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# Situating poverty in social work practice

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# Overview

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'Modern' social work and poverty

Social work processes and poverty:  
assessments and interventions

BASW anti-poverty practice guide

# Social circumstances and poverty

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Low pay, poor housing,  
social isolation, low  
education (JRF 2007)



unable to clothe or feed  
self and children, living  
with illness and disability  
(Shildrick and Macdonald  
2013)



low pay, care  
responsibilities and  
precariousness (Shildrick  
et al 2010)



Intersectionality –  
gender, 'race', disability,  
class (Department of  
Health 2018)

# The why and how of the encounter



## Surveillance

The state enforcing normative lifestyle – e.g. employment; behaviour; food consumption, etc



## Meeting need

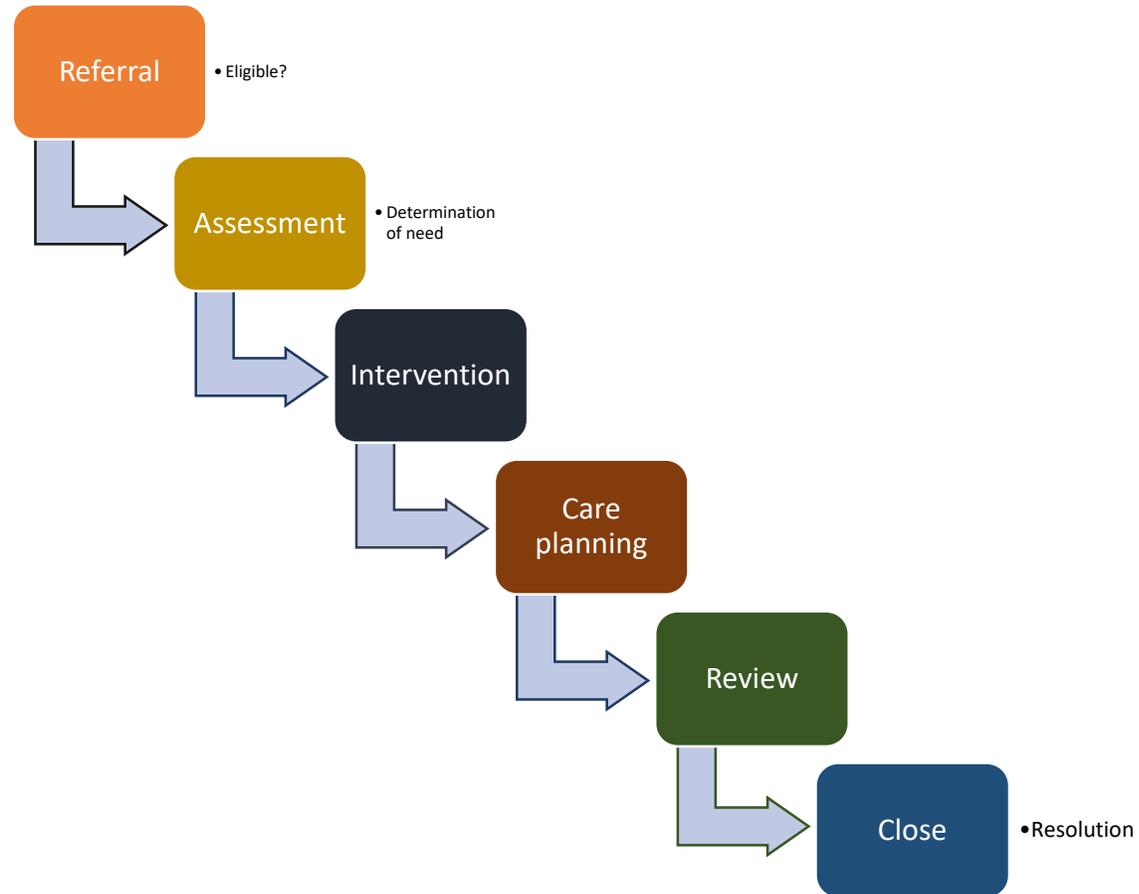
- Statutory duty: assess 'need'
- Powers to meet need



