

WORKING PAPER 27

YOUTH, POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Eldin Fahmy

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Survey of Britain ●●●●

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

**Townsend Centre
for International
Poverty Research**

PREFACE

This Working Paper arose from the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The *1999 PSE Survey of Britain* is the most comprehensive and scientifically rigorous survey of its kind ever undertaken. It provides unparalleled detail about deprivation and exclusion among the British population at the close of the twentieth century. It uses a particularly powerful scientific approach to measuring poverty which:

- incorporates the views of members of the public, rather than judgments by social scientists, about what are the necessities of life in modern Britain
- calculates the levels of deprivation that constitutes poverty using scientific methods rather than arbitrary decisions.

The *1999 PSE Survey of Britain* is also the first national study to attempt to measure social exclusion, and to introduce a methodology for poverty and social exclusion which is internationally comparable. Three data sets were used:

- The *1998-9 General Household Survey* (GHS) provided data on the socio-economic circumstances of the respondents, including their incomes
- The *June 1999 ONS Omnibus Survey* included questions designed to establish from a sample of the general population what items and activities they consider to be necessities.
- A follow-up survey of a sub-sample of respondents to the 1998-9 GHS were interviewed in late 1999 to establish how many lacked items identified as necessities, and also to collect other information on poverty and social exclusion.

Further details about the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* are available at: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/poverty/pse/>

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the government's evolving strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion there has been an especial emphasis upon social exclusion amongst young people in recent years. The overall focus of government policy in relation to young people is outlined within the *Opportunity for All* reports published since 1999. The emphasis here has generally been upon the outcomes of processes of social exclusion in terms of, for example, educational under-achievement and labour market non-participation, rather than upon the root causes of disadvantage. Indicators of success in addressing poverty and social exclusion amongst young people have therefore focused upon tackling "inappropriate" behaviours (eg. teenage pregnancies, young people not in education or training, truancies and exclusions, etc.) (DSS, 1999). The development of government policy in this area is summarised in the Social Exclusion Unit's *Policy Action Team Report 12* (PAT12) as part of the development of the government's Neighbourhood Renewal strategy (SEU, 2000). PAT12 specifies a wide range of measures in relation to young people. Again however the focus of policy development and service innovation has been in relation to specific "problem groups" through for example proposals for the introduction of Drugs Action Teams, Youth Offending Teams, and the development of an integrated support service (Connexions) catering primarily for young people not in education, employment or training (Watts, 2001).

These policy developments undoubtedly reflect the deepening of social inequalities in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s (*see eg.* Mack and Lansley, 1981; Gordon et al., 1983; Gordon and Pantazis, 1990). In relation to young people the erosion of social citizenship rights and the increased economic marginalisation of young people as a result of economic "restructuring" during the 1980s have both contributed to the social exclusion of increasing numbers of young people over this period (France, 1997; Williamson, 1993). Increasing levels of homelessness amongst young people, labour market withdrawal, and educational under-achievement have all been areas

of academic and policy focused attention in recent years. Youth research in the 1990s has identified some of the debilitating effects of these trends for young people's increasingly hazardous transitions to adulthood (Smith, 1999; Craine, 1997; Dean, 1997; Istance et al., 1994). Again however, the focus of empirical research has been upon specific "problem" groups in the absence of conceptual clarity about what social exclusion denotes. By focusing upon only the most extreme forms of social marginalisation and disadvantage this tends to obscure the full extent of social and economic exclusion amongst the UK population as a whole, and the factors which obstruct participation in social life. This paper seeks to begin to redress this imbalance by presenting findings from the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* relating to the extent and dynamics of poverty and social exclusion amongst young people in Britain at the millennium.

1.1 DEFINING YOUTH, POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In government policy the concept of social exclusion has been loosely applied to a wide variety of outcomes and behaviours. The Government has recently defined social exclusion as:

'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown'

(SEU, 2001: 10)

However, the 'links' between these problems are not specified. What is needed therefore is a conceptual understanding of social exclusion as a process rooted in the dynamics of inequality. The *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* identifies and, for the first time, measures four key dimensions of social exclusion: (1) exclusion from the labour market; (2) exclusion from adequate income or resources, or poverty; (3) service exclusion; (4) exclusion from social participation. This chapter contributes to these debates by examining the extent and dynamics of

poverty amongst young people in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. More broadly this paper investigates young people's capacity to participate in the mainstream life of society (ie. social exclusion) and the relationship between poverty and social exclusion amongst young people.

