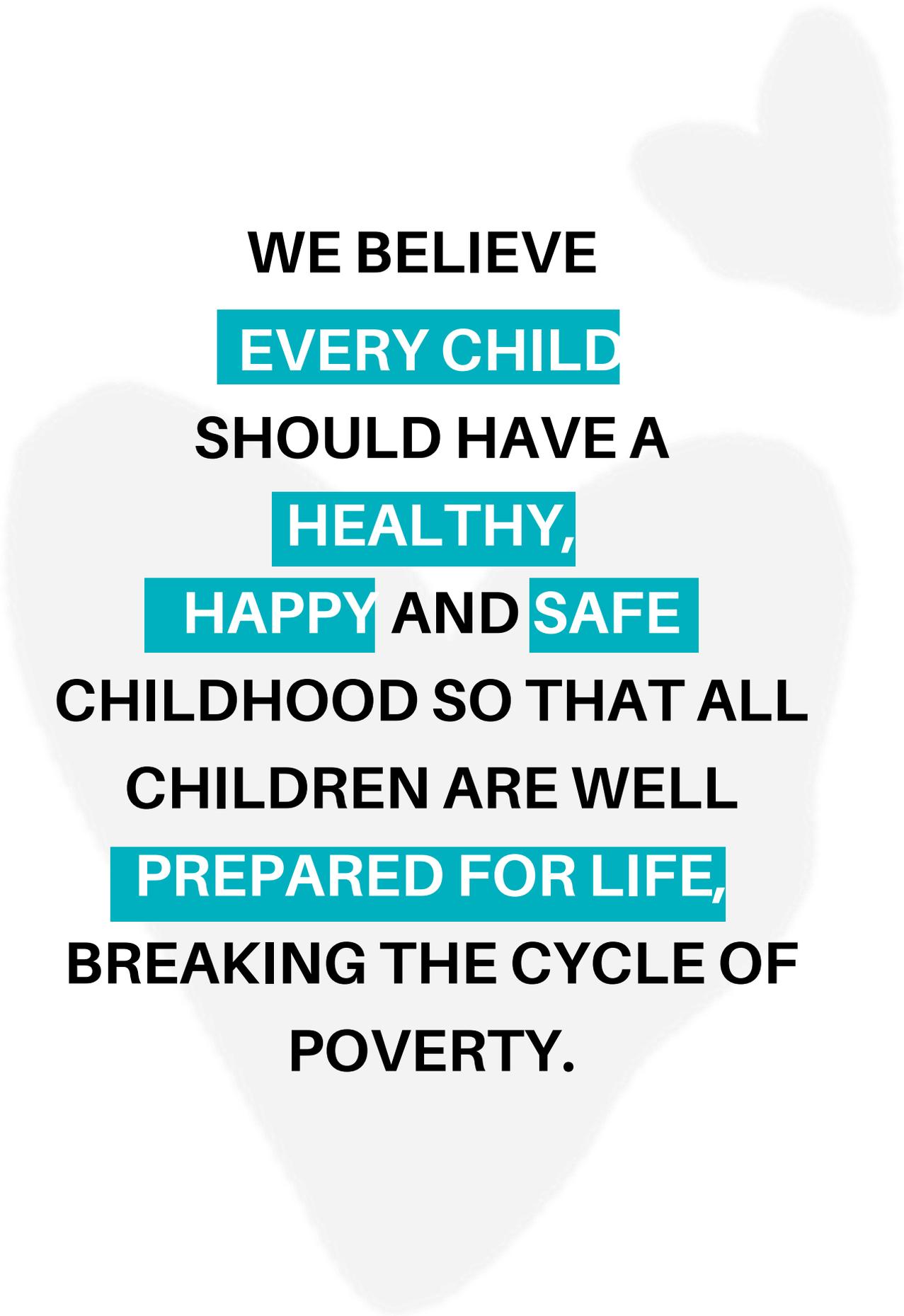




# “THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU” THE IMPACT OF DEEP POVERTY ON CHILDREN IN LONDON



**WE BELIEVE**  
**EVERY CHILD**  
**SHOULD HAVE A**  
**HEALTHY,**  
**HAPPY AND SAFE**  
**CHILDHOOD SO THAT ALL**  
**CHILDREN ARE WELL**  
**PREPARED FOR LIFE,**  
**BREAKING THE CYCLE OF**  
**POVERTY.**

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# INTRODUCTION

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The number of people experiencing deep poverty has been steadily increasing in the UK. In 2019/20, 6.5m people experienced deep poverty [1], almost 1.5m more people than 20 years ago [2]. Deep poverty is multidimensional, often involving a complex interplay of factors, such as health and wellbeing, housing and social support, employment and education. Various forms of poverty, such as fuel poverty and food poverty, often have their roots in deeper, underlying poverty caused by insufficient income to meet basic essential needs. Deep poverty is both the precursor and common denominator for these specific manifestations of hardship [4].

In this report, we use the same definition of deep poverty as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which is defined as households living below 40% of the median household income. In 2020/21, a single adult in very deep poverty would be living on £109 or less per week (after housing costs) [2].

Experiencing deep poverty means that households are forced to focus on making ends meet in the short-term, despite it negatively impacting their future financial situation. This has been intensified by the cost-of-living crisis, for example, by entering a vicious debt cycle [3].

Although all forms of poverty have a detrimental impact on children, deep poverty is particularly impactful, as it affects access to services and the ability to afford basic goods necessary to maintain physical and emotional well-being [1].

The impact of deep poverty on children's physical health is reflected in recent research, finding that children in poorer areas were twice as likely to die as those in the richest, whilst 15% of those who died were known to social services;

Dr Camilla Kingdon, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health with whom we have partnered with on this research, recently criticised the government for failing to act to tackle child poverty, which she said was driving “unforgivable” and “avoidable” deaths [5].

As well as negative health consequences, deep poverty also has a social impact on children, with reports that children are “stealing from schools” due to hardship. A third of all teenagers in families who rely on food banks were found to be victims of violence in the last year [6] [7].

Although existing benefits and third sector organisations help lessen the depth of poverty, they don't do enough to relieve it completely.

Individuals experience stigma when trying to access support or find that support on offer is inconsistent [3]. Yet, current services are over-stretched and strained, which hampers the effectiveness of support measures targeted to children who need it the most [8] [9]. Current research has not looked at the impact of deep poverty during the cost-of-living crisis, nor included the perspectives and qualified opinions of multiple stakeholders involved with providing support to children living in deep poverty.

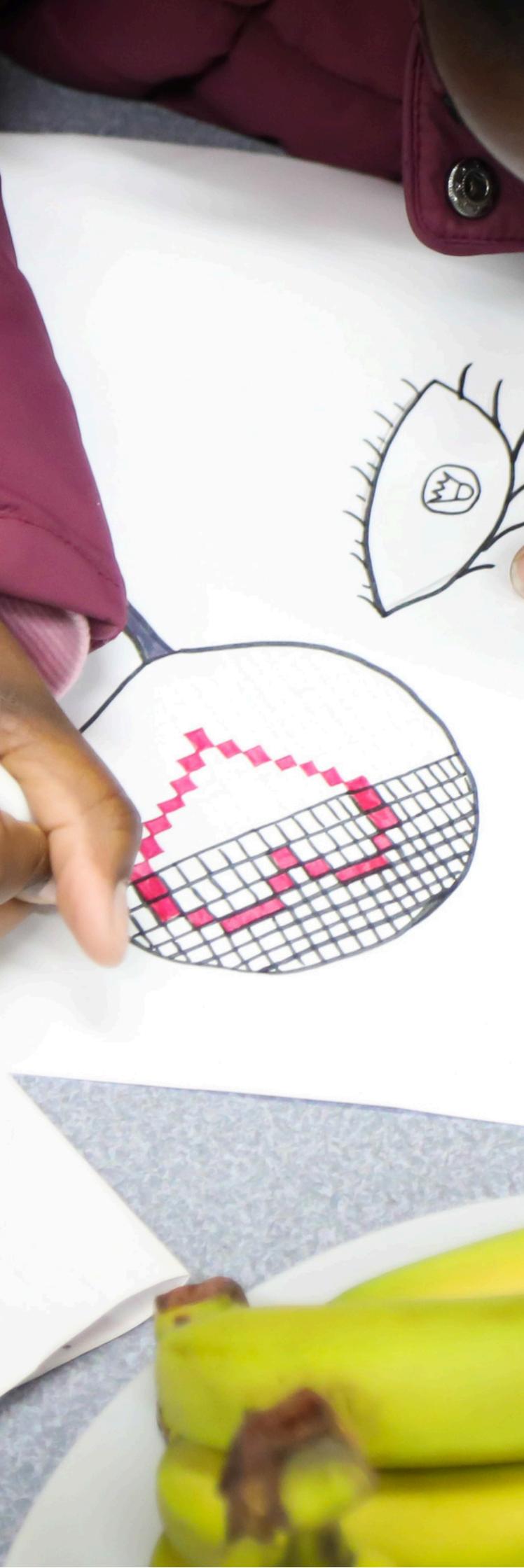
The Childhood Trust has undertaken this research to better understand how deep poverty is impacting children as well as how current support measures are coping with providing the necessary safety net to children living in deep poverty. This research utilises the perspectives and experiences of the Trust's network of charity partners, social workers and paediatricians. It also documents national public perceptions as well as providing a voice for those affected directly by deep poverty.



## KEY FINDINGS

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- 88% of UK adults strongly believe that the government is not doing enough and should be doing more to help children living in deep poverty.
- 98% (51) of social workers attributed the cost-of-living crisis for negatively impacting their ability to support children living in deep poverty. 92% (48) attributed local authority budget cuts, (80%) (42) a failure to increase benefits in line with inflation, and (61%) (32) increasing caseloads.
- 27% (12) of charities reported that 5.7% (6,057) of children that they support are homeless and in deep poverty.
- Paediatricians and social workers reported rising caseloads. 58% of paediatricians surveyed attributed this rise to an increased number of children experiencing deep poverty. Increased caseloads were also reported as making it harder for social workers to provide the support children need.



- 87% (55) of social workers reported that the cost-of-living crisis has increased their caseloads of children living in deep poverty.
- For 65% (925) of children supported by social workers, 26% of children experience physical or emotional neglect, 26% homelessness or temporary accommodation, 25% mental health issues, 24% educational problems, 24% food insecurity, 23% divorce or parental separation, 20% physical emotional or sexual abuse, 16% substance misuse at home, 9% physical health issues, 8% bereavement or loss and 5% an incarcerated relative.
- 95% (18) of paediatricians indicated that limited access to healthcare services is harming the overall health and wellbeing of children. This is followed by mental health challenges and other developmental delays (89%) (17), social exclusion and stigma (84%) (16), malnutrition (79%) (15) and respiratory infections (68%) (13).
- 90% (47) of social workers reported that deep poverty is reducing the ability of children to make the most of their education.
- 98% (51) of social workers reported feeling stressed. Of those, 27% of social workers are extremely stressed (14), 35% moderately stressed (18) and 25% (13) somewhat stressed.
- 61% (11) of paediatricians reported that the NHS is failing children living in deep poverty.

## OUR METHODOLOGY

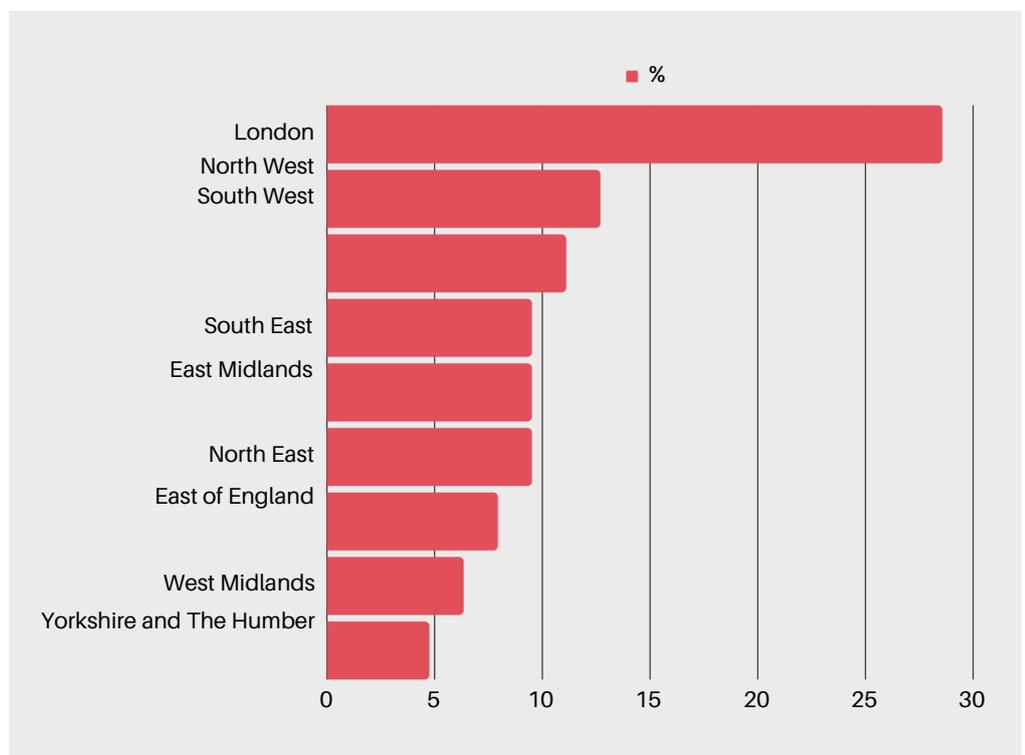
This report employs 5 different quantitative and qualitative research methods to study the various ways deep poverty impacts children. Due to the myriad ways deep poverty affects children, a comprehensive approach is needed from a diverse set of methods to provide a more holistic and nuanced perspective of the multifaceted impacts of deep poverty on children.

