

Child poverty as a barrier to participation in uk education essay



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Child poverty has been identified as a major barrier to participation in the United Kingdom. Poverty can be said to be a lack of basic human needs like water, food, clothing, shelter and education due to the inability to afford these basic needs. A child is deemed to be living in poverty if the resources available to the child are so inadequate as to preclude such a child from having a standard of living that is regarded to be acceptable by the society. ' Child poverty is a significant lack of the basic needs that children need for healthy physical, mental, spiritual and emotional development. Child poverty is also defined as a lack of opportunities (capability deprivation), a lack of control over one's life, and involves social isolation and discriminatory treatment at the hands of others'. (Gordon, D, Adelman, L, Ashworth, K, Bradshaw, J, Levitas, R, Middleton, S, Pantazis, C, Patsios, D, Payne, S, Townsend, P & Williams, J., 2000).

Children are living in poverty if the material and non-material resources available to them are so inadequate that they are denied a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by a society. One way by which poverty limits the participation of children in the United Kingdom is social exclusion. Social exclusion has been described as a situation where there is inadequacy in the functioning of the social subsystems. ' This includes exclusion from the social system, a welfare state whose failure leads to impoverishment, family and community systems that lead to exclusion from social relations, and the power distribution system.' (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2000)

It is important to note the non-monetary aspect of poverty and deprivation, as this will enable us to get a better understanding of the consequences of economic hardship and how low income relates to lack of resources. ' There

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are less quantifiable aspects of poverty, such as not being able to see friends and relatives.’ (Pantazis and Ruspini, 2006). According to UNICEF, ‘ Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection. While a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society’ (UNICEF, 1998)

Going by official statistics, child poverty trends in the United Kingdom are not very encouraging. After a period of improvement in the 1960s, child poverty in the United Kingdom has worsened over the last three decades. Child poverty rates in the world’s wealthiest nations vary from under 3% to over 25%. ‘ In the league table of relative child poverty, the bottom four places are occupied by the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, and Mexico.’ (McGuigan, Claire, 2003)

Anti discriminatory practice and policy

Although child poverty can arise from injustice and violation of rights, it can also in itself, be a cause of injustice and deprive the children from being able to claim their rights. When a child lacks the resources or is unable to claim his or her rights, this can in itself be seen to be an injustice.

Drawing upon theory, Child poverty is not only a function of low income, but also depends on access to services. ‘ Child poverty includes a lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic
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services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life.’ (Howarth, C, Kenway, P, Palmer, G & Miorelli, R., 1999)

Legislation

After coming into power, the Labor government announced that it was committed to eradicating child poverty by the year 2020, and the Prime Minister announced the introduction of Child Poverty legislation in September 2008. The government went ahead to set out interim targets which included a reduction of child poverty by 50 percent before 2010. Ireland also set an additional goal of eliminating severe child poverty by the year 2012. Estimates revealed that about 43, 000 children were living in severe poverty across the United Kingdom. (Howarth, C, Kenway, P, Palmer, G & Miorelli, R., 1999). The interim target of reducing child poverty by 50 percent before 2010 has probably not been met.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 was also passed on the 26th of March 2010. The Child Poverty Act is a United Kingdom piece of legislation which requires England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to put in place strategies that describe the activities to be undertaken to tackle child poverty. Despite the legislation and policy initiatives of the government aimed at child poverty reduction, there isn't much evidence that any sustainable progress has been made in the area of child poverty elimination in the United Kingdom. ' This led to a renewed government drive for devolution, as expressed in the Home

Office-led Together We Can initiative to get departments working together across boundaries to achieve greater community participation.’ (Howarth, C, Kenway, P, Palmer, G & Miorelli, R., 1999)

Values

Fundamentally, child poverty leads to a situation in which children are denied choices and opportunities and their human dignity is violated. Child poverty results in a lack of a basic capacity to participate effectively in society. Poor children are also more susceptible to violence, and are often forced to live in marginal or fragile environments without access to basic amenities.

Children living in poverty suffer disproportionately as a result of hunger, starvation and disease, and have lower life expectancy (Ruspini E., 2000). The world health organization has noted that ‘ malnutrition and hunger are the most serious threats to the world’s public health, with malnutrition being the biggest contributor in child mortality, as it is present in about 50 percent of all cases.’ (Hodgkin, Rachel and Peter Newell, 2002) According to Peter Townsend, ‘ Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society. Unless there is massive investment in children we will head for economic catastrophe.’ (Townsend, P., 1995 p. 11)

Attitudes

Proper healthcare is widely unavailable to poor children. ' Each year, as many as 11 million children living in poverty die before reaching the age of 5.' (Baro, Daniela, 2002) Recent studies suggest that there is a high risk of education under achievement for children born into poverty as these children are likely to not even complete their secondary education.

Participation is a basic right, not a privilege. Every child has the right to participate in matters that concern him or her.

' Every child has the right to access relevant information, express his or her views, be involved in decisions affecting him or her, and form or join associations. Child participation is not about a few children representing other children at a few special child participation events. Children have the right to participate in the family, in school, child welfare homes, orphanages, media, in community, and at national and international levels.' (Holmström, Leif., 2000)

It is therefore of essence that the Government acts quickly in order to protect the rights of children in the United Kingdom so as to prevent a situation in which children in poverty have to suffer the lifelong disadvantages of childhood poverty.