

**An Analysis of the Work-Care
Experiences of Out-of-Work Partnered
Parents in France and the UK: Ideals,
Practice and Policy Learning**

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the United Kingdom (UK). It aims to understand how activation policy could be improved by recognising the importance of work-family reconciliation issues for out-of-work couples. Based on interviews with thirty-six families in Lille and Sheffield, it contributes to knowledge through increasing awareness of how work-care issues play out within couples and by questioning assumptions among policy makers that such issues are unimportant to out-of-work parents. It differs from existing research by examining the experiences of mothers as carers and potential workers; and fathers as workers and potential carers. The cross-national aspect - with a particular focus on policy learning - evaluates how differences in labour market structures, working time regimes and work-family reconciliation policy in France and the UK are borne out in parental experiences.

The ideal work-care scenarios of the parents interviewed are outlined and their experiences of seeking to obtain these models investigated. Respondents were found to have a strong commitment to employment. Personal, activation-side, neighbourhood, societal and (especially for mothers) care factors all contributed to why they were not in work. Differences are identified in the influencing factors cross-nationally between parents. In the UK, even where mothers might find work more easily than fathers, respondents maintained traditional models of whom to prioritise for employment.

Parents' ideals and experiences are analysed in relation to six fields of macro and micro-level literature. Among other contributions, the findings notably allow the development of activation regime theory by fronting the role of care and the extension of 'gendered moral rationalities' theory to couples cross-nationally. Discord was found to exist between policy objectives and the ideals of some out-of-work parents in both countries. New policy directions are identified.

List of Abbreviations

ANPE	Agence nationale pour l'emploi
CAF	Caisse d'Allocations Familiales
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
EU	European Union
FJF	Future Jobs Fund
FND	Flexible New Deal
JcP	Jobcentre Plus
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAJE	Prestation d'accueil de jeune enfant
RSA	Revenu de solidarité active
UK	United Kingdom

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context and Rationale

This thesis analyses the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents or, as they are more frequently referred to, ‘workless families’ in France and the United Kingdom (UK). It tries to understand how activation policy can be improved by recognising the importance of work-family reconciliation issues for out-of-work couples. Based on interviews conducted with thirty-six families in Lille and Sheffield, it provides a timely addition to knowledge in two principal ways. It increases awareness of how work-care issues play out within couples. Secondly, it questions assumptions among policy makers that work-care issues are unimportant to out-of-work parents. It takes an original approach, examining experiences of mothers as carers and potential workers, and fathers as workers and potential carers. In doing so, it fills a significant gap in knowledge regarding the ideal work-care scenarios and lived experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Although some previous research has investigated work-care issues among the out-of-work, the majority of this literature has looked at lone parents from a qualitative micro-level perspective or taken a quantitative macro-level perspective. The cross-national component of this thesis aims to examine how differences in labour market structures, working time regimes and work-family reconciliation policy in France and the UK are borne out in parental experiences in the two countries. This thesis has both theoretical and policy impact.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes the constant challenge that work-care issues represent for parents globally:

“Finding a suitable work/family life balance is a challenge that all parents face”
(2007, no page number given).

However, work-care issues are predominantly considered in existing policy in relation to families where at least one parent is in employment, emphasising the difficulties that face women and men trying to combine caring responsibilities with careers. Excluding families where neither parent is currently working assumes that work-care issues are not important for the out-of-work. The lack of policy focus on the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents as a group is particularly contradictory given the increasing focus on workless families, especially in the UK political context. As MacDonald et al. underline:

“The idea of ‘intergenerational cultures of worklessness’ has become influential in UK politics and policy, and been used to explain contemporary worklessness and to justify welfare reforms” (2014, p.199).

Härkönen (2011) in one of the few existing studies of the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents used regression analysis to show how at a macro-level children increase the risk of worklessness within EU countries including France and especially the UK - indicating that work-care issues are important among out-of-work parents. This thesis contests the assumption among policy makers that work-care issues are not relevant to out-of-work parents by investigating work-care issues among those who are not in employment at all. In doing so, it fills a significant gap in knowledge regarding how work-care issues play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents.

It is important to understand the role of work-care issues in the lives of out-of-work partnered parents as the activation of large parts of the population, including mothers, is a key policy objective for both countries. The involvement of fathers in care to free up the labour power of mothers has also been recently prioritised, especially for fathers of children under the age of one. This thesis offers an original approach to understanding the difficulties regarding employment faced by workless families¹. It is likely to be of interest to policy makers due to how it seeks to find ways to improve activation policy to help parents to achieve their short and long-term work and care goals, and in turn, to improve the life chances of individuals and the possible economic contribution they make to society. In doing so, it helps to address how policy can combat the new social risks agenda as emphasised by Esping-Andersen, 1999; Hemerijck, 2002; Taylor-Gooby, 2004 and Bonoli, 2005, 2007. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.4), especially in the UK, activating the out-of-work has been considered a way of reducing the risk of poverty and addressing the new social risks that have emerged post de-industrialisation. The demographic effect of an ageing population highlights the importance of increasing labour supply – enabling more people to return to work or work for the first time – by amongst other things responding to issues of work-family reconciliation. European welfare state models were designed for full-time, male manual breadwinners (Begg et al., 2015, p.21). As demonstrated in section 3.2, the shift away from this model, particularly for increased female participation, still has some way to go – especially in the UK. Such movement can be considered to be *“increasingly essential”* at a time when Europe’s workforce is shrinking as its population ages (Begg et al., 2015, p.17). An ageing population means fewer economically active people are supporting a larger non-working population

¹ Due to the negative connotations associated with the term “workless families”, this thesis will primarily refer to such families as “out-of-work partnered parents”.

(Begg et al., 2015, p.15). Natural increase in population takes at least eighteen years to work through to labour supply. This places real importance on encouraging people to become economically active and take up work (Begg et al., 2015, p.21). A micro-level comparison of how out-of-work partnered parents understand and negotiate their care and employment responsibilities and ambitions will be of use to policy makers in terms of enabling them to harness norms and desires. This in turn could help them to better target policy or change norms in order to encourage more out-of-work parents to enter the labour market.

Policy supporting parents into work can also be considered significant from a child poverty perspective. Numerous authors have underlined the link between the labour market status of parents and children's economic well-being². It is important to understand the experiences of families led by out-of-work partnered couples because a significant percentage of children in poverty live in two-parent jobless households. 30.3% of no-worker couple families lived in poverty in the UK in 2008 compared to 24.8% in France (OECD, 2014a, p.4).

The gap in studies of work-care issues among out-of-work partnered parents can be considered to exist because where fathers are unemployed they have been classified as 'unemployed men' rather than as 'unemployed fathers'. As such, research has rarely explored the role of care in their experiences, instead focusing on the role of personal characteristics such as skills level as well as the impact of activation programmes. Conversely, mothers in unemployed couples have not been considered as 'unemployed' but rather as 'inactive' and so little research has explored the barriers they face regarding employment. This thesis addresses these assumptions by looking at the work ambitions of mothers and the caring ambitions of fathers. What are the work-care ideals of out-of-work partnered parents? What are their experiences? What are they forced to compromise on in practice? To what extent do they not work in order to order to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios? Which other factors are important in their work-care experiences?

The cross-national nature of this thesis seeks to understand how the differing policy environments, in terms of labour market structures, working time regimes and work-family

² For example, Härkönen (2011) underlines how children's economic well-being is strongly connected to the labour market status of their parents (p.218). Ermisch et al. (2004) argue that parental joblessness can be used as a proxy for child poverty (p.69). Stock et al. (2014) suggest that households with children have a greater risk of poverty than those without since having children involves increased outgoings to provide for children, as well as reduced capacity to partake in the labour market due to childcare responsibilities (p.3).

reconciliation policy in France and the UK, play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. France and the UK were chosen as the focus of this study since they share many similarities but also sufficient differences in order to make a policy comparison interesting and worthwhile³. On the one hand, they are close geographical neighbours with “*a common history*” (Embassy of France in London, 2005). On the other hand, as Chapters 2 and 3 make clear there are important differences in the care-side and activation-side of work-family reconciliation policy, labour market structures (in particular, women’s position in the labour market) and working time regimes. Key labour market differences include that whilst the unemployment rate is higher in France than the UK (particularly, among young people and the long-term unemployed) the rate of full-time employment among women who are employed is considerably higher in France. Statutory legislation regarding working time is stronger in France than the UK. Conversely, the UK working time regime is based on greater flexibility in terms of the use of cheap, disposable labour and has a wide gender gap in that fathers generally work very long hours and mothers work short part-time hours. Important policy differences include the longer history of more generous provision on the care-side of work-family reconciliation policy in France than the UK; and the longer history of activation-side work-family reconciliation policies with greater centralisation, use of sanctions and involvement of the private sector in supporting the out-of-work to find work in the UK than France.

How do such differences play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries? This thesis seeks to use the different policy backgrounds in the two countries to provide new perspective on policy in each country, identifying new policy directions (Hantrais, 1995). In line with increased policy emphasis on the activation of the unemployed in both France and the UK, this research will help policy makers to understand how best to encourage/motivate unemployed parents to enter the labour market.

The OECD favours promoting employment in almost all situations, stating that:

“Giving people better opportunities to participate actively in the labour market improves well-being. It also helps countries to cope with rapid population ageing by mobilising more fully each country’s potential labour resources” (2014b, p.3).

³ It was decided to refer to the UK rather than England because the policies which would appear to have the biggest impact on the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents, such as work-family reconciliation policy, are decided at the state level.

Nevertheless, it is important to question whether those only able to apply for employment at the lower-end of the labour market (low-paid, low-skilled jobs) always feel that seeking employment is in their and their families' best interests. This is especially topical given the rise in de-standardised forms of employment over the last decade in France and especially the UK. On the one hand, this might offer greater flexibility for employees to balance work and care. On the other hand, it may lead to employers prioritising flexibility and low costs creating uncertainty and low pay for employees (Milner, 2015, p.175). Therefore, as argued in Chapter 4, this thesis deliberately adopts the broad definition of 'out-of-work' parents in order to have the scope to investigate the experiences of both those who desire employment and those who do not. Greater knowledge of how the quality nature of jobs available impacts on the employment ambitions of parents in France and the UK will contribute to improved understanding among policy makers of the challenges that out-of-work parents face and could be used to better target policy towards alleviating these challenges.

This thesis makes theoretical as well as policy contributions. It seeks to respond to existing cross-national macro-level theory on welfare regime typologies (e.g. Lewis, 1992, 2001; Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 2006, 2012; Leitner, 2003); activation regime typologies (e.g. Barbier, 2004; Serrano Pascual, 2007); fatherhood regime typologies (e.g. Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Gregory and Milner, 2011a, 2011b); micro-level UK-based theory on the experiences of lone parents; and micro-level research on motherhood ideologies. These outline contradictory factors in understanding the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. The typologies stress differences in the relationship between national policy, the labour market and the family in France and the UK, indicating the interest in studying the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in both countries. However, they are based on macro-level analysis. The extent to which they are relevant to experiences at the micro-level can consequently be questioned. The lone parent literature and the motherhood ideologies literature highlight the importance of individual, moral and social factors in understanding mothers' decisions concerning entering paid work. Duncan and Edwards outline 'gendered moral rationalities' (1999, p.3), whilst the motherhood ideologies literature suggests that individual factors such as class and race could be important in explaining parental experiences (Bortolaia Silva, 1996, p.3; Collins, 1994, p.45; Glenn, 1994, p.6). The lone parent literature has focused primarily on the experiences of lone mothers. Therefore its relevance in understanding the experiences of coupled fathers, in particular, is debateable. The motherhood ideologies literature has not focused on Western European countries; again leading to doubts over the insight it provides. This thesis examines the role of these factors in the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. In relation to welfare regime and activation regime theory, it analyses the

experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in order to assess whether the experiences of individual parents correspond to what one might expect based on differences in the categorisation of France and the UK in these macro-level theories. This thesis contends that a micro-level study will enable identification of additional factors that are important in the parents' experiences but which are not emphasised in macro-level research. In relation to the 'gendered moral rationalities', literature this thesis investigates the extent to which the ethic of care can be considered to apply to coupled parents and in a cross-national context.

This thesis takes a micro-level qualitative approach. As such, it does not aim to be representative. Instead, it explores 'what' parents are experiencing and 'why' they are experiencing this (in other words, it helps to explain 'how' parents are experiencing work-care issues and the causal relationships involved), rather than 'to what extent' certain experiences are prevalent among out-of-work parents as a whole. The impact of this thesis is to provide an in-depth account of how work-care issues can be experienced by out-of-work partnered parents. In doing so, it addresses assumptions within society and the media regarding the behaviour of workless families and the impact of policy on such families.

1.2 Research Questions

This section will briefly outline the research questions. Chapter 2 (section 2.8) lists the questions in full and explains how they are generated from gaps in existing literature.

The research questions aim to examine the ideal work and care scenarios (subsequently referred to as 'ideal work-care scenarios') and work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. They analyse similarities and differences in parental ideals and experiences in the two countries. They ask how parental ideals and experiences are influenced by differences in labour market structures and work-family reconciliation policies in the two countries. They investigate whether different groups of parents (for example, according to parental class, ethnicity, age and health, age and number of children) can be identified in terms of their work-care ideals and experiences. They consider whether welfare regime theory, fatherhood regime theory, activation regime theory and 'gendered moral rationalities' theory can be updated in response to experiences of out-of-work partnered parents identified at the micro-level in France and the UK. They are designed to enable the generation of policy proposals to improve work-family reconciliation policy towards out-of-

work partnered parents in the two countries. Finally, they emphasise cross-national policy learning.

1.3 Chapter Outline

This section provides a brief summary of the aims of each of the chapters in this thesis. It indicates how the chapters enable responses to the research questions outlined above to be developed.

Chapter 2 positions this thesis in relation to existing research. It identifies the gaps in existing research and, consequently, explains the rationale for and sets out the value of the research questions. It explains why it is important to consider the research questions in terms of how they respond to current problems in literature and policy, and crucially, what their contributions therefore are. The chapter argues that a lack of qualitative micro-level studies of the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents both at the national level and at the comparative level can be identified. It outlines the theoretical frameworks that justify the interest in undertaking this thesis, namely:

- cross-national comparative policy studies based on comparative welfare-regime theory;
- cross-national comparative studies of fatherhood;
- cross-national comparative policy studies based on comparative activation regime theory
- cross-national micro-level studies of the experiences of in-work parents;
- micro-level studies of ‘gendered moral rationalities’, the ethic of care, motherhood ideologies and capability frameworks that focus on the experiences of lone parents in the UK;
- macro- and micro-level single and cross-national studies of unemployment and poverty.

Chapter 2 maintains that whilst such theories provide an indication of the possible ideal work-care scenarios and practical experiences of out-of-work partnered parents, none provide a thorough in-depth analysis as they have different foci. Welfare regime theories and activation regime theories are based on state level spending. The fatherhood literature primarily focuses on in-work fathers. Conversely, the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ and ethic of care literature

concentrates on lone parents and has rarely been applied cross-nationally. Studies of work-care issues among in-work parents focus on mothers, leaving questions over the experiences of fathers. Studies of unemployment and poverty assume employment is a core component of ‘good care’ and emphasise the experiences of people registered on training schemes rather than also considering the experiences of people who are inactive. Chapter 2 concludes by listing the research questions.

Chapter 3 contrasts the policy context in France and the UK. It begins by highlighting differences in labour market structures, employment regimes and working time regimes in the two countries. It then discusses work-family reconciliation policy and demonstrates how the history of and motivation behind policy on the care-side and the activation-side of work-family reconciliation policy differs in France and the UK; thus underlining the interest in conducting a comparative study in the two countries. Finally, Chapter 3 outlines what one might expect to find when studying out-of-work partnered parents on the basis of macro-level policy comparison.

Chapter 4 provides detail on the methodology. It discusses the rationale for the research approach taken, how the neighbourhoods where the interviews took place were chosen, issues in data collection planning and practice, the sampling of participants, the data analysis method and ethical considerations. Most importantly, it uses Lincoln and Guba’s criteria to evaluate the “*credibility*”, “*transferability*”, “*dependability*” and “*confirmability*” of this thesis (1985, p.328).

Chapter 5 analyses the parents’ ideal work-care scenarios. It provides the main empirical analysis responding to the first research question – investigating the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. In relation to the research question examining how work-care issues impact in practice – Chapter 5 connects differences in the ideal work-care scenarios identified among parents in the two countries to differences in labour market and work-family reconciliation policies in the two countries. It also analyses whether the parents’ ideal work-care scenarios correspond to what one may expect based on macro-level, cross-national welfare regime theories and micro-level theories of ‘good mothering’ (in the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ literature) and ‘good fathering’ (in the fatherhood regimes literature). In addition to cross-national differences, the chapter examines differences in the ideal work-care scenarios of different groups of out-of-work partnered

parents (for example, according to parental ethnicity and the number of children). In doing so, it responds to the research question which examines how decisions regarding ideal work-care scenarios vary among different groups of out-of-work partnered parents within each country and cross-nationally.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the parents' practical experiences of trying to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios (and thus respond to the research questions that focus on differences in parental ideals and experiences according to the policy and working time regime context, as well as individual parental characteristics). Chapter 6 explores the experiences of couples where both parents were looking for employment in practice. Chapter 7 focuses on the experiences of couples seeking a male breadwinner model and of couples where neither parent was seeking employment in practice. The chapters contrast policy provision in the two countries, investigating the extent to which work-family reconciliation policy provides effective support to enable the parents to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios in practice. Both chapters comment on the extent to which parents' experiences of policy correspond to macro-level policy trends. They also investigate heterogeneity in experience between mothers and fathers in each country, and between mothers and fathers cross-nationally in the two countries.

Chapter 8 relates to the final two research questions that look into the theoretical and policy contributions of this theory. The chapter synthesises the overall conclusions of this thesis. First, it underlines the implications and contributions of the empirical findings to policy. It looks at improving policy towards out-of-work partnered parents and identifies groups of out-of-work partnered parents that policy could target to move into employment. It makes a series of policy proposals to help parents to move into employment. Secondly, it highlights the theoretical contributions of this thesis in particular, updating activation regime theory to take account of gendered experiences identified at the micro-level; and 'gendered moral rationalities' theory to take account of the experiences of couples cross-nationally. Finally, it suggests areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Rationale and Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates this thesis within the context of the wider academic community in the fields of work-care issues and welfare state studies. It outlines the gaps in existing research and, consequently, justifies the rationale for and sets out the value of the research questions. It lists the research questions and explains why it is important to consider them in terms of how they respond to current problems in literature and policy.

First, this chapter underlines the lack of existing studies of work-care issues among out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Secondly, it shows how six areas of literature that are not specifically focused on out-of-work partnered parents indicate possible trends among this group of parents but that gaps exist in the insight that they offer. Thirdly, it demonstrates how the research questions were designed to fill these gaps in understanding. Fourthly, it underlines the theoretical and policy contributions the research questions aim to elicit. Finally, it outlines which chapters in this thesis respond to which research questions.

Lack of existing studies

As indicated in section 1.1, in contrast to the large qualitative literature examining the work-care experiences of out-of-work lone parents⁴, very little qualitative research, either comparative or single country, has examined the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Furthermore, the studies that have been found focus on the experiences of partnered mothers rather than the lives of mothers and fathers in couples (e.g. Duncan et al., 2003; Ingold, 2011). In addition, they have either focused on experiences of policy (e.g. Ingold, 2011) or mothers' normative values (Duncan et al., 2003). Research has not analysed the experiences of mothers and fathers in relation to both the policy context and their normative values. Quantitative studies have also looked at the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents⁵. Härkönen (2011) investigated the impact of the number and age of children in nine EU countries on the probability that neither partner in a couple works,

⁴ See for example, Casebourn and Britton, 2004; Head, 2004; Bell et al., 2005; Whitworth, 2007; McQuaid et al., 2010; Whitworth, 2013.

⁵ This includes Härkönen, 2011; Härkönen, 2007 and De Graaf and Ultee, 2000.

underlining that macro-level differences in experiences can be found in the two countries. Children increase the risk of dual worklessness in both France and the UK but the risk is greater in the UK. Härkönen suggests this risk is greater due to the more “*liberal firing rules*” and “*hands-off approach to mothers work*” in the UK (p.237). Working time regimes can be considered to interact with the care context. As outlined in section 3.2, mothers are more likely to work part-time in the UK than France. Therefore, if their partner is unemployed, it is unlikely that mothers will be able to provide financially for the whole family. More detail on differences in macro-level activation and work-care policy and how this can be predicted to impact on the micro-level experiences of out-of-work partnered parents is provided in section 3.3. It must be stressed though that whilst helpful in outlining macro-level trends, quantitative work – such as Härkönen’s – tends to impute normative motivations on research subjects rather than trying to discover them. By contrast, this thesis aims to analyse and present the issues which parents themselves feel to be problematic. As discussed in Chapter 4, it uses semi-structured questions to find the issues that have been most important in the parents’ work-care experiences.

Turning to Six Other Areas of Literature

The lack of studies specifically focusing on the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK is necessary but not sufficient to justify the interest in undertaking this thesis. In order to do so, it is required to turn to six other areas:

- Cross-national comparative policy studies based on welfare-regime theory and centring on typologies of countries;
- Cross-national comparative studies of fatherhood, based on fatherhood rights and responsibilities;
- Cross-national comparative policy studies based on activation policy theory and focusing on typologies of countries;
- Cross-national micro-level studies of work-care issues among in-work partnered parents;
- Micro-level studies of ‘gendered moral rationalities’ and the ethic of care which tend to be single-nation studies and have focused very heavily on lone parents;
- Macro- and micro-level studies of unemployment and poverty that are both single-nation and cross-national studies.

Each of these fields of literature helps to understand aspects of the possible work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK but do not provide in-

depth analysis as they have different foci. In essence, this thesis sits at the interchange between these six fields of literature. It seeks to utilise and build on these different areas of literature in order to provide insight into the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. As explained below, the gaps in the literature direct the shape of the research questions which this thesis responds to. It is important to investigate the research questions from both a theoretical and policy perspective. The section below briefly summarises how the six theories offer some insight into the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. Sections 2.2 to 2.7 then investigate the contributions in details, drawing out the theoretical and policy puzzles which this thesis responds to. Section 2.8 brings the different theories together in order to outline the overall gaps in current understanding regarding the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. It lists the research questions and provides an overview of the rationale for their formation and their value.

Welfare regime, fatherhood regime and activation regime literatures are defined and analysed in sections 2.2 to 2.4. In short though, they offer typologies that group states according to typical commonalities and variances in policy and ideals/behaviour across states in relation to different factors. Welfare regime theory examines the relationship between states, the market and family patterns. Fatherhood regime typologies specifically consider the relationship between the state, market and fathers, in particular fatherhood rights and gender attitudes. Activation regime typologies explore differences in trends in activation policy across states. Welfare regime, fatherhood regime and activation regime literatures justify why it is interesting to look at the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK as they suggest there is sufficient difference to substantiate cross-national comparison. However, they are focused on experiences at the macro-level. Also the fatherhood literature views fathers as individualised actors rather than placing them in the context of households. In taking a micro-level approach this thesis puts under a critical spotlight the impact of national welfare regimes, fatherhood regimes and activation regimes on the lives of individual couples in order to investigate whether traces of the impact of policies and their surrounding discourses can be seen in the lives of individuals. In terms of theory, this is valuable for two principal reasons. It enables greater understanding of the extent to which macro-level theories relate and apply to particular groups at micro-level and the extent to which macro-level welfare regime and activation regimes theories consider and respond to issues facing both mothers and fathers (in particular how care issues impact). In terms of policy, this is imperative in order to increase understanding of parental work and care norms in order to aid policy makers with designing policy that will respond to parental and economic needs. It helps

to identify if and where a gap between policy aims and parental norms exists so that policy makers can see where they would be best placed to seek to modify or harness norms to achieve desired policy outcomes.

Studies of work-care issues among in-work parents highlight particular micro-level trends which can be explored in relation to out-of-work partnered parents. Unlike the regime literature, they are based on micro-level qualitative analysis and therefore possibly provide a greater degree of insight. They link policy provision to experiences in practice. They are useful in generating hypotheses about the role of work-care issues in the micro-level experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. However, they concentrate on the experiences of mothers and not mothers and fathers. In addition, the studies focus on the impact of differences in formal childcare provision in France and the UK and do not comment explicitly on how differences in the length of the school day impact on the work hours that couples think are ideal and want. This thesis compares the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents based on what one might expect in relation to the different categorisations of in-work parents in France and the UK. It investigates how differences in the length of the school day impact on the extent to which parents ideally and in practice seek employment. In doing so, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis contributes to evaluation of the extent to which the work-care ideals of out-of-work parents correspond to those of in-work parents. From a policy perspective, it enhances knowledge of how policy is a barrier and an enabler for parents in balancing work and care. It provides greater understanding for policy makers of the types of policy that parents believe would help them to better balance work and care and that they would accept – identifying new avenues for policy development.

Literature on ‘gendered moral rationalities’, the ethic of care and motherhood ideologies suggests the importance of moral and social reasons in mothers’ decisions about whether to take up paid work. Like the in-work parents literature, it is based on qualitative analysis and points to parents’ experiences being affected by the class of the neighbourhood they live in, their educational level, their health and the number and age of their children. Research stressing the role of individual factors provides an alternative viewpoint to the regime literature in understanding the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents and is useful in highlighting the need to analyse parents’ individual characteristics. In addition, the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ literature – like the regime literature – supports the focus of this thesis in exploring differences between care ideals presented in national policy and individual parental values. It contributes to why this thesis takes an interest in the extent to which policies match

the ideals and practical goals of parents in France and the UK. However, the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ literature has been developed primarily in relation to lone mothers in the UK and research on motherhood ideologies that has focused on the experiences of mothers in the United States. This thesis, therefore, examines the role of moral and social factors in the work-care ideals of both mothers and fathers who are out of work. In terms of theory, this thesis extends analysis of ‘gendered moral rationalities’ to fathers and to parents in France. In terms of policy, greater insight into the impact of how personal and societal factors play out could enable work-family reconciliation policy to become more targeted.

Finally, studies of unemployment and poverty outline differences in the aims as well as the strengths and weaknesses of specific work assistance programmes in France and the UK thus further justifying the policy interest in undertaking this study. However, they assume employment is always a central component of ‘good care’ and focus on people registered on training schemes rather than also considering the experiences of people who are inactive. They add to why this thesis takes a broad definition of the out-of-work analysing the experiences of both parents who are unemployed and who are inactive. By taking a broader, work and care approach this thesis enables a more holistic, comprehensive insight into parental experiences with a view to enabling work assistance programmes to be more responsive to parental needs.

2.2 State Welfare Regime Theories

State welfare regime theories reveal differences in the relationship between states, markets and families. Duncan and Edwards (2003) describe welfare theory as:

“discrete sets or types of national social policy, based on different concepts of state, market and family, and the relationship between them” (p.4).

They argue that welfare regimes are of relevance for policy studies, especially comparative studies that relate to analysis of the impact of welfare state structures (p.4). Given that understanding the influence of labour market and activation policies on the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents is one of the research questions of this thesis, welfare regime theory would appear relevant in explaining the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. As detailed below, France and the UK are commonly placed in different groups within welfare state theory. These differences help to justify why a comparison of the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK is pertinent since they indicate that parental experiences are likely to differ in the two countries.

They contribute to explaining the cross-national focus of this thesis, and in particular, why the research questions investigate differences in work-care ideals and experiences in France and the UK. Rather than attempting to describe all aspects of welfare regime theories, sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 focus on how France and the UK are categorised by four important theorists: Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992, 2001 and 2002a; Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 2006 and 2012; and Leitner, 2003. What the different categorisations of the two countries might mean in terms of the individual experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK is emphasised.

2.2.1 Esping-Andersen – Classification of Welfare Spending

Among the most cited and contested welfare regime theories is Esping Andersen's 1990 classification of welfare regimes (Ferragina, Seeleib-Kaiser and Tomlinson, no date given, p.1). Esping-Andersen highlighted the emergence of distinct welfare regime clusters post-war in capitalist nations based on an analysis of their welfare spending. Esping-Andersen's categorisation focused on the extent to which regimes decommodify labour.

“Decommodification may refer either to the service rendered, or to the status of a person, but in both cases it signifies the degree to which distribution is detached from the market mechanism” (1990, pp.105-106).

Esping-Andersen categorised the UK and France in different groups; describing the UK as a “*liberal*” welfare state and France as a “*corporatist*” welfare state (p.111). The UK was deemed “*liberal*” due to the prevalence of means-tested assistance and modest social insurance schemes (p.111). According to Esping-Andersen:

“This welfare state regime minimizes decommodification effects, effectively contains the realm of social rights, and erects a stratification order that blends a relative equality of poverty among state welfare recipients, market-differentiated welfare among the majorities, and a class-political dualism between the two” (1990, p.111).

Esping-Andersen termed France “*corporatist*” in view of what he considered the lesser emphasis on market efficiency, the limited nature of redistribution as status differences are upheld, and how the granting of social rights is “*hardly ever a seriously contested issue*” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp.111-112). He noted that:

“Corporatist regimes are also typically shaped by the Church and therefore influenced by a strong commitment to the preservation of traditional family patterns” (p.112).

This classification provides an indication of how parents are positioned in the UK and French labour markets and welfare states. It suggests that parents in the UK might receive more limited state welfare support with looking for work than parents in France. However, it can be maintained that Esping-Andersen does not adequately take gender into account as policy in France has encouraged women or mothers to enter the labour market since the 1970s. The relevance of the classification is further brought into question by the age of the theory. The theory was developed over twenty years ago and as such, does not take into account more recent policy developments. It predates the embrace of formal childcare as part of Active Labour Market policy in the UK under New Labour, and the more recent embrace of Active Labour Market policies in France as detailed in section 3.3. It can be argued that ‘activation’ does not even really feature in Esping-Andersen’s classification as the typology is based on how welfare states address ‘old’ rather than ‘new’ social risks behind Active Labour Market policies. See section 3.3 for a discussion of the relationship between Active Labour Market policies, new social risks and work-family reconciliation policy.

2.2.2 Incorporating Gender into Welfare Spending Classifications

Esping-Andersen received much criticism for his “*inadequate theorization of gender*” (Kofman and Sales, 2003 p.40). Women only enter Esping-Andersen’s analysis when in paid work (Lewis, 1993). However, underpinning (gendered) paid work contributions are (gendered) contributions to unpaid work that typically go unnoticed/ unrewarded within welfare regimes and that similarly are pushed out of view in Esping Andersen’s analyses. Lewis maintained that Esping-Andersen missed:

“The value of unpaid welfare work that is done primarily by women within the family, and in securing those providers social entitlements” (Lewis, 1992, p.160).

This suggests that the extent to which out-of-work partnered mothers in France and the UK feel supported by the state in managing household care responsibilities is likely to impact on the extent to which they desire and feel able to work. As such, it is important to turn to gendered state welfare regime theories in order to gain further insight into how differences in welfare state support may play out differently in the experiences of out-of-work mothers and fathers in France and the UK. Feminist researchers, though, have disagreed on how to categorise welfare states in order to take account of gender.

Lewis responded to the focus on state-market relations in Esping-Andersen’s theory by developing a typology integrating gender, in which the conceptual groupings in Esping-

Andersen's typology are modified. In Lewis' typology which describes the pre-1992 situation, the UK is classed as a "*strong male-breadwinner*" state since women's participation in the labour market was traditionally marginalised, with minimal state provision of childcare, minimal maternity leave and pay (p.159, 163-164). Lewis labelled France a "*modified male-breadwinner*" state since:

"Women's labour market participation has historically been stronger in that it has been predominantly full-time and, and women have benefited, albeit indirectly, from a social security system that has prioritized horizontal redistribution [...] between families with and without children" (Lewis, 1992, p.159).

Lewis updated her typology to take account of policy change, arguing that the UK had moved from a "*male breadwinner model*" to an "*adult-worker*" family model which assumes "*all adults are in the labor market*" (2001, pp.153-154, 159). Lewis did not explicitly revise her categorisation of France although she noted the trend towards individualisation and commodification of female labour in Christian Democratic welfare states such as France (2002a, p.339). Lewis' typology is useful in that it suggests patterns that may correspond to the norms of out-of-work partnered mothers in France and the UK at the micro-level - that mothers in France may show a stronger attachment to the job market than mothers in the UK. However, it does not discuss the situation in France in detail and so it is difficult to use it in order to outline specific differences to investigate at the micro level. Furthermore, like Esping-Andersen's 1990 theory it is now somewhat dated as it does not consider the policy changes in France and the UK over the last fifteen years that are discussed in Chapter 3. More recent quantitative data on parental ideals in France and the UK, such as the European Social Survey is in line with Lewis' categorisation, suggesting that it is still relevant. Such data indicates that norms are more '*conservative*' as regards mothers' employment in the UK than France. The percentage of the population size agreeing that '*Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of the family*' was higher in the UK (37.5%) than France (32.8%) (Norwegian Social Science Data Services, 2010). Conversely, the percentage of the population strongly agreeing that '*men should take as much responsibility as women for home and children*' was considerably higher in France (60.1%) than the UK (31.9%) (Norwegian Social Science Data Services, 2004)⁶.

Most interestingly, in terms of ideal work-care scenarios, Lewis (2001) suggests that a gap may exist between policy and "*social reality*" in the UK. As Lewis sees it, on the one hand,

⁶ It should be noted that these figures are not weighted. Reference is made here to the 2004 survey as this question was not included in 2010 survey.

policy assumes families are now “*fully individualised*” with both parents working full-time and being economically independent of each other (p.155). Yet, on the other hand, social reality is yet to embrace such a model (p.155). Lewis adds that such policy expectations may create particular problems for women who “*put care first*” and who would not seek full-time employment even if “*affordable childcare were to be provided overnight*” (p.158). In relation to partnered women, Lewis notes that UK policy towards married women is ambiguous:

“There is still a sense that this group of women falls between the new assumptions about employment on the one hand and the old assumption that if necessary they can fall back on a male breadwinner for support” (p.162).

Lewis’s theory implies that conflict between policy and parental ideals will be a greater feature of experiences of individual out-of-work partnered parents in the UK than France. It leads to the inclusion of a research question examining how the parents’ work-care ideals and experiences are influenced by differences in the labour market structures and work-family reconciliation policies in the two countries, and whether misalignment between policy goals and parental norms can be identified. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 investigate whether conflict between policy and parental aims is a feature of the ideals and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Chapter 5 focuses on ideal work-care scenarios and Chapters 6 and 7 on experiences.

Pfau-Effinger’s theoretical frameworks (1998, 2006 and 2012) are important in bringing together norms and welfare state policy with regard to women’s participation in the labour market. They are significant in terms of shaping this thesis in that they contribute to why the research questions do not just investigate how policy impacts on experiences but consider the interaction of norms, practice and policy. Pfau-Effinger argues that:

“While institutional conditions, for example childcare policy, can have a contextual importance, these are not adequate for understanding women’s different orientations and practices in combining paid and unpaid work” (1998, p.147).

