Department of Social Security
Research Report No. 1

Thirty Families
Their living standards in unemployment

A report based on case study research among unemployed men and their families

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Social and Community Planning Research

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Finally my thanks go to the 30 families who took part in the study. We are grateful to them for entering into the research with such willingness and for the depth and honesty with which they responded to often difficult and searching questions. The richness of the data collected is a tribute to the time and thought they gave to the study.
Summary of the report

Aims and conduct of the case study research

1. The principal aim of the case studies was to explore the effects of unemployment on living standards, both as they were perceived at the time and, for some, after a return to work. The research was carried out as a longitudinal study over a period of around four years. Two approaches were made to the families, the first in 1983/1984, the second in the early part of 1988. Thirty families were involved initially, 22 of whom were interviewed again at the second stage. Information was collected by means of unstructured in-depth interviews which were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Section 1.2

PART I A profile of the families

The characteristics and circumstances of the families

2. At the first contact, all the families involved were two parent families with dependent children. By the second stage, three of the couples had separated, and some no longer had dependent children. A number of families had moved, in some cases on more than one occasion. Owner occupiers had experienced more change of accommodation than those who rented, sometimes using their housing asset as a means to release capital or to facilitate a move to another area.

Sections 2.1 and 2.2

Length of unemployment

3. At the time of the first approach, all of the men were unemployed for periods ranging from six months to two and a half years. By 1988, just under half of the men were employed and just over half were unemployed. Some had had continuous employment since their return to work, some had moved in and out of work in the intervening period, and some had been continuously unemployed for between 4'-6 years.

Section 3.1

Seeking and finding employment

4. The extent to which the men actively looked for work during the reference period of unemployment was variable and greatly affected by the extent to which unemployment had been accepted, or was found acceptable. In general, job search declined as unemployment lengthened as people became dispirited by their failure to find work and/or resigned to their state of unemployment.

Section 4.1

5. The level of certainty or pessimism about regaining employment, as expressed in 1983/4, bore only little relationship to what had happened by 1988. Some of the men who had given up all hope of ever working again were back in secure employment. Others who were at one time quite optimistic about their prospects had never returned to work. There was also some relaxation of job requirements-some took jobs that were not of the kind they particularly wanted, many took jobs at a lower wage than they wanted. In the main, the return to work was very positively viewed, even where there had been some compromise over wages, the nature of the work or conditions.

Sections 4.2 and 4.3

Wives’ employment

6. Some wives gave up work when their husbands became unemployed, others returned to work once their husbands regained employment. In both cases this was a direct consequence of the earnings rule. There were, however, wives who continued in employment, or returned to work during the period of their husbands unemployment, sometimes in order to help ‘break the mould’ of unemployment within the family.

Section 3.3

PART II Living standards in unemployment

The concept of living standards

7. Nine factors were identified as having a bearing on the families’ judgements of their own living standards:

- the amount of disposable income they had
- the items of expenditure they could or could not afford
- the level of choice or constraint that surrounded their pattern of expenditure
- the level of financial security that was felt
- the degree of struggle involved in making ends meet
- the material possessions they had, or could attain
- the degree to which expectations were fulfilled
- the extent to which self-esteem could be upheld
- the feelings of contentment that surrounded life.

Section 5.1

Changes in living standards

8. Almost without exception, the families felt that the standard of living they had in unemployment was lower than when they had been employed. Many families described what they saw as a continuing decline, at least for the first two or three years of unemployment, until they hit ‘rock bottom’. Those who were
unemployed for the longest periods (four years or more) described a time when the decline in their living standards stopped.

Section 6.1

9. All of the families who had returned to work said their standard of living in employment was better than in unemployment. Most found, however, that a quite lengthy period of recovery was needed to restore their standard of living to its former level.

Section 6.2

10. The ease with which families managed on their unemployment income and the extent to which they were in debt or arrears varied considerably. Four main groups were identified ranging from those who were ensuring that their expenditure did not exceed their income or resources and were not in debt or arrears (managers); to those whose expenditure was consistently exceeding their income and were fairly deeply in debt or arrears (non-managers).

Section 8.1

11. In 1983/4, around two thirds of the families were 'managing' and one third were not. By the end of the reference period of unemployment, over half of the managing families had continued to 'make ends meet' on a regular basis. The rest had found it more difficult to manage in the longer term and had accrued debts of arrears. The level of managing was not solely related to either the income replacement ratio, or the length of unemployment, although both had some bearing.

Section 8.2

12. Two factors that made it difficult for families to 'manage' on unemployment income are identified. The first is the inflexibility of the level of income and the difficulties caused when extra demands are put on it. The second is a direct consequence of living on a low income over a longer period. For some families, there was clearly a point where they found themselves unable to continue with the controls they were imposing. Both factors often led to the onset or increase of debt which in turn placed extra pressure on weekly expenditure because of repayments.

Section 8.3

13. On the return to work, some families continued budgeting much as before. Others reacted against what had happened to them in unemployment and changed their budgeting methods or use of credit. For some this meant placing a higher priority on budgeting and money control. For others it was the opposite response—a reaction against all the controls and constraints they had experienced. This often led to an increased use of HP and credit.

Section 9.1 and 9.2

14. The patterns of expenditure described by the families provides a highly consistent picture. The highest priorities are basic living needs (food, heating, lighting, housing) and items for the children. The lowest priorities are social and leisure activities, parents' clothing and all larger household items (such as household durables, furniture, housing decoration or repairs).

Section 9.3

15. Important changes in patterns of expenditure occurred as the period of unemployment progressed. In the very early weeks, expenditure was not greatly adapted and 'spending as normal' continued. This period ended when families became aware (through difficulties with bills, or increasing debts or use of savings) that they were living outside their regular income. There followed a period of adaptation where much more careful control of expenditure occurred. The third period began when people, as they saw it, could adapt no further. This was often a crucial turning point in the family's acceptance or otherwise of unemployment and action or change sometimes followed.

Section 9.4

16. The patterns of expenditure described by families back at work varied considerably. This depended on the relative level of their income, the extent to which debt or arrears had been accrued, and their reaction to the managing strategy they had adopted during unemployment. Some families found themselves with highly controlled patterns of expenditure, not dissimilar to those in unemployment. Others responded by spending more freely. Although this was less common than the continued control, it created some difficulties for families who had a subsequent spell of unemployment.

The use of additional resources

17. Without exception, the case study families had used some resource other than their regular benefit income to help them through the period of unemployment. The range of resources used included additional sources of income (additional payments, income from other household members, casual earnings); savings, credit and loans; sale of goods; help from family and friends; and stolen goods. The report describes when and why such resources were used and the feelings about using them.

Chapter 10

18. Although a number of the families made full use of the additional payments and benefits they could receive, there were as many who did not. Similarly, some of the men were taking no account of in-work benefits when they considered the wages of possible jobs.
19. The number of families who had experienced sizeable debt or arrears had risen sharply between the first and second interviews. In some cases the debt was incurred as unemployment lengthened, in others on the return to work. Many of those who experienced debt at these later stages had not had serious debts before they were unemployed.

Section 10.2

20. The use of additional resources, particularly credit and loans, often happened at critical times. These occurred when the families regular benefit income, however carefully budgeted, could not stretch to meet an ‘exceptional’ demand (eg Christmas, replacing or repairing domestic appliances, house repairs or redecoration, urgently needed clothes, etc). At times like these, even the good managers found it difficult to ‘make ends meet’.

Section 10.3

PART IV Financial constraint, the consequences and effects

The psychological effects

21. Around half of the men talked of some marked changes in their feelings or behaviour that had come with the financial constraints of unemployment. Two main effects were described. The first surrounded the level of anxiety or frustration associated with trying to make ends meet. The second was connected with the loss of role as the family provider. Either or both left them feeling irritable, strained or depressed.

Section 11.1

22. Wives were under equal if not greater strain than their husbands. They were mainly responsible for day to day budgeting, with all the stresses and anxieties this brought. Additionally some of them were very affected by their husbands change of mood or disposition. There was also a deep sense of insecurity which surrounded family life, which most crucially posed some kind of threat to their children. These factors, together with the constraints on activities which they shared with the rest of the family, left many of them feeling low, anxious or depressed.

Section 11.1

23. For some couples the stress manifested itself in a mild form, for others it caused serious anxiety or depression. The number of people who reported mild levels of stress and more serious anxiety or depression increased during the study period. Although the length of unemployment was relevant it was not the only contributing factor. The amount of financial difficulty experienced (particularly continual overspending or high levels of debt) and the pressures brought by continual managing had a significant bearing.

Section 11.1

The impact on family life

24. Many of the couples spoke of the effects that unemployment had had on their relationship. Some felt there had been a positive effect making them closer and more intimate as a couple. Rather more felt that unemployment had placed a strain on their relationship. By 1988, three couples had separated and a further three were having serious problems with their marriage. None of these couples felt that unemployment was the root cause of the problem, but all of them felt it had contributed.

Section 11.2

25. Most of the parents felt their children were affected in some way by the financial constraints of unemployment. The kind of effects noted changed, as the children grew older. By 1988, three of the parents had a serious concern about one of their children which they felt might be connected with their father’s unemployment.

Section 11.2

Social and leisure activities

26. Social contact and activities were often seriously affected by unemployment. A shortage of money which prevented ‘normal’ participation in social activities, disengagement from settings where social activities naturally occur and feelings of ‘shame’ arising from the status of unemployment were all identified as causes.

Section 11.3

27. Leisure activities that cost money, or which involved social contact, were in the main abandoned during unemployment. Those of a more solitary or passive nature were more likely to be maintained. Most of the disengagement from social and leisure activities occurred in the earlier stage of unemployment.

Section 11.4

Some conclusions and reflections

28. The report ends by drawing together some conclusions about the impact of unemployment on living standards. The effects on each of the main defining elements of ‘living standards’ are described. The final section documents some learning which the families felt they had gained from unemployment. The advice most consistently given was to avoid getting into debt and to manage money as carefully as possible.

Chapter 12
1 Background to the Study

1.1 The origins of the study

In 1982, the Department of Health and Social Security initiated a programme of research into the living standards of unemployed people and their families. The principal purpose of the programme was to provide information which would aid in the formulation of policy regarding systems of income support for unemployed people.

The need for the research arose in two contexts. First, there had been some recent changes in the administration of benefits available to unemployed people. Most notably, the earnings-related supplement had been withdrawn, taxation of unemployment benefit, along with all other short term national insurance benefits had been introduced and there were changes in the administration of supplementary benefit arising from the 1980 review. Moreover, these changes had occurred during a period when the numbers of people dependent on benefits, through unemployment, had risen sharply. Between May 1980 and May 1982, the number of unemployed claimants had doubled.

In addition to this policy context there were questions arising from previous unemployment research. Between 1977 and 1982, the DHSS had carried out a large scale cohort study among men who became unemployed. This study provided comparisons between incomes in work and incomes out of work for a sample of men who became unemployed in the Autumn of 1978. While the study provided a wealth of information on comparative incomes, it was felt that issues surrounding peoples’ living standards in unemployment had not been fully addressed. It was therefore suggested that further research in this area should be conducted.

The programme of research commissioned by the DHSS contained two components. The first, and main component, comprised a large scale survey, carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The aim of the survey was to investigate the extent to which living standards alter, both with the onset of unemployment and as unemployment continues over time. To this end, a cohort study was undertaken with interviews taking place three months and fifteen months after the unemployed person started to sign on. The sample comprised just under 3,000 people aged between 20 and 58 and was confined to married men and single householders, of either sex, who had been continuously unemployed for a minimum of three months at the outset of the study. The fieldwork was carried out in the autumns of 1983 and 1984.

The second element of the research programme consisted of a small number of case studies among unemployed men with families. These were intended to provide information of a different, but complementary, nature to the large scale survey enquiry. The case studies were carried out in two stages, the first in parallel with the OPCS survey, the second around four years later.

This report is concerned with the findings of the case study research. A separate report on the survey evidence has been prepared by OPCS. Although the two studies have been independently conducted, each has a frame of reference within the other. For this reason, cross reference to the findings of the OPCS study is made wherever this is appropriate. But, in the main, this report is intended to be self-contained. It describes, through the experiences of a small number of families, the effects of unemployment on living standards, both as they were perceived at the time and, for some, after a return to work.

1.2 Aims and scope of the case studies

The case studies were undertaken to provide evidence of a kind that could not be collected through the structured survey. Their main concern was to investigate the processes that lead to any changes in living standards during unemployment and the impact of these changes on families. In particular, there was interest in examining the reasons why certain choices or decisions about patterns of expenditure or money management are made and the effects of these choices on individual members of the family.

A small scale case study approach is particularly appropriate for collecting such information because of the flexible and exploratory form of interview that can be used. This allows the people taking part to give detailed
accounts of their experiences or perceptions and to cite instances where these are relevant. They are also encouraged to explore and formulate their attitudes towards the central issues being studied—both those which are pre-defined and those which are of most salience to them as individuals. And there is the opportunity for people to discuss their underlying, or more deep rooted, feelings and beliefs. In essence, such methods allow the accounts and perceptions of those being studied to enter into the research findings in a way that is usually not possible with pre-structured interviews.

The subject areas covered in the case study research were similar to those included in the OPCS study, although, open to extension by the families involved. In outline the topics covered were as follows:

**Household** information including family size, composition and changes.
Tenure and reasons for any changes in housing arrangements.

**Employment** histories of both partners.
Job search, job prospects and feelings surrounding.

**Incomes** in employment-level and sources.
Incomes in unemployment-level and sources

**Managing strategies for coping** with changes in income.
How and when strategies are decided, and how and why priorities are defined.
Impact and effects of changes in expenditure patterns.

**Use of other resources:** decisions surrounding
- use of other financial resources, such as savings, loans, severance pay
- sale of goods, termination of financial commitments
- support from family and friends

**Consideration of potential resources**, including benefits and casual employment.

**How living standards are defined**: what a good/poor standard of living means.
How living standards are affected by unemployment and a return to work; effects on members of the family.

**Reflections on unemployment** and its social and psychological effects.

These areas form the base of the material presented in the following chapters.

It has already been said that the case studies were undertaken to complement the large scale survey. The material they have provided is intended to illuminate decisions or events which will be observed as statistical outcomes in the main survey. Indeed, it must be added that the case study data itself cannot provide any quantification of perceptions or experiences nor determine statistically discriminatory variables. The analytical output is in the form of a synthesis of the range and importance of issues which surround living standards in unemployment, an examination of the relationships which exist between events or circumstances and behaviour or attitudes and a diagnosis of how and why differences between families may arise.

### 1.3 Design and conduct of research

The case study research was carried out as a longitudinal study over a period of several years. Two approaches were made to the families, the first in late 1983/early 1984 when all the men were unemployed; the second in the early part of 1988 some four years later. The decision to return to the families was made after the first stage of the research was completed. There was interest in examining how the families had fared in the longer term, both in relation to a return to work and in comparative living standards.

**The sample**

**Stage 1**
The initial sample for the case study interviews was confined to unemployed male householders with families; that is men who were responsible for their own accommodation and had a wife and dependent children living with them. The decision to confine the study to this particular group was made for two reasons. First, by virtue of being both householders and parents, they are among those with the greatest demands on their income. Second, there is particular concern among those involved in developing strategies for income support that the needs of dependent children should be met as far as possible. In addition, although people with families form a relatively small proportion of all unemployed claimants (ie under a quarter), they are much more substantially represented amongst household claimants (ie around one half).

As with the OPCS survey, the sample was restricted to people aged 20 to 58, Because it was important to examine any changes that occur as unemployment lengthens, an attempt was made to include people with different lengths of unemployment. The eventual range was six months up to two and a half years.

The sample was selected through Unemployment Benefit Offices according to the requirements described above. No attempt was made to draw a systematic random sample since the purpose was to represent a range of circumstances, in terms of such factors as family size, age, length of employment, etc. Three unemployment benefit offices (one in the North, one in the Midlands, and one in the South West) were involved in this selection according to guidelines prepared by the research team. The offices concerned sent a letter to the selected claimants, inviting their participation in the study, before any approach by the research team was made.

It was the intention that a total of thirty interviews should be conducted in the three areas concerned, 10
in each area. Unfortunately, however, three of the cases selected by the offices proved to be ineligible in terms of length of unemployment, household status, or age. However, prior to undertaking the main case study enquiry, some developmental pilot work had been undertaken amongst families in the relevant group. Although the purpose of this was to develop a subject guide for the case studies, the broad areas of coverage were identical. It was therefore decided to restore the guide for the case studies, the broad areas of coverage undertaken amongst families in the relevant group.

Stage 2
An attempt was made to interview all of the 30 families included at Stage I. They were first sent a letter to their original address explaining the purpose of the follow-up study and asking for a reply if they did not want to take part. There was no response at all to these letters and the interviewers therefore went to the areas involved. As a result 24 of the families were contacted and 22 took part in a second interview. The remaining six had moved from their original address and either could not be traced or contacted.

By the time of the second interviews, some of the men were back in full-time employment, some had been in and out of work and some had been continuously unemployed. There had also been some changes in the families’ circumstances and their living arrangements. Again these circumstances are described in Part I.

The interviews
The case study information was collected by means of unstructured in-depth interviews. These were carried out with the aid of outline topic guides. The guides had similar coverage at the two stages, although clearly there was more emphasis on the return to employment at Stage 2. The two topic guides used are reproduced in Appendix II.

The interviews were conducted by two of SCPR's research interviewers who specialise in investigative interviewing. In every case, the same interviewer returned to the same families at Stage 2. This proved to be an important feature of the second interviews, both for reasons of rapport and for enabling reflections on what was said at the first interview. In all cases the interviews were tape recorded.

At each stage, an attempt was made to talk to both the unemployed man and his wife. This proved to be possible in 26 of the 30 cases at Stage 1, and in 14 out of 22 cases at Stage 2. In most instances the couples were interviewed jointly, although in some cases, a sizeable part of the interview was conducted with either the husband or the wife alone.

It is of relevance to note that at the first stage, several of the interviews were felt to be very stressful for the people taking part. Although there was considerable willingness to discuss the issues in question, this very process brought the individuals concerned face to face with the reality of their situation. And, for many, this was a painful experience. In addition, it was difficult at the end of most interviews to bring people out from the feelings they had been describing. This is quite unusual with in-depth interviews of this kind. People often spontaneously mention the beneficial effects of having been able to express their views and thoughts about a key issue. The fact that most of these respondents did not do so was, we feared reflective of the feelings that had been exposed.

Because of this, there was some concern about how the approach for a second interview might be received. It was therefore rewarding to find that the reception was on the whole very positive indeed. Those who were recontacted clearly remembered their first interview and, in most cases, gave a warm welcome to the interviewer. Moreover, some of them remembered with remarkable recall feelings they had expressed the first time around.

Among the eight families who were not reinterviewed, two were unwilling to take part a second time. In one case this was because of a recent accident which the husband had had; in the other case there was a very abrupt refusal without specific reasons being given. In both families, the husband was back in full-time work and this may have had a bearing on their unwillingness to take part.

The remaining six families had all moved and in two such cases it is believed the new address was traced. There was however no response to the letters sent and no contact where calls at the address were made. It is always difficult to know whether the lack of contact was a latent refusal or the result of a very busy life. For the remaining four families, all attempts to trace a new address failed. Two of those were said by neighbours to have left the area completely—a possibility that both had been considering when they were first interviewed.

The pilot study involved two stages of development work. At the first stage individual interviews and a group discussion were conducted in London and the North East. At the second stage individual interviews were undertaken in London and another southern town.
The analysis

The analysis of the case study data was undertaken from verbatim transcriptions of the interviews. Four stages of analysis were involved. First, an index of major themes, and sub-themes, was developed, after listening to a selection of the interviews. This index was then applied to all the transcripts, such that each issue could be easily referenced and accessed. At the third stage, a series of subject charts was prepared, on which each families' comments or thoughts on that subject were summarised. At the final stage of analysis, key abstracts from this material were brought to a central chart where the demographic characteristics and circumstances of the families were already recorded. These central charts played an important role in identifying differences and similarities between families. They were particularly important for comparing and contrasting data from the two stages of the study.

The structure of the report

This report is divided into four main sections. Part I provides a profile of the families studied, describing first their circumstances and then their employment histories. The second part looks at definitions and perceptions of living standards and provides an overview of how they are seen to change with unemployment. Part III examines patterns of financial management and expenditure, looking at changes over the length of unemployment and on the return to work. The final part draws together the families' reflections on unemployment, both as they were perceived at the time and after a return to work.

The evidence from the two stages of the research has been interwoven throughout all the chapters. It is however crucial to preserve the circumstances and feelings as they were experienced at the two points in time. Without this, any changes in attitudes, motivations or behaviour cannot be fully captured. To help to distinguish the two stages, the material from each is presented in a different typographical form. The initial contact is in standard type-face, the follow-up material in italic sans-serif type-face.

Throughout the report illustrative case histories and quotations are presented. Although where possible, factual information about the families' circumstances has been left intact some changes had to be made. This has been necessary in cases where a combination of circumstances or events could, potentially, identify an individual family. All the names cited are fictitious.
PART T  A profile of the Families

2 Family characteristics and living arrangements

2.1 Family and household composition

On first contact, all the families involved were two parent families with dependent children. The number of dependent children and the age of the oldest was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of dependent children (1983/84)</th>
<th>Age of oldest dependent child (1983/84)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Under 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>5 up to 1.1 up to 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 30

In two of the families there was also was also an older child living at home who was now working. In three families there was an additional adult relative living in the household.

The ages of the fathers ranged from 22-46, although over half were in their thirties. The mothers' ages ranged from 19 to 38 and were fairly evenly divided between the twenties and the thirties. Given the age ranges of the children, the pattern of the parents' ages is much as would be expected, although it should be noted that the sample was absent of men in their fifties at the first contact.

In three of the families, the parents were living together, all the rest were formally married. There were also two households where children of a former marriage were living. In both cases, the father had moved into accommodation previously occupied by his current wife or partner and his step-children.

Four years later

Four years on there had been a number of changes in the household and claim unit composition. Less than half the families had the same claim unit composition in terms of the number of adults or dependent children.

Three of the couples had separated, in two cases permanently, in one case with a possibility of reconciliation. In one such family the husband now living alone was interviewed, in the other two the wives were the second stage participants. This was entirely dictated by who was now occupying the original or traced address.

The number and dependency status of children had also changed. Six of the couples had had other children, thus increasing the number of dependent children. At the other end of the age range, six families had experienced one or more children leaving school or full-time education and becoming non-dependent. In two such cases, there were no longer any dependent children in the claim unit. All the remaining families had at least one child of school age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (incl. separated father)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Under 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 up to 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>11 up to 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three families who originally had another adult relative living with them had continued to do so. In four households, one or more of the non-dependent children had continued to live at home. There were therefore around one in three households at the second stage where there were two or more claims units residing.

2.2 Accommodation and tenure

Over half (17) of the families lived in accommodation which was rented from the local authority, and two rented privately. The rest owned their own homes, three owning them outright and eight with a mortgage. The length of time they had lived in their current accommodation varied between five months and eleven years with around half having lived there five years or more. Three of the families had moved since they were last employed. One moved to a lower value property to pay off the mortgage, and to help the search for jobs; and two, both council tenants, moved for domestic reasons,
By 1988 a further five families (3 owner-occupiers, 2 council tenants) had moved and two of the most recent movers had changed their accommodation again. Some of these moves took place while the men were out of work bringing the total number of families who moved during the reference period to six. These numbers, of course, exclude the six families who were not interviewed who were also known to have changed address (see table below).

Changes of accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Owner occupants</th>
<th>Council tenants</th>
<th>Other tenants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During reference period of unemployment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At other times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amongst non-contacts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still in same accommodation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of the unemployed movers (all owner occupiers) directly related the reasons for their moves to being out of work. The family described above who moved first to pay off the mortgage, moved a second time to release further capital. The property they now owned was, by their own admission, very run down and in need of urgent repair.

The other two families decided to move in order to increase their chances of getting work. For one couple the move proved successful and the family now own some holiday flats as well as their own accommodation. The other family did not find suitable employment in the new area and returned to their home town. Although they now own their own home again they had considerable difficulty finding suitable accommodation during their moves to and from the new area.

One of the other movers, also an owner occupier, moved on return to employment. Although the period in work was short (less than 6 months), the family used the opportunity to increase their mortgage and move to a better part of town. Since that time, the husband has not worked again and has heavy arrears with his mortgage.

The remaining moves were quite unrelated to the work situation. In all cases they were council tenants who had asked for transfers, either to an estate or area they preferred or to a different form of accommodation.

Owner occupiers had experienced more change of accommodation than those who rented. Moreover, there were one or two other owners who had thought very seriously about moving to release capital from their housing. The extent to which this use of owner occupied housing is significant cannot be judged from this small sample. From the accounts given however, it would seem that the resource provided by a housing asset did afford some flexibility, either by releasing capital or by providing the chance to move to a different area.

There are no comparable statistics from the OPCS study.
3 Employment histories

3.1 Lengths of unemployment

The original sample of case study families was selected to ensure that a range of unemployment was covered in the reference period, with a minimum of six months. It is therefore not surprising to find that the sample contained a relatively high proportion of long term unemployment. At that time, 19 of the men had been unemployed for 1 year or more as the figures below show.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of current period of unemployment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 up to 9 months</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 months up to 1 year</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year up to 1½ years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1½ years up to 2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years up to 2½ years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For most men (23), the period of unemployment started when their last paid employment stopped. But for seven of the men, the length of time they had spent out of work was rather longer. The reasons for this were twofold. Four had had a period of receiving sickness or invalidity benefit prior to registering unemployed. Another three had a period of imprisonment either immediately prior to, or during, this spell of unemployment.

The OPCS survey shows that 47% of the sample had not been working (either full or part-time) in the week prior to signing on. A high proportion of this group were people who did not start signing on until a few weeks after they stopped reporting for work (because of pay in lieu of notice etc.). Of the other specific categories, the most frequent was sick and out of work (8%). Other reasons included being in full-time education, being on government training schemes, and in prison, each of which accounted for around 2%. The ease study group cannot be compared statistically with the survey data, but it provides a useful context against which to set their experiences.

By 1988, the reference period of unemployment had extended to between nine months and over six years. The periods were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference period of unemployment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 months to 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year to 2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years to 3 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years to 5 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years or more</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the group now contained a high proportion of people who had experienced very long term unemployment, with over half having been out of work for three or more years.

At the time of the second interview, just under half of the men had jobs (9 full-time, 1 part-time) although five of them had had another spell of unemployment. A further six had a job in the intervening period but were again unemployed. The remaining six men had been continuously unemployed during the reference period. The relationship between the initial length of unemployment and finding subsequent employment is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment since reference period</th>
<th>Reference period of unemployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed - no subsequent periods of unemployment (6)</td>
<td>Less than 2 yrs 2-3 yrs 3-5 yrs 5 years or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed - but with subsequent periods of unemployment (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed - but with intervening period of employment (6) a a a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed - throughout (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*includes one person working part-time for less than 10 hours a week.

The ten men who had experienced a period of unemployment subsequent to the reference period had spent between a further month up to two years out of work. For most people, the subsequent period of unemployment was shorter than the reference period although for two it was now equal to or over that length.

The reference period of unemployment is defined as the period that occurred between the last job prior to 1983/84 and the first period of employment between 1983/84 and 1988.
3.2 Job history

Before the reference period of unemployment, the great majority (22) of the men had last worked in a manual occupation, around half (14) of which were unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. These included some factory work but were mainly labouring jobs in building, construction or other such industries. The skilled manual occupations covered such things as welding, fitting (garage), bricklaying and cutting (in a clothing factory). Of the three who had worked in non-manual employment, only one had had a managerial occupation. The majority had been employees in their last occupation while five had been self-employed. All of those who had been in self-employment were in either skilled or semi-skilled occupations (ie turf accountant, taxi driver, bricklayer). Around two-thirds of the unemployed men had worked in their last job for over a year. Approaching half of the case study sample had been in their last jobs for five years or more.

