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Measuring Social Exclusion

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ABSTRACT

There is little agreement about the definition of social exclusion. Unsurprisingly, therefore, those attempts that have been made so far to measure social exclusion have incorporated a diverse set of indicators. Even so there are some clear gaps. This paper considers what steps need to be taken to extend the range of indicators used and to improve the quality of their measurement while accepting that there is unlikely to be agreement about the definition of the concept for the foreseeable future.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Hucklebury Finn once said about the ideal size of fish to catch: “If you can measure it, that ain’t it”. The same general idea applies to elusive concepts such as social exclusion. At the source of the problem is a lack of consensus as to precisely what social exclusion is, with several theories vying for supremacy. There is, however, agreement that social exclusion is a multi-faceted phenomenon. And most commentators also acknowledge that it embraces on the one hand an absence of financial resources and social capital, and on the other a presence of obstacles to building them up. But there the agreement ends. There is no accepted list of the forms of deprivation that constitute social exclusion, still less a shared view on how its various components, whether individually or in combination, should be measured. And even to the extent that certain components of social exclusion can indeed be boiled down into a set of measurable deficits, the problem remains about how to weight them. To be sure, some deficits are a good deal more debilitating to their possessors than are others. But that is as far as one can go for the moment without making heroic assumptions.

Our role in this paper is very modest. Impressed as we are with various attempts to come up with specific measures of social exclusion (Howarth et al 1998; DSS, 1999a; Burchardt et al, 1999; Bradshaw et al, 1998), we have not the slightest intention of trying to do so ourselves. Instead, we merely address some of the many difficult problems in the way of successfully measuring social exclusion, recognising all the while that “that ain’t it”. In keeping with our background in survey measurement, our emphasis is on indicators that can be derived from social surveys.

2. EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

Developed in European, particularly French, political and academic literature in the 1970s, the term ‘social exclusion’ referred initially to those who were excluded from *state* provision of one sort or another (Room, 1995). Over time, it was used to describe a heterogeneous collection of individuals including the “mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, drug addicts, delinquents, single parents and other social misfits” (Silver, 1994). All experienced extreme marginalisation in terms of employment and their relationship with the state (Lee and Murie, 1999).

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

Gradually, the concept has broadened to encompass exclusion from "the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the integration of a person in society" (Walker, 1997) and has become bound up with arguments about the rights of citizenship.

Almost all the literature implicates poverty as a fundamental aspect of social exclusion. Indeed, the term 'social exclusion' migrated to Britain during the Thatcher era at a time when the word 'poverty' was edited out of policy documents and reports. In any event, concerns about the socially excluded have been fuelled by reports on rising inequality in Britain (Hills, 1995), its persistence between generations (Hills, 1998), and its concentration in certain geographical areas (Cabinet Office, 1998). Indeed, Levitas (1999) identifies a 'poverty approach' or '*redistributive discourse*' as the first of three important schools of thought in the debates about social exclusion. From this perspective, low incomes and resources are the *primary* causes of social exclusion, revitalising long-running debates about how to define and measure poverty (Townsend 1979, Piachaud, 1981). This version of social exclusion is close to Townsend's original concept of relative poverty, in which the resources of "individuals, families and groups.... are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend 1979, p32)".

This poverty-dominated definition of social exclusion is, however, not the only current of contemporary debate about the phenomenon. The new Labour government has concentrated its attention heavily on what Levitas (1999) refers to as an '*integrationist discourse*', in which a lack of employment is seen as the primary cause of social exclusion. The aim of its New Deal and Welfare-to-Work programmes is precisely to re-direct working-age adults into employment as a means of reducing poverty and social exclusion. Behind these policies is the belief that, although rises in benefit levels may reduce poverty, they do not tackle its causes, nor do they mitigate the debilitating effects of exclusion through separation from paid employment. This form of exclusion is at its most acute in workless households that suffer the double jeopardy of low income and a lack of contact with working society.

Alongside this focus on paid employment is a concern about the notion of perpetuated or transferable social exclusion. This brings other sub-groups into focus, such as the homeless or roofless, teenage mothers and truants – the sorts of groups that might have been part of the original French conception

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

of *l'eclus*. And, although the Government's New Deal programmes are designed essentially to re-connect people to work, its Social Exclusion Unit reports also focus on marginalised groups of this kind. Using Levitas' classification (1999), this emphasis could be described as typical of a '*moral underclass discourse*', which dates back to the controversial debates that originated in the United States in the early 1960s involving, for instance, William Julius Wilson and Charles Murray.

