Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK: Vol. 2: The Dimensions of Disadvantage

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CHAPTER

Fourteen Conclusions and emerging themes

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Abstract

Poverty as measured by material deprivation through lack of economic resources remains absolutely central to understanding the causation and patterning of most aspects of social exclusion and a wide range of social outcomes. Concerns are expressed about the implications of trends to greater inequality, marketization and loss of social cohesion, as well as stagnating living standards and increased precarity in the workplace and housing market. While the multi-dimensional perspective combining poverty and social exclusion is shown to be of value the emerging behavioural agenda around poverty requires critical challenge.

Keywords: Centrality of poverty, Poverty impacts on social outcomes, Growing inequality, Marketization, Living standards, Precarity, Behavioural aspects of poverty, Dimensions of social exclusion

Subject: Social Stratification, Inequality, and Mobility

Introduction

In this concluding section we attempt to provide some synthesis from the rich detail and insights developed across the preceding chapters. We do not attempt to simply reproduce the conclusions from each chapter. Rather, we have identified some larger themes which cut across the individual chapters and place the emergent findings from the PSE-UK 2012 study into a broader intellectual and policy context. This book presents predominantly quantitative findings from the PSE-UK survey structured thematically, mainly around the domains of social exclusion as set out in the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM, see Levitas et al, 2007 and our Introduction), but with some additional themes around the measurement of living standards and wider well-being included.

In developing our narrative on the larger cross-cutting themes, we have a particular eye on the discourses about poverty, whether in popular debate, the media, academia or 'policy communities', and about associated issues of policy, including poverty-related targets and standards. The authors contributing to this volume are academics active in research on poverty and social exclusion, but also often actively contributing to these discourses and policy debates. While this volume and its companion (Dermott and

Main, 2017) present the largest concentration of output and reflection from the PSE research, it should be recognised that there are other important published outputs (notably Lansley and Mack, 2015; Daly and Kelly 2015; edited collections of papers in *Critical Social Policy* (volume 36, issue 1, 2016) and *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* (volume 22, issue 3, 2014), and the PSE website, www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research), not to mention several TV programmes.

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The centrality of poverty

The central message of this volume is that poverty is a reality, that we can measure it most effectively through the PSE's consensual deprivation approach, and that it still has very pervasive adverse effects on society which we can clearly document. Townsend's (1979) notion of poverty as the inability through lack of resources to participate in normal social activities continues to find strong public support and is reflected in the close relationship of exclusion from social activities with material poverty (as drawn out particularly by Mack in Chapter 1 and Bailey in Chapter 6). Poverty in terms of the shortfall in economic resources is the most central and important domain of social exclusion (as demonstrated by Bailey, Fahmy and Bradshaw in Chapter 13), and it is particularly strongly linked to a number of other domains including employment, housing and social activities. Prior and Manley show convincingly in Chapter 8 that both current and past poverty, particularly as measured by PSE, are strong predictors of physical and mental health problems. The fuel poverty story reported by Bramley in Chapter 9 shows particular examples of how poverty can affect people's health and quality of life. Pemberton, Pantazis and Hillyard develop in Chapter 10 a more general account of the social harms of poverty, embracing impacts through physical and mental well-being, autonomy and relationships, synthesising qualitative as well as quantitative evidence. Tomlinson and Wilson in Chapter 12 review the current vogue for focusing on well-being and 'happiness', but show clearly that the most important route to improving these psychological outcomes is through lifting people out of poverty and economic insecurity.

A more market society?

Some would argue that changes since 1979, and continuing currently, are making for a more 'marketised' society, with more goods, services and experiences subject to market mechanisms and processes. If true, this might be expected to make for a closer correlation of 'other' domains of exclusion with the core economic resources domain. One example discussed by Bramley in Chapter 9 is housing, where the rise of private renting and the decline of both social renting and home ownership may be seen as undermining Britain's traditionally distinct welfare/housing regime, which helped to insulate the poor from an inevitable experience of housing deprivations; the chapter does find however that this transition has not been

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complete. Another ↳ example might be the trend to 'financialisation' discussed by Bramley and Besemer in Chapter 11, with its associated growth of financial 'stress' and debt problems, even as conventional measures of financial exclusion decline. However, the findings on certain other domains, for example social networks and support (Chapter 5) and local services (Chapter 4) show that these remain distinct in their patterns and less closely related to economic resources.