Pfau-Effinger’s 2006 theory is particularly helpful in positioning and justifying this thesis as it takes account of fairly recent policy and outlines distinct differences in work-care models adopted in France and the UK. Pfau-Effinger suggests that France has a “*dual breadwinner/external care model*” whilst the UK has a “*male breadwinner/female part-time care provider model*” (p.145). She contends France is a “*dual breadwinner*” state in that the dominant cultural model involves both parents being in employment. Conversely, she maintains the UK is a “*male breadwinner*” state as the predominant cultural model involves

fathers earning the family wage whilst mothers withdraw from the labour market when children are young and then work part-time around their care responsibilities when children are older (p.145). In view of these differences, one might expect that out-of-work couples in France will ideally seek a dual-breadwinner model where they use formal childcare, and that parents in the UK will seek a one and a half earner model with home-based care. The research questions were designed to respond to this hypothesis by examining differences in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which such expectations can be substantiated if we look at the ideal work-care scenarios of individual couples at the micro-level.

Pfau-Effinger (2012) considers the interaction of family policies, culture and social economic factors in their impact on gendered social practices using data from international surveys and country case studies. She investigates the employment rates of mothers of children under three years of age in six European countries; examining how employment rates are influenced by family policies, the gender culture and the labour-market situation in each country. Whilst the analysis does not include France, the article is insightful with regard to the experiences of mothers of young children in the UK. It highlights that the extent to which family policies support the employment of mothers of children under three does not correlate directly with the employment rate of mothers in the six countries analysed. Whilst policy in the UK is less supportive of mothers' employment than policy in two of the other countries studied (Denmark and Finland), it is among the countries that have the highest maternal employment rates of mothers of children under three. Pfau-Effinger suggests that the reason for this disparity is the influence of cultural differences in family models within countries (p.537). She contends that women in the UK may be able to return to work after childbirth more easily than women in some other countries since due to their cultural values they are only seeking part-time work and primarily home-based care provided by the mother (p.538). As such, family policies may be less important in understanding women's employment rates in the UK than in countries where cultural values place greater emphasis on using external childcare such as France. In relation to this thesis, one could therefore assume that the availability of formal childcare will play only a limited role in defining the ideal-care scenarios of individual out-of-work partnered parents in the UK. Given the greater dependence on formal childcare in France in welfare regime models as underlined by Pfau-Effinger (2006), it would seem reasonable to contend that the provision of formal childcare will be a more important factor in understanding the ideal work-care scenarios and lived experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France. In order to comment on the strength of this argument, the research questions are designed to draw out the parents' normative family models as well as the

parents' views and experiences of family policy provision. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 consider whether this argument can be upheld in practice (Chapter 5 in relation to ideal work-care scenarios, and Chapters 6 and 7 in relation to experiences).

Leitner (2003) links family policy, welfare regimes and the position of women in the job market, outlining varieties of familialism in EU welfare states. Leitner's work provides valuable guidance in highlighting differences in French and UK childcare policy. The UK is classified as part of the "*defamiliarised*" cluster (due to the widespread provision of formal childcare but the lack of payments for in-home care such as paid parental leave) (p360-361). It must, though, be noted that Leitner's classification predates the introduction of parental leave in the UK. France is placed in the "*optional gendered familialism*" cluster given the existence of widespread provision of formal childcare and payments for childcare within the family (Leitner, 2003, pp.360-361). Leitner's typology is particularly useful in terms of its classification of France. Whilst France does not quite fit into many other welfare regime typologies (seeming to share parts of some categorisation as well as parts of other categorisations), Leitner's classification of France as an "*optional gendered familialism*" regime highlights the dual nature of policy in France. The typology helps to understand potential childcare norms and ideals of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK in that the state supports those who want to stay at home with small children as well as those who want to go out to work and use formal childcare. Whilst once again the typology is based on childcare provision rather than norms, it provides a basis to begin an analysis of parental norms with regard to childcare in France and the UK. Taking into consideration these differences, one may expect to find that out-of-work partnered parents will report that childcare provision is less problematic in practice in France than the UK. This is to say that parents in France will suggest that childcare is a smaller barrier in obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios in practice because, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see section 3.3.2), policy is designed to support both those parents who desire to enter the labour market and use formal childcare, and those who prefer to withdraw from the labour market and care for young children at home. Again this discussion contributes to why one of the research questions explicitly investigates how work-care ideals and experiences are influenced by differences in work-family reconciliation policies in France and the UK. Chapters 6 and 7 consider how childcare provision impacts on out-of-work partnered parents' attempts to seek their ideal-care scenarios in practice. They also investigate the extent to which parents feel under pressure from policy to pursue a particular configuration of work and care.

Overall, the key implications for this thesis from the welfare regime literature are that differences will be identifiable in the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. One might expect parents in France will ideally seek a dual-breadwinner model with formal childcare and that parents in the UK will favour a one and a half earner model with home-based care. In terms of the relationship between policy and practice, one may contend that parents in France will report that childcare provision is less problematic in practice than parents in the UK. Furthermore, the literature implies that a gap may exist between policy and parental ideals, especially in the UK. The problem, though, with using welfare regime theory to postulate the experiences of individual out-of-work parents is that it is based on macro-level analysis. Therefore, the extent to which the policies it suggests are central to parental experiences correspond to ideals and experiences at micro-level is unknown. This thesis responds to this lack of awareness of how welfare state structures impact at the micro-level by investigating whether traces of macro-level policies can be seen in the lives of individual out-of-work parents. This leads to the research questions analysing the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK, as well as the research question that considers if macro-level theory can be updated to take account of experiences at the micro-level. From an empirical perspective, this is important because increased understanding of the norms and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents will increase the chances of how policy, whether in terms of finding work or finding childcare, can be changed to help parents to achieve their short and long-term work-care goals. This, in turn, may improve the life chances of individuals and the possible economic contribution they make to society. This thesis responds to the uncertainty over whether a gap between parental and policy ideals exists by examining how far tension is apparent in the parents' experiences. One of the research questions focuses on this issue. Responding to this question is particularly pertinent in the UK given the increase in conditionality towards the out-of-work in the decade since Lewis wrote her article. Thus, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis helps to bring welfare regime theory up to date with recent policy change. In addition, it extends analysis of a potential gap between policy and parental ideals to France.

2.3 Fatherhood Regimes

The welfare regime theories outlined above have paid little attention to the experiences of fathers. Esping-Andersen ignored the role of gender, whilst subsequent literature that sought to incorporate gender focused on the experiences of mothers. Hobson and Morgan (2002) assert that feminist research on welfare states and policy regimes has neglected an analysis of

the experiences of men in relation to policy as they felt that men were already “*center stage in mainstream comparative research*” since men were considered to represent “*the average worker or citizen*” (p.8). In relation to Lewis’ typology, they suggest that:

“If we turn the lens toward men as fathers and the construction of fatherhood, we find the meaning and content of what a strong, moderate and weak breadwinner society is may have to be reconceived, since men as fathers are embedded in family law and social policy, with different economic responsibilities for their fatherhood” (p.8).

However, recent research has investigated fatherhood regimes. Hobson and Morgan (2002) developed their own “*fatherhood regime*” based on fathers’ rights (in terms of custody and care) and obligations (in respect to child support and alimony). They categorise countries with regard to these criteria as “*moderate*”, “*strong*” or “*weak*”. The UK is classified as being a “*strong*” regime in terms of fatherhood obligations to support children financially but a “*moderate*” regime in terms of fatherhood rights to custody (p.13). In response to growing numbers of lone parents and what was considered to be the excessive burden on the state to provide for such families, the 1991 Child Support Act obliged all fathers regardless of their social arrangements or whether they were divorced or unmarried to support their biological children (Lewis, 2002b, p.139).

France is not included in the typology but Gregory and Milner (2011b) note how France and the UK constitute “*good comparative case studies*” as they are illustrative of distinctive fatherhood regimes although some convergence is evident between them (p.590). Gregory and Milner (2011b) develop Hobson and Morgan’s “*fatherhood regimes*”, linking the role of individuals/ households, the state, the market and working time. Gregory and Milner’s “*fatherhood regimes*” are based on “*normative public discourses*”, “*rights and responsibilities*” in family policy and the legal position of fathers concerning children following separation, fathers’ employment rights and working time cultures (p.590). In both countries “*new fatherhood*” has developed as a policy issue but this has been inconsistent. Smith contends that ‘new fathers’ are “*nurturing, hands-on*” fathers who take on many of the tasks traditionally undertaken by mothers. They have a more “*intimate emotional*” relationship with their children than fathers in previous generations were considered to have (2008, p.282). In the UK, “*low take-up*” of parental leave can be related to a culture of long working hours and limited statutory rights and wage guarantees (EHRC, 2009 cited in Gregory and Milner, 2011b, p.594). The relatively minimal time fathers spend on childcare compared to mothers reflects societal encouragement regarding parents’ relationships with the labour market and childcare following childbirth (Fatherhood Institute, 2010 cited in Gregory and Milner, 2011b, p.594). This is backed up by evidence from time-use surveys. The OECD reports that in 2005

whereas women in the UK spent 52 minutes per day on childcare on average, men only spent 26 minutes on average (OECD, 2014c). In France statutory backing for paternity leave is “stronger” enabling fathers to spend “slightly more time with children” as a proportion of mothers’ time. Nevertheless, the continuing existence of traditional gender attitudes is an obstacle to increased paternal involvement (Fagnani and Letablier 2007; and Le Feuvre and Le Marchant 2007 cited in Gregory and Milner, 2011b, p.594). In addition, as Smith points out, men may avoid increased involvement due to public support for childcare (Smith, 2008 cited in Gregory and Milner, 2011b). The amount of time that both women (35 minutes) and men (14 minutes) in France spent on childcare per day on average in 2009 was considerably lower than the 2005 figures for parents in the UK (OECD, 2014c).

Gregory and Milner look at macro, meso and micro-level factors to illustrate “fatherhood regimes”. Their (2011b) article considers the social construction of fatherhood in France and the UK through an analysis of fatherhood regimes and how it influences the construction of fatherhood in both countries, gender attitudes and parenting roles, and popular images of fatherhood in men’s and women’s magazines in the two countries. They argue that:

““new fatherhood” is finding its way into popular representations of fatherhood in both countries, but that cultural products tend to be conservative in their representations and reinforce existing stereotypes rather than innovative in representations of gender relations” (p.588).

Similarly, Gregory and Milner’s (2011a) article which uses existing research together with empirical work in insurance and social work in France and the UK to explore how national policy frameworks interact with the implementation of work-life balance initiatives in France and the UK, finds that:

“fatherhood regimes have evolved in both countries but that the process of change is incomplete and far from coherent” (p.39).

The fatherhood regimes literature relates to this thesis in terms of the parameters of the frameworks used to understand ‘fatherhood regimes’ as well as in justifying the choice of France and the UK for the case studies this thesis is based on. A desire to increase understanding of the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of fathers explains why the research questions treat out-of-work men as ‘fathers’ rather than just as ‘potential workers’, investigating what fatherhood means to them and how work fits into ‘good fatherhood’. Secondly, the fatherhood literature contributes to the construction of the research questions in underlining the importance of considering how policy, practice and norms interact in the experiences of out-of-work fathers. From the fatherhood regimes literature, this thesis gains a focus on the tensions in fathers’ identities, in particular due to disjuncture between norms,

policy and practice. It seeks to understand the issues behind such conflicts. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the extent to which fathers in France and the UK link the fact they are out of work to a lack of support from state policy e.g. paternity leave. Will childcare, as Smith (2008) suggests, be less important for out-of-work fathers in France than the UK due to the wider acceptance of the use of formal childcare?

Whilst the fatherhood regime literature is helpful in understanding the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK, a number of questions remain. First, the literature has up to now viewed fathers as individual actors rather than placing fathers in the context of their households. How are the fathers' ideal work-care scenarios and practical experiences influenced by their domestic setups? How are decisions regarding work and care made within couples? The reason why this thesis explores the experiences of both fathers and mothers is to address this gap in understanding. The benefit of conducting such an analysis is to understand better the relevance of current policy to parental experiences in order to suggest policy modifications (see Chapter 8), which will better enable parents to balance their work and care ambitions in France and the UK. This thesis contends that only with a thorough understanding of the ideals and experiences of both parents within a couple can policy makers hope to address the needs of out-of-work parents.

Secondly, like the research on in-work mothers (described in section 2.5), the fatherhood regime literature concentrates on the experiences of fathers in general and fathers in employment. Whether out-of-work fathers share the same work-care ideals and pressures as in-work fathers is unknown. Therefore, whilst on the basis of fatherhood regimes, it might be expected that out-of-work partnered fathers in the UK will reveal stronger pressure to work long hours than fathers in France, this cannot be assumed to be accurate. In exploring the specific work-care ideals (Chapter 5) and experiences (Chapters 6 and 7) of out-of-work partnered fathers in France and the UK, this thesis aims to comment on the extent to which the ideals and experiences of out-of-work fathers correspond to those of in-work fathers.

2.4 State Activation Regime Theories

In addition to welfare regime theory and fatherhood regime theory, activation regime theory is also useful in framing this thesis, as activation policy is likely to have a large impact on the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. As with models of welfare state provision,

studies of activation policies within EU and OECD countries tend to place France and the UK in different categories, thus justifying the choice of the two countries for the focus of this thesis. Both Barbier (2004) and Serrano Pascual (2007) have developed theories which contrast the individualistic nature of activation policy in the UK, with the more fragmented and in some ways generous system in France. Both typologies underline how France is somewhat difficult to place because it includes elements of more universal policy but policy direction has not always been clear.

Barbier (2004) outlines two opposite activation ideal-types in Europe: a “*liberal regime*” and a “*universalistic regime*”. On the one hand, “*the liberal regime*” is described as being built on values of individualism, being punitive in its emphasis on sanctions and incentives, and being centred around the view that too many people are dependent on welfare (p.242). A “*liberal regime*” supports individuals having limited control over the types of jobs they are offered (“*the jobs are those the market provides*”, p.242), involves the provision of low value and short term benefits, and links social assistance programmes to work incentives (p.243). On the other hand, the “*universalistic regime*” considers that the demands of society and the demands of individuals should be balanced, that equilibrium between sanctions, incentives, benefits and services should be found, and that the welfare system should pay attention to job quality and equality of job access (p.242). The “*universalistic regime*” also favours universal (and not targeted services), the marginal use of tax credits and high value and long term benefits as a path to integration (p.243). Barbier (2004) termed the UK a “*liberal regime*” and positioned France within a third emerging category: “*continental countries*” which combine elements from the “*liberal*” and the “*universal*” regimes (pp.243-244). They are characterised by a low rate of job creation and problems modifying labour market institutions to fit flexibility needs (p.244).

Serrano Pascual’s typology (2007) is based on citizen’s social rights within activation regimes. Serrano Pascual contends that the UK is a clear example of an “*economic springboard regime*” due to the high importance it places on making sure that citizens meet their obligations in relation to activation, namely gaining financial independence so that the state is no longer responsible for providing for them (p.301). Serrano Pascual places France “*somewhere between*” the “*autonomous citizens regime*” and the “*fragmented provision*” model (pp.306-308). The “*autonomous citizens regime*” focuses on individual and collective responsibility in order to achieve self-determination, and a commitment to long term employability policies such as training that invests in the workforce. The “*fragmented*

provision” model is typified by variations in the “*approach to and extent of different welfare interventions*” (pp.306-308). On the one hand, Serrano Pascual suggests that France is like the “*autonomous citizens’ regime*” since spending on employment policies has been “*significant*”, with public spending focusing on training and temporary subsidised employment. Also as in the “*autonomous citizens regime*” spending on direct job creation schemes has been high. Welfare benefits have aimed “*to promote full access to political as well as economic citizenship*” (p.307). On the other hand, Serrano Pascual underlines how funding difficulties have prevented universal access. Economic aspects are being increasingly emphasised. As in “*fragmented regimes*”, France is taking a “*less punitive approach*”. Serrano-Pascual links this not only to the limited financial resources available but also to how French Republicanism has traditionally understood citizenship as promoting not just economic but also political integration (p.291, 307). France is also an outlier in that it followed a policy of work-time reduction into the 2000s and did not develop Active Labour Market policies for the unemployed/inactive to the same extent as many liberal and, indeed, universalistic countries. Activation policies in France and the UK are discussed in detail in section 3.3.4.

What activation regimes provide is a framework for conceptualising how national policy might play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. They suggest that the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the UK will involve greater fear of sanctions and use of conditionality than those in France. Whilst parents may enjoy more freedom regarding job search in France, parents may encounter difficulties accessing services in practice. The activation regime literature contributed in particular, to the formation of the research that examines how parents’ experiences are influenced by differences in the policy environment in France and the UK. Chapters 6 and 7 assess the role of activation policies in the parents’ experiences. They consider the quality of support with job search and balancing work and care provided by work assistance organisations to the parents interviewed. They assess the strength of relationships between organisations and claimants. This will enable greater understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of incentive structures. To what extent do sanctions encourage parents to find work? Are they a positive feature that prevents parents being “lazy” and remaining on benefits? Or do they create unnecessary stress between work assistance organisations and job seekers, pushing parents to give up on job search or accept short-term precarious employment?

Nonetheless several weaknesses in using activation regime literature to outline the possible work-care ideals and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents can be identified. Existing

activation regimes do not front the role of gender. As such, it may not provide a full insight into parents' work-care experiences. How do the experiences of mothers and fathers in relation to experiences of activation policy differ? So as to address this gap, this thesis takes a broader approach to activation policies, considering activation policies within the wider area of work-family reconciliation policy (see section 3.3 for further discussion). This flows into how the research questions bring together work and care rather than viewing them separately within parental experiences. In addition, it contributes to the research question that investigates whether theory can be updated as a result of micro-level analysis. Chapter 5 considers how the ideals of mothers and fathers in France and the UK are shaped by differences in how work-family reconciliation policy targeting parents of different genders in the two countries. Chapters 6 and 7 examine mothers' and fathers' experiences of activation policy. From a theoretical perspective, fronting the role of gender/care issues within activation policy will allow the development of activation theory in a new direction. Indeed, Chapter 8 proposes an extension to activation regime theory based on gender. From a policy perspective, it will enable greater understanding of the extent to which policies are helping parents to address care issues in relation to looking for work. Better understanding could help policy makers to become more reactive to parents' needs and thus potentially support more parents to enter the labour market.

Similar to welfare regime literature, activation regime literature focuses on experiences at the macro-level. Therefore, as with welfare regime literature, the extent to which the policies it suggests are important in understanding the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents are relevant at micro-level can be questioned. This thesis attempts to explore the extent to which the differences evident in activation regime theory at macro-level are visible in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. This is important so to provide greater understanding of how macro-level theories relate and apply to particular micro-level groups. The cross-national element helps to explain similarities and differences in experiences across France and the UK with the goal of identifying possible policy solutions based on practice in the other country.

The theories by Barbier and Serrano Pascual can also be questioned because they are now both fairly dated. They were written in 2004 and 2007 respectively. As such, not only their relevance at micro-level but also their relevance at macro-level can be criticised. As underlined in section 3.3 work-family balance policy in both France and the UK has developed considerably over the past decade, with France placing increasing emphasis on

activation policies, whilst the UK has expanded conditionality whilst to some extent also increasing support with care issues. The research question about updating theory in response to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents partially results from this concern. Chapter 8 responds to this question.

2.5 Research on In-work Couples

Sections 2.2 to 2.4 above have analysed how welfare regime theory, fatherhood regime theory and activation regime theory help to justify and explain the research questions underpinning this thesis. The sections have identified the ‘cracks’ in current understanding of the work-care ideals of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK and emphasised the contributions this thesis aims to make. They have underlined the theoretical and empirical importance of responding to the research questions. In addition to the three theoretical frameworks analysed above, it is also important to refer to research regarding the work-care experiences of in-work couples in order to frame this thesis.

Windebank has examined work-care issues among in-work couples (1999, 2001). Unlike the regime literature, the research is based on micro-level qualitative analysis. Therefore, it is possible that it provides a greater degree of insight. The research outlines differences in the work-care experiences of in-work mothers in France and the UK, linking policy provision with experiences in practice. In the UK where less formal childcare was available and costs were higher than in France, Windebank found more mothers ceased working for a period of time after their children were born (1999, p.9). Windebank underlines how mothers in the UK tended to view home-care as “*natural*” whereas mothers in France saw using childcare as “*normal*” and not requiring justification (pp.9-10). Indeed, mothers in the UK who had not stopped working explicitly justified their decision in terms of financial need or personal desire (pp.9-10). Even where the French mothers ideally would have liked to stay at home this was primarily motivated by concerns that the mother rather than the child ‘would miss out’ (p.10). In terms of the impact of policy frameworks on the gender division of parents, Windebank found that whilst mothers in both France and the UK were responsible for the majority of childcare tasks in the home, British fathers took on a greater role than French fathers (2001, p.284). Windebank argues that the weaker level of support from the state with childcare, and greater flexibility of the labour market in the UK than France could mean that if fathers in the UK want their partner to take part in the labour market, the need for them to become involved

in childcare themselves is greater (p.287). Windebank (1999) also found that mothers in both countries prioritised taking children to and from school personally.

Not only does such work justify the methodological approach behind this thesis (since Windebank also used in-depth semi-structured interviews) but it also highlights particular micro-level trends which can be explored in relation to out-of-work partnered parents. Windebank's findings indicate possible trends in the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents, in particular in relation to how work-family reconciliation policy may impact. They suggest that among out-of-work partnered couples the mother not working is more likely to be the result of a personal decision to prioritise home-based care for children in the UK than France, and that even where couples in both countries would prefer for the mother not to work, ideals in both countries will be based on different factors (couples in the UK will argue that home-based care is in the best interests of children whilst couples in France will position benefits in relation to the mother). In relation to fathers, they imply fathers might take a slightly more active role in practice in the UK than France due to the limited nature of childcare options. Windebank's conclusions add to why the research questions compare the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK, and look to identify the impact of national policy frameworks. Chapter 5 examines whether the differences underlined by Windebank hold out in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents. Chapters 6 and 7 comment on the extent to which the mother not working is the result of personal decisions to prioritise home-based care. Also, in analysing the experiences of both mothers and fathers, this thesis will extend discussion to consider whether fathers' employment patterns are influenced by childcare needs. From a theoretical point of view, similar to how this thesis aims to use the fatherhood literature, this will enable evaluation of the extent to which the care ideals of out-of-work parents correspond to those of in-work parents.

A problem with using Windebank's research to hypothesise about the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents is that Windebank's research is based on interviews with mothers. As such, like the 'gendered moral rationalities' literature and the fatherhood literature, it examines the experiences of one parent as an individualised actor rather than exploring the experiences of mothers and fathers in relation to one another. See section 2.3 for a discussion of how the research questions in this thesis are designed to investigate how decisions regarding work and care made within couples.

Windebank's finding regarding the importance of taking children to and from school suggests that taking children to and from school in person will be important in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents, especially mothers. However, how does the length of the school day in both countries affect the extent to which parents can balance taking their children to and from school with work commitments? Windebank's research focused on formal childcare and so does not allow insight into how this may play out in parental experiences in France and the UK. In 2013, when the interviews for this thesis took place, *école maternelle* and *école élémentaire* lasted from approximately 8:30am to 4:30pm. In 2014, the school day in France was shortened to address concerns about student tiredness and concentration (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2014a). Nevertheless, even following the reforms, the school day in Fives remains over an hour longer than the average school day in Gleadless Valley⁷. Chapter 5 responds to this by considering the extent to which taking children to and from school is a feature of parents' ideal-care scenarios. Chapters 6 and 7 compare how differences in the length of the school day impact on the extent to which parents can combine working in practice with taking children to and from school personally. In doing so, from a policy perspective, this thesis enhances knowledge of how policy acts as a barrier and an enabler for parents in balancing work and care. It provides policy makers with insight into the types of policy that parents believe would help them to better balance work and care and that they would accept. This could lead to the identification of new policy directions.

2.6 Gendered Moral Rationalities, the Ethic of Care, Motherhood Ideologies and Capability Frameworks

The theories examined above focus on the role of national policy, fatherhood rights and responsibilities, and the experiences of in-work parents in understanding the extent to which parents look for paid employment. Literature on 'gendered moral rationalities', the ethic of care, motherhood ideologies and capability frameworks provides an alternative viewpoint. Based primarily on micro-level qualitative research in relation to lone parents, it underlines the importance of moral and social reasons in mothers' decisions about whether to take up paid work. It is important to consider this literature because it provides an alternative

⁷ A typical school day in the *école maternelle* and the *école élémentaire* lasts from 8:30am to 4:15pm (Ville de Lille, no date given, a) whereas school runs from 8:40am to 3:10pm at Bankwood Primary School and from 8:40am to 3:20pm at Valley Park Primary School (Valley Park Primary School, Attendance Policy 2014, 2015, pp.2-3). Free nursery provision for children was even shorter at 15 hours per week (gov.uk, 2015a).

perspective to typologies focusing on the role of state policy or fatherhood rights and responsibilities in understanding parental work-care experiences. Like the literature on in-work mothers, it is based on micro-level analysis. Therefore it is possible that it provides a greater degree of insight than macro-level theory.

Among the most important work in this literature is Duncan and Edwards' (1999) analysis of the relationship between motherhood and paid work for lone mothers living in contrasting neighbourhoods, local labour markets and welfare states⁸. They emphasise how decisions around motherhood and paid work, in particular what constitutes 'good motherhood' differ by parent. This fits with the analysis in feminist literature (section 2.2.2) described above that women's ideal work-care scenarios are not universal. However, it underlines alternative reasons for this. Whilst for some mothers being a 'good mother' means staying at home, for others mothers being in employment is an integral part of being a 'good mother'. Duncan and Edwards' argue that the "*social context*" in which mothers live is crucial to understanding whether they take up paid work or not (p.2). They use what they term 'gendered moral rationalities' to explain how lone mothers negotiate whether to look for work or not according to the local and national context in which they live. The term "gendered moral rationalities" refers to:

"social and collective understandings about what is the proper relationship between motherhood and paid work" (p.3).

Duncan and Edwards outline three "*ideal types*" of 'gendered moral rationalities': "*primarily mother*" (mothers who prioritise caring for children in person), "*mother/worker integral*" (mothers who see full-time employment as a component of 'good' mothering) and "*primarily worker*" (mothers who prioritise paid work separately to their identity as mothers) (p.20). They interviewed lone mothers of different class backgrounds in contrasting neighbourhoods. They found that "*white 'conventional' interviewees*", especially those who were working class had "*primarily mother*" "*gendered moral rationalities*". By contrast "*white 'alternative' interviewees*" and black interviewees, especially those of an African-Caribbean background who were older tended to share "*primarily worker*" "*gendered moral rationalities*" (p.123).

⁸ See Whitworth (2007) and Head (2004) for further discussion of the relationship between work and care in the experiences of lone parents.

Like the 'gendered moral rationalities' literature, the literature on motherhood ideologies and capability frameworks also stresses the role of individual factors in explaining mothers' relationships with employment. The motherhood ideologies literature suggests that mothering ideals are "*historically, culturally and socially constructed*" (Bortolaia Silva, 1996, p.1). Glenn (1994) highlights variation in models in African-American, Latina and Asian-American women (pp.5-6). Collins (1994) underlines the importance of race and class in understanding whether women look for work in the United States (p.45). She argues that:

"For Native American, African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American women, motherhood cannot be analysed in isolation from its context. Motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class and gender" (p.45).

Williams (2004) underlines difficulties faced by ethnic minority families and families with a disabled adult or child in accessing services. Similarly, Burchardt (2010) extends the debate by taking a capability approach, creating:

"a conceptual model of how resources, including time and human and social capital, interact with responsibilities, including personal care, childcare and other unpaid work, to produce a range of feasible time allocations" (p.318).

The results reveal that having low-educational qualifications, having more or younger children, being single and being disabled:

"are each independently associated with having a small capability set, defined in terms of the level and range of combinations of disposable income and free time that can be achieved" (p.318).

Williams acknowledges that lone parents face particular disadvantages due to the lower levels of free time they are likely to have compared to coupled parents. The article is useful in broadening the debate to the experiences of coupled parents, suggesting that coupled parents can struggle if they have low educational levels, young, or several children, and are disabled. For those with low human capital:

"the maximum free time they can command is low" but additionally *"their opportunities for turning that free time into consumption or other valuable outcomes is more limited than for their high-skilled or non-disabled counterparts"* (p.339).

The 'gendered moral rationalities' literature, the motherhood ideologies literature and the capabilities literature indicate the central importance of investigating moral and social factors when attempting to understand the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents.

Given that the parents interviewed as part of this thesis lived in a working-class neighbourhood of Sheffield, the literatures point to the role of class in understanding couples' decisions about work and care. They point to the parents having 'gendered moral rationalities' or ideal work-care scenarios in which the mothers focus on providing care for children in the home. The motherhood ideologies literature and the capabilities literature suggest that this thesis may find variation within parents' ideal work-care scenarios according to race, class, health and number of children. It explains why another of the research question explores variation among different groups of out-of-work partnered parents (such as according to parental class, parental ethnicity, disability and education level).

An issue with using these literatures to gain insight into the potential ideals of partnered parents is that the literatures are based primarily on the experiences of lone mothers and were conducted some time ago. Although Duncan et al. (2003) extend analysis to partnered mothers, they still do not consider the experiences of fathers in couples. This thesis looks into whether such values are shared by both parents in couples; hence why the research questions explore the ideal work-care scenarios of both mothers and fathers. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of whether the mothers and fathers in each couple interviewed shared the same ideal work-care scenarios. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss whether the couples agreed on the work-care model they were looking for in practice at the time of the interview. It is important to respond to these questions from a theoretical angle because it will extend analysis to whether 'gendered moral rationalities' can be identified in relation to fathers. From a policy angle, greater knowledge of how policy and societal factors are borne out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK will enable policy towards this group to become more targeted. This may lead policy to be more successful. In particular, it could improve policy towards parents of different classes and ethnicities.

A second difficulty with using the literatures is they provide little insight in terms of a Franco-British comparison. The motherhood ideologies literature is American-centric and quite dated. A lack of understanding of how race issues affect the ideals and experiences of parents in the UK and France can be identified. The 'gendered moral rationalities' literature has focused primarily on the UK, and has not included direct comparison with experiences in France. Where it has been applied cross-nationally, it suggests that 'gendered moral rationalities' differ both within countries and between countries (Lister, 2007, p.158). As such, it provides further justification for undertaking a cross-national comparison in France and the UK but on a micro-level which does not base itself too much on homogeneity across national cultures.

This contributes to why the research questions are designed to draw out cross-national comparison. This thesis contributes to addressing this gap in knowledge in relation to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents, enabling insight into ‘gendered moral rationalities’ as well as societal factors among parents in France.

More recent literature on lone parents has examined conflict between parental ideals and policy. It has made suggestions for how policy could be reformed to better address the needs of parents. Duncan and Strell (2004) develop the literature on the gendered ethic of care by linking structure and agency. They outline the “*rationality mistake*”, suggesting that whereas policy making is based around the assumption that lone mothers make decisions about work and care purely based on the costs and benefits of paid work, ignoring the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ involved in such decisions. This ties in with Lewis’ argument (2001) discussed in section 2.2.2. Rafferty and Wiggan (2011) consider ‘choice’ within the UK government’s welfare-to-work policy. They use survey data to estimate the extent to which the aims of the policy match lone parent’s intentions about if and when to enter the labour market. They find a mismatch between policy and practice arguing that policy overestimates lone parents desire to work (p.275). Williams (2004) analyses the position of care in contemporary British society, proposing “*a new framework for thinking about families, relationships and care*”, and arguing for a “*political ethic of care*” (p.11, 75). Williams maintains that existing policy lacks recognition of the ethics that are important in parent’s lives (e.g. fairness, attentiveness to the needs of others, trust, being prepared to be accommodating). Central to Williams’ “*political ethic of care*” is the need to balance the ethic of work with the ethic of care. In practical terms, Williams argues for:

“flexible working hours and conditions, access to affordable good-quality care provision, a framework of financial support for parents and carers, and better pay and conditions and training for care workers, so that men and women are able to choose how they combine work and care” (p.84).

Lewis (2009) studies the conflict between parental ideals in terms of “*time to work*” and “*time to care*”, and the economic-based agenda of policy makers in Western European countries. The analysis is focused primarily on the UK. Lewis argues that “*a range of policy provisions*” are “*necessary to make work-family balance possible for mothers and fathers*” (p.461) but does not explicitly outline which policies would be most of use to different groups of parents in supporting them to achieve their ideal work-family scenarios. From this literature, this thesis takes an interest in the extent to which policies match the ideals and practical goals of parents in France and the UK. Consequently, one of the research questions focuses on

misalignment between policy goals and parental ideals. Chapter 5 considers whether any mismatch between policy goals and parental ideals can be identified. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate conflict between policy and parental ideals in practice. They also identify policies which parents suggest are enablers in helping them to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios. Chapter 8 makes policy proposals to help parents to achieve their work and care goals based on ideas the parents suggested as well as cross-national policy learning.

2.7 Studies of Unemployment and Poverty

Studies of unemployment and poverty are useful in framing this thesis in that they outline differences in the aims and experiences of specific work assistance programmes in France than the UK, thus further justifying the policy interest in undertaking this thesis. It should be noted that this thesis differs from existing qualitative and mixed method studies of unemployment and poverty (e.g. Demazière, 2006; Norman et al., 2010; Alberola and Gilles, 2011; Newton et al., 2012; Bloch et al., 2013; Demazière et al., 2013; Fontaine and Malherbet, 2013; Meager et al. 2014). It takes a broader approach than evaluations of specific programmes such as the UK's Work Programme employment support policy. As such the research questions seek to elicit the experiences of both parents who are inactive and who are unemployed. They look into the role of policy in the parents' experiences but do not focus solely on specific programmes or policies. By comparing the experiences of parents who are registered on different programmes and parents who are not taking part in any schemes, Chapters 6 and 7 underline the strengths and weaknesses of the different options available. Secondly, Chapters 6 and 7 consider everyday enablers and barriers in realising work and care ideals, rather than just barriers to employment and how the unemployed can be supported into employment, as in many studies. By taking a work and care approach, the chapters enable a more holistic, comprehensive insight into parental experiences. They explore variance in the work care ideals sought in practice by out-of-work partnered parents and how these ideals relate to 'good care', rather than assuming that employment is always a central component of 'good care'.

