HOME FRONT

175,000 young carers

The 2001 Census revealed that 175,000 (about 2%) of young people aged 5-17 in the UK provided care on an informal basis for relatives, friends or neighbours. Of these, 30,000 were providing care for 20+ hours per week, a substantial undertaking given that almost all of these children were also in full-time education. Additionally, there were around 1.3 million families with dependent children where no parent was in employment. This report shows that areas with the highest percentages of young people providing care also tend to have high proportions of families where no parent is in paid work.

Child poverty and young carers

Child poverty has a host of detrimental effects, harming both current and future health, impacting on educational outcomes, and restricting future opportunities, achievements and living standards. It is also an experience that is unpleasant, restrictive and stigmatising[1].

In 1999 the government set an unprecedented and impassioned policy goal: to eradicate child poverty within a generation. A number of policy initiatives have been devised to achieve progress toward this target, with some success. In 2001-02 there were 3.8 million children living in poverty (children living in households with incomes below 60% of the median after housing costs), a fall from 4.4 million in 1996-97[2]. Many of these 'poor' children will be living in households where there is no adult in paid work and the family is totally reliant on benefits. In other households, low pay is the main cause of family poverty. Many children who have been lifted out of poverty (in technical terms) by benefits and tax credits will still be in families who are only just above the poverty threshold.

Life in Britain

The latest Census reveals that within the UK people live in very different worlds. For some, resources and amenities abound; for others life is characterised by deprivation and difficulties, especially when their need for support is great.

The 2001 Census marked the bi-centenary of Census taking in the UK. It is the most comprehensive social record of life in this country now available. Since 1801 successive governments have asked the population to assist in the taking of a Census.

This report is one of a series of 10 showing key patterns and inequalities in life in the UK revealed by the 2001 Census. These reports focus on geographical inequalities, highlighting where services and opportunities appear not to be available or accessible to those people and places that need them most.

The public manifestations of social exclusion (truancy, area de/regeneration, homelessness) have received a great deal of attention in recent policy debates but the experience of poverty in the privacy of the home has gained less attention[3]. Young people who provide care, usually for other family members, are a group who are often socially isolated and socially excluded in a way that is not easily visible from outside the home. A 2003 survey of over 6,000 young carers in the UK found that 56% lived in lone-parent families, and 22% were missing school or having educational difficulties. Although figures on employment were available for only 1,000 of the adults being cared for by these young carers, 43 (4%) of the adults were in employment[4].

The Census provides simple measures of both children in poverty (as estimated by those living in households with no parents in employment) and of children who provide care, so here – in this series of reports on geographical inequalities – we consider whether these two groups tend to be geographically coincident.

This analysis uses data from the 2001 Census to construct two measures that tell us about the lives of some of the most disadvantaged young people. Firstly, the Census data describe household structures, and also include information on the employment circumstances of all adults. Therefore, it is possible to calculate the number of parents with dependent children living in circumstances where no parent in the household works. While it would be simpler to have a count of the number of children (rather than parents), or families where no parent works, the slightly cumbersome count of parents is what is possible with standard data tables released from the Census. However, the figures available do reflect children living in relatively impoverished circumstances, with families totally reliant on state benefits.

Secondly, the 2001 Census asked, for the first time, a question on the provision of informal care. The question asked:

Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of:

- **long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability, or**
- **problems related to old age?**

Possible responses were: No; 1-19 hours a week; 20-49 hours a week; 50+ hours a week, and the data released from the Census breaks these responses down by age group. It is therefore possible to calculate the number of young people (aged 5-17) providing informal care in this way.

This report describes analysis of these two measures – parents in households with dependent children where no parent works, and young carers – across the UK. As for other reports in this series, the UK is divided into 142 areas consisting of counties, unitary authorities and former metropolitan authorities. The two measures can be calculated for each area, and the report addresses the question:

Do areas that have lots of families with no working parents tend to also have lots of young carers?

Findings

The 2001 Census revealed that there were 1.7 million *parents* living with dependent children[5] in households where no parent worked, around 3% of all people. The Census does not include relevant information on the numbers of families, but it does indicate that 935,000 of these parents are *lone parents* and 815,000 are in *couple* families. These figures can be used to estimate that around 1.3 million *families* were living with dependent children and no working parents in 2001. The Census gives numbers in the relevant data tables for parents with one dependent child or 'two or more' dependent children. This means it is also possible to state that these families with no working parents include *at least* 2 million dependent children.