Inequality

Some argue that we should frame the discussion more in terms of 'inequality' than 'poverty'; others might beg to differ. Clearly the PSE-UK study provides a wealth of evidence on inequality across different domains. Inequality in Britain rose dramatically in the 1980s and remains worse than in many developed countries (Hills, 2015), although recent trends have been less clear-cut (Introduction chapter). One aspect of concern is what has been happening to the incomes and wealth of the 'top 1 per cent', or even the 'top 0.1 per cent', with an increasing range of voices suggesting that rising inequalities at this end of the spectrum are economically, socially and politically damaging (Dabla-Norris et al, 2015; Ostry et al, 2016; Picketty, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012; Sayer 2015). However, the PSE-UK survey is probably not the best vehicle for investigating this group, not least because of the challenges of getting a representative sample of the richest households in this kind of survey. Another aspect is the bottom 1-3 per cent, the people in very severe poverty and destitution addressed by Bramley, Fitzpatrick and Sosenko in Chapter 3. They report some evidence that the incidence has increased and spread to wider groups in the population, for reasons picked up further later in this chapter.

The chapters in this collection underline that inequality is a major concern, not just in terms of income but across a whole range of domains. As Patsios, Pomati and Hillyard show in Chapter 2, there are striking inequalities in 'What we have', 'What we do' and 'Where we live'. When Tomlinson and Wilson look at subjective well-being and happiness (Chapter 12), they find that the most glaring inequality is the low levels experienced by the poor. This provides very striking support for a traditional 'utilitarian' argument for redistribution, to raise average happiness levels. Across demographic groups, the most striking story is the dramatic improvement of the situation of retirement age households in UK, a group for whom poverty – and financial stress more generally – seems to be increasingly rare (as drawn out in our own Introduction,
p. 346 but also the accompanying Dermott and Main ↳ volume). This group, at least the majority who are home owners, are also benefiting from the increasingly skewed distribution of wealth, because of housing price increases and the evolution of occupational pensions. Findings in relation to other dimensions of exclusion, such as Wilson, Fahmy and Bailey's work on social participation (Chapter 5), also suggest this group are doing well, at least on average.

Disadvantaged groups

If the retirement age group is the demographic which is currently most favoured, who appear to be most frequently disadvantaged, looking across the domains of poverty and social exclusion? Patsios, Pomati and Hillyard in Chapter 2 highlight the low average living standards of single working-age people and lone parents, in particular. Bailey, Fahmy and Bradshaw highlight in Chapter 13 a number of groups who feature recurrently, including: younger and single adults; lone parents; the unemployed and economically inactive; Black and other minority ethnic groups; renters, particularly in the social sector; and those in 'routine' occupations. Bailey in Chapter 6 also highlights the extent of poverty and other forms of exclusion for those in paid work. On the whole this is not a new-looking profile of 'the poor', apart from the virtual disappearance of older people from the list. The companion volume (Dermott and Main, 2017) examines the situation of different groups of people in more depth, as well as the place dimension of poverty.

Falling living standards and expectations

Most of the authors involved in this volume grew up in a context of expectations of continual improvement of living standards which post-WW2 economic growth had supported through most years for most of the population. The period leading up to and beyond the PSE-UK 2012 survey was something of an exception to that, as underlined in our Introduction, with flatlining or declining real income levels, and this is strongly confirmed by the headline findings on worsening PSE poverty discussed in Lansley and Mack (2015). Chapter 13 suggests that two-thirds of comparable deprivation or exclusion indicators worsened between 1999 and 2012. Economic growth of the UK remains rather low, and is currently uncertain owing to Brexit, and during the period leading up to 2012 there were strong rises in some elements of the cost of living which are important for lower income households, particularly energy costs and housing costs (with the shift ↳ to
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private renting). It is striking also that expectations had clearly fallen, as reflected in the changes in what constituted necessities as underlined by Mack in Chapter 1, whereas between 1983 and 1999 they had been rising. Cost of living pressures clearly affected groups above the poverty level, sometimes termed 'the squeezed middle', who showed more evidence of struggle as highlighted by Bramley and Besemer in Chapter 11 (where evidence of financial stress on this group is presented). Bailey argues in Chapter 6 that there is a growing issue of both 'in-work' poverty and 'exclusionary employment', and this parallels some wider societal debates about the growth of 'precarity' in the labour market and more widely (Standing, 2011). Bramley noted in Chapter 9 that some housing needs or deprivations appeared to worsen in this period, after a long period of progressive improvement, while Bramley and Besemer suggested in Chapter 4 that a range of local services were starting to worsen under the impact of austerity.

