



*Childhood and family life:  
Socio-demographic changes*

**Report of research conducted by  
The Social Issues Research Centre**

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## 1 Introduction

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has commissioned an independent assessment of evidence relating to the impact of the commercial world on children's well-being. This report focuses on the engagement of families and children in the commercial world by taking a longitudinal approach to the changes and continuities in family life over the past half century. It is divided into three sections that deal with different aspects of children's and families' commercial engagement, as follows:

- **Childhood and family life: socio-demographic changes from 1950 to the present**

This section provides a broad analysis of the socio-demographic changes and continuities that have helped shape childhood and family life in modern Britain.

- **The economic dimensions of family life (spending money)**

This section of report begins with a longitudinal analysis of household income and expenditure. This allows for an historical perspective of commercial engagement as part of family life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, highlighting both change, continuity and variation in how children and families have earned and spent their money. This is followed by an examination of income, wealth and expenditure in family life today, focusing specifically on the role of children as both producers of wealth and as active consumers within the family unit (although these themes will be examined in more detail in Section 3 of our second report, *The Ecology of Family Life*).

- **Children and families: spending time**

This section of the report links socio-demographic trends related to consumption and family expenditure, or spending money (as identified in the previous section), with information about how, where and when children, parents and other family members spend their time.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

In keeping with sociologists of childhood such as Alan Prout<sup>1</sup> and David Buckingham<sup>2</sup>, SIRC takes as its starting point for the

research the idea that childhood and family life are social phenomena, constructed and defined according to social and historical context. As such, the changing nature of modern Britain obliges us to reconsider how we think about childhood and the role of children in consumer society. While it is important in this sense to incorporate points of view that highlight the potential negative effects of the commercial world on the lives of children, it is also vital that we recognise the active role that children now play in shaping their engagement in particular social contexts, such as the family or aspects of the marketplace.

Social theorists, including Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, argue that an increasing diversity in the nature of intimate relations and family structures is evidence of a shift away from traditional categories of social identity towards a more reflective, fragmented, individualised approach to organising our social lives.<sup>3</sup> According to this perspective, changes in family life are inextricably tied to the socio-economic changes that characterise life in post-industrial late modernity. Shifts away from production, changes in the profile of the labour force and the rise of consumer society are connected with a decline in traditional notions of class identity. Similarly, other established loci of identity such as religion, race, gender, nationality, and age no longer provide firm categories against which to anchor our sense of who we are. These changes also make for more fragmented, uncertain transitions between different stages of life – stages that are themselves becoming more blurred and less easy to define. In this process, individuals are increasingly obliged to select aspects of social identity in an ongoing biographical process. We are presented with more opportunity, but also with more uncertainty and risk. This also applies to relationships within the family.

Other sociologists temper notions of fragmentation and individualisation by pointing out that broader social structures still have a powerful influence on people's lives, even if they are sometimes obscured by the rhetoric of individual choice.<sup>4</sup> We may think of ourselves as self-made individuals, and therefore consider all our successes or misfortunes to be of our own doing, but structures of social organisation and patterns of disadvantage and inequality still

<sup>1</sup> Prout, A. (2005) *The Future of Childhood: Towards the interdisciplinary study of children*. Routledge Falmer.

<sup>2</sup> Buckingham, D. (2000) *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media*. Polity Press.

<sup>3</sup> Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Polity Press.

Beck, U. (2002) *Individualization*. Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2007) *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. Open University Press.

remain and have a significant impact on what we are able to do in our lives – they impact on our social and cultural capital.<sup>5</sup>

These complementary theoretical perspectives – at once emphasising emergent social forms as well as recognising the continued presence of long-standing social structures – can be combined to provide a better understanding of the reasons behind specific social changes and continuities that have characterised British society over the past 50 years, particularly in terms of childhood, the family and engagement in the commercial world.

### 1.2 Defining 'commercial engagement'

Commercial engagement in its broadest sense – that is, engagement in the market-driven world of products, services, marketing, advertising, production and consumption – is inextricably tied to engagement in the social world that gives our lives meaning. We argue that an analytical division between the commercial and the social in this sense is artificial. It would be impossible to analyse the impact of the commercial world on children and families without exploring how commercial activities, and consumer culture in particular, are embedded in complex ways within social life.

### 1.3 Defining families: recognising diversity

It is important at this stage to highlight the fact that children's and families' experiences of the commercial world vary greatly according to social, cultural, historical and geographical context. The broad categories of analysis used in longitudinal data relating to children and families – ethnicity, for example – can often obscure the complex variations in the social lives of families across a range of other factors, including regional or rural/urban location, social class, cultural identity, sense of community or belonging, etc. We cannot assume that all White children and families engage in the commercial world in the same way. Nor can we assume homogeneity within other ethnic categories, socioeconomic groups or age cohorts.

While analyses of trends provide valuable insights into how a society as a whole is changing (or staying the same), it is much more difficult to capture the rich diversity of experience that shapes the daily lives of children and families in various social and cultural contexts. Further qualitative materials are

inevitably required and we discuss these, and the lacunae that are evident, in the second report, *The Ecology of Family Life*.

### 1.4 Time frame of analysis:

Given the aims of the project, and in order to conduct the research on a manageable scale relevant to available data, we take the time frame of analysis to be the period approximately from the mid 1940s to the present day. Longer term social and demographic trends will, of course, also be taken into consideration where relevant.

### 1.5 Methodology

#### 1.5.1 Sources of data

There are a number of key data sources that provide information on the changes and continuities in experiences of family life over time in the areas most directly related to children's commercial engagement. Alongside relevant original research<sup>6</sup>, SIRC accessed a wide range of data sources that provide insights into how childhood and family life have changed or stayed relatively constant over the past half century. They include the General Household Survey; 2001 Census; Annual Population Survey; British Social Attitudes Survey / Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey / Scottish Social Attitudes Survey; Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey; Young People's Social Attitudes survey; Family Expenditure Survey / Northern Ireland Family Expenditure Survey; Labour Force Survey / Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey; Survey of English Housing; the United Kingdom Time Use Survey; and so on.

#### 1.5.2 Search strategy

In addition to these sources of statistical data we also included a range of scholarly publications and analyses of the key social trends discussed below. Our search strategy for these sources involved the identification of key texts within particular disciplines and areas of the social sciences, including the sociology and history of childhood, sociological studies of time use, studies of family life and theoretical perspectives on family and childhood as social and historical constructs, anthropological studies of kinship, etc. These materials have served as a basis from which to explore other sources in more detail where they have been relevant to particular issues in the research. They have also helped to provide key search terms that were subsequently used to gather further useful data from

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986) *The Forms of Capital*, in J.E. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory for Research in the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood Press.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, SIRC (2007) *The Trust Fund Generation*. [http://www.sirc.org/publik/trust\\_fund\\_generation.shtml](http://www.sirc.org/publik/trust_fund_generation.shtml)

online sources, including academic journals and publications from research centres, government departments, private organisations, etc. Where necessary, our analysis has also been supplemented by content from leading media and news sources, as evidence of issues of concern in popular discourse.

A primary concern when looking at data that span a number of decades is the extent to which they are comparable and reliable. Unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, there are substantial discrepancies between different datasets in terms of sample size, units of analysis, variables included, definitions of social categories (especially of 'children', which is on its own quite interesting), omissions, etc. This makes the task of drawing out long-term trends for the entire period since the early 1950s complicated and difficult. Where possible we have covered trends across the whole time period. Where there have been gaps, or where data have related only to a particular time frame within the last 50 years, we make this clear in order to avoid confusion over the significance of particular trends.

### 1.6 Historical framework

Similar to public anxiety about the 'death' of childhood are public fears about the demise of the family and family values in contemporary British society.<sup>7</sup> Much of the popular concern about the disintegration of the family is founded on the nostalgic notion that in the past family life was somehow better than it is today. But is this really the case?

It would be impossible to understand changes in the structure of the family unit over time without taking into consideration the social and economic factors affecting the nature of family life in different historical periods. Aspects of the structure of the family and the role of children within the family are very closely tied to the kinds of economic roles that family members have had to play in different socio-historical contexts.

With this in mind, the historian Hugh Cunningham points to the broad changes that have taken place in the family as a result of economic change in Europe since the 16th century, with particular reference to the changing engagement of children in the world of work and commerce.<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the scope of this report to provide an exhaustive history of these changes, but it

is nevertheless worth considering the overall socio-historical picture in order to place the modern family into perspective.

In the pre-industrial era, the structure of the family unit was tied fundamentally to the nature of the economic and political dimensions of agriculture. The importance of land as a resource for peasant families in Britain meant that marriage (then primarily a contract involving property) took place later in life relative to the death or retirement of family patriarchs. During the same period the economic value of children was limited to their ability to take part in seasonal agricultural work, leaving them with considerable free time.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the economic role of children in working-class families changed significantly. Wage labour, at first in the home and then in the factories, became a normal, regular part of the lived experiences of working-class children across Britain. The income from working children became an increasingly important part of overall family income (and national output) during this time, increasing the 'strategic' value of children as an economic family asset. While this inevitably altered the dynamics of family life, and wrought massive changes in terms of experiences of childhood, the essential 'nuclear' structure of the family unit remained relatively unchanged during this period.

Eventually, in the second half of the 19th century, children's engagement in the world of work came under increasing government regulation. Popular notions of childhood shifted to embrace a more romantic, pastoral ideal that was in stark contrast with the grimy reality of working life for many Victorian children. Compulsory education began to take the place of regular employment for most children, increasing their period of dependency on parents and expanding the gap between experiences of childhood and the economically productive adult world of work. Rather than being key earners and producers in the family unit, the primary economic role of children within the family began at this point to shift slowly towards consumption.

By the middle of the 20th century, young people in Western societies were an established, recognised economic force for consumption, then known for the first time as the 'teenagers' for whom 'teen' markets have been developed ever since. The engagement of children and young people in full-time employment has declined over the decades since the 1950s, with increasing participation in further and higher education and changes in the structure of the labour market, leading to

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Family Relationships Magazine* (9/09/2005) New Statistics Show Decline in UK Traditional Family Life. <http://familyrelationships.org.uk/2005/09/09/new-statistics-show-decline-in-uk-traditional-family-life>  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/oct/04/isthefamilydead>

<sup>8</sup> Cunningham, H. (2005) *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*. Pearson, p.88.

delayed transitions into adulthood. Part-time work, however, still remains a common experience for many children and young people, not least because paid work helps to provide money for consumption habits.

Consumption has become an increasingly important aspect of the lives of children and young people from an increasingly young age, with marketing and advertising campaigns carving out new age-related niches for consumer items. Childhood has come to be defined, in part, by consumption and, in turn, children are actively engaged in defining their involvement with the commercial world.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the late 20th century has also heralded significant changes in the world of adult work in Britain, particularly in terms of the kinds of work that people are able to do and in terms of the increasing role of women in the workforce. These shifts doubtless have implications for the dynamics of modern family life and have also led to a more diverse range of family structures alongside and within the more traditional notion of the nuclear family.

The above is, by necessity, a rather crude summation of socio-demographic change in modern British society, but it serves to outline the broad socio-historical context in which we should consider the specific developments that have taken place in family life during the past 50 years. It is to these that we now turn.

## 2 How has the structure of the family unit changed in Britain in recent years?

### 2.1 Introduction

The key social trends point towards both continuity and change in the structure of the family in British society over the past 50 years. On one hand, a diversity of complex family structures has flourished. On the other, marriage and the traditional nuclear family structures remain the norm for most people in contemporary British society.

Many sociological studies of social change and family life tend to emphasise either the degree of continuity or the extent of change in their analyses. The perspective on changes in family structure is often bleak, sometimes optimistic or, on a rare

occasion, claims no real change at all. In many cases ideology and theoretical perspectives appear to be more important than a strict regard for the evidence.

A.H. Halsey, for example, draws from his comprehensive analysis of twentieth century social trends the conclusion that:

*"... few can doubt that the family as an institution is in trouble. Parliament and people are now casting around for solutions to what is seen as a problem of widespread disorder – rising divorce, lone parenting and child poverty ... collapsed community."<sup>10</sup>*

While elsewhere Halsey modifies to a degree his gloomy assessment of the state of the family, his views remain quite out of step with those of the contemporary historian, Pat Thane. Looking at much the same data and trends analyses she concludes that:

*"A persistent trope of popular and media discourse in the second half of the twentieth century was that family relationships were 'breaking down', though such cultural pessimism has a long history in Britain ... Rather than decline, there has been increasing diversity in family forms and relationships ... The continuing strength and importance of the family through a period of rapid social change is more striking than its breakdown."<sup>11</sup>*

With these very different perspectives in mind, our research explores both continuity and change as they appear in the social trends that have developed over the past 50 years, emphasising the fact that new forms of social organisation often converge with, rather than completely subsume, what has come before them.

Significant increases in the number of lone parent families, step-families, cohabiting couples, same sex couples, and children staying at home for longer has resulted in an increased variety of family formations. These kinds of family structure can also be transient – parents, children and other family members may experience a number of different family structures over time. A broader range of family structures also means that networks of family relations have become more complex in some cases – individuals may exist in social family networks that

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<sup>9</sup> Miles, S., Anderson, A. & Meethan, K. (eds.) (2007) *The Changing Consumer: Markets and Meanings*. Routledge.

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<sup>10</sup> Halsey, A.H. (2000) Introduction to A.H. Halsey & J. Webb (Eds) *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*. MacMillan.

<sup>11</sup> Thane, P. (2007) Population and the family. In P. Addison & H. Jones (Eds) *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000*. Blackwell.



incorporate step-parents, step-siblings, ex-step-siblings and a range of other non-consanguineous relations that are still considered to be 'family'.

Within such networks, children are increasingly obliged to negotiate complicated exchanges with other children and adults in relationships that might not normally occur in the traditional sphere of the nuclear family. In this sense, variation has become a normal part of normal family life for many people in modern Britain. Certain traditional family structures, however, still remain the basis for family organisation in the large proportion of households.

## 2.2 Key Points

### 2.2.1 Family structures have become longer and thinner

With these factors in mind it is possible to think about structural changes in the family unit over the past 50 years in terms of what we refer to as a 'narrowing and lengthening' of family form. The core of the family unit (an adult partnership and children) remains the same for most, but families now most often consist of fewer dependent children who stay in the family home for longer – the core family unit remains intact for a longer period of time before new families are formed.

Generations of decreasing birthrates have also resulted in fewer consanguineous extended family members, narrowing the 'horizontal' spread of blood-relations. At the same time, new networks of non-consanguineous relations extend the notion of 'family' beyond traditional understandings of family-as-blood-relations.

Commercial engagement, in terms of consumption and participation in the labour force, are undercurrents in the changes and continuities that the following pages describe. As already suggested, it would be impossible to understand the socio-demographic changes that have taken place in family life over the past 50 years without recognising the specific economic factors involved. These will be discussed with particular reference to children and childhood toward the end of the section.

### 2.2.2 Most children still live in a 'traditional' family unit in one household, with two parents

In 2006, two thirds of all families with dependent children were headed by a married couple, as shown in Table 1.<sup>12</sup> In 2004, 80% of people in the UK lived as part of a family household,

<sup>12</sup> ONS (2007) *Focus on Families*.

compared with 90% of people in 1961.<sup>13</sup> It is important to bear these continuities in mind when thinking about the degree of change that has taken place in other aspects of family life in recent years. Alternative forms of family organisation have certainly become more prevalent, but this is not the same as suggesting that traditional family structures have disappeared as a result. On the contrary, they remain a vital and continuing part of social life for the majority of the population.

**Table 1 Households with dependent Children, by family type (2006)**

	Thousands	Percent
<b>Married Couple</b>	<b>8,585</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Cohabiting couple</b>	<b>1,412</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Lone mother</b>	<b>2,829</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Lone Father</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>2</b>

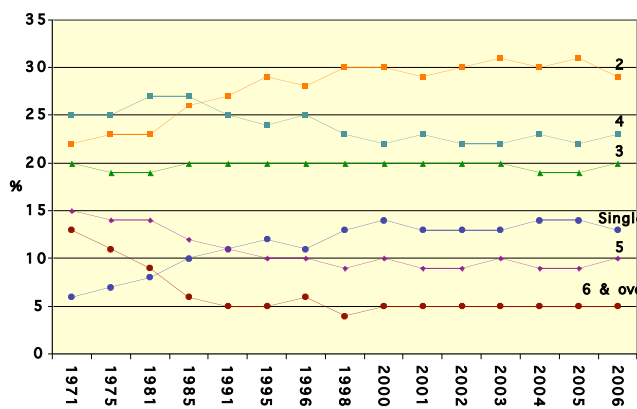
### 2.2.3 Birth rates have declined in recent years, nuclear families have become smaller

While most people live in a clearly recognisable family unit, the average household size has decreased during the past 50 years. In 1971 the average household size was 2.9 persons per household. In 2006 this had fallen to 2.4, representing a decrease of 17%. We can see from Figure 1 that the number of two person households has increased slightly from 32% to 35% of all households, while the number of three person households has reduced slightly, from 19% in 1971 to 16% in 2006. The decrease in larger households has been more dramatic. Households with 6 or more people have fallen from 6% to 2% of the total number of households over the same period.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 1. Household sizes – 1971-2006**

<sup>13</sup> ESRC (2006) *Changing Household and Family structures and Complex Living Arrangements*.

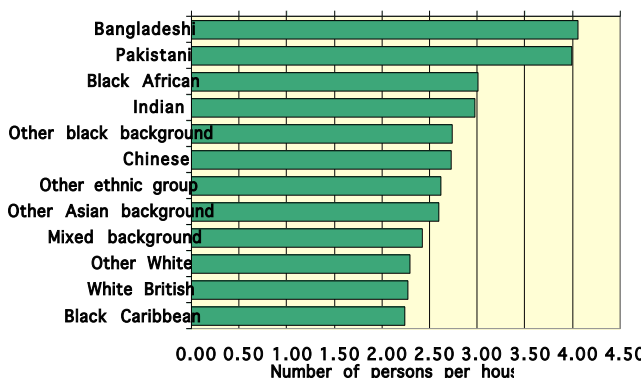
<sup>14</sup> As explained in Section 3 of this report, while most families live within one household the terms 'family' and 'household' should not be conflated. Households may include numerous people who are not considered to be family, while families may live across a number of separate but connected households.



The increasing number of single person households and a rise in the number of lone parent families (noted below) account for part of this change, but the overall reduction in household size also reflects decreasing fertility rates and the consequent reduction in the number of dependent children per family. In 2006 the average number of dependent children per family was 1.8, compared with 2.0 in 1971, a decrease of 10%.

The number of dependent children per family and household size varies considerably according to ethnicity and nationality. According to the 2006 General Household Survey, Pakistani and Bangladeshi households were the largest compared with other major ethnic groups, as is shown in Figure 2. In the same year, 21% of families with dependent children in Northern Ireland consisted of three or more children, compared with 16% of families of the same type in the rest of the UK.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 2. Household size by ethnic group



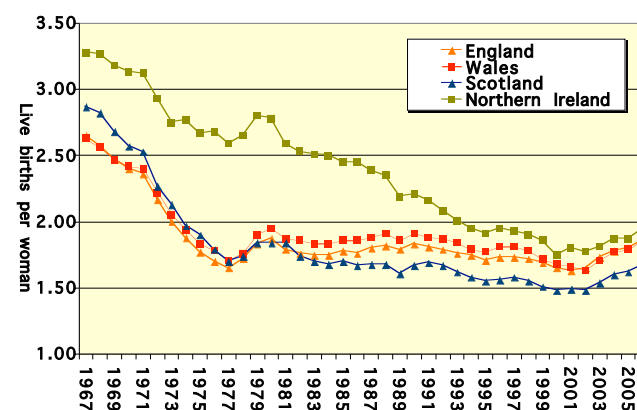
It is important here to remember that these figures relate to the nature of families living within households. While they reveal important information about the number of people living in

individual dwellings, they say little about how extended family structures may exist beyond the walls of the family home.

Over the past 80 years or so fertility rates have fluctuated considerably. In 1920 the total fertility rate for the UK was 2.07 children per woman of child-bearing age<sup>16</sup>. During the exceptional 'baby boom' peaks of the 1960s this increased to a high of 2.95 births per woman. Along with a rise in the number of women taking the contraceptive pill in the early 1970s, total fertility fell to approximately 2.1 births per woman in 1973, and has remained below this level ever since.

In 2001, the fertility rate in the UK hit its lowest point at 1.63 births per woman but has since increased consistently over the past 6 years to 1.91 in 2007 – a rate considerably higher than most other EU countries.<sup>17</sup> For women born in the early 1990s, the average number of children per woman is projected to rise to 1.94. There have been some significant variations across the constituent nations of the UK, as shown in Figure 3, although the traditionally higher fertility rates in Northern Ireland are now much more in line with the UK average than in the past.

Figure 3. Fertility rates in the UK



As with average household size, the average number of children per woman also varies according to ethnicity. In 2001, the average number of children among women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds was 3.4 and 3.6 respectively, compared with 2.1 children among White women.

A number of key factors account for shifting patterns of childbirth in the UK. Rising costs of childcare, increased participation of women in the labour market and in higher

<sup>16</sup> ONS (2004) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=762&Pos=1&ColRank=2&Rank=1000>

<sup>17</sup> ONS (2005) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369> (accessed 19/08/08); Eurostat; national sources for Belgium, France and Italy; *Social Trends* 38.

<sup>15</sup> ONS (2007) *Focus on Families*, p.5.

education, extended periods of transition from childhood to adulthood and greater availability of contraception, particularly the pill, are widely held to account for women having children later in life.

In the context of increased levels of employment for women, the impact of the commercial world on family life is particularly significant. While some women were obviously involved in the world of work before the Second World War<sup>18</sup>, it is only during the past fifty years that women have been able, with varying levels of difficulty and success, to gain access to a greater range of employment opportunities. Increased participation in the labour force can, then, be correlated in part with a later average age at first birth, with a decline in fertility rates and, by extension, with a decline in the average household size.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.2.4 Women are having children later in life

While the total fertility rate decreased during the second half of the 20th century, the average age of childbirth increased. In 1971 the average age at which women had their first child was 23.7. In 2005 this had increased to 27.3 and by 2006 it had risen further to an average age of 29.2 years. In 1971, fertility rates were highest for women in their late 20s. By 2004, however, the fertility of women aged 30-34 surpassed that of women between the ages 25-29. Fertility rates for women over 40 years old have also been rising steadily.<sup>20</sup>

It is also interesting to note the changes that have taken place in the number of births outside of marriage. With the exception of the periods immediately following the two World Wars, for the first sixty years of the 20th century few births occurred outside of marriage. Since the 1960s, however, the number of extra-marital births has steadily increased. In 1988, 25.2% of all births occurred outside marriage – by 2006, the number had increased to 43.7%.

