

UNTOLD
REALITIES OF ~~POVERTY~~

POVERTY IN THE UK

IN THE UK



GROWING RIGHTS
INSTEAD OF POVERTY
PARTNERSHIP

Written by members of
Growing Rights Instead of
Poverty Partnership (GRIPP)

INTRODUCTION

In GRIPP (Growing Rights Instead of Poverty Partnership) we talk about Human Rights with a focus on economic, social and cultural rights which are the essential conditions needed to live a life of equality, dignity and freedom. They include the rights to work and workers' rights, social security, health, education, food, water, housing, an adequate standard of living and to the protection of the family. These are the day-to-day rights that affect us from when we wake up in the morning to when, even where, we go to sleep at night.

In 2023, we submitted evidence to the United Nations about our experiences of how our Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are blocked by the UK government policy decisions. Here is a bit of what we said:

"We recognise that there is a system being created and maintained by the UK Government that not only works against people breaking out of poverty, but in fact works to keep our communities poor, to keep us ill, to keep us isolated. Although our different communities may have different interactions with the state, whether it be through interactions with an Immigration Official, a Social Worker, a Job Centre advisor, or a Health practitioner, we all experience the same povertyism, along with the intersecting experiences of race, disability etc. These state actors are not experienced as 'helpers' but as mechanisms of the state's agenda to blame communities.

We are blamed for our ill health. We are blamed for not working. We are blamed for our broken families. We are blamed for our poverty - when in fact it is the state that is denying us these rights."

To build on this work, we believe more needs to be done to raise awareness of poverty amongst the general public! We believe that it is vital to raise the voices of those who experience the complexity of poverty to build wider understanding of the issues.

In 2024 we began to develop our campaign “Poverty Is a Human Rights Issue” which aims to:

raise awareness: that poverty exists in the UK and that it is caused by political decisions;

enable communities: to understand the potential power of human rights in our lives;

demonstrate: how policy choices impact lives and that implementing human rights offers a solution;

show: the world the positive contributions being made by people in poverty.

The Untold Realities of Poverty in the UK booklet aims to raise awareness of issues and encourage readers to understand experiences of poverty and how poverty is generated. Here follows a range of stories, covering different issues, experiences, communities and locations. We want people to see the realities of poverty in the UK and also the great contributions to society made by many who experience poverty, as they are human rights defenders and activists every day.

These Untold Realities have come directly from groups and individuals who are experiencing poverty in the UK right now. They are uncensored by any organisation’s agenda. Some authors have chosen to remain anonymous; others have chosen to be named, or to reference their group but all are directly involved in leading the work of GRIPP.

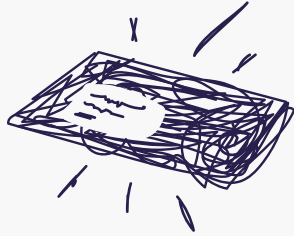
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The GRIPP Campaign Team of 2024

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BROWN ENVELOPE SYNDROME

Can I ask you a question? When you go to bed tonight will you simultaneously breathe a sigh of relief but, at the same time, fear what the morning will bring – caused by something that happens to nearly everyone around the world and doesn't cause a second's thought from most people? Unfortunately, for thousands of people on welfare benefits this is a daily reality. "What is this cause of such trepidation?" I hear you ask. Simple, the daily post being delivered!!

But why would the daily visit from the postie cause such fear? Well, it's a condition called 'Brown Envelope Syndrome (BES)' and I am a sufferer. This condition is so known because if you're on DWP Benefits most of the contact they have with you comes through the post in Brown Envelopes. I am on the PIP (Personal Independence Payment) Benefit and am due to be medically assessed again this year. Firstly, I will dread the envelope coming through the letter box with the application form to reapply. Secondly, once I send the form off I will be waiting anxiously each day to be called for a medical assessment for a condition that both the DWP and I know will never improve and, thirdly, after the examination, I will live in utter dread of the brown envelope dropping through my door informing me of the DWP's decision!

I'm sure most of you are thinking that I'm over-reacting but I'll try to explain why the BES can cause such panic. For me, decisions made by faceless bureaucrats hundreds of miles away can have a really adverse effect on my life. Their decision, especially if it's to reduce your benefits, can affect your ability to meet the daily costs of life, put strain on your family, strain on your health (both physical and mental) and (can and has) lead to family and marital break-ups and, unfortunately, has led to some people committing suicide.

