



The Value of Breaks for Ordinary Working Families: an exploratory study



Nottingham
Civic Exchange

About this report. Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has established Nottingham Civic Exchange, a specialist Place Based think tank within the University. Nottingham Civic Exchange maximises research, policy and practical impact by bringing together Nottingham Trent University expertise with partners seeking to address the needs of local communities. Nottingham Civic Exchange acts as a resource to look at social and economic issues in new ways. This means facilitating debate, acting as a bridge between research and policy debates, and developing practical projects at a local, city and regional level.

This research is one of multiple projects of research and citizen engagement to understand the lived experience of Ordinary Working Families. This programme – Out of the Ordinary – involves assessing, analysing and planning collaborative action to address the contemporary challenges of ordinary working families. The programme has a focus on Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, and a broader objective to influence policy at a national level. It is exploring in-depth the context of economic insecurity as it plays out in a place based context. The Family Holiday Association have worked with NCE on a variety of projects within the programme, including the production of a short film. The RSA have contributed to this report as part of this programme of work undertaken in partnership with Nottingham Civic Exchange.

The Family Holiday Association is the leading national charity dedicated to providing breaks and day trips for families coping with some of the toughest challenges life can bring. Since 1975 it has helped over 48,000 families across the UK. Its vision is for a society where everyone has the opportunity to have a holiday each year.

In 2018 it helped almost 15,000 individuals in 3,820 families, all referred by professionals working with them in a supporting role across 97% of local authority areas in the UK.

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 29,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured. The RSA Action and Research Centre combines practical experimentation with rigorous research to achieve these goals.

This research brings together qualitative material from interviews with members of Ordinary Working Families, a literature review, and policy analysis and recommendations.

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Introduction from Peter Long

As the President of the leading national charity dedicated to providing breaks and days out for families facing daily struggles on many levels, I am passionate about helping more families experience time together away from home.

I have my own vivid childhood memories of breaks by the seaside. A particularly prominent and treasured memory involves my whole family. We were on a beach building sandcastles, and my father was handing flags to me to put on the top of them.

I'm sure my own memories will bring many of your own to the surface - the taste of ice cream that trickled down your chin in the heat, the smell of salt in the air, the heat of the sand in contrast to the refreshing sea. For most of us, simple moments like these have created lasting memories.

In 1975 when the charity was founded, by and large, having a job meant being able to do things like go on holiday. In 2019 this is no longer the case, with working parents struggling to provide something that many of us take for granted. The daily grind of often low paid and insecure work without a break to look forward to means families are missing out on vital time together, the chance to reconnect and have fun.

At the Family Holiday Association we support families struggling with some of the toughest challenges life can bring; many of whom have never experienced a family holiday before. This report highlights that a lack of access to holidays does not just affect those at the very margins of society but impacts on working families who feel that a break is something that should be achievable but which they struggle to provide.

That there will inevitably come a time when children grow up and no longer want to go away with their parents is part of the natural cycle of family life. The report shows that for families who are struggling to make ends meet, this milestone becomes a ticking clock, after which the chance to create those precious childhood memories is lost forever.

At a time when mental health issues affect one in four people every year, the additional layer of 'guilt' which can come from not being able to take a break can be doing little to help those families who could benefit most from it. This challenge is even more prevalent in the families we support, where up to 60% of them are affected by mental health issues. This report suggests that breaks could be a way of addressing this challenge amongst struggling families.

Our own research shows that the impacts of a break can be far-reaching; from improvements in mental health and reduced isolation to increased school attendance and job-seeking behaviour. We call for more research to better understand the potential savings this simple intervention could have on our stretched support services.

Our work with VisitScotland on the ScotSpirit Breaks initiative show what can be achieved when government, industry and charities work together with a shared vision. We welcome the recommendation of an Independent Commission to look at this to better understand the potential for increasing access to tourism in Britain today and funding mechanisms to achieve this.

At the Family Holiday Association, we hear every day of the difference that a break or day out can make: new experiences, hope for the future, lives transformed. We surely must do all we can so that every child has holiday memories that will last a lifetime.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Peter Long
President of the Family Holiday Association



Executive summary

Nottingham Civic Exchange, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and the Family Holiday Association are currently involved in a programme of work helping to understand the level of economic insecurity facing Ordinary Working Families.

Research on the benefits of holidays and short breaks forms part of this broader programme. This research brings together qualitative material from interviews with members of Ordinary Working Families, a literature review, and policy analysis and recommendations.

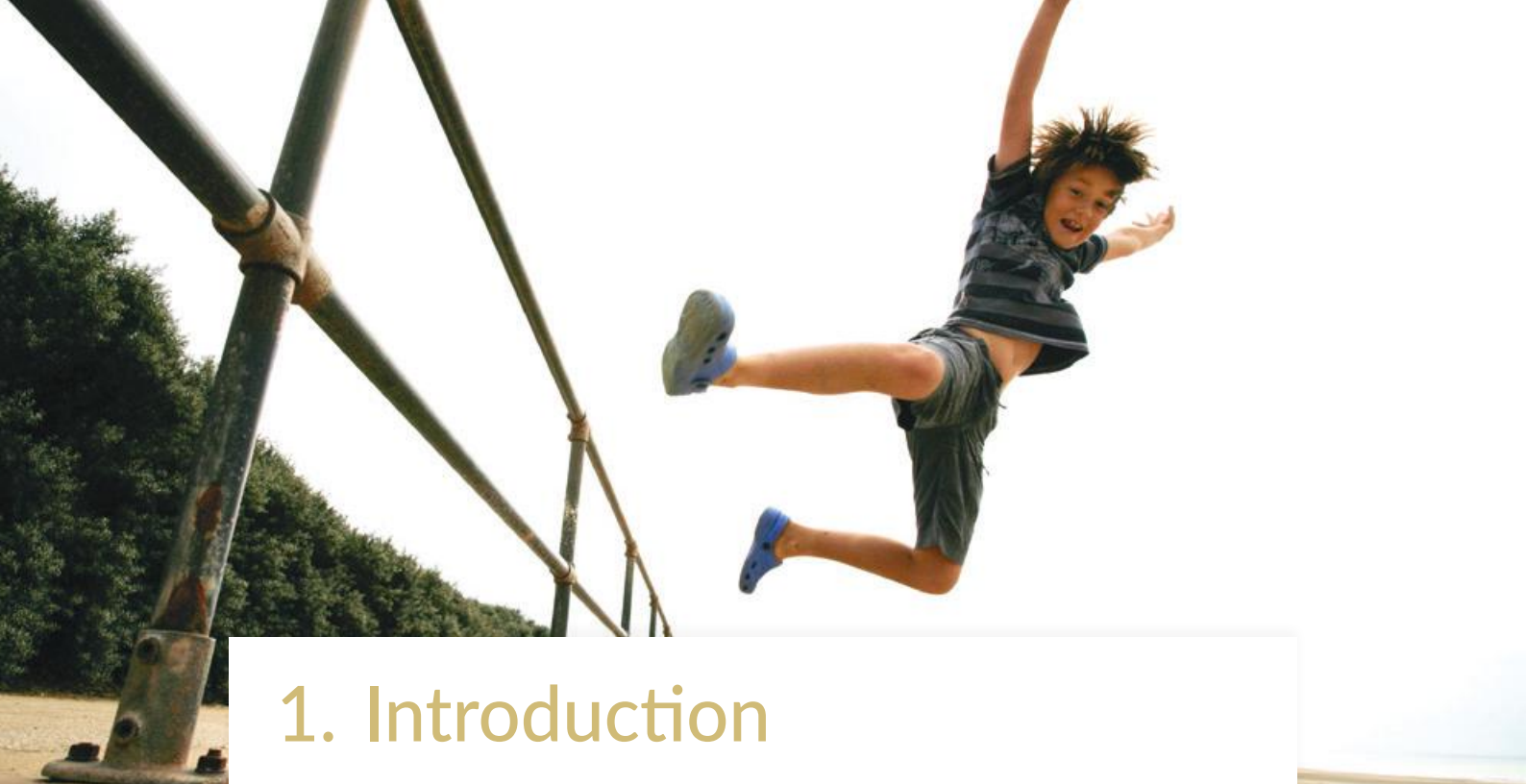
Our research indicates that holidays and short breaks:

- are to be understood in the context of the multiple demands and pressures upon low to middle income households with children
- are seen by the families as a legitimate expectation in households where adults are working
- have a notable positive impact on mental wellbeing. Conversely not being able to take breaks had a negative impact on individuals' mental health
- strengthen family relationships
- create shared family memories – particularly when children are young. There is a 'ticking clock' of childhood which creates pressure for memories whilst children are still young enough to want to share holidays with parents.
- provide new social and cultural experiences for children and adults. Breaks were seen as providing educational opportunities in the broadest sense
- provide respite from the daily routine of work and family commitments. Both the looking forward to the break and the experience of a break itself have a positive impact
- enable children to fully participate in shared social interactions about experiences of holidays. There is strong evidence of guilt and shame for parents and children where this is not provided

- are important but all families carefully managed household finances to be able to afford breaks without debt.
- are made less accessible to those with school age children due to the term-time absences policy. This was seen as penalising those on low incomes and also those with extended families abroad

In addition to conducting primary research and examining relevant literature, we put forward policy initiatives in response to the issues raised in our research. We propose two types of policy and practice responses. The first is to explore a step change in policy, including an Independent Commission to better understand the potential for increasing access to tourism in Britain today. The second sets out examples of how we might capitalise on opportunities to use existing policies, programmes and resources to promote social tourism¹ and the potential benefits this could bring for families and communities.

¹ Social tourism encourages participation in tourism by everyone, including those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged.



1. Introduction

Nottingham Civic Exchange (NCE) and the Family Holiday Association collaboration began in 2017 with the publication of a report on Ordinary Working Families in Nottingham and the region (Black, P. et al 2017). Since that time, we have continued to work on a programme of research, policy development and engagement with low to middle-income households.

