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Has parenting changed over recent decades? Can changes in parenting explain the rise in adolescent problem behaviour?

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WORKING PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE NUFFIELD FOUNDATION JULY 2009

This paper is undergoing revision, and will result in several different publications.

Not for citation in current form

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NUFFIELD FOUNDATION CHANGING ADOLESCENCE PROGRAMME
Working paper July 2009

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1. OVERVIEW

Adolescent problem behaviour has shown rising trends over the last 50 years (Rutter & Smith, 1995). Among the many factors canvassed as possible contributors to these trends, concerns over 'declines' in the quality of family life and parenting have loomed large in both public and policy debate (Ambert, 2006; Margo & Dixon, 2006; DfES 2006). Patterns of family formation and levels of family disruption have clearly shown major changes over that period, as have the patterns of parents' working lives. Given these demographic trends, it seems plausible to assume that more proximal indicators of parenting – well-established predictors of problem behaviour *within* any generation of young people – may also have changed at the same time. To date, however, very little is known about the evidence for these assumptions; few commentators have attempted to bring together extant data on time trends in parenting, and no studies have examined the extent to which they could account for rising levels of problem behaviour in the young. That is the purpose of this review.

Focusing on selected aspects of parenting (those found to be well-replicated risk factors for problem behaviour in longitudinal studies, and effective targets for change in intervention trials), we (i) reviewed existing literature on trends in parenting of adolescents in western societies over the last half century, with a particular emphasis on the UK and (ii) undertook new analyses of UK data sets with measures of relevant constructs. We reached three main conclusions. First, we found that published evidence on trends in parenting is both patchy and limited; our new analyses could fill some, but by no means all, of those gaps. Second, such trends as did emerge gave few suggestions of 'declines' in parenting; instead, current evidence points to apparent 'improvements' in a number of indicators of parents' involvement with and supervision of their adolescent children. Third, we found no published studies that directly brought together associations between parenting and problem behaviours at different points in time: so far as we are aware, the new analyses that we present at the end of this report are novel in this respect. They analyses highlighted parental mental health, and to a lesser extent family type and social disadvantage, as of potential importance in understanding trends in youth problem behaviour. We conclude by offering some reflections on possible implications of these findings for understanding time trends in adolescent behaviour problems, and for future research on trends in parenting.

Our report falls into 9 sections. Section 2 forms the background, beginning with a brief description of trends in adolescent problem behaviour and in family demographic indicators between the 1970s and the early 2000s. We then present the model of parenting and its relationship to adolescent problem behaviour that guided our review, and set out a number of conceptual and methodological issues relevant to the study of time trends in parenting. Section 3 outlines our research questions, and Section 4 describes both the methods of the literature review and our secondary analysis of UK trend data concerning parenting behaviour. Sections 5-8 present the results; Section 9 provides summary, conclusions and recommendations.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Why problem behaviour?

We define problem behaviour in adolescence to include behaviours that are antisocial, aggressive and disruptive. Behaviours of this kind are of interest to researchers and policy-makers in a range of disciplines; as a result, they are defined and assessed in a variety of differing but overlapping ways. For the criminologist, the prime focus is on *delinquency*: behaviours such as theft, serious property damage, fraud, public disorder, and assaults, all of which can attract legal sanctions. Both self-report delinquency studies and official records of recorded crime show that involvement in offending is at its highest in the teens. Much recent UK policy debate has focused on the rather different concept of *antisocial behaviour* – a term that '…tends to be used to refer to a range of criminal and non-criminal activities which are likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress and impact on people's quality of life' (Home Office, 2008). The psychiatric and developmental literatures (broadly, the prime sources for our evidence here), have a somewhat broader focus, including not only illegal and harassing behaviours but those that involve disobedience or disruptiveness in the home (such as lying, staying out late, deliberately annoying others and refusing to comply with rules); while the frequency of many of these behaviours also peaks in the teens, many are also common at much younger ages. In the psychiatric literature, conduct disorder is classified as a mental health problem. Although it is distinct from emotional disorders such as depression and anxiety, it is not uncommon for such difficulties to co-occur with conduct disorder.

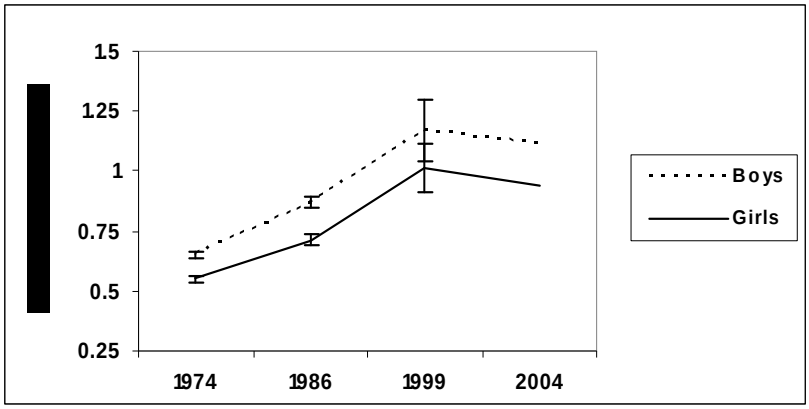
Problem behaviours share in common that they are troublesome and costly to communities, families, schools and the justice system. Some youth show 'adolescent onset' problems; those with more frequent and persistent problem behaviour tend to have started these patterns earlier in childhood; they are also at raised risk for poor outcomes in youth and adult life, including school failure, mental illness, substance use and poor employment prospects.

2.2 Trends in adolescent problems

A variety of evidence highlights the increasing prevalence of all kinds of adolescent mental health problems over recent decades (Rutter & Smith, 1995; Maughan et al., 2005). Evidence from a recent Nuffield Foundation-funded study using comparable measurements from repeated cross-sectional UK surveys showed substantial increases in both adolescent conduct and emotional problems over the last 25 years of the 20th

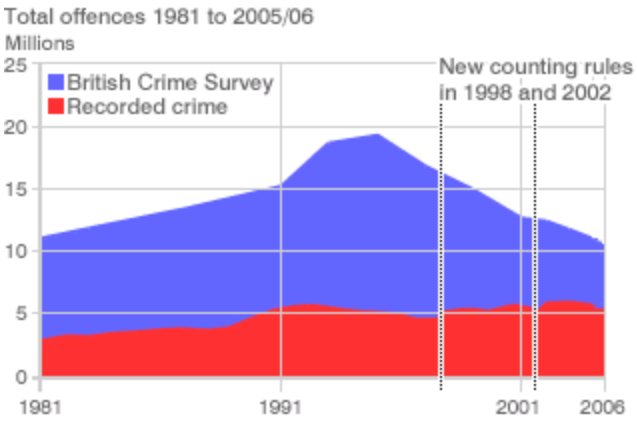
century (Collishaw et al., 2004). More recent comparisons show that rates of problem behaviour have since plateaued or begun to decrease (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Trends in parent-rated conduct problems over four nationally representative UK cohorts of youth (aged 15-16).



These findings were based on opportunistic comparisons of available data-sets. In section 8 we present new data on trends in behaviour problems between 1986 and 2006 taken from a study specifically designed to track secular trends; this showed closely similar results. Because the time-points sampled in both of these studies are some years apart, we cannot be certain of the precise shape (and in particular the peak) of any underlying trend. It is worth noting, however, that aggregate crime data (recorded annually, but not specific to youth crime) show a similar pattern, including an increase across the 1970s and 1980s; they peaked in the early-mid 1990s, and have since shown a sustained reduction up to the present time (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Crime rates



Note: change in counting rules applies to officially recorded crime

2.3 Can changes in family-related demographics explain these trends?

Why did problem behaviour increase so much over such a relatively short historical period? To many, the answer may seem obvious: much the same time period also saw massive changes in family life, with the increasing breakdown of the 'traditional' family, rising numbers of absent fathers, and more mothers returning to work when their children are very young. Detailed accounts of these and related changes can be found elsewhere (Ferri et al., 2003; Halsey & Webb, 2000; Machin, 2008, Scott et al., 2004). We highlight trends in just a few of the key indicators here:

KEY TRENDS IN UK FAMILY-RELATED DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS 1970S---1990S/2000S

- ***Family formation***
  women are older at the birth of their first child
  families are smaller
- ***Family type***
  more parents cohabit, and fewer marry
  single parent and step families are more common
- ***Family stability and breakdown***
  divorce rates have risen
  (and cohabitations – now more common than in the past - are more fragile than marriages)
- ***Maternal employment***
  many more mothers now return to work outside the home early in their child's life
- ***Family economic circumstances***
  though now beginning to fall, rates of child poverty rose markedly between the mid-1970s and early 2000s. Income inequality is continuing to rise.

Sources: Office for National Statistics (2008); Dench et al, 2002;

At the individual level, we know that many of these factors are associated with problem behaviour; surely then they must form a large part of the explanation for the secular change? Perhaps surprisingly, relatively few studies have examined this question – and those that have have reached somewhat unexpected conclusions. In particular, findings from a study based directly on data for the first 3 UK cohorts shown in Figure 1 argued strongly *against* any simplistic view that changes in family type were major drivers of the rise in conduct problems (Collishaw et al, 2007). Though many more adolescents were indeed living in single parent and step-families in more recent cohorts, the data were striking in showing a steep rise in problem behaviour in all family types, and changes in family structure accounted for only around 10% of the rise in problem behaviour.

So far as we are aware this is the only study to have examined these issues directly to date. If its conclusions hold more generally, however, and changes in family structure alone cannot explain the rise in conduct problems - could it be that the quality or quantity of parenting has changed? Do parents today spend less time with their adolescents than in the past, or show less involvement with their activities and concerns? Do today's parents supervise their adolescent offspring less closely than their predecessors – or have parent-child relationships become more conflictual over time? These are the core questions we set out to examine. We aim to focus on UK data where possible,

recognising that we need to be cautious in generalising data from one country to another. Similarly, although our main focus is on parenting of adolescents, which in many ways is distinct from parenting at other stages, where there is limited data on this developmental period, we may make cautious use of data from a wider age span.

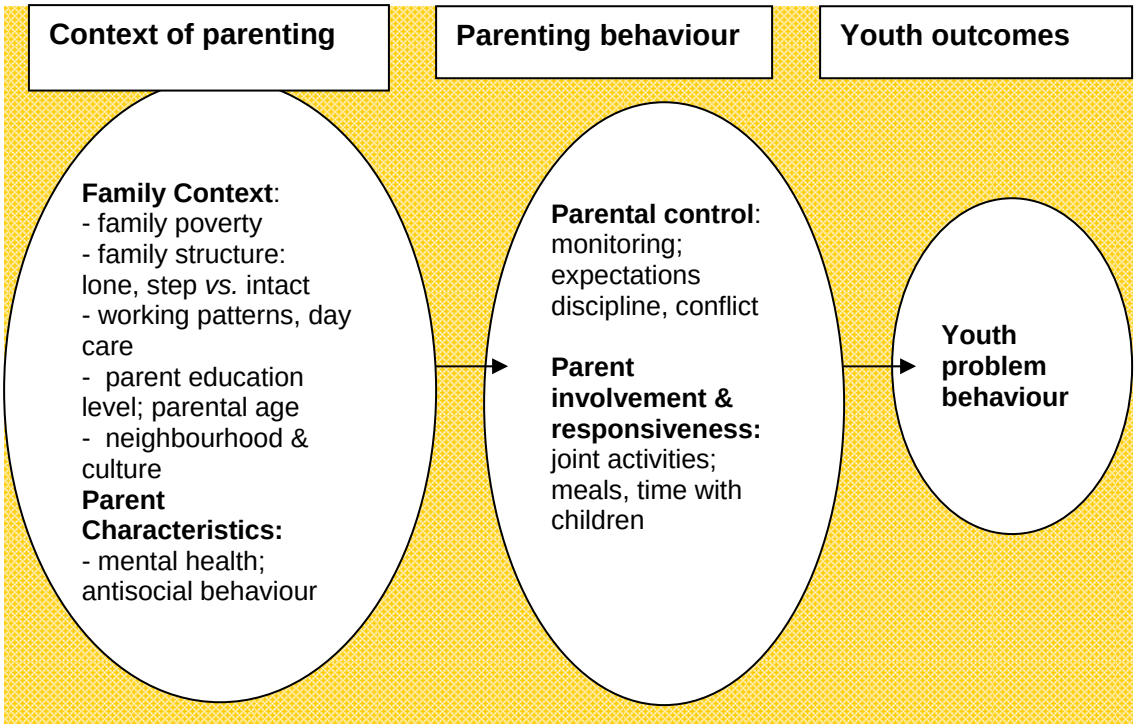
2.4 Parenting and youth problem behaviour

2.4.1 Definition and measurement of parenting

For the purpose of this review our definition of parenting focuses on parenting styles, behaviours and skills, that is, on the ways in which parents interact on a day-to-day (and minute-to-minute) basis with their offspring. In this sense, 'parenting' is distinguished from the wider environment provided by parents (which we term 'family circumstances'), and from parental characteristics – though both of these clearly influence parenting and parent-adolescent relationships. Importantly, we do need to consider the wider contextual influences on parenting; cultural and community norms have a profound effect of parenting; and the need to adapt to local context (e.g. neighborhood safety, gang culture) means that parenting strategies are likely to be rather different in 1950s London, compared to the 1980s, or in a leafy suburb compared to a tough housing estate (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Leventhal & Brookes-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, 2003). Figure 2.3 provides a schematic version of the model we used. It includes arrows to indicate some of the best established associations among the various elements; in practice, of course, most of these associations are likely to be bidirectional.

Parenting behaviours can be assessed by self-report (parent or youth), including questionnaires or more detailed semi-structured interviews, or by direct observational methods. Direct observations can be conducted in natural settings such as the home, or in more contrived settings, such as a clinic or lab, and are often considered the 'gold standard' for measuring parenting behaviors (see Gardner, 2000 for a review), although validity of course depends on the purpose of the assessment. Self-report measures (especially questionnaires) are likely to be influenced by factors such as mood and social desirability – biases that themselves may vary across time and culture. Much of what we know about parenting influences on adolescent problem behaviour has been confirmed using both observational and self-report data. We note here, however, that it is important to exercise caution in interpreting data based only on self-report; as we shall see, this proviso is especially important when seeking evidence on time trends, because the large, representative studies needed have rarely included observational measures.

Figure 2.3 Schematic model of links between family circumstances and parental characteristics, parenting behaviour and youth outcomes



2.4.2 Parenting in adolescence

Several different lines of evidence highlight the importance of parenting in adolescence. First, the tasks of parenting change in many ways (Steinberg & Silk, 2002) as young people enter adolescence, placing new demands on parents and on parenting skills: adolescents both press for and require increased autonomy; adolescent-parent relationships face increased or more intense levels of conflict, and parents perceive adolescence as the most challenging and difficult stage of child-rearing (Smetana et al., 2006). Second, as we outline below, demographic and other changes both internal and external to the family seem likely to have markedly amplified the challenges to parenting in recent decades. Third, variation in parenting is a strong and well-established risk factor for individual differences in adolescent mental health.

2.4.3 Links between parenting and problem behaviour.

Successful parenting involves a myriad of skills and qualities that vary across age, culture and social context. Nevertheless, at the same time most models of parenting (Barber et al., 2005; Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg & Silk, 2002) are in agreement in highlighting two central dimensions of parenting: first, a dimension related to parental involvement and responsiveness (warmth, availability, positive engagement, support) and second, a dimension related to behavioural control (monitoring, expectations, behaviour management) which, at its extreme may be expressed as harsh or punitive parenting, frequent conflict, or even physical maltreatment. Against this background, we focused our review on the two key dimensions of parenting identified in this conceptual framework: parental monitoring and control, and parental involvement.

