



Austerity, Poverty and Social Inequalities: Contextualising Health Inequalities in Scotland

**Gerry Mooney
Faculty of Social Sciences
The Open University in Scotland**

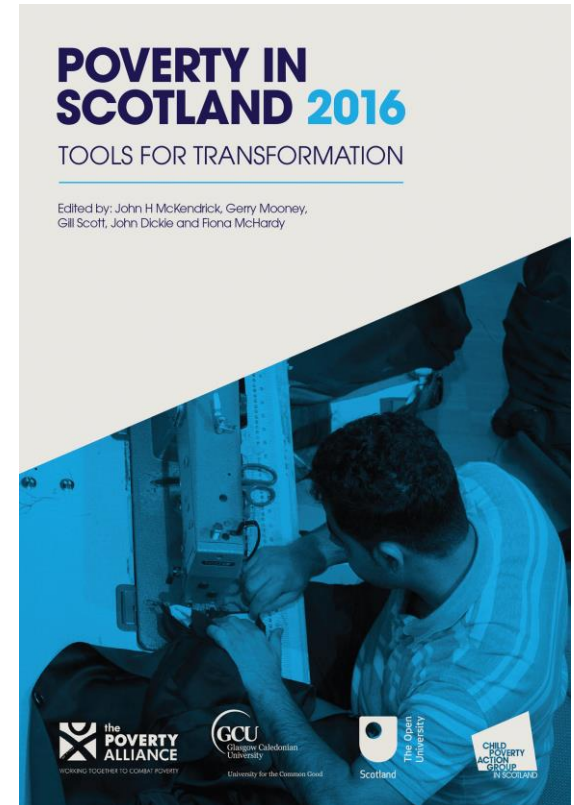
***Understanding the Gap: How Research can help us
Address Health inequalities in Scotland***

Wednesday 1 June 2016

University of Stirling

Presentation Outline: Themes and Issues

- *Understanding health inequalities within the wider socio-economic context and key policy drivers in contemporary Scotland*
- *How do we make sense of the prevalence of poverty and inequality in contemporary Scotland?*
- *To what extent is ‘austerity’ to blame?*
- *The Social Harms of ‘austerity’*
- *Neoliberalism and the Strategy of Inequality*
- *(This draws on my ongoing work on austerity and destitution in the context of contemporary Glasgow and Scotland)*



Resources on OpenLearn from the OU



Accessibility Sign in Contact Search the OU

The Open University Study at the OU Research at the OU **OU Community** About the OU

OpenLearn

The home of free learning from
The Open University since 2006

Search OpenLearn...

Health, Sports & Psychology Education History & The Arts Languages Money & Management Nature & Environment Science, Maths & Technology People, Politics & Law TV, Radio & Events Get Started

You are here: Home > People, Politics & Law > Poverty in Scotland 2014: The Independence Referendum and Beyond

Poverty in Scotland 2014: The Independence Referendum and Beyond

Poverty in Scotland 2014 looks at the September 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the different constitutional futures that were then facing the people of Scotland.

By: Dr Gerry Mooney (Department of Social Policy and Criminology)

Updated Wednesday 21st January 2015

Posted under People, Politics & Law, Politics, Policy & People, Economics, Politics

Twitter Facebook Google+ LinkedIn Comments

Print

Published in February 2014, and launched at the Open University in Scotland where Scotland's Deputy First Minister Spoke to the themes of the book, *Poverty in Scotland 2014* looks, as the subtitle suggests, to the September 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the different constitutional futures that were then facing the people of Scotland.

A central theme of the book is the interconnections between the issues of constitutional changes, namely further devolution – of varying levels – with Scotland staying within the UK, of full Scottish independence, and questions and issues of poverty and inequality in contemporary Scotland. The overall book does not take sides on the Independence question, but contains contributions from authors who represent different perspectives on Scotland's constitutional future. All the contributors, however, share a commitment to challenging poverty and to the creation of a fairer and socially just Scottish society within which poverty is effectively addressed.

