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Households, Families and Cultural Capital

Abstract This chapter focuses on wellbeing within households and families, paying careful attention to child development. This is important from the perspective of the child, of the child's parents, of wider society and globally. Investment in cultural capital enhances wellbeing by creating opportunities for persons to express, develop, transform and pass on to the next generation their cultural inheritance. Men and women can have equal capabilities for wellbeing; yet studies show that significant sacrifices of time and financial costs for parents are carried disproportionately by women, who are also more vulnerable to intimate violence. After accounting for housing costs, nearly one in three children in the United Kingdom are growing up in households with income below 60 per cent of the country's median equivalised income. Thus, the chapter reveals serious problems that can be overlooked when policy advice focuses on economic growth rather than on wellbeing.

Keywords Cultural capital • Child care • Motherhood penalty • Intimate violence • Child poverty

A feature of human experience is that throughout childhood almost everyone grows up in family households of one form or another. Upon becoming adults, a large majority spend significant amounts of time in committed relationships that involve the care and development of children. Figure 3.1 presents data

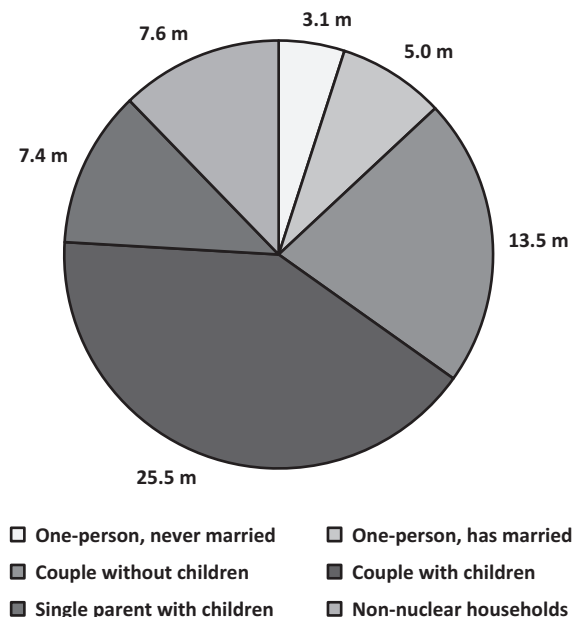


Fig. 3.1 Number of people usually resident in the United Kingdom by household type, 27 March 2011. (Source: ONS (2015, Tables 53a and 57a))

on the living arrangements of 62 million adults and children normally resident in the United Kingdom on 27 March 2011. Only 5 per cent of the population (3.1 million people) were living in a one-person household, having never married. Another 5 million were living alone, but had been married. The remaining 54 million were in multi-person households, with the largest categories being couples with children (41 per cent of the population) and couples without children (22 per cent). Data such as these suggest that forming households and families is an important aspect of leading valued lives.

This chapter begins with definitions of households and families. This is followed by a discussion of the second type of capital in our wellbeing economics framework: cultural capital, which is deeply connected with household and family life. The chapter then examines gender divisions of labour within households and their implications for the wellbeing experiences of men and women, particularly when they are parents. This leads to an analysis of child poverty (including the role played by housing costs), using the wellbeing lens to focus on the capabilities of parents to co-create with their children lives that they all have reason to value. The chapter finishes with a brief conclusion.

Households and Families

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) defines a household as “one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area” (ONS 2016a, p. 2). This definition is adopted throughout this chapter. The Household Labour Force survey estimates there were 27.1 million UK households in 2016 (*idem*, p. 10).

The ONS then defines a family as “a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent, with at least one child, who live at the same address” (*idem*, p. 2). This is a restricted definition, conceptualising a family as a special type of household. Children, however, have vital experiences of family that go well beyond one household, one family (Morrow 1998; Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001; Haugen 2010; Bjarnason et al. 2012; Davies 2015). Indeed, “even children within a single household can live in different ‘families’ and experience different levels of complexity and change” (Sligo et al. 2017, p. 53).

To illustrate, a child’s biological parents may have separated, with one or both parents living with a partner who brings new family relationships into the child’s life. Some children have bedrooms they call their own in two or more households. Families stretch back in time through remembered ancestors, while among those still living, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins may contribute to a child’s upbringing, including on special family occasions or during holidays. Wellbeing economics is particularly concerned with child development, and so this chapter conceptualises a child’s family as including all those who share responsibility for the child’s care and development within the child’s household or households.