Converging evidence from longitudinal studies (Baumrind, 1991; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Pettit et al. 1997; 2001), and from randomised intervention studies, provides powerful evidence that these parenting qualities may play a causal role in the onset and maintenance of problem behaviour in young people (Gardner et al., 2006, 2007; Patterson et al., 1992). This influence of parenting begins early in life, and appears to continue into adolescence (Dishion et al., 2003; Dodge & Pettit, 2003, Farrington 1995, Hill, 2002). Some researchers have claimed that parenting practices may account for as much as 30% of the variation in youth problem behaviour outcome (Patterson, 2002; Patterson et al., 1992). These powerful effects nevertheless leave a good deal of room for other influences; there are many other risk and protective factors which are likely to have complex additive and interacting effects on youth outcome (Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000) . Importantly, there is increasing evidence that these 'proximal' behavioural dimensions of parenting may mediate the effects of broader contextual factors such as poverty, neighbourhood safety, and family structure on behavioural outcomes (Ford et al., 2004; Brody et al., 2001; Conger et al., 1994; Costello et al., 2003; Rutter, 2003; Larzelere & Patterson, 1990; Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000).

Although common influences can be identified across diverse samples, it is important to note that the demands and priorities of adolescent parenting are likely to be different for families living in poverty, or in unsafe neighbourhoods, compared to those in affluent areas. There is a growing literature, mostly from the US, on the complex interactions between neighbourhood safety, characteristics of the young person, and parental culture and expectations, all of which may influence patterns and effects of parental discipline and supervision (Leventhal & Brookes-Gunn, 2000; Ingoldsby & Shaw, 2002; Pinderhughes et al., 2001). For example, Forehand et al. (1997) found that higher levels of monitoring are required to achieve the same beneficial outcomes in high-risk, compared to lower risk neighbourhoods. Variations in neighbourhood disadvantage and collective efficacy are associated with a broad spectrum of behavioural and health-related outcomes (Sampson, 2003). Research highlights effects of neighbourhood on factors such as informal social control, parenting practices, and affiliation with delinquent peers (see e.g. Cantillon, 2006), and suggests that parenting and neighbourhood processes may interact (Beyers et al., 2003). Thus parenting is supported in some contexts but more severely challenged in others. Qualitative studies from the UK complement this work, by exploring strategies parents use to compensate for risk to their children in unsafe neighbourhoods (Seaman et al., 2006). Increasing social inequalities may mean an increasing trend for the differentiation of social groups into contrasting types of neighbourhoods, characterised by greater extremes of dangerousness and safety. Where, for example, drug and 'gun culture' are prominent, and local schools are perceived as violent or disrupted, families who can, may leave the neighbourhood, resulting in reduced risk to their offspring (Leventhal & Brookes-Gunn, 2000) and those remaining may encounter quite different supervision issues than those who move to safer areas.

2.4.4 Parental characteristics: mental health and antisocial behaviour

In addition to direct measures of parenting, we also examined parental characteristics – and in particular, parental mental health and antisocial behaviour – as additional influences on trends in adolescent behaviour problems. Both types of difficulty are strongly associated with youth problem behaviour in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Farrington et al., 2001; Green et al., 2005); both are also linked with poorer family functioning, parental discord, and less responsive and more hostile parenting (Johnson et al., 2003; Serbin & Karp, 2003; Jaffee et al., 2006; Kim-Cohen et al., 2006;

Conger & Donnellan, 2007). The meaning of these associations is likely to be complex: bidirectional influences are almost certainly involved (adolescent behaviour affecting parental well-being, as well as the reverse), and some element of genetic mediation may also be implicated. Despite these complexities, two particular factors prompted our decision to examine parental characteristics here. First, as we outline in more detail in Section 7, UK data suggest that levels of distress and emotional disorders rose in the adult population over much the same period as youth conduct problems increased (Ferri et al, 2003). Second, a number of commentators have proposed that parental stress may mediate the effects of wider social disadvantage on adolescent problem behaviours (see e.g. Conger & Donnellan, 2007). These reasons make it important to consider the impact of parents' mental health and antisocial behaviour as elements in our review.

2.5 Conceptual and methodological issues

We conclude this background section by noting a number of conceptual/ methodological issues relevant to research on time trends in parenting.

2.5.1 Issues in measuring time trends

The first of these is extremely basic: tracing time trends in any phenomenon is only possible when we have comparable measures, collected on comparable samples, at different points in time. In the case of family demographics, these requirements are relatively easy to meet: social researchers have been recording details of many family-related demographic indicators in comparable ways in representative samples for many years. For the more proximal indicators of parenting of prime interest here, the situation is much less straightforward. First, detailed studies of parenting have often been undertaken in high risk or otherwise 'informative' samples, which have rarely been replicated over time. Second, although there has long been agreement at a conceptual level on the aspects of parenting most central to understanding adolescent conduct problems, approaches to operationalising those constructs have varied widely between investigators and research eras. Where comparable measures are available, they often rest on self-reports of parenting – which may be vulnerable to social desirability and other response biases, which may themselves change with time.

2.5.2 General trends and population sub-groups: increasing polarization over time?

Research on demographic change also makes clear that associations *among* social indicators of family circumstances may vary over time. Collishaw et al (2007), for example, found that not only did the proportions of single-parent and reconstituted families increase between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, but that economic disparities between family types increased sharply at the same time. As a result, single parent households (more likely to face income poverty even in the first cohort), became markedly more economically disadvantaged relative to two-parent families over time. A similar pattern is echoed in the US Fragile Families Study (Guzzo & Lee, 2008), where strong initial associations between parents' union status and adherence to early parenting guidelines seemed largely attributable to selection of better educated and more socio-economically advantaged women into more stable unions. This increasing '*polarization*' between family types in economic terms raises the possibility that parenting too has become more polarized, with the economic and other stressors faced by lone parent and other disadvantaged families leading to a widening gap in the quality of

parenting provided to young people. Wherever possible, we examined parenting trends in key socio-demographic sub-groups, as well as in the total population of young people, to check for changes of this kind.

2.5.3 Early influences on adolescent problem behaviour

Although our main focus was on parenting of adolescents, parenting and related experiences earlier in development are, of course, known to affect vulnerability to adolescent problem behaviour (Joussemet et al., 2008; Olds, 2002). Therefore, where relevant, we have included findings on trends in parenting of younger children in the main body of our review. We also note, however, that aspects of 'parent-related' behaviours occurring even earlier in development may also contribute to vulnerability to conduct problems. Recent years have seen increased interest, for example, in the effects of pre- and post-natal exposures on neurodevelopment, with prenatal stress (Talge et al, 2007) and maternal smoking in pregnancy (Wakschlag et al., 2002) highlighted as issues of particular concern. In addition, the striking increase in the proportion of mothers returning to work in their child's first year (from under 20% in the 1970s to nearly 70% in 2000; ONS, 2008) has led to a greatly increased proportion of infants and toddlers receiving early non-maternal care, which may also carry some continuing increased risk for behavioural difficulties (Belsky et al., 2007). Detailing trends in these very early influences fell outside the scope of our review; we do, however, return to a brief discussion of their possible implications in the conclusions.

2.5.4 Using aggregate data to understand individual behaviour

To understand possible causes of trends in young people's behaviour problems, tracking trends in parenting is of course only one part of the equation: in addition, we need to link trends in parenting with trends in adolescent outcomes. Ideally, this should be done at the individual level, using data-sets that include individually-based information on both risk factors and outcomes in samples studied at different points in time. In practice, of course, data sources of this kind are rare. As a result, most inferences about associations between changes in parenting and trends in young people's behaviour problems need to be made on the basis of comparisons of aggregate data. Much of the work on understanding crime trends has involved explanations at an aggregate level, based for example on trends in poverty, abortion, gun crime or drug culture (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Donahue & Levitt, 2001). The general problems of moving from aggregate-level data to inferences about individuals (the 'ecological fallacy') were set out many years ago (Robinson, 1950). These caution that even when aggregate data on trends in one factor (e.g. parenting) follow an apparently similar trajectory to trends in problem behaviour, we must be cautious in inferring any causal links. Where interpretations may be less ambiguous, however, is when adolescent outcomes and potential risk factors follow *different* trends. If, for example, an aspect of parenting improved over a period when youth behaviour deteriorated, it might be reasonable to assume – even based on comparisons of aggregate data - that that aspect of parenting was unlikely to have contributed to youth outcome trends.

2.5.5 Social change is multi-faceted and complex

Finally, it is clear that in addition to changes in 'demographic' indicators of family life, recent decades have also seen substantive changes in many other aspects of adolescents' social worlds: in the educational opportunities available to them, in their use of leisure time, their access to technology, their exposure to media violence, their increased spending power, and in the availability of alcohol and drugs. The list could

easily be expanded. Although some of these changes might be assumed to have made the job of parenting more difficult, others would not; just focusing on demographic trends, for example, we see instances of potentially 'negative' changes (such as the increase in family breakdown) running alongside potentially 'positive' ones (such as the fact that women are now older when they start their families, or that families tend to be smaller today than in the past). As we shall see, most studies of trends in parenting have in effect examined them in isolation from these broader patterns of social change. To evaluate their impact on adolescent outcomes, however, we need to consider any effects of trends in parenting in the context of trends in these many other sources of influence – some reinforcing, but others potentially countervailing - on youth conduct problems.

3. QUESTIONS

Guided by these various considerations, our literature review and secondary analysis focused on the following questions:

- **Has the parenting of adolescents changed over the last 50 years?**

- **If it has, have trends been similar across the population, or is there evidence of increasing polarisation or 'inequalities' in parenting over time?**

- **Can trends in parenting account for trends in adolescent problem behaviour?**

4. METHODS

The study includes two main strands of work: i) literature review, and ii) secondary data analysis. Both strands of work were guided by a number of common criteria: consideration of aspects of parenting thought to be causally related to adolescent conduct problems, selection of literature/datasets that include comparable measures of parenting across time, and comparable, representative samples at each time point. We aimed where possible to focus our attention on UK-based evidence, on parenting of adolescents, or earlier parenting that may affect adolescent outcome; and on studies examining parental behaviour rather than values and attitudes.

Topic coverage

Guided by a theory of parenting which views both parental control and involvement as central determinants of adolescent outcomes (Baumrind, 1991), we divided our review and linked secondary analyses into two corresponding sections. Under the rubric of parental control we consider evidence about changes in monitoring, expectations, parental discipline, conflict and harshness of control (including physical abuse). For parental involvement we consider evidence about parent time use, and surveys of specific joint activities, including family meals and reading to children. For each domain we provide some background - meaning and measurement of the parenting constructs, and where possible, their relation to adolescent problem behaviour, and relations of the construct to broader social contexts (especially those factors that have changed over time), and then consider evidence of changes over time.

4.1 Methods of the literature review

Search strategy
A search for published studies and 'grey literature' was conducted using a range of electronic databases. Search terms related to parenting and to secular change were identified *a priori* and by reference to existing papers, and were then were combined to identify potentially relevant literature: (parenting, parent, parental, parenthood, mothering, fathering, mother, father, fatherhood, motherhood, rearing, socialization, authoritative, discipline, monitoring, responsiveness, child care, home environment, or family) AND (trends, change over time, secular, historical, or intergenerational). Other literature was identified by consulting with experts within the fields of parenting and adolescent psychosocial trends. Finally, literature identified using these methods was used to conduct further searches of cited and citing papers.

4.2 Data scoping

The purpose of the data scoping exercise was to identify i) studies for possible analyses as part of this project, and ii) data sets that may form the basis for future investigation. We also hoped to identify key gaps in the evidence base and to identify possible strategies for filling these. We considered a variety of UK-based and international data sources, but found that most did not use comparable measures across time, or did not use comparably representative sampling frames, limiting their scope for the purposes of this project (see appendix 1 for further detail).

4.3 Data sets included in secondary analysis:

Three UK data sets were identified that allowed us to assess changes in parenting across time – the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) with annual data about parenting collected between 1994 and 2005, and the Nuffield-funded YouthTrends study with comparable data about parenting and adolescent antisocial behaviour collected 20 years apart in 1986 and 2006. The main advantages of BHPS were the use of annual measurements of parenting and parental mental health, the use of both parent and youth reports, and the representative nature of the survey. The main disadvantage was that we were only able to investigate recent trends. The YouthTrends study is the only study that we could identify which was specifically designed to test causes of trends in youth problem behaviour. Its main advantages are that it included two nationally representative samples assessed twenty years apart over a period of time when problem behaviour is known to have increased, and that it included identical youth reports of parental control (e.g. monitoring, expectations) and parental responsiveness (e.g. parental interest, quality time spent with youth), and parent reports of their own mental health and youth problem behaviour. Finally, further supplementary analyses focused on parental reading to younger children using two UK birth cohorts assessed in 1975 and 2005. Details of all three datasets are provided in appendix 2, including the definition of social disadvantage. This was defined by income poverty in BHPS, and by a composite of factors including housing, financial hardship and parental employment status and education in YouthTrends.

SECTIONS 5 & 6: RESULTS OF LITERATURE REVIEW AND SECONDARY ANALYSIS

State of the published evidence

We came to three conclusions about the quality and relevance of the published literature bearing on our questions - 1) whilst there is some evidence about trends for some aspects of parenting (e.g. changes in parenting attitudes, time use, trends in corporal punishment and child maltreatment), very little is known about trends in other key areas (e.g. parental warmth, conflict, control strategies, and monitoring). 2) Few studies met the strict methodological and content criteria described above. 3) No studies have tested whether trends in parenting are responsible for trends in conduct problems.

5. PARENTAL MONITORING AND CONTROL

Successful parenting requires parental monitoring and attention, clear limit setting and expectations regarding adolescent behaviour, as well as effective strategies for discipline and managing misbehaviour. At the same time, harsh control - and at the extreme physical abuse – and frequent parent-child conflict, are found to be predictive of poorer adolescent outcomes.

A number of social attitude surveys (in UK and elsewhere) have included questions about child-rearing values, with many authors focusing on a dimension relevant to control, which contrasts autonomy with obedience (Alwin, 1990; Scott, 2000). Evidence from these surveys shows a systematic shift in parenting values over time, with a long-term change from valuing obedience to valuing autonomy more (Alwin, 1990; Smith & Farrington, 2004). It has been argued that young people expect and receive greater freedom in choosing how to spend their free time, and that they have a greater role in decision-making within their families in general (Meeus, 1996). An important question, then, is whether this shift in values is linked to changes in parenting behaviour, such as reduced monitoring of youth, lower parental expectations, or diminished strictness.

5.1 Parent monitoring

5.1.1. Background

Parental monitoring of adolescent out-of-home activity has long been shown to be an important correlate of adolescent conduct problems. Evidence from both longitudinal studies and randomised intervention trials suggests that parental monitoring has direct and indirect effects on future adolescent conduct problems, substance use and affiliation with delinquent peers (Farrington, 1995; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Patterson et al., 1992; Dishion et al., 2003). In addition, research has shown that parents of boys at high risk for anti-social behaviour in middle childhood reduced their levels of monitoring and guidance as their children reached adolescence. This process appeared especially marked for parents of youth with deviant peers. Parental disengagement contributed to what might be termed 'premature adolescent autonomy', and to heightened risks for later adolescent substance use and antisocial behaviour (Dishion et al., 2004). Family intervention targeted at maintaining parental monitoring as high-risk youth reach adolescence has beneficial effects in relation to later risk for substance use (Dishion et al., 2003). Some studies have found that levels of parent monitoring vary by family type,

with lower levels of monitoring in lone parent (Astone & Lanahan, 1991), and step (Kim, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999) families. At the same time, it has been argued that the effectiveness and importance of parental monitoring depends also on the characteristics of the adolescent and neighbourhood. For example, Stattin & Kerr (2000) have argued that the construct of monitoring depends as much on adolescents' willingness to disclose, as it does on parents' skill at tracking their offspring, and thus reflects a bidirectional process. In addition, there is also some evidence that monitoring has a greater protective effect on youth antisocial outcomes in families where both parents work (Jacobsen & Crockett, 2000), and that higher levels of monitoring may be required to achieve the same beneficial outcomes in high-risk neighbourhoods (Forehand et al., 1997).