All fieldwork took place between October-November 2023. For the purpose of safeguarding, the names of all participants have been anonymised. The rest of this chapter outlines in detail every method used.

### Social Worker Survey

The Childhood Trust, in partnership with Frontline, England's largest social work charity, worked together to survey a random panel of child and adolescent social workers. Social workers play a vital role in the frontline delivery of support services to families and children facing deep poverty. Their unique position offers an irreplaceable perspective on deep poverty as they are often intimately involved in assessing, intervening and advocating for the needs of families in distress.

#### The Geographical Distribution of the Social Workers



Their input can identify gaps in service provision or where additional areas of support are needed against the threats of deep poverty. 63 social workers took part in our survey. Of those, 38 have been qualified for 3 or more years, 23 between 1-3 years, and 2 less than a year.

The total number of children supported by our sample of social workers amounts to 1427 children.

Just under one third of social workers who took part in the survey operate in London (29%), with the remainder spread evenly across England.

## Charity Survey

The Childhood Trust also utilised its network of charity partners operating across London who support children living in deep poverty to gather additional data. Charities often serve as critical intermediaries between children in need and available support systems, providing an opportunity to assess what gaps in service provision(s) exist and understand the evolving options and attitudes towards deep poverty.

Our survey reached 44 charities that support children living in households experiencing deep poverty. 420,439 children are supported annually by this sample of charities, of which (25%) 105,932 are affected by deep poverty.

## Opinium Survey

The Childhood Trust, in partnership with OPINIUM, surveyed adults to gain their perspectives on deep poverty at the national level. This survey allows us to capture a nationally representative snapshot of public perceptions and attitudes towards deep poverty.

Through Opinium we were able to access a well-established platform that ensures the collection of high-quality data from a wide cross-section of the population.

This method not only facilitates the quantification of public awareness and understanding of deep poverty, but also offers insights into prevailing societal attitudes, stigmas and potential misconceptions surrounding this complex issue.

Our survey reached a demographically representative sample of 2000 UK adults ages 18+ across the country. Fieldwork took place between 31st October to 3rd November 2023.

## Paediatrician Survey

The Childhood Trust also surveyed 19 paediatricians across several NHS Trusts who support our objectives. Paediatricians are uniquely placed to observe and address the health challenges faced by children. By querying paediatricians about children affected by deep poverty, we indirectly tap

into their expertise and experience in diagnosing and treating health issues in children. This approach ensures a targeted understanding of the specific health implications of deep poverty, as well as what current service gaps exist, maximising the purposeful nature of our methodology.

## Interviews with Parents and Children

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 7 parents 2 children who are supported by our charity partners. Interviewing parents and children help to provide additional insight into the challenges and experiences of deep poverty, whilst assisting the contextualisation of the data collected from our other research methods.

# CHAPTER 1 - THE PREVALENCE OF DEEP POVERTY

## 1.1 Social Workers' Perspective

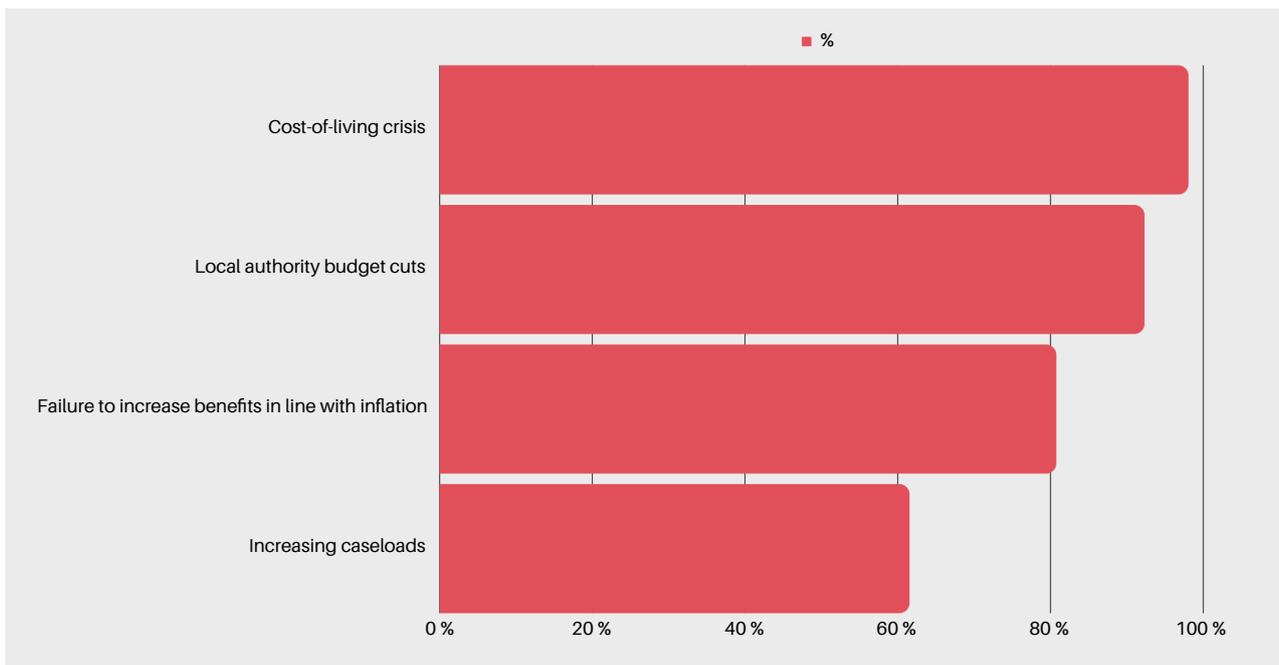
Social workers have on the ground experience with children and families living in deep poverty. Their observations can provide a nuanced understanding of how deep poverty is evolving in their communities.

87% (52) of social workers reported that deep poverty is increasing.

The remaining 13% (7) didn't know. This data shows a general consensus amongst social workers that deep poverty is on the rise.

When asked if there was anything that has negatively impacted their ability to support children living in deep poverty, social workers pointed to a number of issues.

**Impediments to Supporting Children in Deep Poverty:  
Social Workers' Perspectives**



98% (51) of social workers blamed the cost-of-living crisis for negatively impacting their ability to support children. 92% (48) blamed local authority budget cuts, 80% (42) a failure to increase benefits in line with inflation and 61% (32) increasing caseloads.

## 1.2 Charities' Perspectives

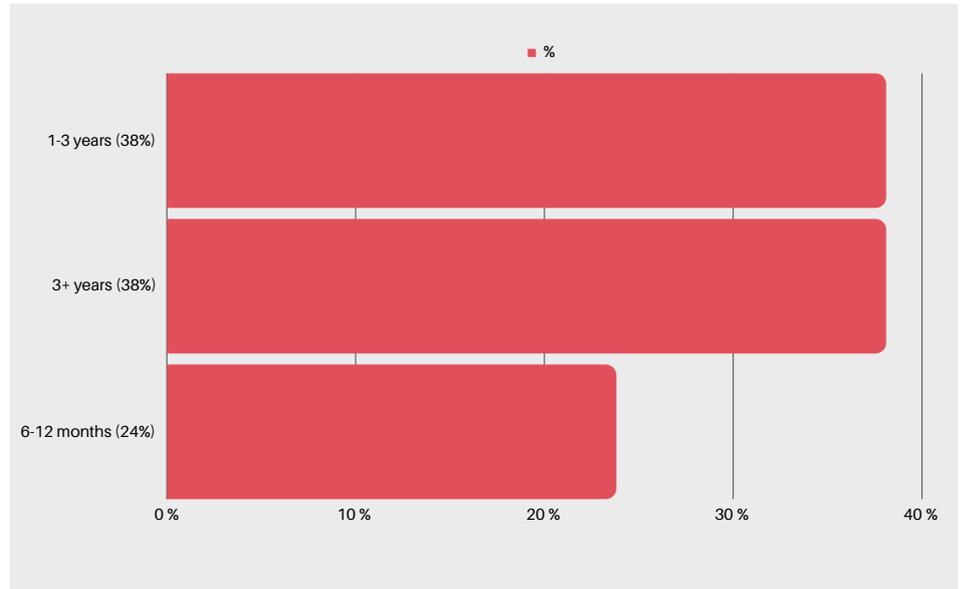
Deep poverty is a persistent issue for charities operating across London too. Almost 80% (76%) (16) of charities support children that have been living in deep poverty for more than a year. A significant proportion of charities said that this duration has lasted for 3 or more years for some children.

Mirroring the experiences of social workers, charities reported that deep poverty is on the rise. At least 90% (20) of charities have seen a worsening of deep poverty for children that they support.

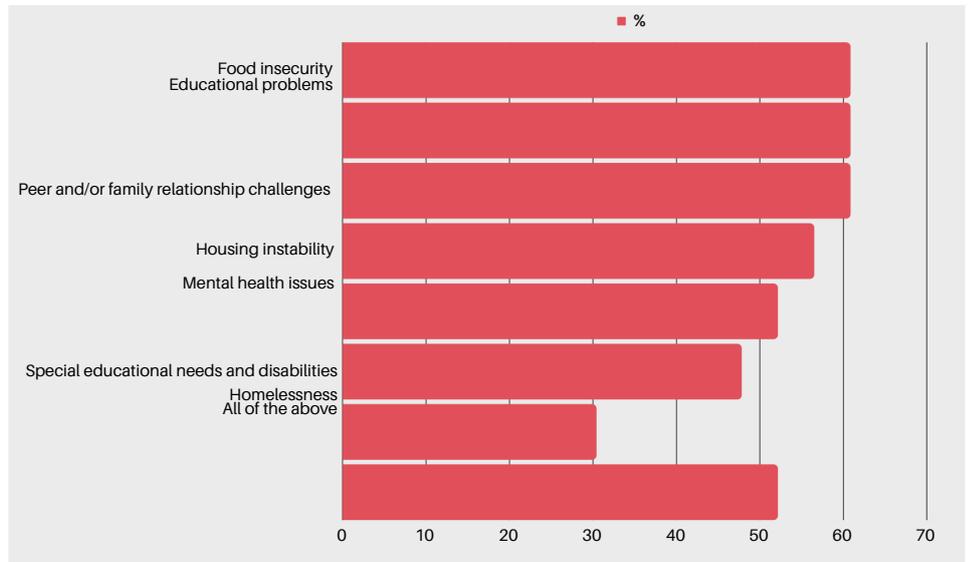
The data below highlights the multi-dimensional impact on children of deep poverty; 61% (14) of charities reported that children they support experience food insecurity and educational problems. These are followed by relationship challenges with peers and/or family members (61%) (14), housing instability (57%) (13), mental health issues (52%) (12), and special educational needs and disabilities (48%) (11).

Over half of charities (52%) (12) selected all of the above conditions. Other issues of concern included racism and discrimination, substance abuse, and trafficking and/or modern slavery.

