



I N D E X

Welcomepage 1
Jacqueline Scott, University of Cambridge

Family, class and gender 'strategies' in mothers' employment and childcare.....page 2
Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette, City University

Latest GeNet working paperspage 3

Perceptions of quality of life of British men and womenpage 4
Jacqueline Scott, Jane Nolan and Anke Plagnol, University of Cambridge

Pathways to economic and psychological wellbeing among teenage mothers in Great Britain.....page 6
Ingrid Schoon and Elzbieta Polek, Institute of Education

Forthcoming eventspage 8

Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of the ESRC Gender Equality Network's Newsletter. The economic outlook for 2009 looks grim. In times of economic recession, the effects are disproportionately felt by the poor in comparison to the better off. From the outset the ESRC Gender Equality Network has stressed that gender inequalities cannot be considered in isolation. The way the economic downturn is manifest in the lives of men and women depends crucially on their class background, their age, their race, and other factors which alter how inequalities are experienced. To know how best to intervene to try to reduce inequalities, it is crucial to understand the processes that help perpetuate and exacerbate existing inequalities. It is also important to understand how new forms of inequality are emerging in contemporary UK society. This is part of the challenges facing GeNet researchers and a selection of new findings concerning families, employment, class, and wellbeing are reported in this Newsletter.

On page 2, Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette, of City University, describe how couples make decisions concerning mothers' employment and childcare arrangements.

On page 4, Jacqueline Scott, Jane Nolan and Anke Plagnol, of the University of Cambridge, present results on what British women and men consider to be important for their quality of life.

Ingrid Schoon and Elzbieta Polek, of the Institute of Education, analyze pathways to financial independence among teenage mothers. On page 6 they show that important factors for independence from social welfare include stable relationships, education and continued employment.

If you would like to find out more about our research or join our mailing list please visit our website: www.genet.ac.uk

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Family, class and gender 'strategies' in mothers' employment and childcare **Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette**

Compared to other countries, Britain is a highly unequal society, and class inequalities have widened since the 1980s. Material inequalities deepened partly because women with higher levels of education, who are usually married to highly educated men, are more likely to continue working after childbirth than mothers with lower education. Furthermore, professional and managerial women are more likely to work full-time than women with manual and intermediate occupations.

Researchers agree that the reproduction of class inequalities originates in the family. In this study, we focus on decision making in the family with respect to women's employment and childcare arrangements. We argue that the constraints and opportunities that couples face are often more important for these decisions than their cultural background.

The study involved more than ninety work-life interviews with men and women in a diverse range of occupational sectors including doctors, accountants, finance and retail employees. The aim was to explore what reasons people gave

for how they reached decisions about the mother returning to work, after their children were born. Do parents have different opportunities and constraints in terms of whether and when the mother returns to employment?

We first wanted to find out how far people planned ahead before they had children. Do people develop family strategies about childcare, domestic work and so on? Most respondents had thought about family strategies and some even had made quite complex adjustments to their work hours in anticipation of parenthood. There were no class differences in the extent to which people had planned ahead before the birth of a child, but intermediate and manual interviewees were more likely to mention the family's need for two incomes. For example, a male retail worker says of his wife "we knew, she knew she had to go back to work because there was no money." A female intermediate employee in retail states: "I knew before I went on maternity leave what I wanted to come back to do. Financially it was never a case of I'm going to give up work, I knew I had to come back." By contrast, women in professional and managerial jobs tend to emphasise their intrinsic rewards from employment. For example, one woman in finance says: "I'd be a dreadful stay-at-home mum" and describes how she vowed not to be like her own mother who turned herself into a martyr by being at home. Although many intermediate and manual women find their jobs fulfilling, they do not explain their return to work in these terms.

