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SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND OLDER PEOPLE:
TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

The concept of social exclusion represents a key theme in current social policy debates. This reflects not only the deepening of social inequalities in Britain over recent decades, but also a growing marginalisation of particular social groups and areas. While poverty and income inequality continue to be important elements of the social exclusion debate, a central concern of this debate refers to loss of access to important life chances, especially those that connect individuals to the mainstream of society. However, policy initiatives on social exclusion have tended, for a combination of economic and political reasons, to focus on groups such as children, young families and the unemployed. Ways in which social exclusion may affect older people have largely been neglected.

This paper, arising from a study funded under the ESRC’s Growing Older Programme, seeks to generate a better understanding of the dimensions of social exclusion that are relevant to older people. The paper draws upon initial empirical evidence generated through group discussions with older people living in socially deprived neighbourhoods in three English cities. These discussions addressed issues such as older people's income and living standards, their family and social networks, community participation, and living environment. The paper discusses the relevance of such factors in relation to social exclusion.

Introduction

This paper arises from work currently in progress that explores, amongst other issues, the extent to which older people living in socially deprived inner city areas of England may be prone to processes and conditions of social exclusion. The study, funded under the Economic and Social Research Council’s Growing Older Programme (http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/gop/), reflects a major concern that current government initiatives relating to social exclusion, including the work of the numerous Policy Action Teams (PATs) established following the Social Exclusion Unit’s (1998) Bringing Britain Together report, tend to ignore the needs of older people. In terms of public policy, the emphasis of social exclusion debates continues to be clearly targeted towards the integration of younger and

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unemployed people into the labour market. This tendency is further evidenced in
the absence of adequate data on the nature of poverty and exclusion experienced
by older people (Howarth et al. 1999).

In relation to social gerontology, there is a considerable amount of work to be done
in respect of conceptualising social exclusion as it applies to old age. One crucial,
if rather obvious, problem to be faced by gerontologists arises from the need to
reach beyond established discourses on social exclusion that, in Ruth Levitas’s
(1998: 27) terms, ‘posit paid work as a major factor in social integration’. This is
the social exclusion agenda that currently dominates within British public policy
debates (see for example, Opportunity for All 1999). Academic debates also tend
to focus more on younger age groups (for example, the LSE’s Centre for Analysis
of Social Exclusion has a strand of work exploring child poverty, and only limited
work directly relating to older people). What we are seeking to do in this paper is to
suggest how contemporary concerns about social exclusion may best be applied
to the position of older people in British society, especially in terms of exploring
social inclusion in the context of relationships and resources that exist beyond
(paid) employment. More specifically, the paper also seeks to explore area-based
dimensions of social exclusion, looking at what difference living in an area of
concentrated poverty makes to (quality of life in) old age.

The paper is divided into two broad parts; one conceptual, the other more
empirical. The first part of the paper examines some of the definitional and
conceptual issues that arise from contemporary academic and policy debates on
social exclusion. Given the nature of the project giving rise to this paper, particular
emphasis is placed upon the area base of these debates. This leads in to a
discussion of techniques used by the research group to explore the different
dimensions of social exclusion in respect of older people. This part draws upon
comments made by older people in a series of group discussions held in a number
of socially deprived neighbourhoods in London (Newham), Liverpool and
Manchester.

*Concepts and Definitions*
It would be easy to get bogged down in a discussion of the relative merits and dismerits of various definitions of social exclusion. Our intention in exploring the range of approaches that have been adopted in addressing social exclusion is to provide a means of linking relevant academic debates to the needs of the research project on which this paper is based. A useful starting point is the often cited distinction between the *distributional* dimension of poverty (i.e. lack of material resources) and the *relational* focus of social exclusion (i.e. lack of social ties) (see, for example, Townsend [1987] and Room [1995]). However, the usefulness of such a clear-cut distinction is questionable, given the obvious point that exclusion is at least related to income - ‘adequate levels of income are a necessary though not sufficient means of ensuring access of people to basic human needs’ according to Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997). This is also one of the key points arising from Townsend’s (1979) approach which suggests that exclusion from social participation is directly related to poverty. Bauman (1998: 37) reinforces this idea in the following way: ‘Poverty means being excluded from whatever passes for a “normal life”’.