Disengagement or alienation?

The cumulative impact of all of the above could be extremely negative, not just for immediate welfare but also possibly leading to a loss of confidence in the economic (and political) system. As researchers, we see a growing gulf between the evidence on the harm caused by poverty and inequality, and the direction of travel in policy. Policy has never been 'evidence-based' in a simple or direct sense, but research and evidence seem to be losing what little traction they had on the worlds of policy and politics. We do not in this volume directly address media portrayals of poverty but accept that this is a significant issue in its own right The evidence of a decline of civic/political engagement addressed by Fahmy in Chapter 7 seems a bit ambiguous, although it is clear that the poor participate less, even when controlling for class and education, and Chapter 13 reports declining participation in political activities and groups, common social activities or use of cultural facilities.

The sense of alienation of sections of society from mainstream politics was given a significant boost by the outcome of the UK's EU Referendum in 2016, although perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the voting turnout was notably high. In subsequent reactions, including by the incoming Prime Minister, Theresa May, there has been considerable emphasis on parts of Britain which may feel 'left behind' by economic events as well as ignored by the 'metropolitan establishment' and the political elite. The regional dimension of poverty is discussed more by Tomlinson's chapter in Dermott and Main (2017).

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The damaging effects of poverty

There are many reasons we should care about poverty. While representing first and foremost an affront to our sense of social justice, poverty also causes significant and lasting harm to individuals and to society (see Pemberton, Pantazis and Hillyard in Chapter 10). These harms create very substantial costs for society, not least financial costs to the public sector (Bramley et al, 2016a). The proposition that poverty and inequality impose such harms and costs is increasingly widely acknowledged, although there may be debates about the exact patterns and directions of causality and the role of other possibly confounding factors.

Within this volume, significant evidence is presented on the nature, extent and significance of such harmful and costly effects. Prior and Manley present this particularly clearly in Chapter 8 on poverty and health, by showing the scale of difference in both physical and mental ill health associated with poverty, and that these effects are robust to the inclusion of a wide range of socio-demographic controls and to the use of time-lagged measures of poverty to address issues about the direction of effects. Chapter 12 reinforces this by underlining that the strongest factor correlated with lower levels of happiness and well-being is poverty. Chapter 10 complements this by presenting arguments and evidence on the different types of social harm (for example through impacting on autonomy and relationships), including through the use of qualitative research findings linked to PSE. Chapter 5 shows that, while social networks and support can help some individuals and families to withstand economic adversity, at the same time persistent and recurrent poverty can wear down such relationships and see a progressive withdrawal of poor people from social engagement (notably social activities), thereby contributing further to risks to health and well-being. Chapter 3 shows how combinations of persistent poverty, lack or loss of supportive relationships, and the rough ends of welfare reform and administration are leading to a significant incidence of outright destitution in the UK in 2015.

Precarious lives?

Some have characterised life for rising proportions of the population in the UK, and elsewhere, as being increasingly uncertain and risky, with terms like ‘precarity’ being frequently used (Standing, 2011). Expressions of economic precariousness include the growing extent of marginal self-employment
p. 349 activities, contract and agency working ↳ including ‘zero-hours contracts’, and unpaid internships rather than proper paid training jobs. Lynch (2016) focuses on the stresses and strains of Britain’s ‘just managing’ families. In a new approach to defining social class in Britain, Savage et al (2015) proposed an emergent structure in which the ‘precariat’ (accounting for 15 per cent of the population) occupied the bottom rung, below groups labelled ‘emerging service workers’ (19 per cent) and ‘traditional working class’ (14 per cent). After discussing the problems of stigmatisation, Savage et al go on to argue that

> … the precariat concept is preferable to that of an underclass because Standing’s term draws direct attention to the way that the vulnerability of these groups is linked to their structural location in society. It also avoids the clichéd stereotypes. The precariat are not passive, culturally disengaged or morally limited.
>
> (Savage et al, 2015: p 353)

