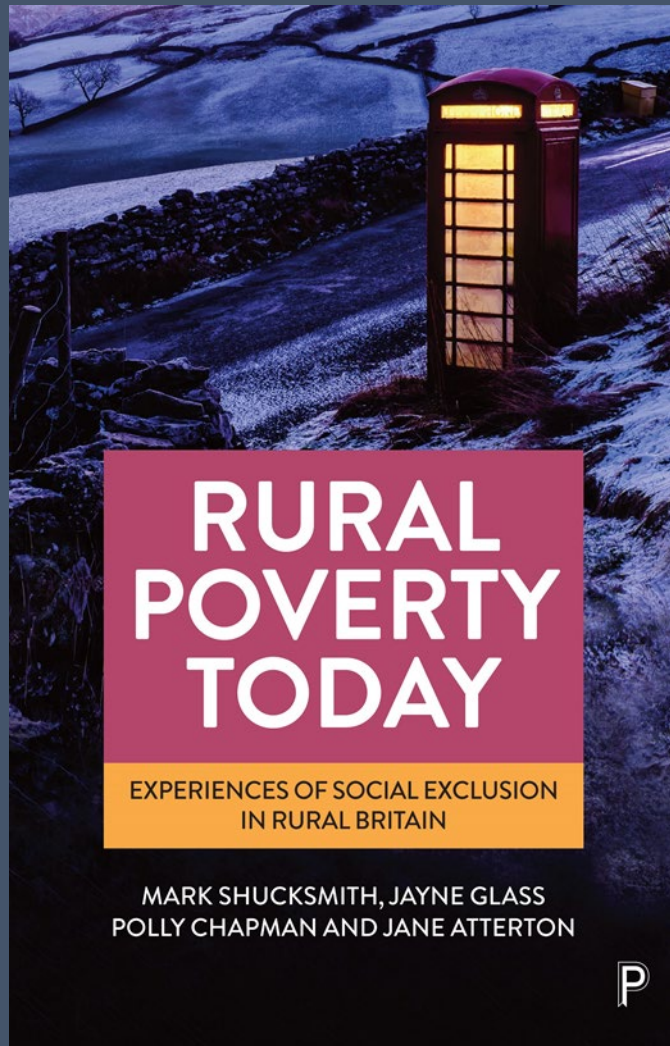


Rural Poverty Today: the policy challenges

Mark Shucksmith, Jayne Glass, Polly Chapman, and
Jane Atterton

RSN Webinar, 26th April 2023



Changing rural economies

- Economic change – from land-based to services.
- Social change: commuting to higher paid, secure professional jobs, and retirement from well-paid jobs.
- Local work : job insecurity, low pay and precarious lives
 - Volatile and unpredictable incomes
 - Limited opportunities – small firms and career progression
- Self employment and poverty: ‘living on thin air’
- Meanwhile, housing, childcare, car, access to services
- Higher cost of living: fuel poverty, unaffordable housing.

The Cost of Living is higher

RURAL LIVES

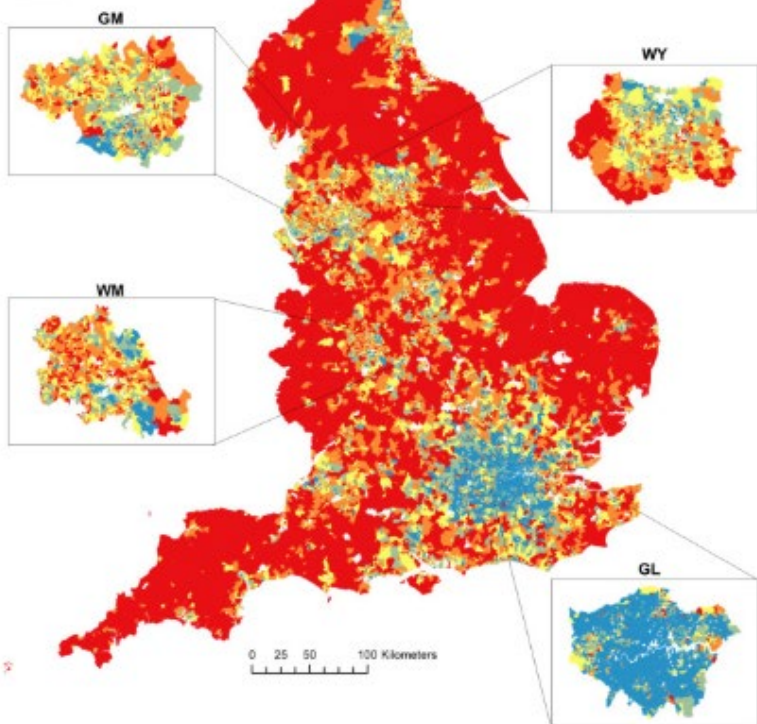
Fuel costs (travel, heating)

