



AGAINST ALL ODDS

LIVING IN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

Introduction

With all our wealth and prosperity what is it like to be poor in Ireland? The most recent poverty data (2001) tells us that:

- 6% of the population live without basic necessities and on weekly incomes of less than €172 per adult
- 4.9% (192,000) of population are on weekly incomes of less than €192 for an adult and €63 for a child and lack basic necessities
- 22% of the population live on weekly incomes of less than €164 per adult and €54 per child per week
- 6.5% of children (66,000) experience consistent poverty; 23.4% (237,000) are in income poverty.

A Combat Poverty Agency study, called *Against All Odds – Family Life on a Low Income*, is revealing about how poverty impacts on families and children. The study was an in-depth examination of 30 families in urban and rural areas.

It highlights how inadequate resources and lack of basic necessities curtail people's everyday life. The families studied were very poor – the average weekly income for an adult was €124. Health problems or care responsibilities were significant reasons for those who could not work. The study also highlights that poverty is a situation people want to escape.

This briefing is part of a three part series based on the study that highlights the experience of:

- Growing up in poverty
- Living in deprived communities
- Living with poverty and poor health

FACTBOX

- Demand for housing is currently outstripping supply, particularly in the social housing sector. According to the Local Authority Social Housing Assessments of 2002 a total of 48,413 households were in need of local authority housing compared to 39,716 in 1999, an increase of 23.5%.
- The financial stresses faced by private renters on low incomes are more severe than the financial stresses from housing costs faced by low income house purchasers.

In the study *Against All Odds*:

- The report highlighted the generally inadequate provision of public housing and the absence of affordable, private-sector housing. These problems were particularly acute in Dublin.
- By far the most common criticism was the lack of maintenance. Almost two thirds of people had experienced long delays in getting any repairs done. There was a general lack of confidence in the local authority in relation to repairs.
- Parents in Dublin were worried that playgrounds might not be safe areas for young children.
- People living in disadvantaged housing estates are not only highly likely to become victims of crime but anticipate this as a part of their daily lives.
- In a third of households relationships with neighbours were problematic and it was not uncommon for these people to live in terror of their neighbours. Many people felt bullied.



Growing Up in a Deprived Community

Parents expressed a lot of anxiety around the welfare of their children and the impact of poverty on them.

“The kids learn much too quick. They have to fight for the right to play on the road. They have to be very aggressive just to survive and that’s not right. It’s a jungle out there.”

They were particularly concerned that teenagers were likely to get into trouble more easily.

“In this area you can get mixed up with the wrong crowd and then they start behaving like the others. The main problem now I think is drugs... They’re very easily influenced into doing the wrong thing and you can’t watch them twenty-four hours a day.”

Children themselves expressed similar concerns and fears:

“When I was young I was a bit stupid... I thought that maybe life was nice but now that I am older and I am out in the world I know that that is not right. I have seen some terrible things, people over-dosing, people getting beat up, things being stolen. They do it during the day and you just stand there and watch.”

It was clear from the study that families felt that there was an urgent need for affordable activities for children and teenagers:

“It’s all money, money, money. If only there was something for the kids to do that didn’t cost loads of money.”

It was also clear that the welfare of their children and teenagers was of critical importance for the parents and that they had hopes and dreams that they wished to see fulfilled:

“When my daughter says she hates it here, I say ‘Get your education and your qualifications and get a good job abroad if you can.’ The circle has to be broken. I don’t want them to put their children through what I’m putting them through. Paul is very bright and intelligent. Will there be a job for him? Will there be a way out of the ghetto? That would worry me with him. He deserves better. I would hope for more support to help children and parents, more prevention work. The families are forgotten. It’s always ‘Let’s blame the parents’.”



Neighbourhoods in Deprived Communities

Social disorder impacted on residents' quality of life, through direct experience of anti-social behaviour and a general loss of communal space and a sense of personal safety.

Many people in the study (almost half of the Dublin based households) lived in fear of other neighbours in their local area:

“You're terrified in your own home. That's the way it is up here. You don't know what's going to happen.”

“I'd rather live somewhere else. There's fights around here. I'd like to live somewhere where there are no robbed cars...There are too many joyriders and robbed cars.”

People felt powerless. The absence of a sense of community and an ability to participate in decisions that affect their lives was sometimes expressed as a desire to escape.

“I'm getting as far away from here as possible. I want to go somewhere where it is quiet and you're not frightened. I so hope the future will change.”

Policy Implications

The issues highlighted in *Against All Odds* should not be reduced to a simple inability to cope among the families concerned. Rather, the families are faced with extreme financial and other deprivations, which place enormous pressures on their management and parenting skills and which expose their children to social exclusion and various at-risk behaviours. A number of policy implications arise from the findings of *Against All Odds*:

- Insufficient income to meet basic everyday living costs was a significant problem. Social welfare payments primarily support those who are not or cannot be in work. Higher basic social welfare payments and child income supports (Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances) are two main ways to provide higher incomes for families on low income. Additional payments for child care, school and disability costs and exceptional costs such as new born babies would also make a difference.



- Local authorities need to improve the quality as well as the quantity of accommodation available to people on low incomes.
- It is critical that people have a say and a role to play in the development of the area in which they live. Opportunities need to be created whereby people can participate and co-operate locally. Community development approaches need to be developed and strengthened. Families themselves should be encouraged to contribute to the definition of needs and to the provision of the required services.
- People generally expressed a level of dissatisfaction with the maintenance of their homes and areas in *Against All Odds*, with little evidence of 'quality' services at the receiver end. This issue needs to be given priority by local authorities.
- Parents expressed strong concerns about the availability, quality and safety of play and recreation areas. Affordable and safe play, sport, recreation and cultural activities for young people should be given particular priority in disadvantaged areas.



Illustrations by Brian Fitzgerald

Other Information Sources

Combat Poverty Agency

www.combatpoverty.ie
Tel. 01 670 6746

Department of Social and Family Affairs

www.welfare.ie
Tel. 01 874 8444

Office for Social Inclusion

osi@welfare.ie
Tel. 01 704 3851

National Children's Office

www.nco.ie
Tel. 01 704 3851

Threshold

www.threshold.ie
Tel. 01 704 3851

Department of the Environment

www.environ.ie
Tel. 01 704 3851

Community Workers' Co-op

Tel. 01 704 3851

The full report '*Against All Odds Family Life on a Low Income*' by Mary Daly and Madeline Leonard is available for €18 from Institute of Public Administration, E-mail: sales@ipa.ie
Tel: 01 240 3600 Website: www.ipa.ie