PIW 12

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Dr Peter Matthews, University of Stirling

Hard to reach or easy to ignore? Seeing similarity and difference in deprived neighbourhoods in Wales and Scotland

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Key messages

In 2012 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in Scotland commissioned researchers from Heriot-Watt University to carry out research on equalities groups and deprived neighbourhoods. Scottish social policy was increasingly using place-based policies to tackle poverty, through measures such as early intervention. The EHRC were concerned that some groups in society might miss out on the benefits of these policies as they do not live in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Some of the analysis was updated in 2014 using data released from the 2011 census.

The data in the reports is only applicable to Scotland, with its own definition of neighbourhood deprivation. However, the key findings of both pieces of research inform our understanding of deprived neighbourhoods and have lessons for policy in Scotland and Wales:

- Scotland and Wales are similarly recovering from de-industrialisation with all the challenges of socio-economic inequality and poverty that entails;
- The Scottish and Welsh governments have used place-focused policies to alleviate and tackle poverty and deprivation;
- Policy and policy-makers often presume these neighbourhoods and communities are homogeneous;
- Between 2001 and 2011, in Scotland, people experiencing poverty have become increasingly concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- Evidence from Scotland demonstrates their diversity – both expected and unexpected;
- A disproportionate number of disabled people live in the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland because limited income from employment exclusion reduces their housing choices;
- Many ethnic minorities are relatively under-represented in the most deprived neighbourhoods meaning they would not benefit as much from place-based policies to tackle poverty;
- The separation of "communities of interest" and "communities of place" in policy-making means we fail to respect this diversity – we almost ignore it;
- Policy also fails to understand the nuance of how different individuals and groups experience places because of their identity;

- A key challenge is how we respond to this diversity in individual and community experience based on identity associated with: socio-economic status; place; and protected characteristics.

These types of neighbourhood-focused anti-poverty policies, typified in Wales by Communities First, make a number of presumptions: that there is something about the neighbourhood that reduces life chances; that the neighbourhood just needs to "pull up its bootstraps" to return to being "normal". None of these statements are supported by research evidence – neighbourhood deprivation is a result of wider trends of de-industrialisation, market mechanisms and housing and land-use planning policies. To put it simply, deprived neighbourhoods tend to exist because we put all of our socially rented housing in one place.

Because individuals, and households with individual problems and challenges, are concentrated in some neighbourhood problems are more visible and obvious including:

- Poor health and wellbeing, including in health behaviours such as smoking and diet;
- Worklessness and unemployment, even though a majority of the working age population may be in employment;
- Poor quality housing and poor environmental quality due to poor housing maintenance and insufficient investment in mainstream services;
- Anti-social behaviour linked to a lower age profile, poor mental health and wellbeing and the stress of income and material poverty.

Regeneration policies aim to tackle these problems, but also make a presumption that these neighbourhoods and the people who live in them are all alike – non-immigrant, white and working class. Our analysis of data from the Scottish Health Survey demonstrates that in Scotland this is clearly not the case. Table 1 presents this data. This looks at the percentage of any group with a protected characteristic that live in most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. To understand this table it is important to recognise that if a group were evenly distributed in Scotland there should be 15% of them in the most deprived 15% of neighbourhoods.

Table 1: Percentage of equalities groups in the most deprived neighbourhoods

Individuals	Percentage of whom live in bottom 15% SIMD areas
All	
Men	14.4%
Women	15.7%
Health problems / disability	
Disabled	22.0%
Long-term illness	22.5%
Disabled AND long-term ill	27.5%
Neither long-term ill nor disabled	12.8%
Ethnicity	

White		15.0%
All non-White ethnicities		22.9%

Religion

No religion		14.8%
Church of Scotland		12.4%
Roman Catholic		26.3%
Other Christian		8.6%
Buddhist		9.3%
Muslim		27.1%
Other religions		14.4%

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual		13.4%
Gay / lesbian / bisexual / 'other'		17.0%
Refused		17.6%

The interesting figures are those in cells coloured yellow and orange – over-represented groups. Key findings to take from this table are:

- The concentration of people who are disabled and/or have long-term ill health. People who are both disabled and have long-term ill health are twice as likely to live in the most deprived neighbourhoods (**27.5%**).
- All non-White ethnicities are over-represented in the most deprived neighbourhoods (**22.9%**).
- Of faith groups, Roman Catholics (**26.3%**) and Muslims (**27.1%**) are particularly over-represented.
- Non-heterosexual sexualities are over-represented (**17%**)

These neighbourhoods are in fact very diverse; much more diverse than I or most policy-makers have ever considered.

This diversity is not reflected in regeneration policy. For example anti-poverty policies focused on deprived neighbourhoods rarely take into account the gendered experience of poverty; that women are entering a different labour market from a different starting point, often with care responsibilities. The tailored support women need is rarely acknowledged by neighbourhood-based projects to tackle worklessness. The unpaid work of women in developing what is termed bonding social capital – strong friendship networks and help to get by – is rarely recognised in policy focused at engaging and helping communities.

What regeneration policies are effective at doing is making people who share protected characteristics a problem:

- Women become the object of policy because of spatial concentrations of lone parents who are seen as problematic and something to be sorted out.
- Disabled people are a problem as we need to reduce the welfare benefits bill, not remove barriers to them getting sustainable, well-paid, skilled employment.

- Neighbourhoods with a high number, or even a majority, of residents from ethnic minority communities are seen as a problem for social cohesion or at worst a focus for islamaphobic concerns around terrorism.

The fact that policy makes people who share protected characteristics a problem demonstrates a lack of sophistication in how we think about the connections between equalities, socio-economic inequalities (particularly poverty) and place. Because equalities groups can be relatively small and therefore difficult to measure it is easy to separate out "communities of place" and "communities of interest". This presumes neighbourhoods are homogenous, denies the complexity of identity, and ignores that where people live interacts with other experiences of inequality to affect their life chances.

To work through a scenario from a gender perspective, a good example is regeneration policy whose objectives include rebuilding housing to improve a neighbourhood. Many evaluations have demonstrated this will improve the residents' perceptions of the neighbourhood; will reduce material poverty and the impacts of income poverty; fuel efficiency may improve household income; and it may improve mental health and wellbeing. However, the burden of community engagement in deciding what gets built is likely to fall on women as community activists. Lone, female parents are likely to find the process of moving house particularly disruptive and unpleasant. Women are unlikely to be able to access the construction jobs or apprenticeships that might be delivered to local residents. Women are much more likely to feel the benefits of better urban design making a neighbourhood feel safer. As they are more likely to be carers or work part-time they are going to spend more time in the neighbourhood and thus derive more benefit to their mental health and wellbeing from the improved environment.

This nuanced relationship between protected characteristics, place and socio-economic status that needs to be brought to the fore in place-based policies targeting poverty and socio-economic inequality. A key challenge in Wales is using your data to understand deprived neighbourhoods as defined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. There are very limited datasets for minority groups, particularly ethnic minorities and those with a non-heterosexual sexual orientation in Scotland as, in a population of 5.9 million, the national level numbers of these groups are very small. In Wales this problem would be even more pronounced. However, data on women and disabled people should be available from most national surveys providing invaluable data. The census can also be used to understand if ethnic and/or religious minorities are under or over-represented in the most deprived neighbourhoods.