Children and Childhood in the United Kingdom

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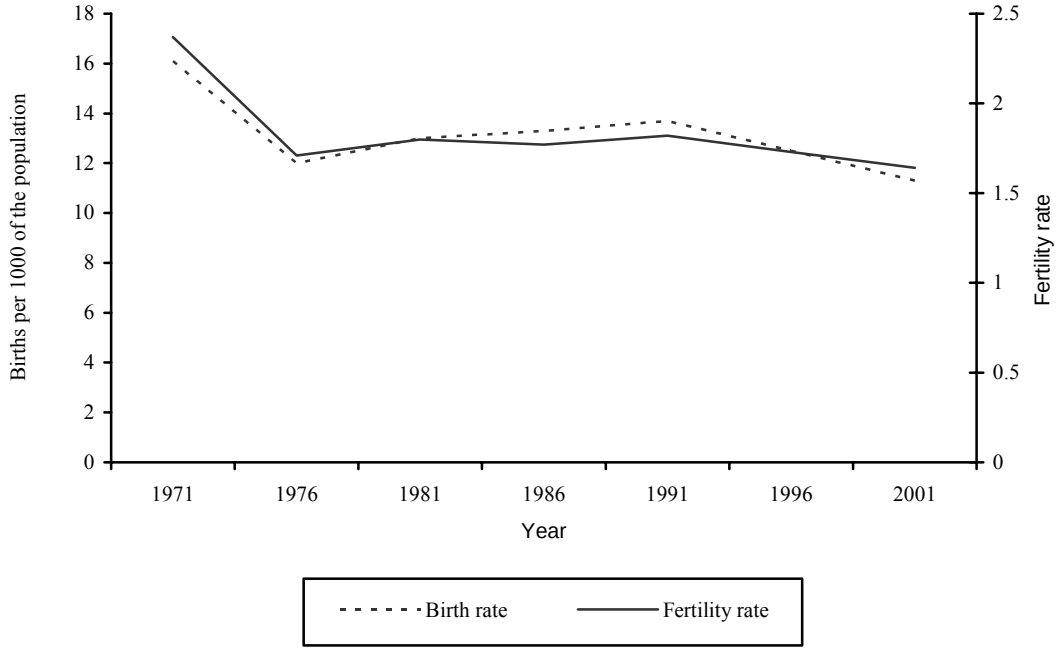
1 Introduction

1.1 Demographic context

The latest population estimates give the child (under 16) population for the UK of 11,759,000. That number has declined by over 2 million since 1971 though the number has risen very slightly since 1991. Children under 16 represent just over 20 per cent of the population of the UK with a slightly larger proportion in Northern Ireland. Over 80 per cent of all children live in England. There are more boys than girls under 16 in the child population – 270,000 more in the UK in 2002. Between 1999 and 2031 the number of children in the UK is expected to fall by over 800,000 (Population Trends, 2003).

The main factors that determine changes in the child population are the birth rate and the fertility rate. Figure 1.1 shows that the birth rate (births per 1,000) in Britain fell from the early 1970s but began to pick up in the mid 1970s as the 1960s "baby boomers" began to have their children. However the birth rate began to fall again from the early 1990s. The fertility rate (the number of children each woman will have) is a better indicator of long-term trends and it has been below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) since the mid 1970s, fluctuating around 1.7 (in 2001 it fell to 1.64) (Population Trends, 2003).

Figure 1.1. Birth rate and fertility rate (Britain).



Source: Population Trends, 2003.

These variations lead to changes in the age composition of children over time. The number of pre-school age children in the UK has been falling since 1991 but the number of school age children has been rising since 1986 (Population Trends, 2003).

1.1.1 Family size and age of mothers

Age of mothers

Between 1989 and 1994 a crossover occurred in the relative birth rates amongst women in their early twenties and women in their early thirties. In 1965-70, when fertility rates peaked, the average age of women at their first birth was 23.9 years. This increased to 24.6 years by 1975, has continued to increase to 25.9 in 1985 and to 27.3 in 1990 (Eurostat, 2000). Presently there is a polarisation within the population of British women, which is reflected in their attitudes towards motherhood (i.e. in low versus high fertility rates, delayed versus early pregnancies) and their continuity of employment. Qualified women are more likely to delay childbearing, have fewer children and return to full-time employment after having children than unskilled women (Dex and Joshi, 1999).

Completed family size

The move towards later childbearing by younger women has been coupled with a reduction in the number of higher parity births by older women (Population Trends, 2003), resulting in a decrease in the average family size, from 2.36 in 1940 to 1.95 by 1960. There was an increase in the average number of children per woman – especially in the under 35 age-groups – between the 1920s and 1940s, and a gradual decline in the number of children born to women in all age groups since the 1960s (Population Trends, 2003).

Teenage pregnancy

During the last ten years, the conception rate of women aged under 18 in the UK has fluctuated from a high in 1990 (47.7 per thousand) to a low of 42.7 per thousand in 2001(provisional estimate, Population Trends, 2003). The teenage conception rate in England and Wales remains amongst the highest in the European Union. More than fifty per cent of teenage conceptions lead to motherhood and the majority of these births (60%) are registered jointly by both parents, while nearly all the rest (36%) are registered solely by the mother (Population Trends, 1999).

Teenage pregnancy has been a high priority issue on the UK policy agenda for some time. There have been concerns about the number of teenage conceptions and about the links with deprivation and adverse outcomes for both mother and child. These include: a higher probability of a low birth-weight baby; increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome; and higher rates of childhood accidents. In the longer term, teenage mothers are more likely to experience post-natal depression than older mothers;

and children of teenage mothers are more likely than children of older mothers to experience parental divorce and to become teenage mothers themselves (Griffiths and Kirby, 2000).

1.1.2 Family formation and composition

Fertility trends combined with changing patterns of family formation and composition have implications for the way children are brought up and their later adjustment to adulthood. Relatively low fertility rates entail that families contain fewer siblings, and more only children. The postponement of childbearing leads to an older average age at the onset of parenthood. Changes in family formation – e.g. increased prevalence of cohabitation and remaining single – created new forms of parenting, not necessarily involving both birth parents. Almost 50 per cent of children experience parental separation which might sometimes be followed by the formation of stepfamilies, often creating complex patterns of generational relationships. The following sections review some of the disadvantages children face because of the break-up of the traditional family.

Parental divorce

Divorce rates have increased markedly over the last four decades, more than quadrupling in size. The number of divorces increased significantly in the 1970s but since the mid 1980s – as the number of marriages declined and the prevalence of cohabitation grew – divorce rates stabilised. Recently, the divorce rate has remained constant at around 13 per 1,000 married couples per year. More than one in four children will experience parental divorce by the age of 16 (Rodgers and Pryor, 1998).

Rodgers and Pryor (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of over 200 research reports on the effects of parental separation on children. They found that children whose parents are separated are likely to experience in the short-term: unhappiness, low self-esteem, behavioural difficulties, problems with friendships and loss of contact with extended family. Good, continuing communication and contact between both parents appear especially important in assisting children to adapt to the new circumstances. The immediate distress surrounding parental divorce usually fades with time and children settle into normal development. Yet, in the long-term, adverse outcomes are approximately twice as prevalent among children of divorced families compared with children from intact families.

Lone parenting

In a European context, Britain leads with the highest rates of (divorce and) lone parenthood. The number of lone parent families has grown continuously since the 1970s, with accelerated growth in the 1990s and has been levelling out in the most recent period. Haskey (1998) has estimated the lone parent population of Britain in 1995 to be 1.56 million, comprising 22 per cent of all British families with children and containing 2.7 million children, representing 20 per cent of British children. By

1999/2000 the proportion of lone parent families increased to 27 per cent of all families with children, totalling 3.1 million children (DWP[1], 2001).

Lone parenthood almost always results in a period of dependency on state benefits. Over 80 per cent of lone parent families are receiving Income Support, Housing Benefit or Working Families Tax Credit. Benefit expenditure on lone parent families is estimated to have increased from €5.7 billion in 1989/90 to €13 billion in 1994/95 (Bradshaw, 2002). Due to the dependence on means-tested benefits, low earnings power and inadequate childcare provision, lone parents make up a substantial proportion of the poor.

McMunn et al. (2001) conducted a study, based on the National Health Survey for England, to examine the effects of the family environment on children's well-being. They found that lone motherhood per se is not detrimental to children's psychological well-being, 'rather it is the poverty that accompanies lone parenthood, as well as the low educational attainment that is associated with both poverty and lone motherhood that increases the risk of behavioural and emotional problems among children of lone mothers' (McMunn et al., 2001, p.432).

Stepparenting

According to the General Household Survey, in 1999, six per cent of all families with dependent children were stepfamilies. In 2000, the majority (88%) of stepfamilies consisted of a couple with at least one dependent child from the female partner's previous relationship. In nine per cent of stepfamilies there was a dependent child from the male partner's previous relationship, while three per cent of stepfamilies contained at least one dependent child from a previous marriage or relationship of each partner (Walker et al., 2001). Research findings suggest that children from stepfamilies – especially at older ages – do not fare as well as children from intact or even lone parent families (McMunn et al., 2001). Children from stepfamilies may be adversely affected in areas of educational achievement, family relationships, sexual activity, partnership formation and early parenthood.

[1] Department for Work and Pensions.

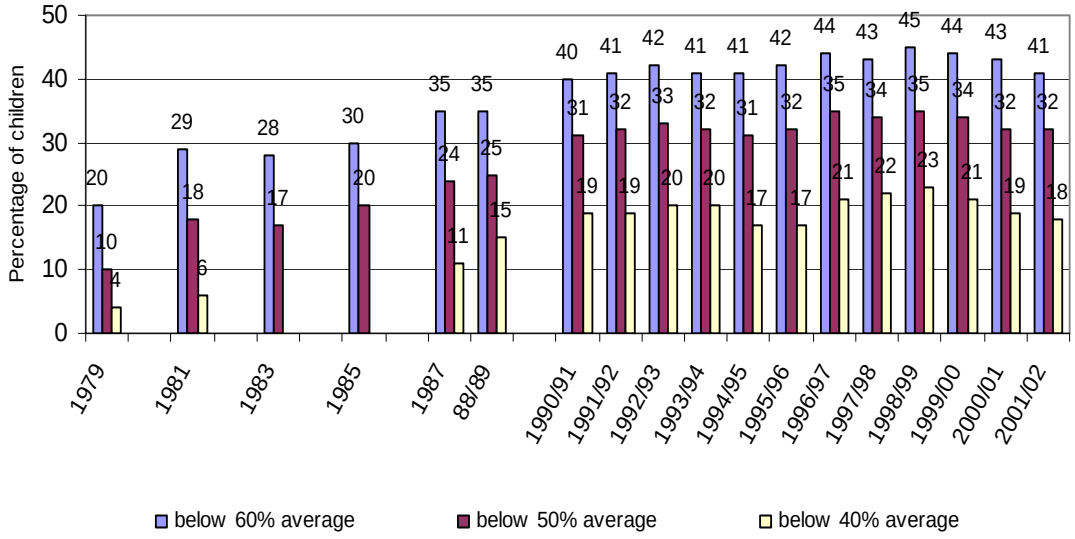
2 Economic and Social Welfare of Children

2.1 Child poverty in the UK

2.1.1 Child poverty over time

It can be seen in Figure 2.1 that during the 1980s Britain experienced a huge surge in child poverty. The proportion of children living in households with incomes less than 50 per cent of the average equivalent (after controlling for the needs of families of different size) income after housing costs increased from ten per cent in 1979 to 31 per cent in 1990/91. During the 1990s there was a further slight increase and the child poverty rate peaked in 1998/99 at 35 per cent. The latest data available is for 2001/02 and this contains welcome evidence that child poverty has begun to fall (HBAI, 2003).

