

Millennium Cohort Study Briefing 7

Neighbourhood and residential mobility

Based on Chapter 7 of *Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years*

Sosthenes Ketende, John 'Mac' McDonald and Heather Joshi¹



About these briefings

This Briefing is one of 14 that distil the key findings of the first three surveys of the Millennium Cohort Study, as collected in *Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years*.

The study has been tracking the Millennium children through their early childhood and plans to follow them into adulthood. It covers such diverse topics as parenting; childcare; school choice; child behaviour and cognitive development; child and parental health; parents' employment and education; income; housing; and neighbourhood.

It is the first of the nationwide cohort studies to over-sample areas with high densities of ethnic minorities and large numbers of disadvantaged families.

For the first survey, in 2001–2, interviewers visited the families of nearly 19,000 children aged 9 months throughout the United Kingdom. It established the circumstances of pregnancy and birth, as well as the families' social background. The second survey recorded how nearly 16,000 cohort children were developing at age 3. The third survey, when they were age 5, involved almost 15,500 children and provided a uniquely

detailed account of their physical, cognitive and social development in the year they entered school.

The study is housed at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London. It was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council, whose funding has been supplemented by a consortium of government departments.

Children of the 21st century (Volume 2): The first five years, edited by Kirstine Hansen, Heather Joshi and Shirley Dex, The Policy Press, 2010, can be ordered via www.policypress.co.uk

Introduction

Families with young children are quite likely to move home. Such mobility often benefits both adults and children, for example when it enables a parent to change jobs or a family to move close to 'good' schools, to a larger home or to a safer area. Other families are forced to move, perhaps because they are evicted, or a couple splits up.

Whatever the circumstances, moving home can be very stressful and can mean the loss of a supportive social network. But is there evidence that moving home disrupts children's lives? This is a key question for the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) as nearly half of the cohort's children moved at least once between the first and third surveys (at age 9 months and 5 years).

Cullis (2008) found no difference in cognitive and behavioural scores of Millennium cohort children at age 3, according to whether families had moved home since the first survey. However, moving can potentially disrupt relationships with health-care professionals and providers. Using MCS data, Pearce et al. (2008) found that moving was associated with lower uptake of childhood immunisations. Hence, the effects of moving home might be positive, negative or neutral, depending on the outcome measured and the reason for the move.

The relationship between child wellbeing and neighbourhood characteristics is also not straightforward. However, this Briefing makes no attempt to assess the impact of home area on children. Instead it charts mobility in the MCS cohort's early years from surveys carried out at age 9 months, three and five years (MCS1, 2 and 3). It looks at whether family circumstances, such as type of accommodation, predict subsequent mobility. It also investigates families' perceptions of their neighbourhood. Is it a good place to raise children? How safe is it? And how are these perceptions related to subsequent mobility?

Housing tenure, neighbourhood and mobility

There has been much interest recently in the effects of growing up in social housing. For the cohorts born in 1958 and 1970, social housing was associated with an inauspicious

start in life. However, children in the 1946 cohort who were raised in council housing do not appear to have been at extra disadvantage in later life. This change in fortunes reflects new allocation policies, the 'right to buy', and changes in the structure of families and the labour market. It has been said that council housing shifted from catering for the 'neat and tidy' in the post-war generation, to providing for the 'tight and needy' by the turn of the century (Lupton et al. 2009). The MCS cannot yet provide evidence of the eventual outcomes for children currently growing up in social housing, but there are already signs of a greater social divide between families in such housing and other tenures (such as owner-occupation) than there was in previous cohorts.

At the age 5 survey, 22 per cent of families who took part in all three surveys lived in social housing, 68 per cent in owner-occupied homes and 8 per cent in privately rented accommodation. The remaining 3 per cent had other arrangements, such as living with their parents. This represents a small shift towards owner-occupation, up from 64 per cent at the age 9 months survey. At age 5, the social renters were the group most likely to be lone parents, and to have lower levels of income, education and maternal employment. Fifty-four per cent of lone parents lived in social housing at this stage, compared to 14 per cent of couples. Black, but not Asian, families were also over-represented in the sector.

