



# PSDP—Resources and Tools: Thinking about the inverse intervention law

## Introduction

This learning tool links with the film by Bywaters et al (2014, 2015), '[Inverse Intervention Law](#)'. If you haven't already done so, please watch it now by either clicking on the above link, or by downloading it from the same web page as this tool.

This tool sets out some messages from research, inviting you to take a 'helicopter view' and think about structural inequality and how this may impact on the children and families you work with.

In working through guide questions, you will be asked to consider your response to the film, and your role in supporting social workers to take account of the impact of poverty and inequality in their work with children and families.

## What is the inverse intervention law?

There is evidence of a gradient in child welfare inequalities across the whole of society. Local authorities (LAs) with lower overall levels of deprivation intervene more often in the lives of children and families (Bywaters et al, 2014). However, it is more complex than this and there are a number of factors which influence intervention rates in different geographical areas (Bywaters et al, 2015).

The term ‘inverse intervention law’ describes these research findings, which highlight higher rates of child welfare intervention in the deprived areas of affluent LAs, compared with deprived areas of LAs with higher general indices of deprivation. Findings from this research study are regularly updated on the [website](#).

## A helicopter view - thinking about structural inequality

The seminal work of Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) highlights that for each of the eleven different health and social problems (physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teenage pregnancies, and child wellbeing), outcomes are significantly worse in more unequal countries, whether these countries are generally considered to be rich or poor. The UK is in fact one of the most unequal countries in the world, therefore as social workers, it is important that we consider this and how this may be influencing the lives of children who are vulnerable to these factors of inequality.

Often, in our day to day practice as practice supervisors, we become immersed in the micro level of society through our work with the children and families we encounter, and through the social workers we supervise. While this is important and useful in relationship-based practice terms, it can lead to us 'individualising' problems that families and social workers face, without considering the macro context of the society they live and work in.

As a practice supervisor, knowing the needs of children and families intimately and seeing the wider organisational and societal perspective is both challenging and important. This learning tool invites you to zoom out of the problems of individualised neglect and abuse, and take a helicopter view of the wider socioeconomic and societal circumstances of children and their families, (taking into account issues such as 'race', culture, ethnicity, religion, immigration status and so on).

## Guided questions: thinking about the inverse intervention law

The questions below are designed to guide your thinking and learning:

How does the film challenge your thinking about social work with children and families?	What is the level of deprivation in your area and which position might it be classed under according to the inverse intervention law film, i.e city borough or county shire?	How does inequality (i.e. the gap between those who have, and those who don't have / have little) play out in your local area as a result of this? Are there any groups or communities you would identify as particularly vulnerable to deprivation?
Do Children's Services unintentionally reflect, reinforce or reduce social inequalities?	What steps could you take to challenge this within your role?	What might you need to consider in your role as practice supervisor?
How do these research findings create challenges or opportunities for you in speaking to individual social workers about families where poverty is an issue?	What questions could you ask during case discussions to explore the issue of inequality?	How might you bring these ideas to the attention of your team?

## Action planning

Having considered these questions, you might want to think about how you include thinking about poverty in own supervision discussions. In order to do so it is useful to reflect on whether there are any things you do which you want to:

**stop doing**

**start doing**

**continue doing.**

## Other ways you can use this tool

Play the film at a team meeting, bring the questions and invite the team to discuss them.

Ask your team to consider what they might stop, start and continue doing, following a discussion about the film.

Link the messages from the film to a particular child and family, open to the team, and invite them to take a 'helicopter view' of that family, then consider what they might need to explore differently during their next visit.



**We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.**

## References

Bywaters P, Brady G, Sparks T and Bos E (2014) 'Child welfare inequalities: new evidence, further questions.' *Child and Family Social Work* 21 (3) 369-380.

Bywaters P, Brady G, Sparks T, Bos E, Bunting L, Daniel B and Scourfield J (2015). 'Exploring inequities in child welfare and child protection services: Explaining the "inverse intervention law"'. *Children and Youth Services Review* 57 98-105.

Wilkinson R G and Pickett K (2010). *The spirit level: Why greater equality makes societies stronger*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.

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