

CATHOLIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IN THE WEST OF SCOTLAND: A NARROWING OF INEQUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

The question of whether anti-Catholic discrimination still occurs in Scotland has been the subject of popular debate in recent years (**The Herald** 1999; Devine 2000). Academics on both sides of the argument have appealed to the same Scottish Election Survey, based on a nationwide all-age adult sample, to demonstrate that Catholics are (Williams and Walls 2000) or are not necessarily (Rosie and McCrone 2000) or are not at younger ages (Paterson 2000b) disadvantaged in their social class position. The issue has not been resolved. In this paper, we focus on the West of Scotland, which has a relatively high concentration of Catholics, and where there is clearer evidence of Catholic disadvantage at older working ages. Since the Protestant Reformation, anti-Catholicism has been a strong force in Scottish society. Labour migrants from Ireland came to Scotland in large numbers during the nineteenth century when heavy industries such as ship-building, coal-mining, and iron-works were expanding. Estimates suggest that between a half and three quarters of these immigrants were Catholic, the remainder being Protestants from Ulster. However, the Protestants were better able to

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assimilate with the Scots, being of the same religion as the host population, and frequently descended from it.

Occupational indicators in the past have shown that men who attended Catholic secondary schools (within religiously separate education systems) in Scotland were more likely to have come from manual backgrounds (Payne and Ford 1977). Middle-aged and older Catholics have reported attempting to disguise the name of their school on job application forms, dropping obvious Catholic identifiers such as a saint's name in order to pre-empt exclusionary practices (Walls and Williams 2003).

In recent decades, several factors have contributed to an improvement in the relative socio-economic position of Catholics, who make up about a third of Glasgow's current population. Equal opportunities legislation, despite not including religious minorities, has resulted in the cessation of much overt discrimination. The growth of public sector employment and foreign investment have removed control of some of the labour market from local Protestant elites (McCrone 1992). Correspondingly, there is now no significant difference in the social class distribution between Catholics and non-Catholics at younger working ages (Williams and Walls 2000).

However, although there have been improvements for Catholics in Scotland, claims of equality (Devine 2000) may be premature. There is evidence that, from a position of former disadvantage in terms of funding and educational opportunities, Catholic schools have redressed the balance, and, after controlling for social class, Catholic-school pupils are leaving better qualified than those from the non-denominational sector (Willms 1992; Paterson 2000b). However, they are still more likely to be unemployed (Willms 1992; Paterson 2000b).

There are two main hypotheses to consider when studying historical change in group disadvantage, such as that of Catholics in the West of Scotland (Williams and Walls 2000). Firstly, an 'age effect' applies when inequalities in socio-economic position emerge as individuals get older. Group-specific factors in selection for promotion may increase, with Catholics finding difficulty in obtaining more senior positions in mid-career. In this scenario, inequalities may be expected to emerge in all cohorts as they reach ages between thirty and fifty. Secondly, a 'cohort effect' describes the situation where historical circumstances result in inequality at a particular point in time, which operates differently (or even disappears) at different ages. It is plausible that Catholic disadvantage could be most severe in the generation

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which grew up during the 1930s and 40s, and entered the labour market immediately after the second world war, at a time when there was widespread discrimination against Irish/Catholics (Hickman and Walter 1997; Devine 2000; Paterson 2000a). If younger generations have experienced less employment discrimination than did their parents or grandparents, their disadvantage ought also to be less.

The most up-to-date data on the socio-economic position of Catholics in the West of Scotland are consistent with both hypotheses, as Catholic disadvantage seems to be most pronounced among older groups. In this area, there was evidence of socio-economic disadvantage for Catholics aged 35 and 55 in 1987 (Williams and Walls 2000). For a younger cohort, who were aged 15 in 1987, there was evidence of disadvantage when they were classified according to their parents' circumstances; but this was no longer apparent when they were re-interviewed at the age of 23 in 1995 (Williams and Walls 2000). Similarly, using a 1997 Scotland-wide study, Paterson suggested that there was parity in social class between Catholics and non-Catholics at younger working ages (who started secondary school after 1965 and moves towards comprehensive education), but pronounced Catholic disadvantage for those over 45 years (Paterson 2000a). A difference by age was also noted in data collected in 2001 from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, comparing Protestants and Catholics in the South West of Scotland, where pronounced Catholic disadvantage in social class was found among those aged 55 and over (Bruce and Glendinning 2003). It has been argued by some scholars that the evidence on greater socio-economic parity among Catholics in Scotland indicates a historic change, and more detailed work seems to locate this in the cohorts aged under 40 in 1992, ie the cohorts born after 1952. A comparison of survey data from the 1970s and 1990s provides evidence for a cohort change from marked inequality to socio-economic parity between these two time periods at younger working ages; but a comparison of data in 1992 and 1997 has suggested that inequalities may be emerging as the cohorts born after 1952 pass the age of 40 (Williams and Walls 2000). Furthermore, the West of Scotland 11-16 Study showed marked socio-economic disadvantage for the parents of Catholic eleven year olds in 1994 (Abbotts et al 2001b), 90% of whose resident fathers (or father figures) were aged between 31 and 50, with a median age of 39. Thus what may be happening is an age effect, with the improvement in Catholic socio-economic position possibly restricted to people in their twenties and early thirties, before key promotion opportunities arise.