Mobility and follow-up surveys

Keeping up with movers has been a challenge for MCS, as it is for all longitudinal surveys. Consequently, there are lower rates of successful follow-up for the mobile than for those who stay put (Plewis et al. 2008). In this Briefing, in order to study longitudinal patterns in mobility, we restrict our analysis to families who provided information at every survey, and apply attrition weighting in an attempt to minimise bias.²

Residential mobility over three surveys

Almost half of all the families had changed address at least once by the time of the age 5 survey. Over a third (38%) moved home between the first and second surveys. Fewer (24%) did so between the second and third

surveys. Among the 2,477 families who moved during the second period, the most common reasons given were: larger home (42%), better area (22%), better home (21%) and children's education (13%). Less common responses included partnership break-up (10%), trouble with neighbours (4%) and eviction (3%). The pattern of reasons given for moving between MCS1 and MCS2 was very similar, with even more emphasis on wanting a larger home (47%).

Forty per cent of families reported one move and 9 per cent two or more. There was more stability in the tenure of that housing (79% remained in the same category). Even the movers mostly stayed in their original tenure (66%). The vast majority of families in areas classed in the 30 per cent most deprived at the age 9 months survey were in the same type of locality four years later (81%). Among the larger group who were not in a high deprivation area originally, only 6 per cent had moved into one.

Characteristics of movers

There were substantial differences in the extent of residential mobility by MCS families in each UK country. The highest rate of mobility between MCS2 and MCS3 was in Northern Ireland (30%) and the lowest in Wales (19%). However, almost all moves were within the same country (99% of respondents were in the same country at MCS1 and 3). Families in Wales also tended not to move when children were under 3, but at that stage Northern Ireland had the lowest mobility rate. Another examination of moves between MCS1 and MCS2 (for England) found that families in villages, or moving to them, had the highest incomes, suggesting some 'flight' from the cities (Joshi et al. 2008). In contrast, the wholly urban wards with high minority ethnic populations had the lowest mobility between the second and third surveys.

Figure 1 shows the percentages of families moving between MCS2 and MCS3 for particular categories. Mobility at this stage was higher for those who had also moved between the first two surveys, but those in adverse housing and/or neighbourhoods were most mobile. However, private renters were more likely to move between MCS2 and MCS3 (44%) than those in social housing (22%) or homeowners (16%). If the main respondent was under 30 years old

at MCS2, mobility was higher (27%) than if they were older (17%).

The analysis on which this Briefing is based also highlighted particularly low mobility among South Asian families, and higher mobility amongst families in the highest and lowest income groups. These differentials are likely to persist.

Other things being equal, the odds of moving between MCS2 and MCS3 were significantly lower for those originally living in disadvantaged wards in England and both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged wards in Wales. Furthermore, the odds of moving for families originally living in English wards with high minority ethnic populations were 43 per cent lower. Those originally living in Scotland had the same propensity to move as those in non-disadvantaged wards in England, adjusting for factors such as the family's level of disadvantage/poverty and type of housing.

Perceptions of neighbourhood

As one reason for moving home is to reach a better or safer area, the perception of the current neighbourhood is important for

predicting future mobility. The mother's (or alternative main respondent's) perceptions are recorded in MCS2 and MCS3. Five-point scales were used to measure whether the neighbourhood was considered 'a good area in which to bring up children' (very poor, poor, average, good, excellent) or how safe the area was (very unsafe, fairly unsafe, neither safe nor unsafe, fairly safe, very safe).

