

Adopting a specific theoretical 'lens' of your choice, critically explore one of the following contemporary issues in society: 'Disablism' 'Poverty Porn' 'Compassion Fatigue'.

This essay will critically explore compassion fatigue through the sociological lens of symbolic interactionism. More specifically the relationship between compassion fatigue, donor fatigue, and public apathy towards poverty, food banks and hungry families. It will consider the feeling that our ever-increasing societal need is now shattering our desire to donate, and explore the continued rise in food insecurity in the UK, the impact of visiting food banks, and the theory of stigma, in relation to poverty and the poor. It will touch upon policy within Welsh Government and how the educational attainment prospects of hungry children contribute to the prosperous future generation it seeks to accomplish and conclude by evaluating what the future may look like for this food bank generation.

Compassion fatigue in its simplest form is a syndrome that puts professionals of care at risk of stress and burnout as a direct result of their work. Defined by Figley (1995), it is a normal but disturbing reaction to supporting those who are traumatised. This in a medical sense may be attributed to the attention given to others in challenging conditions or to nurses attending to soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, Steele (2019). However, in reference to the social landscape, Kinnick, Krugman and Cameron (1996), describe it as the 'numbing of public concern towards social problems. Similarly, donor fatigue is the decline in the public's response to requests to contribute to a charity or a good cause. Brown (2014). It is this apathy, the combining feelings of compassion fatigue, the relentless need for empathy, compassion, and sympathy, with donor fatigue, the persistent request for time, money and now food, that creates a societal atmosphere of constant demand. Looking at it from a societal perspective, it is easy to become overwhelmed by this constant need of something, from someone, that we now struggle with in the UK. Understanding compassion/donation fatigue and apathy through the sociological paradigm that is symbolic interactionism, requires the recognition of many micro sub levels of human relationships, defined by Best (2003), as the observation of human connection, watching and understanding our interactions through gesture, language and the symbols attributed.

The most up to date figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019), show that in 2017, 4.7 million people in the UK were described as being in a state of persistent poverty. This is commonly perceived as a consequence of the introduction of the Universal Credit (UC) state benefit and the significant wait between claiming and the allowance being awarded. First

introduced in 2013, UC has been plagued with problems such as administration errors and roll out delays. Helena Kelly (2018). Designed to encourage people into work and reduce benefit fraud, UC was the Conservative Government's attempt to simplify the welfare programme by combining six benefits into one. Kelly, (2018), argues that its implementation into the UK welfare system has wreaked havoc on its claimants and their dependents. Townsend (1979), describes poverty as lacking in resource. Unable to maintain acceptable living conditions, take part in social activity or obtain a healthy diet, people in poverty are excluded from societal arrangements due to material deprivation. In the current climate of austerity, the government's attempt at reducing spending and cutting services, it can be seen that families and children are the hardest hit societal components, with the British Medical Association (BMA) (2016), confirming that every resident in the UK suffers, due to austerity policies eroding measures which serve to benefit families and children, creating continuous inequality and deprivation. The conflict theory of sociology may indicate that life is a constant battle for money between those who are fortunate and those who are not, however, a symbolic interactionist perspective looks at patterns of interactions between individuals, and the societal perceptions of poverty are not positive, creating prejudice, discrimination and stigma. Slattery (2003).

Within contemporary society we are constantly bombarded with appeals, pleas and advertising all designed to inflict feelings of guilt. Charities are still needing our financial donations, organisations are still needing volunteers to reduce the wage bill, and the poor, whether they be deserving or not, are now needing food. However, we are now more cynical as to where our donations end up. (The Charity Commission, 2019) encourage us to believe that registered charities in England and Wales are regulated, maintaining that the British people can donate with confidence. Craig (2015), however, criticises British charities by stating that the British population are becoming increasingly concerned over the way charities raise and spend the tens of billions of pounds donated each year. This confusion is the biggest contributing factor of compassion and donor fatigue in the UK. This is evidenced in the words of Khan (2018, quoted in Civil Society, 2019), when he stated that the current model of charity, providing money and help to those in need, is broken. He emphasised that the government need to evolve along-side the changes facing children today. He goes on to declare that the sector is not fit for purpose all the time donor money is being used to compete against other agencies, this is not what a contributing member of the public want their donations spent on while many people continue to go hungry.

