Where is the Hope in Social Policy?

An exploration of hope theory and community participation in the context of current inequalities.

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This research would not have been possible without the communities of which I have been a part through my working life. Communities in which I worked as a professional which have been affected by social policy related to families, mental health and more recently food insecurity. In all of these fields, I have witnessed first-hand gross inequalities and injustice. Yet, I also found hope in the most surprising of places; in people who had been treated poorly by others or by 'the system'; in people who shared generously with me even though they seemed to have nothing; in people who shared openly of themselves, showing resilience and letting me be part of their journey. I discovered ubuntu. These experiences and all that I have learned from working with others have formed my approach. I am grateful to every individual who I have met along the way and has shaped my practice. I am grateful to the team at Liverpool Hope University who have inspired me through my studies and provided a context and theory to my practice.

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It feels appropriate to share a poem which summarises so much.

Hope
(Dickinson, 1990)

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

And sings the tune without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm

I've heard it in the chilliest land,

And on the strangest sea;

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.

Abbreviations

TNLCF The National Lottery Community Fund

BBS Blackpool Better Start

HSN Headstart Newham

CCx Community Connectors

SIR Social Impact Report

Abstract

Social policy in the UK currently appears to offer little hope when considering the increasing levels of inequality in the UK. Rising levels of food poverty, increasing high rates of poor mental health amongst adolescents and poor trajectories for children and their caregivers in socio-economically deprived areas result in a miserable landscape. This study aims to identify hope within social policy through an exploration of hope theory and community participation in the context of current inequalities.

Based on a review of the literature on social policy related to food, family and mental health, as well as the broader context of inequalities, a secondary data case analysis was carried out. The first case study focused on a project working to reduce food poverty, whilst the second case study was formed of two parts: one project working with families and another working with adolescents suffering with or at risk of experiencing poor mental health.

Analysis of existing data demonstrates that hope does exist in the narratives of individuals who feel they are encouraged to participate in their community or through the project's ability to meet a need. Hope proves elusive in terms of being able to qualify or quantify it objectively. This contrasts with the subjective accounts where hope, or hopeful feelings are expressed openly. The correlation between hope and its ability to reduce inequalities is limited, however community participation is shown to be key in bringing hope.

The research led to the formation of a tool, provisionally named as the Pyramid of Hope, which summarises the key findings in a visual and practical way. It is recommended that this tool is developed further and tested amongst practitioners, communities and policy makers.

Keywords: hope, community participation, inequality

Contents

Introduction

Decades of neoliberalism, triumphing the role of the market, where communities and individuals have been monetised and UK society has become more unequal makes the study of social policy a miserable task. Subsequent governments have introduced their own ideologies, albeit within a neoliberal framework which has resulted with a greater number of individuals on the margins, with little agency, power or material resources. hooks called for an eradication of "ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganising society so that self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires," (hooks, 1984, p26) which gives some clue to the pervasiveness of hierarchy and historical context. In order to fully understand growing inequalities, it is crucial to acknowledge UK social policy's ideological inheritance, knowing that "ideology can be and often is used to justify oppression" (Beresford, 2021, p37). Such understandings give some clue as to the severity of inequalities and whether they have become so much part of the fabric of society, that they no longer concern some sections.

A rigorous search is needed to find hope in what at first appears a bleak landscape. This research paper will explore the severity of the current inequalities in the UK through the lens of three particular areas of social policy, namely food, family and mental health. These important areas have been chosen as they will also be scrutinised for signs of hope in the light of two key projects: Feeding Liverpool and The National Lottery Community Fund. Both community-focused projects take innovative approaches to reduce inequalities in food security, intergenerational trajectories and poor mental health. Existing research (Maynard & Tweedie, 2021; Mills et al, 2021; Headstart Newham, 2022) will be analysed to ascertain what works and where hope exists for these marginalised communities. Critical reflections on hope will initially be based on Snyder's (1995) hope theory.

Food insecurity is an indisputable way of visualising inequality within a UK social policy context as "people experiencing hunger in wealthier countries, like the US and the UK, have done so as a result of inequality, not famine resulting from food scarcity" (Smith & Thompson, 2023, p1). Increasing levels of food insecurity in the UK are alarming (Bramley et al, 2021), placing greater importance and demand on organisations such as Feeding Liverpool, a food alliance working solely in Liverpool, north west England. Community food projects are generally run by volunteers and highlight the role and influence of charitable food aid and collectivist welfare.

Mental health and family policy will be considered in the light of two lottery funded, community-based projects, namely A Better Start Blackpool and Headstart Newham. These programmes, whilst each has a different target group, are complementary and build on well researched and widely accepted psychological theories. It is important to recognise the role of attachment theory at the outset, for example. Bowlby's (1969) work recognises the importance of a strong bond between caregiver and child in order for a child to feel safe and explore their world. This gives some clue as to why it is crucial to take a holistic and causal view of child and adolescent mental health and family policy for preventative work to be effective.

By drawing on key principles adopted by the National Lottery Community Fund and Feeding Liverpool, an alternative, more hopeful, approach to social policy will be sought. The contrast between the National Lottery's large scale and the smaller, more localised nature of Feeding Liverpool will enable a more exhaustive study of approaches to the related inequalities addressed here and significant social policy areas.

The dissertation will begin with a literature review which will focus on inequality, provide a policy overview, describe how bad things have got, and subsequently discuss the three policy areas of food, family and mental health. An overview of food poverty and mental health in the UK will be given to provide context for this research. With increasing numbers of citizens who live with food insecurity, lack achievement and who suffer with poor mental health, existing research and policy will be drawn on to outline current trends and the scale of inequalities. The literature review will include a synopsis of how social policy in the UK has failed many citizens in the selected policy areas.

Results from secondary case study analysis of Feeding Liverpool and the National Lottery Community Fund will be structured in four subsections entitled economics, universalism, altruism and activism, health and wellbeing. Whilst economics will not be a focus of this paper, an overview will be necessary as poverty underpins many inequalities and has implications on mental health, wellbeing and food security. The National Lottery Community Fund will additionally consider participation which was a factor in successfully gaining funding and is fundamental to the two-fold approaches due to poor levels of community engagement in these areas.

The discussion chapter will initially summarise and subsequently discuss hope in the light of the research. An antidote to the bleak literature review will be offered as a hopeful alternative

approach to inequality, based on themes that emerge from the case study. Reflecting earlier chapters, discussion based on research findings will focus on universalism, participation, altruism, activism and will conclude with reflections on the specified three policy areas. Implications and recommendations intended to influence future practice and policy will conclude the discussion chapter. The conclusion chapter will assemble themes and lessons from the dissertation literature and research. It will acknowledge limitations, make recommendations and subsequently offer direction for the future.

Literature Review

Inequality

A useful starting point to considering inequalities and related social policy in the UK is to reflect on the work of Black (1980), Acheson (1998) and Marmot (2010). Whilst all at first glance may appear to consider health inequalities, it is important to note that over forty years ago, Black recognised the related social aspects and that the NHS could not be held responsible for wider health inequalities. Acheson went further by recommending evaluation of all government policies in the light of health inequalities. Mental health and wellbeing were drawn in by Marmot (2012) who identified a social gradient related to health. Whilst there is a fiscal element to Marmot's six recommended action points, there is also recognition that community collaboration and partnership working play an important role in reducing health inequalities. The reduction of the social gradient could improve children's starts in life, preventing ill health, ultimately creating healthy and sustainable communities thus maximising capabilities and echoing Sen's (1985) approach. What are now recognised as social determinants of health can be used to assess the health of a nation.

Poor mental and physical health become all the more concerning when reflecting on Marmot's social gradient, recognising that prevalence is distributed unequally. As Macintyre reflected, "health damaging behaviours tend to cluster in lower social classes and to contribute to inequalities in health and premature death; and both early life and lifetime exposures to health promoting or health damaging environments generate and maintain social inequalities in health" (Macintyre, 1997, p740). It is not only the existence of inequalities that is concerning, but also the maintenance of these inequalities and currently the worsening of such.

Inequality and injustice are not synonymous, yet there does appear to be a lack of fairness or justice when considering that wealth inequalities show significant correlation with health inequalities. This perhaps emphasises the importance of successful community-based projects which change trajectories of young children despite their poor family incomes and socio-economic disadvantages. Whilst Marmot calls for a level of income that affords basics to survive, the UK is currently far from this as the third sector is ensuring that food is available (Thompson et al, 2020). The evidence shows and will be shown in more detail later that food bank use, for example, was intended to provide emergency short-term support for those in crisis. Alarmingly, Bramley et al (2021) evidence a growing number of households in work poverty as well as destitution.

Universalism

Food banks operate a targeted system whereas food pantries operate as a universal service for local communities within walking distance. Means testing is not required for food pantries and yet means testing that may have attributed, at least in some part, to divisions within communities and those who have or have not. Marmot calls for a combination of targeted and universal services in social policy. A focus on holistic social policies, where all of society is considered, not only those in greatest need. In practical terms, this would result in a reduction of alienation for those on the fringes who lack resources and those who are at risk of slipping from one category to the next and subsequently facing much bureaucracy to access targeted support. One of the challenges with any means-tested state support is stigma. Titmuss is highly critical and sees means-testing as "an assault on human dignity" (Titmuss, 1968, p122) which is surely no basis for a fairer, more equal, collaborative and co-operative society. A universal approach aims to reduce inequalities by preventing a spiral of poverty, disease, neglect, illiteracy and destitution. It is not without financial cost but is not as expensive as its critics may claim, particularly when considering proportionate universalism (Carey et al, 2015; Davala et al, 2015). The economic debate concerning universalism will no doubt continue to be contentious. Meanwhile Titmuss' (1997) concept of gift relationship may scorn placing financial value on transactions where the poor and disadvantaged are supported, but it is difficult to completely discount it within the context of neoliberal society where the market reigns supreme. Recognising the need for some proportionality, suggesting a place for both universal and means-tested provision could be beneficial. The call for "better opportunities that allow people to play an active role in improving their own lives, rather than just 'passive' support that does not address underlying causes of poverty" (Gugushvili & Hirsch, 2014, p74) seems an important reflection when considering community participation and inequality. The impact of individualism (Putnam, 2001) is concerning and challenging to the uptake of active roles.

Whilst this paper focuses on UK social policy, it is important to note that the debate regarding universalism is not unique to the UK, is more generally triumphed in Nordic states and included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, 2022) particularly relating to health, but also internet access. It is perhaps comforting to know that the expense of means-tested programmes alongside the costs, potential flaws and unfortunate liability to exclusion (Mkandawire, 2005) is not unique to the UK. However, as the UK remains one of the richest developed nations in the world, it is perhaps even more prescient that UK social policy addresses the inequalities effectively and returns to the wealth of information already available to inform practice. One of Mkandawire's (2005) key discussion points is that the state is often referred to as the provider of universal services. However, the state may co-ordinate services, but the third sector is key and relieves the state of the expectation as provider. In practice, this may well result in greater autonomy for practitioners, often experts in their field, working to reduce inequalities. Issues of freedom versus social control, discipline and punishment may impact crucial work, paralleling Titmuss' work.

Take up of means-tested benefits or support is concerning. More recently the Healthy Start vouchers aimed at supporting young families at risk of suffering food poverty has been reported as being poorly accessed by those who need it (Feeding Liverpool, 2022a). Over a decade earlier, the Troubled Families programme was similarly criticised for the low numbers of families who accessed support (Portes, 2016). Such means-tested services aimed at preventing existing inequalities or reducing challenges are clearly problematic. This may well prompt policy makers to consider proportionate universalism (Marmot, 2010), recognising that "from the point of view of policy effectiveness, neither universalism nor means-testing is always an ideal solution" (Gugushvili & Hirsch, 2014, p7).

