



The UK: international child poverty outlier

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The UK: international child poverty outlier

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ABSTRACT: *The UK has not only one of the highest rates of child poverty in the rich world, but also the most rapidly rising rate in this grouping. Within the UK, a higher proportion of children are poor in the South East of England than in Scotland. The huge rise in economic inequality in the 1980s caused the UK to become an international outlier in terms of child poverty. All subsequent UK governments have maintained inequality at high levels – by choice. The results are telling: children in England are, on average, becoming shorter in height and child death rates in England are rising, almost certainly due to rising poverty and destitution. As inequality rises poverty rises, but so too does ignorance of each other. Those who study human geography in the UK, if they went to university in recent years, are the least likely graduates to have ever been poor. Child poverty remains off our mental maps and largely outside of our geographical imaginations. That has to change.*

Keywords: child, poverty, inequality, destitution, health, UK

Thirty years ago a group of geographers wrote a book about many things, including why human geographers in Britain tended to ignore poverty (Philo, 1995). The book did not result in any 'geographical turn' towards looking more closely at the stark reality of poverty for British people. British geographical journals are not places where poverty is much discussed, except when it occurs 'overseas'. This is in stark contrast to sociology and social policy, where concerns about inequality and poverty have risen in tandem with the rises in the issues themselves. In this article I argue that the situation in the UK is now so acute, that British geographers in particular cannot continue to see these issues as ones better dealt with and discussed elsewhere.

The UK currently has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the rich world. In December 2023, UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund charity) published an analysis showing that the rate of child poverty was growing faster within the UK than in any other country that they measured in the world (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023). In January 2024, the UK's Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) reported how the UK government was increasing the proportion of children who were poor faster through its choices and actions. The charity Action for Children revealed data showing how a higher proportion of children are now poor in the South East of England than in Scotland. The geography of child poverty has been changing both internationally and within the UK. In this article these statistics are described and contextualised in an attempt to raise awareness among colleagues and students. The geography of poverty and inequality has changed and this has changed the human geography of the UK more than any other trend in recent years.

The huge rise in economic inequality in the 1980s that has caused the UK to become such an outlier is charted below and an argument made for how UK governments maintaining inequality at such high levels since then has helped to both sustain the very high poverty rates and to increase them. Data released during 2023, which shows how children in England are now (on average) becoming shorter in height, is also presented – suggesting

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that nutrition is worsening for the majority of British children. There are several geographers who have studied foodbanks and similar issues recently (Garthwaite, 2016a, 2016b; Lambie-Mumford, 2016; Lambie-Mumford and Green, 2017), and before them there was a trend to study 'food deserts' (see e.g. Wrigley, 2002) – areas under-served by shops selling affordable, nutritious food. However, the underlying reasons for why some residential areas were deserted by retailers, and why there has been a rise in the need for foodbanks (and where that need is best and worst met), are less considered in contemporary British human geography.

The rise in child death rates in England 2022 and 2023 is a further statistic reported below. That more children are now dying between ages one and four is almost certainly due to increasing poverty and destitution. This article concludes with a

discussion of how the death of two-year-old Bronson Battersby from starvation in England in the first few weeks of 2024 was reported and how the geography of his home town was used, by some, to try to explain his death. Human geographers are well placed to explore how places become stigmatised, how spaces of segregation are normalised, and to begin to contribute to the work currently being done by epidemiologists and in social medicine on the growing emergency in the UK today.

