

Social exclusion essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



Social Exclusion & Current policies/Initiatives to address the Issue This chapter discusses social exclusion and its growth in popularity with researchers and policy makers; it looks at policies employed to address the issue and impact of social exclusion within society, particularly social exclusion in Northern Ireland. This chapter also looks at the difficulty in defining the concept of social exclusion and the difficulty defining and identifying the concept and the indicators employed to measure it.

Social Exclusion, the Term and the Extent of the Problem

Social Exclusion covers a wide range of issues that are difficult to define. Existing definitions usually describe how and why it occurs as well as its implications. The term social exclusion became popular in the late 1980's and was employed to describe the results of economic, industrial and social changes that were taking place in France and Europe. These included long-term or repeated unemployment, family instability, social isolation and the decline of neighbourhood and social networks (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion was seen to be the outcome of two strands, which was believed, could combine to reinforce each other: separation from employment and separation from social relations, particularly the family (Martin, 1996). The charity Crisis founded in 1967 in response to the plight of London's homeless population, also found that family 'meltdown' has also been reported as being an important factor in homelessness; this will be discussed in detail later. The concept of Social exclusion, as mentioned, originated in France's social policy to address those living on the margins of society, and particularly those without access to the system of social insurance (Room, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud, 1999).

Since then the term has been used in a wider European context in reference to the European Union (EU) objective of achieving social and economic cohesion (Percy-Smith, 2003). Social cohesion came to the fore with negotiations around the Maastricht Treaty (European Commission, 1997), when social exclusion was written into the Treaty and became an objective for the European structural funds (Room, 1995). Social exclusion has become a topical issue both politically and in social policy in the UK. The growth in the use of the term resulted from growing inequality in the 1980's which increased concerns over the degree of inequality in society and exclusion from participation in employment, and lack of full access to services (Howarth, Kenway, Palmer and Street, 1998).

When New Labour came into power in 1997 they launched the interdepartmental Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), this was an indication of how serious they were about addressing the problems of disadvantage within the UK. As a result of this came widespread adoption of the term social exclusion in the UK by political commentators and the media (Bowring, 2000). Since then the government have published annual reports on both poverty and social exclusion. However, the SEU only encompasses England as social exclusion and poverty are devolved responsibilities and Wales have ' Building an Inclusive Wales'; Scotland have ' Scottish Social Inclusion Strategy'; and in Northern Ireland we have ' Targeting Social Need in Northern Ireland' (Percy-Smith, 2003).

The overall impact on inequality from the Conservative government's office from 1979 to 1997 was indicated in a report by the Department of Social

security (1998), illustrating that since 1979 incomes in the top 10% of earners increased by 70%, average earnings increased by 44%, while incomes in the bottom 10% had fallen by 9%. This increased inequality was contributed to: growing gap between highest and lowest paid workers; increased unemployment levels; reduced value of benefits; increased single parent households; abolition of wages council that provided protection to low paid workers; and greater reliance on expenditure tax, such as VAT, that tend to hit the poorer population hardest. As a result, by 1997 when New Labour took power 25% of the population, just over 14 million people, were living in poverty as defined by the European Union definition, that is having an income below 50% of the average. The Conservatives had adopted the view that welfare spending was contributing to social breakdown by encouraging the 'underclass', as discussed in chapter 1.

New Labour approached the issue as a need to increase the opportunities of work for those who were capable in the 'Welfare to Work programme', in order to provide these people with employable skills (Burden, cited in Percy-Smith, 2003). While, generally, other policies were aimed at; those who were in work whose income was at an inadequate level to meet basic needs (minimum wage implemented in April, 1999), referred to as income poverty (Lister, 1998 in Burden, cited in Percy-Smith, 2003); and those specific groups who were identified as being in need including, the elderly, disabled and children with a commitment to eradicate child poverty within 20 years. New policies to address child poverty included an income related 'working families tax credit' (WFTC) for those working 16 hours or more per week in an attempt to eliminate the poverty trap, for example going to work, losing

benefits and earning less, those receiving WFTC will also be entitled to a childcare tax credit; the family credit for each child depending on their age; the children's tax credit (from April, 2001) replaced the previous married couple's allowance (Burden, cited in Percy-Smith, 2003).