**Duration of Deep Poverty: Average Time for Supported Children**



**Common Challenges Faced by Supported Children**



## 1.3 Paediatricians' Perspectives

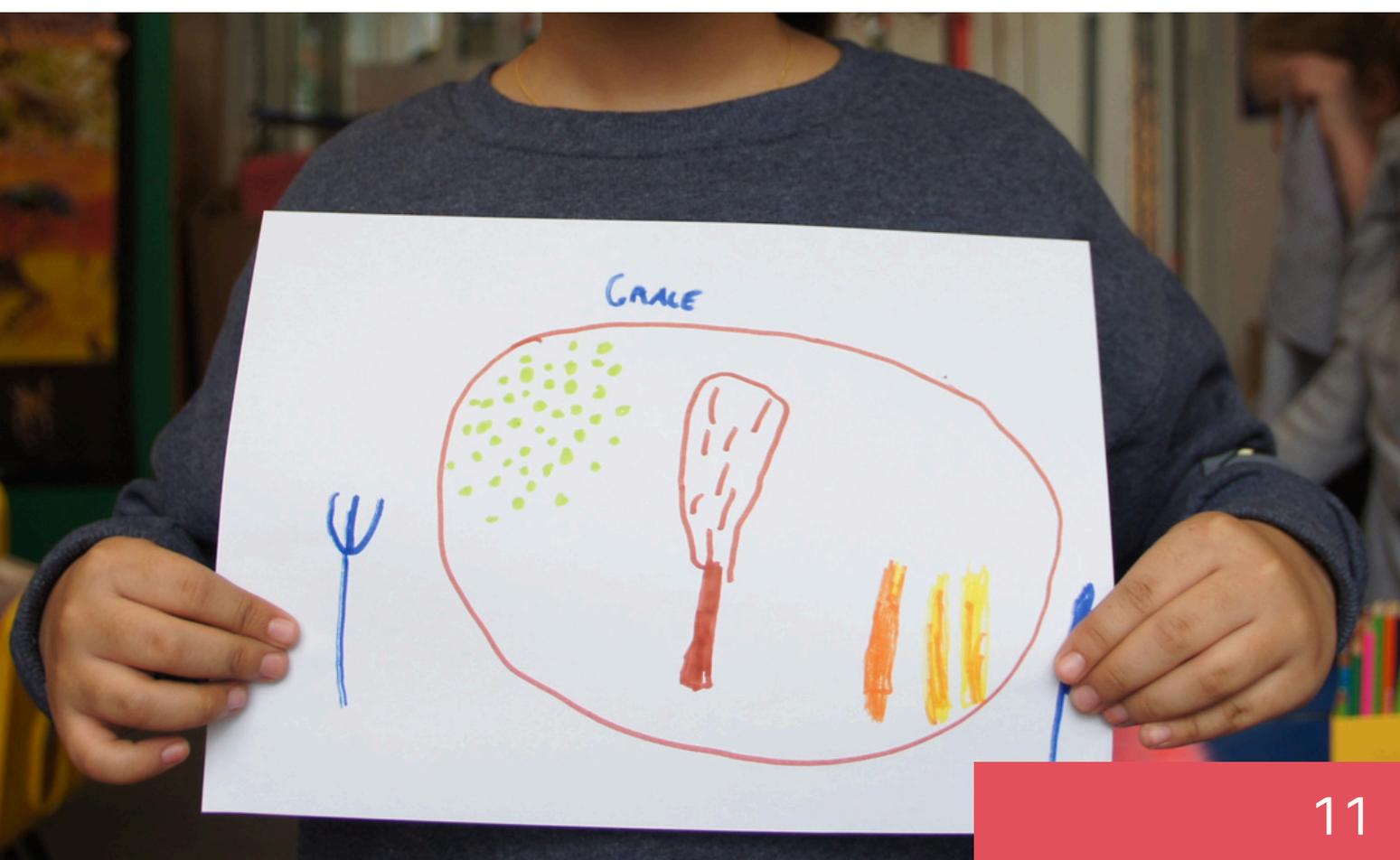
Caseloads of children are also on the rise for paediatricians. 58% of paediatricians attributed their rise in caseloads to an increased number of children experiencing deep poverty.

Yet, when asked if poverty is screened for when determining what resources are necessary to help children that require support, 74% of paediatricians reported no. Despite this figure, 95% of paediatricians think it's necessary to screen for poverty when determining what resources are necessary to support children.

One paediatrician noted that:

*“Most of the cases do not end at point of discharge but have true life- course implications. The family environment, both financial and environmental, is essential in understanding the support a family will need (...) a close understanding of the family is essential to help us to help parents and families care for their complex cases involving babies.”*

A high percentage of paediatricians acknowledging the importance of screening for poverty and the lower percentage of implementing this practice raises questions about assessment procedures and how seriously deep poverty is treated.



## 1.4 Public Perceptions on Deep Poverty

The UK national survey highlighted some of the key beliefs in the causes of why children live in deep poverty. These were;

- Low wages for parents /guardians - 65%
- High food prices - 61%
- High energy prices - 60%
- Housing shortages/availability - 47%
- Welfare support and benefits not keeping up with inflation - 46%

Respondents reported that the state of children living in deep poverty today is believed to have worsened. The majority of UK adults (83%) think that more children live in deep poverty now than they were five years ago (Only 17% said fewer).

Figures are similar where UK adults think that more children live in deep poverty now than since Covid (83%), compared to 17% that said fewer) and those that say more children live in deep poverty now with the cost-of-living crisis (85%), compared to 15% that said fewer.



## CHAPTER 2 - THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS AND DEEP POVERTY

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The cost-of-living crisis exacerbates deep poverty for children and families, with many families struggling with rising prices across all areas of life.

These consequences of deep poverty are felt directly by parents/caregivers.

Maria stressed of how much more work they do now to survive, working long hours, 7 days a week, only to pay for expenses, including bills and activities for their children. She stressed:

*“We are struggling a lot. We’ve been worrying since the pandemic because everything is going up too much. Life in London is always hard, but since the pandemic it’s gotten worse. It’s not working for poor people.”* -- Maria, mother of 3 children

Another mother stressed about how things have gotten so difficult during the cost-of-living crisis since covid, mentioning how:

*“Before covid everything was easy. Now [everything] is up, up and up. We used to save and enjoy life, but now everything is so expensive. We can’t go anywhere because of money. Our utilities are so high, money is gone the next week after getting it.”* -- Sophie, mother of two

These worries were reflected further:

*“Before when we went shopping, we could do and get lots of things. £50 used to get you a lot, but now it gets you nothing. The cost-of-living crisis makes us think twice if we have to buy something. I can’t even explain it because it’s just so hard.”* -- Eleanor, mother of two

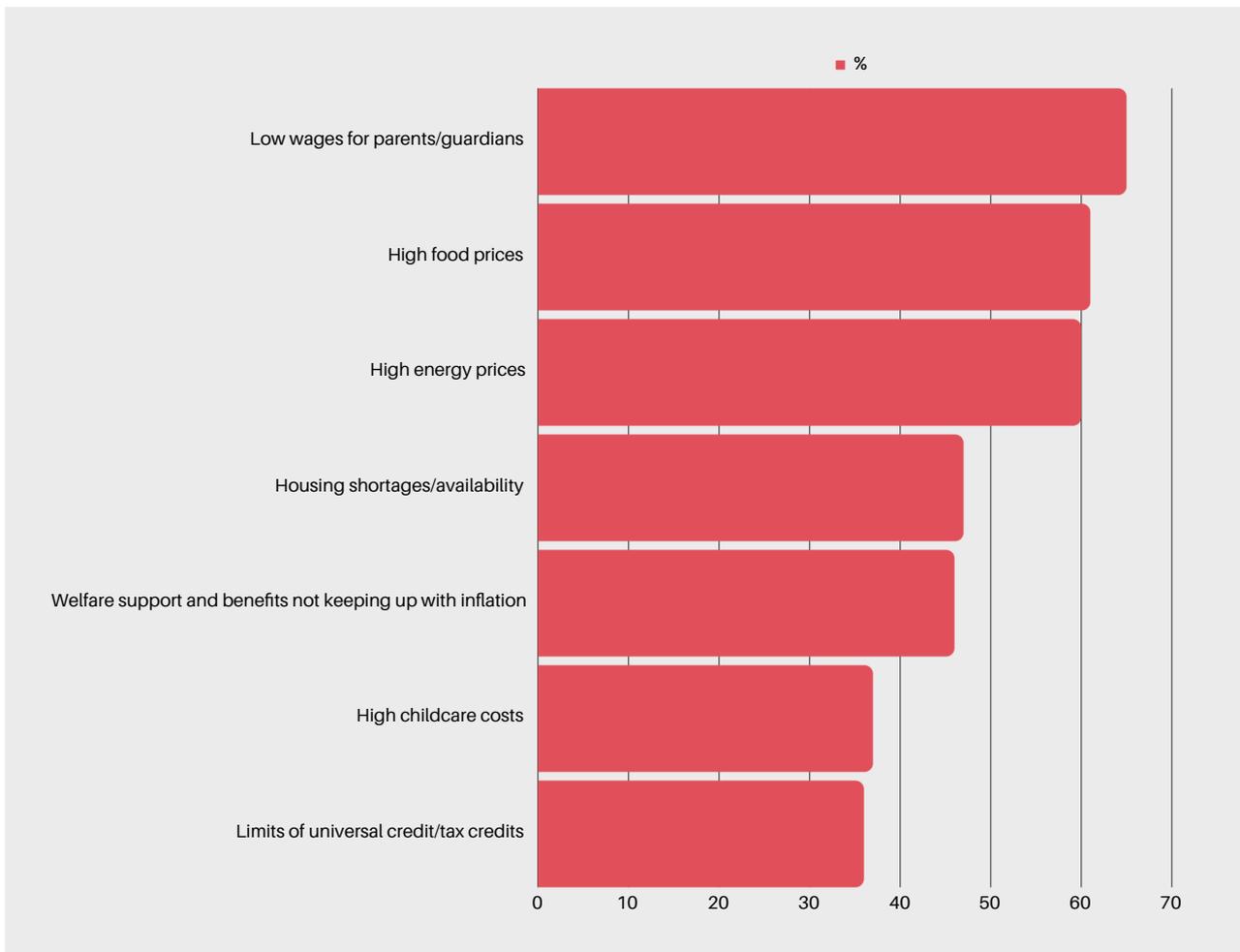
*“The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is so great that sometimes you, at the end of the month, you see there’s nothing left for you.”* -- Stacy, mother of three

Public perceptions about parent/caregiver wages reflect some of these worries parents have expressed. 65% of UK adults reported that low parent/caregiver wages cause children to live in deep poverty, followed by high food prices (61%), high energy prices (60%), welfare support and benefits not keeping up with inflation (47%), high childcare costs (37%) and limits on universal credit/tax credits (36%).

It's clear from these figures that people recognise the impact of these issues on children and families. These factors interconnect and contribute to the cost-of-living crisis.

Many social workers (98%) also blamed the cost of-living crisis for negatively impacting their ability to support children. Relatedly, we quantified this issue on a scale of 0-10, with 0 indicating no change, and 10 indicating very difficult. The average result was 8.

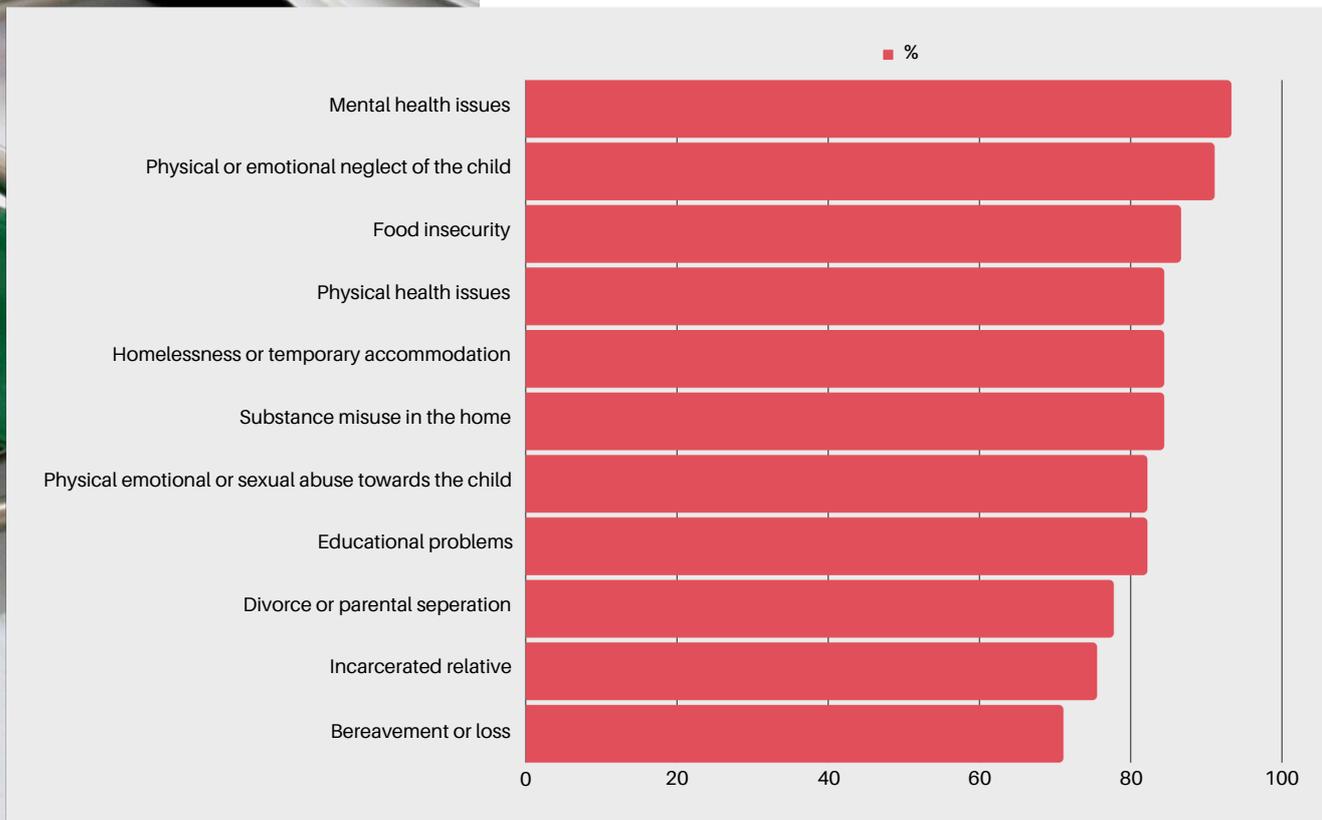
### UK Adults Perceived Causes of Deep Poverty for Children in the UK



## 2.1 Increased Social Worker Caseloads

Increased caseloads have been making it harder for social workers to provide the support children need. 87% (55) of social workers reported that the cost-of-living crisis has increased their caseloads of children living in deep poverty. These caseloads are affected by a number of conditions which are highlighted below.

