

How has the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated poverty among families in Wales?

Part 1

Abstract

Throughout this assignment I will be conducting a researched review on causes of poverty with a particular focus on the effects of covid with children and adults in Wales. Poverty is usually measured by income to a household, though it has been found that people's opinions and experience in poverty brings many factors. These many factors include low pay, lack of affordable housing, poor access to employment and reduced access to services during the pandemic (WEF,2021). An important factor to consider is the lack of affordable childcare and limited access to internet in rural areas. The Welsh Government have shown importance to tackling poverty as one of their main objectives (Gov.Wales) highlighting it as a central objective in their policies. The Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) have analysed evidence that has previously been undertaken regarding the causes of poverty and what could be done to potentially help the issue at hand. These include help for young carers that are at risk of experiencing homelessness and many ways to help increase affordability with housing costs (Gov.Wales, 2012). This review draws on diverse sources including academic journals and policy analyses. It aims to provide an understanding on the short and long term effects that the pandemic has had on poverty in Wales. It will assess on how school closures and the digital divide have widened educational disparities. Which are differences that come from education opportunities that can be related to economic, social, and cultural factors (APA, 2022). Ultimately, this review aims to find affective strategies to help battle poverty and give support to the most vulnerable in this post-pandemic recovery phase.

Part 2

Literature Review

Throughout this assignment, there will be discussion on observation and evaluation of poverty within the UK and the effects that have risen since the peak of covid. This review will reflect on how poverty plays a significant role in both adults and children. The COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant role in children, whether it be their physical health, mental health, or their education. Children who contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic experienced fatigue and respiratory issues and many children have had prolonged effect of the illness, this being long covid (Jiang, et al. 2023). As stated in agreeance with this, Madigan, et al. (2023, p.4) explains that children who have had this illness has led to a notable increase among children in regard to mental health issues. Due to the prolonged lockdowns, anxiety, stress, and depression has been heightened and has rapidly increased the lack of social isolation (WHO, 2022). With

school closures creating a disruption in not only their social life but education, this quickly affected children's academic skills and their ability to socialise. Children then coming from families that have lower income, experienced greater difficulties due to having no access or limited access to the internet and digital devices (Jiang, et al. 2023). The significant changes that happened during the pandemic have played a vital role in the effects of children and adults well-being, this including their behaviours. Their reduced physical activity and disrupted sleep patterns have caused adverse effects. Children who were living in resource -rich environments according to Madigan, et al. (2023) paved a steadier path to the end of COVID lockdowns compared to the those in less supportive households.

Despite the UK being one of the most advanced and developing countries in the world, approximately 11 million people are living in poverty in the UK alone (Cuffe, 2024). This suggests that more than 20% of the population in the UK fall into the category of 'extreme poverty'. All over the world, it has become not only a political issue but a social and economic issue. According to Children in Wales (2024) 28% of children in Wales are currently living in poverty. Following on that children who experience living in poverty can have a potentially devastating effect on the child's education, health, and overall wellbeing (Bessell, 2022. P.5) therefor shows a clear understanding of daily deprivation and struggle. However, stated by World Vision (2018) currently, less than 10% of the population live in extreme poverty.

Addressing poverty is critical to help ensure we uphold human rights and to allow all to live with dignity. Unfortunately, there is not one answer for poverty and as explained by Wijekoon, Sabri & Paim (2021) different observations and methods can sometimes create complications. Therefore, only actions that have been taken practically and theoretically to help abolish poverty appear to be unfeasible or unreliable. This review will help ensure that people know what poverty is, a few different approaches to how it is measured, the slight & vital causes behind the issue and how we are able to help the crisis.

Poverty is a multifaced concept that has been defined in various ways. Such as:

- Absolute Poverty – not enough household income to meet basic everyday needs.
- Relative Poverty – to have less than others in society, whether it be income and/or resources.
- Situational Poverty – a temporary state of poverty, which can be cause by a sudden event, for example, illness or a job loss.
- Generational poverty – poverty that would be passed down from one generation to the next
- Rural Poverty – this is where poverty is only concentrated in rural areas. (JRF, 2019).

