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Children's Perspectives on Economic Adversity: A Review of the Literature

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SUMMARY

This paper reviews some of the recent qualitative literature on children's perspectives on economic disadvantage. The idea of asking people who experience disadvantage about their own situations is still a relatively new one in the social sciences, and the idea of asking children about their own perceptions of economic and social disadvantage is even more recent. Nine analyses, all published since 1998, and all of them involving in-depth interviews or group work with children aged between 5 and 17, are examined in detail. Most of these studies develop frameworks based on the 'new sociology of childhood', which emphasises the social construction of childhood and children's agency in the context of child-adult relations. The nine studies cover a number of issues related to economic disadvantage, including exclusion from activities and peer groups at school and in the community; perceptions of 'poor' and 'affluent' children; participation in organized activities outside of school hours; methods of coping with financial hardship; support for parents in coping and in seeking and keeping employment, and aspirations for future careers and lives.

The analysis is organised under two themes ─ social exclusion and agency. Both are important from a child's perspective. The research examined here shows that what concerns children is not lack of resources per se, but exclusion from activities that other children appear to take for granted, and embarrassment and shame at not being able to participate on equal terms with other children. The research also shows the extent to which children's agency matters, first for themselves, to make sense of their situation and to interpret it positively or otherwise; second, for their parents and families, to help them cope with financial and other pressures through engaging in domestic work and caring, not making demands on parents, and protecting them from further pressure where they are able; and third, for policy: initiatives to reduce children's exclusion must take account of children's own perspectives on their situation.

On the basis of the nine papers analysed, the review argues that economic disadvantage can lead to exclusion in a number of critical areas, including schooling, access to out-of-school activities, and interaction with peers. But the review also finds that children use their agency creatively to reduce the impact of economic adversity on them and their families. However, they can also turn their agency inwards, leading to them lowering their own aspirations, excluding themselves from a range of activities, or engaging in activities that attract social disapproval. The review concludes with a discussion of the ethical and practical challenges associated with conducting research with children, and with a summary of issues that still remain under-researched.

This paper contributes to IRC's ongoing exploration of ways to understand the different dimensions of child wellbeing and the realization of children's rights for policy development.

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CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON ECONOMIC ADVERSITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Keywords: Young people, education, unemployment, Central and Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States

1. Introduction

The scientific examination of poverty has a long history across several branches of the social sciences. But it is only in relatively recent times that people in poverty themselves have been asked by researchers for their own perspectives on poverty (Chambers, 1997; Ruggeri Laderchi et al., 2003). The aim of this review is to describe some important emerging themes from the growing body of literature on children's perspectives on economic adversity. Nearly all of the existing studies of children's perspectives on poverty have been published in the past 10 years. Nonetheless, as this paper shows, the nine studies that make up the raw material for this review constitute a coherent body of research, with considerable consistency in terms of analytical frameworks, themes examined and findings. One of the main themes that emerge from these studies, which analyse the perspectives of children aged between 5 to 17 years, is that children's views matter for understanding children's own behaviour and how they interact with family, peers and institutions, and for developing effective policy responses to the challenges that economically disadvantaged children face − at home, at school and in the wider community.

The children who participate in these studies are not always 'the most disadvantaged' in every respect. In particular, most appear to enjoy close relations with at least one parent, and closeness to family protects them from many of the worst effects of economic disadvantage. Children who experience neglect and abuse, who are homeless or living in care, and who cannot rely on the support of their families (and who, for the most part, have probably experienced economic disadvantage) are likely to face greater challenges in their daily lives and as they grow up (Kruttschnitt et al., 1994; Scott, 2006). While it is important to acknowledge that family poverty is sometimes accompanied by other forms of deprivation, including homelessness, abuse and neglect, this literature review cannot adequately deal with the complex issues involved – they require separate detailed analysis, and review of a different literature that focuses more specifically on the issues in question.

It is now widely accepted that children have a right to be heard – this is clearly stated in article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). A considerable body of work emphasizes the importance of consulting with children, as well as methods for effective consultation (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005; Save the Children, 2003, 2004). In cases of family law and child protection, legislation in several countries states that children must be consulted (see for example, Community Services Commission, 2000; Neale and Smart, 1999). A number of governments have also put in place survey instruments to regularly assess children's perception of their socio-economic well-being (see UNICEF IRC, 2007). As with all participatory or client-focused research, some of it is likely to be tokenistic, while some has a more substantive intent (for a full discussion see Hart, 2001). But regarding poverty, it appears that a different ethic has been applied, both to adults and children. Lister (2004) speaks of the 'othering' of poor people, where the discourses, attitudes and actions of the non-poor can have a profound impact on how poverty is experienced. Among these attitudes are an assumption of passivity and lack of agency on the part of the poor. 'Othering' is also arguably imposed on children, who are likewise assumed to be passive and subject to the will of adults. (James et al., 1998; Qvortrup, 1994). The studies reviewed in this paper show that while both childhood itself and economic disadvantage constrain social engagement, children adapt to and endeavour to manage these constraints. The studies show that many children respond to economic disadvantage with resourcefulness and optimism. But some also respond with anxiety, pessimism and reduced levels of ambition.

There is an important policy purpose to these studies. Children's perspectives are used to identify the most important issues the children themselves associate with economic disadvantage (Ridge, 2002; van der Hoek, 2005). Children's perspectives are also used to inform on the long-term impacts of early socialization of children into socially stratified societies (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Sutton et al., 2007; Weinger, 2000). They show school as an important setting for poorer children's social engagement and the positive effects of some policies, such as school uniforms, which tend to reduce the impact of economic differences between children (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998; Wikeley et al., 2007). They also show how children are important actors in their parents' decisions and ability to seek and remain in employment. Many children appear to go to considerable lengths to support their parents' engagement with the labour market (Ridge, 2007a).

The approach used in this paper

The approach adopted in this review can best be described as sociological. This is appropriate because sociology has led the way with the construction of childhood as a space for agency and creativity, and the conceptualization of children as both 'being' and 'becoming' – that is, not only future adults but also present human beings, with their own perspectives and preferences (Qvortrup, 1994). Until fairly recently, the dominant approach in all the social sciences (and greatly influenced by developmental psychology) was to consider children as empty vessels to be filled, with ongoing arguments around the contexts in which they were filled, and who filled them (James et al., 1998). Economics has generally had little to say about children as active agents. It has tended to assume that households have a single preference and utility function formed by its adult members, and that children are either consumption goods or an investment in the future (Becker, 1981; Donath, 1995; Levison, 2000); although consumer research has long understood that children can influence household consumption decisions (Wang et al., 2007). The new sociology of childhood has actively sought to understand

children's agency through their interpretation of and responses to their environments (Qvortrup, 1994). Most of the studies of children and poverty reviewed here explicitly place themselves within this perspective, drawing extensively on the work of leading experts in the sociology of childhood, such as Qvortrup (1994), Corsaro (1997) and James, Jenks et al. (1998).

One of the key themes running through the sociology of childhood is unequal power relations between adults and children, and how specific qualitative research methods are needed to develop a real understanding of children's perspectives and preferences. In line with this theme, all nine analyses reviewed in this paper are qualitative and involve small samples of children (and sometimes their parents too). This is not to dismiss the value of quantitative research on children. Ridge (2002) includes in her book an extensive analysis of a quantitative survey of 700 respondents aged 11 to 15 years to examine their perspectives on school, and Beavis et al. (2004) survey Australian school-age children's aspirations for their future careers. However the qualitative work is particularly useful in developing an understanding of children's own perspectives on the complex dynamics in their everyday lives, and their relationships with family, friends, school and community.

The first aim of this paper is to summarize and synthesize the main themes in the research. This is the function of Section 2, which introduces and briefly discusses the nine studies that form the basic material for this review. The second aim is to discuss the research in two specific contexts: the social exclusion of children, and the institutions and people that exclude them (Section 3); and children in economic adversity as agents, and the forms of agency that they adopt (Section 4). Section 5 looks at some of the methodological issues for doing research with children that emerge from the studies. Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the implications for future research – what we can learn from these studies, in particular the policy lessons, and what is missing.

2. Studies of children's perspectives on economic adversity

Research that focuses on children's perspectives on economic adversity is a relatively new field. The raw material for this review comprises nine analyses that were readily available. Also discussed are two recent reviews of similar literature that provide useful synthesis and insights into children's perspectives on economic adversity.

The studies

Three criteria have been used to select the studies included in this review: first, they focus primarily on children's (defined as persons aged less than 18) perspectives on school, family and social relations in the context of low incomes, poverty or economic disadvantage. Some, however, also include parents' perspectives. Second, the research is qualitative. This seems, at this stage, a necessary condition for understanding children's views, since quantitative research techniques using highly structured interviews may appear premature in a field that is still comparatively new, and where the explicit aim of the research is to better understand children's own perspectives (Ridge, 2002).

Third, the studies chosen are concerned with children's perspectives on economic disadvantage in rich countries. While there is also a growing literature on children's perspectives on issues relating to economic disadvantage in developing countries, many of these studies are less concerned with schooling, a key focus of the rich country studies, than with child labour (Bessell, 1999; Harpham, 2005; Iversen, 2002). Clearly, many of the conclusions emerging from this review are relevant to children in low and middle-income countries, just as many of the findings from these latter countries are also relevant to children in rich countries. However, the incorporation of papers on the perspectives of children in both rich and developing countries requires a separate analysis.

Studies from a broad range of sources were chosen. Six concerned children in the United Kingdom, and one each children in Australia, the Netherlands and the United States. Three were published in respected academic journals (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Ridge, 2007a; Weinger, 2000) or were widely cited (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998). Two Australian analyses (Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Taylor and Nelms, 2006) were part of a longitudinal study of children growing up in Melbourne. Also included were three working papers (Sutton et al., 2007; van der Hoek, 2005; Wikeley et al., 2007) not yet widely cited elsewhere. Table 1 briefly summarises some of the characteristics of the nine studies, which had small sample sizes. Some were localized to a particular area of a city (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Weinger, 2000), while others sampled children in both urban and rural areas (Ridge, 2002; Wikeley et al., 2007), or in several regions of the country (Roker, 1998). In general, an attempt was made to sample boys and girls in equal numbers, but only one study (van der Hoek, 2005) sampled a significant number of children from ethnic minority groups. In six of the nine studies, parents as well as children were interviewed, and in five (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Sutton et al., 2007; Taylor and Fraser, 2003/Taylor and Nelms, 2006; Weinger, 2000; Wikeley et al., 2007), the perspectives of middle-class children as well as those of poor children were obtained. Most studies made policy recommendations.

