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Sofa surfers and joint-custody children: new living arrangements and household surveys in the UK and France

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“If it’s a standard household it’s
bleeding obvious...”

The Research

Overall aim:

To understand the implications of harmonised definitions of household in surveys, in particular focusing on the ability of such data to represent new and emergent living arrangements in Europe

This paper:

To explore which new forms of living arrangements and households are (badly) captured and / or represented in household surveys and censuses in the UK and France.

Research methods

Comparative research in France and UK

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of key informants in the UK and France
2. Detailed case study households in the UK and France, producing qualitative data on living arrangements.
Purposively selected :
 - different environments – capital, smaller town, rural areas
 - include households from African diaspora populations, and households with older (aged over 60 years) members

	UK	France
KII	27	25
Households	30	30

4 common themes: UK & France

#1. People who live temporarily with others

– Often as a result of a critical change e.g.: divorce

Sofa surfers

#2. Children who are cared for by multiple households

- Joint custody from divorced/ separated parents

- Care provided by grandparents

#3 Living apart together (LAT) couples

#4 Concealed households / (Illegal) migrants

#1 Sofa surfers

Firefox

Nodo authentication server

Sofa, so good - FT.com

www.ft.com/nt/cms/s/2/d508596a-2b72-11de-b806-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1vTM3ytq2

ons solo living

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Sofa, so good

They are called “kidults” or “the Boomerang generation”. Children who happily leave home, only to return a few years later as they realise they can’t afford to pay their rent. The credit crunch seems to have exacerbated the trend. There are now almost 2m people over the age of 18 living rent-free with family and friends – nearly four times as many as a year ago, according to Abbey. The poor parents – as if they don’t have enough to worry about, what with decimated pension pots and tumbling house prices.

Ten years or so ago, many of these returnees would have found it relatively easy to enter the property market. But more and more traditional first-time buyers have been excluded – initially because house prices rose to unaffordable levels and, more recently, because they can’t get mortgages. Figures out this week implied the difficulties may be easing. The number of home loans provided to first-time buyers in February was 7 per cent higher than the previous month, according to the Council of Mortgage Lenders. Unfortunately for the boomerangers, a closer look shows how much harder it has become for first-time buyers to get a loan. The average deposit put down by this group was 25 per cent in February, compared with 11 per cent the previous year, while their average income multiple for loans has fallen from 3.35 to 2.95. Also, the number of loans supplied to first-time buyers was still down almost 50 per cent

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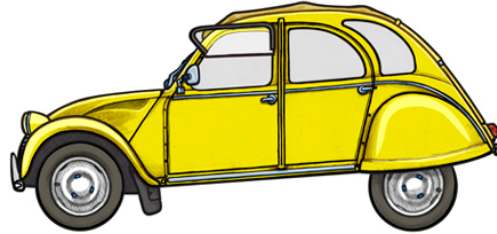
sheds and lats