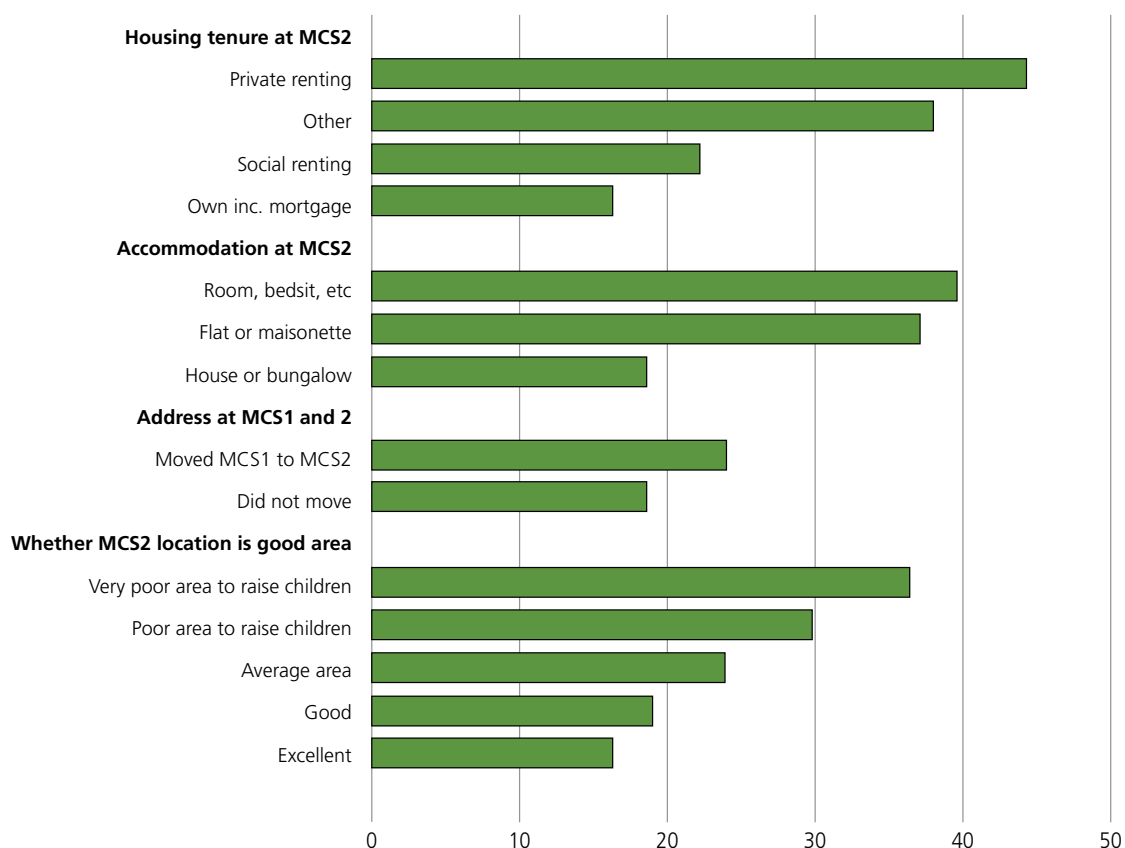
Movers between MCS2 and MCS3 were more likely to report their MCS3 area as excellent for raising children (37% for movers, 32% for stayers) or a very safe area (40% for movers, 33% for stayers). Few respondents at MCS3 reported their area was a poor one for raising children (between 4% and 7%, according to country), or unsafe (3% to 6%). Northern Ireland was considered the best and safest place to bring up children.

As shown in Figure 2, the degree of satisfaction with the area lived in at the age 5 survey was strongly related to the type of ward the family had been living in at the age 9 months survey. Very few MCS respondents (between 1% and 3%) who had been in non-disadvantaged

wards thought that their area was poor for raising children. However, those from disadvantaged wards and the equally disadvantaged minority ethnic areas expressed much higher dissatisfaction (between 5% and 17%). This reflects the finding that few cohort families had moved out of, or into, deprived areas. Families renting from a local authority or housing association were most likely to consider their area poor (18%). Only 3 per cent of those with degree-level qualifications thought their area was a poor one for bringing up children, compared with 14 per cent of those with no qualifications.

Overall, around 5 per cent of parents surveyed at MCS3 thought their neighbourhood was unsafe. Families who moved between MCS2 and MCS3 were 51 per cent less likely than 'stayers' to rate their area as unsafe at MCS3. Just over 90 per cent thought that it was not unsafe at both the age 3 and age 5 surveys. Over two-thirds of those who felt the age 3 area was poor or very poor were still at the same address. As shown in Figure 3, those who had been living in social housing were also more likely to rate their home areas as unsafe at the age 5 survey.

Figure 1
Percentage moving home between ages 3 and 5 by selected characteristics



Key statistics

49 per cent of MCS families had moved by the time the child was 5.

54 per cent of families headed by a lone parent lived in social housing when the cohort child was 5.

17 per cent of families from minority ethnic wards rated their MCS3 area as poor or very poor for bringing up children. This group were also the most likely to report their neighbourhood as unsafe and had low chances of mobility.