Unaffordable housing

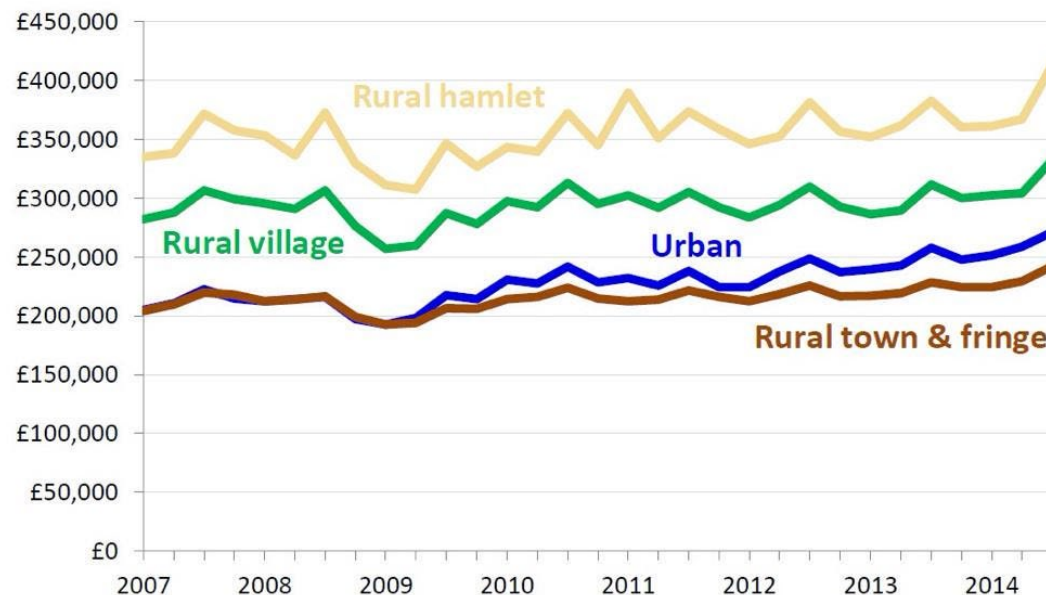
Double Energy Vulnerability

Source: Robinson and Mattioli (2020)

