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Survey of Poverty: University of Essex & London School of Economics  
REPORT for the ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING on 2 October 1967

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Progress Report

Since the last meeting of the Advisory Committee, reports on the four pilot studies have been written and are circulated to the Committee. In some cases there are one or two chapters on specialised aspects which have still to be completed.

The Trust has given authority for the survey aiming at 3000 completed interviews to go ahead. A note on the method of drawing the sample - recommended by Professors Stuart and Durbin - was included in the last report to the Advisory Committee. A total of 51 sample constituencies has been selected and the process of selecting the areas for interview within these constituencies is well advanced. Arrangements are being made to secure that the final sample is drawn from lists which are as up to date as possible. Interviewers have so far been selected and provisionally appointed for three-quarters of the constituencies. A questionnaire has been drafted and is being piloted. The survey is planned to go into the field before the end of the year. Mr John Veit Wilson left us at the end of August 1967. An assistant for Miss Benson, Mrs Brown, took up a part-time appointment from early September.

At the last meeting Miss Rowntree said that the Trustees would like to have a brief statement on (i) what had been achieved so far; (ii) how far the objects of the project had changed; (iii) what degree of simplification would be required if the Trustees were unable to pay for the larger sample. These draft statements follow as the next three sections of this report.

### Achievements to date

Four separate studies have been completed of random samples of

- (i) 92 unemployed men and their families on Tyneside;
- (ii) 86 families with five or more dependent children in London;
- (iii) 116 fatherless families in Northborough and Seaton;
- (iv) 65 families with chronic sick and disabled heads in Essex.

Each study was conducted by a separate research worker and based on interviews averaging 2 to 4 hours per family. These studies have a value in their own right as no intensive studies of random families with these characteristics have been undertaken since the war. They have also given leads on what types of question can and should be explored in a national survey when the type of question asked has necessarily to be more narrowly defined. Among the more interesting lessons from these studies are the following.

Disability of various kinds is a common characteristic of the long term unemployed. It is unhelpful to try and make a sharp distinction between short term and long term unemployment. Some 'short-term' unemployed experience recurring unemployment. Technological change does appear to be a considerable cause of chronic and irregular unemployment. Present training programmes and job placement services are not adequate to prevent this unemployment. The burdens of unemployment fall most heavily on the unskilled who have the least adequate resources to bear this brunt. There appear to be far too few opportunities, through job placement and training or re-training, for men in middle-age and for men with partial handicaps. When skilled they sometimes can only find an unskilled job with luck. When unskilled they often find themselves chronically unemployed or prematurely retired.

That chronic sickness and disability cause considerable drops in income has long been recognised. The pilot showed that as the onset of many conditions was gradual the largest drop in income might occur long before the men finally abandoned work. Some of those in work were

as disabled as others out of work. While chronic sickness gave men priority in obtaining a council house they did not obtain housing which was suited to their disability. The importance of suitable housing for the disabled was shown by the high proportion of owner-occupied disabled who had moved to suitable housing. Many of the sick were able to work and wanted to work but suitable work was not available for them.

The economic situation of fatherless families differed greatly among the sub-groups - widowed, divorced, separated and unmarried. The separated and divorced lacked the kind of provisions the government had made for the widowed. Only one quarter of the maintenance or alimony to which these women were entitled was actually received. Several women had a much less secure income and sometimes lower income before their marriage broke up than afterwards. The circumstances of these families showed the contrast between total and partial poverty. Some with a house, furniture and appliances, had the same income as others who had virtually no stock of personal possessions.

There is a substantial problem of poor families not receiving the various means tested benefits to which they are entitled. Large families have very severe housing problems and these are by no means always solved by being given a council house because many of the latter are unsuited to or too small for their needs.

### The Objects of the Project

The aim of the study as originally conceived in 1964 was to collect information about living standards from a national sample of 5000 households and further information from certain minorities by re-visiting small sub-samples. Two general points were made in the original application: that new definitions and measures of need would have to be explored and that the circumstances and problems of the poor could only be properly explained in relation to the circumstances of the rest of society. Special information about the poor would have to be set against general information about those who were living in more prosperous conditions.

