PLANT YNG NGHYMRU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Poverty Related Bullying

Children and Young People's insight into the impact of poverty related bullying:

Findings taken from the Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey 2022

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POVERTY RELATED BULLYING

Introduction

In October 2022, Children in Wales published their report on the findings of the [Annual Child and Family Poverty Surveys](#). Extracts from, and further analysis of the main findings have been used to inform this report which focuses specifically on the findings relating to poverty and bullying. In the survey, children and young people shared their views, opinions and experiences of poverty related bullying and the impact this can have in all aspects of their lives.

Practitioners, educators and policy makers can all hear these voices and take steps to ensure that children and young people are protected from this and able to realise their rights.

Who responded

It is important to note that dissemination of the survey did not specifically target children and young people who live in poverty and/or deprived areas, nor did the survey ask children and young people if they themselves lived in poverty. Instead, the survey sought their views on how poverty might affect different aspects of children's lives. Given these parameters, it is therefore, not known how many respondents have lived experiences of poverty, or if they live in areas of deprivation.

A total of 250 children and young people responded from 19 Local Authority areas across Wales. Their ages ranged from under 10 years up to 25 years.

FINDINGS

The findings of the survey highlight the wide-ranging impact poverty has on children and young people and this report specifically focuses on the emotional, social and mental impact that children and young people associated with poverty related bullying.

In the current economic and cost of living crisis where many families are experiencing the often, devastating consequences of poverty, it has forced them to make impossible decisions from eating or heating, buying clothes, shoes, and equipment for school. This is on top of young people in communities being locked out of spending quality time with their friends and families on activities that have become a luxury for many. This often leads to many children having to deal with being socially isolated, adding to the environment of stress and anxiety in school and in general.

Comparing the results with the previous year, there are some similarities in the data and responses but there are particular differences in the social aspect of poverty and bullying.

There is fear of not having enough money to spend time with friends but also in the responses, there is reference from several young people that because the whole school and community is "poor", then bullying does not happen. For example, there are comments about not being bullied because "we're all poor" and this is perhaps due to the current economic climate of many families struggling to make ends meet but also the understanding from young people that it affects many children and young people in different ways.

What do you think affects children who live in poverty the most?
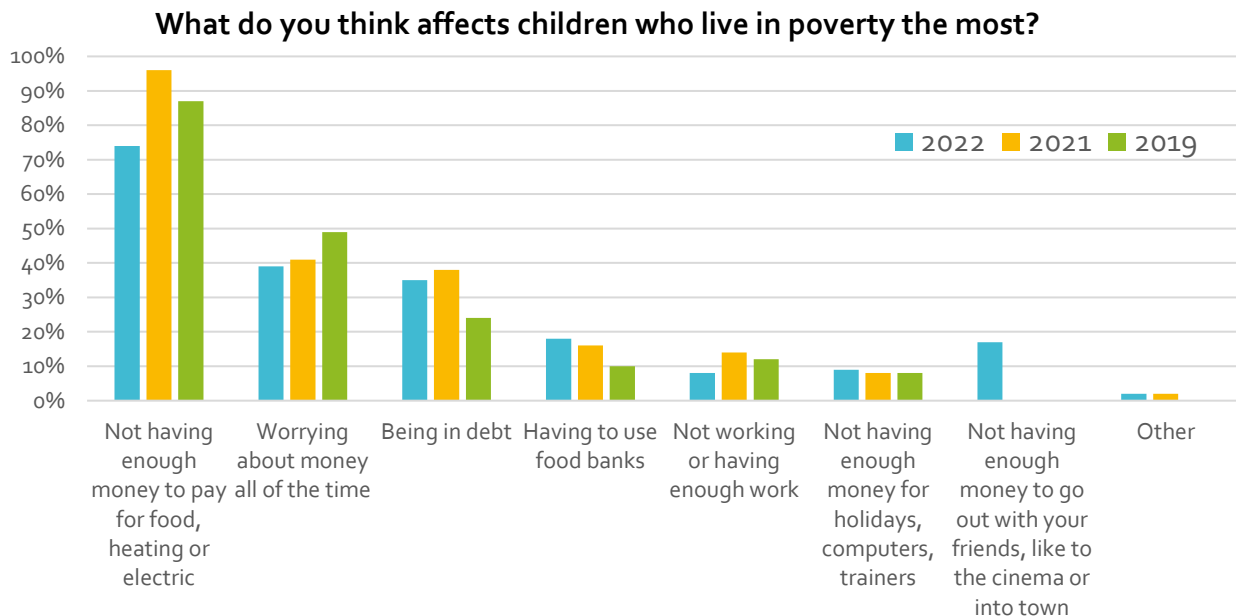
"Fewer opportunities (can't join clubs etc), poorer health due to poor housing and food leading to absence from school, may struggle to make friends and find hobbies, may be more attracted to crime." (14-16yrs)

Several responses from children and young people linked having fewer opportunities to socialise, joining clubs, and finding hobbies, with making them feel depressed, insecure and anxious.

