

‘Flipping the thinking’ on poverty and its impacts on children’s outcomes

Relationships and Resilience:

Addressing childhood adversity to support children’s learning and wellbeing

21st March 2018

Outline

- Part 1 – conflating the causes and consequences of poverty
 - Why understanding the causes (and therefore the definition) is important
 - Is it only those living in poverty who experience ACEs?
 - Blame, stigma and shame
- Part 2 – poverty of aspirations
 - If politicians get it wrong
 - And the media get it wrong
 - How can we help teachers to get it right?
- Part 3 – flipping the thinking (over to you in groups)

Whose behaviours should we focus on?

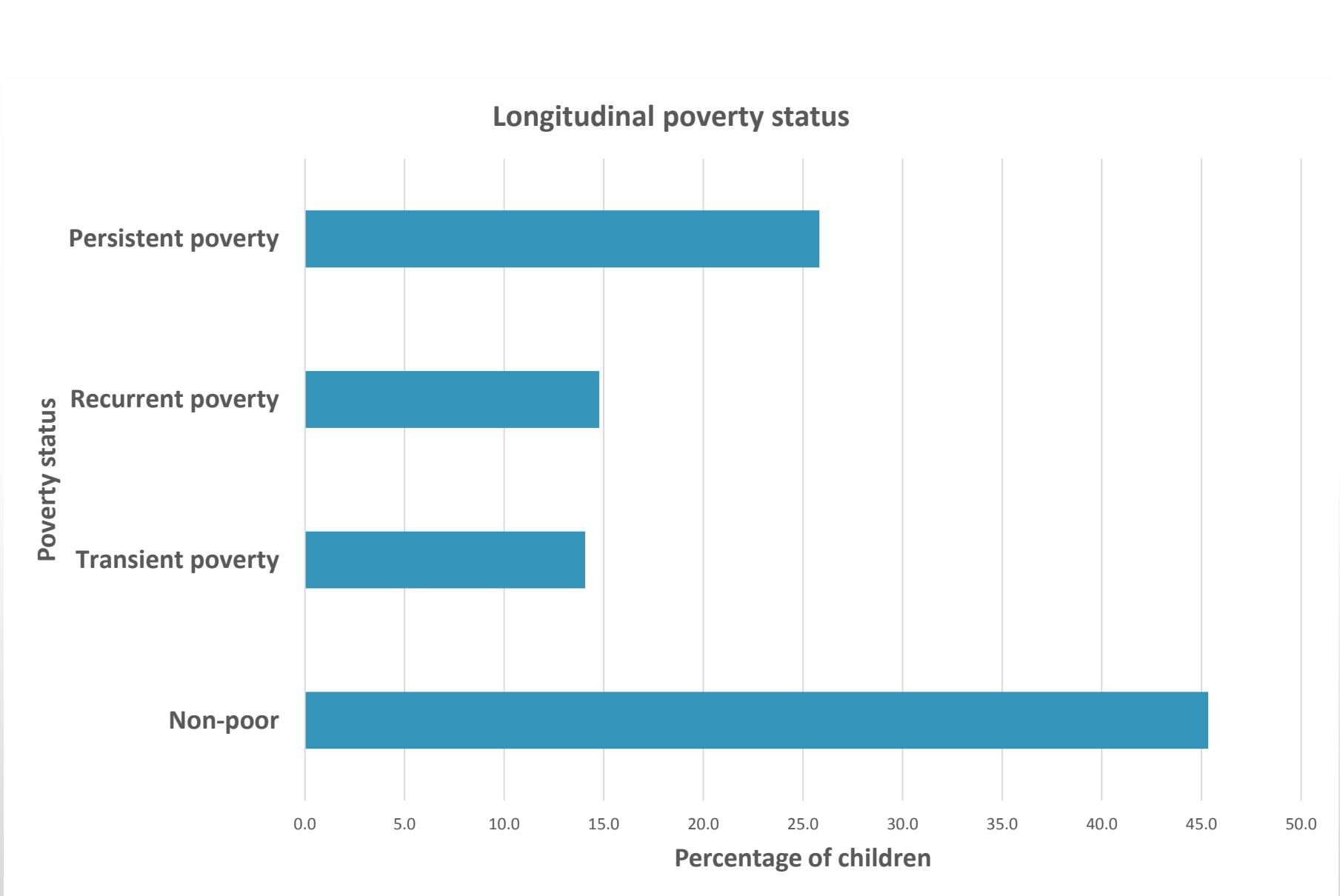
‘what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thoughtful poor people call with equal justice the problem of riches’

‘Improve the character of individuals by all means – if you feel competent to do so, especially of those whose excessive incomes expose them to particular temptations’.