As already mentioned this is a general look at some of the policies that New Labour implemented and is by no means an exhaustive account, but rather it is a flavour of New Labour's initiatives in attempting to address the vast inequality in Britain. However, Burden (2003) (cited in Percy-Smith, 2003) argues that New Labour's policy approach is similar to approaches employed in Australia and New Zealand where they act as a safety net and as such have only marginalised the poor, unemployed, single parents and ethnic minorities, although admits that the results of New Labour's efforts remain to be seen.

Cooper (2004) shows that since 1997 that children and families have emerged as the biggest beneficiaries of a huge push to reduce social exclusion. They claim that the number of children living in relative low-income households has fallen by half a million since 1997 and estimate that if the government had not taken this action that a further 1.5 million children in the UK would be living in poverty. Other key measures of progress include: a 70% drop in the number of people sleeping rough since 1998; 200,000 lone parents have moved into work since 1997; and a 66% reduction in the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation in the last year alone. Yvette Cooper (2004) said, "the decision to focus on families and children and on the long term causes of deprivation was the right one. Good

progress has been made on the most severe and intractable forms of social exclusion, such as sleeping rough, young offenders and long term youth unemployment.

However, there is still a long way to go to sustain current achievements. The scale of the problem remains large: there are only 53% of lone parents in work; and 18% of pensioners and 16% of children are living in persistent poverty; Bangladeshi and Pakistani households are three times more likely to be on a low income. Continued efforts and focus- building on last week's budget boosts for education and health will be essential. We must continue our efforts to ensure jobs and employment in deprived areas and build on investment in children and young families to ensure a fair start to all". (cited as news release on www.odpm.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_=2004_0065).

The British Prime Minister and New Labour leader, Tony Blair claimed that: "Social exclusion is about income but it's about much more. It's about prospects and networks and life chances. It's very much a modern problem, and one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation than material poverty." (Stockwell Park school, Lambeth, London December, 1997)

The New Labour government identified those people vulnerable to exclusion to include: people in poverty; lone parents; unemployed people; disabled people; those experiencing discrimination on grounds of gender, race, sexuality or disability; homeless people; people with ill health; children not

doing well at school; people with few educational qualifications; people with low self esteem; people with addiction problems; communities in areas of deprivation. There is no unique, formal definition of social exclusion that commands assent; however, social exclusion has generally been defined by Gordon et al (2000) as: ‘ a lack or denial of access to the kinds of social relations, social customs and activities in which the great majority of people in British society engage. In current usage, exclusion is often regarded as a ‘ process’ rather than a ‘ state’ and this helps in being constructively precise in deciding its relationship to poverty’ (p. 73).

The European Union (EU) claimed that social exclusion occurs when people cannot fully participate or contribute to society because of “ the denial of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights” (Oppenheim & Harker, 1996). Definitions also indicate that it results from “ a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, bad health and family breakdown”. (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Therefore, social exclusion occurs as a result of shortcomings and failures in the systems and structures of family, community and society and so it is a complex as it involves who is excluded and why they are excluded.

Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland

So far we have examined social exclusion in reference definitions and policies. As already mentioned in Northern Ireland we have devolved responsibilities over social exclusion and poverty. In 1987 the Northern Ireland Civil Service set up a special branch and named it ‘ Central Community Relations Unit’ (CCRU) which was established in order to provide

the secretary of state in Northern Ireland (N. I) with knowledge of all aspects of relationships between the diverse components of communities within N. I. The unit was responsible for formulating, reviewing and challenging Government policies and address all issues of equality and improve community relations within N. I. The research branch of the CCRU was referred to as Targeting Social Need (TSN) and provided information on equality and social needs. In the Autumn of 1998 the CCRU set up a new branch, as a result of the ' Good Friday Agreement', this was ' New Targeting Social Need' (New TSN) to deal with social exclusion and inclusion issues in NI. The Economic Policy Unit works to integrate New TSN policy at a strategic level across Government, in all Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office collectively through cross-Departmental groups as well as individual Departments.

Those groups identified as priority include: travellers, ethnic groups, unemployed and teenage parents in an attempt to help the most disadvantaged people. The New TSN statement on Social Exclusion states: " Our concern is with the people in our community who are in greatest social need and who are most marginalised. People who are in social need can be disadvantaged in many ways. They may, for example, be poorly skilled, unemployed, living on a low income or coping with difficult home circumstances. They might live in poor housing or areas blighted by crime. They may have difficulties accessing services that others take for granted". TSN define the term social exclusion to describe what can happen to people who are subject to the most severe problems: " Social exclusion has to do with poverty and joblessness - but it is more than that. It is about being cut

off from the social and economic life of our community". (NISRA web site)

The New TSN aims to develop strategies to ensure that services are more accessible to minority groups and others at risk of social exclusion – focusing firstly on how information can be presented and distributed in ways appropriate to their needs.

