

Poor People in the Media

Guide for People Experiencing Poverty



Who Listens to the Poor? network with
the European Anti-Poverty Network Finland (EAPN-Fin)

POOR PEOPLE IN THE MEDIA
–Guide for People Experiencing Poverty

Who Listens to the Poor? network &
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Publication team: Tuula Paasivirta, Linnéa Partanen,
Irene Roivas, Tiina Saarela & Erja Saarinen

Cover: Linnéa Partanen

Images: Esa Lehto, Tuula Paasivirta, Linnéa Partanen,
Tiina Saarela, Jouko Vatanen

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for its mitigation.
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EAPN-FIN – European Anti-Poverty
Network Finland is an open network
for organisations, groups and citizens
working against poverty and exclusion.
It is part of the non-governmental
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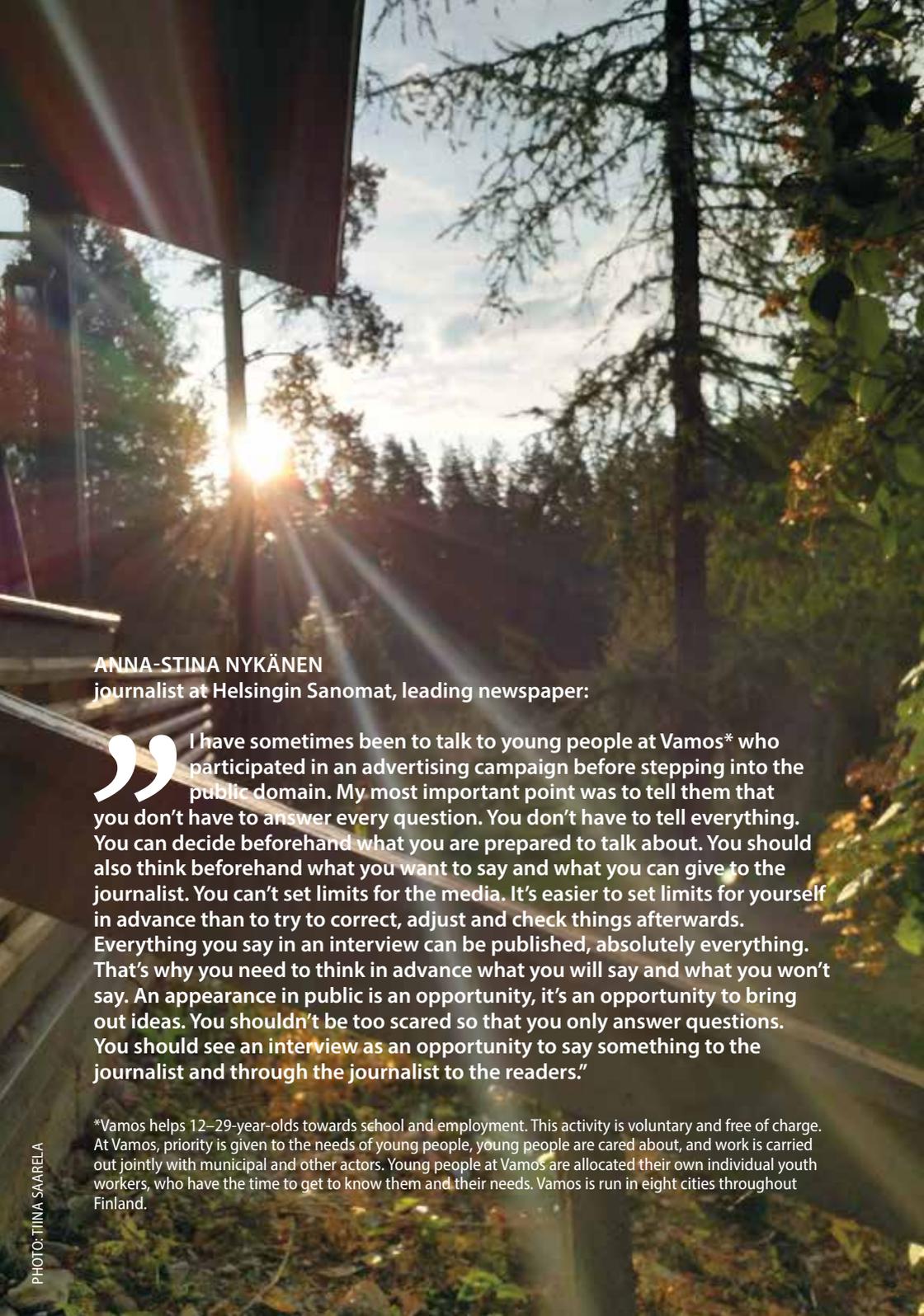
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PHOTO: LINNÉA PARTANEN



