



***The Social and Demographic Profile of Rural Wales:  
Preliminary Insights from the Millennium Cohort  
Study***

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***Summary***

We present secondary analysis of the first survey of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) to investigate the social differences between two sectors of Rural Wales and Urban Wales in their population dynamics. It uses the new classification of rurality developed for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which has been applied to the MCS. As the MCS has only been surveyed once, the findings are purely cross-sectional; providing us with a ‘snap-shot’ of the population in 2001/02.

Its conclusions, so far, are that the social and demographic profile of Rural Wales has much in common with that of the urban population. On many counts there is little difference at all. However, compared to rural England, the rural population of Wales are much less prosperous. There are tendencies for a higher proportion of more prosperous people to be living in the ‘countryside’, especially in the rural towns, and conversely for the poorest people to be living in cities and large towns, with a significant number of poor in smaller and more dispersed settlements (possibly due to the decline of the mining industry). However, the differences are not absolute, neither group is totally absent from either environment.

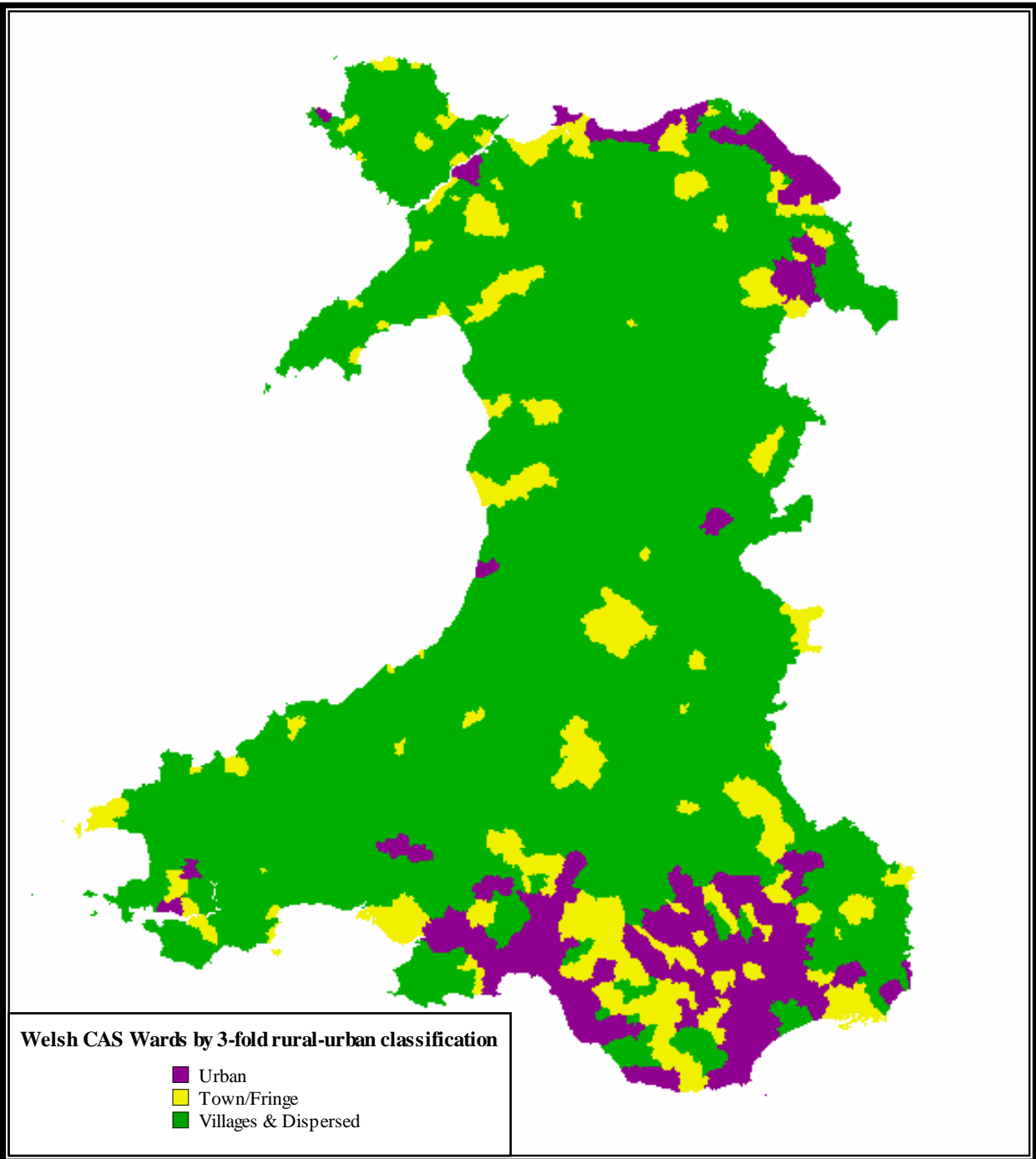
**The Millennium Cohort Study**

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) consists of 18,819 babies born in the UK over a 12-month period in 2000/2001, and living in selected UK electoral wards at age 9 months. It is clustered in 398 wards (or amalgamations thereof) across the UK, 92 in Wales. In these about 70% of all births in between September 2000 and August 2001 were in the target sample, of which 2,761 families (72%) responded. These families will