2.8 Conclusions and Construction of Research Questions

This chapter has shown how a gap exists in the understanding of the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Whilst some quantitative studies in this field have been undertaken, very little qualitative work has been found. The studies that do

exist focus on the ideals and experiences of mothers rather than those of mothers and fathers. The chapter then justified the rationale for and set out the value of the research questions. It demonstrated how six existing fields of literature suggest the interest in analysing the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. However, although each of these theories offer some insight none of them focus explicitly on and how work and care issues play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. The chapter showed how the research questions were designed to respond to these gaps in knowledge. Finally, the chapter explained why it is important to consider the research questions in terms of how they respond to current problems in literature and policy.

The welfare regime and activation regime literatures indicate why it is interesting to look at the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. The regimes emphasise differences regarding national care and activation policy suggesting there is sufficient difference to substantiate cross-national comparison based on experiences of work and care in the two countries. However, the theories are based on the macro-level, raising questions regarding similarity between experiences at micro and macro level. The research questions were therefore constructed to enable identification of the ideal-work care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK and to investigate how ideals and experiences differ at micro and macro level. Increased understanding of the norms and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents is important in developing policy to help parents to achieve their short and long-term work-care goals and to increase the economic contribution they make to society. The cross-national comparison built into the research questions explores similarities and differences in experiences across France and the UK with a view to policy learning. This is important so as to provide greater understanding of how macro-level theories relate and apply to particular micro-level groups.

The ‘gendered moral rationalities’, motherhood ideologies, fatherhood ideologies and in-work couples literatures, in contrast to the welfare regime and activation regime literatures, are based more on micro-level analysis. As such, they possibly provide a greater degree of insight into the ideals and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. The ‘gendered moral rationalities’ and the motherhood ideologies literatures suggest the importance of social and moral factors. The in-work mothers’ literature links experiences to policy provision. However, the literatures tend to view mothers and fathers as individual actors rather than exploring the parents’ experiences in the context of their households. The research questions are consequently designed to examine the experiences of mothers and fathers together. The

questions explore how work-care issues play out within couples. From a theoretical perspective, this could allow the extension of ‘gendered moral rationalities’ theory to partnered parents and, in particular, fathers and allow evaluation of the extent to which the care ideals of out-of-work parents correspond to those of in-work parents.

An important feature of both the welfare regime literature and the ‘gendered moral rationalities’ literature is misalignment between policy goals and parental ideals. However, the analysis is not specific to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents and has rarely been applied cross-nationally. To address this gap in knowledge another of the research questions examines tension between policy and parental ideals. From a theoretical point of view, this provides the potential to update theory in light of recent policy change and broaden analysis to France. From a policy perspective, this could provide policy makers with increased understanding of where policy is hitting a barrier, enabling them to adjust policy to address this discord.

The ‘gendered moral rationalities’ literature and the motherhood ideologies literature stress the role of individual, social and moral factors in understanding why some mothers are in work and others are not. However, the literatures are not specific to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents and do not involve Franco-British comparison. This explains why a further research question investigates whether differences in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents can be identified according to parental characteristics (e.g. class, education level, ethnicity, number of children). This could help policy makers to target work-family reconciliation policy to better meet the needs of different groups of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries.

The fatherhood ideologies literature, together with studies of unemployment and the activation regime literature, front the centrality of work in parents’ ideals and experiences. However, they give little consideration to how care fits into this and impacts on parents’ experiences of looking for and maintaining employment. As such, it is possible the literatures are missing important aspects impacting on parents’ job-search experiences. Therefore, the research questions seek to bring together work and care. This could enable the development of activation theory with a gender/care focus as well new policy insights.

Based on the analysis in this chapter the following six research questions have been identified for this thesis:

1. What are the ideal work and care scenarios (subsequently referred to as 'ideal work-care scenarios') of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK? How are the parents' ideal work-care scenarios influenced by normative constructions of motherhood and fatherhood in the two countries? To what extent do mothers and fathers in the two countries equate work with 'good parenting'?
2. What are the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK of seeking to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios? How do work-care issues affect out-of-work partnered parents' individual experiences in the two countries of entering and maintaining employment (consequently reducing their income and social mobility prospects)? The study will consider the factors that led the parents to be out of work, before focusing on their experiences of being out of work with regard to balancing their care and potential work responsibilities. How similar are parents' experiences in the two countries? What are the main hurdles they face in realising their employment and parenting ambitions? How do experiences differ between mothers and fathers?
3. How do decisions regarding work and care ideals and experiences vary among different groups of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK (for example, according to parental class, ethnicity, age and health, age and number of children)?
4. How are the parents' work-care ideals and experiences influenced by differences in the labour market structures and work-family reconciliation policies in the two countries? Can misalignment between policy goals and parental norms be identified?
5. Can welfare regime theory, fatherhood regime theory, activation regime theory and 'gendered moral rationalities' theory be updated in response to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents identified at the micro-level in France and the UK?
6. How can work-family reconciliation policy towards out-of-work partnered parents be improved to help them to better balance their work and care ambitions? This thesis seeks to make policy proposals based on what the parents suggest that they value or feel would be useful in helping them to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios. Cross-national policy learning is emphasised.

Chapter 3 develops the analysis within this chapter by underlining what one might expect to find in the micro-level work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents based on differences in labour market structures, employment regimes, working time regimes and work-family reconciliation policy. This further justifies the choice of France and the UK as the focus of this thesis, as well as providing additional explanation of how the research questions explore the impact of policy on parental ideals and experiences and relate to the existing literature.

Chapter 3: Labour Market Structures and Work-Family Reconciliation Policy

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 analysed how welfare state, activation, fatherhood and ‘gendered moral rationalities’ theory, together with literature investigating the experiences of in-work parents and studies of unemployment and poverty each posit contradictory factors in understanding the experiences of individual out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. It then underscored how these theories were used to generate the research questions, and in turn, predicted possible trends that one might find in the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries.

This chapter discusses the possible role of labour market structures, employment regimes, working time regimes, activation and work-family reconciliation policy. It further explains and contextualises the choice of the research question that examines how the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK are influenced by differences in labour market structures and work-family reconciliation policies in the two countries. Section 3.2 outlines differences in labour market structures, employment regimes and working time regimes in France and the UK. It considers what these differences could mean for out-of-work partnered parents. Section 3.3 underscores differences in work-family reconciliation policy in the two countries. It adopts a wide definition of work-family policy, considering that activation policy is a component of work-family reconciliation policy. It argues that a longer history of care policies and a shorter history of activation-side policies can be identified in France compared to the UK, raising questions about these differences may play out in practice in the ideal and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. The chapter concludes by posing questions that frame discussion in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

3.2 Labour Market Structures and Working Time Regimes

Milner (2015) underlines important differences in the structure and regulation of employment in France and the UK. As Table 3.1 (see page 57) demonstrates although France and the UK have fairly similar population levels, differences can be observed in terms of the

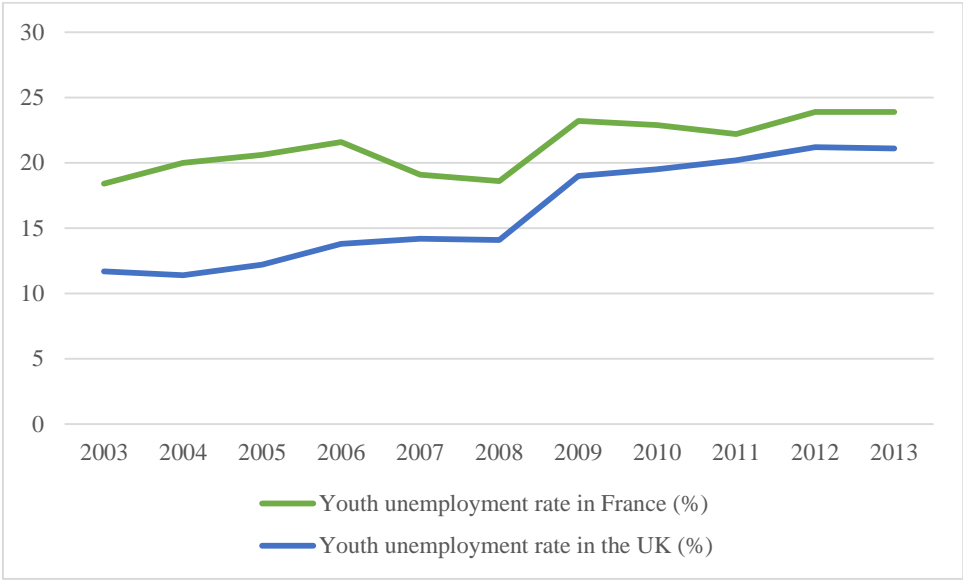
unemployment rate, the employment rate and the involuntary employment rate. The unemployment rate is higher in France than the UK. In France there is little difference in the unemployment rate among men and women whilst in the UK the unemployment rate among men is slightly higher than that among women. Long-term unemployment and youth unemployment are high in both countries but especially in France. As shown in Figure 3.2 youth unemployment in the UK has increased since the 2008 economic crisis whereas in France it has been continually high over the last decade. Milner is right in arguing that the post 2008 increase in the UK is the result of low confidence among businesses and a “*poor policy response*” that has centred on decreasing expenditure on active labour market policies and withdrawing educational support for young people living in low-income families (2015, p.31). Milner points out that the existence of high youth unemployment in France throughout the last decade is the result of structural problems. Involuntary part-time and temporary, precarious employment are particular issues for young people in France. Although governments in France have introduced numerous measures to attempt to tackle youth unemployment, they have had a tendency to “*exacerbate this situation*” as they have revolved around the state providing employers with incentives to hire young unemployed people on temporary contracts (p.31). Young people are not guaranteed an interview at the end of their contracts. Employers have tended to recruit continuous waves of young people on temporary contract rather than investing in more permanent positions meaning it difficult for young people who gain the contracts to move into permanent employment once they end.

Table 3.1 Yearly Average Labour Market Statistics in France and the UK in 2013

	France	UK
Population	63,786,140	62, 571, 410
Unemployment rate as percentage of workforce	9.9	7.5
Unemployment rate among men (%)	10.0	8.0
Unemployment rate among women (%)	9.8	7.0
Long-term unemployment (12 months plus) as percentage of total unemployment	40.4	36.2
Youth unemployment rate as percentage of 15-24 workforce	23.9	21.1
Employment rate of persons aged 15-64 (%)	64.1	70.5
Employment rate of men (%)	67.9	75.4
Employment rate of women (%)	60.4	65.8
Rate of full-time employment among women who are employed (%)	77.3	62.6
Part-time employment rate as per cent of total employment	14.0	24.6
Male part-time employment as percentage of male employment	6.2	12.0
Female part-time employment as percentage of female employment	22.5	38.7
Involuntary part-time employment rate as percentage of total part-time employment	37.4	14.1

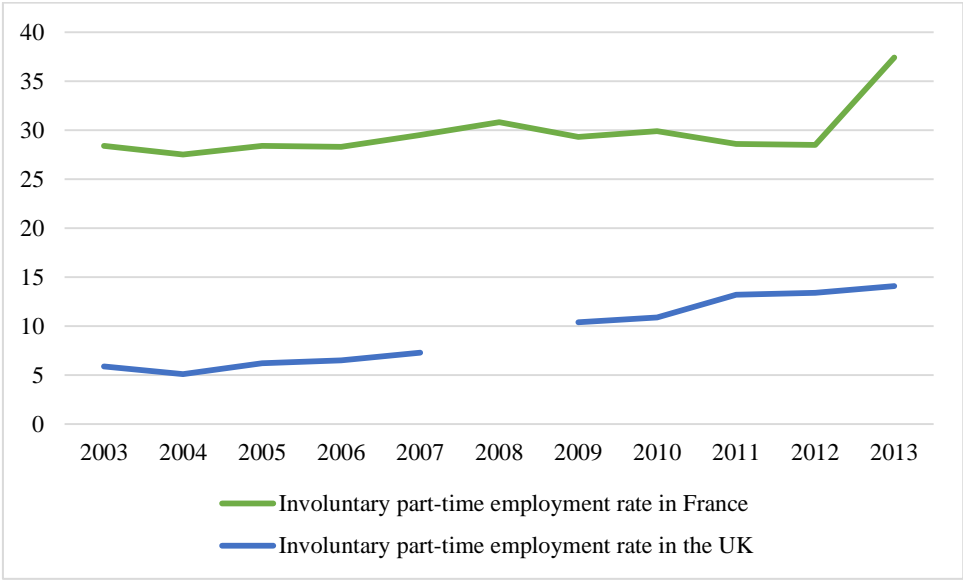
Sources: OECD 2014d, 2015a, b, c, d, e, and f.

Figure 3.1 Youth Unemployment Rate as a Percentage of 15-24 workforce in France and the UK 2003-2013



Source: OECD, 2015c

Figure 3.2 Involuntary Part-time Employment Rate as per cent of Total Part-time Employment in France and the UK 2003-2013



Data unavailable for UK in 2008. Source: OECD, 2015e

Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2 reveal that the rate of involuntary part-time employment (the rate of part-time work undertaken by people who would like to work longer hours) has been consistently much higher in France than the UK since 2003. Milner underlines how the rate of involuntary part-time work can be used as an indicator that a country has a labour market which is bifurcated between a core of employees that are “*relatively protected*” and a periphery of “*more vulnerable employees*” who have less secure contracts, often involving fewer contractual hours, being less well paid and offering few prospects for promotion (2015, p.29) In France new jobs created since 1980 have been largely “*nonstandard*” involving subsidised, fixed-term temporary contracts (Milner, 2015, p.29)⁹. These jobs have primarily been filled by non-traditional members of the labour market including women, young workers, older workers and immigrant workers (Milner, p.29). The UK is among the OECD countries which have pioneered the use of de-standardised forms of work (contractually, spatially, temporally and especially through part-time work) (Beck, 2000 and Edgell, 2002 cited in Milner, 2015, p.172)¹⁰. In terms of the position of migrant workers within the labour market, France has proportionally more migrants from Africa and the global south than the UK; the UK has proportionally more migrants from Eastern Europe (Milner, 2015, p.32). The employment rate of migrants is lower in France than the UK. Whereas many of the recent migrants to the UK from Eastern Europe have high levels of education and have been able to find low-paid work, the labour market attachment of migrants in France is typically very poor on account of low education and qualification levels (Monso and Gleizes, 2009; Milner, 2015). Meurs and Pailhé (2010) underline how it is not just education and qualification levels that play a role in the labour market experiences of immigrants. They argue that a body of research has shown how the children of immigrants are more likely to be affected by unemployment than the children of parents born in France. They show how this is especially significant for the children of immigrants from the Maghreb, especially women who face discrimination due to their ancestry and their gender (pp.129-130, 142).

Particular differences concern women’s position in the labour market in the two countries. In France women mainly entered the labour market in the 1970s and 1980s on a full-time basis with part-time employment mainly developing since the 1990s (Windebank 2011, p.393). Women in the UK entered the labour market largely on a part-time basis from the start of the 1970s (Court, 1995, p.14). As shown in Table 3.1 women who are employed in France are still more likely to work full-time than women in the UK despite policy in France which

⁹ See also: Concialdi et al., 2009.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of de-standardisation of employment in the UK, see: Kretsos and Martínez Lucio, 2013.

supports part-time work through income top-ups for part-time workers and the availability of part-time parental leave until a child is three (as discussed in section 3.3.1). Fagan argues that women in the UK have primarily worked part-time due to individual normative values and the existence of “*constraints*” on women’s working-time options such as limited and expensive childcare and parental leave options as well as long full-time hours (2009, p.38). Overall, part-time time employment is much more frequent among women than men in both countries. Differences in the part-time hours worked in France and the UK can be identified. Part-time workers in the UK are most likely to work “*short work weeks part-time*” typically working three day weeks with standard or part-time hours, while “*part-time weeks, standard hour part-time*” of typically three and a half days a week with standard hour working days is the most common form of part-time work in France (Kan and Lesnard, no date given).

Women’s participation in the labour market differs more according to the age of their youngest child in the UK than France. In 2013 the employment rate of women with two children whose youngest child was less than six years old was 67.5%. The rate for women whose youngest child was aged six to eleven years was 82.4%. And for those whose youngest child was twelve years or over it was 80% in France. The comparative figures in the UK were 63%, 76.6% and 76.9% (Eurostat, 2015a). Windebank (2011) explains:

“The age of the youngest child still has less effect on women’s participation in the labour market in France than in many other countries due to the wide range of childcare options available” (p.403).

However, greater differences can be observed in France than the UK in the rate of full-time employment between women with different qualification levels in France. As Pak underlines:

“Le temps partiel est [...] plus fréquent chez les moins diplômés” (2013, p.11).

In 2011 almost 50% of women in France aged between twenty and thirty nine years who did not have any qualifications and who had at least one child worked part-time compared to approximately 35% of women educated to degree level¹¹ (INSEE, 2013). In 2014 the employment rate of women whose highest educational level was upper secondary and post-secondary non tertiary education (levels three and four of the International Standard Classification of Education) and who had two children was 76.5%. The level for mothers who had completed tertiary education (levels five to eight) was 87.4%. In the UK the figures were 71.4% and 81.6% (Eurostat, 2015a).

¹¹ This refers to: *bac + 3 ou plus*.

'Working time regimes' cluster countries according to regulation of work. It is outside the scope of this thesis to outline all working time regime theories. Instead, focus will be placed on discussing two typologies that underline key differences in working time in France and the UK. This is important in order to consider how national working time might impact on the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. First, Anxo and Reilly (2000) classify countries according to the extent to which regulation is predominantly based on legislation ("*statist*"), is based on collective bargaining ("*negotiated*") and is "*externally constrained*" (countries in which legislation and bargaining are both weak and employers benefit from wider freedom to choose working hours (pp.71-75). In this framework, France is categorised among the countries with strong statutory legislation whilst the UK is given as an example of an externally constrained regime due to the weak nature of statutory provision and collective bargaining (p.71, 75).

Figart and Mutari (2000) analyse gender within working time regimes. They argue that most literature on gender and the welfare state (as discussed in section 2.2) has focused on the role of childcare and parental leave in understanding women's labour market participation. They criticise the lack of focus on work time other than part-time work. They create work time regimes based on the extent of flexibility in working hours and "*the relative gender equity*" that is present in work schedules and economic roles (Figart and Mutari, 2000, p.851). They identify four working time regimes: "*Male Breadwinner*", "*Liberal Flexibilization*", "*Solidaristic Gender Equity*" and "*High Road Flexibilisation*" (pp.852-853). The "*Male Breadwinner*" regime is low in terms of flexibilisation and gender equity with low levels of employment among married women being linked to a long working week (p.852). The "*Liberal Flexibilization*" regime is typified by high flexibility (due to the emphasis it places on using cheap, disposable labour in a deregulated labour market) and high gender equity (p.853). The "*Solidaristic Gender Equity*" regime has low flexibilisation but high labour market participation among women, particularly married women, due to a shorter standard work week (pp.852-853). The "*High Road Flexibilisation*" regime has high flexibility (due to workers and employers having input into work schedules) and high gender equity (pp.852-853)¹². Figart and Mutari categorise the UK as a "*Liberal Flexibilization*" regime in view of the "*moderate to high*" rate of women's participation in the labour market and the wide gender wage gap. In others words it has high levels of labour market flexibility but poor gender equity. Hours of work between men and women vary along gender lines, with men working much longer hours than women (the weekly mode for men is 46-50 hours compared to 38-39 for women) (p.861). Figart and Mutari link the high number of weekly working

¹² See also Mutari and Figart, 1997.

hours for men to the lack of regulation of overtime and employment meaning the majority of men work over 45 hours per week (p.859). It should be noted that the EU Working Time Directive limits working hours to 48 hours per week on average although workers may choose to opt out (gov.uk, 2015a). Conversely, they suggest that France exemplifies a “*Solidaristic Gender Equity*” regime due to the high participation level of married women within the labour market and “*relatively narrow*” gender wage gap (p.855). The mode of weekly hours worked (38-39 hours) is lower than that in the UK for men and the same as that of women in the UK (p.861). Whilst Anxo and Reilly’s and Figart and Mutari’s typologies are useful in underscoring how working time regimes might play out in the labour market experiences and possibilities of out-of-work partnered parents, they are now quite dated. However, analysis by Milner (2015) suggests that many of these observations are still pertinent. Milner shows that full-time working hours are still longer in France than the UK and a greater gender gap in terms of hours worked (pp.182-183). Nevertheless, the typologies do not explicitly consider the experiences of men. The move towards a low-skilled, low-wage economy in the UK could be considered to particularly impact on men in the UK given their tendency to still be the breadwinner, seeking longer hours than women.

The above discussion of labour market structures and working time regimes in France and the UK can be used to highlight what would one would expect to find in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents if national employment trends are transferred straightforwardly to the experiences of individual out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. It thus contextualises and develops research questions three and four regarding the influence of labour market structures on the work-care experiences of different groups of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. The higher employment rate among men than women in both countries supports the argument developed in Chapter 2 in relation to welfare regime theory that the majority of couples in both countries will not be ideally seeking a dual-earner full-time model. The greater rate of employed women working full-time in France than the UK suggests that if couples are seeking a dual-earner full-time model, they will more likely be in France than the UK. Furthermore, where couples are looking for the mother to work part-time it can be contended that couples will look for longer hours for the mother in France than the UK. However, it must be acknowledged that in France couples where the mother has a low education level, may be unlikely to be looking for a dual or one and a half earner model in practice. In the UK, couples whose youngest child is under the age of six years old may especially be looking for single earner model. Examination of working time regimes suggests couples in the UK will be looking for longer working hours for the father than couples in France but that they may face greater barriers in terms of securing a regular, stable salary due

to the more destandardised nature of work in the UK. Finally, we would expect families of immigrant origin (particularly mothers) to have a weaker relationship with employment in France compared to the UK.

Chapter 5 will consider whether these expectations are borne out in the parents' ideal work-care scenarios. It will identify similarities and differences between the parents' ideal work-care scenarios and macro-level structures. In doing so, it will add to understanding of the relationship between normative values, labour market structures and work-reconciliation policy. Whilst labour market structures and working time regimes suggest these trends, what is the role of 'gendered moral rationalities', and individual factors as suggested in Chapter 2? How do ideals vary between mothers and fathers and among different groups of out-of-work partnered parents? Chapter 6 compares the parents' ideal work-care scenarios with their experiences to investigate the extent to which in practice the parents were looking for their ideal work-care scenarios. Furthermore, it relates to discussion in this chapter as it analyses the reasons why the couples were both out of work. To what extent do the parents suggest this is the result of labour market structures, particularly job uncertainty due to work destandardisation? What is the role of their ideal work-care scenarios, policy provision (e.g. access to childcare) and individual factors such as skills level, health and immigration issues?

3.3 Work-Family Reconciliation Policy

The remainder of this chapter contrasts work-family reconciliation policy in France and the UK. It particularly focuses on policy developments over the last five years in order to postulate how differences in policy may play out in the individual work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. In particular, it discusses the relationship between work-family reconciliation policy and activation policy (policies that seek to move the out-of-work, in particular those on unemployment and social benefits, into employment)¹³ in France and the UK in order to further explain the rationale behind this thesis. A wide literature exists exploring the components of activation policies. However, there is not sufficient space in, nor is it the aim of this thesis to provide a comprehensive discussion of the different aspects of activation policy. This chapter argues that the two countries form interesting case studies for comparative analysis of work-care issues among out-of-work partnered parents because of differences in the extent to which care-side and activation-side (activation) elements of work-family reconciliation policy have been adopted. It outlines how one would expect national employment and care policies to impact in the individual experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. Some commentators have argued that work-family reconciliation policy is part of activation policy (e.g. Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner, 2008, p.261). Conversely, as this thesis argues, activation policies could be seen to be part of the larger arena of work-family reconciliation. This view is supported by Bonoli who suggests that “*active social policy*” has developed in response to the emergence of new social risks in post-industrialist society (2013, p.17). Examples of new social risks include, difficulties parents may face reconciling work and family life (when domestic and childcare work is no longer performed unpaid by housewives it needs to be externalised either through support from the state or through buying on the market), single parenthood, having frail relatives, having a low skills level, inadequate social security coverage since schemes such as pensions are still based on pre-industrial models (i.e. the male breadwinner model) (pp.16-17). New social risks particularly affect young adults, working women and families with young children (p.17). More broadly, having an ageing population means there are fewer economically active people to support elderly people in retirement. In other words, the dependency-rate is higher (Begg et al., 2015, p.15).

¹³ See Trickey and Lødomel, 2000; Serrano Pascual, 2004; Clasen and Clegg, 2006; Bonvin, 2008; van Berkel and Borghi 2008; Graziano, 2012; and Bothfeld and Betzelt, 2011 for a more detailed discussion.

Whether one agrees with this view or not, in the UK the important point in policy terms is that the care-side of work-family reconciliation has not been prioritised in relation to out-of-work parents. Instead the focus has been on the employment side with moving people, especially mothers, into work and reducing public expenditure prioritised. As Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner (2008) note:

“The UK government has had primarily an “employment” agenda in promoting work/family policies” (p.271).

There is a very strong contrast in France in that the care-side of work-family reconciliation policy predates active labour market policies focusing on moving the out-of-work into employment. Some path convergence in terms of the activation-side and the care-side of work-family reconciliation policies can be considered to have taken place in recent years in the two countries. However, on the care-side national policy still offers greater support with childcare and parental leave in France than the UK. On the activation-side support with finding employment on paper is similar in terms of aims but differs in terms of the means of delivery, with the UK system being more centralised and including greater enforcement of sanctions and involvement of the private sector, with outsourced contracts of employment support for the longer-term unemployed being held almost exclusively by profit-orientated private sector organisations (although they may refer to third sector organisations). This chapter suggests that a lack of state support with care will be a more critical factor in explaining why the out-of-work parents interviewed were not employed in the UK than France.

The section below outlines the longer history of care policies and shorter history of activation-side policies in France than the UK. The following sections analyse current policy, focusing on the extent to which options for childcare are provided by the state, work-family reconciliation policy involves fathers, and institutional process and mechanisms on the activation-side of work-family reconciliation policy can be considered to create positive relationships between advisers and claimants.

3.3.1 A Longer History of Care Policies in France than the UK

The focus and history of work-family reconciliation policy differs in France and the UK. Whilst the care side has been a mainstay of policy in the France since the 1970s, in the UK it has only developed since the 1990s. Conversely, the activation-side has a longer history in the UK than France with activation policies having existed in the UK since the 1980s but only

having been introduced in France in the 2000s. This section details the main differences in policy direction and policy motivation in the two countries. It contextualises debates in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and justifies the choice of France and the UK as the countries of analysis.

At the start of the 1990s, work-family reconciliation policy in the UK was limited, with the family considered by the state to be part of the “*private sphere*” in which the state did not involve itself (Lewis, Knijn, Martin, and Ostner, 2008, p.271). Work-family policy was only introduced under New Labour as part of the ‘activation’ agenda for families in poverty (Lewis, 2009; Steck, 2010). The Labour Party in the UK won the 1997 election on a platform that publicly embraced activation policies although activation policy has been a “*major*” feature of British labour market policy since the 1980s. The Labour Party considered helping people into jobs was the most effective way to tackle poverty, especially child poverty and felt that significantly increased provision of formal childcare was essential in this regard. Work-family reconciliation policy was designed to support parents (especially, mothers) in seeking employment by providing the infrastructure for them to balance work and care responsibilities. Such policy developed gradually over a number of years and included considerable investment in childcare provision and support to help parents with costs (cash subsidies); development of leave policies; and the establishment of the right to request but not necessarily to receive flexible working (Lewis et al., 2009, p.270; Daly, 2010, p.435). Childcare Tax Credits were introduced in 2003 as part of policy to address how high costs were limiting access to childcare in the UK. The Labour government expanded the childcare voucher scheme introduced under the previous Conservative government (Daly, 2010, p.435). Childcare Tax Credits were means-tested and supported parents with the costs of placing up to two children in daycare. They covered up to 80% of costs up to a rate of £140 per child per week for one child and £240 for parents who had two or more children attending registered childcare (Daly, 2010, p.435). Free part-time nursery provision for three years olds was introduced by 2004 but local authorities were not obliged to provide care for over three only took effect in 2008 (Lewis et al., 2009, p.2008). Childcare for children under three remained limited with care mainly being undertaken by parents, grandparents and childminders (Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner, 2008, p.271).

From 1999 onwards, policy regarding parental leave was also increasingly developed. Paid maternity leave was expanded by half, allowing mothers to take up to one year off work if they combined paid and unpaid leave (Daly, 2010, p.437). Policy was primarily aimed at mothers rather than mothers and fathers. Unlike in France where, as discussed in section 3.3.2,

policy supports women as both workers and mothers, in the UK the rhetoric behind work-family reconciliation policy can be considered to be motivated to a greater extent by a need to bridge the gap between mother's behaviour and policy which wanted them to play a greater role in the labour market (Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner, 2008, p.271). For example, parental leave was introduced in 1999 at the minimal acceptable level to comply with an EU directive (Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner, 2008, p.271). Nonetheless, paid paternity leave of 2 weeks was introduced in 2003 (Daly, 2010, p.437). Sure Start Centres were set up from 1997 in areas of deprivation with a focus on childcare, early education and addressing "*employment degeneration among low-income sectors*" as part of policy to expand support for young children and their families. The services offered were tailored at the local level (Daly, 2010, p.436). From 2004 Sure Start Centres were reframed as Children's Centres with the local tailoring of services reduced. The focus on providing childcare places and promoting parental employment was expanded (Daly, 2010, p.436). Overall, whilst the investment in support for working parents could be considered to have moved the UK towards a '*modified male-breadwinner*' state, it is important to point out that the UK would still appear to operate a market-dominated system, which relies on individual rather than collective support. As Penn underlines, New Labour promoted the growth of private and, in particular, corporate sector childcare (2007, p.192).

Under both the 2010 UK Coalition government and the 2015 Conservative government work-family reconciliation policy has continued to promote the importance of parental employment although limited progress has taken place. The Coalition government stated that:

"Affordable and easily accessible childcare is [...] crucial for working families - it can help create more opportunities for parents who wish, or need, to work and raise children at the same time" (gov.uk, 2015b).

In 2010 the Coalition government marginally increased free nursery provision for three and four year olds to fifteen hours a week. In 2013 the Coalition further expanded entitlement to all-looked after two year olds, and two year-olds whose families met the free-school meal criteria (gov.uk, 2015b). The Conservative government has laid out plans to double the number of free hours of nursery provision for three and four year olds to thirty hours per week. Importantly, this policy will not happen for several years and will only be available to "*working families*" (Department for Education et al., 2015). This commitment to childcare funding is interesting given the continued emphasis elsewhere within welfare policy on the retrenchment of the welfare state within an overall aim of deficit reduction, and reduced public spending on welfare. The Coalition government considered the welfare state to be:

“a vast, sprawling bureaucracy that can act to entrench, rather than solve, the problems of poverty and social exclusion” (DWP, 2010a, p.9 cited in Finn, 2011, p.128).

However, work-family reconciliation policy has not been immune to welfare state cuts. This represents a move from a maximalist to a minimalist approach to the role of the state. Cuts within Working Tax Credits have taken place. The percentage of childcare costs that low-income Working Tax Credit recipients have to pay themselves was increased in 2011, reducing net returns to work (Todd, 2010). In addition, Sure Start children’s services have been particularly affected with the charity 4Children finding that spending on Children’s Centres and Early Years services were cut by 20% between 2012/13 and 2014/15 (4Children, 2014, p.4).

In France policies promoting the care-side of work-family reconciliation policy have existed since the 1970s. As Windebank notes French policy has supported employment for women for a longer period and to a greater extent than policy in the majority of other European countries apart from Scandinavia (2012b, p.22). Extensive state childcare services were established from the 1970s (Windebank, 2011, p.394). Policy in France has been motivated to a lesser extent by child poverty concerns than policy in the UK, perhaps, because of the lower level of child poverty in France (OECD, 2011, p.4) and because policy development predated the development of the activation agenda. In France, state support for working mothers traditionally:

“has been predominantly a response to the need for women to be mothers and employees, a consequence of the perceived demographic weakness of the country” (Windebank, 2012a, p.576).

More recently, policy has been motivated by the need to tackle unemployment (Windebank, 2011, p.394, Lewis, Knijn, Martin and Ostner, 2008, pp.265-266) through parental leave provision and the creation of jobs in the care sector. Unlike in the UK where the fight against unemployment has led to the single policy of increased activation policies towards women, in France tackling unemployment has involved a different two-pronged approach. On the one hand, parents have been encouraged to become inactive. This is related to the ‘work-time’ reduction policy to reduce unemployment in France which is what acted as the barrier to the greater development of the activation agenda as discussed in section 3.3.4. The *Allocation Parentale d’Education* (APE) was introduced in 1985 offering families with three or more children a three-year flat rate parental leave. In 1994 entitlement was expanded to those with two children (Lewis, Knijn, Martin, 2008, pp.266-267). This has primarily affected mothers.

In 2004–05 0.4% of fathers declared to having left the labour market due to the birth of their child compared to 22.1% of mothers (Windebank, 2012b, p.28). In 2004, several allowances were merged to create the *PAJE* benefit. One strand of the *PAJE* supports parents by providing a parental allowance, thus permitting parents to leave the job market (Martin, 2010, p.415). Although the *APE* was promoted as a positive policy to enable women to better balance work and care, it was introduced during a period of high unemployment and when there was falling unemployment (Morel, 2007; Jenson and Sineau, 2001 cited in Morel, 2007). Furthermore, the ‘free-choice’ rhetoric behind the parental leave strand of the *PAJE* can be interpreted as concealing motivations of ‘work-sharing’ to reduce unemployment (Windebank, 2012a, p.579). On the other hand, low-qualified women have been encouraged to accept ‘*emplois de proximité*’ (localised service jobs) e.g. child-minding as part of the *PAJE*, the second strand of which offers families financial support towards child-minder costs (Martin, 2010, p.415; Windebank, 2011, p.395). The introduction of the incentives to hire private child-minders is interesting. The means of delivery may appear to be ‘*liberal*’ but the policy aim is still social democratic in that it involves universal support and is based around the ideal of parental choice.

3.3.2 Wider Care Options in France but What about Provision in Practice?

The above discussion showed how the care element of work-family reconciliation policy has a longer history in France than the UK but that there are indications that path convergence is occurring due to the expansion of formal childcare provision in the UK. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that support with childcare can still be considered less generous than in France.

Current policy in France offers greater parental ‘free choice’ and includes greater levels of state financial support with work-family reconciliation issues than is provided in the UK. In terms of nursery places provision is more extensive in France. All three year olds are entitled to a place at the full-time *école maternelle*. Children aged two are also admitted depending on the availability of places (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale, de l’enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2015a). The percentage of two year olds attending *école maternelle* is though falling. 11.9% of children aged 2 years attended *école maternelle* in 2013 compared to around a third in 2001 (Sénat, 2015; Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2014b, p.1). As mentioned in section 3.3.1, in the UK parents of children aged three to four years (and some two year olds) only receive fifteen hours of free early

education or childcare for 38 weeks (gov.uk, 2015c). Government plans to increase the childcare entitlement for all three and four years to thirty hours per week when both parents are working have yet to be introduced (Department for Education, 2015, p.5).

