

***Investigating employment
instability:
characteristics, causes
and countermeasures***

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Presentation outline

- Explain what the concept of employment instability refers to, why it is important and what is being done to address it.
- Outline research aims & methodology.
- Discuss key themes emerging from pilot case study of a sustaining employment project in Glasgow's East End.
- Summary, challenges and future plans.

Introducing employment instability

- Many of those leaving welfare for work quickly return to benefits.
- About 40% of those leaving JSA for work return to benefits within 6 months (Harker, 2006).
- Results in individuals 'cycling' or 'churning' between employment & worklessness.
- For many people holding onto a job can be just as difficult, if not more so, than getting one in the first place.
- 'Triggers' & 'stressors' reemerge which emulate the original 'barriers' that had to be overcome in order to obtain work (Johnson, 2002).
- Job loss is single most significant cause of entry into poverty (Smith & Middleton, 2007).
- Waste of resources shifting welfare claimants into work if they don't retain it.

Context

- Changing labour market & increasingly 'flexible' nature of work.
- Working life seen as increasingly insecure & precarious (Beck, 2000).
- Danger of overemphasising pervasiveness of insecure jobs, however these occupations are often the only option for those leaving benefits (Danson, 2005).
- Polarisation of services dominated labour market: McJobs v MacJobs (Goos & Manning, 2003) with socially & spatially uneven consequences.
- Close link between no and low pay i.e. 'churn between welfare & the bottom step of the labour market' (Stewart, 1999).

Responses to instability

- Welfare to work agenda has focused on shifting welfare claimants into work *per se*.
- Only belated recognition that there should be greater focus on helping those who have made this transition remain in work (Kellard, 2002).
- Very few programmes which focus exclusively on retention.
- Public, private & voluntary partnerships promoted as best tool for helping claimants attain & retain employment
- Recommendation that the government explicitly builds retention & progression incentives into contracted support for the most disadvantaged (Freud Report 2007).
- Insufficient policy response mirrored by dearth of research; mostly policy evaluation but doesn't engage with theoretical issues. Also complex mechanism to empirically define & analyse.

