

Practitioner Briefing - impact of poverty on children.

Welcome, to this briefing to help practitioners and their managers understand poverty and its impact. The messages in this Briefing are just as important for those working in adult services, where service users could be parents.

There are many reasons a child may be living in poverty, soaring rent costs, insecure work and low pay plus a patchy welfare system are some of the factors that leave families without the means to get by. The negative impacts of poverty start before birth and can accumulate across their lives and onto the next generation. Poverty has negative impacts on children's health, cognitive development, social, emotional, and behavioural development, and educational outcomes. Parents of children living in poverty are more likely to suffer mental health problems, relationship/financial problems/substance misuse, which can affect their parenting behaviours, and which can have negative impacts on their children's outcomes too.

What is poverty? Poverty is when a family lack the finances or resources to provide an adequate diet or appropriate living conditions. People tend to equate poverty to having limited or no money, but it is defined by being unable to provide a decent standard of living for oneself or their family. Around 29% of families across the UK live in poverty.

What is neglect? Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic needs and is the most common form of child abuse. Neglect can be wilful and intentional, but it can also be because of other circumstances which render a parent unable to provide what their child needs, for example parental drug/alcohol misuse and/or mental health issues. 1 in 10 children in the UK have experienced neglect in their lifetime. The relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect: new evidence (Nuffield Foundation). Major reviews of children's social care in England/Scotland have shown that family poverty and inequality are key drivers of harm to children. Evidence also shows that deep and persistent poverty, which have increased rapidly in the UK in recent years, are more damaging for children's safety than low income or temporary difficulties. This is new evidence based on reviews of ninety research papers from the last five years. Poverty is inextricably implicated in other factors which increase the risk of harm: including domestic violence, poor mental health, and substance use. Children's age and ethnicity interact with poverty in ways that increase inequalities. Read the Briefing note [here](#) and the Executive summary [here](#).

Poverty Is a Risk Factor for Neglect, But Poverty Does Not Equate to Neglect... The occurrence of poverty on its own does not mean that a child is unsafe or at risk, unloved, or that a parent lacks the capacity to care for their child. Poverty can make it more challenging for parents to meet their child's needs, but despite this they actively want to change their situation or provide for their children, but they do not have the means. But recent research has proved that increased financial and other pressures on family life will lead to the risk that more children will be subject to harm, abuse, and neglect.

Parenting and Poverty: Parents living in poverty often face their own difficulties such as lack of education, negative childhood experiences, and poor physical and/or mental health, some of which are associated with growing up in poverty themselves. Parents may try to minimise the impacts of poverty on their children by sacrificing their own activities, material goods, consumption and even their own food intake. Some children may be unable to participate in social/leisure/celebratory activities because they cannot keep up with the latest fashion trends in clothing, have money to spend, etc. which can adversely affect their friendships, self-esteem and may result in them feeling ashamed, excluded, and even stigmatised. Their ability to take full advantage of learning and other opportunities in school maybe hampered by their lack of income. Children can show an understanding of the impact of poverty on their family and display sensitivity towards their parents such as not asking for money and undertaking paid work themselves to ease the family finances. This can have positive effects of providing an element of economic independence but can also be negative and detrimental to a child's ability to manage schoolwork. **The flipside to this is that children may see or be groomed into exploitation as a means of getting money either to support they family or provide for themselves.** Children's experiences of poverty are complex as growing up in poverty will not necessarily have poor outcomes in adulthood; protective factors that can mediate the negative impacts of childhood poverty are their relationships within their families and their inclusion in their peer group.

What can practitioners do? The term 'Poverty' can cause shame, fear, and stigma so it is essential practitioners consider and think carefully about the language they use when having sensitive conversations, they will need to prepare for their visits. It is vital that practitioners use restorative language as this helps to shift the focus away from blame/shame to root cause/repair. Practitioners will need to identify the positive intention for the person so they can understand why it is useful to engage in a conversation about finances/poverty. For example, **'If its ok with you I thought it would be useful for me to understand a bit about your financial situation so that I can see if there is any additional support that we can offer in this area.'** It is important to remember that body language has a big impact so using mirroring techniques, effective use of eye contact, leaning in, being aware of location, personal space, how a practitioner is recording the conversation are all techniques which can aid engagement and help people feel more comfortable. Research shows that using images, relevant statistics and research in discussions can aid understanding and help reduce shame because it makes the discussion very factual. Consider discussing how the economy locks people into poverty being on benefits, in low paid jobs, rising rental prices, the increasing cost of living, the way our economy works can trap people in a daily struggle to make ends meet. **Advocacy: ensuring voices are heard** - children who live in poverty often are not included in conversations around their experiences. Adults are often apprehensive about talking to children about poverty, because they do not want to say the wrong thing, or they think that children may be less aware of their parent's financial circumstances. Children who live in poverty are very often aware that they live in poverty, they know about the stresses that their family is under, and they often try to protect their parents from financial worries, by not bringing information home about school trips, or by leaving food on their plate as they know it may be their parent's only meal. Practitioners working with families, it is important that they use the power/knowledge gained as part of their role to advocate for families. They must listen to and work with children and their families to better understand their experiences of poverty, only by doing this can practitioners appropriately advocate on their behalf and work with them to challenge their current situation.

Words and phrases to consider using:

- "How does living with a low-income impact you/your family?"
- "How do you manage your money?"
- "Can I talk to you about your finances?"
- "How do you manage/cope on the income you've got?"
- "Where do you normally go for financial support?"
- Can I support you with accessing different services?"
- "Do you think you're getting all the money you should/are entitled to?"
- "How are you coping with the change to universal credit? A lot of people are finding this difficult."
- "Do you do a weekly/monthly budget planner?"

For more information and guidance regarding neglect.

[Pan Bedfordshire Child Protection Procedures](#)

[NSPCC Protecting children from neglect](#)

[Research in Practice - Child neglect SCIE - Safeguarding -](#)

[Safeguarding Network - Neglect](#)

[NSPCC - Graded Care Profile 2 \(GCP2\)](#)

[Safeguarding Bedfordshire website.](#)