

Institution: The University of Manchester		
Unit of Assessment: 14 (Geography and Environmental Studies)		
Title of case study: The Everyday Austerity Project: Shaping welfare policy and practice and shifting public understanding of the everyday impacts of austerity in the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: October 2012 – October 2015		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sarah Marie Hall	Reader in Human Geography	2012 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>University of Manchester research into the impacts of austerity on everyday life has challenged the perception that austerity is only an economic and political condition. By improving understanding of austerity and informing the work of key influential organisations (including Citizen's Advice, Manchester City Council and Department for Work and Pensions), the research has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. influenced policy-making on flexible and informal childcare, families, welfare and austerity, at UK local and national scales; 2. invigorated creative ethnographic practice for organisations concerned with poverty reduction, which has led to sustained organisational change; 3. shaped public understanding of how austerity is 'lived' in everyday life. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>One of the first major in-depth, longitudinal ethnographic studies on UK austerity [1], Dr Hall's research began as a three-year Hallsworth Research Fellowship at the University of Manchester (2012-2015). Whereas previous research traditionally focused on governmental perspectives, this study explored everyday life in austerity with two years of intensive fieldwork (2013-2015) in Greater Manchester, a region that has experienced significant austerity cuts since 2010 [1-3]. Hall studied the everyday lives of families and communities in Argleton (pseudonym used to protect participants' identities), an 'average' Greater Manchester town in terms of markers of wealth and impoverishment and ethnic/racial diversity, to ascertain the lived impacts of austerity policies on social relationships. [1,4]. Adopting a relational geographical approach, the primary method employed was participant observation, supported by taped discussions and knowledge elicitation tasks (including photo elicitation); providing participants with visual stimuli to encourage them to discuss their experiences [2,3,5].</p> <p>The key insights were:</p> <p>1. Austerity is a deeply personal <u>and</u> social condition that has lasting impacts on both intimate and wider social relationships. Prior research predominantly theorised austerity as an economic and political condition. Hall's research marks a significant departure by conceptualising and empirically demonstrating that it is also a personal and social condition with lasting impacts on relationships both presently and prospectively [1,4,5]. Seeing austerity as a personal and social condition does not preclude economic or political concerns. Rather, it highlights that these concerns must be considered alongside everyday relationships, which had hitherto been neglected and where people are affected on multiple fronts [1,5]. Hall's research revealed that everyday relationships under austerity are subject variously to change and continuity. Conceptualising austerity as a personal and social condition - rather than an ideology or inevitability - acknowledges that it has real and tangible impacts on individuals, families and entire communities [1,3,5].</p>		

2. The impact of austerity on social and more intimate relationships is unevenly spread across families and communities in ways not previously acknowledged in academic or policy literature. The research investigated how the UK's austerity policies were felt 'on the ground'. It found that austerity exposes and exacerbates socio-economic inequalities. The disproportionate impact of these policies was distinctly gendered. Cuts were targeted on public institutions, social welfare and care infrastructures (sectors with a predominantly female workforce and client base) [1-4], with BAME women most negatively affected by austerity [6]. Additionally, the research found that women were typically burdened with managing the impact of these cuts through formal/informal employment and care responsibilities, and in the pivotal contributions that they made to everyday social support systems, or 'social infrastructures' via their family, friendship and neighbourhood relationships [1-3]. Better government investment in and protection of these everyday social infrastructures, such as flexibility in childcare offerings [1,2], is necessary in order to address the differential impacts (by gender and ethnicity) of austerity policies and their longer-term effects.

3. Methodological creativity is needed to give voice to the lived experience of austerity. The research demonstrated that to fully comprehend how austerity is entrenched within everyday life, research methods should give voice to lived experience, engaging stakeholders in meaningful and creative ways about sensitive topics [1,2,5,6]. Methodological nuance is needed to capture these experiences of how austerity impacts on personal and shared experiences in the present, and the lives people imagine themselves leading. Methods should be appropriate for the context, and mindful of ethical complications of researching austerity and the long-term socio-economic impacts [1,3]. The approach adopted in the research demonstrated the distinct value of in-depth, long term, multi-method ethnographic studies to document everyday practices and inform evidence-based policymaking. Accordingly, best practice on creative, participatory and innovative methods, such as biographical mapping and photo elicitation, should be widely shared.

