

Connected – new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage

Summary of potential themes

The *Connected* series explores severe and multiple disadvantage from different perspectives, using different methods. Rather than treating the different reports as separate products, Lankelly Chase would like to explore what the common threads and connections are, and see the *Connected* series as an interconnected whole.

People applying for grants to lead new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage are encouraged to make links between the various reports in their discussions, although ideas based around single reports will also be considered.

This is an experimental approach: we don't know what the results will be and are interested to hear other people's perspectives. As a starting point, some themes and questions which have emerged for us, and which could be taken forward further, include:

Defining disadvantage – the reports challenge the notion that there is one set, authoritative definition of what 'severe and multiple disadvantage' means and who it affects. How do our definitions restrict our conversations?

Structures and systems – the different reports show that severe and multiple disadvantage is not a 'condition' that people 'suffer' temporarily and can somehow be cured from, one by one; instead, it describes a dynamic set of social forces which require much more systemic intervention. How do we talk about severe social harm without reducing it to the level of individual need?

Diversity, equality and identity – the reports cover different experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage for different people. Gender expectations for both men and women also run throughout the reports.

Dislocation vs connection – people's experiences of social and material disadvantage seem to feature a sense of exclusion and separation from other people and from wider society – including feeling different, threatened, or discriminated against. On the other hand, people's stories of recovery and support often feature a renewed sense of connection with others. This also leads us to question...

Services, networks and the limits of institutions – do the reports push us beyond the traditional territory of 'more and better services' or 'more effective interventions' for particular groups of people? Can 'services' provide what's most valuable to people as human beings, and are commissioning frameworks fit for purpose? Is our knowledge about disadvantage limited by a reliance on data from services that not everyone comes into contact with?

The politics of disadvantage is something we've [looked at before](#) and which hasn't gone away. It remains the case that some elements of social harm are seen as politicians' 'business' and others less so. How does this play out in practice?

The dominant **narrative** of disadvantage is the person who has 'turned their life around' or been supported through some kind of change process. But the reports illustrate that people have very difficult lives for very long periods of time – both before and after accessing any kind of professional

help – and having a time-limited ‘intervention’ doesn’t change the fundamental context of life. What does this mean for how we think about ‘solutions’? Can we look more at context and community, and less at individual ‘need’?

Racism and class are rarely discussed explicitly in reports like these, but are constantly just below the surface. Or are they deliberately suppressed?

Research (methods) and **knowledge production** – the reports used a mixture of different approaches. When we seek to ‘find out more’ about severe and multiple disadvantage, what (hidden or obvious) boundaries do these methods give us? Are we using the right tools and moving our analysis forward, or should we approach research from some different starting points?

What are we missing? Is there something we haven’t explored or which is still hidden under the surface of the *Connected* series? Whose experiences are we centring – deliberately or tacitly – and who are we pushing to the sidelines?

Where next and where does this all lead us? If there was a collective set of insights or recommendations from the different reports, for example, what would they be?

These are just a few of the questions which have emerged as we’ve been finalising and publishing the range of different materials in the *Connected* series. We’re sure that others will have different perspectives to offer. We would love for people to bring their own insights and questions and look forward to hearing from people interested in leading new conversations.

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