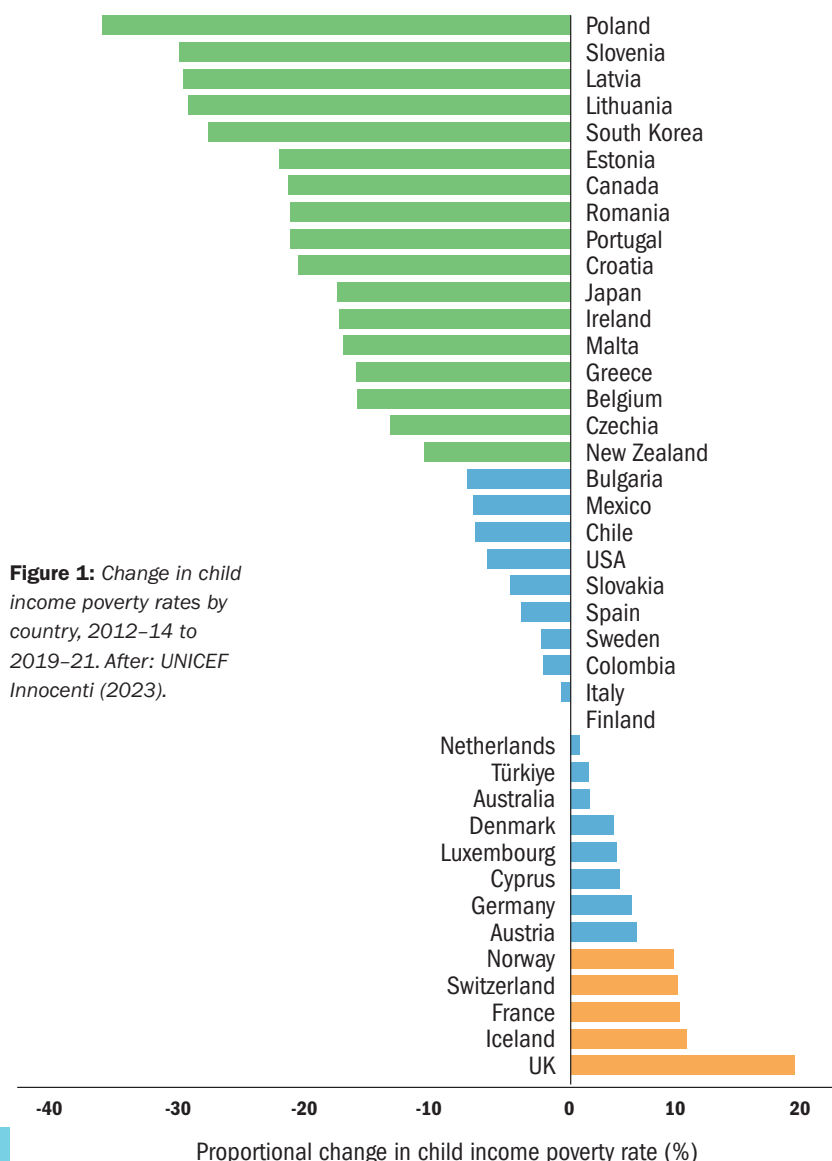
Because this is a geography journal, and because the rise in inequality may be part of the explanation for the current lacunae in our curricula, the discussion of the UK as an international outlier of child poverty ends with a few comments on those who study human geography in the UK and how, if they went to university to do so in recent years, they are the people least likely to have ever been poor of anyone studying for any degree in Britain. Once a country becomes an outlier in one way, it can become one in so many others, and the academic subject of geography itself in the UK, as it is constituted today, is partly a product of that great rise in inequality. This need not be a reason to look away and be more concerned about the climate, places overseas and the environment in general, than with what is now happening to people living within a stone's throw of all UK university geography departments.

The United Nations reports

In December 2023, the UN released its periodic Report Card (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023) on the changing state of child of child poverty across the countries of the world that it monitors in the most detail (those countries for which the most consistent statistics are available). Researchers often argue about child poverty statistics, and governments are even more prone to quibble with particular definitions. There are many ways in which child poverty can be measured. UNICEF, the agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide, tried to seek a compromise by considering more universal measures. As they explained just before Christmas 2023:

'Poverty is often defined by income. But for most children, poverty is about more than just money. It is about growing up in a home without enough heat or nutritious food. Poverty means no new clothes, no telephone and no money for a birthday celebration' (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023, p. 2).

Figure 1: Change in child income poverty rates by country, 2012–14 to 2019–21. After: UNICEF Innocenti (2023).



The headline measure UNICEF uses is an income measure: the proportion of children that live in households that fall below 60% of the median household income within each country. Equivalised income is used to take account of variations in household size, as larger households can make economies and get by with a little less money per person (by, for example, cooking for everyone at the same time). Concepts such a median and equivalised incomes need to be better understood because otherwise the statistics can appear obscure. The need for social statistics also often needs to be explained. By the widely accepted UN measure, the UK ranks 28th out of the 39 countries that UNICEF compares, or 37th out of 39 when its direction of travel is also taken into account. A fifth of all children in the UK live in poverty by this measure and the UK has experienced the greatest increase in child poverty of all the countries that UNICEF compares in the most recent time period (between 2012–14 and 2019–21). Figure 1 highlights this and makes it clear just how exceptional the UK has become.

The other countries in Figure 1 that have been doing badly in recent years all have much lower rates of child poverty than the UK. For example, in Iceland only 12.4% of children are poor by the UNICEF headline measure, even though it had the second largest rise in child poverty after the UK in the most recent time period (2012–14 to 2019–21; see Figure 2). In France the rate is lower and the rise smaller. The same is true of Switzerland and Norway. There is now a stark geographical contrast between what is considered normal in different countries in Europe – and in different parts of these countries. This is a further reason for calling for more work by geographers geared towards understanding these growing geographical differences.