The definition of Ordinary Working Family used in this research is one where household income is between £12,000-£34,000 a year after tax and benefits, where at least one adult in the household is in paid employment, and where there is at least one dependent child.

We approach the issues they face from a broad perspective of economic insecurity. Working with the RSA we produced a report (Shafique, 2018) which argues that economic insecurity is a political, economic and societal challenge that public policy must understand and address. In this research, we examine how this broad context of economic insecurity is experienced within low to middle income working households, and shed light upon the role that access to holidays and short breaks plays for these families.

We define economic insecurity as:

Harmful volatility in people's economic circumstances. This includes their exposure to objective and perceived risks to their economic wellbeing, and their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks or adverse events (Shafique, 2018, p.15).

It is important to note that economic insecurity is objective and subjective. It combines the objective factors of employment and income with the perception of risk. The families in this study are experiencing economic insecurity to a greater or lesser degree. They describe both the objective precariousness of finances and the concern this raises. This has considerable impact on their lives. The experience of a holiday or short break offers some respite from this 'daily grind' as one participant put it.

Families are managing many demands upon their time and resources. These resources are not only financial but also physical and emotional. Financial constraints require a significant amount of time and energy to manage. Budgets must be

carefully monitored and bills paid before saving for holidays can occur. Income is also variable. This may be due to a change in circumstances such as one member of the household changing or losing a job, or due to a life change such as the arrival of a child. Variations in work patterns, pay and benefit entitlements adds further precariousness to the situation. Many families, particularly women in those families, have caring responsibilities in relation to children but also for other family members. The emotional resources this demands are compounded by the organisational skills required to ensure all caring responsibilities are covered whilst they are away from home. It is important to take into account these multiple and intersecting demands upon the lives of low to middle income families in order to understand economic insecurity but also the 'daily grind' in its most complete sense. It is also against this backdrop that we need to understand the value a short break can offer to families. This context vividly illustrates the positive impact holidays and short breaks can offer.

Research Aims

There remains a considerable gap in understanding the benefits of short breaks for Ordinary Working Families and the implications this has for the design of social policy.

Our research seeks to understand:

1. The extent to which short breaks and other forms of holiday are important to people's daily lives and are prioritised by working families.
2. How families access breaks and what resources are required to do so.
3. Perceptions, and qualitative evidence, of the social, cultural, economic and health benefits of short breaks on families.
4. Where breaks are not taken, what impact this may have.



2. The literature

Going on holiday is considered a mainstream and commonplace activity in advanced economies (Minnaert, Stacey, Quinn & Griffin, 2010), occupying both a social and a cultural position across such societies, such that the practice is considered essential to the wellbeing of both individuals and communities (Dawson, 1988), rather than a luxury (McCabe and Diekmann, 2015). Indeed all of the interviewees in our study felt that the expectation of a holiday or break was linked to normal expectations of working family life. A ‘holiday’ might be defined as “a distinct break away from everyday life, routines and chores” (Gram, 2005; see also Seaton & Tagg, 1995). According to Hazel, ‘holiday’ is commonly defined within the literature as “a recreational break of four or more nights away from home” (Hazel, 2005:226). However, the application of this number of nights away from home as a numerical threshold for what constitutes a holiday does appear to be a little arbitrary. As de Bloom and colleagues point out (de Bloom, Nawijn, Geurts, Kinnunen & Korpela, 2017), there is no clear evidence for a close relationship between length of holiday and the benefits gained from having been away, despite the apparently widely held belief that more benefits accrue from a longer time spent away from home.

Despite the centrality of holiday taking to social and cultural life, and the scale of the tourism market (Mason, 2015), not everyone goes on holiday. According to Eurostat (2011), around 45% of people in Europe do not take holidays. Statistics gathered to measure the extent and frequency of holiday taking generally tend to be at the level of the general population rather than breaking that down into family units and understanding which groups of people are more or less likely to access holidays (Hazel, 2005). The Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research, in their analysis of the Family Resources Surveys from the years 2003/4-2013/14 found that an average of 26% of couples with children and 55% of lone parent families in the UK were deprived of a holiday due to low income (2015). Elsewhere, it is noted that the increase in holidaying is not the result of a broadening of access to tourism but of a “concentration of consumption” amongst those who can afford to travel driving the increase (Sedgley, Pritchard & Morgan, 2012). Though varying factors are mentioned in the literature to account for non-participation, such as lack of interest in going on holiday, and differences according to nationality, gender, race and time constraints (Davidson, 1996; Richards, 1998), the most dominant factor for non-participation was financial (English Tourist Board, 1995; Haukeland, 1990; Hughes, 1991; Eurobarometer, 1998; European Commission, 2001; Jolin, 2004; Minnaert, Quinn, Griffen and Stacey, 2010).

“Social Tourism” is defined by Hunziker (1951, p.1, see also Hall, 2000) as “the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements of society”. It is not a term widely used within a UK context. Indeed, a 2011 All Party Parliamentary Group convened to examine the social and economic benefits of social tourism recommended that the term be at the very least clarified but potentially substituted with different terminology. However, it is not a new or novel term and has deep roots within many European countries, such as France and Belgium (Hazel, 2005; McCabe and Diekmann, 2015). The core aim of the movement is to include those in tourism who would otherwise be excluded (Hazel, 2005; Minnaert et al., 2010). However, as both Hazel (2004) and Minnaert and colleagues (2010) point out, despite the widespread embracing of social tourism as a policy approach across many of Europe’s social democratic countries, it has failed to take hold in the UK, nor in other liberal economies such as the US and Japan.

As Sedgley and colleagues note (2012), issues surrounding lack of access to tourism for those struggling economically has been given very little consideration in the literature. They quote Hughes (1991) who argued some decades ago that “there is relatively little special consideration of the plight of those who are unable to either afford a holiday nor provision for them” (p.196). According to Hall (2010), very little has changed. What literature there is tends to be undertaken by a limited number of researchers, as is clear from those cited here. Additionally, extant literature nearly all comes under the umbrella of tourism journals, with the exception of Hazel’s 2005 paper, which was published in the journal *Children and Society*. Instead, it is noted that what literature there is concerning tourism and poverty tends to focus on the impact of tourism on developing countries receiving visitors and not on the association between tourism and poverty in more affluent countries (Sedgley et al., 2012).

There is a lack of literature concerning participation in tourism and those that could be categorised as Ordinary Working Families. Literature that does look at poverty and social exclusion in the context of social tourism does not discriminate between those families who have a member in work and those that do not. This may be because the key issue is, arguably, the level of financial insecurity and relative poverty experienced by families and not their working status.

In recent times, the phrase Ordinary Working Families has been utilised for political purposes, alongside other terms such as ‘just about managing’ and ‘the squeezed middle’, though the latter term has seen a burgeoning of research in the context of rising income inequality in OECD countries (Kenworthy, Nolan, Rowenar, Smeeding, & Thewissen, 2015).

The benefits of short breaks

Within the rather limited pool of literature there is a large amount written as to the benefits of going on holiday for families. These can be broken down into two categories: direct benefits for the individual families taking holidays; and wider societal benefits (specifically as they relate to families living in difficult financial circumstances). Benefits to families include a break from the stresses of everyday life (Ghate and Hazel, 2002; McCabe and Diekmann, 2015), framed as ‘relief and renewal’ by Hazel (2005) and seen as a chance to ‘reflect and rebuild emotional strength’ (p.228; see also Local Government Association [LGA], 2001; English Tourist Board [ETB] 1976; Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 1999). Another reoccurring theme is the strengthening of family relationships (for example Ghate

and Hazel, 2002; Minnaert et al, 2010; Sedgley et al., 2012). This is echoed by research carried out by the Family Holiday Association (2009), who note that the families they work with also report improved confidence, self-esteem, and general feelings of wellbeing. The FHA report that families felt a holiday provided an opportunity to develop “family narratives and treasured memories” (from Sedgley et al., 2012;952). McCabe and Diekmann (2009) echo this, writing that holidays offered the chance for families to take part in ‘normal life’ and for parents to facilitate the creation of happy memories for their children. Further benefits claimed in the literature include an improvement in mental and physical health, and general wellbeing (de Bloom et al., 2017; Dolnicar, Yanamandram & Cliff, 2012, Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004; McCabe and Diekmann, 2015), wider social interaction, exposure to a wider range of experiences, and a chance to develop independence (Hazel, 2005). Our participants also report these benefits although we have not been able to independently measure or quantify these impacts.

Kakoudakis, McCabe and Story (2017) found that social tourism had direct bearing on individual’s self-efficacy, which it is argued was then translated into positive effects on both job-seeking behaviour and willingness to consider alternative routes into employment, such as volunteering. Bos, McCabe and Johnson (2013) looked at the impact of being able to take a holiday on children living in deprived families and found that holidays helped to consolidate and contextualise classroom learning. In addition to the benefits of the holiday, the study provided evidence that, because the holidays were orchestrated with cooperation between schools, families, and other external agencies, relationships between families and schools improved as a result.

Socio-economic factors

There is a general suggestion within the literature that the personal benefits listed previously may translate into socioeconomic benefits (for example: Hazel, 2005), and it seems reasonable to suggest that improved wellbeing and better family relationships may indeed translate in this way, though there is little empirical evidence presented to support these claims. Hazel (2005) goes further than most commentators and suggests that the improvement reported to family relationships would have an onward positive impact on youth crime and drug use. However, support for this claim is not immediately evident in the literature and appears to be overstating the case. Other commentators place more emphasis on structural inequalities that put young people at risk rather than individual agency (see Goddard & Myers, 2017; Yates, 2014). A more direct relationship between social tourism and a wider socio-economic benefit are perhaps demonstrated by the impact that it has on revenue within the tourism industry as it tends to be the shoulder season when tourist numbers are usually smaller that are utilised for social tourism purposes, thus boosting revenue during this low season (Kakoudakis, McCabe, & Story, 2017). Other commentators argue that it is not only that the industry might benefit from social tourism but that they are also inextricably tied to the issues that prevent people from taking holidays in the first place. For example, Sedgley and colleagues point out that the tourism and hospitality industry sector represent one fifth of all low skilled, minimum wage jobs in the UK and that it is ‘unsympathetic to the needs of parents as employees’ (2012: 959). Employment in low pay sectors is one of the limits to accessing breaks which is highlighted in this research.

