



# The Experiences of Education for Children and Young People in Poverty in the UK in 2019

A **Buttle UK** survey of over **1,200** child support workers

## Executive Summary

Buttle UK is a national children's charity providing grants that directly support children and young people in crisis. The applications for these grants come from a unique network of frontline support workers from many different organisations across the UK who are interacting with the most vulnerable children and young people.

This report focuses on the unique insight that over 1,200 frontline workers provided into the **experiences of education** among children in poverty. This report draws from qualitative and quantitative data that highlights how difficulties such as being unable to afford school essentials (i.e. uniform and course materials), food and household essentials, and not having access to appropriate accommodation can impact children's experiences of education. Findings also demonstrate how reductions in support available for children and young people in poverty can exacerbate these issues and result in fewer educational opportunities.



Results from our recent survey completed by frontline workers indicate that there are multiple areas in which poverty can impact children's experiences of education, with several main themes arising:

### **The barriers of not being able to afford school costs like uniform or equipment**

- 79% of frontline workers report regularly (i.e. at least once a week) seeing parents who are struggling to afford the costs associated with school. At its most extreme being unable to afford school uniform or the correct equipment results in children not being able to take certain subjects, or even attend certain schools at all.

*"Children have not been able to take certain subjects at school due to the cost. For example, a family I am supporting, their daughter is in high school and she will not take Domestic Science as an option even though she enjoys cooking and would like to take it as an option. This is because she would have to ask her parents for money for the ingredients to cook and she said her parents don't have enough money."*

- 67% regularly see (i.e. at least once a week) children being unable to access after school clubs due to the cost. Being unable to afford after school activities means that children have limited opportunity to learn beyond core academic subjects, or develop their social skills.

*"Being poor is resulting in a negative impact on their lives. Most children I have come across don't have swimming lessons, go to dance class, sports clubs etc., all activities which build social skills. It is quite obvious that a lot of the children do not know how to interact properly due to lack of social interaction."*

### **A lack of food, a bed and clean clothing prevents children being ready to learn**

- 88% of respondents regularly (i.e. at least once a week) see parents being unable to afford the basics (food, fuel and household items), and 77% see children having to be fed either breakfast or dinner at school.
- 55% regularly see children (i.e. at least once a week) without an appropriate bed of their own.
- Not having regular nutritious meals at home or not having an appropriate bed to sleep in means that children do not have the basic foundations for healthy growth or the energy to concentrate at school and learn. Not being able to afford fuel and travel costs means that children are simply unable to attend school all together.
- 66% of respondents regularly (i.e. at least once a week) see parents being unable to afford the cost of cleaning children's clothes and bedding. A common theme reported was that families often cannot afford heating or hot water. Not being able to provide a clean, warm living environment means that children are more likely to become ill and miss school, or not attend school due to not having appropriate clothing. These problems can also increase bullying within schools.

*"Children [are] having to take days off school due to unwashed or broken clothes."*

*"Bullying is a huge concern when children are unable to dress as their peers, and have poorer quality clothing/shoes/school bag. [Children are] being discriminated against for where they live and how they live."*



- 61% of frontline workers regularly see families (i.e. at least once a week) struggling with internet access. This means that children are unable to complete homework that requires the internet, and parents are unable to communicate with schools or access support that can help with children's education.

*"Internet access is a real difficulty for families we work with...Even schools communicate with families online and do not appreciate this is not possible for some."*

### **Unsuitable housing prevents children from being able to attend school**

- Families in temporary accommodation are often far away from the child's school, resulting in poor school attendance due to families not being able to afford the cost of travel.
- Children in temporary accommodation also have to move frequently, meaning that they have to change schools multiple times, which affects the development of relationships with peers and their engagement in school.
- Overcrowding can often mean that the child does not have the resources within the home to help them learn.

*"Children [are] absent from school because parents do not have the money to pay for transport (e.g. Oyster card) to take the child to school. This is a particular problem because families are frequently moved so are not within walking distance of school."*

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences can prevent school attendance and reduce educational support within the home**

- Domestic abuse means that children have to leave their homes, their belongings, and their schools.
- Parent / carer mental and physical health problems can mean that they do not have the capacity to help their child learn within the home or ensure that they attend school.
- Neglect, and more general negative home environments, often mean that children do not have the resources at home to learn, and are not surrounded by positive role models who value and support education.

*"Families struggle to get their children to school due to their own physical conditions, mental health conditions, sensory impairments - coupled with often being in temporary accommodation far from their school."*

*"Families... are not in a position to help their child with school work. This is sometimes due to over-crowded accommodation, but can also be due to poor education and English language skills on the part of parents. Parents frequently lack confidence in accessing the school system."*



## **There is a lack of support for education from local authorities, schools and third sector organisations**

- The issues outlined above are worsened by the reduction in support available to children and young people in poverty, further preventing them from having equal access to education
- Where there is a higher frequency of families experiencing government cuts or delays to payments due to universal credit, there are also more families struggling to afford the basics that form the foundation for children having fair access to education. This includes being able to provide children with clothes; affording school related costs; accessing the internet and being able to pay for after school activities for children.
- Fewer families are receiving local welfare support or assistance in affording school uniform costs, and fewer have access to furniture recycling schemes, or affordable activities for children than a year ago. Food banks are also struggling to keep up with demand. Likewise, due to funding cuts, schools have reduced the support they provide children.
- The reduction in support can increase crime. High levels of exclusions and a reduction in appropriate support from schools mean that children are sometimes turning to crime, and a lack of welfare support means that parents and children turn to crime in order to afford the essentials.