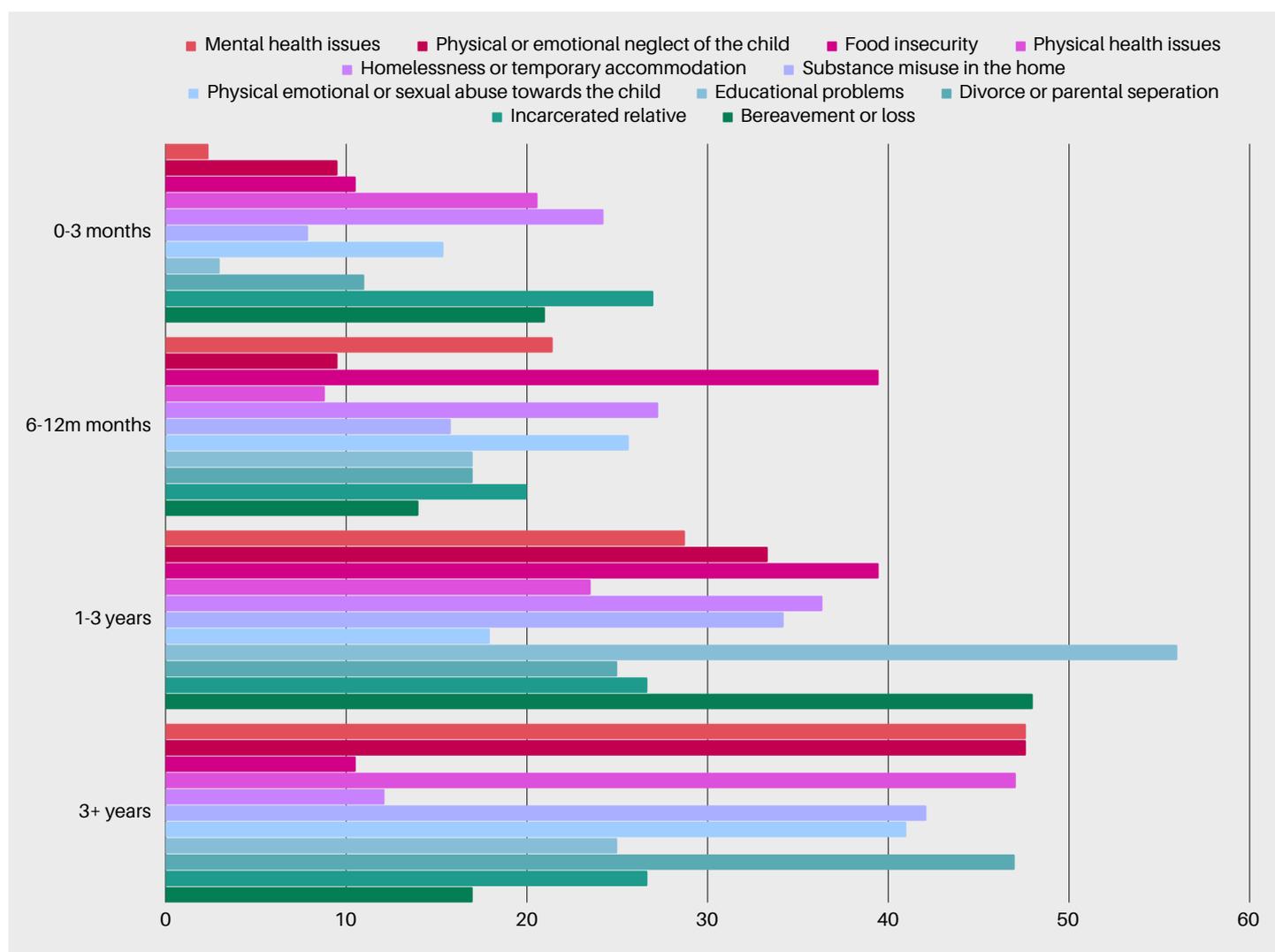
### Prevalence of Multiple Conditions Amongst Supported Children: Approximate %



For 65% (925) of children supported by social workers, 26% of children experience physical or emotional neglect, 26% homelessness or temporary accommodation, 25% mental health issues, 24% educational problems, 24% food insecurity, 23% divorce or parental separation, 20% physical emotional or sexual abuse, 16% substance misuse at home, 9% physical health issues, 8% bereavement or loss, and 5% an incarcerated relative.

These issues are not only pronounced amongst children that social workers care for but are also very persistent. As the figure below shows, most conditions have persisted for at least 1 to 3 years. Some conditions have lasted longer than 3 years.

## Duration of Conditions Amongst Supported Children Reported by Social Workers



On average, almost 50% of caseloads have experienced mental health and physical health issues for a period of 3 or more years. This figure also includes physical or emotional neglect, substance misuse at home and physical emotional or sexual abuse. This is an area that 56% (29) of social workers reported finding more difficult to protect children against over the last 6 months.

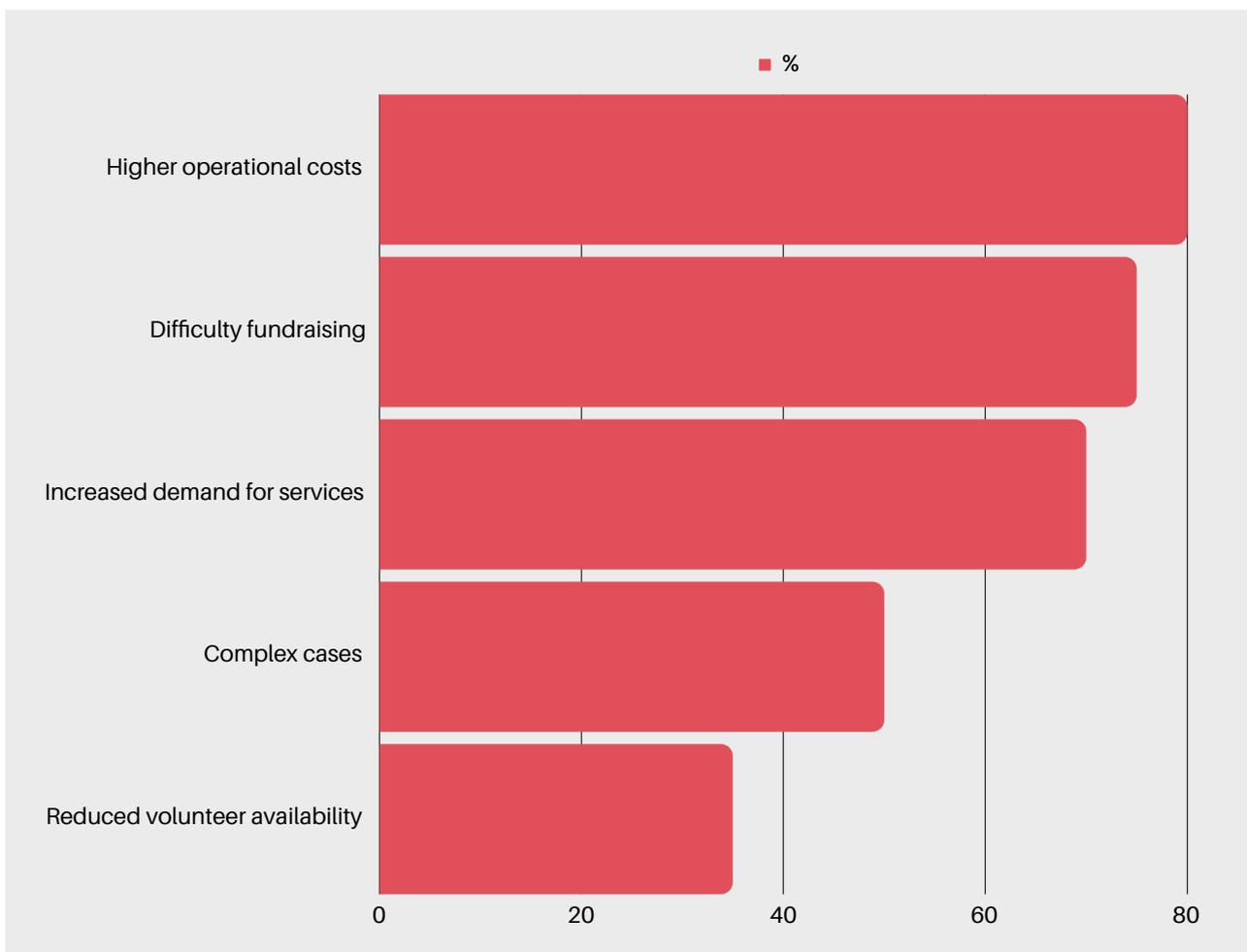
## 2.2 Increased Cost of Delivering Charitable Support

Despite deep poverty being clearly on the rise, social workers are not the only group finding it more difficult to provide support to children. A majority of charities (87%) (20) reported that the cost-of-living crisis has made it more difficult for them to support children living in deep poverty.

Some reasons making support measures more difficult to deliver are higher operational costs (80%) (16), difficulty fundraising (75%) (15) and an increased demand for their services (70%) (14).

These difficulties are marked further by the fact that a number of charities (61%) (14) have had to use their financial reserves to support children over the last 6 months. Almost 40% (39%) (9) forecasted a reduction in their budgets in the next 12-months to satisfy an increased demand for their services.

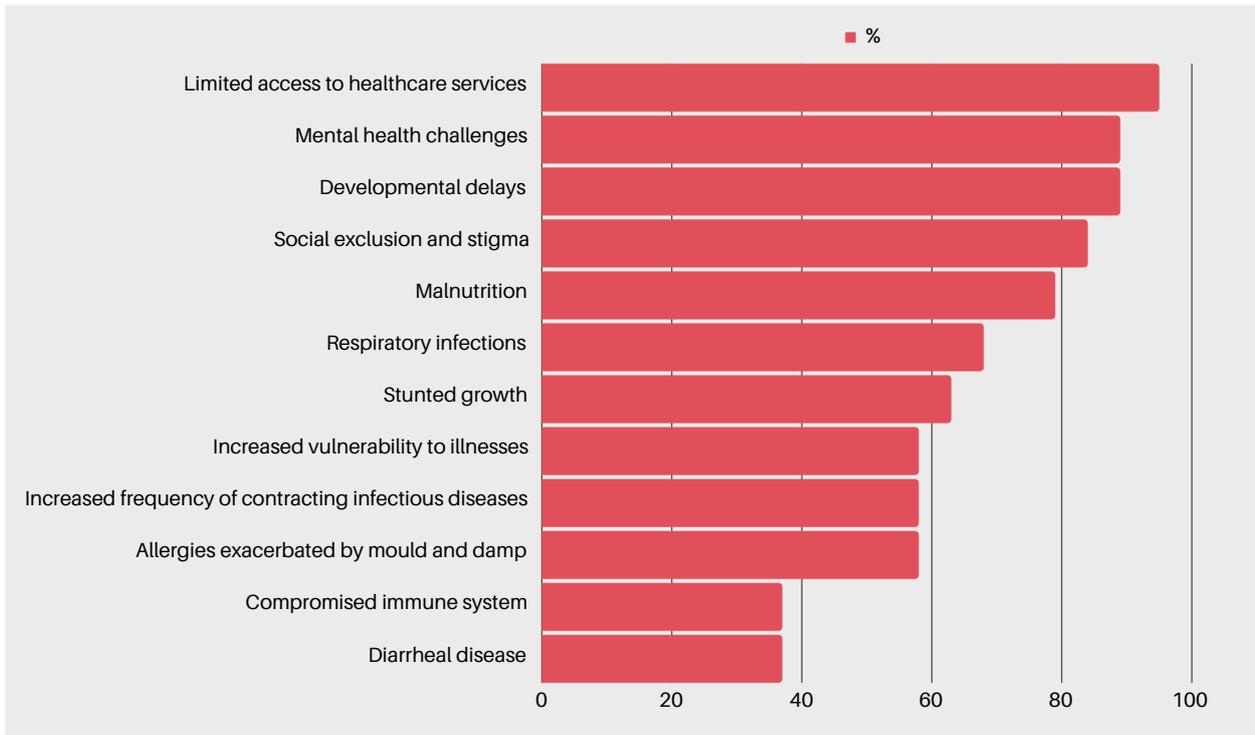
**Impacts of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Charities: Challenges in Supporting Children**



## 2.3 The Cost-of-Living Crisis and Paediatricians

Most of the aforementioned caseloads above are affected by conditions which paediatricians argue are direct consequences of deep poverty that ultimately harm the health and wellbeing of children.