Responses to the informal care question reveal that 30,000 children aged 5-17 were providing 20+ hours of informal care a week at the time of the 2001 Census. That is three in every 1,000 children in this age group in the UK. A further 145,000 children in this age group (15 in every 1,000) were providing care for 1-19 hours a week. This means a total of around 18 per 1,000, just under 2% of young people providing informal care. Most of these children are likely to be providing care for their parents, grandparents or for siblings. The low percentage

shows that it is fairly unusual for children to be put in these extreme positions. However, the events that result in children being carers do not occur at random, neither socially, nor across space, and never have.

Comparing areas

Figure 1 illustrates how the two measures are associated with each other across the 142 areas of the UK. This clearly shows a strong positive association – areas with a high proportion of households with parents not in work tend also to have higher percentages of children providing informal care.

Table 1 lists the five areas used in this analysis that have the highest percentages of young people providing informal care for more than 20 hours a week. In these areas at least 1 in 200 young people are providing this amount of care. These areas are similar to those with the highest rates of informal care provision overall, which are discussed in another report in this series, *In sickness and in health*.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate how the two measures vary across the UK. The highest rates of non-working parents are found in South Wales, cities of the North and Midlands of England, and Glasgow. The highest rates of young carers are found in Wales, cities in northern England, southern Scotland and Northern Ireland.

100 years ago

In 1886 Charles Booth started a 17-year street-by-street survey of the extent of poverty in London. He set out to disprove an earlier report that claimed that a quarter of workers in London were in receipt of wages not sufficient to maintain life. In fact, Booth found that 30% of London's population lived below the poverty line that he had devised.

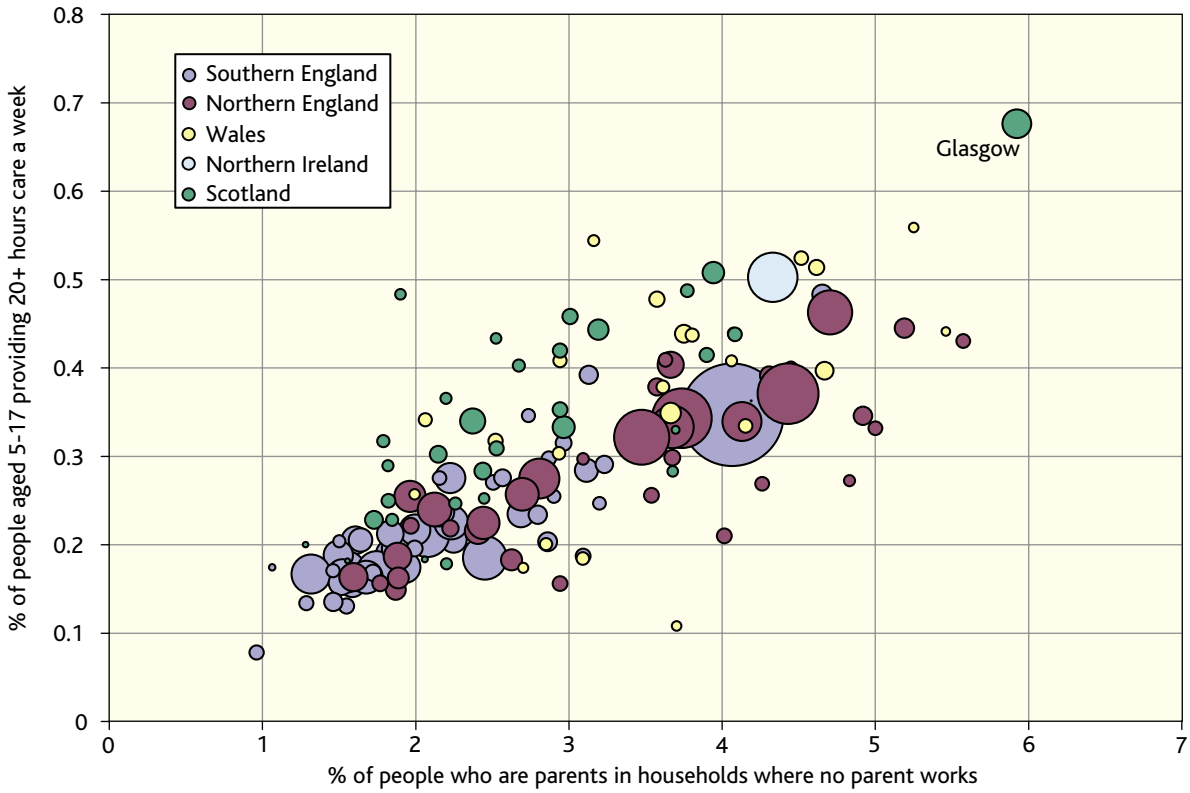
One of Booth's conclusions was that the circumstances of irregular and poor employment, rather than 'habits' or 'character' (what we would call 'lifestyle') were the major causes of poverty. For those who could not find regular work, the workhouse was the last resort. Booth's notebooks described the micro-geography of Victorian London.

