

Childhood poverty worse in school holidays

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The summer holidays are supposed to be a happy and carefree time for school children but the reality is they are often stressful for children from low income families.

A new paper, "The Cost of School Holidays for Children from Low Income Families," published in the journal *Childhood* by researchers at the University of Glasgow, highlights the poor provision of appropriate childcare, limited access to enrichment activities and [food insecurity](#), and the impact this can have on children's health and wellbeing and on their learning.

"The long summer holidays can offer children the chance to have new experiences, opportunities to play, relax, create memories and develop essential social skills," said Nicolas Watson, Institute of Health of Wellbeing Professor, University of Glasgow.

"While this is true for many children, for some the school holidays are a stressful and impoverished period of isolation, boredom and inactivity."

Professor Watson added: "For [low income families](#), summer holidays often entail increased financial pressures, food insecurity, poor health and exclusion from culturally enriching and healthful activities."

The lack of educational and developmental opportunities enjoyed by more affluent children means that the long summer break may be one of the most fundamental contributors toward the attainment gap between richest and poorest children, accounting for almost two-thirds of the gap

by the time children reach the age of 14.

Professor Watson is calling for a system of social protection to be put in place to negate the impact of poverty during the summer holidays – this could be in the form of centres where children can take part in enriching activities in a safe environment with good quality childcare, where they are also fed.

"These children need help immediately," said Professor Watson. "First and foremost, steps must be taken to address the national problem of food insecurity to ensure that children do not go hungry or become malnourished during the school holidays.

"Second, providing accessible, good quality childcare that meets the diverse needs of families is vital if children's learning and wellbeing is to be supported, while enabling parents to pursue better paid and more secure employment.

"Third, although there is a substantial amount of evidence to support the claim that summer learning loss is a problem – and a particular concern for low-income families – there is a lack of research on the long term impact upon attainment and life outcomes, a gap that must be addressed through rigorous academic scrutiny."

Professor Watson is calling for research into interventions that seek to tackle these inequalities.

"We need to know what works and what does not to improve outcomes for children from low income families over the [summer](#) and how best we can reform and change the lives of these children.

"Unless we take steps to tackle this problem, the evidence would suggest that attempts to rectify the attainment gaps in education, health and

wellbeing that exist between the wealthiest and poorest school children will be unlikely to succeed."

Child Poverty Action Group reported the number of children living in poverty in the UK is now four million and that in-work poverty is the most prevalent form of child poverty with 67 per cent of poor [children](#) living in low income households. Nursery places cost 77 per cent more than they did in 2003 while earnings have remained largely unchanged.

More information: Hilary Stewart et al. The cost of school holidays for children from low income families, *Childhood* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0907568218779130](#)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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