

Examine the nature of the family and the challenges they may face in contemporary society, such as changing dynamics of the family, unemployment or poverty, and discuss how these impact on young peoples' adolescent development. Your question should consider how youth work can respond.

Introduction.

This assignment will explore the challenges that families may face in contemporary society. Two of these challenges which are focal points within society today are unemployment and poverty. Both of these issues can be a separate matter, although they are highly likely to stem from one another. These two issues have been ongoing for many years, however are increasingly highlighted in this day and age, due to the power of modern media and technology. According to The Children's Society, "4 million children in the UK are affected by poverty, and this figure is set to rise to five million in 2020" (The Children's Society, 2019, p.1). These figures are extremely concerning, and especially due to them being set to rise is of even greater concern for our children and their future.

Both of the above mentioned contemporary issues are large and broad areas of research which also have broader economic issues for the country as a whole. Due to time and size constraints of this assignment it would be impossible to cover these topics to their entirety. For this reason this assignment will focus primarily on poverty and unemployment and how they impact upon adolescents' lives as well as how youth work can respond.

Unemployment.

Unemployment affects millions of people worldwide, it is a contemporary issue which impacts so many people and families. The English Oxford learner's dictionary defines unemployment as "the number of people without a job" (English Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2019). The opposite of being in paid work and being employed. Some individuals choose to be unemployed, possibly due to family reasons and or a sufficient wage from a

partner. However, many unemployed people do not have the choice and would be working if given the opportunity. Unfortunately for many unemployed individuals there can be contributing factors such as; illness or disability, separation or divorce, drug, alcohol or gambling addictions and domestic violence (Agency for clinical innovation, 2019). "The UK unemployment rate fell back to 3.8 percent in the 3 months to September 2019, its lowest level in nearly 45 years" (Trading Economics, 2019, p.1). Even though the figures are positive and encouraging there is huge remaining amount of concern on the unemployment issue in the UK. Research shows;

That educational deficits emerge early in childrens' lives, even before entry into school, and widen throughout childhood. Even by the age of three, there is a considerable gap in cognitive test scores between children in the poorest fifth of the population compared with those from better off backgrounds (Goodman and Greg, 2010, p.1).

Unemployment has a substantial knock on effect throughout peoples' lives and even into their childfrens' lives. Unemployment and poverty can very often go hand in hand and inadvertently cause negative effects throughout childhood and leading into adolescents.

Poverty

Poverty in the UK has had an enormous lasting effect on families for many years. Children growing up among a family that are in the depths of poverty can suffer serious consequences such as poor physical health, low sense of well-being, experience bullying and have mental health issues. Research carried out by The Children's Society states "many families are struggling to cope with the rising cost of living. The prices of essentials like food and fuel are going up and this hits Britain's poorest families hardest" (The Children's Society, 2019, p.1).

Poverty has many differing definitions and is not purely based on income. Poverty is a social condition that is described by the absence of assets vital for fundamental endurance or important to meet a specific least degree of expectations for everyday comforts expected for where one lives. The salary level that decides poverty varies from place to place, so social researchers accept that it is best defined by states of presence, similar to, absence of access to nourishment, attire, and safe housing. Individuals in poverty ordinarily experience diligent yearning or starvation, insufficient or absent education and human services, and normally estranged from mainstream society (Crossman, 2019). The use of foodbanks has become exponential over the last few years. More and more families are relying on foodbanks to feed themselves and their children. Even some working families who are struggling to make ends meet after having to pay out for various household expenses and not having sufficient income left over to purchase food. Recent statistics from The Children's Society states that; "823,145 emergency food parcels were given to people in the last six months and more than a third of these went to children" (The Children's Society, 2019, p.1).

How unemployment and poverty impact adolescents lives.

As previously mentioned poverty and unemployment go hand in hand and just because somebody is in employment does not necessarily mean they are not experiencing poverty. Both can have a long term detrimental effect on adolescent development. Growing up in poverty can impact negatively upon a child's well-being and their future choices.

Children living in poverty are more likely to:

- Have poor physical health
- Experience mental health problems
- Have low sense of well-being
- Underachieve at school

- Have employment difficulties in adult life
- Experience social deprivation
- Feel unsafe
- Experience stigma and bullying at school

(The Children's Society, 2019, p.1).

Many of the above points mentioned by The Children's Society are often not isolated and generally merge with one another. For example, a child in poor physical health or experiencing mental health issues will not be able to focus on their education and thus underachieve at school. As would a child being bullied regarding their physical appearance due to lack of income and not being able to keep up with the latest trends, could cause a low sense of well-being and feeling unsafe. The effects of unemployment and poverty upon adolescents can be a vicious circle and leave them feeling like there is no way out. Nearly 70% of the UK's poorest families children said how they felt embarrassment due to parents inability to afford an adequate school life. Due to this over 25% have been bullied (The Children's Society, 2019).

How youth work can respond.

The National Youth Agency defines youth work as work which;

Focuses on personal and social development - the skills and attributes of young people - rather than to 'fix a problem'. It is an educational process that engages with young people in a curriculum that deepens a young persons understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes" (National Youth Agency, 2019, p.1).

Youth work and youth workers cannot change poverty or unemployment for individuals. However, they can be an invaluable source of support and security for a young persons adolescent and early adulthood years. For a young person who has no or little emotional support at home a youth worker is an imperative figure within their lives. Sometimes youth

workers can be the only people youths feel they can turn to, due to their home lives being inadequate such as parents suffering with poverty, unemployment, mental health, domestic violence and addiction. Youth work can respond to poverty and unemployment by offering youths safe spaces to investigate their character, experience basic leadership, increment their confidence, develop social skills and thoroughly consider the results of their actions. Youth work can also prompt better educated decisions, changes in movement and improved outcomes for youths (National Youth Agency, 2019, p.1).

Youth centres and youth work can give young people a purpose and focus enabling them to feel valued within society. It aids them in acquiring practical life skills and helps individuals to realise their full potential. When a young person is at their lowest and in utter despair, youth centres can be their lifeline and provide them with life essentials they maybe lacking, along with mental and emotional support. For these young people to feel like they have somewhere to go, someone who cares and someone to talk to is vital. Without youth centres and youth workers the future of our young people would certainly be more bleak.

Conclusion.

To conclude, this assignment has briefly explored the challenges that families may face due to poverty and unemployment. The facts and statistics which were researched for this assignment are appalling and are only the tip of the iceberg. To think we are in the twenty first century and so many families are struggling to such extremes is disgraceful. Children and young people are born into and grow up with such struggles and begin their lives around emotional negativity and this is a very difficult cycle to break. This is why youth work and youth workers have such a paramount and influential role to play within young peoples' lives.

Youth workers can be the key for young people to break this cycle and trying to ensure that young people have solid foundations to build upon leading them into adulthood.

References.

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