Major themes

In terms of themes covered, the nine studies can be placed into three groups. In the first group, four of the studies (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998; Taylor and Fraser, 2003/Taylor and Nelms, 2006; van der Hoek, 2005) have a general and exploratory character, and examine a wide range of issues relating to children's own experiences of and perspectives on living in low-income families. Roker (1998) examines eight major issues, including children's family incomes, personal finances, friends and social lives, family relationships, health, school, crime and future aspirations. Ridge (2002) focuses on children's family relations, income sources, school, fitting in with friends and sources of social exclusion. Taylor and Fraser (2003) and Taylor and Nelms (2006) also focus on family relations, school and friends. Van der Hoek (2005) investigates the mechanisms employed by children to cope with living in low-income families.
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Table 1: Characteristics of the studies included in this review

	Roker (1998)	Weinger (2000)	Ridge (2002)	Backett-Milburn et al. (2003)	Taylor and Fraser (2003) / Taylor and Nelms (2006)	Van der Hoek (2005)	Ridge (2007)[a]	Sutton et al. (2007)	Wikeley et al. (2007)
Aim of the study	To describe young people's experience of growing up in family poverty	To explore low and middle-income children's views on class and friendship choice	To study how poverty and social exclusion affect children's perceptions of their social and familial lives	To examine children's views on processes that impact on inequality and health	Two waves in a long-term study tracking children as they grow up in a Melbourne suburb	To examine the strategies children employ to cope with poverty	To explore the perspectives of low-income children before and after mothers' return to work	To explore two contrasting groups of children's views and experiences of social difference	To examine the impact of out-of-school educational relationships on young people's learning
Number of children	60	48	40	35	About 40 each wave	65	61	42	55
Age range	13-18	5-14	10-17	9-12	11-12 / 15-16	6-16	8-14	8-13	11 and 14
Parents surveyed?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes[a]	No	No
Sample type	Poor children	Middle-class and poor children	Poor children	Middle-class and poor children	Mostly low income, some well off	Poor children	Poor children	Middle-class and poor children	Middle-class and poor children
Location	UK	US	UK	UK	Australia	Netherlands	UK	UK	UK
Specific policy conclusions?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: [a] Parents were interviewed for this study, but their views are not reported on.

The second group includes three studies, all of which explore differences between poorer and middle-class children (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Sutton et al., 2007; Weinger, 2000). Weinger (2000) has both middle-class and poor children describe their lives in the abstract, by showing the children photographs of both opulent and run-down looking homes, and asking them questions about who might live there. Backett-Milburn, Cunningham-Burley et al. (2003) record children's perspectives on material differences and social relations, again focusing on differences (and some similarities) between poorer and richer children, and speculating how these might feed into longer-term inequalities in health outcomes. Sutton et al. (2007) explore poor and middle-class children's attitudes to social difference.

In the third group, two studies focus on quite specific questions. Wikeley et al. (2007) consider how children develop educational relationships with adults outside of the school setting. Ridge (2007a) examines what children in low-income lone parent families think and do when their mothers take up employment – perceived attitudes of other children, changes in family income, household work and childcare, and changes in their relationships with their mothers.

Across the nine studies, the following three themes emerge quite strongly. First, it is usually not poverty per se that hurts, but the social exclusion that accompanies it; second, children are active agents and use a variety of strategies to cope with living on low income; and third, families are central to children's lives – children both contribute to and draw on family strength as a source of resilience. The first two themes are discussed in greater detail in Sections 3 and 4, while the third theme runs through both sections. These themes also emerge, although with different emphases, in recent review articles on children's perspectives on poverty by Attree (2006) and Ridge (2007b), both of which draw attention to the profoundly social costs of children's poverty. In addition, Attree (2006) emphasizes how many children in economic adversity have limited aspirations as a result of their poverty. Ridge (2007b) highlights the types of material possessions that appear to have an impact on children' social exclusion – clothing is particularly important, but so are the tools of virtual networks – mobile telephones, computers, etc. The present paper complements these recent reviews by placing an accent on the themes mentioned above: social exclusion, agency and the role of family

3. Social exclusion

In the literature on economics, poverty or economic adversity is usually defined as a state in which a person or household has low or inadequate material resources according to some absolute or community-based criterion. More recently, poverty has been widely recognized as multidimensional in nature and manifested by inadequate capabilities or functionings "to lead a life one has reason to value" (Sen, 1983, 1999), or in terms of social exclusion (Room, 1995; Atkinson, 1998). While both concepts are designed to encompass issues wider than economic disadvantage, they are nonetheless commonly used in debates about material poverty (see Ruggeri-Laderchi, 2003; Wagle, 2002). The concept of social exclusion in particular appears to resonate with children. Economic adversity as experienced by children can be intrinsic and absolute, for example when there is not enough food in the house (this sometimes happens to children in rich countries too – see van der Hoek, 2005). But in rich countries, it is more often a problem of relativity – having less in material terms than is considered adequate according to community criteria; or a problem of exclusion from participation in activities and institutions that are considered normal in the community. People can be excluded from processes and institutions for a number of reasons, including race, disability, geography and institutional inertia. However, the common thread running through the nine papers examined here is exclusion associated with economic disadvantage.

Atkinson (1998) identifies three characteristics inherent in most definitions of social exclusion. First, it is a relative concept. People are excluded from a particular community or society, at a particular place and time. Unlike material poverty (which can, but need not be relative), it is not possible to judge whether a person is excluded by looking at his circumstances in isolation from his immediate community. Put another way, Katz (2005, citing Room, 1995) characterizes the difference between poverty and social exclusion as a "move from a distributional to a relational focus." The second element identified by Atkinson is dynamics. Not only are people's current situations important (as can be the case with poverty), but also their prospects for the future. This is particularly relevant for children who are both 'being' and 'becoming' (Qvortrup, 1994).

Atkinson's third element is agency. Social exclusion is a process that requires continual conscious or unconscious reinforcement by actors in a community, resulting in "a discontinuity in relationships with the rest of society" (Katz, 2005). The examination of a person's failure to achieve inclusion has to be concerned with identification of the actors (including possibly the person himself or herself) causing exclusion. It is this emphasis on process that to a large extent differentiates the social exclusion approach from Sen's capability approach (Ruggeri-Laderchi et al., 2003). As this review shows, notions of process are central to children's lives, in the family, at school and among peers.

Sen (2000) makes a useful distinction between active and passive exclusion. Active exclusion is the result of a deliberate act (for example a law that reduces access to schooling for children of irregular migrants). Passive exclusion on the other hand, may occur as a result of failure to recognize or address implicit barriers, such as hidden costs associated with education, even though there is no deliberate intention to exclude. The exclusion resulting from these apparently benign policy regimes is, nonetheless, real. Moreover, Sen warns of the danger that tolerance of passive exclusion may foster accommodation to more active measures over time.

Poverty and exclusion among children

All three of Atkinson's characteristics (relativity, dynamics and agents of exclusion) are addressed in the nine studies covered in this review. Examples of Sen's active and passive exclusion are also readily apparent. Attree (2006) states that "for children living in low-income households life can be a struggle to avoid being set apart from friends and peers" (p. 59). Children often feel left out (passive exclusion) and report being picked on (active exclusion) because they do not possess some things that other children appear to take for granted. Several studies argue that with age this problem of exclusion increases in children's perception (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998).

Ridge (2002) draws up a comprehensive list of material possessions and capabilities that can result in the exclusion of poor children from two domains in particular – school and social networks. School came across strongly as a locus of exclusion, something also apparent from the Australian longitudinal study (Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Taylor and Nelms, 2006). 'Dress down days', when children could wear their own clothes to school, caused anxiety among some children who did not consider that they had any decent or fashionable clothes, and were afraid of being teased or laughed at by the other children. Uniforms, on the other hand, were seen as having a protective effect – reducing differences among children, although some parents worried about not being able to afford the 'full' uniform (Taylor and Fraser, 2003). Poor children also regularly missed out on school trips that required a parental contribution. The impact on children was two-fold: first, being excluded from the actual trip, and second, according to a 16-year-old boy quoted in Ridge (2002, p. 74), "the people who are left behind in the school are the people who are looked down on."

Wikeley et al. (2007) show how poverty also affected children's participation in organized out-of-school activities. First, poorer children were more reliant on school provision of extra-curricular activities, while middle-class children tapped into a much wider range of activities. Second, transportation costs, particularly in rural areas, restricted young people's access to many activities (a point echoed by Ridge, 2002). Third, poorer children often had complex family lives that demanded significant amounts of their free time, for example visiting step-parents, or caring for younger or disabled siblings. There was also a tendency for some children to isolate themselves, which Wikeley et al. (2007) interpret as face-saving – covering their inability to participate for financial reasons with a seeming indifference.

In addition, poverty appeared to contribute to children's exclusion from social networks. Ridge cites an Irish study that reports that children who did not have the 'right' clothes were fearful of being bullied or rejected by their peers. Missing out on holidays appeared to be particularly difficult for some children (van der Hoek, 2005). On the other hand, both Roker (1998) and Backett-Milburn, Cunningham-Burley et al. (2003) report some children asserting that material possessions were not important in themselves:

"Many children suggested such differences [in ownership of material possessions] would only matter if you allowed them to, or if the person concerned used differences to personal advantage. Similarly, if other non-material factors such as personality and popularity, clear markers of social status, were not assured in the person making the claims to be better off they would not be taken seriously." (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003, p. 617)

Nonetheless, studies including Roker (1998) and Ridge (2002) point to the possibility that many children living in poverty did indeed lack the confidence and personality to overlook looking different and having less, and therefore felt vulnerable to teasing, bullying and other forms of exclusion.

