



FOR WHOSE BENEFIT? LIVING WITH (AND RESISTING) WELFARE REFORM IN THE UK

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The 'problem' of 'welfare'



- Dualistic divisions between 'hard working families' and 'welfare dependents', between 'strivers' and 'shirkers', the 'deserving' & 'undeserving'
- Political consensus on need to address the 'problem' of 'welfare'

The policy approach in the UK

- Focus on paid work as the 'best form of welfare'
- Policy framing underpinned by an emphasis on 'welfare contractualism'
- Welfare conditionality as the 'silver bullet'
- Post-2010, a drive to reduce 'welfare' spending as part of austerity agenda (& to create higher-wage, low-welfare economy)







A (very long) list of welfare reforms

These include:

- Increasing & extending welfare conditionality
- Reducing levels of benefits
- Introduction of new benefits (Universal Credit)
- Introduction of Benefits Cap & two child limit
- Localisation of areas of welfare policy
- Changes to programmes of employment 'support'

Tracking welfare reform's impact



Of people experiencing **destitution**:



76% go without food



71% lack clothes or shoes suitable for the weather



63% no access to toiletries



56% unable to heat homes



30% unable to light homes

[@jrf_uk](https://twitter.com/jrf_uk) #UKDestitution
www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk

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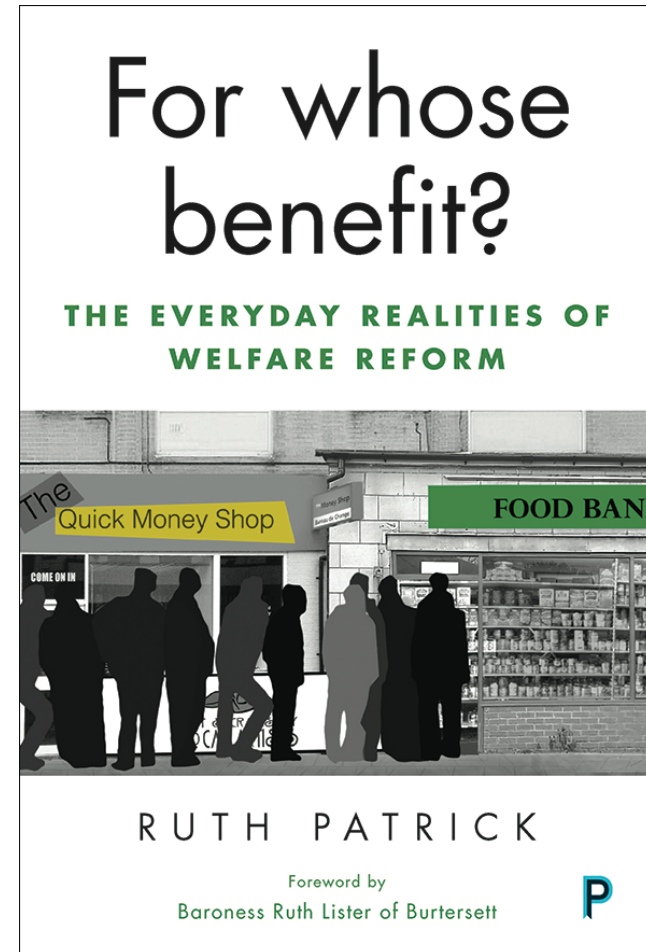
The lived experiences of welfare reform study

- Ongoing qualitative longitudinal research
- Including participatory aspects (Dole Animators project)
- Time as a vehicle *and* object of study



Central findings

- Gap between policy rhetoric and lived experiences for those affected by welfare reform
- Hard work that 'getting by' in poverty demands
- Forms of other contribution in which so many of participants engaged
- Complex relationships with paid employment
- Perverse consequences of benefit sanctions
- Welfare reform is not working
- From social security to social insecurity?



Experiencing benefits stigma

I feel like a bum. I feel useless. When you're walking around the streets... everybody knows that you're not a worker because you're out and about through the day so you feel worthless... You feel like some people are looking at you as if to say “..he's taking piss, he's another one that just sits about and does nowt”. And then when you go shopping and you're having to buy all the cheapo stuff, you feel, I don't know, you feel ashamed. That's how it is. You see people putting nice products in their trolleys and you can't, you've got to get the minimum and it's tough if you like it or not because that's all you can afford. (James, W1)

I need a job; because I'm sick of scrounging. That's how I think of it, anyway, I'm sick of scrounging.
(Sam ,W3)



Institutional stigma



- [Job Centre staff] do look down at you...last week when I went down, she went, “have you applied for any jobs?” I went “yeah, 23”. And she looked at me as if to say “right okay, whatever” ... basically they look at us like rubbish ‘cause we are on benefits...it’s like they put you in a category or something...like low-lifes or something like that. It does get you mad. (Sophie, W3)
- When I started to go in the Job Centre again there were guards. Security men, and I’m thinking what a thing... It’s wordless, It’s a silent, I don’t even have the words. It’s the image... They’re symbolising the fact that they’re the big superpower and we are powerless and we’ve got to do as we’re told, when we’re told. (Cath, W1)

