



The Hygiene Bank: Hygiene Poverty 2022 Summary Report*

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Foreword

Hygiene is the basic level of care needed to feel clean, confident and comfortable enough to engage fully in life. Hygiene is not a privilege and should be accessible to everyone, yet many locked in poverty or who find themselves in crisis due to bereavement, illness or sudden job loss face restricted options. Do we pay our rent or mortgage, heat our home, buy food, fuel or the necessary products to keep clean?

The purpose of The Hygiene Bank is to ensure that no one is held back from participating in society because they cannot access the necessary products to stay clean. Since 2018, we have worked to foster wellbeing by providing essentials such as toothpaste, shampoo, soap, deodorant, nappies, period products and laundry detergent to communities throughout the UK.

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Hygiene is not a privilege and should be accessible to everyone.

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As of the release of this report our network of 162 Local Projects has provided over 1,059,000kg of the products we all rely on every day to over 2,715 Community Partners¹ – including schools, food banks, family support services, refuges and other charities and organisations that support people with little or no access to hygiene essentials.

The demand for our support has been overwhelming and our grassroots, community-based network has brought the reality of hygiene poverty into sharp focus. We have witnessed the life-inhibiting effects of hygiene poverty, from children being bullied at school to adults being housebound. We have heard consistent reports regarding the shame and stigma felt by those experiencing it and we know that hygiene poverty affects every stage of life from infancy to old age.

However, despite having a wealth of grassroots evidence, there has never been a truly comprehensive analysis of hygiene poverty at a national level. We believe that this lack of independent, national data has been a significant factor in suppressing awareness of hygiene poverty, allowing it to thrive largely undetected as a hidden crisis in the UK.

With poverty rates rising and the cost-of-living crisis putting more and more pressure on households in the UK, it is vital that we expose this hidden crisis and campaign for real, meaningful change.

Hygiene Poverty 2022 is a ground-breaking, timely and compelling review of hygiene poverty, giving us a credible picture of the scale, incidence and impact of hygiene poverty in the UK. It is a vital steppingstone in our mission for change.

Everyone has a role to play in turning the tide against hygiene poverty. Communities, businesses and thought leaders must all work together to address the injustice of hygiene poverty and advocate for a fairer society, one where we all have access to the basics needed to keep clean and healthy.

We hope you'll join us to help make that vision a reality.



Lizzy Hall
Founder, The Hygiene Bank

¹ Community Partners are the community-based organisations registered to receive support from The Hygiene Bank.

Introduction

Imagine being unable to wash your child's clothes or hair, or avoiding a job interview because you can't afford laundry detergent or shampoo. Imagine sharing a toothbrush with other family members or staying away from your friends and family because of the anxiety of not having deodorant or period products. This is the reality for an estimated 3.1 million people living in the UK today. And yet most of us are unaware hygiene poverty exists and do not understand the devastating impact it can have – causing depression, anxiety and isolation.

At The Hygiene Bank we believe everyone deserves to feel clean; that one day everyone living in the UK will have access to essential hygiene products. But to make that vision a reality we needed to truly understand the problem, so we commissioned an independent study by YouGov to benchmark the incidence rate and the drivers of hygiene poverty so that we can shine a light on this hidden crisis.

Since the charity started, just four years ago, our work in over 160 communities across the UK has seen a dramatic rise in demand for the basic hygiene products many of us take for granted. But it's only through deepening our understanding of the national picture of hygiene poverty that we can build the charity's roadmap through the cost-of-living crisis and beyond, to reach those who need

us the most and to campaign to end hygiene poverty for good.

Hygiene Poverty 2022 is a difficult and sobering read – but it is a crucial milestone in our understanding of hygiene poverty in this country. Although there is a wealth of research into poverty, until now hygiene poverty had been a largely underrepresented subject, constituting a 'hidden crisis', largely unrecognised and unquantified at a national level. This report is the first comprehensive, national, mixed methodology research study into the issue of hygiene poverty in the UK. It establishes not only the incidence rates and risk factors but provides a clear picture from those with lived experience about the impact of hygiene poverty on their daily lives and their futures. It clearly shows us which groups are disproportionately affected and tells stories which should be unthinkable – of choosing between a few minutes of heating, or a tube of toothpaste, of people not washing their hair for weeks at a time, of parents without enough nappies for their baby. It should be a wake up call for us all.

