

Minutes – Evidence Session on Stigma CPG

25th January 2022

Attendance:

Jeremy Balfour MSP
Beatrice Wishart MSP
Monica Lennon MSP
Collette Stevenson MSP
Bob Doris MSP
Natalie Don MSP
Peter Kelly (PA)
Neil Cowan (PA)
Ashley Mclean (PA)
Fiona McHardy (PS)
Chris Ross (Children in Scotland)
Niki Powers (Let's Talk)
Ailsa Mackenzie (The Pyramid at Anderston)
Andrea Bradley (EIS)
Brian Scott (Glasgow Disability Alliance)
Cara Hilton (Trussel Trust)
Catriona Melville (Age Scotland)
Charis Scott (Christians Against Poverty)
Chloe Goodall (Curiosity Collective)
Chris Birt (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
Clare Simpson (Parenting Across Scotland)
Connie Bennett (ASH Scotland)
Daniela Rondina (SIAA)
David Kelly (Community Transport Association)
David Scott (CAS)
Fiona McAvoy (Newton Primary)
Flora Ranachan (The Health Agency)
Heather Fiskin (Inclusion Scotland)
Jamie Simpson (Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home)
Jane Miller (ALLIANCE)
John McIntyre (Ferguslie Community Development Trust)
Julia Arnot (Public Health Scotland)
Julie Hepburn (Social Justice and Fairness Commission/The SNP)
Kate Cunningham (Energy Action Scotland)
Kate Kelman (Capital City Partnership)
Kate Robinson (National Lottery Community Fund)
Katie Birrell (Women's Enterprise Scotland)
Kirsty McNeill (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights)
Linda Sterry (Funeral Link)
Lindsay Graham (Poverty and Inequality Commission Scotland)
Lorraine Gilles (Scottish Community Safety Network)

Maggie Brunjes(Homeless Network Scotland)
Mairi McCallum (Moray Food Plus)
Marie Ward (Cranhill Development Trust)
Marion Davis (One Parent Families Scotland)
Mike Corbett (NASUWT)
Nairn McDonald (FRSA)
Niven Rennie (Violence Reduction Unit)
Paul Spicker
Roslyn Neely (Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity)
Ruth Wilkinson
Snow Curtis – Kolu (Includem)
Stacey Cuthbertson
Stephen Sinclair (Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit)
Susan McKellar (Scottish Womens Convention)
Trishna Singh (Sikh and Punjabi Junction Social Enterprise Project).

Apologies:

Chris Ross (CiS), Niki Powers (let's Talk),

Jeremy Balfour MSP opens CPG, explaining purpose of today's session is to explore drivers, causes impacts and solutions to poverty related stigma. Notes that we will have three speakers followed by an open Q&A.

Professor Imogen Tyler from University of Lancaster. Professor of Sociology.

IT – Began by explaining their project which focused on historical and contemporary understanding of how stigma persists and can be used as a powerful mechanism and as a form of power through which individuals and communities have been dehumanized, scapegoated, and made to feel shame. Noted that stigma, in multiple ways, drives and fuels social inequalities. Contextually, relative poverty in the UK is static, however the number of very low income households in deep poverty is growing. Today will focus on how stigma has always played a role in the distribution of power, resources and therefore poverty.

More recently, we have moved from siloed, pockets of welfare 'poor relief' to more encompassing and universal welfare provisions and this one of the attempts to destigmatize individuals seeking support. Despite this we're witnessing an intensification of stigma around welfare and benefits whilst also we are returning to more charitable forms of provision e.g., foodbanks. This longer history can provide context around this problematic regressive shift in welfare provisions. IT notes a case study on 2010-2019 focusing on austerity; found that intensification of stigma on people who receive benefits – 'scrounger discourse' – and asked the question of who is saying this, where is it coming from, what are the consequences. This discourse peaked around 2015 with a moral panic around welfare dependent people or 'benefit scroungers' – a revival of a sort of 'badging the poor'. This came from a notable hardening of public attitudes which we can track this in social attitudes survey. The public are tutored to believe that poverty is caused by poor life choices

instead of being structural. Psychological impact on individuals where people feel negatively about themselves when seeking help.

Where is this coming from? Stigma is not organic- its constructed and reproduced. This can come from media, the government but even in how our welfare systems are designed and administered.

Where are we going? How can we destigmatise poverty? Policy design is key – listen to lived experience, involve them in the design of social welfare systems.

Professor Tracy Shildrick – Newcastle University, Professor of Inequalities

Poverty Stigma.

Worked in Teesside & Glasgow their study draws on the idea of poverty propaganda – how do we frame the narratives of poverty. We have a range of ‘soundbites’ around people in poverty e.g., scroungers/skivers. What these narratives do is create confusion – why do foodbanks exist? Are they needed? Are people taking advantage. Instead of thinking about causes of poverty e.g., failure of state, labour market, poverty wages.

One popular narrative around people in poverty is the common belief of ‘generation of worklessness.’ This proposed that some young people are growing up in families where work isn’t respected or valued, and they learn that they do not need to go to work. For their research, they worked with young people in Teesside in Glasgow yet have so far been unable to find many families where this was the case – a very rare phenomenon. It was particularly impossible to find particularly middle aged people who have never had a job.

