

CONCEPT
EXPLAINER



WHAT IS

Child poverty

swipe



Child poverty is a major

determinant of health and wellbeing. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health, lower educational attainment and reduced life opportunities. These disadvantages can persist throughout life, contributing to wider health inequalities in adulthood.

In Scotland, child poverty is commonly measured as children living in households with incomes below 60% of median income after housing costs. Other measures are also used, including material deprivation and absolute poverty, to capture different dimensions of poverty.



While poverty affects

people of all ages, childhood is a uniquely important period. Early life is a critical stage of physical, cognitive, and emotional development, and exposures to poverty during this time can have lasting effects on health, wellbeing and life chances. These impacts may influence brain development, stress responses, educational outcomes and long-term health across the life course.

Child poverty is shaped by a range of structural and economic factors, including low wages, insecure work, the cost of living and the adequacy of social security. Certain family circumstances, including lone parenthood, having a disabled family member or living with a disability, can further increase the risk of poverty.



Addressing child poverty

requires action across multiple areas, including increasing incomes, reducing living costs, and improving access to support services – for example policies promoting fair wages, secure work, adequate social security, and affordable childcare, housing, and energy costs. High-quality early years provision and school-based supports, including free school meals, can also help improve outcomes for children and families.

Targeted action for groups at higher risk of poverty, alongside place-based approaches in disadvantaged communities, are also important. However, progress in reducing child poverty is often constrained by limited public resources, competing priorities, and the need for sustained political commitment.



Prevention is particularly

important in relation to child poverty because the foundations of lifelong health and wellbeing are established during pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. Improving living conditions and reducing child poverty at these stages can help prevent health, educational and social inequalities from developing and persisting throughout life.

Child poverty is widely recognised as an indicator of wider social and economic inequality. Action to reduce child poverty can prevent long-term negative outcomes, reduce pressure on services, improve population health, and contribute to a fairer and more inclusive society.



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