There are several countries among the 39 that UNICEF compares that fare worse than the UK in terms of rates of child poverty, although none of them have been experiencing the *rise* in rates that the UK has seen in recent years. For example, while Greece still has a slightly higher rate than the UK according to the latest UNICEF report (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023), its rate dropped by 17.2% during the most recent period (2012–14 to 2019–21) despite the huge austerity experienced there. Similarly, New Zealand and Chile also remain slightly worse, yet saw 11.7% and 7.7% falls respectively in their child poverty rates during the same period. By late 2024, if these trends continue, all these countries will have a lower proportion of their children experiencing severe income deprivation compared with the UK.

Child poverty remains higher in Romania – 29.0% compared to 20.7% in the UK – but fell by 22.5% in the most recent period, the eighth largest fall of all. Bulgaria is similarly improving. Only Türkiye and Colombia are worse and not improving quickly enough to be likely to soon better the UK. The USA also stands out as worse, with a rate of 26.2% of US children living in poverty according to the UNICEF definition, but the USA has been improving and it is possible to imagine this continuing so that the UK and the USA trade places at some point in the future – unless the UK's fall down the ranks is somehow halted.

The UNICEF Innocenti Report Card (2023) gave these figures in cold numeric detail; but often they do not strike home when presented in this way. Of course, one country has to rank bottom of any list of improvements, but it need not be a country where child poverty was already accepted as more normal and tolerated as much; as is the case in the UK – uniquely across Europe. You might say that the proportion of children that UNICEF presents is not especially high at 20.7%, but it is worth remembering that these children are growing up in households that survive on only 60% (and usually less than that) of what the median household in the UK gets by on each year. If you are reading this publication it is very likely that you would consider that median household income a poverty income, were you to ever have to try to survive on that little money, let alone less than three-fifths of that money – each day, each week, each year.

The median average salary in the UK in 2023 was approximately £26,600 a year (TUC, 2023) and for every person receiving a salary of over £40,000 in the UK in 2023 there was another person paying income tax but earning no more than £19,000 (ONS, 2024a). These amounts will be higher when you read this, but the costs of basic foodstuff and other essential have risen faster than salaries, therefore, almost everyone is now worse off than they were in 2023.

The full UNICEF 'league table' of child poverty in selected countries is shown in Figure 2. Countries are ranked overall according to the combined average z-score of columns 3 and 5 in the table. A z-score normalises for variation in each of the variables being combined, thus no single variable dominates the rankings produced. There are many ways in which these numbers can all be estimated, measured, combined and presented, but the message is clear. The UK is doing very badly and getting worse.

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Figure 2: The UNICEF Innocenti 'league table' of child poverty in selected countries. Notes: Countries are ranked on their most recent income poverty rate and their success in reducing child poverty in a period of prosperity. The overall rank is based on a statistical average of these two indicators. After: UNICEF Innocenti (2023).

Overall rank	Country	Most recent rate of child poverty (average 2019–21)		Change in child poverty rate (2012–14 to 2019–21)	
		%	Rank	%	Rank
1	Slovenia	10.0	2	-31.4	2
2	Poland	14.1	8	-37.6	1
3	Latvia	16.3	16	-31.0	3
4	South Korea	15.7	15	-29.0	5
5	Estonia	14.8	9	-23.4	6
6	Lithuania	18.3	22	-30.6	4
7	Czechia	11.6	4	-14.5	16
8	Japan	14.8	11	-18.7	11
9	Ireland	14.8	10	-18.5	12
10	Croatia	16.6	17	-21.8	10
11	Canada	17.2	19	-22.7	7
12	Belgium	14.9	12	-17.0	15
13	Portugal	19.3	25	-22.5	9
14	Finland	10.1	3	0	26
15	Denmark	9.9	1	+3.5	30
16	Malta	19.8	26	-18.2	13
17	Netherlands	13.5	7	+0.7	27
18	Greece	22.3	31	-17.2	14
19	New Zealand	21.1	29	-11.7	17
20	Norway	12.0	5	+10.1	35
21	Slovakia	18.9	23	-4.9	21
22	Sweden	18.0	20	-2.4	23
23	Iceland	12.4	6	+11.0	38
24	Cyprus	15.6	14	+4.0	32
25	Germany	15.5	13	+5.0	33
26	Australia	17.1	18	+1.7	29
27	Chile	21.6	30	-7.7	19
28	Romania	29.0	37	-22.5	8
29	Austria	19.2	24	+5.3	34
30	Switzerland	18.0	21	+10.3	36
31	Bulgaria	26.1	34	-8.3	18
32	USA	26.2	35	-6.7	20
33	France	19.9	27	+10.4	37
34	Italy	25.5	33	-0.8	25
35	Luxembourg	24.5	32	+3.7	31
36	Spain	28.0	36	-4.0	22
37	UK	20.7	28	+19.6	39
38	Türkiye	33.8	38	+1.5	28
39	Colombia	35.8	39	-2.1	24