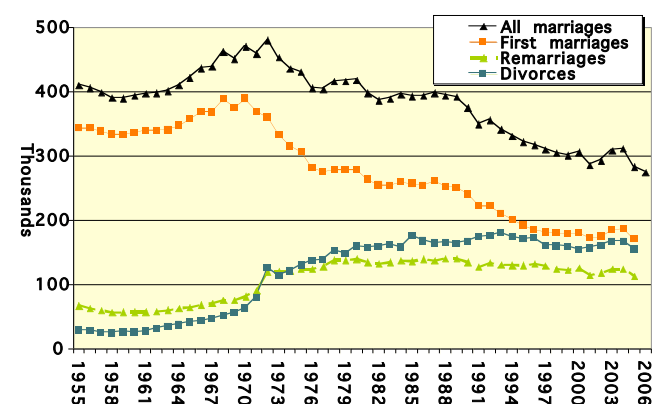
### 2.2.5 Marriage rates have decreased, but marriage remains the most common form of partnership

As noted above, marriage still remains the most common form of partnership in family life in contemporary Britain, with 67% of families consisting of a married couple in 2006. Rates of

marriage in the UK, however, show an overall decline since the peak in the early 1970s, as illustrated in Figure 4 below. In 1972 the total number of marriages in Britain was 480,285. Thirty four years later in 2006, the number of marriages had declined to 275, 140. This is the lowest recorded number of marriages in a year since 1895.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note here that the early 1970s were a time of particularly high marriage rates in the UK, as can be seen clearly in Figure 4. Favourable employment and housing conditions during this period made it easier for younger people to get married at an earlier age, but as the economic climate changed, so too did the incidence of and age at first marriage. While the early 1970s represent a peculiarly high 'blip' in marriage figures, it is still possible to observe a general trend since the 1950s towards fewer people getting married, later in life.

Figure 4. Marriages per year



The average age at which people marry for the first time, like the average age at first birth for women, has increased as the rate of marriage has gone down, as shown in Figure 5. In England and Wales in 1971, for example, the average age at first marriage for men was 24.6 years and for women it was 22.6 years. Three and a half decades later in 2006, the average age at which men got married for the first time was 31.8 years and for women it was 29.7 years.

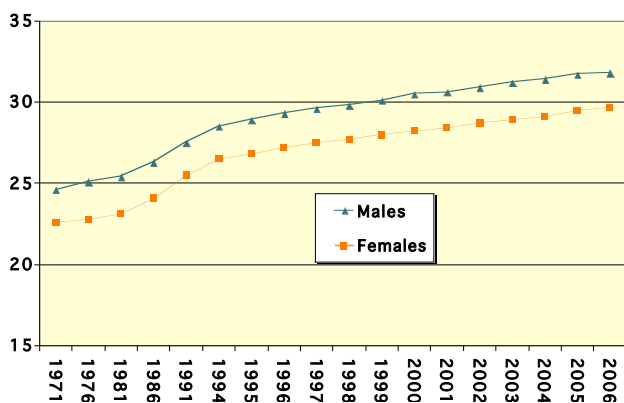
Figure 5. Age of first marriage

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Todd, S. (2005) *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Sources for this and other sections are: Census 2001, Labour Force Survey spring 1996 and spring 2006, General Household Survey (GHS), Office for National Statistics; Census 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency

<sup>20</sup> ONS. General Register Office for Scotland. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

<sup>21</sup> See ONS: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=170>



The rise in age at first marriage was most significant in the years between 1981 and 1994 – since then the increase in age has become more gradual. Overall, however, these shifts represent a significant change. The trend is put into relief when we consider that in 1971 approximately 31% of brides in England and Wales were teenagers – in 2006 this figure had dropped to just 2.2%. Men under 20 counted for approximately 10% of marriages in 1971, compared with only 0.6% in 2006.

This provides an interesting analogue to anxieties about young people growing up too quickly in contemporary society.<sup>22</sup>

While children and young people might be engaging in certain spheres of social life once considered the exclusive domain of adults (such as the production and consumption of consumer products), there are now certainly far fewer teenagers making the 'adult' transition into married life than there were three decades ago.

### 2.2.6 Divorce rates have increased overall, but are now in decline

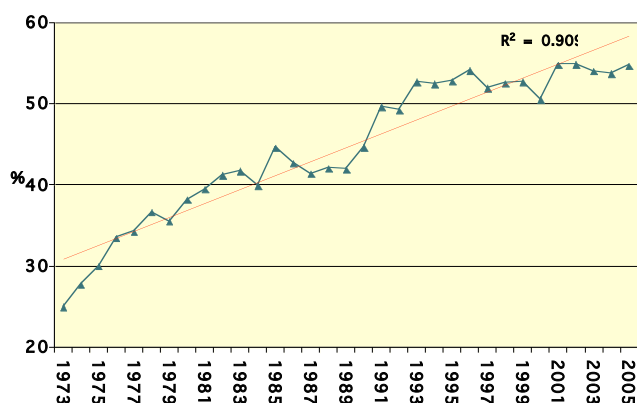
Generally speaking, the last 50 years has seen a considerable increase in the number of divorces taking place in the UK. This has not, however, been a linear trend. The number of divorces rose significantly between the mid 1950s and the mid 1980s, more than doubling between 1958 and 1969, but has since levelled out and is presently in decline. Following a fall in the number of divorces in 1973 (114,000) the yearly divorce rate rose over the next two decades to a high of 180,000. Divorce rates subsequently decreased to 155,000 in 2005 and fell a further 7% in 2006, as shown in Figure 4 above.

These trends in marriage and divorce can, in part, be linked to changes in legislation and other factors. The 1969 Divorce

Reform Act in England and Wales, for example, introduced a single ground for divorce ('irretrievable breakdown') which made the process simpler at a time when divorce was becoming more socially acceptable, contributing significantly to the sharp rise in the number of divorces in the early 1970s. There is also no formal requirement to register marriages that occur outside of the UK. The growing popularity of marriages abroad may, therefore, contribute to the declining number of marriages recorded in Britain.

Divorce is, of course, linked to the number of marriages that take place and it is perhaps in this context that divorce rates over time are best seen. A decline in the overall number of divorces is an almost inevitable outcome of fewer people getting married in the first place. When calculating the ratio of divorces to marriages we reveal an interesting picture. The ratio of divorces to marriages in the UK in 1973 was 25:100. By 2005 this had figure increased to 55 divorced couples per 100 marriages. As can be seen in Figure 6, this is a very significant increase in statistical terms.

Figure 6. Ratio of divorces to marriages



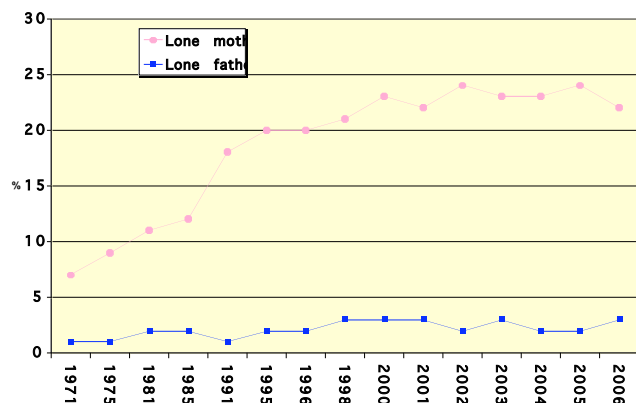
Other countries in the EU have experienced a similar increase in the rate of divorce – the average divorce rate for the EU is currently 43% of marriages.

### 2.2.7 The number of lone parent families has increased substantially

A natural outcome of an increase in divorces among married couples – or, more specifically, divorces among married couples with children and separations between cohabiting couples with children – is the rise in the number of lone parent families in the UK. The number of households headed by lone parents in 2007 was treble that of 1971 at 23%, as shown in Figure 7.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, BBC News, (10/03/08) Are You Growing Up Too Fast? [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/newsid\\_7270000/newsid\\_7274700/7274722.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/newsid_7270000/newsid_7274700/7274722.stm)

Figure 7. Households with lone parents



The overwhelming majority of lone parent households are headed by women – 87% of children in such households live with their biological mothers. Over the past 35 years the proportion of households with lone parent fathers has remained constant at roughly 2% while the proportion living in lone mother households has risen from 6% to 22%. This represents a substantial shift in terms of the diversity of family structures present in British society today. We should note, however, that lone parents families often do not necessarily remain in that state forever – instead transforming over time into step-families or incorporating other forms of cohabitation and partnership.

There are a number of factors that may be the drivers of these trends. The increased participation of women in the labour force and in higher education, for example, has extended opportunities beyond traditional pathways into marriage and childbirth. This and other potential factors related to the rise in the number of lone parent families are explored in more detail below.

**2.2.8 An increasing number of children live with step-parents**

Demographic trends showing increasing rates of divorce and remarriage suggest that the number of step-families in the UK has increased since the middle of the twentieth century. Reliable longitudinal data on the number of step families, however, is rather scant. This is partly due to the fact that it is often difficult to define what exactly constitutes a 'step-family' given the multiple variations of family organization that these can entail. The General Household Survey, however, provides some data on the number of step-families with dependent children in the UK since 1991. Using these data, John Haskey suggests that approximately one in 15 dependent children

lived in a step-family at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>23</sup>

According to the 2001 Census (the first that allowed for proper identification of step-families) more than one in ten dependent children lived in a step-family.

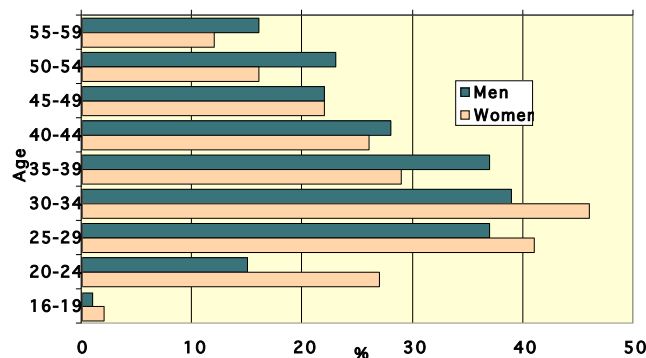
Families with step-parents mainly consist of a biological mother and a step-father (as noted above, the majority of children remain with their mother following a separation). As a result, in 2006 84% of step-families consisted of a step-father and a biological mother. In the same year, 6% of step-families comprised children from both partner's previous relationships.

**2.2.9 The number of people cohabiting has also increased**

Alongside a decline in marriage there has been a marked increase in the number of people cohabiting, as shown in Figure 8. In 1986, 11% of unmarried men under 60 and 13% of unmarried women in the same age group were cohabiting. By 2006 this number had doubled to 24% of men and 25% of women.

Cohabiting families tend to be younger than married couple families. In 2001, half of cohabiting-couple families were headed by a person aged under 35, compared with one in ten of married couples. Overall in 2006, cohabiting couple families made up 14% of all families, compared with 9% in 1971.

Figure 8. Percentages of men and women cohabiting



Interestingly, comparison of data from the 2001 and 2006 General Household Surveys points to a decline in the number of under 25 year-olds who are cohabiting. Not only are under-25s marrying later, they are also delaying moving in with one another. This decline has been most noticeable for women aged 16-19, with only 2% cohabiting in 2006 compared with 8% in 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Haskey, J. (1994) Stepfamilies and stepchildren in Great Britain. *Population Trends*, 76, 17-28. ONS.

This has implications for the broader social trend towards the 'lengthening' of the family form, with young people and young adults remaining in the parental home for longer before establishing their own households or families.

**2.2.10 Legal recognition of same-sex partnerships has increased their visibility**

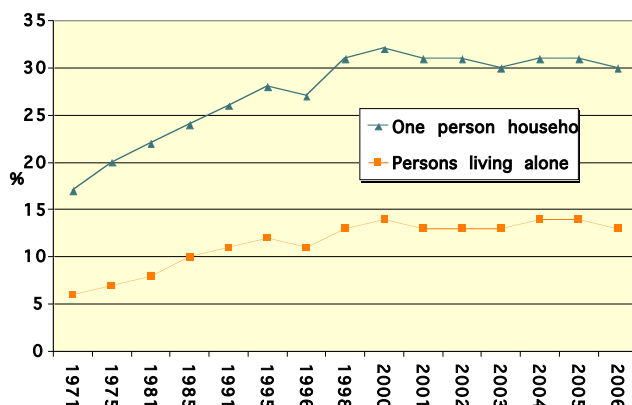
The Civil Partnership Act, which came into effect in 2005, provides for the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in the UK. Between 2005 and 2006 18,059 civil partnerships were recorded, 16,173 of which took place in England. A quarter of all civil partnerships took place in London and 60% of all civil partnerships during the same period were between men. This, of course, represents a very small proportion of all partnerships in the UK and does not take into consideration the many existing same-sex partnerships that have not been recognised under the Act.

Historical figures on same sex partnerships are very scant, not least because male homosexuality was illegal in the UK until 1967. Some evidence of same-sex partnerships exists in the General Household Surveys from the mid 1990s, but was only recorded if volunteered by the participant. The fact that very few data exist in this area does not, of course, mean that same sex partnerships have been absent from the picture of family life in recent decades. In any case, what the existing data do show is that the number of registered civil partnerships is increasing, but only in specific, mostly metropolitan, areas and predominantly among men.

**2.2.11 The number of people living alone has increased significantly**

The discrepancy between the increased numbers of households in the UK in recent years and the lower increase in the number of families can, in part, be explained by an increase in the number of people living alone in the UK, as shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9. Proportions of single person households and persons living alone**

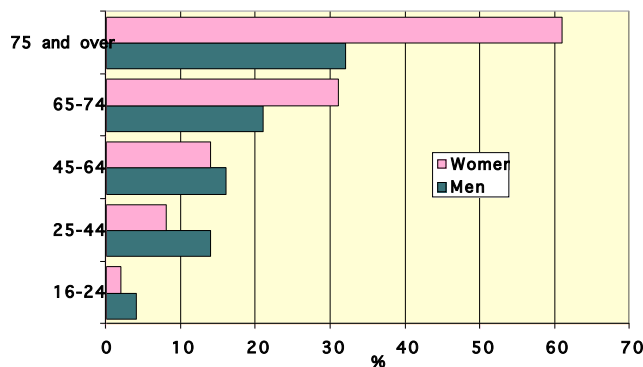


It is necessary to distinguish between a one person household (that is, a residence with a single occupier) and people living alone. It is possible for people to live alone in households inhabited by multiple occupants – as in the case of bed-sits, student accommodation, etc.

In the period between 1961 and 2004, the number of households in the UK increased by 7.8 million. In the same period, the number of families increased by 2.8 million. Since 1971, the number of people living alone, whether before, after, or instead of marriage or cohabitation, has almost doubled, with the most significant rises occurring up to 1995.

Britain's ageing population and sex differences in increased life expectancy are significant factors here. In 2006, more than 60% of women aged 75 and over lived alone, as shown in Figure 10. The proportion of older men living alone, however, is also increasing, with one third of men aged 75 and over living on their own in 2006, compared with less than a quarter in 1986/7.

**Figure 10. Persons living alone by gender**

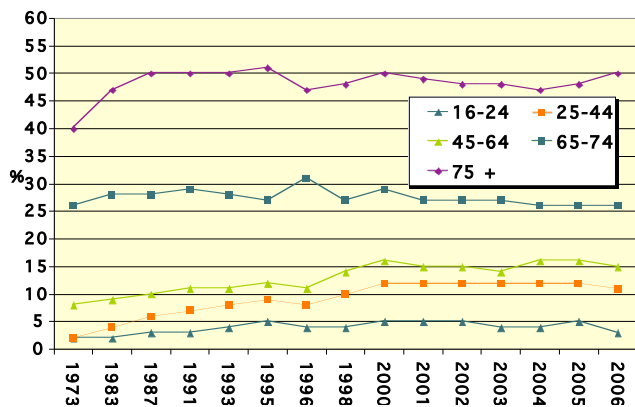


Below the 65-74 age range, men are more likely than women to live alone. This is particularly the case for men aged between 25 and 44. There has also been a considerable increase in the number of both men and women living alone in the 25-44 age range, increasing six fold between 1973 and 2006.

While this figure suggests a change in the mode of living for some people, which could perhaps be linked to broader social trends towards a delayed transition into family life, it is also worth noting that the trends in this area have been relatively stable since 2000, as shown in Figure 11. In fact, the number of people in their 20s to 50s living alone has fallen slightly to

just over 10%. This is somewhat contrary to the popular media image of the rise of the 'meal for one' society.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 11. Persons living alone by age

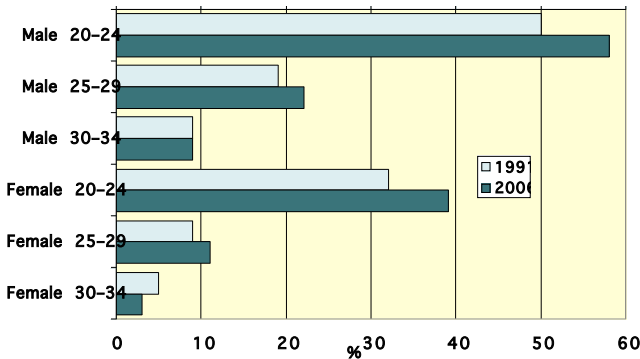


2.2.12 Children are now more likely to remain in the family home for longer than in the past

Delayed transitions from childhood to adulthood impact on the age at which offspring leave the family home permanently.

While children may leave temporarily to attend university or to live in intermediary households with peers, many do not permanently leave home until they are well into their mid-twenties.<sup>25</sup> In 2006, almost 60% of British men aged 20-24 still lived in the parental home, compared with just over 50% in 1991, as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Young people living in parental home



To put this in a broader European context, in Italy in 2001, 93% of men aged 21-25 still lived in the parental home, sometimes while married. In contrast, the proportion of men still living at home in the same age group in Denmark was only

<sup>24</sup> Data from: Censuses, Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency; Household estimates, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Household estimates, Scottish Executive; Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

<sup>25</sup> Survey of English Housing, Communities and Local Government, Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

27%. Maria Iacovou argues that two factors primarily influence these cross-national differences.<sup>26</sup> The first is the religious orientation of countries within the EU. In countries that have strong Catholic traditions men, in particular, stay in the parental home for significantly longer than those in more Protestant or less religious countries, as shown in Figure 13.

A second factor identified by Iacovou is the degree of welfare spending and, in particular, the availability of affordable rental housing in the public sector. As we can see from Figure 14 below, in those countries where a relatively high supply of public sector rented housing exists, men tend to leave the parental home at an earlier age.

Figure 13. Relationship between age of leaving home and degree of Catholicism/Orthodoxy

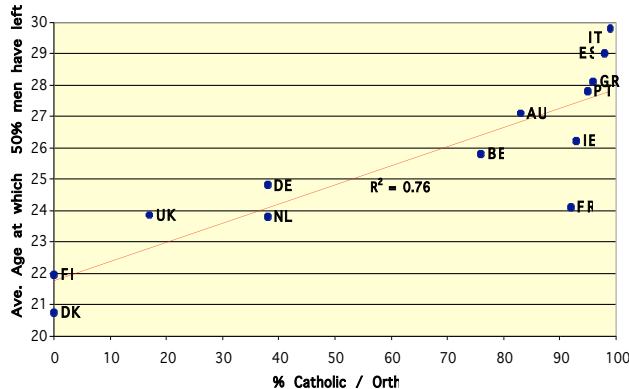
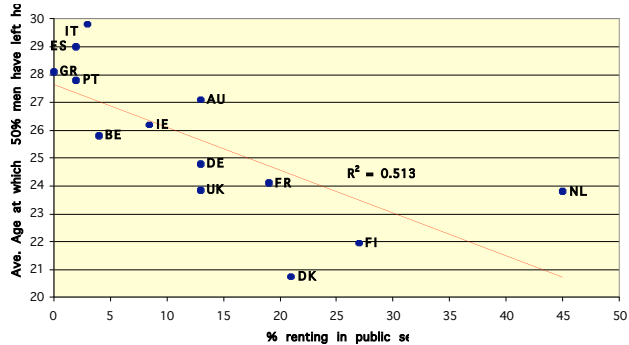


Figure 14. Relationship between age of leaving home and availability of rental housing



The increasing cost of private housing and a relative shortage of local authority rental housing in the in the UK is clearly a major factor in explaining why so many young men in Britain remain in the family home. This in turn has further impacts on the age at which people get married and have children – factors

<sup>26</sup> Iacovou, M. (2002) Regional Differences in the Transition to Adulthood. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 580, 40.

most commonly associated with a move away from the parental home.

This shift is an important one to bear in mind in relation to the changing nature of the family unit, not only in terms of its structure (what we have described as a 'narrowing' effect) but also the existence of families in time (what we have described as 'lengthening'). Families are often considered to consist of parents and children or teenagers, but these figures point to the fact that the family unit increasingly includes grown adult offspring as well.

It is, of course, important to recognise that staying at home for longer represents only one of a number of different but interconnected factors characterising the more complex 'transitions' into adulthood now facing young people. While many remain at home for longer, for example, some (mostly middle-class) young people may leave home at an earlier age but remain economically dependent on parents for an extended period of time. In either case, the family unit remains the primary source of support. Gill Jones suggests that increased dependency on parents in this way has become a normative aspect of young people's lives, but that this dependency can take a number of different forms.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of a more conventional set of transitions, the pathways to adulthood are more fractured and uncertain and can involve 'backtracking' on different academic, professional or personal trajectories. This diversity also implies that the levels of support needed by young people will vary according to the paths that they choose. Continuing in education, for example, may place a particular economic strain on parents, while becoming economically independent but living at home may involve more complex tensions within the social space of the family home. Differences in the expectations of children and parents about this relationship of dependency can become a frequent cause of tension within the family.

