

Timescapes Conference

Understanding & Supporting
Families Through Time

Growing up in low
income, working
lone-parent families

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timescapes

An ESRC Qualitative Longitudinal Study

Title

Summary of presentation

- The sample and aims of the study
- Policy context
- Case studies
- Reflections on children's and young peoples' experiences over time
- Implications for policy

Title

Aims of the study

For lone mothers and their children:

- to examine the impact of paid work, and for some job loss, on family life and living standards over time
- to explore how families negotiate the everyday challenges of sustaining low-income employment over time

Key elements in the research design

- Longitudinal qualitative data
- Children as active participants
- The ‘family-work project’, a holistic approach

Waves funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for Work and Pensions
Study carried out in collaboration with Jane Millar, University of Bath

Title

The sample

Lone-mother families who:

- left income support between Oct 2002 and Oct 2003; and started jobs of 16 hours or more per week with tax credits; and
- had at least one child aged between 8 and 14.

Three rounds of interviews

- 50 women and 61 children in early 2004
- 44 women and 53 children in mid to late 2005
- 34 women and 37 children in late 2007

UK Policy context

- Lone-parent employment target
- Work is good for income, health & well-being
- Eradicating child poverty

Policy discourse

- Children as passive and dependent
- Children in working families - burdens and responsibilities
- Research focus invariably on child care

Following their mother's move into employment

- If the mothers were in relatively stable employment
 - children generally felt financially more secure
 - increases in spending, material goods, treats
 - increased social activity – from low base
- But if mothers in insecure or unstable employment
 - children expressed renewed fears about social exclusion and difference
 - financially insecure
 - uncertain about value of employment

Three case studies

- Louise, 13 years old at Wave 1. Lives with her mother and 5 brothers and sisters. Her mother was unable to sustain employment and was unemployed at the time of the first interview
- Roshan, 12 years old at Wave 1. An only child his mother works full time.
- Karin, 14 years old at Wave 1. Lives with her mother and sister. Her mother works full time.

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Wave 1 - Louise, 13 years old. Large family 5 brothers and sisters, mother initially working but unable to sustain work

'I've got like more education ahead, and we get like more money in for like people's presents and food and everything'

'I'm like shy in front of people and I don't like, like going to toilet without asking and it were embarrassing. And it were quite boring. So I told my mum I wanted to stay at home and she let me'

'I felt like poor, but I didn't dare tell my friends cus it'd be embarrassing, cus like all my other friend's mum's have got jobs and they're like, I wouldn't say they're rich, but they've got quite a lot of money compared to us'

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Wave 2 - Louise 14 years old. Mother still unemployed no further work except temporary 'sliver' job that did not last.

Mother worries - *'I just feel sorry for her like 'cos when your friend asks you to go somewhere and you haven't got no money it's embarrassing.*

School - likes learning hates teachers . Happy with changes in FSM delivery. Less stigma but still struggling with school costs

'PE kit were a bit hard 'cos my sister's lost hers so we have to share now. She has it on Monday, Wednesday, I have it on Friday so it's alright'

Now working, has two jobs, paper round and Saturday job at hairdressers. Looking forward - leaving school and going to college to do Health and Social Care

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Wave 3 - Louise, 17 years old. Left school now living with her auntie, fallen out with her mother who now has a severe disability.

Working - Irregular wage £4-500 month depending on what work was coming in. Does office work where her auntie works.

Had to do an extra year at school but EMA helped her to stay on. Uncertain about going to college. Feels she needs to prove that she is more independent before she can go

' I want to, but there's like something pulling me away, but I don't know what'

Mother worries - *'I want to see her go out and work and meet new people, but because she's stuck in the house all the time she doesn't have no-one to talk to or no-one comes round or anything and there's no-one to look after her because she's got to rely on other people which, I think, upsets her as well'*

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Wave 1 - Roshan, 12 years old – only child, mother working full time

'It was good because she spent lots of time with me, but then the bad thing was that you couldn't do anything at that time because there was no money coming in, you had to limit on stuff, using the gas and everything really, it wasn't good in that way, but it was good 'cos my mum was staying with me'

'Yes, more money coming in now, its better now because of everything, everything's just changed completely and not just a bit, just completely because of the money'

'Coming home, using the key, locking up, um drying up the dishes and all that, making my own food using the grill and the oven and what do you call it, the cooker thing. Yeah, using the matches to do that, I learnt that ages ago'

