

CSI 12: What progress has been made tackling Beveridge's five giants?

- Very substantial progress has been made in tackling the giants of Want, Disease and Squalor. It is surprisingly difficult to be sure how well the fight against Ignorance has been going, and Idleness remains a threatening giant.
- Even in the case of Want, Disease and Squalor, the rate at which the giants are retreating may have slowed in the last decade – they have been weakened but not defeated.
- Although the fight against the giants has been fairly successful overall, the giants may have become increasingly selective in whom they attack. Inequality around the average has grown in the cases of income and housing, though it has declined in the case of life expectancy.
- The giants increasingly pick on vulnerable groups such as young people with low qualifications or some ethnic minorities such as people with black Caribbean, Bangladeshi or Pakistani background.
- Some of the giants may be changing their tactics – Idleness may now be using the weapon of insecurity.
- New giants may well be rising - pollution, corruption, discrimination and neglect.

What progress has been made in tackling the five giants?

The Beveridge Report of 1942 identified 'five giants on the road to post-war reconstruction' – Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. Tackling these giants was a primary focus of the 1945 government's social programme and remained important throughout the second half of the 20th century. So how much progress has in fact been made? After six decades of social change, these giants may not have been standing still. Have they learned to use new weapons? Perhaps they are more selective in whom they attack? And are there any new giants which future governments will need to direct their attention to? What would a 21st century Beveridge be proposing?

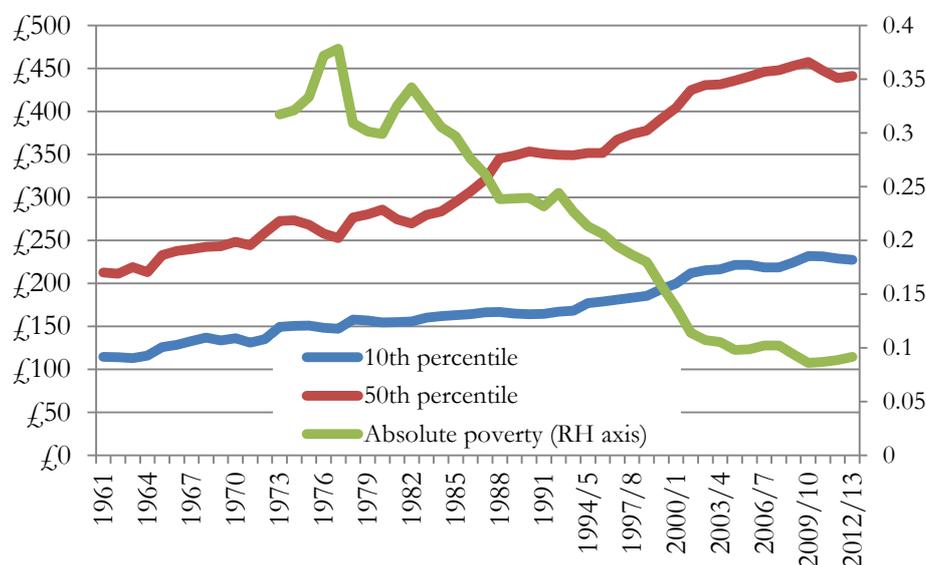
We begin by looking at the longer-term trends in social progress in Britain, focussing on household income, healthy life-expectancy, unemployment, participation in education, and housing. These do not always capture exactly what Beveridge would have had in mind, but reasonably reliable data series are available for looking at these particular trends over time. There continue to be major gaps in the data available for monitoring how the fight against the giants is going.

Want: We can chart trends in real income going back to 1961, and absolute poverty since 1973. GDP figures can be taken back even earlier and are consistent with a story of increasing real incomes since Beveridge's time. Figure 1 suggests that great progress has been made in tackling Want, defined as absolute poverty, although

progress has slowed very markedly in the last decade. The giant of Want has been pushed back but not defeated.

Figure 1: Median household real income more than doubled between 1961 and 2013

For details see briefing note CSI 2.



