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Introduction

The child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

How do children view poverty?

Children are aware of their family's poverty despite the best efforts of parents to shield them. Children exercise agency in the consumption of their family's scarce resources. Even at a young age, children are already active in trying to mitigate their family's poverty by not asking for the everyday consumer items that their peers enjoy. As children grow towards adolescence, they employ further behaviours to support the family's finances, often taking on adult roles and responsibilities and missing out on key aspects of childhood. At this age, older children often take responsibility for the care of younger children, allowing parents to go out to work. This is more often the case in countries that have prohibitively expensive and inaccessible childcare, such as the UK. At this age too, older children often find part-time employment to offset their family's poverty, both directly, by at times handing money over to their parents, and indirectly, by paying for the things they need by themselves. Such precocious responsibilities reinforce the disadvantages poverty brings to a young person's capacity to participate fully in their education and in the social and leisure activities of their peers. Some children are particularly vulnerable in this regard; for example, the children of lone parents who may lack wider family support.

What we know about the experience of poverty for children comes from research undertaken *with* them. It is vital to include the voices of those living in poverty, and of children, in the poverty debate. Too often policies are made about them without them. In this book, I draw on my own long-term studies of families living in poverty, and on the research of others, to provide an understanding of child poverty

that keeps children and their families at its core. This book cannot address every policy that affects child poverty in this country, nor can it address the policies of every country it mentions. Instead, within each substantive chapter it addresses one or two relevant policies to illustrate key points or to emphasise an important point. As much as I would like to be able to address policies pertaining to child poverty more extensively, space does not allow. Therefore, the policies discussed are selected for illustrative purposes and are not an encyclopaedic overview of all policies.

Why child poverty?

Key questions in a book about child poverty in wealthy societies are these: ‘What is child poverty?’, that is, is child poverty any different to the poverty experienced by adults individually or families collectively; ‘Is child poverty going up or down?’, and ‘Why does child poverty persist in wealthy societies?’ The first of these – on what is child poverty – is addressed in this chapter, the second question on the incidence and prevalence of child poverty is addressed in [Chapter 2](#), and the third, why does child poverty persist in wealthy societies, is considered throughout the book. These questions are important in a book about child poverty, as there is no agreed definition that distinguishes it from adult or family poverty, yet it generates a great deal of attention. If there is no formal distinction between child and adult/family poverty, why do we focus on child poverty and why should we aim to prevent or eradicate it?

Child poverty is distinct from adult poverty and, therefore, important for a number of reasons. The first is that a child living in poverty for even a relatively short period by adult standards could easily be impoverished for a large part of their childhood. This is critical as poverty adversely affects many aspects of child development, resulting in children accumulating disadvantage throughout their childhoods and beyond. Poverty shapes growth and achievement in, for example, pre-natal and peri-natal health and development, child health, mental health, family stress and wellbeing, participation in peer social and leisure activities, participation in family and cultural celebrations, in school life, in access to suitable housing and nice places to grow up, in education, in transitions to adolescence and adulthood, in access to post-school education and to employment. The National Equalities Panel in the UK found that ‘economic advantage and disadvantage reinforce themselves across the life cycle, and often on to the next generation’ (Hills et al, [2010](#): 1).

A second reason child poverty is distinct from adult poverty is that children control few of the levers that govern their families' financial situation (although they are by no means passive) and so rely on the adults around them for sustenance and support. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) intends that 'children are no longer envisaged as mere recipients of services or beneficiaries of protective measures. Rather, they are subjects of rights and participants in actions affecting them. They need to be respected in their individuality and in their evolving capacity to influence decisions relevant to their lives' (Santos-Pais, 1999: 5). However, in the children's rights approach there is a tension in the duality of the role of children as rights-bearers but also as dependent on their families (Bradshaw et al, 2007). Jans (2004: 27) calls this an 'ambivalent reality' for children, where 'on the one hand, children are surrounded with care; on the other hand, they are stimulated to present themselves as individuals with their own rights'. This tension is never entirely reconciled in studies of children as, in order to have a full set of adult-equivalent rights, children would need all the freedoms and responsibilities that adults possess. This goes against children's fundamental right to protection, and the role of adults and governments to protect them, as set out in the UNCRC.

