

Patterns of Change in Family and Household Structure and Resourcing: An Overview

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Workshop Paper 7b

Prepared for Workshop Two: *Statistics and Theories for Understanding Social Change*

Friday 21 January 2000

Introduction

This is a companion paper to my critical review (Conceptualising Social Change: CAVA WSP7a). This paper describes current patterns and trends in key familial and household relationships, as they relate to parenting and partnering, and to developments in employment and patterns of inequality. Throughout the paper I highlight some of the key concerns which have shaped discussion in the areas under examination, and some unresolved - and sometimes under-addressed - issues arising from research.

The following presents evidence concerning change in the composition of households, in key demographic indicators which are indicative of change in living arrangements and 'lifestyles', and of emergent patterns of both diversity and inequality. The accompanying bibliography contains a range of references and resources which offer a useful map through some of the main issues and debates of recent years. As a bibliographic resource around issues of change in family structure and household resourcing it should be placed alongside the bibliography of the companion paper.

In addressing changes in the latter decades of the twentieth century it is pertinent to be reminded of the evidence that longer run comparisons are often important. Recent historical changes may, for example, reveal the particularity of family related living arrangements in the 1950s and 1960s (eg. McRae 1999): a shift in recent living arrangements and patterns of diversity, rather than the culmination of a long term trend (Irwin 1999). It is the form, rather than the fact, of diversity in living arrangements - and the processes shaping it - that require interrogation.

Giddens (1996) noted that in order to understand families it is necessary to look beyond changes in household composition to the relationships within which families live. However, we should not think of compositional changes, or changes in family living arrangements, as merely 'change in the context' of relationships. Rather such compositional changes in households, and changes in general patterns of 'standard' living arrangements, are themselves part of the substance of changing familial and friendship based relationships. General patterns and trends can offer vital clues and insights into such changes.

The Changing Composition of Households and New Patterns in Family Demographics *Aggregate Changes in Household Composition*

Recent decades have seen significant changes here which clearly inform notions of 'new' lifestyles, not least the trend to independent living, and to new family patterns.

Table 1: Households: by type of household and family

Household Type	%s		
	1961	1981	1996/7
1 Person:			
under pension age	4	8	12
over pension age	7	14	15
single family households			
couple:			
no children	26	26	28
1-2 dep chil	30	25	21
3+ chil	8	6	5
non-dep chil	10	8	6
lone parent			
dep chil	2	5	7
non-dep chil	4	4	3
All households (millions)	16.3	20.2	23.5

(Social Trends 28, 1998)

The most marked changes are the rise in the proportion of one-person households, and in the proportion of lone parent families. In 1996-7 over one quarter of households comprise one person living alone, double the proportion of 1961 (GHS, in Social Trends 28, 1998). The proportion of families comprising a couple family with dependent children has fallen from 38% in 1961 to 25% in 1996-7 (GHS, in Social Trends 1998).

Clarke and Henwood, also drawing on GHS data, offer the following 'index' of change, here for women in their late twenties. I reproduce this specifically since it touches on a group which, by virtue of both its age and cohort location, one would expect to reveal interesting changes throughout the 1980s.

Table 2: Developments in ranking of most common lifestyles, women aged 25-29, 1981-91, GB

Married, 2+ chil, only husband employed: 22% to 11%, rank from 1 to 2;
 Married, no child, two incomes: 14% to 15%, rank from 2 to 1 (joint)
 Married, 1 child, only husband employed: 12% to 8%, rank 3 to 4;
 Married, 2+ children, two incomes: 10% to 8%, rank 4 to 4;
 Lone mother (single and widowed): 9% to 15%, rank 5 to 1 (joint)
 Married, one child, two incomes: 6% to 6%, rank 6 - /
 Living with parents: 6% to 9%, rank (<6) to 3 (joint)
 Single (not lone mother or with parents): 6% to 9%, rank (<6) to 3 (joint).