As an alternative approach to supporting people in need, enabling a move away from the universalist or means-tested approach would be a person-centred approach, as described by Beresford (2011). This could provide more than a "reaction against longstanding paternalistic and institutionalising approaches" (Beresford, 2011, p61). Whilst universal social policies are intended to be inclusive, they have been inefficient in reducing inequalities so far. One of the issues from the literature so far and identified by Beresford is the slowness of making change, even when consulting users who make constructive and informed suggestions. A person-centred approach, however, is more than simply user involvement and consultation. It requires commitment and longevity, something that has rarely been seen in social policy aimed at reducing inequalities

through half a century of neoliberalism. A person-centred approach is more than tokenism. It requires dedication from policy makers and practitioners, as well as service users. The term 'service user' is problematic as it speaks of paternalism and institutions as referenced earlier. To put each person at the centre means regular involvement throughout the process, at all levels, including decision making, training provision, staff recruitment, commissioning, resulting in a collective voice and ultimately action.

Recognising the global and national calls to reduce health and wealth inequalities, greater focus on social determinants of health in public health research as evidenced in Taylor-Robinson's (2014) work at a local level. Themes raised by Marmot regarding the importance of an early start in life, whilst recognising socioeconomic factors such as poverty further demonstrate that the knowledge already exists. Whether it is social policy that is lacking, the consistency of policy or an agreed universal or means-tested approach remains unclear as the root of the hindrance.

Policy Overview

Upcoming reflections on three social policy areas of food poverty, mental health and families offer a holistic approach and acknowledge the danger of setting policy in departments. This is highlighted in the overrepresentation of families and those with poor mental health as food bank users (Bramley et al, 2021) who subsequently experience loneliness and isolation. Policy changes such as Universal Credit cuts and the two-child limit for claimants have been shown to be key drivers of food insecurity (Stewart et al, 2020). Concerns about food poverty affecting people's mental health, could be perceived as "a natural human reaction to being deprived of the sustenance of that need" (Dorling, 2010, p271), but those with supportive family units are more likely to cope and show resilience against adversity (Goodman & Scott, 2005). These three policy areas are clearly linked and taking a broad view is imperative. Such perspective appears to be lacking in government policy and the need for framework, systemic changes and lead individuals is a theme when reviewing the literature, but the time may well have come to launch a new system rather than fix existing ones (Giddens, 1998; Field & Forsey, 2018; Cottam, 2019).

When we consider that "policy plays an important role in constructing community" (Wetherell et al, 2007, p7), then community cohesion cannot be immune to such policies, or perhaps more poignantly, changes in policy. A plea to build stronger communities is clear, but the method is problematic, such as with The Big Society policy. Establishment of Early Help Teams has supported work with parents in a preventative way, recognising that "Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later" (DoE, 2013, p11). However, this conflicts

with the target groups set by OFSTED (2013), as families are not at an early stage of their difficulties.

Some policies can prove divisive where, "the damaging effects of some multicultural policy has been the inadvertent fostering of an atmosphere of competition between different groups" (Wetherell, 2007, p127). Policy impacts different groups on different levels, where, for example, the Troubled Families Programme fostered competition between the troubled and less troubled, stigmatising those who already faced challenges. The label 'troubled' proved stigmatising and families refused to engage. As only 120,000 families in the country were eligible, it limited the number of families with complex and multiple needs who could benefit. This follows the pattern of the CANParent programme where only 2% of eligible parents engaged in the scheme offering parenting classes with a £100 voucher as an incentive (Boffey, 2013). Social policy that tells communities what they should be doing is problematic. Family social policies have previously proved problematic but family challenges remain plentiful. The need for early intervention and preventative social policy seems worth investment recognising that "less stressed parents might make fewer demands on the NHS and perhaps return to work, requiring less support from the benefits budget." (Robinson, 2010, p44).

As an antidote to the stigma that social policy has previously created, investment in claiming back communities is worth exploring. As Kropotkin claimed the idea of village communities in Western Europe had died long before his writing at the beginning of the 20th century. If this claim is true, then reclaiming communities within a social policy framework will be complex and challenging. As the "natural death of the village community" (Kropotkin, 1902, p194) was facilitated by the state rather than the individuals who owned less possessions and property. It seems that in current times, many individuals in the UK are without possessions, property and possibly more crucially power to change their situation. The state has the power. As Kropotkin goes on to point out, "the ethical importance of the communal possessions, small as they are, is still greater than their economic value" Kropotkin, 1902, p200). Those who are currently victims of the cost-of-living crisis have little possessions, but communally they could gain power. Yet when individuals go hungry, suffer ill physical or mental health, they are unlikely to have the incentive or motivation to object. Survival is the key objective. As the previous quote highlights, there is an ethical importance that outweighs the economics. This may well be the case but after decades of neoliberal governance, a seismic shift may be needed.

How bad have things got

Echoing the words of Blackwell and Seabrook (1988), the consequences of neoliberalism on society are colossal. Whilst the authors identify certain feelings, as the UK has experienced more than three further decades of neoliberalism, these feelings are far less nebulous and could be classified as current issues resulting from political decisions made post World War II. The feelings of surprise, helplessness, redundancy, exile, disappointment, division, loathing, fear and self-doubt described by Blackwell and Seabrooks whilst still valid as feelings, highlight concerning, more tangible issues which highlight the severity of UK societal demise. Whilst difficult to quantify, these feelings are justifiably rife in society today for those marginalised. Inequality and injustice seem intertwined as Dorling's (2010) five social evils of elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair show. Whilst addressing social evils may sound shocking, when the World Health Organisation declares "social injustice is killing people on a grand scale" (WHO, 2008, p4) then surely urgent action must be taken. More alarmingly, the WHO's report was written over a decade ago, before current levels of social injustices and inequalities were reached and the world became the victim of a global pandemic.

Margaret Thatcher's (1987) claim that there was no such thing as society could potentially be argued as a mere foretaste of how the abuse and exploitation by the system has affected large sections of the UK population. At the time of writing in 2022, there is repetition of history. Strikes and anti-government demonstrations are an echo of the miners' strikes almost four decades ago. Such responses are themes to austere times, yet today's protests lack the collective bargaining power of trade unions of the 1980s, which have experienced an overall decrease in membership. This may well reflect the neoliberal message of shifting responsibility to the individual. A useful starting point to identifying an antidote to the individualism created by neoliberalism would be in recognising that "ownership and control aids mental health and wellbeing significantly" (Co-operatives UK, 2022). Such ownership is shared and the control is collective. To hypothesise further, isolation can be prevented by relationships with others and social quality is vital.

Inequalities have grown in the UK alongside isolation and helplessness. The lack of agency, power and capability on those labelled as 'just about managing' (Citizens Advice, 2016) or in destitution is more than concerning. There is little sign of a downturn on the statistics for this as the current cost of living crisis reveals. Blackwell and Seabrook suggest that "the withdrawal from any social hope have come about because we feel that we are inhabiting a foreign country." (Blackwell & Seabrook, 1988; p42) The lack of sense of belonging is a further concern. Whilst immigration policy itself has

caused much controversy for its hostile nature (Jones et al, 2017), it is concerning when those who have never known another place still do not feel they belong and lack agency in their homeland. This surely fuels division and fear, a factor perhaps in 'othering' (Sonnis-Bell et al, 2018) becoming a term in recent times, where commonality is ousted. A resulting fight for survival, protection of individualism and division is unsurprising. Childcare and elderly residential care is now a profit-making industry, but wages are poor and the value placed on parenting means that parents simply cannot afford to stay at home, even if they wanted to. There has been a fear of how desperate the situation might get, but with the current cost of living crisis, it seems that existing in UK society is even more challenging. Public sector pay rises, or lack of, against a backdrop of large profits for businesses resulting in strikes gives some indication of the UK's demise and lack of cohesion across its citizens. Below inflation pay rises plus decades of austerity have a slow burning and cumulative impact. Strikes and riots seem to be the last resort for those with little or no agency.

Concern was growing pre-pandemic that household income inequalities were increasing, with higher income homes seeing increases in income whilst those on low incomes or Universal Credit were seeing real term drops, or cuts in income (Bourquin et al, 2019). The post-pandemic picture is bleaker for those on low incomes with food prices and energy costs soaring (Walker, 2022). The effects of neoliberalism are not merely resultant financial inequalities. Characteristics of unequal societies include a greater prevalence of mental illness, a worsening of child wellbeing alongside health and social problems, lack of trust, increase in infant mortality, reduction in social mobility and a rise in murder rates (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2009) all of which are currently discernible in the UK.

Food poverty in the UK was already worse than other EU countries pre-Brexit when considering the percentage of children under 15 living in a severely food insecure household (Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, 2020). One in six in the UK are food insecure (Armstrong et al, 2022), with food security being defined as the condition "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." (Shaw, 2007) It is not only food insecurity that is alarming, but the resultant inequality when considering food scarcity. In London, for example, 9 million meals are needed every month to alleviate hunger whilst restaurants and food outlets discard 13 million meals per month (Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, 2020). There is clearly enough for everyone.

Inequalities in access to mental health provision are clear to see from Garratt et al's (2022) paper. Whilst children and young people's mental health worsened through the pandemic, access geographically is patchy, often with those who possess more agency accessing the services they need (Dowler & Spencer, 2007). The truth is mental health services function better in some areas than others, whilst the general trend is a decades-long decline in children and young people's mental health despite some reported plateauing (Maughan et al, 2008) earlier in the UK neoliberal state's history.

A further concern is not only gross inequalities present in UK society today, but the level of exclusion of some, for those who have become detached from social groups, or mainstream society. Exclusion can happen at the top and bottom of society, but the difference is those at the top have the resources to survive, opt in or opt out (Giddens, 1998, p104).

Policy discussion

UK social policy in relation to food, families and mental health will be considered separately in the ensuing subsections.

Food policy

The fact that a National Food Strategy (2021) was drawn up with five recommendations for government, demonstrates that UK food policy is problematic or failing. Conversely, if food was equally distributed, food insecurity would not be such a well-used term. A redistribution approach is required to ensure good food reaches all UK citizens. Whilst most people are usually confident in the food supply chain, albeit pre-Ukraine war, there is greater concern about health and nutrition, particularly regarding sugar, fat and salt intake (Armstrong et al, 2022), which may be reflective of government policies. Food banks, often key local initiatives as referenced in the National Food Strategy, have been evident in the UK in their current format for several decades, but they too are struggling to keep up with demand (Halliday, 2022; The Trussell Trust, 2022). Whilst these recommendations are for government and could be read as further opportunity to exert power, importance of local community initiatives that understand the local area's uniqueness is clear. Sustainability is a key factor in looking at food poverty and policy, not only in linking to climate and agricultural policy but also related to project management. Disturbingly, the UK's domestic performance related to tackling hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition has failed to meet its targets (House of Commons, 2019). Gaps have been identified, but with little or no policy in place,

it is unsurprising that performance has deteriorated or remains poor. This is further compounded by the fact that there is no actual measure for hunger in the UK.

Many of the projects are run on the kindness of strangers, or altruism, with volunteer-led projects sustaining the crisis-led food offer for those facing destitution. Links between food and altruism are long-established with "social norms such as food sharing… shaped human life throughout important evolutionary phases" (Bernhard et al, 2006, p912). Recognising two key motivations for altruism as empathic concern and egoistically reducing discomfort are interesting in the light of the current cost of living crisis and undisputed facts about the scale of inequalities. Food banks providing emergency food parcels and pantries offering less crisis-driven provision operate with centralised operational paid staff, as would be typical of large organisations. However, neither could function without the altruism of volunteers who show empathy and social cooperation which "aids in our understanding of how humans interact, connect, and relate with one another." (FeldmanHall et al, 2015). The empathy of those motivated to volunteer may well foster cohesion and enable a reduction of divisions in society through generosity shown in altruistic ways.