One-fifth of the men had themselves decided to leave the job that started their reference period of unemployment. Reasons for this were various but included low wages, changes in hours, a move of location and other, as they saw it, `unfavourable' working conditions. In the remaining cases, there had been no choice about the end of the employment for the following reasons:

- redundancy through closure of a works or factory, or cutbacks in staffing levels, (10 cases)
- a shortage of work for those in self-employed occupations or those in contractually based employment. (5 cases)
- dismissed for reasons including poor attendance, loss of driving licence, imprisonment. (5 cases)
- 111-health or injury. (2 cases)
- Bankruptcy or `collapse' of business, again for those in self-employment. (2 cases)

There was a great deal of variation between the men in the stability of their employment prior to unemployment. It is however, possible to identify three main groups which will be important for later reference. First there were those whose pattern of employment had been reasonably stable. They were characterised by having had one or more long term jobs and virtually continuous employment since they began work. A number of them had had jobs in manufacturing industries from which they had been made redundant.

Then, there were a group whose work pattern had been more erratic but largely because of the nature of the work they did. That is, they were in occupations where the flow of work was very uneven, either because of seasonal variation or simply demand. They had, as a result, had more breaks in their employment but usually in the expectation that there would be certain work in the future. This group contained a number of men who had been employed as labourers in building or construction work, often on a contract basis.

And finally, there was a group who had very unstable employment histories. These were signified by a number of job changes, or changes of occupation, several breaks in employment and generally, as one of them put it, being `in and out of work'.

The first group with stable employment histories was the largest, comprising around half of the men in the case study sample. The other half were divided more or less evenly between the two less stable groups. And, as has already been suggested, there was a relationship between the stability of their employment records and the nature of their occupations. As the chart below shows, those with non-manual, or skilled manual occupations were more likely to have had stable employment records while the reverse was true for those with unskilled manual occupations. This picture is not at all unexpected but it helps to characterise the groups whose living standards are being examined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability of employment prior to reference period</th>
<th>Type of occupation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>s.****</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erratic, due to nature of work</td>
<td>s.****</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>s.****</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be evident from the descriptions above that experience of unemployment prior to the reference period was very variable. For just over half the men (17), there had been either no previous period of unemployment at all (9) or the spells had been very short indeed (ie a few weeks). For the rest, most of whom were people with erratic or unstable employment records, there had been much greater experience of unemployment, both in terms of the number and length of the periods concerned.

Around half of those who obtained employment between 1983/84 and 1988 had returned to broadly the same type of work. The other half went back to work in quite different types of jobs, including a taxi driver who became a debt-collector, a rail worker who moved into car body work, and a skilled metal worker who became a community sports leader. In addition, there were others who first returned to the type of work they had before unemployment but had since moved on to different occupations (a textile cutter who became a litho-print operator is one such example.)

One of the men currently working had a part-time job. He worked for 30 hours a week as part of a job share with another disabled person. Another part-time employee has been classified as unemployed as he currently worked for less than 10 hours a week.
Type of occupation after reference period | Type of occupation prior to unemployment
--- | ---
(16 people who regained employment) | Non-manual | Semi or unskilled manual | Total
Non-manual | • | • | 3
Skilled manual | • • • | 7
Semi- or unskilled manual | • | 6

His hours however, had varied considerably in the past and he hoped to regain more work in the near future.

Of those who had regained employment (16), around half (9) had had two or more jobs in three cases with no break between them. The others had had one job only, in three cases the one they were currently in.
The lengths of time they had spent working between 1983/84 and 1988 and the lengths of their present or last jobs are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total length of employment</th>
<th>Current job</th>
<th>Last job (now unemployed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months-1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year-2 years</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years-3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years-4 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who changed jobs without any break in employment did so in all cases because they found a job they preferred. Among those who gave up jobs without the prospect of other employment, three were forced to do so because the job was only temporary, and two were in self-employed businesses that collapsed. The rest had a variety of personal reasons for giving up their jobs including their own illness, the illness of their wife, the death of a family member in Bangladesh and, for two people the start of a prison sentence.

There is some link between the stability of employment prior to the reference period of unemployment and the subsequent return to work, although it is by no means clear-cut.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment since reference period</th>
<th>Stability of employment prior to reference period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed-no further unemployment</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed-with other period of unemployment</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment-with period of employment</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed throughout</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who had stable employment histories showed a higher ratio in employment by 1988 and a lower number who had been in and out of work than those with erratic and variable work histories. Nevertheless four of the eleven people concerned had been continuously unemployed in the reference period, and this was after a career with almost no unemployment before.

Half of the men had been on government training schemes or assessment programmes of one kind or another. A variety of different schemes was involved, including Restart courses, Job Clubs, Skills courses, Job Training Schemes, Community Programmes, the Enterprise Allowance and attendance at an Employment Rehabilitation Centre. For two men, participation in the programme directly led to work, although a few felt that there had been other indirect benefits. Of the six people who had been continuously unemployed, four had attended some kind of government scheme, one had been invited to do an adult training scheme but had declined because he `would be much worse off financially' and one had now been transferred to invalidity benefit.

3.3 The employment of wives and other family members

Wives employment in 1983/84

Only three of the wives had any kind of employment at all at the time of the first interview. One had a part-time job, as a school meal supervisor, and two did casual work (eg agency typing). Among the rest the majority had not worked at all since they had had children. But there were three families where the wife had had employment since the period of their husband's unemployment began. The main reason for giving up their jobs was the lack of any financial incentive to work. They were all in jobs with low wages and they could see little point continuing when their husband’s benefit was reduced, more or less, by the amount they earned. Two women had made this decision around the time their husband became unemployed, one after the period of unemployment had continued for several months.

The majority of the women who were not working had not given any serious thought to trying to get a job during their husbands' unemployment. In some cases this was because of the young age of the children; in others because one or both of the partners had strong feelings about a woman's role being in the home; and in one or two because, their husbands `would not be capable of looking after the children'.

The few who had given working any thought at all, were either put off by what they saw as the lack of any suitable or available jobs in the area, or by the earnings rule. For those who wanted to work, the lack of financial incentive was a source of irritation.
"I think if I got a job it'd be only fair if all they should take off his money is what he claims for me. But they don't, it's just not fair. I mean, if what they took off was the £14 odd a week he gets for me—if they did that, I would go to work. But they don't they take it all off . . . so it's just pointless." (Mrs Hawkins)

The OPCS data provides some evidence that the benefit system can act as a disincentive for wives to work. It shows that there was a small fall (from 40% to 35%) in the proportion of wives who were doing paid work during the first three months of their husbands' unemployment. It also shows that in families in which the husbands returned to work by the 15 month point, the proportion of wives doing full-time work rose from 43% to 52%. There was virtually no change amongst families where the husband signed on continuously for this period. Nevertheless, the OPCS report also notes that there is a sizeable proportion of women who are not deterred by their husband's unemployment. There is therefore some interest in finding out what happened to the wives in the case study sample, and most particularly, when and why decisions to work were made.

Changes by 1988

By the time of the second interview, five of the wives were working, two full-time and three part-time. In every case, their husband was also working. A further three had had jobs in the intervening period, but had since given them up.

The relationship between the wives' employment and their husbands' working status is complex. For two, the return to work was explicitly connected to the fact that their husband had regained employment. One of the women who had given up work after her husband became unemployed went back to work within three months of her husband getting a job. She said she could have found jobs in the interim but it was simply not worth her while to look. The second woman had now split up from her husband and went back to work shortly after the separation. She, again, said it would not have been worth working while her husband was still at home (and unemployed) because of the earning rule.

For another two women the return to work was directly connected to their husband being out of work. In both cases, the wives were becoming desperate about their situations and somehow wanted to break the mould. One of them had 'persuaded' her husband to move to another town, despite her husband's nervousness. She had decided that she at least could get a job and support them until her husband found work. She got a hotel job within a week of arriving at the seaside resort and her husband found work a month later. For the second woman, it had been a case of trying to revive herself, her husband and her marriage.

"I was getting fed up with him and I was getting fed up with myself and we seemed to be going round in a circle ... I was getting stale, I know he was getting stale but he couldn't see an end out of it ... so I got the chance and I knew it might not last very long but I thought 'perhaps it'll do him good to be on his own ... perhaps I'm too much in his world and he's too much in mine—so that's why I took it" (Mrs Field)

Her husband did not find work during his wife's temporary job, although he did later. They were, therefore, only 'a couple of pounds a week better off' as a result of the wife working.

For the remaining women who had worked, their husbands' unemployment or employment seems to have been irrelevant. They themselves wanted jobs, either because they wanted to earn some 'independent' money, or because they wanted some company and activity outside of the family. One of these women had been working in 1983 (doing school dinners) and has since progressed to a full-time job at a local factory. In another case, the wife took a lunch-time job in a local restaurant just to earn £4 or £5 which was 'my own money'. In some families, the husbands were back in employment at the time, in others not. This seemed to have little bearing on their decision to work.

Among the 14 women who had not worked at all since their husband was unemployed, around half did not want work because of having young children. Others were not in a position to do so because of other care responsibilities, or because of their own health. There were however, a few women whose husbands were unemployed who would have liked to work. They were not doing so, they said, because of the lack of incentive although in two cases their husbands were also against it.

Older children

it was noted earlier that there were a few households where one or more non-dependent children had continued to live at home. In only one family was the son unemployed, all the rest were either working, on YTS or in full-time further education. Similarly, those children who had left home had also mainly found employment—in only one case, again, was there a son, now living away, who was unemployed. In addition, there were two families where older children, still at school, did occasional work, like a paper or milk round, before and after school.

The impact that the earning of older children had had are discussed in a later section.
Other family members

There were three households where other relatives had lived since the start of the reference period of unemployment. Two were elderly parents, in one case being cared for by the family. In the third family, a brother of working age was living. He had been in and out of work during the period of the study.
4 Seeking and finding employment

Behind the descriptions given in the previous chapter lie a miscellany of experiences. They range from accounts of high success and great prospects to ones of bitter disillusionment and discouragement. Some of the men who had given up all hope of ever working again were back in secure employment. Others who were at one time quite optimistic about their prospects had never returned to work. Before embarking on any discussion of living standards, it is important to have some picture of how the search for employment has been experienced.

4.1 Job search and job prospects

The job prospects in 1983/84

The extent to which the men were actively looking for a job at the time of the first interview was varied. Some looked in the papers every day, went to the Job Centre more than once a week and applied for anything that seemed remotely suitable. Others were more passive in their job search, although constantly kept their eyes and ears open for anything that was going. A few appeared to have almost given up, apart from perhaps a quick scan of the newspaper or cards at the Job Centre.

There were two factors which had a strong bearing on the level of the job search activity. The first was the extent to which unemployment had been accepted or was found acceptable. Those who were deeply distressed by being out of work and found unemployment almost intolerable were more likely to be the most active in seeking jobs.

"I'm a tryer, I do, you know I'm a four time Job Centre a week man. I do actually try, I'm not an habitual unemployed person if you know what I mean. I'm not sort of destined to be unemployed for the rest of my life." (Mr Ward)

(Uneployed 7 months)

"If they gave me a welding job, I'd go and do it, even if it is 20 miles I go to do it . . . I'm a strong man, I'm a skilled man, I'm looking for my job every day . . . my friends helping me, lots of English friends, they know me, they say when we have a chance, have a word with the manager or foreman, come for a try . . . I go every day to Job Centre, you know, looking for a job . . . I go into Leeds as well, Sheffield, I've been in Leicester as well." (Mr Johnson)

(Uneployed 8 months)

The second factor which affected job search activity was the length of unemployment. Some of the men, despite a very strong desire to work, were clearly becoming dispirited.

"Getting let down, when you're trying for jobs-it only makes it (self-confidence) worse, you know. I think if I give up trying to find work for a start-off—which is easy actually-I think if I ever lost that I'd definitely know I'm going down hill ... I got into a sort of period after looking for work, endless sort of trips to places and the phoning of them-looking through the papers and the Job Centre and I went through a period when I didn't want to do nothing at all ... I didn't want to go out . . . didn't want to talk ... it were just an emptiness you know . . . I could see myself doing it now." (Mr Field)

(Uneployed 14 months)

As is evident, this man had by no means given up looking for work, despite a period when he nearly did so. But some had become resigned, almost accepting of the fact, that unemployment was likely to continue.

"I did think that when we moved there would be more jobs . . . I was living between and and I thought, like, moving into town I'd have more chance of employment and really it's not so . . . I have accepted it in way. You know, there are just not any jobs about with good money, really, full stop, an end of it . . . it just happens to you slowly without you noticing it. I mean I can't believe I've been unemployed that long . . . You don't realise how time is going by . . . I mean I was trying ever so hard to get a job . . . apart from trying all the local jobs and everything I was going to Job Centres in (other towns), to job agencies . . . leaving my address . . . but after a while we realised that we were spending £2 to £3 a week trying to gain employment and getting nowhere fast and then you realise that £2 or £3 could be put to better use, you know on food, or putting a pane of glass in the front window or something . . . I mean, I'm still looking for jobs.
but . . . you get discouraged don’t you.” (Mr Burns)
(Unemployed 2 years)

This man was not the only one who mentioned the expense of looking for work. Several of them referred to the cost of the bus fares, some had retained a phone simply to aid their job search, and two justified the retention of their cars to help them look for work. In all cases, these expenses were hard to find within the constraints of their household budgets.

Five of the men were reasonably hopeful that they would be able to return to work within the next few months. Two (unemployed for 7 and 15 months) had had an offer of a job, although one seemed much more certain than the other; two, who worked in building occupations (unemployed around 1 year) had heard of sub-contracting work that might soon be available; and one (unemployed 8 months) thought that if he moved to another area (during the week) he would be able to find some construction work. The rest, however, were rather more pessimistic about ever finding a suitable job. And although some of them had very specific requirements about the kind of work they wanted to do, others were open to more or less any offer which was within their skills or abilities to do.

There was, however, one overriding requirement which was mentioned by virtually all the men. And that was that they were not prepared to work for less money than they got ‘on the dole’. This was said even by the men who were highly distressed by not working.

“When I was down at the factory I thought that was a job for life. You know it was a job I enjoyed and that and when that (redundancy) came it was just like the bottom of the world dropping out . . . I enjoyed work, I love being at work, I think that’s what I miss most . . . I would (take any job) . . . I’ve never been the fussy type . . . No, I wouldn’t take a job for the same as now. I can’t live with, well we can hardly manage now . . . so it’d be pointless getting a job because again you’d be wanting money for working, things like that or the bus fare . . . you’ve got to have a hundred pounds ‘cos it’s something I’ve always been used to. Well I ain’t saying hundred pounds, like ninety or somewhere towards the hundred mark. You want it to run a house properly and if you’re going to work and that.” (Mr White)

(Unemployed 6 months)

Like this person, many of the men had a figure in their minds for which they would be prepared to accept a job. But almost without exception they said the jobs that were on offer did not reach the required wage level. The most recurrent theme in the whole discussion of job prospects was the fact that the jobs that were around were not paying enough for a married man with a family. The reference to ‘young single blokes’, ‘kids’, ‘YTS trainees’, ‘youngsters without families’ came up in virtually all the interviews. Indeed, some of the men had actually been offered jobs which paid, as they saw it, these ‘single person’ wages and had turned them down. But throughout all the discussion of such jobs, it was evident that little account was being taken of any ‘in work’ benefits that might be received. It was rare to find someone who said that if they took a job at that level they would get FIS, housing benefit and other low income benefits. And those who did take other benefits into account were usually the few who had received them before.

Four years on

By the time of the second interview it was not possible for people to systematically recall all their job search activities during the intervening period. It was, however, apparent that those who had most bitterly resented being out of work continued the search most actively. Although inevitably this had slowed down as the period of unemployment lengthened, there was still regular search activity on-going amongst some of those who had been continuously unemployed. There were those however, who were now utterly disillusioned, including, the ‘four time Job Centre a week man’ cited earlier.

“No, I’m not looking as much now. All I was doing was spending a £1 a day on going down. Admittedly it did break the monotony but it did break you down—you came out with chin on chest because lots of jobs in the job centre are for £60 or £70 a week . . . it’s not economically viable, I could not survive on the jobs that are on offer and your four times a week become twice a week and then it becomes once a week and then it’s once a fortnight because all they were doing is moving the cards . . . I shall go down, I do go down but I should think once a fortnight would be it—and then you go in with an air of hopelessness so you don’t go in with a spring in your step and let’s get into something . . . the more it goes on the worse it gets because every year you get another year older and then you’ve got the stigma of ‘what have you been doing for four years’ . . . if i was an employer, I’d be exactly the same, I would you know, long term unemployed ‘why haven’t you bothered’. It’s not a case of not bothering, I’d defend that because I have bothered, it’s just the fact it is unviable” (Mr Ward)

(Unemployed 4 years 7 months)

This dispirited account came from one of the four mentioned previously who had had stable employment until their current and continuous spell of unemployment. All of them were equally distressed

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1 The OPCS report provides a detailed analysis of the effect of financial incentives on the return to work.
about their prospects of finding work. In two cases, the men were in their 40’s and also in very bad health. One had recently been transferred to invalidity benefit because of his long term health problems. The other two were younger but felt long term unemployment now worked wholly against them in getting work.

The remaining two men who had been continuously unemployed during the reference period had less stable employment patterns before. For one man, this was because of the nature of his work-he had previously been a self-employed builder. The other man was a building labourer who had been in and out of work. He also had spent time in prison for receiving stolen goods. Neither of these men were particularly fretful about their unemployment. In one case this was because the man continued to live off ‘other means’-accompanied by more than one spell in prison. The self-employed builder thought he could fairly easily get some work again, but he said it would have to pay a lot of money. He had a large family-he also did regular casual work which brought him a not inconsequential weekly income.

Among those who had had employment in the elapsed period, but were now again unemployed, there were some very mixed experiences. Two of the men had set up businesses in the building trade. In both cases the business had collapsed, one because of lack of work, the other because of a client who defaulted on a large bill. Both seemed to have lost heart because of these ventures and were very pessimistic about their future employment. In two other cases, the men concerned had been in and out of work almost all their working lives and neither had a very positive attitude towards working. Both had been involved in some form of criminal or illegal activity which had resulted in prison sentences.

A fifth man had worked in a series of jobs in restaurants, when he left to return briefly to Bangladesh. On return he found a small part-time job (8 hours), but he is hopeful that the amount of work he can get will soon increase.

Only one person who had returned to unemployment was hopeful about working again. His experiences in the last four years had been quite different from the accounts above. He had been working almost continuously during the elapsed period, having found a job within a few months of the first interview. He had only been unemployed again for a few weeks, having been laid off from his contract driving work because of illness. He was however very optimistic that he would soon find work again, once he had regained his fitness.

We have seen that, at the first interview, five of the men were reasonably hopeful that they would return to work within the foreseeable future. In the event, only one of these ‘prospects’ proved to be real, Three of the men have not been employed since, and one, although now back in work, found his dashed hopes ‘devastating’ at the time.

4.2 Regaining employment

As an antidote to the previous section, it is perhaps fitting to describe the experiences of one man who, despite very long term unemployment, had returned to work. He is a man in his 40’s, used to be a lorry driver and was at one time on invalidity benefit. He took himself off it and went back to unemployment benefit because he desperately wanted to work. Nevertheless, when he was interviewed in 1983/84 he was very depressed about his prospects and had almost become resigned to never working again.

For the next three and a half years he continued to look for work. He did find a temporary job as a van driver for about three months, but despite his hopes, the job remained temporary. He was then asked to go on a course (at an Employment Rehabilitation Centre) to assess his disability and to see what kind of work he might be capable of doing. As a result of this assessment he was called to the Job Centre when a job at a local flour mill came up. He now works as a computerised weighbridge operator which he says is ‘the best job I’ve ever had’. He got his job in the latter part of 1987 after a period of over four years without any permanent work.

Although one or two other men had also been helped as a direct consequence of government schemes or assessment programmes, there were two more usual ways in which people found their first job after the reference period of unemployment. The first was through the continuation of a dedicated search, of the kind described earlier. Although as we have seen, this approach was not always successful, there were people who had found jobs through adverts in job centres, local papers, ringing around employers and other such means. The second avenue was through informal networks-through personal contacts, by being personally approached and simply by being in the ‘right place at the right time’.

Two other families decided to leave their home towns and move to areas where they thought there were better prospects of work. In both cases these were large seaside resorts where they thought there might at least be seasonal work. For one family the move was a success with both the husband and wife finding work within weeks of arriving. The second family did not find suitable employment in the new area and returned to their home town. Again, both partners have since found some employment, and, in the case of the husband, with particularly successful results.
Around half of the men had at some point been offered a job they turned down. Almost exclusively, there were people who had regained employment after the reference period. Only one person who has been continuously unemployed had turned down a job offer. Their reasons for turning down jobs were almost always to do with the low level of wages, although sometimes the nature of the work was another factor. As will become evident, some of the men eventually compromised on the level of the wage simply to get back into work.

4.3 The return to work

"It was magic ... after four years of not doing anything you feel useful again, you know what you're supposed to do, get a bit of money, pay your own way instead of going down and join queue and sign your name—that's a lot better"  
(Mr Spencer)
(Uneployed 3 years 10 months; in present job 2 years)

"It was nice to be back to work. Financially we weren't much better off but you know you felt better in yourself like to be working. You felt as if you were achieving something like, working—and you felt more healthier like ... it was nice to get the sun on me again."  
(Mr Black)
(Unemployed 14 months; in last job 1 year; currently unemployed for 2 years.)

These two descriptions of what returning to work had been like were reflective of many. The feeling of being useful, achieving something, feeling pride, being able to face people again were all aspects of a raised self-esteem that people mentioned. Related to this was the experience of real occupation instead of hanging round the house all day or 'getting bored out of your mind'.

The other most frequently mentioned change was in mood and disposition. This was as frequently mentioned by wives as it was by the men themselves 'I-le had a beaming smile on his face for weeks', 'he was sort of uplifted . . . really cheerful to go back to work' were typical of the kind of changes wives noticed in their husbands. And the men also recognised how much happier they had become.

"It seemed to lift us right out of a depression ... it seemed like a big burden gone-and yet you didn't realise it was there—that had grown on us slowly ... "  
(Mr Collins)
(Unemployed for over 6 years; working for 8 months)

There was little doubt that, for some, the experience of 'earning' money, and coming off benefits as a main source of income helped to contribute to the general raising of mood. Men talked about having 'money of their own again', of feeling they 'could spend their money on what they liked' and of not feeling they had someone looking over their shoulder. Some of the wives shared this feeling with their husbands.

"You felt it was your money that you were spending, not somebody's hand-outs sort of thing, 'cos that's what you felt when you got your giro through door, it were like somebody paying you this money to survive. Whereas he's worked for it so it feels more yours ... it just feels more your own money—as if you've got more right to spend it in a sense”  
(Mr Martin)
(Unemployed 15 months and 6 months: working 3 months in present job)

It was not unusual to find a certain kind of anxiety during the early period of returning to work. For some of the men this was because of apprehensions about whether they would be able to cope with, and keep, their jobs. Their nervousness was often shared by their wives who found it difficult to believe that their husbands were back in work. This was particularly so for families who had experienced very long term unemployment.

There were also some aspects of returning to work which caused difficulties, although they were seen as relatively minor. First there was considerable change of routine not only for the men themselves but also for their wives and children. Some of the men had changed their habits quite considerably in unemployment, getting up later, going to bed late and generally getting out of the habit of regular hours. And some of the women said they found it quite strange adjusting back to being in the house all day on their own. Events like shopping and taking the children to school all had to be rearranged.

Several of the men who worked in manual occupations commented on how unfit they had become. Some of them had put on weight, some had taken very little exercise and the return to hard physical work had not been without some pain. Many of the men commented on how physically tired they had been in their first few weeks back at work. As will be evident, few of them resented it given the very positive changes in outlook.

Although, the experience of being back in work was generally valued, the specific jobs which men returned to were not always as positively viewed. As was discussed earlier, some men had only stayed with their first jobs until a better one became available, others had continued with them, even if the conditions were not ideal. In one or two cases, people had given up their jobs and returned to unemployment.
The level of wages paid on return to work received the most comment. Very few people had gone back into jobs that paid as well as they were hoping, although some had since progressed to higher levels of pay. Although some people recognised that they had compromised on the issue of money, it seemed that this was more than outweighed by the positive aspects of working again. One man who felt strongly that there was no point working if you only gained a few pounds a week did eventually return to a low paid job, although one he very much wanted to do. When asked about this apparent ‘compromise’, he explained.

"No, I don’t see it like that, in many ways I could always say, well, I deserve more money ‘cos well we’d all like more money but the job was right, you could say the money was wrong, but what I looked at it is I can get experience through this while I’m earning some money and hopefully improve my opportunities for a career ... I wanted to get off the dole ... ‘cos that is the first time I ever spent time on the dole—I’d always worked since I left school ... , and while you’re working I think you stand more chance of maybe getting a better job somewhere else, you get to know people, make contacts ... like you see this new advert on telly—long term unemployed are employable—that’s right, that’s true but I don’t think a lot of employers see that ..." (Mr Hall)

(Unemployed 2 years and 1 year; working 6 months in present job)

For most of the men back in work, the compensation of being employed far outweighed any negative aspects of the job or its conditions. There were however two men who returned to employment for only a brief spell, and voluntarily became unemployed again. Both of them had had very unstable work histories prior to the reference period of unemployment. Neither of them were very positive about the benefits of being employed unless the job provided precisely the conditions they wanted. Both of them were out of work (1 unemployed, 1 in prison) at the time of the second interview.
PART II  Living standards in Unemployment

5  The concept of `Living Standards'

The terms `living standard' or `standard of living' are widely and colloquially used and are apparently well understood in a conversational context. Yet the concepts which they refer to are complex and multidimensional. A considerable amount of research and literature has been devoted to unravelling these complexities and some of the conclusions that have been reached will subsequently be considered. But first, it is useful to consider how the term is perceived by the families whose living standards are being examined.

5.1 Perceptions of the unemployed

The case study families, between them, identified nine factors that had a bearing on their judgements of living standards. These were:

- the amount of disposable income they had
- the items of expenditure they could or could not afford
- the level of choice or constraint that surrounded their pattern of expenditure
- the level of financial security that was felt
- the degree of financial security that was felt
- -the material possessions they had, or could attain
- -the degree to which expectations were fulfilled
- -the extent to which self-esteem could be upheld
- -the feelings of contentment that surrounded life

These elements emerged during the course of people describing their present standards of living, or what it had been like before, or how they defined a good or poor standard of living or simply their understanding of the term. Although nobody mentioned all of them, each of them recurred. It is useful to briefly consider the dimensions involved, as they were identified by the families.

Income
Implicit, if not explicit, in virtually all of the commentary on living standards was a mention of the amount of money that people have at their disposal. Although the level of income alone was never felt to be sufficient to explain differences in living standards, it was nevertheless a basic element. As one person said `it's a lot more than just money-but you've got to have a basis for it-you've got to have a reasonable amount of money coming in each week'. What he meant by 'reasonable' is, of course, subject to many of the factors which follow.

Expenditure
Most of the people involved evaluated their own living standards, both in unemployment and in the past, in terms of what they could, or could not, afford to buy. For example:

"It's having to cut down on what type of food we eat, what type of clothes we wear, when or if we go out. And there's no chance of holidays . . . (A good standard of living) is being able to go out, say, once or twice a week. Being able to have meat. Being able to go out when you need some new clothes and get them. Being able to go down the hardware shop and get the things you need."

Patterns of expenditure will be considered in a later chapter, but it is important to distinguish here between items of expenditure which were seen as non-essentials-that is 'luxuries'-and those which were felt to be basic requirements or necessities. Although what people counted as a 'luxury' or a 'necessity' is subjective, it is clear that both have their place in determining people's living standards.