The rate charged at public childcare facilities appears lower in France than the UK. Childcare rates in France vary according to parental income and the number of children (CAF, no date given, c). A simulator run by CAF indicates a family with no income or who are beneficiaries of the *RSA* looking to place one child in a collective childcare facility for 35 hours a week would be looking at paying 0.38€ per hour (approximately 28 pence per hour). For households with an income of 2000€ per month looking for the same provision, the cost is indicated at 1.20€ (approximately 88 pence). Even for a household with an income of 4000€ per month (both parents earning above the national minimum wage) the cost would only be 2.4€ per hour (approximately £1.77) (Mon Enfant, no date given). The cost of childcare in public/non-profit childcare facilities in Gleadless Valley is around £4 per hour¹⁴ although parents may be eligible for support with reducing the costs of childcare for example, in the form of tax credits (gov.uk, 2015d). The UK government intends to introduce a Tax-Free Childcare Scheme, which would presumably help to reduce some of the difference in cost of childcare between France and the UK. However, full details have yet to be released. The government argues this “*will save up to 1.8 million working families up to £2,000 per child on their annual childcare bill*” (Department for Education, 2015, p.4). However, this must be set against other cuts in welfare spending. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has calculated that the June 2015 Budget, for example, means 3 million households would be a £1000 a year worse off as a result of the reduction to work allowances for tax credit claimants. They suggest that this will reduce the incentive for the first earner in the family to move into work (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015; Stewart and Elliot, 2015).

French policy offers more generous benefit supplements to help the parents of young children with childcare costs. For parents wanting to hire a childminder, *le complément de libre choix de mode de garde* is available for parents in work with children up to six years old. The rate paid varies according to parental income and the number of children (CAF, no date given, b). In the UK parents on low incomes who are eligible for Working Tax Credit can receive extra tax credits to help with childcare costs. Couples normally need to be working over sixteen

¹⁴ This is based on the price per hour at Manor Community Childcare Centre (£4 per hour) and Tiddlywinks Centre (under 2s: £4.10 per hour Over 2s £3.85 per hour) (Manor Community Centre, 2015; Sheffield City Council, 2014).

hours a week each to be eligible. Depending on their income, they can receive up to up to £112.50 per week for a single child or £210 extra per week for two or more children. Parents may also be entitled to childcare vouchers through their employer but this can affect entitlement to tax credits. However, as Rutter notes:

“The disadvantages of childcare vouchers are that only five per cent of employers offer them and not all childcare providers, particularly out-of-school clubs, accept them” (2015, p.7).

Under Universal Credit parents working fewer than sixteen hours per week will qualify for help with the cost of childcare, unlike under the previous system (Rutter, 2015, p.6).

Parental leave policy is more developed in France for parents who were previously in employment. For parents wishing to care for their children themselves, at the time of the interviews *le complément de libre choix d'activité* strand of the PAJE offered parents a replacement income if they gave up work entirely or reduced their employment to part-time. It was not means-tested and was paid at a rate of 390, 52 € per month for up to six months following the end of maternity/paternity leave for parents of one child, and until the child was three years old for parents of two or more children if the parent gave up work entirely¹⁵. In 2015 *le complément de libre choix d'activité* was replaced by *la prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant* which is paid at the same rate and for parents in couples must be shared between both parents. This is analysed in section 3.3.3. To qualify for either of these elements of the PAJE, the parent is required to have previously worked. For a first child, the parent must have worked for the two-year period prior to the birth; for a second child for two of the four years prior to the birth; and for the third child or more, the parent must have worked during two of the five years preceding the birth (CAF, no date given, a). In terms of parental leave, parents in the UK are entitled to up to eighteen weeks of parental leave but it is unpaid. Eligibility requirements include having worked for the company for more than a year and not being self-employed or an agency worker (gov.uk, 2015e). Statutory Maternity Leave is 52 weeks in the UK, of which up to 39 weeks are paid. The first 6 weeks are paid at 90% of mothers' average weekly earnings. The next 33 weeks are paid at £139.58 or 90% of mothers' average weekly earnings (whichever is lower) (gov.uk, 2015f). Sharing of leave with fathers is now possible and is considered in section 3.3.3. It was introduced after the fieldwork this thesis is based on was carried out.

¹⁵ Rates for those reducing employment to part-time vary. Details can be found at: <https://www.caf.fr/aides-et-services/s-informer-sur-les-aides/petite-enfance/le-complement-de-libre-choix-d-activite-ou-le-complement-optionnel-de-libre-choix-d-activite>.

In relation to ideal work-care scenarios, the more extensive and generous nature of the care side of work-family reconciliation policy in France than the UK would suggest parents in France will display a wider range of ideal work-care scenarios than parents in France. In terms of experiences, it implies that care issues are likely to be a less important barrier in the experiences of the out-of-work partnered parents interviewed in France than the UK. However, this argument can be contested because existing literature points to problematic issues regarding childcare provision in both countries. How do such difficulties play out in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents? This puzzle regarding the role of policy in practice lies at the centre of the aims of this thesis. In France, a lack of collective childcare places, particularly outside big cities, has been noted by many researchers including P  rivi  r (2009, 2012) and the Haut Conseil de la Famille (2012, 2013). In addition, many of the low-paid jobs - which the out-of-work are most likely to obtain - involve irregular hours, during which most collective childcare facilities e.g. *cr  ches* are closed. There has been some attempt to address these issues with money set aside for wrap-around *cr  ches*/childminders in the *banlieues* as part of the *Plan espoir banlieues* (Haut conseil de Famille, 2012, pp.12-13). Furthermore, existing research suggests that a disjuncture between parental norms and childcare provision may exist. The French childcare system is highly bifurcated between the well-off who can afford to use childcare subsidies for child-minders and the lower-paid who cannot afford child-minders, instead relying on long parental leaves, collective and informal childcare (Windebank, 2012a). Whilst childcare in France may appear universal and more affordable than provision in the UK, problems still exist. Research has shown that parental leave in France often has a negative impact on women’s careers in terms of difficulties returning to the labour market post parental leave. The effect has been particularly strong among low-skilled women (Algava and Bress  , with Momic, 2005, p.7).

In the UK, high costs appear to be an important factor preventing usage. The Resolution Foundation has indicated that rising childcare costs in the UK are deterring low and middle-income parents from working despite the subsidies available.

“Improvements in the affordability of childcare over the last decade have not created better work incentives for second earners, largely women, in low to middle income families” (Alakeson and Hurrell, 2012, p.22).

Policy would seem to work out differently for low-income parents in France and the UK concerning the incentives to work full or part-time. A ‘childcare cliff’ would seem to exist with it not being financially viable for parents to take themselves just beyond the cliff for receiving working tax credits (Alakeson and Hurrell, 2012, p.4), thus limiting job opportunities for low-paid mothers. Whilst families become eligible for childcare-related tax

credits once the second earner works over 16 hours per week, the income the families receive does not increase since as a result of working they lose benefits and tax credits and yet, incur taxes and childcare cost credits for each additional hour that the second earner works (Alakeson and Hurrell, 2012, p.20). In France there is little advantage to working part-time in terms of childcare costs since as suggested above French childcare rates vary according to family income and the number of children in the household. British policy would seem to be designed in a context of one and a half full-time workers. As mentioned above, Universal Credit will reduce childcare costs for parents working under 16 hours a week because unlike Working Tax Credits, it will be available for those working under sixteen hours. However, some commentators have expressed concern that the policy will still not have a positive impact in terms of promoting dual-breadwinner models as it will not include an incentive for the second earner in couples to take on additional hours (Rutter, 2015, p.7). French policy is geared towards two full-time workers (Windebank, 2012b). Nonetheless, as described above, options exist to support couples to pursue a male breadwinner model when children are below the age of three.

In addition, Lewis raises questions over the quality of formal childcare provision in the UK, noting:

“Accessibility and availability have taken priority over affordability and quality in an effort to promote a rapid increase in mothers’ employment” (2009, p.461).

This suggests that out-of-work mothers in the UK may be suspicious of formal childcare due to concerns over a combination of cost and quality. Vincent (2007) found that the UK childcare market is *“heavily segregated by social class”* and that amongst working class parents *“considerable distrust of ‘strangers’ providing childcare”* exists (p.2).

How does the greater level of state support in terms of work-family balance in France than the UK play out in the narratives of individual out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries? In terms of practice, are childcare costs and provision a less important barrier in parents’ experiences of trying to obtain their ideal work-care scenario in France due to the wider range of policies designed to support mothers of young children? Given, the higher rates charged for childcare in the UK than France at the macro-level, one would imagine costs would be more of an issue for out-of-work partnered parents in the UK than France at the micro-level. However, given the difficulties obtaining collective childcare places in France noted above it is possible that childcare will be a significant barrier in the experiences of parents, especially mothers. Also are costs not the only barrier for out-of-work partnered parents in the UK in

using formal childcare? The work of Lewis (2009) and Vincent (2007) suggests that concerns over quality and what is best for children may also explain why some of the parents are out-of-work. It is possible that due to reservations over the quality of formal childcare, parents, most likely mothers may reduce the hours they are looking for or not seek employment at all in order to provide home-based childcare. In Chapters 6 and 7 this thesis uses responses to these questions by the parents interviewed to assess the effectiveness of state support for out-of-work parents in France and, in turn, to contribute to understanding of the factors leading out-of-work partnered parents to be outside of the labour market. Chapter 8 makes recommendations for improving childcare provision in order to help parents achieve their ideal work-care scenarios, and support government efforts to bring more parents into the labour market. One would also imagine that parents in France may experience particular difficulties returning to work after taking parental leave. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate if this is in practice important.

3.3.3 Involving Fathers in Care: a Policy Goal but Do Parents Experiences Match?

Paid parental leave has been available to fathers on the same basis as mothers since 1986 in France unlike in the UK. However, paternity leave in both France and the UK lasts barely two weeks¹⁶. Both countries have very recently introduced measures regarding parental leave that have sought to directly involve fathers in care. Shared Parental Leave and Statutory Shared Parental Pay were introduced in 2015. They allow parents to share leave at different times during the child's first year after a child is born or adopted (gov.uk, 2015g). The Trades Union Council has criticised the policy as it argues two in five fathers will be ineligible for Shared Parental Leave, primarily due to their partner not being in paid work (Peachey, 2015).

In 2014 the French government amended the PAJE introducing the *Prestation partagée de l'éducation de l'enfant*. Families with one child, who were already entitled to six months of unpaid parental leave, are allowed a further six months of leave for the second parent. The leave must be taken before the child reaches one year of age. Families with two children will continue to be entitled to parental leave until the child reaches the age of three. However, rather than one parent being entitled to three years of leave as under the old system, under the new system each parent is entitled to up to two years of leave (Service-Public, 2015).

¹⁶ In the UK paternity leave lasts for one or two weeks and is paid at £139.58, or 90% of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower) (gov.uk, 2015h). In France, it lasts for eleven consecutive days and does not involve a loss of pay (Europa, 2015).

The recent reforms were not operational when the fieldwork this thesis is based on was carried out. Research prior to the introduction of the 2014 policy underlined how although parental leave was designed to offer parents greater choice, it was predominantly taken by women. Milner and Gregory relate this to how the French social protection system has traditionally been based on the view that childcare is a maternal responsibility, as well as disparities in salaries between men and women (2011b, p.593). It could be argued that fathers in both countries might suggest that a lack of parental leave policy targeted at fathers is a reason why they were not working. In other words, they had withdrawn from the labour market and become inactive in order to care for their child/ren. The lack of an official framework providing them with leave and then a planned return to employment could be considered to contribute to their continued absence from the labour market. However, if one assumes that policy drives behaviour it could be maintained that few fathers will cite care factors in explaining why they were not in work. This viewpoint would argue that due to the lack of policy encouraging fathers to take a role in childcare, few fathers would have considered doing so, and as such, they would suggest other factors are behind why they are out of work. Chapters 6 and 7 respond to this question by investigating the extent to which care factors were a contributing factor in why the parents interviewed were not in work. The relevance of paternity and parental leave in the parents' experiences will be examined with a view to improving policy to support parents to return to employment whilst balancing their family responsibilities.

3.3.4 A Longer History of Activation-side Policies in the UK than France

Work-family reconciliation policy has a longer history of policies aimed at supporting parents to find work in the UK than France. Clasen and Clegg (2006) underline how activation policies have existed in the UK since the Conservative governments in the 1980s and early 1990s (p.540). Employment and training programmes were 'run down' until the late 1980s. However, towards the late 1980s stronger work-initiatives were developed. This included the Restart programme which made interviews compulsory for unemployed people who had been out-of-work for six months (Clasen and Clegg, 2006, p.540; Bonoli, 2013, p.106).

New Labour focused heavily on activation-side policies. They had inherited a situation where unemployment was falling but the welfare state was under pressure with increasing welfare dependency (Finn and Schulte, 2008, p.307). In addition to improving formal childcare

provision, as part of policy to move those capable of work off benefits and into work, New Labour introduced the New Deal employment programme, created a National Minimum Wage and working tax credits ‘to make work pay’, strengthened activation requirements and sanctions, and expanded the role of private and voluntary sector providers in governing and delivering the new system (Finn and Schulte, 2008, p.308). The New Deal was one of New Labour’s “*flagship*” programmes. It targeted unemployed people such as the young, long-term unemployed, lone parents and partners of unemployed people who were particularly likely to be affected by labour market ineffectiveness and changes in skill demands (Myck, 2002, p.8). Support offered varied according to each programme but included advice and guidance, and sometimes subsidised training and employment. Only the New Deal for Young People (that targeted people aged 18-24 who had been unemployed for six months) was compulsory (Millar, 2000, p.iv). The New Deal programme is a strong example of what Dwyer terms “*creeping conditionality*” in UK welfare policy in terms of the rigour and assertiveness with which policy drew the out-of-work into work (2004, p.265). Policy support was no longer a right but an entitlement based on claimants meeting their responsibilities. It was enforced through the use of sanctions. Despite the economic recession and rising unemployment rates, the 2007 Labour government increased work-related requirements for benefit recipients pulling in groups who were not previously compelled to find work. The age of children at which lone parents were required to look for work was gradually reduced to children aged seven and over between 2008 and 2010, and from 2008 the stricter Work Capacity Assessment was introduced for people claiming disability benefits (Finn, 2011, p.127, 130). In 2009 the Flexible New Deal (FND) and the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) was launched. The FND aimed to provide more “*flexible, personalised*” support for long-term, disadvantaged unemployed people. Under the scheme, Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants who had been out-of-work for twelve months were supported by contractors of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) rather than Jobcentre Plus (Morgan, 2009, p.1, 4). The FJF provided subsidies to employers to create jobs for unemployed 18 to 24 year olds (Fishwick, et al., 2011, p.4). Employment Zones existed for long-term unemployed people in areas of high unemployment. They provided contractors with increased flexibility in using funding to help move jobseekers into work (Harari, 2010, p.5).

On the activation-side whilst the Coalition maintained a commitment to activating the out-of-work, it scrapped the FND and the FJF (Fishwick et al., 2011, p.9; DWP, 2012, p.2). It turned instead to seemingly less costly policies. David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister claimed FJF was “*expensive, badly targeted and did not work*” (Syal, 2012). And yet, analysis by the DWP found that the programme produced a net gain for the UK exchequer in terms of cost as well

as a net benefit for participants, employers and society as a whole (Marlow et al., 2012, p.70). 7-24 months after starting the programme, participants were on average 7 percentage points less likely to be in receipt of welfare support and 10 percentage points more likely to be in unsubsidised employment than if they had not taken part in the programme (p.67). The Work Programme, an activation programme based on a payments-by-results model was introduced as a replacement for previous welfare-to-work policy such as the Flexible New Deal and Employment Zones in 2011 (DWP, 2012, p.2). DWP maintains that it offers providers the “*freedom*” to innovate (2012, p.3). A more detailed analysis of the Work Programme is given on page 81. The apparent success of the Future Jobs Fund is in contrast to the equivalent employment programmes in France (as discussed on page 56). It is not clear why this difference occurs but it may be linked to rigidities of the labour market in France and the very strong drive for FJF by local authorities in the UK.

In 2013 the Coalition government began the introduction of Universal Credit - a benefit programme which replaces all working age benefits, housing benefits and personal tax credits (gov.uk, 2015i, p.1). It aims to simplify the benefit system and ensure that work pays (DWP et al., 2014). Universal Credit came into operation in 2013 but has been affected by a series of delays and roll-out problems (OECD 2014b, p.58; Public Accounts Select Committee, 2015). Fewer than 18,000 people were claiming Universal Credit by October 2014 (Select Committee, 2015). This had risen to 112,000 people by August 2015 (DWP, 2015a, p.1). It was not available in Sheffield at the time the interviews took place. It is designed to ensure that people “*are better off in work than on benefits*” (DWP, 2015b). To receive Universal Credit, claimants need to accept a Claimant Commitment stating:

“What [...] (they) have agreed to do to prepare for and look for work, or to increase [...] (their) earnings if [...] they already working” (gov.uk, 2015i, p.2).

Couples will each sign a commitment (gov.uk, 2015i, p.3). Claimants will be placed in groups according to the extent to which Jobcentre Plus expects them to look for and find work¹⁷. Universal credit is presented as offering claimants “*a new relationship*” with Jobcentre Plus which will offer support such as mentoring and coaching to help claimants to find work. In return, claimants will “*need to take personal responsibility for finding work*” (gov.uk, 2015i, p.2). Where couples do not adhere to their claimant commitments without providing a “*good*

¹⁷ Claimants will normally be placed within one of four groups: the no-work related group, the work-focused interview only group, the work preparation group and the all work-related requirements group. For more details of the different work-related groups under Universal Credit see: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/universal-credit/universal-credit-work-related-requirements/universal-credit-which-work-related-requirements-do-you-have-to-meet/universal-credit-which-work-related-requirements-do-you-have-to-meet/>

reason”, they risk being sanctioned (gov.uk, 2015i, p.3). The context of UK activation policies has hardened as demonstrated by the increase in the use of sanctions in recent years as discussed in section 3.3.5.

The adoption of activation policies in France has been “*somewhat tentative and unsystematic*” (Clasen and Clegg, 2006, p.541). Whilst many other EU states such as the UK turned to activation policies in the 1980s and especially 1990s as discussed above, employment policy in France continued to prioritise labour reduction and social inclusion (Bonoli, 2013, p.95). Policies such as the reduction of working week to 35 hours, as well as job creation programmes aimed at young people and involving the subsidisation of jobs in non-commercial sectors (state and associations) were introduced (Bonoli, 2013, p.95). Although right-of-centre governments in France were “*tempted by the liberal route of deregulation*” (for example, introducing a contract in 1986 which enabled workers to be hired on temporary contracts for up to two years), mass protest frustrated some attempts at deregulation (Bonoli, 2013, p.96). It was only in the 2000s that France began to embrace activation policies. Various policy actors including the Socialist Labour Minister and the Employers’ Association stressed the importance of unemployment policy viewing labour market re-entry as a key priority (p.96; original Clegg 2005). Even then, policy change designed to place greater emphasis on job search for those receiving unemployment benefit was slow to arrive due to tension between the government and the social partners. Bonoli (2013) argues that France was slow to embrace activation policies for two reasons. First, the complicated structure of French employment policy with insurance being managed by the social partners and employment services being the responsibility of the state played a role (p.97). Secondly, the resistance of the French Socialist Party to the concept was crucial. Bonoli suggests that the party was able to resist embracing activation policies for much longer than socialist parties in other EU countries due to the fact that unlike its counterparts, the Socialist Party was in power for much of the 1980s and was able to win the 1997 election with a traditional left-wing manifesto (p.97).

Barbier and Kaufmann describe French strategy against unemployment as “*innovative but inconsistent*” (2008, p.70). They suggest that it combines features of Nordic social democratic regimes with elements of liberal influences as well as “*idiosyncratic national elements*” (Barbier and Kaufmann, 2008, p.70). It includes work incentives, personalised support with job-search and active employment programmes (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011, p.88). Examples include the *Prime emploi* created in 2001 (working tax credits to households with income below a certain level), and the *Revenu de solidarité active* (RSA - the main social

assistance programme which was created in 2009 and limits benefit loss when claimants start employment) (Erhel, 2012, p.34; Bonoli, 2013, p.96). Policies are increasingly aimed at promoting the employment of groups that were previously not expected to look for work such as those on income support schemes, lone mothers and older workers (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011 p.88). The *RSA* includes a focus on ‘making work pay’ and compulsory job search (or elaboration of a professional project aimed at improving the person’s financial situation) for benefit recipients. It covers both jobseekers who are not eligible for insurance or solidarity benefits, and poor people who “*are not looking for a job*” such as those with family constraints (Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.128; Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011, p.88). It replaced the *Revenu Minimum d’insertion* which itself was not introduced until 1988. The *RMI* guaranteed a minimum income level and aimed to facilitate the integration or reintegration of those on low incomes (INSEE, no date given, a).

In conjunction with the increased duty on benefit recipients to look for employment, French activation policy has enhanced the rights of the unemployed or non-employed (Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.127). Recipients of the *RSA* are offered:

“extended job search support that consists of supporting and counselling the unemployed in their job search and providing them with priority access to subsidized employment or training contracts” (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011, p.88).

Access to a *référént RSA* (RSA advisor) is one of the rights of those claiming the *RSA* (Ministère des Affaires sociales, de la Santé et des Droits des femmes, 2014). The *référénts RSA* examine the circumstances of those on *RSA* who are required to look for work. They seek to identify the most appropriate type of support to enable people to enter employment or develop their professional skills. Support revolves around three axis – “*orientation sociale*”, “*orientation professionnelle*” and “*orientation socioprofessionnelle*” (Ministère des Affaires sociales, de la Santé, et des Droits des femmes, 2014). Support can consequently vary from ensuring people have suitable living accommodation, to training, to resolving problems over children. This system administered at a local level by the *Mairie de Quartier* is considerably broader than that offered in the UK.

3.3.5 Similar Activation-side Aims but what about the Differing Means of Delivery?

As noted in section 3.3, the activation-side of work-family reconciliation policy now shares similarities in France and the UK in that policy in both countries seeks to activate out-of-work benefit claimants into the labour market offering tailored support to claimants. The targets of

policy are also increasingly wide in both countries. However, the macro-level policy instruments used to implement policy in the two countries differ. The use of sanctions and the involvement of the private sector in assisting out-of-work claimants to find employment is considerably greater in the UK than France. Support is also more centralised in the UK compared to France. Such differences provide interest in undertaking this study. How do these macro-level policy differences affect the job-search experiences of out-of-work partnered parents?

Although as in the UK, unemployed people are required to show that they are searching continuously for jobs and accept jobs or subsidised training contracts (Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.136), until very recently this did not seem to be enforced as rigorously in France as in the UK. Erhel suggests that at around 2% of unemployed people receiving support:

“la part des chômeurs sanctionnés demeure très faible” (2012, p.35).

It was only in late 2014 that the French government announced plans to increase the enforcement of sanctions (Chastand, 2014) thus preceding the point when the empirical work this thesis is based upon was carried out. In the UK, conditionality has been enforced. The percentage of recipients of JSA who receive sanctions is not readily provided by the DWP, although the number of sanctions handed out is published on a monthly basis¹⁸. Nonetheless, the direction of travel is clear. The use of sanctions in the UK has been intensified in recent years. In 2007, 324,717 decisions to apply a sanction were taken. This figure rose to 439,112 in 2009; 650,473 in 2011; and 907,495 in 2013 (DWP, 2015c, Table 1.1). MacLeavy notes that imposing more stringent conditionality requirements in a period of low economic growth, high unemployment and rising poverty *“poses a particular challenge”* for people *“subject to new social risks”* (2011, p.355)¹⁹. Given that unemployment in the UK only began to fall recently, it would seem fair to suggest that the high use of sanctions in the UK will lead to tensions between advisors and claimants at the micro-level. It is therefore possible that the out-of-work parents interviewed who claim unemployment benefits will report more tension with their advisor in the UK than France. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate this argument.

¹⁸ One person may receive more than one sanction, making calculations of the percentage of people sanctioned problematic.

¹⁹ See section 3.3.3 for a discussion of ‘new social risks’.

Work-assistance support is more state-run in France than the UK - where under the Work Programme responsibility has been subcontracted to private providers who are paid based on job outcomes for benefit recipients (Finn, 2011, p.128; OECD, 2014b, p.58). Questions exist over the quality of job search support and training provided to job seekers, particularly those with the lowest skills and qualifications levels. Davies and Raikes argue that the programme does not support claimants on unemployment, incapacity and out-of-work benefits for people with long-term illness and disability equally. They maintain that those who have the biggest need for resources would seem to receive the least amount of help (2014, p.2)²⁰. This thesis asks if out-of-work partnered parents experience these differences on the ground. It could be argued that the job-search experiences of out-of-work parents in the UK will be characterised by weaker support, more limited training opportunities and a greater fear of sanctions than the experiences of parents in France. However, as discussed above, one of the aims of the Work Programme is to allow for greater flexibility. How does policy play out in practice? It could be argued that the lesser involvement of the private sector together with the lower use of sanctions in France will lead to more positive relationships between work assistance organisations and job seekers, providing parents in France with the freedom to reflect more carefully on their employment choices and ambitions and develop longer-term strategies than in the UK. Conversely, it could be maintained that the lack of sanctions and lesser pressure on services in France to ‘provide results’ will mean that parents in France are distant from their advisors and demonstrate little desire to seek employment. Chapters 6 and 7 will outline the role of policy in the parents’ experiences in the two countries. Chapter 8 will use this analysis to make a series of policy recommendations to improve support for out-of-work partnered parents with regard to balancing work and care ambitions.

A further feature which differentiates activation policy in France and UK is the three-tier nature of the compensation/income support system in France compared to the “*highly centralised*” one-tier benefit system in the UK. The UK does not have social insurance benefits for unemployment. Local municipalities only play “*a limited role*” in delivering benefits and employment programmes in the UK. (Finn and Schulte, 2008, p.299). In France, a three level system exists. This is made up of a contribution-based unemployment insurance scheme, a publicly funded solidarity scheme and a social assistance scheme aimed at the unemployed who are ineligible for the other schemes as well as poor non-employed people all exist (Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.126). Whilst the activation of those in the unemployment insurance system is the responsibility of the nationally-run *Pôle Emploi* (Employment Board),

²⁰ See also Meagher et al., 2013.

the activation of income support recipients in the social assistance system is increasingly managed at the local level by *Départements* (Eydoux and Tuchsirer, 2010 cited in Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.131). Béraud and Eydoux (2011) argue that the statutory segmentation of the non-employed in France “*generates inequalities between non-employed citizens*” (p.128). Access to benefits varies according to age and previous employment (p.128). One would imagine that differences will be found in the experiences of individual parents in France and the UK, given these institutional level differences. Chapters 6 and 7 analyse whether elements of the systems in the two countries which appear to work best can be identified. Particular focus is placed on how trust among participants in the various levels of services differs both within France, and in France in comparison with the UK. Does the multi-level service in France lead to confusion for claimants or offer a more specialised service for individual needs? How does trust vary between organisations that work nationally and locally?

3.3.6 No Specific Policies Targeting Out-of-work Partnered Parents

No current specific policies aiming to draw out-of-work partnered parents into the labour market in either France or the UK have been identified. This is particularly surprising in the UK context given the increasing conditionality towards out-of-work people over the last decade; the increasing policy interest in out-of-work partnered parents at the end of the 2000s (as illustrated below) and, the increasing rhetoric around the problems of workless families (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Ingold (2011) noted how policy in the UK by the end of the 2000s was progressively seeking to move partnered women into work:

“There has been increasing interest in assisting partnered women [...] into work”
(p.1).

This developed as part of policy aimed at reducing the number of workless couple households and lowering child poverty rates. The New Deal for Partners of the Unemployed was introduced in 1999 to activate the partners of main benefit claimants, principally women, who had previously been “*remote from the public employment service*” (Ingold, p.1). This was followed by a series of policy measures designed to help partners (primarily women) into work. For example, the Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minority Pilot and the extension of joint JSA claims to couples with children (Ingold, p.1).

However, in recent years, and as explained in Chapter 1, somewhat contradictorily given the focus in wider society on workless families, activating out-of-work partnered parents to find employment has been less of a priority. Although policy seeks to move out-of-work couples without children into employment²¹, rules for coupled parents are unclear. Neither the Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook (published by the Child Poverty Action Group) nor the gov.uk website (which explains JSA rules) provides explanation of rules for coupled parents. Contact with Jobcentre Plus has also not identified a distinctive policy.

Under Universal Credit the rules for coupled parents are clearer. Parents who are part of a couple and who are responsible for a child will need to decide and inform Jobcentre Plus which parent will be responsible for the child. The obligations regarding looking for work for the parent prioritising care vary according to the age of the youngest child. However, as the OECD underline, Universal Credit:

“brings partners in a couple with children into scope for out-of-work conditionality” (2014b, p.58).

Apart from parents of very young children²², unlike under Jobseeker’s Allowance, both parents will be forced to have at least some contact with work assistance organisations. For parents of children aged three or four, the parent taking on the care role will be placed in the ‘work preparation group’. As such, they will be expected to prepare for work including through training or a work placement. Parents of children over the age of four are likely to be in the ‘all work-related activity group’. As such, it is anticipated that they will be *“ready and available to take up work straight away”* (Citizens Advice, 2015). The important point is that concern has been raised that as couples will only be entitled to one earnings disregard under Universal Credit, the secondary claimant may be less incentivised to look for work (Judge, 2013, p.4; MacLeavy, 2011, p.9). According to MacLeavy, since women are typically secondary earners in households, this:

“Removes the incentive for women in particular to remain in, or find, paid work” (p.363).

²¹ Under Jobseeker’s Allowance, couples who make a claim Jobseeker’s Allowance are both expected to look for work. Whilst guidance notes that one partner can be exempted from signing on, it is implied this is exceptional rather than frequent (DWP, 2014).

²² When children are aged two and under, the parent taking on the care role will face little pressure to look for work and receive little support from Jobcentre Plus with looking for work (parents responsible for a child under one will have no work-related requirements, whilst parents responsible for a child aged one or two will only have to participate in one or two work-focused interviews) (Citizens Advice, 2015).

In addition, the single household payment under both Universal Credit and the *RSA* must be viewed as problematic. Ingold explored international approaches to assisting partnered women into work; analysing policy in Australia, UK and Denmark. She underlined the importance in Britain of partially individualising partnered-women's access to means-tested benefits (2011, p.3). Ingold argues, based on her analysis of support in Australia, that:

“For non-working partners, access to their own income is likely to both encourage relationship stability as well as provide a buffer against poverty if one partner loses their job. Welfare reforms which curtail contributory and universal benefits are likely to result in partnered women's increased dependency on their partners through means-tested benefits” (p.29).

In France, Letablier et al. argue that the 'making work pay' strategy within the *RSA* is weakened in terms of the second earner as the policy is paid to the household not individuals (2011, p.89). More widely, they maintain that French activation policy has not focused on partnered women:

“Activation of income support beneficiaries in France rather concentrates on men [...] and on lone parents/mothers” (2011 p.90).

They suggest that Active Labour Market Programmes (or, as argued in this thesis, the activation-side of work-family reconciliation policy) in France generally do not take gender into account; focusing on other groups that are considered to be vulnerable including the long-term unemployed, those with low-skills, workers that younger, older and handicapped people (2011, p.90). They claim that policy only indirectly targets women; describing how activation policy has aimed to stimulate private demand at an individual level for services such as cleaning and childcare through contribution exemptions and tax credits. Low-skilled women are implicitly targeted by the policy as they form the majority of employees in the private, personal-service sector (pp.90-91). However, this criticism appears overly strong as the encouragement of the *emplois de proximité* was not really part of reconciliation policy, being focused instead on creating jobs (Martin, Math and Renaudat, 1998, p.169; Jönsson and Morel, 2008, p.263).

3.4 Conclusions

This chapter has analysed differences in labour market structures, employment regimes, working time regimes, and work-family reconciliation policy in France and the UK. It has explained what one would expect to find if these macro-level policy differences transferred straightforwardly to the micro-level experiences of individual out-of-work partnered parents

in the two countries. In doing so, this chapter has justified the policy interest in undertaking a cross-national comparison of work-care issues among out-of-work partnered parents. It has outlined sub questions relating to the research question concerning how national policy might play out in the ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents.

In terms of labour market trends, the unemployment rate is higher in France than the UK, especially among young people and the long-term unemployed. The employment rate in both France and the UK is higher among men than women. However, the rate of full-time work among working women is much higher in France than the UK. In addition, women working part-time are more likely to work long hours than in the UK. The age of women's youngest child would seem to be an important factor explaining women's labour market participation in the UK. Conversely, qualification level has been shown to play a role in France. These differences suggest that experiences of the out-of-work differ in France and the UK; helping to explain the rationale for focusing this thesis on France and the UK. Taken together, these national trends indicate that few couples will be looking for a dual-earner full-time model in either country, but that where couples are looking for such a model they will more likely be in France than the UK. Fathers who are out-of-work in France would be expected to be young or long-term unemployed. Mothers seeking part-time work will be expected to look for longer hours in France than the UK. However, these are macro-level trends that do not take account of local contexts. This thesis aims to go behind the macro-level trends, exploring how such trends are experienced at the local level for this particular group. How important are factors such as the age of the youngest child and qualification level? Chapter 5 examines the extent to which the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents reflect these national-level labour market differences. Chapters 6 and 7 consider the extent to which these differences apply in the parents experiences.

Examination of working time regime typologies is useful in outlining differences in regulation of work and in turn, typical working hours and models in France and the UK. In Anxo and Reilly's (2002) typology France is categorised as having strong statutory legislation whilst the UK is positioned as having weak statutory legislation and collective bargaining. Working time regime typologies that incorporate gender such as Figart and Mutari (2000) underline the greater rate of women's participation in the labour market and narrower gender wage gap in France than the UK. In the UK they highlight how working hours vary considerably between men and women, with men working much longer hours each week. The typologies imply that couples in the UK will be looking for or having to take into account the prospect of fathers

being expected to work longer working hours than couples in France but that they may face greater barriers in terms of securing a regular, stable salary due to the more destandardised nature of work in the UK. The models though are national and do not give voice to the accounts of individuals. In addition, they are now rather dated. Therefore their accuracy in predicting the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents can be questioned. Chapter 5 looks at whether this hypothesis is borne out in relation to the ideal care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in the two countries. Chapters 6 and 7 examine how differences in working time regimes can be considered to play out in the parents' experiences of looking to balance their work and care ambitions.

