Social Mobility Commission

The childhood origins of social mobility: socio-economic inequalities and changing opportunities

June 2016

Richards, L., Garratt, E, and Heath, A.F. with Anderson, L. and Altintaş, E. ***Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, Oxford University***

Social Mobility Commission
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

contact@smcpcommission.gsi.gov.uk

About the Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England. It consists of up to 10 commissioners, supported by a small secretariat.

The Commission board comprises:

- The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn (Chair).
- The Rt. Hon. Baroness Gillian Shephard (Deputy Chair).
- Paul Gregg, Professor of Economic and Social Policy, University of Bath.
- David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation.

The functions of the Commission include:

- Monitoring progress on improving social mobility.
- Providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility.
- Undertaking social mobility advocacy.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies and the UK Data Archive are acknowledged for collecting and making available the data examined in this project. The authors would also like to acknowledge our expert colleagues at Nuffield College who have been on hand to offer guidance.

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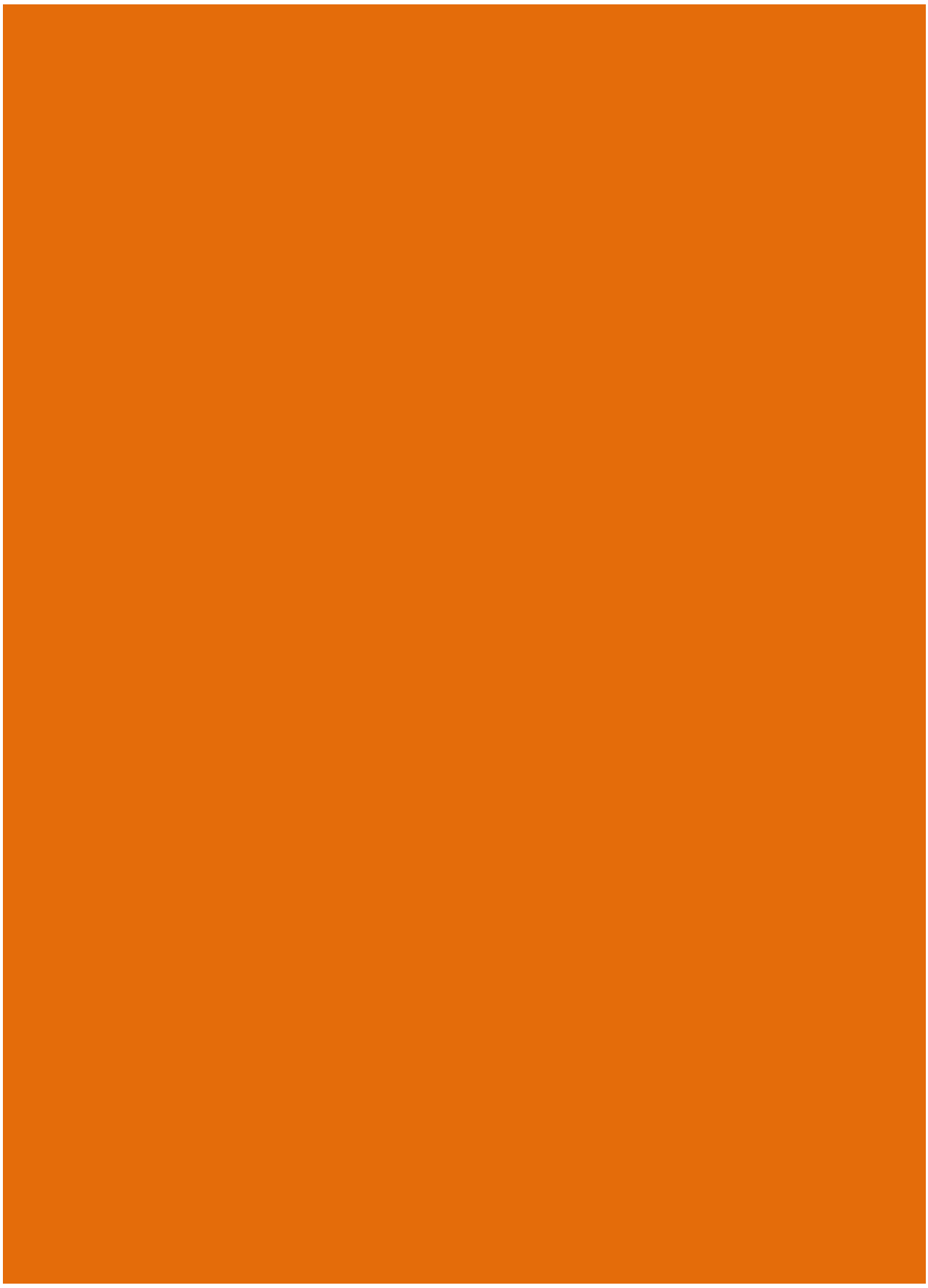


Executive summary

- In his recent book *Our Kids*, Robert Putnam presented an alarming portrait of growing inequality in the United States. His study examined features of the lives of children and families that are known to help or hinder the prospects of doing well as adults. He showed that the lives of rich and poor children in the USA are on diverging paths of opportunity. Growing inequalities were shown for parental time investment, spending on extra-curricular activities, educational success and parents' social capital, among other factors alongside growing economic inequality.
- This report was commissioned by the SMCPC for the purpose of replicating for the British case, as far as possible, the findings in *Our Kids*. In this era in which public concern about poverty, inequality, and social mobility has been increasing, our primary aim in this report is to find out if the situation looks equally gloomy in Britain as in the United States, or if British society exhibits increasing rather than decreasing equality of opportunity.
- The childhood origins of social mobility are divided into three domains for our analysis: parental engagement (including parent-child interaction), children's behaviours, and parents' social capital. We set out to measure the degree to which 1) these factors are unequally distributed between the social classes, 2) there has been overall improvement or deterioration over time, and 3) the socio-economic gaps are widening or narrowing.
- We use multiple survey data sources which have broad coverage in terms of the indicators and the time-span covered. For a small number of measures we are able to compare outcomes today to the 1960s; in other cases we are restricted to exploring change just over the last decade, and for others we are only able to present a snapshot from a single time point. Parental Socio-Economic Status (SES) is measured in two ways: parental occupational class and parental education level. We use absolute rather than relative measures of socio-economic inequality (as was done in *Our Kids*).

Findings

- The picture in the UK does not look as bleak as in the USA (see summary in Figures 1 and 2). While we do find inequalities and areas of concern, there are also areas of children's lives in the UK where we see both improvement and narrowing inequalities over time:
    - Children's behaviours around norm and rule violation were consistently shown to fit this pattern. Truancy, for example, showed a decline from 15 per cent of pupils in 1999-2000 down to 10 per cent in 2013-2014. This improvement was accompanied by a narrowing of the socio-economic gap, which declined from 11 percentage points to 5 points over this period.
    - Helping with homework increased overall from 81 per cent to 83 per cent while the SES gap closed from 15 percentage points in 2004 to 4 percentage points in 2013.
    - Attendance at parents' evenings at schools increased overall from 90 per cent to 95 per cent and the SES gap narrowed from 20 percentage points in 2004 to 12 percentage points in 2013
    - The frequency with which mothers read to their children also increased substantially between 1965 and 2006, from 50 per cent to 95 per cent (though

the true increase was probably rather smaller because of methodological changes) and the SES gap narrowed from 19 to 6 percentage points

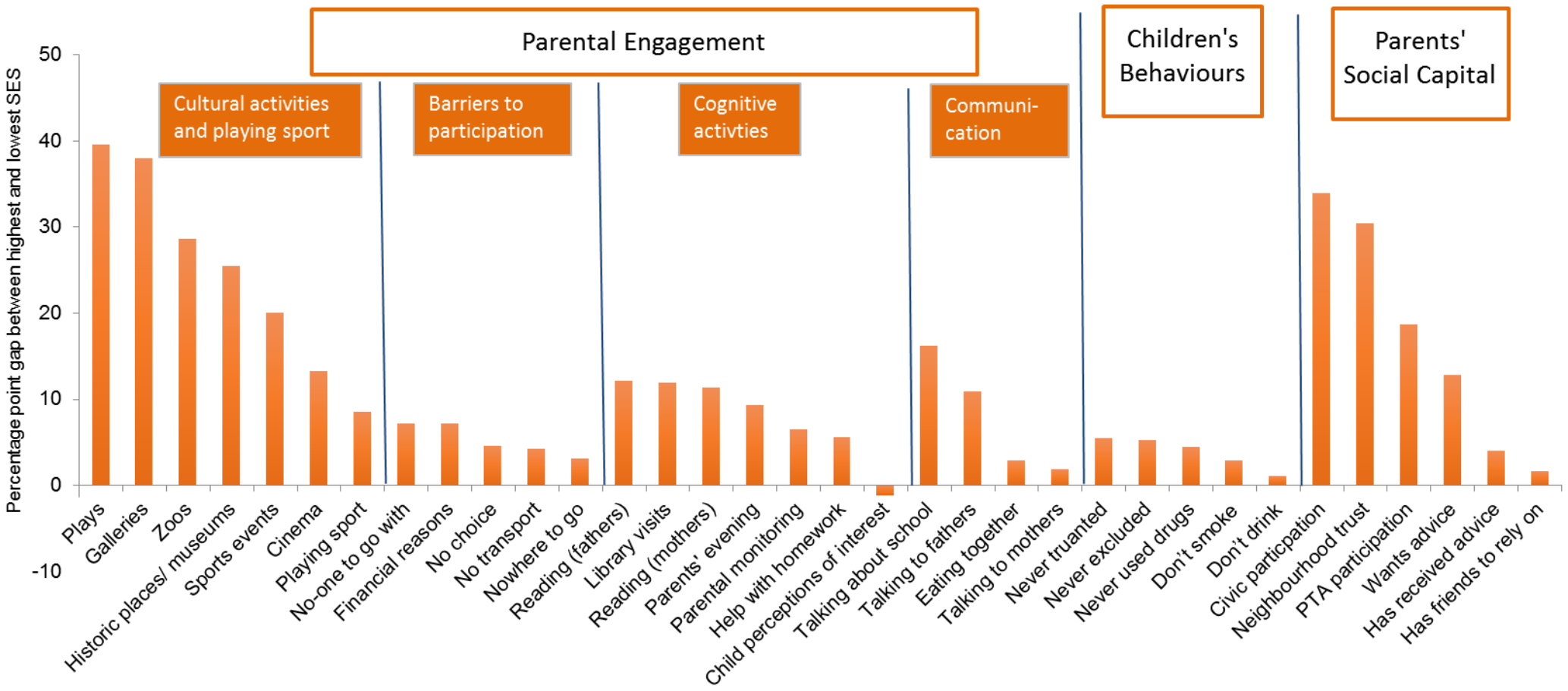
- Some indicators show overall improvement, but rather than narrowing, we see widening inequalities[1].
    - This is the pattern observed in the amount of time that parents spend doing activities such as playing or reading with their children. There was an average increase from 23 minutes per day in 1975 to 80 minutes per day in 2015. However, during this period the size of the SES gap doubled from 20-30 minutes to 40 minutes per day.
    - We see the same pattern in fathers reading to children. Though this increased from 37 per cent to 71 per cent between 1965 and 2006 overall, the gap between high and low-SES families widened from 15 to 26 percentage points.
- Our third pattern of change is where we find average deterioration over time, but widening class inequalities.
    - This pattern of change is observed for children's well-being and behavioural problems: Unfortunately methodological problems means that we cannot confidently state whether the overall incidence of these problems has been increasing or not, but there is a clear picture of widening socio-economic inequalities over time.
        - Conduct problems – in 1969 low-SES children were nearly twice as likely to score in the highest 10 per cent of conduct problems as high-SES children, a gap growing to 3.5 times as likely by 1980, a level continuing to 2012
        - Emotional symptoms – in 1969 children from all backgrounds had equal risk but by 2012 low-SES children were twice as likely as high-SES children to score in the highest 10 per cent
        - Hyperactivity – in 1969 children from all backgrounds had more or less equal risk but by 2012 low-SES children were almost three times as likely as high-SES children to score in the highest 10 per cent
    - We also found evidence for decline accompanied by widening gaps in parental civic engagement. Overall levels declined from around 47 per cent to 41 per cent between 1994 and 2012, while the SES gap widened from 13 to 17 percentage points.
- In terms of where things stand now, even where we have seen improvement over time, socio-economic inequalities persist in almost all of our indicators (see Figure 1):
    - There are a number of indicators for which we could not get reliable measures to compare over time but where substantial inequalities exist. These include several measures of parental social capital:
        - Living in cohesive neighbourhoods (around 79 per cent of high-SES parents agree that their neighbours can be trusted compared to 41 per cent of low-SES parents)
        - Involvement with Parent-Teacher Associations (22 per cent of high-SES compared to 4 per cent of low-SES parents)
        - Having high-status acquaintances in social networks – for example, 48 per cent of high-SES compared to 14 per cent of low-SES parents know a university or college lecturer

[1] We also saw an increase in cinema attendance but with widening inequalities; however, we are not sure if this pattern is typical of cultural participation more broadly as we do not have consistent time-series data.

    - We also see very large SES differences of up to 40 percentage points in some cultural activities.
    - Socio-economic gaps in parent-child communication tend to be somewhat smaller, as are socio-economic differences in physical activities (which appear to cut across class lines to a substantial extent).
    - Finally, the absolute gaps in norm and rule violations are very small reflecting the relative rarity of these events
- Some of these findings are quite close to those reported in *Our Kids*: in particular our findings on the amount of time that parents spend doing activities such as playing or reading with their children parallel Putnam's findings, as do our findings on parental social capital. Other of our findings, such as the positive story about narrowing inequalities in norm and rule violations, are not specifically covered in *Our Kids* (which shows a snapshot from a single time point, rather than overtime change). We also found some differences between the UK and the USA. Families eating their evening meals together, for example, do not vary much by social class, and inequalities are not worsening over time. Furthermore, we do not cover in this report some topics to which *Our Kids* gives considerable emphasis, such as the widening SES gaps in children's educational attainment (though here we suspect British evidence would tell a somewhat different story from the American one).
- While these patterns may seem quite complex, there is in fact a fairly natural explanation which makes sense of almost all these findings. Basically we find that there are 'floor' and 'ceiling' effects. Thus, in cases where higher socio-economic groups are getting closer to the 'ceiling' – as for example in the case of mothers reading to their children which has reached 95 per cent – then it is possible for lower SES groups to catch up. The gaps narrow once higher groups have reached 'saturation' level.
- We find something very similar when we get closer to the 'floor' – as in the case of young people's smoking and drinking. As these forms of norm and rule violation become rarer, then there is again more scope for the lower SES groups to catch up.
- In a sense, then, the big stories are about the trends over time, with mothers reading to their children becoming the norm, and rule violation becoming rare. The decreasing class inequalities are largely driven by the overall improvements over time.
- This interpretation also makes sense of the case of improvement accompanied by a widening socio-economic gap, which we observed with fathers reading to their children. Here we are quite a long way both from the 'floor' and from the 'ceiling'. One possible interpretation is that higher SES fathers are 'ahead of the curve' and have adopted new patterns of behaviour (perhaps reflecting their egalitarian gender norms). While lower SES fathers are also adopting these norms, they are probably later adopters, and so the SES gap has continued to widen. If the overall improvement continues, we might well find that the SES gap will begin to narrow.
- For policy-makers, the priority should perhaps be the cases where trends are not so positive, and the inequalities are widening. *Our Kids* showed a number of examples of this sort of worrying pattern, and in Britain we found a worrying pattern of increasing SES inequalities in children's behavioural problems which is possibly associated with overall deterioration over time, although we must emphasize that methodological problems prevent us from being sure about the extent of the trend over time.
- The causes of the widening gaps in behavioural problems are not well understood, but it does emphasise the importance of continuing work to help young people with behavioural problems. The fact that we see such divergent patterns of change between rule-violation type behaviours and behaviours reflecting emotional and psychological disorder strongly suggests that these domains are quite distinct from each other in terms of experience and drivers. It is possible that peer-oriented risky

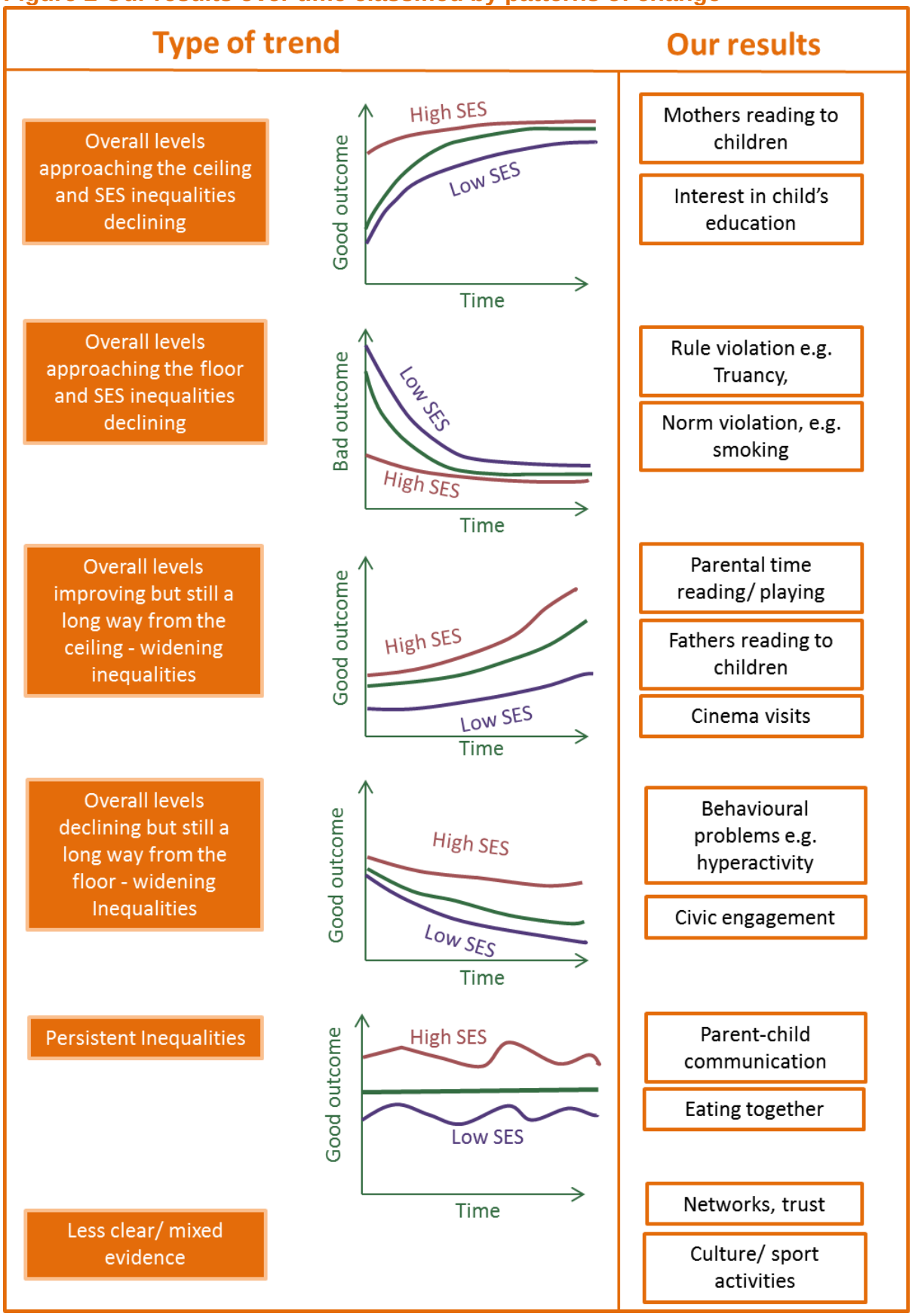
behaviours are being displaced by more individualistic expressions of difficulty coping, but this is an area in which more research is required to understand the processes of change and their consequences. Whatever the reason for the changes, these behavioural problems are a cause for concern. The effects of these disorders on later-life outcomes are large and pervasive.

Figure 1 Differences between high and low Socio-Economic Status families by domain and indicator



Note: Only findings that translate well into percentage point differences are reported here

Figure 2 Our results over time classified by patterns of change



Introduction

Research into social mobility typically compares the occupational (or income) attainment of adults in mid-career with the occupations achieved by their parents at a similar age. This is the classic and perhaps the most objective way to gauge levels of social mobility in Britain. However, the American political scientist Robert Putnam, in his recent book *Our Kids*[2], likens this approach to looking in the '*rearview mirror'*; his point is that by the time we measure rates of social mobility, it has already occurred for that generation. This means that any interventions to foster upward mobility and prevent downward mobility are likely to be too late to make a difference to the current generation. What we really need to know, argues Putnam, is what is happening to equality of opportunity now, not in 20 years' time when today's young people will have reached 'occupational maturity'. *Our Kids* was an investigation into the lives of children in the USA, covering economic inequality and related aspects of family, school and community life which are likely to make a difference to their subsequent life trajectories. The focus of the study, in other words, is on the changing *antecedents* of social mobility.

This report was commissioned by the SMC for the purpose of replicating for the British case, as far as possible, the findings in *Our Kids* which had presented an alarming portrait of growing inequality in the United States. It suggested that socioeconomic gaps in a range of indicators including parental time investment in the care of their children, participation in extra-curricular activities, college education, the size of social networks, and civic engagement have been widening over time, a finding that has bleak consequences for social mobility now and in the future. However, economic, institutional and cultural differences between the US and UK make it less clear whether these gaps in opportunity and equality will also have widened in the UK. In this era in which public concern about poverty, inequality, and social mobility has been increasing, our primary aim in this report is to find out if the situation looks equally gloomy in the Britain, or if British society is more resilient and equal.

We do not replicate Putnam's study to the letter, but we use indicators relating to each of the key areas of children's lives, which we organise into three domains. The first relates to the *interaction* between parents and children. Parental engagement matters; the amount of time parents spend reading to their children or doing other 'developmental' activities is known to cultivate cognitive development. How much do parents 'engage' with their children's school homework? Monitoring or helping is likely to lead to punctuality and higher quality work (independent of children's academic skills) that sets in motion a positive feedback loop with the teachers and the child's academic confidence. Interaction which is 'non-cognitive' (in the sense that it is less closely linked to school work), such as parents and children regularly talking, is also important for doing well at school and in life. Where parents are able to offer more emotional support, children are less likely to fall behind or to engage in risky behaviours.

Secondly, we examine children's behaviour including 'problem' behaviours such as hyperactivity and conduct disorders in childhood which are known to increase the likelihood of unemployment as adults. Other norm-violating behaviours we might label as 'risky', such as drinking, smoking and taking drugs, and are associated with poor educational attainment; exclusions from school are likely to have negative effects lasting a lifetime.

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[2] Putnam, R.D. (2015) *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

The third domain relates to the social networks of parents, including their ties to high-status individuals, which can be used to give their children a leg-up, particularly into their first job or into a work placement. The practices and attributes within these three domains are all thought to be patterned by social class and all are believed to influence how likely children are to succeed at school and beyond. For example, developmental activities may influence cognitive and academic attainment; emotional and behavioural advantages are likely to help children in many key moments such as interviews and exams; and, social and cultural resources will ease entry into the elite universities, or into the labour market[3].

The classic studies of social mobility have focused on the relationship between class origins and class destination, and have emphasised the role of educational attainment as a mediator of social mobility. Figure 3 shows our theoretical model of social mobility, where these 'classic' variables and relationships are shown in the blue boxes and arrows. Our extended model, however, considers intermediary factors related to social class (the orange boxes) that influence patterns of interaction between parents and children, children's behaviours, and parental social capital, which in turn will influence educational and occupational attainment. As such our model calls attention to *processes* of occupational attainment and the *mechanisms* by which advantage can be passed from one generation to the next. The solid arrows in Figure 3 represent the relationships we measure and report. The dashed arrows represent relationships that we assume to exist based on the body of empirical evidence. Thus, instead of measuring social mobility directly, we make a well-grounded assumption that items we are measuring are some of those that may enhance or inhibit the chances of children to reach their potential.

It is worth emphasising that our model of social mobility does not 'stop' at education. There are arrows leading directly from our three domains of interest to occupational attainment as well as to educational attainment. Education is strongly correlated with success in the labour market, and there is no doubt that a child starting out from a disadvantaged background would be far more likely to succeed if obtaining a higher qualification. However, there are several reasons why schooling is not the only answer to the social mobility problem. Inequalities in cognitive skills are evident before children start school and it is known that high-SES children make faster progress during the school holidays[4]. It is therefore unlikely that schools alone can bring about greater equality, and the indicators we measure within the three domains are some of the drivers of the attainment gap. A second limit of education is that the relationship with occupational attainment may be weakening over time as the supply of new graduates outstrips demand for graduate-level employees. Employers look for social skills, cognitive abilities and other personal characteristics in addition to, or even instead of, formal qualifications[5]. Finally, although qualifications doubtless provide opportunity for disadvantaged children to climb the ladder, evidence suggests that high-SES parents are able to protect their children's status even when they fail to obtain qualifications[6].