Other definitions of social exclusion usefully draw together distributional and relational elements. For example, Berghman (1997: 19) disaggregates the idea of exclusion, conceiving social exclusion in terms of the non-realisation of citizenship rights within four key societal institutions - the democratic and legal system, the labour market, the welfare system, and the family and community system. This approach emphasises the multi-dimensionality of the concept of exclusion, suggesting that exclusion can occur where any of these institutional systems break down (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000). Alden and Thomas (1998) stress the interconnectedness of Berghman’s strands of social exclusion. Russell Barter et al. (1999), in a section from the Policy Action Team 17 report, take the distinction made by Room as intending to recognise:

‘... not only the relative material deprivation of those in poverty, but also the broader processes of isolation, detachment and low
participation in social, cultural and political life which accompany it. (..) As a concept, it does not seek to diminish the importance of the distributional issues of material resources, but serves to focus upon relational issues - of inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power’ (p. 85).

Following in this tradition, Burchardt et al. (1999) have sought to operationalise a definition of social exclusion that encompasses five distinct elements that relate to the individual’s participation in ‘normal’ social activities: consumption activity (the ability to consume up to a minimum level the goods and services considered normal for society); savings activity (the accumulation of savings, pension entitlements, or property ownership); production activity (engagement in an economically or socially valued activity); political activity (engagement in some collective effort to improve or protect the immediate or wider social or physical environment); and social activity (engagement in significant social interaction with family or friends, and identifying with a cultural group or community). A similar approach has also been adopted by Gordon et al. (2000), albeit with reference to a different range of indicators of social exclusion. In their work, Gordon et al. examine exclusion in relation to impoverishment, labour market participation, access to services, and a range of social relations (p. 54f.).

Of growing relevance in discussions of social exclusion are several approaches which link exclusion to residence in particular types of neighbourhood. In this respect, the basis for a study by Glennerster et al. (1999) of areas of concentrated poverty is offered by a definition that succeeds in tying the distributional and relational characteristics of exclusion in with a concern about its geographic distribution:

‘We define social exclusion as the exclusion of individuals and groups from the main stream activities of that society. Social exclusion is about more than income poverty, but area studies in Britain have yet to demonstrate how social exclusion develops, how far it is an individual or locational problem, and how important area factors are in this process’ (p. 7).
Similar ideas are expressed by others such as Allen et al. (2000), Brennan et al. (2000), Perri 6 (1997) and Madanipour et al. (1998). Perri 6 (1997: 3) emphasises the importance of the geographical dimension of exclusion in a manner that bears striking resemblance to the Home Office’s community development projects of the 1960s:

‘[Social exclusion] is a useful term in societies in which there is growing geographical polarisation of access and opportunity, so that often quite small areas - a housing estate, an inner or outer urban area - are cut off from the life around them.’

Madanipour et al. (1998: 22) offer a useful definition which reinforces the spatial element of social exclusion:

‘Social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods’.

One difficulty of current exclusion debates in terms of the situation of older people arises from the way in which exclusion is seen to operate. In this context, the work of Ruth Levitas (1998) is useful in identifying what she refers to as a ‘Durkheimian conspiracy’ lurking behind current social exclusion debates that suggests that cohesion is best achieved through integration into occupational roles. This represents part of the distinction she draws between three discourses of social exclusion - RED, MUD and SID which refer respectively to redistributionist, moral underclass and social integrationist discourses. Nevertheless, the position of older people within these discourses is unclear. Moreover, as Byrne (1999) correctly argues, social exclusion discourse tends to emphasise the dynamic nature of exclusion. There are now a variety of panel studies available that show how people move in and out of poverty/exclusion as their circumstances change (for
example, Leisering and Walker 1998). The evidence from such studies leads to the conclusion that, as Perri 6 (1996) asserts, ‘... most people get out of poverty’. Similar arguments are developed in some of the PAT reports, giving rise to the impression that the boundaries of exclusion are essentially fluid rather than rigid. However, the situation of older people is likely to be rather different. For those prone to exclusion, the experience of being excluded may be maintained on a longer term basis than is the case with other groups. This may change the way in which exclusion is experienced, leading to different types of questions about the process by which exclusion is handled.

Arising from this general discussion, and taking for granted that adequate material resources represent an important prerequisite for social integration, we have identified at least three further strands to the discussion around definitions of social exclusion that need to be acknowledged in research concerning older people:

- A Durkheimian strand which identifies exclusion as a form of anomie, where the focus is on issues concerning participation and integration;
- A second strand which concerns spatial dimensions of exclusion: social exclusion as manifest in spatial segregation;
- A third strand revolving around what Atchley (1988) in a gerontological context would define as exclusion as a form of institutional disengagement.

