7º Encontro Internacional de Política Social
14º Encontro Nacional de Política Social
Tema: Contrarreformas ou Revolução: respostas ao
capitalismo em crise
Vitória (ES, Brasil), 3 a 6 de junho de 2019

Mesa coordenada Early Child Development.

NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC POLICIES AND CHILDREN IN THE UK: A CRISIS UNFOLDING

Gary Spolander[1]

Abstract

The UK has been a leader in the promotion of neoliberal economic policies (Couldry, 2010). Global economic change and the last financial crisis have enabled the imposition of "austerity" (Jordan & Drakeford, 2012) and reductions to the UK welfare state. The consequences of these "austerity" policies have been increased numbers of citizens dependent on food banks, visible increases to homelessness and reductions in expenditure on education, social welfare and health services (Strier, 2013). The origins, nature and impact of these economic crises, along with altered political and economic perspectives, have provided an important backdrop to the aetiology, nature and extent to which social distress is experienced individually and collectively in families and communities today. Economic and social isolation of marginalised groups such as the unemployed, youth, migrant workers, undocumented workers and those with low social visibility (Strier, 2013) have all increased. Importantly equality in society is strongly correlated to better social outcomes, evident in measures such as life expectancy, infant mortality, murder rates, teenage pregnancy, trust, obesity, mental illness, illiteracy and imprisonment (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Likewise for a good life and healthy society, dimensions such as health, a home, meaningful work/activity, a degree of status and respect, security and reduced fear about losing or maintaining these aspects are also correlated (Oxfam, 2013). Changes to social welfare are having enormous impacts for the most vulnerable including children.

The Social Metrics Commission (2018) estimate that poverty effects one in four children, with 4.5 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2017-18. That's more than 33% of children, with estimates that this will increase to 5.3 million as a result of government cuts (IFS, 2018).

---

[1] Coventry University. E-mail: <aa2912@coventry.ac.uk>.

Poverty is highest in families with at least one disabled person, single-parent families, and households where no one works or that are dependent for income on irregular or zero-hours jobs (ibid). Twelve percent of the total UK population is in "persistent" poverty, with the poor significantly less likely than the wealthy to drink to excess or take illegal drugs (Social Metrics Commission, 2018). That this is a direct consequence of current government policy is evidenced by the fact that child poverty reduced between 1998/9-2011/12 resulting in a reduction of 800,000 children living in poverty (Child Poverty Action Group, 2018). Work does not guarantee the lack of poverty as 67% of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person works. Children in large families are at a far greater risk of poverty – 42% of children living in families with 3 or more children. Child poverty has long-lasting effects, by GCSE, there is a 28% gap between children receiving free school meals compared to peers in terms of the number achieving at least 5 A*-C GCSE grades. Poverty is also related to more complicated health histories over the course of a lifetime, again influencing earnings as well as the overall quality and length of life. Men in the most deprived areas of England have a life expectancy 9.2 years shorter than men in the least deprived areas, and spend 14% less of their life in good health. Women share similar statistics. Childcare and housing are two of the costs that take the biggest toll on families' budgets when childcare costs are considered, an extra 130,000 children are pushed into poverty.

Role of the state as a buffer against poverty (Gregory & Holloway, 2005) and the ills capitalism has reduced significantly in recent years. Social work is a key profession in working with deprived children. Neoliberalism has had a significant impact on the structural and organisational contexts for social work, including how the profession is enacted (Wallace & Pease, 2011). The impact of neoliberal policy on social work has been at macro, mezzo and micro levels. At macro level this has been through regulation and policy, mezzo through employment and management and micro influences how social workers do their jobs, their values and their functions. Social work has been confronted by policy promoting greater interventionalist roles with so called "troubled families" (Featherstone, White, & Morris, 2014) regulation, penality and governance of the poor (Wacquant, 2009, 2012), with certain population groups targeted through child protection (Bywaters, 2013; Bywaters, Brady, Sparks, & Bos, 2014; Parton, 2014). Marginalised families have become further marginalised, through the restriction of services (Murray, 1994), reductions to the role of preventative services (Dominelli, 1996) and increased professional managerialist supervision and

management (Wastell, White, Broadhurst, Peckover, & Pithouse, 2010). The constant process of change and reinvention of social welfare structures, reinforces the continued focus of pressing service demands (Pollitt, 2008). Social work has been challenged by balancing collectivity and individual freedoms in practice (Lorenz, 2005, 2015, 2016). While social work has a unique position at the nexus of the powerful and the poor offering unique insight, its role and voice is disappearing… if it ever was there.

References:

Bywaters, P. (2013). Inequalities in Child Welfare: Towards a New Policy, Research and Action Agenda. *British Journal of Social Work*. http://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct079

Bywaters, P., Brady, G., Sparks, T., & Bos, E. (2014). Inequalities in child welfare intervention rates: The intersection of deprivation and identity. *Child and Family Social Work, 21,* 452–463. http://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12161

Couldry, N. (2010). *Why voice matters: Culture and politics after neoliberalism*. London: SAGE Publications.

Dominelli, L. (1996). Deprofessionalizing Social Work : Competencies and Postmodernism, 153–175.

Featherstone, B., White, S., & Morris, K. (2014). *Re-imagining child protection – towards humane social work with families*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Gregory, M., & Holloway, M. (2005). Language and the shaping of social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 35*(1), 37–53.

Jordan, B., & Drakeford, M. (2012). *Social Work and Social Policy under Austerity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lorenz, W. (2005). Decentralisation and Social Services in England, *3*(2), 1613–8953. Retrieved from http://www.socwork.net/Lorenz2005c.pdf

Lorenz, W. (2015). Practising history Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work, 50*(5), 597–612. http://doi.org/10.1177/0020872807079918

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question, *1457*(January). http://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

Murray, C. (1994). *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens*. London: IEA.

Oxfam. (2013). *The New Measure of Scotland's Prosperity: Second Results*. Oxford. Retrieved from https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/293743/rr-humankind-index-second-results-100613-en.pdf;jsessionid=DE2A0BE01363D4AF45E1AEA5F49CE4CC?sequence=1

Parton, N. (2014). *The politics of child protection: Contemporary developments and future directions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pollitt, C. (2008). *Time, Policy, Management: Governing with the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Social Metrics Commission. (2018). *POVERTY A new measure of poverty for the UK The final report of the Social Metrics Commission*. London. Retrieved from http://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/MEASURING-POVERTY-FULL_REPORT.pdf

Strier, R. (2013). Responding to the Global Economic Crisis: Inclusive Social Work Practice. *Social Work, 58*(4), 344–353 10p. http://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt040

Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing The Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham, NC.: Duke University Press.

Wacquant, L. (2012). Three steps to a historical anthropology of actually existing neoliberalism. *Social Anthropology*, *20*(1), 66–79. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2011.00189.x

Wallace, J., & Pease, B. (2011). Neoliberalism and Australian social work: Accommodation or resistance? *Journal of Social Work*, *11*(2), 132–142. http://doi.org/10.1177/1468017310387318

Wastell, D., White, S., Broadhurst, K., Peckover, S., & Pithouse, a. (2010). Children's services in the iron cage of performance management: street-level bureaucracy and the spectre of Švejkism. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *19*(3), 310–320. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2009.00716.x

Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.