A third distinction is that children often have little control over the distribution of resources within their own families. How resources are shared in a family, irrespective of whether that family lives in poverty or not, is likely to increase or decrease the prevalence of child poverty. A fourth distinction is that children have traditionally been viewed as blameless, as innocent bystanders of their parents' material conditions and, as such, deserving of society's care and protection from poverty (although this is arguably changing). It is the blend of these ideas, that children are blameless even if their families not, and that poverty poses a far greater threat to the life chances of a child, that have made governments keep child poverty on the policy agenda, even if, as we shall see later, some governments, such as the UK, erode and degrade efforts to prevent and reduce child poverty.

Childhood comprises transitions: from infancy to nursery, primary school and on to secondary school; from compulsory education on to, hopefully, employment or further study. As a result of poverty, every single transition a child will make is made more difficult and more problematic. These difficulties in transitioning gather pace throughout childhood, especially where the experience of poverty is persistent. Without support or intervention, a child living in poverty who experiences difficulties making the transition to secondary school

is more likely to have difficulty making successful transitions post-secondary school. Transitions can continue into adulthood. Many adults who live in persistent poverty, and who experienced adversity in childhood, have often made unsuccessful, unsupported transitions to adulthood. At every transitional stage of childhood is a risk of making a worse transition if you live in poverty. For this reason, focus should be on children across the whole of childhood, with special attention given to key transitional stages.

The state of child poverty

Child poverty is rising across affluent Western societies. Child poverty is not inevitable and, even in times of deep recession, is avoidable. What governments choose to do matters. Whether child poverty increases or decreases depends on how countries respond to economic instability and insecurity. Across many wealthy societies, austerity measures were put in place after the Great Recession of 2008. In the UK, severe cuts to in-work income supplements, delivered via the tax credits system, out-of-work benefits for those not in paid employment, and help with the cost of childcare for working parents, has had a harsh impact on those living in poverty.

In the UK, the Child Poverty Act 2010 was rescinded and the definition of child poverty was replaced with one of 'life chances'. Relatively commonplace characteristics such as family 'breakdown', ill-health, lack of skills, inadequate housing, 'poor' schools and parental 'worklessness' were presented as the causes of poverty and the new legislation proposed to remove the income-based targets of the 2010 Act. This was intended to downplay the importance of income to child poverty. However, an amendment that passed in the House of Lords requires that the UK government continue to publish data on how many children live in poverty using the income definition. The new legislation also publishes data that focuses narrowly on educational attainment and parental 'worklessness' as the government's preferred way of measuring child poverty. By massively downplaying the importance of income on (rates of) child poverty, the UK government can justify a position of providing families with less money in the name of austerity. Such a move has increased the rate and severity of poverty in the parts of the UK governed by this legislation. In Scotland, one of the UK's four nations, under devolution and increased powers to the Scottish parliament, the Scottish government has developed its own legislation to replace the 2010 UK Act: the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. In this Act

the income-based measures and targets of the 2010 UK Act are not only retained, but are strengthened. Furthermore, attention has been paid to particularly vulnerable groups, such as lone parents, and it has a focus on children's circumstance and outcomes, in relation to, for example, housing and education. Under this Act, community planning partnerships – comprising local authorities, health boards and other public bodies such as the police – have to report every three years, both prospectively and retrospectively, on what they are doing to tackle child poverty. One of the cornerstones of this new Scottish Act is that respect and dignity must be afforded to all. This is greatly at odds with both the rhetoric and the practice in the rest of the UK, which, as Marsh et al (2017: 234) note, 'requires a proper explanation of why it should be different in England and Wales'.

Across affluent Western countries, much is being said about child poverty, particularly in political and media discourses, with an increasingly disparaging focus on perceived parental shortcomings. Common questions include: Which children live in poverty? Why? Is it real? What does child poverty look like? Are parents to blame? Is there a culture of poverty? Do children learn how to be poor from their parents? Is poverty transmitted between generations? Is poverty caused by parents being unwilling or unable to work? Do parents have too many children that they cannot afford? These questions and more form much of the public understanding on child poverty today. With the roots of child poverty being fiercely debated, the outcomes of these debates are likely to lead to (further) negative changes to how child poverty is understood and tackled by national governments, and by extension, on programmes and initiatives to prevent or eradicate it. At present, the social, political and economic landscape is in flux and low-income children's lives and wellbeing are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation and misrepresentation.

