Make sure they understand this.

- Explain that you will be recording the interview so that you don't have to make lots of notes during the interview. Check this is ok with the respondent

- Ask whether they have any questions before you start.

SECTION A CHILD POVERTY QUESTIONS

ASK ALL

I would like to start by asking you some questions about poverty in Britain today

Q1
a) Would you say that someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty if…they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but **not** enough to buy the things most people take for granted?

>   1   Was in poverty

>   2   Was not in poverty

b) (Would you say someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty)…if they had enough to eat and live, but **not** enough to buy other things they needed?

>   1   Was in poverty

>   2   Was not in poverty

c) (Would you say someone in Britain **was** or **was not** in poverty)…if they had **not** got enough to eat and live without getting into debt?

>   1   Was in poverty

>   2   Was not in poverty

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *To explore how respondent understands the terms used*
➢ *To see how they judge whether or not someone is "in poverty"*

Probes for Q1
- What did you understand by the term 'really needed'?
- What type of items were you thinking of as 'really needed'?
- What did you understand by the term 'take for granted'?
- What type of items were you thinking of as 'take for granted'?
- How easy or difficult is to decide if someone in Britain is in poverty or not?

Q2.
SHOW CARD A

a) Thinking now only of the government's spending on social benefits like those on Show Card A, please tell me which, if any, of these would be your highest priority for **extra** spending?

1. Retirement pensions
2. Child benefits
3. Benefits for the unemployed
4. Benefits for disabled people
5. Benefits for single parents
6. Benefits for families in poverty
7. Benefits for those in work on low incomes, e.g. tax credits
8. (None of these)

SHOWCARD A AGAIN
b) And which would be your second highest priority?

1. Retirement pensions
2. Child benefits
3. Benefits for the unemployed
4. Benefits for disabled people
5. Benefits for single parents
6. Benefits for families in poverty
7. Benefits for those in work on low incomes, e.g. tax credits
8. (None of these)

SHOWCARD A AGAIN
c) And which would be your third highest priority?

1. Retirement pensions
2. Child benefits
3. Benefits for the unemployed
4. Benefits for disabled people
5. Benefits for single parents
6. Benefits for families in poverty
7. Benefits for those in work on low incomes e.g. tax credits
8. (None of these)

SHOWCARD A AGAIN
d) And which would be your fourth highest priority?

1. Retirement pensions
2. Child benefits
3. Benefits for the unemployed
4. Benefits for disabled people
5. Benefits for single parents
6. Benefits for families in poverty
7. Benefits for those in work on low incomes e.g. tax credits
8. (None of these)

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *To explore respondent's views of the relative priority of benefits for tackling child poverty compared to other spending priorities*

Probes for Q2
▪ Can you describe how you chose your answer at Q 2a)?
▪ How easy was it to choose?

• How did you go about deciding what the next three priorities should be [at Q2b]?
▪ How easy was it to decide the order of priority?

• What do you understand by 'benefits for families in poverty' (code 6)?
• What do you understand by 'benefits for those in work on low incomes, e.g. tax credits' (code 7)?

I would now like to ask you some questions about **child** poverty in Britain today

Q3.
a) Some people say there is very little **child poverty** in Britain today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which come closest to **your** view…? READ OUT **…**

> 1 … that there is very little real poverty in Britain,

> 2 or, that there is quite a lot?

b) Over the **last** ten years, do you think that child poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing or staying at about the same level?

> 1   Increasing

> 2   Decreasing

> 3   Staying at same level

c) And over the **next** ten years, do you think that child poverty in Britain will increase, decrease, or stay at about the same level?

> 1   Increase

> 2   Decrease

> 3   Stay at about the same level

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *Whether there is a perceived difference between child poverty & general poverty*
➢ *Awareness of the prevalence of child poverty in Britain*

Probes for Q3
Q3a
▪ What do you think of as 'child poverty' compared with poverty in general?
▪ How easy is it to know how much child poverty there is in Britain?
▪ What did you base your answers on?
▪ What did you think of as 'very little' and 'quite a lot'?