In Chapter 6, Bailey develops the concept of ‘exclusionary employment’ and suggests that one third of the working population are in this category, suggesting a somewhat broader phenomenon. Clearly different definitions and thresholds produce different numbers, but perhaps the wider point is that relatively poor quality of work affects a large and possibly growing section of the UK population. It is certainly clear from PSE evidence from successive surveys that ‘in-work’ poverty is a growing phenomenon, and that therefore

it is becoming less true that work constitutes a general route out of poverty. In addition, precarity of employment can also be linked to precarity in the housing market. The share of households in the private rented sector has increased dramatically in the last twenty years, and in most of the UK the standard private tenancy offers little security beyond six months (Chapter 9). A growing share of working households in their middle years and families are now obliged to live in such an insecure tenure, having been excluded from owner occupation by unaffordability and from social renting by its unavailability, particularly in higher demand regions. Another form of precarity stems from the growth of household debt, creating a source of stress for both poor and middle income households, as documented in Chapter 11.

Pemberton, Pantazis and Hillyard in Chapter 10 question the adequacy or appropriateness of the concept of 'risk society', and the associated emphasis on 'resilience', in some social theory and policy literature of the last two decades. It is clear that a weakness of these discourses is to not recognise that the exposure to risk is
p. 350 in fact strongly ↳ patterned, and that certain groups (notably the 'precariat' as defined above, and the poor more generally) are disproportionately exposed to such risks and disadvantaged in being able to counter or absorb them. Striking evidence of this inequality of risk in the case of homelessness is presented by Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2017) drawing on PSE and other data. While it is true in a general sense that some individuals and families may display more resilience than others in overcoming hardship or specific adverse events/harms, resilience can be weakened by a range of factors, such as a lack of social support networks or a previous stressing of these networks (Chapter 5), prolonged experience of poverty or repeated bouts of severe poverty (Chapter 3), or episodes of mental ill health confronting wholly inadequate service provision (Layard and Clark, 2014).

Social exclusion

The PSE studies have been based to a considerable degree on the premise that governments and policy communities are interested in the wider concept of 'social exclusion', a concept which overlaps with but is distinct from 'poverty'. While Bailey, Fahmy and Bradshaw question this presumption in Chapter 13, at least implicitly, we would say that the jury is perhaps still out. The specific language of social exclusion may have been used somewhat less frequently in recent years, but there is still a very live political and policy debate about both poverty and wider inequalities in life chances. The debates about how definitions of poverty and related targets may evolve over time, picked up further later in this chapter, serve to illustrate this. Having attempted to measure social exclusion in a comprehensive way through the B-SEM framework, what have we learned about the utility of this concept?

First, as already underlined (under the 'Centrality of poverty' section), this body of research confirms the view that poverty remains central to the experience of exclusion. While the strength of the associations between poverty and the different domains of exclusion may vary, Chapter 13 shows that the groups which suffer multiple forms of exclusion all have – albeit to greater or lesser extent – significant material disadvantage. Social exclusion is not an alternative focus to or substitute for poverty, but rather a reminder to look beyond the immediate material position. Second, it is also true that the 'social exclusion' perspective, when applied systematically, does expose some different clusterings of problems which are less
p. 351 closely associated with poverty, particularly in the areas of family and social networks and ↳ support, political and civic/cultural participation, and local services. In some instances, such as local services, we would argue that this lack of close association with other domains of exclusion is good news since it is evidence of policy success (as developed further later).

On a more pragmatic note, we would acknowledge that some aspects of social exclusion are less adequately and completely measured in the PSE-UK survey. For this reason we have found it more difficult to provide a rounded account of them in this volume. This applies particularly to education and cultural resources and

participation, and perhaps also to crime and criminalisation. While the current survey has been the first to try to operationalise such a broad measure of exclusion, there is undoubtedly scope for improvement.

A less cohesive society?