ANNA-STINA NYKÄNEN

journalist at Helsingin Sanomat, leading newspaper:

” I have sometimes been to talk to young people at Vamos* who participated in an advertising campaign before stepping into the public domain. My most important point was to tell them that you don't have to answer every question. You don't have to tell everything. You can decide beforehand what you are prepared to talk about. You should also think beforehand what you want to say and what you can give to the journalist. You can't set limits for the media. It's easier to set limits for yourself in advance than to try to correct, adjust and check things afterwards. Everything you say in an interview can be published, absolutely everything. That's why you need to think in advance what you will say and what you won't say. An appearance in public is an opportunity, it's an opportunity to bring out ideas. You shouldn't be too scared so that you only answer questions. You should see an interview as an opportunity to say something to the journalist and through the journalist to the readers.”

*Vamos helps 12–29-year-olds towards school and employment. This activity is voluntary and free of charge. At Vamos, priority is given to the needs of young people, young people are cared about, and work is carried out jointly with municipal and other actors. Young people at Vamos are allocated their own individual youth workers, who have the time to get to know them and their needs. Vamos is run in eight cities throughout Finland.

Foreword

Hundreds of thousands of people in Finland are affected by poverty for some reason or another. Poverty has a negative effect on society and individuals alike. Poverty cannot be mitigated without hearing people experiencing poverty as experts of their own circumstances. It is important to give them visibility in the media, because society is changed by making important issues public. Statistics alone do not reveal the widespread and long-term impacts of poverty on the lives of the poor and the people near them.

It is not easy to talk about being poor – especially in public. People appearing in the media need advice and support. We hope that our publication will be of benefit to you who are experiencing poverty. We invite you to consult this guide when you are asked to be interviewed or to give comments for the media. It is also a good idea to consult the book when you are writing a blog or otherwise participating in social media. We have gathered tips and ideas for you in the book. Throughout the planning, writing and compilation of the book, we have listened to many people experiencing poverty and people experiencing poverty have also been making the guide.

This guidebook was preceded by the publication of another book, *Respectfully about Poverty – How to Write about Poverty*. The Anti-Poverty

Network Finland (EAPN-Fin) has an annual *Respectfully about Poverty* award which is given to journalists who have written about poverty in a way that respects the poor and analyses the economic and social causes of poverty. The journalists' guidebook was released in conjunction with the 2017 award.

For the present publication, a two-part online survey was conducted in spring and summer 2018, to which 146 responses were received. We also organised two panel discussions: one in spring 2018 for people experiencing poverty and another in autumn 2018 for journalists and people experiencing poverty. The discussions were used as a resource for the writing of this guide. We have also sprinkled quotes by people experiencing poverty around the guide and to accompany the images. The pictures and the quotes are not related as such.

We want to thank everyone who participated in the online survey and the panel discussions!

This publication is a joint project by the *Who Listens to the Poor?* network and EAPN-Fin.

Helsinki, November 2018

Publication team
*Tuula Paasivirta (chair),
Linnéa Partanen, Irene Roivas,
Tiina Saarela, Erja Saarinen*

1

Instructions on how to work with the media

Background

Journalists and reporters are interested in poverty as a social phenomenon and also in how it is reflected in the lives of individuals, families and communities. Through you, the journalist wants to present a viewpoint on the matter that politicians or authorities are unable to provide.

According to the survey conducted for this guide, people experiencing poverty do want to talk about poverty in public and thereby to help in the eradication of poverty. Many survey respondents said that poverty must be made visible so that something will actually be done about it.

The respondents also wanted to point out that poverty is not something “out there” that only touches other people. The poor are not “beings from alien worlds” – anyone can be affected by poverty: “Unemployment, illness, divorce, etc. are things that can happen to an IT manager just as well as to a ditch digger.”

The media also like to use social media updates as a source for news reporting, and for that purpose they monitor conversations in Facebook groups, for example. In addition to social media, journalists also search for interviewees through various organisations, Christian commu-

nities, and by word of mouth. You can also be active yourself and offer to be interviewed, or you can suggest poverty-related topics for journalists. You can write a blog, or start a social media discussion on some topic.

This guide gives advice to the situation when a journalist has asked you to do an interview either for a newspaper, magazine, television or radio, or for an online forum. The advice can also come handy in other contexts, such as when you blog or participate in online discussions.

Take time to think

Before you promise to do an interview, tell the journalist that you want some time to think, and then discuss the subject of the interview with your networks, family and friends. When you think about the interview, remember that the subject of the story can awaken a lot of emotions in you, also negative ones.

