

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Issued by The Policy Press, University of Bristol  
Embargo: 00.01 hrs, Tuesday, 24th January 2006

### **New study reveals true levels of poverty in Britain**

A quarter of British adults are poor and one third of children are forced to go without at least one of the things they need, such as three meals a day, toys, out of school activities or adequate clothing, according to the most comprehensive survey of poverty and social exclusion ever undertaken. Launched at the House of Lords today, *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain: The Millennium survey* shows that 3 million adults and 400,000 children are not properly fed by today's standards.

The book reports on the largest and most rigorous investigation of poverty and social exclusion and shows that at the turn of the millennium, there were more people living in or on the margins of poverty than at any other time in British history.

These shocking findings illustrate the scale of the task faced by the Labour Government, which made a commitment in 1999 to abolish child poverty within a generation.

Christina Pantazis, Head of the Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice at Bristol University and co-editor of the book said:

"If the Government is to succeed with its objectives, then reliable and valid research on poverty and social exclusion, as well as more exact measures of trends and causes, is needed. Unfortunately, in the last 30 years, there has been only limited research of this type which is why this book is so important."

The survey results show:

- Roughly 9 million people in Britain cannot afford adequate housing. For example, their home is unheated, damp or they cannot afford to keep it in a decent state of decoration
- About 10.5 million adults cannot afford one or more essential household goods, like carpets for living areas, a telephone or to repair electrical goods or furniture when they break or wear out
- About 5 million adults and three quarters of a million children go without essential clothing, such as a warm waterproof coat or new, properly fitted children's shoes, because of lack of money
- Over 12 million people suffer from financial insecurity. They cannot afford to save, insure their house contents or spend money on themselves

The report also provides unparalleled detail about the extent of social exclusion experienced by the British population:

- Almost 10 million adults and 1 million children are too poor to be able to engage in common social activities such as visiting friends and family, having celebrations on special occasions or attending weddings and funerals

- Nine per cent of the population has no family member outside the household who they see or speak to at least weekly. Just over 1%, or more than half a million people, have neither a friend nor a family member with whom they are in contact at least weekly
- Nine per cent perceive themselves as unlikely to have much emotional or practical support available in times of need
- 18% of the population has no civic engagement at all, and that rises to 30% if voting is excluded

The survey highlights important policy implications, and establishes that the policies pursued by Conservative and Labour Governments since 1979 have resulted in a major redistribution of resources from the poor to the rich, increasing inequalities in both income and health outcomes.

Ruth Levitas, co-editor and Professor of Sociology at Bristol University said:

"Not only child poverty and pensioner poverty, but the poverty of working age adults, needs to be at the centre of policy concerns. At the moment the policy focus is almost entirely on pushing people into paid work in the expectation that this will overcome poverty and social exclusion. The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey demonstrates that this not the case, with many of those in paid work not earning enough to lift them out of poverty.

She continues:

"The policy of 'making work pay' is in fact a policy of less eligibility - i.e. deliberately ensuring that those who are outside the labour market are worse off than those in paid work. This is the primary cause of poverty and social exclusion in Britain, and the only solution is an increase in cash benefits and improved universal public services, free at the point of use."

According to David Gordon, co-editor and Professor of Social Justice at Bristol University:

"The only way to end poverty within a generation would be to embark on a serious policy of redistribution. At the beginning of the 21st century, the UK is one of the most unequal societies in Europe. In order to reduce poverty and social exclusion the Government needs to reverse this redistribution to the rich, and, at a minimum, return to the levels of inequality in income and power that existed in the mid-1970s. This would see poverty and social exclusion reduced by at least half."

Peter Townsend, contributor to the book and Professor of International Social Policy at the London School of Economics said;

"This book shows the importance of establishing the link between anti-poverty policies in Britain and those internationally."

Notes to editors:

1. The Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Survey was designed by senior academics from the Universities of Bristol, Loughborough, and York, carried out in 1999 by the Office for National Statistics, and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The chapters have been written by 16 academics from eight universities who are the leading experts in their fields.
2. Poverty and social exclusion in Britain: The millennium survey edited by Christina Pantazis, David Gordon and Ruth Levitas is published by The Policy Press. It is available to buy from [www.policypress.org.uk](http://www.policypress.org.uk) or from Marston Book Services, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YN (01235 465500) price £24.99 plus £2.75 p&p.
3. Christina Pantazis is Head of the Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice in the School for Policy Studies, David Gordon is Professor of Social Justice and Director of the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research and Ruth Levitas is Professor of Sociology and Head of Department, all at the University of Bristol, UK.
4. The book will be launched at a meeting in the House of Lords on Tuesday 24th January 2006 from 12.00 - 1.00 pm in Room 4B, Main Committee Room Floor, House of Lords, Westminster, London.
5. Poverty and social exclusion in Britain: The millennium survey is part of the Studies in poverty and social exclusion series, published by The Policy Press. For more information on other titles in the series, visit the website at [www.policypress.org.uk](http://www.policypress.org.uk)

**Contact information**

For further information, please contact:

Christina Pantazis Tel: 0117 9546766	e-mail <a href="mailto:C.Pantazis@bristol.ac.uk">C.Pantazis@bristol.ac.uk</a>
Ruth Levitas Tel: 0117 9288216 or 0117 9287506	e-mail <a href="mailto:Ruth.Levitas@bristol.ac.uk">Ruth.Levitas@bristol.ac.uk</a>
David Gordon Tel: 0117 9546761	e-mail <a href="mailto:Dave.Gordon@bristol.ac.uk">Dave.Gordon@bristol.ac.uk</a>
Peter Townsend Tel: 0207 9556632	e-mail <a href="mailto:P.Townsend@lse.ac.uk">P.Townsend@lse.ac.uk</a>

Jacqueline Lawless at The Policy Press on Tel: 0117 3314097 or email [Jacqueline.lawless@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Jacqueline.lawless@bristol.ac.uk)

-----  
Dave Gordon  
Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research  
University of Bristol  
8 Priory Road  
Bristol BS8 1TZ, UK

E-Mail: [Dave.Gordon@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Dave.Gordon@bristol.ac.uk)  
Tel: +44-(0)117-954 6761  
Fax: +44-(0)117-954 6756