The analyses presented here reflect the views and circumstances of the 'young' PSE respondents (aged 16-25) (a detailed social and demographic profile of PSE respondents is given in the Appendix)¹. Whilst there is no universally agreed definition of "youth" (see eg. Coles, 1995; Jones and Wallace, 1992; Gillis, 1974), most youth researchers agree that youth transitions at the millennium are more protracted, more complex, and in some cases more hazardous, than for previous generations. Coles (1995) for example refers to "extended" and "fractured" transitions in which young people's economic dependency upon their parents continues longer, and status transitions produce uncertain and often unsatisfactory results. The contraction of the youth labour market, together with the erosion of young people's social entitlements, is central to these accounts, extending the transition to independent adult status into the early to mid twenties in most cases. The 1988 Social Security Act initiated this process by removing 16-18 year olds benefit entitlements and introducing a special (ie. lower) rate of benefits for 18-24 year olds. In the context of the virtual collapse of the youth labour market in the 1980s these reforms had the effect of frustrating many young people's efforts to achieve financial independence. For the most vulnerable, the consequences in terms of persistent unemployment and the risk of homelessness are well documented (eg. Williamson, 1997; Craine, 1997; Jones, 1997; Johnston et al., 2000). Young people's exclusion from the rights and entitlements of adulthood has been similarly reinforced in relation to Minimum Wage legislation

¹ The analyses of income data presented here are based upon the PSE data. These estimates are likely to differ somewhat from those derived from the (much larger) 1999 General Household Survey, and data relating to perceptions of necessities upon the July 1999 ONS Omnibus Survey (in preparation).

2. YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

2.1. INCOME POVERTY

Research into poverty and inequality often concentrates on income as a measure of economic well-being, usually by classifying households with an income below a certain proportion of the mean or median household income as poor. Whilst there are a number of problems associated with this approach (see eg. Townsend, 1986; Townsend and Gordon, 1992), the PSE reveals a moderate age effect in terms of measures of income inequality whether using OECD, *Households Below Average Income* (HBAI), or PSE equivalisation scales. Table 1 (*below*) presents three different measures of inequality in net weekly equivalised household income based upon the HBAI, OECD, and PSE income equivalisation scales which adjust income to need. The extent of income inequality varies somewhat according to indicator used. In all three cases however a greater proportion of young people (aged under 25) reported significantly below average incomes than amongst the sample as a whole, with estimates ranging from 27% to 33%.

Table 1: Income inequality and the PSE poverty index by age group (%)

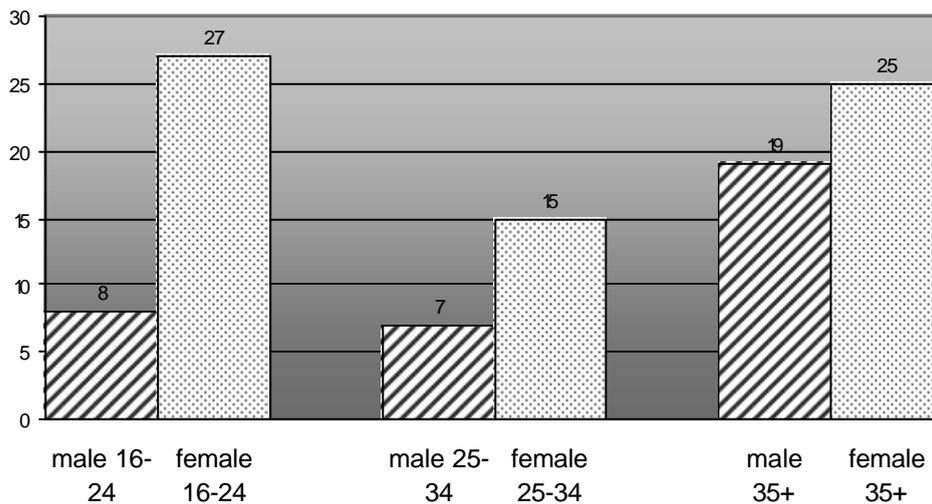
	Age group			ALL
	Under 25	25-34 years	35+ years	
			%	%
Below 50% mean HBAI	27	17	26	24
Below 60% median OECD	33	16	25	24
Below 50% mean PSE	30	17	28	26
Below MIG threshold	18	11	22	20
PSE poverty index (% poor)	34	37	21	25

The 2002 Budget extended the principle of Minimum Income Guarantees (MIG) in the form of a Working Tax Credit to all those aged 25 and over in full-time employment, set at a rate of £154 for single people and £183 for couples with effect from April 2003. However, neither this nor any other similar principle has been applied to young people in work in order to safeguard their incomes. There is no reason to suppose that someone aged under 25 needs less income to meet their basic

material and social needs than older citizens, although this has been the underlying premise of social security payments since 1988. As with the social security changes introduced in 1988, the exclusion of young people from the Minimum Income Guarantee represents a further erosion of young people’s social rights and entitlements as citizens.

