ARE 'CULTURES OF WORKLESSNESS' PASSED DOWN THE GENERATIONS?

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This report critically investigates the idea of 'intergenerational cultures of worklessness' and that there may be families where 'three generations have never worked'.

Although there is relatively little solid research evidence to support them, these ideas are said to help explain worklessness in the UK and continue to inform recent and current government policy agendas. Our study used qualitative research methods, with families in Middlesbrough and Glasgow.

The report:
- explores the existence of permanent worklessness across generations within families;
- concludes that even two generations of extensive or permanent worklessness in the same family is a rare phenomenon;
- examines whether families experiencing long-term worklessness can be described as having a 'culture of worklessness';
- shows how the impact of complex and multiple problems, rooted in long-term experiences of deep poverty, can distance people from the labour market; and
- argues that policy makers should abandon theories – and policies that flow from them – that see worklessness as primarily the outcome of a 'culture of worklessness', held in families and passed down the generations.

INSPIRING SOCIAL CHANGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was undertaken with families in neighbourhoods of Glasgow and Middlesbrough who had experienced extensive worklessness. Qualitative life-history interviews with different generations of the same family allowed us to investigate the extent to which long-term detachment from the labour market might be accounted for by a 'culture of worklessness'.

The aims and background of the research

The idea that worklessness can be explained, at least in part, by the familial inheritance of values and practices that discourage employment and encourage welfare dependency, is a powerful one. Indeed, much UK policy thinking continues to be based on the premise that workless people can become dependent on welfare and that this dependence is passed on between different generations within families, particularly in neighbourhoods where high rates of worklessness prevail. Through a critical case study approach, using methods and research sites most likely to reveal 'intergenerational cultures of worklessness', the project put these ideas to the test.

'Three generations who have never worked'?

Social statistics suggest that the proportion of workless households with two generations who have never worked is very small — approximately half of one per cent of workless households. Despite dogged searching in localities with high rates of worklessness across decades we were *unable to locate any families in which there were three generations in which no-one had ever worked.* Although we know of no other studies that have explicitly sought to measure or research families where 'three generations have never worked', if such families do exist, logically they will be even fewer in number than those estimated to have two-generational worklessness (i.e. an even more miniscule fraction of workless families).

Eventually, we recruited twenty families where there was:

- a parent in the middle generation (aged between late 30s and mid-50s) who had experienced very long-term worklessness (defined as currently being out of work and having been so for at least the last 5 years — although many had been out of work for longer than this)
- at least one child of working age (typically aged 16 to mid-20s) who was unemployed (most of whom had never had a job).

The difficulties in recruiting this sample, and the need to relax our initial recruitment criteria to do so, corroborates available statistical evidence showing long-term, cross-generational worklessness in households to be a rare phenomenon.

The typical story for the majority in this middle generation was of leaving school and entering employment relatively easily. Despite this early engagement with the labour market, when interviewed, these mid-aged interviewees all had long histories of worklessness. We met two people in the middle generation who had never had a job (recent research tells us that there are no more than 20,230 families in the UK where two generations have never worked).

Rarely were there simple explanations for why individuals in the middle generation had such extensive records of worklessness. Typically, a range of problems associated with social exclusion and poverty combined to distance people from the labour market. These problems included, but were not limited to:

- poor schooling and educational underachievement
- problematic drug and alcohol use
- the attraction of opportunities in illicit economies (such as drug dealing) when legitimate opportunities were scarce
- criminal victimisation
- offending and imprisonment
- domestic violence, and family and housing instability
- physical and mental ill health.

Children of those with extensive worklessness in this middle generation comprised the younger generation of the sample (and were typically aged 16 to their mid-20s). Most of the younger generation had never been employed. Whilst emphatically not occupying 'a culture of worklessness', they carried the disadvantages of being brought up in largely workless households with multiple problems (such as having spent time in local authority care, having faced housing moves that disrupted their education, and lacking the family social and cultural capital that can help people into jobs). Nevertheless, they clung to conventional values and aspirations about jobs. Members of their wider family and social networks who were in employment acted as role models and sources of inspiration to these young people. The main explanation for their worklessness was that they were attempting to make their transitions into the labour market in a period of national economic downturn, and of high national and very high rates of local unemployment.

'Cultures of worklessness'?

Theories about cultures of worklessness suggest that people are unemployed because of their values, attitudes and behaviours rather than because of a shortage of jobs. In simple terms, they imply people prefer a life on welfare benefits to working for a living. A theory of 'intergenerational cultures of worklessness' adds to this by arguing that such values, behaviours and attitudes are transmitted in families, from unemployed parents to their children who, in turn, pass on anti-employment and pro-welfare dependency attitudes to their own children. Over time, these cultures of worklessness become entrenched and are said to explain the persistent, concentrated worklessness that can be found in some British towns and cities.

   We found no evidence to support the idea that participants were part of a culture of worklessness, and none for the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness. Despite their long-term worklessness, parents actively strove for better for their children and often assisted them in searching for jobs. Young people in these families described wanting to avoid the poverty, worklessness and other problems that had affected their parents. Running directly counter to theories of intergenerational cultures of worklessness, the research found that conventional, mainstream attitudes to and values about work were widespread in both the middle and younger generations. Employment was understood to offer social, psychological and financial advantages (compared with worklessness and a reliance on benefits). Interviewees knew it was better to be in work than to be out of work, partly because of the deep and long-term poverty that extensive worklessness had brought to these families.

   The interviewees did not occupy social or family networks that were isolated from employment or from working cultures. Inevitably, given the localities we studied, unemployment was common in their family and social networks – but, so was employment. Even in the very deprived neighbourhoods we studied, most working-age residents were in jobs. A telling finding (against the cultures of worklessness thesis) was the variability of work histories in the families we studied. Employed family members (e.g. other siblings or members of the extended family) sometimes served as role models or provided inspiration, especially to younger interviewees. We found very little evidence of people working fraudulently, 'on the side' whilst in receipt of benefits, which is claimed to be another facet of cultures of worklessness. Many in the sample did 'work', however, if we use the term to mean something more than paid employment. The work of looking after children in very difficult circumstances and caring for other relatives, meant that some women (and it was women rather than men in the main) were limited in their opportunities to engage with employment. Volunteering was not uncommon in the sample; for people with limited labour market opportunities voluntary work has been found to provide some of the positive social and psychological benefits of employment. Finally, some individuals became involved with criminal work, particularly shoplifting and drug dealing, usually to fund their own dependent drug use.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the notion of three or even two generations of families where no-one has ever worked is ill-founded as an explanation for contemporary worklessness in the UK. Such families account for a vanishingly small fraction of the workless. Our research shows that the

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more general idea of 'intergenerational cultures of worklessness' is also an unhelpful concept in trying to understand patterns of extensive worklessness in families.

We would stress that the sample of families in our study is extremely unusual. Their histories of very lengthy worklessness are typical neither of working-class people in Glasgow and Teesside, nor of other people living in poverty and experiencing worklessness. Other research has shown that a pattern of churning between low-paid jobs and unemployment is likely to be a more common experience. What makes them unusual and explains their distance from the labour market is the sheer preponderance of hardships and problems in their lives. The report concludes that politicians and policy-makers should abandon the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness – and, indeed, of cultures of worklessness. These ideas failed to explain even the extreme cases of prolonged worklessness we uncovered so they are unlikely to capture more common and widespread experiences of worklessness.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The idea that worklessness can be explained, at least in part, by the inheritance through families of values and practices that discourage employment and encourage welfare dependency is a powerful one. Indeed, much recent and current UK policy thinking is shaped by a wish to challenge what is perceived as the intergenerational transmission of welfare dependency (DWP, 2010) and 'cultures of worklessness' (DWP, 2012).

We have got places where there are three generations of men who have never worked. If your grandfather never worked and your father never worked, why would you think work is the normal thing to do?
– Dame Carol Black, 2008

For too long, in too many deprived areas of the country, there has been a destructive culture that 'no-one around here works'.
– Gordon Brown, 2003

… there are four generations of families where no-one has ever had a job.
– Chris Grayling, Minister for Work and Pensions, BBC 'Newsnight', 15 February 2011

Introduction

The idea that there are families where members of different generations have never had a job is a short-hand and particular statement of a more

general theory about intergenerational cultures of worklessness. It has become a mantra that is often repeated and rarely questioned. There is no doubt that concentrations of worklessness can be found in some neighbourhoods. Some families, particularly those in the most deprived neighbourhoods, are more likely to be affected by unemployment than others. As we will show in this chapter, there is strong evidence of a possible causal link between worklessness in one generation and the next. What remains open to question is how we explain patterns of worklessness across generations. It is understandable that some people seek to answer this by arguing that anti-work attitudes and cultures of welfare dependency are passed down the generations, especially when this is a viewpoint often promoted by the tabloid press. As we show in this chapter, however, there is surprisingly little conclusive evidence to support this explanation, despite its widespread currency.

Families where 'three generations have never worked': the power of an idea

The idea that worklessness might be cultural in nature arises from the notion that there are sub-cultures — typically in urban areas suffering from prolonged, high levels of unemployment — where work values differing from those of mainstream society have emerged. The HM Treasury Pre-budget Report (2002) argued that:

> *Rising concentrations of worklessness – particularly within inner cities, former coalfield communities and seaside towns – have led to the emergence of communities in which worklessness is no longer the exception, but the norm. Households that have experienced generations of unemployment often develop a cultural expectation of worklessness.*

The existence of intergenerational cultures of worklessness and cultures of welfare dependency has wide political appeal (being influential with the previous Labour government, as well as the current Coalition administration). That workless households are an unnecessary drain on the public purse, are workless largely through choice, are content to 'languish on benefits' and pass such negative attitudes on to children, are also common themes in tabloid headlines:

> *Meet the family where no one's worked for three generations and they don't care*
> *– Daily Mail,* 21 March 2008

> *The Sun declares war on benefit scroungers – help us stop*
> *£1.5 billion benefits scroungers*
> *– Sun,* 12 August 2010

> *4 million scrounging families in Britain*
> *– Daily Express,* 2 September 2011

In our own earlier research we have found that such views are popular amongst practitioners who work with the unemployed. In numerous interviews with 'welfare-to-work' professionals in Teesside, carried out over many years, the cultures of worklessness thesis has frequently been offered

up to us as one of the main barriers to helping the unemployed into work (Webster, *et al.*, 2004; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010).

Since the election of the Coalition government in 2010 these ideas have been employed with renewed vigour. Chris Grayling (2010), the Minister for Work and Pensions, has said that: 'Some areas of Britain are suffering from intergenerational worklessness, which is why we must act now to ensure that children living in workless households are not left behind like their parents have been.'

At the heart of the Coalition government's current welfare reforms is a desire to tackle the problem of 'children growing up in homes where no one works', to prevent worklessness being repeated 'through the generations' (DWP, 2010) and to disallow the possibility that some people might 'regard welfare benefits as a "lifestyle choice"' (Osborne, 2010). So a key goal of the Department for Work and Pension's new Universal Credit (a single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income) is to 'reintroduce the culture of work in households where it may have been absent for generations' (DWP, 2010). The recently launched *Social Justice Strategy* pursues the same theme, with an overriding emphasis on the 'importance of work' particularly amongst the most disadvantaged families (DWP, 2012). Declaring the government 'unashamedly "pro-work"', the *Social Justice Strategy* asserts that policy must transform 'the way people think about work' by 'ensuring that work rewards those who take it, and making it clear that choosing not to work when you are able to is no longer an option' (DWP, 2012). Social surveys suggest that a majority of the general public share the belief that welfare needs to be reformed, with 54 per cent of respondents to the 2011 *British Social Attitudes Survey* thinking that unemployment benefits are too high (up from 35 per cent in 1983) and that they discourage the unemployed from finding jobs. Sixty-three per cent believed that parents who 'don't want to work' are a reason why some children live in poverty (NatCen, 2011).

The cultures of worklessness thesis also feeds into another current policy agenda about 'families with multiple problems' or 'troubled families'. 'Families with children with multiple disadvantages' were originally identified by the previous Labour government's Social Exclusion Unit Task Force (2007) as where:

- no parent in the family is in work
- the family lives in poor quality or overcrowded housing
- no parent has any qualifications
- the mother has mental health problems
- at least one parent has a long-standing limiting illness, disability or infirmity
- the family has low income (below 60 per cent of the median)
- the family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items.

The Coalition government has pledged to help what are often now referred to as 'the 120,000 families' with the most difficult and complex problems (Cameron, 2011). To be clear, this is a policy agenda that is not simply or even mainly about worklessness — although this is part of the definition of the perceived problem. Rather, 'troubled families' are ones said to experience a plethora of interlinked social problems (and to exhibit various problem behaviours), part of which is their worklessness and welfare dependency. The recent *Social Justice Strategy*, for instance, is strongly geared towards tackling the problems faced and posed by 'troubled families' and, as we noted above, is insistent about the importance of challenging alleged cultures of

worklessness as part of this agenda (DWP, 2012). In Chapter 4 we return to the issue of 'troubled families' when we seek to explain the experiences of the people we interviewed.

To summarise, the idea that worklessness might, in large part, be explained by people's cultures (their values, outlooks and behaviours), and that such cultures of worklessness are passed down between the generations, has been influential in the way that the current and previous UK governments have sought to tackle unemployment. These ideas also now feed into wider government strategies for social justice and to help 'troubled families'.

Research evidence

In common with much of Europe, since the recession of 2008 unemployment in the UK has been running at historically high levels. Particular concerns have been expressed about the situation facing young people and their difficulties in accessing the labour market, with over one million 16 to 24 year olds currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) (ONS, 2012).

One impetus underpinning current government welfare policy agendas (discussed above) has been the problem of 'workless households'. These are defined as households having one or more working age adults, none of whom is currently in paid employment. In the second quarter of September 2011, around one in five (19 per cent) households in the UK were workless, that is, 3.8 million households (ONS, 2011). Conversely, the percentage of households where all adults were in work was 53.5 per cent. Figure 1 shows these rates and trends between 1996 and 2011. It also identifies households that have 'never worked', that is, those where none of the working age adults have ever had paid employment. In 2011, this group was estimated to number 370,000 (approximately 2 per cent) of households (McInnes, 2012). Figure 2 shows more clearly how households that have never worked are a small fraction of all workless households.
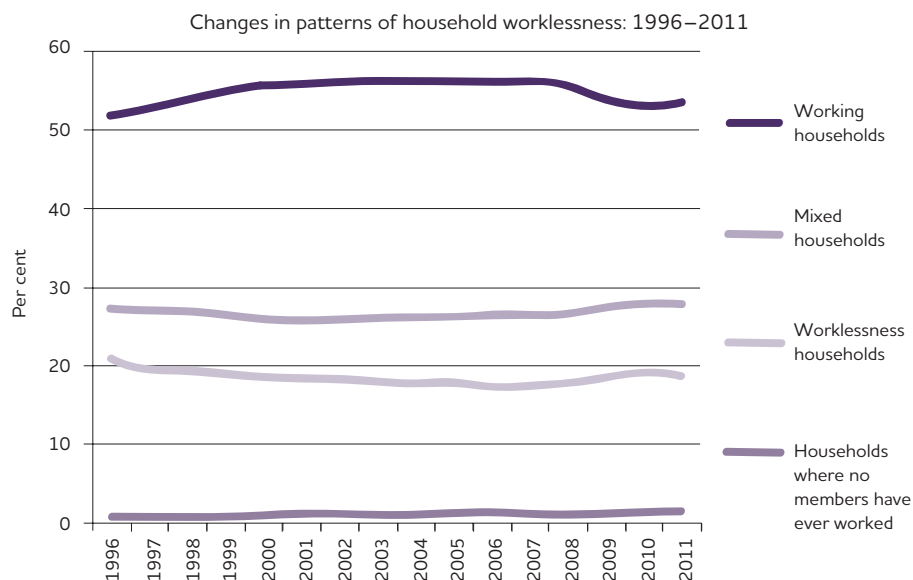
The idea that worklessness might be explained by people's values, outlooks and behaviours, and that such cultures of worklessness are passed down between the generations, has been influential in the way that the current and previous UK governments have sought to tackle unemployment.