**Participation and integration** - At one level this is fairly straightforward, concerning issues about the involvement of older people in aspects of community life, issues of access, and older people’s links within and beyond the local community. Emphasis upon participation and integration beyond the labour market encompasses a wide range of social relationships and roles fulfilled by older people. The focus can be conceived of in terms of the degree of access that older people have to different forms of social capital. This can be expressed, for example, in relation to forms of civic participation, expressions of interpersonal trust, the nature of social (support) networks, and mutuality/reciprocity (see, for example, the work of Putnam [1995] and Coleman [1988]). At another level, this element is more problematic since the structure of social networks and social
capital identified in the literature as sustaining integration is likely to vary according to an individual’s position in the lifecourse. For example, while integration in ‘weak’ networks has been shown to be important to unemployed people seeking work, for older people it has been assumed that it is more important to have ‘strong’ networks (Kruger 1997; Perri 6 1997). In respect of the social capital mix, there could also be differences between age-groups that have yet to be fully explored. In terms of generating interpersonal trust, for example, older people may well regard ‘loose ties’ (such as being able to say ‘hello’ to neighbours) as being more important than ‘close ties’ (Phillipson et al. 2000).

Spatial segregation - this element of social exclusion definitions is particularly important in a study such as ours. Potentially three different forms of spatial segregation require consideration:

- mental space which may be influenced by fears and perceptions about particular places;
- narratives of space which are about the degree to which people in a particular area articulate shared understandings and histories;
- economic space which is about the way in which social exclusion operates in spatial terms.

Madanipour et al. (1998) draw these three themes together as follows:

‘Space has, therefore, a major role in the integration or segregation of urban society. It is a manifestation of social relationships while affecting and shaping the geometries of these relationships. This leads to the argument that social exclusion cannot be studied without also looking at spatial segregation and exclusion. Social cohesion or exclusion, therefore, are indeed socio-spatial phenomena...’ (p. 81).

A discussion of spatial elements of exclusion as they apply to the situation of older people gives rise to at least two paradoxes. The first concerns issues of difference. On the one hand, cities are constructed around the idea of difference: ‘A city is
composed of different kinds of men (sic); similar people cannot bring a city into existence’ (Aristotle, cited in Sennett 1994). Yet it is precisely the desire for similarity which is a striking feature of the views of older people. For example, the work of Cattell and Evans (1999) suggests that older people living on two estates in East London derived an important part of their identity from their similarity with one another. This desire for similarity is understandable: at one level it is about feeling protected by those with similar attributes (illustrated, for example, by Phillipson et al. [1998] with reference to the situation of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets); at another, it is about being surrounded by people with a similar history. In most urban areas, however, the desire for ‘sameness’ may be difficult to realise. This applies in particular to so-called ‘zones of transition’ which thrive on a rapid turnover of people and buildings. A similar situation may arise for older people living in what Power (2000: 12) describes as ‘non-viable’ estates - those unpopular urban neighbourhoods characterised by low housing demand and subsequent abandonment of housing by all but the very poorest or least mobile residents. Part of the problem here may be that the advantages of the inner city for some (services for minority groups, relatively cheap housing) also translate into disadvantages for others (falling house prices in some cases; destruction of familiar landscapes in others). It is also clear that older people can be highly selective in how they view the consequences of profound urban change, and this translates into often negatively charged perceptions about those around them. Such change could also result in dissatisfaction with the neighbourhood, as clearly demonstrated in the study Unpopular Places by Burrows and Rhodes (1998).

The second paradox is that the marginalisation of particular urban places/neighbourhoods may go hand in hand with an increased identification of some residents with their neighbourhood. In his discussion of the post-fordist city, Marcuse (1996) sums this idea up in the following way:

‘Neighbourhood has become more than a source of security, the base of a supportive network, as it has long been: it has become a source of identity, a definition of who a person is and where he or she belongs in society’. 
Richard Sennett (1999) also makes the point that: ‘One of the unintended consequences of modern capitalism is that it has strengthened the value of place, aroused a longing for community’. Thus, the spatial manifestations of exclusion may also concern the way in which people’s familiar attachments are undermined with urban, and perhaps more especially global change. One significant result of the rapid change experienced in some urban neighbourhoods - expressed most clearly in the work of Power (2000) and other members of the LSE’s CASE group - would be an undermining of older people’s sense of identification with the local community.