Evidence shows that Covid-19 exacerbated existing issues (Westwater, 2020) with growing numbers concerned about rising food prices and one in six people reliant on food banks (Wratten, 2022). Despite the challenges of food poverty combined with the pandemic, there is evidence that "social networks and communities have played an important role in reducing food insecurity and its impacts." (Connors et al, 2020). However, this is not the story for all, as many remained isolated throughout the pandemic. There is a dichotomy of those who benefit from connection to community and those who feel isolated. As Connors' report continues, the contrasts in emotions felt by study participants resulting from food insecurity, were wide ranging with negative feelings conflicting with hopefulness, community spirit and gratitude.

Whilst pricing, affordability and access to food is clearly an issue in terms of survival, food poverty has wider implications for public health policy. As mentioned earlier, a preventative approach may be more helpful when implications of an unhealthy diet are clear. Childhood obesity, growth and diabetes are increasing, with inequalities clear in deprived and affluent areas (Goudie & Hughes, 2022). Again, these are not new findings. Various government policies to encourage healthy eating have existed for decades with the '5 a day' campaign in 2003, junk food advertising bans introduced in 2007 and a soft drinks tax as recently as 2018. These are just a few and many would argue do not go far enough, with the independent National Food Strategy calling for a

reformulation tax on sugary and salty food with the aim of ensuring fresh fruit and vegetables reach families on low incomes. Unfortunately, implementing new initiatives can be flawed, as seen earlier with poor take up of the Healthy Start voucher scheme (Clark, 2022). Additionally, whilst government advertising campaigns may well have their place, the wider context and subsequent implications of marketing are worthy of scrutiny. Fear and worry can be induced from being subjected to advertising materials when viewers are faced with what they do not or cannot have (Dorling, 2010).

Family policy

Shaping family policy in the context of an individualistic society seems contradictory. It may therefore be helpful to consider family life as part of a wider collective, echoing the African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child" (Reupert et al, 2022). Encouraging variety and engaging constructively with difference, may be an effective starting point to embrace the diversity in recognising what constitutes a modern-day family. "Working for immediate changes that will increase the possibilities of choice so that existing favoured patterns of family life become realistically available and desirable" (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; p134) may seem like an old call for acceptance of difference yet is still a work in progress for UK family social policy.

It could be argued that Sure Start provided the largest potential change for families and intended to create communities, modelling a functioning family unit in modern times. It was set up against the backdrop of New Labour's manifesto to eradicate child poverty by 2022. There was some optimism for this vision (Blair, 1999), but in reality the policies were ineffective and Sure Start lacked universalism. Dissemination of the Sure Start programme started in what were deemed the most deprived areas, whilst families experiencing deprivation who happened to live in more affluent areas could not access Sure Start programmes. Thresholds have continued to be a point of contention and currently more families experience in work poverty (Schmuecker et al, 2022), showing how crucial a universal service is for families and highlighting the close relationship across social policy areas. Overall, research into the effectiveness of Sure Start seems inconclusive with concerns at an early stage that the programme failed to reduce inequalities (Rutter, 2006). Regardless of perspectives concerning Sure Start's effectiveness, lessons can still be learned. One factor that is clear throughout many family policies and approaches is the importance of sustainability and mutual support (Olds et al, 2003), echoing earlier discussion regarding food policy.

Themes of flexibility, adaptability, engagement, trust and collaboration weave their way through programmes working with families. It is no surprise that families are labelled 'hard to reach' when practitioners have clear guidelines as to who is in their target audience. The tension between targeted and universal services for families has continued for decades, yet the evidence is clear and robust that in order to reduce social inequities, circumstances for the whole population must be improved (Rutter, 2006). A further criticism of Sure Start is that the aims were unclear, particularly the universal intentions. Whilst universalism was a key principle, the catchment areas were problematic (La Valle & Smith, 2009).

Family policy is further complicated, as well as further understood, when acknowledging the neoliberal context. Family has an economic and social value (Daly, 2010) which informs policy. Whilst the first ever childcare strategy was introduced under a Labour government, some of the previous Conservative government's strategies were merely continued or extended by Labour. Childcare vouchers morphed into Childcare Tax Credit. Investment in affordable and accessible childcare for all children can improve child outcomes as can be seen later in the Blackpool case study. Innovation may have been a theme in family policy under a Labour government, not only through Sure Start but also through the new department of state for children which became the Department for Children, Schools and Families. However, whilst innovation and investment cannot be denied, neither can the neoliberal market priority. Needless to say, the aforementioned department is now defunct, having been replaced by the Department of Education by the 2010 coalition government.

Family policy is understandably shaped by the government in power at the time, which includes the governing party's view of the family. New Labour's perspective, for example, emphasised the importance of marriage in functioning family units at a time when divorce and separation rates were increasing. The concern is that "family policy attempts to regulate behaviour" (Ferguson et al, 2002; p118) by measures such as tax benefits. Financial reward for living in a family unit preferred by the state is far from an empowering method of fostering societal cohesion. Political ideologies certainly play their part in shaping social policy, yet the crux of the family unit is about safety, belonging and empowerment as well as diversity. When we view "investment in the family as an easily comprehended, indeed highly rational, choice, given the material ideological privilege accorded to it in our society" (Barrett & McIntosh, 2015, p21), then family policy, may be viewed in a less controversial light. On this basis, it may see some of the participatory, co-operative values with warmth and interdependency. Rather than the focus being on what shape or form a family

unit may take, the focus may be in building a cohesive society which may resemble a functioning extended family unit.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines and government requirements for evidence-based practice (Harold et al, 2016) could be accused of hindering a responsive and community-based approach to community participation as an early intervention/Tier 1 provision of preventative care. Whilst "interventions that do occur are usually of a controlling, authoritarian nature, amounting to parents being told to change" (Rogowski, 2018, p78), the relationship between professional and parent appears as another victim of a neoliberal state where marketisation of services equate to rife authoritarianism which judges parents capable or not. Local initiatives face an impossible challenge of competing with national organisations for funding or credibility. Innovation is often rewarded by funders but community organisations could be accused of unprofessionalism, of experimenting with vulnerable lives while attempting to build an evidence base. Smaller organisations may be more adaptable and responsive to local need, but due to their size and lack of infrastructure or support make them an unlikely addition to the list of evidence-based practice referenced above.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

As Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) shows, an individual will struggle to survive if their basic needs are not met. Having considered the high levels of food poverty in the UK and fractured family policies, it is challenging to expect any adolescent to thrive in the current context. The ConneXions programme (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), intended to address issues facing young people at the time, late Generation X, to ensure they could transition more smoothly from school to work. Being labelled as "NEET" (not in education, employment or training) is yet another example of a targeted social policy. Subsequently Millennials and GenerationZ have featured on mental health policy agendas. Such age categorisation of citizens seems problematic. Adolescence has changed a lot in the UK and no longer seems to reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory with a strong familial and neighbourhood microsystem at the core.

Bearing in mind the previous outline of family policy and the Nanny state within the context of changing family forms in the UK, it is important to recognise the role of early foundations in shaping adolescence. The deterioration in adolescent mental health does not necessarily start in adolescence, further evidencing the need for a preventative approach in policy. Foundations for an individual's self-esteem are built early in life. The close correlation between a mother's self-esteem and her child's (Coopersmith, 1967) should encourage policymakers to look beyond the children

and seek out the wider community. Whilst the correlation between social class and self-esteem is generally assumed, contradictory evidence reveals "there are almost as many persons in this (lower) class who report high esteem as they do low" (Coopersmith, 1967, p83). Resilience, which can be built by high self-esteem, is low in the current generation of young people (VicHealth, 2015). This concerns all society in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) system and points to a universal approach. Whilst those in households with high self-esteem have higher aspirations for achievements, those with low self-esteem are concerned more with what others think of them and their individual acceptability within society (Coopersmith, 1967). This puts the concept of active citizen participation at great risk, as shall be explored later.

Key fundamental issues with mental health policy in the last decade including frequent policy changes have led to poor, unequal and worsening access to mental health services which requires even more attention post-Covid (Garratt et al, 2022). It can only be commended that mental health is a focus of policy, but the system is flawed. New initiatives are given little time to embed before another pathway, even if slightly modified, is adopted. Inequalities are compounded by trialling of approaches in certain areas. The context of staff shortages, difficulties in partnership working and need for training results in huge challenges. The reality is rates of poor mental health amongst children are increasing and whilst GP referrals and waiting times have decreased, there are still over a third of children waiting for treatment, there is little accountability as to whether the allocated funding has been administered correctly (Department of Health, 2015). The National Audit Office's (2018) criticism of subsequent governments' under-investment in children and young people's mental health services raises key persistent issues; broadly a lack of explicit objectives, arrangements to deliver, clear costings or structure. With such flawed policy and neglect, issues of access to mental health services for young people are unsurprising when demand is rising, staff are pressured and resources are sparse. Dissemination of the government's policy within prolonged timeframes results in an unequal distribution of services and repeated occurrence of issues raised here. From the literature and evidence, knowledge and expertise exist, but the resources are lacking. Any child or adolescent outside of a pilot area is left waiting for an intervention, whilst those transitioning from child to adult services are likely to slip through the net. Whilst it is well accepted that early intervention can help prevention, policies such as No Health Without Mental Health (Department of Health, 2011) and Future in Mind (Department of Health, 2015) have failed in advancing towards a consolidated pathway.

The call for longitudinal research within the field of mental health contrasts greatly to the rapidly changing mental health policies. As social trends change in the UK, there is a call to look at these,

yet perhaps gives greater credibility to the communities themselves who have endured the changes. Whilst there has been an emphasis on service user involvement in more recent years (Omeni et al, 2014), there is also recognition of the influence of key adults as a protective factor for children's mental health. The call for communities to participate as a collective and provide support may indeed enhance society's mental health. However, there does need to be an element of caution when striving to include children in shaping policy and inputting through the decision-making process in mental health, family policy, or any other policy for that matter. Caution is required to avoid false hope. Government policy often dictates to include children's voices, but when change is not implemented, children can feel let down and subsequently disengage (Hallett & Prout, 2003). A cycle of policy endeavouring to target 'hard to reach' children ensues. As James (2007) highlights, children who have less freedom, or rather free time that is controlled by or provided by institutions, are less likely to explore, they lack curiosity, seem fragile because they lack beneficial white space (Arnold, 2014) to develop. It is therefore not surprising that young people struggle with their mental health as they have not explored or made decisions for themselves.

Methodology

Method

This research will take the form of a desk-based secondary analysis case study review. Having reviewed literature sources related to inequality in the three social policy areas of food, family and mental health, analysis of case studies will begin. The first case study will focus on Feeding Liverpool, a local food alliance and part of the nationwide initiative, Your Local Pantry, which aims to reduce food insecurity. The related social impact report is titled "Dignity, Choice and Hope" (Maynard & Tweedie, 2021) and therefore an obvious choice for this research. The second case study will focus on The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and comprises two significant parts, Better Start Blackpool (BBS) and Headstart Newham (HSN), both TNLCF funded projects. Whilst the aims overlap, the projects have sufficiently robust data to justify their own subsection. BBS has been chosen to consider family policy due to its work with caregivers and aim of reducing disadvantages in a community with high levels of deprivation. HSN has be chosen to discuss mental health policy as it takes a multi-pronged approach to tackling mental health inequalities through building resilience in young people. Both projects have existing quantitative and qualitative data which will be drawn on to highlight key findings and themes. Published data by Mills et al (2021) and the end of programme report for HSN (Headstart Newham, 2022) will be the focus for BBS and

HSN respectively. It is anticipated that this case study analysis will straddle the three aspects of social policy, hope and community participation.

Having contextualised inequalities within the field of social policy in the literature review, it is anticipated that secondary case study data analysis will enable identification of policy in practice and themes emerging which can subsequently inform future practice. Considering the impact of social policy on individuals and communities through the work of a food pantry, parenting groups and youth work will enable an investigation of solutions all three offer and whether hope may be found. The importance of narration is acknowledged in Golden-Biddle and Locke's (2007) research. This seems pertinent for this dissertation as all three case studies include an element of storytelling, namely those accessing a sustainable food pantry, gaining support as a caregiver, or building resilience.