Figure 1: Working and workless households in the UK

Changes in patterns of household worklessness: 1996–2011

Notes: yearly figures are for the months April to June. Households where no members have ever worked excludes student households

Source: Labour Force Survey Household datasets

Figure 2: Workless and never worked households in the UK, 1996–2011
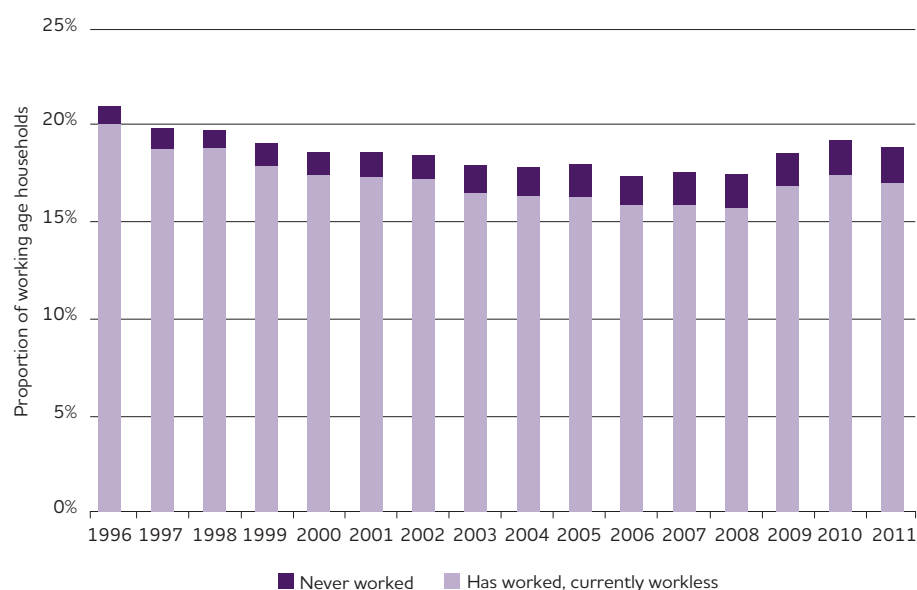
Source: Office for National Statistics/New Policy Institute, 2012

These statistics and trends in respect of worklessness in the UK provide some context for our study. Our focus, however, is on a sub-set of those households identified in Figure 1 and Figure 2 as having 'never worked'. Specifically, we investigated the phenomenon of two or three generations of the same family where no-one has ever worked (and, more generally, the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness).

Recent analysis of available social surveys has cast light on these questions. Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent in the available datasets, Gaffney (2010) has attempted to estimate the size of the problem of two-generation workless households in the UK. He identifies three necessary conditions in the Labour Force Survey (LFS, 2009/10) by which a household is deemed to have intergenerational workless:

1   The household must include more than one generation of the same family.
2   There should be at least one parent and at least one non-dependent child over 18 (or, if not in full time education, aged 16–18).
3   No-one in the household should ever have had a job.

Gaffney identifies 20,230 such UK households (of which 18,070 – 89 per cent – were headed by lone parents). Even on the basis of the necessary, let alone sufficient, conditions – and targeting the logically larger group of two- rather than three-generation workless households – Gaffney concludes that a minuscule proportion of workless households in the UK (approximately 0.5 per cent) can be described as having members across generations who have never worked.

Macmillan (2011) also analysed the LFS (for June 2010) to investigate this phenomenon, operating with a similar definition to Gaffney (above): seeing a two-generation 'never worked' household as one where all members aged 16 or over are currently not in employment (she excluded non-employed students), and who state that they have never had paid work, aside from casual or holiday work. Macmillan arrives at an even lower figure than Gaffney, finding that 'only 15,300 households in the UK have two or

more generations who report to have "never worked", and of these, many of the younger generation have only been out of education for less than a year' (2011).

Therefore, statistical evidence of this sort is strongly against the idea of generations of families who have never worked as being a significant problem. Using large-scale datasets covering different generations in the UK, Macmillan (2010) and the Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions, (CAYT) (2012) have also recently considered a different question: whether young people who grow up in workless households face a greater risk of unemployment themselves (for earlier studies see also Johnson and Reed, 1996; O'Neill and Sweetman, 1998). Macmillan (2011) finds that there is a 'moderate significant correlation in spells out of work across generations' and that 'a son with a workless father is likely to experience between 8–11 per cent more time out of work themselves between 16 and 23'. Over the ages 16 to 29 years, Macmillan found that a son was 20–25 per cent more likely to spend a year or more out of work if he had a workless father. Interestingly, she found that this intergenerational effect 'is strong in weaker labour markets with high unemployment, with no relationship in tight local labour markets with low unemployment'.

A recent CAYT study (2012) also suggests that there is 'some evidence of an intergenerational transmission of worklessness'. Drawing upon different cohort survey evidence to Macmillan, CAYT investigated the effect of growing up in a workless household on the outcomes of children and young people. Controlling for other potentially explanatory variables, parental worklessness was found to be 'significantly associated' with poorer educational attainment and 'with being not in education, employment and training (NEET) and with being NEET longer in late adolescence'. Whilst they found that parental worklessness was an 'independent risk factor' associated with the young person being NEET, the magnitude of this effect was 'relatively modest: young people whose parents were workless experienced between one and two months more being NEET than young people whose parents were not workless'. The CAYT study also stresses that a range of other, negative outcomes for children and young people (e.g. teenage parenthood and criminal behaviour) were not significantly related to parental worklessness once other risk factors were taken into account. The authors argue, therefore, that 'it was not parental worklessness per se that caused poorer outcomes in childhood and adolescence but rather the complex needs and numerous socio-economic risks faced by workless families'. In other words, factors beyond parental worklessness – such as low household income and poverty, family type and family instability, living in a deprived area, low qualifications of parents and so on – helped explain a range of poor outcomes for children.

Neither the CAYT nor Macmillan study was able to explain why this correlation between parent and child worklessness exists. The CAYT researchers are clear that they 'have not necessarily proved a causal intergenerational relationship' and Macmillan suggests that further studies 'are needed to examine the drivers of this intergenerational correlation and to attempt to identify causality in this relationship for policy prescription'. As Macmillan puts it, her research cannot answer the question of whether this is a 'welfare dependency story' (in which cultures of worklessness have developed in areas of high unemployment and been passed down in families, from father to son) or a 'deprivation story' (in which concentrated social and economic disadvantages impact on families over generations, limiting their chances of employment). The conclusion of our study is one which would strongly support the suggestion that this is a 'deprivation' rather than a 'welfare dependency story' (see Chapter 5).

Other studies, typically using different methods (such as interviews or cross-sectional surveys rather than analysis of cohort surveys), have investigated whether unemployment can be explained by cultures of worklessness (i.e. Macmillan's 'welfare dependency story'). Evidence of this would also introduce the possibility of intergenerational cultures of worklessness, with welfare dependency and anti-employment values and practices being passed down in families.

Research completed for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP, 2003) in Salford supports the idea of a culture of worklessness. It argued that the pull of the informal economy, a culture of benefit dependence (wherein people feared leaving the security of welfare benefits) and a 'poverty of aspiration' were all 'community factors' that helped explain local worklessness. HM Treasury and DWP research (2003) also suggested that 'in some areas a culture of worklessness and poverty of aspirations have developed locking people into cycles of worklessness'.

It is often the influence on young people of growing up in families where parents are unemployed that has been a concern for researchers. Page (2000) studied three deprived council estates in England and, on the basis of focus groups and interviews, described 'inward looking communities' and an 'estate effect'. These were characterised by ambivalent attitudes towards education and work, and acceptance of social problems such as anti-social behaviour, and general feelings of apathy. Unemployed young men, particularly those from 'work poor' families, were said to have low morale, aspirations and motivations. Young men with working parents tended to have more positive attitudes to work because, Page argues, they had 'a framework of norms and values much closer to those of mainstream society'. Also with a focus on young people, Green and White (2007) found that family and social networks in deprived neighbourhoods restricted young people's employment opportunities and horizons. The Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) suggests that for young people 'the intergenerational experience of worklessness' could be an influential social framework leading to low aspirations, pursuit of 'the mothering option' for some young women (Craine, 1997) and a lack of longer-term plans for legitimate employment.

There is insufficient space here to provide critical assessment of these various studies but some general observations can be made. First, the majority did not have as their main research goal the investigation of cultures of worklessness. Several are government-sponsored reports that were geared, primarily, towards evaluating or informing regeneration or employment programmes and did not attempt to research cultures of worklessness in a concerted or methodologically robust manner. For instance, not all engaged in direct, first-hand qualitative research with workless individuals or families (some relied more on testimonies from welfare-to-work practitioners). Second, and related to this, none undertook research that directly examined how cultures, values and practices in respect of work and welfare were shared (or not) in families – or, if they were, how durable or widespread these cultures might be. Third, it should be noted that the studies we present as supporting a cultures of worklessness thesis often tend to do so in ways that were far from conclusive. For instance, an evaluation of the government's *Working Neighbourhood Pilot* (Dewson, *et al.*, 2007) found that a lack of suitable jobs that paid sufficient to live on, and a perceived lack of skills and qualifications, were the biggest obstacles to work for unemployed people in their research neighbourhoods. They also, however, came to the following conclusion (emphases added):

> *The persistence of unemployment and economic inactivity across several*
> *generations in many families* may *have created a situation in which*
> *worklessness is seen as the 'normal' and perfectly acceptable way of living.*
> *As a consequence, there are few positive role models for younger people*
> *resulting in, at best, little understanding of what it means to be working*
> *and at worst, in a* possible *widespread perception that it is those who*
> *work who are aberrant. There* may *also be relatively good experience of,*
> *and access to, advice about how to make the most of the benefits system;*
> *and how to avoid or minimise penalties under the welfare-to-work*
> *system.*
> – Dewson, *et al.*, 2007

In other words, Dewson and colleagues emphasise problems with insufficient
and low-paying jobs and with skills and qualifications as the main obstacles to
employment but then provide a much more speculative statement about a
culture of worklessness (note their use of 'may' and 'possible'). Very usefully
for our purposes, Ritchie and colleagues (2005) undertook a thorough
review of evidence on the causes of worklessness in the UK at individual and
community levels. They acknowledge the conflicting and partial evidence
and, therefore, are necessarily circumspect and tentative in their summary
(emphases added):

> *where cultures of worklessness* are said to exist, *they are characterised*
> *by: lowered incentives to work where peers are also unemployed and the*
> *informal economy has a strong pull factor, and a view of joblessness as*
> *unproblematic within a context of lowered aspirations, and short-term*
> *horizons … it can be said that cultures of worklessness* may exist *in some*
> areas, *within which worklessness, in some cases, is intergenerational.*
> – Ritchie, *et al.*, 2005

There are, however, several studies that dispute the existence of cultures
of worklessness (and therefore, obviously, of intergenerational cultures of
worklessness). In contrast to those mentioned above, other government-
sponsored reports have come down against the idea. For instance, in the
early 2000s, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2004) researched what more
could be done to tackle 'the concentrations of worklessness' that existed
at the time, despite the overall low levels of unemployment. The report
concluded that these were largely 'structural' in their causation, resulting
from changes in the job market, 'residential sorting' of disadvantaged people
and other area effects. They found that there was 'no consistent evidence
of a culture of worklessness in these neighbourhoods, in the sense that
people have completely different values and do not want to work at all'
(SEU, 2004). Studies that have adopted a more expansive and in-depth
qualitative approach with residents of high unemployment neighbourhoods
have tended to dismiss cultural explanations of worklessness. For instance,
Fletcher, *et al.* (2008a) in a study of residents of social housing came to
exactly the same conclusion as the SEU (2004); there was 'no consistent
evidence for the existence of cultures of worklessness'. A key finding was
that a main problem for residents was not finding work but keeping it. They
became caught up in a cycle of low paid, insecure work and worklessness.
Interviewees did not view themselves as separated from the rest of society
and saw working as necessary for a positive personal identity. Although
without paid work, they could not be described as workshy: they worked
hard caring for children or other family members, engaged in education or

training and did voluntary work (for very similar findings, see Shildrick, *et al.*, forthcoming 2013, and Chapter 3 of this report).

MacDonald and Marsh (2005) investigated directly whether a culture of worklessness, as posited in underclass theory (Murray, 1990), could explain the experiences of 'socially excluded' young adults in deprived neighbourhoods. Counter to those studies of young people, cited above, that emphasised their disconnection from the values of work, MacDonald and Marsh found overwhelming commitment to the 'social and moral value of working for a living' amongst economically marginal young adults (2005). Similarly, and despite the title of their report (*Destined for the dole?*), the Prince's Trust (2010) revealed a strong work ethic among unemployed young people with over three-quarters agreeing that finding a job was their main priority. A study by Crisp, *et al.* (2009) contrasted policy assumptions about work and worklessness with the experiences of residents living in deprived neighbourhoods. Intriguingly, interviewees agreed with a theory of cultures of worklessness but only in respect of others in their community, not themselves (see MacDonald and Marsh, 2005 for a fuller discussion). Many were trapped in the sort of low-pay, no-pay cycle described by Shildrick, *et al.* (2010) and by Fletcher, *et al.* (2008b) and, like interviewees in those studies, expressed their strong and conventional motivation to work and frustration at not being able to secure better quality or lasting jobs. An overall conclusion of the study by Crisp, *et al.* (2009) was that 'the Government needs to switch emphasis from the supply-side focus on individual employability to consider measures that stimulate employment' (see also Goulden, 2010).

