

“There are not many buses that go up there anyway, and if there are buses, I think it is just between 2 o’clock and 4 o’clock, I think, up to [village]. So then the rest of the day you have either got to walk or go by car.”

Young people in remote and rural areas reported a more limited choice of local services and were then more likely to need to travel further afield to access certain services. Mobility (both in terms of access to a car and the costs and frequency of public transport) then became a key issue. Young people in these locations voiced concerns about the local availability of some relevant health services, as well as limited retail services that were more expensive than in urban areas.

The interaction between ‘income poverty’ and ‘poverty of place’ has a significant impact on children’s service use.

2.6 WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS?

Service providers shared children’s views in several key areas:

- **Young people need services from staff they can trust** - who treat them with respect and where confidentiality is respected.
- **Informal spaces** are important - as are flexible delivery times.
- **Cost, parental consent, the perceived hostility of other young people and transport** (especially in rural areas) were also seen as barriers.

Service providers were also concerned about **young people’s lack of confidence** forming a barrier to service use, especially regarding young people from lower income homes who may miss out as it can be difficult to find out about and use services on their own.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE MAIN THEMES TO EMERGE FROM THE RESEARCH ARE:

- **Barriers are cumulative** - children from lower income households confront multiple barriers which combine to limit or prevent access to services.
- **Missed opportunities have a knock-on effect** - reducing opportunities to develop friendships or learn new skills, with longer term negative consequences.
- **‘Transformative’ services are essential** – enabling young people from lower income households to develop life changing skills and social networks.
- **Income poverty combines with poverty of place** - impacting negatively on children’s experiences of service use.
- **Financial awareness is higher amongst children from lower income households** - this can lead to children withholding requests to participate or not informing their parents about services with cost implications.

KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- **School and statutory services are influential** – this is especially the case for children from lower income households who may not be accessing services any other way.

Recommendation: Raise awareness of this vital role amongst schools, school nurses and other associated professionals. Consider how schools can be supported to make other services more accessible for children from lower income households.

- **Alternatives to formal services are needed** - ‘informal’ spaces such as parks are particularly important for children from lower income households.

Recommendation: Encourage local authorities and other public agencies to involve young people in the process of planning high quality, informal spaces. Invest in developing informal spaces and making them safer for children and young people.

- **Affordability extends beyond entrance or membership fees** - Travel, equipment and refreshment costs all add to the burden - especially for young people from lower income households.

Recommendation: Provide more help for lower income children with indirect costs associated with accessing services.

- **Transport access affects service access** - service proximity is a key factor associated with accessibility. Young people in households that lack access to private transport are particularly constrained in relation to their mobility and, subsequently, their access to services. The lack of good public transport links can further constrain already limited mobility.

Recommendation: Create more facilities within walking distance and more affordable public transport. Provide alternatives to public transport where it is not available.

- **Safety is a particular issue in deprived urban areas** - disproportionately impacting children from lower income households who fear territorial based peer aggression, anti-social behaviour related to drug and alcohol abuse and other physical danger.

Recommendation: Develop ways of improving neighbourhood safety and security, (for example, through providing more transport for young people; initiating and maintaining preventative measures at a neighbourhood level e.g. community wardens)

- **Those growing up in deprived, typically urban, areas had the poorest access to both formal services and informal spaces.**

Recommendation: Make available a wide range of long term services in deprived neighbourhoods addressing direct and indirect costs, and ensuring safe participation.

- **Information is too parent-focused** - lack of knowledge is a barrier for many children.

Recommendation: Target information towards children and parents from lower-income households - and in a wider range of formats.

- **Lack of self-confidence** - a particular issue for children from lower income households who often need to access leisure services more independently than their more affluent counterparts.

Recommendation: Target confidence-building initiatives at lower income groups.

- **Material capacity of parents to support access to services varies** - parents provide support across the affluence spectrum, though their material capacity to do so varies.

Recommendation: Develop improved understanding of the way friends and family provide significant material support in order to put in place mechanisms to facilitate this.

4. WHY WE SHOULD LISTEN TO CHILDREN MORE

The informed and articulate views of young people such as those who participated in the *Serving Children* study are clearly very illuminating. Indeed, for many it was their first experience of being ‘listened to’ in this way.