These broad objectives of studying poverty and its incidence remain unchanged, but our pilot work has convinced us that the means of reaching them need to be a little different from those originally anticipated. We have come to realise that the poor are far less homogeneous even than had been supposed hitherto and this fact had implications both for measuring the incidence of poverty and explaining how poverty arises. Fatherless families, large families dependent on low earnings, families with a disabled adult and old people living alone or in pairs have problems which are very different/ as well as problems which are very similar to each other. How then do we determine their needs? In judging whether their resources allow them to buy an adequate share of the food and other items commonly consumed and participate in activities and customs commonly practised by 'ordinary' families, we have to compare them not only with families of a man, wife and two or three young children but with families of the same type but different income. This naturally affects the design of the study. The mother with a husband in irregular work may be unable to adapt as easily to a carefully planned budget which just attains standards of minimal adequacy for her children as the mother who is widowed or divorced, even when the former's income is on average substantially larger. To decide just where to draw the poverty line for some types of family therefore depends on looking at other families in similar circumstances, but with a higher income.

The second conclusion we drew from our pilot work was that if the true dimensions of poverty are to be measured distinction must be drawn between short-term or occasional and chronic poverty, whether due to some combination of family size, rent and low earnings or to absence of earnings (fatherlessness, unemployment, sickness or disability) or to irregular employment; and also between total and partial poverty. Developments in the modern economy, together with developments in the welfare state, have ensured that the vicissitudes experienced by some sections of the population are temporary - though of course they are nonetheless real for being temporary. Again, these same developments

have ensured that the lives of the chronically poor can sometimes be relieved in one or two crucial respects. A family with a very low income may be found living in a modern council house, the father working in good factory conditions and the children of the family attending a newly-built school. The increasing complexity of modern society obliges us to obtain information about living and occupational facilities and social services as well as weekly income.

In the national survey we therefore wish

- (i) to make sure that we are able to get information for a relatively 'rare' types of sufficient number of households, thus adding to the number of households to be included in the survey; and
- (ii) to widen the search for information from the national sample of households to include rather more about housing, the social services and working conditions than we had originally intended.

Thirdly - and this is new in emphasis - we would like to devote greater effort than originally intended to studying the characteristics of the main sub-groups of the population vulnerable to poverty to find

- (a) the extent and degree of poverty in the various groups;
- (b) how effective are the services which aim at helping the poor;
- (c) what changes in services might help to prevent certain types of poverty now and in the future - particularly longer term poverty. Thus we are interested in which occupations are low paid, in the effectiveness of job placement, ~~family planning~~, training and re-training services, in savings, fringe benefits and private insurance, in housing and rent policies, in education and apprenticeship, in rehabilitation services.

Different  
study  
altogether.

This approach makes it necessary to have enough of particular types of poor households to form useful conclusions.

This extension in the scope of the survey is proposed mainly as a result of the knowledge we have acquired in our pilot surveys. But there are other reasons. First, certain partial incidence surveys have been undertaken since we first applied - in particular, of retirement pensions and family allowance recipients by the Ministry of Social Security (as it is now called). To be most useful further work needs

to be deeper and wider. Secondly, there have been substantial changes in social security and other factors in the last few years which have affected or will affect the numbers in poverty in particular groups (the establishment of the supplementary benefit system, wage-related sickness and unemployment benefits, the announced increases in family allowances, redundancy agreements and the present high level of unemployment).

The design of a survey  
consisting of 3000 interviews

Later in this paper we return to the case for and possible methods of extending the survey. Miss Rowntree asked, however, at the last meeting what degree of simplification would be required if the Trustees were unable to support a larger sample. We will therefore start by setting out for the comments of the Committee our present proposals for a survey to obtain information from 3000 households on the assumption that no extension proves to be possible. Throughout we mean number of completed household interviews when we refer to size of sample: we assume that 5000 households should comprise the initial sample.

In designing a study with resources to complete approximately 3000 households interviews there are two conflicting considerations. Any attempt to obtain an estimate of the incidence of poverty requires a random national sample. On the other hand any attempt to describe in any detail the characteristics of the different categories of the poor (as a means of improving definitions of poverty and understanding cause) requires that as high a proportion as possible of poor households should be included in the total of households interviewed and thus a sample biased towards areas where the incidence of poverty is high.