The focus on child development can be justified for at least four reasons. First, there is substantial evidence that a child’s wellbeing is badly affected by poverty (Griggs and Walker 2008; McCall 2016), and that lifelong wellbeing is strongly influenced by family circumstances during infancy and childhood (Blanden et al. 2008). Gaviria (2002, p. 331) expresses this succinctly: “If one were to summarize the main message of the massive scientific literature dealing with family influences, a single line would suffice: it pays to choose one’s parents.” A representative example is the analysis of young men in the United States by Keane and Wolpin (1997), which highlighted how differences in personal abilities by the age of 16 years are a dominating influence on lifetime inequalities.¹

Second, close conjugal relationships and a good family life are important for the wellbeing of parents (Bok 2010, p. 17). As summarised in a recent authoritative review, “parenthood and parenting experiences have significant effects on well-being over the life course, potentially contributing to cumulative advantage for some and to disadvantage for others” (Umberson et al. 2010, p. 625). The success children enjoy in their own adult lives can affect the ongoing wellbeing of their parents (Greenfield and Marks 2006).

Third, the wider community has an interest in children, if only to avoid future costs associated with poor child development (Bramley and Watkins 2008; Hirsch 2008, 2013). A 40-year study of 1037 children born in New Zealand (see Poulton et al. 2015) found that nearly 80 per cent of the burden to central government finances attributable to survey participants by the age of 38 was due to just 20 per cent of those participants (Caspi et al. 2016). This burden involved disproportionate use of costly services in healthcare, criminal justice and social welfare. Members of the high-cost group could be predicted reasonably well by four indicators of disadvantage during their first decade: lower family household socioeconomic status; greater experience of childhood maltreatment; poorer scores on tests of childhood IQ; and lower scores on measures of childhood self-control.

Finally, the global community has recognised the importance of protecting children’s innate rights to health, education, protection and equal opportunity (Lake 2014, p. 1). The Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, was adopted by the United Nations in 1989. There were 194 state signatories 25 years later, making it the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history (Sandberg 2014, p. 60). The signatories record their conviction “that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community” (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990, Preamble).

Cultural Capital

The Convention on the Rights of the Child refers at several points to a child’s culture. Article 29 states that a child’s education shall be directed, among other things, to the development of respect for their own cultural identity, language and values. Article 30 states that a child belonging to an ethnic, religious or

linguistic minority, or who is indigenous, shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language. Article 31 recognises the right of the child to participate freely and fully in cultural and artistic life.

In the early 1960s, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1964) sought to understand why school children from wealthy households achieved better educational results in the French education system than those from households with fewer economic resources. Drawing on that research, Bourdieu (1973, 1983) later introduced the concept of *cultural capital*, intended as a deliberate counter to “human capital” theory. He argued that the latter’s emphasis on differences in innate aptitude ignores that children arrive at their first day of school with different levels of “cultural capital previously invested by the family” (Bourdieu 1983, p. 244).²

The key idea is that a young person inherits from previous generations diverse cultural values and accepted norms for practising those values. Culture in this context can be defined as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group” that “encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001, Preamble).³ Cultural values and accepted norms are not set in stone; each generation transforms aspects of its cultural heritage to reflect, or perhaps to create, new social conditions. This understanding is reflected in Proposition 7.

Proposition 7 Investment in cultural capital can enhance the wellbeing of households and families by expanding opportunities to express, develop, transform and pass on to the next generation their cultural inheritance.

Describing cultural heritage using the metaphor of capital can be applied at two levels (Bourdieu 1983; Throsby 1995). Primarily, persons develop *embodied cultural capital* through investing their time in acquiring cultural values and norms. A young person may learn skills for a particular sport, or how to play a particular musical instrument, or how to appreciate the beauty of a wilderness area, or how the family engages in certain spiritual or religious practices and so on. This also refers to learning cultural norms concerning daily activities such as eating a meal or greeting a stranger. Investment in embodied cultural capital begins at birth and depends not only on the young

person's time, but also on the time available for this task in the family (Bourdieu 1983, p. 253).

Young persons are not passive in this process; adolescence, in particular, can be a turbulent time as the next generation of emerging adults constructs cultural fits with their own developing self-identities and world views (Hammack and Toolis 2015; Trommsdorff 2015).

