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University
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Sheffield.

Changing Families,
Changing Food.

Feeding the family

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Summary

This research aims to understand how rules and expectations pertaining to food related practices and imaginations in two contrasting economic and social institutional frameworks, are made and re-made within the family setting. Specifically, examinations of the practices and expectations regarding eating, food provision and cooking in a command economy (Hungary), are compared to the practices and expectations of families where the dominant and sometimes institutionalized anticipation is/was for women to leave employment upon marriage (UK).

By examining families in different national contexts it is possible to tease out the degree to which expectations regarding how food should be made available and consumed, as well as who makes that food, is linked to changes in the family, the roles of individual family members, and increased awareness of food related health risks. This line of inquiry is particularly important as the UK is increasingly looking toward a model of full employment that includes an assumption of women as workers, while there are persistent gender divisions in household labour and assumptions about family formation.

Royal Holloway
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www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood

The Leverhulme Trust

Research questions

- Within families in the UK and Hungary, how are tasks associated with food provision and eating allocated?
- What are the rules of provisioning and eating within UK and Hungarian families?
- What is the origin of these rules, how are they passed to future generations, and how do family members resist, renegotiate, or undermine the rules?
- What conflicts arise between heritage, nutrition, popular culture, memory, and everyday life in relation to food provision and eating within UK and Hungarian families and how are these resolved by family members individually and as a family unit?



Research design

The context for this research is middle class families in the UK and Hungary. Middle and upper income families were chosen because they are less likely to be burdened by the constraints and consequences of food security than poor families, although issues of food availability and affordability will continue to figure into the choices for some families.

The research findings are based on data collected through diary-interviews, observation, and focus groups as well as life history accounts gathered in partnership with the Ilkley and Szeged Clubs of Soroptimist International. Additional contextual materials such as cookery books, extracts from archived material, images derived from food advertising and government publications will also be used.

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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