A question posed by some of the issues raised in this concluding chapter might be: 'Is society becoming less cohesive?' One should always, of course, guard against naïve assumptions about the nature of British society in the past. With the exception of Northern Ireland, we have managed to avoid civil wars and revolutions over the last couple of centuries, but Britain has also been a notably class-ridden society. Perhaps the period of the Second World War and its aftermath, which saw the foundation and consolidation of the modern welfare state under consistently improving economic conditions, was a period of relatively high national consensus and cohesion (Hennessy, 1992). Conversely, the period since the 1970s has seen more economic instability and political change, including at times polarisation, major occupational changes associated with transition to a post-industrial economy in a globalised world, and greater population diversity associated with greater international migration.

The PSE-UK study is not primarily focused on questions relating to social cohesion, for example in terms of values and attitudes. Nevertheless, in the one area of attitudes which we examined explicitly, namely attitudes to what constituted essentials for living in the UK today, we found remarkable consensus across groups. In terms of changes over time, we detected some areas where change might have some bearing on social cohesion. In Chapter 4, it was shown that local public services in the information, leisure and cultural field, which are generally open to the whole population, have tended to see a reduction in usage, so that services previously used by majorities are now only used by minorities (for example, libraries). Socio-
p. 352 technical change, with the growth of online access to information and services, was seen ↳ as a factor behind this trend, but it could have as a consequence some loss of social cohesion. Services for children expanded in the period after 1999, so that families might have experienced more involvement in public services, such as children's centres or after school clubs, but this process will have gone somewhat into reverse during the period of austerity after 2010. In Chapter 7, some mixed evidence was presented on political and civic participation, with some evidence of decline which might be taken as another indicator of declining cohesion.

If attitudes towards poverty, including views about its causes and the role of individual agency, are a guide to social cohesion, then we can probably say from evidence from other sources (particularly the British Social Attitudes Surveys) that attitudes to welfare have hardened over time (although there is some tendency for this to relate to the economic cycle). This seems to be particularly true for views about unemployment benefits, and possibly more generally for benefits to working-age households. Overall, the proportion *disagreeing* with the statement that the government should spend more money on welfare benefits rose from 15 per cent in 1989 to 44 per cent in 2009, before dropping back to 31 per cent in 2015 (NatCen 2016).

A behavioural agenda

The way that public attitudes to welfare and poverty fluctuate over time is associated with beliefs or assumptions about behaviour and about the choices which people make. If you believe that whether people are working or not is more a matter of choice than opportunity, and that there are not structural barriers of geography and discrimination which make it much more difficult for some people to find work, then you are more likely to favour welfare policies which impose conditions and create incentives for working-age people to actively seek work. The behavioural agenda may be seen as entailing a continuum from the more subtle, psychological approaches of the 'nudge' school towards the more crude and coercive world of job-seeker benefit sanctions.

However, it has long been recognised that people have both more understanding of and more sympathy, or empathy, for people more similar to themselves in terms of experience (Culyer, 1983). Thus the generation of the 1930s who experienced mass unemployment with inadequate social protections, as well as the privations of World War 2, were much more sympathetic to the plight of unemployed people in the earlier years of the post-WW2 welfare state. By contrast, the prolonged period of falling unemployment up to 2008
p. 353 may have underlain the changing attitudes mentioned in the preceding section. ↳ It is perhaps more in the qualitative research associated with the PSE study, as well as in other contemporary studies (for example, Fitzpatrick et al, 2016), that one may gain more insight into the real and perceived nature of the choices facing people in poverty. And it should also be stressed that behavioural sciences have shown clearly how our capacity to make 'good' decisions or to put long-term benefits ahead of short-term rewards is heavily influenced by our material position and hence poverty (Behavioural Insights Team, 2016).

During the period of the PSE research, there has been a concerted and partially successful attempt to redefine poverty in the UK, retreating from the apparent consensus around the child poverty targets achieved in 2010. This attempt is closely bound up with a focus on behavioural issues. For example, in proposing a redefinition of these targets, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) (2012) made the following statement:

> … our main concern is that the exclusive use of an arbitrary line to measure child poverty tells us almost nothing about how the disadvantaged live their lives. . … Yet we know from our own extensive research as well as the research of others that the key drivers of poverty are family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency and worklessness, addiction and serious personal debt . …
>
> (Centre for Social Justice, 2012: p 4)