Do those in professional and managerial occupations find different solutions to the childcare dilemma than those in other occupations after the children are born? Not surprisingly, women with lower incomes have more constrained choices for childcare arrangements and thus childcare options tend to differ by social class. Managerial and professional interviewees used the more expensive forms of childcare, such as nannies and private nurseries, whereas parents in intermediate and lower-level jobs used childminders, and were heavily reliant on help from relatives, particularly grandparents. In the case of grandparents, these were usually regular, unpaid arrangements which were not a matter of preference but necessity. A male in retail describes: "If we were paying for childcare, I don't know that we would have a child to be honest, because I don't think that we could have made it work. Childcare probably wouldn't have made it worthwhile my wife carrying on working." For managerial and professional interviewees grandparents were rarely part of regular childcare arrangements but rather seen as additional benefit to the child. Once again, intermediate and manual respondents were constrained in their choices because of their limited ability to pay for childcare.

National statistics and survey data indicate that managerial and professional women are more likely to be in employment when their children are young, and less likely to think that young children suffer from non-maternal childcare. Managerial and professional

“ Men were significantly more likely than women to think that children would suffer from non-maternal care. ”

women who opt for full-time motherhood when their children are young, express attitudes to maternal employment that are very similar to those of women in intermediate and lower level jobs. These findings suggest that whereas professional and managerial women might be 'choosing' employment, those less well qualified - who of course will earn less - are more likely to be constrained by economic necessity.

“Couples' decisions about female employment and childcare arrangements are more based on economic constraints than cultural background. Only managerial and professional women seem to have choices with regard to continuing employment and selecting childcare options.”

Men were significantly more likely than women to think that children would suffer from non-maternal care. However, there were no class differences between men although managerial and professional men are more likely to profess a 'liberal' perspective on gender roles in general.

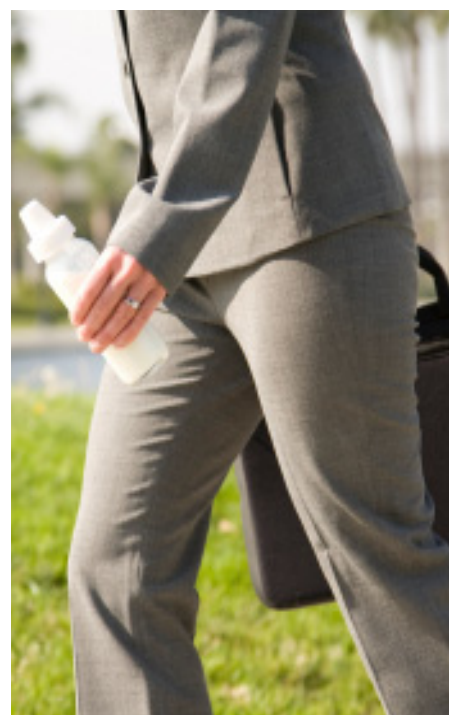
“Although childcare provision in Britain has been much improved, much of it is provided by the private sector and too expensive for mothers from low income families whose choices are mostly shaped by economic constraints.”

Parents from all classes who had used paid childcare stress the benefits their children had gained, such as increased confidence and social skills. Professional and managerial respondents tend to mention scientific evidence to justify their decisions to use or not use childcare.

Our study found that women, including those in paid employment, still retain the major responsibility for domestic work and childcare - even if they arrange for it to be done by others. Couples' decisions about female employment and childcare arrangements are more based on economic constraints than cultural background. Only managerial and professional women seem to have choices with regard to continuing employment and selecting childcare options.

Government provision of high quality childcare could diminish class inequalities by allowing mothers from all class backgrounds to return to work.