On the secondary level, the metaphor is used to describe how communities invest in conserving and creating *cultural capital assets* such as historical sites, environmental parks, heritage buildings, sport venues, museums and archives, art works, written literature and traditions of artistic performance. This too can be a turbulent process, particularly when artistic works challenge previously accepted values and norms.

Cultural capital assets may be irreplaceable in some cases, but their contribution to wellbeing depends on the ongoing cultural services they provide to people living valued cultural lives. Thus, a social group's cultural vitality depends primarily on the embodied cultural capital being expressed in the group's households and families (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 246–247).

Interaction between the two levels of cultural capital can be measured using indicators such as the number of visitors to heritage sites, the value of tickets sold for arts events, hours of participation in sport activities and the number of visits to museums and libraries. The Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (CASE) in the United Kingdom labels this as *engagement* (Cooper 2012). Echoing a major theme of this section, CASE (2010, Fig. 1, p. 16) has documented how engagement during childhood strongly influences engagement as an adult.

The programme also collates evidence on the economic value of engagement (CASE 2010, pp. 33–41; Marsh and Bertranou 2012; Fujiwara et al., 2014, provide further evidence). Although insightful for tracking trends, it is important to recognise that the value to a social group of its lived culture cannot be captured by economic measures (Walmsley 2012; Taylor 2016). Klammer (2002, p. 467), for example, argues that “cultural capital appears to generate the most important values of all, values that can give meaning to our life”, while others have emphasised the cultural value that is enjoyed in “the lived experience of everyday life” (Highmore 2002; Back 2015; Ebrey 2016; Miles 2016).

Cultural capital is also associated with some of the worst crimes recorded against humanity, reflected in the horrors behind words such as genocide, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, racial hatred, colonial dispossession, female genital mutilation and homophobic violence. The UNESCO Universal

Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001, Article 2) affirms that “in our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together”, but adds in Article 4 that cultural diversity cannot be invoked to infringe upon human rights. Consistent with that principle, Mackenzie (2007) has argued persuasively, among others, that “if the cultural or religious practices of particular communities can only be sustained by perpetuating women’s subordination and stunting their capacities for autonomous agency, then liberals and democratic theorists cannot consistently accommodate the demands made by such communities” (idem, p. 105).

Cultural Capital and Gender

The previous section described how developing cultural capital in children requires investment of time. Bourdieu identified this as the major reason why children growing up in families with more economic resources arrive at school with higher levels of cultural capital; wealthier families have greater amounts of usable time, “particularly in the form of the mother’s free time” (Bourdieu 1983, p. 253). The description of a mother’s time as “free” obviously reflects Bourdieu’s own cultural norms. As Reay (1998, p. 94) has noted, “once mothers’ time is harnessed to the acquisition of cultural capital, it is no longer free time.” Time caring for children sacrifices opportunities for other time-choices, including earning income from paid employment.

There is no dispute that sacrifices associated with the arrival of a child into a household can be significant for both parents at the time (Genesoni and Tallandini 2009; Dew and Wilcox 2011, p. 1). Musick et al. (2016, p. 1070) report that “a substantial body of work shows lower levels of subjective well-being among parents compared to men and women without children” (see, e.g., Hansen 2012, and Deaton and Stone 2014).

It is not the presence of children per se producing this outcome (Pollmann-Schult 2014). An analysis of American Time Use Survey data by Connelly and Kimmel (2015, p. 1) found that “mothers and fathers engaged in child caregiving enjoy their time spent in child caregiving; fathers as much, or even more so, than mothers as evidenced by their average values for happiness, meaningfulness, tiredness, and stress and an aggregated statistic, the unpleasantness index”. Instead, both studies suggest that lower parental wellbeing is due to the sacrifices imposed by high financial and time costs of parenthood (see also Fawcett 1988).

The sacrifices are disproportionately made by women. This begins with women carrying a greater responsibility for childcare than men (Pettit and Hook 2009; Hook 2010). This can be illustrated using time-use surveys (Gershuny 2011). The two most recent surveys in the United Kingdom took place in 2000 and 2015 (ONS 2003; Gershuny and Sullivan 2017). Figure 3.2 presents the average daily minutes recorded for parents spending time in the active care of children, distinguishing by the age band of the youngest child. Active care includes items such as feeding a child, but excludes time when the parent is primarily engaged in another activity while also being present as the responsible person on call if the child needs attention (ONS 2016b, p. 4).

