An inquiry into poverty-related stigma in Scotland

Cross Party Group POVERTY

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty

February 2023

the POVERTY ALLIANCE

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

Introduction

Acknowledgements

We want to extend our thanks to everyone who contributed to this inquiry by sharing their experiences and expertise. A special thanks to those individuals who shared their own experiences of poverty-related stigma and to those individuals who took part in the discussion event with MSPs. We are grateful for the support of both Neil Gray MSP and Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP in their capacity as convenors of this cross party group and their endorsement of an investigation into the role of poverty-related stigma.

About the Cross Party Group (CPG) on Poverty

The Cross Party Group on Poverty in the Scottish Parliament is a forum for exploring the drivers of and solutions to poverty in Scotland. It acts to connect MSPs with organisations working to tackle poverty, as well as with people living on low incomes across Scotland, in order to better inform anti-poverty policymaking and contribute to the ending of poverty in Scotland.

About the inquiry

In January 2022, the CPG on Poverty launched an inquiry into poverty-related stigma in Scotland. The scope of the inquiry was to explore the causes and impacts of stigma, as well as potential solutions. In the process of undertaking this inquiry, we:

- Hosted a roundtable with members of the media to explore how poverty-related stigma can be exacerbated and tackled through the media.
- Hosted a discussion event with people with lived experience of poverty-related stigma and MSPs to understand the real impact in people's daily lives.
- Called for written evidence of which we received submissions from 20 organisations and one individual discussing how poverty-related stigma is created, maintained and its impact on different communities in Scotland.

This report provides an overview of the written evidence submitted to the inquiry and incorporates evidence discussed within the sessions outlined above. The report concludes by making a number of recommendations around how we can tackle poverty-related stigma in Scotland.

Executive summary

The submissions to this inquiry have highlighted that poverty-related stigma is extensive and deep-rooted in Scotland. This stigma continues to manifest in several reinforcing ways, impacting people's mental health and wellbeing; erecting barriers to accessing support; restricting educational attainment; and influencing the design and resourcing of policies that can tackle poverty.

Poverty-related stigma is felt broadly by all low-income communities. However, a number of submissions also noted that specific groups of people who are at particular risk of poverty can experience multiple forms of stigma and discrimination simultaneously. Black and minority ethnic people, women, disabled people and people with experience of the criminal justice system experience an intersectional double-whammy of disadvantage which intensifies the impact of stigma on the lives of individuals and communities.

Societal perceptions and treatment of those experiencing poverty have become ingrained, not only among the broader population, but in how people experiencing poverty perceive themselves. As a result, poverty-related stigma negatively impacts the mental health and self-esteem of people experiencing poverty by reinforcing feelings of shame and self-blame. This is exacerbated by narratives that present poverty as an individual choice, rather than structural issue.

Negative assumptions about people living on low incomes have been used to justify policy changes and the under-resourcing of services. For example, submissions noted that stigmatising views of those living in poverty often formed part of the rationale for welfare reform by the UK Government. The resulting policy changes have undermined our social security safety net, impacting on awareness of support; how often support is awarded to applicants; and how easy it is to access. People on low incomes continue to experience shame about their situation as a result of these narratives, impacting the uptake of support including free school meals, debt advice and social security.

Respondents were keen to highlight that it is possible to design policies which actively challenge, rather than reinforce, poverty-related stigma. Throughout the submissions to this inquiry, the importance of introducing a "no-wrong door" approach to support; investing in benefit uptake programmes; automating benefits; and prioritising cash-first models were highlighted as best practice in minimising stigma. Moreover, Social Security Scotland's focus on dignity, respect and human rights was welcomed by respondents in actively challenging stigma in design and delivery.

Submissions to this inquiry highlighted that placing lived experience at the heart of all decision-making and policy design via genuine co-design and co-production processes was key to tackling poverty-related stigma. Similarly, the media should hold politicians to account for their views and give space to people who are experts by experience. We must listen to people with lived experience as experts in poverty-related stigma; its causes, consequences, and solutions, and amplify their thoughts.

The focus and tone that the media adopts in relation to poverty influences how it is perceived and understood by the public. Consequently, the frequent use of stereotypes and inaccurate depictions of people and communities experiencing

poverty was identified by contributors as a key cause of poverty-related stigma. Online media and the need to generate clicks was seen as further encouraging sensationalised and narrowly-focused stories about poverty that do not embed compassion towards people living on low incomes.

Social media has also become another arena where people, especially young people, experience poverty-related stigma. The rise of online influencers and a culture which implies that "wealth = value" has contributed to the further devaluing of people on low incomes. By contrast, there was also acknowledgement that those with a public platform can break down stigmatising ideas of poverty. Public figures such as Marcus Rashford and Martin Lewis were highlighted as increasing awareness of support and sharing content that indicated that struggling with money is not something to be ashamed of. People using their platform in such a manner can reinforce the idea that poverty is not a choice made by individuals, but rather the result of systemic failure.

Respondents highlighted that the UK and the Scottish Government have a responsibility to dispel myths regarding poverty. This report emphasises the long-term implications of language used by politicians, Governments and the media. Much of the narrative and language used throughout the period of austerity around "deserving" and "undeserving" recipients of welfare, and "scroungers" continues to linger large within people's understandings of poverty. Of great concern is the fact many people on low incomes have internalised this stigma and use these tropes to judge themselves. While politicians and elected members will have different views on poverty, it is clearly possible to retain ideological perspectives on poverty without stigmatising those who experience it.

Overall, the findings of this inquiry again underscore the fact that tackling poverty-related stigma should be viewed as a critical aspect of action to end poverty in Scotland.

Key Findings

- Poverty-related stigma is pervasive in Scotland with the public and media holding negative views about poverty and people experiencing poverty.
- The stigma associated with experiences of poverty results in shame and secrecy meaning that researchers, governments and the general public are broadly unaware of the full experience of poverty.
- There is no homogenised experience of poverty-related stigma. Stigma interacts with other forms of disadvantage and inequality which means that Black and minority ethnic (BME) people, women, disabled people, people with problem drug and alcohol use, people with experience of the criminal justice system and single parents have specific experiences of stigma.
- Poverty-related stigma creates barriers to people accessing the support they are entitled to including social security, emergency welfare and support with debt. As a result, stigma can deepen experiences of poverty.
- Stigma negatively impacts the mental health and self-esteem of people experiencing poverty by reinforcing feelings of shame and causing isolation and withdrawal.
- In addition to impacting individuals, poverty-related stigma can impact particular geographies and areas. This contributes to feelings of shame

among local communities and the designation of communities as 'no go' areas.

- Neglect of physical spaces where people experiencing poverty live, work and access support can communicate the notion that these areas are not worthy of care or maintenance. This means people accessing these services do not feel valued which exacerbates any feelings of shame.
- Poverty-related stigma has implications for educational attainment, often holding children back from fully participating in school academically, socially and in extra curriculars.
- Assumptions about people in poverty impacts public service delivery. For example, stigma can result in less favourable treatment of people by public service staff or in approaches to debt collection services.
- Poverty-related stigma negatively impacts on the development and resourcing of policies designed to tackle poverty, such as social security.
- Stigma also impacts whether people's applications for support will be accepted and how difficult application processes are. For example, there is often a large burden of proof when accessing support, especially for disabled people.
- The causes of poverty-related stigma are multi-faceted, including media narratives and coverage of poverty, the use of language by people in position of influence and power, and policy design.
- The emergence of online journalism creates an incentive for content that stigmatises people living in poverty. Reliance on 'clickbait' stories to generate clicks and profit coupled with a need to meet tight deadlines often result in articles being published that have not considered the impact of poverty-related stigma.
- Social media has become another sphere where poverty-related stigma is both promoted and experienced. Evidence shows that the framing by social media influencers around their own wealth and opportunities has contributed to feelings of stigma around people experiencing poverty, particularly younger people.
- There is a lack of data relating to experiences of poverty-related stigma from the perspective of those that are affected by these issues. Without this data, it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of poverty stigma; which types of poverty stigma are felt most acutely by which groups in society; or whether poverty stigma is increasing or decreasing over time.
- There are some positive examples of public services effectively challenging stigma including the formation of Social Security Scotland which has placed emphasis on dignity, respect and entitlements being a human right. This approach helps to remove feelings of shame and promote higher self-esteem among people experiencing poverty.

What is poverty-related stigma?

Poverty-related stigma is a process whereby individuals or communities are devalued because they live in poverty or access services which are designed to support people living on low incomes. It is complex, multi-dimensional and can be perpetuated through language, cultures, policies, institutions, and systems.

Structurally, poverty-related stigma manifests through institutional policies or practices that disadvantage individuals living on low incomes. This can be seen in policy design including, for example, the often-complex system for applying for social security. This makes it extremely daunting to apply for benefits and causes significant stress for those who do choose to go through the process.

In the public sphere, stigma can be seen through negative public attitudes regarding people living in poverty and the systems in place to support them, for example, stereotypical representations in the media of people 'scrounging off the system' or notions of poverty being the result of poor choices by the individual as opposed to structural failings through government policy.

Lastly, poverty-related stigma can also be felt internally by the individual and have consequences on the emotional and mental well-being of those experiencing poverty. This can be seen in personal experiences of stigma among individuals living on low incomes such as internalised self-stigma and feelings of shame which may prevent someone from being honest about their circumstances and hesitant in reaching out for support.[1]

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[1] Inglis, G., Jenkins, P., McHardy, F., Sosu, E., & Wilson, C. (2022). Poverty stigma, mental health, and well-being: A rapid review and synthesis of quantitative and qualitative research. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology,1–24. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2677

Section 1: Impacts of poverty-related stigma

Q1. What is the scale and extent of poverty-related stigma?

