

Family Life Survey annex to 'Family and its Protective Effect: Part 1 of the Independent Family Review'

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1. Introduction

The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, has been asked by the Government to undertake an independent review into support for families, following on from a recommendation of the 'Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities'.

As part of the Review, the Children's Commissioner commissioned a nationally representative survey of adults, parents, and children in the UK on Family Life (FLS). The survey was designed to understand what modern families in the UK look like, the current pressures on families, the services they currently use and what they think about that support. The survey also asked children aged 8-17 about who cares for them, who they would talk to about worries and their wellbeing. All parents and children aged 8-17 were asked which words they associate with family, and what family means to them in their own words.

In this report we analyse responses at an aggregate level and how these responses vary according to respondent demographics and geographic region. We present analysis of household composition, family relationships and socioeconomics across both parents and adults without children. We also present findings on childcare and use of family services from parents, and qualitative responses on the meaning of family from parents and children.

In total, over 3,500 adults were surveyed across the UK, including over 3,300 parents, as well as over 2,200 children aged 8-17. Key results and findings from this report are presented in The Family Review Part 1 main report.

2. Methodology

This report presents key findings from a nationally representative survey of 3,305 parents with children aged 0-17 (including over 2,209 parents and their children aged 8-17) across the UK commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for England as part of the Family Review.

The survey was carried out through Opinium's online research panel. Fieldwork was undertaken in March 2022. Sample quotas were designed to be representative of the UK population by oldest child's age and gender, parental employment status and household region. The sample was also boosted (additional respondents added) for lone parents, ethnic minorities, and families with children receiving free school meals (FSM) to ensure sufficient sample size for reporting. Findings are weighted to ensure that data is representative of the UK. This allows findings to be scaled up to the whole population (see Table S1 for a demographic breakdown).

An additional sample of 259 adults without children were included in the overall sample for comparison, their findings are weighted to be nationally representative by adult's age and gender (see Table S2 for a demographic breakdown).

We asked all adults questions about household composition, region, demographics such as age and gender, and their economic situation. We then asked parents further questions about childcare, family time, the facilities that are important for families and what family means to them. Over 2,000 children aged 8-17 were asked about their family life, support networks, their happiness with aspects of their lives and again, what family means to them.

Over 3,300 parents responded to this survey, from across the UK. All parents included in this sample had children living with them at their main address that were aged between birth and 17 years old at the time of the survey (March 2022). This section is split into three broad themes, mirroring the key questions outlined above:

1. What does the modern family look like and what does family mean to parents and children?
2. Which forms of childcare do parents use and who do children think provides them with the most support?
3. Who accesses Government and community-led family support, and how useful are these support systems?

3. What does the modern family look like and what does family mean to children and parents?

3.1. Household composition

The parent and child sample used for these analyses is nationally representative for the UK by oldest child's age, gender, household region and parental employment status. The adults without children sample is weighted by adult age and gender. See Tables S1 & S2 in the Appendix for a full sample size breakdowns by demographic and socio-economic factors for parents, children, and adults without children, with comparisons to national-level data.

3.1.1. Adults who are parents

On average, family households across the UK have two adults (2.0 adults in England and Scotland, 2.1 in Wales and 1.9 in Northern Ireland, this includes any adult, not restricted to parents). Across all households in this sample, 16% reported including one adult, 72% had two adults, 8% had three adults within the household. The largest number of adults living with the responding parent in this sample was six adults (n=5).

Most parents were either married (60%), co-habiting (20%) or civil partnered (1%) and also listed a married husband or wife (57%) or co-habiting partner (19%) as the second adult living within their household (see Table S3 for full list). A much smaller percentage listed a son or daughter (3.2%) and or parent (2.6%) as the second adult living in the household.

The survey was boosted to ensure representation for parents from ethnic minority groups. Just over 8 in 10 of parents that responded to the survey were White (83%), 7% were Asian, 5% were Black and 4% were of mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.

3.1.2. Adults without children

Households of adults without children in the UK comprised of, on average, 1.7 adults (slightly lower than for parents). Similar proportions of adults without children lived alone (42%) or with one other adult (46%) and 8% of adults lived with two other adults. Forty three percent of adults without children were single, 23% were married, 17% were co-habiting and 7% were divorced. The remaining 10% of adults without children were, together but living apart (5%), widowed (3%) or civil partnered (2%). Three quarters of adults without children identified as heterosexual (75%), 10% as lesbian or gay, 4% as bisexual and 1% as another sexual orientation.

3.1.3. Children

Across the UK, households with children had on average 1.6 children living in the household at the time of the survey. The highest number of children (under 18) listed as living in the same household as

the parent responding to the survey was 7. The majority of relationships between the responding parent and the children in the household were parental (see Table S4 in appendix for a full list), either a son or daughter, or stepson or stepdaughter.

The average number of children per household in England was 1.6. This was lower than in Wales (1.9) and Northern Ireland (1.8), while Scotland had the lowest average of children per household, in line with London (both 1.5).

The number of children per household varied significantly by ethnic group. Respondents with mixed or multiple ethnic group backgrounds (n=86) or Asian backgrounds (n=246) both had on average 1.8 children per household, and 55% of households had 2 or more children, while respondents from Black backgrounds (n=165) had 1.6 children on average, 45% of households with 2 or more children.

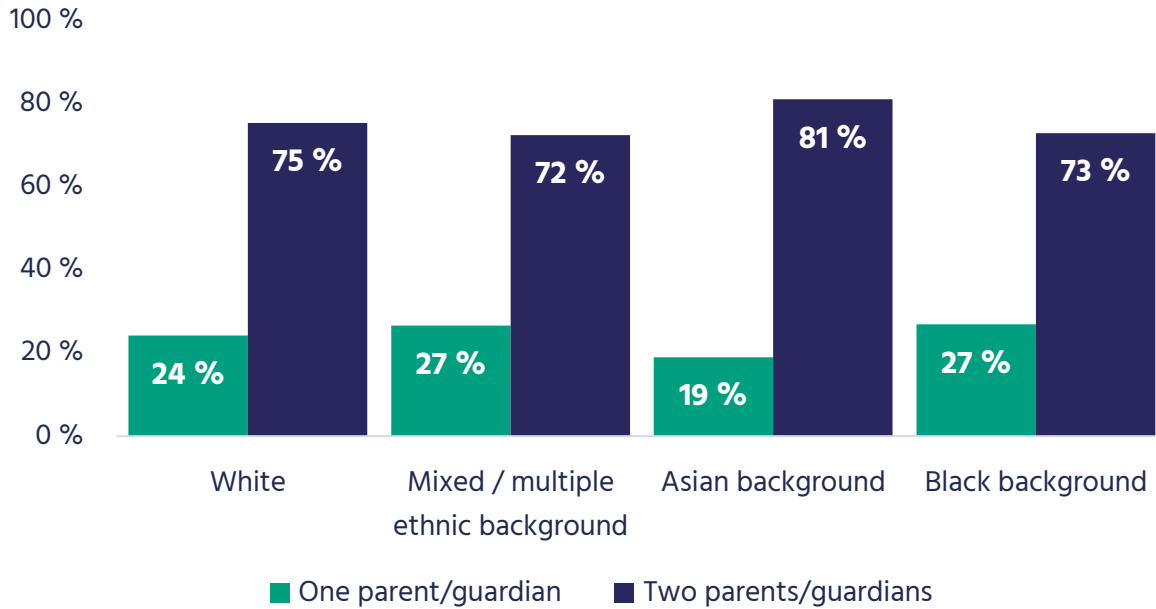
3.2. Lone parent households and having a parent not residing at their child's main home

Across the UK, 16% of parents (n=518) reported to be the only adult in a household, yet nearly a quarter of all parents reported to be a lone parent or guardian (24%). By comparison, 42% of adults without children reported to live alone.

