

## LIVING BELOW THE RADAR Severe child poverty in Scotland

- Over 90 000 children in Scotland live in severe poverty.
- The key risk factors of severe poverty are worklessness and lack of uptake of benefits and tax credits.
- Policy interventions are not reaching children and families living in severe poverty.

### Too many Scottish children are living in severe poverty

90 000 children in Scotland are living in severe poverty, according to research by Save the Children. These children and their families get by on very low incomes. For example, a couple with one child have to make ends meet on an average of £7000 a year for clothes, toys, food, activities for children, electricity and gas, phones, other bills, washing, transport, health needs, and other essentials.

Evidence suggests that current policy interventions are not doing enough to lift children and families out of severe poverty. We will never eradicate child poverty unless we begin to focus now on the most disadvantaged households.

### Those living in severe poverty are very disadvantaged

The effect of severe poverty is that children, and their families are going without basic necessities such as a proper diet, a warm home or a school trip. All poverty is an infringement of a child's right to a decent standard of living, but the more severe the poverty, the greater the hardship experienced.

Children living in severe poverty are going without basic necessities that most people in Scotland take for granted. The research found that:

- One third can't afford play equipment such as a bike or a football.
- One quarter miss out on going to toddler or play groups once a week.
- One in five can't afford to celebrate birthdays or Christmas.
- Nearly one quarter cannot afford to go on school trips.

### Risk of living in severe child poverty

The report found that there are two key factors that increase the risk of families living in severe child poverty:

#### 1. Outside the labour market

There is a strong association between the economic activity of parents and severe child poverty status. In Scotland, **72% of children living in severe poverty parents' are not in work**. This suggests that current back to work policies, such as Working for Families, are not reaching the poorest.

Further, this means that **28% of children's parents are in work yet are still living in severe poverty**. This suggests that families are struggling to make ends meet on unacceptably low wages.

## **2. Benefit and tax credit claimants**

Children living in severe poverty are more likely to be in households where benefits and tax credits are being claimed, however more detailed analysis reveals some concerning issues.

**66% of children in severe poverty in Scotland are in families claiming income support, job seekers allowance and incapacity benefit.** This suggests a significant proportion are not claiming these benefits and therefore subsisting on very low wages, likely to be unsupported by the tax credit system. This conclusion is supported by the figure of just 44% of children in severe poverty receiving the child tax credit, far lower than it ought to be if all were taking up their entitlements.

## **3. Other risk factors**

- 45% of mother's of children living in severe poverty have no educational qualification.
- 1 in 2 children living in severe poverty live in single parent families.
- 10% of children living in severe poverty are from an ethnic minority, compared to 2.6% not in poverty.
- 41% of children in severe poverty live in families with a disabled adult, compared to 17% of children not in poverty.

## **Policy recommendations**

Our long term goal must be to eradicate child poverty once and for all. It is possible and it is achievable, but it will not happen unless we focus now on those in greatest need. We can't let these children slip below the radar.

Save the Children is calling for:

- 1. Targeted action at those households where children are living in severe poverty. Actions should include:**
  - Ensuring that parents are supported going in to work with appropriate and affordable childcare, flexibility in the workplace, decent take home pay and continued access to training.
  - Ensuring that all who are entitled to benefits and tax credits take them up.
  - Introducing a measure of severe child poverty.
- 2. The Scottish Government to work in partnership with the UK Government to end child poverty.**

## **Save the Children's measure of severe child poverty**

Children are classified as being in 'severe' poverty if they are in households with severe income poverty (below 50% median income), in combination with 'severe' material deprivation (deprived of both adult and child necessities, at least one of which shows some degree of severity).

## **Further information**

Copies of the report, *Living Below the Radar: Measuring Severe Child Poverty in the UK*, are available to download at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/endchildpoverty](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/endchildpoverty) or on request.

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