(RH Tawney, 1913, 10)

Let's look at child poverty in Scotland...

- 19% child poverty rate before housing costs (2015-16)
- 26% child poverty rate after housing costs (2015-16)
- 10% / 12% of children in combined low income and material deprivation
- 66% / 70% of children in poverty are in in-work poverty
- 10% / 12% of children are in persistent poverty
- What these statistics do not convey...



Source: Growing Up in Scotland sweeps 1 – 7
Weighted by longitudinal weight from sweep 7

What's the message?

- Note that only 45% of children in Scotland **have not** experienced at least one year of poverty in all seven years of data.
- Poverty is **dynamic**
- There is not a fixed population of people living in poverty
- Annual, cross-sectional snapshots can't tell you that
- But the new experimental statistics on persistent poverty that the Scottish Government are trialling are not cross-sectional so they could do more than they are.

Part 1 – conflating the causes and consequences of poverty

Causes of unemployment

Revealed: The state of people who are fit to be on benefits

- 4 out of 10 work-related benefits claimants are fit to work
- Iain Duncan Smith releases report
- Ministers under fire for capping benefits
- Study found a third of all children are born into poverty

A million on benefit capable of work

One million people who are capable of work are “stuck” on benefits, Iain Duncan Smith will disclose on Wednesday.

The one million who are FIT TO WORK but live on benefits

A MILLION welfare claimants have lived on working-age benefits for three out of the last four years, despite being judged capable of trying to find a job, shocking figures revealed last night.

Iain Duncan Smith Photo: GEOFF PUGH FOR THE TELEGRAPH

Mr Thomas and Ms Howe, an unmarried couple, are now known to millions as ‘Mark and Becky’, the young, jobless couple whose lives and parenting skills dominated this week’s episode of the controversial Channel 4 show Benefits Street.



Benefits scrounger who says his job is to be me' admits shoplifting at Co-op

Stealing £15 worth of food from Co-op in Rotherham, south Yorkshire after starring in Benefits Britain

DATED: 16:09, 3 November 2016

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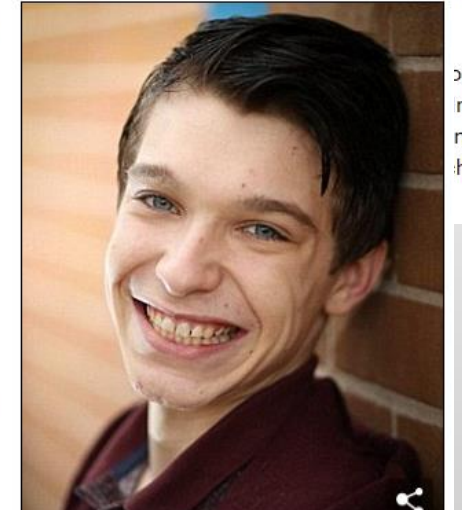
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arrested in October after police identified him from CCTV footage taken at the Co-op in Rotherham, south Yorkshire.



Why is it important to understand the causes of poverty?

- How we understand the causes of poverty will determine how we define it.
- How we define poverty will guide how to measure it:
 - A measurement is important as it allows us to monitor change for the better or worse
- How we define poverty will guide the actions we take to prevent / mitigate it:
 - Eg if a government decides that poverty is not about money then they will have the perfect reason not to give people in poverty more money
- The Coalition government (2010-2015) and the Conservative government (2015-present) tried (and succeeded to a great extent down south) to change the definition of poverty away from income.

Away from income towards what exactly?

- What their ideology told them were major causes of poverty:
 - Addiction (usually portrayed as drugs/alcohol)
 - Poor parenting
 - Being bad at relationships
 - Low educational attainment
 - Worklessness (what does that even mean?)
 - Debt
 - Personal characteristics and behaviours
- By using the media to generate stories of scroungers, and by defining poverty as not being about income, they have been able to foist 8 years of austerity on people with nary a squeak of protest.
- However, if these *were* major drivers of poverty, then a particularly **poor** person would look like ...

Poor Sarah for one...



Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York

"Had I not just chosen food as my friend, I would have chosen something else. I mean a lot of people turn to shopping, alcohol, smoking, any other addiction. My addiction was food."

