

Public Attitudes to Poverty in Scotland

Adults' and Young People's Views of People Living in Poverty

Scottish Government Communities Analysis Division

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stigma regarding living in poverty has been underlined by key stakeholders and during public engagement as an important issue for the Scottish Government to address as part of its work in tackling poverty. While there is evidence that some people living in poverty experience stigma, there are gaps in our understanding of the public attitudes that may be influencing this.

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of what type of negative attitudes towards people living in poverty exist and how widely these are held. New data was gathered from two nationally representative surveys of people in Scotland: an online omnibus survey of adults in Scotland and the 'Young People in Scotland' (YPiS) survey.

The survey of adults used the Scottish Opinion online omnibus, run by Progressive Partnership in partnership with YouGov. YouGov drew a sub-sample of its panel that was representative of Scottish adults in terms of age, gender and social class, and invited this sub-sample to complete the survey. Once the survey was complete, the final data were statistically weighted to the national profile of all adults aged 18 and over. The survey took place in March 2017 and the final sample achieved was 1,027.

The YPiS survey is a biennial school-based omnibus survey of young people in Scotland run by Ipsos MORI. Data was collected from a representative sample of young people aged between 11 and 18, across 50 state-sector secondary schools in Scotland. The survey was conducted between September and November 2016 in school in online self-completion sessions, and the final sample achieved was 1,550.

Most adults (90%) accepted an 'absolute destitution' definition of poverty; there was majority support (71%) for a 'minimum standards' definition; and only minority support (31%) for a 'relative poverty' definition that implies social inclusion. Young people's responses followed a similar pattern compared to adults but with a higher proportion of young people selecting the 'don't know' option.

Around three quarters of respondents (77%) thought that there is some or a lot of child poverty in Scotland. When asked to select from a list all the reasons they think might best explain why children are in poverty in Scotland, people selected seven reasons on average, which shows they recognise that child poverty is a complex problem with no single, straightforward cause. That "their parents suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse or other addictions" was the most commonly selected reason for child poverty. However, there was also recognition that wider, structural factors play a role, for example: "their parents' work doesn't pay enough" was also one of the most commonly selected reasons.

In general, the majority of adults and young people in Scotland held sympathetic views about people living in poverty, or expressed uncertainty in their responses.

Asked, "thinking about people in Scotland's chances of doing well at school and work, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements", around two thirds of adults (66%) and young people (65%) agreed that most people have

the chance to “get on well at school and work if they try”. Just under half of adults (47%) and young people (45%) thought that most people from poor backgrounds “face barriers to getting on well at school and work”. However, a sizable minority of adults did not believe that coming from a poor background might create barriers to opportunity (27%). A smaller proportion of young people disagreed with the statement, although almost a quarter were unsure. Over half of adults (54%) and young people (61%) thought, “most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one”.

Our findings suggest that a significant minority of people in Scotland accept some stereotypical views: 28% of adults and of young people agreed that “most poor people could get by fine if they just budgeted sensibly” while 28% of adults and 26% of young people agreed that “many poor people have it easy because they get everything paid for by the Government”. Nineteen per cent of adults and 10% of young people disagreed that “most poor people are in that situation through no fault of their own”.

Similarly, the majority of adults and young people thought experiences commonly related to poverty – not being able to pay bills, needing to use foodbanks, not having a job and receiving benefits – were nothing to feel embarrassed about. However, a minority of adults did hold some potentially stigmatising views: 21% of adults and 13% young people thought that adults who do not have a job should be embarrassed; 15% of adults and 8% of young people thought adults who can’t pay their bills should be embarrassed; and 10% of adults and young people thought adults who receive benefits from the Government should be embarrassed.

Overall, young people’s views were fairly similar to those of adults, although young people were much more likely to be uncertain in their knowledge and views about people in poverty. Larger proportions of young people, and especially younger school pupils, selected the ‘don’t know’ option for many of the questions.

Findings from previous surveys suggest that individual explanations of poverty are more common than structural explanations and attitudes towards poverty have hardened over recent years. This report has also found some evidence that people tend to focus on individual explanations of poverty and hold some negative attitudes towards people living in poverty. The widespread belief that parental addiction to alcohol and/or drugs is one of the reasons that best explain why children live in poverty in Scotland underlines the need to better communicate that that problem substance use has a relatively limited impact on overall poverty levels. The results provide some evidence to confirm that some of the stereotypes identified as problematic in discussions with people who have experience of poverty – e.g. being lazy, unable to budget – are reflected in public attitudes, albeit held by a minority. Also that a minority of adults did hold some potentially stigmatising views. The findings from this research will be used by the Scottish Government to inform work on tackling stigma towards people living in poverty in Scotland.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

1.1 Background and policy context

In 2015/16, there were approximately 1.05 million people living in relative poverty (after housing costs) in Scotland, which represents 20% of the population. The total included approximately 260,000 children, 650,000 working age adults and 140,000 pensioners.[1]

The Scottish Government believes that stigma in relation to poverty is a key issue it needs to address – and this view has been informed by public engagement over many years and by key stakeholders, including people with direct experience of poverty. Respect and dignity was a key theme raised through the Fairer Scotland Conversation.[2] The stigma people in poverty experience has also been identified as a key challenge by the Poverty Truth Commission.[3] Similarly, local commissions set up to explore fairness and poverty – including Renfrewshire Council's Poverty Commission and Dundee Partnership Fairness Commission – have all highlighted stigma as a concern.[4, 5] Common issues relating to stigma were raised across all of these discussions: perceptions of negative attitudes towards people living in poverty or in disadvantaged areas from the media, politicians and society more broadly; people's (including children's) sense of shame about their financial situation and where they live; and the way that people are treated by services. The Report of the Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality also highlighted how people felt about the services they received and the impact of stigma on benefit claiming.[6]

1.2 Research context

While there is evidence that some people living in poverty experience stigma, there are gaps in our understanding of the public attitudes that may be influencing this.

The Scottish Government recently published a report reviewing what is known about *Public Attitudes to Poverty, Inequality and Welfare in Scotland and Britain*. [7] It found some evidence of negative attitudes towards those living in poverty. Over time, people have become more likely to think poverty is caused by individual factors, and less likely to think it is due to injustice in society. This suggests a shift towards focussing more on the behaviours and choices of individuals (such as substance use or worklessness) in explaining their disadvantage and less on the broader structural and economic forces that shape their circumstances (such as the labour and housing markets). Further, negative attitudes to welfare recipients are widespread, and there is a lack of understanding of welfare issues. In general, the existing survey evidence focuses on understandings of poverty and its causes, and attitudes towards welfare spending and recipients. There is a lack of evidence regarding what type of negative attitudes towards people living in poverty exist and how widely these are held. This information is necessary in order to develop messages to change attitudes.

The main existing sources of data on attitudes towards poverty are NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA)ⁱ, ScotCen's Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA)ⁱⁱ, and a 2013 Scotpulse survey on attitudes to child poverty in Scotland.[8] The BSA asks about poverty more frequently and in more detail than the SSA: the BSA has regularly asked questions on attitudes to poverty and welfare over time between 1983 and 2014, including on understandings, levels and causes of poverty. Where the same question has been asked in both the British and Scottish attitudes surveys, Scottish and British attitudes to poverty have been found to be relatively similar.[7]

1.3 About the new data presented in this report

This report presents new data on the type and extent of negative public attitudes toward people living in poverty, from two nationally representative surveys of people in Scotland:

- An online omnibus survey of adults aged 18 and over in Scotland (referred to as the 'Scottish Opinion survey')
- The 'Young People in Scotland' survey of school pupils aged between 11 and 18 (referred to as the 'YPiS survey')

The survey of adults used the **Scottish Opinion online omnibus**, run by Progressive Partnership in partnership with YouGov. Respondents were invited to take part from YouGov's opt-in panel of over 30,000 Scottish adults (aged 18+). The survey uses targeted quota sampling. YouGov drew a sub-sample of its panel that was representative of Scottish adults in terms of gender, age, socio-economic group, location and education, and invited this sub-sample to complete the survey. Only this sub-sample had access to the questionnaire via their username and password, and respondents could only ever answer the survey once.