Exclusion as a form of institutional disengagement focuses on ways in which services and agencies withdraw from marginal (urban) areas. Socially deprived neighbourhoods, and the people who reside in them, may be prone to what Gans (1972) refers to as ‘institutional isolation’. Lash and Urry (1994) suggest that the situation of people living in deprived areas has deteriorated, and is likely to continue to deteriorate further, as they are deserted by a range of institutional capacities and resources. The resulting isolation of deprived areas in terms of the withdrawal of both private and public sector institutions reflects the limited power of local residents within the marketplace (Bowring 2000: 312f.). This in turn raises problems for residents. For example, Speak and Graham’s (2000) study of private sector businesses operating in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Newcastle Upon Tyne showed that local residents experienced difficulties accessing such basic services as energy, food retailing, telephones and banking. For older people with limited incomes or restricted mobility, the loss or absence of local services, including sub-post offices or affordable local shops, can be especially problematic, necessitating dependence upon others and/or the use of more costly means of transport. In their study of neighbourhoods in Liverpool, for example, Andersen et al. (1999) report on the ‘widespread feeling of loss especially amongst older residents in relation to the closure of shops and workplaces’. Inaccessibility of services would tend to reinforce an inhibition amongst some older people to use services in the first place. In this respect, Kempson and Whitley (1999) found that a considerable proportion of people aged seventy and over belong to a cash-only generation. Limited access to basic health and social care services, or to public
transport, could represent further dimensions of older people’s exclusion from key public and private sector institutions.

**Social exclusion and older people: developing an empirical base**

Our attempt to explore in more detail some of the issues that arise from the discussion of definitional and conceptual dimensions of social exclusion has been informed by a series of discussions with groups of older people within some of England’s most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods, identified with the assistance of the DETR’s (1998) Index of Local Deprivation, are to represent the location for a planned survey of 600 people aged 60 and over (see [http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/so/csg/SOCSEX.html](http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/so/csg/SOCSEX.html)). Initial group discussions allowed researchers to ‘talk aloud’ with older people about some of the emerging themes of the research project. While the focus of discussions was not only on ‘social exclusion’ - the research also explores issues around the general themes of older people’s ‘standard of living’ and ‘quality of life’ - it is this part of the research which this paper draws upon.

Seven groups were identified through contacts made by the researchers with relevant local agencies and with existing local contacts. As a result, in Spring 2000, three discussions were held in Newham (East London), two in Liverpool, one in Manchester and, for the sake of comparison, one in a more affluent part of central England. The composition of the groups broadly reflected the social and ethnic mix of the neighbourhoods in which discussions were held. Group members tended to have a working class background. In Newham, separate discussions took place with older people from white, Bangladeshi, and a mixed Asian community. The seven groups ranged from the more formal (a pensioners forum with an agenda and a structured organisation) to the fully informal (a group of friends meeting in a hired church hall). Tape recordings were made of the interviews, which usually lasted around one hour. Findings presented here derive from the detailed transcripts of the group discussions. Where necessary, extracts from the transcripts have been anonymised in order to maintain the confidentiality of research participants.
In the context of the central issues raised in this paper, researchers were particularly keen to establish with group members whether there was sufficient evidence to support the distinction drawn between the three elements of exclusion referred to previously: exclusion from participation and integration; spatial segregation; and institutional disengagement. Initial questions relating to each of these themes were formulated and, based upon the degree to which they were understood and elicited meaningful responses from older people in the groups, refined for subsequent discussions.

**Participation and integration**

Group discussions showed that the social capital dimension is potentially a very fruitful source of new ideas for social gerontologists. Inevitably, our discussions brought together relatively well integrated older people - all were regular participants in the activities of one type of group or other. While many people commented on the importance of non-kin community ties, with neighbours being especially important in some areas, it was widely felt that such ties had weakened in recent decades. One member of the Manchester group compared her neighbourhood with that of her son:

‘Where my son lives there are old houses that have been renovated - and most of the people in them own them - and the atmosphere of all the neighbours there is like it used to be here. The neighbours will help each other, and it’s like it used to be here. And the neighbours all mind each other’s children if they’ve got to go somewhere.’