This has a range of implications in terms of social relations within the family, in terms of the economic (in)dependence of adult children living at home, negotiations of family time and space, and in terms of the processes by which new families are formed. Particular aspects of this larger theme are discussed in more detail in the following sections of this report.

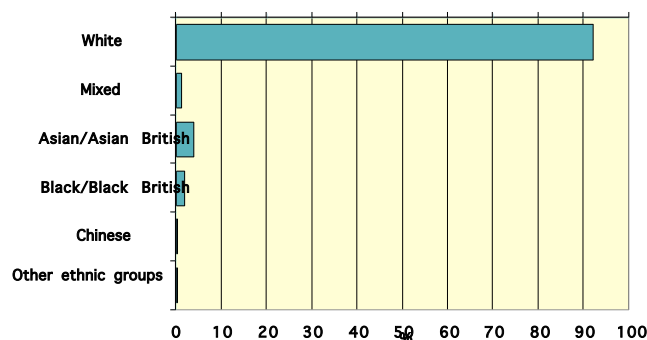
<sup>27</sup> Jones, G. (2006) *Young Adults and the extension of economic dependence*. Family and Parenting Institute.

### 2.2.13 Migration, ethnicity and religion

Changes in the structure of family life over the past 50 years have also resulted from the impact of international migration during this time. Immigration from Commonwealth countries (particularly from the Caribbean and Asia) during the decades after the Second World War had a profound effect on the sociocultural profile of Britain. These trends have obvious resonance in the UK today, as do ongoing patterns of in-migration from all over world – in recent years, most notably from the A8 countries of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>28</sup>

In certain respects, patterns and family organisation are related to ethnicity or religious belief – although, of course, these are not fixed or essential categories to which it is possible to assign a specific type of family organisation. Nor would it be helpful to overstate the size of Britain's minority populations in proportion to the population as a whole. As we can see from Figure 15, in 2001 (the year of the most recent census) over 92% of the UK population was White British and the largest other ethnic group was Asian/British Asian, accounting for 4% of the population. Black people constituted 2% of the population.

Figure 15. Ethnicity in the UK



This having been said, Richard Berthoud argues that general trends towards more diverse family structures can be observed across all minority populations in the UK, although these changes are experienced differently, generally speaking, by different minority groups.<sup>29</sup> The British Afro-Caribbean community is characterised by a low marriage rate and low rates of partnership, although the rate of mixed race partnerships between Afro-Caribbean men and White women is increasing.

<sup>28</sup> The A8 countries were those that joined the European Union in 2004.

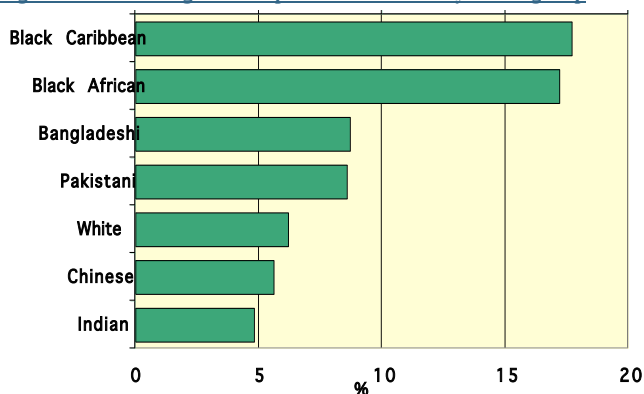
<sup>29</sup> Berthoud, R. (2005) *Family Formation in Multi-cultural Britain: Three patterns of diversity*, in T. Modood, G.C. Loury & S.M. Teles (Eds.) *Ethnicity, Social Mobility and Policy: comparing the UK and the US*. Cambridge University Press.



The number of lone parent families, headed overwhelmingly by single mothers, is also higher among the Afro-Caribbean population in the UK, as shown in Figure 16.

In contrast, Richard Berthoud indicates that rates of marriage are very high in the UK's South Asian population, with 75% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women currently getting married before the age of 25.

Figure 16. Percentage of lone parent households by ethnic group



The proportion of separations and divorces for South Asian partnerships is almost half that of the White population. South Asian families are also likely to be larger than other families in the UK, both in terms of greater numbers of children remaining in the family home, and in terms of multi-generational family units that incorporate older family members.

Differences in family structure can also be related to religious belief – although it is also important to remember that religion, like ethnicity, does not produce fixed social categories. Christian and Jewish families are least likely to have children living with them. In 2001, 40% and 41% of Christian and Jewish families respectively had children living at home. This contrasts with Muslim families, of which 73% had at least one dependent child living with them.

This divergence reflects to a large extent the varying age structures between these groups. In 2007, 34% of the Muslim population was under 16. This is over twice that of Christians and Jews. In 2006 Hindu families were the most likely to be headed by a married couple (96%), compared with 76% of Muslim families and approximately 75% Christian families. Of all Hindu families with dependent children, 4% were step-families, compared with 10% of Christian families.

There is, then, evidence that family structures and households can vary considerably according to ethnicity and religious belief. As noted above, however, just as this does not imply the essentiality of ethnic groups, nor does it suppose the universality of particular family formations within these groups. It is equally important that correlations between social factors such as ethnicity, family formation and social indicators such as poverty are also treated critically. For example, a direct link is often made between early motherhood and high risks of poverty. As a result, Pakistani and Bangladeshi poverty is often understood in terms of family formation. Karen Robson and Richard Berthoud, however, argue that age at first birth has little effect on the poverty experienced by ethnic minorities.<sup>30</sup>

Here we are reminded that each permutation of family structure must be considered in its particular social, cultural and historical context, rather than within a universal framework of dominant middle class moral and social values. The fact that certain family formations do not fit this framework does not imply that they are morally inferior and/or necessarily experience social or economic disadvantage.

**2.2.14 What are the key social and economic factors contributing to these changes?**

Each of the sections above has explored specific factors related to changes and continuities in family life and structures over the past decades. These factors are, of course, interlinked and many of the shifts can be seen within the context of broader social and economic trends – family forms change in certain ways according to the resources that they have at their disposal.

It was more likely, for example, for young couples to marry and make their own home at an earlier age in the more prosperous years leading up to the early 1970s than it is the case today. In the leaner years of the 1980s up to the present time, young adult offspring have spent more time in the parental home simply because it has (and is) often difficult to afford to do otherwise.

Another key factor underlying shifts within the family unit is the changing role of women in the family, in education and in the labour force. As the structure of the British economy and the UK labour force has changed over the past century, moving away from primary and secondary industries towards today's

<sup>30</sup> Berthoud, R. & Robson, K. (2006) Early fertility and ethnic groups in Britain, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29:1.

service-oriented and 'knowledge' economy, women's participation in the workforce has increased substantially.<sup>31</sup>

The increased participation of women in higher education and in labour outside of the family home has had an impact on family life in a number of ways. For many (but not all) women, the notion of pursuing further and/or higher education and entering the labour force has become a normalised part of social identity. As such, work and education become accepted points of social transition that take place alongside more traditional forms such as marriage and childbirth – the latter increasingly take place later in life for many women as a result.

A very substantial rise in the availability and use of contraception, particularly the pill, since the beginning of the 1970s, has also altered the extent to which couples are able to control both the number of children that they have (if any) and the time of life at which these children are born. It is important, however, to look at present day fertility rates in a longer-term historical perspective. Compared with rates in the mid-20th century 'baby boom', it appears that birth rates have dropped dramatically over the past 50 years. Taking a longer-term perspective, however, we see that there has been a downward trend in birth rates since the early 1900s, with the exception of the years that fall within the two anomalous 'baby booms' after the first and second world wars. The parallel decline in infant mortality must also be taken into account in this context.

In relation to marriage, we should note the decline in religiosity that has taken place across the UK in recent decades. In 1964, 74% of people belonged to a religion and attended services. By 2005 this figure had fallen to 34%.<sup>32</sup> The fact that fewer people now subscribe to the beliefs and practices of major world religions (principally Christianity in the UK) is likely to have an impact on popular conceptions of the ritual of marriage and its significance as a legally- and/or spiritually-binding act.

In terms of what is socially acceptable and economically feasible, marriage remains a common practice but is no longer a prerequisite of childbirth. In 1960, only 6% of recorded births took place outside of marriage. By 1980 this figure had increased to 12%, and by 2001 40% of births in the UK took place outside of marriage. We have already seen that this partly reflects the increasing popularity of cohabitation but can also

be explained in terms of a rise in the number of women having children outside of any kind of co-residential partnership. Kathleen Kiernan and her colleagues argue that the increase in the number of lone parent families (and particularly lone mother families) is connected in this sense to the ideological and practical separation of parenthood from the ritual of marriage.<sup>33</sup>

While lone parent families are still often portrayed negatively as a 'social problem' in academic and popular discourse, divorce and childbirth outside of marriage no longer carry the level of stigma that they did in the first half of the twentieth century. The level of transgression previously associated with marital breakdown or childbirth outside of wedlock meant that unmarried mothers were often hidden away, both in reality and in statistical records, up until the 1970s. For lone mother families, conditions began to change alongside shifts in welfare policy that recognised the needs of women raising children alone. Rather than relying on family networks, as was frequently the case in the past, welfare support has allowed lone mother families to gain increasing public recognition and financial autonomy – although this has always been tempered by the negative popular image of lone parent families as somehow 'lesser' than traditional married couple families and, worse still, as a self-perpetuating drain on the welfare system.

Shifting popular notions of gender, sexuality and sexual mores (particularly in connection to contraception), the increasing social acceptability of divorce and the more diverse social, educational and professional experiences of women are all further factors that have had an important impact on the increasing number of lone mother families in the UK today.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, the experiences of unmarried or never-married mothers and their children vary considerably according to social and cultural factors such as age, ethnicity, educational status of the mother, socio-economic status, etc. There is also considerable variation in terms of what kinds of relationships fit into the broader categories of married, cohabiting or lone- or non-partnered parents. Kathleen Kiernan and Kate Smith, for example, highlight the range of different relationships existing between unmarried mothers and the fathers of their children. Their analysis of findings from the Millennium Cohort Study showed that fathers who were involved with the mother at the

<sup>31</sup> Labour Force Survey, ONS

<sup>32</sup> British Social Attitudes Survey, 2007, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Kiernan, K. & Smith, K. (2003) Unmarried Parenthood: New Insights from The Millennium Cohort Study. *Population Trends*, 114, ONS.

<sup>34</sup> Kiernan, K., Lewis, J., & Land, H. (1998) *Lone Motherhood in Twentieth-century Britain: From Footnote to Front Page*. Oxford University Press.

time of a child's birth were more likely to see the child subsequently on a regular basis and to contribute to the costs of childcare. Here again we are reminded of the complexity and diversity that exists within and across the broader social categories by which families and children are defined.

### **2.2.15 What are the social implications of these changes for children's and families' commercial engagement?**

While men and women are certainly not always equal in terms of their experiences of working life, the participation of women in the labour force has changed the dynamic between partners within the family unit.

An increased level of economic independence for women not only challenges the traditional distinction between male and female roles within the family unit, in terms of childcare and family income, but also allows women a greater independence in terms of the choices that they make about family life.

Alternative forms of family formation that do not centre around the traditional notion of a male 'bread-winner', such as female-headed lone parent families, are made more viable, more commonplace and, by extension, more socially acceptable, by the increased economic independence of women. Increased participation in paid work, of course, does not necessarily equate to a reduction in the family responsibilities shouldered by women in terms of unpaid work, as we discuss in the following section.

A declining birth rate and a reduction in average household size indicates that 'nuclear' families are getting smaller. This has significance not only in terms of the structure of the family unit but also in terms of how families organise time and physical space, as we discuss in greater detail later in this report.

Commercial engagement is an integral aspect of how families organise time and space, but this is mediated through the particular kinds of interactions and family formations that are made possible in smaller nuclear family units. Socio-economic relations within the family (how families spend their money) are also altered in this sense. While the number of children per family has decreased, household income and expenditure has significantly increased (although not equally across all sections of society), particularly in households with a married or cohabiting couple and children where both parents are earning. As a result, parents have more money, in theory, to spend on fewer children, although whether this is in practice what happens is debatable – see Section 4 of this report. At the same time, however, the 'lengthening' of the family form also

means that parents must continue to support financially dependent offspring until later in life.

While the nuclear family has thus been reduced in size, the extent of the 'traditional' extended family has also been altered. Children of the present have fewer aunts, uncles and cousins – fewer consanguineous or 'blood' relatives. On another level, non-consanguineous kinship networks (step-fathers, half brothers, mother's partners, ex-step uncles, and so on) have increased – the result of a rise in the number of divorces, step-families, lone parent families and cohabiting couples. Children may have fewer 'blood' relatives now than in the middle of the twentieth century, but family networks are now often supplemented by other kinds of family relations. As with members of a nuclear family unit, the relationships between the members of extended family networks also involve complex and overlapping social and economic exchanges. The next section of this report explores these socio-economic relations in broad historical context by looking at household wealth, income and expenditure over the past 50 years.

### **2.2.16 How have these changes impacted on young people's attitudes?**

Do young people generally think that the shifts taking place in family structure are a positive aspect of modern life? Have these changes become normalised to the extent that we accept them as part and parcel of contemporary British society? Importantly, do children accept a broader, more dynamic notion of what 'family' means?

The Young Persons Attitudes Survey (2004) showed that 75% of males and 80% of females agreed that working mothers can establish a warm relationship with their children, a slight increase since the 1998 survey. Only 28% of boys and 23% of girls agreed that family life suffered if a mother had a full-time job, a slight decline since 1998. When asked if they thought it was the man's job to earn money and a woman's job to look after the family, 63% of boys disagreed, compared, perhaps not surprisingly, with a larger proportion of girls (81%). Most of those taking part also agreed that it was acceptable for unmarried couples to live together. There was an additional consensus that one parent can bring up a child just as well as two, increasing significantly from 59% in 1998 to 71% in 2004.

The data, then, seem to indicate that children and young people are accepting of the increasing diversity that can be seen in family structures, perhaps not least because these kinds of

understandings or representations of 'family life' (including those that incorporate more traditional, 'nuclear' family forms) make up part of their daily lived experiences.

## 3 The economic dimensions of family life

### 3.1 Introduction

The first section of this report has dealt with socio-demographic continuities and changes in British society during the past 50 years, highlighting the impact that these have had on the structure of the family unit and the way in which we think about the family as a means of social organisation. We now turn our attention specifically to trends in the economic dimensions of family life. Building on the premise that economic activity and, therefore, commercial engagement, is embedded in complex social activities, this section of the report begins with a longitudinal analysis of household income and expenditure and their impacts on the social lives of families over time. Finally, we focus specifically on the socio-economic role of children as both producers of wealth and as active consumers within the family unit – an issue that will be examined in more detail in section 3 of Project 2, *Ecology of Family Life*.

The trends in family income and wealth over the past half century indicate that, overall, families and households are financially better off than they were 50 years ago. Generally speaking, families have more disposable income now than they did in the past and are therefore able to spend more money on an increasingly large range of consumer goods and services. Consumption has, in this sense, become both a key economic activity and a fundamental aspect of social relations, not only within the family unit but in society more generally.

As the sociologist Jonathan Gershuny<sup>35</sup> has suggested, much of our time outside of work is taken up either with sleeping or with the consumption of the fruits of other people's labour. In relation to consumption, this marks a considerable change compared with spending patterns and notions of social identity prevalent before the 1950s. For better or worse, consumption now plays an important part in defining who we are in relation to others. Within the family, children play an important and active role in these processes and it is in the changing experiences of children as consumers within the family unit that

some of the most interesting and significant historical developments can be observed.

There is also evidence to suggest that changes in family income and wealth differ markedly according to family structure, socio-economic status and ethnicity. While the average disposable income of individual households has increased over time, wealth has also become more unequally distributed. Lone parent families, for example, have significantly lower incomes on average than married or cohabiting couples where both partners earn a salary. Given the increasing importance of consumption as a social and cultural activity, this disparity has significant implications in terms of the social and cultural capital of economically disadvantaged families.

A related shift in patterns of income, wealth and expenditure of families over the past 50 years has been the changing role of women in the workforce. An increasing number of families now have dual incomes, with an increasing number of women, including mothers, in paid work. This has led to a partial renegotiation of gendered roles and responsibilities within family life. While gender is certainly still a key factor in the organisation of the family unit (women still do most of the unpaid work in the home), the increasing economic independence of women raises a number of important questions about gendered notions of family, childcare, domesticity and the home. The economic activity and commercial engagement of women in this sense have had a significant impact not only on the realities of family earning and spending but also on ideas of what constitutes 'family' in modern Britain.

The economic role of children in family life is primarily related to consumption, which reshapes the consumption and expenditure patterns of the family unit as a whole. This, in turn, has led over the past 50 years to a shift in the construction of 'childhood' as a social phenomenon. During this time we have seen the development of multiple 'youth' market segments for products and services and children have become actively engaged in processes of both production and consumption. As different kinds of products become increasingly interlinked and cross-marketed, and advertising and media converge, it is increasingly difficult to draw the line between where the social begins and the commercial ends for both children and adults. Indeed, processes of consumption and commercial engagement in this sense raise important questions about how childhood and adulthood are defined in the overlapping spheres of commercial and family life.

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<sup>35</sup> Gershuny, J. (2003) *Changing Times: Work and Leisure in Post-industrial Society*. Oxford University Press.

In addressing these issues we seek answers to three key questions:

- How has family wealth, income and expenditure changed in recent years?
- What are the relationships between economic and social relations within family life in modern Britain?
- In particular, what is the socio-economic role of children in family life in modern Britain?

### 3.2 Key Points

#### 3.2.1 Income and wealth have increased, but so has economic inequality

People today in the United Kingdom are better off than in the past across a range of measures, but the benefits are not spread equally. Wealth has become even more concentrated at the top of the distribution over the past three decades, although relative inequality in these terms is less than was evident a century ago.

Income represents a flow of resources over a specified period of time either in cash or in kind. Wealth on the other hand describes the ownership of assets valued at a particular point in time. Thus, although often used interchangeably these relate to quite different concepts.

Household net wealth more than doubled in real terms between 1971 and 2005 but growth over this period has not been even, as shown in Figures 17 and 18.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 17. Real disposable household income in the UK

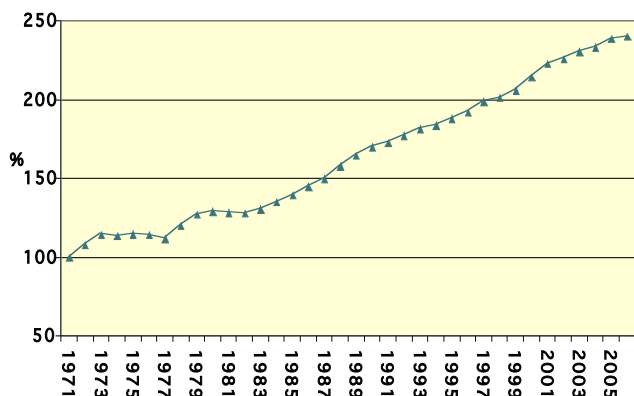
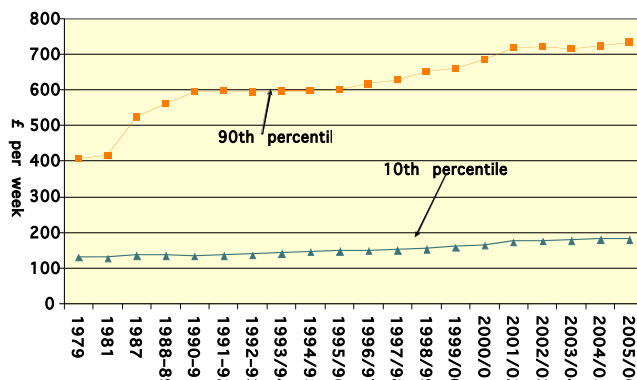


Figure 18. Distribution of real disposable income per head in the UK



Estimates produced by HM Revenue show that in 2003, one half of the population owned 7% of total wealth. This proportion has scarcely changed since 1991. Conversely, in 2003 the share of the wealthiest 1% of the population was 23% of total wealth, increasing from 17% in 1991.

These figures suggest that a significant minority of people in the UK are affected by a relative lack of material resources. Inequalities in standards of health have also widened. Lone-parent families, those with health conditions or disabilities, older workers and minority ethnic groups have been identified as having a high labour market disadvantage. Lack of participation in the labour market is, of course, an important indicator of social exclusion.<sup>37</sup>

#### 3.2.2 'Poverty' and 'inequality' need to be clarified

It is important to emphasise here that income and wealth are among a number of different and sometimes divergent indicators that are used to measure inequality, poverty and social exclusion. While it is not appropriate to explore in detail here the complex debates surrounding the nature of poverty, it is worth clarifying the different ways in which poverty can be defined, particularly in relation to families and children.

Poverty is most frequently defined in either absolute or relative terms in relation to income, although poverty and social exclusion also involve a wide range of other social, cultural and economic factors. 'Absolute' poverty is often defined in relation to a fixed level of minimum income necessary for survival – normally around US\$1-2 per day. In the UK there are few people, if any, who live on such small incomes, meaning that this definition of absolute poverty is largely irrelevant in the British context. 'Relative' poverty, on the other hand, is useful because it relates to the median household income and

<sup>36</sup> Babb, P. et al. (2004) (Eds.), *Focus on Social Inequalities*, Office for National Statistics.

<sup>37</sup> Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions.

provides an indication of the number of households that have significantly less than average income.

According to official government measures, those households with less than 60% of median household income are normally considered to be experiencing poverty (sometimes before and sometimes after housing costs have been deducted). This threshold measurement of poverty is often criticised because it disguises the number of households that fall far below 60% of median household income.

