# 'COVID-19 and low-income families: Researching together'

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**Learning Lessons from a Year Like No Other: Recommendations for a (Post)Pandemic Future**
**24th January 2022**

**Covid Realities**

Families on low incomes

during the pandemic

# Why research together?

- Growing evidence of the **adverse impacts** in our substantive area - families on a low-income – was clear.

- It was vital that we **continued to document and understand lived experiences of families living through poverty during the pandemic**, while also increasing the policy reach and potential impact of the resultant data through processes of synthesis.

- Therefore, an underpinning belief of our collective is that we can **make the clearest impact on behalf of families by working together**.

- Our collaboration is rooted in a commitment **to thinking sensitively** about how we adapt our research to the new pandemic context;

- This includes seeking to reduce additional burdens on people taking part in research; ensuring research efforts aren't needlessly duplicated; and seeking to maximise the policy impact of our **collective and emergent evidence base**;

- The project is foregrounding **collaboration over competition** or incidental co-operation over research, which can be unusual in academic research and the 'publish or perish' culture.

# Our approach

- [14 projects](14 projects) working with **over 4,000 parents and carers across the UK**;
- Meet monthly as a Special Interest Group, also individually
- **Principles** – early on in the process, as a group we developed a core set of values that underpin our collaborative work
- **Thematic mapping** – developed a set of research questions to apply to the projects
- **Support** - ideas sharing workshop around digital technologies and remote interviewing; writing retreats; solidarity

# Thematic mapping

- Conceptual mapping exercise which was informed by the following questions:

  - Who are the parents and carers your project is working with? E.g. number of children; gender; ethnicity; employment; social security; etc

  - What are the key issues facing parents and carers on a low income during COVID-19?

  - What one policy change would make a difference to the lives of parents and carers living on a low income?

# Secondary data analysis

# Key findings

- Increased **precarity** for families on a low income

- **Mental health** and isolation

- Importance of/lack of **support networks**

# Increased precarity for families on a low income

- Families on a low income who were already experiencing financial insecurity were less well prepared to cope with the pandemic (Bringing up a Family and Making Ends Meet; Covid Realities)

- Disrupted budgeting practices (Welfare at a Social Distance; Covid Realities)

- Uneven impacts on labour market (A Tale of Two Cities; Get Heard Scotland; Caring Without Sharing)

- Gendered impacts of: work, care, homeschooling (Born in Bradford; Caring Without Sharing; Couples Balancing Work, Money and Care)

# Mental health and isolation

- Lockdown measures and restrictions generally had greater negative effect on mental health amongst families already on low incomes / people already experiencing hardship and inequalities (Born in Bradford; Covid Realities)

- Fears about contracting Covid-19 and the possible health implications of that. Heightened concerns amongst some participants from minoritized ethnic backgrounds (Covid Realities)

- Isolation leading to mental ill health – especially for single parents (Caring Without Sharing; Benefits Changes and Larger Families; Covid Realities)

- Fears about £20 UC cut (prior to October 2021) caused anxiety about making ends meet on even less (Couples Balancing Work Money and Care)

- Some families reported improved mental health – spending time with family (Following Young Fathers Further; Born in Bradford; Benefits Changes and Larger Families)

# Importance of/lack of support networks

- Even while informal support networks were harder to access at the height of the pandemic, they remained essential for many (UC in Salford; Covid Realities; Benefit Changes and Larger Families)

- Parents who lived apart from their children sometimes struggled to see them (Following Young Fathers Further)

- Formal support services moving online worked for some people and not for others (Forces in Mind; Get Heard Scotland; Following Young Fathers Further)

- Role of research projects in providing online community (UC:Us; Covid Realities; Commission on Social Security)
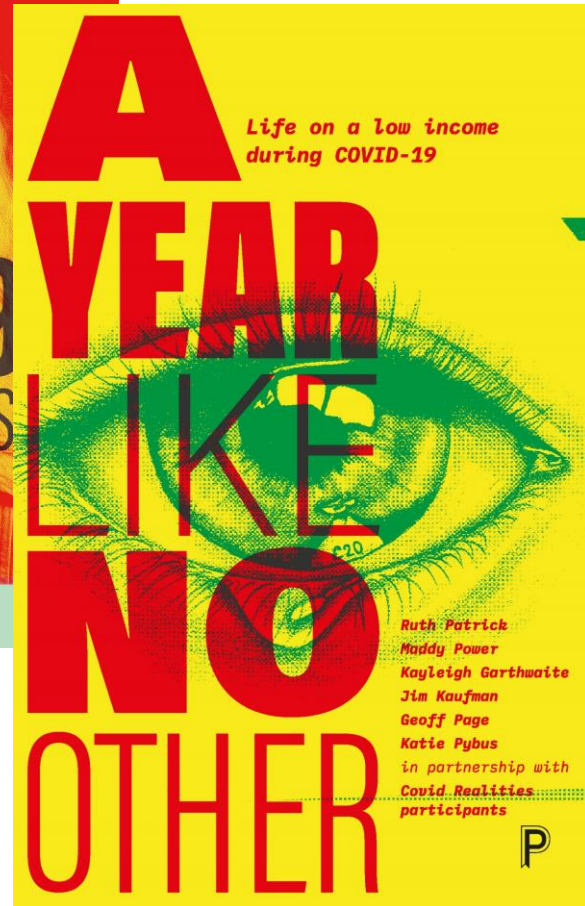
# Find out more:

- Researcher Resources
  https://covidrealities.org/research/resources


- Joint blog on our approach:
  https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/iprblog/2020/11/20/researching-together-the-value-of-collaboration-between-researchers-of-poverty-and-low-income-during-covid-19/

"Something needs to change. We cannot continue to pretend that being in work means not being in poverty."
**Mel,** Covid Realities participant

"We're asking for a fundamental change in the way we are seen and treated within the system. We want to be respected enough to not have to prove ourselves at every single turn."
**Catherine**, Covid Realities participant, extract from speech at parliamentary event, March 2021

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