“Speech Marks”

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The negative impact of MP’s stigmatising language on welfare policy

A Discussion Paper From Community Links

Introduction

“We have managed to create a block of people in Britain who do not add anything to the greatness of this country.” Iain Duncan Smith

“Believe you can or believe you can't, either way, you're right.” Henry Ford.

Condemning people on benefits and the benefits system itself has fast become a necessary part of achieving credibility for senior politicians of all parties. As many have pointed out, much of the rhetoric is over-simplified and often factually inaccurate, but we argue it also serves to undermine the aim Ministers purportedly hold dear; that of getting people back to work.

Not only does it affect the confidence and self-esteem of those seeking to move off benefits (and those who genuinely cannot work but are tarred with same brush), but it creates an environment in which people on benefits are viewed with suspicion by potential employers and by those - from the Jobcentre and elsewhere – whose support could be crucial to success.

Chancellor George Osborne:
“People who think it is a lifestyle to sit on out-of-work benefits … that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end. The money will not be there for that lifestyle choice.”
(Guardian, 2010)

In a series of workshops last year, Community Links explored with people receiving benefits, and looking for work, the impact of the language often used to describe them. We showed people some quotes from senior politicians, asked if they recognised the sentiment and how it made them feel. The quotes and people’s responses, from these workshops and others are printed throughout this short paper.

The language

Much of the language around welfare reform perpetuates the idea that people on benefits are lazy, sofa-bound, and not contributing. As just one example amongst many, while in government, Hazel Blears MP said: “*We should give local agencies and voluntary groups new powers to do whatever it takes to get people off the sofa and into a job” (*Daily Mail, 2009). The Prime Minister’s speech at Conservative Party Conference last year included this swipe at the opposition, but more importantly at people on benefits: “*But they [Labour] weren't the ones smashing up our town centres on a Friday night or sitting on their sofas waiting for their benefits”* (Cameron, 2010).

“A government source said last night: “There is no right to a life on benefits. If suitable work is available, people must take it. There will be tough new sanctions for scroungers who play the system” (The Sun, 2008)

Poverty and benefits are often discussed in relation to crime, antisocial behaviour, or fraud, creating the impression that benefits and crime are one and the same. Most recently, the benefits system and people on benefits featured heavily in the analysis of the causes and consequences of the riots in London. A Daily Mail article by David Cameron before he became Prime Minister was headlined: “*There are 5 million people on benefits in Britain. How do we stop them turning into Karen Matthews?*” (Cameron, 2008). Karen Matthews, the mother, of Shannon Matthews was charged with child neglect and perverting the course of justice following a much publicised faked kidnap in Dewsbury during 2008.

The way in which benefit fraud dominates discussions about the benefits system fuels the perception that deception is rife and claiming benefits is akin to fraud [see boxed section Pg 6].

“Anyone claiming benefits is now automatically classed as a scrounger. If people were more knowledgeable about benefits it would not be given such a negative label”
Workshop participant, Manchester, (from Hall & Pettigrew, 2007)

Factually incorrect or misleading claims are often used to create a false impression. Chancellor George Osborne’s claim that *“there are households receiving £104,000 a year in housing benefit”* (Osborne, 2010) is technically true, but the dozens of actual examples are far outnumbered by the tens of thousands who will be affected by the proposed changes. Meanwhile the benefits bill – *“one third of all public spending”* according to Osborne (Osborne, 2010 c) – is unfairly blamed on workless households, when in fact 60% of it goes to pensioners, and only 2% is spent on Jobseekers Allowance (TUC, 2010).

This language, and attitude is carefully crafted to appeal to sections of the electorate, and its success in shifting public opinion towards or away from a particular party is eagerly researched. But its impact on people who actually receive benefits – those being talked about but rarely to – is given scant attention. Although it has been brought up in Department for Work and Pensions reports:

“We are not all feckless, bone idle, spongers, I do believe that if we are given the help we need we would all be in are ideal fields of employment.”
ATD fourth world speaker

“Poverty is also an experience which is often misrepresented, poorly understood and stigmatised. For this reason, the framing and reporting of these findings is also important and terms such as ‘the poor’, ‘poor people’, or ‘poor parents’ can be used pejoratively to imply failings on the part of people who experience poverty.” (DWP, 2009).