(Clarke and Henwood 1997)

Both tables reveal in particular a growth in 'non-partnering', whether through independent living or due to, amongst young adults, a propensity to live with parents for longer than in the past. We need to be sensitive here to the issue of whether changes in household composition reflect an

alteration in the patterning of events across people's lifetimes. The greater incidence of independent living amongst those under pension age may, for example, be a consequence of later ages at marriage and cohabitation. For example, Murphy and Berrington note the overall proportion of women living as a spouse of the household head (married or cohabiting) was very similar in 1981 and 1991 - at 24.9% and 25.2% - but this results from different trends in different age groups (Murphy and Berrington 1993). These authors also explore patterns of age related change in household composition, noting the greater pattern of remaining at the parental home for longer amongst young adults, the declining number who live with a partner, and having children, amongst those in their 20s (Murphy and Berrington 1993; see also Irwin 1995 for analyses of patterns of delay in household and family formation).

Table 1 shows that one-person households have increased threefold in three decades, and Table 2 shows this to have become the joint 3rd most common living arrangement among young adults (although it amounts to no more than 9% of households, amongst the age group). Murphy and Berrington offer figures for those aged 30-49, revealing that the proportions living alone have increased - from 4% to 7.7% for men and from 2.5 to 7.7% for women (1981-1991). They describe this as a major shift in living arrangements amongst this group.

Clarke and Henwood refer to the kinds of changes elaborated in terms of family fragmentation, where women are less likely to be part of a couple and more likely to be a lone parent, alone or part of a childless couple with two incomes. There has been a marked shift for women away from role of spouse to a more independent living arrangement. The results of family fragmentation, they claim, are experienced by both young women and by women in their late 40s. For example, in 1991 the second most common lifestyle amongst the latter was to be living as a lone divorcee (a status which was not even in top six in 1981). However, to describe contemporary trends in terms of fragmentation is to call in 'explanatory' terms which risk being unhelpful. An issue which can perhaps be usefully drawn from the above is to highlight the importance of change in life course trajectories and their relationship to changing living arrangements and ties of intimacy.

Marriage, Cohabitation, and Divorce

Marriage rates have been in steady decline since early 1970s with falls of 3 to 4% per annum. From 1971 to 1995 first marriage rates fell by 90% for teenage women and 80% for women aged 20-24. Median age at first marriage rose from 23.4 to 27.9 yrs for men and 21.4 to 26.0 years for women (Murphy and Wang 1999). The decline in remarriage rates has been even more pronounced. For divorced men, the remarriage rate has fallen by 75% since 1971. Remarriage rates amongst divorced women are about same level as amongst single women: in the 1970s they were twice as likely as single women to marry (Murphy and Wang 1999).

Ermisch and Francesconi (1998) argue we are observing a postponement of marriage - not a large scale rejection of it, and that cohabitation contributes to its postponement although partnership overall is also being postponed. In respect of cohabitation, McRae suggests that its continued growth, " - before marriage, between marriages, and instead of marriage - encapsulates the depth and breadth of changes in people's behaviour and attitudes towards sexual morality and living arrangements" (McRae 1999, p. 16).

In the mid 1960s fewer than 5% of never married women cohabited before marriage but by the 1990s 70% did so (McRae 1999). Over one third of births were outside marriage in 1996.

There is mixed evidence regarding the link between cohabitation and later divorce, and whether cohabiting relationships are themselves more likely to be dissolved than married ones, even controlling for age and presence of children (Buck and Ermisch 1995; McRae 1997; see also Haskey 1999, Kiernan 1999 and Kiernan and Mueller 1999) the latter providing evidence which contests the idea that those who cohabit prior to marriage are more likely to divorce.

Childbearing within cohabiting unions has become more common. Children are more likely to be born into unions which are doing less well financially, suggesting a tendency for union dissolution to 'select' mothers in relatively unfavourable economic circumstances into lone parenthood. This tendency is reinforced by a higher rate of union dissolution among couples in which the male partner's earnings are lower. (Ermisch and Francesconi 1998).

In the 1990s over 30% of births in UK occurred outside married partnership - a rate well above European mean and increasing at a faster rate.

In respect of divorce, the UK has the highest divorce rate in the European Union. In 1995 1/65 children were affected by divorce, an annual estimate which has meant that one in four children are affected by the time they reach their 16th birthday. This was the case for the cohort of children born in 1979 (Social trends 1999). The divorce rate has been quite constant since the early 1990s at around 14/1000 couples per year.

