

# The Lies We Tell Ourselves: Ending Comfortable Myths About Poverty

*“Churches have a special interest in speaking truthfully about poverty.  
The systematic misrepresentation of the poorest in society is a matter of injustice which  
all Christians have a responsibility to challenge.”*

## 1. ‘They’ are lazy and don’t want to work

Child poverty is most commonly blamed, by churchgoers and the general public alike, on “their parents not wanting to work”. Yet the majority of children in poverty are from working households. In-work poverty is now more common than out-of-work poverty.

## 2. ‘They’ are addicted to drink and drugs

Churchgoers and the wider public cite addiction as the second most common cause of child poverty. While addiction is devastating for the families and communities touched by it, fewer than 4% of benefit claimants report any form of addiction.

## 3. ‘They’ are not really poor – they just don’t manage their money properly

Nearly 60% of the UK population believes that the poor could cope if only they handled their money properly. The experience of living on a low income is one of constant struggle to manage limited resources, with small events having serious consequences. Statistics show that the poorest spend their money carefully, limiting themselves to the essentials.

## 4. ‘They’ are on the fiddle

Over 80% of the UK population believe that “large numbers falsely claim benefits”. Benefit fraud has decreased to historically low levels - the kind of levels that the tax system can only dream of. Less than 0.9% of the welfare budget is lost to fraud.

## 5. ‘They’ have an easy life

Over half the British public believes benefits are too high. Government ministers speak of families opting for benefits as a lifestyle choice. Yet we know that benefits do not meet minimum income standards. They have halved in value relative to average incomes over the last 30 years. We know the ill and the unemployed are the people least satisfied and happy with life.

## 6. ‘They’ caused the deficit

The proportion of our tax bills spent on welfare has remained stable for the last 20 years. It is ridiculous to argue, as some have, that increasing welfare spending is responsible for the current deficit. Public debt is a problem but why is it being laid at the feet of the poorest?

Read the new report from the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland and find more resources at [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies)



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