

Chapter six

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a range of existing definitions of multiple disadvantage or social exclusion. Some of these refer to structural characteristics of the social system, or to aggregate indicators. Because this project was designed to consider the possibility of sub-system analysis of survey data at the household or individual level, an appropriate definition was derived from the literature as:

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

The brief asked for the exploration of 'deep exclusion' or multiple disadvantage. Exploration showed that the concept of 'deep exclusion' as a qualitatively different phenomenon from 'social exclusion' does not exist in the academic or policy literature. This is because 'social exclusion' itself is universally regarded as involving multi-dimensional disadvantage. It is, however, recognised that there are degrees of severity of social exclusion, just as there are degrees of inclusion. Severe or deep exclusion could, therefore, potentially be defined as follows:

Deep exclusion refers to exclusion across more than one domain or dimension of disadvantage, resulting in severe negative consequences for quality of life, well-being and future life chances.

It is possible to derive from these definitions and from the surrounding literature a series of domains and sub-domains of potential exclusion that should be considered.

Those domains and sub-domains are:

Resources

Material/economic resources

Access to public and private services

Social resources

Participation

Economic participation

Social participation

Culture, education and skills

Political and civic participation

Quality of life

Health and well-being

Living environment

Crime, harm and criminalisation

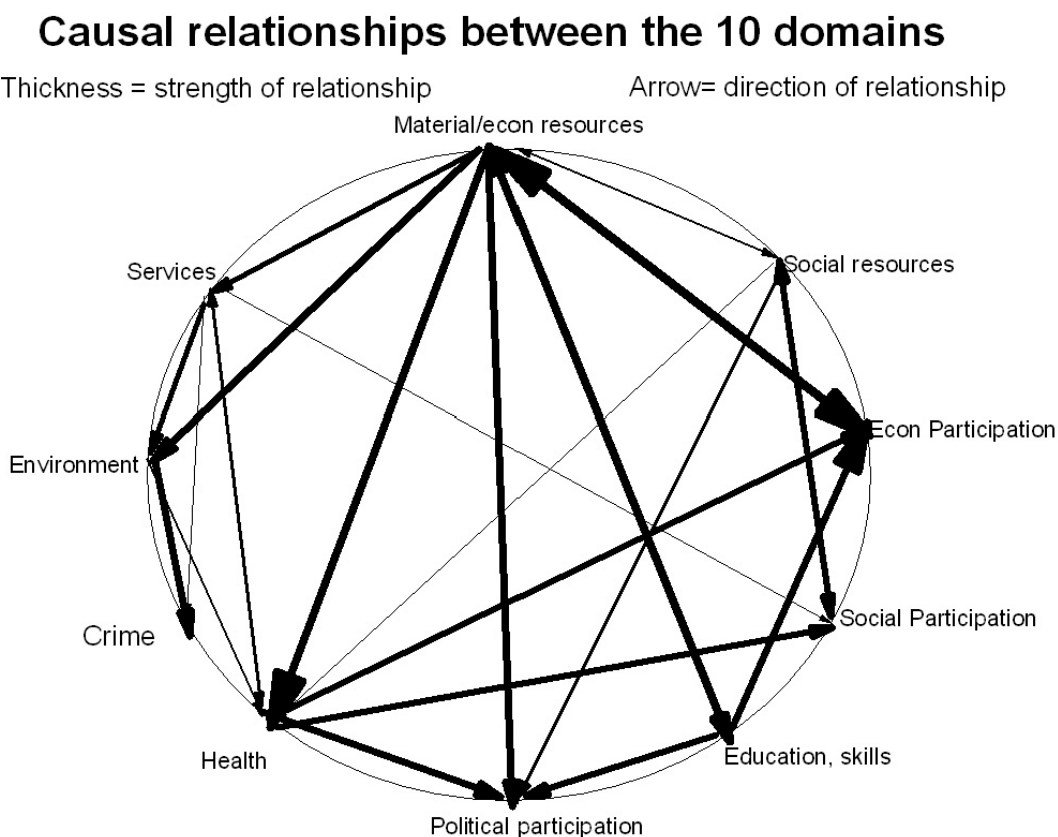
Within each sub-domain, individual topics have been identified, where the availability of indicators in existing data sets can be explored. Together with the individual topics, which differ for different life course stages, this array of domains constitutes the B-SEM.