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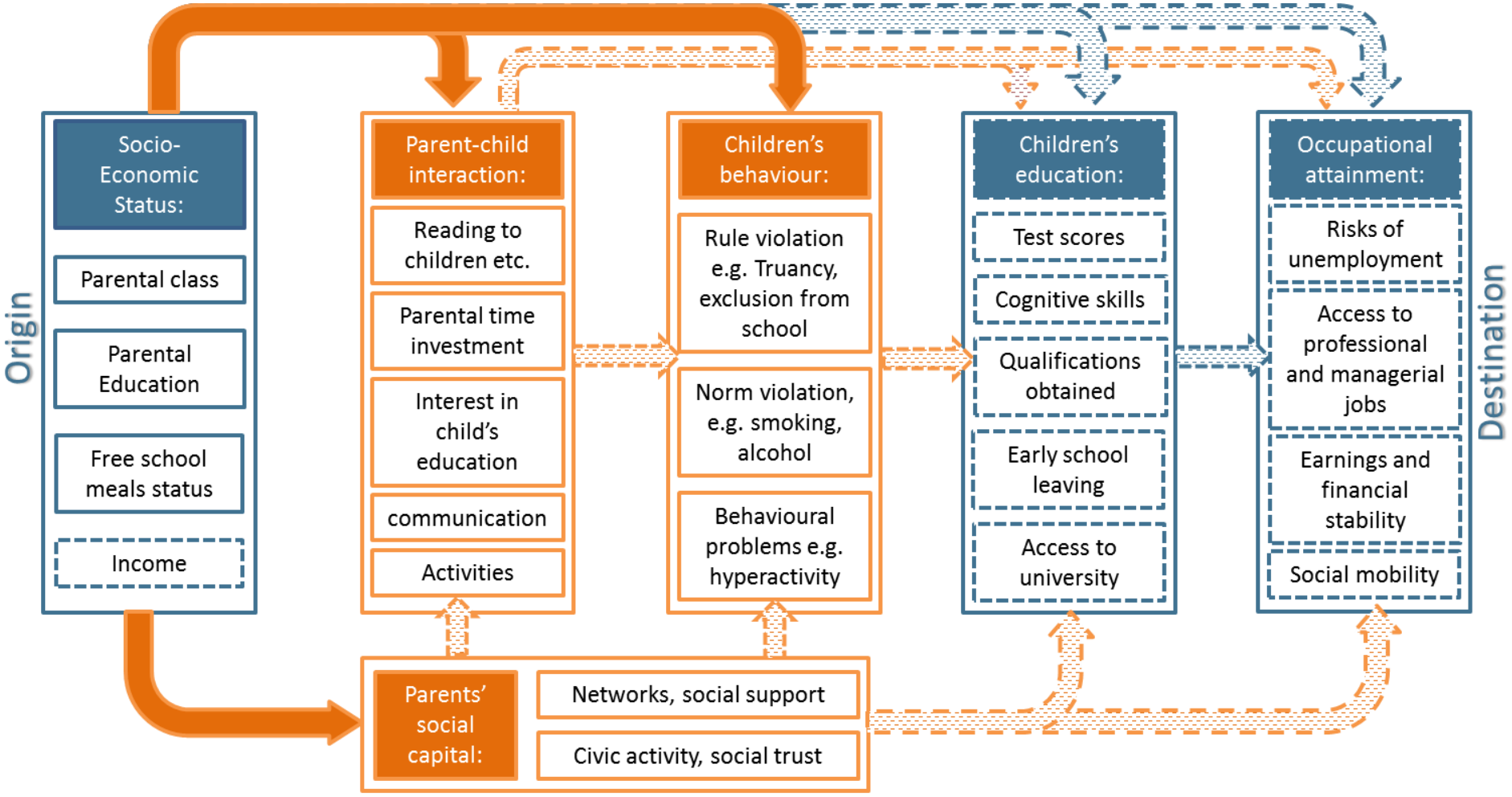
[3] See Fishkin, Joseph. (2014) *Bottlenecks: A new theory of equal opportunity.* Oxford University Press, USA.

[4] Downey, D.B., von Hippel, P.T. & Broh, B.A. (2004) 'Are schools the great equalizer? Cognitive inequality during the summer months and the school year.' *American Sociological Review* 69(5): 613-635.

[5] Jackson, M., Goldthorpe, J.H. & Mills, C. (2005) 'Education, employers and class mobility.' *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 23: 3-33.

[6] Goldthorpe, J.H. (2013) Understanding–and misunderstanding–social mobility in Britain: the entry of the economists, the confusion of politicians and the limits of educational policy. *Journal of Social Policy* 42: 431-50

Figure 3 The social mobility model



What are we measuring? Indicators and domains

We investigate a number of indicators of family life. These have been selected based on the body of academic work in which it is hypothesised that each is important in terms of the consequences for life chances and opportunity for social mobility. The strength of the supporting evidence is however highly variable. The evidence suggesting that behavioural problems exert lasting effects on life chances, for example, is robust, and the effects are large. On the other hand, it is not clear that parental monitoring has much effect on mobility chances at all. The existing evidence-base is also crucial to inform our understanding of which facets of family life will be important at different stages of life. Reading to children, for example, gives a particular boost to the early years at school (though with positive consequences from 'setting off on the right track'). Other factors such as cultural participation are more likely to have beneficial returns later on in life, in particular circumstances, such as in an interview for a place at university. We group our indicators into several domains which are shown in Table 1, along with notes on the evidence for their effects on mobility chances. We expand upon the likely consequences (and provide references) in each of the relevant results sections[7].

Being cautious on causality

It is important to bear in mind that this is a study of economic disadvantage and equality of opportunity rather than an exercise in pointing out the failings of parents. The indicators we examine are ones that have attracted the attention of mobility researchers in the past but even for the well-established findings there are reasons to be cautious in interpretation. For example, the amount of effort parents put in to reading to their children, and indeed the awareness that they ought to, may stem from their own childhoods and experience of education, which in turn were shaped by economic advantage. In other words, behaviours that might be superficially regarded as parental choices are likely to be shaped by parents' own economic and social background. It is also possible that some relationships are spurious; for example, is it that cultural activities cause success in the labour market, or is it the case that cultural activities are a habit of the advantaged classes who do well anyway? There is a danger in this field of enquiry of placing too much emphasis on the role of 'middle-class' (i.e. socially desirable) parenting behaviours and we provide summaries of the evidence for each of the substantive topics in an attempt to avoid these pitfalls.

[7] There are, of course, a number of important aspects of family life that we are not able to examine. Good quality data are simply not available for everything. For example, in *Our Kids*, Robert Putnam showed the importance of non-parental adult mentors for children in the USA, particularly perhaps when it comes to making choices about higher education. We believe this is likely to be the case in Britain too, but it is a topic not well covered in surveys.

Table 1 The three domains, indicators, and associated consequences

Domain		Indicator	Evidence for consequences
Domain 1	1.1 Parental engagement/ extra-curricular activities: cognitive (or schoolwork related)	Reading with children	Positive link to cognitive ability and educational attainment
		Taking children to the library/ children saying they go to the library	Cognitive development, though association may be declining now people have more books at home
		Parental time spent on developmental activities	Associated with cognitive ability and educational attainment
		Helping with homework (also monitoring)	Effects positive where help is seen as supportive by child
		Interest in child's education	Reduces the effect of economic hardship on attainment
	1.2 Engagement/ activities: communication	Eating meals together	Reduced risky behaviours (though possibly non-causal)
		Parental monitoring, i.e. knowing where child is in the evenings	Lower risky behaviours and lower risk of getting no qualifications
		Talking to parents about things that matter/ day at school	Significant association with GCSE and A-level attainment
	1.3 Engagement/ activities: physical activity	Doing sport; going for walks, outings etc.	Higher rates of university applications and enrolment; also benefits to 'soft skills' such as personal control
	1.4 Engagement/ activities: cultural	Going to museums, historical places, etc.	Some evidence for better educational attainment and increased access to elite universities
Domain 2	2.1 Children's behaviours: violation of norms and rules	Truancy	Reduced educational attainment
		Exclusion from school	Lower educational attainment
		'Risky behaviours': smoking, drinking, taking drugs	Lower educational attainment but probably non-causal. Increased risk of truancy
	2.2 Children's behaviours: problems	Behavioural problems: hyperactivity, conduct problems, emotional symptoms	Strong evidence for higher unemployment, lower incomes, lower educational attainment
Domain 3	3. Parents' social capital	Receiving advice from professional (e.g. GP/ school)	Weak evidence for benefits
		Status/ range/ volume/ heterogeneity of networks	Increased access to employment, better jobs
		Civic participation	Increased network size; possibly higher trust. Possible direct effects on child's schooling via PTA involvement

Setting the scene: Social change in Britain since 1965

Some (by no means all) of our data allow us to go back to 1965 when life in Britain was different in many ways to life as we know it today. Here we outline some of the major social changes that have occurred in this half century, not as an offer of direct causal explanation for the trends but as a means of setting the scene, as a context of change to be borne in mind as we describe the patterns of change and stability we observe in the lives of parents and children[8].

First and foremost, the past fifty years have seen tremendous social progress in a number of areas that most of us would consider to be important and positive. Incomes have increased across the board so that most citizens today have greater spending power than in the 1960s; despite the financial crisis, we are still better off today than in the early 2000s. With these increases in prosperity we are able to live in bigger homes, where we have more space than at any point in the last 50 years. In terms of child poverty, things have also been improving: absolute child poverty has been in overall decline since 1979 (despite some year on year fluctuation) and although relative poverty increased throughout the 80s it is now also in decline[9].

As the country became richer, more money has been invested in educating its citizens. In 1965 around 20 per cent of 16-17 year olds stayed on at school, rising to around 50 per cent in 2014. The expansion of tertiary education in the 1990s also had a profound effect on average educational attainment, and means that, as time marches on, the probability of any child at school having highly-educated parents is increasing. Not only are we becoming more educated but attitudes towards schooling have shifted. Anti-school subcultures have perhaps become a thing of the past as both parents and children respond to the fact that education has become more important as a means to access the best jobs, and avoid unemployment. Processes within schools may be changing too: parents are perhaps held more accountable for their child's behaviours these days than in the past. Crime is another story of progress in the last two decades. After a rising trend between the mid-60s and the mid-90s, it has since been in decline[10].

Our health and longevity have also progressed. Life expectancy in 1965 was 68 for men and 75 for women, but by 2014 had increased to just below 80 for men and 83 for women. This change largely reflects a reduction in mortality relating to cardiovascular and smoking-related diseases as medical science advanced and health behaviours were modified. Of course, not all the change has been positive. There is a greater availability of food that is rich in sugars and fats, and a new set of health risks such as those related to obesity present a larger challenge today than in the past.

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[8] Much of the supporting evidence for the social change described in this section can be found in 1) Halsey, A.H. & Webb, J. (2000) *Twentieth-century British social trends*. New York: St. Martin's Press, and 2) The Centre for Social Investigation http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/. Where this is not the case separate footnotes will provide references.

[9] SMCPC (2015) *State of the nation 2015: Social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain.* Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

[10] In contrast to the crime statistics, the prison population has been increasing in England and Wales over the last two decades. See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218185/story-prison-population.pdf

Thus far we have been describing progress, which is say, those changes deemed welcome and positive for members of society. However, there are a number of areas of life which have been getting more difficult, thus deteriorating quality of life. Examples include the rise of household debt, which means that despite rising incomes, it remains likely that poorer and indebted families in Britain may well be finding things a struggle financially, and the rise in the uptake of food aid has been well publicised. Children are more likely to be growing up in privately-rented homes today compared to a decade ago[9]. Further financial uncertainty might be linked to unemployment; while rates of unemployment fluctuate with economic cycles of growth and recession, they have been consistently been above 5 per cent since 1980, a figure substantially higher than the rates of 2 per cent or below seen throughout the 1960s. Particularly relevant to questions of social mobility is the rise of income inequality, which increased dramatically during the 1980s. Relative inequality has remained stable or even declined slightly following the recent economic recession, but the absolute differences between the top one per cent and the lowest ten per cent have been growing steadily wider. By increasing the economic and social distance between people, rising absolute income inequality could intensify the importance of childhood circumstances for life chances in adulthood.

There are further changes that cannot be so neatly categorised as either 'progress' or 'deterioration' and are often factors that divide opinion. Immigration is one such example: Britain is far more ethnically diverse today than in 1965, with the 2011 census placing the proportion of the population belonging to an ethnic minority group at 14 per cent. There have also been huge changes to family size and structure. The birth rate was in decline throughout the period as was the marriage rate and women are delaying the age of first birth to later ages. At the same time numbers of children born to unmarried couples and single parenthood have both increased. Moreover, these changes have occurred unevenly across the social classes[11] and as such may be able to explain some changes to patterns of inequality. Alongside the rise of divorce and re-marriage, these changes have brought about new heterogeneity in the composition of the family unit.

The structure of the labour market has also changed markedly. In 1971, 45 per cent of the male workforce was in the working classes, with 10 per cent in the higher (class 1) and 15 per cent in the lower (class 2) professional occupations; as such the class structure was pyramid-shaped. Forty years on, the pyramid structure has given way to a more even distribution. In the modern labour force, 30 per cent of men are working class, 22 per cent are in class 2, and 18 per cent in class 1. These changes reflect the decline of the manufacturing industry and the expansion of the service and finance industries, changes influenced by technological advancement. Alongside this huge structural change, there has been a growth in the uncertainty and insecurity associated with employment; there are more short-term and fixed-term contracts than in the past and 'jobs for life' are rare. The expansion of the higher classes was accompanied by increases in the rate of *absolute* social mobility. However, *relative* rates of mobility suggest a pattern of relative constancy, with the exception of recent improvement for women[12]. Women have been entering the labour force in greater number as labour-

[11] McLanahan, S. (2004) Diverging destinies: How children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography* 41(4): 607-627

[12] Bukodi, E., Goldthorpe, J.H., Waller, L. & Kuha, J. (2015) The mobility problem in Britain: new findings from the analysis of birth cohort data. *The British Journal of Sociology* 66: 93-117; Goldthorpe, J.H. (2016) *Social mobility in modern Britain: changing structure, constant process*. Centre for Social Investigation briefing note 21.

saving technologies reduced the demands of housework and gender roles moved away from the traditional[13]. In 1971 just over half of women worked, rising to two-thirds four decades on. As for men, the class structure for women has also changed: in 1971 4 per cent were in class 1 and 10 per cent in class 2 but by 2011 22 per cent were in class 2 and 8 per cent in class 1. As men and women tend to choose partners similar to themselves in terms of education and social class[14], the increasing participation of women in the labour market may bring about increases to the clustering of resources within households.

[13] Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.) (2013), *British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research.
[14] Halpin, B., Chan, T.W. (2003) Educational homogamy in Ireland and Britain: trends and patterns. *The British Journal of Sociology* 54(4): 473-95

Methods

This is a quantitative study based on survey data from multiple sources. The defining feature of quantitative analysis is that the samples obtained are intended to be *representative* and thus *generalizable* to the population. Due to the nature of our study we are not interested in representations of the whole population of Britain, but rather in relevant subsets. We look at the responses of both adults and children, and the surveys we use differ in terms of their *target* population. For example, in several of our surveys the target is the adult population from which we select a subsample of those who have children living with them; in the youth surveys the sample is representative of 11-15 year-olds in the general population; in school-based surveys, the target sample is school children of a particular age. We include a list of the surveys and their sample coverage in Appendix 1. We use survey weights to correct our samples to be more like the target population where they are available. Survey weights, however, depend upon knowing the sources of bias and are not infallible. Nonetheless, the data we use are the best available in Britain for answering our research question; the data are based on systematic random samples (rather than being based on quota samples or 'opportunistic' samples as with some online polling); they are largely collected via face-to-face interviews conducted by professional researchers. We provide additional specific details on the methodology relating to particular indicators and surveys throughout the report.

Being sure of our results

In order that our estimates of averages are comparable over time, we adjust all the figures shown for the child's age and sex using regression modelling techniques. The figures shown can be straightforwardly treated as averages but it should be borne in mind that some measures are particularly susceptible to age, such as the likelihood of trying smoking. In these cases the percentages we present differ from the actual mean based on the survey data; however, our adjustments in this case are likely to be correcting for downward-bias in the sample. We take account of sampling error and where applicable present the results with 'error bars'. These error bars capture the 95 per cent confidence intervals around the mean and can be interpreted in the following way: *we are 95 per cent confident that the true value in the target population lies between these two values*. Confidence intervals are calculated using information about the variance of estimates and the sample size. Where confidence intervals are large this may indicate a small sample or a lot of variability, both of which translate into uncertainty.

Sampling error is not the same as measurement error, which may result from problems including equivalence of meaning among survey respondents. We raise issues of the potential influence of measurement error in the results sections. Where there are similar indicators in different surveys, we are able to corroborate findings. Where two data sources provide different answers, we can only reliably conclude that we do not know the 'true' picture and as such we are honest and open about the limitations of the data and analysis.

Measuring Socioeconomic Status

We measure Socioeconomic Status (SES) with two different, but correlated, indicators: parental social class and parental educational attainment, and we measure these at the household level[15]. Social class relates to occupation and reflects the type of job that the parents in this study do. While social class is not the same as income, it might be best

[15] See Appendix 1 for details of the 'Household dominance' approach we apply.

thought of as a proxy measure of the ability to access resources, i.e. *economic capital*. On the other hand, educational attainment can be thought of as *human capital*. Human capital can be converted into economic capital since education has a strong bearing on success in the labour market, although it also has a wider range of non-economic benefits too. Our focus on class and educational attainment is not to suggest that income is unimportant or inconsequential. On the contrary, explanations of the effects of social class and education depend heavily on the idea of (access to) resources, including both material goods and services. Unfortunately, income is problematic to measure and we will talk little about incomes in this report; however, we believe access to resources to be a critical factor for the majority of the outcomes we study[16].

Table 2 Categories of SES[17] used to test inequality

Social Class: NS-SEC	
1	Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
2	Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Not working
Educational attainment	
1	Degree or equivalent
2	Other higher education below degree
3	GCE A/AS levels and equivalent
4	GCSEs/O levels 5 at grades A*-C and equivalent
5	Lower grade GCSEs, no qualifications, 'other' (including foreign qualifications)

Class or education: A better measure?

We look at all of our outcomes where possible by both class and education. We do this in acknowledgement that both might be important and each may exert an influence on family life in subtly different ways. Throughout the report, we draw attention to incongruences, for example, where inequalities are evident by education but not by class. On the whole, where we see social gradients they are evident by both measures of SES. However, some of our findings might suggest that inequality by parental educational attainment may be more sharply defined than by class. One reason for this might be a more direct link between having greater experience of education and some of the more 'academic' indicators we look at, such as going to the library. A second reason may relate to the nature of the measurement: educational attainment, after a certain age, is more fixed than social class. Changes of career type or progression up the career ladder may mean that changes to one's class categorisation are highly likely well beyond the onset of the child-rearing years. From this perspective, educational attainment may be a

[16] We say more about the relationship between class and income in Appendix 1.
[17] We also use a linear measure of occupational prestige (the 'CAMSIS scale') in the analysis of parents' social networks

better proxy for measuring the stable attributes of parents that translate into parenting behaviours and attitudes[18].

Absolute or relative measures of inequality?

Sociologists make an important distinction between 'absolute' and 'relative' rates of social mobility and of social inequalities more generally. For example, relative income inequality, as measured by the **ratio** of the incomes of the top 10 per cent to those of the bottom 10 per cent, increased sharply in the 1980s but has since remained constant. However, the absolute difference in the incomes of the top 10 per cent and the bottom 10 per cent, as measured in GB pounds, has continued to widen. For example, if the income of poor families doubles from say £10,000 to £20,000 and if the income rich families also doubles, from say £100,000 to £200,000, then the ratio stays the same but the absolute gap has widened from £90,000 to £180,000. Both statements are true simultaneously, but they give very different perspectives on the same situation.

For some purposes absolute differences are of particular sociological relevance. They tell us how similar or different are the experiences of the different social classes. For example, the ratio of school exclusions may be three times as high among low SES families as among high SES families. But because school exclusions are very rare in all social classes, the most common experience in all SES groups is avoidance of any school exclusion. The social classes are thus very similar in their absolute levels of experience of school exclusion.

In this report we focus on absolute measures of the gaps between socio-economic groups. We express these in most cases in terms of percentage point differences in the experience of the outcome in question. This is also the method which Putnam used in *Our Kids*. It would be straightforward to calculate relative measures of the inequalities, but their interpretation would be less transparent.

[18] A further difference between our two measures of SES is that the education scale is linear in nature with category 1 (degree) being 'higher' than category 2 (other higher education), which is higher than category 3, and so forth. The NS-SEC class measure, on the other hand, is not perfectly linear. Professional and managerial jobs are clearly 'higher' in the rank ordering of classes than routine and semi-routine jobs based on the criteria of autonomy and replaceability. However, intermediate occupations have more mixed profiles and the self-employed are a heterogeneous group. For this reason we might expect these middle groups to have outcomes that are less clear-cut in terms of a gradient.

Domain 1.1: Parental engagement: Cognitive behaviours

Parental time investment: *'Gruffalo'* time

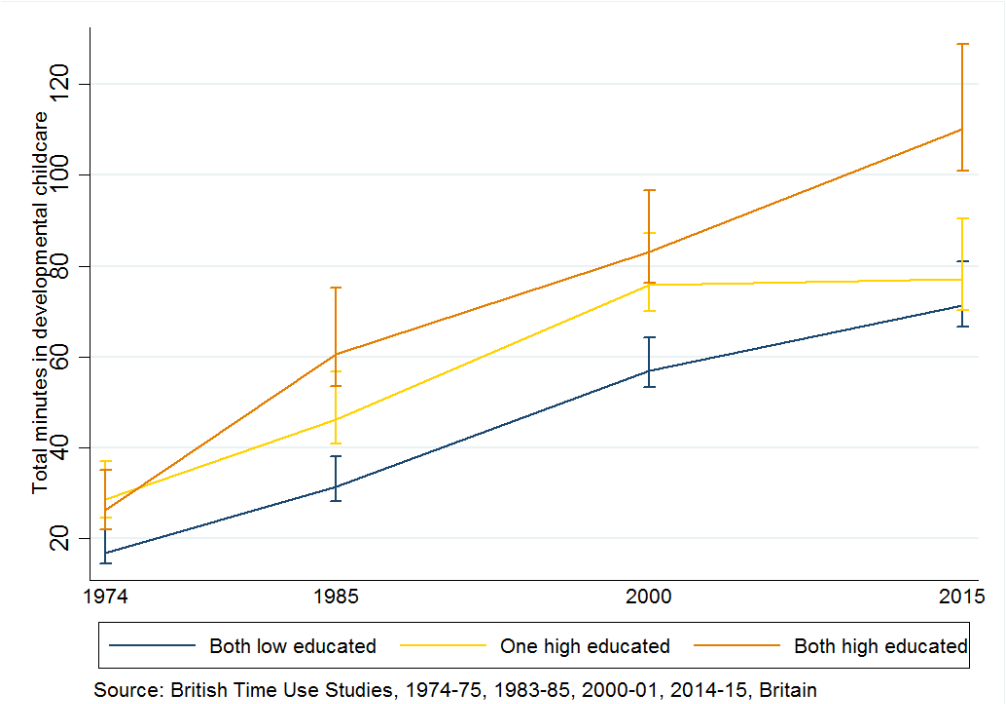
Some activities are particularly important for the development of children's social and cognitive skills; these include reading and talking to children, teaching, and playing with children. Parents' involvement in children's education within the home – such as the provision of intellectually engaging materials – is associated with academic achievement[19]. In *Our Kids*, Robert Putnam captured these activities using the term '*Goodnight Moon'* time, named after a children's book popular in the USA. The term is used as short-hand for all these activities that are 'developmental' and that stand apart from other more practical elements of parenting ('*Diaper'* time). In the same vein, we use the term '*Gruffalo*' time in this report.

Data from the British Time Use studies[20] allow us to explore the amount of time parents spend on these activities in greater detail than is available in the other surveys and is shown in Figure 4. We show the trends for children aged five years and younger between 1975 and 2015 (see Altintaş (forthcoming)[21] for more detailed analyses). Parental time investment in *Gruffalo* time has substantially increased in the last four decades, from an average of 23 minutes per day in 1975 to 80 minutes in 2015. However, this increase is most pronounced for highly educated parents resulting in a widening inequality. In the 1970s parents spent 20-30 minutes on *Gruffalo* time and there was no significant difference by parental educational level. From the 1980s onwards the education gradient widened, and by 2015 children with two low-educated parents receive on average 71 minutes every day, while those with highly educated parents receive 110 minutes every day. Couples with greater economic and human capital may be better-equipped for 'concerted cultivation' (discussed below), which could account for the particular benefits to having two highly-educated parents.

This widening gradient in parental time investment cannot be explained by women's increasing participation in the labour market over this period (see Appendix 2). This sample is limited to married and cohabiting parents, so children living in lone parent households (who are at particular risk of missing out parental time investment) are excluded, which is likely to underestimate the educational gradient in *Gruffalo* time.

[19] Hill, N.E. & Tyson, D.F. (2009) Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3): 740-763.
[20] Because education was not consistently coded in these surveys, we use a measure based roughly on the most educated third and the least educated third.
[21] Altintaş E. (forthcoming) *Are British parents investing less in their children?* Centre for Social Investigation.

