

People Remember Stories: research, evidence and policy

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Social Research in the 21st Century: what makes for evidence we can trust?
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'Time and time again we were told that the statistics were interesting but that we needed to tell "real stories" about the impact of poverty in the 21st century.'

Frank Hont, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Fairness and Equalities at Liverpool City Council, preface to *Getting By? A year in the life of 30 working families in Liverpool* (Liverpool City Council, 2015).



Overview

1. Policy – stories in the mix
2. Poverty research
 - busting the myths
 - quality qualitative research



‘In defence of using anecdote, the officials interviewed presented the following reasons:

they felt that experiential evidence, particularly from front-line workers, could illustrate and help policy makers understand how policies had been received locally;

there was also a strong belief that anecdotal evidence was helpful in presenting policies to Ministers and to the wider public;

it served to contextualise and humanise statistical evidence and provided a “real-world” element that people could relate to, in comparison to the more inaccessible scientific or technical evidence’.



‘We think of research illustrated with representative case studies or personal stories as a ‘one-two-punch’.

With a convincing story you get a left!

With rigorous research, you get a right!

With a convincing story and rigorous research, you get a knock-out punch!’



‘The trouble for sociologists as tellers of exemplary stories is not their lack of scientific rigour but rather the opposite: that policy-makers are constantly influenced by other kinds of stories, usually less carefully grounded.

The findings of applied research have to compete for attention in a public debate already filled with compelling anecdote, journalistic exposures, highly dramatized television documentaries and the rhetoric of manipulated statistics.

The qualities which give research authority – the careful analysis of systematic information and measurement, the laying out of method of enquiry, and the testing of received ideas – are at once its claim to attention and a constraint upon its dramatic impact’.



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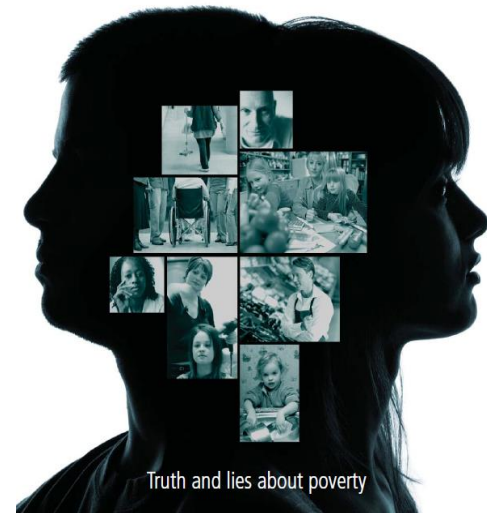
Exposing
the **myths**
of welfare



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A report from
the Baptist Union of Great Britain,
the Methodist Church,
the Church of Scotland
and the United Reformed Church

The lies we tell ourselves:
ending comfortable myths about poverty



Truth and lies about poverty



Save the Children

CHALLENGING 12 MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT
LOW INCOME FAMILIES AND SOCIAL SECURITY
SPENDING



‘The combined narratives in literature and public policy illustrate remarkably consistent feelings of **shame, fear, disgust and difference** expressed by and about poor people, which both contradict and reinforce each other’



Innovations in qualitative research

1. Qualitative longitudinal research
2. Cross-national comparative research
3. Co-production/participatory research



counterbalance & challenge to ‘fear, shame and disgust’

- create empathy and understanding, reducing the perception of people living in poverty as the ‘other’
- provide examples and accounts to challenge policy assumptions
- drive deeper understanding of the nature of agency, against simplistic ideas of ‘lifestyle’ choice



Quality and Trust

The challenge of reframing the discourse

Trust in both directions

