

NOVEMBER 2005

CLS Briefings



Following lives from birth and through the adult years

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The Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) is an ESRC Resource Centre based at the Institute of Education, University of London. CLS is responsible for three of Britain's birth cohort studies:

- 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS)
- 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70)
- Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

The studies involve multiple surveys of large numbers of individuals from birth and throughout their lives. Over the years they have collected detailed information on education and employment, family and parenting, physical and mental health, and social attitudes. Because they are longitudinal studies following the same groups of people throughout their lives, they show how histories of health, wealth, education,

family and employment are interwoven for individuals, vary between them and affect outcomes and achievements in later life. Through comparing the different generations in the three cohorts, we can chart social change and start to untangle the reasons behind it. Findings from the studies have contributed to debates and enquiries in a wide range of policy areas over the last half-century.

The aim of CLS Briefings is to provide examples of findings from the three cohort studies. Although the findings they include are not exhaustive, they give an idea of the work that has been carried out and the scope of the studies for future research. Data from the 1958, 1970 and Millennium cohorts is available free of charge from the UK Data Archive (www.data-archive.ac.uk), which is administered by the Economic and Social Data Service, University of Essex.

Parenting

In this first paper in the CLS Briefings series the focus is on parenting. Work in this area has been carried out by many researchers throughout the UK – related papers can be found in *Further reading*.

This briefing gives examples of some of the parenting data available in the three cohort studies. On page 4 there is a list of some of the parenting-related variables in each of the studies as a guide for researchers who may wish to do further analysis on this topic.

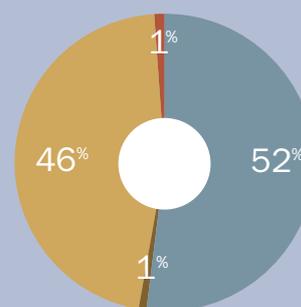
More equal responsibility?

In recent years we have seen the birth of 'work rich/time poor' households where the involvement of both parents in the workforce means that families are finding it difficult to spend time together. But as the numbers of women in employment have grown and attitudes have changed towards mothers with careers, have the roles of fathers changed to accommodate this? Are today's fathers spending more time with their children?

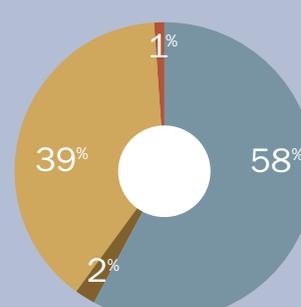
When the 1958 and 1970 cohort members were in their 30s, they were asked who had the main responsibility for looking after the children. The answers of the cohort mothers are shown in the two pie charts.

For both generations, the majority of mothers had the main responsibility for looking after the children. But it is interesting to

1958 cohort mothers



1970 cohort mothers



Key

- I do most
- Partner does most
- Shared equally
- Someone else does it

note that a substantial percentage of mothers reported that the responsibility was shared equally between themselves and their partner. However, although the number of fathers taking the main responsibility for children doubled from 1% in the 1958 cohort to 2% in the 1970 cohort, the number of fathers taking equal responsibility for childcare dropped from 46% to 39%.

Interestingly, when fathers in both cohorts were asked to report on childcare, they were slightly more likely than mothers to claim shared responsibility, showing the difference in subjective perceptions of levels of care between the genders (Ferri and Smith, 2003).

Fathers in lower social class occupations were more likely to help with childcare

Ferri and Smith’s (1996) analysis of the 1958 cohort at age 33 found that fathers who were involved in childcare were less likely to be found amongst the well-educated middle classes. Graduate fathers in professional and managerial jobs reported the lowest levels of participation in childcare. Just 40% of fathers in professional jobs played an equal part in parenting, compared to 58% of fathers who worked in semi-skilled or unskilled jobs.

Arrangements for the care of children when they were sick showed the same trend – fathers working in higher social class occupations were the least involved. However, when asked who should look after children when they are ill, the figures were very different – middle class parents were likely to express more egalitarian views, although this was not evident in their behaviour (Ferri and Smith, 1996).

