



Pioneer Scheme Day-release programme
Wednesday 14th June 2017
Horselethill Road, Glasgow

Living with poverty

With Fiona McHardy and Rachel Thomson from the Poverty Alliance

THE POVERTY ALLIANCE www.povertyalliance.org

- Established in 1992
- Network of over 250 organisations and individuals
- Strong anti-poverty network from grassroots level to MSPs
- Collective voice working towards social and economic justice
- Staff team is 17 (largest ever)
- Board of 17 member organisations
- Core funding is from Scottish Government but also via projects, lottery etc
- Aim is to influence at all levels – from local to European
- Part of the European anti-poverty network
- Not affiliated with any political party

POVERTY ALLIANCE WORK

Income

Looks at income in the broadest sense, including the Living Wage Accreditation scheme. This advocates for the real living wage (£8.45) rather than the current minimum wage (£7.20).

<https://www.livingwage.org.uk>

Scotland is doing better than the rest of the UK in terms of accreditation of employers. Approximately 20,000 individuals in Scotland had a wage increase in the past year.

Attitudes - Stick your labels

A study by PA showed that for people living in poverty, the worst aspect for them was the stigma and discrimination they received, including from those trying to help (e.g. the language used in the 2015 general election “hard working families”, “shirkers and strivers”, and “deprived communities”). Organisations can give PA documents to be revised in terms of the language used.

Access to Services

Petition through Scottish government regarding the NHS 24 phone number being previously a paid number. After 3 years it became the 111 number which is free. This project shows the value of listening to lived experience as a lady with Crohn's had been trying to phone for advice but the money on her mobile kept running out.

There is talk about Job Centre closures coming from Westminster which would increase patient travel and costs.

Participation

Community engagement and research is a massive part of PA work. They can coordinate press releases but obviously have no control over the reaction to it, especially through social media. Community activists are from a range of backgrounds, e.g. from existing groups or through outreach community projects. They can be short or long term. In work people are harder to reach.

Being non-judgemental and facilitating a safe space is very important for PA staff and for service users (field work team). We can put patients in touch with PA but they do not have the capacity to do everything and patients need to be warned that things may not change. Apathy in a community may occur as a result of poor pieces of community work or feedback.

Research projects

PIP - Confusing for claimants and causes a lot of stress however this is reduced if they are supported by specialist advice agencies.

Play and poverty – Fife

- Parents are often not allowing their children to play in the accommodation due to fear of damaging the property
- Cramped/overcrowded properties
- Isolation as ashamed of the accommodation so not asking other children round
- Antisocial behaviour in community
- Summer holidays cause stress – no free meals, no money for activities etc
- Play is now factored into housing points in Fife council

Game: Play your wages – Scottish living wage UK. Shows how families can struggle with day to day decisions. Often parents try to shield their children from the poverty and their situation but they usually are aware. We discussed the difficulty patients may have in speaking to their child's school or at hospital appointments etc. and the importance of empowering them to do so. They often have a fear of being reported to social work regarding their poverty e.g. using food banks and reassuring people that living in poverty does not mean an automatic referral to social work.

- The UK is 7th out of 30 OECD countries in terms of income inequality
- 8 men now own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world
- Life expectancy reduces by 1.7/1.2 (M/F) years per stop of the Argyle line, travelling east across Glasgow from Jordanhill (75.8yrs for men) to Bridgeton (61.9yrs for men)

Relative Poverty in Scotland

- Median and after housing cost figure (check when media reports “poverty” if before or after housing cost as after much more accurate picture)
- All people 20%, children 26%, working age adults 20%, pensioners 13%
- The relative poverty threshold is a line so excludes people just above it
- Poverty rates by gender (19% female, 18% male) has been relatively flat but slight narrowing of gap over the past year
- Poverty rates urban 21%, rural 18% but rural poverty is masked by SIMD in how it is calculated. Housing costs are higher in urban areas
- Poverty in a lone parent is almost double that of a two-parent household (child care costs)
- If a disabled person is at home this increases the chance of child poverty - level stable since 2012 at 23%
- Poverty rate is higher for younger rather than older children
- Ethnic minorities have a higher rate of poverty than white British

Employment

There are lots of people in part time work who want full time employment. The living wage does not prevent zero-hour contracts (though these contracts are better for some groups e.g. students). Most families experiencing poverty have at least one adult in work. Work is often not the way out of poverty. There are sanctions coming in for people in part rather than full time employment.