"I'm a hardworking single mum".

"I'm continually on the verge of financial bankruptcy."

"Do you understand that I absolutely have not a pot to piss in?"

"It's just because my ex-husband's so nice that he lets me be a guest at his house. If I didn't have him I'd be homeless."

"happiest divorced couple in the world".

Sarah, Duchess of York is left 'devastated' after being ditched by her toyboy lover Manuel Fernandez after two years together.

A university education might have helped her navigate her adult life with less drama, she says.

Causes of poverty

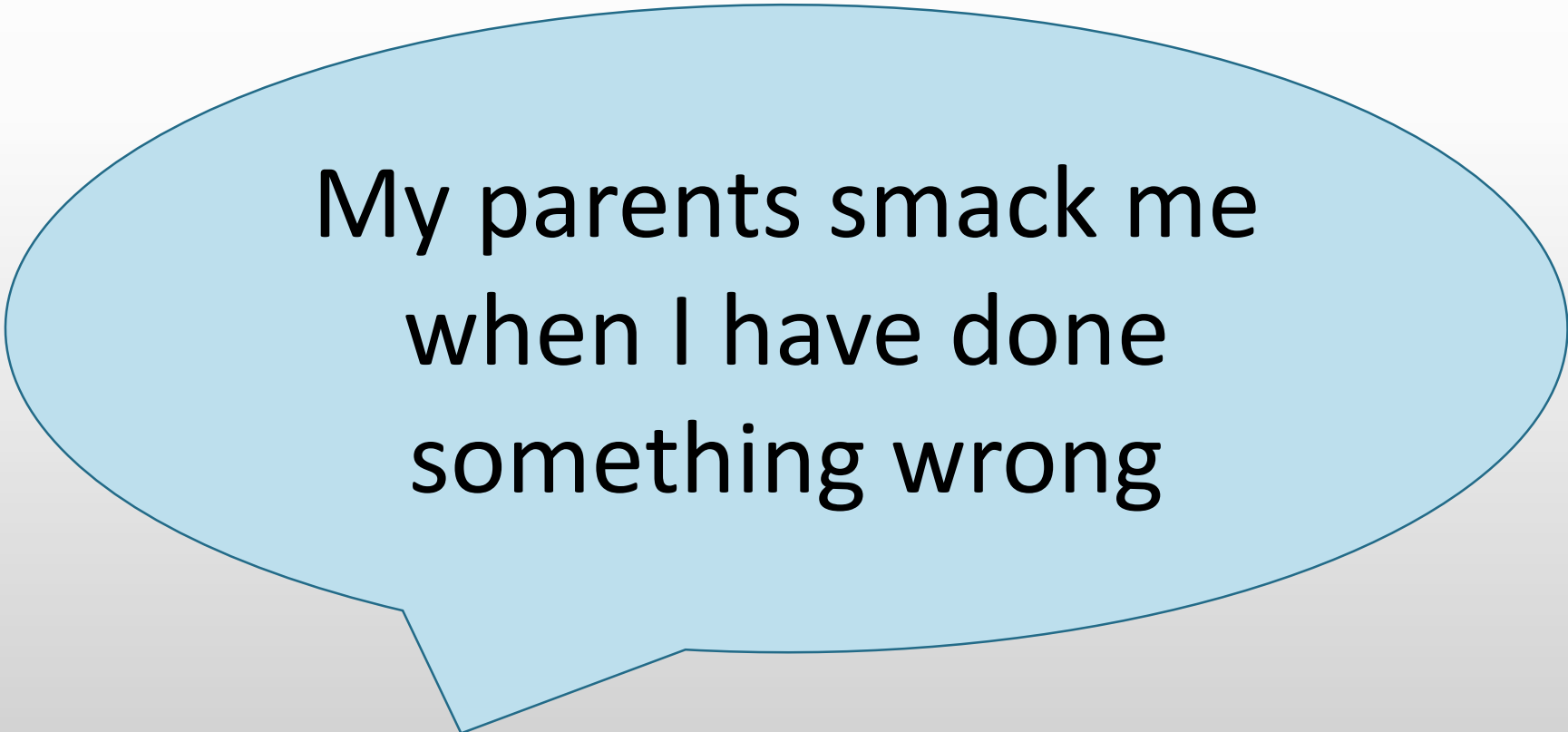
- Poverty is caused by a complex blend of structural issues relating to macro-economic, political, social and individual factors.
- Macro-economic factors, such as economic systems and distribution of wealth, the structure of the labour market, the housing market, low pay, irregular hours and insecure employment cause poverty.
- Political factors, such as the level of social security payments and the recent social security cuts for families both in and out of work, are another cause.
- High costs: the high cost of housing and essential goods and services
- Social factors, such as gender, lone parenthood, disability, age and race/ethnicity result in a heightened risk of living in poverty, although this is not inevitable.
- Low levels of skills or education: young people and adults without the necessary skills and qualifications can find it difficult to get a job, especially one with security, prospects and decent pay
- Individual factors in relation to capacities and choices play a part too, although arguably “what appear to be individual level factors often reflect underlying social and economic processes” (McKendrick, 2016:60).
- Abuse, trauma or chaotic lives are a cause of poverty (but are small in number and should not be conflated with poverty per se)