The TSN found that the initial priorities from the research conducted for the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative indicated that people from ethnic minorities, particularly Travelers, were subject to multiple problems. They reported that they often had difficulty accessing the services they needed. The New TSN policy aims to tackle social need and social exclusion by targeting efforts and resources on people, groups and areas in greatest objective social need, through three elements including; tackling unemployment and increasing employability; tackling inequality in areas such as housing and education and promoting social inclusion. The New TSN unit has central co-ordination responsibility for the implementation of New TSN across departments. On behalf of ministers, the New TSN aims to promote a coordinated cross-departmental approach in order to develop and implement equality and social need policies.

Each department produces a New TSN action plan outlining how it will implement New TSN through existing and new programmes, these plans identify the social needs that the department tackles, while also containing the action plan and targets that the department aims to meet, success of these aims are later assessed by New TSN, and the results are compiled in their annual report. As a result the TSN have set up working groups to

examine each of these areas and to recommend effective ways of tackling social exclusion. Therefore the New TSN is an objective team assessing need within NI who focus on measures to reduce unemployment and enhance employability, while other government programmes target people and areas in need on key issues of need such as health, housing and education. The New TSN Unit has a role in relation to both the Programme for Government and the budget, while also ensuring that New TSN considerations are taken into account in all aspects of development of the Programme for Government. The New TSN Unit comments on bids to the budget and guidance on the budget demands that full consideration is given in departmental returns to the principles of the Executive's New TSN policy.

Therefore, overall the approach to the promotion of New TSN is one of mainstreaming, with the aim of facilitating total integration of New TSN into the policy and programme development of all departments. These departments have worked closely with relevant Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and where necessary, with the North-South Implementation Bodies in order to advance the implementation of New TSN. Following the suspension of devolution in October 2002 the responsibility for the governance of Northern Ireland passed to the Secretary of State. The Government has continued to closely follow the example set by the Executive with regard to the approach to New TSN including undertaking quarterly, and annually the monitoring of progress across all departments, in delivering against all commitments in the Programme for Government.

To date there has been no data published in Northern Ireland regarding the distribution of income comparable to the Family Resource Survey (FRS), however this will soon change as FRS data is currently being compiled in Northern Ireland and should be available soon. As a substitute the spatial mapping of multiple deprivations has been used for poverty measurement in Northern Ireland since the 1970's (Noble et al, 2001). The two most recent models of deprivation for Northern Ireland have been Robson's (1995) 'Indicators of Deprivation in Northern Ireland', and the updated 'Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure' by Noble (2001).

The Robson Indicators of Relative Deprivation (1995) in N. Ireland were developed to measure social deprivation. The Robson report became the standard measurement of deprivation throughout N. Ireland and was employed by a wide range of government and funding agencies as an index of deprivation; for example, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) employed it to identify characteristics of weak community infrastructure over the 1996-2000 periods. However, the Robson measure was only able to give one overall measure of deprivation for the area combined from 18 individual indicators in a composite index scale, as each indicator contributes to the multivariate structure. These could be analysed at both ward and enumeration district (ED, which are subsets of electoral wards in N. Ireland, originally designed for the collection of census data) and therefore enabled insight into the spatial pattern of deprivation. The Robson indicators were based on the information drawn from the 1991 census figures; it was based upon 18 variables (see appendix 4)

All indicator scores are added together in a non-weighted form. Under the Robson indicator any district council areas outside Belfast whose deprivation index score was above the natural break points in at least 2 of the 3 Robson measures was considered an area of social disadvantage. Belfast was treated as a 'special case' due to its size, targeting electoral wards. Robson (1995) ranked the results for overall degree of deprivation (see appendix 4).

Criticisms of the Robson indicator were generally based around decreasing accuracy of the measure due to the passing of time, as it was based on the 1991 census figures and also the inability to examine the individual components of deprivation, as it is a combined deprivation score accounting for 18 variables could be produced. Practitioners were also concerned about the relevance of some of the 18 variables. For example, the ED variable that accounts for the number of households that lacks a link with a public sewer, this is an indication of a lack of rural amenities, so even if the household had adequate septic tanks, it was still argued that they were deprived.