In both survey years, and for both age bands of the youngest child, female parents spent more than twice as much time engaged in active child care as male parents. Over the 15 years between the two surveys, the gender gap narrowed for households where the youngest child was of preschool age, but increased for the older age group.

Further, objective wellbeing indicators show lower wages and lifetime losses of personal wealth for women with children, compared to men with children or to women without children. The gap is so clear that it is commonly termed the

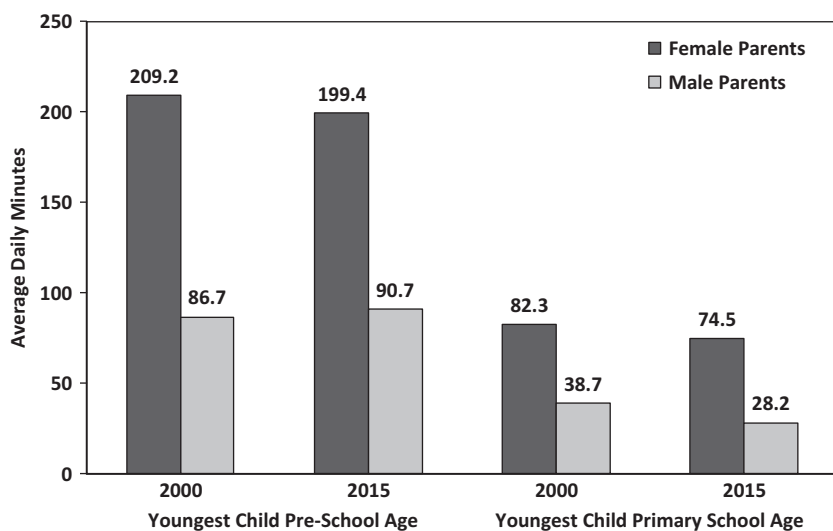


Fig. 3.2 Average daily minutes of total active childcare provided while youngest child living in same household is preschool age or primary school age, by gender of parent, United Kingdom, 2000 and 2015. (Source: Adapted from ONS (2016b, Fig. 2, p. 6))

motherhood penalty (Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Gash 2009; Budig et al. 2012; Harkness 2016; Lersch et al. 2017), which may be driven by cultural values.

Gary Becker, for example, applied economic analysis to family issues in his *Treatise on the Family*, first published in 1981. In his Nobel Prize lecture, he expressed one of his key research questions in the following terms: “Why in almost all societies have married women specialized in bearing and rearing children” (Becker 1992, p. 47). His answer focused on biological differences and on cultural values reflected in labour market discrimination. His analysis suggested how economic forces, unchecked by public policy, are able to amplify small biological and cultural differences between men and women into a sharp division of childcare between mothers and fathers (Becker 1991, pp. 30–79; see more recently Ermisch 2003, pp. 6–7, and Browning et al. 2014, pp. 67–69).

Budig et al. (2012) have researched the influence of cultural attitudes on the impact of work and family policies in 22 industrialised countries. They measured cultural attitudes using survey questions on how strongly respondents agreed with the following statements: family life suffers if woman works full-time; preschool children suffer if mother works; and a man’s job is to earn money, while a woman’s job is to look after home and family. They found significant differences in outcomes where cultural attitudes supported the male breadwinner/female caregiver model compared to support for maternal employment, concluding that “culture amplifies the relationships between parental leave and maternal earnings, and of childcare policies with maternal earnings” (idem, p. 185).

Given these findings, the critique of Mackenzie (2007) cited at the end of the previous section applies. It is not legitimate to sustain social institutions and practices that perpetuate large penalties for women who become mothers, compared to men who become fathers. Instead, reason suggests the following proposition (see also Nussbaum and Glover 1995; Sen 1995; Nussbaum 2000).

Proposition 8 Men and women can have equal capabilities for wellbeing.

The United Kingdom is a long way from equal capabilities between men and women. Personal security, for example, is recognised as essential for wellbeing. Nussbaum’s (2003) list of central human capabilities includes Bodily Integrity, for example, and the OECD’s (2017) wellbeing conceptual framework has Personal Security as one of its quality of life indicators for individual wellbeing. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. In that context, consider the prevalence of intimate violence in England and Wales, represented in Fig. 3.3.