The survey was carried out online and took place in March 2017. The final sample achieved was 1,027. All questionnaires were self-completed. The final data set was weighted to reflect the adult Scottish population (aged 18 and over) based on age, gender, social class and region.

The **YPiS survey** is a biennial school-based omnibus survey of young people in Scotland run by Ipsos MORI. Data was collected from a representative sample of young people aged between 11 and 18, across 50 state-sector secondary schools in Scotland. The survey was conducted between September and November 2016. Sampling for YPiS is done primarily at the level of schools and classes. All state funded secondary schools in Scotland were included in the sampling frame, while independent and special schools were excluded. The overall sample frame therefore comprised around 300 state secondary schools throughout Scotland. Sixty schools were then recruited by Ipsos MORI (with a target of 50 schools participating), to quotas by local authority. Each school that agreed to participate in

ⁱ <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ssa.natcen.ac.uk/>

the research was randomly allocated two year groups from S1-S6 and asked to administer the survey to a randomly allocated class per year group.

The survey was administered in school by class teachers, using self-completion online questionnaires in a mixed ability class such as Personal, Health and Social Education, during one classroom period. Teachers were provided by Ipsos MORI with detailed instructions on how to administer the questionnaire to their class. The final sample size achieved was 1,550. The final sample profile was in line with that of Scottish schools as a whole.

1.4 Questionnaires

The main areas the questions included in both surveys covered were:

- Understandings of the extent and causes of poverty (particularly to what extent people are seen to live in need because of individual failings and beliefs about the availability of opportunity);
- How widely held negative stereotypes of those living in poverty are;
- Whether people think aspects of living in poverty are shameful.

Some of the questions replicated questions used in the BSA and/or Scotpulse surveys.

Although the Scotpulse survey was also an online omnibus survey, it should be noted that the BSA survey involves computer-assisted interviews carried out face-to-face with respondents aged 18 or over, living in private households in Great Britain. This means that questions are generally read out by interviewers and respondents can choose response options from a card. BSA also uses random probability sampling. While YPiS involved online self-completion of the questionnaire (like the Scotpulse and Scottish Opinion surveys), the method of sampling (via schools) and completion (in-school rather than in-home) differs from the adult surveys. There were also some differences in the questions the adults and young people were asked. In particular, adults were asked slightly more detailed questions on child poverty that were used in the Scotpulse survey, as well as in a recent BSA survey. Additionally, the surveys took place during different time periods.

The report does present comparisons of findings between the four surveys to give an indication of (a) how young people's and adults' views compare and (b) how adults' views in Scotland in 2017 compare with views in Scotland and in Great Britain a few years earlier. However, the differences in the sampling and data collection methods discussed above mean that comparisons should be seen as indicative only.

1.5 Analysis and reporting

All percentages cited in this report are based on weighted data (and are rounded to the nearest whole number). All differences between different groups of people described in the text are significant at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). This means that the probability of having found a difference of at least this size, if there

was no actual difference in the population, is 5% or less. The term 'significant' is used in this report to refer to statistical significance, and is not intended to imply substantive importance.

The sampling technique used for the Scottish Opinion survey was quota controlled to achieve a representative sample of the Scottish general public; use of quotas means it was a non-probability sample. The margin of error should therefore be treated as indicative, based on an equivalent probability sample. The margin of error for the total sample of 1,027 is 0.61% to 3.06% (calculated at the 95% confidence level – market research industry standard).

Standard notation is used in tables: '*' is used to indicate results of less than 1% and '-' used to indicate no respondents gave a particular answer. For ease of reading the results, '1%' and '2%' notations have been left off some of the charts. In instances where percentages quoted in the text do not match the sum of two figures in the charts, this is due to rounding.

SECTION 2: FINDINGS

2.1 Perceptions of poverty – definitions of poverty

To capture public understanding of poverty, we drew on a series of three questions used in the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey.ⁱⁱⁱ The wording of questions was changed slightly to make it easier for young people to answer, and the adapted question was then used for the adult survey (see Figure 1 below). Figure 1 shows that most adults accepted an ‘absolute destitution’ definition of poverty – 90% agreed with statement A); there was majority support for a ‘minimum standards’ definition – 71% agreed with statement B); and only minority support for a ‘relative poverty’ definition that implies social inclusion – 31% agreed with statement C).

Figure 1: Adults’ definitions of poverty – someone is really poor if...

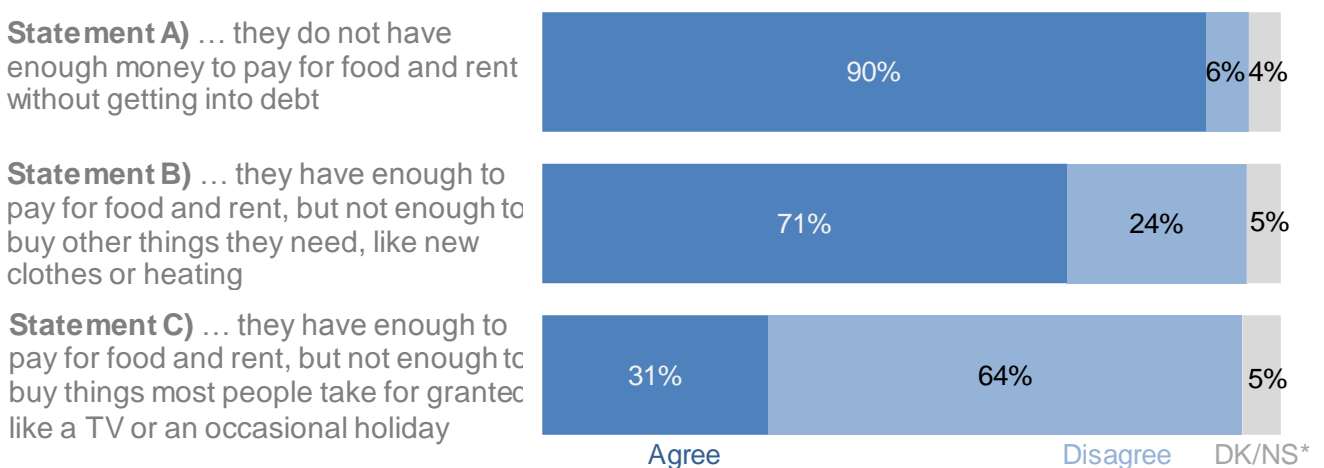
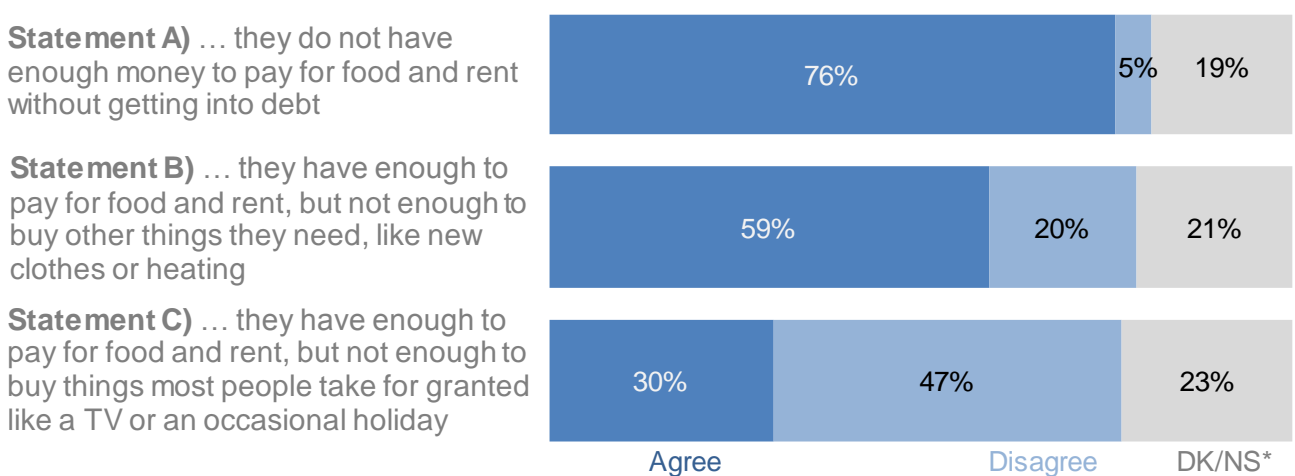


