

New research highlights devastating impact of poverty on children's mental health

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New University of Liverpool research - published today in *The Lancet Public Health*—shows that children who move into poverty are more likely to suffer from social, emotional and behavioural problems than children who remain out of poverty.

The UK Government has recently questioned whether the relative measure of income poverty used in this research (a household income that is less than 60% of the national average) is a good indicator of [children's](#) life chances. The Government has argued that it is better to increase the number of parents who are employed, than use the social security system to prevent children moving into poverty.

This research challenges this view finding that moving into poverty adversely affected children's and mothers' mental health even if there was no change in the mother's employment status.

Researchers from the University's Department of Public Health and Policy explored the impact that

moving into poverty had on the mental health of children and their mothers, using a nationally representative sample of children born in 2000 and followed up until 2012 (UK Millennium Cohort Study).

The researchers identified 6063 families who were not in poverty and had no mental [health problems](#) when their child was 3 years old. They tracked these families and compared the mental health of those that moved into poverty to those that remained out of poverty by the time their child was 11 years old.

Fourteen percent (844) of these 6063 families moved into poverty over this period. The children that moved into poverty were 40% more likely to develop social, emotional or [behavioural problems](#), compared to those that remained out of poverty. The mothers who moved into poverty were also 44% more likely to develop mental health problems and this partially explained the negative effect that poverty had on children's mental health.

Dr Sophie Wickham, Wellcome Trust Research Fellow at the University's Department of Public Health and Policy, said: "Our study shows that moving into poverty damages children's mental health. Child mental health in the UK is poor, with roughly one in eight children reporting [mental health problems](#), and this is partly because Child poverty is higher in the UK than in other European countries.

"Our findings reinforce the need to monitor income-based measures of [child poverty](#) to track the effect that government's policies are having on children's lives. In order to improve mental health in the UK it is essential that children are protected from the toxic effects of growing up in poverty"

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive of Child poverty Action Group, said: "This comprehensive study shows how children's [mental health](#) is

compromised by poverty. It tells us loud and clear that inadequate family income damages children's life chances - and having a working parent doesn't stop that damage from happening.

"Working poverty is still poverty. With one in four children in poverty in the UK, and projections that numbers may rise by half by 2020, that should ring alarms. The well-being of our next generation is at stake: surely that is a compelling reason for reinstating poverty-reduction targets that, along with most of the Child Poverty Act, were scrapped last year. Without targets to track progress on eradicating [poverty](#), how can we know if we're improving or further jeopardising our children's well-being?"

More information: 'The effect of a transition into poverty on child and maternal mental health: a longitudinal analysis of the UK Millennium Cohort Study' [DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667\(17\)30011-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(17)30011-7) , [www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ... rticle/PIIS2468-2667](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan/article/PIIS2468-2667)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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