Housing

There has been an increase in the number of private tenancies, where the quality varies and people can be more marginalised and hidden. There has been a reduction in the number of social housing places.

Mould and lack of furniture for example could result in people being reluctant to let both agencies and friends/family in, resulting in increased isolation and marginalisation.

The Scottish Welfare Fund - can apply for furniture online or by Freephone telephone number. Patients can access themselves or via HV/CAB/support worker.

Child poverty and material deprivation

110,000 children are living in low income and material deprivation (2015, as data on material deprivation only started being collected then). Child poverty projection (UK) is predicted to rise as benefits changes will hit families the hardest (e.g. freezing benefits).

Welfare reforms

- Complex area to keep up to date with as they change quickly and affect each demographic differently
- Media portrays “scrounger phobia”
- There has been an increase in disabled hate crime after reforms
- There has been an increase in emergency food provision and sanctions
- Increased fraud prevention from DWP e.g. they can monitor social media
- Fraud in error is included in the “benefit fraud” statistics in newspapers, which includes errors made by the DWP themselves!!
- Sanctions are now up to 3 years. Approx. 78 people in Scotland have this.
- The DWP can now give more sanctions financially than the courts.
- If a patient does not challenge the first sanction then it extends for longer the next time (i.e. 1st sanction may be 6wks, 2nd will be 12wks, etc.) – when challenging need to quote “mandatory reconsideration”

Services dealing with the after-effects are over-stretched. PA have done some research into the staff wellbeing of those supporting people in poverty, however most people are not willing to speak “on record”. They themselves are often suffering from stress.

Impact on families from welfare reforms:

- Losing a lot of money
- Stress and anxiety
- Even more vulnerable if they are not engaged with services
- Increased food poverty

Child maintenance

A £20 fee is to be applied with few exemptions and extra charges are to be applied if the non-resident is not paying (20% charge for non-resident parent and 4% fee for resident parent, via ‘Collect and Pay’ system) – non-payment could be used as a form of coercive control. The aim is to get the payments sorted out without government/external help however this is a further example of reforms negatively impacting on those struggling already.

Food poverty

There is not one place to get information on all local food banks. The Trussell trust has a referral process but patients can present themselves to other food banks. Only 3 parcels/year from TT. “Menu for change” – PA is working on reducing the use of emergency food banks. Unsupported trauma is coming up a lot so far.

Devolved benefits

111 health and disability benefits, including PIP, DLA and attendance allowance. Also; carers allowance, best start grant, funeral payment, cold weather/winter fuel payments and discretionary housing payments.

Universal Credit is due to be introduced as it should be more difficult to commit fraud and is supposed to simplify the process, as well as making it easier to go into work. However, each household will receive one payment rather than multiple to reduce admin costs but this could result in numerous issues including, for example, women not receiving money via an abusive

partner. There have been multiple issues in the pilots and early roll-outs, e.g. the computer system not working!

“Give me 5” project: The Scottish government has the capability to top up benefits. PA is campaigning for an extra £5/week/child in child benefit.

There is some shielding of the worst aspects of austerity in Scotland, for example the bedroom tax is mitigated.

There are going to be two benefits systems running in parallel; UK and devolved.

Brexit

Unknown ramifications including those regarding EU legislations e.g. working time directive, and workers’ rights, as well as what happens with funding.

Discussion: High levels of stress mainly for patients but also clinicians regarding benefits. We as GPs often do not have time to do letters for patients but PA says that these can be helpful – they will look into possibility for premade templates for letters that we can adapt to practices. We wondered about the possible future impact of link workers with regards to letters. Hopefully this is the start of a dialogue between PA and GPs at the Deep End.

Contact details:

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Twitter: @PovertyAlliance, @ScottishLivingW, @CPW_Scotland

Facebook: www.facebook.com/povertyalliance; www.facebook.com/ScottishLivingWage

Further reading:

Play and Poverty. http://www.povertyalliance.org/article/play_poverty_fife

Beyond 4Walls http://www.povertyalliance.org/article/b4w_report

Bairns Come First - Child Maintenance

<http://www.fifegingerbread.org.uk/site/assets/files/1166/bairns-come-first-fairness-for-their-future.pdf>.

KEY SUMMARY POINTS:

- Poverty in the UK defined as below 60% of median income level – 20% of population affected
- Most families experiencing poverty have at least one adult in work
- Welfare reforms have been complex and have resulted in increased sanctions and increased use of food banks.
- People living in poverty face stigma and discrimination, which can lead to feelings of shame and embarrassment