Ferri and Smith (2003) also examined the age 30 survey of the 1970 cohort and found that the results were similar to the age 33 survey of the 1958 cohort. 60% of fathers in semi- and unskilled jobs played an equal part in childcare but this figure fell to 39% of fathers working in the professional or managerial sector.

In both the 1958 and 1970 cohorts, almost twice as many respondents reported shared childcare when both parents were working than families where only one parent worked. Men’s participation in childcare appears to rise in line with their partners’ earnings (Ferri and Smith, 2003).

Data from the first survey of the youngest of CLS’s three studies, the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), showed that for all family types, higher proportions of mothers reported that they were mostly responsible for childcare in 2001 and 2002 than mothers in the 1958 cohort when they were age 33. However, it should be remembered that MCS babies were very young – aged between 9 and 10 months at the time of the first survey (Calderwood et al, 2005). As this cohort grows older, and more surveys are carried out, we will have a clearer idea of how responsibility for childcare has changed over time.

When examining intergenerational patterns in family life, Ferri and Smith (2003) note that back in 1965, when the 1958 cohort were 7 years old, as many as six out of ten fathers played an equal role in childcare.

Overall, findings from the three studies do not support the notion of a ‘new dad’ who spends more time with his children. In fact, they seem to suggest that fathers today are actually taking a slightly smaller role in childcare.

Parenting in the Millennium Cohort Study

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) examined parenting more closely than the two earlier studies and detailed information was gathered on parent-child interactions when the children were aged between 9 and 10 months. Schoon and Hope (2004) found that when the main respondents were asked how they felt about the amount of time they got to spend with their baby, 70% of them (mostly mothers) thought they had plenty of time to spend with their baby compared to only 22% of partners (mostly fathers).

Although only 4% of main respondents felt that there was nowhere near enough time to spend with their baby, this figure

was markedly higher for partners (virtually all fathers) at 20%. Similarly, whilst 12% of main respondents thought there was not quite enough time with their child, the corresponding figure for partners was 36% (Schoon and Hope, 2004).

Proportions varied considerably by ethnic group – 90% of Bangladeshi and 86% of Pakistani main respondents thought they had plenty of time to spend with their child but only 64.5% of Indian, 66% of black and 69% of white main respondents felt this way. Similarly, Bangladeshi and Pakistani partners were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of time they got to spend with the MCS baby (Schoon and Hope, 2004).

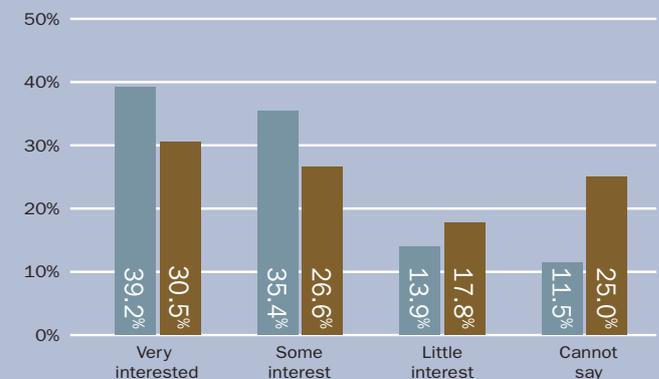
These findings appear to show that not only are fathers spending less time with their children than mothers, they are also more likely to feel dissatisfied with the amount time they get to spend with their child. Perhaps this is the ‘new dad’ – a father who wants to be more involved in his child’s upbringing but, due to other pressures, finds this is not possible.

How do experiences of parenting affect children’s future outcomes?

