

Public Attitudes and Environmental Justice in Scotland

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This is a study of the reported incidence, distribution, and impact of environmental incivilities. An environmental incivility is any aspect of the environment about which people may be inclined to feel negatively. In commissioning this research, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department was particularly interested in whether certain groups of people or those living in certain types of places are more likely to regard potential incivilities as a problem in their area. The study also examined the impact of the reported incidence of environmental incivilities upon health, social trust and fear of crime. Evidence for the study was collected by including a module of questions in the 2004 Scottish Social Attitudes survey conducted by the Scottish Centre for Social Research in collaboration with Health Protection Scotland and the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit (University of Glasgow). This survey interviewed a random sample of 1,637 adults aged 18 plus between July and December 2004.

Main Findings

- The kinds of incivility most commonly reported by respondents as a problem in their area were 'street-level' incivilities. These include cat and dog mess (reported by 47% as a problem), litter and rubbish lying around, and uneven or dangerous pavements (both reported by 39%).
- People also felt that the absence of some 'environmental goods', such as the availability of safe places for children to play (39%) was a problem in their area.
- Infrastructural incivilities such as overhead power lines or landfill sites were less frequently regarded as a problem. No more than 14% said that smell from sewage was a problem in their area, and just 6% considered either overhead power lines or noise and smells from factories to be a problem.
- Street level incivilities also predominate amongst the items that people say they would worry about if they were to exist in their area. 55% said they would worry about persistent heavy traffic, 52% about vandalism and graffiti, and 49% about dumped cars and 'fridges'. In contrast, people were much less worried about the prospect of infrastructural incivilities such as a power station (15%) or a wind farm (5%).
- Those living in a deprived area are much more likely to report that an incivility is a problem in their area. This is especially true of street level incivilities and the absence of goods. 33% of those surveyed and living in the most deprived areas say that cat and dog mess is a 'really big problem' compared with just 5% of those living in the least deprived areas. No less than 45% of those living in the most deprived areas say that the availability of safe places for children to play is a 'really big problem' compared with just 4% of those in the least deprived.
- Those who report experiencing a higher level of street level incivilities or suffering from the absence of goods also report higher levels of anxiety, depression, poor health and smoking. 23% of those who report a high incidence of street level incivilities say they feel sad or depressed very or fairly often, compared with 13% of those with a low incidence.
- Further, those who report a higher level of street level incivilities or the absence of goods are also less trustful of others, more resigned about the difficulties of their area, and report more fear of crime. Whereas 80% of those who report a low level of street level incivilities say they feel safe walking in their neighbourhood during the day, only 46% of those who report a high level of incivilities say they feel safe.

Introduction

Concern about the impact of the environment on health and well-being has tended to focus on the physical effects that exposure to toxic and infectious substances can have on health, a concern that has tended to be accompanied by a concentration on the impact of large scale infrastructural incivilities such as power plants and open cast quarries.

In contrast, this study focuses on the possible psychosocial impact of the environment. This approach emphasises the importance of how people feel about their environment. It is argued that if people feel bad about the environment in which they live, they may be more prone to anxiety or depression, and perhaps less likely to avoid unhealthy behaviours such as smoking. Moreover, it may be that the things that people feel unhappiest about are not large items of infrastructure, but rather more everyday street level incivilities such as litter, graffiti and broken glass. They may be concerned too about 'the lack of' or absence of certain desirable features of the 'environment goods' such as somewhere safe for children to play.

This study was designed to help assess the validity of these arguments. It reports on the incidence and distribution of 'environmental incivilities' in Scotland, as perceived by a representative sample of the country's adult population, and examines the apparent impact of these incivilities on health, social trust and fear of crime. 'Environmental incivilities' are simply 'any aspect of the environment that people are capable of discerning through hearing, sight, touch or smell and about which they may be inclined to feel negatively'.

Particular attention was paid to the level of incivilities reported by those living in more deprived communities. One of the requirements of the Scottish Executive's definition of environmental justice is that 'deprived communities....should not bear a disproportionate burden of negative environmental impacts'. By assessing the degree to which this requirement is met in how people feel about their local environment, the study helps to identify what measures might be required to ensure that Scotland becomes a more environmentally just society.

Research Aims

The study aimed to answer four main questions

1. What incivilities are regarded as most undesirable, and which are regarded as a problem in the area where different groups live?
2. How far and in what ways do people's perceptions of incivilities vary according to their individual characteristics or the characteristics of the area in which they live?