In particular, the research suggests the need for involving children further in decision-making relating to neighbourhood spaces. Young people have very clear ideas about what they want and what they think would improve spaces. It is especially important that young people from lower income households are involved in these processes.

This principle could usefully be adopted by all those involved in developing Children’s Services Plans in every local authority. This must happen if we are to try and remove some of the many ‘life shaping’ barriers to service access faced by children living in poverty.

SERVING CHILDREN?

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES OF SERVICES

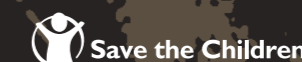
A SUMMARY VERSION OF THE SERVING CHILDREN? REPORT

BY FIONA WAGER, NICK BAILEY, ROSIE DAY, DOUGLAS HAMILTON, MALCOLM HILL AND CAROLINE KING

Glasgow Centre for the Child and Society, (Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde), Save the Children (Scotland) and Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice (University of Glasgow)
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VIEW AND DOWNLOAD THE FULL SERVING CHILDREN? REPORT AT www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland
To find out more about how poverty affects young people in the UK visit www.savethechildren.org.uk/endchildpoverty



1. BACKGROUND

1.1 WHAT IS THE SERVING CHILDREN REPORT - AND WHAT BROUGHT IT ABOUT?

It is generally recognised that society has a special responsibility towards children, complementing their parents' role. At the same time, the issue of social exclusion continues to challenge governments and other agencies as they attempt to understand and tackle its effects on health, education, crime, regeneration and many other areas.

A great deal of valuable statistical work has already been done on childhood poverty in the UK and elsewhere. What has not been considered in depth up to now are children's perceptions of their own experiences of poverty, explored via a 'qualitative' (focusing on subjective experiences) rather than a 'quantitative' (statistical) angle.

The *Serving Children?* study was designed to address this knowledge gap by exploring children's views on access to and use of services specifically, and how poverty shapes their experiences. The terms 'children' and 'young people' are used interchangeably throughout.

1.2 HOW DOES THE STUDY DEFINE 'SERVICES'?

'Services' are defined in this study as any means, public or private, of taking part in activities (e.g. a swimming pool, youth club or shop) or accessing help and support (e.g. a health clinic).

Even though the term 'services' is not necessarily one children might ordinarily use in these contexts, the above concepts were well understood by the young people involved.

1.3 WHAT WERE THE STUDY'S SPECIFIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES?

- To explore the impact of poverty on children's perceptions of, access to and use of services by i) comparing views from children living in low-income and more affluent households and ii) examining the impact of place of residence encompassing urban and rural environments
- To examine perceptions of service accessibility and quality
- To examine the impact of knowledge and understanding of services on access and use
- To explore how children and young people negotiate service access
- To identify which adults - if any - mediate young people's access to and use of services

1.4 WHEN, WHERE AND HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Funded by the Big Lottery from late 2004, staff from the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde and from Save the Children conducted fieldwork between Spring 2005 and Autumn 2006. The final report was published in May 2007.

Involving its subjects closely in the study's design - in keeping with its theme of children's participation - the project focused on 56 young people in a 'middle childhood' age range from 10 to 14 years. Participants were recruited from lower and higher income households covering urban and rural locations throughout Scotland.

Given the similarities of service provision and the spectrum of social groupings in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, it is hoped that the findings are of wider relevance.

Research with children took place in two stages. Initial focus groups familiarised the children with the study and explored their understanding and views of services in general; individual interviews were then conducted to which young people could take along photographs they had taken of services used over a week, to stimulate discussion.

Focus groups identified three service areas for in-depth exploration: health, leisure and retail.

Up to six service providers in each case study area were also interviewed.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 WHAT IS THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF SERVICES IN CHILDREN'S LIVES?

Perceived **benefits** included mainly short-term opportunities to participate in activities - 'a place to go' to meet existing friends and make new ones. Services were also seen as offering access to a wide range of help and support, occasionally also including the development of skills and expertise.

Young people thought that a **quality** service should be easily accessible in terms of opening hours, location and affordability. It should also have child-friendly, trustworthy staff, a welcoming environment and offer continuity - especially important for 'one-to-one' services such as health.

