

How Has The Notion of Social Exclusion Developed In The European Discourse?

Jonathan Bradshaw*

Abstract

This paper reflects on the development of the idea of social exclusion in European and particularly in British discourses. When it first emerged, social exclusion seemed to add to little to poverty and in some guises carried a great deal of behaviourist ideological baggage, or blamed the poor. Over time, however, experience in the UK has shown that social exclusion has broadened the research agenda and opened up new possibilities for policy. This paper contributes to these debates by presenting new estimates of poverty and exclusion in Britain using data from the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. The estimates confirm that poverty and exclusion are related, but distinct concepts. There remains the question of whether social exclusion has not entered official discussions in Australia as a result of a 'Howard effect' or because of some more fundamental resistance in the Australian political – and academic – culture.

Introduction

Is there any purpose to be served by introducing the notion of social exclusion into the Australian social policy discourse? This paper is a reflection on the development of the idea of social exclusion in European and particularly British discourses. I ask the question because, at least on the basis of a fairly

* Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, United Kingdom

casual search of Australian literature,¹ it does not appear to have been incorporated into, at least, official Australian discussions. For example there is no mention of social exclusion in the remit of the Australian Senate Inquiry into Poverty. There are some mentions in the academic literature. For example Jones and Smyth (1999) undertook a (very good) review that covers some of the same ground as this paper. It is generally positive about the notion of social exclusion – arguing that it broadens the analysis of poverty; provides an additional concept on the basis of which claims can be made; helps to understand the particularities of difference; highlights the spatial dimension; and is suited to cross national comparisons. I cannot claim that the notion is entirely absent in the Australian literature – just much less than in the policy and research literature of Britain and Europe.

I wonder why social exclusion may have been neglected in Australia. Micklewright (2002) attempted to proselytise social exclusion to the US, having found that in a search of the American literature social exclusion was entirely absent. In a recent paper (pp. 120-21) he argued that “social exclusion’s emphasis on *process* seems useful ... The headings suggested by Atkinson – *dynamics, relativity* and *agency* – offer a good route forward ... The US literature on child well-being is good on dynamics but less so on relativity and, arguably, agency”. But Micklewright believes that his mission was a failure. Gornick (2002) explains this failure in terms of the political culture of the US that is characterised by diversity, economic insecurity, unorganised labour, a decentralised state, mixed with values of individualism, autonomy, self reliance and the promise of mobility. All these mesh badly with the relativity, external causation and long-term condition implied by social exclusion. Also, the European paradigms of social solidarity and positive social rights are not embedded in American political culture.

The question that arises from this is whether this is also an explanation for the relative absence of social exclusion in the Australian discourse? On balance I would expect not. Australia is certainly diverse (multi-cultural) and a federal state. But insecurity is not as prevalent as in the US, labour is more organised and, though self-reliance (the battling Aussie) is a traditional virtue, surely values of social solidarity are more firmly embedded in the notion of a ‘fair gos’ and your wage arbitration system.

Poverty and social exclusion

The concept of poverty has had many alternative representations or even synonyms: lack of physical necessities, minimum subsistence, relative deprivation, transmitted deprivation, a culture, the underclass. It became low income during the Tory years in Britain when poverty was denied and the ‘P word’ was expunged from official documents. In that context when the

French concept of Exclusion Sociale crossed the channel and began to be used in British discussions, some of us were very suspicious. Our general paranoia was provoked by the book by Levitas (1998), which drew attention to the political and ideological baggage that the concept of social exclusion had picked up. She famously distinguished between MUD – the moral under-class discourse of social exclusion where the individual's behaviour was blamed for their plight and education, social work, and a framework that enhanced incentives and responsibilities was the solution, and SID – the social integrationist New Labour/Third Way discourse, where rights as well as responsibilities were given equal sway but the solution to social exclusion was employment and education. Then there was the old left RED – redistributive egalitarian discourse where social exclusion was the result of structural factors and policies involving redistributive taxation and public expenditure as solutions.

In Britain, SID defeated MUD and came to power with the election of the Labour Government in 1997. SID decided that in order to win the election they would stick to Tory spending plans for two years and there would be no increase in direct taxation during the first term. RED was vanquished. Poverty and inequality continued to rise. And SID was active in declarations of “work for those who can, welfare for those who can't”, “hand up not hand outs”, and so on.