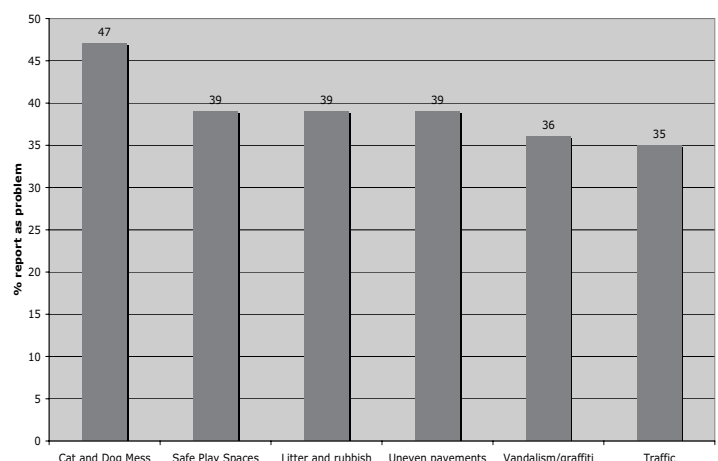
3. Is there a relationship between reported experience of incivilities and key indicators of perceived health status?
4. Is there a relationship between reported experience of incivilities and measures of community cohesion such as social trust and fear or crime?

1. Which incivilities are most undesirable?

For the most part it was street level incivilities that were most likely to be reported by respondents as a problem in their area (see Chart 1). These include cat and dog mess (reported by 47% as a problem), litter and rubbish lying around (39%) and uneven and dangerous pavements (39%). Also mentioned relatively frequently as a problem was an absence of safe places for children to play (39%). In contrast, infrastructural problems, such as smell from sewage (14%) or overhead power lines (6%), were reported as a problem much less frequently.

The study also asked its respondents which incivilities they thought would be a problem if they were to exist locally. Once again it was street level incivilities that were most likely to be regarded as a problem. Of the six incivilities that were most commonly mentioned as things that people would worry about if they were to exist in their area, five were street level incivilities, the most common being persistent heavy traffic. Meanwhile, the reported incidence of street level incivilities, along with the absence of 'goods' is also correlated with how happy people feel about living in their area. In contrast, the incidence of infrastructural incivilities is not.

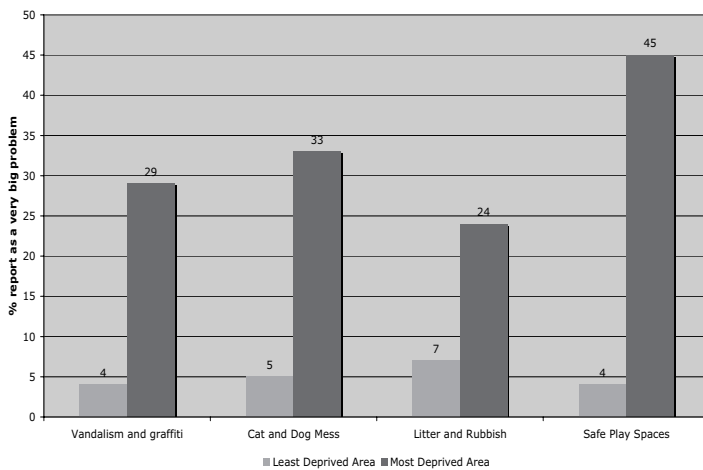
Chart 1 Incivilities Most Commonly Reported as Problems



2. Who suffers from incivilities?

Those living in deprived areas, as measured by an index derived from data collected by the 2001 Census¹, report a much higher level of incivilities, especially street level incivilities and the absence of 'goods'. As shown in Chart 2, those living in the most deprived parts of Scotland were more than seven times more likely than those in the least deprived to say that vandalism and graffiti was a really big problem in their area, more than six times more likely, cat and dog mess, and more than three times, litter and rubbish. In addition they were also more than eleven times more likely to say that the availability of safe play spaces for children was a really big problem.

Chart 2 The Impact of Deprivation



Further, those living in urban areas were also rather more likely to say that various incivilities were a problem. Those living in one of Scotland's four largest cities were four times more likely than those in remote rural areas to say that litter and rubbish are a really big problem, and twice as likely to say the same about cat and dog mess. They were nearly seven times more likely to feel that the availability of safe places to play was a really big problem.

