

Royal Statistical Society & Centre for Public Data Roundtable on Gender and Poverty Data Gaps July 2025

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Background

On the 28th of July 2025, The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and Centre for Public Data (CfPD), with support from the Women's Budget Group, held a roundtable to discuss data gaps in the UK poverty-data landscape. The roundtable brought together experts from our networks with experience of working at the intersection of gendered issues and poverty with the aim of gathering information about key issues they have faced while trying to work in this field.

This roundtable was the first in a series of meetings that we will hold as part of our poverty data gaps research, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) Insight Infrastructure team. There has been a growing awareness of gaps in statistics in recent years, but the statistical system has struggled to respond effectively due to limited resources and competing priorities. Additionally, this project comes at a time of intense scrutiny of the UK's official statistics system, as seen through the recent [Lievesley Review](#), [Devereux Review](#), and the [UK Statistics Assembly](#).

Considering this challenge, part of this project seeks to put forward practical, achievable, user-led recommendations for where the system can focus its efforts while being mindful of the context in which it is operating.

This briefing summarises the main threads and themes coming out of our discussion. Rather than providing detail on everything discussed, we pull out the key points that were raised, taking account of both the breadth of opinion and the impact issues have had on the attending organisations.

Roundtable objectives

The roundtable had 3 main objectives:

1. To identify specific data gaps that are affecting people that research, work in, or experience issues at the intersection of gender and poverty.
2. To understand how people in this domain interact with the statistical system so that we can advocate for appropriate resource allocation.
3. To understand the limitations of the questions people can answer within the current system, and to understand what the desired changes are.

The questions that were discussed were:

- 1) What questions about poverty are you / have you been interested in answering?
- 2) What are the main statistics and data sources you use, and where do you get them? Do you ever rely on non-governmental data sources?
- 3) Are there questions you'd like to answer but can't with current data?
- 4) What (data-related) barriers have you encountered when trying to research questions on poverty and gender?
- 5) What aspects of gendered issues and poverty are not well understood by the statistical system?

- 6) How could statistics producers better help you answer your questions about gender and poverty? What could be improved about the stats and data that are produced? How can producers make it easier for you to engage?

Key Themes

Several cross-cutting themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Limited granularity and intersectional analysis.** Participants emphasised that much UK poverty data cannot be disaggregated by more than one protected characteristic at a time, severely restricting intersectional analysis. In many cases this is related to data suppression or small sample sizes when trying to do analysis at small geographical levels such as local authorities. In others it is related to inconsistencies between datasets collected at the local level or by devolved administrations.
- **Household-level measurement obscures intra-household dynamics.** Income and poverty measures are typically produced at the household level. This makes many questions of interest simply unanswerable insofar as they require individual-level data to be available. This particularly affects analysis of women's access to resources, intra-household decision-making and behaviours, and economic control.
- **There is a general underutilisation of data linkage and data sharing issues abound.** While administrative datasets have the potential to fill gaps, linkage across systems is limited. Additionally, data sharing between government and third-sector organisations is often limited, which makes organisations reliant on the incomplete pictures that are made public. Since a lot of data is already collected but just not shared outside of government departments, many questions of interest would be answerable if data was more widely accessible.
- **It is often not straightforward to access data, even when they are publicly available.** Both technical and non-technical users brought up difficulties they have had getting the data that they need for their questions. Attendees expressed the need for more streamlined access and use of data.
- **User engagement could be improved.** Attendees flagged that they were often unsure how their contributions to prior user engagement activities hosted by official statistics producers were considered. They also felt that some surveys could have been improved with better engagement with third-sector organisations and people with lived experience of poverty.

Overview of Discussion

Most organisations in attendance expressed interest in understanding rates and experiences of poverty amongst specific segments of the population, including people experiencing domestic or economic abuse, people with caring responsibilities, lone parents, pensioners, people experiencing homelessness, working people in poverty, and others. Within and beyond



these groups, one of the most cited topics of interest across attendees was intersectional analysis of poverty. This included gender but extended to a variety of other protected characteristics.

Organisations wanted to be able to break down data on, for instance, deprivation or incomes by various combinations of protected characteristics, but couldn't with the available data. We heard most organisations express interest in being able to conduct their analyses at relatively granular geographical scales, most commonly by local authority area. Unfortunately, analysis is often undermined by data suppression practices combined with low sample sizes for some groups at small geographical levels. The issue with geography also flows the other way, in that the ability to do coherent, national-level policy analysis and comparison is frustrated by the fact that the collection of some data is devolved and not standardised between devolved administrations.

Often, where data for small geographical levels does exist, we heard a desire to go beyond existing metrics of deprivation or income towards a richer set of data that allows organisations to better understand experiences of poverty and its effects over individuals' lifetimes. This included, but was not limited to, having access to better health-related data or having more robust data on individuals' and households' pensions or other wealth, assets, and debt. It also naturally involved a desire to have better longitudinal data than what is currently available. Attendees mentioned wanting to be able to estimate the impact of care responsibilities on someone's lifetime outcomes with regards to paid employment opportunities, for instance, or the effect of poverty on someone's health over the long term.