The proportion of parents reporting to be a lone parent varied by age of parent, rurality of household. Parents in the 16-24 age groups were most likely to be a lone parent (40%), but this was a small sample size and therefore should be seen as an indicative finding (n=49). Parents in urban areas were more likely than rural or sub-urban parents to be lone parents (urban = 29%, sub-urban = 21%, rural = 23% lone parents).

The proportion of lone parent households was lower for respondents from Asian backgrounds (19%) and higher for respondents from Black backgrounds and those from Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 1. Number of parents or guardians living with the child at their main home. Note: Households with 3 or more parents or guardians living with the child(ren) at their main home were removed due to small sample sizes.



A quarter of children in this survey (equivalent to 2 million children in the UK +/- 140,000) had a parent or parents that did not reside at their main address. Older children (age 8-17) were significantly more likely to have parents not residing at their main address, compared to children aged 0-7. A more detailed breakdown of the proportion of children with a parent not living at their main address can be found in Table 1 below.

Children in London were most likely to have a parent not residing at their main address (30%), while children in the South West of England were least likely (17%). Despite this, there were no significant differences between rural and urban areas (both 27%). However, this was lower for children living in sub-urban areas (22%).

Table 1. Number and percentage of children within each age group that had a parent that did not live at the child's primary address.

Child age group (years)	Children with a parent not at their main address	
	Sample size (n)	Percent of age group (%)
0-3	124	18
4-7	180	24
8-11	219	28
12-14	153	29
15-17	153	28

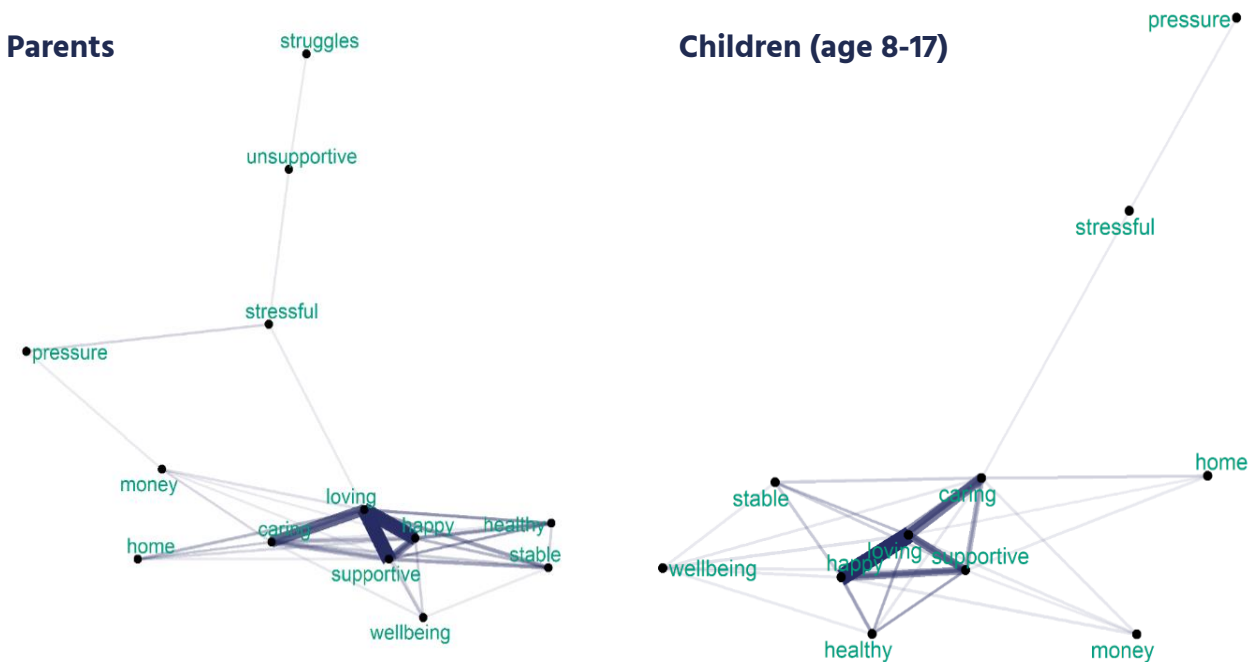
4. What does 'Family' mean to parents and children?

4.1. Which words were associated with family?

When asked which three words respondents first thought of when they heard the word 'family', parents and children across all ages, gender and ethnicities were likely to select similar words of positive sentiment (see Tables S5 & 6). 'Loving' was the word most likely to be selected by parents (64%), followed by 'home' (43%), 'caring' (40%), 'supportive' (38%) and 'happy' (37%). All of the negative terms listed in the survey (stressful, struggles, pressure, breakdown, unhealthy and unsupportive) were selected by fewer than 7% of parents. Similarly, when asked to select three words to describe family, children (aged 8-17) were most likely to select 'loving' (63%), followed by 'happy' (51%) and 'home' (48%).

The trigram maps below (Figure 2) indicate the strength of the connections between words selected by parents and children (n=2,861 and n=1,889 respectively). 'Happy', 'supportive' and 'loving' were most likely to be selected together by both parents and children. 'Happy' and 'loving' were most likely to be selected together, both of which frequently linked to many of the other positively oriented words such as 'stable' and 'supportive'. 'Caring' was also linked to 'stressful' and 'pressure'. Compared to the children who answered this question, parent's word choices were more varied as most words, regardless of sentiment, linked to multiple other words. For example, 'stressful' links to 'loving', 'unsupportive' and 'pressure'.

Figure 2. Trigram maps showing the links between the three words selected by parents and children to describe family.



4.2. What does family mean to children and parents?

Both parents and children (aged 8-17) were also asked 'Please tell us, in your own words, what family means to you'.

4.2.1. Parents

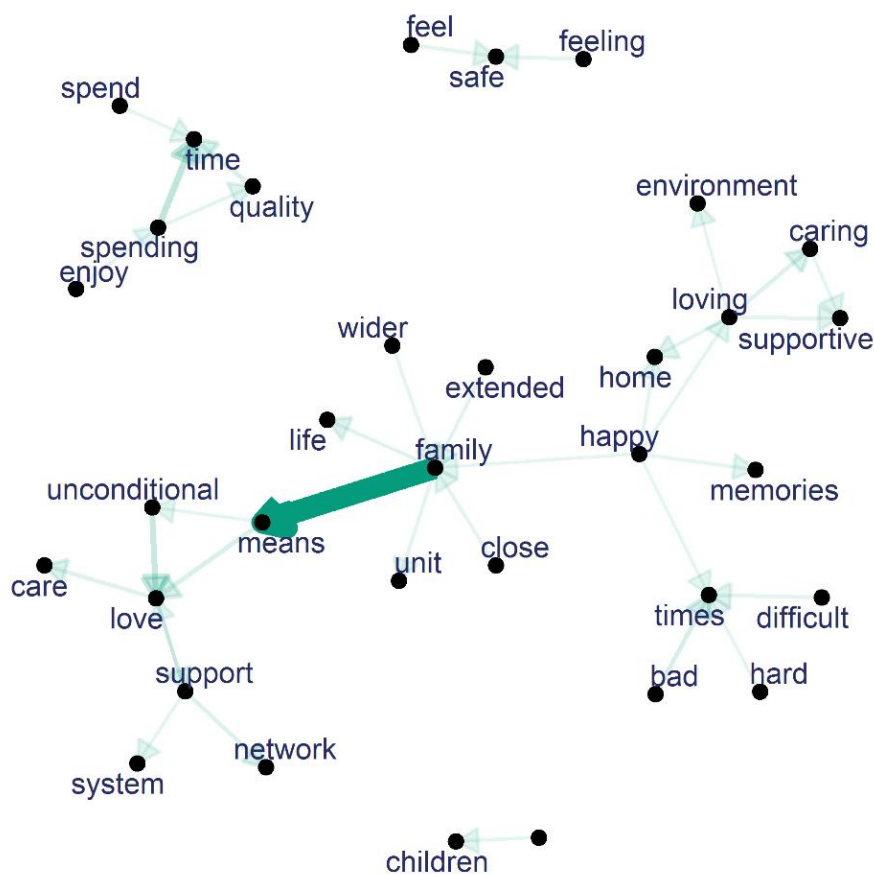
Thematic analysis of 1000 responses from parents revealed the following key themes, listed in order of relative occurrence.