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Latest GeNet Working Papers

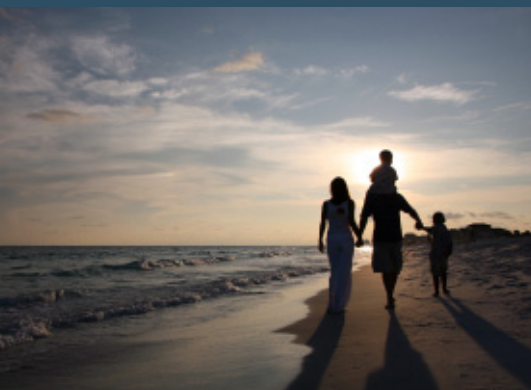
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Recent titles include:

- Family, class and gender 'strategies' in mothers' employment and childcare
- Individual perceptions of quality of life over the life course: implications for the comparability of subjective well-being measures
- Aspirations, attainments, and satisfaction: life cycle differences between American women and men
- Gender and equality of opportunity in China's labour market
- Gender, tax policies and tax reform in comparative perspective

Understanding perceptions of quality of life of British men and women

Jacqueline Scott, Jane Nolan and Anke Plagnol



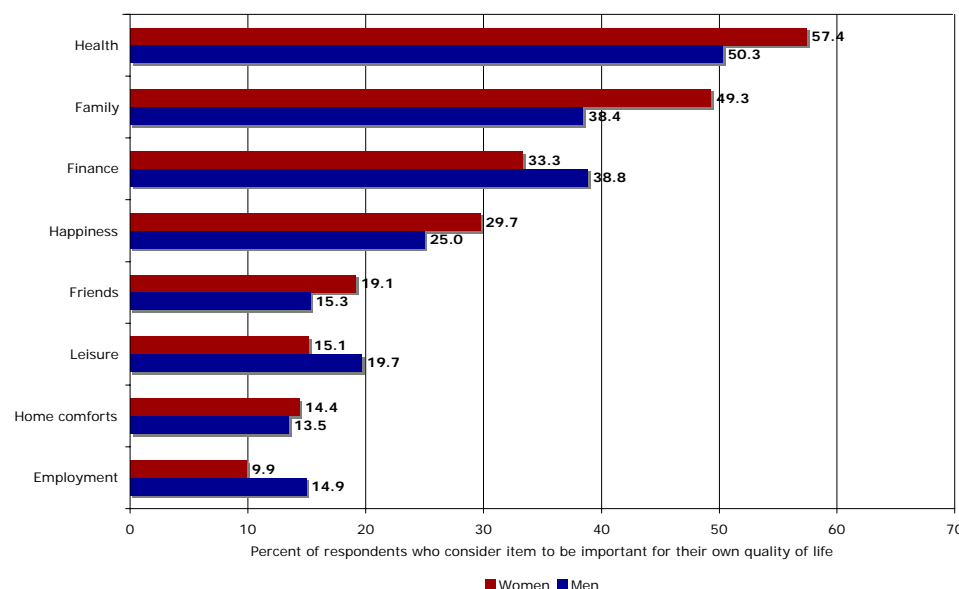
An old adage states that 'money cannot buy happiness' and most people will agree that there is more to life than the pursuit of wealth. So what does make people happy and do the things that matter for one's happiness differ between people? Social scientists have increasingly turned to the analysis of people's wellbeing, but there is still little consensus on what we mean by 'quality of life'.

In this study, we analyse what men and women consider to be important for their own quality of life. We further ask whether different things matter for different ages, and how far people change their views on quality of life before and after important life events, including the transition to partnership and parenthood.

Our analysis is based on data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), a large scale survey which includes an open-ended question about individuals' perception of quality of life in 1997 and 2002. The use of responses to open-ended questions helps us understand what people perceive as important for quality of life and also to track how perceptions change across the life course, something few other studies have done.

We found that both genders rank health, family and finances highly (see Figure 1), but men place greater importance on finances and employment than women. Women, on the other hand, value family, friends and home comforts more than men do.

Figure 1: Percent of respondents who consider an item to be important for their own quality of life.