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Wave 2 - Roshan, 13 years old – mother working full time

'Sometimes when, in like in the week when we need shopping and my mum doesn't have enough money for shopping she'll get the essentials like bread, milk, sugar and she'll get them and she wouldn't get stuff, little things like cookies and stuff like that, but when we did have, when we do have, when mums alright with money we just get, we don't have to like worry about what we're getting, we just stuff it in the trolley'

'She has to keep working, so I go to my Aunties which is in Birmingham and I don't see her, well most of the holidays I don't actually see my mum, 'cos she's got work'

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Wave 3 - Roshan, 16 years old – Only child, mother working full time, but has had a bad accident and now has a disability. At college and applied for EMA

'It's been a good thing. I mean obviously where we are now, it's just because she's been working. You know, working away, so she's been working away and basically we've just got where we are really. She's got what she's wanted, the house, nice car, whatever'

'It's been stressful, but I guess worth it at the end. It's not the end though. I mean it's worth it in the longer run, it's worth it. I mean, as I say, again you've just got to work to get what you want anyway, you've got to work'

'So, I'm worrying how to get, you know, how I'm going to get enough cash. But then again, there's another worry of where am I going to be living? What am I going to be doing? What job am I doing to have?'

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Wave 1 – Karin, 14 years old – Mother working full time

‘I miss my mum because I'm used to coming in home from school and my mum will be there and then they'll be a nice dinner cooked already as soon as we walk in from school’

‘She comes home and then she's all aching and she's got a bad shoulder and that really does hurt sometimes. She'll come home and you can just look at here and think well she wants to cry and you can tell she does sometimes’

Feels a bit better off now mum working but knows her mum is worried about money

‘The way she talks about it. Like yesterday I said can I have some money and she said ‘look you can't, I haven't got enough’ and the way she says it, she has a worried voice but she keeps a real still face so we don't know. She thinks we're stupid, but we're not. We know her tricks’

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Wave 2 – Karen, 15 years old. Mother now out of work. Karen has finished school and is working 2 nights a week in fast food restaurant

'I want to go out and do stuff like ice skating and go to pictures and do stuff like that. Sometimes my mum hasn't got the money so I don't bother asking because I don't like asking for her to say no and then she feels guilty for saying no do you know what I mean. So I don't really ask, but now I've got a job I've been buying stuff for myself and I liked it'

'When she's not working, I love it, it's great. It's absolutely great because I just love spending so much time with her. When she was at [work] she come in real late and rush cooking tea and stuff like that and then she's get a bath and then it was time for bed already and then she's do it the next day, and the next day and the next day and then she'd work about six days and then we'd get to see her what that day, the one day she's got off and then she's really knackered, do you know what I mean and she doesn't want to do much'

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Wave 3 – Karen, 18 years old. Mother now in employment and working mainly nights. Now working 5 nights a week and going to college

‘I think I’ve always worried about money. I think that’s why I started working when I was so young’

‘It’s five ‘til twelve on a Sunday to a Thursday and then on a Friday and Saturday, it’s ‘til one o’clock. I just kind of like come home, get my mum... if my mum’s not on a night shift, she runs a bath for me and then I jump straight in the bath and then jump straight in bed and then get up, go to college, come home, get changed, have a cup of tea and then go straight to work. Sometimes I don’t get to have a cup of tea even, I just go straight to work.

‘Well I mean I love it when my mum’s not working because I get to spend more time with her, but obviously it’s a really bad thing, because then it’s all the bills and stuff like that and the money what you get off social, it’s just not enough’

Key elements children's accounts over time

- Poverty and the fear of stigma and difference
- Flux and change in working life and family life
- Changing time and family practices
- Changing needs and expectations
- Exercising agency under the constraints of poverty

Policy implications

- Policies can have a differential impact on children's lives over time
- Increasing activation and compulsion in welfare has implications for children as well as adults
- Adequate financial support key element for security out of work and reward in work
- Children are active not passive family members

DWP Report:

Ridge, T & Millar, J (2008) Work and well-being over time: lone mothers and their children. DWP Research Report No.536. Leeds: Corporate Document Services

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/rr_abstracts/ra_536.asp

CASP Website:

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/casp/projects/current/workwelfare/transitions.html>

ESRC REGARD website

<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/ViewAwardPage.aspx?awardnumber=RES-000-23-1079>