Why we mustn't confuse poverty with other social problems

Is it only poor kids who get 'smacked'?

Are poor women more likely to experience domestic abuse?

- Question from Growing Up in Scotland (2012 – sweep 7) when 94% of children are 7 years old and 6% are 8 years old (3,353 children in total)



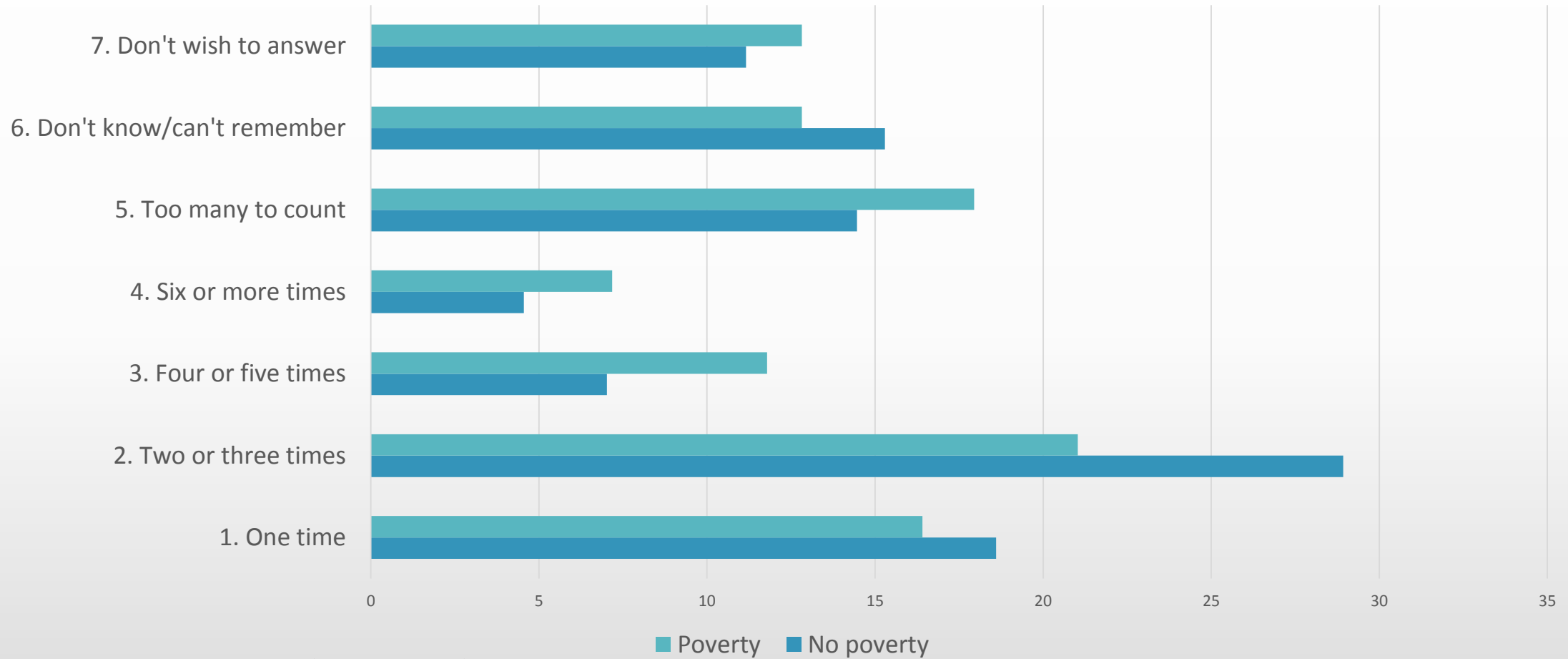
My parents smack me
when I have done
something wrong

	Boys		Girls	
	No poverty	Poverty	No poverty	Poverty
My parents smack me when I have done something wrong				
Never				
Sometimes				
Often				
Always				

	Boys		Girls	
	No poverty	Poverty	No poverty	Poverty
My parents smack me when I have done something wrong				
Never	45.7	41.8	49.5	41.1
Sometimes	33.5	33.1	37.3	37.7
Often	21%	25%	13%	21%
Always				

Source: Growing Up in Scotland (2012 – sweep 7)

Who experiences domestic abuse?