There is agreement across the literature that those families who would most benefit from being able to go on holiday together are also the ones least likely to be able to access breaks (ETB, 1976; Hazel, 2005; Hughes, 1991; ETB, 1976; FHA, 2009). According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation ([JRF], 2017), of the 14 million people living in poverty in the UK, 8 million of those live in working families. End Child Poverty reports that there are 4 million children living in poverty, of whom two thirds live in families where at least one person is in work (End Child Poverty, 2017). In 1971 that figure was one in ten (Banardos Scotland, 2007). Since the abolition of the Child Poverty Act (2010) in 2016 the UK no longer has an official measure of poverty (Social Metrics Commission, 2018), nor the targets for reducing child poverty that were its central aim, although Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have continued to use the 2010 definition. The act utilised the following definitions: relative poverty, which was defined as an equivalised net income below 60% of the UK median; absolute low income is defined as an equivalised net income below 60% of an adjusted base amount; and persistent poverty which was defined as living in poverty for a period of three years or longer (2010). The abolition of the act signalled the abandonment of Prime Minister Tony Blair's pledge to end child poverty by 2020, which at the time of inception had cross party support (Child Poverty Action Group [CPAG], 2018). The current government is therefore not bound by these targets.

Social exclusion

Sedgley and colleagues argue that there is a clear connection between poverty and non-participation in tourism (2012; see also Smith and Hughes, 1999), and that the lived experience of those effected is one of exclusion from a mainstream social and cultural activity, something that particularly impacts children. It is widely agreed that to be able to go on holiday is to participate in a mainstream part of contemporary life (Dawson, 1988; Hazel, 2005; Hughes 1991; Minneart et al., 2010), such that not be able to take a holiday is a marker of poverty and a form of social exclusion (Minneart et al., 2010; Sedgley et al., 2012). 'Social exclusion' is a term dating from the 1970s but is used widely in contemporary discussions to encompass a broader and more dynamic process than poverty, but which has poverty at its core (Collins, 2004). It has been defined by Commins (1993) as a lack of access to basic social systems that equates, for Collins, to "limited or second-class citizenship" (Collins, 2004:727). The relationship between non-participation in tourism and social exclusion is experienced by those unable to participate as a feeling of disadvantage (Hazel, 2005; Kumar, 1993; Richards, 1998), which Sedgley and colleagues argue "increases social deprivation, social ills and social exclusion" (2012:952). This is particularly acute for children living in financially insecure families who are conscious of social and cultural norms, want to be like their peers, but are very aware of their own families' position and often hide their own needs to save their parents from further worry (Ridge, 2011).

Ruth Lister draws on her experiences of serving on an independent Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, half of whose members had direct experience of poverty. What became clear to her was 'how poverty is experienced as a shameful and corrosive social relation as well as a disadvantaged and insecure economic condition' (Lister, 2015, p.141)

It is this insecure economic condition which leads to the material disadvantages and exclusions experienced by low and middle-income families. However, it is the psychological and emotional impact of the shame of the visibility of this exclusion

which impacts daily upon the lived experience of individuals and families. The interviewees in our research speak continuously of shame and ‘failure’. They also vividly highlight the mental health impact that this combined with economic insecurity has upon them.

There is some discussion in the literature of tourism as a right, given its centrality to mainstream life, the benefits of participation and the socially excluding nature of not being able to participate (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015). There are some grounds for this argument, in that it has been recognised as an essential part of life in some European countries. For example, in the UK the Minimum Income Standard is based on what members of the public identify as the items and services households need to reach a minimum acceptable standard of living, covering essential requirements and allowing participation in society. The MIS includes having a low-cost annual one-week holiday in the UK (JRF, 2018). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) states that “social tourism...should be developed with the support of the public authorities (quoted in Hazel, 2005:230). However, the UK is not a member of this organisation and so has not signed up to their agenda (UNWTO, 2018). The UK is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Hazel proposes that the presence of a clause concerning equality of access to leisure activities would suggest that tourism is included (2005). Minnaert and colleagues argue that, in the UK, social tourism is ‘a discretionary activity, to which no right exists’ (Minnaert, Maitland & Miller, 2009: 317) and others point out that in the UK, legislation referring to the right to leisure mostly concerns the right to paid leave for those in employment, rather than an absolute right for all. It is further noted that in the context of continued austerity it is questionable whether support for social tourism in the UK will broaden from the charitable sector, where it currently resides, to government policy (Sedgley et al., 2012). McCabe and Diekmann conclude that where rights to tourism exist they represent little more than lip service to the idea of such rights and lack the legislative and financial framework necessary for implementation (2015). However, it is certainly one of the aims of our research to push the issue up the political agenda and to suggest policy approaches which may facilitate an examination of this position.

Whilst it is reported that a consistent finding from public survey data is that an annual holiday is considered a necessity for British people (Hazel, 2005. See also ETB, 1976; Mark and Lansey, 1985; Minnaert et al., 2010; Oppenheim, 1990), it is also noted that there is public disapproval that those considered ‘undeserving’ might enjoy breaks, even if those breaks produced the kind of societal benefits proposed above (Hazel, 2005; Hughes, 1991). There is much literature surrounding the notion of the undeserving poor, as well as how and when this trope comes to the fore. For example, Garthwaite, Collins and Bambra write that it is a neoliberal narrative that seeks to divide those in need into those who are deserving and those who are not (2015). Other studies demonstrate the way in which the media portray issues around poverty, such as food bank use, as the ‘underserving poor’ taking advantage of a system giving out free food in order that they can then spend their money on luxury items, despite evidence that it is food poverty that drives the use of food banks (Bowe and Wakefield, 2018; Taylor-Robinson et al., 2013; Wells and Caraher, 2014). Sedgley and colleagues write that at the time of their research, support for both a social inclusion policy agenda and sympathy for those in society who are most vulnerable had diminished (2012). Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Vollmert, Pinaeu & Kendall-Taylor, 2016) found a gap between public perceptions of poverty and that of academics and other professionals, with the variance proving to be a barrier,

not only in the public's understanding of the issue but in the implementation of measures designed to tackle poverty. Among the models of views about poverty gathered by JRF, the two most relevant here are the 'non-negotiable needs' model, in which people define poverty in a very limited way, restricted to a lack of access to basic needs which places all needs other than those absolute ones within the realms of luxury. The other is the 'self-makingness' model, where people attribute the difficult circumstances of those living in poverty to poor decision making and a lack of motivation to change their circumstances rather than seeing it in the context of structural inequalities.

Despite the continuation of attitudes towards 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor remaining, there is some more recent evidence that attitudes towards benefit claimants may be softening, with the proportion of people believing that social security claimants do not deserve help at a record low (21%). These results from the British Social Attitude survey will need to be replicated to see if these trends continue. Similarly, there are some signs that public attitudes towards tax and spending are becoming more favourable towards redistribution of wealth (Clery et al., 2016). For the first time since the implementation of government austerity programmes, more people want to see taxes increased (48%) than stay as they are (44%).



3. Design and research methodology

The research conducted by Nottingham Civic Exchange took a qualitative approach in order to capture the lived experiences of working families. All households included in the study conformed to our definition of an Ordinary Working Family which is that household income was between £12,000-£34,000 per year after tax and benefits, with one member of the household in work and at least one dependent child. We spoke to 36 people in a short telephone interview based on pre-set questions. We then asked each person if they were willing to take part in a longer case study in order to pursue issues raised in the initial interview in more depth. We conducted 10 case study interviews. The demographic characteristics of interviewees are outlined below.

Our interviewees

The interviewees were recruited through a range of methods including through posters placed in libraries, community centres and other locations where we felt eligible families were likely to see them, social network groups, asking interviewees if they could recommend anyone they knew to take part and drawing on the networks of our researchers.

The table below gives demographic information on the 36 participants.

Summary:

- Age – half of the participants (18) were aged between 31 and 40 years old
- Gender – two of our interviewees were male
- Relationship status – more than half (21) of the participants said they were married
- Ethnicity – six different ethnic groups were represented with the majority (17) identifying at White British
- Children – due to the selection criteria all had at least one child but the majority of interviewees had one or two dependent children
- Employment status – none of the research participants worked full time
- Housing status – almost half owned property
- Disability – three stated that either they or one of their children had a long-

term limiting illness or disability

- Local area – almost all participants were residents in the Nottingham City conurbation
- Monthly income – most (24) had household incomes of £1-1,900 per month

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of interviewees

Age	<20	20-30	31-35	36-40	41-50	>50
	1	4	7	11	8	5
Relationship status	Co-habiting	Divorced	Married	Separated	Single	Widowed
	2	2	21	2	8	1
Ethnicity	Asian/ British Pakistani	Black African	Mixed White & Black African	Other (N African, British Muslim)	White British	White other/ Eastern European
	8	4	1	2	17	4
Children in household	1	2	3	4	5	7
	10	16	6	2	1	1
Employment status	Part time	Part time (partner full time)	Part time/ sessional	No work; (partner full time)	Self- employed	Self- employed (partner full time)
	12	12	3	4	4	1
Housing status	Owner/occupier with a mortgage			Renting council/private		
	17			19		
Disability status	No disability			Disability of self or at least one child in household		
	33			3		
Local area	NG3/4	NG5	NG6/7	NG8	NG9	County/ south of the river
	5	7	9	5	5	5
Monthly income	£1-1.4k	£1.5-1.9k	£2-2.4k	£2.5-2.9k	£3k (maximum for study)	
	10	14	5	6	1	



4. Ordinary Working Families, holidays and short breaks

Are breaks available to all?

