'Leaving No One Behind'

World Social Work Day 2022

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Outline of presentation

How we understand *'left behind'* – social justice and social work

The importance of intersectionality

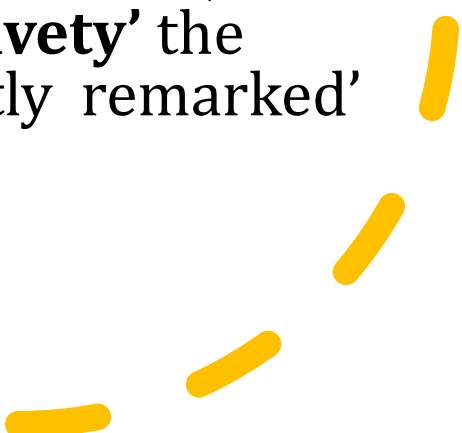Reflections from research on race, poverty and migration

What might this mean for social work practice? – affirmative and transformative strategies

Critical thinking and hope

'It is important to say what hope is not; it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and destruction. The hope I am interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act. It is also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is getting-worse one. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties with openings.

'Critical thinking without hope is cynicism, but hope without critical thinking is naivety' the Bulgarian writer, Maria Popova recently remarked'

(Rebecca Solnit, 2016: xi/ii).

Social Justice and the Global Definition of Social Work

- The **social justice** value base of social work is often seen as a defining feature of the profession and is an integral part of the *Global Definition for Social Work* (IFSW, 2014):

- *Principles of **social justice**, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work.*

- However social justice is a complex and contested term that has exercised philosophers, sociologists, economists, political and religious leaders for centuries.

- Meanings of the term are influenced historical/ social contexts, values, political ideologies and religious beliefs

Social Justice and Social Work
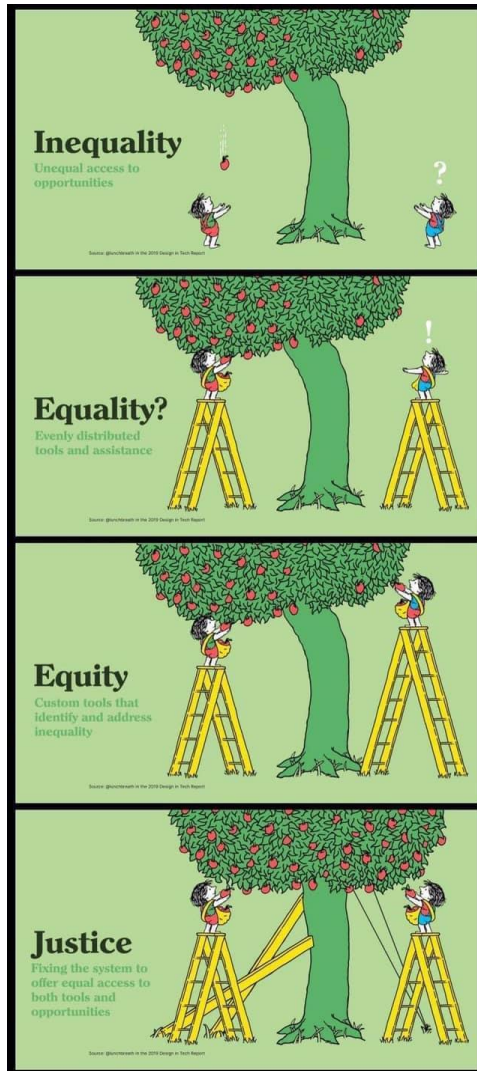
- Everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities to live a life with dignity. However, we live in societies and a world deeply riven with structural inequalities.

- Social work within a social justice framework locates individual experiences within wider social structures, seeks to challenge power dynamics that perpetuate oppression, domination and exploitation, and further societies that are more equal, humane and peaceful.

The Individual vs The Social

Social work has always been defined by its focus on individuals within their social contexts. However the relationship between an individual and society, and whether personal problems should be understood as a consequence of individual factors, social problems or a combination of the two has been and continues to be highly contested (Pease, 2013).

A key argument of my presentation is that we need to shift focus to more social and structural understandings of people's lives and critically analyse the influence of political and policy contexts that have led to the individualizing of many social problems.

# We discussed this in relation to protecting children….

We argue that we need to tell another story from the current CP story:

One that moves away from individualised notions of risk to children of parents' actions or inactions

To one that recognises the social determinants of harm and the economic, social and cultural barriers faced by most of the families.

As well as the protective capacities within families and communities and how these can be mobilised.

What are the economic, environmental and cultural barriers to ensuring they are cared for safely and their relational needs and identities respected?