Figure 2.1. Percentage of children in poverty, contemporary terms (after housing costs).



Source: HBAI, 2003.

The government published the fifth annual report *Opportunity for All* in September 2003 (DWP, 2003). This latest 'annual report' on progress in its anti-poverty strategy contains (now) 15 indicators relating to children and young people. Table 2.1 summarises the results. On all the indicators the latest results show an improvement on the base line data. So, for example, the proportion of children living in workless households is falling, as is relative, real terms and persistent poverty. There are small improvements in all the indicators of educational outcomes and a welcome fall in teenage pregnancies. Of the indicators given here some are for Great Britain and some are for the UK.

Table 2.1. Summary of the *Opportunity for All* indicators for children and young people.

% children living in workless households	17.9 (1997)	17.9 (1998)	17.3 (1999)	15.6 (2000)	15.2 (2001)	15.8 (2002)	15.2 (2003)
% children living in households with income below 60% of the contemporary median before housing costs	26 (1996/97)	25 (1997/98)	24 (1998/99)	23 (1999/00)	21 (2000/01)	21 (2001/02)	
% children living in households with income below 60% of the median after housing costs	34 (1996/97)	33 (1997/98)	33 (1998/99)	32 (1999/00)	31 (2000/01)	30 (2001/02)	
% children living in households with income below 60% of the 1996/97 median held constant in real terms before housing costs	26 (1996/97)	24 (1997/98)	22 (1998/99)	19 (1999/00)	16 (2000/01)	12 (2001/02)	
% children living in households with income below 60% of the 1996/97 median held constant in real terms after housing costs	34 (1996/97)	32 (1997/98)	31 (1998/99)	28 (1999/00)	24 (2000/01)	20 (2001/02)	
% children experiencing persistent low income – below 60% median household income – in at least 3 out of 4 years	20 (1991/94)	16 (1994/97)	16 (1995/98)	16 (1996/99)	17 (1997/00)	16 (1998/01)	
% children experiencing persistent low income – below 70% median household income – in at least 3 out of 4 years	30 (1991/94)	26 (1994/97)	26 (1995/98)	26 (1996/99)	26 (1997/00)	25 (1998/01)	
% attendances in schools (England)	92.4 (1995/96)	92.8 (1996/97)	92.7 (1997/98)	92.9 (1998/99)	93.2 (1999/00)	92.7 (2000/01)	93.0 (2001/02)
% children who live in a home which falls below the set standard of decency	43 (1996)				30 (2001)		
Admission rates (per 1,000) to hospital as a result of an unintentional injury resulting in a stay of longer than 3 days for children aged under 16	1.22 (1996/97)	1.14 (1997/98)	1.03 (1998/99)	1.04 (1999/00)	0.94 (2000/01)	0.95 (2001/02)	
% of 16–18-year-olds in learning	76.3 (1996)	74.9 (1997)	74.8 (1998)	75.4 (1999)	75.4 (2000)	75.5 (2001)	
Under 18 conception rates (per 1,000 aged 15-17)	45.9 (1996)	45.8 (1997)	47.0 (1998)	45.3 (1999)	43.8 (2000)	42.3 (2001)	
% of teenage parents who are not in education, employment or training	84.2 (1997)	72.9 (1998)	73.6 (1999)	68.9 (2000)	70.3 (2001)	66.5 (2002)	73.3 (2003)
% re-registered on the child protection register		19 (1997/98)	15 (1998/99)	14 (1999/00)	14 (20001/02)		
Infant mortality rates per 1,000 live births in England and Wales of routine and manual groups/all	1.15 (1994-96)	1.14 (1995-97)	1.12 (1996-98)	1.13 (1997-99)	1.14 (1998-00)	1.17 (1999-01)	
Smoking rates during pregnancy among children aged 11-15	13 (1996)		11 (1998)	9 (1999)	10 (2000)	10 (2001)	10 (2002)

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2003) *Opportunity for All Fifth Annual Report*, CM. 5956, London: Stationery Office.

2.1.2 Country and regional variations in child poverty

Table 2.2 provides a comparison of various indicators of child poverty for countries within Great Britain. There is very little variation at the 40 per cent threshold before housing costs. After housing costs, however, Scotland has a lower rate than England and Wales. At the 60 per cent threshold, Wales has the highest child poverty rate, both before and after housing costs.

Table 2.2. Child poverty rate, various indicators (excluding the self employed), 2001/02.

Country	*Bottom quintile*	*<40% mean*	*<50% mean*	*<60% mean*
Before housing costs				
England	24	10	23	37
Wales	29	10	26	42
Scotland	30	11	27	39
Great Britain	25	10	23	37
After housing costs				
England	27	18	32	41
Wales	29	18	32	44
Scotland	27	16	32	42
Great Britain	27	18	32	41

Source: DWP, 2003.

Spatially, child poverty is unevenly distributed. For example, in England there are wards where over 90 per cent of children are poor and wards where less than 1 per cent of children are poor (Bradshaw, 2002).

2.1.3 The characteristics of children in poverty

Children are more likely to be poor if they:

- live in a household where no one is employed;
- live in a lone parent household;
- live in a couple family where there is only one full-time worker;
- their mother is of a younger age;
- there are four or more children in the household;
- youngest child in the family is aged under 5;
- there is a disabled adult or a disabled child in the household;
- family receives Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance;
- household belongs to an ethnic minority group, especially Pakistani or Bangladeshi in origin. *Source*: Bradshaw (2002).

2.1.4 The dynamics of child poverty

We have seen in Table 2.1 that the proportion of children experiencing persistent poverty (below the poverty threshold in at least 3 of the 4 years) fell from 20 per cent in 1991/94 to 16 per cent in 1998/01. This indicator is derived from longitudinal analysis of the British Household Panel Survey. It

can be complemented by a more detailed analysis by Hill and Jenkins (2001) from the same source. They traced child poverty experiences of children over 6 years (1991-1996). They found that 62 per cent of children under 17 had never been poor during that period, 24 per cent had been poor during one or two years, 12 per cent during three to five years and one per cent throughout all six years. Children 0-5 had the greatest risk of being poor more than three times. They identified nine per cent of children under 17 in chronic poverty, where their family income over the six years was below the poverty threshold. Again children 0-5 were most likely to be living in chronic poverty.

2.2 Children's accounts of their lives and experiences in poverty

To understand the experiences of poverty in childhood and the thoughts and feelings of children who are living in poverty, we need to turn to research which engages directly with children themselves. Historically the lives and experiences of low-income children have been obscured, both as children and as part of the population of the 'poor' (Ridge, 2002). However, the growing recognition that children are best informed about their lives and experiences is reflected in a developing body of research directed towards understanding how children in poverty experience and interpret their own lives. This section draws on four recent studies involving low-income children which explore through children's own accounts how the experience of poverty has impacted on their lives (Middleton et al., 1994; Davis and Ridge, 1997; Roker, 1998; Ridge, 2002). The studies reveal that the experience of poverty in childhood has a severe impact on children's lives across a wide range of economic, social, and familial areas.

2.2.1 Economics

The issue of children's capacity to access adequate financial and material resources to ensure social participation is one that clearly has profound implications for children in poverty. Childhood has its own social and cultural demands, and children's need for financial resources and their desire to attain certain commodities reflect not just the 'common culture of acquisition' (Middleton et al., 1994), but also the significance of consumer goods as a means of communication between young people (Willis et al., 1990). Studies with low-income children show that children identify several areas of concern, of these, three key areas emerge in children's accounts. First, their opportunities to access their own autonomously controlled financial resources, through pocket money or through employment; second, the need to own 'appropriate' clothing for peer acceptance; and third, the prohibitive costs of transport and its impact on personal mobility.

Pocket money

Pocket money is an important issue for low-income children, who have their own thoughts and feelings about its use and value. Children's interaction with the economic world is increasing and pocket money or an allowance is the main medium through which children and young people

generally gain access to their own source of money. Low-income children live in restricted economic environments and are less likely than others to receive regular pocket money, this is often driven by necessity especially for families on Income Support (Shropshire and Middleton, 1999; Middleton et al., 1994). When low-income children are able to gain access to pocket money, they identify it as an important element in maintaining their social status and social acceptance. For these children, pocket money is a vital source of autonomous income that allows them to share in part in the everyday activities and culture of their friends. It also gives them some opportunity to have some autonomous control over their own financial resources within a generally constrained financial setting. Children in one study said they used their pocket money not just for sweets and treats but also crucially to buy clothes, pay for school trips, pay for transport to see friends, and to go on social outings (Ridge, 2002). Low-income children who were not receiving regular pocket money often show a subtle understanding of their parents' financial situations restraining their needs and demands and expressing a resigned acceptance of their parents inability to provide a regular amount of money for them. Many children who did not have pocket money had found employment and this provided essential funds to share in the accepted social and cultural norms of their friends. Without access to pocket money or wages from employment children expressed very real fears of social exclusion. Some children and young people are also contributing to their family incomes, some with money from work, others through contributions in kind by trying to cover some of their own needs.

> 'It's hard for them with all of us. We have to help out with money, and by not asking for stuff'.
> 14 year old male (Roker, 1998)

Clothes

Children experience considerable social and peer pressures to conform to childhood norms and expectations. One area in which low-income children have indicated that they are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure and where they feel especially aware that their poverty is having an impact on their social lives is the clothes that they wear. Research has shown that children are under considerable pressure to wear 'acceptable' clothes from an early age (Middleton et al., 1994). Children who are poor identify clothing norms and expectations as particularly important for maintaining their social status and they make considerable efforts to secure the 'right' appearance to fit in with their peers. They also show an acute awareness of the consequences of wearing inappropriate clothing and the dangers of appearing 'different' and standing out from their peers. The perils of having the wrong clothes are particularly severe, and children express fears of being ostracised or bullied.

Concerns about having the right clothes for social acceptance also affects how low-income children feel about their appearance at school. Although they recognise school uniforms as providing them with some protection, they point out that the cost of school uniforms is so high that many low-income families cannot afford the complete uniform and children are left feeling vulnerable and exposed.

These feelings are particularly heightened when schools have non-uniform days when children are allowed to wear their own clothes rather than the school uniform. For many low-income children this presents a painful social challenge when they are stretched to find the right clothes to wear, and in some cases suffer agonies of worry leading up to the day and on the day itself.

> 'If you haven't got the right clothes and all your friends have got all the nice clothes you feel left out like, cos like you think to yourself "Oh they've got all the good clothes and they've got all the money to buy them" and that you feel left out. … I sometimes like get really worried if like I've got all these old fashioned clothes and I don't like them and everyone else has fashionable ones'.
> Sue, 11 years (Ridge, 2002)

Transport

A further important area of concern highlighted by low-income children is their capacity to access affordable transport for personal mobility. We discuss this further in Section 3.7.

