

Socio-economic Classifications

Hello, I'm David Pevalin, and welcome to this online resource about socio-economic classifications. In this resource, there are two videos. The first one is an abridged history of official and academic social classifications, scales and schemas that have been used in the UK. And the second video is an deep dive into the national statistics socio-economic classification, the current official classification for the UK. Before I start, I have to recognise the work of Professor David Rose in this, I worked firstly under the direction of Professor Rose and then with as a colleague throughout the last 20 odd years on the national statistics, socia-economic classification, and much of this would not have been possible without him.

So to start with, I'd like to start with the official measures of official socio-economic measures. So, these are the ones that have been adopted by the Office for National Statistics and all its predecessor organisations. And the one most widely known is the Registrar General Social Class or RGSE. Its name was changed in 1992. That to Social Class based occupation, but it's still commonly known as RGSE. And that's how I'm going to refer to it in this video. It was initially introduced in 1913, but substantially modified in 1921. And before it was discontinued, it was described as a graded hierarchy of occupations ranked according to skill. But this description of RGSE changed in 1971. Before that, it was described as reflecting occupations standing in the community. And it's not clear how this reconceptualization of RGSE impacted on the allocation of occupations to the classes. Along with the changes of the reconceptualization in 71, the number of changes have been made at each census, after 1921. And these tended to be on the basis of judgments made by the Registrar General Staff. And it's really quite opaque about that process and why changes were made or what evidence was used for the basis of these changes, or for the allocation of new occupations as they came up. Saying that however, the RGSC was widely used in government and academic research, and a key measure in describing health inequalities in the mid to the late 20th century. What, but while at the same time that it was been extensively used, producing valuable insights, there was a developing dissatisfaction with the RGSC on theoretical, conceptual and technical grounds. And it led some epidemiologists and sociologists to use other socio-economic indicators in their analysis.

By the time we got to the ESRC review of government social classification in the mid-1990s, there was a plethora of papers and book chapters calling attention to the problems of RGSE and especially in increasing recognition that RGSC described an industrial society and economy that was fast disappearing, and in which the old manual/ non-manual divide was of less and less relevance. It was officially discontinued in 2001 when it was replaced by the NS-SEC. But in this timeline, I've put a shaded area after 2001 whereas, where myself and Professor Rose have unofficially continued producing derivation matrices for RGSE especially for people who are using longitudinal studies and may have used these measures prior to 2001. So, to offer some form of continuation of measurements for 2001 up to the present day as as we develop matrices based on the occupational classifications in 2000, 2010, and 2020. And these should all be in the UK Data Archive soon.

The classes in RGSC as shown in this table here, as you can see, there are five classes of which the class three is split into three manual and three non-manual. And that dividing line is where you see a manual/non-manual divide dichotomy in a number of analyses or using RGSE there is actually a sixth class which is for the armed forces, but they are normally dropped out of analysis or descriptive statistics using RGSE. You can see there there are rules for where occupation, where foremen or supervisors are dealt with and managers as well.

Now, if we turn to socio economic groups, which was another official socio-economic classification, it was introduced in 1951 extensively amended in 1961 and it was introduced alongside RGSE. So, from 1951 to 2001, there were two official socio-economic classifications. Now, socio-economic group aimed to bring together people with jobs of similar social and economic status. And whilst socio-economic groups were a more social scientific measure, which is not surprising given it was developed by David Glass who was a social scientist with an interest in social mobility. There was still a lack of conceptual rationale or clear rules about how the many categories in socio-economic groups could be collapsed into classes for analysis. And this led to many varied and inconsistent ways about how these categories were collapsed into classes in practice. It's also been said that socio economic groups partly relied on the outmoded distinction of the manua/non-manual divide and so, was open to some of the same critiques as RGSC. So, socio-economic groups groups are also discontinued in 2001 with the introduction of NS-SEC. But again, we have sought to continue the use of these measures from 2001 to the present day by producing our own derivation matrices, which hopefully will be available in the UK Data Archive soon.

If you move on to the NS-SEC I'm only going to talk briefly about it in this video because the the second video in this resource is a deep dive into the NS-SEC. So, the NS-SEC came out of the ESRC review of government social classifications, which was conducted in the mid-1990s. And it was officially introduced in 2001, based on the standard occupational classification SOC 2000. Although there's a SOC 1990 version that was used during the development of NS-SEC. The first official one is based on SOC 2000. The NS-SEC was rebased, on SOC 2010, and then on SOC 2020. And we'll go into more detail on those processes in the second Video. The NS-SEC is a nested classification. But the one that adopted by ONS as its official measure was the seventh or eighth class version. Here, shown here in this table, you can see that class one is split into 1.1, and 1.2. But class eight is a sort of optional class because it it can't be operationalized in every data set.

Next on the timeline, I've put some of the main academic scales or schemas that have been developed. And I've split them left and right into those developed by John Goldthorpe. And his colleagues and those with on the right on to those that have a different conceptual basis to the Goldthorpe schema. I'm going to talk more about the Goldthorpe and its its genesis and it's input into the development of NS-SEC in the other video, so I'm going to concentrate more on those on the other side and the Hope-Goldthorpe scale that sort of sits somewhere between the two as John Goldthorpe was involved in it, but it didn't it had a different basis from his later schemas.

If we started in 1950, with a Hall-Jones scale this aim to grade occupations according to their prestige, and it was used in many pioneering social mobility studies. However, the Hope-Goldthorpe scale in 1974, was designed specifically to remedy some of the issues with the Hall-Jones scale. And it ranked

occupations in terms of their social desirability. The Hope-Goldthorpe scale was used in the early stages of the Oxford mobility project before it was abandoned for the Goldthorpe schema.

If we now go to the Cambridge scale, this is a wholly different measure, and it's based on a scaling of occupational friendship and marriage. And it's regarded as a broad measure of social stratification and inequality. There's an extensive literature on the debates between the Cambridge group and the Goldthorpe group at Oxford on the relative merits and disadvantages of these two different approaches. And some have compared this to the Oxford Cambridge boat race. But really, there's the there's a, there's there's so much difference between the two camps apart from their common interest in social mobility and social stratification, I mean, the they have different takes on the theory, the theoretical basis, the conceptual basis, the measurement of their different schemas and scales. And this debate within the literature was given more impetus with the ESRC review of social government social classifications and the adaptation of the Goldthorpe scheme or into the NS-SEC, more of which in the other video.

But in the early noughties, it's sort of it died down a bit. Until in 2013, when the Great British Class Survey run by the BBC and headed up by a Professor Mike Savage came along. I put a number of different materials, YouTube videos in about this in in the additional resources. Now, the Great British Class Survey they argued that measures such as the NS-SEC failed to capture the social and cultural processes that generate class divisions. And the data that they use and the concepts that they use to develop their classes, say more about modern society than measures such as the NS-SEC and it's particularly about how people understand society and class divisions within society. There's they use a massive data set from an online web survey, but also a national smaller national representative sample to to develop their seven new classes. But there is a long discussion and critique about this all of which are pointed to in the in the additional material.