Sociologists have endeavoured to build an explanation of increasing divorce rates more than they have engaged with the other demographic changes so far addressed. For a valuable review and discussion of the issue of causality here, see Phillips (1988). Amongst the core developments commonly cited as significant are change in the material bases of people's livelihoods, leading to marital ties being based increasingly on emotion and romantic love, rather than economic necessity. Expectations in this newly dominant domain could not realistically be met, hence break-up. The other core development which has engendered a good deal of research has been the issue of gender relations, and changes in women's access to 'independent' income. The latter notion has never squared with the patterning of divorce which is associated with female disadvantage, not its opposite. There is an apparent contradiction between the greater 'wealth' of women and the frequent poverty of those who divorce. For Kiernan and Mueller divorce is clearly associated with absence of access to resources - material or cultural, and takes place in highly constrained environments. Recent research by Kiernan and Mueller emphasises that the most significant causes of divorce are poor economic and somatic well being, with particularly high divorce rates occurring amongst people who marry at an early age; those who experienced parental divorce; and those who are economically, somatically and emotionally vulnerable (Kiernan and Mueller 1998; 1999; see also McKay 1998).

Fertility

The post war period has seen a significant rise in fertility followed by a sustained decline: the so-called baby boom and baby bust. In the UK the Total Period Fertility Rate (1) has been quite stable at around 1.8 since 1980 (2). Following the Second World War there was a sharp peak in

fertility rates (at 2.75) and then the TFR remained close to 2.1 (the population replacement rate) until the mid 1950s. For the next ten years there was a rapid increase in fertility rates to a peak, of 2.95, in 1964. This then fell to 1.69 in 1977, the lowest fertility level on record (Armitage and Babb 1996). There was a slight rise after, to 1.89 in 1980, and a fairly stable rate subsequently. The two major components of change in fertility rates are change in family size and change in the timing of parenthood. In respect of the fertility decline, it was the diminishing likelihood of having large families which initiated the decline in the 1960s, and the pattern of delay in the timing of parenthood which entrenched the decline in the 1970s (Hobcraft 1996).

Given its salience in respect of conceptualising change in social relations, and the ordering of social reproduction, it is perhaps surprising that sociologists have engaged with changing patterns of fertility to only a limited extent (although see McRae 1997; Irwin 1999).

One key development has been in the timing of parenthood, such that cross sectional indicators may overstate the importance of fertility decline, where what is being observed is a trend to later ages at parenthood (see Irwin 1995 for theorisation of this trend). There has been a shift to later ages at first birth. Between 1989 and 1994 there was a crossover in the relative birth rates amongst women in their early twenties and women in their early thirties. Births to those aged 30 to 34 came to exceed births to those aged 20 to 24. In 1964, when fertility rates were at a peak, the average age of women at their first birth was 23.9 years. This increased relatively slowly to 24.4 years by 1977, nevertheless reversing a decades long trend to earlier childbearing. It has continued to increase, to 25.3 in 1989 to 26.8 in 1997 (Armitage and Babb 1996, ONS 1997).

Yet, notably, British fertility is exceptional within Europe for its relative youthfulness (Coleman and Chandola 1999), and more similar to the N. America and Australia. A component of this pattern lies in Britain's rate of births to teenagers - with a rate four times the Western European average. Teenage births have stood at about 30/1000 since the mid 1970s and changed little in twenty years. Indeed since 1970s UK age specific fertility profile has shifted its distribution in important ways. It has been suggested that the fertility distribution is now best seen as a combination of two different populations with different age schedules of childbearing (from about 1975). Now the distribution looks heterogeneous as if the fertility of two populations co-existed, one retaining the precocious fertility of the 1960s, the other behaving similarly to the rest of Europe (Coleman and Chandola 1999, also see their forthcoming article in *Population Studies*).