Our participants were overwhelmingly in support of the principle that a holiday is something that all working families should be able to afford. However, they were more nuanced in their assessment of whether this was a realistic possibility for them:

We are in a society and culture which promotes and pushes holidays and breaks, it's normalised yet so many people can't afford them, it's not fair.

(Amanda)

As is demonstrated throughout our study, the regenerative benefits of breaks include the impact on an individual's mental health and wellbeing, the strengthening of family relationships, the opportunity for new experiences, and the chance to break out from relentless routines. These are findings consistent with both the literature on social tourism and the Family Holiday Association's own assessment of the impacts for their clients. For our interviewees in particular, the cost of taking regular short breaks or a summer holiday could be prohibitive. Irregular working hours or self-employed status meant that it was difficult to take time from work. In two adult households, it was not always possible for both partners to be away from work due to employment contracts and costs. Caring commitments for elderly relatives or other family members also acted as a barrier.

Careful management of household finances was key to being able to afford short breaks and holidays. The families had different approaches to ensuring they could afford to go away, with different emphasis upon the importance of holidays, but all families ensured their household bills, rent or mortgage were paid first before budgeting for breaks. None indicated that they would consider borrowing to finance a break.

Work, for many, is hard. The intensive nature and long hours of work with comparatively little financial reward means that families seek rewards and recuperative benefits by other means:

Being in lower paid work often means you are working very hard in labour intensive, physically demanding roles, and need a break but can't afford a holiday, so there is no reward for the hard work.

(Selena)

Carole noted that ‘...it’s not just about having a holiday away, just constantly working is not sustainable’ and for Kathie, ‘you go to work for 40/50 hours a week, you should get at least one week to build relationships’. Heather pointed out that by working ‘you give up time for your family ... holidays help bring family together and have quality time together’.

Long and demanding working hours were compounded by the additional challenges and pressures of childcare. Kathie, highlighted that ‘some families don’t have much help in the day to day from other family members so really need a break’. Even those with extended family members living close by could not always count on their help either due to strained family relationships or the commitments those family members had. Diane identified the care and education of children as a priority that took precedence over others:

...families have to think about children and making sure they’ve got everything they need, clothes, equipment etc for the everyday as well as their future versus a holiday.

(Diane)

Some participants identified the policy challenges and potential interventions that are discussed throughout this report and in the literature. Mareka pointed to her experiences in Belgium and Paris where ‘if you work then you get a discount on transport and bills like gas and electric and other things, they incentivise work but not in the UK, you work to pay bills’. Razaana called for ‘support from charities to help vulnerable families’ because she felt that everybody ‘regardless of whether you are working or not should be able to get away’. This seems to directly appeal for the kind of support offered by the Family Holiday Association. All interviewees were provided with material on the charity and how to access a referral if required. Rachel reflected on her own childhood experiences when schools ‘would subsidise and take children on holidays and you had the factory fortnight [where local employers closed at the same time for 2 weeks over the Summer] so families could take a break which helped’.

Rowena identified the problems of the ‘commercial enterprise’ of holidays that are ‘not for the least well off’. Amad indicated that this had been their experience growing up with the family unable to afford a holiday, but nowadays: ‘the pressure from the government to work means that people have a lot of pressure, so yes, they should be able to afford a break’. Parvina went further:

Definitely shouldn’t be a privilege for a few. If you are looking at the health of a nation then diverse packages to suit different budgets should be available and holidays made accessible.

(Parvina)

This sense of expectation about whether a break was a priority and the view of what types of experiences children should have access to had to some extent been set by the interviewee’s own childhood experiences as well as by the current household situation:

I think it’s hard because when I was a kid I did loads, and I still do always want to do everything. I was in a brass band, and school production, and all those sorts of things, and I did all the school, after school athletics club. [My partner] is the complete opposite. He didn’t do anything. His parents never encouraged him to do everything, and he was a very typical

teenage boy, and didn't do anything. He's got this kind of discrepancy, and no expectations, I suppose, of what kids do.

(Rowena)

For some there was a marked difference between holidays from their own childhood, and those they provide as parents for their own children. This was both in terms of frequency and holiday type. For example, Rowena and Chris talked about having one or two weeks away when they were growing up each summer:

...those annual two-week holidays, I think, we used to take almost every year up until I was about eighteen.

(Rowena)

We used to go once or twice a year, generally in the UK, and then we used to go abroad, but we used to go just to a cottage somewhere.

(Chris)

However, recent holidays with their own children would often be staying with their parents, organising an occasional break to stay in a cottage or going abroad tagged on to a work trip. Interviewees said these generational differences were mainly due to current financial limitations. This meant that whatever their expectations, or even preferences, based on their own childhood experiences, current financial resources determined the type and regularity of breaks available to them.

Others experienced less choice in holidays when they were growing up. For example, Rachel spoke about subsidised school trips as being her main holiday as a child, Tonya growing up in Eastern Europe recalled the occasional trip to a Black Sea resort, and Gabby remembered the 'factory fortnight' when her parents were off work.

Chris cautioned about 'managing expectations' in relation to what type and frequency of break should be expected but recognised that 'everyone should be able to have some time away'. Gabby was also circumspect, identifying the difference between a 'need' and a 'want', framing holiday entitlements as a personal choice, but one that was constrained by the resources available to that family. This was not necessarily seen as being a fair situation:

It's about priorities, certain things need to be sacrificed, some people do live on absolute subsistence level and only survive whilst others spend money without thinking.

(Gabby)

Ayesha recognised the personal choice in whether to prioritise taking breaks, but also emphasised the pressure to consume and the broader social expectations about having holidays. For her this is not about covering the basics of being 'happy, fed and comfortable' in addition to having a holiday, but rather an either/or choice:

You're working not just to live and get by but there are people who can't afford things and get into debt because they feel the pressure and the expectation, you're constantly told you need xyz holiday, it can cause more stress, the money the preparation etc, rather not be in debt than have a holiday, defeats the objective of a holiday, I would prefer to be happy, fed and be comfortable.

(Ayesha)

Sajid stated that for people struggling financially ‘the holiday concept creates pressures’ and encouraged the idea of thinking of other ways to ‘find time out’. He described his traditional cultural norms as meaning ‘there’s a level of acceptance... it was never an expectation to go away for the purposes of a holiday’. However, Sajid indicated that this was changing as the priority for second and third generation families was different. There was less need to visit Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and a growing realisation of the ‘need to have a break’. In other cases:

Some people still have connections to Pakistan through marriage and also people priorities visiting religious places so some people are compelled to go Pakistan and Saudi and the holiday moves down as a priority.

(Sajid)

Do working families prioritise holidays and short breaks?

No matter how desirable access to a break was the families felt that they had to ensure they could afford the essentials of everyday life, particularly for children. This is not to say that they did not value breaks. Out of the thirty-six families, thirty-one said this was because they prioritised family essentials such as food, clothing and paying household utility and mortgage/rent bills. For all who said they prioritised daily family necessities over taking a holiday or a short break, a shortage of money was key.

Nursery fees were mentioned as being a significant expense and one which has increased dramatically in recent years, which took priority over being able to afford a holiday or a short break.

Eight of the families said that prioritising holidays or short breaks was important. This was managed in a variety of ways, including visiting family. For one household, there was a tension between what could and couldn’t be afforded with the priority of a holiday being seen as desirable ‘in my mind’ but the financial reality meaning that this was not possible.

The overall picture was of parents wanting to do the best for their families by providing positive and lasting benefits in terms of holidays and breaks, but often struggling to do this for financial reasons.

Summary

Our participants were overwhelmingly in support of the principle that a holiday is something that all working families should be able to afford. However, they were more nuanced in their assessment of whether this was a realistic possibility for them. The regenerative benefits of breaks include the impact on an individual’s mental health and wellbeing, the strengthening of family relationships, the opportunity for new experiences, and the chance to break out from relentless routines. However, the demands of employment, caring responsibilities and limited household finances meant that even if breaks were seen as a priority, they were not always accessible. This sense of expectation about whether a break was a priority and the view of what types of experiences children should have access to had to some extent been set by the interviewee’s own childhood experiences as well as by the current household situation. All households balanced family budgets in order to take holidays and it was not something that they took on debt in order to do.

The impact of short breaks and holidays

If you have a working life without a holiday, that's close to servitude, there's no other word to describe it, other than that's the exact definition of modern slavery, you're just working for a living, there's nothing else there.

(Chris)

The people we spoke to shared with us an insight into how it can feel like a relentless struggle to invest time, energy and financial resources into simply keeping all aspects of life going. There were variable levels of control evident in the extent to which this balance was maintained. All households put considerable emphasis upon money management. However, the fluctuations in earnings due to unpredictable hours at work or the change in employment patterns, or losing a job coupled with the very low levels of disposable income meant that unforeseen costs could jeopardise plans for breaks and also place the household into a precarious financial situation. Our participants' experiences in this regard are supported by evidence of the rise in insecure and unpredictable employment as well as stagnating wages for the majority of low to middle income families. Nottingham Civic Exchange is leading an initiative 'Good Work Nottingham' which aims to tackle and offer policy solutions to some of these issues in the city www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/nottingham-civic-exchange/good-work-nottingham

Many other factors are also outside of the control of individuals – for example, the requirements of children at different ages, relationship break down, changes in work contracts, and so on. These are not just objective factors. How each family is affected relates to their own subjective wellbeing and the psychological effects of being in precarious situations. The level of individual, family and community resources each household is able to draw on is an important factor in supporting resilience and the ability to cope.

Set against this, holidays or breaks provide important points to build resilience for individuals and the family unit in several ways. Participants cited a number of benefits and impacts from taking a break, including those related to their own mental wellbeing, a break from the routine and something to look forward to.

We need to have something to work towards. We work day in day out so it's important to have a break as a family. We perk up when we book early and have something to look forward to.