Choice
Another recurring theme in the discussion of living standards was the question of choice, or as it was more usually expressed, the absence of choice. One of the unemployed men described this forcefully:

"The first thing we stopped was saving for a holiday ... that was the first thing to go. I think then your standard of living just grinds to a halt. I think then they are determining how you are going to live. Or, what you get determines how you are going to live. You don't make a conscious decision of saying 'right, we won't do so and so, we won't do this'. I think if you've just got an amount of pounds, you make it last. You've got no choice, you've got to make it last."

Choice is not just important for items of expenditure such as holidays. It is also referred to in relation to basic items like food, heating, clothing, social activities, educational activities for the children and even simple things like buying washing powder or furniture polish. More crucially, however, it is the degree of choice that
people have which is seen, in part, as determining living standards.

**Financial security**

Although related to some of the dimensions already discussed, a level of financial security was also of relevance to the families. It was expressed in terms of having ‘a few pennies over ... earning more than you need to survive' or always having ‘money over to put aside for bills . . . a bank account to fall back on', or ‘not being scared to death of anything happening'. In other words, it was about the security of having reserves, however small.

**Struggle**

Highly related to the issue of financial security, although again containing a slightly different element, was the degree of anxiety and struggle that was involved in making ends meet. There was constant reference to this in the discussion of living standards. Hence, a comfortable or good standard of living was being able to spend without ‘watching the pennies' or 'never having to worry about money' or not ‘having to think about every single item of expenditure'. Conversely, a poor standard of living was having ‘to look at every single penny', to ‘struggle permanently' or having ‘that fear all the time'. Although, as suggested, it is close to the issue of having reserves, it is also about the existence of any spare capacity within a family's budgeting system.

**Possessions**

Possessions usually entered into the debate when people were describing a standard of living to which they aspired, or what they saw as constituting a 'good' standard of living. In some cases, the possessions referred to were 'luxury' items such as ‘a colour television, fitted carpets throughout the house, a video recorder, a compact disc player, a car ...’. In others, however, they were more basic requirements, such as items of furniture, a good 'washing machine' or things for the children like a 'bike'. And in the latter context, it was not simply ownership that was at issue, since most of the families had had the basic items to which they were referring. The bearing on living standards was the ability to 'replace these basic requirements when they were old or worn out.

**Expectations**

Only one or two people explicitly mentioned the impact that expectations could have on judgements about living standards. But where they did so, their argument was that an individual's view about his or her living standards would be highly affected by their personal expectations, and in this respect, judgements about living standards were all relative. But the idea of 'expected' standards of living entered the discussions in other ways. For example, one person said ‘I don't think most working class people is ever at a good standard of living’. Others, in their descriptions of their present standard of living talked about having had to abandon plans or expectations when they were unemployed. And yet others referred to the whole question of individual values or priorities.

"It (a standard of living) is hard to define really-so many people have got different ideas-everybody's priority is different. I mean some people say 'I'd never wear second-hand clothes, I'd only wear new ones. You wouldn't catch me wearing something else's clothes!' And you know some people can't bear going without a bottle of wine every night ..."

**Self-esteem**

Self-esteem was not often directly mentioned in relation to living standards. But again, for one or two people, it was a central issue.

"I think a standard of living has something to do with pride-if you've got the money you dress better and I think if you feel comfortable your pride bounces up a bit. But if you can't afford to buy the things you know, you walk along the street sometimes and you think 'well, I'd like to look a bit smarter'. But you know you just can't afford it."

Although this person was really discussing what he could not afford to buy (ie expenditure), for him, this had a direct impact on his self-respect.

**Contentment**

Arising from virtually all the other elements described, was the importance of the level of contentment that surrounded life. And for some this was what a good, or comfortable, living standard was about. It was the absence of anxiety, being able to have 'small pleasures' or simply having 'peace of mind'. One Asian man, when asked about his standard of living when he was last working, described it as follows:

"Quite happy, good feeling, happy to come home from work, looking after my kids, chat with everybody and I changed my dress and said 'I'm going for a pint', you know. See my friends, then talk, have a round, perhaps drinking three or four pints. I came back home, wife cooking for me nice meal, everybody happy you know. Now shut my mouth, no smile, looking to each other like a statue, you know."

It will be clear from the descriptions above that many of the elements mentioned are highly interrelated. Indeed, to some extent all of them have a bearing on each other. But they were all components which the families specifically mentioned in the context of discussing living standards. And thus, for them, at least, all of them have some significance.

**5.3 Definitions and measurements of living standards**

There was reference earlier to the fact that a sizeable body of literature on living standards exists. This
includes government documents such as the 1979 Review of the Supplementary Benefits Scheme; the report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, research reports and papers, such as those prepared by the Social Policy Research Unit at York, the DHSS, and the Child poverty Action Group, and a wealth of other social policy publications from the academic sector. Some of this literature has directly addressed the question of living standards (eg Townsend, 1979). Rather more has dealt with issues such as poverty or hardship, adequacy of scale rates and other highly related subjects. (See for example, Cooke & Baldwin, 1984).

It is not the intention here to provide a comprehensive review of this literature. But, as a context for the chapters that follow, it is important to attempt some distillation of how living standards have been defined and measured.

Since the 60s there has been a certain amount of consensus that living standards cannot be measured simply by objective criteria. Although income and resources are a vital part of the measurement, it has been argued that other factors, such as the life style of the community around or people’s expectations of resources are a vital part of the measurement, it has been argued that other factors, such as the life style of the community around or people’s expectations of minimal living standards must enter into the calculations. Townsend, among others has been a major advocate of this view and it formed an important component in his study of household resources and standards of living.

"Historically, the most influential definitions (of poverty and inequality) have been those which have been expressed in terms of some absolute level of minimum needs, below which people are regarded as being poor, and which does not change through time. However, conceptions of poverty as ‘absolute’ were found to be inappropriate and misleading. People’s needs, even for food, are conditioned by the society in which they live and to which they belong, and just as needs differ in different societies, so they differ in different periods of the evolution of single societies ... A fuller conception of relative deprivation needs to be adopted and spelt out."

But others have argued that absolute levels can be set. Piachaud, in his studies of the cost of a child, assessed the adequacy of supplementary benefit scale rates for meeting modern minimum requirements of children. And it was stressed that the study had focussed on ‘an absolute minimum—not on levels that are desirable or equitable’. The view that absolute levels can be set, through the use of budget standards, has been strongly advocated in a recent paper by Bradshaw.

A related, although separate, element of the debate concerns patterns of expenditure and how these should be judged in measuring ‘living standards’. It has been noted in much of the literature that patterns of expenditure need to be evaluated in relation to individual tastes and preferences and can only be compared when differences in family size and composition are taken into account. This in turn raises questions about what constitutes a 'need', a question that becomes particularly relevant when changes in living standards are being examined.

The problem of measuring living standards through patterns of expenditure are further compounded when the link between expenditure and consumption is considered. It is generally recognised that a major component in the concept of living standards concerns the ability to obtain material commodities or services, whether they be somewhere to live, something to eat, or the price of a bus fare. But expenditure is only a proxy measure for consumption, as has been noted by several authors,

This in turn raises the issue of non-monetary assets and resources. On this issue, there is quite general agreement about their inclusion in any measurement of living standards, but the difficulty occurs over how they can be measured. Although it is relatively simple to ask about the possession of certain key household items, such as a washing machine or refrigerator, it is much less easy to ascertain their condition. A similar problem arises in relation to housing conditions, household furnishings and the quality or condition of clothing.

Finally, there is a question about the need for subjective as well as objective criteria in the definition and measurement of living standards. It has already been noted that the relativist view of living standards would require the measurement of some subjective component. But there is also divergence of view about the extent to which personal welfare is relevant in living standards measurements. As some of the families themselves noted, ‘self-esteem’ or feelings of ‘contentment’ have some connection with a standard of living. But this notion of personal well being is an elusive part of the living standards debate.

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DHSS Review of the Supplementary Benefits Scheme: analysis of views and comments (1979) HMSO.
- Burghes L, (1980) Living from Hand to Mouth CPAG

The OPCS study

It is important to note here the measurements of living standards used in the parallel OPCS study. Three types of measures were developed covering different aspects of material and service provision. These were:

**Domestic capital** - a *scale* which reflected such things as the family’s stock of furniture and domestic appliances, television and other electrical goods, the use of a car and the size of their accommodation.

**Current consumption** - a *scale* covering specifically food, clothing and the upkeep of the accommodation and stock of consumer durables.

**Leisure consumption** - a *scale* covering a range of leisure and recreational activities including eating out, drink, going to the cinema, watching sports, playing bingo etc, and any travelling for leisure purposes.

Measurements on the three scales were made at two points in time—that is 3 and 15 months after the reference period of unemployment started. They were each supported by specific indicators of consumption such as the state of repair of the house, ownership of washing or household durables, whether fresh food had been eaten on the previous day and whether a meal had been eaten out in the previous four weeks.

Two other sorts of measures were used in the analysis of the survey data. The first, *income and financial measures*, covered changes in income, savings and debt during the study period. The second, *opinions data and psychological measures* collected information about the informants’ own reactions to their material living standards and about psychological welfare. These subjective measures were designed to give some insight into the impact of any changes in material and financial circumstances.

A full description of the OPCS indicators used is given in the study report and all the features involved in the measure will be continuing themes of later chapters. They are all aspects which the families themselves saw as determining the level of their living standards.
This chapter aims to provide a summary of how families felt their living standards changed during the course of the study. The first section looks at how living standards were described in unemployment, and particularly as the period out of work lengthened. The second section considers the extent to which perceptions changed when people were back in employment. The purpose at this stage is simply to provide an overview—the more detailed elements of living standards measurement are considered in later chapters.

6.1 Changes in unemployment

When the families were first asked (in 1983/84) how they would describe their standard of living, in unemployment, the majority said 'poor' or words to that effect, and a few said 'average'. All but one of them said it was a lower standard of living than they had in employment. When asked why they thought it was lower, they described cuts in expenditure, or the level of struggle they had to make ends meet or their absence of choice over what they bought or did or the amount of anxiety they felt and so on. In other words, they described how one or more of the factors identified in the previous chapter had, in their view, deteriorated. It was very evident, however, that some of the families were much more deeply affected than others. This was signified either by the recurrence of particular issues, like the level of struggle or the lack of choice; or by the level of emotion or distress with which they spoke about an issue. And it was also the case that some of the families felt their lives had been deeply affected on almost every one on the nine dimensions described earlier.

The extent to which families felt their living standards were affected was in part a reflection of the degree to which their income had dropped. Their relative incomes in unemployment, compared with those in employment, are discussed in the next chapter—but differences ranged from a 50% decrease to a more or less equivalent income. Clearly, this had some impact on how changes in living standards were perceived.

Other factors were also relevant. These included the extent to which a standard of living had been fully established before unemployment or was at a more variable or embryonic stage. Hence, it tended to be the older men or those with more stable employment histories who saw the greatest changes. This was again affected by the drop in income they had experienced.

It may be useful at this point to let three families describe how their living standards had changed during the earlier stage of unemployment. All three had been out of work for around a year and none of them had had particularly stable work histories. They had different perceptions about how their living standards had been affected, partly as a result of the relative decline in their incomes.

"(When I was working our standard of living was) just about the same to what it is now. Just about the same you know. Just a little bit tighter, you know,-it was a little bit better off than what it is now . . . It was extra money you know, and it did help in bills . . . when I was working, the money was better than what it is now. The shopping was the same as now, but we were saving then when he was working, the difference we feel now is we are not saving any money, we're just spending roughly what we were doing when he was working ... Just being unemployed ... you could never satisfy, you know, your family and yourself the way you really want it . . . we just manage leaving debts behind you, which you have to pay in a while, eventually . . . It affects your food and everything. You know, like before I used to buy chops and steaks for the kids, but noiv, not now. It's just ordinary. Sausages and fish fingers. There's a difference that way as well . . . You just have to be careful what you buy now . . . whenever, like whenever, we want anything new we can't afford it now. I mean this couch is, well we put it up with telephone books, you know. Whereas, when he was working we could just go and buy one. Now we don't. It's as simple as that."

(Mr Brown)

(Parents (31/30] with three children /1 month-7 years]; several previous spells of unemployment current income 80% of employment income)

"(Our living standard when I was working) were good compared with now . . . we weren't well off or owt like that, we've never been well off have we, but we've managed ... we managed and we were happy . . . I'm not saying we're not happy now but it's harder to manage now, so there's, you've more stress on you . . . you tend to get

(Parents (31/30] with three children /1 month-7 years]; several previous spells of unemployment current income 80% of employment income)
upset that much easier than when we were working and we could manage, and pay the bills and every-
ting, you know . . . I mean we can manage now-
we haven’t got a right lot of choice but to manage, have we? (Our standard of living) we’re not rock
bottom, but I think if it goes on much longer, we
could be going that way . . . It’s getting harder to
manage every week . . . I’d love a holiday, really
would love a complete break but we haven’t no
chance have we? I mean it’s natural to want hol-
days and things isn’t it? . . . I think everyone
needs a holiday I don’t care who you are. There’s
no way we can . . but if you’re working you
don’t have this problem . . . you get so depressed
that . . . I’ll just start thinking about things. If I
was working we’d have some money in the bank
or something, we could get some clothes, we could
have some decent furniture, and it just gets on top
of you after a while.” (Mr Hawkins)

(Parents [34/27] with 4 children [3-8]; erratic
employment history through type of work ; current
income 70% of employment income)

“(Our standard of living when working) was I’d
say good; I could buy what I wanted to buy or
what we wanted to buy, a lot more self-respect . . .
because I’d earned, I’d worked for what I was
getting, enjoyed life a lot more . . . and just satis-
faction all round . . . If you’re happy with what
you’ve got I think yo ’ve got a good standard of
living . . . (our standard of living now) is basic,
well I’d say definitely below average, and hard I
think, very hard at times, to stop it slipping any
further away, you know, or any further below . .
she tells me every week that things are getting
dearer, I think things are slowly slipping away from
her . . . My luxuries now are a packet of fags and
a pint of beer—they’re going up. And all of them
little things sort of accumulate and you think were
it all going to end? It’s (choice) gone I think
because we’d have to have the cheapest now, if at
all, you know. Our self-respect had definitely gone
down I think . . . I suppose the best way you can
see how your standards have dropped is looking
back on how, what you got before and what you’ve
got now, and knowing really that you would’ve
bettered yourself from where you first was. You
should’ve gone forward not backwards . . . say
I’m lucky enough to get a job tomorrow, it’s
probably take two years to get back to a standard
I was before . . reasonable standard again . . .
We’ve just got to try as best we can to keep some
sort of standard.” (Mr Field)

(Parents [30/34] with 2 children [5+ 9]; several
previous spells of unemployment; current income
60% of employment income)

There was evidence, even from the early stage of the
study, that living standards became increasingly affected
as the period of unemployment lengthened. This how-
ever can be more effectively judged by turning to the
later interviews. By this time, it will be remembered
the reference period of unemployment had lengthened
considerably for several families and for some time it
was still continuing.

The descriptions given in 1988 suggest that two quite
different changes occured as the period of unemploy-
ment increased. The first was a continuing decline
which many of those unemployed for two or more
years noted. There then seemed to come a second
change when, as they described it, they hit ‘rock
bottom’. All of the families who had been continuously
unemployed (that is, for 5 years or more) described
a time when their standard of living in unemployment
was poorer than they saw it at present or, at the very
least, a time when the decline had stopped.

There is little doubt that some families had become
‘acclimatised’ during the period of unemployment
and thus now had lower expectations. One man who
used this term said “we’ve become accustomed to
how we live now . . . we’ve gone to a station lower
in life . . Our peg on the ladder, we’re quite settled
now”. Another man whose literal descriptions had
changed little over four years, thought his standard
of living was now better.

“Well, we ain’t high up and we ain’t well there’s
toffs and that . . . we ain’t poor, we’re just above
that but we ain’t well off, put it that way . . . but
we ain’t poor, well we ain’t got no savings or
nothing . . no I wouldn’t say it was worse, well,
put it this way, we’ve gone from a black and
white to a colour TV, so that’s a little better ... would say it’s a bit better”

(Mr Taylor)

(Unemployed 5 years)

We shall see later that by any objective measure of
domestic capital, this family’s living standards would
be seen to have seriously declined. This, however,
did not seem to colour perceptions of any changes
that had occurred.

There were families whose experiences of ‘rock bot-
tom’ had been brought about by demands on expen-
diture continually exceeding income . As a result
there was major debt or debt was accruing. The
actions which followed are described later, but in
each case the point of lowest ebb in terms of living
standard was described as around this time.

Although the ‘fall’ in living standards may have ended
for these families, the experience of continuing to
have a poor standard of living, as they saw it, had
clearly taken its toll. For some it was evident in terms
of the condition of their domestic capital. For others
the consequences were more evident in terms of
stress—either on the marriage or on individual mom-
bers of the family. The only exception to this was the family in which there was a regular source of income in addition to benefits. All of these circumstances are discussed in later chapters.

These findings about the longer term effects of unemployment on living standards appear to be at variance with the OPCS results. The survey findings show that main reduction in living standards occurred in the first three months and, for most groups, did not markedly decline thereafter in the 15 month study period. In assessing these apparently contradictory outcomes, some important differences between the two data sets need to be recalled. First, the case study sample consists exclusively of unemployed married men with dependent children-a group which constituted around 50% of the OPCS sample. Perhaps more significantly, the periods of unemployment experienced by the case study families were generally longer-the reference periods of unemployment ranged from 9 months to over 6 years with over half out of work for three or more years. Judgements about living standards were also based on different types of measures. In the case study interviews, subjective assessments were made about the impact of unemployment on overall views about ‘living standards’. The OPCS data is based on more stringent measures of changes in possessions and consumption. While these form an integral part of people’s general perceptions of living standards, there are a number of other dimensions (eg. choice, financial security, ‘struggle’ etc) which will have affected people’s judgements.

It was difficult to draw any conclusions about how a second period of unemployment had affected families’ living standards. Although six families were now back in unemployment again, all but two of them had experienced a change of circumstance which they felt had a material effect on their living standards. In two cases marriages had broken up and the demands on expenditure had changed greatly. One woman in this situation felt her standard of living was now infinitely better because her husband was no longer there to ‘drink and gamble’ all their money away. Conversely, a husband now living on his own thought his standard of living was worse because of rising prices— but he found it difficult to make any real comparisons. Two other families had moved house and felt this had contributed to a change in their standard of living. Both now lived in areas and houses which they greatly preferred. In the remaining two cases, the current period out of work was still relatively short and, as one of them said, ‘hasn’t yet bitten’.

Most people found it very difficult to compare their living standard in unemployment with other families around them. They said it depended so much on how well people managed their money, or what their priorities were, or how secure their family life was. Others said it was impossible to compare the living standards of people out of work with those in work. Where any comparisons were made, some families thought they were generally ‘better off’ than those around them, some said they were ‘just average’. These comparisons, however, were also influenced by the complexity of judging a standard of living.

6.2 Changes on return to work

Several of the families who had obtained work said that it had taken, or was taking, some time to restore their standard of living to how it was before. Some felt they had now made if, others were still, as they saw it, recovering. The length of time back in work and the level of income available both had a strong bearing on whether recovery was still occurring.

“Our standard of living is pretty good in comparison with how it used to be (in unemployment) ... we’ve not got to think about every penny we spend ... I still don’t spend money I can’t afford to spend— still hang on to the money as much as I can ... we’ve still not reached a good standard of living, we’re still getting back to that ... we’re still paying bills off so it’s still hard ... I’ve given myself this 12 months target. The beginning of the new year, next year, our standard of living will be good. There will be food in the cupboards and the bills will be paid. There will be money in the bank ... and hopefully we’ll have a holiday next year.” (Mr Campbell)

(Unemployed 4 years, 3 months; in work for 7 months; current income 200% unemployment income)

There were also families who had experienced a period of recovery who now felt it was over. As with the above family, a number said it had taken a year or more. They were, however, ‘back on their feet’ and their standard of living was now ‘back to normal’. What they meant by normal was again relative— for some, it was just average for others, positively good.

“We’ve got that (good) standard of living now ... we’ve got what we wanted, you know, ... we can spend as much as we want on meat at weekends and I can go in the shop and buy what ever I mean I don’t go out and buy loads and loads of things, clothes or owt like that, but if I need them and if the kids need them, I can get them. It’s a load better ... It weren’t a good standard of living for quite a while, but it were better than what we’d had. You know maybe there’d be £8 a week more in the budget which meant a lot to us— more food really and fire and what we wanted was things like that ... I mean, I felt right happy with myself when I bought a

The OPCS sample also contained married couples with no dependent children (27%) and single householders (21%).
microwave you know and things like that. But they came later ... (Mrs Winter)

(Unemployed 2 years, in work for 3 years.
Current income = 300% unemployment income)

All of the families who were working in 1988 said their standard of living was better than in unemployment. But it was not necessarily better than it had been before they were unemployed or yet at a level they aspired to. Nevertheless, irrespective of their income level, there was some ingredient for all of them that made their standard of living better, now they were back at work.

It's improving-it's coming ... we may not be completely better off, well we aren't are we, but its not all money is it, it's like I said, a sense of freedom, you become more alive ... it's just that like, a standard of living is, I think, the all round you know ... I think people today talk of a standard of living as a measure just in money, what you can buy- but I don't class that-I think your standard of living is if you're happy, then your standard of living is good ... I think we'll be comfortably off again, if things go on as they are. At the moment we're still in a bit of a turmoil, we haven't quite got over unemployment ... " (Mr Collins)

(Unemployed 6 years; In work for 8 months;
Current income = 175% unemployment income)
7 Level and sources of income

This part of the report is concerned with the choices and constraints which surround expenditure and money control in unemployment. To set the scene, this chapter describes the sources and levels of income available to the families, with a picture of their relative value over the period of the study.

7.1 Incomes in unemployment

In 1983/84, 19 of the 30 families were receiving supplementary benefit because their period of entitlement to unemployment benefit had come to an end. Eleven men still received unemployment benefit, in seven cases combined with supplementary benefit and in four cases without a supplementary allowance. In addition, all the families were receiving child benefit, all but one, housing benefit, and two families were receiving an attendance allowance. One of these was the family not claiming housing benefit, although they would certainly have been entitled. Their claim for the attendance allowance was also very recent, although the 'constant care' had been required for some time. These and other unclaimed benefits will be discussed in a later section of the report.

In addition to income from benefits, there was only one case where there was any other regular income. This was the family where the mother worked part time. Apart from this, the only other additions to income were occasional earnings from the wife's casual employment (in the two cases previously mentioned) and contributions to domestic expenses from non-dependent members of the household (either adult children or other relatives).

After allowing for payment of housing costs, which in most cases were rebated and paid direct, the families' total net weekly incomes ranged from £53.00 to £149.00 (equivalent to £63 to £178 at 1988 prices). This range was almost entirely reflective of the number of dependent children in the family as shown in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net Weekly Income</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£50 up to £60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1160 up to £70</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£80 up to £90</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£90 up to £100</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cases which did not fall within the pattern were as follows:
- wife earning receiving attendance allowance
- exceptionally large number of dependent children

By 1988, five of the twelve unemployed families had an additional source of income. Two were families where older children were working and contributed to the household expenses. In another family, the wife had claimed an invalid care allowance which she was awarded with back payments. In a fourth household, there was now regular weekly income from part-time work, and in a fifth from undeclared 'casual' work.

The net weekly incomes for those who were unemployed ranged from £30 to over £250. The lowest amount was accounted for by a man who now lived on his own—his wife and small child were no longer supported by him. The highest amount was the income of the largest family where there were also earnings from casual work. The rest were very much in pattern for the size of the family, the average weekly income lying between £80 to £100 for those with two or three dependent children.

7.2 Incomes in employment

In their last jobs before the reference period of unemployment, the men experienced considerable variation in earning levels. Their earnings ranged from £54 to £250 per week, with an average weekly wage of
In some cases, however, the earnings had fluctuated considerably depending on things like overtime, availability of work etc. In such cases, the average earnings in the period immediately prior to unemployment have been used.

In addition to the men's earnings, twelve of the families had additional sources of income when they last worked. These were either the wife's earnings (5 cases), housing benefit (7 cases), and family income supplement (3 cases). It was not possible from the information collected to make precise calculations about eligibility for benefits in employment, but there were some cases where it was quite evident that either housing benefit, FIS or both formed an unclaimed entitlement.

The men who were working in 1988, earned between £78 and £150 a week with an average wage of £113. In five families, wives were also working with earnings ranging from between £20 to £120 a week.

There were other sources of income in these working families. These included child benefit (9 families), family income supplement (3), housing benefit (4), attendance allowance and invalid care allowance (1), and income renting holiday flats (1). The total incomes (net of tax and national insurance) ranged from £78 to £285 a week. Their net incomes after deducting housing benefit and housing costs were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net income</th>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than £100</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£100 up to £125</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£125 up to £159</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£150 up to £200</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£200 or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.3 Replacement ratios and relative income levels

An effective way of identifying changes in levels of income is to measure replacement ratios—that is, the level of the family's income in unemployment as a ratio of that in employment or vice versa. There is more than one way in which such ratios can be calculated, but the following principle has been used for this study:

**Stage 1**

Replacement ratio = \[
\frac{\text{Income in unemployment - housing costs}}{\text{Income in employment - housing costs}}
\]

It is also useful to compare incomes at stage 2 with those at Stage 1. This ratio has been termed the 'relative income ratio' and calculated as follows.

The income levels quoted were standardised to the time of the first interview using the RPI index. The comparable 1988 earnings would be £65 to around £300 with an average of £123. There is some uncertainty surrounding the families previous benefit history—these are known cases.

It is useful here to see how the replacement ratios for the case study families compare with the OPCS data. The comparison shown below is the ratio of means (ie mean income one month before signing, divided by mean income at the three month point) which is the nearest comparison available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of father and number of dependent children</th>
<th>OPCS families (1st stage)</th>
<th>Case Study families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 35 with 1 dependent child</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with 2 dependent children</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with 3 or more dependent children</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 or over with 1 dependent child</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>1.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with 2 dependent children</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with 3 or more dependent children</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>585</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 case only

Given the size of the case study sample, any statistical comparison is inappropriate. Bearing in mind the very
small sample, however, the pattern of ratios is not incompatible. The OPCS data shows that younger families had higher income ratios in employment than older families and that the ratio increased with the number of dependent children. This is mirrored to an extent amongst the case study families.

It is important to note that the financial information collected during the ease study interviews is considerably less robust than that collected in the OPCS study. There are two reasons for this. First, there was a problem of recall which arose particularly for people who had been out of work for some time. This was most likely to affect information about smaller items of income but also cast a certain amount of haze over other items. Second, there is a problem with the kind of interview used for the case studies. This arises because of the need to switch between rigorous systematic questioning, as is needed to collect financial information and the more open, exploratory questions which were being used for the major part of the interview. With hindsight it would have been preferable to make the collection of financial information a distinct part of the interview as was done at the second stage. However, although the precision of the financial information cannot be guaranteed, the overall levels are not in question.

Stage 2 (1988)

By 1988, all but one of those who had returned to work had increased their net income. Sometimes this was by only a small percentage, sometimes by as much as two hundred per cent. The only person to experience a reduction in relative income worked part time and also had two older children who had become non-dependent.

Those who were unemployed had relative incomes ranging from 50% to over 150%. As can be seen below, the reductions were mainly a result of changes in the size of the claim unit, either because of children becoming non-dependent, or in two cases, a husband or wife leaving. Those who had a higher relative income in 1988 either had more children, or had older children for whom a higher rate of benefit was paid, or, as in two cases, had additional sources of income as previously described.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative income ratios by activity status in 1988</th>
<th>Claim unit size</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% or less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-200%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-300%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-125%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126-150%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151% or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problems of calculating replacement ratios or other income ratios have been well documented before, particularly those concerning the effects of changes in circumstances which occur as time elapses. This problem has been well demonstrated in the case study interviews. At the first stage there were two cases where it was felt to be completely inappropriate to even attempt a replacement ratio. The changes of circumstances that had occurred between the time of the last employment and the present were so great as to make any comparisons meaningless. In one case, for example, the unemployed man was single and living with his parents when last employed; by the time he was unemployed he lived with his partner and three children, two of whom were his wife’s children by a former marriage. Similarly, by stage 2 there had been many changes in the size and structure of the claim units which directly affected the value of the disposable income available. All of these have an impact on the interpretation that can be placed on the size of income ratios.