Figure 4: Time spent on developmental childcare increased and a socioeconomic gradient in developmental childcare emerged between 1975 and 2015



Source: British Time Use Studies, 1974-75, 1983-85, 2000-01, 2014-15, Britain

Note: this analysis has been done with the early release version of the 2015 data by the Centre for Time Use Research, University of Oxford

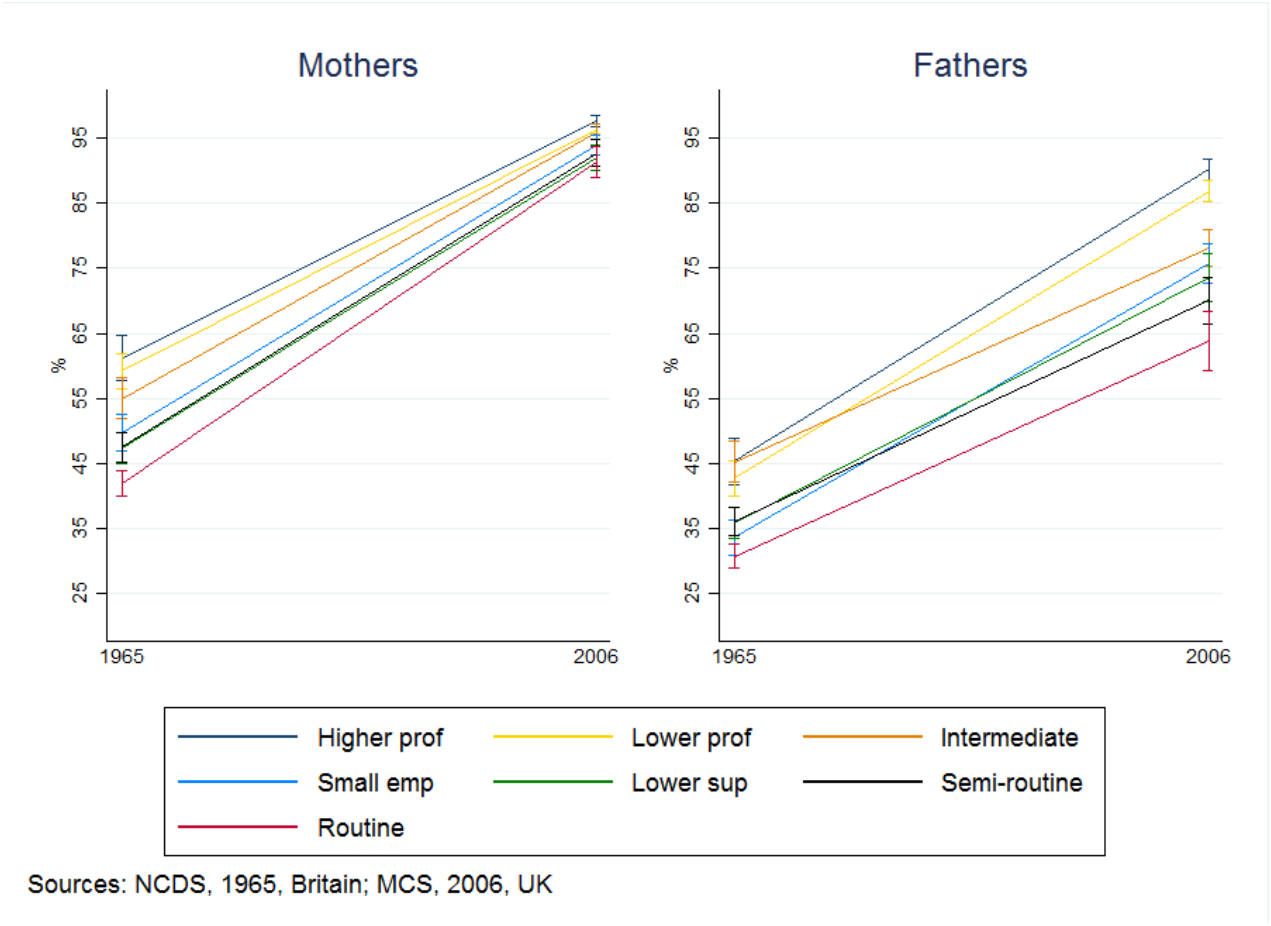
Reading to children

Several activities that parents and children participate in are aimed at fostering children's cognitive development, and engagement in these activities varies considerably according to families' social background. In her ethnographic research on social class differences in parenting, the sociologist Annette Lareau[22] observed that while children from working-class households spent much of their leisure time watching TV, or playing informally with siblings or neighbours, children from more advantaged backgrounds were often engaged in structured activities intended to develop their skills and interests. This investment in leisure time is an important dimension of what Lareau refers to as the 'concerted cultivation' model of parenting, in which parents intensively nurture their children and inculcate middle-class attitudes, skills and behaviours. This 'concerted cultivation' includes both activities between parents and children – such as reading to children – and children's extra-curricular activities. Differential involvement in 'concerted cultivation' might help explain socioeconomic differences in children's cognitive[23,24] and non-cognitive skills[25,26] and wider academic success.

[22] Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[23] Castro, M., Expósito-Casas, E., López-Martín, E., Lizasoain, L., Navarro-Asencio, E., Gaviria, J.L. (2015) Parental involvement on student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review* 14: 33-46
[24] Kiernan, K. E. and Huerta, M. C. (2008) Economic deprivation, maternal depression, parenting and children's cognitive and emotional development in early childhood, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59(4): 783–806
[25] Weininger, E.B., Lareau, A. & Conley, D. (2015) What Money Doesn't Buy: Class Resources and Children's Participation in Organized Extracurricular Activities. *Social Forces*.

The total proportion of parents (combining both mothers and fathers) who reported reading to their children every week increased from 56 per cent of 7-year-olds in 1965 to 97 per cent of 6-year-olds in 2006. Figure 5 displays changing social class gradients in reading behaviours separately for mothers and fathers. The absolute rates are not directly comparable because the 1965 figures refer to 7-year-old children, and 2006 figures refer to 6-year old children, but broad comparisons are possible[27]. Reading to children at least every week over this period increased by an almost identical rate in mothers (45 percentage points) and fathers (44 percentage points), but the social gradients follow different trends. In mothers, the social gradient in reading narrowed from 19 percentage points in 1965 to 6 percentage points in 2006. This trend is likely to reflect the 'ceiling' effect: it is possible for lower-SES groups to close the gap once 'saturation' point is reached. In contrast, in fathers the social gradient widened from 15 per cent in 1965 to 26 per cent in 2006, reflecting greater gains among the professional classes. It may be that high-SES fathers have been quicker that low-SES fathers to adopt new gender norms around sharing child-rearing responsibilities.

Figure 5: Reading to children increased and the socioeconomic gradient in reading narrowed for mothers and widened for fathers between 1965 and 2006



Sources: NCDS, 1965, Britain; MCS, 2006, UK

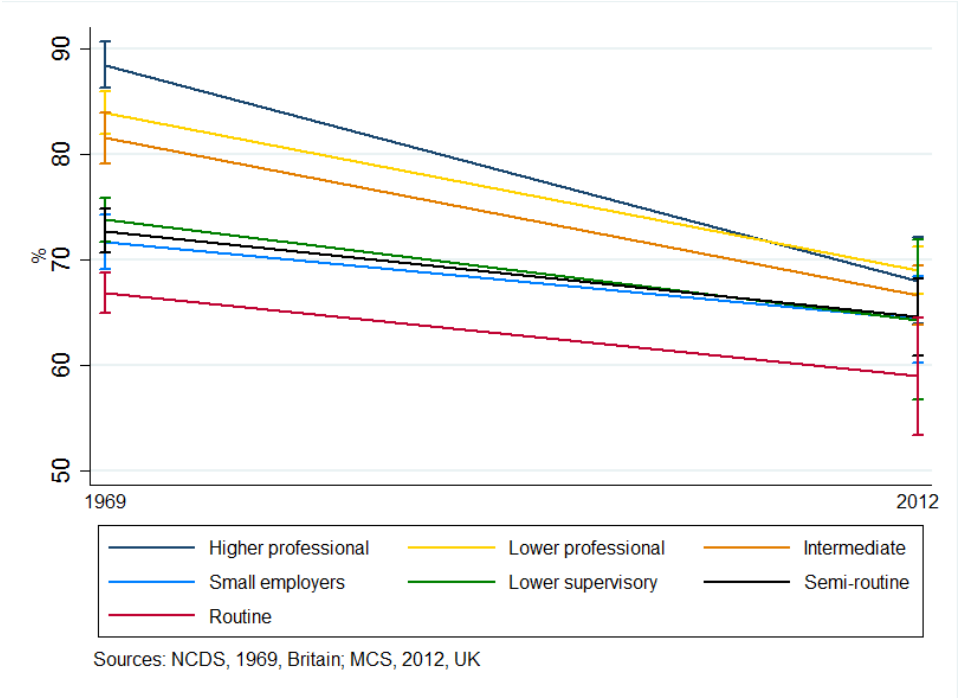
[26] Covay, E. & Carbonaro, W. (2010) After the bell participation in extracurricular activities, classroom behavior, and academic achievement. *Sociology of Education* 83: 20-45

[27] We might expect rates of reading to be higher for younger children, i.e. before they are reading on their own. However, this cannot explain our patterns of change over time as additional analysis including 5 year-olds in 1975 confirms the pattern of overall increase with narrowing inequalities (see Appendix 2).

Library visits

Visiting the library is a further activity that is positively associated with children's cognitive development[23]. Figure 6 illustrates the changing social class gradient in the proportion of 11-year-olds who visited libraries. Children's library visits became less significantly common for all social class groups between 1969 (75 per cent) and 2012 (65 per cent). The social gradient in children's library visits also narrowed from 22 percentage points in 1969 to 9 percentage points in 2012, which reflects more pronounced declines in library use among more advantaged children. This may reflect changes in the price of books over this period and consequent reductions in reliance on libraries, especially among the higher social classes.

Figure 6: Library visits declined and the socioeconomic gradient in library visits narrowed between 1969 and 2012



Sources: NCDS, 1969, Britain; MCS, 2012, UK

Helping with homework

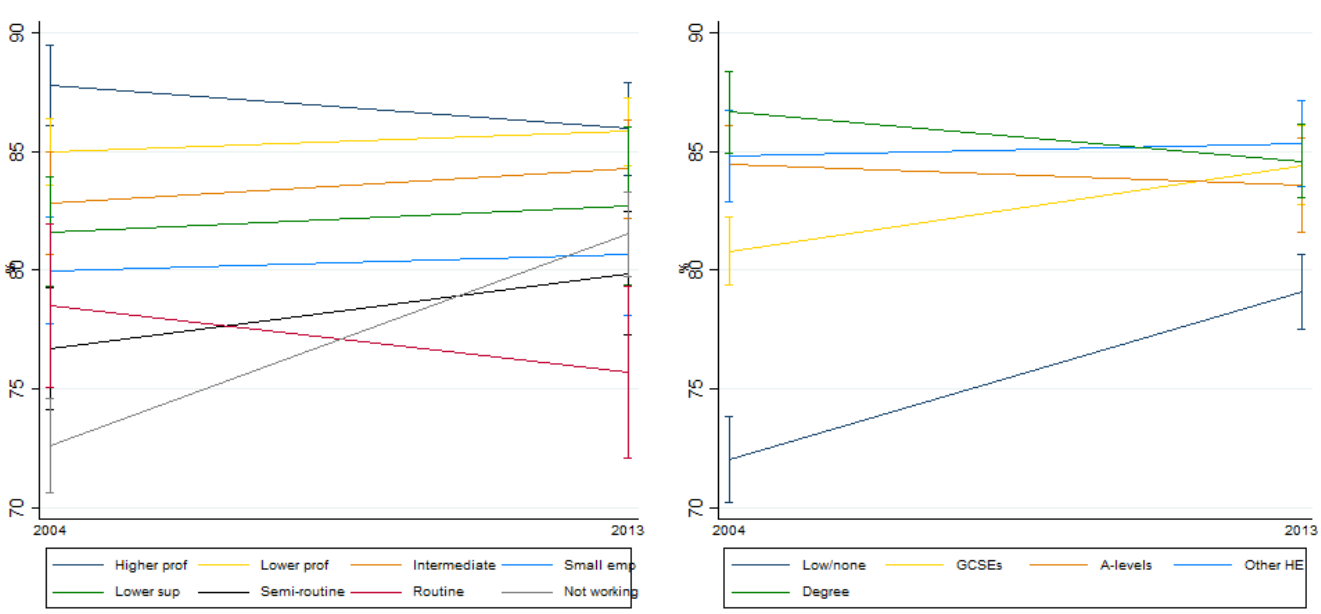
Parental involvement in education is a potentially important pathway through which family background influences educational attainment. Helping with homework represents a major way in which parents involve themselves directly in their children's education. However, evidence on the influence of parental assistance with homework has been mixed: parents helping with homework is not consistently associated with academic achievement[23, 19]. Further research on the value of parental help with homework concluded that the quality of help was important: help that was perceived as supportive was associated with higher academic achievement, while intrusive involvement had negative effects on children's academic achievement[28]. We therefore should not over-interpret the possible consequences of these trends.

Trends in parents helping with their children's homework can be compared for education and social class between 2004 and 2013 (Figure 7). There was a small increase overall

[28] Moroni, S., Dumont, H., Trautwein, U., Niggli, A., & Baeriswyl, F. (2015) The Need to Distinguish Between Quantity and Quality in Research on Parental Involvement: The Example of Parental Help With Homework. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108(5): 417-431

in the proportion of young people who received help with homework, from 81 per cent in 2004 to 83 per cent in 2013. This average change conceals far larger changes among certain groups, such that the social gradient narrowed from 15 percentage points in 2004 to 4 percentage points in 2013. This change was largest among children of non-working families, while changes were far smaller for the other social class groups. The educational gradient also followed a pattern of general convergence[29].

Figure 7: Help with homework did not show clear overall trends but children with low socioeconomic status showed signs of catching up between 2004 and 2013



Source: Next Steps, 2004 and 2013, England

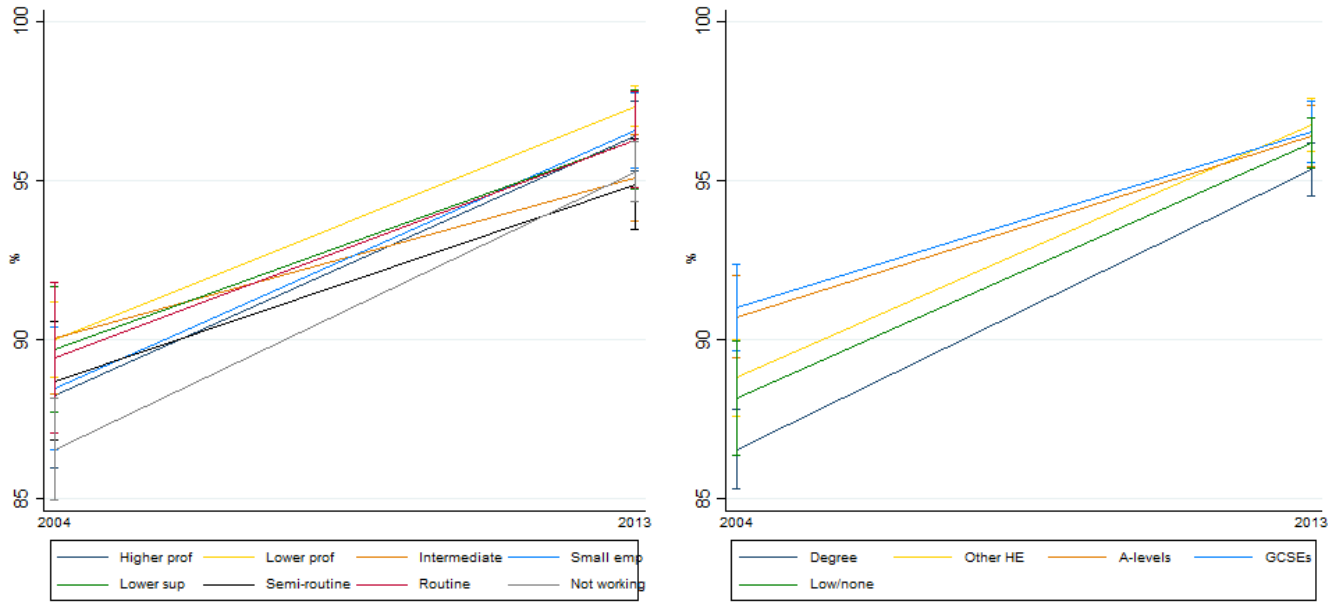
Monitoring homework

A further means of parental involvement in their children's education is checking or monitoring their homework. As can be seen in Figure 8, checking homework increased significantly between 2004 and 2013 for all groups, from 89 per cent of young people in 2004 to 96 per cent in 2013. However, there was no clear social class or education gradient in whether young people said that someone at home ever checked their homework[30].

[29] Help with homework among 11-15 year-olds also follows social class and education gradients (see Appendix 2).

[30] The absence of social gradients is replicated for parents' reports of checking 11-15-year old children's homework between 1995 and 1998 by social class and education (Appendix 2).

Figure 8: Parents checking their children's homework increased but does not follow a socioeconomic gradient in 2004 or 2013



Source: Next Steps, 2004 and 2013, England

Parents' interest in their children's education

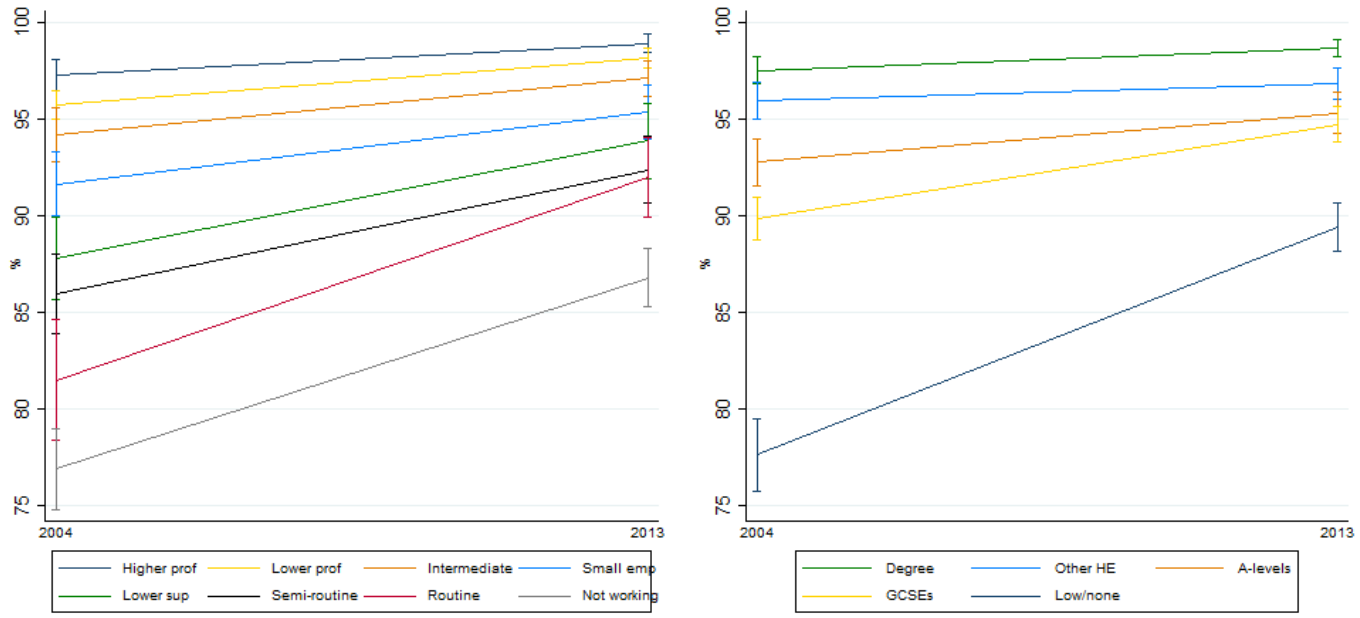
Children whose parents show an interest in their education may help foster children's interest in learning, and encourage children to work hard. Parents' interest in their children's education – measured using a range of behaviours including talking to their children about school activities and schoolwork[23, 19] and school-based involvement[19] – are positively associated with children's academic achievement. Moreover, high levels of parental interest reduce the impact of economic hardship on attainment[31], so parental interest could be an important mechanism to reduce social gradients in attainment.

There are several ways to explore parents' engagement in their children's education. First, looking at attendance at parents' evenings, the proportion of parents who attended parents' evenings increased from 90 per cent in 2004 to 95 per cent in 2013 (Figure 9). This move towards the 'ceiling' of 100 per cent was accompanied by a narrowing in the social class gradient from 20 percentage points in 2004 to 12 percentage points in 2013. Likewise, the education gradient in parents' evening attendance followed a pattern of convergence[32].

[31] Hango, D. (2007) Parental investment in childhood and educational qualifications: Can greater parental involvement mediate the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage? *Social Science Research* 36: 1371–1390

[32] The 11 percentage point increase in attendance at parents' evenings among parents with lower or no qualifications might reflect compositional changes in this group, in particular the changing ethnic composition of this group over this period. The category of lower or no qualifications includes parents with 'other' qualifications, some of whom will be first generation migrants who do not hold British qualifications. When ethnicity was controlled, the same trends were replicated, so increasing educational engagement among parents with low or no qualifications cannot be attributed to changes in the ethnic composition of this group.

Figure 9: Parents' evening attendance increased and the socioeconomic gradient narrowed between 2004 and 2013



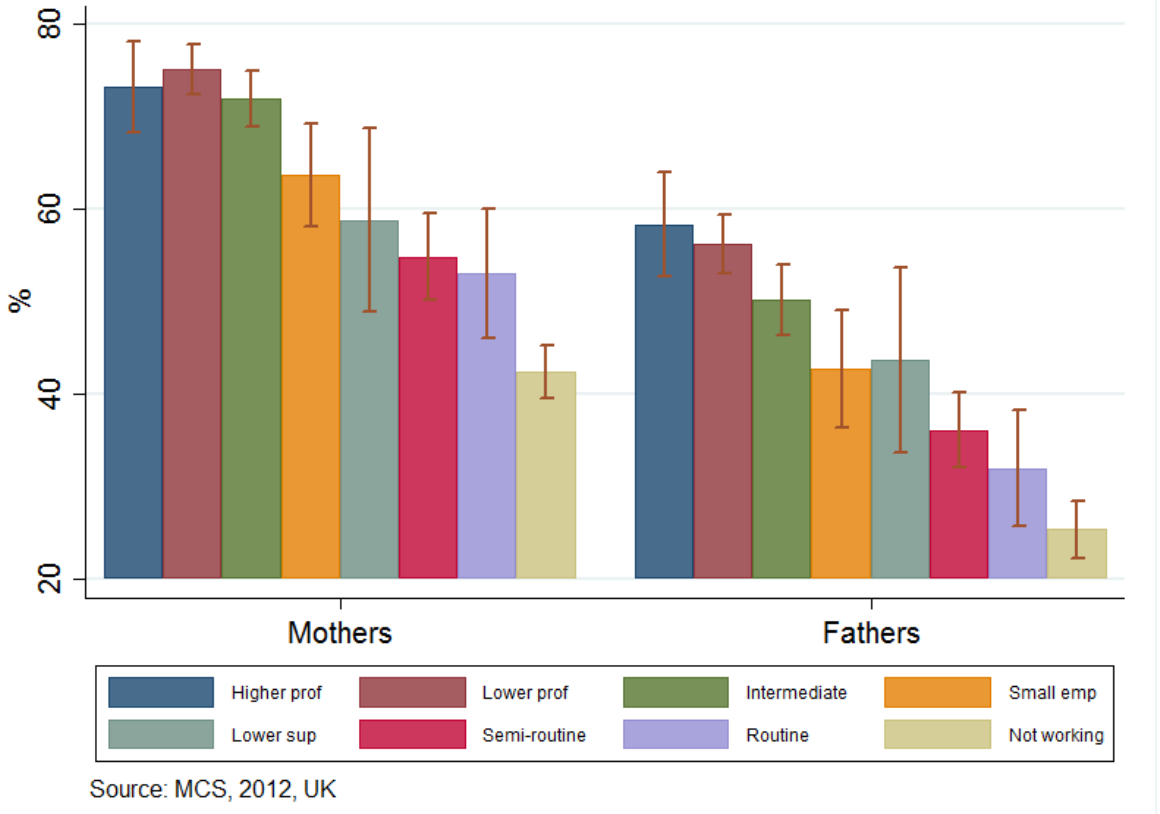
Source: Next Steps, 2004 and 2013, England

The Millennium Cohort Study also surveyed children's class teachers when children were 11 years old to provide insight into perceived parental engagement, as rated by teachers[33]. This information is available in relation to 2012 only so we cannot explore any changes over time. Figure 10 shows that parental engagement is noticeably lower for fathers than mothers, and the proportion of 'very interested' parents follows a clear social class gradient for both mothers and fathers. A larger proportion of higher professional mothers were considered to be 'very interested' in their children's education (73 per cent) than were mothers in non-working families (42 per cent). The same pattern is true of fathers, where a larger proportion of higher professional fathers were considered to be 'very interested' in their children's education (58 per cent) than were non-working fathers (25 per cent)[34]. In contrast, there is no social gradient in children's own ratings of their parents' interest in their education (see Appendix 2).