Whilst birth rates in Britain remain higher than the European average, more women born in Britain in the late 1940s have remained childless than in most other countries. The increased rate of childlessness is widely cited as an especially important trend, perhaps since it appears to be so suggestive of an altered relationship to children by contemporary cohorts of fecund adults. Amongst women aged 40 in 1997, 17% were childless. This contrasts with a low of 10% amongst women aged 40 in 1985. [It should be noted that of the cohort born in 1930 13% remained childless and amongst those born in 1950, 14% remained childless, and we should recall that 21% of all women born in 1920 remained childless (ONS 1997; and Irwin 1999). It is clearly premature to suggest, as some do, that significant proportions of people are 'abandoning parenthood'.

Lone Parenthood

In the domain of lone parenthood in particular sociological research agendas have been particularly shaped by critiquing the discourses surrounding the presumed meanings of lone parenthood as an indicator of family change and of patterns of claims on state welfare. Recent research has been shaped by a move away from notions of 'the' lone parent family or status, to life course patterns of mobility through this status (Kiernan, Land and Lewis (1998) for overview of long run trends in pathways through lone parenthood).

By 1991 around 20% of all families with dependent children in UK were headed by a lone parent, three times the proportion of 1971 (Social trends 1998). Between 1971 and 1986 the growth was mainly due to significant increases in divorce rates, from 1986 to 1991 it was due mainly to the growth in single, never married parents (McKay and Marsh 1994). In a linked piece of survey research Ford and his colleagues stress patterns of movement into lone parenthood, and explore the issue of motivations, concluding that 6% of lone parent households were comprised of 'purposive lone parents' (Ford et al 1995).

The increasing number of lone parents recently is due to more events leading to lone parenthood and to an increasing duration of lone parenthood (McKay 1998). The recent increase in never married lone parenthood includes a growth the breakdown of cohabiting relationships: a pattern which is linked to a tendency now for lone parents to be younger and to have younger children and smaller family sizes than in past. (Murphy and Wang 1999). Additionally, early lone parenthood appears to be the result of growing inequality of opportunity among young women (McKay 1998; also McRae 1997). For those with extra-marital births, median time spent as a lone parent was three years, for those who divorced, the median duration was 4.5 years. Those becoming lone parents recently have tended to remain lone parents for longer (McKay 1998). As well as more people becoming lone parents, exit rates from the status have declined as re-partnership has become less popular.

Recently Britain has had a comparatively high proportion of children living in lone parent families, matched only in Europe by Denmark. In 1994 about one quarter of all families with dependent children under 16 in UK were headed by a lone parent, a proportion two to three times greater than the Netherlands or Germany. In the UK around 15% of dependent children live in single parent households (Coleman and Chandola 1999). For Ford and Millar (1997: 2):

“The growing social acceptance of a separation of sex, marriage and parenthood has created a situation in which lone parenthood is increasingly coming to be seen as another stage in the family life cycle, rather than as an aberration from 'normal' family patterns. Not just in the UK but throughout the western industrialised countries, much more diverse patterns of family structure are developing with more complex ties of family love, support, exchange, duty and obligation”.

It is the more adequate conceptualisation of such diversity and its meanings, in terms of lived experience, perceptions of fairness and appropriate modes of behaviour, and the related distribution of opportunity and meaningful social participation, which is an urgent task for social scientific research.

Changing Patterns of Employment

Trends in Employment and Household Resourcing

Changing patterns of employment, in particular in female patterns of participation, are often 'grouped' with trends in family and household structure, related divisions of labour in financial and care based resourcing. The links have been drawn in different ways. In the following I explore general patterns of change in paid employment whilst, for the most part, reviewing these in relation to household level divisions of labour and gender (and life course) related developments in respect of access to and rewards from employment. Amongst the key trends experienced over recent decades in the UK are a pattern of polarisation - at the level of individuals and of households; important alterations in gender relations to education, employment and household resourcing; and related developments in respect of the articulation of family obligations and patterns of employment.

Recent decades have seen a growth in participation in post-compulsory education, partly linked to changes in the employment opportunity structure, as well as to changes in early life course trajectories and familial relations of partial dependence and obligation, and linked to growing inequality. Qualification level is an important marker of difference within employment. In 1998 86% of highly qualified women ('A' level +) were economically active compared to 50% without qualifications. Amongst men the comparable figure was 92% and 66% (Thair and Risdon 1999). Women with pre-school children manifest an economic activity rate of 27% where they had no qualifications (of which 22% were employed); and in contrast if they were highly qualified comparable women had an economic activity rate of 76% (of which 74% were employed). Amongst all women, 75% of women who were in professional and managerial occupations worked compared to 57% of unskilled manual women (ONS 1998).