Governing encounters

It's how she spoke to me about it. Now if she would have said, "would you", not "you have to", that's where they go wrong. If they say "you have to do it", then no, I won't do it. But if it's "would you do it", then yeah I would. But I'm not having somebody telling me to do summat. (Robert, W3)



'othering'

I'm not racist, I really aren't, but I don't agree at all with the way that we're living in our country compared to what other people [from other countries] are living. I really don't. And it gets me really angry...so help me that I want to go out and punch some polish or [immigrant]. (Chloe, W3)

There's so many people out there that are just lazy and don't want to work and they...won't get questioned...They'll just get left. And there's people out there that are on disability that don't deserve it. I mean I've seen a man a couple of weeks ago that was on disability and had a disability badge and everything, and he was just walking normal and swinging his walking stick about like it was nowt. And I thought there's people there that actually really deserve it that could do with the money, and they're not even getting it and it just winds me up. (Sharon, W2)



Unlikely supporters of welfare reform?

In some ways [welfare reform] is a good idea because maybe there is people who don't need to be on certain benefits that could go out to work. Not like me but people that are just playing on it or something to get money out of the social. (Amy, W1)

There is quite a lot of people faking having bad backs and stuff. So I think [the government have] got to do something really. (Kane, W1)



The function of stigma

- Governance through stigma (Tyler)
- The promise of inclusion versus experiences of exclusion
- Extent of stigma then makes challenges and resistance harder still (Lister)
- And yet....

Resistance – developing an alternative imaginary of ‘welfare’



a 5 point plan for A BRIGHTER FUTURE

by Dole Animators

- 1. Direct money into programmes that work**

Don't put up barriers... *...open doors instead*
- 2. A benefits system that shows empathy and is personalised**

"Hello, how can I help?" *...I'm a person*

I'm not a number... **Good jobs**
- 3. A right to work so people can have a decent life**

Surviving is not... *...living*

Good jobs
- 4. Child care that makes work possible**

Make work... *...worth while*
- 5. A right to decent and affordable homes**

From this to... *...Home Sweet Home*

Find out more at:
www.doleanimators.org | [@doleanimators](https://twitter.com/doleanimators) | [#goodsociety](https://twitter.com/goodsociety)

HOUSE OF COMMONS IT'S TIME YOU LISTENED TO PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

LET THE HOLE IN DEMOCRACY BE FILLED WITH OUR VOICES...

...AND BUILD BRIDGES WITH YOUR POLICIES

ONLY YOU CAN MAKE THE BIG CHANGES!

For more information go to: www.atd-uk.org | [@ATDFourthWorld](https://twitter.com/ATDFourthWorld) | [#goodsociety](https://twitter.com/goodsociety)

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VOICING the PEOPLE

OUR 5 SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

- 1. COMPASSIONATE & NEEDS BASED BENEFITS SYSTEM**

UH UH. COMPUTER SAYS NO

>Next..No
>Next..No
>Next..No
>Next..|

NO
- 2. DECENT HOMES FOR ALL**

HOME SWEET HOME
- 3. A DECENT DAYS WORK FOR A DECENT DAY'S PAY**

HAPPY TO'S CHILD CARE

BYE, BYE MADDY
- 4. BRING BACK OUR COMMUNITY CENTRES**

RUN BY THE PEOPLE. FOR THE PEOPLE
 BINGO * CITIZENS ADVICE * CAFE
 HEART OF THE COMMUNITY
 FOOD BANK * JOB CLUB
 HOUSING ADVICE
 CHILD CARE
- 5. PROVIDE CHILD CARE SO PARENTS CAN CHOOSE TO WORK**




Building blocks for a better future

- Valuing the expertise that comes with experience
- Focusing on relational harm that poverty causes (and seeking to address this)
- Greater recognition of (inter)dependency of us all
- Possibilities in developing a shame-proofed social security system
- Reclaiming social citizenship as a force for meaningful inclusion
- Re-thinking place of paid employment within ideas of citizenship responsibility
- Moving from an analysis of the problem of 'welfare' to a rights-based engagement with social security



QUESTIONS?

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Some places to read more about the findings from the Lived Experiences of Welfare Reform study

- In The Guardian
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/ruth-patrick>
- LSE Policy & Politics Blog
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/for-whose-benefit/>
- The Conversation
<https://theconversation.com/profiles/ruth-patrick-265337>
- Discover Society
<https://discoversociety.org/2017/07/05/taking-the-long-view-better-understanding-the-impact-of-welfare-reform/>

- Or, you can get the WHOLE book
www.policypress/for-whose-benefit

- Watch the Dole Animators film at www.doleanimators.org