It was clear from the range of submissions we received that the scale of poverty-related stigma in Scotland is extensive, deep-rooted and manifests in a number of reinforcing ways. Submissions showed that poverty-related stigma impacts both the personal experience of poverty by lowering self-esteem in individuals, and on the political narrative around poverty, by negatively shaping policies designed to tackle poverty like social security.

A number of organisations stated in their submissions that stigmatising beliefs about poverty were widespread among the public. These beliefs are then reinforced through media outlets and prominent public figures who, through their method of talking about poverty, worsen the stigma faced by those living on the lowest incomes. Organisations who contributed to this inquiry relayed detailed accounts of people on the lowest incomes facing the daily consequences of poverty-related stigma. Unfortunately, there is currently no mechanism to measure the prevalence of poverty-related stigma, therefore making a definitive statement on the scale and extent of poverty-related stigma hard to quantify. The British Social Attitude Survey provides some indication of the extent to which members of the public hold negative attitudes toward people living in poverty. In 2020, 22% of respondents agreed with the statement "most people on the dole are fiddling one way or another."[2]

These ideas and narratives about people living in poverty are often internalised by people on low incomes, who are made to feel extreme shame about their circumstances and fear potential retribution from being honest about their financial situations. In their submission, Christians Against Poverty (CAP) note that the narrative that people in debt are "bad with money" or "cannot budget" causes many of those accessing their debt advice service to feel embarrassed and attempt to hide their debt. This can cause delays to accessing help and thus worsens people's financial situation.

More generally, the secrecy and shame that surrounds experiences of poverty can mean that researchers, governments, and the general public are broadly unaware of the full experience of poverty which can fuel misinformation and perpetuate false ideas about the causes of and solutions to poverty. To this end, the joint submission from the Poverty Alliance, Mental Health Foundation, and the University of the West of Scotland and University of Strathclyde noted the lack of evidence relating to poverty-related stigma. In particular, the submission highlighted a significant lack of evidence on issues such as the types of stigma most prevalent in populations affected by poverty; wider inequalities and outcomes of being impacted by one or multiple forms of poverty based stigma; as well as the mechanisms by which experiences of poverty-related stigma impact life course outcomes.

The stigma associated with poverty can often interact with other forms of stigma and create multi-layered and intersecting stigma. For example, in their submission, the

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[2] NatCen Social Research (2020). New values, new divides? The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public attitudes. Available at: https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-38/new-values-new-divides.aspx

Scottish Violence Reduction Unit note that people with experience of the criminal justice system may experience stigma associated with their status as having experience of the criminal justice system. This can hinder employment opportunities and plunge people into poverty where they then face both the stigma associated with having experiences of the criminal justice system and the stigma associated with living in poverty. Likewise, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection described how children and young people in poverty with experiences of care often live with the compounded stigma associated with experience of being in the care system again further entrenching difficulties they already face due to experiencing care, making them more vulnerable to poverty.

A number of submissions also noted that, while poverty-related stigma is felt broadly by all communities, specific groups of people who are at particular risk of poverty can experience multiple forms of stigma and discrimination simultaneously. This includes Black and minority ethnic (BME) people, women, people with problem drug and alcohol use, people with experience of the criminal justice system, single parents and disabled people. Education Institute Scotland highlight that for these groups, there is an "intersectional double-whammy" of stigma which intensifies the impact of stigma on the lives of individuals and communities. How stigma is experienced by particular groups of people is covered in more detail in question five.

Stigma may also be layered whereby people feel stigma more acutely due to their contrasting living circumstances and geography. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) explain that parents on low incomes who live in affluent areas may struggle to support their children at school due to higher costs such as more expensive uniforms, extra curriculars and equipment.

> *"It's humiliating trying to not sound poor in a well to do area." (Parent from CPAG's Cost of the School Day Project)*

Likewise, those living in rural areas and on a low income may struggle with lack of available, affordable public transport and a lack of nearby services designed to support people in poverty.

> *"I think that many of the rural areas where our school is situated are seen as affluent therefore there is a stark contrast between those who can afford and those who can't." (Head Teacher from CPAG's Cost of the School Day Project)*

Both affluent areas and rural locations are spaces where it is assumed that poverty does not exist or is minimal. Individuals experiencing poverty in these areas often feel a greater sense of shame; feel pressured into concealing their financial worries; and face additional difficulties in accessing suitable support.

Q2. What are the key impacts of poverty-related stigma on you and/or the people that your organisation works with?

For people living in poverty, poverty-related stigma is a very real and intensely felt experience that has direct and daily impacts on their lives. Most commonly, submissions stated that poverty-related stigma:

- prevents people from coming forward for support.
- instils feelings of shame and poor self-esteem and negatively impacts mental health; and
- due to the above, is actively preventing the reduction of poverty in Scotland.

Stigma as a barrier to accessing support

The purpose of social security should be to provide financial support to people who are facing financial challenges and insecurity, However, submissions from both Centre for Excellence in Children's Care (CELCIS) and Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) highlighted that discussions around social security are often tainted by narratives such as scrounging or accusations of benefit fraud. Press coverage and public discussion on social security can often focus on ideas of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, leading to notions that some people do not deserve social security. This together creates a reluctance to apply for social security and an urge to hide the realities of their financial circumstances. CPAG highlighted that polling data from 2012 supports the conclusion that stigma impacts benefit take-up, with one in four respondents to an IPSOS MORI survey commissioned by Turn 2 Us giving at least one stigma-related reason for delaying or not claiming benefits.[3] The Corra Foundation's submission also reflected this, highlighting a local food initiative that found that people were concerned about being seen queuing outside a food bank. As a result, individuals held back from accessing this support for fear of judgement from others in the community.

The joint submission from the Poverty Alliance, University of the West of Scotland, University of Strathclyde and the Mental Health Foundation also highlighted that people experience stigma when accessing public services.[4] Participants in a 2019 study described their experiences of claiming benefits and interacting with social security systems in the UK as being degrading, punitive, and unsupportive. Participants also reported encountering judgemental behaviour from Job Centre staff and described the process of applying for disability benefits as being particularly stigmatising.[5]

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[3] Turn 2 Us (2013) *Benefits Stigma in Britain* available at
https://www.turn2us.org.uk/T2UWebsite/media/Documents/Benefits-Stigma-in-Britain.pdf
[4] Inglis, G., McHardy, F., Sosu, E., McAteer, J., & Biggs, H. (2019) Health inequality implications from a qualitative study of experiences of poverty stigma in Scotland. *Social Science and Medicine*, *232* 43-49.
[5] This study explored how individuals with experience of living on a low-income in Scotland experience various forms of poverty stigma. 39 adults, recruited from community organisations supporting individuals living on low incomes in Scotland, participated in focus groups to discuss their experiences of poverty stigma.

> *"I think the way the Job Centres treat people who are on benefits is absolutely shocking. I mean, these are the people that are employed to help people to get back to work, but they're the most likely to judge you." (Female focus group participant).*

GDA expanded on this in their submission and noted that for disabled people, this narrative around "deserving" poor is especially harmful and pervasive. GDA's Welfare Rights Officers reported that individuals fear of being viewed as "undeserving" or a "scrounger" is listed as a common reason for their hesitancy in applying for welfare and other non-financial support. GDA members have commented that the direct experience of being stigmatised in their previous engagement with public bodies and public services is central to their reluctance to access services unless in an emergency or crisis.

The fear of judgement and shame also impacts issues like accessing support for debt. CAP highlighted in their submission that although poverty is the primary driver of problem debt, poverty-related stigma traps people in this debt. The feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear and guilt prevent people from reaching out for financial support, leading to a worsened financial situation and making it harder for people to escape their debt. The often-hidden nature of problem debt also means that options for support are not discussed openly as individuals instinctively want to hide their financial circumstances. Consequently, many people are unsure where to go when faced with problem debt.

Stigma negatively impacts mental health and self-esteem

A joint submission from the Poverty Alliance, University of the West of Scotland, University of Strathclyde and the Mental Health Foundation highlighted that people living in poverty are disproportionately affected by mental health problems.[6] The relationship between poverty and mental health is multi-faceted and mutually reinforcing: mental health problems increase an individual's risk of experiencing poverty and the experience of poverty has a negative effect on mental health and well-being. Some people experiencing poverty internalise the stigmatising attitudes they have experienced. Demonstrating this, the joint submission noted a 2019 study where participants described how negative public attitudes can diminish their self-esteem:

> *"People's attitudes does knock your confidence, it does knock your self-esteem" (Male focus group participant).*

The impact of not being believed when applying for social security was a common theme in submissions. GDA shared that their members often identify poverty-related stigma as a prominent source of lowered self-esteem and poor mental well-being. The process of having to reapply for multiple benefits and prove that they deserve the support makes individuals feel as though that are untrustworthy and generates feelings of shame and stigma. A submission from an individual stated:

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[6] Lister, R. (2013) 'Power, not pity: poverty and human rights', *Ethics and Social Welfare* 7(2) 109-23.

> *"There are huge impacts on the health and mental health of disabled single mums, not only because we are never believed, but also because we live in such a precarious financial position."*

Includem highlight that this process compounds the feeling of being ashamed of their circumstances and causes people living on low incomes to remain in a state of defensiveness – always ready to defend themselves, their lifestyles and income levels. Includem's submission highlighted that parents who they had interviewed regarding their experiences with social security continually attempted to dispel negative ideas about their financial status for fear of being judged.

One parent was keen to emphasise that she was managing her money well:

> *"I budget and I'm a saver, I don't squander it. We are careful with money, and I don't go out."*

Another initially responded to being asked about her finances in a way that suggested she did not want to be judged for how she uses her income:

> *"I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't take drugs."*

These responses from Includem illustrate how societal perceptions and treatment of those experiencing poverty becomes ingrained, not only among the broader population, but in how people experiencing poverty perceive themselves. This is likely to have far-reaching mental health implications for people and communities across Scotland.

Q3. How does poverty-related stigma impact on communities that are more likely to be affected by poverty?