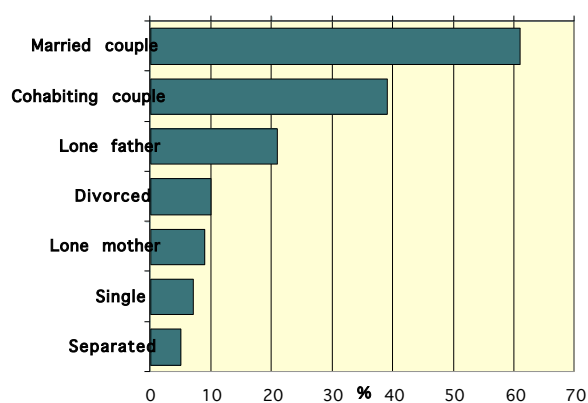
It is, of course, worth bearing in mind that poverty in its broadest sense involves other issues such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographical location, cultural beliefs regarding work and education, health issues, disability, housing, etc. Family type can also be an important factor, as we highlight below. We should also note that income inequality is not necessarily reflective of poverty because it describes variations in levels of income across the whole distribution of income, rather than the difference between those above or below the 'poverty line'. Measurements of income alone do not necessarily reveal the more complex matrix of social factors that contribute to the marginalisation of certain individuals, families or communities.

Looking at income poverty, however, is nevertheless a valuable way of putting the real increases in household income into perspective. While Figure 17 shows a gradual increase in real disposable household income since the 1970s, for example, it is also the case that the number of people living in households below 60% of median household income has increased during the same period, reducing only towards the end of the 1990s, before rising again in 2005/6. An income-focused approach to poverty is useful in providing a quantifiable measurement of the number of people who are disadvantaged and excluded from aspects of social life because of low income (that is, their social and cultural capital is limited in certain ways by their lack of economic capital).

### 3.2.3 Family income varies according to family type

Gross weekly household income varies between different types of families with dependent children. In 2001, married couples with children had the highest incomes. Six out of ten of these families had household incomes of over £500, compared with four out of ten cohabiting couples with dependent children, and one in ten lone parents, as shown in Figure 19.

**Figure 19. Percentages of families with dependent children earning over £500 per week**



Among lone mothers, 9% had household incomes of £500 and over, compared with 21% of lone fathers. Lone parents had markedly lower gross weekly household incomes than married or cohabiting couples with dependent children. Over a third (36%) of lone parent families had gross weekly household incomes of £150 or less, compared with 10% of married couples and 15% of cohabiting couples with dependent children. Lone mothers who had never been married were particularly likely to have low gross weekly household incomes. Over half of single mothers (51%) had incomes of £150 or less compared with 28% of divorced lone mothers and 26% of separated lone mothers.<sup>38</sup>

A similar picture is reflected in the median incomes for each of the family types, as shown in Table 2.<sup>39</sup> Here we can see that while the median income for families comprising a married couple and children was over £500 per week in 2007, lone mothers with children received much less – between £150 and £250 per week. Per capita figures – those indicating the income per adult and per child – are unfortunately not easily retrieved from the existing datasets.

Family type	Media income category
Married couple	£450-500+
Cohabiting couple	£450-500
Lone father	£350-400
Divorced	£250-300
Lone mother	£150-250

<sup>38</sup> General Household Survey, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> The calculation of median incomes is slightly complicated by the fact that there are an even number of income categories from <£100 to >£500 per week. This means that the medians tend to fall between two categories, each covering £50 of income.

### 3.2.4 Family income varies according to ethnicity

While the number of low income households in the UK has diminished by one fifth over the last decade, there is significant variation in household income not only according to family type but also according to ethnicity. Generally speaking, the larger ethnic minority communities in Britain have always experienced lower levels of income than the White population. This has been the case since the post-war years when large numbers of migrants from Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Asia arrived in the UK. Today there are still twice as many people from ethnic minorities living in low income households than White people in Britain, although we need to stress again that there is significant variation within the White population as well. More than half of people from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds live in low income households.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as Modood suggests, if there is an ethnically-based underclass in Britain it is the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.<sup>41</sup> The Indian community is the ethnic minority with the lowest number of people living in low-income households but, overall, almost half of children from ethnic minority backgrounds live in low-income households, compared with one quarter of all white children.

Wages and salaries are the largest component of household income in the UK regardless of ethnicity. The relative importance of wages and salaries, however, varies from 73% among Indian households to 54% in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households. Conversely 26% of income of Pakistani and Bangladeshi households comprise social security benefits (other than the state retirement pension) compared with 7% of Indian households.

Self-employment income is around twice as important to White, mixed Asian, Asian British and Chinese groups (between 9-11%) than among Black or Black British groups (5% of gross income). The state retirement pension forms 6% of gross income for White households and 5% for Black Caribbean households, compared with 2-3% for the other ethnic groups, reflecting the younger age structure of these populations.<sup>42</sup>

Bangladeshi and Pakistani households often contain a larger number of people compared with white households, indicating that lower levels of income are divided between more people in

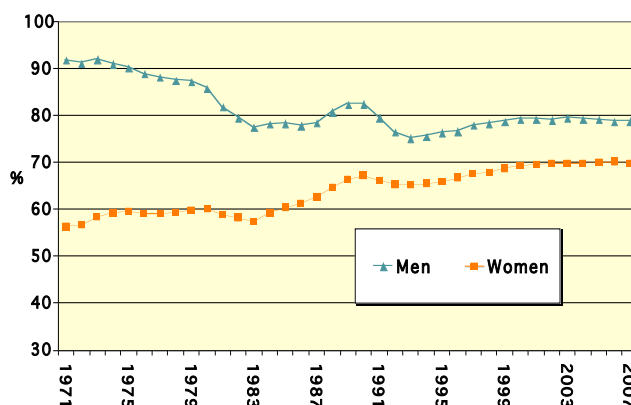
certain ethnic minority households. This is a factor that may compound income inequality even further.<sup>43</sup>

The level of poverty experienced by ethnic groups also varies according to region. In London, for example, the rate of low income for white British people is in proportion with the rest of the UK. For ethnic minorities in London, however, it is much more pronounced – over half live in low income households.

### 3.2.5 Women work and earn more, but still earn less than men

Female participation in the labour force has increased significantly in the past 50 years, reflecting broader changes in society, including increased access to further and higher education and a shift in employment away from manufacturing towards service industries. In total, the female working-age employment rate increased from 56% in 1971 to 70% in spring 2007 when women constituted 46% of those in employment, as shown in Figure 20. This is in stark contrast with the 1950s when male bread-winners were in a much more significant majority.<sup>44</sup>

Figure 20. Employment in Britain by gender



According to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, however, a gender gap in terms of earnings still exists, although this gap is slowly narrowing. In April 2007 the median hourly earnings, excluding overtime, of women working full-time in the UK was £10.46 – 87% of the median earnings of men. The gender pay gap (as measured by median hourly pay excluding overtime of full-time employees) narrowed between 2006 and 2007 to its lowest value since records began – 12.6%. The median hourly rate for men went up 2.8% to £11.96, while the

<sup>40</sup> Palmer, G., MacInnes, T. & Kenway, P. (2007) *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion*. New Policy Institute / Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>41</sup> Modood (1992)

<sup>42</sup> Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions.

<sup>43</sup> See Kenway, P. & Palmer, G. (2007) *Poverty among ethnic groups: how and why does it differ?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation / New Policy Institute.

<sup>44</sup> Babb, P. et al., 2004 (eds.), *Focus on Social Inequalities*, Office for National Statistics.

rate for women increased by 3.1% to £10.46.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in 2007, women's weekly earnings, including overtime, were also lower than those of men. This was partly because women worked fewer paid hours per week.

Women's earnings increased more slowly across the bottom 10% of the distribution than men's, with a growth of 3.0% compared with 3.7% for their male counterparts. The hourly earnings of the top 10% grew by 2.8% and 3.2% respectively.<sup>46</sup> According to an Economic and Market Review by the Office for National Statistics, men's earnings progress faster than women's. The rate of increase is similar up until the age of 40, but thereafter the rate of pay increase is steeper for men than for women. It is argued that about one third of the gap between men and women's earnings can be explained by observable factors such as occupation, age, industry and region, but the remaining two-thirds are due to other factors, including discrimination. These findings have important implications for family life, particularly for single mothers.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2.6 Family spending has increased significantly in the past 50 years

The levels and forms of expenditure seen in households today are in many ways quite different from those experienced during the Second World War and the early 1950s. There were, of course, tight restrictions on what people were able to buy and sell during the war years but the end of the war did not bring a rapid end to rationing. Access to consumer goods and services was still restricted until 1954. It was after this point that Britain began to experience a shift towards consumption as a key social and economic activity – a trend which continues in the present as the first teenagers of consumer society become grandparents.

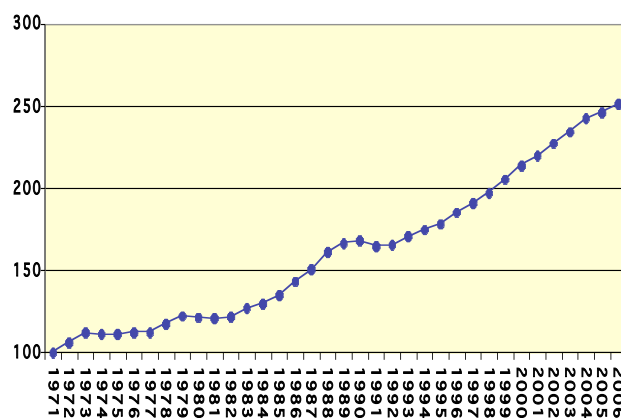
This shift is reflected in changes to household expenditure. In 2006 the total spending by households in the UK was two and a half times that in 1971, taking inflation into account, as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Total household spending (1971 baseline = 100)

<sup>45</sup> ONS 2007 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ashel1107.pdf>

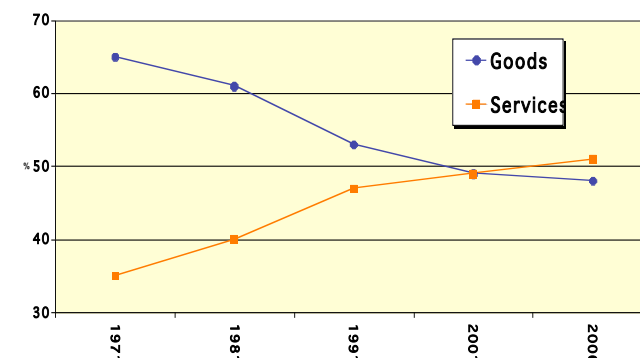
<sup>46</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics.

<sup>47</sup> ONS Study looks at factors behind gender pay gap. Economic & Labour Market Review <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/elmr0808.pdf>



This has been accompanied by substantial changes in the way households allocate expenditure to goods and services. In 1971, 65% of total household expenditure was on goods compared with 35% on services. Since then, the proportion allocated to goods has decreased and the amount allocated to services has increased. By 2001, total expenditure on services exceeded that on goods for the first time, as shown in Figure 22.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 22. Spending on goods and services



Household spending is analysed according to an internationally agreed system, the Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose (COICOP). Using this classification, in 2006 the second highest category (after housing) was the transport category at £62 per week. This included £23.40 on purchase of vehicles, £28.60 on the operation of personal transport such as petrol, diesel, repairs and servicing and £10.00 on rail, tube and bus fares. The proportions of household income allocated to particular categories are summarised in Table 3.

Category	% expenditure
Housing, water and fuel	20

<sup>48</sup> Office for National Statistics.



Transport	15
Recreation and culture	12
Restaurants and hotels	12
Miscellaneous goods and services	12
Food and non-alcoholic drinks	9
Clothing and footwear	6
Household goods and services	6
Alcoholic drinks and tobacco	4
Health	2
Communication	2
Education	1

Expenditure on communications, such as postage and telephones, in the UK is almost nine times greater than it was in 1971. The third highest category of spending is recreation and 'culture', at £58 a week. This includes spending on TV, computers, newspapers, books, leisure activities and package holidays. On average, £13.20 per week is spent on package holidays abroad, compared with a mere £0.90 per week on package holidays in the UK. The volume of spending by British tourists abroad was around eight times greater in 2006 than it was in 1971.

The amount spent on 'culture' per week – what might be more accurately described as the consumption of culture – is of importance here because it provides some evidence of the significance that consumption in general plays in the daily lives of household members today. The fact that 'culture' ranks second highest in the list of expenditures for the average household signals the increased importance of domesticated leisure activities, including watching television and using computers.

Some of these figures can be compared with household spending data available from the middle of the twentieth century. It would appear that we not only spend more as families but, perhaps not surprisingly, we also spend our money in different ways. For five decades the Family Expenditure Survey and the Expenditure and Food Surveys have recorded changes and continuities in the nation's household spending habits. In 1957, food and non-alcoholic drinks accounted for the highest proportion of average weekly expenditure, taking up 33% of the household budget. In the 50 years since then the proportion we spend on food has fallen by 15%. Housing (including mortgage interest payments and rent)

is now the single largest item, accounting for 19% of spending. In 1957, housing accounted for just 9% of spending.

Expenditure on leisure remained fairly stable between 1957 and 1977. From 1977 to 2006, however, such expenditure increased significantly. In contrast, between 1957 and 2006 the proportion of the average weekly household budget spent on fuel and power halved, from 6% to 3%. Spending on clothing and footwear also halved from 10% to 5%.

The 2007 Family Spending Report includes rankings of the 'top 50' items bought during the half-century. While it is not possible to compare this directly with all of the data available from 1957, this list offers insights into changing patterns of household spending and housing-related costs.

Housing related expenditure was number one on the list for both 1957 and 2006. The remaining 'top 10' items, however, are very different. In 1957 they included four food and beverage items, including meals bought away from home, milk (fresh), poultry and other meat. In 2006, the top 10 included only one food item – restaurant and café meals.

The purchase of coal and other fuels featured in eighth place in 1957 but fell off the list in 2006. In 1957, cigarettes were at number two in the top 50, accounting for almost 6% of total expenditure. They have since fallen to number 30. The proportion of expenditure on running a vehicle was very similar in 1957 and 2006. In 2006, petrol, diesel and other motor oils ranked at number 3 and in 1957 ranked just one place lower. Cosmetics, hair products and hairdressing have remained in much the same place (40) over the past five decades.

It is interesting to note how the patterns of expenditure have changed over time in relation to actual amounts spent. Between 1971 and 2006 the amount spent on food and non-alcoholic drinks has increased by 52%, while falling as a proportion of total expenditure. The only category showing a decline in the volume of spending over this period is alcohol (for consumption at home) and tobacco.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2.7 Household goods: 'luxuries' have become 'necessities'

The data noted above indicate a significant change in the importance of consumption as a part of family life. Nostalgic visions of family life before the rise of 'consumer society' often revolve around the notion of a 'safer' society, where community

<sup>49</sup> Expenditure and Food Survey, Office for National Statistics.

spirit prevailed and one did not have to lock one's door. If this was indeed the case it was probably because there was not a great deal to be lost from leaving the door unlatched. Now, it would appear that the case is very different. Consumer goods have become an intrinsic part of the landscape of the family home, with particular goods – televisions (as with radios before) – becoming central to the organisation of family time and space. Amenities that were once available only to a minority of households in the 1950s are now frequently considered to be necessities, not least because of the relationship between consumption and social and cultural capital. Access to a television at home, for example, has been widespread from the 1970s to the present – 93% of households owned TVs in 1972, compared to 99% in 2002.<sup>50</sup> In 2008, 100% of children claimed use of a television within their household. In 1956,<sup>51</sup> only 37% of households owned a television.<sup>52</sup>

According to the 2002 General Household Survey, only 37% of households had central heating in 1972 – by 2006 this had increased to 95%.<sup>53</sup> By the mid 1990s most homes had a freezer, washing machine, fixed telephone and television. Households owning home computers increased from 13% in 1985 to 67% in 2006, while 58% of homes had broadband in 2008. Mobile phone use also increased dramatically during the 1990s. By 2000 nearly three fifths (58%) of all households owned a mobile phone, increasing to 75% in 2002. By 2008 the number of individuals with mobile phones had risen to 86%. Among children aged 8-15, 77% owned a mobile phone in 2008, compared with 65% in 2005. This should be considered alongside the increasing convergence of different kinds of digital technology (cameras, music players and internet browsing facilities on mobiles, for example) and the resulting expansion of access to different media sources within the home.

In 1972 just over half the population had access to one car or van. By 1995, this had increased to 71%. The proportion of households with one car remained fairly constant over this

period, and was 75% in 2002. The proportion of households with two or more cars or vans, however, has increased substantially. By 1972, 8% of households had two cars and 1% had three or more. By 1995, 22% had two cars and 4% had three or more. These figures have remained fairly constant since then. Just as the rise in access to central heating has altered family uses of domestic space, so too has access to cars allowed families to alter how they interact with public spaces outside of the home.

### 3.2.8 Spending on leisure has also increased, but is unequally distributed

Expenditure on leisure activities has increased over time. According to the Families and Children study 2006, however, there are considerable disparities in what families can afford. The report highlights the fact that out of a list of seven 'deprivation' items, the most common was being unable to afford a one week holiday away without staying with relatives.<sup>54</sup> The report also indicated that one third of families with children were unable to afford any of the items or activities listed – e.g. celebrations with presents on special occasions, toys and sports gear for each child, a night out once a month, etc.

Lone parents (61%) were more likely to go without at least one leisure activity than couple families (25%). Families in the lowest and second income quintiles were groups more likely to be unable to afford at least one leisure activity (66% and 53% respectively). Lone parents without work, or who worked less than 16 hours per week, were twice as likely to report going without at least one leisure activity because they could not afford it, compared with lone parents working 16 hours or more per week.

Other families particularly likely to not afford a leisure activity included those with a Black mother (61%), families who were social tenants (68%), private tenants (58%) and families with at least one disabled child or one disabled adult. These figures are again significant if we consider the importance of spending on leisure in terms of social and cultural capital. The inability of lower income families to provide what are increasingly considered to be necessities of social life for their children – a family holiday, for example – has strong implications for the continuing reproduction of socio-economic inequalities.

<sup>50</sup> *Living in Britain*, General Household Survey, 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Ofcom (2008).

<sup>52</sup> Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB), *Television Ownership in Private Domestic Households: 1956-2008*. <http://www.barb.co.uk/tvfacts.cfm?fullstory=true&includepage=ownership&flag=tvfacts> -accessed 3/09/08

<sup>53</sup> As will be seen, this change has had a significant impact on the ways in which people use domestic space. Children's bedrooms are now comfortable places to be during the winter, where before they would have run a cold second to the warmth of the communal family or living room.

<sup>54</sup> *Families and Children Study (FACS)*, 2006, Table 10.2 <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rpports2007-2008/rrep486.pdf>

### 3.2.9 Spending on childcare varies with income and family type

The changing nature of women's engagement in the work force over the past 50 years has led to the institutionalisation of what was once a peripheral service. Access to and spending on childcare in today's society, however, varies with socio-economic status. In the 2006 Children and Families Study it was found that families with high incomes and mothers who were not in paid employment were twice as likely to use formal childcare arrangements compared with lower income families. Overall, however, over half of children whose mothers worked were in some form of childcare (formal or informal) independent of household income.

Children with lone parents working 16 or more hours per week have the highest levels of childcare. Where both parents work, childcare is provided most often by a grandparent. This is the same for couples where only one parent works 16 hours or more per week.

For single mothers who also work, the most common form of childcare is also a grandparent (33%) or ex-husband or non-resident partner (15%). These arrangements vary according to children's age and also according to whether or not they are engaged in formal education. The figures, however, indicate that the increasing tendency for mothers to engage in paid work brings with it opportunities and/or obligations for fathers and grandparents to become more actively involved in caring for children. In 2005, nearly a half of children under the age of 5 who had working mothers were looked after in formal childcare. This fell to one quarter for children aged 5-10 and fell further when children reached secondary school age.

#### 3.2.10 Families with children spend the most

In 2006, the average weekly household expenditure was highest among households consisting of two adults plus children – £700 per week. The lowest expenditure, predictably, was among one-person retired households who were mainly dependent on state pensions – £138 per week.

Expenditure also varies with the age of the household reference person. Those households where the reference person was aged 30 to 49 spent the most – on average, £554 per week. Those where the reference person was aged 75 or over had the lowest average household expenditure of £212 per week. Families with young children, however, are also most likely to receive financial help from their relatives – lone parents in particular. Of families where the youngest child is under five, 43% receive

such assistance. Families with children in their late teens are least likely to receive financial assistance in this way (19%).

While families with children spend the most, they are also frequently concerned about not having enough to cover costs. When asked whether money ever ran out before the end of the week, respondents to the Family and Children Study 2006 provided a range of answers depending on family type. Out of all families, 21% suggested that money frequently ran out before the end of the week. This was a particular worry for lone parents who were out of work or working less than 16 hours a week, with 50% reporting running out of money by the end of the week. Around one fifth of lone parents working more than 16 hours a week said that they worried about money 'all of the time', in comparison with 7% of couple families where both partners worked more than 16 hours per week.

#### 3.2.11 Differences in household spending exist between ethnic groups

Just as family income varies according to ethnic background, so too does family expenditure. As with income, it is possible to see variations both within and across different ethnic communities in terms of how families spend their money. Between the years 2003/04 and 2005/06, total expenditure was lower for household reference persons (HRPs) who defined themselves as Asian, Black or Mixed Race compared with White HRPs. Average expenditure per head for households for Asians was £125 per week compared with an average of £142 for Black and Mixed Race households. This contrasts with an average of £187 for households where the HRP was White.

Expenditure on alcohol, tobacco and narcotics was far lower in households where the HRP was Asian, Black or Other as opposed to White (and much lower than could be explained just by the differences in total expenditure). Ethnic minority groups allocated less of their expenditure to recreation and culture, restaurants and hotels than White households. Higher proportions of expenditure, however, were allocated to education and communication among Black and other groups. For Mixed, Black and Other groups, total expenditure on housing, fuel and power (including rent but not mortgage payments) was higher than White groups.