Secondary Case Study Analysis

Secondary analysis desk-based case study research is intended to "conduct further analysis of the data that could not have been considered by the original researchers, on the basis of new theoretical ideas" (Clark et al, 2021, p297). An in-depth examination of the case studies will be carried out, including comparison and linkage across the case studies, related literature and policy.

Following Stake's (2010) approach to case study research, the cases are seen as entities in themselves and although they may contain problems and certainly relationships within, they are not simply a problem in themselves. The desire is to understand the projects more fully through this methodology, with a view to informing future practice and policy making.

Much literature exists on theories and social policy related to this research alongside a wealth of literature on the key themes of this dissertation's hypothesis, namely hope and community participation. The three projects being explored have published primary data, specifically data that relates to the general themes. It is intended, as Hart (1998) suggests, to go deep and broad. This dimensional aspect of research is reflected in the work experiences of the researcher which have led them to this research. This neither makes the methodology stronger or weaker as outlined below.

Strengths

Hope and community participation were not the focus of the original research, thus this secondary analysis could be seen as a primary analysis, reflecting Bryman's (2012) perspective. Objectivity will be key to ensuring strength and depth through taking a different position to the primary research. Whilst "there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and observed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006, p31), it is suggested an objective knowledge merely requires skill to access it. Identification of differences, similarities and themes across the case studies intends to strengthen the findings, something preferable to single case study analysis. Integration of ideas and concepts should follow, as "case study data becomes important when the researcher seeks to integrate them with a theoretical context." (Bryman, 2006, p90)

A strength of analysing data as a secondary researcher is that primary data collection was guided by others with expertise in a field which is not possessed by the secondary researcher. A greater skill mix and perspectives of primary and secondary researchers will lead to more comprehensive reflection. The difference in primary researchers for the case studies and the acknowledgement that no case is typical follows Bryman's advice.

Limitations

The significant amount of literature available is a challenge and puts the researcher at risk of becoming sidetracked, losing focus or merely collating existing data. To minimise these risks, the research question will be regularly referred to when selecting and including materials with the aim of contributing something new to the field (Hart, 1998).

Caution will be exercised regarding generalisation, either analytic (Yin, 2009) or theoretical (Mitchell, 1983). Whilst Thomas (2011) states that it is never possible to generalise from a case study, there is scope to influence (Seale, 1999). Using more than one case study for this research is partly in response to criticism that "the qualitative researcher's ability to have an impact on social policy through the use of case study can be diminished by a belief that the findings may be idiosyncratic" (Bryman, 2012, p88). The risk of considering these case studies as the solutions to all food, family or mental health inequalities has been noted as per Stake's (2008) cautionary warning. Recognising the imperative to consider depth of research above width, a search for uniqueness begins.

Results

Results from secondary case study analysis will be outlined here. Feeding Liverpool will be analysed first, followed by analysis of The National Lottery Community Fund's Blackpool Better Start (BBS) and HeadStart Newham (HSN) programmes. Each case study comprises subsections, namely universalism, health and wellbeing, economics, altruism and activism. These have been chosen as they link closely with emergent themes from the literature review and are useful lenses through which to view hope and participation in relation to inequalities. Participation is reviewed specifically in TNLCF case study as it was a primary aim of the funding stream and not a primary aim of Feeding Liverpool.

Feeding Liverpool

It was a challenge to choose whether to use Feeding Liverpool's Social Impact Report (SIR) as a case study (Maynard & Tweedie, 2021). The narrative of one project, albeit part of a social franchise model, with several individual pantries across the city, is a powerful one. However, as the report touches into many other areas, it has been necessary to draw on those too. The decision was made to draw on the work of Feeding Liverpool as complementary to Your Local Pantry (YLP), therefore fulfilling the intention to research deeply rather than wide and shallow. The links between Feeding Liverpool and the YLP model in the city are too strong for either to be considered in isolation. Not only this, but key themes and patterns have emerged which relate to themes of hope and community participation against the backdrop of inequalities. Feeding Liverpool is also active in attempting to shape policy which has influenced the decision to reflect on its work in this way. One limitation of solely using the SIR as a case study is that it captures a particular period, September to December 2020, which was mid-pandemic. With the current cost of living crisis, it seems mandatory to draw on more current data from Feeding Liverpool to enhance this case study within a rapidly changing social policy climate.

This case study argues that YLP and the work of Feeding Liverpool, whilst their primary focus is food poverty, their approach offers something hopeful to individuals and social policy through encouraging citizens to participate. The findings suggest a model where dignity, choice and hope (the title of the SIR) can improve physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, thus creating more optimistic and inclusive communities.

One of the strengths of the SIR is its ability to share qualitative and quantitative data in an accessible way. Through survey method, 490 pantry members' experiences and stories are captured. Through use of the YLP database, qualitative data was gathered.

Economics

Having considered earlier the role of neoliberalism in perpetuating and worsening inequality in the UK through the role of the market, it is perhaps important to start by documenting the financial impact of YLP. With 95% of pantry members self-reporting an improvement in their household finances, each pantry visit saving at least £15 which results in an annual household saving of £780, the financial benefits are clear. The model is self-sustaining, with membership fees covering the costs of buying weekly fresh local produce and a subscription to Fareshare, an organisation which redistributes food which would otherwise go to waste. There is little or no drain on the state and it could be argued that YLP saves the state by improving health and therefore limiting drain on health services.

Pantries are volunteer led, with 116,000 hours contributed by 360 volunteers in 2020. This figure has increased rapidly with 35 pantries operating at the time of the 2020 report. At the time of writing, 84 pantries can be seen on the UK's YLP UK interactive map (Your Local Pantry, 2022).

Behind the statistics, there are real life stories of the financial impact of pantry membership on a household. Members reported being able to save for birthdays, celebrations, treats, trips, activities and household items such as carpets with the savings they made from weekly food bills. Some members were more able to pay bills or pay off debts as well as have capacity to purchase essential items such as clothes or shoes. The list of expenditures members make because of their food bill reductions gives some indication of the inequality across households. Whilst some members are helped financially and can save, others are being saved from destitution. Food pantries are not able to solve all inequality in the UK, but they do go some way in doing so and "until the safety net is strengthened, and household incomes are adequate, Pantries will continue to play an important role in supporting households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity" (Maynard & Tweedle, 2021, p12).

Universalism

One of the criticisms of food banks has been the shame and limitations of emergency food provision. Food banks traditionally operate on a referral-only basis and visits were initially limited to three. Concerns about means-testing earlier can be seen in practice at a food bank. Food

pantries initially aimed to reduce the number of households accessing food banks. In practice, with the cost-of-living crisis, this is extremely difficult, as numbers of pantries opening increased and the need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network increasing by 81% in the last five years. One of the benefits of food pantries is their universal nature. No proof of income is required to show that an individual is eligible. However, some pantries do have geographical restrictions, so could be criticised for not being completely universal. Here, it is useful to consider Feeding Liverpool's Good Food Plan, which aims for affordability and availability of good food within walking distance for all Liverpool residents. City-wide mapping is effective here, as it ensures all residents have a pantry in their ward, resulting in savings on public transport costs, therefore reducing household expenditures.

Feedback of members liking the universal nature of food pantries provides evidence that YLP is achieving its aim of developing and strengthening local communities. Pantry participation is multi-layered. Pantry attendance is a sign of active participation. Members come to shop and whilst taking their food, they are playing a role. There is pride in the fact they are paying, reducing food waste and enabling the pantry to thrive. The pantry model works based on 150 registered members, with an expectation that 50 of those members would attend each week. Such scaling enables the pantry to cover its costs. The approach needs members as a community to participate. Collaboration is closely linked with participation as pantries often act as community hubs. Other services offered vary, including financial or legal advice, computer access, bike repair, DIY support, and fun activities such as bingo. Other organisations and individuals participating in the pantry programme enhance the lives of its members. Food pantries, like some food banks, have been shown to offer far more than emergency food provision. They have been seen as spaces of care, where more hopeful and progressive possibilities can be envisioned (Cloke et al, 2017).

Such a holistic approach ensures that communities can access a range of help or support they might need, without question of whether they are eligible. This contrasts with criticisms of food banks which while they "can provide safety, support, and refuge for those experiencing extreme hardship, as a sector they can be viewed as inadvertently perpetuating a neoliberal anti-welfare agenda based on conditionality and mistrust of cash-based welfare" (Smith & Thompson, 2023, p3).

There is a tension here with the varying levels of need which can be seen in the members' narratives of using the savings. This reflects Sen's (1992) discussions on inequality and what true equality really means. It may be that to reach true equality, some pantry members may need more

support than others, yet there is no denying that every member being able to shop for the same price and number of items is a beneficial universal service. In response to differing needs, some pantries offer a family membership for those households with children. Reflecting the importance of a child's start in life, pantries can accept Healthy Start vouchers in part payment for a shop, a government scheme which aimed to provide "a nutritional safety net and improving access to a healthy diet for low-income families" (Feeding Liverpool, 2022, p4). However, this too is problematic as take up was low and information patchy. Pickett & Taylor-Robinson's (2021) call to feed children well through universal free school meals may well extend to the universal provision of healthy start funding for all children under 5, rather than as a means-tested benefit which some eligible families fail to claim.

Altruism and Activism

The link between altruism, volunteering and food poverty is strong and further evidenced by the mainly volunteer-led pantry model. The SIR states that 10% of members go on to volunteer at their pantry. Whilst recognising the empathy motivation for altruism, it is important to notice the active nature of such altruism. This is noticeable with regards to regular attendance at pantry sessions and the activism that such altruism can lead to. Pantry members and volunteers routinely shape and form their community space as has been seen by extra activities that can be offered. However, activism can also be seen more broadly by identifying Feeding Liverpool's holistic approach to food poverty comprising innovation, research and lobbying for policy change. By experiencing issues with the Healthy Start scheme first-hand, Feeding Liverpool was able to gather evidence and subsequently profile the flaws with local and national government which resulted in further training and rollout of the scheme, in Liverpool at least. Once again, the benefits of cooperation can be seen here with Feeding Liverpool as an alliance which already draws on the expertise of other stakeholders. Pantries play their part, but other stakeholders in the community are also needed to maintain a holistic and collaborative approach which is responsive to need. As was seen earlier, responsiveness of social policies can be slow, whereas innovation of pantries at a local level appears to have been effective in responding to local need. Whilst people go hungry, it is poor practice to wait for research and social policy change. Innovation is necessary. This can be seen in Feeding Liverpool's use of the Queen of Greens bus which "brings affordable fresh fruit and vegetables to communities across Liverpool and Knowsley" (Feeding Liverpool, 2022) which would otherwise be classed as food deserts. Responsiveness of food pantries in the Covid-19 pandemic, albeit with support from larger voluntary sector organisations such as Feeding Liverpool was something that UK social policy was unable to do and is generally slow in its national response.

Local pantries knowing their communities resulted in an effective home delivery service for isolated or vulnerable members. When knowledge and experience of innovation is shared, as can be seen by the YLP network facilitated conference to generously share ideas and collaborate, the alliance appears to be leading the way, whilst developing practice-based research ahead of policy. As is evident, "the economic inequalities in this country are not about to vanish overnight. Whatever the Government's other 'levelling up' priorities may be, there is a particular urgency to the problem of helping low-income families eat well." (National Food Strategy, 2021, p62) The responsiveness of the food pantry network in ordinary and pandemic times surely offers some expertise in informing nationwide policy. However, volunteer-led pantries can only do so much in affecting the worsening trajectories for health of children born in 2022 (Goudie & Hughes, 2022). Nevertheless, the altruism maintaining YLP combined with the activism of Feeding Liverpool may affect change in a more constructive way in keeping with Smith's (2013) suggested public health advocacy approach.