### Pediatric Perspectives: Consequences of Deep Poverty on Children's Health and Wellbeing



95% (18) of paediatricians argued that limited access to healthcare services harm the overall health and wellbeing of children. This is followed by mental health challenges and other developmental delays (89%) (17), social exclusion and stigma (84%) (16), malnutrition (79%) (15) and respiratory infections (68%) (13).

Despite these overarching consequences, they come at a time when paediatricians stress the duty of carers and practitioners in supported children affected by deep poverty.

#### One paediatrician noted how:

*"We have a duty to the whole and their parents/caregivers to ensure they thrive."*

#### Another said:

*"[It's] important to safeguard children as poverty will make them vulnerable from the psychological burden on the whole family. We should be advocates for the needs of children and families in our care."*

# CHAPTER 3 - DEEP POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY

The United Nations defines food insecurity as "lack(ing) regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life." People experiencing food insecurity are uncertain about their ability to obtain food due to a lack of money or other resources, and as a result, often reduce both the quality and quantity of the food they consume [10].

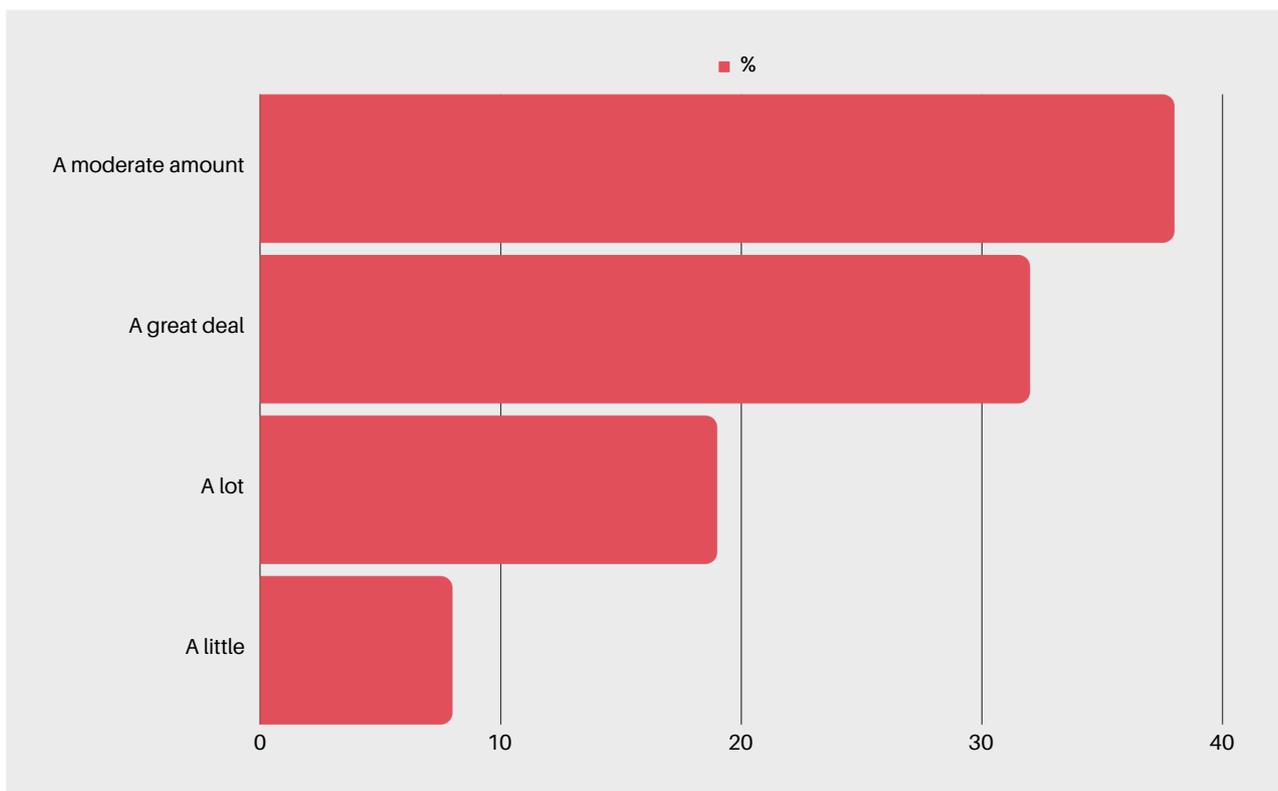
Looking at the individual elements of poverty and difficulties in life, UK adults think that 27% of children live with food insecurity. This figure understates the true impact of food insecurity when compared against the data.

## 3.1 Food insecurity as a Persistent Problem

80% of paediatricians reported that malnutrition worsens overall health and wellbeing. 71% (37) of social workers have found it difficult to ensure children get access to regular, nutritious meals. This is because food insecurity is evidently on the rise, with most children not having enough food on a consistent basis for over a period of 6-12 months and/or 1 to 3 years.

33% (17) of social workers reported that food insecurity has increased by a great deal amongst children that they support in the last 3 months. 19% said by a lot (10), 38% (20) a moderate amount and 8% (4) by a little.

**Trend in Food Insecurity Among Supported Children: Last 3 Months**

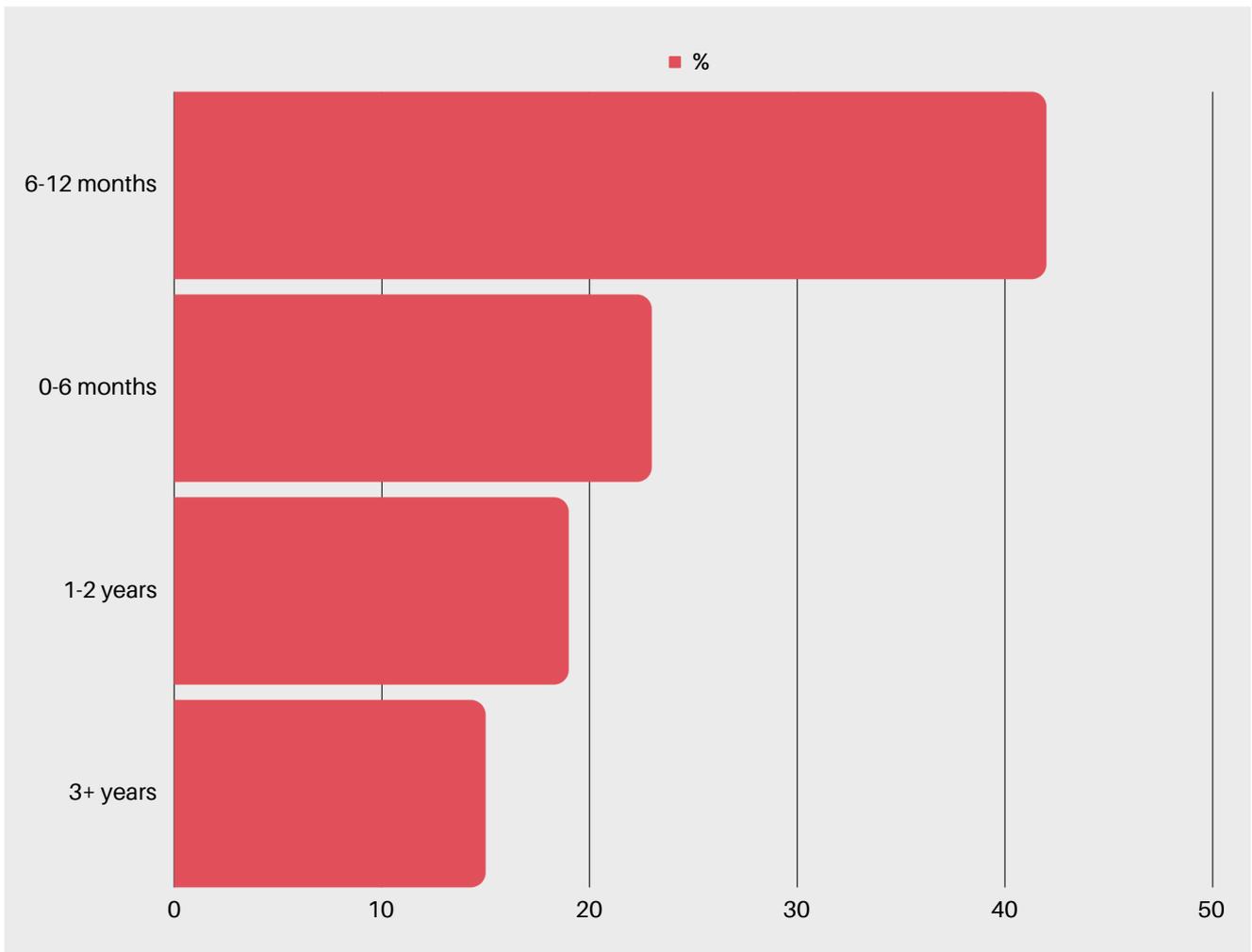


40% (21) of social workers also reported that this level of food insecurity is highly severe. It is also very persistent – 34% (18) of social workers said that the average duration children experience food insecurity lasts between 1 and 3 or more years. The increased prevalence and duration of these conditions can affect the quality of care and support social workers can provide. These issues become particularly acute once social workers have limited resources and funding to address the growing needs of children and families.

These experiences of food insecurity are also very severe for some. 20% (4) of charities indicated very high severity of food insecurity amongst children that they support. 50% (10) reported high severity, 25% (5) moderate severity and 5% (1) minor severity.

Over the last 6 months, 30% of charities reported that food insecurity has increased to a great extent for children that they support. 45% (6) reported to a large extent and 20% (4) somewhat.

### Average Duration of Food Insecurity Amongst Supported Children



Chloe, one mother we interviewed, referred to several occasions where she'd have to skip food to ensure her children ate:

*"We skip food for the children. I have nothing in between breakfast and dinner, having just 2 meals a day, sometimes 1." -- Chloe, mother of three*

John stressed how:

*"I'm used to it now because sometimes I'm just hungry. I ask my parents if there's any food, they say like maybe later or maybe tomorrow (...) I'm worried that one day we won't have any food for a long period of time, and I hope that will never happen." -- John, 12*



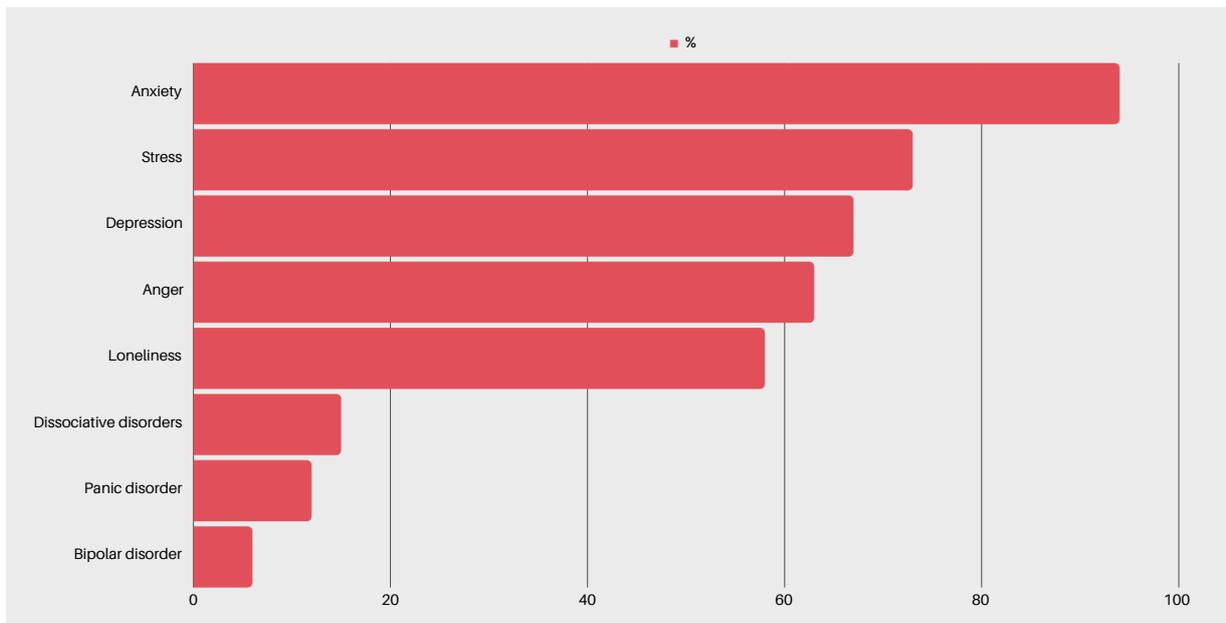
# CHAPTER 4 - HEALTH & WELLBEING

## 4.1 Common Challenges

The majority (89%) of UK adults think that living in deep poverty will affect children later in life, primarily with mental health (73%), physical health (69%) and personal development (66%). A majority of people recognise the long-term impacts of living in deep poverty on children. These issues are interconnected aspects that can be significantly influenced by early life experiences.