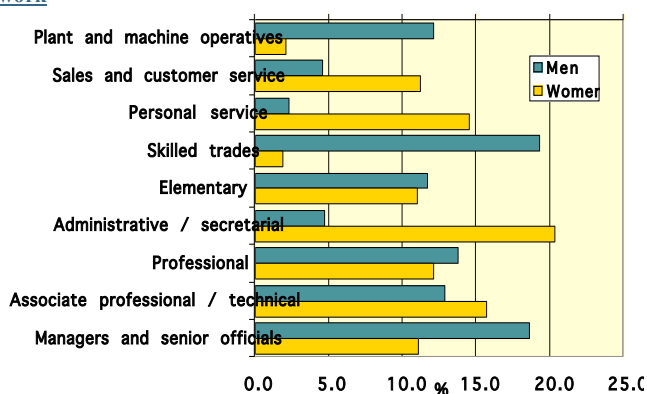
#### 3.2.12 The labour market has undergone radical changes

Employment is linked in obvious ways to the levels of income and expenditure that families are able to achieve and the leisure activities that they can experience, just as unemployment is linked to social exclusion. Families that experience

unemployment are frequently less able to access particular forms of consumption than families with members in full-time employment.

The UK labour market has experienced significant structural change of the past 50 years, leading to a substantial decline in jobs in primary and secondary industries and an increase in jobs in the service sector. According to the 2001 General Household Survey, 10% of people were in the higher professional and managerial group. Men were much more likely than women to be classified in the higher professional and managerial group, with 16% of men and 5% of women represented, as shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Proportions of men and women in various categories of work



### 3.2.13 Lone parents are still most likely to be unemployed and in poverty

Until recently, many lone-parent households experienced high levels of unemployment and poverty. Among lone-parent households with dependent children the proportion of worklessness is 43% – much higher than the overall household rate of 16%. This, however, is an improvement on a peak of 54% in the early 1990s, when the overall unemployment rate for households was 18%.<sup>55</sup> Women are over-represented in low-income jobs and have lower employment rates than men. On average, women also have lower pay at key stages of their life cycles. For example, both lone mothers and single older women are more likely to fall into poverty. These disadvantages partly stem from the fact that women are also more likely than men to

have responsibilities caring for dependent children as well as being employed in lower-paid occupations.<sup>56</sup>

Female economic inactivity has continued to decline as more women move into the labour market - from 4% in 1971 to 27% in 2003. Men, however, have been systematically withdrawing from the labour market. In spring 2003 16% were economically inactive - this is more than three times the number in 1971. This is most apparent amongst those aged above 50 and also those with low levels of educational attainment. Underlying this trend has been the rapid expansion of 'outsourcing' manufacturing and production to developing countries.

### 3.2.14 Ethnic minorities still have the lowest paid jobs and highest rates of unemployment

The levels of poverty experienced by ethnic groups, noticeably the British Indian population, has improved over the past 50 years. Through the practice of 'chain migration' by South Asians, ethnic minority groups have become increasingly well-established with job opportunities for friends and family members often sourced by those already in the country. The socio-economic position of ethnic minorities within Britain over time, however, cannot be understood without an appreciation of the nuanced nature of the ethnic minority 'community' itself.

Today, Ethnic minority groups make up about 8% of the population. They have, however, a younger age profile than the population as a whole and have accounted for over half the growth of Britain's working population over the past decade. These groups experience relatively high unemployment risks and earning gaps that can have major material consequences.

Men and women from non-White ethnic groups were more likely to be economically inactive than White groups. Between 2002-3 the overall employment rate for members of ethnic minority groups was 58% compared to 74% of the White population.<sup>57</sup>

There are considerable differences between ethnic minority groups in terms of employment and economic inactivity. The UK's Indian population, for example, has fairly similar levels of employment to White groups. The 2001/2 Annual Labour Force Survey showed that Bangladeshi and Chinese men had particularly high levels of economic inactivity (31% of each

<sup>55</sup> Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

<sup>56</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury from Labour Force Survey.

<sup>57</sup> Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey.

group), but for very different reasons. Bangladeshi and Pakistani women had the highest rates of economic inactivity, at 78% and 72% respectively. Most of these women were primarily involved in childcare, domestic work and other family responsibilities.

Employment rates for British born minority ethnic groups are generally lower than those of British born whites with the same qualifications, although there are signs that relative employment is improving over time. This is with the notable exception of British born Afro-Caribbean and Bangladeshi groups, however, whose levels of employment have declined over recent years despite a general improvement in economic conditions.

### 3.2.15 Intergenerational income mobility has decreased

The picture of intergenerational mobility is a complicated one and cannot be explained in terms of education alone. Research suggests, however, that the expansion in higher education in particular has disproportionately benefited higher income families, allowing for the social reproduction of differences according to socio-economic status.<sup>58</sup> Even with increased levels of access to further and higher education there remain divisions in terms of the kinds of institutions, qualifications and, eventually, employment opportunities that people may access.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2.16 Overall, the level of child poverty in Britain is declining; but child poverty still remains high

In the last 10 years child poverty has declined considerably overall in Britain according to the indicators currently used by the government. In 2006-7 there were 3.9 million children living in low income households, a reduction of 12% (0.5 million) since 1998-99.<sup>60</sup> Levels of child poverty, however, actually doubled between the 1970s and the 1990s and levels of child poverty in the UK remain some of the highest in the developed world. Indeed, levels of child poverty have actually increased in the UK since 2004-5.<sup>61</sup> The government's ambitious plans to eradicate child poverty by 2020 appear to

be yielding some results, but many children still live below the poverty line.<sup>62</sup>

Child poverty is currently defined in official terms according to three inter-related, tiered indicators that involve measurements of income, although as we have already seen defining poverty is made difficult by the fact that poverty and social exclusion are underpinned by a host of other social and economic factors, not least among which are ethnicity, socio-economic status and family background. 'Absolute' low income is used to measure household income in real terms relative to a low income baseline set in 1998-9. This rather arbitrary measurement of absolute low income (essentially measuring poverty since the Labour government came to power in 1997) is combined with measurements of 'relative low income' which use the same threshold of 60% of median household income to define the poverty line.

Finally, this is combined with a measurement of 'material deprivation' and low income combined, which measures more broadly the number of children living in households that are both materially deprived and which are below 70% of the median household income.<sup>63</sup> 'Material deprivation' is helpful because it recognises the significance of consumption as a social and cultural activity – or rather, it recognises the profound negative social effects of not having access to certain material goods, consumer items or leisure activities beyond those necessary for mere physical survival.

The difficulty, however, lies in deciding how 'material deprivation' should be defined, as the material 'essentials' of social life change over time. In the 2006 Families and Children Study, for example, material deprivation was defined in terms of access to a range of consumer items and leisure activities, such as having friends over for a meal or going on a family holiday, but such categories are likely to change as consumption and leisure patterns shift.

This particular method of measuring child poverty is relatively new, making it difficult in particular to draw comparisons over

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Machin (2005).

<sup>59</sup> See Furlong & Cartmel (2007) pp.45-47.

<sup>60</sup> This figure is for children living in low income households after deducting housing costs. The equivalent figure for children living in low income households before deducting housing costs would be 2.9million.

<sup>61</sup> Palmer et al. (2007)

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<sup>62</sup> This does not, however, imply that children themselves necessarily identify with being 'poor'. Research conducted by Liz Sutton et al in 2007, for example, showed that children in both high and low income houses were likely to consider themselves neither 'rich' nor 'poor', but somewhere in between. Most children associated poverty with the developing world, or with beggars and homeless people in the UK (see Sutton, L., Smith, N., Dearden, C. & Middleton, S. (2007) A Child's View of Social Difference. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>63</sup> See for example, H.M. Treasury/Department for Work and Pensions/DCSF, Ending Child Poverty: everybody's business.

time in terms of quantifiable levels of 'material deprivation'. Measured in terms of the number of children living in low income households, it is possible to see that child poverty increased substantially between the late 1960s, when one tenth of children lived in 'poor' households, and the mid to late 1990s, when roughly one third of children lived in low-income households (34% in 1996-7). This figure fell to 28% of children living in low income households in 2004-5, but had increased to 30% by 2006-7.

Children in lone parent families in particular are more likely to live in low income households. Half of all lone parent families are on low incomes, in comparison with 20% of couples with children.<sup>64</sup> Not surprisingly, child poverty is also much more likely in households where there are no working adults, although parents in low income households (whether working or not) often 'go without' so that their children can have more.

Christina Patazis and her colleagues, for example, found that 30% of parents reported going without new clothes and 4% without adequate food so that their children did not have to do so.<sup>65</sup> Susan Middleton and her colleagues came to similar conclusions in their study of family spending on children.<sup>66</sup> A large percentage of mothers (and particularly single mothers on income support) claimed to go without certain clothes, shoes, and other consumer items in order to provide for their children. Despite the best efforts of parents in low income households, then, child poverty continues to be a serious issue in the UK and is a key factor in the continued reproduction of inequality and disadvantage as children move into adulthood.

Looking at inequality, Leon Feinstein and colleagues reinforce the fact that socio-economic circumstances at birth have a considerable impact on outcomes later in life.<sup>67</sup> Beyond income, family 'background' – the complex matrix of social and cultural factors that make up the fabric of family life – plays an important role in shaping the kinds of opportunities that are available to children. Children are involved in creating the cultural world of the family and obviously play an active role in shaping their own futures, but structural inequalities make it much more

difficult for some children to access certain aspects of social life, particularly in terms of participation in education, but also more generally in relation to consumer items and leisure activities.

### 3.3 What is the relationship between the economic and the social within family life in modern Britain?

The kinds of continuities and changes in family and household income, wealth, expenditure and consumption outlined above have considerable implications in terms of the social life of the family. As stressed earlier, it is impossible to separate the social aspects of family life from the economic contexts in which they take place. Economic relations within the family inevitably have an impact on social relations, and vice versa. The following section explores a number of the social factors that accompany changes to the economic profile of households and families over the past half century.

#### 3.3.1 Consumption: a common language for the family?

One of the most striking shifts demonstrated in the data above is an overall (if unequal) rise in household income and a concomitant rise in spending, particularly on consumer products in the area of 'culture' – or what we have termed the consumption of culture.

Over the course of the past century consumer culture has become of central importance in Western societies such as ours, not only as a focus for economic activity but also as a fundamental building block for social identity and social and cultural capital. Consumption and popular culture, however, served as a vehicle for both positive and negative social exchanges in families before the 'teenager' was more explicitly recognised and targeted as a lucrative market segment during the 1950s, and it would be misleading to suggest that the middle of the twentieth century marks a complete sea-change in terms of the role of consumption within the social life of the British family.

David Fowler, for example, argues that young people already had increasing access to jobs and higher levels of disposable income well before the beginning of the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> The evidence would seem to suggest, however, that the past fifty years or so has seen a growth of both the scope and scale of consumption as an activity within family life. In this sense, today's great-

<sup>64</sup> Palmer, et al. (2007)

<sup>65</sup> Patazis, C. et al. (Eds) (2006) *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain*. Policy Press.

<sup>66</sup> Middleton, S., Ashworth, K., & Braithwaite, I., (1998) *Small Fortunes: Spending on children, childhood and parental sacrifice*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>67</sup> Feinstein, L., Hearn, B., Penton, Z., Abrams, C., & Macleod, M. (2007) *Reducing Inequalities: Recognising the Talents of All*. National Children's Bureau.

<sup>68</sup> Fowler, D (1996) *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain*. Routledge.

grandparents, grandparents, parents and children have all developed a sense of individual and community identity that is tied to consumption in important ways. This does not of course mean that all family members consume the same kinds of things or that they experience consumption in exactly the same way. Owning and using a mobile phone does not necessarily mean the same thing to a 7 year-old and a 70 year-old. It does, however, suggest that the practice of consumption and its significance as a marker of social identity, status and belonging are shared and recognised across generations within contemporary family life. Commercial engagement has become a fundamental aspect of how children, young people and parents define themselves and their relationships with one another.

### 3.3.2 Consuming the idea of family

Consumption within the family unit in this way also involves the consumption of items that relate to ideal notions of 'family life' and 'well-being' for children. In this sense, perhaps ironically, it is through consumption that families attempt to remedy the perceived ills of consumer society. While this aspect of the relationship between commercial engagement and family life is explored in more detail in the second report, *Ecology of Family Life*, we should note here that an increase in expenditure and consumption also offers opportunities for investment in the artefacts of family life.

This is seen as much in expenditure on 'educational' toys, 'family' holidays or Mother's Day cards as it is in the ritual gift exchanges that take place during Christmas – arguably the most important family celebration of the calendar year in contemporary Western societies. While these kinds of family consumption have many of their origins in the mid 19th century, it is in the last fifty years or so that consumption has become the primary means for representations of the family and, importantly, of childhood within the context of family life.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.3.3 Changing economic roles within the family

An overall rise in the disposable income available to individual households is a result of changes to the labour force and corresponds with changes in the lives of women in particular. Substantial disparities still remain between levels of income for men and women and in many families entrenched views of men as economic providers and women as domestic carers still persist. In general, however, women work and earn

much more now compared with the middle of the twentieth century.

This has implications for the relationships between men and women, presenting challenges to traditional gender-based notions of division of labour and control of economic resources within the family unit. While full-time employment remains the most common form of employment for men, increased employment of women means that men are becoming increasingly engaged with the domestic sphere.

## 3.4 What is the socio-economic role of children in family life in modern Britain?

We have seen that the socio-economic role of children in contemporary family life is perhaps best understood within the context of consumption and the creation of new consumer markets for children and young people during the course of the 20th century. In the first half of the century children had already come to represent a profitable market for consumer items, but it was not until the 1950s, with the popularization of television as a medium for advertising and marketing, and the beginning of a new era of relative economic prosperity, that children and youth markets for consumer products were developed more expansively and exhaustively.<sup>70</sup>

In the present, consumer items targeted at children represent a multi-billion pound industry, with increasingly convergent and overlapping media platforms for advertising and marketing. New media technologies, for example, represent not only a huge new range of products to market to children and young people, but also an increasingly effective and multi-layered platform from which to market and advertise other consumer items. As these children's and youth markets have grown, marketing and advertising have become increasingly focused on them rather than their parents in a way that both recognises and facilitates the increasingly agentive role of children in the economic affairs of family life.

Children, however, remain economically dependent on parents, and the markets for children's consumer items are primarily dependent on the 'pester' power of children to influence the purchasing choices of their mothers and fathers. This shift in the economic role of children has implications in terms of the broader balance of power between children and their parents in

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Gillis, J. (1996) Making Time for Family: the Invention of Family Time(s) and the Reinvention of Family history, *Journal of Family History*, 12 (4), pp.4-21.

<sup>70</sup> Cunningham, H. (2005) *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*. Pearson.

the family unit and, indeed, for the very notion of childhood itself.

In connection with this shift, the historian of childhood Hugh Cunningham, rightly points out that just as children have primarily become consumers rather than producers of family income since the Second World War (although many still work), their value to parents has become essentially emotional rather than economic. This shift marks a profound change in the economic relationship between parents and children. Rather than providing some form of contribution to family income, children have become vessels for emotional and financial investment. The social and emotional well-being of the family has, in this sense, become inextricably tied to that of children.

### 3.4.1 Pocket money

Cunningham suggests that this change in socio-economic relations within the family can be seen, in part, in approaches to pocket money. Whereas children would once have handed much of their own income over to their parents, the practice of parents giving children pocket money to spend on consumer goods became more commonplace towards the middle of the twentieth century and has continued ever since.<sup>71</sup>

Pinning down exactly how much this pocket money amounts to, however, is a rather difficult task, not least because pocket money can take a variety of forms and involves a range of different reciprocal relationships between parents and children. Pocket money for some children, for example, involves no explicit obligations in terms of chores, schoolwork or behaviour, while for others pocket money takes the form of a 'wage' in exchange for work around the house or in a family business. Parents may also be supporting children in other ways, such as paying for transport, mobile phone top-ups or music downloads.

Mapping levels of pocket money over time is also made more complicated by the fact that this information is of great commercial value to those interested in better understanding and exploiting children's and youth market segments. It is, therefore, difficult and/or very expensive to obtain. Data from the most recent Halifax Pocket Money Survey puts average pocket money earnings at £8.13 per week in 2008, compared

with £8.01 for 2007 – a drop of approximately 25%.<sup>72</sup> Research conducted by SIRC reached a similar figure for the average amount of weekly pocket money for 11-18 year-olds in 2007, at £8.48.

Measuring levels of pocket money in a slightly different way (that is, in a way that makes it difficult to arrive at a reliable average weekly amount), figures from the FACS 2006 suggest that 29% of children aged 11-15 years old received under £5 in the week before the survey, while 20% received £8-12.50, and 18% received between £12.50 and £25.<sup>73</sup> This represents only a slight change from figures for 2004 (29%, 18% and 18% respectively). Data from the market research organisation Datamonitor suggests that British children receive more pocket money than their European counterparts, and that this amount is slowly increasing. In 2003 Datamonitor calculated the amount of money given by parents to children aged 10-17 at £775 per year, compared with a European average of £496 per year. This figure had risen to £848 per year for British children, against a European average of £563 in 2006.

Looking back a little further it appears that overall levels of pocket money have slowly increased over time. Data from the Childwise Trend Report 2008, for example, indicate that earnings from both pocket money and paid work have increased from £8.00 in 2000 to £9.90 in 2007 which, when taking inflation into consideration, suggests only a small increase. The Walls Pocket Money Monitor for 2001, on the other hand, puts average pocket money considerably lower at £3.19 per week, although this too represents an increase in comparison with data from previous years. Halifax data suggest a similar degree of overall increase in average pocket money earnings since the 1980s (these trends in pocket money are also dealt with in Section 3 of Project 2, *Ecology of Family Life*).

Not surprisingly, levels of pocket money also vary with age, in part reflecting the increasing possibility of part-time or occasional paid work for older children. The idea of gaining more independence through earning one's own money is an important part of the process of developing a sense of adult identity for many young people and this has important implications in terms of the social relationships between parents and children. As children gain a greater degree of

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<sup>71</sup> Cunningham, H (2006) *The Invention of Childhood*. BBC Books.

<sup>72</sup> Halifax Pocket Money Survey 2008.  
<http://www.hbosplc.com/media/pressreleases/articles/halifax/2008-08-25-Halifaxpoc.asp?section=Halifax>

<sup>73</sup> FACS 2004/2006.



financial independence the balance of power within the family shifts because parents are obliged to relinquish some control over spending habits and lifestyle choices. Where this happens, a shift away from dependence on pocket money in later years is reflective of the changing social roles of children within the family as they get older.

There are of course many children who remain in some way financially dependent on their parents long after the traditional cut-off points of 16 or 18 years, and this too has an impact on the dynamics of parent-child relations. In either case, it is the emotional value of children to parents that underpins the act of providing pocket money. On the other hand, it is often the need for independence and autonomy on the part of children – the desire to escape the moral and emotional ties that bind the act of giving pocket money – that provides the motivation to look elsewhere for sources of income.

Before looking at some of these sources of income, it is worth emphasising that parents' spending on children is by no means confined merely to pocket money or money spent as a result of so-called pester power. As an expression of the emotional and social value that children hold, parents willingly spend large amounts of money on their children above and beyond what children ask for themselves.

In 2007 the financial institution Liverpool Victoria calculated the total cost of raising a child in the UK at £186,032, compared with £140,398 in 2003 – figures that include a range of costs and expenses that parents incur as a result of providing children with consumer items, clothes, hobbies, birthday presents, holidays, and so on. We have already seen that families with children (and particularly families including two working adults) spend the most – a further indication not only of the fact that children are often the focus of both parent's spending behaviours, but also that spending is an important part of the social life of families with children across a range of different events – from birthdays, to family meals, to family shopping trips. This is the case not only with parents, but also with other family members such as grandparents as well.

### 3.4.2 Children working

But what of children working? Have patterns in children's employment also changed? Child labour is most often presented in terms of 'exploitation', reflecting the current emotional and ideological notion of childhood in the Western world. It is the case that children are far less involved in full-time employment today than during the 19th century, leading,

as already noted, to a decline in their economic value within the family. There is evidence to show, however, that work, and particularly part-time work, has been and still remains a normative experience for children in the UK, although the reasons for work and the types of work available have changed over time.<sup>74</sup>

Jim McKechnie and Sandy Hobbs<sup>75</sup> suggest that approximately 3.5 million children between the ages of 11 and 15 were involved in some form of work at the turn of the last century (1999). This work did not necessarily involve payment and was often informal, occasional or at the margins of the workforce.<sup>76</sup>

The Families and Children Study (FACS) 2006 includes 'paid jobs around the house' as a category when asking children to self-report their involvement in paid work. Parents themselves engage their children in 'employment' of particular types in exchange for pocket money and in this way bring the commercial world into their homes. The embedded nature of this work within other social practices (as in the case of a family shop or restaurant, for example) makes it very difficult to measure the number of children working, how long they are working for, or to pinpoint the particular types of work in which they are involved.

Data from FACS 2006 support the idea that a large proportion of children are involved in some form of paid work. Of respondents aged 11-15, 32% reported having worked for money in the last week. Of these, 86% had worked up to 5 hours in the past week while 12% had worked between 6 and 15 hours. Figures from FACS 2004 (the first in the series which asked questions about children working) show no significant change in working hours compared with 2006. Research conducted by Cathy Howieson and her colleagues in Scotland between 2003 and 2006 resulted in similar findings among children in S3 to S6 (equivalent to Year 9-13, or 13-18 year-olds). Over a third (38%) of respondents said that they were involved in part-time work (defined as 'any paid employment

<sup>74</sup> Mizen, Phillip, Bolton, Angela and Pole, Christopher, School age workers: the paid employment of children in Britain, *Work, Employment and Society*, 13 (1999), 423-38.

<sup>75</sup> McKechnie, J. and Hobbs, S. (1999), Child Labour: the view from the north, *Childhood*, 6 (89), 89-100.

<sup>76</sup> Morrow, V. (2004) Il lavoro minorile nel Regno Unito, in *Bambini e adolescenti che lavorano: un panorama dall'Italia all'Europa*, Questioni e Documenti Quaderni del Centro nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza. 30. (Italian National Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre, Report on Child Labour in Europe).

including family-based work') while a further 21% had experienced part-time employment in the past.