Whilst pantries are part of a social franchise model, they do have a level of autonomy which seems to be reflected in the qualitative data. This is also mirrored in the members' accounts. A sense of ownership and agency enables members to shape their community space. As volunteers are automatically pantry members, it is unsurprising that the SIR reports a sense of belonging where everyone is welcome. Whether volunteers start as members or vice versa, the benefits of volunteering are clear, giving "a sense of you're actually doing something for someone else for a change, rather than always wanting people to do something for you." (Maynard & Tweedie, 2021, p22). If not altruism, this is certainly community participation. When individuals are suffering and merely surviving, it is difficult to see beyond oneself, yet here it is possible to support others.

Health and Wellbeing

Having considered the social determinants of health and its influence on social policy, it is important to identify ways in which food pantries are improving health and wellbeing, in a bid to reduce inequalities. With 54% of members reporting eating more fresh fruit and vegetables, 59% eating less processed food and 69% improved physical health, there is a strong argument that pantry members' health improves. Physical activities undertaken, such as football training, only possible having saved cash from reduced food bills, further strengthens this perspective. These are merely the physical health aspects. Interestingly, 76% of members reported improved mental health, 57% had made new friends and 70% felt more connected to the local community. These reflections combined would act as protective factors in mental health and building resilience to

face adversity. Food pantries appear to be operating as places for improving physical health and mental wellbeing. Such a communal preventative approach to ill mental and physical health cannot be underestimated within the current climate where social policy has led to greater inequalities and reduction in good health as outlined earlier.

Such provision is not complicated but does stand in stark contrast to some of the draconian measures seen through decades of neoliberalism where stigma and individualism seemed rife. The inclusive nature of food pantries goes some way to replace embarrassment or stigma with dignity and agency. The principles of creating an environment such as that described in the SIR, where members are valued and listened to, where pride can be felt when a member pays for their own shopping, knowing that they are participating in the wider issue of reducing food waste is surely worth considering in other contexts.

Whilst food bank provision is undeniably necessary, the lack of dignity that comes with being identified as someone without, or in deficit, must surely have a negative impact on an individual's mental health. Conversely, the opportunity to choose one's own groceries at a food pantry, which frequently resembles a corner shop, can build self-esteem, a protective factor for positive mental health.

Learning is a theme that emerges from the SIR and related literature which is important when considering health and wellbeing inequalities. Learning has a multi-dimensional role in the pantry model. Volunteers receive formal training and gain new practical skills which can lead to employment. Members can also attend cookery workshops at some pantries. Training, regardless of subject or level, can improve confidence and wellbeing. Again, Feeding Liverpool has taken a holistic approach in offering slow cooker training to its members. Not only do members learn to cook from scratch, but they are also given a slow cooker which will help reduce energy bills in the current cost of living crisis. Benefits on physical and mental health are clear. Such an approach offers a further prompt to social policy makers to cease from separating policies and look more holistically.

There are countless examples of people in the food system doing amazing work and showing that a better food system is achievable including YLP (Goudie & Hughes, 2022). Having considered the SIR and Feeding Liverpool, it is important to note that similar findings are evidenced in the evaluation report for Peckham Pantry, part of the YLP franchise based in south east London. Themes of community participation and hope arise equally. Powerful personal narratives of hope being found in community food spaces appear to be worthy of informing social policy. Only longitudinal

research will show whether food pantries are effective in reducing inequalities, however as citizens become community-focussed and feel more hopeful, then pantries may act as a warning against the perpetuation of individualism. The themes of hope and community participation will be considered in the context of food pantries in the discussion chapter.

The National Lottery Community Fund

Blackpool Better Start Blackpool (BBS) and Headstart Newham (HSN) are complementary elements of The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF). In 2015 Blackpool was successful in gaining ten-year funding, whilst Newham received five-year funding in 2016. BBS funding aimed to improve the life chances of babies and children under the age of three living in Blackpool, a town in the north west of England, identified as the most deprived town in the country, containing 8 out of 10 of the most deprived wards. Intergenerational poverty, unemployment, low educational achievement, accompanied by poor health and wellbeing reveal the sharp end of inequality in the UK (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019).

Newham was one of six Headstart partnerships which aimed to improve the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents and prevent serious mental health issues. Newham is one of the most ethnically diverse and deprived of the London boroughs and third most populous. Blackpool was also one of the six HS areas but for the purposes of this case study, it was felt that considering BBS and HSN as two parts of the same case study would provide richer data and reflection. Having considered social policy related to families and child and adolescent mental health earlier, recognizing the close links between the two fields, TNLCF's approach fits well with this research. Covering two very different and distant areas, along with one ongoing and one completed project would lead to a more holistic picture.

Having been granted TNLCF funding, both Newham and Blackpool embarked on ambitious journeys to change the trajectories for families and young people in their areas. The aims and objectives of both projects had far-reaching, life changing claims. Both areas wanted to involve their residents and saw them as stakeholders. Inequalities within each area exist but are less stark than when comparing either to national figures. It is the inclusion of intended citizen participation within these areas experiencing high inequality that provides the context for this case study. Both projects involved rigorous, robust and independent evaluations as a requirement of the funding grants which shall be referred to here.

Participation

In order to address citizen participation, it is first of all important to consider that both projects focused on engagement. In aiming to improve mental health and family life, both areas agreed to engage the local community. Terms used by Blackpool and Newham have a buzzword-like resonance. Co-production has become a far more widely accepted term, particularly in mental health where individuals and communities are consulted and actively encouraged to shape decision-making or services. It indicates more than user involvement where a 'user' receives a service. Co-production is more about sharing. That said, it is important to recognise that the key principles of user involvement and "putting people in the centre" (Osborne, 2022; p4) contrast sharply with neoliberalism's marketisation of individuals. The triumph of co-production seems contrary to the authoritarian governments that have devised social policy in modern times.

User involvement in HSN has shown that it improves young people's mental health. The sharing of evaluations also models generosity which has been seen to be lacking in government policy. Whilst recognising calls for evidence-based practice, TNLCF admit a lack of rigour with some of their evaluation tools, yet also highlight the need for responsiveness and the wealth of existing data to shape children and young people's mental health policy. There is enough knowledge to make informed decisions and support those who face challenges.

HSN successfully engaged young people in its youth panel. This is potentially the most quantitative and tangible success of the whole programme, with the data showing that the more involved the young people were, the healthier their mental wellbeing. HSN's ambitious approach to citizen participation was holistic. HSN wanted to involve parents in their children's journey to better mental health and wellbeing. On the surface, it appears that HSN successfully engaged parents in this way, developing a team of parent facilitators who received training and then went on to deliver parenting courses to other parents in their local communities. The role of these parents in building relationships, forming alliances and networks with their peers is crucial and has been seen through the literature as a protective factor in community resilience and mental health. The number of parents engaged is impressive yet declaring the number of parents who attended a single session, is far from convincing as successful participation. Longitudinal data would be more authentic, perhaps showing completion of a course or using the same threshold as in the original evidence base of five out of eight sessions may be more indicative of true success and fidelity.

Similarly with BBS measures, evidence for the effectiveness of the Community Connectors (CCx) is misleading. Interview excerpts tell a powerful story of parents who previously exhibited a lack of trust in professionals, are drawn in by their peers and subsequently start to feel valued. CCx, employed in the role to disseminate information about the services available, are local parents themselves. They successfully increase levels of engagement and subsequently improve outcomes for Blackpool residents. On closer look at the quantitative data, only a small number of parents were interviewed, 22 out of a potential 95. Reasons for this could be summarised as administrative errors and lack of impact (Mills et al, 2021, p5).

In both cases, anecdotal and qualitative evidence seems strong. A narrative is powerful, particularly for individuals who felt marginalised, lacked trust in others and then became more involved and healthier as a result of their participation in something bigger than themselves. For policy makers these stories need to be quantifiable. When something is seen to be working well and citizens are participating, the impact seems weaker if masses of quantitative data cannot be collected. In terms of participation, HSN successfully created "a sense of belonging and purpose by meaningful change in the community" (Headstart Newham, 2022, p2). Both projects were exploring and testing, wanting to share findings and develop interest in other areas where scaling may be possible. Now that the funding period has recently come to an end, it remains to be seen if participation, or even the project, continues within a wider context.

Economics

One of the benefits of a test and learn model is that elements can be adapted, changed, or even ended if they are ineffective. BBS includes a list of discontinued services in their five-year review. Despite choosing evidence-based programmes from the outset, the fact that seven programmes stopped altogether or were absorbed into existing provision, such as Social Care, albeit with extra funding, demonstrates environmental factors are important alongside adaptability. Throughout HSN and BBS programmes there is an awareness of the strong links between agencies, both charitable and local authority. The tension between mainstream underfunded local council budgets and large-scale charitable funding accompanies the desire for integrated services. Whilst such large funding was welcomed, the local authority will remain long after the projects conclude. However successful the use of grant funding, it will only change the outcomes for the group of people eligible in that period. Sustainability and maintenance of investment for unequal and deprived communities is crucial.

BBS offers some direction in terms of longevity and system change, viewing the "key to sustainability is embedding an ethos of social responsibility and the continued motivation from the partnership to press forward with the shared vision of BBS" (Blackpool Better Start, 2021, p31). An emphasis on integrating the successful elements of the programme within existing services and expertise, training staff, maintaining an emphasis on the core value of early intervention whilst recognizing the crucial role and cost effectiveness of the CCx staff gives some indication that effectiveness does not have to be expensive. BBS made these claims halfway through their funding, which offers further time to embed services to enable system change.

HSN echoes BBS's approach by recommending re-establishing the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing partnership. There's a concern here that something that had vanished is being brought back, mirroring some of the social policies referenced earlier. However, HSN do make a strong financial case through their cost-benefit analysis that early intervention tools tested by HSN would save the local authority £2.2m, compared with non-intervention. Such savings for borough councils at such austere times could prove pivotal.

Health and Wellbeing

Results for improving mental health and wellbeing in HSN and health in BBS are mixed, despite featuring in their main project aims. However, it is important to note that both set out to explore and test existing evidence-based approaches. One theme seems to emerge quite clearly in the data relating to HSN's effect on mental health and wellbeing. The greater the attendance of young people in any aspect of the programme, the more positive the impact on their mental health and wellbeing. To clarify, the greater the participation, the more positive the impact on the young person. Participation is active whereas attendance can be passive. HSN's More than Mentors programme appears to have had a less convincing impact, yet those young people who trained as mentors reported feeling much better about themselves. The value of participation is further highlighted, even in challenging times of the Covid pandemic where "all young people interviewed reported the ability to express themselves freely, while feeling emotionally supported and valued. This was a result of individuals coming together for a shared purpose and as their own choice." (Headstart Newham, 2022, p18).

The sense of being part of a community and small family is echoed further in HSN's work with parents and is reflected in BBS with feedback from caregivers who have contact with CCx. Responsiveness of CCx to caregivers appears crucial in the relationship, not only between parent

and peer-professional, but also in family and wider community. Even in the early stages of BBS, strong and sustained relationships were being formed in the community (Smeaton, 2022, p11). Similarly, HSN parents found sharing with other parents had a positive impact on their self-confidence and relationships at home (Headstart Newham, 2022, p13).

It seems that the fostering of relationships, alliances and networks have gone some way to improving the health and wellbeing of Blackpool and Newham residents. Whilst the transformative change for some individuals is clear, these human connections which are formed and become protective factors for an individual's healthy mental and emotional wellbeing are something which could be argued should be fundamental to human existence and not necessarily part of a multimillion-pound programme.