Despite these reservations, the income ratios do give some indication of the range of experience people had had. At one extreme, there are men who have more than doubled their disposable income over the course of the study, even taking account of the income from their previous employment. There are others who experienced a major reduction of income in unemployment and have remained much at that level. The others have incomes that have see-sawed over the period, some still up, some still down, at the time of the second interview. The impact such changes had had on managing levels and living standards forms an important base for the remaining chapters.

5 The average ratio for men still with dependent children was 182%. A comparable figure from the OPCS data for the 15 month period shows a similar ratio of means of 167 for men with dependent children.
8 Patterns of management

This chapter examines the extent to which families managed on their income in unemployment and the kind of strategies they adopted to do so. It looks at how patterns of management changed over time and how they were affected by a return to work.

8.1 Levels of managing in unemployment

Levels of managing can perhaps best be summarised by the extent to which families were `making ends meet'-a term frequently used during the interviews. There are two ways in which this can be judged. First, there is the family’s ability to budget their income and expenditure on a regular weekly, or fortnightly, basis. Secondly, there is the extent to which the families had avoided debt or arrears during the course of unemployment. The evidence provided by families in 1983/84 showed the following distribution on these two dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing (1983/84)</th>
<th>Managing to make ends meet on a regular basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in debt or arrears</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt or arrears incurred during unemployment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 8 families who said they quite consistently budgetted their expenditure to their income, but had accrued some debt or arrears in unemployment. There was just one family who was not regularly `managing' but who was not so far in debt or arrears. These assessments of `managing' were based on evidence the families gave about usual budgetting patterns over a weekly or fortnightly period.

It would be fair to say that the ease with which families `managed' and the level of debt or arrears varied considerably. That is, some families were budgeting their income and expenditure with rather more ease than others. A few of the families were in considerable debt or arrears (some incurred before unemployment) while for others it was fairly marginal. It is therefore possible to see the pattern of managing as on some kind of a continuum. This can be described as follows:

Managers-ie people who were ensuring that their expenditure did not exceed their income or resources and were not in debt or arrears (13 families).

Marginal managers-ie people who were usually making their expenditure just match their income or resources, but who were in, or moving into, some debt or arrears (8 families).

Marginal non-managers-ie people whose expenditure was just exceeding their income and resources and who were in, or moving into, some debt or arrears (4 families).

Non-managers ie people whose expenditure was consistently exceeding their income and resources and were fairly deeply in debt or arrears (5 families).

To provide a picture of how managing or non-managing worked in practice it may be helpful to describe the practices of one family from each group.

A `managing’ family

Martin and Julie Taylor were in their late 30’s. They had three children, one aged 8 and the other two in their early teens. Martin has been unemployed for just over a year-his first period of unemployment. He was made redundant from a job in a local factory which he had held for several years.

The family lived on a net income of £81.50-this represented just under three quarters of the income they had before. The couple shared the management of the household income and between them seem to do it well. Their general attitude towards budgeting is `if you haven’t got it you’ve just got to go without’. So for example, while holidays were something which they used to look forward to, they now realise they are out of the question. They have cut down on several items of expenditure-food, heating, clothes for themselves, days out for the family, smoking etc but with a general air of acceptance. Wherever possible, they try to maintain expenditure on the children-but, even they can only have `sweets’ or `spending money’ if `there is money there’. They have made little call on any other kinds of financial resources, although Julie’s mother occasionally gives them a small loan to tide them over, which they always pay back as soon as they can.
A 'marginally managing' family

Jackie and Ed Black were in their late 20's. They had three children aged between 4 and 10. They lived in a council house and had a net income of £67.00 a week.

Ed had been unemployed for just under a year. He previously worked as a self-employed roofer. He had a very erratic income, varying between £50 and £160 a week, and particularly low in winter. Both he and his wife acknowledge that the stability of receiving regular income, albeit low makes it easier for them to manage. However, although they are managing just about, they always run out of money two or three days before the end of the fortnight. To cope with this they usually borrow from his parents or occasionally from a neighbour. They also have no spare financial capacity whatsoever to deal with any extra expenses-at the time they could not afford to repair the washing machine. As a result Jackie had to do the washing every day by hand—a particular problem as one of their sons is incontinent at night.

A 'marginally non-managing' family

Jamie and Alice Winter were in their early thirties. They had two children aged 8 and 13 and Alice’s father also lived with them.

Jamie used to work as a coach driver—he had worked for the same company for almost 10 years. Fifteen months ago he lost his licence because of drinking and consequently lost his job as well. He was hoping however to go back to a similar job within a few weeks’ time.

The family’s income was £72.00 a week. This is just over half what Jamie had earned as a coach driver. Jamie and Alice found it very hard to manage on their benefit income even with the additional contribution Alice’s father made. They confessed that they have never been ‘budgeters’ because they have always had a good regular income. They had therefore had to ‘learn to survive’. Despite cutting back a great deal on their expenditure, they had got into arrears with bills. They had recently had an electric bill they could not meet and were having to pay it off at £11 a month. This, they thought was likely to be very ‘hard to manage’.

A ‘non-managing’ family

Dick and Sal Hamilton were in their mid-twenties. Both their children were aged under 5. They lived in a house which they owned and which they were buying with a mortgage.

Dick used to work on the railways but gave it up about two years ago because the money was so low. In that job he used to have net earnings equivalent to just over £60 a week. Their net weekly income in unemployment was just a little bit more. But although their income has not dropped they found it much more difficult to manage now-partly, they say, because they spent to fill the long days. They were in a worsening financial situation with many bills in arrears. This was exacerbated by loans taken out whilst employed, which they found impossible to repay. Like the other families, they had generally reduced certain items of expenditure, but alcohol was one that has been maintained. Dick suffered from a severe drinking problem, was in very poor health and had a court case for burglary pending.

It will perhaps be evident from these cases that the level of managing is not necessarily related to the income replacement ratio. This picture is very much confirmed when the relationship for the whole sample is considered. As the chart below shows, there are approximately equal numbers of non-managers in all the four ratio groups. And there are just as many managers amongst those whose income had reduced by 50% or more as among those whose income ratio was higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of managing income replacement ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal non-manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The managing levels described above existed in 1983/84 when the men had been unemployed for between six months and two and a half years. It is therefore useful to consider how these patterns compare with the OPCS survey data after 15 months. The item used is the balance of savings and debt, the only statistical variable available which has a direct bearing on managing. This shows that among men with dependent children, who had continuously signed on, just under two-thirds had some debt, in the majority of cases around £500 or less. The rest of the families had no net debt and in around one-fifth of cases some net savings. Although direct statistical comparisons cannot be made, the figures do not suggest anything very untypical about the ‘managing’ ability of the case study at the time they were first interviewed.

The second interview provided an opportunity to see how managing abilities fared over a longer term of unemployment. The circumstances described by the end of the reference period of unemployment were as follows:

The OPCS data is based on a series of questions about savings, debts and arrears. The figures quoted represent the balance between informants money assets and those debts which are not fixed to a specific material asset.
Managing level by end of reference period of unemployment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Marginal manager</th>
<th>Marginal non-manager</th>
<th>Non-Manager</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marginal non-manager 5
Non-manager 6

Over half (10) of the managing families had continued to make ends meet on a regular basis, although three had moved into a little debt or arrears. The rest (5) had found it more difficult to manage in the longer term and had accrued debts of greater consequence. Those who were not managing at the earlier period showed a more varied picture. Some had maintained their debts at about the same level as before, some had accrued much deeper debt while two had been able to retrieve their situation to a degree while still unemployed.

To illustrate how managing abilities had survived or changed in the longer term, it is useful to trace the histories of the four families described above. In 1988, the accounts they gave were as follows:

The Taylors

The Taylors were now in their early 40’s and their two younger children were still at school. Their eldest son was now working and had recently left home to live with his grandmother.

Martin Taylor had not found any employment in the intervening years and had therefore been continuously unemployed for five years. Their income was £82.50 a week—comparatively lower because of their son becoming non-dependent.

The Taylors still ‘manage’ on their unemployment income by much the same means as before. They still hold the view that ‘if we ain’t got it we go without’ and they are still meticulous about their budgeting. They say they have always managed the same in unemployment and have therefore been continuously unemployed for five years. Their income was £82.50 a week—comparatively lower because of their son becoming non-dependent.

The Taylors still ‘manage’ on their unemployment income by much the same means as before. They still hold the view that ‘if we ain’t got it we go without’ and they are still meticulous about their budgeting. They say they have always managed the same in unemployment and have therefore been continuously unemployed for five years. Their income was £82.50 a week—comparatively lower because of their son becoming non-dependent.

The most noticeable difference for the Taylors is in the condition of their household durables. Their washing machine needs repair—although they can still use it if they ‘help the wash along’ manually.

Their cooker also needs repair—two of the top rings do not work. And their fridge has now broken down completely so Mrs Taylor pays a neighbour 50p a week to store milk and other food for her. They did however change from a black and white to a colour television when they realised the difference in the weekly payments was very little.

The Blacks

The Blacks, now in their 30’s, still have three children of school age. They moved two and a half years ago to another council house in an area they greatly wanted to live in.

Ed went back to work a few months after the first interview. He first got a job doing sub-contracted building work and then set up his own roofing business again. Two years ago he did some work for a client who defaulted on payment and left Ed with a bill of £3,000 owing. As a result, Ed’s business collapsed and he has been unemployed again since.

During the first period of unemployment which lasted 14 months in total, the Blacks’s managing level remained much the same as first described. They continued to have difficulty making ends meet but never got seriously into debt. They did increase their borrowing a little, and still had nothing to spare, but managed to keep things under control until Ed’s return to work.

In this current period of unemployment, managing has become a lot less easy. They have a lot of debt, although a very large part of this is the result of the defaulted payment. They did however also take on quite a lot of HP and credit when Ed returned to work. This was partly to replace items like the washing machine and partly to buy new things they could not afford before. As a result they owe the bank £4,000 (mainly the outstanding debt) and make credit payments of one kind or another of about £12-15 a week. The only compensating factor has been their new home, where their heating bills are generally much lower.

The Winters

The Winters still live in the same house with their two children and Alice’s mother. Their son has just left school and started an apprenticeship.

Jamie was out of work for two years during the reference period of unemployment. He has had two
jobs since but with only a month's break in between. He has been in his present job as a driver for the last two and a half years. Alice also now works full time at a local factory.

During the two years Jamie was unemployed, the Winters got quite heavily into debt. They did not borrow 'any substantial amount of money off anybody' but they had a lot of credit, HP, and outstanding bills. They reckoned that by the time Ed went back to work they owed around £2,000. All of this had crept up on them slowly because they had never quite been able to 'make ends meet'.

The Hamiltons

Between 1983/84 and 1988, the Hamiltons had another child and also moved house. They owned their own house previously but had since moved to a large detached house on the outskirts of town.

Dick went to prison shortly after the first interview and was inside for a year. When he came out he was unemployed again for another twelve months. He then went to work in a garage for about three months. He took the job he said, only to get a bigger mortgage so that the family could move to their new house. He has not worked again, at least not in a formal job, since that time.

The Hamiltons have continued to be non-managers throughout the period under review. Despite the brief spell back at work, the move to their new house and, clearly, some money from illicit sources, they have never managed to live within their income and to retrieve their debt. There is a catalogue of debt outstanding-heavy mortgage arrears, loans, a bank overdraft and hundreds of pounds worth of credit. As they say they 'owe money everywhere' which they have no hope of repaying. Dick is shortly due to appear in court again and it seems another prison sentence is impending.

These varied accounts illustrate a number of important issues. They raise questions about the use of loans and credit, the impact of long term unemployment on household durables and about people's patterns of expenditure on return to work. All of these issues are discussed in later sections. Two features however need to be noted here. First there is the effect of a second period of unemployment and the impact it has on ability to manage. The Blacks' story would suggest that it becomes less easy the second time and this was certainly so for other families. Equally, however, some families changed their style of managing in the subsequent period of unemployment, largely because of lessons learned the previous time.

A perhaps more significant conclusion from the above accounts is that the length of unemployment is not the only factor that will affect a family's ability to manage. The Taylors, it seems, have continued to manage throughout five years of unemployment. The Hamiltons never have managed their income in unemployment, did not do so before, and probably never will. Although there is a relationship between changing patterns of management and the period of unemployment, as the chart below shows, this is clearly not the only factor. The important question for these case study interviews therefore is how do some families manage and why does it vary?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to manage</th>
<th>Reference period of unemployment</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Less 2-3 3-4 4 years Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>'Manager' throughout 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Non-manager' throughout</td>
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<td>Changed</td>
<td>-increased debt 9</td>
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8.2 Managing strategies

There is little doubt that the families who were best able to make ends meet were all highly determined managers. Some had always been so, others had learned to do so during the period of unemployment. The attitudes of this group are characterised by a desire to 'pay everything that has to be paid', 'organising yourself around the amount of money you've got' and a strong aversion to getting into debt. How these determined managers achieve this is by a mix of resourcefulness, ruthlessness and precision. Resourcefulness because they use their money or time with great expediency; ruthlessness, because they will cut expenditure as savagely as is needed to keep out of debt; and precision because they plan their budgets and household accounts almost to the last penny.

Such determination is almost certainly not confined to the unemployed, or even to people in low incomes. As was suggested before, many of these families had been equally careful when they were in employment-and often they were the ones who had accrued some savings. But there were some families who had simply had to learn this style of management. They were too terrified of being in debt to do anything else. And some of them had experienced arrears or debt earlier in their unemployment. They had realised, however, that if they did not do something about it, the situation would become irretrievable.

To examine the forms of budgeting strategies and money control which enabled families to manage, it is useful to describe the practices of one couple. They were a family who, in 1984, had regularly 'made ends meet' throughout a period of over 12 months unemployment.
Jack and Mary Hawkins (aged 34 and 29) had four children, aged between 4 and 9. Jack was a coach driver and was used to seasonal breaks in his work. His unemployment income was about two-thirds of what he got when he was last employed—he claimed both FIS and HB when he was working.

When Jack was first unemployed they were fairly regularly overspending. They say they did not really bother about budgeting because they thought another job would come up quite soon. But when it did not, they realised they had to do something about it. As Mary described it “we sort of, pulled ourselves together—we had to, we had no choice”.

As a result of ‘pulling themselves together’ they now had a tight rein on their fortnightly expenditure. Mary, who did most of the household budgeting, ‘shops around more for the cheaper things’. They had had meters put in for gas and electricity so that they were no longer faced with quarterly bills. They were very careful with electricity—they ‘switch lights off that we’re not using’ and put the ‘immersion heater on twice a week for a bath’‘boil a kettle for washing up and washing kids stuff’ and so on. In this way, they always managed to have 50p left at the end of the fortnight so that ‘we’ve never sat in the dark’.

When clothes for the children were needed they usually save for them. They also, had an arrangement at a local shoe shop such that they give him 5:2 a week ‘even when we don’t owe him anything’. This way they could have shoes for the children more or less when they needed them. They got a school clothing grant each year for the three children at school which the previous year Mary spent on new coats for them. Clothes were becoming an increasing problem—the oldest child was now getting more fashion conscious and all of them were growing fast. Mary’s strategy was to try buying something for one of them each week but if it isn’t there ‘they just have to wait’.

They used to take the children out regularly on day trips but had had to stop because of the cost. They did however, manage a street outing the previous year. ‘We hired a coach from a friend for the day and everybody put the cost of it in’. They quite regularly saw other members of the family who all live fairly nearby.

Both Jack and Mary had cut down on their smoking. They did not particularly want to but say ‘if the money’s not there to buy the cigarettes, there’s nothing you can do about it’. They did still however, manage to get out occasionally when they have the money. Because they were staying in much more they’ve rented a colour TV from the ‘man next door’ to replace their black and white one.

They found Christmas a bit of a struggle but did manage to get all the children a bike. They got second hand ones, which they saved for gradually and Mary’s sister helped them out with one of them. Mary and Jack however could not quite manage a present for each other.

The children got free school meals, which they used to have when the family was on FIS. They also asked the DHSS for a loan for transport. ‘I were guaranteed a job so long as I had transport but there was no way I could get a bank loan from a finance company. So I asked them at the Social Security office if they could give me a loan which I’d repay’. The Social Security office told them that ‘they don’t do that sort of thing’. Apart from this, the family had not claimed for, or received any additional payments.

Mary and Jack had no debt or arrears at all in 1984. This was largely a result of their philosophy that you organise yourself around the amount of money you have to spend. They said they have always been able to manage on their money, even though they have never been well off. And, they said, they have no other choice but to manage now.

This family’s budgeting style had certain features in common with other families who managed to make ends meet. First they had the attitude of organising themselves ‘around the amount of money’ they had. Although for most ‘managing’ families this involved cuts in expenditure of the kinds that were previously described, they saw these as cuts that had to be made. Secondly, they had found ways of controlling their money so that big or unexpected bills did not mount up. Like many of the families they had put in meters for gas and electricity; and they put money aside for clothes. Although other families did not have similar arrangements with the local shoe shop, several of them used ‘catalogues’ or ‘clubs’ to pay for clothing by small amounts each week. And thirdly, Mary, like other mothers ‘shopped around’. Several of the families described how their shopping habits had changed—for example by ‘always buying the cheapest brand’ or ‘going to cheaper supermarkets’ or even going to supermarkets late in the day when things might be on ‘special offer’.

Unlike the Hawkins, some of the families who ‘managed’ were in debt or arrears. However, if at all possible they were trying to retrieve it. This was another characteristic which managing families shared. They strongly disliked the idea of being in debt, partly because of a worry about how repayment would be made, but also because of a more deep rooted dislike of ‘not paying your way’. And for similar reasons most of them also disliked the idea of borrowing even small amounts from friends or relatives. They did not like having to ask, even when they thought the person would not mind.

It was to avoid being in debt that most of the ‘managing’ families tried to control the demands on their expenditure. This was another reason why many of the
families had slot meters for gas or electricity. It meant that they could see, as they went along, what they were spending and if necessary, cut down on their consumption. And it was also one of the reasons why so many families had stopped going out for the day or out for a drink at night. They knew that as soon as they did so, they would feel some pressure to spend money. This might be from the children for an ice-cream or it might be ‘buying a round’ in a pub. On this latter point particularly, many of them commented that this was why they stopped going to the pub, even if it was just for a pint. It was not so much that they could not buy themselves a pint, even if it was a pint of shandy. It was the idea that they could not ‘buy a round’, or ‘pay their way’, as some of them saw it, which offended their social principles.

In many families, like the Hawkins, the responsibility for household budgeting fell mainly on the mothers. They were the ones who worked out what could or could not be spent and allocated the resources accordingly. Some of the men acknowledged that they would not have managed money as well, while others said they ‘wouldn’t have a clue’ how to do it. There were other families where budgeting responsibilities were shared—either working everything out together or dividing the responsibilities. It was sometimes the case that the husband would pay the ‘big bills’ and the wife would deal with the daily expenditure. There were no cases, however, where the husband took the full responsibility for day to day managing.

It will perhaps be evident that none of the families who ‘managed’ found it particularly easy to do so. Those who had previously been on much higher incomes in employment had had to make quite radical cuts in their expenditure. And those who were more used to living on low incomes often found it a struggle to ‘make ends meet’. Indeed, struggle was a word that appeared in most interviews. Even the Hawkins, who managed very ably, talked of the pressures which the constant ‘counting of pennies’ brought with it. Nevertheless, it seemed that most of these families with their learned or adopted managing styles would continue to strive to ‘make ends meet’.

There is little doubt that in the longer term such rigorous managing had its effects, both in material and psychological terms. We have already seen how the Taylors had managed throughout very long term unemployment but with a notable effect on their personal and household possessions. Similarly, the psychological pressures brought by stringent budgeting over a long period was something that many families noted. Both of these consequences are discussed in later chapters.

We have already seen that the kinds of managing styles described above were not apparent in every family. It is therefore important to consider why other families found it more difficult to make ends meet in unemployment, when, with few exceptions, they were living on broadly equivalent incomes.

It has already been noted that, for some families, being a ‘non-manager’ had been a long term problem. They had had difficulties before they were unemployed and some had continued to have difficulties after a return to work. Why some people find it easier than others to budget or manage their money is the subject of a separate study. It is evident however, that being a ‘non-manager’ is not a characteristic solely of people on low incomes, although clearly this exacerbates the problem. People who control their expenditure to match their income and those who do not would be found amongst groups at all income levels.

Learned methods of budgetting and management are by no means the only factor that can affect a family’s ability to make ends meet. As we have seen some of the most highly determined managers found it impossible to ‘manage’ or avoid debt in the longer term. Evidence from the case study research would suggest that other factors, more directly related to being on unemployment income, also have some bearing.

The first is the inflexibility of the level of income and the difficulties caused when extra demands are put on it. This is in part related to the length of unemployment as the need to replace and repair possessions, or perhaps decorate the house, rows. It is also related to the additional requirements of children as they grow older. Many families talked of the increased pressure put on their unemployment income as their children got older, a subject discussed in a later chapter.

The second factor is a direct consequence of living on a low income over a longer period. For some families there clearly came a crisis point where they found themselves unable to continue to keep their expenditure within their income. This may have been the result of a specific demand, like Christmas or one of the children changing schools; or it may have been a simple ‘blow-out’ because of having lived frugally for a long time. Either way, the result was often a relatively large debt which then put extra pressure on the weekly income because of repayments.

A third factor concerns the use of additional resources. Without exception the families had called on resources other than their benefit income during their period of unemployment. These resources were many and various and are discussed in a later chapter. What is of relevance here is that some of the families who were ‘managing’ best had had, or found, more resources to call on. Some of the families explicitly said this was how they were able to manage. Regular help from family and friends, use of savings and the sale of possessions, casual earnings and additional income from other household members were of particular significance in this context.
8.3 Changes on return to work

Among those who had regained work after the reference period of unemployment there were two quite distinct patterns in the way money was managed. One group continued much as they were before, either living within their income, or not, depending on their managing style. But a second group reacted against what had happened to them in unemployment and changed their budgeting methods or use of credit. Whether a change occurred depended partly on the relative increase in income they had experienced on return to work and partly on the kind of level of managing they had achieved in unemployment. For some the changes were quite short lived, for others they seemed to have become permanent features.

Those who continued with much the same managing strategy were in a sense the long-term managers or non-managers. They had brought with them into unemployment a pattern of managing and this continued in much the same way when back at work. For some of those who saw themselves as good managers, this resulted in building up savings again, for some, it meant carefully controlled replacement of things that were needed. For those who were less good at managing, it often meant a big spend with the use of credit.

Among those who had changed, the reactions were one of two kinds. For some, budgeting and money control became almost a higher priority than it had been in unemployment. The reality of having been worried about money for so long, or having got into debt, made them want as clean a financial record as they could possibly have. They paid their bills almost instantly, refused to have any more credit and, for those who had got into debt, made repayments often of quite sizeable amounts. In some cases this left them with a disposable income of much the same level as in unemployment, but with the safety of knowing that they were moving to more secure, rather than less secure, territory.

Many of those who changed in this way were families who had tried very hard to live within their means in unemployment but had accrued sizeable debt or arrears. The Winters, who were described earlier, were one such family. Although they now have a much higher income, between them, this was not so when Jamie first returned to work. They put £50 a week aside to pay off their debts and meanwhile lived almost as frugally as before. Nevertheless, any restrictions felt quite different to them:

"... there was a lot of relief inside you yourself because you knew you were getting it paid back. It were going back and then eventually everything would straighten out. I mean you stay in, and you don't do this and you don't do that till you get it paid back." (Mrs Winter)

The second group who had changed had a very different response on their return to work. Very often these were families who had ruthlessly managed in unemployment and then somehow reacted against it when they started to get income from a job. As was described earlier, the Blacks took out a lot of HP and credit when Ed was in work for those two years. Similarly, the Hawkins, who were shown to be such careful managers in unemployment, were in debt shortly after the return to work. It happened at Christmas time:

"I got into debt that Christmas ... I were really stupid. I were trying to make it up to them (the children) for what they never had. They've not gone without ever, even when he were on dole, but I just went a bit overboard, got loans and stuff out of catalogues, just up to my eyes in it." (Mr Hawkins)

By the time of the second interview, the families of men back in work had mainly restored a more regular pattern of managing. Most of them were managing to 'make ends meet', some quite comfortably, others with more of a struggle. This largely depended on the level of income available although the demands on expenditure also had a bearing. There were however families who had not got their financial management back into gear. They were continuing to overspend largely, they thought, as a response to the tight budgeting required in unemployment.
9 Adaptations in expenditure: Priorities and choices

9.1 Patterns of expenditure in unemployment

It is possible from the case study data to describe the items of expenditure which have been maintained, reduced or withdrawn during the period of unemployment. However, the OPCS study has examined patterns of consumption on a range of material goods and services, looking particularly at how these changed over time. The picture provided is complex because of differences in levels of consumption prior to unemployment between those who returned to work and those who continuously signed on. Consumption patterns are also affected by age, marital status and family size. Nevertheless, the evidence shows the extent to which expenditure on food, clothing, the upkeep of accommodation and possessions and leisure activity falls during unemployment and how this is affected over the longer term of 15 months.

The case study data has been used to describe the nature of changes in expenditure in order to extend the statistical descriptions. All of these descriptions are drawn from the first interviews. Although at this time lengths of unemployment varied (between 6 months and 2½ years), the cuts made in expenditure presented highly persistent patterns. Ten areas of material and service provision will be used to illustrate the items which were most or least affected.

Food
All of the families said they had cut their expenditure on food in some way. This had either affected the amount of food they eat, the type of food or both. Most of the families, for example, had reduced the amount of meat they eat and also, often, the type. It was also typical to find that there was increased expenditure on food that was more filling like bread or potatoes. What families saw as 'luxury' items, like cakes, coffee, bought fish and chips, soft drinks and fresh fruit were usually only rare treats. This family's pattern of eating was not all that unusual.

"I think we're still quite big eaters in a lot of respects but we don't eat the luxuries we used to eat ... we eat now basic things which two or three years ago we wouldn't have eaten ... Well until Sid became unemployed I never ate potatoes, simply because I'm not very keen on them but since Sid's been unemployed I eat a great deal of them ... I eat potatoes simply to fill up. I don't like meat either-plus the fact it's very expensive. I buy half a pound of stewing meat of something and give that to Sid and the kiddies and then I just have the gravy-before I used to buy soya things and substitutes to meat but I can't afford to now ... Like breakfast now is basically a slice of toast. It's not that we can't afford thin things like cornflakes but it just doesn't interest me (husband) but I suppose that if I had a bacon sandwich or egg and bacon that'd interest me more . . . We rarely eat meat during the week-it's only at weekends when the kiddies are at home . . . through the week we sort of have egg and chips ... I've tried to be sensible about it-I try and buy things that I know is good for them. I try and give them something warm for their tea every night. Like last night we had a lot of mushy peas left from lunch-so the kiddies had these mushy peas warmed up with a tin of vegetable soup ... so at least they has some warm vegetables and some soup and some bread." (Mrs Greene)

(Family with two children; unemployed for 20 months; RR = 80-90%)

The mother who provided most of this description is typical in a number of respects. First, she placed great priority on food for the children, something which was virtually universal among the families. She was also concerned to ensure that the food they eat was nutritional or 'well balanced', although families varied in what well balanced meant. And she did her best to provide meat at the weekend so that the family could have a 'Sunday dinner'. The case studies demonstrate clearly what an important tradition this is. Many of the families attempted to provide meat for Sundays, even if they did not eat it during the week. The reasons why 'Sunday dinner' is so important are described in the next section.