JRF (2019) states that some of the causes of poverty throughout the UK are caused by the lack of employment and low paid jobs. An effective benefit system, high costs of living such as housing, goods, and services (e.g. electricity, water) and discrimination for instance – disability, gender, age or religion and trauma. Abuse linked to drugs and/or alcohol abuse, neglect from childhood and problems linked to mental health can also lead to poverty in the UK. Save the Children (2021) further this point by stating almost a third of children living in Wales are currently living in poverty. Comparing children in Wales to those that live in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, statistics show between 24-30%, whereas Wales is currently the highest percentage at 31%. Williams and Doyle (2016) state that tackling this issue is extremely important for Welsh policy makers. However, the UK Government have decreased the spending potential which in turn creates fewer resources for Welsh ministers to help intervene in challenges that are faced in rural communities. Hence, the importance of obtaining the correct and most recent evidence about the causes of poverty in Wales and the best way to tackle it.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has had multifaced impacts on both adults and children. This worldwide problem has affected their mental wellbeing, physical health and their experience throughout education (Suleman, et al. 2021. P38). The aim of this review is to gather the key causes of poverty that has been enhanced by the pandemic and has affected children and adults in Wales. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort. Educators, policy makers and health care providers will play a crucial role in supporting families in recovery.

Part 3

Methodological Considerations

The review will be conducted through a school setting while gaining gatekeeper consent being the headteacher, for safeguarding issues. A proposal will be presented alongside any questions asked. Detailed safeguarding protocols will be addressed including any information that any children may disclose to the researcher. Any information provided will be reported to a safeguarding officer or the gatekeeper.

The two methods which will be used to gather data in this review to gather an understanding of poverty post COVID -19 will be a survey and an interview. Conducting a survey that will target not only the children, but the parents also will provide a nuanced understanding of the multiple impacts that COVID-19 has caused. This method allows both quantitative and qualitative data and will allow us to gather a thorough understanding of their experience (George, 2022). Quantitative and qualitative data are two fundamental types of data that are frequently used in research in order to gather and analyse information (Streefkerk, 2019). Each type has different purposes, methods and collection styles. Quantitative data is information that can be subjected to

mathematical analysis. It is numerical and can be used to measure variable and analyse statistics (Huyler, 2019). Qualitative data is non-numerical but is descriptive. It is used to help understand opinions, concepts, and experiences in more depth (Huyler, 2019).

The survey will help gather statistics on how the pandemic has affected both children and parents through healthcare, mental health, and education among impoverished families (Munbli, 2022 p.3). This method will ensure a vast reach that small – scale qualitative studies may miss. Having the ability to engage with both children and parents help capture the intergenerational effects and helps us view the difference in family dynamics (Krzeczkowska et al, 2021). This in turn will offer a holistic view on how the pandemic has affected the children's development and their family's wellbeing. As stated by Tourangeau et al. (2013) a survey will help ensure anonymity throughout and will encourage honest responses from the candidates. The survey will be conducted through a system that would provide a number instead of the participant's name. Providing anonymity will help encourage honest and accurate responses while respecting the participants. The use of numbers used will help in data management while avoiding the compromise of anonymity (Saunders & Kitzinger, 2015, P.6). Personal information such as names, addresses and contact information of the participants will prevent any responses being linked to the individuals (Tourangeau et al, 2013). This is a crucial step which will help allow the understanding of sensitive issues that are related to poverty. By developing policies and interventions while informing support services, this survey will help immediate needs for the children and families and help with the recovery post COVID-19 poverty. The survey will be carefully designed to age-appropriate standards. All questions asked will be clear and concise in regard to the impact of COVID-19.

The second method chosen to collect data will be an interview. This method will allow to capture a broad range of needs by the families and their experiences. Interviews allow the collection of qualitative data, which can help with the findings of patterns in access to their education, mental health and health care services (Munbli, 2022). In addition to this, it will provide a deeper understanding of not only their psychological but their emotional wellbeing due to the impact of the pandemic. There will be two forms of interviews, one will be the children and adults interviewed separately, the second interview will consist of the adult and child being interviewed together. This is simply to analyse how the child's answers will be affected while having their parent in the room. This in turn will add to the aspect of quantitative data. These mixed methods will allow us to understand on a deeper level to how the multi-faced challenges of the pandemic has impacted families. Mixed method research combines both quantitative and qualitative research techniques (Creswell, J.W (2014). Creswell (2014) explains that it will allow more of an understanding of the research collected by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of data. However, Schoonenboom & Johnson (2017) argue

that implementing a mixed method approach in research can be complex. This method often will require more resources and time than a single method approach. Mixed methods can also gather conflicting results between qualitative and quantitative data (Harvard, 2018). By using both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the research, it is then possible to cross-verify the findings (Creswell, 2022). This process is known as triangulation and will help enhance the reliability of the results. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, data sources or theories used to help gain the credibility and validity of the results. It is used to help cross-verify data and ensure comprehensive analysis (Hassan, 2024).