It should be noted that there is a wide variation in the array of domains identified in the literature and used in analysis. The B-SEM differs from most approaches in being theory-driven rather than data-driven, and in therefore asking what information we need, rather than simply what information we have. It therefore acts as a benchmark for systematically assessing the current availability of data.

Further research

As is usual in addressing complex topics, further research needs to employ a range of strategies, including secondary analysis of existing data sets, the generation of new survey modules, the use of qualitative methods, and the use of specialised surveys preferably informed by qualitative research. There is no single answer to the question of which research strategies best estimate and/or track multidimensional exclusion, or how we should best use analysis to measure multi-dimensional exclusion. A proper understanding of social exclusion requires a combination of all these approaches. Nevertheless, the B-SEM provides a heuristic device for assessing the coverage of existing data, and shows that there is a shortage of adequate data for the understanding of exclusionary processes and the drivers, risk factors and triggers of social exclusion. While the B-SEM identifies the appropriate domains of investigation, estimating or tracking social exclusion depends on the prior understanding of the causal relationship between domains.

Fig. 6.1 below gives a graphical illustration of the potential complexity of the interaction between domains.



Even a purpose-designed longitudinal survey constructed to cover all ten domains of the B-SEM would be limited by the exclusion of the non-household population, including many of the most vulnerable people in our society. There is scope for secondary analysis of some of the better surveys (in terms of their usefulness in relation to social exclusion), as indicated below. However, the strength of the B-SEM is that it draws attention to the limits of coverage of each data set, and the absence of coverage of particular domains needs to be noted in each instance. It is tempting to simply ignore the domains where data is thin or absent, but this will simply reproduce the existing weaknesses in our understanding of exclusionary processes.

It is likely that future research will reveal, as suggested in Fig 6.1, that some domains are more important as risk factors for other, and some are effectively outcomes with lesser causal effects. The present state of knowledge is such that it would be risky to make assumptions here and to regard some domains as having lesser importance. Notwithstanding the need to maintain as broad a coverage as possible across the domains of the B-SEM, we do (for example) know that income poverty and material deprivation constitute a driver for most

other domains of exclusion. This has implications for policy interventions both at the individual and household levels and at the level of social structure.

Although we identify below possible data sets for further secondary analysis, it is beyond the scope of this project to specify particular analyses. Some detailed issues relating to statistical inference are set out in Appendix 8. The key point is that there are a wide range of different questions that can be asked, or hypotheses that can be tested, in relation to the interaction of variables in social exclusion, and the appropriate techniques must be selected in relation to these and the specific nature of the data in individual surveys. It is also important in terms of the reliability of findings that causal models are cross-tested on different datasets rather than derived from and tested on the same data.

As discussed above, some presentations of data on social exclusion involve adding up the number of dimensions on which people are excluded. This is simply a descriptive, not an analytic, device, which tells us nothing about the interaction of the domains of exclusion, which is the primary objective of multidimensional analysis. Even from a descriptive point of view, the additive approach is problematic, since it implicitly assigns equal weight to each dimension, and this is unlikely to be empirically correct. Moreover, additive presentations depend on the identification of thresholds and binary divisions on individual dimensions, such that individuals can be identified as included/excluded rather than more or less excluded. In the present state of knowledge, such thresholds are almost always wholly arbitrary. They need to be established empirically as for example in Levitas (2006) where it was demonstrable from the PSE data that social participation dropped more sharply below a threshold income, or Townsend (1979) which showed a similar income threshold for deepening material deprivation. Composite ‘numbers’ of those multiply excluded are highly sensitive to the chosen thresholds and the particular indicators used for different dimensions, and add little to our understanding of exclusionary processes and appropriate policy interventions.