Summary and organisation of the report

On the one hand, we have a powerful and pervasive idea that worklessness can be explained with reference to cultures of worklessness. Several studies have been cited that lend some support to this and, by implication, to the argument that such cultures can be passed down through generations of families. The current influence of the 'intergenerational cultures of worklessness thesis' is found in the ubiquity of taken-for-granted statements, from politicians, social commentators and, sometimes, those who work with unemployed people, about 'two or three generations of families where no-one has ever worked'.

On the other hand, we are not aware of any previous study that has investigated whether three generations of families where no-one has ever worked actually exist. Recent statistical analyses show, actually, that even 'two generation' workless households are extremely few in number in the UK. Furthermore, several studies that have had a concerted and qualitative approach to investigating the idea have found no evidence of a culture of worklessness.

It is this backdrop of inconsistency, contradiction and uncertainty in research findings – together with the contemporary power of the idea in politics, policy and practice – which motivated our study. It had one overall aim:

- to investigate the value of the concept of intergenerational cultures of worklessness and, if shown to be wanting, to seek better ways to understand familial and intergenerational experiences, and processes of worklessness.

Recent statistical analyses show that even 'two generation' workless households are extremely few in number in the UK.

Chapter 2 briefly describes our research methods and reports results in respect of worklessness across the generations in the families we studied. Chapter 3 examines whether these families exhibited a culture of worklessness. Chapter 4 describes the range of interlinked problems that individuals and families in the study reported and how these combined together to distance people from the labour market. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises our main research findings and presents our key conclusions.

2 'THREE GENERATIONS WHO HAVE NEVER WORKED'?

To put the concept of intergenerational cultures of worklessness to the critical test we researched in the places, and with people, most likely to reveal them.

Research methods and sample

As an introduction to our findings it is important to clarify exactly how we went about our research (see Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of the research sites and methods). We identified neighbourhoods with high rates of worklessness and multiple deprivation in two conurbations that have experienced long-term economic decline: Glasgow, in Scotland, and Middlesbrough, in North East England. Both are predominantly white, working-class neighbourhoods with relatively stable populations.

The primary challenge was to recruit 20 families (ten in each locality) where at least one family member in each generation had never been in employment. We hoped to be able to interview at least one member of each of three generations within each family and to include reasonably balanced proportions of men and women.

The practicalities of recruiting a sample demanded relatively broad categorisations of generations.

- The 'older generation' were people typically in their 60s or older; people who had commenced their working lives in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The 'middle generation' were aged in their late 30s to mid-50s and had made their first transitions to the labour market between the mid-1970s and early 1990s.
- The 'younger generation' – the grandchildren of the 'older generation' – were aged between 16 and their mid-20s (although two were in their 30s).

During eight months of ethnographic, community-based fieldwork, many strategies were used to recruit an appropriate sample (see Appendix 1). This included a set of meetings with local practitioners to help us locate families for interview. The idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness was well-known to them. It was one that they often drew on in trying to understand the situations of the families with which they worked. For instance, a regeneration manager in Glasgow stated that he had heard, anecdotally, of families where three generations had never worked but stated that his organisation did not record such information. Similarly, a Job Centre Plus manager told us she did not know of any directly but she had also 'certainly heard' of families where three generations had never worked. It became apparent that most of these practitioner interviewees operated with a loose definition of the term 'never worked'. They often meant families who experienced longer-term unemployment in different generations or families that were known to them because of their 'multiple problems', which might include periods out of the labour market. We met with more than 30 practitioners but none was able to direct us to potential recruits for the study (confidentiality of client records only accounted for this to a small extent). We believe this to be an interesting finding in itself; when pushed to identify families where 'three generations had never worked' these practitioners were unable to do so, despite their apparent belief in the existence of such families and their close engagement with local communities.

Recruitment

Despite the range of our strategies, finding appropriate families to interview who were suitable to an investigation of intergenerational cultures of worklessness proved very difficult. We had to relax our recruitment criteria from three to two generations of the same family where an individual had never worked. When this also proved unlikely to generate a sample of 20 families, we relaxed the criteria further to search for families with 'extensive worklessness' across two generations.

For those in the middle generation we stipulated extensive worklessness to mean a current period of worklessness lasting at least 10 years. For the younger generation, the criterion was that they should have never been employed. They were not required to be living in the same household as their parents (several were now living independently).

In practice, to be able to speak to 20 families about intergenerational worklessness, we had to relax these criteria even further in a few cases (e.g. some in the middle generation had periods of current worklessness of 'at least 5' rather than 'at least 10 years', and a few of the younger interviewees had previously held a job). We applied the criteria flexibly and used our judgement about suitability for the study (for instance, we decided to include one woman in the middle generation, aged 38 years, who was currently a student, but who had rarely been employed). The hardest recruitment challenge was to find people in the middle generation who had known extensive worklessness, and whose working age children had never been in a job.

In summary, we recruited 20 families to take part in the study, all of whom had at least one parent in the middle generation who was workless and had been so for a long time (a minimum of 5 years) and who had at least one working age child who was currently unemployed and, usually, who had never been in a job.

Eleven families (27 people) from Glasgow and nine families (20 people) from Middlesbrough participated in the research. Of the 47 interviewees,

When pushed to identify families where 'three generations had never worked' these practitioners were unable to do so, despite their apparent belief in the existence of such families.

28 were women and 19 were men. Although our recruitment criteria specified that only one parent in the middle generation needed to be workless, it transpired that all middle-generation members of these households were out of work. It only proved possible to interview one family (in Glasgow) where three generations participated because in the other cases these older family members were deceased or too ill to take part. We asked people what was the main 'out of work benefit' they received. The responses were:

- Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA): eleven
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA): eight
- Income Support (IS): five
- Employment Support Allowance (ESA): five
- Carer's Allowance (CA): two
- Incapacity Benefit (IB): two.

In addition, four interviewees in the older generation were retired and in receipt of state pensions, one middle-generation interviewee was a student (and receiving a student loan) and nine interviewees, all but one in the younger generation, reported receiving no income, from benefits or otherwise (see Appendix 2 for a summary of the sample).

Worklessness across the generations

Despite determined fieldwork in localities with high rates of worklessness for decades, and a research strategy that doggedly sought them out, we were unable to locate any families in which there were three generations each containing someone who had never worked. In this section we report what we found to be the dominant stories in respect of work and worklessness across each of the three generations of the families in the study.

The older generation

As highlighted earlier, usually we were unable to interview members of the older generation, typically those aged 60 and over. In these cases, we relied on testimonies gathered from those in the mid-generation for accounts of their parents' lives. Middle-generation interviewees tended to be able to describe the general pattern and nature of their parents' working lives if not all the details. The picture gathered was typically of working-class life histories, commenced in the 1950s and 1960s, when opportunities for employment were more abundant. Some of the men had worked in skilled trades and others had owned small businesses. More common was the unskilled or semi-skilled work associated with the heavy industrial past of Middlesbrough and Glasgow. Women, as well as men, in this older generation were described as having had extensive working lives. Not all were stable and secure in employment – and a small number of men left the labour market later in their lives for reasons of ill health – but the stories we gathered described a culture of work, not of worklessness.

The middle generation

We targeted the middle generation of families first for recruitment, regarding them as being key to potentially uncovering intergenerational cultures of worklessness (and being most likely to enable access to other family members for interview). The typical story for the majority in this middle generation was of leaving school (some before the official school

leaving age) and quickly entering jobs. Despite this early labour market engagement, by the point of interview these mid-aged interviewees all had long histories of worklessness (but only two people had never had a job).

Rarely were there simple or singular explanations for why individuals in the middle generation had such extensive records of worklessness (these are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). Typically, a range of problems and social disadvantages associated with social exclusion and poverty combined together to effectively distance people from the labour market. These problems included but were not limited to: poor schooling and educational underachievement; problematic drug and alcohol use; the attraction of opportunities in illicit economies (such as drug dealing) when legitimate opportunities were scarce; criminal victimisation, offending and imprisonment; domestic violence, and family and housing instability; and, particularly, physical and mental ill health. For instance, at the time of interview, over half of those in the middle generation were receiving some sort of benefit related to ill health (including ESA, IB, DLA and CA).

The younger generation

Working-age children of those with extensive worklessness in the middle generation comprised the younger generation of the sample. All were currently unemployed and the majority had never had a job. Of the 21 people interviewed in this generation, 16 were aged twenty-one or under. They were attempting to make transitions into the labour market in a period of national economic downturn and of high national and very high rates of local unemployment. These younger interviewees were raised in 'work poor' households that also faced wider, multiple troubles. Younger family members were, to an extent, disadvantaged by this family background (see Chapter 4) but had not yet faced the extended periods of worklessness of their parents. Nevertheless, their employment prospects appeared to be bleak.

Conclusion

We conclude that confident assertions that there are three generations where no-one has ever worked – and even that this applies across four generations (Grayling, 2011) – are likely to be only that, assertions. When subjected to rigorous investigation the 'three generations who have never worked' idea starts to crumble as a serious explanation of worklessness in the UK. Of course, it is not impossible that such families might exist somewhere, but we were unable to locate them even in the most likely places and using the most likely research strategies to find them. The older generation in our study was typified by a culture of work, not worklessness, and more buoyant labour markets in the immediate post-war decades make this idea implausible. The available statistical evidence (discussed in Chapter 1) for two-generation worklessness shows such families constitute only a tiny fraction of workless households. Logically, three generations 'where no-one has ever worked' would be rarer still.

The sheer difficulty we faced in fieldwork in locating a sample of families that had experienced extensive worklessness over two generations, and the relaxing of our measures of what we meant be 'extensive worklessness', would seem to corroborate the available statistical evidence (see Chapter 1). With hard searching we were able to locate families with extensive worklessness across two generations. This finding should be tempered with a reminder that the younger generation are relative newcomers to the labour market, who have been trying to make transitions

When subjected to rigorous investigation the 'three generations who have never worked' idea starts to crumble as a serious explanation of worklessness in the UK.

to employment in very difficult economic conditions. Long-term worklessness in the middle generation was typically the outcome of the combination over time of a range of social problems associated with poverty and social exclusion, which impacted negatively on well-being and distanced people from already difficult local labour markets. We return to a discussion of these processes in Chapter 4. Next, we examine the evidence we gathered about interviewees' values, outlooks and practices in respect of work, welfare and worklessness.

3 CULTURES OF WORKLESSNESS?

We were unable to find evidence to support claims about 'three generations of families that have never worked'. Nevertheless, it might still be the case that families with extensive worklessness across two generations inhabit cultures of worklessness.

Cultures of worklessness are said to involve the transmission of values and practices between parents and their children, helping to explain their unemployment. It is this idea that we interrogate in detail in this chapter. Steered by the research literature, it assesses what we found from interviews regarding key aspects of what is claimed to characterise cultures of worklessness. The chapter is organised around the following themes:

- attitudes to and values about work
- attitudes to and the experience of living on welfare
- searching for jobs
- worklessness in wider family and social networks
- work outside of formal employment
- aspirations and horizons.

Attitudes to, and values about, work

The main tenet of the intergenerational cultures of worklessness thesis is that young people are socialised into the welfare dependency of their parents. Investigation of this idea formed a key part of our interviews.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees told us that they were strongly in favour of the value of work over a life on welfare. This included individuals claiming JSA (and who, apparently, were capable of entering paid work) and those who were claiming DLA or IB (and were clearly less able to enter employment). This viewpoint also held across generations. Of course, it might be expected that interviewees would make statements that avoided the stigma of being seen as work-shy or welfare dependent. However, the consistency and force of answers given to questions like this (within and

across interviews), the openness with which interviewees discussed other sensitive issues and experiences that would not cast them in a good light, and our ability to probe and challenge what people said, are all factors that convinced us to accept these statements as accurate. Interviewees identified the positive social psychological benefits of working that have been widely reported in other research (e.g. Jahoda, 1982; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005), even though their engagement with employment had been fleeting at best. Work provided structure to days, goals in life and a sense of purpose. It allowed social connectivity and enforced activity. It relieved boredom and was a source of self-esteem and pride:

> *It gives your whole day some sort of order. It's like a regimental thing …*
> *whereas if you are just sat around it can be frustrating and awful, really.*
> – Patrick Richards, 49, Middlesbrough

> *It gives you an interest, it broadens your mind and gives you a sense of*
> *self-satisfaction, I suppose.*
> – Carrie Smith, 52, Middlesbrough

> *Yeah, it's very important for your self-esteem; for everything – just for*
> *the way you are.*
> – Vera Lamb, 54, Middlesbrough

Very importantly for theories about intergenerational cultures of worklessness, we found that parents in the middle generation were unanimous in not wanting their children to suffer the extensive worklessness that they had. Linda White (51, Glasgow) said simply that she wanted her children's life to 'be a lot better than mine'. Kenny Jamieson (48, Glasgow) said of his children who were in jobs: 'I think they seen what I've been through and chose not to go that way. And I'm proud of them. I'm proud of my wee girl. I'm proud of my wee boy'. Roy Cunningham (50, Middlesbrough), had been out of employment for 25 years due to a long-term disabling condition ('it's soul destroying, it's just killed me'). He said:

> *What I want is for my family to have jobs, you know? They're not asking*
> *for anything big, that's the thing, they are not, like, being greedy.*

Workless parents made great efforts to ensure that their children did things differently – that they should avoid what they often regarded as having been the mistakes of their own lives. Archie Wilson (42, Glasgow) was determined that one of his sons, who was employed, should stick with his job:

> *It doesn't matter if he doesn't like it. He's keeping it and he's still got a job*
> *and he knows what he'd be getting on the broo [welfare] and what he's*
> *getting now, know what I mean? It's a big difference. So he knows; he's*
> *not going to give his job up or anything.*

Our younger interviewees shared in the same attitudes towards work as their parents, sometimes directly stating that they did not want to end up in the same situation as them. Unusually, we interviewed three members of one family together (the Martin family, of Glasgow). Here Leanne (17) describes her ambition to work as being influenced by what she has observed of the depressing reality of the long-term worklessness of her mother, Claire, and her uncle Douglas:

Interviewees told us that they were strongly in favour of the value of work over a life on welfare.

Interviewer: *So can I ask you Leanne, do you think it's important to work?*
Leanne: *Aye, cause I don't want to just … and I don't mean this bad Mum, against my Dad or you Uncle Douglas, but I don't want to just sit, just sit …*
Claire: *End up like us.*
Douglas: *Vegetating.*
Leanne: *Aye.*

Younger interviewees talked of the social, psychological and financial motivations to work, combined with an understanding of the realities of unemployment:

Of course it would be important to me [to have a job], especially when I'm only on £95 a fortnight. God, to have a wage that would be £95 a week; I would feel like a millionaire! I would love to be able to have money to go out and buy things and know that I've earned it for myself. You know, that's why you live. I don't want things given to me. I'd be able to look to the future, put some away knowing that I've worked for it and earned it myself.
– Verity Lamb, 16, Middlesbrough

I'd take anything. Who would want to be on the Job Seeker's Allowance? It's not even a lot to live on. I would love to go out and work every day … instead of just sitting about.
– Jade McGinn, 18, Glasgow

I've always wanted to be able to say to somebody, 'I work here', 'I'm going to my work'.
– Pamela Fraser, 21, Glasgow

This motivation towards working was sometimes particularly strong for people who felt that either they or their families were stigmatised in the community. Individuals sometimes wanted to prove that they could hold down a job and that they were different from the rest of their family. Kerry White (31, Glasgow) had grown up in very difficult circumstances (her mother was a heroin user and she had lived in care for periods of her childhood). She described how she felt when she worked as a volunteer in a nursing home when she was 18:

I remember having my tunic on and going down Parkhill and the older ones, that seen my mum as a junkie, seen me as a wee hairy [a derogatory term for a young, working-class woman], seen us all as kind of riff-raff, they used to go 'Oh, are you working?' They would look at me, shocked, because I had a work uniform on. And it made me all the more determined. I thought 'everybody's thinking I'm just going to be the next wee drug addict growing up', and it's kind of made me stronger, the more people react like that to me.

