



Developing a Profile of Severe and Multiple Disadvantage in Scotland

A Research Project

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Background

There is growing concern across the UK about the need for a more sophisticated understanding of severe and multiple disadvantage to inform effective responses, but the data underpinning social policy in this area remains largely patchy and fragmented.

In January 2015 our report *Hard Edges: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage in England* was published by the Lankelly Chase Foundation (www.lankellychase.org.uk). Building on a qualitative scoping stage, this study sought to provide a statistical profile of a key manifestation of 'severe and multiple disadvantage' (SMD), using this as a shorthand to signify the problems faced by adults involved in the homelessness, substance misuse and criminal justice systems in England, with poverty an almost universal, and mental ill-health a very common, complicating factor. The study had a significant impact on policy discourse, because it offered a robust picture of the scale of the problem group, their demographic and geographic profile, background circumstances, quality of life, and the cost to society in both financial and broader terms.

The *Hard Edges* study utilised administrative datasets to identify this group with overlapping problems, while supplementing the picture from several specialised surveys. Such datasets differ significantly between the countries of the UK, and it is necessary to develop a bespoke approach to undertaking any similar exercise in Scotland. The Lankelly Chase Foundation have therefore now commissioned Heriot-Watt University to undertake an 'Hard Edges Scotland' study, supported by the Robertson Trust. This Scottish study will also draw on ongoing profiling work in England to supplement the original *Hard Edges* study to ensure that it is fully gender sensitive.

Scottish Study

The study will, first, involve a round of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the fields of homelessness, substance misuse, criminal justice, mental health and domestic abuse. Secondly, the existing review of UK and international literature will be updated and extended to include more detailed material on Scotland. In both cases a key focus will be to highlight what is distinctive about both the problems manifested in Scotland and the responses which have been and are being developed.

Third, the main thrust of the study will entail drawing on a number of secondary administrative and/or survey datasets to paint a picture of the SMD population in Scotland. In particular we will seek to make robust estimates of

- the overall numbers ('stock' and 'flow')
- the extent of overlaps between different problems
- changes over time
- the demographic profile
- the geographical location and origins
- the prevalence of particular background circumstances
- current quality of life indicators for those affected
- outcomes of interventions and prospects for recovery
- costs of service demands from this group

Fourth, service user perspectives will be integrated into the study via 'reference groups' of people with direct relevant experience, facilitated by Glasgow Homelessness Network, who will help to shape its the design, conduct and presentation. In-depth interviews will also be conducted with 40 service users to illuminate their routes into this particular form of SMD, to identify any 'missed' opportunities for preventative or early interventions, and to investigate opportunities for systems improvement and change.

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