2.2.2 Social status and friendships

Friendships

Friendship for children, as for adults, creates an entry point into wider social relationships. It plays a role as a social asset and a source of social capital, both in childhood and in the future. Conversely, difficulties in maintaining social relationships can leave children vulnerable to social exclusion (see Ridge and Millar, 2000). In common with most children, low-income children value their friendships and work hard to maintain their social relationships. However, it is apparent from low-income children's accounts that poverty in childhood has an impact on children's capacity to make and sustain peer relationships. Low-income children report difficulties in meeting friends and sharing in social activities with their peers, this leads to fears of social isolation and bullying. School presents an opportunity for children to meet a wider social group and enrich their social skills and social networks. However, school friends, particularly for low-income children living in rural areas, are often too far away to meet after school, and difficulties in accessing transport and the cost of transport cause significant problems for children trying to gain access to their friends, or join in clubs and other shared peer group activities (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Ridge, 2002). Lack of a telephone can also lead to feelings of isolation and difficulty in arranging social events

> 'You really feel cut off, can't speak to your mates, and people don't contact me now 'cause it's too difficult, they'd have to call in'.
> 15 year old male (Roker, 1998)

Social participation

Opportunities for leisure and shared social activities are increasing with the growth of private leisure centres, expensive sports complexes, bowling alleys, multi-screen cinema complexes and so on. However, these facilities are highly commodified and low-income children and young people find it hard to gain access to them. The provision of free or low cost access to clubs has been reduced and

low-income children report great difficulties joining in with their peers in the leisure opportunities that are available to them in their local areas. Significantly, many of the children interviewed in different studies showed a resigned acceptance of their 'restricted' lifestyles and the limited opportunities available to them. Many low-income children drew attention to the opportunities available to their friends and peers, and identified the costs of participating, including entrance fees, transport costs, clothing and equipment, as restricting their involvement. For children in larger families the participation costs are even more prohibitive. Some low-income children actively manage their social relationships to conceal their situation and obscure their financial circumstances. In these ways children mediate their experiences and manage their relationships to save face and cover up their inability to participate on equal terms in and out of school with their wealthier counterparts.

> 'Like when they went down town and they were spending their money, I'd go down town but not spending anything. If you're hanging around with people that are getting quite a lot of things from their parents and you are not, you feel you don't want them to know. That's the last thing you want them to know, and you're kind of like trying to keep it from them'.
> Amy, 15 years (Ridge, 2002)

School life

Children spend a significant proportion of their daily lives within the school environment which is an important site of pedagogical learning but also an important site of social learning. The experiences of low-income children within their schools indicate that schools may be failing to provide them with a sufficiently inclusive social environment for their needs. Low-income children reveal school life to be fraught with the dangers of bullying, material disadvantage and structural exclusion from shared activities through financial hardship. In one study, a substantial number indicated that they were being excluded from shared social events such as school trips and that they were unable to participate within school on the same basis as their peers (Ridge, 2002). Material costs in particular were identified as creating problems for children, including an inability to afford the costs of participating in school trips, which are an important part of shared school life, and provide an opportunity for social contact and different life experiences. With increasingly demanding exam curricula there are a growing number of opportunities to go on trips to enhance schoolwork and develop learning experiences. However, when children were unable to go on school trips they were particularly aware of being excluded from the shared experiences of their friends.

> 'Year 7 there was a French trip, it was one day and you stayed overnight on the ferry and most people went but I didn't go … I don't know it was a lot of money for one day. … But even now my friends sometimes bring it up and I'm like "Oh I didn't go, I can't talk about it"'.
> Amy, 15 years (Ridge, 2002)

Ensuring adequate resources to participate fully in school is another area of difficulty mentioned by low-income children. As we have seen, access to school uniforms is constrained, however, children and young people also highlighted difficulties obtaining books, stationery and bags for school. They

also compared their experiences with those of their more affluent schoolmates showing an acute awareness of the restricted opportunities presented to them in contrast to those available to their peers. Material costs became especially demanding in the final years of school when resources and equipment were needed for exam projects, and children wanted to ensure that they were able to produce work of an appropriate quality to be judged alongside other children's. Managing on a low-income frequently requires trade-offs between different needs and demands and children are fully aware that their parents cannot afford to provide for all their school needs. In some instances this means that children were excluding themselves from participating in trips and events by not even asking their parents for the money required. In other cases children indicated their awareness that difficult choices are often made.

> 'I had to choose either to have new shoes or to go to [the school trip] so I had school shoes instead'.
> 15 year old (Roker, 1998)

2.2.3 Poverty awareness and thoughts about being poor

When talking about their thoughts and feelings about being poor and living in poverty many children are particularly concerned that their friends and other children will see them as different. As we have seen, low-income imposes restrictions on children's lives, which means that they are often unable to participate and share in the same social and material conditions that are enjoyed by other more affluent children. When children reveal their inner worries and fears of social difference and stigma, they expose the impact of poverty on their self-esteem, confidence and personal security.

> 'You can't do as much and I don't like my clothes and that. So I don't really get to do much or do stuff like my friends are doing … I'm worried about what people think of me, like they think I'm sad or something'.
> Nicole, 13 years (Ridge, 2002)

Many children had experienced great upheavals in their personal lives, through unemployment, the onset of disability, and/or family dissolution, which had coincided with their parent's receiving social assistance and an extreme change in their circumstances. These children were keenly aware of their situation and were often very protective of their parents. While there is evidence that parents go to great lengths to protect their children from the experience of poverty (Middleton et al., 1997), there is also evidence that some low-income children are also trying to protect their parents from the realities of the impact that poverty is making in their lives (Ridge, 2002).

When low-income children talk about their worries and fears they articulate themes common to many children. Concerns about schoolwork and success or failure at school, friendships, and relationships with boy or girl friends, and bullying. However, there is also an overriding concern with money and fears of failure, and debt which would not be characteristic of children's general concerns. Low-income children reveal that they are particularly anxious about money and fearful that they or their

parents may not be able to manage on the restricted incomes that they have. Hopes for the future include the possibility of getting employment and making sure that their own children do not have to experience a childhood marked by poverty in the way that they have

> 'To have more money that's all, go to college so I can get a job so my kids don't have to go through it like'.
> Brad, 15 years (Ridge, 2002)

2.2.4 Concluding comments

This section has drawn on some of the few studies that exist in the UK that engage directly with children who are poor. These studies give us a valuable insight into children's lives and experiences and reveal how the effects of poverty and disadvantage can permeate every area of children's lives. From the material and more quantifiable aspects of their needs, to the social and emotional requirements, so important for children both in childhood and beyond. However, low-income children's lives are very diverse and their experiences will be mediated by many factors including age, gender, ethnicity, and disability, and we are only just beginning to develop a meaningful understanding of how different children interpret their experiences of poverty in childhood. What is apparent, is that the children in these studies are not passive victims of poverty and social exclusion but active social agents who show a keen sense of the impact of poverty on their own lives and great resilience and hope in the face of social and material disadvantage.

2.3 Children's services in the United Kingdom

The primary responsibility for children's upbringing rests on the shoulders of parents, but during the course of childhood (lasting typically 16 years) there are several other actors and agencies that contribute to children's well-being and healthy development. This section examines current policies and provisions in the United Kingdom which facilitate parents' role as carers and/or take over some or all of their caring tasks.

2.3.1 Home care

Maternity/parental leave provisions

Maternity/parental leave provisions in the United Kingdom are relatively weak. Job-protected, paid leave after childbirth is only available to mothers who satisfy certain eligibility criteria based on their employment records. There are two kinds of maternity leave provisions according to the mother's employment history and earnings level:

1. *Statutory Maternity Pay*: can be claimed by mothers who have been employed for at least 26 weeks by the same employer by the 15th week before the baby is due to be born. The maximum duration of maternity leave is 40 weeks: 18 paid and 22 unpaid.
2. *Maternity Allowance (MA)*: a benefit that aims to provide for mothers who do not fulfil the eligibility criteria of Statutory Maternity Pay (for example because they are self-employed or have

been employed by more than one employer in the qualifying period). Standard rate MA can be received for a maximum of 18 weeks.

Since April 2003, working fathers have the right to two weeks of *Paternity Leave*, paid at the same rate as statutory maternity leave. Both parents are entitled to *Parental Leave* to spend time with or look after a child under 5 even if there is no medical need for it. British Parental Leave is unpaid and is a maximum of four weeks per year per child, taken in multiples of one week periods.

Programmes targeting low income families

Sure Start programmes are delivered through local partnerships with the involvement of parents and the community. Their aim is to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of young (under 4 years old) children in disadvantaged areas. They provide services across health, education and family support. By 2004 Sure Start programmes aim to reach 400,000 under 4 year olds living in deprived areas of England (DWP, 2003). *Sure Start Maternity Grant* is available to low-income families (eligibility determined by the reception of means-tested benefits) to help them with the costs of a new baby.

2.3.2 Childcare

The UK and Ireland are unusual in Europe in having a large for-profit childcare provision sector as opposed to a state non-profit sector. In the mid-1990s, as mothers' labour market participation continued to rise – and in the absence of adequate state funded childcare – there was a threefold increase in childminders and a sevenfold increase in private nurseries (Skinner, 2002). In response to increased demand, the New Labour government developed the first *National Childcare Strategy* to improve state childcare provision. The strategy does not provide fully funded childcare services: rather the private/voluntary sectors are expected to fill gaps in provision. In April 2003 two means-tested benefits were introduced, offering financial help to middle and low income families using registered childcare (for types of childcare see section 3.3.1): the Child Tax Credit and the Working Tax Credit.

1. The *Child Tax Credit* (CTC) is aimed to provide help towards the 'general costs associated with bringing up children' and being in employment is not a criterion for eligibility. The amount of CTC awarded does however depend on household income, but the threshold is set high enough to include middle income households. Families with an annual household income of up to €84,968 are still eligible to CTC and if there is a child under age one in the household the income threshold rises to €96,686.
2. The *Working Tax Credit* (WTC) provides additional income to working families on low incomes. It contains a Childcare element for parents who use registered childcare. It can cover up to 70% of childcare costs, reaching a maximum level of €138.50 per week for one child and €205 per week for two or more children. To be eligible for the childcare element of the

WTC, lone parents must work 16 hours or more per week; and for couples, both partners must work 16 hours or more per week.

The Daycare Trust's 2003 survey of the cost of nurseries, childminders and after school clubs in England has revealed the following findings:

1. The typical cost of a full-time nursery place for a child under two is €187.50 a week and more than €9,740 a year.
2. The typical cost of a full-time nursery place for a child over two is €174 per week.
3. There are large regional variations within the country in childcare costs, London and the South East being much more expensive than the north of England.
4. The highest cost for a full-time nursery place identified in the survey was €439.50 a week.
5. The typical cost of a full-time place with a childminder for a child under two is €173 a week.
6. The typical cost for an after school club is €50 for 15 hours a week.

(*Source*: Daycare Trust, 2003)

2.3.3 Education

In the UK the minimum school age is 5 years of age and the school leaving age is 16. Normal school hours last every weekday from 9.00am to 3.30pm.

In an international context the UK exhibits a greater gap in performance between pupils from high and low socio-economic groups than other countries. The government's goal is to reduce this performance gap between different groups of the population and also between different parts of the country.

Following the 2000 Spending Review, the government established a €545 million *Children's Fund* targeting children aged 5 to 13. The Fund supports services to identify children who show early signs of difficulties and provide them and their families with adequate support. The types of programmes financed by the Children's Fund include: Family/Parent Support, Literacy Programmes, Mentoring Schemes and Health Awareness. There are presently 89 Children's Fund partnerships operating in England (DWP, 2003).

Education Action Zones (EAZs) have been established in areas where children are most at risk of failing at school. EAZs consist of a cluster of 2-3 secondary schools with their supporting primaries, working in partnership with local education authorities, parents and local businesses. EAZs initially run for three years, with the possibility of extension for a further two years. Presently over 1,400 schools are part of an EAZ, with over 1,000 businesses working in partnership with EAZs nationally. In 2000-01 the rate of improvement in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs (at grades A*-C) in EAZs was three times the national rate (DWP, 2003).

Modern Apprenticeships (MA) provide work-based vocational training for young people to achieve qualifications at foundation or advanced levels. In March 2002 there were 226,800 young people undertaking Modern Apprenticeships in England. Of those young people who left advanced MA in 2000/01, 86 per cent were in employment six months after leaving (DWP, 2003).