Poverty in Scotland 2014 builds on earlier editions of the series. It provides a picture of the overall context around poverty and disadvantage in Scotland, and the role and impact of policies from the Scottish and UK Governments. The primary difference with the earlier editions is the focus on the ways in which issues around poverty – and social welfare and social justice more generally – came to be entwined with the constitutional debate and the competing arguments around Scotland's future.

Since the September 2014 Referendum, which returned a majority NO vote, these issues of social welfare, and arguments around the devolution of welfare and tax powers, have remained central in the debate that has unfolded.

Download the PDF from the [Open University Website](#).



About this site

OpenLearn: free learning from The Open University

- Explore your world with the OU's experts
- Over 800 free courses to try today
- Video, audio and games & more

I want to... Go

Sign In Sign Up Help

Editor's choice

Discover Mercury

Get to know the planet we're starting to find out a whole lot more about.



What was Lewis Carroll like?
The man behind Alice



Dave Myers talks to OpenLearn
The power of generations coming together



Inspired? Could you become an OU student?
Discover the world of social sciences courses at The Open University



OU on TV & Radio

Life Story: Parenthood
Catch up



Life Story: Courtship
Catch up



Accessibility Sign in Contact Search the OU

The Open University Study at the OU Research at the OU **OU Community** About the OU

OpenLearn

The home of free learning from
The Open University since 2006

Search OpenLearn...

Health, Sports & Psychology Education History & The Arts Languages Money & Management Nature & Environment Science, Maths & Technology People, Politics & Law TV, Radio & Events Get Started

You are here: Home > People, Politics & Law > Politics, Policy & People > Society Matters > Yachts, planes and buses... Mind the (inequality) gap

Yachts, planes and buses... Mind the (inequality) gap

Gerry Mooney delves in to a new Oxfam report that lays bare the extraordinary level of inequality in the world.

By: Dr Gerry Mooney (Department of Social Policy and Criminology)

Duration 15 mins
Introductory level

Updated Tuesday 2nd February 2016
Posted under Society Matters, Social Policy

Twitter Facebook Google+ LinkedIn Comments

Print

In media output across much of the world, accompanied by countless discussions on online forums and across various websites, there has been a considerable amount of commentary following the publication of the latest Oxfam report on the extent of global inequality.

The new 2016 report, *An Economy for the 1% 17*, was published to coincide with the latest World Economic Forum event in Davos, Switzerland. The report highlights that we live in a world of growing inequality: a deepening and widening gap between the richest 1% and the rest of humanity.

Oxfam calculate that the 62 richest people in



The Open University Study at the OU Research at the OU **OU Community** About the OU

OpenLearn

The home of free learning from
The Open University since 2006

Search OpenLearn...

Health, Sports & Psychology Education History & The Arts Languages Money & Management Nature & Environment Science, Maths & Technology People, Politics & Law TV, Radio & Events Get Started

You are here: Home > People, Politics & Law > Politics, Policy & People > Politics > Independence, social welfare and a fairer Scotland

Independence, social welfare and a fairer Scotland

This collection of articles focuses on the role of social welfare in the debates around Scottish independence.

By: Dr Gerry Mooney (Department of Social Policy and Criminology)

Updated Wednesday 1st May 2013

Introductory level

Twitter Facebook Google+ LinkedIn Comments

Print

Introduction

This collection focuses on the role of social welfare, and the arguments around inequality and fairness, which featured in the debates surrounding Scottish independence and its alternatives in the run up to the referendum on independence for Scotland on 18th September 2014. It explores the ways in which such issues became increasingly central in these debates and considers the contrasting arguments of those in favour and those against Scottish independence.

This collection accompanies two others: *The context for the independence debate*, which considers the process of how and why the issue of independence for Scotland came to political prominence in the first decades of the 21st century, and *The debate on Scottish independence*, which focuses on the main ideas that are being advanced in the debate, the arguments for and against independence for Scotland and what the implications might be for people in Scotland of a Yes vote for independence.