What's the result?

Health

There is strong evidence that the way someone feels they are perceived or treated in society has an impact on their life. One of the most well-documented effects is on an individual's health. For example, a London Health Observatory report describes a range of health problems associated with being unemployed (including higher rates of mental health problems, higher rates of life-limiting illnesses, and higher rates of premature mortality), and *attributes these partly to 'social exclusion, isolation, and stigma'* (LHO, 2010).

Mental health problems themselves then acquire more stigma. Link and Phelan, writing in the Lancet, show that:

"*An insidious form of discrimination occurs when stigmatised individuals realise that a negative label has been applied to them and that other people are likely to view them as less trustworthy and intelligent, and more dangerous and incompetent*" (Link & Phelan, 2006)

Unemployment does not just lead to worse health, but worse health itself lowers chances of employment. For example, only 21% of people with a mental health problem are in employment, compared with 74% of the working age population (DWP, 2009)

Confidence

Confidence and self-esteem are widely recognised as crucial in successfully finding work, including by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith:

"*Too often in some of these areas people have been out of work for a long time, they've lost confidence, they've lost courage, they've lost any sense of self-worth. What the Work Programme I hope will do will be to tackle that and start to bring them back to the work force*" (Duncan Smith, 2010 c)

This recognition seems at odds with some of the Minister's public statements, which would seem designed to undermine rather than bolster someone's confidence, courage, and self-worth. For example, when talking about people out of work for long periods: "*We have managed to create a block of people in Britain who do not add anything to the greatness of this country"* (The Sun, 2010).

> **"Since leaving school early with no qualifications, I've had jobs ranging from cleaner to assistant manager. I've always loved working, I've never been sacked and I've always received glowing references with reminders that the door is always open. But none of my jobs have ever lasted more than a year and a half… because no employer will take me on and keep me on with the type of condition I have because of the amount of sick leave I need.**
> Workshop participant

Ed Miliband MP:

> **"The night before the election I was in my constituency and I met a guy who had done well under Labour. And he said, 'look, I am not voting for you. I've voted Labour all my life but I am working all the hours that God sends to make a decent living' and yet, he felt, that there are people down the street who could work but were not doing so."**
> (Miliband, 2010)

“I don’t believe that anyone wants to live on benefits, we all want to work.”
2010 participant

Indeed, successful back-to-work schemes, including those run by Community Links, overcome the barriers that stigma has introduced – a lack of confidence or motivation to apply for jobs, the belief that you just can’t get a job, the assumption that you’re not adding anything.

It is this contradiction - between senior politicians’ recognition that confidence and self-esteem play a significant role in successfully getting and keeping a job, and their tendency to use stigmatising and confidence-sapping language directed at these same jobseekers – which this report aims to address.

Participants in our workshops agreed that confidence is vital. One summed up the feeling of the group: “*the constant use of negative language undermines people’s health and self esteem, reducing motivation and self-belief*.” A participant in a UK Coalition against Poverty workshop described the stigma as follows: “*You're like an onion and gradually every skin is peeled off you and there's nothing left. All your self esteem and how you feel about yourself is gone. You're left feeling like nothing and then your family feels like that*” (Quoted in Lister, 2003).

Chris Grayling MP:
“We will reform our welfare state and end the situation where people can sit at home on benefits doing nothing.”
(Grayling, 2008)

Accessing support

Stigma does not just stem from a sense of personal failure, but also a fear of what others might say, and the embarrassment caused when they say it. In a review of the benefits system in 1994, Walker also suggested, “there is stigma by association when, by applying for benefits, people join a group they have previously despised.” He highlighted examples where “People claiming disability benefits express ‘distaste’ at having to apply for benefits and be identified with the long term unemployed. Recently separated mothers…feel a sense of ‘awkwardness and degradation’ when claiming income support…[and] elderly customers applying for retirement pension fear visiting the local office” (Walker, 1994).