## The profession's values

- (In)equality
- Human rights
- Profoundly ethical issue: loss of power, marginalisation, and shame (Brown 2006; Chase and Walker 2014)

# A model of practice



# Risk society

- Dominance of risk in social work (Webb 2006)

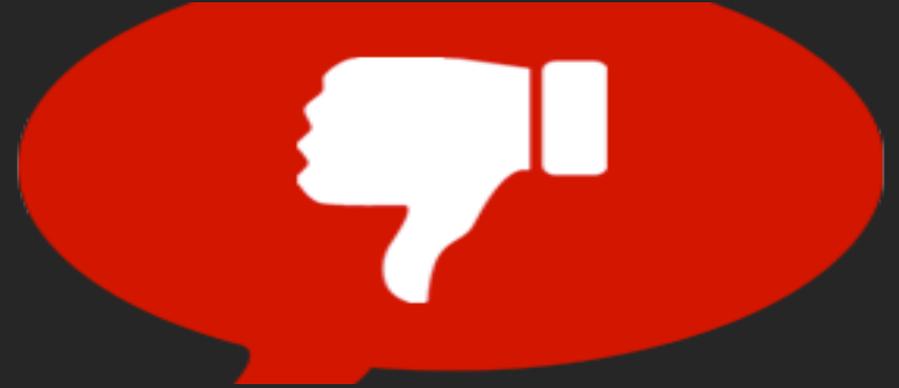
[P]ractitioners may be faced with trying to address a single area of need (e.g. parental substance misuse) while this in itself may be *reflective of a wider combination of risk variables that also require close consideration* (Scotland's National Risk Framework, Calder et al 2012; emphasis added)

- Transposing need as risk?
- Eligibility criteria  only 'risk' can be met?

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## Effect on practitioners



- Risk is everywhere but not properly understood (Warner and Sharland 2010)
- Peoples' lives are too complex for clinical tools!
- Poverty is an issue beyond service users' control (Featherstone et al 2017)
- Unfilled social work profession (Revelier 2017)

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Austerity is not a  
short-term disruption  
to balance the books.  
It is the demolition of  
our welfare state.

Sid 2016

# Paradigm shift?

- Critical poverty practice?
- What might this look like?



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# BASW's Anti-poverty practice guide



Generating a practice-focussed guide for members

Boot out austerity campaign - part of BASW's campaign against austerity





# Focus groups

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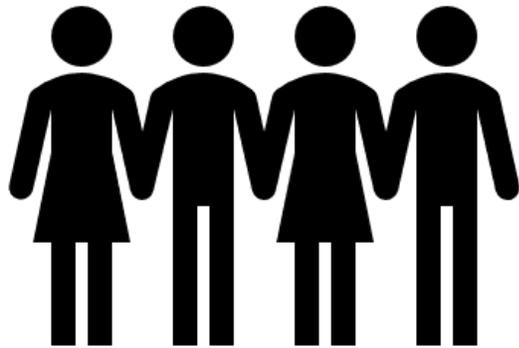
# BASW's Anti-poverty practice guide

**What makes a good guide for social workers?**

**Structure and format: electronic or hardcopy? Children and/or adults?**

**What information should be contained in children's section?**

**And for adults?**



# Format

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- Workshop and focus group format
- Co-production
  - Practitioner-generated solutions
  - Diversity of views
  - Equality of participation

# Findings

Social workers referred to many aspects of poverty and practice in terms of broader background features and complex interplay of legislation, needs, resources, and so on, that were important, before turning quickly to a more myopic focus on specific actions that could be taken (Calum Webb, fieldnotes)