Brid Featherstone, Anna Gupta, Kate Morris and Sue White
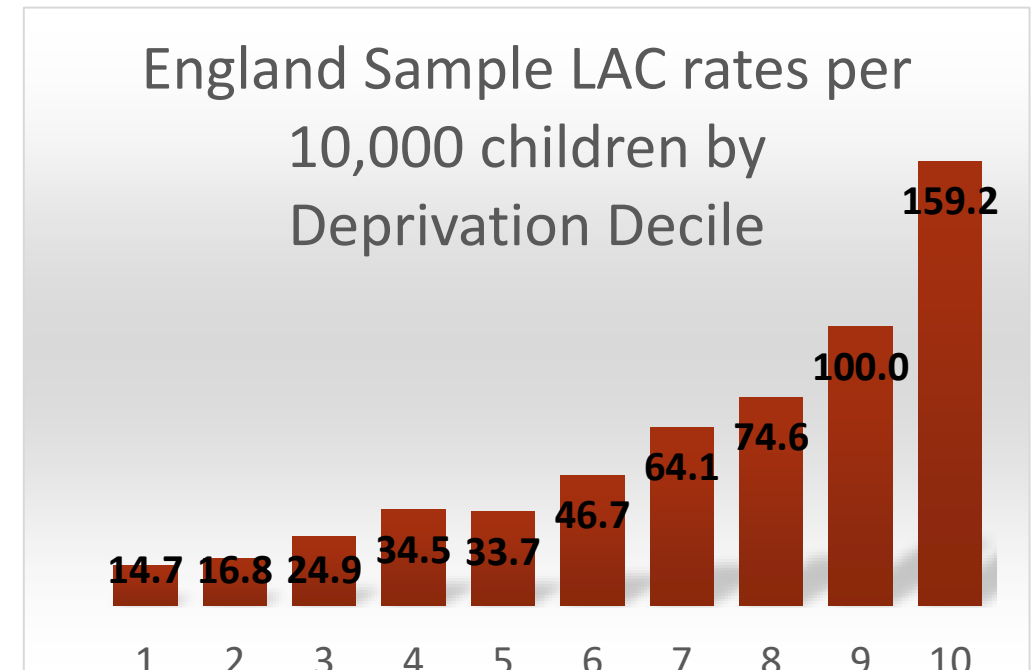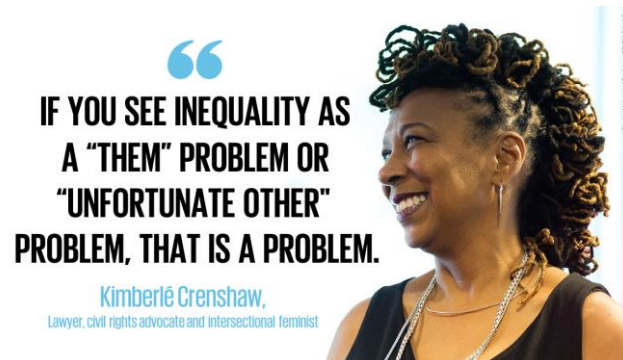
PROTECTING CHILDREN

A SOCIAL MODEL
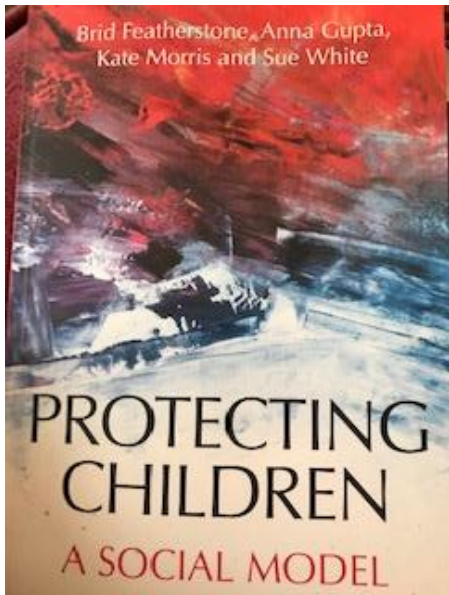
Child welfare inequalities

- Bywaters (2020) deprivation the major explanatory factor for children on CP plans of in care in the UK.

- Also Hood et al (2016) - deprivation levels continue to be the key driver of referrals and other categories of demand

However:

Tackling poverty and inequality is not considered **'core business'** for child protection workers or policy makers (Morris

England Sample LAC rates per 10,000 children by Deprivation Decile

Decile	Rate
1	14.7
2	16.8
3	24.9
4	34.5
5	33.7
6	46.7
7	64.1
8	74.6
9	100.0
10	159.2

