

Thematic guide: family studies (using qualitative data)

Describe the experience of modern family living

Introduction

The study of the family in sociology progressed considerably in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Rapid changes in economic, political and cultural spheres played a significant role in the reshaping of family units and individual relationships within them.

In Britain there have been significant shifts with regards to household and family formation and dissolution, generating patterns that were quite unimaginable forty or fifty years ago.

Classic collections such as Thompson and Lummis' *Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870-1973* offer a fascinating historical insight into family life for the Edwardians.

More recent studies such as Backett-Milburn's *Work and Family Lives, 2002-2009*, break down the once rigid boundaries between different branches of sociology (such as family and work) and attempt to understand and describe the experience of modern family living.

Searching for related materials

The [UK Data Service catalogue](#) can be searched for data on family studies using subject terms such as:

- adultery
- life histories
- divorce
- marriage
- family life
- parents
- household
- relationships

Every data collection is accompanied by comprehensive documentation. These are open access and available to the public from the website and it is not necessary to be a registered user to access and download them.

The content of the documentation varies by collection, but usually includes information such as the initial proposal, interview schedule, description of methodology, end of award report, and so on.

In some cases, more details are provided, such as the coding schemes of the original researchers or examples of the consent forms used.

Other resources on family

[Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#)

[Centre for Research on Family, Life Course and Generations](#)

[Centre for Research on the Child and Family, University of East Anglia](#)

[University of Cambridge - Centre for Family Research](#)

[Timescapes, University of Leeds](#)

Summary of selected qualitative studies on family studies

Study name

[SN 4688 US-UK Working Families: Work, Life and the City, 1996-2001](#)

Jarvis, H.

This project focused on three overlapping spheres of restructuring in family life: those operating in labour markets, urban housing markets, and gender relations. The project explored the way 'two wage' families draw on local labour, housing, transport, and childcare solutions to cope with everyday life. Other issues explored were varying prosperity and growth, family structure, social dislocation, home and work dislocation.

Coverage

Sample: two-parent families with young children and at least one economically active partner, resident in Great Britain or the USA between 1996 and 2001

Data: 85 interviews

Topics

- household
- employment
- childcare
- housing
- relationships
- social networks
- transport

Study name

[SN 5028 Quality of Home Experience for Homeworkers, 2002](#)

Moore, J.

This study examined the ways in which home is conceptualised, experienced and evaluated by homeworkers, a hard-to-reach group. It explored the impact of home working on the experience of home and family life and sought to identify ways in which working from home may challenge the traditional stereotypical view of home.

Coverage

Sample: homeworkers: worked more than 20 hours, did not live alone, resident in the North of England and South Wales

Data: 45 qualitative interviewees, 15 focus group interviewees, 62 quantitative respondents

Topics

- homeworking
- home life
- leisure time activities
- local neighbourhood

Study name

[SN 2000 Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870-1973](#)

Thompson, P. and Lummis, T.

The major part of this collection comprises life story interviews originally collected as part of the study The Edwardians: Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918. The interviews were undertaken in the early 1970s and formed the basis of the first national oral history project in the United Kingdom.

Coverage

Sample: men and women born between 1870 and 1908

Data: 449 interview transcripts (PDF format) and 444 quantitative cases

Topics

- age
- birth order
- childbirth
- community
- families
- marriage

Study name

[SN 5190 Cross-Generational Investigation of the Making of Heterosexual Relationships, 1912-2003](#)

Hockey, J.

Making intimacy and the practices of everyday life its core focus, this study asked how women and men manage and subjectively experience the institution of heterosexuality. The study used a life course perspective to investigate the processes through which women and men have identified themselves as 'heterosexual' at various points across the last 80 years.

Coverage

Sample: extended families with three generations of adults aged 15+ based in Northern England

Data: 54 face-to-face interviews

Topics

- sexual knowledge
- courtship
- weddings
- parenthood
- separation and divorce

Study name

[SN 4723 Family Life of Old People, 1865-1955.](#)

Townsend, P.

This material formed the basis for Professor Townsend's classic 1954-1955 study which examined the growing perception that a breakdown in extended family networks was leaving old people isolated, and creating an increasing demand for residential care. The project demonstrated the important role that kinship networks, and relations within the extended family, played in the maintenance of community membership.

Coverage

Sample: elderly men and women in Bethnal Green, Hampstead and Westminster, London
Data: 189 interviews, diaries (in PDF format)

Topics

- old age
- family life
- welfare services
- community life
- retirement
- poverty
- social isolation

Study name

[SN 5100 Transition out of the Parental Home in Britain, Spain and Norway, 2001-2002](#)

Hollway, W.

There is considerable diversity in young people's experiences of leaving home throughout Europe, with young people leaving home at much older ages in the south rather than the north. This research project explored the relative importance of factors such as access to higher education, labour and housing market conditions and culturally-defined norms on leaving home in three European countries: Britain, Spain and Norway.

Coverage

Sample: young people and their parents in Liverpool, Bilbao and Trondheim
Data: Interviews - Liverpool: 34, Bilbao: 34, Trondheim: 24

Topics

- domestic responsibility

- family life
- leaving home
- parents
- siblings