Source: British Household Panel Survey, 1997 and 2002

The importance of some aspects of one's quality of life changes with age. For instance, health is a more important factor from the mid-30s onwards which may reflect a growing awareness of declines in health (Figure 2). One respondent notes: "If you've got your health that's all that's important." The

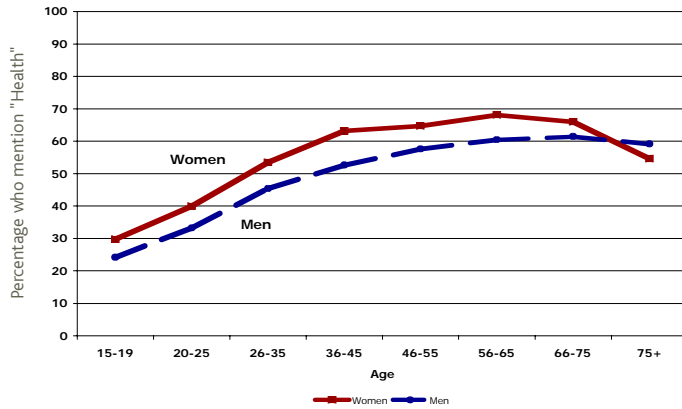
Both genders rank health, family and finances highly, but men place greater importance on finances and employment than women. Women, on the other hand, value family, friends and home comforts more than men do.

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increasing importance of health may also indicate that health becomes more salient for people when they have children themselves and see their parents age. In most age groups women are more likely to mention health than men.

Figure 2: Percent of men and women who mention "health" as being important for their quality of life, by age



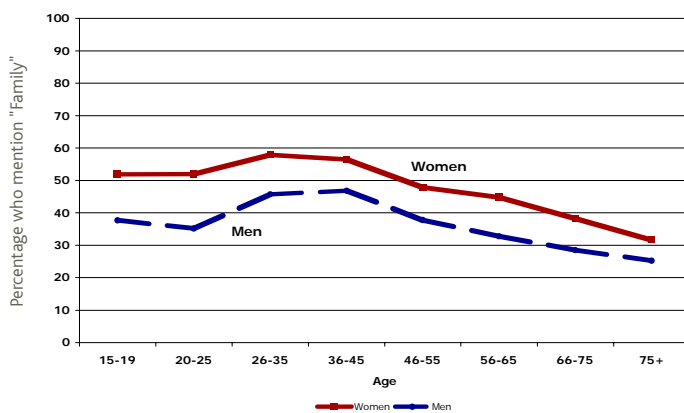
Source: British Household Panel Survey, 1997 and 2002

With regards to their own health, older people often mention the importance of keeping their mobility and marbles. Will, 76, tells us: "You need to have all your marbles; mobility is important and to have all your thinking facilities." One of the most interesting findings to emerge from this research is that people often focus on those close to them when assessing what is important for their own quality of life. One survey respondent states "I haven't got any quality [of life] at the moment as my husband has Alzheimer's."

The importance of family for one's quality of life is recognized across gender and age groups. Paul, 27, notes: "The family's the most important part of my life", while a 61 year old female respondent stresses the importance of "Having family around you."

The significance of one's family declines at old age (Figure 3) and at the same time, the role of family in one's life changes. Young people mainly consider their families as the providers of moral and material support, which is reflected in the response of a 19 year old male who notes: "My family looked after

Figure 3: Percent of men and women who mention "family" as being important for their quality of life, by age.



Source: British Household Panel Survey, 1997 and 2002

me for a lot of my life." However, this view of family life changes as people start to form their own families. In the 26-45 age group, women often refer to the importance of children's wellbeing while men focus more on their role as breadwinners. Luke, 41, notes that for him, quality of life means: "A secure job [which] enables me to buy things for my family."

Contrary to the common belief that our society is becoming more and more materialistic, those who mention finances as an important aspect for their quality of life mostly refer to "Having enough money not to have to struggle." We did not find evidence that people in Britain are dreaming of winning the lottery, buying mansions and living a life of luxury.