1. Everything/life/purpose
2. Love/care/joy
3. Support/trust
4. Safety/security/stability
5. Unit/nuclear/biological – includes descriptions of the family unit
6. Togetherness/ Time together
7. Memories
8. Stress/worry/responsibility (including financial worries)
9. Disappointment
10. Children's futures (including being a good role model)

- 11. Health and loss
- 12. Lack of support/negative relationships

Many of these themes are also mirrored in a bigram map (Figure 3) of all of the words used to answer this question, in which the size of the word is proportional to the number of times this word was mentioned.

Figure 3. Bigram map of terms used by parents to describe what family means to them (n=3,036). The arrows indicate the order the words were most often used in (e.g., spending time) and the thickness of the arrows indicate the strength of the relationship between words.



References to family being ‘everything’, ‘my world’ or ‘life’ was the most commonly mentioned theme by parents. Many of these responses also talked about love, a feeling of being cared for and supported by family.

“My three daughters are my world. I wish they lived with me.” – Dad, 55

“Family is everything to me, to me family are people you love unconditionally and they feel the same. I have a few, yet very close, friends who I would also consider family although they don’t share blood. Family is support, love, non-judgmental and what I personally need to remain sane. I wouldn’t be me without family, and I most definitely would not be happy” – Mum, 25

“Family is everything to me. Knowing that every morning I wake up next to my loving wife, I get to cuddle and kiss my sweetest children... That is all I ever wanted. And a stable income. However, family is also a lot of work, commitment and compromise.” – Dad, 42

Another theme that emerged from this question was the idea of a family unit. This theme included responses describing the members of their family, and how family could span across multiple households and generations.

“It’s complicated. I adore my husband and son, but our son is disabled and life is full of battles. I win most of them, but they’re still battles, and I wish I didn’t have to fight every day for what some families take for granted. I love my dad, but I’m one of the sandwich generation who is trying to raise a family and keep a parent healthy and independent, and I’m darned tired... I am mostly happy, and I appreciate I am very lucky, but things are hard sometimes.” – Mum, 52

“Married couple with man and woman only and children after marriage. Stable loving home life that work through problems together. Woman looks after home and children, man goes to work and earns the money. Proper traditional family values that are strict but fair.” – Mum, 49

However, many parents also recognised that their family extended beyond their relatives, but to friends, community members and those with a shared history or bond.

“As humans we require support emotionally, physically and much more from our families. Family is not necessarily blood bound.” – Dad, 35

“Family means providing emotional, financial and moral support to the people I love, no matter what” – Mum, 44

Many parents also mentioned the importance of safety, security, stability and a sense of trust in those they consider part of their family.

“A very supportive resource that have a wealth of experience and are willing to help us at anything time.” – Dad, 44

“Family means being there for one another and being patient with the children and always meeting their needs” – Mum, 27

Parents often emphasised the importance of spending time together, creating memories a sense of togetherness.

“Family to me means spending time together doing things we love with everyone we love. Creating awesome memories!” – Mum, 43

“Family means that we share our lives together, good times and bad. We listen, we laugh, we argue, we forgive, we communicate. Family for me is warm, caring and protective. My children are safe when we’re together. Family means creating a super strong support hub that lasts a lifetime” – Mum, 51

Cutting across many of these themes was a sense of responsibility as a parent, not only for their children, but also for their parents, which often linked to worries or stress regarding other aspect of life, including finances, housework and other relationships. Likewise, children were sometimes mentioned as the care giver to a parent or sibling, taking on some or all of the responsibilities that would traditionally be left to parent.

“Family means providing emotional, financial and moral support to the people I love, no matter what” – Mum, 56

“Families cause a lot of stress. Especially with money worries and feeling of guilt when you don’t feel you can offer enough time and support to each child... Sometimes one child causes a lot of emotional upset and stress, and this means you feel you neglect other children in the home. Children are a constant worry and I think every parent worries about their child’s safety constantly...” – Mum, 49

“My children are my family they are the most loving supportive daughter's anyone could ask for. My youngest daughter 27 is my full-time carer, and has given up so much for me. My 16-year-old son is a real handful at times he has autism and puts a lot of pressure on the family as a whole he has severe anger issues and frequent melt downs. We also have 5 dogs that I love nearly as much as my children. I have always told my children that if they ever have any problems however had I am always here and I will always support and help as much as possible.” – Mum, 52

Parents of children with SEND were especially likely to talk about the importance of family, alongside the pressures and strains of family life.

“My family is the most crazy, loving, supporting family. Lockdown brought us so much closer as we struggled mentally and physically! Have a non-verbal, autistic son with global delay and

sensory issues can be difficult. He requires care from me 24 hours a day. It's essential to have strategies and support from family during these hard times with him. Also, having a 3-month-old, working, everyday house chores, shopping, coping with money and costs rising. So important to stick together” – Mum, 28

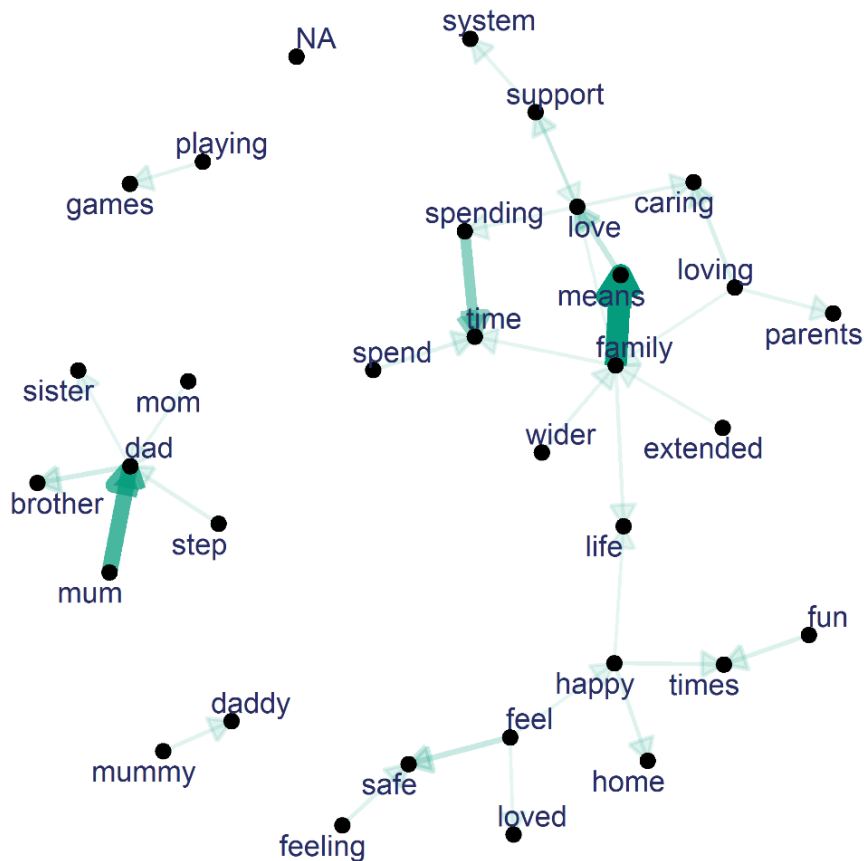
“My family (husband and two children, plus three cats) are the foundation of the safety of my home.... It's been hard adapting to my daughter being away socialising sometimes as much as half the week, but it makes it more special when she's here. Family beyond those who live in my house are stressful and best taken in small doses.” – Mum, 45

4.2.2. Children

Thematic analysis of over 600 responses (children aged 8-17) indicates the following key recurrent themes, ordered by relative frequency of mentions (includes only themes that have been mentioned more than 5 times):

1. Love and kindness
2. Unit – includes references and descriptions of the family unit
3. Care/help/looked after
4. Support and communication
5. Everything
6. Security and safety
7. Happy
8. Fun/activities/holidays
9. Togetherness/time together
10. Stress and annoying

Figure 4. Bigram map of terms used by children (aged 8-17) to describe what family means to them (n=2,179). The arrows indicate the order the words were most often used in (e.g., feel safe) and the thickness of the arrows indicate the strength of the relationship between words.