In 1998 employment participation rates amongst the 25-39 age group stood at 93% for men and 74% for women. Activity rates stood as follows:

of women with a pre-school child 55% were economically active in 1998 (up from 45% in 1988);

if child aged 5-10: 72% were economically active;

if child aged 11-15: 78% were economically active;

if child aged 16-18: 82% were economically active;

if no dependent children: 75% were economically active.

(Thair and Risdon 1999)

Of married women with children aged under 5, *working full time*, activity rates rose from 6% in the early 1980s to 18% by the mid 1990s. Part time employment amongst comparable women increased from 19% in the early 1980s to 36% by the mid 1990s (ONS 1998).

The proportion of lone mothers who worked full time fell from 22% to 16% in same period and proportion working part time remained at a similar level (25/24%) (ONS 1998). If they had a child under 5, 54% of married women were in employment compared to 27% lone mothers. Of married women with a child under 5: 18% were full time workers compared to 9% of lone mothers.

Both married women with dependent children and lone mothers were more likely to be working part time than full time. In 1994-6:

42% of md women and 25% of lone mothers worked part-time;

24% of md women and 16% of lone mothers worked full-time.

Data on lone mothers with children aged under 5 shows that a large relative decline (from 12% to 7% full-time participation rates) occurred between 1979 and 1983. General Household Survey data (ONS 1998) also reveals that single lone mothers were the smallest of the single/widowed/divorced/separated group at the end of the 1970s and the largest group by the mid 1990s. It was this group that manifest the most dramatic shrinkage in full time employment rates, with a decline from 27% in 1979-81 to 9% by 1983-5 and whilst full-time rates recovered amongst this group, to 14% by 1985-7 they have remained at or down on this level since (and at 14% in 1994-6). It may be that there was a kind of shaking out, from which this group has not recovered. However the data reveals a decline in semiskilled manual and personal service work for women but this occurred between 1983 - 1991 (from 30 to 22%) and it is unclear why there was such a sharp decline in employment for this group.

As a group, lone mothers typically have low levels of qualifications and work experience - so it is unlikely they will secure anything other than a low-paid job, and most have young children so the relative cost of childcare is substantial. Along with material hardship, Ford and his colleagues identify the other main problem amongst non-working lone parents as health (in their survey up to one third of respondents reported illness or disability for themselves or their child; Ford et al 1995).

These patterns reflect majority ethnic modes of family organisation and resourcing. In contrast many minority ethnic women record lower levels of part time, and greater levels of full time employment than white women, and may be more likely to work full time if they have dependent children - and often even within sectors where part time employment predominates (Dale and Holdsworth 1998). Amongst lone parents the contrast is striking : white mothers with a pre-school child have participation rates of 28% compared to 47% of similar Black Caribbean women. A widely noted pattern amongst white women is the tendency for those with higher levels of qualification and higher status employment to be, and remain, in full time employment, particularly around the family building period. Linked census data analysed by the authors revealed patterns of continuity in full time employment to be the norm for minority ethnic women, irrespective of occupational level. The authors suggest the importance of economic necessity here, and it must be pertinent to incorporate a theorisation of different articulations of family resourcing and related patterns of participation in paid employment as key to explanation (see also Siltanen 1994). Additionally, Dale and Holdsworth stress the ways in which differences across ethnic groups arise partly from different historical and cultural heritages as these interact with structural factors particular to the UK, in particular the timing of, and rationales of, migration.

Brannen and her colleagues (1998) explore Labour Force Survey data for the period 1984 to 1994. Over this period the proportion of parents in employment increased from 66% to 71%, and 85% of fathers were employed and 59% of mothers, compared to 70% of other men and other women. In this period too mothers' employment increased from 49 to 59%, and growth most marked amongst women with a child under 5. The authors also note a polarisation of family / household employment: 1984-94: the proportion of no-earner families increased from 17 to 21% and two-earner families increased from 40-46% of all families, and one-earner families fell from 38% to 25%. (Brannen et al 1998).

