



Social Justice Pulse Review

Poverty and Cost of Living

The Hidden Burden of Poverty Among Adoptive Families

Dr Helen Close (Newcastle University), Sarah Fry (The Belay Foundation), Donna Mease & Lynn Applegarth (ARC Adoption North East)

Project Summary

Thousands of children and young people are legally adopted in the UK annually. Our study uncovers hidden poverty experienced by adoptive families, spanning into adulthood. Our call-to-action addresses barriers to financial stability including shame, inability to work, and lack of awareness about eligibility for benefits and financial support.

"What a relief to let it all out without feeling judged or inferior!"

The Challenge

Around 3000 children and young people (CYP) are legally adopted in the UK every year. Adopted people are more likely to have additional social, educational, mental health, and physical disabilities than their peers, usually from exposure to drugs & alcohol, abuse, or neglect (known as 'developmental trauma'). For adoptive families, managing chronic and complex needs with a systemic lack of external support may result in a cost of living much higher than for traditional families.

Using our trauma-responsive engagement model (See Me to Care for Me), we consulted 116 parents with one or more adopted children aged 0-30yrs in workshops and surveys. We also searched current published evidence and talked to service providers and benefits advice specialists. We coproduced findings and a call to action with adoptive families and stakeholders.

Findings

Our headline finding is that some adoptive families may be suffering financially in the cost-of-living crisis even more severely than other family groups, for a longer duration, with the impacts for both the parents and the young people continuing well beyond the children's transition into adulthood.

- **Adoptive poverty is real and can be life-long** - Many adoptive families are resorting to savings, bank loans, and remortgaging their home to pay for essential food and utility bills. Complex needs, and financial dependence, can last well into adulthood.
- **Adoptive poverty is hidden** - We searched 7 international databases and could find no published studies. Service providers are often unaware of this unmet need and families told us of their shame, preventing them from asking for help.
- **Adoptive poverty is complex** - with interconnected causes requiring further investigation including job loss, lack of safe childcare, poor availability of trauma-informed schools, higher than average utility costs and bills; and lack of awareness about benefits and available support,
- **Adoptive poverty CAN be prevented or mitigated** - A service evaluation of benefits advice provision by The Belay Foundation, demonstrated a 100% success rate in accessing or increasing the benefits received by families.

Recommendations

- *Research to understand the causes, consequences, experiences, and solutions to adoptive poverty and how it might benefit care-experienced families, and families with disabled children, more generally.*
- *Extend and evaluate the benefits service provided by The Belay Foundation.*
- *Engage with commissioners, policy makers, practitioners, and families via Adoption UK and Adoption England to raise awareness and campaign for change. The changes we would like to see are:*
 - *Financial advice, benefits awareness raising, training and assessments woven into pre and post adoption support*
 - *Education and training for practitioners about eligibility for benefits and local and national schemes for those with developmental trauma.*
 - *Greater understanding within DWP of the importance of the impact of development trauma on eligibility for benefits, and the need for legislation around flexible working for parent carers.*
 - *Better availability of trauma-informed schools, to improve the life-chances of CYP, and allow parents to work.*
 - *Freely-available education and training to families and professionals to apply successfully for state benefits.*
 - *More consistent and transparent decision making around adoption allowance and financial support for families most in need.*