

*City Survivors: Bringing up children  
in disadvantaged neighbourhoods*

Anne Power, LSE

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# Families matter to cities

- Anchoring the workforce
- Youthful energy and enthusiasm
- Future vitality
- “Taming” influence
- Social and protective instincts, sharing imperative environmental antennae

# Families matter to cities

- *“We had a battle to keep the green behind our house but we have. The kids like it – the wildlife. We get foxes and bats.”*
- *“At the end of the day you have to concentrate on the youngsters, to help them forget the parents they’ve got.”*
- *“It’s friendly and caring here, we look out for each other.”*

# Families leave cities

- Seeking healthier, safer, calmer environments
- Ambitions for children – better schools
- Escaping dirt, noise, pressures, instability
- Wanting more controlled environment
- Finding cheaper and bigger housing

# Families leave cities

- *“Families make up neighbourhoods because they are the foundation stone of communities.”*
- *“If I could take them somewhere else and bring them up, I would.”*
- *“People that I’ve known have moved out because families want better for their children.”*
- *“I want somewhere nice for her to grow up.”*

Annie

# Families concentrate in poorer urban areas

- Cheap housing attracts younger and poorer
- Service workers are low paid and need to be near jobs
- Families have tighter budgets because of more dependents
- Poorer families occupy poorer homes
- Lone parents, minorities and low skilled also concentrated
- Low income areas deter people with choice
- Good and affordable family housing is scarce

# Families concentrate in poorer urban areas

- *“It’s just widening the gap between the poor and the rich. The bad houses are still for people without money.”*
- *“There are no facilities for the children, no parks or play centres or nurseries. The poor state of the houses. The place is neglected. Everything here is just the lowest grade, and very dirty.”*
- *“Is it the people? Who put the people here? I’m trying to wonder why this place is so bad, is it because it’s the East End? West London is a different area completely. Every corner they have leisure centres, parks. We all live in London. But the old view of people in the East End, the old stereotype, still hangs around. Some neighbourhoods are better in terms of their environment, litter etc but estates are all the same.”*

# Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South

- Threatening, neglected, poorly maintained neighbourhood conditions
- Precarious, unstable community relations
- Families experience multiple pressures and problems
- Too few supports for positive parenting
- Too many strangers – locals v. outsiders
- Too heavy-handed interventions

## Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Threatening, neglected, poorly maintained neighbourhood conditions

*“I got an offer of an upstairs maisonette. It was awful ... really hard to lug the buggy upstairs ... tiny bedrooms ... the bathroom was totally filthy. The council expected me to move in by Monday but I couldn't move into that filth with my children.... So then they offered me a maisonette ... ground floor with a garden. It was all boarded up but I accepted it without seeing inside ... It was an absolute wreck. There was serious water penetration. The beds and TVs in the boys' rooms got regularly drenched. I discovered the wall in one bedroom literally bulging with water. I just started shouting, ‘Get me out of here’”.*

Joyce

Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Precarious, unstable community relations

*“I can’t lock my child away. So I only let her play with certain children, which is wrong, but it’s my way of protecting her. I don’t really mix. I don’t focus around the area. I don’t really keep her within the vicinity round here because of the way things are and the way people are.”*

Flowella

Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Families experience multiple pressures and problems

*“Broken families, that doesn’t help. It’s really hard. I can speak from experience.”*

Sola

Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Too few supports for positive parenting

*“They’ve pulled all the swings down. The kids have nowhere to play. We tried to fight the council to stop them taking our play area away but they sold it to private buyers. They should be doing more for children, for example on that green there. But then you’d get old people moaning. You could have a time restriction like 8 o’clock.”*

Zoe

Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Too many strangers – locals v.outsiders

*“Some people are angry, they don’t accept us. The older people say things. When they see you’re not English, they say, ‘You’re trouble, go back to your own country, you don’t belong in this country’”.*

Luiza

Bringing up children is a struggle – North and South: Too heavy-handed interventions

*“They made decisions without seriously consulting the tenants or local people. They seem to think local people made decisions by not living there, but there were reasons for that, like disrepair.”*

Phoebe

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Community links, social networks, local activity
- Inward focus on their children's survival and progress
- Brokering dangers and protecting their children
- Establishing friendly rapport with neighbours
- Fearing and “accepting” change and diversity
- Getting involved, helping and training

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Community links, social networks, local activity

*“It increases our sense of safety, physically and emotionally. It helps you relate to people more openly and work together for things to get better in the community.”*

Marissa

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Inward focus on their children's survival and progress
- Brokering dangers and protecting their children

*“When they were young, they didn't go out playing because it's not safe. We don't know the neighbours because when I look at the behaviour, they have bad language in school and on the bus. I have control over them. In Sudan swearing is bad and you have to behave good.”*

Kali

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Establishing friendly rapport with neighbours

*“It’s good for parents with young kids who need to get out to get some adult conversation. It helped Emily to play with other kids, it helped her to settle into nursery, it was a good environment. Sure Start do a whole diversity of groups. There’s a toy library and you can borrow tables and chairs and things for 20p a week. It’s good for parents on Income Support.... The project’s well known with the parents.”*

Olivia

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Fearing and “accepting” change and diversity

*“I’ve lived here all my life but it’s not the same as when we were growing up. I don’t like the changes. It feels like the heart’s been ripped out of the East End”*. The main problem for Lesley was too much change: *“They’ve just piled loads of people in here and pushed us out”*.