You should also consider whether you have enough time to prepare for the interview. Journalists are often in a hurry, because that is the way the media works. If some issue relating to poverty has become a topic, journalists want to do an interview as

fast as possible. Even in the case of a longer story that will be published later, you should consider whether your schedule will fit that of the journalist's. Do not be intimidated: it is your right to consider these things.

Seek support

You can find support for yourself and for your message among relatives, friends, relevant organisations and professionals. You should seek support beforehand, because the interview process can be exhausting.

You should be aware that you can get all sorts of feedback and comments from readers, listeners and viewers after the interview. Comments in social media in particular can be quite intense either positively or negatively. In addition ordinary people, the participants in online discussions often include Internet trolls – people who deliberately set out to irritate others or to generate conflict, or people who have an entirely different perspective on the issue. It is quite common that commenters only read the title of the story and use that as a springboard to air their own views. Sometimes an online discussion following the publication of the interview can take on a life of its own. You may want to protect yourself and refrain from reading the comment section of the story.

What is your message?

Before you do the interview, think about what you want to say and dis-

til it into a single sentence. If you like, you can write down the sentence and key talking points on a piece of paper. In the interview, the journalist can ask a lot of questions about your life, and talking about difficult things it can easily make you emotional. It is therefore good to have a reminder, a note that you can consult, in which you have written down the most important things you want to bring up in the interview.

The interview situation itself can also be very tense. Most of us feel nervous about appearing in public, especially on radio and television. It is entirely normal – you are not the only one who is nervous or scared. Focus on what you want to say! You can manage your nervousness by picturing the interview in your mind beforehand, and by reviewing facts and topics that may be related to the subject of the interview. It is also a good idea to practice by speaking out loud. You can practice speaking in front of a mirror or by recording yourself speaking out loud.

Journalists commonly use only a small part of the interview in their story. They may ask you questions about your background so that they will understand your situation better in the interview. You have the right to decide what things you want to discuss in public and which ones you do not.

It is particularly important to rehearse the key points in advance when you are doing a television or radio interview. Think about the impression that you want to make in the interview, what you can say and how to say it so as to ensure that the

correct impression will come across. That will help you also focus on key topics and to only say what you had decided to say in advance. Your voice is very important in a TV or radio interview. In television your carriage, facial expressions and body language are also important. Remember that communication consists of:

- Words: 7 percent
- Voice and articulation: 38 percent
- Body language and facial expressions: 55 percent

You are the expert

Remember that you are the expert of your story, and that the journalist is responsible for other, general information related to the story. It is a good idea to acquaint yourself with the topic of the interview and to consult relevant sources on, for example, the poverty of disabled persons or of families with children. You can of course give also facts regarding the matter over and above your personal experiences, but ultimately it is the journalist who will decide what general information and facts will be included in the story.

Even well-meaning journalists can sometimes use wrong terms. It is OK to correct them politely, whether you are discussing background information or are in a live broadcast.

What do you want to disclose about your personal life?

Think about the way in which you want to talk about your experiences of poverty. What things are you pre-

pared to reveal about yourself, and what things you want to keep away from the public. You can and should determine the limits of your privacy before the interview.

If the interview also touches upon your family, or if you intend to bring up matters relating to the private life of your loved ones, you should tell them about it before the interview. Take special care if you intend to talk about the situation of your family, especially if you have underage children. School teachers, your children's friends and their parents may all read or watch your interview. The journalist might also want to check the things you have said and contact your family or friends to do so. The journalist can also google you. It is therefore a good idea to also google yourself to see what kind of information there is about you online.

How do you want people to see you?

Think about the place where you want to be interviewed – at home, at work, in some neutral place? Decide whether you want to show your face in the interview, or if the journalist should use some other images. Make sure that the journalist agrees to let you accept or reject the pictures of you before the story is released. Journalists and photographers usually have ideas and wishes about how they want to picture you. For instance, they might want to show the home of a poor person. It is for you to decide if you want to let a photographer into your home or not. You

can also suggest ideas for photography yourself.

Agree on ground rules

Lay down the ground rules with the journalist. Make sure you know where the interview will be published. Ask about what the topic and perspective of the story will be and what the journalist wants to say with it. You must nevertheless remember that the final questions can be slightly different, especially in a live situation. You should also ask beforehand about other interviewees who might be included in the story or in the discussion.

Remember that you can always refuse to give an interview. Make sure that you have a chance to check the story before it is released. Remember that online stories often include an unmoderated comment section, where people may also post offensive comments.