86% (54) of social workers reported that providing timely mental health support has been more difficult to achieve, attributing this to a worsening of long waiting times and limited resources in the last 6 months. Some of the most common signs of mental distress and emotional challenge amongst children are highlighted in the figure below.

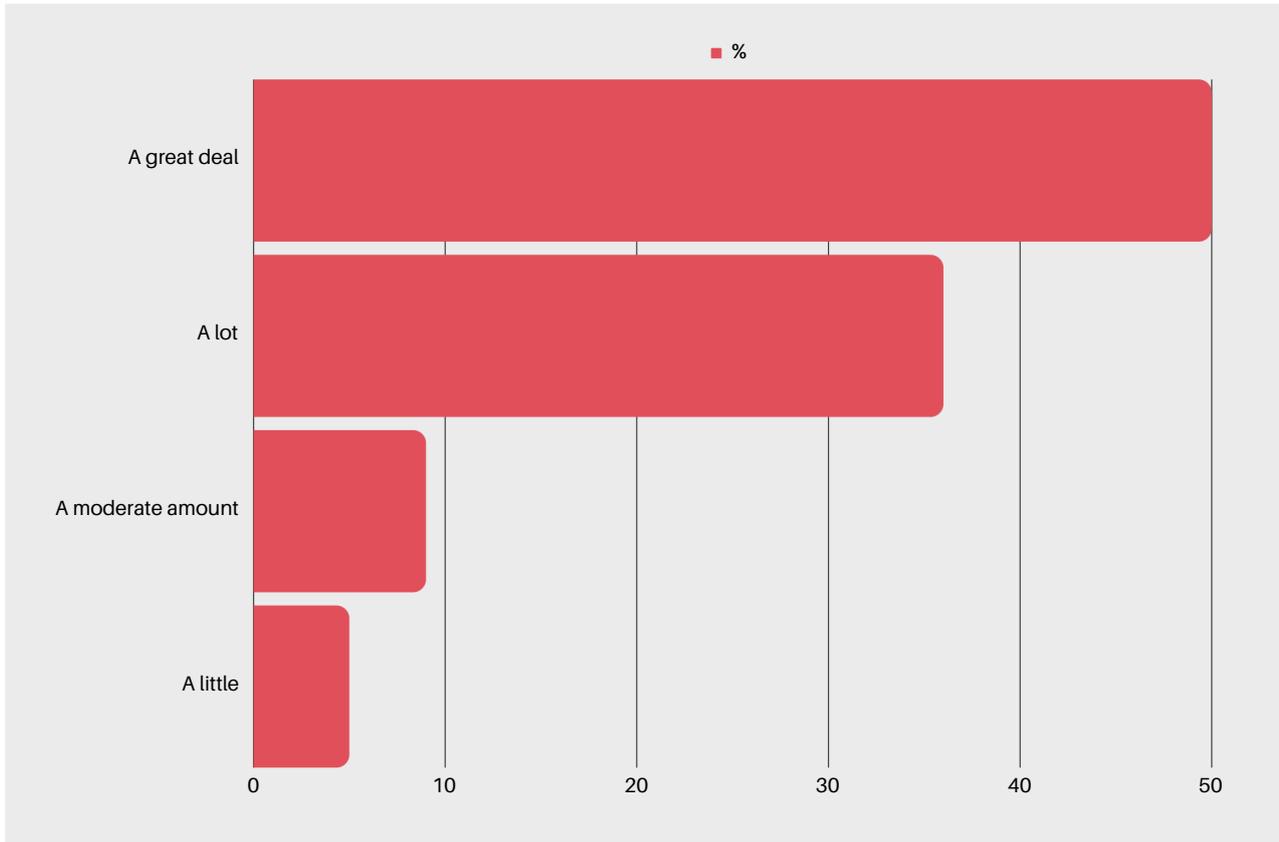
**Indicators of Mental Distress and Emotional Challenges in Children Living in Deep Poverty: Insights from Social Workers**



Almost 95% (49) of social workers reported anxiety as being the most prevalent impact of deep poverty on children's mental health. 73% (38) reported stress, 67% (35) depression, 63% (33) anger and 57% (30) loneliness. One social worker also reported "shame" being an issue faced by children living in deep poverty. When asked if the cost-of-living crisis is to blame for the worsening of these conditions from a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 indicating not responsible and

10 indicating very responsible), the average result was 7 (83%) (52). 50% (11) of charities reported that deep poverty caused a great deal of distress and emotional challenge for children that they support. 36% (8) said by a lot. One charity noted a frequent normalisation of poverty as children bear the brunt of the effects of deep poverty despite many of its issues being beyond their control.

## Impact of Deep Poverty on Children's Distress and Emotional Well-being: Perspectives from Charities



### 4.2 Paediatricians' Perspective on Access to Healthcare

Paediatricians stressed that parents/caregivers do not have the time, energy nor resources to often attend healthcare services. A consistently cited issue was the cost of getting to the hospital, which was enough for some parents/children to prevent their children from attending appointments. Some paediatricians cited expensive medicines also being an issue preventing children from getting access to basic healthcare measures.

One paediatrician stressed:

“They [the children] are not brought in or are very late as parents cannot afford the transport or have to work. This applied to picking up medication and other aspects of healthcare.”

Another paediatrician noted:

“It lessens parents’ abilities to provide for their children. We are seeing increasing cases where parents have been so concerned with basic survival that they have not been able to address children's healthcare needs. I had one patient last week, a boy aged 4 who was suffering from rickets and the parent was not able to bring the child to their GP because they couldn't afford the bus fare. Another patient, a girl aged 10, is suffering from malnutrition because of insufficient household income.”

Parents/caregivers also suffer from mental health problems. Abigail, mother of two, stressed:

*“But yeah, when it comes to buying food, going out shopping, that's when it really hits me. To do these things but I can't because I don't know I've always been that sort of person to get depressed very easily, you know. Then my kids are like worried about me, and I don't want them to worry about me because I'm worrying about their needs.”*



Despite Abigail having to deal with depression whilst doing her best to be a parent, the cost-of-living crisis continues to worsen her mental health:

*“I've put myself in a situation (...) I keep getting these phone calls [from debt collectors], and I'm not realising what I'm doing. Financially, I don't know how to look after money well.”*

# CHAPTER 5 - SAFETY AT HOME

## 5.1 The Scale of Housing Instability and Homelessness

Almost two fifths (38%) of UK adults surveyed said they were lacking the funds to pay for aspects of everyday living. This would be equivalent to 19,720,000 adults lacking the funds to pay for aspects of everyday living for the entire population. 20% lack the funds to take part in hobbies/personal interests and 19% to socialise and see their friends and family (equivalent to 10,400,000/9,880,000 adults for the entire population).

Looking at deep poverty, however: 25 14% lack funds to pay for electricity/gas. This would be equivalent to 7,280,000 adults lacking funds to pay for electricity/gas for the entire population. 14% lack funds to pay for groceries. This would be equivalent to 7,280,000 adults lacking funds to pay for electricity/gas for the entire population.

9% lack funds to pay for hot water. This would be equivalent to 4,680,000 adults lacking funds to pay for hot water for the entire population. When asked what they think deep poverty entails, top mentions included:

**Lack of funds to pay for groceries - 80%**

**Lack of funds to pay for electricity/gas - 79%**

**Lack of funds to pay for hot water - 75%**

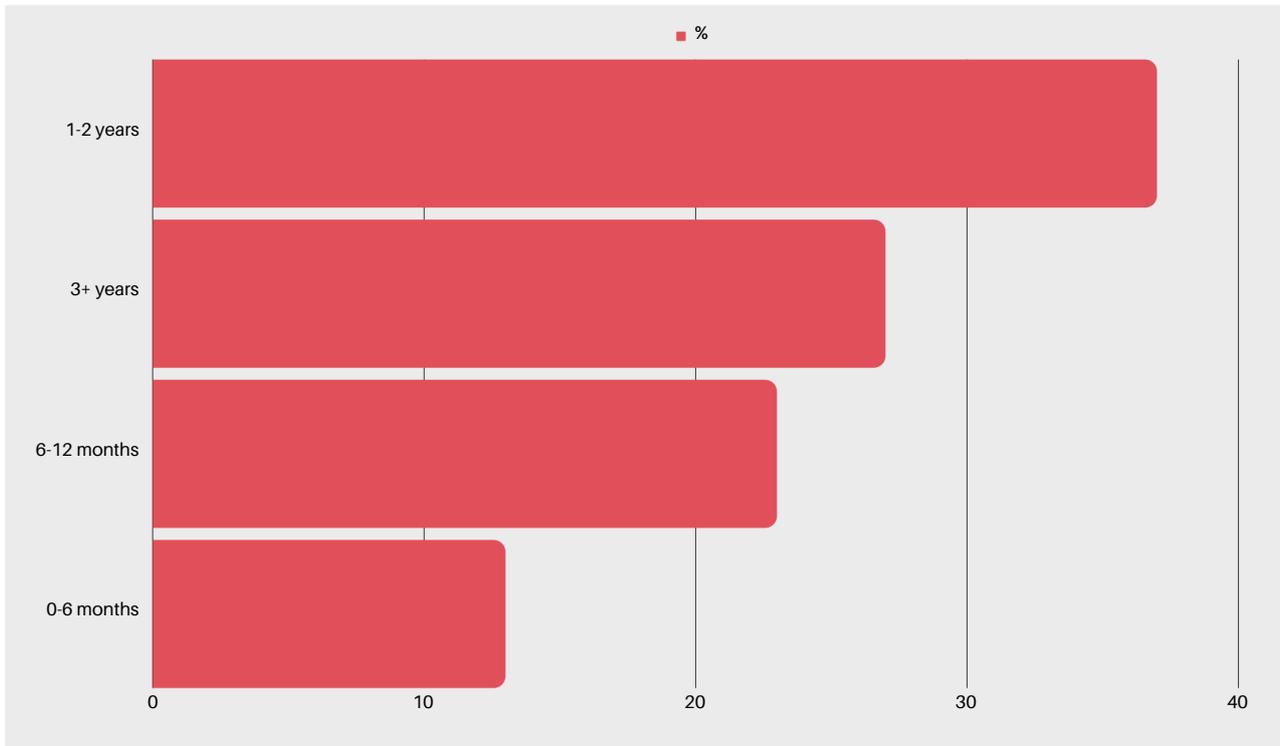
Lack of funds to pay for basic needs like utilities can foster a range of health concerns for children, hindering an environment in which they can learn, play and grow comfortably. Some of the parents and children we interviewed often remarked about their living spaces, with most having to spend nights in overcrowded rooms. One boy mentioned how:

*"I want to have my own room, my own stuff in my room. We have to share a bedroom because we don't have a lot of room. All three of us; my mum, brother and me, have to share a small room." -- Damien, aged 11*



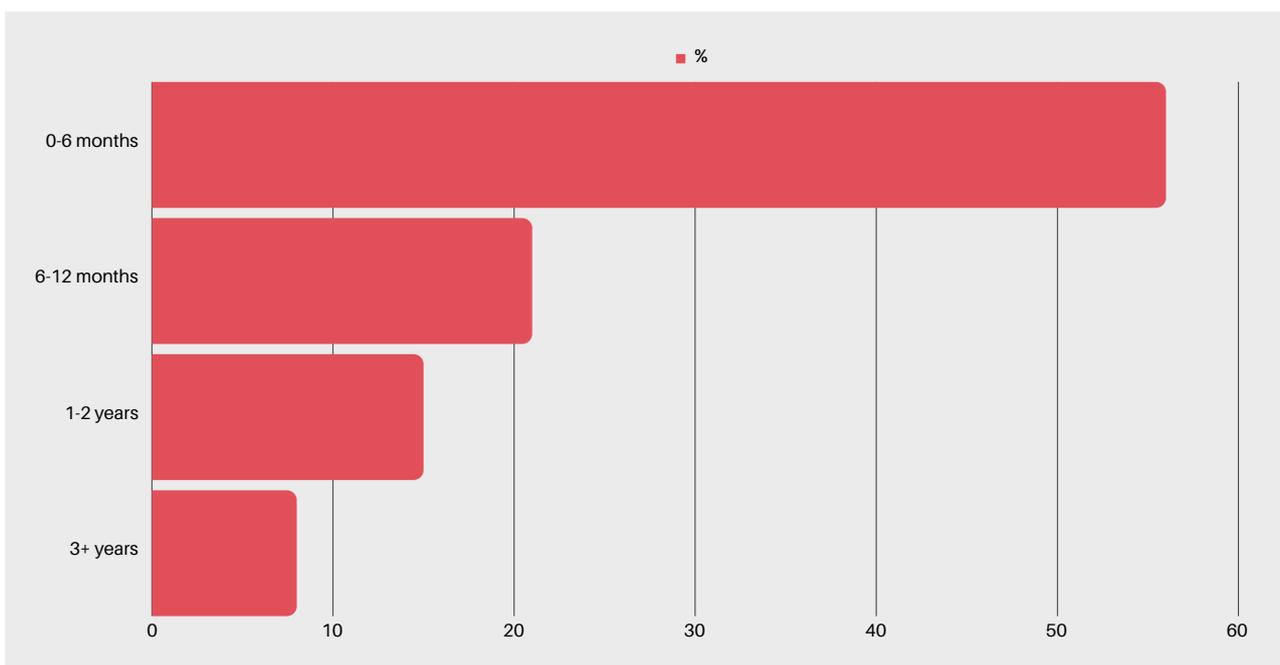
85% of social workers have found it difficult to achieve support for children experiencing housing issues and homelessness. 63% (33) said that children they support have experienced housing instability for at least 1 to 3 or more years.