Both the Scottish data and the data from FACS 2004 and 2006 suggest, not surprisingly, that the number of hours worked increases as children get older. In the Scottish case as many as 83% of S6 students were engaged in part-time work, compared with 29% in S3. FACS data from 2006 suggests that 40% of 15 year-olds had worked up to five hours in the week before the survey, compared with 23% of 11 year-olds. SHEU data also indicate that older children are more likely to have jobs than younger children, although there has been a slight increase in the number of 12-13 year olds who work since the late 1990s.<sup>77</sup>

There has been, however, an overall decrease over the past decade in the number of children who have a regular job and work for more than 5 hours during term time. Childwise data, for example, indicate that the average percentage of children aged between 11 and 16 in paid work fell from 66% in 1997 to 23% in 2007. While this represents a significant reduction in the number of children and young people working, it is still the case that almost a quarter of people of this age are engaged in some form of work.

Beyond the stereotypical jobs associated with children (such as paper rounds and baby sitting) children are also frequently employed on the fringes of the service sector – in catering, as shop assistants, delivery staff, etc. The kinds of jobs now available to children in part reflect broader shifts in the labour force away from manufacturing and towards the service industries.<sup>78</sup>

These shifts have occurred alongside a change in the reasons for children working, with children now providing a far less significant contribution to household income than was the case in the years before the Second World War).<sup>79</sup> Instead, it appears that most work undertaken by children is now motivated by consumption and, importantly, the opportunity to consume independent of financial support from parents, rather than by the need to bolster family earnings. Children may, in this sense, indirectly contribute to family income by covering the costs of consumer items for which parents or guardians would otherwise pay.

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<sup>77</sup> SHEU (2006) *Trends, Young People and Leisure: Attitudes to Experience of Leisure Activities, 1983-2005*.

<sup>78</sup> See Howieson et al. (2006).

<sup>79</sup> Morrow (2004).

The nature of children's work also varies according to socio-economic status and ethnicity. While it might be assumed that children from lower-income families would work more in order to compensate for a lower level of household income, it would appear that the opposite is often the case. Morrow suggests that locality and social networks are key factors in children's employment. In this sense children in deprived areas work less because they have restricted access to employment opportunities and are potentially less mobile than children in more affluent areas.

Sue Middleton and her colleagues found evidence to support this broader trend when analysing family income and expenditure in relation to children and work.<sup>80</sup> Children living in two parent families or in families not on income support were more likely to work than children in lone parent families or families on income support. This may also be connected to social values and work ethic. Perhaps due in part to the abundance of family resources, middle-class families may encourage children to work in order to learn the 'value' of money. In families with fewer economic resources, on the other hand, the notion of children working might more frequently be equated with a public admission of being unable to provide sufficient financial support for the family.<sup>81</sup>

While children's work and means of earning money are explored in more detail in Section 3 of Project 2 (Ecology of Family Life), the data reviewed here serve to highlight the fact that it is not only adults who are likely to experience the need to achieve a balance between work and leisure. At the same time, however, there is little evidence to suggest that children's need for balancing work, school and leisure is a particularly new phenomenon. In 1959, for example, the Crowther Report on secondary education dealt with the issue of school-age workers, particularly within middle-class families. The types of work available to some (but not all) children may have diversified in recent years, as has the variety of consumer items that are available for children to purchase with their wages. Childhoods completely devoid of work, however, would appear to fit more comfortably with an idealised notion of childhood than with the lived experiences of real children.

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<sup>80</sup> Middleton, S, Ashworth, K and Braithwaite, I. *Small fortunes: spending on children, childhood poverty and parental sacrifice*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998, pp. 67-68.

<sup>81</sup> Morrow (2004).

### 3.4.3 Renegotiating social relations in the family: 'pester power' and the purse strings

Whether in the form of pocket money, through work or as the result of 'pester power', children and young people account for an increasingly significant proportion of family spending. The notion of 'pester power' raises questions about the ways in which processes of consumption may impact on the broader 'balance of power' within family life. If the happiness of children is increasingly important to the emotional and social stability of family life, do children have greater influence over how family life is constituted?

Hugh Cunningham points to the fact that the increasing significance of children both as consumers and as the emotional focus of family life has occurred alongside an increasing recognition of children's rights within broader international political contexts, as exemplified by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, others have argued that children increasingly have access to what were once exclusive 'adult' spheres of social life.<sup>82</sup> Against this background, it has been suggested that relationships between parents and children now involve a greater degree of negotiation and 'give-and-take' than was perhaps the case in the past.<sup>83</sup> This can be seen in the general shift away from more disciplinarian approaches towards childcare, but can also be seen in patterns of consumption.<sup>84</sup>

Pål André Aarsand, for example, has explored the ways in which children and adult family members interact at home through the consumption of digital media such as video games.<sup>85</sup> The children in his study often positioned themselves as more 'media savvy' or knowledgeable than their older relatives, who in turn acquiesced in the role of being less knowledgeable in order to negotiate leisure time spent with the children. Similarly, Christine Griffin points to the role that consumption plays in families as a topic for constant negotiation and dialogue, sometimes leading to tensions when the consumption choices of parents and children diverge.

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<sup>82</sup> Giddens' and Beck's notions of erosion of the ties between generations and authority, for example, support this argument.

<sup>83</sup> See Lee (2001).

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Miles, S. (1997) Towards an understanding of the relationship between youth identity and consumer culture, *Youth and Policy*, 51(4), 35-45.

<sup>85</sup> Aarsand, P.A. (2007) Computer and Video Games in Family Life: The digital divide as a resource in intergenerational interactions, *Childhood*, 14(2), 235-256.

Children in these examples can, therefore, be considered to have greater sway in the social and economic negotiations that take place within the family, but it would be unhelpful to over-emphasise the 'power' of children in relation to parents. Children now remain financially dependent on parents for longer than was the case in the 1950s and 1960s and are in this sense subordinate to their parents in very real ways until later in life. They must often accept parental influence in lifestyle choices, for example, in exchange for financial support.<sup>86</sup>

Negotiation is, then, a key aspect of the social and economic relationships between parents and children in many families in contemporary Britain. The following section of this report explores how families negotiate another important, connected family resource, family time.

## 4 Spending time

### 4.1 Introduction

Examining how time use has changed over the past 50 years is a useful way of exploring how families and children have incorporated the commercial world into their normal everyday lives. After all, we spend most of our time when not asleep in activities which, in Western societies, constitute some form of commercial engagement.

The historian E.P. Thompson suggests that by the beginning of the 19th century time had become regimented in both moral and economic terms in Europe and North America, principally due to the combined influences of capitalist industry and the 'zealous husbandry of time' espoused by Protestants seeking salvation through 'goode workes'.<sup>87</sup> The proliferation of clocks and watches among both rich and poor during the 1800s, and the institutionalisation of disciplined timekeeping in schools and places of work, has deeply inculcated a sense of time divided with chronological accuracy into periods of work and leisure. The established Western idea that work and leisure do not overlap in time still holds sway, although the rising popularity of flexible working patterns and working from home may begin to challenge such a view.

More recently we have seen the emergence of the notions of 'quality' and 'family' time – moral and ideological assumptions not only about the value of time but also about the kind of

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<sup>86</sup> See, for example, 'pushy parents acts as agents', BBC, 19/08/08, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7570127.stm>

<sup>87</sup> Thompson (1974) 61-63.

activities and interactions that are considered to be conducive to the 'well-being' of the family.

Notions of 'family' time are inextricably tied to ideas about the nature of childhood. Just as these ideas have varied according to social, historical and cultural contexts, so too have the types of activities and exchanges that constitute them. While television viewing, for example, might constitute a lynchpin of 'family' time for some, for others it is the principal activity undermining the 'well-being' of family life. Ironically, what is perhaps most constant in ideas of family time is the feeling that it is under threat – not least from the encroachments of the commercial world. Whether or not these ideas about family time translate into the complex realities of family life is another matter, particularly when commercial activities are woven into the very fabric of family time.

To explore precisely how commercial engagement features in the ways in which families spend their time together, this section of the report looks at how perceptions and realities of 'family time' have both changed and, in fundamental ways, stayed the same, over the past 50 years.

- The following questions provide a framework for exploring these issues.
- How do children and families spend their time together and apart and how has this changed in the past 50 years?
- How is this related to the engagement of children and families in the commercial world?
- What specific role has the media and media consumption played in changing the ways in which children and families spend their time?

### 4.2 Key Points

Over the past 50 years the ways in which children and families spend their time has been altered by changes in patterns of work, the structure of the labour force, principally by the increased participation of women in the workforce and changes times spent on different kinds of leisure activities and consumption. Despite current worries about increasingly limited 'time budgets' and the precarious nature of the work/life balance, the trends point to a stability in the proportions of time spent in paid and unpaid work, with an initial increase and then, more recently, a decrease, in leisure time.

Jonathan Gershuny provides a useful model with which to understand these changes. Alongside a convergence between the amount of time spent on work and leisure, the evidence also points to a convergence in time use between men and women. While women still spend more time in unpaid work than men, the trend is towards more paid and less unpaid work for women, and the opposite for men.<sup>88</sup> A third convergence can be seen in terms of time use according to socio-economic status, with both men and women from less-advantaged socio-economic groups experiencing a greater increase in leisure time than men and women in more-advantaged socio-economic groups.<sup>89</sup> The potential causes of these changes and continuities are discussed in more detail as we explore each in turn below.

Each of these trends is paralleled by changes in particular kinds of engagement in the commercial world, whether in terms of time spent working or time spent in leisure and consumption. Consumption – whether of food or media content – continues to be a key aspect of family time in this sense, although the particular focus of individual and family time has shifted across different kinds of activity, from eating together, to radio, to television and, more recently, to converging new media and the use of digital technologies.

The combined effect of the proliferation of new media and digital technologies, increasing levels of income and expenditure, decreasing family size and increasing amounts of (heated) space within the family home, raises interesting questions about how contemporary consumption habits encourage families to spend time at home, but not necessarily together. The consumption of new technologies also encourages interaction between family and friends even when they are physically apart.<sup>90</sup>

Another aspect of change and continuity in time use trends for the past 50 years is the length of time that offspring remain in the family home before establishing their own households or family units. Here there is a shift not only in terms of how families spend time together but also in terms of the duration for

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<sup>88</sup> Time use for children is not necessarily represented in this interpretation of changes in the past 50 years. This points not only to a lack of data about time use for children in particular, but also an indication of broader traditional perceptions of the insignificance of children as a social group worthy of study on their own.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Sullivan, O. & Gershuny, J. (2004) Inconspicuous consumption: Work-rich, time-poor in the Liberal Market Economy, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 4, 79-100.

<sup>90</sup> These issues indicate the close relationship between family 'time' and family 'space'. The relationship between space and family life is considered in more detail in section 2 of project 2 (*Ecology of Family Life*).

which these patterns persist. Young adults leave the family home for good at a much later age now than was the case in the more prosperous years leading up to the early 1970s. This has implications for how 'family' time is conceptualised beyond the more traditional understanding of families consisting of parents and younger children.

### 4.2.1 The notion of 'family' time is relatively modern

As the historian John Gillis points out, the contemporary notion of family time emerged during the 19th century as a means to overcome the particular social and economic conditions brought about during and after the Industrial Revolution.<sup>91</sup> Prior to the beginning of the Industrial era the idea of family time held far less ideological weight because family experiences were not necessarily separate from other aspects of everyday life. Due to the nature of pre-industrial work and rest patterns, for example, the household was often considered a space where family experiences and working life overlapped. With the onset of industrialisation, however, paid labour moved out of the domestic sphere and into the factories, where shift work made work and leisure time much more distinct. In theory, the home became a private space for men to seek refuge from the spheres of work and public life, while for women home continued to be a place of unpaid domestic work, childcare and familial responsibility.

In response to the regimentation of time for work, weekends became institutionalised as a time for leisure, with Sunday becoming the day for both family and religion. Middle class notions of ritual events such as children's bedtimes, the family meal and, more recently, shared family consumption of media such as radio and television, have also become established as part of what family time should be. These occasions involve the performance of family roles and highlight the cyclical, repetitive aspect of family time. As such, even though families are increasingly required to balance ever more demanding daily schedules, family time provides an important arena in which family values are enacted and confirmed. While certain aspects of time use have changed during the past 50 years this ideal of family time, divided neatly into specific activities, and characterised by specific roles and responsibilities according to gender and age, is still of profound importance in contemporary Britain.

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<sup>91</sup> Gillis, J. (1996) Making Time for Family: The invention of Family Time(s) and the Reinvention of Family History, *Journal of Family History*, 21(4).

### 4.2.2 Parents are working fewer hours per week than a decade ago

Contemporary anxieties about the perceived decline of the modern family often revolve around the issue of work-life balance. There is a fear that parents are spending more time at work and therefore less time with family.<sup>92</sup> Although the general belief is that we are now working much longer hours than in the past, the available data do not necessarily reflect this. They are often less than conclusive, mainly due to the fact that measures of working hours are frequently inconsistent. The longest consistent series of data on working hours is based on employer records only of manual labour, representing a section of the workforce that has been steadily diminishing over the last 60 years. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides data from 1979 onwards concerning number of hours worked in a wider variety of occupations (including paid and unpaid overtime hours) and is perhaps the more reliable source in the context.

Trends for workers in manufacturing occupations indicate a steady decrease in average working hours, falling from 54 hours per week in 1900 to 42 hours per week in 1975 rising slightly for those in manufacturing jobs to 44.20 hours in 1997.<sup>93</sup>

Looking at the wider workforce, the data suggest an overall trend towards stability rather than change in the mean number of hours worked through the 1980s and 1990s and only a slight change in the average number of hours worked during the past 10 years.<sup>94</sup>

During the years of higher unemployment in the early 1980s, hours worked declined from an average of 35.6 hours per week in 1979 to 32.0 hours in 1981. They steadily rose once again and by 1994, the figure was 33.3 hours per week. The number of hours that employees work per week has changed only slightly since 1992. The proportion of people working between 31 and 45 hours per week was 60% for men and 49% for women in 1992 – today the figures are 61% and 49% respectively. The number of employees working more than 45 hours per week, however, has fallen slightly overall – from 33% of men and 8% of women to 25% of men and 9% of women over the same period.

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, BBC (3/09/04) Longer hours 'erode' family life, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3622084.stm>

<sup>93</sup> Halsey & Webb (2000), p.306.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Evans, J.M., Lippoldt, D.C. & Marianna, P. (2001) Trends in Working Hours in OECD Countries, *OECD Labour Market and Social Policy Occasional Papers*, No. 45, OECD Publishing

Self-employed people generally work longer hours than employees. The numbers working long hours every week, however, has dropped significantly in the past 15 years. In 1992, 53% of men and 26% of women who were self-employed were working more than 45 hours per week. In 2007 these proportions had fallen to 39% and 16% respectively.

In 2006, 18% of full-time employees in the UK usually worked over 48 hours per week, with a higher proportion of these being male – 22% of working males exceeding 48 hours, compared with 11% of females.<sup>95</sup>

Comparing changes from 2000–2005, the Time Use Survey provides further evidence of this shift. The average amount of time spent per day in paid employment fell slightly from 174 minutes in 2000 to 170 minutes in 2005. For men in particular, the average amount of time spent in paid employment has decreased by 15 minutes from 2000 to 2005.<sup>96</sup> While these data point to a modest decline in working hours, it is worth remembering that work still takes up a large portion of our time budget. ONS reports for both 2000 and 2005 show that paid work continues to be the second most time-consuming activity during an average day after sleeping.

### 4.2.3 Married women are spending more time in paid work ...

It is also important to note that employment rates for women have risen substantially since the middle of the last century. While some data exist for employment rates by gender before 1950,<sup>97</sup> trends in employment by gender can be more accurately traced between the early 1970s and the 1990s.<sup>98</sup> The employment rate for men, as noted earlier, for example, fell from 92% in 1971 to 86% in 1980.

Conversely, over the same period, the female employment rate rose gradually from 56% to 60%. During the early 1980s employment rates for both sexes fell, although more prominently for men, before recovering and increasing in the early 1990s, with the increase being more evident among women. The early

1990s brought recession and the employment rate for men fell to a low of 75% in 1993 – the lowest since the Labour-force survey began in 1971. Since 1993, employment rates for men and women have followed a similar pattern and by 2006 79% of working men were in employment, compared with 70% of women.

Participation rates of single women in the labour force has been relatively high since the beginning of the twentieth century with 69% of all single women over compulsory school age being economically active in 1911, falling slightly to 64% by 1991. For married women, however, the trend is quite different. The participation rate for married women has risen considerably through the course of the twentieth century, but particularly since the late 1930s. In 1911, 9.6% of married women participated in the work force. Following a 10% rise in employment rates between 1931 to 1951, just less than a quarter of married women were recognised as part of the work force. By 1991, half of married women were working.

### 4.2.4 ... and mothers, in particular, are increasingly in employment

There has also been a particularly large change in terms of workforce participation among women aged 34–54. Only 10% were in paid work in 1911, compared with 72% in 1991.<sup>99</sup> The proportion of working mothers increased significantly between 1979 and 1994 – a rise from a half to two thirds of married women with children. Professional women with children are much more likely to be working than unskilled women with children, particularly on a full time basis.

In 2006, 30% of married or cohabiting mothers with dependent children worked full time and 41% worked part time. Among women without dependent children, 51% worked full time and 22% worked part time. For men, a higher proportion of married or cohabiting fathers with dependent children worked full time (87%) than men without dependent children (64%).

The Annual Population Survey reports variations in employment between parents, non-parents, and different types of parents, across all age groups. Overall, in 2007 fathers had a higher employment rate than mothers (90% compared with 67%) and couple parents had higher employment rates than lone parents (81% compared with 56%). Lone fathers had higher employment rates than lone mothers (69% and 55%

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<sup>95</sup> These changes in average working hours per week have been noted in other Western contexts. Wilensky, for example, reports on the well-documented decrease in hours of work in the United States. He notes that between 1850 and 1950, the average hours worked per week by American workers decreased from 70 hours to 40 hours (in Kaplan, M. (1960) *Leisure in America: a social Inquiry*, Wiley, p.30).

<sup>96</sup> The low figures here reflect the fact that non-working and retired people are included in the sample from which the average is derived.

<sup>97</sup> Halsey and Webb (2000) for example indicate that the percentage of women in paid employment increased from 35% in 1911 to 54% in 1998.

<sup>98</sup> Labour Force Survey, ONS.

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<sup>99</sup> Figures taken from the British Census before 1998 and the Labour Force Survey after 1998.

respectively). In 2003, women with dependent children were less likely to be in employment than those without dependent children (68% vs. 76%) but out of the women with dependent children in employment, 56% had children aged under 5.<sup>100</sup>

Much popular anxiety about the decline of the family and the well-being of children in contemporary Britain is connected with the issue of mothers spending more time at work and the so-called time 'squeeze' that this creates in relation to responsibilities at home. The assumption is that because women are choosing to work more overall, they are spending less time at home with children and that this has a negative impact on children's well-being.

The reality, of course, is far more complicated and involves the negotiation of diverse and sometimes divergent social, cultural and moral beliefs about how women should balance different aspects of their identities and responsibilities as workers and as mothers. The ways in which women define these overlapping identities varies according to a number of different social factors, meaning that very different approaches to balancing work and family commitments might result in equally viable ways of negotiating the roles of mother and worker.

Exploring different approaches to this process, research conducted by Fiona Williams and her colleagues found that mothers were primarily concerned with 'doing the right thing' for their children, although 'doing the right thing' meant different things from case to case. For mothers who placed providing for their children financially above physically 'being there' for them, full-time work fitted comfortably within the framework of being a 'good' mother. For women who placed emphasis on personally caring for children and 'being there', however, less work was an equally important aspect of being a 'good' mother.

These different definitions of being a 'good' mother (like definitions of being a 'good' father) were not simply personal or individual preferences but instead reflected the values and beliefs of the communities in which mothers lived. Local social and cultural context was key in determining how people approached the issue of balancing family commitments and paid work, particularly in relation to diverse understandings of gender roles within the family unit. Importantly, Williams also

points out that the discrete divide between time at work and time at home does not necessarily reflect the distinction between mother and worker identities for women. Women can be mothers at work and workers at home. Indeed, for many women, being a 'good' mother necessarily involves the blending of these identities.<sup>101</sup>

### 4.2.5 Children are still working

Overall, then, there would appear to be an increasing trend towards women working as well as raising children which, of course, has implications for the balance of time use between work and family. But what about patterns of employment for children? Children are often ignored or afforded only a marginal position in data related to time use (see, for example, the lack of relevant data on children in Jonathan Gershuny's analyses).

<sup>102</sup>As suggested in Section 3 of this report, however, children's experiences of some form of work are commonplace in the UK.

As we noted earlier, whatever the nature of the work, employment most often takes place alongside compulsory education, implying that there is an ongoing negotiation of time use between these different activities and time spent at home or with family. After all, if children are involved in part-time work and full-time education, how much time can they realistically spend on family activities or domestic tasks at home?

### 4.2.6 Childcare and housework: men are doing more, but women are still doing the most

The increasing involvement of women in the paid workforce raises a number of questions related to the renegotiation of gender roles and time use in the domestic sphere. Particularly in couples with dual incomes, changes in time use have led to a partial redistribution of responsibility in terms of domestic work and childcare. Women and men are more likely to share domestic tasks including child-care duties. Women, however, are still doing more than men around the home and because of this, women have unequal access to leisure time.<sup>103</sup>

Between the 1960s and 1990s time spent on house work has increased for men and decreased for women, although these changes are relatively small. Among men, the time spent on housework slightly increases with age, while the time spent on

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<sup>100</sup> Labour Force Survey, Spring 2003, Reported in the Time Use Survey, ONS 2005, [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/time\\_use\\_2005.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/time_use_2005.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Williams, F. (2007) ESRC CAVA Research Group, *Rethinking Families*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

<sup>102</sup> Gershuny, J. (2007) *Changing times. Work and leisure in post-industrial society*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>103</sup> Hochschild, A. (1989) *The second shift*. Avon.

housework slightly decreases as women (and their children) get older.<sup>104</sup> In terms of housework, either gender was less likely to spend time on house work in 2005 than in 2000. In 2000, 86% of men and 96% of women engaged in housework, compared with 77% of men and 92% of women in 2005. The average amount of time spent was 128 minutes per day for men and 215 for women in 2000, and 101 minutes for men in 180 for women in families with children in 2005. The time spent on housework only really decreases when the child reaches between 16 and 17 years of age<sup>105</sup> and, possibly, start to make less mess.