For young people, having a job was about more than having money or staving off boredom. Unemployment represented a life on hold. Without a job, there was no future because the markers of adulthood – independence from the family, finding one's own accommodation and starting a family – all were difficult, if not impossible, without a job. Only one young man expressed a more ambivalent attitude to employment. Stephen Reid (20,

Glasgow) described how he wanted to find 'something decent' and was not prepared to take any 'shitty job' in order to leave the unemployment register.

Attitudes to, and the experience of, 'living on welfare'

Extensive worklessness in families is associated with long-term, family poverty. This is hardly a sensational finding but one that perhaps needs repeating given contemporary statements about 'unemployment as a lifestyle choice' (Osborne, 2010). It is also critical to understanding informants' expressed commitment to employment as preferable to a life on welfare. All of our respondents told us that life on welfare was a struggle and the hardship of sometimes deep poverty was graphically expressed:

> *You're fighting for your life here. Do you know what I mean? It's this area. Poverty from day one. You're not brought up, you're brought up to be survivors. We've had enough now and it takes its toll and you end up mega depressed with it.*
> – Kenny Jamieson, 48, Glasgow

Vera Lamb (54, Teesside) also described being 'very poor' when she was growing up:

> *... it was an existence. You can imagine what it was like. There was no fire on, no luxuries, no nowt, nothing. The house was full of mice and bugs. Proper Oliver Twist in those days ... Here you're living hand to mouth, you know what I mean?*

Poverty was not history, nor just a memory of older interviewees. Younger interviewees also told us of their current struggles with living on welfare and in poverty. Charlotte Harris (21, Glasgow) lived on IS with her young daughter:

> *It's hard to ... see when I get my money? I have to budget everything, have to write it all down, how much it is going to cost, for all the messages [shopping] and sometimes she [her daughter] cannot get clothes. Or I walk about like a tramp most of the time because you've not got the money ... I find it a real struggle, you have to budget absolutely everything. You cannot go 'oh I'm going out with my pals'. I have to go 'right well, maybe in three months I will be able to go out'.*

Socialising was severely restricted and, as we have found previously (Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010), the absence of holidays, even day trips, was emblematic of lives lived in poverty. Neither Janet Nash (40, Middlesbrough) nor her son Connor (16) could recall ever having been on holiday. Trudy Lamb (25, Middlesbrough) responded to our question here by saying:

> *What do you mean, like a day out [of Middlesbrough]? [pause] ... I don't believe this! I can't remember! I can't, I really can't – when was the last time I had a day out, Mam?*

Cultures of worklessness are sometimes said to be typified by attempts to maximise welfare benefits in illegitimate ways (see Ritchie, *et al.*, 2005). We found no evidence of this. Indeed, because of their age, several of the younger interviewees were unable to claim benefits at all, and some

interviewees appeared to have little understanding of those benefits to which they might be entitled. Similarly, a preference for the security of life on benefits is said to be a feature of cultures of worklessness. Only two interviewees commented that other people might reject low-paid employment in favour of the security of welfare benefits. One person, Michelle Gordon (45, Glasgow), referred to the potential security provided by Housing Benefit payments:

> I mean OK, the only advantage to being unemployed is if you're living in council accommodation, you're getting your rent paid. That is the only advantage I see. At least you don't have to worry about being put onto the streets. But that's it. It does not go any further than that. That's the only thing I have, security in knowing I've got my house.

More regularly, informants described being prepared to take minimum waged work and they found nothing to recommend in the experience of being on benefits. In short, for most life on benefits was a constant struggle and it was this recognition of the deep and lasting poverty associated with long-term worklessness that led respondents to positively value work. As Ryan Blenkinsopp (54, Middlesbrough) put it: 'I've got no life being on the dole … it's a miserable existence. I wouldn't wish it on anyone.'

Significant changes to the welfare system were being enacted by the UK Coalition government at the time of the fieldwork. These were having direct impact on the families we interviewed. In addition, we talked to many people outside Job Centre Plus offices (see Appendix 1) who had recently been moved off sickness benefits and were being forced to make new claims for other benefits. Most said that the process of transition between benefits had not been straightforward and some reported that their benefits had stopped abruptly without warning and that they had been left with no income at all to support themselves or their families. Interviewees reported the loss or curtailment of benefits often with a sense of dismay and incomprehension. For instance, the husband of Alice Hopkins (53, Middlesbrough) had been declared 'fit for work' despite his long-standing and terminal illness. The family appealed against the decision: '… it went through in February and it was denied and he was dead. It was denied and he was already dead!' Some people reported a direct, negative impact on their mental health when they were moved from sickness related benefits to JSA. Often it was the uncertainty brought about by this process that caused most stress, exacerbating existing difficulties sometimes with a dramatic impact. For instance, Pamela Fraser (21, Glasgow) had become ill with depression whilst working as a hotel housekeeper. She signed on for ESA but this was recently challenged. She attempted suicide, attributing this partly to the stress of the work capability assessment that deemed her fit for work (she recently won her appeal for ESA but was still struggling to access mental health services at the time of the interview):

> See that decision, that changed my life, because, see, the social security they were on my back and then I was getting scared … So all this was getting to me. I drank a lot … and the social security were mucking about. I wasn't getting paid [ESA]. That meant my rent wasn't getting paid, so I was in rent arrears and everything. It really scared me actually 'cause I thought I'm going to lose everything, 'cause of the depression. A couple of months ago I took an overdose and took two cardiac arrests.

Searching for jobs

We were not only interested in exploring people's attitudes to work and to welfare. We were also keen to investigate their practices (for instance, in respect of job search activity). Given the stigma associated with long-term unemployment and living on benefits (tabloid attacks on 'welfare scroungers' were rife at the time of fieldwork), an important challenge for the research was to try to get behind what might have been understood by informants as 'acceptable answers' to our questions. Through challenging, probing, approaching topics in different ways and by questioning other family members we did our best to gain insight into people's behaviours and to map these against what they told us about their attitudes towards work and welfare.

Evidence about job searching was mixed. In the younger generation many did appear to be very active in searching for jobs. Connor Nash (16, Middlesbrough) had only recently left school but said, 'I have applied for 120 jobs and haven't got one.' Fred Smith (17, Middlesbrough) was in the same situation:

> *I'm just trying to find a job. Get the interview. It's easy enough to send them off [applications]. At home I've got a big file of CVs – it's got my welding CV in it, it's got a CV for all the jobs I've applied for, with a covering letter. I've got about 50 CVs in there.*

Some of the middle-generation interviewees were also actively searching. Archie Wilson (42, Glasgow) had only ever been employed for three years since leaving school (because of prolonged engagement in crime and drug use and subsequent imprisonment). Yet, life on the dole drove his commitment to work. He was an active job seeker, getting up 'early every morning' to call into factories and garages, on the off-chance they had jobs going, and to visit different Job Centres: 'I'll see what jobs they have got … even if they have not got a vacancy I'll get an application form and sent it in because you never know your luck.' He went on:

> *I just hope I get a job. That's it, I just want a job. Once I get a job I'll get myself … everything sorted out. I just want a job so I can just live my life, know what I mean? Because I cannot live off that [benefits], do you know? You're always skint and I hate that, you know what I mean? I would rather be out grafting and getting money and whatever. It's killing me being unemployed; it's killing me so it is. So I'm dying to get a job, I prefer to work.*

Overall, however, most people in the middle generation seemed relatively inactive and resigned to their unemployment. They strongly held the view that working was better than not working but at the same time were aware that their chances of finding work were very slim. The extensive literature on long-term unemployment and 'the discouraged worker effect' shows that pessimism and fatalism are typical responses to a protracted period of worklessness (Jahoda, 1982; Ashton, 1986). Sometimes people said that they were looking for work, but the efforts they described appeared limited and unlikely to lead to jobs. Some of our younger interviewees in particular seemed to lack knowledge about how best to look for work. For instance, Maisie and Verity Lamb (17 and 16, respectively, Middlesbrough) were adrift from the labour market and, it appeared, from practical support to help people into jobs. They both expressed a desire to work but this did not seem

to feed into active, organised or successful job search practices. Maisie said: 'Me and my sister, she was helping me to look for some [jobs] yesterday. It didn't really work out. We were looking in newsagents' windows and things and, well, it didn't succeed.'

An important finding, which contradicts the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness, concerned the efforts to which parents went to help their children into jobs. There were many instances of this in interviews. Susan Morrison (39, Glasgow), for example, did a newspaper delivery round with her younger children (aged 12 and 10) to teach them work-related values and discipline: 'to give them a wee start, to learn how to earn money'. Some admitted that they may come across as hypocritical – emphasising the importance of work when their own labour market involvement had been so limited – but the determination that their children have better lives ran deeply across the interviews with parents. Peter McGinn (55, Glasgow) talked about his ambitions for his children: 'I know I've wasted most of my life so I don't want obviously for them to do the same.' His daughter Jade (18) is currently out of work, but Peter encouraged her to apply for jobs:

> My dad's always on my back. Because he says that I've just given up and ... he's saying that I shouldn't give it up. My dad's always been, like, pushing me to get a job all the time. He always pushes us.

Peter would accompany Jade to job interviews to provide moral support, waiting outside on the pavement until the interview was over. He had also used illegal profits from drug dealing to help establish his older children in legitimate employment. He helped one son by paying for driving lessons and by helping him obtain a 'lock-up' garage from which he now sells car parts. Peter said:

> Got his driving licence, got him a bit of money behind him and he's bought the car part, the lock up, so that was him sorted. My [other] daughter, when she was 16, she was going into caring, but: driving licence, lessons, lessons, car, and that's her away. She was sorted. My older boy, he's been in and out of work. But I help him out whenever he wants.

Worklessness in wider family and social networks

Ideas about cultures of worklessness imply that individuals are cut off from people who work. Living in family and social networks typified by widespread unemployment is said to lead to a sense of normality about life lived on benefits, lowering the incentive to get a job.

Unsurprisingly – because the locations were selected as those where worklessness was widespread – interviewees knew and mixed with many people in similar positions to themselves. Worklessness was common within their immediate and wider families, and amongst their friends and acquaintances. Did this lower incentives to work? We found no obvious evidence of this. Indeed, an important finding is that the individuals we spoke to came from families and social networks where both unemployment and employment were common. Friends, neighbours and other family members had jobs (even if these were often reported to be insecure): they were not isolated in complete cultures of worklessness. Davie Harris (55, Glasgow) said his parents: 'had never seen the inside of a broo [unemployment office] in their life'. Talking of his siblings, he went on:

… they all had jobs and all – but nothing that you could call a career. Just dead-end jobs. Labouring, things like that, you know? My sister she's a machinist and that was her first job when she left school.

His daughter, Charlotte (21), argued that young people do not necessarily end up in the same situations as their parents (both of hers were long-term workless), citing examples in her wider family:

Everybody's different. My older cousin [Natalie], her mum – my auntie – is a drug addict as well. And see, from when Natalie was young, she's worked. As soon as she could she had a paper round, and then she worked in a wee shop across the road from her. Her and her boyfriend both work now. Her sister, my other cousin, she's also working now.

This variability in family work histories is well demonstrated by the White family from Glasgow. Linda White (51, Glasgow) has six children, including Kerry (31), who had known long periods out of the labour market, like her mother. Of the other five siblings, one had never worked and been in and out of prison. One sister was not in a job but bringing up her young daughter. Another sister worked in a betting office and another was currently unemployed but previously worked in nursing homes and in a pizza factory. Finally, one brother was a head chef in a Glasgow restaurant. This variation in employment activity amongst siblings brought up in the same household was not unusual in our sample. It is a finding that runs counter to the idea both that cultures of worklessness are transmitted from parents to children and that workless individuals are disconnected from those in jobs. A significant effect of knowing people in employment was that younger interviewees drew on examples – role models – of employed people from their family and social networks as proof that they too might be able to escape worklessness and get a better life; that they did not have to emulate the extensive worklessness typically experienced by their parents.

Work outside of formal employment

A further feature of cultures of worklessness, it is said, is engagement in the informal economy (see Ritchie, *et al.*, 2005): formal, legitimate employment is resisted because it can be more lucrative to claim benefits at the same time as fraudulently engaging in cash in hand jobs 'on the side'.

Very few of our interviewees had been engaged in working undeclared, 'on the side' whilst in receipt of benefits. Rarely had they been offered it and the barriers in the way to them working legitimately in employment (see Chapter 4) were also ones that stood in the way of them doing such work. Previous studies have shown that people with stronger connections to the formal labour market and a fuller history of employment are likely to have greater opportunities for illegitimate work 'on the side' than the long-term unemployed (Harding and Jenkins, 1989; MacDonald, 1994).

If we consider the concept more broadly, however, there were three types of 'work' that interviewees engaged with outside of formal employment: caring work, particularly mothering but also looking after family members who were in ill health; voluntary work for local community organisations; and particular forms of criminal work.

Childcare

A significant barrier to engagement with the labour market for some of the women in the study was, or had been, their commitment to caring for their children and the difficulties and costs of finding appropriate childcare for them. This is a well-established finding (e.g. Warren, *et al.*, 2009; Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010). Being a mother *was* work. For instance, Carol Cunningham (26) insisted that mothering was an important and difficult 'job': 'You have kids and you see how hard it is. That's like a full-time job in itself. That's not scrounging off benefits, that's you bringing up your kids and it's hard work.' Carol strongly valued her role as mother and purposefully did not look for jobs when her two children were of pre-school age (and since then has been heavily involved in voluntary work, as we describe below): 'If I went out and worked I don't think you'd have a bond, when you're working all the time, with your kids.' She described how her own mother had 'always gone without' and how she herself would prefer to be 'in rags before I'd let my kids look scruffy … anyone can do anything to me but if they call me a bad mum then that's it, I won't take that from no-one'.