You should therefore check with the journalist whether the story or parts of the story will be published online in addition to the printed paper. Stories in digital media are usually published in several different channels.

Your message will not only be communicated by the media, the journalist will also edit it to make your story interesting and attractive to readers. You must accept that the journalist will include general information about the subject to build up the story. That can also include opposite viewpoints and interviews with other people. You should always check the story before it is released.

Ask the journalist when the story will be released and also when they will send the story to you for comments, and when they need your comments back.

If the interview is for radio or television, find out if it will be recorded or broadcast live.

If the interview is conducted remotely, by phone for example, do it in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. You can ask where you can access the broadcast afterwards.

Recorded interviews rarely end up being broadcast unedited. The journalist will most likely choose the sections that will be used, or will shorten the interview for the slot set for the programme. It is therefore more than likely that the broadcast version will not include everything you said in the interview.

For longer documentary programmes, you will usually be asked to sign a release form. The form states in writing that you have agreed to be interviewed and that you give your consent that the interview will be presented publicly at some later date. The reason for the release form is that the documentary is usually made by a freelancer journalist or a production company, and the final publisher is a media company. The form gives the media company an assurance that the subjects appearing in the programme have agreed to be filmed.

Documentary programmes are often filmed in the interviewee's home, in a public place or in some other location outside the studio. You can tell the makers of the programme about your personal limits

in this. You do not have to let the crew into your home or to any situation or place that you feel should not be shown publicly.

You should also remember that documentaries tend to have a longer “life span” than news or current affairs programmes. They can be broadcast several times on television and also be screened at media festivals and events. Documentaries can also be sold to other media outlets, such as companies in other countries or to online streaming services.

Be yourself in the interview

Be yourself – you are interesting just as you are. Good interviewees talk about things that are important to them personally. They know what they are talking about and they let their feelings show. Use your personality and speak from the heart – say what you mean and mean what you say. Do not pretend.

The journalist is interested in your story. Real life stories are interesting and captivating. Remember that an interview about poverty is often not an interview about a person. For example, the journalist can be interested in your personal experience and your life situation because you are unemployed or sick. Your personality is not the core issue. However, you bring added value to the story which can explore the social status of the unemployed, for example. Interviews can focus on different things: the focus can be on the person (human interest), on experience, or on factual information.

All these are rarely present in the same programme or interview.

Try to forget the cameras when you are interviewed for the television. You have come to the show as a valued guest. Usually you get to see the questions before the interview or discussion. You can ask the journalist for support. Journalists do not treat ordinary citizens as roughly as they treat politicians.

When you appear in a live television broadcast, you will usually get advice on how to dress. In a television interview, you should try to sit in a way that feels natural to you. Be calm and avoid unnecessary fuss.

Look the interviewer and other interviewees in the face, do not look at the cameras or the set. Use short sentences and give telling examples. Use concrete arguments to make your point. If possible, finish by repeating your key message. Stay on topic.

In a radio interview, you will be told how near the microphone you should speak. Even in the radio you should look the interviewer and other speakers in the face.

Check the story before it is released

When the interview is sent to you for comments, you should check that the journalist has understood your words and your viewpoint correctly. You have the right to ask any place where you have been misquoted to be altered. However, you cannot alter the journalist’s general background information or perspective on the story. Remember that at this stage you can still refuse to participate in the story.



AN ANONYMOUS PERSON RECALLS:

” When you give an interview, you lose control of your own narrative. You must understand that, and you also have to accept it. One reason is that the viewpoint of the story is always that of the journalist, who chooses what to include in the news item. For example, in my interview I pointed out several times that my life is not poor, I am just occasionally broke. Life can be rewarding even if you don't have money. But that point was never included in the news item, and I was really annoyed. I felt that the journalist just wanted to give the story an edge. But feedback from readers was almost entirely positive: I received a lot of praise, I was congratulated on my courage, some people even saw me almost like a hero.”

2

Interviewee's rights – Guidelines for Journalists

Guidelines for Journalists set out ethical guidelines for journalists in newspapers, television and similar media in Finland. Compliance with the guidelines is monitored by the Council for Mass Media in Finland, which is composed of publishers and other media stakeholders.