It was a commonly held position across all submissions and discussion that ending poverty in Scotland will be made significantly harder without action to tackle poverty-related stigma.

Deepening experiences of poverty

Poverty-related stigma increases reluctance to applying for available support, particularly social security entitlements and emergency support. As a result, poverty-related stigma has a profoundly negative impact on the financial well-being of low-income communities. The ALLIANCE point out that if people are reluctant to seek out support, whether from social security, public services, or the third sector, they are likely to experience deeper and longer-lasting poverty. Thus, tackling poverty-related stigma must be considered a key component of any strategies directed at tackling poverty.

Health Inequalities

Data from the National Records of Scotland shows that women and men in the most deprived areas live 10.5 years less and 13.7 years less respectively than those in the

least deprived areas.[7] Similarly, research by Public Health Scotland identified that children in the lowest income households are four times more likely to experience mental health problems, with consequences extending into adulthood.[8]

The 2019 study mentioned above aimed to understand how experiences with poverty-related stigma may affect health and contribute to health inequalities. Participants discussed stigma in relation to emotional well-being and described the negative emotional consequences of experiencing stigma, which included feelings of embarrassment:

> *"It's not a nice feeling that people are judging you when you're just trying to do your best." (Female focus group participant).*

Space and place

CELCIS's submission noted that poverty-related stigma can create notions that certain areas are "rough" and become de facto "no-go" places. This has consequences for the people who live, work and socialise in these areas; instilling feelings of low worth based on their surroundings. CELCIS elaborated on the consequences of this for the individuals living there:

> *"Myths are perpetuated that all individuals living in a particular area belong there due to poverty, that they are there because of their own fault, and also that everyone that is poor lives in rough areas and is uneducated."[9]*

These experiences were echoed by research from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit who conducted a community survey with over 400 people. Among the responses, people spoke about the reputation of the area they lived in being an immediate barrier:

> *"I feel like there is a stigma attached to the area when trying to get a job or go to college."*

> *"As soon as you speak to someone you are judged by your postcode. Even down to job opportunities."*

> *"The minute you say where you're from, they automatically think you're scum."*

Moreover, these areas can often be targeted by businesses profiteering from people struggling with their finances. The ALLIANCE noted the known relationship between poverty and gambling, with poorer communities being deliberately targeted by the

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[7] Life Expectancy in Scotland 2019-2021. National Records of Scotland. 2022. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/life-expectancy-in-scotland/19-21/life-expectancy-19-21-report.pdf

[8] Public Health Scotland (2021) *Child poverty overview* Available at: https://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/child-poverty/child-poverty-overview/impact-of-child-poverty

[9] The Poverty Truth Commission (2016) *Poverty in Scotland* available at https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2016/06/poverty-scotland/documents/00502217-pdf/00502217-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00502217.pdf

gambling industry.[10] People who have experienced gambling harms via addiction then face compounded stigma both for being in poverty, and for the perception they are choosing to waste their money on gambling.

Educational impacts

For parents with children living in communities more likely to be affected by poverty, stigma can act as a deterrent from applying for support such as free school meals and uniform grants. Education Institute Scotland (EIS) and National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) detailed in their submissions that free school meals are often viewed as an indicator of poverty, thus parents and children feel unable to apply for these or indeed use them due to being perceived as having a low income. Submissions from CPAG and EIS also noted that both parents and children living on low-incomes may be less likely to participate in school-based activities, such as parent evenings or trips, which can impact children's educational outcomes.

Q4. Does poverty-related stigma impact on the way that public services are delivered?

All organisations taking part in this inquiry agreed that poverty-related stigma impacts access to public services. In summary, CPAG (CPAG) highlighted:

> *"Poverty-related stigma acts as a barrier to accessing any service in which there is potential for a person's income to be highlighted, made obvious or interrogated."*

Policies tackling poverty

Organisations including the ALLIANCE and Advice Direct Scotland commented on the impact that poverty-related stigma can have on the amount of investment a policy receives. If a policy is presumed to be targeted at or for people living in poverty, negative tropes like "benefit scroungers" can lead to politicians, policy makers and public service staff being reluctant to invest in certain policies or promote them publicly. This has an impact on awareness of support; how often support is awarded to applicants; and how easy it is to access. For example, The ALLIANCE detailed the impact of decisions by consecutive UK Governments around social security including tightening eligibility criteria for entitlement to social security support, capping payments to a level that does not keep pace with the cost of living, and introducing harsher sanctions on recipients.[11] The decisions to do this were often justified in part by claims that the system is intended to encourage people into work, despite a significant proportion of social security support being accessed by people who are already in work, people who are unable to work, and on behalf of children. The ALLIANCE stated that:

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[10] Hannah Gunn, The ALLIANCE (2021) "Key messages from the Glasgow Gambling Summit" available at: https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/opinion/key-messages-from-the-glasgow-gambling-summit/

[11] CPAG (2016) *What is welfare reform and how is it affecting families* available at https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-Scot-EWS-Welfare-Reform%28May16%29.pdf

> *"[s]tigmatisation therefore undermines the essential safety net provided by social security and helps to sustain an environment in which further shrinking social security provision is both possible and considered politically desirable."*

Public-facing staff in organisations can themselves be affected by the negative portrayals of people in poverty leading to the potential for unconscious bias and assumptions around who is and who isn't "deserving" of support. According to GDA, this may influence how service providers engage and communicate with those who are experiencing poverty. One of their members experienced the consequences of this:

> *"It can be difficult if you have a hidden impairment – people think there is nothing wrong with you or you are "at it". My adviser at the DWP actually said "this is not a disability".*

Social services

CELCIS described their perceptions on the impact of poverty-related stigma on the delivery of social services. Poverty is often be assumed to be inevitable in households where social services intervene and as a result, poverty reduction strategies can be much less of a concern to social work. There is both limited consideration of socio-economic factors within social work assessments meaning the social workers attention is directed elsewhere, and subconscious bias can lead to assumptions related to poverty influencing practice, such as a belief that families and parents are to blame.

Includem noted in their submission that those clients facing complex challenges reported not being believed or listened to when trying to access support for wider services, and others struggled with not seeing their social worker enough or getting appointments for mental health support. These experiences of being disregarded or not believed added to their stress, encouraged self-stigma, and increased distrust in public services. In Includem's research, several parents commented on the importance of not being judged by services as being the foundation of a working relationship with them, with one of their clients stating about their time with their Includem support worker:

> *"[He] works with me and I have a trusting relationship with him – he is not stuck up…He's normal – he doesn't judge. You can swear in front of him – he gets it and there are no tick boxes. He understands that things can be difficult when you have four kids and that's just the way it is."*

An important consideration highlighted by a number of submissions is the fear that many parents and carers can have around the consequences of being honest about their financial status. For example, Includem noted that one of their clients had been asked by social work services repeatedly if they needed help with finances, but the individual declined support due to fear of retribution in Children's Hearings. Should families anticipate shaming or disrespectful responses, they may avoid or resist interactions with these services. Therefore, negative and unempathetic attitudes and

behaviours of individual practitioners leaves families feeling disrespected and dismissed.[12]

Gatekeeping of support

As well as the impact of stigma on the personal relationships with people providing these services, the way that these services are designed can itself be stigmatising. For example, inflexible options for offline application forms, requiring an applicant to retell their story to multiple people and departments, or requiring multiple forms of ID to access support. Digital literacy and access are further barriers for people on low incomes and the move to make more support only available through digital application methods further hinders many groups from accessing support. This is particularly true for groups like older people who already struggle with barriers such as digital literacy. These mechanisms not only make it practically harder to access support but also reinforce the idea that support should be hard-won, and that welfare has to be guarded from fraudulent applications. This instils ideas of people in poverty being untrustworthy. Hence, mechanisms that support cash-first approaches and allow for a range of accessible and easy to use application methods work to tackle stigma, and instead communicate ideas of trust and that everyone deserves support, when they need it.

Q5. Do particular groups of people living on low incomes (for example women, disabled people, Black and minority ethnic people, young people) experience stigma in different ways?

Submissions to this inquiry supported the notion that particular groups of people living on low incomes experience stigma in different ways. There was an acknowledgement that the stigma associated with poverty also interacts with and compounds existing social prejudices relating to other aspects of a person's identity. This means that there is not necessarily a homogenised experience of poverty-related stigma.

Children

Poverty-related stigma has damaging impacts on children, young people, and their families. These impacts can last well into a child's adult life. On an individual scale, CPAG noted that the blame, judgement, and othering involved in stigma leads to a sense of shame and difference for children. On a service level, experiences of stigma at school can act as a barrier to participation, inclusion and to accessing support where required. In their submission, EIS outlined the range of impacts that poverty-related stigma has on children and young people including:

Emotional Impacts:

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[12] Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H. & ATD Fourth World (2018) Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: the contribution of 'the politics of recognition & respect', *European Journal of Social Work*, 21:2, 247-259

- Experiencing feelings of shame, embarrassment, humiliation, low self-esteem-sometimes amounting to trauma response where stigma has been felt over a long period of time.
- Emotional impact resulting in behavioural impact-distressed behaviour.
- Unwillingness to seek/accept support that might exacerbate the sense of othering already felt.

Educational Impacts:

- Giving other reasons than the actual as to why homework has not been done including having no access to the internet at home, house is cold or there being no electricity.
- Trying to hide poverty by saying that they have no interest in school trips or other activities that incur cost or not studying subjects for which there have been associated costs for materials.
- Not taking the Free School Meals to which they are entitled and going without food all day to avoid being set apart from peers who use high street shops and cafes at lunchtimes.

Social Impacts:

- Withdrawal from certain social situations to avoid stigma including not joining in social events after school that involve costs. For many young people, this means spending a lot of lunchtime and other leisure time on their own.
- Staying off school on days that have been designated non-uniform days because they don't have clothes on a par with peers.