Nevertheless, relationships with neighbours continued to be valued by many group members. This also extended to areas with a diverse ethnic mix, although a distinction was sometimes drawn between immediate neighbours and those further away.

As can be expected, integration within family networks varied from community to community and from person to person. In some areas, families continued to live in close proximity, whilst in others the younger generations had tended to move out
to more desirable residential areas: ‘My family would never have had a family if they had to live in this dump’ according to one Newham woman. Proximate family members, in particular grandchildren, were generally viewed as an asset. In all areas, frequent mention was made of the transfer and exchange of goods and services between and across the generations. Such goods and services could also at times include everyday necessities such as food. For example, one woman in a Liverpool group described how she might leave her home in the morning in the knowledge that her fridge was empty. On returning home in the afternoon she would sometimes find that her fridge had been restocked by younger members of the family: ‘... it’s our lot. They’ve been around nosing and they’ve seen nothing there, and they’ve gone out and got it all in for us’. In the same discussion, other people commented on the type of services provided to younger members of the family, especially to grandchildren. This took the form of accommodation, meals and, on occasion, money. Findings from group discussions tend to support those from the studies undertaken on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across England which emphasised the strength of bonds of reciprocity and mutual aid amongst older people (Forrest and Kearns 1999).

Nevertheless, for some older people difficulty in maintaining family links was attributed to the characteristics of their residential environment. Some commented that their children and grandchildren visited less often because they disliked the neighbourhood or felt unsafe there. Again this view was expressed most clearly in Newham:

‘Mine [my family] probably wouldn’t come to London if it wasn’t for us living here. They’d go into the City, but wouldn’t come to this locality because they don’t like what’s happened to it; the people and the actual borough, it’s filthy dirty’.

Participation and integration was enhanced by good public services - free access to reliable transport was often mentioned in this context - or by the presence in the neighbourhood of a range of voluntary organisations. Clubs or places where older
people could meet were felt to be particularly important and to fulfil an important integrative role:

‘To come to these clubs in an afternoon gives you a breather. (...) I live all on my own, so therefore it gets me out to see people, have somebody else to talk to’ (Newham);

‘You look forward to going there. And even if you don’t do anything very active, there’s always someone to talk to and to have a cup of tea and to have a meal if you wish’ (Liverpool).

Equivalent views were expressed by people in each of the group discussions. Local churches continue to offer an important meeting place for older people, accentuating the sense of loss that arises when such institutions disappear from a neighbourhood (see below).

**Spatial segregation**

Considerable evidence existed to back the notion that older people experience exclusion in the variety of forms of spatial segregation raised earlier. Limitations in *mental space*, for example, can be witnessed in most neighbourhoods through all-pervasive concerns about crime. Many people commented on the restrictions placed upon normal daily activities by a fear of crime; some backing these comments up with examples of how they, or close friends, had personally been the victims of crime. The effect is that many older people feel uncomfortable leaving their homes even during daylight hours; very few people would leave their homes at night. In some areas, older people also felt unsafe in their own homes: ‘If you hear the bell ringing at the door, you’re frightened to open it’. Fear of crime tends to encourage a houseboundedness amongst many older people living in socially deprived areas. There are parts of some urban neighbourhoods that are effectively out of bounds to older people, including, in Manchester, public parks and cemeteries. Busy streets occupied primarily by groups of younger people also contributed in Newham to the fears of some (white) older people: ‘They’re pushing all the time. And if you see a group of them - they may be harmless - but if you see a group of them, you’re frightened to walk past them’. On a different occasion, the
same group discussion in Newham emphasised that older people were often invisible in public spaces: ‘(...) in the majority us older people are invisible. We have to get out of the way with all our shopping’. For members of one Asian group, however, despite fears about street crime, Newham was regarded as a much safer place to live than other parts of Britain: ‘It’s a good area; it’s clean and there is very little racial harassment’. Also of concern for some Asian elders in Newham was a different type of criminal activity - street prostitution and drug dealing.