*"Exclusion from education results in crime."*

*"There are occasions where residents will resort to theft or drug running because of non-payment of benefit through sanctions or other delays. Sanctions and delays leave them without funds for essentials, including food, sanitary products and personal hygiene products."*



# What is it really like for children growing up in poverty in the UK in 2019? Part 2; Education

## Methodology

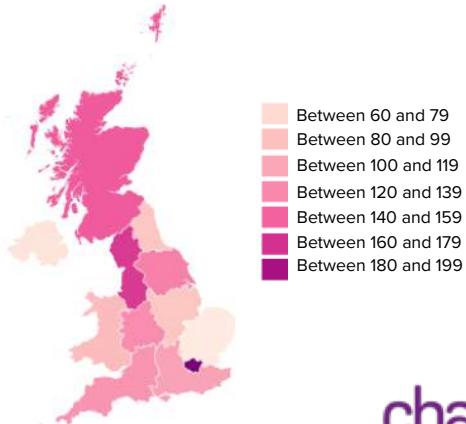
We identified 10,000 support workers that we have worked with to support children through our database. We emailed these support workers an online questionnaire that asked about the issues they see the children and families that they work with experiencing, in order to develop a picture of frontline workers' experiences of children in poverty. We asked a range of closed questions (generally on a scale from never to very often [daily], or on a scale indicating the percentage of families they work with experiencing certain issues [i.e. 0-24%, rarely; 25-49%, sometimes; 50-74%, often; 75-100%, very often]) to assess how often support workers see issues with families being able to afford essentials and school related costs, their experiences of crime, adverse experiences to which the children are exposed and the support available to families. We also provided a number of opportunities for open-ended responses, allowing support workers to go into detail about the difficulties children face as a result of poverty, and the impact that these issues have on children's experiences of education. Several themes also became apparent from the qualitative aspects of the survey. A selection of quotes from these responses are included in the report that highlight how children's experiences of education are affected by poverty.

## The Respondents

We had a high response rate to this survey, with 1,290 individuals that work with children and young people across the UK completing the questionnaire in total. We obtained results from people working with vulnerable children and young people in poverty across all regions in the UK, from 616 organisations. These organisations include local authorities, charities, housing associations, Citizen's Advice, local healthcare trust partnerships, primary and secondary schools and children's centres. All respondents work directly with children and young people in poverty; professionals who responded to our survey include, community project workers, social workers, health visitors and nurses, school staff and probation officers. The map below shows the distribution of individual responses, and the table shows the distribution of organisations from which we received responses.

Region	Organisations
East Midlands	33
East of England	30
London	97
North East	27
North west	70
Northern Ireland	31
Scotland	71
South East England	48
South West England	60
Wales	40
West Midlands	48
Yorkshire and The Humber	61
Grand Total	616