Children were most likely to give responses relating to the love when asked what family means to them were also frequently mentioned themes by children, as well as being looked after or helped by their family members.

"I love my Mummy" – Boy, 8

"Family means someone who loves you and somewhere that's warm and loving" – Girl, 8

Many children gave descriptions of family structure, such as a list of those who they would consider 'in their family' and those who are outside their sense of family.

"Your family is your parents and your brothers and sisters and other relatives which you love and they love you." – Girl, 13

"Mum and dad and my brother. Also, my Nan and Grandpa and my uncles. Looking after me." – Boy, 8

"Family is mummy, she looks after me and I know she loves me even if my dad does not. I don't need my dad I just need my mummy because she is the best. She is kind and gives me lots of cuddles. She tells me I can do anything I want to if I work hard for it. She let me go to the high school I want to not just the nearest one, so I get a good education."– Girl, 11

Many children also mentioned pets as part of their family, as well as friends and members of their wider community.

"My mum is autistic like me and worries. Mum has a best friend that is family too. We have a cat...she is family. Mum takes me on holiday. We went to Iceland. Iceland horses and a blue lagoon. She takes me to see trains which is my favourite."– Boy, 8

"I love family time and when we play lots of games. Me and my sister argue a lot and that sometimes makes my mum mad at us, but we are sisters what does she expect. I like our home and our pets...they are lovely and...my sister's hamster is in her room and he smells funny but it is our family."– Girl, 13

"Family is the group of people who make me feel accepted, loved, safe and supported. They don't have to be blood related. My friends are like family too."– Girl, 17

Some children specifically mentioned that their family was separated or lived across multiple households. Some also mentioned hoping to see more of their extended family.

"I have a blended family. I have stepfamily and half siblings but my family is full of love." – Prefer not to say, 14

"My mum and my dad. They live apart now so I have 2 homes, but my family is mum and dad." – Boy, 13

"Live with mum and boyfriend, 2 brothers one side one brother the other, split family but it works OK now."– Boy, 15

"My family are my mum and sister who I live with and then my dad and my other sister, so I have two sets of parents who live apart then I also have my grandparents and uncles and an aunt." – Girl, 17

"My family is my parents and brother and my grandparents. I wish we would see our grandparents more though." – Boy, 16

Care and a feeling of being 'looked after' were also frequently mentioned themes by children, as well as being helped by their family members.

"Family is me and my mam, she is always there for me. I have autism and other health issues and she is by my side through all the struggles I have." – Boy, 13

"My sister and my mum looking after me and making me happy and making sure I have nice food" – Boy, 11

Similar to the responses from parents, children often referred to family being 'everything', 'my world' or 'life'.

"My family mean the world to me. They mean knowing I always have someone to love and care for me and supporting me in everything I do. They give me confidence make me feel happy and good about myself." – Girl, 12

Many children mentioned a sense of trust, acceptance and communication within their family and how important that is to them. For example, children said they were often able to talk to their family members about any problems they might have and recognised that other children were less able to talk to their families.

"I know if I have a problem there's always someone in the family I can speak to. I have a couple of friends at school whose home life is a bit rubbish as their parents take drugs. I'm so glad Mum isn't like that. Dad was a bit, but he left, and we never see him." – Boy, 17

"To me it means having someone to love you unconditionally in spite of you and your shortcomings. Family is loving and supporting one another even when it's not easy to do so. It's being the best person you could be so that you may inspire your loved ones. Family doesn't see colour, race, creed not culture it sees heart." – Boy, 17

Children also told us about the hardships facing their family, how these issues affect their family life and how they support each other during these times.

"After Mum's death, Dad and I carried on together, just as a smaller family than before, sharing the duties as I got older" – Boy, 17

"It's only me and my mum because my waste of space dad never bothered with us when he was here...now he's gone it's so much better! Family should be the ones who are there for you no matter what. I've made lots of stupid teenage mistakes, but my mum always helps me through them and she's always there for me and puts me first even when I don't want her to. She's the stability and feeling of feeling secure and unjudging. I just wish we had more money so mum wouldn't have to worry so much, and we could spend more time together." – Boy, 15

"I think I have a good family. We argue sometimes but we all love each other. Sometimes kid is hard as we can't afford much things but my mum and dad always try and make sure we have everything. Family holidays are my favourite memories." – Boy, 17

Older teenagers or children of families with older children sometimes mentioned their expectation for their family to let them grow up, give them space or leave home, or that they missed their older siblings who had left home.

"It's my mum, dad, and brother first and foremost. I've got cousins, grandparents too but mum and dad are my first family links. Family is about getting on, support, sometimes arguments, but also letting go as I grow up..." – Girl, 16

"I like my family, we have fun most of the time, even though I argue with my brother and like being on holiday together. I miss my sister who is at university." – Boy, 17

5. Finances, parenting and childcare

5.1. Making ends meet

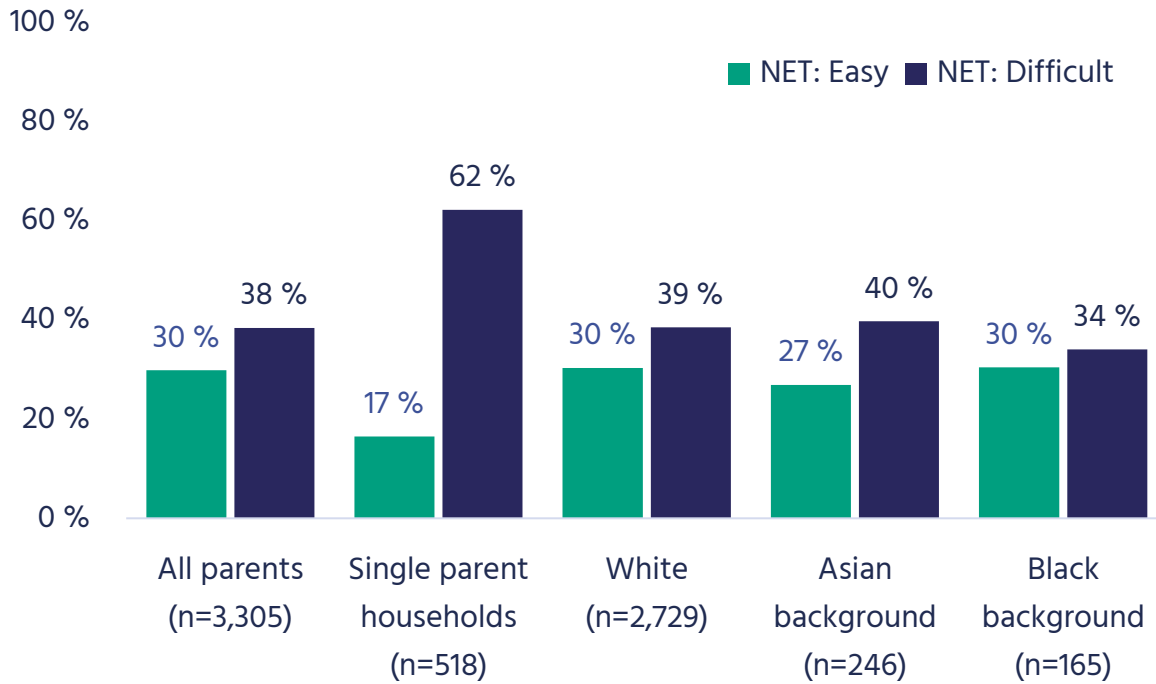
Of households with up to four adults (limited to four or fewer due to low sample sizes of households with over four adults), 63% were working (n=1156), 47% of which were working full-time (n=679) and 12% (n=174) part-time.