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a conceptual framework concerned with social justice that conceives experiences of privilege and oppression as shaped by interacting social constructions, such as class, 'race', gender and sexuality
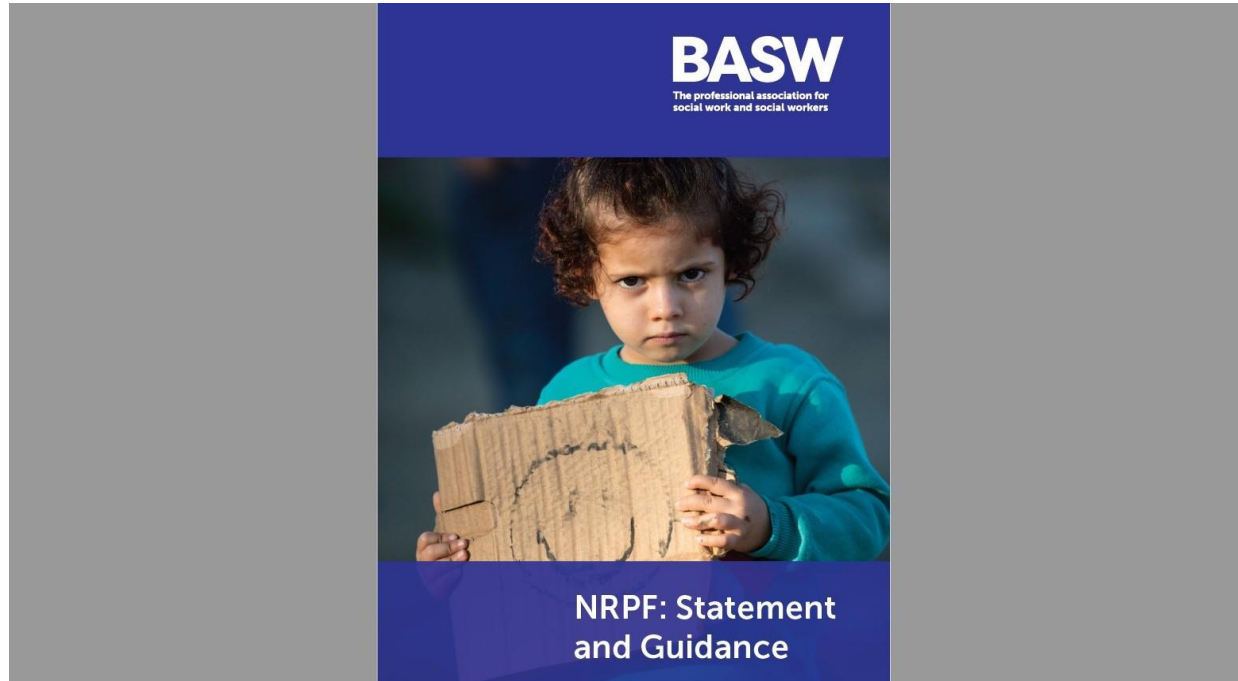
- Moves away from single-axis framework of discrimination, which treats (for example) race and gender as separate categories of experience – identities layered and multi-faceted
- Intersectionality is designed to explore the dynamic between co- existing identities (e.g. woman, Black) and connected systems of oppression (e.g. patriarchy, white supremacy).
- Encompasses specific reference to the play of power dynamics arising from context. The importance of emphasising location or context enables a repositioning of shame and blame from the individual to the situations they inhabit.
- Includes the voice of the client/service as experts by experience because intersectionality was born from and rooted in Black women's experiences of simultaneous multiple disadvantages and struggles for intersectional anti-racist social justice.
- Intersectionality provides a framework of practice that explicitly addresses the relationship between social contexts of inequality due to divisions based on difference and the psychological impact of living in these contexts.

(Intersectionality & SW – see Nayak & Robbins, 2018; Bernard, 2021)

"THIS IDEA THAT **WE ALL HAVE THE SAME LIFE** IS FALSE. RACE, CLASS, GENDER COME TOGETHER TO SHAPE THE LIFE CHANCES OF PEOPLE IN **VERY DIFFERENT WAYS**."
–Kimberlé Crenshaw

IF YOU SEE INEQUALITY AS A "THEM" PROBLEM OR "UNFORTUNATE OTHER" PROBLEM, THAT IS A PROBLEM.
Kimberlé Crenshaw,
Lawyer, civil rights advocate and intersectional feminist

Frank

- Frank is from Liberia. He was brought to the UK as a trafficked child (now he is 24 years old) - has no immigration status in the UK

- He has two children (aged 2 & 4) with Sarah (who is British). The children have been taken into foster care because of Sarah's depression and drinking

- Frank was in immigration detention when children were removed – had been sentenced to identity fraud offences related to lack of status.

- In the court proceedings the local authority say they are not going to assess Frank as a possible carer for the children, although he has been released from detention but has no recourse to public funds

(Gupta & Featherstone, 2016)

- *Did the 'culture of disbelief' about irregular migrants and anti-immigration public discourse impact on professionals' responses?*

- *Did the fact that he has no housing or 'no recourse to public funds' impact on the decision-making?*

- *How were his convictions viewed? Were they seen for what they were – survival offences?*

- *Frank was viewed with suspicion, as a 'non person' with no rights -due to his immigration status, but may have been compounded by his race and gender.*

- *What about his children's rights under Article 8 of the ECHR (right to family life)?*

Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds: Learning from Case Reviews (Jolly & Gupta, under review)

NRPF – Review of SCRs (before the pandemic)

- 26 SCRs (18 from the past 5 years) were analysed – with the aim deepening our understandings of the lives of children and families who are marginalised by their lack of access to resources available to other families - NRPF and how it interplayed with other vulnerabilities.