The Noble report launched the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure in June 2001 following a period of consultation throughout N. Ireland. This was an attempt to update the Robson indicators (1995) that had been the standard for the measurement of relative deprivation in N. Ireland. Noble (2001) provides an overall multiple deprivation measure, drawing on government statistics rather than census data therefore they are more easily updated. The overall multiple deprivation measure is constructed from 7 separate domains of deprivation (see appendix 5). These 7 domains are combined to produce the overall multiple deprivation measure. However,

unlike the Robson multiple deprivation measure, these domains are not all given equal weighting in creating the overall multiple deprivation measure.

Domains 1 and 2 each carry 25% weighting (combined = 50%), domains 3 and four each carry 15% domain 5 carries 10% and domains 6 and 7 each carry 5%. This is an important fact as it has had a particular impact in the definition of deprivation, especially in rural settings. Noble claims that the reason for assigning varying weighting to the domains and why he assigned so much weight to income and employment was because people suffering any type of deprivation, whether educational or health deprivation, are “ in almost every instance likely to have very little income or other resources”.

However, the types of deprivation that has a real and significant impact on rural areas have been assigned relatively less weight. As a direct result of employing the Noble index allocations of Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPS) Peace II funding was dramatically reduced in rural areas in comparison to the funds allocated to the initial Peace programme, which employed the Robson Multiple Deprivation Measure. Although this is a criticism of the Noble indicators, if the index is employed with care it is a useful tool for identifying areas of deprivation; as it provides measures of income and employment at enumeration district (ED, geographical area of about 250-400 households), it allows us to identify pockets of deprivation that may exist in wards that are masked by more affluent surrounding communities. Therefore, it is a useful tool for selecting small pockets suffering acute levels of income and employment deprivation. The main criticism of the Multiple Deprivation Measures is that it has tended to shift the focus of relative deprivation from

rural areas in the Robson report (1995) to urban areas in the Noble report (2001).

Another advantage is that the Noble report can examine deprivation information either individually or at ward level. A combination of this information from each of the 7 domains enables the identification of the overall multiple deprivation measures (MDM) at ward level. The Noble index is currently the most commonly applied MDM by government departments and funding organisations to identify deprivation. It initially seems that the Noble index provides more flexible and reliable means of identifying relative deprivation within N. Ireland. However, there is some cause for concern in relation to the usefulness of the measures. The primary concern is the weighting assigned to each of the 7 domains when calculating the overall MDM. The low weighting afforded to the geographical access to services and housing, two of the major causes of rural deprivation, leads to the situation that most rural areas, in relation to Noble MDM that is now most commonly employed for awarding funding, do not appear to be disadvantaged.

This means that many of N. Ireland's rural areas will not receive funding or other resource allocation. There is also a temptation to use the information from the 2 main domains (income and employment) as the basis of identifying disadvantage, which are significant, are only 2 of the 7 overall domain components of disadvantage. Therefore issues surrounding weighting the domains need to be addressed. However, NISRA (2001) employed the Noble MDM to map deprivation in N. Ireland and indicated the most deprived wards were concentrated in the West of the province (see

appendix 6). These are reassuringly similar to those areas identified as deprived using the Robson Index (1995) and also correspond to figures published in 2003 by on Income Support and Disability Living Allowance claimants (see appendix). Therefore the employment of Noble (2001) indicators will be employed in this research to identify areas of disadvantage in Belfast.

Results from the first large scale study of 3100 people across 3500 addresses, drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency; based on a representative random sample conducted on poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland between October 2002 and January 2003; were conducted by Hillyard et al (2003) (published by the think tank Democratic Dialogue); poverty was measured in terms of both low income and the inability too afford items or activities that most people regard as ' necessities of life'; for example ' new, not second hand clothes'; ' attending weddings, funerals or similar occasions'; and having ' enough money to pay heating, electricity and telephone bills on time'. Findings were shocking, indicating that in Northern Ireland over 25% of households and more than 33% (37. 4) of all children were living in poverty. Results were worse than those found in the UK or in the Republic of Ireland, which are two of the most unequal societies in Europe. Findings also showed that all sections of the community agree on what the ' necessities' should include. Hillyard et al (2003) argue that " Northern Ireland is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world".