[33] In the MCS, 11-year-old children are asked to state how often their parents show an interest in their education. In contrast to teacher ratings, children's ratings of parental interest do not vary systematically by either social class or education (see Appendix 2)

[34] These social class gradients are also replicated by education for mothers and fathers (see Appendix 2).

Figure 10: Teacher ratings of parents' interest in their children's education follows a social class gradient in 2012



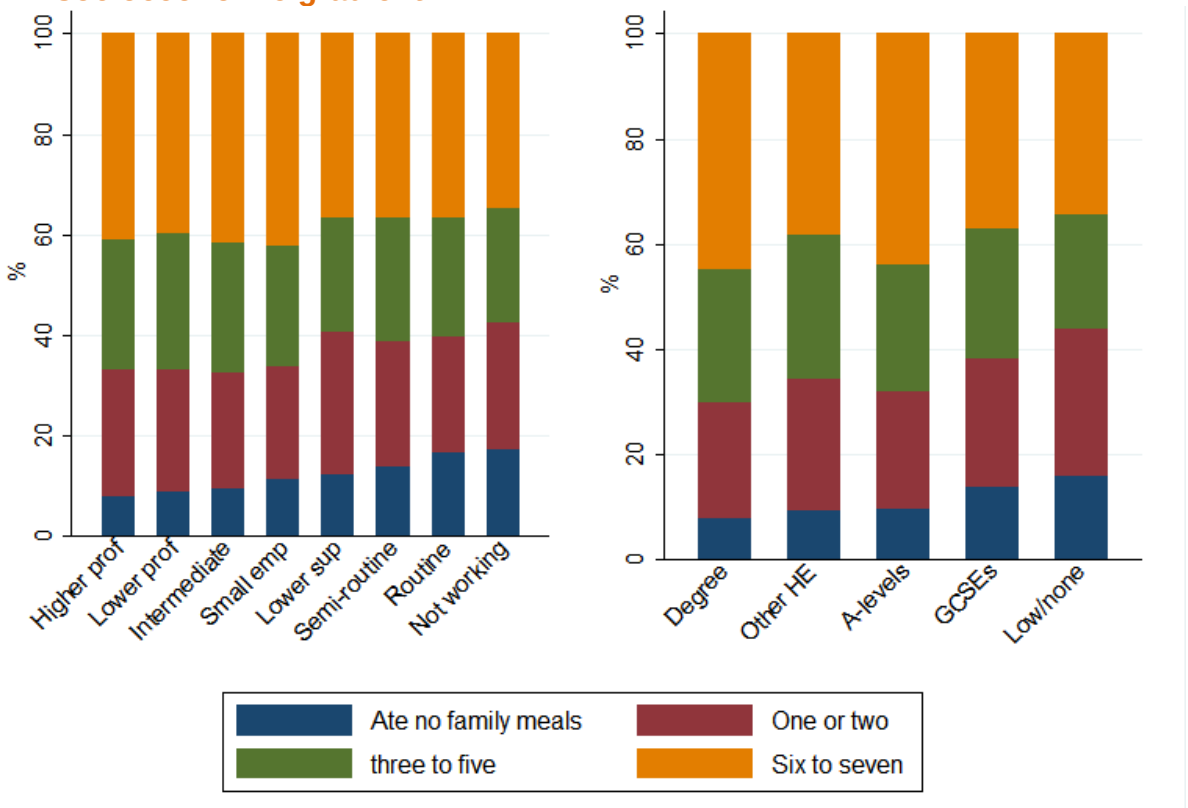
Source: MCS, 2012, UK

Domain 1.2: Parental engagement: Communication

Eating family meals together

We begin in this section by looking at the frequency of parents and children eating evening meals together. Family meals are hypothesised to be an important protective factor for a range of childhood outcomes, which themselves are likely to have important consequences over the life course. Sitting down together regularly may provide a chance for parents to monitor, convey expectations to, connect with, and support their children. Indeed, there is evidence of links between families eating together and reduced prevalence of substance use, sexual activity, depression and delinquency[35]. On the other hand, it is argued that families eating together are disproportionately those faring well in many other respects – and so family meals serve only as a proxy for other advantages and are of little importance in and of themselves. Indeed, a recent review suggests that studies using techniques to control for other differences between families tend to be less likely to find evidence of a protective effect of eating together. However, the frequency of family meals eaten together does appear to affect depressive symptoms, even when controlling for a wide range of family characteristics[36].

Figure 11 Families eating meals together in the last 7 days follows a socioeconomic gradient



Source: BHPS, 1991-2008, UK

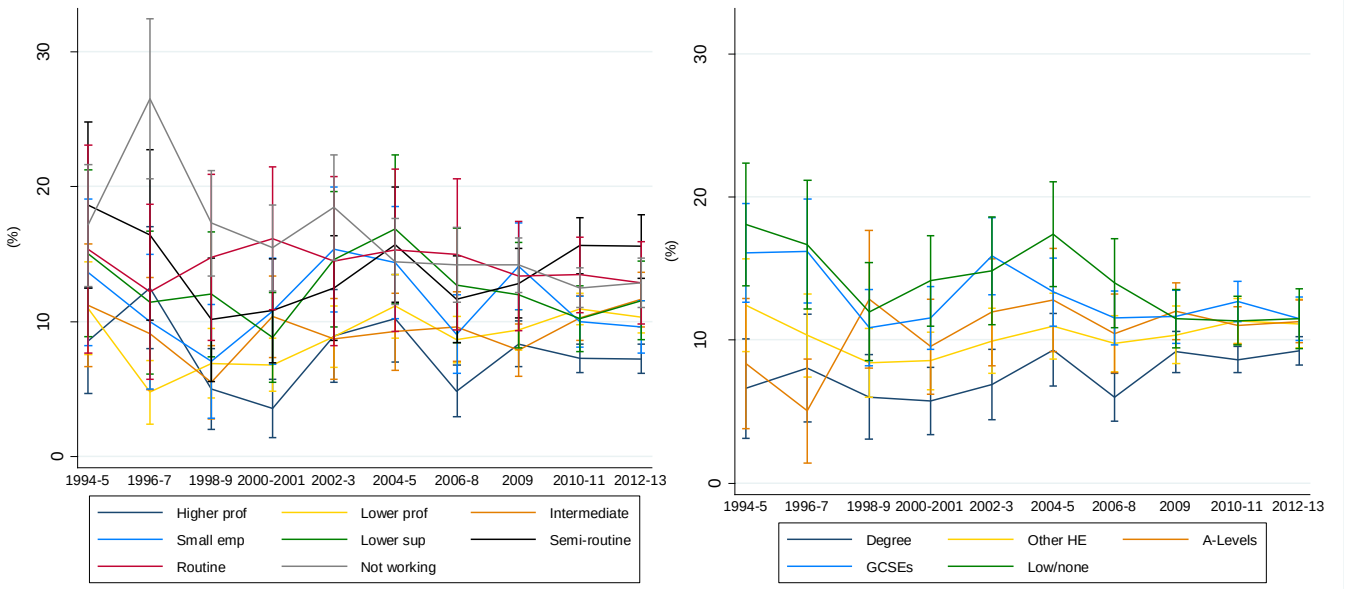
[35] Goldfarb, S.S., Tarver, W.L., Locher, J.L., Preskitt, J., Sen, B. (2015) A systematic review of the association between family meals and adolescent risk outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence* 44: 134-49

[36] Meier, A., & Musick, K. (2014) Variation in Associations Between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76(1): 13-23

Figure 11 shows that there are socioeconomic differences in the frequency of eating family meals together. Looking at the last category, we can see that 8 per cent of children in higher professional families reported eating no meals together over the previous week, compared to 17 per cent of those in families where no-one is in work. There are similar differences evident by parental education. The socioeconomic inequalities are less evident when we look at the most frequent category: eating together 6 or 7 times in the last week.

In Figure 12, we break down the same data by year in order to understand if patterns of eating together have been changing over time. There is a lot of year on year variation, and the overlapping error bars indicate that the prevalence of never eating together is often not statistically significantly different between classes. Overall there seems to have been little change in the level of not eating together although the data (particularly evident by education) suggest some narrowing of inequalities over the period. The lack of corroboration of this trend and the issues with comparing the two surveys (see *A note on combining BHPS and USoc* inset box) means we cannot be certain of this trend.

Figure 12 The socioeconomic gradient in families eating together may have narrowed a little between 1994 and 2013, but there is no average trend



Source: BHPS & USoc, UK

Talking about things that matter

Some studies of eating family meals point out that this factor alone is unlikely to be a fruitful target for intervention, as meals eaten as a family will not tend to have a positive effect if the parent-child relationship is weak[36]. It is also important, then, to understand the strength of the parent-child relationship and the degree to which parents provide emotional support to their children. The theorised benefits of emotional support apply just as much to adults as to children; it is essential for coping with life's stresses and strains.

With this is mind, what evidence links these items to children's outcomes? As with family meals, we might expect that parent-child communication allows parents to offer support and guidance, and also to convey norms and expectations, leading to positive outcomes in terms of health and risk behaviours in particular. The results of a large, population-based survey from Minnesota indicate that adolescents who felt they could talk to their mother or father about problems, or who valued their parents' opinion for serious decisions, were substantially less likely to engage in substance use and unhealthy weight-control behaviours, make suicide attempts, and also less likely to experience body dissatisfaction, depressive symptoms, and low self-esteem; moreover these results were consistent for both boys and girls, and across both parents[37]. Overall, then, it seems that parent-child communication may largely depend upon whether the child enjoys being with parents, but that children feeling close to their parents and feeling loved and wanted is consistently protective against a range of risky behaviours as well as emotional distress. Lower emotional support is associated with greater numbers of both depressive symptoms and chronic health problems and there is also evidence on educational outcomes, perhaps in part as a result of increased norm-violating behaviours. Talking with one's mother shows a significant association with achieving 5 good GCSEs, and with achieving 2 or more A-levels[38].

Talking to parents about 'things that matter' taps into the quality of communication between parent and child when the question is asked to children (like the item we report here) and the answers given depend on the child's comfort in broaching sensitive issues with his/her parent(s), and thus on the quality of the parent-child relationship. These measures also capture 'family connectiveness' and the degree to which the child feels satisfied with their relationship to mother and/or father and feel loved and wanted by family members[39].

Figure 13 shows the frequency with which 11-15 year-olds[40] talk to their mothers and fathers about things that matter'. An uneven distribution is evident when we look at the category of 'hardly ever' which accounts for 21 per cent of children in higher professional

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[37] Ackard, D.M., Neumark-Sztainer. D., Story, M. & Perry, C. (2006) Parent–child connectedness and behavioral and emotional health among adolescents. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 30(1): 59-66

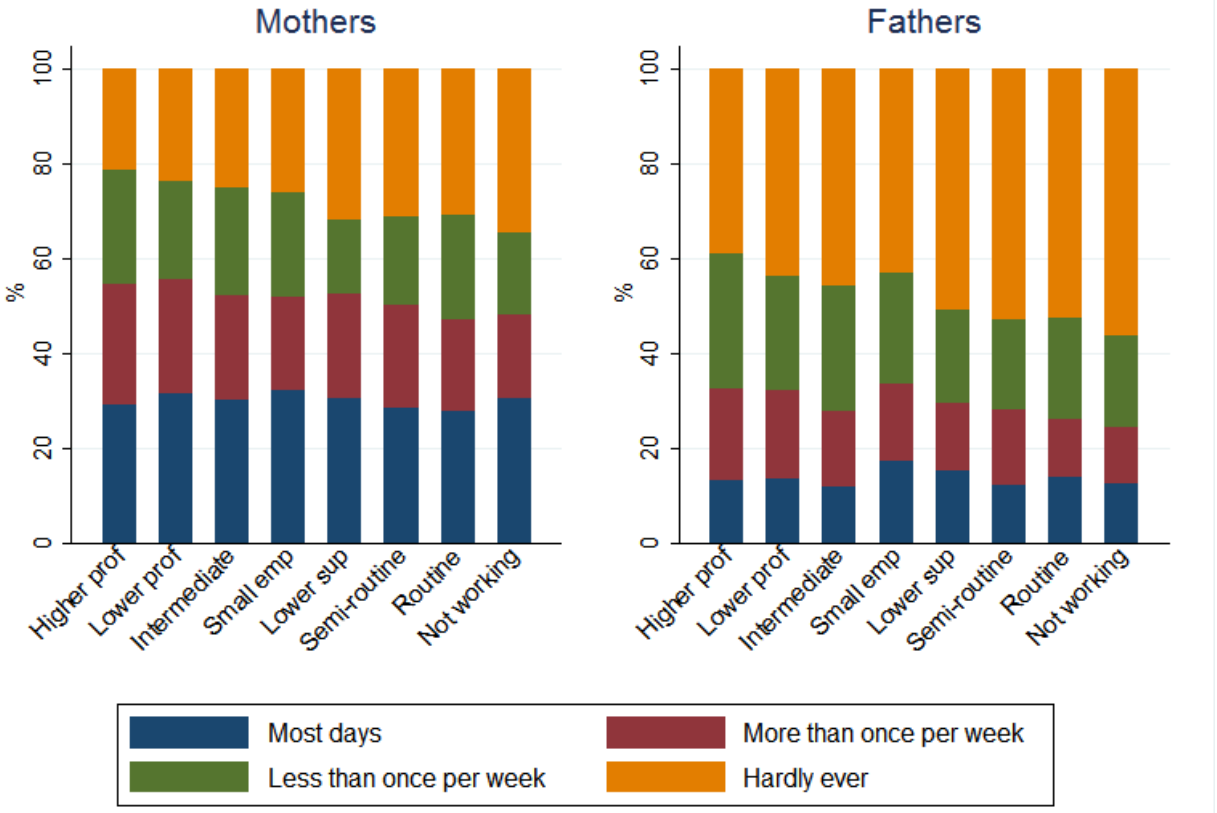
[38] Scott, J. (2004) Family, gender, and educational attainment in Britain: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 35(4): 565-589.

[39] Resnick, M.D., Bearman, P.S., Blum, R.W., Bauman, K.E. Harris, K.M., Jones, J., Beuhring, T., Sieving, R.E., Shew, M., Ireland, M., Bearinger, L.H. & Udry, J.R. (1997) Protecting adolescents from harm: findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *JAMA* 278: 823-32; Nonnemaker, J.M., Silber-Ashley, O., Farrelly, M.C. & Dench, D. (2012) Parent–child communication and marijuana initiation: Evidence using discrete-time survival analysis. *Addictive Behaviors* 37(12): 1342-48.

[40] The overall levels of children saying they talk to their parents are higher among younger children from this age group. In a separate analysis based on 11-year-olds, we see that the patterns of inequality are already present.

households, but 35 per cent of children in households where no parent is working. The differences are similar by educational categories (see Appendix 3). Children talk less to fathers than to mothers, but similar patterns by socioeconomic status are present. There are moderate differences in hardly ever talking to fathers: 39 per cent for children in higher professional households and 56 per cent for those in workless households.

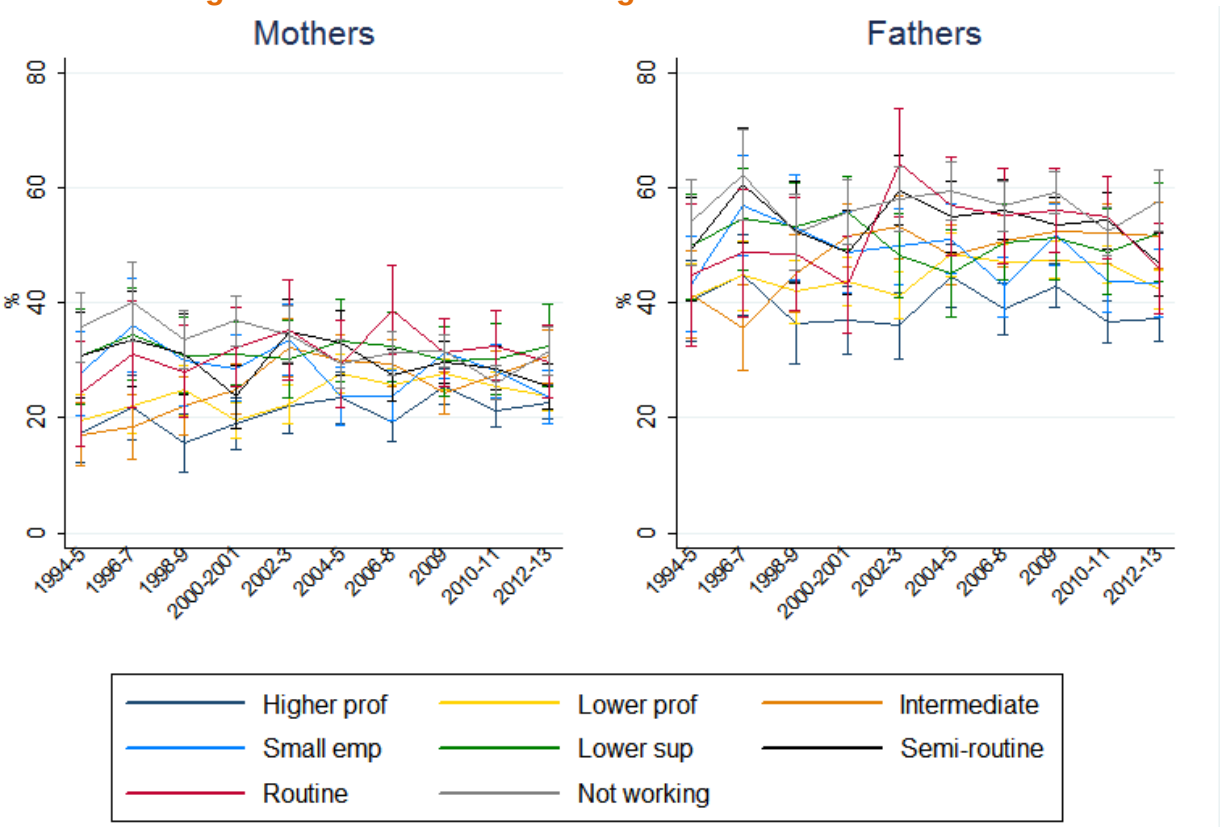
Figure 13 There is a social class gradient in 11-15 year-old children 'hardly ever' talking to their parents about things that matter



Source: BHPS, 1991-2008, UK

Figure 14 shows rates of 'hardly ever' talking to mothers and fathers over time. Again we see a lot of fluctuation and overlapping error bars making a single trend difficult to discern. We conclude that there is no overall trend in the rates of talking to mothers and also to fathers about things that matter. In the case of mothers, it appears with these data that the inequalities may have narrowed a little. However, analysis with an additional data source does not support the suggestion that gaps are narrowing (see Appendix 3).

Figure 14 Levels of 11-15 year-old children 'hardly ever' talking to parents about things that matter did not change between 1994 and 2013



Source: BHPS & USoc, UK

A note on combining BHPS and USoc

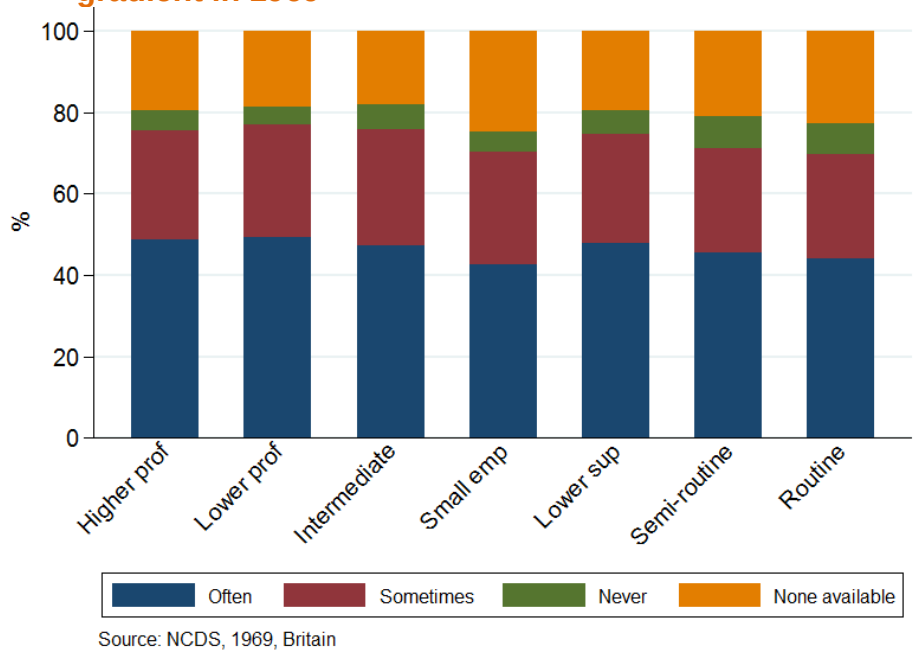
The British Household Panel Survey was replaced by Understanding Society in 2009. Much of the BHPS sample was retained and subsumed into the larger new USoc sample. There were a number of methodological modifications at the survey changeover, and it is likely that these methodological factors influence the results. On all the outcomes in both surveys, the outcomes are better (in normative terms) in the later of the two. Is this because families really have changed their parenting habits between 2008 and 2009? We take the view that a 'step-change' in these outcomes (eating together, talking together) is unlikely and that the sudden drops or increases are more likely to reflect the methodological differences in data collection. To correct for this, in all charts using both sources, the USoc estimates have been adjusted by the average difference in prevalence rates between the two surveys. For families not eating together in the last week, for example, the USoc numbers have been adjusted upwards by 3.7 percentage points.

Domain 1.3: Parental engagement: Physical activity

Children's involvement in sports and physical activity is also positively associated with children's later outcomes. Participation in sports fosters non-cognitive skills including persistence, independence, group work and personal control[41], which can 'spill over' to influence academic and wider outcomes. Playing sports is associated with more time spent on homework, university applications and enrolment, and higher grades at school and university[42]. Sports participation is also linked with broader measures of children's well-being including social well-being[43] and self-esteem[42].

The frequency with which parents took their 11-year-old children swimming in 1969 is broken down by social class in Figure 15. This demonstrates little evidence of a social class gradient in going swimming: the proportion of young people who 'often' went swimming is only slightly larger in higher professional families (49 per cent) than routine families (44 per cent). This question only asks about swimming, so we are unable to determine whether social class gradients existed for other sporting activities.

Figure 15: Swimming among 11-year-olds did not follow a socioeconomic gradient in 1969



Source: NCDS, 1969, Britain

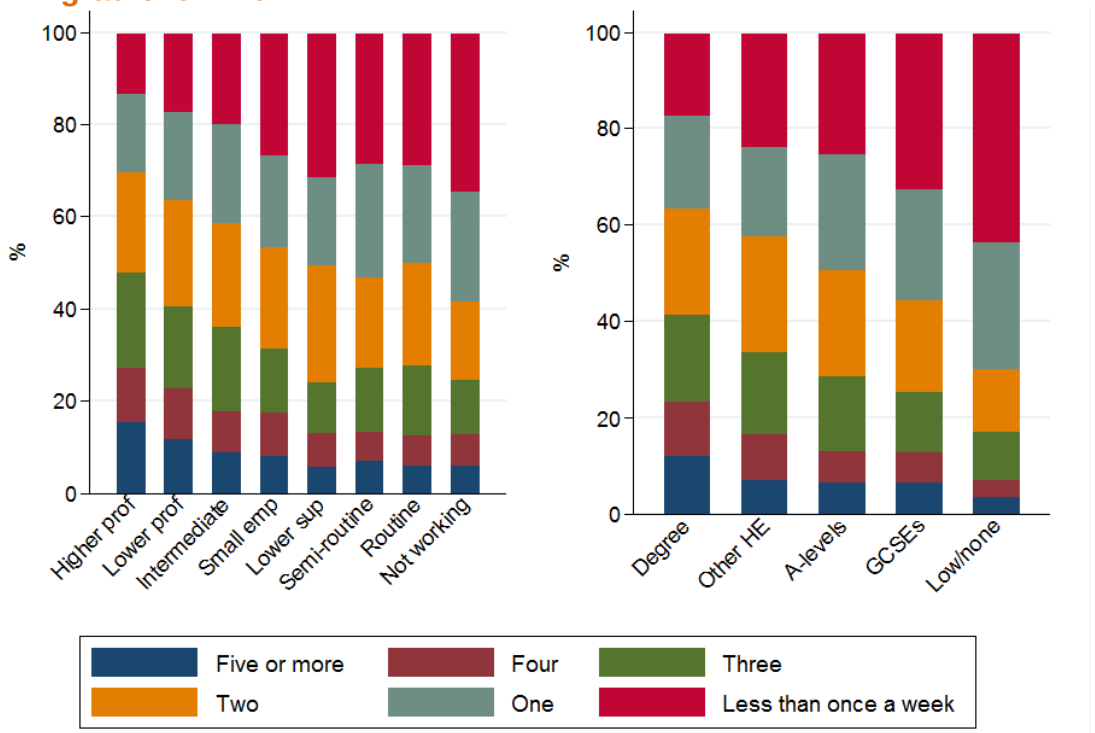
[41] Broh, B.A. (2002) Linking extracurricular programming to academic achievement: Who benefits and why? *Sociology of Education* 75(1): 69-95

[42] Marsh, H.W. & Kleitman, S. (2003) School Athletic Participation: Mostly Gain With Little Pain *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* 25: 205-228

[43] Linver, M., Roth, J.L. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2009) Patterns of Adolescents' Participation in Organized Activities: Are Sports Best When Combined With Other Activities? *Developmental Psychology*, 45(2): 354–367.