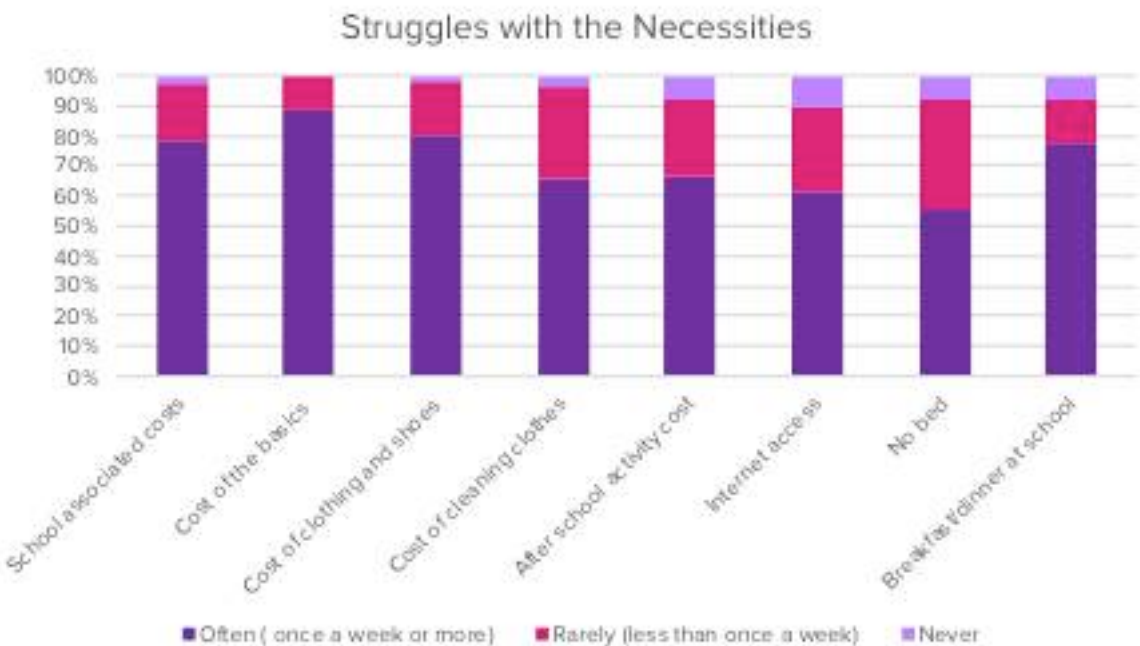
Individual responses



# Not being able to afford the essentials and its impact on education

We asked support workers how often they come across families who are unable to afford a range of things that most of us would take for granted including: the basics (food, household items, fuel etc.); children’s clothing and shoes and the cost of cleaning these items; access to the internet; costs associated with attending school and after school activities. We also asked how often support workers see children being fed breakfast or dinner at school due to the family being unable to feed them, and how often they come across children having their clothes washed at school.

We found that support workers witness alarming rates of these issues among families in poverty, with at least 92% of support workers reporting that these issues are present among the families that they work with. Respondents also provided insight into how these issues can affect children’s experiences of education, including: not being able to afford the uniform or equipment necessary to take certain subjects, access extra-curricular activities or even attend certain schools; hygiene problems and not being able to afford certain items resulting in bullying in school; housing problems leading to difficulties attending school; and being too hungry or tired to focus.



## Direct School Costs

One common theme that arose was how trying to find the money for children's school uniform is a real pressure for parents. This can even go as far as parents having to turn down offers of good schools for their children simply because they cannot afford the cost of uniforms. In many cases, there is no support to purchase uniform, and it was reported that some schools fine parents who are not able to afford the correct uniform or the costs of cleaning clothes.

Being unable to afford clothes and specialist items can also prevent children from participating in extra-curricular activities, and even acts as a barrier to taking certain subjects within the school curriculum; this limits children's choice and opportunity for their education. Affording school trips were also frequently reported as being an issue for children in poverty.

79%

Regularly see parents (i.e. at least once a week) struggling to afford the costs associated with school, and **19%** see this problem every day.

80%

Regularly see parents (i.e. at least once a week) unable to afford children's clothes and shoes, and **19%** see this problem every day.

*"School Uniform is a big problem as so many schools have a strict uniform policy, but there is no scheme to help families that cannot afford the uniform. This means that some families are having to refuse places at good schools, which puts their children/grandchildren at a disadvantage from an early age. This also applies to extra-curricular activities (e.g., music tuition) and having the correct equipment for school (e.g., a tablet/laptop)."*

*"Children have not been able to take certain subjects at school due to the cost. For example, a family I am supporting, their daughter is in high school and she will not take Domestic Science as an option even though she enjoys cooking and would like to take it as an option. This is because she would have to ask her parents for money for the ingredients to cook and she said her parents don't have enough money."*

*"We have young people who are in education who struggle to have laptops, stationary, books etc. due to needing to eat."*

*"[Families in poverty struggle with] being able to afford school journeys and other school activities, being able to afford school meals."*

*"Children are unable to participate in school trips/excursions"*

*"some schools won't accept non-branded uniforms which are a massive expense upon families, especially if they have multiple school aged children. Families will go with essential items and put themselves in food poverty in order to try and afford uniforms."*



*"Families are unable to provide the basic needs like heat, food [and] bedding. In some families the child sleeps on a mattress on the floor with no sheets."*

*"[Poverty affects children's] ability to concentrate when they come to school [and] poor behaviour management...due to a bad night's sleep and/or lack of breakfast or [an] evening meal."*

*"If you are struggling financially, I have found that families will not have a quality meal at home very frequently."*

*"It's hard to do as well when you are hungry."*

*"Parents are being taken to court for the non-payment of bills they can't afford to pay, then the high court costs and admin fees added means that they find paying the debt harder to manage. This causes them to have less money to be able to buy food and have their basic needs met, which is damaging to their health and self-esteem."*

*"[Children in poverty have] poor dental health and physical health...not attending appointments for health reviews and treatments...obesity and failure to thrive, anaemia, lack of exercise, all risking long term health problems [and] poor concentration, leading to [poorer] development and problem solving skills."*

*"Children [are] having to take days off school due to unwashed or broken clothes."*





The cost of travel to school was a common theme identified as being a barrier to education; many respondents reported that among the families they work with, parents cannot afford to take their children to school, because they have to prioritise food over fuel or public transport costs. Travel costs were particularly prominent for limiting young people's access to further education.

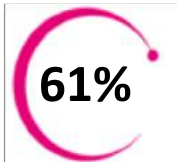


*"Very often, I hear from parents that they have no money to fix their cars and buy petrol. I also work with families in rural areas, where cars are essential for taking children to school, activities and medical appointments."*

*"Some parents have to pay for taxis daily to get them [to school] which they cannot afford whilst in temporary accommodation. Whilst the local authority will sometimes provide bus fare for the child, none is provided for the sibling or parents that have to travel with them at a cost of over £5 a day for a bus ride into the city. This cost is a significant drain on the families' resources and often parents have to make a choice between food or bus fares."*

*"Cuts to transport for 16 to 18 year olds will impact on whether the children of poorer families will attend further education"*

Respondents also noted that, whilst the government would see things such as internet access as a luxury for families in poverty, in reality this is a necessity, particularly for accessing support and communicating with school. Nevertheless, many supporter workers see children without internet access.