In some of the academic discourse, social exclusion was advocated as an enriching construction of poverty. Room (1995) argued for example, that social exclusion was better than poverty in that it expanded poverty:

- From income/expenditure to multi-dimensional disadvantage;
- From a moment in time to a dynamic analysis; and
- From the individual or household to the local community in a spatial dimension;

The REDS argued that most social understandings of poverty encompassed these elements and to claim them for social exclusion was merely to misunderstand, for example, Townsend's conception of relative poverty. Does not his classic definition include it all?

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average family or individual that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend 1979).

Certainly Townsend defined resources very broadly and his use of the word 'group' could imply the community and spatial element. Although there is no mention of time, efforts have been made to explore the dynamics of poverty since longitudinal data sets have become available.²

The Social Exclusion Unit

Tony Blair established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in the Cabinet Office³ in 1997. It was a policy unit with a brief to tackle socially excluded people and places. The SEU defined social exclusion as

a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, low skills, poor housing, family breakdown, high crime rates that lead people or places to be excluded from the mainstream.

This definition tended to confirm RED suspicions that poverty was to be defined as an exceptional experience and not one requiring major structural redistribution.

The SEU was staffed by civil servants and practitioners and people from voluntary organisations and business with experience of tackling social exclusion. It had an integrating function, bringing people from different departments to work together on a common set of problems. They reviewed the evidence about the problems, analysed what works, made recommendations about solutions and an implementation team then followed up to ensure that the recommendations were implemented.

They were set to work on specific topics including rough sleepers, teenage pregnancy, school exclusions, young people not in education or employment, neighbourhood renewal. Worthy, serious topics, but at the margins of the subject – the REDs thought.

The Volte Face

For a time, I shared many of the RED views about social exclusion and played a part in defending poverty against the invasion of social exclusionary ideas. However I have now come round to the view that social exclusion is here (in Britain perhaps especially) to stay and I want to spend the rest of this paper trying to justify this change of heart to myself. In the process it might also indicate why it might be useful in Australia.

SID became REDder

The SID rhetoric of New Labour has been moderated. They introduced for

the first time in Britain a National Minimum Wage, announced then out of the blue. In a speech at Toynbee Hall in the (poor) East End of London where Beveridge, Atlee, Titmuss and Townsend had worked, the Prime Minister declared that the Government would 'eradicate child poverty within a generation'. Subsequently the Treasury set out further objectives: to eradicate child poverty by 2020, to halve it by 2010 and 'to make substantial progress towards eliminating child poverty by reducing the number of children in poverty by at least a quarter by 2004'.⁴ The wording of the target has now been slightly altered 'To reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004 as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020 ... The target for 2004 will be monitored by reference to the number of children in low-income households by 2004/5. Low-income households are defined as households with income below 60% of the median as reported in the HBAI statistics ... Progress will be measured against the 1998/9 baseline figures and methodology'.⁵

This was poverty not social exclusion. The target (at least for the first five years) was a relative one – the number of children living in families with incomes below 60 per cent of median income. The Government also committed itself to bearing down on pensioner poverty – though the target was more vague. In 2000, substantial real increases were made in both in-work and out-of-work benefits for families with children and in the 2001 budget very substantial real increases were made in both the basic state contributory pension and the Minimum Income Guarantee for pensioners. In April 2003 a new system of child tax credits and working tax credits began operating. The Government has introduced monitoring of their progress towards meeting these targets with the publication of the annual *Opportunity for All* reports (with similar reports in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) which contain an array of indicators covering children, working age people and pensioners. There still has been no increase (indeed a cut) in income tax rates but National Insurance contributions were raised in 2003 and the revenue has been used to fund substantial increases in public expenditure on services. So the treatment is right, though the dose could be stronger.

The Government has been blessed with (and partly responsible for) an excellent performance of the economy. Employment is at record levels. Male and female unemployment is at a 25-year low. Interest rates are very low and falling and prices are stable.