### Average Duration of Housing Instability Amongst Supported Children



Over 55% (29) reported that children they support experienced homelessness for up to a period of 6 months. 23% (12) said this issue has lasted between 1 to 3 or more years for some children.

### Average Duration of Homelessness Amongst Supported Children





Charities also paint a vast picture of housing instability. 23,706 children are impacted by the current housing crisis in London (41%) (18).

60% (13) of these charities reported all living conditions amongst children they support to be severely inadequate.

These numbers can partly be attributed to homelessness. 59% (13) of the charities stated that the children they support are experiencing or have experienced homelessness at least once in their lives. For the 12 charities that were able to provide data, 6,057 children were reported as being homeless, or have experienced homelessness once in their lives.

**This means that, of the 23,706 children that are impacted by the housing crisis in London, 26% of children are homeless.**

# CHAPTER 6 - CHILDREN'S LIFE PROSPECTS

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66% of UK adults believe that deep poverty affects the personal development of children later in life. This is followed by academic development (64%), future employment prospects (57%) and relationship development (54%). The connection between deep poverty and these areas of development speaks to the broader aspect of a child's growth, encompassing emotional, social and psychological wellbeing.

## 6.1 Deep Poverty and Education

Despite a widespread consensus that deep poverty might affect these developmental aspects, 90% (47) of social workers reported that deep poverty is reducing the ability of children to make the most of their education: On the other hand, 59% (22) of charities said that children living in deep poverty are participating less in extracurricular activities and social events, such as recreational play and leisure activities.

## 6.2 Deep Poverty and Relationship Development

62% (32) of social workers reported that they have found it difficult to meet parents/caregivers' expectations of support. Yet, 100% (52) of social workers reported that deep poverty is making it harder for parents/caregivers to maintain strong and positive relationships with their children.

On the other hand, 59% (22) of charities said that children living in deep poverty are participating less in extracurricular activities and social events, such as recreational play and leisure activities

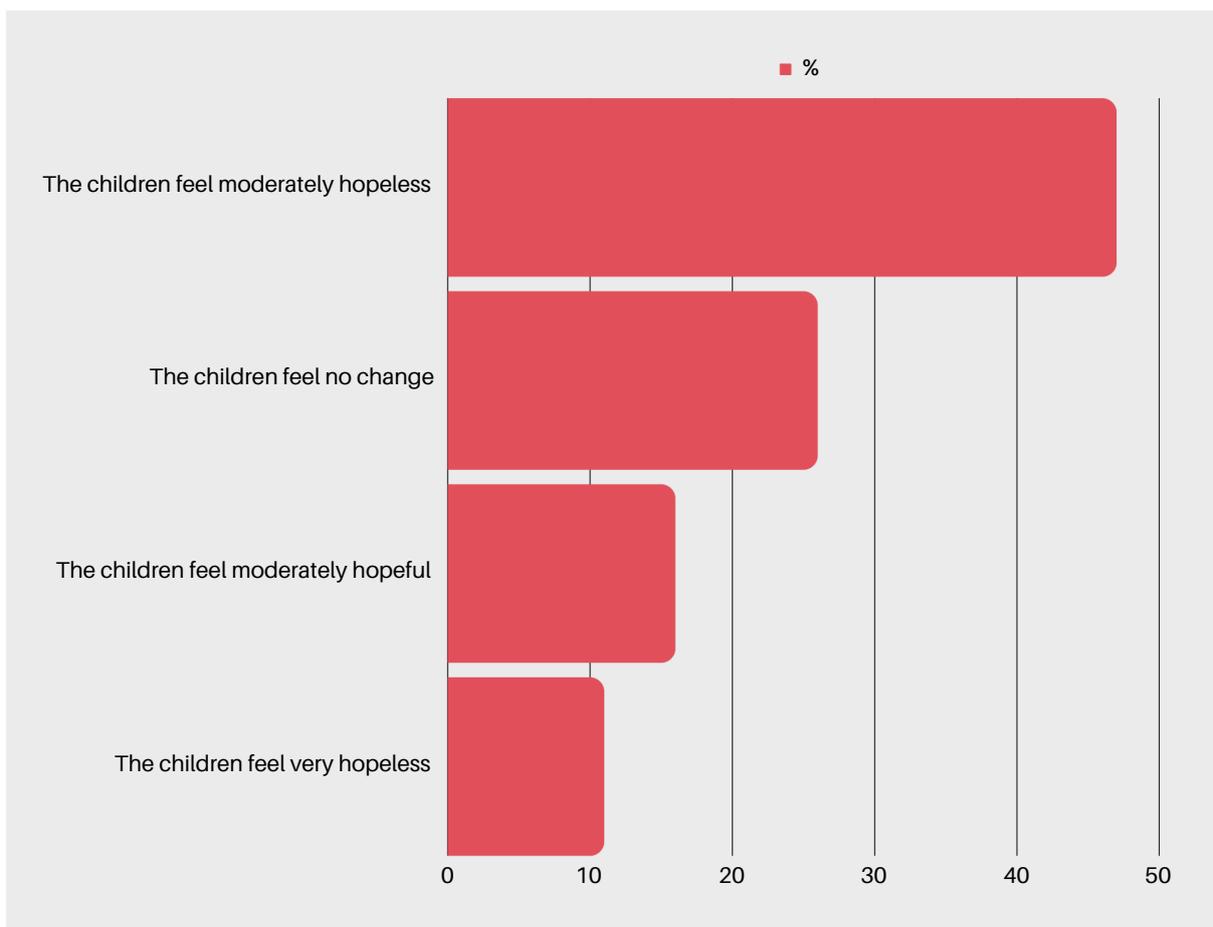
*"For me, it's affected me when we go to school trips, and you have to pay for it. Sometimes my parents say that maybe like next time you'll go on this school trip, something like that. I felt disappointed, but I just knew that it's for the best. Well, because I know it's for my parents' good and for money's sake." -- John, aged 12*

## 6.1 Children's Hopefulness About the Future

Over the last 6 months, 37% (19) of social workers have noticed or been told about the various perceptions children internalise on whether or not their lives might improve in the future.

For those that did notice or have been told by children directly, 58% (11) said that the children feel hopeless about how their lives might improve in the future.

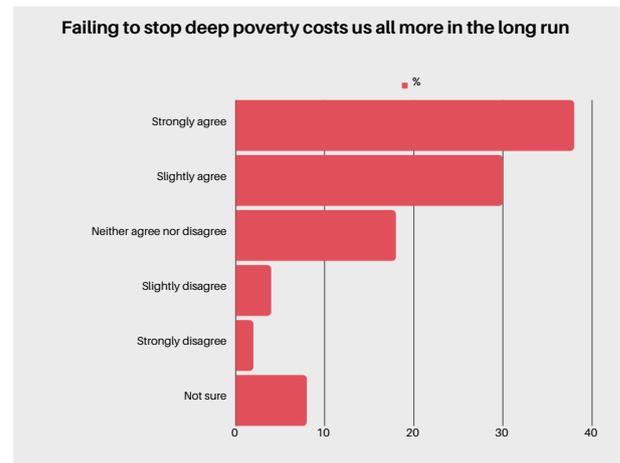
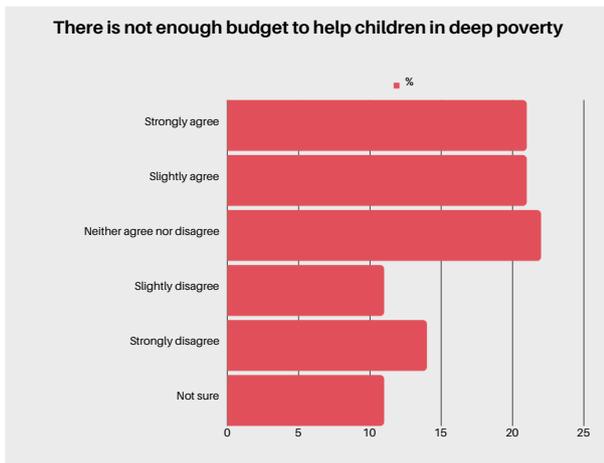
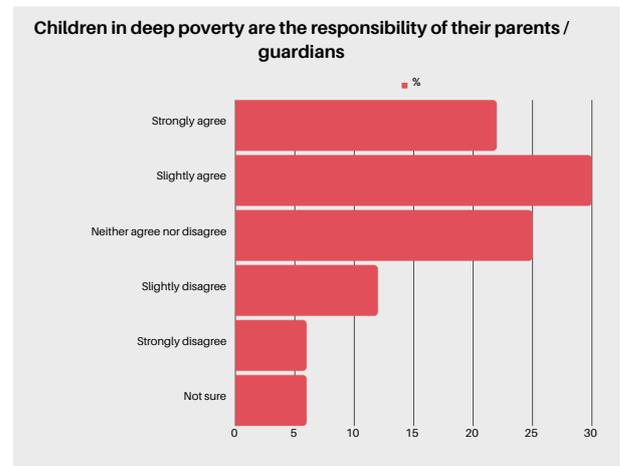
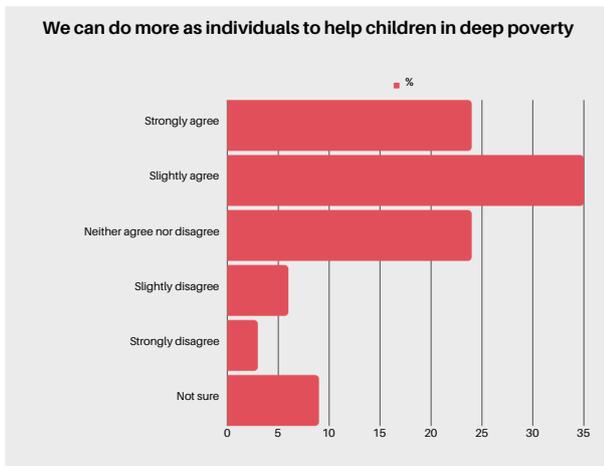
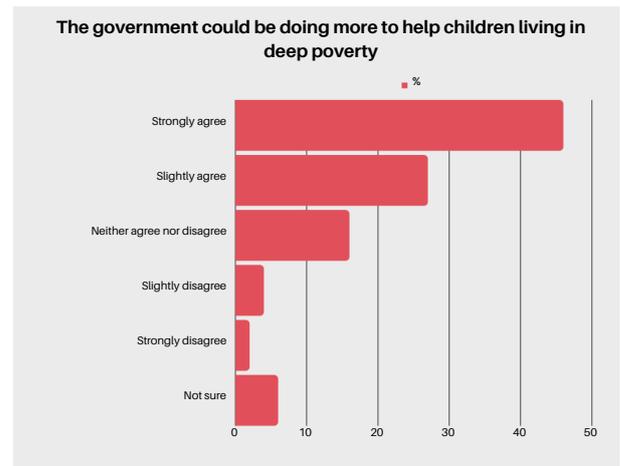
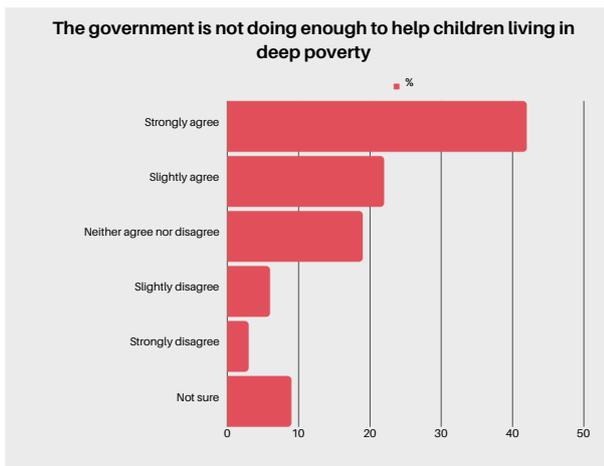
**Shifts in Children's Perceptions of Future Improvement: Observations in the Last 6 Months**