5.1.2. Literature on trends in parental monitoring of children

In relation to younger children, evidence suggests that parents today exert more control, restricting the range of out-of-home activities that children are able to engage in. This is reflected for example in the decline in the number of primary-school aged children who walk to school alone (Hillman et al., 1990; Sonkin, 2006; UK National Travel Survey, 2006). Reasons for increased monitoring of children include increased parental concerns about road safety and stranger danger (Gill, 2007). Current levels of parental concern were indicated in a recent UK poll to parents and children (Playday, 2008) which found that 30-40% of 7-12 years olds were not allowed to play locally without an adult. These data have been used to argue for possible negative implications of limiting younger children's' opportunities for independent play and risk-taking, with Gill (2007) suggesting that many children on reaching adolescence will not have developed the necessary skills to manage risk independently of their parents.

5.1.3. Literature on trends in parental monitoring of adolescents

We could find no published evidence on historical trends in parental monitoring of adolescents. The Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development came close to providing data, by attempting to compare parenting across generations (Smith & Farrington, 2004), from the 1960s, when the original study men were children, and some 20 years later when they themselves were fathers. However, monitoring was unfortunately not assessed in comparable ways across time, but was compared across generations through the use of percentile scores. This precluded direct tests of change in use of monitoring, but nonetheless allowed some comparison of the extent to which monitoring contributed to child outcomes in the two generations. The authors concluded that parent marital conflict and authoritarian parenting were similarly related to youth conduct problems in two successive generations, whereas parent monitoring and father involvement appeared to be less associated with conduct problem in the second generation than in the first. Interpretation of the findings is complicated by the fact that there were some changes in measures and samples in the second generation, for example, the sample included girls, and (as is inevitable in cross-generational designs) a much wider age range in the offspring.

In what ways might we expect adolescent monitoring to have changed? Some commentators have speculated that changes in parental employment leading to an increase in unsupervised time, together with increased parental separation has led to decreases in monitoring (Ambert, 2006). This issue was often labelled in the 1980's and 90's as an increasing problem of 'latchkey kids' However, we were not able to find data on time trends in children or adolescents being left home alone after school, nor many other investigations of this issue (Galambos & Garbarino, 1982). At the same time as

working parents may find monitoring more difficult, there may be pressures to monitor adolescents more closely, as parents become more concerned about dangers such as peer delinquency, drug use, or knife crime.

5.1.4. Results from secondary analyses: Time trends in monitoring

Our analyses provide some of the first evidence about trends in parental monitoring of adolescents. Together data from BHPS and YouthTrends enabled us to examine changes in parental monitoring between the mid-1980s and today.

As shown in Table 5.1, the YouthTrends study found that adolescents in 2006 reported that their parents more closely monitored their out-of-home activities than did youth in 1986. This was mirrored by higher rates of reported youth disclosure. These findings applied equally to both boys and girls.

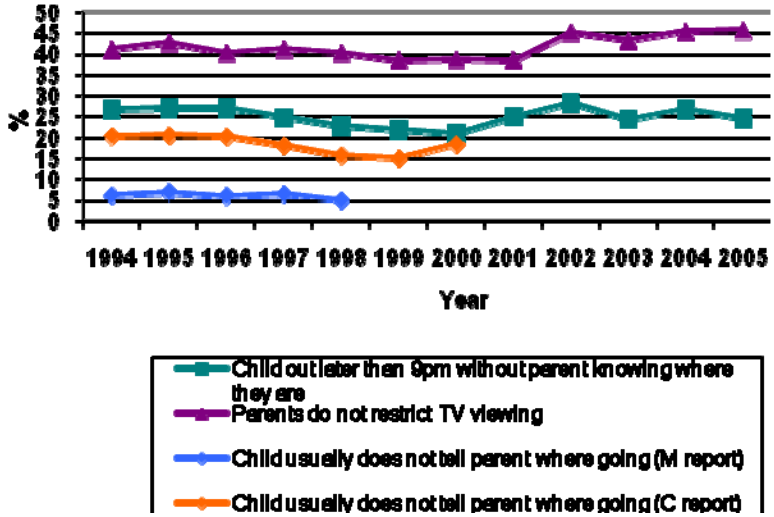
Table 5.1 YouthTrends: Monitoring and disclosure (almost always/mostly)

	BCS70 %	HSE06 %	POR[1]	P
Parental monitoring				
Parent asks who with	67.1	76.8	1.51 [1.3-1.8]	<.001
Parent asks where going	78.5	85.4	1.61 [1.3-2.0]	<.001
Parent asks what will do	47.4	65.6	1.94 [1.6-2.3]	<.001
Adolescent disclosure				
Youth tells who with	78.3	86.4	1.32 [1.1-1.6]	.006
Youth tells where going	76.7	85.0	1.38 [1.1-1.7]	.001
Youth tells what will do	64.1	79.2	1.73 [1.4-2.1]	<.001

NB Cohort comparisons based on four-point ordinal scale (almost always, mostly, sometimes, hardly ever)

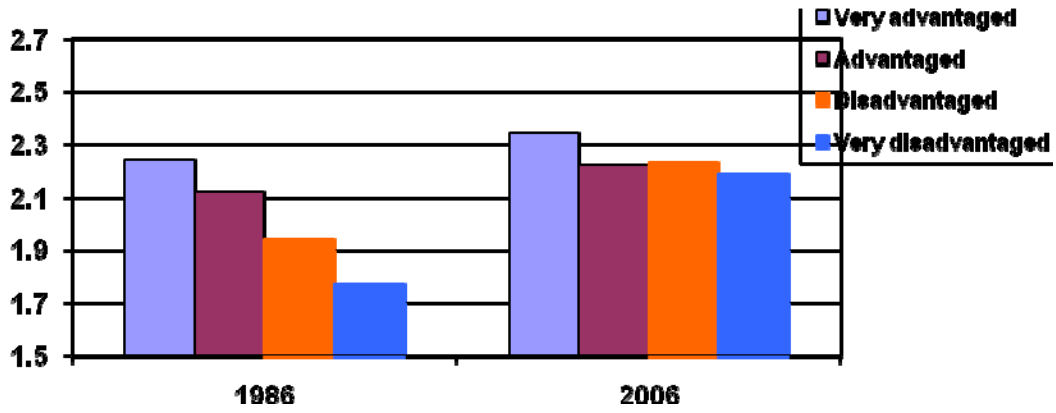
The BHPS data allowed a more detailed year-by-year analysis of recent trends in parental monitoring, from 1994-2005. Questions assessed problems in monitoring as follows: 1) no parental restrictions on TV viewing (child report); 2) youth being out later than 9pm without parents knowing the adolescent's whereabouts (youth report); and 3) adolescents not usually telling parents where they were going (mother and youth reports). As shown in Figure 5.1, there was no systematic overall change on any measure between 1994 and 2005.

Figure 5.1 Poor parental monitoring 1994-2005 (BHPS 11-15 year olds).



5.1.5 Results from secondary analyses: Trends in monitoring by family type and income. We assessed the possibility that there might be vulnerable subgroups for whom parental supervision has declined over time, but could find no evidence for this. In general the studies showed significant variation in parental monitoring by socio-economic status and family type, with reduced monitoring for lone parent, step parent and low income families. However, in both YouthTrends and BHPS, differences by family type and income had reduced over time.

Figure 5.2 Mean parental monitoring score by social disadvantage and cohort (Youth Trends study).

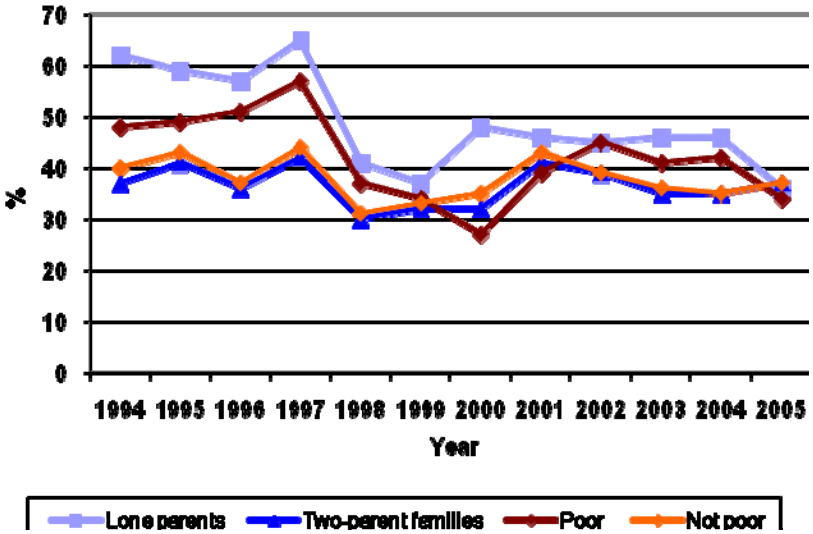


As shown in Figure 5.2, in YouthTrends social disadvantage was strongly related to parental monitoring in 1986 (POR = 0.72 [0.67-0.77], p < .001), but not in 2006 ([POR = 0.96 [0.83-1.11], p > 0.5). A significant interaction between social disadvantage and cohort (POR = 1.32 [1.1-1.6], p = .001) confirmed that there had been a reduction in associations between social disadvantage and parental monitoring between 1986 and 2006.

Analyses of the BHPS data produced very similar results. As shown in Figure 5.3, the number of 14-15 year olds staying out late unsupervised was greater for lone parent and

low income families, but the gap between monitoring of disadvantaged and advantaged youth reduced over time. In particular, there were significant interactions between poverty and year of study (t=1.96, p <.05) and between family type and year (t= -2.73 p <.01). Similarly, differences by family type in the proportion of youth who did not usually tell their parents where they were going also reduced over time (t= -2.81 p <.01), as did differences in parental restrictions on TV viewing by family type (t = 2.51, p <.05) and by income group (t = 3.09, p < .01).

Figure 5.3 Youth out later than 9pm without parents knowing where - associations with lone parent status and poverty (BHPS 14-15 year olds).



Together, these findings provide strong evidence against the view that parenting has declined for vulnerable subgroups but improved for more advantaged families. Instead, the opposite appears true, with a degree of catch-up of parental monitoring among poorer families and among single parents.

5.1.6 Parental monitoring and new technology

Technological change means that both the resources available for monitoring youth and the focus of parental monitoring have changed. First, the now almost universal possession of mobile phones by adolescents (and parents) means that parents are in a better position to keep in contact with their offspring when they are away from home. Second, the increasing use of the internet for social communication means that this is an important new priority for parental monitoring. Most families in the UK now have a PC at home, with around a third of 9-16 year olds having internet access in their bedroom (Childwise, 2008). The importance of effective parental monitoring is made clear by a study from Ireland in 2006 which found that 27% of children reported meeting someone on the internet who asked for personal information like their photo, address or telephone number and 7% of children had met someone in real life that they had first met on the internet (NCTE, 2006). Other potential dangers include young people engaging in or being the victim of online bullying. Whilst the prevalence of 'cyber-bullying' is difficult to establish, around 10% of young people report engaging in some form of electronic

bullying of others (e.g. using text messaging, internet sites or email; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Surveys of internet victimization in the US show that 19% of youth had experienced unwanted sexual solicitation, and 6% more severe incidents of harassment (Mitchell, Finklehor & Wolak, 2004). In UK surveys, 20-25% reported being cyberbullied 6-7% several times a month or more often (Smith et al., 2008). Research on parental monitoring of internet use is in its infancy, but a study by Wang, Bianchi, Raley (2005) comparing parent and youth reports found that 61% of parents reported monitoring teenagers' internet use, compared with only 38% of teenagers. To conclude, new research and conceptual development are needed in order to understand parental monitoring of online behaviour.

5.2 Parental expectations and discipline

5.2.1. Background

Research shows substantial variation in the frequency and methods by which parents discipline their children (e.g. through withdrawal of privileges, telling off, shouting, physical chastisement), and the consistency with which behaviour is dealt with across occasions and by different caregivers. Constructive forms of parental discipline are linked to lower levels of problem behaviour in children and adolescents, including clarity of expectations, consistent use of incentives and consequences (Patterson et al., 1992) and proactive use of discipline (Gardner et al, 1999; Pettit et al., 1997). These strategies form a major focus of effective parenting interventions to reduce adolescent problem behaviour (see Woolfenden, 2006 for a review). Other forms of discipline may have adverse effects; studies have found substantial associations between problem behaviour and both the frequency and level of physical punishment (Fergusson& Lynskey, 1997 Gershoff, 2002; Farrington, 1995) although the strength of this correlation appears to vary by cultural group (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997), and is to some degree bi-directional in nature, reciprocal and reinforcing over time.

5.2.2. Literature on trends in parental discipline

We could find no long-term comparisons of the prevalence of different types of punishments used by parents, or the frequency with which they are used. Indirect evidence comes from studies of parental *attitudes* to punishment (in particular corporal punishment). Studies of parental attitudes show almost universally a decline in *reported* acceptance of physical punishment of children (Strauss & Mathur, 1996; Finklehor & Jones, 2006; Durrant, 1999). For example, the proportion of adults in Sweden supportive of corporal punishment of children declined from 53% in 1965 to 11% in 1994 (Durrant, 1999; Roberts, 2000). During this time period, Sweden introduced a ban on corporal punishment, which was presumably made possible by changes in societal attitudes, and may also have further reinforced these attitude changes. Similar declines in reported acceptability of physical punishment come from studies in other countries. In line with these findings, societal acceptance of corporal punishment has also changed with bans or restrictions on the use of physical punishment of children in schools in many countries including the UK. It remains unclear whether trends in attitudes relate to real changes in parenting behaviour, or whether they partly reflect changes in social desirability biases affecting parental survey responses.

5.2.3. Parental expectations and discipline: evidence from the YouthTrends study

The YouthTrends study included several questions about parental expectations and discipline. Reported parental expectations increased over time (see Table 5.2),

particularly in relation to youth informing their parents about out of home activities, and being polite to parents.

Table 5.2 YouthTrends: Youth reports of parental expectations.

Parents expect me to…	BCS70 %	HSE06 %	OR	P
Go to school	93.2	96.4	2.17 [1.2-4.1]	.02
Do homework	89.8	94.7	2.08 [1.2-3.5]	.005
Help in the house	94.8	95.7	1.19 [0.8-1.9]	Ns
Be polite to them	74.8	86.8	2.13 [1.6-2.8]	<.001
Tell time coming home	83.1	85.9	1.51 [1.1-2.0]	.004
Tell them where going	85.8	91.4	2.09 [1.5-3.0]	<.001
Tell them who with	74.4	87.3	2.50 [1.9-3.3]	<.001
Tell them if in trouble	88.1	97.7	5.56 [3.3-9.4]	<.001

Several other youth questions assessed aspects of parental control: whether the young person had been told off in the last month, parent disapproval of friends and activities, and perceived parental strictness. On the whole these also indicated some increase in parental expectations and control between 1986 and 2006. The proportions of young people who said they had been told off by parents was higher in 2006 than in 1986 (OR = 2.26 [1.9-2.7], p < .001), as were mean rates of parental disapproval (b=.09, p < .001). As shown in Figures 5.4 and 5,5, increased parental telling off and disapproval in 2006 did not merely reflect greater levels of youth problem behaviour in the later cohort. Instead, it appears that youth with problem behaviour in 2006 were subject to greater control than youth with problem behaviour in 1986. Ratings of parental strictness were also marginally higher in 2006 (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.3) than in 1986 (mean = 3.41; SD = 1.4).

Figure 5.4: Youth told off by parents in past month by year of study and level of parent-rated problem behaviour.