The proportion of children and older people living in poverty has at last begun to fall and the Government should meet its first five-year target for child poverty. They would have done much better if inequalities in market income had not widened and resulted in them having to chase a moving target. The realisation of this problem with the relative income target has led

them to set up a consultative review of poverty measures.

About one third of government spending is on services and they are thus an important element in the attack on social exclusion. In 2002, the Government announced the results of the spending review,⁶ which covered expenditure in the three-year period 2003/4 to 2005/6. In the Labour Government's first term in office, spending on services was constrained by the commitment to stick to the previous administration's spending plans and then by the constraints of the commitment not to increase income tax rates. Spending on health and education grew in real terms but fell as a proportion of GDP up to 2001. The new spending plans envisage an overall increase of 3.3 per cent per year in real terms over the period and public expenditure as a proportion of GDP will rise from 39.9 per cent in 2002/03 to 41.9 per cent in 2005/6. This increase in spending is concentrated on education (7.7 per cent growth), health (7.3 per cent growth), and transport (12.1 per cent growth). Between 2000/1 and 2005/6, educational spending will rise from 4.6 per cent to 5.6 per cent of GDP. By 2007/8, it is envisaged that UK health spending will reach 9.4 per cent of GDP – above the current EU average of 8 per cent. Among the many other measures that the Government has introduced have been a child-care strategy, a neighbourhood strategy, Surestart for early years children in deprived areas and cash subsidies for children to stay on at school.

There is no doubt that elements embedded in the expenditure plans are part of an assault on social exclusion. Measures of poverty or social exclusion do not usually take into account access to high quality service provision, either public or private, and there is actually very little analysis in the UK of the overall distributional impact of this expenditure on services. Lakin (2003) provides an indicative analysis of how spending on some services effect the overall distribution. A more sophisticated analysis has recently been produced by Sefton (2002). He compared spending between 1996/97 and 2000/01 on health, personal social services, housing and education. He concluded that poorer households receive a greater share of benefits in kind from welfare services than richer households and that the 'pro-poor' bias in spending has been rising gradually over the long term. Since 1996/97, spending on welfare services has grown faster than in the past and there has been an incremental shift in favour of lower income groups, even after controlling for demographic effects. Between 1996/97 and 2000/01, the bottom quintile's share of the social wage increased, while that of the top quintile fell. However, not all service expenditure has a pro-poor distributional effect. Differential rates of participation in post-compulsory schooling and higher education, under-utilisation of health and personal social services by lower income groups and the fact that poor people do not live as long – are all factors that favour higher income groups.

This kind of analysis is important because it raises questions about the ex-

tent to which central government aspirations to target social exclusion are 'mainstreamed' or represented in the spending priorities of separate Ministries at government level and by local authorities.

The Social Exclusion Unit began to extend our appreciation of poverty

Research on poverty has always been concerned with a lack of resources beyond merely income. Thus, there is a literature on fuel poverty, food poverty and of course the whole area of access and affordability of housing. However in its concern with social exclusion the SEU has begun to take us into poverty areas that have not previously been seriously investigated. For example transport and social exclusion, have recently been the subject of an excellent SEU report, which included a review of the evidence.⁷ Transport is relevant to social exclusion because those without access to a car have difficulty accessing employment, education, health and other services, food shops, sporting leisure and cultural activities. People without cars mainly rely on buses, but poor people face physical barriers in accessing buses. In addition, there are problems of frequency, reliability, coverage and cost – bus fares have risen by 30 per cent in the last 20 years and are some of the highest in the EU. Spending on bus route subsidies has fallen by two-thirds since 1985. Overall transport spending is highly regressive, with better-off road and rail users receiving much more of the benefit of subsidies than worse-off bus users. The SEU report estimated that the lowest income quintile will receive 12 per cent of the total spending of the Government's recent 10 Year Transport Plan, while the highest quintile will receive 38 per cent.

The Social Exclusion Unit recently indicated that it wishes to share its learning from experience so far; and that it wants to examine how government policies act together against social exclusion and what the potential drivers of social exclusion might be in the future.⁸ If these goals are pursued, this would be a real opportunity for consolidation of recent experience. They are also planning two new investigations of the links between poverty and mental illness and high unemployment areas.