Figure 2: Young people’s definitions of poverty – someone is really poor if...



*DK/NS = ‘don’t know’ or ‘prefer not to say’

ⁱⁱⁱThe BSA question asks: “Would you say that someone in Britain was or was not in poverty if: A) they had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt? B) they had enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed? C) they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted?”

Young people's responses followed a similar pattern to adults with 76% agreeing with statement A); 59% agreeing with statement B); and 30% agreeing with statement C) (Figure 2 above). But a much higher proportion of young people selected the 'don't know' option (around a fifth for each question) compared to adults (4-5%). In general, across all of the questions, a higher proportion of young people selected the 'don't know'/'prefer not to say' option compared to adults.

The Adults survey results are similar to previous results from the BSA, which finds that 87% of people in Britain agreed with statement A) in 2013 and 91% in 2010; 47% agreed with statement B) in 2013 and 54% in 2010; and only 19% agreed with statement C) in 2013 and 21% in 2010^{iv}. BSA results suggest that views may be becoming less sympathetic over time. However, this survey found higher support than in BSA for the 'minimum standards' (B) and 'relative poverty' (C) definitions.

2.2 Perceptions of poverty – level of poverty

To explore perceptions of levels of poverty in Scotland adults were asked a question specifically on child poverty, which has been used in recent surveys of adults in Britain and Scotland. Three quarters of respondents thought that there is some or a lot of child poverty in Scotland (Table 1 below).^v

Table 1: Perceptions of child poverty levels – adults, comparison with previous surveys

Some people say there is very little child poverty in [Scotland/Britain] today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which comes closest to your view?	BSA 2012* (Britain)	Scotpulse 2013 [8] (Scotland)	BSA 2014* (Britain)	Scottish Opinion 2017
There is no child poverty in XXX today	3%	1%	4%	1%
There is very little child poverty in XXX today	13%	4%	10%	8%
There is some child poverty in XXX today	43%	34%	44.0%	42%
There is quite a lot of child poverty in XXX today	39%	55%	39%	34%
I don't know/I would rather not say	2%	6%	3%	15%

* Data is taken from the British Social Attitudes Information System: <http://www.britisocat.com/Home>

As Table 1 shows, previous surveys have also found that the vast majority of those in Britain and Scotland recognise that there is child poverty. In addition, a higher number of respondents in the Scottish Opinion survey selected the 'don't know' or

^{iv} Data is taken from the British Social Attitudes Information System: <http://www.britisocat.com/Home>. Between 1% and 2% of respondents said they didn't know for each question in 2010 and 2013.

^v It should be noted that no definition of what 'quite a lot' or 'very little' means was offered alongside the questions, and the response therefore reflects individual interpretations, which may differ widely between respondents. However, variations in definitions should fluctuate randomly and even each other out over the sample as a whole. The same approach was taken in the most recent set of questions.

'prefer not to say' option than previous surveys. When comparing to the BSA results, this is likely to be partly explained by the different data collection method.

Young people were asked a question on poverty generally, which was adapted from BSA to be easier for young people to answer.^{vi} Table 2 shows that a minority of young people thought hardly anyone in Scotland today is really poor, while just over a third selected the 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' responses.

Table 2: Perceptions of poverty levels – young people

Some people say hardly anyone in Scotland today is really poor. Others say there are many really poor people in our country. Which of these comes closest to your view?	
Hardly anyone in Scotland today is really poor	14%
There are many really poor people in Scotland today	47%
Don't know	34%
Prefer not to say	5%

When asked a similar question, since 1986 a majority of adults in Britain have said that there is 'quite a lot' of real poverty in Britain. In the 2013 BSA, 62% thought there was 'quite a lot of poverty' in Britain, compared to 58% in 2009.

2.3 Perceptions of the causes of poverty

Adults were then asked a detailed question on causes of child poverty, which has been used in recent surveys of adults in Britain and Scotland. The question first asks respondents to select from a list (see Table 3 below) all the reasons they think might best explain why children are in poverty in Scotland. Then, from the same list, they are asked which they think is the main reason children are in poverty in Scotland^{vii}. Tables 3 and 4 compare responses on the reasons for poverty in the Scottish Opinion survey, to responses in the Scotpulse survey of adults in Scotland in 2013 and the BSA survey of adults in Britain in 2012.

When asked about all the reasons they think might best explain why children are in poverty, people selected seven reasons on average, which shows they recognise that child poverty is a complex problem with no single, straightforward cause. Looking at tables 3 and 4, "their parents suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse or other addictions" was the most commonly selected contributory and main reason for child poverty. This is consistent with previous surveys of adults in Britain and Scotland, although a higher proportion of the respondents to the 2013 Scotpulse survey

^{vi} The BSA question asks: "Some people say there is very little real poverty in Britain today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which comes closest to your view... That there is very little real poverty in Britain; or that there is quite a lot?"

^{vii} Only respondents who gave a reason/reasons in the previous question were asked to select the main reason; n=901.

selected this option. However, there was also recognition that wider, structural factors play a role, for example: “their parents’ work doesn’t pay enough” was one of the most commonly selected contributory and main reasons.

Table 3: All reasons for child poverty – adults, comparison with previous surveys

Reason	BSA 2012 (Britain)*	Scotpulse 2013 [8] (Scotland)	Scottish Opinion 2017
Their parents suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse or other addictions	73% (1)	87% (1)	73%
Their parents have been out of work for a long time	49% (3=)	74% (2)	57%
Their parents' work doesn't pay enough	46% (4)	57% (4)	56%
Their parents do not want to work	58% (2)	67% (3)	53%
They - or their parents - suffer from a long term illness or disability	42%	51%	51%
There has been a family break-up or loss of a family member	49% (3=)	54%	47%
Their parents lack education	53%	54%	43%
Their family cannot access affordable housing	28%	41%	42%
They live in a poor quality area	42%	56% (5)	42%
There are too many children in the family	43%	45%	40%
Because of inequalities in society	30%	41%	36%
Their family suffers from discrimination, such as because of their ethnicity, age, disability	23%	25%	26%
Their grandparents were also poor - i.e. it has been passed down the generations	23%	25%	24%
Their parents do not work enough hours	18%	28%	22%
Social benefits for families with children are not high enough	18%	21%	20%
None of these/other reasons	0%	9%	2%
Don't know	1%	1%	9%

* Data is taken from the British Social Attitudes Information System: <http://www.britsocat.com/Home>

Table 4 highlights that “because of inequalities in society” was the third most commonly selected main reason – selected by a higher proportion of respondents in the Scottish surveys compared to the BSA. A lower proportion of respondents selected “their parents lack education” as a main reason for child poverty in the Scottish surveys compared to the BSA.