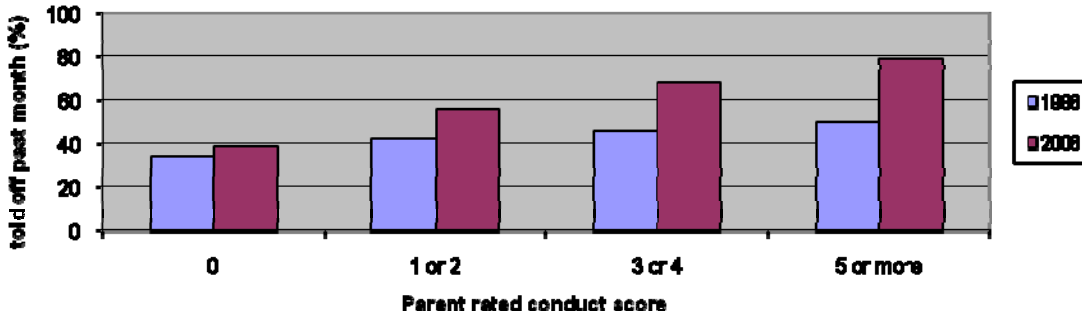
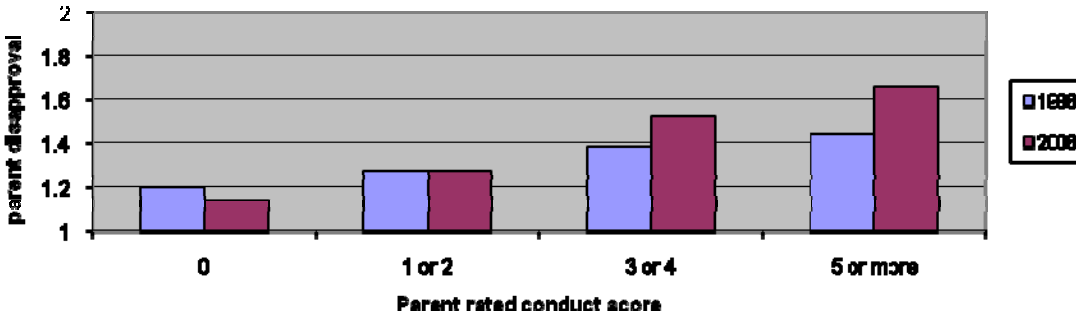


Figure 5.5: Youth-rated parental disapproval of youth activities and friends by year of study and level of parent-rated problem behaviour.

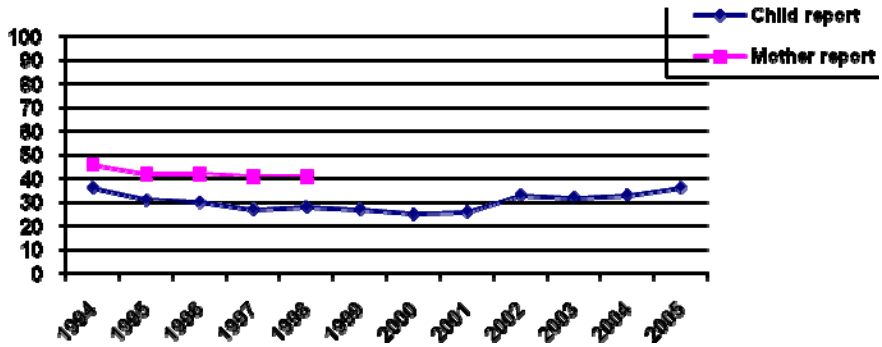


Further analyses tested effects of gender, family type and social disadvantage, and for interactions of these with year of study. Girls said that their parents were more strict and more disapproving than did boys, youth in step-families reported greater parental chastisement and disapproval than did other children. Finally, youth in socially disadvantaged families and lone parent families reported lower levels of parental strictness. There were no interactions between cohort and demographic variables for any of these outcomes.

5.3. Parent-adolescent conflict

We include parent-adolescent conflict under the general heading of control, for two reasons. Firstly, it is within conflictual interactions that much parental controlling behaviour takes place, and secondly, because such episodes are thought to make an important contribution to the development and maintenance of youth problem behaviour, through social learning mechanisms (Gardner, 1989; Hill, 2002; Patterson et al., 1992). It should be noted, though, that to some extent conflict is normative in parent – adolescent relationships, and it may be its intensity or unpleasantness that is more important than frequency (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). We found no published evidence on time trends in parent-adolescent arguments or conflict. Our BHPS data (fig 5.6) found no consistent pattern of change in parent-youth conflict in BHPS. There was a small but significant decline through to 2000, but then reported conflicts increased back to the original level. Parents perceived a slightly higher rate of conflict than young people.

Figure 5.6 BHPS: Arguments between adolescent and mother (> 1/week)



5.4. Physical maltreatment

5.4.1 Background:

Finally, within the general section of parental control, we also consider abnormally harsh parenting, in particular, physical maltreatment (sometimes defined as assaults resulting in physical marking or harm). A number of studies suggest that this is sadly a relatively common experience for a sizeable minority of children. A nationally representative survey of young adults conducted by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1999 (Cawson et al., 2000) found that around 20% had experienced one or more form of physical violence during childhood by a parent or carer, with 7% defined as experiencing serious physical abuse. Physical abuse is one of the strongest predictors of a range of child and adult psychiatric disorders, including increased likelihood of conduct disorder, substance abuse and suicidality (e.g. Fergusson, et al., 1996; Schuck & Widom, 2001).

5.4.2. Trends in physical maltreatment

The proportion of children registered as at risk for abuse shows considerable variation over time. In the UK there was a three-fold increase in child abuse registrations between 1975 and 1990 (Creighton, 1992), with more recent trend data showing a further substantial increase for all categories of abuse between 1989 and 1995, but a subsequent decline for sexual and physical abuse up to 2005. In the US, Finklehor and Jones (2006) report a substantial decline (between 40 and 70%) in the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse of children between 1992-2004, in parallel with improvements in other indicators of violent crime (Finklehor & Jones, 2006). This follows periods of sustained increases in rates of registrations of abuse during the 1970s and 1980s. Clearly, considerable caution is needed in generalising from these kinds of data to trends in physical maltreatment in the general population. Official registers only capture the 'tip of the iceberg', with the majority of even seriously abused children not officially registered (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999; Cawson et al., 2000). In addition, studies of trends in officially registered abuse are vulnerable to changes in the criteria for registration, child protection policy, and child protection practice (Hess, 1995). Repeat general population surveys of child abuse are needed to accurately chart trends in child maltreatment, but none exist at present.

5.5 Conclusions on monitoring and control

We could find no evidence that parental control of young people changed for the worse over time. Published evidence suggests that parents more closely monitor younger children, curtailing opportunities for independent out-of-home activity. We could find no published evidence on trends in parental monitoring or discipline of adolescents, but secondary analyses of BHPS suggested no recent increase in conflict, and YouthTrends data indicated increases in parental monitoring, expectation, and parental strictness and disapproval. This appeared not just to be a reflection of greater levels of problem behaviour in the later cohort. Further tests also found no evidence for the hypothesis that these general comparisons might mask decreasing parental supervision among some more vulnerable subgroups (e.g. lone parents or poor families). In fact, the data showed that the gap in monitoring had narrowed between more advantaged and disadvantaged families.

6. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSIVENESS

6.1 Background

Parental positive involvement with their offspring (including warmth, responsiveness and time spent in joint activities) is a second key aspect of parenting related to adolescent adjustment (Baumrind, 1990). Parent involvement both prior to and during adolescence, appears to lessen the likelihood of problem behaviour, after controlling for key predictors of outcome, such as social class and pre-existing behaviour problems. Thus, studies using direct observations in the home, or time diaries, to measure parenting, have shown that time spent in early parent-child positive activities, such as joint play and conversation, are linked to lower levels of child problem behaviour (Gardner, 1994; Gardner et al., 2003; Galboda-Liyanage, 2003). Unsurprisingly perhaps, since there are strong continuities between child and adolescent problem behaviour, longitudinal studies have also found predictions from early parent involvement to fewer conduct problems in adolescence (Ary et al., 1999; Patterson et al., 1992; Pettit et al., 1997), independent of social class and gender. Parental warmth and responsiveness are similarly linked to fewer problem behaviours in childhood and adolescence (Rothbaum & Weisz, 1994; Steinberg & Silk, 2002), and are a target for change in successful interventions. Mediation analyses show that changes in parent warmth and involvement help account for improvements in problem behaviour following intervention, at least in younger children (Dishion et al., 2008; Forgatch et al., 1999; Gardner et al., 2006). Most of this literature on 'parenting' is based on studying mothers; however, UK cohort studies (among others) attest to the importance of father involvement (Flouri, 2005) and as we shall see, there may be different considerations in relation to fathers, especially absent fathers.

Although we could find no studies of time trends in parental warmth and responsiveness, we found data on some activities that reflect aspects of parental involvement. These include broadly defined parent 'time use' with children; we also found data on a couple of specific activities; parent reading with younger children, and family meals, both known to be correlated with child outcomes. Finally we report on data on young people's views of their involvement and relationships with parents.

6.2 Surveys of parent time use with children and adolescents

There is an extensive literature from many countries on historical change in how people spend their time, which allows us to gain some insight into trends in parent involvement. For the most part, these data were collected with the goal of studying social change, including trends in leisure and employment patterns, and how these might affect family roles and parental time investment in children. They were not designed to measure different styles or dimensions of parenting, or to examine their effects on adolescent outcomes. Typically time use is measured by asking adults to record their time allocation in a 24-hour diary, in broad categories such as work, leisure, sleep and childcare. Some methods capture childcare in two ways, as a primary (sole) activity, or combined with other activities, e.g. housework. Thus it is not possible to extract detailed information about the type or extent of parental involvement, and often we lack information about age of the young people. Nevertheless, whilst bearing in mind these and other limitations, it seems reasonable to employ time use data in order to make cautious inferences about trends in parental time and involvement with children, albeit defined in very broad terms. It is worth noting that although quantity of time spent with children is

only a weak proxy for quality of parenting, there is nevertheless some evidence for an association between the two measures (Zuzanek, 2001). Furthermore, time use studies have the advantage of using large, representative samples, and repeated measures at many time points, some going back several decades.

Family time use needs to be considered in the light of two striking changes to family life which have taken place over the last 50 years, namely the rise in family break up, and increases in maternal employment (Ferri et al. 2003). Studies suggest that parents today perceive a decline in time spent with children, and are under considerable "time strain" (Milkie et al., 2004; Gauthier et al., 2004; Zuzanek, 2001). This fits with the popular perception that parental involvement must have decreased over recent years due to increases in parents' working hours and the greater number of non-resident fathers (Ambert, 2006). Furthermore, some studies of children's views suggest children perceive their employed parents to have little time to spend with them, perhaps because they spend long hours at work that (Galinsky, 1999).

Although these changes would on the face of it appear to decrease time available for children, other secular changes may work in the opposite direction. There have been substantial decreases in family size, linked to increases in maternal age and education (Sayer et al., 2004). For both men and women, these reproductive changes appear to be bound up with changing cultural norms for how much parents invest in the social and cognitive development of each child; and for how much fathers should be involved in care-giving, rather than just providing through work outside the home (Bianchi et al., 2006).

Studies based on UK nationally representative time use surveys (Fisher et al.,1999) found steady increases in parents' childcare time (as a main activity) from about 20 mins per day in the 1960's and 70's, to about 40 in the 1980's and 70 in the 1990's. For parents with a child under 5, and for fathers, the rise was considerably steeper. Using a different survey for the 1987 data, Jenkins and O'Leary (1999) found a similar pattern of rises in child care time for men and for women, between 1974 and 1987. This rise was more than offset by a decrease in time spent in housework. Lader, Short & Gershuny (2006) examined a more recent period (2001-2005), using the ONS survey. In general, across all activities sampled, time use had not changed a great deal over this recent period, however, there were some increases in adults' time spent in child care.

Data from the US and other countries present a broadly similar picture to those from the UK (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). For example, Sayer et al., (2004) used time diary data from 4 national surveys of US adults in 1965, 1975, 1985 & 1998. These diaries are useful in classifying parent-child time into total time with children, direct care and educational/ play activities; time use in all these categories showed upward trends over time. Documented increases over time would be more marked if one took into account the decrease in family size over this period, leading to more time available per child. Non-employed mothers spent more time than employed mothers around their child, but there was less difference in direct child care and play/education. Trends for fathers have tended to be steeper than for mothers; for example Sayer et al. (2004) found dramatic increases in fathers' time spent with children, with a doubling of reported time spent between 1985 and 1998. Bryant and Zick's (1996) studies are important in examining time trends over a longer period, from 1920s onwards, albeit restricted to white, two-parent families. They found little evidence of change in overall time spent with children, around 1.2 hours per day, from the 1920s-1970s. However, if change in family size is

taken into account, then the authors estimate that there has been a substantial increase per child in direct child care.

Finally, Gauthier et al. (2004) analysed and aggregated time use data for two-parent families from 16 countries, and concluded that there have been broadly similar trends towards increasing time spent with children from the 1960s to 2000, across all countries studied. Trends were similar for employed and non-employed mothers; differences between these groups in time with children were small, compared to the large differences in time spent in paid work between these groups.

Parental time use is strongly patterned by family type and parental education (Bianchi et al., 2006; Schoon, 2006; Bianchi & Robinson, 1997). The ways in which changes in family structures affect parent time with children are complex; firstly, more children are raised in lone parent families; as a result these children tend to spend less time with non-resident parents. Moreover there have been economic pressures on lone parents to return to work when their children are quite young. This is reflected in recent UK policy changes, for example, in welfare benefits, tax credits and child care facilities. Secondly, the nature and frequency of children's contact with fathers may change dramatically post-separation; if children gain a step-parent then this may affect time spent with biological father; but many children also gain an additional parent.

We found US data on trends in time use by social group. Sayer et al (2004) reported similarly rising trends for single and married mothers, but with lower mean times spent by single mothers. They also found that time spent with children is related to parent educational level. Bianchi et al.'s (2006) analyses of time diaries from 1975-2000 concluded that parental time with children has gone up in all groups, with no widening of the gap between more and less educated parents; and that the gap between fathers' and mothers' time spent with children has narrowed.

6.2.1 Conclusions on time use data

At first sight, it seems implausible that parental time in child care could have risen at a time when maternal employment rose steeply. So how is this possible? Explanations come from several sources: i) demographic shifts towards women having children when they are older and more educated might have led to increased time spent with children; ii) women have reduced the time they spend in housework; iii) fathers spend more time with children; iv) parents make extra time by engaging in more multi-tasking and 'squeezing' of other activities, and by devoting more leisure time to child- rather than adult-centred activities (Bianchi et al, 2006). This 'squeezing' has been documented by Craig (2006), using the 1997 Australian time use survey. She found that employed mothers protected their time with children by reducing other activities, especially housework, leisure and grooming. These findings were borne out in a UK study combining qualitative and quantitative data to address the same question (Gray, 2006).

On the other hand, data could also be explained by changes in the way parents respond to time diaries, due to shifting norms towards placing greater value on child care and enrichment activities, rather than real change in amount of activities. There is evidence that this may be the case for some questionnaire data, but the same study suggests that time diaries may be more robust and less open to global rating bias compared to other methods (e.g. questionnaires) of rating the time spent in activities. (Hofferth, 2004). We discuss reporting bias in section 9.

Generally, we need to be cautious in interpreting time use data because of a number of methodological difficulties (Bianchi et al., 2006, Gauthier et al., 2004), including sampling issues, changes in definitions and response mode over time, and possible but unknown time changes in how parents define child care. However, our confidence in the conclusions is somewhat increased by the fact that there is a reasonable agreement in the findings between samples and countries, and as we shall see, some consistency with the findings from UK cohort data, using quite different measures of parenting.

6.3 Parents reading with their children

We now turn to parental reading with children, another activity associated with positive developmental outcomes. Longitudinal data, adoption studies and intervention research all suggest that quantity and style of parental reading with young children is linked with literacy development, educational outcomes, and child behavioural adjustment (Petrill et al., 2005; Duursma et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2008).

Considerable effort is focused on encouraging parents to read with children, and it is therefore likely that more parents now read with their children than in the past. Evidence on trends in parental reading suggests an increase in the number of parents who read with their children daily from 53% in 1993 to 60% in 2005 in the US (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2006). In the UK, data available from the national birth cohorts allows considerable scope for comparisons of parental involvement over time. Schoon (2006) documented marked changes in the engagement of parents in the education of children born 12 years apart in 1958 (the National Child Development Study) and in 1970 (BCS70). At age 5, parents in 1975 were considerably more likely to read with their children and to attend parent-teacher meetings than did parents of 7-year-olds ten years earlier. In middle childhood, parents stating that they were very interested in their children's education increased from 30% of fathers and 39% of mothers in 1969 to 36% and 48% respectively in 1980. Finally, at age 16 nearly two-thirds of BCS70 parents wanted their children to engage in post-16 education or training, compared with less than half of NCDS parents. Follow-up data from BCS70 demonstrate the importance of parental engagement of this kind for later educational attainments and early adult wellbeing (Flouri, 2006).