Another common pattern was to cut down on the number of meals eaten in a day. Usually first to go was breakfast, the midday meal often became a snack but the evening meal was almost always maintained. This pattern of course, might change during school holidays, but most of the mothers were keen to ensure that everyone had at least one hot meal a day.

RR represents the replacement ratio, that is the proportion unemployment income forms of the families income when last in work.
**Heating**

The first stage interviews took place during the autumn and winter months. Heating was therefore very much an issue. Without exception, all the families had cut the amount of heating they had to a minimum.

“Well like today, it's cold today but we can't afford to light the fire until about half past three, four o'clock 'cos a bag of coal only lasts the evening. I mean its £2.50 a bag and there's no way we can light it in the morning . . . As long as it's warm when the children get home, I'm not bothered about myself. I know I can get the little one (4 year old) warm by wrapping her up and we lay on here in the afternoons with the cover over, saves lighting a fire. It's the only way you can do it.”

*(Mrs Ward)*

*(Family with 3 children (4---9); unemployed 7 months; RR = 80-90%)*

Again, it will be seen that priority was given to heating at times when the children were around, a common strategy for families to adopt.

The family above had central heating in their house but they would not use it. This was partly because it was expensive to run but also because it was not possible to control, or even know, how much was being spent. As has been discussed, many families were anxious to know exactly what they were spending at the time and this had particular relevance to sources of heating.

Again, not unusually, the problems which this family had with heating their house were not confined to their period of unemployment. Many of the families had not been able to have as much heat as they would have liked when they were last in work. But because of the heavy demands that fuel bills make on expenditure, heating was an item that had to be reduced, or reduced even further, in unemployment. This was particularly the case in families where budgeting was under tight control.

**Clothes**

Invariably, expenditure on clothes had been reduced during unemployment. However, unlike heating or food, the effect of this was variable depending on the stock and condition of clothes that had been owned before. At least, this was true of the parents although less so for the children who were still growing. Partly because of this, but also because of the priority that parents often gave to their children, expenditure on the children's clothing had been less severely cut down than expenditure on the parents' clothing. Again, this family's situation is illustrative:

“Now and again we get something out of a catalogue you know because with two kids you've mainly got to keep them clothed anyway ... I go to jumble sales . . . and me sister's girlfriend . . . she's got a young daughter and we usually get clothes handed down, you know, it's just now and again that we put a little bit away . . . and then go down town and get a few things for them. Now, the jacket I've got on now, I got that for £2 off a lass down the road you know, she's a friend of the wife's whose split with her husband and asked if I wanted to buy a jacket. I says 'yeah' because I could do with one you know, warm jacket, that's the only jacket I've really got that's decent . . . I go to the jumble sales . . . I don't like going because it's what people might say, you know 'have you seen him at jumble sale getting stuff' but there's nowt else you can do when you're on dole."

*(Mr Ross)*

*(Family with two children (3 + 6); unemployed 1 year; RR not classified)*

Unlike this father, not all the parents were prepared to buy clothes from jumble sales. And although handing down clothes may be quite customary for younger children, it becomes much more of a problem as the children grow older and become conscious of clothes and fashion. However, by far the biggest problem for parents was that their children grew out of their clothes and this made getting new ones, even if they were from jumble sales, a necessity. And it was for this reason that parents found their own clothes were much further down on the list of priorities.

“I hardly got owt for us because by the time you want something, you've got to buy it for the kids because they need it. Like they grow out of their things so fast and so it takes us all our time to be clothed.”

*(Family with two children (under 5); Unemployed for 2 years; RR = 60-70%)*

**Household durables, furniture and furnishings**

The possession and condition of household durables or furniture was not systematically investigated in the first stage interviews. Such items were, however, mentioned spontaneously by several of the families. And where they were mentioned, it was usually a problem with replacement, service or repair. In other words, the families owned the article in question but the problems arose when they were worn out or broken down. In a previous case illustration, a broken washing machine was cited, but other items like hoovers, refrigerators, even cookers were also mentioned. Similar problems arose with furniture, soft furnishings and bedding which were now in a bad state of repair. In the main, expenditure on any of these latter items was seen as completely out of the question. Although some of the families had faced similar kinds of difficulties when they were in employment, others said they would have been able to save for them, pay for them on hire-purchase or even buy them outright when they were needed.

More systematic evidence was collected at the second stage and is described in a later section.
Insurance and assurance
It was noticeable that a number of families had given up house insurance or life insurance or assurance policies. Only a few had been determined to continue them. Those who had relinquished their policies had done so for one of two reasons. Either they had found they did not have the money for the premium when it was due; or they wanted to obtain some extra money by cashing them in.

"We were paying about £7 a month and I just had to stop it. I don't like not having insurance but we aren't insured now-he's not insured anymore, I'm not, the house isn't, nothing. It's not a luxury insurance but it is if you can't afford it. You know, your £7 a month can be spent on other things-I never seem to have it when she comes-it seemed a lot to pay-maybe if she'd called every week.”  (Mrs Hawkin)

(Family with 4 children (3-8); unemployed 13 months; RR = 60-70%)

"I cashed two insurance policies since I've been unemployed-they were endowment policies of mine-you got them for two years and then you can draw them out . . . I did it just before Christmas so I could get kids something for Christmas.”  (Mr Winters)

(Family with two children (7+ 12); Unemployed 15 months; RR = 50-60%)

In both cases, there were more immediate demands than having insurance that had a priority for expenditure.

Transport and travel
Of the families who had owned a car when they were last employed (around half), two-thirds had sold them since they became unemployed. Like the insurance policies, the decision to get rid of family cars was usually made at a time when some expenditure on them was demanded (ie tax, insurance, repairs, etc). Four of the families had decided to keep their car, for reasons that will later be described.

The majority of the families now used buses to get wherever they needed. The cost of bus fares, however, was always an item to consider. For most families, journeys had to have a purpose, such as shopping, signing on, or occasionally visiting relatives, before the bus fare could be justified.

"What I do miss is going to town-we used to go quite often to look at the shops and that. It's over a £1 to go to town on the bus so we couldn't all go together anyway. It would cost £6 odd a day. We only go once a week to do the shopping sometimes if we've got big bills we've got to pay, we shop locally . . . We don't all go (to town) you see . . . Two could go and then we'd have to meet them coming off the bus to carry the groceries”.  (Mr Murphy)

(Family with 3 children (14-17); unemployed 9 months; RR = 40-50%)

This family lived in one of the more rural areas covered by the study. It was notable that concern about the cost of transport and travel arose most in such areas. And often in the context of the cost of having to go to the UBO to sign on since this was an item of expenditure that was difficult to avoid. Some of them economised by walking at least part of the way.

School trips and educational activities
It was noted earlier that twenty of the thirty families had children of school age, eight of them at secondary schools. It was this latter group, particularly, who mentioned difficulties with expenditure on school trips or other activities, although it also applied to some of the children at primary schools. In the main, these were items of expenditure which, if at all possible, the parents tried to meet.

"I do feel sorry for the kids if there's something going on at school and they need some money for a trip, it really hurts me to have to say 'sorry you can't go'. If the whole class is going on a trip and it's £3 or £4, you can't say to them they can't go because they're going to be left on their own when all the class goes off somewhere . . . once or twice I thought I was going to have to say no, but somehow we managed to scrape through.”  (Mrs Atkinson)

(Family with three children (3-11); Unemployed 1 year; RR = 40-50%)

But for some parents, £3 or £4 was just impossible to find, particularly if they had no advance warning so that they could budget for, or save the money. The previously quoted family who described their difficulties with bus fares had faced this problem.

"Like Ed's class went to see the All Blacks earlier this year. That was £3-well we couldn't afford it so he couldn't go and he was the only boy in his class who didn't go . . . when the trips come up at school, if they sort of spring them on you, you can't do anything about it.”  (Mr Murphy)

Entertainment and ‘leisure’ activities
Entertainment, social and leisure activities were raised in the category of items which had been reduced to a minimum or cut out completely. There was not a single family who did not refer to them in this context. Although some of them still did go out now and then, either for a drink or to see friends, such activities were now much less frequent.

"I used to go out-I don't now . . . only occasionally I go out if Carole has got a couple of pound to spare - I go and have myself a drink-just
havent got it to go out now . . . I used to go out probably on a Friday and a Saturday night, very rarely in the week . . . I used to take Carole out once a month, sometimes on a Friday night . . . the last time we went out together was our anniversary and that was last August (four months before) and we haven't been out since together."

(Mr Jackson)

(Family with three children (10-13); unemployed 8 months; RR = 85%)

Days out with the children had also now become a very rare occurrence. This was not just because of the cost of transport or getting to places but also because parents found it difficult to take their children out without spending money. The cost of going to a Wimpey bar, the zoo or cinema, tickets to a football match, going to the swimming baths or even the price of an ice-cream were all mentioned as examples.

For similar reasons, some of the unemployed men had now themselves stopped being involved in a hobby or interest, for example, snooker, darts, motor-scrambling or fishing. Even when the activity itself did not cost anything, they found it difficult to avoid spending money, for something like a round of drinks. Although one or two had managed to keep their particular hobbies going, for example, using whatever free resources there were or by taking advantage of concessionary rates for unemployed people, these tended to be people whose interests, like reading or gardening, did not involve any social activity.

The one expenditure on entertainment that had been maintained in virtually all households was on television. Although some of them had had to switch from renting a colour television to black and white and one or two were having difficulties paying the licence fee, most of the families said having a television was a priority. Some of the families also owned video recorders, and occasionally spent money on hiring a tape. In one case at least, the video recorder had been bought since the onset of unemployment, in order to maximise the use of the television.

Smoking and drinking
Twenty-two of the thirty families spent money on tobacco each week. In some cases, only one partner smoked, in others, both the husband and the wife were smokers. In only two families had smoking been successfully given up since the period of unemployment started, although some others had tried. Even more had attempted to cut down their expenditure on smoking, either by reducing the number of cigarettes they smoked, switching to a cheaper brand or changing to roll-ups. The extent to which these attempts to cut down had been successful is difficult to know, although several of the families did quote the reduction in expenditure they had achieved.

"We used to smoke ordinary fags you know, the packet fags-we don't smoke them now, we can't afford them . . . sometimes we would be buying two to three packets a day-now we just have a 2oz pack of tobacco a week-we was paying what, say £2 a day on fags and we're spending £2.69 a week." (Mr Jones)

(Family with I child under 5; Unemployed 1 year; RR = 76%)

But certainly not all the families had managed to achieve this kind of reduction. Some were spending two or even three times that amount each week.

In general, expenditure on drinking was less than on smoking. This was largely because most of the families preferred to go to the pub for a drink, rather than drink at home and such activity was now only occasional. Many of the families who drank regularly before said they had cut their expenditure on alcohol, although there were a few for whom it was still a daily item of expenditure.

Treats and luxuries
What people consider to be a treat or a luxury is highly personal. It is therefore not surprising to find what the families described was very varied. For some it was a 'piece of steak' or a 'Chinese take-away', for some it was having a 'hair do' or some new clothes, for others it was buying a drink or a day out. But whatever it was, the families said that their expenditure on treats was virtually non-existent. There were perhaps two exceptions. The first was on birthdays and at Christmas, when many of the families did spend money on special food or presents. And the second concerned 'treats' for the children. Although many of the families said they could not buy 'little' things for the children as they had done before, most of them felt they could not let them go without completely.

9.2 High and low priorities
It has already been said that the patterns of expenditure described by the families provided a highly consistent picture. It is therefore possible to draw up a list of 20 items which had common levels of priority. In descending order it is as follows:

TOP PRIORITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Heating and lighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing costs (other than those rebated or paid direct)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television (rental, licence fee or costs of running)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's clothes and shoes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's toys, sweets, pocket money, school activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas and children's birthday presents or celebrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The order of this list does not reflect the amount of money which would be spent on the items, but the priority it is given in the decisions about expenditure. Clearly the exact position of items would vary between families, and some families had priorities completely out of pattern. Nevertheless, if this list were given to the families who were interviewed, all of them could be expected to recognise the broad picture shown. It is now relevant to consider why different items were given high or low priorities.

The high priorities

Children
As will be evident from this, and much of the previous evidence, expenditure on children comes very high on the list of priorities. This is true whether it be for their food, their clothes, school activities or just little things like toys or sweets. In many respects, this finding comes as little surprise—it would almost certainly be the case in most families, whatever their level of income. But it is of interest to see why these families on low incomes consider their children's needs so important.

There seem to be three central reasons. The first concerns what can only be described as a personal standard. This may have been developed during their own childhood or it may have developed later. But, whatever its origins, parents clearly have a strong idea of how they want their own children to be brought up.

"I try me best to dress them all . . . I don't like to see untidy children. They've always been dressed as best I could—I mean they haven't had much and that ... but I always thought when I got married I want more out of life for them ... I think it's `cos I haven't had it . . . I never had a good life really—I just want to make sure they're comfortable . . . like now I've got insurance policies for the kids, 50p each month—that's for when they're 15 . . . I just want them, you know, in a better life than mine were, you know." (Mrs Fraser)

(Family with 2 children (under 5); unemployed 2 years; RR = 60-70%)

For some parents, this personal standard is less clearly located in their own upbringing but is nevertheless as strong. And when they see people around who do not maintain that standard, they become more determined for their own children.

"Some of the kids who go to the same school as mine, you see them goin' to school looking ragged you know and they've all got second hand sort of clothes that came from jumble sales and all that. Well, mine have never been like that and I don't want them to be. I'd hate to think that—to me that is slipping below rock bottom. You start dressing your kids in dirty, scruffy clothes and let them walk about like little tramps and that is the lowest of the low to my mind." (Mr Campbell)

(Family with 2 children (6 + 9); unemployed 11 months; RR = 80-90%)

A second reason is related to the parental difficulty of saying 'no' to children's requests or demands. Nearly every interview contained the phrase 'you hate to have to say no to them', when they ask for something. The 'something' could be anything from a large item like a bicycle to something as small as an ice-cream. Although the parents may often have had to say 'no', they found it difficult to always have to do so. As the father above put it:

"When the kids come home and they tell you other kids have got this and the kids want to go on trips at school . . . And if you've got to keep saying 'No', you just feel as if life weren't blooming worth living anymore, you know." (Mr Campbell)

The third reason for parents giving children such priority seems to arise from a fear of any relative deprivation they might suffer. In other words, they do not want their children to be disadvantaged compared with other children. And this comparison is not only with other children today, but again often stems back to their own childhood.

"I like to see the kids have a decent life. I know this ain't Buckingham Palace and I ain't a Rothschild or anything, but I like to give them what I can ... I had it when I went to school. Our mother brought me up and our dad like. I never wanted for anything, not really although I was far from spoilt . . . I don't want to see their standard of living drop just because I ain't working. I think it's wrong. I think all children should have the same . . . Like other kids say they've got this and that, not that you want to keep up with the Jones' or nothing—but other kids say they're going there, having this for Christmas, like 'I've got a new pair of jeans' and all this, well, I think it disturbs them". (Mr Black)

(Family with three children (4 to 10); unemployed 20 months; RR = 80-90%)

It was common to find, as in the two examples above, that the parents referred to their own childhood at some point in the interview. And this was usually in the context of discussing why expenditure on their
children was so important. Somehow, the seeds of their expectations about what the children should have, or should not have, lay deeply rooted in their own past. This factor had a particular bearing at times like Christmas and birthdays or even for `Sunday dinner'. The importance of keeping family traditions was something many parents talked about.

"Well, we try and give the kids a good Christmas ... they still have a few bits of toys, stuff like that ... they don't have expensive toys, just a lot of small stuff ... it looks more ... well I look at it as important because I always had stuff when I was a kid. And other people's kids, they can be quite nasty really at times, can't they ... You know if they haven't got nothing and they have."  
(Mrs Smith)

(Family with 2 children (4 + 7); unemployed 1 year; RR = 40-50%)

"Sunday dinner (we've kept the same) ... Because when I was young we always had a lovely Sunday dinner and I think it stays in your mind-it's to give the children ... and they'll remember it. It might sound daft but I think you look forward to Sunday. And we always give them a party on their birthday ... I always make a cake, even for Jack (husband) or myself. We always have a cake, yes. It's little things that I think they'll remember when they're older."  
(Mrs Murphy)

(Family with 2 children (14 + 16); unemployed 9 months; RR =50-60%)

**Tobacco**

Expenditure on smoking for these families on low incomes is certainly open to some challenge. The parents who smoked recognised this themselves. They knew that as well as the health risks they could usefully spend the money elsewhere.

"I'd like to give up ... I mean this afternoon I went up for about 3 hours without one you know and I felt a lot better ... I would like to pack it up - ... it'd be more money in the house which maybe could go to the side for one of the kids to have something each week. I've always liked to pack it up. I'm interested, you know, in me health."  
(Mr Hall)

(Family with 3 children (2 to 6); unemployed 15 months; both smokers)

For reasons like this many of the parents had tried to give up or cut down their smoking.

The fact that so many of the parents were still spending money on tobacco is reflective of two main factors. First, many of them had a heavy physical or psychological dependency on smoking, often one which had existed for many years. Those who had tried to give up described the difficulties they had been through:

"We keep trying to stop but with not being able to go out and this ... we're at each other's throats when we stop ... we call it a luxury . . . I tried stopping-I stopped for about three months and I was the nastiest person you could wish to meet . . . I was shocking, I hit the roof,"  
(Mrs Wright)

(Family with 1 child (under 1 year); unemployed 20 months; both smokers)

To non-smokers, these difficulties may be hard to understand, even though problems of nicotine dependency are well documented. And, it could be asked why, in the face of such competing financial demands, some `self-control' or `will-power' is not forthcoming. But it is here that the second factor begins to play its part. The parents who have continued to smoke argue, and not without some defiance, that they have as much right to `choose' to smoke as anyone else. This mother, who had cut down on her smoking argued the case as follows:

"The only thing (left to cut down) is to stop smoking completely-it's the only thing we do really-but if I didn't have a cigarette now and again I think I'd go barmy . . . I've always smoked. Whether or not it's bad for your health I think it's wrong that they just take everything away from you ....I mean it's your choice whether you smoke or you don't smoke, it's up to you. It's the only pleasure we've got really, smoking-I mean we both enjoy a cigarette so I don't see why we should give it up. It's not on."  
(Mrs Hawkins)

(Family with four children (3 to 8); unemployed 13 months)

`The only pleasure we've got' was a common part of the argument about maintaining some choice. And this combined with the inevitable difficulties which people experience when they try to give up smoking, was why so many of them continued to smoke. But it is also fair to say that many of them alluded to the additional psychological stress which unemployment had brought. Smoking is perceived as a stress-related activity and, for many of the parents, the psychological difficulties associated with unemployment simply exacerbated the difficulties of giving up. For those who were regular drinkers, alcohol was associated with similar problems.

**Television**

The reason why expenditure on television continued as a priority needs little explanation. It is, for many of the families, a major source of entertainment and had almost certainly been so long before unemployment. But, for some families, it had become a much more dominant activity. This was partly because the parents, or even the children, were going out less. It was also because the men now had `extra' time on their hands during the day.

"We're having to pay £20 a month for the stereo and £32 a month for television and that leaves us
a hell of a lot short all the time ... they're luxuries that you need, you need a television ... I don't go out socialising ... and it's just same thing, day in and day out ... you know there's no entertainment whatsoever ... you've got £46 television licence there for a start but it's a bit of entertainment, it's something to watch.” (Mr Ross)

(Family with three children (2 to unemployed 1 year; RR-not classified)

Cleaning agents
There were times when a ‘standard of living’ and ‘standards for living’ became intertwined in people’s conversations. And it was perhaps most often in this context that the need for cleaning materials was raised. Several of the families commented that keeping their homes clean and tidy, or keeping their clothes clean, were important priorities for them. As one or two of them commented, it was when you let these ‘standards’ drop that your ‘standard of living’ begins to lower.

"If you've got the money and you can buy these things (soap, furniture polish) to do these jobs you have a standard . . . you set yourself a standard ... I've always felt that way ... we haven't got a lot of money but I make sure the house is always clean. Well, the wife does anyway. But I mean ... just because you haven't got no money doesn't mean to say that you've got to let your own standards fall, does it. Really? If you haven't got a Hoover, use a sweeping brush.” (Mr Murphy)

Food, heating and housing costs
In describing the items that have a priority for unemployed families, the highest priorities—food, heating and housing costs—have not been mentioned. It seemed invidious to describe why such expenditures are at the top of the list. Nevertheless, many of the families did themselves state what may be obvious. Being ‘fed’ and ‘warm’ and ‘having a roof over our heads’ were often said to be the first essentials. And what all the top priorities have in common is that they are immediate needs or demands or ones that cannot easily be ignored. It is this that distinguished them from items which were lower down on the list of priorities.

The low priorities
The items which have lowest priority with the families almost universally involved large expenditure. They are also, as has been suggested, commodities or services that can, without immediate ‘deprivation’, be foregone. Although most of the families recognised that this was less true in the longer term, there seemed little ‘choice’ in the face of what seemed like urgent or competing demands. It was this that made expenditure on items such as new furniture, house repairs or holidays go to the bottom of the league.

It would be easy to give long, detailed accounts of what repairs or decorations were needed, what the state of household durables or furniture was like or how badly a holiday was felt to be needed. Such accounts are contained in most interviews and hold many recurrent themes and comments. But, it is perhaps more useful to address some key questions that such experiences or circumstances raise. First, there is the question of whether this is a new situation for these families. Were these problems experienced before or have they arisen because of their income in unemployment? Second, there is some interest in how a few families do manage to pay for what can be termed as low priorities, when this is clearly out of pattern. And finally there are some questions which must be asked about the effects of avoiding low priorities over a long term.

The first question about changed circumstances; is perhaps the most straightforward to address because the answer is that it varies. This must be an evident finding since the levels of income from which the families have come and the kind of lifestyles and resources they had before were clearly very varied. The OPCS study has shown considerable variation in scores on domestic capital, depending on the age, family size and the employment history prior to unemployment. Since the case study sample contains people from a range of different circumstances, there were inevitably families who experienced more change than others in the items they could afford. Some families have always had difficulties in finding money for major household items or even things like holidays. They tend to be the families where there had been an unstable pattern of employment, or more obviously, a low income in employment, although this did vary with the ages of the parents and the size of the family, as the OPCS data would suggest. At the other end of the scale there were people who had become used to spending money on what were now out of reach items and they were quite clear about the differences unemployment had brought.

The case study evidence has shown how expenditure on consumer durables, like household items or cars, was ruled out or slowed down by unemployment. Such findings are supported by evidence from the OPCS survey. It may therefore be useful to look at how and why one such item is made when it is in many senses, unlikely. For the purpose of illustrating a low priority issue, the decision to keep a car has been used as an example.'

It was noted earlier that few families had retained a car, representing just under one-third of those who had

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1 The OPCS data shows that 41% of people who had continuously signed on for 15 months owned a car. This compares with 70% of those who returned to work and 81% of the working population (when compared with General Household Survey data 1983). Although continuous signers began their spell of unemployment with less domestic capital than those who returned to work, some of the difference will be accounted by giving up car ownership during unemployment.
one when last employed. They were all fairly long term unemployed, one having been unemployed for just under one year (11 months) and three for over one year (13, 15, and 30 months respectively). In their last employment, two of them had had approximately the same net disposable income as they had in unemployment, one had reduced income by around three-quarters and one by around half. Three of them were what has previously been described as ‘non-managers’, with debt or arrears, and one was a ‘manager’.

The three ‘non-managers’ were all having considerable difficulty running their cars. In one case, the car was neither taxed or insured, nor had an MOT. In another, the family had just gone into arrears on their fuel bills to pay the insurance. And the third family said they could not afford to use it. They were, however, all quite clear about why they kept their cars. In two cases, it was because they said they needed the car to look for work, although they both added, that the cars were old ‘wrecks’ which would not fetch anything anyway. And in the third case the car was being bought on hire purchase and its owner was in a ‘catch 22’ situation. He knew that if he sold it—which he wanted to do—it would not fetch the amount he still owed for it. In all these three cases, there is little doubt that retaining a car was adding to their financial problems.

The fourth case was rather different. This was the family who had the longest period of unemployment (30 months) and who was apparently ‘managing’ their income. They had retained the car because of the needs of their son who had diabetes and a mental handicap. This was partly because he was unable to walk very well—but also because of his diabetic comas. He had twice had very bad comas in the middle of the night and the family felt more reassured having a car at hand to take him to hospital. Although this family did not find it easy to meet the costs of running a car and used it as little as possible, they saw the needs of their son as being a very high priority. They received an attendance allowance, which although not intended to pay for the costs of the disabled person’s travel, did help to meet some of the car’s expenses.

The three set of questions posed earlier concerned the effects of continuing to assign a low priority to items such as household durables, furniture, decoration and house repairs over a long period. What, in practice, happens as unemployment lengthens? The answer to this can perhaps best be drawn from the second stage interviews when much longer periods of unemployment had been experienced. Two sorts of consequences were apparent. The first was that gradual replacement and repair started to occur, sometimes with very carefully controlled credit or HP, sometimes with the help of family and friends. Often the decision to buy new possessions or to decorate the house was made when the need to do so was becoming critical, although this did depend on an extent on the priorities of the families concerned. It was clear however, that replacement and repair usually took place after the time that would have been chosen and to this extent restocking and rehabilitation were slowed up.

A second consequence was a serious degeneration in domestic capital and house repair. This occurred mainly amongst the families who had experienced the very longest periods of unemployment and where decisions to restock had not been made. A family described earlier who had been unemployed for five years had neither a cooker, washing machine nor fridge in good working order. There were other such examples relating both to household durables and to the state of repair of the decoration or fabric of the house. Such experiences were sometimes the result of less able management but just as often reflected an aversion to debt or credit.

The OPCS data shows that the decline in ‘domestic capital’ is only slight during the 15 months period of unemployment examined. Although the case study sample cannot be compared in any statistical sense, it is important to note that the longer periods of unemployment experienced by the case study sample may explain why more extensive effects have occurred. It was certainly the case that those who had been unemployed for the longer periods showed most evidence of the decline in domestic stock.

9.3 Changes during period of unemployment

The patterns of expenditure described in the previous two sections were mainly those which existed at the time of the first interviews. It was evident, however, that certain important changes occurred as the period of unemployment progressed. These changes are worthy of some description.

First it was apparent that the patterns of expenditure described in the previous section rarely occurred right away. That is, there was a period when the adaptation to living on an unemployed income had not been made. This period was cited as lasting ‘a few weeks’ or ‘two to three months’ and rarely more than six months.

The reasons why this ‘honeymoon’ period, if it can be called that, occurred seems to be related to the need for a period of initiation. In other words, people need time to learn how they are going to manage on benefits. Any of the families commented on the fact that it was only after a large bill arrived, or they became aware of how hard up they were or how much debt they were getting into, that they realised that their expenditure patterns would have to change.

“It took me a while to get used to—at first I just went on spending as normal . . . for a couple of months I suppose . . . and then there came a big
build up of bills, the council, electric, gas, . . . looking back on it I realise that we were spending money in a similar way to what we had been-I mean things like on food and essentials-but not cutting back on them soon enough, that's what made us get behind on the electric and gas." (Mrs Haynes)

`Spending as normal' was the kind of phrase used by many families. And some of them were cushioned from their overspending by redundancy money, severance payments or savings. But others, as in the example above, were moving, almost unknowingly, into debt and arrears. It was when this became quite evident that some action had to be taken. As one family said, `we realised we had to stop'.

For a few families the situation was exacerbated by the fact that their benefits were not completely sorted out. Either their unemployment or supplementary benefit needed some adjustment or perhaps their housing benefit had not come through. This family, who admitted to having `got into bit of a state' at the beginning was a case in point.

"We'd never had to put away each week ... we sort of didn't budget properly, . . . so we were behind with gas bills and electric . . . you see for the first six weeks we weren't getting the proper benefit ... they have to assess what you are going to get because you're assessed on if it's-if it's your fault for packing up work and thin & s like that-so it took about six weeks before they finally decided what figures we was going to get and then I got a lump sum repayment-that helped us." (Mrs Greene)

A few families said that the expectation of an early return to work had had some bearing. They felt that even if they did move into debt or spend all their savings, they would soon be able to recover.

