

Hidden reality of hygiene poverty in Ireland revealed

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Credit: Los Muertos Crew from Pexels

Hygiene poverty is a pervasive and hidden problem in Ireland and cuts across all income levels, according to the first comprehensive study of the issue in Ireland.

The study, conducted by the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin, was commissioned by the charity Hygiene Hub and funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. It comprised a literature and policy review, an expert workshop and submissions, an indicative survey (258 respondents), focus groups and in-depth case study interviews.

Of the respondents to a small-scale survey, which forms part of the research study, 65% reported difficulty affording essential [hygiene](#) items in the previous 12 months. This was defined as "having gone without basic toiletries or hygiene items because you could not afford to buy them."

The [report](#) was launched at an event in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on Tue, Nov 28.

Dr. Joe Whelan, author of the report, explained, "Hygiene [poverty](#) occurs when people are forced to go without or cut back on essential personal care products. Living without access to basic hygiene items can have a profound negative impact on a person's life, dignity, physical and mental health. Our small-scale survey revealed that 69% of [respondents](#) reported feeling embarrassed or ashamed, as a result of not being able to afford basic hygiene items. Increased stress was reported by 61.2% of individuals."

"This research sheds much-needed light on the pervasive and often hidden issue of hygiene poverty in Ireland. We were very interested to find that the issue transcended income levels. This shows the broad-reaching implications of the ongoing cost of living crisis.

"Moreover, the research highlights the potential inadequacy of social welfare payments and the impact of inadequate income, with recent increases failing to keep pace with inflation. This leaves individuals

facing [difficult decisions](#), often sacrificing hygiene items in favor of basic needs like food, heat, and electricity."

The report concludes that hygiene needs are an aspect of deprivation for households who are both at risk and not at risk of poverty and argues that hygiene related needs are not yet fully or even partially recognized politically or in policymaking circles. The study advocates for a nuanced understanding of poverty, highlighting the importance of combining measures of income poverty and enforced deprivation.

Sorcha Killian, Co-Founder of Hygiene Hub, added, "As the sole charity dedicated to hygiene poverty in Ireland, this research is a major milestone, giving a voice to those we support and unveiling a long-hidden facet of poverty. Our mission is to leverage these findings to secure recognition and support for hygiene poverty and to ensure that access to hygiene products is included in the broader discussion of what constitutes an adequate standard of living.

"While Ireland's current measures do not explicitly include access to personal hygiene items, the research suggests that incorporating hygiene-related needs into deprivation indices would provide a more accurate depiction of individuals and households experiencing hygiene deprivation. In response to the findings, Hygiene Hub firmly advocates for [universal access](#) to hygiene products supported by increased awareness and recognition of the issue. Ideally, individuals facing financial constraints should easily be able to receive these items through established [support services](#)."

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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