Within the UK

Different measures are used within the UK by the government, which paint an even worse picture of the current situation. In March 2023, the UK charity the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) reported that the official government statistics showed that 350,000 more children fell into poverty in the 12 months to March 2022 before explaining why those numbers were about to rise throughout 2023 and into 2024 (Hirsch, 2023). The CPAG also presented an analysis

demonstrating that accepting this level of child poverty was costing the state £39.5 billion a year in terms of the effects of the impacts of poverty. They explained that the official annual poverty statistics showed: 'an estimated 350,000 more children were pulled into poverty last year, largely because the Government cut the £20 universal credit (UC) uplift half-way through the year' (CPAG, 2023). The official Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) figures reported that '4.2 million children were in poverty in the year April 2021 to April 2022' (DWP, 2023); the most recent year

available and the year after UNICEF's reporting ended. The CPAG then explained in detail why this figure will rise in future as the full effect of new government cuts to social security (universal credit) are felt, as the austerity that began in the UK in 2010 was continued into its 14th year and as family income inequality was allowed to remain at what was very likely to be the highest levels seen across all of Europe (CPAG, 2023). High levels of inflation in the UK, especially of the cost of food following Brexit, were also exacerbating the crisis.

On 1 January 2024, the charity Action for Children (AFC) released data – again using the official UK measures – on the local geography of child poverty in the UK. Figure 3 shows what AFC found when analysing the DWP data (Corcoran, 2024). They used the official UK definition that a child is considered to be 'growing up in poverty if they live in a household whose income is below 60% of the average (median) income for that year' (Corcoran, 2024). The AFC then showed the results after housing costs are taken into account, because families with children have no choice other than to pay for housing: they cannot live on the streets or in a tent because social workers would then take their children into care. Including this measure increases the proportion of children living in poverty in the UK to 29% (Corcoran, 2024). That is almost three out of every ten children. And if we consider that many families have just a few pounds over the 60% threshold, so are almost as poor as those who officially count as poor, the rate becomes even higher.

Housing costs in the AFC report 'include rent, water rates, mortgage interest payments, buildings insurance payments, and any ground rent or services charges'; but for poorer children this is almost always rent costs that matter most (Corcoran, 2024). A third of younger children in England live in private rented accommodation, which is the costliest form of accommodation. Almost half of all children in the UK now begin their childhood in a rental property, the large majority with private landlords, and 'a third of millennials face renting their entire lives' (Coughlan, 2019). Private landlords make a lot of money, both from these children's families and from the UK government (which often pays a proportion of their rent to the landlords). All these housing costs are unavoidable to families. However, note that contents insurance is not included in the list, and the proportion of families that can afford to pay to insure their contents in case of fire, theft, or flood has been falling in the UK in recent years.

The proportion of parents of the poorest children in Britain who say that they cannot consider home contents insurance rose from 25% to 27% between March 2022 and March 2023 according to the most recent DWP statistics (released in March 2023). In contrast, only 4% of the best-off children's parents said this (down from 6% as inequalities between these groups in the UK increase). Many poorer UK families had already given up insuring their possessions before 2019. This was happening even though the rationale for insuring was rising. Thus, the situation was worsening even while some of the statistics were not changing, such as the overall income inequality measure, because it would cost more in future (due to inflation) to replace items lost in a fire or flood, or due to theft. By 2024 many people in the UK, and especially parents, simply could not afford to insure against these risks any more (Dorling, 2024a).

The AFC report (Corcoran, 2024) explained that the 'after housing costs' data allows us to compare incomes for households in different parts of the country where housing costs vary. The result of their analysis is shown in Figure 3. What is remarkable about this is how much the geography of child poverty has changed compared with 20, 40 or 60 years ago. In 2021/22 Northern Ireland had the lowest official rate of child poverty at 22%. (Although the UK government 'sanctioned' that Province during 2023 to try to force the devolved government back into office, therefore this proportion is likely to no longer represent the current likely rate of child poverty there.) Scotland, by 2021/22, already had the second lowest official child poverty rate in the UK at 24%. At the same time, the South East of England, which excludes London, had a higher proportion of children living in poverty (and it is still rising according to recent reports – see Dorling (2024c)). The success of Scotland is almost entirely due to the recent actions of the Scottish Government to reduce child poverty by giving more money to the families with the poorest children (Dorling, 2023; Kidner, 2024).

Every line in Figure 3 illustrates how the English now tolerate between one-fifth and, in some cases, over one-third of our children growing up in poverty. This is poverty according to the official definition. If other definitions are used, such as whether a family has enough to live on above a minimum income standard, the proportions are all higher. The other countries of the UK appear to be slightly less tolerant of high rates of poverty given their generally lower positions on Figure 3, but other than Scotland's recent fall (which now looks as if it will be permanent), this is a graph of shame.