We would take issue with this statement, and certainly with its implications. First, you could argue that the statement is equally or even more true the other way around – that is, family breakdown, educational failure, and serious personal debt are all strongly found following and as a consequence of poverty. Clearly it is a very substantial and unwarranted assertion that the direction of causality contained in the CSJ formulation is the dominant one. Secondly, the statement insinuates that these are all examples of personal behavioural choices indicative of moral weakness and fecklessness, or possibly weakness in certain public institutions such as schools, rather than broader structural features of the economy, society and the state. Yet such assumptions are blind to the real constraints facing many people in their daily lives – women driven out of relationships by violence and abuse, schools which routinely fail to address additional educational needs, the negligible chances of a person with limited qualifications or work experience finding a decent job in many localities, or the crude and uncoordinated practices of debt collection agencies in public as well as private sectors.

p. 354 It is sometimes said that extreme cases make bad law, and this may be true of the kind of response to poverty implied by the CSJ intervention. It is suggested that 'addiction' is one of the key causes of poverty, which tends to imply that this is very common and that for most people in poverty this is a factor. Yet this is simply not true. Serious addictions to drugs or alcohol are closely related to certain other social problems, particularly chronic offending, single homelessness and, to some extent, mental ill health. This cluster of 'complex needs' is a significant issue for the individuals affected and their families, friends and neighbours, and for a range of services they use, placing significant burdens on public expenditure (Bramley et al, 2015). But they are a small part of the total population affected by poverty – between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of the total number of adults in poverty in England at that time.

Positive stories

It is easy to lapse into a negative, critical stance in the light of debates such as those just mentioned. However, it is also important to highlight positive messages where these are apparent within the research. One good example is the picture presented on local and public services (Chapter 4). Insofar as some people were excluded from a number of services, the pattern of who and where was not systematically related to poverty or to the other domains of social exclusion. In other words, there is no inevitability to the potential link between deprivation and local services exclusion. It is not invariably true in Britain that if you are poor you will have no services or only poor quality services available to you – an assumption that would typically be made in some other 'advanced' countries, such as the USA. Through the combination of activities by local government (both as service provider and as planning and regeneration agency), the NHS, and other public regulation, there is generally good service provision across the board in most areas. Furthermore, although there was some evidence of retreat for some services, in the important area of children's services, the availability and quality improved markedly between 1999 and 2012.

There are other examples of positive stories on the lack of close correlation of some other domains of social exclusion with core material poverty, for example housing where Chapter 19 argued there was still a degree of insulation of housing deprivations from economic deprivation, for educational and cultural
p. 355 resources/participation (albeit not very thoroughly measured or analysed here) and similarly for social ↳ activities and support (Chapter 5) and civic and political engagement (Chapter 7). Some aspects of living standards have improved over time (Chapter 1), fewer people are excluded from basic financial services (Chapter 11), and people continue to feel a little bit happier year by year (Chapter 12). It is a real strength of the PSE-UK approach that it can draw attention to these positives, giving credit to policy makers and institutions where due, as well as highlighting continuing problems or challenges.

Where next?

In drawing these threads together it is incumbent on us to suggest what the most important 'take-away' lessons are for certain key questions facing UK in relation to poverty and social exclusion in 2017:

- What is the right set of poverty targets for governments to work to and for the policy community to focus on, and hence for the statistical agencies to measure?
- Is social exclusion still the key 'twin concept' to run alongside poverty and is it appropriately encapsulated by the B-SEM framework? Do other terms – inequality, social mobility, or life chances, for example – provide a better means of focusing our attention?
- How do key conclusions emerging from the PSE-UK study link up with current agendas for policies to tackle poverty, particularly the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's anti-poverty strategy, 'Solve UK

poverty'? (JRF, 2016a, b)

Poverty targets

It was a significant advance for Britain to place legislation on the statute book specifically on poverty through the 2010 Child Poverty Act. This established a framework of targets to provide a benchmark for progress towards the goal, first established as a government target by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2001, to first halve and then eliminate child poverty over 10 and 20 years respectively. The key targets were the four measures of: relative low income; absolute low income against a fixed base year; combined low income and material deprivation; and persistent poverty. The third of these drew on the approached developed in the earlier PSE studies. At the same time, the EU was developing a parallel set of targets and measurement tools
p. 356 utilising the EU-SILC datasets (Guio et al, 2016). These also drew on the PSE ↳ approach, incorporating a measure of material deprivation into the EU's headline poverty reduction targets (EU 2010).