Q3b&c
▪ How did you go about deciding if child poverty is increasing or decreasing when answering these questions?
▪ What time period were you thinking of when answering Q3b & c? Why?
▪ What might be the best time period for thinking about child poverty?

SECTION B   VIGNETTES

ASK ALL
Q4.
I am now going to describe the situation of three children and would like you to tell me whether you think each one is, or is not, living in poverty.

SHOWCARD B
a) Billy is seven years old. He lives with his family in a small house, sharing his bedroom with his younger brother. The house is kept warm in winter and Billy has the clothes and shoes he needs. He usually has a proper meal each day, but the cooker broke two weeks ago and his parents can't afford to repair it at the moment. Billy sometimes goes swimming with his friends, but can't go every month, as his parents can't afford it.

Would you say that Billy…READ OUT…

      1   …is **definitely** in poverty,

      2   Is **probably** in poverty,

      3   Is **probably not** in poverty,

      4   Is **definitely not** in poverty?

SHOWCARD C
b) Sharon, who is 12, lives with her parents and her older brother in a three bedroom flat on a new estate. The flat is generally in a good condition. When the fridge broke down last week, her parents replaced it by claiming on the insurance. Sharon plays in a netball team each weekend. When her friends come round for a snack, Sharon gets embarrassed as some of the furniture is worn out. The family can't afford to go on holiday every year, but manage to go away every couple of years.

Would you say that Sharon…READ OUT…

      1   …is **definitely** in poverty,

      2   Is **probably** in poverty,

      3   Is **probably not** in poverty,

      4   Is **definitely not** in poverty?

SHOWCARD D
c) Tom, aged 11, lives with his family in a small two bedroom flat. Tom shares a bedroom with his two sisters aged 14 and 16. The flat is in a poor state of repair, and the heating system does not function properly. Tom can't invite his friends round for tea as his parents can't afford it. He also usually can't go on school trips or out with friends because it costs too much.

Would you say that Tom…READ OUT…

1   …is **definitely** in poverty,

2   Is **probably** in poverty,

3   Is **probably not** in poverty,

4   Is **definitely not** in poverty?

Objectives of the probes:
- ➤ *How people go about deciding what defines poverty*
- ➤ *How well the use of vignettes helps in the process*
- ➤ *How well the answer codes work*

Probes for Q4
- How easy was it to take in the information for each person's situation?
- What did you feel about the length of the description?
- How easy was it to decide which answer to choose [for each one]?
- Which things in the description made you decide which answer to choose [for each one]?
- Did you have any difficulty deciding whether to choose 'definitely' or 'probably'? If yes, where and why?
- How well did the answers fit with what you wanted to say?

SECTION C   CARD SORT

ASK ALL

Q5.   SORT CARDS
a) I would now like you to sort this pack of cards into three piles. As you are doing so, please say out loud what you are thinking. I will demonstrate what I mean

⇒ **INTERVIEWER DEMONSTRATES THE 'THINK ALOUD' PRINCIPLE USING THE EXAMPLE OF SORTING OUT THE MORNING POST FOR THE HOUSEHOLD**

Each of these cards has an item written on it, which might mean that a child is living in poverty. Please sort the cards into three piles to show whether you think the item indicates that the child is **'definitely living in poverty', 'possibly living in poverty' or 'not living in poverty'.** Remember to say out loud what you are thinking as you decide which pile to put each card on.