We will use this report as a platform to push for meaningful change. We want to work with communities and business leaders, policy makers and the public to both get families the products they desperately need, but ultimately to ensure that

“

At The Hygiene Bank we believe everyone deserves to feel clean; that one day everyone living in the UK will have access to essential hygiene products. ”

we no longer need to do that. If you believe, as we do, that everyone deserves to be able to care for themselves and their families, that everyone deserves to feel clean – then donate, volunteer, join our grassroots movement and help us to make this hidden crisis a crisis of the past.



Ruth Brock
CEO, The Hygiene Bank

Executive Summary

Prevalence of Hygiene Poverty in the UK

Hygiene poverty was found to affect an estimated 3,150,000 adults in the UK (6% of the population).²

This baseline rises significantly for disabled people or those living with a long-term health condition.³

Those from lower-income households, younger people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds were also found to be at a greater risk of experiencing hygiene poverty.

3.1 Million
adults in the UK
are affected by
hygiene poverty.



Hygiene Poverty Affects:

6%
of adults
in the UK

21%
of disabled
people

13%
of those from
lower-income
households

11%
of younger people
(18-34 year olds)

11%
of those from
an ethnic minority
background

5%
of adults who
are working

² Hygiene poverty was defined as the individual or their household having gone without basic toiletries because they could not afford to buy them, in the last 12 months. Population estimates have been calculated using the latest ONS mid-year estimates (for the United Kingdom, 18+, 2020). These are based on a total population size of 52,890,044 UK adults.

³ This is those saying their day-to-day activities are limited a lot due to a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months.

Impacts of Hygiene Poverty

Mental and Physical Health:

The most-reported impact of hygiene poverty was its negative effect on mental health. It was also reported to have a significant and detrimental effect on physical health.

- **three in five** (61%) people experiencing hygiene poverty say that it has negatively impacted their mental health
- **50%** of people experiencing hygiene poverty said that they had felt anxious or depressed and **49%** said they felt ashamed/embarrassed as a result of going without basic toiletries or hygiene items
- **39%** said they have avoided seeing a friend
- **36%** said they had avoided going to a social event
- **32%** have avoided seeing family
- **a third** said they felt lonely or isolated
- **a third** said their physical health has been impacted

Social isolation was identified as a significant impact of hygiene poverty, with many respondents reporting feelings of shame and anxiety, which often leads to isolation.

50%
of people living
with hygiene
poverty felt anxious
or depressed.



“

I used to go out and see my friends, but I got anxiety about the way I looked and smelt, so I became a recluse, I was so upset that my life had changed.

”

Cycle of Poverty:

Hygiene poverty was also identified as a barrier to employment and education, with many respondents avoiding job interviews, work or education, highlighting its potential to trap people in a cycle of poverty.

- **One in eight** (13%) said they have avoided going to a job interview
- **Just less than one in eight** (12%) said they had avoided going to work
- **9%** had avoided going to school, college or university, rising to 16% of 18-24 year olds

1 in 8

of those experiencing hygiene poverty have avoided going to a job interview.



“

I feel really depressed, I feel worthless, I can't prepare for a job, I don't think I will ever be able to get out, or have confidence to get back to normal life.

”

Family Stress:

Hygiene poverty was continually reported to have negative implications for the dependents of those living in hygiene poverty.

Three in five (62%) of those experiencing hygiene poverty with dependent children said that they have had to choose between buying hygiene products for themselves or their child(ren).

Despite this attempt to mitigate the impacts of hygiene poverty on family life, the research showed that children were still perceived to be significantly impacted by living in hygiene poverty.