Low self-esteem appeared as another symptom of Newham and Blackpool's marginalised communities before programmes commenced. Whether manifesting as a lack of trust in professionals or engagement in the local community, low self-esteem is a risk factor to an individual's mental health. Early intervention can change the trajectory sufficiently that further intervention is not required when an individual's self-esteem and confidence is boosted. Through examining the research, it seems feeling heard, being encouraged to express an opinion and receiving training are beneficial in building self-esteem and subsequently promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Universal

Whilst both BBS and HSN had ambitious aims of transforming the whole community, there were some limitations to the projects in terms of their universal approaches. BBS recognized the limits to its place-based approach, where the most deprived wards were identified and services focused on the Children's Centres located in those wards. Inevitably, parents attended Children's Centres unaware of the ward boundary. Whilst place can create a sense of belonging and improve access to services for some, it can also deem some services inaccessible to others. Earlier discussion regarding the high levels of deprivation in Blackpool make it a worthy recipient of long-term funding to reduce its inequalities across the town. However, in directing the resources to seven children's centres, it fails to identify the inequalities within wards by taking a selective rather than universal approach. Whilst a recognized level of expertise and local knowledge may be developed in a specific place, the services offered may not be equitable or comparable. More disturbingly,

competition between wards may develop which could well have a divisive effect rather than the desired unifying one.

Place also played a part in HSN's strategy by selecting some schools to base its work with young people and parents. Management of resources affected this, both in terms of HSN's funding as well as school resources. HSN identifies its proportionate universal approach as needed to improve access to services for Newham's residents, especially those who needed more specialist help. Whilst working to build resilience and positive mental health in young people, HSN also recognized the demands on specialist services. The intention was to offer universal support for mental health whilst complementing the specialist provision of mental health professionals.

Whilst means-testing does not feature in either BBS or HSN's approach, geography clearly limits accessibility and therefore the universalism of either project. Although this seems counter-productive, there is potentially a redeeming feature of both projects in their level of responsiveness to local need. Through consultation and listening to the voices of young people, caregivers or professionals, a more comprehensive approach has been adopted. Word of mouth seems to have been a useful tool in communities encouraging their peers to participate. It is unfeasible for every young person in Newham, for example, to be part of the youth panel, and even though they are selected and elected members, they are representative of a wider group of people. Democracy features strongly in the decision making here. Such democratic decision-making is far more universal than pre-HSN times when there was little involvement or consultation with young people. Similarly, there is a finite number of CCx needed in Blackpool or peer parent group facilitators in Newham. To be universal in the sense of training all parents or caregivers would lose something of an individual's uniqueness. Universal engagement may be a more realistic aim and seems to be strong in TNLCF programme.

Even in challenging pandemic times, an impressive 73% of Newham young people accessed one-off support through HSN with 55% finding it helpful. A service offered to all young people has its place and with HSN a wide range of services were on offer to young people. In terms of the overall aim of promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, it seems that the universal services were most effective. For those young people with high levels of need and poor mental health, a clear case for targeted support beyond a preventative universal offer seems necessary. An efficient approach to universalism is complex and can be seen most distinctly in the evidence that HSN's universal interventions were strong in identifying those young people who might benefit from

targeted support. However, take up of targeted HSN interventions was low. Such differences in levels of need, balancing prevention with treatment provide some evidence for both universal and targeted support.

Altruism and Activism

It could be argued that activism was not only a thread of TNLCF programme, but an intention from the outset. System change was a key objective and a concept which needed a process (Evidence Based Practice Unit, 2019). The level of need and the failure of existing structures or services to meet the needs in both Blackpool and Newham required action. Both projects offered something new in their areas that had not been tried before. Throughout the proposals and narratives of early thinking and planning, there is an energy and vision which led to innovation. Generosity appears strongly through co-production at all levels. Some may say a maverick approach, but at no point was any person acting alone. Community and a desire to see others join the activity of changing an area appear strongly.

Whilst a desire for systemic change is clear, realism is expressed about the limitations. BBS, for example, recognise the challenge of housing, particularly transience of the population due to housing issues. Consequently, practitioners cannot always work for lasting change with families, despite collaboration across sectors.

Activism exhibited in BBS and HSN seems to emerge from a different starting point to that described earlier. Whilst altruism does not so overtly appear to have led to activism in either Blackpool or Newham, it does feature. It may well have motivated those who initially compiled the ambitious plans when writing the funding bids. In considering the narratives, the activism may well have led to a fostering of altruism. Altruism expressed as generosity can be seen in terms of time given by stakeholders, whether inputting in discussions, contributing to data collection or sharing learning with other agencies and areas. Whilst there is some dependence on volunteers, there is also a focus on upskilling through training and some paid positions, although the latter are limited as explained previously. The value and altruism expressed as kindness and devotion for others could be named as characteristics of the approach of BBS and HSN. The data analysed would lack much of its narrative without such altruism which may well provide a useful tool when considering tackling inequalities through social policy.

Discussion

Summary

Having considered earlier how bad things have got in relation to social policy, this discussion section aims to provide an antidote by reflecting on hope, considering how good things could get and offering an alternative approach. Secondary case study analysis evidenced positive changes in the Liverpool, Blackpool and Newham areas through Feeding Liverpool and The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF). Whilst aiming to change trajectories within their stated communities, these projects do not state bringing hope as an objective. Discussion of hope and related reflections on social policy will follow in the light of the case study narratives. The focus on food, family and mental health policy will be maintained.

The importance of community participation emerged as a key theme in both case studies. Whether groups of people gathering to buy food at affordable prices, parents accessing courses to support them with their young child, or teenagers looking for ways to escape their depression, the role of community appeared vital. Social policy to date has failed to reduce inequalities or stem high levels of food insecurity, parents feeling isolated and high prevalence of poor adolescent mental health, but the role community plays in reducing these inequalities and offering hope in what otherwise might seem a hopeless situation cannot be understated. Community participation will be interwoven through the following discussion of hope and its role in addressing current inequalities.

Hope

Having acknowledged the levels of destitution and rising inequalities in the UK, the sense of misery and desperation is clear. A search for hope seems mandatory in such a bleak landscape. This contrast is mirrored in Snyder's hope theory where "A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same – a personal rainbow of the mind." (Snyder, 2002, p269). Within the context of a cost of living crisis, it is even more pertinent to consider what elements or traits demonstrated by the case studies have lifted the spirits and can be used to inform practice. Hope is complex but has a more solid foundation than vain wishing, containing "an optimism of the will that recognises the historical and structural difficulties which need to be overcome." (Grace, 1994)

The case studies evidence emotions that accompany the economic impact of decades of neoliberalism. Greater importance should be given to such emotions, alongside the economic and physical health impacts on individuals and communities. Emotion already features in mental health policy, with hope recognised as a protective factor (Sparks et al, 2021, Chang & Banks, 2007). Feelings that come with poverty (Mills et al, 2021) should justifiably be taken into consideration. It can also be seen from the case studies that a mistrust of professionals, another strong emotion, can result in the failure of an otherwise useful intervention, or even engagement of a service (Mills et al, 2021). Feelings of shame and stigma accompany poverty, being judged (Strelitz & Lister, 2008). This stigma can lead to disengagement, the accompanying feelings of which need acknowledgement.

Recognising the importance of emotions is a useful starting point when constructing hope in a community. Whilst acknowledging the paradox of hope as an emotion it also has some autonomy in its active motivational power, suggesting that it does far more than lift the spirits, forming a firm foundation on which to create a more equal society.

Themes of isolation and individualism in the UK have been strong throughout. Contrastingly, hope would be identification of places of belonging and togetherness. Such hope becomes more tangible in places like Blackpool, Newham and Liverpool where long neglected and marginalised areas create communities that "can find resolution and meaning only through participation in a shared project" (Blackwell & Seabrook, 1988, p48). For those who experience a lack of goal achievement, whose performance may be thwarted, it is difficult to identify whether a lack of hope is resultant of their circumstances or is causal to them. The point is not to apportion blame on an individual for their own lack of achievement, but to point to hope and community participation as a route to cohesion and greater equality.

Through questioning general understandings of state, community and individual (Norman, 2022), Green's theory of the common good provides a more hopeful outlook in the context of growing inequalities. Individuals realise their own capacities, resulting in participation and ultimately finding good in the common good. The individual is validated in their uniqueness, as a vital part of wider society. Hope is surely in the common good, where all individuals are valued, recognized, acknowledged and needed for their contribution to society. Underlying these characteristics is equality which seems fundamental in bringing system change, as well as potentially linking with Sen's capability set, or freedom to pursue wellbeing (Sen, 1992). It is not about how to measure wellbeing, capacity or freedom, but how society can help (i) people who do not have the freedom

to buy the food they need, (ii) parents who lack the resources to help their children thrive, or (iii) adolescents who struggle to navigate the challenges they face.
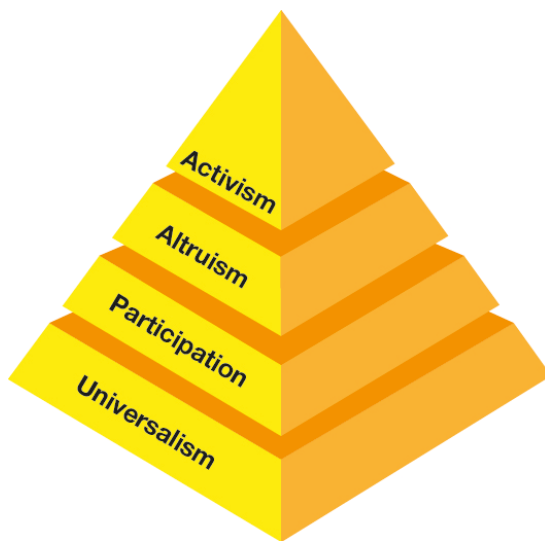
One criticism in the earlier literature review was that of the need for evidence and robust data to inform social policy. A combination of the need for rigorous research and a pattern of revolving social policies has unsurprisingly resulted in a lack of stability for those living in more challenging circumstances. Whilst evidence bases and effective programmes are important, wellbeing and hope as aspects of community functioning are difficult to quantify objectively, often referenced subjectively. Although measures of social hope have been drawn by some (Jin & Kim, 2019) a general emphasis from policy makers on quantitative data can be problematic. An objective measure is questionable on something so subjective as emotions. Nonetheless agency and pathway thoughts as constructs of hope theory may prove useful considerations where "agency fuels iterative generation of potential success routes through pathways until an effective route is identified and utilised" (Blake et al, 2018, p232). When such hope is offered through agency, capacity and resourcefulness, Snyder et al (1997) and Sen (1999) enable a rich understanding. Whilst Sen offers an alternative to neoliberalism, he is criticised by some for the specifics of his work and implementation in certain areas (Navarro, 2000). This further reflects the challenges of implementing the same strategies or social policies in different communities. It brings into question the transferability of approaches across geographical divides. However, it is the underlying hope of Sen's approach in linking development with freedom and his call to reduce inequalities that is of interest here, as a principle rather than an operating manual. The diverse areas of Liverpool, Blackpool and Newham all require effective social policies to reduce inequalities, even if the practical approaches to equality vary.

How good things could get

Repetition of the terms universalism, participation, altruism and activism throughout this research have unexpectedly led to the construction of a potential tool for considering hope and its importance within community projects and social policy. The intention is a form of social science litmus test, ensuring a hopeful approach is taken when social policies aimed at reducing inequality are set. This practical tool builds on the hopeful effectiveness identified in the case studies and offers an alternative to the bleakness of deficit identified in the literature review. The tool, hereafter called the Pyramid of Hope, is a prototype and open to development. For now, it acts as a useful reflective tool to facilitate a discussion between community practitioners, academics or

policy makers, through consideration of four key factors which may positively affect communities and reduce inequalities.

Four conditions help provide some context and boundaries. Firstly, the levels of the pyramid do not necessarily follow a linear progression from the bottom to the top, although this advancement is possible. Secondly, it should be borne in mind that the pyramid emerged whilst looking for hope in social policy and is intended to offer a hopeful approach when considering inequalities, based on the stories contained within the qualitative data analysed in the case studies. The hypothesis was that whilst the UK witnessed some of the greatest inequalities in the world, there was still hope through community participation. Thirdly, there are parallels between the pyramid and some of the literature reviewed. This goes some way to highlight the importance of collaboration and a much-needed move away from individualism. Fourthly, each layer is partly hidden, as is the case with a pyramid shape. This is intentional in the development of the tool and reflects something of the complexity of social policy and the challenge of capturing hope in a tangible way. It cannot all be simultaneously seen.