The chapter showed how work-family reconciliation policy has a longer history in France than the UK. It argued that although there has been some recent convergence in terms of the extent to which policy seeks to activate the out-of-work in both countries, and childcare support on offer, considerable policy differences remain. In terms of norms, it suggested that normative values might involve greater use of formal childcare and both parents wanting a full-time dual-earner model once their youngest child reaches the age of three years in France, compared to the UK where formal childcare might could be viewed more negatively and parents could be more reluctant to embrace a dual-earner model. In terms of experience, it made two suggestions regarding the impact of policy. First, it contends that care factors will play a greater role in explaining why the couples interviewed are out-of-work in the UK than France due to the more limited childcare provision offered by the state in the UK than France. Secondly, it asserts that experiences in the UK could be exacerbated by tensions between claimants and job search providers as a result of the greater involvement of private sector organisations in provision and use of sanctions in the UK than France.

Chapter 4 explains the methodological approach behind this thesis. It builds on the discussion of research questions within this chapter and Chapter 2 by explaining how the choice of methodology corresponds to the aims of the research questions.

Chapter 4: The Methodological Approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach behind this thesis. First, it outlines the rationale for the research approach taken. Secondly, it considers issues encountered with the method and modifications subsequently made to the fieldwork. Thirdly, it defines the data analysis method. Finally, it assesses the overall credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research.

4.2 Rationale for the Research Approach Taken

The research method used in this thesis is guided by the epistemological and ontological approach of the thesis: an interpretivist, constructionist approach. This thesis is interpretivist in that its philosophical base argues that different people interpret the world differently and that the role of research is to reveal how these different people construe the world (Walliman, 2011, p.22). In this case it seeks to better understand the perspectives of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. An interpretivist approach contrasts with a positivist approach, which contends that the world can be observed and “*is knowable as it really is*” and that research aims to uncover quantifiable observations (Walliman, p.22). Interpretivist research argues that scientific methods offer limited benefits when studying the social world (Bryman, 2008, p.15).

This thesis adopts a subjective rather than rational theoretical approach. It involves inductive methods and value-laden data, acknowledging the role of the researcher in the research process (Walliman, p.22). Consequently, this thesis takes a qualitative approach. It is based on semi-structured interviews with nineteen out-of-work partnered couples in Gleadless Valley, a low-income neighbourhood of Sheffield, and semi-structured interviews with nineteen out-of-work partnered couples in Fives, a low-income neighbourhood of Lille, as case studies of the national situation in France and the UK. The method corresponds closely to the aims and objectives of this thesis in that it supports the goal of understanding the norms and ideals of out-of-work partnered parents and their views on their experiences, rather than simply their behaviour which would have been the more likely outcome of a positivist study.

The research questions behind this thesis explore how work-care issues play out in the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK, rather than considering the percentage of out-of-work parents affected by work-care issues (e.g. the percentage of parents who had difficulty finding a childcare place or affording a childcare place, percentage of parents who had difficulty travelling to work), which would have most probably been the result of a quantitative study. As Béraud and Eydoux argue concerning the growth of activation policies in France since the mid-1990s:

“Political decisions regarding employment, unemployment, compensation or income support did not pay much attention to the opinion of the unemployed or income support recipients” (Béraud and Eydoux, 2011, p.143).

This quote is insightful, justifying in turn, the research objective and method in this thesis. This thesis responds to this gap by aiming to give out-of-work partnered parents the power to relay their experiences. Qualitative methods in turn were chosen as the principal research method because they enable the depth, nuance, and complexity of the situation to be better explored than if quantitative methods were adopted. This thesis aims to analyse the subject ways in which out-of-work partnered parents interpret the world and consider reality to be constructed (Jupp, 2006, p.249). Therefore this thesis requires a flexible rather than a rigid approach. Qualitative methods enable analysis:

“Of the quality rather than the quantity of experiences; they allow for the study of meanings, and of processes, rather than the relationships between events” (Oakley, 1992: 17, cited in Head, 2004, p.69).

Individual interviews with out-of-work couples were chosen over other methods such as focus groups. Whilst a benefit of focus groups is that participants may interact with each other and create meaning, the views expressed by participants may be influenced by the presence of other people in the focus group (Gibbs, 1997). Furthermore, Barbour (2007) notes that focus groups are not ideal when trying to draw out individual narratives as narratives are unlikely to be told in as sequential order in focus as in individual interviews due to the number of people competing to share their experiences (p.18). It was hoped that individual interviews would lead to “good quality data” offering “rich, detailed, complex accounts” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.98). Focus groups were rejected as a means of developing the questions for the interview due to the time constraints that would have been involved in recruiting participants for focus groups.

In keeping with the qualitative approach described above, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate interview form. They provide the flexibility the research

questions require to keep an open mind on the possible outcomes of the interviews; giving parents the freedom to raise and explore the issues that have been important to them in terms of how work-care issues impact on their past and future employment trajectories. Furthermore, they gave the freedom to tailor the order of questions and add supplementary questions according to the experiences of each participant whilst retaining the overall structure needed for a comparative study (Mabry, p.218). Structured interviews were rejected because they would not allow the flexibility to investigate each person's experiences. The need in structured interviews for all participants to be asked the same questions would have placed emphasis on concerns identified by the researcher rather than giving interviewees the freedom to lead the direction of the interviews (Bryman, p.193, 437). Loosely structured interviews where the researcher has even greater flexibility to ask questions that emerge during the interview and does not have a structured interview schedule are unsuitable, as some form of benchmark is needed in order to compare the data and draw conclusions.

The interview schedule was designed based on five themes: Neighbourhood, Services, Work and Training, Environment and Parenting²³. These themes were adapted from the themes of Head's pioneering research into caring and paid work among UK lone parents: family and friends, local services, work and training, neighbourhood, and motherhood (Head, 2004, p.70). The themes explore the wide range of issues likely to impact on out-of-work parents when they look for work and the choices they make not to work due to care responsibilities. The interview schedule consisted of three sections: Introduction, Main Interview and Conclusion. The Introduction was designed to put participants at ease. It included basic questions about people's backgrounds. The Main Interview section consisted of two open-ended questions and further questions about the role of each of the themes in the parents' experiences of entering and maintaining employment. The interview schedule was designed to be flexible, with the ability to change the order of/add additional questions according to people's responses. The two primary questions were designed to give parents the freedom to discuss the important issues in their experiences. It was hoped they would make people think, rather than say, what they thought was wanted. The additional questions under each theme were to gain information on topics participants may not have mentioned in their responses to the first two questions. Whilst they were less open-ended than the two main questions, it was felt important to have some more direct questions to help compare the data and especially, to prompt less talkative participants. The Conclusion was made up of questions linked to parents' ideal work-family balance scenarios. These questions were placed at the end of the

²³ See Appendix A for the Interview Schedule.

interview in case they influenced the direction of the interview if asked earlier. Such questions share similarities with the “*ending questions*” in Charmaz’s staged model of qualitative interviews (2001, p.680).

Thirdly, the interview schedule was adapted from Van Oorschot’s staged model of factors affecting whether or not a person decides to claim for social security benefit. Van Oorschot identified two critical stages that need to be overcome before a person claims: “*threshold character*” (having basic knowledge of the scheme and perceiving they are eligible), and “*trade off character*” (the balance between the perceived need and utility of benefits, and deterring factors such as attitudes towards welfare dependency, the characteristics and consequences of the administrative process) (1991, p.26). Whilst this thesis does not focus specifically on benefit take-up, the ideas of “*threshold character*” and “*trade off character*” can be applied to the employment trajectories of out-of-work partnered parents to identify the extent to which work and care issues impact on their employment (or non-employment) choices. “*Threshold character*” issues that need to be passed to apply for jobs relate to the job market (e.g. perception they could find a job, knowledge and perception of job training schemes), and/or to work-life balance aids (e.g. knowledge and perception of eligibility of policies such as parental leave schemes). “*Trade-off character*” issues influencing whether people apply for jobs/work-life balance aids include whether they feel they are a financial or social necessity, whether they will be useful (will people be better off financially in a job given associated costs such as childcare? Will work-life balance aids really make a difference?), and whether this will outweigh negative concerns over welfare (especially of children) and adverse experiences of administrative processes (e.g. training, job support). Care responsibilities are crucial. They include whether people value caring for their children more than potential extra income through employment, lack of suitable childcare (e.g. cost, inflexible opening hours), and lack of time to work due to family responsibilities.

Both parents were chosen as the unit of analysis rather than a single parent since it was felt interviewing both parents would enable deeper understanding of the experiences of both mothers and fathers as demanded by the research questions. Conducting interviews where possible with both parents was considered crucial to open up issues of the symmetry or non-symmetry of parental roles in France and the UK i.e. similarities and differences among the experiences of mothers and fathers of the pushes and pulls towards care and work. How is power shared in couples? What are the normative structures of how parents want to balance work and care? Whilst it would undoubtedly have been easier logistically to interview a single

parent, it was felt that asking a single parent to report on the experiences of both parents may have been less insightful since their account may well differ to that which the other partner would have given, had they been interviewed. The household was ruled out as the unit of analysis since whilst it would have had strengths, the strengths would not have outweighed the disadvantages of the approach. Strengths of a household strategies approach include, as Wallace puts it, the ability to “illuminate” “the practices” of members of households (2002, p.279). A household strategies approach can aid understanding of social factors motivating participation in the labour market (p.275). In the case of this research project, it could have helped to contribute to the identification and analysis of the factors influencing household ideal work-care scenarios and experiences. However, one of the main concerns linked to the use of a household strategies approach is that it overemphasises agency (Wallace, 2002, p.275). Crowe (1989) maintains that:

“Since the term ‘household strategy’ has ‘rational-calculative connotations (Morris 1987: 138), this raises [...] the general problems of agency and rationality” (p.7).

Furthermore, focusing on the household would have excluded couples who did not live together from participating. Moreover, a household-focus would have required interviews to be conducted with other potential adult members of the household such as grandparents, moving the focus of the thesis away from the research questions. In addition, as Daly and Kelly underline:

“Whereas a household is a functional arrangement, a family is an arrangement of personal life” (2015, p.2).

This thesis involves a cross-national comparative case study. This involves comparing experiences in two countries using almost identical methods (De Vaus, 2008, p.252). To achieve the depth of understanding of parents’ experiences in both France and the UK as required by the research questions, this thesis follows the Safari approach to comparative analysis. A reminder of the research questions is provided in the footnote below²⁴. The Safari approach involves a single researcher carrying out an in-depth study in two or more countries.

²⁴ What are the ideal work and care scenarios (subsequently referred to as ‘ideal work-care scenarios’) of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK? How do work-care issues affect out-of-work partnered parents’ individual experiences in the two countries of entering and maintaining employment (consequently, reducing their income and social mobility prospects)? How do decisions regarding work and care ideals and experiences vary among different groups of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK? Can welfare regime theory, fatherhood regime theory, activation regime theory and ‘gendered moral rationalities’ theory be updated in response to experiences of out-of-work partnered parents identified at the micro-level in France and the UK? How can work-family reconciliation policy towards out-of-work partnered parents be improved to help them to better balance their work and care ambitions?

“Researchers are required to have intimate knowledge of all the countries under study” and interpret “findings in relation to their wider social context” (Hantrais and Mangen, 1996, p.4).

Having studied, worked and experienced life in both countries, my skills suit this method.

Representative case studies were considered the most appropriate way of obtaining the detailed and intensive analysis of the national approach in France and the UK needed to respond to the research questions. Representative case studies aim *“to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation”* (Yin, 2013, p.52). As such, they complement the research questions behind this thesis, which rather than seeking to examine an extreme situation, are intended to allow greater understanding of people’s experiences through a focus on direct accounts of their lives.

A wide definition of ‘*out-of-work*’ parents was adopted. When selecting criteria for fieldwork participants, it was decided to consider parents to be out of work both if they were unemployed²⁵ and if they were economically inactive²⁶. Demazière underlines that:

“Les distinctions entre les chômeurs et les autres (les non-chômeurs) sont de plus en plus brouillées, floues et mouvantes” (2006, p.4).

It was felt important not to limit the sample based on complicated administrative distinctions. Furthermore, it is essential to focus on the experiences of unemployed and inactive parents in order to understand the experiences of both mothers and fathers and to see the interaction of the care and work agenda. Policy targeting out-of-work parents tends to have a gender focus (as explained in Chapter Three, the job side of work-family balance policy has traditionally targeted fathers although it is now increasingly aimed at mothers, while policies encouraging parental inactivity, have generally targeted mothers). Excluding either group would have prevented exploration of how work-care issues impact differently on the work decisions of mothers and fathers in France and the UK, potentially limiting the implications of the research.

²⁵ People who are unemployed *“are jobless, have been actively seeking work in the past four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks; or they are out of work, have found a job, and are waiting to start it in the next two weeks”* (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

²⁶ People who are inactive are *“people without a job who have not actively sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks”* (Office for National Statistics, 2010).

Determining the appropriate number of participants required to obtain sufficient information to respond to the research questions was complex. In the original planning of this thesis, thirty interviews with out-of-work couples in both France and the UK were envisaged to obtain a broad range of responses. However, as planning progressed, it was decided to aim for twenty interviews in each country due to the extra time the additional interviews would have taken to conduct and transcribe. It was considered reducing the number of interviews to twenty would still leave enough scope to explore trends in parental experiences. As will be discussed further below, this thesis does not aim to be representative in the same sense as quantitative studies. The number of interviews planned also took account of the perceived difficulties of and likely time involved in accessing this particular group of parents. Out-of-work partnered parents, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, are a hard group to access as other than schools (which as described below were reluctant to take part in recruiting participants) there is unlikely to be one place where they all attend.

4.3 Choice of Neighbourhoods

Choosing the neighbourhoods for the case studies involved several stages. Lille and Sheffield were selected to conduct the fieldwork in principally for socio-economic reasons. Lille and Sheffield share a similar socio-economic profile. Lille is the fourth largest *Métropole* in France; Sheffield is the third largest unitary authority in England (Lille Métropole, no date given; Sheffield First Partnership, 2013, p.9). Both areas experienced substantial decline in their basic industries in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, both areas have made considerable efforts to regenerate their economies. Whilst this dissertation does not aim to look specifically at local policy, the two areas are comparable locations for the case studies.

Fives in Lille, and Gleadless Valley in Sheffield were then chosen as the neighbourhoods to conduct the fieldwork in. The population in the six “extremely poor” *quartiers* in Lille and the seven Sheffield wards with high child poverty levels was analysed to give an indication of each neighbourhood (INSEE, no date given, b; Office for National Statistics, no date given). Factors considered included the activity rate, the unemployment rate, the proportion of people of an immigrant background, the proportion of people not in education without any qualifications, the proportion of people who are students or interns, the percentage of main residences that are social housing, the percentage of main residences that are owner owned, and the percentage of families that are headed by a lone parent. It was decided to conduct the research in neighbourhoods that had high levels of deprivation but not the ‘most serious’

social problems. If the interviews had been conducted in neighbourhoods with exceptional social deprivation, it was likely that it would have been difficult to isolate the role of care factors in the parents' experiences. Whilst Fives appeared an appropriate choice for the French interviews given its position towards the lower (more favourable end) of the deprivation criteria, none of the seven Sheffield wards appeared to be comparable to Fives (either having too high deprivation levels or having a 'different feel spatially' e.g. due to being further from the City Centre than Fives is from Lille City Centre). Analysis was extended to wards in Sheffield with Medium High Child Poverty Levels. Gleadless Valley emerged as a neighbourhood for the UK case study due to its comparative position (like Fives) towards the lower end of the unemployment rate, its relatively low proportion of people of an immigrant background, low student population and lower rate of households in social housing. Whilst the statistics give an indication of each neighbourhood, it was considered important to not choose the neighbourhoods for the case studies using statistics alone. Statistics did not provide a complete picture of the neighbourhoods since they did not include all factors likely to impact on the experiences of families (e.g. the availability of public transport). Local knowledge of the spatial characteristics of Fives and Gleadless Valley was therefore used to confirm their similarities in terms of 'feel'. Both neighbourhoods are close to but cut off spatially from their respective City Centres. In Fives, this is a result of railway tracks and major roads (including the ring road); in Gleadless Valley, this is due to railway tracks, a busy road and warehouses.

4.4 Data Collection Planning

It was planned that interviewees would be identified via agencies/organisations working with low-income parents in Fives and Gleadless Valley. It was hoped participants could be recruited via activities the parents or their children were involved in locally. Voluntary/community groups in the two areas were prioritised over statutory service providers such as JobCentrePlus or the *Pôle Emploi* since going through community groups was likely to lead to a wider range of participants. Furthermore, it was felt if participants were recruited via statutory service providers, they may consider the research associated with those service providers and this may in turn affect their accounts or their participation. Depending on the response rate, leafleting in streets/outside shops and 'snowballing'²⁷ were also identified as another potential method to find participants. Public locations were identified for the interviews.

²⁷. 'Snowballing' refers to a sampling method where initial participants in research are asked to suggest other potential participants. It is particularly used to access hard-to-reach populations (Atkinson and Flint, 2004, pp.1044-1045).

A flyer advertising the research, an Information Sheet (detailing the aims of the project and likely content of the interview), a Pre-interview Questionnaire (including questions on the number and age of children parents have, the parents' educational level, and their activity over the previous five years to ensure the sample was broadly comparable in the two cities and to help with coding the data) and a Consent Form were drawn up²⁸. The Flyer and Information Sheet were designed to be given to organisations to pass on to clients interested in the research. They could also be given out whilst flyering on the street or in organisation meetings where the study could be described and questions from potential interviewees answered. Participants could then email or phone to discuss taking part and arranging an interview.

The Flyer, Information Sheet, Pre-Interview Questionnaire and Consent Form were first written in English. The main issue encountered was how to ensure the language of the documents was comprehensible to all. It was necessary to balance the need not to make the documents too long-winded (which may put potential participants off) with ensuring the documents included sufficient information to give potential participants a clear idea of why the research was being conducted and what participation involves. Bold font was used to highlight key terms on the documents. The documents were shared with friends and family to check they were comprehensible to people with a variety of backgrounds. They were also approved by the University of Sheffield School of Languages and Cultures Ethics Review Committee. Examples of language modifications made include changing the term “*first language*” to “*home language*” on the Pre-Interview Questionnaire and rewording “*I would like to talk to couples who [...] live in Gleadless Valley Ward*” to “*I would like to talk to couples who [...] live in the local area*”. The documents were then translated into French. The translations were checked on three levels to ensure the meaning was correctly transferred and the register was appropriate. The documents were shown to a Lecturer in the French Department. Grammar mistakes were corrected. Some terms were particularly difficult to translate²⁹. A volunteer at one of the organisations approached for help in recruiting participants in Lille also offered to look at the documents. Suggestions were then made on

²⁸ See Appendix B for a copy of the Information Sheet; Appendix C for the flyer; Appendix D for Pre-Interview Questionnaire; and Appendix E for the Consent Form.

²⁹ E.g. “*out-of-work partnered parents*” had been translated as “*les parents en couple sans emploi*”. “*Sans emploi*” is not as widely used a term as “*au chômage*” but it was felt necessary to retain a close translation to the English to ensure the sample criteria remained the same.

how to make the documents more approachable and less academic³⁰. The documents were read by an employee in a local internet café in Fives who confirmed they were easy to understand. It was decided to ask the employee since he was not connected to the research and it was felt he that could provide an ‘everyday’ overview of the accessibility of the documents. A lecturer at Lille 3 University read the translated interview schedule. This was valuable and led to the rephrasing of several questions that had been translated too literally³¹.

Van Teijlingen and Hundley note the importance of pilot studies in terms of flagging up problems with research methods, in particular, where methods might be inappropriate or overly complicated (2001, p.1). Mock interviews were conducted and proved useful in both the UK and France. A mock interview was carried out with a father in an out-of-work couple with a young child in Sheffield in January 2013 recruited via personal contacts. The mock interview provided valuable insight. It led to changes to the introductory interview questions. The transition from the introductory questions to the main interview questions felt abrupt. To address this, priority was given to chatting to participants before the interview started in order to help them to relax. In addition, it was felt the transition could be improved by better following up on the parents’ descriptions of what they had done since they were at school, and what they thought of the area. The interview also led to changes to the concluding interview questions since it felt like they ended unexpectedly. A final question was added to the interview schedule asking if there was anything else they interviewee felt it was important to add.

Two mock interviews were conducted in France. The first was with an out-of-work couple in Fives recruited via personal contacts. Sufficient responses were gathered to respond to the research questions. The interview underlined the importance of finding suitable interview venues in Fives. The interview was conducted in a park as suggested by the parent interviewed but was moved to a café when it started to rain. It took some time to regain the momentum of the interview after the change in location. The second interview was arranged through one of the organisations approached when recruiting participants. When the

³⁰ E.g. on the Information Sheet « *La participation à l'étude dépend de **votre décision** et de la décision de votre conjoint* » was changed to « *La participation à l'étude dépend de **vous** et de la décision de votre conjoint* ».

³¹ E.g. « *How have care issues affected you in entering and maintaining employment ?* » was initially translated as « *Quelle a été l'influence de la question de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants sur vos expériences d'intégrer le monde du travail et de maintenir un emploi stable* ». After meeting the lecturer this was reworded to « *En quoi les difficultés de garde d'enfants ont eu un impact sur l'accès à un emploi stable ?* ».

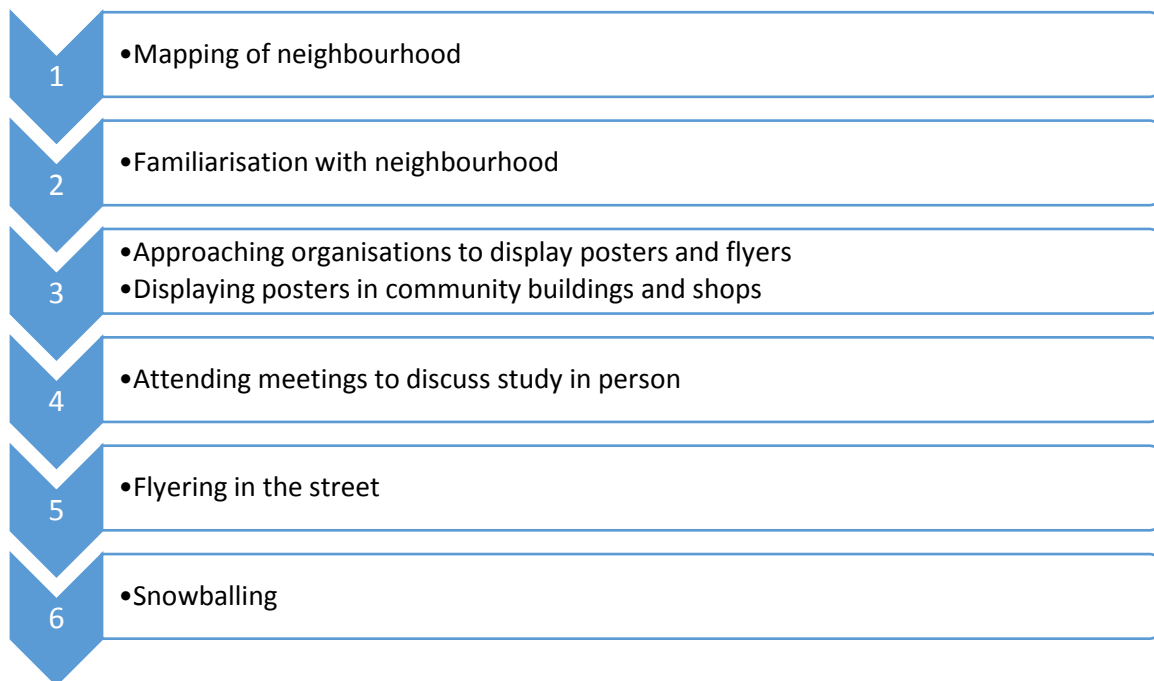
interviewee arrived, it became apparent that they were a lone parent. It was felt important to continue nonetheless with the interview as the parent appeared to have different experiences to the couple the first mock interviewee was undertaken with. An employee of the organisation sat in on the interview at the parent's request. This was helpful as the member of staff provided alternative ways of formulating questions in the interview schedule³².

4.5 Data Collection in Practice

Recruiting participants involved several stages. The method was tried in Gleadless Valley in spring 2013 and then replicated in Fives. A map of each neighbourhood was drawn up identifying likely places out of work parents would go (e.g. advice centres, doctors' surgeries, playgroups). Secondly, as recommended by Shaw in his article on research with participants who experience problem events in life (2005, p.843), time was spent walking around the neighbourhoods to become acquainted with the services, housing and transport links in the area. Organisations on the map were approached to ask if they would distribute flyers and posters about the study to their contacts in order to find participants. Posters were placed on notice boards and in shops. As detailed below, the response rate was low. Therefore, different groups in the community (from playgroups, coffee mornings and street parade meetings in Gleadless Valley to biscuit making classes, after-school clubs and food banks in Fives) were attended to raise awareness of my study and to answer questions that people had. Flyering was conducted in the street in both neighbourhoods in an attempt to increase further the response rate. At the end of each interview, participants were also asked if they could pass on details of the study to their contacts. Consequently, (as detailed below) couples were also found through 'snowballing'.

³² E.g. that many people would still refer to the equivalent of JobCentre Plus, the "*Pôle Emploi*", by its previous name - the "*ANPE*".

Figure 4.1 Data Collection Method



Lessons were learnt about the effectiveness of the methods in both Gleadless Valley and Fives. As indicated by other studies (e.g. Karwalajtys et al., 2010, p.133), placing flyers and posters in public spaces was found to be ineffective in recruiting participants. Despite placing posters/flyers in over ten organisations/shops in both neighbourhoods, only one participant was found as a result of a parent seeing a flyer in Sheffield and no one was found through this method in Lille. Community organisations consulted about the slow recruitment level suggested people often did not have time to read flyers, did not notice them or were unsure of who was doing the project. Asking organisations within each neighbourhood to refer participants for interview was fairly effective in the UK and effective in France. Three participants in Gleadless Valley and eight participants in Fives were recruited this way. However, the approach was time-consuming. Due to the busy environment in which the organisations operated, it often took several weeks and in some several cases months before they had time to approach their clients about taking part. It was particularly time-consuming to recruit participants in France due to the effect of the long summer holidays. During this period, most of the organisations contacted were either exceptionally busy or closed. Persistently approaching the organisations whilst understanding the constraints on their time was necessary to make the method work. For example, securing help from one organisation, which subsequently offered invaluable help in recruiting participants in France, involved an initial visit in person, several phone calls, a further visit in person, email, phone call, and two visits (one of which involved several hours waiting). A further downside of the approach was

that some organisations contacted found it difficult to advertise the study, as they did not necessarily know or feel comfortable discussing the employment situation of their clients or their partners. In the UK, schools were reluctant to participate due to data protection concerns. The method relied upon organisations correctly recruiting people according to the sample criteria. Some couples referred by organisations turned out to be ineligible.

Recruiting people through talking at meetings/events organised by local organisations was fairly effective in the UK and effective in France. Although time-consuming, the method was valuable in terms of gaining direct access to out-of-work partnered couples in both countries, particularly in France. Two families in Gleadless Valley and five families in Fives were recruited this way. Being able to answer participants' questions on the spot appeared helpful in breaking down preconceptions about the research. Most of the families found through this method were subsequently interviewed whereas several of the families recruited through other organisations or via flyering in the street, who initially agreed to take part, subsequently dropped out. It would appear approaching people to take part in an environment in which they are comfortable, and when they are generally not rushed, meant they would find out more about the research, and subsequently feel more inclined to take part than if they were recruited through a rushed message from an organisation, or while they briefly stopped in the street. Whilst street flyering proved useful for recruiting participants in the UK, it was more problematic in France. Despite trying to flyer in seven different locations in Fives (many of which appeared similar to locations that had proved successful for flyering in Gleadless Valley), flyering remained difficult. Overall, eleven families were recruited via street flyering in the UK, compared to only two families in France. People were suspicious of my motivations. Two passers-by commented they thought the interviews were on behalf of a religious organisation. These comments may be revealing of wider held beliefs. In the four months of undertaking the fieldwork in France, only two other people were spotted flyering in Fives – both were preaching religious material. By contrast, in Gleadless Valley, several companies and another researcher distributed flyers during the fieldwork period. Overall 'snowballing' was the most straightforward method of recruiting participants in Fives since it involved less time searching for the participants. Participants recruited through 'snowballing' all turned up to interview on the first time of asking. Two families in the UK and four families in France were recruited via snowballing.

Once participants had been recruited, modifications to the process of arranging the interview were necessary. Initially, email was used to communicate with participants. It became

apparent early on when recruiting participants in Gleadless Valley that email was impractical. Due to many parents in the neighbourhood not having regular internet access, communication with participants (in particular returning the pre-interview consent form) was slow. Therefore, it was decided to communicate with participants solely by phone. The flyers were reprinted with only a phone number. It was felt a basic form of the pre-interview questionnaire could be completed over the phone, with participants filling in the full-version on the day of the interview. Communication with participants subsequently became more efficient. It was important participants could contact me easily since they had busy lives and often had to reschedule interviews due to family problems such as children being ill.

Initial plans for this thesis involved both parents being interviewed separately about their experiences. However, several parents asked to be interviewed together. Reasons given in the UK included one parent being the carer of the other, parents being unable to find childcare for their children and preferring to look after them together during the interview, and parents being more comfortable being interviewed together. In France, practical reasons were also behind most requests for parents to be interviewed together. Several of the parents recruited through organisations were interviewed on the spot when they first showed interest in participating. Both parents were present at the time and so it was more convenient for the parents to be interviewed together rather than separately. It was decided to accommodate parents' requests to be interviewed together since this thesis does not explicitly ask questions of gender divisions of labour (in which case it might have been more important to obtain individual testimonies) and the need not to unnecessarily reduce the potential sample size. Analysis of the transcripts indicates that interviewing parents did not have a big impact on what parent said or how long they spoke for. However, transcribing sections where parents talked over one another was difficult.

Another issue encountered was that several people who showed interest in the study did not live in the areas chosen for the case studies. It was decided that it was acceptable to interview people who lived in neighbouring areas to Fives (e.g. Mons-en-Baroeul) and Gleadless Valley (e.g. Arbourthourne) given the socio-economic and spatial similarities between the neighbourhoods. Similar organisations to those in Fives and Gleadless Valley exist in neighbouring areas. The areas also have similar deprivation levels. Not interviewing such people would have needlessly limited the sample since people who lived in neighbouring areas to Fives and Gleadless Valley, were unlikely to have experiences that differed significantly from the experiences of families in Fives and Gleadless Valley to invalidate the

research. Similarly it was decided to interview two couples who had previously lived in Gleadless Valley and close to Fives since it was considered that accounts would be interesting in terms of the reasons why they moved away from the neighbourhoods.

The interview schedule was also reviewed after the initial interviews in the UK. The transition from the introductory questions to the main questions was still messy. The final introductory question (What do you think of the area?) seemed to sometimes disrupt the flow of the conversation. Given that the question was not a critical part of the research and had been added in to help put participants at ease, it was decided to remove the question if participants seemed comfortable answering the initial introductory questions. New issues in the interviews also emerged such as the impact of having a criminal record and discrimination based on ethnicity in entering and maintaining employment.

4.6 Sampling

Overall, interviews were conducted with nineteen couples in both Gleadless Valley and Fives. Eighteen of the interviews in each neighbourhood were conducted with out of-work-couples and one interview in each neighbourhood with couples where both parents had previously been out-of-work but where one parent had since found employment. In the UK, seventeen of the interviews were completed with both parents and two of the interviews with a single parent in the couple. In France, thirteen of the interviews completed were with both parents and six with a single parent. As Appendix F indicates, the majority of participants interviewed in the UK were recruited through distributing flyers on the street. In France, the majority of participants were recruited after speaking at events. In the UK, thirteen of the interviews were conducted in the offices of the organisations, eight in a library, one in a Church, and two on a park bench. In France, twenty were conducted in the offices of the organisations, three in a café and one in a park (numbers do not round to nineteen because of parents being interviewed separately). English was not the first language of three participants in the interviews conducted in Gleadless Valley. French was not the first language or was the joint first language of twelve of the parents interviewed in Fives.

4.7 Data Analysis Method

To fully respond to the research questions and ensure the transcripts “*provide a verbatim account of the interview*” (McLellan et al., 2003, p.66), enabling the identification of all possible themes in the interviews, it was decided to transcribe all interviews in full. This is consistent with the protocol for preparing transcripts of qualitative interviews for qualitative data analysis developed by McLellan et al. p.66). To ensure the systematic generation of the transcripts, all transcripts “*include elisions, mispronunciations, slang, grammatical errors non verbal sounds [...] and background noises*” (McLellan et al., p.66) as far as possible. Thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method due to its on focus on “*the content and meaning*” of interview data and how it allows for the interpretation of both “*anticipated and emergent themes in interview*” data (Hislop, 2013a, p.1). This fits with the epistemological and ontological approach of the thesis (and consequently, methodology) to keep an open mind on the possible outcomes of the interviews. A quantitative approach to the subject, for example counting the usage of pre-determined categories, would have pointed towards the use of alternative data analysis methods such as Content Analysis (Hislop, 2013b, p.8; Hislop, 2013c, p.2). The focus on ‘what is said’ in the interviews is ideal since this thesis is principally concerned with the experiences out-of-work parents describe, rather than the language used to describe their experiences which would have required use of alternative analysis methods such as Discourse Analysis or Conversation Analysis. The NVivo software package was used to help identify themes within the interviews.

4.8 Ethical Considerations and Safety

Ethical considerations were carefully managed throughout this thesis. Ethical Approval for this thesis was obtained from the University of Sheffield School of Languages and Cultures Ethics Review Committee (see Appendix G). It was decided to obtain freely given informed consent from participants as recommended by the British Sociological Association (BSA) (2002, p.3) and required by the University of Sheffield ethics guidelines. Participants were provided with an Information Sheet (detailing the aims of the project and the likely content of the interview) and a Consent form. Knowing whether the documents provided “*appropriate detail*” and were written “*in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken and how it is to be disseminated and used*” was challenging. As described in section 4.3, not overwhelming participants with information had to be balanced with providing them with sufficient information to comprehend what they were thinking of participating in. In addition to providing participants

with the Information Sheet and Consent Form, prior to commencing the interviews, the main points were reiterated, highlighting that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Furthermore, it was highlighted how, should they not wish to answer any particular question or questions, they were free to decline.