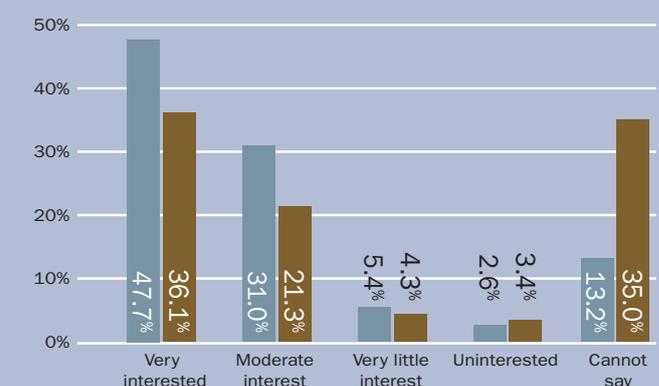
The impact of parental interest on children’s educational attainment

The bar charts show parental interest in children’s education in the 1958 and 1970 cohorts at 11 and 10 years old respectively.

Parental interest in child’s education when child was 11 years old (1958 cohort)



Parental interest in child’s education when child was 10 years old (1970 cohort)



Key
■ Mothers ■ Fathers

The bar charts show that parents of the 1970 cohort were more likely to be very interested in their child's education than parents of the cohort born in 1958 – 47.7% of mothers and 36.1% of fathers of the 1970 cohort were reported as being very interested, compared to 39.2% of mothers and 30.5% of fathers of the 1958 cohort.

It is good news that parents appear to be taking more interest in their child's education – research carried out by Flouri (in press) using the 1970 study shows that children whose parents were interested in their education when they were 10 years old had higher educational attainment in later life.

Flouri's research (in press) using 1970 cohort data shows that mothers' interest in children's education appeared to have a greater impact on later educational attainment than father's interest. And although the level of fathers' interest in their children's schooling was not associated with the later educational attainment of sons, it did have a significant impact on the educational achievement of daughters.

Fathers' interest in their children's schooling had an impact on daughters', but not sons', educational achievement

The impact of parenting on adult well-being

Parental interest has also been shown to have an impact on adult well-being in terms of life satisfaction, psychological functioning and the absence of psychological distress (subjective well-being).

Research carried out by Flouri (2004 c) using 1958 cohort data found that closeness to mothers at the age of 16 predicted life satisfaction at age 42 in both men and women. Women who were not close to their mother at 16 were more likely to suffer poor psychological functioning. Mothers' involvement with their child at 7 years old also predicted life satisfaction at age 42 for men.

Mental health and self-efficacy were also assessed in the 1958 cohort when its members were 42 years old. Through examining parenting (measured by mother's and father's involvement with their child at the age of 7 and family structure from birth to 16), it was found that mothers and fathers who were more involved with their offspring had children with greater levels of self-efficacy in adulthood. For women, but not for men, intact family structure between the ages of 0 and 16 was positively related to later self-efficacy, which was related to good mental health (Flouri, 2005).

The impact of mothers' child-rearing attitudes

When the 1970 cohort was 5 years old, mothers were asked on a sliding scale how they felt about statements such as "Children must accept what parents say" and "Child with own ideas will not learn". When the cohort members reached the age of 30, they were asked how they felt about anti-racism, environmentalism, right/left wing beliefs, authority, working mothers, traditional marital values, politics and the work ethic.

Flouri (2004 a) found that mothers who had non-authoritarian child-rearing attitudes when their children were 5 years old were more likely to have children with anti-racist values and who

supported environmentalism when they were adults. The children of these mothers were also less likely to endorse authoritarian and traditional marital values.

Mothers' child-rearing attitudes were found to have an impact on daughters' levels of life satisfaction at the age of 30 but were unrelated to sons' psychological well-being in adulthood

For daughters who suffered significant material disadvantage in early childhood, mothers' non-authoritarian child-rearing attitudes had a protective effect against later psychological distress and low levels of self-efficacy (Flouri, 2004 b).

Further reading

Calderwood, L., Kiernan, K., Joshi, H., Smith, K. and Ward, K. (2005) 'Parenthood and parenting'. In S. Dex and H. Joshi (eds) *Children of the 21st century: from birth to nine months*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Ferri, E. and Smith, K. (2003) 'Family life'. In E. Ferri, J. Bynner and M. Wadsworth (eds) *Changing Britain, changing lives*, London: Institute of Education.

