

Developing a Deprivation Index: The Research Process

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Summary

This paper tells the story of the development of the Ontario Deprivation Index. A 'deprivation index' is a list of items (or activities) considered necessary to have a standard of living above the poverty level, given prevailing social and economic conditions, but those who are poor are unlikely to be able to afford. The intent of the index is to distinguish the poor from the non-poor. With funding from the Metcalf Foundation, Daily Bread Food Bank and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy set out to construct such a list for Ontario. Using a community-based research approach, a three-stage process was undertaken to develop the measure, engaging those with lived experience while making an innovative contribution to poverty research and policy development. Statistics Canada refined this list and incorporated it into their Labour Force Survey, under the sponsorship of the Government of Ontario. The result of the process was the creation of the Ontario Deprivation Index, which constitutes one part of the multi-indicator "Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel" in the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. This is the first poverty measure to be developed through a unique partnership of a community organization, a policy think tank, government and Statistics Canada. It is also the first time a deprivation index has been developed in North America.

Partners

Daily Bread Food Bank's project team was Michael Oliphant, Director of Research, Richard Matern, Research Co-ordinator and Susie Kim, Research Assistant. The project was guided by Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. Support for the data analysis and 'number crunching' was provided by Harvey Low, Social Development Finance & Administration Division, Social Policy Analysis & Research Section of the City of Toronto and Andrew Mitchell at the Social Assistance in the New Economy project at the University of Toronto. We are grateful to the Metcalf Charitable Foundation's funding for phases 2 and 3 of the project and the intellectual support of Colette Murphy at the Foundation.

Special thanks go to each of the eight focus group co-facilitators hired to collect the qualitative data in phase two, who have been invaluable in presenting the results: Carol Armstrong, Opal Sparks, Daniel Mordecai, Isabelle Kang, Patricia Smiley, Charles Jergl, Erika Klein and Carole King. Two agencies in London - South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, a multiservice agency, and the Merrymount Children's Centre, a family support and crisis centre - participated in the community engagement toolkit. Thanks to each of the 55 food bank partners who participated in phase 1 of the project, and the 247 community volunteers who collected the data on our behalf. Finally, thanks to the 1,775 food bank recipients and 49 focus group participants who shared their opinions and kept the project grounded in lived experience.

Table of contents

Summary	3
Partners.....	3
Introduction	5
What is a deprivation index?.....	5
Importance of the research.....	5
Focus of the paper	5
Research Process	6
Developing a community-based poverty measure.....	7
Combining qualitative and quantitative research	7
Stage 1: Deprivation survey of GTA food bank clients.....	8
Developing the survey questionnaire	8
Phase 1 survey outcomes.....	10
Engaging government.....	12
Community engagement results from London, Ontario.....	12
Stage 2: Focus group research.....	13
Focus group recruitment process	13
Focus group challenges.....	15
Co-facilitators	15
Focus group structure	16
Focus group outcomes: rationale behind choice of items.....	17
Consumer items	17
Financial security	17
Dietary and health needs.....	18
Clothing and grooming needs.....	18
Social inclusion	19
Housing conditions.....	19
Stage 3: Ipsos-Reid deprivation survey	20
Ipsos-Reid survey outcomes	21
Next steps	24
References.....	25

Introduction

In the fall of 2007, the newly re-elected Ontario government came to power with a commitment to introduce a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Both government and anti-poverty advocates recognized that targets and indicators to measure poverty would be critical elements of an effective strategy. In February 2008, Daily Bread Food Bank, in partnership with the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and with the support of the Metcalf Foundation, began developing a 'deprivation index' and advocating for its inclusion as one of the measures of poverty in Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. This paper introduces the concept of the deprivation index and describes the three-stage research process undertaken to produce a deprivation index for Ontario.

What is a deprivation index?

A 'deprivation index' is a list of items (or activities) which have two characteristics, given the prevailing social and economic conditions in a time and place. First, the items on the list should be widely seen as necessary for a household to have a standard of living above the poverty level. In other words, these should be items which most households not in poverty are likely to have. Second, these items should be such that households in poverty are likely to find some of them unaffordable and so not have all those items. In short, the index, if it is well developed, should contain those items that distinguish the poor from the non-poor in the prevailing social and economic conditions.

The items in a deprivation index are not a comprehensive list of basic needs, since in a wealthy society such as Ontario's in 2009 most households, even the poor, are likely to have most of the basic necessities. For example, almost everyone in Ontario has clean running water (except infamously on some First Nations reserves). 'Clean running water' would not be of much use in distinguishing poor from non-poor households in Ontario in 2009. However, being able to afford fresh fruits and vegetables every day could distinguish poor from non-poor households even in a wealthy place such as Ontario.

Importance of the research

The deprivation index advances the measure of poverty in a number of ways compared to existing measures:

- Reflects the real life experiences of the poor;
- Communicates a powerful and compelling picture of poverty to the public;
- Measures actual standard of living;
- Captures dimensions of poverty that income does not, for example social isolation;
- Reflects public perception of poverty and not arbitrary decisions made by experts;
- Should reflect government investment in services and in-kind benefits i.e. If government invests in affordable housing, we should see a reduction in deprivation;
- Complements (but does not replace) existing income measures.

These and other comparative advantages and disadvantages of the deprivation index as a poverty measure will be discussed in a future paper. Here we wish only to document the methodology used to develop an Ontario Deprivation Index.

So far as we are aware, the Ontario Deprivation Index is unique in North America. Poverty reduction strategies in other countries, notably Ireland and the United Kingdom, use a deprivation index as a key component of their measure. Deprivation indices have been used, or are being developed, elsewhere in the world, in Europe and Australia for example. The deprivation index is becoming a new standard in the measurement of poverty. However, although there has been discussion about developing one in Canada, no government has yet done so - until now.