Source: Growing Up in Scotland (2011 – sweep 6)

There was no statistically significant difference between those living in poverty and those not living in poverty. I repeated the analysis with social class and longitudinal poverty – there was no difference.

Key points

- Over half of all children are being smacked at age 7
- This is right across the socioeconomic spectrum
- This rises to almost 60% for boys
- There is a stronger gender difference than poverty difference
- While this is not an ACE as such, if a 7 year old is 'often' or 'always' being smacked then it's detrimental to their wellbeing
- There is no statistically significant difference in experience of domestic violence between those living in poverty and those not living in poverty (is that why the data have not been analysed?).
- This demonstrates why it is important to look at poverty for its own sake and not conflate it with other social problems

Stigma

Stigma and Stereotypes

- ‘Shettleston Man’ – a stereotypical ill, work-shy scrounger:

“This individual has low life expectancy. He lives in social housing, drug and alcohol abuse play an important part in his life and he is always out of work. His white blood cell count killing him directly as a result of his lifestyle and its lack of purpose.” **Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP**

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3560470/Living-and-dying-on-welfare-in-Glasgow-East.html>



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Shettleston Man defines city ills

Shettleston Man personifies Glasgow's ills, according to the right-leaning Centre for Social Justice (CSJ).

His life expectancy is 63 - some 14 years below the UK average.

He lives in social housing and is terminally unemployed.

The CSJ Breakthrough Glasgow report said: "His white blood cell count is killing him due to the stress of living in deprivation."

It said he had no control over his life, with diet and exercise providing no escape.

Only employment could cure him. The impact of stress could be reversed in three years by giving him work, according to researchers

For those at the heart of the community, Shettleston Man personifies a lost generation.

The CSJ, which created the label, was set up by former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

Many still blame his party for creating Shettleston Man while in power.

Local MSP Frank McAveety knows the ills facing his constituency as he lost his father at an early age.

"It is a massive challenge," he said.

"The government ignored lost opportunities in the 1980s. The reality is we need to work with those folk who never got back into work.

"There are ingrained attitudes we need to work to change.

"The answer is changing neighbourhoods through better housing and getting young people to realise the benefit of education."



Confidence is returning to Glasgow's east end, it was claimed

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Stigma of poverty

- Experiencing poverty makes an individual 'different' from the normal expectations of participating in society.
- Substance abuse, “scrounging”, commonly associated with poverty through the behavioural interpretation.
- Stereotypes of poverty focus on individual failings.
- People experiencing poverty also believe these views – importance of shame.
- Shame leads people to conceal their stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1990), ie parents and children may make great efforts not to appear poor in front of other pupils, parents and teachers.

Key messages

- It is important not to get distracted by behavioural, individualised explanations of poverty.
- If we do we will have the wrong response and try to change the wrong things.
- Misunderstandings about poverty can:
 - present barriers to, and direct attention away from, action required to prevent and alleviate its effects.
 - Reduce public support for policies and interventions to prevent and alleviate it.
 - Cause stigma, blame and shame and lead to concealment.

Part 2 - Poverty of Aspirations

Poverty of Aspirations briefing paper

Background

- Aspirations have become a key educational policy driver in the UK and are seen as one of the critical levers for improving educational attainment and raising skills.
- children and their parents are seen as lacking ambition
- leads to a deficit view of aspirations, holding young people and their parents 'responsible' for their 'lack of' ambition.
- but aspirations expressed by young people and their parents reflect the expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcome.

GORDON BROWN

So my argument, and my starting point today, is it is time for Britain to leave behind once and for all this culture of pessimism, any acquiescence in defeatism, any acceptance of low aspirations that holds us back. Poverty of aspiration is as damaging as poverty of opportunity and it is time to replace a culture of low expectations for too many with a culture of high standards for all.

