

Families, Social Mobility and Ageing, an Intergenerational Approach, 1900-1988

Principal Investigators: Thompson, P., Newby, H. Study Number: 4938

Introduction

Colloquially known as '100 families', this ambitious study sought to trace connections between family life and social mobility. It did so through 170 in-depth life story interviews spread across three generations of family life.

"To be honest, most of my friends don't have fathers. Either their parents are divorced or their fathers are dead."

"I determined that my life would be completely different...I was gonna be as good a mother as possible."

"I wasn't supposed to be ambitious for myself. I was supposed to spend my life revolved around my husband and me family."

(Interview extracts)

The research team, headed by Paul Thompson and Harold Newby at the University of Essex, devised an interview schedule that asked participants extensive questions relating to their own and their family's education, politics, family trees, marriage and relationships, housing, parents' work, and leisure. The interviews average 54 pages in length and were conducted during the mid-1980s.

A generation of men and women aged between 30 and 55 and married with children participated in the study. This 87 strong cohort of informants were located amongst parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, London, north-west, west and south-east England and the Midlands.

Method

The fieldwork strategy selected a 'middle generation' of married men and women with children. These 'middle generation' informants were initially drawn from a subsample of informants interviewed for an ESRC project and had agreed to be re-interviewed. They were located in 200 polling districts in 35 parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, London, north-west, west and south-east England and the Midlands. Later on, further polling districts were added and a stratified occupational quota was introduced to ensure an appropriate class balance.

The collection consists of interviews with 170 informants. Of these, 87 were middle generation, 42 younger, and 41 were older generation informants. The families included 26 represented by a lone participant and 11 where all three generations were interviewed.

Archive resources

The interview transcripts have been fully digitised and it is now possible to carry out keyword searches on these transcripts through different search filters, such as: interviewee's gender, date of birth, geographical region and/or occupational class. Further details can be found online in the ['search interview transcripts' section](#).

Teaching resource

Interview extracts from the study have been used in our teaching resources. The resource *Exploring Diverse Interview Types* provides instructors and students with materials designed to assist in teaching qualitative interviewing. This study has been used as an example of the life story approach to interviewing.

User documentation

The documentation for *Families, Social Mobility and Ageing, and Intergenerational Approach, 1900-1988* can be downloaded in the form of a user guide in PDF format from the UK Data Service catalogue record page.

[Study description and documentation](#).

Publications and other resources

The main published outcomes arising from this study are:

Thompson, P.R., Itzen, C. and Abendstern, M. (1990) *I don't feel old: later life then and now*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0-19820-147-8.

Thompson, P.R. (1990) 'I don't feel old: subjective ageing and the search for meaning in later life', paper presented at the World Congress of Sociology, Madrid, July 1990.

Thompson, P.R. (1992) 'I don't feel old: subjective ageing and the search for meaning in later life', *Ageing and Society*, 12(2).

Thompson, P.R. (1993) 'Family myth, models, and denials in the shaping of individual lifepaths', in P.R. Thompson and D. Bertaux (eds.) *Between generations*, London: Oxford University Press.