

THE Poverty Truth Commission

*We believe that the deep-set problems and far reaching consequences of poverty will not be truly tackled until those living this reality are seen as part of the solution - not as part of the problem. We believe that people affected must **participate in the policy making process** from beginning to end. Only by doing this do we believe that real and lasting change is possible.*

*We understand that violence is a public health issue linked to the growing levels of inequality in our society. As a result we know that it cannot be adequately dealt with through policing alone. We want communities and the public sector to come together to support initiatives which will help to ensure **a long term reduction of all forms of violence**.*

Poverty is an issue that can affect anyone, in anyway, anyplace. When I was approached to be a testifier for the Poverty Truth Commission I wouldn't have actually classed myself to be one living in poverty. One thinks of poverty and images of starving, naked Africans come to mind. However, when poverty is explored it brings to light the fact that poverty has many different guises. Bringing the issue closer to home, although I wouldn't like to admit it or want to be associated with it, I am an example of someone living in poverty.

I am a person who fits into many communities. I am a female, Asian, Muslim, single parent, from Govanhill and poverty can affect any of these communities. One of the significant things that has left in this position is my single status. Normally within the Asian community a girl is looked after by her daddy and when she marries she is looked after by her husband. I left my husband in order to survive as I was a victim of domestic abuse. As I don't have the traditional support of a husband I have to rely on the welfare state. I don't think one would normally associate domestic abuse with poverty yet it can be a cause.

Poverty affects me. I rely on benefits to survive and ensure my daughter and I are looked after with the basic necessities - a roof over our heads, food in our stomachs, clothes on our back. Having to live within the constraints of benefits means that the essentials are naturally a priority but having to worry about when the brown envelope is going to come and will the cost be within the confines of benefit payout. It is only after the bills have been paid that the fridge-freezer and cupboards are allowed to be stocked and that is to a limit and this requires careful planning - which shop is the cheapest for which product.

Clothing only gets renewed once the water leakage into the shoes is a considerable amount and the trousers that are supposed to be below the ankle are now above the ankle and the full sleeve tops are now $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve tops.

Those are examples of poverty that affects my daughter who has just turned 8 years old. This is not fair. My daughter has not done anything to deserve this. She has been unfortunate to be born into poverty. Poverty ensured that my daughter wasn't able to get a birthday party with all the trimmings in a children's play area like her peers.

Poverty ensures that I cannot take my daughter on holiday, not even to places which are so common, and cheap to some, such as Benidorm or Majorca. Poverty ensures I cannot buy my daughter the toys she desires or ensure she has the appropriate school uniform with the school logo instead sufficing for a version that is merely the same colour.

One of daughter's friends didn't go on a school trip as the mother couldn't afford the £3.00 fee. This then singled her out as the one who didn't go on the school trip and didn't join her friends. I sincerely hope it doesn't come to that point for my daughter but recognising the fact that it very easily could.

People listening could very easily say 'get a job'. That is not a solution as poverty affects even those that are in employment. Issues that would then concern me would be childcare foremost. As many working parents will be aware childcare is an issue in itself. To initially source childcare, dropping and picking up the child and most importantly paying the childminder. This can work out expensively. The first thing that comes to my mind regarding childcare is the quality time that I would lose with my daughter and this is before the reassurance that my child would be safe and well-looked after. Dinner and bedtime isn't sufficient to ensure parent and child have a strong, emotionally stable relationship with good communication and assurance for the parent that all is well with the child. So in this case poverty would rob me of time with my only child. I am also aware of the many reports that children whose parents are in employment do not do as well emotionally and at school as those children whose mother or father are able to devote time to them. This shows that poverty affects education and the well being of a child.

To be able to get to work would require money for travelling and this would naturally amount to a great cost over the course of a week. Therefore travel expenses would also play a part in ones road to poverty.

Coming from the Asian community I am able to identify some of the barriers to employment even before childcare and travel expenses would be tackled with. One of those barriers being a lack of confidence and this could be due to language, never been in employment or having less chances compared to our white counterparts which unfortunately does happen. Exclusion based on cultural or religious differences is a fact and this fact leads to poverty too.

A lack of respect from self and others due to ones situation leads to other problems. Hope can be washed away having to accept ones situation. The knock on effect could be that the next generation is compelled to accept that poverty is in their fate too. A vicious circle.

What worries me is that if I went into employment then I would be liable for my own rent, council tax would increase, I would have to pay for regular travel expenses, pay for childcare, and miss out on quality time with my daughter. Being so close to my daughter, as we only have each other, prevents me from gaining employment too. I don't want to be apart from her.

I am aware of the governments drive to get people off benefits and into employment. This should not be seen as a solution on its own. For many being on benefits have its advantages. Would a salary be able to give the same amount if not more comfort? There are many changes to be made and some of these changes will be highlighted by my fellow testifiers.

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