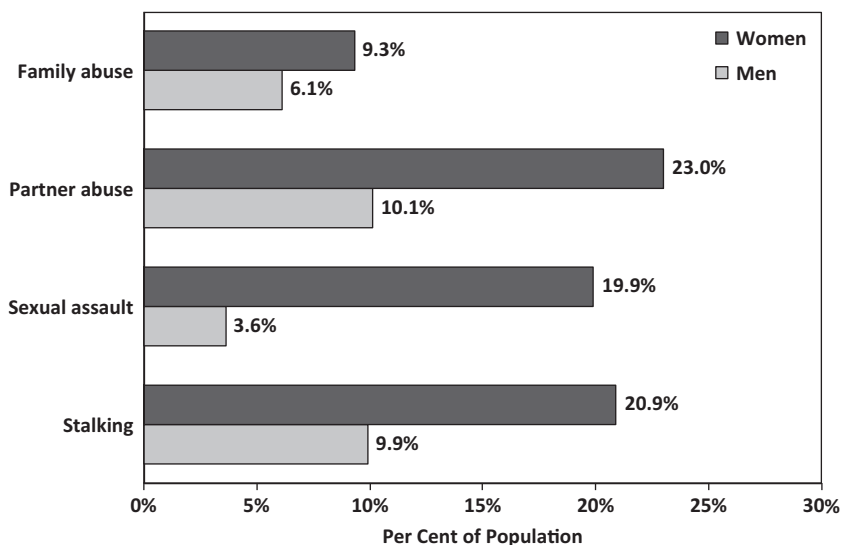


Fig. 3.3 Prevalence of intimate violence since the age of 16 among adults aged 16 to 59, by category, England and Wales, year ending March 2016. (Source: ONS (2017, Appendix Table 4.01), reporting data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales)

The data come from the UK Crime Survey, which defines intimate violence as family abuse, partner abuse, sexual assault or stalking (ONS 2017, p. 74). The Survey offers self-reported data for each of these items, reproduced in Fig. 3.3. Women are much more likely than men to report having suffered intimate violence since the age of 16. The likelihood ratio is greater than two to one for partner abuse and for stalking, and is greater than five to one for sexual assault. These are very large differences in such an important item of wellbeing.

The Blight of Child Poverty

The major focus of this chapter is the development of embodied cultural capital in children through the investment of time and financial resources by their families. This is critical for current and lifelong wellbeing of each child and for the wellbeing of the child's parents. Successful child development also produces benefits for wider society. Consequently, if a large number of children grow up in households without adequate economic resources, the ramifications persist through time and go well beyond the immediate families. This reflected in Proposition 9.

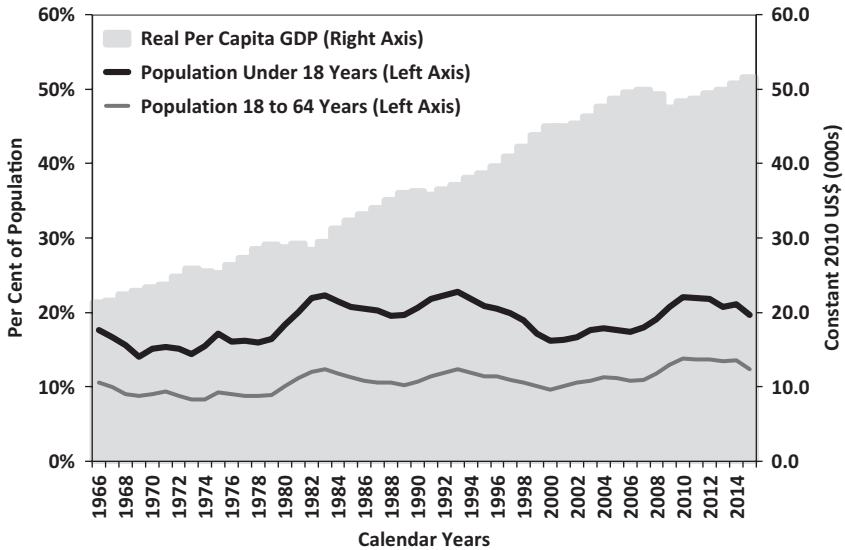


Fig. 3.4 Real per capita gross domestic product and absolute poverty status of population by age group, United States, 1966 to 2015. (Source: World Bank (2017, Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.KD) and United States Census Bureau (2016, Table 3))

Proposition 9 Present and future wellbeing can be enhanced if children grow up in households that are able to access adequate economic resources.