Focus of the paper

This paper outlines the process undertaken to develop a list of 10 deprivation indicators. While we have built on the work and experience elsewhere, especially in Australia, Ireland and the UK, the Ontario Deprivation Index is unique in its rigorous empirical development and reliance on the lived experience of people in poverty. Throughout the paper, we make reference to the methods by which the community was engaged in the research process.

Understanding our methodology is all the more important because the Ontario Deprivation Index has been adopted by the Government of Ontario as one way of measuring its progress in reducing poverty, and is part of the multi-indicator "Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel" in the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. Under the sponsorship of the Ontario government, Statistics Canada has completed a survey of 10,000 households in Ontario, using the deprivation index developed by Daily Bread and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. This is the first implementation of a deprivation index in North America.

Research Process

Beginning in February 2008, Daily Bread and the Caledon Institute began a process of both researching and advocating for an Ontario Deprivation Index as a key measure of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Our goals for the project were the following:

- To develop an Ontario Deprivation Index that:
 - could be validated empirically and implemented by the Ontario government;
 - represents poverty as socially perceived - i.e., the indicators in the index meet the 'intuition test' of the average person that they do indeed represent poverty; and
 - employs an empirical methodology that others could duplicate elsewhere.
- Enhance our understanding of poverty through direct consultation with those experiencing it.
- Engage the public in debate and discussion on an acceptable minimum standard of living.
- Increase community support for the measure and facilitate community mobilization through participation in the project.

The research process took place in three stages that are described in detail in the subsequent sections of this paper:

- Deprivation Survey of GTA Food Bank Clients (February-April 2008): 247 trained volunteers interviewed 1,775 food bank clients in 55 locations throughout the GTA. Twenty-nine deprivation indicators were tested and a range of demographic data collected.
- Focus Groups (July-September 2008): Ten focus groups with 49 participants were held in Toronto, the GTA and Cornwall. People with lived experience of poverty were participant-facilitators in the focus groups. The focus groups allowed us to arrive at 25 indicators to test in the next phase.

- Ontario Deprivation Survey (September 2008): Daily Bread partnered with Ipsos-Reid to conduct a random sample, online survey of 2,047 Ontarians based on the 25 deprivation indicators. Demographic data was also collected. A final list of 10 deprivation indicators was derived from this data and presented to the Ontario government and Statistics Canada.

Initially, we envisioned a research project of limited scope, with the intent of developing exploratory quantitative data on deprivation through a survey of people accessing food banks. The survey of clients is an annual component of Daily Bread's existing work, and offered an infrastructure that would allow us to collect data on deprivation from those in an objective situation of poverty. Before we had completed this research, interest in the project grew such that it soon evolved into a much more extensive project than we had originally conceived. Only after completing this first phase and analyzing the resulting data did we appreciate that we could use the findings for the more ambitious goal of compiling a deprivation index.

As the project expanded into the two additional phases, our goal became more explicit: to develop a measure of poverty in a way that engaged those living in poverty while making an innovative contribution to poverty research and policy development. As a result, the research process we developed went beyond traditional survey research and into community-based research. The process was intended to involve low-income voices in the work both as subjects of, and participants in, the research. It also allowed engagement with other community groups in the project.

Developing a community-based poverty measure

The project followed a community-based research process. It combined elements of traditional research - research 'on communities' with the purpose of creating new knowledge; and participatory research - understood as research 'in collaboration or partnership with the community' to create tools and strategies for change [Lee 2001]. We understand community broadly to include the public, people living in poverty and agencies that provide services to those affected by poverty. All three were engaged directly in the research process at different points.

This approach offered a number of benefits with respect to both process and methodology. From a process perspective, engagement with a wider community increased ownership in the measure. People who participated directly in the data collection developed a stake in the deprivation index measure, therefore increasing community buy-in.

The process also strengthened the legitimacy of the measure. We employed people living in poverty as our focus group co-facilitators. Their participation as co-facilitators was effective in creating an environment in which focus group participants felt comfortable sharing sensitive personal information and moving forward the conversation in the focus groups. The co-facilitators also participated in analyzing the discussions of the focus groups. This led to a measure that closely reflects the lived experience of poverty.

From a methodological perspective, community-based research can support and strengthen traditional qualitative and quantitative research. Our focus group sessions (pages 12 - 21) were conducted with and led by persons in poverty, achieving a realistic and compelling view of poverty we would not otherwise have had.

Combining qualitative and quantitative research

In addition to being community-based, the project also combined qualitative and quantitative methods. There is substantial literature demonstrating that qualitative data gathering, such as focus groups, can be used to develop and/or refine large-scale quantitative survey instruments [O'Brien 1993; O'Donnell et al. 2007; Willgerodt 2003].

Focus group feedback can be used to generate questions or refine wording on surveys so they are more relevant, leading to increased validity in results.

The deprivation index was generated by the community using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods such as focus groups were used to refine the list, and quantitative methods were used to arrive at a short list of 10 deprivation indicators. Ontario's deprivation index also had the benefit of Statistic's Canada's rigorous survey research methodology for creating the baseline measure. This work was conducted in a unique partnership that included Statistics Canada, the Province of Ontario, Daily Bread Food Bank and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. The result is Canada's first truly community-based measure of poverty.

Stage 1: Deprivation survey of GTA food bank clients

Every year, Daily Bread conducts a face-to-face survey of food bank clients as they access food at their local food bank. The 2008 survey took place from mid-February to mid-April 2008 in 55 food banks across the City of Toronto, York Region, Durham Region and Peel-Halton Region.

Surveys were administered by 247 trained volunteers. Volunteers were recruited from the general public, partnerships with local universities, and through a core of committed volunteers who had worked on this project in previous years. Surveys were administered in person with food bank clients in the waiting area of the food bank. The survey was read to the interviewee in an open format which allowed the interviewee to read each question and respond. This process increased trust and comprehension of the questions on the part of the interviewee.

Interviewees were read a list of ethical guidelines prior to beginning the survey which explained to the potential respondent that participation in the survey was completely voluntary and did not affect food access in any way, all surveys were confidential and interviewees could pass on any question they did not want to answer.

The survey was a 'convenience sample.' However, volunteers were trained to select clients in a way that enabled as random a selection of respondents as possible. The total sample size of the 2008 survey (N) was 1,775 people. This represented a minimum of three per cent of the client load of each participating food bank.

Daily Bread's annual survey, with its substantial sample size of a hard-to-reach population, offered an exceptional opportunity to pilot a process of collecting data on deprivation. Given that the population interviewed was highly likely to be currently experiencing poverty, since they were visiting a food bank, this survey allowed a unique opportunity to begin to build a knowledge base on deprivation from those actually experiencing poverty.

Developing the survey questionnaire

A deprivation questionnaire was developed with a list of 29 items taken from already existing international research as well as our own front-line experience. Two reports particularly useful in developing the list were *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain [2000]* published by the Rowntree Foundation, and *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia [2007]* published by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales.

We wanted the long list to include material needs but also items or activities that are requirements for social inclusion. We included items or activities that we felt the majority of people would more than likely consider necessary, such as fresh fruits and vegetables on a daily basis as well as items which we thought to be discretionary such as a food processor. We did not want to impose our own preconceptions about what is necessary to avoid a poverty-level standard of living in Ontario. Indeed, once we moved into the focus group component of the research, we learned that even some discretionary items had a particular importance in some circumstances. The food processor, for example, was considered a necessity by one lone parent we interviewed, because she was able to make her own baby food which helped her save on food

The 29 items or activities in the initial list and their categories are set out on Table 1.

Table 1: Deprivation indicators tested in Daily Bread survey

Consumer Items
Microwave
Stereo
DVD Player
Cable Television
Vacuum Cleaner
Home Computer
CD Player
Food Processor
Financial Security
Having regular savings of at least about \$20 dollars per month for rainy days or retirement
Small amount of money to spend each week on yourself
Dietary and Health Needs
Having at least two good meals a day for adults
Fresh fruits and vegetables every day
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day
Medicines prescribed by doctors
Clothing and Grooming Needs
Having a warm winter coat
Having at least two pairs of shoes, including one pair to wear outside in winter
Appropriate clothes for job interviews
Being able to get a professional haircut every one or two months
Having mostly new, not second-hand clothes
Social Inclusion
Having a personal telephone – either regular land telephone or a cellular phone
Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent
Hobby or leisure activity
Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month
Being able to buy some modest presents for family/friends at least once a year
Having a holiday away from home one week a year not with relatives
Access to the internet at home
Housing
Keeping your home or apartment adequately warm
Replace or repair broken electrical goods
Replace worn out furniture

Building on Townsend's [1979] path-breaking work using the concept of deprivation to measure poverty, Mack and Lansley [1985] refined Townsend's work by distinguishing between lacking an item due to choice rather than affordability and by asking whether an item was perceived as necessary. By seeking the opinion of which items were necessary based on surveying the population at large, rather than an expert judgment, the resulting deprivation index would more likely reflect society's norms of what it means to be in poverty at any given time. Both of these refinements are highlighted in McKay and Collard's Developing Deprivation Questions for the Family Resources Survey" [2003].

Our survey incorporated both of Mack and Lansley's refinements to measuring deprivation. Consequently, our questionnaire asked two questions: "Which of the following do you consider to be necessary to live in Ontario today?" as well as "Which of the following do you NOT have because you CANNOT afford it?"

Respondents were presented with a list of the above 29 items in random order on the page with check boxes for each of the two questions beside the item. Respondents answered the first question, checking off a box beside each item as it was read only if the answer was 'yes.' They then proceeded to the second question, once again checking each applicable box as the question was read.

Phase 1 survey outcomes

The initial deprivation index was derived through a straightforward methodology: deriving a deprivation score by multiplying the likelihood of an item being perceived as necessary times the likelihood of a respondent not having the item. This approach reflects Mack and Lansley's concept of deprivation being about lack of socially perceived necessities. Table 2 sets out the results of the survey and the scores. The initial items that emerged from this phase are the first 10 items with the highest scores.

Table 2: Deprivation scores of items in Daily Bread's survey

Item	% who lacked the item	% who felt the item was a necessity	Deprivation score (%)
Regular savings of at least about \$20 dollars per month for rainy days or retirement	63	81	5096
Fresh fruits and vegetables every day	52	89	4669
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	48	89	4291
Small amount of money to spend each week on yourself	61	70	4258
Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent	44	85	3767
Appropriate clothes for job interviews	45	83	3721
Replace worn out furniture	61	61	3713
Being able to buy modest presents for family/friends at least once per year	54	65	3520
Having at least 2 pairs of shoes, including one pair to wear outside in winter	38	90	3412
Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month	49	67	3269
Hobby or leisure activity	48	67	3268
Having at least 2 good meals a day for adults	35	93	3214
Replace or repair broken electrical goods	48	66	3182
Having a holiday away from home one week a year not with relatives	65	48	3137
Being able to get a professional haircut every one or two months	49	59	2868
Medicines prescribed by doctors	32	89	2835
Having a personal telephone either regular land telephone or a cellular phone	30	87	2625
Vacuum cleaner	41	64	2600
Having mostly new, not second-hand clothes	53	49	2596
Having a warm winter coat	27	96	2569
Home computer	48	51	2461
Access to internet at home	51	46	2314
Cable television	45	47	2136
Keeping your home or apartment adequately warm	21	94	1948
Microwave oven	29	65	1919
Stereo	39	40	1544
CD player	42	32	1349
DVD player	42	32	1349
Food processor	46	26	1212

Engaging government

These initial results were used to brief key people in the Ontario government, who found the list intuitively resonant and relevant. Having an initial list based on empirical research made the concept of the deprivation index more concrete and helped galvanize interest in it as a measurement tool. Statistics Canada was approached by Ontario at this stage to engage in exploratory discussion of using the results to conduct a wider survey on deprivation in Ontario as a possible component of Ontario's poverty measurement. Statistics Canada ultimately used the first ten deprivation indicators derived by Daily Bread, as set out on Table 2, in a pilot survey to test their viability in a major survey. This test was successful. For a detailed discussion of the pilot survey, see Heisz and Langevin [2009].

Community engagement results from London, Ontario

A community engagement toolkit was developed based on the initial survey to obtain as wide input as possible on the list. The purpose of this toolkit was to enable community-based organizations to host their own client interviews in their organizations, collect responses as well as feedback on the list, and submit the information back to Daily Bread for compilation and analysis. This method allowed us to test the list with a client population other than those served at food banks. It also facilitated other community-based organizations and their clients to engage in a discussion of poverty and take part in the research.

Two organizations in London, Ontario, completed this tool: South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, a multiservice agency; and the Merrymount Children's Centre, a family support and crisis centre. The respondents in both organizations had a larger variance in income levels and more households with children than did the respondents from the Daily Bread Food Bank sample.

Using the same methodology for the London sample as was used for the Daily Bread sample, eight out of the top ten items were identical, as can be seen on Table 3. Similar to the Daily Bread list, the London list did not contain any items from the 'consumer items' category. While the large difference in samples of the two populations would require that comparisons be made with caution, the same general categories emerge in both lists in respect to the items and activities which people deem to be most necessary and that they cannot afford.

Table 3: Comparison of results of Daily Bread survey and survey from London, Ontario agencies

Daily Bread food bank sample (N=1775)	London sample (N=64)
Regular savings of at least about \$20 dollars per month for rainy days or retirement	Regular savings of at least about \$20 dollars per month for rainy days or retirement
Fresh fruits and vegetables every day	Appropriate clothes for job interviews
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day	Having at least two pairs of shoes, including one pair to wear outside in winter
Small amount of money to spend each week on yourself	Small amount of money to spend each week on yourself
Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent	Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month
Appropriate clothes for job interviews	Fresh fruits and vegetables every day
Replace worn out furniture	Replace worn out furniture
Being able to buy modest presents for family/friends at least once per year	Having at least two good meals a day for adults
Having at least two pairs of shoes, including one pair to wear outside in winter	Replace or repair broken electrical goods
Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month	Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent

Stage 2: Focus group research

Stage 2 of the research was comprised of focus groups with 49 participants across the Greater Toronto Area and Cornwall, from July to September 2008. The purpose of the focus groups was to:

- a) help us refine the initial deprivation questionnaire of 29 items to reflect more accurately the lived experiences of those in poverty, including different ethnic and language groups
- b) give low-income people an opportunity for input of other items that may not have been included on our original survey
- c) make any wording or conceptual changes with items already on the list
- d) collect qualitative data on the experience of poverty and the stories that accompany the items in the list and explore the experience of low-income people with respect to poverty and deprivation

The outcomes of the focus groups then informed the Ontario Deprivation Survey administered in the third stage of the research described below.

Focus group recruitment process

Most of the focus group participants were recruited from Daily Bread Food Bank's Annual Survey of Food Bank Clients. Respondents to the survey were asked to opt into the focus groups by providing their name and contact number or email on the survey instrument after being given a general description of the purpose of the focus groups. Potential candidates were assured of the confidentiality of the survey data they provided.

The decision to recruit through the survey was a pragmatic one. The timeframe for the research was tight, as we were working under the schedule of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation itself. The government was committed to releasing their Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy by December 2008, so to influence their choice of measures our data had to be available no later than the fall of 2008. Our survey gave us face-to-face access to nearly 2,000 people, and an opportunity to recruit in a quick and controlled way. The downside of this choice of recruitment was that most participants had already been asked the questions contained in the deprivation survey, and therefore had some familiarity with it in advance. This may have affected their objectivity in suggesting other items or activities for the list. However, there was a four-month gap between taking the survey and participating in the focus groups that mitigated this concern.

The Cornwall focus group was recruited through the Agape Centre; the local food bank serving the Cornwall and surrounding area. Recruitment took place in August 2008 by Agape staff that made the first contact with the client. Daily Bread followed up that first contact with a phone call for screening purposes. Attempts were made to expand regional focus groups by recruiting through food banks in other communities. Difficulties in working with those food banks (e.g., due to summer vacations) combined with challenging timelines limited other regional focus groups.

After initial recruitment, possible focus group candidates were categorized according to a number of factors to ensure a broad range of opinions and experience, and a balance of different people known to experience poverty. The categories were as follows:

- those who experienced short-term poverty, classified as having to rely on a food bank for a year and a half or less
- persistent poverty: food bank usage for more than a year and a half

- people who were employed
- people who were receiving social assistance
- people with disabilities
- ethnic and language groups including those born in Africa, eastern Europe, southeast Asia, Latin America and Arabic speaking countries
- lone parents
- regional

Background demographic information about each possible participant was available through the original survey. This information included age, family composition, income, income source, education level, immigration status, primary language spoken, country of origin for non-Canadian born clients and employment information if the respondent was working.

Once possible participants were identified, a screening tool which followed some of the suggestions of Woodring [Woodring et al., 2006] was developed to ensure all people contacted were suitable for the focus groups. The screening tool included six different aspects:

1. Explained the purpose of the study.
2. Ensured the person on the phone was the same person who filled out the survey. Two questions were asked based on identifying information provided earlier in the survey - the closest major intersection to the person's home and their age.
3. Ensured participants were comfortable sharing their thoughts in a small group format because of the sensitive topic of the focus group. One person who declined explained "I'd be willing to participate if it was private, but just waiting with other people in a food bank is hard enough."
4. As part of informed consent, it was explained that participation was completely voluntary and confidential.
5. Participants were asked to repeat their understanding of the purpose of the focus group. This practice also addressed issues of informed consent and clarified any misunderstandings, particularly since many candidates spoke English as their second language. Researchers made discretionary judgments regarding respondents who did not understand the focus group. There were about five people who did not participate for this reason, all due to a language barrier.
6. Once screening was completed, participants were informed with a follow-up call that a \$40 honorarium would be provided at the beginning of the focus group, given location of the focus group and the chance to ask any further questions they may have had.

After screening was completed, it was apparent that some of the planned focus groups would not materialize because of the difficulties reaching some of the participants and reduced availability. Some respondents had found employment and no longer had time to participate. Most often, unreturned messages were left in voice mails or people were no longer interested. As a result, several ethnic and language group categories did not proceed as focus groups on their own. Instead, interested participants were placed in other groups. Additionally, a planned focus group in Durham Region did not proceed. The focus groups that emerged were as follows:

1. Short-term poverty – six participants
2. Longer-term poverty – six participants
3. Both short- and longer-term poverty – eight participants
4. Russian-speaking – three participants

5. Born in Africa – four participants
6. Spanish-speaking – six participants
7. Spanish-speaking – two participants
8. Mississauga/Peel Region – five participants
9. Newmarket/ Aurora – six participants
10. Cornwall – five participants

Focus group challenges

Language was a key challenge throughout the process. During the screening stage of the study, an attempt was made to contact people in their native language. For example, a Spanish-speaking volunteer at Daily Bread Food Bank translated and screened interested participants who spoke Spanish at home. An attempt was made to organize the focus groups around language needs wherever possible, with simultaneous translation in English provided. This approach was much smoother in terms of the flow of the groups than having them conducted in many languages at once. Two of the focus groups, the Russian-speaking group and Spanish-speaking group, had translators available. The Spanish-speaking group was conducted entirely in Spanish with simultaneous translation, while the Russian-speaking group was mostly conducted in English due to the wishes and language skills of the participants. Simultaneous translation of focus groups poses its own methodological issues, which will not be described here. Our goal was to obtain as many speakers of other languages as possible, but to be aware of issues of representation.

Access to a telephone often was a challenge. The majority of the 250 people recruited through Daily Bread's survey were contacted by phone. Only a small minority had left email addresses. There was a challenge in reaching a significant number of interested participants, as about 30 phone numbers were disconnected sometime within the four-month period between the survey administration and the initial focus group contact. The irony was not lost given the purpose of the study, and the fact that access to a phone was actually one of the items tested.

A handful of participants had left their phone number at their local food bank, or a friend or family member, who would relay messages to the participant. One respondent who was contacted indicated he was still interested in participating, but because he was running out of cell phone minutes would call back later. He did not, presumably because he was unable to do so. The disconnected phone numbers and the restricted access to a phone exemplified impoverished conditions and the social isolation that often accompanies them.

Co-facilitators

Each focus group was facilitated by one Daily Bread staff member and one co-facilitator who had lived experience of poverty. Eight co-facilitators were employed in this way. Each co-facilitator had previously participated in a Daily Bread community-based research training program. In spring 2008, food bank clients were recruited from Daily Bread Food Bank member agencies to take part in a series of workshops that were designed to educate participants on how to conduct community-based research. The workshops took place once per week for two hours in which dinner, transportation tokens and honoraria were offered. These workshops were conducted by an outside facilitator, with Daily Bread staff present at the meetings to help administer the tokens, meals and honoraria.

Clients had to pre-register to participate, then take part in a brief interview asking them why they would be interested in taking the course and what they would hope to get from it. In total 30 clients were recruited, and 20 to 25 came to every session regularly.

Sessions on the agenda were:

Week 1: Introduction – what is research? The session included how to go about recruiting participants, sampling and ethical research.

Week 2: Different ways of getting information, including how to conduct surveys, interviews and focus groups as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

Week 3: Practice facilitating a focus group through role playing.

Week 4: Practicing interviews, including how to probe to get more detail in a response, using audio devices to record responses.

Week 5: How to keep track of the information you get and how to figure out what it means: practice note taking and transcribing, coding responses, and organizing responses into themes.

Week 6: Arts-based research: how to use art and storytelling to explain a story.

Week 7: How to run a meeting – creating an agenda, examining what makes a good facilitator, illustrating a decision-making model, how to facilitate agreement in a group.

Week 8: Planning next steps – how do we take what we learned and use it?

The intent of these workshops was to build capacity of both Daily Bread and Daily Bread clients to conduct community-based research. At the end of the eight-week session, clients had the option of doing various projects. Options included conducting their own research project, taking part in an advocacy campaign or working with the 'Developing a Poverty Measure from the Ground Up' project. Seven graduates from the workshop decided to take part in the latter project.

The co-facilitators were responsible for drawing out people's ideas, moving the conversation forward and introducing personal experiences when appropriate to help generate thoughts and ideas from others. Co-facilitators also observed and noted the dynamics in the room and non-verbal reactions to the discussion. Co-facilitators also offered their written analysis on the data collected, and provided insights on the topic at hand. Their experiences and training proved effective in the success of the focus groups. Many have also been involved in the dissemination of the results of the project.

Focus group structure

The focus groups were structured around two questions based on the original survey questionnaire. The first was "What do you believe are necessities living in Ontario today?" This was an open question, which allowed for general brainstorming. Asking an open question of people's opinions was effective as a conversation starter for the group. We consciously did not ask people about their own personal experience of deprivation because of its sensitive nature, although this information did come out as the conversation proceeded.

The second half of the focus groups consisted of a presentation of each of the 29 items tested in the initial survey research in the categories listed above. Focus group participants were asked which of the items presented to them stood out as important, if any, and why. Participants were also asked if they felt anything was missing.

The focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed, and coded using Nvivo 7 Qualitative Research Software.

The detailed outcomes of the focus groups are available in an upcoming paper. Ultimately, the focus groups' results, and reflections and feedback from the co-facilitators, enabled the creation of a new list of 25 items that was refined from the previous list of 29. Various methods were used to determine if an item was kept, eliminated, altered or added, which included:

- The level of consensus generated: a high level of consensus overall led to the item being kept or eliminated.
- Observing the level of discussion generated by a particular item. A low level or absence of discussion regarding an item created conditions where the item could be eliminated. A high level of discussion indicated a possible significance to the lives of people living in poverty, and hence was kept.

The significance was related to the importance of the item to the participants, how the item intertwined with other facets of their lives, and levels of disagreement as to the item’s necessity due to different needs of participants or their coping mechanisms. One item was altered based on the language that focus group participants used to describe their experience. Further, an item was added based on what was observed in focus group discussions overall. Suggestions and reflections from co-facilitators were also incorporated.

Focus group outcomes: rationale behind choice of items

1. Consumer items

Some consumer items provoked more discussion than others. The discussion was often connected with other aspects of people’s lives, and illustrated specific barriers faced by those living in poverty. Even though some of the consumer items appear to be non-necessities on the surface, they were not only important in providing entertainment, but also regarding social inclusion.

Items such as a vacuum cleaner and microwave oven were seen as important as basic household items to maintain one’s household, and cable television and stereo were seen as important for information, education and affordable forms of entertainment. Food processor and CD player were generally not seen as necessary, and home computer was usually discussed in relation to internet access. Hence these three items were eliminated.

What we kept	Vacuum cleaner Microwave oven Cable television Stereo DVD player
What we eliminated	Food processor CD player Home computer

2. Financial security

Both financial items created much discussion for participants because having extra money greatly influenced the ability to make choices, social inclusion and exercising more control over one’s life. However, discussion around savings usually used language that referred to emergency-type situations. Moreover, it was acknowledged that saving \$20 a month for retirement would not get most people very far, and hence was not seen as a practical component of the question. The question was reworded to “Having regular savings of at least \$20 a month for emergencies.” The new sentence was also more accessible for people whose first language is not English, as “rainy days” is colloquial term.

What we kept	Small amount of money to spend on yourself each week.
What we altered	Having regular savings of at least \$20 a month for rainy days or retirement. Question was reworded to “Having regular savings of at least \$20 a month for emergencies.”

3. Dietary and health needs

Dietary and health items were significant for participants, as these were consistently seen as necessities. These items were also related to having to make difficult choices, such as eating or paying rent.

Having meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day was slightly altered to having these foods “at least” every other day, due to the emphasis placed on it by participants. Having two meals a day for adults was eliminated because although seen as a necessity, the quality of meals was emphasized more than its quantity or frequency. These items were captured in the other two dietary items.

Dental care was added, as it was highly significant to participants and co-facilitators in focus group discussions.

What we kept	Having fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Having medicines prescribed by doctors.
What we altered	Having meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent every other day. Altered to having these foods “at least” every other day due to the emphasis placed on it by participants.
What we added	Being able to get dental care if needed.
What we eliminated	Having two meals a day for adults.

4. Clothing and grooming needs

Most clothing and grooming needs created agreement and much discussion.

Having a warm winter coat and two pairs of shoes were widely seen as essential. Being able to afford a professional haircut did not produce much discussion, nor seen as crucial. Having mostly new clothes was usually seen as unnecessary, except when referring to children (including pre-teens and teens), which generated mixed responses.

Having appropriate clothes for job interviews usually produced discussion related to agency - i.e., personal decision-making power and ability to make one’s own choices. For example, not being able to afford appropriate clothes for job interviews was linked to failing to secure a decent job, which was tied to poverty, low self-esteem and having to rely on a humiliating and frustrating welfare system.

In terms of grooming, a co-facilitator introduced the difficulty of being able to afford personal care items, such as shaving cream for men and feminine hygiene products for women. Shaving cream and feminine hygiene products are items that are often requested at food banks by many clients, thus we felt that adding these items would be more representative of the needs of people living in poverty.

What we kept	Having a warm winter coat. Having at least two pairs of shoes, including one to wear outside during winter. Having appropriate clothes for job interviews.
What we added	Having personal care items, such as razors or feminine hygiene products.
What we eliminated	Having a professional haircut every one or two months. Having mostly new, not second-hand clothes.

5. Social inclusion

Most of the items discussed in this section produced much discussion and held great relevance and interest to participants, since these items were associated with issues of social isolation and personal agency. Hence almost all the items in this section were retained and unaltered.

'Holiday away from home not with relatives' did not produce discussion, except when noting its impossibility while surviving on a low income, or when referring to the importance of having an affordable leisure activity. As a result, this item was eliminated.

What we kept	Having a personal telephone, either a regular land telephone or a cellular phone. Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent Hobby or leisure activity. Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month. Being able to buy modest presents for family or friends at least once per year. Access to the internet at home.
What we eliminated	Holiday away from home once per year, not with relatives.

6. Housing conditions

Housing conditions generated much dialogue among participants, and their comments and anecdotes often reflected a feeling of powerlessness and lack of agency. For example, the ability to heat one's home or have a broken appliance repaired was often linked to the landlord. Many people expressed frustration that control over their living environment rested outside of their hands. Newcomers were especially vulnerable because of a language barrier and not being aware of their rights. Being able to replace worn out furniture was usually discussed in relation to lack of safety of having furniture that was broken or damaged, with furniture being "worn out" not sufficient in itself to warrant it being replaced.

The issue of household pests proved to be significant when discussing housing conditions, due to the lively and frequent dialogue it generated. Having a house or apartment free of pests was similar to other housing items as it related to the feeling of powerlessness, translated as an inability to afford fumigation/necessary sterilizing products and/or powerlessness to induce landlords to correct the problem. "Having a house or apartment free from pests" was added to the final deprivation questionnaire as a result.

What we kept	Keeping your home or apartment adequately warm. Replace or repair broken electrical goods.
What we added	Having a home or apartment free of pests, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and mice.
What we altered	Being able to replace worn out furniture was changed to being able to replace broken or damaged furniture.

Stage 3: Ipsos-Reid deprivation survey

To test the new revised list of 25 items, Ipsos-Reid was contracted to conduct a province-wide Deprivation Survey. The purpose was to obtain a random sample of Ontarians at a wide range of income levels and regions. The total sample size was 2,047 persons. Data was weighted to be representative of age, region, gender and household income. For example, while a minimum of 300 people per region were surveyed to allow for robust analysis among regions; the 'North' region weight is decreased in the total sample to account for the fact that it constitutes only seven per cent of the province's overall population.

The survey was conducted through Ipsos-Reid's 'online panel'. An online panel is a proprietary database of individuals who have agreed to take part in on-line surveys. The online panel was chosen over a telephone survey, which is the traditional method of conducting random sample surveys, primarily for cost and ability to obtain a large sample.

A secondary consideration in selecting the online panel was the efficacy of the methodology in reaching low-income respondents: is it easier to reach them by phone or by internet? Our experience from the focus group recruitment was that it is often difficult to reach people by phone. Many did not have a phone to begin with, while others had their phones disconnected during our recruitment process. On the other hand, our research identified that internet access at home is often lacking amongst low-income people. However, most people with whom we were in contact did have an email address, and it tended to be more permanent than a phone number. In addition, people are able to access the internet through public libraries, social service organizations, schools and so on. On balance, we felt that the internet was a suitable methodology for collecting the data and that we were not excluding low-income respondents by choosing this method.

Ipsos-Reid's online panel is composed of 91,000 individuals. Key areas of categorization for our research (age, gender, region, income and education) were recruited so that a general population sample could be derived when required. To get a balanced representation of income groups, the online panel increased the proportion of respondents earning a household income of \$25,000 or less to 20 per cent versus the 2002 Census findings for Ontario of 13 per cent. Other quotas on age, region and gender were set to ensure a representative sample of Ontarians within categories of interest. Data was then weighted back to Census proportions.

In developing the Ontario survey, we again used the notions of enforced lack and social perception of necessities, as discussed earlier. We did, however, refine the survey to include three rather than two questions in order to improve clarity. Consequently, the Ontario survey asked what people: a) felt was necessary to live in Ontario; b) whether or not they had the item; and c) if they lacked the item in their household, whether it was because they could not afford it. Other demographic information, such as income, number of people in the household and country of birth, were also gathered. Table 4 lists the 25 indicators used.

Table 4: Deprivation Indicators tested in Ipsos Reid-Deprivation Survey

Consumer Items
Microwave
Stereo
DVD Player
Cable Television
Vacuum Cleaner
Financial Security
Regular savings of at least about \$20 dollars per month for emergencies
Small amount of money to spend each week on yourself
Dietary and Health Needs
Fresh fruits and vegetables every day
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least every other day
Medicines prescribed by doctors
Being able to get dental care if needed
Clothing and Grooming Needs
Having a warm winter coat
Having at least two pairs of shoes, including one pair to wear outside in winter
Appropriate clothes for job interviews
Having personal care items such as razors or feminine hygiene products
Social Inclusion
A personal telephone either regular land telephone or a cellular phone
Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent
Hobby or leisure activity
Being able to have friends or family over for a meal at least once per month
Being able to buy modest presents for family/friends at least once per year
Access to the internet at home
Housing
Keeping your home or apartment adequately warm
Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as a stove or toaster
Replace or repair worn out furniture
Having a home or apartment free of pests, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and mice

Ipsos-Reid survey outcomes

The Ipsos-Reid survey was of the whole Ontario population at all income levels. The Daily Bread survey was composed entirely of people with low incomes, likely to be living at or below a poverty-level standard of living. A deprivation index is intended to identify items that are most likely to differentiate those living at a below poverty standard of living from the rest of the population. Everything else being equal, an item should be on the list of items if the likelihood of having it is positively correlated with higher income but negatively correlated with lower income. The methodology for determining our final list of 10 items from the Ipsos-Reid survey had to be modified from that used with the Daily Bread's survey due to the differences in the populations.

For Daily Bread's survey we could calculate a deprivation score for an item, and use the score to rank the items, by multiplying the likelihood of an item being perceived as a necessity by the likelihood of its being unaffordable for that population. But the larger the proportion of the higher-income population that reports involuntarily lacking an item or an activity, the less likely is its absence to be indicative of a household living in poverty – in fact, the likelihood of an item's absence being an indicator of a poverty-level standard of living is inversely proportional to the likelihood of the item being absent among those with higher incomes. In other words, the deprivation score should be lower as the probability of the item being absent from a higher-income household increases.

In addition, if a substantial number of people with higher incomes lack the item, the inclusion of the item is problematic. On this basis, we created an upper cut-off. Items that more than 10 per cent of upper-income respondents reported not having, even though most said the item was necessary, were automatically removed from the list (i.e., assigned a deprivation score of zero).

To implement this methodology, we needed to distinguish between higher and lower income families in our sample. We calculated a low income measure (LIM) equal to 50 per cent of the sample's median equivalized income as follows:

1. Adjusted family income according to family size and composition, using the following equivalence scale: 1.0=oldest person in family, 0.4 to second oldest and each additional adult thereafter, and 0.3 for each child. For example, a family of 2 adults and 2 children is assigned a size equivalent to: $1.0 + 0.4 + 0.3 + 0.3 = 2.0$ individual adults.
2. Each family's income is then divided by its size to produce the adjusted family income.
3. The median (or mid-point) of the distribution for all adjusted household income was calculated.
4. The LIM is calculated as 50 per cent of the adjusted median income.

The new method for ranking the list of items was to assign a deprivation score using the following formula:

L = percent of population with low income (below LIM) who cannot afford item A;

H = percent of population with high income (above LIM) who cannot afford item A; and

P = percent of whole population who feel item A is necessary; then

Deprivation score for item A = $P \times (L - H)$, if $H < 10$ percent. Deprivation score for item A = 0 if $H \geq 10$ percent.

The resulting deprivation score, and consequent rank order, are shown in Table 5. (Note that item names are shortened due to space limitations).

Table 5: Deprivation scores of items in Ipsos-Reid Deprivation Survey

Item	L = % under LIM who cannot afford	H = % over LIM who cannot afford	Under LIM minus over LIM A-B	P = % who feel item is necessary	Deprivation Score = [(L-H) x P]
Dental Care	32	8	24	91	2184
Savings	43	14	29	74	0
Replace/repair broken electrical goods	35	9	26	71	1846
Replace/repair furniture	46	15	31	57	0
Small amount of money	38	12	26	65	0
Presents	25	5	20	65	1300
Clothes for job interviews	21	4	17	70	1190
Friends or family over for a meal	29	8	21	50	1050
Fresh fruits and vegetables	16	3	13	80	1040
Transportation	12	2	10	88	880
Hobby	21	7	14	55	770
Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent	11	2	9	82	738
Pest free home	11	3	8	90	720
Prescriptions	9	3	6	88	528
Two pairs of shoes	8	2	6	84	504
Cable television	16	4	12	34	408
Warm coat	5	1	4	93	372
Vacuum cleaner	7	1	6	60	360
Personal care items	4	0	4	83	332
Warm home	5	2	3	92	276
Stereo	15	4	11	24	264
Telephone	2	0	2	89	178
Internet access at home	4	1	3	55	165
DVD player	9	2	7	23	161
Microwave	5	1	4	39	156

Three items were removed because more than 10 per cent of those who were over LIM said they could not afford these items. The three were: repairing broken or damaged furniture, saving \$20 per month for emergencies and small amount of money to spend on yourself each week.

To replace the items that were removed from the rank ordered list, the next three items on the list (hobby, meat/fish at least every other day and pest-free home) were inserted in their place. Thus the final 10 items were:

Table 6: Final list of 10 deprivation indicators

1. Being able to get dental care if needed.
2. Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as a stove or toaster.
3. Being able to buy modest presents for family/friends at least once per year.
4. Appropriate clothes for job interviews.
5. Having friends or family over for a meal at least once a month.
6. Fresh fruit and vegetables every day.
7. Being able to get around your community, either by having a car or in a larger centre a monthly bus pass or equivalent.
8. Hobby or leisure activity.
9. Meat, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least every other day.
10. Having a home or apartment free of pests, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and mice.

These 10 items were also significant within the focus groups, in that all were strongly associated with one or more themes that were seen as representing a poverty level standard of living. These themes were social isolation, lack of economic security and lack of personal agency, and are discussed in greater detail in the accompanying paper on focus group outcomes.

Two of the items in the final list of 10 indicators were not on the initial deprivation questionnaire but were introduced by the focus group participants and co-facilitators – ‘Dental care’ and ‘A home or apartment free of pests.’ Inclusion of these items further grounds the list in the lived experience of persons in Ontario in poverty.

Next steps

The Ontario government was engaged throughout all three phases of the project. By the end of the first phase, and the presentation of the initial deprivation index, there was broad agreement that the deprivation index would be part of the basket of measures used to assess the progress of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In the summer of 2008, the Ontario government, Statistics Canada, the Caledon Institute and Daily Bread’s project team consulted on a regular basis to include the ten deprivation indicators as a supplement to the Ontario component of the Labour Force Survey. In October 2008, the final list of ten deprivation indicators was presented to Statistics Canada and the Ontario government. Statistics Canada refined the survey instrument based on their rigorous review procedures – mainly improving the wording of some questions to remove ambiguity. In spring 2009, the Ontario Material Deprivation Survey was formally conducted to arrive at the baseline measure to be used in the first Ontario poverty reduction report card.

Conclusion

Daily Bread Food Bank and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy have built on European experience to develop a community-based deprivation index. So far as we are aware, the Ontario Deprivation Index is unique in North America. Poverty reduction strategies in other countries, notably Ireland and the United Kingdom, use a deprivation index as a key component of their measure. The deprivation index is becoming a new standard in the measurement of poverty. However, although there has been discussion about developing one in Canada, no government has yet done so - until now.

Measurement matters. What and how a problem is measured plays a role in arriving at solutions and driving government investment. We believe that the Ontario Deprivation Index will prove a robust and credible way of understanding and measuring poverty. It offers government and the advocacy community a new tool in the fight against poverty.

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