Poor households were found to have incomes below half the average and to be lacking 3 or more necessities. They claimed that “ the challenge for Northern Ireland as a whole and in particularly for the local politicians is to reduce the deep fractures of inequality and create a more just society” (Bare necessities, p65). Other key findings were: 29% of women compared to 25% of men live in poor households; 56% of households contain 1 or more disabled people who are living in poverty; Roman Catholics are 1.4 times as likely as Protestants to live in poor households; the richest 40% of households together possess 67% of the total household income in Northern Ireland; while the poorest 40% of households have 17% of the total household income. Therefore Hillyard et al (2003) highlight the extent of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland and indicates the urgency in tackling the problem. OTHER RESEARCH THAT COULD GO HERE THAT I HAVE INCLUDED IN OTHER CHAPTERS INCLUDE: MCDONALD (1997), HOBBCRAFT (1998), Hobcraft (2000), ELLISON (2001), KILPATRICK ET AL (1999), ARMSTRONG ET AL (1997), BOROOAH (2000), CALLAN ET AL (1999), DHSS&PS (2000) Johnston et al (2000), MCVICAR (2000), MCVICAR ET AL (2000) & SILVER (1995).

Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity

Parkin (1979) (cited in Understanding Social Exclusion p. 1) claims that the concept of social exclusion can be identified as a form of social closure. Where exclusionary closure is seen as an attempt of one group to secure privileged positions, at the expense of others, through the process of subordination, some would argue that this was the situation in Northern Ireland. Barry (1998) has highlighted how this is very visible in modern day

USA, where the rich have literally created 'social barriers' to separate themselves from the rest of society. This could be viewed as the wealthy excluding themselves (voluntarily self-exclusion), or as a form of social closure; whereby the wealthy are increasingly opting out of common services such as: the state school system, national health care system, private security provision and pension scheme as it is felt that a better quality 'product' can be bought in the private sectors. They are withdrawing from participation in the wider society which negatively impacts on traditional forms of social cohesion resulting in social isolation from mainstream society and IN THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF THOSE WHO CANNOT LIVE THIS LIFESTYLE.

Barry (1998) argues that this negative impact is more serious when social isolation takes the form of social exclusion as the choice of the rich minority to create their 'own' environments and institutions, as this restricts the opportunities of their children to experience the more generally shared social experiences which help create social solidarity. Therefore Barry (1998) tends to disagree with the definition of social exclusion forwarded from Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud (1999) (BLP) claiming that a person is excluded if: They were geographically resident in a society; They cannot participate in the normal activities of that society; They would like to participate in these activities; They are prevented to by factors beyond their control.

The indicators of S. E they employed included were:

DimensionIndicator

Consumption Equivalised household net income below half mean

Production Unemployed, self-employed, in education or

Training or carer (status 0)

Political engagement Non-voter, not a member of community organisation

Social interactions Lacks someone to offer personal support

(note dimensions are taken as dimensions of 'normal' activities)

Barry (1998) disagrees with this definition as it only views the impact on the individual being excluded and fails to take into account the negative impact on social solidarity and social justice, while it implies that the only form of social exclusion that is problematic is involuntary exclusion. Barry (1998) believes that social exclusion hinders equality of opportunity and is therefore unjust, as it negatively impacts on society as a whole and on both personal and political levels. Richardson & Le Grand (2002) collected the opinion of residents living in deprived neighbourhoods and found that the residents tended to support Barry (1998) on the point of voluntarily social exclusion, as residents felt that both voluntarily and involuntarily social exclusion caused wider social problems such as threatening social solidarity. Although the residents distinguished between the voluntarily withdrawal by those who were better off and the involuntarily withdrawal of those facing disadvantage, for example, through criminal activity, they tended to be critical of both.

Barry (1998) argues that social solidarity has been undermined over the last twenty years as a result of public policy in Britain that has deliberately created a 'competition for shares of fixed and adequate resources' on

<https://assignbuster.com/social-exclusion-essay-sample/>

institutions such as schools and universities. He argues that public policies have resulted in a decline of the standards in public health care and education while there has been a phenomenal increase in the top 10% of the population to the median. Combined this has increased the desire to opt out and an increase in resources has made this possible.

Social solidarity is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable, the fact that we have had the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland may have had considerable impact on social solidarity within our society. Barry (1998) claims that it is beneficial for members of all groups to share some kind of existence, to participate in the common institutions, while it is instrumentally important as social justice is more likely realised in democratic societies, through politics, the higher the level of social solidarity existing in the particular society. He argues that the significance of social isolation is basically that the lack of empathy between the majority and socially isolated minorities provides ambitious politicians an opportunity to advance their careers by demonising and dehumanising the minorities whether the isolation is forced or voluntary tends to be irrelevant. He claims that social exclusion is even more dangerous as the process is often the same as the process that leads to stigmatization.