Young people's **priorities** for service improvement included more access to cheaper services (particularly leisure-related) within walking distance; better local parks; more child-focused health services (e.g. more dedicated waiting areas and school nurses); more respectful treatment of children by staff, especially in retail services; less vandalism and litter; and improved service information, better targeted at young people and parents.

Informal spaces were of particular importance to children from lower income households, not least because they tended to spend less time engaged in organised activities than their more affluent peers.

2.2 HOW DOES ADULT AND PEER MEDIATION IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO AND USE OF SERVICES?

Parents were seen as the key adult mediators of information and access for most participants across age and affluence groupings. Levels of parental mediation nevertheless varied considerably amongst participants and by type of service. Health was strongly mediated by parents (particularly mothers) across all age groups, while children from lower income households tended to access leisure and some retail services more independently than their more affluent peers. Some children nevertheless saw themselves constrained in accessing services as they did not have an adult to support them.

Family members, agencies and professionals also facilitated service access, with **schools** emerging as especially important in pointing children towards external universal and specialist services. Other agencies, such as **youth clubs**, also facilitated access, frequently to health services. These agencies were especially important for some young people from lower income households and could be regarded as 'transformative' in that they created opportunities that the young people otherwise lacked.

Peers also played an important role accompanying and jointly accessing services with children. This was increasingly the case as children grew older and gained greater independence. Peers could also introduce friends to services with which they were already involved.

This role was especially important for young people who lacked a strong parent or other adult mediator in their life, or who had limited resources via their family to access services - a particular concern for less affluent children.

“...well my Mum doesn't even... she can't really afford that much, that is why we don't go to the pictures a lot”

“Not many children are going swimming because their mum's can't afford to give them £1 every time - and just give them money to get something to eat”

“Sometimes, it's bad service and sometimes they don't serve you till last and you stand in a queue and they serve the other person before you.”

“It would be easier for [children] if there weren't a lot of bad people going about, because sometimes you can't go out.”

2.3 HOW IMPORTANT ARE MATERIAL RESOURCES?

Service affordability was one of the most significant influences, especially for children from lower income households. Delayed consumption and sporadic/erratic leisure service use associated with poverty were particularly evident. Health service affordability was rarely mentioned as a concern irrespective of socio-economic group.

Children highlighted the importance of services that are free at point of delivery. Some children from lower income households indicated that they rarely used services otherwise.

Less affluent children appeared to be more aware of service costs and their implications than more affluent young people.

Public transport costs formed a barrier for children from lower income families, particularly when entry costs were also taken into account.

The availability of space in **children's own homes** influenced desires or needs for services.

Material resources accessed via other family members, peers and, to a lesser extent, local community networks, play an important role in assisting children to access services.

2.4 WHAT OTHER FACTORS IMPACT SERVICE INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION?

- **Children's age** – for example through imposed age restrictions and young people's perceptions of whether a service was 'age appropriate'.
- **Gender** - but only in so far as it affected preferred activities and peer associations.
- **Limited or lack of provision** - especially in the context of leisure facilities study-wide, but particularly relating to outdoor play areas in deprived urban environments.
- **Service location** - a crucial issue that relates to young people's ability to travel.
- **Service environment and design** – factors that also influence perceptions of accessibility and use.
- **Staff attitudes towards young people** - a clear influence on perceptions and use.
- **Quality and availability of information** - much of currently available information is seen as parent rather than child-focused.
- **Time of day and year** – factors affecting willingness and ability to use services, especially those outdoors.
- **Mobility** - shaping use locally and further afield.
- **Safety concerns** - a major influence, especially for children in deprived urban neighbourhoods.

Barriers impacted on young people cumulatively and in combination - disproportionately so in the case of those from lower income households.

2.5 HOW IMPORTANT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT?

This emerged as an important influence on children's perceptions of local services.

Young people in relatively more deprived areas tended to view their local services less favourably than those elsewhere. They were also more concerned about safety – for example the threat of gangs and other territorially motivated groups. Retail and leisure services were also rated more negatively in more deprived areas - in terms of environment, quality and limited choice. Health services, however, were perceived similarly across more and less deprived areas.

Young people from more affluent neighbourhoods on the other hand were more positive about local services than children in more deprived areas.