

Chapter 7 – *The Family and Welfare*

Regular updates about developments in all the main areas of social policy can be found in the [Social Policy Digest](#). The easiest way to access this is through a university library which subscribes to the [Journal of Social Policy](#). Here we highlight some new information and additional resources which have appeared since the chapter was written.

[Mini baby boom](#)

The [Office of National Statistics](#) noted that in 2007 the average number of children per woman in England and Wales increased to 1.87, which is the highest since 1980.

[Marriage and cohabitation](#)

A report by the [Office of National Statistics](#) showed that more couples are cohabiting and fewer marrying. The number of cohabiting couples has increased by 65 per cent in a decade, with a more gradual rise in the number of single-parent families. By 2014, married couples could account for less than half of British families. Children do best in families where the parents are married. However, Professor Kath Kienan argued that this may be because people in cohabiting relationships are more likely to be socially disadvantaged in the first place, and so the children are disadvantaged by poverty, rather than by the fact that their parents are not married.

[Child care](#)

A report from the [Day Care Trust](#) said that high costs, unsuitable hours, and concerns over quality still prevented many families from getting the childcare they wanted. For the most disadvantaged, even the free entitlement to nursery education for children aged 3-4 was not always taken up, and the baffling complexity of the childcare element of working tax credit was deterring many of those eligible from claiming much-needed help.

[Child Support Agency failure](#)

A report by a group of MPs showed that the [Child Support Agency](#) had not made full use of the range of enforcement powers it had available. Around £3.5 billion of maintenance had not been collected by the Agency, 60 per cent of which was now considered uncollectable. In general money should be collected from fathers and paid to mothers, so it is mothers and children who are disadvantaged by this failure.

[End Child Poverty](#)

The campaigning group, [End Child Poverty](#), drew attention to the fact that 3.8 million children - one in three - are currently living in poverty in the UK, one of the highest rates in the industrialised world. Poverty can set in motion a deepening spiral of social exclusion, creating problems in education, employment, mental and physical health and social interaction. The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) brought together experts in the field to consider what it would take to end child poverty.

[Lone parents and employment](#)

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced that the rules on lone parents' benefits might be changed in order to get more back into work earlier. He said that it was not unreasonable to stop income support once the youngest child reached the age of 12, rather than 16 as under existing rules. The [Child Poverty Action Group](#) said that

harassing lone parents and forcing them to take paid work is not the answer. The [Journal of Social Policy](#) published an article by Tess Ridge on what the children of lone parents experienced when their mothers moved into paid work.

[The costs of long term care for older people](#)

A special issue of [Social Policy and Society](#) brought together experts on long term care for older people. Despite all the moral panic about the costs of long term care, it seems that only a minority of older people will require long term care and support in later life, and many of those will need care only for the last few months. The articles in this special issue raised many questions and concluded by underlining the importance of listening to the views of older people themselves.

[Women in couples do more housework](#)

An article by Helene Couprie in the [Economic Journal](#) showed that single women in Britain spend an average of 10 hours a week on housework whereas single men only spend 7 hours a week. But as soon as men and women form a union, women tend to spend more time on housework – an average of 15 hours a week – whereas men react in the opposite direction, falling to 5 hours a week.

[Domestic violence](#)

An article in the [British Medical Journal](#) highlighted the amount of un-reported domestic violence. Around 750,000 children witness domestic violence every year. The costs to the welfare state amounts to over £3 billion a year and its impact on health can include fractures, burns, depression, and post traumatic stress disorders. Violence affects all groups in society but is particularly likely to go un-reported in Asian families.

[Mediation in divorce](#)

A report from the [National Audit Office](#) suggested that too many family breakdown cases are going to court rather than being settled through mediation. Family breakdown cases which are resolved through professional mediation are cheaper and quicker to settle. Also academic research shows that they secure better outcomes, particularly for children, as they are less acrimonious. However, only 20 per cent of people in cases which are funded by legal aid opt for mediation, and over half go straight to the courts.

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