A similar proportion of adults without children were in employment (60%) including 36% full-time, 15% part-time and 9% self-employed. Just under 1 in 5 adults without children were retired (18%), compared to only 7% of parents, likely a result of the higher average age of adults without children who responded to the survey (52 years old, compared to 39 years old for parents).

When asked how easily parents are able to 'make ends meet', 30% of all parents said it was Easy (either 'Very easy' or 'Fairly easy') and 38% selected difficult ('Fairly difficult' or 'Very difficult'), while 31% found making ends meet 'Neither easy or difficult'. By comparison, adults without children in the household were 12 percentage points more confident it would be 'very or fairly easy' to make ends meet compared to parents (42%), while only 24% said it would be 'very or fairly difficult'.

Figure 5 below shows the variation in parents' ability to make ends meet. Lone parents and households with more than two children were significantly more likely to find making ends meet difficult, compared to households with two parents and households with more than two children. However, no significant differences in ability to make ends meet were found by ethnicity across the UK.

Figure 5. Comparing difficulty parents found ‘making ends meet’ across the whole sample, lone parent households, and multiple ethnic groups.



We asked parents to select any support payments received by themselves or any member of their household. Just under half of parents (45%) said that at least one member of their household received a form of support benefit or payment (see Table 2 for a breakdown of sample size and percent by each type of support), the most common being Universal Credit (25% of households).

Lone parent households with more than two children were significantly more likely to have been in receipt of at least one form of support benefit or payment. Significant variation in the number of households receiving support payments was found by regions in England when compared to London as a baseline, with households in the North East and East Midlands significantly more likely to receive support payments and households in the East of England significantly less likely to receive support payments, when compared to London. However, no significant effect of ethnicity was found (see Table S7 for full model results).

Table 2. Percentage of households with children that receive each of the listed types of support payment or benefits.

Type of support payment or benefit	Number of households (n)	Percent of households* (%)
Universal credit	827	25

Housing Benefits	398	12
Personal Independence Payment (PIP)	305	9
Income support	206	6
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	188	6
Pension	143	4
Job seeker's allowance	84	3
Other	148	4
None of these	1833	55

* Percentage of households with at least one child across the UK.

5.2. Time together

Over a third of parents (34%) said that they thought they spend too little time with their family, 60% of parents thought they spend 'about the right amount of time' with their family, while 4% thought they spend too much time. Female parents were more likely to think they spent too little time together (36%) compared to male parents (28%). Respondents living in rural areas were most likely to think too little time was spent together (40%, compared to 32% of urban households).

Of the parents that felt they spend too little time together as a family, the most likely perceived blocker was 'my work/employment' (68%), followed by school/homework (31%), screentime (24%), then travel (including commuting) and caring for other family members (both 14%).

Differences in perceptions of time spent together by urbanity of household do not appear to be associated with commuting as parents living in urban areas were the most likely to blame a lack of time together as a family on commuting (17% compared to 13% rural and suburban areas). Parents of children in rural areas were most likely to attribute too little time together school/homework (38%, compared to 27% in urban areas).

Children of parents who felt they were spending about the right amount of time with their children had a higher average reported happiness with family relationships (8.8 out of 10) compared to those whose parents felt they were spending too little time with their children (8.6 out of 10) or were spending too much time with their children (7.7 out of 10). Parents who felt they were spending about the right amount of time with their children were more likely to use words with a positive sentiment to describe family (85%) than parents who felt were spending too little time with their children (82%).

6. Trends in the use of family support, services and childcare

When asked 'If you needed help with any aspect of family life, which of the following people or services would you turn to?', just over three quarters (78%) of all parents selected family, 51% selected friends and 20% selected health services. Far fewer parents said they would turn to each of social media (including social media support groups) (15%), support forums (12%), council services (11%) or local community services (10%). Seven percent of parents (237) said they wouldn't seek any help.

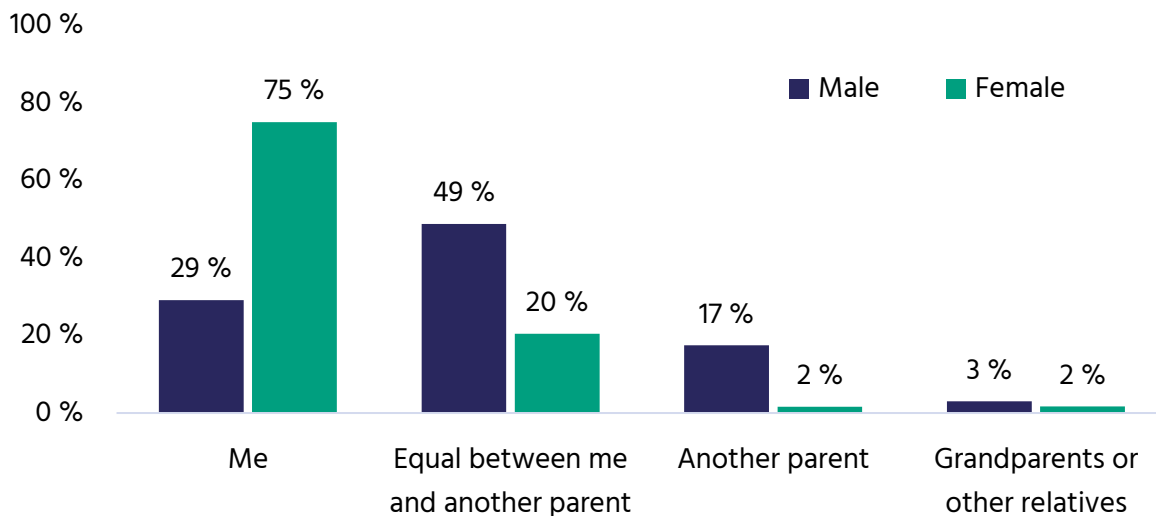
When looking at which types of support were selected together, 85% turned to both their friends and family. Of those 15% who didn't turn to their friends or family, 48% said they would not seek help, 22% would turn to social media (including social media support groups), 17% to health services, 15% to council services, 15% to support forums and 9% to local community services.

6.1. Childcare

When asked about the share of childcare tasks, 62% of all parents who took the survey said they were the primary provider of childcare to the children in the household, and 28% said childcare was shared between them and another parent. Parents who were married were most likely to say they share childcare (35% shared).

Mothers were more likely to select themselves as the primary childcare provider (75% - see Figure 6 below) than male respondents (29%). Fathers were most likely to say childcare was shared equally (49%).

Figure 6. Perceptions of the share of childcare tasks between different family members, by respondent gender.



Across all parents, 53% used additional childcare or nursery education in the past year. For families where the oldest child was under 5, 60% of households used any form of childcare in the past year.

Households where the oldest child was aged 15-17 were the least likely to use any form of childcare (33%). Regionally, households in the London were most likely to use childcare (66%, compared to 40% in the East of England). Households of a lower socio-economic grade were also more likely to use some form of childcare (60% for ABC1 grade) compared to 43% for C2DE households.

Households with younger children were more likely to use some form of childcare or nursery in the past year, than those with older children. Thirty-nine percent of households where the eldest child was aged 0-3 used a nursery, creche or playgroup in the past year, but when the oldest child was aged 4-11, households were more likely to use grandparents or other relatives for childcare, than for other age groups.