Of those living in hygiene poverty with dependent children:

- **Two in five** said that their children's confidence has been negatively impacted
- **39%** said that their children's participation in hobbies including sports had been negatively impacted
- **41%** said that their children's mental health had been negatively impacted
- **37%** said that their children's physical health had been negatively impacted
- **32%** said that their children's performance at school had been negatively impacted



41%

of parents said their children's mental health had been negatively impacted due to hygiene poverty.



“

I'm the sole provider, they deserve the world, to feel that I'm failing them, I can't give them what I want to... I don't want them to be looked at differently, but people look at me, I feel it, and that's an added pressure.

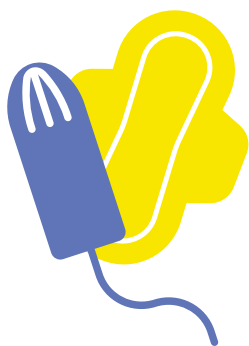
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Barriers to Accessing Support

Shame and Stigma:

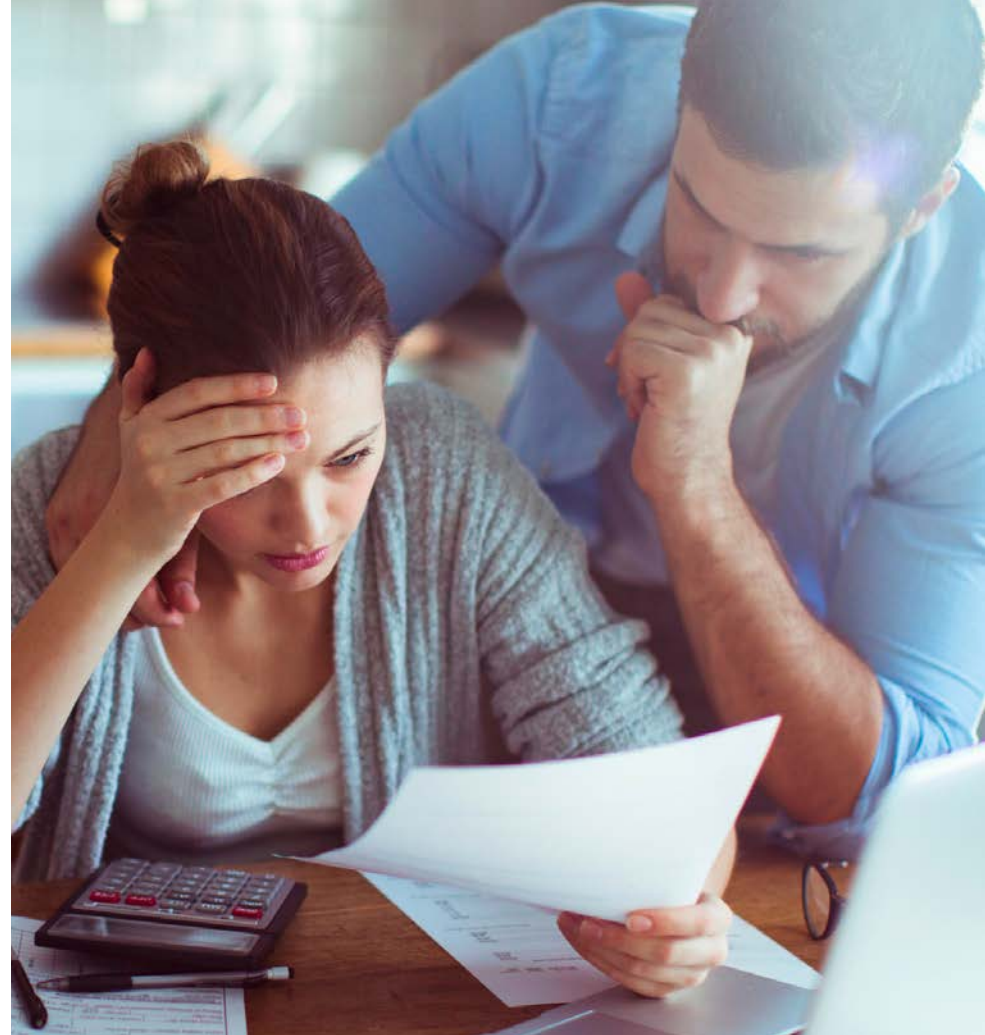
Embarrassment prohibits half of those experiencing hygiene poverty from asking for help. Participants in the qualitative research reported accessing support as a 'last resort' or at the point of 'desperation'.