Table 4: Main reasons for child poverty – adults, comparison with previous surveys

Reason**	BSA 2012* (Britain)	Scotpulse 2013 [8] (Scotland)	BSA 2014* (Britain)	Scottish Opinion 2017
Their parents suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse or other addictions	19% (1)	29% (1)	17% (1)	20%
Their parents do not want to work	14% (2)	13% (3)	9% (4)	14%
Because of inequalities in society	7% (5)	16% (2)	7% (5)	14%
Their parents' work doesn't pay enough	9% (4)	8% (5)	11% (2)	13%
Their parents have been out of work for a long time	7%	10% (4)	8%	8%
Their parents lack education	11% (3)	6%	11% (3)	5%
They live in a poor quality area	4%	5%	6%	4%
There are too many children in the family	4%	3%	4%	4%
Their grandparents were also poor	3%	1%	3%	3%
Don't know	2%	*	2%	7%

*Data is taken from the British Social Attitudes Information System: <http://www.britsocat.com/Home>

**Only reasons selected by 3% or more of respondents in the Scottish Opinion survey are shown in the table

To explore young people's understandings about the causes of poverty, we asked a simpler question on poverty generally, adapted from the BSA (Table 5).^{viii}

Table 5: Reasons for poverty – young people

Which one of the following four views comes closest to what you think about why some people are poor?	
Because they have been unlucky	13%
Because they are lazy	15%
Because society is not fair	25%
Because it is just part of modern life that some people are poor	15%
None of these	5%
Don't know	20%
Prefer not to say	6%

^{viii} The BSA question asks: "Why do you think there are people who live in need? Of the four views on this card, which one comes closest to your own? Because they have been unlucky; Because of laziness or lack of willpower; Because of injustice in our society; It's an inevitable part of modern life; None of these."

A quarter of young people thought that people are poor because society is “not fair”, compared to 15% who said that it was because “they are lazy”, 15% “it is just part of modern life” and 13% because “they have been unlucky” (Table 5 above).

In 2010, adults in Britain were asked why they thought that people lived in need. Of the four options they were presented with: 35% thought that living in need was an inevitable part of modern life; 23% said that it was due to laziness; 21% that it was due to injustice in society; and 13% because people in poverty have been unlucky. Over time, the view that people live in need because of individual factors (laziness) has become more prevalent among adults in Britain, while an explanation focused on social justice (injustice in our society) has become less common.

2.4 Attitudes towards the availability of opportunity

We asked both adults and young people a series of questions to explore beliefs about the availability of opportunity in Scotland.

Asked, “thinking about people in Scotland’s chances of doing well at school and work, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”, around two thirds of adults and young people agreed that most people have the chance to “get on well at school and work if they try”. Figure 3 shows that a higher proportion of young people strongly agreed compared to adults, but also that young people were less likely than adults to disagree that “nearly everyone in Scotland has the chance to get on well”, and more likely to say they were unsure.

Figure 3: “Nearly everyone in Scotland has the chance to get on well at school and work if they try”

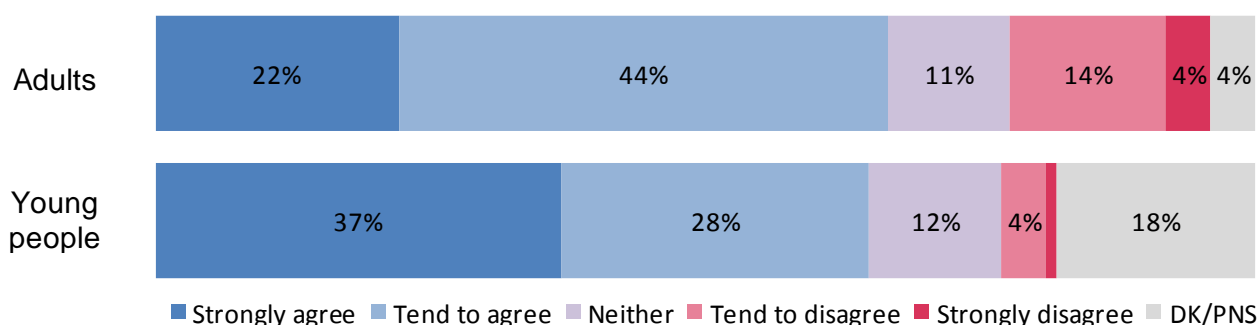
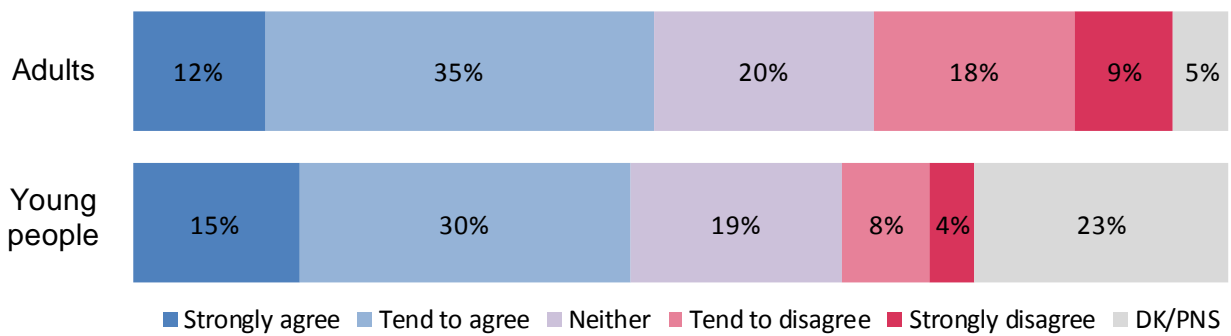


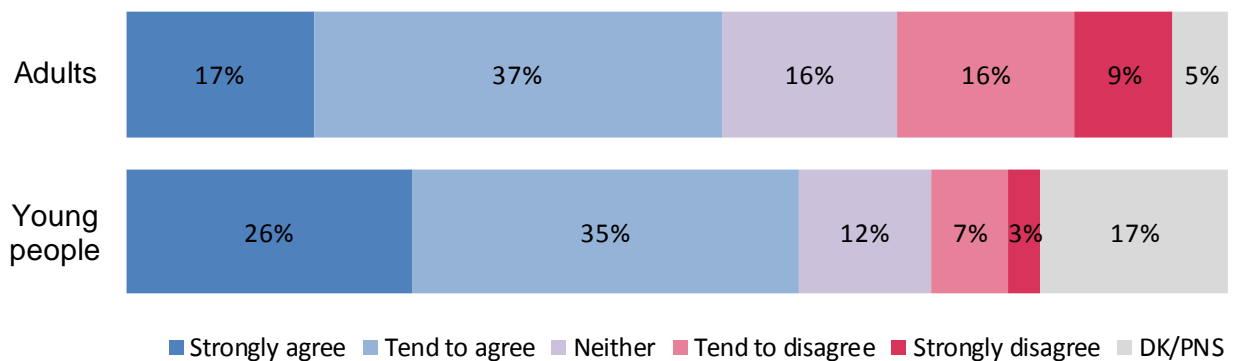
Figure 4 shows that just under half of adults thought that most people from poor backgrounds “face barriers to getting on well at school and work”. However, a sizable minority did not believe that coming from a poor background might create barriers to opportunity. Similarly to Figure 3, a higher proportion of young people than adults agreed strongly with this statement, but a smaller proportion of young people also disagreed with the statement, and almost a quarter were unsure.