As Table 1 (*above*) shows, applying these MIG standards (adjusted for the effects of inflation since 1999) to the PSE household income data reveals that amongst young people aged under 25 nearly one fifth (18%) of the PSE sample had household incomes below the MIG thresholds outlined above. Moreover these data also reveal a substantial gender effect, especially amongst PSE respondents with more than three times as many young women (27%) reporting incomes below the MIG thresholds compared with young men (8%), as Figure 1 (*below*) illustrates. Indeed these data suggest that gender differences in levels of poverty *amongst* young people may be at least as significant as differences in levels of poverty and deprivation *between* younger and older age groups.

Figure 1: Respondents with household incomes below MIG threshold (%)

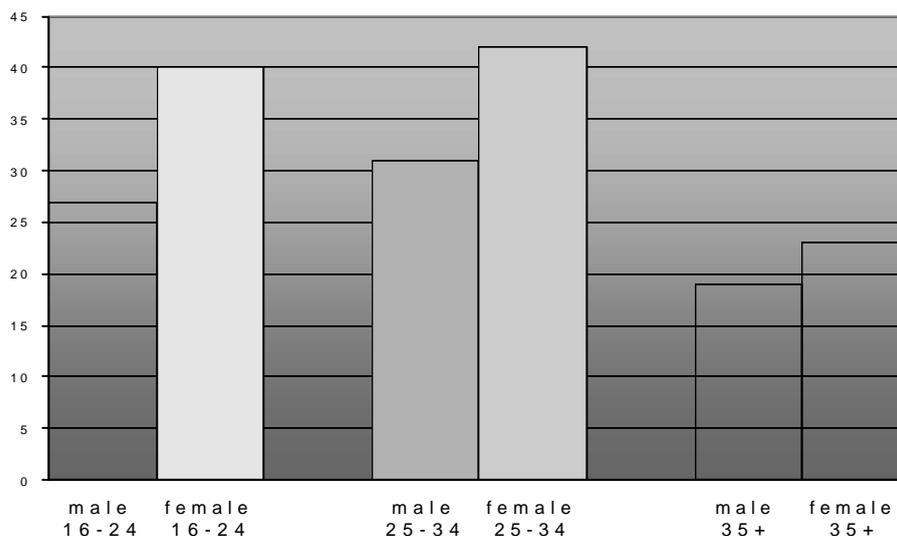


In themselves income based measures are, however, a fairly crude indicator of levels of poverty and deprivation. In particular there is a substantial mismatch between poverty measured *indirectly* as low income and poverty measured *directly* as

observed deprivation (Hallerod, 1998). As Gordon and Townsend (1998) argue, individuals and households are most adequately described as ‘poor’ when they have both a low standard of living and a low income relative to societal norms (see also Gordon, 2001). The measurement of poverty adopted within the *1999 PSE Survey* reflects this thinking. Establishing a poverty threshold thus involves consideration of both income and standard of living (defined in terms of individual’s material and social living conditions and their participation in the social life of the country).

The consequences of adopting this more multi-dimensional approach to the measurement of poverty are illustrated in Figure 2 (*below*). These data show that as with income poverty the proportion of PSE respondents who were deprived, that is, who were unable to afford three or more socially perceived necessities, varies both with age and with gender. However in comparison with age differences in income inequality (*Table 1, above*), deprivation measures reveal those aged 18-24 to be slightly less likely to experience poverty compared with the 25-34 age group. However rates of poverty amongst both men and women are higher amongst young people (27% and 40% respectively) than amongst adults aged over 35 as a whole (18% and 23% respectively), as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2: PSE poverty by age group and gender (% poor)



These findings illustrate the lack of correspondence between income and deprivation measures of poverty. Whilst young people's incomes are, on average, considerably lower than amongst the 25-34 age group, levels of deprivation amongst young people are slightly lower. Housing is one of the most significant costs which distinguishes young people from the adult population as a whole. A majority (60%) of the young respondents in the PSE sample were living with their parents or guardians and this is likely to have a significant effect upon their access both to material necessities (via their parents) and social necessities (since their housing costs are usually considerably lower). Thus although young people's incomes are low, a similar proportion of those living with parents were poor (23%) compared with the sample as a whole (25%). However amongst those young people living independently or sharing with non-relatives virtually half (48%) were poor.

