



Severe poverty and destitution in the UK: estimating local incidence and trends through secondary indicators calibrated on general and specialised household surveys

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Acknowledgement of Data used

- This presentation and paper draw on author's research using data from *Family Resources Surveys* 2024/25 and earlier years back to 2019/20, plus derived *Households Below Average Income* (HBAI) datasets accessed through UK Data Service
- Part of this work involved UKDS Secure Lab Access to these datasets with attachment of (published secondary) data variables at small area and local area linkage, as part of Indices of Deprivation project 2025 (ID25)
- The work also refers to research combining these datasets with data from the Destitution in the UK Surveys (DUKS) 2019 & 2022 supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Bramley & Fitzpatrick 2023, 2025, Bramley et al 2023)
- Office for National Statistics, Social and Vital Statistics Division, NatCen Social Research, Department for Work and Pensions. (2025). *Family Resources Survey, 2005/06-2023/24: Secure Access*. [data collection]. 2nd Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 9256, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-9256-2>
- Office for National Statistics, Social and Vital Statistics Division, NatCen Social Research, Department for Work and Pensions. (2025). *Households Below Average Income, 1994/95-2023/24: Secure Access*. [data collection]. 15th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7196, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7196-16>

Background

- Rising concern about deep poverty, and re-emergence of term 'destitution', previously mainly associated with Third World and 19th C Poor Law
- Clear evidence (JRF studies) of dramatic rise in scale of destitution since 2017, despite apparent near-flatlining in official poverty measures
- Needed special survey (DUKS) to show this
- Could insights from this be brought to bear within mainstream poverty monitoring & research?

Definition of Destitution

- A: Lacking 2 or more of 6 material essentials because can't afford: food, clothing, toiletries, heating, lighting, shelter
- B: Income so low they can't afford these essentials (based on EFS spend, 80% of MIS on these items, and survey perceptions)
- C: ***[Implicit]***: Have exhausted any assets and informal support from family etc. [proxied by the act of using a crisis service, e.g. CAB, Food Bank, Soup Run, Homeless accom or drop-in, Migrant service...]

Challenges to mainstream surveys measuring destitution

- Falling response rates a cause for concern
- Contacting segments incl small/single households living in flats behind entryphones, esp mobile private renters
- Migrants in overcrowded informal tenancies
- Uncompensated attrition in panel surveys (UKHLS, SLC)
- Covid forced switch to telephone /online with low response, taking several years to recover from
- No coverage of high risk non-household population and temporary residents (e.g. sofa surfers)

Research Questions

1. Is it possible to identify and measure destitution within the mainstream poverty-related survey (FRS) population/sample?
2. If so, what does this tell us about the recent level, pattern and trend in destitution (vs more general measures of poverty and deep poverty)?
3. Can predictive models be developed using FRS (with local contextual attributes attached to the data) for measures of destitution and related severe poverty indicators?
4. What do the models highlight as the key predictors for these indicators, with what differences between the different measures?
5. Can synthetic models be derived at Local Authority (and lower?) levels using Census & other data to predict destitution/severe poverty across UK geography?
6. How may the severe poverty experienced by people not usually resident in private households or in chronic non-responding groups be captured and included in overall local measures?

