

Webinar

Poverty Proofing

Our Practice

(and wobbling our constructs about poverty too)



24 November 2020



Poverty, Inequality and Neglect

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- ‘If we can understand that injustice can strike its roots into the personality itself, producing rage and resentment and the roots of bad character, we have even deeper incentives to commit ourselves to giving each child the material and social support that human dignity requires’
(Nussbaum, quoted in Sayer, 2017: 160)

Outline

- Defining poverty and inequality
- Child Welfare Inequalities Project: findings and implications
- Thinking about neglect
- Some of the elephant traps in this area
- Making the findings fit for practice

Defining Poverty

- Very contested politically
- Emotionally very complex

Definition of Poverty

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong

(Peter Townsend at
www.cpag.org.uk)

Poverty...

- While shortage of material resources are at the heart of the hardships experienced by families, definitions also have to engage with rights and relationships, how people are treated and how they regard themselves
- Shame has been described as the “irreducible absolutist core in the idea of poverty” (Sen, 1983, p.159 quoted in Featherstone, Gupta, Morris and Warner, 2016)

Psycho-social ...

- It is rarely enobling- it can damage people and contribute to, as well as, produce, a range of social problems

Inequality

- The work of epidemiologists Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) has mapped the impacts of the rise in inequality. They have collected internationally comparable data on health and a range of social problems: mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction), life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, children's educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates and social mobility.
- Their findings suggest that there is a *very strong* link between ill health, social problems and inequality. Differences in average income between whole populations or countries do not seem to matter once a certain level is reached, but differences *within* those populations or countries matter greatly.

Inequality

- Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue that inequality *within* a society ‘gets under the skin’ of individuals leaving them feeling unvalued and inferior.
- They draw from the work of the sociologist Thomas Scheff (1988) on shame to argue: ‘Shame and its opposite, pride, are rooted in the processes through which we internalize how we imagine others see us’ (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.41). Greater inequality heightens anxieties because it increases the importance of social status, thus social position becomes a key feature of a person’s identity in an unequal society.
- Mental health and addiction issues

Inequality matters

- ‘It is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life’

(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, 3)

Check out www.equalitytrust.org.uk



Implications for family life

- In Chapter 4 we described how the general quality of social relationships is lower in more unequal societies, and in Chapters 5 and 6 we showed how inequality is linked to poorer physical and mental health and more substance misuse. It's not a great leap then to think how life in a more hierarchical, mistrustful society might affect intimate, domestic, relationships and family life. Domestic conflict and violence, parental mental illness, poverty of time and resources will all combine to affect child development (p.111).



Child Welfare
Inequalities Project



Child Welfare Inequalities: A UK four nations study

The team: Professor Paul Bywaters (PI) with Brid Featherstone, Kate Morris, Will Mason, Brigid Daniels, Jonathon Scourfield, Lisa Bunting, Nughmana Mirza, Geraldine Brady, Calum Webb and Jade Hooper



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Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP)



The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review

Paul Bywaters, Lisa Bunting, Graig Davidson, Jennifer Henretty,
Will Mason, Claire McCartan and Nicole Stalls

This report examines evidence on ten key aspects of the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect: how poverty affects a child's chance of being abused or neglected, and the impact abuse or neglect in childhood has on poverty in adult life.

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- **Key components:**
- Review of the association between poverty and CAN
- Examination of the relationship between CPP or LAC rates with area level measures of deprivation (UK)
- Mixed methods case studies exploring the interplay between family circumstances and social work decision making.

The evidence review

- There is a strong association between families socio-economic circumstances and the chances that their children will experience CAN. But, poverty is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in the occurrence of CAN
- Evidence of this association is found repeatedly across developed countries, types of abuse, definitions, measures and research approaches, and in different child protection systems and this conclusion can be drawn despite the major limitations in the evidence from the UK
- Poverty as a contributory casual factor is supported by evidence from a number of studies – raising the income of families has a statistically significant impact on rates of CAN in empirical studies

