
Malnutrition Hits Record High in UK, World's 5th Richest Nation

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The public health system recorded more than 16,000 cases of malnutrition in 2015, which is four times higher than 10 years ago.

People the U.K. are increasingly going hungry as more than 16,000 people were hospitalized for malnutrition in 2015, according to public figures, with thousands of cases being treated by clinics and other facilities not included in the official tally.

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Calling it “a national scandal,” Simon Capewell, professor of public health at Liverpool University and vice president of the Faculty of Public Health, told the British tabloid the Daily Mirror Saturday that one of the major drivers of the phenomena is the rising prices of food in the country.

“The fifth wealthiest country on the planet is now suffering from Victorian diseases such as malnutrition, rickets, scurvy. These figures are shocking and need to be a real wake-up call,” Capewell said.

He added that in less than a decade “food prices rose 12 percent in real terms, while wages fell by 7 percent.”

According to the Mirror, the number of malnutrition cases reported increased by four times in just 10 years. Nine hundred of the cases reported by the British National Health System were of patients in danger of starving to death.

But these cases are only a small fraction of the actual numbers of hungry people in the country, according to Capewell.

“Severe malnutrition is very serious and can be fatal. And what is really worrying is that for every person admitted to hospital, there will be five times that number getting care in outpatient clinics, and another 50 times that number getting care from their GP (general practitioner).”

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Inequality in the U.K. and an economic system that favors the rich championed by successive right-wing governments is at the heart of the problem.

Last year alone, Trussell Trust, the country's biggest food bank network, said it gave more than 1.1 million three-day food packages in 2015. Seven years ago, the charity gave less than 26,000 of the same packages to those in need.

"This new data on malnutrition, as well as the data we have uncovered on the numbers of children who are underweight and anemic, paints a grim picture of life at the bottom of the pile," Labour lawmaker Frank Field, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on hunger, said.

The newspaper further documented several cases in which individuals died as a result of starvation last year and how doctors in the U.K. resorted to prescribing energy drinks to those who couldn't afford to eat.