be followed up wherever they move to, the results of the second sweep becoming available in 2006. 35 of the 92 Welsh clusters have been classified here as rural, containing 646 families, or 23 percent of the families surveyed in Wales (30% after reweighting). Although it focuses on a narrow age group (and their parents whose ages range more widely) MCS is a rich source of information on the socio-economic circumstances of a large sample of families, along with information on income, health and attitudes which are not collected in the census. For further details on the sample design and response rate, see Plewis et al (2004), and for some descriptive results of the first survey, Dex and Joshi (2004) and Dex and Joshi (2005).

The Millennium Cohort evidence is used here, among other things, to investigate the contrast between rural and urban areas in the extent to which individual deprivation is geographically concentrated. To the extent that rural areas are more socially heterogeneous than urban neighbourhoods, the area-based delivery of anti-poverty policies may be less well targeted. The sample was deliberately stratified to over-sample people living in areas of high child poverty rates (see Table A) and concentrations of ethnic minorities (in England only). The rest of the wards were divided according to whether or not they fell into the top quartile of wards in England and Wales on the Child Poverty Index, i.e. had a local child poverty rate of over 38.4 percent. Families were over-represented in this stratum, as were wards with high child poverty rates, but the average number of families per ward is also smaller in the more advantaged stratum. This reflects the very large size of some inner city wards, but also the smaller population size of rural wards. Seven wards in Wales (with 115 responding families and a high Child Poverty Index in 1998 of 46%) were selected from deeply rural areas, dispersed or small settlements ('villages'). There were nine wards in the more densely settled rural areas, ('small towns') containing 185 responding families in places with an average Child Poverty Index of 48%. Otherwise 346 'rural' respondents came from 19 wards with an average child poverty rate of 20% in 1998. This leads us to expect higher general levels of prosperity in the rural areas, but also confirms that the rural poor do exist, though not in the sort of concentrations the sampling strategy has been able to 'harvest' in urban areas.

**Map A: The Rural-Urban classification of Welsh wards in 2001**



## **THE GEOGRAPHY**

The new official classification was based on assigning very small zones (census output areas, average population 150 households) to a hierarchy of settlement size, and also to a measure of proximity to other settlements. For our purposes it was necessary to work within the boundaries of electoral wards (average population 5,000) which may in practice contain output areas of different degrees of rurality. Based on the predominant characteristics of the output areas within each ward, it is possible to classify wards into urban (i.e. settlements of at least 10,000); small towns (up to 10,000) or town fringe; and villages and dispersed (for village definition, see Bibby & Shepherd, 2004). At the ward level, it is not possible to distinguish dispersed areas, since ward boundaries are drawn to ensure a certain number of inhabitants are included. This geography is illustrated in Map A.

Although the majority of the surface area is coloured green, it is only a minority of the population who lives there – 15 percent in 2001 in wards classified as villages or dispersed. 15 percent lived in the small towns or urban fringe, which we also classify as rural, and 70 percent in urban areas, which we do not attempt to differentiate in this paper by further features of settlement, such as population size, conurbation, inner city or inner/outer suburbs.

As it only covers a sample of wards, we cannot provide a detailed map locating the members of the Millennium Cohort across the whole of Wales, and it would be impermissibly disclosive to plot exact locations.

**Table A: Number of wards\*, families and average Child Poverty Index for sample achieved in Wales, Millennium Cohort Study, survey at 9 months**

	<b>Villages/ dispersed</b>	<b>Rural towns/ fringe</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Disadvantaged</b>	7 <i>115</i>	9 <i>185</i>	42 <i>1629</i>	<b>58</b> <i>1929</i>
	CPI = 45.5	CPI = 48.2	CPI = 50.5	<b>CPI = 50.0</b>
<b>Non-disadvantaged</b>	12 <i>188</i>	7 <i>158</i>	15 <i>486</i>	<b>34</b> <i>832</i>
	CPI = 22.9	CPI = 15.7	CPI = 27.3	<b>CPI = 24.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b> <i>303</i>	<b>16</b> <i>343</i>	<b>57</b> <i>2115</i>	<b>92</b> <i>2761</i>
	<b>CPI = 31.5</b>	<b>CPI = 26.8</b>	<b>CPI = 45.2</b>	<b>CPI = 42.2</b>

Numbers of wards and families unweighted (*families in italics*)

\* Original electoral wards before the amalgamation of small wards in to 'superwards')

See Plewis I (Ed) (2004)