The pressures and multiple hardships on mothers in this study made caring for children and bringing them up well especially difficult. Mothers strove to care for their children in adverse circumstances, a commitment that demanded great energy and time, and which militated against getting a job or engagement in further education courses that might improve their qualifications. For instance, Amanda Duncan (50, Middlesbrough) had started a college course but found that she was unable to finish it due to the demands of being a single mother in a new neighbourhood (which meant she had to travel some distance to the college for the course):

> I literally dropped to pieces physically and mentally. I could not do five days a week, three kids, everything, doing my homework. It just proves I could have done with a bit of help. If I had got the support I would have sailed through it. You're back to thinking you're useless, you've failed.

Another example is Kerry White (31, Glasgow). She said she hated where she lived, a neighbourhood known locally as 'the Ghetto', where she feared for her children's safety and what she regarded as the negative effect of other local young people:

> I hate bringing my weans [children] up here. It's a pure nightmare. When I left my partner I ended up homeless and they put me here … They said to me 'it is your one and only offer [of council accommodation]'. It was a pure party den with menchies [graffiti] all over the walls. It had been peed in and everything. Windows all smashed. And I had to take my three weans in there and try and clean it up … I take them [the children] to the clubs every day after school and try to keep them involved in the clubs, but it is so difficult …

More generally, beyond the strains of parenting in adverse circumstances, caring for family members who were ill also limited engagement with the labour market. Alice Hopkins (53, Middlesbrough) had long-term mental health problems, which had become worse since the recent death of her husband. She rarely felt able to leave the house and Martin (34), her son, who lived with Alice, had become her full-time carer. He said:

Now I am on Carer's Allowance because I look after my mother after my father passed away. That's all I do now. I go to the shops for our mam if she needs anything. If our mam goes out I am with her 'cause she can't go on her own. So if I'm not doing things for our mam, I'm either sat in my room playing on my computer or reading, so not really much.

Voluntary work

Many of our interviewees were or had been involved in voluntary work. For instance, Roy Cunningham (50, Middlesbrough) and his wife had been 'doing the voluntary work for 30 year. We've done so much and I've really enjoyed it'. Roy received IB for a long-standing physical disability, a condition precluding him from getting and holding down a job since he was in his early 20s. Roy explained the appeal of volunteering:

You can do your own days. If you don't feel very well you can always say 'well look I'll just not go' but not with a lot of jobs … I would not like to go into a job like that where people relied on us, because I've never liked letting people down. I have my good days but I have me bad days … I mean I'm not making my illness an excuse, but if I say 'I'm sorry I have to go I don't feel very well'. The boss is going to think well, 'hang on, you're getting paid here'. I want to do something but with the condition I've got, how can you?

Carol (26), Roy's daughter, was on IS and had never had a job. She stressed, however, that she was not 'sat back on benefits … the same week my son started full time [at school], I went straight to voluntary work'. Not only did she prioritise mothering as an important social role (see above), she felt that voluntary work was too. Talking of her welfare benefits, she said 'I think that money – well I've earned it. Because I don't sit back and do nothing.' Carol volunteered as a childcare worker with local organisations:

I'm doing something every day of the week. The only day off I've got is Friday. They asked me to do something on a Friday but I said it's the only day I get off work to help out my brother [who was disabled].

She explained why she did so much voluntary work: 'I want my kids to be proud of me, because even now I don't say "I'm going to voluntary work", I just say "I'm going to work", you know?. All in all, interviewees described volunteering as a way of giving something back to society, a way of compensating for not working formally. We described earlier some of the social and psychological benefits of employment, as understood by informants. In the absence of employment, some found some of these same benefits in voluntary work. MacDonald (1996) found the same in his investigation of the role of voluntary work for people in a depressed local economy.

Work in the criminal economy

Finally, some of the middle-generation interviewees had become engaged in work in the criminal economy. Typically, this was in the form of acquisitive crime, such as shoplifting, or in drug dealing, both of which were often motivated by a need to raise funds to support dependent drug use (e.g. of heroin or crack cocaine). Several people reported dealing or having dealt drugs (usually at the lower rungs of the local drug economy). As we describe in Chapter 4, the research neighbourhoods we studied had thriving drug markets. These individuals, leaving school unqualified and poorly educated,

had found opportunities to work illegally in the drug trade to be more abundant and attractive than those in the formal economy. Some were engaged in drug dealing (and dependent drug use) before they even really contemplated searching for legal jobs. Douglas Martin (47, Glasgow) had had a disrupted childhood and formal education. After the separation of his parents he lived with his grandparents, who he regarded as too elderly to supervise him closely. He truanted persistently from school. By 16 he was dealing, as well as using heroin:

> *Did I look for a job? The truth? No, I sold drugs ... just to keep my [drug] habit going. And I never bothered looking for work. And I never have done. And now, I couldn't work if I wanted [because of his drug-related disabilities]. 'Would I have worked if I had the choice?' Aye, if I had the chance, the choice ... maybe, I don't know. Because I was taking drugs [heroin] from 13 so, and when I was 16 I'd been on it 3 year.*

Peter McGinn (55, Glasgow) also began dealing heroin in his teens (but, unusually for those who dealt heroin, he had never been dependent on the drug himself). He had persisted for many years in the same illegal trade, despite repeated convictions and imprisonment:

> *I was just not interested [in thinking about jobs]. Just went, as I say prison, prison, prison, prison. Time, time, time, time. I just, I think it happened, more when I was, I just got into this habit when I was young. And I just could never break out of it.*

So, many of our informants were not, in practice, 'workless', even if their time out of employment was very extensive. In the absence of jobs, work in the form: of mothering in very adverse circumstances; of volunteering; and of criminal activity, occupied many in the sample.

Aspirations and horizons

Some people might be tempted to regard some of the views of our participants as reflecting 'low aspirations'. Indeed, this discourse of 'low aspirations' as explanatory of the social and economic positions of people living in poverty, especially young people, has been very influential in government policy (Cummings, *et al.*, 2012) and is said to typify cultures of worklessness (Ritchie, *et al.*, 2005). We would argue, however, that we need to understand how an individual's aspirations are closely tied to his or her opportunities and past experiences. For instance, Patrick Richards (49, Middlesbrough) discussed his post-school years:

> *It was just the accepted thing. You went out to work ... My ambitions sort of faded because I was working in a factory when I was 16, through to 24 or something. I didn't have much time for ambitions. I was working too hard.*

Some of those in the middle generation in particular gave descriptions of their current situations and future ambitions, which reflected the weight of past and current troubles in their lives. Davie Harris (55, Glasgow and currently receiving ESA) had a history of crime and imprisonment associated with drug and alcohol problems which had kept him out of the labour market for most of his adult years. He asked:

… who is going to employ somebody like me, that's uneducated and got psychotic problems? As far as I'm concerned I think my life's more or less, not finished [but] I've got nothing else to do, nothing else to look forward to, really. Just a bit of peace in my life, really. That's what I hope for; to stay out of jail, have a relationship with my wee granddaughter.

Terry Jamieson (44, Glasgow) had particularly depressed aspirations. Like Davie, he had a long record of problematic drug use and imprisonment (and was now in receipt of DLA). He said that being sexually abused as a boy 'took his life away'. Asked about his hopes for the future he said: 'I don't know. I honestly don't know. Because this is a bad life. For me anyway, know what I mean? I don't bother with anyone. I keep myself to myself. I just want left alone.' Alice Hopkins (53, Middlesbrough) lived a very financially and socially constrained life. She said: 'No, I don't really think of the future. It's day to day. I just get up each day, really. It's hard because some days I don't really want to get up.'

But even for the middle generation, lives could sometimes be turned around. Jill Hardy (38, Middlesbrough) had had a very difficult life, which included parental abuse, educational failure, domestic violence, young single parenthood and homelessness. She was an exception for this study, however, in that she was a middle-generation interviewee in full-time education (as a university student); see Chapter 2. We decided to include her in the study because, despite her age, she had worked only very briefly (and she had a son, Kieran, who had also never been employed). The way she describes her 'sense of future possibilities' now, compared with the past, provides a good illustration of how an individual's sense of agency and aspirations for the future are 'temporally embedded and bounded' (Evans, *et al.*, 2001):

Now me and Jimmy [Jill's partner] will sit and make plans, like, 'in a year's time we're planning to do …' or in five years or ten years down the line. I know it to be realistic, not just that little girl's dream. I know it's something we can do; it's possible. Whereas before I didn't want to look any further than the end of the day because if I planned for something I was only going to get the hose on my face. It would go wrong, something would happen and take it away and you just didn't. You didn't plan for stuff. Didn't do anything, just got through it the best you could. But now I sit and plan all sorts of stuff [laughs].

As we described earlier, most interviewees in the younger generation expressed conventional aspirations about wanting a job, even if their engagement with the labour market to date had been minimal or non-existent. Charlotte – Davie Harris's step-daughter – was 21. She worked after leaving school until she had her daughter, at age 18. She did not see herself as a single parent on benefits 'for the rest of my life, definitely not'. She wanted to return to college to study for childcare or social work. Repeating exactly the language of young people growing up in disadvantaged circumstances elsewhere (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005), Charlotte clung on to normal working-class aspirations for her life:

… [to live] somewhere quiet and be able to have a house and stuff for her [her daughter], to show, right, well if I work hard than I can have a house and a motor and bring my kids up and … be OK … I've set my heights [sic] a wee bit higher.

For some of the younger generation, however, the failure to find employment was leading to a sense of fatalism. Asked about the likelihood of her finding work, Verity Lamb (16, Middlesbrough) said: 'I don't expect it, I hope it.' Nowhere was there a sense of young people being on the cusp between conventional aspirations for work (and an understanding of the importance of it for a normal transition to adulthood) and collapse into a fatalistic, perhaps realistic, acceptance of the possibility of long-term worklessness, than in the interview with Mark McGinn (18, Glasgow). Asked how he would like to see his life in five years' time, he replied:

> ... steady job, steady income. A wee family and things. You cannot do that without a job, you cannot have a family or a steady life ... you need a job to just grow up more or less. So a job isn't just a job, it's more than a job. It's the future of your life.

He went on to say, however:

> Aye, I've lost hope. I wouldn't expect, see if I applied, if I went for a job and they actually did reply to me I'd be shocked. I don't know, but I would be shocked anyway. Put it this way, if somebody said to me 'do you want to go and get a job and work with me?' I'd be like 'yes, there's my national insurance number, I'll do it now, when can I start?' But it's not as easy as that.

Conclusions

First – directly counter to theories about intergenerational cultures of worklessness – conventional, mainstream attitudes to and values about work were widespread in both middle and younger generations. Employment was understood to offer social, psychological and material benefits (compared with worklessness and a reliance on benefits). Extensive worklessness had brought long-term poverty to these families and all would have preferred to have been in jobs. We found no evidence for the transmission of cultures of welfare dependency. Despite their long-term worklessness, parents actively strove for better for their children (for instance, often assisting them in searching for jobs) and young people aspired to do better than their parents.

Second, it would be impossible to describe our interviewees as occupying social or family networks that were isolated from employment or from working cultures. Inevitably, given the localities we studied, all knew others in the same situation as they were. Yet, equally, members of their families and their friends worked or had worked. Even though these were neighbourhoods with high rates of worklessness, over 60 per cent of their working age residents remain in jobs (see Appendix 1). A telling finding (against this aspect of the cultures of worklessness thesis) was the variability of work histories within the families we studied, with interviewees describing the extensive employment of some other family members. Such individuals sometimes acted as role models or gave inspiration, especially to younger interviewees.

Third, theories about cultures of worklessness often suggest that people prefer to engage with the informal economy and work 'on the side' whilst in receipt of benefits. We found very little evidence of this. It would be wrong, however, to characterise the sample as completely workless. Working outside of employment was quite widespread. In particularly difficult circumstances, mothering and caring for others demanded much work,

Despite their long-term worklessness, parents actively strove for better for their children and young people aspired to do better than their parents.

commitment and energy. It was one reason why some were less able to engage with the labour market. In the absence of employment, regular and long-term voluntary work was a facet of the lives of several interviewees. Others had become heavily involved in criminal work, in shoplifting or drug dealing, typically driven by their own long-standing drug dependency.

Finally, we asked if our interviewees could be characterised as having low aspirations. Despite their valuing of employment and their negative experience of worklessness, many of the middle-generation interviewees were characterised by a sense of resignation and fatalism. All wanted, but most did not expect, to get jobs. Some had very depressed outlooks on life and had withdrawn into getting by day to day. We interpret these findings not as evidence of a culture of worklessness but as part of the normal social psychological response to long-term unemployment, and an outcome of the hardships and multiple problems people had endured in their lives. In the main, despite their lack of success in the labour market, the younger generation still clung to normal, conventional aspirations for jobs and hopes for their futures. For some young people, however, repeated rejections from jobs had made the prospect of employment more of a hope than an expectation.

4 EXPLAINING LONG-TERM WORKLESSNESS IN FAMILIES

We were unable to find families who fitted the label of 'three generations who have never worked' and there was no evidence of a culture of worklessness amongst the families we did interview. So, in this chapter we seek to explain how and why these families experienced extensive worklessness.

Introduction

We were interested in the idea that values, practices and attitudes promoting welfare dependency might be passed down the generations. Even though we were only able to interview a few members directly, in Chapter 2 we described how the collective experiences of the older generation were ones typified by work not worklessness. So, we start with the middle generation in our study to seek an explanation for their experiences of worklessness. In the first section of this chapter we also note similarities between the situations of those in the middle and younger generations. Next, we turn to the more specific experiences and prospects of those in the younger generation. Drawing on these descriptions, we attempt to understand the extensive worklessness experienced in these families.

Explaining extensive worklessness in the middle generation: the effects of multiple social problems

The hardships and problems faced by people in the middle generation interconnected with a cumulative, negative impact on their possibilities for employment.

Education and exclusion

Most people in our research – of whatever generation – had not done well at school. Over half of the sample had left with no qualifications. This highlights a disappointing, and often exclusionary, experience of an unequal education system, shared across generations, that 'fails' working-class people (e.g. Willis, 1977; Evans, 2008). Interestingly, typically positive and happy experiences of primary school were overtaken by negative and unhappy experiences of secondary school. A strong sense of failing in – or being failed by – schools ran through interviews. 'School just forgot about me,' said Maisie Lamb (17, Middlesbrough) and Kerry White (31, Glasgow) said she did not think she was 'badly behaved' at school but that 'everything I was going through as child' meant that she did not do well. She was absent frequently because for periods she acted as the carer for her siblings (her parents were heavily involved in heroin use). A particularly poignant 'critical moment' for Kerry had been when, aged 13, she had put a lot of effort in to writing a story for her English teacher, on the given subject of 'a heroine'. Not understanding that this meant, to use her words, 'a woman hero' she wrote a lengthy tale, that she was 'pure proud of', about how 'this great family had split up through heroin and the man ended up in prison and the kids got taken off them and blah, blah, blah ... I thought I'd done really, really well'. After that 'they told me I wasn't to sit any more exams ... I felt the education board let me down big time. Because they never addressed that ... but it was the only heroin I knew'. Kerry eventually took the attitude 'well why bother because you [the teachers] aren't bothering with me?' and she 'ended up just leaving school'.