3. References to the research

1. **Hall, S.M.** (2019) *Everyday Life in Austerity: Family, Friends and Intimate Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan.
2. **Hall, S.M.** (2020) 'The Personal is Political: Feminist Geographies of/in Austerity', *Geoforum*, 110: 242-251. DOI: [10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.04.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.04.010). ***selected as Editor's Choice***
3. **Hall, S.M.** (2017) 'Personal, relational and intimate geographies of austerity: ethical and empirical considerations', *Area*, 49(3): 303-310. DOI: [10.1111/area.12251](https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12251).
4. **Hall, S.M.** (2019) 'Everyday Austerity: Towards Relational Geographies of Family, Friendship and Intimacy', *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(5): 769-789. DOI: [10.1177/0309132518796280](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518796280).
5. **Hall, S.M.** (2019) 'A Very Personal Crisis: Family Fragilities and Everyday Conjunctures within Lived Experiences of Austerity', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44(3): 479-492. DOI: [10.1111/tran.12300](https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12300).
6. **Hall, S.M.**, McIntosh, K., Neitzert, E., Pottinger, L., Sandhu, K., Stephenson, M-A., Reed, H. & Taylor, L. (2017) *Intersecting Inequalities: The Impact of Austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic Women in the UK*. Runnymede and Women's Budget Group: London. www.intersecting-inequalities.com

4. Details of the impact

The economic downturn in the UK between 2008-2013 led to a prolonged period of low growth and fiscal austerity. Austerity policies implemented in the UK since 2010 have been described by Phillip Alston (UN Special Rapporteur) as 'ideological', 'tragic', 'harsh and uncaring'. The research has informed the work of key influential organisations, bringing the personal impacts of austerity to the fore. Findings of the research outlined in Section 2 were shared through policy briefs, data-sharing workshops, practitioner training sessions and a public exhibition, resulting in three major impacts:

1. Shaping Local and National Policy Debate

By informing the work of key influential organisations and through citation in Parliamentary debates, the research findings have had a transformational impact on national and local policy-making regarding families, welfare and austerity.

Citizen's Advice (formerly known as The Citizen's Advice Bureau) is a national charity that helps people to resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free advice and information. A respected and influential organisation in the field of social welfare, the charity also aims to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. A tailored policy briefing document entitled 'Making Childcare Decisions in Families' (detailing insight 2) was shared with Citizen's Advice, supported by three in-person data sharing sessions in London (2014-2015). As stated by Kayley Hignall, Head of Policy, insights on inequality and social infrastructures have allowed Citizen's Advice to better *"understand the negotiations and decision making stages that families were going through and how finely balanced childcare arrangements were... We rarely get insight into the impact of negotiations between partners or extended family we just get told what childcare is possible or not to allow us to work out benefits and work etc for advice purposes. Your work, added with our own allowed us to explore further the impact on families of the different findings around flexibility or payments for example"* [A].

This shift in understanding of informal childcare arrangements and the crucial role of extended family [A] influenced Citizens Advice in their recommendations [B] to the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury on childcare support structures within Universal Credit, as discussed in the House of Lords in December 2014 [C]. Recommendations included: *"The chief executives of local authorities should ensure that parents can access flexible, evening and weekend childcare and that this is routinely assessed"* [B].

Hall's findings regarding how *"informal childcare (including it not being available to some) ... factors into parents plans for the future"* [A], the importance of flexibility, and the influence on everyday spending and financial budgeting, were also included in evidence submitted by Citizens Advice to the Affordable Childcare Committee and the Childcare Payment Bill as it progressed through Parliament [A]: *"providers need to be enabled to provide flexible childcare as far as is possible bearing in mind the needs of the child. Where provision is as flexible as possible, even with additional help, yet still not suitable, consideration needs to be given to whether the local employment market is providing enough family friendly work opportunities for the local community"* [D].

A further policy brief with a Greater Manchester focus, entitled 'Lived Experiences of Poverty and Austerity in Greater Manchester' was produced for Manchester City Council's (MCC) Family Poverty Strategy Working Group, supported by two data sharing sessions and Hall's membership of the Working Group as an academic expert (2016-2017). Key insights 1 and 2, and related recommendations, are extensively quoted in Manchester City Council's Family Poverty Strategy 2017-2022 Report (2017, p.29) [E]. In Greater Manchester, Mayor Burnham adopted recommendations related to insight 2 into his campaign for re-election: *"Devolving the welfare budget would be a step in securing and enhancing social infrastructure investment across the region. It would also help to address the gendered inequalities caused by austerity policies and Universal Credit. This is now a key feature in my re-election campaign"* [F]. Based on the methodological insights of Hall's research, Citizens Advice has commissioned its own internal research and a set of project guides, implementing practical measures to move away from what was previously a reliance on quantitative data [A,B] wherein *"a separate project took place recently doing qualitative interviews with parents about their childcare arrangements"* [A]. Hall's methodological insights have also shaped the ethnographic approach to evidence-based policy now taken by Manchester City Council to provide a more 'realistic' representation of lived experiences of poverty using person-centred methods [E,G].

2. Changing professional practice for organisations concerned with poverty reduction

Hall's research has invigorated ethnographic practice within influential organisations that are concerned with securing poverty reduction, thereby enhancing their data collection and

project development practices.