NASUWT stated that *"**one of the most profound and damaging consequences of child poverty is the impact that it has on pupils' educational attainment, their wider well-being and their future life chances…".** Poverty-related stigma therefore has important impacts on wider Scottish Government policy priorities including the Attainment Gap Challenge. Action to tackle poverty-related stigma will support children to thrive at school, both in terms of educational attainment and inter-personal relationships. This will have longer-term benefits and will better children and young people's chances of a life free from poverty in later years.

Poverty-related-stigma significantly impacts young people's self-esteem and mental health. CELCIS highlight in their submission that poverty-related stigma can affect children's social relationships and sense of self: *"**Poverty can not only restrict children's direct access to opportunities, leaving them marginalised, but also has a pervasive impact on their feelings and confidence. Children experience embarrassment, anxiety, shame, worry and sadness: high emotional costs, impacting on self-esteem and self-worth."**[13] CPAG further demonstrated the mental health impacts of stigma in a series of quotes from young people with experiences of poverty:

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[13] Ridge, T. (2011) 'The Everyday Costs of Poverty in Childhood: A Review of Qualitative Research Exploring the Lives and Experiences of Low-Income Children in the UK' *Children & Society*, 24, 73-84; https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty

"Well, I think if all of your friends or people you know go to the after school clubs, school trips, that kind of isolates you from them. You're singled out, you're not with them, just a spare person." **(Pupil, age 15)**

"They talk behind your back [about what you wear] and stand staring at you." **(Pupil, age 12)**

Parents and caregivers

Regarding parents and caregiver experiences of poverty-related stigma, the most present theme was parents feeling severe shame about their circumstances. CELCIS highlight that surviving on a low income requires significant skills, yet people living in poverty - and in particular, parents - continue to be stigmatised and experience shame, particularly related to parenting. They included in their submission a reference to one study which described parents feeling *"'horrible', 'embarrassed', or 'dreadful' about having to accept help from others or not managing to provide for their families… and responses of 'feeling guilty', 'feeling rotten', 'awkward', 'useless', 'letting myself down', or 'ashamed' were common in relation to how they viewed their inability to provide for children"*.[14]

CELCIS noted that the withdrawal and social isolation that stems from parenting whilst surviving on a low income may lead to parents turning to coping mechanisms such as substance use and self-harm. This creates additional problems for parents through posing risks to their children which results in yet more fear around state services intervening in their child's care. Due to this, parents may underreport their financial concerns to services such as social workers and schools due to fear of being perceived as a failure and the risk of losing custody. CELCIS noted that this has direct consequences on benefit take-up where shame and stigma can make people feel so awful that that they choose not to access their entitlements.

CPAG noted that some parents will go without essentials like food, heating and rent so that their children can avoid stigma and take part in the same way as others at school. This is particularly true for mothers who often function as "poverty-managers" in the home. Stigma can also lead parents to being reluctant to approach the school about their inability to afford certain parts of school activities due to fear of judgement. As a result, parents may take on additional debt in order to provide for their children and mask their financial situation. EIS point out that stigma may also prevent parents from participating in other activities at school such as parents' evenings, parent council and sports days. CPAG surveyed parents and carers regarding their feelings toward approaching the school regarding financial instability:

"[I felt] guilt, embarrassment, shame"

"It is hard to talk about not being able to afford things"

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[14] Chase, E., & Walker, R. (2014). 'The 'Shame of Shame: Experiences of People Living in Poverty in Britain.'. In Chase, E. & Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, G. (Eds.), *Poverty and shame: Global experiences*, Oxford: OUP, 161-–174.

"I sometimes feel like I am looked down upon for receiving free school meals"

"I was worried my child would find out and that people would make fun of them."

Single Parents

The issues highlighted above are particularly pertinent for single parents, over 90% if whom are women. CAP highlighted that problem debt disproportionately impacts single parents, accounting for 28% of their clients seeking debt support. They describe an example of one of their clients, a single parent, who was gripped by problem debt after fleeing from an abusive relationship. Her ex-partner built up debts in her name and she was left with a newborn baby and no idea where to go for support. She told CAP that: *"I was quite nervous. I felt quite ashamed of being put in that situation. I was embarrassed."*

Wester Hailes Healthy Living Centre highlighted that they see a significant number of single parents who feel judged and ashamed of being reliant on social security, presuming that people assume they are lazy and are choosing not to work. They feel that people are unaware of the complexities of taking up work when you are a single parent, with people failing to consider the costs associated with working such as childcare and transport.

Older people

In their submission, Age Scotland explain that stigma and shame is widespread for older people living with poverty. Many older people in poverty feel as though they have worked hard throughout the duration of their working life leading to compounded feelings of shame if they find themselves in a position of having to apply for social security to make ends meet. This is worsened by the widely held assumption that older people are financially well-off, leading older people to feel as though have failed by societal standards.

This creates a barrier to applying for social security. Age Scotland highlighted research by Independent Age which estimated that as much as £332 million worth of Pension Credit goes unclaimed annually in Scotland, further entrenching the difficulties faced by older people living on low incomes. There are multiple reasons for this including lack of awareness about available support, stigmatised ideas about what relying on social security means about a person, and not necessarily realising they are in poverty. Age Scotland continued:

"For some older people "benefits is a dirty word" so there is clearly some way to go in destigmatising poverty and social security"

"In our experience, many older people who are struggling financially may believe that others are worse off and more in need – for instance, children – and so don't take up support available"

When looking at the social consequences of poverty for older people, Age Scotland felt it was crucial to highlight that this stigma particularly forces older people into isolation and self-excluding from available support. They note that this can both be due to older people feeling embarrassed about their financial position or being uncomfortable about being in a position where they feel forced into asking for help.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) people

Black and minority ethnic people in Scotland are more likely to experience poverty than the rest of the population. Compared to the 19% of the overall Scottish population who experience poverty, this number stands at 43% of people who identify as 'Mixed, Black or Black British and Other' and 41% of 'Asian or Asian British'.[15] As a group more likely to experience poverty, BME people have greater exposure to poverty-related stigma and its consequences.

Highlighting the importance of an intersectional approach, Age Scotland noted that older ethnic minority people fear others in the community knowing that they are experiencing poverty. This ensures that people refrain from discussing their circumstances for fear that their situation becomes common knowledge and their standing in the community is impacted. For those who have moved to the UK, there may also be specific pressures for those who have previously been accustomed to sending money back to friends and family, with fears about the way they would be perceived if people discovered their financial situation. For some groups of Black and minority ethnic people, there may be other cultural barriers holding them back from accessing support including language barriers or having less of an awareness of what support they are entitled to from the offset due to navigating a new system of support.

Asylum Seekers & Refugees

Asylum seekers and refugees are at significant risk of destitution, and face compounded, and multiple forms of stigma associated with living on a low income and through their experiences with the asylum system. In their response, Corra highlighted that groups that have no recourse to public funds such as refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to multiple deprivation.

EIS noted in their submission that the UK's immigration and asylum processes are deeply stigmatising due to their ***"deliberately hostile and dehumanising bureaucracy...and rhetoric and attitudes that demonise and 'other' members of these groups."***. These processes, and the manner in which politicians discuss these policies, reproduce negative and inaccurate ideas about what it means to seek refuge in the UK. EIS explained how these narratives permeate false ideas that asylum seekers have adequate provisions. This impacts public support and political will to provide further support for asylum seekers and refugees. These negative and false narratives lead to further isolation and poor mental health. Poverty-related stigma exacerbates the existing struggles associated with moving to a new country, including language barriers and the difficulties of navigating a new system of support.

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[15] Poverty and Income Inequality Scotland 2017-2020, Scottish Government

Unpaid Carers

The ALLIANCE identified in their submission that unpaid carers who are not in paid employment are often further stigmatised by the social and economic model in the UK which fails to adequately value care work. Despite a vital contribution to the economy and society, unpaid care is seen as operating outside of the "real economy" and is not counted in measurements of economic growth that rely heavily on GDP. This adds to the undervaluation of this work. Social security support for carers is often presented as a cost, rather than an investment. The ALLIANCE note that the social security system is a large contributor to the stigma experienced by unpaid carers.

This has an additional gendered dimension, as the majority of unpaid care work prior to the pandemic was provided by women (57%)[16] and this was only exacerbated during the Covid-19 crisis. Unpaid care can leave carers with a legacy of poverty which lasts beyond the end of their caring role, as well as poor physical and mental health. However, attitudes towards unpaid carers and people experiencing poverty can prevent unpaid carers from accessing their entitlements.

Disabled people

Disabled people are significantly more likely to experience poverty, with 23% of households with a disabled person experiencing poverty compared to 17% in households without a disabled person.[17] As a population, disabled people are more reliant on social security for some or all their income and often face significant barriers to employment.

