



Child Welfare
Inequalities Project



Understanding Child Welfare Inequalities: Scottish Case Studies

To become a stakeholder in the Child Welfare Inequalities Project
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The Case Studies

What is the interplay between decisions to intervene in children's lives and their social, economic and material circumstances?

Mixed Methods

- Photographs and walking tours of case study sites
- Practice observation
- Semi-structured interviews (key informants)
- Focus groups (SWs/IRO)
- Case narratives
- Decision making flowcharts
- Analysis of documents (case files / assessment tools)

- Co-constructed residents study in one English LA

Emerging 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

The wallpaper of practice....



C&FSW: "We are conscious of poverty, but it has been beaten out of us when we became professionals with a capital P".

<http://www.harryvenning.co.uk/>

www.coventry.ac.uk/CWIP | @CWIP_Research

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C&FSW: “It’s just been chipped, chipped away. They don’t get rid of it all at once so you almost don’t notice it but you look back at previous reports and you think oh yeah, they [families] used to get all these supports”.

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C&FSW: “we have to respond to need and to risk first and foremost and the other things are additional but they come afterwards”

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 as 'too big to tackle' in a context of ever diminishing resources
- The availability of services shape and constrain social work analysis
- At times practice narratives could reflect a focus on personal responsibility over structural determinants
- Some systems and practices can reinforce the shame and suffering of poverty for family members

Team Leader: “I think it’s just the **sheer volume of work** we are expected to do and very few workers now have low tariff cases because we don’t have the capacity to take a lot of voluntary cases. **Most of our cases are CP or LAC and that involves a huge amount of work and a lot of stress** because you are constantly weighing up has the risk to this child tipped over into being dangerous for that child to be at home”

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Team Manager: “...when you are looking at issues of poverty and deprivation a lot of them are interlinked, like high unemployment, poor health, poor diet, poor nutrition, whether you are smoking, whether you bare breastfeeding. All of these are interlinked and the only way to change any one of them is to work... on all of them”

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IRO: “You can give these families £1million and they will still have the same issues. They will still be in the CP system. It’s got nothing to do with deprivation ... Poverty is the outcome not the cause”

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Summing Up: messages for practice and policy

- Social workers often have deep knowledge of poverty and its consequences, but are not given adequate resources or caseload levels to engage with these
- There is a need to re-connect with the core business for *families* and value work to tackle issues of hunger, shelter and warmth (amend assessments, arrangements for family engagement, case plans)
- ‘Poverty check’ procedures, do they reinforce the shame and debilitating consequences of poverty
- Identify and use income maximising services – form working partnerships with local services
- Practice isn’t enough – structures and systems need to put deprivation and poverty at the heart of planning and service development





The aim is to re-frame child welfare

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