Regularly see families (i.e. at least once a week) struggling with internet access at least once a week, and **14%** see families with this problem every day.



*"Internet access is a real difficulty for families we work with, it is unaffordable but the lack of it is really challenging and isolating as most services operate online now. Even schools communicate with families online and do not appreciate this is not possible for some."*

*"Parents and carers tend to rely on loans and debts in order to provide. [The] expectation to have certain products means that although local authorities class them as 'luxury', in reality children and parents see them as essential (phones, internet etc.)."*

## Not having the basics and bullying

The lack of resources for children in poverty was commonly highlighted as a factor in bullying within schools. Several respondents noted that children are often being bullied by their peers for not having the same things such as clothes and electronic gadgets, as well as being bullied for their living conditions. Many referrers noted that the pressures that come alongside poverty are negatively impacting children's mental health, and can mean that children do not go to school to avoid being bullied.



*"Bullying is a huge concern when children are unable to dress as their peers, and have poorer quality clothing/shoes/school bag. [Children are] being discriminated against for where they live and how they live."*

*"[Children in poverty have] feelings of low self-esteem. [They are] unable to join in, and have feeling of exclusions = bad behaviour/rebellious behaviours."*

*"Bullying in the schools is very often a result where some of these children do not have the latest up to date technology, or due to family financial issues personal hygiene is not always a priority and becomes an issue."*

*"Children are impacted when their friends are showing what they have, and it causes a lot of anxiety and stress with the ones who don't have these things. It can be a potential for bullying."*

*"Our families find budgeting extremely difficult. It is not unusual for our young people to have iPhones or decent trainers, but then have no food or electric at home. The pressures of society and social media mean parents make bad financial choices because they are trying to ensure their children are able to fit in with their peers."*

*"[Children in poverty are at risk of] Bullying due to not having the latest items or clothing brands, impacting on confidence and causing low attendance in school."*

*"[There is an] Increase in bullying if children are perceived as being different, e.g., not having the latest phones, computers, clothes etc."*



## Housing problems and education

When asking support workers to expand on the difficulties that children and young people in poverty face, many noted that travel problems are a barrier to education for families that are placed in temporary accommodation and forced to move frequently. This results in children having to travel long distances to school or having to change schools, which can impact on their education. Support workers also noted that where there is lots of temporary housing and where social housing is available, schools tend to have lower Ofsted ratings. Several support workers noted that these experiences can also have a negative impact on children's mental health. Overcrowding in the home was also noted as a barrier to children's education.



*"[Families have difficulties with] Travel costs, [and] getting kids to and from school if they have been placed in temporary accommodation far from school."*

*"Children [are] absent from school because parents do not have the money to pay for transport (e.g. Oyster card) to take the child to school. This is a particular problem because families are frequently moved so are not within walking distance of school"*

*"Families [are] being moved into temporary housing, children [are] having to travel long distances to school."*

*"Families move constantly which massively affects their education and [affects them] socially as they cannot maintain friends. We get so many boys in particular that parents say have anger issues as they have nowhere and no one to go to talk to about their feelings... this goes on to affect their education again."*

*"[Families struggle with] Temporary accommodation that is very unsuitable and has a lack of provisions - e.g., no cooking facilities or laundry [facilities], high rent.... Women are moved from one temporary accommodation to the next, causing stress, difficulties travelling for the children to school and lack of stability."*

*"Affordable housing isn't available within the local area; many families are forced to move without transition into local school, therefore attendance at school declines."*

*"[There is] Not enough social housing. [There are] Very long waiting lists and when families are rehomed when homeless they could end up anywhere in the county, resulting in the children having to change school. This often means that if that the accommodation is mostly B&Bs, [and] the schools in the area are not rated so highly by Ofsted."*

*"Children in refuges have had to leave belongings, friends and family behind so often feel isolated and stressed about joining a new school."*

## Crime and education

We asked respondents about whether and why they are seeing changes in crime rates in their area, and responses highlight that the link between crime and children's education. Many support workers noted that children in poverty are much more vulnerable to criminal exploitation and becoming involved in gangs, positing that some of the reasons for this include high levels of exclusion from school; criminal activity within the schools themselves; and a lack of after school activities available to keep children safe and away from harm out of school hours. Several also emphasised the need for children to be educated about violent crimes, such as knife crime, gun crime and gang culture, showing how a lack of targeted education in schools can exacerbate this problem. Support workers also noted that there is a lack of funding to help children in poverty access further education, which can lead to these young people turning to crime.

53%

Reported having seen an increase in violent crime over the last year, with less than **1%** seeing a decrease over the same period.

Regularly see the families they work with (i.e. at least once a week) being directly impacted by crime.