Figure 4: “Most people from poor backgrounds in Scotland face barriers to getting on well at school and work”



We also asked a question exploring perceptions of people’s motivation to find work. Over half of adults and young people thought, “most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one” (Figure 5 below). A higher proportion of young people agreed with the statement compared to adults.

Figure 5: “Most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one”

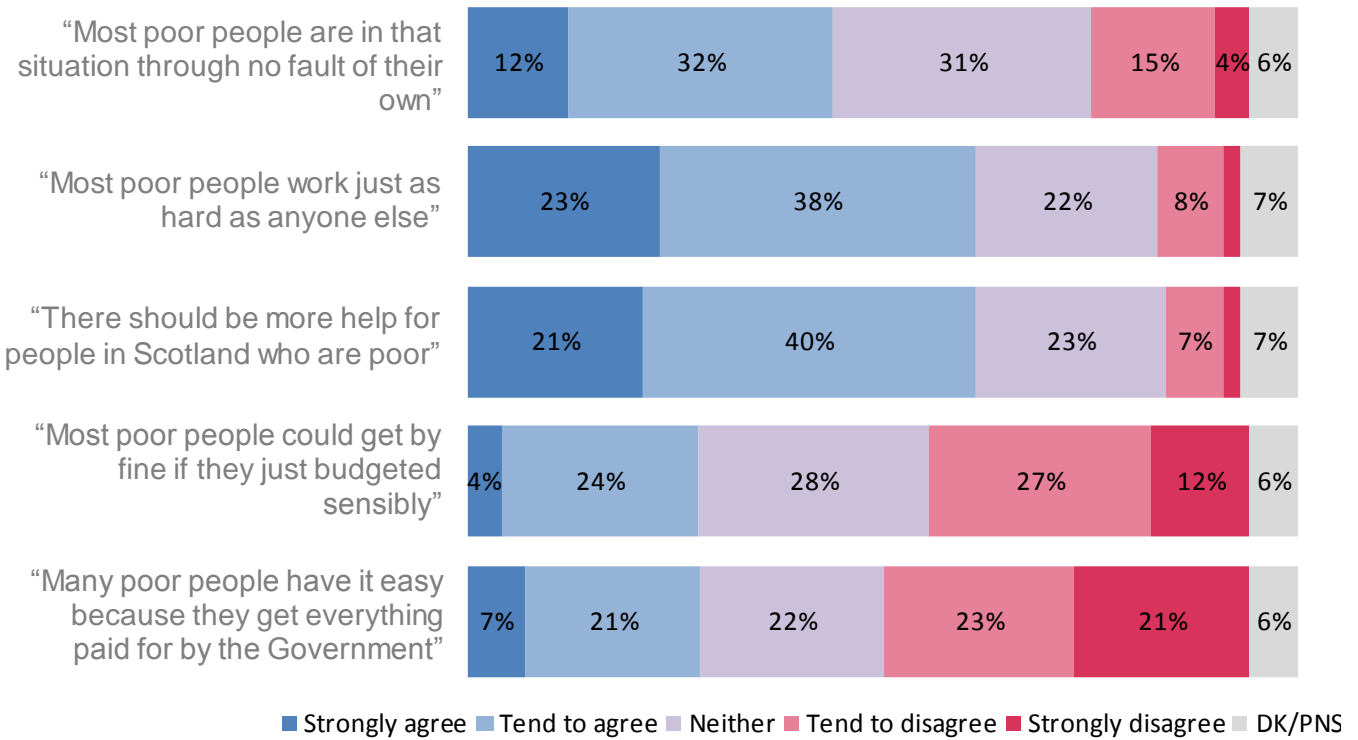


2.5 Attitudes towards and stereotypes about people in poverty

The next set of questions asked both adults and young people to agree or disagree with five views (three sympathetic views and two negative) about “poor people” (see Figure 6 below). The purpose of these questions was to assess how widely held certain commonly discussed stereotypes are, including ideas about poverty as an individual failing, and people living in poverty being lazy and not able to budget.

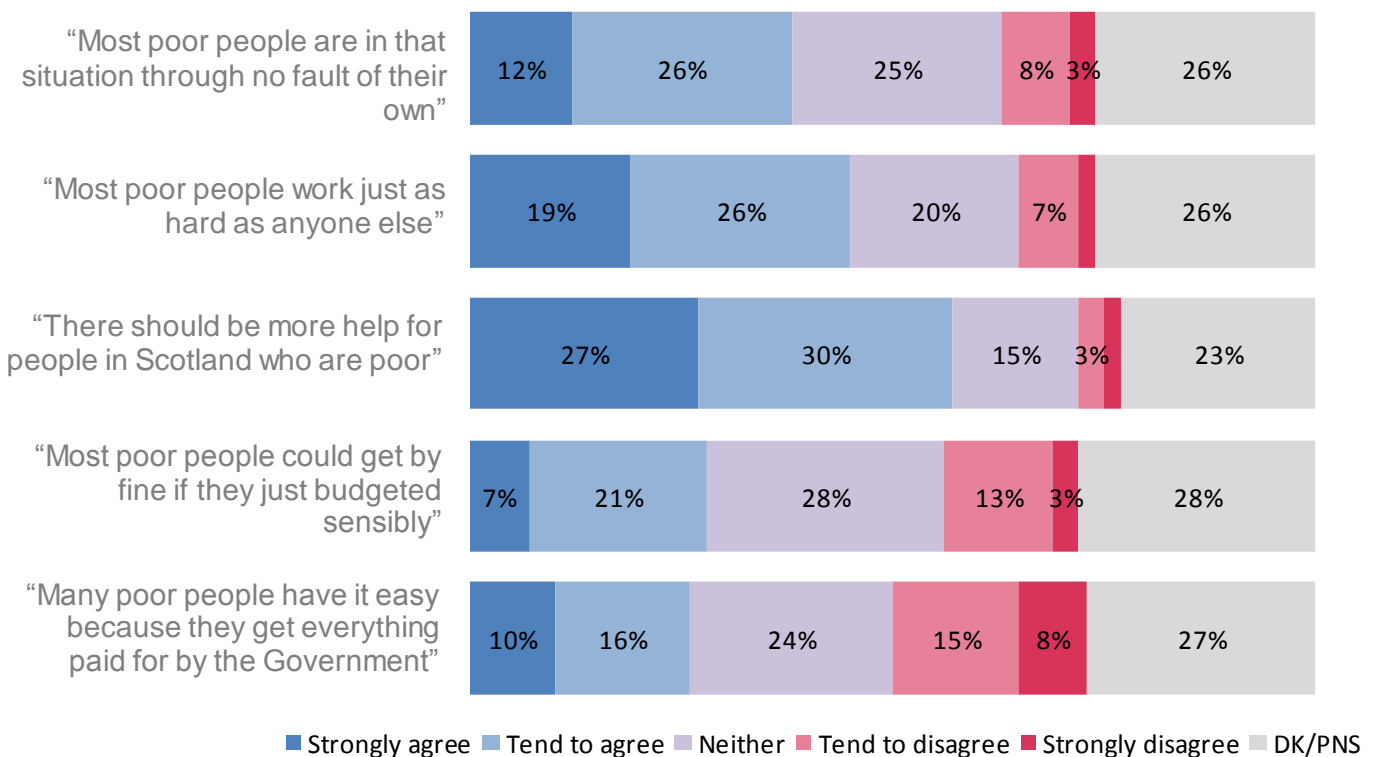
Figure 6 shows that a higher proportion of adults agreed with the positive statements – that poor people are in that situation through no fault of their own, should get more help and work just as hard as anyone else – than the two negative statements. However, almost 3 in 10 adults agreed that poor people could “get by fine if they just budgeted sensibly” and that poor people “have it easy”.