Figure 16 illustrates the social class and education gradients in the frequency of 11-year olds playing sport in 2012. The proportion of young people who took part in sport less than once a week was significantly higher for young people living in routine (29 per cent) or non-working households (34 per cent) than those living in higher professional households (13 per cent). These patterns are replicated when exploring sports participation by education. These gradients are steeper for 6-year-olds and 8-year olds (see Appendix 4). Taken together, Figure 16 demonstrates clear social gradients in 11-year old children's participation in sport in 2012, which contrasts with Figure 15, which identified almost no social class gradient in 11-year-olds going swimming in 1969. The social gradient in young people's sports participation may therefore have emerged between 1969 and 2012[44].

Figure 16: Playing sport among 11-year-olds follows a socioeconomic gradient in 2012



Source: MCS, 2012, UK

[44] See Appendix 4 for evidence of socio-economic gaps in walks and outing with parents in 1969 and 1980

Domain 1.4: Parental engagement: Cultural

Some of the activities that parents and children do together are cultural in nature, for example going to the theatre, seeing films, or going to art galleries and so forth. While any activities that parents and children do together are likely to be enjoyable and beneficial the opportunity to learn, it may be that cultural activities have a particular role in encouraging success at school, and later, for accessing the better universities and jobs. This specific function of cultural experience is known as *cultural capital*[45]. The benefit may not stem from the experience itself but from being able to talk about cultural experiences, or express an opinion on various cultural forms[46]. These linguistic features then act as signals that are widely shared in a given society and understood to reflect the 'right' behaviours in terms of habits, skills and tastes. One of the classic studies into cultural capital showed that, even after accounting for the child's ability level and the educational attainment of parents, these 'cultural resources' were associated with achieving higher grades[47]. The same study showed that cultural resources have a greater benefit to those coming from less-advantaged backgrounds: this is known as *cultural mobility theory*. Cultural capital is not just a means to better grades, but has also been shown to increase the odds of a successful application to Oxford University, even after holding grades and parental education constant[48].

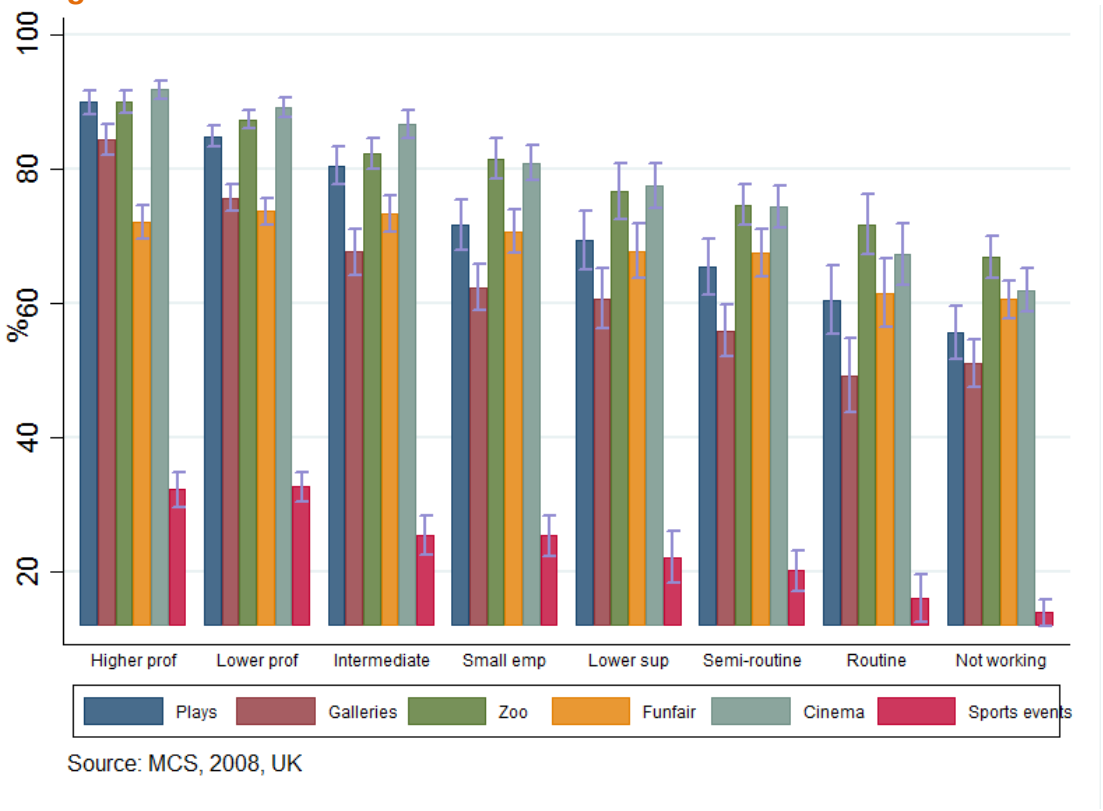
In the framework of cultural capital, culture can be divided into 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow': going to the opera would be considered highbrow while going to a football match would be considered lowbrow. In reality, the lines between low and highbrow are blurred. Football is a case in point; while it used to be the domain of the working classes, it is now enjoyed by people from all SES backgrounds. These lines are also blurred in studies that have attempted to show which activities matters for educational and occupational attainment. Some studies have found that the reading habits of parents had a stronger effect than 'beaux arts' participation (galleries, plays, concerts)[49]. What may matter more is knowledge of the 'dominant culture' which reflects broader cultural knowledge of the things most people do and engage in.

Figure 17 shows the cultural participation rates of 8-year-olds[50]. Types of activities and events are divided into plays, galleries, going to the zoo, funfair, cinema or sports events. Not all of these require economic resources to be able to get involved, but many of these are likely to be expensive days out for families of limited means. Participation is generally high (above 60 per cent) for all of these activities with the exception of sporting events (for which 8 years of age might be too young). However, each and every type of participation is more common among higher-SES families. For some activities, the gradient is rather shallow. For example, the lowest rate of going to the funfair is 61 per

[45] Cultural capital can also be used to describe style of dress and speech and so forth, but here we focus on a number of measures of parents and children doing cultural activities together.
[46] Sullivan, A. (2007) Cultural capital, cultural knowledge and ability. *Sociological Research Online* 12(6): 1
[47] DiMaggio, P. (1982) Cultural capital and school success: The impact of status culture participation on the grades of US high school students. *American Sociological Review* 47(2): 189-201
[48] Zimdars, A., Sullivan, A. & Heath, A. (2009) Elite higher education admissions in the arts and sciences: is cultural capital the key? *Sociology* 43(4): 648-66
[49] De Graaf, N.D., De Graaf, P.M. & Kraaykamp, G. (2000) Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in the Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. *Sociology of Education*: 92-111.
[50] Similar inequalities are also found in the rates of cultural participation of 11-15 year-olds (see Appendix 5).

cent in the not-working households, and above 70 per cent in the top four classes. There are steeper gradients in going to art galleries (51 per cent among the not working, and 84 per cent among the higher professionals) and going to sporting events (32 per cent higher professional households and 14 per cent in households where no-one works)[51].

Figure 17: Participation in cultural activities at age 8 follows a social class gradient

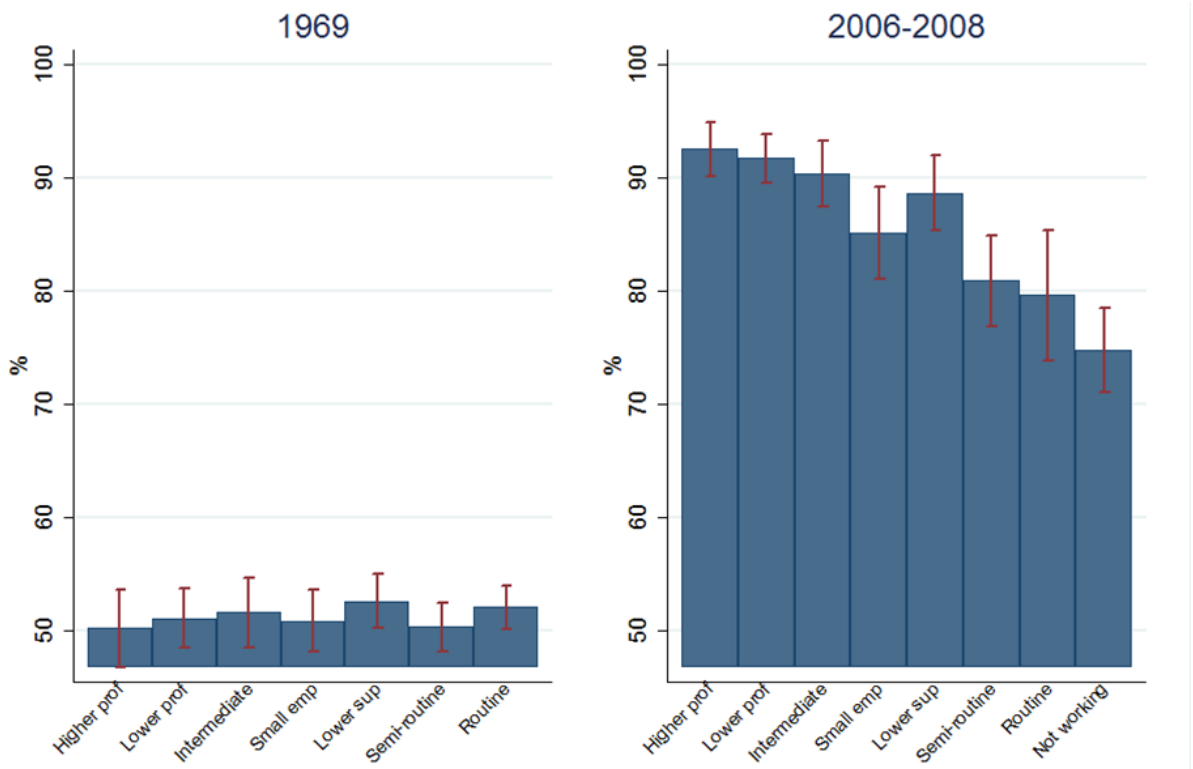


Source: MCS, 2008, UK

[51] Patterns are similar by education (see Appendix 5).

Going to the cinema is one specific activity for which we can roughly compare results with a measure available in the early cohort study. Figure 18 is shows that in 1969 there was almost no difference by social class in cinema attendance, with around 50 per cent of children in all household types going either often or sometimes. It appears that for this particular activity that an inequality has emerged over the decades. It is difficult to know if the cinema constitutes a unique case or if inequalities have also grown in other forms of participation.

Figure 18: A socio-economic gradient emerged in cinema attendance between 1969 and 2006-2008

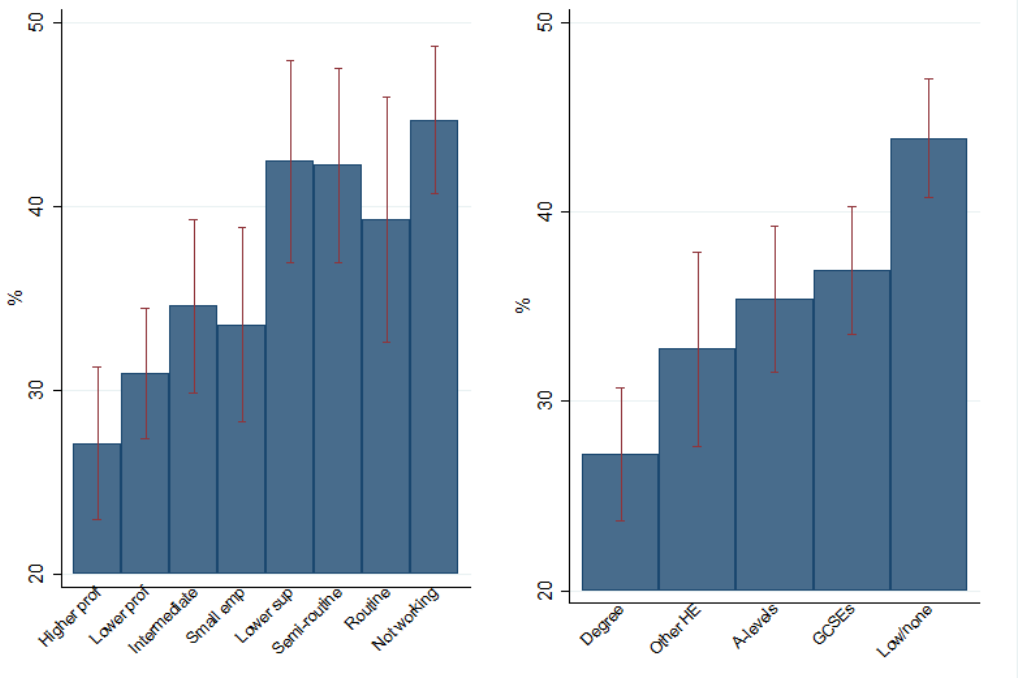


Sources: NCDS, 1969, Britain; Taking Part Survey youth sample, 2006 and 2008, England

Domain 1.5 Barriers to extra-curricular activities

It is also possible to explore patterns of young people not engaging in extra-curricular activities, and their reasons for this. Not being involved in any type of organized activities is potentially detrimental to young people, and is associated with reduced social well-being, and lower perceived ability and positive behaviours[43]. The proportion of 11-15 year-olds who said they would like to do more extra-curricular activities is displayed by social class and education in Figure 19 below. Because of small numbers, this figure refers to all extra-curricular activities, combining cultural and physical activities. There are clear social gradients: a higher proportion of young people living in routine (39 per cent) and non-working households (45 per cent) said they wanted to do more extra-curricular activities than young living in higher professional households (27 per cent). This pattern is very clearly replicated by education (see Appendix 4). It demonstrates that the lower rates of participation in extra-curricular activities by low-SES young people do not reflect social differences in young people's preferences for how they spend their time, but instead that lower levels of participation among disadvantaged young people is driven by difficulties in accessing these activities.

Figure 19: Wanting to do more extra-curricular activities among 11-15-year-olds follows a socioeconomic gradient



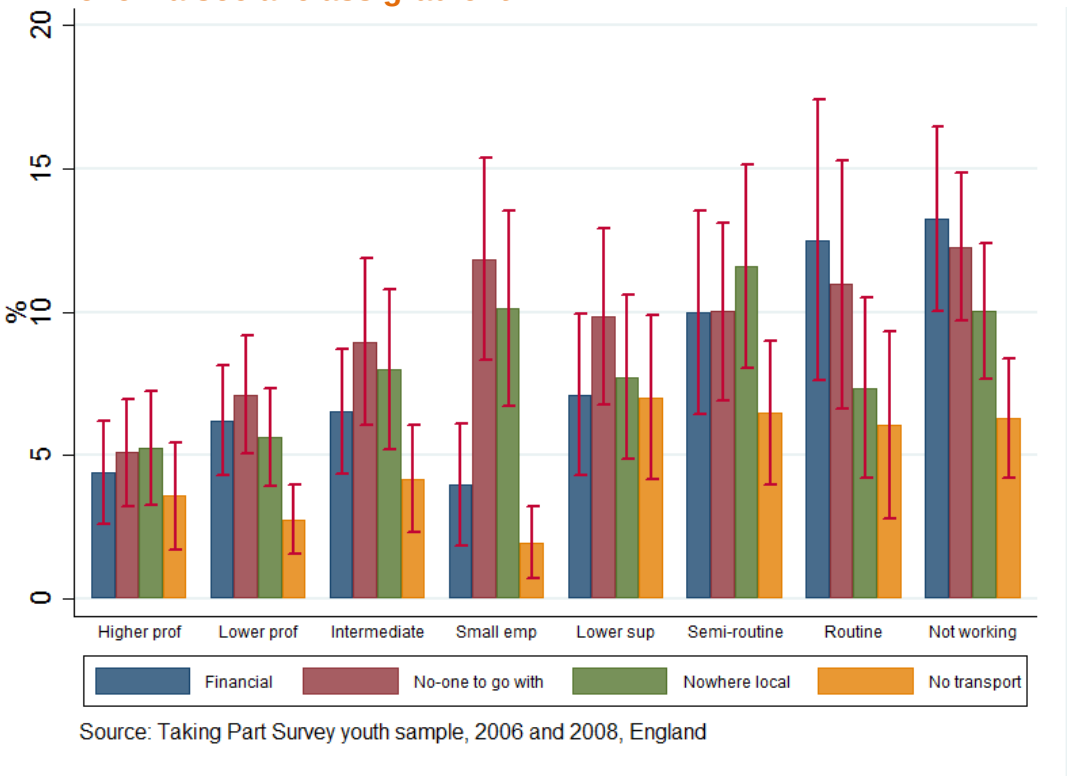
Source: Taking Part Survey youth sample, 2006 and 2008, England

To explore barriers to participation in greater detail, the Taking Part Survey asks 11-15 year-old young people to state the reasons stopping them from participating in extra-curricular activities. As above, because of small numbers, this figure refers to all extra-curricular activities, and the error bars are large. Barriers to extra-curricular participation are reported by social class in Figure 20. As expected, financial barriers to participation were mentioned by a larger proportion of children from routine and non-working families (both 13 per cent) than children in higher professional families (4 per cent). Financial reasons were not however the only barrier to participation: a higher proportion of children

from routine and non-working than higher professional households reported having no-one to go with (11, 12 and 5 per cent), having nowhere local (7, 10 and 5 per cent), and having no transport (6, 6 and 4 per cent)[52].

Taken together, it is clear that children in lower social class groups are more likely to experience several barriers to participation in extra-curricular activities. Financial barriers were the largest reason but were not the only factor that reduced participation in disadvantaged groups, demonstrating that issues of transport and accessibility are also important to understand the social gradient in participation in extra-curricular activities.

Figure 20: Barriers to extra-curricular participation among 11-15-year-olds follow a social class gradient



Source: Taking Part Survey youth sample, 2006 and 2008, England

[52] We see similar patterns by education (see Appendix 4).

Key Findings: Parental Engagement

Overall improvements with narrowing inequalities were seen:

- Mothers reading to 6 or 7 year-olds (see below for fathers) increased overall by 45 percentage points – the SES gap narrowed from 19 percentage points in 1965 to 6 percentage points in 2006
- Helping with homework increased overall from 81 per cent to 83 per cent – the SES gap closed from 15 percentage points in 2004 to 4 percentage points in 2013
- Attending parents' evenings at schools increased overall from 90 per cent to 95 per cent – the SES gap narrowed from 20 percentage points in 2004 to 12 percentage points in 2013

Some overall improvements are accompanied by widening inequalities:

- Fathers reading to children – though this increased by 44 per cent between 1965 and 2006, the SES gap widened from 15 to 26 percentage points.
- *Gruffalo time* (parental time investment) – there was an average increase from 23 minutes per day in 1975 to 80 minutes per day in 2015. However, the SES gap widened from 20-30 minutes to 40 minutes per day.
- Going to the cinema has become more common, but an SES gradient has emerged – in 1965 around 50 per cent of children from all backgrounds went to the cinema. By 2006, 92 per cent of high-SES go, compared to 62 per cent of low-SES children
- The overall trend in physical activity is less clear, but we have some evidence of emerging inequalities – there was little inequality in swimming in 1969, but gradients in sport more generally in 2012

Persistent inequalities:

- Parent-child communication. Around 21 per cent of high-SES children report hardly ever talking to their mother about things that matter, compared to 35 per cent of low-SES children. This gap appears to have been persistent over the last two decades.

We do not have data for change over time, but there are moderate or large inequalities in:

- Doing sports and physical activity – in 2012, 34 per cent of children in low-SES households did sport less than once a week compared to 13 per cent of high-SES households
- Low-SES children are more likely to say they would like to do more activities (45 per cent compared to 27 per cent)
- Low-SES children are also more likely to say that financial barriers, including transportation etc. prevent them from participating more. For example, 13 per cent of low-SES children compared to 4 per cent of high-SES kids mention financial reasons for not doing more cultural and sporting activities
- High-SES children do more cultural activities. For example, 84 per cent of children from high-SES homes compared to 51 per cent from low-SES homes go to art galleries

There was no clear SES gradient in:

- Monitoring homework
- Eating together (There is a very small SES difference of 3 percentage points in eating together 6 or 7 times per week: 37 per cent compared to 40 per cent)
- Children's ratings of parents' interest in their education. This is in contrast to teacher ratings which are strongly graded by SES.

Domain 2.1: Children's behaviours: Violation of norms and rules

The focus of this section is on behaviours that might appropriately be termed 'risky behaviours', which are variously associated with reduced educational and occupational attainment. We also explore children's behavioural problems; although these behaviours are not an expression of young people's behavioural choices, they have long-term consequences for children throughout adulthood.

The behaviours discussed in this section all carry negative consequences for young people, both in the short-term and with longer-term effects. However, it is not always clear whether the behaviours themselves have direct causal effects on young people's prospects. It is instead possible that engaging in these behaviours is instead a consequence of other factors, so might not be independently important to children's prospects. For example, teenage alcohol use may have direct negative consequences for young people's educational outcomes by affecting brain functioning or detracting from time spent studying. Alternatively, teenage alcohol use might reflect pre-existing differences, such as in socioeconomic background[53] or school attainment[54] between young people, which are instead the 'true' determinants of young people's later prospects. In some respects, these non-causal associations are still important because these intermediate behaviours serve as a warning for later problems. However, the unclear causal mechanisms linking children' behaviour with their later outcomes means we should be cautious when interpreting the causal role of these behaviours on children's prospects.

Truancy

Young people playing truant from school is associated with reduced educational attainment at both the individual and school level[55]. The figures reported here are likely to underestimate levels of truancy as the school-based survey will not capture children who were excluded from school during fieldwork. We can explore changes in truancy by measures of Free School Meals status (FSM) between 1999 and 2014[56]. General trends in truancy over this period are replicated in two sources, corroborating these results (see Appendix 6). The FSM gap in truancy reduced over this period: in 1999-2000, truancy among non-FSM young people was 11 percentage points higher than in FSM young people, halving to 5 percentage points in 2013-2014 (see Figure 21).

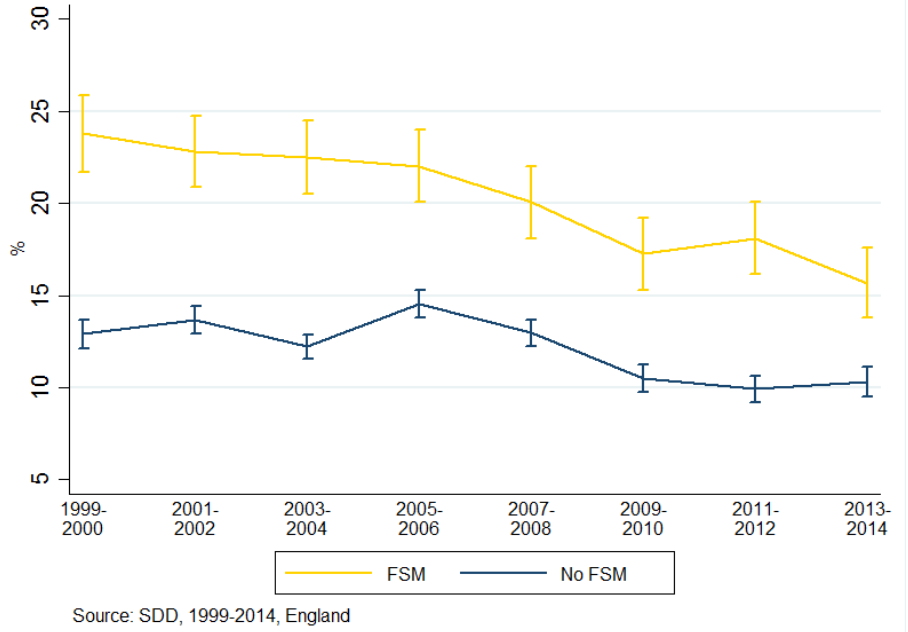
[53] Staff, J., Patrick, M.E., Loken, E. & Maggs, J. L. (2008) Teenage alcohol use and educational attainment. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 69(6): 848–858

[54] Ellickson, P.L., Tucker, J.S. & Klein, D.J. (2003) Ten-year prospective study of public health problems associated with early drinking. *Pediatrics* 111: 949-55

[55] OECD (2014) Who are the school truants? *PISA in focus* 35

[56] We also check by social class and education between 2004 and 2013 with an alternative data source, shown in Appendix 6.

Figure 21: Truancy declined and socioeconomic differences in truancy narrowed between 1999 and 2014



Source: SDD, 1999-2014, England

Fixed-term school exclusions

School exclusions – a disciplinary measure whereby a young person is temporarily removed from school for a fixed period – are a further risk factor for children's later prospects. Fixed-period exclusions (referred to throughout as exclusions) cover a set period of time, after which the pupil returns to their usual classes, and are distinct from expulsions or permanent exclusions. Due to data availability, we report only on fixed-period exclusions. School exclusions are worrying as they represent both a consequence of poor conduct at school, but also present risks to subsequent outcomes, by interrupting young people's schooling, undermining their links with school, and increasing rebelliousness, potentially reinforcing patterns of negative behaviour[57] and placing young people into contact with negative peer networks. To this extent, exclusions are more prevalent among students who have been excluded previously[58], and fixed-period exclusions are the largest single precursor for permanent exclusions[59]. The possibility that school exclusions serve as a first step towards young people's wider exclusion from society has also been noted[60]. Like the other behaviours discussed in this chapter, exclusions act as a precursor to later experiences of disadvantage[61].