2.2 LACK OF SOCIALLY PERCEIVED NECESSITIES

SUBJECTIVE POVERTY

The *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* also used a subjectively assessed measure of poverty to estimate how much money respondents consider necessary to avoid absolute and overall poverty as defined by the 1995 United Nations World Summit on Social Development (UN, 1995). Absolute poverty is defined in terms of severe deprivation of basic human needs (eg. food, shelter, health, education) whereas overall poverty refers in addition to an incapacity to fully participate in civil, social and cultural life due to a lack of resources. Respondents were asked to estimate the average weekly income needed to keep a household like theirs out of each of the subjective measures of poverty. In addition respondents were asked to determine whether their income was "below the level of income you think is necessary to keep a household such as yours out of poverty", described below as 'general' poverty.

As Table 2 (*below*) shows, younger respondents' perceptions of the 'poverty line' were somewhat higher than those of older respondents. Amongst young people estimates of the various poverty thresholds were between 10% and 14% higher than for those aged 35 and over. This may reflect generational differences in respondent's expectations and aspirations. Older people sometimes under-estimate the effects of inflation when making financial decisions and this is likely to influence their perceptions of an appropriate poverty threshold. Similarly it could be argued that younger people are more likely to be influenced by a climate of affluence and material consumption even where these obviously clash with their own personal circumstances.

As Table 2 illustrates, one in five respondents (20%) felt that their household income was below the that necessary to avoid poverty (general poverty), and one in six (17%) also felt that their income was insufficient to meet the very basic needs defined by the absolute poverty threshold. These findings are even more striking when the effects of age differences in responses are considered. Taking a broader view of poverty which includes an inability to participate in social and cultural life due to a lack of resources (overall poverty) well over a quarter (29%) of young people felt their incomes fell below such a threshold, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Weekly income needed to keep people above the poverty line by age group (%)

	AGE GROUP			
	Under 25	25-34 yrs	35 or over	All persons
General poverty threshold				
Estimated income needed (£)	239	242	218	224
A little / lot above	60	59	69	66
About the same	18	17	13	14
A little / lot below	22	24	18	20
Absolute poverty threshold				
Estimated income needed (£)	200	203	181	187
A little / lot above	69	69	78	76
About the same	15	10	7	8
A little / lot below	15	20	16	17
Overall poverty threshold				
Estimated income needed (£)	281	267	247	253
A little / lot above	55	63	68	66
About the same	17	6	8	8
A little / lot below	29	31	24	26

The overall correspondence between respondents subjective assessments of their overall poverty status and the objective measurement of poverty used in the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* (Table 2) is equally striking. An almost identical proportion of respondents (26%) considered their incomes to be below that necessary to avoid poverty defined in ways analogous with that used in the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* (25%). However there is a greater divergence between subjective perceptions of overall poverty and the PSE index in relation to age differences. In particular it appears that young respondents under-estimate somewhat their own poverty. Thus, 29% of young people, and 31% of the 25-34 age group, considered themselves to be in overall poverty compared with 34% of young people, and 37% of the 25-34 age group, according to the PSE index.

This may reflect differing perceptions of the necessities of life in contemporary Britain. Table 3 (*below*) illustrates the extent of age differences in perceptions of those items or activities considered to be necessities of life by over half of the 1,743 respondents in the June 1999 ONS Omnibus Survey. As this table shows, in most cases fewer young people considered these items to be essentials of modern life in Britain compared with the sample as a whole. In most cases the relationship

between age group and perceptions of necessities was linear so the variation between, for example, young people and the elderly in their perceptions of the necessities of life is even more striking.

Table 3: Perceptions of the necessities of life in Britain in 1999 by age group

	18-24 yrs	ALL	Difference
Two pairs of all weather shoes	40	66	-26
A television	43	57	-14
Telephone	58	72	-14
Fresh fruit and vegetables daily	75	86	-11
Money to spend on self weekly	49	60	-11
A dictionary	45	55	-10
A warm waterproof coat	76	86	-10
A holiday away from home	45	55	-10
Presents for friends/family yearly	48	57	-9
A washing machine	67	76	-9
Collect children from school	82	73	+9