Data now available up to age 5 years in the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) allows us to extend these comparisons with comparable (but not identical) questions about parental reading. Table 6.1 compares rates of parental reading for children in BCS70 at age 5 in 1975 with rates of parental reading in 2005 in MCS. As shown, the past thirty years has seen further substantial increases in parental reading. Around one in ten children were not read to regularly in 1975 (7% of parents said nobody read to the child and 12% said that their child had not been read to in the last 7 days). These figures dropped considerably by 2005, with only 2-3% of children not read to at least weekly by parents. More parents also read to their child every day in 2005 (55% vs. 39%). Finally, it is noteworthy that both mother and father reading to children increased over time, although data are somewhat limited by lack of information about non-resident fathers.

One important limitation of these data that affects both the interpretation of comparisons across social groups and across time is that the use of a stylized one-off question asked in 2005 ("How often do you read with the child?" - "Every day", "several times per week", "once or twice a week", "once or twice a month", "less often") may result in biased

responding due to the vague, open and potentially ambiguous nature of the question and from the social desirability biases that might affect questions of this type (Hofferth, 2004). In particular, Hofferth reported that in comparison with time diary data, a survey question of almost exactly the same type as that used here generated significantly higher rates of reading every day, and that this bias was most pronounced for better-off and higher educated parents.

Table 6.1. Parental reading to children at age 5 in the 1970 British Cohort Study and the Millennium Cohort Study.

	BCS70 – 1975[5] %	MCS3 – 2005[5] %
Nobody reads to child[1]	7	2
Frequency of reading[2]		
< weekly	12	3
1-2 days/week	18	12
Several days	31	30
Every day	39	55
M reads child weekly[3]	72	95
F reads child weekly[3,4]		
Intact family	50	73
Step family	29	48

[1] 1975: Who reads to child most often? Response – 'nobody'; 2005: Main respondent and partner read to child less often that 1-2 times per month or not at all; [2] 1975: On how many days has child been read to at home in the past seven days? (7 vs. 3-6 vs. 1-2 vs. 0); 2005: How often do you (main respondent/partner) read to child? (Every day vs. several times a week vs. once or twice a week vs. 1-2 times per month or not at all); [3] 1975: Ring all who read to child in past week. 2005: How often do you (main respondent/partner) read to child?; [4]information about non-resident parents not available [5] MCS analyses weighted as outlined by Hansen (2008); BCS70 weighted for differential attrition by social class, region, marital status and maternal smoking in pregnancy.

Next, analyses tested how far parental reading was patterned by social and demographic factors. In tables 6.2 and 6.3, each demographic subgroup showed evidence of increases in parental reading between 1975 and 2005, but differences by demographic group remained pronounced in 2005. There was considerable change in associations between social demographic factors and 'absence of parental reading', however, a degree of caution is required due the sensitivity of analyses to the substantial change in base rates for this measure. Differences by social class, housing tenure and ethnic group in 'regular parental reading' all appeared to reduce over time.

Finally, analyses assessed the longitudinal relationship between parental reading at age 5 and youth conduct problems at age 16 using follow-up data in BCS70. Parental reading shows a dose-response relationship with later conduct problems with more frequent reading associated with lower rates of later conduct problems (every day: 7%; several days: 9%; 1 or 2 days: 13%; 0 days: 16%). Lack of parental reading has a significant effect on later conduct problems (OR = 1.4 [1.0-2.0], p = .03), even covarying for childhood family type, social class, housing tenure, ethnic group, maternal age, maternal education and child gender.

Table 6.2
Parental reading by child gender and family demographics and by year of study.

No one reads to child				
			OR [95% CI]	Interaction
Gender	Girls	Boys		
1975	6.8	7.1	1.1 [0.9-1.2]	1.0 [0.7-1.4]
2005	1.6	1.7	1.1 [0.8-1.5]	
Family type	Intact	Single/step		
1975	6.4	12.5	2.1 [1.7-2.6]	1.9 [1.3-2.8]
2005	1.0	3.8	4.0 [3.0-5.4]	
Class (Father)	NM	Manual		
1975	2.9	8.6	3.2 [2.6-3.9]	1.2 [0.4-3.5]
2005	0.4	1.5	3.7 [1.3-10.7]	
Maternal age at birth	24 yrs+	<24yrs		
1975	5.8	8.7	1.6 [1.3-1.8]	0.7 [0.5-1.0]
2005	1.6	1.8	1.1 [0.8-1.6]	
Tenure	Owner	Rented		
1975	4.4	10.3	2.5 [2.2-2.9]	1.8 [1.3-2.6]
2005	0.8	3.4	4.6 [3.3-6.3]	
Ethnic minority	No	Yes		
1975	6.4	16.8	2.9 [2.3-3.8]	1.2 [0.8-1.8]
2005	1.3	4.4	3.6 [2.7-4.9]	

Table 6.3
Parental reading by child gender and family demographics and by year of study.

Reading every day				
			OR [95% CI]	Interaction
Gender	Girls	Boys		
1975	41	38	0.9 [0.8-0.9]	1.2 [1.0-1.3]
2005	55	55	1.0 [0.9-1.1]	
Family type	Intact	Single/step		
1975	40	31	0.69 [0.6-0.8]	1.0 [0.8-1.1]
2005	58	48	0.67 [0.6-0.7]	
Class (Father)	NM	Manual		
1975	52	33	0.45 [0.4-0.5]	1.6 [1.3-1.9]
2005	61	53	0.71 [0.6-0.8]	
Maternal age at birth	24 yrs+	<24yrs		
1975	43	33	0.66 [0.6-0.7]	1.1 [1.0-1.3]
2005	57	50	0.75 [0.7-0.8]	
Tenure	Owner	Rented		
1975	47	29	0.46 [0.4-0.5]	1.4 [1.2-1.5]
2005	59	48	0.63 [0.6-0.7]	
Ethnic minority	No	Yes		
1975	40	26	0.53 [0.4-0.7]	1.3 [1.0-1.7]
2005	57	47	0.69 [0.6-0.8]	

6.4 Family Meals

6.4.1. Family meals and problem behaviour

Several studies show strong associations between the frequency of joint family meals and a variety of adolescent health and developmental outcomes, including substance use, depression, and antisocial behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Fulkerson et al., 2006). A recent study shows that a routine of daily family meals may statistically moderate genetic influences on problem behaviour (Guo et al., 2008). Each of these studies has typically controlled for some covariates (e.g. social class, educational attainment, neighbourhood characteristics), but causal mechanisms underlying these associations remain poorly understood. One likely explanation is that regularity of family meals provides a good proxy for more general positive family processes such as routine and consistency, family cohesion and parental involvement.

6.4.2 Literature on trends in family meal times

Social commentators have lamented the decline of the family meal, and national surveys from the US and other countries suggest that around a third of teenagers eat no or only a one or two meals per week with their family (e.g. Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003). By the same token, however, the majority of teenagers do then appear to eat meals with their families on most days (Videon & Manning, 2003; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2004). Crucially, there is little reliable evidence about longer-term trends in family meals (Murcott, 1997; 2008), and it is interesting that there is evidence of public anxieties about the decline of the family meal going back as far as the 1920s (Lynd & Lynd, 1929).

Only a small number of studies have used comparable measures and samples across time to assess changes in children's meal times. Comparing three nationally representative US studies using 24-hour dietary diaries, Nielsen et al (2002) found that the proportion of food energy intake at home (including from meals) for 12-19 year olds reduced from 72% to 52% between 1977 and 1996. Second, a study based on 7 repeated cross-sectional surveys in Los Angeles (Nicklas et al, 2003) showed a similar decline in home-prepared dinners, this time among younger children (aged 10 years), from 89% to 76% between 1973 and 1993. More recent comparisons, however, show an *increase* between 1998 and 2003 (CASA, 2003).

Evidence from an analysis of time diaries in the UK shows that the mean duration of eating at home reduced between 1975 and 2000, but that this occurred both for families with and without children (Cheng et al., 2007). Finally, changes in the patterning of family meal times are likely to be culture specific. Time-diary data from the UK, US, France, Holland and Norway shows that time spent eating meals at home declined in most countries but not France (Warde et al, 2007). However, families with children in all countries except the US were more likely to eat meals at home compared to those without children, with no change over time in this effect.

A crucial issue of course concerns not just the frequency but the nature of family meals, especially with respect to how far they provide an opportunity for fostering family cohesion and better quality parent-child relationships. One oft-cited concern is that families now eat in silence in front of the TV. Contemporary cross-sectional data shows that many children do eat (some) meals in front of the TV, with studies suggesting that around a third of American teenagers regularly watch television during family meals

(Feldman et al., 2003; Dubois et al., 2008). However, it is not known how far TV viewing during meal times has changed over time, or what proportion of British children eat meals in front of the TV. Nor do we know if watching TV together might increase rather than impede conversation for some families.

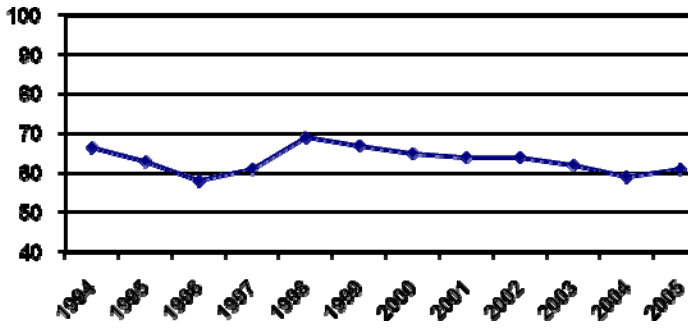
6.4.3 Secondary analyses of meals from YouthTrends and BHPS

The YouthTrends and BHPS data provided an opportunity for examining changes over time in the frequency of family meals in the UK, and to test whether changes have affected lone and two-parent, or poor and well-off families, in similar or different ways.

There was no systematic change in numbers of young people reporting three or more evening family meals over the past week between 1994 and 2005 in BHPS (Figure 6.1). However, evidence of a longer-term trend comes from YouthTrends, where the proportion of 16-17 year olds reporting eating a family meal with their parents more than once a week declined from 83% in 1986 to 72% in 2006 (2006 vs. 1986, OR = 0.48 [0.4-0.6], $p < .001$).

Further analyses showed no or only small differences in the frequency of family meals by low income/ low SES, family type, or by gender, and no differences in trends by any of these factors in YouthTrends.

Figure 6.1 Joint family meals (BHPS 11-15 year olds, 3+ meals /week: child report)



Taken together, the literature and data presented here suggest some change in the pattern of family meals over past decades, but that any changes are relatively modest in nature. Empirical evidence about changes in family meal times remains limited, with no study combining information on which family members are present, the location of the meal (e.g. at the dinner table, in front of the TV, or in a restaurant), and crucially the quality of family interactions during the meal. Further research then is needed to assess whether and how changes in family meal times are correlated with other changes in related aspects of family cohesion, parental responsiveness or youth behaviour.

6.5 Young people's views of parental involvement

Until recently, relatively little was known about children and adolescents' own views of parenting and family life (Madge & Willmott, 2007) and few conclusions can therefore be

drawn about how young people's views of parenting and family life have changed over time. Contemporary surveys show that children emphasize parental love, support and involvement as key aspects of parenting (Madge & Willmott, 2007; Brannen et al., 2000; Balding, 2002). Interestingly, Flouri et al (2004) reported that teenagers rate their step fathers as being more involved in a number of different ways (e.g. discipline, school support, praise and affection), but that non-resident fathers retained an important role in many children's lives and were often rated as the main father figure. Finally, children's ratings of the quality of parenting provided by both resident and non-resident parents are associated with their own levels of behaviour problems (Dunn et al., 2004).

Both BHPS and YouthTrends provide important, novel data about whether and how youth views of parental support and involvement have changed over time, and these data are presented next.

6.5.1 Perceived parental interest

Perceived parental interest was assessed in the YouthTrends study by asking young people whether they felt that their parents wanted to hear their ideas; closely similar proportions in both cohorts (1986 - 67%, 2006 - 66%) said that their parents did. There was a significant effect of gender ($p < .001$), with greater parental interest reported by girls (71%) than by boys (64%), although a significant interaction between cohort and gender suggested that this gender difference was only apparent in 1986 (interaction, $p = 0.01$). Rated parental interest also varied by family type (single or step: 63%; intact: 69%; $p = .005$), in this case similarly for both cohorts (interaction, ns).

6.5.2 Quality time

Young people in the YouthTrends studies also reported on the frequency of 'quality time' spent with parents – that is "talking together, doing things together, going out together, because you want to". In contrast to reports of joint family meals, perceived quality time spent with mothers *and* fathers increased between 1986 and 2006 (see Table 6.4).

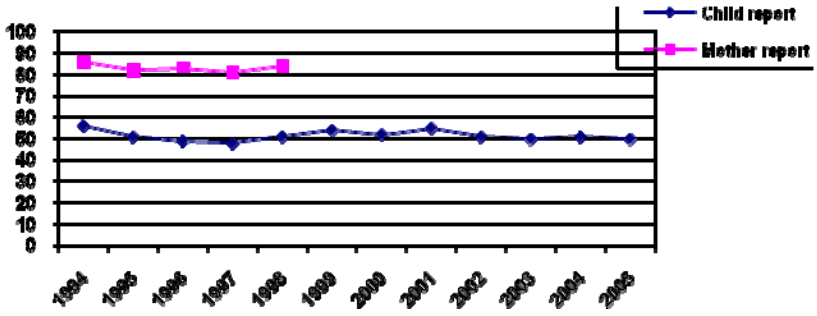
Further analyses showed significant effects of gender and not surprisingly family type, as well as some interactions between these variables and cohort. Boys in both cohorts were more likely to say that they spent quality time with their fathers than were girls (POR = 1.43 [1.3-1.6], $p < .001$). In contrast, girls were more likely to say they spent quality time with their mothers (POR = 1.74 [1.6-2.0], $p < .001$), interactions between gender and cohort indicated that both these gender differences had reduced between 1986 and 2006.

As expected, young people in lone parent or step-families spent considerably less quality time with their fathers than young people in intact families ($p<.001$). However, when analyses were adjusted for changes over time in family type, the effect size for cohort in relation to spending time with fathers was comparable to that for mothers (POR = 1.54 [1.3-1.8], $p < .001$). Note that the questions asked in these surveys do not allow us to identify whether the 'father' referred to in the question was the adolescent's biological or stepfather.

Table 6.4 YouthTrends: Spending time together with parents, because you want to.

	1986 %	2006 %	POR	P
With mother				
Most days	23.1	30.4	1.53 [1.3-1.8]	<.001
Some days	30.3	32.1		
Once a week	8.9	7.0		
Occasionally	26.2	21.2		
Little or never	11.6	9.3		
With father				
Most days	9.6	13.3	1.29 [1.1-1.5]	.008
Some days	24.8	26.7		
Once a week	12.7	12.2		
Occasionally	28.2	24.2		
Little or never	24.7	23.6		

Figure 6.2 BHPS: Adolescent talks with mother about important matters (more than once a week or most days)



6.5.3 Parental advice and support

Turning to BHPS, results showed a modest but statistically significant decline between 1994 and 2005 in how often young people reported talking to their parents about important matters (coeff = -.025, $p < .001$). In addition, parent-adolescent communication was greater for girls than boys (coeff = .561, $p < .001$), for children aged 11-13 years than for youth aged 14 and 15 years (coeff = .240, $p < .001$), and children in two parent families (coeff = .653, $p < .001$). A significant interaction between cohort and family type (coeff = 0.059, $p < .001$) also indicated that differences by family type have reduced

somewhat over time. There were no differences between low income and other families in BHPS.

