

# **The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2004**

*Response by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland*

The Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) is a non-departmental public body established in 1990 by the Youth Service (NI) Order. YCNI is principally tasked with supporting and advising on the development of the youth service. YCNI has also been instrumental in establishing intersectoral approaches to youth strategies, researching youth issues, and advising on policies which impact on children and young people.

## **OVERALL DOMAIN STRUCTURE**

### **1. Domain Structure and weighting**

With reference to the proposed weighting of the domains that make up the proposed deprivation measures, the domain for crime accounts for only 5% of the entire measure. For those individuals living in areas which are affected by crime, this represents an under-estimation of its importance. Under the "Weights B" proposal crime will be given 10% but this is still an underestimation compared to the 25% weighting given to both the Income and Employment domains. The quality of life depends on many factors and too much emphasis is placed upon the income and employment domains which are largely defined by the uptake of means-tested benefits which is a partial measure of this aspect of deprivation. This will be dealt with in more detail by the section below.

### **2. Age specific domain**

For those areas of government responsible for the location of schools, youth clubs and training and social services for children and young people, a domain or sub-domain is required which will act as an accurate proxy for the well-being of children and young people. In the Youth Service, for example, senior managers are unsure whether to use the Child Poverty measure or the Education and Skills domain as the correct tool for assessing deprivation among young people. In this light it would be a positive

development to highlight all those indicators relating to young people across all domains and combine them into a separate sub-domain so a more rounded portrayal of deprivation among this section of the population would result. This could also include a number of census variables.

## INDICATORS WITHIN DOMAINS

### 1. Income Deprivation Domain

Whilst income is a highly important measure of deprivation, the construction of this domain is entirely based on the uptake of means-tested benefits. Therefore, this misses a significant section of the population who are in poorly paid employment or are entitled to benefit but do not claim them. This also has a strong spatial dimension. There are two main points in relation to this:

#### (i) Low incomes in rural areas

Many people living in rural Northern Ireland are entitled to benefit but choose not to claim or in some cases consider themselves “deprived”. Typically, this section of the population have disposable incomes which are very low and in many cases, small and medium sized farms may be held by an ageing population. Furthermore, in addition to those depending on low farm incomes, the high degree of rural poverty is a result of mainly blue-collar occupations (agricultural labourers), few educational qualifications and high proportions of single parent families and shared dwellings.

#### (ii) Carers

The domain on income should take account of the 250,000 carers in Northern Ireland. This group of people are heavily dependent on benefits (Invalidity Allowance and Income Support) and suffer a high degree of income deprivation and debt. Research has shown that one in three cannot afford to pay household utility bills and half cannot afford essential repairs to the home.

#### (iii) Low income but high property value

Low disposable income is also found among those whose property has a high value living in areas where deprivation is not usually found. This is particularly prevalent among older people and pensioners (or “empty-nesters”) who live alone in a family home and have no main source of income but the value of their dwellings has risen dramatically over the last decade.

### **1a. Income deprivation affecting children**

The inclusion of a sub-domain taking account of children and young people is welcomed. However, this proposed sub-domain takes account of only those children living in households dependent on means-tested benefits. As mentioned above, perhaps a more rounded representation of young people living in deprivation would be to broaden the focus and application of this domain. This would be done by combining the income indicators as relates to young people with other such as those entitled to Free School Meals, those living in lone parent households and in overcrowded accommodation, the claimant count for youth unemployment, those subject to illness, ill-health (including dental health), teenage pregnancy, social services data (i.e. those placed on Child protection Register, those suffering from visual/audible impairments and crime data. Data should also be used which has been collected on children with special needs on those children who have been “statemented” due to behavioural and emotional difficulties as this has been found to correlate with socio-economic deprivation. These are all topics on which spatial data is collected and could be combined with census data which in this case could reliably be used. This domain also needs a measure of young people living in households where there is no household income derived from employment.

### **2. Employment Domain**

Again, the benefit dependent nature of this domain does not take account of the rural dimension as those who live in rural poverty frequently do not claim benefits or participate in training courses. It is however good to see the addition of New Deal

participants at age 18-24. Although it is proposed that participants in New Deal for Lone Parents be included as an indicator within this domain, this is not a reliable indicator of lone parents who have been involuntarily excluded from the labour market as not all lone parents who participate in the scheme are involuntarily excluded (i.e. those proceeding past the first interview). Research has found that due to family commitments, many single parents find that a full-time job is not beneficial both in terms of lost benefits and stress. As there are 81,000 lone parents caring for 150,000 children, of whom 70% are dependent on benefits and 90% living below the poverty line, the inclusion of a separate indicator for lone parents using census data to identify them would be justified.