Evidence review

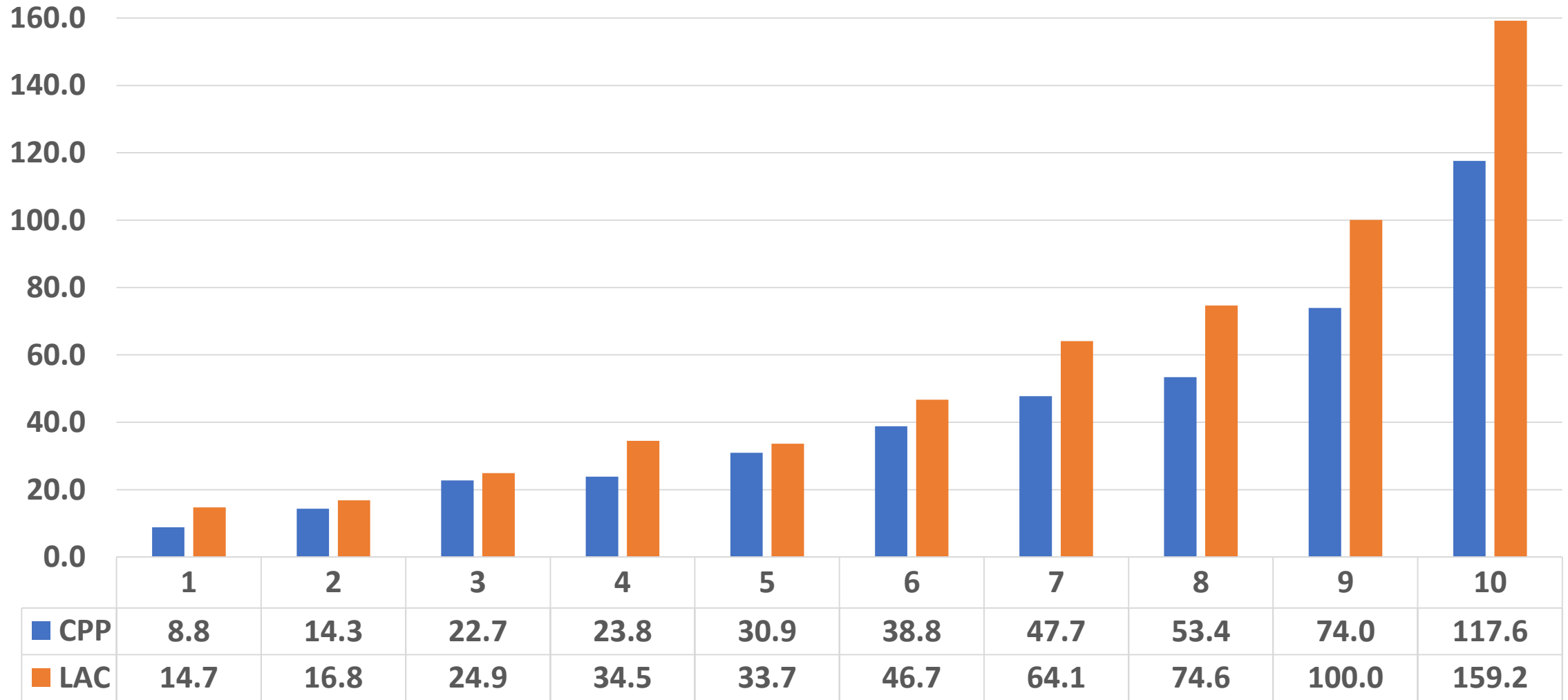
- Poverty is evident in child protection but rarely centre stage, or the primary focus of intervention
- Reducing child poverty is likely to reduce the extent and severity of child abuse and neglect.