Finally, a critical point to emerge from BHPS was that comparisons of parallel reports of youth and parents showed that young people reported considerably lower levels of parent-adolescent communication than did parents, highlighting the need to take account of children's and young people's and not just parents' views about parenting.

6.5.4 Do youth care what their parents think of them?

Young people in YouthTrends were also asked whether they cared what their mother and father thought about them. There was no difference in ratings about mothers between 1986 and 2006 (see Table 6.5). More girls (79%) said they cared a lot what their mother thought about them than did boys (66%, p< .001); and there were also some differences by family type (intact: 74%; single: 70%; step 68%; p = .002). There were no significant interactions between cohort and other predictors (p > .1).

Table 6.5 Teenagers feelings about parental opinions about them

Do you care what your..	BCS70 %	HSE06 %	POR	P
Mother thinks about you				
A lot	72.2	73.2	0.95 [0.8-1.2]	ns
A little	22.7	22.5		
Not at all	5.1	4.3		
Father thinks about you				
A lot	65.2	58.8	0.72 [0.6-0.9]	.001
A little	25.2	26.9		
Not at all	9.6	14.3		

A different pattern of results became apparent in relation to feelings about young people's fathers. As shown in Table 6.5, young people in 2006 cared less what their father thought about them than in 1986 (POR = 0.72 [0.6-0.9], p = .001). As expected, family type was strongly related to young people's feelings about their fathers, with numbers who cared a lot considerably higher among those living with their fathers (intact: 69%; single: 42%; step: 54%; p < .001). A multivariate model showed that the effect of cohort was moderated by family type (interaction: p < .001). There was no change over time in young people's rating about fathers among those living in intact families, but lower rates in both years and a decline over time in ratings for those living in lone parent and step family households. These results may suggest some increasing disengagement of young people from their non-resident fathers between 1986 and 2006. Finally, there was also a significant effect of gender. Again, more girls (68%) said they cared a lot about what their fathers' thought of them than did boys (60%, p < .001).

7. PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

7.1 Relevance of trends in parent psychopathology: links with parenting and adolescent problem behaviour

Trends in parent mental health and antisocial behaviour are relevant for a variety of reasons. First, parent antisocial behaviour and emotional problems are both strongly associated with higher rates of youth problem behaviour (Farrington et al., 2001; Green et al., 2005). Second, evidence shows that parent depression, antisocial behaviour and other psychopathology are all linked with poorer family functioning and parental discord, and with less responsive and more hostile parenting (Johnson et al., 2003; Serbin & Karp, 2003; Jaffee et al., 2006; Kim-Cohen et al., 2006; Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Third, evidence also suggests that parental stress may mediate the effects of wider social disadvantage on child problem behaviour (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Fourth, given increasing rates of youth conduct and emotional problems (Collishaw et al., 2004) and evidence of strong continuity between adolescent and adult mental health, it is likely that increasing trends in youth problems may have implications for rates of difficulties among subsequent generations of parents, creating a 'negative feedback loop' which further increases the risks for problem behaviours in subsequent generations of youth. Finally, taking account of parent characteristics may help clarify the impact of family type on children's outcomes. For example, Jaffee et al. (2003) found that children living with their father had lower levels of child conduct problems, but only if the father engaged in low levels of antisocial behaviour; the opposite held true for children of antisocial men.

A degree of caution is also needed when considering links between adult mental health and youth behaviour. Much of the research on links between parental mental health and child outcomes has been conducted in younger children. Second, the literature also highlights considerable complexity in interpreting links between parent and child adjustment. There are likely to be bidirectional links between parental mental health and youth behaviour (Gross et al., 2008). In addition, links between parent psychopathology and youth behaviour are likely to reflect in part some degree of shared genetic liability (Kim-Cohen et al., 2005), but there is also evidence of environmentally mediated effects on youth behaviour over and above these confounders (Kim-Cohen, et al., 2005; Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Third, it is possible that different types of parent problems (e.g. depression, anxiety and antisocial behaviour) may be linked in different ways to parenting behaviour and youth adjustment.

7.2 Evidence on trends in parental mental health and antisocial behaviour

A detailed review of trends in adult mental health is beyond the scope of this study. Briefly, however, we highlight several likely conclusions. First, caution is needed when interpreting evidence of apparent change in adult adjustment. For example, evidence of increases in diagnoses of depression and in the use of antidepressant medication may reflect factors other than a true increase in population prevalence, e.g. changes in clinical recognition or treatment availability. At the same time, however, comparisons of members of three UK birth cohorts born in 1946, 1958 and 1970 in their thirties, provides reasonably reliable evidence for an increase in rates of emotional disorders whether assessed using symptom questionnaires or with questions about help-seeking for anxiety or depression (Ferri et al., 2003). Repeat surveys in the US in which representative samples of adults were assessed using comparable instruments and methods of diagnoses showed a substantial increase in the prevalence of major depression during the 1990s (Compton et al., 2006).

Turning to evidence of change in adult antisocial behaviour, we conclude that there is greater difficulty in providing firm statements about historical trends, as antisocial behaviour is typically not measured in comparable ways in repeated representative general population surveys. However, a number of sources of evidence suggest that adult antisocial behaviour has increased over time. First, as already mentioned, there are strong continuities between child and adult antisocial behaviour, and known increases in youth problem behaviour are likely to foreshadow increases in the adult population too. Second, official statistics show marked increases in adult crime from the 1950s onwards and though crime peaked in the early to mid-1990s, rates today remain considerably higher than 50 years ago (Rutter and Smith, 1995; Kershaw et al., 2008). Although crime statistics are sometimes difficult to interpret, e.g. due to changes in police recording of crime, evidence is corroborated by rates collected from victim surveys (e.g. the British Crime Survey). Third, in two major retrospective studies of adults, the Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) study in the early 1980s and the National Comorbidity Study conducted in the mid-1990s, later born cohorts reported higher rates of violence during adulthood than did earlier born cohorts (Robins, 2001).

One concern is that much of any increase in antisocial behaviour might be accounted for by young adult men, and it is unclear then how far findings generalise to the antisocial behaviour of mothers and fathers of teenagers. Similarly, we are not aware of any direct evidence about trends in the mental health of parents of teenage youth.

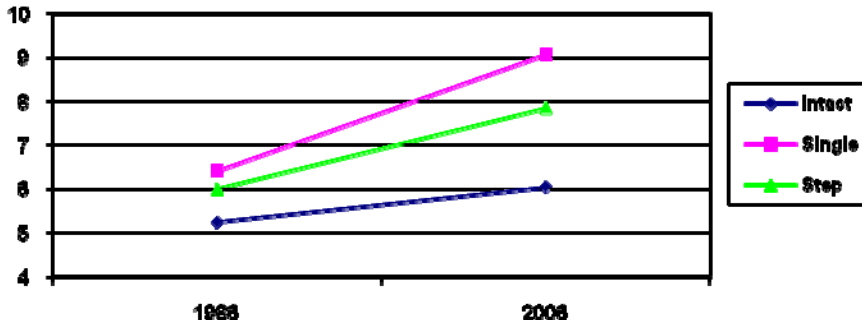
7.3 Trends in parental stress: secondary analyses

We turn to BHPS and YouthTrends which allow us to examine trends in parental distress, assessed using comparable measure across time, the Malaise inventory in YouthTrends and the General Health Questionnaire in BHPS. In addition to testing trends in parental distress in general, we also aimed to examine whether changes over time in distress have varied for different demographic subgroups. Note, measures included in the two studies assessed symptoms of depression and anxiety, but did not allow us to estimate rates of mental disorders. Furthermore, neither study included comparable measures of parent antisocial behaviour.

Analyses of parental stress provide similar findings in both datasets, suggesting i) a general increase over the past twenty years in self-reported distress among parents, and ii) that increases in distress have affected single parents and parents on low incomes to a greater extent than they have other families (see Figures 7.1-7.3).

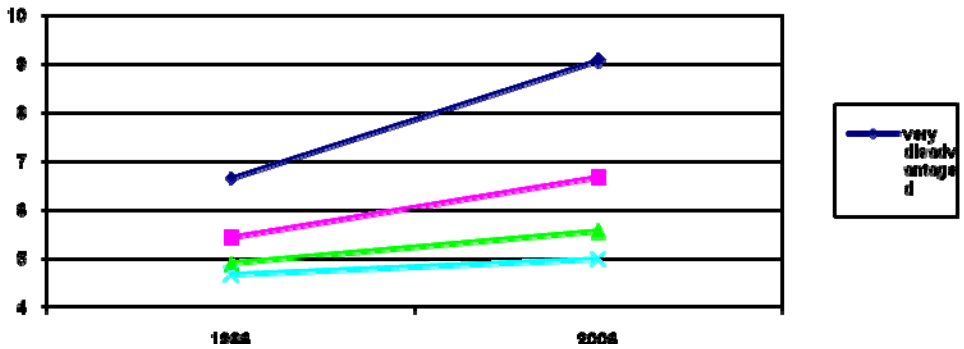
Analyses of YouthTrends showed significant differences in parent Malaise score by family type and by year of study. Malaise scores were highest amongst single parents, intermediate for parents in step families, and lowest for parents in intact families. As shown in Figure 7.1, parental malaise scores increased across time ($p < .001$), but the rate of increase was greater for lone parents (ES = 0.45) than for parents in step families (ES = 0.35) than for parents in intact families (ES = 0.17).

Figure 7.1 YouthTrends: Mean parental Malaise score by family type and cohort



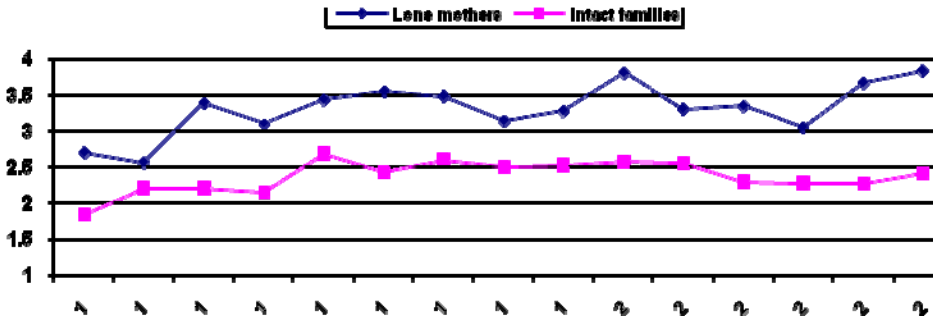
In addition, lone parent families in both 1986 (POR = 3.89 [3.3-4.5]) and in 2006 (POR 4.98 [3.2-7.7]) were much more likely to be socially disadvantaged than were intact families. Further analyses showed similar fanning in parental Malaise scores by level of social disadvantage (Figure 7.2). Multivariate analyses showed independent main effects of family type ($p < .001$), social disadvantage ($p < .001$) and a significant interaction between disadvantage and cohort ($p = .004$). Controlling for social disadvantage, the interaction between family type and cohort was no longer significant. This suggests that increasing levels of parental stress in lone parent families over time are likely attributable to increasing social inequalities.

Figure 7.2 Mean parental Malaise score by degree of social disadvantage and cohort



Next, we explored the same issues within BHPS, this time using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Results showed significantly higher GHQ scores for lone mothers, compared with mothers in intact families ($b = 0.71$, $p < .001$), as well as a significant interaction between year and family type suggesting an increasing gap in parental stress between lone and intact families ($b = 0.049$, $p < .01$) in these data too (Figure 7.3). Again, however, changing levels of parental stress by family type may again be (at least partly) attributed to higher levels of social disadvantage.

Figure 7.3 Mean mother GHQ by family type and year of study (BHPS).



Finally, we assessed links between parent-rated stress and youth-rated parenting. The YouthTrends study showed that parents with higher Malaise scores in both studies were somewhat less likely to monitor their youth's out-of-home activities (r=.03, p = .03), had lower expectations about youth behaviour (r=-.05, p < .001), spent less quality time with their children (rho = -.04, p = .01), were less interested in their children's ideas (rho = -.07, p<.001), and had children who cared less what their they thought of them (rho =-.05, p < .01). Parental stress was also associated with higher adolescent-rated parental disapproval (rho = -0.05, p < .001). Though statistically significant, the size of each of these associations was very small. There was no change in associations of parental stress and parenting over time, with all interactions between parent distress and year of study non-significant.

7.4 Conclusions on parent mental health

Parent emotional problems and antisocial behaviour are critical for understanding links between social context, parenting, and youth problem behaviour. Increasing rates of problems in parents could in principle provide one explanation for increasing rates of youth problem behaviour. Published evidence suggests deterioration in adult psychosocial adjustment, and this is reflected in our own analyses of rates of psychological distress among parents of young people. These analyses also highlight that lone parents and parents on low incomes have been most affected by these changes. One interesting paradox is that whilst parental distress is associated with poorer parenting at the individual level (though modestly in our own analyses), increasing parental distress is not accompanied by deteriorations in parenting when comparing samples of parents across time. We come back to this issue in the final section of the report.

8. LINKING TRENDS IN PARENTING AND TRENDS IN CONDUCT PROBLEMS

To this point the evidence we have reported has focused on answering our first two research questions: whether available evidence suggests that key aspects of parenting and parental characteristics have changed over recent decades, and whether any changes detected followed similar patterns in different socio-demographic groups. Our review, though inevitably limited by the quality of the available data, found no strong evidence for a 'decline' in the quality of parenting over this period (if anything suggesting

that the opposite might hold true); it did, though, highlight evidence of increasing levels of parental distress, most marked for lone parents and those on low incomes.

In this final section we address our third key question: whether trends in parenting or parental characteristics can help account for trends in adolescent outcomes. As noted earlier, we found no published studies that directly addressed this issue, nor indeed any publicly available data sources capable of addressing it. The Nuffield-funded Youth Trends study was, however, specifically designed to examine these questions; the analyses that follow thus focus predominantly on this source. This study for the first time allows us to test in a direct way the extent to which changes in parenting and parental mental health have contributed to (or ameliorated) trends in youth problem behaviour.

8.1 Trends in parent-rated conduct problems

Our first step was to test whether data from YouthTrends confirmed prior evidence of an increase in parent-rated problem behaviour. As shown in Table 8.1, there was a significant increase in youth problem behaviour consistent with other evidence over this time period (Collishaw et al., 2004).

8.2 Associations of parent-rated youth behaviour with youth-rated parenting

Next, we tested associations of each of the parenting and parent-adolescent relationship variables with a total youth conduct problem score (sum of seven items in Table 8.1). As shown in Table 8.2, almost all measures of parenting and family life were associated with youth conduct problems in both samples. Multivariate tests (also controlling for family type and social disadvantage) showed independent associations of all variables with youth problem behaviour, with the exceptions of monitoring and expectations. Importantly, as shown in Table 8.2, the majority of parenting measures also showed *stronger* associations between parenting and youth conduct problems in 2006 than twenty years earlier.

Table 8.1 Parent-rated conduct problems by year of study (Rutter-A scale items)

	1986 %	2006 %	OR	P
Destroys			1.91 [1.3-2.8]	.001
applies somewhat	4.0	7.7		
certainly applies	1.3	2.0		
Fights			1.45 [1.1-1.9]	.01
applies somewhat	10.1	11.7		
certainly applies	1.6	3.5		
Irritable			1.22 [1.0-1.5]	.04
applies somewhat	36.8	36.8		
certainly applies	11.5	15.2		
Theft			1.89 [1.4-2.6]	<.001
applies somewhat	6.8	11.7		
certainly applies	1.6	2.4		

Disobedient			1.10 [0.9-1.4]	.4
applies somewhat	25.0	24.5		
certainly applies	4.3	4.3		
Lies			1.47 [1.2-1.9]	.001
applies somewhat	15.7	19.8		
certainly applies	2.2	2.7		
Bullies			1.10 [0.7-1.6]	.7
applies somewhat	6.8	6.1		
certainly applies	1.1	1.8		

8.3 Do associations reflect parent effects on adolescent behaviour or adolescent effects on parenting?

Although our main interest lies in parent influences on youth behaviour, we have noted throughout this review that bi-directional effects are also likely to be involved: adolescents with high levels of problem behaviour may be more difficult to monitor effectively, for example, or, as shown here, may be less likely to disclose their whereabouts to parents. In a similar way, adolescent problem behaviour may contribute to, as well as being influenced by, parental distress.