Governments, when they are responsive to the issue of child poverty, often view it through a predominantly economic lens. They understand that child poverty will affect a child's potential as a fully functioning, future taxpaying member of society. Child poverty brings great economic costs (Hirsch, 2013); yet, few governments view child poverty as a fundamental source of inequality, a social injustice, a breach of a child's rights under the articles of the UNCRC and a source of national shame in a wealthy society. When governments do not fully understand or accept the causes of child poverty they turn to blaming parents – especially lone parents, ethnic minority parents and parents who are underemployed or unemployed, even if this is a result of poor physical or mental health – for their children's poverty.

In so doing, they shift the focus from the actions of government to the behaviours of individual families. As previously noted, child poverty is not inevitable, and it is within the gift of national governments to prevent and eradicate it. Yet when governments get involved badly the situation for children becomes increasingly perilous.

In addition to the austere economic responses post-Great Recession, in Europe there is an escalating migration catastrophe that is testing human rights and social cohesion to their limits. In these contexts, it is children who are bearing the brunt of failures in economic and social policies and yet their lives and experiences remain largely hidden or misunderstood and misrepresented. This book places children at the centre of a critical examination of contemporary policies and political discourses surrounding the causes and consequences of childhood poverty in wealthy societies. It looks at received wisdoms and pejorative assertions in relation to child poverty and presents arguments to show that individual characteristics do not distinguish between poor and non-poor people but result in a highly stigmatised and distressed group. Finally, this book asks the reader to consider an alternative, to 'flip their thinking', and to ask questions from a different perspective, to consider the issues through the eyes of a child living in poverty.

So, what is (child) poverty?

When discussing child poverty in today's societies, when thinking about what children today should or should not be entitled to have, people tend to draw on their own experiences, or received wisdoms, often of a different time and place. But the lives and experiences of today's children cannot be measured against the standards of the past. Poverty involves gauging the average standards of any given society at a certain point in time and making comparisons against them (Alcock, 2006). When people lack the resources (income) to obtain what is required to be able to function and participate fully in the norms of that society they can be said to be impoverished (Townsend, 1979). Such comparisons require that the social standards in which people live be taken into account, an exercise that can involve subjective value judgements. This idea of poverty is centred on the tenet that people are social animals with social and familial roles, responsibilities and obligations (Townsend and Walker, 2010). Such social responsibilities require people to participate in family and cultural life course events such as births, marriages and deaths and celebrations such as birthdays, Christmas and other religious festivals (Townsend and Walker, 2010).

To be prevented from participating in events and activities of the family and society that a person belongs to due to a lack of income, according to Townsend, was unacceptable and constituted 'a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage' (Townsend, 1987: 125). Using Townsend's concept, people can be said to be in poverty if they lack the resources to live a life free from deprivation:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns and activities. (1979: 31)

Townsend's idea uses a measure of both 'income poverty' and 'material deprivation': the former pertains to income and resources available (1987) and the latter refers to 'conditions or activities experienced' (1987: 127). Based on Townsend's ideas, the measure of income poverty now used across all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and beyond, is income at 60 per cent median equivalised income and material deprivation as measured by a set of individual deprivation indicators that together form an index of material deprivation.

Income and material deprivation

The threshold used to measure income poverty is 60 per cent of median *equivalised* income. When income is equivalised it is adjusted depending on who is in a family, that is how many adults and children. It is understood that more people living in a family will require more resources and the adjustment, or equivalisation, takes this into consideration while making modifications for economies of scale. The equivalisation process is often criticised for not taking into account circumstances that will make a family require greater resources, such as disability. As such, the rate of child poverty for those experiencing disability in the family may be underestimated.

The advantages of using income as a measure of poverty are manifold. Income confers an objective, well-defined, measurable gauge that provides information about the extent of poverty and inequality within

a society and allows for comparisons with other advanced industrial societies (Alcock, 2006). The use of material deprivation as a measure of poverty would be incomplete in itself, as it is only when material deprivation is imposed by a lack of income that it constitutes a measure of poverty. Lister (2004) warns of the danger of downplaying income when defining poverty for fear that it be used to justify a policy stance opposed to raising the incomes of those living in poverty, a prescient sentiment as will be discussed in the following chapter.