For more information see Charles Booth online archive (http://booth.lse.ac.uk/); Davey Smith, G., Dorling, D., and Shaw, M. (2001) *Poverty, inequality and health in Britain: 1800-2000 – A reader*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Table 1: The five areas of the UK with the highest proportion of young people aged 5-17 providing care for 20+ hours a week

Area	% of 5-17 year olds providing 20+ hours care a week	% of people who are parents in households where no parent works
Glasgow City	0.7	5.9
Blaenau Gwent	0.6	5.3
Denbeighshire	0.5	3.2
Neath Port Talbot	0.5	4.5
Caerphilly	0.5	4.6
UK	**0.3**	**3.0**

Figure 1: The association between the two measures across the 142 areas of the UK



Note: Each circle is a county, unitary or former metropolitan authority, drawn with the area in proportion to the total population in 2001 (the largest circle represents London, with a population of just over 7 million). Areas in northern England are those that lie west or north of the counties of Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire (the Severn-Humber divide).

Since 2001

In 2002/03 3.6 million children in the UK were living in poverty[6]. It has been claimed that unless a further £1 billion is spent on tax credits the government is unlikely to meet its interim target of reducing this to 3.1 million children living in poverty by 2004/05[2]. Although the number of children living with parents not in work will have fallen, it is unlikely that there has been any great rise in the proportion of those children living with parents who have got well-paid jobs.

Informal care by young people has only been formally recognised in the past decade[7]. The government established a Young Carers Forum in July 2001, and has implemented a Young Carers Strategy. In addition, the Department for Education and Skills has taken on responsibility for policies to ensure that young carers gain an education[8].

Discussion

Child poverty reflects family poverty. Children may live in impoverished situations because their parents are unable to work, sometimes through poor health, in which case these children may also be providing care for their parents. Children may also provide care for others, such as siblings and older relatives.

These Census data do not allow analysis of individual families, so it is impossible to be sure whether or not the children providing care are living in families with no parents in paid work. However, this is a reasonable explanation for the close relationship between the two measures. Certainly, both of these indicators can be read as measures of the social exclusion experienced by young people and their families in these areas. The government's definition of social exclusion describes it as what "... happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor

Figure 2: Maps illustrating variation across the UK of households where no parent works