When you're on benefits, you are constantly being called to account for your life. This can either be in the form of a daily journal listing your attempts to get a job if you're on Job Seeker's Allowance or account anywhere from yearly to 3 yearly for your medical condition if you're on PIP. However, at the same time the decision-makers and politicians are very rarely called to account for the effect their decisions have on thousands of people's lives. Even when a mechanism is put in place to challenge a decision, the apparatus and procedure of getting access to this system is so complicated, convoluted and bureaucratic that it puts people off. Eventually, when a challenge finally goes to tribunal you feel like you're on trial not the policy-makers. The tribunal itself can be so traumatic that there have been cases of people having nervous breakdowns after it, some individuals have even taken their own lives due to the stress of the 'trial'.

So, friends, this is a daily reality for me and for thousands of other people up and down the country. We are made to feel like criminals. We have to justify our very lives – continually – and in forensic detail. We are given no dignity, no control over our lives, no input into any decisions made that impact our lives and finally, the system is so complicated and full of traps we sometimes feel it's easier to accept the decisions made by others rather than challenge them. Now do you see why BES is a very real condition and why I suffer from it?



RAPAR ON THE 'RIOTS'*



The Refugee Experience: Escaping Again

Being a refugee isn't merely about crossing borders; it's a perpetual state of vulnerability. Imagine always glancing over your shoulder, fearing danger, and yearning for safety. The trauma of displacement lingers, even after finding refuge in a new land. Uncertainty and memories of what was left behind: the faces, smells and sounds that continue to haunt shape the ongoing refugee experience. It's like living in a museum, where everything remains tantalizingly out of reach behind thick glass—a life observed but not fully lived.

Fear and Vigilance: Life in the Shadows

Picture this: you're in an unfamiliar city, surrounded by strangers. Each passerby becomes a potential threat. You check over your shoulder, wary of anyone who might harbour ill intentions. The fear of acid attacks, whether real or imagined, weighs heavily. And you warn others against wearing scarves, because even clothing choices can mark you as different. It's a life lived in the shadows, where safety remains elusive and trust is scarce. The psychological toll of constant vigilance erodes the soul, leaving scars that no one else can see.

Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword

Social media, the great connector and divider. On one hand, it unites people across borders, allowing them to share stories, find common ground, and build communities. But on the other hand, it can amplify hate, misinformation, and fear. Far-right groups exploit these platforms, spreading their toxic ideologies. Meanwhile, mainstream media often pours fuel on the fire, sensationalising events and deepening divisions. It's a digital battlefield where narratives clash, and truth becomes elusive.

Remember those haunting images, the ones etched into your consciousness? People fleeing hotels, seeking refuge in wooded areas while hotels were under attack. Was it all planned? Perhaps not explicitly, but during the summer months when schools are out, tensions rise. The government's decisions, such as placing people in hotels, become puzzle pieces. And in this chaotic mosaic, refugees, people seeking asylum and many of the rioters who followed the Far Right call emerge as victims of the same enemy: the systemic drive for profit that is the reason for capitalism to exist and that needs division, anger, isolation and the consequent scapegoating to thrive. It's a cruel irony—the very people seeking safety are caught in the crossfire.

The Mushroom Treatment: Kept in the Dark

"We're given the mushroom treatment," someone says. It's a darkly humorous way to describe how marginalised communities are often kept ignorant, fed misinformation, left in the dark, and abandoned to grow in isolation. This isn't unique to immigrants; indigenous communities share this plight. The potent combination of resource deprivation and lack of education perpetuates discrimination. White communities in areas with few Black and Brown residents may have preconceived notions, but they don't truly understand racism. The Right to Work, so that we can experience our independent agency and contribute within the society, and access to meaningful education: these are our collective antidotes, lights to dispel the shadows.

Solidarity: When Communities Stand Together

Amidst the chaos, there's hope. A couple of weeks ago, when the Far Right tried to spread hate, fear, and violence many people, regardless of race, faith, or political view, joined the fight against discrimination and fascism. They stood alongside refugees, making a powerful statement. Trust is built, and comfort is found in collective action. It's a reminder that we're not taking anything away; we're coming together to dismantle the barriers that divide us. Solidarity is our weapon against hate, the force that binds us across fractured lines.

Contradictions and Education

Contradictions abound. Some indigenous voices cry, “Give our country back!” Yet, the very fabric of this nation is woven from diverse threads. We must educate, not just about “Life in the UK” but about the shared struggles, the scars of dictatorships, corruptions, wars and so on... Only then can we bridge the gap between “us” and “them.” It’s not about erasing history; it’s about understanding the complex tapestry that shapes our present.