Providing anonymity to participants was considered necessary to comply with the BSA guidelines (p.5) and University of Sheffield ethics guidelines. To keep personal information about the participants confidential, only a single password-protected document contains the names and code of each participant. Pseudonyms have been used in this thesis to prevent participants from being identifiable as recommended by McLellan et al. (p.71). Other information (e.g. previous workplaces) that could identify participants in this thesis has been anonymised. Similar practice will be used in future published work. Transcripts and coding documents are password-protected. Paper documents such as consent forms are kept in a locked cabinet. Participants are referred to by a letter and number code. First, the participants are referred to as a letter of the alphabet, based on the order the interviews were conducted in. Secondly a number is added to the code, to indicate if it refers to the mother or the father in the couple. '1' is used for mothers and '2' for fathers. Finally 'UK' or 'Fr' is added to indicate whether the parent was interviewed in the UK or France. For example, 'B1UK' refers to the second mother interviewed in the UK; 'C2Fr' refers to the third father interviewed in France. This coding system is not intended to dehumanise the participants but rather is a response to the need to preserve the anonymity of the participants whilst also differentiating between the experiences of different participants. The ethics permission obtained from the University of Sheffield in order to conduct the fieldwork enables the data collected to be stored for use in future research projects/publications. Paper consent forms are kept in a locked cupboard, transcriptions and other analysis are stored on a University of Sheffield, password-protected computer and online file store.

Issues of safety and well-being were prioritised. It was considered there was little potential for physical harm to participants during the interviews. Although the participant group was not considered an especially sensitive group according to the University of Sheffield (The University of Sheffield, p.2), a small but possible risk of psychological harm/distress to participants was identified - that parents may not enjoy talking about difficult aspects of their experiences. Although it was thought many may find it important to share their experiences, it was identified that others may find talking about their experiences more difficult. To address

this, participants were spoken to in a friendly, calm manner; the interviews took place in a neutral environment in which participants were able to speak freely; and at the start of the interviews it was explained to participants that they did not need to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. In reality, no participants showed signs of distress during the interviews. However, several participants spoke of sensitive issues such as suffering depression. It was decided not to question participants on such topics (for example, the causes of such issues) and just listen to their accounts due to the potential for participants to become upset. As the BSA states:

“sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research” (p.2).

I felt I did not have sufficient training in dealing with sensitive issues to conduct such questioning. *“Researchers also have a responsibility to consider their own safety”* (The University of Sheffield, p.7). It was decided to meet participants in public locations (e.g. community centres or cafes) during working hours and not in their own homes. A SIM card was purchased in each country for contacting participants. Whilst most participants understood this requirement and it appeared to be convenient for them too, several fathers whose partners had been interviewed were only prepared to be interviewed in their own home. It was decided not to pursue interviews in such cases due to the potential risks involved.

Whether to provide financial incentives to participants was another issue. Critics suggest that paying participants could lead to bias (Thompson, 1996). Participants who would not otherwise take part in research may agree to take part in order to receive the payment. However, Thompson has argued that:

“the dangers of making payments to respondents can be outweighed by the gains, both by reducing bias and by compensating for power differentials between the researcher and the researched” (1996, no page number given).

Thompson maintains that paying participants can reduce bias where participants are poor:

“The research process itself would have contributed to their financial pressures and put strains on them by taking time away from other essential tasks” (1996).

The sample population in this study are such a group. It was therefore decided to offer each parent participating in the study a £10 supermarket gift voucher³³ as a thank you for attending the interview. The gift vouchers were provided to compensate for the time and potential travel costs parents incurred in attending the interviews. Given the likely low-income of the parents,

³³ A 15€ gift voucher was offered in France as this was the minimum denomination available.

offering a small token of appreciation seemed particularly appropriate. The gift vouchers were provided at the start of the interview so as not to influence whether participants completed the interview. In reality, participants rarely mentioned the voucher when asked at the end of the interview why they had taken part. Participants generally seemed to be motivated by a desire to describe their experiences or because they wanted *'to help me out'* rather than the voucher. Originally, the question was not part of the interview schedule but often arose after the interview had ended. It was decided to add the question to the interview schedule as the responses appeared interesting. The responses recorded on tape correspond to what participants said off-tape after the recording had finished. In France, a desire to explain the situation to me as an 'outsider' appeared important. A sample of responses when the question was asked at the end of the interview include:

"Just to know more what it were about and er yeah to say what I'm thinking, to let somebody know because if I went to the JobCentre and tried telling them they wouldn't, they wouldn't want to listen at all. They just would be like okay thank you. Hehehe" (M2UK).

"And I thought as well [...], a lot of people on the estate are a bit like oh I can't be bothered so in a way I felt a bit bad and I felt like we'll yeah we'll just do it, just for your sake more than owt because people are quite feisty" (N1UK).

"Bah comme ça je peux en parler vraiment qu'est ce qui se passe ici, vous renseignez qu'est-ce qu'il y a ici, qu'est-ce qui est intéressant, qu'est-ce qui est pas intéressant" (B1UK).

4.9 Evaluation

Traditionally, quantitative social research has been evaluated in terms of 'reliability', 'replication' and 'validity' (Bryman, p.31). This thesis involved a small-scale qualitative study. Writers, such as LeCompte and Goetz, 1982 and Peräkylä, 2004, have attempted to evaluate 'validity' and 'reliability' in relation to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba contend that such criteria are inappropriate in assessing qualitative research. Instead they propose that different criteria should be used when evaluating qualitative research: *"credibility"*, *"transferability"*, *"dependability"*, and *"confirmability"* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.328).

‘Credibility’ is the equivalent of “*internal validity*” and refers to how believable the findings are. Lincoln and Guba suggest that prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation of sources can contribute to credibility (p.328). This study does not seek to draw out causal relationships as a quantitative study may. It focuses on ‘what’ parents are experiencing rather than ‘why’ they have such experiences. ‘Credibility’ in this thesis comes from the fact the data obtained and conclusions drawn, (as will be explored in subsequent chapters), complement and extend existing research and from how the data was collected. All conclusions are backed up by evidence from the interviews; the analysis chapters are based on quotations from the interviews (which were transcribed in full enabling all potential themes to be considered), linking the themes identified to wider literature.

‘Transferability’ corresponds to ‘external validity’ and concerns whether the findings are applicable in other contexts. Lincoln and Guba contend that it is established through “*thick description*” of the cases so as to enable another person interested in applying the findings in another context to decide whether a transfer is possible (p.316, 328). This thesis achieves ‘transferability’ thanks to the contextual information provided in relation to each of the quotes (e.g. location, age of parent, number of children) as well as the descriptions within this chapter of the neighbourhoods the fieldwork was conducted in.

‘Dependability’ is the equivalent of ‘reliability’ and concerns whether the findings are consistent and could apply at other times (p.318). In terms of the process of how this fieldwork was undertaken, this thesis does not aim to be representative in a quantitative sense. However, the consistency of the methods used to recruit and interview participants in both countries still points towards its ‘dependability’. The five stage systematic approach used to recruit participants and collect data in this thesis would indicate the results are dependable. All possible, reasonable efforts were made to obtain a sample that was not biased by the location in which the studies were conducted. The same method was used in both countries and enabled the recruitment of participants in a variety of settings that can be found across each country. The approach was multi-layered to access participants who participated in community activities and those who were less involved. Although more parents chose to be interviewed separately in France than the UK, this can be considered not to have adversely affected the ‘dependability’ of the research since this thesis is not explicitly looking at gendered accounts of the divisions of labour. Where participants were interviewed together, the two parents frequently differed in their responses to questions. It does not appear the presence of the other partner impinged on the responses to the Interview Schedule. Whilst

more people were interviewed of an immigrant background in France than the UK, this should not be considered to overrule the ‘dependability’ of the research, since sufficient interviews with out-of-work immigrant couples in Gleadless Valley were conducted to allow insight into their experiences. Overall, the interviews provided insight into the experiences of different groups of parents in both countries. Whilst more families who lived outside of the case study neighbourhood were interviewed in France than the UK, almost all of the families lived close to the case study neighbourhood and the services they described in the interviews were often located in Fives. Even where they were not, similar services existed in Fives. In terms of internal dependability, in other words the dependability of the “*data, findings, interpretations and recommendations*”, the way in which the thematic analysis was carried out points to their ‘dependability’. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using the Nvivo programme in a rigorous process that played close attention to detail.

‘Confirmability’ parallels ‘objectivity’ and relates to whether the investigator allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree. Whilst the ontological approach of this study means my role in the research process cannot be denied (Walliman, p.22), care was taken throughout the process to ensure the sample was not heavily biased by my values. For example, when recruiting participants at organisations, attempts were made to speak to all clients, rather than using subjective values to choose which clients to approach. Within the interviews, effort was made not to reveal my beliefs or values when responding to points made by participants. Although difficult at times, phrases like ‘*that is really interesting*’, ‘*right*’, ‘*d’accord*’, ‘*merci*’ were useful in linking sections of the interview together without giving a personal opinion.

4.10 Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach taken with this thesis. It provides the context needed to understand how the data discussed in the remainder of this thesis was collected and analysed. It has outlined the rationale behind taking an interpretivist, constructionist approach in relation to the objectives behind the research questions. Such an approach supports the aim of understanding the norms of out-of-work partnered parents and their views on their experiences. This thesis gives out-of-work partnered parents the opportunity to relay their experiences. It explained how qualitative interviews were chosen as the research method as they are ideal for investigating the depth, nuance, and complexity of the situation. Semi-structured interviews in particular were chosen because they ensure the flexibility required by the research questions to provide parents with the freedom to raise and

discuss the work-care issues that have characterised their experiences. A more rigid structure of interview would have enforced the valued of the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were preferred over loosely structured interviewed because some form of benchmark is needed to compare experience nationally and cross-nationally. The chapter then justified the choice of neighbourhoods in terms of socio-economic data as well as the ‘feel’ of the areas. Data collection issues in practice were systematically discussed, highlighting problems with the method encountered and how these were resolved. The chapter also demonstrated how this thesis has taken account of ethical issues. Finally, the chapter demonstrated the overall credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this thesis.

The first four chapters of this thesis have explained the rationale, context and methodology behind this thesis. They have justified and developed the research questions. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respond to these research questions based on analysis of the empirical fieldwork carried out with out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK.

Chapter 5: Understanding and Negotiating Care and Employment

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK understand and negotiate their care and employment responsibilities together with their ambitions. Based on the qualitative interviews undertaken with parents, the chapter sets out the research puzzle to be answered through analysis of the empirical research in relation to existing theoretical concepts of welfare regimes, activation regimes and fatherhood regimes; ‘gendered moral rationalities’; the ethic of care; and constructions of motherhood and fatherhood. It discusses ideal work-care norms for out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. In particular, the chapter highlights differences in the ideal work-care scenarios of parents in the two countries. Building on the concept of ‘good mothering’ and ‘good fathering’ outlined in Chapter 2, it explores what ‘good mothering’ and ‘good fathering’ mean to the out-of-work parents interviewed. What are their normative views of their ideal work-life balance? How does work fit into their normative views of care? How would the parents ideally split their work and care responsibilities? Who would they ideally prioritise for work? Disagreements within couples regarding ideal work-care scenarios are also highlighted. The chapter includes pen portraits of couples in order to demonstrate the different ideal work-care scenarios identified. In concentrating on the experiences of individual couples, this chapter takes a micro-level approach. References are then made to the macro level national contexts in France and the UK which have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

5.1.1 The Research Puzzle – Responding to Chapters 2 and 3

Chapter 2 highlighted how research into how out-of-work partnered parents understand and negotiate their care and employment responsibilities and ambitions in the UK and especially, France, is limited. This chapter aims to unravel the normative work and care views of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. It responds to the questions set up in Chapter 2 and 3 regarding the extent to which the ideal care scenarios of individual out-of-work partnered parents correspond to what one might expect in view of existing literature that relates to but is not focused on the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents cross-nationally. Welfare regime and activation regime theories indicate the potential role of national welfare and activation policy but are based on the macro not the micro level. To what extent do they disregard or assume the norms that parents have? The ‘gendered moral

rationalities' and the ethic of care literatures contend that moral and social reasons are important in framing parents' ideal work-care scenarios. However, they concentrate on lone parents in the UK and very rarely include cross-national analysis. One might expect that norms might differ between partnered and lone parents because most lone parents surveyed in the UK have been mothers. As stressed in Chapter 1, this thesis looks at the norms of both mothers and fathers. How important are 'gendered moral rationalities' in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK? Literature on work-care issues among in-work parents examines how macro-level policy in France and the UK is borne out at the micro-level in the experiences of in-work parents. It underlines micro-level trends that can be examined in relation to out-of-work partnered parents.

The motherhood ideologies literature and the capabilities literature stress the role of individual characteristics such as ethnicity, education level and health but are not specific to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents as they are neither focused on couples nor cross-national comparison. Are individual factors also important in understanding the ideal-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents? The motherhood ideologies and the fatherhood ideologies literatures also tend to view mothers and fathers as individualised economic actors rather than considering the couple context. How are ideals formed within couples?

Greater insight into the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents will enable policy makers to target policy better in order to help parents to achieve their short and long-term work and care goals. In turn, this could expand the economic contribution parents make to society. Identification of a gap between policy goals and parental ideals would help policy makers to better understand where policy is hitting a barrier. They could then either modify policy to meet parental goals or seek to introduce further policy to modify norms.

5.2 Ideal Work-Care Scenarios

Analysis of the interviews conducted with the parents in France and the UK has enabled identification of the parents' ideal work-care scenarios³⁴. This refers to the situation the

³⁴ The scenarios were identified by examining parents' responses in the interviews. This was primarily in relation to their answers to the question 'what is your ideal balance of work and family balance?'. Sometimes parents only referred to hours of work rather than work and childcare. The childcare component was therefore identified in relation to other comments parents made in the interviews regarding childcare such as 'what do you think of childcare in this area?' Whilst the question focused

couples suggested would be ideal for them in terms of work model (the extent to which both parents would work) and in terms of childcare (the type of childcare they would ideally use). The ideal work-care scenarios of parents in the two countries are indicated in Figure 5.1. Ideal work-scenarios are indicated on the *x* axis and are measured according to whether neither, one or both parents are seeking employment and whether this is part-or full-time. The possible variables are: both parents employed full-time, both parents employed with one full-time and one part-time, both parents employed part-time, one parent employed full-time, one parent employed part-time, and neither parent employed. Ideal childcare scenarios are shown on the *y* axis and are determined according to whether the household overall favours home-based or formal childcare. Home-based care consists of either home-based care provided by a parent; split-shifting, where parents alternate work hours in order for one parent to always be available to take care of their child/ren; or care provided by a family member or friend. Formal childcare relates to either use of a daycare centre, or a childminder/nanny. The use of early/compulsory education (e.g. nursery and primary school in the UK, and *école maternelle* and *école primaire* in France) is not included in the variables since they were not considered a form of childcare by the participants. However, differences in early/compulsory education are discussed in relation to the number of hours of work that parents are seeking and the age of children at which parents in the two countries feel it is appropriate for them to return to employment. In view of the diverse ages of the children of the parents interviewed (the parents interviewed had children ranging in age from a few months old to eleven years old³⁵), Figure 5.1 refers to the ideal work scenarios of parents of children of various ages.

on current provision rather than ideals it sometimes led on to discussions of what parents ideally wanted.

³⁵ Some parents had children above the age of eleven years but for the purposes of this study, they were asked to only discuss their ideal work-care scenarios relating to their children up to the age of 11 years.

Ideal Future Work-Care Scenarios in France and the UK

		Both parents Employed F/T			N
		Both parents Employed 1 F/T, 1 P/T	<u>D</u> , E , <u>D</u>	H, J, O	B, <u>d</u>, I, K, Q A, <u>c</u>, <u>d</u>, E, M, P
		Both parents Employed P/T			S, P, <u>C</u>, <u>f</u> I, S, Q
Daycare centre	Child- minder/ nanny		Care provided by family/ friends	Split Shifting	Home-based care provided by parent at home
		1 Parent Employed F/T			H, <u>m</u>, <u>n</u>, R B, <u>f</u>, G, K, R
		1 Parent Employed P/T			
		Neither Parent Employed			

Figure 5.1 indicates the ideal future work-care scenarios of the families interviewed in France and the UK (excluding early/compulsory education). Families are identified by letters A-S. Letters in green indicate families in France, letters in orange families in the UK. Cases where the parents within a couple disagree on their ideal work-care scenarios are indicated by the letter of the couple appearing in underlined italics with that of the mother in the couple highlighted with an uppercase letter and that of the father with a lowercase letter.. The letters of couples disagreeing appear twice in the figure to demonstrate the differing ideal work-care scenarios of the two parents. There was insufficient information to classify couple F in France and couple L in the UK. Couple HF appear twice as the mother did not reveal a clear childcare preference.

5.2.1 Complex and Multifaceted Work-care Scenarios

Analysis of Figure 5.1 reveals that the ideal work-care norms and values of out-of-work parents in both France and the UK are complex and multi-faceted. The extent to which households seek employment and their use of formal care varies considerably both within France and the UK, and between the countries. The most common ideal future work-care scenario in both countries involves similar work ideals (the two parents being employed with one parent working full-time and one parent working part-time) but differing care ideals (parents in the UK all preferring home-based care by a parent), and parents in France being split between formal care provided by a daycare centre and informal care provided by a parent at home). Overall, parents in France were split between using formal and informal care, whereas parents in the UK all preferred scenarios involving informal care. Five scenarios were identified only by parents in one country (in other words not by parents in both France and the UK). Only couples in France ideally sought models in which they:

- use a daycare centre and have a dual-earner model,
- use a daycare centre and have a one and a half earner model,
- use a daycare centre and have a single earner model,

Conversely, couples in the UK but not France had scenarios involving:

- split shifting and a one and a half earner model,
- home-based care provided by a parent and a dual-earner model.

The significance of the different ideal work-care scenarios identified in Figure 5.1 is considered below from a theoretical and policy perspective. Reference is made back to Figure 5.1 as part of the analysis.

5.2.2 Findings in line with Macro-Level Comparisons

Analysis of Figure 5.1 is interesting because in many ways the parents' ideal care scenarios correspond to what one might expect from micro-level comparisons. In terms of how childcare fits into parent's ideal work-care scenarios welfare regime theory underlines differences in care provision in France and the UK. Leitner (2003) underlined the greater existence of formal childcare and options for payments for childcare within the family in France than the UK. Pfau-Effinger (2006) went further arguing that France has an "*external care model*" whilst the UK is an example of a "*female part-time carer model*" (p.145). In

addition, Chapter 3 highlighted the longer history of formal childcare provision in France than the UK. Such theories and policy analysis indicate that the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work parents in France will show greater support for formal childcare than the scenarios of parents in the UK. The scenarios identified in Figure 5.1 would suggest that this hypothesis generally holds with regard to the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Although there are a wide range of ideals expressed by parents in both countries, a larger proportion of the interviewees in France than the UK advocated the use of formal childcare in their ideal work-care scenarios. Formal childcare was a feature of the ideal work-care scenarios of nine couples³⁶ in France compared to none in the UK. The finding that not all French interviewees were in favour of formal childcare fits very well with how, as discussed in Chapter 3, French work-family reconciliation policy is based on parental ‘free choice’. As such, one would expect a range of ideals to be expressed in the French sample. That out-of-work parents in the UK are suspicious of formal childcare is also expected. It fits with the finding of Vincent as discussed in Chapter 3 that families in working-class areas may express distrust over ‘strangers being responsible for childcare (2007, p.2). Quotes are provided below to illustrate these arguments. Differences between the ideal-care scenarios of parents in France and the UK are highlighted.

If one looks at the ideal work model desired by the parents, at first it may seem to differ from the hypothesis proposed on the basis of Pfau-Effinger’s 2006 theory, in that not all couples in France ideally seek a “*dual breadwinner model*” and not all couples in the UK ideally desire a “*male breadwinner*” model (p.145). Figure 5.1 indicates that the majority of parents interviewed would ideally both be part of the labour market in France and the UK – the ideal care scenarios of fourteen of the couples in the interview sample in France involved either both parents working full-time or one parent working full-time and one parent part-time. The number of couples in the UK with the same position was ten. However, Pfau-Effinger’s model was written in 2006 and as such is going to be somewhat out-of-date. Furthermore, the scenarios found in France fit with the existing literature described in Chapter 2 which shows that a dual breadwinner model is not the usual practice for younger mothers, less well-qualified mothers and those with large families (Pak, 2013, p.11; INSEE, 2013; Eurostat, 2015a). Among the couples not looking for a dual-earner model in France, all were unqualified and one (couple H) had six children. The greater proportion of couples looking for a dual-earner model in France than the UK in their ideal work scenarios fits with what one

³⁶ The figure for formal care includes one couple who were not in agreement on whether they would ideally use formal or informal childcare. The mother advocated formal childcare whilst the father felt informal childcare would be more appropriate.

might expect on this basis of the greater rate of employed women working full-time at macro-level in France than the UK, and the wider gender gap in working time regimes in the UK than France detailed section 3.2.

Overall, the normative values of parents in the UK placed greater emphasis on spending time with their children. “*Being a mum*” was associated with “*being at home*” and was referred to by several participants as “*a full-time job*” (E.g. Interviews Q, G, K). K1UK, introduced herself as:

“the mother of three young children. [...]. It’s a full-time job”.

In addition to personally taking children to school when discussing their ideal work-care scenarios, mothers in the UK referred to the importance of taking their children to play group (e.g. Interview I), cooking their tea (e.g. Interview C), being there for mundane things like filling in forms (e.g. interview C) and doing the housework (e.g. interview I). Strong opinions were raised against placing children in formal care such as after school clubs and child-minders. As evident in Figure 5.1 the ideal work-care scenarios of all of these parents involved informal childcare.

S1UK and S2UK parents of two children aged five and seven who were not looking for employment, had the following discussion about putting their children in an after school club if the mother was to work full time:

S1UK: “Why do they want to be at after school club when they would rather be at home with mum?”

S2UK: They want to come home straight away.

S1UK: I don’t want my kids thinking my mum can’t be arsed with me, stick me in after school club. No I’m not doing it. They are there from quarter to nine in the, in the morning till what quarter past three. That is long enough”.

S2UK: The kids that are usually in after school club are the parents that are still working at that time do you know what, and probably don’t finish work till like half past four you know something like that.

S1UK: To them that that do you know what I mean but.

S2UK: For them it’s good.

S1UK: No I don’t, my kids don’t like that once, they are knackered by the time they get home. They want their tea and they want to chill out. That’s what they want to do.

Couple RUK explained that for them placing children in formal childcare is a neglect of parental responsibilities:

*“R2UK: And I I don’t think, I think if you are gonna have children, you **should**, you **should** have time to, you **should** have time for them.*

R1UK: Time for them yeah. Yeah.

R2UK: It’s not somebody, you have chose to have those children.

*R1UK: To have those children, why why why have children if you are gonna put them on someone else from like half five in the morning, six o’clock in the morning until six o’clock in the evening. I think you have **always** got to have a parent there in the home with the children. It’s just the way it **should** be.*

R2UK: Fair enough when we have had all of us children, we can go out and get a job and we can work during the day time and stuff like that. But yeah”.

The repetition of ‘should’ together with ‘always’ indicates the strength of the parents’ beliefs and how their beliefs are internalised as norms. It is interesting to consider that the mother in the couple previously worked in a childcare environment. It is clear that her employment experiences have influenced her norms:

“R1UK: I used to look after quite a few children, if I did like a double shift at work when I was at the nursery, there would be like children that had been there, the parents would be sat in the car park at half past five in the morning. They had the children in their pyjamas, they hadn’t had their breakfast or anything. They had literally got them out of their cot, brought them to nursery, put them into their car seat, brought them into nursery. Then we’d have to dress them, feed them, change them and then they wouldn’t pick them up again until gone six o’clock, half past six at night. And then all they have got to do literally is put them to bed”.

The father in Couple SUK also alludes to the role of social history in creating and maintaining parental norms when he argues in relation to government policy activating both parents within a couple:

“S2UK: It never used to be like that years ago and we never had half of these problems we are having these days. Since all this has happened and the government has made everyone else what they call it? Make everyone go out, both partners go out to work and everything else, the expenses stuff and everything else as well, society, society is going downhill I think because of that.

AT: Yeah?

S2UK: I think society is definitely going downhill because of, because both parents are going to work, because they they are forced to by the government and by the price of goods and services which I think is ridiculous so basically I think that is why society is going downhill”.

A1UK, a mother of one who had been out-of-work for several years, linked poor behaviour in children with time spent away from their parents due to parents working full-time. Again her ideal work-care scenario appears to be influenced by practical experience. Describing the experiences of her friend, she states:

“She works full time and she doesn’t see that much of her daughter and her daughter is really naughty. And I think a lot of it is from not spending time her mom that much”.

In addition to concerns about child development, issues of trust are also important. G1UK remarks:

“I couldn’t just chuck my children onto anybody and start working because I I am one of them where I haven’t got trust for a lot of people”.

Couple N explored trust in relation to using paid childcare:

“N1UK: It’s that trust issue ain’t it.

N2UK: ... yeah it’s the trust, you don’t, you don’t know who it is.

N1UK: You don’t know anybody”.

Cost issues were raised by some parents as a barrier to using formal childcare. I1UK revealed:

“The cost of childcare if I was to send my child there would be cost be a fortune if I was working”.

However, such issues appear to have little relative importance compared to the ‘quality’ issues raised above. Very few parents in the UK sample had used formal childcare for their children before they attended the free nursery provision provided at three years of age in the UK and no couples expressed a preference for using formal childcare. It is interesting to consider that many parents in the UK appeared not to consider the free nursery provision by the state for children over three to be a form of childcare. When asked about childcare provision in their neighbourhood, few parents discussed nursery provision even when their children attended nursery. Instead, they focused on child-minders, babysitters and paid formal childcare such as children’s centres. E1UK stated that:

“I have not really looked into one because I have never, I have never taken my son to a childminder or a carer or or something like that. I have never done that so I I really don’t know”.

Yet she goes on to describe how she values the nursery school that her son attends, classifying it as:

“Brilliant. Brilliant. It is really helping his development and there are some things he learnt learnt from school which I am proud of”.

Similarly, Q1UK claims, *“To be fair I’ve not actually ever heard about any childcare in this area”* then reveals that her son attends a nursery at a childcare centre. Again, she describes the nursery positively:

“It’s lovely actually, it’s really good erm they they are it is, don’t get me wrong it is a good children’s centre and a good nursery. It’s nice and they help you out, you know if you are stuck with some paperwork or something, you take it in and they will help you and stuff so it is quite helpful down there”.

Referring to nursery as *“school”* was a relatively common feature of the UK interviews. K2UK states his four year old son who has yet to start full-time school *“loves going to school [...] he really enjoys it and it’s getting him [inaudible 04:01] with other kids as well”*. The apparent differentiation which out-of-work partnered parents make between formal childcare provision and free nursery school provision and the extent to which they favour nurseries over other forms of formal childcare is worthy of discussion. It could be interpreted either as a positive embrace of nursery provision or as a reflection of the limited number of hours available. On the one hand, as highlighted in Chapter 3, the extension of free nursery provision has been an important part of government policy in the UK aimed at increasing take-up of formal childcare as part of moves to tackle child poverty and activate low-income parents into employment. The interviews reveal how for the majority of parents attending free nursery provision has become a cultural norm. The fact that the parents associate nursery provision with ‘school’ which has a much longer history of existence, could be considered to indicate the extent to which it has been adopted into cultural norms. On the other hand, the parents may distinguish between ‘childcare’ and ‘school’ because the fifteen hours of free nursery care provided is not sufficient to cover most employment if travel time is taken into account. As such, policy does not seem to be having the desired effect. It works out as either five hours of provision over three days, or three hours over five days, effectively limiting working hours to 10am-12pm. Therefore the parents might not consider it to be a viable form of childcare for pre-schoolers. Chapters 6 and 7 consider the extent to which the free nursery provision had the desired effect of providing parents with enough time to look for work. Chapter 6 emphasises how many parents in the UK struggled to find employment that fitted around the short-time timeframe they were available for work each day as a result of the

limited free nursery provision. This supports the contention that parents' vocabulary regarding nursery is influenced by the level of provision available.

The interviews reveal a note of caution with regard to government policy to increase free provision to 40% of all two year olds from September 2014 (Department for Education et al., 2014). It would appear that cultural norms have not adapted sufficiently for many parents to embrace the idea of children attending nursery from the age of two. P1UK, a mother of a two-year-old boy revealed how she felt two was too young for children to attend nursery:

“P1UK: He’s not old enough to go to nursery unless I put him in that Fell programme what the health visitors have started and everything but.

AT: Oh I haven’t heard of that, what is that?

P1UK: It’s where you can put your child in nursery at two when it will help them with their social skills and everything like that ready for when they are in nursery when they are three but I don’t want to put him in yet because I feel like he is too young and everything. But he has got cousins and everything so he is like interacting with people”.

In contrast to the general hostility towards formal childcare in the UK and in line with the scenario predicted based on welfare regime theory (Lewis, 1991; Leitner, 2003; Pfau-Effinger, 2006), the ideal work-care scenarios of the parents interviewed in France involved use of formal childcare far more frequently than those of parents in the UK. Overall, the French out-of-work mothers and fathers interviewed were more positive about the use of formal childcare. Even mothers who did not wish to work themselves felt it was beneficial for both their children and themselves. L1Fr a mother of four who desired a dual-breadwinner model with formal childcare suggested that attending a *garderie* would be good for daughter because she:

“Va être un peu entouré à des enfants et elle sera pas toute seule. Elle sera avec d’autres enfants et et un peu détachée à avec maman”.

C1Fr, a mother of four from West Africa who had trained to work in the care field but struggled to balance her work ambitions and care responsibilities felt:

“À la garderie les enfants apprennent beaucoup de choses, ils découvrent les les couleurs, ils découvrent les les mots qu’ils connaissent pas”.

She described this as particularly important for children like hers who were not of French origin. I1Fr contended that formal childcare helps children to become more independent. Formal childcare was also highlighted as beneficial in providing parents with free time for

other activities (Interview AFr). As C2Fr, a father of four who expressed a strong commitment to employment stated:

“Si les enfants sont gardés, vous avez la possibilité euh de faire toute, de répondre à certaines invitations et tout ça, non seulement de l’emploi mais à la Préfecture et tout ça là”.

Overall, as demonstrated in Chapter 6 even for those parents who gave up work in order to look after their children, a desire to remove their children from formal childcare did not appear to be an important factor behind their decision to leave employment. Few indications were given that parents left employment due to formal childcare being ‘bad’ for children. Parents in France focused on the importance of taking time to enjoy bringing children up but did not reveal the same personal attachment to caring for their children themselves as parents in the UK. E.g. F1Fr a mother of two, described how she gave up work to be *“là pour elle (her daughter) plus”* and K1Fr, a mother of three enrolled on a training course, stated she deliberately did not seek to return to employment after the birth of her third child, in order to raise her child *“tranquillement”*. Interestingly, both F1Fr and K1Fr had worked after the birth of their first children (and in the case of KFr, second child), an experience they did not wish to repeat. It would appear that unlike the UK mothers who had strong normative values dissuading them from using formal childcare, the French mothers revealed a different discourse based on life being easier if they did not work. Particularly if there were other children in the family, it appears that work is ‘too much’. This fits with national statistics which indicate a steep drop in the percentage of mothers of three children who work in comparison to mothers of two children. In 2004-2007, the activity rate of partnered women with three or more children was 66% compared to 85% for mothers of two children (Chardon and Daguet, 2008, p.2). This is also in line with Windebank’s finding that the main motivation for in-work mothers to stay at home focused on concerns related to the mother’s rather than children’s well-being (1999, p.10).

The greater preference for formal care in the ideal work-care scenarios among out-of-work parents in France compared to in the UK fits with the greater provision of formal childcare in France than the UK as described in Chapter 2, as well as with the picture in national statistics. National statistics indicate greater use of formal childcare in France than the UK. According to Eurostat 70% of children less than three years of age were not in formal childcare in the UK in 2013, compared to 61% in France (Eurostat, 2015b). 4% of children less than 3 years of age were in childcare for 30 hours or more in the UK in 2013, compared with 26% in France

(Eurostat, 2015b). The situation for children aged 3-5 years is particularly divergent in France and the UK given that formal education at *les écoles maternelles* starts the year when children are three years old³⁷ compared to primary school in the UK which begins the year of a child's fifth birthday. 99% of children aged three years attend *écoles maternelles* (part of the *Education Nationale*) which have a fixed 24 hour week excluding a minimum ninety minute lunch break per day (Service Public, 2014a). Therefore the percentage of children attending formal childcare for the majority of the week is far higher in France than the UK. For children aged between three years and compulsory school age, in 2013, 46% attended childcare for 30 hours or more weekly in France compared to only 21% in the UK (Eurostat, 2015b)³⁸. As will be discussed below, the longer school day in France than the UK and the fact that formal education begins earlier in France than the UK, has considerable implications for the hours parents, particularly, mothers are looking to work ideally, and the age at which they consider it appropriate for parents to enter/return to work following the birth of children.

Many parents interviewed seemed to talk about their ideal work-care scenario in relation to their present situation. At times in the interviews (see for example, the quote from couple SUK earlier in this chapter) the distinction between what parents felt was their ultimate ideal was blurred by what they could contemplate in their present situation. Ideals are undoubtedly not 'pure' in that they are likely to be framed by the bounds of people's cultural norms and practical possibilities. Adaptive preference theory maintains that oppressed and deprived people adapt their preferences according to their situation. Sen (2002, p.634) argues such adjusting of preferences is conscious, whilst Elster deems it unconscious (1987, pp.117-119). With reference to working time preferences specifically, Lewis, Campbell and Huerta contend that:

“poverty, low wages and lack of access to good quality, affordable child-care which in turn may constrain the preferences which mothers express” (2008, p.25)³⁹.

This thesis attempts to differentiate between ideals and present experiences as much possible but it must be acknowledged that it is not always strictly possible. This does not detract from

³⁷ Whilst obligatory schooling does not start until children are six years old, children can attend *les écoles maternelles* in all areas from the age of three, and in some areas from the age of two. For more information about the education system in France, see: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche (2015b).

³⁸ These figures consider attend *école maternelle* to be a form of childcare.

³⁹ For a detailed discussion of work which discusses factors affecting working time preferences, see Lewis, Campbell and Huerta (2008) 'Patterns of paid and unpaid work in Western Europe: gender, commodification, preferences and the implications for policy', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18, p.25.

the findings of this thesis as it is a reflection of everyday life. As underlined in Chapters 1 and 4, the aim is to provide greater insight into the everyday experiences of out-of-work partnered parents by giving the parents' experiences validity rather than judging others by one's own values and norms.

5.2.3 Findings based on a Micro-Level Approach

Although as described above many aspects of the parents ideal care scenarios correspond to what one would expect based on macro-level theory, some more surprising aspects were found.

Whilst welfare regime theory can be considered to correspond to the overall trends in the ideal work-care scenarios identified at macro level, it does not take account of the fact that among some working-class parents strong opposition to using formal childcare in France can be found. As shown in Figure 5.1 and explored in detail below some couples in France expressed hostility to using formal childcare. This fits with what was known to happen in practice – as described in Chapter 2 less qualified women are more likely to leave the job market due to an inability to afford formal childcare. However, the reasons for this hostility had not been clearly explored. A contribution of this thesis is to show that some parents in working class areas have ideological concerns about using formal childcare formed as a result of negative media coverage of formal childcare and their children experiencing problems attending formal childcare in practice.