Inclusion Scotland highlighted that disabled people with lived experience of poverty who participate in their Poverty Lived Experience Group have previously spoken of their experiences of institutional, societal and community stigma on their access to services and support, and enjoyment of community life. This has far-reaching implications including discrimination, exclusion, isolation, fewer life chances and a deprecating impact on self-belief. Disabled people highlighted examples of how they have been stigmatised and treated by employers, services, and their own communities:

> *"I retired on grounds of ill health at age 61 and had worked all my adult life. My neighbour said, "you'll get PIP and a new car every 2 years, and my taxes are paying for it". You feel guilty about getting the help that you are entitled to and that somehow you are not contributing. I definitely think there is a perception that disabled people get all this money and are loaded. I was actually frightened to tell my neighbour I was going to Manchester on a holiday so sneaked out of the house in the dark to leave."*

Inclusion Scotland also highlighted that disabled people reported feeling that they were not believed when describing their own needs, particularly when applying for

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[16] Carers Week 2020 Research Report, Carers UK
[17] Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-2020. Scottish Government.

social security. This was even more present if someone's impairment is "hidden" or they have conditions that fluctuate. Similarly, GDA's submission noted that the social security system often dehumanises those seeking to access their entitlements, often resulting in people not claiming the support that they have the right to. The system itself requires the retelling of deeply personal stories and circumstances with multiple fact checks, which can create a feeling of suspicion and mistrust. This was felt deeply by members who were quoted in GDA's submission:

> *"Disabled people definitely have a different experience of stigma – we are seen as scroungers and lazy and can't be bothered working "even when there is nothing wrong with them". This is because of the media and politicians I think perpetrate this image"*

Some of GDA's members discussed the shame they feel when the inadequacy of social security impacts on their ability to afford essentials. They highlighted that false perceptions of social security being a significant amount of money conceal the true issue that many disabled people face when trying to keep up with costs for additional support and equipment:

> *"Poverty stigma affects us a lot differently as disabled people – it impacts on how we access services like Health and Social Care. I can't afford essentials I need because of my medical condition like extra toilet roll: it's so embarrassing, running out before my next payment comes in. The impact of Covid has made all of this worse."*

> *"As disabled people we often have to pay more for equipment and aids – it's much more expensive to buy accessible items like the specific software and TV that I need because of my visual impairment".*

Mental Health

Mental health and poverty have a cyclical relationship wherein being in poverty may cause poor mental health and concurrently having a mental health condition can make poverty more likely or make it more difficult for a person to lift themselves out of poverty.[18] Advice Direct Scotland highlighted in their submission that issues relating to applying for social security can be particularly pertinent for people with mental health issues, as these issues are often invisible. As a result, mental health issues are often ignored, trivialised or used to condemn someone.

The joint submission from the Poverty Alliance, Mental Health Foundation, the University of the West of Scotland and the University of Strathclyde highlighted research showing that experiences of poverty-related stigma are associated with four broad mental health and well-being outcomes: mental ill-health, negative emotions, low self-esteem and diminished social relationships. Their submission noted that poverty-related stigma should be viewed as an important public health issue, as it contributes to inequalities in mental illness and well-being.

People living in rural communities

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[18] Summary Briefing: Poverty, Economy and Mental Health Roundtable Event, 18 January 2022

Advice Direct Scotland (ADS) noted that people living in rural areas are more likely to experience social isolation and are particularly vulnerable to supply/service shortages for services like welfare advice, money advice, and crisis support like foodbanks. Moreover, ADS noted that there is a lack of concern in wider public discourse for the impact that rural isolation has on poverty, with it often being ignored when the causes of poverty are discussed. This is in part due to assumptions that poverty does not exist in rural locations. Individuals experiencing poverty in rural areas are therefore left without support, often attempting to conceal their income status due to shame and fear of judgement. With regards to debt, CAP noted that there can be a heightened sense of embarrassment or fear of being found out. People in rural areas are fearful of being seen accessing debt advice or support by someone in their town or village.

Women

Women are more likely to experience poverty and find it harder to escape poverty than men. Women's poverty is also inextricably interlinked with child poverty for a number of reasons, including the fact women account for 90% of single parents and are more likely to be primary caregivers for children. Women in particular circumstances disproportionately feel the impact of poverty-related stigma. CELCIS noted the example of stigma concerning people accused of exploiting the housing system, particularly single mothers with children who need houses with multiple bedrooms.

In their submission, the STUC women's committee noted that societal norms place greater expectations on women and girls than on men and boys in terms of physical appearance. This often carries additional costs such as make up, hairdressing and clothes. Where women are unable to meet these costs, there is heightened risk of associated stigma from not having the financial means to conform to societal expectations.

The STUC Women's committee also highlighted the additional cost that women face due to bearing the greater burden for childcare. Since responsibility for childcare continues to remain disproportionately with women, women are more likely to experience the stigma associated with their children appearing to be experiencing poverty, whether this be through worn-out, old uniforms or lack of attendance at school events. They noted that women who have children and are experiencing poverty are more likely to feel that this is somehow down to a fault that lies within them rather than it being the result of deep-rooted structural gender inequalities coupled with contemporary political decision-making.

EIS noted that poverty impacts on the ability for people to afford and access period products.[19] Being unable to afford these everyday essentials can lead to feelings of shame and being unable to perform some tasks such as school, work, and caring.

Victim-survivors of men's violence against women

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[19] We recognise that it is not just women who menstruate, and that some transgender and non-binary people have periods. While this report refers to 'women', it is intended to be inclusive of any person who menstruates.

NASUWT's submission highlighted a 2015 survey which found that as many as one in five women had experienced financial abuse at some point in their lives.[20] Financial abuse reduces women's financial well-being and resilience, often leaving women and children with no money for food or clothing. As current measurements of poverty are based on household income, this measurement assumes all individuals benefit equally from the combined household income thus failing to consider intra-household resource allocation and the poverty experienced by victim-survivors of financial abuse. Poverty-related stigma may also interact with the stigma of being a victim-survivor of domestic abuse through making women feel shame, guilt or responsibility for their experiences of male violence.

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[20] Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2015). Money Matters: Research into the Extent and Nature of Financial Abuse within Intimate Relationships in the UK.

Section 2 – Causes of poverty-related stigma

Q6. What causes poverty-related stigma?

Overall, contributors agree that there are multiple factors which contribute to the existence of poverty-related stigma rather than there being one singular cause. There was also consensus that poverty-related stigma has been sustained through years of prejudice combined with the impacts of government policies.

One such factor considered to play a significant role is the lack of knowledge by the general public and of public figures such as politicians on the reality of living on low incomes. CPAG noted that there is a misalignment between the public's generally high prioritisation of ending poverty and their understanding of how poverty is caused. Despite the work that takes place in the anti-poverty sector showing that the drivers behind child poverty rates in Scotland are structural factors such as the cost of living and inadequate income from employment and the social security system,[21] some still see poverty as the result of individual choices, decisions and failings. Demonstrating this, CPAG highlighted the 2017 Public Attitudes to Poverty in Scotland survey showing that over a quarter of adults and young people agreed that "most poor people could get by fine if they just budgeted sensibly" and that "many poor people have it easy because they get everything paid for by the Government".[22]

Young people in the Cost of the School Day project at Braes High School echoed this, explaining that systems currently in place (such as social security) make it difficult to break out of poverty:

> *"The main cause of poverty-related stigma is a long history of ignorance, people's fear of being in that position and misunderstanding of how people end up in that situation."*

They explained that those who have never experienced these systems do not understand how they work in practice. This leads to the assumption that individuals can simply "work their way out" of poverty. Such attitudes fail to acknowledge both the structural causes of poverty and the barriers people experience in trying to escape poverty. When public figures such as politicians, political commentators or social media influencers promote these narratives without acknowledging or recognising the role of wider economic structures the harm these narratives cause is deepened.

As discussed in more detail in question seven, contributors highlighted that the media also plays a significant role in perpetuating poverty-related stigma through which stories it chooses to tell and in what way.

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[21] Scottish Government, Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022
[22] Scottish Government. (2017). Public Attitudes to Poverty in Scotland - Adults' and Young People's Views of People Living in Poverty

Q7. What role do you believe the media, including social media, play in causing poverty-related stigma?

Many contributors noted the key role that the media can play in both perpetuating poverty-related stigma and tackling it. ADS emphasised in their submission that those who work in the media possess the ability to direct public attention to an issue and slant that issue in a particular light:

> *"…the focus and tone that media has in relation to poverty can influence how it is ultimately perceived by the public. Media can reinforce stereotypes and be unsympathetic to those in poverty, reducing the chances that they will seek help."*

Contributors highlighted that the most significant issues in media reports is the frequent use of stereotypes and inaccurate depictions of people and communities experiencing poverty. GDA described one of the most referenced representations which is the false depictions of people in receipt of social security as "scroungers" and the presentation of individuals as intentionally exploiting the social security system and "burdening the taxpayer". The ALLIANCE highlighted the disproportionate reporting of benefit fraud as further evidence of the important role the media can play when constructing and promoting narratives of poverty by pushing narratives that aim to demonise people in poverty rather than promoting instances where people in poverty are themselves exploited:

> *"Instances of benefit fraud are similarly reported widely, and often without the context that fraud is rare and is equivalent to a fraction of the money that goes unclaimed by people who would be entitled to it."*

The ALLIANCE and the Wester Hailes Healthy Living Centre highlighted a type of media presentation labelled "poverty porn". Poverty Porn styled television shows (e.g. The Scheme) aim to depict only the most extreme and sensationalist aspects of the lives of a small number of people experiencing poverty, usually for entertainment. These are often misrepresentative of the reality of experiences of poverty broadly and instead instil stigma and further negative feelings towards those facing poverty.

CELCIS noted in their submission that portrayals of people living in poverty can often include depictions of people involved in criminal behaviour (particularly when showing young people with experiences of poverty) or engaging in problematic alcohol and substance use. This generates ideas of deviance and instils ideas of punishment rather than compassion. These harmful depictions generate a particular hatred towards people in receipt of welfare by portraying people as "choosing" to be on benefits instead of working and using this money for "non-essential" uses. In the context of these harmful narratives, poverty is seen as deserved or justified. These stories often neglect to discuss those who are unable to work; those who would lose financial security if they entered employment as a result of the operation of the social security system; those who can work limited hours due to caring responsibilities; and those dealing with the reality of social security payments being too little to meet essential costs. Specifically, when looking at depictions of disabled people who are experiencing poverty, Inclusion Scotland point out that media reports often exclusively focus on people with the most severe conditions which can compound

stigma for people with conditions that don't fit that mould when applying for social security or being unable to work.

The politicisation of poverty in the media was identified by contributors as worsening the stigma associated with poverty. NASUWT pointed out that the media is often driven by political commentary and so people experiencing poverty can become pawns to use between political parties during tense political debates. The issue of poverty itself and its prevalence at any given time is often used to criticise a certain party or policy without consideration given to those facing poverty themselves or actually reducing poverty in a meaningful way. Moreover, the ALLIANCE explained that stigmatising statements by politicians, in line with the narratives described previously, can be reported on uncritically, without challenging the assertions made, for example instances of benefit fraud as detailed earlier.