There are important policy debates about what are adequate economic resources (Ravallion 2016, Chap. 4). It is useful to begin in the United States, where official measures of child poverty are based on 1964 research by the Social Security Administration that set minimum adequate income thresholds for families of different size and composition (United States Census Bureau 2016). These thresholds were calculated using the cost of the cheapest nutritionally adequate food plan designed by the Department of Agriculture, multiplied by a factor based on survey data to cover other necessary expenditures such as accommodation, clothing and transport (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1982, p. 185). The thresholds are adjusted annually to compensate for inflation, but not for increases in the country's average living standards. Because the thresholds do not change with economic growth, these data are termed *absolute poverty* indicators.

Figure 3.4 presents data for the last 50 years on the percentage of people living in households with income below the absolute poverty thresholds for two demographic groups: people aged under 18 years (children) and people aged 18

to 64 years (the working-age population). The shaded bars show the level of real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in each year. GDP has shortcomings as discussed in Chap. 1, but continues to indicate a country's average material living standards. Over the five decades, real per capita GDP increased from just over \$12,000 in 1966 to just under \$52,000 in 2015, an increase of 140 per cent.

Two observations stand out from Fig. 3.4. First, child poverty in the United States is more extensive than adult poverty; the proportion of young people living in households with inadequate income is well above the proportion of working-age adults in this situation. Second, despite a 140 per cent increase in real per capita GDP, there has been no sustained improvement in the country's level of child poverty, using absolute standards set in the 1960s. There have been oscillations, but child poverty has remained above 15 per cent since 1974, and has been 20 per cent or higher since 2009, damaging the care and development of large numbers of children. Economic growth has failed to improve this important aspect of a country's wellbeing.

The UK approach to measuring child poverty is different. Children need access to sufficient economic resources for their cultural development; hence, official poverty thresholds are defined relative to the country's living standards. The Family Resources Survey samples more than 19,000 private households in the United Kingdom (Department for Work and Pensions 2017a, p. 18). Adjustments to each household's income are made to reflect its size and composition, which results in *household equivalised income*. Ranking these data from poorest to richest, the result for the middle household is the median equivalised income. The poverty threshold is set at 60 per cent of this median equivalised income.⁴ When the median equivalised income changes, so does the threshold; hence, it is a measure of socially determined relative poverty.

Figure 3.5 presents three poverty measures for the United Kingdom between 1994–1995 and 2015–2016, against a background showing the country's real per capita GDP. The GDP data show steady growth before the impact of the global financial crisis in 2007–2008 and 2008–2009.

The bottom measure in the graph is the poverty rate of working-age adults, calculated before housing costs (BHC) are considered. This sits at 14–16 per cent throughout the 22 years. The lighter shaded line in the graph is the poverty rate of children, again before housing costs. Like in the United States, child poverty in the United Kingdom is more extensive than adult poverty. Unlike America, there is a downward trend in the child poverty data (at least until the last two years), to the extent that the gap with working-age adult poverty almost closed in 2012–2013.

