

chancesFOR  
CHILDREN

BUtLEuk



# The State of Child Poverty 2024 Executive Summary

This is the sixth year we have published a State of Child Poverty report. This year, we heard from just over 1,000 frontline professionals working with approximately **150,000** children. They reported that **58%** of these children live in **destitution**, and their responses outline the appalling standard of living that these families face in 2024.

Through the public narrative surrounding the cost-of-living crisis is beginning to indicate that the worst is past, we know that the cost-of-living crisis is continuing to have a serious impact on households living in poverty. Years of its worst impacts are having a cumulative effect. Comparing this year's responses to the 2023 responses, we have seen little improvement, with increases in the proportion of respondents linking the rising costs of basic items and services and the severity of their financial hardship, demonstrating increasing income precarity. Respondents told us that of the families they support:

- 53% cannot afford enough food and nutrition, while 55% cannot afford utilities
- 59% go without basic furniture such as beds, sofas and appliances
- 50% cannot afford children's clothes or toys, while 47% are unable to afford to clean their homes or clothes.
- 48% are not able to afford their rent or equivalent
- 64% go without IT equipment for education or employment

Over half can't afford enough food, gas, or electricity, and 91% of respondents told us that the impacts of poverty have worsened as a result of the recent cost increases of these items. The lived experience of this is shocking. Many families are skipping meals; some households are down to eating only one meal a day. The food they can afford lacks both nutritional value and quantity, leading to serious issues with tooth decay, weight changes, and physical illness. Foodbanks were cited as critical services for these households, but some families are stretching out food parcels beyond the intended amount, to make them last longer.

“

**I worked with a nursery aged child who was hospitalised due to malnourishment which caused a heart condition, and all of her teeth required to be removed (Glasgow, Scotland)**

In addition to being unable to afford these absolute basics, we heard fears that more families than ever simply cannot afford their rent. Rents are so high that families are being made homeless or forced to live in squalor. The conditions they endure are degrading and unliveable, including pervasive mould, widespread damp, and severe overcrowding. 47% of families can't afford to clean their homes or belongings, exacerbating appalling living conditions.

Children living within these homes are seeing their futures curtailed. They can't engage in their education because they are tired and hungry. They can't sleep because of hunger, overcrowding or they are lacking a bed (28% of households). These factors create and exacerbate mental health issues, particularly anxiety and stress. All of these factors contribute to poor school attendance. However, attendance is also limited by tangible factors such as lacking the uniforms or transport required to attend, nor can they afford the practical resources required to support learning at home such as laptops (64%) and internet access (48%).

“

**I am supporting a family of 3 children and a mother who fled domestic violence. They were accommodated in a hotel sharing 1 room. The hotel has no cooking facilities. The family spent 6 months in this hotel room (London, England)**

Respondents to our survey reported high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which have been increasing year-on-year since we first captured them in 2021. These describe the types of crisis and trauma that children and young people living in poverty are experiencing.

The highest reported five include:

- Mental illness is present in 70% of the households, increasing 7% points since 2021
- Domestic violence in 64% of the households, increasing 5% points since 2021
- Neglect in 55% of the households, increasing 7% points since 2021
- Parental separation in 71% of the households, increasing 8% points since 2021
- Verbal abuse in 66% of the households, increasing 5% points since 2021

These ACEs reflect the immense strain that financial hardship puts on family relationships. For the families that these frontline workers support, forms of mistreatment - domestic violence, verbal abuse, physical abuse, neglect – are not only common; their rates are rising.

Respondents also reported that close to half of families in poverty are experiencing alcohol abuse (47%) in their households, followed closely by drug use (42%). They told us about the toxic impacts of witnessing these activities in the home, and the increased likelihood that young people themselves may reflect these behaviours as a coping mechanism. This is leading to exploitation and higher risk of criminal activity, both for children and their parents.

Our survey asked frontline workers to describe any changes in severity for these ACEs that they have witnessed over the last 12 months, not just the prevalence. Mental illness saw one of the strongest changes, with a 93% net increase in severity. Written responses outline the relentless stress, anxiety and depression that parents and carers experience, balancing parenting while enduring extremely low standards of living. These same stresses are most likely factors in the other severe changes reported, particularly in the worsening of domestic violence (+82%), neglect (+84%), verbal abuse (+79%) and physical abuse (+65%).

“

**We have children that are covered in nits because parents can't afford the medication (East Sussex, England)**

These multiple challenges are having severe impacts on the wellbeing of children and young people. We measure wellbeing not just as mental health, but also family relationships, friendships, and behaviour. In 2024, we saw a rise across all five key measures of wellbeing yet again. 71% of children and young people are reported as suffering mental health problems, now 20 percentage points higher than the same recorded measure in 2020.

“

**I have seen children being given a slice of toast for breakfast, a cheap milkshake carton for lunch and then a bowl of pasta for dinner, then going to bed hungry (Kent, England)**

“

**I am working with twins aged 6 who had never slept in beds until 3 months ago (East Yorkshire, England)**

“

**We have a single dad of 4 children [whose] rent has increased from £550 to £850. Dad is working over 70 hours a week, on a zero-hour contract. They were storing chilled foods in cold water and cooking on a camping stove (Derbyshire, England)**



This pace is almost matched by the rise in behavioural problems, too, which now present in 67% of the children and young people the frontline workers are supporting. Respondents told us that these challenges are explained by:

- Children and young people having little control over their circumstances, so they seek control in ways that are destructive, such as self-harm, self-neglect, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, and attempts on their own lives.
- Children experiencing jealousy, anger, isolation, and resentment on seeing their peers access opportunities that are out of their reach. They simply cannot access the same spaces, because they do not have the money, transport, or wellbeing.
- Overcrowding, low privacy, and uncomfortable furnishings (or lack of), leave children without a safe space to escape or recover at home.
- Parents have an extremely diminished capacity to care for their children's mental health, when their own is so depleted. They struggle to control behaviour and set boundaries, and lack the means to reward good behaviour, provide celebrations, or take children on days out.
- Bullying is rife. Children in poverty are treated poorly by their peers because of their differences, and this profoundly influences their sense of worth and self-esteem.