With regard to narratives of space, it is evident that there are considerable variations between deprived neighbourhoods in terms of residents’ shared understandings and histories. Long-term residents of some communities commented on the relentless decline of what had once been perceived as desirable urban neighbourhoods: ‘I know by my own experience that the town I lived in used to be lovely’ in the words of a (white) Newham resident. However, the fact that (white) Newham group members had shared the experience of decline seemed to help them to cope. Members of this group were also aware that some aspects of everyday life had changed for the better in their lifetimes: ‘Nobody starves today, but they did in my mother’s day’. The experience of shorter term residents and in-migrants is rather different. Not having witnessed change over such a long period, Asian members of one group in Newham were much more willing to identify positive features of their neighbourhoods. While members of some groups were keen to emphasise the decline of their neighbourhoods, this was often qualified by an expression of satisfaction with the area (for the benefit of the researcher perhaps). Thus, having cited numerous examples of how her (Liverpool) neighbourhood had changed for the worse, one older woman was still able to reflect that: ‘It’s not bad round here, like’.

Further evidence of variation across the communities existed in frequently expressed tensions between different ethnic groups (Manchester and Newham) or, where such tensions did not occur, between older and younger age groups (Liverpool). This mirrors findings from the Rowntree studies referred to above (Forrest and Kearns 1999), and lends further weight to Sennett’s (1999) ideas about the strengthening value of place in modern society. Thus, the often visceral responses to change voiced by some older people in Manchester and Newham
can be perceived as reflecting a threat to their identity. In the context of changes to population structure and composition, older people in several areas felt that they had become marginalised. In Manchester, for example, commenting upon the changing ethnic mix of her neighbourhood, one (white) group member emphasised that in the future ‘we’ll be the odd ones out (...) You walk down the street, you don’t see a white person. You can’t speak to anybody’. Similar views were expressed by some white residents of Newham: ‘We are the minority in the area I would say now’ or ‘We’re the foreigners’. Referring to ways in which their neighbourhoods had changed during their lifetimes, the views of many white older people reflected a loss of identification with the local community. Such views can be contrasted with those held by older people belonging to Newham’s ethnic minority communities. In one group, elders commented positively on the absence of racial harassment in their neighbourhood.

Exclusion in terms of older people’s use of *economic space* also emerged from some group interviews. This applied, for example, to the use of a range of shops ranging from local markets to more prestigious shopping developments. Local markets were regarded by some older people as being suited only to the needs of people from ethnic minority groups. Others felt that shops and shopping centres catered mainly for families or couples rather than for those who lived alone. Most areas had reasonable access by public transport to out-of-town shops. However these commercial centres were often regarded as unsuited to the needs of older people;

‘The bus outside here takes you to the Trafford Centre (..), but I mean it’s all shops for the young ones. I went in with a friend and it had caviar - 260 grams for £400’ (Manchester).

For some older people living in Newham, the theatres of London’s West End may as well have been located on a different continent. Even though good public transport offered access to central London, the cost of a theatre ticket was beyond the reach of a person reliant upon the basic state pension as their main source of income. The evidence from our group discussions tends to confirm the view that
older people living in deprived urban areas occupy different economic spaces to younger people.

Institutional disengagement

Group discussions were peppered with concrete examples of institutions that were once present in the local neighbourhood and were now missed. This was usually framed within the context of a general concern that the neighbourhood had changed for the worst or ‘gone down the pan’ in the words of more than one group member. Poorly thought-through redevelopment of neighbourhoods in the past also contributed to this feeling. Thus, in some areas established terraced houses - referred to in Manchester as being ‘like little palaces’ - had been systematically cleared in the 1960s and 1970s to make way for new roads that had not subsequently been built. The Manchester group also referred to the loss of shops and cinemas, limited opening of public libraries, the closure of churches and public houses. It was even difficult to find a shop willing to deliver newspapers to the door. Members of one Liverpool group commented on the difficulties of maintaining a local church subject to frequent vandalism: ‘You’ve never seen a church with barbed wire around. I’d hope you hadn’t. But there’s plenty of that around here’. In a different Liverpool group older participants suggested that they had never had a good service infrastructure in the first place; the presence of numerous pubs and off licences contrasted with the absence of food retailers; long distances to bus stops; and, the closure of places once frequented by older people: ‘Now the British Legion used to be all right for old people, but they closed that down.’ For people who had moved into an area relatively recently, comparisons with the past - however idealised - could not be made. Thus, older Asians in one of the Newham groups simply noted that there were no local facilities for pensioners.