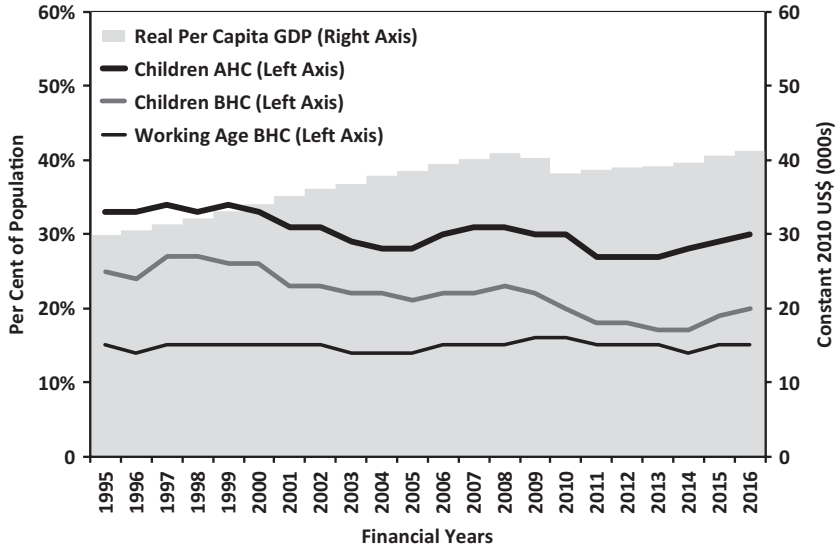


Fig. 3.5 Real per capita gross domestic product and relative poverty status of children, United Kingdom, 1994–1995 to 2015–2016. (Notes: Data are for Great Britain prior to 2002–2003. AHC is After Housing Costs. BHC is Before Housing Costs. Source: World Bank (2017, Indicator NY.GDP.PCAP.KD) and Department for Work and Pensions (2017a, Table 4.1tr and 5.1tr))

Finally, the top line depicts child poverty after housing costs (AHC); that is, after accounting for: rent (gross of housing benefit); water rates, community and council water charges; mortgage interest payments (net of tax relief); structural insurance premiums (for owner occupiers); and ground rent and service charges (Department for Work and Pensions 2017b, p. 45). This series is better for comparing living standards of individuals whose housing costs are high relative to their quality of accommodation and where their Housing Benefit has risen to offset higher rents (*idem*, p. 27). On this definition, child relative poverty in 2015–2016 was 30 per cent, back to its value a decade earlier.

This represents 4 million children recorded as living in households with inadequate economic resources. This has two consequences. First, it limits the capabilities of parents and children to co-create the kinds of lives they value and have reason to value according to the country's social norms of the day. Second, the lack of access to adequate economic resources hampers the children's educational and cultural development, which is creating long-term costs. Such high child poverty is a blight on the country's wellbeing.

Conclusion

The central idea of this chapter is expressed in Proposition 7: Investment in cultural capital can enhance the wellbeing of households and families by expanding opportunities to express, develop, transform and pass on to the next generation their cultural inheritance. Although a clumsy term for the richness and dynamism of the experiences it signifies, the metaphor of cultural capital emphasises that cultural inheritance is an important asset for persons co-creating the kinds of lives they value, and have reason to value, in their households and families.

There is robust evidence of serious wellbeing challenges experienced by UK households and families. Parental sacrifices of time and financial costs are carried disproportionately by mothers, and large numbers of women do not have the same capability for wellbeing as most men, reflected in far greater vulnerability to intimate violence. After accounting for housing costs, nearly one in three children in the United Kingdom are growing up in households with income below 60 per cent of median equivalised income. These children are likely to be missing opportunities for cultural and educational development, with long-term adverse consequences for their personal wellbeing, for the wellbeing of their parents and for the wellbeing of wider society.

The urgency of integrated action to address child care arrangements, intimate violence, affordable housing and child poverty is lost when the primary focus is on economic growth as “the essential foundation of all our aspirations” (Cameron 2010, par. 4). In contrast, the lived experiences of families and households reflected in the data presented in this chapter must challenge the dominant cultural values in our society. How can it be culturally acceptable for such high levels of parental inequality, intimate violence, poor housing and child poverty to be allowed to persist?

This chapter has focused on households and families. The next step in the wellbeing economics framework is to analyse how people can collaborate outside their homes to pursue greater wellbeing for themselves and for their communities. This analysis begins in Chap. 4.

Notes

1. See also Belzil (2007, p. 1076).
2. More recently, Miles and Sullivan (2012, p. 321) draw on UK data to “confirm the powerful role of the family in transmitting tastes and participation [in culture] during childhood, and of community cultures in maintaining and reinforcing them”.

- The term is now part of the economics lexicon; see, for example, Berkes and Folke (1992), Johnson et al. (1995), de Bruin (1998, 1999), Klammer (2002), Cheng (2006), Cochrane (2006), Dalziel et al. (2009) and Throsby (1999, 2011, 2014).
3. Consistent with the way we use “cultural capital” in this chapter, Article 1 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) describes cultural diversity as “the common heritage of humanity [that] should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations”.
 4. Other proportions of median equivalised income can be used; the OECD, for example, uses 50 per cent of median household income for its international comparisons (see <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>). A child is a person aged under 16 years or a person between 16 and 19 years who is: not married nor in a civil partnership nor living with a partner; living with parents or a responsible adult; and in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training (Department for Work and Pensions 2017b, p. 39).

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