Survey data

A key question addressed by this project is the scope for secondary analysis of existing survey data in ways that will shed light on the states and processes of social exclusion. There is a great deal of data collected on aspects of disadvantage in existing surveys and administrative data sets. However, very few cover the range of aspects of multiple disadvantage or social

exclusion included in the B-SEM. The question of data coverage must be looked at in conjunction with population coverage. Here, there are a number of crucial issues:

- Household-based surveys by their very nature exclude vulnerable sections of the population, especially those living in institutions such as residential homes (for children, disabled people, older people), nursing homes, prisons and so on. Travellers and asylum seekers are also likely to be excluded, as are those who are homeless.
- There are sections of the population who although technically eligible for inclusion are under-represented in social surveys. Again, these are often groups who may be particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, such as those on low incomes or in temporary accommodation, or young residentially mobile people.
- Even where representation is proportionate, the numbers in vulnerable groups may be too small for further analysis unless original sample sizes are very large. This applies, for example, to the numbers of minority ethnic respondents in many surveys, as well as to lone parents and to younger and older pensioners.
- The geographical coverage of some surveys is limited. Not all cover the whole of the UK, and Northern Ireland (in particular) is often un- or under-represented. It is important in developing further research or new data sources to consider how far similar data is or should be available for all four countries of the UK.
- Data quality and sample estimates are affected where proxy informants are used and in some surveys large sections of data are derived from proxy informants. This a particular issue in relation to children, where proxy informants are the norm, although there is an increasing acceptance of the possibility and merits of direct data collection. In further research it is important that children's cohorts be included and that the age of respondents is taken as far down as possible, certainly to about seven years of age.
- The majority of surveys include the common risk factors associated with social exclusion such as gender, age, housing tenure, SEG and ethnicity. However, only a limited number include critical life events that may act as triggers for social exclusion, such as a death in the family, divorce or separation or pregnancy. Very few surveys include information on religious affiliation.
- Few surveys include additional administrative data such as IMD scores or ACORN neighbourhood.

With these cautionary points in mind, it would, however, be possible to undertake useful secondary analysis on some existing data sets using the B-SEM. Consistent with the life

course approach taken throughout this project, we have assessed the following data sets as likely to generate additional useful understanding.

Children

FACS collects a wide range of data (and there is scope for additional questions to be added in the future). Quite a lot of analysis has been undertaken of this rich data set, but most of it focuses on child poverty and material deprivation. We **recommend** further analysis of FACS using B-SEM to explore other aspects of social exclusion, thus building on Willitts (2006) and McKay and Collard (2004).

ALSPAC, although not a nationally representative sample, has exceptionally rich data that could be used for the analysis of social exclusion.

Young people

At present there is no ideal single data set for looking at young people and further work needs to draw on a number of sources. Indeed, there is no consistency in current survey approaches in the definition of a young person. We would **recommend** the more consistent application of the UN 16-24 definition, while bearing in mind that the most important issue is that of youth transitions. Notwithstanding its limited geographical coverage, the most promising data for this age group is likely to be the LSYPE, although the relevant data that will allow meaningful comparison of cohorts will not become available for some years.

Existing research and policy in this area have increasingly tended to focus upon exploring the situation and needs of 'socially excluded' youth specifically with reference to discrete though connected instances of marginalisation (e.g. NEET, teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, homelessness, etc.). Nevertheless, experiences of poverty and exclusion are not confined to a small minority but are a common experience for young people at various points in their transitions to adulthood. Addressing youth poverty is thus an important policy objective in its own right, as well as a lever in reducing the hazard of more extreme forms of exclusion and marginalisation.

At the same time there is some evidence that changes in the nature of youth transitions may be increasing both the relative risk of poverty and exclusion for young people relative to other life phases, and the persistence of poverty in later life. Future research informed by a longitudinal perspective is therefore needed to investigate the extent of inter-generational

change in the relative risks of multidimensional exclusion for young people. This research agenda is important both in developing the evidence base for future youth policy and in influencing the wider welfare reform agenda.