Barry (1998) therefore argues that social exclusion is a phenomenon very much distinct from poverty and economic inequality. Although he agrees that there is an association between the dispersion of incomes and social exclusion, although it is not straight forward as it is mediated by experience, such as the sharing of common institutions such as schools and health care

facilities, and by public policies. Therefore Barry (1998) claims that any government concerned with social exclusion must also concern itself with the issue of inequality, as in any society where goods and services are allocated through the market, where even those provided publicly can also be bought privately, there must be a close connection between inequality and social exclusion. Therefore Barry (1998) would argue that social exclusion violates social justice and social solidarity and negatively impacts on all of society, so indicates that social exclusion is much more than multiple deprivation, poverty, or lack of employment.

Potential Impact of Associated Risk Factors

Walton, (2003), states that education “ is a weapon against poverty”.

Education minister David Blunkett, (January 2003), told the European Social Policy Forum in Brussels, that the root cause of social exclusion lies in educational failure. In his speech to social policy makers he said “ We cannot afford social exclusion in Europe, it generates huge costs in the form of crime, ill health, welfare dependency, social breakdown and dislocation”. “

When the education system fails young people it sows the seeds of criminality, drug taking, unemployment and all forms of marginalisation from society”. “ It has been duly noted that such failures only serve to reinforce social exclusion and highlights the need for good educational standards”.

Therefore, education and training have been identified as playing a key role in combating social exclusion.

The significance of education and training to social exclusion is initially established due to unequal levels of participation and achievement in

education and training, (Walton, 2003). According to figures released by the Government in 2000, only 30% of teenagers in care had attained at least one GCSE or GNVQ. This five year longitudinal study, which was the first of its kind, used a 'best value' model to examine the academic performance of Coventry's 350 young people in care and found no relation between their key stage 3 and 4 results. Those who had achieved good results at the end of year 9 were just as likely to leave school with no qualifications as those who had consistently failed. A total average of only 4% left school with five or more A*-C GCSEs between 1995 and 2000, compared to 38% of all the authority's children. These children were also found to be 7 times more likely to be excluded from school than other pupils, more than 6 times more likely to truant and more than 3 times more likely to have a special need.

There was no correlation found between the number of care placements and exam results. (TES, 30 March 2001). Walton (2003) supports these findings that individuals in care were more likely to truant, be excluded from school and less likely to be entered for GCSE exams. Furthermore, Biehal et al (1992) and Garnet (1992) found that over 80% of care leavers remain unemployed two and a half years after leaving school compared with 9-16% within the general population. Contributing factors found have been the prioritisation of welfare above educational concerns, lack of transport to school, low priority allocated to education by social workers, low expectations, and stigmatising treatment by teachers and bullying by peers, (Carleen et al, 1992; Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990).

However, this academic neglect of young people does not only impact young people in the care system. Hobcraft (1998, 2000) Forsyth and Furlong (2003) and Hammer (2003) have suggested a strong link between educational achievement and social class (Walton, 2003). Britain is at the bottom of the educational league for industrialised countries. Three quarters of young people in the top social classes tend to get five or more GCSE's, however figures for those in the lower social classes tend to be less than one third. Ironically while Britain has one of the highest university rates in the developed world, it also has one of the highest drop-out rates at 16 years. Four key factors have been identified as being an impact on this pattern.

Firstly, the fact of growing up in poverty, with all the restrictions that poverty places on housing, diet and lifestyle. Secondly, family factors, critically parental interests and support (Feinstein and Symons, 1997) which was found to have a massive direct effect on educational attainment at 16. This was also found to be largely driven by parental experience of education. Thirdly, neighbourhood factors such as living in council housing, as Bosworth (1994) found that this factor increased reports of truancy and decreased the likelihood of attaining qualifications. Fourthly, the quality of schooling also has an impact.

David Milband, the schools standards minister has claimed that the first 3 require long term change in the social and economic environment, but the fourth, the power of schooling could be addressed now and would therefore reduce the drain on the government through benefits when education has been completed, (Independent, 8 September 2003). Milband claims that “

We continue to have one of the greatest class divides in education in the industrialised world, with a socioeconomic attainment gap evident in children as young as 22 months" (cited in the Observer on 10th November, 2002). However, Penny Leach, a childcare expert, said that care should be taken into consideration to ensure that the government did not send out negative messages to working class parents, and added that it was more important to encourage parents to take time to interact with their children, allowing the child time to respond to questions, helping children to complete tasks, rather than taking over and doing the tasks for the child, (Observer, 10 November 2002). The importance of this was recently illustrated on the BBC's documentary 'Child of Our Times' (2003), where different parenting styles were shown to impact on the child's self-esteem.