PHOTO: LINNÉA PARTAINEN

According to the guidelines, interviewees have the right:

- to know in advance the context in which their statements will be used.
- to know in which media the interview will be used.
- to know whether the conversation is intended for publication or will be used exclusively as background material.
- to read their statements prior to publication, if the editorial deadline permits. This right only concerns the personal statements of the interviewee, and the final journalistic decision cannot be surrendered to any party outside the editorial office.
- to refuse to allow the publishing of their statement if the circumstances following the interview have changed so significantly that the publication of the interview could be viewed as unjust.
- to get essentially incorrect information corrected without delay and so as to reach, to the highest extent possible, the attention of those who have had access to the incorrect information.

https://www.jsn.fi/en/guidelines_for_journalists/

STATEMENT BY AN ANONYMOUS INTERVIEWEE:

” A few years ago I was interviewed for A2 (a current affairs show by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE) on the cutting of housing support for pensioners. A short clip on my case was edited for the show. The reporters were friendly, they treated me respectfully and listened to my wishes regarding the publication.”

LINNÉA PARTANEN:

” I agreed to do an interview for an online publication of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, because I wanted to make a difference and make experiences of poverty more widely known. Putting myself forward was part of my agenda because I was talking about my own life. Since the interview I have received lots of positive feedback. I have received encouraging and supportive messages from both friends and complete strangers. I was prouder of myself after each interview, and the interviews have helped me see myself in a more positive light. I've been praised for my courage and perseverance.”

3

How to respond to malicious comments

When you publish something in social media or when you are interviewed in some media, the public's reactions can be malicious and scornful. Every blogger, online writer, commenter and interviewer has probably come across online malice. It can be a good idea to protect yourself from online comments and simply leave them unread.

Hostile commenting can feel extremely offensive and disrespectful. Remember that the person making the comments may not know you or may have misunderstood your message.

Do not respond immediately, wait for your emotions to cool down. Intense feelings such as anger or

feeling hurt only show that the matter is important to you.

It is always best to respond to negative comments in a positive and constructive way: for example, you can just point out that "this kind of behaviour is not appropriate in this publication/discussion group." On the other hand, if negative comments get no reaction at all, it can seem that negative commenting is acceptable. That in turn can encourage others to make similar comments, which will have a very negative effect on the atmosphere.

You do not always need to answer: if the mood in the discussion is otherwise positive and someone



PHOTO: ESA LEHTO

makes an isolated nasty comment, it is often best just to ignore it. All participants – and that means everyone – are responsible for the quality of the conversation: we are all responsible for not being drawn into negative argumentation.

The people reading the publication or watching the interview can have an impact on all texts or recordings through social media. The audience reads or watches others who perform for them. If you find yourself involved in a heated discussion, you should try to respond so that the others do not lose face and the discussion can continue in good spirits. It is also important that the discussion does not stray into attacks on other participants' personality or private life.

It is always best to make comments that you can stand by later without needing to be ashamed of your own negative behaviour, for example. You should also remember that even if the group is restricted and secret, someone can take a screen shot of the discussion and publish it elsewhere.

Social media comments on your interview will depend on the medium, the theme and the identity of the interviewees. Sometimes people make malicious comments only because they feel that the interviewee is receiving some benefit that the commenter is not entitled to, such as housing support, income support, or transport services for the disabled.

If your interview has awakened malicious commenting, you should also consider whether the comments might be made by an Internet troll.

The commenter may be trying to provoke the discussion on purpose. A malicious commenter can deliberately misunderstand your interview and aim to offend you just to vent his or her anger. It is also possible that the commenter is just writing in a clumsy way without meaning to offend anyone. Malice and unfairness are always hurtful, and you are justified to be upset. If the comments continue to bother you, you should talk about them with someone whom you trust.

Maintain a positive, constructive and respectful attitude towards other people's opinions if they are expressed in a decent way.

If you want to reply to malicious comments, ask a friend to read your reply and give feedback on it before you post the comment.

Points to consider: Does your reply clearly express what you want to say? Is the tone polite, constructive and friendly? You might also want to tell the commenter that you felt hurt by their post, that it seemed unfair. Make specific reference to what aspect of the comment felt bad: its sarcastic or belittling tone perhaps, or swearwords, and so on.

You have the right to be firm and to defend yourself. No one has to accept malicious behaviour. You can end your reply by thanking the commenter for participating in the discussion, and wish them a good day. A friendly attitude will give the commenter a positive impression of you and also to other readers. You will also feel better about yourself if you do not stoop to the same level as the commenter.



STATEMENT BY AN ANONYMOUS PERSON:

” The reasons for my low income status include issues that would reveal a lot about my own health status and that of my family. Talking about that would have meant entering an area

where you have to be really careful about privacy. My child doesn't want our family affairs to be talked about in public. He's afraid of being stigmatised at school and by friends.

On the other hand, if I were to omit some relevant details, people might begin to wonder and moralise – without all the necessary facts they



wouldn't be able to understand my situation. I also thought about how the interview might affect my prospects for getting work, for example. I thought about how my public appearance as a low-income parent of a special needs child might affect the way that the authorities see me as a parent.