Between work and childcare, then, it appears that housework is occasionally 'squeezed' out of the family time budget, where this is possible. In a study of time use among women, for example, Elizabeth Such<sup>106</sup> found that housework is one of the activities most commonly abandoned in favour of other pursuits. Participants in her study indicated this was due to prioritising commitments. This finding is in line with the decrease in time spent on housework over the past few decades. Alternatively, women must often economise on leisure time in order to keep up with family obligations.

Such and others have also highlighted the obvious but important fact that women do not experience time uniformly – the 'work-life' balance is experienced in varying ways by women with different professional and family commitments. Full-time working women and single women, for example, often find it easier to separate activities into work and leisure, while for women with families such boundaries are likely to be increasingly blurred. Single women with full time jobs may be more likely to distinguish paid employment clearly from leisure, but women with dependent children and with full- or part-time jobs are closely tied to the roles and responsibilities of motherhood.

This suggests, not surprisingly, that dual earning in a household with dependant children places a strain on family resources and that women, in particular, experience 'time squeeze' due to competing family and employment demands. The time squeeze, however, is not something exclusively experienced by women. Sacrificing leisure because of family

obligations is something experienced by men as well. According to Such, men reported that work and home demands placed restrictions on their ability to pursue personal leisure, although time with the family was considered to be 'leisure-like'. This tallies with data from the UK Time Use Surveys. Men aged 16-49 with children of pre-school age have 231 free minutes compared with 348 minutes for those without dependent children.<sup>107</sup>

We should not forget, of course, that while children may be a 'burden' in that they require care, they are also themselves involved in housework and domestic chores. Older siblings may also look after younger family members for varying amounts of time – especially in some ethnic minority families.<sup>108</sup> As noted earlier, however, empirical data relating to children's 'work' within the family unit are scant, making it impossible to detect specific trends in this area.

### 4.2.7 Parents are doing more childcare, although it remains primarily women's work

The ONS Time Use Surveys consistently show that childcare is unevenly distributed between men and women with, allegedly, an average of 15 minutes spent by men on this specific task as a main activity and an average 32 minutes by women in 2005. An additional 10 minutes per day were spent by men and a further 32 minutes by women on childcare as a secondary activity. Clearly, one can engage in child care while doing other tasks.

Combining figures for childcare as both main and secondary activities, these data suggest that mothers spent 64 minutes per day on such activities compared with 25 minutes for men in 2005. In 2000, the figures were 48 and 19 minutes respectively, indicating an increase of 33% for women and a very similar 32% for men over the intervening period

These data, however, need to be interpreted with great care. Although the ONS publish summaries of the data such as that noted here, they are not restricted to families with dependent children – simply to individuals who engage in such activities, which is not quite the same.

Our own analyses of the raw Time Use Survey data for 2005 indicate that parents spend far more time on childcare than the ONS summaries indicate. Taking the variable 'aprim15'

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<sup>104</sup> Gauthier, Smeeding & Furstenberg (2004) Are parents investing less time in children? *Population and development review*, 30 (4), 647-672.

<sup>105</sup> Time Use Survey, 2005

<sup>106</sup> Such, E. (2001) *Leisure, family, and work in the lifestyles of dual-earner families*. School of Sociology Social Policy, University of Nottingham, pp. 2-16.

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<sup>107</sup> Time Use Surveys 2000 and 2005.

<sup>108</sup> This point is stressed by Viginia Morrow – see, for example, *Children's perspectives on families*, Joseph Rowntree Trust: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/spr798.asp>



(Primary activity – total time (mins per day): caring for OWN children), we find that the figure for mothers of dependent children is 92 minutes per day. The equivalent for childcare as a secondary activity is 90 minutes. The figures for men are 46 and 35 minutes respectively. These, perhaps, give a more accurate view than the ONS summary tables – the suggestion that mothers, on average, spend only about an hour per day in total caring for their children sounds like a serious underestimate.<sup>109</sup>

Not surprisingly, as children get older, the amount of time that parents dedicate to childcare per day decreases. Using the same raw Time Use Survey data we find that the amount of time spent on childcare as a primary activity shown in Table 4.

Age of youngest child (yrs)	Females	Males
0-4	163	84
5-10	102	50
11-15	60	30

The number of dependent children also, as we would predict, increases the amount of time spent on childcare. For women with one child the figure is 73 minutes per day (primary activity) compared with 131 minutes per day for women with three or more children. For both men and women the time spent on childcare is significantly greater at weekends than during the week.

Time use data from the United States and other countries, indicate increases in the amount of time spent on childcare in line with the ONS summaries, although the figures are less recent. Between 1965 and 1998 the time devoted to childcare by married fathers in the US increased from 0.4 hours to 1.0 hours a day. For married mothers, the time spent on childcare was 1.8 hours a day in 1995, an increase of 0.7 hours over the same period. Suzanne Bianchi and her colleagues also note that the amount of time that men spend doing 'housework' (including childcare) in the USA has doubled since the 1960s.<sup>110</sup>

Research by Jonathan Gershuny and Oriel Sullivan<sup>111</sup> indicates figures for the average time spent on childcare by British parents that are broadly consistent with our analyses of ONS data and show a similar trend. British working mothers spent an average of 135 minutes a day reading to, or caring for, their young children in the mid 1990s, compared with 32 minutes at the beginning of the 1960s. For non-working mothers, the average was 189 minutes a day compared with 95 minutes over the same time period. This trend is also evident among fathers, who by the 1990s reportedly invested an average of 88 minutes a day looking after their children – more than 8 times the amount spent on childcare by men in 1961. British parents, they suggest, are spending almost an hour more per week than their American or European counterparts on childcare.

Increases in time spent on childcare provide an interesting reflection of changing perspectives on how parents raise their children. While parents have certainly always spent some time on childcare, it may be that contemporary discourses about childhood and child-rearing are making parents more aware that they are doing it and, therefore, more likely to record it in time use surveys. As part of the current dominant paradigm of thinking about childhood and the family, child-centred approaches to parenting encourage the kinds of nurturing and learning activities that might be constituted as 'childcare', in contrast with the more disciplinarian approach to raising children popular in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. Levels of childcare might also be affected by perceptions of risk and danger. Because parents are made more aware of the threats supposedly posed to their children by modern living conditions – from traffic to paedophiles – levels of childcare and adult supervision increase as a means to counter such perceived threats.<sup>112</sup>

#### 4.2.8 Flexible working hours blur the distinction between 'work' and 'family' time

In an effort to help people to balance work and home responsibilities, the Working Time Regulations 2003 introduced legislation to encourage flexible working hours, giving parents of children under 6, or of disabled children under 18, the opportunity to request a flexible working pattern. This means that parents are now able to change the scheduling of working hours or have the opportunity to work from home.

<sup>109</sup> Comparable data from the 2000 survey are not available in the published datasets.

<sup>110</sup> Bianchi, S., Milkie, M., Sayer, L. & Robinson, J (2000) Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor. *Social Forces*, 79 (1), 191-228.

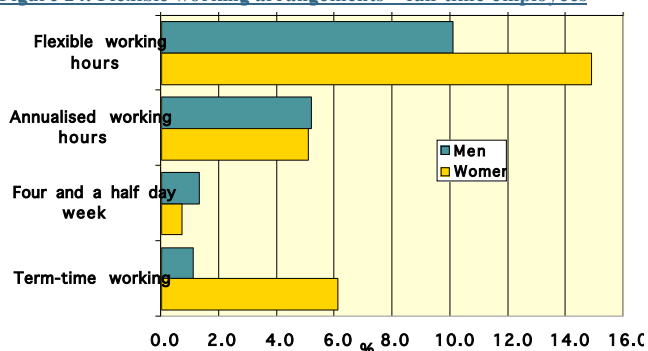
<sup>111</sup> Gershuny, J. & Sullivan, O. (2001). Cross-National Changes in Time-Use: Some Sociological (Hi)stories Re-examined, *British Journal of Sociology*, 52 (2).

<sup>112</sup> See Gershuny (2000), p.182.

In 2005, flexible-working arrangements counted for one-third of full-time working mothers compared to around one-fifth of full-time working fathers.

The take-up of these opportunities by full-time employees is summarised in Figure 24 below. Here we can see that over 10% of men and nearly 15% of women in full-time employment now have flexible working hours arrangements. A further 5% of both men and women are able to spread their work commitment over the year – normally working less in school holidays and more in term-time. Six per cent of women only work during term time. The figures for part-time workers are fairly similar but proportionally more of these, and men in particular, work only during term time.<sup>113</sup>

Figure 24. Flexible working arrangements – full-time employees



This change in legislation may have contributed to the rise in part-time employment, particularly for women. In the mid-1950s, roughly 11% of women's jobs were part-time but by 1971 it was characteristic of a third of female employment. From 1971 to 1998 the number of part-time jobs almost doubled for women – from 2,757,000 to 5,168,590. The number of females in the work force who were participating in part-time work rose from 34% in 1971 to 46% in 1998.<sup>114</sup>

Legislation such as the Working Time Regulations may have a positive impact on family time because it facilitates a balance between time spent at and home and in the workplace.

Legislation that expands the boundaries of work time, however, can also restrict 'family' time by bringing work into the home.

For parents working from home the distinction between working time and family time is now arguably less clear than it used to be. Along with digital technologies that allow easier access to work in the home, flexible working hours make it easier for the public sphere of work and the private sphere of

family time to overlap.<sup>115</sup> It may also be the case, however, that before labour-saving technology transformed the nature of housework, the much longer times spent by women on domestic chores may also have overlapped with 'family time' as a secondary activity.

#### 4.2.9 Families are probably spending more time together, not less

We have established that women are now working significantly more than they were in the 1950s and that working hours overall have remained relatively stable during the same period. At the same time, women appear to maintain primary responsibility for housework and are spending more time on childcare, although men are now also engaging to a greater degree in these family-related and domestic tasks than was the case in the past. For women in particular, then, the issue of time squeeze (the need to balance competing personal, professional and family responsibilities within an increasingly tight time budget) is a growing concern, not least in terms of notions of 'quality' time spent with family. But do such concerns actually match up with the realities of family time use as seen above? Is there just cause for anxieties about the so-called disappearance of family time?

According to the latest edition of the UK Time Use Survey (which included detailed information on the location of activities making up time use for the first time in 2005), 70% of our time was spent in the home. Activities principally located in the home were sleeping, dressing and washing, housework, watching television/watching DVDs/listening to music, computer use and reading. As we have stressed, however, time spent in the family home does not necessarily equate to family time. On the other hand, the high percentage of time use that takes place in the family home each day would seem to make easier, if not make inevitable, interaction between family members. Proximity, after all, is an important element of face-to-face social interactions.

#### 4.2.10 We are staying at home more for safety's sake

The large amounts of time that we now spend at home partly reflects the increasing domestication of leisure activities – watching films at home rather than going to the cinema, for example. At the same time, it is also important to consider

<sup>113</sup> Labour Force Surveys.

<sup>114</sup> See Halsey & Webb (2000), p.97, Table 8.11.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Kaufman-Scarborough, C. (2006) Time Use and the Impact of Technology: Examining workspaces in the home, *Time and Society*, 15 (1), 57-80.

notions of 'risk' in this context – do we stay at home because we feel safer there?

In the 1990s the German sociologist Ulrich Beck developed the notion of 'risk society' to describe the important role that popular fears and insecurities play in shaping modern societies such as the UK. Along with other prominent social theorists, including Anthony Giddens, Beck highlights the fact that we live in an age where 'manufactured', man-made risks (as opposed to 'external', natural risks) play an integral part in how we see the world.<sup>116</sup>

Several sources of data show increases in perceptions of risk and danger relative to the actual levels of such risks. In the case of particular types of criminal activity, for example, fear of crime considerably outstrips the likelihood of actually being a victim of crime. In this sense our fears impact in important ways on social life and, in this context, on how and where we feel safe spending our time.

Some sources of data relating to levels of crime are notoriously unreliable for a number of reasons – including changes in legislation, police policies and strategies (including 'crackdowns' on particular types of crime), differential reporting rates, etc. The British Crime Survey, however, which is an annual large-scale survey that asks respondents about the crimes they have experienced and their attitudes relating to crime, is generally seen as a useful barometer of both levels of crime and fears of crime. This survey indicates that while crime levels have fallen significantly in the past decade and more, the numbers of people feeling that crime is on the increase has declined less dramatically. In 2006/07, 65% of people thought that crime in the country as a whole had increased while 41% felt the same about their local area. The figures for 1996 were 75% and 55% respectively.<sup>117</sup>

#### 4.2.11 Fear of crime is focused on threats to the home

Our fears are also more focused on crimes that might affect our homes than those which tend to be committed in public spaces. We can see from Figure 25 that our worries about being the victim of violence has decreased more than the level of violent crime itself. In this illustration, the levels of both crime rate and proportion of people expressing worries are shown as percentage reductions since 2001/02.

Figure 25. Worry about violence and violent crime rates

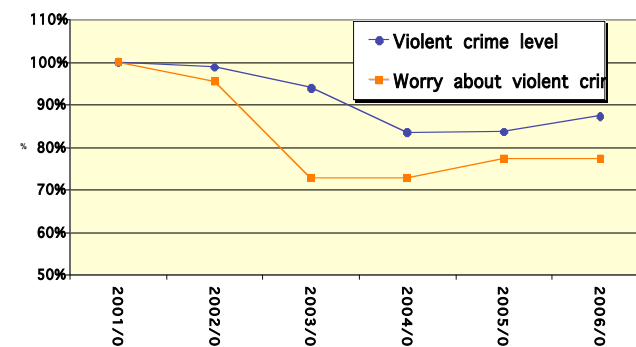
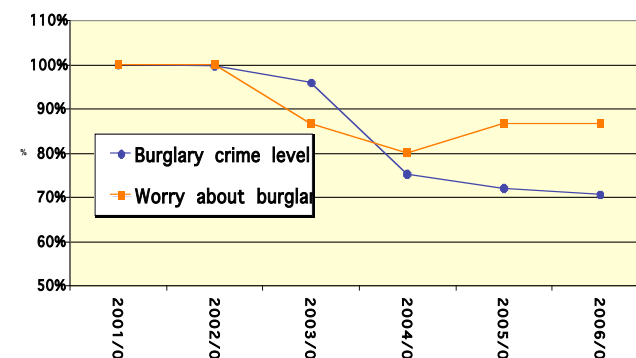


Figure 26 summarises similar data relating to burglary. Here we can see that the number of burglaries has fallen by 30% since 2001/2. Our worries about being burgled, however, have decreased by only 12% over this period. Our concerns about safety are, therefore, more focused on our homes – hence our worries – than the outside world.

This is consistent with David Buckingham's view of the family home as a space often associated with an idealised sense of safety, control and comfort and is contrasted with uncontrollable (and therefore inherently dangerous) public spaces.<sup>118</sup>

Figure 26. Worry about burglary and burglary rates



We have no control over public space so, ironically perhaps, we worry about our safety in that context less. In our homes, however, we are supposed to feel safe and, therefore, have greater concerns about protecting that territory.

#### 4.2.12 Despite our fears, we view the home as a safe sanctuary

Despite worries about being burgled, parents can associate time spent at home with safety from risks and restrict the movements of their children accordingly. This does not mean, of course, that children are in fact protected from risk within the home, or even that they are necessarily restricted in their

<sup>116</sup> See Beck, U. (1992).

<sup>117</sup> British Crime Survey 2007.

<sup>118</sup> See Buckingham (2000), p.70.

interactions with others because they are behind closed doors. New digital media provide a host of ways in which children can virtually roam far beyond the confines of their bedrooms.

While we will deal with the issues of family and space in more detail elsewhere (see Project 2 Section 2 – Ecology of Family Life), it is worth noting the ideological significance of spending time at home rather than outside. Ideas of childhood, if not the realities of childhood experiences, are firmly delineated according to an inside-outside divide that variably pits protection/over-protection against independence/threat.

In this fearful context we and our children appear to be staying at home and consuming media more.

The Young People Survey conducted by the Schools, Health and Education Unit (SHEU), for example,<sup>119</sup> reported that 88% of young people watched TV during the evening prior to the survey with 17% watching for more than 3 hours. Boys had much more involvement in computer gaming than girls, with 79% reporting that they played computer games after school, compared with 43% of females. These figures, however, do not tell us much about the social significance of these activities in terms of who else was involved, if anyone. This issue of whether media engagement actually constitutes 'family time' is dealt with in more detail below.

### 4.2.13 Young people are at risk from their ownership of 'hot' products

The BCS is now being extended to incorporate the experience and views of children under the age of 16. Existing data of this nature are relatively scant. One recent survey,<sup>120</sup> however, highlights the risks that young people run because of their consumption habits – particularly their ownership of new technology 'gadgets'. One in eight (12%) young people were victims of theft of such 'hot' products in the past three years. Nearly a third (31%) of victims were listening to music on headphones, talking or texting on a phone or playing on a games console when their item was stolen.

The vulnerability of children in this context is very evident from the fact that over half of them routinely carry with them items whose total value ranges from £100 to £500 and two thirds worry about the potential theft of such items. A third of

such thefts occur when young people are actually using their mobile phones or listening to mp3 players.

In general, young people are more likely to be the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators. They are also more likely to be victims of harmful behaviours that do not actually constitute crimes in most cases. One example here is that of bullying. A study by Pat Cawson and her colleagues<sup>121</sup> revealed that 31% of children experience bullying by their peers. A further 7% experience discrimination (on the basis of ethnicity, alleged homosexuality, etc.) while 14% are made to 'feel different' or 'like an outsider'.

The ownership of new technologies has added a further dimension to bullying – creating a platform for 'cyber-bullying'. A report from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) identified seven types of cyber-bullying, ranging from abusive text messages, e-mails and phone calls to bullying in internet chatrooms, social networking sites and instant messaging. The data showed that nearly one in five school students in London had experienced such bullying and a third of victims had not reported this to an adult.<sup>122</sup>

Whether there has been an increase in bullying (of whatever kind) in recent years, however, is difficult to determine. There are few sources of longitudinal data in this context and while bullying has become a significantly greater concern among teachers and parents, little is known about whether the real experiences of children are consistent with the rise in adult anxieties.

### 4.2.14 The UK in perspective

Research on family time in other countries has generated varied conclusions. Inge Mestdag and her colleagues,<sup>123</sup> for example, conducted a longitudinal study of time use in Belgium using data from the Multinational Time Budget Study. The findings suggest that in 1966 the amount of time children spent with both their parents during the working week was 2 hours and 12 minutes. By 1999, this had decreased to 1 hour and 47 minutes. In contrast, the study also found that, on average, parents increased the amount of time spent with their children on Saturdays, but not Sundays, over the same period.

<sup>121</sup> Cawson, P. et al. (2000) *Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*. London: NSPCC

<sup>122</sup> IPPR (2006) *Britain's teenagers' social skills gap widens* – <http://www.ippr.org/pressreleases/archive.asp?id=2415>

<sup>123</sup> Mestdag, I. et al (2005) Where has Family Time Gone? In Search of Joint Family Activities and the Role of the Family Meal in 1966 and 1999. *Journal of Family History*, 30 (3), 304-323.

<sup>119</sup> SHEU (2007) Young People's Report.

<sup>120</sup> Design Council on behalf of the Home Office, 2008. See <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Youth-Crime>

Evidence from other countries suggests similar trends towards less time spent with family members during the working week. In 2007, Canadian Social Trends<sup>124</sup> reported that the average Canadian worker now spends 45 minutes per day less with his/her family than was the case in 1986. This study was based on data from 4 cycles of the General Social Surveys on Time Use (1986, 1992, 1998 and 2005). Using a time journal, participants aged 15 and over provided detailed information on the amount of time they spent on various activities on a given day. For each activity, they indicated if they had been alone, or in the company of family members or other people. According to the survey, in 1986 women spent an average of 248 minutes with their family members, while in 2005 they spent 209 minutes. For men, the average time fell from 250 minutes in 1986 to 205 in 2005.

The study suggested the main factor associated with the decline was an appreciable increase in time devoted to paid employment on a typical working day. In the Canadian example, this was also connected to an increase in the amount of time that children spent at home on their own – a trend that is also reflected in data for the UK. The 2000 Time-Use survey indicated that time spent alone by 8-18 year olds is steadily getting longer and increases with age. On average, 8 year olds spend about 20 minutes alone a day, and this steadily increases to roughly 1 hour and 20 minutes by age 14 and 2 hours by 17. Males spend more time alone than females.<sup>125</sup>

A survey carried out in the 9 countries of the European Community in 1979 investigated similar patterns in time spent at work and at home with (or apart from) the family and the 'time squeeze'.<sup>126</sup> The results suggested that two-thirds of people in the EC aged 15 and over thought that parents spent too little time with their children and only 22% considered the amount of time spent with children to be appropriately oriented towards the family.

Interestingly, it is possible to observe similar negative perceptions of 'work-life' balance in the context of the UK, despite what the data suggest about the relative stability of working hours over time. Allison James and her colleagues<sup>127</sup>

for example, explored children's construction of time and time use in both school and at home over a 2 year period from 1997 to 1999. The study showed that children were aware of changes in relation to family circumstances, parental work and family forms. About one third of the 70 school children involved in the study said that their parents' working hours meant that family time was often difficult to arrange.

A slightly different perspective on 'time squeeze' is presented by the Young People's Attitudes Survey 2004. Nearly a half of males (49%) of males and 55% of females disagreed with the statement 'family life suffers if a woman has a full time job'. Sixty two percent of males disagreed with the statement that 'it is the man's job to earn money and the woman's job to look after the family', compared to 81% of females. 53% of females and 45% of males thought that working was a way in which women could be independent and 77% of all respondents agreed that it is possible for mothers to establish a warm relationship with their children whilst doing so.

It appears, then, that the notion of 'work-life' imbalance exists, even if it is not always the result of more paid work,<sup>128</sup> but is not inevitably perceived negatively by children. Indeed, it is possible that the time 'squeeze' experienced by some families is in part due to an increase in the variety and abundance of leisure activities and consumer products available for families to consume as part of the process of pursuing the ideal of family life.<sup>129</sup> As we become more aware of the role consumption plays in the construction of social identity, we are anxious that this aspect of our lives is given due attention in terms of how we use our time.