Several parents revealed strong normative views against the use of formal childcare. Such ideals contradict the ideal work-care scenarios implied by welfare regime theory. M1Fr an out-of-work mother of three who ideally wanted a dual-earner formal care model:

“Franchement pour moi c’est un truc que ça me convient pas de tout parce que quand on entend euh il y a pas assez longtemps j’ai entendu qu’un bébé était mort à la crèche d’Hellemmes. J’étais [inaudible 11 :47] parce que je me suis dit ça peut arriver à n’importe que qui. Par rapport à c’était une dame de la crèche qui s’est mal euh, qui a mal pris soins du bébé. Donc j’ai un peu peur ».

That M1Fr expresses such opposition to formal childcare is interesting since elsewhere in the interview she expresses a desire to use formal childcare. When asked what her ideal work-care scenario would be she replied:

“M1Fr : Bah l’idéal c’est de travailler quand même un peu. Vu que je suis beaucoup avec mes enfants, mon mari, j’aimerais un peu travailler pour qu’on puisse avancer quoi.

AT : Quels types types d’heures est-ce que vous voudriez travailler ?

M1Fr : Bah je voudrais travailler de 9h à 17, à 16h ou 17h.

AT : Pourquoi ces horaires ?

M1Fr : Bah à 9h je dépose mes petits, mes petits à l’école, ma fille euh je peux la faire garder jusqu’à 18h tout au moins avant de la récupérer et rentrer chez moi et m’occuper d’eux ».

It is implied in this ideal work-care scenario that M1Fr would ideally like to and be comfortable with leaving her children in the school *garderie*. Local events seem to be closely linked to parental fears. It appears that local events questioning the safety of leaving children formal childcare are causing M1Fr to have contradictory ideal work-care scenarios and underlines the importance for policy actors of ensuring that any incidents within formal childcare centres are dealt with quickly and effectively, with particular attention given to addressing parental concerns.

B1Fr, a mother of two whose youngest child is two and a half, demonstrates how children’s experiences can modify parent’s care preferences. B1Fr originally placed her daughter in a *crèche*. However, her daughter experienced difficulties settling in to the environment:

“Moi je sais que ma fille a été à la garderie et je l’ai plus mis parce que ça se passait, ça se passait pas bien parce que ceux qui travaillent à la garderie je suis désolée ils disent que c’est là pour apprendre l’enfant est propre, est bien à parler, pour s’entraîner et quand j’ai mis ma fille ça a pas été. Dès qu’elle pleurait, je faisais la route, il m’appelait Madame [surname of B1Fr] vous devez venir chercher votre fille. Donc pour moi c’est pas possible et je l’ai plus mis ».

B1Fr goes on to state that were she to find employment, “*je prendrai plus la garderie*”. Instead she would prefer to use family or friends to provide care:

“Bah je préfère que mes enfants ils sont avec quelqu’un de ma famille, ou avec des amies qu’avec des étrangers parce que avec tous ce qu’est-ce qu’on entend au niveau de la télé si tu les laisse [inaudible] avec une nounou. J’ai entendu des fois les informations ils disent il y a une nounou qui garde une fille les parents ils ont dû mettre des caméras parce qu’il est tapé sur le gamin, il faisait ça donc je préfère que mes enfants sont avec ma propre famille puis avec mes amies proches ».

B1Fr rules out using a childminder due to safety fears. As with the experiences of M1Fr described above a link can be established between local events and parental fears. Such

experiences underline the complex environment in which policy is seeking to support parents in both countries to achieve their work-care goals. Even in cases where parents would ideally like to use formal childcare, issues in the news or in their own children's experiences can occur which modify their ideal work-care scenarios.

A worrying aspect of childcare provision that is not highlighted in existing literature and which emerges in several interviews in relation to ideal work-care scenarios is racism among some formal childcare providers in France. Whilst C2Fr, described above, underlined many positive reasons for using formal childcare, and formal childcare was a feature of her ideal work-care scenario, she suggested that a consideration in her ideal work-care scenarios was that some staff in *les garderies* can display racist behaviour to children of an ethnic minority background:

«À la garderie il y a les les mamans, pas les mamans, les formateurs, il y a [09 :57] déjà racistes quand ils voient un enfant noir, ils touchent pas pour changer les couches, met le comme ça. Tu as vu ? C'est bizarre quoi, méchant c'est pas formes de tendresse avec les enfants. C'est pas quoi. C'est son métier, il l'a choisi, mais il n'a pas care. Les manières qu'ils arrivent pas à péter, quand un enfant il fait beaucoup de caca il commence de le taper tout ça, non quand on enlève des des boulots là tu prends un enfant la voilà ton fils ou bien ta fille à pour faire le métier sinon on peut pas faire ça ».

Although C2Fr has some difficulties with French language, the sense of her point is clear. From this study it is not possible to comment on the scale of racism among staff in the formal childcare sector in France and how this may affect the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work parents. Further research would be required. The contribution of this study is in identifying the perception that it exists.

Another way in which macro-level theory can be considered to assume an exaggerated level of homogeneity in terms of parents' ideal work-care scenarios when applied to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents relates to the how it does not allow for disagreement with couples over the work-care scenarios they would like for one another and their child/ren. If one just read macro level welfare regime theory, one would expect many fewer ideal work-care scenarios, no disagreement within couples and that a greater proportion of parents in France would have favoured a dual-earner model than have been identified in this micro-level study. Although this would be difficult to achieve in a macro-level model, it seems important to stress in micro-level studies. Figure 5.1 indicates couples who disagree on their ideal future work-care scenario. Case studies of couples CUK and MFr will be used to

demonstrate how the ideal work-care scenarios of some couples differed. Disagreements concerned both ideal and care norms. Welfare regime theory only discusses the most common parental model in each country at macro level. Therefore it can easily be understood why it does not include the variety of scenarios found in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK.

As evident in Figure 5.1 C1UK's ideal work-care scenario involved both parents working part-time and providing home-based childcare. Conversely, C2UK ideally wanted a one and a half earner model with himself working full-time and care provided in the home (presumably by his partner). Couple C had three children ranging in age from 11-16 years. C1UK had worked in a variety of low-skilled jobs prior to having children and following the birth of her first child. As explored in Chapter 6, she subsequently gave up employment because she felt the income gained from employment did not merit the effort involved in arranging to share childcare with her partner.

“To me it felt like we were working for the same amount of money people would get if they were sat in their bed if you know what I mean so it caused a lot of trouble, a lot of stress and erm and erm the rent was... I don't know it just seemed we were paying out a lot more than we were getting in sometimes if you know what I mean. I stopped working only four months before I gave birth to [name of child 2]”.

C1 had taken up regular volunteering which she enjoyed greatly. She was experiencing increasing pressure from Jobcentre Plus to return to employment but was concerned how she would balance her care responsibilities with employment. She felt her youngest child was too young to be left to return home alone. Whilst C1 in many ways wished to return to employment *“I'd love to put the girls to school, go to a job, come back, and sit comfortable if you know what I mean”*, like mothers in the lone parent literature she prioritised spending time with her children over employment. C1's ideal care balance would be:

“To just do part-time so that I can still cook their tea and do this and do that. I don't want to lose you know being there for them and them having to rely on somebody else”.

Apart from having her mum around, C1 stated that the change that would make the biggest difference to how she could balance her work and care ambitions would be if both her and her partner could work part-time.

C2UK had been out of work for about six years. He had previously worked in various manual, low-skilled jobs and had lost previous jobs due to a lack of funds to pay for transport to work

and funding for contracts ending. He suggested he struggled to find employment due to his low qualification level. Like his partner he felt pressure to enter employment from Jobcentre Plus. However, unlike his partner and in line with the pattern of most fathers interviewed, he did not link his ideal work-care scenario to childcare responsibilities. His ideal work-care scenario did not match C1's ideal work-care scenario. Whilst C1 would like him to work part-time in order to share their care responsibilities, C2's ideal work-care scenario involved him working any hours so as to "to be out of the house as much as I can". It is significant that C1 and C2's ideal work-care scenarios differ. It is possible that C2 shows less interest in and concern regarding childcare responsibilities than C1 clearly wanted since he was not the biological father of C1's children. His biological children live elsewhere. It would seem that some fathers who are not the biological fathers take less responsibility for childcare. Policy in the UK nevertheless would assume that both parents are equal in the household and seek to activate both parents. Therefore, a mismatch between rationalities and policy can be identified with regard to work-care norms.

One of the couples with the most profound divergences in their ideal work-care scenarios in France was couple M. The couple had three children aged 5, 4 and 4 months. M2Fr had left school after year ten. She subsequently began a refresher course which would have led to a work placement. However, she was unable to finish the course due to falling pregnant. As shown in Figure 5.1 and in the discussion of how local events can influence care ideals above, the mother's ideal work-care scenario for her and her partner involves them both working full-time and using formal childcare:

M1Fr : Bah l'idéal c'est de travailler quand même un peu. Vu que je suis beaucoup avec mes enfants, mon mari, j'aimerais un peu travailler pour qu'on puisse avancer quoi.

AT : Quels types types d'heures est-ce que vous voudriez travailler ?

M1Fr : Bah je voudrais travailler de 9h à 17, à 16h ou 17h.

AT : Pourquoi ces horaires ?

M1Fr : Bah à 9h je dépose mes petits, mes petits à l'école, ma fille euh je peux la faire garder jusqu'à 18h tout au moins avant de la récupérer et rentrer chez moi et m'occuper d'eux".

The father in the couple had worked in a variety of semi-skilled jobs since leaving school including cleaning. He had been out of work for a year. He was due to start a training course involving supporting young people. His ideal work-care scenario involved himself working full-time and his partner staying at home to look after the house and their children:

“Pour moi bah ce serait moi qui travaillerais et madame à la maison, les enfants à l'école. Euh euh madame qui s'occuperait des des enfants tout ça quand je suis au travail. Mais pas des horaires euh tard quand même. Il faut que je vois grandir mes enfants quand même”.

Chapter 6 will discuss the care models which couples who had different ideal work-care scenarios were seeking in practice.

With regard to the link with policy, Lewis (2001) suggests that a gap is opening in the UK between government policy which increasingly advocates a dual adult worker model and “social reality” which has yet to move to such a fully individualised model, instead preferring a one and a half earner model (pp.154-155). Similarly Duncan and Strell (2003), Rafferty and Wigan (2011), Willams (2004) suggest discord between the aims of parents and work-family reconciliation/activation policy in the UK. This study gives evidence for the existence of such a gap and suggests that in fact it may be larger than envisaged by Lewis, particularly amongst parents who are most removed from the labour market. As demonstrated by Figure 5.1 of the parents interviewed in the UK, only one would ideally like a dual earner model in future (couple N). Furthermore, over a quarter of the interview sample in the UK advocated a male breadwinner model where only the father was in employment in their future ideal work scenario. For example, B1UK, a young mother of one who had never worked did not describe any career ambitions, or the following quote from R1UK, who was even more emphatic about wanting a male breadwinner model describing how she saw herself as the “homemaker”:

“I am, I am old fashioned, I am really old fashioned. I would like him to go out and work and me to stop at home and be the homemaker and then when he comes home, he can have his tea ready”.

That such a considerable proportion of parents in the UK have yet to even move towards embracing a one and a half earner model indicates that policy which assumes a one and a half earner model and, especially, a dual-earner model is likely to encounter significant resistance among out-of-work partnered parents. There is also evidence of a gap between ideals in policy and practice. Although as noted in section 3.3.2 policy in France supports parental ‘free choice’ in terms of work-care models, it presumes that both parents in couples will work on a full-time basis once children reach the age of three. The vast majority of parents had ideal work-care scenarios which involved the mothers entering/returning to work when their child reached the age of three years. However, some parents in France did not ideally think it would be right for the second earner to work until the child was older. For example, L1Fr felt that it was important that she did not work until her daughter reached the age of four years.

The apparent gap between policy and ideals strengthens interest in exploring whether such a gap is a barrier in practice to obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios. Chapters 6 and 7 respond to this question.

5.2.4 Findings in relation to the Comparative Fatherhood Literature

Analysis of the parents' ideal work-care scenarios also enables refinement of the fatherhood regimes described in Chapter 2, in terms of the experiences of out-of-work partnered fathers. As indicated in Figure 5.1, as in the experiences of fathers in employment referred to in the existing literature, the ideal work-care scenarios of the couples interviewed showed only limited progress towards the characteristics of “*new fatherhood*” identified by Gregory and Milner (2011b, p.588). Out-of-work fathers can be considered to have similar ideals to fathers in work. None of the couples in either France or the UK would ideally seek the father to be a full-time home-based carer. On the whole, the ideal work-care scenarios of fathers identified in Figure 5.1 correspond to existing fatherhood regimes identified by Milner and Gregory since in both France and the UK the couples ideal work-care scenarios prioritised the father as the principal financial earner and generally, involved the father playing a lesser role in childcare than the mother. The ideal work-care scenarios in both countries showed a preference for full-time employment for the father. This featured in both the narratives of the fathers and the mothers. With the exception of M1Fr, N1Fr and C1UK the mothers did not question the roles that their partners stated they wanted ideally.

Traditional values around motherhood and fatherhood still appear to have a fairly large influence on who couples prioritise for employment and the hours of employment that they seek. The hours that mothers seek will be discussed in detail in section 5.2.4 but it is difficult to discuss father's ideal work-care scenarios without situating them in the context of mother's ideal work-care scenarios. The ideals of B2UK demonstrate how fathers in the sample often viewed mothers as more ‘natural’ carers ideally compared to fathers, and consequently favoured male-breadwinner work-care models as their ideal work-care scenarios:

“Obviously children are going to get a heightened bond with their mother anyway cos she has carried him for 9 months. [...] It just makes sense in a way because obviously... obviously well I’m I’m trying not to be sexist here but it makes sense in a way for the man to provide for the family and the woman to be at home to look after the family”.

P1UK explained that her husband feels she more ‘*naturally*’ understands their two year old son and is better at dealing with their son than himself and that this consequently impacts on their ideal work-care scenario:

“Because I look after my son more, like if he is unwell I will know what is up with him unlike my husband. He will ring me to ask what is up with him and everything so I thought he might as well be the main one looking for work. Hehehehe”.

Couple RFr displayed particularly strong support for a male-breadwinner model:

“AT : Quelle est votre organisation idéale du travail et de la famille ?

R2 : Bah Monsieur il travaille et la maman s’occupe de la maison, des enfants, des courses, des papiers et si elle a le temps elle va travailler.

R1 : Et moi je pars d’un principe où un homme comme aux Etats-Unis, un homme pour moi il est à travailler 17h par jour. C’est comme l’ancien président disait si tu veux payer plus, travailler plus. C’est pas en travaillant 35 heures qu’on va gagner sa vie en France.

R2 : Dans l’idéal français c’est le l’homme qui travaille et la maman qui reste au foyer”.

The reference to “*l’idéal français*” by the mother is particularly interesting, as it is so definitive and clear-cut. It presents the male-breadwinner model as the sole parental work-care model in France, despite as demonstrated in Chapter 3 the high proportion of working mothers in France. The use of such an emphatic phrase, demonstrates the strength of conviction among the parents about the importance of the model.

Nevertheless, an important aspect of fathers’ work-care ideals that does not feature in the work of Gregory and Milner can be identified. The ideal work-care scenarios of fathers in the UK more often than those of fathers in France involve the fathers being willing to work “*any hours*” (e.g. interviews D, G, H, P in the UK, and interviews Q in France). Several mothers in both countries suggested that their partners were willing to work any hours. For example, G1UK, P1UK, and M1Fr who stated in relation to the hours of work that their ideal work-care scenario would involve in relation to her husband:

“n’importe parce que je veux dire que c’est l’homme de la maison. Donc il peut travailler, moi je peux m’occuper de mes enfants quoi. Donc il y a pas de soucis au niveau des horaires”.

However, willingness to work any hours was a feature of father’s narratives to a much greater extent in the UK than France. Although the majority of fathers described wanting to work full-

time in France, only one father went as far as stating he would work any hours and in that case he was prompted by his partner (Interview Q). The greater voicing of willingness to work “any hours” would seem to fit with cultural expectations of the long hour’s culture in the UK (see Williams, 2001) and the effect of 35-hour working week in France. This would therefore appear to be a further example of how policy combines with normative values to reinforce ideals. However, the statements could equally be taken literally, in that the participants are willing to work either part or full time depending on the jobs available. In this interpretation, the role of cultural expectations is diminished, with emphasis being placed on the disadvantaged situation the individuals find themselves in. This fits with the high levels of involuntary part-time work especially for the lower qualified, and the growth of destandardised forms of employment in the UK as discussed in section 3.2. Chapter 6 investigates in detail the extent to which fathers in the two countries desire and are actively seeking employment.

Despite the reluctance of the out of work fathers interviewed in France and the UK to take a leading role in care responsibilities, the majority of fathers in both countries displayed some engagement with their childcare responsibilities. In the UK context, this interest was frequently revealed through a desire to play some part in childcare duties. E2UK stated:

“I don’t like my son to, I don’t like taking my son to people for them to look after him so if the mum is busy, I have to be the one to look after him, and if I am busy she she has to be the one to to look after him. And er so it has been difficult. I can’t just leave my son on the streets or leave my son with a stranger all because I need I need work”.

Whilst it appears that E2UK did not consider himself to be his son’s main carer, he had strong views on the ideal type of childcare and so took on responsibility for childcare when required. H2UK speaks of childcare as a shared responsibility with his partner:

“AT: What age do you think children should be before their parents work?”

H1UK: Five.

H2UK: Until they go to school.

AT: Primary or Secondary?

H1UK: Primary.

H2UK: Primary. That’s when they are at school in the morning through until three. Then your mother or father has got from that time in the morning until about two o’clock to work.

AT: Mmm yeah so if you like, in an ideal world would one of you work part-time?

H2UK: Mmm.

AT: And look after the children?

H2UK: Or yeah like if like if if she worked, goes out and works in the day, like so many hours, I'd go out all that day and then she'll pick the kids up or I'll come and look after them myself".

Whilst some fathers in France exhibited similar if not higher levels of engagement with childcare, the majority spoke less of childcare responsibilities than fathers in the UK did. For example, as demonstrated in section 5.2.5 although P2Fr prioritised a care model in which he could spend time actively involved in childcare, fewer fathers in France than the UK linked responses to a question about their ideal work-life balance to a discussion of childcare responsibilities. They tended to discuss the benefits of working particular hours in terms of salary and not family considerations. Mothers interviewed in the UK also referred more often than mothers in France to wanting their partners to spend more time in the home in order to share childcare responsibilities. It is possible that the greater level of provision of and support for state provided childcare provision, means that fathers in France have less impetus to desire involvement in childcare. This fits with Smith's argument that men "*escape*" increased childcare involvement due to the level of provision available. The fact that several fathers in the UK suggested that they would like to split shift with their partners is likely to be a response to the traditional lack of state provided childcare provision in the UK. Even though they were not in work, several fathers in France favoured the use of formal childcare over looking after children themselves. Again this conforms to Smith's argument (2008), cited in Gregory and Milner, 2011b).

5.2.5 Applying Gendered Moral Rationalities to Couples Cross-nationally

Analysis of the empirical research conducted with out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK enables development of the 'gendered moral rationalities' literature outlined in Chapter 2. The literature, based on micro-level analysis of the experiences of lone parents in the UK, underlines the importance of moral and social reasons in mothers' decisions about whether to take up paid work.

Although not immediately apparent in Figure 5.1, couples in both France and the UK placed their role as a carer above their career and financial ambitions. Decisions were rarely taken based on an economic cost-benefit analysis. Instead, as indicated in section 5.2.2 and 5.2.3

parents used similar language in both countries to underline the importance they placed on taking their children to and from school. For a large majority of mothers in both countries who sought employment in their ideal work-care scenarios, the hours of employment they were looking for were based around taking their children to and from school themselves. This corresponds to the prediction in Chapter 2 (based on Windebank's research into in-work coupled mothers) that taking children to and from school in person would be an important element in the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents, especially mothers. Mothers' decisions seemed to be personal choices based on what they thought was right for them and their children. The policy infrastructure in each country would seem to influence the normative values that the parents hold. This section will analyse some quotes showing the importance placed on taking children to and from school personally as in the section above, emphasis was on other factors e.g. type of childcare rather than the school day specifically.

Q1Fr was a mother of a five year old boy. As analysed in Chapter 7 she had not worked since moving to France from North Africa due to her degree not being recognised in France. She expressed a strong desire to seek employment, explaining that she would be more comfortable working if she could take child to and from school personally. Her ideal work-care scenario was a one and half earner model with herself as the second earner, and the parent providing home-based childcare. Prioritising taking her child to and from school consequently affected the hours she would consider working:

“Même si il y a la garderie le matin et le soir pour moi je je vais me sentir bien si je trouve un boulot par exemple de 9h à 4h30. Comme ça je peux me lever avec mon petit tranquille euh pour lui donner le petit déjeuner... Et j'aimerais, moi j'aimerais bien que c'est moi qui l'amène à l'école parce que même pour le petit ça fait un confort. Et en même temps j'aimerais j'aime bien aussi à 4h30 lui aller chercher parce que l'école elle finit à 4h30. Alors pour mon petit dans sa tête à 4h30 maman il faut qu'elle venit vienne me chercher. Alors c'est pour ça je vous avais dit de 9h à 4h serait l'idéal”.

Similarly, A1UK stressed the importance of working around school hours in her ideal work-care scenario:

“Mine would be able to just get a job that fits around school. I would work. I do not want to sit in house. I am fed up of sitting in the house every day. I want to work so bad”.

A1UK clearly disliked being out of work, particularly due to having a low income. Her ideal work-care scenario was a one and a half earner model with herself providing home-based care. She prioritised taking her daughter to school personally, and collecting her as soon as school finished, implying that parents miss out if they do not do so. As such, even though

practically possible, she rejected the possibility of her mother collecting her daughter from school:

“It’s finding a job that fits round them hours, schools hours and stuff. I could get a job if it was on school hours. But as soon as she is finished at twenty past three, that’s it”. “I could get my mom on days she like weren’t working, she has always said if you were working I’d look after her but and there’s after school clubs and stuff, but I don’t want to. I still want to see her. I know people are like oh you can’t just not get a job cos you’ve got kids but then you’ve still got to have time for your kids”.

Despite the value A1UK placed on taking her child to and from school work remained an element of good care. We can see how wanting to be able to better provide financially for their family, and setting an example for their children, strongly motivated couple AUK’s decision to both actively seek employment. Whilst they referred to pressure from Jobcentre Plus to find employment (primarily in relation to the father), their commitment to looking for work can be considered to be more the result of a personal conviction about the importance of employment in providing ‘good care’. Being stable economically is associated with a normal/good lifestyle for their children. Mother A stated *“I just want a job”*, adding:

“I’m just fed up of not being able to do owt with my daughter, not being able to take her anywhere, buy her all this new stuff and it it’s horrible”.

Father A revealed:

“When [...] you have done all your shopping and you realise you have only got so much and then you’ve got to budget, [...]. And really you think if I had a job, I’d have all this money and then I’d have something to go and take kids out, go and have fun”.

In terms of setting an example for her daughter mother A described her pride when she was working and her daughter said she would like to work in the same profession when she is older. Mother A contrasted this with the difficulty she has explaining to her daughter why she is no longer in work:

“I want her to see that that’s [work] what you’ve got to do with your life and not just sit and do owt”.

The ideal work-care scenario of K1Fr (who also sought a one a one and a half earner model in which she was the secondary earner providing home-based care) was also based around the importance of parents taking children to school. K1Fr suggested this was important not just for parents but was an ideal shared by children:

“K1Fr: Les mamans ce que nous aimerons trouver c’est du travail mais qui correspond aussi à nos horaires, pouvons amener nos enfants à l’école et pouvons aller les chercher à 4h30. [...]”.

AT : Alors donc quelles horaires seraient vos horaires idéales ?

K1Fr : Bah par exemple de commencer entre 9h 9h30 et finir à peu près à 4 heures. Il y a beaucoup de mamans on demande à faire des longues journées et ne pas avoir de comment dire ? De de coupures en fait entre le matin et l'après-midi en fait. Donc nous il y a beaucoup ça nous intéressent plus de faire des grosses journées. Comme ça ça nous permet d'aller chercher nos enfants et les amener le matin à l'école, [...].

AT : Oui, oui pourquoi est-ce que c'est si important de de les amener à l'école et les chercher ?

K1Fr : Bah parce que les enfants ils prennent le plaisir que nous on les amène. Ils aiment bien, moi je sais que mon fils il aime bien quand je le ramène à l'école et je viens le chercher le soir”.

The use of the pronoun ‘*nous*’ can be considered to underline how K1Fr believes that the importance of taking children personally to and from school is a common cultural norm. Through using the term, she is placing herself with a group of other mothers who share the same cultural and social norms. This is also very much about mothering norms as opposed to fathering norms. It links up with the ethic of care literature because so much of it focuses on lone mothers.

C1UK offers insight into rationalities regarding the age of children at which parents felt it was less important for children to be personally accompanied to and from school. She was putting off looking for work as much as possible until her youngest child reached eleven years of age as before that she felt children were too young to be left unaccompanied:

“But they are still at that giddy stage really if you know what I mean. I mean they do go on the bus to their dads and all that which is what a ten-minute bus ride. They do go to the shops together but to leave them in the house not yet you know what I mean but when it comes to the end of year and one of them has moved up and the other one has moved up a year then it will be that wee bit better. I wouldn't be at work thinking oh no what are they up to you if know what I mean?”

P2Fr is an example of a father whose decisions about working hours are based on personal norms about what is best for children rather than pure financial decisions. He differed from most of the fathers interviewed in this respect. When asked about his ideal work-life balance, he contrasted the impossible (waking his children earlier than at present in order to drop them at school earlier in time for them to go to a *garderie*), with the acceptable compromise (his children having lunch in the school canteen). His decision was based on his personal values about what was best for the well-being of his children:

“Si je travaillais euh forcément il faut que ma fille aille à la cantine ça pour moi serait le compromis faisable. Le compromis pas faisable ça serait de les amener à l'école à à 7h30. C'est-à-dire une heure avant et ça ça veut dire les faire lever à trop tôt. [...]. Je trouve que dormir c'est important mais euh vraiment j'aime pas devoir lever ma fille quand quand elle est fatiguée quoi, [...] qu'il fait noir parce que c'est ça aussi quand on a pas beaucoup d'argent c'est la question du chauffage c'est des trucs comme ça quoi donc en hiver [...]. Ici c'est pas un hiver assez rude quand même. [...]. C'est que mes enfants elles ont des rythmes d'ouvriers en fait. [...] l'école c'est pas l'usine mais c'est une sorte de préparation à l'usine. Et et moi je tiens quand même à ce que mes enfants voilà ont une vie à côté quoi, fin préserver l'enfance quoi. Donc pour moi voilà un truc idéal entre le rythme de l'enfant et puis le rythme des parents ce serait de pouvoir les amener à à la vraie heure du début, pouvoir les sortir à 4h30 et que tu as voilà, travailler le midi ou à prendre juste une pause d'une demi-heure le midi pour l'adulte l'enfant il est à la cantine et voilà”.

As stated above, couples in France and the UK seemed to make individual decisions regarding their prioritisation of accompanying children to and from school personally in their ideal work-care scenarios. However, differences in the education system in the two countries appear to impact on the hours of work which the couples seek for the mothers to work and the age of their children at which the mothers would ideally start looking for employment. Policy can be viewed as influencing the normative ideals and practical behaviour of parents. Mothers' ideological decisions with regard to the number of hours they seek, and the age of their children at which they consider it appropriate to seek work are still determined by their “*collective and social understandings*” of what is “good mothering” but policy influences the detail of how their ideals play out in practice.

Although not applicable in all cases, mothers in the interview sample in France for whom employment features in their ideal work-care scenarios (as indicated in Figure 5.1), are generally seeking longer hours of employment than mothers in the UK. In particular, differences are apparent in the ideals of mothers who seek part-time employment. The part-time hours involved in couple's ideal work-care scenarios in France were considerably longer than in the scenarios of couples ideally wanting part-time employment in the UK, corresponding to Kan and Lesnard's argument regarding differences in part-time hours worked by women in France and the UK (no date given). Whilst in the UK interviews, ‘part-time’ generally meant working 10am-2pm, in France mothers felt it would be possible to work until between 4-5pm. An important factor behind these differences appears to be the length of the school day in France and the UK. The length of the school day in the two countries differs considerably. In France, formal education begins at the age of three and the school day generally lasts from 9am to 4:30pm. By contrast in the UK, formal education begins at the age of four and the school day lasts from around 9am to 3:30pm. Whilst all three and four year

olds in the UK are entitled to free early education, the free provision only covers fifteen hours of classes per week (gov.uk, 2014). The longer length of the school day in France than the UK means that out-of-work partnered parents, particularly mothers, are able to envisage working longer part-time hours than parents in the UK without compromising their desire to take their children to and from work personally. Chapter 6 examines how differences in the hours of part-time work which parents are seeking impacts on the hurdles they face in relation to employment in practice.

A second example of policy influencing the normative values and care ideals of couples relates to the age of their children at which they think it is appropriate for mothers to consider employment. As highlighted above, the earlier age at which children start formal schooling in France compared to the UK also seems to influence the age of children at which parents think it is appropriate for them to look for work. Parents frequently linked seeking employment with children starting full-time education. Therefore reflecting how children start full-time education at a younger age in France than the UK, most couples in France felt that it would be possible for the mother to enter or return to the job market when their children were younger than the age given by mothers in the UK. Although there were some exceptions such as C1UK who felt children should be secondary school age and P2Fr who thought children should be 12 or 13, most mothers in the UK interviews felt it would be appropriate for themselves to work once their children were four years old, whilst in France, most interviewees described being comfortable with the idea of working once their children were three years old. When asked at what age of children parents can consider working, B1Fr stated:

“Moi je vous dis franchement à partir de trois ans, trois, quatre ans on va dire. Dès qu’ils commencent à aller à l’école les gens peuvent aller travailler”.

C1Fr replied :

“Bah normalement il y a les parents à partir de trois ans quand les les les enfants ils vont à l’école”.

Similarly, H2UK clearly linked the age at which parents should work to children starting primary school and having a longer school day compared to previously.

“Primary. That’s when they are at school in the morning through until three. Then your mother or father has got from that time in the morning until about two o’clock to work”.

E2UK argued it was best for parents not to look for work until their children were primary age:

“I think the the age that they do start proper school because with them being toddlers they can learn like the basics from home, from their parents”.

In terms of differences among parents within the same country, analysis of the care norms of mothers of an immigrant background in France is interesting. Some mothers of an immigrant background displayed a strong inclination to work. O1Fr, a mother of four children aged 6-11 whose ideal work-care scenario was a one a half earner model in which the mother works part-time, argued that it is possible for mothers of large of families to balance their work and care ambitions:

“Nous on a pas de problèmes de garde de d’enfants. C’est-à-dire qu’il y a moi ou mon mari et j’ai toujours quelqu’un qui peut me les garder à un moment si on travaillerait tous les deux. On a la garderie le matin, on a la cantine le midi et on a la garderie le du soir. Le problème c’est pas, c’est pas nous les garderies qu’on pourrait trouver à l’extérieur c’est le problème c’est du l’employeur qui croit que pour nous c’est une charge, pour nous c’est un poids. C’est ah comment vous allez faire avec vos enfants ?”.

Conversely, H1Fr felt that it would not be possible for her to look for work due to a combination of poor health and the need to look after her son:

“Donc pour moi je peux pas travailler, je peux pas parce que à cause de mes mains et à cause de mon fils euh tous les jours je la ramène et je je prends à la maison le le plus le plus petit. Il a sept ans et demi. Donc c’est moi que j’occupe de lui et et son père”.

It would appear that age is not a particularly useful factor in explaining the mothers’ ideal work-care scenarios. Whilst H1Fr was one of the oldest mothers interviewed, being in her 50s, and so it could be considered that her age was a factor in her traditional work care balance, other mothers in their late 40s had ideal work-care which involved them working to a greater extent. I1Fr, a mother of two in her late 50s, sought to work long part time hours and had an ambitious career plan in mind. Of more use than age in explaining the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered mothers is the mothers’ fluency in French and qualification level. The higher the degree of fluency, the greater the extent to which the mothers sought employment. For example, O1Fr, Q1Fr and I1Fr had highly developed French language skills, and both sought long part-time hours ideally. By contrast, H1Fr had less sophisticated French language skills and showed less attachment to seeking employment ideally. C1Fr had intermediate language skills and sought a one and a half earner model with her partner ideally working full-time. This identification of a relationship between family care model desired ideally and language level develops the argument put forward by Monso and Gleizes that some immigrants in France feel their language skills constrain their work opportunities (2009, p.3).

Whilst only one mother of an immigrant background was interviewed in the UK and so it is difficult to make comparisons, the mother interviewed corresponds to the relationship identified in France. The mother had previously worked in a skilled profession in her country of origin. She had average English language skills and showed an interest in finding employment. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1 her and her partner's ideal work-care scenario involved a one and a half earner model. This appeared to be a result of a mixture of health and language issues. Such a relationship between language level and employment focus is interesting. On the one hand, it is possible to suggest that mothers with higher language skills levels would be more inclined to seek employment because they think it is more achievable than mothers with low language skills levels. As such, it could be suggested that the government should prioritise affordable language classes in order to support mothers to develop their language skills. On the other hand, it may be that mothers with poor French language skills live in traditional work-care setups. Consequently they may have little opportunity to develop their skills; so seeking employment may not enter their normative values. This would be an interesting area for future study.

5.3 Conclusions

This chapter has contrasted the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Section 5.2 used a scatter graph to indicate the ideal work-care scenarios of the out-of-work couples interviewed in France and the UK. Parents' scenarios were shown to be complex and multifaceted. However, clear differences can be observed between the scenarios favoured by couples in France and those favoured by couples in the UK. None of the couples in the UK ideally wanted situations using formal childcare. By contrast, couples in France were split between using formal and informal childcare. The most popular ideal work scenario in both countries was a one and a half earner model.

The broad distinctions in terms of the care models sought ideally by parents in France and the UK were shown to be in line with macro-level comparisons. Although couples in the two countries expressed a wide range of ideals, more couples in France than the UK advocated the use of formal childcare in their ideal work-care scenarios. This fits with what one would expect at the micro level based on the macro-level theories developed by Leitner (2003) and Pfau-Effinger (2006). Leitner (2003) stressed the greater existence of formal childcare and options for payments for childcare within the family in France than the UK. Pfau-Effinger (2006) maintained that France has an "*external care model*" whilst the UK has a "*female part-*

time carer model” (p.145). In addition, the ideal care scenarios found fit with the discussion in Chapter 3 of the longer history of formal childcare provision in France than the UK. Such theories and policy analysis indicate that the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work parents in France will show greater support for formal childcare than the scenarios of parents in the UK. Moreover, the finding that not all French interviewees were in favour of formal childcare fits very closely with how, as highlighted in Chapter 3, French work-family reconciliation policy promotes parental ‘free choice’ in terms of childcare. As such, one would assume ideal care scenarios in the France sample would express a range of ideals. That out-of-work parents in the UK are suspicious of formal childcare is also expected. It fits with the finding of Vincent (2007) as discussed in Chapter 3.