2.3.4 Transition from school to work or higher education

At 16 years of age, young people are technically able to leave school and go into full-time work. They are, however, much more likely to stay on in further education, higher education or training, or to become unemployed than to get a full-time job. Table 2.3 shows the main activities of young people who left school in 1998/99 in England and Wales.

Table 2.3. Changes in main activities of 1998/99 school leavers* (percentages).

	Main activity at 17 (Autumn 2000)	Main activity at 18 (Spring 2002)	Main activity at 19 (Spring 2003)
Full time education	66	41	40
Government supported training	11	8	6
Job	17	37	42
Out of work	4	6	5
Something else	2	8	6

*Sample size: N=5572.

Source: DfES, 2003.

Governmental policies targeting school leavers

Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was first piloted in 1999 in 15 local authorities. Its aim is to encourage young people to stay in further education after the age of 16. The scheme provides €43 per week to pupils on the condition that they stay at school or college and fulfil their learning agreement. The scheme is now available in around a third of the country (41 local authority areas) and over 12,000 young people are benefiting from it this academic year. Early findings from its evaluation are positive and EMAs are planned to be extended to cover the whole of England from 2004 (DWP, 2003).

2.3.5 Leaving home

Young people are leaving home earlier than in the past. There are variations in the age of leaving home by *social class* and *gender*. Women leave home before men and middle class before the working class (Jones, 2000). In 1992, 18 per cent of males aged 18-20 and 32 per cent of females aged 18-20 lived away from the parental home. *Family background* also seems to be a factor: young people living with a step-parent tend to leave home before those who live with their natural parents or a lone parent (Jones, 1995). For most young people there exists an intermediate stage between leaving their parental

home and establishing their own family home. There are several types of 'intermediate households' including: *sharing accommodation with previously unknown people* (e.g. students halls of residence, hostels, nurses' homes); *living with kin*; *living with peers/friends*; *living alone*; with a *partner* or as a *lone parent* (Haskey, 2001).

2.3.6 Children in state care: governmental policies

Quality Protects is a five year (1999-2004) programme to transform the governance, management and delivery of services for children in need, including looked after children, children with disabilities and children in need of protection. Quality Protects aims to ensure that children receive stable and safe care, are protected and enabled to participate in decisions about their lives and the services they receive. As part of the Quality Protects programme, the *Children (Leaving Care) Act* was implemented in October 2001 to improve the life chances of looked after children. The majority of young people leave local authority care at the age of 16 (46 per cent in 1998). The Act makes local authorities responsible as 'corporate parents' for the provision of continuing support and education to care leavers (DWP, 2003).

2.3.7 Homelessness

In the United Kingdom there were 119,950 households classed as homeless in 2000 (Jones, 2002a). The causes of homelessness among all households are complex, but the main factors are *violence*, *relationship breakdown* and *harassment* or *intimidation*. Associated risk factors include *poverty* and *deprivation*, *young parenthood*, *single parenthood* and *poor educational achievement*. In the UK, local authorities have a *legal responsibility* to accommodate families with children who are found to be statutorily homeless. Households must show that they are *in priority need* and have not made themselves homeless intentionally. Households containing a pregnant woman or dependent children represent main priority need categories (Jones, 2002a). Homeless households can receive temporary housing in *registered social landlord accommodation*, *Bed and Breakfasts*, in the *private rental sector* or in *hostels*.

The current estimate of youth homelessness in Britain is 31,000 16-21 year olds in 2001. Care leavers are very much over-represented among homeless youth, they are 60 times more likely to be homeless than other young people. A 1999 study of the *Safe on the Streets Research Team* found that 10,000 young people aged 16 had been living on the streets for a continuous period of 6 months or more before they turned 16 years old. The *Children's Society* estimated that 100,000 children aged under 16 run away each year in the UK (Jones, 2002a). Recent research suggests that the effects of homelessness on children depend on the reasons for homelessness, the age of the child and the type of accommodation and area where they are housed.

3 Children and Childhood: A Time and Space Perspective

3.1 Introductory note

The structure and content of this section of the report is, to some extent, driven by the data available. In trying to gather data sources that illustrate children's lives, it becomes quickly apparent that there is a great need to re-think the concept of 'social statistics'. Whilst national surveys help to describe UK society at a given point in time, it is clear that the 'social' that these statistics measure is adult-centred and not child-centred. For example, while the UK Census is regarded as an unparalleled source of detailed information for social scientists, the researcher interested in collating data about *children's* lives also faces an unparalleled obstacle course of difficulties when it comes to re-organising the data so that accurate and valid measures of change can be calculated. For example, a major difficulty is that several different age categories are used throughout the census itself (Ennew, 1994). So for instance, sometimes the counts refer to 'under one year olds'; other times, it can be 'zero to two years'. Worse still, sometimes these adult-based statistics can fail to include children at all. As Qvortrup (1997: 94) points out, if 'family statistics are taken at face value it seems that it is only adults who divorce, but we also know children are separated from one of the parents and often even from siblings.' Yet this information does not appear.

When it comes to researching children's access to space and use of time, the lack of child-centred primary data becomes even more important. Other than the new 2002 UK Time Use Survey, there are no quantitative data sources that directly seek to explore where and how children spend their time. Consequently it has been necessary to think about possible sources of information more creatively. First, we have re-examined general UK datasets (typically from surveys conducted by various government departments) to establish whether they contain any information on young people, and whether any of the data measured children's access to space and use of time. A significant problem here is the lack of consistency between the four countries in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) in terms of what data is collected, if at all. Second, we have turned to extant research that *does* specifically explore children's access to time and space. Aside from the 2002 UK Time Use Survey this is mainly of a qualitative nature thus providing information on a local or regional scale rather than a national one. A key source of qualitative data are a number of the projects funded within the UK's Social and Economic Research Council's research programme entitled 'Children 5- 16'. A third source of 'data' comes from UK policy and accompanying documents that guide the implementation of such policies.

3.2 Children, childhood and the family

3.2.1 Changing home and family spaces

Other than the school, the home and family are the main physical and social spaces in which most children live out their childhood. In terms of children's overall access to space and use of time, therefore, these spaces are especially important. Britain has recently witnessed significant changes to the home and family environments (see Section 1.1.2): specifically there have been substantial changes in marriage and divorce patterns. These have had important ramifications in terms of children's home and family experiences. For instance, separated parents can result in one-parent families; new relationships can create stepfamilies. For children with divorced parents, 'Family life no longer happens in one place but is scattered between several different locations' (Beck and Gernsheim, 2002). Indeed, the geography of divorce for these children is one of punctuated movement as the children travel from one home space to another and back again. Children become increasingly aware of the effort involved in maintaining a life across two households (Smart et al., 2001). Moreover, sometimes children feel that the effort that they are forced to contribute is disproportionate to that of their parents who, unlike the children, need not constantly displace themselves (*Ibid*.).

3.2.2 'Private'/adult free space at home: children's bedrooms

The child's bedroom begins to appear in British houses during the eighteenth-century, at the same time as children's nurseries and classrooms (Whitehead, 1997). From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the ideal is still that each child has their own bedroom. Where and when children do share a bedroom, the space is usually divided such that there are clear rules as to which designated space which 'belongs' to which child. Thus, the bedroom space of the child becomes symbolic of the growing child-centeredness in the modern family and household arrangements (Whitehead, 1997).

Activities and time spent in bedrooms

Children are spending more time in their bedrooms: this might be time spent alone or with friends or siblings. It is thought that one of the main causes of this is that, increasingly, children's bedrooms are equipped with a television set, video recorder and/or a personal computer (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998; Livingstone and Bovill, 2001; Hanley, 2002). This coincides with a decrease in the amount of time families spend watching television together (Hanley, 2002). It is suggested that the main reason why in-home entertainment and children's bedroom culture is so high amongst children is the perception that there are relatively few places children can go on their own (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998; Livingstone and Bovill, 2001; Hanley, 2002), see Section 3.5. Whilst more and more parents are placing a television set in their children's bedrooms, parents' attitudes towards this rising phenomenon are mixed. Many report that their decision to place a TV in the child's bedroom was the result of pressure from the children themselves claiming that 'everyone else has one' (Hanley, 2002). Parents who end up 'giving in' to the demands of their children tend, on the one hand,

to consider the media-rich bedroom to represent a 'safe place' compared to the dangers of the 'outside world'. On the other hand, the bedroom television represents a threat to traditional family relationships and more 'constructive' leisure activities, such as reading or other hobbies (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001; Hanley, 2002) and the child being exposed to unsuitable or inappropriate images or programmes (Hanley, 2002).

Privacy

The bedroom space is a particularly important space in the home with regards to which spaces children come to appropriate and claim as their 'own', and especially so as children get older. For many teenagers, the bedroom is converted to a private, personal space which reflects the child's individual tastes and interests (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). It becomes a place where friends are brought into and other non-invited individuals, i.e. other friends or family members, are actively *kept out.* It is often decorated to further reflect the teenager's emerging sense of self. This is the place where they can listen to 'their' choice of music, read 'their' magazines and unfold their private lives (Steele and Brown, 1995). For most adolescents, the bedroom becomes a personal space in which they can experiment with 'possible selves' (McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Markus and Nurius, 1986; Moffatt, 1989; Willis, 1990).

For children of divorced parents, 'the' bedroom space that they once 'owned' is lost. As Whitehead suggests, 'divorce evicts children from their own bedrooms.' With divorce, the child lives in two households and 'owns' two beds and two rooms, which may or may not both be referred to as their own 'bedroom'. Whilst fixed in the sense that households are fixed physical entities, the bedroom of the child affected by divorce is stretched across two households as the child pendulums from one 'bed and room' to the other.

3.2.3 Children in care: a space of their own?

Around 4 in 1,000 children are live away from the family home and are 'in care' under the responsibility of the state: these children are known as 'looked after' children. The reasons for entering the care system are related to poverty, family dysfunction or children's own behaviour. Between a third and half of looked after children come from families where marital/partner relationships are discordant and often marked by violence. Over the past 20 years the proportion of children entering the care system for reasons connected with abuse has risen rapidly while the proportions entering for other reasons have fallen. Children in care experience heavier demands of displacement – spatially and temporally.

A quarter of children 'in care' are in 'informal placements' with their parents or with relatives. Foster care accounts for 80 per cent of 'formal placements' while adoption and residential care account for the rest. Residential placements are divided between children's homes (two-thirds), boarding schools (one in ten) and a variety of other accommodation (e.g. mother and baby homes). Most formal placements are provided by the statutory sector but there is a growing independent sector (both for-profit and non-profit) which accounts for around ten per cent of the total time spent in foster care in Great Britain (Sinclair and Gibbs, 2002). Some children in care, especially those in 'residential care', may find themselves sharing 'dormitories' with other children and may lose the sense of a 'bedroom' space altogether, not having access to a private space of their own.

While a minority of children are 'looked after' for a short period of time, the majority of children are away from the family home for more than six months. For example, in England, in 2000, only 16 per cent of children had been in the care system for less than six months. Four in ten children had been in care for over three years and one in 20 for over ten years (Sinclair and Gibbs, 2002). In addition, nearly half of all 'looked after' children were on a full care order and would therefore never return to the family home. Children in care can also experience repeated 're-placements' from one foster family to another. For example, while the average duration of foster placements in England ending in 1998-99 was 230 days, 15,000 placements lasted for seven days or less (ONS, 2002).

3.2.4 Family and non-family time

Time spent together as a family is important to both parents and children (MORI, 2001; Christensen, 2002). In a survey conducted by MORI (2001), sharing time together was the single biggest factor identified by parents describing a 'successful family', with London parents valuing time together less than parents living elsewhere in England. Similarly, the majority of the 489 children involved in another study (Christensen, 2002: 80) claimed to enjoy spending time with family.