Figure 6: Adults' attitudes towards people living in poverty



Young people were also more likely to agree with the positive statements than with the negative statements (Figure 7). However, around a quarter of young people selected the 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' option for each of these questions, suggesting that these is a sizeable minority of young people who do not appear to have formed views one way or the other on people in poverty.

Figure 7: Young people's attitudes towards people living in poverty



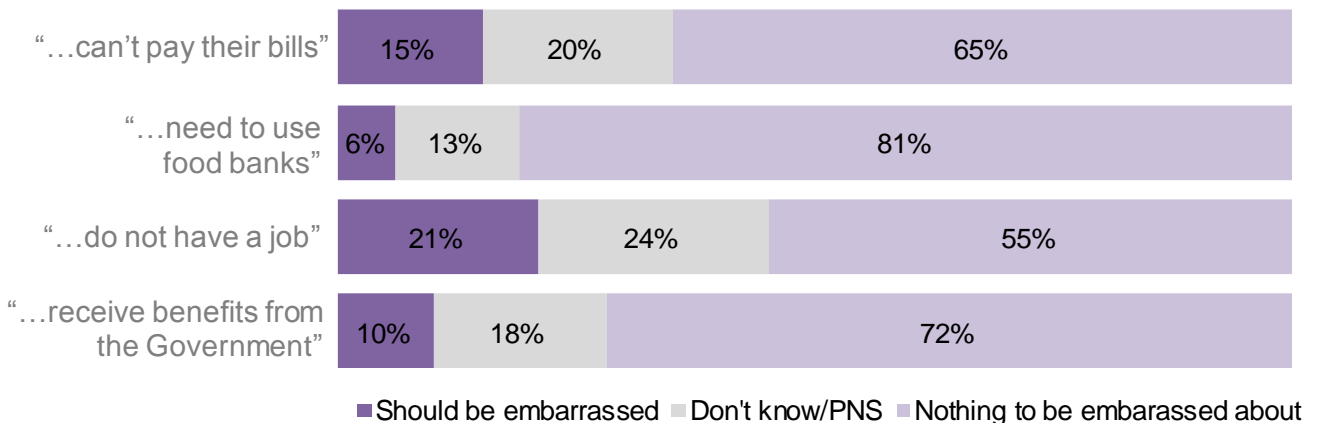
2.6 Holding potentially stigmatising views

Finally, both adults and young people were asked a set of questions that tried to get at potential stigma and shame around aspects of poverty that have been identified in the literature as experiences people can find stigmatising. Questions were asked in the following format:

Some people think that adults who [example] ought to be embarrassed. Others think that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. What do you think?

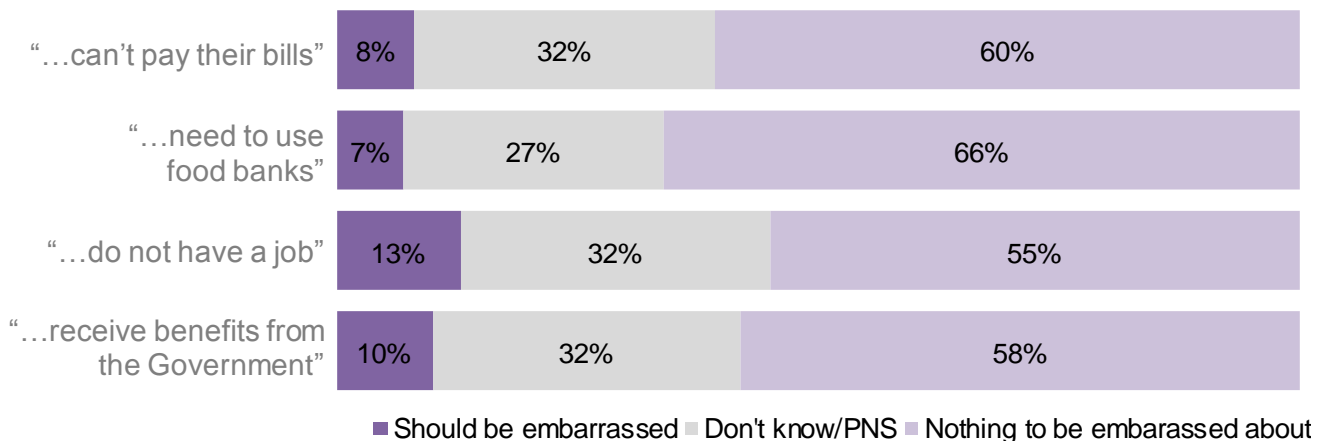
For each question over half of adults thought there was nothing to be embarrassed about, with the highest proportion – around 8 in 10 respondents – saying this about using food banks (Figure 8). However, a minority of adults did think there was something to be embarrassed about for each aspect, with the largest proportions saying this for not having a job – around 2 in 10 adults. While a larger proportion of adults chose the ‘don’t know’ option for this set of questions (13% - 24%).

Figure 8: Whether aspects of living in poverty are embarrassing – adults



Young people’s responses followed a similar pattern to adults. Over half thought there was nothing to be embarrassed about for each question, with around two thirds saying using food banks is nothing to be embarrassed about (see Figure 9). A particularly high percentage of young people said they didn’t know for each of these questions – around a quarter to a third.

Figure 9: Whether aspects of living in poverty are embarrassing – young people



SECTION 3: HOW DO ATTITUDES TOWARDS POVERTY VARY BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS?

3.1 Adults

3.1.1 Having experienced poverty

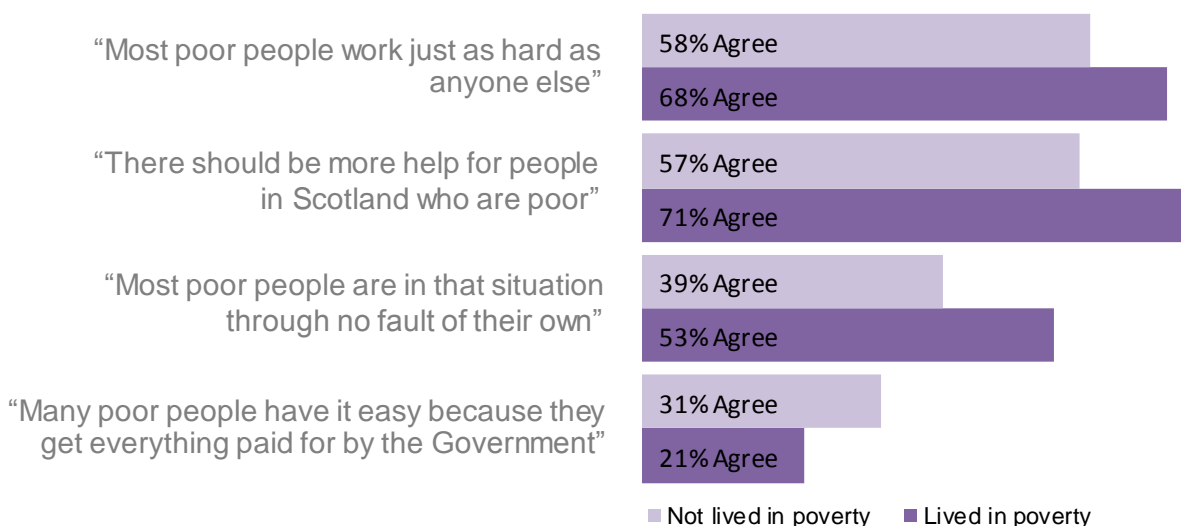
Table 6 shows that around 4 in 10 adults in Scotland reported that they had experienced poverty.