Still more complex are debates about 'agency' – mostly about whether social exclusion should still be so defined if it results or persists from the voluntary actions of those it adversely affects (Burchardt, 1999), or from their inertia when remedial action could have been taken.

So far, we have implicitly referred to social exclusion as an outcome. Many would take issue with that view and argue that it is essentially a *process*. Outcome measures, however interesting they may be, are regarded by this school of thought as convenient but poor proxies for something far more illuminating. As Giddens (1998) describes it, "Exclusion is not about gradations of inequality, but about mechanisms that act to detach groups of people from the social mainstream". To be sure, any sensible definition of social exclusion is likely to embrace deficits such as poor health or poor education within its ambit. But those who emphasise process rather than outcome concentrate on limited *access* to health and education, and on the increased risks of exclusion that result from poor health and low human capital. Both types of indicator are clearly useful for different purposes - process measures to diagnose how the problem occurs and how it might be prevented, and outcome measures to monitor the success or otherwise of policies that aim to combat social exclusion.

Room (1999b) provides a theoretical framework of social exclusion that incorporates process and outcomes and the inextricable links between them. His recent analysis traces how an individual's 'initial endowment' (their income, savings, social capital etc.) goes on to influence their living conditions, a process interrupted by 'shocks' (such as the loss of a job) or 'opportunities' (such as the acquisition of a job). The impact of a 'shock' or 'opportunity' on an individual is in turn influenced by his or her 'buffers' or 'passports'. 'Buffers', such as strong social networks, mediate the effect of a shock, while 'passports', such as access to a car that enables one to take up a job offer, maximise the benefit of the opportunities that come along. This analysis suggests that measures of endowments, shocks, opportunities, buffers and passports should be part and parcel of monitoring social exclusion, helping to explain why people whose lives start off in similar circumstances nonetheless take different trajectories.

We summarise below (if somewhat simplistically) the key distinguishing features that Room (1999a) identifies between the limited notion of poverty on the one hand and social exclusion on the other.

1. While poverty consists primarily of a monetary deficit, social exclusion is multi-dimensional and interactive.
2. While poverty may be a temporary setback, social exclusion is a dynamic condition, implicated perhaps with intergenerational transfer.
3. While poverty tends to refer to a lack of resources at an individual or household level, social exclusion refers to a community or area-based deficit as well.
4. While poverty is concerned with an absence of basic, concrete resources, such as income, food and housing, social exclusion is also concerned with a relative absence of more abstract phenomena, such as social engagement and social integration.
5. While poverty is found towards the end of a continuum of inequality, social exclusion is sometimes used to refer to a catastrophic rupture or discontinuity in relationships with the rest of society.

So, however it may be defined nowadays, the notion of social exclusion is no longer confined to being barred from state provision; nor is it about poverty alone. Rather, it is seen increasingly as a dynamic, multi-faceted process that confers disadvantage, of which poverty is usually a necessary but insufficient component. Its effects may be apparent at both an individual and a community level.

3. EXISTING MEASURES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

While the concept of social exclusion has been tackled in some detail by various writers (such as Room 1995; Levitas 1998; Silver 1994), the practical task of how to measure it has had less attention. We concentrate here on four initiatives that attempt to look at social exclusion in the round.

3.1 The New Policy Institute's 46 indicators of social exclusion

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

Howarth et al (1998) recommend a set of 46 indicators that could be updated annually to monitor trends in overall levels and specific forms of social exclusion in Britain. Their approach has been criticised for its concentration on *available* indicators rather than on what a coherent conception of social exclusion would demand. And some of their proposed indicators are contentious, such as the proportion of children whose parents are divorced, the level of criminality among young adults, and the rate of teenage pregnancy – phenomena that are associated with long term disadvantage (Howarth et al, 1998; Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1999).

Nevertheless, the New Policy Institute indicators constitute an imaginative array of direct and proxy measures of economic disadvantage, such as the lack of a bank or building society account, various indicators of consumption and debt, and measures of civic engagement and fear of crime, all of which could be implicated in one way or another in the process of social exclusion.

One major attraction of these indicators is that they draw on a variety of data sources, including both aggregate-level data (such as children in institutions for young offenders, and the proportion of low birth weight babies) and survey data (attitudinal, behavioural and factual). Their primary disadvantage, as Levitas (1999) points out, is that they are rather atheoretical, failing to distinguish adequately between, for instance, poverty and social exclusion.

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

We summarise (and re-categorise) their indicators below.

Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap between low and median income, and individuals with below 50% and 40% mean income • Individuals with spells of low income of at least 2 or 3 years • Self-reported difficulty managing financially • Long-term recipients of benefits • Children living in households with below half average income • 16 and 17 year olds on severe hardship payments • Pensioners with no private income • Lacking a bank or building society account • Older people's spending on essentials • Spending on travel – poorest, relative to middle income • Mortgage arrears
Access to financial services Consumption Debt	
Employment- related factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children living in workless households • Young adults unemployed • Young adults and adults (25 to retirement) on low rates of pay • Adults (25 to retirement) wanting paid work • Adults (25 to retirement) in households without work for 2 years • Adults (25 to retirement) in 'insecure' employment • Concentration of worklessness among those in social housing •
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils gaining no GCSE grade C or above • Children permanently excluded from school • 19 year olds without a basic qualification • Adults (25 to retirement) without access to training
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low birth-weight babies, and accidental deaths among children • Young adults starting drug treatment • Young adults committing suicide • Premature death among adults (25 to retirement) • Adults (25 to retirement) experiencing depression, and older people experiencing anxiety • Adults (25 to retirement), and older people with limiting long-standing illness or disability
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people receiving help from social services to live at home • Older people without a telephone • Homes lacking central heating • Households in temporary accommodation • Overcrowding
Local environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfaction with local area • Vulnerability to crime
Family circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children whose parents divorce • Births to girls conceiving under 16
Criminality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in young offenders' institutions • 23 year olds with a criminal record
Civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-participation in civic organisations

3.2 The 'Poverty Audit' White Paper

At the end of September 1999, the government produced its long awaited plans for dealing with poverty and social exclusion (DSS, 1999a). The meaning of social exclusion which underpins the

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

report is “a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a *combination* (our emphasis) of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown” (SEU, 1999). There is an emphasis, also, on those factors that “can trap individuals and areas in a spiral of disadvantage” (DSS, 1999b).

The report sets out key indicators of social exclusion - another impressive catalogue of sources and symptoms - all of which could, in principle, be measured over time. In effect, it contains the Government’s list of priorities for the processes and outcomes it wishes to improve over the coming years, and on which it is prepared to be judged. Although it represents an attempt to be both specific and accountable, it confines its stated goals to virtuous changes in direction, not to a specific degree of change in any of them (though measures of success have been set elsewhere, e.g. DSS (1998). And the report concentrates heavily on those aspects of social exclusion at which government counter-measures are already aimed. This may be a reasonable target for the government’s own monitoring purposes, but on its own it may risk overstating the diminution of the problem in the round. So it needs to be supplemented by a rather more broad-ranging research agenda.

The indicators it contains fall into three broad categories, most of which apply to individuals and only a few to areas:

- Indicators of poverty – based on measures of low *absolute* and *relative* incomes, and on the persistence of low income, plus fuel poverty and housing deprivation.
- Indicators of integration through work and access to services, plus measures of outcomes such as improving health and education.
- Indicators of precipitating factors – such as lack of contributions to non-state pensions which increases the risk of financial hardship in old age, levels of teenage pregnancy which are associated with increased risk of immediate poverty and hardship later in life, plus factors such as fear of crime or worklessness which increase the risk of social isolation.

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

Naturally, some of the indicators serve dual functions. For instance, a measure of poor housing is also a precipitating factor in poor health. We show below a (re-ordered) summary of the indicators proposed in the report.

Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of children, the working age population, and older people experiencing poverty (as defined by low relative income, low absolute income and persistently low income) • Proportion of people with long term benefit dependency
Fuel poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of children and elderly households experiencing fuel poverty
Financial exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of working age people contributing to a non-state pension, both currently and persistently (i.e. in at least three of the last four years) • Amount contributed to non-state pensions
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of working age people in employment • Children and working age people who live in workless households • Employment among disadvantaged groups, and the gap between their employment rates and the overall rate
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of children living in poor housing • Proportion of households in poor housing that contain a person aged 75 or over • Proportion of older people being helped by public services to live independently • Number of people sleeping rough
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of older people whose lives are affected by fear of crime
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health outcomes in Sure Start areas, such as proportion of low weight births and numbers of serious injuries • Children's injuries • Cocaine and heroin use among young people • Adult smoking rates • Mortality rates from suicide and undetermined injury • Healthy life expectancy rate at age 65
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational achievements of 7yr. olds in Sure Start areas, children in care, all 11 year olds, and all 19 year olds • Proportion of working age people with at least one qualification • Levels of truancy and exclusions from school • Proportion of 16 – 18-year-olds not in education or training
Teenage pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in conceptions among under-18s and an increase in the proportion of teenage parents in education, employment or training

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

The report identifies an important gap in the measures it includes, and refers to the future development of area based measures which will capture the reduction in the gap between the worst neighbourhoods and the rest. The Social Exclusion Unit has put in place a team whose task is to come up with recommendations to fill this gap.