Malnutrition and chronic hunger have long been problems for some in the UK, and it is commonly known that before the introduction of the state welfare system in the 1950s it was the church that would feed its hungry parishioners. However, in 2000 when Trussell Trust, the Christian anti-poverty charity, felt compelled to open its first food banks to respond to the growing poverty and food deprivation that was becoming increasingly apparent in Britain, little did they realise that the increase in need would rise so rapidly, and now nearly two decades later have over twelve hundred banks supplying food and support to those in poverty. Trussell Trust (2019). Trussell Trust are just one model of an agency that supplies emergency food provisions, however, the role of distributing supplies to those without the necessary means to purchase their own is the recognised common goal. With the continued rise in people and families using food banks, supermarkets are a major player when it comes to the supply of food and toiletries. Whether it be by the distribution of its surplus stock or encouraging their shoppers to contribute, collection bins are now commonplace. In 2019 Sainsbury's trialled a labelling system on the shelves within their stores, alerting its customers to items that could be donated to its local foodbank collection point, Sainsbury's (2019). This increased their donations three-fold, however, Cheung and Chan (2000) argue that we donate through a sense of social conscience or moral obligation rather than for the pleasure of giving. The New Economics Foundation (NEF) (2011), write with reference to five principles of well-being. Of these principles, number five is 'giving'. According to NEF, giving, can be extremely rewarding and is beneficial in promoting relationships with community and other individuals. Being kind regularly and consistently can increase happiness levels within one's self. However, Moeller (1999) argues that no matter how much we give, the impact is ineffectual, and society will continue to need more.

Despite the prevalence of non-profitable charitable organisations that distribute mostly donated food, it should be noted that like all charities, food banks are scrutinized extensively. Current criticism includes insufficient regard given to dietary requirements and long-term conditions such as diabetes. Many donated food packages from food distribution centres do not meet nutritional recommendations nor does the food support the maintenance of a healthy diet, severely detrimental to the well-being of an individual struggling with food insecurity long term, Loopstra, Reeves and Tarasuk (2019). This idea of sub-standard food being offered and not meeting dietary standards, however, is mitigated in countries such as New Zealand where a different approach to good food choice is taken. Here a 'community meal' is prepared and provided, rather than 'raw' ingredients donated. Graham et al (2018) points out that this

charitable meal provides an individual with much more than a dinner, but a space for otherwise excluded groups of people to come together without fear of stigma. Also, another blow to the food bank economy, is the theory of the Human Rights Watch, (2019), who are determined to prove that the reliance of people using food banks in the United Kingdom is denying British people a fundamental human right to food. They challenge the government to publicly accept that their changes to benefits systems including the way that Universal credit is claimed and paid, has left parents unable to feed their families despite living in the fifth richest economy. The report makes the suggestion of compensation being given to those left without food security, those unable to access the resources and finances to feed their children through no fault of their own.

Food security is defined by Anderson (1999) as an individual or household having the capacity to access, within socially accepted means, enough nutritious food for a healthy and active lifestyle, however it is now apparent that one of these socially acceptable methods is by means of an emergency food bank and a three day supply. This does not come for free. Purdam, Garrett and Esmail, (2016), describe how interviewed food bank users pay for their free food in shame and humiliation. People describe feeling like a failure, unable to provide for their families, how they feel uncomfortable approaching a food bank for help and how parents felt they risked losing their children to social services if they were seen to be not meeting their needs. Purdem et al (2016) go on to say that these feelings of stigma and shame can lead people to withdraw from their individual networks, the wider community, and societal sources of support. Stigma is defined by Goffman (1968), as the devaluation of identity either physically or socially, eliminating individuals from complete social acceptance. Children are also struggling with feelings of shame and social exclusion when visiting food banks, have families known to be using food banks, and are discriminated against or 'othered' for being poor. Back up here Attempts to control the feelings of stigma can be exhausting and lead to feelings of failure as stated above, this internalisation can then lead onto more debilitating obstacles as people battle with the external forces of discrimination and the internal debate on self. Given its complicated nature and the judgemental attitude of society, poverty typically creates large amounts of stigma. Stigmatisation can often be a result of ignorance. A lack of understanding on a subject such as poverty or the need to claim certain benefits can lead the poor to become part of marginalised groups who are misunderstood as deviant and lazy. These labels can result in dehumanisation of the Othered group, and a hostility towards those who receive money without labour. Interestingly it is noted that the use of a capital letter at its beginning denotes the

theories symbolic weight, Lister (2004). These theories of stigma, othering and labelling are common themes in the symbolic interactionist's perspective, allowing the critique of groups and individuals and the responses to them.

