




POVERTY, CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Interrogating a 'neglected'
relationship



'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

Some of the elephant traps in this area



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, 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

POVERTY TODAY

There were 4.1 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2016-17. That's 30 per cent of children, or 9 in a classroom of 30

Child poverty reduced dramatically between 1998/9-2011/12 when 800,000 children were lifted out of poverty.

Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person works

Check out www.cpag.org.uk and www.jrf.org.uk

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

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 ...

The UK has a very high level of income inequality compared to other developed countries.

Households in the bottom 10% of the population have on average a disposable (or net) income of £9,644 (this includes wages and cash benefits, and is after direct taxes like income tax and council tax, but not indirect taxes like VAT). The top 10% have net incomes almost nine times that (£83,875).

Inequality is much higher amongst original incomes than disposable incomes with the poorest 10% having on average an original income of £4,436 whilst the top 10% have an original income 24 times larger (£107,937)



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.

? IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD PROTECTION

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 KATE MORRIS, BRID FEATHERSTONE, WILL MASON, BRIGID DANIELS, JONATHAN 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 Hennaty,
Will Mason, Claire McCartan and Nicole Stalls

The 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.

JRF JOSEPH
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FOUNDATION

INSPIRING
SOCIAL
CHANGE

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.

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 (Shook and Testa, 1997; Fein and Lee, 2003; Cancial et al., 2013; Raissian and Bullinger, 2016)

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:

We need to talk about inequality

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

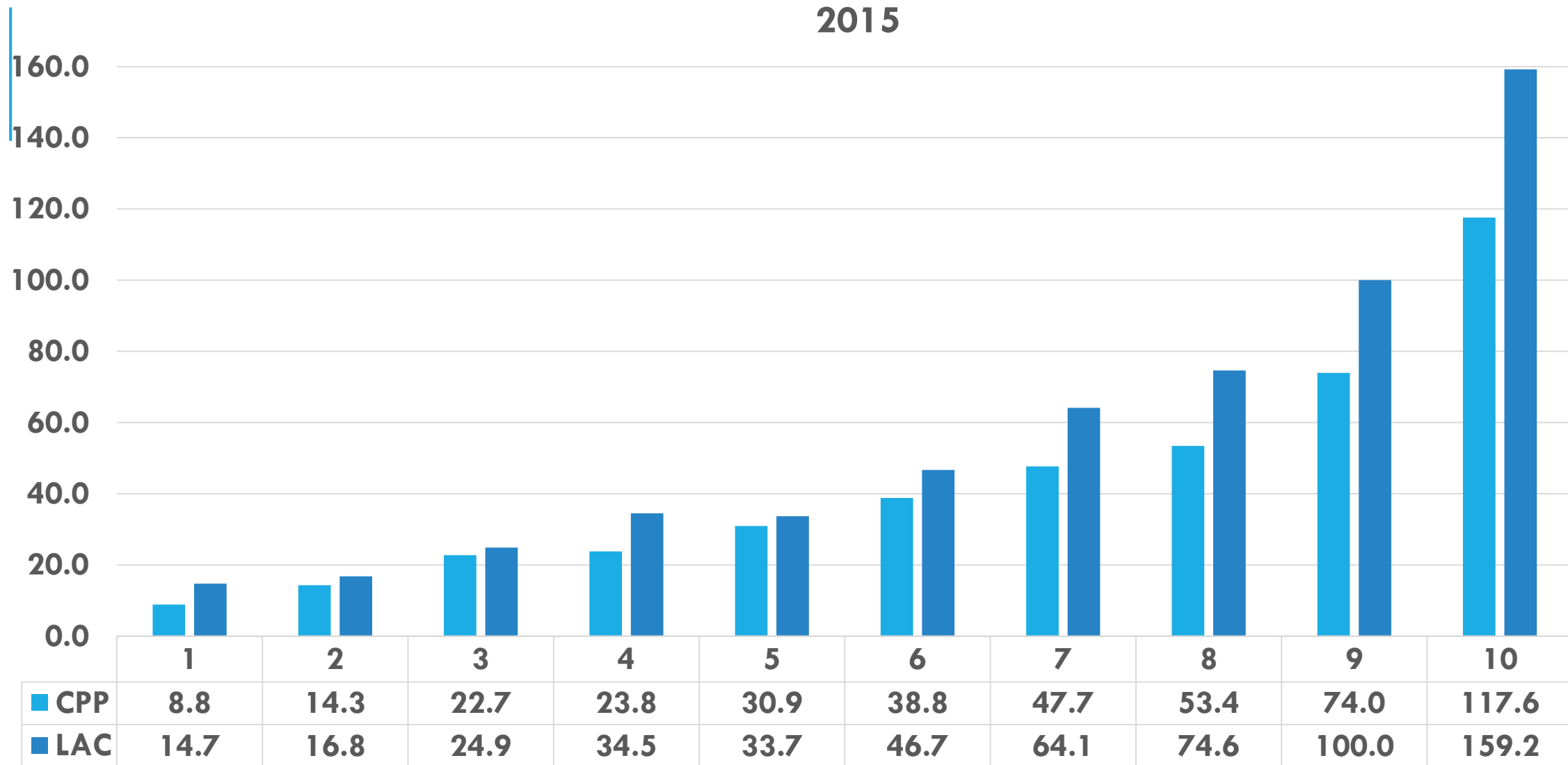
This finding mirrors evidence about inequities in child health and education

Direct effect – material hardship or lack of money to buy in support

Indirect – through parental stress and neighbourhood conditions

It's **not** a background factor – it is implicated in all sorts of ways in the decisions made or not made every day

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



KEY HEADLINES FROM THE STUDY'S ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Children in the 10% most deprived small neighbourhoods in England are more than 10 times more likely to be CPP or LAC than children in the least deprived 10%.

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)

KEY HEADLINES (CONTINUED)

The ***inverse intervention law***: Although high deprivation LAs have higher rates of intervention than low deprivation LAs, when you compare equally deprived or equally affluent neighbourhoods, low deprivation LAs are intervening significantly more.

Relative to demand, low deprivation LAs have more money to spend than high deprivation LAs.

Cuts in expenditure since 2010/11 have been larger in high than low deprivation LAs, and in early help/prevention.

CASE-STUDY FINDINGS: POVERTY AS A CONTEXT

- Poor localities are the usual sites of social work practice – this is an accepted norm.
- 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

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 context 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 'too big to tackle' in a context of ever diminishing resources
- The overwhelming scale and complexity of unmet need and the hollowing out of family support resources form a uniform experience across all the sites
- 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

‘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”

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



‘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).

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

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