

## Care provision and policy interventions

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**Tuesday 2 September, 4.45pm**

**Data on a new generation of fathers: findings from a new UK-wide birth cohort (the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study)**

**Alyce Raybould - University College London, Lisa Calderwood - University College London, Alissa Goodman - University College London, Pasco Fearon - University College London and University of Cambridge, Erica Wong, University College London, Karen Dennison, University College London, Rebecca Goldman - Fatherhood Institute, Adrienne Burgess - Fatherhood Institute**

Fathers are typically 'less-often-heard' from in birth cohort research: sometimes mothers report on them by proxy which can lead to measurement bias and limited variables, or when fathers do take part, they are nearly always recruited through their child's mother which can lower their response rates and lead to only certain kinds of fathers taking part. Fathers that do not live full-time with their child (nearly 20% at age 9 months) are particularly seldom-heard from.

The Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study (ELC-FS) successfully tested a new UK-wide birth cohort of several thousand families with a baby aged 8-12 months in 2023-2024. A key innovation of the study was using birth records as a sampling frame. This meant that both mothers and fathers, including those living in their own households, were directly recruited into the study.

In this presentation, I will discuss the development work we undertook with fathers to maximise their participation in the study, and the subsequent father response rates. I will showcase some of the data available for research on fathers in ELC-FS, including about their personal circumstances and parenting involvement. I will also present preliminary findings about fathers in the study, comparing ELC-FS to the first wave of the last UK-wide birth cohort in 2001, the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). For example, we find that 1 in 2 dads say they fed their baby at least once a day, compared to 1 in 4 dads in MCS, reflecting the changing roles of fathers in modern families.

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**Evaluating people's perceptions of family policies to support fertility in Scotland.**

**Francesca Fiori - University of Strathclyde, Daniele Vignoli - University of Florence, Raffaele Guetto - University of Strathclyde**

In 2023, fertility in Scotland fell to a historical low, to the extent that low fertility is regarded as one of the country's future challenges, and the Scottish Government is committed to reduce barriers preventing individuals from starting a family. The implicit assumption is that if conditions were more favourable, people in Scotland would have more children. But is that the case?

This study answers this question by conducting Factorial Survey Experiments (FSE) on a sample of respondents of childbearing age living in Scotland. This approach allows the appraisal of hypothetical and complex policy scenarios. The FSE questionnaire focuses on the hypothetical situation of a couple with one child who would like to have a second one. It is structured as a series of 'vignettes', i.e., a description of the fictitious couple's characteristics and of a combination of family policy measures; each vignette is followed by a question asking respondents to predict how likely is the fictitious couple to realise their intentions to have a second child.

Data collection is ongoing, and the BSPS Conference will offer an opportunity to share first findings. Regression analysis will be used to address the following research questions:

- 1) Do fertility intentions respond to policy changes? And if so, are there specific measures likely to have a stronger impact? Or are fertility intentions more receptive to the combined effect of composite policy packages?
- 2) How might family policies impact differently on fertility intentions across population sub-groups (e.g., by parity or socio-economic status)?

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**Care leaves and unemployment risks in Finland and Sweden. Comparing periods of economic upturn and downturn.**

**Kathrin Morosow - University of Manchester, Marie Evertsson - Stockholm University**

Research on women's career advancement after the transition to parenthood has been abundant. However, little is known about how periods of economic downturn combine with care leaves to produce increased employment volatility among those taking leave. In periods of economic downturn, leave policies may either protect from negative career outcomes or aggravate individuals' employment prospects. Finland and Sweden have been referred to as 'economic twins' during the 1990s recession, making the comparison an interesting one in terms of how different family policies structures women's return to work and employment volatility.

In this paper, we follow mothers who have a child in the period from 1993 to 2012, focusing on unemployment risks after a birth in four various time periods in Sweden and Finland. Drawing on yearly population register data, we estimate discrete time, event history models of mothers' risks of experiencing unemployment of at least ten days in periods of economic downturn compared to upturn/stability in Sweden and Finland. We find reducing ones maternity/parental leave benefit uptake reduces unemployment risks in both countries, but the home-care allowance hides (even higher) unemployment in Finland. The link between the share of income from leave/care benefits and unemployment risks are strongest in the period 1993/1995 to 1996 in both countries, indicating that a high share of income from leave/care policies correlates with increasing unemployment risks. Taken together; the Swedish family leave system seems to do a better job than the Finnish leave system of facilitating mothers' return to work after childbirth.

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**Exploring Physical and Mental Health in the Sandwich Dual-Earner Couples: A Dyadic Analysis**

**Yan Wen, Nan Zhang - University of Manchester**

The rise of the sandwich generation highlights the growing need for informal care within families, which has stimulated extensive discussions about health disparities between the sandwich and non-sandwich generation, especially when both partners are employed. However, current research shows no conclusive findings on health outcomes across family caring roles, nor consistent findings on gendered health outcomes and health inequalities within couples. This research uses advanced quantitative methods including Fixed-Effects models and Actor-Partner Independence models, drawing on the sample of dual-earner couples from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2010-2022) to explore (1) how physical and mental health outcomes differ between sandwich caregivers and non-caregivers; and (2) how health outcomes differ between wife and husband within families. Our result shows that a sandwich dual-earner couple have better physical health and worse mental health compared to their non-sandwich counterpart, offering empirical evidence of the role strain theory and the stress process model. Wives in the non-sandwich group show both physical and mental health disadvantage compared to their husbands. This differential health implication reflects the structural social forces in shaping gendered caring experiences. Our results also suggest that the gender health disparities within couples are the smallest amongst sandwich generations compared to other generations, while confirming that the wife may have greater resilience facing the caring burden than the husband, it also suggests the traditional division of labour might be disrupted when the caring burden increases.

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