



Responding to poverty, trauma & multiple disadvantage



Essay collection compiled by



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SCSN Learning Report on 'The Knot'

Webinar by Revolving Doors

25th February 2021

Speakers: Julian Corner, Chief Executive of Lankelly Chase, Professor Tracy Shildrick, Dr. Deborah Morris, Dr. Michael Smith and more.

"Poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage are all inter-connected, so why don't we act as if they are?"

Introduction

This webinar launched a [new collection of eight essays](#) that explore how poverty, trauma and structural disadvantage create and perpetuate multiple disadvantage, and featured contributions from a range of speakers, including some of the authors of these essays to this topic.

This topic is of particular interest to us at SCSN, so much so that we dedicated a full section of our recently published ['Manifesto for Safer Communities for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections 2021'](#) to policy action on poverty, giving it top billing within the document.

We did this because we understand that poverty and multiple disadvantage are not only among the key social determinants of poor health, but also impact on numerous areas of community safety by giving rise to so many of the social and environmental conditions that give rise to stress and trauma.

Poverty, multiple disadvantage and trauma directly impact upon violence/violent crime, unintentional harm and injury, alcohol and drugs, anti-social behaviour, human trafficking and more.

In our manifesto, we called for a continued dialogue on poverty and its' harms, and chimed with 'The Knot' essay collection by calling for cross sector action to eradicate poverty.

"Poverty creates crime. It puts people into a situation where their backs are against the wall....where they're being forced into it. All my offending has been due to the fact I had no money in my pocket"

Event Discussion Summary: Untying the Knot

The Essay Collection uses the delightful metaphor of a knot representing how poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage interact.

Rates of poverty in the UK are increasing – with the Covid-19 pandemic only exacerbating this pre-existing situation. Speakers discussed how this is fundamentally about justice and human rights.

One speaker said that unless we get real about this, poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage will be left to spread.

Speakers said that these essays offer a framework for action and help form an ecosystem where we can all act on the same thing and play our role in an instrumental way, helping us to avoid acting reductively as if these things (poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage) weren't connected.

There was a big emphasis on co-production and lived experience as being pivotal in taking effective action.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

Unsurprisingly, there was much discussion of ACES. One contributor said that kids being brought up in more stressed environments creates problems for the future, including in education and trauma – which can cause a chain reaction on a whole number of other issues and areas of life.

Chiming with the work of Dr Gabor Mate, one contributor talked about the importance of taking a human rights based approach rather than deficit based approaches of 'What's wrong with you?'

Dr Mate in his books on stress, child development and addiction made exactly this point that rather than asking 'What's wrong with you?' we should be asking 'What happened to you?'

There was discussion on the need to avoid the risk of ACES being used in such a way that they became deterministic and that the presence of trauma in childhood need not mean there

Poverty in the UK

Professor Tracy Shildrick of Newcastle University reminded us that the two main causes of poverty in the UK are:

- Inadequate out of work benefits
- In work poverty (low paid, insecure jobs)

She said, 'I don't think we talk enough about the fact that poverty isn't just a given in society; that it IS a policy/political decision.'



"The idea that welfare dependency is widespread and that poverty is caused by individual failings is also well embedded in our political system. For too long there has been a narrative perpetuated, at times, by all political parties and the media that individualises blame and stereotypes people."

Professor Tracy Shildrick, Newcastle University

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is an inevitability of negative outcomes for individuals, given that we know protective factors can mitigate the impact of trauma.

Food for thought: *This was an interesting point within the discussion when thinking about public perceptions, as in some ways people do seem to understand that having experienced trauma is not deterministic of negative outcomes such as addiction or criminal behaviour, though they perhaps don't understand this in helpful ways.*

In the 'debate' between those who emphasise personal responsibility and those who posit strong environmental or social factors influencing a person's behaviour, a commonly heard refrain is, 'I came from a poor background, I had traumatising experiences but I didn't go about committing crime or using alcohol or drugs.'

So people understand intuitively that trauma doesn't always result in negative consequences, seeming to believe that their own high virtues are responsible for that, and (possibly without knowing it) downplay the extent to which they had protective factors in their lives that mitigated against these negative outcomes. What can we do to enhance people's understanding?

How does 'Place' interact with poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage (PTMD)?

There was discussion around how place interacts with PTMD. High rates of poverty and disadvantage can embed multiple problems.

One contributor quoted experience from research in Australia where he said typically, areas of high deprivation are thought to attract lots of services and charities, which therefore attract lots of clients who sometimes move into the area to be close enough to access these services. However, many of these people don't manage to get better and stay in these areas, impacting on levels of social problems – e.g. crime, anti-social behaviour, alcohol & drug problems.

For more see the [Australian Early Development Index](#).

Speakers also discussed how stories of deficit, shame and stigma attach themselves to places, and people who grow up in those places absorb these stories.

Racial and gender inequalities

There was some discussion on how intersections such as race and gender must also be considered around poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage, with Professor James Nazroo of the University of Manchester saying in his essay that, 'The pursuit of an agenda to reform the operation of institutions to address race/ethnic inequalities, rather than to reproduce them, must involve partnership between the clients and leadership of institutions.'

Dr Deborah Morris and Elanor Webb of St Andrews Healthcare said on gender, 'Moving forward it is imperative that the mainstreaming of an inclusive approach to gender be embedded throughout the design of policies and practices, from the outset. By doing so, services will be better placed to address the life limiting impacts of trauma and reduce structural inequalities.'

Final thoughts

Speakers discussed a need for further research to plug gaps in knowledge, but warned against getting trapped in a 'hunt for evidence' when it comes to the exploration of the interactions and impact of poverty, trauma and multiple disadvantage and taking action to remedy their negative outcomes – saying that the evidence base is already there, we need to start taking action!

These essays will undoubtedly give me, and hopefully many others, more tools and structures for three crucial challenges. First, to engage with the interconnections of poverty, trauma, and multiple disadvantage in ways that reduce overwhelm and paralysis and enable action and learning. Second, to examine the degree to which our own practice inadvertently reproduces injustices, and to find ways in which our choices can do more good and less harm. And third, to locate our own ideological lenses clearly enough so that, in the words of Jones, Ricon and Dommers, we are able to “see possibility, potential, growth and a future of radical inclusion”.

Julian Corner, CEO, Lankelly Chase

You can view the webinar in full [here](#).

Read more about the Untying the Knot project and essays [here](#).

Revolving Doors will be publishing a range of podcasts using the #KnowYourKnots hashtag on Twitter. Follow them at: [@RevDoors](#)