Measurement issues

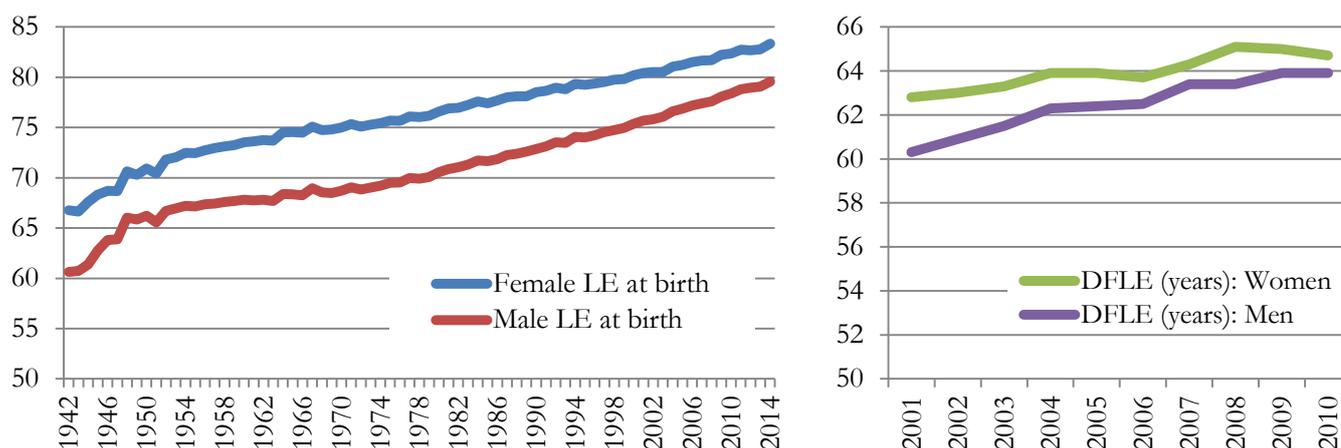
The only data sources available for measuring longer-term trends are ones deriving from official administrative data. There tend to be major issues of comparability over time arising from changing administrative procedures and definitions. Survey data are often to be preferred to administrative data, providing they are of sufficiently high quality. However, most survey series did not start before 1972, and good reliable data is often only available for the last twenty years or less. There are also major advantages in having independently-collected data. Data which are used by government for evaluating progress in meeting government targets run risks of distorting the behaviour of the bodies being evaluated.

Even when high-quality survey data are available, there are risks that the social groups being compared will change their character over time. For example, school-leavers today with no educational qualifications may not be exactly comparable with school-leavers from fifty years ago with no qualifications: their numbers have certainly shrunk, and they may also be more concentrated in deprived areas than they would have been before.

Disease: There have been major improvements over the post-war period in the fight against infectious and cardio-vascular diseases and lung cancer. As a result of progress in these and other areas, life expectancy at birth has increased greatly. Disability-free life expectancy has been improving for men in recent years, but progress for women appears at risk of coming to a halt.

Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth and Disability-Free life expectancy have both improved in the UK

For details see briefing note CSI 1



Ignorance: We really do not have adequate data for checking whether ignorance has declined over the long term or even medium term. Despite major public debates about educational standards, there is little that can usefully be said in the absence of robust data. This is one of the great gaps in monitoring social progress. We can however look at longer-term trends in educational participation, for example staying on beyond the school-leaving age (which was raised from 15 to 16 in 1972). It is a reasonable hope that increased time spent in education would lead to increasing skill levels.

There are major breaks in the official data series, but the overall story is that participation of 16 and 17 year olds has more than doubled (although like income, the trend is rather bumpy). Independent evidence, however, suggests that there has been little change overall in young people's skills between 2006 and 2012.

Figure 3: Participation in full-time education among 16 and 17 years-olds has shown major advance

For details see CSI 7



Squalor: On average, the number of rooms per person has improved considerably since 1951, although once again progress appears to have slowed in the last decade. The improvement will be due partly to falling family size and partly to improved stock of housing. However, many houses are ‘under-occupied’ while in the recent past there has been an increase in overcrowding, especially in London. Dispersion around the average will therefore have been growing in recent years.