Pyramid models of participation are acknowledged in other fields (Green, 2005; Beresford, 2019). However, it is believed that hope is the unique factor to this thought pathway. The discussion will now consider each of the Pyramid of Hope's strata, outlining the meanings, tensions and lessons learned having analysed the case studies.

Universalism

Feeding Liverpool and TNLCF offer universal services, albeit with Blackpool Better Start (BBS) and Headstart Newham (HSN) offering proportionately universal services. The low take up of government schemes such as the Healthy Start vouchers (Clark, 2022) and Troubled Families programme (Portes, 2016) evidence the challenge of offering targeted services. Unequal levels of food poverty prevent people from doing so much more than eating and can result in exclusion. Means-testing and targeting of services has shown to foster challenges leading to low engagement of caregivers, young people or food insecure households. Such labelling and division are different to proportionate universalism. The latter term can be inclusive, especially when linked with generosity and understanding of the common good, or ubuntu, as Desmond Tutu explained to highlight the linkage between all of humanity (Murove, 2012).

Once the security, safety and basic individual needs are assured, humans feel safe to explore, a reflection on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). When viewing these theories through a community lens, then wider participation feels achievable. Currently, it seems communities, or individuals within communities, do not feel safe and are therefore less likely to explore or participate. However, once the basic needs are met, a secure attachment can be fostered and result in a more hopeful outlook.

Interestingly, Marmot's (2010) principles fit well with the pyramid outlined here and can be included in the first stratum where citizens have the best start in life, capabilities and agency are maximised and a healthy standard of living is assured for all. Taking a universal approach to health and wellbeing is fundamental in the Pyramid of Hope ensuring key preventative tools are considered in bringing equality at an early stage.

Considering universalism in practice through the case studies, it is important to note HSN's proportionate universal approach where all young people can access the general service, but some young people will receive more help than others. Transparency and compassion ensure general acceptance of times and situations that may be more challenging. Your Local Pantry and BBS provide totally universal services, albeit on a geographical basis. Services are accessed without proof of eligibility. The Pyramid of Hope would urge consideration of all boundaries including geography.

Social justice and fairness currently seem difficult to quantify and distant in the case studies. Thrupp and Tomlinson's (2005) identification of complex hope and problems with social justice, albeit in the field of education, warns against oversimplification of the term universal. Through a well-meaning desire to encompass all, the uniqueness of individuals and their communities is lost. Lessons can be learnt from this in informing formation of the Pyramid of Hope where uniqueness is celebrated and all are welcome, should they choose to join in.

The following considerations of participation, altruism and activism build on this perspective of universalism and may go some way to capture what may be possible in future policy making, shaping and implementation.

Participation

Measures of engagement or attendance are insufficient to evidence a fully hopeful and participatory community. Active participation is required. In the search for a robust evidence base, success of projects is sometimes seen in attendance figures, as in the case of HSN, without considering quality of attendance or participation. Whilst the importance of resourcing communities with services and projects that work is undisputed, it is an unwieldy tool to measure effectiveness purely on quantitative attendance data. Little indication of the quality of attendance, specifically the quality of the participation is given. Whilst acknowledging the freedom to opt out, passivity does not feature within the Pyramid of Hope's participation strata.

Community participation in both case studies gives some credence to the perspective that "community is the true master of the free man" (Hobhouse & Grimes, 1964, p19). Whilst TNLCF placed particular emphasis on engagement, this facilitated an improvement on young people's mental health which subsequently increased participation and changed families' life courses. The dedicated work of staff and volunteers across the case studies, who restore trust in professionals, clearly evidences the power of active participation. Similarly, individuals who found some dignity at the pantry in Liverpool and subsequently volunteer, participate actively, feeling better about themselves and their community. This informed the Pyramid of Hope's active participation being facilitated through, but not dependent on the open welcome of universalism.

One criticism of the case studies is that whilst they are offering something for the whole of the community, different elements of the large-scale programmes are limited in practical ways. HSN's youth panel lacks capacity to accommodate every young person in Newham. Consultation of the

whole borough's youth population is viable. The challenge of representation on the panel is not unique (Beresford & Harding, 1993). Whilst praise is due for those diverse and representative boards and panels, the Pyramid of Hope would urge a broadening of such endeavours to include more vulnerable voices, even those who lack trust in professionals. Clearly, it is difficult for any trustee to remain representative of those on the edges, without speaking with their own voice, particularly when those on the board have come so far. This scenario becomes less hopeful as it merely replicates those cliques and misrepresentations of government boards or policymakers. Yet it is relationships that have the ability themselves to foster hope (Heuvel, 2020, p203) and further attention is drawn to the foundational building block of the Pyramid of Hope where much time and importance must be placed on drawing in the whole of community.

Reflecting Jupp's (2008) approach, the government could learn from the spaces where citizens are participating. In Newham, Blackpool and Liverpool, evidence at a micro level demonstrates that participation is key. Individuals and communities have felt comfortable, have helped out, have kept going in each of these areas and the results are positive. Whilst both case studies have built on government initiatives where consultation, user involvement and volunteering are fundamental, such endeavours can sometimes seem like tokenism and limited in their scope, building a further layer of bureaucracy or hierarchy. The danger of cliques forming is possible as not everyone can be part of a small youth forum or a volunteer at a pantry, however there must be a move towards finding a space for everyone. "The more effectively communities are engaged in shaping services, the more likely it is that quality will be delivered" (Jupp, 2008). Participation in shaping services is an active and worthwhile endeavour and requires altruism which will now be discussed.

Altruism

As was seen earlier, altruism can have more than one motivating factor. The Pyramid of Hope prompts consideration of sustainable altruism through highlighting compassion and placing value on "a universe of worth outside individual recreation and exchange." (Sacks, 1997, p202). Once again, the root is an emotional one, as well as a returning to ubuntu. Hope and sustainability are linked in humanity's survival, where "the rich must renounce their version of riches" (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1988). Current longstanding inequalities are perpetuated when "the privileged are able to exclude the public from their special advantages" (Scott, 1994, p52). Such privilege can be transformed into a motivator for altruism, something through which to show generosity and empathy.

When considering links between altruism and universalism, some hope can also be drawn. Universalism represents the whole of society where no one is missing out. In conditions where individuals or communities have been marginalised, all are brought into the centre. Altruism can be an extension of universalism since once all in society are included, citizens then look outwards and prepare to give of themselves for the benefit of others. Ultimately, a hopeless landscape can be changed through the inclusion, participation and altruism of a community. It could also be argued that there is a certain element of altruism involved in participation as individuals give beyond themselves, indicating that there is at least some crossover between strata. It is important to note that this might not be a linear progression through the Pyramid of Hope stages, although some individuals may move seamlessly through each element in turn to activism.

Activism

In times of austerity and over the last decades of increasing alienation through rising inequalities, a general sense of hopelessness is evident. However, hope for the changing of a landscape is possible through activism. Altruism seen as collective participatory activism can increase hope when considered as more powerful than an individual voice. The case studies highlight change can happen, with plenty to celebrate, to learn, and to inform future practice. In the current climate, it is difficult to claim a good state, yet there are good elements which, if captured, could multiply and flourish.

Activism in the Pyramid of Hope builds on participation, although for activists, it may be where they enter the community or even where their identity lies. The importance of community may be an activist's motivation which has led them to entering the pyramid at this level, but this does not place any greater importance on any individual. It is important to note that activism itself can act as a protective factor in preventing or reversing neighbourhood decline (Lister, 2004; Lupton and Power, 2002). Feeding Liverpool proves a good case study for activism's part in the Pyramid of Hope as policy change features strongly. Through its alliance with other individuals and groups within the community, it is an activist for shaping food policy, researching and ensuring all city residents have access to good food. The Pyramid of Hope recognises that activism is not a necessary endeavour for the whole community but represents a sign of a healthy community, understanding the political landscape and ensuring it works for the common good (Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005).

Food Policy

Feeding Liverpool provides a positive case study to reflect on the Pyramid of Hope through all its stages. The food alliance evidences each strata well through offering a universal service, citizens actively participating with some expressing altruism through volunteering and others shaping food policy. Feeding Liverpool's responsiveness through a pandemic and the current cost of living crisis are in stark contrast to the government's unpreparedness in times of crisis (Committee of Public Accounts, 2022). The community was motivated and acted. Admittedly, Feeding Liverpool have received funding from local government, but they have also been able to respond rapidly and adapt accordingly, proving the value of cooperation and recognising how different elements of society can work together. The alliance may be part of their success as well as a model for good practice. Collaboration and participation feature throughout with these close relationships facilitating rapid response and change. Such social structures are interconnected but better understanding of the needs of the precariat are required if a security net is to be fit for purpose.

One concern related to any UK food policy would be the reliance on volunteers. With the cost of living crisis, then it is hardly fair to expect communities to participate in any project without pay, or at least some reimbursement.

Family Policy

The close correlation between food poverty, family life and mental health can be so closely intertwined, they are difficult to separate. In this light, the universalism of the Pyramid of Hope tool may be worth considering in terms of holistic social policy. When all are welcome, and the strength of participation is recognised, then a preventative structure in cross-discipline policy may form.

Through the case studies, particularly when considering BBS, a functioning family model has been fostered in the mode of operation. Family policy essentially starts with parenting as a move from excluded or anti-social families to responsible or resourceful families often features (Jupp, 2017). A shift from such a binary understanding of families may enable greater understanding of the messiness of participation and subsequently application of hope in various settings. The Pyramid of Hope is open to suggestions and may be interpreted and applied differently in a range of settings. This more accurately captures the essence of the intended model, which in turn reflects family

units which "both shape their social surroundings and are shaped by them", (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980, p189).

A model of hope and its subsequent implication is much needed in UK social policy where low levels of happiness amongst children are alarming. Such children "are much less likely to enjoy being at home with their family, to feel safe when they are with their friends, to look forward to going to school, to like the way they look, and to feel positive about their future ... are also more likely to be victimised, to behave in ways that are risky ... to have eating disorders and to be depressed." (Layard & Dunn, 2009, p5). These are the very traits that family policy which adopts the elements of the Pyramid of Hope could begin to address.

Child and adolescent mental health

As was outlined earlier, emotions of hope and their subsequent impact are perhaps ignored within policy, yet it is human beings with feelings and emotions who form society. It would be a contradiction to neoliberalism to consider individuals to be of emotional value, as opposed to market value. Whilst the economy clearly cannot be ignored, there must be some scope to give emotional health a more prominent position when setting policy, otherwise Marmot's social determinants are side lined.

The need for a change of approach is clearly needed, more so as at the time of writing, research findings were published evidencing increasingly high levels of mental disorders in children and teenagers (NHS Digital, 2022). Whilst mental health has had a higher public profile in recent years than previously, these latest concerning figures indicate that mental health policy is ineffective, despite the glimmers of hope from projects referenced here. Once the link between resilience and hope (Heuvel, 2020) is given a much higher profile in mental health policy, then reflection on the Pyramid of Hope's principles is meaningless. The hope that Heuvel outlines is about desires and what people value, it concerns the ability to navigate obstacles. It contrasts with his view of optimism which is seen as more of an expectation. With this in mind, it seems significant that social policy aims to fix mental health whilst ignoring the importance of emotions. Feelings, including those of anxiety, need to be acknowledged when we know so much about the triggers and risk factors. If we can limit anxiety, then people may be more willing to participate or explore their altruistic nature.