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[57] Hemphill, S. A., Toumbourou, J. W., Herrenkohl, T. I., McMorris, B. J. and Catalano, R. F. (2006) The Effect of School Suspensions and Arrests on Subsequent Adolescent Antisocial Behavior in Australia and the United States, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39(5): 736–744.

[58] Theriot, M. T., Craun, S. W. and Dupper, D. R. (2010) Multilevel evaluation of factors predicting school exclusion among middle and high school students, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(1): 13–19.

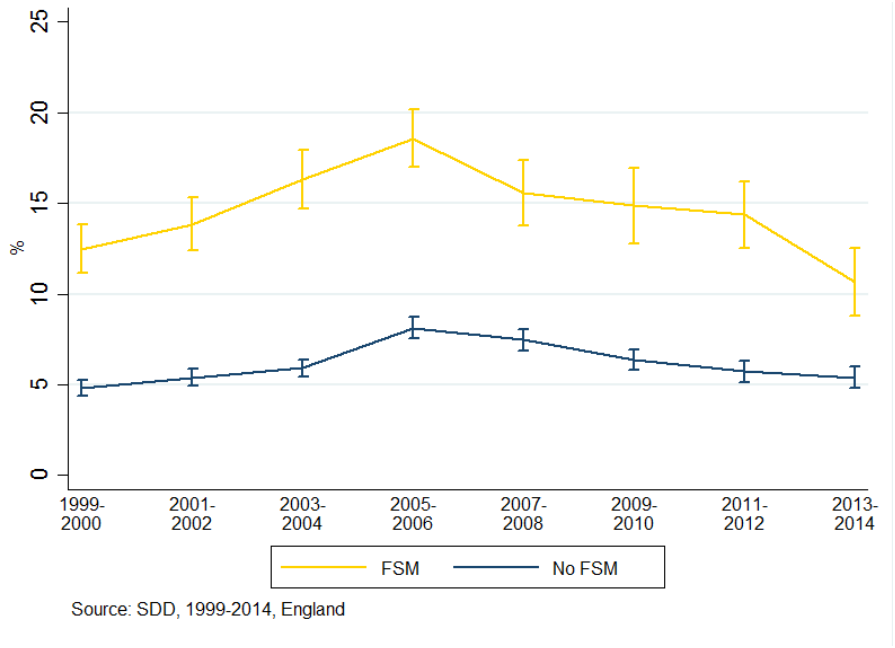
[59] Strand, S. and Fletcher, J. (2014) *A Quantitative Longitudinal Analysis of Exclusions from English Secondary Schools*. Oxford.

[60] Blyth, E. & Milner, J. (1993) Exclusion from school: a first step in exclusion from society? *Children & Society* 7: 255-68.

[61] The figures reported here are almost certain to underestimate levels of school exclusions as the school-based survey will not capture children who were excluded from school during the fieldwork period. Furthermore, exclusion rates are thought to be influenced by schools' policy on responses to challenging behaviour, and the extent to which schools enforce exclusions over other strategies, although this possibility has received mixed empirical support.

Changes in school exclusions by measures of free school meals between 1999 and 2014 (Figure 22) are displayed below[62]. The FSM gradient in school exclusions reduced over this period: in 1999-2000, exclusions among FSM young people were 8 percentage points higher than in non-FSM young people, reducing to 5 percentage points in 2013-2014, demonstrating a narrowing of the gap in school exclusions over time[63].

Figure 22 School exclusions persisted and socioeconomic differences in exclusions narrowed between 1999 and 2014



Source: SDD, 1999-2014, England

Smoking

Reducing smoking has been a persistent public health priority in the UK. Two-thirds of adult smokers in Britain started smoking before 18 years of age, while 40 per cent had started smoking before they were 16[64]. In response to this, major attempts have been made to reduce smoking among young people, primarily through the progressive restriction of cigarette sales. Smoking before the age of 14 is associated with elevated rates of alcohol dependence, substance use disorders and depression in adulthood, even after accounting for family background[65]. Figure 23 shows overall smoking rates alongside regular and occasional smoking among 11-15-year olds in England between 1999-2000 and 2013-2014 for children who did and did not receive free school meals. Over this period, a significantly higher proportion of pupils receiving FSM reported smoking regularly, while there were no clear differences in occasional smoking between groups. Smoking declined progressively over this period in both groups. The absolute size of this gap halved from 4 percentage points in 1999-2000 to 2 percentage points in

[62] General trends in school exclusions over this period are replicated in two sources (see Appendix 6) and also corroborate National Statistics figures and analyses of administrative data, so we can be confident of our results.

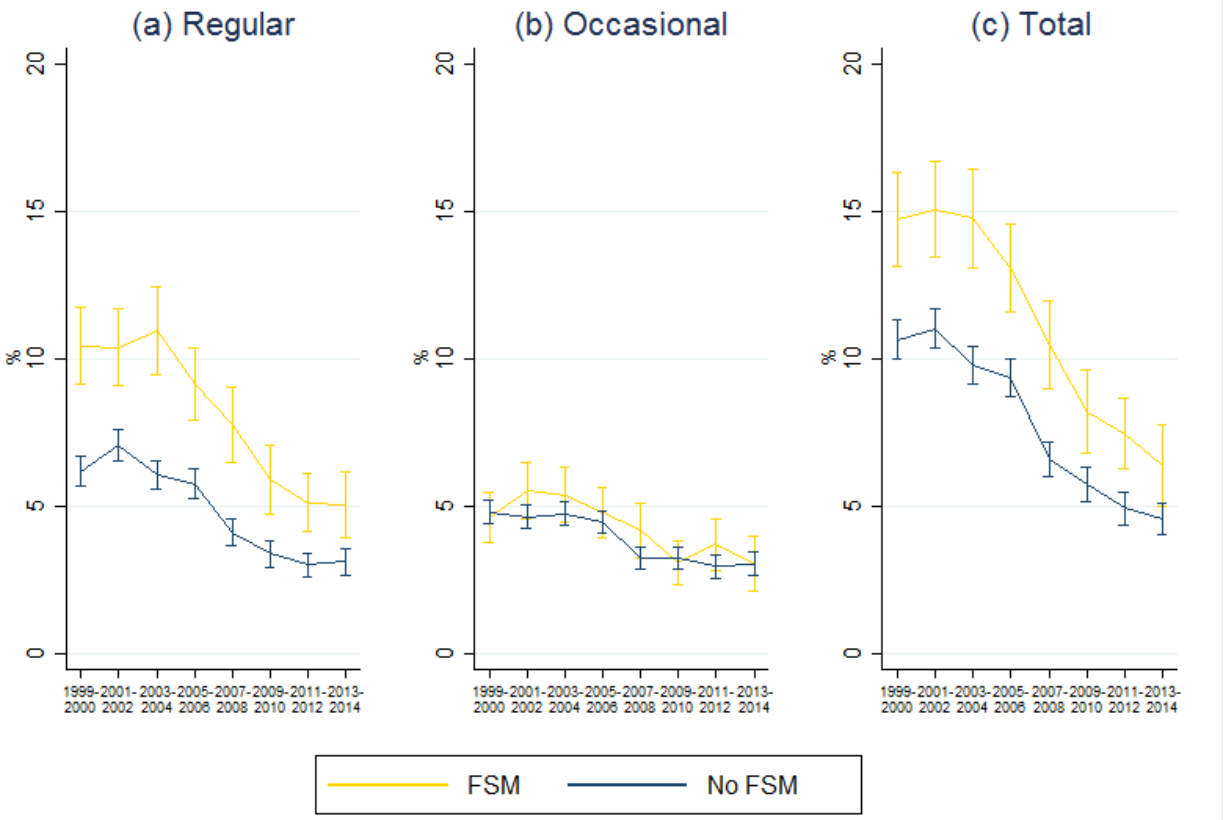
[63] Similar stories emerge when exploring trends in exclusions by social class and education (see Appendix 6).

[64] Office for National Statistics (2013) *Chapter 1 - Smoking. Report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey*. London: ONS.

[65] Brook, D.W., Brook, J.S., Zhang, C., Cohen, P. & Whiteman, M. (2002) Drug use and the risk of major depressive disorder, alcohol dependence, and substance use disorders. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 59: 1039-44

2013-2014, indicating a narrowing of social class inequalities over a period of dramatic improvements to young people's smoking.

Figure 23: Smoking declined and socioeconomic differences in smoking narrowed between 1999 and 2014



Source: SDD, 1999-2014, England

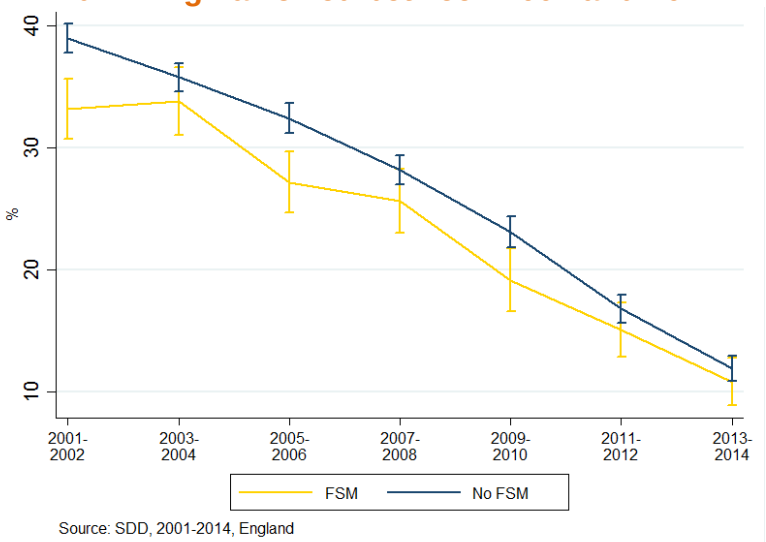
Drinking

Alcohol consumption typically begins during the teenage years. Particular concerns have been raised about the high prevalence of underage drinking in the UK, where 65 per cent of 15-16 year-olds in the UK had consumed alcohol in the past month, compared to 57 per cent in 36 western countries[57]. The risks of alcohol use may be greater for young people than adults: alcohol has a larger effect on adolescent brains, and high levels of alcohol consumption may disrupt brain maturation during this period[66]. Young people may have a lower tolerance to alcohol than adults, placing them at risk from intoxication and its consequences including injury, violence (both as perpetrators and victims), drug taking, and early pregnancy and parenthood. Longer-term, underage drinking is associated with lower educational attainment and employment problems thereby exerting a direct effect on mobility chances[54].

[66] Spear, L. P. (2002) The adolescent brain and the college drinker: Biological basis of propensity to use and misuse alcohol *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 14: 71–81

Figure 24 displays the proportions of 11-15 year-old young people in England who reported having an alcoholic drink in the past month[67] between 2001 and 2014 for children who did and did not receive free school meals. Drinking alcohol more than halved over this period from 41 per cent in 2001-2002 to 18 per cent in 2013-2014. This pattern illustrates a longer-term trend of declining alcohol use in young people, where 80 per cent of 16-year-olds in 1974 reporting drinking alcohol in the past month[53]. Young people's drinking follows an *inverse* social gradient, where rates of drinking alcohol are more prevalent in more advantaged groups[68]. Children receiving FSM are less likely than non-FSM young people to report drinking alcohol in the past month, although these differences are not statistically significant in all years. The inverse social class gradient also reduced over this period: in 2001-2002, drinking among non-FSM young people was 6 percentage points higher than in FSM young people, reducing to an absolute difference of 1 percentage point in 2013-2014, narrowing the inverse social class gradient in young people drinking.

Figure 24 Drinking alcohol has declined and socioeconomic differences in drinking narrowed between 2001 and 2014



Source: SDD, 2001-2014, England

Drug use

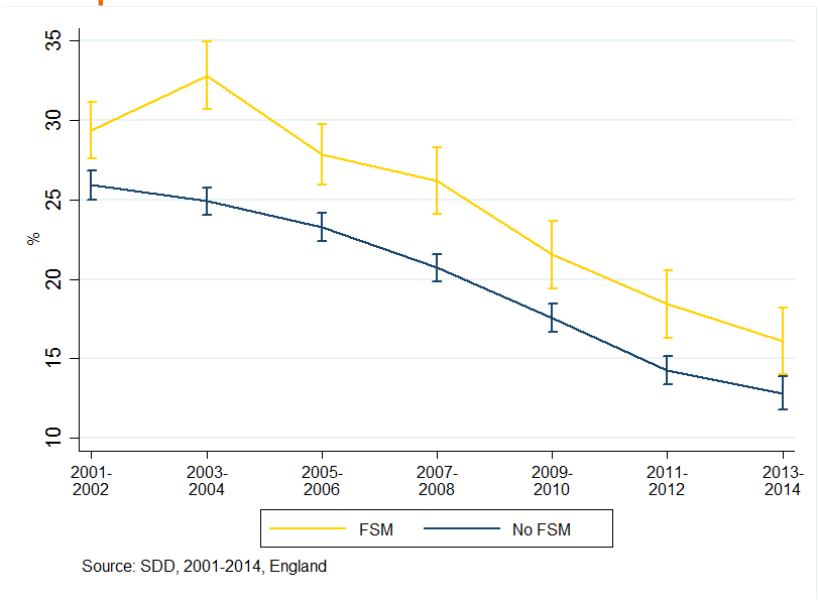
The UK has higher rates of drug use than other countries[69], and policies have attempted to reduce drug use on the understanding that adolescent drug use has negative consequences. Lifetime drug use among 15-16 year-olds in the UK is considerably higher than the European average (27 and 18 per cent, respectively), suggesting that drug use is a particular problem for the UK[70]. However, research on the consequences of adolescent drug use has revealed inconsistent evidence, so the later effects of drug use are poorly understood. For example, drug use before the age of 14 was associated with elevated rates of alcohol dependence, substance use disorders and depression during

[67] This simple measure of alcohol use does not distinguish different levels of alcohol consumption, but even infrequent drinking has negative consequences during adolescence and adulthood.
[68] This reverse gradient in alcohol use has previously been reported in adults and young people – see http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB10932/alc-eng-2013-rep.pdf
[69] Smart, R. G. & Ogborne, A. C. (2000) Drug use and drinking among students in 36 countries. *Addictive Behaviors*, 25(3): 455–460
[70] Hibell, B., Guttormsson, U., Ahlström, S., Balakireva, O., Bjarnason, T., Kokkevi, A. and Kraus, L. (2012) *The 2011 ESPAD report. Substance use among students in 36 European countries*. Stockholm.

adulthood[71]. Others have reported that associations between drug use and lower educational attainment and psychological health[72] weakened and in some cases disappeared after accounting for some of the precursors of drug use. This means that the consequences of drug use may not reflect the impact of taking drugs per se, but instead broader risks that might make young people susceptible both to taking drugs and later negative consequences. Despite mixed and unclear evidence over the true consequences of young people's drug use, it is nonetheless informative to explore trends over time.

The proportion of 11-15 year-olds in England who reported ever using drugs by FSM status between 2002 and 2014 is plotted in Figure 25. This captures use of all illegal drugs including volatile substances (e.g. sniffing solvents, gases, aerosols, glues), but the same trends are evident when volatile substances are excluded. Drug use nearly halved from 2001-2002 when 28 per cent of young people said they had used drugs, to 15 per cent in 2013-2014. This decline is evident in both FSM and non-FSM young people, although a larger proportion of FSM than non-FSM reported ever using drugs throughout this period. Over this period, drug use was consistently 3 percentage points higher in FSM young people, indicating maintenance of the social gradient in young people's drug use over this period[73].

Figure 25 Illegal drug use has declined but socioeconomic differences persisted between 2001 and 2014



[71] McNeill, A. (1991) The development of dependence on smoking in children, *British Journal of Addiction*, 86(5): 589–92.

[72] Macleod, J., Oakes, R., Copello, A., Crome, I., Egger, M., Hickman, M., Oppenkowski, T., Stokes-Lampard, H. and Davey Smith, G. (2004) Psychological and social sequelae of cannabis and other illicit drug use by young people: a systematic review of longitudinal, general population studies, *Lancet*, 363(9421): 1579–88.
Mokrysz, C., Landy, R., Gage, S., Munafo, M., Roiser, J. and Curran, H. (2016) Are IQ and educational outcomes in teenagers related to their cannabis use? A prospective cohort study, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 30(2): 159–168.

[73] Young people's drug use depends on the availability of these illegal substances and we also explore whether young people in Britain said their friends have ever used drugs using data from the BHPS (see Appendix 6).

Domain 2.2: Behavioural problems

Childhood behavioural problems are strongly associated with chances for social mobility, being linked to unemployment[74], lower incomes and wages[75,76] and reduced educational attainment[75]. The behaviours we look at in the section also have known associations with impaired mental health[77,78] and higher rates of crime and substance use[77] during adulthood. We compare the social class gradient in children's conduct problems, emotional problems and hyperactivity, as rated by their mothers, between 1969 and 2012 (see Anderson (2016)[79] for more detailed analyses). Because the number of questions, their wording, and the response categories changed during this period, we do not consider absolute levels of particular problems (defined, for example, as having a certain number or severity of symptoms), but instead explore the social class distribution of children with the top 10 per cent of scores in each cohort. This means we do not comment on whether overall levels of behavioural problems have changed or not over this period. Existing evidence is inconsistent, but these behavioural problems may be on the increase[80].

The social class gradient in 11-year-old children's conduct problems is illustrated in Figure 26. We report the social gradient using risk ratios, which tell us how many times more likely it is that an event occurs in one group compared to the most advantaged group[81]. Indicators of conduct problems include disobedience, bullying children, and destructive and other antisocial behaviours. This reveals a class inequality in children's conduct problems where children of fathers working in routine jobs were nearly twice as likely as children with managerial or professional fathers to have the highest level of conduct problems. These inequalities widened by 1980, when children in the routine category were 3.5 times as likely as those from the most advantaged backgrounds to showing the highest level of conduct problems. These wider inequalities persisted or even slightly increased by 2012. For this cohort we also have data on children in households where a social class categorisation is not applicable, where these children (17 per cent of the cohort) are a great deal more likely to have the most severe conduct problems in the cohort, with a risk ratio of 5.8.

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[74] Egan, M., Daly, M. & Delaney, L. (2015) Childhood psychological distress and youth unemployment: Evidence from two British cohort studies. *Social Science and Medicine* 124: 11-17

[75] Delaney, L. & Smith, J.P. (2012) Childhood health: trends and consequences over the life-course. *The Future of Children*, 22(1): 43–63.

[76] Goodman, A., Joyce, R. and Smith, J. P. (2011) The long shadow cast by childhood physical and mental problems on adult life. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108(15): 6032–6037.

[77] Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J. and Ridder, E. M. (2005) Show me the child at seven: The consequences of conduct problems in childhood for psychosocial functioning in adulthood, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46(8): 837–849.

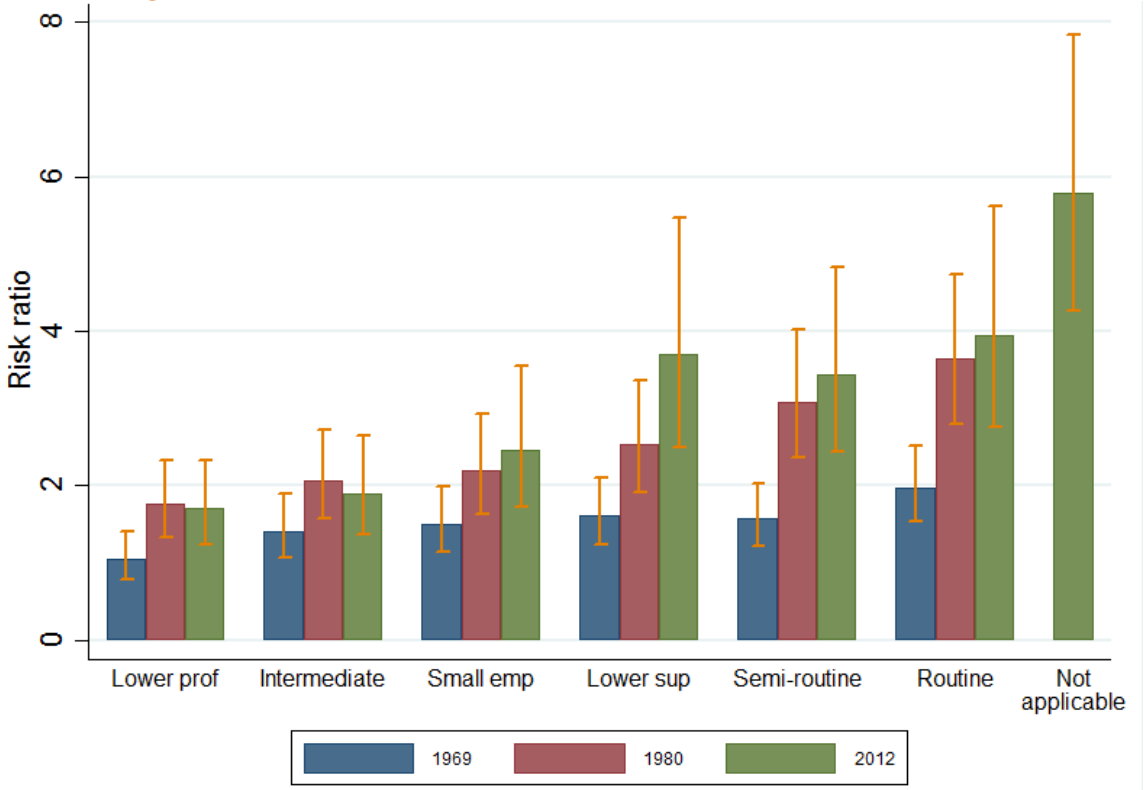
[78] Kim-Cohen, J., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., Harrington, H., Milne, B. J. and Poulton, R. (2003) Prior juvenile diagnoses in adults with mental disorder: Developmental follow-back of a prospective-longitudinal cohort, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 60: 709–717.

[79] Anderson L. (2016) *Inequality in children's mental health and behavioural problems: what are the trends?* Centre for Social Investigation briefing note 19. http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CSI-19-Inequalities-in-childrens-health.pdf

[80] Collishaw, S., Maughan, B., Goodman, R., & Pickles, A. (2004) Time trends in adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45: 1350-62; Collishaw, S (2015) Annual Research Review: Secular trends in child and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 56(3): 370–393.

[81] More details about risk ratios is included in Appendix 1

Figure 26 A socioeconomic gradient in children's conduct problems emerged between 1969 and 2012



Note: the 'not applicable' category in 2012 is approximately equivalent to the 'not working' category displayed elsewhere.