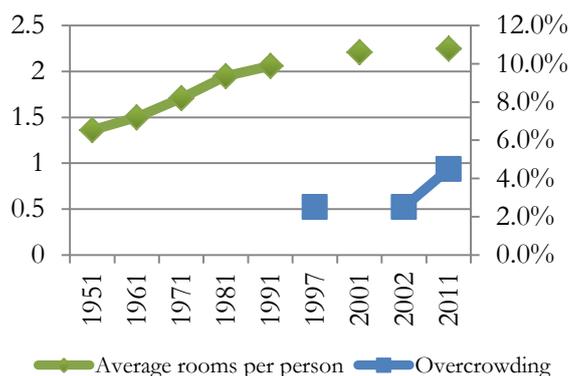
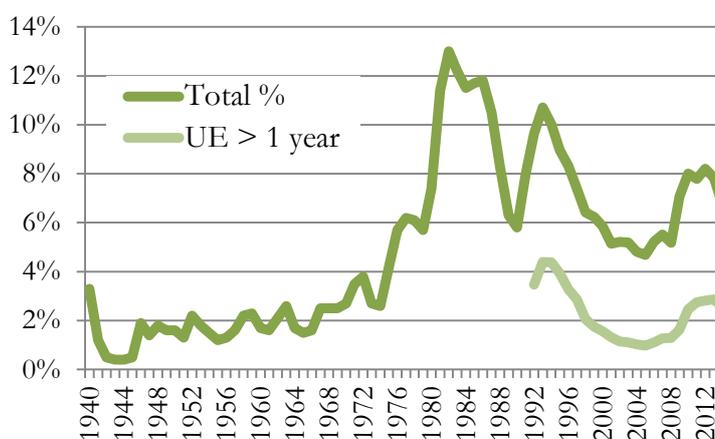


Figure 4: The average amount of household space (rooms pp) has grown steadily in England and Wales *Details in CSI 6*

Idleness: The giant of Idleness returns to the attack from time to time. Unemployment reached a peak of 8.2% in 2012, lower than the two previous peaks. It has since been falling but is still well above the full-employment levels achieved in the 1950s and early 1960s. Unemployment has serious adverse psychological consequences for those affected (see briefing note CSI 3), and remains a threatening giant.

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Figure 5: Britain has failed to return to the full employment of the immediate post-war years *For details see CSI 5*



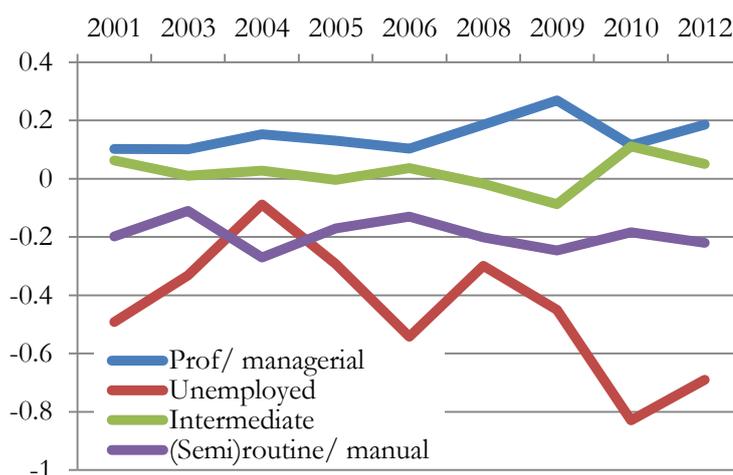
Have the giants become more selective in whom they pick fights with?

Around these averages (or medians) there is always considerable variation. We know that income inequality increased markedly between 1979 and 1991. There will also have been increasing dispersion around the average with respect to housing. However, trends in other domains do not always match what has been happening in the economy – one reason for looking at a much wider range of outcomes. In the case of life expectancy for example dispersion around the average has been getting smaller. Dispersion has also fallen in the risks of becoming a victim of crime.