(Tracy)

For children, breaks were seen as an opportunity to make memories, providing activities away from 'the screen', seeing different cultures, learning in the broadest sense, and enjoying time as a family. Whilst there was some mention of planning and budgeting for a holiday causing stress, overall, breaks were seen to provide families with important time together which in turn strengthens relationships and allows more in-depth conversations. This matters for resilience, a holiday holds a family together as a coherent unit.

Making memories, strengthening relationships and the ‘ticking clock’ of childhood

Holidays and breaks are crucial, it's the time when we are all together, when can spend time together, which is the main purpose of the holiday. It helps us to bond, especially for my partner as he is working.

(Rachel)

The respondents talked about the importance of making memories, and that having short breaks or holidays was crucial to this. However, the time to make memories with children was limited because once old enough to spend their leisure time with their friends and peers, families and parents became less significant. Families spoke of the pressure to make memories through short breaks and holidays before their children grew up. This was a significant source of further pressure for families with younger children. Not having the financial resources to provide holidays meant that some felt they failed as parents:

It's definitely important, especially as the children are growing up and getting older, it's become more important. I feel like we are running out of time before they won't want to go on holidays with us.

(Samantha)

Our participants told us about the importance of sharing new experiences together and how this in turn creates memories that can be treasured. Breaks away together were seen as important family time where shared memories are created. Selena saw breaks as ‘really good clock off time from life. You're in the zone with each other to bond’. During her interview, Samantha became very emotional as she reflected on the importance of being away together, especially as a single parent, pointing out that ‘being able to get away helps you to get to know each other and bond’.

Kathie also used the word ‘bond’, particularly pointing to the opportunity to spend time together as a family with her husband who routinely works long hours. Work, school and home care routines separate family members into different spheres of responsibility and experience. In contrast, the opportunities afforded by a break enable whole families to bond and to build their relationships through shared time, location and activities. This was demonstrated in Razaana's example:

You communicate as family unit, laugh, talk and this has an impact on relationships. A new environment and being outdoors impacts on wellbeing. Going away creates a space in your head, you plan things/activities together. Every family should consider a short break, it's important.

(Razaana)

Gabby also highlighted how such experiences help the family ‘come into alignment’:

Being together is important and enjoy the company of the children and get on with each other, consolidates the family, there is nowhere or no opportunity for avoidance so things come to the surface and you have to deal with issues so that you can then go off and do things as individuals, so really beneficial to truly connect.

(Gabby)

This 'having to deal with issues' is important. The holiday not only provides an opportunity to escape the everyday routine but also where necessary to deal with difficulties, such as mental health issues, as discussed below. The holiday is both escapism, but also a space to focus on challenging issues faced by family members.

Julie noted that a break:

...makes us stronger as a unit to get away. With both of us (parents) working, it's hard for us to get quality time. But it's important to stop and listen to each other. It feels like we can get to know each other again.

(Julie)

For Charlotte it was about the memories that are formed and captured from new experiences together:

It's nice, a nice event and occasions, we take pictures of the children on the beach for the first time – capturing those moments. Want to take the children to somewhere different and do different things and see the world.

(Charlotte)

This emphasis upon capturing the first time experiences of children highlights the 'ticking clock' pressures parents felt to create these memories whilst children were at a young age. Where people couldn't take holidays away from home memories were made through shorter, memorable activities closer to home:

because we can't get away I will make that time at home, spend the day in town, bowling, go for a buffet... Also some community organisations have events and day trips where they organise transport, which helps as it's cheaper.

(Selena)

Selena explained further that:

Going away does not necessarily mean a break. We live in a flat, so we go to the local park and we do this together, so it's a break. It's about understanding a break in a different way, there are different ways of bonding together, switching off the phones.

(Selena)

Yet Selena felt guilty for not being able to take her children on holiday. As she says: 'In April we went for a day trip but a holiday is about packing the suitcase and aeroplanes'.

Memories of time away were strong and acted as a motivator to create new memories. As mentioned earlier, parents were evidently drawing on their own formative experiences in reflecting on the importance of breaks and other activities for children:

...I grew up with holidays, exploring new places, relaxing and spending time with the family brings you together.

(Heather)

Reflecting on her visits to parents in Cornwall, Amanda illustrated how these trips helped to create memories:

We don't go away much other than our visits to my parents but because it's Cornwall we can go down to the beach which is free and other such things. It's a lovely memory, we laugh and talk about it when come back.

In her account, Amanda went on to describe the different animals, wildlife, sites as well as the sensory changes of being away – the air, smells, and beauty and how all of this helped the family to recharge and to get away from the 'everyday mundane routine':

Different experiences were clearly important to many of the families and this included making friends and seeing things from outside of normal experience. As Diane noted:

The world is evolving and it's important to know people outside your own circle, also when you go away you don't think about work, you laugh, play and have fun and get to know the family better.

(Diane)

Breaking routines

It's a huge difference. It's time free from gaming and the computers, it's about spending quality time together, rest time together, time out, time to do new things, it's very healthy to have good distractions, it gives a different perspective and it's very restorative.

(Maya)

Linked to the notion of new experiences was the importance of breaking routines. As we have found, much of the pressure faced by working families is in how the balance between work, family life, caring responsibilities for children and other family members, is underpinned by the constant challenges of a low income or precarious work. In this context, the chance to break a relentless routine becomes even more important. Rowena highlighted the importance of getting out of 'the normal routine of balancing work and life'. The countryside enabled her to 'feel relaxed and grounded'. Tonya described how a break 'raises the spirits' and provides an escape 'from the house, and everyday problems'. Rachel also stated that the 'dedicated time together' provided a flexibility in routine which was 'important for the children too'. As Dalma noted, the daily routine often disallowed regular time together so breaks had a 'big impact':

...it's very relaxing, you're not thinking about anything, have fun spending time with husband and family as we don't have much time for each other normally, on a day to day.

(Dalma)

Mareka found that breaks provided both a relief from daily stress but also the opportunity for exploration of cultural traditions with her children:

You feel relaxed, there's not much stress, no phone calls and letters which can destroy your day. Being away makes you feel relieved and relaxed, you get away from the day to day routine. You have quality time together, laugh, cook special traditional food together with family, which the kids get to taste and also they can practice their mother tongue.

(Mareka)

Even activities which compromise the daily routine at home can be framed differently when undertaken on holiday, as April suggests:

We're more relaxed as a family, enjoy doing nice things and even walking the dog together is a pleasure. We can recharge our batteries...You're not waking up to an alarm clock, being out of routine is good, and making breakfast but not being rushed, those kind of things.

(April)

This was a point echoed by Lucy who explained that even getting up early to look after her child on holiday felt like a change from the 'sameness' of home. Dalma noted that time away was 'good for [me] mentally' with the breaking of routine contributing to feelings of wellbeing which were evident throughout the interviews.

I'm a nicer person, not having to time things about homework and bedtimes routine, so away I'm more relaxed and friendlier, no deadlines.

(Hafi)

What this illustrates is that for women domestic and childcare responsibilities are not removed whilst away from home, but that simply carrying them out in a different environment can have some positive effect.

Chris took a slightly different view to others, questioning the quality of breaks with young children and his concern about having access to a child-friendly environment. This highlights the fact that the point in the life course of a family influences the ability to take breaks, and the types of breaks seen to be suitable:

It can be more hassle than it's worth with very young children and the logistics of packing can mean it's not that refreshing. It would have to be really child friendly accommodation for it to be relaxing for us for anything like a week.

(Chris)

Summary

The interviewees talked about the importance of making memories, and that having short breaks or holidays was crucial to this. Families spoke of the 'ticking clock' pressure to make memories through short breaks and holidays before their children grew up. This was a significant source of further pressure for families with younger children. Holidays also strengthened the bonds between family members and facilitated new experiences together. Linked to the notion of new experiences was the importance of breaking routines. Much of the pressure faced by working families is in how the balance between work, family life, caring responsibilities for children and other family members, is underpinned by the constant challenges of a low income or precarious work. In this context, the chance to break a relentless routine becomes even more important. The holiday is also an opportunity where necessary to deal with difficulties, such as mental health issues. It is both escapism, but also a space to focus on challenging issues faced by family members.

What happens when families are not able to take a holiday or short break?

Guilt and 'failure'

We asked participants to reflect on what happens if they are not able to go away, and to describe the impact of their ability/inability to go on holiday or a short break. A range of feelings were disclosed, from those that affected the individual to wider impacts on the family. Feelings of 'guilt' were commonplace.. Amanda felt 'stifled' by her environment and her exposure to holiday adverts did not help:

You're teased by billboards and adverts, you feel stuck, especially where I live, it's a very deprived area, not a very nice sight...

(Amanda)

As a result, Amanda felt 'awful, the kids always know that you can't afford things and have to make sacrifices because the family budget doesn't stretch' but when she did spend money on treats and holidays, she felt 'guilty':

We went for a coffee in Cornwall and the children had ice cream it cost £17 and I felt really bad because I thought I should spend that money on better quality clothes and shoes which will last them longer rather than such one off experiences and expenses which have nothing to show for it.

(Amanda)

Despite constantly trying to make ends meet and to provide experiences for children Rose said 'I feel like we are failing pretty much every day'. This was a common sentiment echoed by Selena who felt guilty when she saw her children's cousins being able to go away on holiday. Jane stated that her eldest child would say 'this other family's been to Florida and is always asking to go on a plane, so there is that pressure'. For Charlotte, it was frustration at not being able to provide the same experiences she had when she was a child:

...as a child I did go away and it's something I would like to do with my children to create memories and experiences and exposure to different people and places and cultures. Holidays are useful learning experiences and also an opportunity for relaxation.

(Charlotte)

This source of guilt and shame was compounded when children returned after the school holidays to be faced with peers asking where they went and to be asked to draw upon the experience of going away in classes at school. Parents talked about developing innovative ways (such as day trips) to provide something for children to be able to speak about in these situations so that their child would not feel left out or ashamed.