37%

*"Low income families in deprived areas are so much more vulnerable to gangs grooming them into sexual exploitation, drug dealing and transporting."*

*"Young people need more educating around knife crime from an early age and their environment/mindset needs to change. This can only be achieved through education and giving them more opportunities which can build their self-esteem."*

*"[There is a] Lack of youth services and lack of education around violence"*

*"Teenagers have no funding for further education, therefore do not have anything to keep them busy. Benefit cuts are impacting on home life."*

*"More young people are not in education or employment. ... [there are] not enough activities to keep youth off the street; all the youth clubs and outreach workers are gone."*

*"[There has been an] Increase in knife crime and serious youth violence in relation to gang exploitation. There is a clear link between this and the high number of permanent school exclusions that are taking place and a lack of community services for young people."*

*"Exclusion from education results in crime."*

*"The violence is often gang related. I also think that children being off rolled from school and being referred to PRU [pupil referral unit] is not working."*

*"Knife crime within schools is the reason children feel the need to self-protect."*

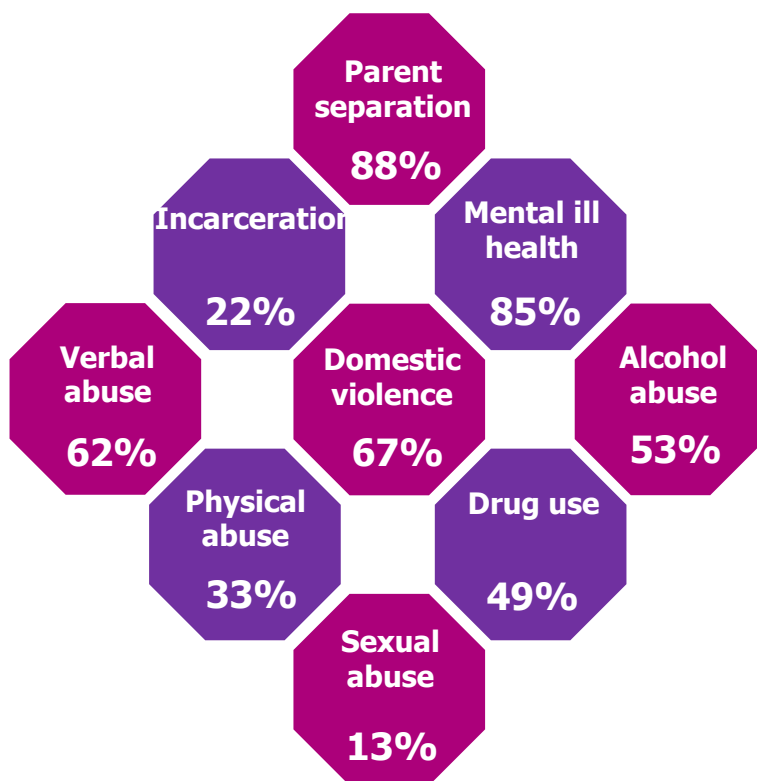


## Family relationships, adverse childhood experiences and education

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refers to negative and/or traumatic life events experienced in childhood, such as: domestic violence; parent separation; parent or family member drug and alcohol misuse; physical, emotional and sexual abuse; neglect and parent or family member incarceration. Research widely demonstrates that these experiences can negatively impact children's development into adulthood, including their academic / educational development and future life chances. Whilst research on ACEs tends to show that children who experience four or more ACEs are at increased risk of negative outcomes,<sup>1</sup> each of these experiences have been related to both poverty and poorer educational achievement in children. <sup>2,3</sup>

We asked support workers what percentage of the children they work with have experienced ACEs to gain an understanding of the types of adversity children and young people in poverty live with day to day. Respondents indicated that a large percentage of the children that they work with have experienced these issues.

### Percentage of respondents reporting that more than half of the children they work with have experienced specific ACEs:



<sup>1</sup>Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., ... & Marks, J. S. (2019). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 56(6), 774-786.

<sup>2</sup>DWP (2017) *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*.

<sup>3</sup>DCfE (2019) *Help, protection, education: Concluding the children in need review*.

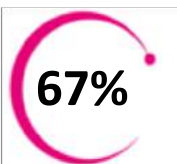
Throughout the survey, respondents highlighted how different types of adversity can affect children's experiences of education. Several respondents reported that parental mental and physical ill health can mean that parents are not able to take their children to school, resulting in poor attendance and more difficulties achieving in school. This in turn can lead to children becoming isolated, which then further affects both the child and parent's mental health. Sometimes, neglect or incapacity of the parent can also lead to children becoming carers for their parents and their siblings, meaning that they stay at home rather than going to school, so do not get an education.



*"Families [are] struggling to get their children to school due to their own physical conditions, mental health conditions, sensory impairments - coupled with often being in temporary accommodation far from their school. Some parents are having to pay for taxis daily to get them there which they cannot afford. Or if they go into hospital to have a procedure they have no close family members to step in to care [for the child], take them to school or help out."*

*"[Children in poverty experience] Isolation from peers...particularly for those families where a parent is physically unable to take their child anywhere due to their own pain thresholds and particularly where the child is in primary school and therefore unable to travel independently. They are highly isolated, as there are so few of our families who have extended family nearby to help. They are therefore isolated at home with often a chronically unwell parent, very often an absent father and this has all sorts of negative effects on the child and parent (who often feels guilty)."*

At Buttle UK, a large number of the families we support are victims of domestic abuse, so it is not surprising that several referrers highlighted the impact of domestic abuse on children's experiences of school.