- The SCRs show how destitution and extreme poverty manifested in families' lives and the inevitable harms experienced by children as a result. However, this was rarely viewed as a 'safeguarding' issue warranting the same attention as harm caused by parental actions or inactions.

- The tension between child welfare and immigration control and the influence of political and mainstream media discourses, permeated organisational cultures and professional practice - examples of families being treated with suspicion and viewed as 'undeserving', and families avoiding professionals for fear of alerting the immigration authorities. A fear not unfounded.

Child G's review noted that fear of information sharing with the Home Office acted as a barrier to engagement with welfare services. The need to avoid the attention of immigration enforcement was a motivation for avoidant behaviours in Child M's case. Social isolation and lack of friends, family or other support networks compounded this fear for Ellie's mother.

In three cases, even though the child was destitute, assessments concluded there were no safeguarding concerns and closed the case (Child G1; Child L1; Ellie).

- Lack of material resources and access to support services increased the vulnerability of some of the parents to exploitation and violence.

- Insecure and unsuitable housing was a feature of many of the families' lives, with vulnerable families moved away from sources of support, both personal and professional, exacerbating social isolation, mental health difficulties and risk of exploitation for some.

- Like poverty, poor or temporary housing has pervasive effects on the lived experience of children and their family and external relationships

- The reviews themselves were frequently ignorant about the implications of the NRPF rule, did not ask questions about immigration status, sometimes failed to identify poor practice, and occasionally repeated false or misleading information

school staff noted that children were undernourished, poorly clothed, grubby and destitute (SCR 0310). Despite their poverty, the children were not eligible for free school meals because of their parents' NRPF status.

Child AZ's family were evicted due to rent arrears while the mother was 34 weeks pregnant. When the family were taken to A&E after being found in a park at 10pm on the day of eviction, staff noticed that: "the family appeared to have few possessions, apart from the clothes they were wearing, and the children had no socks or shoes."

Same storm, different boats

We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar

Damian Barr (@Damian_Barr) [April 21, 2020](#)

Structural inequalities exacerbated

From the individual to the social

- Then comes COVID-19. Far from the great leveller, mortality from COVID-19 follows the social gradient. COVID-19, of course, is caused by a virus. But the 'causes of the causes' are the same social conditions that give rise to the social gradient in health, more generally (Michael Marmot, 2020)

[Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review | The Health Foundation](#)

- The disproportionate death toll among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities has fast forwarded recognition of the inter-related nature of inequalities with evidence that such communities were 'under protected and over exposed' due to the nature of their occupations, living in overcrowded housing, health inequalities and racism .

https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Runnymede%20Covid19%20Survey%20report%20v2.pdf.

COVID Realties (2022)

- Families living on a low income are profoundly disadvantaged and Covid-19 has only made this worse - our social security system and wider public services are failing to provide families on low incomes with adequate support. This failure means that families are routinely going without, and makes them especially ill-equipped to weather the income cost of living crisis.

- The soaring price of food and rent, along with energy bills – which are expected to more than double in April when the price cap is lifted, bringing the number of households under "fuel stress" to at least 6 million – is forcing families to choose between basic essentials such as food and heat, the experts said, while growing numbers are being forced into debt and relying on food banks.

Co-POWeR: Consortium on Practices of Well-being and Resilience in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Families and Communities

Project Summary

Two viruses – COVID-19 and racial discrimination – are currently killing in the UK (Solanke 2020), especially within BAMEFC who are hardest hit. Survivors face ongoing damage to wellbeing and resilience, in terms of physical and mental health as well as social, cultural and economic (nonmedical) consequences.

Co-POWeR investigates the combined impact of these viruses on practices for wellbeing and resilience across BAMEFC in the UK to create an holistic idea of vulnerabilities damaging BAMEFC.

Research Stream (Work Packages) Overview

WP1: Emergency Powers investigates these vague COVID Act powers to understand their impact on practices of well-being and resilience across BAMEFC.

WP2: Children, Young People and their families investigates significant implications for children/young people in BAMEFC (Carter 2020) who experience COVID-19 negatively due to disproportionate socio-economic and psychosocial impacts on their families and communities (ADCS 2020).

WP3: Care, Caring and Carers investigates the interaction of care, caring and carers within BAMEFC to investigate how to increase the well-being and resilience of older people, and paid and unpaid carers.

WP 4: Physical Activity and Nutrition will investigate improving resilience and well-being by tackling vulnerability to underlying health conditions (cardiovascular disease, obesity) in BAMEFC, which may have contributed to the disproportionately high severity of illness and deaths from COVID-19 (PHE Report 2020).

WP5 Empowering BAMEFC through Positive Narratives channels research from WP1-4 to coproduce fiction and non-fiction materials tackling the vulnerability of BAMEFC to 'mis infodemics' (IOM 2020): multi-level misrepresentation, linguistic and cultural miscommunication, that undermines understanding of the public health crisis and marginalises BAMEFC.