Despite cross-party support for the 2010 Act, the change of government later that year set in train a process to question the basis of the targets, as briefly described in Chapter 1. Particularly influential through its links with Iain Duncan Smith, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ, 2012), which argued that these measures of child poverty were inadequate, placing too much emphasis on income while neglecting what CSJ saw as 'the main drivers of poverty', which it listed as 'family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependency and worklessness, addiction and serious personal debt'. It proposed a recasting of targets and indicators to place more emphasis on the latter factors rather than the former.

It should be clear from much of the content of this volume that the present authors reject the thrust of this critique. We have already commented above, under the 'behavioural agenda' heading, on the inadequacy of the CSJ approach. More fundamentally, it is simply logically wrong to sidestep the definition of poverty and talk about causes, without being clear about what is the phenomenon that these are causing. The CSJ then compounds this error by pushing a tendentious list of alleged causes without giving consideration to the full range of present and past causes of poverty. Poverty is fundamentally about the lack of material resources to enable human well-being, thriving and participation in society, yet the CSJ intervention and some of the subsequent policy responses represent an attempt to airbrush the main source of material resources, income, out of the picture.

The most important conclusion of the present study, reviewing the findings across all the chapters in this volume, is that material poverty remains central to most aspects of social exclusion in Britain today. This conclusion is reinforced by many other studies which exploit the growing richness of longitudinal data, to show the longlasting and often cumulative effects of poverty in childhood and younger adulthood on later life chances, whether in terms of education and skills, earning power, health, or wider participation in many aspects of life. Although PSE is fundamentally a cross-sectional survey, key questions on past experiences of poverty show a strong relationship with contemporary outcomes in this respect (see especially Chapter 8).

Notwithstanding the critical reaction of the wider policy community, as well as many academics, the post-2015 Conservative government legislated in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 to abolish the Child
p. 357 Poverty Act and its associated targets. The only formal targets ↳ set were in relation to children in workless families and educational attainment. After a prolonged campaign, the government agreed to commit in law to regularly publishing data on the number of children in poverty under the old targets, but it is clear this represents a major downgrading in their status. The government duty to publish a child poverty strategy was also removed by this legislation. A previous Child Poverty Commission was reconstituted as the Social

Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in 2012, while under the 2016 Act this was renamed once more as the 'Social Mobility Commission', a further attempt to airbrush poverty out of the picture (CPAG, 2016).

It should also be emphasised that the UK/England policy agenda here has increasingly diverged from that pursued in the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Broadly, these countries continue to focus on child poverty and to promote a range of strategies and key outcome targets that give significant emphasis to poverty as well as wider life chances.

It seems likely that the debate about poverty measurement will continue to run. Following intensive criticism of the Child Poverty Act measures from some members of government, an independent Social Metrics Commission has been established to try to identify new measures which can command long-term cross-party support. In their Interim Report (Social Metrics Commission, 2016), the Commission argued that these measures needed to meet a number of criteria, including being scientifically credible as well as having support across the political spectrum. Given the views expressed by some in government about the existing well-established poverty measures, it remains to be seen whether the Commission can identify any new indicators which will satisfy both criteria.

Whither social exclusion?

We have touched at various points in this book on the origins, development and interpretation of the concept of social exclusion. The PSE-UK study was a serious attempt at measuring all aspects of exclusion in a systematic way within one household survey instrument, providing a unique opportunity to better understand the interrelationships between as well as the distinctiveness of particular domains of exclusion. This and the companion volume are our best attempt to put this picture together in one place and to provide a rich account of the meanings and realities of social exclusion, albeit one resting mainly on quantitative data. What can we conclude from the exercise as a whole?

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First, we would claim to have been, in the main, successful in generating and analysing an appropriate set of measures which provide a balanced picture of multidimensional social exclusion in the UK today. This picture enables us to say much more confidently how important economic resources, or material deprivation, are in the broader picture, re-emphasising the centrality of poverty and the validity of the original Townsend conceptualisation from 50 years ago (Townsend, 1979). In this volume in particular, we focus on the nature of the different dimensions, including how they are best measured and how they may be changing over time as well as how they interrelate with one another.