More elaborate multivariate analysis confirms that how deprived an area is and how urban it is both have an impact on the incidence of street level incivilities, with deprivation the more important of the two. Much the same holds for the absence of goods. This analysis also indicates that these patterns hold even after we take into account individuals' individual characteristics such as gender age and social

1 This index was the Carstairs index of deprivation, which was chosen in preference to the Scottish Index of Multiple deprivation because it does not include measures of health, one of the very phenomena whose incidence this study seeks to explain. It is designed to show the population's access to those material resources which in turn provide access 'to those goods and services, resources and amenities, and physical environment which are customary in society'. See P. McLoone, *Carstairs Scores for Postcode sectors from the 2001 Census*, Glasgow: Social and Public Health Science Unit, University of Glasgow.

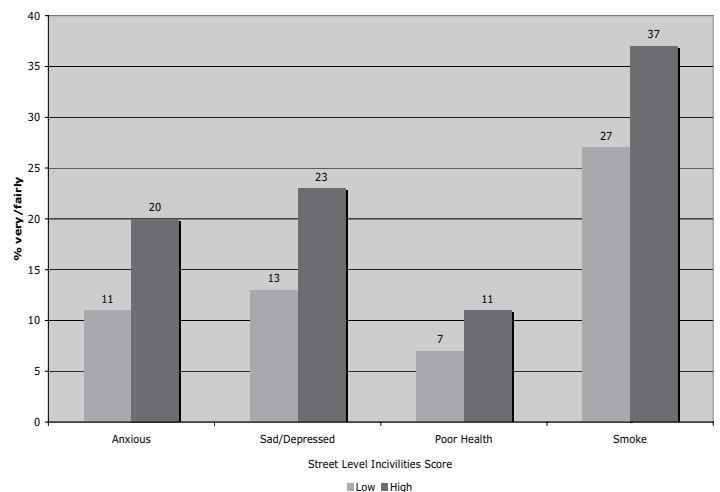
class. It appears that there is considerable social inequality in the distribution of reported environmental incivilities in Scotland.

3. Experience of incivilities and health

Those who report a high incidence of street level incivilities or the absence of goods are more likely to report anxiety and depression and a poor general state of health. They are also more likely to report being smokers, while those who are concerned about the absence of goods in their area are also less likely to have taken a walk of a mile or more over the last year.

For example, as Chart 3 illustrates, those who report a high incidence of street level incivilities are ten percentage points more likely to say they feel sad or depressed very or fairly often, and nine points more likely to say they feel anxious very or fairly often. In addition, those who report an absence of goods in their locality are no less than 15 percentage points more likely to be smokers.

Chart 3 Health and Street Level Incivilities



These relationships are confirmed after taking into account respondents' age, gender and social class. It appears that exposure to a high incidence of street level incivilities is not conducive to good health, and that much the same can also be said of living in an area that is lacking in environmental goods.

4. Experience of incivilities, social trust and fear of crime

Those who report a high incidence of street level incivilities or the absence of goods appear in general to be less trusting of others and more fearful of being a victim of crime.

No less than 66% of those who report a low incidence of street level incivilities say that they would feel very

comfortable asking a neighbour to collect a prescription for them if they were ill. In contrast just 49% of those who report a high incidence of street level incivilities feel that way. Equally 71% of those who report a low incidence of the absence of goods would feel comfortable asking this favour, compared with just 52% of those who report a high incidence.

As many as 80% of those who report a low level of street level incivilities say they feel very safe walking in their neighbourhood during the day, but only 46% of those who report a high level of incivilities feel very safe.

These relationships are generally confirmed after taking into account respondents' age, gender, social class and educational qualifications. It appears that a high incidence of

street level incivilities and an absence of goods do not coincide with strong community cohesion.

Conclusion

This study provides substantial evidence that street level incivilities and an absence of environmental goods are more likely to be regarded as problems than are infrastructural incivilities and are not conducive to health and well-being. At the same time experience of these is heavily concentrated amongst those living in deprived areas. This would appear to confirm the importance of tackling street-level incivilities and the paucity of environmental 'goods' in deprived areas, if environmental justice is to be achieved in Scotland.

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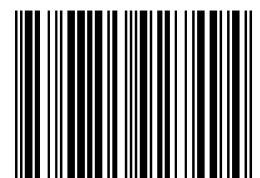
The report, "Public Attitudes and Environmental Justice in Scotland", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications page of the Scottish Executive website at

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