So, disengagement from school was common and often related to other crises in people's lives (e.g. an experience of abuse at home, having to act as a carer for a family member, a housing move to a new area). As with Kerry's case, apparently these crises often went unrecognised by school authorities or other services. For instance, Amanda Duncan (50, Middlesbrough) reported that she was expelled from school when she was 13 after an aggressive outburst against a teacher (and left formal education with no qualifications). She said she had been very depressed and angry at the time because of the emotional and physical abuse she suffered at home:

> *This teacher had asked me to wash the pots after her in Domestic Science and I was so extremely angry and I said 'what do you think I am, your slave? I do this all the time [at home]. That's all anybody wants me for, a bloody slave!' ... they must have known [something was wrong].*

Substance use and crime

'Getting in with the wrong people' and spending time truanting with friends, 'on the streets', was the context for some to engage in crime and drug use (see MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; McAra and McVie, 2010). With poor qualifications and limited employment opportunities as they made the transition from school, drug dealing was attractive for some individuals – especially if they needed money to fund their own drug use. For some men in the middle generation, problems at school (and truancy from it) meant that they were often sent to Approved Schools. This action seemed to confirm a pathway towards long-term criminality and subsequent imprisonment, rather than divert them from it. For this middle generation, problematic drug use usually started in the teenage years, encouraged acquisitive offending, and became associated with repeated imprisonment and long-term health problems. This pattern became a major explanation of extensive worklessness for several in the study. For instance, Douglas

The hardships and problems faced by people in the middle generation interconnected with a cumulative, negative impact on their possibilities for employment.

Martin (47, Glasgow) had committed about 150 offences (mainly shop lifting), resulting in repeated custodial sentences. He suffered chronic health problems (drug-induced psychosis and a serious heart condition, and was now unable to walk) rooted in his long-term intravenous use of heroin. Douglas was one of two in the sample never to have had a job. He explained his life-long worklessness:

> … you get the money to feed your addiction … and then you've got a criminal record and then once you kind of get your head together, you've stopped taking drugs, you end up you can't get a job because you've messed your body up and messed your life up.

Even if long-term heroin users had managed to avoid significant health problems, the pattern of repeated and regular offending and imprisonment accompanying it meant that employment was rarely achieved or achievable. This was the case with Archie Wilson (42, Glasgow) who had not been employed, and then only temporarily, until he was 37 years old. Archie said he had taken 'the wrong track in life' but now he wanted:

> … to work now. I don't do what I used to do so the only thing now for me is work … I'm looking for a chance to turn my life around. You hear 'Aye, we'll get back to you' – but nobody does.

As with all of the other factors we consider in this part of the report, we would not wish to overplay educational underachievement – or persistent offending or long-term problematic drug use – as straightforward or singular causes of exclusion from the labour market. We know that in the past a 'failed' education was not necessarily a barrier to labour market participation, as many of the middle-generation interviewees, like Roy Cunningham (50, Middlesbrough), described. Roy had no qualifications but in the more buoyant labour market of the 1970s had moved through several jobs in his late teens and early 20s before being forced to give up employment because of a disabling health problem. We also know that many people with only limited qualifications – and with substantial criminal records – are still able to access jobs, even if these are low-paid ones (Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, for the majority early educational failure (including problems with literacy and numeracy) impacted on confidence and set in place a resistance to further engagement with education.

Training schemes and further education
We stress 'for the majority' because this was certainly not the complete story. Several had engaged in post-school, vocational training schemes but, for this sample, these tended to be regarded as poor quality, and seemed to do little to help people into jobs (Furlong, 1992). This was another experience that was shared across generations. Davie Harris (55, Glasgow) described how in the 1970s he was treated as a 'skivvy' on his post-school painting and decorating 'apprenticeship' ('I never touched a paintbrush!'). Thirty years later his step-daughter Charlotte (21) quit her childcare training course for similar reasons: 'I felt it was taking a really long time to get trained up … I just felt that I wasn't getting brought on any.' More positively we mentioned, in Chapter 3, for instance, how Jill Hardy (38, Middlesbrough) had benefited from the 'widening access' opportunities of her local university, and had turned her life in a more optimistic direction (we have learned, since the completion of fieldwork, that Jill has now found a job working in a voluntary sector agency that helps young offenders). Others

in the middle generation were now engaged in courses run by colleges or welfare-to-work agencies to improve skills or boost confidence, as a step towards employment.

Violence and family instability

Research has pointed to how 'cultures of violence' can be a facet of deprived neighbourhoods, which can impact on well-being (Henderson, *et al.*, 2007: 98). Even though several interviewees reported the violence they had perpetrated or witnessed, or of which they had been a victim, never did they suggest this was a sole or basic explanation for their worklessness. The consequences were indirect and more complicated. For instance, the Cunninghams in Middlesbrough had been subject to criminal victimisation, including violent attacks on their home because of the family's attempts to combat local crime and anti-social behaviour. This added to the stresses and difficulties they faced as a family and was implicated in the psychological problems suffered by some family members. For others, domestic violence led to family instability and housing mobility, as people sought to escape violent parents or partners (perpetrators of domestic violence were usually, but not always, men). In an extreme case, for instance, Amanda Duncan (50, Middlesbrough) told a gruelling story of how she had progressed through a series of relationships with abusive and violent men (several of whom became fathers to her children), a process she saw as psychologically rooted in her own experience of being abused as a child. The Duncans' chaotic, violent and complex family life was the source of long-term depression and problematic alcohol use for Amanda, further inhibiting the possibility for her to engage with employment. Susan Morrison (39, Glasgow), provides another example. She and her children had moved through 12 addresses in two years, to physically escape the children's violent father. Reflecting on these experiences, she asked: 'How can you work with a life like mine?'

Interviewees explained how the violence they had experienced – from partners or parents – was often related to the perpetrator's problematic use of alcohol or heroin. In addition, being brought up by parents embroiled in 'heavy-end' drug use is likely to impact on family stability (especially when offending and imprisonment are outcomes) and on the quality of parenting. Bancroft and colleagues (2004) investigated the impact of parental substance misuse on children, finding that it 'was at the centre of a web of problems that often included violence and neglect'. For instance, Claire Martin (36, Glasgow) remorsefully commented in a joint family interview, how it was 'her fault' that her daughter Leanne (17) had persistently truanted from secondary school. An earlier switch to crack cocaine use had 'brought on pure madness': '[but] if my head had been like where it is now I would have paid more attention to what was happening. [Speaking directly to Leanne] we could have done better by you. We should have.'

Physical and mental ill health

Long-term problematic drug use had taken a heavy toll on the physical and mental health of several of the middle-generation interviewees, especially in Glasgow. This difference between the research sites can be explained by the histories of drug markets. Heroin impacted on Glasgow, particularly its poorer neighbourhoods, more than a decade earlier than in Middlesbrough (in the 1980s compared with the mid-1990s). In our study, the most affected were the Glasgow middle generation (see Parker, *et al.*, 1998). Now ex-heroin users, the effects of adulterated substances and long-term and risky injecting practices meant, nevertheless, that they had been left with

serious, often multiple and debilitating health problems that made it very difficult for them to get jobs.

Overall, ill heath and disability was the most obvious explanation for the extensive worklessness of people in the middle generation. Thirteen from twenty-two were in receipt of some sort of ill health related benefit at the time of interview (i.e. DLA, ESA or IB, and a further person received CA). Most of these were suffering from multiple health problems that seriously limited their capacity to work. We know that socially structured health inequalities 'are ubiquitous: the less affluent have always had worse health, they have worse health wherever they live, and they suffer more from all forms of ill health' (Davey Smith, 2003). Unsurprisingly, the premature death of family members (i.e. before the age of 65) was widespread across the sample and several interviewees had experienced the loss of a child, sibling or other close relative. For people already trying to cope in difficult circumstances, bereavement can be closely linked to subsequent mental health problems (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2013, forthcoming). Ill health was the usual cause of these deaths but two murders and four suicides of family members were also reported. The links between ill health and poverty are magnified when applied to mental ill health. Mental ill health (e.g. anxiety, stress, depression, and psychosis) was sometimes related to problematic drug and alcohol use. Often, it was more an outcome of the general hardships and difficulties that individuals had faced over years, sometimes stemming back to problems in childhood (e.g. abuse, family disruption, failure at/by school). Davie Harris (55, Glasgow) thought his long-term mental health problems (psychosis and depression) were rooted in his childhood:

> I think it's always been there, from schooling days, know what I mean? Labelled because I was at 'the backward school'. I think it stems from there. Not feeling like a normal citizen – at a very young age and I think it's left its mental scars.

The traumas and hardships of life combined together – 'it just keeps going like this, stack, stack, stack, stack', as Amanda Duncan (50, Middlesbrough) put it – negatively impacting on well-being and restricting people's ability to engage with jobs. Alice Hopkins (53, Teesside) suffered from severe depression and agoraphobia and had mobility problems. She received ESA (her son was her full-time carer). She said:

> […] and who would employ me, really? Because I would be bursting into tears or I would be a jabbering idiot. Who would want to employ me? No-one!

Agency interventions

To conclude this section it is necessary to make some comment on the interventions by agencies that individuals in the middle generation had experienced. We did not investigate these in detail and so what we can say is necessarily limited. We make four brief observations.

First, unsurprisingly, these families had been the subject of a plethora of interventions by a variety of health, social work, criminal justice, employment, training, and welfare benefits agencies and services. The current situations of the middle-generation interviewees in the study, and the sort of difficulties they faced as described in this chapter, indicate that these interventions had not met with complete success.

Second, the sheer range, immediacy, complexity and severity of problems that individuals sometimes faced seemed to be a challenge to professional

intervention. Quite often, interviewees commented that agencies did not understand their lives or needs (and vice versa, to a degree, that interviewees did not understand agencies or what they were trying to do for them). Being passed from one agency to another or agencies apparently seeking to 'terminate engagement' (Communities and Local Government, 2011) with them because of the complexity of their cases, was described several times in interviews. Trudy Lamb (25, Middlesbrough), for instance, suffered from depression and anxiety problems and had claimed IB for several years. In line with current government welfare reforms, she had recently been moved from IB to JSA after officially being deemed 'fit for work'. Her claim for the latter benefit now seemed to be in jeopardy, however, because, after suffering a severe panic attack in the Job Centre Plus office, she was told she was 'not allowed to sign on there anymore' because she was 'not fit for work'. She was told 'never to come back'. At the time of interview, she was unable to say which benefit she thought she might receive in the future, if any. The nature and effects of complex, multiple, interconnecting biographical problems are unlikely to be visible to hard-pressed practitioners (who often have more immediate and narrow targets to meet and a limited range of support at their professional disposal). Amanda Duncan (50, Middlesbrough), in reflecting back on why numerous, separate agency interventions had never really helped her, said 'they didn't see the complexity behind what they screened'.

Third, some interviewees described how early problems had not been identified or responded to by services, and how these had critical and longer-term effects (a key example being how schools failed to find ways to identify and respond appropriately to the wider pressures in young people's lives, with the consequence that crises in family life sparked disengagement or expulsion from school).

Finally, interviewees spoke most positively of the voluntary sector, community-based agencies with which they had come into contact (e.g. in Glasgow, initiatives to help ex-offenders and drug users were particularly welcomed). As other research has suggested, the popularity of voluntary sector approaches such as these seems to rely on: the voluntary nature of participation (people were not compelled to take part, unlike some 'welfare-to-work' schemes); that interviews felt affinity with the aims of the projects; that staff shared personal backgrounds not dissimilar to participants and had faced some of the same personal troubles; and that projects were not primarily working with rigid 'employability' targets, understanding that other problems needed to be tackled first before employment could become a possibility (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2008). We know from interviews with local practitioners, as well as with families, however, that some of these voluntary (and statutory) sector interventions were being scaled back or closed down completely at the time of the fieldwork, under the pressure of public spending cuts (which will hit the most deprived local authorities the hardest; Hastings, *et al.*, 2012).

Explaining worklessness in the younger generation: the inheritance of disadvantage and the resistance to worklessness

Compared with the middle generation – their parents – the worklessness of the younger generation was much more limited in duration and more explicable in terms of the lack of demand for unqualified young workers in times of national economic recession and very high local unemployment.

This is not to suggest, however, that they were free of any disadvantage from their upbringing. We discuss some examples below.

We noted earlier how family and housing instability was common for these families. One consequence of this for the younger generation was that changes of schools disrupted their education sometimes, which further added to the processes that underlie educational underachievement. In some cases, most of which related to problematic drug use, parents had been deemed, or deemed themselves, unable to look after their children. Occasionally this had involved episodes of neglect or abuse of children. Young people brought up by parents who misuse alcohol and drugs sometimes have 'disrupted and difficult lives' (Bancroft, *et al.*, 2004). So, several of the younger generation had spent periods being 'looked after' in local authority care. Research tells us that this is an experience strongly associated with later disadvantage, not only in respect of the labour market (Coles, 2000; Stein, 2005). Although there were examples of the younger generation becoming involved with problematic use of alcohol or drugs, more common was occasional, recreational use of cannabis or alcohol. Similarly, ill health was not a significant problem for younger generation interviewees (albeit that some reported psychological problems such as anxiety and depression). One disadvantage that these interviewees did face, however, was a relative lack of the sort of social and cultural capital that is beneficial in accessing the labour market. Lindsay (2010) argues that the long-term unemployed can become cut off from informal networks through which information about job opportunities is distributed and through which personal recommendations are made. Our previous research has showed these to be critical in helping people get jobs in deprived neighbourhoods; parents would often directly help their children into jobs, for instance by making representations to current or previous employers on their children's behalf or by giving close advice about how to undertake job-searching effectively (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010). Clearly the middle-generation parents in this study were not rich in these forms of social and cultural capital.

These were some of the particular forms of disadvantage faced by the younger generation in the study as a consequence of their family situations. It is important to reiterate (see Chapter 3), however, that what was most striking about this younger generation, in respect of debates about an intergenerational culture of worklessness, were their efforts and the desire to resist or overcome the disadvantages they had inherited. Most specifically, interviewees were adamant that they did not wish to emulate the life histories of their parents not only in respect of the extensive worklessness they had experienced but in reference to the wider problems they had in their lives. To repeat Charlotte Harris's (21, Glasgow) phrase, she was seeking to 'set her heights [sic] a wee bit higher' than her parents' situation. Diane Duncan (23, Middlesbrough) sought to avoid repeating the pattern of abuse and time in local authority care that had marked her childhood:

Just because I'd been in care doesn't mean that what had happened to me, the reason I was in care, doesn't mean I'm going to do the same thing. [Some people] know how it feels to be left out and abused by people – so they wouldn't do it.