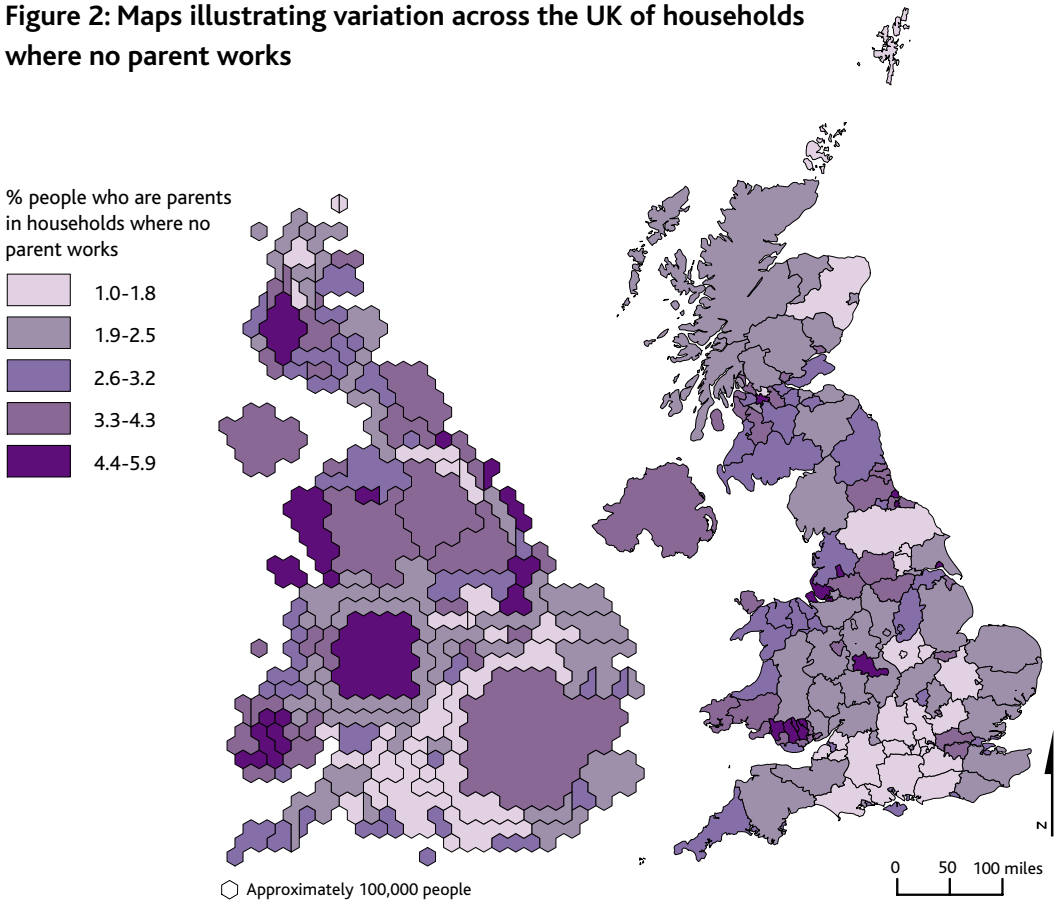
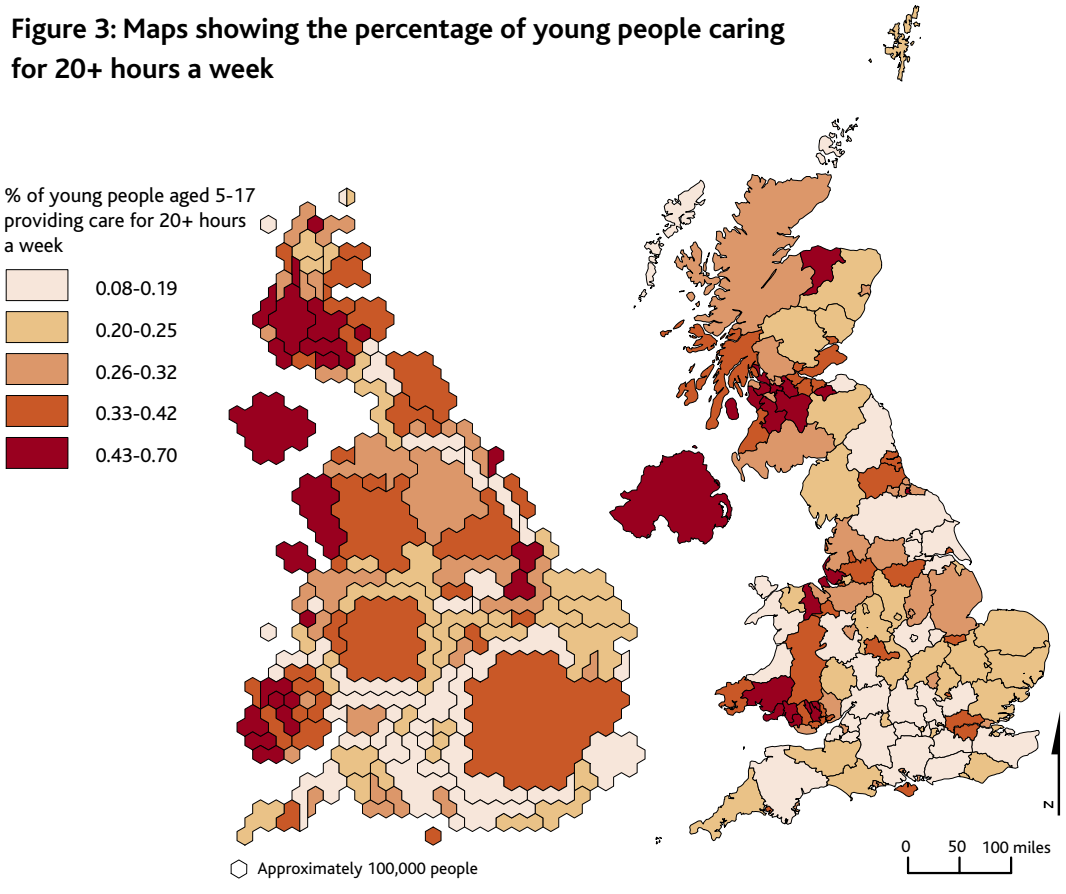


Figure 3: Maps showing the percentage of young people caring for 20+ hours a week



Note: Both maps in each figure represent the same places, shaded identically. The map on the left is a cartogram – each area is shown in proportion to the size of its population in 2001. The largest area is London, since it has the highest population of any of the places[TR]. The map on the right shows the actual boundaries of the areas.

skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle"[9]. Social exclusion is therefore about areas as well as people.