Dissatisfaction with income poverty

As a result of lessons learned in undertaking the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE) survey and in comparative work I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the reliability and validity of income based measures of poverty. To put the problem briefly income has always been:

- An indirect measure of poverty;

- Subject to problems of recall in answer to survey questions;
- Volatile; and
- Not a good measure of command over resources – ignoring dissavings and borrowings.

In addition the equivalence scales that we have to use to adjust income to household needs lack any basis in science or evidence on relative needs. In recent years, for no good reason, poverty researchers and organisations such as the EU have switched from using the ‘original’ OECD equivalence scale (1.0 for the first adult, 0.7 for the second and 0.5 for each child) to the ‘modified’ OECD equivalence scale (1.0 for the first adult, 0.5 for the second and 0.3 for each child). Because this makes little difference to overall poverty rates, few have noticed that it transforms the composition of the poor – increasing the proportion of the poor made up of older people and reducing the proportion of children.

- A change in equivalisation may thus result in a change in the poverty agenda.
- The threshold below which people are defined as poor has also shifted and remains entirely arbitrary. The EU decided to adopt 60 per cent of the median because they found that too many of those below 50 per cent of the median were students, the self employed and farmers! The threshold is influenced by the distribution of income and how it is changing and in comparative research this tends to show poorer more equal states have lower poverty rates than richer more unequal states. Thus, 12 per cent are poor in Luxembourg and 22 per cent in Portugal using national thresholds but using EU thresholds 2 per cent are poor in Luxembourg and 47 per cent poor in Portugal. In Slovakia 8 per cent are poor on a national threshold and 80 per cent in European thresholds. This problem of the threshold is going to get much more important as the boundaries of the EU expand eastward. We tend to take too little account of poverty gaps. Is it better to have many a little way below the poverty line than a few a long way below?
- Sometimes we take account of housing costs and sometimes we do not and it makes a big difference to the size and composition of the poor and in comparative research the issue of cost is actually very difficult to deal with consistently.
- Then there is the unit of analysis problem – we tend to assume equal distribution within households
- Finally, we tend to explore cross-sectional poverty rates and not spells and episodes.

All these problems with income poverty measures have led us to explore the relationship between income poverty and other measures and I now describe of that rescue (Bradshaw and Finch 2003).

Deprivation is represented by a lack of socially perceived necessities. This is based on the social indicator methodology pioneered by Townsend (1979) and developed especially by Mack and Lansley (1993) and Gordon and Pantazis (1997). For the PSE survey, we developed a new and more elaborate index than previously (including a separate index for children) (Gordon, D. et al 2000). We established the proportion of the general population who considered an item was a necessity using questions in the Office of National Statistics Omnibus Survey that preceded the PSE survey. Only items and activities that 50 per cent or more of the general population considered were necessities were included in the index. In this analysis, I have counted the proportion of households lacking four or more adult necessities because they cannot afford them as poor. The choice of four items as the threshold was made in order to match as far as possible the proportion defined as poor by the other two measures.

Subjective poverty: Those who say that they feel poor represent subjective poverty here. In the PSE survey we used three sets of questions to measure subjective poverty, including an attempt to operationalise the *Absolute* and *Overall* notions of poverty adopted by the UN World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 (UN 1995). But here we use the results obtained from the following questions.

How many pounds a week, after tax, do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in, out of poverty?

How far above or below that level would you say your household is?

A lot above that level of income

A little above

About the same

A little below

A lot below that level of income

Don't know

Those a little or a lot below the level of income were defined as subjectively poor.

Income poverty is represented here by the measure that has become in the UK (DWP 2002a) and the EU (Atkinson et al 2002) the conventional measure of relative poverty— those households with net equivalent household income less than 60 per cent of the median. In this case the measure is before

housing costs on the grounds that an after housing costs measure cannot be derived from the General Household Survey. The PSE survey employed a variety of equivalence scales, including one created especially, based on budget standards research. But for this paper we have used the modified OECD scale that is now adopted in most comparative work (Atkinson et al 2002).

Table 1 shows that the proportion of the sample defined as poor by each of the dimensions is fairly similar lying between 17 per cent and 20 per cent.