A further sign of institutional disengagement expressed by members of most groups could be witnessed in the absence of a visible police presence in areas characterised by (a fear of) high levels of crime; the closure of a police station in one Liverpool neighbourhood was also noted. Bangladeshi elders in Newham commented on the poor clear-up rate for crimes committed in the area. People in most groups also cited a lack of maintenance of previously well-kept public spaces
or boarded-up houses as an indication that their neighbourhoods were neglected by local authorities; as one Liverpool group member noted ‘As far as the Council’s concerned, we don’t exist’. In Newham, blocked or uneven pavements and poor street lighting were regarded as particular sources of concern. In Liverpool, road repairs had been started but left unfinished. However, views of neighbourhood decline were not universally shared. For one of the Asian groups in Newham in particular, more positive feelings about the neighbourhood were expressed; schools had improved, and the presence of mosques was beneficial. Nevertheless, in the same group several difficulties accessing a range of public services were voiced. This was related in part to a disinterest among many service-providers in the needs of older people (belonging to ethnic minority groups):

‘If you go to hospital, all the doctors are drinking tea and they say: “We are very busy.” And if you go the police station, they are a little bit different and they also say: “We are very busy,” but they are drinking coffee!’

Health care provision, both in hospitals and in the community, was almost universally felt to be inadequate by members of the discussion groups. This contrasted with a general feeling that public transport was accessible and, on the whole, of a good quality. For older people in all communities, good (free) transport enabled access to social and leisure activities located beyond the boundaries of their neighbourhood. Nevertheless, fear of crime tended to restrict discussants’ mobility after dark.

Systematic disengagement of key public and private institutions from deprived areas contributed to a marginalisation of these neighbourhoods in terms of outsiders’ perceptions of them. In the group discussion conducted in the more affluent Midlands neighbourhood, a former trade union official’s anecdote about a tribunal hearing he had attended served to emphasise the advantages associated with residence in a non-stigmatised place:
‘Years ago I was fighting a case at an appeal court in [next major city] for somebody that worked for a large company. And when they asked me where I lived, and I told them [affluent community] that made one hell of a difference. (..) the fellow in front of me was a solicitor and he was representing somebody else, and all six of those who had gone in before me - every one had lost their case and yet I won. (..) the word [affluent community] made a hell of a difference as far as I’m concerned’.

Summary
This paper has emphasised the multi-dimensionality of social exclusion in relation to older age. We have sought to do this within the context of an increasing interest amongst academics and policy-makers in the relationship between particular types of residential location and deprivation/exclusion. In seeking to distinguish between different types of exclusion, attention has focused upon the three areas of participation and integration, spatial segregation, and institutional disengagement. Findings from group discussions with older people living in socially deprived communities tended to lend credence to the drawing of such a distinction. Nevertheless, there is also a clear interconnection between these forms of exclusion.

Participation and integration refers to older people’s embeddedness in social networks, and the extent to which older people contribute to or draw upon the social capital that exists in their neighbourhoods. Our interest here is in the supportive mechanisms that may exist in a particular community or for an individual that serve to counteract tendencies which would otherwise lead to social exclusion or marginalisation. Group discussions emphasised the importance of participation in a range of social relationships beyond the labour market as a source of social integration. Thus strong networks of families, friends and neighbours are regarded as very important by older people living in areas characterised by social deprivation. Some evidence was found that ‘loose’ ties within the community are important for older people, especially in terms of facilitating participation in normal daily activities.
Spatial segregation is a key component of social exclusion in respect of old age. This was explored in terms of segregation of mental space, narratives of space and economic space. Evidence from group discussions on this aspect of exclusion confirmed the usefulness of such a distinction. For example, limitations in mental space arose for many group members out of a concern about crime. The result for some older people was an avoidance of particular places or situations. In some areas, older people feel invisible in public spaces. Narratives of space addressed the extent to which older people expressed shared understandings and histories of their neighbourhoods. Here variations existed between the experiences of long-term residents and shorter term residents. For the former, the relentless decline of what had once been perceived to be reasonable places to live was only tempered by the shared nature of this experience. For the latter, experience of decline was not shared and a more positive view of the neighbourhood could be expressed. Where decline was identified, this often translated into tensions between different age groups or ethnic groups. With regard to use of economic space, the group discussions tended to show that older people occupy different spaces to younger people.

Institutional disengagement, and its impact upon older people living in deprived urban neighbourhoods, represented a major concern of participants in group discussions. Considerable evidence of a systematic withdrawal of public and private sector institutions from marginal urban areas was presented. Thus questions arose about older people’s degree of access to basic health and social care services, to financial services, and to basic facilities such as shops.
References