However, spending time together is not how families spend most of their time. For much of their waking time, parents and children are apart: adults spend a large proportion of their time at work whereas children spend theirs at school (UK 2000 Time Use Survey). Outside of school, children spend more time with their friends than their parents; this is increasingly so as they get older (Morrow, 2001). The MORI (2001) study found only a small proportion of the families sampled (15%) sat down to eat together in the evening. According to the UK 2000 Time Use Survey, children aged under 16 only spend two per cent of their time on their own. For the rest of their time, children are either in the company of their parents, siblings, friends, classmates and/or teachers.

'Family' time

The changing patterns of parental employment, particularly the increasing numbers of working mothers, has implications both in terms of where children are spending their time (and this is discussed in the following section) and how 'family time' is spent. Concerns about the impact of a decrease in the amount of time families spent 'together' ('quantity time') – in terms of their impact on the 'moral fabric of society' prompted policy responses which sought to protect family time (for example, Home Office, 1998). Underpinning these policies was the assumption that family time was 'quality time': time devoted to being together as a family (Christensen, 2002). What is interesting is that that premise on which these concerns and policies are based is erroneous. Indeed, a large scale international study (including the UK) by Gershuny (2000) has found that since the 1970's, despite the huge increases in working mothers and the increase in working hours, the time spent by parents with their children has increased. The reasons behind this include the fact that families are smaller, fathers are spending more time with their children, and parents are spending less time on themselves (Galinsky, 1999; Gershuny, 2000). It is this last reason which is seen as contributing most to the observed trend. The fact that children are spending more time at home due to anxieties about the safety of playing out (see following section) must also be contributing to this.

Recently published work by Christensen (2002) explored 11-13 year old's, living in both rural and urban areas, perspectives on 'family time' and what 'qualities of time' matter to them. Overall, the majority of children (~63 per cent) said they enjoyed 'spending time with family', and they 'liked this time more than the time they spent with friends or on their own'. Through ethnographic interviews, Christensen then went on to unpick what children mean by, and value from, family time. The *ordinariness and routines of domestic life* were seen as an important part of family life and featured strongly in children's descriptions of family time. Mealtimes and watching television together were frequently cited as examples of 'family time'. Mealtimes were seen as pauses or islands of time which brought a family together before dispersing again to different places and activities. *Availability of support* – to draw upon when needed – was the second valued aspect of family life, and this was not dependent on family members being physically together in the same room or being engaged in shared activities. Third, 'family time' was a time in which children felt there was the *potential to negotiate how they spent their time*. It can be a source of conflict but unlike other contexts (for example school), the possibility of some degree of control exists – and is worth fighting for! The fourth valued aspect of family time was *time to be alone in peace and quiet*, yet within reach of other family members. This was one of the aspects of family time that children often found hard to achieve. Likewise, *being able to plan one's own time* was something that was valued about family time but was constrained by the busy lives led by the children and other family members and the lack of space within the home to accommodate all the desired activities of family members.

What is clear from Christensen's work is the interrelationship between space and time in terms of children being able to enjoy the different aspects of valued family time. For example, the presence of 'safe' places to meet with friends outside the home influenced the extent to which children were able to negotiate how (and where) they spent their time; and sufficient internal domestic spaces will clearly affect the extent to which children are able to spend time quietly or to choose how they spend their time. These qualities of place/space are linked to socio-economic factors. Overcrowding is endemic among low income families, and it is these children who also perceive the greatest risks to playing out. Children in families renting their homes from their local authority or a housing association are likely to have to share a bedroom with a sibling – at least until a certain age. UK space standards are the lowest in Europe (Karn and Sheridan, 1994), but it would seem that the size of domestic space should not be ignored in any discussion of children's welfare.

3.3 Children/childhood and formal institutions

3.3.1 Formal care/provision for children outside school

Types of formal childcare

There are a number of different forms of childcare in the UK:

- Day nurseries
- Registered childminders
- Out of school clubs
- Holiday play schemes
- Play groups
- Early years education provision.

Childcare services which exist primarily to enable parents to work include day nurseries (preschool children), registered childminders (preschool and school aged children) and out of school clubs and holiday schemes (school aged children). Day nurseries are located in purpose built/adapted buildings. Out of school and holiday clubs can be located in a range of places: purpose built buildings, un-used classrooms, and community facilities, such as village or church halls. Typically they are within the boundaries of a school or close by. Childminders provide childcare in their own homes. In contrast, the purpose of playgroups is to provide preschool children with opportunities for socialising and play with their peers. Such groups only last a few hours a day and, typically, do not enable parents to work. As with out of school clubs and and holiday play schemes, playgroups can be located in a number of different settings: typically being found in school or community buildings. Finally, is the 'childcare' being provided within the auspices of the current government's early years education policy within private/voluntary sector 'nursery schools' and in nursery/reception classes in primary schools for children aged 3 to 4 years.

Trends in formal childcare provision

Recently there has been an expansion of public funded pre-school and out of school formal childcare services. This has been driven by a desire to decrease unemployment, particularly among low income and lone parent families, and thus reduce child poverty (Skinner, 2002). Thus the past ten years has seen dramatic increases in the use and availability of public funded childcare. In the mid 1990's, only two per cent of childcare services for children aged two years and under was publicly funded. This contrasted dramatically with other northern EU countries such as Denmark (48 per cent 0-2 childcare publicly funded), Sweden and Belgium (around 30 per cent) and France and Finland (around 20 per cent). Demand for childcare in the UK is therefore met by private, for-profit, providers with a threefold increase in childminders and a sevenfold increase in private nurseries in the UK in the mid 1990's (Skinner, 2002). Table 3.1 shows the trends in formal child care provision in the UK over the past three to four years as represented by the number of available *places* in different childcare settings.

Table 3.1. Trends in childcare provision (no. of places) in the UK: 1997 and 2001.

	No. of places available	
Type of child care	*1997*	*2001*
Day care nursery places	227,741	285,600
Out of school club places	95,279	152,800
Holiday scheme places	219,226	594,500
	1997	*2000*
Childminder places	417,527	352,590
Playgroup places	452,862	395,416

In essence, what has been happening in the UK over recent years have been substantial increases in the numbers of places in holiday play schemes and out of school clubs, and a less dramatic, but still clear, increase in the number of places for babies and young children in day care nurseries. At the same time there has been a decrease in the number of childminder and playgroup places. The decline in childminders has been ascribed to women who were previously childminders taking other forms of work due to the wider availability of childcare. In addition, low rates of pay and the increase in bureaucracy brought about by registration and inspection procedures are likely to have acted as deterrents (Mooney et al., 2001). The decline in playgroup places is the result both of the expansion of early years education services being provided both in school settings and by organisations that previously operated as playgroups.

Data on the number of early years education is collected in terms of the number of children using the service as opposed to the places available (thus the figures cannot be compared to those in Table 3.1).

What is clear from the data available (see Table 3.2) is that there has been an enormous increase in the numbers of preschool children attending some sort of early years education provision service in England, and this now exceeds the previously higher proportions found in Wales and Scotland.

Taken together the data presented here shows that, as well as there being changes in the locations child care is taking place, there is also an increase in the number of children in the UK using formal childcare – as opposed to being looked after at home by a parent or by informal carers such as grandparents and other relatives. In addition, there is a clear trend of an increasing number of young 'pre-school' children spending time in early-education, as opposed to less formal 'play' based, settings. Overall, these figures offer a clear picture of the changes that are taking place in terms of where and how children are spending their time. What is lacking at the moment is evidence in terms of children's experiences and outcomes of these new and different settings in which they are spending their time.

Table 3.2. Number of children under five in early education in the UK[ab].

	Year				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001 (estimates)*
Private/voluntary					
England	***	***	95,100[e]	364,800	386,200
Wales	***	***	***	***	***
Scotland[c]	***	14,623	20,458	***	26,040
Northern Ireland	***	1,945	3,407	3,957	***
Nursery schools/classes					
England	713,509	720,478	722,004	713,600	709,600
Wales	55,260	54,720	54,547	54,405	***
Scotland[c]	***	63,072	66,719	***	72,797
Northern Ireland	11,066	11,371	12,329	13,921	***
% Under 5 in early education[d]					
England	56	57	58[f]	88[g]	90[g]
Wales	74	75	77	79	***
Scotland[c]	***	***	83[g]	***	88[g]
Northern Ireland	***	***	***	***	***

a Preschool education provision in special schools, private/independent schools and hospitals are excluded
b For England, Scotland and NI there may be double counting as children may attend more than one provider. Thus percentages of total population receiving education are likely to be overestimates for these countries.
c Scottish data is not comparable across the years; in 1999 results are based on incomplete responses and in 2001 a new Annual Integrated Census was introduced. In addition, Scottish data is not easily comparable with other countries because children start primary school aged five and entry to school is once per year in August; children not aged five in August, defer entry for one whole year. Thus Scottish data will include some children aged five and over.
d Mainly children aged 3 to 4 years, but can include some aged 5. Excludes provision in private voluntary sector unless otherwise stated.
e Four year old children only.
f In 1999, a further 15 per cent of the four year old population were in education in the private/voluntary sector in England.
g Includes private/voluntary provision for three and four year old children.
(Table taken from: Skinner, 2002: 179)

3.4 Children/childhood and 'the market'

3.4.1 Children as producers

Within the UK, combining part-time employment with full-time compulsory education is viewed as acceptable though there is little research into the impact of child employment on well-being and achievement (Jones, 2002b). Data on the employment of children is very difficult to access as Government employment surveys typically do not extend below young people under 16 years of age. Within the UK, estimates of level of employment among young people aged 13-17 years suggest that 43 per cent have some sort of paid employment: most of these children are thought to be working illegally (Heptinstall et al., 1997). As Table 3.3 shows, apart from Denmark, these levels of child employment are markedly high compared to other European countries.

Table 3.3. Employment of 13-17 years olds as a proportion of population and of those in education.

	Belg.	Den.	Fra.	Ger.	Gree.	Irel.	Ital.	Neth.	Port.	Spain	UK
% of all 13-17 yr olds with paid work	1	44	5	12	8	7	8	16	25	9	43
% of those in education with paid work	-	39	0	1	1	2	1	15	3	1	35

Source: Heptinstall et al., 1997.

Using a different data source, Bradshaw and Williams (2001) found that, on average, children were working six hours a week during term time. In addition, while UK law restricts working hours in the summer holidays to 35 hours per week, one in ten of children with summer jobs were working more hours than this.

While babysitting and paper rounds are the most common form of work for UK children, and are viewed as 'children's jobs', many have jobs which are more commonly associated with part-time adult employment (Jones, 2002b). A survey conducted in 2001 showed that children are working in a number of different locations doing a range of activities, see Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Children's jobs

	Term time jobs (%)	*Summer jobs (%)*
Paper round	39	39
Baby-sitting	38	29
Shop work	15	23
Cleaning	14	17
Catering	13	13
Gardening	8	12
Office work	6	6
Market stall/street stand	4	6
Farm work	4	6
Milk delivery	3	2
Factory work	2	2
Other	21	17
Not stated	4	7

Source: TUC, 2001.

The key motivation behind taking paid work is money (Mizen et al., 2001), and for children from low income families part of their pay contributed to the household purse. However, there is no evidence that paid employment is taken as a substitute for pocket money (Bradshaw and Williams, 2001). Typically, money earned for spending on themselves is used by children to purchase items such as sweets, snacks, cigarettes and alcohol (Leonard, 1999).