"Not having enough money to go out with your friends, like to the cinema or into town; Not having enough money to pay for things like holidays or a computer or nice trainers; Worrying about money all the time." (14-16yrs)

This report identifies 3 sections to show how poverty and bullying can affect different environments and circumstances, including in school; at home; and outside in the community.

The findings include verbatim comments from children and young people. Whilst many of these do make for uncomfortable reading, they have still been included in this report. The aim of this is not to shock or sensationalise, but rather provide a greater understanding of the impacts of poverty and bullying for many of the thousands of children and young people who live this reality on a daily basis.

School, Poverty and Bullying

The survey asked children and young people 'In school, what do you think would affect children who live in poverty the most?' They were given the opportunity to expand on this and explore the reasons why they had chosen each option.

Children and young people were asked to choose 2 options from the list of below.

"In school, what affects children who live in poverty the most?"
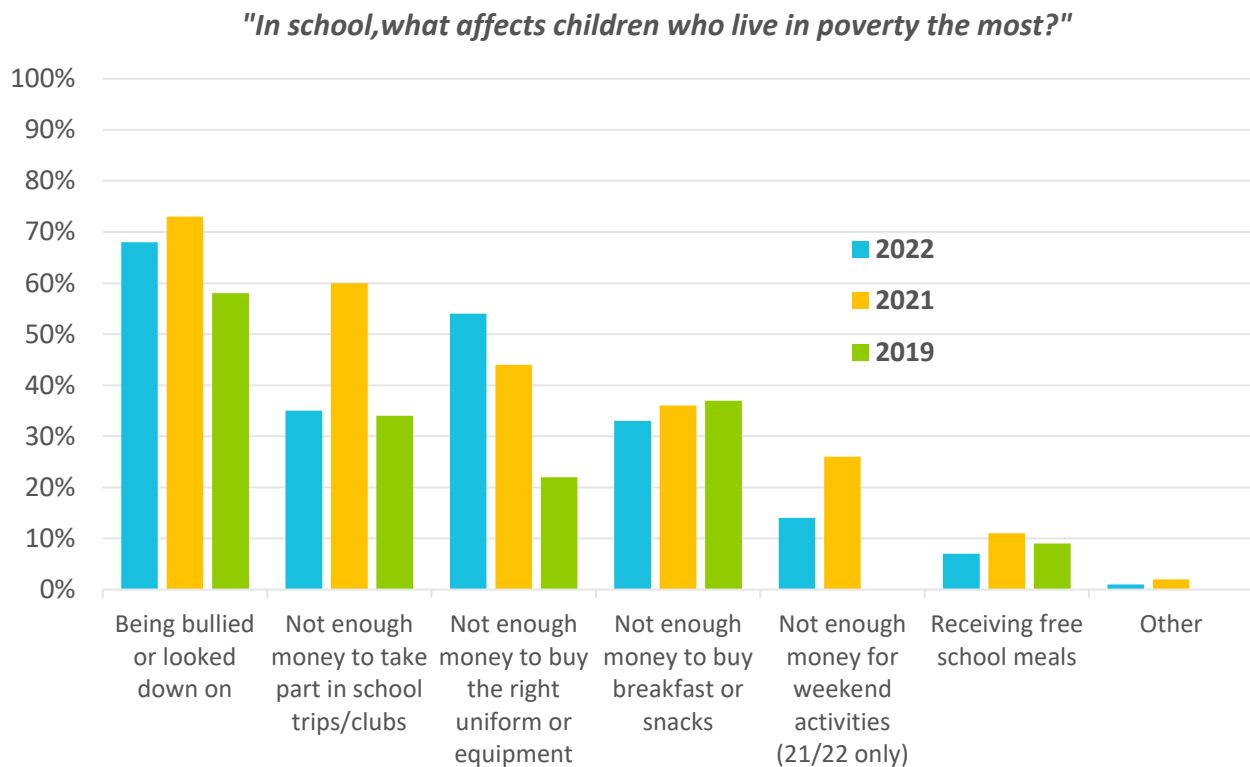
Overall, poverty related bullying at school was commented on by 85% of the children and young people responding.

As in previous years, *'being bullied or looked down on'* was the most commonly chosen option. However, in other areas, there have been significant changes in the answers frequently chosen by children and young people.