A problem with using income to measure poverty results from the power adults have over income, expenditure and consumption, and the lack of power children may have. This power over income is not just a function of the adult-child relationship, it is also a function of the gender of the income-earning adults. Intrafamilial transfers of resources can be uneven, with women (and children) often exercising less control over the distribution and use of family resources, leading to higher levels of deprivation for these two groups (Pahl, 1989, Pahl, 1999, Goode et al., 1998). However, in such families it is usually mothers who experience the highest levels of deprivation as they are shown to subjugate their own needs to safeguard those of their children (Middleton et al., 1997, Magadi and Middleton, 2007, Harris et al., 2009, Ridge and Millar, 2011). Income, therefore, while imperfect, is still the necessary and defining aspect of poverty and usually forms the basis of any multidimensional measure.

Material deprivation is an index comprising 11 indicators for adults and ten for children consensually agreed by the public to be necessities. The index of material deprivation thus distinguishes between child and adult poverty. Across societies these indices show that parents are more deprived than their children because they sacrifice their own needs to protect their children (Treanor, 2014). How material deprivation has changed over time is explored in Chapter 2. A problem with material deprivation as a measure of poverty for children results from who decides what the child-centred indicators of material deprivation are. The children's items on the index of material deprivation currently in use have been consensually agreed by adults. There has been meagre attention paid to children's voices in the selection of deprivation indicators thus far, which is a loss to the understanding of child poverty and a missed opportunity to allow children to inform and enrich the debate on deprivation.

A new child-centric measure of material deprivation, using children as informants, was developed by Main and Bradshaw (2012). To ensure the resulting measure of deprivation was caused by a lack of resources, the data were linked to income data the parents had provided. In the

analysis, this child-informed index explained more of the variation in children's subjective wellbeing than parental income poverty did. Interestingly, it also showed that subjective wellbeing was lower for children who were deprived but not in income poverty and higher for those who were in income poverty but not deprived. This shows the importance of material deprivation to the concept of poverty, including child poverty, and the importance of measuring child deprivation from a child's perspective.

Income inequality

Although the agreed income threshold used to measure income poverty is 60 per cent of median equivalised income, there are other thresholds in use across the OECD, for example, being below 50 per cent of median equivalised income (severe poverty), and other measures in use, such as the poverty gap and the relative income gap, among others (Hudson and Kühner, 2016). This book will focus on poverty as 60 per cent of median equivalised income. It will also address another way of looking at unfair income advantage and disadvantage: income inequality.

As a framework for studying poverty, income inequality is of increasing interest and growing concern. Income inequality refers to the gaps in income (and wealth) between the highest and lowest paid in society. Some governments view poverty as a mere artefact of inequality. Furthermore, among right-leaning governments, income inequality has been seen as a precondition of economic growth, as 'necessary for creating competition in the free market' (Ridge and Wright, 2008: 288). This is because it is through maintaining low wages that businesses can maximise profits and retain a competitive edge over others. Thus, some commentators would say that 'inequality is acceptable, even desirable in an economy requiring strong incentives for people to work hard' (Marsh et al, 2017: 15). Walker and Walker (1997) argue that the right-leaning Conservative Governments (1979–97) in the UK had a deliberate strategy of creating inequality to stimulate competitiveness.

Income and wealth govern people's access to capital, goods, services and functions. Those at the lower end of the income (and wealth) inequality spectrum have lower levels of influence and control over the conditions of their and their children's lives. Income inequality perpetuates advantage and disadvantage, leaves the poor trailing behind, and negatively affects progress across all wealthy nations (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). In fact, income inequality negatively

