
Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15 February 2013
Your comments must reach us by that date.
Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential. ☐
Reason for confidentiality:

Name: Richard Meier, on behalf of the Relationship Alliance (comprising Relate, One Plus One, Marriage Care and the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships)

Organisation (if applicable)

Address: c/o TCCR, 70 Warren Street, London W1T 5PB
If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can telephone: 0370 000 2288 or e-mail: MeasureCONSULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the CYPFD Team by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department’s ‘Contact Us’ page.

Please select the category that best describes you as a respondent.

- [ ] Voluntary and community sector - X
- [ ] Local authority
- [ ] Practitioner working with children/families
- [ ] Central Government
- [ ] Research body/academic
- [ ] Public bodies and named partners in the Child Poverty Act
- [ ] Family/organisation representing families and children
- [ ] Social enterprise
- [ ] Other

Please Specify:
SECTION TWO: POTENTIAL DIMENSIONS

1 Are there dimensions, other than those proposed in the consultation document, we should consider for inclusion in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

☐ Yes - X  ☐ No  ☐ Not Sure

Comments: Yes, the Relationship Alliance believes that a multidimensional measure of child poverty should include the following dimensions:

- The quality of the relationship between the parents of a child (whether or not the parents are still in a relationship or not)
- Parenting style of the parents (whether or not the parents are still in a relationship or not). We note that on page 17 of the consultation document the Government appears to rule out the possibility of measuring parenting style as being ‘very difficult to measure’; however, while we acknowledge that this dimension may be difficult to measure, the consequences for children (in terms of mental and physical health, and therefore for their life chances) of being parented in a particular style are various, and profound, and we would urge the Government to set aside resources to ensure that data on this key element can be captured and therefore included in any future multidimensional measure.
- Quality and warmth of the home environment (for example by using a measure such as HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) [http://fhdri.cls.asu.edu/home/index.html](http://fhdri.clas.asu.edu/home/index.html))

DIMENSION 1: INCOME AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

2 a) How should we measure income as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?
2 b) How important is relative and absolute income?

Comments: Not within our area of expertise so others will be best placed to provide detail.

3 How does the ownership of assets such as a house affect our understanding of poverty?
Comments: The Relationship Alliance does not believe that ownership or non-ownership of a house should affect our understanding of child poverty. However, the impact of poor or unstable housing – which is more associated with temporary and rented accommodation than home ownership – should be taken into account.

4 How can an income dimension in a multidimensional measure of child poverty avoid the drawbacks associated with a simple income threshold?

Comments:

DIMENSION 2: WORKLESSNESS

5 How important is worklessness as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

☐ Very important ☐ Important - X ☐ Slightly important
Comments: We suggest that this is important in terms of aspiration and role model issues for children as a way out of poverty; however, we must stress that it does not within our area of expertise and others will be better placed to provide detail.

6 How should worklessness be measured?

Comments:

7 Does the length of time for which a household is workless matter for measurement?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No  [ ] Not Sure
Comments: This does not within our area of expertise and others will be better placed to provide detail.

DIMENSION 3: UNMANAGEABLE DEBT

8 How important is unmanageable debt as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Important
- [ ] Slightly important
- [ ] Not important
- [ ] Not sure

Comments: Debt issues and entrenched money problems (as do poor housing and worklessness) have a significant impact on parental mental health and the capacity to parent well - distressed parents are distracted parents.

Debt issues and entrenched money problems can additionally increase parental conflict, and worsen maternal health and the quality of parent–child relationships – all to the detriment of the children.
9. What aspects of unmanageable debt should we be most concerned about capturing?

Comments:

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**DIMENSION 4: POOR HOUSING**

10. How important is poor housing as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

- [ ] Very important
- [x] Important - X
- [ ] Slightly important
- [ ] Not important
- [ ] Not sure

Comments: The Alliance would wish to draw attention to the impact that inadequate or temporary housing has on family stability. The stress associated with such instability will have an effect on the parental relationship and, in turn, the capacity to parent effectively.
11 What aspect of poor housing should be captured in a measure?

Comments:

12 How can we consider the impact of where children grow up when measuring child poverty?

Comments:

DIMENSION 5: PARENTAL SKILL LEVEL

13 a) How important is parental skill level as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

☐ Very important  ☐ Important  ☐ Slightly important
13 b) What level of skills matter?

Comments:

14 How can we best capture parental skill level in a new child poverty measure?
Comments:

DIMENSION 6: ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

15 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's experience of poverty?

☐ Significant impact - X ☐ Some impact ☐ Little impact
☐ No impact ☐ Not sure

Comments: For some children, school can provide the best means of escaping poverty through education; moreover, school can provide a constant in an otherwise unstable situation – e.g. teachers can provide role models and regular attendance a structure and focus. They are also in a position to intervene early where child neglect as result of poverty might be a concern.