The report's focus, in line with the government's general emphasis, is on the 'integrationist' aspects of social exclusion, characterised by the central role it gives to employment as an antidote. But it by no means excludes other strands of the social exclusion debate, including some emphasis on aspects of process rather than outcomes.

There are, in fact, several similarities between the proposals in the government report and those in the New Policy Institute's report. But there are also important differences, one of which is the government's implicit rejection of attitudinal measures of social exclusion, despite references in its report to the "poverty of expectation". It also seems to overlook aspects of social capital, such as measures of social networks or civic engagement. As noted, the report concentrates on seeking improvements in deficits that government policies are already trying to address, possibly infringing the rule proposed by Howarth et al (1998) that the selected measures should be "free from perverse responses to administrative changes as well as being as immune as possible to direct targeting or manipulation" (p.13).

3.3 The CASE analysis of the British Household Panel Study

Burchardt et al (1999) of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) define social exclusion as the condition of living in a society and not participating in the "normal activities of citizens in that society". This definition dispenses with the notion of agency on the basis that non-participation is a social problem regardless of its most proximate precipitating factor. An inability to participate in 'normal activities', according to this thesis, has five components:

- A low standard of living (implying low consumption, but measured by a household income of below half the mean household income)

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

- Lack of security (savings under £2000, not contributing to or receiving an occupational or personal pension entitlements, not an owner-occupier)
- Lack of engagement in an activity valued by others (not in employment, self employment, full-time education or training, child care activity or retirement over pension age)
- Lacking decision-making power (not voting in elections, inactive politically)
- Lacking support from or contact with friends, family and the wider community

The authors acknowledge that other external factors can adversely affect people's propensity to participate. For instance, poor health or education, unstable partnerships or jobs, poor housing, a stagnant local labour market, inadequacy of transport links, and a lack of social, civil and political institutions can all inhibit participation – as can factors such as race discrimination, and so on. But their concentration is on outcomes rather than causes. Unlike the government report, however, their measures (notably the fourth and fifth components above) include the presence or absence of 'social capital' within the ambit of social exclusion (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b).

The analysis of the British Household Panel Study's (BHPS) data from 1991 to 1995 by Burchardt and her colleagues (Burchardt 1995) reveals strong associations between an individual's level of participation on the five different dimensions above, as well as on each dimension over time. But they find few "socially-excluded individuals" who were excluded on all dimensions in any one year, and even fewer who had experienced multiple exclusion over the whole period.

The distinct advantage of this data source for this purpose is that it is a panel, enabling the tracking of individual household circumstances over a period. Its disadvantage, other than sample attrition (especially, perhaps, among the most vulnerable), is that, in common with other household surveys, it excludes the institutional population. Thus, many of the most socially-excluded groups in society are out of its reach – notably prisoners, people who are chronically sick, children in care, people in various forms of sheltered accommodation, and so on. Also in common with other household surveys, it excludes the homeless and roofless.

3.4 Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey

The Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (also referred to as the Survey of Living Standards in Britain) is a third incarnation of the 'Breadline Britain' surveys which were carried out in 1983 (Mack and Lansley, 1985) and 1990 (Gordon and Pantazis, 1997). Funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the study is being carried out on this occasion by a group of academics from York, Bristol and Loughborough, in conjunction with ONS.

This survey has several advantages over other sources. In particular, it is based on well-focused development studies, including qualitative work to establish the 'consensual' or 'perceived' view of poverty. This was bolstered by a quantitative assessment via the ONS Omnibus Survey of what people believe are the necessities of everyday life. The full survey stage (still in progress) is based on a sub-sample drawn from the 1998/99 General Household Survey which over-represents low-income households.