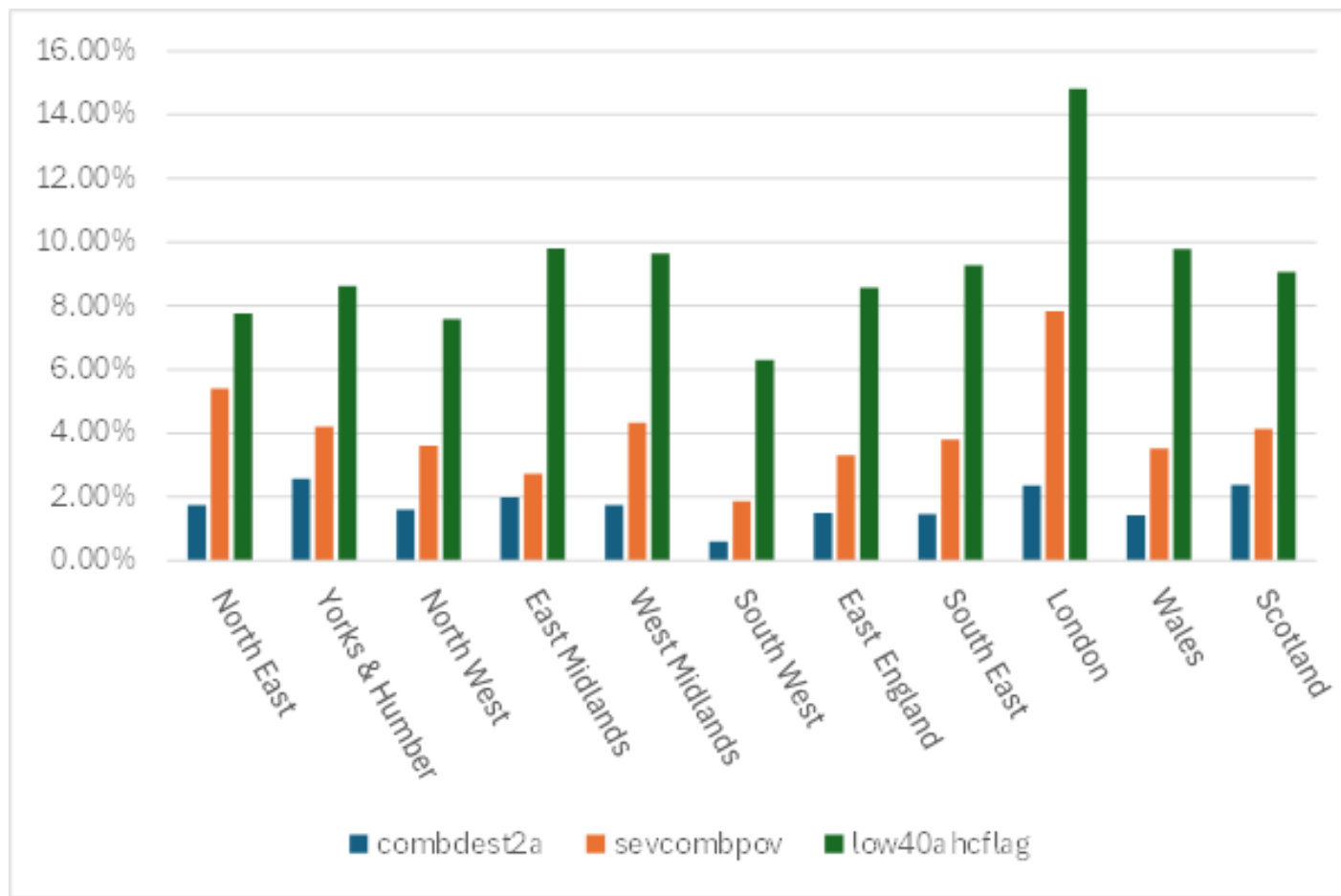
Destitution in FRS?

- Income (& savings) criterion straightforward, indeed more precise than DUKS
- Material deprivations can be approximately matched, with some creativity, reflecting inconsistent FRS approach across 3 household types (see next slide)
- Third (implicit) criterion, based in DUKS on use of crisis services, cannot be directly matched. Proxies used were receiving loan/grant from SF/LWF/LA; replaying loans from WA benefits; use of food bank last year.
- Another issue is the time period of assessment; somewhere between point in time and yearly, but closer to former

Material Deprivation indicators of destitution in FRS by household type

Depriv number	1. Families with children	2. Pensionable households	3. Other households
	Lacking 2/3? Of the following 6 items		
1	Food: Child want but can't afford to eat fruit and/or vegetables every day	Food: Lacks 1+ filling meal per day (no money/not priority /health disab/ trouble/ no-one to help or do with)	Food: Used food bank in last 30 days
2	Clothing: Child want but can't afford warm winter coat	Clothing: Lacks warm waterproof coat (reasons as above)	Housing1: Evicted by private landlord, or moved for financial reasons
4	Repairs: Parent of child wants to but cannot afford to replace broken electrical goods or decorate home or replace worn-out furniture	Repairs: Could not replace broken cooker (reasons as above)	Repairs: Cannot afford to replace broken elec goods nor worn furniture nor save £10 /mth
3	Heating: Parent of child can't keep house warm	Heating: Home not kept adequately warm (reasons as above)	Heating: Cannot afford to keep house warm nor save £10 /mth
6	Bills: Parent of child wants to but cannot keep up with bills.	Bills: Unable to pay regular bills (reasons as above)	Bills: Cannot afford to keep up with bills
5	Housing: Children want but can't afford enough bedrooms for every child 10 yr & over of different gender	Housing: Damp home (reasons as above)	Housing2: Overcrowded on bedroom standard (approx).