A key theme running across these collections is that while the focus is on developments in Scotland, they have a much wider cross-UK resonance and potential implications. Social welfare represents a particularly potent illustration of this.



The main debating chamber of Scottish Parliament

About this site

OpenLearn: free learning from The Open University

- Explore your world with the OU's experts
- Over 800 free courses to try today
- Video, audio and games & more

I want to... Go

Sign In Sign Up Help

Editor's choice

Discover Mercury

Get to know the planet we're starting to find out a whole lot more about.



What was Lewis Carroll like?
The man behind Alice



Dave Myers talks to OpenLearn
The power of generations coming together



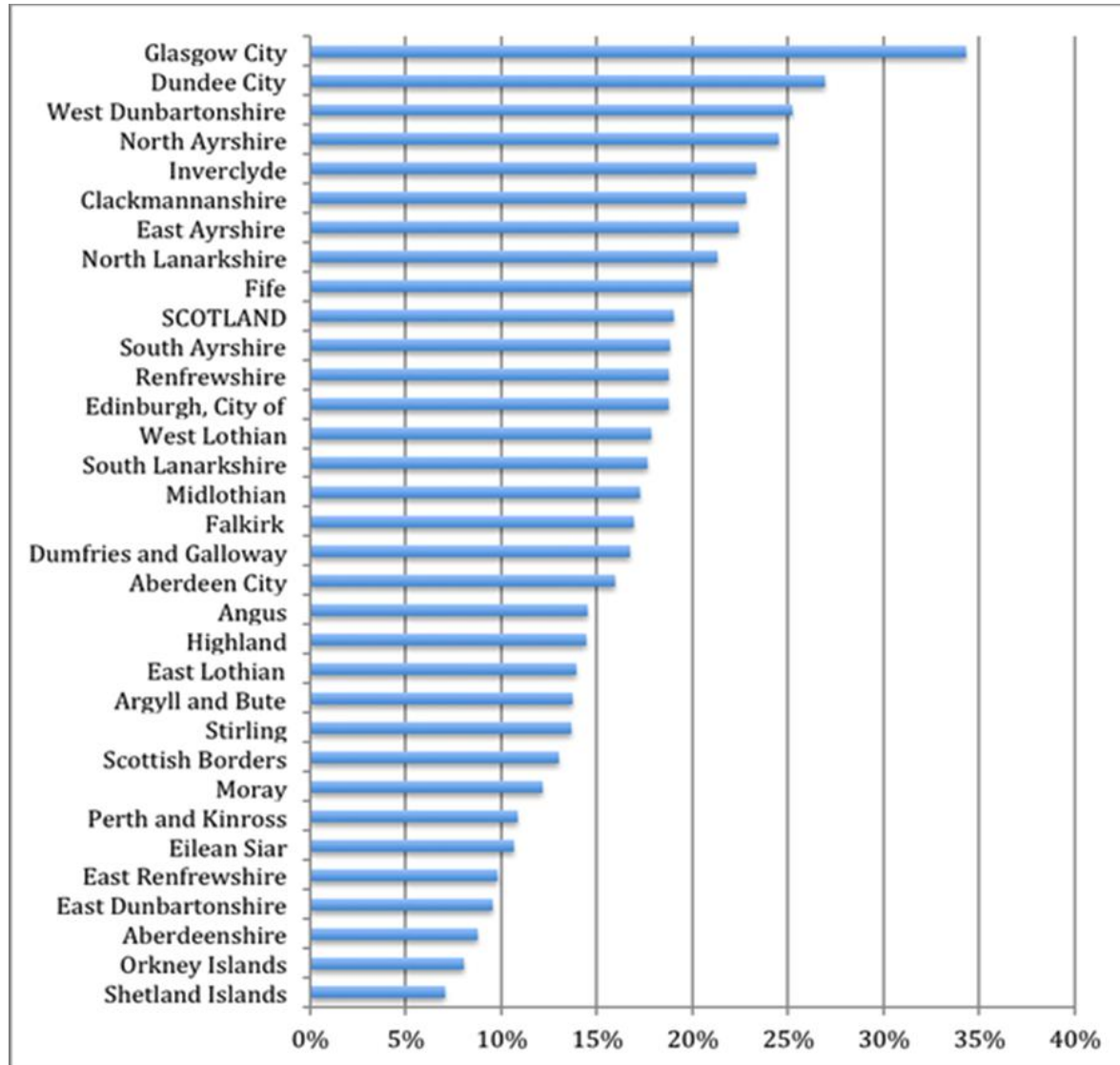
Inspired? Could you become an OU student?
Discover the world of social sciences courses at The Open University