Table 6: Personal experience of poverty

“Looking back over your life, have there been times in your life when you think you have lived in poverty by the standards of that time?”	
Yes	42%
No	49%
Don't know	7%
Prefer not to say	2%

The views of adults who said they had previously lived in poverty differed from those who had not on several questions. Those who had experienced poverty were more likely to agree with the broader ‘relative poverty’ definition of poverty than those who had not (38% vs. 28%). Figure 10 shows that they were also less likely to hold stereotypical views about people living in poverty.

Figure 10: Attitudes towards people living in poverty by experience of poverty



3.1.2 Income

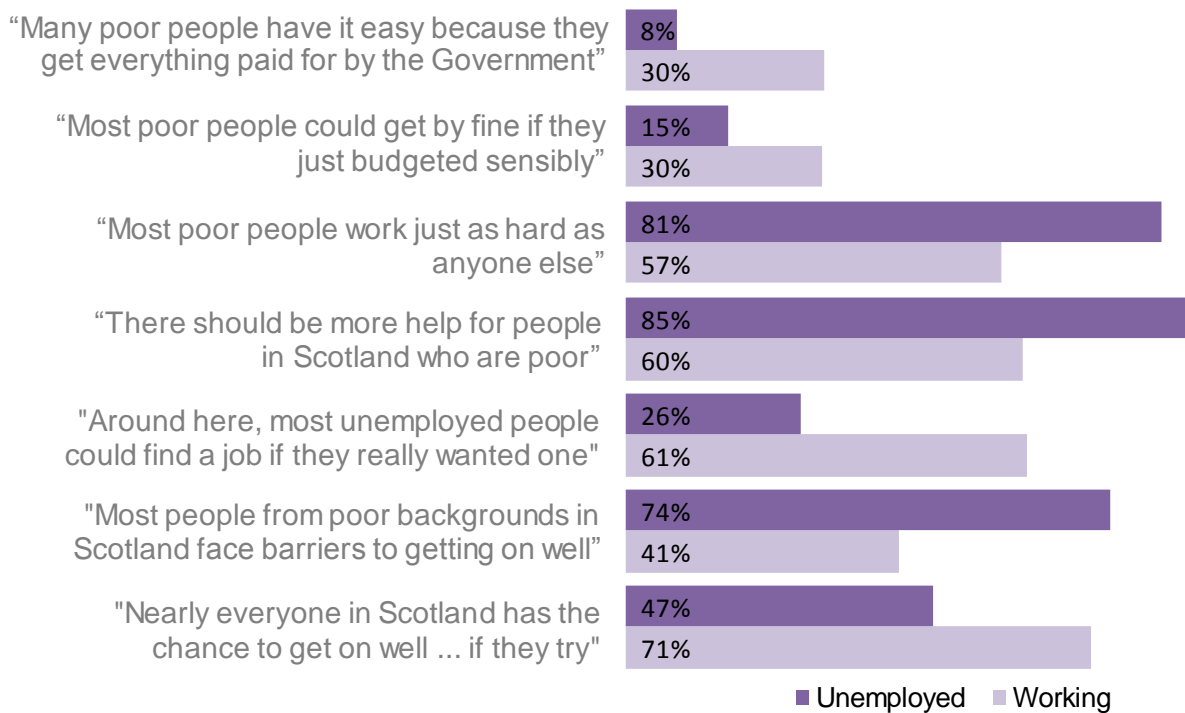
Respondents with a lower household income were more likely to see people’s opportunity as constrained than those with a higher household income: 44% of those with household income under £20,000 agreed that “most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one” compared to 58-69% of higher income groups). Similarly, 35% of those with a household income under £20,000 disagreed that nearly everyone has “the chance to get on well at school and work if they try”, compared to 16%% of those with household income over £60,000.

Those with household income under £20,000 were also more likely to agree that “poor people work as hard as anyone else” (69% compared to 53-59% of higher income groups) and to think that not having a job is nothing to be embarrassed about (65% compared to 43% of those with household income over £60,000).

3.1.3 Economic status

Figure 11 shows that those who were unemployed were much more likely to see people’s opportunities as limited compared to those who were working, and less likely to hold stereotypical views.

Figure 11: Attitudes towards people living in poverty by unemployed/working



Those who were unemployed were also less likely to think that not having a job is something to be embarrassed about (5% compared to 24% of those who were working).

3.1.4 Age

Young adults were more likely to see people's opportunities as constrained compared to older adults: 63% of those aged 16-24 agreed that "most people from poor backgrounds face barriers to getting on" compared to 42-46% of those aged 25 and over. Similarly, 37% of those aged 16-24 disagreed that "most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one" compared to 19-28% of those aged 25 and over.

Young adults were also less likely to hold some stereotypical views: 55% of those aged 16-24 disagreed that "most poor people could get by fine if they just budgeted sensibly" compared to 32-37% of those aged 25 and over; while 62% of those aged 16-24 disagreed that "many poor people have it easy" compared to 35% of those aged 65 and over.

Correspondingly, those aged 65 and over were more likely to hold some potentially stigmatising views: 30% thought that those who cannot pay their bills ought to be embarrassed compared to 6-15% of those aged under 65; 13% thought those using food banks ought to be embarrassed compared to 4-6% of those aged under 65; and 16% of those aged 65 and over thought that those who receive benefits should feel embarrassed compared to 7-9% of those under 65.

3.1.5 Gender

Overall, there were few clear differences by gender, or differences were not statistically significant.

3.2 Young people

3.2.1 Age

As noted in Section 1, in general young people were more likely to select the 'don't know' option than adults. Similarly, younger pupils were more likely to select the 'don't know' option than older pupils, suggesting that knowledge about and attitudes towards people living in poverty are less fully formed among this group. For example, older pupils were more likely to think there is poverty in Scotland (58% of those age 17-18) compared to younger pupils (32% of those age 11), while younger pupils were more likely to say they don't know.

Older pupils were more likely to perceive people's opportunities as limited than younger pupils: 1-3% of those aged 11-13 disagreed with the statement that nearly everyone has the chance to get on well if they try compared to 9% of those aged 17-18. Similarly, 19% of 17-18 year olds disagreed that "most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one" compared to 6% of 12 year olds. This may reflect the fact that older young people are closer to the labour market.

3.2.2 Gender

Boys were more likely than girls to select "because they have been unlucky" or "because they are lazy" to explain poverty: 17% of boys said people are poor

because they have been unlucky compared to 10% of girls; and 20% of boys said people are poor because they are lazy compared to 11% girls.

Girls were also more likely to hold more sympathetic views for some questions: 41% of girls agreed that “poor people are in that situation through no fault of their own” compared to 34% of boys; 63% of girls agreed that there should be “more help for poor people” compared to 53% of boys; and 50% of girls agreed that “poor people work as hard as anyone else” compared to 40% of boys. Thirty two per cent of boys agreed that “most poor people could get by fine if they budgeted sensibly” compared to 24% of girls.

Similarly, girls were more likely to think the various aspects of poverty asked about were nothing to be embarrassed about: for receiving benefits, 63% of girls compared to 53% of boys; for not having a job, 60% of girls compared to 50% of boys; for using foodbanks, 73% of girls compared to 59% of boys; and for not being able to pay bills, 65% of girls compared to 56% of boys.

DISCUSSION

This report has presented new data from two nationally representative surveys, one of adults and one of young people in Scotland, on the type and extent of negative public attitudes towards people living in poverty. This information is necessary in order to develop messages to help change attitudes towards poverty. Findings from previous surveys suggest that individual explanations of poverty are more common than structural explanations, and attitudes towards poverty have hardened over recent years. This report has also found some evidence that people tend to focus on individual explanations of poverty and that a minority hold some negative attitudes towards people living in poverty.