Heather reflected similar feelings of guilt based on her own childhood experiences, expressing that she felt 'pride and joy' when she was able to afford to take her children away.

Nothing to look forward to, feel sad and slightly guilty as I saw so much when I was young, and I can't give my children those opportunities to see and appreciate different cultures and countries. I don't want them to miss

out on life experiences which you can't teach from a book. It breaks down fear of flying and new places and new people.

(Heather)

Selena and Amanda's exposure to others going away was a theme shared by both Samantha and Ayesha who felt guilty for their children. Samantha stated:

at school they do activities after holidays about what you did over the summer and this only highlights the differences between the children and yet they are trying to create level play field with the school uniform etc. As a single parent it makes me feel like that I can't provide for my kids.

(Samantha)

It's depressing if we're not able to get away, I get holiday envy and get resentful that [lack of] money stops these experiences, I feel I've failed.

(Ayesha)

Children were seen to be exposed to different experiences when away from home. Parents expressed guilt and frustration at not being able to provide this and felt their children's social and cultural education was being impacted, seeing holidays as 'useful learning experiences' which their children were missing out on.

Lucy described what she called 'working mum guilt', being unable to spend more time with her child. From her perspective the absence of a break meant there was 'Not anything to look forward to, stuck in work, life, school and keeping going...'. If Lucy was to afford a holiday, she would have to do more overtime, reducing the time she was able to spend with her child. But as a result of this, the 'special' experiences were unattainable.

Impact on mental health and wellbeing

Listening to these comments about guilt, shame and worry it is possible to understand why almost all of the respondents commented about the clear benefits to mental wellbeing of being able to have a break, and described the negative impacts of not having a holiday to look forward to, or to see a break from their daily routine on the horizon. In this sense breaks impact on a broad sense of mental wellbeing. The relentless nature of everyday life meant that both looking forward to breaks and the holidays themselves provided respite. This sense of not having respite from the daily routine and the negative impact this had on mental wellbeing is very clearly articulated here by Rose:

It's a long time just to, kind of, sat in a fish bowl, going around doing the same things, and seeing the same things. You kind of end up in the funk, I suppose, is the word, you can use just like, this is this, and this is this again, and the kids ask as well, especially my older one, when are we going to a holiday house? I want to go a holiday house.

A break in the routine, as I say. We're, sort of, very much in the school runs, the school run routine, walking around my little block, and that's it. It's just something about having a change, isn't it? It brings you out of yourself a bit. You can see further. Different horizons make you realise that your little block isn't all that there is, or reminds you, because obviously

sometimes you just forget. I get, personally, very caught up and dragged down in the day to day routine. The cleaning, the cooking, the trying to fit my work in, whining kids.

(Rose)

This complex relationship between domestic and childcare responsibilities being the source of mental stress, whilst at the same time seeing time together as a family as a positive contribution to mental wellbeing was evident. All but two of our interviewees were women and as it is women in particular who take on the majority of domestic and care responsibilities this complexity came through strongly in their experiences.

Parents felt that children received more positive attention from them when away from the daily routine. In one case, a child disclosed self-harming behaviour to a parent whilst on a holiday. The parent felt that the disclosure would not have happened in the same way in the daily context. She also commented that the space created on holiday allowed her to respond in a more thoughtful way to the disclosure.

He does. He bottles things up. He does suffer a lot, [her son] does. I mean, he's had a lot of...history with mental health problems, he doesn't deal with things very well. When we were on holiday, we had quite a situation. He told me that he was self-harming, and I had no clue whatsoever. I don't know why, and it seemed so much calmer. The way I handled probably at home wouldn't be the same.

(Tracy)

Hafi's experience of being under considerable financial pressure meant that she had 'accepted we're not going away' and was making a 'conscious effort to do normal things, [like] sit down together in the house' but the day to day pressures were impacting negatively upon her ability to do this.

Diane and Carole described frustration. Carole described the frustrations of not being together as a family. As a result, Carole experienced 'low mood due to excessive work load of husband'. For Diane, this was as a result of missing out on the positive rehabilitative effects of holidays:

it [going away] affects you mentally and psychologically, you leave your thoughts behind and refresh your head and get a fresh perspective.

(Diane)

Linked to guilt was the feeling of having 'failed'. Gabby described feeling:

Like [I'm] not fulfilling/providing things as a parent and envy people who have the financial freedom but accept my situation... [I] feel like a failure.

(Gabby)

Maya felt like she had 'failed' and this was 'depressing' in light of being a 'very vulnerable family, very delicate'. The impact for her was that:

stress levels build up, it's depressing, my life has a very mundane routine and I miss not having the highlights, you become more inward looking and self-absorbed.

(Maya)

The impact on mental health was picked up by Julie, who stated:

I just sit there and cry. It really has an effect on how I feel, and on my mental health. We need to have something to work towards. We work day in day out so it's important to have a break as a family.

(Julie)

Rachel suggested that without a break, there would be negative impacts linked to being in the 'same routine' and the 'same place' – 'the day to day grind is not good for your wellbeing and quality of life. The pay back of holidays is very beneficial'. Lisa also identified these feelings, stating that she was:

...the person who finds it the hardest, as I'm at home, and not at work or school, while my oldest two actually ask if they can spend a day at home. My world is very shrunk with choosing not to work, it's very small, so even going into town is a break, and something to look forward to.

(Lisa)

All but two people we interviewed were women, and their responsibilities often included not only paid employment but caring for children and the home, as well as care for other family members. Mental health issues were a particular concern for them. This highlights how the conditions of economic insecurity and the impact of having or not having breaks is experienced through the lens of gender.

Summary

A range of feelings were discussed when participants reflected on what happens when they are not able to go away, from those that affected the individual to wider impacts on the family. Feelings of 'guilt' and 'shame' were commonplace. Children were seen to be exposed to different experiences when away from home. Parents expressed guilt for not being able to provide this and felt their children's social and cultural education was being impacted. This was compounded when children returned after the school holidays to be faced with peers asking where they went and sometimes also to be asked to draw upon the experience of going away in classes at school. Most significant was the clear benefit to mental wellbeing of being able to have a break, and the negative impacts of not having a holiday to look forward to. The relentless nature of everyday life meant that both looking forward to breaks and the holidays themselves provided respite. This sense of not having respite from the daily routine and the negative impact this had on mental wellbeing was evident in almost every interview. However, the complex relationship between domestic and childcare responsibilities being the source of mental stress, whilst at the same time seeing time together as a family as a positive contribution to mental wellbeing was evident. In particular, women who take on the majority of domestic and care responsibilities highlighted this complexity.

School holidays and term-time travel²

All families who travelled or wanted to travel with school-age children were impacted upon by school policies related to absence during term-time. Lisa's expectations of being able to go on holiday were low, on account of costs in school holiday times being 'not family friendly'. April points out that 'there is a cost to having to stick to the rules'.

The obvious and most recurring issue was related to the increased cost in flights, other travel and accommodation during the holiday period:

When we visit my parents it's often timed around the school holidays when everything is expensive. The prices for everything go up, accommodation, food, parking and flights. They also do road works over the holiday period which means you are stuck in traffic for hours and so burning more fuel.

(Amanda)

Diaspora communities and those with wider family networks overseas were likely to be particularly disadvantaged for a number of reasons, for example, through visiting relatives abroad either for family occasions or, in some cases, because illness or another emergency required it. Several of our participants cited examples of this:

It's good that parents need to keep their children in school but the policy is strict, so when I was visiting my sick parents in Pakistan it went down as an unauthorised absence, but it can depend on the attendance rate.

(Hafi)

Travelling during the summer seasons could be both expensive but also uncomfortable for young children, as Ayesha identified:

This affects us greatly as we would love to go and visit family abroad in the cooler season but school holidays at that time are too short and the summers are too hot abroad. We have taken the kids but do try to work around the set school holidays.

(Ayesha)

The general complexities of family life and the need to care for others outside of the home were also implicated as a factor. For Heather:

First child is about to start school, so dreading it as I go on holiday with my parents to support my dad with caring responsibilities for my mum and they go twice a year in term time, so it's going to impact on me and them.

(Heather)

2 School holiday term time policy is as follows www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence:

You have to get permission from the head teacher if you want to take your child out of school during term time.

You can only do this if:

you make an application to the head teacher in advance (as a parent the child normally lives with)

there are exceptional circumstances

It is up to the head teacher how many days your child can be away from school if leave is granted.

You can be fined for taking your child on holiday during term time without the school's permission.

Hamida, who has never been on holiday, was still able to identify a hypothetical situation where the policy would impact upon her: 'if I needed to visit my other children, if something happened'.

The perceived inflexibility and threat of sanctions loomed heavily for some parents, and Jane for example decided against risking the impact on her child's education that might result from missing two days at school:

We have a family wedding at a weekend coming up in Devon, and we were going to take oldest out of school on a Friday and a Monday, so we were going to be fined, which we can't afford, but we were told we won't be charged but it would be unauthorised absence so a big stress, and it would go down on her record, so we're coming back a day early so that she doesn't miss school on the Monday. I hate the policy and I think it's stupid.

(Jane)

There was evidence of inconsistency in how the interviewees felt the rules had been applied and how parents had worked the system to enable children to attend family events during term-time. Chris noted that 'I do think it's a harsh rule, and it's not even a hard and fast rule as it depends on the head'. April also noted this: 'it does depend on the school as to discretion in applying the fines'. It was this inconsistency that parents found as frustrating as the policy itself.

This included reporting a sickness absence or not reporting at all with no consequences.

Done this twice, one week each time, not sure how the discretion works but school did not refuse and wasn't fined. Wish it was possible to have two weeks a year that could be authorised, otherwise it costs too much and I'd rather they changed the rules.

(Tonya)

Some weighed up the costs of paying fines over the added costs of going away during school holiday periods and decided that it was better financially to remove children and pay the fines rather than bear the costs of holidays during the school break.