A   Family cannot afford a holiday away from home for at least one week a year

B   Family cannot afford sports equipment or a bicycle for child

C   Family cannot afford a mobile phone for child

D   Sharing a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex (for child over 10)

E   Family cannot afford to keep house warm enough in winter

F   Family cannot afford a computer at home

G   Family cannot afford a celebration on occasions like birthdays and religious festivals

H   Family cannot afford new clothes, so child's clothes are second hand

I   Family cannot afford a TV

J   Family cannot afford to replace or repair major electrical goods such as a refrigerator or a washing machine, when broken

K   Family cannot afford for child to go on school trips

L   Family cannot afford to have hot water every day

RECORD ALLOCATION OF SORT CARDS TO EACH PILE AT Q5) in grid below:

Definitely living in poverty	Possibly living in poverty	Not living in poverty

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *To see what items respondents consider as 'definite' and 'possible' indicators of a child living in poverty, & why*
➢ *To explore whether the age of the child would influence the answers given*
➢ *To see how well the items listed elicit the information – especially whether the use of the word 'afford' creates any difficulties*

Probes for Q5:
▪ How easy was it to sort the cards into the three piles?
▪ How did you go about deciding which pile to put things in?
▪ Would you put any items on a different pile if you had been told to think about a child who was 12? How about a child who was six?

• Most of the items use the term 'the family cannot afford'. What do you understand this to mean?
▪ Would you put any items on different piles if you had been told that the family could afford to buy the item, but had chosen not to? Which & why?

▪ Did you experience any difficulty deciding between 'possibly' and 'not' living in poverty? Where & why?

SECTION D   QUESTIONS ABOUT GOVERNMENT POLICY AND TARGETS

Q6.
SHOWCARD E

Please say from this card who you think should be **mainly** responsible for tackling child poverty? CODE ONE ONLY

1   Central government

2   Local government

3   Individuals/families

4   Charitable organisations

5   Other

PLEASE SPECIFY_____

Objective of the probes:
➢ *To get the respondent's view about where responsibility for tackling child poverty lies*

Probes for Q6:
▪ How easy was it to decide which answer to choose?
▪ Why did you decide on the answer you did?
▪ What are the sorts of roles you think government, charities and individuals and families could have in reducing child poverty? Do you think there is any role for the private sector?

Q7.
SHOWCARD F

a) The government has a number of targets relating to child poverty in Britain. What do you think the government's target for 2010 is?

1. To ensure child poverty in Britain does not increase

2. To reduce child poverty in Britain by a quarter

3. To reduce child poverty in Britain by half

4. To reduce child poverty in Britain by three-quarters

5. To reduce child poverty in Britain to nothing

6. (Don't know)

SHOWCARD G
b) The government has a target to end child poverty in Britain. What do you think the target date for ending child poverty is?

1. 2010

2. 2015

3. 2020

4. 2025

5. 2030

6. (Don't know)

SHOWCARD H
c) Before this interview, how aware were you of the government's target to end child poverty in Britain?

1. Very aware

2. Quite aware

3. A little aware

4. Not at all aware

5. (Don't know)

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *To check out levels of awareness of government targets for tackling child poverty*
➢ *To see what respondents understand by terms used*

Probes for Q7:
• How did you go about selecting your answer to Q7a? How sure were you that your answer was correct? Why?
• What did you understand by **'to end child poverty'** at Q7b?
• How did you go about selecting your answer to Q7b? How sure were you that your answer was correct? Why?
• [If appropriate] How have you heard about the government's policies relating to child poverty?

Q8.
SHOWCARD I

a) There are a number of possible ways in which the government could help to remove children from poverty.

First of all, they could help improve **employment opportunities** for the parents of children in poverty. This might include helping parents to find jobs or providing more affordable childcare.

What impact do you think the government helping to improve **employment opportunities** for parents of children in poverty would have on child poverty?

1. A great deal

2. Quite a lot

3. Some

4. Not very much

5. None at all

6. (Don't know)

SHOWCARD I AGAIN

b) The government could also help to remove children from poverty by **giving financial help to their parents**. This might involve having more tax credits available to parents on low incomes, increasing the provision of affordable housing or increasing benefits for families in poverty.

What impact do you think the government **giving financial help to parents** of children in poverty would have on child poverty?

1. A great deal

2. Quite a lot

3. Some

4. Not very much

5. None at all

6. (Don't know)

SHOWCARD I AGAIN

c) The government could help remove children from poverty by **providing help targeted directly at these children**. This might include encouraging children in poverty to acquire skills for future employment or ensuring that fruit and milk is available to all children at school.