“Politicians seem to have a certain opinion of what type of people are on Jobseekers – they think we’re all lazy, and drinking cider. And then they try and cut benefits. But actually what everyone on Jobseekers needs is help and encouragement to get a job.”
Charlotte, 19, Canning Town

When the Labour government introduced tax credits in 1998 they hoped that, “As a tax credit rather than a welfare benefit, it would reduce the stigma currently associated with claiming in-work support…it would prove more acceptable than social security benefits to most claimants and taxpayers as a whole” (Taylor, 1998). This was successful (HMRC 2010), with people viewing them “as a composite part of household income and more akin to wages than benefits” (Graham et al, 2005) yet did nothing to decrease the stigma still associated with benefits.

DWPs own research has suggested other ways of reducing stigma associated with accessing services. In 2007 it commissioned Ipsos Mori to conduct a series of large focus groups with individuals around the country, to ascertain their thoughts on the department and the services it provided to inform future strategy. The results are fascinating, particularly when set against department policy since then. Amongst the responses, participants felt that "people can feel ashamed in asking for support and advice – even when they are entitled to it" and a participant illustrated this: "There's quite a psychological barrier associated with going into a Jobcentre. If the Jobcentre was everywhere it would reduce the stigma associated with it." The report suggested that DWP services like Jobcentre Plus could be accessed from within community facilities like supermarkets or libraries: "this would not only improve access but may also help reduce the stigma associated with seeking state support" (Hall & Pettigrew, 2007).

"I don't like going down to the Jobcentre because all the benefits and stuff are all in the job centre now and I mean, obviously there's people there...and it's just the way people look at you when you're walking in...Like something that came off the bottom of their shoes...But, obviously, they don't see the full picture. They only see half of the picture.'
(Experience taken from Ridge and Millar, 2008)

Experience of support

Running alongside the public stigma associated with accessing the service, visiting the Jobcentre, or claiming the free school meals, is the impact of experiencing stigma from professionals administering the service. The most commonly-cited example is the Jobcentre, which for almost all our workshop participants, held negative associations:

"*They [Jobcentre Plus advisers] look down on customers. They automatically have a negative perception of unemployed people.*"

Respondents to DWP research suggested 'that the emphasis of DWP's communications could change as well. While they recognised that benefit fraud is an issue in need of tackling, it was thought that this conveys an image of DWP as being a Department concerned with punishment, rather than support and empowerment' (from Hall & Pettigrew, 2007)

DWP research with families on low incomes detailed their Jobcentre experience: "*Those who berated the service sometimes talked of how they felt judged by the staff involved, and felt that their genuine attempts to find work were disbelieved. Furthermore, less satisfactory encounters were ones in which people described how they felt 'harassed' rather than motivated by staff in Jobcentre Plus*" (Graham et al, 2005). Walker details how, "*Insensitive staff add to the humiliation of personal failure and may undermine the confidence that is necessary to cope with the unexpected*" (Walker, 1994).

"Some people do have problems, but Jobcentre should help them even more, trust in them, rather than treat them like they don't deserve anything. They don't seem to care about people who might be sick. Signing on is embarrassing enough without feeling like you don't deserve to be there, but they make you feel like that."
Charlotte, 19, Canning Town

An example – benefit fraud

Benefit fraud provides a very clear illustration of many of the arguments presented in sections one and two, and is an issue on which Community Links has done particular work.