The Corporate Web: Serco and Beyond

Dig deeper, and you’ll find multinational corporate fingerprints. The leadership of Serco, now being paid by the Government to assess people on benefits alongside controlling a multitude of detention centres and implicated in many allegations of human rights abuses, has connections that stretch back to Churchill’s grandchildren. The intricacies of power and influence weave tangled webs that knowledge and awareness, alongside action, can dismantle. Let’s shine a light on the hidden threads—the ones that connect policy decisions to distant billionaire boardrooms.

In conclusion, our fight against discrimination requires education, empathy and unity in action. Let’s break down the walls that separate us, one conversation and another mobilisation against the far right at a time. The people united will never be defeated.

*The views represented here derive from a participatory action research semi structured discussion in RAPAR about the impact of the recent riots on our lives that have been written up into this blog by one of our Leaders, Farid Vahidi.





NOT FIT BUT FIT FOR WORK

We saw you coming in
Walking like everyone does
Now let's get you back to work.
Hang on, wait, I need to tell you...
There's work out there
For people like you,
If you just...
Can I get a word in please? I can't...
Our assessments are thorough
We know what you're capable of
You're a woman who CAN!



"CHILD" POVERTY IS ACTUALLY ABOUT FAMILIES



In the UK, we are currently witnessing countless members of society plunging into poverty. Statistics show that absolute poverty has seen the biggest rise in 30 years. This is linked to an influx of media coverage, much of which repeats the dire term: **"child poverty"**. However, as GRIPP pointed out to the United Nations in 2022, focusing only on "child poverty", as though children were not impacted by their parents' poverty, may create an incentive for removing children from parents in poverty, and thus from the statistics on child poverty. Dr. Simon Haworth (social work academic at the University of Birmingham) aptly points out, "Instead of talking about a 'child at risk' or a 'child in need', it's more helpful to understand that the whole *family* deserves support".

All of us want children to grow up with a sense of belonging, connection, and roots. And yet in Britain today, more children are being removed from their families and put into care than at any time since the 1980s. Children and families in poverty, especially those suffering from multiple disadvantages, are significantly more likely to be the subject of state intervention in the form of child protection investigations and care proceedings than those not living in poverty.¹ Children in the UK's most deprived communities are over 10 times more likely to enter the care system than those from the most affluent areas. Poverty leads entire families to feel neglected by an austerity-based society rife with inequality and discrimination, and to then be doubly punished by having their children removed.

¹ Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G., Bunting, L., Hooper, J., Mirza, N., Scourfield, J. and Webb, C. (2018) 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions', *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), pp. 364-372.

One academic explains the problem with the current approach: “Social workers say ‘I’m not helping the mother with her housing because I’m the social worker for the child’. But children live in families and have relationships. You cannot just be the social worker for the child. The harm that the system does to people is not recognising that **children are not separate from the family.**”²

Children’s social care is increasingly being used as part of a punitive welfare state linked to benefit sanctions, poor inadequate housing, and harsh responses to families living in deprived areas. Families in poverty go through painful separations more often than others, with poverty becoming the “wallpaper of practice” for social workers “being too big to tackle and too familiar to notice”.³

Tammy Mayes, Angela Babb, and Taliah Drayak are members of GRIPP who have been running a series of study groups on poverty, social work, and the right to family life. These are some of the things they have heard in the study groups about the importance of offering early preventative support to a family as a whole:

“Our kids go through trauma when they have social work involvement or the removal of themselves or their siblings. My girls always say that the worst part was watching me break, seeing me come back broken time and again from hearings. I was trying to hide it. I wanted to be strong for them. I was so worried about how they were being affected; while they were worried about me. Nobody ever talks about how kids want to protect their parents.”

– parent

“Social workers at times hone in on poverty and individualise it and start looking at parenting capacity in terms of the social class of the individual. They don’t look at the fact that there isn’t enough money coming into that family, and they still do the best they can.”

– practitioner

2 This academic spoke as part of a study group on poverty, social work and the right to family life run by ATD Fourth World.

3 Kate Morris, Calum Webb, Paul Bywaters, Martin Elliott and Jonathan Scourfield, ‘Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions’ (2018) 23(3) *Child & Family Social Work* 370 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12423>>

“Social workers talk about being ‘the child’s social worker’ quite a lot. It sounds as though it’s to avoid helping with things that might be really helpful for a parent. For example, a parent had to go into a drug and alcohol unit and had issues with losing her furniture while she was in the unit. She wanted the social worker’s support in sorting that out so that she would have furniture when she came out of that unit, which is obviously really important in the context of being able to care for her children. But the response was, ‘I’m the children’s social worker, so I can’t help you with these practical things, that’s outside my role’. What professionals see as being most important can sometimes be a tick box. And they use that kind of language to describe their role so as to avoid helping with support for that parent.”

