Social Exclusion and Ageing in Diverse Rural Communities
Social Exclusion

• Social Exclusion (SE)
  – The denial of rights, resources, goods and services, and a lack of ability or barriers to participate in normal relationships and activities (Walker 1997; Craig 2004), which determine the extent of social integration of a person in society.

• Understanding of SE is under developed (Higgs and White, 1991)

• Localities and individuals involved (Cattell 2001; Kearns and Parkinson 2001)

• Place mostly considered in terms of urban locations (Commins, 2004)
Ageing in diverse rural communities

The Working Conceptual Model

- Social
- Services
- Financial Resources

Individual Diversity

Rural Diversity
Study Aim

• To explore how age and rurality combine over the life-course to impact on the likelihood of exclusion in later life in contrasting rural contexts (i.e. village rural, dispersed rural, island rural, remote rural and near-urban rural)

• and to develop a conceptual framework that emphasises the role of individual and rural diversity in age-related rural SE.
Methodology

• Approach
  – Ecological multi-level approach (Thrift, 1999; Conradson, 2005)
  – 10 case-study communities: 5 in Ireland; 5 in Northern Ireland

• Data collection
  – Focus groups: 62 community stakeholders
  – 106 Face-to-face interviews with older people
    • 47 men/59 women; 59-93 years; 33% 80+; 48% living alone; 35% non-native
Case-Study Sites

- Island
  1. Rathlin: Island with Scots-Irish heritage (32.6%)
  2. Inishbofin: Non-gaeltacht island – west coast (16.5%)
- Remote
  3. Garrison: West Fermanagh village (23.9%)
  4. Dromid: South Kerry gaeltacht village (13.3%)
- Dispersed
  5. Finnis: Down junction hamlet (21.3%)
  6. Coomhola Valley: West cork valley (14.7%)
- Near-urban
  7. Donemana: Derry city regional community (19.8%)
  8. Rosemount: Central Ireland village (11.2%)
- Village
  9. Upperchurch: Tipperary accessible village (19.1%)
  10. Clough: Down accessible village (14.2%)
Domains of Exclusion

- **Interconnecting**
  - **Social Connections and Social Resources**: Changes in social relations; Social relations and support.
  - **Services**: Health and social care and general services
  - **Transport and Mobility**: Car crucial; rural transport;
  - **Safety, security and crime**: Importance of safety; limited crime;
  - **Income and financial resources**: Pensions rates; thresholds, housing rates; household bills;
Mediating Influences of Exclusion

- Exclusion not just domains

  - Individual capacities
  - Life course trajectories
  - Place and community characteristics
  - Macro-economic forces
Influences: Individual Capacities

• Personal agency and sense of independence
  – Reflection of not wanting to be a burden; not wanting to be dependent
    • Not always linked to functional independence – a relative construction

  it is great to be able to get out of the bed…I’m as happy as Larry thank God. As long as I’m not tied inside in the bed, that’s all I need. (Female participant)

• Coping and Adaptive Capacity

  Well what I know… any of those who stopped, died! You know if I didn’t have my sheep, what’d I do all day? If I was in [a town], and retired, you go out to walk. Well if you can teach a farmer to walk, you know! As a hobby? [Laughs] It’s not on!... You have to be a townie and walk the dog. (Male – K05)
Influences: Individual Capacities

- Expectations shaped assessments of happiness and satisfaction

- Yes I am satisfied… but no one didn’t say to me, you could improve… So, therefore I took it for granted that I was happy enough, I am contented yah… D’you know taking the rough with the smooth. Life was never that bad. You see, some people say ‘Oh God, aye it was.” Not really, ya know. (Female Participant)

You were better off to be struggling away with life… Well, ‘tis my life. ‘Tis, quite natural to me. So far, thank God, I’ve my own boss [wife]… Well now, I have ould angina and I don’t know what road that’s going to take. But yerrah, I have various old thing-a-majigs, but I takes no notice of them. I’m managing away. There’s nothing serious and… I know that we have problems and various things but, I don’t live thinking like that, unless ‘tis happening [laughs]. (Male participant)
Influences: Life Course Trajectories

• Transitions – events and transitions influence exclusion/inclusion
  – Health
  – Old Age
  – Bereavement
    • Loss and hopelessness, a period of significant transition:
    • Death of spouse; children and friends

I do miss my daughter. I’ll always miss my daughter. No matter what the world says, I’ll always think of poor [daughter’s name]. [Son’s name] I don’t think too much of, he was only eleven months. But I know his death when he died at eleven months was a big shock to me. And of course my first child was my very first, and you’re so looking forward to your first baby. To find that it had died at birth that’s not a very pleasant thing to happen. So what can you do? Life is hard. (Female participant – K02)
Influences: Place and Community

- Natural and geographic elements
- People and community cohesion
  - Connectedness
  - The impact of new residents
  - For some new residents: question of would they ever be truly included

They still have this thing about, they call them blow-ins here… if you wanted to come and feel at home, and be included you would have to wait a while and you could be very disappointed. (Female participant – S02)

- Tensions NI communities
  - Complex set of relationship dynamics
Influences: Place and Community

- Belonging and Attachment

If I was there now of a Sunday I’d go home from mass and I’d have things done and… I’d go off through the fields. I could travel, God I could walk miles down through everyone’s nice fields you know and places that you were when you were a gossan [boy]…If you just go out on the field and a cow is after having a calf and you see him racing around the field and everything good. It’s, it’s a great lift to anyone. (Male – near-urban)
Influences: Macro-Economic forces

- Economic and social structures
  - Declining role of agriculture

- The Recession
  - Health and social care – reduction in infrastructure and services
  - Unemployment – damaging fabric of rural communities
  - Emigration – impact on vibrancy, community groups and local networks

Oh God. One thing was if we could see this recession lift a bit is one of the things… It’s impacting on the [GAA] club, it’s impacting on the population because people now with the qualifications are having to leave. (Male – E02)
What is Rural about Exclusion?

• Areas of Vulnerability
  – Shifts in population structure (mortality, in and out migration)
  – Fragile social connections (dispersed settlements, migration, death)
  – Absent services

• Identifying exclusion
  – Lack of cues
  – Low-expectations
  – Place-based and cultural resilience
What about Ireland and Northern Ireland?

- Rurality differs across jurisdictions
- Populations more diverse in NIrl.

- Welfare systems
  - Service provision
  - Pension rates

- Protestant and Catholic Participants
Framework of Age-Related Rural Exclusion

- Identified 5 domains
  - Confirms existing work
  - But we do this for rural areas

- 4 mediating factors
  - New insight
Thank You
Adapted from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) rural classifications and rural typology (types 1 to 6) - Irish Rural Structure and Gaeltacht Areas Report