For families where this was the case, there was a common context of declining job opportunities, poor performing, disciplinary welfare state, poor housing, lack of investment in neighbourhoods etc. So, the narrative of generational worklessness is largely mythical and needs to be challenged.

TS noted that we can fight this. To do this we must challenge these myths with evidence. We need to talk about poverty more point blank and to note that we have a duty to tackle poverty particularly discrimination against people in poverty. Learn lessons from Covid-19; showed us how inequality works by making things worse for those in the lowest income households. We know the government can act – furlough etc. What kind of society do we want to live in? Have these conversations with general public.

Dr. Greg Inglis – University of West Scotland, Professor of Psychology.

Poverty Stigma and Mental Health.

The focus of their research was how experiences of poverty related stigma impact mental health outcomes and how poverty stigma may contribute to inequality in mental health. We know from stigmatized groups have poorer health by putting them into a state of prolonged stress.

Stigma is not one thing- poverty stigma can be witnessed in: media representations of poverty, perceived public attitudes to poverty, negative encounters with social security systems, lowered self-esteem and internalization of negative attitudes, emotional responses to stigma. Media represents low income households as scrounging off benefits and shows families like these as irresponsible or underserving of assistance. Social security systems where people describe these experiences as degrading and highly unsupportive e.g., from people at job centre, also linked into significantly lacking support available to people navigating the social security system. Members of the public can blame other people for their own income problems and blame people on benefits as being lazy. Public stigma can make people feel poorer about themselves.

Inglis' conducted research focusing on comparing 22 international studies on the impact of poverty stigma on mental health. Findings showed four types of broad mental health and wellbeing outcomes associated with poverty related stigma. First stigma associated with mental ill health e.g., depressive symptoms and low mental health quality of life, negative self-evaluations including low self-esteem, negative emotions including the feeling of shame and impacted social wellbeing including social withdrawal to avoid stigma.

Conclusions noted that stigma and discrimination is harmful to mental health and wellbeing. People living on low incomes experience several types of poverty stigma. Emerging evidence that poverty stigma is detrimental to mental health and wellbeing, although some important evidence gaps remain.

Q&A

Brian Scott (GDA) – There is some evidence that disabled people face stigmatisation as benefit scroungers which is impactful on behaviours for example recent increases in disability hate crime related to being accused of being benefit scroungers

TS – Considers this a significant low point- it is about trying to challenge those narratives as when you look at evidence of how people end up in these situations, you cannot help but feel sympathy. Absolutely people withdraw from situations due to stigma, particularly for disabled people.

IT- Important to note that disabled people have been the most impacted by the most recent period of welfare reform since 2010. Thinking of the relationship between poverty and disability and that people have died due to these welfare changes. How

the stigmatisation of certain groups and how welfare more generally has impact and change the UK. The late professor John Hill spoke about this- The meaning of welfare has changed from 'universal' to 'cash benefits to groups known as 'economically unproductive people'' we need to destigmatize the meaning of welfare. The narrative of disabled people as an 'economically unproductive group' is hugely stigmatising of disabled people.

Nairn McDonald (FRSA) – Has research looked at the impact of 'poverty porn' e.g. 'The Scheme' on the stigmatisation of people in poverty through entertainment media.

GI- Have noted the representation of poverty in media - it presented as entertaining. There is a link between unrealistic and stereotypes of poverty and perceptions on the reality of poverty; people watch these shows and assume its truth. Research has also found that participants in these shows are impacted by those experiences through lower self-esteem. The media responses to their 'performances' in these shows also impacts but this is underreached at present.

TS – One of the biggest issues is that members of the public still think that these shows are reality, even if it does not match people's own experiences with poverty.

Paul Spicker- Why only 15 years? There was an abundance of evidence showing stigma against certain groups prior to 2010. A lot of the issues on the topic of stigma and poverty have existed for a long period time.

GI- In our research it was practical and its relevant due to its newness, yes, these issues have existed but due to covid, these inequalities have new emphasis as a public health issue.

TS- Agree that these issues are structural and long term, and this is frustrating. There is an opportunity to look at new data and recent data due to shifting public attitudes shifting in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Trishna Singh (Sikh and Punjabi Junction Social Enterprise Project) – Within all this research, is there any research showing what poverty is like for the Sikh community? Charities focusing on ethnic minority communities are heavily under resourced leading to inability to provide data to government to provide an accurate picture of what poverty is like for these groups.

JB – I think it's a valid point, we will come back and work with charities to make the consultation process more accessible.

Snow Curtis-Kolu (Includem) – Interested in lived experience angle, specifically reflections on the need for systems level change – do we have any international examples that demonstrate best practice.

TS- Good question, change happens on multiple levels such as local and regional, but these changes must come from central government. We need the differing levels of change together.

Andrea Bradley (EIS) – We're campaigning on universal provision for free school meals with a focus on stigma to achieve this. Any insights that may help this campaign?

TS- Can recommend with NE child poverty commission.

JB closed evidence session by announcing call for written evidence, encourage all attendees and their networks to submit responses. There will also be a round table for those involved with the media, CPG members welcome to attend- date TBA.