Interviews will gain an insight into a wider audience, which in turn will ensure diversity in the data that will be collected. This method will go hand in hand with the survey method as it ensures anonymity, and it again helps encourage families' honest responses while helping reduce the stigma of poverty (Coomber, 2010 p.3). While conducting this review on the impact of COVID-19, the use of focus groups as a data collection method would not be an ideal approach. This method has limitations that would be unsuitable for the purpose of the review. According to Krueger & Casey (2014) focus groups would generate qualitative data, however it would be difficult to generalize. Organising a focus group would require a significant amount of time, resources and planning to recruit the participants, facilitate discussion and finally organise the data (Morgan, 1997, P.2). Certain participants may find it overwhelming, may not give their honest opinion in front of an audience and be influenced by a dominant participant, making the outcome less reliable (Carey & Smith, 2015).

When conducting interviews, we must be aware of various biases from the participants that can potentially affect the reliability of the data that is collected (Wingate et al. 2023). The Hawthorne and Halo effects are two biases which must be considered, and their implications understood when gathering accurate data (McCambridge, Witton & Elbourne (2014).

The Hawthorne effect refers to when a participant is aware that they are being observed and changes in their behaviour occur (Oswald, Sherratt and Smith, 2014 P.3). This was first identified between 1920 and 1940 when a series of experiments were conducted at the Hawthorne Works Factory (Britannica, 2024). Participants may show signs of behavioural changes and can potentially lead to inaccurate data collection. Another response documented is an increase in performance, participants may elevate their performance by impressing the interviewer (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014). Establishing a relationship with the participant may reduce the risk of the Hawthorne Effect (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This term is used academically and in the methodology of experiments (Jones, 1992) and demonstrates the difficulty to understand human behaviour (Goodwin et al, 2017).

Initially described by Edward Thorndike (1920), the Halo effect is a cognitive bias where we may make an assumption about someone or something based on one characteristic (Schultz, n.d). According to Thorndike (1920) when an individual is presented with information, an overall impression is formed. This information then forms a 'Halo' and can potentially lead to systematic errors in our evaluations (Neugaard, 2024).

Part 4

Ethical Considerations

In order to conduct research that involves young children and parents, it will involve the navigation of a complex landscape of ethical considerations especially when it involves families who have experienced poverty post COVID-19 (Palaiologou & Brown, 2023. P.3). We must ensure that the protection of families, along with their consent is at top priority. Gaining consent is a foundational ethical requirement (BERA, 2018), ensuring we respect the participants rights and anonymity. In order for the parents to get a clear understanding of the review, it will involve providing clear, comprehensive information about the purpose of the study, the procedure behind it and the risks of the review alongside the benefits. It is crucial that the participants know the voluntary nature of participation (Arellano, Alcubilla & Leguizamo, 2023).

All participants will be notified of the right to withdraw during both research methods (BERA, 2018). Participants will receive the researchers' details in case of a late withdrawal and will never be coerced into taking part or remaining in the review process (Blackburn, 2015). Accessible language must be used while conducting the research to help ensure an understanding as there may be varying levels of literacy and education (Emanuel et al. 2000). In addition to gaining consent from the parents involved, we will seek assent from child participants. Planning research will need to conform to the UNCRC and ensure that the children's rights are acknowledged (Mayne, Howitt & Rennie (2018). Mayne et al (2016) addressed the specific needs for young children in the process of informed consent. Being mindful that informed consent can become a 'hurried process' with slight emphasis on whether children were coerced into making an informed decision (Harcourt & Sargeant 2011, P.10). We must ensure the child is of the understanding behind the review, and that they are verbally willing to participate. It is important that the review is explained to the children in an age- appropriate language.