In spite of all that, I would like my interview to contribute towards changing things like the service system. I had always trusted it, but my "faith" in it has severely eroded over the past few years.

For example, there is little real help available for everyday needs of a family, and sometimes they offer help we don't need, such as help on weekends or holidays."

4

Checklist

Before agreeing to an interview, read the chapter Instructions on how to work with the media. Consider each point and your ability to deal with it. Here is a checklist to remind you of the instructions.

1. Remember that you have the right to a period of time to think it over whether you want to do the interview or not. Sometimes, however, you need to decide right away! In a situation like that, it may be a good idea to say no, especially if you have the slightest doubt about doing the interview.
2. Do you have enough time to prepare for the interview?
3. Talk with your family/friends about the topic that the interview is about. You can find support for yourself and your message among your relatives, friends, relevant organisations and professionals.
4. Find out which media the story will appear in and in what form. Find out if the story will be released in electronic or social media. Remember that online stories often include a comment section. If your interview is published online, check whether the comment section is moderated or supervised by the publisher of the story.
5. Lay down the ground rules with the journalist. Make sure you know where the interview will be published. Ask about what the topic and perspective of the story will be and what the journalist wants to say with it.
6. Ask the journalist who else they intend to interview for the story or what other people will join the discussion.
7. What is your message? Before you do the interview, think about what you want to say and distil it into a single sentence. Write it down if necessary.
8. Focus on what you want to say! It is also a good idea to practice by speaking out loud. You can practice speaking in front of a mirror or by recording yourself and memorizing the key sentence. That is especially important for television and radio interviews.

9. Consider which things about your personal life you are prepared to talk about. Think about how you want to talk about your experience. What things are you prepared to reveal about yourself, what things you do not want the public to know? You can lay down the boundaries of your privacy before the interview.
10. The journalists will often use only a small part of the interview in the story. They might ask you questions for background in order to understand your situation better.
11. You are the expert of your own story, the journalist is responsible for facts and related general information.
12. Think about where you want to be interviewed – at home, at work, in some neutral place. Decide whether you want to show your face in the interview, or whether the journalist should use some other images.
13. If the interview is for the radio or television, find out if it will be recorded or broadcast live.
14. Be yourself.
15. Ask the journalist for support.
16. In electronic media, use short sentences and give telling examples. Use concrete arguments to make your point.
17. When the interview is sent to you for comments, check that the journalist has understood your meaning and viewpoint correctly. You have the right to have the text altered in any place where you have been misquoted.
18. Make sure that you will have a chance to check the story before it is released. Ask when the story will be published, and also when they will send the story to you for checking, and when you need to send back your comments and corrections to direct quotes.
19. Remember that you can always refuse to give an interview.

5

Do it anyway!

Your story is likely to affect many people and help them understand broader social issues. People in similar situations can feel that your story gives them peer support and reduces their feelings of being alone. Our survey showed that the publication of their story also made the interviewee themselves feel less lonely, because they receive peer support and encouragement.

It takes courage to appear in public. Stories have a strong impact on people. Only people who have experienced poverty first hand can tell about the experience of poverty. Economists and ministers can talk about statistics and figures, but you



PHOTO: TIINA SAARELA

can tell what it is like to live in poverty. Your story is important and just as valuable as the stories of other interviewees.

Our survey showed that people feel that the public discussion on poverty should include more stories about financial difficulties, about the level of benefits, legislation, sickness and health care, housing and homelessness. Interviews are important to give visibility to issues of poverty and to generate public debate. The more people there are who tell their stories, the more the stories will affect people and society in general. Your experience is valuable, you possess special expertise. The current social order does not serve all of us equally. We want to change it. We all have a responsibility to reduce poverty. Remember: poor people are the best experts on poverty!

Make sure you know people with whom you can talk about the potential impacts of publicity on your life, and who can support you if necessary. An anonymous interview is also an option that you can suggest to the journalist. However, feedback from journalists and people experiencing poverty suggests that being interviewed with your own name and face creates a bigger impact. You can seek support from organisations like anti-poverty networks. Join us to make a difference!



”

Journalists have great respect for people who talk about their own lives.”

RIITTA PIHLAJAMÄKI
Head of Current Affairs, YLE,
The Finnish Broadcasting Company

6

Results of the survey “Poor People in the Media and in Public”

The Who listens to the poor? network conducted two surveys for the Poor People in the Media guide in the spring of 2018. The purpose of the surveys was to gather data on the opinions and thoughts of people experiencing poverty about how poverty is dealt in the media, and also about their experiences of appearing in the media.