TONY BLAIR

Their poverty is, not just about poverty of income, but poverty of aspiration, of opportunity, of prospects of advancement. We must not in any way let up on the action we take to deal directly with child poverty. But at the same time, we have to recognise that for some families, their problems are more multiple, more deep and more pervasive than simply low income. The barriers to opportunity are about their social and human capital as much as financial. Universal services are not reaching them. And thus it follows that pre-fabricated services cannot answer to individual needs.

Despite excellent work on child poverty by the Scottish Government, myths persist...

Alex Cole-Hamilton (LD)

Naturally, the bill commands the support of the Liberal Democrats. I am heartily glad that that support is shared across the Parliament. There is now a recognition in this chamber that our efforts to tackle the scourge of child poverty must go far beyond just the financial health of our nation's families. I refer to the range of other forms of poverty that are in many ways as pressing as financial poverty and which might have as profound an impact on life outcomes. There is poverty of aspiration, whereby children grow up in families that have experienced generations of unemployment and economic inactivity and do not seek social mobility for themselves; poverty of attachment, particularly among the 15,000 children in our care system who will find it difficult to form lasting adult relationships due to childhood trauma and loss; and poverty of health, whereby poor housing, health inequalities and depression diminish life outcomes and life expectancy.

Michelle Ballantyne (C)

Alex Cole-Hamilton hit the right note when he talked about the other impacts of poverty. The poverty of attachment is something that I have seen through my professional life, and I certainly acknowledge that the poverty of aspiration needs to be addressed. He also highlighted the importance of community planning and the need to ensure that looked after and accommodated children have a voice in the process.

Ruth Maguire (SNP)

Ruth Maguire:



Can the member understand how offensive the term "poverty of aspiration" is to people who simply do not have enough money?

Poverty of aspirations

- Children living in poverty **do** have high aspirations for themselves, although the jobs they aspire to are often of the gendered variety familiar to them within the context of their knowledge and experience, such as hairdressers or mechanics.
- That is to say that *‘aspirations expressed by young people reflect the expectations and constraints inherent within their setting, rather than a free choice of desired outcome’*.
- Children do not start off with low expectations. When they are younger they have the same hopes and dreams as all children, however, their confidence in their ability to attain their aspirations becomes diminished over time.
- Aspirations, even in communities struggling with poverty, are very high—the missing element is the knowledge of how to make these aspirations real and obtainable.
- Parents living in poverty also have high aspirations for their children but feel unable to engage with their child’s learning in the home and feel inadequate in their knowledge and experience to help their children.

Teachers and the poverty of aspiration

- Teachers and student teachers often found to have little understanding of the link between child poverty and educational attainment, which lead to their falling back on negative stereotypes of children and parents living in poverty (Thompson et al, 2016: 220).
- Often teachers do not understand enough about existential poverty to get beyond a pathologising discourse of families, parents and children as feckless and undeserving (Singh et al. 2013)
- Negative stereotypes about impoverished children based on deficit assumptions can perpetuate inequality (Cummings et al., 2012).

Children's experiences of school

"How much I like it when the teacher asks me to tell others about my schoolwork"

"I enjoy learning at school"

"I hate school"

"I look forward to going to school"