Indeed, where it comes to caring responsibilities—a major and consistent topic of interest—there was a widespread view that currently available data is inadequate. As just one example, it was expressed that time-use surveys are currently our best look at unpaid care, but they do a poor job of illuminating the amount of time people spend on childcare or adult social care, and they also fail to detail the intensity of carer's work.

But there was also a desire to understand the root causes of poverty and how these relate to gendered dynamics in various parts of society. Several attendees noted that accomplishing this requires understanding women's working patterns better, which is related in turn to getting high-quality data at an individual—rather than household—level.

Official statistics' over-reliance on household-level data was a theme that emerged repeatedly throughout our discussion. Attendees noted that it prevents us from getting an understanding of a very wide range of issues, including the division of resources and behaviours within households. Indeed, many questions of interest are simply not answerable when looking at households alone.

Some questions that organisations have been unable to answer include more complex analyses using models that require more robust data than what they find easily available. This includes being able to assess the degree to which disparities in wealth or income are due to systemic bias as opposed to other factors, or being able to effectively evaluate the economic and financial impacts of various changes to policies. These sorts of questions would substantially benefit from detailed microdata on individuals that attendees do not find readily available.

The timeliness of publication for some datasets was also raised as an issue, specifically with regards to the Census, as this is only updated in full every decade. Such a slow pace of update means that there is a lot of extrapolation and interpolation that is necessary when working with its data for poverty-related questions.



In some cases, data about particular questions of interest is not published (either entirely or at specific geographical levels), such as data on the rates of people accessing certain public services. It is clear that the lack of availability of specific data has negatively affected organisations' ability to understand poverty for their own purposes, but a key point that emerged in discussion was that much of the data that is needed to answer these questions is already collected. However, it is not readily available to many researchers.

A noted example in the discussion was individual-level income metrics, which already exist but are not widely published. This issue is connected to a lack of data sharing and accessibility between (and within) government and outside organisations, but also to linkage of datasets that have untapped potential for painting a more complete picture of poverty. While data linkage and sharing were mentioned throughout the discussion as an issue, some attendees also expressed that there is a lack of data sharing between charitable organisations that often collect their own data. It was remarked that additional support could be provided by official statistics producers for linking these data sources together, or simply to help ensure that the data are structured in such a way that they were more consistent and linkable in the future.

Given the various problems people raised with governmental data sources, we also heard that many organisations make use of data produced by other organisations. In some cases, these are presented in user-friendly ways that would be accessible to non-technical audiences, such as the Unpaid Care Dashboard from the University of Sheffield, the Cost-of-Living Dashboard from Citizens Advice. In other cases, they cover topics of interest that are not adequately handled by governmental sources.

Attendees noted that in some cases, they had to work on collecting novel data themselves in order to get at the kinds of questions they had. This reliance on third-sector data signals the importance of several gaps in official data. One example specifically mentioned in this discussion was the Gender Equality Index UK, which emerged as a result of IMD data not being sufficiently disaggregated by sex.

An undercurrent of discussion that emerged at several points was a sense that the statistical system in the UK could improve accessibility of data and also better engage with users about the data that gets produced.

For example, some organisations mentioned that they have sometimes struggled to get data via Freedom of Information (FoI) requests, even when they know the data exists (for instance, because the data is subsequently published). There was a sense that this avenue for gathering information is not always as productive as attendees would expect it to be.

Several organisations also mentioned that a lot of the data that gets published is not accessible to non-technical audiences, who often find it challenging to get what they need or analyse it effectively. A noted success that ran against this point was the Census's Flexible Table Builder, which was found to be relatively easy to use. Stat-Xplore, by contrast, was noted by several attendees as not being particularly user friendly, although there was some dissenting opinion, with most agreeing that after explanation and guidance, these tools can become much easier to use. Nevertheless, accessibility and availability of desired information was a notable issue that many attendees raised.

However, even amongst technical users, there was an overarching wish for more streamlined and accessible data that would make it easier to get answers to the questions they want, or at least to identify where they can get or link the data that would help answer their questions.



Several participants commented that statistics producers could do more to involve them in the production of official statistics and datasets. Some of this stemmed from a perception that official statistics producers were not successfully communicating about how third-sector contributions to consultations and other user-engagement activities were being integrated into their outputs. Some attendees felt that certain questions in surveys were seemingly designed without proper consideration of what third-sector perspectives were or without being informed by lived experiences of the people they were sampling.

Next Steps

The findings from this roundtable discussion will be integrated with our ongoing desk research that collates poverty data gaps mentioned in civil society publications and government department consultations and parliamentary questions.

Over the coming weeks, we will be launching the next phase of our research, which will involve semi-structured interviews with data experts who can speak to specific data gaps that have a wide and / or deep impact on poverty research. This phase of the project will also include two additional themed roundtables that will serve information-gathering purposes.

To have your say in what themes we cover in future meetings, please fill out [this form](#).

If you would like to share details of your experience with poverty-related data gaps, please fill out our [open call for input](#). You can also use that form to register your interest in taking part in one of our stakeholder interviews and staying updated on our progress.