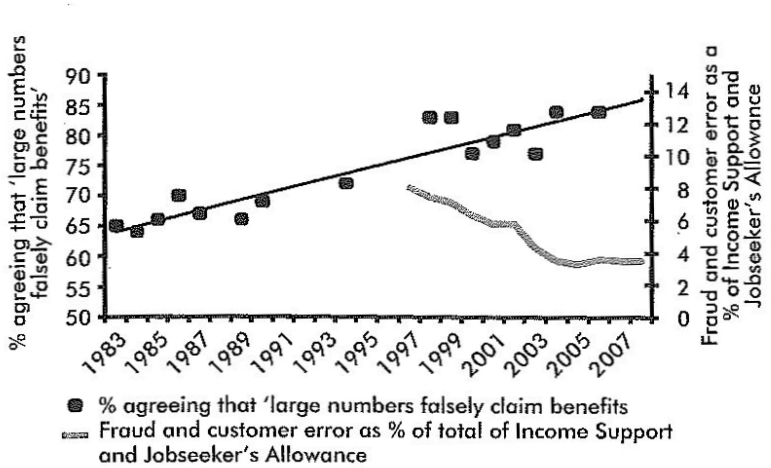
Background

In 1998 the new government published their strategy for tackling benefit fraud, called *Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business (*Department of Social Security, 1998). In its foreword Prime Minister Tony Blair said tackling fraud was a priority because "public support is vital for welfare reform, and public support is eroded by the failure to stop people defrauding the benefit system."

Its first aim was to "develop an anti-fraud culture among staff and the public and to deter fraud," and to do this proposed a communications campaign to capitalise on the fact that "the most effective deterrent for those who would commit fraud…will always be peer group disapproval and pressure**.**" The document cited public attitudes research showing that while 94% of people considered systematic and organised fraud to be wrong, "there is a degree of sympathy for people living on benefits who supplement their income by occasional earnings which they then fail to declare as they should." Only one in five people considered this type of fraud to be a "serious matter."

The public opinion cycle

In the next decade, a series of advertising and communications



Data on public attitudes from NatCen's British Social Attitudes survey. Data on benefit fraud and customer error from DWP (2009). Fraud and customer error across all benefits account for just 1.3 per cent of expenditure, and have followed a similar trend to that in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance given here.[118]

campaigns (including deliberately prosecuting low value fraud, and proactively press releasing convictions) accompanied widespread systematic reforms. Estimated fraud across all benefits fell from £2bn in 1997/98 to £800m by 2006/7 (NAO, 2008).

But as fraud fell, the public's perception of its prevalence rose dramatically, as the graph on the previous page (taken from Tim Horton's book *The Solidarity Society*) shows (Horton, 2009).

Government's zeal to publish details of its crackdown unintentionally gave people the impression that there must be a lot of fraud about. As government intended, public opinion hardened, so that any new anti-fraud initiative was increasingly well received. A cycle developed.

Misleadingly extreme

The approach was adopted by the newly elected government in 2010, who claimed that £5bn was lost to fraud each year when actually the figure combined for benefits and tax credits stood at around £1.5bn (Oborne, 2010).

Meanwhile, the increasingly blurred line between committing fraud and legitimately claiming benefits disappeared completely in a Sun campaign targeting "feckless benefits claimants" - backed by David Cameron - which urged readers to phone in and report "fraudsters". The feature was illustrated with the story of a young couple legitimately claiming benefits who were dismissed as "scroungers" (The Sun, 2010 b).

The situation had escalated such that Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith said, in February 2011, that he hoped his welfare reforms would "tone some of the rhetoric down and basically stop people being accused of something that, frankly, is partly because of the system and has nothing to do with them" (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2011).

Meanwhile the most recent DWP strategy on benefit fraud said it aimed to "disrupt the current social norms surrounding benefit fraud, including the view that benefit fraud is rife" (DWP, 2010) but simultaneously planned to proactively publicise "the extent of and outcomes from our tough range new range of punishments' including through 'undertaking "naming and shaming" in local areas' via the local media".

A 2008 report interviewed Jobcentre users about their experiences. They found "*a view among participants that staff in the agencies they dealt with did not sufficiently empathise with service users when dealing with their problems… Some participants reported that they felt stigmatised by the staff they dealt with and that staff 'looked down' on them, and made assumptions about them because they were claiming benefits: that they were lazy and uneducated and that they did not want to work*" (Finn et al, 2008).