3.4.2 Children as consumers

The notion of 'children as consumers' is a burgeoning topic within the research and literature relating both to 'children and childhood' and 'business and marketing'. Essentially, authors point to the increase of commercial spaces that are designated to children's goods or that are specifically marketed *at* children. Much of this work tends to fall into two camps. Some authors argue that the notion of consumer children, and the marketing trend from which this emerges, are positive movements, which may also be beneficial to children's daily lives in general. In contrast, others are less welcoming of these changes and argue that the rise of children as consumers marks further evidence of the 'end of childhood' thesis (Postman, 1994); in turn, they argue that the movement of child to child-consumer must be viewed at least with ambivalence, if not negatively (Zelizer, 1985; Kline, 1993; Best, 1998; Cross, 1998; Cook, 2000a; Cook, 2000b).

On the other hand, however, there is an aspect which sheds a positive light on the issue of children as consumers, namely in terms of its implications to thinking about children's agency (McNeal, 1992; Luke, 1994; Cook, 2000c; Cook, 2001) and as 'significant players in the economy' (Smith, 2000). That is, their purchasing and spending power (Gunter and Furnham, 1998) can be seen from a number of angles (see Hall, 1987): the money that children spend on themselves (see McNeal, 1992); the money that children spend on others; the money that parents, relatives, friends and others spend on children; the influence that children have over family purchases and expenditure (see Browning, 1992); the influence they have over their peer's purchases (Bachmann et al., 1993); and the money they will spend in the future as teenagers and adults.

Interestingly, however, despite this documented market potential, and more importantly, this agentic potential, there is surprisingly little research explicitly exploring the implications of these consumer changes on children living in Britain, or on British society as a whole. Indeed, the vast majority of the research and literature on children as consumers emerges from authors writing about, and research conducted in, American society. Yet a quick glance at some 1997 expenditure levels (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997) involving children shows that children, directly or indirectly, are active parts of Britain's consumer society: it costs approximately €72,000 to care for a child up to 17 years old – 90 per cent of this is spent by the parents; approximately €4,300 is spent on children each year for regular items (e.g. food, clothing, childcare, school, toys, etc.); parents spend an average of €8.49 a week on

children's educational items (e.g. school trips, school materials, etc) and on average, another €119 on birthdays. In 2000, children spent an average of €14.3 a week (Social Trends 31, 2001). Boys and girls show different spending patterns with boys spending more money on leisure goods and services than girls; girls spent significantly more money on clothing, footwear and personal goods than boys (Office for National Statistics, 2000; Mintel International Group Ltd., 2001). Child related expenditure in the UK can also be seen as an inter-generational and relational phenomenon: ten per cent of all money spent on children is provided by friends or relatives; grandparents spend on average €3.2 a week on each grandchild. At Christmas time, children receive around €360 but 37 per cent of this is provided by people other than the parents.

In addition, there is the continuing increase in the number of commercial outlets within the (growing) shopping spaces in and around British cities, which are aimed at young consumers (Russell and Tyler 2002). For example, 'Claire's Accessories' (originally an American retail outlet selling a range of (mostly glittery) jewellery and hair accessories aimed primarily for young girls) first appeared in the UK in 1996 with 50 outlets throughout the country; there are now 370 shops scattered about Britain (Claire's Accessories). More generally, the market for childrenswear is estimated to have grown by 31 per cent between 1995-2001, to reach €8.5 billion (Mintel International Group Ltd., 2003).

Thus, given the changes to the British child related market, the relative lack of literature on children as consumers in contemporary British society is interesting. It reflects a general sense of conflict about children's participation in British society, and the British construction of childhood more generally (see Hendrick, 1997). It seems there is growing tension between, on the one hand, a desire to continue to perceive children as social actors who participate as economic agents in the wider social world. On the other, the view that children must not act or participate 'too much' or else the construction of children as 'passive', 'dependent' 'innocents' (Jenks, 1996) is potentially – at least temporarily – 'fractured' (Bourdieu, 1990).

3.5 Children/childhood and public space

3.5.1 Public outdoor spaces

Public outdoor places have been termed the 'fourth environment' where children spend their time: the others being home, school and the playground (Matthews and Limb, 2000). Overall, public outdoor places form an important part of the lifeworlds of many UK children, being spaces where they can meet up with friends and be away from the 'adult gaze' (Matthews and Limb, 2000). Research into children in public outdoor places has tended to focus on children in their local neighbourhoods. It does not include children's use of commercial or service settings, such as shopping centres, cafes/restaurants and sport and other leisure facilities.

Comparative data analyses suggest an increase in the age at which children tend to be allowed to 'play out'. O'Brien et al. (2000) compared data from their survey of over 1,300 children with that collected in the 1970's and 1980's (Hillman et al., 1990). They found evidence of a decrease in independent use of public spaces by 10/11 year olds, but little change among 13/14 year olds. There have been more marked changes in terms of specific behaviours or activities. Thus whereas in 1970 94 per cent of children walked to school unaccompanied, this figure had fallen to 47 per cent in 1998 (this is due both to an increase in parental car use, parental chaperonage and increased parental choice of school). Another area of change has been the number of parents allowing their children to be unaccompanied when out after dark: six per cent of parents allowed this in 1990 compared to two per cent in 1998. Yet despite these increases in restrictions imposed on children, evidence suggests that only a minority of children live highly restricted, 'home bound' lives.

The main causes behind these trends are parental fears about dangers from traffic and 'strangers', the latter being fuelled by intense levels of media coverage of child abductions and paedophiles despite there being no evidence of an increase in actual risk. However, as O'Brien et al. note, 'increasingly, in the UK context at least, letting children roam or play out unaccompanied is becoming a marker of neglectful or irresponsible parenthood' (2000: 273). In particular regions other factors mean that children are not allowed to 'play out'. In certain parts of Northern Ireland, active terrorism is thought to have impacted on children's use of and presence in outdoor public places (Quilgars and Wallace, 2002). Chahal and Julienne (1999) found that racial harassment also curtailed children's use of their local neighbourhood. Concerns about 'gangs' and the activities associated with the illegal drugs market were greatest among children living in very deprived or 'troubled' estates, and were a barrier to 'playing out' – imposed both by the children themselves and their parents (Matthews, 2001).

UK research also reveals considerable differences between children - in terms of age, gender, location, ethnicity and income/social class – with regard to the extent to which they spend time without adults in public outdoor places, the types of public outdoor places they frequent, and what they do in these spaces (Matthews and Limb, 2000; O'Brien, 2000; Raey, 2000; Robertson and Walford, 2000). In addition, the seasons – and their associated weather and the duration of daylight – affect the extent to which children 'play out' (Matthews, 2001). Boys are more likely to use outdoor public places (see Table 3.5), and tend to use these spaces for sporting activities. For girls, outdoor public places are social venues.

Table 3.5. Playing out without an adult by gender and location for children aged 10-14 yrs.

Inner London		Outer London		New town	
Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
67%	84%	75%	87%	82%	93%

Source: O'Brien et al., 2000.

In O'Brien et al.'s study, exclusion from outdoor public places was highest amongst older Asian girls. In an inner London suburb, just 37 per cent of older Asian girls played out compared to 92 per cent of boys from the same neighbourhood. As the researchers note, it was the dominance of boys in the locality which meant that the cultural need to protect girls' honour resulted in their absence from neighbourhood streets.

For some children – typically those from lower income families – 'the street' was where they spent their time because they had no where else to go (Matthews, 2001). These children do not have the resources of more affluent children to use settings such as leisure centres, fast food venues and other more 'formal' recreational venues. A lack of space within their own homes also means children need to find other ways and places to be with and do things with their friends.

Table 3.5 also highlights the impact of location on 'playing out'. So-called New Towns – housing estates developed with plenty of green spaces and community facilities – appear to be environments which most support children being able to 'play out'. Research about children living in rural communities is very scarce and, intuitively, it would seem that the issues associated with 'playing out' are likely to be different. In addition to whether or not rural children are 'playing out', is the question of whether they are playing out alone or whether they are able to play out with their friends who may not live a walk or bike ride away. Complaints about a lack of transport and increased levels of boredom and isolation reported by young people living in rural areas, reported by Matthews and Limb (2000) reiterate the importance of accounting for location in any picture painted of children's out of home lives.

3.5.2 Spaces for teenagers

Research with children aged 11-18 years (teenagers) and parents suggests that the lack of local, non-commercial spaces where teenagers can spend time together 'off the streets' contributes to the reported levels of boredom and, for some, subsequent troublemaking among teenagers (NACRO, 2000). Seventy per cent of parents and young people taking part in one survey believed that young people commit crimes because there is not enough for them to do (Nestle UK Ltd., 2002). A key feature of the sorts of spaces teenagers want to have access to is that it is specifically for their age group and

offers the opportunity to spend unstructured time with their friends and peers. The need for access to such a facility in the evenings and not just after school has also been highlighted. At the moment in the UK, access to places such as these are few and far between though initiatives are underway to develop these sorts of services, such as the 'Make Space' campaign (www.makespace.org.uk) which is being led by the UK wide organisation Kids' Clubs Network.

3.6 Virtual space[2]

Children's access to virtual space[3] always occurs, by necessity, within real time and space. *Where* children access virtual space and *when* they do so are, therefore, pivot points around which issues of power and control are articulated. In other words, the nature and extent of children's access to the virtual is structured by where they access it (e.g. in the home or in the school) and when (e.g. in the evenings or during their lunch break). The 'politics of cyberculture', Jordan (2002:1) notes, 'revolves around issues of grossly uneven regional distribution of the Internet'. The politics of children's cyberculture in England seems to be of a similar kind. Indeed, a common issue within the literature and children's own narratives of cyberculture is that of 'difference': virtual space is more accessible to some children than others; it is accessed from different places in different ways; how the virtual affects the real is different to how the real affects the virtual. Essentially, new sites of social exclusion are emerging in the UK because of different patterns of children's access to virtual space. In what follows, some of the ways in which the virtual and the real impact and interact with one another in the everyday lives of English children are briefly described.

3.6.1 Inequality of access to virtual space

The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is a central issue in current British education policy. 'IT for All' was a Government initiative launched in the late 1990s aimed to make information technology accessible, understandable and convenient for everyone. Since then, there has been an overall upward trend in ICT use in schools across the UK. Virtually all schools are connected to the Internet (DfES, 2001a), and computer to pupil ratio continue to improve, with there being on average one computer for every nine pupils (DfES, 2001a). Indeed, the DfES's (2001c) 'Young People and ICT' study revealed that 99 per cent of the children sampled had used computers at home, school or elsewhere. Seventy-three per cent of the children sampled used the Internet at home, school or elsewhere. However, despite the increase of computers in schools, children's access to ICT is both limited and uneven (see Valentine and Holloway, 1997-1998; Becta Report; Becta, 2002; DfES, 2001a) – dependent on factors such as school resources and teachers' skills.

[2] Due to the sparse extant research in this field across the UK, all the studies reported in this section are confined to those based upon samples of children living in England.

[3] The terms 'virtual space', 'cyberspace' and 'Information and Communication Technologies', i.e. 'ICT', are used synonymously. They refer to Internet use, e-mail, on-line games and general computer use, including word processing.

The other main place from which children access virtual space is from the home. In a survey (DfES, 2001a) of over 2,000 pupils in 60 schools across England, 48 per cent of the primary pupils and 64 per cent of the secondary pupils sampled reported access to the Internet at home. Household income and class differences tend to determine the likelihood of having a computer in the home and hence, children's pattern of access to virtual space. The main reasons why parents do not purchase a computer for the home is cost related (Valentine and Holloway, 1997-1998; DfES, 2001a). Thus middle class children are more likely to have access to virtual space in the home compared to lower class children (Valentine and Holloway, 1997-1998; DfES, 2001c). In addition, children make more use of the home computer than the school one (Mumtaz, 2001; DfES, 2001a). Thus children without a home computer are, therefore, further disadvantaged in terms of the relative ICT skills acquired.