Recurrent poverty

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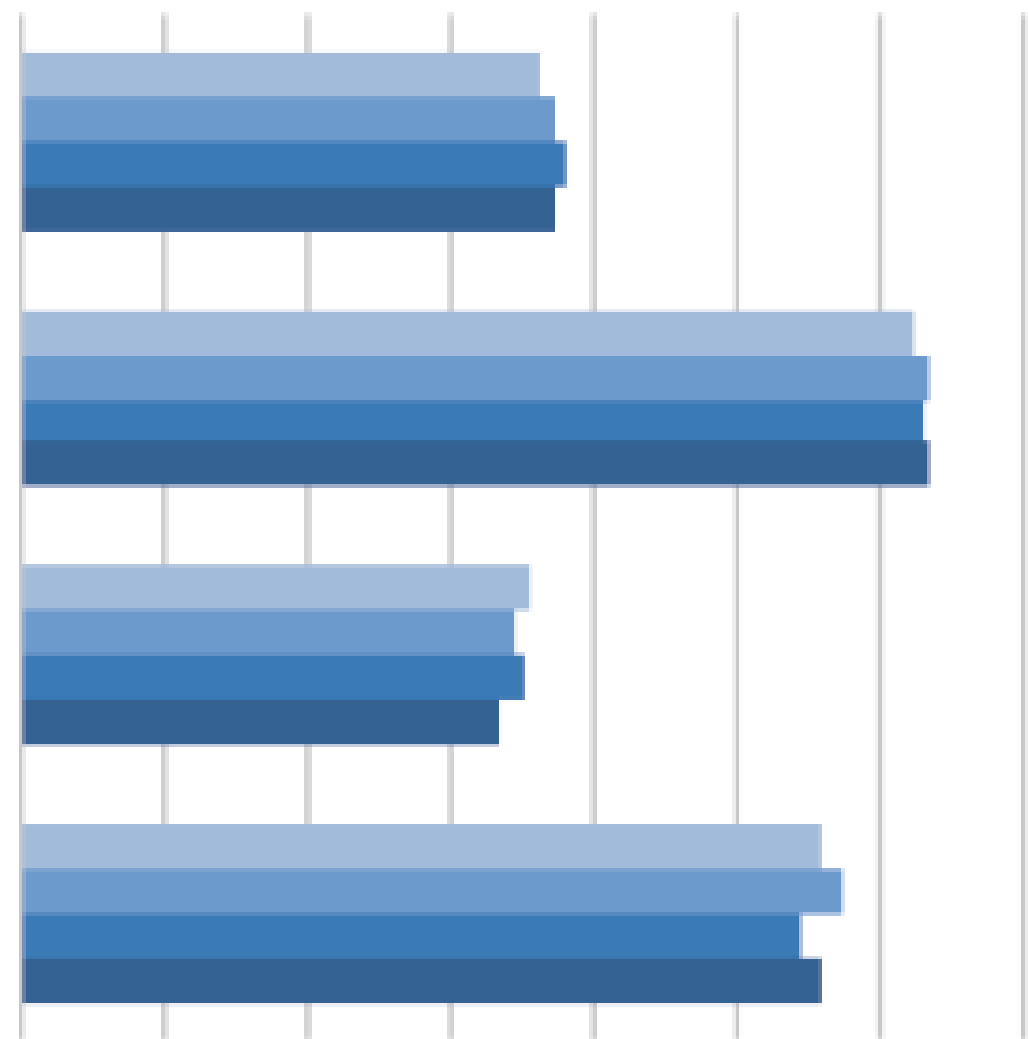
Poverty over time