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In health as well as in socio-economic position, Catholic disadvantage increases with age. Indeed, socio-economic disadvantage has been shown to be a contributing factor to the excess of ill health and higher death rates among Irish/Catholics (Abbotts et al 1999; Abbotts et al 2001a). The health gap observed between Catholics and others in the 1990 data collection of the West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study was greatest in the eldest cohort (aged 58) and hardly apparent in the youngest cohort (aged 18), where statistically significant differences were few (Abbotts et al 1997). At age 38, however, and to a greater extent at age 58, disadvantages in Catholic health were observed. No evidence of health inequality was found for children aged 11 in 1994, in the West of Scotland 11-16 Study (Abbotts et al 2001b).

Longitudinal data from three cohorts of the West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study, collected in 1990 and 2000, present a unique opportunity to test the cohort effect hypothesis. In this paper, we investigate whether inequalities have widened, diminished or remained the same over the 1990s for cohorts aged 18, 38 and 58 at the beginning of the decade. We also examine reports of religious discrimination in the three cohorts in 2000, and for the youngest cohort in 1990 and 1995 as well.

METHODS

The West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study is a longitudinal study of everyday life and health among three cohorts (aged 15, 35 and 55 at the start of the survey in 1987/8) resident within a large and socially mixed urban area centred on Glasgow¹. In this paper we refer to data obtained in 1990 on 444 youngest cohort (then aged 18), 593 middle cohort (then aged 38) and 527 eldest cohort (then aged 58) members, who also had follow-up data in 2000.

¹ *The samples were drawn from Strathclyde Region's Voluntary Population Survey, an enhanced electoral register (Black 1985). Each of the cohorts was sampled using a two-stage stratified random procedure based on postcode sectors, which were stratified by a combination of local government district unemployment rates and proportion of low income socio-economic groups, as ascertained at the 1981 census. At the second stage, individuals were stratified by sex (Ecob 1987).*

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Interviews and measurements were done by nurses trained in survey techniques².

Socio-economic position was determined using three common indicators applied to the respondent's household: head of household occupational social class (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys 1990), housing tenure and car ownership³. The 20% of young adults still living in the parental home at age 28 were excluded from the comparisons of housing tenure in 2000 in order to maintain comparability across the whole cohort, but included in the figures for social class and car ownership. Any changes for the youngest cohort between 1990 and 2000 reflect intergenerational social mobility, rather than intra-generational mobility as is being measured in the middle and eldest cohorts.

Experience of discrimination in the middle and eldest cohorts was asked in 2000 using the preface 'In your education or work career, do you feel you have ever been unfairly discriminated against because of your...' followed by a list of ten items, one of which was religion. In 2000, the youngest cohort was asked about discrimination since 1995, rather than 'ever', as they had already been asked this question in 1990 and 1995. These additional data on discrimination for the youngest cohort are also presented.

² *This represents 44% of the achieved sample in the youngest cohort, from whom baseline data were obtained in 1987, 60% of the middle cohort and 51% of the eldest cohort. Attrition has been most severe among younger working class males, as is common in other surveys. Checking for differential attrition between Catholics and non-Catholics revealed a slight unevenness, with the original 32% of the sample identified as Catholic at the baseline in 1987 reduced to 30% at the 2000 data collection.*

³ *Head of household social class was based on current main occupation for men, or, if none, on their current or last main occupation from the previous wave of data collection. For women it was based on their partner's occupation or, if none, on their own occupation or, if none, on their head of household social class from the previous data collection. For the youngest cohort, this will include parental social class as socio-economic measures generally referred to the parental household in 1990, as almost none had left home by age 18. Housing tenure was determined as 'owner-occupied' if the respondent and/or their partner owned the home outright, was buying it with the help of a mortgage or was in a part-rent, part-mortgage scheme. Car ownership was defined as someone in the household owning a car or van.*

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Religion of background was obtained at the baseline survey in 1987. Respondents were classified as 'Catholic' in the youngest or eldest cohorts if they had at least one Catholic parent, and in the middle cohort if they answered that 'Catholic' was the religious group into which they were born. About a third of each cohort were thus determined to be of Catholic background, and are hereafter referred to as 'Catholics'. Most Catholics in the West of Scotland are of Irish descent, with very small minorities of Scottish ancestry, converts to Catholicism on marriage and immigrants from other European countries. Non-Catholics are generally of Scottish and English descent and identify with Protestant Christianity or no religion. A very small minority are of non-Christian traditions, the main one being Islam.