She said: '*I proved everyone wrong; that, in fact, I am capable of looking after a child*', and emphasised the importance of providing a better life for her child:

Hopefully when I get a job, I'll keep my job, and I'll show him [her son Callum]. He won't end up in care and he won't end up having a kid at

16. He won't end up doing the things that I done ... I want it to change. I wouldn't want to sit in a council house doing nowt [nothing] with my life. Do you know what I mean? I want to show Callum that you work; you get nice things from working. People have maybe got a bit more respect with you. You've got a job and they don't just see you as someone who's on the dole and doesn't want to do nowt with their life.

Kieran Hardy (20, Middlesbrough) was currently unemployed and living with his pregnant fiancée. After his parents split up, he decided to live with his father but because his father frequently served prison sentences Kieran ended up living with various members of his extended family: 'It was really bringing myself up.' This family instability impacted on his engagement with education and he left school with no qualifications. Since then he has returned to college to re-sit his GCSEs. Although his father, and several members of his family, were often involved in offending Kieran never had been. He said 'considering my upbringing and my family background I've always kept myself clean'. He wanted to 'be the father that my father wasn't and to provide for my child properly'. His ambition for the future was 'just to do well, get a nice house, a nice job, and to provide a nice healthy living, a life for my fiancée and our child ... doesn't matter what it is, I'd take any job at all, simple as that'.

We finish these examples of members of the younger generation resisting the potential to emulate their parents' life stories with the following excerpt from an interview with Leanne Martin (17, Glasgow) and her mother Claire (37) and her uncle Douglas (47). Leanne had engaged in a post-school training project and voluntary work placements. Although she planned to sign on for benefits soon, she was keen that this was only for a short period. She rejected completely the idea that she lived in a family that preferred worklessness and that she had inherited such a disposition. Indeed, despite their distance from the labour market, Douglas, Claire and Leanne were all keen to dispute the central question of our study:

Claire: *More or less what she [the interviewer] is asking is did I bring you up to think that it was good to be on benefits? [long pause] Did you grow up thinking, 'no, I'm going to go on benefits like my mum'?*
Leanne: *I think that's crap ... I know I've not worked and whatever but ... I know I'm not stupid or anything. I can learn easily enough so, I mean even if it was a sandwich shop or something, you know what I mean? It's easy enough to butter pieces [sandwiches] so ... I'll do any job. And I want to work, aye.*
Claire: *I would say that's a myth. I can't see anybody in their right mind bringing their children up saying it's good to be on benefits.*
Douglas: *I don't think that's right. All our family worked.*
Leanne: *My granny worked and my great granny. I've seen my granny's family, my uncles, aunties and that all working. My pals' families, I know loads of people that work.*
Claire: *It's just the way of the world. People go to work, that's how the world turns.*

Understanding extensive worklessness in families

Our argument, therefore, is that whilst the younger generation of these families were disadvantaged by their family background, their worklessness to date is best explained not by the inheritance of family problems but by the

general lack of job opportunities for working-class young people in these localities at the time they were making transitions from school to the labour market (i.e. typically, in the late 2000s). Their personal or family problems did not provide a 'good start' but are not so extensive or unusual so as to be able to explain their worklessness, especially given their strong commitment to employment. With a stronger local economy we suspect that many of these people would have moved into jobs (albeit at the lower end of the labour market; Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010).

The story is less simple for their parents. For the middle generation of these families an explanation of their extensive worklessness cannot be made mainly with reference to the availability of job opportunities. To be clear — as we have argued elsewhere (see Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010) — typical experiences of worklessness in localities like this can largely be explained in relation to declining opportunities for jobs, particularly for full-time, regular employment. Even in very deprived neighbourhoods in times of high unemployment, most disadvantaged, working-class people do not become completely disconnected from the labour market. A pattern of repeated, intermittent engagement with jobs — of churning between unemployment and insecure, casual work (i.e. the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle) — is, we argue, the more common experience of working-class people in impoverished, de-industrialised communities. This is a central finding of our previous research on Teesside (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010; see also Byrne, 1999; Goulden, 2010) and also suggested by fieldwork for this project. It would have been easy to recruit those engaged in the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle in the neighbourhoods we researched (see Appendix 1) but finding families with very long-term worklessness, across generations, was extraordinarily difficult. So, we suggest that the middle-generation interviewees of our study were not typical of the working class in Middlesbrough and Glasgow, or even of currently workless residents of their deprived neighbourhoods.

How, then, do we explain their unusually prolonged experience of worklessness? To answer this we need to understand, to use Beck's phrase (1992), that 'poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks'. Deep and long-term poverty, experienced in many of these families over decades, generated exactly this abundance of risks, limited people's ability to cope with problems when they arose and inhibited efforts at betterment. Another way to express this is that because of processes of long-term decline, these research neighbourhoods now feature very high on registers of deprivation, indices of which measure the severity and multiplicity of social problems that bear down on residents. These were 'rough places to live' (Trudy Lamb, 25, Middlesbrough). This context of persistently impoverished social and economic conditions gave rise to an abundance of social, psychological and financial problems, faced especially by those in the middle generation. These were interconnected, experienced in combination and cumulative in their impact, having long-term repercussions for family members and their engagement with the labour market.

As this chapter has shown these risks included, for example: an educational system that failed to provide routes to achievement; the attractions of the criminal economy against the paucity of legitimate job opportunities; the destructive impact of the arrival of heroin markets in poor neighbourhoods; heroin and alcohol use that fuelled violence between people and impacted on the stability of families, and the ability of parents to look after each other and their children properly; and, particularly for the middle generation, the debilitating consequences of long-term adversity on well-being and consequent ill health.

Our previous research (Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010) found that, in ones and twos, these sorts of risks – such as possessing poor educational qualifications or getting involved in crime or having a period of ill health or having a violent partner – are unlikely to wholly derail people's engagement with jobs. The evidence of the current study, however, is that when problems are multiple, interlinked and faced in quick succession they can have a cumulative, negative effect on individual and family well-being, one result of which can be very extended periods of worklessness. Interestingly, the descriptions of families we give here are reminiscent of those produced as part of an earlier research programme, which investigated not intergenerational cultures of worklessness but the 'cycle of deprivation'. Coffield, *et al.*, (1980) rejected that term, preferring instead the metaphor of a 'web of deprivation' because this better described the 'dense network of psychological, social, historical and economic factors that … either created or perpetuated problems' for the families that they studied.

This 'web of deprivation' or 'abundance of risks' is exemplified by Michelle Gordon's life story (45, Glasgow). She was currently living on DLA for reasons of mental ill health. She had been employed until her mid-20s but had not had a job since. Reflecting on her life – being physically and sexually abused as a child, violent relationships with men, separation from her partner, struggling with bringing up twins in the poverty of a life on benefits and trying to keep them away from local drug-using peers, and her own depression and attempted suicide – she said: 'there are far too many other things to think about than work'. Indeed, when hearing the deeply troubled and often traumatic life stories that interviewees had to tell, asking questions about why a person was not in employment felt, sometimes to us as researchers, to be verging on the absurd. Repeating Susan Morrison's (39, Glasgow) question to us at the end of her interview, 'how can you work with a life like mine?'

To summarise, in an already tight labour market an accumulation of problems associated with persistent, deep poverty served to distance people from employment. In contexts of high unemployment, our interviewees were at the back of a very long queue for jobs. Because employers prefer to recruit from the employed or newly unemployed rather than the long-term unemployed (Devins and Hogarth, 2005), extended worklessness itself became a further impediment to employment. In turn, a life lived on benefits kept people in poverty, entrenching the problems they faced. Peter McGinn (55, Glasgow) had a long record of drug-related offending and imprisonment. He had been out of employment for most of his adult life as a consequence. He had now given up drugs and offending. He wanted to work. He said:

> … so I apply and apply and apply [for jobs] but there's nothing there now. If I was an employer, I wouldn't employ me. You see, although I've been in prison, actually, I'm a good worker. I've just done too much bad stuff …

Conclusion: worklessness and families with multiple problems

Determined research failed to reveal 'three generations of families that had never worked' (and we only found two middle-generation participants who had never had a job). So we targeted those who had periods of 'extensive worklessness'. In doing so we researched a rare social group: very long-term unemployed, middle-aged people with children who have spent limited

When problems are multiple, interlinked and faced in quick succession they can have a cumulative, negative effect on individual and family well-being, one result of which can be very extended periods of worklessness.

or no time in jobs (see Chapter 1). This has meant that we have bypassed the more typical, majority experiences of worklessness (e.g. shorter spells of unemployment or repeated churning between unemployment and insecure jobs) that are likely to be more common even in these deprived neighbourhoods. Our research aims and methods led us downwards to a sample of families that would appear to be quite unusual in the extremity and extent of the multiple problems they faced. These, we argue, are rooted in a long-lasting family experience of deep poverty which, in the case of the middle generation, helped to explain their detachment from the labour market.

Perhaps, ironically, in failing to find the subjects of one current policy agenda (about intergenerational worklessness and 'three generations of families that have never worked') our study has researched the subjects of another, which focuses on what are said to be '120,000 families living particularly troubled and chaotic lives' (DWP, 2012; see Chapter 1). We did not closely itemise the problems each of our families faced against the list of seven characteristics that were originally used to define this group (SETF, 2007). The discussion in this chapter will have at least suggested, however, that six of them – low family income, inability to afford food and clothing items, long-standing illness or disability, maternal mental health problems, lack of qualifications, worklessness – were very widespread across the middle generation of the sample (the seventh, overcrowded housing, was not a topic we investigated). These seem to be the sort of multi-disadvantaged families that were imagined in policy thinking, at least originally. Levitas (2012) has argued, however, that there has been some slippage in the definition of this group and shifting emphases in the policy agenda (for example, from 'troubled families' to 'families that cause trouble').

At the time of writing, interventions to tackle these '120,000 troubled families' are current (see Chapter 1) and evaluations have yet to be produced. Gregg (2010) argues that more research is required to complement the existing limited work on how multiple problems can accumulate and impact on families. Although it did not have this aim, our qualitative study has, we hope, made some contribution in this area. For instance, it has perhaps clarified the complex, long-term difficulties such families face, in relation to their worklessness. An evaluation (Lloyd, *et al.*, 2011) of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) – a scheme initiated under the previous Labour government to help families with multiple problems – found that one of its least successful outcomes was in respect of moving adults in workless households into jobs (indeed, a 'successful outcome' was reported in only 20 per cent of cases). As the discussion in this chapter has shown, multiple problems need to be tackled first before a return to employment is a serious possibility. This is also a conclusion of CAYT's recent analysis of intergenerational worklessness (2012). Workless households were found to face a multitude of interlinked risks and 'policy needs to not only target getting parents back into work but also to address the other risks that these children and their families face'. This, of course, presumes that suitable employment is available once these wider risks have been addressed and other 'barriers' removed. Another study makes a similar point in relation to changes to IB and the movement of claimants from this benefit to JSA:

> Although some incapacity claimants will re-engage with the labour market, there is little reason to suppose that the big fall in claimant numbers will lead to significant increases in employment. Incapacity claimants often face multiple obstacles to working again and their concentration in the weakest local economies and most disadvantaged communities means they usually have little chance of finding work.
> – Beatty and Fothergill, 2011

5 CONCLUSION: (INTERGENERATIONAL) CULTURES OF WORKLESSNESS?

We believe this to be the first study to have interrogated, explicitly, the idea that there are families where 'three generations have never worked'. The notion of intergenerational cultures of worklessness might be a captivating and convenient means of trying to explain patterns of worklessness but the evidence collected in this research project, from families most likely to fit the thesis, leads us to conclude that the phenomenon is more imagined than real.

That we could not find families matching even a loose interpretation of 'three generations that have never worked', coupled with the results of recent social surveys, suggests that the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness enjoys an undeserved level of popularity. Locating middle-aged individuals who had never had a job proved to be extremely difficult. This is unsurprising, not least because welfare reforms – pre-dating the current government but continued rapidly by it – have made it difficult for people who are able to work to remain on benefits for substantial periods of time.

A very important conclusion of the research is that, for younger interviewees, the impact of being raised in workless households did not encourage them towards worklessness. Typically, they aspired to a life that included work, although their local labour markets made this difficult to achieve. Indeed, the long-term worklessness, poverty and wider problems in their parents' lives often provided the motivational spur for young people to try to do better with their own lives. Without exception, parents also hoped for better for their children and, where possible, made practical efforts

to help them towards employment. We found no evidence that young people learned a culture of worklessness from their parents. The type of problems that had affected these families over the years had sometimes impacted detrimentally upon young people as they were growing up. So it is particularly notable that, despite this, young people held conventional values about work and welfare, and clung on to normal aspirations.

So, we found the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness to be wanting, but what can we conclude in respect of the more general idea of cultures of worklessness? As described in Chapter 1, much contemporary government policy towards worklessness is underpinned by the idea that the workless tend to hold flawed attitudes towards work and welfare. We could find no evidence of this amongst the families we interviewed. Even in those families that had faced the most severe and multiple problems, and even where individuals had very prolonged worklessness, they held on to the view that working for a living was better than reliance on welfare. We would, therefore, echo Lupton's (2003) conclusion that people in excluded communities endorse, rather than reject, mainstream values. In Chapter 1 we mentioned how Macmillan (2011) was unable to say whether the association she observed between the worklessness of parents and that of their children was the result of a 'welfare dependency story' or a 'deprivation story'. The evidence of our study of long-term workless parents and their unemployed children is unequivocally against it being a 'welfare dependency story'. There appears to be greater support for this being a story chiefly about deprivation, albeit in extreme and complex form for most of these families.

Our main conclusion is that politicians, policy-makers and those who work professionally with unemployed people should abandon theories – and the policies that flow from them – that assume worklessness is primarily the outcome of a culture of worklessness, held in families and passed down the generations. If these cannot be found in the extreme cases we studied, then they are unlikely to explain more general patterns of worklessness in the UK.

Politicians, policy-makers and those who work professionally with unemployed people should abandon theories – and the policies that flow from them – that assume worklessness is primarily the outcome of a culture of worklessness.

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The Research Sites: Glasgow (Parkhill) and Middlesbrough (East Kelby)

Glasgow has a long and important economic and social history, developing from the early tobacco and slave trade, through iron and steel, shipbuilding and manufacturing. Industrial employment began to decline from the mid-1960s with traditional skilled manual jobs increasingly being replaced by jobs in the service sector; jobs which 'have generally been of a much lower quality, in terms of pay, job security and job satisfaction, than those lost in the traditional manufacturing activities' (Cumbers, *et al.*, 2009). At the time of our research, Glasgow was a city struggling with high rates of worklessness, pockets of deep deprivation and, in particular, notorious for its poor health.