Poverty In Scotland: The Headline Figures

- The latest data, for 2013/14, show that after housing costs are taken into account, more than one in five of Scotland's children live in poverty (22% or 210,000 children).
- Almost one in seven children in Scotland live with income poverty/material deprivation combined (13% or 130,000 children).
- Statistics show that relative poverty has remained stable in Scotland: in 2010/11 and 2013/14, 210,000 children lived in relative poverty.
- Number of working-age adults living in relative poverty only fluctuated between 570,000 and 600,000, and the number of people of pension age living in relative poverty was 120,000.
- There has been evidence of increasing levels of 'severe' poverty and acute income crisis among Scottish households.
- Recent trends suggest that there has been an increase in material deprivation (and income poverty combined) among children in Scotland.
- Poverty is intensifying, with an increasing number of people facing an immediate and acute income crisis,
- Rising levels of demand on food banks reflecting growth in food poverty.

Poverty: A Scotland-wide Problem?



The Age of 'Austerity'

- Idea of 'austerity' has entered popular usage in recent times and arguably it has become the watchword of the period from 2007/8 to the present day.
- We live in 'the age of austerity', David Cameron informed the country in 2009.
- Used in everyday language, even though its origins lie in a mix of economics and moral imaginings about the state of the economy and of society at large: the '*Broken Society*'!
- For the 2010-2015 UK Coalition Government, austerity as the only option available to deal with the UK's economic and fiscal crisis.
- The idea of 'austerity' has entered political, popular and media discourse as a shorthand way of capturing the period of economic and financial crisis that engulfs much of the UK today. It is presented and represented almost as a technical term, devoid of any political basis, seemingly neutral in that the main Westminster political parties saw 'austerity' cuts as offering the only way to economic growth and financial health. The term also played a key role in both the 2010 and 2015 General Election campaigns.
- The notion serves to legitimate the huge reductions in public funding, in services, in benefits as well as a range of 'reforms' to welfare, housing and education provision (the latter two primarily in England, much less so in the devolved countries of the UK).
- Broad political consensus about austerity among the main UK parties (SNP aside arguably?)

Austerity and the State

- Key role of the state – contrary to neoliberal ideology: state as laissez faire at the top but hugely interventionist in relation to the regulation and policing of disadvantage and of perceived ‘problem populations’: Increasing interventions concerned with managing, regulating and re-socialising the poor!
- Austerity and economic crisis as raising huge issues about redistributive justice and injustice in our society
- In March 2015 Scottish Government data revealed that income inequality in Scotland was 3% lower than the UK, income was more unevenly distributed in Scotland with the bottom 40% households had around 20% of total household income with the top 10% sharing 25% of all household income in Scotland
- Wealth inequality was even more unevenly distributed with the top 20% owning 44% of all personal wealth
- Oxfam Scotland (2015) estimated that Scotland’s four richest families are wealthier than the poorest 20% of the population with the richest 14 families sharing greater levels of income and wealth than the most deprived 30%
- Austerity programmes have or are dismantling not only benefits and services, but also the mechanisms which work to reduce inequality and enhance equity
- ***The stigmatisation, demonisation and misrepresentation of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage continues to feature prominently in public and political accounts of poverty***