Reported that **more than 50%** of the children they work with have **witnessed domestic violence**.



*"[Families are] Having to flee domestic abuse and leave behind personal belongings, family pets and extended family and friends... Starting over in new schools can be particularly stressful... Mum [needs] to find extra money for uniforms... Children are] not able to talk to new friends about why they have had school moves... Some children decide not to make friends as they don't know if they will be staying long in the area or have to flee again if Dad finds them. These children experience acute stress reactions which affect them physically, psychologically, socially and behaviourally."*

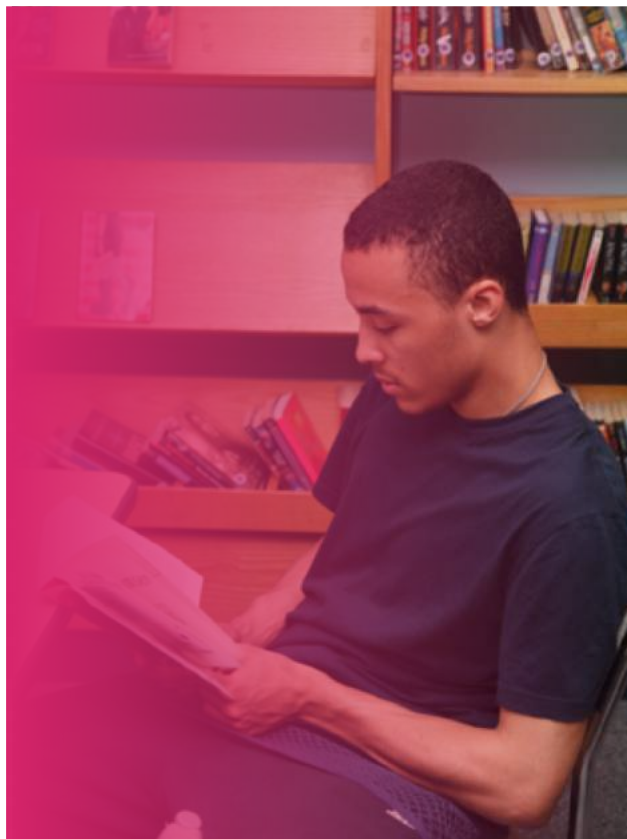


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Support workers indicated that where children in poverty experience neglect, they have fewer educational experiences and access to stimulating activities, which can impact their language skills and educational development. They reported that neglect can also lead to young people having fewer life skills, such as understanding of budgeting, being able to cook, and how to clean.

Some reported that family environments more generally can impact education, with several noting that when children come from families in which parents are not educated, this can lead to lower aspirations for the next generation. They also indicated that a lack of education can make parents less able to help their children with homework and less able to communicate with schools.



*"[Children in poverty have a] lack of educational experiences and stimulating activities, games, books, toys etc. outside school."*

*"Living with a chaotic family can lead to [parents/carers] not taking the children to school so [the] child ends up poorly educated, being a carer for their own family, [or] looking after younger siblings. Families [are] unable to provide the basic needs like heat, food, [or] bedding. [In] some families the child sleeps on a mattress on the floor with no sheets. [The child is] Unable to make friends [or] bring them back to the house to play due to being embarrassed of the environment they live in."*

*"[Children in poverty have] low levels of education and aspiration. Generations before them are also living in poverty and no one in their circle is achieving – there is a lack of positive role models."*

*"Families... are not in a position to help their child with school work. This is sometimes due to over-crowded accommodation, but can also be due to poor education and English language skills on the part of parents. Parents frequently lack confidence in accessing the school system."*

# The lack of support available to improve children's chances in education

We asked respondents where they see families receiving support, and where they have seen increases or reductions in this support over the last year. Respondents also provided some insight into how this support can impact children's experiences of education. Several issues around a lack of support were highlighted, both from the government, schools and support in the charity sector.