McVicar et al (2000) found that many young people, particularly those who leave school with few qualifications, end up experiencing long term spells of non-participation at age 18+ despite no spells of non-participation, or only a short spell, at age 16 and 17 years. This non-participation in employment, full-time education, or training is referred to as 'status 0'. The longer the status 0 the more likely the chances of long-term unemployment and increased risk of social exclusion as adults, partly due to the negative impression it creates to potential employers and damage caused to these young people's self-esteem, skills and motivation, (McVicar et al, 2000). This group of young people share many characteristics of those who are prone to truancy and exclusion. For example, they include the least qualified school leavers; those from lower socio-economic groups; social housing residents; those in local authority care; African Caribbean; and those with learning

difficulties (Pearce and Hillman, 1998). Therefore, further inactivity after compulsory education will further exacerbate any existing disadvantage. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999) suggest that those young people experiencing status 0 between the ages of 16 and 18 years, are by 21 years more likely to earn less money if they gain employment, be a parent and experience depression and have poorer physical health than their peers.

The lack of organizational co-ordination among relevant agencies and departments has been cited as one of the key factors contributing to the problems faced by young people at risk of status 0 in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, as previously there has been no organization or agency responsible for providing support to these disadvantaged young people. McVicar et al (2000) conducted a longitudinal study on 980 young people between over a 2 year period, found that about two fifths had experienced a period of at least 6 months of continuous status 0, while some had experienced continuous status 0 for the whole 2 year period. This suggested that the relationship between relevant professionals, young people, their family background, and their experiences of school and post-school institutions created a complex web of interactions. This has also been supported by Hobcraft (1998, 2000). The longer the period of status 0 the more likely the chances of long-term unemployment and social exclusion as adults; due to discouragement and the impression given from status 0 to potential employers.

Analysis suggests family and community backgrounds are also significant contributing factors that affect young people's chances of falling into

exclusion in later life. Armstrong et al, (1997), suggested that for 16 and 17 year olds the complex web of factors such as; family background (parental employment status and social class) and living arrangements, school experiences including qualifications at 16, religion (Roman Catholics having a greater risk than Protestants), location, confusion (as to what path to take on completion of compulsory education at age 16), low self-esteem and low aspirations, Forsyth and Furlong (2003) tend to support these findings. McVicar et al (2000) produced a number of inter-related factors in determining long term non-participation or unemployment, these included: having experienced 'status 0'; being Roman Catholic; poor qualifications at 16; originating from families with experience of unemployment; originating from disadvantaged areas; males from single families; and females who have children. This evidence highlights the importance of confusion about career choices, low self-esteem and low aspirations in social exclusion outcomes of young people, and will be investigated in this study. Long-term unemployment is in turn a key indicator of social exclusion; the longer a person is unemployed, the less likely they are to find employment and the greater the social isolation, (Budd et al, 1996, Medows, 2001)).

Therefore research suggests that policy makers should take a holistic approach to the problems generated through the social exclusion of young people. This should address: problems at school for the bottom 10% with greater focus on the needs of the disadvantaged, and a drive for improved qualifications, as school league tables may have widened the gap at the bottom of the achievement range. In response to this the government has piloted programs, such as reading recovery and sure start, these need widely

extended. Problems for young people at 16 and 17 years need to be addressed, particularly with confusion about career choices and perceived exploitation by competing education and training providers.

Therefore there needs to be greater flexibility and guidance for those young people at ages 14 and 15 years so as they feel informed of available options and are given choices and a sense of control, the government need to address these problems. Any initiative that can keep the most disadvantaged young people involved in some kind of education or training is likely to improve both basic skills and self-esteem is a vital tool to combat the associated risk of social exclusion. The divisions in the education system between the least and most able students have been particularly apparent in Northern Ireland with the 11 plus which is now set to be abolished. Any serious attempt to promote social inclusion in schools is likely to have implications for the selective system of secondary education.