Harmful Societies: Elites, Austerity and the Production of Social Harm

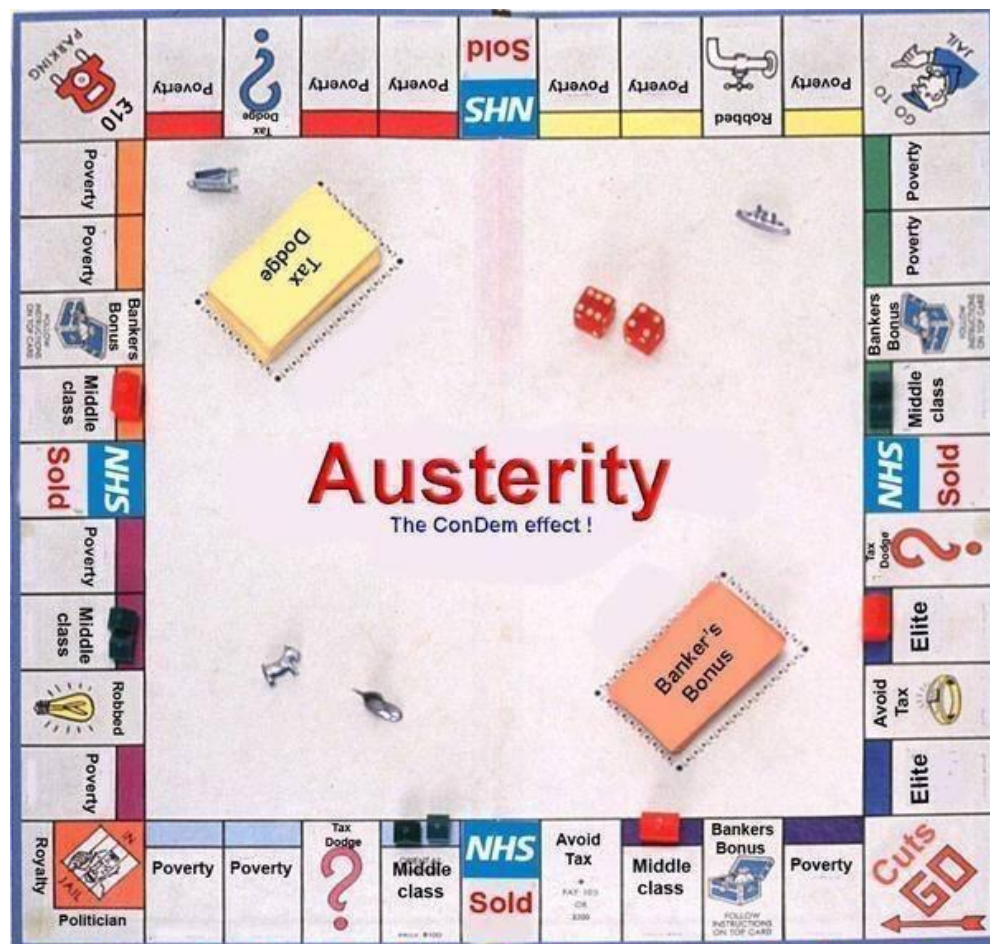
- From Criminology and Critical Social Policy: focus on ***Social Harms*** (Pemberton 2015)
- Capitalist societies are organised in specific ways that are intrinsically harmful (exploitation, commodification, alienation, crisis prone)
- However, the extent and experience of harm is not inevitable – *it varies, according to the forms social organisation take*
- Social Harms: Homicide, Suicide, Infant Mortality, Poverty/Child Poverty, Long Working Hours, Financial Insecurity, Social Isolation, Other forms of insecurity....food, fuel, health...
- Austerity has intensified the shift in many societies to an increasing neo-liberal and ultimately more harmful mode of social organisation
- Current agenda driven by vested ideological and material interests
- ***State produced social harms***
- Time bomb of social harm: it is not a statistical fluctuation, results from a conscious policy direction, therefore it can be prevented...it is a matter of political will...