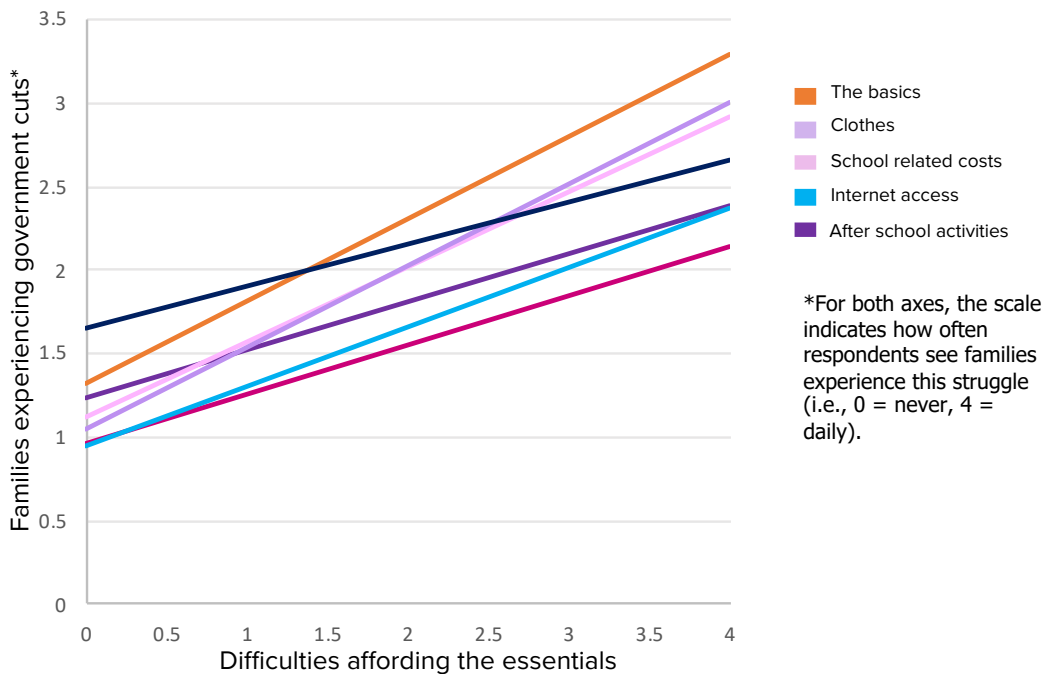
**89%** Regularly witness (i.e. at least once a week) families receiving less support as a result of government cuts to welfare provision, and 37% are seeing this every day.

Regularly witness (i.e. at least once a week) families experiencing delays to their payments as a result of universal credit, and 30% are seeing this every day.

**93%** Regularly witness (i.e. at least once a week) families getting in increasing debt, and 35% see this every day.

**85%**

The graph below demonstrates that where there are more families experiencing government cuts, there are more families who are struggling to afford the necessities and school costs that are the essential foundations for positive experiences in education. The same pattern was found for families experiencing delays in universal credit; where support workers see more families experiencing delays to payments, they see more families struggling to afford the necessities.

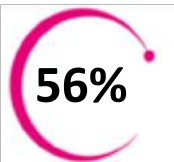




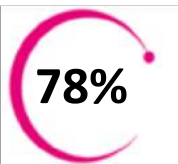


*"There are occasions where residents will resort to theft or drug running because of non-payment of benefit through sanctions or other delays. Sanctions and delays leave them without funds for essentials, including food, sanitary products and personal hygiene products."*

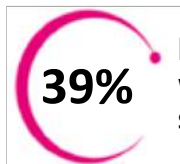
**Respondents reported that...**



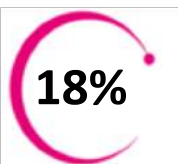
**56%** of families they work with are living in destitution\*.



Regularly see (i.e. at least once a week) families in which work is not paying enough to make ends meet, and 21% are seeing this problem every day.



have seen an increase in the number of families in which one person is working needing financial support over the last year.



have seen an increase in the number of families in which at least two people are working needing financial support over the last year.



*"There appears to be an increase in families with financial difficulties where one or both parents work and yet they report living hand to mouth and increasingly have to turn to food banks when a crisis or something unexpected happens."*

When asking about changes in availability of support over the last year, respondents indicated that support has decreased in all areas, and in most cases, the proportion of support workers seeing decreases in support is greater than the proportion seeing increases.

The number of support workers reporting decreases in these areas of support is shocking given that this support is needed to reduce the issues experienced by children and families in poverty every day.

Reductions in school uniform support, welfare assistance, support for household items, and affordable activities show that the needs of children and young people in poverty are not being met. We have already highlighted how children in poverty frequently do not have access to activities that can promote their development, do not have the correct school uniforms, and do not have adequately equipped homes or environments. The alarmingly high percentage of frontline workers reporting reductions in support shows that there is not enough support in place to mitigate these difficulties for children and young people in poverty.

**Percentage of respondents reporting a decrease vs increase in support in the last year:**





Our findings highlight that reductions in government and local authority welfare assistance more generally can make experiences of education more difficult for children. On several occasions, issues with universal credit, the two child limit,<sup>4</sup> and changes in thresholds for government support were noted as important contributors to the difficulties that children and young people face. A lack of support around education for asylum seekers was noted as a particular issue.



*"Some families fall on the borderline of being able to access free school uniform & free school meals and struggle financially as a consequence, especially in families with 2 or more children"*

*"[There have been] Cuts to all services but especially youth services"*

*"Too much of what the government is offering is short sighted and is only a quick fix."*

*"Many of the families I work with have siblings who were born here but they weren't. They may have come to the UK at an early age but not have a British passport and not be able to apply for a student loan. Many of these young people have excelled at A-Level. The families have gone through hell and high water to stay in the UK. To be denied a possibility of entering uni with their peers is soul destroying. There is no way they can pay foreign student fees...yet [the student loans company] continues to have no clear way to appeal despite clear uni offers.... [it's a] set back to the young person's trajectory to contribute to society."*

<sup>4</sup> The two-child limit refers to the policy that means that families can only apply for the child elements of universal credit for a maximum of two children. For more information, go to: <https://cpag.org.uk/node/2126>

Although food banks were the support most commonly reported as having increased in the last year, respondents provided a clear indication that there are still difficulties for families in accessing this support. Often, the number of visits families can have to the food bank are limited, local welfare will not support travel costs to get to food banks, there are barriers to accessing foodbanks initially (namely the process of proving eligibility) and many food banks are simply running out of food.