Allowing for neighbourhood and housing factors, low family income has an independent association with adverse neighbourhood ratings. No such association was found with mobility.

Conclusions

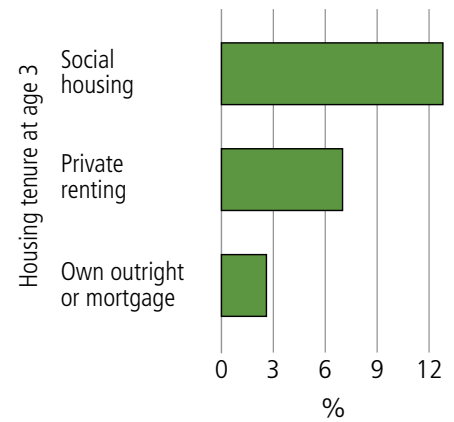
One-quarter of the cohort lived in high deprivation localities at all three surveys and another 11 per cent had done so at one or two surveys. Families originally living in ethnic wards, mostly from minority groups, had a consistently low rate of mobility.

The overall aggregate improvement in the quality of local environments inhabited by the Millennium cohort families is small and slow. Objective and subjective accounts of moves are generally more positive than negative, but the average perceived safety of neighbourhoods deteriorated slightly as the children reached age 5.

If the patterns observed in families with older children in the 2001 census are replicated, the next five years will see fewer home moves. This will give the MCS children a better chance of establishing themselves

Figure 3

Home area rated as unsafe, age 5 survey, by housing tenure



at school and with friends. It may also reinforce an emerging polarisation between owner-occupied and other housing tenures, and a closing off of 'escape' from the places rated worst for bringing up children.

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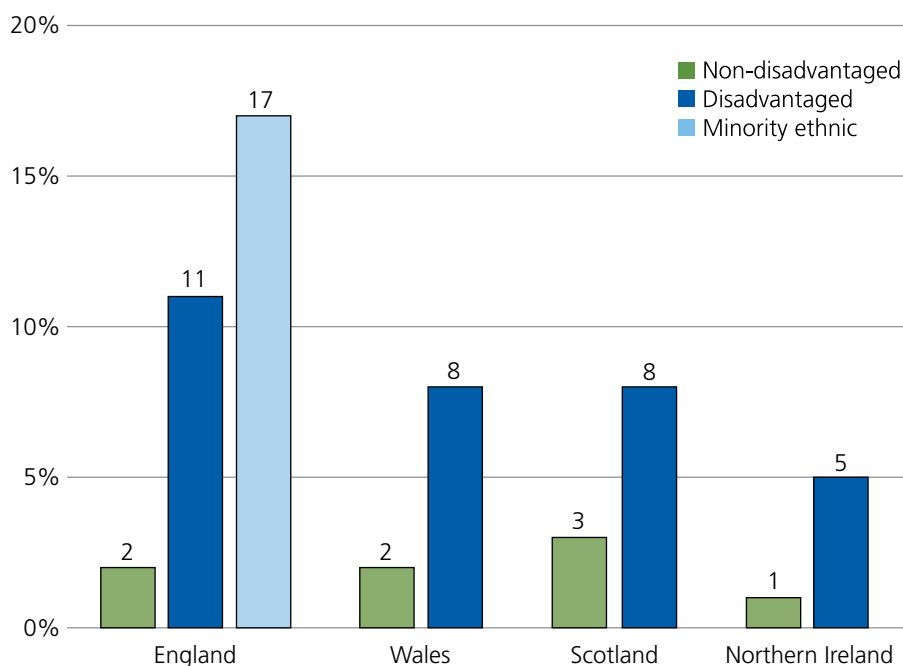
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Figure 2

Whether home area is poor for bringing up children, main respondent's views at age 5 survey, by ward type*



* Ward type at first survey, age 9 months

1 Sosthenes Ketende, John 'Mac' McDonald and Heather Joshi, Institute of Education, University of London. This text has been adapted and shortened to suit the format of these Briefings. Responsibility for any errors therefore rests with the Centre for Longitudinal Studies rather than the chapter authors.

2 The weighting of data adjusts both for the disproportionate representation of some types of area in the original sample, and for the rates at which different types of families drop out of the survey.