### **3. Health Deprivation and Disability**

There are several points that need to be raised in relation to Health deprivation. They are:

(i) Community Health Services

The main point in relation to the proposed construction of indicators to show health deprivation is that the usage of community health services have not been taken account of. As these services tend to be used more frequently by people who live in rural areas a means of capturing the usage of community health services needs to be developed as well as from hospitals.

(ii) Non-deprivation related health issues

There may be some problems inherent in some of the proposed indicators. Firstly, measures relating to emergency admissions to hospital will include traffic accidents and other non-deprivation related injuries such as injuries sustained through work and domestic accidents. These types of incidents do not reflect on the on-going state of health of these patients.

(iii) Potential to use a range of other health indicators

The usage of health services and hence the portrayal of health deprivation depends enormously on variables such as age, location and type of health complaint and therefore the services demanded. In this sense, NISRA should seek to expand on the indicators proposed in the Consultation Document. Indicators not currently proposed but could be justifiably included in the Health Deprivation Domain (including mental health issues) include:

- Data available indicative of a poor diet, which is a good predictor of long-term health prospects
- Audible and visual impairments of those who live at home (allowing for age)
- Child protection against abuse, in which the home postcodes of children on the Child Protection Register are collated
- Children admitted into care
- Children with learning disabilities
- Teenage pregnancies
- The uptake of counselling services including telephone helplines (available from those organisations who provide this service)
- Referrals from GPs to counselling and psychiatric services (at individual postcode level)

(iv) Postcode referencing

The data used for measuring spatial distributions needs to be referenced at an individual postcode level of the patient, not at the geographic location of the hospital, GP, clinic or social services. Otherwise this will impose a resource-driven rationale for need for these service, providing justification for the demand of the health services, rather than a needs-based approach which plots the home postcodes of the individuals using the services therefore showing need where it exists at a spatial level.

#### 4. Education, Skills and Training Deprivation

Within this domain, the inclusion of sub-domains for young people and working age adults is a welcome development, capturing the distinct educational environment in which young people find themselves in. Also, the proportions of those in Years 11 and 12 not in Grammar school is a useful addition, showing a strong indication of likely routes to be followed at age 16. However, the same resource-based rationale explained above may be at work in this case as the uptake of services at the location of service delivery will distort the true picture of need. Therefore, all school data needs to be individually postcoded so as to show where the children and young people come from rather than showing this deprivation at the locations of schools, colleges and training centres.

There are some further issues relating to the use of some of the proposed indicators at post 16 and post 18 stages:

(i) The use of GNVQ points scores

Unlike GCSE (the scores of which are also proposed to be used in this indicator), GNVQ is not a universal qualification. It is optional, so its use will only reflect the achievements of those who have chosen this route and ignore the achievements of those who have selected alternative routes. Many of those who have chosen GNVQ will have done so because of its vocational nature.

Therefore, A-level points scores will need to be included as a comparison as these students studying A-levels have selected a more academic route likely to lead into Higher Education. The A-level/GNVQ split is also largely representative of those young people who attend a grammar school at post-16 and those who attend a secondary school or a college of Further Education.

(ii) The use of those leaving school at age 16 and not entering Further Education

This indicator needs to take account more comprehensively of the routes taken at age 16. Those leaving school and not entering Further Education could be entering training at a training centre or employment related training, and as such, those leaving school either not achieving any qualifications or a very low

GCSE points score would be a more accurate indicator of educational deprivation. Further data showing those who enter Further Education or training but not achieving any qualifications or drop out will further demonstrate educational deprivation. Educational deprivation needs also to be shown through the various routes taken by young people also, so that show those who choose Further Education at age 16, those who choose A-level (Grammar school), GNVQ (Grammar/Secondary school) and training. The individual postcodes of all who choose these routes will show a spatial distribution thus showing the need for services. The corresponding rates of achievement will then show the level of deprivation in each of these routes taken.

(iii) The use of unsuccessful applicants for Higher Education

This indicator should be supplemented with those who entered Higher Education but did not achieve any qualifications. It would also be useful to ascertain the qualifications gained in Higher Education, i.e. those who graduated with HND or degree. Furthermore, it would be useful if the domain included those have not applied for Higher Education at all, indicating a preference not to go into Higher Education either because they have chosen to enter employment, unemployment or because they are insufficiently qualified.

(iv) Socio-economic deprivation

The domain for Education, Skills and Training deprivation could also have an accompanying measure for those young people attending schools who come from socially deprived backgrounds through entitlement to Free School Meals, subsidies for school uniforms etc.