SPSS for Windows was used to obtain cross-tabulations of social class, housing tenure, car ownership and experience of discrimination by religion, separately by age cohort and year of survey. Percentages and odds ratios⁴ are displayed in tables 1 and 2, with an indication of the significance of the Chi-squared statistic. These were compared for the different indicators, among cohorts and over time to examine the extent to which age and cohort effects were operating.

RESULTS

Comparison by cohort 1990

Amongst the youngest cohort (age 18) in 1990, fewer Catholics (32%) than non-Catholics (49%) were in households headed by someone of non-manual social class (see Table 1). Home ownership levels tended to be lower among Catholics, but this did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

⁴ *An odds ratio is the odds of one group having a particular characteristic divided by the odds of another group having that characteristic. For example, Table 1 shows that in 2000 at age 48, 48% of Catholics were of non-manual social class, compared to 58% of non-Catholics. This gives an odds ratio of $48 / (100 - 48) / (58 / (100 - 58)) = 0.67$ for Catholics to non-Catholics being of non-manual social class. Catholics were less likely than non-Catholics to occupy a non-manual social class. An odds ratio close to one would indicate that there was not much difference between Catholics and non-Catholics. An odds ratio higher than one would indicate that Catholics were more likely to be of non-manual social class. An asterisked odds ratio indicates that the result is statistically significant and unlikely to be attributable to chance: the more asterisks the higher the confidence of a genuine difference.*

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Neither was there any significant difference in car ownership by religion. Amongst the middle cohort (age 38), fewer Catholics (45%) than non-Catholics (58%) were of non-manual social class, and fewer Catholics were owner-occupiers. Car ownership tended to be less among Catholics, but this did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Amongst the eldest cohort (age 58), fewer Catholics (33%) than non-Catholics (53%) were of non-manual social class, and fewer owned their home or had a car.

Comparison by cohort 2000

In 2000, there was no significant difference in social class, and home and car ownership levels, between Catholics and non-Catholics for the youngest cohort (then aged 28). However, amongst the middle cohort (then aged 48), fewer Catholics were in non-manual households, and home and car ownership levels tended to be lower, although this did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. In the eldest cohort (then aged 68), fewer Catholics were of non-manual social class, and their home and car ownership levels remained lower.

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Table 1
Socio-economic position of Catholics and non-Catholics, by age and year

	1990 aged 18	2000 aged 28	1990 aged 38	2000 aged 48	1990 aged 58	2000 aged 68
<i>% non-manual social class</i>						
Catholic	32	50	45	48	33	29
non-Catholic	49	57	58	58	53	54
Odds ratio	0.49**	0.73	0.57**	0.67 ⁺	0.43***	0.35***
Sample size	432	397	584	568	524	518
<i>% home ownership^a</i>						
Catholic	54	76	65	78	48	65
non-Catholic	62	80	79	84	68	78
Odds ratio	0.72	0.80	0.49***	0.68 ⁺	0.43***	0.53**
Sample size	437	374	589	589	524	522
<i>% car ownership</i>						
Catholic	66	82	75	78	52	53
non-Catholic	70	84	82	84	75	69
Odds ratio	0.82	0.87	0.69 ⁺	0.66 ⁺	0.36***	0.51***
Sample size	437	437	589	589	524	521

^a at age 28, percentages are restricted to the 80% of respondents who were not living in the parental home

⁺, *, **, *** statistically significant at 10%, 5%, 1%, 0.1% respectively

Change over time

Between 1990 and 2000, most odds ratios became closer to unity, indicating a diminishing gap between Catholics and non-Catholics. From a lower level in 1990, Catholics have attained non-manual social class (except in the eldest cohort), and bought houses and cars at a faster rate than non-Catholics, thus improving their relative socio-economic position. In the youngest cohort, progress towards equality was 47% in social class (computed by $(1-0.49)$ -

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(1-0.73) / (1-0.49)), 28% in home ownership and 28% in car ownership. In the middle cohort, progress towards equality was 23% in social class and 37% in home ownership, but there was a very slight widening of the gap in car ownership. In the eldest cohort, progress towards equality was 18% in home ownership and 23% in car ownership, but the gap in social class widened by 14%.

