


# Are 'cultures of worklessness' passed down the generations?



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## 3 generations...

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- For too long, in too many deprived areas of the country, there has been a **destructive culture that 'no-one around here works'** (Gordon Brown, 2003).
- We have got places where **there are three generations of men who have never worked**. If your grandfather never worked and your father never worked, why would you think work is the normal thing to do? (Dame Carol Black, 2008).

## 3 generations...

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- ❑ Life expectancy on some estates, where often **three generations of the same family have never worked**, is lower than the Gaza Strip (Iain Duncan Smith, 2009).
- ❑ To 'reintroduce the culture of work in households where it may have **been absent for generations**' (Universal Credit, DWP, 2010).
- ❑ ...there are **four generations** of families where no-one has ever had a job (Chris Grayling, Minister for Work and Pensions, 2011)

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## 2 key questions for the study

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- 1. **Are there ‘three generations of families where no-one has ever worked’?** How widespread a problem?
- 2. Long-term and/ or recurrent unemployment can affect families – *is this explained by ‘cultures of worklessness’* passing down the generations? **Do families pass on ‘welfare dependency’ & anti-employment attitudes?**





# Research design & methods

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- ❑ **Critical case study approach** – giving best possible chance for positive answers (so ‘if not here, unlikely anywhere’)
- ❑ Very deprived neighbourhoods of high worklessness in Middlesbrough & Glasgow
- ❑ 8 months determined, community-based fieldwork
- ❑ Using all avenues & strategies to locate ‘3 generations that have never worked’ & ‘inter-generational cultures of worklessness’

# Practitioners' views on '3 generations never worked'

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## ❑ 'Welfare to work' advisor

'...an ingrained attitude that unemployment is a way of life. *Often they are coming from families with second, third generational unemployment* and they are too far into the habit of unemployment to get out of it'

## ❑ Housing Officer

'With some it's the case that when grandfathers haven't worked and father's haven't worked, well why should I bother?'

## ❑ Job Centre Manager

'Yes... or at least I've certainly heard of it'.



# Practitioners' views on '3 generations never worked'

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## □ New Deal advisor

'There is a fear of leaving "secure" benefits for "insecure" work...this is particularly difficult for someone who is *part of a family of generations who are unemployed*, as their peers may be discouraging them from work'

## □ Employability practitioner

'**Yes** - *anecdotally* but we don't record or track that information'.





# The curious case of the boy who woke his parents

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# Practitioners' views on '3 generations never worked' in this study

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- 30+ interviews with local workers in Glasgow/  
Middlesbrough
  - e.g. JC+, 'welfare to work' projects, churches, comm. groups, GPs, youth + community workers, drugs agencies
- Widespread use of/ agreement with concept, ***BUT none able to identify any such family***
- When pushed, usually clarified to *mean families where people had faced unemployment repeatedly and/ or long-term*, or that had other problems

# 'Hunting the yeti': other methods

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1. £20 interviewee payment
2. Local news stories
3. Posters (e.g. shops, libraries, community centres)
4. Formal surveying of JC+ clients
5. Talking to clients of numerous agencies
6. Leafleting & door knocking in particular clusters of streets
7. 'Hanging around' (detached youth work, jumble sales, coffee mornings, volunteer groups)
8. Drawing on previous (Teesside) fieldwork contacts
9. Hired extra RA support
10. Talked to hundreds of people, over 8 months

# Q1: Are there 'three generations of families where no-one has ever worked'?

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- **A: Impossible to locate any such family - in these neighbourhoods, using these methods**
  - Many of oldest generation deceased/ ill *but all had had jobs*; e.g. 'full employment' in Teesside in mid-1960s
  - Oldest generation typically had life-times of work not of worklessness

# What do best social statistics tell us?

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- Analysis of ONS stats from Labour Force Survey (Gaffney, 2010) <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2010/09/the-myth-of-the-intergenerational-workless-household/>
- **< 0.5% of all workless households in the UK have two generations where no-one has ever worked**
  - i.e. approximately 20k households (from 3.6 million)
  - MacMillan (2011) gives slightly lower figure
- Logically, *IF* 'three generation never worked' households exist they will very few in number
- We couldn't find any!