The issue of pressure to use evidence-based programmes has been raised earlier, however it deserves particular mention here as the pressure on evidence-based practice in the field of mental health is particularly strong. This contrasts with Feeding Liverpool who carried out their own research in collaboration with local educational establishments, perhaps because there is no protocol for drawing on evidence-based practice when running an affordable food pantry. TNLCF stipulate that they only use evidence-based programmes, whilst developing their own rigorous research. BBS were able to use some evidence-based programmes and abandon them if they were seen to be ineffective in their own setting. HSN adopted a test and learn model with mixed results and no sense of longevity or sustainability. The case studies themselves bring doubt on the emphasis in mental health on evidence-based practice. Whilst recognising how robust research is key to maintaining quality, the case studies offer an alternative of quality-based practice where something may be tested or adapted where necessary. This may highlight another important aspect of participation. Namely where professionals meet with community groups and individuals to identify quality-based practice.

Implications and Recommendations

Through this research, the development of a potential tool may lead to more questions than clear solution to the problem of gross inequalities in UK society. However, it is understood that the Pyramid of Hope in its current prototype form is sufficient to be tested and used in a range of settings to assess its effectiveness as a practical tool. If it proves ineffective, then it will remain merely a visual aid to this piece of work and has enabled identification of key themes when exploring hope, community participation and inequalities.

The case study analysis strengthens an argument for taking a preventative approach to inequalities through participation which offers hope not only to the communities themselves, but also to the wider field of social policy, particularly relating to food, family and mental health policy. The recommendation would therefore be for investment in social policy which prevents problems and reduces inequality rather than crisis management.

Economics emerged as a theme of the case study. However, the research was not intended to have finance at its centre. Feeding Liverpool, for example, exists on relatively little financial help and could prove interesting to review through the eyes of an economist. It appears that something could be learned or transferred to other similar projects, although geography is also acknowledged, which results in caution being urged when considering transferability.

Whilst hope has been identified through this research, there is a tension between its clarity in an individual's story and its elusiveness in the wider community or society context. Whilst the argument against quantifying hope seems stronger, particularly when the emphasis shifts from an individual narrative, it is important to note the relationship and collective element to social hope. To this end, an exploration of collective hope where individual stories are brought together, or individual landscapes are scoured for hope may be beneficial.

This research indicates a renewed perspective of hope. Whilst the Pyramid of Hope has flexibility to be shaped and interpreted by those who participate in discussion and reflection, there are some parameters. Hope should be tempered with realism. It recognises challenges and disappointments but has resilience to cope through relationship with others. Hope is sufficiently real to recognise that disappointment can result from being overly optimistic or unrealistic.

Having rightly lauded Sen's work regarding links between development and freedom earlier in this section, due to Sen's role as an economist, there is a strong emphasis on productivity levels and market value which is only of secondary importance when reflecting on the Pyramid of Hope. Sen rightly recognised the importance of wellbeing and it is that angle which is of more interest here. Not for what it is, but in its link with safety and curiosity, enabling individuals to consider something beyond themselves, namely community.

In some ways one of the limitations of this research is that it is not new. In that sense it has failed its ambition. Whilst it has led to the forming of a useful tool for practitioners and policy makers, this discussion section repeats existing knowledge. It strengthens the argument that some previous recommendations need to be heeded urgently. In the case of food policy, the recommendation is for "political and business leaders in this country to take these issues seriously, understand the scale of the problem and recognise that they must play a critical role in the solution and implementing change." (Goudie & Hughes, 2022, p42).

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to search for hope in social policy through the exploration of hope theory and community participation within the context of current societal inequalities. The primary method was secondary data case analysis. Research began with a brief overview of the context before considering the scale of inequalities and focusing on three policy areas, namely (i)

food, (ii) family and (iii) child and adolescent mental health policies. These policy areas were critically evaluated within the literature review. Practical application and reflection of the policies and inequalities were analysed through two related case studies. The initial case study focused on Feeding Liverpool, a food alliance based in north west England, which works to reduce food poverty in the area, places community participation at its core and therefore links closely with food policy. The second case study focused on the National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and was formed of two parts: Blackpool Better Start (BBS) which relates to the broader area of family policy and Headstart Newham (HSN) which links with child and adolescent mental health policy. BBS works with caregivers and aims to improve the outcomes for children living in Blackpool, one of the most deprived areas in England. HSN worked with young people from the age of ten and aimed to build resilience in young people. Due to the high levels of socio-economic deprivation and history of lack of engagement between professionals and the community in BBS and HSN designated areas, both parts of the second case study proved rich grounds for research considering community participation where gross inequalities were clearly existent. Similarly, Feeding Liverpool is based in one of the most economically deprived food deserts in England with almost one third of adults identified as food insecure and levels of fuel poverty ranking higher than the England average. This proved fertile ground for secondary data analysis identifying examples of hope through community participation, despite such high levels of inequality.

The secondary data analysis related to food policy and inequalities focussed specifically on the Social Impact Report for Your Local Pantry, research carried out by Maynard & Tweddie (2021), one of Feeding Liverpool's key projects where community participation has been seen to bring hope to individuals. Reference was made to the broader work of Feeding Liverpool as it was identified at an early stage that the connections with other organisations were key to community participation and hope. More precisely, these connections were identified as fundamental to hope. Similarly, whilst the work of Mills et al (2021) was cited as the focus of secondary data analysis related to BBS, the project continually carries out robust research and evaluations which led to a more complex frame of reference for this work. Contrastingly, HSN project was completed as it reached the end of its TNLCF funding, so it was possible to reach more definitive conclusions than with BBS and Feeding Liverpool as ongoing projects.

Following the literature review and case studies, a discussion was formed which included reflections on Snyder's hope theory and the elements of hope which could be contextualised within the social policy field and could help reduce inequalities, or more specifically promote

equality. The work of Sacks (1997), Blackwell and Seabrook (1988) and Heuvel (2020) were also drawn on to provide a broader and cross-disciplinary reflection. Crucially, these writings scoped the period of neoliberalism and its impact on hope which have been interwoven through the decades.

Whilst the direct and short response to the research question is that despite decades of neoliberalism and growing inequalities, hope can indeed be found in UK society, there is little evidence to show that hope can be found in the social policy itself. Hope emerged through the narrative of community participation which in turn provides its own challenges, specifically in terms of capturing the data in such a way as to quantify the ability of hope to reduce inequalities. Further research is undoubtedly required to identify a link where hope is shown to be powerful enough to do this. The challenge is further complicated by the conclusion that hope itself proved nebulous, despite the key writings referenced. This persistent tension between tangible narratives of hope and a lack of quantifiable data led the researcher to make some unexpected conclusions. This surprising outcome formed through the identification of key characteristics of hope through community participation against the backdrop of a grossly unequal society, which had, at least in part, been formed by inadequate social policy.

Consequently, the key finding from the research was the development of a tool which could be used to consider hope in projects and policies working to reduce current inequalities and building more sustainable communities. The tool, provisionally named the Pyramid of Hope includes four main elements: universalism, participation, altruism and activism. Each of these elements emerged as key themes through the literature review and subsequent case studies, thus forming a stratum of a pyramid, hence the working title. The Pyramid of Hope meets the need for an infrastructure which appeared strongly through the research. This was further extrapolated as a need for a quality assurance or fidelity tool which emerged through this research and has formed into this reflective tool.

The importance of the four main elements were highlighted through reflections on the case studies and recognised the links between them, despite the differing aims of the projects analysed. A helicopter view facilitated by the chosen research methodology enabled such repeating themes to emerge which could subsequently lead to identification of the Pyramid of Hope's four main terms. Yet, as with hope itself, the terms can also be interpreted subjectively and this leads to the implementation and explanation of the tool. For community workers, policy makers and funders

alike, the Pyramid of Hope is intended as a starting point for conversation and discussion where questions can be asked.

In summary, the four key elements are listed below with their own description. This is intended to be complementary to the discussion chapter and will inform future practice and use of the tool.

i)   Universalism: This is enhanced inclusivity. It ensures that absolutely everyone in society has opportunity to be included and engaged. It recognises the importance of proportionate universalism for those who may need more support at challenging times of their lives but is a move away from means-testing. Universalism's form may differ but takes a simple approach by starting a discussion through questioning how people are welcomed in a community, project or policy.

ii)   Participation: The key consideration with participation is that it is active and cannot be measured purely by attendance. It concerns how well someone participates rather than how much.

iii)   Altruism: This is a form of active participation but involves generosity. Altruism involves citizens giving something of themselves for the benefit of others without expecting any return for themselves.

iv)   Activism: It is acknowledged and accepted that only a proportion of the community will engage in activism. Systemic change can happen through activism of a few representing the universal community.

There is much underlying the short summaries which have been formed through this research. Whilst it has been acknowledged that some researchers have already highlighted the importance of emotions in social policy which can be seen in BBS/Feeding Liverpool/HSN, this is further strengthened when considering participation. The case studies were chosen initially because of the clear link with the three specified policy areas. However, at quite an early stage it became increasingly challenging to look at any one in isolation. The repetition of themes across disciplines led to two particular themes emerging which could be seen as principles in each of the four elements listed above, forming part of the Pyramid of Hope. These two themes can simply be listed as emotions and economics. The latter requires further exploration and evaluation, as it is far too large a subject for this study. Emotions are an equally huge and potentially more nebulous area but are more easily reflected on here since mental health cannot be addressed without considering emotions. Additionally, the emotions experienced by those marginalised by current

inequalities was too large to ignore. The view that poverty is about more than economics was followed and is reflected in the poem at the beginning of this paper, where hope "demands nothing of us" (Dickinson, 1990). Purely economic reflections will be recommended for another piece of work.

There were several parallels that emerged through this research. Potentially most striking was a parallel with Bowlby's (1969) family attachment theory. The lack of trust accompanied by feelings of security and safety seemed to be reflected in modern society with its gross inequalities, resembled a disorganised or insecure attachment style. On a micro scale, where a child has little or no secure attachment, they behave in a disorganised or insecure way. On a macro scale, the repercussions for communities of the disorganised attachment are a myriad of mental health problems and low self-esteem. The other key parallel, particularly when developing the Pyramid of Hope, was with Maslow's hierarchy of need. This reflected Bowlby and linked with Feeding Liverpool's work insomuch as if basic needs are not met, then it is impossible to thrive. The fact that the work of Bowlby and Maslow is widely accepted gives credence to the principles which led to the conclusions being drawn here. It is this parallel that highlights the importance of acknowledging the emotive side to social policy and introducing empathy rather than the market as the dominant role.

Limitations and Recommendations

As has been stated above, further research is required to quantify the economic value of hope. The challenge with any future data collection will be the inability to capture hope. Nevertheless, once a researcher has defined the concept of hope, when consistency ensues, then financial and longitudinal impact studies of hopeful projects and policies may be possible.

Suggestions for further research would be recommended regarding transferability of findings and the application of the Pyramid of Hope in other settings. The tool requires immediate development to form a workshop or training session for community workers or project leads, with of course, participation from the community. Questions, group activities and reflective exercises need to be designed with the aim of facilitating rich discussion and evaluation of a project, as well as the Pyramid of Hope itself. An initial starting point would be with a food pantry, those working with families or in the field of mental health.

Future Directions

As has been seen, there are projects that are successfully reducing levels of food insecurity, improving adolescent mental health and changing trajectories for young families. It is important to recognise what is working and be responsive to the needs of individuals, showing compassion and offering hope. A move to more permanent spaces of belonging, with a mindset of sufficiency replacing scarcity will go some way to provide hope and inclusion. The Pyramid of Hope's four elements provide some reference for this and may evaluate future policies and projects as they work towards reducing inequalities. At the time of writing, inequalities are growing and scarcity is rife. Realistically, the Pyramid of Hope will not change UK social policy imminently, however, hope currently exists in the small projects researched. Such projects may well remain small and not become the social policy makers and shapers that they could be, leading the revolution against neoliberalism. However, it is pertinent to celebrate the hope found, to look for and subsequently encourage more universalism, participation, altruism and activism in social policy and practice to ensure UK society becomes more equal in the future. With these characteristics in place a different landscape may be envisaged; one where hope can easily be found.

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