Table 1. Poverty rate by each measure of poverty

Poverty Measure	% poor
Deprivation (lacking 4+ socially perceived necessities)	17.2
Subjective Poverty (subjective measure)	19.6
Income Poverty (equivalent income before housing costs less than 60% median)	18.8

However, it can be seen in Table 2 that while 33 per cent are poor on at least one dimension, only 5.7 per cent are poor on all three measures simultaneously. These results indicate a considerable lack of overlap between measures that have been, and still are, used to represent poverty. If the measures were completely uncorrelated one would expect to obtain a distribution that is quite close to the one obtained. The actual and predicted proportions are given in the table.

Table 2. Number of measures on which respondents are poor

	% poor	
	Actual	Expected
Poor on at least one	32.9	32.9
Poor on a least two	16.1	10.9
Poor on at least three	5.7	3.6

Note: Expected under hypothesis of no correlation between the three measures.

Social Exclusion has begun to be operationalised in empirical research

For a long time the literature on social exclusion was largely theoretical and concerned with defining what it was and whether it was any different from poverty. Researchers have now begun to build on that literature and seek to operationalise it in comparative research. Thus Burchardt, Le Grand and Pia-

chaud (2002) developed an index of social exclusion from (and constrained by) the questions asked in the British Household Panel Survey. The definition used was 'An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in key activities of the society in which he or she lives'. They then identified four activities:

Consumption: the capacity to purchase goods and services

Production: participation in economically or socially valuable activities

Political engagement: involvement in local or national decision-making

Social interaction: integration with family, friends and the community

They then selected indicators of each dimension and counted the proportion of the population excluded in that dimension.

Table 3. Exclusion on multiple dimensions, Wave 7 BHPS

Number of dimensions on which excluded	% of working age population
0	57.5
1	30.1
2	10.0
3	2.3
4	0.1
All	100

Source: Burchardt et al (2002) p 35.

Burchardt et al had to rely on data already collected in existing surveys. For the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey we could structure a questionnaire to measure social exclusion (Gordon et al 2000). We distinguished between four dimensions of social exclusion: impoverishment or exclusion from adequate income or resources; labour market exclusion; service exclusion; and exclusion from social relations. The first of these was represented by the conventional income threshold.

Exclusion from the labour market

Attachment to the labour market is important for individuals not just because it is a route to an adequate income but because it is an important arena for social contact and social interaction. An individual living in a jobless household may as a result be living in poverty, be service excluded and excluded

from social relations. In the PSE survey 21 per cent of households were retired (11 per cent of who were 55–64), 13 per cent were jobless households, and the remaining 66 per cent had employed person(s) in the household. The very high proportion of the population who are inactive should lead us to be cautious about treating labour market inactivity in itself as social exclusion. If we exclude retired persons of pensionable age or student households 11 per cent of households, are labour market excluded.

Service excluded

One aspect of social exclusion is lack of access to basic services, whether in the home (such as power and water supplies) or outside it (such as transport, shopping facilities and financial services). We asked about disconnections of water, gas, electricity and telephone and whether people had restricted their use of these services because of cost. Five per cent had experienced disconnection from one or more services and 11 per cent had used less than they needed because they were unable to afford them. Then respondents were asked about a range of public and private services outside the home and identified whether they did not use them because they were unavailable, because they could not afford to or because they did not want to. We then counted the number of private and public services that households lacked because they were unaffordable or unavailable and found that 24 per cent lacked two or more and 13 per cent lacked three or more.

It was decided not to include the disconnected and restricted use of utilities indicators on the grounds that the questions asked about whether they had *ever* done this rather than about now or recently. So one indicator of service exclusion was produced – those lacking three or more services (13 per cent).

Exclusion from social relations

A unique feature of the PSE survey is that it seeks direct information about social relations and social participation. Exclusion from social relations has been examined through; non-participation in common social activities generally regarded as socially necessary; isolation; lack of support; disengagement and confinement. The measures for each of these will be discussed in turn.

Non-participation in common social activities

These are the activities (i.e. not the assets) in the list of socially perceived necessities. Of these common social activities which people are excluded from on grounds of cost (and here we have also included those that less than 50 per cent of the population consider necessities), 63 per cent lacked none,

11 per cent lacked one, 7 per cent lacked two and 20 per cent lacked three or more. We used three or more as a threshold.