We used longitudinal data from BCS70 to explore these issues in more detail. BCS70 collected comparable (parent-rated) measures of both child behaviour problems and maternal Malaise at child ages 5, 10 and 16 years. Taking maternal Malaise at child age 16 as the outcome, and controlling for prior maternal Malaise scores, the child's level of antisocial behaviour at age 10 showed significant effects on maternal distress (OR = 1.57 [1.1-2.2], p = .009). Conversely, taking adolescent conduct problems as the outcomes, maternal distress at child age 5 years showed a significant association with later youth conduct problems, even with prior child antisocial behaviour controlled (OR = 1.63 [1.2-2.2], p = .003). We thus concluded that bi-directional influences are undoubtedly involved, and that it is appropriate to assume some effects of maternal distress on adolescent outcomes in our subsequent analyses. Unfortunately BCS70 did not include comparable data on parenting earlier in childhood; several other longitudinal studies have, however, shown similar evidence of reciprocal associations between parenting and child problem behaviour (e.g. Laird et al., 2003; Hipwell et al., 2008).

Table 8.2[1] YouthTrends: Associations between parent/ family measures and youth conduct problems, 1986 and 2006.

	Associations with parent-rated youth conduct problems		
	1986	2006	Year X Parenting Interaction
Parental control	r	r	p
Parental monitoring	-.11**	.02	.10
Disclosure to parents	-.14**	-.21**	.05
Parental expectations	-.14**	-.11**	ns
Parental disapproval of friends and activities	.11**	.33**	<.001
Told off by parents	.10**	.27**	<.001

Parental responsiveness			
Parental interest in child's ideas	-.19**	-.20**	ns
Quality time	-.14**	-.25**	.01
Child cares what parent thinks about them	-.16**	-.24**	.04
Other			
Perceived family stability	-.18**	-.38**	<.001
Maternal mental health	.33**	.42**	.03

**p < .01; * p < .05

8.4 What is the net contribution of changes in parenting, family structure and disadvantage, and parental mental health to trends in youth behaviour?

The final step in the analyses was to investigate the joint contribution of family demographics (family type and social disadvantage), youth-rated parenting and parent-adolescent relationships[1], and parental mental health on trends in youth conduct problems.

As shown in Table 8.3, conduct scores in 2006 were 0.25 SD units higher than in 1986. We went on to assess how far changes in family composition and poverty, in parenting, and in parent mental health contributed to these trends – that is, in statistical terms, how far adding these covariates reduced the initial coefficient for year of study. There was a modest contribution of changes in family type and social disadvantage as shown in step 2 of the model (where the effect size for year of study is reduced by a fifth, from .25 to .20). Adding the composite indicator of parenting/ family life (step 3) returned this to its original level. Maternal mental health (step 4) had a much more substantial effect, however, 'explaining' around 40% of the effect of year of study on youth behaviour (i.e. a reduction in effect size from .25 to .16). As Table 8.3 also shows, even accounting for differences in family type, social disadvantage, parenting and parental distress, a significant independent effect of year of study remained unexplained.

Table 8.3 Multivariate model of the contribution of family change, parenting and parent mental health to trends in youth conduct problems

	Step 1	step 2	step 3	step 4
1. Year of study	.25 **	.20 **	.26**	.16 **
2 Family type (single/step)		.25**	.17**	.11**
Social disadvantage		.16**	.12**	.08**
3. Parenting			.25**	.22**
4. Parent mental health				.30**
R-squared	.01	.06	.12	.20

[1] To simplify our models, we created a composite parenting/family life variable comprising all the individual variables described in Table 8.2 (alpha = .64) with the exception of maternal distress (entered separately here in step 4). Models in which each individual parenting variable was entered showed closely similar results.

**p < .01; * p < .05; Analyses based on subset of cases with complete data (N = 4632) and in each case covarying for small difference in child age between 1986 and 2006.

8.5 Conclusions on linking trends in parenting and problem behaviour

The finding that changes in family composition and social disadvantage have made only small contributions to overall trends in youth problem behaviour is consistent with our previous findings, based on comparisons of different data sources (Collishaw et al., 2007). Measures of parenting, though correlated with youth problem behaviour in both cohorts (and increasingly so in 2006), also failed to account for trends in youth problem behaviour, reflecting the apparent 'improvements' across many of the measures included in this study as documented in earlier stages of this review. Finally, though the analyses suggested more substantial effects associated with parental distress, some caution is needed in interpreting these findings. At least three different interpretations are possible. First, parents completed measures of both their own distress and of their children's behaviour. Evidence shows that depressed parents may overstate their children's difficulties relative to other informants (e.g. Offord et al., 1996, 1997; Collishaw et al., in press), making it possible that some of the effects observed here reflected rater biases of this kind. Second, as we have seen, some aspects of the increases in parental distress may have occurred as a result of increases in youth problem behaviour, or because the job of parenting has become more difficult and stressful over time. Finally, however, it is also plausible that greater levels of parental distress have contributed to an increase over time in levels of youth problem behaviour.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 Overview

Parenting style is a major risk factor helping to explain individual differences in problem behaviour in young people. It is also a common and reasonably effective target for intervention. However, little is known about whether there have been changes in adolescent parenting over time, and whether any such changes might possibly explain the known changes in rates of problem behaviour that have taken place over the last half century. The present study is the first, to our knowledge, to systematically examine evidence on recent time trends in parenting and to attempt to relate any changes found to the known rise in antisocial behaviour in young people.

Before summarising our substantive findings, we begin by emphasising an important methodological issue that emerged from our review. Despite extensive searches, we found only a limited amount of published literature, and only two 'untapped' data sets, that could address our questions and come close to meeting our minimal methodological requirements - namely, employing comparable samples and comparable measures of parenting at more than one historical time point. So far as we could ascertain, very few studies have directly attempted to chart trends in the parenting of adolescents, though rather more have looked at related issues such as trends in parental time use, or the parenting of pre-adolescent children. We were able to fill some of these gaps through secondary analysis of BHPS and YouthTrends data. We found no other UK data sets that could be used for this purpose. Although the British cohort studies are increasingly seen as key sources of data on social trends, the earlier studies in this sequence

included relatively few indicators of parenting as we defined it here, and the two recent ONS child mental health cohorts (1999, 2004), though explicitly designed to monitor trends in child outcomes, did not include repeat measures of parenting. Although this is disappointing from the perspective of attempts to understand trends in parenting, it is of course unsurprising that constructs and measures of parenting should have changed considerably over 50 years. We return later to proposals that might help remedy this situation for future research.

Whilst bearing in mind these caveats, we first briefly summarise our findings for each aspect of parenting; we then attempt to draw together consistencies, puzzles and gaps in the findings and to critically appraise their quality. We consider possible explanations for the findings, and discuss recommendations for research, drawing together reflections on the changing context of parenting over recent decades, and on specific gaps in the literature that may warrant further investigation.

9.2 Summary of results: has parenting changed and are trends similar for different social groups?

9.2.1.Parental monitoring and control

Parent monitoring.

Poor monitoring shows robust associations with problem behaviour. However, some commentators are concerned about *over-monitoring* (children no longer allowed to play outdoors, thus failing to learn to deal with normal risk) as well as *under-monitoring* of youth (e.g. increases in 'latchkey' kids; unsupervised teen gangs in street). We found no published data documenting changes in monitoring of adolescents; data on specific aspects of monitoring suggests percent of children walking alone to school has declined.

Secondary analyses found that young people perceive parental monitoring to have increased from 1986-2006. From BHPS data 1994-2005, there were no time changes. Our two datasets were consistent in suggesting that the gap between two parent and lone, and richer and poorer families has narrowed, so that in recent years, there are few or no differences in monitoring by family type or poverty.

Parent monitoring: phones and screens.

Technology has altered youth activities and brought new challenges for parenting. Most young people have internet access at home, and a high percent are unsupervised. Cyberbullying is a problem for a substantial minority of children. As yet, little data appears to link technology and parenting, let alone looks at trends over time.

Parental expectations and discipline

We found no studies documenting changes in parental discipline, although reported acceptability of physical punishment has declined from 1965 to the present, and legal restrictions on corporal punishment have increased in the UK and other countries. Secondary analyses of YouthTrends data indicated increases in parental expectations about good behaviour, perceived parent strictness and parent disapproval of adolescents' activities. Although both were increasing over the same time period, trends in parent strictness and disapproval could not be explained by trends in adolescent problem behaviour. On some variables, parents were rated as less strict in lone-parent and poorer families; however, this gap did not widen over time.

Parent-adolescent conflict

We found no consistent pattern of change in parent-youth conflict in BHPS. There was a slight decline through to 2000, but then reported conflicts increased back to the original level.

Physical maltreatment

Various data sources from UK & USA suggest an increase in officially-registered child abuse during the 1970s and 80s, followed by a decline from the early 90s onward, although it is hard to be confident about comparability of methods of registration across time.

9.2.2 Parental involvement and responsiveness

Parental involvement: overall time use, reading with children and family meals

Time use surveys suggest that parents' reported time spent with offspring (at all ages) has increased over recent decades for mothers and fathers, during a period when maternal employment has risen steeply. Although time diary methods are reasonably robust, we should interpret this data with some caution, as it is possible that social desirability of spending time with children has also increased, biasing reports upwards. Reported frequency of reading with young children has also increased considerably from 1975-2005. Although frequency of reading is strongly associated with social class and family type, this rise in reading is seen in all groups; for frequent reading there was some evidence of decreasing inequalities between groups defined by social class and ethnicity. Family meals are thought to have declined. However, we found evidence of only a small decline in teens taking meals with parents from 1986- 2006; and no decline from 1994-2006, based on BHPS data. Trends did not vary by social class or family type.

Children's views of parental involvement

Children's views of parental involvement appear reasonably consistent with the picture drawn from parent diaries and ratings: in the YouthTrends study, teens perceived an increase in quality time with mothers and fathers from 1986-2006, matching the parent time diary data; they perceived no change in how interested their parents were in their ideas. BHPS data showed no change in perceived parental support over time. Those in lone parent families felt less supported than those in intact families; however, this gap narrowed from 1994-2006.

Do young people care what their parents think about them?

The majority of teens in 1986 and 2006 cared a lot what their parents thought of them, with no change in views about mothers. There was some evidence of increasing disengagement from fathers (in particular for those not living with their father) in 2006 on this particular measure.

9.2.3 Parental characteristics

Has parental mental health changed?

Based on several published data sources, adult mental health problems and antisocial behaviour appear to have increased over the last half-century. Our analyses of YouthTrends and BHPS similarly found increases in parental distress over time, which were steepest in lone parent families. This was the only measure for which we found evidence of increasing social gradients over time. We return later to the paradox that parental distress (which at an individual level, was modestly associated with poorer parenting) has increased during an era when parenting appears to have improved.

9.3 Summary of results: Can trends in parenting account for changes in adolescent problem behaviour?

Finally, data from the YouthTrends study enabled us to make direct tests of the extent to which trends in parenting contributed to trends in adolescent conduct problems between 1986 and 2006. In essence, the results confirmed many of the findings from earlier stages of our review. Youth-reported measures of parenting showed clear (and strengthening) links with adolescent conduct problems over this period; despite these associations, however, parenting played no part in accounting for increased rates of adolescent conduct problems over time. Instead, findings suggested that socio-demographic change had played a modest role here, and that increased levels of maternal distress may have played a potentially more powerful one.

9.4 Integration and critical appraisal of the findings

9.4.1 Has parenting changed?

One conclusion to draw from our study is that we could find no good evidence of an often-assumed decline in parenting that might account for the increase in youth problem behaviour. In some respects, parenting behaviours and parent-adolescent relationships appear to have improved over the last half century. Thus, adolescents view their parents as monitoring them more closely and having higher expectations for their behaviour, compared to 20 years ago. Family meals appear to have decreased only modestly in frequency, and this decline may have levelled off since the mid-1990's. Joint activities appear to have increased, based on both youth perceptions and parent time diaries, indicating that parents may in some respects have become more, not less, involved in their children's lives. Though more young people live apart from their biological father, we also found evidence for increased father involvement where children do live with their father. However, we must point out that the growing complexity of family situations, together with limited details available from repeat time use surveys means that we are not able to draw conclusions about trends in involvement of e.g. biological vs. step parents, resident vs. non-resident parents.

9.4.2 Is there evidence for increasing social inequalities in parenting?

There has been a great deal of concern about rising levels of inequality in the UK and about our very low ranking (along with the US) in a cross-national league table of income inequality in developed countries. If the rise in problem behaviour were due to increasing inequalities in society (e.g. in terms of income and education; insecure job market for the least skilled young people), then we might expect that a subgroup of young people from families who were worse off in these respects would show a greater rise in problem behaviour. The mechanism of this influence might be through its direct effect on young people, feeling dislocated from mainstream society, or though putting extra stresses on their parents, and making it harder for them to be effective parents. Our data do not bear either of these explanations out. Many of the trends we found did not vary by social class or family type; where they did, there was in some cases evidence of a narrowing of the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged families. We could find no time trend data on parenting across different neighbourhood contexts. There was surprisingly little data on parenting trends by ethnicity - a clear gap in UK research.

9.4.3 How much confidence can we place in these conclusions?

Our study suggests there has been no decline, and even a possible improvement over time in the aspects of parenting addressed in our studies. Neither do our data suggest that there is a decline in parenting in more disadvantaged groups in society. If we take these data at face value, then it cannot be the case that a decline in parenting explains the rising trend in problem behaviour. Before turning to other potential explanations for these trends, it is important first to critically appraise the coverage of parenting and measurement quality in our studies.

9.4.4 How much do the findings tell us about adolescence in the UK?

We aimed to focus on parenting of adolescents in the UK. Our secondary analyses were entirely based on UK cohorts, and largely concerned the adolescent period. However, a good portion of the review necessarily drew on literature from other countries, including US, Australia, and Sweden. Although we should be very cautious in drawing conclusions relevant to the UK from other countries, it is nevertheless worth noting the striking consistencies seen across countries in some aspects of time trends, for example, in the rise in antisocial behaviour over recent decades (Smith & Rutter, 1995), and in the data we found on cross-national trends in parent time use. With respect to age group, clearly aspects of parenting such as joint activities, warmth, supervision and family meals take on quite a different form and meaning in adolescence compared to earlier ages. Notwithstanding, where data are very limited on adolescence, we have drawn on data about younger children, for example on physical punishment and supervision of journeys to school, and some of the time use data. Although we cannot claim that these studies tell us anything about adolescence, it is nevertheless worth noting that the broad trends we have identified, towards increasing levels of parental involvement and supervision appear, from the limited information available, to hold across a range of ages of childhood and youth.

9.4.5 What aspects of parenting are not covered by trend data?

Although our studies included a reasonable coverage of many aspects of parenting, other processes known to be important in the development and amelioration of adolescent problem behaviour were not included. For example, we found data on perceived monitoring and expectations for youth behaviour, but were not able to assess whether effectiveness of control has altered over time. Thus we do not know if parents plan and conduct monitoring activities accurately, whether they communicate clear and reasonable expectations, incentives and sanctions to young people, and then implement and follow these through consistently. We know little about the quality and nature of parental involvement (e.g. activities and communications) that is tapped by crude survey measures of parent time use. Nor could we assess how parents adapt their methods to the changing autonomy demands of adolescents. We don't know whether adults and young people converse more or less nowadays during the joint meals that they take. Although the data showed no change in perceived frequency of arguments, we found no data on whether expression of negative affect (e.g. yelling, crying, insulting) during these conflicts has changed, or whether positive affect (e.g. warmth, laughter) in parent-adolescent relationships has changed. There is a long history of work on measurement of these more dynamic aspects of parenting, through naturalistic observational techniques (Gardner, 2000; Le Couteur & Gardner, 2008), family discussion tasks, more detailed time diaries (Galboda-Liyanage et al., 2003) and semi-structured interviews. Perhaps understandably, these costly methods are rarely used in large repeated cohort studies, one exception being the use of the HOME Inventory in panel studies in the US

(Bradley et al., 2001). However, it would be important to include some of these higher quality measures in future studies of time trends, for example by using brief structured observational tasks, in modest-sized representative samples (such as that employed in YouthTrends).