## Q2: but, 'cultures of worklessness' still might exist..

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- ❑ So, we looked for 'two generation never worked' families... (found only two families)
- ❑ Then x 2 generations with >5 years worklessness for middle, parent generation
- ❑ Eventually recruited **20 families (47 people) with at least one parent with long-term worklessness in middle generation (age 35+) and at least one child who had never worked (age 16+)**
- ❑ ...to test idea of 'cultures of worklessness'
- ❑ ...via lengthy, one-to-one, biographically-focused interviews with 2 generations of same family (e.g. unemployed teenage son, unemployed middle-aged father)

# **‘Cultures of worklessness’?**

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□ We investigated:

- 1. Values/ attitudes/ practices viz. work, welfare & worklessness**
- 2. The informal economy/alternative forms of work**
- 3. Family/ social networks & worklessness**
- 4. Aspirations & horizons**

# 1. Work/lessness & welfare: values, attitudes & practices

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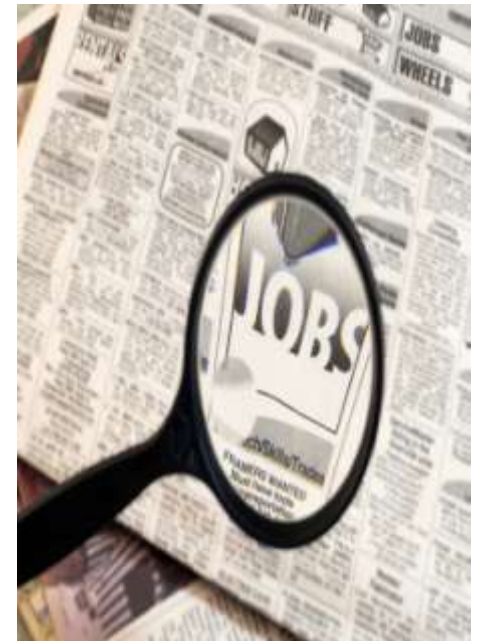
- ❑ Strong pro-work attitudes expressed *across families, genders & generations*
- ❑ Stressing the social, psychological & material benefits of employment:
  - **Yeah, it's very important for your self-esteem; for everything - just for the way you are** (Vera Lamb, 54, Middlesbrough).
- ❑ Parents keen for children to do better
  - ‘**I think they seen what I've been through and chose not to go that way. And I'm proud of them. I'm proud of my wee girl, I'm proud of ma wee boy**’. (Kenny Jamieson, 49, Glasgow)

# 1. Work/lessness & welfare: values, attitudes & practices (continued)

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- ❑ Mixed evidence on **job-searching**
- ❑ Stronger amongst younger generation – but little success

**I have applied for 120 jobs and haven't got one** (Connor Nash, 16, Middlesbrough)
- ❑ Not uniform but greater sense of resignation/ fatalism/ accommodation to worklessness amongst mid-generation (who were very long-term unemployed & often claiming ill-health related benefits)



## 2. Worklessness in wider family & social networks?

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- ❑ **Not isolated in complete ‘cultures of worklessness’**
- ❑ Unemployment **and** jobs (low paid/ insecure) = common
- ❑ [NB most local working-age residents are in jobs]
- ❑ Variability **within** families...
- ❑ Davie Harris (55, Glasgow) said his parents: ‘had never seen the inside of a brew [unemployment office] in their life’.
- ❑ His siblings?
  - ‘all had jobs and all - but nothing that you could call a career. Just dead end jobs. Labouring, things like that, you know? My sister she’s a machinist and that was her first job when she left school’.
- ❑ **People in jobs = inspiration/ role models** (esp. to younger people), that they need not become like parents