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Figure 3: Child poverty across the nations and regions of the UK, 2014/15 to 2021/22. After: Corcoran (2024).

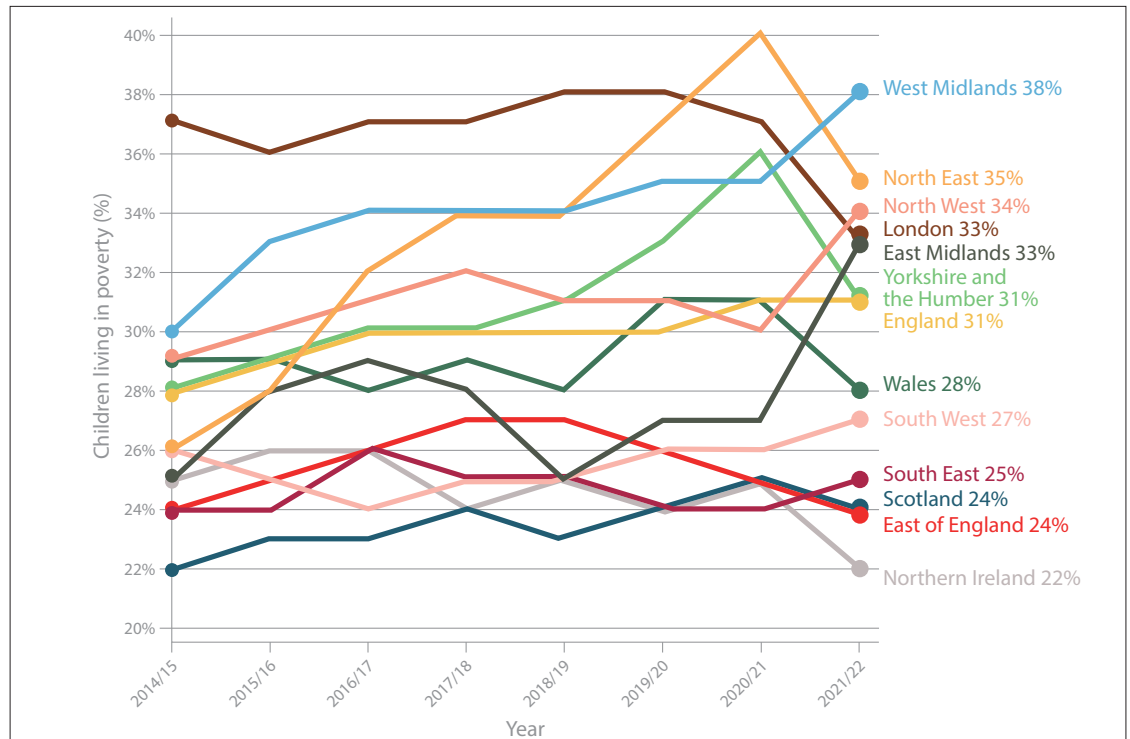


Figure 4: The long-term trend in income inequality in Britain (Gini coefficient): from equitable to very unequal. Note: Years refer to financial years for data from 1993 onwards (e.g. 1993 refers to 1993/94). Data: Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (2024).

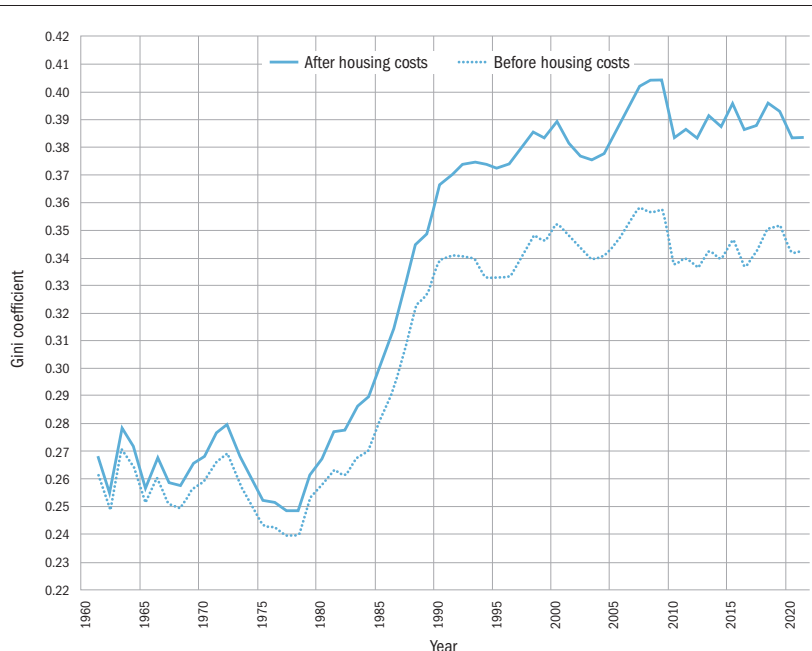
It should also be noted that other lines fall in the year 2021/22 because of temporary COVID-19 pandemic social security measures and random fluctuation in the sample used to measure them, which was badly taken due to the pandemic and the UK Government deliberately reducing the sample size. Obscuration was not the reason for this; the survey was cut in size to save money (Dorling, 2024c). No UK Government minister since 2010 has shown much interest in what the survey reveals. Before then it was of more interest because of UK-wide child poverty targets. The only part of the UK where child poverty is still a target