The Co-POWeR Academic Team

Work Package 2

WP2: Children, Young People and their families investigates significant implications for children/young people in BAMEFC who experience COVID-19 negatively due to disproportionate socio-economic and psychosocial impacts on their families and communities (ADCS 2020).

Prof Claudia Bernard
Prof Anna Gupta
Prof Monica Lakhanpaul
Dr Teresa Peres
Dr Anita Sharma

Work Package 2

Black, South Asian, dual heritage
Birmingham, Leeds, London, Cardiff, Milton Keynes, Essex, Sheffield

Focus group discussions and interviews to date:

Children and young people (12-19) – 66
Parents – 38
Professionals -17

Hybrid of remote/f2f
July 2021 – March 2022

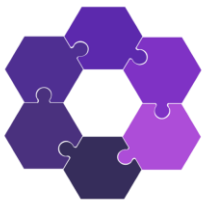**Young people's community engagement panel –** involved in Photobook project
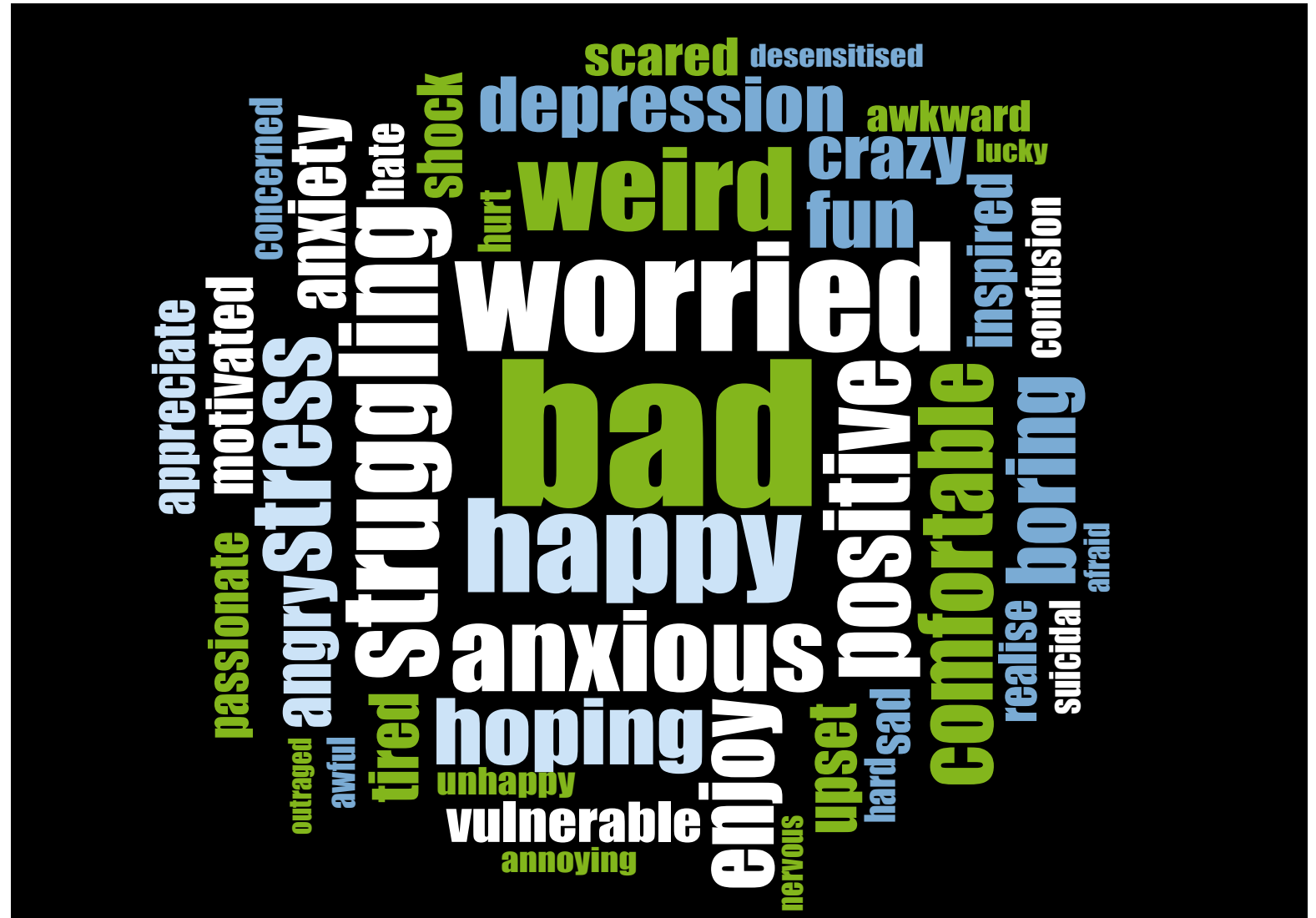
Data still being analysed – EMERGING FINDINGS……