For ascertaining the incidence of poverty there are dangers in biasing the sample towards regions or areas where poverty is believed to be high. Areas of high unemployment may have a disproportionate amount of particular types of poverty mainly associated with lack of

employment opportunity for both able-bodied and disabled. On the other hand areas which appear to be affluent may have an undue proportion of poverty caused by high rents, large families or the migration to those areas of the retired. Poverty in rural areas may be different from poverty in urban areas and poverty in growth areas may be different from poverty in declining areas. While it is true that any bias deliberately introduced in the drawing of the sample can be removed by appropriate weights fed into the computer at the analysis stage, there remain difficulties in making detailed breakdowns of a sample which was originally biased in any direction. Partly because of our lack of reliable criteria to determine which regions or areas should be given excess weighting and partly because of the problems posed for the analysis, we have come to the conclusion, which is supported by Professors Stuart and Durbin, that an incidence survey requires a ~~com-~~  
~~pletely~~ random national survey.

We have considered the possibility of introducing a screening technique in the national incidence survey to determine in a relatively short interview whether a household does or does not contain persons in poverty. We have, however, found that to be sure of complete reliability a screening interview would have to last half an hour or an hour and thus yield no economy. The difficulty is that poor persons can be hidden away in households which are not on average poor: e.g. pensioners, disabled persons or lodgers. Moreover, we believe that a large number of random households need to be interviewed to give an indication of customary levels of living with which deprived households can be compared.

On the other hand, our desire to describe the characteristics of the poor leads us to want as many poor as possible in the sample as the poor can only be usefully studied in fifteen or more separate sub-groups. This is one of the lessons we have learnt from our pilot studies.

Our proposals for a 3000 sample attempt to balance these conflicting aims. We propose to aim at 2000 completed interviews drawn on a wholly random basis from the 51 sample constituencies, to give us a reliable incidence figure and proper controls, both in the sense of giving us data on average households and as a means of knowing how efficient the screening procedure used for the remaining households, has proved in practice. We are well aware that 2000 is on the low side for this purpose.

Instead of carrying out a further 1000 interviews nationally we propose (secondly) to use an abbreviated screening procedure to identify some types of poor households in one of our sample constituencies in four different regions of the country, selected because they have the highest level of unemployment. More than 2000 households will be 'screened' but the cost of even a minimal screening procedure means, however, that only about 150 identified households could be interviewed in each of the four areas - making about 600 altogether. These households will thus be consciously weighted towards the problems of unemployment and low wages. The representativeness of these four constituencies and to some extent the reliability of the screening procedure can be checked by comparison with data in the random sample of 2000. Concentration on only four constituencies for this part of the study has the advantage of reducing the cost of screening by minimising interviewer travel and increasing the proportion of poor households ascertained. It also makes it possible to review the findings against the background of local services and the local employment situation.

#### The content of the survey

As explained in the paper we presented to the last meeting of the Advisory Committee, we are proposing to concentrate on income in its widest sense rather than on expenditure. This decision is based partly on our desire not to duplicate the Family Expenditure Survey and partly on the fact that the collection of detailed expenditure data reduces the response rate particularly among the elderly and disabled.



We envisage three measures of poverty:

- 1 Comparisons with supplementary benefit levels as used by the government in its own survey;
- 2 Comparisons with average levels of living;
- 3 An attempt to identify deprivation on the basis of both
  - (a) the levels normally found to be necessary for the standard percentage on food to be spent, and
  - (b) inability to participate in even a substantial number of the activities and customs followed by the majority of the population of the United Kingdom.

We will attempt to distinguish brief episodes of poverty from chronic poverty and to measure the various safeguards against poverty available to different sections of the population - savings, expectations of occupational benefits and private insurance. We will also ascertain to what extent poor families 'take up' the various services provided to assist them - national assistance, free school meals, welfare milk, welfare food, clothing grants, educational maintenance allowances, rate rebates, subsidised or free holidays for children. To obtain statistically significant figures for the use of some of these services, samples of 2000 and, say, 600 will, however, inevitably be too small even if they allow us to make some estimate of the contribution of the services to families' standard of living. We will also study overcrowding, lack of housing amenity, housing deficits and housing suitability (in terms of child play facilities) to see how far these are correlated with poverty. We will also ascertain the assistance received from family and friends. Data will be collected on hours of work and the working environment.

