

Responding to Austerity and Wellbeing in Wales



If I see a child in my clinic with lead poisoning, I treat them by seeking to reduce their exposure to lead. Why not then if I have a child with toxic stress would I not try to reduce their exposure to adverse stress.

Dr Nadine Burke Harris

How was Wales doing?

Prior to the implementation of austerity measures in 2010 by the UK Coalition government, Wales over the past ten years had made small gains in improving the lives of its citizens.



Of the population 20% lived in poverty.

This was the highest proportion of people living in relative poverty outside of London.¹

28% of children in Wales lived in poverty. This is amongst the highest levels across the UK. This has decreased from in the 1990s when 36% of children in Wales lived in poverty.²



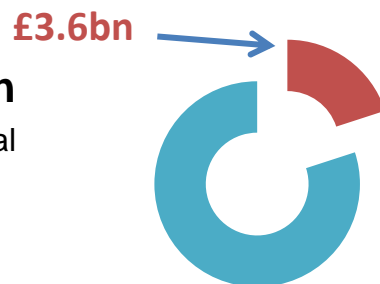
Education in Wales had been improving. In parts it is still a year academically behind England.³

25 per cent of jobs in Wales were low paid. This rises to 45 per cent of all part time jobs. All in all, 270,000 jobs (mainly held by women) in Wales are paid below two-thirds of the UK median hourly wage.⁴



27% of people in a family with at least one disabled adult were in poverty, compared with 23% overall. The poverty rate in these families rises to **33%** if disability benefits are excluded from income.⁵

Poverty currently costs Wales £3.6bn a year. A fifth of the Welsh government's annual budget.⁶



The Welsh Valleys' are poorer than parts of Bulgaria, Romania and Poland⁷

What does austerity mean for Wales?

School budgets cut by up to 12%⁸

£590 million loss in welfare a year¹⁷

42,500 people lose disability living allowance¹⁷

£11m cut from Higher Education¹⁶

330,000 families lose tax credits⁹

By 2025/26 there will be a funding gap of £2.5 billion for the NHS in Wales¹⁰

Youth services spending cut by £6.1m. 100 Youth Centres closed.¹¹

Social care funding cut by 13% in real terms in five years¹⁵

21% cut to library staff numbers.¹⁴

Between £600m and £1bn loss to Welsh households¹²

Welsh Government has received an 8% real term budget cut since 2010. There is still a potential additional £175m cut set for 2019/20¹³

Austerity and Wellbeing

Psychosocial

There are adverse biological consequences of social superiority and inferiority.

Behavioural – cultural

People in lower socio economic groups are more likely to engage in health damaging behaviours

Materialistic

How much you earn affects what you can afford in terms of schools, health and social care, housing, and diet etc.



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The life course approach

How much time someone has spent in more / less disadvantaged circumstances will affect the impact over their life. Also, different diseases and difficulties can be affected by the social gradient in different ways.

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Contextual

The economic, social, physical and political environment of a place matters. Health promoting environments are less likely in deprived areas.

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There are 5 pathways linking individual social and financial status and health.

These 5 pathways help us understand how austerity and adverse life and environmental experiences impact a person's health, wellbeing and ability to thrive.

It has been shown that those with the lowest socio-economic status have the worse health.¹⁸

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful childhood experiences that directly harm a child such as **verbal, physical or sexual abuse**. Or affect the environment in which they live, including being exposed to **drug use, alcohol abuse, mental health difficulties, domestic violence, parental separation or incarceration**.

How many adults in Wales have been exposed to ACEs?



Children who experience stressful and poor quality childhoods are more to lead to mental health difficulties and diseases such as **cancer, heart disease** and **diabetes** later in life.

ACEs are not just a concern for health; experiencing ACEs means individuals are more likely to perform **poorly in school**, more likely to be **involved in crime** and ultimately less likely to be healthy members of society'.

Preventing ACEs in a single generation or reducing their impact can benefit not only those children but also future generations in Wales.¹⁹



What does it all mean?

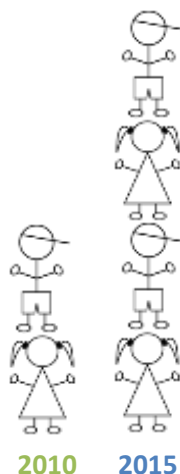
Austerity is hitting the poorest children hardest. Despite having made steady progress austerity measures will in some cases reverse the efforts Welsh Government had made to reduce poverty in Wales. ***Those most likely to be impacted are those already vulnerable within the system.***²⁰

1 in 5 of the Welsh population are claiming some form of benefit, including many people who are in fact in some form of employment. **A higher proportion of the Welsh population claim benefits** than in other parts of the UK. **Cuts will therefore have a significant impact** upon the economic wealth and subsequently the **mental health** of a large number of people in Wales.²¹



Families with children are losing out the most

Across Wales, the use of food banks has risen by 11% between 2016 and 2017. **In Cardiff alone it rose by 20%.**²²



The number of children in the care system has doubled since 2010.

Children in Care are 4 times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty.

They are twice as likely to not be in education or employment at age 19.²³

Debt, austerity and unemployment have been linked as significant factors in the rising number of **British men** who have **killed themselves** since 2008.²⁴



Increased in **substance abuse and suicide generally** have been linked with the implementation of austerity measures.²⁵

How can we achieve Mental Wealth?

The evidence collated in this report indicates that a range of key psychological experience can be directly linked to public policy and are sensitive to macro social and economic changes. It is therefore crucial that policy makers and service developers consider the psychological impact of current and future policies. Creating the conditions for wellbeing and resilience directly helps to prevent distress in the short and long term, thereby saving resources and reducing suffering.²⁶

We call for:

- Social policy that works towards a more equitable and participatory society, to facilitate individual wellbeing, resilient places, and strong communities.
- Policy makers to take into account the psychological impacts of macro social and economic changes.
- A social security system that empowers and supports, rather than punishing people in times of need.
- Public services to increase focus on preventing distress, improving citizen participation and social justice, as well as help facilitate the five positive indicators above.
- Co-production to be one such model of public service reform. This approach harnesses individuals' and communities' assets and expertise rather than viewing them just as passive recipients of and burdens on services.
- A community-led approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing that develops collective responses to individual needs and by.
- doing so works to strengthen communities and build on communal resources²⁶



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South Wales

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This work was compiled by Jen Daffin, Sara Cooper, Jon Harrold, Kim Blott-Jackson, Matt Yates and Louise Pascoe.

November 2017



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Psychologists for Social Change /
Seicolegwyr dros Newid Cymdeithasol
paasouthwales@gmail.com