As well as updating the Breadline Britain surveys, the new survey is designed to provide estimates of the proportion of households in different circumstances, to explore movement in and out of poverty, and to examine age and gender differences in experiences of and responses to poverty. The main focus of the survey is poverty rather than social exclusion, on the basis that "a comprehensive measure of social exclusion and its causes is beyond the scope of a survey which must retain continuity with its earlier versions" (Levitas, 1998). Nonetheless, much of its data will be central to the concerns of social exclusion. In particular, it adds an attitudinal assessment of different dimensions of exclusion, and examines processes as well as outcomes. It also has a limited longitudinal element since it involves re-interviewing people from the GHS about a year earlier. In addition, along the lines of the CASE work, it measures aspects of social capital alongside more conventional variables.

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

Its broad content is summarised below.

Income	Changes in income (and reasons) for respondent and other household members
Unemployment	Duration of respondent unemployment over last ten years
Consumption patterns	Voluntary or enforced absence of various consumer goods and activities.
Financial exclusion and debt	Problems paying bills; disconnections or necessity to ration use of utilities; debts and borrowings; possession of bank or building society account.
Intra household poverty	Nature of financial management in household, necessity to ration and share
Persistence of own poverty and expectations for future	Self-perceived relative and absolute income - past, present and future
Perceptions of national levels of poverty	Changes in perceived poverty in Britain over last 10 years; expectations over next 10 years; reasons for poverty and strategies for reducing it
Housing	Tenure; perceptions and reality of present accommodation, its state of repair and its fitness for purpose
Health	Existence of limiting long-standing illness or disability and its effects on other activities; psychological problems, such as feelings of isolation or depression; stress levels; self-confidence; pressures on use of time
Education	Children's experience of exclusion, being bullied or bullying, special needs
Quality and use of local services	Perception and use of library, public sports facilities, medical services, Post Office, shops, transport and leisure facilities
Events or shocks	Experience or fear of traumas such as death of friend or relative, breakdown of relationship, loss of job, serious debt, serious problems with children, work or neighbours, accident or injury, serious illness
Social networks and support	Contacts with relatives and friends in neighbourhood or work; factors preventing such contact ; availability of support when ill, or in need of advice or help
Area deprivation	Neighbourhood problems, such as noise, homelessness, vandalism, rubbish, poor condition of homes and gardens, poor street lighting, traffic pollution, lack of open space
Fear of crime	Experience of, or fear of, crime, such as vehicle theft or damage, burglary, vandalism
Discrimination	Self-reported experience of discrimination
Civic engagement	Turnout in elections; contacts with political party, trade union, other pressure group, parents, school, residents or tenants association; membership of religious, voluntary or community group, social or sports club, etc

3.5 Summary of sources

The table below crudely compares the coverage of these four sources of data on social exclusion.

	New Policy Institute, Howarth	Poverty Audit, DSS	CASE Analysis, Burchardt	Millennium Survey, Bradshaw, Gordon
Financial well-being and stability				
Income	4	4	4	4
Home ownership			4	4
Other capital				
Consumption of goods	(4)			4
Fuel poverty		4		
Savings			4	
Debt	4			4
Access to financial services				
Bank/building society account	4			4
Pension entitlements		4	4	4
Access to reputable loan services				4
Employment	4	4	4	4
Health factors				
Use of health services				4
Use of drugs, adequacy of diet	4drugs	4drugs		4diet
Adult morbidity/mortality	4	4		4
Psychological distress	4			4
Childhood morbidity/mortality	4	4		4
Education				
Truancy and exclusion	4	4		4
Qualifications of children, 16-18s, working-age population	4	4		4
Family dynamics				
Teenage pregnancy	4	4		
Children in divorced households	4			

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

3.5 Summary of sources (Cont'd)				
Local environment				
Access to services				4
Housing conditions	4	4		4
Experience of discrimination				4
Quality of physical environment	4			4
Experience and fear of crime	4			4
Criminal behaviour among young people	4			
Social networks/social capital				
Electoral turnout and political involvement			4	4
Involvement in parties/lobbies/campaigns			4	4
Involvement in community groups	4			4
Social support/networks			4	4
Attitudes				
Perception of self and others				4
Poverty of expectations/alienation				4

Some of these measures of social exclusion are based on aggregate or administrative data of one kind or another, others on sample survey data. Some depend on existing sources, others on potentially new sources. Some depend on snapshots, others on moving pictures. Some are based on people's individual circumstances or characteristics, some on their household characteristics, some on their neighbourhood or area characteristics. All imply quantitative measures of one sort or another. Whichever way we look at it, these individually important but collectively disparate measures would surely defy any attempt to combine them into a composite index, such as GDP. Such an index would not only have to be based on heroic oversimplifications and endless value judgements, but it would also be void for vagueness (see Atkinson, 1999).