### 3. The informal economy/alternative work?

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- ❑ Very little evidence of **'cash in hand' work** 'on the side' -
- ❑ For some in mid-generation, engagement in **criminal work...**
  - Oppns to deal drugs in teens (& poor oppns in formal economy) led to long-term offending
  - ...usually accompanied by long-term 'problematic heroin use', recurrent imprisonment & debilitating ill-health; *one reason for long-term worklessness*
- ❑ Regular **voluntary work** common (providing some of the social & psychological benefits of employment)
- ❑ Widespread unpaid **caring work** – for children & family members, not just by women

## 4. Low aspirations & narrow horizons?

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No, I don't really think of the future. It's day to day. I just get up each day, really. It's hard because some days I don't really want to get up

(Alice Hopkins, 53, Middlesbrough – long-term physical & mental ill-health, husband had recently died)

Charlotte Harris (21, Glasgow, single parent) – parents/ step-parents long-term problematic heroin users – she wants to return to college to study child care or social work

'[to live] somewhere quiet and be able to have a house and stuff for her [her daughter], to show, right, well if I work hard then I can have a house and a motor and bring ma kids up and... be ok... I've set ma heights [sic] a wee bit higher'.

# Findings: summary

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- **Question 1:** '3 generations never worked'? **Impossible to locate; very unlikely**
- **Question 2:** '*Cultures* of worklessness'? **No**
- So, how *do* we explain extensive worklessness in these families?

# Younger generation

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- ...comparatively simple: 'the usual story'
- white WC young people with low qualifications + limited parental economic, social and cultural capital + multi-deprived/ disadvantaged neighbourhoods + national economic recession + high local unemployment = **high rates of youth unemployment**



# Middle generation

*‘Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks...’*

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- ❑ ...**complex web of hardships & traumas**
  - ❑ ...associated with deep & long-term poverty & disadvantage
  - ❑ ...**in combination & over time**
  - ❑ ...distanced/ disqualified people from an already tight local labour market
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- ❑ ***e.g. Educational ‘failure’+ family instability + domestic & other violence + alcohol & drug dependency + offending, victimisation & imprisonment + physical & mental ill-health***





# *‘How can you work with a life like mine?’*

## Michelle Gordon, 45, Glasgow (DLA)

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- ❑ Bullied at school, left at 16 with few qualifications
- ❑ Physical abuse as a child/ left home at 16, schemes + unemployment + jobs (as chef) until 25 (only one short-lived job since, as cleaner)
- ❑ Relationship with (extremely) violent man
- ❑ Single parenthood (mother of twins), gave up job
- ❑ New partner, heroin dependency (now desisted, in treatment)
- ❑ *‘my life was a mess when I first had the girls, know what I mean? I hoped to go back to work but then, came up here [to Parkhill], started taking drugs and basically I was just in a rut, you know?... just getting through the day, know what I mean? Never mind having to go out and look for a job and look after the two kids and not let the drug use affect them’.*

# Michelle Gordon, 45, Glasgow

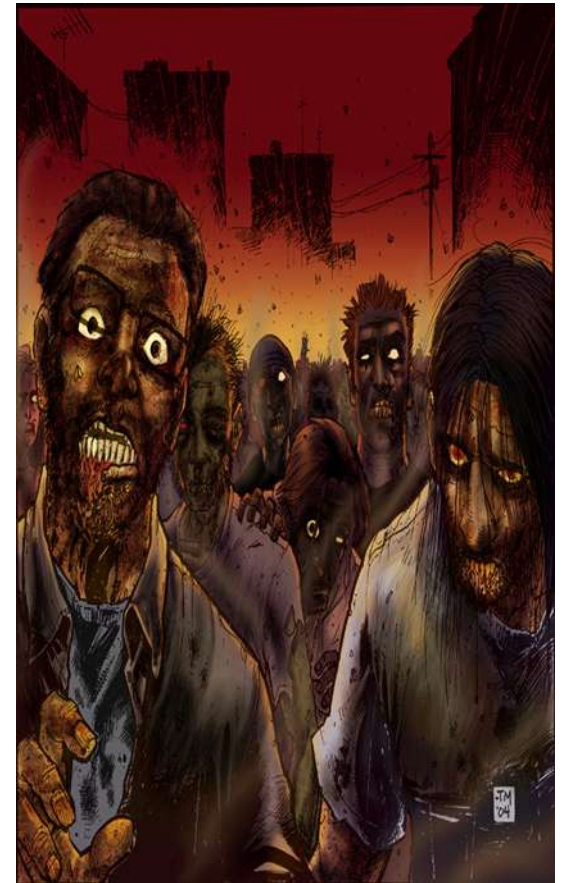
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- ❑ Poverty: 'It was really, really bad... [there were times when there was] two to three days with no money at all. Nothing. I'm talking about not even a penny'.
- ❑ Depression, attempted suicide - incapacitating illness of new partner
- ❑ Looking back over past 20 years of 'worklessness':
- ❑ **'You've got far too many other things to think about than work'**
- ❑ Now doing part-time computer course
- ❑ 'I hope to get working – there must be something out there I can do. I want a better life for myself. As much as they say it's a great life on benefits, believe me it's not. There's nothing like getting your wage, earning your wage. I used to love getting my wee pay check. It wasn't much but it was mine'.