It will be possible to analyse the data by broad region, by age, by marital status, by type of household, by immediate cause of poverty, by country of origin, by occupation, by social class, by functional disability and a variety of other variables - though again the sample is too small for certain sub-groups to be recorded with statistical reliability. The questionnaire is, moreover, being planned to make it possible to analyse the data by the individuals in each household as well as by the household as a complete unit.

### The case for extending the survey

The case for extending the survey is that the poor consist of a large number of principal sub-groups with different characteristics and different problems. The extent of the differences has become clear in our pilot work. Medium term or long term poverty is to be found disproportionately among the following types of household. The estimated number of households of the particular type per 1000 is indicated against each principal sub-group.

<u>Minorities for whom information will be specially collected:</u>	<u>N u m b e r s per 1000 households</u>
1 Families in which one parent is absent	30
2 Families consisting of woman and adult dependants	20
3 Families in which there are five or more dependent children	15
4 Families containing an adult who has been unemployed for thirteen weeks (consecutively or in last twelve months)	20
5 Families containing an adult under 65 years of age who has been ill or injured for thirteen weeks (consecutively or off work for a total of thirteen weeks or more in last twelve months)	50
6 Families containing a disabled adult under 65	50
7 Families containing a disabled or handicapped child (including children ill or injured for thirteen weeks or more)	25
8 Families containing a person aged 65 or over who has been bedfast or ill for thirteen weeks or more or who is otherwise severely incapacitated	25
9 Families in which there are (a) earners, none earning £12 a week or more (b) adult male earners (aged 21 to 64) earning less than £14 a week	150
10 Families in which there are persons who are (a) non-white (b) born in Eire	40
Total of sub-groups:	<u>425</u>
Total allowing for double-counting:	<u>300</u>

Some other groups - eg: retirement pensioners living alone - are sufficiently numerous to allow analysis of sub-samples of the national sample of either 2000 or 3000.

It should be emphasised that this list shows the number of households per thousand in which the incidence of poverty is high. By no means all the households will prove to be poor under any definition of

poverty. But the incidence is likely to be much higher than in the population at large. Many of the groups amount to no more than 20 to 30 per thousand households. If only a third of the households prove to be poor, we will achieve only 7 to 10 poor households per thousand of a particular type. This is the reason why we believe it essential to be able to draw upon a total population of around 10,000 to give us a minimum box size of some 100 households in poverty of a particular type. Moreover, without a sample of this size we cannot make useful statements about the extent of the failure of poor families to use the many services provided on a means test basis - supplementary benefit to supplement sickness or unemployment benefit, free school meals, clothing grants, rate rebates etc.

We will also argue that if the most economical techniques are used - and we discuss this in the next section - additional interviews can be added to a survey of this kind at relatively low marginal cost. There are two reasons for this. First, there are substantial overheads in a study of this kind which do not increase with the number of interviews - preparing and piloting the questionnaire, briefing and selecting interviewers, determining coding procedures and computer programming. Secondly, screening procedures can be safely used for extra interviews. We hesitate to use them without also having a control sample to enable us to check on the efficiency of the screening. Thus we also see a control sample as an overhead, the cost of which need not increase with the total number of interviews in the survey.

#### The method of extending the survey

At the last meeting of the Advisory Committee a report was made on the negotiations with the Ministry of Social Security and it was decided to explore the possibilities of a cooperative project with the Supplementary Benefits Commission. On 29 June 1967 the Minister wrote to say that the Department was unable to participate in a joint project.

Soon after we received this disappointing news, we sought an interview with Professor Moser, the Director of the Central Statistical Office, to seek his advice on whether any private market research agency might be equipped to undertake the screening of an extended sample. He suggested that we approach Audits of Great Britain. This agency interviews 35,000 households in some 420 areas of Great Britain about their possession of and purchases of consumer durables. Each household is interviewed for four successive quarters. Each quarter 8,000 new households are brought into the survey to replace the 8,000 households which have already given four quarterly interviews.