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

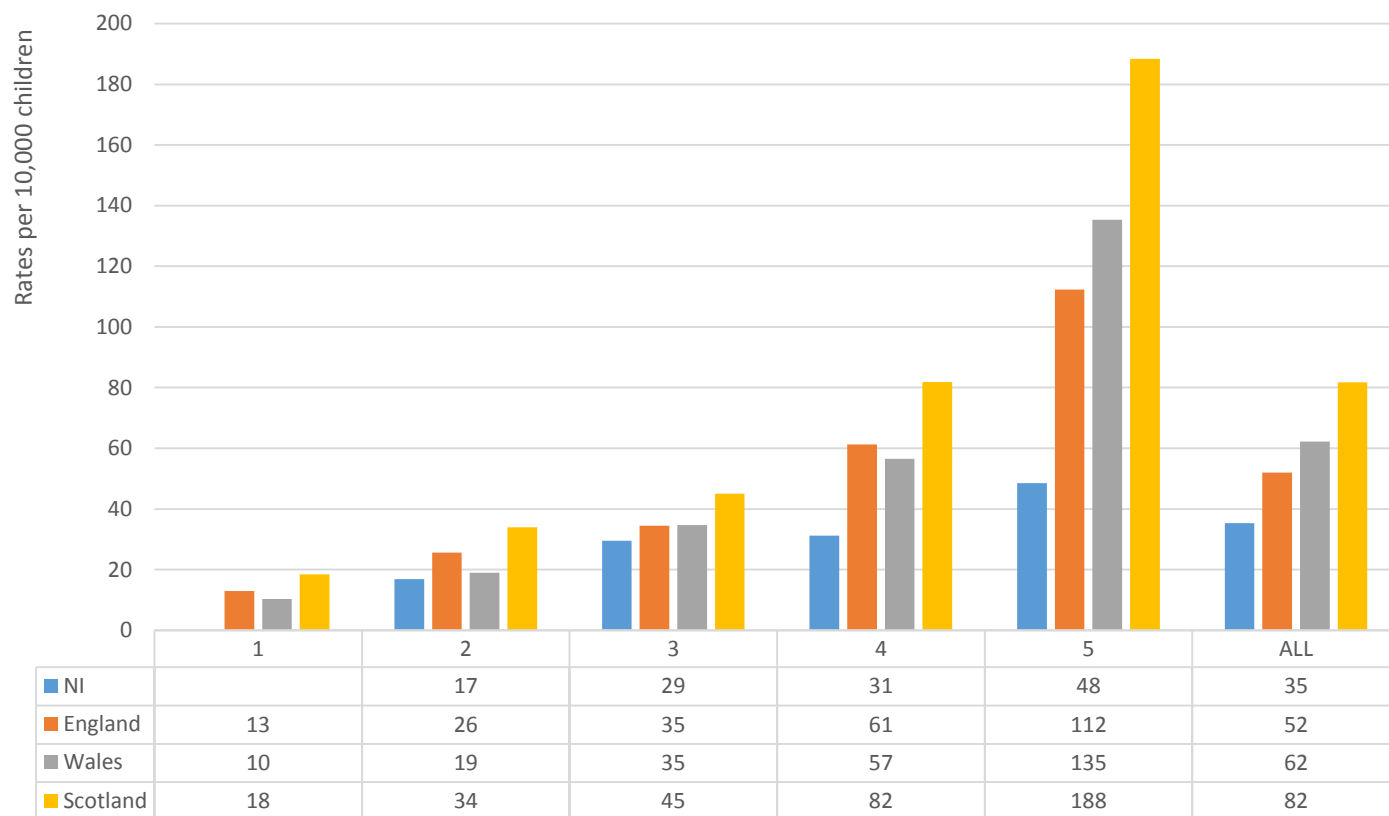
The nature of the association between poverty and CAN in the UK:

- There is a gradient in the relationship between family socio-economic circumstances and rates of CAN across the whole of society
- It is not a straightforward divide between families in poverty and those who are not
- This finding mirrors evidence about inequalities in child health and education
- **Direct effect** – material hardship or lack of money to buy in support
- **Indirect** – through parental stress and neighbourhood conditions

CPP and LAC Rates by Deprivation Decile, England Sample, England IMD, 2015



CLA not at home or with relatives or friends by Deprivation Quintile, UK Countries, 2015



Key headlines from the study's analysis of quantitative data

- Association with deprivation held within each of the 4 countries but not comparatively
- A social gradient in children's chances of an intervention, not a divide between families in poverty and the rest.
- Each 10% increase in neighbourhood deprivation brings a 30% increase in LAC and CPP rates.
- Money matters:
 - For families: increasing levels of child poverty and therefore family poverty
 - For practitioners: all LAs experiencing reduced funding, those with highest demand and highest deprivation have taken the hardest hit
 - For performance: statistically significant link between Ofsted ranking and deprivation level (at LA level)

Case-study Findings: Poverty as a Context

- Poor localities are the usual sites of social work practice – this is an accepted norm.
- The overwhelming scale and complexity of unmet need and the hollowing out of family support resources form a uniform experience across all the sites
- Poverty is ingrained, endemic but usually not visible in practice responses and, though there were differences, this was surprisingly consistent across all the sites
- *When prompted* social workers articulate their understanding of the circular relationship between poverty and harms
- This understanding was rarely evident in case planning

Case study data: thinking specifically about neglect

- Neglect a driving category in the case study sites in terms of fuelling the system
- Case study data: tipping points from support to responsabilisation
- Social work narratives – ‘territorial stigma’