– social worker

“That’s riling me up inside because the child’s social worker is passing the buck of responsibility. If you’re the child’s social worker, but you have a parent asking for a supportive role, then your job to help the child would be to contact a service and pass that parent along to those services in order for them to achieve that help that they need. It’s not a social worker’s responsibility to completely dismiss the parent; it is still your role to support that leg of that child’s life. That is a leg on the table for that child, take that leg away and your table’s wobbling.”

– parent

The upshot is that to become civilised and compassionate, and to remove the barriers to justice currently affecting families in poverty engaged in the UK’s child protection system, we need to listen to parents like Tammy, Angela, Taliah, and others with lived experience in order to fixing attention entirely on the child in isolation. Parents know their children best, and a family-centred approach can reap the expertise of all family members to develop the most suitable support system to work towards an end to poverty for all.





THE MANY FACES OF POVERTY: A PERSONAL EXPLORATION BY RAPAR MEMBERS

Poverty affects people in many ways, and understanding these differences can help us address it better. Recently, some members of the Refugee and Asylum Participatory Action Research (RAPAR) group came together to talk about what poverty means to them personally. This discussion took place at the RAPAR office a few weeks ago, providing a space for people to share their experiences and views on poverty. Our conversation was about both individual hardships and our struggles as a community.

During our meeting, we found that the idea of poverty is very personal and can mean different things to different people. For some, poverty means not having basic things like food, shelter, and clothing. For others, it means not being able to get education, healthcare, and other important services. Despite these differences, we all agreed that poverty affects every part of our lives daily.

As refugees and displaced people living in the UK, we all agreed that we experience poverty in deep and significant ways. This might not be true for every refugee or displaced person, but for those of us in the discussion, it is a fact. The challenges we face are many and affect our housing, education, health, and mental well-being.

We decided to focus on how poverty affects health. One member shared her story about health problems. She was told to follow a specific diet for her health, but because of money issues, she couldn't. This shows a bigger problem: how not having enough money can make health problems worse, creating a cycle that is hard to escape.

Food banks are a crucial help for many, but they are not a perfect solution. The same member mentioned that while food banks provide much-needed help, the food they offer often doesn't meet the dietary needs of people with specific health issues. This gap between the food provided and what people need makes the tough situation of living in poverty even harder.

Our discussion at RAPAR showed us how poverty affects health in many ways. Not being able to afford a healthy diet, get necessary healthcare, or live in decent housing severely impacts our physical and mental health. These challenges affect not just individuals but our whole community.

In conclusion, understanding the many faces of poverty means listening to those who live it every day. Our stories and experiences as members of RAPAR show how complex poverty is, especially when it comes to health. We hope that by sharing our experiences, we can raise awareness and inspire action to address the root causes of poverty and improve the lives of refugees and displaced people in the UK.





NOT GOOD ENOUGH

When she tried to hide the bruises
They said, 'Not good enough,
She shouldn't have got married so young'
So she left

When she struggled to live on benefits
They said, 'Not good enough,
Single parents are just a drain on the system'
So she got a job

When she tried to rise above the typing pool
They said, 'Not good enough,
You need qualifications if you want to get on'
So she got an education

When she graduated from a Poly,
They said, 'Not good enough,
For high level jobs'
So she taught

Other kids from the streets
To stand up and fight and NEVER to take
'Not good enough'



GRIPP

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Growing Rights Instead of Poverty Partnership (GRIPP) is working together to end poverty across the nations and regions of the UK.

We believe that Poverty is a Human Rights Violation, and that poverty and human rights need to be brought together to challenge systemic causes of injustice.

We believe that undocumented* experience needs to be shared to expose and challenge systemic issues at the root cause.

We believe that through bringing together lived and learnt experience of poverty and human rights, we can realise knowledge and generate the power to drive real change.

We believe that by bringing people, groups and communities together, across the UK, we can build a social movement for change.

***We recognise the “undocumented” both in terms of people who are without status and therefore undocumented, and people with status whose experiences have so far remained undocumented.**



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THE Poverty Truth
Community



RAPAR
WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE
EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

THRIVE
BUILDING BETTER LIVES



SEFYDLIAD
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FOUNDATION



justfair