We have discussed with AGB the possibility of adding a screening questionnaire for our study as a trailer to the questionnaire which they are already using to ascertain purchases of consumer durables. AGB were only prepared to consider this in the case of households being interviewed for the fourth time lest the response rate for their own study be reduced when the time came for further interviews with the same household in their regular programme. On the other hand they were prepared to approach once more households which had dropped out of their survey at an earlier stage or refused to cooperate in the first place. We gave AGB copies of a screening questionnaire which we had prepared when it was hoped that Social Survey or the Ministry of Social Security might be cooperating with us. They reported that this particular questionnaire would be too complex to be handled by all their regular audit interviewers. They then agreed to cost out a special 'bespoke' screening job undertaken by their selected interviewers in our 51 sample constituencies. The cost of approaching

10,000 households came to a maximum of about £42,000. If they were to undertake the subsequent interviews with the households identified in the screening process there would be a further maximum cost of £9,000. Allowing for coding, punching and computer analysis, the total cost would be in the neighbourhood of £53,000. (This is Method II in the attached AGB memorandum excluding the cost of coding and analysing the screen.)

We did not feel that we could ask the Trust for sums of this size and have therefore devised a simpler screening interview which we hope will prove to be acceptable to AGB for use by all their regular audit interviewers. The simplified screen is inevitably less precise. But it is obviously uneconomical to bear the cost of some ten per cent of unwanted households being given the main interview if much greater savings could be made in the cost of the screening process. If the simplified screening interview proves acceptable to AGB the cost of adding it to their fourth audit interview plus 'drop outs' and original non-respondents (a total of 8000 households) would be up to £15,000. As, however, this exercise could only be conducted in Audit's 420 areas the main survey would have also to be conducted by their interviewers. This would cost a further sum of up to £17,000, a total cost of up to £32,000. (Method I in the AGB memorandum with adjustment for not processing the interviews 'screened out'.)

There are serious disadvantages in this procedure which are clearly explained in AGB's memorandum and we are disinclined to recommend it. There are dangers that the screening work might not be accurately done. AGB have therefore prepared costings for a Method III. This involves AGB administering, as a purpose built operation, a simplified screen in our 51 selected constituencies. This would cost up to £22,000. If AGB also undertook the final interviews the total cost would be up to £33,000 - a figure which is remarkably similar to the estimate for similar work which we ourselves made without any detailed technical help when preparing the paper we presented to the last meeting of the Advisory Committee.

Bringing in AGB involves a certain amount of duplication. Inevitably we would have to incur 'overheads' in securing that their senior staff familiarised themselves with the questionnaire and worked closely with us on it, in briefing their own interviewers etc. Some of the duplicated overheads could be avoided if the final interviews were conducted by our own interviewing team. The sample design has made it necessary for us to recruit interviewers to cover the 51 constituencies. Under our plan for 3000 interviews each interviewer would only have to complete interviews. We do not think it would be too difficult to increase that number to per interviewer so that all the final interviews were done by our team.

Under this plan, one national sample of 14,500 households would be drawn. Our team would attempt to contact 4,500 random households to achieve 3000 completed interviews. We would also undertake a further 3000 interviews with households screened out by AGB from 7,500 households contacted (out of 10,000 approached). The extra grant needed to achieve this would be some £30,000. It would still be possible to give some extra weighting to four selected high unemployment areas within this total design if it were desired to make comparisons with local data and local services.

Further economy could be achieved if we ourselves attempted to organise the screening, using students to undertake it in their vacations. Many universities are keen that students should have interviewing experience. If we can find students who live in the sample constituencies this method of screening could be very economical. However we are well aware that great care would be needed in the selection of students for the work and supervising them in the field. We would welcome the Committee's comments on this suggestion. By this method it should be possible to complete the whole operation with an extra grant of around £20,000. We appreciate that the recruitment and supervision of the students would be a major administrative operation and that some households identified by students in vacation time may have moved or changed their circumstances by the time we reached them for the main interview.

We therefore see three serious options:

	<u>Extra cost</u>
Screening and final interview by AGB	£33,000
Screening by AGB, final interview by our team	£30,000
Screening by students, final interview by our team	£20,000

We particularly ask for the Committee's advice on the various options.