Some contributors commented on the wider issue of the promotion of consumerism in the media and the activities of some social media influencers/content creators which puts additional pressure on children and young people. Young people who are experiencing poverty then face judgement or experience shame when the reality of their lives is very different to the images of success seen online. Young people at Braes High, Cost of the School Day group felt particularly strongly about this:

> *"You rarely see people in poverty who are influencers or with big followings. All the 'famous' people have big fancy houses, cars etc, meaning that people in poverty won't feel as represented in society. Many influencers believe that they are relatable but aren't, they don't have what we do."*

> *"The media's role in judgement of the poor has been rising, as it encourages people to constantly be in awe of those with material things. It glamourises the rich lifestyle with those who 'make it' often not addressing their original head start and blaming their success on pure hard work."*

EIS touched on this more broadly arguing that when wealth is used as a measure of success, this furthers feelings of shame among those experiencing poverty:

> *"All-pervasive and powerful media interests both within traditional and social media perpetuate myths of 'success' and 'goodness' and 'failure' and 'badness' of human beings in terms of their wealth or lack of it, respectively. Wealth and poverty in many ways have become proxies for 'good' and 'failed', even 'bad' human beings, who have simply made the wrong choices in life, the psychosocial impacts of which are significant."*

If society continually pushes the notion that "wealth = value", then anyone experiencing poverty is automatically devalued, often leading to further stress when struggling to make ends meet.

Q8. What role do you believe public figures (politicians, business leaders, celebrities, and others) play in creating and/or perpetuating poverty-related stigma?

People with a public profile have the ability to shape narratives around poverty in either a positive or negative way. Public figures such as celebrities, influencers and politicians have a significant influence over the public, particularly young people. Several contributors, including young people at Brae High, mentioned Molly Mae Hague as a recent example of someone using their profile to convey stigmatised ideas about poverty and people living in poverty. In an interview on the podcast Diary of a CEO, the former Love Island contestant claimed that everyone could have success if they worked hard because "we all have the same 24 hours as Beyonce".

The young people noted that "*As shallowly inspirational as that sounds, those who have to work multiple jobs to be able to pay rent do not in fact have the same day as the superstar."*

Particularly for young people, the lifestyle promoted by these groups suggests that hard work is all any one person needs to have success and this fails to deal with barriers such as poverty nor recognise that privilege plays a large role in success later in life. The idolisation of people with these lifestyles can in turn instil feelings of shame and a sense of failure for young people from families struggling on low incomes.

In contrast, it was also acknowledged that people with a public profile can have a positive impact on narratives toward poverty. Marcus Rashford was mentioned by many as being an example of someone using their platform for good by communicating the reality of the impacts of poverty and the barriers this creates in many young people's lives. His multiple statements during the first lockdown regarding the need to support children from families on low incomes and his own experiences of poverty showed how pervasive poverty is. Marcus Rashford's interventions underscored the fact that poverty is not a choice made by individuals, it's the result of systemic failure.

Many contributors noted the impact that Rashford had on the public opinion is testament to the changes we can see when those with power and influence set their minds to tackling inequality and challenging stigma. As the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit stated:

> *"Rashford's cause did show that it is possible to highlight issues in relation to poverty, gain public support and challenge widespread opinion. If anything, that should give hope that a more positive and compassionate public narrative is possible."*

Other figures like Martin Lewis (Money Saving Expert) were mentioned as working towards reducing the stigma of poverty by speaking candidly about support available and the struggle that comes with living on low incomes. By increasing knowledge and awareness of support and issues related to money, people with high profiles can break down stigmatised ideas of poverty and that struggling with money is something to be ashamed of. In their submission, CAP stated:

"We have also seen the impact of the valuable work of people like Martin Lewis, in normalising talking about money and asking for help. There is a high level of public trust in the advice given by Martin Lewis, and he has done valuable work in signposting people to where they can get the help and support they need. Creating room for this in public spaces is a big step towards removing the stigma and embarrassment surrounding financial hardship."

Lewis' most recent myriad of press appearances throughout the evolution of the cost of living crisis has proved again that public figures have a key role to play in holding politicians and their policies to account by highlighting the impact they have on broad spectrums of household incomes, and the further impacts on the lowest income households.

EIS noted both the UK and the Scottish Government have a responsibility to dispel myths regarding poverty. This includes the way representatives talk about poverty, how they choose to design the delivery of social security and their justifications for either investing in or cutting funding to services aimed at supporting people on low incomes. Members of the GDA echoed this noting that politicians and those responsible for the culture and management of public services have a key role to play in challenge in poverty-related stigma. Their potential endorsement of the negative and stereotypical characterisation of those in poverty is particularly damaging. This ranges from politicians supporting austerity and cuts to welfare benefits, to promoting messages that claim that work is the best route out of poverty and framing social security as a tax burden rather than a public good.

Q9. How do public bodies and public services contribute to poverty-related stigma?

As detailed in question four, many of the contributions to poverty-related stigma relate to the delivery of public services.

Social Security

CAP noted that a significant source of poverty-related stigma by public bodies and services is the disempowerment of those seeking support. This exact form of stigma is particularly felt by people when applying for disability support who are often quizzed and required to provide extensive proof of their disability; this can be particularly stressful for people with fluctuating conditions. As detailed in question four, this process supports the notion that those applying for social security must be trying to get "more than they deserve" and results in greater feelings of shame and failure at providing for one's family.

This narrative can also be seen in the design of benefits. CAP expanded in their submission that overpayments of social security are taken through repayment plans despite often worsening the financial situation of those in receipt of welfare. Relatedly the attitude and sometimes aggressive nature of sheriff officers when attempting to reclaim debt can make people feel ashamed, judged, and can make them fearful of public services generally. Organisations also noted that when support is awarded, often the initial preference of public services is to do this through non-cash-based methods such as vouchers and pre-paid cards. Although the support is

still being awarded, these methods communicate that people cannot be trusted to spend money on essentials and is another form of gatekeeping entitlement and entrenching stigma.

Public Spaces

An often-overlooked element of poverty-related stigma is the lack of care and investment given to the buildings and facilities where public services are delivered. CELCIS highlighted that the neglect of physical spaces where people experiencing poverty live, work and access support can communicate the notion that these areas are not worthy of care or maintenance. This exacerbates any feelings of shame as people do not feel valued when accessing support. This can be seen in the placement of essential services located at a distance from regular public transport (which also creates barriers to accessing support), an abundance of derelict and run-down centres/offices; or having in-use services like schools and doctors' surgeries containing broken items (such as toys in waiting rooms). This can also stem into local council investments being lower for services like waste collection or cutting funding for bus routes through areas with higher poverty rates whilst simultaneously increasing investment for policing in those same areas.

Schools

The experiences of pupils facing poverty was highlighted as a particular area where public services can play a large role in alleviating poverty-related stigma but can also worsen it. CELCIS noted that in schools there is a lack of attention given to poverty awareness training for teachers. This can lead to teachers lacking knowledge of how to deal with and support children experiencing poverty creating unfair learning environments for children and prevent parents and children from reaching out when they are struggling. Relatedly, children may be singled out in school because they do not have the "right" equipment for the day ahead. Initiatives designed to support children dealing with poverty can also function in a stigmatising manner, including free school meals being accessed using obvious vouchers or making pupils access meals through a different queue or another time/place.

Social Work

CELCIS note that in services such as social work, the drive to tackle poverty-related stigma must be promoted from the top down:

> *"…if practitioners are not supported by leaders, managers and the wider organisational infrastructure to critically reflect on families' experiences of poverty, the impact of this on their lives, and the support they require as a result, then the public service response families receive can further contribute to their experiences of stigma."*

Consequentially, this can risk poverty being mistaken for neglect, thus families feel threatened by social work involvement because their circumstances are not properly understood, and interventions by social work are not effective because it fails to address the underlying needs of the family. CELCIS highlighted that the structure of the social worker's role means that:

"[their] capacity to practice using poverty-aware approaches can be limited due to limited training, high caseloads preventing them from spending enough time thinking about poverty with families, or due to feeling powerless to affect positive change or lacking the resources to make a difference."

Q10. Are there any other bodies, organisations or individuals that you believe play a role in creating and/or perpetuating poverty-related stigma? If so, please detail.

In fulfilling their role in collecting debt on behalf of the Government, Sheriff Officers were identified by CAP as playing a vital role in perpetuating poverty-related stigma. Sheriff Officers have an important role in treating individuals with respect as to not further feelings of shame or failure. These Officers are also involved in decisions of how to proceed with debt. Officers have the power to progress cases onto bank or wage arrestment, which can instil feelings of shame, or to work with the individuals in debt to find ways to manage this through options like payment plans which communicates trust and respect.

NASUWT noted that education bodies such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland have a role in ensuring that the delivery of education to Scotland's young people works in a way that doesn't stigmatise those on the lowest incomes. This includes issues such as costs for equipment for subjects, the cost of textbooks and the provision of technical equipment for all students such as laptops and tablets, particularly for schools in areas of deprivation.

Section 3 – Tackling Poverty-related stigma

Q11. What is the key change that can be taken that would help tackle poverty-related stigma?

Altering how we talk about and deliver social security was considered a key change to tackle poverty-related stigma. ADS note that through actively and positively promoting social security, we can both create greater awareness of the different types of benefits available and maximise incomes for people on the lowest incomes. This would inform the public about how different households may need to rely on social security for a variety of reasons and reduce overall poverty rates through boosting uptake.

Other submissions felt strongly that we must emphasise the health risks linked to poverty in order to unite people behind the importance of tackling poverty and reducing the stigma around it. CAP believe that we need to recognise problem debt should be a public health priority, particularly given the linkages between problem debt and poor mental health.