A third of parents said they had asked a grandparent, another relative, friend or neighbour for help with childcare.

6.2. Use of state and community family services – Family Hubs

We asked parents whether they had accessed or used a Family Hub in the past month, year, between 2-5 years ago or over 5 years ago in relation to any of their children.

Across all time periods, family hubs were used by 12% of parents. Parents did mention that they had accessed other family services including Free School Meals programmes, food banks, Better Start services, online support groups, local parenting classes and mental health services such as CAMHs, Healthy Young Minds and Calms. A selection of quotes from those who selected other services are highlighted below, alongside the parent's age and gender, the length of time since they used the service.

"Care direct helped me manage childcare duties with caring duties for my disabled husband" – Mum, 43, service used over 5 years ago

"Child Bereavement UK" – Mum, 54, service used in past year

"Children's centres and family centres" – Mum, 38, service used in past year

"Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services" – Dad, 50, service used in past month

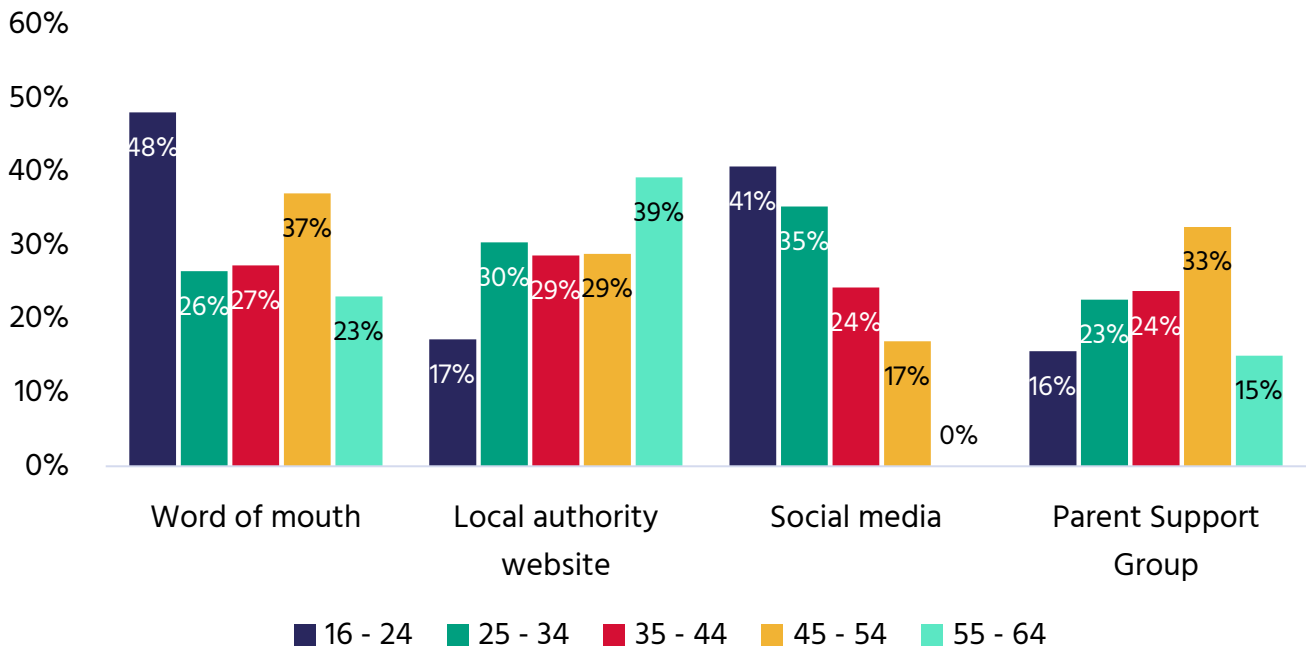
"Food parcels, Grant for boiler and home improvements, tax credits" – Mum, age 57, service used over 5 years ago

6.3. How did families hear about services, and would they recommend them to a friend?

Of those who had ever accessed family services, 29% had heard about them through word of mouth, 29% through the local authority and 28% through social media, 24% through a parental support group, 22% through TV and 21% via a search engine.

The way parents heard about the services they used varied by responding parent age. For example, Figure 7 below indicates that older parents (age 45+) were more likely to have heard about the services they use via a Local Authority Website and Parent Support Groups, while younger parents (particularly age 16-24) were more likely to have heard about services via word of mouth or social media, compared to older parents.

Figure 7. Percentage of parents that heard about family services the top four communication methods (word of mouth, local authority website, social media and parent support group) by age group.



Of the 105 parents that had only accessed a family hub in the past 5 years, 35% of parents told us they had heard about the family hub(s) via word of mouth, while 30% had heard through a local authority website and 20% had heard through social media.

When asked whether they would recommend family hubs to a friend on a scale of 1 to 10, the average score given by parents that had accessed a family hub in the past 5 years was 6.7.

7. Children's perspectives on childcare, worries and time away from home

7.1. Care and support

Children aged 8-17 were asked who was most likely to give them the most care or support. Across all children, 'my mum' was the most selected option (72%) followed by 'my dad' (12%). All other options were selected by less than 5% of children. Responses to this question varied notably according to the gender of the adult. Where the adult respondent was female, 'mum' was selected 81% of the time and dad was selected 6% of the time. By contrast, when the adult respondent was male, children selected 'mum' 50% of the time, and 'dad' was selected 26% of the time. By contrast, responses to this question did not vary by child gender.

7.2. Worries

Twelve percent of children, equivalent to 950,000 (+/- 110,000) children across the UK, told us that they would keep their worries to themselves. Of these children, children from lone parent households and more than two children were significantly more likely to say they would keep their worries to themselves (see Table S8 for full model results).

Children aged 8-17 were most likely to say they would tell 'their parents' if they were worried about something (73%), followed by telling 'a friend or boyfriend/girlfriend' (20%) then a sibling (19%), a teacher (12%). Children with 2 or 3+ siblings were more likely than average to tell a sibling (25% and 32% respectively).

7.3. Living away from home

Table 4 outlines the results for the question, 'Have you ever lived away from home with any of the following (other than for holidays/or short visits)?'. Children could select multiple options. The most commonly selected option was 'grandparents' (17%) followed by 'friends' (8%), then 'other relatives' (7%) highlighting the importance of kinship care in this sample. Nearly one third of children selected 'someone else' (29%).

Of the 540 children that selected 'Other/someone else', 90% said they had never stayed away from home, 2% of children stayed with their mum only, 2% stayed with their dad only and under 5 children had stayed with a combination of other relatives.

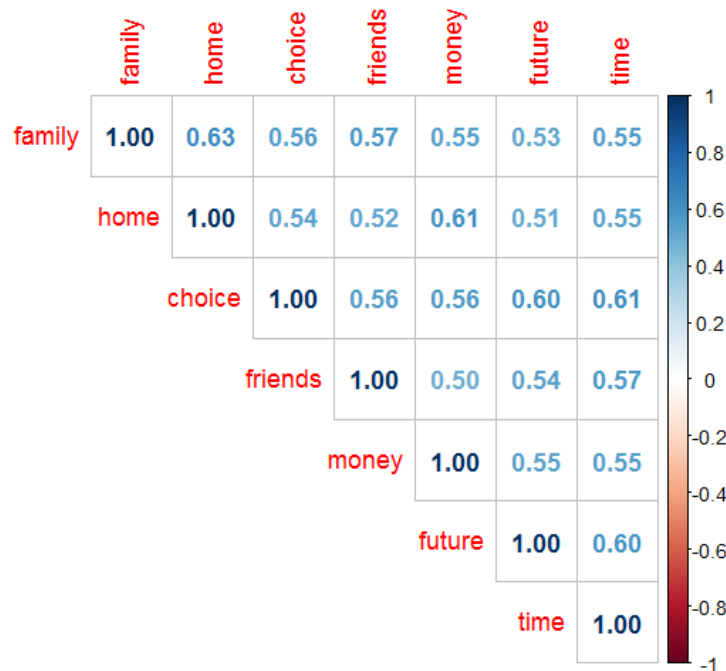
Table 4. Proportion of children in this sample (weighted n= 1,838), who had spent more than a week living away from home in the following locations or care providers.