The majority of adults in Scotland accepted that there is child poverty in Scotland. In general, child poverty was seen as a multidimensional problem with a range of different reasons selected as contributing. Pay levels and inequalities in society were considered to be significant explanations for child poverty; however, there remains a widespread belief that parental addiction to alcohol and/or drugs is one of the reasons that best explain why children live in poverty in Scotland. This highlights a need to further raise awareness about the wide range of factors that drive poverty, and the importance of structural drivers of poverty such as the labour and housing markets. In particular, it will be important to continue to communicate the fact that problem substance use affects only a relatively small number of people, and has a very limited impact on overall poverty levels.[9]

In terms of opportunities, while almost half of adults in Scotland did appreciate that growing up in poverty can create barriers to success, the majority thought that most people can get on in life if they work hard enough. Similarly, over half thought that most unemployed people could find a job if they tried hard enough. This again points to a tendency to focus on the actions of individuals in shaping their lives, and to not recognise, or to downplay, the economic and structural barriers people face in accessing and maximising opportunities, especially those living in poverty or disadvantaged circumstances.

Turning to the central question for this research on the type and extent of negative attitudes towards people living in poverty, the survey found that, in general, the majority of adults in Scotland held sympathetic views about people living in poverty, or expressed uncertainty in their responses. However our findings suggest that a significant minority of adults in Scotland do accept some stereotypical views. A fairly large minority accepted ideas about poor people “getting everything paid for by the government” and “just needing to budget sensibly to get by”, while a smaller minority thought that those in poverty are, to some extent, to blame for their situation and don’t work as hard as other people. This provides some evidence to confirm that some of the stereotypes identified as problematic in discussions with people who have experience of poverty – e.g. being lazy, unable to budget – are reflected in public attitudes, albeit held by a minority. Clearly, the fact that a majority of low income households contain at least one person in work is not

commonly understood and could be a focus for communication activity going forward.

Similarly, the majority of people in Scotland thought experiences often linked to poverty – not being able to pay bills, needing to use foodbanks, not having a job and receiving benefits – were “nothing to be embarrassed about”. In particular, a large majority (8 in 10) thought having to use foodbanks was “nothing to be embarrassed about”. However, our findings again suggest that a minority of adults did hold potentially some potentially stigmatising views. Being unemployed was seen as something to be embarrassed about by the largest minority (around 2 in 10 people), followed by being unable to pay bills.

Overall, young people’s views were fairly similar to those of adults, although there were some interesting differences. In general, young people were more likely to be uncertain what they think about people in poverty. Fairly large proportions of young people, and especially younger school pupils, selected the ‘don’t know’ option for many of the questions. Around a third of young people were unsure about the extent of poverty in Scotland, and around a fifth said they did not know why some people are poor. Around a quarter to a third of young people said they ‘don’t know’ in response to the questions exploring stereotypical and stigmatising views. The fact that a sizeable minority of young people do not appear to have formed views one way or the other on poverty and people living in poverty may present an opportunity to shape young people’s understandings about drivers and experiences of poverty.

Additionally, in general younger adults held more sympathetic views than older adults for example being more likely to see people’s opportunity as constrained and to reject some stereotypical views. As might be expected, the survey also suggests that those who had some experience of living on a low income or unemployment (i.e. having lived in poverty in the past or being unemployed/living in a lower income household currently) were less likely to hold negative views about people living in poverty. This suggests that communications that tell the stories of people living in poverty and give an insight into what their lives are like are an approach to changing attitudes that could be further explored and tested.

In conclusion, this research provides a better understanding of to what extent perceived negative attitudes identified by those with experience of poverty are held by the public. The findings from this research will be used by the Scottish Government to inform work on tackling stigma towards people living in poverty in Scotland.

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APPENDIX A: DETAILED TABLES

“Would you say that someone is really poor if they do not have enough money to pay for food and rent without getting into debt?”	Young people Adults	
	Yes, definitely	46%
Yes, probably	30%	28%
No, probably not	4%	5%
No, definitely not	1%	1%
Don't know	14%	4%
Prefer not to say	5%	1%

“Would you say that someone is really poor if they have enough to pay for food and rent, but not enough to buy other things they need, like new clothes or heating?”	Young people Adults	
	Yes, definitely	15%
Yes, probably	44%	51%
No, probably not	16%	22%
No, definitely not	4%	3%
Don't know	16%	4%
Prefer not to say	5%	1%

“Would you say that someone is really poor if they have enough to pay for food and rent, but not enough to buy things most people take for granted, like a TV or an occasional holiday?”

Young people Adults

Yes, definitely	9%	6%
Yes, probably	21%	25%
No, probably not	30%	39%
No, definitely not	17%	25%
Don't know	17%	4%
Prefer not to say	6%	1%

“Nearly everyone in Scotland has the chance to get on well at school and work if they try”

Young people Adults

Strongly agree	37%	22%
Tend to agree	28%	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	11%
Tend to disagree	4%	14%
Strongly disagree	1%	4%
Don't know	13%	4%
Prefer not to say	5%	*

“Most people from poor backgrounds in Scotland face barriers to getting on well at school and work”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	15%	12%
Tend to agree	30%	35%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	20%
Tend to disagree	8%	18%
Strongly disagree	4%	9%
Don't know	18%	5%
Prefer not to say	5%	*

“How much do you agree or disagree that, around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one?”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	26%	17%
Tend to agree	35%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	16%
Tend to disagree	7%	16%
Strongly disagree	3%	9%
Don't know	13%	1%
Prefer not to say	4%	3%

“Most poor people are in that situation through no fault of their own”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	12%	12%
Tend to agree	26%	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	25%	31%
Tend to disagree	8%	15%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%
Don't know	21%	5%
Prefer not to say	6%	1%

“Most poor people could get by fine if they just budgeted sensibly”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	7%	4%
Tend to agree	21%	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%	28%
Tend to disagree	13%	27%
Strongly disagree	3%	12%
Don't know	22%	5%
Prefer not to say	6%	1%

“There should be more help for people in Scotland who are poor”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	27%	21%
Tend to agree	30%	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	23%
Tend to disagree	3%	7%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%
Don't know	17%	6%
Prefer not to say	6%	1%

“Many poor people have it easy because they get everything paid for by the Government”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	10%	7%
Tend to agree	16%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	22%
Tend to disagree	15%	23%
Strongly disagree	8%	21%
Don't know	20%	4%
Prefer not to say	7%	1%

“Most poor people work just as hard as anyone else”		
	Young people	Adults
Strongly agree	19%	23%
Tend to agree	26%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	22%
Tend to disagree	7%	8%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%
Don't know	19%	6%
Prefer not to say	6%	1%

“Some people think that adults who can't pay their bills ought to be embarrassed. Others think that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. What do you think?”		
	Young people	Adults
Should be embarrassed	8%	15%
Have nothing to be embarrassed about	60%	65%
Don't know	25%	3%
Prefer not to say	6%	17%

“Some people think that adults who need to use food banks (that provide free food for people who cannot afford it) ought to be embarrassed. Others think that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. What do you think?”		
	Young people	Adults
Should be embarrassed	7%	6%
Have nothing to be embarrassed about	66%	81%
Don't know	21%	2%
Prefer not to say	6%	11%

Some people think that adults who do not have a job ought to be embarrassed. Others think that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. What do you think?

	Young people	Adults
Should be embarrassed	13%	21%
Have nothing to be embarrassed about	55%	55%
Don't know	26%	4%
Prefer not to say	6%	20%

Some people think that adults who receive benefits from the government ought to be embarrassed. Others think that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. What do you think?

	Young people	Adults
Should be embarrassed	10%	10%
Have nothing to be embarrassed about	58%	72%
Don't know	25%	3%
Prefer not to say	7%	15%