Emotions – Young people

Thoughts and feelings

- Isolation
- Bored
- Lonely
- Silence
- Anxious

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Friendships

Shrinking networks/ Impact of BLM

- Supporting friends remotely, coping with sudden loss of contact

- Connecting differently, digital divide

- Re-evaluating friendships – especially in connection with discussions about BLM

- *"And many of them would call like me the "P" word and stuff like, I had a few white friends, and they were really nice people. They just, they used slurs that's all. But, I say that's all but it's very bad… But now it's like, it's **more defensible**, especially because like race is not talked about as much as we think…it's just little microaggressions, and like, sometimes many of us like look past that because we don't want to create a commotion.." (P58)*

And they couldn't speak to friends, which was often like a coping mechanism for them and will help them release anxiety. So I know a few of my friends did begin to self-harm in that time (P1)

I'm someone who doesn't really like social media...before COVID even, like, I enjoyed meeting up with people. And so I have this kind of attitude where I'm like, if I can't do it then I might as well not. So I just didn't speak to any friends (P6)

then the whole oppression Olympics, it's like, who got oppressed more? It's like "Well I got bullied for my freckles", but that's not the same (P58)

4. Family

Impact on relationships within the family

- Risks when family members go to work

- Relationships with immediate family members – positive (more quality time together) and negative (claustrophobic – overcrowded housing)

- Relationships with extended family, remote support
  - **Disappointment** of not being able to visit family abroad,
  - **Having to use money set aside for holidays** for subsistence due to job losses and people in precarious employment.
  - **loss of things that cannot be substituted by online calls –** '*the smell of my grandmother*'
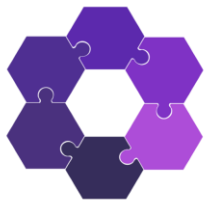
> as time's gone on I have been feeling a bit anxious about my dad going out to work (P.33)

> *So I think it has brought some positives. Like because now I have a more close relationship with my siblings (P9)*

> I think that was the most worried thing, I was, like, obviously for, like, my grandparents because they are, like, vulnerable people (P33)

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3. Education

Impact on learning and relationship with teachers

- Online to in-person and back again, laptop scheme, **digital divide – space in home, access to internet, parental ability to support education...**

- Uncertainty over assessments, happy not to sit exams, previous relationship with teacher influencing grades, use of mock results

- Support from school, BLM reading group, counsellors

it was just very hard to get back into retaining information...I was quite alone for most of six months just doing nothing by myself, my mental health, kind of, receded quite a bit. So being around people was quite difficult as well (P32)

..she was like 'Can you lot separate because when I see a big group of you it give me anxiety, it scares me' And it was literally only black people there, I was like 'what!' (P12)

the teachers do really enforce that we can email them should we need help during holidays or even weekends so they are very helpful (P33)

Co-POWeR
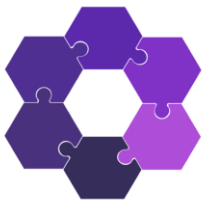
5. Community

Impact on relationships outside of home

- **Importance of support from community** hubs, youth groups, church, sports clubs – sense / place of belonging – also providing for basic needs of marginalized families.

- Participating in food banks, volunteering, outreach work, questioning why services rely on volunteers

- Over - policing **disproportionately deterred young Black males from using exercise** to manage their wellbeing.

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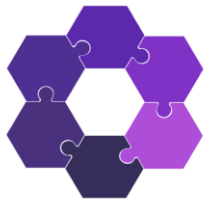
Co-POWeR

And it was nice, you'd meet like, there's situations where you're like 'oh it's quite sad' because you know, like old people where it's just them living alone and it's like they can't wait for you to come at that door with their hot meal so they can talk to you and just tell them about their day and just have that interaction, because they're so alone (P13)

I told them I was going on a run, I thought they were going to be calm and then they were like 'oh yeah, go off, go on, do your run.' So I started running and I swear the car just followed me for 10 minutes (P70)

Some initial findings from parents (mainly mothers)

- **Major upheaval in their daily lives**

Children and husbands at home all day – lack of space, food,   resources for schoolwork, arguments, financial worries, job insecurity

- **GP access**

 Lack of resumption of basic healthcare services

- **Online learning**

 Supporting children with their education and to stay motivated - especially when families have limited English language skills/ knowledge of curricullum

- **Anxiety and fears of COVID-19 impacting their families (here and abroad)**

 Multiple bereavements and losses, lack of sensitivity to cultural practices relating to death

- **Crucial importance of community based organisations for marginalised families**

Provide information, resources, care and attention, responsive in crises….
But severely under funded and dependent on goodwill

"So one size doesn't fit all. So you should look at [the] individual community and their needs and how death and bereavement is seen or practiced in those communities and provide services or things according to their [needs]…" (P47,)