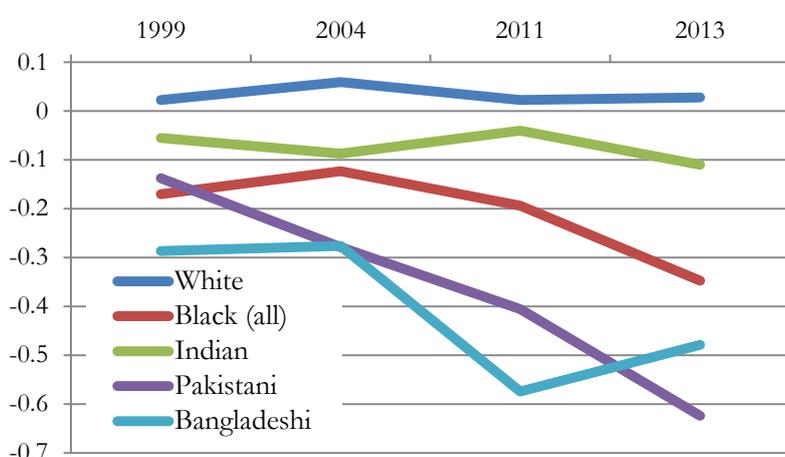
- **Gender inequalities:** the overall evidence suggests that there has tended to be convergence between men and women, for example in earnings, unemployment risks, crime victimization and life expectancy (though women have been gradually moving ahead of men in education)
- **Ethnic inequalities:** there has been some convergence for people of Indian background and white people, but major inequalities persist for people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi background with respect to earnings, poverty, health, overcrowding and risks of unemployment, though not education. People of black African and black Caribbean background also continue to experience systematic disadvantages and are particularly at risk of psychological distress.
- **Class inequalities** persist in most domains, but there is evidence that they have been reducing slightly in education over the last decade – at least with respect to GCSE results. Contrary to the received wisdom that class inequalities in social mobility are increasing, more recent evidence suggests otherwise – for women there is evidence that class inequalities are actually declining.¹
- **Regions and territories of the UK** show marked differences, for example with respect to life expectancy. Some of these inequalities can be explained by the geographical distribution of economic deprivation and unemployment.
- Differences between **age groups** are important in a variety of domains, most evidently with respect to unemployment. Young people with no qualifications are particularly at risk.

Figure 6: the unemployed have been falling further behind in their psychological well-being *Source: Health Survey for England. Scores adjusted so that zero = average*

We can use psychological well-being as a summary guide to which groups are most at threat from the giants and whether they are becoming more or less threatened. The most threatened groups are the unemployed, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi background, and black people, and the threats have recently increased. Differences between social classes may well have



narrowed, while overall differences between regions and age groups are smaller and appear to have been largely



stable over recent decades. Differences between men and women have tended to decline. However, we should be aware that particular sub-groups of the population may also be particularly threatened - the young with low qualifications, for example.

Figure 7: Some minorities have also been falling behind

Source: HSE (1999, 2004) and UKHLS (2011, 2013); Scores are adjusted so that zero = average

Have the giants changed their form?

Maybe the giant of Want is now turning to debt as his weapon of choice. Perhaps the giant of Disease is turning to mental health or obesity; the giant of Ignorance to digital illiteracy; the giant of Squalor to overcrowding on roads and trains, hospitals, schools and prisons; the giant of Idleness to job insecurity. These are challenges for future research as well as for policy-making.

What are the new giants?

Inequality is often regarded as a new giant. But is extreme wealth really such a threat to the rest of us? Should we not perhaps continue to focus the struggle against the giants of Want and Idleness instead of being distracted by the wealthy? Surely pollution and environmental degradation, especially in the developing world, is a bigger threat? Market failures involving corruption in high places, discrimination against minorities, and neglect of the elderly or children in care are perhaps more insidious and more pressing.

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ⁱ E. Bukodi, J.H. Goldthorpe, L. Waller and J. Kouha, The mobility problem in Britain: new findings from the analysis of birth cohort data. *British Journal of Sociology* 66 (2014).