# Summary & conclusions

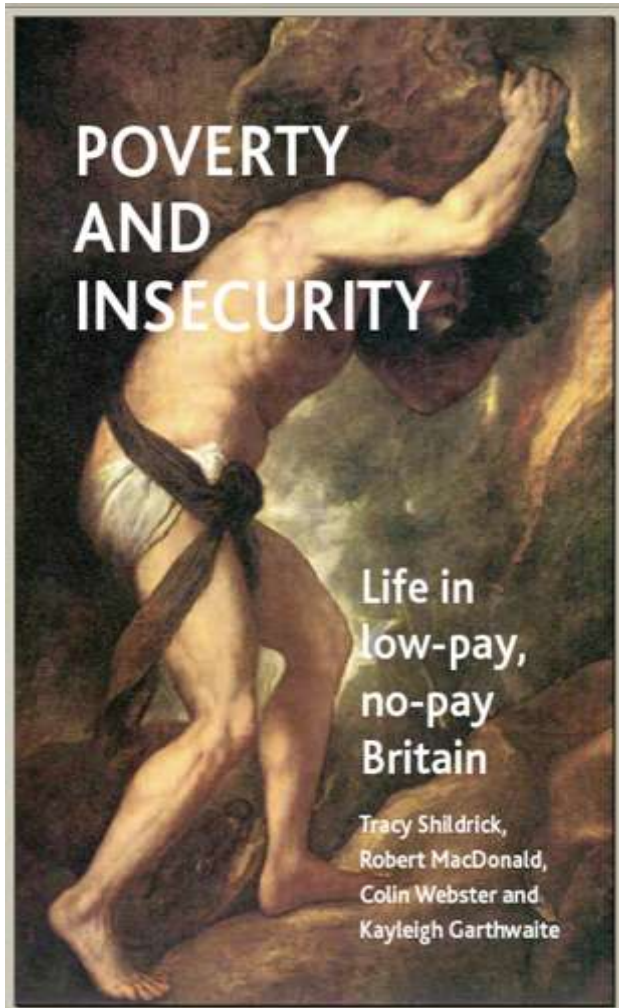
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- ❑ **‘Three generations were no-one had ever worked’** = *if* exists is miniscule phenomena
- ❑ BUT *long-term worklessness* can be found in families in 2 generations
- ❑ BUT cannot usefully explain this by **‘cultures of worklessness’**
- ❑ Strongest evidence against = aspirations & efforts of middle generation (parents) that younger generation (children) get jobs and do better in life (echoed by their children)
  
- ❑ **Zombie theory...**



# The real problem...

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- ❑ Families we talked to = very unusual
- ❑ Important to dispel/ challenge myths
- ❑ 2<sup>nd</sup> study (book published December 2012)
- ❑ The more common, less reported issue of '**the low-pay, no-pay cycle**'
  - e.g. 1.6m people on JSA, but 4.8m claimed JSA at least once in last 2 years.
- ❑ **Greater quantity & quality of employment opportunities**

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