being taken seriously is Scotland. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 required Scottish ministers to ensure that less than 18% of children in Scotland were living in poverty by the official measure in 2023/24, and that less than 10% of children will be living in poverty by 2030 (Kidner, 2024). So far the target has not been hit. However, having a target and associated measures in place is now clearly having an effect, as Figure 3 illustrates.

The origins of the great rise in child poverty

Figure 3 shows permanent extremely high rates of child poverty but how has this situation come to pass? Figure 4 shows how income inequality was forced up across Great Britain from lows in the 1960s and 1970s to quickly reach a high plateau by the year 2000 that has never decreased (Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), 2024). During this period the UK as a whole moved from being one of the most equitable countries in Europe to being the most inequitable. Child poverty soared as a result. Families with children were worse hit than most families (people do not need to be living with children to be counted as a family), especially after housing costs were included (see Figure 4).

The final uptick in Figure 4 indicates inequality rising slightly in the most recent period measured. This occurred because the short-term measures to relieve extreme poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic were removed (outside of Scotland).



However, there is a limit to how much graphs and tables of data can have an impact, so I will end this article with the story of one child's slow death in England in early 2024, following the death of his father.

How little we understand each other

On 16 January 2024, *The Sun* broke the story of two-year-old Bronson Battersby who had been found starved to death curled up next to his father, Kenneth (Pattinson and Dale, 2024). Kenneth had died of a heart attack at the age of 60. The two had last been seen by a neighbour 14 days earlier. Five days after the initial media reports, the BBC reported the local police and crime commissioner as suggesting that any speculation over their demise was at that point 'unhelpful' (Iredale, 2024). A week on and other media reports suggested that in places like the town in which Bronson and his father died – a place of much poverty and where more than usual people lived 'chaotic lives' – often it is only the local social services who might 'pick up the pieces' (*The Week*, 2024). These reports point out that, nationally, there is only one social worker for every 12 children known to be very vulnerable and that those social workers have a great deal more to do than just keep an eye on that dozen children. The reports also explain that social work is becoming harder to do as other services, such as General Practitioners

(GPs) withdraw, as deprivation rises, and because the starting salary for social work is only £24,000. No one asked why the pieces were falling apart for Bronson and Kenneth. Instead, an inquiry was begun to ascertain whether any failings and 'missed opportunities' could be ascribed to individual professionals (Social Work Today, 2024). All such inquiries are limited in their scope. The death of a 60-year-old man, in this case Bronson's father Kenneth, was treated as commonplace. However, there was a time in the UK when health was improving, when poverty was falling, when people's lives were less 'chaotic' and when fewer children and adults died each week. More people now die of destitution in England than previously, and many are only found much later, their bodies putrefied (Hiam *et al.*, 2023).

I am English and I am writing this article in a small city in the heart of England. You may be English too, but if not you have a better chance of understanding a part of what is wrong. We, the English, are a people that do not know themselves. Nowhere is this more the case than in our study of the human geography of Britain. We cannot know ourselves because we have become so very divided. We can try to understand others – as geographical explorers once tried to understand those whose lands they crossed – but our experiences of life now differ so much. Indeed, in the case of academic geographers in Britain, 98% of us have never experienced poverty as a child.