"Their [Jobcentre staff's] job is to help you find work not make you feel as if you're completely useless in your efforts to find a job."
ATD fourth world speaker

Research with people who had recently begun claiming benefits confirmed the prejudice held by many. One participant said: "*I expected it to be horrid. All I knew of it was the stereotype of the drug addicts and all the rest of it*" (Quoted in Ipsos Mori, 2010). This young woman was pleasantly surprised to discover it was not as bad as she feared.

Impacting on staff behaviour

"They make you look like beggars. They keep you waiting around"
Participant in Manchester, (from Hall & Pettigrew, 2007)

Wright shows that Jobcentre staff's personal prejudices impact on the way they treat clients, so that "*users receive a service that is a modified version of the official policy*. *Staff would subdivide clients into 'good' and 'bad', and then further categorise 'bad' – 'wasters', 'unemployables', 'nutters', 'hoity-toity' (unemployed professionals who could be more trouble than they were worth) and those who are 'at it'."* (Killeen, 2008)*. This led to differences in the way the service was provided and "self-fulfillilng prophecies in terms of outcomes*" (Wright, 2003).

"When you live in long-term poverty you have to depend on services that are delivered with suspicion and disdain making you feel humiliated."
ATD fourth world speaker

Wright also showed that although some clients would react against the stereotype, many would act according to their label as a means of "maintaining the status quo." And Killeen (2008), in interviews with people living in poverty, recorded people's frustrations with the way they were treated:

"*People said that their expressions of distress and their desperation at failing to get fair treatment were too easily interpreted as aggression by service staff and could lead to assistance being denied."*

Overall, the group Killeen talked to "*were convinced that the treatment they received was different from what people with higher social status would expect.*"
Another, recent example, is of staff from ATOS healthcare – the company charged with assessing the fitness or otherwise for work of everyone applying for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The process itself has come in for significant criticism and seen drastic reform, but the attitude of staff working for ATOS has been singled out for particular concern (Dryburgh & Lancashire, 2010), with staff under investigation for making offensive comments about individuals (Disabled Go, 2011), and evidence that the process is, in turn, worsening the health of those going through it (Dryburgh & Lancashire, 2010)

Even if personal prejudice does not get in the way of providing an appropriate service, underlying stigma (or the client's perception of it) will undermine the "deep value" relationship (Smerdon and Bell, 2011) between client and advisor that has been shown to be vital in supporting people into work.

Research for the DWP by Campbell-Hall et al showed that clients want an advisor who does not judge: *"customers valued mutual collaboration and support between themselves and their advisers, and voiced a desire for a trusting, non judgemental relationship… Active involvement in the process and having their opinions sought and acted on boosted customers' confidence and motivation to find employment…"* (Campbell-Hall et al, 2010).

Separate research found that Employment Zone advisors were generally more effective than their counterparts in Jobcentre Plus at encouraging clients to take steps back to work. This was attributed to five qualities, including that the advisor was 'positive' about the claimant, for example in highlighting marketable skills, and 'collaborative' in their approach (Drew et al, 2010).

Hasluck and Green's review in 2007 of 'what works for whom' across DWP programmes concluded that an effective client-advisor relationship was "*Critical to the success or otherwise of interventions…Friendly staff, welcoming accommodation and a sense of shared purpose are not just desirable rather cosmetic aspects of provision but may be essential elements in the effectiveness or otherwise of provision*."

Applying for a job

Several workshop participants expressed the view that employers discriminate against people on benefits when recruiting, and some felt they had been discriminated against personally.