*"Councils are asking our clients for 3 months' [worth of] bank statements before they will give out a food bank voucher. I didn't know that they were in charge of this, I thought this was a charity"*

*"[There is a] High demand for food banks who run out of items and have to appeal to the public in general for help. [There have been] Cut backs in money given to families, [and] families [are] going without meals a few times a week or eating noodles."*

*"Young people are only allowed to access food banks a few times."*

*"I often find that if the family is working, often earning the minimum wage, they are worse off than those on benefits as they have to pay for everything. [It is] often the families who are working that need to use food banks and have debt."*

*"The local food bank has limited their parcels to 6 weeks on 6 weeks off, which can cause further hardship. We are starting to see the impact of Universal Credit roll out."*

*"There is an independent food bank available in the area. This is a great support to the families in the area. Welfare fund often refuse or request the families travel to collect this when already destitute."*

*"We rely heavily on the local food banks but there are restrictions on the number of food parcels they can have."*

*"Less children are meeting thresholds for support. At one time if a child received pupil premium they could access activities in school. Now schools are strapped themselves and ask for payments towards costs. I have parents who have nowhere to turn to when it comes to buying uniforms for their children. There are less and less charities to refer to and now charity terms are very specific and so it's hard to find a charity where the family fits the criterion. More families are in rent arrears and utility debt with no support available to them, unless case is very extreme."*



We asked respondents how often they see families in poverty receiving support from schools, family and friends, local authority services and charities. Findings indicated that schools are the most commonly accessed support.

However, it was noted by multiple respondents that schools have stopped providing free activities for children, such as arts and sports activities. Changes in school structures means that some children are no longer getting a full education or all the support that they need. These changes include reduced timetables amongst schools changing to an academy status, or cuts in funding reducing the numbers of pastoral staff. Fewer education and training opportunities for young people (i.e. above 16) were also noted as an issue. Overall, it is clear that the support available is not meeting the needs of children and young people in poverty.

57%

see over half of the families they work with receiving support through schools, making schools the most frequently accessed support.

see over half of the families they work with receive support from other local authority services, making this the least frequently accessed support

35%

*"The biggest problem is the academy chains of schools... that are excluding a huge number of vulnerable pupils. These pupils are abandoned, left with no education, in poor families often already in chaos, financially insecure and with significant levels of trauma. [There is] No support in schools due to cuts of pastoral staff that would support them in the classroom, so [if the children display] any behaviour issues (which are not behaviour but as a consequence of their chaotic life styles) they are pushed out."*

*"Many activities that schools used to provide are no longer provided e.g., free arts and sports activities. On a low income or even a moderate one, children can no longer access these opportunities, leading to lower life chances, aspirations, self-confidence, learning achievements and a less fair society."*

*"The schools have changed to academy status and this has had an extremely negative effect on the most vulnerable young people we work with. We have a high number of young people who are on partial timetables, but this means that schools are offering them one hour per day, a couple of days per week. It is not uncommon to drive round the estates and see lots of children who should be in school."*

*"There are less accessible training opportunities available for NEETs. Where young people are affected by a prevalence of gang and knife crime, colleges are not always accessible and training providers are not always local. It is tricky for parents whose child benefit and child tax credits are then cut."*

*"[There is a] Serious lack of support and services for the vulnerable and needy people such as [those with] mental health, alcohol and drug issues. There are also issues with support for care leavers.... moving into general needs accommodation and maintaining either their jobs and/or education."*

## Concluding Remarks

This survey provides invaluable insight into the struggles that children and families in poverty are currently facing across the UK; our findings show the extent to which frontline workers see poverty impacting children on a daily basis.

Overall, it is clear that a range of factors can impact experiences of education for children and young people growing up in poverty. Not having access to nutritious food or a bed to sleep in means that children are too tired to concentrate in school. Children are prevented from attending certain schools or doing certain subjects because parents cannot afford the correct uniform and equipment. Poor hygiene as a result of not being able to afford hot water and the costs of cleaning means that children in poverty often get ill, in turn they miss school. Bullying is frequent among children in poverty, which can further reduce children's attendance. A lack of suitable housing means that children are often placed far away from their school without the means to travel, again reducing school attendance. Poverty means that children are unable to access after school activities that can promote their personal and social development. ACEs and negative circumstances in the family home can mean that children are not growing up in an environment where their education is supported or encouraged. Cuts to funding and reductions in support for families means that children in poverty continue to face these struggles, and in some cases that lack of support around education can lead to children turning to crime.

The combination of all of these factors has the effect of creating inequality in the education sector for children in poverty, given them less chance of benefiting fully from education made available by the state. Buttle UK's *Chances for Children* grants are designed to help address these barriers, but our resources will only go so far. We therefore urge all political parties to form child centric strategies to give these children a chance to benefit from an education that can help them break the cycle of poverty in the future.

We are very grateful to all of the support workers that took the time to respond to this survey when already stretched, without whom we wouldn't be able to highlight the alarming conditions that children in poverty face day to day, or demonstrate the need for increased support in each of these areas. Thank you.



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