Isolation

This measure was derived from questions about the frequency with which respondents spoke to a particular family member outside their household or friend with whom they are in daily contact, including both face to face and over the telephone. As elsewhere, there is a judgement to be made about the appropriate threshold for this analysis but we chose people who say that they do not have contact with family or friends daily (12 per cent).

Perceived lack of support

One indication of the existence of functioning social relationships and networks is the amount of practical and emotional support potentially available to individuals in times of need. Respondents were asked how much support they would expect to get in seven situations, including support from members of the household, other family and friends and any other means of support. Four items related to practical support; help needed around the home when in bed with flu; help with heavy household or gardening jobs; help with caring responsibilities for children or elderly or disabled adults; someone to look after the home or possessions when away. Three related to emotional support: needing support about important life changes; someone to talk to if depressed; and someone to talk to about problems with one's spouse or partner. Out of the whole sample 54 per cent had support in all seven circumstances, 23 per cent lacked support in at least four out of seven areas and nearly 2 per cent lacked support in all areas. We used four or more.

Disengagement

Lack of civic engagement is sometimes deemed to be an important aspect of social exclusion. Respondents were asked which of a list of activities they had reformed in the last three years and whether they were actively involved in any of a comprehensive range of organisations. We found that 10 per cent were disengaged from all activities and that 28 per cent were disengaged or only voted. We used the totally disengaged.

Confinement

Participation in social activities and social contact beyond the household depends on being able to get out and about. People who are not able to move

freely may be effectively excluded from full social participation. We asked people to identify the factors reducing participation in common social activities. The most important factor was ‘can’t afford to’ (47%), next was ‘not interested’ (44%), then there were a range of other reasons. We excluded those who were ‘not interested’ and identified the rest as confined for reasons outside their control – 29 per cent.

Another form of confinement is personal safety and 30 per cent of the sample report feeling unsafe walking alone after dark. Table 4 summarises the results obtained from these elements of social exclusion

Table 4. Proportion of the PSE sample socially excluded

Component of social exclusion	% socially excluded
Labour market excluded	11
Service excluded <i>Lacking three or more services</i>	13
Exclusion from social relations <i>Unable to participate in three or more activities</i>	20
<i>No contact with family or friends daily</i>	12
<i>Lack of support in four areas</i>	23
<i>Disengaged for all activities except voting</i>	10
Confined	29

Table 5. Proportion of socially excluded who are poor

Component of social exclusion	Income poor	Necessities poor	Subjectively poor
Labour market excluded	53	65	51
Service excluded <i>Lacking three or more services</i>	26	40	31
Exclusion from social relations <i>Unable to participate in three or more activities</i>	37	76	54
<i>No contact with family or friends daily</i>	13	20	19
<i>Lack of support in four areas</i>	18	23	17
<i>Disengaged from all activities</i>	30	43	31
<i>Disengaged for all activities except voting</i>	26	35	27
Confined	28	56	41
<i>Confined because of fear</i>	25	31	26
All	19	26	20

In both the Burchardt Measure and the PSE measure income poverty is treated as a dimension of social exclusion. But it is possible to compare the

proportions of those socially excluded⁹ with other measures of poverty as is shown in Table 5. It can be seen that the proportion of the excluded that are also poor varies with the poverty definition. In general the socially excluded are more likely to be necessities poor than income or subjectively poor but this is partly a function of the fact that a greater proportion of the sample are necessities poor. Labour market exclusion, inability to participate in three or more activities and being confined are the elements of social exclusion most associated with the poverty measures.