Destitution & deep poverty measures for household population 2024/5 by region/country ('new' FRS 2024/5)



Demographic differences in destitution & severe combined poverty risk, based on FRS/HBAI (2023/4 & earlier) data

- Single working age and lone parent families have much higher risk of destitution (3.2 & 4.2x), severe combined poverty similar (1.7 & 3.5)
- Also very elevated risk for 3+ children (2.9 & 3.2 x)
- ..and no worker hhd (2.4, 1.7), social renters (3.9, 2.8), & private renters (1.2, 2.2)
- and Black (1.2,3.2), Mixed (2.4, 1.9) & Other (0.8, 3.2) Ethnic groups
- Protective (-ve) factors inc ret age, numb workers, High NS-SEC, L T disab (?)

Composite survey approach to modelling destitution

- Bramley & Fitzpatrick (JPSJ, 2023) demonstrated this using UKHLS & DUKS for 2019, including food bank usage as well as destitution
- Common set of variables – logistic regression models
- Key advantages:
 - increases size of sample with higher risk & experience of destit.
 - includes cases of types which would be unlikely or certain not to be included in household sample
 - improving ability to capture association between a wide range of potential predictor variables and this outcome
 - possibility to include some local or regional area level predictors
- In this paper the main emphasis is on prediction rather than causality, although findings may be suggestive

Findings from composite modelling

- Compared 2019 (DUKS+UKHLS) and 2022 (DUKS + FRS) models
- FRS increasingly preferred due to attrition of UKHLS, although currently only regional, not local linkage
- Overall fit of models good, and similar
- Two-thirds of variables same in both models, a couple not available
- Strongest variables income, savings (-ve); followed by financial difficulties, parental help, receiving UC, MH problems, limiting disability, unaffordable rents.
- More protective factors incl aged 65+, couple, working, homeowner, hostel places locally

Updated modelling of severe poverty using FRS/HBAI Micro data with attached local attributes

- First stage of this modelling done within UKDS Secure Lab
 - enables linkage of local & SA variables, also controlling to area types
- Overall fit of models reasonable, but better pooling 3-4 years, bringing in more variables as significant (not able to do for Destit)
- Strongest risk variables*: social & private renting, census depriv score, Black ethnicity, rental affordability ratio
- ...followed by older private renter, single working age, born overseas, part time workers, receiving IR bens.
- More protective factors incl: aged 65+, high NS-SEC, number working, l t sick/disabled, aged 55-64, higher qualifs
- Synthetic versions of these models can be run at LAD (& MSOA) levels using Census & other published data inputs
- ***But these models refer only to private households***