The reason for this cannot be analysed based on the parameters of the data collected in this survey. For example, we do not know the socio economic backgrounds of those responding, which schools they attend, or their lived experiences of poverty.

Possible considerations for the fluctuation may include, for example; a reduction in the number of school trips being organised post pandemic and therefore less importance attached to these; an increase in the number of children receiving free school meals or greater acceptance due to media coverage and campaigns. Whatever the reasons may be, the main issues around bullying, uniforms and food remain a constant.

The children and young people responded that in school, poverty meant they were not able to get the right equipment, 'nice school shoes' or uniform and were unable to go on school trips. This led to young people feeling isolated, anxious about what they wear and sometimes depressed in the school environment, leaving them feeling very self-conscious about themselves and affecting their mental health.

"Negatively as they do not have the right uniform or equipment compared to others so feel left out and different." (14-16yrs)

"Lack of money means they cannot gain the same benefits such as textbooks or equipment their peers may have caused an education gap they cannot control." (10-13yrs)

There were several comments from young people about this and it seemed to be a recurring theme in different age groups from under 10 to 17-18yrs, this was a concern for many young people.

"They may look different because they don't have enough money to buy new clothes, coats and shoes, sometimes their clothes don't fit properly, and they feel self-conscious and worry that other kids will pick on they and be nasty." (Under 10)

As a result of these causes, children and young people tended to respond on how this affects their mental health, especially noting how it creates low-self-esteem, constant anxiety, and depression. Some young people also mentioned how this can affect their learning in school. There were comments on how they wanted equal opportunities to learn and access wider school resources. The consequences of not being able to learn led to being called names and made fun of for not doing well in school.

"It affects them by not being able to have school dinners or snacks and being bullied for being in poverty." (10-13yrs)

One of the few differences between the age groups in terms of responses was that more in the 10-13yrs age bracket tended to comment more on the fact of not having school breakfasts or school dinners and made particular points of not being able to buy snacks. This resulted in some being hungry.

Home, Poverty and Bullying

Respondents considered what they thought would affect children who live in poverty the most when they are at home. Again, the question format asked respondents to choose 2, from the list provided.

At home, what affects children who live in poverty the most?
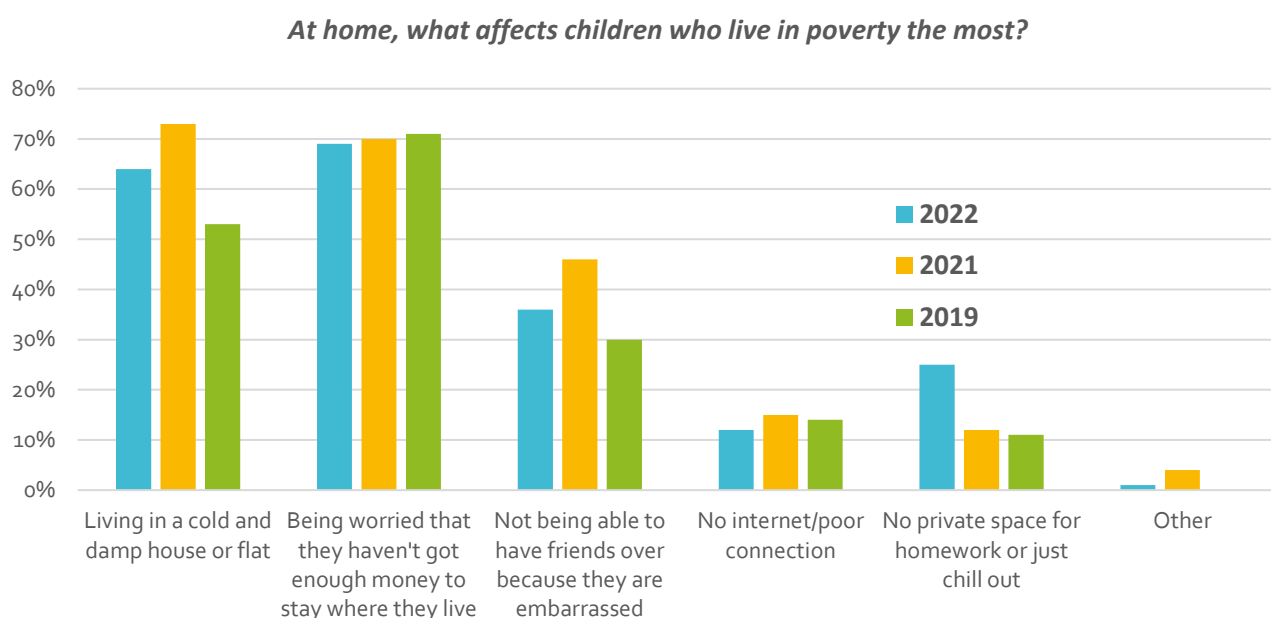
The results produced responses concerning the 'safety' or 'security of a home' for young people and children. Even though it is difficult to draw certain conclusions from the variety of responses to bullying, there were responses from many young people about 'feeling embarrassed' or having 'poor connections' which led to poorer relationships and possibly worsening bullying.