The surveys received 146 responses. 98 percent of respondents had experienced poverty personally. 21 percent had personal experience of talking about poverty in public.

Most of the respondents were middle-aged women. The group of under 30-year-olds accounted for 3 percent of the respondents; 31–40-year-old for 23 percent; 41–50-year-olds for 30 percent; and over 50s for 44 percent of all respondents. 78 percent of the respondents were women. Just over one half of the respondents lived in southern Finland: 56 percent.

More media attention on poverty is needed

99 percent of the respondents felt that it is important that poverty is covered in the media. Almost all, 95 percent, felt that poverty and related ills do not receive enough public coverage.

Why should poverty be covered in the media? Here are some answers:

“Poverty needs to be made visible so that something can actually be done about it.”

“It enables us to build a better society for all.”

Many respondents stressed the importance of talking about the real state of the Finnish welfare society. They felt it is important to remind the public that poverty is not something “out there” that only touches other people. The poor are not “beings from some alien world” – we can all be affected by poverty.

“Unemployment, illness, divorce, etc. are things that can happen to an IT manager just as well as to a ditch digger.”

“Ordinary people in working life also need to know what is happening in society.”

The majority of respondents are disappointed with the way poverty is covered in the media

Respondents were dissatisfied by the way poverty is covered in the media:

86 percent were disappointed or angry about media coverage of poverty. The following views were expressed regarding traditional media coverage of the debate on poverty:

“Existing policies only increase inequality, and stories that do not make waves get more coverage than those that do.”

“Social distance, social gap, lack of understanding. Inability to report the reasons for low income (low-wage sectors, high cost of housing, unemployment, lack of education opportunities, poverty among pensioners).”

“Poverty is presented as a tragedy that befalls on families and individuals, the social dimension is covered very superficially. The only places where politics and poverty are connected is in digressions or statistics discussed in connection with budget cuts.”

“The poor are treated as one big lump, as if they were not really part of society, but aliens from another world.”

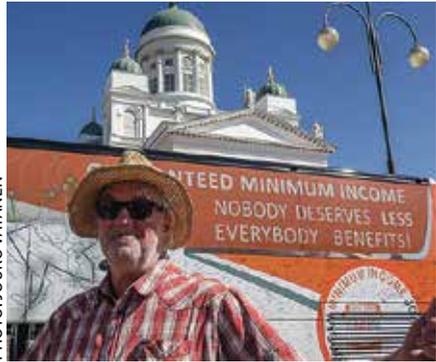
“Issues about poverty are downplayed, distorted, invalidated, and the poor are robbed of their dignity.”

However, there were also respondents who were satisfied with the way poverty is covered in the media:

“The discussion on poverty is diverse, factual and defends the poor.”

“Fortunately, increasing attention is paid to the issue.”

PHOTO: JOUKOVATYANEN



The attitude is often improper

Replies to the surveys suggest that the media should review critically the way in which they report on the poor. According to many respondents, the media have a condescending attitude towards the poor: they are prone to give advice, arrogant, and they belittle poor people's ability to think and act intelligently.

“Whenever poverty is covered by showing some so-called poor person, the resulting conversation is inane, consisting of advice how the poor should save up or live their life – it's patronising. And it's the same attitude that authorities have when they appear in public debate.”

“Poverty is viewed from outside, and the stories are clearly written for middle-class audiences. Even interviews with poor people present poverty from a middle-class perspective.”

“A poor person is an object that is scrutinised, not a person being interviewed, although that is the presumption.”

“The poor are hardly ever included in the discussion. And when they are, they are presented as beset by alcoholism or mental health problems, subject to guidance and activation by the wealthy and healthy (the two terms are synonymous).”

Poverty is more than just bread lines

The respondents would like to see a broader approach to poverty in the media. There is a lot of talk about bread lines, less so about the poverty impacts of health care and illness.

“There is a lot of talk about bread lines, but that’s superficial. There is very little talk about poverty among the elderly, the disabled, the long-term ill, or the poverty of family caregivers.”

“All they report is bread lines in the big cities, but there is poverty in the countryside as well, and no food aid.”

“I think the media have been focusing too much on “free riders”, people who take advantage of the current social security system. We would need reporting on other perspectives and on poverty as a structural phenomenon. On causes and effects and the big picture. We need to have respectful discussion and promote understanding.”

The respondents felt there is not enough research on poverty and analysis of the causes of poverty. Descriptions of the diversity of poverty would also be welcome. The respondents would also like to

see stories about solutions to poverty – both on the level of individuals and of society. One respondent reported that problems and solutions are presented separately.