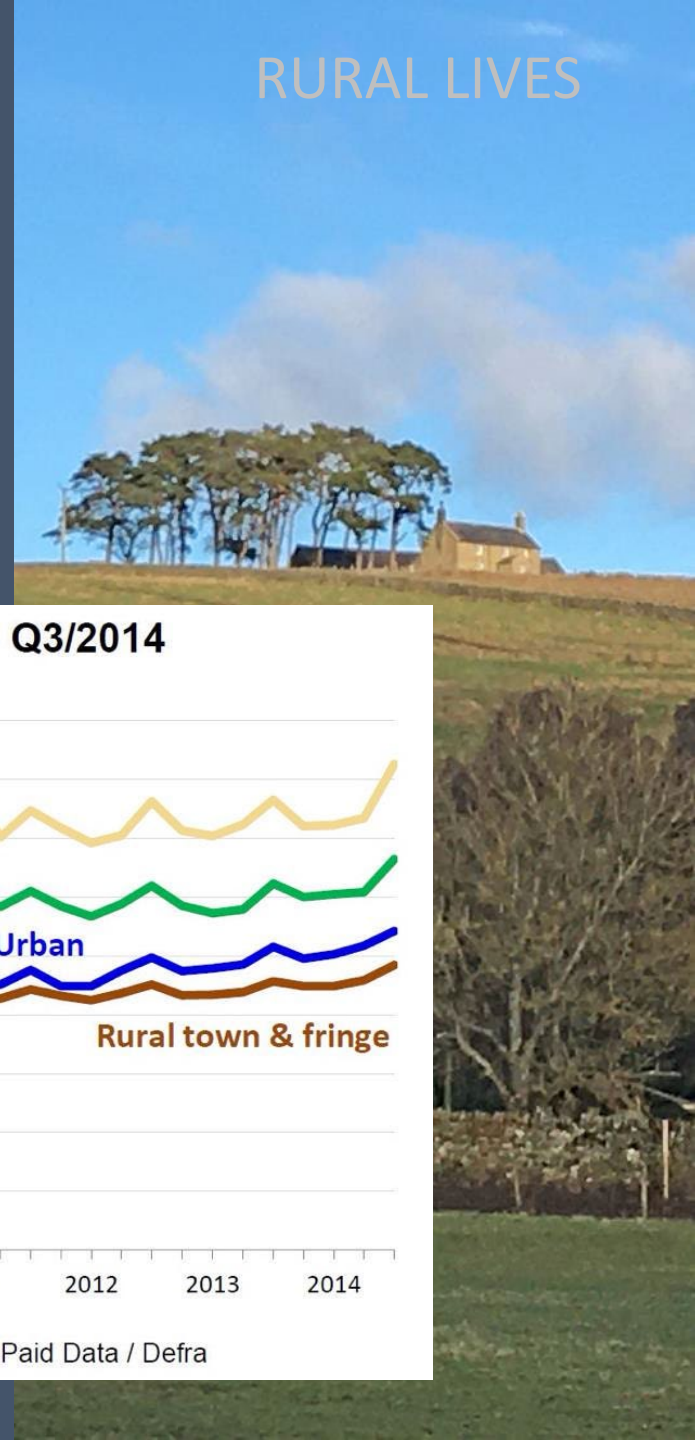
Vulnerability index



Average house prices, Q1/2007 to Q3/2014



Source: Land Registry © Crown copyright 2014, Price Paid Data / Defra



The welfare state in rural areas

Same issues as urban dwellers but compounded by rurality

- Multiple jobs/seasonality – irregular incomes don't fit system
- Centralisation of welfare advice services
- Distance to work capability assessment centres
- Digital exclusion: online systems of claiming
- Increased visibility and stigma in small communities
- Close link between debt ,delays in benefits, foodbank use and mental health



“It’s digital by default, everything is online... if we did that we would isolate a high percentage of our tenants who would not be able to access any services.”

“The main reason that people come [to the foodbank] now is the delays in benefits.”

Voluntary and community organisations

- Funding cuts and shift to competitive tendering
- Sector under pressure
- But sector still very strong in rural areas, and very significant
- Often first port of call for those in financial hardship
- Delivery across large geographies a challenge – high reliance on volunteers
- Potential importance of community assets

“I think that lack of advocacy and support to get your benefit is very lacking, particularly in rural areas. People are not going to go down to [Town], and not everybody is comfortable with doing it on the phone. It’s quite an intimate and personal thing to do. So I think that lots of people struggle and lots of people will not be getting their benefit.”

“I’m supporting two women [...]. Neither of them have got internet at home, I’ve had to meet one of them on a park bench, we had a really bad time of trying to get on to the website where you can sign on. So, neither of those two women would have got signed on without that and they’re both absolutely bankrupt, they’re both penniless.”