As Table 3 illustrates, in most cases young people were less likely to perceive ‘material’ items (such as a television, telephone, or dictionary) as necessities compared with older age groups. Many of these items also, or primarily, fulfil a *social* function such as a telephone or perhaps a television. However since a greater proportion of young people do not consider these to be essential compared with older age groups it is perhaps unsurprising that young people also underestimate the extent of their own poverty in comparison with the more objective PSE poverty index.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

3.1 EXCLUSION FROM THE LABOUR MARKET

Contemporary approaches to social exclusion frequently cite labour market withdrawal as a key component of social exclusion. Within European policy

discourse tackling the problem of long-term unemployment and labour market non-participation has been viewed as central to addressing social exclusion (eg. EC: 1994a, 1994b). In the UK this emphasis is reflected in the work of the government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), especially in relation to young people. Addressing the 'problem' of young people not in employment, education or training has been a major focus of policy in this area (see eg. SEU, 1999). However, as Colley and Hodgkinson (2001) argue, underlying the government's approach is an individualised and moral account which focuses upon young people's own deficiencies and shortcomings. Reference is rarely made to the structural changes which have undermined young people's labour market position and made the transition to adult increasingly precarious for disadvantaged young people (see eg. Ball et al., 2000; Bates and Riseborough, 1994).

Thus whilst paid employment is trumpeted within the 1999 SEU Report *Bridging the Gap* as "the best defence against social exclusion" (SEU, 1999: 6), less attention is given to the fact that young people are far more likely than older workers to be in low-paid jobs. More than 40 per cent of those aged under 21 earned less than the National Minimum Wage of £3.50 per hour in 1998, compared with just 10% of those aged over 21 (Low Pay Commission, 1998). Two thirds (67%) of 16 and 17 year olds, and well over one third of 18 to 20 year olds in employment are within the lowest paid decile of the UK working population (Low Pay Commission, 1998: 76). Whilst earning potential for many young people increases significantly into the early thirties, for those within the lowest income decile at age 18 this is not the case. Rather, earning potential begins to level off from as early as 20 or 21. Young people's pay has also fallen dramatically as a proportion of adults' pay since 1979. For 18–20 year olds, wages fell during the same period (1979–1996) from 62% to 47% for men, and from 77% to 57% for women (Low Pay Commission, 1998: 37). These findings are also reflected in the PSE sample data. Of those in employment and prepared to divulge their earnings, mean net weekly earnings amongst those aged under 25 were just 62% of those for the sample as a whole.

These trends partly reflect the effects of labour market policies since the 1980s, for example through the removal of Wages Council protection for young people in 1986. There are currently no plans to re-introduce such protection and young people under 18 are also excluded from protection under Minimum Wage legislation. For those aged under 22 Minimum Wage rates are set below those for working adults (£3.50 and £4.10 respectively, with effect from October 2001). Young people's exclusion from the Minimum Income Guarantee legislation introduced as part of the 2002 Budget reinforces the erosion of young people's social citizenship status initiated in the 1980s. As was argued above these developments also represent a significant re-definition of youth transitions.

3.2 SERVICE EXCLUSION

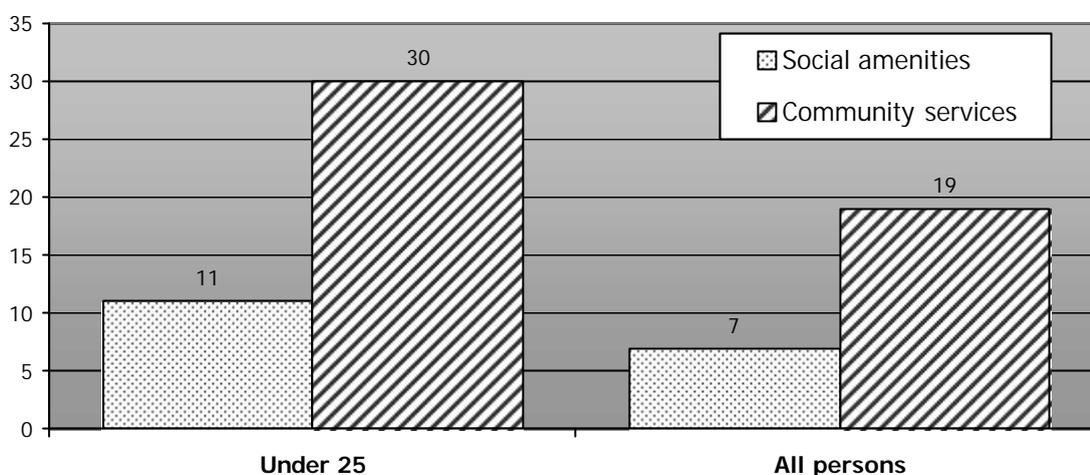
A majority of respondents to the *1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain* considered a wide range of public and private services to be essential (rather than just desirable) (Bramley and Ford, 2002). As might be expected the most significant age effects related to services associated with specific phases in the life course. Young people were less likely to consider services for the elderly (*ie.* transport for the aged, home helps, and meals on wheels) to be essential compared with the sample as a whole, and more likely to consider services relating to children and young people (*ie.* school transport, youth clubs, and pre-school playgroups) as essential. Some services (such as GPs, post offices, chemists, supermarkets, bank/building societies, dentists, and hospitals) were used almost universally by all households in the sample and hence no significant age differences were evident. As Table 4 (below) illustrates, age differences in patterns of usage of other social amenities largely reflect anticipated age differences in patterns in leisure. Hence young people were more likely to use cinemas, pubs and public sports facilities, and less likely to use museums, galleries, and places of worship, compared with the sample as a whole.