affects almost every facet of life (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). In very unequal nations people are less healthy than they are in nations where everyone is more equal, whether they are equally rich or equally poor (Marsh et al, 2017). Inequality matters because what happens in the upper deciles of the income and wealth spectrum also negatively affects children living in poverty. This is a consequence of those at the upper end striving to protect the social position of their children and ensuring they do not slip down the ladder of social mobility. In so doing, their actions serve to block and exclude poorer children advancing up the social scale. This is most notable in relation to the family, education and employment, and will be further discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Political will usually focuses on the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage rather than on the impacts of wealth and socioeconomic *advantage*. For children, income inequality brings unequal chances, opportunities and outcomes. The reasons why looking at the experience of children living in poverty through the lens of inequality is illuminating is twofold: firstly, its relational nature allows us to make comparisons in the experiences and outcomes of children living in poverty compared to all other children. It does not isolate children living in poverty as a separate group to be fixed, but engages with the experiences of all children. In so doing, it allows us to see the distance travelled and how far we have yet to go as a society to try to equalise children's experiences and outcomes. Secondly, it allows us to focus on what is happening at the top of the socioeconomic scale and analyse the impact of social policies on them. As the income gap widens, so too does the experiences and outcomes for children and young people living at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. In order to understand the gaps, child poverty ought to be compared to the corresponding experiences of children living in the upper strata of society. This is in keeping with the central request to the readership of this book, to flip their thinking, in this instance to introduce the idea of focusing on the problems with the rich and wealthy rather than the problems with the poor.

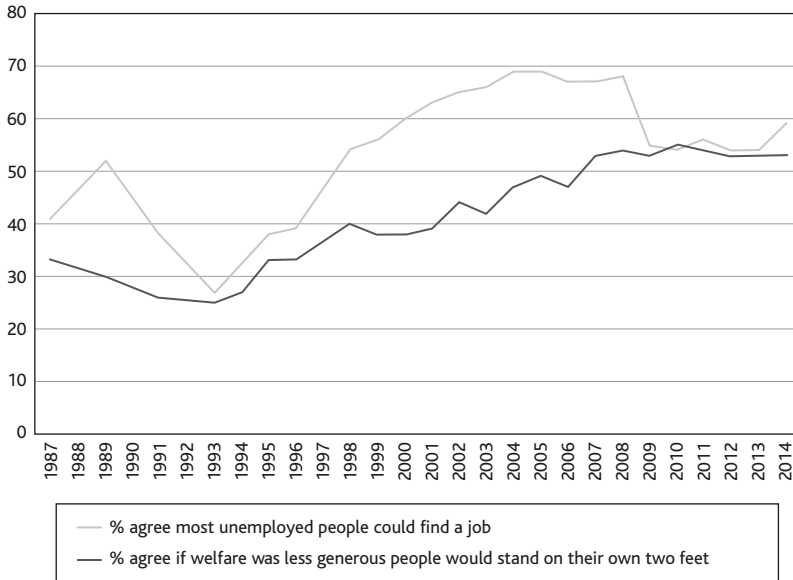
There has been disproportionate attention paid to people living in poverty, and the problems associated with them, and almost none paid to people living in the upper strata of society and the problems they may bring. As Tawney (1913: 10) said: 'what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thoughtful poor people call with equal justice the problem of riches'. Over a century has passed since Tawney made this observation and little has changed in the intervening period. Even then, the behaviours and character of

individuals were blamed for their poverty. Tawny (1913) understood this and wryly noted that the behaviours and character of the wealthy should also draw attention: ‘improve the character of individuals by all means – if you feel competent to do so, especially of those whose excessive incomes expose them to particular temptations’. Given the short-lived focus on the behaviour and character of bankers in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession this is vatic counsel indeed. This book will have reminders in each chapter to flip our thinking on who we should be focusing on; those with the least or those with the most. While there is little research on the advantaged and the ways in which they perpetuate their advantage, a reminder of this gap and what it could mean for children living in poverty recurs throughout the book.

While some commentators have sought to downplay the importance of inequality, divorcing it from the problem of child poverty, analysis shows that societies with high levels of inequality also have high levels of child poverty and, furthermore, rates of child poverty historically have tracked those of inequality (McKnight et al, 2017). Thus, income inequality is a structural cause of child poverty, and previous attempts to reduce child poverty have been criticised for explicitly avoiding any focus on income inequality (Lister, 2011, Stewart et al., 2009). To achieve the goal of reducing poverty it has been argued that inequality of income and wealth must be tempered (Giddens and Diamond, 2005).

What causes child poverty?