- **Almost half** (48%) of those experiencing hygiene poverty said they were too embarrassed to ask for help
- Foodbanks were reported as the most commonly accessed support service, although many expressed a lack of supply or services close to them
- Some were reliant on friends and family, but most were managing the issue alone due to feelings of shame
- **Two in five** (42%) said they have felt judged (either a great deal or a fair amount) for going without basic toiletries. Among this group, **four in five** (79%) said that this has stopped them from reaching out for support.



48%

(almost half) of those experiencing hygiene poverty were too embarrassed to ask for help.



“

Asking for things is just embarrassing and shameful especially as I've got kids, I brought them into this world, they should have the products they need to live.

”

Influencing Factors

The research found that hygiene poverty was linked to a range of influencing factors beyond low income and poor employment conditions. Further reported factors influencing hygiene poverty included:

The cost of living crisis:

The expectation for a continued rise in the cost of living was reported as a serious concern for the future, with participants concerned about receiving an unexpected bill which would dismantle their carefully planned budget.

“

I always prioritise bills first, then food second, then hygiene products last.

”

The pandemic:

The pandemic had a complex impact on household finances. Typically, higher income households were less likely to experience negative impacts on employment (such as job loss or furlough) and more likely to feel the benefits of reduced expenditure (in areas such as commuting and leisure) than lower income households.⁴

Ultimately, however, the overarching picture is of negative impacts and increased financial insecurity from the pandemic, with 54% of those living in hygiene poverty reporting that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to afford hygiene essentials.

54%



of those living in hygiene poverty report the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to afford hygiene essentials.

Life experience and events:

The interviews with Community Partners also highlighted other common influencing factors such as:

- suffering from existing depression and anxiety
- the end of a relationship
- bereavement

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/articles/weeklyhouseholdspendingfellbymorethan100onaverageduringthecoronaviruspandemic/2021-09-13>

Conclusions

Hygiene Poverty 2022 provides the first-ever benchmark of hygiene poverty in the UK. It establishes not only the incidence rates and risk factors, but also provides a clear picture from those with lived experience regarding the impact of hygiene poverty on their daily lives, their mental and physical health, and their ability to shape and determine their prospects in life.

Hygiene poverty affects a considerable proportion of the UK's population. However, some groups were shown to have disproportionate incidence rates, namely those on a low income and disabled people or those living with a long-term health condition.

The study also highlighted the link between hygiene poverty and poor mental and physical health, with the negative effect on mental health being the most reported impact.

Hygiene poverty was also identified as a barrier to education and work, with a significant percentage of those experiencing hygiene poverty citing it as a reason for having avoided opportunities in both settings. This raises the concern that hygiene poverty potentially 'traps' people in poverty as work and education are widely accepted as routes out of poverty.

The study indicates that the current cost of living crisis is a significant concern for those already experiencing hygiene poverty. Further, as hygiene essentials were reported as being 'bottom of the list' when budgets were tight, the crisis is likely to push more people into hygiene poverty.

Hygiene Poverty 2022 also identified the negative impacts on the dependents of those living in hygiene poverty. Children living in households affected by hygiene poverty were perceived to be less confident and less able to engage in school and sports, raising the prospect that hygiene poverty is significantly inhibiting the wellbeing of a future generation.

Read the entire report [here](#).



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**THE HYGIENE
BANK**

**At The Hygiene Bank we believe everyone
deserves to feel clean; that one day
everyone living in the UK will have
access to essential hygiene products.**

**Donate. Volunteer.
Join our grassroots movement.
Let's end hygiene poverty together.**

**Visit us at
www.thehygienebank.com**

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