Persistent poverty

Recurrent poverty

Transient poverty

Non-poor

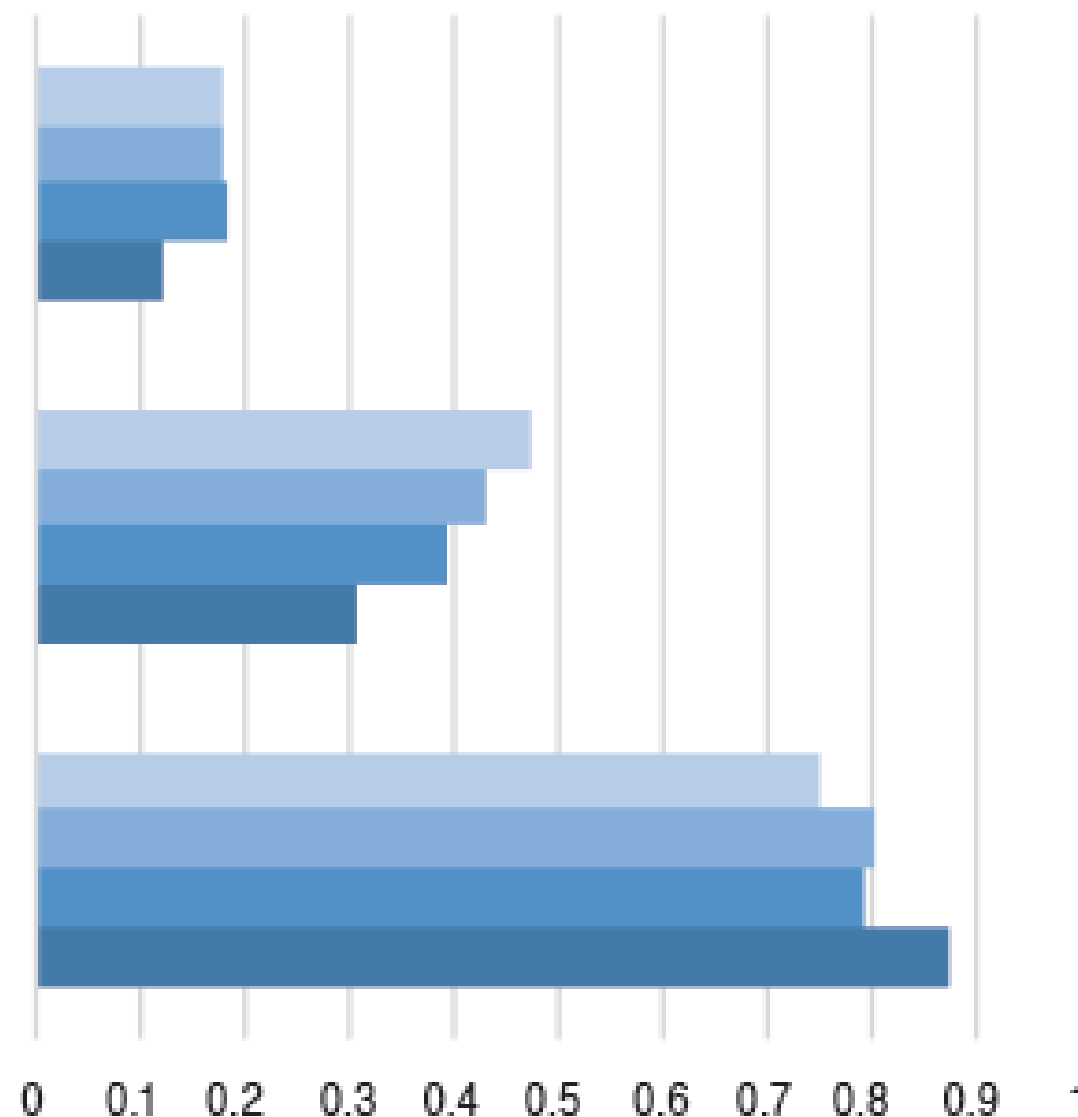


Parental aspirations for child

Aspirations for child: Leaving school to start a training course or apprenticeship

Aspirations for child: Leaving school to go to college/further education

Aspirations for child: Staying on at school



Poverty over time

Persistent poverty

Recurrent poverty

Transient poverty

Non-poor

Parents' experience of their children's education

- For every type of poverty, parents are **less** likely to believe that they can positively influence their child's achievement at school compared to parents with no experience of poverty.
- That is not to say that they believe they cannot, just that they are less likely to believe that they can. This corresponds to the literature that while poorer parents have aspirations for their children they are less confident in their ability to assist them.
- All children are talking about the things they have learned at school with parents irrespective of their experience of poverty.

Poverty of aspirations

- The problem with the 'poverty of aspiration' as a concept is not only that the research evidence does not support it, but also that it passes the responsibility for a presumed lack of aspirations onto parents and children.
- In so doing it shifts responsibility away from local and central government, and schools, to children and parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- However, teachers are also disadvantaged by not understanding the causes of poverty, its effects on children and on their education, and by believing that the poverty of aspirations is a fact.
- Teachers perpetuate the myth but are tasked with solving the problem as it is (wrongly) understood.

Coming at the problem from the wrong angle

- Schools and policy-makers are putting effort into 'raising aspirations' to increase achievement among disadvantaged pupils.
- Focusing on 'raising' aspirations unlikely to narrow the educational attainment gap
- It is based on false assumptions about low aspirations.
- The real challenge for disadvantaged young people is sustaining and achieving their aspirations.
- The challenge for parents is how to understand and support their children's aspirations.
- The challenge for teachers is how to understand the causes and consequences of poverty, and then how to support and sustain aspirations.
- It's about knowledge, experiences, support and relationships.

Key messages

- School is important to, and for, children living in poverty
- Parents living in poverty value school and want to help
- The 'Poverty of Aspiration' is a myth
- Parents all want the best for their child
- Parents living in poverty less likely to know what that looks like or how to achieve it
- Parents living in poverty less likely to know how to help their child
- Teachers on the whole would like to help but are trying to change the wrong thing, often through misunderstandings of poverty itself.

“Those of us with no experience of sailing in the Mediterranean do not aspire to yacht ownership on the Côte d’Azur. That does not make us deficient in aspiration; rather, we aspire to what we have experience of, what we know we can influence, and what we believe we can achieve. ”

Part 3 - workshop

‘Flipping the thinking’ JFK-style



“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

John F. Kennedy Inauguration speech, 20 January 1961