What impact do you think the government **providing help targeted directly at children in poverty** would have on child poverty?

1. A great deal
2. Quite a lot
3. Some
4. Not very much
5. None at all
6. (Don't know)

Objectives of the probes:
➢ *To see how easy respondents find answering questions about different ways of tackling child poverty*

Probes for Q8:
- How easy was it to understand the definitions of each of the three ways in which the government could help to remove children from poverty?
- What did you understand by: **'employment opportunities'; 'giving financial help to parents'; 'providing help targeted directly at children'?**

- How did you go about choosing your answer [to each of these]?
- How easy was it to choose? Why/why not?

Q9.
SHOWCARD J
And if the government **had to choose** between the three different types of help, which do you think it should choose?

      1   Increasing and improving employment opportunities for the parents of children in poverty

      2   Providing increased benefits or financial assistance for the parents of children in poverty

      3   Providing help targeted directly at children

Probing objectives for Q9
➢ *To check if respondents understand the different strategies*
➢ *To see if people draw a distinction between targeting help at parents versus children directly*

Probes for Q9:
• How did you go about choosing your answer?
• What do you think is the better strategy for removing children from poverty: to target help at the parents or the children themselves? Why?

Q10

a)   *Imagine a lone parent with a 1 year old child. The parent is living on benefits while they stay at home to look after the child.*

As the child gets older, do you think the parent should be required to look for work at any stage?

1   Yes   GO TO Q10b

2   No   ASK PROBES FOR Q.10 THEN END

IF Q10a= YES ask B
b)   How old do you think the child should be before the parent is required to look for work?

ENTER AGE: _____

<u>*Objectives of probes:*</u>
➢ *To get views about whether the government should be getting lone parents to stay at home to look after children or go out to work*
➢ *To establish whether or not respondents think that the requirement for a lone parent to look for work should vary according to the age of the child*
➢ *If yes, at what age & why?*

<u>*Probes for Q10*</u>
- How did you go about coming up with an answer?
- What factors influence your answer about how old a child should be before a parent should be required to look for work?
- If 'school' age not already mentioned: would your answer change depending on whether the child is old enough to go to school or not? Why?
- If appropriate following answers to previous probes: do you think it is right that a single parent with a 1 year old child should be able to stay at home rather than being required to look for work?

THANK RESPONDENT FOR THEIR TIME AND HELP AND REASSURE THEM ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY. GIVE THEM THE £20 HIGH STREET VOUCHER AND ASK THEM TO SIGN THE RECEIPT FORM

SAMPLE QUOTAS   Table 1

Gender	Men			Women		
Age	18-29	30-49	50+	18-29	30-49	50+
	3	4	3	3	4	3
With children under 16	3			3		
Lower socio economic group	5			5		
Minority ethnic group	2			2		

P. 2778 BSA Child Welfare

SCREENING AND RECRUITMENT SHEET

Serial Number:
Interviewer:
Area:

A   Introduction

- My **name** is [AS APPROPRIATE], and I am from the **National Centre for Social Research** which is a large independent research institute.

- We carry out a number of large ongoing surveys, such as the National Travel Survey and the Health Survey for England and are constantly looking at how to improve the way we ask our survey questions

- At present we are designing some new questions about poverty in Britain, especially child poverty. The questions have been designed on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions and will be included in a large survey that we do every year into **Social Attitudes in Britain.**

- We want to test out how well our new questions work and see what changes need to be made. We are therefore looking to carry out a small number of interviews with a range of different people to get their feedback.

- The interviews, which last about an hour, are carried out at a time and place of people's choosing. Everyone that takes part will receive a £20 gift voucher as a token of our appreciation for their time and help. This does not affect any current or future benefit or tax credit claim.

- Everything said in the interviews will be treated in strict confidence and will only be used to help the research team with designing survey questions.