Perceived discrimination on the grounds of religion

Perceived discrimination on the basis of religion was reported by a minority of respondents (see Table 2). Catholics in the youngest cohort in 1990 (age 18), reported an excess of religious discrimination 'ever' in comparison with non-Catholics the same age (9% vs 3%). In 1995, when asked the same question (at age 23), a much lower proportion of Catholics reported discrimination and there was consequently no significant difference by religion. These results are mutually inconsistent, as all who had reported ever being discriminated against in 1990 might have been expected to continue to do so at the next wave of data collection. For the youngest cohort in 2000 (age 28), the question was phrased so as to refer to discrimination since 1995. Again, an excess of religious discrimination was reported by Catholics.

Catholics in the middle and eldest cohorts in 2000 (then aged 48 and 68), reported an excess of religious discrimination 'ever', compared to non-Catholics. The odds ratio for the eldest cohort (7.81) was substantially greater than that for the middle cohort (2.50).

DISCUSSION

In this article, following debate about anti-Catholic discrimination in Scottish society, we have examined longitudinally the relative socio-economic position of Catholics and non-Catholics, and reports of religious discrimination. This is the first study which has been able to examine changes for different age groups in the West of Scotland over a ten year period. Our results confirm previous observations of an age gradient in disadvantage, showing most extreme inequality in the eldest cohort, less evidence of Catholic disadvantage in the middle cohort, and very little difference in the youngest cohort. The majority of the eldest cohort were retired by 2000, and thus least likely to be able to improve their socio-economic prospects (although they did do so in absolute terms in home ownership). The middle cohort displayed a modest improvement in circumstances. The youngest

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cohort became established in adult roles between 1990 and 2000, and changes reflect upward social mobility between generations. An excess of religious discrimination was reported by Catholics in all cohorts, which corresponds in some measure to the socio-economic difference, with stronger evidence of anti-Catholic discrimination for the cohort aged 68 in 2000 than the cohort aged 48. Results were more difficult to interpret for the youngest cohort because of their inconsistency over time.

Table 2
Reported discrimination for Catholics and non-Catholics, by age and year

	1990 aged 18	1995 aged 23	2000 aged 28	2000 aged 48	2000 aged 68
% religious discrimination	'ever'	'ever'	'since 1995'	'ever'	'ever'
Catholic	9	2	4	6	10
non-Catholic	3	3	1	3	1
Odds ratio	3.50**	0.72	5.69*	2.50*	7.81***
Sample size	437	399	436	589	519

+, *, **, *** statistically significant at 10%, 5%, 1%, 0.1% respectively

Our conclusions about diminishing differences between Catholics and non-Catholics need to be set in the context of relatively small sample sizes. Differences of up to seven percentage points failed to reach statistical significance at conventional levels, which is not the same as saying 'there was no difference'. In no case (in any cohort on any indicator) did the figure for Catholic socio-economic position suggest their advantage over non-Catholics. Therefore, while demonstrating evidence of a diminishing gap between Catholics and non-Catholics, we should remain cautious about claiming equality even in the youngest cohort.

Our data covering a ten year period are not adequate to test for an age effect in Catholic disadvantage in the West of Scotland – that is to explore whether improvement is limited to people in their twenties and thirties, before key promotion opportunities arise. There is indeed evidence of an intergenerational narrowing of the gap in social class in the youngest cohort. However, small movements towards equality are also noted for social class and home-ownership in the middle cohort, and home and car ownership in the

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eldest cohort. Thus the data are most indicative of a period effect with increases in home and car ownership generally, and non-manual jobs for young adults, between 1990 and 2000, with a faster increase amongst Catholics. This period effect interacts with an age effect such that it is stronger at younger adult ages and weaker at older ages, demonstrating a cohort effect. The historical circumstances of widespread anti-Catholic discrimination are reflected by the socio-economic disadvantage observed in the generation which entered the labour market immediately after the second world war. In contrast, subsequent generations of Catholics, although starting from a situation of disadvantage, have been able to improve their (relative and absolute) socio-economic position over time. Over the decade 1990-2000, sectarian attitudes and behaviour in the West of Scotland have been less able to determine current employment opportunities for Catholics. The hypothesis of historic cohort change implies sustained socio-economic improvement for Catholics of working ages, and this may eventually ameliorate much of their current and previous health disadvantage.

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