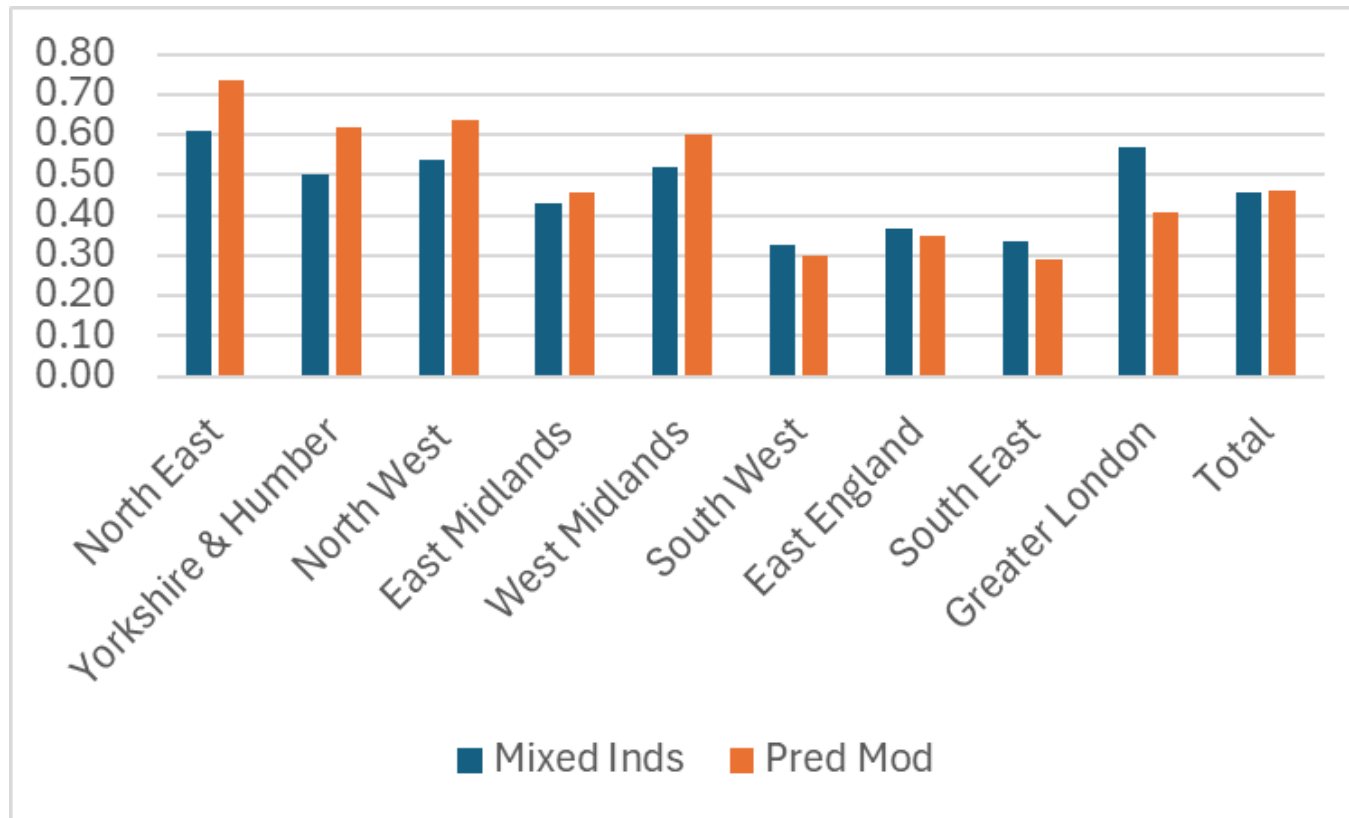
Local predictive indices

- Can these predictive models be used as a basis for synthetic models applicable to LAs?
- Broadly the answer is yes, although some secondary indicators need scaling adjustments.
- When comparing with previous models, as well as judgementally weighted indices, this destitution model displays a higher variance in predicted rates
 - reflects presence of –ve (protective) factors, as well as logistic functional form (implicit interaction in middle range)
- Reflecting this, plus smaller sample/period basis for destitution model, and its rather wider regional/local variation, prudent to downweight it somewhat as well as use direct indicators based on judgement