For public facing services like social services, CELCIS suggest embedding poverty awareness training into inductions and staff training programmes as key to tackling experiences of stigma for those accessing public services. This is particularly necessary for people working in services that will indefinitely interact with people living on the lowest incomes such as social workers, administrators of social security (in Scotland and the UK), and teachers/educators.

The Homeless Network Scotland noted that the media will play a central role in tackling poverty-related stigma. To work together in this, they highlighted the need for greater partnership between the media and the third sector to understand key strategic ways to communicate about poverty that will reduce stigma. There was a desire to have greater accountability for the media when communicating false narratives about poverty. It was suggested that media outlets should conduct training about poverty, including the structural issues that cause and sustain poverty and the relationship between poverty and other protected characteristics such as disability, gender and race.
Schools offer important spaces to discuss poverty and reduce stigma. Embedding lessons about the causes of poverty and the solutions to it in the compulsory Personal and Social Education classes is one space where this can happen. This was felt by young people at braes High in the Cost of the School Day group:

> *"…if poverty is addressed frequently and from a young age all stigma towards poverty would be reduced."*

The ALLIANCE highlight that politicians play a key role in exacerbating poverty-related stigma and can play a key role in tackling it. In their submission they note that politicians should be sending a strong message that social security is an essential public good and a fundamental human right. Politicians should emphasise that poverty is a structural issue and not a personal one, communicating that nobody

living in poverty should feel ashamed, but instead they should seek out support that is available and which is there specifically to help them. Other contributions highlighted that there is a need to hold politicians to account over promotion of false narratives about poverty. Key to all of this is ensuring that lived experience is at the heart of all decision- making processes and policy design via genuine co-design and co-production processes. Corra Foundation noted that:

> *"…if people's experiences of poverty are misunderstood, and the day-to-day challenges they face overlooked, there is a risk stigma could be amplified and the extent people engage with services reflects how well they feel seen and heard."*

It is therefore important that putting lived experience at the heart of policy design is coupled with an understanding of the responsibility to safeguard people providing their experience, with for example training and well-being support.

Q12. What could the media do differently to end poverty-related stigma?

Participants agreed that there was ample opportunity for those working the media to positively influence attitudes towards poverty and people living in poverty.

Telling the right stories, the right way

Overall, contributors felt that there is a need for those working in the media to focus on telling the right stories about people living in poverty, in a manner that affords dignity and empowerment to those living on the lowest incomes. This means prioritising stories that encourage compassion and support, rather than promoting judgement and 'otherness'. Telling stories that show the reality of poverty including the causes and consequences of poverty, can encourage a more constructive conversation about poverty and the workable solutions to it. Key to this is the inclusion of people with lived experience in the writing and production of these stories, including news coverage, documentaries and fictional representations of people living in poverty. On the necessity to include lived experience when reporting on poverty, The ALLIANCE noted:

> *"The voice of lived experience is not just an essential component of service design, but also in creating public understanding and empathy. Hearing the stories of real people, presented with sensitivity and compassion, can help break down misconceptions created by stigma."*

CELCIS highlighted the work of FrameWorks Institute and Joseph Rowntree Foundation in this context. Their framing toolkit centred on the most effective ways we can frame the issue of poverty that instils feelings of compassion and justice. The toolkit which follows on from extensive research regarding attitudes towards poverty, showed that the general public have three prevalent beliefs about poverty:

- Post-poverty: people don't believe poverty exists today, in this country.
- Self-makingness: people blame individuals for being in poverty and believe they should try harder and work more. They don't see the wider context.

- The game is rigged: people think there will always be poverty, and nothing will ever change.[23]

CELCIS explained that these beliefs are categorically untrue yet are the most commonly held ideas about poverty. Through reframing how we communicate about poverty and those living in poverty, we can change hearts and minds and encourage people to think about poverty in a more constructive way. Thus, those working in media outlets have a responsibility to consider how they are framing their stories about poverty.

On language, both the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) and CELCIS note that the choice by politicians and the media to refer to social security as "benefits" miscommunicates the role they play in society. Describing these payments as "welfare" or "social security" helps to communicate social security more positively, showing it to be the vital safety net and public good that it is. Advice Direct Scotland noted that the stories reported by the media can be a source of encouragement and can direct those in poverty to get the help they need. They noted that:

> *"…having the right information and the confidence in finding solutions are key requirements to individuals resolving their issues, especially with poverty".*

Through this, the media can play a key role in communicating what support is available and that seeking support should not be hidden or something to be ashamed of. CAP noted that their experiences working with the media have been broadly positive however more work can be done on safeguarding people experiencing poverty once they tell their stories. Backlash, particularly on social media, can be extremely degrading thus there are calls for better moderating of comment sections on social media platforms.

"Poverty porn"

Along with suggestions of what the media should include in their communications about poverty, many submissions to this inquiry highlighted the types of storytelling that must end if we are to tackle poverty-related stigma. The need to end depictions of poverty which sensationalise those living in poverty for amusement, often referred to as "poverty porn", was mentioned in this context. The ALLIANCE notes that this coverage instils shame and degradation on those living on the lowest incomes:

> *"There should also be an end to all "poverty porn" programmes, which only value people experiencing poverty as caricatures for entertainment purposes, rather than as equal human beings with the right to a home, food, and dignity."*

Rather than attempting to have any sort of constructive conversation about the structural causes and trap of poverty, sensational coverage and television shows instead focus on what will instil anger and resentment towards the individuals featured, and those living on the lowest incomes more broadly.

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[23] https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/framing-toolkit-talking-about-poverty

In print media, contributors such as NASUWT noted the culture surrounding "clickbait" news articles and how this drives journalists to write headlines that depict negative ideas of people in poverty (e.g. the widely held "scrounger" narrative). These headlines create anger and disdain towards those in poverty by portraying them as deceitful. This anger generates clicks on articles which in turn generates income for news outlets. This incentivises coverage which promotes a toxic culture of outrage rather than compassion. EIS note that only through ending these practices can we begin to shift public opinion and meaningfully tackle poverty-related stigma.

Promotion of available support

The media can play a role in generating awareness about the support that is available to those on the lowest incomes including social security and charitable provisions for emergency need. CAP noted that the media must *"[demonstrate] how our social security system is an expression of our shared values of justice and compassion and a vital service that we all rely on."* This both increases the likelihood that people struggling financially will know about support available whilst also tackling stereotypes around social security.

CAP continued that the media can also take the opportunity to highlight stories where social security has worked to be a positive force for change in people's lives and increase the financial education of the public whilst removing the awkwardness and stigma around talking about money. For example, discussion of debt in the media can increase public awareness of the prevalence of debt and increase the likelihood that people will know where to go for support.

Accountability of elected representatives

As well as informing the public, the media also plays a key role in holding our politicians to account for their views. The ALLIANCE highlighted that challenging stigmatising remarks about people living in poverty is *"… entirely in line with the fundamental principles of objectivity and impartiality and can be achieved both by pointing out specific inaccuracies or where there is lack of context, and by providing greater platform for experts, including through experience, to push back on claims."*

By both working to end untrue and sensationalised angles on poverty and pushing informed and evidence-based reports about the causes of poverty, the media can play a positive role in eradicating poverty-related stigma.

As part of this inquiry, the Cross Party Group on Poverty also hosted a roundtable with 10 individuals from across both print and digital media to explore the role of the media in tackling poverty-related stigma.[24] A summary of this discussion it included in appendix one.

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[24] Outlets included: Glasgow Times, The Herald, NUJ Scotland, Channel 4 Dispatches, BBC Scotland, The National, Third Force News, Daily Mirror, STV, and the Big Issue

Q13. What changes can public services and public bodies make to help end poverty- related stigma? Please give examples of existing good practice where possible

Public services and public bodies must be designed in a manner that treats people with dignity and compassion. For example, people with experience of poverty can often lack trust in services like councils and social services. This can be due to previous negative experiences or fear of the consequence that their poverty status may have on the support they receive. Age Scotland noted that in recent Scottish Household Surveys, people living in the 20% most deprived areas were less likely to agree that their council addresses key issues impacting their quality of life. Contributors such as CAP, CELCIS and SVRU highlighted the need to include people with lived experience in the design, evaluation, and delivery of public services.

Respondents noted the possibility of utilising existing spaces with services that are trusted, such as schools and GP practices, and increasing funding for roles that help to support people living in low incomes such as Community Link Workers and Welfare Advice Health Partnerships. The aim of this is to design and fund services around the user so that it works to meets people's needs whilst affording them dignity and respect.

There are some positive examples of public services effectively challenging stigma including the formation of Social Security Scotland which has placed emphasis on dignity, respect and entitlements being a human right. The ALLIANCE stated that:

> *"It is important to acknowledge that Scotland is making significant progress in this area. Social Security Scotland has explicit commitments to treating people with dignity and respect, to uphold their human rights, and to maximise uptake of devolved payments. Ben Macpherson, the Minister for Social Security, has publicly stated the Scottish Government's view that "accessing social security is a human right", which is enshrined in legislation in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. However, the UK Government has yet to adopt a similar shift in tone and focus for the DWP."*

The approach adopted by Social Security Scotland, including the framing of social security entitlements as a human right, may encourage benefit uptake and overcome the narrative of "undeserving" recipients. This is also likely to have positive results in terms of the self-esteem and wider mental health of people who are in receipt of social security entitlements.

Schools were identified as a key place where hidden costs associated with uniforms, lunches and subject materials can exacerbate poverty, create barriers to opportunity for pupils from low-income backgrounds and encourage poverty-related stigma. EIS argue that reducing the overall cost of the school day as extensively as possible will help to reduce stigma in school settings and allow pupils from low-income backgrounds to participate in the school experience fully. This also expands into guidelines related to school uniform, ensuring that policies are broad enough to allow

flexibility (e.g. no exclusive, expensive suppliers) yet detailed enough to prevent instances where lack of income is obvious (e.g. banning designer brands).