With this in mind, Oriol Sullivan Jonathan Gershuny show that those who work the longest hours compensate for a lack of leisure time by spending more.<sup>130</sup> They suggest the concept of 'inconspicuous consumption' as a way of framing the imagined future use of purchases already made and argue that purchasing expensive leisure goods symbolizes a 'wished-for self identity' or lifestyle that higher earners aspire to but do not necessarily achieve.

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<sup>124</sup> See Stats Canada:

<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070213/d070213b.htm>

<sup>125</sup> [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/timeuse/summary\\_results/time\\_alone.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/timeuse/summary_results/time_alone.asp)

<sup>126</sup> Commission of the European Communities, 1979.

<sup>127</sup> James, A., Christensen, P. & Jenks, C. (1999) *Changing times: children's understanding and perception of the social organization of time*. <http://www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/details/james.htm>

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<sup>128</sup> In the case of mothers, as we have seen, this imbalance is often the result of combined professional and domestic responsibilities.

<sup>129</sup> Gershuny (2000) p.8.

<sup>130</sup> Sullivan, O & Gershuny, J (2004) Inconspicuous consumption: Work rich, time poor in the liberal economy. *Journal of consumer culture*, 4, 70-100.

This idea of 'wished-for self identity' also applies, perhaps, to goods purchased for children as a means for compensating for a perceived reduction in 'quality' family time. The increase of consumer goods in families with children emphasises the ideological importance of children within the framework of spending, in both time and money terms, in the family.

Pursuing this idea, Allison Pugh<sup>131</sup> investigated 'cultural deals' offered to mothers through toy catalogues. She takes the view, based on analysis of 3,500 toys marketed in catalogues, that toys are often portrayed as a solution for the real or supposed absence of the mother – a compromise for her real or supposed longer hours at work, to the detriment of family time. They allow mothers to be 'good mothers' without having necessarily having to spend additional time with their children. The marketing of these toys emphasised the extent to which they would provide education and stimulation in the mother's absence, recalling ideals of togetherness and companionship even though the toys largely involved solitary play.

This is echoed in David Buckingham's argument that the notion of 'quality time' spent with children has become 'commodified'.<sup>132</sup> As the value of children is increasingly conceptualised in emotional or ideological rather than economic terms, ideas about good parenting and families values become manifested in approaches to spending money as well as (or instead of) time.

Alan Warde and his colleagues<sup>133</sup> have analysed time-use data to investigate the extent to which contemporary Britons are entering a more 'leisured' society. While agreeing that we have more leisure time overall compared with the past, they stress, that this should not be interpreted as an indication of greater universal 'freedom' in lifestyles as a consequence of consumer choice – They factors of gender, social class and household type remain significant determinants. Warde also suggests that greater flexibility of time may actually be a source of discontent, particularly in deciding on the proportion of time that should be devoted to family activities.

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<sup>131</sup> Pugh, A. (2005) Selling compromise: Toys, motherhood and the cultural deal. *Gender & Society*, 19; 729-747.

<sup>132</sup> Buckingham, D. (2000), p.65.

<sup>133</sup> Warde A., Southerton D., Olsen, W. & Cheng, S-L. (2004) Time use surveys and the changing organization of everyday life in UK, 1975-2000, in M. Pantzar & E. Shove (Eds) *Manufacturing Leisure: Innovations in happiness, well-being and fun*, National Consumer Research Centre, Helsinki.

### 4.2.15 Is the family meal a thing of the past?

Whether or not work is in fact infringing on family time, it is evident that the notion of safeguarding family time (or transmuting family time into consumption) remains an important factor in family life. One resilient focus for ideas about spending family time is the communal consumption of food – the family meal.

As the social anthropologist Robin Fox<sup>134</sup> reminds us, food is a vehicle for a host of ritual social activities related to everything from courtship to religion. Eating is almost always about more than simply putting food in one's mouth. In the case of the family meal, eating together has come to represent a number of core family values, including cohesion and communication, and is symbolic not only of 'coming together' as a family but also of the hierarchy of roles in the family unit (in terms of seating arrangements, serving roles, and so on).<sup>135</sup> As a result, the notion of a reduction in time spent eating together as a family is often associated with the break-up of the family unit and with a move away from the 'core' values and roles that the family meal is traditionally seen to represent.

A number of academic studies have attempted, following this argument, to make the connection between the supposed decline in family meals and a range of psychological, social and behavioural disorders among children.<sup>136</sup> The perceived 'decline' of the family meal has become a valuable metaphor for a host of movements concerned with the well-being of children and the moral and social fibre of society more generally.<sup>137</sup>

There is little historical evidence, however, to suggest that the communal family meal is a universal, essential or even long-standing aspect of social organisation within family units. Indeed, the popular contemporary notion of the 'family' meal as a time for family 'togetherness' can be traced to the mid-19th century, when the temporal rigours of industrialisation prompted middle-class families to adopt communal eating as a

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<sup>134</sup> See Fox, R. (1998) *Food and Eating: an Anthropological Perspective*, [http://www.sirc.org/publik/food\\_and\\_eating\\_0.html](http://www.sirc.org/publik/food_and_eating_0.html)

<sup>135</sup> See, for example, Chevalier, S. (2002) The Cultural Construction of Domestic Space in France and Great Britain, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27 (23), 847-856.

<sup>136</sup> See, for example, various studies by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, which point to the inverse relationship between family meals and drug abuse (<http://www.casacolumbia.org/templates/Home.aspx?articleid=287&zoneid=32>)

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, the 'back to the table' campaign: [http://www.raisingkids.co.uk/btt\\_2005/home.asp](http://www.raisingkids.co.uk/btt_2005/home.asp)

ritual symbolising both the cohesiveness of the family unit and the hierarchy of status positions within it.<sup>138</sup>

While the idea of family mealtimes gained popularity during the 19th century, the practice of eating together was not altogether a common one, particularly among working-class families. Here again we are reminded of the difference between the importance of ideas about family 'time' and the realities of how families actually spend their time. If family meals, for example, are presented in popular discourse as an eternal aspect of family life, even though there is little historical evidence to suggest that this is the case, it is perhaps not surprising that contemporary families are anxious about the fact that they do not eat together as much as they should.

But are families actually spending more or less time eating together? The evidence, unfortunately, is not entirely clear. The most recent UK Time Use Survey (TUS) 2005 suggests that on average people spent 82 minutes a day eating and drinking. Of this, 59 minutes (or 72% of daily food and drink consumption) were spent eating and drinking at home. This does not, however, necessarily mean that eating and drinking take place communally in the form of a 'family' meal. There is little in the TUS that allows clarification of this issue.

The 2004 National Family Mealtime Survey, conducted by the raisingKids organisation<sup>139</sup> using a sample of 1,200 of its own members, alleges that only 20% of families sit down to eat together with their families once a week or less. The report also notes that "Even when families do eat together, they don't make the most of this family time, with 75% of families watching TV while they eat."

In distinct contrast, a study conducted in the United States – the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health – using a representative sample of over 102,000 family members, concluded that 80% of families with children aged 6 to 11 shared a meal on 4 or more days and 55% of families with children from 6 to 11 shared a meal on 6 or 7 days. Rates did not differ greatly between ethnic groups and social classes and

responses from teenagers suggested that since 1998 rates had remained stable or may have increased.<sup>140</sup>

Could the UK really be as different from the US in these terms as the studies would seem to suggest?

### 4.2.16 We are balancing TV viewing with new media use as part of 'family' and 'private' time

We have already seen that in 2005 watching television was part of media consumption activities that are third only to sleeping and working in terms of average daily time use. Before the 1950s the family radio or gramophone may have provided a similar locus for families to come together and enjoy popular entertainment within the confines of the home. Since the 1950s, however, watching television has remained the dominant form of media consumption occupying 'family' time, although other forms of new digital media – principally home computers, mobile phones, games consoles, etc. – have become increasingly important in the past 20 years.

Concerns about the potential social and psychological effects of television viewing on the well-being of families and children are almost as old as television itself.<sup>141</sup> Television has been viewed ambiguously in popular and academic discourse either as a focal point for family interaction and a facilitator of the education of children, or as the seed of family disintegration and the cause of misanthropic behaviour among young people. Just as with 'penny dreadfuls' in the 19th century, television has been blamed for a host of degenerative behaviours among children, the most obvious of which is seen in the connection between on-screen violence and the violent behaviours of young people.

David Buckingham<sup>142</sup> points to the fact that television is positioned at centre stage in the 'death of childhood' debate championed in the late 1980s by Neil Postman<sup>143</sup> and others, in which television was seen to erode the sanctified boundaries between adulthood and childhood, encouraging a cognitive malaise among passive young consumers of visual media content. Similar anxieties have been voiced more recently by figures in the 'toxic childhood' debate in relation to the

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<sup>138</sup> Larson, R., Branscomb, K., Wiley A. (2006). Forms and Functions of Family Mealtimes: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives, *New Directions for Children and Adolescent Development*, 111.

<sup>139</sup> See [http://www.raisingkids.co.uk/btt\\_new/tab1\\_pr\\_02.asp](http://www.raisingkids.co.uk/btt_new/tab1_pr_02.asp)

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<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Fiese, B.H. (2006) *Family Mealtimes: Opportunities for Child & Family Health & Wellbeing*. American Psychological Association online, <http://www.apa.org/pi/cyf/fam1.html>

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Himmelweit, H.T., Oppenheim, A.N. & Vince, P. (1958). *Television and the child: An empirical study of the effect of television on the young*. Nuffield Foundation/Oxford University Press.

<sup>142</sup> Buckingham (2000) p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> See Postman, N. (1982) *The Disappearance of Childhood*. Delacorte.

allegedly dangerous and degenerative effects of new digital screen-based technologies.

The increased use of media technologies in the home, however, can also be partly attributed to growing perceptions of risk.<sup>144</sup> Children's participation in public life is seen to carry a number of risks which parents attempt to limit and control by restricting children's movements to within the home. While media consumption at home in this sense serves as a means to regulate children's exposure to the perceived dangers of the outside world, it is at the same time a source of anxiety itself because it represents the primary means by which the outside world may enter the home space.

Media consumption is not, of course, a single category of activity. Sometimes media can be consumed alone while at other times it forms a focus for social interaction. Finding statistical data to support the social context in which media are consumed is, however, very difficult, given that few studies explicitly explore this aspect of time spent in the family home.

Analysis of data related to media use is further complicated by the fact that activities such as watching television, or texting, gaming online, etc. are often carried out alongside other activities – described in time use surveys as 'secondary'. It would be quite possible, for example, to do all three of the above at the same time while interacting with family members. Simple figures of 'viewing' or 'doing' hours do not give us the full picture.

Despite these difficulties a number of different data sources provide some interesting insights into patterns of media consumption. Between 1997 and 1998, the Broadcasting Standards Commission investigated the consumption practices of 15,000 children aged 6 to 16 in twelve counties including the UK, Belgium, Denmark, France, Israel, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland.<sup>145</sup> Not surprisingly, television was shown to be the most pervasive medium in European homes. For many, it was considered the main leisure activity in the house. Out of a list of 16 media, both boys and girls surveyed said television would be the medium they would miss the most. This was particularly true of British children who were reported to make the greatest use of screen media and spend the least amount of

time reading or playing outdoors compared with their European counterparts.

The Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) indicates that in 2002 the average individual watched slightly less than 3 and a half hours of television a day – a figure slightly lower than that recorded in the 2005 Time Use Survey. For children, the average daily time varied from 1 hour and 52 minutes per day among those in households with terrestrial television to 2 hours 27 minutes in households with multi-channel televisions.

According to the National Consumer Council,<sup>146</sup> these figures indicate a decline in the time that children spend watching television when compared with BARB data from 1997.<sup>147</sup> This small reduction in viewing hours is explained in terms of the continued convergence of media and digital technologies, with children and adults alike spending more time on computer use than was the case in the past. The 2005 Time Use Survey<sup>148</sup> shows that computer users in particular spend less time watching television. Childwise<sup>149</sup> have also noted a gradual and small decrease in the amount of TV that children watch and a parallel increase in computer activity. These changes, however, are not significant enough to demonstrate that the popularity of television has diminished in recent years.

The most recent data in this area come from Ofcom and indicate that nearly three quarters of children aged 8 to 15 have access to digital television at home and 73% have a TV of some kind in their bedroom.<sup>150</sup> Two thirds of children also have internet access at home. Games consoles are owned by a half of children in the UK and an additional third have access to one in the home.

The Ofcom data for 2007 also show that children report watching television for just under 14 hours per week – down significantly from the earlier BARB and Time Use Surveys noted above.

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<sup>144</sup> Harden, J. (2007). There's no place like home. The public/private distinction in children's theorizing of risk and safety. *Childhood*, 7 (1), 43-59.

<sup>145</sup> See Livingstone, S. & Bovil, M. (2001) *Children and their changing media environment*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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<sup>146</sup> NCC (2003) *What Children Watch: An Analysis of Children's Programming Provision Between 1997 and 2001 and Children's Views*.

<sup>147</sup> See Narin, A., Ommrod, J. & Bottomley, P. (2007) *Watching, wanting, and wellbeing: Exploring the links. A study of 9-13 year olds*. National Consumer Council.

<sup>148</sup> Time Use Survey 2005, *How We Spend Our Time*, [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/time\\_use\\_2005.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/time_use_2005.pdf)

<sup>149</sup> Childwise (2007).

<sup>150</sup> Ofcom (2008) Media Literacy Audit.



While most people spend a considerable amount of time at home watching television, to what extent can such media consumption be considered to be a 'family' activity? Various studies indicate that for adults and children, watching TV is an activity strongly associated with the family.<sup>151</sup> Reed Larson and Robert Kubey,<sup>152</sup> for example, argue that 'heavy' TV viewers spend more time with the family than 'light' viewers. Similarly, among low income families in the United States, Carolyn Tubbs and her colleagues<sup>153</sup> point to the fact that 'television time' provides an important opportunity for mothers both to socialise with their children and to engage in a range of 'productive' exchanges that reinforce basic skills learned in pre-school or primary education.

Television viewing can also be a vehicle for dialogue and negotiation among family members, for the simple reason that they must often make collective decisions about what to watch, and when. Ingunn Hagen highlights the role of television and other media as a focus for negotiation within the family home, particularly given increased public anxieties about the need for parental regulation of children's media use.<sup>154</sup>

Pia Christensen highlights the very important point that 'family' time for children often does not involve a specific ritualised family activity (visiting grandma, for example), but focuses instead on the mundane and everyday.<sup>155</sup> In interviews with British children, Christensen found that 'sitting on the sofa and watching TV' was an activity closely related with the 'togetherness' of family, above and beyond 'family' activities more traditionally associated with 'quality' time.

Television itself provides us with numerous representations of the family in which televisions figure prominently as a kind of social magnet, which helps to normalise the idea that television is part and parcel of family time. Each episode of *The Simpsons*, arguably the most famous fictional family in the United States,

for example, begins with the Simpson family sitting down in front of the television together. In Britain the BBC's *The Royle Family* provides a similar example of a family whose social interactions are centred primarily around the act of watching television.

At the same time, of course, television and other media can be seen to encourage fragmentation and reduce social interaction within the home. Sonia Livingstone<sup>156</sup> has highlighted the fact that children now more frequently have their own bedrooms (because there are often fewer children per household than was the case in the past, and many more households have central heating), and that individual bedrooms are increasingly filled with different forms of media for communication, entertainment and education. As a result children may spend more time on their own when consuming media in these 'private' spaces.

Ofcom data, however, indicate that 'solitary' television watching is the norm for only 23% of children aged 8 to 15. We have already noted, however, that children spend more time alone as they get older – due in part to the availability of 'private' televisions. The Ofcom data reflect this – while solitary TV watching was evident among 19% of 8 to 11 year olds, 28% of those aged 12 to 15 mostly watched TV alone. There were no significant differences in these trends between the gender.

Such patterns of media use, then, may reduce social interaction among family members, particularly as children get older. An interesting counter to the 'solitary use' picture of television viewing, however, is presented in recent research conducted in Australia into the rising popularity of digital, multi-channel television viewing. While households may have more televisions, each household normally has no more than one hub for multi-channel viewing. This means that if children wish to watch non-terrestrial channels they are obliged to enter the family room and engage socially with others.<sup>157</sup> Families are also reportedly spending more time together thanks to the rising popularity of digital recording technologies that allow programmes to be watched 'on demand' at a particular time when all family members can be present.

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<sup>151</sup> See Comstock, G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M. & Roberts, D (1978) *Television and Human Behaviour*. Columbia University Press.;

Lull, J. (1980), Family Communication Patterns and the Social Uses of Television, *Communication Research*, 7, 319.

<sup>152</sup> Larson, R. & Kubey, R. (1983). Television and music: contrasting media in adolescent life. *Youth and Society*, 15, 13-31.

<sup>153</sup> Tubbs, C, Roy, K and Burton, L (2005): Family ties: constructing family time in low-income families. *Family Process*, 44, 1, 77-91.

<sup>154</sup> Hagen, I. (2007) 'We can't just sit the whole day watching TV: Negotiations concerning media use among youngsters and their parents. *Young*, 15, 369.

<sup>155</sup> Christensen, P. (2002) Why more 'Quality time' is not on the top of Children's Lists: The 'qualities of time' for children, *Children and Society*, 16, 77-88.

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<sup>156</sup> Livingstone, S. & Bovil, M. (2001) *Children and their Changing Media Environment*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>157</sup> See Holloway, D. (2008) Sharing Foxtel: The Kids Are Back Around the Hearth Again. *Journal of Media and Culture*, 6 (2) [www.journal.media-culture.org.au](http://www.journal.media-culture.org.au)

Time spent watching television, then, would at times seem to be the essential 'family' while at others it is a means to escape family interactions while still remaining in the home. In either case, it is important not to oversimplify the dynamic nature of family interactions with media and technology. This is particularly important as converging media and digital technologies become increasingly popular.

Today approximately 65% of houses in the UK have internet access. Since 2002 the number of households in the UK with internet access has increased by 4 million to a total of 15 million, or 61% of the population. Of these households, more than 80% have a broadband connection. According to the Office for National Statistics, 87% of people aged 16 to 30 used a computer in the period between January and April 2006, compared with 45% of those aged 50 and over.<sup>158</sup> In 2005, 94% of people aged 16 to 24 had sent a text or SMS message, compared with 17% of people aged over 65. The Ofcom Residential Survey carried out in 2003 showed that 75% of all adults in the United Kingdom owned or used a mobile phone, rising to 80% in 2006. Those aged under 25 are most likely to have a mobile phone to text their friends and family.

The NCC suggest that 90% of 5- 16 year olds have a computer at home, 38% have their own PC or laptop, 71% have internet access and 20% have on-line access in their own room.<sup>159</sup>

Robert Towler and colleagues researched the differences between UK households with and without children and found that those with children were more likely to have a wider range of new technologies in the home, including a wide screen television, compared with childless households – 31% and 21% respectively.<sup>160</sup> The same was true for satellite TV and multiple channels. Households with children also owned more video games (54% vs. 21%), DVD players (36% vs. 21%) and personal computers with internet access (49% vs. 39%).

The availability of these technologies in the home has obvious implications in terms of time use, although once again it is difficult to gauge the social aspect of time spent. Findings provided by the Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU) suggest an increase in time spent over the past five years among children aged 11 to 15 on computer gaming and internet

browsing without adult supervision. This was particularly the case for boys. The 2007 Young People Survey (SHEU) reported that up to 16% of males in the sample spent more than 3 hours on computer games after school and 79% of 14-15 year olds browse the internet without adult supervision.<sup>161</sup>

The NCC found children's main use of the computer is to play games, usually online. Another use is socialising and information searching. Boys surf the web and play bought games while girls tend to email more. Older children are more likely than younger children to email and use messaging facilities such as MSN, especially those who have private access to computers.

As with television, new media consumption and computer use are transforming many children's bedrooms from functional spaces into self-contained virtual worlds of 'solitary' activity.<sup>162</sup> In 2005, for example, Ben Veenhof reported that in Canada heavy internet users (over 15s who spent more than an hour a day on the internet) devoted less time to socializing with their partners or families and friends.<sup>163</sup> Sonia Livingstone similarly argues that while television viewing remains a predominantly communal activity, media-rich bedroom environments are far more likely to encourage time spent away from other family members.<sup>164</sup>

Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel point to the extreme example of the *hikikomori* phenomenon in Japan.<sup>165</sup> The term describes an increasingly large number of Japanese teenagers who apparently have almost completely withdrawn from face-to-face social interactions in favour of time spent online.

It would be wrong to suggest, of course, that time spent online is necessarily non-social. The opposite is much more frequently the case, particularly with young people for whom social networking is one of the most popular uses of the internet. Media-rich homes may provide opportunities for social interaction beyond the scope of the family, but this is not the same as suggesting that media consumption encourages

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<sup>161</sup> See <http://www.sheu.org.uk/publications/yp07.htm>

<sup>162</sup> See Moscovitch, M. (2007) Good servant, bad master? Electronic media and the family. *Contemporary family trends*, 3-26.

<sup>163</sup> Veenhof, B., Sciadras, G., & Clermont, Y. (2005) *Literacy and Digital Technologies: Linkages and Outcomes*, Statistics Canada, Connectedness Series, Cat. No. 56F0004MIE, No. 12.

<sup>164</sup> Livingstone, S., & Bober, M. (2005) *UK Children Go Online* ([www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net))

<sup>165</sup> Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2007) *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. Open University Press, 28-29.

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<sup>158</sup> ONS, *Focus on the Digital Age*.

<sup>159</sup> See Nairn, A., Ormrod, J., & Bottomley, P. (2007) *Watching, wanting, and wellbeing: Exploring the links. A study of 9-13 year olds*. National Consumer Council.

<sup>160</sup> Towler, R. (2002) *The Public's View 2002: An ITC/BSC Research Publication*. British Market Research Bureau International, 3-82.

'solitary' behaviour. The proliferation of new media and digital technologies allow families to spend time away from one another while at home, but also allow them to be connected when physically apart. The issues of parents emailing or texting children while at work, or families interacting via social networking sites online, are relatively unexplored at present but may prove to be an important aspect of families' active social engagement in the commercial world.

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