However, many parents on a point of principle, did not take their children out of school or found the decision to do so a difficult one. Selena said that if she had the money, 'I would only work around the school holidays as I don't like the children to miss school' but that 'It is cheaper to take holidays outside of school holidays', whereas Razaana was clear that she 'wouldn't take kids out of school, it's not fair on them as they miss out on their education'. Kathie stated:

Personally, I would not take the kids out of school in term time to go on holiday as I feel their education is very important, so it means we pay a lot more to get away; but I know parents who do take kids out during term time.

(Kathie)

Throughout the interviews, Maya referred to a desire to 'stick to the rules'

Because I play by the rules... It just makes me uncomfortable. I've never liked them missing school particularly, and I've been lucky in that they haven't had to, and they've rarely missed any, but I don't know. I don't think I could relax because I'd feel uncomfortable. I'd feel like I'm doing something naughty.

(Maya)

Sajid identified a number of interconnected issues in his contribution highlighting how the decision about whether and when to take children away from school for holidays was interwoven with many other factors:

In the past when the children were young we took two of them out of school for two months but the policy didn't exist at the time. We went to Pakistan for various family events such as weddings and took the kids out of school. I think school attendance is important but there are other things that support learning.

(Sajid)

On another occasion Sajid had told the school that his child was sick and this experience highlights another issue many of our interviewees raised – the fact that the school did not check or follow up with the child when they returned. No effort was made to cover the work which had been missed and the school also failed to request a doctor's note. This struck Sajid and other interviewees who raised this issue as unprofessional. He believes that this is due to the quality of the school and the perception of the parents:

The other issue is if you can put an eloquent argument forward and are from a middle class background they treat you differently. It was a failing school placed under measures, with a change of head twice in one year but my son did well. They can't get their own house in order, inner city schools have so many issues, teachers off sick, lack of continuity of teacher and they focus on bums on seat and target compliant families and label those kids and families.

(Sajid)

Some participants argued that holidays can provide an educational experience in their own right and so the experiences children gain on holidays were viewed as a contribution to the child's education in its broadest sense, so in some part justifying removal from school for short periods:

There needs to be some judgement but people can't take the mick, but there needs to be flexibility, not happy about paying the fine but I would do it for a wider education, travelling is important, it's even education going to the beach, exploring the forest, going abroad with different cultures, languages, even getting swimming skills.

(Lucy)

Samantha stated that she did not want to disadvantage her child by missing out on school, but identified that schools could be more proactive in supporting those who did take time out:

You have to put the holiday request in to the school weeks in advance but that's got nothing to do with the school helping or preparing any work to support you and the child... all the onus is on the parents, if there was more support from the school I would take him out of school. The request only legitimises the absence, there is no other reason and there is no follow up from the school.

(Samantha)

In all but two cases, those with pre-school aged children understandably said that the school policy had no impact on them though some indicated looming problems as the children approached school-age. Chris was one of those affected by others needing to build their holidays around school holidays: 'our childminder has to take their holidays during school holidays so we have to fit in with that'. Carole noted the impact on taking breaks locally: 'there is the ripple effect for example activities are limited or don't take place during term time'.

The key frustrations about this policy were that it disproportionately impacts those on low incomes or with family networks abroad, and that the policy is inconsistently applied.

Summary

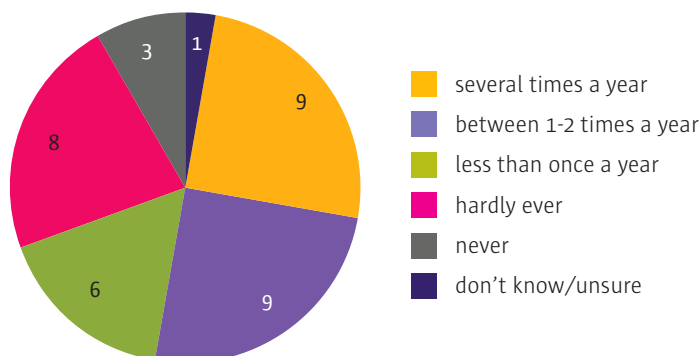
The policies around school holidays and absences have received much media attention, notably through high court rulings in favour of parents who refused to pay fines. Criticism is levelled at policies that are, 'based on pre-industrial social rhythms [that] are struggling to cope with the pattern of modern lives' (Guardian 2016³). In this study, we spoke to families who found holiday travel impossible to attain on account of costs, and made more difficult by prohibitive seasonal inflation. There was significant evidence to suggest families weighed up the moral case for keeping children in school but found prohibitive policies to be unfair. Furthermore, many families have ties that extend beyond borders, or caring responsibilities beyond the home, and in these cases, they require flexibility to be able to travel during periods that avoid extreme weather or are more responsive to the normal family patterns of celebration and support for wider family members.

3 The Guardian (2016) 'The Guardian view on term-time holidays: give them a break', 13th May, available at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/13/the-guardian-view-on-term-time-holidays-give-them-a-break

How often do people take a break?

The participants were asked how often they usually managed to take a holiday or have a short break.

Fig 1: How often are you able to take a holiday or a short break?

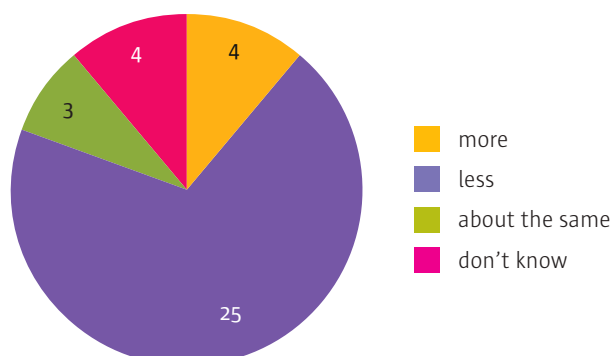


Our questions around the frequency of holidays and short breaks reveal some interesting insights into the diversity of people's experiences of going away. The simple quantification of results (highlighted in figs 1 and 2) somewhat masks this diversity. We looked at all descriptions of activities the interviewees referred to as a break or holiday and although our participants were often able to point to fairly recent trips away, or evidence of going away at least once a year, the range of activities that fell within this was considerable. It covered everything from day trips to London, an overnight stay in Wales, to holidays abroad.

Fig 1 shows that half of the participants said they usually managed to have a holiday or short break at least once a year. One participant was able to have a break each month and did so to stay with relatives as part of an ongoing family commitment. However, some had not been away for several years, while three said they did not go on holiday or had never had a holiday as a parent with their child or children. Changes over time to the frequency families were able to take breaks was dependent on a number of factors, for example, having a new baby, a change in financial circumstances or because of a partner's work commitments.

We asked participants whether they went on holiday more, less or about the same as other families they know (see figure 2).

Fig 2: Do you go on holiday more, less or about the same as other families that you know?



Maya was right to state that ‘it depends who I’m comparing to’. Amanda, for instance, was not sure:

Don’t hear about people going on holiday so can’t say, just hear about holidays in social media and billboards but not from people in my neighbourhood, the kids are all playing outside in the holidays.

(Amanda)

Most, however, felt that they got away less than other families. Heather compared herself to her friends from university when she stated that she went away less: ‘[they] go on luxury holidays and also more frequently’. Kathie drew on her neighbours and people she knew to compare, stating that her family went on about the same number of holidays compared to her neighbours but less than other friends who did not live in the same area:

...we live on a council estate and the children go to the local school, which is in a disadvantaged area so all the families are in the same boat and have similar holidays, but when compared to other friends, we have less holidays.

(Kathie)

Costs were cited as a recurring reason for taking less breaks than those they compared themselves to, with Jane highlighting childcare costs as a prohibitive factor: ‘[I] feel awful about it but with a baby in nursery the costs are high’. Rowena said that costs were the major factor, even when thinking about cheaper alternatives such as camping but pointed out that the ‘initial outlay for [camping] gear would be expensive’. In Dalma’s case, it was the combination of time and cost:

Less, because of commitments and time, we have a very tight schedule because of work and study and also financially can’t afford it.

(Dalma)

One strategy that Dalma had used was to build on a break to a work conference in Canada she attended. Chris had also managed to combine a work-related visit to Italy with a week-long family holiday. Two participants, Selena and Hamida, described never going away and four others said they travelled less than others. Razaana prioritised supporting her ‘children to take part in international school trips, which can be expensive’.

Sajid’s reasons were less to do with cost and more to do with cultural norms where travel for recreation was not necessarily prioritised:

Less, hardly ever, it wasn’t part of the cultural norm, at the most you did day trips but things are changing now, our older children go regularly.

(Sajid)

There were four participants who indicated that they took more breaks than other people. For two people (Chris and Julie) this involved frequent shorter breaks, rather than big holidays:

[We are] very lucky, and do quite well really, if we can structure it and plan in advance, probably more weekend breaks with family in Devon, but not as many big holidays.

(Julie)

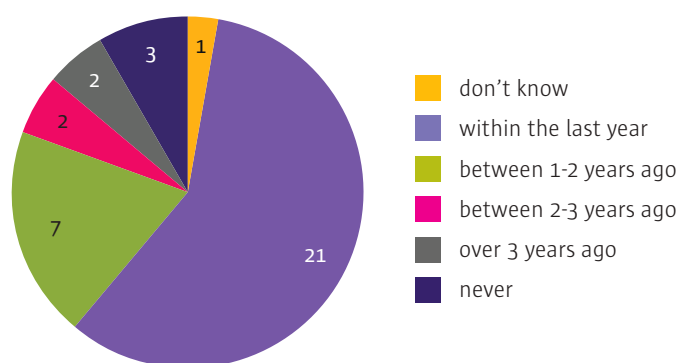
The use of shorter breaks was common amongst others who indicated they were ‘about the same’ as others. For instance, Carole indicated that her family would take 3-4 breaks a year but these were short in duration. Amad, focused on days out:

...not holidays, and keep it local. “My children don’t like going out”, but in the summer holidays they do like going away with their dad. I like more days out, going to the climbing centre with a Wowcher.