EN

05:15

Liz: Not in the census

Liz's sister's house -
Oxfordshire



Liz's mother's house -
Hertfordshire



Most weekends

Liz

Liz's friend's house

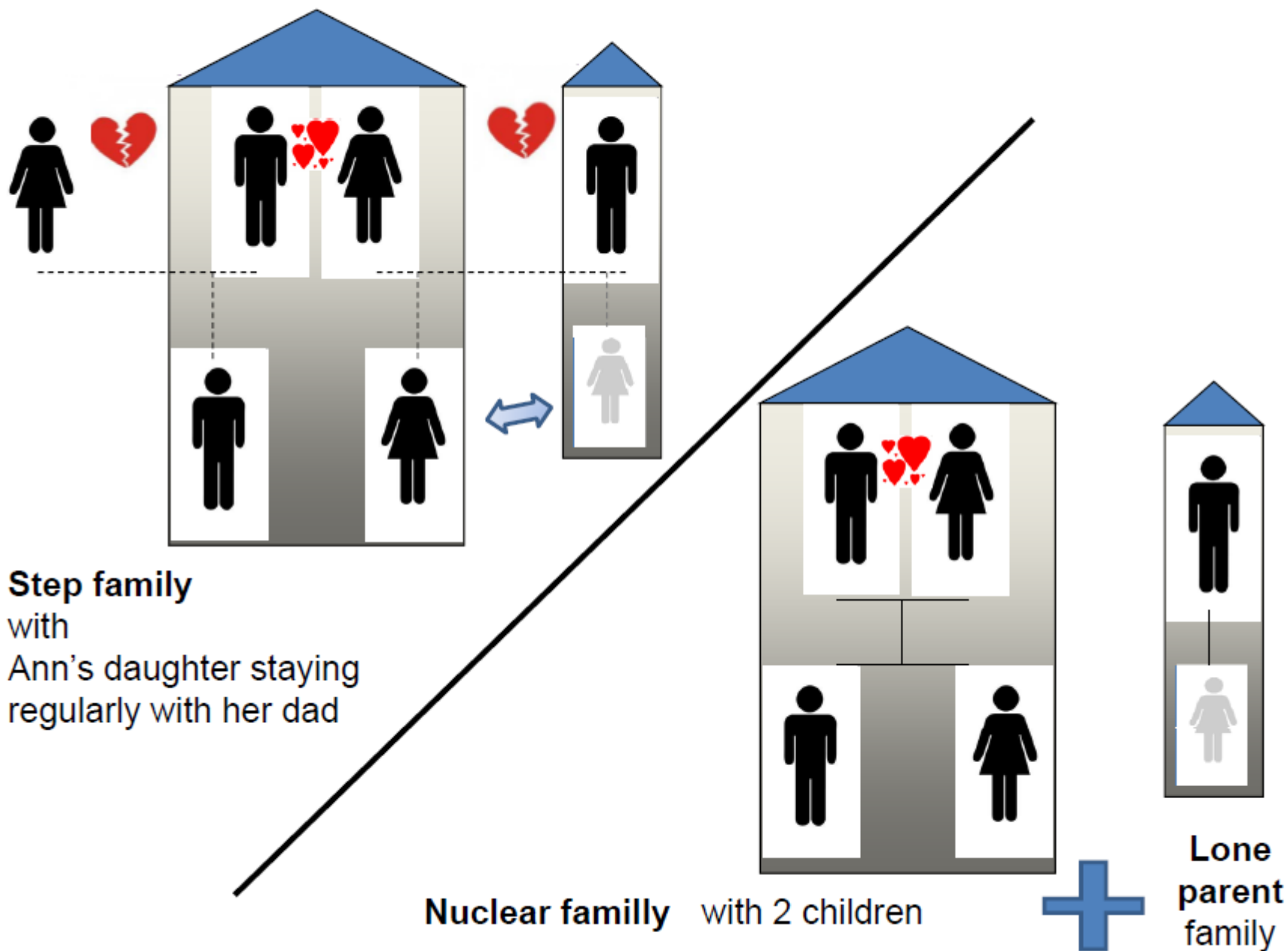
Liz stayed there on census night



Friend had already completed the online
census

#2. Children who are cared for by multiple households

- RES: I've had that a few times because that is getting more and more common, half a week with each parent. I tend to, wherever the child benefits go that's where I put them ... but I've had the conversation and try and find out exactly but they're adamant it's half and half and that's it.
- INT: So is that something that respondents find difficult to categorise?
- RES: As far as they're concerned they're half and half and that's it, so for the purposes of putting something in the survey I tend to put wherever they are getting child benefit, I tend to say that's where they live.



Step family
with
Ann's daughter staying
regularly with her dad

Nuclear family with 2 children

Lone parent family

#3 Living apart together (LAT)

« I live with my husband and my daughter. He has another wife who lives two blocks away and two boys. He eats and sleeps here more often because I am less quarrelsome... »

Bintou, interviewed in France, de facto polygamous union

Michel LAT

Michel (Rural area):

- « *Ecoutez, je ne suis pas en ménage. Depuis la mort de ma femme, je vis seul ici...j'ai par contre ma compagne qui vit à 5 km de mon village qui vient...on a une partie de vie commune mais chacun habite dans sa propre maison.* »
- « Listen, I'm not 'en ménage' [living with someone]. Since my wife died, I have been living here alone...my partner lives 5km from my village does sometimes come over... we share a part of our life, but each one live in his own house »

#4 “Concealed” households

Firefox | Noodo authentication server | financial times sofa unable afford ... | BBC News - 'Sheds with beds' are ... | EPC 201

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17185294

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'Sheds with beds' are London's modern day slums



BBC NEWS

27 February 2012 Last updated at 19:03 GMT

A series of modern day British slums have been described as "sheds with beds".

The illegal structures, some dangerous and cramped, are offered by landlords - often to Britain's illegal immigrants.

start | BBC Player Desktop | BBC News - 'Sheds w... | Microsoft PowerPoint ...

theguardian 21.05.12 Updated 05.26

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Society

The woman who lives in a shed: how London landlords are cashing in

Council finds people living in everything from massively overcrowded houses to a walk-in freezer – and the problem is getting worse



The shortage of housing in Newham, east London, and new benefit caps are forcing tenants to take what they can. Photograph: Martin Godwin for the Guardian

Amelia Gentleman
The Guardian, Wed 9 May 2012 16.58 BST

Maria's front door has a house number –

“I officially live in a [collective household] with other migrant workers, but in fact, I sleep at my wife’s and this is where I receive my private mail. My official papers are shared with my twin brother who stays at the foyer”

Allou, illegal migrant from Senegal, interviewed
in Paris

I think it those people who are renting out rooms and you've got a couple of Polish workers sharing a room and the rent's not declared, the Polish wouldn't be illegal immigrants but the Ukrainians might be, and the Bengalis might be and, yeah, I think it's those **households within households**

Survey consultant, UK

And finally, a methodological note...

- What are the implications for data on households as more interviews are conducted by phone or online?
 - No visual checks
 - No “hunches”

Conclusions

- Some households are definitely under enumerated in the census ('sofa surfers', 'beds in sheds' may even disappear...)
- Others may be better enumerated, such as LATs and (step)-children
- Perhaps, regardless of how the questions and definitions are applied it is almost certain that they will not be well captured
- www.householdsurvey.info