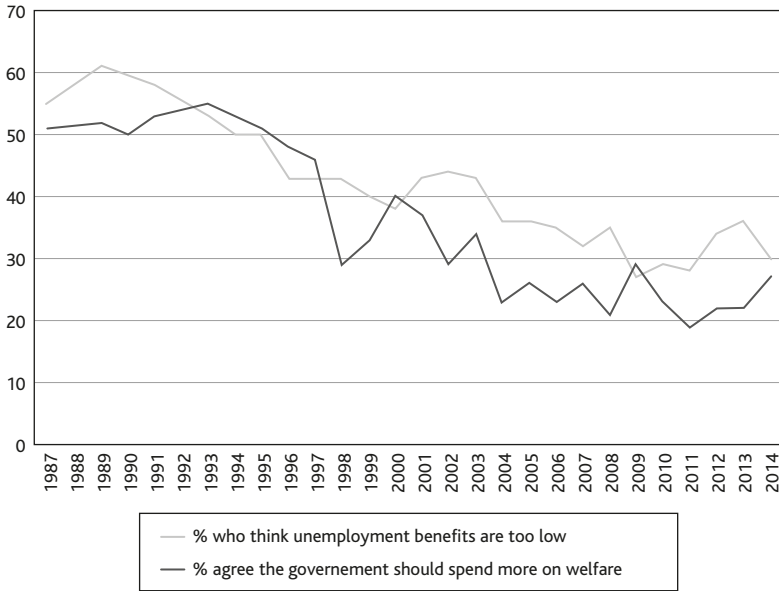
The risks, causes and consequences of child poverty are frequently conflated in the UK and internationally. They are often misunderstood and misrepresented. How a government understands the causes of child poverty is key to the steps it would be willing to take to mitigate and prevent it. There are increasing policy and media discourses on parental attributes and behaviours as causes of child poverty. This erodes government and public support for child poverty initiatives and also damages the wellbeing of children themselves. This lack of understanding extends to the general public too: in 2014 a quarter of the Scottish public thought that child poverty was mainly caused by parents’ alcoholism, drug or other substance use (McKendrick et al, 2016: 68). The current UK-level political and media narrative that attributes child poverty to parental behaviours has created a political backlash and led to those not in poverty blaming those in poverty for their situation. Both have weakened support for the maintenance of

Figure 1.1 Change in negative attitudes to unemployment and benefit payments

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1987–2014¹

anti-poverty strategies. In [Figures 1.1 and 1.2](#), the change in positive and negative attitudes to unemployment and the receipt of unemployment benefits in Britain is tracked from 1987 to 2014. In [Figure 1.1](#) it can be seen that there is between a 30 and 40 percentage point increase in the number of people who believe that most unemployed people could find a job and that if welfare was less generous people would ‘stand on their own two feet’. In [Figure 1.2](#), we see that there has been a decrease in positive attitudes to benefit receipt over time. Here, the percentage of people who agree the government should spend more on welfare and who think unemployment benefits are too low has almost halved. Why have these attitudes changed and why do pejorative ones now prevail? These are questions that will be posed throughout the book; however, it is safe to say that one reason is that the public are constantly being told that it is so.

Contrary to common misconception, child poverty is caused by a complex blend of structural and personal issues relating to macro-economic, political, social and individual factors. Macro-economic factors, such as the structure of the labour market, the housing market, low pay, irregular hours and insecure employment cause child poverty. Political factors, such as the level of social security payments and the recent social security cuts for families both in and out of work, are

Figure 1.2 Change in positive attitudes to unemployment and benefit payments

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1987–2014

another cause. Social factors, such as gender, lone parenthood, disability, age and race/ethnicity result in a heightened risk of living in poverty, although this is not inevitable as will be seen later in the book. And, finally, individual factors in relation to capacities and choices play a part too, although arguably ‘what appear to be individual level factors often reflect underlying social and economic processes’ (McKendrick et al, 2016: 60). These risks and causes will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Consequences of child poverty

The consequences or impacts of child poverty start before birth and accumulate across the life course. Poverty has negative impacts on children’s health, cognitive development, social, emotional and behavioural development, friendships, self-esteem, relationships, experience of education, educational outcomes and access to employment, amongst other areas (Treanor, 2012). Poverty does not just impact on children’s future outcomes. Poverty has detrimental effects on children during childhood itself, providing a compelling case for action to address it.