Location, carer or type of care	Number of children (n)	Percent of sample (%)
Grandparents	307	17
Friends	147	8
Other relatives	135	7
Boyfriend/Girlfriend/Partner	99	5
Hospital	35	2
Foster parents	22	1
Children's home	15	1
Boarding school	13	1
Hostel	12	1
Secure training centre or youth offending institute	<10	<1
Other/Someone else	540	29
N/A, Prefer not to say	669	36

7.4. Children's happiness with different aspects of their lives

Children were asked to rate their happiness with different aspects of their life, home, relationships and future on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 represents the highest level of happiness. On average, children were happiest with their 'relationships with family' (8.7 out of 10), followed by their home (8.4/10) and relationships with friends (8.1/10). Of these categories, children were least happy with 'what happen to [them] in later life' (7.6/10). Figure 9 shows the strength of the relationship between these measures of happiness where higher values mean a closer relationship between the measures. All measures are positively correlated, so as one increases, so does the other. The strongest relationship is between happiness with family and home ($r=0.63$, $p>0.001$) and the weakest was happiness with friends and money ($r=0.50$, $p>0.001$).

Figure 8. A correlation matrix using Spearman Rank correlation, visualising the strength of the relationship between each of the measures of children’s happiness with different aspects of their lives.



Children’s happiness about their relationships with family varied significantly by region, in which children in Wales showed significantly higher happiness scores (9.2/10) than other regions in the UK (see table S9 for model).

There are also links between happiness with family relationships and the words chosen to describe family. Among those who were happy with their family relationships, 65% chose the word “loving” when asked to pick three words that describe family (compared to 40% for those were unhappy or neutral about their family relationships).

8. Conclusion

This nationally representative survey of over 3,300 parents, 2,200 children (age 8-17) and 259 adults without children in the UK highlights the importance of family in daily life. For people of all ages, family life provides love, care, support and security, through relationships, shared memories and experiences. These results highlight the diversity of family life, and the variety of ways family can influence the happiness of children and their parents.

9. Appendix

Table S1. Descriptive statistics of adults with children sample (n=3,305) including oldest child's age, gender, household region and size, primary parent employment status and ethnicity compared to most recent official data sources. NOTE: The sample is weighted to be nationally representative by oldest child age and gender, household region and responding parent employment status.

Socio-demographic variables	Weighted sample size (n)	Percentage of sample (%)	National population (%) *
<i>Responding parent age group</i>			
16-25	174	5.3	14.6
26-35	1169	35.4	16.6
36-45	1272	38.5	15.5
46-65	673	20.4	31.6
66+	14	0.4	21.7
NA	3	0.1	NA
<i>Responding parent gender</i>			
Male	910	27.5	49.0
Female	2387	72.2	51.0
Prefer to use own term	1	0.02	NA
Prefer not to say	7	0.2	NA
<i>Oldest child age group</i>			
0-7 years old	1452	44.2	55.9
8-17 years old	1853	56.4	54.5
<i>Oldest child gender</i>			
Male	1684	50.9	60.0
Female	1599	48.4	48.4
Prefer to use own term	3	0.1	0.1
Prefer not to say	19	0.6	0.6
<i>Household region</i>			
East Midlands	211	6.4	6.4
East of England	284	8.6	8.6
London	429	13.0	13.0
North East	112	4.3	4.3
North West	329	9.9	9.9
Northern Ireland	93	2.8	2.8

Scotland	215	6.5	6.5
South East	416	12.6	12.6
South West	233	7.1	7.1
Wales	132	4.0	4.0
West Midlands	274	8.3	8.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	246	7.4	7.4
<i>Primary parent employment status</i>			
Working	2003	60.6	60.6
Not working	1302	39.4	39.4
<i>Primary parent ethnic group</i>			
Asian background	246	7.5	7.5
Black background	165	5.0	3.3
Mixed/multiple ethnic background	86	2.6	2.2
White	2729	83.4	86.0
Other ethnicities	36	1.1	1.0
Total sample (unweighted)	3,305	-	-

*National population estimates for age, gender and region are calculated using the [Overview of the UK population – Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) and *Families and households in the UK: 2021 dataset*. Ethnicity is calculated using the [2011 UK Census](#). NOTE: National statistics on adult age and gender is for all adults aged 16+, not just parents.

Table S2. Descriptive statistics of adults without children sample (n=259) including household region and size, respondent employment status and ethnicity compared to most recent official data sources. NOTE: The sample is weighted to be nationally representative by responding adult age and gender only.

Socio-demographic variables	Weighted sample size (n)	Percentage of sample (%)	National population (%) *
<i>Responding adult age group</i>			
16-25	21	8.1	14.6
26-35	49	19.1	16.6
36-45	51	19.8	15.5
46-65	93	35.9	31.6
66+	44	17.0	21.7
<i>Adult gender</i>			
Male	128	49.6	49.0

Female	131	50.4	51.0
<i>Household region</i>			
East Midlands	15	5.9	6.4
East of England	20	7.5	8.6
London	37	14.3	13.0
North East	5	2.0	4.3
North West	21	8.2	9.9
Northern Ireland	5	1.9	2.8
Scotland	18	6.8	6.5
South East	28	10.9	12.6
South West	23	9.1	7.1
Wales	9	3.5	4.0
West Midlands	11	4.1	8.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	17	6.5	7.4
<i>Adult employment status</i>			
Working	154	59.8	60.6
Not working	105	40.2	39.4
<i>Adult ethnic group</i>			
Asian background	18	7.0	7.5
Black background	4	1.6	3.3
Mixed/multiple ethnic background	6	2.2	2.2
White	225	86.8	86.0
Other ethnicities	0	0.0	1.0
Prefer not to say	1	0.3	NA
Total sample	259	-	-

*National population estimates for age, gender and region are calculated using the [Overview of the UK population – Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) and Families and households in the UK: 2021 dataset. Ethnicity is calculated using the [2011 UK Census](#).

Table S3. Descriptive statistics of relationships between adults living within the main respondent's household at the time of the survey. The table outlines the relationship of up to four adults living with the primary responding adult/parent.

Relationship	Percentage occurrence of relationships between each adult and the primary respondent (%)						
	Adult 1	Adult 2	Adult 3	Adult 4	Adult 5	Adult 6	Total

Brother or sister (including half-brother or sister)	0.48	0.75	0.55	0.36	0.06	NA	0.37
Foster child	0.05	NA	0.01	NA	NA	NA	0.06
Grandparent	0.01	0.14	0.07	0.03	NA	NA	0.25
Husband or wife	57.38	1.05	0.32	0.03	NA	NA	58.79
Legally registered civil partner	0.28	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.28
Mother or father	2.60	2.52	1.06	NA	0.12	NA	6.29
Partner	19.34	0.38	0.06	NA	NA	NA	19.78
Relation – other	0.16	0.76	0.28	0.00	NA	0.03	1.23
Son or daughter	3.23	5.73	1.18	0.21	0.03	0.01	10.38
Stepbrother or stepsister	0.05	0.08	NA	0.02	NA	NA	0.15
Stepchild	0.14	0.30	0.09	0.01	NA	NA	0.55
Unrelated	0.60	0.43	0.10	0.08	NA	NA	1.21
Stepmother or stepfather	NA	0.13	0.08	0.04	NA	NA	0.25
Grandchild	NA	NA	0.02	NA	NA	NA	0.02
NA	15.68	87.74	96.17	99.22	99.79	99.96	498.56
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	600

Table S4. Descriptive statistics of relationships between the children and the primary respondent living within the main respondent’s household at the time of the survey. The table outlines the relationship of up to four children living with the primary responding adult/parent.