The ALLIANCE noted the necessity of introducing a no wrong door approach to support. This means that services providing support for one area of a person's life can also provide information or referrals to other areas that they may be struggling with. This is particularly important for individuals applying for social security. Social Security Scotland and any associated partners involved in the delivery of financial support should ensure that all frontline staff are supported to provide referrals through the provision of a funded referral network established between the different agencies and partners delivering different types of support. This should include data sharing where appropriate. This will go some way in helping to remove the need for claimants to inherently know which benefits and support they may be entitled to and how to claim them, whilst removing the stigma associated with different forms of support. Prior to this, it is also important that information about available support to different groups such as parents is brought to them, rather than individuals having to seek out information for themselves. This sort of approach tackles stigma by moving to show that entitlements are easy to determine and access, cementing the idea of social security as a safety net and a moral good.

In addition, simplifying and automating processes for applying for financial assistance must be a priority. Age Scotland identified that joining up and automating processes will increase take-up and help to normalise the experience of receiving social security thus tackling the stigma associated with it. Using the example of support for parents in Scotland (such as the Scottish Child Payment), automating processes avoided parents potentially being put off applying due complex systems which, as detailed earlier, give the idea that social security should be hard-won.

CPAG noted that during lockdown, parents in local authorities where free school meal applications were automated, spoke about the *"incredible relief"* of not having to fill in forms:

> *"No need to apply, they just did it, which was really helpful as it was one less task for me to try and sort out at stressful time. Aside from financial side, it was a good feeling that someone was looking out for us when things are difficult."*

CPAG gave the example of Glasgow City Council who automated its school clothing grant process in 2017 leading to almost every eligible child in Glasgow receiving their entitlement. Again, increasing the availability and reducing the barriers to support, communicates the narrative that support should be taken and that those in need deserve support.

On the delivery of support, embedding cash-based support first and foremost was seen to be critical to ending poverty-related stigma. Providing cash-based support to families is the most effective way of supporting them to meet the needs of their children and can bolster financial inclusion efforts. During the pandemic CPAG conducted research with families receiving free school meal replacements in a variety of ways, including vouchers and food parcels. Families expressed a clear preference for a cash first approach to enable dignity, choice, accessibility and discretion. A cash first approach avoids stigma, empowers people to make the best

choices for their households and families, and shows commitment to including the voice of low-income families in policy decisions designed to tackle poverty.

Q14. What other bodies or organisations do you believe have a responsibility for helping to end poverty-related stigma, and what particular changes can they make?

ADS noted that all levels of government (local, devolved and national) have a responsibility for tackling poverty-related stigma in a variety of ways. They hold the power to design services, including social security, in a manner that does not stigmatise people living in poverty. In addition, their ability to communicate ideas and narratives to almost all members of the public gives Governments and elected members power to shape understandings of people living on low incomes. All levels of Government have responsibility to communicate truths about poverty, its causes, consequences and solutions. The choices around which departments to invest government funds into is indicative of the value attributed to the people accessing those services. Investing in services that serve people living on low incomes communicates the notion that these services have worth and should be accessed, thus tackling stigma.

Third sector and community organisations were highlighted by CELCIS as playing a key role due to their direct engagement with people living in poverty. CELCIS noted that charities hold significant power to lobby governments and identify the best ways to tackle poverty through listing to and elevating the voices of people with lived experience.

Lastly, contributors like EIS, the ALLIANCE and SVRU noted that all of us individually have a role to play in tackling poverty-related stigma. To see vast change in societal attitudes towards poverty and those living in poverty, we must challenge our own internalised prejudices and stereotypes of poverty, whilst also challenging the stigmatised beliefs of the people we interact with daily. We must listen to people with lived experience as the real experts in poverty; its causes, consequences, and solutions, and amplify their thoughts.

Conclusions

Submissions to this inquiry highlighted that there is a lack of national surveys that capture experiences of poverty-related stigma from the perspective of those who are affected by these issues. Without this data, it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of poverty stigma; which types of poverty stigma are felt most acutely by which groups in society; or whether poverty stigma is increasing or decreasing over time. It is crucial that we address this data gap. This could be achieved by exploring the feasibility of measuring experiences of poverty stigma through an existing national survey such as the Scottish Household Survey.

In preventing people from coming forward for support and instilling feelings of shame, poverty-related stigma is actively preventing the reduction of poverty in Scotland. Similarly, negative assumptions about people on low incomes have had a tangible impact on the design and resourcing of policies that could tackle poverty. The findings of this inquiry again underscore the fact that tackling poverty becomes substantially more challenging, if not impossible, if we fail to tackle poverty-related stigma.

Recommendations

Based upon the submissions to this inquiry, the Cross Party Group on Poverty make a number of recommendations:

- Ensure the design of social security does not embed stigma by automating benefits where possible and reassessing application processes.
- Increase investment in a comprehensive programme of benefits take up, through both mainstream media and targeted activities at community level to maximise uptake.
- Provide poverty awareness training to all staff in public facing roles, including teachers, health care professionals, social workers and those administering welfare advice.
- Hold the media to account over promotion of negative and/or false narratives about poverty and those experiencing poverty.
- Include education about poverty in the national curriculum to prevent and challenge stigma in younger people.
- Politicians should consider how they frame their perspectives on social security and poverty in their speeches and other communications.
- Ensure that policymaking is informed by people with direct experience of poverty. We must listen to people with lived experience as the real experts in poverty; its causes, consequences, and solutions, and amplify their perspectives .
- Utilise forthcoming work from the University of Strathclyde, University of the West of Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and Mental Health Foundation to develop a measurement on stigma.

APPENDIX ONE: Perspectives of the role of the media, by the media

As well as calling for written submissions for this inquiry, on the 23rd of February 2022 Cross Party Group on Poverty hosted a roundtable with 10 individuals from across both print and digital media[25] to have an open conversation about the role that the media can have in tackling poverty-related stigma.

A significant portion of the discussion revolved around actual practise of interviewing and reporting on people with experiences of poverty. Challenging poverty-related stigma starts by treating people with lived experience of poverty with respect, dignity and ensuring they are informed about the realities of discussing poverty in the press.

Participants from the media concluded that informed consent is key to ensuring dignity and safety. This includes:

- Ensuring participants know what is going to happen with their contribution, including where it will be accessible (online/print), and the number of times shown and/or shared.
- Preparing individuals for any backlash; ensuring interviewees know that people may disagree or even be actively hostile.
- Setting reasonable expectations about the results of their contribution. For example, highlighting that it is unlikely that their interview will result in policy change.
- Making sure that quotes are signed off by individuals, allowing participants to see their quotes in the context of the article so they understand how they are being framed. It should then be possible for people to retract their quotes should they be uncomfortable with the context.

Ensuring the individual is prepared for the interview. This includes:

- Recruiting appropriate contributors through ensuring that the individuals being interviewed are going to be right for the job. For example, taking extra care and consideration if an individual has mental health issues.
- Knowing the motivations of the individual for taking part in the research. For individuals in poverty, they most often wish to highlight the structural inequalities that lead to poverty and trapped them in there; they do not want to be pitied or receive sympathy. Instead, they want to communicate the reality of how existing policies create these inequalities and show solidarity with others in similar situations.
- Providing guides and advice on how to deal with social media responses, taking care to implement safeguarding practices as needed.
- Conducting welfare check ins following the interviews.

During the interview, reporters should:

- Provide a safe and welcoming space for participation.

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[25] Outlets included: Glasgow Times, The Herald, NUJ Scotland, Channel 4 Dispatches, BBC Scotland, The National, Third Force News, Daily Mirror, STV, and the Big Issue

- Ensure that participants they feel listened to and ensure they trust the outlet they are contributing to.
- Recognise their own lack of knowledge and their privilege.
- Treat people as individuals and recognise that not everyone in poverty is the same. There are intersections and individuality with each person's experiences of poverty.
- Recognise the uniqueness of this experience for the people they are giving a platform to. While journalists do this sort of work every day, this is not the norm for people with experience of poverty.

During the roundtable, there was a wider discussion regarding the setup of the journalism sector and how this can hinder reporters from being able to actively tackle stigma in their writing. For outlets who have relative autonomy in what they report on, they can dedicate time to ensuring their coverage works to tackle poverty, including being able to dedicate time and resource to preparations and aftercare of participants. However, journalists are often put into contexts where their primary goal is to gather views and clicks on links for online articles, in addition to goals set around the number of publications they produce. In these contexts, journalists are incentivised to churn out multiple shorter articles that generate clicks. These types of articles are less likely to be the kind that tackle stigma and instead will rely on "clickbait" titles which are often drivers of stigma.

Participants in the roundtable also noted that many people they speak to who have experience of poverty have concerns around the consequences of speaking out, particularly when the delivery of public services is considered. People with experiences of poverty can be concerned about losing their homes or having their support cut if they speak to the press about problems for example people in housing associations or people in council tax arrears. This may be heightened with groups going through government systems such as Asylum Seekers who may fear authority and institutions and repercussions on applications. More broadly, the toxicity of social media pile-ons is increasingly becoming an issue. Individuals may struggle to avoid this as switching off comments or not posting on social media cannot mitigate for people being tracked down and attacked online.

References

The CPG on Poverty received 21 written submissions to this inquiry. Submissions were received from:

- Advice Direct Scotland
- Age Scotland
- Centre for Excellence in Children's Care and Protection
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Christians Against Poverty
- Education Institute Scotland
- Glasgow Disability Alliance
- Includem
- Inclusion Scotland
- NASUWT
- Pupils at Bellahouston Academy's Cost of the School Day Project
- Scottish Community Safety Network
- Scottish Violence Reduction Unit
- The ALLIANCE
- The Corra Foundation
- The Mental Health Foundation
- The Poverty Alliance
- The Poverty Truth Commission
- University of Strathclyde
- University of the West of Scotland
- Wester Hailes Healthy Living Centre