

Moravian Women's Association
Home and Overseas Paper – September 2015
“The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate...”

“*The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate...*” is part of a Hymn verse which many of us used to sing. Like many out of date sentiments, that verse has quietly disappeared from modern Hymnbooks, as incompatible with modern social justice. The Moravian Church is holding a one day conference at Ockbrook School on Saturday 31 October 2015 to discuss the question “What does *to seek to transform unjust structures of society* mean to us today?”

What are the facts about *unjust structures* in the UK today? Adult poverty is very difficult to discuss, as many of the root causes are to do with lifestyle. Children, however, cannot choose their lifestyle, they are dependent on how society treats them. Taking child poverty as an example or product of *unjust structures*:

Child poverty

There were 3.7 million children “living in poverty” in the UK in 2013-2014. That’s 28% of children, or 9 in a class of 30. London is the area with the highest rates of child poverty in the UK.

Children in large families are at far greater risk of living in poverty, 35% of children in poverty live in families of 3 or more children. Families experience poverty for many reasons, but its fundamental cause is not having enough money to cope with the circumstances in which they live. There may be a rise in the cost of living, rent, job losses, or benefit changes, which send a family into poverty. A child in poverty may be cold, hungry, unable to join activities with friends, suffer bad health, do badly at school, the result is he or she is unable to go to college or get a good job. When such children grow up, a man living in a deprived area lives up to 9 years less than in an affluent area. (Information from the Child Poverty Action Group).

Child poverty is defined as living in a family with an income below 60% of average.

Critics say that this measure is therefore not a measure of poverty, but of *inequality*. It means that if average incomes go up or down the number of children “living in poverty” remains the same! By this measure there was *less* poverty in the 1970s, when we were all a great deal poorer than we are now. The reason is that there was a lot less *inequality* at that time.

What is the Government doing about child poverty?

This summer, the Government has announced a new way of measuring child poverty. It will focus on “root causes” and make “meaningful changes to children’s life chances”. The old method of measuring child poverty was “deeply flawed and a poor test of whether children’s lives are genuinely improving”. New laws will introduce a duty for agencies to report on worklessness and level of education attainment. The government will develop a range of other indicators to measure other causes of poverty, including family breakdown, debt and drug and alcohol dependency, reporting annually on how these indicators affect a child’s life chances.

What can an ordinary person do about child poverty?

Many many people such as grandparents, healthcare workers, and teachers, quietly support children in their own extended families or their neighbours and local community. If you don't already do this, and you prefer not to support the whole family, there are specific charities which for example provide breakfasts for children who come to school hungry. Others provide children's clothes, toys, books, and holidays. If you think it is more effective to take political action, some of the larger charities spend a lot of money on campaigning and lobbying the Government. Many of the long established big name children's charities have bureaucracies and Barnardo's Chief Executive earns £165,000 a year!

Its easy to say that children like these poor children in Birmingham are not as absolutely poor as poor children in Victorian times, but these children are with us today, and deserve better.



Children living in poor circumstances in Birmingham today.

Naomi Hancock