Are the B-SEM domains the correct ones for structuring analysis and commentary in the future? From a statistical point of view, Chapter 13 suggests they can be grouped together to a considerable degree, although the picture of closeness of association depends on the measures and techniques used to some extent. Using the approach of categorising people as excluded or not on each domain, most domains appear to be positively associated with each other but in many case the overlaps look quite modest. Using the factor analysis approach based on continuous scales of more or less exclusion, the domains of the B-SEM appear to collapse to perhaps five composite dimensions, with one or two domains (notably access to services) not closely correlated with any others. These five comprise: economic resources (with social activities and housing); political/civic/cultural participation; family and social resources; neighbourhood environment; and health and well-being. This suggests there may be a degree of duplication or redundancy in the present conceptual framework, and scope for a realignment of the current set of domains.

In terms of policy discourse, social exclusion has perhaps gone out of fashion since 1999, but the underlying issues remain essentially similar. One can discuss 'life chances' or 'outcomes' and still be essentially discussing the same issues. However, the discussion may now place a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of change, on the legacy of experiences at an earlier stage for opportunities in the present, and on barriers to

change or factors which facilitate change. This parallels a change in the analytical landscape, with (as earlier noted) more emphasis on longitudinal datasets and data linkage as enhancements to conventional cross-sectional household survey methods. It is claimed that such developments offer significant opportunities for quantitative social sciences to gain a greater handle on issues of causation. While this focus on micro- and longitudinal data might be seen as putting a greater emphasis on a questionable 'behavioural agenda',
p. 359 and ↳ downplaying broader structural explanations, this is not necessarily the case. It may serve to provide a stronger demonstration of the longer-term, cumulative and geographically linked negative influences of material poverty on life chances and outcomes. These issues can be seen illustrated and discussed in a number of chapters in this volume (for example, Chapters 8 and 12).

Policy strategies

It has not been the purpose of this book to develop, review or critique policies which bear directly or indirectly on poverty and social exclusion, although inevitably particular policies do come into the picture. Our main purpose has been to provide an evidence-based assessment of the state of poverty and social exclusion in the contemporary UK, and to explore the nature of the different dimensions of exclusion and how they interrelate. However, governments follow strategies, implicitly or explicitly, even though the disjointed incrementalism of typical policy making as well as the impact of 'events' often mean that the actual operative policies do not represent a clearly coherent strategy. Other bodies – including think tanks, pressure groups and charities, as well as academics – also put forward their ideas for policy strategies, whether comprehensive or sectoral.

A particularly interesting contemporary example of this is the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a charity which specialises in policy-oriented research and is active in the fields of poverty, place-making/housing and social policy. It has recently launched an anti-poverty strategy under the headline 'Solve UK poverty' (JRF, 2016a, b), based on a four-year programme of research and policy development. One of the present authors contributed to this background research, including: the study of 'Destitution in the UK' reported in Chapter 3; a study 'Counting the cost of poverty' (Bramley et al, 2016a), which showed how much it costs the public finances to leave poverty unsolved; and a study entitled 'What would make a difference?', which modelled the longer term impacts of a wide range of policy and contextual scenarios on outcomes in terms of a range of poverty and inequality measures (Bramley et al, 2016b).

This latter study suggested that it would be difficult to eliminate relative low-income poverty, but that substantial progress could be made in reducing 'combined poverty' (relative low income combined with material deprivation) and severe poverty or the depth of poverty (poverty gap shortfall against Minimum
p. 360 Income Standard) by around ↳ half to two-thirds. This could be done through a concerted strategy of different measures, which could still be relatively fiscally neutral, while also greatly improving housing affordability and access. Among the measures highlighted as offering some of the best potential were improved childcare packages, closing the gender pay gap, implementing the Full Living Wage and positive indexation of this in future, and convergence of regional growth rates, as well as restoring cuts in Universal Credit.

To go further it would probably be necessary to widen the agenda into a broader counter-inequality strategy, taking up some of the ideas canvassed by the late Tony Atkinson (2015) in his recent volume. These include such concepts as modifying the nature and emphasis of technological change and innovation, labour market policies and social partnership, national savings products, and possible universal child and 'participation' income. As these and other ideas are expanded and explored, we anticipate that the research reflected in this volume will play its part in influencing the evolving agenda, while the PSE data itself, and other datasets whose design and content has been influenced by PSE, will play a key role in building the evidence base for more effective policies.

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