(v) The need to show performance at school level and absence of suitable local employment opportunities

As stated in the consultation document, the need to show performance at school level and the absence of suitable local employment opportunities will show a high performing school in an area where the local adult population is

disadvantaged. This would be overcome by the provision of data at an individual postcode level, so as to compare educational underachievement directly with the level of disadvantage among the adult population in the same area. In this way, the “stock” and “flow” of educational disadvantage will be more accurately reflected.

## **5. Geographical Access to Services**

The key issues in relation to the Geographical Access to Services domain are as follows:

### **(i) Road distances**

Most of the indicators in this domain use road distances. This cannot be linear distances as this will not take account of actual distances travelled. For example, rivers, motorways and hills (also sectarian divides in urban areas) will form barriers that can only be overcome by travelling around the obstacle. This will create considerably longer distances to travel than those distances geographical proximity would suggest.

### **(ii) Public Transport**

Given that access to services becomes less of an issue if there is access to cars, a measure of car ownership ideally would be included as an indicator. Otherwise, access to public transport is problematic as the use of the an indicator of access to bus stops/train stations do not take account of the frequency of service or if the service is not in the direction of the particular service needed at a particular time, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, a measure of access to a main town needs to be developed as villages and smaller settlements do not have the same variety or volume of services. For example, a small foodstore in a village will not have the same variety as a major supermarket typically only found in larger centres of population.

(v) Services for Young People

A main issue in regard to access to services are young people and their access to transport. A measure of access to youth clubs, leisure centres, community centres and training and educational facilities would be a welcome development given a lack of or inconsistent and unpredictable access to cars for young people. These services for young people are a clearly an important element of community infrastructure. As rural areas are characterised by a high dependent population (aged under 18 and over 65), there is a corresponding need to take account of accessibility of services for the elderly in rural areas.

**6. Living environment**

The inclusion of a domain for the measurement of living environment is a useful addition which reflects deprivation in an area, particularly indicators of housing quality and overcrowding. The local area problem score also appears to be a useful development as it takes account of the physical environment of an area (litter, graffiti, derelict buildings).

This domain would be enhanced if a measure of those who suffer fuel poverty (those unable to heat their homes) was included. Research has found that households with the lowest incomes spend, proportionately six times as much on fuel as those in the high income bands. Fuel poverty results in “spatial shrink” (families confined to one room in winter), condensation and damp and fuel debt. Again rural communities are at particular risk from fuel poverty as they are dependent on cars and the rising cost of fuel and the higher cost of oil, coal and gas because of their distance from larger urban retailers.

**7. Crime**

In relation to the newly proposed domain for crime, it should be borne in mind that the police do not record all incidents that are reported, especially incidents of domestic violence. The main points in relation to this domain are as follows:

(i) Domestic Violence

Young people are frequently the target of such crime and research has also shown that the emotional effects of a child even witnessing domestic violence are very similar to the psychological trauma associated with child abuse and can impact their behaviour, health and educational performance.

(iii) Young people and anti-social behaviour

The crime domain should also include an indicator on the extent to which anti-social behaviour affects neighbourhoods. The consultation document makes reference to what constitutes anti-social behaviour as being subjective, but the fact that a call is logged to the police complaining of anti-social behaviour is a more accurate reflection of the incidence of anti-social behaviour, rather than actual recorded incidents. Recorded incidents will not capture the extent of anti-social behaviour as the offending groups or individuals will have moved away in the time between the police are called and arrive at the scene.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

It is the view of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland that the use of Wards and Output areas be retained in preference to the proposed use of Super Output Areas (SOAs). The proposal for the aggregation of Output Areas into SAOs to replace the use of Wards does have some benefits as they are smaller and more socio-economically homogenous than Wards. However, the Wards and OAs are more preferable because:

- (i) Wards have the advantage of being an electoral boundary and Ward names has given them the local familiarity that would be lacking if SOAs were used.

- (ii) If the aim of defining SAOs are to identify smaller areas with more similar characteristics, then Output Areas are much more suitable to use as need on a local level will be far more accurately identified. OAs can also be aggregated to show patterns of need under any individual domain.
- (iii) The rationale to use populations of no less than 1300 and aim for 2000 is of no particular value in quantifying deprivation in a particular area. If an area has a low population, it is still relevant to assess deprivation using that figure as that is the reality for people in that area.
- (iv) It is not beyond doubt that SOAs will succeed in combining areas of similar socio-economic homogeneity, especially if these areas are unequally spatially distributed throughout the Ward or if the Ward shows several patterns of deprivation (particularly in Belfast). This would also make it difficult to reach the target population.

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