3.6.2 Control over access to virtual space

In the same way that parents control children's access to outdoor space through microgeographies of surveillance (Valentine and Holloway, 2001) and temporal regulations (Christensen et al., 2000) parents control children's access to virtual space also (Valentine and Holloway, 2001; see also DfES, 2001d). Where the PC is located structures how and when children access virtual space. 'In some homes,' for example, 'the internet-connected personal computer is actually located in a particular room to facilitate Foucauldian surveillance (and self-surveillance) of the children's use of the Internet' (Valentine and Holloway, 2001: 77). Of course, the actual cost of being on-line can also pose restrictions on children's access to virtual space. For example, parents will impose time restrictions upon when during the day (e.g. after 6 p.m. is cheaper) and the amount of hours the children spend on-line (Valentine and Holloway, 1997-1998; DfES 2001c).

Whilst both the literature, adults' and children's representations of virtual space tend to depict ICT as a space completely separate from people's off-line worlds, this representation is inaccurate in two important ways. First, ICT has the potential to transform the relationship between school and home (Becta, 2002; DfES, 2001d). For example, it encourages communication between home and teachers via e-mail, web-sites can inform pupils and teachers (Becta, 2002). Second, as Valentine and Holloway (2002) research revealed, children's on-line worlds are not, in practice, separate from their off-line worlds. In terms of how children integrate ICT into their daily lives, Valentine and Holloway (2002) identify four main ways in which their 'real' lives are incorporated into their 'virtual' lives and how the 'virtual' is incorporated into their 'real' lives. They suggest that the real is incorporated into the virtual in the identities some children use 'on-line' are direct (re)presentations or based on their off-line selves and activities; in addition, on-line worlds reproduce class and gender divisions, and the economic and temporal realities of children's everyday lives impact upon the nature and the extent of their on-line activities. Similarly, the virtual is incorporated in the real: on-line activities help to

maintain, develop and reconfigure both distant and local real relationships and friendships; children use ICT to find information about their off-line hobbies and interests; and children talk about their 'real' hobbies and lives, develop friendships on-line which then become part of their off-line social networks.

The issues related to how real space and time affect children's access to virtual space are plentiful. Only a few have been presented here. How gender and class differences and access to virtual space map onto each other has not been discussed (see Valentine and Holloway, 2002; Becta, 2002; DfES, 2001c). Nor have the social perceptions of risk related to children's access to on-line worlds (see Valentine and Holloway, 2001; DfES, 2001d). What we have tried to highlight, however, is that children's access to virtual space is structured by, amongst other things, the economic and temporal realities of their everyday life, the material realities of the technology itself (Valentine and Holloway, 2002: 312), as well as the parental and school restrictions imposed upon them.

3.7 Mobility: moving between spaces

Children should be able to move between spaces which are familiar and local to them. Transport is a key to social involvement for many children, but for low-income children access to transport is often constrained by a lack of personal and family mobility and the cost of using public transport (see Section 2.2.2). Children living in low-income families without private transport, in areas served by inadequate and costly public transport, are particularly disadvantaged. These children report that the cost of transport has a severe effect on their ability to move beyond the confines of their local environment and to socialise with their friends. It also constrains their capacity to join in and regularly attend clubs and other social activities with their peers.

Without access to transport to move freely out of their immediate environment and develop social networks and activities further afield, many of the children are effectively confined in their immediate locality. For some low-income children local neighbourhoods are characterised by insecurity, degraded spaces, the dangers of traffic, and in some cases hostile adults.

3.7.1 The school journey

The journey between home and school is the one that children most often make, and accounts for over a quarter of all trips made by people under 16 years of age (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), 2001). The average distance to school for children in Great Britain is 3.6 kilometres. In metropolitan built up areas, this falls to 2.5 kilometres; in rural areas, it rises to 8.1 kilometres for children. In general, the travel patterns of primary school children (aged 5-10) differ from those of secondary school children (aged 11-16). This is due to the different levels of

independence between these two age categories but also because children tend to live closer to their primary school than their secondary school.

The travel distance, the age of the child and the regional variations are key to which mode of transport the children selected. For example, in metropolitan areas, 58 per cent of children of all ages walk to school, but in rural areas, only 29 per cent do so. As a general pattern, however, more children across the UK aged 5-16 years tend to walk to school than use any other single mode of transport (48% in England, 45% in Wales and 57% in Scotland). These figures, however, show a general decline in the numbers of primary aged children walking to school compared to previous years. Second in choice in England and Wales, is travel by car followed by bus transport: 30 per cent of children in England and 25 per cent in Wales travel by car, whereas 18 per cent of children in England and 28 per cent in Wales travel by bus. However, in Scotland, more children choose to travel by bus (23%) than those who travel by car (19%). This pattern is similar to previous years, though across the UK, car travel has increased and bus transport decreased. As far as time taken to travel to school is concerned, primary school children take on average 12 minutes whereas secondary school aged children take about 23 minutes, roughly twice as long (DETR, 2001). As is to be expected, travel to school usually takes place at the same time each weekday morning and evening.

3.7.2 How safe is travel to school?

Britain's overall road safety record is the best in Europe and the overall rate of serious road injuries to children is better than average compared to other EU countries. However, accident rates for child pedestrians are higher than in most other EU countries (DETR, 2002). It is thought that one of the reasons why child pedestrian casualties are high is that children tend to need to cross major roads, wide roads, roads with higher traffic flows as well as roads with higher speed limits. In other words, the different land-use and road networks are such that it tends to be more dangerous for children to cross roads in Britain compared to other countries. Every year, over 4,500 children are seriously injured and 130 children die whilst travelling by foot or by bicycle. Another 60 children die whilst travelling by car; over 1,100 are seriously injured by travelling in this way. Most of these deaths and injuries involve children on their way to or from school.

4 Citizenship and Childhood in the United Kingdom

This section examines how children living in Britain can gain British citizenship status, what being British entails from the perspective of children's rights and at what stages of their development do children acquire the social, legal and political rights which will ultimately contribute to their full citizenship status (for a summary see Table 4.1).

4.1 British citizenship

In 1992 the UK government ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN Convention). The Convention sets out principles and standards for the treatment of children, and for laws, policies and practice which affect children. Article 7.1 of the UN Convention states that every child 'shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents'. The UK does not comply with these requirements in all circumstances. Children of immigrant and refugee families, for example, might experience statelessness as well as separation from their parents during their stay in the UK (UK Agenda for Children, 1994).

How can a child acquire citizenship?

In Britain difference is made between two kinds of citizenship: (a) citizen by descent, and (b) citizen otherwise than by descent. Citizens *by descent* gained British citizenship not through their own birth, adoption, naturalisation or registration, but through that of a parent or grandparent. Citizens *otherwise than by descent* have gained British citizenship through their own birth, adoption, naturalisation or registration. The difference between the two kinds of citizenship is that a citizen otherwise than by descent automatically passes on British citizenship to his/her children who are born outside the United Kingdom, but a citizen by descent does not (Home Office). Unmarried fathers can only transmit British citizenship to their children if they assume legal guardianship over them.

Why do some children not get citizenship?

The *British Nationality Act 1981* removed the automatic entitlement of children born in the UK to British nationality. Since 1983, children born in the UK are stateless if: (a) neither of their married parents are British citizens or are settled in the UK *and* (b) the child cannot acquire the nationality of his/her parents (Home Office). Children of parents who are not settled in the UK must be aged between 10-21 in order to register for British citizenship. This entails, that under British law, a child might be stateless for the first ten years of his life, which is a violation of the right to a nationality as stated in the UN Convention. Furthermore, children born in 'undocumented' refugee or immigrant families, might not register for citizenship for fear of the consequences for their families (i.e. the

investigation of their immigration status). Non-British children might consequently have no access to health care, appropriate accommodation and benefits, and be at a disadvantage in relation to British children (UK Agenda for Children, 1994).

4.2 Children's rights

Child citizens have certain civil, political, economic and social rights in the UK. These rights are however often restricted because of children's dependence on their parents, teachers and policy makers. The 'child's best interest' is often decided by adults especially if the child is under the age of 16. For children under 16, their 'mental competence' must be proven, before they can participate in legal proceedings.

4.2.1 Social rights

Parental responsibility

It is important to establish legal recognition of parentage since it entails certain rights and responsibilities in relation to the child. The *Children Act 1989* emphasizes the concept of parental responsibility rather than parental rights and defines this as 'all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property'. If the parents are married both parents automatically have parental responsibility, if they are unmarried only the mother automatically has this although the father may acquire it through marrying the mother, adopting the child or obtaining a court order (The British Council).

A parent is responsible for the care and upbringing of their child and the *Children and Young Persons Act 1933* imposes criminal liability for abandonment, neglect or ill treatment upon any person over the age of sixteen years who is responsible for a child under sixteen years. Under the *Child Support Act 1991* each parent of a qualifying child is responsible for maintaining it and this maintenance assessment will be enforced through the court if necessary. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives an education (The British Council).

Family environment

The *Family Law Act 1996* sets out the legal proceedings relating to *marriage breakdown, divorce and separation*. In the case of divorce or separation the welfare of children is paramount and the court has particular regard to among others: 'the wishes and feelings of the child in the light of his age and understanding and the circumstances in which those wishes were expressed' (The second report to the U.N., 1999: 68).

In the case of *adoption*, the child's right to be heard in judicial and administrative procedures affecting the child and the child's rights to have his or her views given due weight still need to be strengthened. In particular:

1. The child is not normally entitled to party status in adoption proceedings.
2. In England and Wales, the child may have no representation or other voice in proceedings between parents concerning residence and contact or in applications by fathers for parental responsibility. (The second report to the U.N., 1999: 69)

The *Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service* was launched in April 2001. It is responsible for looking after the interest of around 65,000 children whose well-being is decided by the courts. Its aim is to help the court to decide what is in the child's best interest (DWP, 2003).

4.2.2 Civil rights

Children's legal status

Children under the age of 10 are entirely exempt from *criminal responsibility*. Children over 9 and under 14 years are exempt from criminal responsibility unless the prosecution can prove that the child could distinguish between right and wrong at the time of the offence. A child over the age of 14 is responsible for his actions as though he were an adult.

In terms of *civil law*, a person under the age of 18 is known as an infant. An infant may not sue or be sued in person, this must be done via a 'next friend' which would usually be a parent but can be someone appointed by the court. A minor cannot enter into a contract, cannot make a will and though he may own property they may not hold the legal title until they reach the age of 18 years (The British Council).

The minimum legal age for *getting married* is 16 years old. In Northern Ireland the written consent of the parents or Guardians is required for persons who have not reached 18 years old and have not been previously married. If either of the persons is below 18 a birth certificate must be produced. In the United Kingdom the *age of consent* for entering into a sexual relationship is 16 years.

Education

Children have the right to full-time education from the age of 5 up to the age of 19, and the minimum school leaving age is 16 years. In Northern Ireland, many children are obliged to begin school at four (*Education Reform Order 1989*). Government policy on education is dominated by parental choice, the *National Curriculum* and the encouragement of greater managerial and financial independence for schools. It has sought to diminish the role of local authorities and to devolve the responsibility of

delivery of education to the individual school. Policies are concerned with the rights of parents but often fail to address the rights of children (UK Agenda for Children 1994: 151).

Play and Recreation

The *child's right to play and recreation* is not recognised in legislation and it could be said that compulsory schooling itself interferes with this right. A child must spend 200 days per year in school from the age of five, earlier than in many European countries. The importance of play and recreation is supported by the UN Convention, yet these activities are often marginalized.