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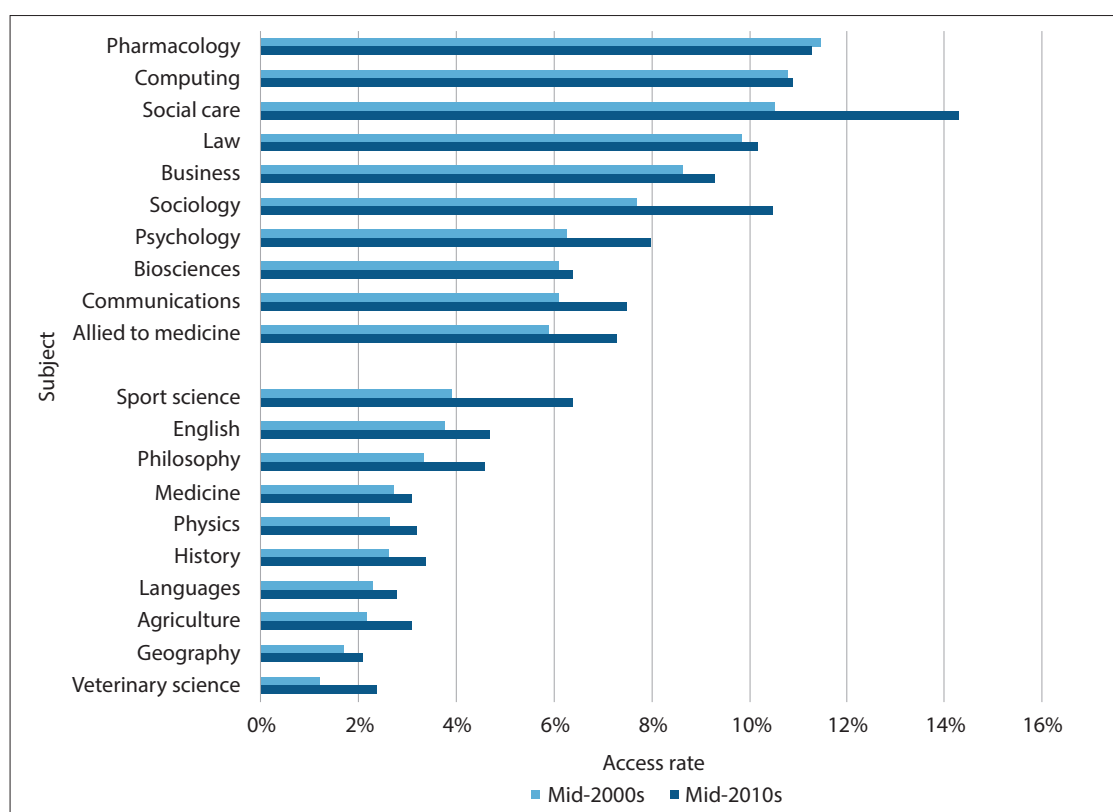


Figure 5: Proportion of university students who had accessed free school meals while in compulsory education, by university subject studied, top and bottom 10 subjects. After: Britton et al. (2021).

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Figure 5 graphs university students' access rates to the free school meals scheme (offered by the UK Government to 'disadvantaged pupils' - DfE (2024)) when they were in compulsory education. In the 2000s geography undergraduates were the second least likely to have accessed free school meals (Britton *et al.*, 2021). By the 2010s they were the least likely of all. Of all 86 subjects studied in UK universities by more than 500 students, the subject studied most by the rich and least by the poor is human geography (Dorling, 2022).

Two months before Bronson Battersby's death, the President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Dr Camilla Kingdon, raised concerns about the latest release of the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD), which showed a dramatic increase in deaths among children aged one to four (NCMD, 2023). She said: 'Behind this awful data published today, is a whole raft of deteriorating child health outcomes *and the clear driver is rising child poverty in the UK*' (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2024; emphasis added).

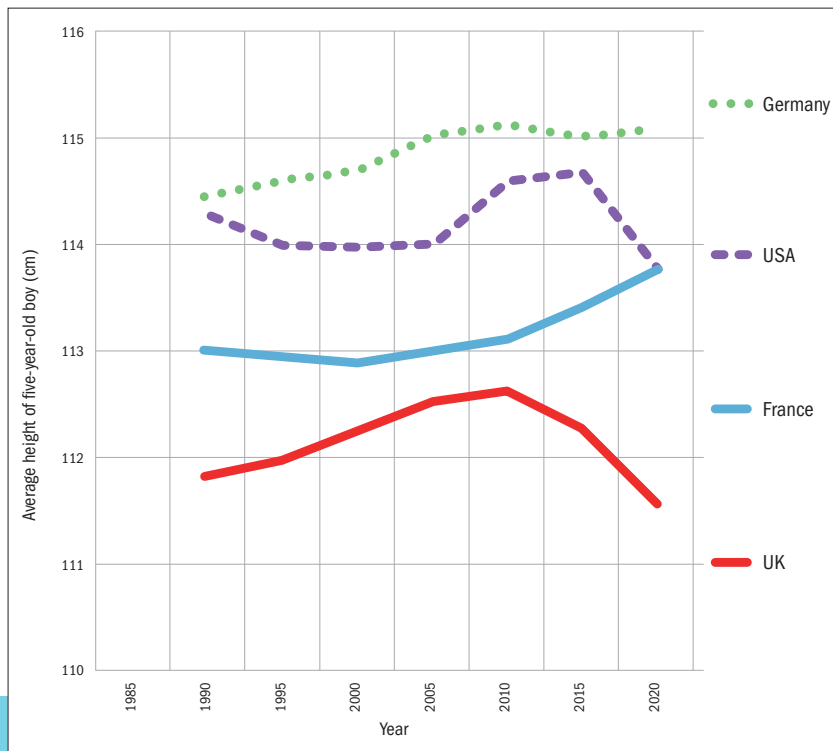
Dr Kingdon was speaking, in effect, to an empty room. This was not an issue deemed of much importance, at least not in England. Interestingly, statements Dr Kingdon made on other issues were reported in the media (Hallows and Sawyer, 2023), but not her warning on the deaths of children in the UK. This perhaps helps illustrate why it matters if academic subjects such as geography do not see poverty and inequality as a priority. That view can

then pervade more widely. I am not arguing that geographer matters that much, but more that the general lack of interest among those who are materially better-off matters greatly.

