

Commission on Justice in Wales

Response by the Bevan Foundation

1. The Bevan Foundation is an independent thinktank that develops lasting solutions to Wales' most challenging problems, aiming to increase prosperity, equality and justice. It is a registered charity and does not receive any funding from government or political parties.
2. The nature of our funding means that we have been unable to undertake significant work on the justice system. However our work on poverty has highlighted that living in poverty makes offending and being the victim of crime much more likely.
3. Relative income poverty affects about 700,000 people in Wales, nearly one in four of the population. The risks of poverty are highest for some groups of people, notably:
 - Children in a workless families (68% in poverty)
 - Children in lone parent households (47% in poverty)
 - Being from an ethnic minority (47% in poverty)
 - Being a single female (32% in poverty)
 - Living in a household where someone is disabled (29% in poverty).

Poverty is forecast to rise in the next 5 years, increasing to nearly 40% of children by 2021/22.¹

4. Having a low income affects a wide range of other socio-economic circumstances such as access to a private car (e.g. to get to court), educational attainment (e.g. to understand complex written materials), lack of savings (e.g. to pay fines), and mental as well as physical ill-health. These together shape the ability of people on low incomes to access and receive justice.
5. The Bevan Foundation recently contributed to a major evidence review of poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A review of the evidence on the relationships between poverty and crime² showed that the deeper and longer the experience of poverty, the greater the impact on the likelihood of perpetrating or being a victim of crime.
6. This evidence review also highlighted that although the processes are complex the key drivers are:
 - a. Family relationships: poverty contributes to poor family functioning, which can contribute to early onset offending.
 - b. Employment: long-term unemployment is strongly associated with offending and victimhood, especially amongst teenagers and young adults, but having a secure and stable job is more important in reducing the risk than just having any job.
 - c. Women: increased poverty appears to increase female crime, with sudden unexpected events that impoverish women triggering crime as a 'survival' mechanism.

¹ Andrew Hood and Tom Waters (2018) **Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2016–17 to 2021–22**. Institute for Fiscal Studies: at <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R127.pdf>

² See Colin Webster and Sarah Kingston (2014) Crime and Poverty, in **Reducing poverty In the UK: a collection of evidence reviews**. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: at https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/Reducing-poverty-reviews-FULL_0.pdf#page=146

- d. Community: People living in poor neighbourhoods are generally more likely to be the victims and/or commit crime. Neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty can concentrate the risks of people becoming victims of crime and lessen the ability of people to protect themselves.
 - e. Rehabilitation: criminal careers are unnecessarily prolonged and hardened because positive choices and legitimate routes out of criminality are difficult or simply not available.
7. The review highlights a particular concern about the risks of offending and / or victimhood amongst unemployed young men in disadvantaged communities.
 8. Not only are people on low incomes more likely to be victims of crime or to be offenders, there is a wealth of evidence that people on low incomes are less likely to be able to access advice e.g. because of geographical, time and cost constraints.
 9. Although we have not directly conducted research into this issue ourselves, an ex Family Court magistrate told us:

“...that access to justice is a particular problem because of the combination of poor transport, especially in the valleys, the reduction in local courts and the non-availability of Legal aid for applicants in child care matters unless there is evidence of domestic abuse. This has been exacerbated in recent years by the centralising of the Court Staff and what the lay magistrates see as uninformed dictates from Whitehall seeking cost savings over practical travel for applicants, respondents and witnesses.”
 10. We regret we are unable to offer further contribution on this important subject. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information if required.

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