

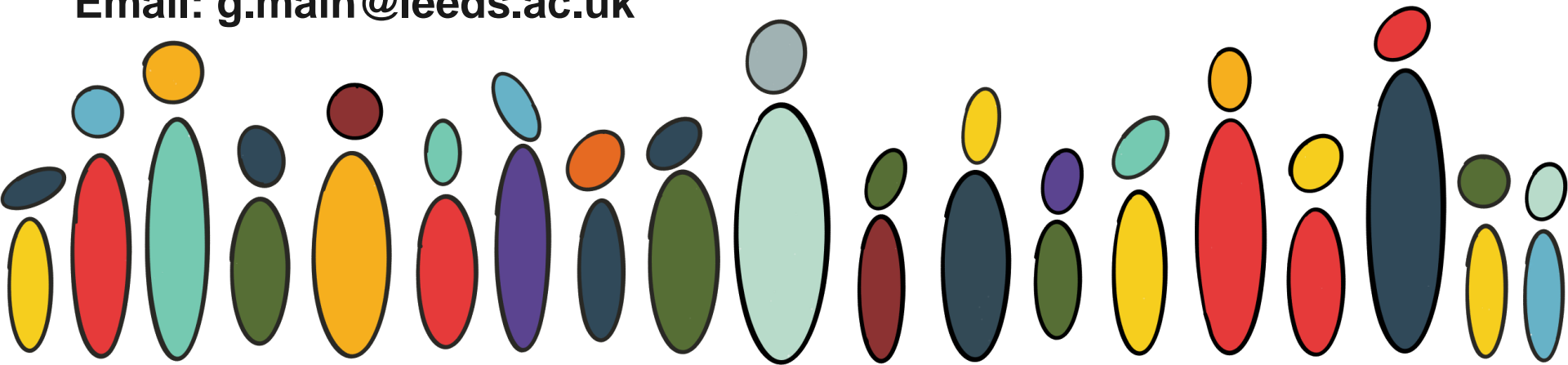


# **Child poverty and the consensual method: Including children in how we conceptualise, define, measure and address child poverty**

BPI Advanced Poverty Research Methods Online Course, 1<sup>st</sup>  
December 2021

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# Why child poverty?



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- Importance of child poverty to child well-being and well-becoming
  - For children during childhood
  - For the adults children become
  - For the societies in which poor children live
- Policy attention to child poverty at national and international levels
  - UN: Sustainable Development Goals
- Intersecting crisis impact children in particular and push more children into poverty: COVID-19, climate crisis



# Traditional approaches to measuring child poverty



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- Dominant measures focus on household and/or adult
  - Household income
  - Adult-identified needs (experts/parents)
  - Adult-reported deprivations (parents)
- Children positioned as passive in the household economy
  - A net drain on resources
  - 'Top down', unidirectional influence
- Children positioned as ignorant of poverty
  - Unaware of their relative material living conditions
  - Unaware of stresses on parents/carers
  - Transparent in their needs and wants

Ridge, 2002; Main and Bradshaw, 2012



# The components of child poverty

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- ‘Child poverty’ requires us to consider both ‘child’ and ‘poverty’ (Main, 2013)
- Focus tends to be on ‘poverty’ – but only minimally
  - Lack of resources: usually low income
  - Impact on lives: victimhood
  - Absence of theory of agency: *command over* resources (Townsend, 1979)
- ‘Child’ tends to be ignored (Main, 2019)
  - Implicit acceptance of developmental theories of childhood
  - Limited engagement with sociological theories of childhood
  - ‘Being’ and ‘becoming’ both seriously impacted by poverty



# Evidence for the sociological approach

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- Children – including children in poverty – are actively involved in making sense of and negotiating their lives (Ridge, 2002)
- Children in poverty exercise agency in many ways (Main and Mahony, 2018)
  - Seeking ways to earn money or obtain resources
  - Strong awareness of, and attempts to reduce, parental stress
  - Sense-making: engagement in narratives around poverty
- Vulnerability to maltreatment does not negate agency
  - Children absolutely require protection from poverty
  - Threats to child safety are often linked to poverty
  - Ignoring the fact that children can and do exhibit agency increases, rather than reduces, risks and vulnerability