Table 6 shows the proportion of the poor who are socially excluded. In most elements of social exclusion (and for all measures of poverty) the socially excluded are more likely than average to be poor. The exceptions are the isolated and those who lack support, who are no more likely to be poor by all measures. This is an interesting finding – it may be because paid work (and long hours at work) may be an obstacle to forming social relations – at least in the home environment. It is also interesting that those poor on all three dimensions of poverty are more likely to be socially excluded than those poor on one dimension – again with the exception of those that lack contact and support

Table 6. Poor by various dimensions and social exclusion

	Necessities poor	Subjectively poor	Low income poor	Poor on all three dimensions	Not Poor (poor on 0)
Labour market excluded %	30	32	30	61	4
Service excluded					
Lacking two or more services %	46	37	33	46	18
Exclusion from social relations					
Unable to participate in three or more activities %	81	56	40	78	7
No contact with family or friends daily %	13	12	9	9	12
Lack of support in four areas %	19	20	23	16	24
Disengaged from all activities %	22	17	18	19	7
Confined %	45	60	44	72	17

Using these elements of social exclusion we created an index which counts how many classes (labour market/service excluded/social relations

excluded) that the respondents experience, where the maximum possible is equal to three. It can be seen in Table 7 that there is a clear association between poverty and the number of components: example, over two thirds of the socially excluded on all three components are subjectively poor, whereas less than 10 per cent of those not socially excluded are poor – by all measures.

Table 7. Components of social exclusion: proportions who are poor

Number of components socially excluded	Income poor	Necessities poor	Subjectively poor	All
None	9	6	6	27
One	15	24	17	55
Two	42	56	43	16
Three	62	79	66	2

Concluding discussion

Let me try to recap the arguments so far. When it first emerged, social exclusion seemed to add to little to poverty and in some guises carried a great deal of behaviourist ideological baggage or blamed the poor. However over time, I at least, have come to appreciate it, for a number of reasons:

- Concern with it has led the Labour Government in Britain to launch a series of policy reforms that are having an impact on poverty. The ‘P word’ and ‘E word’ are both in the discourse.
- At the Lisbon summit in 2000, the European Council agreed to adopt an Open Method of Coordination in order to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Member states adopted common objectives at the Nice European Council and all member states drew up National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion. The first *National Action Plans on Social Inclusion 2001-2003* was published in July 2001. The second Plans were being published in October 2003.
- The work of the Social Exclusion Unit is now taking us into less marginal fields of study – for example their project on mental illness and social exclusion is long overdue. They have also contributed to broadening the perspective on the policies relevant to poverty and social exclusion.
- We have all become concerned with the reliability and validity of income measures of poverty and although there are other ways to measure poverty – lack of socially perceived necessities, subjectively or as a combination of measures social exclusion adds to the armoury.

- Social scientists have begun to operationalise the concept of social exclusion in interesting ways and have shown that it is related to income and other dimensions of poverty – the poor are more likely to be socially excluded and the poorer you are the more socially excluded you are likely to be – but not on all dimensions. The existence of valuable social relationships – social capital does not seem to be particularly related to poverty, possibly because the poor have more time to maintain them.

Of course there are still problems with social exclusion – not least in defining it. I have tried to avoid that in this paper. But I have mentioned the following:

- Atkinson, who suggests that social exclusion is concerned with – process, dynamics, relativity and agency;
- The SEU talk about linked problems that lead to people and places being socially excluded;
- Room also mentions the spatial element and multi-dimensional disadvantage as well as its dynamic nature;
- Then Burchardt measures social exclusion as a capacity to consume, to participate in employment and social activities; political engagement and social interaction; and
- Finally the PSE survey measured, low income, employment, access to services, social activities, lack of friendships and carers and civic disengagement.

These are just a few of the mass or representations of social exclusion. It is also getting more complicated. You may have noticed that the EU has begun to emphasise government action plans for social inclusion and Atkinson et al (2002) have developed indicators of social inclusion. Social inclusion is not necessarily the opposite of social exclusion – though the emphasis of the state as agent is welcome. Then there are related concepts – social quality, social capital, social cohesion – some of which are individual characteristics or an aggregate of them from the neighbourhood to the nation.

Admittedly this confusion of overlapping concepts is not one that poverty has avoided. Over its history, poverty as a concept has been redefined and it has certainly been operationalised in a variety of different ways. Perhaps this imprecision is inevitable in social science. The Social Exclusion Unit thinks that there is merit in not being too precise about what they focus on.