"But there was some other issues like looking after her [mother-in-law]. Because she didn't know what she was doing. She was wetting her bed and all that. So I had to do all that because obviously, none of the carers was coming home. And there was no help at all. Then, with, with the older kids as well. And all the housework too, it was quite hard. It was a really bad time that, last, nearly two years (P29)
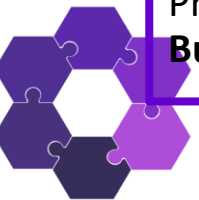
Accessing support

Anticipating and receiving support – impact of racist assumptions, stereotypes and the 'hostile environment'

- **Treated with suspicion** – being questioned by the GP receptionist before being able to access NHS services

- **Seen as less 'deserving'** -

"And it's not right and we are not asking to have it special, but because we live in this society as…and we're participating in it, they should look at us and say 'look, they have a need, that needs to be fulfilled as well'…adapt services" (P48 Bangladeshi, Muslim, father)

- **Fear of being stigmatized and judged a bad parent – lack of trust**

- **Fear of a hostile response (NRPF)**

*"So, come to think of someone who cannot fight like I will, you will just be there, unemployed, suffering and everything. And there was a time, things were very rough and people advised me 'go to job centre, go and meet them, tell them you need help or Citizens Advice.' What they told me they said, 'we can't help you because the visa you have says no recourse to public funds. **But we can take your children away from you.' I said 'Are you insane? You are going to take my child away from me?** …You are just clearly intimidating me and taking advantage of my colour, and doing all sorts of things, which is very wrong.'"* (P87)

A member of a group at community organisation for African women and girls

- In the **NHS, we are not free….you cannot claim child benefit or any benefit**. We are not well treated. We are being victimised. **We are being discriminated about**. Thank you for this [name of organisation] and thank God for my daughter who introduced me here. For me, for as young as I am, to be caring for five grandchildren. They came to visit me, I thank God they have the money to come to visit me. But when the lockdown locked them down, what will I say. ...Only one church, down there, they will come and give us food. I feel **proud (inaudible) to be begging for food**, but the children now ate, there are some **tinned food that they gave to me, I've never tasted this in my life**. That you see these children, they will eat it with happiness. **But I wasn't happy because they were not brought up like that. But something has to be in their stomach.**
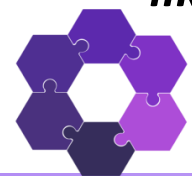
Hearing the voices of BAME professionals – the impact of COVID 19 on their lives and their service users' lives

- **Stigmatization**: 'and then also the way the Muslim community was vilified I'm going to say, during the first lockdown you know. We were vilified, seen as the super spreaders. I mean do you remember those messages for Eid……..Exactly. But then the white people who were going to the seaside or the pub, they were not seen. ' (Women's group)

- **Community response to COVID 19 and lockdown (after PM announcement):** 'It's not even an hour, people are organised, that wasn't coming from the council, that wasn't coming from the government, it was coming from everyday people like you and, me and my neighbours. It boosted our spirit… I was like wow, look, not even an hour' (Women's org)

- **BLM ,George Floyd, policing of young Black men**: 'They just clash all the time. We're trying to break that down. But it was discussed and I think a lot, especially our older ones, in terms of police brutality, I think it's come to a stage where they just normalise it now. When you bring things up such as George Floyd they're like, yeah, that's just the police, that's just how they are. So we try to challenge them and try and engage them, hold on, this is not normal, this is not how people should behave' (Youth worker)

- **Double standards:** 'it just struck me because I watched a programme last night about British soldiers and post traumatic stress disorder when we think about it in terms of our asylum seeking cohort or our other families who are refugees it's as if it's disregarded and they haven't experienced post traumatic stress disorder as a result of seeing the same things as our soldiers.' (Anti-racism professional)