Instead, the quality of measurement of all the individual components ought to be improved and refined – a subject to which we now turn.

4. BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL MEASUREMENT

Several generic obstacles block the way to the comprehensive and accurate measurement of social exclusion. Four in particular suggest themselves:

- Available sampling frames and administrative records tend to exclude the most marginalised members of society, such as the roofless. Similarly, few survey samples (barring those tailor-made for other purposes) incorporate the fairly large institutionalised population in hospitals, prisons, old people's homes, residential homes, hospices, children's homes, and so on. Statistics based on existing frames are bound to under-represent the socially-excluded, according to any reasonable definition of the term. Better attempts than hitherto need to be made to bring them into scope.
- Even if and when these groups do become the focus of research attention, it is often extremely difficult to obtain accurate information about them. Some avoid contacts that appear remotely 'official'. Others lack the ability to respond because of, say, physical or mental illness, or language difficulties. In cross-sectional surveys, these problems already manifest themselves in terms of non-response bias, and in longitudinal surveys they may be compounded over time by differential rates of attrition among the most excluded. Fortunately, Britain does not yet have 'no-go areas', which survey interviewers dare not enter. But certain techniques (such as self-completion surveys) are clearly inappropriate for research among certain subgroups. It is axiomatic, perhaps, that those most excluded from society will – for one reason or another – also be excluded from being counted.

- To the extent that social exclusion is about outcomes and processes, there is a need to separate causes from effects – an activity confounded by the fact that both outcomes and processes tend to come in large and interlocking clusters. Although multivariate modeling can clearly help in this respect, it cannot solve the underlying problem.
- Until the definitional problems are solved, a variety of summary measures will be used. There is thus an ever-present risk that the possessor of numerous individual correlates of social exclusion may be classified as such, despite powerful counter indications. There are, for instance, many people who are divorced, come from a broken home, have few qualifications and no job, suffer ill-health and are in debt, who would nonetheless not qualify as socially-excluded by any reasonable definition of the term. By the same token, almost nobody possesses *all* the elements that go towards social exclusion. So, the selection of items for any summary measure is fraught with difficulty.

5. WAYS FORWARD

5.1 Focused sample surveys

The Millennium Survey is, perhaps, the first custom-built vehicle for measuring multiple components of social exclusion. To fulfil its potential scope, however, it should ideally be repeated annually, (or at least at regular intervals) so that it can measure the size and distribution of short- and longer-term changes. It also needs to be buttressed by follow-up studies and qualitative work in order to probe more deeply into some of the phenomena it uncovers.

But, like the Family Resources Survey, for instance, its very strength as a comprehensive, multi-dimensional survey is also its weakness. More focused studies of other individual

components of social exclusion are also needed, by no means all of which require fresh data collection. It is plain, for instance, that measures of the income components of social exclusion are, for the moment, more precise than are other measures, though quite a bit of work has also been done on other aspects of social exclusion, such as social capital (Johnston and Jowell 1999), access to financial services (Kempson and Whyley 1999) experiences and effects of race, gender or age discrimination, and access to services.

In addition, there is a clear need for a custom-built longitudinal study that investigates and charts the dynamics of deprivation and the factors that determine individual trajectories (who sinks, who swims, and so on) - which are central to any examination of social exclusion. The birth cohort studies and the BHPS are, of course, excellent sources of data for some of the issues involved and a number of valuable analyses have already emerged based on them (for example McMahon et al, 1992, and Hobcraft, 1998). The existing birth cohorts might also be quarried still further for evidence about the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion, testing Room's notions of catastrophic rupture (Room, 1999a).

But these panel studies have other agendas to fulfil and existing time series to honour. In any case, despite their sizeable samples, they already suffer from attrition over the years and may have insufficient numbers of people in the target categories for a robust study of the socially-excluded. A data source with greater potential may be the Survey of Low Income Families, funded by the Department for Social Security (DSS) and carried out by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and the *National Centre for Social Research*, and which is now to incorporate a panel element. And another possibility we have been investigating in collaboration with colleagues at CASE is to use respondents from the Family Resources Survey as a starting point for a new longitudinal survey for this purpose, drawing on its large sample size and detailed measurement of income, financial exclusion, and household characteristics.

5.2 Small area studies

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

Much of the research into social exclusion takes the individual or the household as the unit of measurement. At the same time, policy is shifting towards tackling social exclusion at an area level (see Cabinet Office, 1998), in the light of evidence that deprivation is heavily concentrated within a relatively small number of areas. These areas apparently suffer from a double jeopardy. Not only do they have large clusters of socially excluded people who require above average service provision, but they are also faced with the collapse of local labour markets, the decline of schools, transport and other services, and a rise in crime.