Figure 27 A socioeconomic gradient in children's emotional symptoms emerged between 1969 and 2012

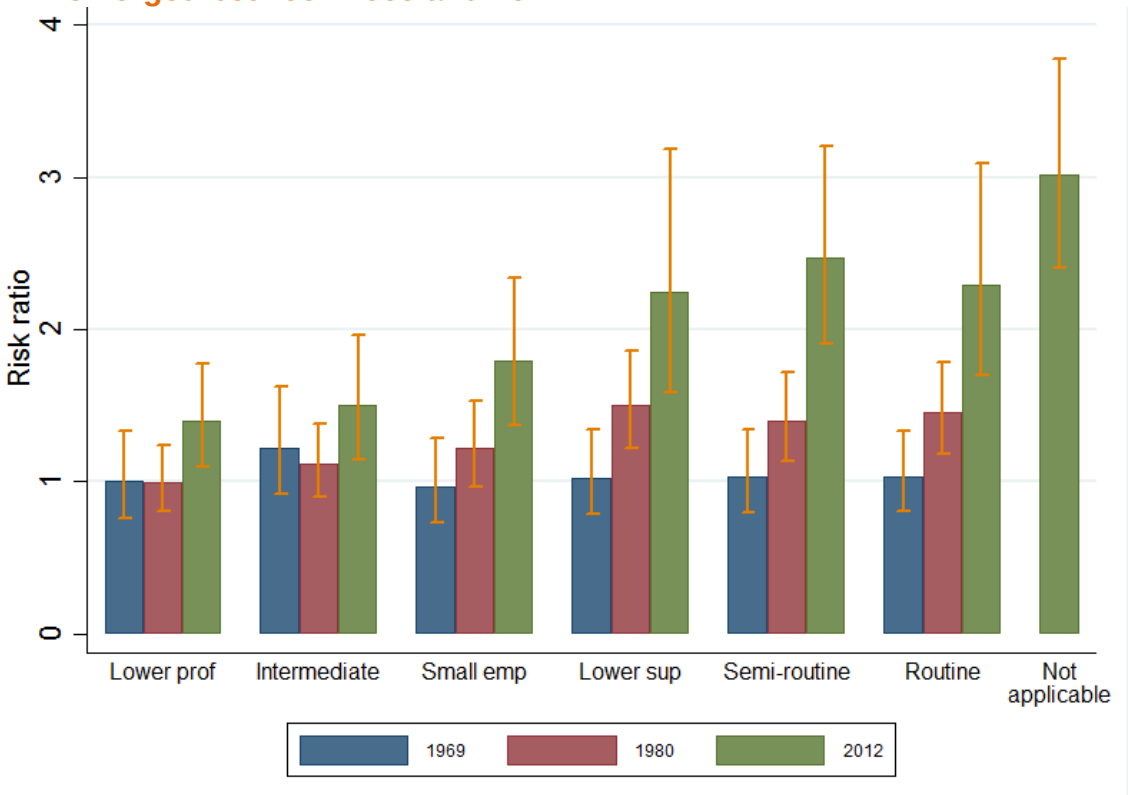
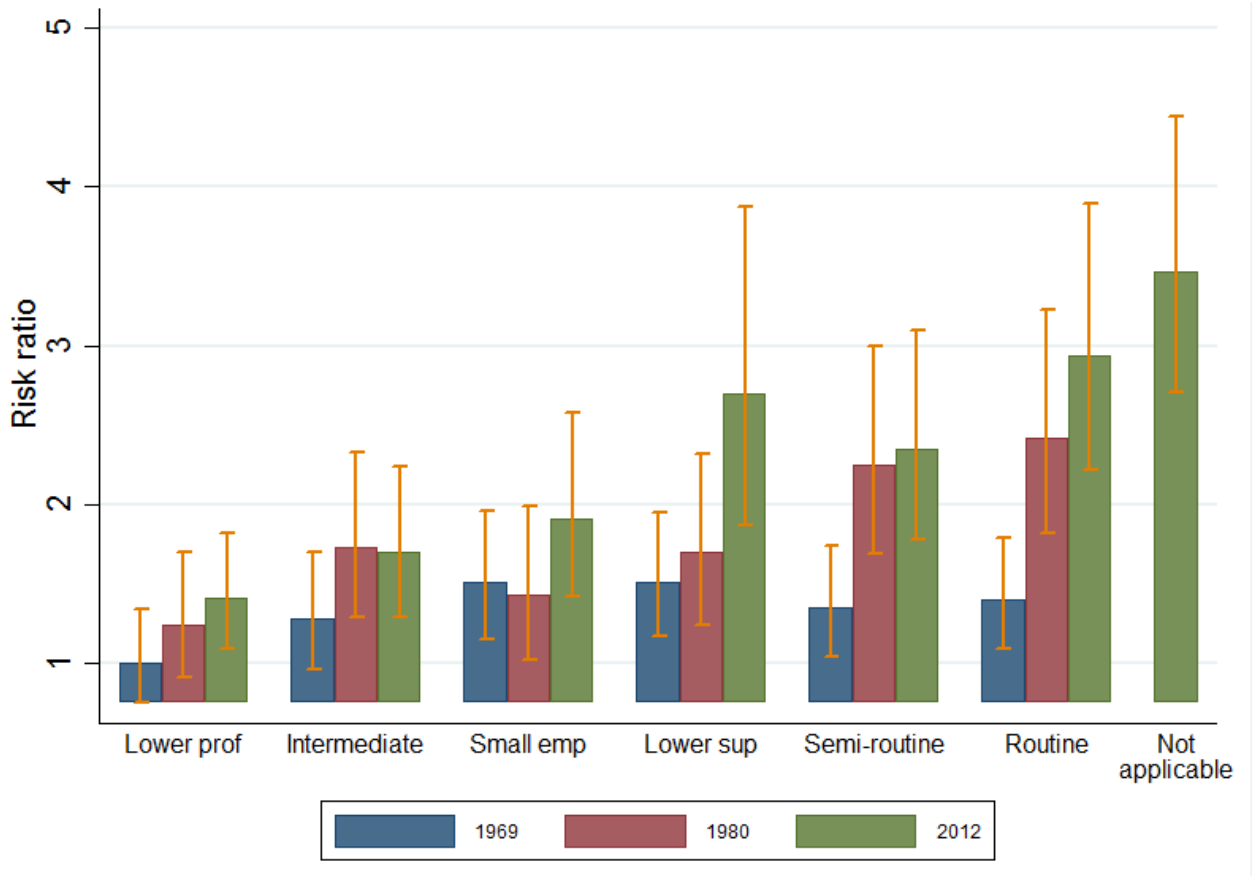


Figure 27 illustrates the social class gradient in children's emotional symptoms. This captures symptoms equivalent to adult anxiety and depression, including low confidence, worrying intensely and nervousness. In 1969, the 10 per cent of children with the most severe emotional symptoms were equally spread between the social classes. By 1980, children in the routine category were 1.5 times more likely to have a high level of emotional symptoms than children with professional parents. In 2012 this inequality has widened further, with risk ratios now above 2 for children from three of the least advantaged class backgrounds, and those in the 'not applicable' category were faring even worse.

Finally, Figure 28 shows the social class gradient in children's hyperactivity. This captures behaviours including restlessness and difficulty sitting still. Consistent with the other indicators of children's behavioural problems, the social class gradient in hyperactivity widened over time. In 1969, children from backgrounds outside the managerial and professional classes were moderately more likely to be the most hyperactive. Increases in children's hyperactivity by 1980 occurred mainly in the lower social classes, and by 2012 this pattern also appeared for the intermediate occupations, and the risk ratio between the routine and higher managerial/professional categories grew to 2.3. Once again, children in the 'not applicable' category were most likely to have high levels of hyperactivity. Taken together, there is a clear widening of the social class gradient in children's behavioural problems across these three domains.

Figure 28 A socioeconomic gradient in children's hyperactivity emerged between 1969 and 2012



Key Findings: Children's behaviours

Overall improvements with narrowing inequalities were seen:

- Truancy fell from 17 per cent to 12 per cent – the gap between high and low-SES children was 11 percentage points in 1999 but more than halved to 5 percentage points by 2014
- Fixed term school exclusions – the gap between high and low-SES children was 8 percentage points in 1999 narrowing to 5 percentage points by 2014. Overall improvement has been only since 2005, falling from 11 per cent to 7 per cent
- Smoking has fallen from 13 per cent to 6 per cent – the gap between high and low-SES children was 4 percentage points in 1999 narrowing to 2 percentage points by 2014
- Drinking has fallen from 41 per cent to 18 per cent – here we see a reverse gradient with better outcomes for high-SES kids. However, the gap also narrowed here from 6 to 1 percentage point between 1999 and 2014

However, some overall improvements are accompanied by persistent inequalities:

- Drug use – overall illegal drug use fell from 28 per cent in 2001 to 15 per cent in 2014. The gap between FSM and non-FSM children remained at around 3 percentage points throughout

Unclear overall trend but widening inequalities in:

- Children's well-being and behaviours:
  - Conduct problems – in 1969 low-SES children were twice as likely to be in the highest 10 per cent of conduct problems than high-SES, a gap growing to *3.5 times as likely* by 1980, a level continuing to 2012
  - Emotional symptoms – in 1969 children from all backgrounds had equal risk but by 2012 low-SES children are *1.5 times as likely* as high-SES children to be in the highest 10 per cent of emotional symptoms
  - Hyperactivity – in 1969 children from all backgrounds had more or less equal risk but by 2012 low-SES children are *2.3 times* as likely as high-SES children to be in the highest 10 per cent of symptoms of hyperactivity

Domain 3: Parents' social networks

A famous paper in the 1970s[82] showed that men who had used interpersonal channels to find their jobs occupied the best positions and had higher incomes. It demonstrated, in other words that *it is not what you know, but who you know* that matters for getting ahead and, therefore, that social networks are a means to access resources. This is often what is meant by the term *social capital*. Social capital can also include those everyday exchanges with friends and family such as small loans, getting lifts, and child-minding. However, the 1970s study on job attainment was an early demonstration that it is not just *close ties* that are important but also that *weak ties*, i.e. acquaintances, have a particular role to play. Social networks are known to be more valuable as a means to access the better jobs if the social connections are 'bridges' into other social circles, and have particular value if they are of high status.

Of course it is possible to have extensive and high-status networks and not make use of them, but in having such networks parents have an increased opportunity to use them to ease their children into their chosen career. As well accessing the better jobs, parental networks are also known to increase the probability of getting good work experience positions and internships. Studies have shown that around half of work experience placements are found with the help of parental social networks, and that higher SES parents have greater access to individuals in managerial and professional jobs[83]. Their children are therefore more likely to end up in placements of higher quality. This in turn is likely to help with accessing universities as well as high-paying or high-status work later on.

Further, it is likely that parental networks are of particular importance when the child does not attain a high level of education, and as such they may provide a means of protecting status attainment between the generations. Research has shown that upwardly-mobile adults have wider, bigger, and higher status networks than those who are in the same (low) social class as their parents. This does not establish a causal link between networks and mobility but it suggests that social networks may be a means by which to achieve social mobility[84]. Evidence in the USA suggests that parents in different class positions use their networks to intervene in their children's schooling. Social ties were drawn upon, for instance, to contest placement decisions, teacher selection, and even the curriculum[85].

The charts in Figure 29 show features of parental social networks[86]; the *average status* scores of the social acquaintances of higher-SES parents are consistently higher than lower-SES parents and the same pattern is evident for the average *range* of networks[87].

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[82] Granovetter, M.S. (1973) The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 1360-80

[83] Mann, A. (2012) *Work experience: impact and delivery–insights from the evidence*. London, Education and Employers Taskforce; Hatcher, R. & Le Gallais, T. (2008) *The work experience placements of secondary school students: widening horizons or reproducing social inequality?* Birmingham City University, Faculty of Education

[84] Li, Y., Savage, M. & Warde, A. (2008) Social mobility and social capital in contemporary Britain. *The British Journal of Sociology* 59(3): 391-411

[85] Horvat, E.M., Weininger, E.B. & Lareau, A. (2003) From social ties to social capital: Class differences in the relations between schools and parent networks. *American Educational Research Journal* 40(2): 319-51

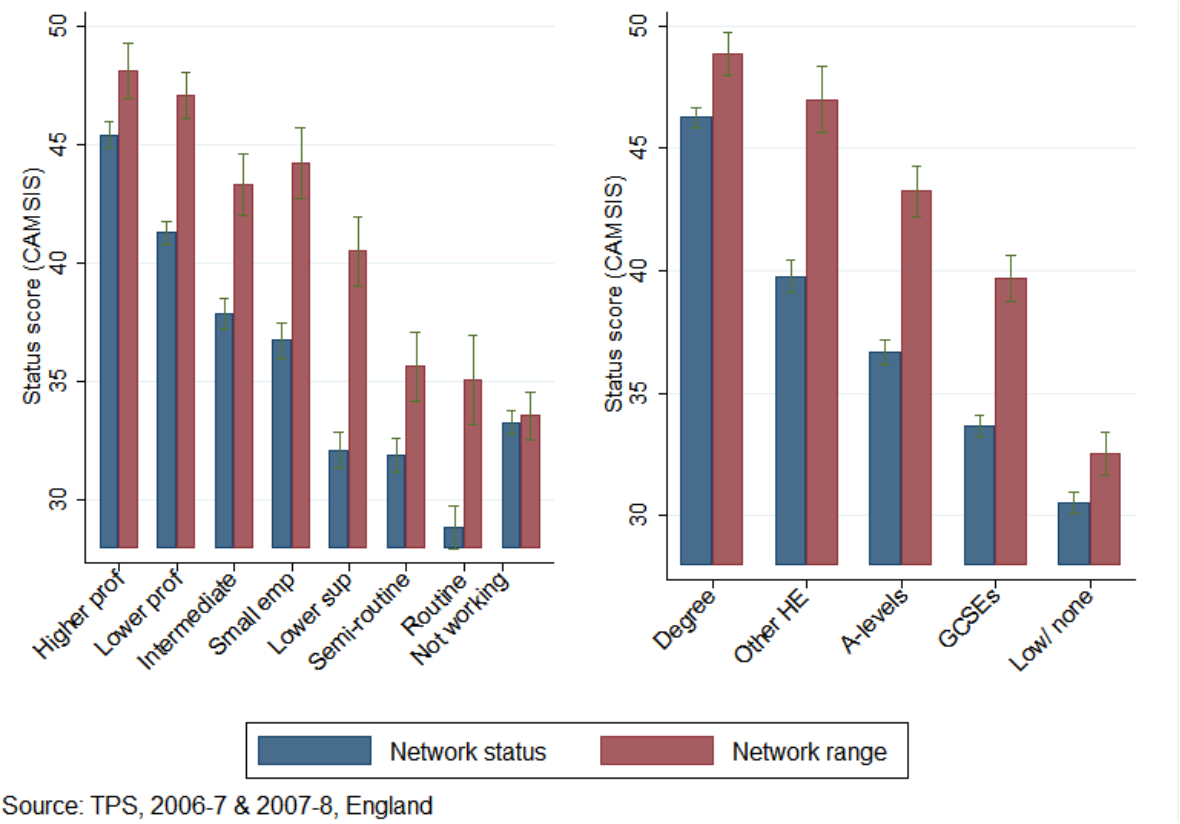
[86] There is also a shallow social gradient whereby the higher SES groups are less likely to say that their friends' incomes are all similar (see Appendix 7)

[87] We see similar patterns for network volume, though these charts are not shown

The average status score of an acquaintance of a routine parent is around 25 compared to 45 for the higher professionals. These scores are somewhat opaque (see inset box 'Measuring networks…'), but in more concrete terms, our data show that 48 per cent of those in higher professional households are acquainted with a university or college lecturer, compared to just 14 per cent of those in routine households. This is an apt example for understanding the effect on the chances of children; a connection to someone working in a higher education establishment may well translate into good advice on educational choices, tips for interviews, or references for applications. In a study of young people about to enter university and their families, for example, Diane Reay and colleagues interviewed a middle class mother who obtained information about Cambridge colleges by asking an acquaintance who worked there. Such 'hot' knowledge has higher currency than 'cold' official information[88].

The average status of acquaintance of the not-working families is higher than those in the working classes, possibly reflecting the heterogeneity of this category. However, their network range is limited and it is likely that the workplace is fertile ground for making social connections. Although there is no time series data available to see how these network dynamics might be evolving over time, previous research on census data has shown that the rich and the poor now live further apart than they used to, and that clustering of both poor and wealthy households has increased[89].

Figure 29 The average status of acquaintances is far higher among higher-SES groups; the range of social networks is also wider in high-SES families



Source: TPS, 2006-7 & 2007-8, England

[88] Reay, D., David, M. E., & Ball, S. J. (2005). *Degrees of choice: Class, race, gender and higher education*. Trentham Books.
[89] Dorling, D., Rigby, J., Wheeler, B., Ballas, D., Thomas, B., Famny, E., Gordon, D. & Lupton, R. (2007) Poverty and Wealth Across Britain 1968-2005. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Measuring networks with the 'Position Generator'

Social networks are very challenging to measure. We all have hundreds of acquaintances, so how might these be measured in large-scale quantitative studies? One solution, which we apply here, is to use a survey instrument known as the *position generator*[90]. This method involves asking respondents to indicate if they know anyone in any of eleven different occupations each designed to represent various locations in terms of social class, and each having a substantial representation in the UK. To interpret these variables, each occupation is assigned a CAMSIS score, a scale that runs 0-100, designed to capture the relative status position held by members of an occupation[91]. Of the eleven occupations in the survey, the highest score is assigned to university/ college lecturers and the lowest to factory workers. Using these scores, three variables are generated each describing different aspects of the social network. Firstly, range is calculated by deducting the lowest from the highest score and gives an indication of the span of different social classes in the network. Secondly, a mean is computed providing an indicator of the average status of ties. The mean and range, being based on CAMSIS scores, are rather abstract in nature but can be interpreted as a linear scale in which higher scores indicate greater status. No distinction is made here in the type of relationship that characterises the tie. It is important to note that while the survey instrument uses the example of occupations, the network scores are intended as proxy measures of the features of social networks more broadly.

Advice and support for parents

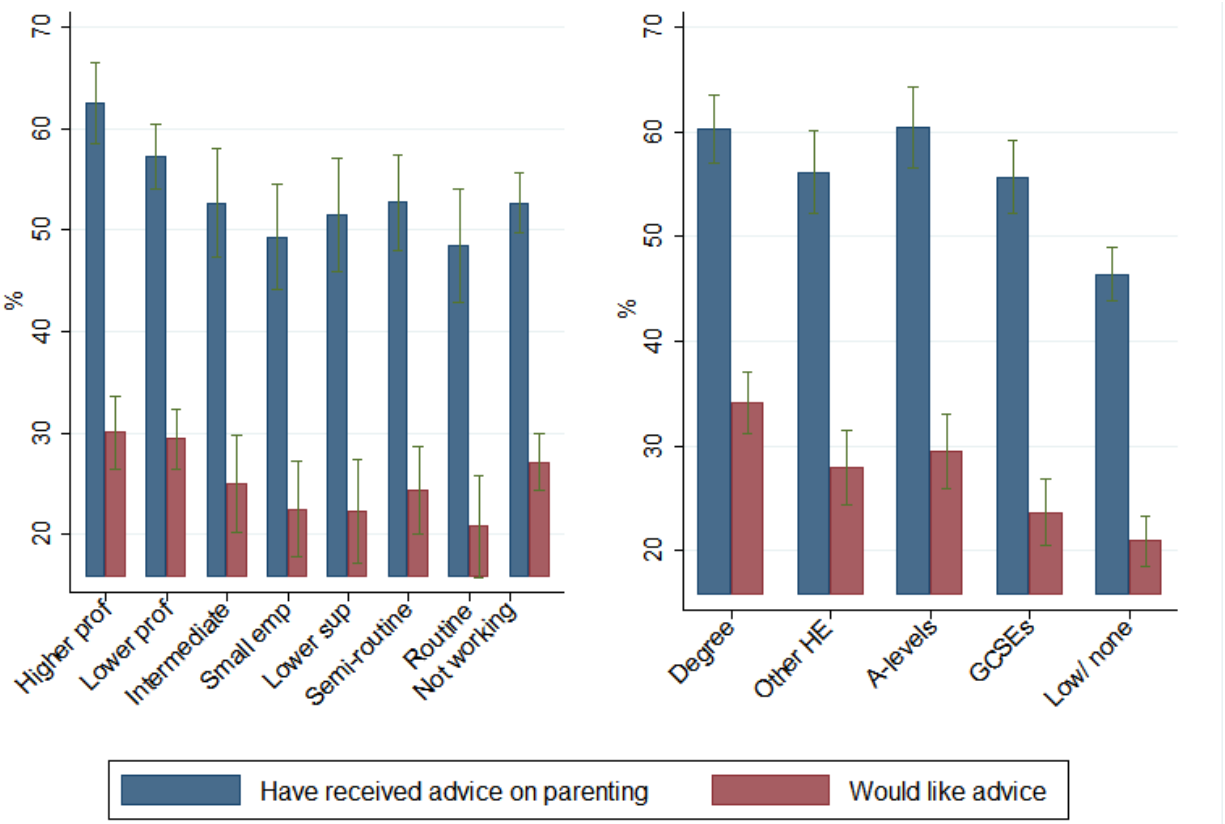
Another concept that is closely connected to social capital is that of social support. Social support might be thought of as an *expressive* or *emotional* return to having social connections, rather than an economic one. Social support can be provided in the form of emotional support (a shoulder to cry on), instrumental support (help with little jobs, such as babysitting), but also informational support (such as getting advice about tricky situations, or finding out about a particular course at a university, for example). All of these are important for well-being, for coping and for reducing the stress of difficult life circumstances. Different stages of bringing up children may be associated with particular stresses, for example, dealing with difficult behaviours or making choices around schools, exams and university applications. There is little evidence on the effect of parenting advice, though some studies claim that supporting parents can bring about positive outcomes for children, their parents, and the wider community, and that ensuring parents are able to access advice is important for this[92].

Parents were asked a series of questions on whether they have received any advice from professionals. The list included teachers, schools, health care professionals, parenting groups, and community organisations, among others, and we group these all together into a single measure of whether the parent has received any advice or not. We can see

[90] Lin, N., & Dumin, M. (1986) Access to occupations through social ties. *Social Networks* 8(4): 365-385.
[91] Lambert, P.S. and Prandy, K. (2012) CAMSIS project webpages: Cambridge Social Interaction and Stratification Scales
[92] Home Office (2004) 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: People, Families and Communities. Home Office Research Study 289.

in Figure 30 (the blue bars) that those in the lowest SES groups are less likely to have received advice than parents in the highest SES groups. The levels are very similar by both occupation and education: around 47 per cent in the lowest and around 60 per cent in the highest categories. It is not the case however, that receiving parenting advice is entirely 'graded'. By social class, it is the higher professionals and managers that stand out as being the most likely to receive advice on parenting. By educational level (here it is by individual rather than the combined household), it is those with no or low qualifications who have been less likely to receive advice. Parents were also asked if they would like to receive advice on a range of topics including: their children's education or career, about child care or parenting skills, and also about problem behaviours. Again, we group all the answers together into a single measure which is shown in the red bars. There are almost no statistically significant differences in wanting advice by social class.

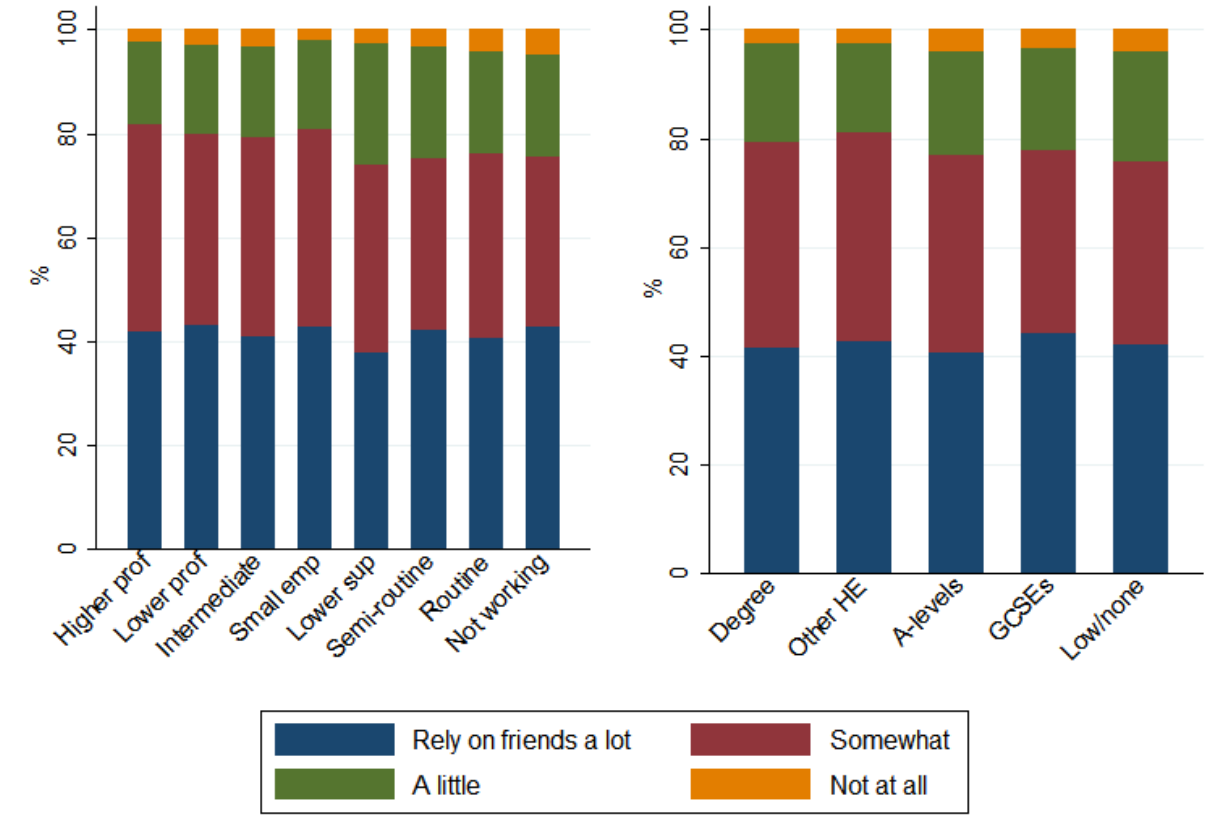
Figure 30 Higher professional households have received more advice on parenting, but they also are more likely to say that they would like more advice



Source: Citizenship 2003, England & Wales

We also looked at a more general measure of social support, based on having friends that can be relied on if a serious problem occurs – see Figure 31. By this measure, it seems that inequalities are slight; indeed, around 80 per cent of all respondents across occupational and educational groups say that their friends can be relied on 'somewhat' or 'a lot'. Saying that friends cannot be relied on at all is unusual, yet it is more common in low-SES households: 4.9 per cent of low-educated compared to 2.6 per cent of high-educated parents.

