

People in poverty - how they view media coverage

by Dan Paskins, formerly of the UK Coalition Against Poverty

In a series of workshops on communication of poverty, discussion groups of people on low incomes were asked for their views on how poverty is discussed in the media. They were given stories from a range of different newspapers about poverty and asked for their responses to them.

Their advice to journalists included 'the need to build up trust', that they ought to realise that people won't just tell them their life story straight away, because poverty can be a very difficult subject to talk about, especially the fear of being judged by others who will read the story. They should work on stories which challenge people's attitudes about 'scroungers' or people who live in housing estates. For example, when talking about 'scroungers' why not talk about tax avoidance and tax evasion as well as benefit fraud?

When talking about benefit fraud why not talk about the amount lost in bureaucratic error and also talk about those who do not claim benefits to which they are entitled?

Commenting on an extract from the Daily Mirror, written on International Day for Poverty Eradication, 17 October, participants said how it was good to give information and facts on poverty. But participants felt that the photograph which was used was a stereotype and suggested that all families living in poverty conformed to the image of an unhappy lone parent. Why not show the rest of the family (the woman is wearing a wedding ring but there's no sign of the father in the picture)? They felt that people would just turn over the page and not want to read the rest of the story.

They also felt that the piece would be much more effective if it was less unrelentingly negative. The phrase in the title 'no hope' suggested that there was nothing that could be done, and hence no point in people engaging with it. Just by putting a question mark at the end of the strapline, it could give a different tone to the piece, particularly if it included some of the ideas for how to do something about poverty.

(from [Reporting poverty in the UK](#) pp36-7)