**Table B: Sweep 1 in Wales**

<b>MCS Variables</b>	<b>Village/ dispersed</b>	<b>Rural town/ fringe</b>	<b>Urban</b>
Living in a disadvantaged area	18.4	30.0	55.2
Ethnicity= white British or Irish	94.3	96.2	95.8
Welsh speaking	24.0	10.3	4.6
Mothers: No qualifications	11.8	14.5	18.1
Mothers: Graduates	17.9	32.6	23.0
Fathers: No qualifications	14.3	15.1	19.0
Fathers: Graduates	33.7	42.3	27.5
Lone parent	8.1	15.8	21.9
Mothers aged 21 or less at first birth	14.7	22.0	31.9
Mothers aged 28 or over at first birth	46.9	42.3	30.5
Couples with no earner	4.5	6.8	10.8
Couples with two earners	60.1	60.9	55.7
Lone parent earners	15.2	24.2	20.9
Below 60% median equivalent H-hold income	24.3	23.9	36.0
On benefits (JSA,IS,WFTC &/or DPTC)	30.2	31.0	48.3
No savings	38.2	41.8	53.3
Housing Tenure: Owner occupier	72.2	71.3	61.0
Housing Tenure: Social Housing	15.2	18.3	26.0
Not in a house/bungalow	0.5	5.0	6.5
Overcrowding	0.2	0.5	1.1
No car access	6.6	9.3	16.5
Mothers with long-term illness	16.9	20.3	23.0
Fathers with long-term illness	16.4	16.0	20.9
<b>Sample Numbers (unweighted)</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>2115</b>
<b>Sample Numbers (weighted)</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>1919</b>

*Source: Millennium Cohort Study, First Survey*

The major axis on which wards were over-sampled was the local rate of child poverty, measured through administrative indicators in 1998. After re-weighting 30% of those living in rural town/fringe were in “disadvantaged” areas and 55.2% in “disadvantaged” urban areas. How good was this criterion at pinpointing poor families? The administrative criteria used in the sampling cannot be exactly replicated in 2001 because of changes in the benefit system, e.g. Family Credit had been replaced by the more widely available Working Families Tax Credit. Of various possible indicators, Table B takes an approximation of the one used in official poverty statistics: living on net household income below 60% of the national median (Bradshaw, Mayhew et al, 2005). On this basis, nearly one third (32.6%) of the total sample in Wales were “poor”, including one in four of the survey families in villages/dispersed, although only 18% lived in places where more than 38% of all families with children had been on benefits in 1998. In “rural towns/fringe”, a similar proportion were “poor” on an individual basis (24%) compared with 30% living in “poor” areas, though the two sets do not overlap completely (44% of rural towns/fringe in “poor” areas have a net household income below 60% of the national median). In urban Wales the individual ‘poverty’ rate is half as much again what it is in villages (36% vs. 24%). It is particularly high (46%) for the small minority ethnic group (n=95 not shown).

On a number of other indicators of social conditions reported in Table B, there is a geographic gradient from most to least advantaged as one crosses the sample from villages to urban areas: parents’ with no qualifications, lone parenthood, mother’s age at first birth, no-earner families, on benefits, no savings, housing tenure, living in a flat (or other accommodation, not a house or bungalow), overcrowding, car access and mothers with long-term illness. In a few respects villages are little different to rural towns: below 60% median equivalent household income, fathers with long-term illness and two earner couples. This is not an exhaustive list of comparisons that could be made. We have found, for example, that replies to questions about attitudes to family life differ between rural and urban Wales to the extent that the non-British report different sets of values.

Note from the second row of Table B about the social profile of the 2,761 families sampled for the Millennium Cohort Study in Wales is the very small proportion in any

type of area with minority ethnicity– only 5.7% of families in villages/dispersed and 3.8% in small towns and 4.2% in urban Wales, in contrast to 18% in urban areas of England. As for Welsh-speakers, there are greater proportions in rural areas – with 24% of those residing in villages/dispersed areas speaking Welsh compared to 10.3% in small towns and 4.6% in urban areas.

### **Further studies**

There is a great deal of information available for Wales in longitudinal studies, which has not been studied in the rural-urban context. Following on from the preliminary analysis in this paper, work can be continued with many more variables, and further cross-classification in the MCS first survey, and with dynamic longitudinal data, such as MCS (after the second survey has been completed) or currently existing surveys such as 1958 and 1970 British Birth Cohorts and the ONS Longitudinal Study. These would enable us to look into migration patterns. Taking the example of longitudinal analysis for England, we have shown evidence of a high degree of population exchange - an exodus of men and women from rural areas in youth, matched by an influx of adults in mid-life (rather than at retirement ages). This means there is considerable churning of the population, producing a relatively socially homogenous population. There is some evidence of selective in-migration helping to raise the level of educational attainment in the rural population, but other flows tend to bring rural and urban averages closer together. This analysis could be repeated for Wales to study for similar tendencies, and allow for cross-border migration flows. It would be possible to look at other characteristics of movers and stayers in rural Wales, such as employment, occupation, travel to work and long-term illness. It would be also possible, though complicated, to look at mobility between these social states simultaneously with geographical mobility. It might be perhaps possible, subject to disclosure considerations, to investigate whether patterns of urban-rural flows vary sub-regionally.

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