Table 4: PSE respondents using selected local services by age group (%)

	18-24 yrs	ALL	Diff.
Museums and galleries	15	33	-18
Place of worship	14	31	-17
Cinema	68	52	+16
Optician	66	81	-15
Bus services	67	53	+14
Public sports facilities	59	46	+13
Village / community halls	21	34	-13
Pub	71	58	+13
Petrol station	66	77	-11

Whilst age differences in respondent's perceptions of the importance of services and amenities, and in patterns of actual usage were often not significant, substantial age differences did emerge in relation to respondent's assessments of the adequacy of services in meeting their needs. It is useful to distinguish here between 'social amenities' which fulfil a primarily social or leisure function (libraries, sports facilities, museums, community halls, pubs, cinemas, evening classes and places of worship), and 'community services' which address more basic, material needs (GPs, hospitals, dentists, opticians, post offices, buses, trains, chemists, supermarkets and banks). Figure 3 (*below*) illustrates the proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied with at least one of the services they used in these categories. Firstly, a greater proportion of respondents were dissatisfied with community services as outlined above (19%) compared with social and leisure amenities (7%).

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with social amenities and community services by age group (%)



Secondly, in both cases young respondents were less satisfied with these services compared with older age groups and the sample as a whole. This is especially so in relation to key public and private sector services such as health services, transport and finance described by the ‘community services’ scale. As Figure 3 (above) shows, almost one third (30%) of young respondents were dissatisfied with these services compared with less than one fifth (19%) of the sample as a whole. These data broadly confirm the age profile of public satisfaction with local services presented in recent research by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2000b). Using a multivariate approach this study suggests that the main age effect occurs at the other end of the age spectrum with those aged over 55 expressing greater satisfaction with a range of public services (GPs, libraries, councils, police, benefits agencies) compared with younger age groups.

Young people’s dissatisfaction with many of the key public and private services outlined above at least partly reflects their inadequacy in addressing the needs of young people. Until recently young people have been largely neglected in terms of policy and research in comparison with adults and children (Dennehy et al., 1997). A failure to address young people’s needs and concerns in the provision of key services has been one legacy of this trend, and is (belatedly) encouraging a greater

awareness of the need to involve young people in the planning and delivery of key public services (eg. CYPUP, 2001).

The importance of services in raising the standard of living of households living on low incomes should not be estimated. Gordon and Townsend (2000) for example find that over half the income of the poorest 10% of households is in the form of 'benefits-in-kind'. However, the allocation of public spending on mainstream services to address disadvantage amongst young people is an especial problem. A recent DETR review for example found that spending on 16-24 year olds in the most deprived areas is 14% less than in 'average' areas (Bramley et al., 1998). Similar problems are also evident in relation to the provision of public services for vulnerable young people (see eg. Howarth and Street, 2000).

3.3 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Recent years have witnessed renewed concerns about the apparent withdrawal of young people from civic engagement in the UK. Anxiety has focused in particular upon declining levels of electoral participation by young people, and more generally upon their apparent disengagement from conventional politics. The data presented in Table 5 (*below*) certainly demonstrate that overall young people are somewhat less likely to participate in a range of social, community and political organisations than older age groups. More than half (52%) of respondents aged under 25 had not taken part in any of the activities listed below compared with 41% of those aged 35 or over, and 43% of the sample as a whole. However, with the exception of faith-based organisations and tenants and residents associations, the difference is not substantial. Whether these data reflect lower levels of social participation per se, or simply a predisposition towards engagement in the types of relatively unstructured, informal and community based activities which are more difficult to measure using survey methods is open to question. Thus, although young respondents report

somewhat lower levels of formal social and community involvement compared with the sample as a whole, other data reveal that young people are nevertheless often highly committed in a range of ‘collective’ voluntary and campaigning settings (eg. Roker et al., 1999; BYC, 1998).