Therefore for a child who is already experiencing any number of other disadvantages, the added disadvantage of attending a failing school is, we believe, significant.
16 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's life chances?

- Significant impact
- Some impact
- Little impact
- No impact
- Not sure

Comments:

17 How should access to quality education be measured?

Comments:
DIMENSION 7: FAMILY STABILITY

18 How important is family stability as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

If the term ‘family stability’ is being used to describe a crude measure of whether or not family breakdown has taken place (as seems to be the case from the definition used in the consultation document – ‘Family stability describes when children grow up in a stable family environment without experiencing family breakdown’, page 40), then the Alliance believes that this would be of only slight importance to a future multidimensional measure of child poverty. After all, the multiple transitions that result from, for example, money issues – such as moving house, parental unemployment, loss of stability caused by change of schools and friendship groups all should be taken into account when defining what is meant by family stability. Moreover, parents under stress may be more neglectful of the impact of instability/changes on children.

The approach which the consultation appears to be taking in regard to a definition of family stability runs the risk that, for example, a child living in an intact family but whose parents are engaged in chronic and poorly resolved conflict could be deemed not to be in poverty when a child from a family that has broken down (and where the resident parent has, or has not, re-partnered successfully and has a constructive and amicable relationship with the child’s biological parent) is deemed to be in poverty. This would go against the evidence base which shows that how a family functions has a greater affect on child outcomes than family structure (Demo and Alcock, 1996 cited in Mooney et al., 2009).

The Alliance believes that the approach set out in the Social Justice Outcomes Framework where ‘the proportion of children who have a stable family free from breakdown, and the proportion of such families that report a good-quality relationship’ will both be measured is a more sensible policy.

However, we suggest that it is not only the relationship quality of families that are free from family breakdown which should be measured, but of all families, given that the relationship quality between parents where family breakdown has taken place can significantly affect children’s outcomes both positively or negatively.
19 How important is the long term involvement of both parents to their child's experience of poverty and life chances?

[ ] Very important  [ ] Important - X  [ ] Slightly important
[ ] Not important  [ ] Not sure

We have found Q19 and Q20 to be questionably worded. Notably the questions seem ambiguous due to lack of specification as to the relationships between parents in either question.

To avoid any confusion, in answer to Q19 we will address the issue of long term involvement of both parents as a couple. In our answer to Q20 we will outline our position on the presence of nonresident parents.

The Relationships Alliance believes that long term involvement of both parents is important to their child’s experience of poverty and life chances, but what form that long term involvement takes is very important.

In any measure of family stability we must be careful not to measure by family structure (i.e. parental relationship status) alone, since ‘all types of family structure have the potential to provide the stability that is vital for enabling good outcomes’ (Social Justice: transforming lives, 2011). It is a concern that this recognition is missing from the consultation document. Looking at family structure alone can ‘disguise a good deal of the variation that exists in the connections between parents’ (Kiernan and Smith, 2003: 33). This risks us creating a measure that is meaningless, and could lead to stigmatisation or discrimination.

How a family functions has a greater impact than family structure (or parental separation) in contributing to a child’s outcomes (Demo and Alcock, 1996 cited in Mooney et al., 2009). In research that compared lone parent families with intact families that were experiencing high levels of conflict, it was found that children fared less well in intact families (Rodgers and Pryor, 1998 cited in Mooney et al., 2009).

It is not separation alone that leads to poor outcomes for children, but a range of factors that are associated with the process. Such factors include the pace of change, and deterioration in the quality of parenting and in the parent-child relationship, and can precede separation (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001 cited in Mooney, 2009). Multiple transitions have a major impact on child outcomes.

Preventing parental separation and maintaining an intact family where healthy relationships (both between parents and between each parent and their child)
can exist is something to strive for. However where this is not possible parents should be supported in making a healthy separation since ‘some children can actually benefit where parental separation brings to an end an aversive family situation, for example when there is a high level of marital or relationship conflict (Booth and Amato, 2001; Jekielek, 1998 cited in Mooney et al., 2009).

20 How important is the presence of a father to a child's experience of poverty and life chances?

- Very important
- Important - X
- Slightly important
- Not important
- Not sure

As stated in our answer to question 19, we are going to take this question as asking about the importance of the presence of a non-resident parent following parental separation (in 90% of cases this is the father (Mooney et al., 2009)).

The presence of non-resident parents is important to a child’s experience of poverty and life chances. However, to understand the effect of the presence we must examine the nature of the non-residents relationship with both their children and with the resident parent.

We recognise that there is a wide range of desirable outcomes associated with ‘positive’ father involvement whether resident or not (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004, cited in Burgess, 2007). We are committed to encouraging and maintaining positive relationships between non-resident parents both with their children and with the resident parent.