Agents of inclusion and exclusion

As noted above, one of the key assumptions that underpin the concept of social exclusion (and one of the things that sets it apart from poverty or deprivation) is that (active or passive) actions by people and institutions have the impact of including or excluding adults and children from what is considered normal in a community or society.

Micklewright (2002) draws up a useful list of the key potential actors who exclude children: government and its agents, the labour market, schools, parents, other children and the children themselves. To this a further source of exclusion may be added – neighbourhoods and the people living in them. It is also important to recognize that if these actors have the power to exclude, then they may also have the power to include. Many of these actors engage in multiple transactions with children, some of them inclusionary and some less so.

Government and its agents are important factors of inclusion in society through redistribution of resources towards low-income families, and through provision of universal services such as public transportation, health and education. Several of the studies note the positive impact of such services on children in low-income families.

Governments can also exclude particular people, through social policies that promote a particular welfare ethic or ideal family type, or through a particular type of service delivery. Most of the studies equate surviving on income support payments with poverty (indeed, some define poor populations according to receipt of a targeted benefit or other service), and most make the further leap of linking poverty with children's exclusion. Some studies (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998) argue that in order to reduce exclusion among children, income support payments to families need to be increased. In a study of exclusion associated with disability, Dowling and Dolan (2001) also make the point that many social services aimed at children in general exclude children with disabilities, and that services aimed at children with disabilities do little to reduce exclusion, both for themselves and their families.

It is not only institutions that can include or exclude, but also individual service providers, sometimes with and sometimes without the explicit or tacit approval of their managers. Lister (2004, p. 117) argues that "the manner in which welfare is administered can degrade its recipients and act as a warning to others." Most of the studies reviewed here lack a perspective on the extent to which individual service providers (other than teachers, see below) can exclude economically disadvantaged children and their parents, by stigmatizing them, or by ignoring their needs and demands. This may be because parents, being the principal point of contact with bureaucracies outside of the school, may be able to shield their children from stigmatizing experiences. However, the issue of children's perspectives on the wider welfare state is not well covered by the current research and is a potential subject for further study.

The labour market includes many children, often from quite a young age. However, it sometimes exploits them, particularly through payment of very low wages, as Ridge (2002) finds in her study. Both Roker (1998) and Ridge (2002) attest to children's real contributions to the household economy through giving at least some of their earnings from casual work to their parents. Micklewright (2002) argues that children can also suffer from their parents' exclusion from the labour market (which can, in turn, be the result of lack of maternity leave or suitable childcare provisions), and that young people are often excluded by employers who may be unwilling to invest in training them. Smyth (2002) points out

that "credential creep" implies employers may increasingly demand formal qualifications for even fairly basic jobs.

Of the nine studies, only one (Ridge, 2007a) develops a strong labour market perspective. Ridge shows the considerable efforts to which some children go to support their parents in work, particularly through care of siblings and performance of domestic chores. Equally, she reports children's dissatisfaction with poor quality after-school childcare services that are arguably aimed at serving the interests of the labour market rather than those of the child.

Neighbourhood quality can influence children's inclusion or exclusion. One third of the Roker (1998) sample reported being a victim of crime, and many spoke of their own involvement in committing crime as something that everybody in the neighbourhood participated in. Some of the Backett-Milburn, Cunningham-Burley et al. (2003) sample refer to areas where they live, or nearby areas as unsafe. Sutton et al. (2007) note that there were fewer out-of-school activities in the poor estate in their study, compared with the middle-class estate. Ridge (2002) on the other hand notes how children in close-knit rural communities feel that their poverty is exposed for all to see, heightening their sense of stigma and exclusion.

Neighbourhood or community can be an important factor associated with the exclusion of economically disadvantaged children if they live in the midst of more affluent children (Ridge, 2002). Stanley, Ng and Mestan (2007) argue that children's social exclusion can be invisible to the community and to policymakers where it occurs in the midst of plenty. And while whole communities may be deprived compared to the national average in terms of a range of indicators, it may also be the case that economically disadvantaged children who live in deprived communities enjoy a greater sense of inclusion with their peers than economically disadvantaged children who live in more affluent communities (Sutton et al., 2007).

Schools are clearly agents of inclusion in the first instance, in that they bring children together. The importance of school as a place where children from low-income families meet their friends is underlined in several of the studies (Ridge, 2002; Taylor and Fraser, 2003). However, schools can also be agents of exclusion – literally, as Micklewright (2002) points out in the case of exclusions (sending children home for unacceptable behaviour) and expulsions, but also because they may fail to teach some children adequately due to policies that exclude children from some activities because they do not have the means to pay for them, or policies that stigmatize children who access income-tested school services. This type of exclusion figures prominently in several of the analyses. Ridge (2002) points out that in the United Kingdom expulsions and suspensions are much more common among children whose families rely on means-tested income support payments than among other children. Such children, moreover, appear to have worse relations in general with their teachers, and are less concerned about doing well at school. As reported above, many children also keenly feel the stigma of lack of money at school, often as a result of deliberate or unthinking school policies and practices (Roker, 1998; Ridge, 2002).

Parents, as Micklewright notes, "have an enormous influence on the well-being of their children. One implication is that parents must be a major potential agent for their children's exclusion." (2002, chapter 3) He suggests that parents can exclude their children by not bringing enough money into the household, by failing to spend their money wisely, by failing to take an adequate interest in their children's education, health, nutrition or social development. (Conversely, parents can promote inclusion of children by paying due attention to these aspects of their development.) While parental failures may be inadvertent or unintended, and greatly exacerbated (or ameliorated) by other factors, the point remains that parents can be agents of exclusion. This argument fits well with Mayer's (1997) thesis that children's life chances are not principally governed by their parents' incomes, but by other factors relating to parenting practices and parents' psychological well-being.

Interviews with parents in the reviewed studies generally found that they were keen to do the best for their children (Taylor and Fraser, 2003). They also show that children, rather than blaming their parents for their poverty, offer support and cooperation in their struggle to survive together (Ridge, 2002; van der Hoek, 2005). Roker (1998, p. 29) also notes that "very few of the young people mentioned that their relationship with their parents was affected by the family's limited income." In general, family functioning is not dealt with in the studies. Although children in the Roker (1998) study do refer to family violence and other indicators of poor family functioning, this study like the others does not analyse in depth overlaps between economic adversity, family relations and family functioning. Rather, families emerge from the studies as protective institutions, softening the impact of economic adversity for children. Nonetheless, as van der Hoek (2005) argues, children may also feel the pressure of economic disadvantage, because many parents confide in their children about money worries, and because arguments and disagreements over money may arise within the family.

Other children come across in the studies as the main includers and excluders of children, not least because of the importance children themselves placed in fitting in and in being included in their peer group. The exclusion of poor children by non-poor children, and how it is ingrained from an early age, is the main theme running through both Weinger (2000) and Backett-Milburn, Cunningham-Burley et al. (2003). Sutton et al. (2007) emphasize the antagonism that that children often felt for children in other socio-economic groups. Roker, Ridge and van der Hoek all report on children being bullied, teased or otherwise excluded as a consequence of their poverty (although clearly bullying is seldom simply associated with economic disadvantage). As a 13-year-old girl from the Netherlands reports:

> "I don't think I have nice clothes. I want those clothes that are in fashion. At school there is often said something about it: 'you dress out of fashion' and 'you look stupid'. It's not nice to hear such things." (van der Hoek, 2005, p. 28)

This, however, was not apparent in the Australian study (Taylor and Fraser, 2003), where children reported being bullied for a number of reasons, but not as a result of their poverty.

The exclusion of economically disadvantaged children by other children is problematic in many senses. While it occupies a huge area of exclusion in children's own perception, none of the studies make policy recommendations

directly related to this issue. Changes in some practices at school as proposed by Ridge (2002) would undoubtedly help reduce the incidence of such exclusion. But the real solution to the exclusion of children by other children is probably found in making a cultural shift that develops a more caring and inclusive society. In terms of policy, this represents a longer-term and more challenging undertaking than the introduction of concrete measures to raise family incomes or promote employment of parents.

And while exclusion of children by other children as a consequence of economic adversity is well covered in the studies reviewed, evidence of exclusion as a consequence of prejudice is more notable for its absence, with the exception of Taylor and Fraser (2003), who report exclusion of children from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The lack of evidence of other forms of prejudice in these studies may reflect the (relative) homogeneity of most of the samples. The possibility that some children could be doubly disadvantaged by economic hardship and prejudice from other adults and children as a consequence of their disability or ethnicity should be an important motivating factor for the examination of the perspectives of children from different groups at risk from exclusion.

Finally, children can also exclude themselves (for example, from school or from interaction with their peers). Micklewright (2002) notes a number of forms of self-exclusion, including truancy and drug addiction. Certainly, children may voluntarily decide to miss school or to take drugs. But agency in these circumstances should perhaps be interpreted in the context of constraints (including poverty and adult authority) that may greatly restrict freedom of action in a range of domains that are considered more legitimate. Arguably, self-exclusion by children may follow some form of exclusion by others more powerful, or, as Wikeley et al. (2007) argue, may be some children's means of interpreting a negative experience (for example, exclusion due to lack of resources) as a positive choice (not wanting to belong).

Attree (2006) highlights another form of self-exclusion that children and their parents in the samples engage in, also directly related to their economic disadvantage: they often had few aspirations to engage more actively in life in the present, or to improve their situations in the future. In the Roker (1998) sample, parents' aspirations for their children are modest (for example, they want them to get any job) while children's own aspirations often appear unrealistic, especially when their engagement in school is considered. In addition, children exclude themselves from some activities to avoid pressuring their parents into having to pay for activities they cannot afford, so they simply do not ask (Ridge, 2002; van der Hoek, 2005). In contrast, children whose parents have recently found work and whose family incomes have increased find themselves going out more and engaging in more activities (Ridge, 2007a). The ingenuity of children and their parents (for example, in organizing inexpensive holidays) can also promote greater inclusion (van der Hoek, 2005).

4. Children as agents

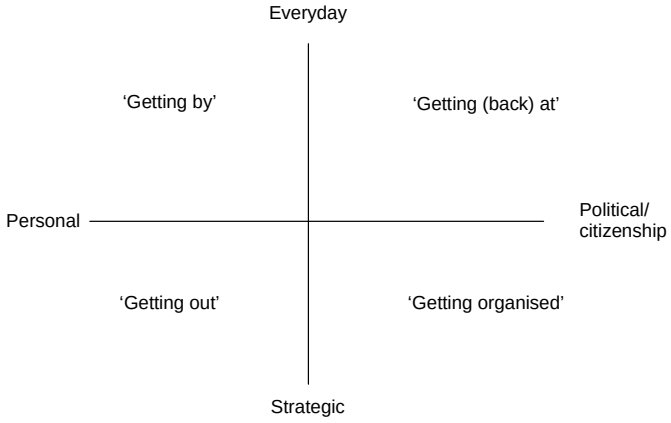
The idea of children as agents has only relatively recently been widely applied in the social sciences. Irwin (2006, p. 17) argues that "prior to the 1980s children were constituted as incomplete, requiring socialisation to become adults. This adult centred perception of childhood frequently meant that children were objectified, written about but rarely consulted." Economics has often characterized children as objects of their parents' consumption, or as subjects of human capital investment (Donath, 1995). While some economists have attempted to open up the family to analysis (for a review, see Browning, 1992), children have generally been subsumed within it, and the family is assumed in classical economic thought to have a unitary utility function (Becker, 1981; Donath, 1995).

Sociology too has long ignored children as individuals, but focused instead on their socialization into society. Until quite recently, the only discipline that appears to have taken childhood seriously as a separate subject for study and analysis is that of developmental psychology, which introduced a popularly accepted 'gold standard' of child development (James et al., 1998). This is now changing. Zubrick, Silburn and Prior (2005, p. 162) argue that recent methodological breakthroughs and new developments in human genomics and neuroscience highlight the need for a more integrated understanding of the interplay between the behavioural, social and biological aspects of development, particularly in early childhood and adolescence. It is now increasingly accepted that children are not passive observers of their own development, but social actors who seek to interpret and shape it.

Outside of the social sciences, some idea of children and agency has always been present − in Australia and the United Kingdom the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 10 years. And entrepreneurs have long recognized children's economic power, as witnessed by the proliferation of advertisements for toys in between children's television shows, and the careful placement of candies near supermarket checkout lines within reach of small hands. Yet it is only in the past 15 to 20 years, with the adoption by most countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the emergence of serious debate on the evolving capacities of the child, that the idea of children as full members of society, not just as adults-in-waiting, has been subject to serious analysis. National and international agencies have become more receptive to the voices of children on a number of issues, for example, their experience of social service provision (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006), foster care (Community Services Commission, 2000), and domestic violence against women (Irwin, 2006). The UNICEF website notes that "for the first time in G8 history, young people shared their views with G8 world leaders" at the June 2006 summit in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation.

Children's agency needs to be understood in the context of dependence on, and submission to, the authority of adults. Within the confines of this relationship, some agency is sanctioned or positively encouraged, while some agency can also be understood in terms of rebellion against adult and parental authority. Lister (2004) identifies four types of agency that are relevant to the analysis of poverty, which she places along two axes, everyday-strategic, and personal-political/citizenship, as shown in Figure 1 (see page 8). The everyday-strategic axis differentiates between those actions a person undertakes to make ends meet today, and those a person undertakes to improve living standards over the longer term. Some longer-term strategies may cause greater hardship in the short term. The personal-political axis refers to those actions that are aimed at improving one's own situation, and those that aim at wider change. It is worth examining how children in adverse economic circumstances might utilize the four types of agency proposed by Lister.

Figure 1: Forms of agency exercised by people in poverty



Source: Lister (2004), Figure 6.1, p. 130.

Getting by stands in the everyday-personal quadrant of Lister's typology in Figure 1, and includes the many little things that people do in order to cope with everyday situations, for example, prioritizing daily expenditure and juggling resources. Lister indeed makes the salient point that this form of agency is so commonplace that it is often only noticed when it breaks down. Ridge (2002) and van der Hoek (2005) provide examples of what some children do to get by in the face of economic adversity: for example, saving pocket money and birthday money, taking advantage of informal and ad-hoc opportunities to earn money, helping parents with housework and childcare, reappraising their daily situations in a more positive light, and not complaining to parents about lack of money. On the other hand, Roker (1998) reports that lack of money was a cause of family conflict among some of her sample).

There is also a considerable body of literature on the social resources (friends, family and community) that many people call on in order to help make their daily experience of poverty more bearable (see, for example, Narayan-Parker and Patel, 2000). In her review of children's perspectives on poverty, Attree (2006, p. 60) argues that children "adopted strategies within their immediate families, in the wider family network, and outside the family sphere, to maximise their means." Although Roker (1998) states that a third of the sample in her study said that lack of money did not affect their social lives, the literature covered in this review (which is slightly different to the literature covered by Attree) suggests a picture of reliance on, and support for the family (coupled with a wish not to overburden parents), but a reluctance to show weakness and dependency to peers – thus avoiding engagement in a range of wider social resources. This is explicitly brought out by Taylor and Fraser (2003), who show that children in low-income families are significantly less likely than other children to spend time with their peers outside of school; and by van der Hoek (2005) who argues that poorer children often exclude themselves in order to avoid confrontations or embarrassing interactions with their peers. On the other hand, Wikeley et al. (2007) show how children living in a poor estate in their study participate widely in spontaneous street play, in contrast to middle-class children, who tend to engage in more formalized activities, or visit each others' houses. Street play can be seen as a positive and creative response to economic disadvantage, since it is enjoyable for children and costs little. However, its visibility means that children are exposed to a number of risks, including being victims of crimes and facing accusations of anti-social behaviour because they may be seen to 'hang around' in groups (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Wikeley et al., 2007).

Getting (back) at in the everyday-political quadrant of Figure 1 is characterized by Lister (2004) as the channelling of anger and despair that may accompany poverty, into activities and lifestyles that signal resistance to bureaucratic and social norms. This includes, for example, borderline non-compliance with the petty rules and obligations that may accompany welfare receipt, outright social security fraud, petty crime, engaging in confrontational behaviour, vandalism, graffiti writing, or taking excessive amounts of drugs. These "isolated acts of resistance" usually take place in a context where such behaviour is to some extent tolerated, either out of understanding for the poor person's situation, or because many other people in the neighbourhood are engaged in similar activities.

Lister (2004), on the other hand, highlights 'getting back at' as a form of adaptation to circumstances that challenges the view of poor people as passive and lacking agency. However, this form of agency, which is arguably common among children and young people in general, and not only those who experience economic adversity, suggests (to my mind) a response to powerlessness in relation to society and the formalized world. As noted in Section 1, most children are placed in positions of powerlessness – subjection to adult authority is one widely understood characteristic of childhood. Most do not respond with seriously disruptive or illegal 'getting back at' agency. But when they do respond in this way, it is not always clear whether it is the powerlessness of childhood and testing the limits of adult authority, or the powerlessness of poverty that provokes the response.

Getting out is the officially sanctioned response to poverty in the rich societies represented by the studies under review, particularly if it involves taking up employment, or improving one's employment prospects through education or training (although it could also conceivably involve re-partnering).

This form of agency is located in the personal-strategic quadrant of Figure 1. Lister (2004, p. 145) notes that "individuals exercise their strategic agency in negotiating these routes [education and employment] but the routes themselves are forged by structural and cultural factors, which can assist or obstruct the exercise of that agency." Piven (2001) emphasizes the political character of these assisting and obstructing factors, for example, how they are influenced by the welfare reform that has taken place in most rich countries since the mid-1990s. "When public income supports that undergird wages are rolled back, workers are inevitably less secure, and it becomes easier for employers to roll back wages and restructure work. It's as simple as that." (Piven, 2001, p.28). According to Piven, therefore, the purpose of welfare reform is to encourage 'getting out' by increasing the relative attractiveness of low-wage work.

As discussed in Section 3 of this paper, moreover, the will to 'get out' may depend to a very large extent on aspirations and preferences that may be adapted (or revised downwards) to

economically straitened circumstances. This is both a human reaction to difficulty and a way of coping with that difficulty. Van der Hoek (2005) characterizes it as 'positive reappraisal', while Attree (2006) characterizes it as becoming resigned to living in poverty. Roker (1998) also hints at the role of constrained or adapted preferences in lowering children's aspirations for themselves. In the language of the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999), adaptation of the will to 'get out' is in itself an indicator of capability deprivation – the loss of freedom to choose between desirable alternatives.

Lister (2004) makes the point that for some people, for example lone parents, barriers to 'getting out' are often significant, and here Ridge (2007a) suggests that children's support can make a real difference – through engaging in greater self care, care of siblings and home production, and through giving parents emotional space to recuperate after the working day. Pocock and Clarke (2004) make a similar point with regard to Australian children with working parents. However, this research is silent on the negotiation that may take place between parents and children over 'getting out' – for example, how children's views (as well as parents' perceptions of children's needs) influence parents' decisions to look for work, accept particular jobs, or leave their jobs.

Getting organized is placed by Lister (2004) in the strategic-political/citizenship quadrant of Figure 1. She argues that this is often a particularly difficult type of agency for poor people, in part because of the 'othering' process that objectifies them as passive. Perhaps the most important part of 'getting organized' relates to the factors that prevent people from engaging in it "where the problem of poverty is typically individualized and blamed on 'the poor' by politicians and the media, it is likely that those affected will make sense of their situation in individualized, often self-blaming terms, and look for individual rather than collective solutions" (Lister, 2004, p. 150 citing Lyon-Callo, 2001 and Dean, 2003). Poor people as a group, moreover, are often disorganized because they do not wish to identify with each other. 'Proud to be poor' is not a banner under which many are likely to march" (Lister, 2004, p. 152).

Like poor adults, all children experience 'othering' to a greater or lesser extent simply because of their status as children. Moreover, they are for the most part explicitly excluded from political processes, and while they may sometimes be listened to regarding issues that directly affect them as children, they are not generally considered to have a voice in big-picture politics or community activism. One potentially fruitful avenue for future research might be to better understand how children support (or otherwise) their parents' involvement in community issues and engagement with public and state agencies.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed here suggests that the treatment of children as passive by researchers, policymakers and service providers is inappropriate. However, their agency is still in many senses restricted – more everyday and personal (mostly 'getting by' and 'getting (back) at'), and less strategic and political (many children will help their parents 'get out' and 'get by', but many also appear to have limited aspirations for themselves). The dual focus of children's agency is worth noting: both to help themselves in coping with their daily lives and to help their parents in their struggle to improve family finances and functioning.

A number of knowledge gaps remain. Current research does not address how children and their parents negotiate important transitions ('getting out'), such as parents' taking up employment, even though this often explicitly depends on children's active cooperation. Nor is it apparent from the existing literature what roles age and other indicators of maturity play in a child's agency, but presumably children employ different tactics and strategies at different ages. For example, the typology of evolving capacities of the child drawn up by Lansdown (2005) would tend to foster expectations that consultation and negotiation that go on between child and parent are likely to vary considerably according to the age of the child.

There also is a need to better understand the influence of structural and cultural factors that facilitate or inhibit the use of different types of agency by children. In this respect, a better understanding of how and why children adopt particular coping strategies might be revealing (van der Hoek, 2005). Importantly, these factors may not always be the same for children and their parents, for example because of their different social environments, for example. Addressing this issue would require an explicitly multicultural approach to the research, assuming from the outset that culture and ethnic background play a role in how children utilize agency in response to economic adversity.

5. Doing research with children

Expertise in the social sciences is necessary in order to conduct scientifically robust research on poverty. But the very process of acquiring that expertise may disable the researcher in a number of important respects. Chambers (1997) argues that (i) extended education when young, coupled with delayed responsibility in the real world, (ii) working in organizations with fellow professionals with shared values, and (iii) the ambition to do well within their professional discipline, create a considerable distance between professional researchers and the objects of their research, who are invariably poor or disadvantaged in some respects. To a large extent, professional research concerns itself with quantifiable phenomena, such as income or consumption.

Chambers' argument, that poor people are distanced from the whole poverty definition and measurement process, which is simplified in order to satisfy the requirements of administrators and academics rather than to address the real needs of the poor, is arguably amplified in the case of children. Children are excluded by tradition, authority and dependency, first from the adult world (James et al., 1998; Qvortrup, 1994), and then from the even more rarefied worlds of academia and policymaking. The challenge, central to the task of understanding children's perspectives on poverty, is to break down the double barrier of distance that disables professional researchers and policymakers: professionalism that differentiates them from poor people in general, and the authority and remoteness of adulthood that separates them from children. In this section, we are particularly concerned with the second barrier, for arguably, in breaking this down, and in recognizing the diversity that exists among children, we will also be going quite some way towards dismantling the first barrier. We also briefly consider some of the ethical issues associated with research with children.

Research techniques with children

The research agenda is changing. As Bessell (2006) argues, citing Hill (1999), top-down approaches to research, whereby adult experts set and control the agenda, are now being challenged by approaches based on genuine respect for children's views of their social world. Mason and Urquhart (2001) draw the distinction between 'Adultist', 'Children's Rights' and 'Children's Movements' models of participation by children in issues of child protection, child welfare and research with children. In the Adultist model, which assumes a clear dichotomization between adulthood and childhood, adults set the agenda, identify children's needs and use professional knowledge as the basis for their decision-making. Children are viewed as passive and developmentally incomplete 'becomings' whose views may be sought, but then filtered through adult eyes. Under the Children's Rights model, adults still largely set the agenda in that they take the initiative in extending rights to children. But children themselves are viewed as competent social actors, where competence is understood in terms their evolving capacities, which may be reflected broadly in terms of experience as well as age. This model recognizes the uneven balance of power between children and adults, suggesting the need for strategies that promote symmetry between them, for example through reflexivity on the part of both adults and children. Under the Children's Movements model, on the other hand, exemplified to some extent in the work of Biggeri, Libanora et al. (2006), children themselves seek to set and remain in control of the agenda and to use it to effect political change.

Although none of the studies reviewed here discusses research techniques in great detail, most would appear to fit in Mason and Urquhart's (2001) Children's Rights model. The studies mostly appear to adopt a dynamic approach to the research, where all children are asked about particular issues, but space is made in the research process to incorporate children's perspectives on a range of issues outside of the interview schedule. For example, Weinger (2000) structures her conversations with children around their thoughts on the sorts of children who would live in opulent, middle-class and poorer looking homes. Ridge (2002) adopts a flexible approach, allowing space for children to talk about a wide range of other issues relevant to them. Roker (1998) puts considerable stress on ensuring children are relaxed and comfortable with the research process, taking care for example that children do not feel intimidated with the interview setting. In her studies, Ridge (2002, 2007a) states that children were interviewed alone, with no other adult present. Alone among the nine studies, Sutton et al. (2007) state that they explicitly adopted a participatory approach, where children set the agenda or the research, and were involved at every stage of the process.

A considerable body of literature proposes different methods for overcoming the inequitable balance between researcher and child. Barker and Weller (2003) outline a number of different techniques for engaging children in the research process, including allowing children to take photographs disposable cameras are cheap and simple to use); create drawings (putting children in control); write diaries (a personal account of their lives, but perhaps a better technique for older children); and questionnaire interviews and focus groups. The different techniques have both advantages and disadvantages. The usefulness of photography as a technique, for example, depends on the child's interpretation of the photograph. Most of the nine studies reviewed use as their main method semi-structured interviews, while one (Sutton et al., 2007) uses a variety of play-based techniques, evolved with the participation of the children themselves. Another study (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003) also employs some alternative techniques, including drawing in conjunction with interviews, but does not appear to draw on results from these other techniques in the written research.

It is not clear, however, how much involvement the children in the nine studies had in the research process. Sutton et al. (2007) report that the research results were fed back to the children for comment, but it seems that other studies did not do likewise. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005) argues that a crucial part of involving children in research is engaging them through the whole research process, so that they participate in determining research priorities, and in evaluating the ongoing research, for example, through advisory groups that consider each stage of the process. This peer group evaluation as used by Sutton et al. (2007) is arguably useful, not only in terms of mobilizing children's interest in the research, but also in ensuring that it remains child-centred and relevant to children's most important concerns.

Ethics

While most research has (or should have) social implications, the process of primary research that involves gathering information from human subjects can also have a direct impact on the people involved. For this reason, most research institutions have developed strong procedures for ensuring that research follows ethical guidelines. Bessel (2006) discusses three important ethical factors that need to be considered in the design of child-centred social research. First, the researcher should take into account children's capacity to take decisions, and the research should be cast appropriately for the children at whom it is aimed. "The burden of responsibility is no longer on the child to demonstrate his or her capacity, but on the researcher to develop techniques that recognise and support children's capabilities" (Bessell, 2006, p. 45).

Second, consent presents many challenges. Children, particularly young children, cannot be assumed to give consent in the way that adults do. Citing Boyden and Ennew (1997), Bessell states that it is not consent or assent that should be sought from children, but informed dissent. For example, a rights-based approach would suggest that a child's failure to protest should not be interpreted as consent or assent. (Bessel, incidentally, is particularly scathing of the draft Statement on Ethical Conduct in this regard, since it appears to allow researchers to override children's objections to participating in the research in some circumstances, such as where parental consent is forthcoming). Third 'the best interests of the child' must be paramount. The singular 'child' precludes a utilitarian argument that the research will benefit all children as a way of justifying ignoring an individual child's wish not to participate. Rather, the researcher must at all times remain alert for signs of withdrawal of consent (including implicit withdrawal), and also for signs of risk of harm to the child resulting from participation in the research.

These are high standards, and it is difficult to discern from the published studies how they perform in these respects. Certainly, some of the studies allowed their research designs to take explicit account of children's capacities (van der Hoek, 2005). In all cases it is reported that parental consent was

sought, and it is usually added that children's consent was not assumed, but also actively sought. Some studies also showed particular concern about consent throughout the research process (Ridge, 2002; Roker, 1998). However, the implications of 'the best interests of the child' did not appear to be explicitly considered (or at least written about) in any of the studies. This may be because it is genuinely difficult to do so, since the researchers, the children themselves and their parents, may not fully understand what is in the child's best interests at a particular point in time. However, it is also the case that 'best interests' principles are intrinsic ethical research guidelines that are followed by many research organizations. They may therefore be implicit in the research process. One lesson from this review might be that researchers should be more openly reflexive about the processes of their research, particularly in relation to the child's consent and to how the researcher perceives the child's best interests.

The adoption of high ethical standards in research suggests a potentially high refusal rate, both from children and their parents. This also raises the potential problem of bias in achieved samples. One study of the nine reviewed in this paper notes the extreme difficulty experienced in developing a sufficiently large sample (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003). It is also notable that none of the samples appeared to include families with multiple problems. Such families may have been inadvertently excluded by the researchers, or themselves excluded from the samples.

6. Discussion: What do we know and what is missing?

This concluding section summarizes the findings of this review in four parts – what we have learned; policy conclusions; what we still need to know; and implications for future research with children.

What have we learned?

The key substantive issues arising from the papers covered by this review relate to social exclusion, agency and family. Economic disadvantage affects children in particular because of the social exclusion that often accompanies it. Some aspects of this exclusion can be addressed in policy terms, but some are arguably more difficult to deal with. Children are resourceful and they respond to their situations by interpreting their environments and choosing courses of action that can materially improve their personal and family situations, and help them cope with economic adversity.

Heterogeneity among children: Children are important actors in their own and their families' lives, and their perspectives should not be ignored. They are also, just like adults, heterogeneous individuals, and it is important that research reflects this.

School is one of the most important social settings for economically disadvantaged children, not least, as Ridge (2002) points out, because lack of money limits their opportunities to meet with friends outside of the school setting. Yet schools can also be a difficult place, not least because of bureaucracies that can add to the stigma and exclusion experienced by many poor children through, for example, subtly identifying those who receive help from the school because of their family's low income, or through inadequate provision for poorer children to participate in extra-curricular activities organized by the school.

