



Absolute Deprivation in the context of affluence

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How do experiences of deprivation of food and clothing impact on young people in the affluent context of Australia?

Draw on data from qualitative research (n=200) and nationally representative survey (n= 5,440)

Analysis:

- Young people's experiences and avoidances of shame and exclusion
- Extent of food and clothing deprivation
- Associations with educational participation
- Policy implications

The Australian context

- Proportion of Australian children in relative poverty (50% of median income)
 - Australia – 15.1%;
 - OECD average – 13.3% (OECD, 2014)
- Australian government has a human capital agenda NOT a child poverty agenda
- Child poverty is poorly understood in public policy

Poverty in affluent countries

- contemporary neoliberal discourses (human capital frameworks) question “individual-level competencies within low income households”
- Problem of access to basic resources is transformed to one of interventions on individuals
- Changing welfare arrangements
 - Increasing conditionality in cash transfers (New Income Management)
 - Significant government investment in parenting programs targeting ‘poor’ families & micro interactions
- Shame – well documented among people in poverty in affluent countries
 - Jensen, 2014; Walker, 2012, Dowler and O’Connor, 2012; Gillies, 2012; Levitas, 1998; Lister, 2004

food poverty - “the inability to acquire or eat quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways”

Understanding poverty and deprivation in childhood

- Absolute poverty
 - adequate food is a basic need, and hunger is not a relative condition (Doyal and Gough, 1991; Streeten, Burki, ul Haq *et al.*, 1981).
- Relative poverty
 - not having clothes to fit in to customary activities (Adam Smith and the linen shirt)
- Social exclusion
 - Processes & institutions that marginalise & deny rights of individuals & groups (Levitas, 1997).
- Capability deprivation
 - shame leading to adaptive preference.
 - food and clothing deprivations constitute absolute poverty in the space of capabilities (Sen, 1983, 1999).

Data Sources – participative methods

Making a Difference

- Exploratory study of young people's experiences of economic adversity
- Qualitative interviews (n =100)
- Sampling frame included variations in neighbourhood composition

Australian Child Wellbeing Project

- Mixed method
 - Qual (n=100)
 - Survey (n = 5440)
- Survey of wellbeing among 9-14 year olds
- Instruments and sampling frame weighted towards disadvantage
- Nationally representative, internationally comparable (Children's worlds, HBSC)

Food shortages

Intermittent and continuous:

“My mum and my step-dad, there’s six of us who live in our house . And because there’s six that live there regularly, on some weekends there’s my step-brother and sister come over. That makes eight kids, ten people living in one house, and the electricity bill is huge. And the weeks when we don’t have my step-brother and sister come over, that’s when my mum and my step-dad get paid, but last week when they came over my mum and my step-dad didn’t get paid, it means they couldn’t do shopping and we were low on food supplies.”

You need food because if you don’t have any food you’ll be very hungry and you start stealing and you’ll be like shoplifting from shops to get food. And you’ll go really, really, really skinny.

Clothing shortages

“My mum doesn’t really have money because of the bills and stuff but my sister has a job and gets money so when she gets clothes I get the other clothes but occasionally I get a couple of pieces of clothing that are on special, it is pretty hard but I get used to it. If people had to live on what we have to live on they wouldn’t know what hit them.”

“My mum would take me to the Op shop because I keep on splitting my pants when I kneel down but she can’t afford to buy me new pants. I don’t get pocket money and have to make my own lunch and sometimes I don’t even do that I just go to school with no food.”

National Survey

5,440 respondents in 180 schools, years 4, 6 & 8

Nationally representative

Domains – family, health, school, friends, bullying, material wellbeing, subjective wellbeing...

Online questionnaire

Audio support

Low levels of missing data

Marginalised Groups

	Year 4	Year 6	Year 8	All	% total
young person with disability	86	86	397	569	10.5
materially disadvantaged	96	89	298	483	8.9
culturally and linguistically diverse	102	45	276	423	7.8
young carer	69	58	357	484	8.9
Indigenous	57	52	136	245	4.5
Rural & remote	52	49	19	120	2.2
young person in out-of-home-care	33	21	30	84	1.5

Prevalence of hunger and 'not the right clothes' among marginalised groups (%)

	Often goes hungry to bed or to school (N=152)	Does not have the right kind of clothes to fit in with other people their age (N=314)	Either goes to school/bed hungry or does not have the right clothes to fit in (N=437)
	%	%	%
Young people with disability (N=512)	6.1	10.2	15.0
Young carers (N=438)	7.5	14.2	19.2
Young Indigenous people (N=212)	9.0	10.4	17.0
Young people in any marginalised group (N=1,394)	5.8	9.9	14.3
Young people not in any marginalised group (N=3,611)	2.0	4.9	6.6

Clothing deprivation - absolute or relative?

- Adam Smith - adequate clothing speaks to a relative concept (a linen shirt being customary)
- Clothing critical to fitting in
 - active management of feelings of shame through self exclusion
 - Sen (1983) - shame = absolute capability failure.

“Facework”

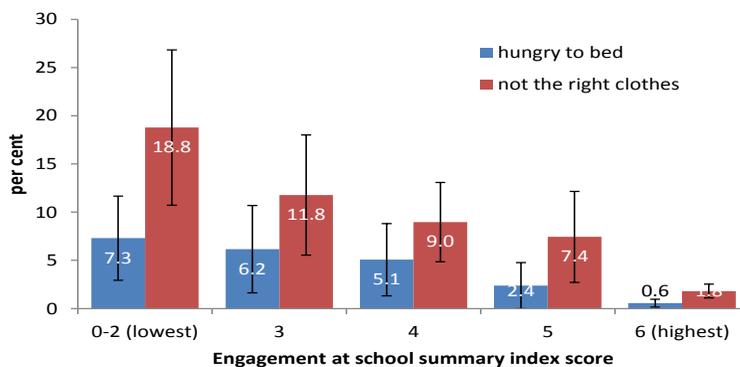
“ My mum doesn’t like having [my friend] over when there isn’t much food; she gets ashamed like she is going to go tell her mum. In case she says we didn’t have much for dinner tonight.”

“ Mum doesn’t send us to school when we are hungry”

- Linx claimed his parents could get him anything he needed - belied worn shoes and clothing and his trouble getting money for bus fares
- Narratives are often a bricolage constructed to avoid shame

Allison Pugh (2009)

Associations with school engagement



School enjoyment
Relationship with teacher
Experience of bullying
Absence from school
School pressure
Academic performance

Rights, capability deprivation and social exclusion approaches

- Rights to adequacy in the present and to healthy development – including engagement in education and human capital development.
- Social exclusion is “*constitutively a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures.*” [Sen \(2000: 5\)](#)

Conclusions

- Hunger & clothing deprivation is common in Australia
- Deprivation → school disengagement → capability deprivation
→ wellbeing and well**becoming**
- Institutions, structures and discourses exclude
- More research needed:
 - on how institutions & discourses exclude
 - on how social/familial networks protect young people from severe deprivation

Policy implications

- Money matters
 - Australian income support system is inadequate & overly conditional;
 - Benefits and transfers need to be increased;
 - Human capital development policy needs to include poverty targets;
- Social/familial networks matter
 - Policy needs to engage with young people in their wider familial/community contexts;
- Inclusion matters – focus on institutions
 - Inclusive school policies
 - Universal service systems should be truly universal;
- Policy discourses on poverty and disadvantage exclude

<http://australianchildwellbeing.com.au/>