One participant, now working for a charity but previously temping at a recruitment agency, described how applications from anyone

> **"I think the press do absolutely disgusting things to people on benefits. You never hear of any good things – it's all "benefit fraud, scroungers." Yet you can go to any community in Britain and you'll find people on benefits doing great work, helping people in their community. I'd like to see people on benefits recognised for the good things they do. And I'd like to see benefits increased to recognise that.'**
> Ian, volunteer, Anti-poverty Network Cymru

Glenda Jackson MP:

> **"The Government are trying to sell to the British electorate the argument…that the majority of people who claim benefit, particularly housing benefit, are scroungers and wastrels who do not want to work and are battening on the backs of the majority of hard-working British people who do not claim for housing benefit. That is simply not the case."**
> (Jackson, 2010)

“The media and politicians speak about the poor in derogatory terms like lazy, scroungers, feckless parents and the underclass. This stereotyping of all poor people dehumanises them in the eyes of others and does nothing but impact negatively on society.”
ATD fourth world speaker

receiving benefits were routinely thrown in the bin with little or no consideration of the individual’s experience or competencies.

There is robust evidence that employers discriminate on other grounds – for example a substantial piece of research for the DWP showed applicants were significantly less likely to be offered an interview if their name suggested they were from an ethnic minority background. This was particularly true for the private sector, particularly in smaller companies (Wood et al, 2009).

Yet our research uncovered no studies of this sort investigating discrimination against people on the basis of their benefit status. We suggest this as a crucial piece of future research.

The studies that do exist are based on interviews or focus groups or polls with employers themselves. These suggest there is evidence that some employers do discriminate, although the report authors voice their suspicion that actual rates may be higher than disclosed.

“R was worried about the stigma of being on benefits. There are adverts on the bus asking that people ‘shop’ their neighbours for claiming benefits that they are not entitled to. R thinks that this puts in peoples mind that claimants are fraudsters”
2010 participant

For example, the DWP Employers Survey asked employers whether they would still consider recruiting someone who had been out of work; 7% said ‘it depends’ and 2% said ‘no’, with the rest saying they would. When asked how long someone would have to be out of work before they would consider not recruiting them, 83% of employers answered ‘not applicable’ or ‘do not know’, but some of the remaining 17% would consider it after as little as a year of unemployment (Colman et al, 2007).

In interpreting their results the authors cite research from Moss and Arrowsmith (2003) which “*suggests that employers can have a negative perception of long term unemployment, even considering long-term unemployment as synonymous with being unemployable.*” Colman et al conclude: “*This indicates that the respondents in this survey who say they would consider these applicants may* ***consider*** *them, but may not always offer them a job in practice.”*

A report looking at unemployed people’s participation in training suggested that: *“Employer attitudes, particularly regarding the length of time spent unemployed or frequency of unemployment, can be a barrier to younger people’s employment*” (Newton et al, 2005).

A 2001 report for the DWP (Bunt et al, 2001) investigated employers’ experience and attitudes towards recruiting people on benefits. It was concentrated amongst employers who had recently recruited people

from three specific groups – lone parents, the long term unemployed, and people with physical or mental disabilities, and was intended to inform the way the ONE programme, operating out of Jobcentres, could improve links with employers. It found that most employers' experience had not put them off employing people on benefits – 78% said they were likely to take on someone who had been long term unemployed within the next two or three years. Nevertheless, of the 32 employers interviewed in depth, four would not consider it, and one was adamant:

"If they have been unemployed for over 12 months and have been signing on for unemployment benefit it means they do not want a job doesn't it? We do not see these people."

Finally, research by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development looked at employer's perception of hiring people from various 'disadvantaged groups' (CIPD, 2010). They found that 4% of employers deliberately exclude those with a history of long term unemployment (down from 10% in 2005), although only 21% have actually employed someone in this situation in the last three years. Reasons given for excluding these groups (which also included ex-offenders, disabled people, young people with few qualifications, and older people), included 'trust' (17%), 'reliability' (13%), 'bad experience' (12%) and the 'risk of disruption' (7%) and quite a significant 'other' (51%).