Recent research within this framework has drawn heavily upon the 1958 and 1970 birth cohorts in order to explore the changing dynamics of disadvantage across generations (e.g. Blanden & Gibbons, 2006; Bynner et al., 2003). However, whilst scope exists for further analysis of these data they also have several significant shortcomings related to:

- The effects of differential attrition (and unit non-response) amongst relatively 'disadvantaged' young respondents
- The limited range and adequacy of indicators measuring poverty, deprivation and disadvantage in the birth cohort studies
- The absence of a cohort study investigating the transitions of young people in the 1990s

For the above reasons it is useful to augment such analyses with those informed by a quasi-cohort approach based upon analysis of pooled cross-sectional data. Amongst existing large-scale official surveys the General Household Survey (GHS) offers unique opportunities for investigating the changing profile of income poverty, deprivation, and wider forms of disadvantage amongst Britain's young people. The advantages of this approach include:

- Minimising problems of non-response bias, specifically those relating to differential sample attrition in panel studies
- Wider range of items relating to material deprivation and more adequate measurement of income compared with the 1958/70 cohort studies
- Broad time coverage of the GHS (since 1970) allows for investigation of the ways in which the predictors of youth exclusion based upon the B-SEM approach have changed over the past 35 years
- Relatively large sample sizes based upon pooling at (for example) 5-year intervals allows for further dis-aggregation of the youth sample (aged 16-24)

We therefore **recommend** use of existing cohort data (that is, the 1958/1970 cohort studies) in order to make longitudinal comparisons of youth transitions using the B-SEM approach. Some work has been undertaken in this area but there remains considerable scope for further analysis. Allied to this – and since the data series extends back to 1970 – we would also

recommend using pooled cross-sections of the GHS to develop a quasi-cohort approach. This is especially important in relation to specific dimensions of the B-SEM model such as income poverty and deprivation.

Working-age adults

The best existing longitudinal survey from the point of view of social exclusion is the BHPS. Secondary analysis of this would be more useful than some earlier analyses if it were undertaken using the wider categories of the B-SEM. However, there are, as discussed above and indicated in the survey commentary, some serious problems about the BHPS. These include its small sample size, differential attrition and non-inclusion of the post-1990 immigrant population.

Recent recommendations to extend the sample size of the BHPS to 40,000 are currently being taken forward in discussions for a new longitudinal survey, the UKLHS. The first sweep of data is likely to be in 2008. Consultations about content are ongoing. We strongly **recommend** that there is input into these consultations to ensure the generation of adequate and appropriate data on social exclusion. We also **recommend** that the survey builds on BHPS best practice and includes a children's cohort.

The best repeat cross-sectional survey is the GHS. It would be possible to develop a social exclusion module (as was done for the social capital module), which could be used in future surveys on a longitudinal basis. While the GHS is one possible home for such a module, it could be used elsewhere, as in the BHPS and later the UKLHS. We **recommend** the development of a social exclusion module based on the B-SEM.

The APS is another possibility, especially for exploring the geography of social exclusion (a question outside our brief). The sample size is very large at almost 0.5 million and it includes Northern Ireland. However, its topic coverage is focused mainly on labour market exclusion.

Later Life

By far the best source of data on older people is the ELSA. It follows up the same individuals frequently, and has a refreshed panel. The sample is large and the range of topics wide. It includes critical life events, and allows for hazards and event analysis. For example, it would be possible to look at the impact of retirement on younger (50-60/65) respondents. It makes

possible the analysis of the *process* of social exclusion at the latter stages of the life course. We **recommend** the analysis of ELSA using the B-SEM tool. We also **recommend** that in future sweeps, a sample be included for Wales.