Health care

The National Health Service (NHS) offers universal coverage in terms of health needs of children. However the *Children Act 1989* and the *NHS & Community Care Act 1990* do not include a principle concerning the 'best interest' of the child in the legislative framework of the NHS. The rights of children in relation to *health care provision* are subject to the influence of the parent or carer. In relation to provision of health and related services for children, much of the legislation is couched in terms of duties owed to children by various bodies rather than rights owned by children.

One of the most fundamental rights in health care is the *right to consent to treatment* or to withhold consent. This right of the mentally competent adult is firmly protected by law. The *Family Law Reform Act 1969* states that competent young persons over the age of 16 years can give consent to medical treatment without regard to the wishes of their parents or those with parental responsibility. However, this does not give young people total autonomy as the ability appears to relate only to the giving of consent and not the withholding of consent. If a young person (under 18) refused consent to treatment (especially if life saving) then anyone with parental responsibility could override their refusal and give consent on their behalf, the court also retains the right to override the young person's wishes (The British Council).

The right of children under 16 years to make their own decisions about medical treatment is restricted. Children under this age can only consent to treatment without parental authority if they are deemed to be of sufficient maturity and understanding to do so. The decision as to whether a child is 'competent' will usually be taken by the health care professionals involved in the child's care, sometimes with input from clinical psychologists, teachers etc. Some doctors will involve children in decision making in relation to their treatment, but most of the time the parents are seen as having total authority in relation to the child's treatment. Staff caring for the child and children themselves are often unaware of the child's rights in this area.

The law recognises a duty of confidence between a doctor, or other health professional and their patient in relation to information obtained by the doctor in his professional capacity, the patient has the *right to confidentiality*. If a child is deemed to be capable of forming a confidential relationship with the doctor, the obligation of confidentiality applies as it would to an adult patient. However this right is not absolute. A doctor may disclose confidential information where it is in the public interest to do so, or if he can show that it is in the child's best interest (e.g. in case of suspected child abuse) (The British Council).

4.2.3 Political rights

Active citizenship – child participation in decision making processes

The New Labour Government has introduced *Citizenship* as a subject to be included in the national curriculum in Britain. Pupils develop skills of enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action through learning about and becoming informed and interested citizens. This is achieved through creating links between pupils' learning in the classroom and activities that take place across the school, in the community and the wider world.

Right to Vote

The legal age for participating in local and general elections is 18 years. Young people aged 16-17 can register themselves on the Electoral Register but cannot vote until they turn 18.

4.3 Excluded children: two examples

In this final sub-section we have chosen to highlight two groups of children – gypsy/traveller children and refugee/asylum seeking children. These are just two groups of children (others include disabled children, children in residential care/living away from the family home) who are likely to be excluded from what might be understood as a 'normal' UK childhood. We have included a commentary about these children to serve as a reminder to the fact that among the UK population certain children or groups of children will not experience the 'typical childhood' described in the remainder of this section.

4.3.1 Gypsy traveller children

Article 30 of the UN Convention states that a child belonging to 'ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin … shall not be denied the right … to enjoy his or her own culture'. Despite this, for the 120,000-150,000 Gypsy Travellers[4], of whom approximately half live in caravans and half in houses (South West Public Health Observatory, 2002), the extent to which this

[4] The term 'Gypsy Travellers' is based on a person's ethnic background rather than their lifestyle. In the UK, Gypsy Travellers comprise mainly of English and Welsh Romany Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers and an increasing number of European Romanichals (Van Cleemput and Parry, 2001).

right is exercised is questionable. Indeed, as this section shows,[5] Britain's Gypsy Traveller children[6] tend to be significantly disadvantaged compared to their resident counterparts living in the same localities in relation to, among others, access to education and space.

A number of schemes (for example, Traveller Education Support Services) have been set up to support the integration of Traveller children into mainstream education (Kiddle, 2000). However, despite these efforts, Gypsy Traveller children are the most at risk in the education system, in terms of attainment levels compared to school and national averages (Ofsted, 1999). Regular school attendance and drop out rates of the estimated 50,000 Gypsy Traveller children 0-16 years (Ofsted, 1996) are still very poor (Ofsted, 1996, 1999; Kiddle, 1999, 2000; Jordan, 2001a, 2000b). Transfer from primary to secondary school is a particular point of concern with dropout rates increasing significantly (Ofsted, 1999; Kiddle, 2000); the majority will have left school altogether by the age of fourteen (Kiddle, 2000).

There are many reasons for these patterns. Though the most obvious one is perhaps that of mobility, Hawes (1986) notes school attendance does not necessarily improve when a family is housed. In addition, it is thought that low teacher expectations (Ofsted, 1999) and racist bullying and name calling (Lloyd, et al., 1999; Ofsted, 1999; Lloyd and Stead, 2001; Jordan, 2001a; 2001b) are important problem factors. Other explanations relate to the cultural differences in how childhood is constructed within Gypsy Traveller and non Gypsy Traveller/resident cultures. For example, many Gypsy Traveller families perceive formal education as having little relevance to a culture that has always relied on practical skills and self employment and that once basic literacy has been achieved, there is little need to attend school (Van Cleemput, 2000). There is a also a fear about assimilation and that children may pick up different and unacceptable moral values (Van Cleemput, 2000; Jordan, 2001a). Whereas children's agency and autonomy are seen as positive characteristics, which are actively fostered in Gypsy Traveller culture, at school, where conformity and child dependence are prime, such values are compromised and perceived negatively (Jordan, 2001a).

In terms of access to space, similar issues to those mentioned concerning education arise. Gypsy and Traveller children have, of course, as much right of access to certain spaces and 'wild places' (Nabhan and Trimble, 1995) as any child. However, within the British legal system, there exists institutional discrimination against Gypsy and Traveller children's spatial practices and nomadic lifestyle, which is based on ingrained 'sedentarist' assumptions about what constitutes a normal way of life' (Bancroft,

[5] The studies upon which this section is based tend to be small qualitative studies, which are localised to particular geographical areas of the UK. Due to widespread non-literacy levels and a nomadic lifestyle, such studies are typical of research concerning this social group.

[6] Obtaining population numbers for Gypsy Travellers is notoriously difficult. However, OFSTED (1996) estimate a total of 50,000 children under sixteen years old. Although the cut off point of sixteen years is primarily due to the very low numbers of over 16 year old Gypsy Travellers in education, it also highlights the social construction of when 'adulthood' begins for different social groups.

2000). The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act is seen to be the key problem here for it effectively criminalises their nomadic way of life (Home Office, 1994). The effect of this legislation is that the freedom to travel and stop at will for work or other purposes is greatly impinged (Jordan, 2001a). Furthermore, many of the 'official' public Gypsy sites are located in 'hostile environments that are deemed unsuitable for any other development, such as on old waste tips, or beside or underneath motorways (Van Cleemput, 2000). Home (2002) sums up that the contested position of Gypsy Travellers derives from general 'antipathy towards them, the perceived inconsistency of the nomad seeking a settled base, the difficulties of incorporating caravans (essentially movable property) under land use regulation, and the reluctance of the planning system to accord a special exemption from countryside protection policy to a minority group'.

Overall, it is clear that there is a need to disentangle four main causal factors that are thought to play a part in explaining the disadvantages experienced by minority Gypsy Traveller children compared to their resident counterparts: the effects of poverty and low socio-economic status, the effects of their mobile lifestyle, the effects of cultural attitudes and the effects of marginalisation from mainstream society (South West Public Health Observatory, 2002: 10).

4.3.2 Refugee and asylum-seeker children

The net inflow of children entering Britain between 1985 and 1999 was nearly 74,000, with numbers being at their highest in the 1980s (Dobson et al., 2001). The growing numbers of 'separated/unaccompanied children' in the UK entering Britain are particularly important – from 603 in 1995, 3,349 in 1999 (Aycotte and Williamson, 2001), to approximately 5,500 reported in 2001 (Battle, 2001). Although children of all ages come to the country, most are aged between sixteen and seventeen. Most separated/unaccompanied children are based in England, though an increasing number are located in Scotland and Wales; there are still relatively few in Northern Ireland (Aycotte and Williamson, 2001).

It is not possible in such limited space to discuss the current status of immigration, refugee and asylum policies in the UK. Suffice to say, however, that amongst those who lose out the most in terms of financial and social support offered to them according to current policy are children (Penrose, 2002). Many families struggle to send their children to school because they do not have sufficient financial help to provide shoes and school uniforms (Penrose, 2002). While asylum seekers can apply to the school or the local authority for extra help for such fundamental items, this requires an awareness of entitlements and knowing how to make relevant applications. Penrose (2002) remarks that 'special support', which would entitle them to the same benefits as UK citizens, such as milk tokens, vitamins, etc., would be of great benefit to such children and families. At present, asylum seekers have no claim to mainstream welfare benefits.

One of the most controversial current policies impacting on refugee children is the dispersal scheme (see Home Office, 2001). The idea behind the scheme is that refugees are placed *throughout* Britain in order 'spread the cost' and thus to relieve pressure on the social and economic structures of only a few localities. There are examples of this policy working very well. However, in practice a number of relatively serious problems have been arisen. Firstly, although the NASS (National Asylum Support Service) will not disperse families or children if they have been living in the same place for a year, it may, and indeed it does, disperse individuals who have been there for any time up a year, i.e. they can be dispersed after having 'settled' for eleven months. Thus, refugee children, who tend to already be in great need of stability for social and psychological well-being and integration, may nonetheless experience yet another upheaval simply because a decision regarding their dispersal has finally been made. Furthermore, the way in which dispersal actually takes place is an issue. Although some people working closely with the children (social workers, child psychologists) may be informed of the date of dispersal, the family or children are only informed on the day on which it occurs. Overall, it is clear from research and many of those working with refugee and asylum seeking children that at 'ground level', government policy does not meet the needs and rights of children (as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Child). Moreover, swift changes to the system are necessary in order to improve the lives of these children (Refugee Council, 2001).

Table 4.1. Children's rights on basis of age, United Kingdom 2002.

From age	Type of rights	
	Civil/Political	**Economic**
0-3	Right to a name. Right to a nationality. Right to a guardian. Right to privacy. Right to medical treatment.	Right to child support. Right to Child Benefit (0-19 years).
5-19	Right to full-time education. Right to special education.	From age 7 can open savings account i own name.
10	Age of criminal responsibility, but treated as a child during proceedings	
13-16		Can work for up to two hours a day (no school hours).
14	Treated as an adult in criminal proceedings.	
16	Right to consent to medical treatment. Right to access own medical records. Right to marry with written parental consent. Age of sexual consent.	Free to negotiate own terms and condit Employment. Can open cheque account in a bank in
17	Can apply for a driver's license.	
18	Can sue or be sued in person in civil proceedings. Right to make a will. Can renounce British citizenship. Right to marry without parental consent. Right to refuse medical treatment. Right to vote.	Right to own (have a legal title on) pro Right to enter into a contract. Aged 18-21: right to receive the nation wage (at the lower rate).
22		Right to receive the maximum national wage.

5. Final comments

In the process of describing UK childhood and children a number of issues emerge. First is the sheer heterogeneity of childhood/children, and the impact of socio-economic, cultural, geographical and demographic factors which impinge on the experience of childhood. It begs the question: Is childhood becoming increasingly heterogeneous? Second, is the absolute importance of seeking children's views and perspectives on observed phenomena/social trends. Third, is the 'resilience' of children and their creativity in dealing with the problems and difficulties they encounter: there is a sense that children are adept at 'finding ways round things', and this is very much in line with the notion of children as active agents. However, this does highlight the most significant 'evidence gap' we encountered: that is, what are the *outcomes* of these reported changes to children's access to and use of time and space? How have they impacted on children's views of their lives and their well-being? These are important questions, yet the dearth of existing data and a lack of on-going research which is concerned with exploring children's welfare in terms of time and space mean these questions run the risk of going unanswered.

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