(Amad)

We asked people to tell us about the last time they went on holiday or took a short break (see fig 3, below). Whilst most indicated that they travelled less than those they compared themselves to, there was evidence that the majority of our interviewees had been away within the past year.

Fig 3. When was the last time you had a holiday or a short break as a family?



However, as we highlighted above, what constitutes a break varies considerably. Rowena’s breaks were paid for by her parents, enabling her to get away for 2-3 times a year. She also visited her parents but did not consider this to be a break because ‘it can be challenging’.

Others also received family support to enable them to take a holiday. Hafi had visited Pakistan to see sick parents. However, they had taken time out to do:

...some sight-seeing in Lahore to get the cultural feel of the old markets, which was all very different with beggars on the streets. We enjoyed seeing the extended family and trying out different foods, as well as being able to eat at McDonalds, Nandos, Pizza Hut, KFC because it’s all Halal over there.

(Hafi)

Ayesha and her family had been camping locally for two nights, described as ‘nice, a different setting and a change’ and an alternative to hotels which ‘are too expensive’. Diane had been to Paris with her partner before the arrival of their baby but felt now that ‘even going to London is too stressful’. Others, like Carole, had been away but a visit to France for a long weekend was to ‘attend [my] sister’s wedding...[we] didn’t get a lot of family time’. Kathie and her family had managed a trip to Mablethorpe for four nights within the past year and Gabby recalled an overnight ‘spontaneous’ trip to Wales. Parvina described two trips this year as ‘unusual’ – Turkey in June and Scotland in September – taken as a ‘treat for my daughter who has been unwell’.

Jane had joined a group of friends to go away to Cornwall in August:

We could forget about home life and enjoy days together. The children were the only kids there with seven adults, so they loved it.

(Jane)

Lisa's last holiday had been to visit London for a week, made possible by free accommodation and keeping an eye on the daily expenses incurred while being away:

...[we] stayed with friends, so no accommodation costs. A lot of attractions are free eg museums, and we could afford to eat out a bit, but we did take flasks of tea and our own biscuits to save money when going out for the day, otherwise going for a coffee together can soon mount up.

(Lisa)

Another money saving approach was adopted by Tonya, who had collected vouchers to take a holiday:

Very recently, October 5th this year, used vouchers from the Sun (newspaper) and went to Yorkshire to a caravan park, went with friend and her son, swimming, walking, arcades, usual caravan stuff.

(Tonya)

Summary

Interviewees expressed subjective feelings that they were more disadvantaged in terms of holidays and breaks than those they compared themselves to. Alongside this, there was some evidence to say that most of the interviewees had been away for a break within the past year, with some taking more than one break a year. However, as was demonstrated throughout the exploration of these figures in the case study interviews, breaks are not all that they seem. Some of our families were combining trips with wider caring responsibilities, others classified a break as even just one night away from home, work and daily routines. Some participants described breaks to visit family in the UK and abroad. The challenges of costs (including the challenges of saving up for a holiday) and time away from work was a source of worry for many.



5. Policy recommendations

The evidence from this report and elsewhere highlights the potential for short breaks and social tourism⁴ to confront challenges high on the policy agenda: social isolation, poor mental health and wellbeing, and social and economic exclusion and precarity. Holidays can create a nurturing environment for children and young people to develop confidence, motivation and skills.

And yet there is very little policy direction or leadership on social tourism in the UK, which is in stark contrast to other parts of Europe which recognise it as a social right and a welfare measure, appreciate its positive impacts on struggling families and benefit from the economic and fiscal returns of investing in social tourism.

Although holidays have not historically been seen as part of the UK's social welfare tradition, there is significant scope to shift the dial. Initiatives such as ScotSpirit (see below) are indicative of what can be achieved.

Nottingham Civic Exchange has worked with the RSA to propose some policy initiatives which could be explored in relation to these areas. Below we propose two types of policy and practice responses. The first is to explore a step change in policy. The second sets out examples of how we might capitalise on opportunities to use existing policies, programmes and resources to promote social tourism.

A step change in policy

The rise of in-work poverty, growing economic insecurity and an increasing willingness to challenge some of the punitive elements of our welfare system provide opportunities to take a bolder policy approach to promoting social tourism.

- An Independent Commission on social tourism could be launched to catalyse a national public and policy debate on the place of social tourism in Britain. This could explore what it means and how it has developed in the UK; to what extent holidays are a social right; what the evidence base is and what the best tools and levers are to promote it.

⁴ Social tourism encourages participation in tourism by everyone, including those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged.

- As part of or separately to the above, there should be an exploration of specific funding and investment models to support social tourism, potentially including a form of co-investment between public organisations, businesses, social enterprises and charities, and individuals. In particular, options to establish a national funding pot to support tourism (including social tourism) in struggling parts of the UK should be explored.

Social tourism can complement existing policies and programmes

There is significant scope for policymakers and practitioners to deploy social tourism as a key tool to strengthen policies and programmes related to social welfare, health, work support, regeneration, education and cultural and civic enrichment. In particular:

- The government's on-going examination of and policies related to modern work could incentivise or create legal and ethical obligations for employers to make it easier for workers to go on short breaks, especially those in less secure, casual employment. Employer behaviour can also be influenced through public procurement, ensuring that businesses involved in public supply chains adhere to family-friendly work standards.
- Commissioners of health and social services can explore the potential of commissioning breaks as a social intervention, particularly to support the early intervention and prevention agendas (such as the Life Chances Fund). Pilots could be used to test the social, economic and fiscal (through savings) value of doing so.
- To support the market development and commissioning of social tourism as a public service, short breaks could also form an important part of 'social prescribing' services for particular groups, and support the government's loneliness strategy and programmes.
- More broadly, there is significant scope for collaboration between the tourism industry and public services. For example, the 'Stay Well Network' in Wales is bringing together the Welsh tourism and social care sectors to provide breaks for carers and those they care for.
- Housing associations and other social and community-led housing providers could invest in short breaks as a way of promoting wellbeing and social capital. For example, the Linc Cymru Housing Association⁵ in Wales uses its accommodation to offer 'stay well' short breaks for people with care needs and their families.
- The Work and Health Programme and holistic employment support programmes – such as Working Well⁶ – could research the work-related benefits arising from the increases in self-efficacy and motivation associated with family holidays and short breaks.
- Social tourism opportunities could be funded as part of arts, cultural, civic and heritage projects to support greater engagement of communities with civic and educational projects as well as the cultural assets of the country.

5 Linc Cymru Housing Association www.linc-cymru.co.uk/news/linc-begins-work-with-tourism-sector-to-provide-respite-for-carers/

6 Working Well: www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/working-well-an-approach-to-work-and-health

- Social tourism could be a key lever for regeneration, especially in helping to revive towns that have seen their commercial tourism industries decline (through the economic strategies of Local Enterprise Partnerships, for example). Resources from devolved funds, and funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund and the post-Brexit Shared Prosperity Fund could support this.
- Attach conditions or incentives to funding for tourism businesses or projects, to ensure that it is tied to increased participation from those that are economically marginalised.
- Business leadership in the tourism sector can play a key role. For example, VisitScotland and the Family Holiday Association⁷ work closely with the tourism industry to offer breaks to struggling families. Businesses offer accommodation, holiday activities and transport. The commercial incentive of reduced seasonality and more all-year round employment can help get businesses on board.
- Policymakers should also consider the wider barriers to taking family breaks, for example the prohibitive costs of childcare, which lead some parents to use all of their annual leave to cover school holidays in order to avoid the use of formal childcare.

Term time policies

As the research in this report demonstrates, one of the biggest barriers to low income families being able to go on holidays or short breaks is the cost associated with peak holiday travel and the sanctions imposed on parents for ‘unauthorised absences’ during term time. Some local authorities and individual schools have trialled innovative ways of overcoming this problem – for example by adapting the term timetable to give families an opportunity to go on holiday at ‘off peak’ times. Individual action by schools is unlikely to have a wider impact. It may be worth pursuing more regional coordination. For example, ABTA and the TimeAway campaign have proposed school holidays being staggered by region – as is done in many parts of Europe – to even out the peaks and troughs in demand⁸. There may also be opportunities to complement this with education and holiday budgeting programmes in partnership with tour operators to help ensure families get the best deals possible.

⁷ ScotSpirit: mediacentre.visitscotland.org/pressreleases/scotspirit-breaks-aim-for-another-record-year-2396428

⁸ www.abta.com/news/abta-renews-call-consider-staggering-school-holiday-dates-region



Conclusion

There remains a considerable gap in understanding the benefits of short breaks for Ordinary Working Families and the implications this has for the design of social policy. We have highlighted in this report how both the objective factors of economic insecurity including precarious and low paid work, alongside the experiential aspect of this insecurity including the impact on mental wellbeing, are core to understanding the benefits of holidays for Ordinary Working Family households. We suggest a range of policy recommendations: from using breaks as an early intervention tool; to making tourism both more affordable and more accessible to low and middle income families. We also suggest that tackling the context of economic insecurity will facilitate access to holidays and short breaks. Nottingham Civic Exchange with the RSA and the Family Holiday Association will continue to explore the impacts of economic insecurity in future research and civic engagement projects.



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The Family Holiday Association is the leading national charity dedicated to providing breaks and day trips for families coping with some of the toughest challenges life can bring. Since 1975 it has helped over 48,000 families across the UK. Its vision is for a society where everyone has the opportunity to have a holiday each year.

Nottingham Civic Exchange has been established by Nottingham Trent University to maximise research, policy and practical impact by bringing together university expertise with partners seeking to address the needs of local communities. NCE acts as a resource to look at social and economic issues in new ways. This means facilitating debate, acting as a bridge between research and policy debates, and developing practical projects on a citizen, city and regional level.



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