More rarely, children living in poverty are at increased risk of growing up with additional adverse experiences, such as substance misuse, domestic abuse or involvement with the criminal justice system (Bramley et al, 2015). Despite public belief, these are a minority of cases (approximately 3 per cent of all people living in poverty); however, where these issues do occur they have highly devastating consequences for children and require dedicated and specialised input from services (JRF, 2016). In fact, it is such adversity in childhood in addition to poverty, rather than the experience of poverty in isolation, that can lead to children developing complex needs in adulthood. Adverse childhood experiences will be explored further in [Chapter 9](#).

The children at greater risk of poverty

Risks and disadvantages cluster together and amplify each other and it is through this clustering that we are able to see who are the most disadvantaged (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007). There are groups who are at particular risk of poverty, such as women, ethnic minorities, refugees/asylum seekers, the sick and disabled, the young, the unemployed, those with larger families, and those with lower levels of education and social class. These are also some of the people in society who are more likely to experience prejudiced attitudes and behaviours in the first place. This compounds the disadvantages experienced by these groups in society and adds to their marginalisation, stigma and shame. These groups will not be the primary focus of the book but will be considered throughout.

There are also groups of young people who are especially vulnerable, including children in/leaving care, teenage parents, children with a parent in prison, children with disabilities or disabled parents, children who are carers, migrant children and refugee/asylum-seeking children. Not only are these groups more at risk of poverty, the experience of poverty for them is often more severe, which, when interacting with their already vulnerable status, can be particularly damaging. For example ‘the impact of the recession on children in migrant households in Europe was often greater than it was on children from non-migrant households ... in the two countries where child poverty increased the most, children in migrant households suffered disproportionately’ (Fanjul, 2014: 22). [Chapter 8](#) looks at children of higher risk of poverty who are especially vulnerable.

The following chapters will address common understandings and misunderstandings, and the impacts of child poverty on children in

relation to: Context, Family, Lone parents, Education, Employment, Health and Children at particular risk. It is important to note that these areas are not free from intervention; there is much policy governing them. The following chapters will discuss why it matters *how* we address them.

The rest of the book

Chapter 2 looks at the profile of child poverty, as measured by both income and material deprivation, within the UK and beyond and explores whether its rates are increasing or decreasing. It looks in depth at the misunderstandings, causes and consequences of child poverty and how government (mis)understandings of child poverty affect how it is perceived and tackled. It looks too at the profile of child poverty as regards who lives in poverty and describes how child poverty is a dynamic phenomenon with different groups of families cycling into and out of poverty across time. The chapter emphasises the importance of income to child poverty and concludes by describing a small number of policies that help to increase family incomes.

Chapter 3 takes a critically informed look at the role of families, and children's position within families, in understanding child poverty and disadvantage. It looks at the role of social support and gendered relationships and examines how families are not value-free environments. Family life under conditions of disadvantage tends to be pathologised and denigrated: parents who are 'poor' are frequently situated as 'poor parents'. Low-income families are particularly vulnerable to categorisation as 'troubled families' or troublesome families (Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2013). This chapter looks at the myths and realities of family life at the bottom of the income structure, how children understand, negotiate and mediate poverty in family life and their experiences and agency within the family.

Chapter 4 explores the importance of, and relationship between, family formation, or 'breakdown' and lone parenthood in the context of childhood poverty. Few subjects excite the public and political imagination quite as much as the issue of lone parents. It is an area with strong connections to poverty, disadvantage, gendered inequalities, and the supposed breaching of normative values and expectations. I engage with myths and assumptions about lone parents and reveal the corrosive effect of demonising lone-parent family life on children's lives and wellbeing. I show that relationships are dynamic, that lone parents are not a homogenous group, that a large proportion of children will spend time in a lone-parent formation, and that how a government responds

to lone parents in policy terms directly relates to how impoverished their children will be.

Chapter 5 explores the importance of understanding child poverty and its relationship to children's education. It takes a child-centred perspective to situate children in the context of their peer relationships, pupil-teacher relationships and parental relationships to explore their wellbeing and achievement at school. Education has the potential to be a vital passport for low-income children, but many children are unsettled, undervalued and underachieving at school. This chapter will explore the importance of education, of school social and academic life to children living in poverty, of educational transitions, of examinations and achievements, and of wellbeing, participation and inclusion at school. It looks at how school culture and the misunderstandings of teachers on the causes and consequences of poverty can present a barrier to the full participation of children living in poverty in their schooling.

