



Keele University

Centre for Social Gerontology



Commission for
Rural Communities
Tackling rural disadvantage

Rural Disadvantage and Older People

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Outline

- Scientific and policy background
- Research questions
- Methods
- Key findings
- Conclusions and policy implications

Scientific and policy background

- Implicit urban focus of research on ageing
- Limitations of existing studies of rural ageing
- Extending the 'social exclusion' agenda to rural areas
- Commission for Rural Communities: thematic study on rural disadvantage

Research questions

- What are the key *characteristics of disadvantage* facing rural older people?
- How does the *experience of disadvantage* vary for different groups of older people?
- What are the *drivers of disadvantage*?
- What are the links between *disadvantage* and *quality of life*?
- What are the *policy implications*?

Methods

Qualitative research design involving two stages:

- Screening survey of 91 potentially disadvantaged rural older people.
- In-depth interviews with 20 older people identified as being (multiply) disadvantaged; preparation of case studies.
- Content analysis based on research questions.

Methods: screening survey

Selected indicators of disadvantage

- **Material disadvantage:** perceived management of finances.
- **Inadequate social relations:** social isolation or loneliness.
- **Limited access to services:** difficulty accessing four of five key services.
- **Community change:** satisfaction with place of residence.

Methods: interviews

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews:

- Experiences of daily life;
- Perceptions of rural life;
- Management of household finances;
- Social relationships;
- Access to services and amenities;
- Biographical information.

Key findings

Sample of disadvantaged older people:

- **Diverse in:** age, gender, marital status, household structure, housing tenure, length of residence and health status.
- **Little diversity in:** quality of life (only two with poor or very poor quality of life); ethnic background.

Key findings

- Transition to widowhood as risk factor (for women); divorce as risk factor (for men).
- Chronic ill health associated with heightened vulnerability.
- Being an informal carer as risk factor.
- Longstanding residence in a rural community may also be linked to disadvantage (requires further research).

Forms of disadvantage

- 14 people (of 20) affected by limited material resources;
- 13 people affected by inadequate or poor quality social relationships;
- 8 people affected by difficult service access;
- 2 people affected on the community dimension.

Material disadvantage

“As long as you’re thrifty, and you don’t spend on excessive things, it’s a reasonable standard of living.”

“Well, WI is, yes, very, very expensive, because you pay 30p when you go in. And think, that’s for your cup of tea and cake and then there’s a raffle, so you reckon it up in the year...”

Material disadvantage

“I mean there’s no way we’re borrowing. I mean if we’ve got bills coming in, we just save. (..) When you get to our age you’ve got more or less everything that you want. But I mean, we had this place decorated last year, it’s never been finished off, everything is just everywhere. We’ve got things we don’t really need, you know.”

Inadequate social relationships

“It’s like a totally different world living in a town. Everybody seems to... there’s no community spirit and everybody looks after number one and if... well I find they find it even difficult say good morning to you.”

Inadequate social relationships

“Well, the few [people] just around are friendly, but you don’t see anything much now of what I call the new people up in the barns and that. They’re very nice when you do see them, but they’ve sort of divided the village in half almost now. Because they’re at the top and we’re at the bottom. We don’t mix very much.”

Limited access to services

“... years ago we used to have a little village hut and then, when they built the new hut at [larger village one and a half miles away] ... they said this (one) wasn't good enough to have functions in, you know and it was sold, it went. But it was very good and then of course everybody went then because there was no transport. But we had lovely times in there, much happier than in the [new] parish hall, I think. But of course, the people's changed and the building's changed.”

Limited access to services

“... unless you’ve got transport you’re beat before you start ... and if you can’t walk very well and you haven’t got the best of health ... well, it can be a soul destroying experience, stuck out in the sticks ... unless you can drive and you’ve got public transport ... well you’re far better off moving into the town.”

Community change

“I don’t know, but I feel sorry for young people. Our daughter certainly can’t live here... could never buy a place here. Never, ever, will be able to. [..] Now anywhere round here, you’re talking £400,000 at least, so how can anybody young buy it, with a mortgage and Council Tax, you know? They can’t do it, can they? So, I mean, she has to live in the town.”

Community change

“We have got a lot of new people come into our village through the new houses, some are very nice but others really don’t want to know you, and a lot of them are not country people... they come from Buckinghamshire and all over, and I suppose they’re younger... I mean, they’ve probably come into the village to a big new house and they come, the wife has a brand new car, the husband has a company car and in a short while they have a 4x4, a Barbour jacket and wellies with straps on. That’s like trying to be country people... And they seem to know, some of them, more about the village than the likes of what I know. And they don’t...”

Disadvantage through the life course

“They [town people] don’t know what hardship is. And to go out into the rural areas... on a November day at about 4 o’clock in the afternoon, it’s as foggy as a bag and you’re the only person on that farm... It can be very frightening, lonely...you haven’t got all these lovely street lights and all these amenities... I can understand why the suicide rate is so high in farmers, it is a soul destroying experience. If you’re living right out in the middle of nowhere and your wife’s at work, your daughter’s at school and you are there, or your wife’s left you and you haven’t got anybody, I can understand farmers going down the field and not coming back.”

Disadvantage and quality of life

“It’s not a good life, you know what I mean? It’s not an ideal life, not by a long way. The ideal life would be me sitting here and having my dinner brought in, or going out – my ideal life would be outside, like we used to have lovely lawns up here. That would be the ideal life, two or three years ago. We’ve got photographs of it, with lights on, and rose bushes, and all mowed, and all the edges done and all the drive neat.”

Conclusions and policy implications

- Limitations of pilot study.
- Evident that rural disadvantage is not the same as urban disadvantage.
- Transport and affordable housing for 'local' people identified as important issues.
- Importance of supportive and proximate family, friends and neighbours.
- Need for larger follow-up studies.