A number of national programmes have either been set up or brought forward from the previous administration to deal with these problems in specific areas. They include the initial series of New Deal programmes, the subsequent New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, the Single Regeneration Budget, Employment Zones, and Education and Health Action Zones. They are all aimed at some of the most deprived areas in Britain. It is no surprise therefore that research attention on small areas is following suit, whether its aim is to acquire and analyse attitudinal data (such as perceptions of local crime levels), behavioural data (such as victimisation levels), or administrative data (such as local police statistics).

Accompanying this more localised focus of research are attempts to develop defensible area-based units of analysis. Recently, for instance, Scottish Homes invited the *National Centre for Social Research Scotland* to explore issues of neighbourhood with particular reference to social exclusion. So, just as has been the case in electoral research over the years (MacMahon et al, 1992), it is becoming increasingly important for researchers into social exclusion to distinguish the impacts of individuals on neighbourhoods from those of neighbourhoods on individuals, and to identify their interactions (see Bradshaw et al, 1998).

Social capital is a good case in point. Taken in its broadest sense, it requires measures not only of people's social ties and networks within a neighbourhood, but also of their local access to different sorts of social, cultural and economic provision – whether public or private. The Millennium Poverty survey intends to include measures like these, but not with the aim of generating small area-based statistics, since their numbers within any single

neighbourhood will be too small. There are in any case simply too many interactions going on. For instance, lack of access to a good education or a good job is related to poor health outcomes (Marmot and Wilkinson, 1999), and so on.

There is, however, always a risk that the results of specific area studies will be wrongly attributed to the nation as a whole. This is especially likely when research budgets for small area research follow the programme budgets in those areas. To the extent that these programmes work at all in the earmarked areas of special treatment, a measured reduction in social exclusion in those areas should not mask the fact that the problem still looms large in a national context.

5.3 Attitudinal research, both qualitative and quantitative

As noted earlier, most references to the measurement and monitoring of social exclusion are to indicators of economic and social circumstances and behaviour. Comparatively few (with important exceptions such as the Millennium Poverty survey) take the 'poverty of expectation' into account and include attitudinal measures in their ambit. In our view, this omission needs to be remedied. The fact is that people or subgroups who feel excluded and whom others also regard as marginal may well be likely to live out a self-fulfilling prophesy about their place in society. This issue can be resolved only by empirical evidence.

In any event, people's self-perceptions and attitudes are just as much a part of social reality as are their economic circumstances and behaviour patterns and, more importantly perhaps, they are often determinants of them. It could well be argued that a goal of public policy that aims for inclusion rather than exclusion should be to increase a sense of self-belief among its citizens and to enhance a reciprocal sense of security between the individual and society.

These sorts of attitudes and perceptions are all capable of being measured quantitatively. On their own they will not necessarily tell us a great deal about the distribution or nature of social exclusion. Some people suffering severe deprivation may, for instance, not feel

excluded or marginalised. Their expectations may have been too depressed by circumstances to be capable of being lifted. Even so, attitudinal measures can be powerful allies to measures of circumstances and behaviour.

Although qualitative research projects are not ‘measurement tools’ *per se*, they too can be powerful tools in helping to understand elements of social exclusion that quantitative research often only reveals rather than explains. For instance, O’Connor and Lewis (1999) uncovered a self-perpetuating process of withdrawal from society among the most isolated and deprived sections of the community. Not surprisingly, the causes were multiple, including all the usual suspects, but their report provides a fascinating account of the processes and how attitudes interact with circumstances to produce a downward spiral.

Similar insights have been gained into the role of specific causes of exclusion, such as debt (Rowlingson, 1994) and race discrimination (Chahal and Julienne, 1999). In the latter study, based on focus groups and in-depth interviews, the authors examine the impact of racist victimisation on people’s daily lives, leading not only to profoundly negative changes in routine behaviour patterns but also to financial losses, health problems and social isolation. They found that some family’s perception of the situation led them to adapt by seldom venturing out at night and by tackling even the most simple tasks, such as hanging up washing or putting out the rubbish as if they were “strategic events”. It is an excellent example of how the *process* of exclusion can be illuminated by qualitative studies, which provide insights into people’s reactions and responses that are of immense value to theory and practice. They also help to guide further substantive study in productive directions.