‘We also do a lot of signposting families to foodbanks, or we can issue foodbank vouchers. But we tend, if we can, we are more than fully committed doing what we would consider our core business, which is doing parenting skills, parenting capacity change type of things. And this other stuff, whilst in a perfect world we should be doing it, and doing it with family, the reality is that the work load people would say "you need to be doing other things, getting other people to do that sort of thing for them, you can't, you haven't got the capacity and if you do it, you run the risk of drowning”

Practice and Poverty

- Our analysis suggest that existing frameworks cannot address the core issues for families. There is a need to reconnect with this and pay attention to the structural contexts that bear upon families
- Social workers don't see anti poverty activity as 'core business' – they say they focus on risk / parenting and that others should be addressing issues of deprivation (food, warmth, shelter)
- Poverty is considered 'too big to tackle' in a context of ever diminishing resources

- The availability of services shape and constrain social work analysis
- In their attempts to practice equitably, some social workers consciously disengaged with the social and spatial distribution of social work demand
- Some systems and practices can reinforce the shame and suffering of poverty for family members
- Underclass narratives

Elephant Traps

- 1. Shouldn't people take responsibility?
- 2. Not all poor people neglect or harm their children
- 3. Are you justifying abusive behaviour?

Trap 1

- There is a danger that we simply invert the status quo and substitute an 'underdog' story which presents those experiencing inequality as structurally constrained and any agency or responsibility for their troubles.
- Are all forms of asking people to take responsibility for their situation problematic?
- No of course not
- But it is problematic when we expect individuals to resolve problems for which they cannot reasonably be held responsible ... just what in each case is reasonable to expect and what is too much is partly a practical question but also a normative one of what people should be willing to do and what lengths they should go to... (Sayer, 2017)

Trap 2. Causation


- The difference between direct and systemic causation
- If I put my hand in the fire it will get burned ... direct causation
- If I work hard, I will get a good job ...not so clear cut

(see discussion in Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K. and White, S 2018)

Trap 3: Justification

...

- Are you saying poverty justifies violence or neglect or...?
- This challenge is completely understandable but confuses explanation with justification

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- ‘Much behaviour lacks moral justification, but is nevertheless made more or less likely by particular circumstances. An under-regulated financial system does not justify irresponsible actions that risk crashing the economy, but causally it makes them likely’ (Sayer, 2017: 161).

Ongoing work with agencies

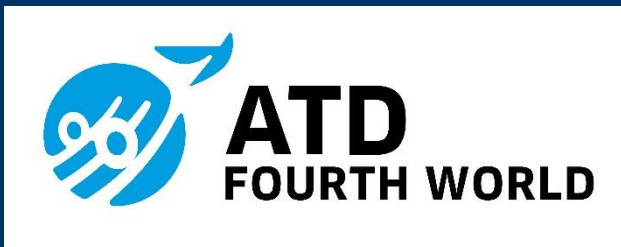
- Training and awareness raising ... some reflections on our experiences
- Supervisor prompt sheet <https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Using-a-social-model-of-child-protection-in-supervision.pdf>
- App by Callum Webb <https://www.cwip-app.co.uk/>.
- Also a number of anti-poverty frameworks have been developed from our research

<https://www.basw.co.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/anti-poverty-practice-guide-social-work>

Selected references

- For details of the Child Welfare Inequalities Project go to www.coventry.ac.uk/CWIP
- Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K. and Warner, J (2016) Let's stop feeding the 'risk monster': towards a social model of child protection', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Advance Access, published on February 15 2016, doi.org/10.1332/204674316X14552878034622
- Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K. and White, S (2018) *Protecting Children: A Social Model*, Bristol, Policy Press
- Sayer, A (2017) Responding to the Troubled Families Programme: Framing the Injuries of Inequality, *Social Policy & Society* (2017) 16:1, 155–164

- Wilkinson, R and Pickett, K (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies always do better*, London: Penguin



Understanding Poverty in All Its Forms

Disempowering systems, structures and policies



Financial insecurity, financial exclusion and debt



Damaged health and well-being



Stigma, blame and judgement



Lack of control over choices



Unrecognised struggles, skills and contributions



Key messages about proactive practice

1. Consider a variety of ways to communicate
2. Chose empathetic words while building a relationship
3. Be willing to listen to and learn from a family's lived experience

Respect the unseen positives: families' inner strength and what they know and already do



Address the impact of poverty on well-being



Moraene Roberts: “A valued working relationship based on empathy and respect of human dignity can help drive change”