"Can't do homework. Can't have friends over." (Under 10)

"They may potentially make jokes about their home life to cover up that they are embarrassed by how it may look to other children." (14-16yrs)

Children and young people frequently commented on feeling embarrassed about their home environment and not wanting, or able to invite friends round. The responses of 'making jokes' or 'scared' to have anyone over shows children and young people potentially being anxious of being made fun of, whilst others commented on not having designer items or how the house generally looks. Again, they further commented on how this leads to more anxiety, constant worry and feeling more 'depressed'.

"Having bad Internet connection disconnects them from friends and removes them from being able to deepen the learning they get in school." (14-16yrs)

"They maybe feel embarrassed to have friends over or they may worry about if they lose money, they may not be able to stay where they currently live." (10-13yrs)

It is evident from the comments, experiences and views provided by children and young people, that poverty impacts on every single aspect of their lives. This inevitably links to children being worried about bullying and this affects their mental health.

Community, Poverty and Bullying

This was the final question on the impact of poverty across different environments and again, children and young people were asked to choose 2 of the options shown below.

As the chart shows, 75% of children and young people stated that living in a place where they don't feel safe to go outside would be most likely to affect those experiencing poverty.

"Outside in the community, what do you think would affect children living in poverty the most?"
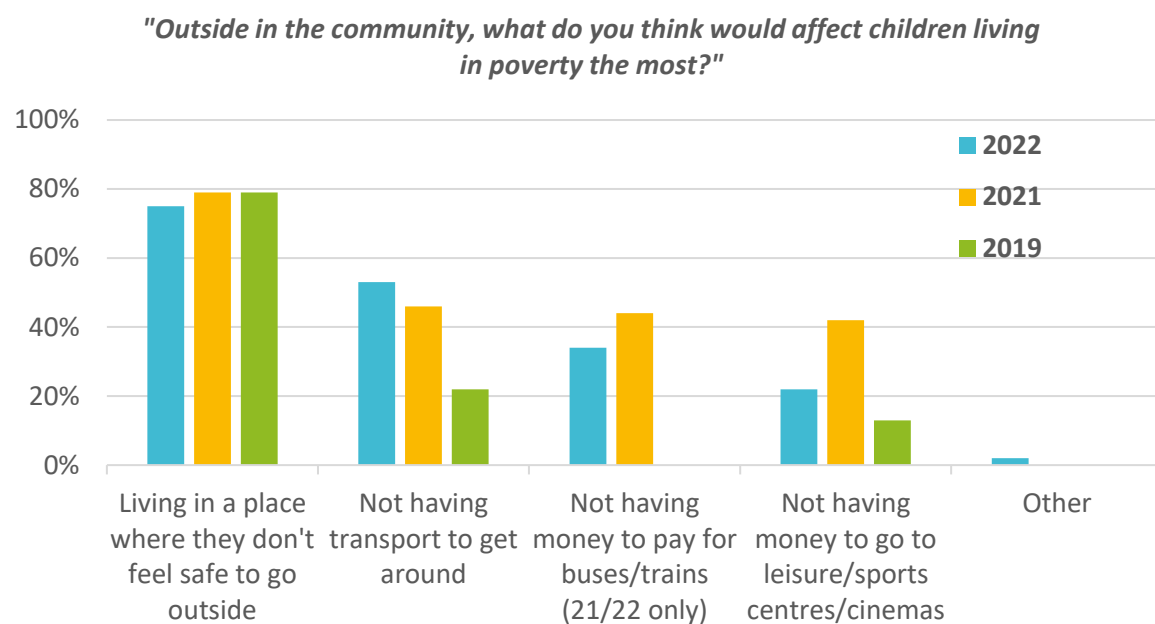
"Negatively if out with friends who go to the shop the child in poverty cannot buy anything (go thirty as can't buy drinks when their friends can." (14-16yrs)

For children and young people, bullying in the community raised three main themes from the responses. Firstly, many of the comments addressed not being able to take part in social activities or to afford 'food, drinks, toys' etc. when they did go out with their friends. This came up frequently and highlighted the worry and the isolation felt by young people because they are financially excluded from spending time with their friends. As a result, fear of being made fun of for 'not going out', or not being able to buy things when they are out, concerned them.