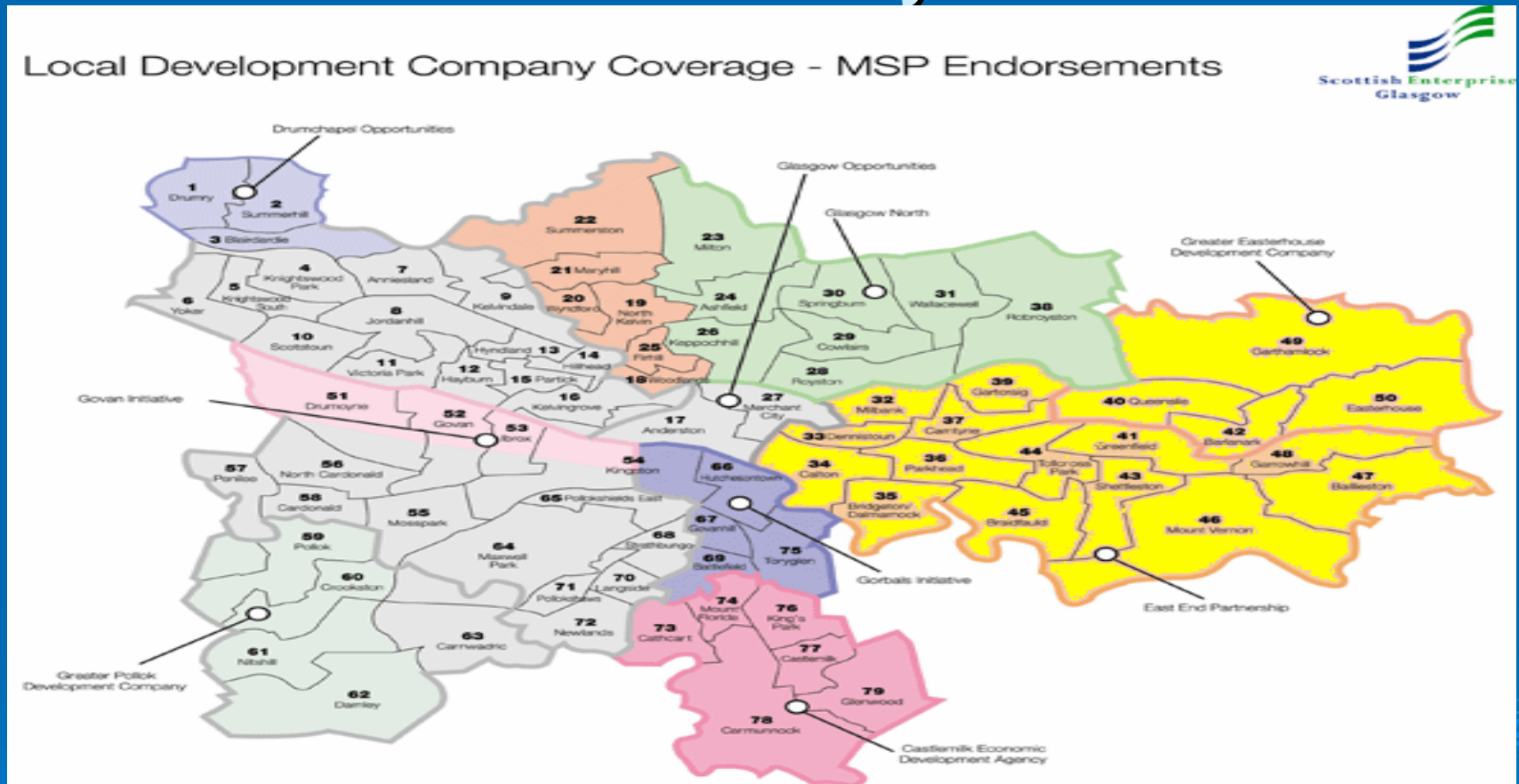
Research questions & methodology

- 1: Which groups are most susceptible to employment instability?
Analysis of longitudinal datasets (LLFS & BHPS).
- 2: What processes are responsible for it?
Interviews with individuals who have experienced work-welfare churning.
- 3: What is being done policy-wise to help ex-welfare claimants retain employment?
Interviews with employment/ welfare service providers and their clients as well as employers.

Glasgow East Regeneration Agency: Sustaining Employment Project

- Initiated in 2002, GERA are the only Local Development Company in Glasgow that runs a sustaining employment project.
- Four member team who work with East End Residents who have started, or are just about to start, employment.
- Clients from mainstream GERA programmes, Jobcentre Plus, some NHS projects & self referrals.
- Funding drawn from a range of sources including Glasgow City Council, Scottish Enterprise & the European Social Fund.
- Research so far: interviews with team members & four of their clients

Area covered by GERA



Has suffered as a result of economic restructuring; a process which has created 'winning & losing spaces' (Rodriguez-Pose, 1999) and 'new landscapes of employment' (Green & Owen, 1998).

Percentage of working age population on benefits

	Glasgow East parliamentary constituency	Glasgow City	Scotland	Great Britain
Job Seeker	4.4	3.7	2.4	2.3
Incapacity Benefits	18.9	14.4	9.4	7.2
Lone parent	4.6	3.4	2	2.1
Other benefits	4.5	3.6	3	2.7
Total	32.4	25.1	16.8	14.3

Causes of instability

- Factors cited by clients: government training schemes coming to an end, becoming a single parent, seasonal jobs, mental health problems, family problems, caring for elderly family members and redundancies due to employer relocations & bankruptcies.
- Multiple barriers (operating simultaneously).
- Issues raised by project team: poor budgeting/ financial institutionalisation, benefits trap, inability to cope with the practical & emotional challenges associated with the shift into work, lack of 'soft skills', unrealistic wage expectations & attitudes to work and peer pressure from friends & family.

Significance of socio-spatial context

➤ Localised employment outlook

‘The geography is a big problem, especially in the council areas... you get people who have never even been to the other side of the city’ (Jim).

‘I couldn’t find restaurant work here, it was all city centre & I didn’t want to travel to work’ (Rebecca).

➤ Social norms

‘Quite often if you come from a situation where your reaction to something you can’t cope with is to either kick its head in or walk away from it then that is what you do in work too. So a lot of people give up their jobs rather than be with new things & new people’ (Ann).

Value of sustaining employment project

- Practical issues: help with CV & job searching and help towards cost of equipment, transport, training & clothes for interviews. Also advice: 'they gave me advice on how to stick it out basically instead of going from being in work to benefits and going back into work' (Rebecca).
- Emotional support: 'My mum doesn't really talk to me or give me any support, so I don't get any support from anybody apart from them [the project]... I think I would go insane or be hanging from the M8 if the support wasn't there' (Sharron).
- Liaising with employers: 'I like having someone there who is able to speak up for me because I am terrible at talking up for myself... I fight depression everyday but I love the job that I am in and I have got this place to thank for keeping me where I am now. If it wasn't for them then I don't think I'd still be at X [current employer]' (Carly).

Concluding remarks

- Muted policy response to an important but under researched issue.
- Multiple causes of instability (often acting at once).
- Effective emotional and practical aftercare support can help people retain employment.
- Challenges: gaining access to a sufficient quantity of 'hardest to reach' individuals, getting interviewees to disclose sensitive information, employers' side of the story.
- Plans: Gain access to local employers and some more clients to boost sample size.