

*Paper presented at the WELLCHI Network Conference 2*  
**Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe**  
**Different kinds of risks resulting from various structures and changes in the labour markets**

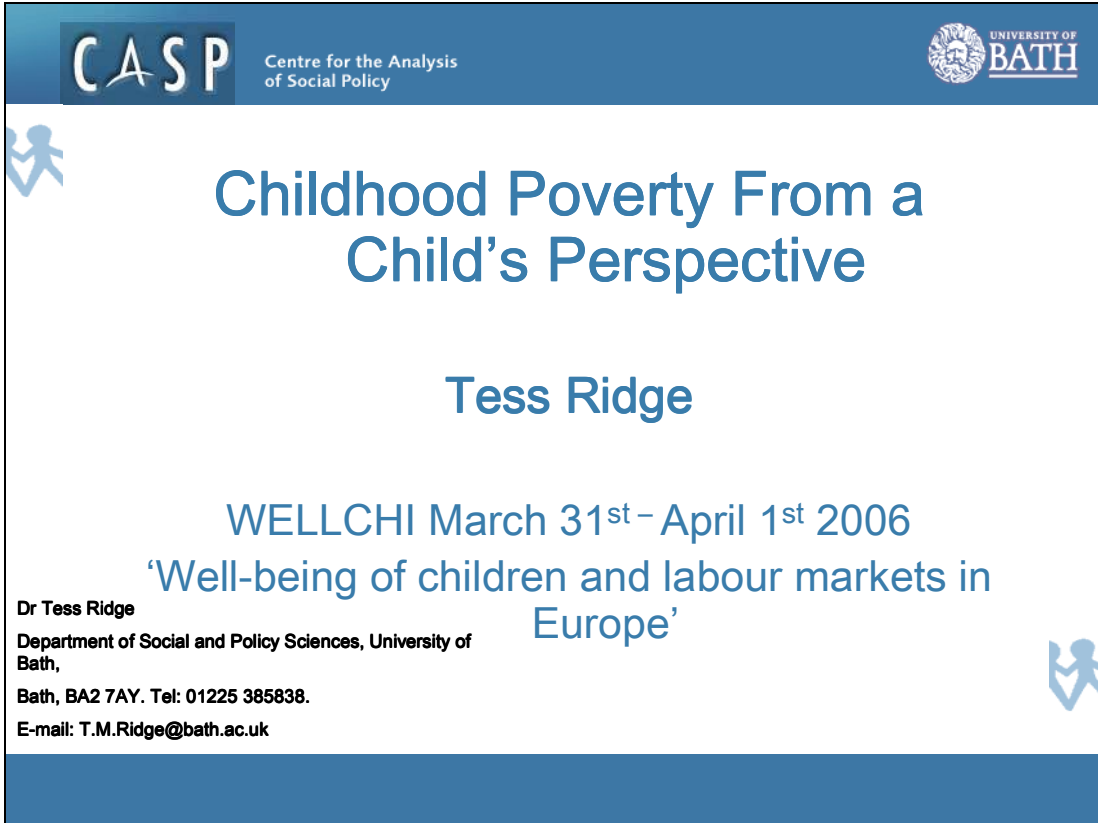
*Centre for Globalisation and Governance, University of Hamburg*  
*March 31 – April 1, 2006*

## **Childhood Poverty From a Child's Perspective**

Tess Ridge, *University of Bath*

Please do not cite or quote without permission of the author

*Slide1*



The slide features a blue header bar with the CASP logo (Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy) on the left and the University of Bath logo on the right. The main title 'Childhood Poverty From a Child's Perspective' is centered in a large blue font, with a small blue icon of a child on the left. Below the title is the author's name 'Tess Ridge' in a smaller blue font. The event information 'WELLCHI March 31<sup>st</sup> - April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006' and the conference theme 'Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe' are displayed in blue text. Contact information for Dr. Tess Ridge is provided in the bottom left corner. A small blue icon of a child is also present in the bottom right corner of the slide content area.

