
LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

The video testimonies in this film were collected in Birmingham, Glasgow and Gloucestershire during 2012 and 2013.

THE RISING COST OF LIVING

Things have always been hard but since January of this year it's not been hard – it's been impossible. Absolutely impossible. I don't know how people survive.

Interviewer

So is your income – what kind of an income do you have at the moment?

It's all benefits. It's all benefits and the money stays the same but cost of living has just gone out of the roof.

The food prices are always going up and up. There's some food you have to pay VAT now which wasn't there before. Even on clothes you have to pay VAT now. So it's not coming off. Prices are going up every – every so often – every month. Every time you go shopping and you buy same thing they've stuck a few pence on it

I've had to cut down because my house is actually a cold house anyway so I'm trying obviously to keep the gas now but my heater's not on and it's a cold house because it doesn't have double glazed windows and things like that my house is damp and I mean it's just terrible I just can't get a house with that kind of scenario –

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

Interviewer

And you rent from a housing association – is that right?

Housing association yeah –

Interviewer

But you've had some problems have you with this?

With the dampness and things like that and I think it's you know – oh what do you call that – condensation you know aye like condensation so I said to the housing officer Basically do you know what I mean? I don't know if it's last year or the year before it was icicles actually inside my window and I went to the housing and he says oh that's not an emergency and I went excuse me – that's not an emergency? ... I said that window could break because it's actually unsafe the window Oh pipes and things like that Okay – fine.

It's just the cost of living in general has gone up – obviously fuel and everything else. You know that's had a big impact because you know I can't afford to heat my home sometimes you know and we have had times when we've had to sit with no heat because that's how bad things are you know.

I don't eat in the day so I know I've got enough money at the end of the week to buy food. My boy eats all the time. I have dinner with him because I can't not eat with my child. It's not fair. But I don't do anything because I can't afford bus fares. I can't afford petrol in my car and I literally get stuck here.

Well when you have a session it affects you anyway when you have no – no job and obviously you have very little money in

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

your pocket so it affects you in every field err I mean when you're working – when I was working I used to go out down the pub, have a couple of pints, have a laugh and a joke with the mates and you feel happy and in the morning go to work but now I can't do that so I've lost all my friends. I can't afford to go down the pub. And same thing with - even with the food because I have no money you look for nearly out of date or out of date foods you have to go to Tesco's and supermarkets so you go to them but obviously it's not good for your health worker but that is all you can afford.

CUTS TO SERVICES

We used to have one – we used to have more coach places here. We used to have one in Posmead – they had one in Posmead but that had to be shut because of funding and then we had ... which is where I was working before I come here but that had to be shut because of funding so all these charity places And stuff like that they're all getting closed down. Same as the youth ones – they've all closed down. There's no youth – no young kids – there's nothing like that round here or round by where I live anyway.

Interviewer

And what impact do you think the cuts have had then for you and for your community?

For everybody it's – it's kids just gone wild again. The kids are just roaming the streets like they used to years – well not long ago. The impact for me is you've got to worry just in case your house gets broken into – all the youths and stuff and things like

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

that now but of course I've got two daughters and at the end of the day ...

Interviewer

So it feels less safe than it did in the past?

It does. You can't walk the streets no more on your own. You've got to be maybe two, three of you – so –

Interviewer

Is that even during the day or?

No day times not too bad. It's just mainly night time. As soon as it starts going dusk they start. You see them all roaming the streets and you're thinking are they gonna break in tonight – know what I mean? Especially White City -

Interviewer

And that's - you think part of that is because -

It's because they've got nothing to do. They've got nothing to do they just - know what I mean - because when they used to have these youth places they'd go in there and do what they had to do and then by – I think they used to shut about nine o'clock then the kids would go home you know. You didn't see any kids on the street then but these now cuts have knackered it for everybody.