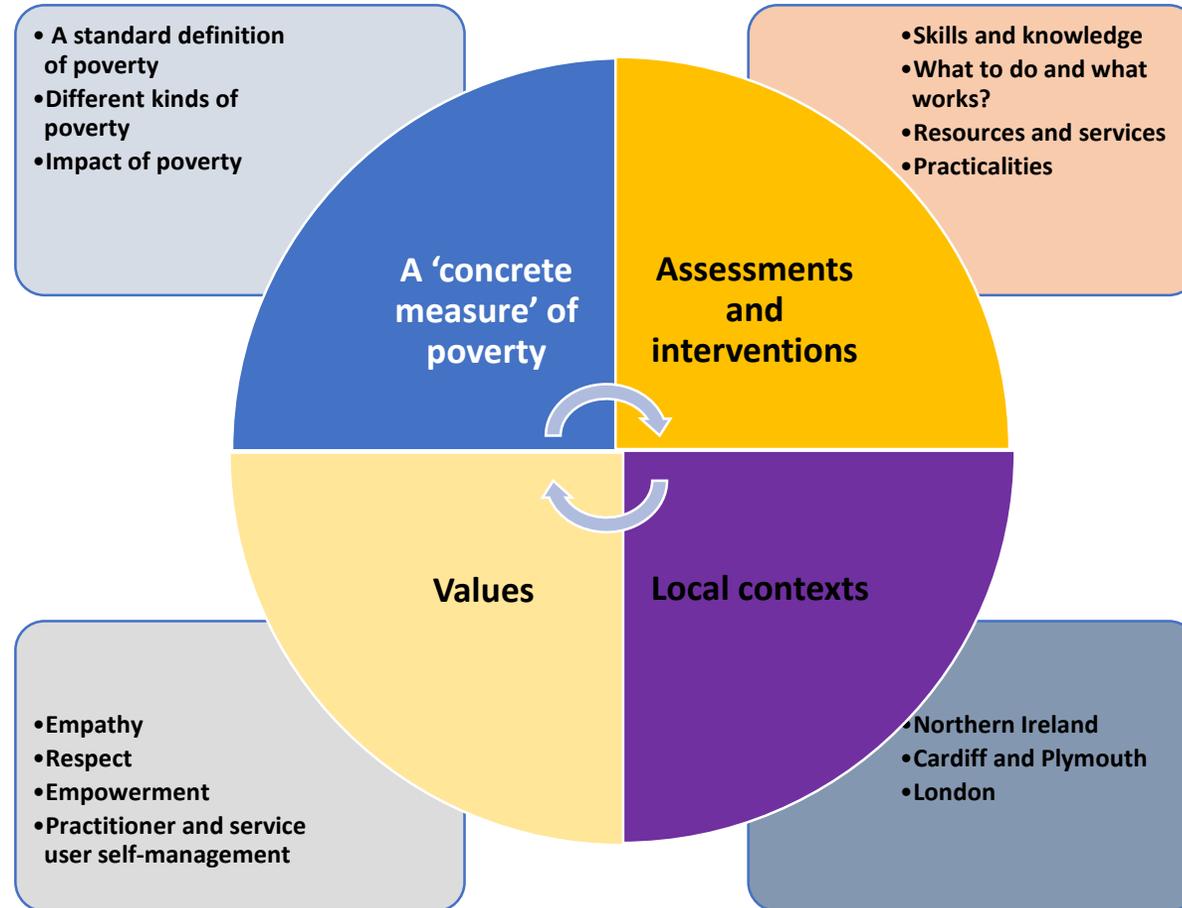


**MIND THE GAP**

# What the guide should address

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# Conclusion

- Risk society has been a divergence from social work's key ethical values
  - BUT
- Presage of a paradigm shift?
- Critical poverty practice:
  - What is the extent of poverty here?
  - How has it contributed to the current situation
  - What can we (professional, user, and community) do to change the situation?



Thank you for  
listening



**Thank  
You**

# Definition: Minimum Income Standard

**A minimum standard of living in the UK today includes, but is more than just, food, clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society (JRF, 2017)**



## Conclusion



# The ethics of anti-poverty practice

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What are the ethical issues  
involved?

- From social workers' perspectives
- From the viewpoint of families