**CASP** Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy


UNIVERSITY OF BATH

# Childhood Poverty From a Child's Perspective


Tess Ridge

WELLCHI March 31<sup>st</sup> - April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006  
'Well-being of children and labour markets in Europe'


Dr Tess Ridge  
Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath,  
Bath, BA2 7AY. Tel: 01225 385838.  
E-mail: T.M.Ridge@bath.ac.uk



Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy





UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH




**Engaging with low-income children provides us with an opportunity to:**


- Explore some of the social processes and the relational dynamics that lie behind statistical data
- Begin to understand some of the experiences and realities of childhood poverty
- Gain an insight into the issues and concerns that low-income children themselves identify as important.



Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy




UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH




**The paper draws on findings from two empirical studies carried out with low-income children living in the UK:**

- In-depth interviews with 40 children living in families in receipt of income support (the lowest level of UK social assistance)
- In-depth interviews with 61 children who are part of an ongoing qualitative study of family life in low-income, working, lone-mother households





Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy




UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH




**Children identify three main areas where poverty is affecting their lives:**


1. Economic and material concerns
2. Social costs
3. School life and school inclusion



Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy





UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH




**1. Children's economic & material concerns**

- Worries about adequacy of family income for their needs
- Little or no access to personal spending money
- Lack of material goods and childhood possessions– including toys, games and appropriate clothing






Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy




UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH



## 2. Children's concerns about the social impact of poverty

- Affects friendships and social networks
- Reduces participation
- Vulnerable to bullying and isolation
- Fearful about difference, stigma and exclusion



Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy



UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH



## 3. Children's concerns about school life

School is a vital social environment for children

- Children feel under social and material pressure at school
- They experience
  - Economic barriers
  - Stigmatising institutional processes
- They identify exclusion *within* school



**CASP** Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy 

 **Children with mothers who started work**


- Had experienced these exclusions when on Income Support
- Where mothers had moved into relatively stable employment children generally felt more secure financially
- Economic benefits
  - Increases in spending, material goods, treats
- Social benefits
  - Increased social activity – from low base




**CASP** Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy 


 **Children whose mothers unable to secure stable employment and/or left labour market**

- Renewed fears about social exclusion and difference
- Financially insecure
- Uncertain about value of employment
- The impact of repeated moves in and out of the labour market on children's well-being is still little known or understood






Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy





UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH




## Mediating factors


- Age, income and security, family time and family practices, childcare, and perceptions of maternal well-being
- Not discrete elements overlap and intersect with each other
- Reveals complexity of children's lives and experiences
- Highlights positive and negative dimensions of change



Centre for the Analysis  
of Social Policy




UNIVERSITY OF  
BATH



## How children negotiated and managed change in their lives

- Previous experience of poverty key factor
- Strong incentives to sustain families in their 'project of work'
- Children engaged in a complex range of caring and coping strategies
- Strategies often concealed and unacknowledged
- May have far reaching implications for children's lives and well-being





Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy



## Three main strategies

- Assuming extra responsibilities
  - Housework
  - Self and sibling care
  - Emotional support
- Moderating and policing needs
  - Hiding illness
- Accepting and tolerating adverse situations
  - Childcare
  - Changes in family time



Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy



## Hearing what children say

Poverty is experienced by children in childhood amongst their peers

- Poverty damages and disrupts childhood
- Children identify economic disadvantage and fears about social costs and exclusion *within* school
- Previous experiences of poverty are significant - the fear of a return to poverty may affect children's behaviour





## Challenges for policy

- Children are active social agents producing and reproducing childhood and family life
- Children identify issues and concerns that adults may not notice or value
- They try to manage and mediate the experience of being poor and changes in family life
- Policies can have an intended and/or unintended impact on children's lives
- Low-income children may absorb some of the negative costs of policies e.g. welfare-to work policies