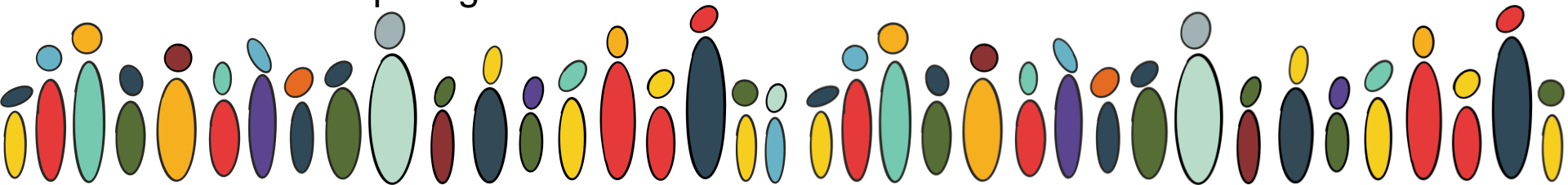


# Intra-household sharing: what can we learn from gender?



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- Studies of intra-household resource sharing demonstrate that we cannot assume equitable access to or control over resources (Bennett, 2013)
- Children's experiences often mirror those of women (Main and Mahony, 2018)
  - Narratives of 'breadwinner' justify limited autonomy
  - Most 'invisible' in the 'black box' of the household
  - Active in the protection of others from financial stress
- Fairness is an important principle – and associated with well-being (Main, 2019)
  - Strong sensitivity to (perceived) injustices
  - Open discussions of family resources reduce stress
  - Appropriate levels of control over resources beneficial
  - Strong capacity to understand constraints on budgets and competing demands



# Children *and* adults: avoiding false binaries

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- The inclusion of children's knowledge can be controversial and provoke strong reactions
- Intent needs to be clear
  - Adding to, not replacing, adult knowledge
  - Respecting children's rights: to participation and to protection
- There is no limit on the forms of expertise we can include
  - Children's experiential expertise
  - Adults' experiential expertise
  - Popular perspectives – the consensual approach
  - Expert knowledge: academic perspectives from sociology, psychology, health, education...; practice knowledge
  - Policy considerations: what is needed, what is realistic?



# The consensual approach: findings from diverse countries

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- Inspired in the UK by inconsistencies between qualitative and quantitative studies
  - Strong impacts of poverty on well-being noted in consultations with children (Ridge, 2002)
  - Limited if any correlations between poverty and subjective well-being (Knies, 2010)
- Children's perspectives hypothesised to be the missing link (Main, 2013)
  - Access to resources mediated by household-level actions
  - Impact of resources on daily life unexamined
- A research agenda in the making!





# Beyond deprivation indices: what else should we measure?

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- Economic activity: formal or informal, including activity which promotes the economic well-being of the household and family
- Relative position as an individual and at the level of the family: can be a powerful factor in their well-being
- Subjective poverty: satisfaction with their access to resources
- Intra-household processes and outcomes: how resources are shared is important whether or not the context is poverty
- Attitudes towards poverty: children are active in producing and reproducing narratives which hinder societal progress in addressing poverty



# Improving lives: measurement matters

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- Children hold knowledge about their needs which is not accessible to adults
- Children have a right to have a say in decisions which affect their lives
- Children are, whether we like it or not, active in managing their material well-being. Their economic activities exist whether we like it or not.
- Including children's perspectives alongside those of other experts increases the knowledge base from which we can fight poverty
- Anti-poverty policy will be more effective if it is based on a holistic understanding of the issue, including how it is experienced by children in poverty, and how this experience relates to adult and wider societal narratives



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# Thank you!

## All questions and comments welcome!