Providing informal care will impact on children's experience within the home as well as beyond it. Caring can contribute to personal development, a sense of reward by fulfilling social expectations, the pleasure of social interaction and the mutual exchange of laughter, affection and love[10]. However, home can also become the limits of the young carer's social world. The burden of caring – in terms of time and energy (both physical and emotional) – can mean that young carers find it difficult to form and sustain long-term friendships. Their education may also suffer – they may have to miss school, or feel tired at school, which means they may not reach their educational potential[3]. Their labour within the home thus has an impact on their life outside the home as well as inside it.

Similarly, growing up in conditions of poverty can affect the experience of home life as well as the world beyond, as Ridge says: "… the effects of poverty and disadvantage can permeate every aspect of their lives; from the material and more quantifiable aspects of their needs, to the social and emotional requirements so important for children, both in childhood and beyond" (p 131)[1]. Both child poverty and young caring are thus experienced in the home, but have ramifications for the lives of young people far beyond that sphere.

Most importantly the geographical distribution of where children find they need to care does not arrive by chance – it reflects the general distribution of childhood poverty. Although a minority of child carers may not be poor, for as long as child poverty remains we can expect some children to have to care for their parents or other members of their families who are ill and in need of many hours of help a week. Poverty reduces the options open to families in need to care. A very simple interpretation of Figure 1 could be that if child poverty were reduced to the levels of the best-off places, fewer than 1 in 1,000 children would be found caring for more than 20 hours a week in the country. Ninety-nine point nine per cent would have the time to study and play that most children enjoy. Of course, the future does not tend to play out as such statistical relationships suggest, but the fact that where children are most likely to be found to be carers is also where they are most likely to be poor provides yet more evidence of the need to abolish poverty.

Notes

1 Ridge, T. (2002) *Child poverty and social exclusion: From a child's perspective*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

2 Brewer, M. (2003) *What do the child poverty targets mean for the child tax credit? An update*, Briefing Note 41, London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

3 Roche, J. and Tucker, S. (2003) 'Extending the social exclusion debate: an exploration of the family lives of young carers and young people with ME', *Childhood*, vol 10, no 4, pp 439-56.

4 Dearden, C. and Becker, S. (2004) *Young carers in the UK: The 2004 report*, London: Carers UK (available from www.carersonline.org.uk).

5 The Census defines a dependent child as "... a person in a household aged 0 to 15 (whether or not in a family) or a person aged 16 to 18 who is a full time student in a family with parent(s)".

6 CPAG (Child Poverty Action Group) (2004) *Poverty: The facts (summary)*, London: CPAG.

7 Aldridge, J. and Becker, S. (2003) *Children caring for parents with mental illness: Perspectives of young carers, parents and professionals*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

8 www.dfes.gov.uk

9 www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk

10 Benn, M. (1998) *Madonna and child: Towards the new politics of motherhood*, London: Jonathan Cape.

TR Further information on this point is available in the accompanying technical report.

What do we know?

- Child poverty is a significant problem in the UK, and the subject of major government targets.
- Many children living in poverty are in families where no parent is in paid employment.
- Young people who provide care on an informal basis may be socially isolated and socially excluded.

What have we found?

- 175,000 children and young people (aged 5-17) in the UK provide informal care.
- Areas with lots of young carers tend also to have lots of families where no parent works.
- In the best-off areas as few as only 1 in 1,000 children need to provide care for more than 20 hours a week, while in other areas this figure reaches 7 per 1,000.

Other reports in the series

The companion report to this, *Top gear*, looks at whether areas with many households that might need a car tend also to have many households that have more cars than they might really need.

1. *Doctors and nurses*
2. *In sickness and in health*
3. *Teachers*
4. *Sons and daughters*
5. *Changing rooms*
6. *A place in the sun*
7. *The office*
8. *Open all hours*
9. *Top gear*
10. *Home front*

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