Why do perceptions of quality of life change over the life course? Our study revealed that people often reassess what is important in their life after key life transitions, such as having a first child or getting married. In one example, a 29-year old man describes quality of life as "being able to go out and enjoy yourself." Five years later after the birth of his first child he is more interested in "being with my family; they keep me happy; make me laugh." In another case, Eleanor's priorities in 1997 are "giving up smoking, health generally, expanding my career, making myself money, my future generally." After the birth of her son, however, her concerns are: "my son and a good family life: that's all that's important to me." These two examples demonstrate how for many people life transitions lead them to re-evaluate their priorities in life and focus more on those close to them.

Overall, our research shows that quality of life is a process, not a fixed state. We also found gender differences between people's perceptions of what is important for their quality of life. There are qualitative differences in how men and women perceive the importance of aspects like family or finance, and these perceptions change markedly with age.

Pathways to economic and psychological wellbeing among teenage mothers in Great Britain

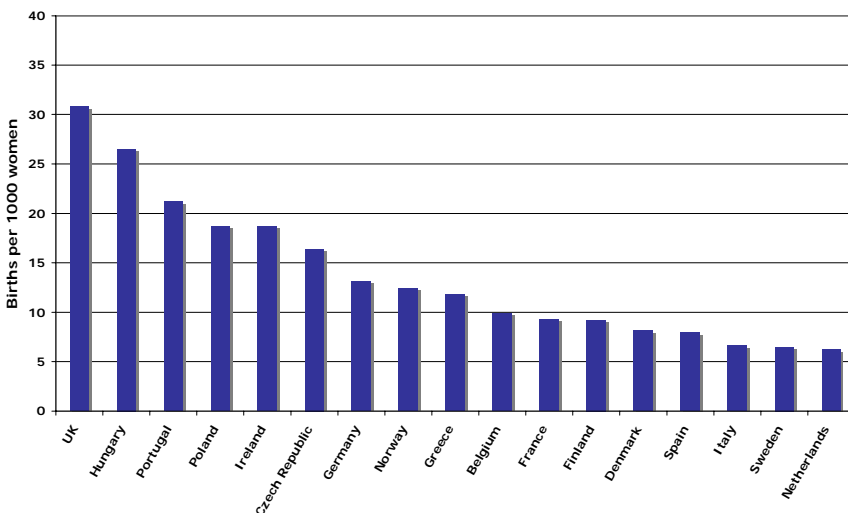
Ingrid Schoon and Elzbieta Polek



“ For most teenagers and young adults the usual sequence of life events includes finishing an education, entering stable employment and getting married. Teenage pregnancy often interrupts this typical sequence, leaving teenage mothers with limited education and employment opportunities. ”

The United Kingdom has the highest rate of births to teenage mothers in Western Europe (Figure 1). Teenage pregnancy is strongly related to poverty and social disadvantage with about half of all pregnancies under the age of 18 occurring among the most deprived social groups.

Figure 1: Births to women aged below 20 per 1,000 15-19 olds



Source: UNICEF: Innocenti Report Card, Issue No. 3, 2001

For most teenagers and young adults the usual sequence of life events includes finishing an education, entering stable employment and getting married. Teenage pregnancy often interrupts this typical sequence, leaving teenage mothers with limited education and employment opportunities. Many teenage mothers are not in stable relationships, which in addition to limited education and employment can lead to welfare dependence and socioeconomic disadvantage, as well as depression.

The wellbeing of adolescent mothers is often related to the experience of their own mothers and can, in turn, influence the future of their children. Despite this generally grim outlook, not all teenage mothers are destined to lead a life of destitution and disappointment. Those who manage to beat the odds usually return to school to finish their education, attain continued employment or enter stable relationships.

Our research investigates how some teenage mothers break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and succeed in being independent from social welfare by their early 30s. In general, those that are most successful are the ones who manage to not be excluded from the labour market for too long. Other important factors for adolescent mothers' economic and psychological wellbeing include education and relationship status.

Our analysis was based on data from the British Cohort Study (BCS70), a study comprising all individuals born in one week in 1970. The study sample includes 738 female respondents who had a child before age 20 (13% of the sample), and who were followed up at age 30. Among these adolescent mothers 5% gave birth before age 16; 33% between 16 and 17, and 62% between ages 18 and 19. About one third of these teenage mothers were themselves daughters of teenage mothers.

