



## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

*...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland*



# ***“We asked for workers, but human beings came”: Mental health and well- being of Polish migrants in Northern Ireland***

**Anne Kouvonen<sup>1,2</sup>**

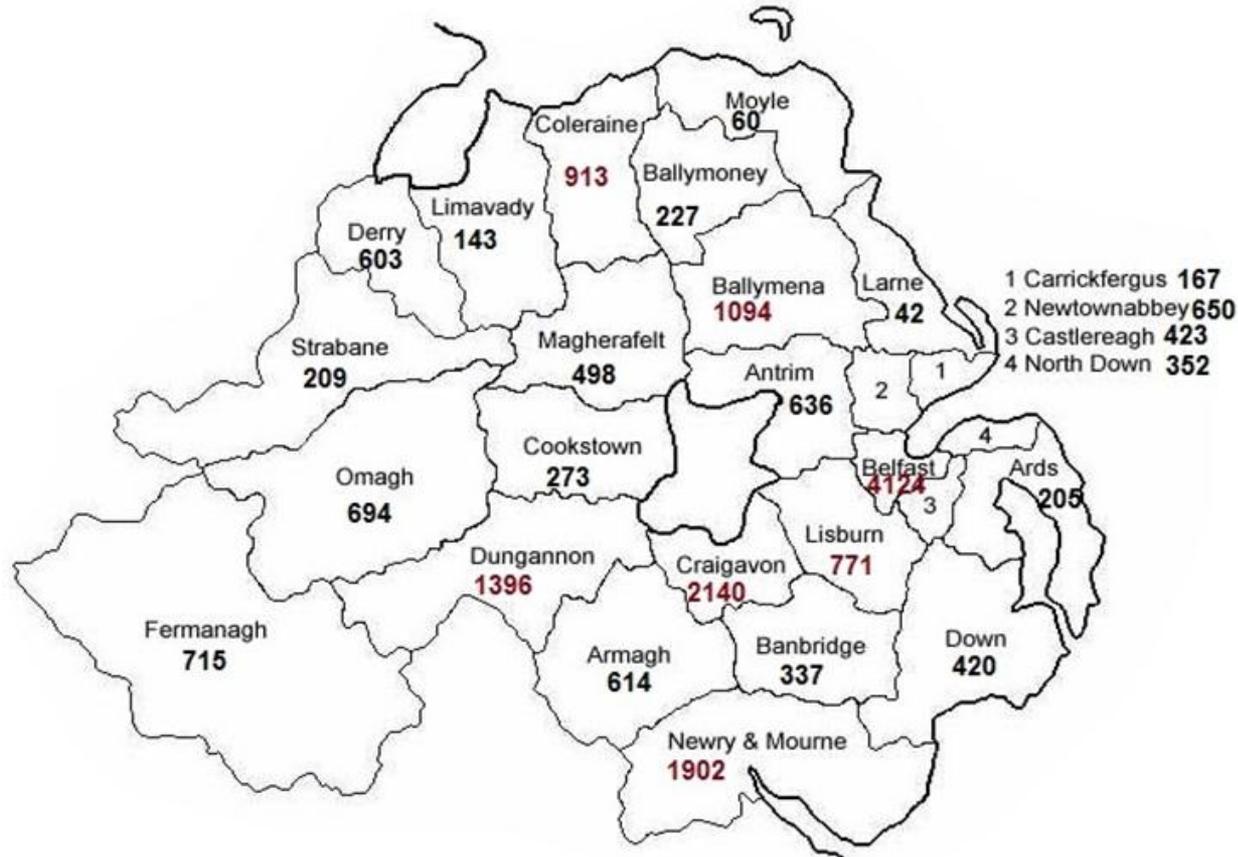
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# POLISH MIGRANTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND ACCORDING TO CENSUS 2011



# MIGRATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Migrants as workers; migrants as human beings
- The relationship between migration and mental health is an important public health challenge



# Preliminary data

- 17 purposive interviews
- 9 with key professionals in regular contact with Polish migrants (with mental health problems)
- 8 with Polish migrants
- Location: Belfast, Newry&Mourne, Portadown, Craigavon, Ballymena



# MAIN FINDINGS: Social isolation

- Limited social ties in Poland
- Lack of strong social networks in NI
- Migration as a strain on relationships:
  - Lack of childcare
  - Lack of quality-time for couples
  - Shift in gender roles - change of family dynamics



# MAIN FINDINGS: Language barrier

- Difficulty engaging fully within ‘the receiving society’
- Barriers to accessing local mental health services and practitioners
- Inability to speak about feelings and emotions in English
- Lack of Polish workers in mental health charities
- Problem recognising qualifications of Polish psychologists
- Issues with interpreting services





# MAIN FINDINGS: Cultural differences

## ❖ Differences in...

- perception of and reference to mental health
- perception of the health system in the receiving country and the country of origin
- paths of bereavement



# OTHER FINDINGS:

- Addictions
- High number of suicides
- High level of common mental disorders
- Domestic violence
- 'Poorly planned migration'
- Impact of migration on children



# PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS:

- Engage Polish migrants in activities outside work
- Engage Polish volunteers in mental health charities
- Improve training for Polish interpreters
- Translate information booklets
- Prepare 'welcome packs'
- Expand 'Cultural awareness guidelines' for HSC staff
- Information campaign among Polish migrants



# POSITIVE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

- Escaping poverty
- Escaping family control
- Discovering new talents (e.g. sports, music)
- Occupational and professional development





Northern Ireland  
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