The issues outlined regarding education are extensive. Frontline workers told us that **66%** of the children and young people they support were struggling to engage in their education. **63%** were falling behind as a result of the high cost-of-living. These are 3 percentage points higher than the same measures in 2023. 99% of all respondents reported that mental and physical health issues of children and parents, as well as dealing with the trauma caused by ACEs, were making all aspects of education harder, including attendance, attainment, and engagement. The excessive worry and anxiety that children experience contributes to their declining mental health and poor capacity to engage in their learning, compounded by the lack of items and resources they need to access educational resources.

“

**I had three children sharing a double bed with grandmother – the home was dilapidated and they ended up going into care as the home was not suitable (Gloucestershire, England)**

97% of respondents told us that access to food and poor housing conditions are also making access to education even harder. Children are clearly struggling to learn in homes that are not equipped or set up for learning, which is where additional provision from schools may be instrumental. Their diminished capacity to learn leads to further negative internal and external perceptions of their abilities. We heard that for young people trying to access further education or finish their secondary education, many are dropping out or failing to achieve their potential. This is attributed to the multiple factors outlined here, but also because of strong pressures to earn money to contribute to their household income.

When we asked frontline workers to describe the employment patterns and challenges they are seeing, it was clear that the very severe impacts of poor health, trauma, and abuse in the home are leading to families having the dual impact of low to no income, and high needs. 64% of households have applied for Universal Credit in the last year, while 63% have been unemployed, and 44% have faced a reduction in income. Reduced spending power due to the cost-of-living crisis coupled with real-term reductions in income is having catastrophic effects on households in poverty. Taking on extra hours or additional jobs is further reducing opportunities to build relationships and support between parent and child. It also adds stress and overwork in homes where tensions are high, and wellbeing is poor.

Frontline services are facing significant challenges in supporting these multiple needs, due to complex, overwhelming caseloads and long-term underfunding. Service availability is reportedly worse in 2024 than any single year we have previously measured. The most commonly required services are not from one particular sector. There are gaps and major stress points across all services and frontline support. The respondents to our survey told us that 70% of the families they work with need mental health support, while 63% required support with housing and 59% support for utility bills. However, the net change in service availability fell by 51%, 56%, and 23% respectively for each of these crucial services.

One of the key findings of this report is the evidence the frontline workers have reported regarding the extreme challenges that families are enduring, and the challenge to respond within their own services. They speak overwhelmingly of internal pressures, and the almost complete breakdown of support services for families in poverty, with a mixture of anger, frustration and embarrassment. It is clear that services are not only insufficient, but occasionally inefficient too, as expressed by a number of frustrated respondents; funding is poorly applied, failing to meet need yet not delivering value either. Many feel that their service has been unable to enact its primary purpose, which triggers a growing cycle of poverty and crisis. Because families are no longer being supported after experiences such as abuse and the lived experience of poverty, the root cause of mental health crises are no longer being addressed.

As a result of these findings, Buttle UK has the following calls to action:

- We stand behind the Child Poverty Strategy<sup>1</sup> due to be published in Spring 2025. We support the commitment to reducing essential costs, particularly those acting as barriers to education, as well commitments to providing better local support, particularly focusing on children's early years, with work on improving access and the quality of necessary services. We support the '8 Tests' proposed by the End Child Poverty Coalition<sup>2</sup> to hold this strategy to account when it is published.
- We continue to stand with End Child Poverty's call for the lifting of the two-child limit in their All Kids Count Campaign. The two-child limit significantly reduces household income and wellbeing. A quarter of a million children would be lifted out of poverty if it was scrapped<sup>3</sup>. We stand by this call, and have done since it was announced in 2023, because we know the two-child limit is a negative factor in many of the conclusions made in this report.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Trussell Trust are continuing to advocate for an uplift in Universal Credit payments, which they demonstrate are not adequate to cover the basic cost of living for low-income households. We stand behind their Guarantee our Essentials campaign, which is proposing an independent process to regularly determine an 'essentials guarantee level'<sup>4</sup>.
- We stand with the Crushed by a Million Pressures campaign being led by Young Minds<sup>5</sup>, which calls on the government to stand on their election promises to support and improve the mental health crisis we are seeing for children and young people. The campaign calls for the provision of early support hubs with an open-access approach to mental health support. It also calls on the government to tackle poverty and discrimination, which they argue acts as a root cause of youth mental health crises, and are campaigning for the involvement of young people more directly in policies surrounding mental health.

---

<sup>1</sup> [GOV.UK | Child Poverty Strategy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [End Child Poverty | 8 Tests](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Child Poverty Action Group | All Kids Count Campaign](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Joseph Rowntree Foundation | Essentials Guarantee](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Young Minds | Crushed by a Million Pressures](#)



**CC1.06 Workspace  
Kennington Park  
1-3 Brixton Road  
London  
SW9 6DE**

**020 7828 3211**

**[www.buttleuk.org](http://www.buttleuk.org)  
@buttleuk**

Registered Charity No - 313007  
Scotland - SCO37997