Table 5: PSE respondent’s social and community participation by age Group

	16-24	All	Diff	Sig.
Sports club	29	18	11	<.01
Voluntary service group	9	8	1	Ns
Other community or civic group	4	3	1	<.05
Political party	2	2	0	<.05
Any other group or organisation	10	11	-1	<.01
Women s Institute or similar guild	0	1	-1	<.05
Trade union	8	10	-2	Ns
Environmental group	1	3	-2	Ns
Women s group or organisation	1	3	-2	<.01
Other pressure group	0	2	-2	<.01
Social or working men’s club	6	9	-3	Ns
Parents or School Association	1	6	-5	<.01
Religious group or organisation	4	12	-8	<.01
Tenants or Residents Assoc., etc.	0	9	-9	<.01
None	52	43	+9	<.05

Similar issues are pertinent in the investigation of young people’s civic engagement and political participation. Measures of political participation are often scaled in order to more reliably measure their social and spatial distribution. Table 6 (below) details a range of measures which seek to tap different dimensions of citizen’s engagement with the political process. The items listed below describe a range of ‘formal’ modes of participation in politics and as such exclude the types of unstructured and informal participation often favoured by marginalised groups (Lister, 1990; 1997). However as a measure of formal engagement with the political process this scale displays a high degree of internal consistency. As Table 6 (below) shows the reliability coefficient for this scale is 0.69 suggesting a close correlation between this index and other similar indices.

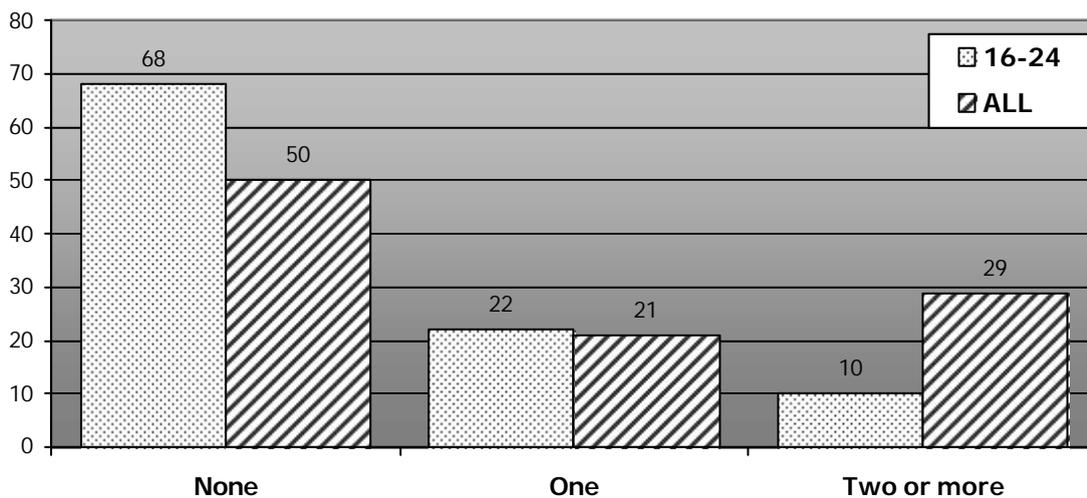
Table 6: Reliability analysis of civic engagement index

	Item-Total Correlation	Alpha If Deleted
Presented my views to a local councillor	.41	.65
Written a letter to an editor	.31	.68
Urged someone outside my family to vote	.38	.66
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	.47	.64
Made a speech before an organised group	.46	.65
Been an officer of an organisation of club	.38	.66
Taken an active part in a political campaign	.28	.68
Helped on fund raising drives	.41	.66

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha = .690

This index reveals a clear relationship between age and levels of engagement in the formal representative process, as Figure 4 (*below*) shows. Amongst young people aged less than 25 only one in ten (10%) had participated in two or more of the activities measured by this scale compared with 29% of the sample as a whole. Even more strikingly, half of the sample as a whole and two thirds (68%) of those respondents aged under 25 had not participated in any of the measures described by this scale.