The ideological baggage remains. New Labour still emphasises behaviour over structure or actor over agency. Thus ‘the R word’ for redistribution is now expunged from the discourse and the preoccupation of Ministers with crime and anti-social behaviour, with children at risk (rather than just poor),

with parents who don't send their children to school, the emphasis on work for those who can, the educational benefits of childcare rather than the social and labour supply benefits. This argument has been with us since the Poor Law and it will not go away and perhaps it is wrong to muddle it up with the value or otherwise of social exclusion. Eternal vigilance and the appropriate use of evidence is still our best hope.

Notes

- ¹ Kindly undertaken on my behalf by Laura Adelman, a visiting fellow from the UK at SPRC.
- ² See for example Bradbury et al (2001).
- ³ It is now in the Office of the Deputy Prime-Minister.
- ⁴ HM Treasury, Spending Review 2002: Public Service Agreements 2001-2004, Cm 4808, London: The Stationery Office, 2000.
- ⁵ HM Treasury, 'Technical Note for HM Treasury's Public Service Agreement 2003-2006', London, 2002. (HBAI = households below average income)
- ⁶ HM Treasury, *Opportunity and Security for All*, 2002. See also for Scotland Scottish Executive, *Closing the Opportunity Gap: the Scottish Budget for 2003-2006*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, Social Inclusion Division, 2002.
- ⁷ Social Exclusion Unit, *Making the Connections: Transport and social exclusion*, SEU, 2003.
- ⁸ Social Exclusion Unit conference, 5 March 2003.
- ⁹ We use socially excluded form here onwards to indicate that they fall below one of the thresholds of the indicators of social exclusion. It is acknowledged that this begs the question whether falling below one or more elements constitutes social exclusion and whether all the elements indicate social exclusion.

References

- Atkinson, T., Cantillon, B., Marlier, E. and Nolan, B. (2002) *Social Indicators: the EU and Social Inclusion*, Oxford University Press.
- Bradbury, B., Jenkins, S. and Micklewright, J. (eds) (2001) *The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Industrialised Countries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bradshaw, J. and Finch, N. (2003) 'Overlaps in Dimensions of Poverty', *Journal Soc. Pol.*, 32, 4, 513-525.
- Burchardt, T., Le Grand, J. and Piachaud, D. (2002) 'Degrees of exclusion: Developing a dynamic, multidimensional measure', in Hills, J. et al (eds) *Understanding Social Exclusion*, Oxford University Press.
- Department of Work and Pensions (2002) *Households below average income 1994/95-2000/01*, Leeds: Corporate Document Services.
- Gordon D. and Pantazis C. (1997) *Breadline Britain in the 1990s*, Ashgate: Aldershot.
- Gordon, D. et al (2000) *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Gornick, J. (2002) "'Social Exclusion" and American Political Culture', in Kahn, A.J. and Kameron, S.B. (eds) *Beyond Child Poverty: The Social Exclusion of Children*, The Institute for Child and Family Policy, Columbia University.

- HM Treasury (2002) 'Technical Note for HM Treasury's Public Service Agreement 2003-2006', London.
- HM Treasury (2002) *Opportunity and Security for All*.
- HM Treasury, Spending Review 2002: *Public Service Agreements 2001-2004*, Cm 4808, London: The Stationery Office, 2000.
- Jones, A. and Smyth, P. (1999) 'Social Exclusion: A New Framework for Social Policy Analysis?' *Just Policy*, 17, December.
- Lakin, C. (2003) *The effects of taxes and benefits on household income, 2001-02*, London: Office for National Statistics.
- Levitas, R. (1998) *The Inclusive Society*, London: Macmillan.
- Mack J. and Lansley, S. (1985) *Poor Britain*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- Micklewright, J. (2002) 'A European View of the U.S. Debate', in Kahn, A.J. and Kamerman, S.B. (eds) *Beyond Child Poverty: The Social Exclusion of Children*, *The Institute for Child and Family Policy*, Columbia University.
- Room, G. (ed) (1995) *Beyond the Threshold: The Measurement and Analysis of Social Exclusion*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Sefton, T. (2002) *Recent changes in the distribution of the social wage*, CASE paper 62, London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, STICERD, London School of Economics.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *Making the Connections: Transport and social exclusion*, SEU.
- Scottish Executive (2002) *Closing the Opportunity Gap: the Scottish Budget for 2003-2006*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, Social Inclusion Division.
- Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, London: Allen Lane and Penguin Books.