# CHAPTER 7 - THE STATUTORY SYSTEM AND WELFARE SUPPORT

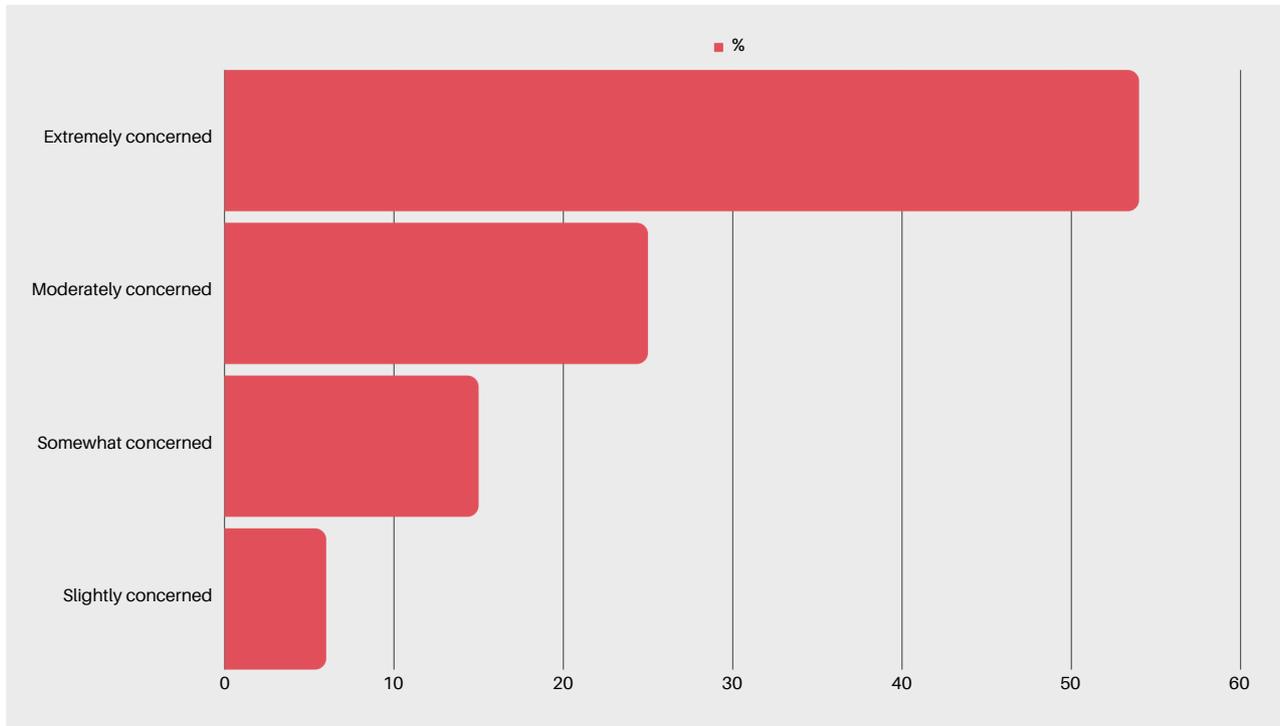
## 7.1 Lack of Government Support

According to our demographically representative survey, 88% of UK adults strongly agreed that the government is not doing enough and could be doing more to help children living in deep poverty. On the other hand, 24% of UK adults strongly agreed that, as individuals, we can do more to help children in deep poverty. 38% strongly agreed that failing to stop deep poverty costs us all more in the long run.



Social workers are also worried. 54% (28) were extremely concerned, 25% (13) moderately concerned and 15% (8) somewhat concerned that the statutory system is failing to ensure children's needs are met.

### Concerns Regarding the Efficacy of the Statutory System in Meeting Children's Needs



## 7.2 A Stressed Support System

Social workers are stressed. 98% (51) experience some level of stress; 27% of social workers are extremely stressed (14), 35% moderately stressed (18) and 25% (13) somewhat stressed.

One social worker emphasised how local authorities fail to acknowledge the pressure social workers are under professionally and personally, and what knock-on effect this may have on the performance of their work. With social workers stressed and stretched beyond

their limits, they might not be able to give each child the attention they deserve or provide the necessary emotional support.

A collaborative approach with charities can help to create a comprehensive support system, ensuring no child slips through the cracks. However, charities themselves are saying that we can no longer continue to rely on community organisations and charities to support children affected by deep poverty.

One charity specified how their local authority currently operates under Section 114, which has reduced or completely cut many universal and non-statutory services, having a major impact on families.

Other charities have stressed the need for increased funding across various areas. These include targeted funding for pregnant women and families with children that have special educational needs and disabilities. Several other charities also noted the importance of funding to provide meals for families, as well as more practical forms of additional support, such as mentoring, budgeting support, extracurricular activities and recreational play.

Several charities also reported the importance of funding to provide meals for families, either through schools or through the charities themselves.

The underfunding of schools is mentioned as a general issue and gets linked to a lack of services such as extracurricular activities, breakfast clubs and after-school provision. The cost-of-living crisis is seen to be exacerbating existing issues, especially in the winter and holiday season.

On the other hand, we asked paediatricians how healthcare providers can work collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as educators, charities and social workers, to better support children living in deep poverty. 84% of paediatricians reported that healthcare providers should work with social workers to connect families with vital social services. 68% reported needing regular communication and data sharing mechanisms amongst stakeholders to ensure a more coordinated approach. 63% reported the importance of working with educators to identify and address health-related barriers to learning.



Yet, 74% of paediatricians reported that there is a current disconnect between these stakeholders and the services they offer. When asked why, many paediatricians cited the need for the Government to get involved. “Implementing change” was frequently cited.

One paediatrician stressed:

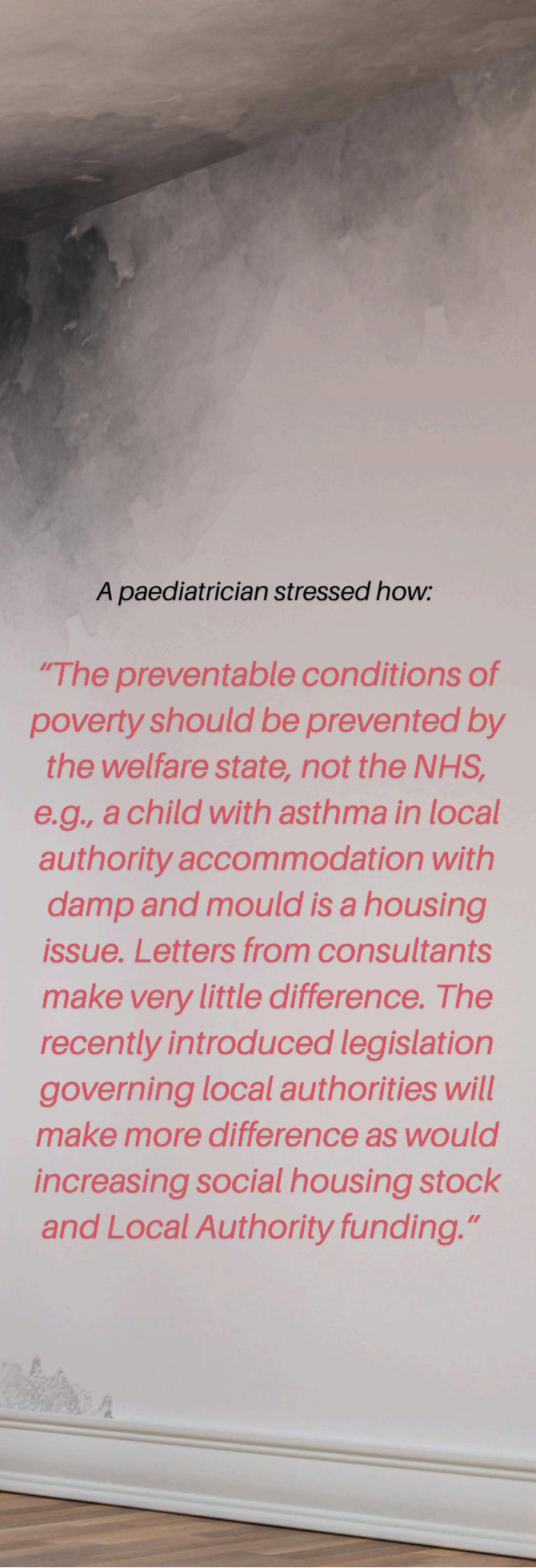
*“[It’s] better for the Government to change policies to target and supported [children] living in deep poverty through the existing welfare system.”*

Another paediatrician expressed solidarity with social workers, saying that:

*“Social workers can’t keep up. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) is overrun.”*

When asked if the NHS is failing children living in deep poverty, 61% (11) of paediatricians said yes.

Acting as a uniform body to advocate for the needs of children, poor access to services, and a lack of resources and effort put into prevention, were some the cited arguments supporting those that said yes.



*A paediatrician stressed how:*

*“The preventable conditions of poverty should be prevented by the welfare state, not the NHS, e.g., a child with asthma in local authority accommodation with damp and mould is a housing issue. Letters from consultants make very little difference. The recently introduced legislation governing local authorities will make more difference as would increasing social housing stock and Local Authority funding.”*

This consensus against the current failures of our support system resonate with what parents are saying. One mother mentioned how:

*“I wish it gets like before, but now I know it’s never going to be like before. I wish, I wish, especially for the NHS. They’re not responding like before. It’s unfair for me and my husband because we both have health conditions. I can’t even do hydrotherapy anymore. There’s no support for my pain that existed before. It’s all gone now. And it’s not only me but lots of people are suffering.” -- Alice, mother of two*

A paediatrician noted that:

*“[The] NHS is failing children in general. The more poverty you have, the less likely you can compensate for this.”*

## CONCLUSION

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Deep poverty has profound consequences on all areas of a child's life, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable children and families in society.

The evidence documented in this research brings to the fore the complex and extensive challenges that face children affected by deep poverty. It also highlights the challenges being experienced by social workers and paediatricians, both providing critical support for children in crisis, which the cost-of-living crisis has intensified greatly over the last year.

It's estimated that the broad annual cost of significantly reducing poverty in the UK is £36bn – equivalent to £6,000 a year for 6 million families living in poverty, a figure reached through a combination of benefits and wage increases, and investment to lower housing and energy costs, and improved health services [11]. Despite this, overall relative poverty rates barely changed at between 21% and 24% over the past two decades, but even in areas where some progress was made, such as single-parent poverty, they have started to go into reverse [11].

Some financial relief measures, such as the cost-of-living payment scheme, still don't go far enough to help households afford food and pay their bills. Eight million low-income households will have received the next £300 instalment of the cost-of-living payment during October / November [12]. Although one-off payments are helpful, it's only ensuring survival and not enough to provide support for the lowest income families over the long term.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has said that these payments are poorly designed to alleviate deprivation. Whilst the payments facilitated higher spending for low-income households, they were not targeted at those most in need – and their occasional, lump-sum nature created additional difficulties [13]. Other social support measures have lost their values in the last decade, making it pivotal to restore these to ensure a more robust safety net.

These issues come during a time when social workers, paediatricians and charities are struggling to meet the needs of children in deep poverty, as the cost-of-living crisis continues to exacerbate the existing array of challenges they face. Paediatricians, experts in child healthcare, point to the need to address the very challenges our current social safety net is struggling to meet. The consequences of these have been experienced by children directly, and a dire picture is painted over what the future might hold for these children, their families and organisations trying to meet their needs.

In line with the findings of this report, the following policy recommendations are proposed that can address deep poverty in various contexts.

- Build upon existing collaboration between local authorities and third sector support organisations to improve data infrastructure and jointly publish information on the level of unmet need locally. This includes facilitating collaboration amongst all stakeholders involved directly with the health and wellbeing outcomes of children living in deep poverty [20] [14] [17].
- Appropriately target support to the communities most in need- cost-of-living payments to means-tested social security recipients (currently worth £650) should be significantly enhanced and extended to help the lowest-income households meet rising costs [14].
- The Government should better resource the Household Support Fund and target additional funds towards local authorities with the highest rates of child poverty. It should also Up-rate the Local Housing Allowance in line with current rents to safeguard the financial security of those on the lowest incomes [14].
- Extend and enhance the Household Support Fund so statutory agencies and third sector organisations have the necessary resources to meet rising demand for support from those experiencing financial crisis [14].
- Remove the two-child limit that restricts support provided through Tax Credits and Universal Credit to two children per household. Younger siblings are missing out on up to £62 per week that their older siblings receive from the state [15] [18].
- Provide universal free school meals across England, ensuring no child is too hungry to learn [19].
- Strengthen and expand social security measures. In the immediate term, areal-time uprating of social security in line with rising inflation would address the growing gap between entitlement and need. The government should permanently reintroduce and extend the £20 uplift to all those relying on Universal Credit(as well as other mean-tested legacy benefits) [14].
- Strengthen mental health services, this should include work on wider services such as homelessness or housing services and employment support, as well as investment in school-based programmes, including bullying and violence prevention, interventions to promote child social-emotional functioning and development, universal resilience-focused interventions, school-based promotion of self-regulation, school based mindfulness programmes, youth mentoring programmes, psychosocial interventions delivered by teachers, and prevention of substance abuse [17] [16].

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# APPENDIX

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## Note on equivalences:

The equivalences made to make comparisons between the survey sample of 2,000 adults and the general population draw on data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2021 results. This figure includes the adult population. The equivalences are not a direct measure but are intended to be an approximate estimate of the equivalence ratio.

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