However, the impact of poverty is not exclusive to those people who lack a good education; education is not a magic protector against poverty and social exclusion. The UK's leading homeless charity CRISIS conducted research at hostels across England and found an 'underclass' of well educated people sleeping rough or in temporary hostels, with nearly 50% of the CRISIS homeless sample possessing some sort of qualification. In fact 1 in 10 had a degree qualification, 25% had at least 1 GCSE and 8% had A' levels. These findings undermine the commonly held belief that education is the key to resolving poverty, and illustrates the complexity of poverty and

that education, on its own, is not an infallible shield against the risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Research found that risk factors were problems like 'family meltdown' that tended to override the protective value of education. Mrs Shaks Ghosh the CRISIS chief executive added that "Most have dependency issues, whether it be drink, drugs or mental health issues. Until we tackle that raft of problems we can only get so far". Reasons given by the sample for being homeless were:

- Over 25% were thrown out of their family home by a parent or step-parent
- Sixteen percent fled because of physical or verbal abuse
- Four percent claimed that alcohol or drugs initially led them to become homeless
- Three percent claimed that job loss was the cause

- One percent that homelessness was a result of their mental breakdown.

Therefore the CRISIS research is an excellent example of the complicated interactions between the risk and protective factors of poverty and social exclusion. For example, CRISIS found that many homeless are the victims of family and relationship breakdowns, who experience further risk due to isolation from society. For example, an indication of isolation was reported when the sample was asked about current personal aspects, results showed that:

- Twenty five percent spent their days alone
- Sixty percent suffered from depression
- Fifty three percent felt lonely
- Thirty six percent felt suicidal
- Over forty percent didn't have any contact with their parents or siblings

- Twelve percent had lost touch with partners
- Forty percent had lost contact with friends

Hobcraft (1998) also found that those who had 3 or more cohabitant relationships between the age of 33 and 23 years were more likely to become homeless by 33 years. As the CRISIS chief executive Shaks Ghosh claimed “ No one should have to suffer this kind of emotional desolation in the 21st century Britain”.

Studies of youth transitions views youth as a life phase when the transition between childhood status and full adult status is made (Johnston et al, 2000). One of the most useful contributions has been by Coles (1995), who argues that youth transitions involve much more than simply the young people’s involvement in the labour market. Cole (1995) suggests that there are 3 main dimensions to youth transitions; 1. Transition from fulltime education and training to fulltime work in the labour market (school-to-work transition). 2. From family of origin to family of destination (the domestic transition). 3. From residence with parent, or surrogate parents, to living away from them (the housing transition). Cole (1995), claims that each of the 3 transitions interrelates, and so the status gained by one may both determine and be determined by the status of another. For example; becoming homeless can have dramatic effects in their labour market situation-possible unemployment, even given the protective factor of a good education as highlighted indicating the complexity of the web.

The virtual collapse of the youth labour market, high levels of youth unemployment, the introduction of youth training schemes, the diminution of

welfare support to young adults and the growth of mass further and higher education have all served to extend the youth phase. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) conclude that this fragmentation and extension of youth transitions doesn't mean that young people have become free of determining influence of social structure. Rather, while individual young people may feel that they have more choice, the pathways that they follow are still strongly influenced by factors such as social class, locality, gender and ethnicity.

Therefore, it has been indicated just how complex the web of social exclusion can be, and how the risk and experience varies from one individual to another, and the issue, especially in regards to vulnerable young people, demands further investigation to shed some light on their experiences. There is some consensus about the indicators of social exclusion and how it can be operationalised. However, these generally refer to aspects of adult life however, social exclusion begins much earlier than when a young person decides upon which employment route to follow. Targeting policy initiatives at those young people identified as at risk of exclusion at an earlier stage in the future may prove more beneficial to them and society as a whole. If policies can address the associated issues before their full impact is evident, should reduce the negative effect of social exclusion in future generations. Although there has already been vast research on the outcomes of poverty for children on adulthood there is less understanding of the impact that poverty can have on the everyday experience of childhood (Ridge, 2002).

Therefore there is a lack of understanding regarding the nature and impact of poverty and social exclusion on children and young people who live in

areas identified as high in social disadvantage. Young people are one of three priority groups identified by the Department of Health and Social Services Public Safety (DHSSPS, 2000) in its consultation document 'Investing in Health'. Ridge (2002) examined poverty and social exclusion from children's perspective and found the impact to be reported as: constraints in participation, challenges to social well being, self-esteem, social identity, and social integration coupled with the reduced ability to make and sustain adequate social relationships and networks. Therefore as a result of this lack of existing literature from young peoples perspectives coupled with the recent research from Democratic Dialogue (2003) illustrating the disturbing levels of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland, this current research aims to address, if only to a limited extent, the void of information regarding young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.