Children exclude children. This is clearly one of the most important aspects of economic adversity from children's perspective. While children in some studies state that economic resources are not a key determinant of inclusion or exclusion, children in other studies report being bullied, teased and excluded in other ways because they do not have the 'right' clothes, for example. In some respects, schools can reduce bullying and teasing, but much of it may be outside of direct policy control. The studies of Weinger (2000), Backett-Milburn, Cunningham-Burley et al. (2003) and Sutton et al. (2007) suggest that differentiation on the basis of social class is ingrained in children from an early age and subtly reinforced by parents who may at the same time profess to want their children to make friends with other children from a broad range of backgrounds.

Families often protect children from the worst impacts of economic adversity and exclusion, and children in turn act to protect their families, through home production, economic support (for example, giving parents money earned through part-time work), not making economic demands, providing emotional support to parents who are under duress, and taking care of younger siblings, especially while parents are at work. Strong families promote resilience among children and young people. Children use their agency not only for their own immediate ends, but also to support their parents, to help them cope with the stresses of economic adversity and to help them in their return to the labour market. Ridge (2007a) documents the considerable lengths to which some children will go in order to offer both practical and emotional support to their mothers who are returning to the labour market after a period of non-employment.

Agency: children act for themselves in a number of ways. 'Getting by' and 'Getting out' agency is often seen by adults as acceptable forms of child agency. 'Getting (back) at', on the other hand, which may be characterized by negative or destructive behaviour, and which may be aimed at adult authority and restrictions, is likely to be seen as less acceptable. A relatively high proportion of young disadvantaged people may be involved in crimes (Roker, 1998), and a wide literature suggests that economic disadvantage can be associated with a range of destructive behaviours, including abuse of drugs (Spooner and Hetherington, 2004). In addition, children as agents can act to accept their situations without seeking to improve them or to get out. As Attree (2006) puts it, many poor children become resigned to living in poverty, while others interpret their situation in a more positive light (van der Hoek, 2005).

Policy conclusions

The research shows that much can and should be done to support children and their families who are experiencing economic adversity. Most of the studies call for an increase in public social transfers for families, to reduce the income gap between poor people and others in society. In addition, some of the studies make quite specific proposals, some, but not all, of which are relevant outside the context of a particular country.

Reduce stigmatizing school bureaucracy. Ridge (2002) makes some particularly strong points in this regard. First, school uniforms can act as an equalizing agent among children, thus protecting them against exclusion. But this is the case only if poor children can afford to buy the same uniform as other children, and they should be enabled to do this in a non-

stigmatizing way. Second, extra-curricular activities, now an important part of the school experience for many children, need to be made accessible to poorer children. In the United Kingdom, schools cannot legally charge parents for trips, but can only ask for a contribution. Many parents nonetheless regard the contribution as compulsory and any help offered by schools as very conditional. Third, schools should not make it easy to identify the children who receive in-kind support through the school, for example free meals, textbooks or other items.

Increase opportunities for social participation outside of school. Many children are excluded from meeting friends outside of school because they cannot afford to do many of the things that their friends are doing, or even the transportation costs associated with meeting their friends. Both Roker (1998) and Ridge (2002) point to the need for cheaper provision of leisure facilities for young people, and Ridge (2002) particularly emphasizes the benefits of a cheap public transportation policy for young people.

Address children's clothing needs. Ridge (2002) argues the need for special grants to help children and young people dress in a manner that allows them to fit in with their peers She sees this as especially significant.

Improve support for working parents. Ridge (2007a) argues that a key issue for children whose mothers return to work is the quality of care they are placed in, and a child-centred approach is needed to ensure high quality care for children of all ages.

What do we still need to know?

Agents of inclusion and exclusion. While much of the research touches on structural and other factors that serve to exclude children, there is perhaps space for a more explicit analysis of the agents and gatekeepers of children's inclusion or exclusion – who they are (a tentative list is offered in Section 3 of this paper), children's own awareness of them, who they act for or discriminate against, and policy levers that can reorient them or reduce their influence.

Children's exclusion by other children, a particular case of the 'agents of exclusion' problem, can perhaps best be characterized as a structural problem in society, which the studies reviewed here expose but do not adequately explain. Particularly useful in this regard would be examples of communities or societies where the exclusion of some children by the majority is minimized and an understanding of the factors that can help in this regard.

Ethnic and other minorities. A small body of sociological research examines how children from different ethnic groups respond to economic adversity, by themselves and in support of their families (see for example, Song, 1996). Given that many children from minority backgrounds may face double exclusion both because of their minority status and their poverty (and may, on the other hand, also benefit from strong ethnically based community support) it is important to further consider this issue.

Children of different ages. Although several studies reviewed here do analyse the differences between younger and older children, they appear to find remarkably little to report; and although some studies include children as young as five or six, little or nothing is said about this younger age group. Since the evolving capacities of children for reflexiveness and action are likely to be associated with age (and since children's rights to be consulted on matters affecting them increase as they mature), there is a need in future research to examine more closely how children of different ages perceive economic adversity.

Parents' transitions to work. More research is needed on how children influence their parents' decisions regarding employment. Ridge (2007a) shows how children support parents who have made the decision to return to work. However, it is also important to know what happens to parents who do not return to work, and the negotiation processes that may take place between these parents and their children regarding employment.

Multiple disadvantages. Most of the studies reviewed are concerned with children who experience economic adversity. It is likely that many of these children experience multiple problems. Wikeley et al. (2007) observe that children who experience economic disadvantage often have complicated and diffuse family lives that involve frequent visits to step-parents and care of siblings, sometimes leaving little free time for other activities. It is important to better understand the impact of multiple disadvantage on children.

Family functionality. Support between family members comes across as one of the strongest features of the studies reviewed, and this is clearly a huge positive for many children. But the studies present little evidence, from the children's own perspectives, of what happens when family relations are under strain. Irwin (2006) shows, for example, the enormous impact that domestic violence has on children. Arguably financial and other strains may exacerbate problems of family functioning. More general research may be needed on how children cope with economic adversity in the context of family strain, which may be manifested in neglect or abuse of children.

Pointers for future studies and policy

The studies reviewed here provide useful lessons for future studies into children's perspectives on economic diversity. These perhaps can be summed up as follows:

- Children's standpoints are important for understanding poverty as it affects children and their families, and the effectiveness of policies to support them. However, the challenges attached not only to obtaining children's views, but also to involving them as co-researchers in the entire research process, while at the same time paying attention to their rights and best interests, are considerable (although not insurmountable) and require care and reflexiveness on the part of the researcher.
- Children, like adults, are diverse and heterogeneous, and research that seeks to obtain their views needs to recognize this. Of importance in this respect are likely to be age, gender, family type, ethnicity, indigenous status, disability and location. Location matters because the regional/urban/rural experiences of low-income children are most likely to differ, particularly if many of their peers are also experiencing economic disadvantage or if only a few of their peers are in such circumstances.
- The family setting is central to our understanding of children's perspectives on their poverty. At the same time, the research needs to be sensitive to situations where families are divided or in distress, or where

parents and children perhaps do not display mutual support and common interests.

- Policies aimed at parents, as well as those aimed at children, impact on children in several ways – on their self-esteem, economic independence and well-being at school, for example. It is also possible that children's actions within the family may influence parents' responses to policies aimed at them (for example, relating to employment). Children's perspectives may offer important clues about parents' responses to policy initiatives, including the trend in many OECD countries to encourage or coerce all single and partnered parents into paid employment.
- Children's perspectives may also reveal stigmatizing and exclusionary aspects of community services that are not apparent to the service providers.
- School is an important setting for children, and it is possible that much could be done at the level of the school to improve the experiences and outcomes of children facing economic adversity. It is important, therefore, for part of the research to focus on the school setting, for example, the way schools categorize and potentially create divisions among children.
- Among children's greatest concerns is their exclusion by other children. Research that seeks examples of successful inclusionary initiatives in school or community settings, and which identifies children's resilience in the face of adversity (what Margot Prior 2002 calls 'solid kids') could provide pointers for policy-led responses to this particularly difficult issue.

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APPENDIX: Summaries of qualitative studies of children's perceptions of poverty and exclusion

Debi Roker (1998), *Worth More Than This: Young people growing up in poverty*, The Children's Society, London, 80 pages.

Aims: To describe young people's experience of growing up in family poverty, with a focus on young people living with their families who are dependent on income support payments, and to a lesser extent on young people in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Sample characteristics: This book reports on an in-depth survey of 60 young people aged 13-18 that was carried out in three parts of England and Scotland from 1996-1997. All lived in families that relied on benefits, and some were living in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Half were male and half female, and the majority were Caucasian, with just seven coming from an ethnic minority. One quarter were living with both natural parents, one quarter with one natural parent and a step-parent or partner, and half with lone parents.

Sample selection: "The young people were commissioned to take part in the study in a number of ways, including via advertisements in youth clubs, word of mouth, and via social workers and youth workers." (Roker, 1998, p. 6) Parental permission was obtained for respondents aged under 16 who wished to take part, and interviews were held wherever the respondent wanted – at home, in a youth club, or in the researcher's office. Each was paid £10. Confidentiality was assured, but the respondents were told that where they revealed abuse, the researcher might have to give this information to other professionals.

Interviews: The book does not give much detail on how interviews were conducted, but they appear to have been semi-structured, tape-recorded and transcribed, with each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews covered nine areas: (1) Current situation and family income (2) Personal finances (3) Friends and social lives (4) Family relationships (5) Physical health (6) School life and current activities (7) Crime and the law (8) Future prospects and aspirations and (9) Psychological aspects.

Main findings: The author identifies four main themes running through respondents' perspectives. First, a considerable number of young people (including those aged 13-14) in the study had significant family responsibilities, contributing pocket money or their own work earnings, making fewer demands on the family budget, caring for parents with health problems, and trying to prevent family violence and disagreements. Second, respondents tended to be comparatively satisfied with their lives, often comparing themselves with those who were worse off, or trying to find good things in their lives. Many also disputed use of the word 'poverty' to describe their situation. Third, limited funds impacted on their lives in a number of ways – not being able to do what other young people do and not being able to go on holidays. Limited funds were also the source of disagreements and arguments in the family – a problem exacerbated by often limited space in the home. Older children aged 16-18 in particular appeared to suffer from lack of money. Fourth, young people's families were very important to them, and close family and personal relationships made living on low incomes easier. However, this may also have made some young people more accepting of their poverty. Finally, young people's resilience in the face of economic hardship is noted by the author as an important cross-cutting finding.