> **"The government doesn't appreciate the time we put in. They always talk about bad people in our communities, but I don't think they appreciate the good."**
> Constance, volunteer, Cardiff

Life Chances

Much of the argument in this paper has concentrated on how stigmatisation could impact on employment. Another area in which the current government has shown particular interest is in improving the life chances of children from low income families. When launching his 'Fairness Premium' before the Comprehensive Spending Review, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg hailed this as the defining aim of the coalition:

"I want to describe the kind of fairness this Coalition Government aspires to – future fairness, improving the life chances of our children…all of us in this government, including the Prime Minister and myself, are not willing to compromise on a better future for the poorest children" (Clegg, 2010).

> **"I survive on under £5,000 whilst hearing all day, every day, from every medium that I, and those like me are a burden and a drain on the 'honest, hardworking tax paying families, businesses and public services of this country.' I hear words like 'lazy, feckless, scrounger, lying, cheating, immoral, undeserving, parasite', as well as the latest media spin of the deserving and undeserving. I didn't ask to be sick. I don't ask for sympathy or pity. I've never taken a penny I didn't have to."**
> ATD fourth world speaker

David Cameron MP:

“What chance for these children? Raised without manners, morals or a decent education, they’re caught up in the same destructive chain as their parents. It’s a chain that links unemployment, family breakdown, debt, drugs and crime.”
(Cameron, 2008)

Yet there is evidence that the kind of language highlighted above has a detrimental effect on the children of low income families. This can be manifested, again, in the way families are treated by statutory services. For example, Killeen (2008) quoted a mother talking about her experience of social services:

“One woman described a catalogue of difficulties she had experienced in getting an appropriate response to her child's educational needs. She said that only one social worker had been sympathetic to her efforts; that social worker had said she understood the difficulties because she had been brought up on a similar estate.”

He also documents the direct impact stigmatisation of those in poverty can have on children:

“Parents described the problems faced by their children at school. These included dinner ladies telling children that their parents were lazy and giving them the worst of the food to eat. Being bullied was a common experience, often connected with children not having the 'right' clothes or trainers.”

The UK Coalition Against Poverty (UKCAP, 2008) convened six focus groups of people living in poverty for their Communicating Poverty Report. When asked about the way poverty is communicated in schools, participants identified a strong need for better informed teachers and students:

“They reported ‘children experiencing intimidation and teachers turning a blind eye’, ‘throw-away comments by teachers which are really hurtful’, and the fact that ‘even the best willed are patronising … and blame the parents without understanding what it is like trying to bring up children while living in poverty’.”

Conclusion

Stigmatising language directed at people receiving benefit might be good politics but it is bad policy, countering the effect of more practical measures being put in place by government to support people off benefits and into work.

It affects people's confidence and self esteem which, as senior politicians note, is vital for regaining employment. The public stigma associated with claiming benefits can deter people from accessing the support they need, and the stigma of staff delivering services, for example in Jobcentre Plus, can mean that support is less effective.

Finally, employers' prejudices about the skills of those on benefits could hinder employment opportunities, and the stigmatising effects can extend to people's children, further hindering their life chances.

We recommend more research in this area, but not as strongly as we urge senior politicians to think carefully about their choice of words. Echoing a phrase frequently used in this debate – the right (the privilege) enjoyed by senior politicians to have their words widely reported comes with a responsibility to ensure they chose the right ones.

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About Community Links

Community Links is an innovative east London charity, running a wide range of community services and projects for all ages. Founded in 1977, we now work with 25,000 local people each year supporting children, young people, adults and families, in 16 centres through 41 different projects. We share the learning nationally with government, other practitioners and the media to generate social change.

The national team of Community Links, shares the learning by providing practitioner-led consultancy and training, research, policy and campaigns and a communications / events programme; and over the last ten years has:

- Published over 54 books and reports based on our research
- Provided consultancy and training support to over 50 organisations from across the UK
- Succeeded in securing 12 national policy change
- Influenced government strategy and policy about the cash-in-hand / informal economy
- Led the Need NOT Greed campaign (members including TUC and Oxfam)
- Worked with over 10,000 local people using our innovative 'Everyday Innovators' approach

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