Child death rates have risen in England for all ages and all social classes, but most of all for those who are living in poor areas, and especially for the youngest children like Bronson. The greatest rise occurred in the 12 months between 2022 and 2023. But, so what? We are used to these stories now. Many of us cannot remember a time when there was good news. 'Tragic but inevitable' appears to be the response, and at least (we may secretly think to ourselves) it is mostly only occurring in the poorest of areas – even when, as noted, child mortality is now rising everywhere in all social groups.

In times like these people tend to keep their children close. Few poor children take the academic subject of geography at school once there is the option to drop it. Geography is sold as one of the ten academic subjects most likely to get you a high paid job if you study it, but that is only because of who goes on to study geography at university, not because of what they learn there (Dorling, 2022). When inequality is high, getting a well-paid job becomes even more of a desperate priority for the already well-off because being normal becomes terrifying and poverty is unimaginable. There is a temptation not to stay friends with people who are beginning to lead more chaotic lives. You aim upwards, choose 'better' friends, and worry about climate change.

Figure 6: Another indicator of child poverty in the media? Changes in the average heights of boys in Germany, USA, France and the UK, 1990–2020. Data: ITV (2023)



When we tolerate this

The National Life Tables for the UK were released five days before Bronson and his father were found (ONS, 2024b). This was the first revision since 2021, but, again, we don't look any more – it is no longer news. Life expectancy in the three years to 2022 was 78.6 for men and 82.6 for women; falling from 78.7 and 82.7. This drop was partly because the period before included a COVID-19 pandemic-free year. A decade earlier though (2012–14) men lived to over 79 years and women to 82.8.

The deaths of two-year-old boys make a tiny contribution to the national figures. By 2020–22 the national UK mortality rates of two-year-old boys, like Bronson, according to the new National Life Tables had risen to 15 per 100,000; its highest level since 2015–17 (ONS, 2024b). In all of recorded British mortality history it has never risen by as much as it was reported to have risen most

recently. The National Child Mortality Database figures are even more up to date (2023). They are worse. This means we already know that when the National Life Tables are next updated, probably two years from now, they will rise yet again.

Despite this, we don't ask the most important questions. We don't ask the geographical questions. We ask about the competence of professionals, or the supposedly fecklessness of individuals, but we do not ask why more children are now dying so very young. We don't ask why the average heights of our five-year-old children have been falling; why boys born in 2005 were hardly any taller than those born five years before them (Figure 6) when British children's height had been rising for more than a century. We don't ask why this can be when children's heights are still rising in France and only briefly stalled for a short time in Germany due to that country accepting hundreds of thousands of children from war-torn Syria (ITV, 2023). And we don't ask why the UK is copying the USA when they have the same issues.

(Internationally, the study of geography is dominated by the USA and the UK. Is it any wonder we have such a warped view?). We don't ask why the two largest political parties in England continue to support the two-child policy on benefits – condemning the majority of English children (56%) with two or more siblings to go hungry several times a month in 2023 (Dorling, 2023). In England we do not know that in Scotland this is not done; or that the Scottish child payment was increased in November 2022 so that no children north of the border need go cold or hungry – or be stunted in height for lack of nutritious food.

To be honest, I can see why we don't ask these questions. I am using colloquial rather than academic language here as I want to get my point across and academic language is often not the best way to do that. There comes a time when you feel you might as well just give up; throw the towel in and accept that our children will be worse fed, shorter in stature, and most will live lives a little more desperate than before. Why not accept that hope is dead and all we can do is to try to look after just ourselves and our families because we killed our society, our social empathy, our soul? Alternatively, you can pick yourself up and say this far and no further. That we do still have a society. That people did knock on Bronson's door to try to help. That there are millions who care, deeply; but who also know that the situation could get much worse. And neither of the two main political parties is committed to reducing child poverty any more, or abandoning the cruel two-child benefits policy. If you want to look for hope in the UK you do not have to look far: Scotland now makes extra

payments to families with children in addition to all the benefits they received before. The English try to pretend that is not happening. Geographers can help in rectifying this problem greatly, both by learning more about what is happening and then by teaching about the growth in poverty and inequality, starting with children.

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