"We just never bothered cutting back on anything and then it just hit us all of a sudden . . . the bills started coming in and we'd got no cash ... we expected them but we kept putting it off you know and thinking `oh well, I won't be out of work long'" (Mr Robertson)

During this initial period, a few families went beyond their `normal' expenditure and decided to spend their money (usually redundancy pay) on a major item. One family, for example, decided to continue with the holiday they had already arranged. Another bought some furniture and things for the household that were needed, yet another decided to carry out some essential repairs to the house.

"Just after I finished I used my redundancy money towards having the windows replaced—we thought it best to do it that way than to leave it . . . Of course, I would have liked to have kept it so I had a little nest egg but the windows needed it . . . the house was a lot colder than it is now ... fifty per cent of the heat was going through the windows." (Mr Hawkins)

Whatever the reason, virtually all the families referred to this initial period when somehow expenditure was different. Not all of them waited until savings ran out or debt accrued before beginning to remedy the situation. Some of them said it was when they realised how `difficult bills were to pay' or `when they had no money left at the end of the week'. But whatever the event, there seemed to come a day for most families when reality dawned.

It was at this point that many of the families `sat down' to see what they had to do.

"We just worked it out— we put everything down on paper . . . I tried counting the money we were getting in off the dole. I said the food's costing more than we're getting. I said something will have to be cut back." (Mrs Robertson)

As a result, this and many of the other families began much more careful budgeting. Those who had accrued some debt or arrears began to look for ways of paying it back. Some arranged for a regular repayment for debt or arrears, some used savings to pay off their debts, some sold belongings to retrieve the situation. But all of them in some way began adapting their expenditure to meet their income.

During this second `adaptation' period, some families were less successful than others. This meant that a few continued to be in debt and others began to get into debt being unable to adjust their expenditure to their income. Those who still had some savings continued to use them to supplement their income. Some also sold more possessions or used other resources (such as insurance money) either for exceptional expenditure or to stop their debts mounting. For some families this period was brought to an end by a return to work, for others a third period started.

The third period is more difficult to label but was reached when people felt they could adapt no further. They referred to being `in a hole', on the bottom rung of a ladder or sometimes `sliding' or `slipping backwards'. A number commented that it got worse as time went on. This was not simply because the families were getting tired of having to manage although that too was important. It was also because the `need' to spend on items that they could not `manage' seemed to be increasing as unemployment lengthened.

For many families this third period formed a crucial turning point in their acceptance or otherwise of unemployment. There were certainly some who became resigned to the consequences of long term unemployment during this time and seemed to lower their expectations accordingly. Sometimes this was
accompanied by a slowing up of the search for jobs, sometimes not, but either way, resistances seemed to be lowered.

"We manage about the same, would say it’s been a bit better recently ... prices don’t seem to be going up as much at the moment. Well we’ve come to terms with it now, you know what i mean-how to live-and once you’ve got used to it-it’s getting used to not having money and learning to go without. Once you come to terms with that you know you can get through anything ... the first couple of years, I couldn’t get used to it . . . I’d never been on the dole before."

(Mr Jones)

(Unemployed over 5 years)

For some families ‘coming to terms with it’ was not acceptable and a variety of consequences followed. For a few families it was the point at which a search for jobs was stepped up. Sometimes it was the husband, sometimes the wife, who decided that drastic action was needed as was previously described. Some decided they would ‘try anything’ and at this point compromised on what they saw as an acceptable wage for a job. In other families, a decision to move house was made, either to release capital or to reduce housing costs. And some turned to less orthodox means of trying to resolve the situation by obtaining false credit or dealing in stolen goods.

There were a few families for whom neither acceptance nor positive action followed the ‘rock bottom’ point. In many respects these are amongst the unhappiest people who were reinterviewed. In two families, a break-up of the marriage occurred at this time, initiated by the wives. In both cases, the men are now living on their own and are still unemployed. In other cases, the families are together but see themselves still at the bleakest point. In all cases, they are people who have experienced years of unemployment, either continuously, or in a spell subsequent to the reference period.

9.4 Changes on return to work

The patterns of expenditure which families described on their return to work varied considerably. It depended, it seemed, on four key factors:

- the relative level of their income
- the length of time back in work
- the extent to which they had accrued debt or arrears
- the type of managing strategy adopted during unemployment and the kind of pressures this had brought.

There was, however, one feature of expenditure which all families shared. And this was to restore what constituted a treat or luxury was very personal but ‘having a meal out’, a ‘day out for the family’, a ‘Chinese take-away’, ‘fish and chips’, ‘a piece of steak’, ‘going out for a few pints’, ‘hair lacquer’, a ‘pair of tights’ and ‘buying some treats for the children’ were all mentioned. Being able to do such things again, without feeling guilty, was something which clearly brought immeasurable pleasure. As one man said ‘everything were a treat’ when people felt they only had money ‘of their own’ again.

Once these ‘little sprees’ were over, many families adopted a pattern of expenditure not dissimilar to that in unemployment. This was sometimes because they had quite heavy debts and arrears which they wanted to pay off and the disposable income they allowed themselves as a consequence was not greatly higher than it had been when unemployed. Similarly people who had lost their savings in unemployment and felt very insecure having done so, started to save rather than spend. And for others there was very little increase in the income they had available which meant that carefully controlled expenditure had to continue. Some of the families were still living through this period of control, and perhaps would continue to do so. For others strict control had ended, often after about a year.

Another consistent pattern for this group was to maintain precisely the same priorities. The top priorities remained at the top, and the lowest remained at the bottom. As a consequence, expenditure on food and children was immediately increased even if this meant other things had to be left.

"First thing that went up were food money so that we could buy more of what we wanted to eat instead of having to eat everything that were cheapest price in the supermarket, And then it were mainly clothes-clothes for kids. And then we went on to a new iron because we’d had to buy them from car boot sales because we couldn’t afford an iron . . . And then it were a new set of pans because my other ones were falling to bits .. , “ (Mrs Martin)

(Unemployed 15 months and 6 months; working 5 months)

This policy of continuing to spend on high priorities meant that many families had not yet bought any sizeable items for the house since their return to work and most had still not had a holiday.

A few of the wives said that they found the spending habits they had adopted in unemployment had continued with them when their husbands went back to work.

"The funny thing was that although we had a bit more money, I hadn’t got into the habit of spending more-I was still in my sort of thrift-I’m half and half at the moment-I don’t have to think..."
quite so much but I still get these little naggings, you know in the back of my mind ... I've streamlined the heating and that's stayed streamlined ... I've only just started getting a bit better cut of meat." (Mrs Collins)

(Unemployed 5 years: Back in work 8 months)

Amongst many of the families that continued with their controlled expenditure, there was a distinct nervousness that it was all going to end. The woman above said she found it hard to believe that her husband was back in work after so long. Others who were equally worried that their husbands' employment might not last, wanted to cushion themselves by saving in case unemployment ever came again.

For a quite separate group of families, there were some quite marked changes in their patterns of expenditure. A few families, as was previously described, took out a lot of credit or HP to buy clothes and household items they felt they could not afford before. Others just started to spend more freely on daily items, in part they felt, as a reaction to having lived frugally for a long time. Although this pattern of freer spending was less common than the continued control described above, it created difficulties for families who had a subsequent spell of unemployment. By 1988, six of the working families had been back in work for over a year and some for two or more years. In most cases, their pattern of expenditure had now stabilised to the level of income they had available to them. These levels, it will be remembered, ranged from three times the amount of disposable income to little more than people had available in unemployment. Some families now ran a car, had bought several outfits of clothing, had had a holiday and went out as often as they wanted. Others were still controlling their expenditure very carefully and had bought very few large items since being back in work. All of them however, said they spent more on food and, where they still had dependent children, on clothes and other items for the kids. And, irrespective of their relative income they all felt they had more choice in how their money got spent.

It has already been noted that many of the patterns of expenditure described in this chapter are highly persistent ones. The items of expenditure that were given highest priority, those which were reduced to a minimum or withdrawn completely were very similar across all the families. This was the case irrespective of the reduction in income they experienced in unemployment, the stability of their previous employment or even the style of managing they adopted for household budgeting. An underlying reason expressed repeatedly by the families, was that there was little choice but to follow these patterns, since expenditure was reduced to the bare essentials. Keeping the family fed and warm, ensuring the children were clothed, giving the children an occasional treat or present were not choices but necessities. Buying something for the house, continuing with social or leisure activities, paying for insurance or assurance, having a day out or a holiday with the family, were not.

While these dominant patterns were repeated, it is also clear that some families managed to maintain their control of expenditure better than others. Different managing styles have already been discussed and these are pertinent to the kinds of control adopted. But there are factors related to expenditure patterns which need to be drawn together in conclusion of this chapter. They have been implicitly, if not explicitly stated in many of the families' descriptions previously cited.

First it is evident that the demands on expenditure are not uniform throughout all families. The ages of the children, the level and condition of domestic stock prior to unemployment, the established habits of both children and parents inevitably varied between families and brought with them different demands. A second and related factor arises from how necessities are defined. For some parents, school trips or educational activities for the children, or nice toys at Christmas, are essential—for others they are items that can be foregone. Similarly for some people tobacco is a necessary expenditure, for others it is not.

Another issue relates to who controls the expenditure. In households where there was single management (usually by the wife), or where both parents were in agreement about necessities and priorities, expenditure remained under smoother control. Conversely, in households where part of the expenditure was taken away from this central control (often by the husband), effective management was made more difficult. This was particularly so when money was spent on items which were very low on the list of priorities.

The stage at which stringent expenditure control is adopted is another factor. Some recognised very early that expenditure had to change and quickly reached the stage of 'adaptation'. Others let it ride for longer, often in the hope or expectation that employment would return, Arrears or debt incurred in this period could have a significant effect on later patterns of expenditure control.

And finally there is the effect of the length of unemployment on patterns of expenditure. As has been shown, low priorities will inevitably increase in importance as the wear and tear of domestic stock, clothing, and indeed psychological well being take their toll.

Controlling expenditure to the 'bare essentials', which is what most families felt they did, can be sustained in the long term by some. For others however it is tolerable only for a limited period, although clearly the length of that period will vary. But however adapted people became, and however long the period continues, controlling expenditure in the ways described clearly has some material or psychological effects. There was not one family interviewed for whom this was not evident.
Without exception, the case study families had used some resource other than their regular benefit income to help them through their period of unemployment. For a small number, this was no more than some help from their relatives or friends, which any family might receive. In rather more families, however, the use of other resources had been quite considerable, although with some selectivity about the source. This chapter examines the range of resources that were used, both during unemployment and on the initial return to work. More specifically it looks at why certain resources are, or are not used, and at the range of feelings about using them.

10.1 Additional sources of income

Income related benefits and additional payments

A number of the families were making full use of the additional payments and benefits they could receive at the time by virtue of their low income status. Some of those on supplementary benefit had claimed their entitlement to special payments (for things like furniture or fittings), others had claimed their entitlement to items such as free prescriptions, one a special allowance for heating and diet and most of them milk tokens for their small children. In addition, some of those with children at school had claimed free school meals and school clothing grants.

But there were almost as many who did not claim the benefits and payments they were entitled to. There were certain cases where free school meals, clothing grants, free prescriptions and, as noted previously, housing benefit were not being claimed. There were also possible cases where special payments or allowances for necessary repairs and decoration, essential furniture, home moving costs and things for a baby were being foregone.

It is not the intention here to repeat the considerable literature on reasons for unclaimed entitlements. It is perhaps sufficient to say that the factors which have been shown to be key inhibitors to claims (negative beliefs about the claim process, uncertainty about eligibility, negative feelings about being in receipt of income support) all had their part to play. But this is a particularly serious issue for these low income families. It has already been shown that most of the families did not find it easy to make ends meet, yet some of them were foregoing additional income or help they could have had. Two families, therefore, will be used to illustrate why this additional help was not being sought.

The first family was knowingly foregoing some unclaimed entitlement. At that time, the family had two children at secondary school and one who was working. The family's net income (from SB and child benefit) had reduced by over half since employment and they were amongst the group who have been described as 'marginal non-managers'. They would not however claim free school meals for their children although they were fully aware that they were entitled to do so. They also thought they would probably get free prescriptions (for which they have just paid themselves) although are a little less sure about this. On the question of free school meals the mother said:

"My children won't take free school meals - they just won't take them. They say it's terrible because the children that have free school meals have a card (instead of paying from day to day)-they have to hand it over, the ticket, on a plate you see, so everybody watches-they say it's very embarrassing, especially for a boy of 16. He wouldn't do it so we have to pay (over £5) for the school meals. I understand how he feels that way-no I don't push them because it's terrible to be embarrassed at that age.“ (Mrs Robertson)

The wisdom of not 'pushing them' must be called into question. Not only did this family have some difficulty in managing on their income, they also acknowledge that they cannot give their 16 year old son any money to go out with in the evening, something which he is far from happy about. But it is not only the children who did not want to 'be embarrassed'. The parents themselves also had some very negative feelings about the whole issue of being in receipt of benefits. Although they said they did not know whether they are eligible for free prescriptions or anything else, their reasons for not going to find out were much more deep rooted. The father said:
"There’s too much hassle, you know getting these benefits. You have to go down there and sit and wait in queues ... then people ask you silly questions when you’re there or why you need this, we wouldn’t be there if we didn’t need it, so they should know these things themselves."

(Mr Robertson)

And the mother added:

"There’s just no way I could go begging you know, for everything ... well how do you go about it (getting free prescriptions)? I mean I wouldn't go and sit in that place, I feel awful ... I hate it. I keep saying, I'm going to do it and I never do. I just go and pay for it."

(Mrs Robertson)

The second family has some similarities although they were receiving free school meals and school clothing grants for their older children who was at school. They too were on supplementary benefit, with an income of around half what they had before. They owned their own house and needed some fairly urgent repairs to the roof. They said that they did not know anything about extra benefits or allowances they might be able to get. The father said:

"I don't know a right lot about it-I've never delved into it at all ... I suppose there'd be loads of things?"

When asked why he does not delve into it he replied:

"Pride, I should imagine, I don't like going down there ... you feel so low when you walk in and see them all queuing up and arguing for money and stuff ... you go in and say I'm entitled. They say 'sorry you're not entitled' ... and you start sort of saying well why not this, that and the other. They say 'well come back in a few weeks and we'll see what we can do for you'. They just sort of fob you off-it gets on your nerves ... some of them (claimants) just really sit there and stick it out and they get fed up and they'll pay them. But I couldn't do that. I couldn't go down there and argue the toss for now-it’s not in me nature, I don't suppose. I just couldn't do it-I'd sooner go without ...

You feel as though you're begging all the time. I mean if you don't really know how to go about getting all this sort of thing-it’s the first time I’ve been on the dole really you know. I don't really know what I’m entitled to or what I’m not."

(Mr Winter)

In both cases, some negative beliefs about the claiming process and some very deep rooted feelings about having to ask for additional help were operating. These beliefs and feelings were preventing any attempt to find out more, a problem that has been documented in much of the take up literature. But from the perspective of this study, these unclaimed entitlements were having serious repercussions. Both families were in debt or arrears, which they looked to have little prospect of retrieving.

Negative views about income related benefits also had some bearing on job search activity. As was noted in Chapter 4, some of the men were taking no account of in work benefits when they considered the wages of possible jobs. Some of them seemed very uncertain about the benefits that they might get in employment. And even those who made some reference to things like FIS had insufficient knowledge to know what income might accrue from it. But even more important was an underlying resistance to being on any form of income support. For many of the families, working was precisely how you got yourself out of the benefit system.

"I wouldn't have taken a job where I had to back the money up. Because I don't think you can have any pride in yourself, working for a job where you're not taking home enough to live on ... I don't think it’s helping anybody out to give Family Income Supplement because its still keeping them feeling as if they’re reliant on the Government, on the country, or whatever to support them. You know, everybody needs to feel that they're supporting their own family."

(Mr Campbell)

This view was expressed at the second interview when the husband had been back in work for just seven months. The family's current income would have made them ineligible for a FIS award.

By 1988, four other families back in work were well established FIS claimants. And the amounts received from FRS were not inconsequential, ranging from £16 to over £30 a week. A further three had made claims but been turned down. In all three cases they were people with erratic earnings (either because of self-employment or because of variable overtime) and their earnings at the time had precluded them. In none of these cases had a further claim for FRS been made.

Income from other household members

At both stages of the study, there were some families where other members of the household had income of their own. In 1983/84, there were three families where other relatives were living with the family and two in which older children were on grants or working. By 1988, the number of families in which older children had independent incomes had risen to six.

In all of these cases, contributions of some kind were given to the household expenses. In some cases this was a regular weekly payment, ranging from £10 to £20, in other cases it was payment of specific bills as regular outgoings. In most cases, these payments seemed to provide some cushioning of the demands on household expenditure. This was particularly so

for families still on total income support, where an older child moved from being dependent to non-dependent. Even where the weekly contribution did not outweigh the loss of benefit (ie from SB and child benefit), it was usual to find that the sons or daughters now mainly bought their own clothes and other personal commodities, and very occasionally items for the house. Buying personal possessions also occurred amongst children still at school who did evening or weekend jobs, although to a much lesser extent.

Casual earnings

In 1983/84 very few of the men said they had looked for, or done, any casual work during their period of unemployment. Three reasons were given for this. First, some of them were more concerned to put their efforts into looking for a 'proper job'. Secondly, there was little or no suitable casual work available. And third, even if there was, there was little point in doing it. If they declared their earnings, they would only be allowed to keep £4; and if they did not declare them they might get 'found out'.

There were a few men who had apparently had some casual earnings during the earlier part of their unemployment. In the two most certain cases, one had not declared his earning\(^8\), one had done so. For the first, this was "Because they're not bloody well giving us enough to live on anyway so if I can earn a few quid with work I will do." And in the second because the unemployed man had no wish to have illegal undeclared income. But he was not going to do it again. "I know two or three part-time jobs I could get . . . but I done it once and I told them down there that I earn £10 and they just took £10 off me so I thought well I've dug that bloke's garden for nothing-'put your money in your pocket' you know and dig it for nothing. I mean the only person that gained out of that was the DHSS wasn't it."

Although this man was obviously not aware he should have gained a little financially (ie £4), he was not alone in his criticism of the earnings regulations. Several of the men commented that they would like to do odd jobs, simply to occupy themselves and take time off their hands. But they saw little point in doing so when, as they saw it, most of it would be taken away from them.

There was also another disincentive which several of them referred to. This concerned the difficulty of getting the benefit rate back to normal once it had been interrupted. The budgeting in many of the families was sufficiently fragile that the thought of having a reduced benefit income for a few weeks, even if there was back pay, was not something they wanted to risk.

By 1988, the same range of attitudes towards casual work existed. There were however, slightly more explicitly stated instances of when casual work had been done. Some of these were from men who had had little more than the 'odd job here and there' for family and friends. Others had had very occasional and short periods of 'cash in hand' employment, for which in one case they had 'got caught'. This had also happened to one of the wives who had taken up some casual work.

There was only one cited case where a man who was still unemployed talked of regular earnings from casual work. The amount was not insignificant and the family was quite clear that it helped a great deal in being 'able to manage'. The husband said that his view about doing undeclared casual work had changed during the course of 5 years unemployment.

"I know it's dishonest and when I first became unemployed honesty to me meant saying what you were and what you weren't. But I feel I've changed my view on what honesty is, . . . it comes back down to (the rich and taxes)-I know it's not right to say if the rich does something wrong it's alright for everyone else . . . I'm not saying that. But I do honestly feel that, that it's nothing wrong and I'm doing what's necessary."

10.2 Savings and debt

Savings and severance payments

None of the families had any of their savings or severance payments left at the time of the first interview. Around half had some when their unemployment began, ranging in amount from around £200 to over £3,000. As was noted earlier, some of those with cash in the bank had spent it early in their unemployment period on such things as household items, holidays, or housing repairs. The rest of the money had gone in later months, usually when some big item of expenditure needed to be met.

It may be useful here to describe how and why two families had spent cash savings and severance payments. The first family (the Atkinsons), who would be counted as 'managers', had £1,700 redundancy pay and some savings. They had both worked previously and their unemployment income was under half their former income. When they were first unemployed they had great difficulty adjusting to their much reduced income. As a result, they got behind with their bills and eventually had to ask the DHSS to pay them directly. But by this time they were behind on virtually everything so they used their redundancy money to pay their fuel and rates bills. Another problem was the level of their outstanding hire purchase payments. When they were employed they had taken on quite 'heavy HP commitments' for things for the house. Soon after unemployment began they realised that they were going to have great difficulty meeting all these payments from within their unemployment income. They therefore used what was left of the money in the bank to pay off `most' of these outstanding HP commitments.
The second family (the Spencers) had £2,000 redundancy money and holiday pay at the start of the unemployment period, almost two years ago. They would be described as a ‘marginally non-managing’ family, in that they did not regularly live within their weekly income. They did not, however, have any outstanding debts or arrears when they were first interviewed. When Mr Spencer first became unemployed they were ‘behind’ on paying their bills and mortgage, so they used some of the redundancy money to get ‘up to date’. They also, as they say, ‘got two luxuries out of it’. They bought a fridge-freezer and went on holiday to Yarmouth. This, again, was during the first six months of their unemployment.

Although not all of the families used up their cash savings in the early months of the unemployment period, this did seem to be the more common pattern. And as has been demonstrated, some of it was spent on clearing bills or arrears and some on the purchase of household items, or holidays, or in other cases, housing repairs. It was evident, as in the second case above, their severance payments, were the first large cash sums some families had had. Their use for larger items of expenditure is therefore perhaps not surprising. Those who previously had some savings were a little more likely to spread their spending over a longer period, but they too eventually spent the money in the ways that have been described.

In 1988, around half of the families back in work had made some savings or were now saving hard. For some families the reason for saving was to provide a ‘cushion’, some ‘security’, a ‘shock absorber’ should anything like unemployment ever strike again. For others it was a question of saving money for some purchase, like furniture or a holiday, or perhaps even a car. Not all of these families were people who had savings before—some had come to feel the need for ‘something behind them’ because of their experiences in unemployment. With the exception of one man, who had recently returned to unemployment after a long spell at work, there were no ‘savers’ amongst those still unemployed.

Debts and arrears

At the time of the first interview, the extent to which families were in debt or arrears was very variable. As has already been described, some had no debt or arrears at all, others were simply behind with one or two regular payments, like fuel bills or mortgage payments, while others were beginning to mount quite serious debt. In some cases, there had been debts outstanding when unemployment began, in others the families found themselves newly in debt in unemployment. The families who have been described as ‘non-managing’ were more likely than the ‘managing’ families to have debts before, although this was not exclusively so.

It was not untypical to find that the ‘managers’ who were getting into debt were doing so at times when urgent expenditure of some kind was ‘needed’. While the ‘non-managers’, as in the first case, were getting into debt, or deeper into debt, largely through regular over spending.

By the time of the second interview, the number of families experiencing sizeable debt or arrears had risen sharply. As has been described, in some cases the debt was incurred as unemployment lengthened, in others on the return to work. Around half of those who experienced debt at these later stages had not had serious debts before they were unemployed.

All of those families saw their need for loans, credit or arrears as a direct consequence of unemployment. For some the debt had arisen at one or two critical points, for others it had crept up slowly over time. Whatever its cause, being in debt, was, for most families, deeply disturbing.

Of the ten families who were working in 1988, six families had experienced a sizeable debt through unemployment. All of them were either paying back those debts or had now managed to do so in full. The few who did not have any debts had achieved this through a determined policy to avoid them. In two cases this policy had been cushioned by the use of capital from the sale of the house or by the use of savings.

Of the twelve families who were unemployed in 1988, six had experienced sizeable debt in unemployment. Five, of them, all but one of whom were people who had been in and out of work, still had sizeable repayments to make. In the remaining case, the repayment of debt had been achieved in unemployment through the receipt of the invalid care allowance, which had been awarded with back payments.

It is significant to note that only one of the families who had been continuously unemployed had any sizeable debts outstanding in 1988. This was a family who had entered unemployment with a large debt from a failed business. Their debt had risen during unemployment (from about £3,000 to £4,000) although an additional loan taken out to buy clothes for the children had been repaid. This had been achieved under pressure (from the source of the loan) and during the time of repayment had brought considerable hardship.

The remaining families with continuing unemployment had either managed to avoid debt completely; had repaid it as previously described, and had only limited debt (ie £200–£300) that was controlled. All of them were families in which the wives were careful managers, although in three cases there was at least
one additional source of income or provision. One family had income from an older relative as well as the invalid care allowance previously noted; one earned regular money from casual work; and one had ‘goods’ provided by the husband from more illegal means.

10.3 Other resources

Sale of goods

It has already been shown that two thirds of the families who owned cars had sold them during the earlier part of unemployment. This was partly because of difficulties in finding the money for tax and insurance, but also because the sale released some cash. And it was for similar reasons that just under half of the families had sold other items of transport, household items or personal effects. Once again the amount varied considerably from ‘a push bike’ through large household articles to valuable gold and silver jewellery.

Differences between ‘managers’ and ‘non-managers’ appeared in much the same way as with loans or debts. In other words, the managers sold, either to retrieve some early accrued debt, or to meet an exceptional item of expenditure. The non-managers were more likely to have sold simply to meet their regular expenditure.

Those who had not sold any household or personal items gave two reasons for this. Either they prized their possessions too highly to want to sell them, or they had ‘nothing to sell’. At least, they had ‘nothing to sell’ which would ‘fetch anything worthwhile’ or which was in ‘good enough condition’ to sell.

Most of those who sold goods did so in the earlier stages of unemployment (ie within a year to 18 months). There were very few reports of a continuing sale of possessions at the second stage interviews. The only exceptions to this were a family who had continued to sell items of antique furniture which they had, and one of the families with a car who sold it not long after the first interview.

Help in kind from relatives and friends

Some of the unemployed families were evidently quite dependent on the help they got from their relatives, particularly from parents and siblings. Others were receiving fairly minimal help, perhaps a few articles of clothing for the children, the occasional £10 note, the odd package of groceries-help of the kind that could occur in almost any family. But several of the families commented that they were getting much more help from their relatives in unemployment than they did before. This family is a case in point:

“I don't know what we would have done really (if it wasn't for 'our mum'). Only this week the little girl's shoes, the bottoms were all falling off, we couldn't afford new shoes. So Mum bought her a new pair of shoes. And Dan's (husband's) Mum bought Liam his school uniform... we had a £20 grant... but there was no way it would pay for it, it came to over £100 for his uniform... Our Mum, she's been ever so good, we'll go and see her and she'll say 'Oh take a couple of pounds of sugar or a quarter of tea... or a couple of Sop's for the cleaners... and she's helped with other clothes for the children... My Mum's not well off, not by a long way but she's tried hard to help... but it makes you feel guilty... we don't like accepting it. It's not a situation we like but there's times when we've just had to sort of swallow our pride and say 'Thanks very much' 

(Mrs Campbell)

(Family with 2 children [6+ 9J; unemployed 11 months; RR = 80-90%)

Not all the parents felt ‘guilty’ about taking help from their families. Some of them saw it as something which families would always naturally do and they knew they would do the same if the situation were reversed. But others, like the family above, disliked having to ask for things, or receive the help in kind they were given. More crucially, they felt they should not have to depend on their parents or families to ‘manage’.

These feelings were highlighted when families reflected on the help they had received. Those back in work in 1988 spoke of the importance of having had help with things like children’s shoes, school uniforms etc but reaffirmed that they had continued to feel upset by it. Some were still receiving similar ‘gifts’ or payments from their families but said their feelings about it were now quite different. The fact that their families now ‘didn’t have to help’ made the receipt of any financial support much more acceptable.

Some of the families who were unemployed in 1988 were still receiving help of the kind described above. Only in one case had this been increased substantially. The family concerned had serious financial difficulties and depended on ‘a big box of food’ which one of their parents brought up each Friday. Although the wife felt guilty about receiving this from her mother, she said they ‘would never manage without it’.