Figure 4: Civic engagement scale by age group (%)



Social exclusion can be conceptualised as a state of incomplete citizenship arising from a range of exclusionary mechanisms including but not limited to processes of economic marginalisation (Gore, 1995). Analysis of the PSE data certainly

demonstrates a clear association between poverty and social participation amongst the PSE sample as a whole, with those respondents classified as 'poor' using the PSE approach being less likely to participate both in civic life and social and community organisations (Bradshaw et al., 2002). However, in addition to material resources, young people's civic engagement is also shaped by their access to the types of personal networks, resources and skills which facilitate active engagement. As a consequence of their position of dependence and subordination within the life-cycle, young people, and especially disadvantaged young people, are unlikely to benefit from the types of social and professional connections, or to participate in the types of organised civil associations, which facilitate political participation. In addition to their relatively weak position vis à vis the personal resources which encourage involvement, young people are also remote from the types of collective resources and networks which might encourage them to engage with formal political institutions. Young people's lack of access to these types of individual and collective resources constitute real barriers to their exercise of political citizenship and in the process serve to exclude young people, especially disadvantaged young people, from exercising genuine influence upon the policy making process.

4. CONCLUSION

The analyses presented above demonstrate the prevalence of income poverty amongst young people in the UK at the millennium. However young people are not a homogenous group. Demographic and structural inequalities of gender, social class origin, educational achievement, and ethnicity all shape the terrain of youth transitions in the UK, and more than any other group the social position of young people is also characterised by considerable fluidity. A much larger sample would be necessary to fully explore the effects of such distinctions upon young people's material and social circumstances using a survey approach. The consequences of poverty for young people's experiences of the transition to adulthood is also an area which requires much further work building on existing research in this area (eg.

Dennehy et al., 1997; Roker, 1998). Nonetheless these data demonstrate the centrality of both gender and young people's domestic arrangements as determinants of material and social well-being, with young women and those living independently being more likely to experience poverty.

Poverty amongst young people is also more widespread than might be suggested by the focus of government concerns with 'disaffected' and 'excluded' youth. The emphasis of current youth policy upon 'problem' groups obscures both the underlying structural processes of economic and social marginalisation, as well as the widespread nature of poverty and social exclusion amongst young people in Britain today. As Craig (2000: 17-18) observes:

The government appears to remain convinced that redistribution of income is an inappropriate policy response to poverty and that strategies for including disaffected young people should be based on structural reform and work-related initiatives. The issue...of replacing benefits for 16-17 year olds appears not to be on the agenda

In the process responsibility for the predicament of disadvantaged young people is shifted to young people themselves. Such a perspective rarely acknowledges, for example, the effects of the contraction of the youth labour market, low pay, and the consequences of housing policies which undermine young people's domestic transitions to adult independence.

Social policy developments in the 1980s and 1990s exacerbated these trends through the erosion of young people's social entitlements. Changes in social benefit regulations and the deregulation of the labour and housing markets have resulted in increasingly protracted and precarious transitions for many young people. Whilst the introduction of Minimum Wage legislation and working tax credits signal a shift away from the divisive social policies of the 1980s and 1990s young people have often been excluded from this legislation. The development of more inclusive social policies thus requires that young people be treated on more equal terms for example

in relation to the framing of minimum income legislation. However, underlying current policy is an implicit assumption that young people should continue to live with their parents and stay on in tertiary education. For many disadvantaged young people this is unlikely to be a realistic option in the foreseeable future unless more fundamental structural inequalities are addressed. For some young people the effects of such assumptions are potentially disastrous. Addressing poverty and social exclusion amongst young people therefore requires the development of a more inclusive approach to social and economic policy which restores young people's social entitlements and in the process offers greater support for young people's transition to independent adult status.

Appendix

Table 7: Sample Characteristics

		Under 25	25-34 years	All
Gender	Male	50	52	48
	Female	50	48	52
Marital Status	Never Married	96	40	20
	Married/Living with Spouse	4	50	58
	Divorced/Separated	-	10	12
	Widowed	-	-	9
Household type	1 adult, no children	10	14	18
	1 adult with 1+ child	6	6	3
	2 adults, no children	10	24	36
	2 adults with 1+ children	12	44	21
	3+ adults, no children	40	6	16
	3+ adults, 1+ child	24	6	7
Economic status	Working	57	83	57
	Unemployed	13	4	3
	Permanently unable to work	2	1	5
	Retired	-	-	24
	Keeping house	6	10	7
	Student	22	3	3
	Other inactive	1	<1	2
Valid N		126	285	1529

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