“It would be nice to read about people who have risen from poverty, how they have improved their chances.”

Differences between social and traditional media

Respondents were asked separately about how poverty is addressed in social media and in traditional media. The answers were not very different.

According to one respondent the social media have a better grip on reality: more realistic and based on personal experience. According to another, social media as a forum for discussing poverty is fraught with risk, because the conversation tends to veer away from the subject.

The responses suggest that discussion in the social media is polarised and the extremes do not meet. Argument without dialogue rules, or smug consensus among like-minded people.

“The discussions are often pathetic, they just show that values in Finland are getting tougher.”

Respect and empathy would encourage people to speak out

According to the respondents, the easiest way to share personal experiences of poverty is to do it anonymously. The next easiest way

is to talk about them in social media and in current affairs programmes.

The respondents felt that in the current opinion climate, the poor tend to be seen as guilty of their predicament, which is another reason why anonymity was seen as a safe option.

The respondents also felt that such condemnatory attitudes in the media are bolstered by the statements of politicians and the government and also by the current social, health and employment policies.

Respondents were asked what would encourage them to share their experiences of poverty more openly in the media.

“Knowing that you will be treated respectfully and be appreciated, and that openness would not lead to problems or hate speech.”

“Peer support and media skills coaching: social media texts, interviews in magazines/online publications, TV interviews, panel discussions.”

“The feeling that your speech would find resonance among people who are not poor themselves, among politicians, experts and decision-makers.”

Positive experiences and misinterpretations

The respondents had both good and bad experiences of working with the media.

The negative experiences involved misinterpretation of state-

ments and omitting of important matters from the interview. 67 percent of respondents had had an issue or perspective that was important to them but was ignored by the journalist.

Most interviewees knew beforehand where the story would be published. 52 percent had had an advance opportunity to check and correct their contribution. 34 percent of those who had been interviewed in the media felt that their messages had been used against themselves.

A small minority feels shame after the release of the story

Most of the respondents who had appeared in the media, 62 percent, had not felt any shame or humiliation after the release of the story; only 15 percent of respondents had experienced those emotions.

The majority of interviewees had not talked inadvertently more than they had decided. In reply to the question: “Have you been asked to talk about your affairs confidentially, and did it make you say more than you would have wanted?” 72 percent answered in the negative.

37 percent of respondents had felt that they were alone with their problem before the interview, and that the public appearance had made a change in that.

All respondents would like poverty experiencing people to have more ways to alter things in society. Peer support and the example of others were felt to be positive and encouraging.

GLOSSARY

Blog: A website with chronologically ordered diary-like entries in which the writer or writers address topics from their own viewpoint.

Blogger: The writer of a blog.

Documentarist: The maker of documentary films or programmes.

Specialist: A person who has experienced poverty (or something else) and gives an interview about the experience (with no formal training as experience expert).

Experience expert: A person with experience of poverty who has completed experience expert training. Tours schools and organisations to talk about the experience. Provides peer support.

Poor: In this publication, the term “poor” refers primarily to people living in financially narrow circumstances with no assets or little means. At the time of writing (autumn 2018), the official one-person poverty line in Finland is 1,200 euro per month.

Media: Channels of mass communication. Electronic media include television and radio. Print media include newspapers and magazines. Other media include social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition to the print version, newspapers often publish an electronic facsimile of the paper. The electronic (digital) version often includes a comment section where readers can comment on the story.

Moderation: The practice of monitoring comments on a social media forum.

Traditional media: Newspapers, magazines as well as television and radio.

Provocation: A deliberately annoying or controversial comment, often in an online forum. A provocation is a message that specifically seeks to elicit strong reactions. Provocation is usually best ignored.

Social media: Digital online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and others.

Internet troll: A person who deliberately seeks to undermine online discussions. Do not feed the troll: do not respond to messages that are deliberately conflict-seeking and misleading.

Journalist: A person who produces content for a media outlet; editor; editor-in-chief; radio, television reporter.

Producer: The person who is responsible for the production and financing of items on the radio, in television, film, music, etc. Film producer; television producer; radio producer; music producer. The person who has overall responsibility for a production.



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in the Media hearing and Poor People
in the Media panel discussion

Hundreds of thousands of people in Finland are affected by poverty for some reason or another. Poverty has a negative effect on society and individuals alike. Poverty cannot be mitigated without hearing people experiencing poverty as experts of their own circumstance – also in the media. Entering the public arena requires courage and carries risk. However, the risks are manageable when you know the rules of the media, when you know your ideas and resources, and where to get support. This guide provides people experiencing poverty with information, tips and support for appearances in the media. Its message is: It is worth doing!

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