In addition to measuring parenting behaviour, it would also be important to include measures of other aspects of family functioning which potentially affect adolescent problem behaviour. These might include constructs related to family-level climate and communication patterns (Moos, 1990), family social support (White et al., 1998) and joint activities. For example, family narratives, cultural rituals, and religious affiliations are likely to have changed considerably over recent decades, and there is evidence that some kinds of positive family practices may be associated at an individual level with better adolescent outcomes (e.g. religiosity; Bradford et al., 2008). These family-level factors might also include parental risk behaviours that have changed markedly over a generation (for example, parental history of drug use) and which may influence the norms and role models provided within the family for young people (Dishion, Owen, & Bullock, 2004).

Overall, we suggest that despite many gaps in the coverage of parenting, our data nevertheless provide a broad, useful picture of time changes in young people's perceptions of many important aspects of parenting and parent-adolescent relationships.

9.4.6 Measurement quality issues

All our data are based on self-report measures of parenting. These include brief questionnaire and time diary methods, which are likely to be the only practical measures for many large surveys. We therefore need to be cautious in interpreting the findings, as self-report measures may be open to biases, which may themselves change over time, and which may not be the same for youth and adult reports. One potential source of bias is social desirability of 'good' parenting. It is possible that over time there has been increasing emphasis on the virtues of being an involved and communicative parent, who spends 'quality time' with their children. Over and above any real changes in behaviour that this norm might engender, change in desirability might affect the way that parents present their parenting in questionnaires. If this were the case, it would bias many of our findings towards overstating improvements in parenting over time. Another kind of bias, which is well documented, but would tend to work in the opposite direction to social desirability, is mood of the informant. We know that self-reported low mood and distress are associated with increased tendency to report more negatively on events and relationships in one's life (Collishaw et al., in press; Offord et al., 1996; Richters & Martinez, 1992). Our analyses suggest that in youth and adults, self-reported distress has increased over time. Mood bias, if present, would presumably sway informants toward viewing family relationships more negatively. As such, it would be unlikely to account for many of upward trends in parenting quality found.

We should also consider whether reporting bias might apply differentially to different social groups. This issue was addressed in a study of parental reports of reading with children. Hofferth (2004) directly compared questionnaires and more detailed diary methods, and found that questionnaire methods tended to exaggerate rather than reduce variations between social background groups. However, a bias in this direction could not easily account for our findings – since, for many variables we found a narrowing of social gap over time.

We briefly draw attention to other limitations in the quality of measurement in the studies we have reviewed and analysed. Limitations of daily time diaries for measuring parent-child activities were described earlier. In the data sets we analysed, some survey questions were potentially ambiguous, for example as described in the section on reading. There are some specific limitations of BHPS: one that is apparent in our charts is that there were adult and youth informants only until 1998, then youth only; sample sizes are quite small for the 11-15 year age group in the earlier years; the mode of data collection changed from a pre-recorded interview administered by personal audiotape, to a standard self-completion format. Similarly, the YouthTrends study has some specific limitations: the majority of youth in 1986 completed questionnaires about parenting at school, those in 2006 completed questionnaires sent to their homes. Non-response and attrition biases, though quantifiable using prior data, might also have influenced our findings. Finally, youth in 2006 were on average a few months older than in 1986 - a confound which we controlled for in all analyses. Overall, these measurement limitations have led us to be cautious in our conclusions; although our confidence is somewhat bolstered by the finding of some consistency across methods (self-reported time diary *vs.* questionnaire), informants (youth and parent), data sets (two UK cohort studies) and countries (at least, for the time use data).

Analyses also addressed whether trends in parenting differed by family type and social disadvantage. One limitation is that these were necessarily crudely defined. The 2006 YouthTrends survey only included information about current parent figures. This meant that we could not for example distinguish those in stable and unstable arrangements, or young people who had always lived with just one parent, and those who experienced the separation of their parents. We note that caution may be needed in conducting these kinds of analyses, given that numbers in each subgroup of family type may be small, and this is especially the case in samples that are likely also to be informative about parenting styles. Nevertheless, this is clearly an issue deserving of attention in future studies.

9.4.7 Design considerations in trend studies

Clearly in order to explain the rise in adolescent problem behaviour, data on parenting trends must cover the same historical time period. For the small amount of published data found, parenting trends generally cover the same period as the known rise in problem behaviour, including some time use studies which cover five decades. BHPS, on the other hand, covers a briefer and more recent period (1994-2006), during which (although we don't know exactly when) the rise in adolescent problem behaviour levelled off. However the strengths of BHPS lie in its suitability for examining variation by social group, and its ongoing, detailed annual data sweeps - this makes it invaluable for charting more accurately the slope of recent parenting trends, and for continuing these into the future. A considerable strength of our study is that it draws on data from YouthTrends, perhaps the only study specifically designed to address questions about time trends in adolescent mental health and related risk factors such as parenting, over the same period (1986-2006). It thus incorporates a good slice of the time period under investigation. Importantly, it allows us to link parenting to problem behaviour trends in the same samples, which is not possible with many other studies, which then have to rely on comparing aggregate trends (Fabio et al., 2006).

9.5 If trends are not due to parenting change, does this mean parenting in adolescence doesn't matter?

We have argued that although the data available for review are limited and measurement is not ideal, there is nevertheless justification for cautiously concluding that parenting is unlikely to have declined, and may even have improved. If parenting - as we defined it, behaviourally - cannot account for these trends, does this mean parenting doesn't matter? Clearly this is not the case *within* generations: for example, in YouthTrends, significant associations were found at an individual level between problem behaviour and measures of parenting in both studies, which if anything became stronger over time. But we know that different factors may account for trends over time, compared to those accounting for individual differences. Putting aside for the moment the argument (in 9.4.5) that trends might be due to unmeasured behavioural aspects of parenting, we explore some broader contextual explanations.

One way of conceptualising these trends is to suggest that the job of parenting adolescents has become harder over time. The duration of adolescence has elongated, with biological puberty and arguably 'social adolescence' beginning earlier, and, at the other end, extended years of living at home. It could be argued that parents feel more stressed, as a result of lower levels of social cohesion in families and communities, and longer working hours. At the same time, there may be more pressures on young people, from peer and media influences, towards problem behaviour. Thus, although many aspects of parenting may indeed have improved, those improvements might not have been enough to offset countervailing influences. Put another way, contextual change and perhaps society's expectations may be raising the threshold of what it takes to be a good parent, and 'good enough parenting' in 1970 may be deemed less than satisfactory in 2000.

We should also consider the possibility that the changes we observed were merely a response to increasing levels of problem behaviour in society at large. Awareness of such changes might, for example, lead parents to monitor adolescents more closely, and to be more strict and disapproving, in just the ways we documented. Bi-directional influences of this kind have of course been widely reported in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, and it would be surprising if they did not play some part here. But an account of this kind could not so easily explain other trends we observed (for example, increases in parents' involvement with young people), and is also not borne out by our findings that levels of disapproval increased over time even for young people of comparable levels of behavioural difficulty. As a result, though we cannot rule out the possibility that some part of the changes we observed may have occurred in response to adolescent behavioural change, we think it unlikely that this is the whole (or even the principal) explanation.

Another explanation for our data could be that key 'parenting' influences have already happened long before adolescence, with early childhood or even prenatal factors increasing vulnerability to problem behaviour later in development. In relation to prenatal influences, there is now well-replicated evidence that both maternal smoking in pregnancy (Wakschlag et al,. 2002) and prenatal maternal stress (Talge et al., 2007) are associated with increased risk of antisocial behaviour/ adjustment problems in offspring. It seems unlikely that prenatal smoking could have contributed to upward trends in behaviour problems, as rates of pregnancy smoking are known to have declined over much the same period as adolescent problems were seen to rise. So far as we are aware, there are no comparable data on trends in women's stress levels in pregnancy - but given the increases in maternal distress that we have documented, it is not

implausible that stresses in pregnancy could have gone up too, making more children potentially vulnerable to later difficulties.

It is of course surprising to find little change in parenting behaviour, given that the context of parenting has changed enormously over the last 50 years. In many ways the direction of social and economic change has mitigated against good parenting (e.g. unsociable work hours, more partnership disruption, greater child poverty; poorer parent mental health); in other ways social changes have supported better parenting (more education, more material wealth).

9.6 What else might have caused the rise in problem behaviour?

Various explanations have been put forward for the rise in problem behaviour (Ambert, 2006), although few commentators draw on systematic evidence to support their claims. It is beyond the scope of this study to review other possible explanations (many of which are being examined in detail in other projects funded under the current Nuffield Foundation Initiative); however, we draw attention to those linked to parenting. We begin with explanations that are illuminated by our own data - data that are unique in attempting to test the extent to which trends in parenting and other demographic changes contribute to trends in adolescent conduct problems. We know from UK cohort data that one very plausible explanation, the concomitant rise in the divorce rate, is at best only a modest contributor, accounting for some 10-20% at most of the rise in problem behaviour (Collishaw et al., 2007). Our current analyses, not surprisingly, found that parenting did not contribute to rising problem behaviour trends – indeed, they suggested that without reported improvements in parenting, adverse trends in behaviour might have been even more marked. The analyses also broadly confirmed prior work in showing that social disadvantage made only very modest contributions to rising trends in adolescent behaviour problems. However, declining maternal mental health was a stronger predictor of problem behaviour trends, an issue we turn to next.

9.6.1 Parental mental health

Our findings on the strong associations between trends in parental distress and trends in adolescent conduct problems seem both important and challenging. Links between parental mental health and adolescent outcomes have, of course, been documented in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies for many years. Their interpretation has also generated much debate. Setting aside issues of rater bias (often troublesome where – as in our data – the same parent reports on their adolescent's behaviour and their own mental state), some part of any association is likely to reflect shared genetic liability, and some part adolescent effects on parental well-being. Well-designed studies capable of accounting for these effects have, however, concluded that there is also evidence of environmentally-mediated influence of parental depression and distress on child behavioural outcomes (Kim-Cohen et al, 2005).

Our findings extend this literature by suggesting that influences associated with parental distress and mental health problems may also be implicated in time trends in adolescent outcomes. We should stress here that just the same interpretational issues apply to our findings as to results from many cross-sectional studies, so we must be appropriately cautious in our interpretations. In addition, our results in this area highlight a further paradox: although our measures of parenting were (as expected) modestly associated with measures of maternal mental health, these two indicators showed quite different

trends over time, and quite different patterns of association with adolescent outcomes. It is beyond the scope of this review to explore these issues in more detail. Given the strong associations that we detected between trends in parental distress and trends in adolescent conduct problems, however, we do consider that further work in this area may be of particular importance.

9.6.2 Other social contextual factors

One factor we did not investigate, which is closely resulted to parenting, is that of changes in adolescent role models. These may include role models that operate at an individual level, for example the admirable or antisocial behaviour of parents, the effects of which may be moderated by the relationship and amount of contact the parent has with the young person; at a neighbourhood or societal level, where there may be collective role models, such as influential peers; and at a national level, where there may be celebrity role models. Related to these role models and peer group norms are young people's aspirations, for example for school success, for job and training opportunities, which have changed in many ways over recent decades, and which affect different groups in society in varied ways. It might be that 'celebrity culture' makes parents seem particularly dull, and raises young people's aspirations to unattainable levels of material wealth and fame. For some children, the education system has become more difficult to negotiate, with increased emphasis on measuring academic success. There is some evidence to suggest that the relationship between parental input and young people's educational attainment has become stronger not weaker over time. Thus children whose parents are unsupportive of school work or ill-equipped to help with learning are likely to be deemed 'failures' in the education system, bringing truancy or even suspension in its wake. Exclusion from education is not simply the result of problem behaviour – it also tends to exacerbate such problems. This is an area where further research is needed, and might include investigating mechanisms (at an individual level) by which parents transmit roles and values to their offspring (e.g. Dishion, Owen & Bullock, 2004), and examining at a societal level relationships between trends over time.

Clearly there are many direct influences on young people – their peers, other role models, their experience of schooling, and the predominant values, aspirations and opportunities operating in their community. These influences have not only changed over time, but also vary widely within the UK. Similarly the task of parenting is challenged by the same societal factors that directly influence adolescents, but which vary widely by social context – by area, ethnicity, social capital, wealth, and so on. Thus some communities have very high rates of youth disorder and pose huge challenges for parents; whereas other communities are relatively low risk. These areas of intersection between community, cultural, family and school influences on youth outcomes would be fruitful areas for further investigation of time trends.

9.7 Recommendations

Based on our review and reflections on our findings, we offer three main recommendations for future research:

(i) Our first and strongest recommendation is for future research to include comparable and valid measures of adolescent parenting over time. Although our particular focus here was on adolescence, both early and later parenting have a significant influence on adolescent outcomes, and yet there is a lack of data on time change in parenting at any

ages. Parenting measures should be included in data sets that allow linkage to youth outcomes. We suggest two models for doing this. One way would be via consistent inclusion of parenting measures in broad based cohort studies, ideally based on the perspectives of both parents and young people. The UK's admirable tradition of longitudinal studies looks set to continue, with the inception of the UKHLS and the strong possibility that a new national birth cohort study will be initiated soon. ALSPAC and the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime have already included useful measures of parenting of adolescents, and the Millennium Cohort Study will be in a good position to build on these when that cohort enters the teens. If comparable measures could be included in planned future studies, our understanding of parenting in current and future generations of young people would be significantly enhanced.

A second route would be through dedicated studies of time trends in parenting. Compared to national cohort studies, these might use smaller representative samples, as was the case with YouthTrends, but would focus on more detailed measurement of parenting from multiple sources, perhaps using a brief observational task, or a tailor-made time diary, to complement questionnaire measures.

(ii) A second recommendation is that there is an urgent need to develop plausible and testable hypotheses regarding broad social changes that may differentiate successive generations of youth and that might help explain trends in youth antisocial behaviour. For this, it may be necessary to look not only at risk factors (such as parenting) typically identified as operating at an individual level. There is accumulating evidence from various domains as diverse as child health, IQ, and adult height that different factors may account for individual variability within a population and differences between populations (Silventoinen et al., 2000). One change hypothesised to affect longer term trends in youth misconduct is the ‘maturity gap’ (Moffitt, 1994). The gap refers to the way biological maturity has outpaced social maturity and, over-time, this may have led to an extension of psychically uncomfortable years that could exacerbate conduct disorders. Moffitt suggests that when adolescents are in this gap it is virtually normative for them to adopt anti-social behaviour as an alternative form of social maturation and as a way of demonstrating autonomy from parents and respect from peers (Moffitt et al., 2001). The maturity gap has largely been used as an explanation for why there are differences between 'adolescence-limited' and 'life course persistent' patterns in anti-social behaviour. However, it may also be useful, if adequate measures exist, for explaining changes over time in adolescent conduct disorder, in the UK and other nations.

(iii) We also recommend that future studies examine parenting in its changing social context. Much of the research that we reviewed was in effect ‘decontextualised’, focusing on parenting abstracted from its social context. Given that parenting does not take place in isolation, it is important for future studies to investigate the ways in which the changing picture of parenting, peer relationships, neighbourhood and schooling may interact to increase risk or resilience to problem behaviours.

(iv) Finally, we suggest that data from other countries and cross-national comparisons may be useful. There are high quality cohort studies from the US, and potentially from other countries, which might be suitable for investigating similar questions about time trends to those we addressed here in relation to the UK. In a related way, like the study of time trends, cross-national comparisons can function as another means by which to study broader influences on the relationship between risk factors and adolescent mental health problems, in this case across a wider range of cultural and policy contexts.