Hearing the voices of BAME professionals – the impact of COVID 19 on their lives and their service users' lives
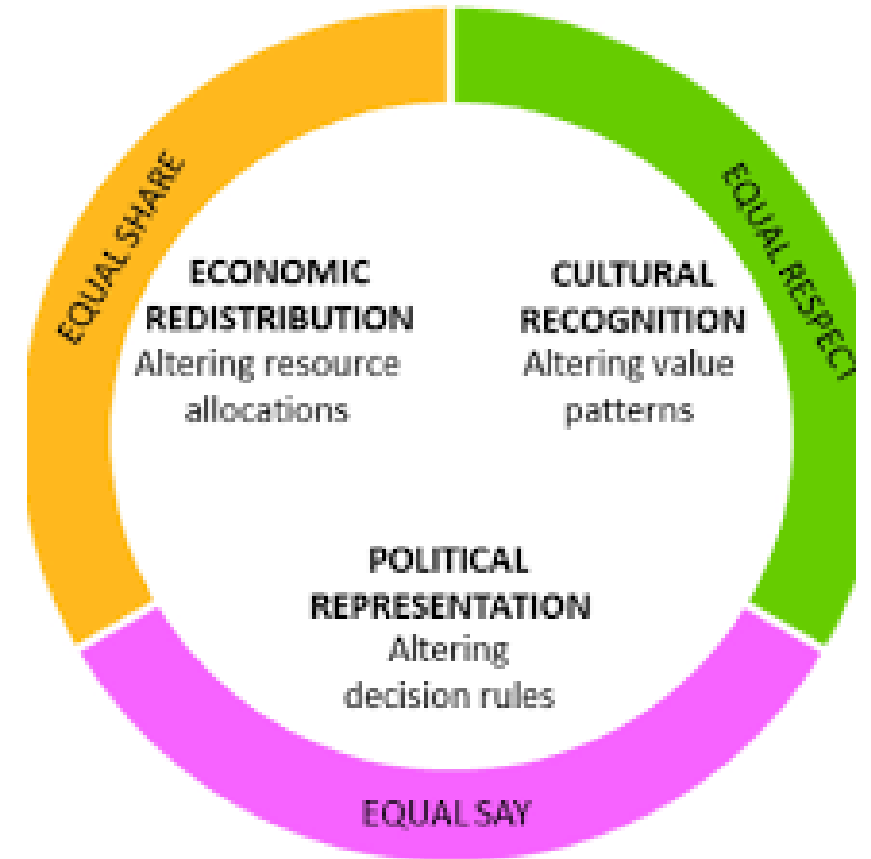
Intersectional policy research addresses the fact that any given policy problem or intervention will not be experienced by groups in the same way. Thus, the goal is to identify how specific policies address or fail to address inequalities across different social groups (Day & Gill, 2020)

Key discussion points/themes (within and beyond a COVID-context):

- Need for a *more intersectional approach* to understanding ethnic minorities and their needs; nuanced understanding of cultural and religious beliefs and sensitivities; active *listening*

- Tackling *the biases, stereotyping and stigmatisation* of groups within the existing support systems and structures: re-educating workers to *move beyond Western Eurocentric way of thinking,* white privileged way of doing things.

- Critique/anger around the Establishment/established practices; *institutionalised, systemic racism and structural inequalities* and *cumulative impact* on ethnic minority populations

- Working towards *empowerment* and *education* of service users through support and leadership.

- **Need for *value driven* – non-judgemental, safe community spaces**

Social Work and Social Justice – what can we do?

- Social theorist Nancy Fraser identifies two ways of dealing with injustices: **affirmative and transformative**.

- **Affirmative** strategies deal with the implications of injustices without challenging unequal social relations, with reference to 'remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them'

- On the contrary, **transformative** strategies are about changing the way society (& world) is organised and aim at restructuring the underlying framework. Transformative strategies are therefore 'remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework' .

- **For social work**:

- **Affirmative strategies:** Working with individuals and families to address need and impacts of social injustices

- **Transformative strategies:** Keeping open the discussion on the structural nature of problems, involvement in social movements/activism,

EQUAL SHARE

EQUAL RESPECT

ECONOMIC REDISTRIBUTION
Altering resource allocations

CULTURAL RECOGNITION
Altering value patterns

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION
Altering decision rules

EQUAL SAY

Affirmative strategies – some suggestions

- Existing structural inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic - Incorporate an understanding of social determinants of harm into assessments and how experiences of the pandemic have impacted on children and adults' lives and difficulties they face (e.g. multiple bereavements)

- Avoid individualizing risk and resilience – incorporate social context in assessments and care plans – including income, housing, employment

- Adopt an intersectional approach – race, poverty, gender, immigration, disability, sexuality

- *Race is a social construction but racism is not* - Take racism seriously – Listen to young people and families' experiences of professionals and services

- *The hostile environment* is real for so many – critically reflect on how this impacts on own and others' practice

- Material and practical support and proactive advocacy help individual and families (and relationships with professionals)

- Co-production with people with lived experience

Towards transformative change – some suggestions

- Making alliances … opening dialogue with those whose voices are less heard

- Getting to know our communities – building community resources and creating spaces of safety and belonging

- Co-production of services with with people with lived experience

- Providing rights-based advocacy services

- Support social activism

Embracing Ambiguity

- Roose et al. (2012) propose a stance in social work in which social work embraces its ambiguous nature:

- This implies that social work needs 'to simultaneously consider the rights and aspirations of the individual citizen and collective welfare, solidarity and equality in a democratic society'

- This tension between the relational and social dimensions of social problems such as poverty requires that social work is prepared to accept its ambiguous mandate and identity, supporting people on an individual level while at the same time highlighting the structural nature of problems.

- This awareness that the necessity to use affirmative strategies to mediate in the daily struggles and situations of people experiencing injustice can offer opportunities for structural change when those strategies are brought into the public debate by social work.

- Briskman (2013) argues that, as practice ethnographers, social workers are privileged by a proximate relationship in the lives of marginalised people and thus well placed to bear witness to such lives by exposing 'wicked' and unjust policies and challenging dominant discourses

Final words

- 'Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew…It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through it lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it' (Arundhati Roy, 2020)

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