"They don't have the money to participate in things other more well-off children can." (10-13yrs)

"Lack of adequate transportation means unable to get around which can also impact availability for young people. Some people may look down or stigmatise them." (17-18yrs)

Secondly, the issue of transportation was brought up by quite a few young people. The responses varied from not being able to go anywhere with friends, having to walk everywhere and worrying about others 'looking down on them'. This links with the overall theme in how poverty generated worry, anxiety and further socially isolated young people in their communities.

"Fear of judgement, worry about having to get from A to B, having to walk everywhere, unable to take part in activities." (17-18yrs)

Finally, young people and children commented about being afraid to go outside because they could be made fun of or judged for not having the latest clothes. All of these underpin how poverty affects the mental health of young people and increases feelings of anxiety, isolation, low self-esteem and confidence.

"They will be bullied and made fun of because of the clothes." (10-13yrs)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Do you see children and young people being bullied because they don't have as much money or the same things as others?
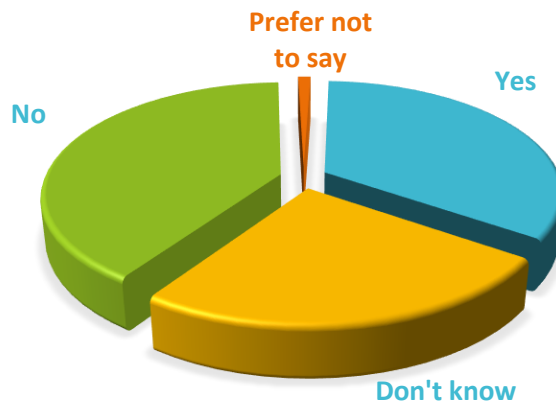
Last year's survey did not specifically ask about poverty related bullying, however, it was so frequently commented on by children and young people that this year, questions were included on this issue.

The majority of respondents (40%) stated that they did not see children and young people being bullied because of poverty. Whilst this was encouraging, their comments provided greater perspective. For example, a number of respondents who had chosen 'no' as their answer, cited that their school was too small; everyone at their school had access to opportunities; they personally do not *"associate with bullies";* or that bullying did not take place in their school.

It could be assumed that where poverty related bullying does not happen in school, one reason may be that there is limited poverty in that school or catchment area. However, the comment of one of these young people would indicate otherwise. When asked if they saw children being bullied because of poverty, their response was:

"Nah, we're all poor" (10-13 yrs)

Respondents were asked about what effect poverty related bullying would have on children and young people and how it might make them feel. These are the words they used most often.

In conclusion, living in poverty is likely to increase the instances and depth of bullying. This is not only within the school environment, but also outside. Fear of poverty related bullying, either perceived or real, does have an impact on the mental health of children and young people. They are increasingly anxious and concerned about this and for many, this not only happens within the school environment, but within their communities and social networks. This fear can lead to isolation in all aspects of children and young people's lives.

In their survey responses, children and young people believe that poverty and poverty related bullying is not fair. They voiced their opinions on what needs to change, including increasing wages for parents; *"watching"* children more closely and providing support if needed; *"banning"* non-uniform days; and lessons on budgeting to ensure that all children and young people understand the value of money. However, the majority of the comments focused on the need to raise awareness, change attitudes, be respectful and for school uniforms to be provided.

Recommendations from Children and Young People

- *"Close watching of the young people and make sure they're always ok and if not have the right support."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Educate children in schools and have the children/parents that can make a donation bring it to school and make it available for the families within the school that need it."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Promote compassion and ensure that children facing poverty are provided with uniforms or at least a discount."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Like food tokens but shoe tokens, so that everyone can have new shoes that fit every year when they move up a class. Then everyone would have shiny shoes, and no one would be different."* (14-16yrs)

- *"I think children should be educated about this and the impact that poverty can have from a young age. I think that this will lead to them being more open minded in the future which can stop or limit bullying."* (10-13yrs)

- *"Speaking more about child poverty in PSE lessons, making people aware about what it feels like."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Help provide money for school trips for these students."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Create lesson plans or outside of school sessions on understanding poverty/its effects to build compassion."* (14-16yrs)

- *"Options for grants for school equipment and uniform. Projects which fund free trips/social outings so that anyone can take part and an allowance in schools to give financial aid to those who can't afford school trips. Support in school like counselling or support workers for those who are being bullied or are unhappy for reasons relating to financial problems e.g., feeling left out or missing trips, losing friends, or feeling isolated."* (17-18yrs)