Family, friends and neighbours

- Important source of help but important how help is offered
- Unequal access and regional differences – social norms and social connections very important
- Vital networks for housing, work, care, transport....

“You don’t get work until you know people. And until you’ve met somebody in the pub or you’ve gone and done some door-knocking around gamekeepers’ houses and that sort of thing, there just isn’t work there.”

“Sometimes [people] don’t ask for help from their families simply because the family is in exactly the same situation.”

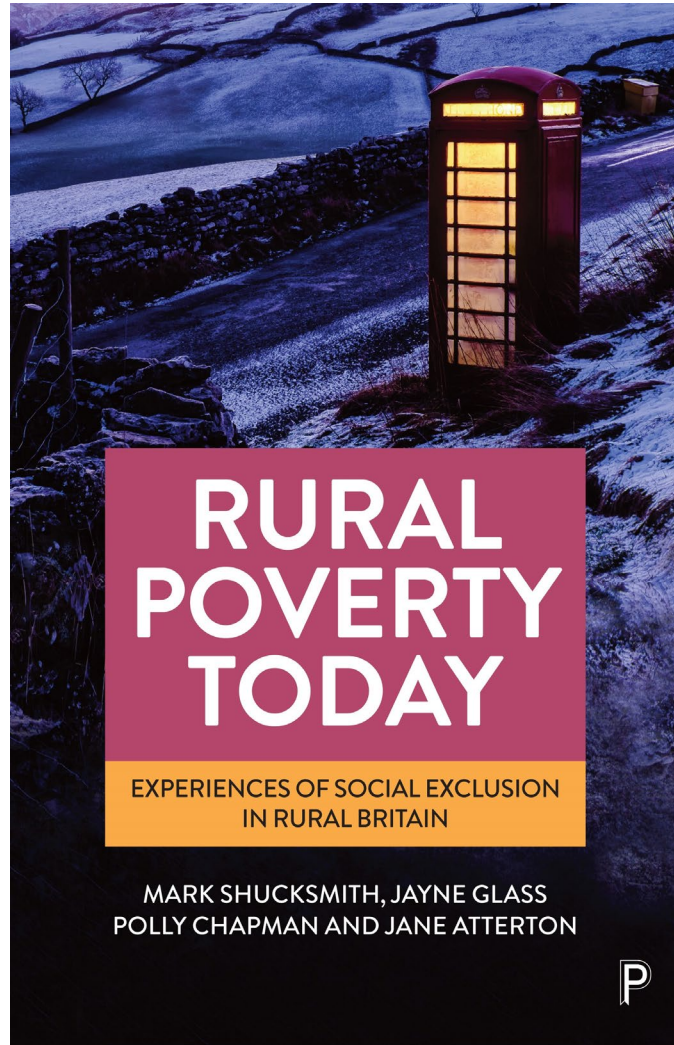
“The foodbank, for instance, it’s tucked away so no-one can see who’s going to it and it’s very confidential and hidden... So the stigmas are there, whether it’s benefits, foodbank... [re-used] school clothes.”



Challenges and Policy opportunities

- Many rural residents are at risk of poverty, but relevant policies are often not well adjusted to rural contexts.
- The cost-of-living crisis is hitting rural communities harder. Action is needed to address fuel poverty and the lack of affordable housing.
- The state continues to play an essential role. But welfare reforms make lives more precarious and individualise risk. DWP policies need rural-proofing.
- Voluntary organisations are the most valued and trusted source of support, often substituting for roles the state would be fulfilling in urban areas, despite their precarious funding and reliance on volunteers.
- Digitalisation works well for some and is disastrous for others. There is a continuing need for face-to-face support in rural communities.
- The COVID-19 experience highlighted the everyday importance of digital exclusion, the continuing loss of services, the fragility of social care provision, and the vulnerability of particular social groups.





Rural Poverty Today: experiences of social exclusion in rural Britain

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