The neighbourhood of Parkhill (which, like East Kelby, is a pseudonym) was selected from numerous potential sites because of its particularly high levels of worklessness; because of its relative population stability; and because the local population is predominantly from the white working-class, the socio-demographic group most implicated in discourses of intergenerational cultures of worklessness. Local experts confirmed to us that Parkhill was a good place to look if we were to find this phenomenon. Parkhill ranks amongst the 5 per cent most deprived wards in Scotland and has higher than average rates of ill health, suicide, problem drug and alcohol use and crime (GCPH, 2008). Local industry began to decline in the 1960s and local amenities (cafes, cinemas, bingo halls) closed. By the 1980s the area had witnessed significant population decline and satisfaction among Parkhill residents was poor, with complaints of problems with heating, dampness, noise, transport services, vandalism and drugs (Glasgow City Council, 1990). Large areas of housing were cleared during the 1990s, leaving many vacant sites in the area. Now Parkhill has a population of around 9,000 with about 4,700 households, of which just under 25 per cent are owner-occupied (GCPH, 2008).

Middlesbrough is significantly smaller than Glasgow (with a population of around 140,000, compared with over half a million) and it emerged as a centre of population much later, growing from a small, rural hamlet in the nineteenth century to an internationally renowned centre for industrial

production by the 1960s. As with Glasgow, Middlesbrough's local economy was based on traditional industries (specifically, iron and steel, chemicals and heavy engineering). The scope and speed of Middlesbrough's economic collapse was equally dramatic as its rise (Foord, *et al.*, 1985). Close to 100,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in Middlesbrough between 1971 and 2008, and were gradually replaced by 92,000 jobs in the service sector (particularly in call centres, leisure services and the public sector). As with Glasgow, these new jobs were often regarded as more suited to women than men and were less likely to be full-time and permanent. They also became relatively less well paid. At the time of the fieldwork, as with Glasgow, much higher than national levels of unemployment and concentrated poverty affected Middlesbrough. Compared with Glasgow, however, the collapse of the mainstays of the local economy and the widespread experience of poverty has been more recent in Middlesbrough.

East Kelby is a neighbourhood of Middlesbrough that is in many ways typical of UK estates of social housing built in the mid-twentieth century to house working-class families as the result of slum clearance in inner-urban areas. With a population of approximately 30,000 people, it comprises five, interlinked estates on the outskirts of Middlesbrough and was constructed originally to house skilled workers in nearby heavy industry and their families. It is a predominantly white, working-class area (approximately 98 per cent White British) with relatively high levels of population stability. Whilst originally a popular place to live, the East Kelby wards of our research neighbourhood all appear in the top 3 per cent of the most deprived wards in England.

As with Parkhill, worklessness rates are high and over twice the national average, as we can see in Table 1. Table 2 shows rates of long-term worklessness – that is, between 2 and 5 years workless and more than 5 years – for Glasgow, Middlesbrough and nationally.

Deep de-industrialisation and widespread worklessness, concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods such as Parkhill and East Kelby, make Middlesbrough and Glasgow the sort of places where we might be most likely to uncover intergenerational cultures of worklessness should they exist. Researching in two areas increased our likelihood of locating this phenomenon and the reliability of our findings, and allowed us to explore potentially different processes impacting on worklessness in different places.

Table 1: Worklessness rates February 2010

	Research area	Local authority	Country	Research area	Local authority	Country
	'Parkhill'	Glasgow city	Scotland	'East Kelby'	Middlesbrough	England
Worklessness count	1,220	90,490	499,570	1,215	19,590	4,203,450
Worklessness rate	**38.1**	21.8	14.6	**30.6**	20.9	12.4

Note: source is adapted from the Department for Work and Pensions Working Age Client Group (February 2010) and based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) Resident Population Estimates by Broad Age Band, Mid-year (2010). Figures rounded to the nearest 5 to preserve anonymity.

Source: ONS. The worklessness rate for an area may be obtained by dividing the out-of-work benefit count (Job Seeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit/Employment and Support Allowance, Lone Parent and OIRB only) by the number of those of working age resident in the area. This gives the worklessness rate for those who are of economically active age (see ONS, 2009). The available statistics for worklessness in 'Parkhill' only cover part of that neighbourhood (and are based on a whole population of 5,431 not 9,000 residents cited earlier in text above).

Table 2: Long-term worklessness rates, February 2010

	Research area	Local authority	Country	Research area	Local authority	Country
	'Parkhill'	Glasgow city	Scotland	**'East Kelby'**	Middlesbrough	England
2 years up to 5 years						
Worklessness count	~	12,000	65,990	~	2,830	596,260
Worklessness rate	~	2.9	1.9	~	3.0	1.8
5 years +						
Worklessness count	~	39,110	201,800	~	7,360	1,506,120
Worklessness rate	~	9.4	5.9	~	7.9	4.4

Note: source is adapted from the Department for Work and Pensions Working Age Client Group (February 2010) and based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) Resident Population Estimates by Broad Age Band, Mid-year (2010). Figures rounded to the nearest 5 to preserve anonymity.

Source: ONS. The worklessness rate for an area may be obtained by dividing the out-of-work benefit count (Job Seeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit/Employment and Support Allowance, Lone Parent and OIRB only) by the number of those of working age resident in the area. This gives the worklessness rate for those who are of economically active age (see ONS, 2009). Please note that ~ indicates that data is not available for the lower level geography research areas (i.e. 'Parkhill' and 'East Kelby').

Fieldwork

The research team strove to undertake fieldwork as rigorously and systematically as possible, so as to allow a fair test of the intergenerational culture of worklessness thesis. Whilst experienced in social research with 'hard-to-reach' social groups, the research team found this particular fieldwork a serious challenge.

Stakeholder meetings

First, the researchers acquainted (or re-acquainted) themselves with the research neighbourhoods, partly by holding interviews with local stakeholders. These included: community workers, housing officers, youth workers, representatives of faith organisations, drugs workers, staff from Family Intervention Projects, GPs, managers from Job Centre Plus, urban regeneration officers, and workers from local support charities and agencies that help the unemployed into jobs. Across the two research sites, approximately 30 such meetings took place. We gathered these local experts' views on the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness and hoped that they may be able to introduce us to families who could take part in the research. The idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness was well-known to these local practitioners, and popular with many of them, but as we described in Chapter 2 they were unable to help us locate any families who fitted our recruitment criteria. Confidentiality of client details was only a small part of the explanation for this. More commonly, when pressed, interviewees clarified that, whilst they had heard of the idea or imagined that such families existed, they had never dealt with them personally; or, in fact, when they referred to 'families who had never worked' they meant individuals from the same family who had experienced extensive unemployment, often coupled with other social or health problems.

Defining the sample for recruitment

The second stage of fieldwork, lasting eight months, involved recruiting and interviewing families for the study. We aimed to speak to ten families in each locality, hoping to interview at least one member of each of three generations within each family. Overall, we sought to recruit a reasonably balanced sample of men and women. We directed our recruitment strategy towards middle-generation parents, believing that they would be likely to be able to introduce us to the other two generations of their families (i.e. their parents and their children).

Our original aim was to recruit 20 such families where, in each generation, there was at least one family member who had never been in employment. So as to investigate the popular idea, reiterated locally by practitioners – that intergenerational cultures of worklessness can take this extreme form – a determined effort was directed at meeting this aim in the first month (and this continued as a goal across the eight months of this stage of fieldwork). It quickly became clear, however, that we were unlikely to recruit such families. Indeed, despite our best efforts we were unable to recruit any families that included individuals, across three generations, who had never worked (see Chapter 2).

As a consequence, we loosened our recruitment criteria, first, to two generations of the same family where an individual had never worked and, when this also proved unlikely to generate a sample of 20 families, second, to extensive worklessness in two generations of the same family. By 'extensive worklessness' we initially stipulated in respect of the middle generation a current period of worklessness lasting at least 10 years but, again, this had to be relaxed to 'at least over 5 years' (many had been workless for considerably longer than this, however). In respect of the younger generation, we aimed to recruit people from these families who were aged over 16, were no longer in full-time education and had never been in employment (in practice a few here had previously had a job).

Recruitment strategies

To recruit the sort of sample we required involved many strategies, some of which were more successful than others, and included:

- interviews with local practitioners (as described above)
- posters in sites across the neighbourhoods (e.g. shops and community centres) inviting participation
- short stories about the research project placed in free newspapers, and the newsletters of local primary and secondary schools encouraging people to contact us
- leaflets distributed in particularly deprived clusters of streets within the neighbourhoods, followed up by personal calls by the researchers at a pre-set time
- placing a researcher in or outside of Job Centres that served our research neighbourhoods to approach claimants and screen for eligibility
- spending time in or outside the offices of agencies that help people into jobs
- generally 'hanging around' in Parkhill and East Kelby, for example, talking to people in shops and cafés and accompanying detached youth workers on the streets or attending coffee mornings and jumble sales organised by local community groups
- recruitment via 'snowballing' (i.e. early interviewees suggested other families that we might approach).

The effectiveness of these strategies varied between areas; the poster campaign was fairly successful in Glasgow, as was the snowballing technique. In Middlesbrough some families were recruited via the newspaper articles. The leafleting strategy, while time consuming, was ineffective in both areas. Our attempt to recruit participants outside Job Centres was also largely ineffective, but it did serve a secondary purpose in that it allowed us to get a sense of the number of Job Centre clients who met our sampling criteria: in Middlesbrough, none of those we approached outside the Job Centre Plus office over a period totalling 15 hours did so. In Glasgow over a similar period we did meet a few people with lengthy worklessness but in most cases they did not have family members who also fitted our criteria. The vast majority of those we spoke to in both places were either newly unemployed or had a work history that was characterised by churning between jobs and unemployment. This excursion into one aspect of our method is important because in itself it suggests a significant finding: the vast majority of unemployed people who accessed the Job Centre at the time of our fieldwork seem not to have personal or family histories that fit with theses about intergenerational worklessness. Overall, we would stress the sheer difficulty in finding a sample of families who had experienced extensive worklessness over two generations, even in these two most likely of locations in which to uncover intergenerational cultures of worklessness. The achieved sample is described briefly in Chapter 2 and in Appendix 2.

Doing the research

As implied, conducting the fieldwork was an arduous and demanding process. Interviews were semi-structured and tended to be lengthy, usually around two hours but occasionally almost four hours. They were audio recorded and conducted in places that were most convenient to the interviewees: in people's homes, in community centres, pubs, church halls and at the university (in Middlesbrough). We tried to find a quiet, private place to hold the interview, on a one-to-one basis. In one instance, three members of a family were interviewed together (the Duncans, in Glasgow). Participants all received £20 to cover their expenses and as a 'thank you' for their participation. The research received ethical approval from Teesside University and followed the guidelines for research ethics of the British Sociological Association. Given the nature of some of the data that we collected we have been especially careful to preserve the anonymity of participants (with non-essential details changed in some cases).

The interview schedule was designed to identify individuals' attitudes and behaviours, to provide a comprehensive investigation of the idea of intergenerational cultures of worklessness. We used questions that would explicitly interrogate contemporary research about intergenerational cultures of worklessness. In practice, however, much of the interview content became a discussion of the person's life – and family history – and a detailed exploration of the processes and events that had shaped their extensive experience of worklessness.

Analysis

The first stage of the analysis was the verbatim transcription of interviews. Interviewees were given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity and although family members sometimes had different surnames we have used the same surname for each family member for clarity.

The second stage of analysis was the construction of 'life-grids' for each family member. These plotted the key experiences, situations and events of a person's life, from childhood to the present day. Life-grids are valuable for revealing the significance of critical moments, turning points and policy/ practice interventions in individual life stories.

Third, the interviews and life-grids were read and scrutinised by the research team. Reflecting our reading of the contents of transcripts and key questions in the research literature, we arrived at a dozen thematic codes to help sort the interview 'data' (e.g. 'low aspirations/short-term horizons', 'experiences and attitudes towards poverty').

Fourth, all interviews were sorted by these codes. To keep a focus on families and family processes we produced case studies of each family, with the relevant material under each code being presented together for the family members. This meant that we could see how far experiences or attitudes were shared by individuals in different generations of the same family.

Finally, all research team members read the case studies, which were used to generate the findings presented in the report.

APPENDIX 2: THE SAMPLE OF FAMILIES IN GLASGOW AND MIDDLESBROUGH

On the following page is a sketch of the 47 interviewees and 20 families in the study, divided by 'older', 'middle' and 'younger' generation, and by locality. As described in Chapter 2, in most cases we were unable to interview members of the older generation.

Glasgow families and interviewees

Wilson	Holland	McGinn	Reid	Morrison	Jamieson
Tina Wilson 76, retired	Liz Holland 64, retired				Anne Jamieson 76, retired
Archie Wilson 42, JSA	Margaret Holland, 42, DLA	Peter McGinn 55, JSA	Alison Reid 39, ESA	Susan Morrison 39, ESA	Kenny Jamieson 48, no income
					Terry Jamieson 42, DLA
John Wilson 16, no income		Mark McGinn 18, JSA	Steven Reid 20, JSA	Ross Morrison, 20, DLA	

Gordon	Harris	Martin	Fraser	White
Michelle Gordon 45, DLA	Davie Harris 55, ESA	Claire Martin 36, DLA	June Fraser 44, DLA	Linda White 50, DLA
		Douglas Martin 47, DLA		
Natalie Gordon 21, IS	Charlotte Harris 21, IS	Leanne Martin 17, no income	Pamela Fraser 21, ESA	Kerry White 30, IS

Abbreviations: ESA = Employment and Support Allowance; DLA = Disability Living Allowance; IS = Income Support; JSA = Job Seeker's Allowance

Middlesbrough families and interviewees

Blenkinsopp	Duncan	Cunningham	Hardy	Lamb
Brenda Blenkinsopp 79, retired				
Ryan Blenkinsopp 54, JSA	Amanda Duncan 50, JSA	Ron Cunningham 50, IB	Jill Hardy 38, student	Vera Lamb 54, Income Support
	Diane Duncan 23, JSA	Carol Cunningham 26, IS	Kieran Hardy 20, JSA	Trudy Lamb 25, JSA
				Maisie Lamb 17, no income
				Verity Lamb 16, no income

Smith	Hopkins	Richards	Nash
Carrie Smith 52, JSA	Alice Hopkins 53, IB	Patrick Richards 49, ESA	Janet Nash 40, CA
Fred Smith 17, no income	Martin Hopkins 34, CA	Adrian Richards 17, no income	Connor Nash 16, no income

Abbreviations: CA = Carer's Allowance; DLA = Disability Living Allowance; ESA = Employment and Support Allowance;
IB = Incapacity Benefit; IS = Income Support; JSA = Job Seeker's Allowance

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Tracy Shildrick and **Robert MacDonald** are Professors of Sociology at Teesside University. **Andy Furlong** is Professor of Social Inclusion and Education at Glasgow University. They each have long-standing interests in research on young people, youth transitions, unemployment and social in/exclusion, particularly in respect of patterns of inequality and social reproduction.

Johann Roden is a researcher specialising in public health, worklessness and social deprivation and carried out fieldwork for this project in Glasgow.

Robert Crow is a Research Associate in the Social Futures Institute, University of Teesside. His research interests include urban social regeneration, the role of the third sector within regeneration and issues around social deprivation. Together with Tracy Shildrick, he carried out fieldwork in Middlesbrough.

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