5.4 Methodological research

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

There are clear risks in trying to devise new measures that monitor the rise and fall of social exclusion in Britain in the absence of detailed methodological research to guide the process. To be sure, the starting point is to define the scope of the measurements as precisely as possible, and to come up with working definitions that rest on a coherent conceptual framework. As far as the main components of social exclusion are concerned, it is fair to say that this process is already a long way forward, though far from complete. Moreover, the empirical research necessary to test and refine the theories is gradually being accumulated, while many of the favoured measures rest on well-worn data sources that have already been proved. So far so good.

But a range of new measures has also been proposed which necessitate careful development work, testing and validation before being adopted. Some but by no means all of these measures have gone through rigorous testing and validation. And they need to if they are to stand up to the inevitable scrutiny they will be under from all sides. This applies equally to indicators based on new uses of administrative data as to new questions in social surveys.

The shortcomings of new questions in social surveys are, as always, likely to be particularly debilitating. Survey respondents have the well-known habit of answering questions they have not quite been asked, or do not quite understand, in a way that disguises the discrepancy. And although the problem may reveal itself at the analysis stage, it is by then too late to rectify. Worse still are cases that go undetected. We do not pretend that these problems of question design – especially when dealing with complex and sensitive issues – will necessarily be eliminated by careful development work (including cognitive testing, pre-testing and pilot work), but they can certainly be mitigated. More importantly, perhaps, a serious research project that omits these essential stages leaves itself open to justified criticism and reduces confidence in *all* its findings.

It goes without saying that any respectable survey measure of social exclusion ought to be based on more than one question and, preferably, on several questions in combination. Not only do survey questions travel better in convoy, buttressing one another, but carefully

constructed multiple questions enable the development of scales, which tend to be more robust as measuring instruments than are individual questions. They also enable internal consistency checks to be conducted, which – in the frequent absence of reliable external validation measures – are always reassuring.

Suffice it to say that, in our view, there is a substantial amount of methodological work waiting to be done in the pursuit of robust measures of social exclusion – whether to do with question design, scale construction, validation techniques or analytical methods.

6. CONCLUSION

The successful measurement of social exclusion requires a number of complimentary approaches, by no means all of which involve massive new investments of time and money.

A number of important sources of critical data are already available via existing sources. For instance, a great deal can be learned by quarrying the rich seams of aggregate statistics available through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other government departments. Other valuable source material is also available from the collected datasets of longstanding surveys, such as the Family Resources Survey, the 1958 and 1970 Birth Cohort studies, the British Household Panel Survey, the British Social Attitudes series, and many others. To the extent that these various sources do not quite fit the bill, those responsible for them might be prevailed upon to adapt or add to the data as an economical means of filling an important gap.

New sources will, however, also be necessary and the Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey promises to fill an important gap. Designed specifically to address multiple aspects of social exclusion head on, it is eagerly awaited both for its immediate contribution to the field and for its longer-term value as a benchmark study. Since it also contains a good number of measures included in the earlier Breadline Britain surveys, and draws on measures from other contemporary studies, it will also identify the scale and

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

direction of change in certain variables. In our view, serious consideration should be given to turning it into a regular cross-sectional time series.

New sources of longitudinal data are also needed to supplement the valuable material in the Birth Cohort studies and the BHPS. The proposed Millennium birth cohort survey is a welcome development, but it will naturally take time to fulfil its potential value. More immediately, attention should be given to other possibilities for longitudinal data, such as through follow-up panels from, say, the Family Resources Survey or the Health Survey for England – both of which have already been proposed. The ONS co-ordination of longitudinal research initiatives should give a welcome boost to these lines of enquiry.

We remain deeply sceptical of attempts to develop a sure-fire, summary measure of social exclusion, despite its apparent ‘political’ appeal. The argument against this approach has, we hope, already been won, as it would generate endless unproductive arguments as to the selection and weighting of the indicators it incorporated, and detract much-needed attention from the multifaceted nature of the problem. By the same token, it is important to ensure the combination of measurement strategies adopted should not be so focused on the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in society that they neglect the importance of social polarisation. Otherwise, evidence on the distribution of resources in society will effectively be lost (Hills, 1995, 1998).

It is too soon to come to any realistic conclusion about what the most valid and reliable measures of social exclusion are likely to be, or about how they might connect to one another. For the moment, by far the safest strategy is ‘to let a thousand flowers bloom’, planting a few new ones where there are obvious gaps in the landscape.

Measuring Social Exclusion
by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

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by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

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by Carli Lessof and Roger Jowell

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