The concept of assent respects the developing autonomy of children (Alderson, 2004). There should be no incentives given to the children before the survey begins as it will potentially discourage the children to give an honest opinion. Children should also always be made aware of their right to withdraw throughout the process of the survey and interview (Harcourt & Sargeant, 2011). Research that involves the participation of children are being changed as a consequence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Article 12: Respect for the views of the child and

Article 13: Freedom of expression (UNICEF, n.d). The UN Committee Rights of the Child (1990) state that historically, there has not been sufficient attention to children under 8 years old and respect for their voice is overlooked. If a child is uncomfortable through this process, a simple five-minute break from questioning will be granted. If then said child is continuously uncomfortable, the review will be stopped and will have no further questions asked.

When dealing with sensitive topics like poverty, it is crucial we protect the privacy of the participants. The data will be collected and will be stored and locked in a filing cabinet, along with their consent forms. Only authorised personnel will handle these documents during the review period. It is important that we keep the same level of confidentiality throughout the process (Princeton University, n.d). Digital data will be stored on devices that only the researcher will have access to such as One Drive. And transferable data from devices, such as videos from the interviews will be transferred into secure storage as soon as possible in order to minimize risk (GOV. UK). The collection and storing of data under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) involves very specific requirements that will help ensure the privacy for all individuals and the protection of personal data (ICO, 2017). Participants will have a clear understanding of the timelines in which the data will be stored and will be ensured that it will not be kept longer than necessary.

If a participant requests their data, it is important to follow the guidelines set by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR guidelines state that if data is requested, the researcher must respond to the request within one month however, this timeline can be extended by a further two months if it is a complex request. (Goodbody, 2019). We must ensure that the person requesting is the data subject or someone that is authorised to act on their behalf (European Union, 2012. Article 8). All data pertaining to the individual must be gathered including any personal data and must be given in a structured format. Article 15 of the GDPR states that we must inform the participant of their rights, this includes the right to rectification, erasure, and restriction of processing (European Union, 2012). Not all data collected will be given to them, only what will be catered to them as this will protect the anonymity of the former participants. Ensuring anonymity throughout will help protect all participants identities. However, where detailed information in qualitative research is collected, complete anonymity can become challenging. It is crucial to be vigilant in identifying potential harm that may arise with the participants (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2014). Meaning, psychological distress when discussing poverty. It may recall a traumatic experience that participants may have been through previously. Throughout the review, participants will be provided with the most suitable information and supportive services if distress arises throughout the review process or after (BERA, 2018).

It is crucial that ongoing support is provided to all participants who enrol in this review. It is a critical component to the ethical research practice, as outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) guidelines. As stated by BERA (2024) when working with vulnerable groups of children and adults, ensuring their rights and welfare is crucial. The environment we place the participants in should feel respected and safe. Communication and transparency are essential, as stated by ERIC (2013). Children and their guardians should always be kept informed about any changes throughout the review process. When addressing children, clear, age-appropriate information will allow children to understand their involvement, promoting a sense of agency (ERIC, 2013). Both emotional and practical support must be offered at all times throughout the review to all participants to allow them to express how they're feeling throughout. By sharing feedback and their results of the review, this will potentially reinforce the participants value throughout the research process. Along with the key principles of BERA and ERIC guidelines, it will ensure transparency and accountability. (ERIC, 2013).

Conducting research when it involves sensitive topics such as the impact of COVID-19 on children and adults in poverty, creates several risks to not only the participants but the researcher and the university. Speaking to individuals who have experienced hardship can take a toll on their emotions and mental well-being (Palaiologou & Brown, 2023). Conducting a survey online may be less of a risk to the researcher, however Pract (2014) states that the researcher may face physical risks when conducting an interview along with follow up meetings after the review has been completed. The participants may risk exposure of their personal information if their information is not stored safely. Anonymity in online surveys must be maintained in order to avoid any data breaches (UWTSD, 2016). If both the survey and interviews are not conducted to the correct ethical guidelines or if data breaches occur, the university of Trinity Saint David's reputation may be at hand. If there are any negative outcomes for example due to the nature of the question, the institution's credibility and trust could be damaged. We must be compliant with the data protection regulations such as GDPR, as previously explained as this could result in significant legal and financial repercussions for the university (UWTSD, 2016). Section 5.5 of University Trinity Saint David's Policies state that all information of research data must be stored in the university managed environment (as defined by the GDPR policy). Any data breaches that may occur must be immediately reported.

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