Ferri, E. and Smith, K. (1996) *Parenting in the 1990s*, London: Family Policy Studies Centre.

Flouri, E. (2005) 'Adult materialism/post materialism and later mental health: the role of self efficacy', *Social Indicators Research*, 73: 1-18.

Flouri, E. (in press) 'Parental interest in children's education, children's self-esteem and locus of control, and later educational attainment: twenty-six year follow-up of the 1970 British birth cohort', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Flouri, E. (2004 a) 'Mothers' non-authoritarian child-rearing attitudes in early childhood and children's adult values', *European Psychologist*, 9 (3): 154-162.

Flouri, E. (2004 b) 'Psychological outcomes in midadulthood associated with mother's child-rearing attitudes in early childhood: evidence from the 1970 British birth cohort', *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 13: 35-41.

Flouri, E. (2004 c) 'Subjective well-being in midlife: the role of involvement of and closeness to parents in childhood', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 5: 335-358.

Schoon, I. and Hope, S. (2004) 'Parenting and parents' psychosocial adjustment'. In S. Dex and H. Joshi (eds) *Millennium Cohort Study first survey: a user's guide to initial findings*, London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

More publications based on parenting data from the cohort studies can be found by searching the CLS bibliographic database (www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/bibliography).

The information in this briefing paper was sourced and edited by Jessica Henniker-Major, CLS Marketing and Communications Manager (j.henniker-major@ioe.ac.uk).

A selection of parenting variables in the cohort studies

This list, together with variable names, is available online at www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/briefings.

1958 National Child Development Study

QUESTION	AGE
How often do the parents read to the child?	7
How interested are the parents in the child's educational progress?	7, 11
How often do the parents take the child out e.g. for walks, picnics, outings, visits, shopping	7, 11
Does the father take a big part in managing the child?	7, 11
Do the parents want the child to stay on at school after the minimum school leaving age?	7, 11, 16
Who teaches the children good behaviour?; Who looks after the children when they are ill?	33
Who looks after the children?	33, 42

1970 British Cohort Study

QUESTION	AGE
Does the parent agree that strictly disciplined children rarely grow up to be the best adults?	5
Does the parent agree that it is best not to visit children under five in hospital because it is too upsetting for the child?	5
Does the parent agree that if a child is often allowed to have his/her own way when he/she is young he/she will be uncontrollable later?	5
Does the parent agree that increases in vandalism and delinquency are largely due to the fact that children nowadays lack strict discipline?	5
Parent asked at what age they thought their child would leave school and whether they intend for that child to stay in post-compulsory education	10
Does the mother feel that father plays a big part in managing the child?	10
As a family, how often do you do things together, e.g. go for walks, outings, have meals, go for holidays, go shopping, go to restaurants?	10
Is anyone usually at home when the child returns from school?	10
With regard to the child's education, how concerned or interested do the parents appear to be?	10
Who mostly looks after the children?	30
How close are family members living in household?	30

Millennium Cohort Study

QUESTION	AGE
Mother asked whether she ever tried to breastfeed	9-10 months
How old was the child when he/she last had breast milk?	9-10 months
What the main parent does when the child cries (from bed)	9-10 months
Do you feel that the child's crying is a problem for you?	9-10 months
How much do you agree or disagree that: babies should be picked up whenever they cry; it is important to develop a regular pattern of feeding and sleeping with a baby; babies need to be stimulated if they are to develop well; talking, even to a young baby, is important; cuddling a baby is very important?	9-10 months
Does the child go to bed at regular times?	9-10 months
Does the child have meals at regular times?	9-10 months
Father is asked how often he looks after the child on his own; how often he changes the child's nappy; how often he feeds the child; how often he gets up in the night for the child	9-10 months
Main respondent is asked: who is most responsible for feeding the child; for changing his/her nappies; for getting up in the night; looking after the child when they are ill; generally being with and looking after the child	9-10 months

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