Relationships	Percentage occurrence of relationships between each adult and the primary respondent (%)							
	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5	Child 6	Child 7	Total
Brother or sister (including half-brother or sister)	0.37	0.19	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.01	NA	0.72
Foster child	0.44	0.27	0.09	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.79
Grandchild	0.65	0.32	0.02	0.02	0.02	NA	NA	1.02

Relation – other	0.94	0.38	0.11	NA	NA	NA	NA	1.43
Son or daughter	95.87	46.93	11.01	2.73	0.40	0.12	0.11	157.16
Stepbrother or stepsister	0.06	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.06
Stepchild	1.66	0.63	0.31	0.02	NA	NA	NA	2.63
NA	0.00	51.28	88.40	97.17	99.58	99.87	99.89	536.18
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	700

Table S5. Proportion of parents that selected each of the top three words ('loving', 'home' and 'caring' when asked which words they think of first when they hear the word 'family'. Sample sizes are weighted.

Parents		% Selected		
		Loving	Home	Caring
Total		64%	43%	40%
Parent Gender	Male (n=910)	55%	37%	37%
	Female (n=2387)	67%	45%	40%
Parent Age	16 – 24 (n=123)	50%	36%	35%
	25 – 34 (n=1034)	63%	42%	37%
	35 – 44 (n=1377)	64%	44%	39%
	45 – 54 (n=605)	65%	42%	42%
	55 – 64 (n=150)	59%	45%	48%
	65+ (n=15)	89%	51%	71%
Ethnicity	Asian background (n=246)	64%	41%	41%
	Black background (n=165)	57%	42%	42%
	Mixed / multiple ethnic background (n=86)	61%	32%	30%
	White (n=2729)	64%	43%	40%

	Other ethnic background (n=36)	50%	21%	18%
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Table S6. Proportion of children (age 8-17) that selected each of the top three words ('loving', 'home' and 'caring') when asked which words they think of first when they hear the word 'family'. Sample sizes are weighted.

Children (Age 8-17)		% Selected		
		Loving	Happy	Home
Total		63 %	51 %	48 %
Oldest Child Gender	Male (n=931)	61 %	53 %	48 %
	Female (n=897)	65 %	50 %	48 %
Oldest Child Age	8-11 (n=765)	66 %	58 %	46 %
	12-14 (n=535)	63 %	49 %	48 %
	15-17 (n=538)	58 %	45 %	51 %
Ethnicity	Asian background (n=123)	53 %	48 %	41 %
	Black background (n=68)	65 %	47 %	42 %
	Mixed / multiple ethnic background (n=45)	57 %	46 %	23 %
	White (n=1569)	64 %	52 %	49 %
	Other ethnic background (n=13)	50 %	33 %	49 %

Table S7. Regression model coefficients investigating the effects of multiple socio-economic and demographic factors on receipt of household benefits.

<i>Coefficient</i>	Receives benefit		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>Conf. Int (95%)</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
(Intercept)	2.76	1.71 – 4.44	<0.001
Region [East Midlands]	1.43	1.01 – 2.04	0.046
Region [East of England]	0.67	0.48 – 0.94	0.019
Region [North East]	1.16	0.74 – 1.81	0.514
Region [North West]	1.39	1.02 – 1.90	0.038
Region [South East]	0.90	0.67 – 1.21	0.478
Region [South West]	1.01	0.71 – 1.42	0.962
Region [West Midlands]	1.25	0.90 – 1.73	0.181
Region [Yorkshire and The Humber]	0.87	0.62 – 1.22	0.418
Ethnic group [Asian background]	1.04	0.65 – 1.65	0.879
Ethnic group [Other ethnic background]	0.77	0.29 – 1.96	0.594
Ethnic group [Mixed / multiple ethnic background]	1.20	0.65 – 2.23	0.561
Ethnic group [White]	1.28	0.88 – 1.87	0.195
Number parents [Two parents/guardians]	0.23	0.19 – 0.28	<0.001
Number children [One or two]	0.70	0.54 – 0.91	0.008
Observations	2552		
R ² Tjur	0.099		

Notes: The reference category for region is London, the reference category for ethnic group is Black background, the reference category for number of parents is one and the reference category for number of children is three or more.

Table S8. Regression model coefficients investigating the effects of multiple socio-economic and demographic factors on children's likelihood to tell different people about their worries.

<i>Coefficient</i>	Worries – Do nothing		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>Conf. Int (95%)</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
(Intercept)	0.09	0.03 – 0.22	<0.001
Region [East Midlands]	1.21	0.60 – 2.36	0.579
Region [East of England]	1.41	0.77 – 2.57	0.268
Region [North East]	0.95	0.35 – 2.22	0.908
Region [North West]	1.60	0.91 – 2.84	0.105
Region [Northern Ireland]	0.48	0.11 – 1.44	0.249
Region [Scotland]	0.55	0.22 – 1.24	0.172
Region [South East]	1.16	0.65 – 2.07	0.619
Region [South West]	0.82	0.38 – 1.69	0.599
Region [Wales]	1.16	0.50 – 2.49	0.711
Region [West Midlands]	1.12	0.59 – 2.11	0.728
Region [Yorkshire & The Humber]	1.28	0.67 – 2.42	0.447
Ethnic group [Asian background]	2.07	0.81 – 6.08	0.151
Ethnic group [Other ethnic background]	0.56	0.01 – 4.51	0.665
Ethnic group [Mixed / multiple ethnic background]	1.05	0.22 – 4.15	0.946
Ethnic group [White]	1.94	0.89 – 5.18	0.132
Number parents [Other]	1.69	0.18 – 7.86	0.561
Number parents [Two parents/guardians]	0.55	0.41 – 0.76	<0.001
Number children [One or two]	0.54	0.37 – 0.80	0.002
Observations	2961		
R ² Tjur	0.012		

Notes: The reference category for region is London, the reference category for ethnic group is Black background, the reference category for number of parents is one and the reference category for number of children is three or more.

Table S9. Regression model coefficients investigating the association between region and children's level of perceived happiness with their relationships with family.

<i>Coefficient</i>	Happiness with family relationships		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>Conf. Int (95%)</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
1 2	0.00	0.00 – 0.01	<0.001
2 3	0.01	0.00 – 0.01	<0.001
3 4	0.01	0.01 – 0.02	<0.001
4 5	0.02	0.01 – 0.03	<0.001
5 6	0.05	0.04 – 0.07	<0.001
6 7	0.07	0.06 – 0.10	<0.001
7 8	0.17	0.13 – 0.22	<0.001
8 9	0.48	0.37 – 0.61	<0.001
9 10	1.48	1.15 – 1.90	0.002
Region [East Midlands]	0.86	0.58 – 1.29	0.474
Region [East of England]	0.75	0.52 – 1.09	0.132
Region [North East]	1.34	0.82 – 2.21	0.244
Region [North West]	0.87	0.61 – 1.22	0.415
Region [Northern Ireland]	1.39	0.80 – 2.43	0.242
Region [Scotland]	1.03	0.69 – 1.54	0.895
Region [South East]	0.84	0.59 – 1.18	0.307
Region [South West]	0.90	0.60 – 1.35	0.598
Region [Wales]	1.89	1.18 – 3.06	0.009
Region [West Midlands]	0.91	0.63 – 1.33	0.631
Region [Yorkshire and The Humber]	0.79	0.53 – 1.17	0.232
Observations	1664		
R ² Nagelkerke	0.323		

Notes: The reference category for region is London. Regression model is an ordered logistic regression.