Data from the 1998 Labour Force Survey shows that of working age households (defined as those with at least 1 person of working age) the proportion with all adults in employment stood at 53%, whilst the proportion of workless households stood at 18% (Cooper 1999). The majority

of workless households have only one adult, and the lowest rates of worklessness recorded were for couples with dependent children (Cooper 1999). Evidence indicates that the proportion of non-pensioner workless households has increased to this figure of around one in five from a figure of one in twenty in the mid 1970s (Gregg and Wadsworth 1994; Meadows 1996).

Evidence is indicative of change in patterns of financial resourcing of households, with evidence pointing to an increase in the importance of co-resourcing, where the earnings of women as well as men are increasingly necessary to resource households at levels commensurate with expectations and aspirations. The latter, of course, include not only material or financial expectations (including aspirations to home ownership at historically young ages) but also women's aspirations to the independence and autonomy afforded by participation in paid employment. There have been significant changes in the relative earnings position of women and men where women are working full time (Irwin 1999b) and other evidence reveals the relevance of changes in part time employment for patterns of household income maintenance (Webb 1993; Machin and Waldfogel 1994; Ward et al 1996). Amongst low income households male earnings have declined relative to average earnings, and - where such men are working - their partners have increased their employment rates. Machin and Waldfogel argue that (GHS) data on this trend through the 1980s reveals it to have had an equalising effect across households. Evidence suggests that changing relations to household resourcing are being experienced and authored by a population more general than the privileged group to whom they are often attributed.

Changing Patterns of Poverty and Inequality

There is a growing body of evidence which elaborates patterns of socio-economic polarisation since the early 1980s. Additionally there has been interest amongst theorists in longitudinal or life course approaches to poverty dynamics, with writers calling for policies which are more sensitive to people's life trajectories. In such perspectives writers advocate forms of intervention which move away from targeting static and aggregated 'problem' groups towards policies more attuned to the nature of transitions into and out of problematic sets of circumstances. Whilst such an approach holds promise we also need to note the persistence of poverty amongst particular high risk groups, and temper the notion that 'trajectory is all'.

Since the 1970s we have seen a growth of both permanent, lifetime inequalities and short term income risk. In 1977 - 6% of the population had incomes less than half the national average, by 1995 this had trebled, to 18% of the population (McRae 1999), and income inequality by the mid 1990s greater than at any time since the late 1940s (Hills 1998). From 1961-79 incomes for all income groups had risen, the lowest fastest. Then, from 1979-91 average incomes grew by 36% while poorest fifth saw static incomes. Factors contributing to income inequality growth between the late 1970s and early 1990s have been cited as:

- a growing gap between high and low pay, with increasing premiums for skills and qualifications;
- the number of workless households rising faster than overall official unemployment rates, with more households containing only one adult and growing polarisation between no-earner and dual-earner couples;
- the 1980s price linking of benefits meant a falling behind of the rest of the population when overall incomes rose (Hills 1998).

In respect of the issue of income mobility: British Household Panel Study data reveals that 54% of poorest tenth in the first year of the study had escaped it a year later, but two thirds were still

in poorest fifth. More than 3/4s of low income observations represent either persistent low income, or are linked to other observations of low income with no escape over a four year period. Hills concludes that the 'poverty problem' is 80-90% of the size suggested by cross section surveys (Hills 1998).

The above has focused on some key issues in respect of current patterns and trends, and pointed to considerations in respect of how emergent patterns are best delineated and best understood. In respect of understanding the nature of developments in family demography, household resourcing and social divisions of labour, the literature tends to divide between that which focuses on 'proximate causes' and that which offers broader theoretical takes on processes shaping change, and the issues are elaborated and discussed in the companion paper to this one.

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NOTES

(1) The Total Period Fertility Rate (TFPR) is the aggregate of age specific birth rates across all fertile ages in the reference year, and can be interpreted as the average number of children a woman would have if she experienced the age specific fertility rates of that year throughout her childbearing life.

(2) The fertility replacement rate is 2:1.