Susan Weinger (2000), 'Economic Status: Middle class and poor children's views', *Children & Society*, 14 (2), pp. 135-146.

Aims: To explore low- and middle-income children's character associations regarding economic class and their corresponding friendship choices.

Sample characteristics: The article reports on a survey of 48 children, half middle class and half poor, ages 5-14, living in a Midwestern city in the United States. The low-income children were equally divided between Caucasian and African-American, while the middle-class children were nearly all Caucasian. Most of the middle-class children, but only a third of the poor children, lived in two-parent families.

Sample selection: Poor children were recruited through school-based health centres that had records on those eligible for support based on financial need. Middle-class children were recruited through letters from principals in an elementary school and a middle school. Parental consent was obtained in every case.

Interviews: Interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, during which children were shown photographs of different types of houses (big, opulent, typical middle-class suburban and poorer housing). Interviewees discussed who might live in these houses and how they might relate to these people. "Use of these photographs allowed children to express their ideas and feelings unencumbered by the usual parameters of academic conventions. Rather than asking them questions in which they were the focus, attention was placed on the imagined children/families living in these homes, permitting the interview subjects to be more open and expressive. In addition, the use of photographs was designed to avoid prejudice that might be elicited by direct questions about 'poor', 'middle-class', or 'rich' people. These words may have connotations that the actual reality of poor and middle-class living does not" (Weinger, 2000, p. 138).

Main findings: Poorer respondents appear better able to identify with the poor, while middle-class respondents appear more distant and less empathic. Middle-class children tended to describe poor children as 'nice', but had difficulty stating any more specific positive characteristics; many made negative stereotypical judgments. In other words, depersonalization of the poor appears to take place from a young age in middle-class children. The poor children, on the other hand, often disparaged other poor children, and were exceedingly positive towards the middle class, not only in terms of financial means, but also in terms attributing them positive character traits. When asked to select an imagined friend, both middle-class and poor children selected children of their own class. The study concludes by arguing that from a very early age children internalize the divisions that intense income inequalities cause, undermining common bonds, familiar connections and mutual understanding among people.

Tess Ridge (2002), *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a child's perspective*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 192 pages.

Aims: To develop an understanding of how the experience of poverty and social exclusion affects children in their social

and familial lives, and particularly children's own perceptions of their lives.

Sample characteristics: This book reports on an in-depth survey of 40 children aged 10-17, the majority of whom were aged 10-12, in south-west England in 1999. All were living in families who had been dependent on means-tested income support payments for at least six months. Half of the sample lived in towns and urban areas, and half lived in rural areas. Within each urban/rural group, half lived with just one parent and half lived with both parents. Half were boys and half were girls. All of the children were Caucasian. Interviews were also carried out with 17 of the parents in the families sampled, mainly as a means to reassure them about the interview process.

Sample selection: The sample was drawn from a list of income support recipient families provided by the United Kingdom Department of Social Security. Parental permission was secured and confidentiality assured.

Interviews: In-depth, unstructured one-on-one interviews were held with children and (in some cases) their parents. A flexible procedure was adopted to allow children to set the agenda, and this evolved over the fieldwork period. Some structured elements in interviews included discussions of pocket money and work. All interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed using thematic indexing.

Main findings: "Listening to the accounts of children and young people has revealed how the effects of poverty and disadvantage can permeate every aspect of their lives; from the material and the more quantifiable aspects of their needs, to the social and emotional requirements so important for children, both in childhood and beyond." (Ridge, 2002, p. 131). These effects included limited access to their own pocket money and other economic resources that in turn limited engagement with friends. Children often responded inventively to these effects, using strategies such as saving. Many also engaged in work, partly for the money but also for the autonomy it brought. However, they commonly also used their earnings to help out their families – this was particularly true of children in lone-parent families. Access to affordable transportation was also a difficult issue for the children, particularly those in large families and those living in rural areas.

Friendships were important to the children. Friends were seen as supportive and protective, particularly for boys, who felt that without their friends they would be vulnerable to bullying and exclusion. Shortages of money meant that friendships made at school were often difficult to maintain outside of the school environment. For many children, the value of school as a social setting was overshadowed by their experiences of bullying. For example, the fear of being bullied was often behind children's desires to dress in the 'right' clothes. Older children, in particular, were concerned about 'inappropriate dressing', and school 'dress down days' often caused children anxiety. Schools featured prominently as factors in children's exclusion, for example the inability to participate in school trips, as well as the inability to pay for books, school bags, etc., leading in turn to fears of poor academic performance.

Children also talked about how lack of resources affected their home environments, from the stigma of living in a poor neighbourhood, to their negotiations with parents over financial issues and their realistic assessments of their families' situations. Holidays were seen as important, and children were very aware that they could not expect to go on holiday with any regularity. Children worried about their parents' health and capacity to pay bills. Some children talked about the difference some money would make to their lives and security.

The study examines four mediating factors in understanding children's experience of poverty: family type, gender, age and location. Relatively few differences were noted between children in lone-parent and couple-parent families. There were also relatively few differences between boys and girls, although girls were identified as being more protective of their parents. More similarities than differences were also noted in terms of the age of the child. However, as children became older, they became more oppressed by their poverty and increasingly felt that they were missing out on social involvement. As regards location, rural children felt that their poverty was highly vulnerable and visible. They also noted more keenly the lack of transportation, restricting their opportunities to meet with friends.

Finally, the study identifies five key issues that arise from the research. First, that children and young people from low-income families make efforts to protect their parents, regulating their demands and excluding themselves from some social activities. Second, that children should be seen as active social agents who interpret and help shape their environments, constantly developing means of participation and social inclusion. Third, social space at school is important for low-income children, yet the study reveals structural and institutional exclusion at school, with poorer children not always able to enjoy the same experiences as their better off classmates. Fourth, friendships and social networks are important to children, yet poorer children often have great difficulty in maintaining adequate levels of social participation. And fifth, there is a need to develop a child-centred concept of social exclusion, which relates to the complex world that they live in, with its own social and economic demands and pressures.

Kathryn Backett-Milburn, Sarah Cunningham-Burley and John Davis (2003), 'Contrasting Lives, Contrasting Views? Understandings of health inequalities from children in differing social circumstances', *Social Science & Medicine* 57 (4), pp. 613-623.

Aims: To examine children's perspectives on the socio-economic and cultural processes that impact on inequality and health.

Sample characteristics: This article reports on an in-depth survey of 35 children aged 9-12 and their parents, in two districts of a Scottish city, one affluent and one poor. In addition, observational work was carried out on more than 100 children in local football and computer clubs. Thirty parents were also interviewed. The article does not report on any characteristics of the sample.

Sample selection: The researchers encountered extreme difficulty in recruiting families to this study and a number of methods were used, including letters from schools and general practitioners, followed by snowball sampling and numerous visits to an after-school computer club. The achieved sample was considerably smaller than had originally been envisaged.

Interviews: Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were carried out with the children, each several months apart. They included some child-appropriate techniques − vignettes, taking and commenting on photographs, drawing, writing poems or stories. But it appears that these were not used in the analysis. Interviews focused on children's experiential worlds, since these were seen as allowing children to more easily describe their perceptions and concerns (as opposed to using abstract terms such as 'health' or 'inequality'). Children were asked questions about their daily lives, interests, likes and dislikes, home and school, friendships, families and futures.

Main findings: The most interesting finding relates to differences between discourses and actual experiences or actions. The children appeared to downplay material inequalities (for example, in wearing fashionable clothing), suggesting that they made no difference, or that they only mattered if a person made them a concern. The inequalities that they did talk about related to interactions, often with adults. They talked about fairness and unfairness in social relations, with the implication that adults wielding 'unfair' power tended to bear down more heavily on the poorer children. Both the better off and the poorer parents and their children spoke about the importance the children mixing with a wide range of children from different social backgrounds (the 'liberal discourse'). Their actions, however, tended to separate poorer from richer children, so in practice this mixing did not happen often. Poorer areas were often 'off-bounds' to richer children. Poorer children were aware of developing resilience against deprivation by making sense of it and accepting it.

Janet Taylor and Alex Fraser (2003), *Eleven Plus: Life chances and family income*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, Australia (230 pages).

Janet Taylor and Lucy Nelms (2006), 'School Engagement and Life Chances: 15 year olds in transition - Life Chances Study Stage 7', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, Australia.

Aims: These are the seventh and eighth books in a series reporting the findings of the Life Chances Study, undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to explore the long-term impact of family income and other factors on children. This book reports on interviews with children from some of the families, the first time that children were interviewed as part of the study.

Sample characteristics: Parents and children from about 40-50 families were interviewed in Waves 6 and 7 as part of this study, all of them aged 11-12 at Wave 6, and 15-16 at Wave 7, and most living in inner Melbourne. The families were selected by income group and were mostly low income, some previously low income but now better off, and some described as 'advantaged'. A number of the families were from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Sample selection: The Life Chances study has followed 167 children born in inner Melbourne in 1990. The families where parents and children were interviewed at Waves 6 and 7 included a high proportion of families that had been on low income in the first six years of the study, plus 10 families identified as the 'most advantaged' when the child was six months of age.

Interviews: As part of the wider study, at each wave all families were asked to complete a primary carer's questionnaire, a father's questionnaire, and a child's 'about myself' questionnaire. In addition, teachers were interviewed about children's school performance. Among the selected families, face-to-face (and some telephone) interviews were carried out with parents and their children in the respective age groups. Interviews with parents lasted about 30 minutes, and interviews with children about 20 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. It is not clear whether the interviews were structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

Main findings: In general, children were quite positive about their experiences growing up. Family was very important to children, and they enjoyed family activities, such as holidays, Christmas and eating meals together. Some children reported getting distressed when their parents fought, or not seeing their parents much because they worked such long hours, or having to deal with parents' varying moods after a long working day. On the other hand, children did recognize the importance of work for maintaining the family's living standards. A quarter of low-income children reported that their parents argued about money.