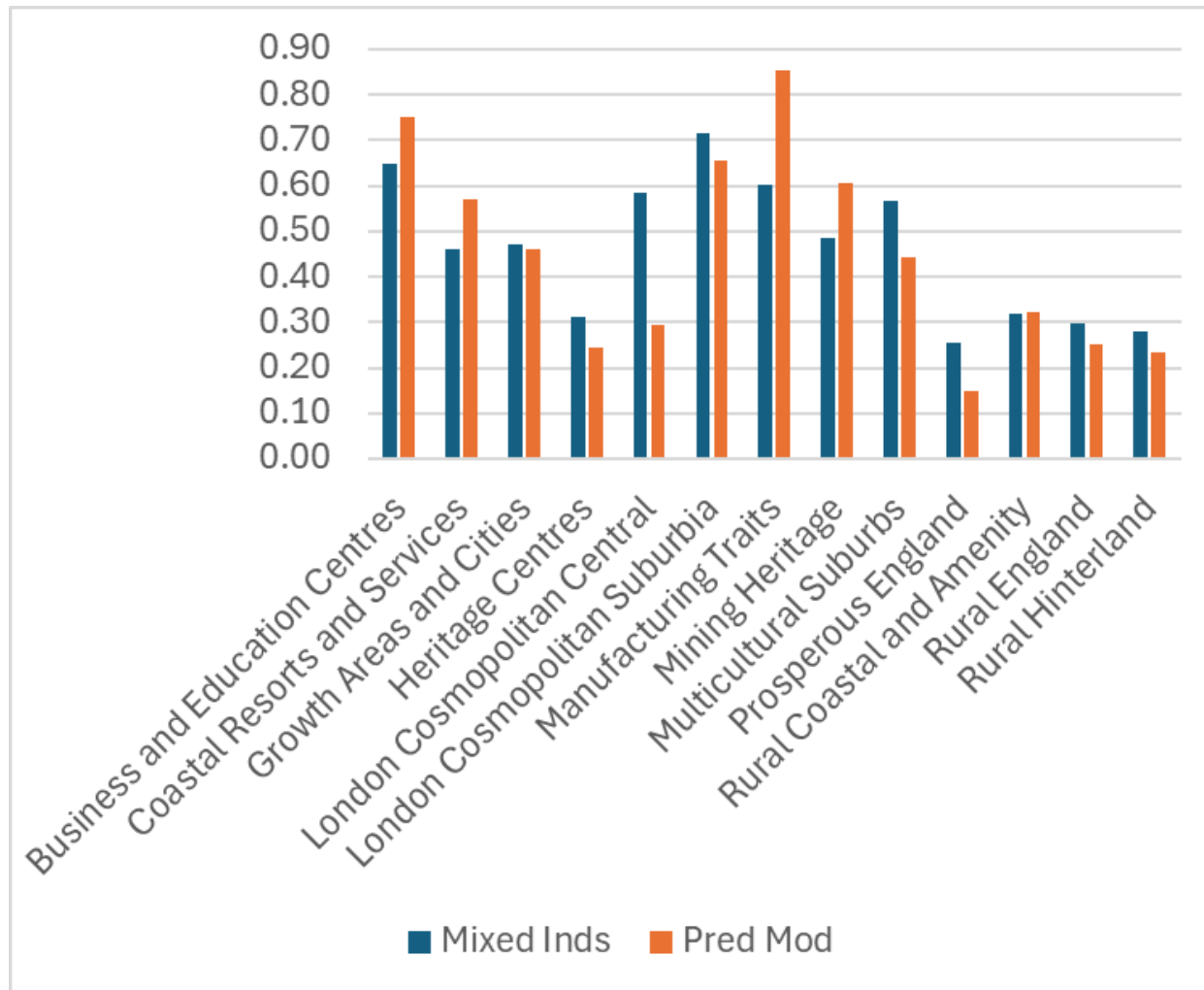
Non-household and un(der)represented populations

- For measuring or profiling poorest/most deprived groups, necessary to recognise significant numbers/% who would not be (adequately) covered in official surveys
 - non-household population (institutional, students, homeless)
 - temporarily staying with other households
 - hard to contact groups e.g. single mobile private renters in flatted accom in cities
 - groups shy of official sounding contacts e.g. migrants with uncertain status, grey/black economy, DVA victims
- DUKS indicates that 37% of weekly crisis service users in 2025 were in these excluded categories (25% of annual users)
- One approach involves compositing DUKS & mainstream survey
- Another approach is to use ID25 'Core Homeless' estimates x 5 sub-categories at LAD level and assign appropriate proportions to destitute status based on DUKS

Comparison of mixed judgemental index of general destitution with FRS-DUKS based predictive model by region/country (2022)



Comparison of mixed judgemental index of general destitution with FRS-DUKS based predictive model by ONS Local Authority Groups (2022)



Conclusions 1-3

- Yes, we can approximately flag destitute households in FRS households
- DUKS studies indicate destitution risen strongly 2017-2022, consolidating in 2025; can't track it consistently in FRS however
- Regional profile shows destitution highest in London, higher in N, while food indicators less high in London, higher in N
- London more homeless, migrants, not in FRS!
- Some regional anomalies, Y&H, EE look high, SW v low in FRS
- Combined severe poverty looks more sensible
- Possible to composite FRS & DUKS to generate useful predictive models of destitution (etc.)
- These or Secure Lab analyses can feed synthetic models at local or area-type levels

Conclusions 4-6

- Main predictors of risk:
+ve W A singles; L P families; 3+ chn; 0 Wkrs; all Renters: Black, Mixed & Other Eth.
-ve (protective) age 65+, numb workers, High NS-SEC, L T disab
- Synthetic approach to local /S A/ area type analyses, and possible ID components
- Destitution highest in London Cosmop, Core Cities, Manufacturing, Multicultural Suburbs
and lowest in Prosperous Eng, Rural, Coastal & Heritage areas
- Between 25-40% of destitute households are not captured in FRS or similar surveys; DUKS complements these
- Dealing with missing populations, 2 approaches:
either composite models, or separate est for NPHH//missing groups, e.g. based on new Core Homeless LA estimates (ID25)
- Still necessary to also use specific admin data on sub-pops