About 45% of these adolescent mothers succeeded in reaching financial independence from social welfare at age 30, compared to 85% of female survey respondents at age 30 who avoided teenage pregnancy. An important factor for financial independence was the teenage mothers' education, which in turn was influenced by their cognitive ability (measured at age 10) and school motivation at age 16. Mothers with good educational qualifications usually spent more time in employment than those who did not manage to complete school. Education, relationship status and time spent in employment were all important factors for independence from social welfare. Teenage mothers who did not depend on social welfare at age 30 were significantly happier and less depressed than other teenage mothers at the same age.

Our findings also highlight the importance of intimate relationships for successful adult transitions. These relationships do not have to be with the biological father of the child, and in many cases they are not. It is also important to what extent teenage mothers experienced family cohesion in childhood. We found that family cohesion not only has a significant impact on school motivation, subsequent school qualification and employment opportunities later in life - but also on one's ability to maintain a stable relationship.

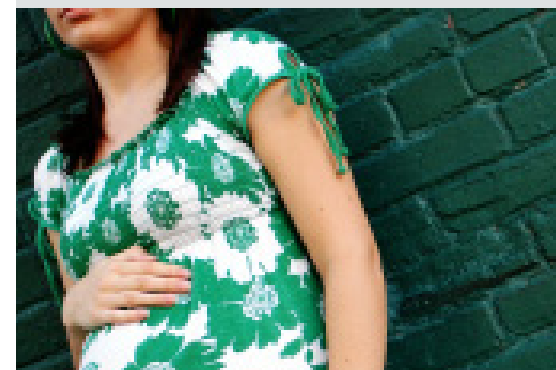
The creation of opportunities for families to engage in joint activities could boost the positive development of young women - especially those from a less privileged background - by promoting family cohesion. Parks, libraries and sports facilities could enhance families' opportunities for family recreation and engagement. Present family policies aiming to increase labour market participation of young mothers seem to overlook the importance of family cohesion for the wellbeing of children and their mothers.

In general, little attention is paid to the emotional needs of young families, who need to find the time and resources to maintain a supportive and stable relationship in the face of economic hardship. Our results suggest that potential areas for intervention include targeting participation and engagement in education, employment and family cohesion. Such policies could improve substantially the wellbeing of teenage mothers and their children, and break the vicious cycle of intergenerational teenage pregnancy.



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Forthcoming Events 2009



The Credit Crunch: Gender Equality in Hard Times

March 6th 2009, 1.00pm - 4.30pm

ESRC Festival of Social Science

Queens' College, University of Cambridge

'Minimum wage and gender equality'

Professor William Brown, University of Cambridge

'Job insecurity and stress'

Dr Brendan Burchell, University of Cambridge

'Sink jobs and gender inequalities'

Professor Shirley Dex, Institute of Education

'Are women bearing the burden of the crunch? What data does and does not tell us'

Dr Katherine Rake, Director, The Fawcett Society



- GeNet is a multi-disciplinary network of nine research projects spread across eight British universities which brings together internationally respected expertise from the disciplines of economics, psychology, sociology, geography, social policy, law and demography
- GeNet aims to develop theoretical understanding, substantive evidence and policy innovation in relation to gender equality
- GeNet's interests cover paid work, developmental studies, domestic time-use, migration, class, welfare benefits, human resource management, corporate social responsibility and work life balance
- GeNet uses an innovative range of methods and data sources: quantitative and qualitative, longitudinal and cross-sectional

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Queens' College, University of Cambridge

Topics include:

Work-family balance

Gender equality and well-being

Fathers and child well-being

Careers and household time use

Employment and equality

Risk, transitions and identities

Within-household finances

Family and well-being

See our website - www.genet.ac.uk/Events/ - for further details or contact our administrator

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