All age groups

The survey that covers the widest range of information across the domains of social exclusion and across the life course is the PSE Survey. This has the disadvantage of being cross-sectional and of having been carried out only once, so that neither longitudinal nor repeat cross-sectional analysis is possible. The sample size is also too small for the detailed analysis of some vulnerable groups, especially minority ethnic groups. We would **recommend** repeating an improved version of the PSE Survey with a larger sample size and a minority ethnic booster. If possible we would **recommend** re-contacting the households in the original survey to provide a longitudinal element.

We also **recommend** that more consideration is given to the use of minority ethnic and other boosters in existing survey research to improve the overall usefulness of these sources.

Administrative data

We **recommend** a further consideration of the use of administrative data following the publication of the ADMID report and UK NDS report on this issue. There are clearly possibilities here both for tracking of individual cases and for linked anonymised records as a research resource. However, in addition to technical issues, there are two areas of concern. First, there is the question of data quality. Although administrative data may not be subject to the same kinds of sampling error as survey data, it is particularly vulnerable to a range of non-sampling errors. Unlike survey data, its quality is not routinely assessed in these terms, so there is no independent assessment of its quality. Second, there are debates about ethics, confidentiality, informed consent and public trust in relation to data sharing across government. Social researchers are governed by ethical codes that place a high value on confidentiality and informed consent. These considerations would remain even if legal obstacles were removed. The loss of public trust might also have a general impact on data quality, in relation to both administrative and survey data. Third, there are currently legislative differences among the four countries of the UK that may have an effect on the feasibility of cross-programme linking of data for the whole of the UK. For example, there is interim legislation, which sets aside doctors' duties of confidentiality and allows the

disclosure of patient information without consent for (among other things): linking data from multiple sources, validating its quality and completeness and avoiding incorrect linkage or duplication; and audit, monitoring, and analysing of health service provision of care and treatment. However, the legislation applies only in England and Wales. The Confidentiality and Security Advisory Group for Scotland has proposed a solution that does not require legislation, but relies on government guidance which sets out situations in which a 'legal defence' can justify overriding consent requirements (see English et al, 2002).

We **recommend** that these considerations are kept to the forefront when considering the use of administrative records for purposes other than those for which they were originally generated.

Specialist research on non-household and under-represented population groups

A key issue in the analysis of social exclusion using existing data is the absence of vulnerable groups of the population from the social survey base because they are not included in the household population. There are two possible strategies for approaching this problem, which should be seen as complementary rather than as alternatives.

One is the use of specialist surveys directed at, for example, children in care, homeless people, refugees, prisoners and institutional populations in different forms of residential care for adults. Only the decennial census provides information on the non-household population and there have been very few specialist surveys. Such survey information on disabled children in institutions dates back to 1985; the last national survey of the prison population took place in 1991. The numbers concerned are not necessarily small. For example, some 500,000 older people are in care homes – that is about 1 in 20 of all older people. Over a fifth of those aged over 85 are in institutional care (Royal Commission on Long Term Care, 1999).

The second strategy is detailed qualitative research using life history and biographical techniques to identify exclusionary processes and experiences. This would be a useful way of identifying critical life events both leading to and preventing exclusion. Biographical techniques have already been used in relation to social exclusion in a comparative cross-European project (Chamberlayne et al, 2002). In general, qualitative research is superior to survey research for exploring individual experiences, and can offer far greater insights into complex interactions of factors. Qualitative research has enormous merits in its own right, but

can also provide the basis of better questions for specialist surveys. B-SEM could be used to develop a topic guide for use in qualitative research, although in its present form it is designed for survey assessment.

We **recommend** qualitative work with selected groups at particular risk of social exclusion, especially those who are excluded from or under-represented in household surveys. Such groups include: children in care, homeless people, people with disabilities, asylum seekers, prisoners and ex-prisoners, and all age groups living in institutions. Such qualitative work should use biographical methods to explore the experience of social exclusion and the nature and sequence of precipitating events.

We **recommend** that the findings from this qualitative work be used where possible to inform specialised surveys of social exclusion among the non-household population.