- Participation is entirely **voluntary** - we rely on the good will of people to take part so that we get a good representation of people. **Would you be willing to take part?**

                                        YES ☐   GO TO NEXT BULLET POINT

                                        NO   ☐   GO TO REFUSALS SHEET (3)

B Checking whether they fit your quota

1)   INTERVIEWER TO CODE RESPONDENT GENDER

      Male   1

      Female   2

As I have said, we want to talk to people from a range of different backgrounds. May I just check some basic details?

2)   Firstly which of the following age bands do you come under? READ OUT

      18-29   1

      30-49   2

      50 and over   3

3) *I would now just like to ask you a few questions about your living circumstances.*

     a. How many people live in this household including you?
           Enter number ☐☐

[IF MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN HOUSEHOLD]

4)   Who else do you live with? CODE ALL THAT APPLY

      Spouse/partner   1

      Children aged under 16   2

      Children aged 16 or over   3

      Other household member   4

5)   Can I check, to which of the following groups do you consider you belong?
    CODE ONE ONLY READ OUT….

      White   1

      Mixed ethnic group,   2

      Asian or Asian British,   3

      Black or Black British,   4

      Or Chinese or other ethnic group?   5

6) a.   Please tell me the sort of work you do, or that you did in your last job.

RECORD VERBATIM: _____

b. INTERVIEWER CODE ONE ONLY:

Professional occupations   1

such as: teacher – nurse – physiotherapist – estate agent – social worker –
welfare officer – clergy – artist – journalist –
police officer (sergeant or above) – army officer (above NCO) –
civil service executive officer – accountant – solicitor –
medical practitioner – scientist – civil or mechanical engineer –
IT professional – software designer

Clerical and intermediate occupations   2

such as: secretary – personal assistant – clerical worker – office clerk –
wages clerk call centre agent – building inspector – insurance broker –
civil service or local government administrative or clerical officer –
nursing auxiliary – nursery nurse – police officer (below sergeant) –
armed forces (NCO or below) – fire-fighter – air traffic controller

Senior managers   3
such as: finance manager – chief executive –
senior public sector manager

Middle or junior managers or proprietors of small businesses   4
such as: office manager – retail manager – bank manager –
restaurant manager – warehouse manager – publican –
proprietor of a shop, garage, hairdresser/barber etc

Technical and craft occupations   5
such as: motor mechanic – fitter – inspector – plumber –printer –
tool maker – electrician – gardener – train driver

Semi-routine and routine manual and service occupations   6
such as: postal worker – machine operative – security guard –
caretaker – farm worker – catering assistant – receptionist –
sales assistant – hairdresser – HGV driver – van driver –
bus driver – taxi driver – cleaner – porter – packer – sewing machinist –
messenger – labourer – waiter/waitress – bar staff – child minder –
teaching assistant – building worker – painter or decorator

Never had a job   7

C   IS RESPONDENT NEEDED FOR INTERVIEW?

Yes☐   ARRANGE APPOINTMENT AND GET
        CONTACT DETAILS

No☐   THANK AND CLOSE

If this person does not fit quota but someone else in household does, complete a new recruitment sheet for the other person in the household.

D   CONTACT DETAILS

Case ID _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Telephone no _____

E   APPOINTMENT DETAILS

Date: _____

Time: _____

Venue: _____

- LEAVE LETTER CONFIRMING THESE DETAILS WITH RESPONDENT

F   Refusals

IF THEY ARE HESITANT, OR DO NOT WANT TO TAKE PART:

At various points along the way, respondents may say they do not want to participate. We want to ask very gently about why that is, just to find out if there are particular groups of people who are more reluctant to take parts than others. Please ask something like, *'Just for the record, I wonder if you'd mind telling me why you do not want to take part'?*

Please record reason for refusal below:

G Action after recruitment

PLEASE CHECK THAT ALL THE RELEVANT INFORMATION FOR THE INTERVIEW IS ENTERED ON THE FORM.

RETURN THIS FORM TO ROBIN LEGARD ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR INTERVIEW (YOU CAN BRING IT TO THE DEBRIEFING).

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