With regard to the future of children whose families are dependent on state welfare benefits and food bank donations, Education secretary, Damian Hinds (2019) tweeted that despite new mental health pressures for young people, 2019 is in many ways the best time to be young. However, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2019) argue this and call on government to keep children high on the political agenda. Declaring that while many children in the UK grow up well, many face adversities. In a parliamentary inquiry into the future of children's food, young people are recorded as fearful of food insecurity, embarrassed at not having any money to buy food and jealous of teachers in school who have better meals prepared for them than they as children are offered, The Food Foundation (2019). Food insecurity, as it is now referred to is not new. Similarly, neither is the concept of childhood. Its changing nature is affected by geography, culture, religion, and race. Green (2019) writes that these factors as well as the trends and social differences of the macro population level, continues to change strategies, outcomes, and service delivery. Green (2019) argues that despite it being difficult to define a typical family structure in modern society, it is not important when delivering care to children. According to the Child Poverty Action Group (2019) today's poverty figures equates to 1 in 4 children, nine children in every class of thirty being food deprived. Children need love, stability, security and sustenance and it is both the role of parents and society as a combined structure to provide these. Action for Children (2019) and YouGov recently collaborated to report on the current state of childhood, within, it is recorded that substantial cuts to welfare benefits, the implementation of Universal Credit and service provision over the last ten years have collectively damaged the life chances of vulnerable children. The research gathered shows that young people worry about becoming homeless, terrorism, poverty, and hunger. Articles 24 and 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNICEF) (no date) clearly assert a child's right to food. Food being a fundamental requirement in terms of child development, physically, socially, and emotionally. One particularly significant aspect of hunger for a child is its control over education and there is much reputable and undisputed evidence regarding the impact of hunger on a child's educational attainment. The mental and physical development of children can be impeded which can lead to problems in cognition, emotional well-being, and physical illness. Hunger can often result in poor concentration and lack of energy to stay awake in a classroom,

poor attendance at school and poorer educational attainment outcomes. This therefore limits the job prospects of this young person or adult which carries forward into their own parenting environment. World hunger (2016) say that appropriate amounts of highly nutritional fresh foods are essential for everyone, however, children are significantly greater in need for growth, organ function, immunity to disease and illness, as well as neurological maturity.

More locally in Wales, in terms of families and specifically children, The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 calls for all forty-four Welsh public bodies to fully consider the long-term impacts of decisions made within their organisations. Considering long term problems, climate change, health, poverty for example, The Welsh Government insist on the need to create long lasting positive change for both the current generations and those of the future.

However, this is disputed as Children in Wales (2019) argue. They claim that there is 'damning' evidence that poverty in Wales remains a constant threat to families who are struggling to just get by, let alone further their life choices. He says growing up in poverty with parents claiming universal credit is 'no longer the exception' but the norm in Wales, limiting our children's chances of higher educational attainment, finding paid work and contributing to society as adults and living both a happy and healthy life. Children in Wales (2019). Moving forward it would appear In February 2019 the government agreed to include a measure of food insecurity in annual Department of Work and Pensions, questionnaires regarding household standards of living and levels of income. Poverty Measure (2019). Supported by Public Health England alongside Welsh and Scottish Governments, this would indicate the recognition of the deprivation of sustenance faced by families in the UK and an awareness of the impact this can cause. Collated information should unveil a clearer image of the food insecurity of UK households and identify which societal groups are most affected. The aim of this being to more effectively target support. Taylor (2019).

In summary, it is evident that food insecurity is an ever-prevalent issue in the UK and the balance of apathy and demand need to be effectively balanced to create a seamless transition of money, time and food between public and charity. It is clear that families are suffering through food insecurity and its related outcomes within areas of deprivation in Britain and that the situation is not being adequately addressed. This essay has discussed some reasons why families are suffering food shortage in Britain and the effects hunger can have on children.

Psychologist Charles Figley (describes, compassion fatigue is a state of biological, physiological, and emotional exhaustion and dysfunction. It would appear that the same can be said for hunger, poverty, and the constant societal need to provide for both.

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