Chapter 6 explores the complex relationship between child poverty and families being in and out of work. It looks at the role of employment in lifting families out of poverty and how low quality, low security employment poses a threat to children and families rather than a route out of poverty. The chapter examines poverty and employment from the perspective of the child, exploring the implications for children of parental employment, unemployment, worklessness, low pay, and insecure employment. With the increase across the developed world of labour market activation, and the dominant status and values attached to employment, this chapter draws on research from children and low-income working parents to highlight the challenges faced by children and families situated at the insecure, fragile end of the labour market.

Chapter 7 focuses on health. The subject of health can encompass disability; however, the subject of disability is addressed in **Chapter 8** as well as being a cross-cutting thread that runs throughout the book. This chapter, then, explores how poor health can be a risk, cause *and* consequence of poverty. It illuminates the ways in which poor health has particularly strong consequences for children and young people. There is a strong association between health and poverty with poor health being a universally accepted predictor of poverty across time and place. What is less well known is that the association is bi-directional, that is that poverty also causes poor health. Even short-term falls in income increase the risk of ill health (Smith and Middleton, 2007: 58). This reverse causal relationship is strong and is also seen in people with disabilities: those who become disabled are more likely to have been poor beforehand. Another facet of health that is important to the study of children living in poverty is whether the health condition is

physical or mental. Poverty is strongly related to poor mental health in adults and children. Furthermore, children are increasingly presenting with poor mental health themselves. [Chapter 7](#) focus predominantly on mental health as an increasing risk to the wellbeing and outcomes of children living in poverty now and in the future.

[Chapter 8](#) looks at two groups of children who are at increased risk of living in poverty: those from an ethnic minority background and those who are disabled or who live in a family with a disabled family member. For those from an ethnic minority background the conscious and unconscious racism and discrimination they face affect many areas of life from education to employment and health. Those with a disability experience higher levels of poverty, personal and social disadvantage and are more likely to experience deprivation, debt and poor housing than children without disability in the family. This chapter explores the issues that affect children from these groups and emphasises the need to have policies that help to overcome the discrimination they face.

[Chapter 9](#) looks at the children who are particularly vulnerable and who are at increased risk of living in poverty. Some of these children are living outwith the protection of family and community, for example looked after children and refugee/asylum-seeking children, which enhances their risk of poverty and lack of support. There is also a (relatively small) proportion of children who experience trauma and adversity in childhood, sometimes called ‘adverse childhood experiences’ – such as parental mental health issues, domestic abuse or a parent in prison – that put them at particular risk. These adverse circumstances can also make children more likely to experience complex needs in adulthood, such as homelessness, imprisonment, addiction or mental health issues. It is often the case that these particular adversities are confused with poverty, and there is often the assumption that all children living in poverty are exposed to adverse experiences. This chapter shows that, while it is the minority of children who experience additional adversities in childhood, they comprise a group of children in great need of dedicated services and a dedicated policy response.

Each of the chapters has a section on ‘flipping the thinking’, an entreaty to encourage the reader to think about child poverty in a way that deviates from the current dominant discourse. At present, what people know or think they know about child poverty and its impacts derives from received wisdom, common sense ideas, what they hear and what they read in the media. Even many professionals working with families living in poverty do not necessarily appreciate

the nuance of its risks, causes and consequences. This is especially the case with those professionals who work at the sharp end of family and community life and who come into contact with high levels of adversity. Their understandings of poverty can be skewed to the experiences of particular families, which can make individualised and behavioural accounts of poverty seem most reasonable. This book offers an understanding of child poverty, situated within families, with children at the core that, hopefully, generates more light than heat, unlike the current dominant media and policy discourses. Each chapter also presents details on one or two policy responses that are particularly helpful or unhelpful to the incidence or experience of child poverty. As this is a short book to get a broader understanding of child poverty in our society, I cannot address all of the policy issues that govern child poverty, no matter how much I wish to, so I am having to be selective. These concise policy reflections, and the entreaties to 'flip the thinking', are picked up and discussed further in Chapter 10, the conclusions chapter. In this chapter questions are asked such as 'What could be done? What should we do? How do we respond to thinking about child poverty differently?' The aim is to encourage all of us to 'flip our thinking' and allow alternative ideas and explanations to guide us on a path that might actually prevent and eradicate child poverty.