We also note that vulnerable children, such as those experiencing poverty, have been identified as benefitting most from a positive relationship with a father or father-figure (Dunn et al, 2004 in Burgess, 2007).

Evidence suggests that children in separated families generally do best when they retain a strong positive relationship with both parents (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999 cited in Burgess, 2007). There are also indicators that ‘high-levels of non-resident father involvement protect against later mental health problems in children’ (Burgess, 2007).

However ‘The mere presence of fathers is not enough' (Mooney et al., 2009), while in the majority of cases the removal of a father leads to a worse situation...
for children, in other cases the situation improves (Guterman & Lee cited in Burgess, 2007).

The nature of the relationship maintained with the non-resident parent is of great importance. Positive elements of a non-resident father-child relationship have been found to be ‘warmth, support, authoritative parenting and level of involvement’ (Dunn, 2005 cited in Burgess, 2007).

21 Which experiences associated with family stability should be captured in a measure?

The Relationships Alliance would be concerned if concrete measures alone – such as ‘Does the child have a set bedtime?’ or ‘How frequently does one or other parent read to the child?’ – were captured in a measure without also capturing something of the quality of the relationship between a child’s parents. For while stability is important, quality of relationships within the family is paramount (and something which is it possible to measure using, for example, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)); it is imperative that the simple relationship status of a child’s parents is not taken as an indicator of poverty.

As Unicef point out in their briefing ‘A Multidimensional Approach to Measuring Child Poverty’ (Unicef, 2011), ‘multidimensional child poverty measures need to take spiritual and emotional deprivations into account’ and that the dimension of emotional deprivation ‘is often overlooked’. Simply capturing data on particular facts or behaviours that take place in the context of family life would, in our view, fail to adequately reflect the child’s emotional experience, something we feel should be crucial to any multidimensional measure of child poverty. One way of achieving this may be to collect data on the emotional climate of the home environment (for example, using the HOME measure (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment - [http://fhdri.clas.asu.edu/home/index.html](http://fhdri.clas.asu.edu/home/index.html))).

DIMENSION 8: PARENTAL HEALTH
22 How should we recognise young carers in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Comments:

23 How should we recognise parental drug and alcohol dependence and mental health conditions in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Comments: It is not clear to us whether this question is seeking information of a technical nature (e.g. that only when a parent has a diagnosable mental health disorder should their mental ill health be included in a multidimensional measure of child poverty) or a more general response.

Whichever of these two approaches is being sought, the Relationships Alliance is keen to stress that any recognition of parental drug and alcohol dependence and mental health conditions should take into account the impact which these factors have on the quality and stability of the parental couple relationship and on the capacity of a child’s mother or father to parent adequately.

The Relationships Alliance believes that these impacts on relationship quality and parenting capacity are so significant that they must be a core feature of the multidimensional measure of child poverty which arises from this consultation process.
24 How can parental disability and general poor parental health be reflected in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Comments:

SECTION 3: CREATING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURE

25 Are there criteria, other than those listed in Section 3 of the consultation document, that we should evaluate a new measure against?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not Sure

Comments:
26 In creating a new measure should any dimension be a gateway?

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<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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Comments:

We believe that the proposed multidimensional measure should be constructed in such a way that those children whose lives and experience are impoverished – *in whatever way* – are deemed to be ‘in child poverty’ by the standards of this measure.

We do however believe that relative income poverty should also be measured for international comparisons.


27 Should the indicators be weighted and, if so, what factors should influence the choice of weighting?

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<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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Comments:

Yes, please see our answer to question 28.
28 Which indicators should be weighted more or less?

Comments:

The Relationship Alliance believes that the quality of the relationship between parents (whether together or not) has such a significant bearing on the full range of dimensions under consideration for this multidimensional measure that it should be weighted accordingly.

29 How could we measure child poverty at the local level?

Comments:

By ensuring that resources are made available through national Government to ensure that surveys based on the multidimensional measure of child poverty which results from this consultation can be carried out at a local level.

There is surely little point in devising a multidimensional measure of child poverty if wholly different measures are going to be employed to gauge rates of child poverty at a local level.
30 How should we check the robustness and simplicity?

Comments:

31 What would you use a multidimensional measure of child poverty for?

Comments:

The Relationship Alliance believes that this multidimensional measure of child poverty should be used as a lever to drive policy across all the dimensions of which the eventual measure is comprised.

We also believe that it should be used to capture data at a local level (including data on the quality of the relationship between the child’s parents (whether together or not)) so that the impact of relationship support services and initiatives can be gauged at local authority level.
32 Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make.

Comments:

33 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.).

Comments:
Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an ‘X’ in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

☐ Yes - X ☐ No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office Principles on Consultation

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

Responses should be emailed to the relevant consultation email box. However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Carole Edge, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 February 2013.

Send by post to: CYPFD Team, Department for Education, Area 1C, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2GJ or email to: MeasureCONSULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk
References:


