

## How is it relevant?

Nappy Need, which refers to a family's inability to afford enough nappies to maintain proper infant hygiene, is a serious though virtually unrecognized problem affecting millions of young children in the U.K. While no formal literature exists, anecdotal evidence culled from a wide spectrum of food and baby banks suggests that the problem is similar in nature and relative scope to its American equivalent, Diaper Need. In the US, multiple studies done by the National Diaper Bank Network in conjunction with partners such as the Yale School of Medicine<sup>1</sup> and Kimberly-Clark<sup>2</sup> (manufacturer of popular US diaper brand Huggies) suggest that one in three families experience Diaper Need, leading to preventable infections, missed daycare and early childhood education (and parental work opportunities), and longer-term effects such as pediatric and maternal depression. Additionally, like the U.K., the US does not offer any government assistance for diaper purchase, leaving families in need to rely on private donations, which can be inconsistent and difficult to obtain.

Though Nappy Need is largely unidentified in the U.K., it is a prime example of two social issues that are currently gaining traction: hygiene poverty and the poverty premium. Hygiene poverty has been recently championed by In Kind Direct, a longstanding U.K. charity that connects not-for-profits with excess products from consumer goods manufacturers. In a recent report, In Kind Direct estimated that 37 percent of people in the U.K. must abridge or forego basic grooming habits because of the expense of hygiene products; the report suggested that the problem is likely to escalate alongside budget cuts for small and medium charities<sup>3</sup>. While their research focuses on soap, shampoo and washing powder, nappies would certainly qualify as a hygiene item for which cost is prohibitive.

The nappy poverty premium arises from the following limitations characteristic of young struggling families in the U.K.:

- **Living arrangements.** Many families purchase a monthly supply of nappies in bulk, reducing per-unit cost. Because families in poverty have limited storage space (or may not have consistent living arrangements), they cannot take advantage of bulk deals for nappies, *making nappies less expensive per unit for wealthier families than for poor families*. This is particularly true for online shopping or subscription discounts, which require a long-term address and regular internet access.
- **Savings.** Restricted cash on hand prevents poorer families from capturing the savings in bulk purchases. Additionally, because it can be difficult to predict when a child will need the next size of nappy, these families may hesitate to purchase too many of one size at a time to prevent waste. The lack of upfront cash also makes it difficult for poorer families to purchase a set of cloth nappies, a

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Megan; Kruse, Anna; Weir, Alison; Goldblum, Joanne (2013). "[Diaper Need and Its Impact on Child Health](#)". *Pediatrics*: 252–259.

<sup>2</sup> Huggies (Kimberly-Clark). *Diaper Need and Its Impact on US Families*. September 2017. Web.

<sup>3</sup> In Kind Direct. *Product Giving: A Review of the Market, Business Case and Impacts*. November 2017. Web.

commonly-recommended solution to nappy need (the lack of a private washer/dryer is also a major hurdle).

### Effect on Low-Income Families

As aforementioned, there is no formal statistical research on nappy need in the U.K. However, examining child poverty statistics illuminates the effect of nappy cost on families in need. The average child poverty rate in the U.K. is 27 percent<sup>4</sup>, which echoes the U.S. statistic of one in three families who experience diaper need. Recent changes in the universal credit, especially the elimination of additional funds for a third or subsequent child, have accompanied widespread budget cuts for small and medium-sized charities, exacerbating poverty conditions for young families. Currently, almost half of families with three or more children live in poverty<sup>5</sup>; many of these families likely include two children in nappies at the same time, ballooning the nappy expense further. Indeed, child poverty is expected to increase by 4.1 percentage points through 2022, amplifying the degree to which nappy need is likely to distress families in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at nappy need in the context of the child benefit illustrates the crushing burden of nappy cost. Based on a survey of leading U.K. retailers, the nappy cost range per month per child comes out to £13-£32, assuming an average use rate (no illness), and not including wipes or creams<sup>7</sup>. This range represents between 16 and 39 percent of the child benefit for one child; due to diminishing benefits for subsequent children, having two children in nappies consumes between 19 and 46 percent of the child benefit for two children<sup>8</sup>.

The pressing need for nappies and the struggle to meet it is a common refrain among interviews with a wide range of children's charities and food banks. Each charity reported that nappies were among the most requested items, and that parents found themselves making painful financial choices to accommodate nappy purchase. Facing limited budgets, charities must make difficult decisions on how to deploy resources. There is no standardized provision of nappies in the U.K.; food banks and baby banks rely on ad hoc donations from individuals and supplement with their own funds. Because of the lack of overall awareness of this problem among the public, individual donations are often insufficient to meet client needs; one small charity near London reported spending £200 per month to meet nappy need among its clients due to insufficient private nappy donations.<sup>9</sup> Nappies are

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<sup>4</sup> Butler, Patrick. "Most children in UK's poorest areas now growing up in poverty." *The Guardian* 23 January 2018: Web. Accessed 29 May 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Barnard, Helen. "Poverty is taking a hold on UK families - what can we do?" *The Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. 29 March 2018. Web. Accessed 12 June 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Hood, Andrew and Tom Waters. "Living Standards, poverty and inequality in the UK 2017-18 to 2021-22." *The Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. 2 November 2017. Accessed 19 May 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Price survey of a range of nappy brands at grocery/personal care retailers Tesco ([www.tesco.com](http://www.tesco.com)), Boots ([www.boots.com](http://www.boots.com)), Morrisons (<https://groceries.morrisons.com/webshop/startWebshop.do>), Asda ([www.asda.com](http://www.asda.com)), and Sainsbury's ([www.sainsburys.co.uk](http://www.sainsburys.co.uk)). Accessed 12 June 2018.

<sup>8</sup> "Bringing up a child - How much Child Benefit will I get?" *Turn2us*. <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Child-Benefit/How-much-Child-Benefit-will-I-get>

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd Park Children's Charity. "Nappie insecurity and adverse child health outcomes - U.K. research?" Message to Audrey Symes. 16 May 2018. Email.

among the top requests from service users as well as clients, particularly service users specializing in post-natal depression and SEND; this suggests a relationship between nappy need and other adverse maternal-child outcomes similar to what has been found in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> Other anecdotes reveal that children who have experienced trauma can regress, needing nappies again unexpectedly; families in this situation may have trouble meeting this spontaneous need.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, multiple charities noted that nappy provision by charities enables young parents to deploy their personal resources most effectively, especially as they undergo the Universal Credit six week waiting period.

## Next Steps

To address and ameliorate nappy need in the U.K., here are two suggested next steps:

- **Publicize.** Increasing awareness of nappy need among the public is an excellent start, as many young families with leftover nappies would likely be happy to donate. Highlighting the fact that most baby and food banks accept opened packs of nappies would maximize these individual donations, as it has in the U.S. The Junior League of London is currently working on a survey of baby and food banks modeled on a 2013 Yale School of Medicine study to gather more discrete data on U.K. nappy need; the results of this study are expected to be widely disseminated by advocacy organizations.
- **Expand.** Corporate donations of nappies such as through In Kind Direct could potentially be effective and efficient, as they would be easier to catalog and ship than individual donations. However, many baby and food banks have limited storage space and may not be able to handle a large influx of nappies.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> In Kind Direct. *Products, People, Pride: Impact Report 2017*. 27 July 2017. Accessed 17 May 2018.