



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Changing Families,  
Changing Food.

Photograph: Frank Olsen

# Children as family participants

## Principal Investigators

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## Summary

This project explores children's participation in the everyday practice of family life. 'Doing' family is considered as the ongoing and dynamic social relationships through which 'being a family' is realized and the project explores children's perspectives on that process. Focusing on food and eating practices in and across different

forms of family and different family styles the project looks both at 11-12 year old children's experiences and perceptions of their contribution to the family through the everyday negotiations that take place with parents and other family members over food.

Royal Holloway  
University of London

The Leverhulme Trust

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood)

## Research questions

This project uses food and eating practices to:

- explore the changing dynamics of everyday family life as perceived by children and by parents,
- explore children's perception, and that of their parents, of children's contribution to those changing dynamics,
- explore these issues across a range of different family forms (families with sibling groups of at least three, families with only one child, single parent families),
- locate children's everyday experiences of, and participation in, family life within broader social and cultural contexts (social class, ethnicity, families with restricted dietary practices).



## Research design

In asking about children's experiences of and contribution to making 'family', and using food practices as a focus for this, the project explores two main issues.

First from the perspective of children, what ideas, beliefs and practices do they take from 'the family' into other contexts, such as the school, the peer group and leisure spaces?

Second, as active contributors to the everyday life of their own families what do children bring to the family from their participation in these other contexts and how is that negotiated or managed within the family?

## The 'Changing Families, Changing Food' Programme

'*Changing Families, Changing Food*' is a major inter-disciplinary research programme, funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The Programme began in October 2005 and will run for just over three years.

It is organised into three research strands on: pregnancy and motherhood; childhood and family life; and family and community. Focusing on contemporary Britain, the Programme also includes some international comparisons and a 'time-line' to establish the quantitative and qualitative nature of social changes affecting families and food over the last century.

The Programme is coordinated by Peter Jackson (Director of Research for the Social Sciences at Sheffield University) and is based in ICoSS (the University's new social science facility). The Programme involves colleagues from Clinical Sciences, East Asian Studies, Geography, Nursing and Midwifery, the School for Health and Related Research and Sociological Studies at Sheffield in collaboration with colleagues in Health and Social Care at Royal Holloway, University of London.

The research takes food as the lens through which to observe recent changes in family life and examines how changes in family form have affected patterns of food consumption. The Programme's findings are expected to contribute to current debates about obesity and nutrition, media and consumption, food choice and deprivation.

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