As a result of the research outlined above, Hall is an invited member of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Methods Advisory Group (2019-2022), providing expert advice to the department, analysts and civil servants on ethnographic research [H]. DWP is the largest and most expensive government department. Hall has delivered ethnographic and creative research training (half day events in 2019 and workshops at the Social Learning Day 2020) for DWP civil servants in this capacity, leading to changes in research consultations and project methodologies. As confirmed by Trevor Huddleston, the DWP Chief Analyst and Chief Scientific Adviser: *"through a series of bespoke methodological training sessions with DWP government researchers and through her participation in the DWP Methods Advisory Group, Sarah Marie Hall has made an important contribution to the means by which DWP conceptualises its analytical programme. Dr Hall's innovative methods training has helped colleagues reflect upon methods designed to maximise researcher/participant encounters in the pursuit of vital and valuable information to shape current and future social policy"* [H].

Between 2016-2020 Hall was invited to deliver 18 ethnographic, participatory and creative research methods training sessions to local, regional and national organisations (including the Department for Work and Pensions, LGBT Foundation, Northern Policy Forum, Oldham City Council, Shelter, and Women Asylum Seekers Together), in order to disseminate the key methodological insights arising from her research, regarding how austerity should be approached in research and practice. These sessions involved more than 120 individuals in research, policy and activist roles, and resulted in changes in participants' perceptions and practices (evidenced by an analysis of 90 evaluation questionnaires [I]): *"After receiving the training, we changed the primary method of data collection for our research project to peer interviewing"* (LGBT Foundation, 18 months post training) [I]; *"It showed the value of storytelling, which I found helpful in developing Working Class Heroes [a peer-led research project and film documentary] - being clear about the narrative of the project [and] using methods that fit with that narrative"* (RECLAIM, 17 months post training) [I].

An increase in understanding, confidence and adoption were reported as a result of the training sessions. Prior to the sessions 62.2% of participants indicated no or limited understanding of the research methods covered by the training and 64.8% indicated no or limited confidence in using ethnographic, participatory or creative methods in their job role. Following the training, 98.9% felt they had some or full understanding, 88.5% indicated they were confident or fully confident, 98.8% indicated that they had found the course either useful (21.2%) or very useful (77.7%), and 81% reported being likely or very likely to use the methods covered by the training in their future work [I].

3. Enhancing public understanding of the impact of austerity in Greater Manchester

The research improved public understanding of austerity through the Everyday Austerity public exhibition, which toured across 15 locations in Greater Manchester from 2016-2017. Using first-hand stories from participants presented in the form of written field notes, audio clips, photographs and material objects, accompanied by illustrated vignettes from local artist Stef Bradley, the exhibition brought to life the key finding of austerity as a highly social and personal phenomena (insight 1). The exhibition attracted more than 4000 visitors (including Mayor Burnham [F]), for which Hall was awarded the Political Studies Association's inaugural Jo Cox Prize in 2017, and winner of the Outstanding Emerging Impact category at The University of Manchester's 'Making a Difference' Awards 2018.

Feedback from visitors [J] showed that there had been an impact on their thoughts about austerity as a result of visiting the exhibition, including a sensitivity to and appreciation of the 'lived', 'felt', and 'mundane' aspects of life as affected by austerity:

"It provides a real insight into the ways families cope with less and the different ways people deal with this. Really enjoyed the personal stories and how these are communicated through audio, drawings and objects."

"People's everyday experiences of austerity differ. Small choices about what to prioritise are extremely personal. Insignificant events become significant."

The exhibition had a social impact by changing public perspectives as a result of the research findings [J]:

"Austerity directly impacts more socio-economic and household groups than I thought."

"It has made me think about effects of austerity on individuals, rather than austerity as government policy."

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Statement from Head of Policy, Citizens Advice. Received May 2015.
- B. Citizens Advice Report, 'The practicalities of childcare: an overlooked part of the puzzle', www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/the-practicalities-of-childcare---an-overlooked-part-of-the-puzzle.pdf (July 2014)
- C. House of Lords Discussion on the Childcare Payments Act, 17 December 2014. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/141217-0001.htm#14121732000373>
- D. Select Committee on Affordable Childcare, Citizens Advice Bureau Written Evidence for Parliament (ACC0029): <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/affordable-childcare-committee/affordable-childcare/written/11749.html>. 14 August 2014.
- E. Manchester Family Poverty Strategy 2017-22, https://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/6929/family_poverty_strategy_2017-22
- F. Statement from the Mayor of Greater Manchester. Received March 2021.
- G. Statement from Family Poverty Strategy Lead, Manchester City Council. Received September 2018.
- H. Statement from Chief Analyst and Chief Scientific Advisor, Department for Work and Pensions. Received June 2020.
- I. Analysis of training evaluations. Evaluations collected 2016 – 2020.
- J. Analysis of attendee feedback from *Everyday Austerity* exhibition. Feedback collected 2016 – 2017.