Lesley

# Families manage to survive bad conditions through:

- Getting involved, helping and training

*“I’m doing this course to try to get a job ... I wouldn’t have even thought about it if I hadn’t done that little course last year and the tutor said to me I was really good and could go on”.*

Fatima

# Why stories?

- True picture from the ground
- Lived area experience
- 300 different questions per family
- Revealing the images of life
- “Telling” it like it is

*“Why are these studies done? Is anything going to change because of it? If it’s just more statistics on a graph, then why? If it will change things, great.”*

Joyce

# Cold facts are relevant and prove argument

- But understanding generates support
- Shared values and aspirations create solidarity
- Paths that never cross become tangible
- Makes basic need for community transparent

*“Community spirit matters, especially when you’re bringing up kids, so they have a sense of where they are. I was brought up by my nana and I knew everybody and it was safe. Mine can go next door or in the street. One way has no kids but the other way has two girls and we swap nights for them to come round or mine to go there to have tea, so we speak more than once a day. We sit and have a natter or we go shopping together. People like to get involved in things. I like to be involved. We had an anniversary party for an elderly resident. It was in the street and the whole street came and it made her day”.*

Louise

# Vital message: make cities family friendly

- Keep links and bring together
- Keep special programmes and activities
- Go more gently and listen
- Supervise public spaces
- Maintain, reinvest
- Local control where possible
- Co-op, local organisations and institutions

*“We’re lucky we have skinheads who are anti-racists”.*

Kamal

*“It makes a difference because it gives you an opportunity to play a part in the community, get to meet other local people and bring people together. And there are people who help each other out quite a bit. They take parcels in next door. I lent a hand to a woman over the road and to my neighbours on the other side. I sorted out some kids’ clothes for someone over the back and I asked the chap next door to get a rottweiler out of my garden”.*

Becky

*“Funding is difficult to get. You have to apply hand-to-mouth. Therefore there’s insecurity for the club. Other people have got the strings to pull and lots of money. We haven’t got the time but also we don’t know what’s going on. I haven’t always got time to go to external network meetings. We’ve got funding from New Deal but not for workers. The money is to help buy things we need. But it’s no use if we’ve no workers for the club. It’s going through constant crisis. One woman has left us in the lurch a bit; now I’m doing both jobs, organising and fundraising”.*

Phoebe

*“...they were bullying another boy. He was asked to go and do something he didn’t want to do. He was running away, and this big one just grabbed him by the shirt and said ‘You’re not going nowhere, you just stop with us. You grass on us and I’ll beat the hell out of you’. And I thought, ‘If that was my son, or even if I knew the parents of that boy I’d tell them to do something’. He didn’t want to be with them or to do something bad. But he couldn’t leave because he might’ve got beaten up or something. I’ve seen those things and I think it’s horrible.”*

Cynthia

*“They should have more policemen on the beat. Outsiders think it’s rough and they’re right”.*

Ellie

*“We could have a say a bit more. After all, we’ve got to live round here”.*

Zoe

# We can help

- Equalise conditions
- Make children and youth our top priority
- Recognise societal burden on fragile communities
- Create respect
- Cross racial and class divides

*“In secondary school they don’t bother with black kids.”*

Sola

*“Afterschool activities, with secure supervision; use of land and space – all kinds of things for kids.”*

Flowella

*“They wouldn’t attend meetings about their kids damaging property. At the end of the day people just want kids out of the way. People expect them to be taped up and not making any noise”.*

Olivia

*“We have not choice but we’re not animals. They said we were overcrowded, but they only sent us here.”*

Kali

*“I would build some kind of community centre, for people like us to chat and socialise so that we can get out of the house.”*

Yonca

# What are the costs?

- Neglect ends in disorder
- Care creates havens

*“Recently they built a really nice play area for the children and that’s made a big difference to the families here. Every morning I walk past and see lots of parents in there with children, whereas before people would just walk through the park and not stop – a big green space and no one using it. It was a shame. It’s really nice to see families there and nice for me, because I can sit down on a bench while my youngest plays after school. It’s good for her because I don’t let her out. Chantelle said to me, ‘Mum, can we go in there before it gets all broken?’”*