School was one important setting where clear differences between low-income and other children emerged. Low-income children tended to miss out on school activities because of the cost, and were less likely to have computers at home. 'Voluntary' costs associated with school were an important issue for parents, and both parents and children worried about not being able to afford a proper school uniform. Several parents and children from non-English-speaking backgrounds reported bullying and occasionally racist behaviour by teachers. Many children in this group also felt that their English was 'not good enough'.

On some issues, this study makes an explicit comparison between the perspectives of parents and children. For example, while parents tended to think children were better off after a marital separation, children expressed distress or sadness about lack of contact with the absent parent.

Uniquely in this study, children were asked directly about what families need from government. Many of the low-income children replied that their families needed greater levels of income support, while others proposed reviews of the tax system or help for parents to find work.

Tamara van der Hoek (2005), 'Through Children's Eyes: An initial study of children's personal experiences and coping strategies growing up poor in an affluent Netherlands', *Innocenti Working Paper* No. 2005-06, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence (42 pages).

Aims: To promote children's visibility and voices in the field of research on child poverty in rich countries, with a particular focus on the strategies children employ to cope with poverty.

Sample characteristics: This paper reports on a survey of 65 families from different ethnic backgrounds in some small and large cities in the Netherlands, all of whom were living on incomes totalling less than 105 per cent of the Dutch minimum benefit level, with children in the family aged between 6 and 16. In total, 63 children and 65 parents were interviewed (the study does not indicate when they were interviewed). Children were fairly equally divided by age and gender. A conscious effort was made to recruit families from

ethnic minorities: 37 of the 63 children were native Dutch, and 26 were migrant children, from the Antilles, Cape Verde, Morocco and Suriname. Most of the families were headed by a lone parent, and most survived on social security payments.

Sample selection: The paper is vague on how the sample was selected, but it appears that intermediaries such as social workers were approached.

Interviews: Different questionnaires were used, tailored to the ages of the children interviewed. Interviews differed in length depending on the child's age, and ranged from 20 minutes for 6- to 9-year-olds to 45 minutes for 12- to 16-year-olds. Interviews were semi-structured, but commenced with a series of structured questions about what children did in their free time. Children were never directly asked about their poverty, but were asked, for example, if their parents ever talked to them about money. Interviews with parents were also semi-structured.

Main findings: The research shows that poverty affects children in a number of ways (socially, materially and emotionally), and that children develop their own solutions to deal with it. Agency is emphasized. However, poor children are not equally affected by poverty and they should not be considered a homogeneous group. Even though all families were living at or below the minimum subsistence level, the level of discretionary expenditure available varied, for example, with some families weighed down by debts, and others relatively debt free. The extent of parents' creativity, or the contributions of an ex-partner, could also make a difference to children's experience of poverty. There was considerable variation in the extent to which parents shared their financial worries with their children, and this seemed to be related to access to a larger emotional support network. Those parents with a large support network seemed less likely to discuss financial worries with their children. Younger children, too, were less likely to be burdened by their parents, while parents shared their worries with all the 15- to 16-year-olds in the sample.

The research identifies four dominant coping strategies employed by children: problem-solving and positive reappraisal; problem avoidance and resignation; role reversal – children protecting their parents; and emotional distress, for example, shame or anger. It is noted that children vary their coping strategies across situations, and while many felt they had some control over their situations through the ability to save or earn money part-time, they also coped through avoidance, keeping their wishes to themselves, or not burdening their parents, in particular by avoiding money-related discussions with them. The author argues that avoidance-type coping carries greater risks for a child's mental health.

Tess Ridge (2007), 'It's a Family Affair: Low-income children's perspectives on maternal work', ***Journal of Social Policy*** **36 (3), July 2007, pp. 399-416.**

Aims: To explore the perspectives of low-income children and their mothers in lone-parent families on their lives before and after the mothers' return to work, in particular the difference that mothers' employment has made to their lives, mediating factors and experiences, and how they would feel if their mothers left the labour market.

Sample characteristics: Fifty mothers and 61 children (aged 8 to 14) were interviewed for this study in 2004 and 2005. Two interviews were carried out, but this article only reports on the first interview with the 61 children. The mothers had all left income support payments in order to enter low-paid employment. The sample was evenly divided between boys and girls. One tenth came from ethnic minority backgrounds, and a further one tenth had dual heritage. Interviews were carried out in several urban and rural regions in England. The mothers of 11 children had left employment by the time of the interviews.

Sample selection: The sample was drawn from Inland Revenue records of tax credit recipients.

Interviews: Parental consent was obtained, but children were interviewed without their mothers present. Interviews, which lasted about 45 minutes, were taped and transcribed.

Main findings: Although some children whose mothers remained in employment missed spending time with their mothers, most children noted an improvement in their lives since their mothers had taken up work. By contrast, the 11 children whose mothers had since left employment did not show increased signs of well-being, and expressed renewed fears about social exclusion and difference. Children with mothers in employment benefited financially, and their social lives improved as a result of increased expenditure on home and school activities. However, this improvement was from a low base, and participation in many activities therefore remained sporadic.

As a result of the mother's return to work, older children increasingly looked after themselves or their younger siblings. Some younger children spent time alone waiting for mothers to return from work. Most, but not all of the children noted increased material well-being, but many missed the extensive contact they previously had with their mothers, and some had negative views of after-school and other forms of childcare that they now had to attend. Children also tended to worry more about their mothers' well-being – health, fatigue and the stresses of combining work with raising children. Children tended to moderate demands on their parents, both financially and emotionally, and often willingly assumed extra responsibilities in the home in order to relieve stress on their mothers, even though it interfered with their own social lives.

Liz Sutton, et al. (2007), ***A Child's-Eye View of Social Difference*****, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York (42 pages).**

Aims: To explore children's perceptions of social difference as stratified in terms of relative poverty and affluence, and to understand how children view poverty, social exclusion and social inequality with a view to informing public opinion and government policy.

Sample characteristics and selection: Nineteen poorer children were recruited from a youth centre for children living on a particular housing estate. They were recruited in four groups based on age (8-10 and 11-13) and gender. Each subgroup participated in five research sessions over one year. Twenty-three middle-class children were recruited from a private school, divided into four groups similar to the poorer children, and visited four times over the year.

Interviews: A participatory approach was adopted for this research, where the researchers encouraged the children to

become co-researchers and thus involved in all aspects of the project, from design to dissemination. "Overall, it avoided imposing an adult-centred research agenda but instead enabled the children to set the agenda and steer the research themselves." (p. 4). The research itself did not involve interviews. Instead, a range of methods, including drawing, mapping, writing, games and role play, were used. Both the activities and the materials they produced were treated as data for the research, but equally important were the discussions that arose from the activities, which were recorded and transcribed.

Main findings: Children did not see themselves as 'rich' or 'poor', but tended to claim the middle ground, and stressed the importance of not being different. Poverty was equated with Africa, or with homeless beggars. However, social differences were keenly perceived, and children spoke of other children from different social backgrounds in disparaging or antagonistic terms. Poorer and richer children had very different attitudes towards education, with richer children expressing positive attitudes and reporting lots of involvement in after-school activities, and poorer children expressing negative attitudes and little extra-curricular involvement. Free time play for richer children centred on clubs and organized activities, but for poorer children centred on street play.

The authors make a number of policy-relevant findings. Poorer children resented the closure of open spaces for building, highlighting the need for open spaces and not just playgrounds for children to play in. The quality of parenting is an important policy issue, and street play is often associated with lack of parental control and anti-social behaviour. However, poorer children emphasized the restrictions and limits placed on their street play by parents, suggesting that, in itself, street play is not associated with lack of parental control. Opportunities and subsidies for participation in organized activities out of school are useful, but withdrawal of these opportunities from individual children for anti-social behaviour may result in victimization of children who engage in street play most, since they are highly visible.

Felicity Wikeley et al. (2007), *Educational Relationships Outside School: Why access is important*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York (60 pages).

Aims: To examine educational relationships in out-of-school activities and how they impact on young people's learning. The research is premised on the view that positive relationships between teachers and students will foster improved learning outcomes. But positive relationships with teachers require a degree of interpersonal skills on the part of students. This study examines the opportunities that children have for developing interpersonal skills with adults outside of the school setting.

Sample characteristics: The sample comprised 25 young people attending schools (2 primary, 3 secondary; all in south-west England) and in receipt of free school meals, and 30 young people attending the same schools who were not in receipt of free school meals. Of the 55 interviewed, 26 were aged 9 and 29 were aged 14.

Sample selection: Children were accessed through schools, with permission letters sent to parents ahead of the commencement of the research.

Interviews: Personal semi-structured interviews were conducted, prefaced with respondents drawing a visual map of activities they participate in during the week. This map formed the basis for the interview on out-of-school activities.

Main findings: Young people's out-of-school activities were categorized into two types: first, spontaneous activities with friends and family members; and second, organized groups run by adults and focused on a specific activity. The research focused mainly on the second type of activity, and noted two aspects in particular – how children made genuine contributions to these activities through the responsibilities they undertook; and second, how children were able to articulate what they had learned with specialized vocabulary and skills, and the opportunity to have these assessed through local and national assessments. It was also apparent that children who engaged in these activities accepted the strict discipline that was usually imposed by leaders and coaches.

Relationships with adults engaged in supervising these activities were generally perceived as different to relationships with teachers and involved less hierarchy and a more participatory approach. In contrast, relationships with teachers were seen as "part of the system rather than part of the activity itself." Out-of-school activities appeared to have an impact on learning, where children began to see themselves as active participants (much as they did in out-of-school activities), with a more equal interaction with teachers. The biggest difference between children from poorer and middle-class backgrounds was less in the impact of out-of-school activities on in-school learning, than in opportunities for participating in out-of-school activities. Poorer children engaged in fewer activities for a number of overlapping reasons: perceptions about lack of availability of organized activities in their neighbourhoods; lack of availability of transportation; costs; and complexity of family arrangements, which meant that more free time was spent, for example, visiting a biological parent.

Policy conclusions emphasize the importance of out-of-school activities as providing children with the skills to increase learning in the school setting. However, the authors also propose that the more equal adult-child relationships inherent in out-of-school activities could perhaps be replicated in the school, with the teacher seeing his/her position as co-learner rather than as holder of knowledge.