Figure 31 Most people in households of all SES levels have friends that can be relied on, but lacking this support follows a socioeconomic gradient



Source: USoc 2010-11, UK

The community

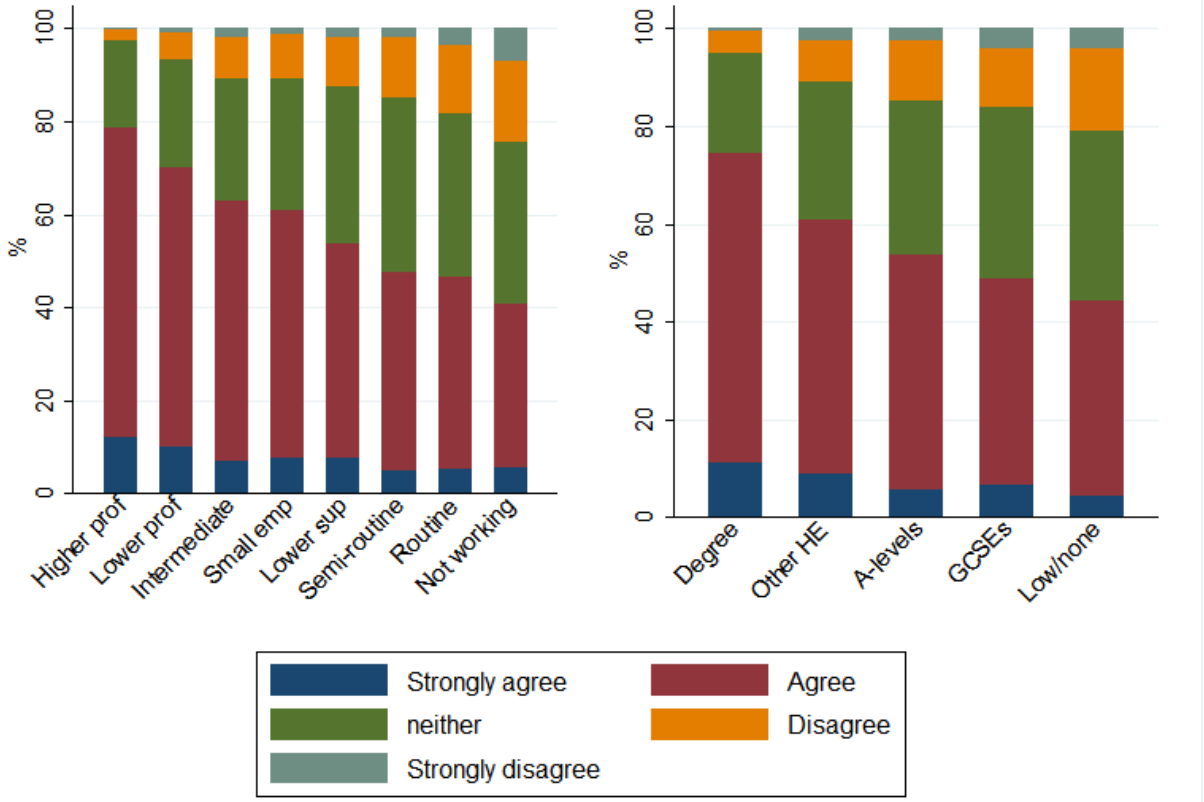
Another aspect of social capital relates to the community and may be thought of as a type of social cohesion. To capture social cohesion we use a measure of how much parents agree that they can trust their neighbours. In trusting neighbourhoods, there may be a shared expectation that parents will look out for each other's children. Co-residents may also be more likely to intervene if they spot any risky or delinquent behaviour among local children, and where parents know and trust each other they are better able to control the behaviours of their children[93].

Figure 32 shows that trusting the neighbours is strongly graded by SES. More than twice as many higher professional parents agree or strongly agree that their neighbours are trustworthy, compared to parents who are not in the labour market. It is important to note that there are probably good reasons to trust less in low-SES neighbourhoods. Crime rates are higher and there may be greater pressure on shared resources[94].

[93] Coleman, J.S. (1988) Social Capital in the Creation of Human-Capital. *American Journal of Sociology* 94: S95-S120; Sampson, Robert J. (2012) *Great American city: Chicago and the enduring neighborhood effect* University of Chicago Press.

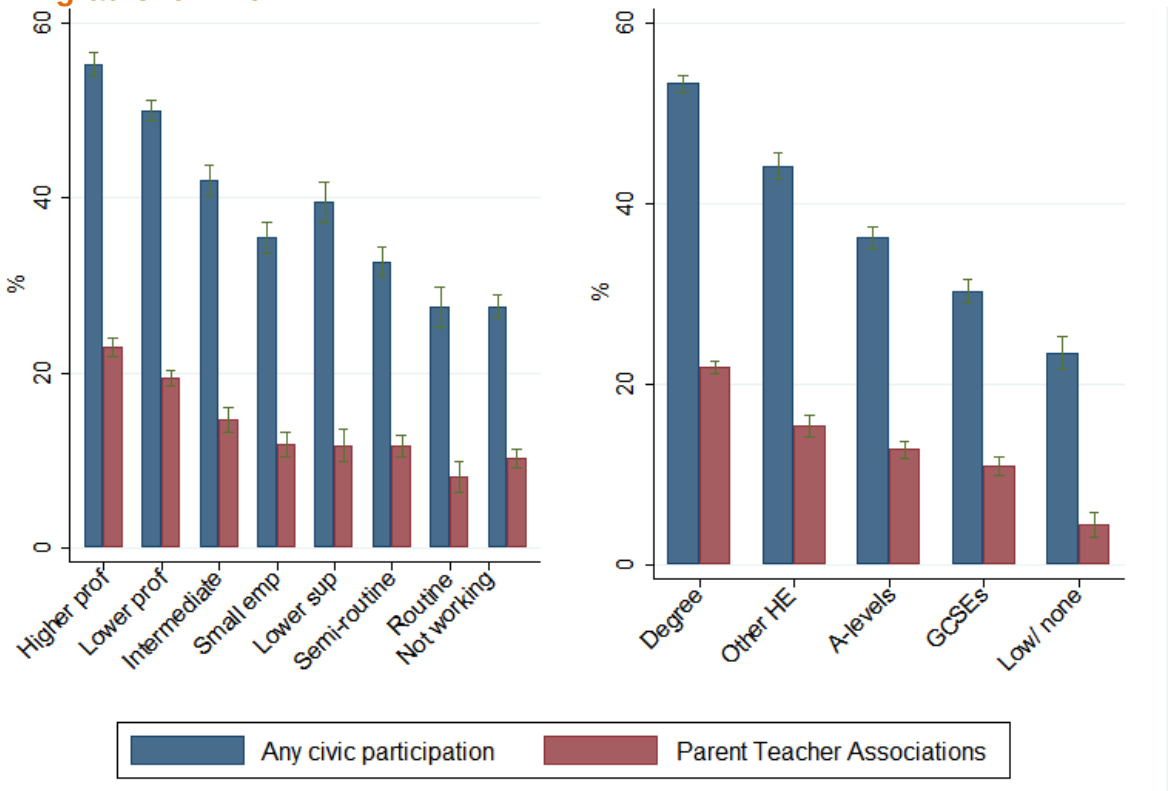
[94] Trust in others in general also follows a similar gradient though the results are not shown here.

Figure 32 Neighbourhood trust follows a socioeconomic gradient in 2011-12



Source: USoc 2011-12, UK

Figure 33 Civic participation and PTA involvement follow a social class gradient in 2011-12

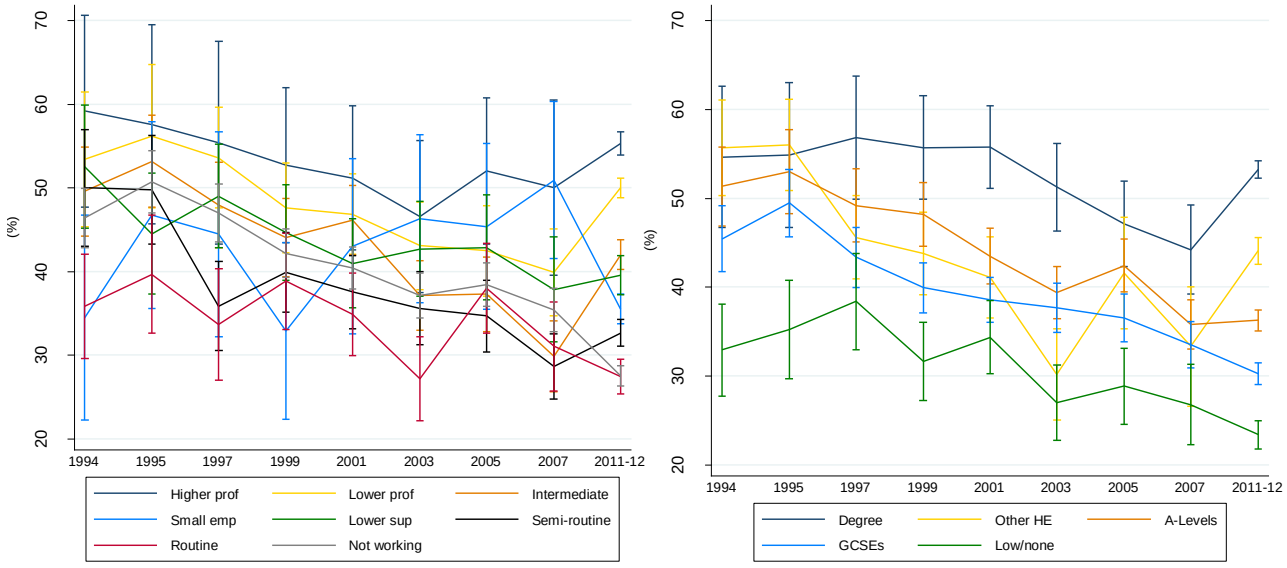


Source: USoc 2011-12, UK

Finally, Figure 33 reports the level of civic participation of parents. We look at two measures. The first is a total participation rate in all voluntary organisations (including social groups, neighbourhood groups, environmental groups etc.), and the second is a single type of organisation, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Again, there are large inequalities. The degree-education and higher professionals are around twice as likely to be civically engaged in this way as those in lower-SES groups. The differences in PTA involvement are also large: 22 per cent of degree-educated parents compared to just 4 per cent of those with no or low qualifications.

It is well known that civic participation in the form of activity and membership with voluntary associations is in decline in Britain. Our data also confirm this to be the case – see Figure 34. Again, the fluctuation and overlapping error bars make the trends a little difficult to interpret, though the trends by parental education are clearer. In the last data point, from interviews conducted in 2011-12, we can see that the two most-educated groups (degree and other higher education) have increased their level of participation, while those with GCSEs or below continued to decline. This suggests a widening gap. We ought to bear in mind that 2012 had unusually high levels of volunteering and civic participation as a result of the London Olympics, and may not be indicative of a longer term trend[95].

Figure 34 Civic participation in the form of activity with voluntary associations has been in decline since 1994. Decline has been fairly uniform across SES groups until recently, where widening inequalities appear



Source: BHPS & USoc, UK

[95] We are unable to report trends in PTA participation due to small sample sizes in the early years of the survey series.

Key Findings: Parents' social networks

There are large inequalities in:

- Having high-status acquaintances – for example, 48 per cent of high-SES compared to 14 per cent of low-SES parents know a university or college lecturer
- Civic participation – 61 per cent of high-SES compared to 29 per cent of low-SES parents are involved in voluntary organisations
- PTA involvement – 22 per cent of high-SES compared to 4 per cent of low-SES parents
- Living in trusting neighbourhoods – around 79 per cent of high-SES parents agree that their neighbours can be trusted compared to 41 per cent of low-SES parents

There are small/ modest inequalities in:

- Receiving parenting advice – only the higher professional class stand out from the other social classes with about 60 per cent saying they have received advice, compared to around 50 per cent for everyone else
- Having social support – 5 per cent of low-SES parents compared to 3 per cent high-SES say their friends cannot be relied upon

Decline over time with widening inequalities:

- Civic participation – overall decline (47 per cent in 1994 to 41 per cent in 2012) across all social groups, but the SES gap has grown from 13 percentage points in 1994 to 17 percentage points in 2012

Conclusions

Our Kids presented an alarming portrait of increasingly polarised opportunity and diminishing equality in the United States, where widening class gaps were observed in many of the key factors known to inhibit or enhance mobility chances. In contrast, the picture in the UK looks better, or at least more mixed. We detected a diverse range of widening, narrowing and persistent inequalities in children's life chances, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Beginning with the best news; we see a number of items changing over time in a way that fits the description of *improvement, with narrowing inequalities*. We classify the trend as *improvement* when we see more favourable outcomes for everyone on average, and *narrowing* where the gaps between the social classes have grown smaller over time. Children's behaviours around norm and rule violation were consistently shown to be in this category using data that cover the last ten to fifteen years[96]. Truancy, for example, showed a decline from about 15 per cent of pupils in 1999 down to 10 per cent in 2014. This improvement was accompanied by a narrowing of the socio-economic gap, which declined from 11 percentage points to 5 points over this period.

The same pattern was found for helping with homework and attending parents' evenings where overall increases (of 2 and 5 percentage points respectively) were accompanied by a reduction in the socio-economic gap (by 11 percentage points in both cases). The frequency with which mothers read to their children also increased substantially between 1969 and 2006, from 56 per cent to 97 per cent (though the 'true increase was probably rather smaller because of methodological changes) and the SES gap narrowed from 14 to 6 percentage points

Our second type of trend is where we see overall improvement, but rather than narrowing inequalities, we see widening ones. Parental time investment in their young children's development follows this pattern: the gap between high and low-SES *Gruffalo time* has grown from around 20 minutes in 1975 to around 40 minutes per day in 2015. It should be recognized that these trends apply to a rather younger age group than was the case for the previous indicators such as truancy and smoking. In principle, it is not implausible that trends might be different for older children, coming up to adolescence and younger preschool children. We should also note that our analytic methods are a little different here, due to the nature of the time-use diary data which we employed.

We see the same pattern in fathers reading to children. Though this increased from 37 per cent to 71 per cent between 1965 and 2006 overall, the gap between high and low-SES families widened from 9 to 17 percentage points.

Our third pattern of change is where we find average deterioration over time, but widening class inequalities. This is probably the pattern of change for children's well-being and behavioural problems. Unfortunately methodological problems means that we

[96] We should also mention that these 'good news' findings come with an important caveat. We have focussed here on the size of the absolute gap between social classes, but the degree of inequality and the direction of change over time may look very different if we measured differences in ratios. The absolute, percentage-point difference between classes is a valuable measure as it shows the extent to which the classes have converged or diverged in their average experience. Relative measures look at inequalities from a different perspective and may tell us more about the underlying terms of the competition between more and less advantaged families.

cannot confidently state whether the overall incidence of these problems has been increasing or not, but there is a clear picture of widening socio-economic inequalities over time.

We also found evidence for decline accompanied by widening gaps in parental civic engagement. Overall levels declined from around 47 per cent to 41 per cent between 1994 and 2012, while the SES gap widened from 13 to 17 percentage points.

The second and third of these three patterns are not dissimilar from those reported in *Our Kids*: in particular our findings on the amount of time that parents spend doing activities such as playing or reading with their children parallel Putnam's American findings, as do our findings on parental social capital. However, our first pattern, the positive story about narrowing inequalities in norm and rule violations, is very different from anything covered in *Our Kids*. We investigated over time change in norm and rule violation while *Our Kids* presented a single snapshot of inequalities in disciplinary problems in schools, and so there is not in fact any contradiction between our two studies. Where we do cover the same areas, there are few contradictory findings with the exception of families eating together. We also suspect that while Putnam reported growing inequality in college education, where increases in the proportion of advantaged young people gaining a college degree have not been matched by less advantaged groups, British evidence would tell a somewhat different story about changing social class inequalities in children's educational attainment[97].

So why do we find this positive pattern in Britain for norm and rule violations (and some other areas) in contrast to the pessimistic accounts in other domains?

While these patterns may seem quite complex, there is in fact a fairly natural explanation which can explain the pattern of trends over time and widening or narrowing inequalities. In essence the results are driven by 'floor' and 'ceiling' effects. Thus, in cases where higher socio-economic groups are getting closer to the 'ceiling' – as for example in the case of mothers reading to their children which has reached 97 per cent – then it is possible for lower SES groups to catch up. In other words, the gaps narrow once higher groups have reached 'saturation' level.

We find something very similar when we get closer to the 'floor' – as in the case of truancy and school exclusion. As these forms of norm and rule violation become rarer, then there is again more scope for the lower SES groups to catch up.

This interpretation also makes sense of the cases of improvement accompanied by a widening socio-economic gap, which we observed with fathers reading to their children (and parental time spent on playing and reading with children). In both cases we are quite a long way both from the 'floor' and from the 'ceiling'. It may well be that, if fathers continue to increase their levels of involvement in reading to children, then this SES gap too will eventually begin to decline.

In a sense, then, the big stories are about the trends over time. The decreasing class inequalities are largely driven by the overall improvements over time. Thus mothers reading to their children has increasingly become the norm throughout society. The

[97] See, for example, Mills, C. (2015) *Is Class Inequality at KS4 decreasing?* Centre for Social Investigation http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CSI_11_Class_Inequalities.pdf

middle classes appear to have led the way, and these practices have spread throughout all sections of society as they became more and more prevalent, although these behaviours remain socially graded. There are various possible explanations for these overall improvements, both with respect to parents' involvement with their children and with respect to rule and norm violation. Our interpretation (although others are possible) is that these overall improvements may directly result from education taking a more central role in the labour market as a result of declining opportunities for employment in traditional manufacturing industries. People born in the 1950s and 1960s could do very well in manufacturing, in terms of occupation and earnings. And education, in many cases, had little to do with it: school-leavers with no formal qualifications could fairly quickly obtain manual jobs in the labour market. Increasingly, however, for those born in the following decades, it became necessary to get good qualifications in order to avoid the risks of unemployment. The long-term decline of manufacturing, and the move to the service economy, means that without qualifications, the chances of getting secure and well-paid jobs are greatly diminished.

This new and amplified role of education is understood by both parents and children: they know that extra effort during the school years will have pay-offs later in life. And perhaps the opposite scenario is a greater motivator. Failing to get good qualifications may have negative consequences that last a lifetime. Thus there may be a shift away from classic problems of the anti-school subculture described by Paul Willis in his classic 1970s study *Learning to Labour*[98]. The formerly attractive peer group of '*the lads'* (who had little interest in academic work and looked forward to leaving school for the more macho world of paid work) is less appealing, while '*the ear'oles'* (who were committed to education, followed rules and respected their teachers, and were consequently despised *by the lads*) don't look quite so daft as they used to. Parents realise this too and increasingly reinforce pro-school attitudes and behaviours. As parents and children concentrate more of their efforts on doing well at school, the perceived 'costs' of truancy, smoking or drinking, are perhaps higher, and more children refrain.

As time goes on, the probability of children at school having highly educated parents is also increasing, reflecting earlier expansion to the education system. It is likely that parents' own experience leads them to value the education process and engage more directly with their children's schooling. At the same time, there is increasing concern over the '*missing middle'* – young people who can neither be characterised as *lads* or *ear'oles*, but who have limited success at school and enter the labour market at a young age and occupy low-quality roles[99,100,101]. We saw evidence of narrowing gaps with helping with homework and attending parents' evenings, although this does not clearly tell us whether the position previously occupied by *the lads* is being replaced with this *missing middle*.

A not-unrelated parallel development may be with respect to changing gender norms, in which the more advantaged classes have also perhaps taken the lead. Certainly fathers are doing much more childcare today than fifty years ago, reflecting a move away from

[98] Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour.* Farnborough, Saxon House.
[99] House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility (2016) Overlooked and left behind: improving the transition from school to work for the majority of young people. London: The Stationery Office Limited.
[100] Spours, K, Stanton, G, Vesey, R and West, J (2012) *The 'over-looked middle' in 14+ education and training: Becoming the new NEETs?* Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation, Institute of Education, University of London.
[101] Murray, S, Gayle, V & Connelly, R. (2012) Exploring Educational Attainment between the Elite and the NEET: A contemporary analysis of British Household Panel Survey Data.

traditional gender roles. The other indicator where we see the same pattern as time investment is in fathers reading to children, a finding that suggests that high-SES fathers may have embraced new gender norms to a greater degree than low-SES fathers. Two high-SES parents together may have the edge on being able to 'concertedly cultivate' their children by providing stimulation and activities that are known to have positive consequences. Widening class inequalities may well be plausible in a context where new normative patterns emerge first among more advantaged classes and then diffuse to other sections of society.

We also suspect that middle-class parents are 'ahead of the curve', at least when it comes to their emphasis on children's education. The middle-class world has long been dominated by the need for credentials and professional qualifications. It is the working-class world which has changed with the dramatic decline of manufacturing in recent decades, and hence it should be no surprise if they are behind the curve.

In turn, this suggests that we should not perhaps be too perturbed by some of the widening class inequalities – provided there is evidence of positive change in all sections of society. And this is indeed what we see in the cases of fathers reading to the children and parents spending time in developmental childcare. To be sure, we should not be complacent, but the trends are positive even in the most disadvantaged social classes. It would be inaccurate to suggest that low-SES families are not engaged or that they do little to encourage their children's development; in fact by many measures low-SES families are doing more than high-SES families did in the not-so-distant past. Rather than focussing on class inequalities, perhaps the key thing for policy-makers is to encourage the continuation of these positive trends.

It is important, however, to be alert to the possibility that they might be other areas where higher SES groups are innovating and finding new ways to help their children succeed. The existing time-series data will not pick up these new developments but we should not allow ourselves to be complacent. In the sociology of education for example it is well-recognized by scholars that, as socio-economic gaps close at one educational level such as GCSE or entering university, the focus of higher SES groups may shift to higher levels of the educational system – perhaps by focussing on access to Russell Group universities or to prestigious post-graduate qualifications like MBAs (which seems to be happening in the USA). Data show that privileged families make use of university league tables, put in greater efforts to find the right institution and courses[88] and make more use of private tuition outside of school to make sure their children stay ahead, both before high school[102] and at exam time[103].

For policy-makers, the priority should be the cases where trends are not so positive, and the inequalities are widening. *Our Kids* had a number of examples of this kind of phenomenon, and this is why it is such an important book. Thus Putnam shows an overall deterioration, especially marked among lower SES families, in participation in school-based extracurricular activities and in families having dinner together. And there are similar patterns in America with respect to adolescent obesity, trust, and church

[102] Reay, D. (1998). Class work: Mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling. Taylor & Francis.
[103] Smyth, E. (2009). Buying your way into college? Private tuition and the transition to higher education in Ireland. Oxford Review of Education, 35(1), 1-22.

attendance, which are all examples of deterioration with the middle-classes being behind the curve (in the sense that they have not declined so quickly).

Our British results do not exactly match the American ones in these respects, although parental civic engagement does follow this pattern in Britain. In Britain, however, the worrying pattern is with respect to children's behavioural problems (something which *Our Kids* does not cover in detail) – although we must emphasize that methodological problems prevent us from being sure about the magnitude of the trend over time.

How might we explain the patterns found for children's behavioural problems? We must emphasise here the difficulty in ascertaining absolute levels of these problems (hyperactivity, conduct disorders and emotional symptoms) over time: there may be changing diagnoses or conceptions of these conditions. Our analysis of the *relative rates* of these disorders, however, means we can be confident in our finding that the gaps between the social classes have grown. The emergence of inequality is particularly striking: in 1969 there were no class differences, and by 2012 the differences between classes were substantial.

The fact that we see such divergent patterns of change between rule-violation type behaviours and behaviours reflecting emotional and psychological disorder strongly suggests that these domains are quite distinct from each other in terms of experience and drivers[104]. It is possible that peer-oriented risky behaviours are being displaced by more individualistic expressions of difficulty coping, but this is an area in which more research is required to understand the processes of change and their consequences. There are potentially various elements of social change that might be influencing children's behaviours. For example, we know that older mothers tend to have children with lower levels of behavioural problems[105], and thus the changing patterns of the age of first birth may influence inequalities over time[106]. Some studies have suggested that screen-time and computer games might be having a negative influence on children's attention[107] and the modern diet may also be a factor[108]. It is also possible that the conditions of life for families in more disadvantaged class situations is deteriorating, due to increasing economic insecurity, increasing debt and higher incarceration rates. This is an important area worthy of further investigation. Whatever the reason, these behavioural problems are a cause for concern. The effects of these disorders on later-life outcomes are large and pervasive.

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[104] Note that the behavioural problems were measured among 11 year-olds, and the norm-violating behaviours among older children. However, behavioural problems are similarly unequal in their distribution among adolescents (see Collishaw *et al.* 2004 and Collishaw 2015). In general, further scrutiny is required to understand the implications of these findings in terms of patterns of causality and the age at which problems occur.

[105] Ermisch, J. (2008) Origins of social immobility and inequality: parenting and early child development. *National Institute Economic Review* 205: 62-71

[106] Ní Bhrolcháin, M. & Beaujouan, É. (2012) Fertility postponement is largely due to rising educational enrolment. *Population Studies* 66: 311-27

[107] Swing, E.L., Gentile, D.A., Anderson, C.A. & Walsh, D.A. (2010) Television and video game exposure and the development of attention problems. *Pediatrics* 126(2): 214-21

[108] Howard, A.L., Robinson, M., Smith, G.J., Ambrosini, G.L., Piek, J.P. & Oddy, W.H. (2011) ADHD is associated with a 'Western' dietary pattern in adolescents. *Journal of Attention Disorders* 15(5): 403-11

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List of appendices

The appendices providing supporting information and evidence to this report are available to view or download online at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission. They cover the following topics:

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Appendix 4 – Further analyses of parental engagement: Physical activity
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Social Mobility Commission

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at the Social Mobility Commission, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.
Email: contact@SMCPcommission.gov.uk

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