Stolen goods

At the first stage, a few of the men admitted to having used stolen goods to supplement their unemployment income. Three of them had criminal records, one of whom had a court case pending. The fourth had apparently so far ‘not been caught’.
It is perhaps best to let one of the men involved explain why they were stealing.

"We've really ground down to nothing . . . I mean electrics nearly cut off, the gas is nearly cut off, The water rates are chasing me everywhere. I can't warn the house up. Me kid's in jumble sale clothes. I've nicked these shoes . . . I d nick anything. Too true. Yeah. Why shouldn't I? You know I'm willing to work. I'm strong you know. But I would. Never used to before, when I were in the Army, you know. When I first came out of the Army, I was going to be a policeman—but what future have I got? ... why should she (wife) have to suffer in clothes and that from jumble sales and that because of my predicament. I mean, it's hard for me, yeah. I mean, I've gone out of here and we've been skint ain't we? I've gone out of here in the mornings, I've come back with a box of groceries, chicken, bag of coal and that. One way or another I'll find food; you know what I mean. I'll get money one way or another. But I shouldn't have to do that. I shouldn't have to do that, but I do. I mean I think nothing of going into-(store)—and putting a coat on under mine----not that much (clicks fingers). I'd do it again tomorrow, you know. I'd do it for her. If I haven't got it then I'll nick it. The fact of the matter is—I haven't got the money . . . Don't get me wrong, I don't go out nicking every week - I’m talking about when the bills come in or something like that, when I'm really stuck."

This man apparently did not have a previous history of "nicking" things and, in his view, had been driven to it through unemployment. But some of the others did, as is evidenced by their previous spells in prison. They were, however, similarly defiant about their 'need' to resort to crime.

The illegal evidence of these four men had evidently continued after 1983/84. Two were in prison at the time of the second interviews and a third (who was not interviewed) was 'thought' to be in prison by neighbours. The fourth had also served a prison sentence since the first interview and now had another case pending. One of the men had been continually unemployed since 1983/84, two had very brief spells (of a few months) back in work. From what was said it seemed that "doing a job" was now a way of life and a return to any regular employment was unlikely.

The overall use of other resources

With the exception of stolen goods, some of the families had used every one of the resources described during unemployment. Others had adopted perhaps, only one or two, and then only minimally. As has been shown the use of alternative resources alone does not distinguish the managers from the non-managers. Their use is about equally divided amongst both. What does, however, distinguish 'managers' from 'non-managers' is the sort of alternatives chosen, and the times when they are used.

In this context, we should comment on what appear to be the more difficult or 'critical' points. There are times when the families' regular benefit income, however carefully budgeted, cannot stretch to meet an 'exceptional' demand. Christmas is one such time. Others mentioned include occasions when domestic appliances break, when repairs become urgent in accommodation which is owned, when internal decorating is needed, when children urgently 'need' clothes, perhaps for example, when they change schools, or even during the long weeks of the summer school holidays. It is at times like these when even the good 'managers' find it difficult to 'make ends meet'. And it is at points like these that the families whether managers or not, are most likely to call in any additional resources they have whether it be the use of 'catalogues', the sale of some belongings, help from the family, or a loan.
This final part of the report will examine the consequences and effects for families of living on unemployment income. In this chapter, the psychological and social effects for the unemployed men and their families will be considered. The last chapter documents some conclusions and reflections on the experiences people had in unemployment.

In both these final chapters, there is a serious problem in trying to disengage the effects of the financial constraints of unemployment from its other aspects. Three factors become closely intertwined. First, there is the change in occupational status which unemployment has brought to the unemployed men. This `drop' in status, as it is often described, is felt deeply by some of the fathers. Secondly, there is the change in daily routine and life style which unemployment brings. This is in part a result of the men having time during the day but also a consequence of reductions in activities which cost money. Finally, there are the psychological pressures brought by having to `manage' on a low income and the cutbacks in expenditure this may involve. This in turn seems to have a compounding effect on the feelings of lowered status which unemployment can bring.

It is not the purpose of this study to consider the psychological or social consequences of unemployment per se. There is already a considerable amount of literature devoted to the subject. An attempt will be made therefore, to focus on the consequences of living with the patterns of financial management and expenditure described in the previous section.

11.1 The psychological effects

During the first stage interviews, around half of the men talked about some marked changes in their feelings or behaviour which had come with the financial constraints of unemployment. There were two main strands to the changes they described. The first surrounded the level of anxiety or frustration that was associated with `making ends meet'. The second was connected to the loss of role as the `provider' for their family. Either or both left them feeling irritable or strained at best and quite seriously depressed at worst.

Before moving on to describe these effects in more detail, it is important to bring in the experiences of the wives. Because they appeared to be under equal, if not greater, strain than their husbands. This finding is confirmed by the OPCS data. This showed that husbands and wives recorded similar levels of psychological welfare, at both the 3 month and 15 month period of continuous unemployment.

There seemed to be three reasons why wives experienced as much, if not more, psychological stress than their husbands. First, in most of the households, the women were mainly responsible for the day to day budgeting. This was in part a result of the men having time during the day but also a consequence of reductions in activities which cost money. Secondly, there are the psychological pressures brought by having to `manage' on a low income and the cutbacks in expenditure this may involve. This in turn seems to have a compounding effect on the feelings of lowered status which unemployment can bring.

It is not the purpose of this study to consider the psychological or social consequences of unemployment per se. There is already a considerable amount of literature devoted to the subject. An attempt will be made therefore, to focus on the consequences of living with the patterns of financial management and expenditure described in the previous section.

A useful review of this literature is provided in Work, Unemployment and Mental Health, (1987) Warr, P, Oxford University Press.
your own endeavours. I think that demeanes you more than anything else. And life's demanding when the kids (three aged 4 to 9) come home and they say 'can we have this and can we have that' and you've got say 'No'. I think that really makes you down, it really puts you down ... You know I tend to look on the children as giving them what I can . . . I'm perhaps too soft, I've perhaps given them too much. But I think it's the fact that I can't give in to them and can't give them this and that really gets me down. I think that's how I'd turn it up, the fact that you can't live as expected.

These feelings were further intensified by the 'hopelessness' of trying to make ends meet every fortnight.

"It doesn't seem to have any hope with it. You know you've got about £2 to last 3 days and you've got to make it last. And yet you know that the next time, the next fortnight it's going to be exactly the same ... it is purely the hopelessness of it, the fact that you can't survive."

Although the family had some debts when unemployment began (7 months previously) they were now also acquiring new ones. They kept trying to pay off their initial debt but without great success. This however worried the husband less than his wife.

"I have honestly become immune to it, it doesn't worry me . . . you know there's just no way you can produce money out of a hat ... the priorities have got to be, you've got to eat . . . you've got to keep warm . . . and like the next priority must be clothes for the kids . . . So bills that have been incurred before or whatever . . . you just can't worry about," (Mr Ward)

But his wife did worry a great deal.

"We're getting deeper and deeper into debt. I mean that hurts as well . . . One week he'll go and tell them that we can't pay, the next week I'll go. There was a time I'd hide if anybody knocked on the door. And if I went to the door, I'd stand there shaking. But now I just stand there and face them and tell them we haven't got the money."

The mother is equally upset about having to deny her children things they would like to have. And she feels 'degraded' by the fact that she can no longer buy herself clothes and go out as they used to. And she was also very upset when they had to sell jewellery and some other personal effects to try to pay off their debts. As a result of all this she admits to being very distressed.

"I sit there and I cry. Night after night some nights. Because I don't know what I'm going to do you know, for the kids' sake or my own."

She has been to a doctor who prescribed tranquillisers which she prefers not to take.

"I think of my kids first-you get addicted, you know, it's one of those things. My children comes first." (Mrs Ward)

In this first family, the husband made an unsuccessful attempt at running a business before he became unemployed. This is how his initial debts accrued and part of their present struggle is trying to pay off these debts. In the second family, who have been unemployed for about two years, they have so far managed to avoid any debts or arrears. But this has been as a result of some extremely careful household management by the mother. And the strain of this was beginning to tell.

"He'll look at me and say 'Oh it's no good worrying about it, is it. There's nothing you can do, things will get better.' He's ever the optimist. You have to do that, see, because if you don't then you go under. Especially if you're the type of person that can get very depressed about it, which you can. At least some people . . . think 'well to hell with it' you know, I mean there's always tomorrow. But I always look at tomorrow in a different light. I always think of tomorrow as getting by with the food, getting by with the rest of life's everyday things. I can't look at life and say, you know, there's something better round the corner, perhaps there is. But to me, tomorrow is feeding the family. Tomorrow is keeping warm. Just things like that. You have to. I do."

This mother, like all the others, hated having to deprive her children of things they wanted. Her eldest daughter who was 13 was interested in fashionable clothes, but they could not afford to buy the kind she wanted.

"She hasn't got a lot; she's got practical things, rather than fancy."

The mother admitted that she would stick to the 'practical' clothes if she had a choice but recognised that her children:

"Don't want to be practical all the time . . . you've got to have a bit of fun in your life." And so occasionally she will buy "something 'fancy' which puts more of a strain on the money and therefore more of strain on me. I tend to get a bit het up and ratty and take it out on them, which is not fair because it's not their fault."

This wife was clearly carrying most of the responsibility for the household finances but she also felt sorry for her husband. He had very deep feelings of 'shame' about his unemployment, and felt his 'pride' had been greatly affected. So she tended to keep the responsibility all on her shoulders.

"I can't go to him and say well the boys need a new winter coat or whatever. It's no good me going to him, he's got no money. I feel sorry for him because I know that it hurts him too. But it is a tremendous pressure on me and I sometimes-I
These two families between them have referred to a number of recurrent issues concerning the strains of financial management. Perhaps most important is the daily endeavour of keeping the family warm and fed. Then there is the pressure which children’s demands or requirements bring. If these are met there is a ‘strain on the purse’. If they are not met, the parents feel dispirited because they are having to ‘deny’ their children. The cuts in expenditure mean that there is little ‘fun in life’ which might help to relieve the tension and frustration. Finally there is the anxiety caused by being in debt or arrears, or by trying to avoid it.

For some couples, the stress manifested itself as ‘short-temper’, feeling ‘irritable’, feeling ‘low’, being ‘moody’ or having ‘difficulty sleeping’. But in its more extreme form it caused serious bouts of depression or anxiety which continued over long periods. In some families, one or both of the parents were receiving medical treatment in 1983/84 and in one case suicide had been attempted.’

In 1983/84, many of the couples spoke of the effects that the period of unemployment had on their relationship with each other. Some felt there had been a positive effect making them closer and more intimate as a couple. This was partly a result of the greater time they spent together and the opportunity to combine more activities and partly a consequence of sharing a problem and working it through together. One husband, for example, talked of the encouragement his wife gave when he felt depressed about his unemployment:

"I don’t want to get so low in myself as not to bother, not care. I think there’s no coming back to it then. That’s why I’m happy that we’re happy together, sort of me and the wife you know. Because she gives me lots of encouragement ‘cos I do get a bit depressed. Our happiness together I think has got better."

And his wife agrees,

"We seem to be stronger in that line than anything else. We’re closer as a pair now than we’ve ever been I think ... there are certain things that a husband and wife can talk about together and to each other." (Mrs Field)

The marital relationship

The case study data suggests that three factors played an important part in the amount of stress or depression families experienced. The first was the amount of financial difficulty experienced, particularly where continual overspending and/or high levels of debt had occurred. (The OPCS data shows as other studies have done before that there is a close association between psychological stress and the existence of debt.) The second factor noted related to the pressures brought by continual ‘managing’ (le regularly making ends meet) over a very long period. The third was the strength of the marital partnership and the extent to which it survived intact during unemployment.

It must be noted that some of the families were not experiencing the stresses that have been described for the first time. It was evident that, in a few families, there was quite a long history of depression or of anxiety or worry about the family’s financial situation. Some of the families who entered unemployment with heavy demands on a low income, or with existing debt or arrears, had clearly suffered these kinds of strains before unemployment. Unemployment, however, had inevitably heightened any difficulty that existed before.

11.2 The impact on family life

The marital relationship

In 1983/84, many of the couples spoke of the effects that the period of unemployment had on their relationship with each other. Some felt there had been a positive effect making them closer and more intimate as a couple. This was partly a result of the greater time they spent together and the opportunity to combine more activities and partly a consequence of sharing a problem and working it through together. One husband, for example, talked of the encouragement his wife gave when he felt depressed about his unemployment:

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And his wife agrees,

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(The family with 2 children; unemployed 14 months)

It is evident that many of the couples who had become closer had had strong and supportive relationships before. And the opportunity to see more of each other had apparently given a great deal of pleasure. One wife commented that "I like him being at home, around all the time, I’ve got used to him, I’d miss him terribly if he went to work." Another talked of the greater enjoyment that arose through sharing the household responsibilities.

"We get on much better. I think we understand each other better now. Whereas before he was

The ‘assessments’ of levels of stress are derived solely from the descriptions given and not from any systematically applied scale or measurement.
Strains that put pressure on A lack of money to go out was just one of the financial ... never do we argue because we've no money or anything like that now. Never do argue." (Mrs Brown)

(Family with 3 children; unemployed 11 months)

Not all the couples however felt that having more time together was a good thing. Indeed rather more of them talked about the disadvantages of ‘seeing too much of each other’. This was partly because they ‘were stuck together all day and got on top of each other’. One couple, who were apparently quite close, had realised what a problem this was becoming:

“We both sat down and had a discussion—what was happening to us like and we've both come to the same conclusion. We both could see the same thing, that because we were both together all the time, we weren't mixing socially or anything. Everything we talked about day after day after day after day and month after month was the exact same things. We didn't have anything like I could come in from work or come in from a night out and tell Sue a story. And Sue didn't have anywhere where she’d been out and come in and tell me a story you know.” (Mr Greene)

(Family with two children [11 + 14]; unemployed 20 months)

Clearly, the additional time which couples spend together is mainly a result of the husband not being at work during the day. But, as is indicated in the example above, it is also a consequence of a reduction in social, leisure and other external activities. One wife, who found the lack of any social activity a problem, commented on the effect this had on her relationship with her husband.

“You have the feeling that you don't remember what a pub looks like and that you know. And it makes me right bad tempered with the kids at times. Because you've got them all day and they're screaming round you and you're never getting a break from them . . . And I do get had tempered . . . and take it out on him and all . . . All I do here is clean up, you know, and never get out, never get anywhere. I say to him sometimes, I said, 'I might as well be an old age pensioner', I said, because all I do is get stuck in here, I said, 'I never get out anywhere . . . Our marriage—I don't know—to me lately it's a bit rocky, you know . . . Sex life isn't the same . . . isn't as good as it used to be . . . many nights we don't go to bed together, if we do go to bed we fall out . . .” (Mrs Fraser)

(Family with 2 children [1 +4]; unemployed 2 years)

More commonly, it was the stress of the household budgeting that caused the arguments. Around one third of the couples commented that they had arguments, or tensions in their relationship, which they felt were rooted in their shortage of money. In some cases these tensions had existed before; but in others the problem was new to unemployment.

"Like the food had been cut down drastically, and the type of food. Clothing, we're still buying new stuff for the kids . . . but the wife can't think about getting a coat, that's out. So we've lost the car, entertainment has gone, the social life has gone completely. And we argue a lot more now. All the things we'd never have noticed before we argue about. Sometimes quite heated . . . little things now, when you talk about even spending a couple of bob, a couple of shillings, I mean things that she shouldn't have spent. And before, I never noticed it, it's pennies for the kids and those things creep in now, small little things, that I never noticed before, cause minor rows and arguments. And some other rows that have been quite heated . . . At times it's been very strained, very strained at times. But we get over it and we both know the reasons. It's purely lack of money, most of it. And we get over it but at times it gets very strained and it's not had a very good effect at all. I think we're quite lucky we have got over it. Now that we can see an end to it because I've got this job . . . but I don't know how much longer it could have gone on. It couldn't go on indefinitely.” (Mr Atkinson)

(Family with 3 children [3-10]; unemployed 1 year)

This couple have ‘got over’ their difficulties because of the prospects of a job. And some of the couples say that despite the rows they are having about money, their marriage is strong enough to pull them through.

"It (unemployment) has put a terrible strain on the marriage really because it does tend to make us row more . . . when it's money, it makes my wife, you know . . . Mind you we've always had a very strong marriage, we're very lucky as two people and being Roman Catholics our marriage vows are very precious to us and our children . . . I've got to keep Stuart going, if we're ever to get out of this mess. You know I've got to keep my husband going, I've got to be as supportive as I can to him because he gets very down sometimes and it depresses me more . . . We had a strong marriage before and the fact is it's stronger in the sense that we know that even this couldn't force us apart.” (Mrs Haynes)

(Family with over 5 children [aged 1-14]; unemployed 13 months)

There were, however, three marriages where it looked as if the strain might prove too much. In one case, the couple had started living together at much the same time as the period out of work began, and it is difficult
to know what their relationship would have been like in or out of work. But in two cases, the financial strain of unemployment was contributing heavily to the marital stress.

"I think I'm a bit of a failure because I don't think I'm keeping the family. We've had a lot more rows since I've been unemployed. Terrific amount of arguments over money in fact. Whereas before we never had them ... You know Sylvia will sometimes say 'why don't you go out and get a job', you know, knowing full well there's nothing there." (Mr Ward)

"I go with him (to the Job Centre), we go down 3 or 4 times a week and we come home, we've got the kids in bed and someone will say something like they are going somewhere or my sister will say 'Are you coming to bingo?'. And I sit there and I say 'well why the hell can't I go?'. and he will say 'well it's not my fault'. I say, 'it is your fault, you should get out and get a bloody job ... It's affected the whole lot because of the fact that I was leaving last week. I'd packed me bags and I was waiting for the children to come home. I just couldn't take any more." (Mrs Ward)

"Yes, you know, I can understand that. I don't think it's anything to do with ourselves you know. I mean we got married, for obvious reasons, that sounds corny but we loved one another and we got married. And we've got children, which we love our children and I don't think that's altered at all. I just think it's circumstances altered ... and you can only take so much of it. You can take so much and in the end it just does get right through you. And when it gets through to you, you've got to rebel and the nearest person you've got to rebel to is the person opposite you. And I do it myself. I turn round and I say 'what other man would bloody well ... you know ...'" (Mr Ward)

(Family with 3 children [4-9]; unemployed 7 months)

By 1988, three couples had separated. In two cases the separation had occurred during unemployment, in one case after the husband returned to work. None of the three partners who were interviewed thought that unemployment was the root of the problem. All of them, however, thought it had contributed.

"To some extent (it made it worse). You're always short of money all the time and like we never went out and we were here together all day ... but as I say we weren't getting on. It could have had something to do with him being unemployed, part of it, but, as I say, I wouldn't put the blame entirely on him being unemployed, 'cos that would be just an excuse really." (Mrs Hawkins)

(Mother with two children; unemployed for 2½ years in reference period; separated three years ago)

There were three other marriages, where couples were still together, in which some serious problems with the relationship were occurring. In one of these the husband was back at work, in the other two the husbands were either unemployed or in prison. In only one case was unemployment (which had continued for five years) seen as the direct cause of the problem and the marriage was acknowledged by both partners to be on the point of separation. They had, the wife said, only stayed together as long for the sake of the children.

Four of the six couples who had experienced serious difficulties in their marriage had shown strong signs of marital stress in 1983/84. For two couples, however, there had been no signs at all—indeed, one had talked very positively about the strength of their relationship. There had, however, been a number of difficulties in this family, other than unemployment.

There were some marriages that had looked more fragile before which were acknowledged to have grown stronger. Although some of them said there had come a point when they nearly split, they had not done so. The experience of surviving unemployment together was sometimes said to have brought couples closer together, particularly if a return to work eventually followed.

The effects on children

The top priority that parents give to their children has been one of the more dominant themes of this report. It has been shown that when it comes to thin's like food, heat or clothes, parents will put their children's needs first. And as far as possible, parents will try to meet their children's other demands and requirements. However, despite these efforts, it is evident that most of the children had had to adjust to some change with their father's unemployment.

Not unexpectedly, the parents with the youngest children were least likely to comment on any effects on their children. This was certainly true for those with babies or toddlers, who were clearly too young to notice any effects of curtailed expenditure. By around the time the children were perhaps four or five, parents were beginning to comment on their children's reactions to not having a toy or present they wanted or to the food they had to eat, although these incidents seemed fairly minor. If anything, it was the parents who were feeling it more than the children.

"I mean, like this year, really I'd say was one of the poorest Christmas's for the kids ... like they want the bigger items ... I mean you feel awful sometimes when they're all in the street with big things and you can't afford to give them it, you know. You see my little daughter, she's always
demands on expenditure. But in this age group the parents, who have three daughters aged between 4 and 9 felt these kinds of pressures greatly.

"I think it's the children who get hurt more than anyone else because they tend to want to live like their friends do. Especially the older they are. You know she comes home and she says 'Oh so and so has got a new track suit', and 'so and so's got a BMX bike' or whatever you know. Yes, like it was her birthday the other week. Now the youngest, the 6 year old, I gave her a birthday party because we got paid that day. And I couldn't afford to do one for the oldest one and she keeps coming home every day saying 'My friends say, 'When am I going to have a party?' Well all I can say is when we've got the money...Well I can't do no more. I mean she had nothing for her birthday. She had her tracksuit...I feel terrible. I do. I sit down and cry. You know every night she comes home and that's no word of a lie and says, 'Mum, when am I going to have my party? Are you going to give me a party?' We haven't got any money. She says, 'Can we have an ice-cream', and you say, 'Well why not?', you know. Because she knows that we can't really afford to give it back."

(Mrs Fraser)

(Family with two children (1 + 4); unemployed 2 years)

By the time the children were at primary school, the parents were beginning to feel the pressure in terms of demands on expenditure. But in this age group the children found it difficult to understand why they could not have things or do thin's like their friends. These parents, who have three daughters aged between 4 and 9 felt these kinds of pressures greatly.

Another 10 year old, who does odd jobs in the market, for perhaps 50p or £1 a week comes home sometimes and says 'Do you want this £1 then to buy a bit of food or anything or is there money in the telly?' His father says that he knows it 'plays on his mind'.

"I feel a bit choked up because I can see he's concerned but we've had it off him, I will admit that. We have said 'Well can I borrow it until we get our dole money?' and we've given it back. You know, sometimes, possibly he'll say, 'Well keep the 50p for me then for another day' whereas he knows that we can't really afford to give it back."

(Mr Black)

(Family with 3 children [4--10]; unemployed 11 months)

In some families, children in their early teens showed similar concern. One fourteen year old, for example, told his father `not to worry about presents for them this year as long as they had plenty of food and things they like'. And a mother of a 7 and 12 year old spoke of how her children never complained although they were beginning to understand what they were missing.

"There was an advert on the telly where somebody won a lot of money-'Don't you wish that were us Mum', they said. Where at one time it wouldn't have entered their heads to say anything like that you know. They've missed-they know what way. And Christmas, they didn't get hardly anything to what they were used to getting. But they didn't complain. But they knew. They just said 'next year-maybe we'll be able to get more' when their Dad's working."

(Mrs Winter)

(Unemployed 15 months)

But some of the children in their early to mid teenage years were beginning to be disturbed by the constraints of the family budget. As their parents saw it, they did not want to be left out of things or made to feel different from their friends. An earlier example quoted a school trip to see the All Blacks which a 14 year old had had to miss. His response to this was to:

"stay home-he didn't go to school-he missed the bus that morning on purpose. Because he's 14. He isn't as understanding as the girls (17, 18) ... He's always been used to having it you see-my husband's spoilt him because he's the only boy. I know he should understand but he doesn't."

(Mrs Murphy)

(Unemployed 9 months)

In one family this lack of `understanding' on the part of their 16 year old was beginning to raise some serious tensions in the family.

"The 16 year old, he gets very bored because he hasn't got any money to go out. We can't give him anything you see and at 16 he does get sick of being in the house. He has homework lots of
of unemployment’. Nevertheless she felt it might not have happened if they had been able to buy their son the things he wanted.

In the third case, the son concerned was now in his early twenties. He had left home. His parents, who were having difficulties with him in 1983/84 found him impossible to live with ‘he just can’t hit it off with anybody, he was so bad tempered, fighting over everything, always grumbling about money ... he had a grudge against the world, he thought this country owed him something, so finally he moved out’. The parents thought part of his problem was ‘always being without money’ in his crucial teenage years ‘it just happened at the wrong time’.

11.3 The social consequences

A previous chapter has described the quite severe cuts that the parents had made in going out for entertainment. It was therefore not unexpected to find that in 1983/84 many of them said they saw much less of their friends and acquaintances than they had before. Going out to pubs, clubs or discos, however, is not the only way in which social contact is made. Entertaining friends at home, or going round to see them or going to parties or other events provide other social contexts. It was perhaps more surprising to find that many of these other forms of social gatherings had also been affected during the earlier stages of unemployment.

Around half of the ease study families said that the level of their social contact had been quite seriously affected during unemployment. There were apparently three main reasons for this. By far the most dominant was a shortage of money which prevented ‘normal’ participation in social activities. Expense was mentioned in the context of ‘buying a round’, ‘going to bingo’, having people ‘round for a meal’, bus fares to go and see friends, buying presents, taking a bottle or even having reasonable enough clothes to go out in.

"We had one very good friend who lives in ..................we used to visit him quite regularly. But with no car it’s not on ... Well it's £2 for the bus fare, a pound to get there and back, you can’t afford it. The only other sort of friends, well acquaintances, were people I knew through work. Once away from work you don’t see them ... a few passed by and said 'hello' but they weren’t too keen on socialising. Some of them feel a bit guilty for the fact that they’re still in work, they’re not in the same circumstances ... they’ll probably go for a drink or something and we can’t, you see, so we more or less keep away from the situation, we being financially embarrassed with being in their company. So we try to socialise more with people in the same position as ourselves. Because you’re both in the same boat and it doesn’t matter, you can afford to go to a cafe for a cup of tea and
things like that. So you tend to shine over to people like that.” (Mr Atkinson)

(Family with 3 children, [3-40]; unemployed 13 months)

A second reason for less social contact arose from the disengagement from settings where social activity would naturally occur. For men, work was one such setting, as is illustrated by the example above. But as will be described in the next section, several of the men had given up hobbies or leisure activities which would have brought social contact with them. This was much less true for the wives, although activities like bingo were cited.

And thirdly, there was a more deep rooted cause which arises from feelings about the ‘status’ of unemployment. This is in part related to feelings of ‘embarassment’ about not being able to pay for things like ‘people in work’ can do. But it goes deeper than this, as is evidenced by this wife’s description:

"I’ll be honest, since Dave's been out of work, it's completely isolated me. I don't think we go any-where without each other . . . Dave was working a lot of hours . . . so I had a life of my own then ... I sort of pop into town and I had a lot of friends ... I don't go to see them because I know my friends are the type that say 'look I'll meet you in town, we'll go for lunch one day'. Now, I can't afford to do that so I have avoided them to the state where I've lost those friends now. Plus when they sort of found out that Dave was unemployed you're in a different class together. You don't have the money to do anything anyway. So I just felt--- I felt ashamed-so I just didn't go to see them.” (Mrs Greene)

(Family with 2 children [12+ 14]; unemployed 20 months)

In this particular case, the family had had financial problems before becoming unemployed arising from difficulties with a self-employed business. Although at one time they had had quite a high income, it had dropped considerably in the last year of employment. This would certainly have prevented many trips to town to have ‘lunch’. But this wife also spoke often of her feelings of ‘shame’ and ‘degradation’ arising both from unemployment and from receiving supplementary benefit. These feelings had clearly had some part to play in her social detachment.

