

## Reporting poverty Images – photography and filming

This looks at issues surrounding graphic representations of poverty. It is based on extracts from [Reporting poverty in the UK](#).

### Introduction

Poverty in the UK is not easy to illustrate: it is a long way from the simplicity of images of such as Gin Lane by William Hogarth in the 18th Century or pictures of starving African children. There is no one image that can symbolise the subject, in the way, for instance, that a picture of a hospital can for health issues. As with words, photography and filming needs to be handled very sensitively.

### Illustrating poverty

#### Avoid preconceptions

The starting point must be to aim for an image that accurately represents the situation of the people or person being featured, that is, as they are.

#### Willing participants

Finding someone can be a challenge. Given the stigma attached to poverty, many people are unwilling to be portrayed as poor. Even when you do find someone, they may well make great efforts to look good – few people in any circumstance like ‘bad’ photos of themselves.

#### Anonymity

There are many ways of disguising people’s identities through over-the-shoulder shots, silhouettes or pixelation. Another approach is stylisation, or use of an illustration. Some other approaches are shown below. Photos of the interiors of people’s homes may be another approach in some circumstances, or perhaps the area where they live.

#### Sources

For general pieces, it may be appropriate to use stock shots to illustrate a story. There are a small number of photo agencies that specialise in social issues and have good examples, which may help. Details are listed at the end of this paper.

#### Captions

A caption can change the significance or context of a picture, and this is another area where great sensitivity is needed, so subeditors need to be well-briefed. The positive impact of an otherwise understanding piece can be wrecked if the caption beside it says something like: ‘Mary Smith in the hovel she calls home’. In some cases, captions may be superfluous.

## Examples

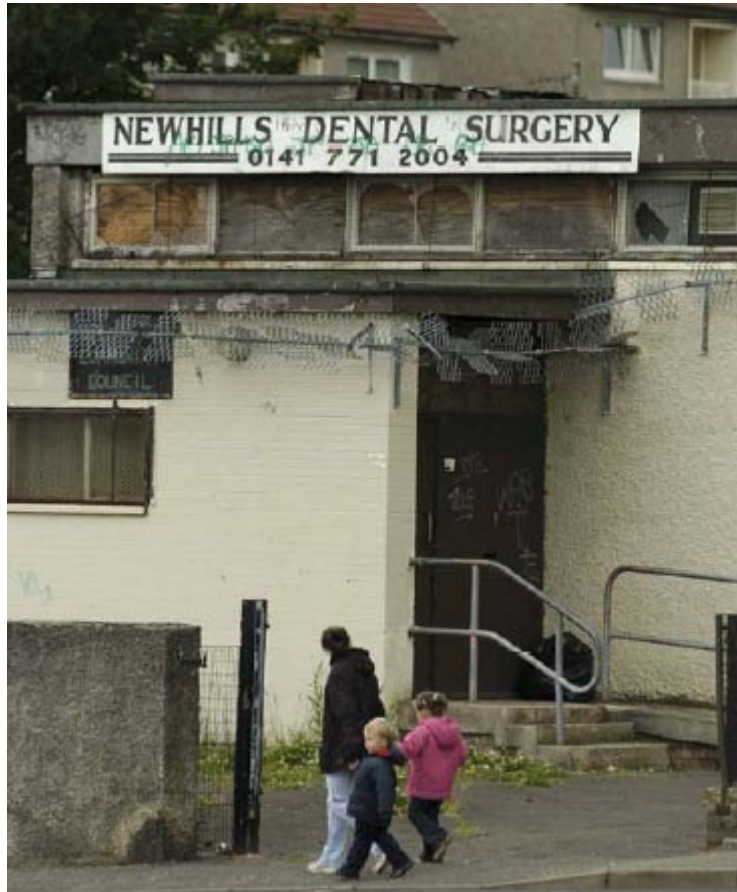
The following examples were used in *Reporting poverty in the UK*.



Some people might think they don't look poor but, like any proud mother, she doesn't want her children or herself to appear to be in need.



A stark illustration that living in poverty can mean feeling trapped in a bleak existence.



Closure of amenities in deprived communities and transport difficulties in rural areas add to the daily challenges of living in poverty.



Rundown estates are often out of sight and out of mind for many people



Images of life on a low income do not have to be bleak. This shot is a good example of 'reportage' style photography, showing life as it is.



A very simple image that gets to the root of what poverty is about.



Two clever ways of disguising the identities of subjects.



In the right circumstances, this sort of shot can help illustrate an article on poverty without the need to show people.



An evocative way to show poverty while at the same time protecting the child's identity.

### **Photo agencies**

Leading voluntary organisations and charities involved with poverty have photo libraries, or may be able to help source appropriate pictures. There are a few photo agencies that specialise in photography on social issues, or which have been able to provide appropriate shots, and these are listed below.

John Birdsall Social Issues Photo Library which is now based at PA Photos

<http://www.paphotos.com/>

David Hoffman Photo Libraries

<http://archive.hoffmanphotos.com/c/hoffman>

Guzelian

<http://www.guzelian.co.uk/>

Photofusion

<http://www.photofusionpictures.org/>

Janine Wiedel Photolibrary

<http://archive.wiedel-photo-library.com/c/wiedel>