A Risky and Precarious 'Scotland'?

- 'Scotland' as an '*austere society*'?
- UK Government policy: austerity is manufacturing insecurities and social risk for the most vulnerable
- Transfers of risk and precariousness to the most disadvantaged sections of society – including those who are already most vulnerable
- More and more precarious forms of work
- More people reliant on precarious income
- A growing number of people in need of food aid (Teachers feeding pupils in schools)
- Increasing feelings of isolation, alienation and a fear of falling into poverty
- The re-emergence of destitution
- Welfare 'reforms' (**pre-2015**) are unevenly impacting on the poorest areas in Scotland:
- Glasgow loses £259m per annum = £620 per working age person
- Calton (Inner East End) = £880 p.a. per working age person (St Andrews, Fife, (£180 p.a.) (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015))
- **What are the health impacts of these policies and developments in Scotland?**



'Austerity': 'We are all in this together'!



‘Austerity’ as a ‘Strategy of Inequality’

- Alan Walker in 1990: At its core Thatcherism developed and imposed a *strategy of inequality*:

...rather than seeing inequality as potentially damaging to the social fabric, the Thatcher governments saw it as an engine of enterprise, providing incentives for those at the bottom as well as those at the top

- This strategy was essential to the social and political project of ‘Thatcherism’
- How useful is this for understanding the drivers and outcomes of austerity today?
- Austerity as a necessary evil or austerity as creating social harms impacting on particular groups in the population?
- Austerity as the **regressive redistribution** of social insecurity and of wealth/income
- Neoliberalism and the austerity to which it gives rise is not only a class project about the restoration of class power (in the words of Marxist thinker David Harvey) but also involves the redistribution of income and wealth in favour of the rich
- What seems to be emerging might be described as a **‘post-welfare’** social landscape in which the continuation of welfare – a much more hollowed out welfare system - is now working in ways that displace insecurity towards vulnerable individuals, households and communities
- It is within this context and armed with this understanding that we can begin to understand the key processes and social relations which are causal factors in the generation and reproduction of health inequalities in Scotland today.

References and Sources

- Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S. (2015) '*Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest : The local and regional impact of welfare reform*', Sheffield: Centre for Regional and Social Research Sheffield Hallam University. Available at: <http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/hitting-poorest-places-hardest-local-and-regional-impact-welfare-reform-pdf-535mb>.
- Harvey, D. (2009) 'Their Crisis Our Challenge: Interview with David Harvey', *Red Pepper*, March. <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/Their-crisis-our-challenge/>
- Pemberton, S (2015) *Harmful Societies: Understanding Social Harm*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Walker, A. (1990) 'The strategy of inequality: poverty and income distribution in Britain 1979-1989', in I. Taylor, *The Social Effect of Free Market Policies*, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Useful Sources:

- Lansley, S. and Mack, J. (2015) *Breadline Britain: The Rise of Mass Poverty*, London: Oneworld Books.
- McKenzie, L. (2015) *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Mendoza, K.A. (2015) *Austerity: The Demolition of the Welfare State and the Rise of the Zombie Economy*, London: New Internationalist.
- Mooney, G. and Scott, G. (2015) 'The 2014 Scottish Independence Debate: Questions of Social Welfare and Social Justice', *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 23, 1: 5-16.
- O'Hara, M. (2014) *Austerity Bites*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Sayer, A. (2015) *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Contact Information

Gerry Mooney

Department of Social Policy and Criminology,
Faculty of Social Sciences
The Open University (Scotland),
Edinburgh, Scotland

e: Gerry.Mooney@open.ac.uk

w: http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Gerry_Mooney

OU OpenLearn Profile:

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/profiles/gcm8>

Twitter: @gerrymooney60

Facebook: Gerry Mooney