For some couples, the impact of unemployment on social contact had been quite minimal. Amongst these were some families who had very deliberately main-tained some contact with close friends, others who said they have never had many friends or much social life anyway and some whose social life revolved around their families. In this latter context, it is important to note that social contact with other relatives who lived nearby had been much less severely affected by unemployment than contact with friends or acquaintances. Indeed, in one or two cases, the couples said they now spent more time with other members of their family than they had before unemployment. It appeared that the refuge of the family removed some of the pressures of "paying your way" and made it possible to 'entertain' as modestly as was necessary. Some couples also found their relatives very emotionally supportive, particularly where there were strains or tensions arising as a result of unemployment. However, contact with relatives who lived at some distance had been affected, largely because of the costs of travel.

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that the families whose social relationships had been affected did feel sad about their loss of contact. In some cases, as with the example quoted above, the feelings of isolation had gone deep. In others there was less evident emotional effect, but clear regret that they did not see friends or acquaintances just to have a chat with. And for a few of the men this was not helping their job search. Those who had worked previously in construction and building occupations, particularly those who worked on a con-tractual basis, said that ‘word of mouth’ was the best way to hear about jobs.

11.4 Leisure activities

For many of the couples, going to pubs or out for a meal, or taking the children out for the day formed their main leisure activities outside of the home when they were last in employment. A few of the men however, had more specific leisure activities mainly connected with sport (eg football, darts, fishing, boxing). With a few exceptions, these had been abandoned, either because of the cost of the activity itself or because of the socialising expense they involved.

"I was in a league club here and I had to pull out of that because I couldn't afford the subscription . . . it was £2 a week you know, there was various things there like darts, dominoes . . . but it was just this subscription you had to hand over . . . and any 'do's' or anything like that was organised I had to stop going to them.” (Mr Robertson)

(Family with 2 children [12+ 16]; unemployed 8 months)

"I used to play football with my mates . . . they'd all go back after, have a few drinks . . . I just can't afford to go on. So I don't hardly see them now." (Mr Winter)

(Family with 2 children [7+12]; unemployed 15 months)

A few of the men who had been involved in activities of this kind had managed to maintain them. One man, for example, had kept up fishing although he now went alone rather than with this friend.
"I used to go fishing with him... it do take so much money... well like I used to borrow our mam's car and go down and pick him up and that and it's all money you know. We couldn't do it no more so that's why I stopped picking me mate up... and things like maggots cost, er, ninety odd... so I take worms now, dig worms out the the garden 'cos it don't cost nothing you know."

(Mr White)
(Family with 2 children [under 5]; unemployed 6 months)

Another had continued with football 'to get out and do something' and a third had kept up an interest in a boxing club. In this latter case, the man was very certain that he needed to maintain this external activity.

"It is depressing (not going out socially) although it's not so bad for me (husband) because I do some training like which doesn't cost me anything... train some lads to keep fit and boxing which gives me an interest which is a good thing but it doesn't cost me anything."

But like the other man above, he had had to withdraw from the social activity which accompanied his training.

"We used to go to a lot of boxing shows... but we daren't go to these functions any more because it's embarrassing... we haven't got the money."

(Mr Haynes)
(Family with over 4 children [1-12]; unemployed 13 months)

It was much more common to find that individual leisure activities, which did not involve groups or social contact, had been maintained or even increased during unemployment. Gardening, for example, was something which a few of the men spent more time on and which had the added benefit of providing cheap home produce. And for those who read, or enjoyed listening to music, libraries offered a free source of material. But as soon as the activity, however solitary, involved money, it was common to find that it had been withdrawn. One couple, for example, used to buy and do up antiques as a hobby; another used to repair and sell second-hand cars in his spare time. Both had had to give these activities up because of lack of cash resources.

For similar reasons, some of the men were unable to do any house decoration or home repairs that were needed. They found this particularly frustrating because of all the time they had available.

"I try and do a lot more for me mother... and even me brothers... there's odd things they want doing... it gives me something to think about... and I think it's that what does me really. It's the mind not being active, let alone the body. It's like decorating. I don't mind decorating. I don't mind carpentry... I'd love to do things in the house but I just haven't got the money to buy the materials and that's frustrating. That's one of the worst problems I think--having too much time you know."

(Mr Field)
(Family with 2 children [5+9]; unemployed 14 months)

It appeared that the wives' personal hobbies or 'leisure' activities had been less affected than their husbands. Those who had skills in crafts like knitting or dress making had often increased the time they spent on these activities, provided they could afford the wool or material. And there was again one case where a wife had been determined to maintain her keep fit classes because it provided her with much needed contact with friends. It also did not involve having to spend much money, other than for the price of the class itself. But in general the wives appeared to have had less personal leisure activities outside of the home before unemployment, and had been more dependent on informal social activities.

The evidence from the second interviews would suggest that most of the disengagement from social and leisure activities had occurred in the earlier stages of unemployment. Very few people described any further changes or any more cuts that had been made. Some, however, had lived through very long periods of withdrawal from their earlier leisure activities, and not without some bitterness. This was particularly so where they felt they had lost their friends because of the difficulties of mixing with people 'on equal terms'.

There were a few people who had made a conscious decision to return to some social or leisure activity of the home, while they were still unemployed. One wife, for example, went back to going to bingo. Some of the men started to go to the pub occasionally--simply to get 'out of the house and break the boredom'. There were also people who found new friends in unemployment--often people living nearby who shared similar circumstances. Mostly however, people had maintained a low social profile throughout their period of unemployment.
12 Some conclusions and reflections

12.1 Living standards and unemployment

This final chapter attempts to draw together some of the main conclusions and recurrent themes of the report. It aims, in particular, to identify how and why living standards were seen to change in unemployment. As a framework for such analysis it is useful to refer to the nine elements of living standards identified earlier (see Chapter 5). All of these were factors that the families themselves saw as having a bearing on judgements of their own living standards.

Disposable income At the first stage of the study, all the families had a comparatively similar level of weekly income from benefits. None of the families felt it was sufficient for their needs or, more significantly, the needs of their children. Some, however, were able to `make ends meet' on a regular basis, others found it difficult or impossible to do so. In the longer term, the length of unemployment had a bearing on this, but was not the only contributory factor.

The extent to which the families had experienced a drop in disposable income in unemployment varied considerably. The replacement ratios of incomes out of work to in work ranged from 30% to over 100%. The income replacement ratio did not appear to be a major determinant of a family's ability to `manage' on their unemployment income.

All of the families made use of some additional material or financial resources to help stretch their unemployment income. For some, it was simply regular help from parents or other relatives, for others more extensive use of HP, credit, loans, sale of possessions, or in a few cases, stolen goods. Casual work had also produced some additional income for some families, although only one person had regular income from work over the period of unemployment. Whatever the source or extent of use of additional resources, they were generally judged to have been `essential' for helping to cope on unemployment income.

Constraints and choices in expenditure The OPCS study has shown how patterns of consumption change with unemployment. It is evident from this research that there is a fairly common level of priority given to different items of expenditure. Nevertheless, even items of expenditure which are high on the list, like food, heating, clothes or other things for the children, or tobacco, have to be curtailed in unemployment. Spending on low priorities is minimal or non existent.

Families see these changes in expenditure as one of the major impacts of unemployment on living standards. This is because of the effects such changes are seen to have, particularly in the longer term. Even the items which continue to have high priority give rise to concerns about health; the deprivation of the educational or social needs of their children, and the general impact on family life. Among those assigned low priority, the disengagement from social and leisure activities is of perhaps most significance. To participate in such activities is seen as an integral part of a `normal’ standard of living, but one that largely has to be abandoned in unemployment.

Most families saw themselves as having little `choice' in their expenditure during unemployment. This is reflected in the highly recurrent picture of low priorities described above. The items assigned low priority almost universally involved the largest expenditure. They were, in general, services or commodities that could, without immediate `deprivation’, be foregone. Although most of the families felt this was less true in the longer term, there seemed little `choice’ in the face of urgent or competing demands.

There is inevitably a consequence of assigning low priorities or having restricted choice in the longer term. The effects are noticeable in terms of the condition of domestic stock, housing refurbishment, clothes and the effects of long term withdrawal from social life. Where unemployment continued over the longer term, some families clearly accepted these long term consequences. Others, however, felt it necessary to take some remedial action and this is often where the use of additional resources, particularly credits and loans, come into play. At such times, the difficulty of obtaining any additional resources from the benefit system, or a lack of willingness to do so, were often mentioned.

Financial security In one way or another most of the families depleted their financial or domestic reserves during their period of unemployment. This was evidenced by the use of savings or severance payments, the increase of debt, the sale of ears and other goods and the deterioration of domestic stock. Inevitably all of them removed a tier of security, leaving a feeling of financial vulnerability. For some this was caused by
the worry that there was nothing to `fall back on', particularly evident in families who had savings or other reserves before. For others it was the fear of what would happen, or did happen, when any urgent, unexpected or even large demands on expenditure arose. In addition, there were the anxieties raised by the onset of, or increase in, debts. The benefit system itself was rarely seen as a safety net for providing financial security, or relieving insecurity, in the longer term.

Making ends meet It has been shown that some of the families managed to budget their unemployment income, without accruing major debt or arrears. In some cases this happened throughout long periods of unemployment. It would be unrealistic, however, to suggest that this occurred without some degree of `struggle'. Even the most able managers talked of the pressures which the constant `counting of pennies' brought with it. For some these pressures proved too much, others appeared to continue to cope with them. Perhaps inevitably, their toll was most apparent over the longest periods of unemployment.

Material possessions The consequences of living on unemployment income for a family's material possessions have already been noted. Lack of repair and replacement, the restrictions on new purchases and the sale of domestic stock or possessions, all have a deleterious effect. For some families it is evident that the level or condition of domestic stock and personal possessions would have been little different if employment had continued. This was particularly so in younger, less established households, or where employment income had previously been low. For others, however, the effect of unemployment on domestic and personal possessions was more dramatic. Either way, there was a noted period of recovery for those who returned to employment.

Expectations about standards of living were explicitly said to have changed in unemployment. For some the change concerned the standard of living they aspired to, or had hoped for, in employment. For others, the change involved a lowering of standards for the living conditions they felt able to accept. The degree to which either perspective was accommodated varied considerably, clearly influenced by experiences before unemployment began. But it was evident that most families had to accept some adjustment to their required standard of living, both in unemployment and in the recovery period after a return to work.

Self-esteem In general, self-esteem appeared to be more affected by the lack of employed status and occupation than by the financial consequences of unemployment. Nevertheless, for some families the very factors described above-depleted domestic stock or personal possessions, the absence of choice in expenditure, the inability to mix socially, the onset of debt or arrears-affected people's feelings pride and respect in themselves. For some people, although not all, this was relevant to the family's overall standard of living.

Contentment The study leaves little doubt about the anxiety, depression, stress and low morale that unemployment can bring. In some respects this is a direct consequence of the loss of occupation and employment status, bitterly felt by some men. But as the report notes some of the psychological stress, and particularly for wives, is brought about by the constraints and consequences of trying to manage on a low income. The existence of that stress arises from virtually all the other dimensions described above.

In an earlier chapter, we described how all the families felt their living standards had in some way been affected by unemployment. The pulling together of these nine dimensions would seem to confirm this view. For some the effects were short lived, for others they are permanent. There were few families, however, in which the changes in living standards experienced did not leave some mark.

12.2 Reflections on unemployment: Some advice to others

At the end of the second interviews, the families were asked to reflect back on their experiences throughout unemployment. They were asked what had been the main effects for them and what learning, if any, they had gained. We then asked them to turn this into some advice to others-how would they advise another family who was living through unemployment. Although some of them were very reluctant to give advice-'everybody is different' or 'you can't tell other people how to live their lives'-all of them had some message to convey.

A variety of aspects of unemployment were mentioned in the advice that was forthcoming. A few men spoke of the importance of maintaining the search for jobs-a point that was felt with particular poignancy by those who had regained employment after a long period. Others mentioned government training schemes-in one case the importance of using them, in another the need to avoid them. Another man advised against any sense of 'false security' about getting a job, particularly in the earlier stages of unemployment.

A few men gave very personalised advice. One man, who was deeply religious, spoke of the importance of prayer and his faith throughout his long spell of unemployment. Another man identified the importance of keeping fit and maintaining a regular fitness programme. Others, too, suggested that it was important to keep an outside interest, or at least find something to do `that doesn't cost money'. The destructive effect of being bored, or having no `real' occupation, was cited as one of the most negative
aspects of unemployment. This finding was strongly confirmed by the OPCS data.

The advice that was given with greatest frequency concerned money. And, within this context, there was a highly recurrent piece of wisdom—‘don’t get into debt’. This advice came from all quarters—from those who had accumulated heavy debts, from those who had managed to avoid them, from those now back at work, from those still unemployed. It was a subject on which people spoke with considerable passion.

“Never borrow, struggle all you can, go without, but never borrow . . . as long as you’ve got a roof over your head and a sack of spuds you can survive . . . but whatever you do, don’t borrow anything . . . you can’t go no further once you’ve borrowed, you can’t go no further and you fight and fight to pay it back . . . the thought of it makes me ill, physically sick . . . it was tears every Saturday morning when you’d sort of get your money . . . and you was skint already and you’ve got a fortnight to go and desperate for the next cheque in 2 weeks’ time” (Mr Ward)

(Unemployed 4 ½ years)

This couple spoke from the bitter experience of trying to repay a loan whilst still unemployed, although they still had debts outstanding. Others who were repaying debts after a return to work spoke with equal vehemence.

“Don’t get no loans or any more HP than you’ve got already because it’s hard-very hard-to pay later on and if you need anything it’s better to be able to be skint for a week than having to be skint for the rest of that term that you’re unemployed. You’re better off buying it out of your pocket than getting a loan because in the long term it’s worse. They put too much interest and they’re so easy to get and all . . . and because you’re unemployed you want that money to get whatever it is you need. So you get a £50 loan and you’ve got to pay £80 back and that means over a period of 26 weeks you’re paying them money you really can’t afford . . .” (Mr Martin)

(Unemployed 15 months and 6 months; in present job 3 months)

This couple were not the only ones to talk about high interest rates, the ease with which loans and credit could be obtained and the exploitation of unemployed peple by ‘loan sharks’. For some, the experience of having got into so much difficulty through such means, was a lesson they felt would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

“I think unemployment and being hard up has taught me a lesson I shall never forget . . . The lesson is that I shall never get back into debt. You know, I’ve gone into debt because I’ve been hard up and being in debt has made me even more hard up. And I shan’t get into debt again . . . A lot of people such as myself who have never been unemployed, maybe for a day, they’re not equipped for unemployment. You know they run up debts when things are reasonably rosy . . . and if the future brings unemployment . . . it’s too late because you’ve already got the debts . . . I’m never going into debt again . . . if I’ve not got the cash there I won’t have it . . . I’m not touching any credit in future, I’m not allowing the family to touch credit in the future . . . we’ve done without for 6 years now and if we can do without things-material things—for 6 years then we can do it for another 12 months . . . when we will be able to buy everything we want cash . . . (Mr Campbell)

(Unemployed 6 years: in work for 7 months)

For some families, this resolve came from the hard lessons of unemployment, for others, they were views they held before.

The second most consistent piece of advice was to ‘carefully manage your money’. People spoke of the need to ‘spread it out and not blow it’ ‘to look after the pennies’ to ‘cut your cloth according to size’.

“Budget your money well when you’re shopping. There’s no disgrace in asking for bacon ends . . . don’t always go for the best-don’t smoke too heavy if you do smoke, don’t drink, you know, just a casual pint now and then . . . and don’t worry about what other people have got-don’t try to keep up with the Jones—that’s the worst thing you can do really” (Mrs Black)

(Unemployed 14 months and 2 years; currently unemployed)

On the subject of money, a few people turned their attention to benefits. As has been shown, some families had a strong dislike of the ‘benefit system’ and were reluctant to claim, or ask, for anything additional. But some felt this was precisely what unemployed people should do. They should find out their rights of entitlement and ensure that they got the full range of benefits available. Going to a welfare rights agency was a suggestion that followed one such view.

The other most frequently-mentioned advice concerned non-financial aspects of unemployment. And here the most general suggestion was to ‘keep your head up’, not let ‘people knock you’ and to ‘try to keep a belief in yourself’. Those who gave such advice knew how desperately hard it was to maintain such confidence, but, equally, how important it was to do so.

“It’s not easy is it . . . but there is a light somewhere, it’s a matter of getting there . . . you’ve
got to stick at it one way or another and not let it get you down any more than it has to ... you've got to keep some self respect somewhere, there is a light, you don't always see it, some times it's round a sharp bend ... you think you'll never come out of it ... but it does change .. there is a light somewhere, it's just a matter of finding it ... if you give up hope you've lost everything then ... 'cos if you don't believe in yourself when you go for a job then certainly no one else is going to. (Mr Ward)

(Unemployed 4½ years)

This man's view was clearly very affected by the fact that he eventually found secure and permanent employment after four years out of work. But there were others, still unemployed, who believed that maintaining a level of self respect was the most difficult aspect of unemployment. And it was not helped, they felt, by the attitudes of 'other people'. The view that others saw the 'unemployed' as people who did not want to work, who were lazy, were 'scroungers', weren't 'trying hard enough' had clearly undermined several people. It was this that led some to stress the importance of being with people who understood. A few couples talked about the strength of their partnerships in this respect, a few talked about individual members of their families. Being able to talk about the problems of unemployment, in an atmosphere that was not hostile, was something which several couples said, 'if you've got a problem you've got to sort it out-you can't sit there and wait for it to go by'.

The advice which families have given may come as no surprise given the evidence presented earlier. Lessons about finding jobs, managing money, staying out of debt, keeping dignity, holding on were all ones that had been learned the hard way. And in one way or another, they had all touched on the life styles and living standards of the families. For some, the wisdom had been gained from hindsight and from the comparative security of a job. For others, it was the experience of a second spell of unemployment that had reinforced the message. For a few it was the bitter legacy of a continued term of unemployment. And for one or two, it was wisdom that it was not easy to hold on to.

"It's when you close the door, when you come through the door, you've got nothing else ... it's a weird feeling that you're shutting everything out there and you're into your own little world sort of thing and you don't get out of that no matter what you do you're still there, you can't say I'll go racing tonight or do this or do that and then you've got the same tomorrow and then you've got the same the day after and Saturday it's a great highlight because the postman comes . and you worry about how you're going to spend it and then come next Monday you're closing the door again . . . , if I had to condense it all I'd just like to be able to live like other people and you can't, you cannot." (Mr Ward)

(Unemployed 4 years; in present job 2 years)
Appendix I

Selected References


Burghes L, (1980) Living from Hand to Mouth, CPAG


DHSS (1979) Review of the Supplementary Benefits Scheme: analysis of views and comments, HMSO

Davies C, Ritchie J (1988) Tipping the Balance, HMSO


Townsend P (1979) Poverty in the United Kingdom, Penguin

Appendix II

Topic guides used for interviews with families

Living Standards: Main Interview Guide

Background

FAMILY
Size, ages, employment status.

HOUSING
Tenure, length of residence, costs.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (husband)
Last job, reasons left, history of employment/unemployment.

Income and expenditure

CURRENT INCOME
Sources, level (in detail).

INCOME WHEN LAST EMPLOYED
Level, extent of change.

MAIN EFFECTS ON EXPENDITURE
What has changed; how has it changed.

IDENTIFY items/activities which have been
WITHDRAWN
Why; how important before, what does the loss mean to them; what is the effect.

REDUCED
Why; how important before, what does reduction mean to them; what is effect.

MAINTAINED
Why; what is their importance, why not reduced/cut out.

INCREASED
Why; what is importance.

CHANGE IN PATTERNS OF EXPENDITURE
Did changes all happen immediately or over time. What caused change in patterns.

DEFINITION OF STANDARD OF LIVING
What do they mean by S of L; what does a good/poor S of L mean to them.

EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN S OF L
What do they feel has had most effect; on whom; why; why is it important.

PROBE: Effects on other members of family.

Other resources used

USE OF OTHER FINANCIAL RESOURCES
Savings, loans, sale of goods, given up insurance, HP agreements etc. why; when; how feel.

SUPPORT FROM FAMILY FRIENDS
Extent of financial help/support in kind; who; how feels.

OTHER HELP/RESOURCES USED
What; why; when; how feel.

Potential resources

OTHER BENEFIT ENTITLEMENT
Whether explored; attitudes towards.

WIFE'S EMPLOYMENT
Whether considered; attitudes towards.

JOB SEARCH
What type of work looking for; what attempts made; how feel about it; job offers.

OTHER POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INCOME
Casual employment; contributions from other adults in household; any others.

OVERALL EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT
Most important; good/bad.

Standard of living

FORMER STANDARD OF LIVING
How would they describe standard of living when last employed; why.

PRESENT STANDARD OF LIVING
How would they describe it; why; what aspect has changed most. What effect has this had.
Living Standards of Families in Unemployment:

Case studies follow up

Topic guide

1. BACKGROUND
   Use FACT SHEET to establish current circumstances and main changes since last interview. The questioning should be tape recorded so that any elaboration of events or explanation of change, etc. can be captured.

2. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (HUSBAND)
   EMPLOYMENT-current or last job
   • How last job was obtained, extent of job search to find
   • Reasons why took last job (explore in detail)
   • Expectations about its permanence
   • Feelings about job, whether type of work suited for/wants to do;
   • Feelings about wage level for type of work done;
   • Feelings about wage level in comparison to period when unemployed;
   • Whether felt they had to take a job at lower level than wanted; why;

   FIRST JOB AFTER KEY PERIOD OF UNEMPLOYMENT
   • How did they feel about their first job (following key period of unemployment).
   • Reasons why took job (explore in detail).
   • How did they feel about going back to work after the period they were unemployed.
   • Did they have any difficulties when they first went back to work; what kind of difficulties.
   • Did they have any difficulties with changing their source of income from benefits to earnings; what happened; why did the problems arise.
   • How they feel about the income they got from that job in comparison with income in unemployment.
   • If no longer doing job: why did they leave the job/why did it end; how did they feel about that.

   UNEMPLOYMENT-current
   • Extent of job search now; how changed over time
   • Type of job seeking
   • Income level prepared to accept
   • Whether any jobs offered and turned down; reasons

   If had any other period of unemployment (since key period)
   • How did they feel when they became unemployed then (subsequent time); how did this compare with their feelings before (ie for period explored at first interview).

   CASUAL WORK
   • Have they done any casual or temporary work since last interview; when; what type of work; reasons for change; feelings about in comparison with not working at all/being in employment.

   GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES
   • Since last interview, have they been on any training or employment programmes like a community programme; have they been to a restart interview, a job club or anything similar; have they received anything like the enterprise allowance; job start allowance;
   IF ANY-when; why did they do this; how did they feel about it; did they help in getting a job.

3. WIFE’S/PARTNER’S EMPLOYMENT HISTORY
   CURRENT JOB-if same as at first interview
   • Feelings about job/income received
   • Ever considered giving up; reasons

   NEW JOB
   • How job was obtained; extent of job search to find
   • Reasons why took job (explore in detail)
   • Feelings about income level for type of work done

   OTHER JOBS BETWEEN
   • Feelings about job held (for first job following last interview)
   • Reasons ended
   • Income level/feelings about

   UNEMPLOYMENT
   • Whether would like to work-if not, why?
   • Extent of job search now; how changed over time
   • Type of job seeking
   • Income level prepared to accept
• Whether any jobs offered and turned down; reasons

4. HOUSEHOLD CHANGES
• Events leading up to any changes in composition
• Impact of changes on family members

ACTIVITY STATUS, CHILDREN 16 +
• For any children 16+. Check current activity status; when did they start doing current activity; had any (other) jobs since last interview; how has this affected the family's circumstances.

ACTIVITY STATUS, OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS
• For any other household members Check current activity status; when did they start current activity; had any (other) jobs since last interview; how has this affected the family's circumstances

5. ACCOMMODATION AND AREA
If changed accommodation
• Reasons for changing accommodation, events leading up to;
• Feelings about new accommodation; type of tenure (if changed)
If changed area
• Reasons for moving to a different area, events leading up to
• Reasons for choosing particular area
If not changed accommodation
• Over last four years, have they ever considered a move; reasons
• What type of change were they considereing; reasons

6. MANAGEMENT
• How well do they manage on present income, reasons for view
• Have there been periods in last four years when it was easier; when; why? At what time over the last four years has income (from any source) been highest; why; how did they manage at that time?
• Have there been periods in last four years when it was less easy; when; why? At what time over the last four years has income been lowest; why; how did they manage at that time?
• How have children growing up affected ability to manage?
• If children 16+ How have (changes at 4) affected family's ability to manage. If other household members. How have changes affected management?
• Which partner is mainly responsible for household management; which responsibilities are shared; why is it organised this way; how does this work out between them; would results be better/worse for family if organised differently?
• Does the way they manage their money change (between partners) in periods of employment/unemployment?

7. EXPENDITURE
• Have there been times (in reference period) when their pattern of expenditure was different; when; why

If been employed
• When they first went back into work after (last) period of unemployment, did they feel they had more spending capacity; what did they first spend money on; then what (explore in detail priorities for expenditure on return to work.)

All
• At present, are there items of expenditure which - they cannot afford at all - they have had to cut back on; what; how important are these to them, eg smoking

If employed
• How does pattern of expenditure now compare with when last unemployed.

If unemployed
• How does pattern of expenditure now compare with when last employed

8. DURABLES AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD POSSESSIONS
CARS
• Does household own a car? Is it taxed, insured, MOT'd; do they use it?
• IF OWNED CAR AT LAST INTERVIEW Is it the same car? When did they change; why;
• IF NO LONGER OWNS CAR why did they have to give car up.
• IF DID NOT OWN CAR AT LAST INTERVIEW Have they had any (other) cars since; when did they first get one? why;

TELEPHONE
• Do they have a telephone; use of a telephone; why/why not. Do they use it as much as they want; why? What do they most use it for?
• IF HAVE OBTAINED TELEPHONE SINCE FIRST INTERVIEW: When did they have their present phone installed; why;

OTHER DURABLES
• Do they have-washing machine - fridge - vacuum cleaner Are any of them broken/in need of repair?
• Are there any (other) essential household items they need/that need repair; why are they not able to get them/get them repaired; how long have they been without them.
• Household insurance/life assurance: changes since last interview
9. BENEFITS AND OTHER RESOURCES
• CHECK which benefits currently being received AND for how long
• Are there any (other) benefits they have claimed over last four years; which; when
• Are there any (other) benefits they think they might be entitled to; which; why not claiming

If employed and not claiming FIS/HB
• Do they know if they would be eligible for FIS/HB; how do they know about this; why are they not claiming them

All
• Any other sources of income at time of last interview that have ceased; why?
• Are there any other sources of income which they have used in last year (CHECK saving; loans; HP agreements, etc.) when did they use this; for what; how much was this for?
• To what extent do they receive any financial help/help in kind from family/friends; for what kinds of things; how do they feel about that.
• Any outstanding debts at last interview? What happened to those?
• Do they have any outstanding debts; for how much; to what owed; how or when did they get them; are they managing to pay them off.

10. STANDARD OF LIVING
• How would they describe their standard of living at present; why

If employed
• How would they describe their standard of living now compared to when last unemployed; why; what is it that makes it better/worse

If unemployed
• How would they describe their standard of living now compared to when last employed; why; what is it that makes it better/worse.

All
• Thinking back over the last four years, at what times have their living standards been best/worst; why
• How was standard of living affected by activities like
  • casual work
  • training programmes/re-employment initiatives
  • other marked activity period.
• Has standard of living of all family members been the same? If not for whom is it different; in what ways; why
• How does family's standard of living compare with other families of same age living nearby/that they know; why is their's different; were there times when it was much the same; when.

11. REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE
• Thinking back over the period(s) of unemployment they have had/they had when last met, what do they think the main effects have been on them personally? on their partner; on their children.
• STATE OVERALL FEELINGS AT LAST INTERVIEW (see fact sheet). Can they remember those feelings; looking back now, how do they feel about that period.
• what do they think are the most difficult aspects of
  -being unemployed
  -of returning to work after period of unemployment
• what recommendations would they make to help people who are unemployed
  - financially
  - in other ways