It would be disastrous because last few months it's definitely getting worse because you got to the souper now on a night at eight o'clock and you're getting kids there – you're getting babies, seven, eight years of age going down there for food.

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

This shouldn't be happening. It shouldn't be happening in this country. It's not – it's not Africa or somewhere like that you know what I mean? It's not Ethiopia. This shouldn't be happening. The government – I mean – I dunno – they live in a bubble don't they? They don't see things that we see. I mean David Cameron was in Birmingham last week – I'm sure he didn't go round the souper and say this shouldn't be happening you know what I mean? I'm sure he didn't come down here and see why is there so many people coming down here?

Interviewer

What effect do you think cuts in funding of local services would have for you? I mean do you think that – have you noticed you know have they had any impact on you – the cuts in services?

What do you mean – in places like this? I've noticed that they are struggling a lot here. It's not affected me because they've not let it affect the clients I don't think but if it got to the stage where this sort of place had to close I think that would be awful because so many people are helped here and so many more people will need help if it closed. The knock on effect would be just awful I think. I can't imagine – I don't want to imagine what it would do you know. They offer so much help here and people need that.

FINDING WORK

If I could get a job I would get a job – know what I mean? But there's so many people want the same job now so at the end of the day you're working against everybody now. So it's say if I wanted a job – I'm a cleaner originally a cleaner so if I'm going for a job as a cleaner you could be getting about six or seven

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

people at the same time and nine times out of ten you –
because of my age at fifty as well so you know what I mean
you've got no - you have got a chance but it's a little chance –
know what I mean to get a job in Gloucester unless you go to
Cheltenham and stuff like that know what I mean and that's
travelling by bus – that's gonna cost for a day ride into town it's
three pound forty and then you've ... a ticket to go Cheltenham
and then you have to buy another ticket to go to Cheltenham

Interviewer

So it's three forty to get into town and then another –

Another about four or five pound to get into Cheltenham on a
different ticket. So that's a lot of money know what I mean?

Interviewer

So that's thirty or forty pounds a week to get there?

Precisely

Interviewer

So there's not many jobs in the Gloucester area?

Not in the Gloucester area –

Interviewer

But would you – would you consider

I would travel yeah – I would travel

Interviewer

Would you consider moving somewhere else?

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

I'm one of those who are moving anyway because I'm down sizing but still in Gloucester. I would travel but all my kids are in Gloucester so and grand children

Interviewer

And you've lived here all your life –

And I've lived all my life. I would move if I didn't have no kids or nothing like that know what I mean?

Interviewer

But because you've got family –

I've got all family round so –

Interviewer

Yeah

So stay in Gloucester

I've applied for so many jobs and no ones bothered to even have the decency to say sorry this time I couldn't – no apology or anything. Its just I apply and nothing

Interviewer

Nothing comes back – yeah

It really like gets me down but it's the fact that they don't reply that gets me.

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

Interviewer

So none of them acknowledge that you've actually applied. That must be very difficult. So when you apply for jobs do you know – I mean roughly how many jobs would you say you think you've applied for already this year?

This year - after eighty different positions

Interviewer

That's a lot isn't it because it takes a lot of time?

Exactly. I mean I just want to get into any job just to give me that budget so once I've got ... but no one even bothers.

Interviewer

So when you're applying what sort of jobs are you applying for then?

Cleaning, retail - any possible – any job that I've seen in a window I go in and just apply because it's just trying to get that job.

Video testimonies were collected by:

Dr Simon Pemberton (University of Birmingham)

Dr Eldin Fahmy (University of Bristol)

Dr Eileen Sutton (University of Bristol)

Assisted by Dr Karen Bell (University of Bristol)

LIFE ON A LOW INCOME IN AUSTERE TIMES – PART ONE

Edited by Liaket Ali (Open University)

The PSE team would like to thank the participants and organisations who generously gave their time and offered their support to the project.

The PSE team would also like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this research project.

ESRC Grant Res-060-25-0052