The ideal work models desired by the parents, are also in line with expectations based on macro-level policy. The ideal work-care scenarios of the majority of parents interviewed in both France and the UK involve both parents being part of the labour market – the ideal work-care scenarios of fifteen of the couples in the interview sample in France involved either both parents working full-time or one parent working full-time and one parent part-time. The number of couples in the UK with the same position was eleven. The scenarios found in France fit with the literature outlined in Chapter 2 which shows that a dual breadwinner model is not the usual practice for younger mothers, less well-qualified mothers and those with large families (Pak, 2013, p.11; INSEE, 2013; Eurostat, 2015a). All the couples not looking for a dual-earner model ideally in France were unqualified and one couple had six children. The greater number of couples ideally seeking a dual-earner model in France than the UK corresponds to the higher rate of employed women working full-time in France than the UK, and the wider gender gap in working time regimes in the UK than France.

In addition, the micro-level approach adopted in this study has allowed greater heterogeneity in experience to be observed. It has provided three contributions. First, it allows greater understanding concerning the factors that lead some parents in France to hold normative values that are suspicious of formal childcare. It stresses how some parents develop their values as a result of negative media coverage of formal childcare, whilst for others it is a result of their children having negative experiences of formal childcare. Secondly, the thesis identified disagreement among some of the couples interviewed in terms of their ideal work-care scenarios. Thirdly, it revealed concern among some parents regarding racism on the part of some staff in public *garderies* in France.

Lewis' (2001) suggestion that a gap is opening up between the goals of policy makers who prioritise a dual earner model and couples who are yet to move to such an individualised model was discussed. It has been demonstrated that such a gap can be considered to exist not just in the UK as suggested by Lewis but also in France. Whilst policy in France promotes parental 'free choice' in terms of work-care models, it assumes that parents will both work full-time once children reach the age of three. Some parents in France did not ideally think it would be right for the second earner to work until the child was older.

In relation to fatherhood models, whilst trends in ideal work-care scenarios generally corresponded to patterns identified in existing literature, divergence was identified at a national level between France and the UK in terms of the definition of full-time employment that fathers were prepared to work in the two countries and the extent to which they were willing to work "*any hours*". Some parents in France did want traditional set-ups in which the fathers were the breadwinner. It is such cases that indicate that the gap between policy and cultural norms suggested by Lewis in relation to the UK can be said to also exist in France.

Section 5.2.5 examined the potential for using an ethic of care and gendered rationalities model to understand the work-care ideals of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. It was demonstrated that the idea of 'gendered moral rationalities' can also be applied to the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents, especially in terms of how they envisage the role of the mother. Concerns relating to care were prioritised by mothers in both countries; with accompanying children to and from school, and not working when children were young identified as shared preferences for mothers in both France and the UK.

Importantly, this chapter links ideals with policy provision in order to further understanding of how policy influences ideals from a cross-national perspective. Differences in the length of the school day and the age at which children start compulsory education were highlighted as particularly important factors influencing the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work parents. The longer school day and earlier age at which children start school can be considered to be behind differences in the length of part-time hours mothers in the two countries generally consider working, and the age of their children at which they think it is appropriate for them to enter/return to employment. Worryingly the study revealed perceptions that some workers in the publicly funded childcare system in France display racist behaviours towards children who are of an immigrant background.

To sum up, this chapter has demonstrated how “good motherhood” and “good fatherhood” clearly have different meanings for different out-of-work partnered couples within France and the UK and in terms of a comparison between France and the UK. The identification of considerable variation within ideal work-care scenarios particularly in France is in line with Duncan and Edward’s finding that lone parents’ experiences of work and care differed within the UK (1999). In addition, it confirms the hypothesis posed in Chapter 2 that welfare regime theories based on social spending, assume an exaggerated degree of similarity with regard to parental norms on work and care. Although welfare regime models such as that by Pfau-Effinger correspond to the general trends identified in this chapter between France and the UK, they do not allow for discussion of experiences, which differ from the most common. The identification of some clear differences between parental ideal work-care strategies in France and the UK also provides further evidence that ‘gendered moral rationalities’ among couples differ cross-nationally.

Chapters 6 and 7 move the focus of this thesis from the work-care models the parents interviewed wanted ideally, to analysis of their experiences of seeking to obtain these models in practice. They consider the main barriers and enabling factors that characterise the parents’ experiences. They place a strong emphasis on understanding the experiences of different groups of parents.

Chapter 6: The Experiences of Parents Both Actively Seeking Employment

6.1 Introduction

In contrast to Chapter 5 which examined the ideal work-care scenarios of the out-of-work partnered parents interviewed, this chapter (as well as Chapter 7) considers the parents' care and employment experiences in practice. It, together with Chapter 7, develops the arguments put forward in Chapter 5 by exploring the relationship between the parents' normative views of work and care and their practical experiences of attempting to achieve these norms with a view to better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of existing policy targeting this group. It traces the impact of work-family reconciliation policy introduced in France and the UK in recent years.

Chapters 6 and 7 seek to contribute to knowledge of the relationship between parental ideals of work and care, parental experiences of work and care in practice, parental background, employment policy and neighbourhood factors. The chapters provide a unique portrait of how ideals, individual and couple-level factors, neighbourhood factors, and policy combine in similar and different ways in France and the UK. They add to debate by responding to four important questions:

1. What are the principal factors influencing whether out-of-work partnered parents can obtain their ideal work-care scenarios in practice?
2. Can different groups of out-of-work partnered parents be identified in terms of how they prioritise and share their care responsibilities in practice?
3. If so, how do the groups differ according to the national context in France and the UK?
4. To what extent is policy 'helpful' in meeting the needs of the different groups of parents with regard to care?

These questions emerge from gaps in existing literature. As set out in Chapter 2, little existing literature directly considers the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents. However, welfare regime literature, activation regime literature, fatherhood regime literature, research on in-work parents, literature on 'gendered moral rationalities' and studies of unemployment disagree on the role of policy and individual characteristics in parental experiences. Responding to these questions is important both in terms of policy and theoretical development. From a policy perspective, the questions are designed to elicit insight into

whether misalignment exists between policy goals and parental ideals in practice, as well to provide greater understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of incentive structures. Responses to these questions could enable policy to become more reactive to parents' needs, thus potentially supporting more parents to find work. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to respond to the research questions to enable greater understanding of the extent to which activation policies consider and respond to gender and care issues, and to expand knowledge of how national welfare and activation regimes play out at the micro-level.

The most significant difference to flag up between the parents' ideal work-care scenarios and their current situation is that with the exception of couples AFr and JUK, both of the parents in each couple interviewed were out-of-work at the time of the interview even though in their ideal work-care scenarios all of the couples wanted at least one parent to be in employment. A1Fr and J2UK had found work shortly prior to the time of the interview. Their experiences are discussed in this chapter nonetheless as both A1Fr and J2UK had previously both been out-of-work at the same time as their partner.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that three groups of parents can be identified in terms of the extent to which they were looking for employment in practice: couples where both parents were actively looking for work, couples where the father was looking for work and the mother was not and couples where neither parent was looking for work. None of the couples interviewed were seeking a model where the mother was actively looking for employment and the father is not. The number of couples who fall into each category is indicated in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Categorisation of Parent's Experiences in Practice

Present Situation	Couples in the UK	Couples in France
Both Actively Looking for Work	A, C, D, E, P	A, C, K
Father Actively Looking for Work, Mother Not	B, G, J, K*, M, N, O, Q	B, D, E, H, I, J, L, M, N, O, Q, S
Mother Actively Looking for Work, Father Not	None	None
Neither Looking for Work	F, H, I, R, S	P, R
Unable to classify	L	F, G

*K1UK had been looking for work due to pressure from JcP but at the time of interview she was not looking for work as she had put in an appeal against the decision to not award her sickness benefits.

This chapter considers the experiences of couples who were actively seeking a dual-earner model (either with both parents being employed full-time or a one-and-half earner model) at the time of interview whilst Chapter 7 evaluates the experiences of parents in the other two categories. It takes a thematic approach to identify the principal factors influencing whether the parents could obtain their ideal work-care scenario. It outlines the enabling factors that were positive features of their experiences as well as the ‘barriers’ that the parents faced in seeking their ideal work-care scenarios. Through taking a qualitative, micro-level approach, the chapter demonstrates how enabling factors can in essence be cancelled out by barrier factors. Internal factors relate to the characteristics of the individual parent/s. External obstacles/enablers concern factors that have to do with the practical context in which parents seek to balance their work and care ambitions. As such, external factors relate both to the experiences of the individual parents within the couple and to couples as a whole. To what extent do out-of-work parents in France and the UK value the assistance they receive from employment support organisations? Does the training provision available to them match their ambitions and expectations? To what extent are wider societal factors like discrimination important? To what extent have they had access to suitable childcare? The internal and external factors discussed in this chapter are summarised in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Summary of Internal and External Factors

Internal Factors	External Factors
Support from family/friends	Length of the school day
Skills level	Cost, accessibility and normative views of formal childcare available
Knowledge of the labour market	Quality and accessibility of job search support available
Confidence level	Availability and accessibility of employment including public transport provision
	Discrimination

The couples interviewed who were both seeking employment at the time of interview were looking for work and care scenarios that were almost identical to their ideal work-care scenarios. In other words, their ideal work-care scenarios and their practical experiences both involve the two parents in the couple looking for work and the type of childcare they were seeking is very similar in both instances. This relationship is demonstrated in Figure 6.1. For example, the ideal work-care scenarios of couple A in France and couple A in the UK consisted of both parents being employed. In the interviews they then described how they had been trying to find employment in practice. Couple A_{Fr} favoured a daycentre ideally and in practice, whilst couple A_{UK} preferred home-based care provided by a parent in both instances. As stated above, the main difference between the ideal work-care scenarios and the current situation of parents in this group was that whereas all of the couples wanted both parents to be employed, neither of the parents in couples A_{UK}, C_{UK}, D_{UK}, E_{UK}, P_{UK}, C_{Fr} and K_{Fr} were in employment. The mother in couple C_{Fr} had recently found employment although previously both she and her partner were out-of-work.

In addition to this significant difference between ideals and current situation, couple E differed slightly in the form of home-based care that they desired ideally and were looking for in practice. They ideally would have liked home-based childcare provided by the mother, but in reality, were looking to split shift with the father working nights and then caring for their child during the day. This appears to be the result of an acknowledgement that the mother is likely to be busy in the day with training and job search:

“At the moment if I am going to be working it is going to be in the night. Night jobs so I could come back, sleep a bit, er take care of my son a while because she she is in school, she goes to class, she is doing IT and so I could help out in the house”.

That the parent's ideal scenarios and practical experiences are so similar in terms of the involvement of both parents in the labour market is significant as it demonstrates that a group of parents exists in France and the UK for whom providing 'good care' both ideally and in practice involves both parents in a couple being active in the labour market. The parents have a strong commitment to employment; they then take steps in practice to achieve this ideal.

Whilst the experiences in practice of parents in this group in terms of the extent to which they were looking for work were all in line with their ideal-care scenarios, some of the mothers in the UK appeared to only be looking for work at the time of the interview due to pressure from employment support organisations. C1UK and D1UK whose care ideals were discussed in Chapter 5 stated they would ideally like to work part-time. Yet, when the couples described their actual experiences it was clear they were somewhat reluctant to actively seek employment. It was only pressure from Jobcentre Plus that led them to search for employment and to attend interviews at the time. This conflict appears to occur because the parents' ideal-care scenarios which involve them working relate to a point in the future when their children are older. If we take the example of C1UK although she states she is "*available for work*", she goes on to explain that she signed up for the Work Programme as a way of reducing the immediate pressure on her to find employment, thus indicating that finding employment was not her present ideal work-care scenario. As such, her job search efforts should be considered to be linked to a work ideal forced onto her by Jobcentre Plus. She continued to apply for jobs despite her reservations but was not wholeheartedly committed to job search:

"He [her Jobcentre Plus adviser] said if you sign up for this then we won't hassle you about getting a job every time you sign on. He says we will just ask you a question are you still with A4E [...] Every two or three weeks I go down there look through the papers, go on the computer[...] and erm update my CV [...] So every other week I just go in there and fill all of that in, send away applications".

C1UK states she signs onto "*Jobseeker's Allowance with a disability element something like that*". It can be presumed from this that C1UK received JSA with a disability premium. Claiming JSA with a disability premium gives entitlement to additional benefit amount but pressure to find employment is not reduced (Greaves, 2015).

D1UK when asked if she was looking for work indicates that she is but later in the interview suggests this is only because of pressure from Jobcentre Plus:

"AT: Are you looking for a job or?"

DIUK: Yeah I'm with SERCO at the minute, Jobseekers SERCO. [...] They (Jobcentre Plus) know I have got kids and they just like pressure you to get back to work. But I have already told them I have got to be with my kids. But they don't take much notice mind you".

C1UK could envisage being more comfortable looking for work once her youngest child entered secondary school in a few months' time as her daughter would then be old enough to be more independent. DIUK felt children should be at least fourteen years old before their parents ideally seek employment. Given that her youngest child was just eight years old, it is clear why she was resisting searching for employment. The barriers to obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios, in particular, looking for work, that mothers C and D faced at the time of the interview are discussed in more detail below in section 6.2.1.

Duncan et al. (2003) argue that how partnered mothers combine motherhood and employment varies according to their class, conventionality, ethnicity and sexuality (p.314, 327). Analysis of the experiences of the parents interviewed highlights differences in couples' experiences according to conventionality and whether or not they had a professional background. Whilst all the parents were looking for a one and a half earner model in practice, there were differences in how the couples shared their responsibilities and the number of hours work which they were looking for.

Couple AFr had the most professional background and alternative lifestyle of the couples interviewed who were both actively looking for employment. They were *pacés* rather than married, both had degrees, were involved in the arts scene in Lille and were the couple who stressed their identity most as individuals (e.g. attending different types of musical concerts). Couple AFr were the couple where the father was most involved in childcare in practice. The parents shared taking their son to his *crèche*. For them 'good care' involved both parents looking for employment in practice (with the mother working part-time at the time of interview) and using a *crèche parentale*. As discussed below in section 6.2.1.2 they valued how parents (in their case the father due to his greater time availability) could take part in activities at the *crèche*.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were parents who had a traditional split in terms of care and household responsibilities. More couples fell into this group in the UK than France. This is most probably because the sample included fewer parents with a professional background in

the UK than in France. In practice the mothers were responsible for the majority of childcare and running of the home, looking for work in the time remaining. By contrast, the fathers prioritised job search in terms of time spent looking for work and the number of hours of work they were seeking. The couples felt this was the best option in terms of providing ‘good care’ for their children. The children were looked after by their mothers in the comfort of their homes whilst the parents did not neglect their work ambitions either. Couples in this category in both France and the UK were those with the least professional backgrounds. For example, couple AUK both had little work experience or labour market skills. A1UK was only looking for work part-time around her care responsibilities:

“If I could do full-time I would, but there is no chance while she is as little as she is that I could do full-time work”.

Meanwhile, A2UK was looking for full-time work. A2’s experiences are also indicative of a trend concerning interviewees in this group who had children from other relationships. Where fathers also had children from previous relationships, the children were even less likely to limit the number of hours of work the fathers sought since the children often lived with their biological mothers rather than their fathers’ new partners. In addition, the fathers did not appear to feel a commitment to looking after their present partners’ children as they were not the biological fathers. A2’s child lived with his former partner. Therefore providing childcare during the week was not an issue in the hours of work he considered. Rather, as long as he was not working weekends when he saw his biological child normally, A2 felt he could meet his care responsibilities and work ambitions:

“He comes on a weekend so I could really work full time and have weekends with [name of child]”.

At no point in the interview did A1 discuss his potential work hours in relation to a responsibility to care for his present partner’s daughter.

In between these two groups were couples who said they were prioritising a traditional split in responsibilities in practice, but who, when talking about their experiences revealed that the fathers were taking a more active role. The couples who fell into this category both involved fathers with a more professional background and mothers with a less professional background. C2Fr had worked in the IT sector, whilst E2UK had a medical qualification. C1Fr had undertaken work placements in the care sector. Both C2Fr and E2UK stated in their interviews they had helped to care for their children in practice on a regular basis when their partner was busy.

Care Scenarios Parents Sought in Practice in France and the UK

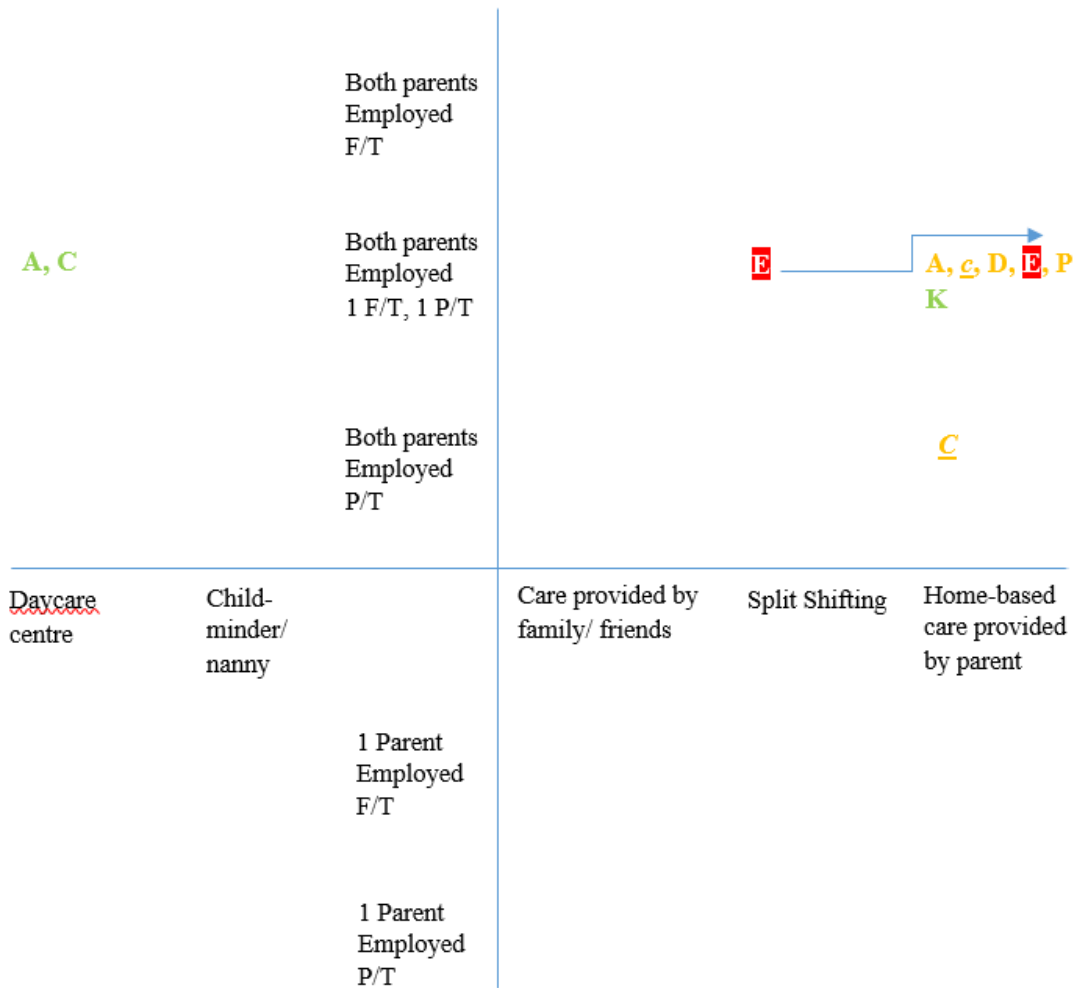


Figure 6.1 indicates the care scenarios the families interviewed were seeking in practice compared to ideally (excluding early/compulsory education). Families are identified by letter. Letters with no background colour show the scenarios sought in practice. Letters in green indicate families in France, letters in orange families in the UK. Cases where the parents within a couple disagree on their ideal work-care scenarios are indicated by the letter of the couple appearing in underlined italics. None of the couples disagreed on the scenario they were seeking in practice. The arrow demonstrates how only one couple were looking for a different model in the long-term in practice compared to ideally – couple EUK. Couple E moved from wanting home-based care ideally to looking to split shift in practice.

6.2 Enabling and Barrier Factors in Practice as cited by Parents

This section will discuss the factors that can be considered important in understanding the experiences in practice of couples who were both actively looking for employment to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios. It will discuss both enabling and barrier factors in their experiences, highlighting perceived and encountered factors referred to by the parents interviewed. As will be demonstrated some factors appear relevant in the experiences of both mothers and fathers whilst other factors are associated with parents of a particular gender. In addition, cross-national differences in the enablers and barriers cited by the parents can be identified. The enabling and barrier factors analysed in this section, and the differences in which they can be considered to play out in the experiences of mothers and fathers, and in France and the UK are summarised in Table 6.3. Due to many of the factors being associated with mothers or fathers rather than both parents, the analysis in this section often does not discuss the two parents in each couple together. In order to demonstrate more clearly how factors can interact within each couple, small vignettes are provided at the beginning of the childcare and job search sections.

Table 6.3 Summary of Enabling and Barrier Factors

Factor	Country important in?	Enabler or Barrier Factor in Practice?	Relevant to whom?
Length of school day	France + UK	School day = enabler in France and barrier in UK in looking for work due to longer school day in France.	Mothers
Reliable, regular support from family/friends	UK	Barrier. Parents described a lack of such support. Parents in the UK suggested it was particularly important.	Mothers
Cost, accessibility and normative views of formal childcare	France + UK	Enabler and barrier. More widespread & affordable provision in France than the UK but some issues of accessibility raised in France. Normative views against formal childcare more common in UK, limiting extent mothers look for work.	Mostly mothers.
Confidence, skills and knowledge of the labour market	France + UK especially,	Barrier. Parents struggled to find work due to a lack of confidence, skills and experience of the labour market.	Both especially fathers.
Availability and accessibility of employment	France + UK	Barrier and enabler. Few jobs available in G.V. or Fives. General shortage of jobs around school hours in UK and of professional jobs in France. Jobs in wider area more accessible in Fives due to greater public transport availability and lower costs than in G.V.	Both especially, fathers.
Support with job search and training	UK and France	Barrier and Enabler. Personalised & human support helped with job search in both countries. Overall policy in France was more reactive and less procedural than policy in the UK.	Both
Racial and gender discrimination	France	Barrier. Not mentioned in UK but caution must be taken when interpreting this due to small sample size.	Both
Criminal record discrimination	France + UK	Barrier.	Fathers

6.2.1 Childcare

Childcare provision and costs arguably play a critical role in the experiences of couples both actively seeking employment in practice in France and the UK. As in their ideal-care scenarios, childcare provision is particularly important in the experiences of mothers. The parents reveal that where formal provision is available, affordable and trusted by parents, it acts as a powerful enabler facilitating the extent to which mothers can spend time looking for work and the hours of work which they seek. Where formal provision is weaker and viewed as expensive and the parents' normative values were against using formal childcare, the couples interviewed suggested they limited the time the mothers spent on job search and also the numbers of hours work which they sought.

Overall, the interviews conducted indicate that despite the recent investment in childcare in the UK under New Labour and the Coalition government, lower-income parents in the UK continue to face many difficulties finding suitable childcare. Sections 6.2.1.1 to 6.2.1.3 show how from the parents experiences we can deduce that the short length of the school day, the constrained number of free nursery hours provided by the state and the perceived high cost of childcare (both pre-school age childcare, and school age before- and after- school clubs) all hinder the extent to which couples in the UK can obtain their ideal-care scenarios. They limit the extent to which the secondary earner mothers can look for and find suitable employment. These problems exacerbate a situation in which parents are already reluctant to use formal childcare as a result of normative values they hold which favour home-based care over formal childcare. Overall policy in the UK regarding childcare faces three challenges: availability, high costs and negative normative values about formal childcare.

The interviews with the parents in France expose a system which is generally well-thought of but in which accessibility can be an issue in practice. Formal childcare provision was described more positively in terms of enabling parents to balance their work and care ambitions in France than the UK. As predicted in the Policy Review chapter and in line with existing welfare regime theory, the parents' experiences indicate childcare provision is greater and more affordable in France than the UK. This reduces the reliance on support from family and friends. Nevertheless, difficulties obtaining formal childcare places were a feature of the French interviews. Whilst accessibility issues are not discussed in either welfare regime or activation regime theory, they are acknowledged by the French government. This study in addition, highlights the particular difficulties which out-of-work partnered couples face in obtaining places, as they are considered less of a priority for places than working parents.

The importance of childcare issues is clear in the experiences of couples AUK and CFr. Both couples ideally wanted a one and a half earner model, and both were looking to obtain such a model in practice. Childcare issues in practice primarily affected the mothers more than the fathers in both couples, limiting the extent to which the mothers could look for employment. The issues highlighted in these profiles are discussed in more detail later in this chapter:

Couple AUK's Story

After leaving school A1UK began a college course in the arts sector but did not complete it due to having her daughter. She enrolled on a course in the health sector but dropped out as her normative values meant she was reluctant to leave her daughter in formal childcare:

"[The main barriers were] childcare and nursery and stuff cos she was still... she could have gone in nursery cos they have them from being tiny but I didn't, obviously she were, she were right little so I didn't want to leave her".

She had subsequently worked evenings in the catering trade. Her partner cared for their daughter at home in accordance with their ideal care goal. A1 gave up the job as it was not paid above board. She had struggled to find paid employment since due to a lack of jobs within what she considered to be a reasonable travelling distance during school hours:

"It's finding a job that fits round [...], schools hours [...]. I could get a job if it was on school hours. But as soon as she is finished at twenty past three, that's it".

Whilst attending a Community Learning Centre had increased her confidence and given her a course to add to her CV, it did not seem to have brought her closer to the labour market. She wanted to return to a full-time college course but cost and care issues were obstacles. Overall her normative care values which opposed the use of formal childcare, and the lack of part-time jobs/training within what she considered to be an acceptable travelling distance meant that although she was looking for employment, there was little chance of her situation changing until her daughter was older and could be more independent. The factors hindering A2UK in achieving couple A's ideal-care scenario were different to those affecting his partner. He was not constrained by care responsibilities; rather a lack of qualifications was the main barrier. He felt he struggled to find employment because employers would always choose applicants with higher qualification levels than him. His experiences were exacerbated by a lack of tailored support from Jobcentre Plus. He felt as if JcP doesn't have "time" for him. Being dyslexic added to his difficulties. He struggled to travel outside of Gleadless Valley due to difficulties reading bus numbers. He would like to volunteer to gain experience but when referred to a voluntary placement, he was unable to find it and subsequently became disheartened. His difficulties were further compounded by the cost of public transport, meaning he sometimes had to rearrange appointments with JcP.

Couple CFr's Story

C1Fr came from a central African country. She had undertaken work placements in the care sector but not worked. She stopped her placements after the birth of her third child because she was unable to find suitable childcare:

“Avec les enfants déjà c'est trop dur il faut j'occupe la la petite à l'époque-là il n'y a d'école parce qu'elle est petite, elle va pas à l'école je suis obligée je reste avec elle à la maison”.

C1's difficulties stemmed not from normative values opposing the use of formal childcare but because she had struggled to obtain a *garderie* place for her youngest child. Couple C felt parents who were working were prioritised for places available. She could not employ a childminder due to high costs involved:

“Il y a les je crois assistantes maternelles comme moi pour garder les enfants, c'est leur métier. [...] Mais ça tourne en rond. L'argent que tu gagnes là-bas, tu donnes [...] donc tout ça sert à rien”.

She had turned down employment during anti-social hours as it would conflict with her care responsibilities. C1Fr's difficulties looking for work were exacerbated by racial discrimination. She valued the support of her *réfèrent* RSA in looking for work. C1's partner C2 had a degree and had worked in several professional posts in the African country of his birth. The main difficulties which C2Fr faced in obtaining his and his partner's idea care scenario - a lack of skilled jobs in the IT sector - were not related to childcare. Nevertheless, childcare played a role in his experiences. He stated he had turned interviews down if his wife was not available to look after their daughter:

“Il y a un problème sérieux. À supposer que là vous avez fin demandé un emploi [inaudible], on vous appelle dans un entretien et que la dame est s'est partie faire des courses. Euh vous avez une difficulté. Oui [inaudible] vous pouvez pas laisser les enfants tous seules – ce sont des mineurs – pour aller répondre à cette invitation. Oui donc euh mais si vous avez en fait, en fait un [inaudible] consistant vous pouvez pas mettre les enfants à la garderie. Ça joue, ça joue. Aujourd'hui ça fait possible mais demain ça serait impossible du fait des difficultés”.

Whilst ideally couple C ideally wanted the father to focus primarily on employment, in practice he was taking an active role with childcare due to problems accessing formal childcare space. C2Fr was reluctant to criticise the support he had received from employment support services but they did not seem to have played a positive role in his experiences. This was possibly linked to his insecure immigration status.

6.2.1.1 Length of School Day

The longer school day (both in terms of pre-school care in children's centres/nurseries and *garderies*, and in terms of formal school at primary school *école maternelle* and *école élémentaire*) in France than the UK makes it easier for couples in France to seek a one and a half earner model. Furthermore, if children take part in optional free *activités périscolaires* as encouraged by the *Mairie de Lille*, their day will be even longer (Ville de Lille, no date given, b). Whilst breakfast clubs and after school care is available in Gleadless Valley, this thesis maintains that due to the parents' normative views prioritising home-based care, it is viewed less enthusiastically than formal school by parents in the UK.

Couples in both countries emphasised the importance they placed in practice on collecting their children personally from school at the time school closed. As in their ideal work-care scenarios and as hypothesised in Chapter 2, parents resisted placing their children in before and after school clubs believing it was better for their family's well-being to spend time together as soon as possible after school finishes. In the UK mother A who was looking for part-time work explained:

"I could get my mom on days she like weren't working, she has always said if you were working I'd look after her but and there's after school clubs and stuff, but I don't want to. I still want to see her".

In France mother A who had found work shortly in a school shortly before the interview explained how her working hours fitted well with collecting her child from school in person:

"Je travaille dans une école, c'est des heures scolaires. Donc à quatre heures et demi j'ai fini. Donc je peux profiter de mon fils dès cinq heures de l'après-midi en fait. Je finis pas tard, le midi je travaille pas non plus donc je peux aller le rechercher, le prendre".

Due to the longer school day in France, couples can pick up their children from school at a later time in France than the UK without having to place them in an after school club. In essence, this means the secondary breadwinner – the mother in all cases in the sample, corresponding to the couples' ideal work-care scenarios – can look for longer part-time employment, increasing their chances of finding employment as they were less restricted in the hours of work they were looking for. A1Fr was already working 29 hours a week at the time of interview, whilst C1Fr and K1Fr appeared willing to work long part-time hours and did not describe difficulties finding employment due to a shortage of jobs available for the hours they were looking for. By contrast, mothers AUK, CUK, DUK, EUK and PUK stated

they were only looking for jobs that involved working a few hours a day around school hours and underlined the scarcity of jobs involving short part-time hours:

“There’s not much you know to fit in with kids you know times” (D1UK, whose youngest child was at Primary School).

“He is only there (at nursery) half twelve to half four and there is no job offering me those times whatsoever” (E1UK mother of a three year old child).

6.2.1.2 Reliable, Regular Support from Family and Friends

The existence of family support can be considered to expand the opportunities for out-of-work partnered parents to seek employment for those parents both engaged in active job search. The existence of limited family support is important in enabling E1UK to undertake limited community-based training. Despite the logistical difficulties involved, E1’s mother looks after her son weekly in order to allow her daughter to attend training. It would appear that without such support E1UK would have been unable to attend her training course:

“I have to get like my mum has to watch him in the morning and she works nights so it’s right difficult so at times I feel absolutely terrible asking her to leave right the way from the other side of the City to come over to stay with him so that I can go and learn”.

The significance of family support fits with Daly and Kelly’s argument that “wider family” in particular parents and siblings are “central to both resource use and resource accrual” for parents on low incomes including in terms of childcare (2015, p.195).

However, a significant finding of this thesis is that a lack of reliable, regular support from family or friends was common across the parents interviewed who were looking for employment. It appears to have a particularly important impact on the experiences of parents in the UK. Parents described a lack of support due to living far from their family, having no family left, not being in contact with their family and their family being otherwise occupied (e.g. through work, care responsibilities and illness). C1UK who became geographically cut off from her family after leaving home to look for work once she finished school argued the factor that would make the biggest difference in helping her to balance her work and care ideals would be “Having my mum here”. A lack of family and friend support is possibly more significant in parental experiences in the UK than France because the state has traditionally provided less support with family issues than in France. Given the hostility to formal care services that still appears to resonate in some low-income families in the UK as evidenced in

Chapter 5, it would appear societal changes are weakening the care ties between families but social attitudes have still not developed to embrace formal services to take their place. The fact that the take up of formal childcare for children aged 0 to 14 years rose with increasing family income in the UK in the 2012-2013 Department for Education Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents⁴⁰ supports this argument. Whereas 68% of parents with a family income of over £45,000 per year reported using formal childcare, only 41% of parents with a family income of less than £10,000 per year described using formal childcare (Huskinson et al., 2014, p.47). As will be discussed below the extent of parental trust in institutional provision can be questioned, especially in the UK.

6.2.1.3 Affordable, Good Quality Childcare

Existence of and confidence in affordable, good quality childcare also played a positive role in the experiences of couples both seeking employment in France. This was particularly associated with the testimonies of the mothers but was also mentioned by some fathers. It corresponds to the argument postulated in Chapter 2 based on Leitner's (2003), Lewis' (1992 and 2001) and Pfau-Effinger's (2006) theories that one would expect to find that out-of-work parents in France report in practice that childcare provision in France is less problematic than parents in the UK. Couples A and C in France valued how they had been able to access good quality childcare. Couple A used a *crèche parentale*, whilst couple C used a *garderie*. A1 appears happy with the *crèche* where she sends her son, particularly valuing how parents are encouraged to participate in activities. She describes the *crèche* as "*vraiment pas chère*", emphasising how costs are calculated according to family income. A2Fr adds that if they had not received the *PAJE* benefit subsidising their *crèches* costs, they would have struggled to afford the service:

"Ça donne un [...] coup de main forcément fin, moi qui suis sans emploi euh, ma campagne qui est à temps partiel, qui fait pas, qui fait vingt-neuf heures par semaine. [...] Bah s'il y avait pas la PAJE, on aurait beaucoup plus de difficultés à à mettre [name of son] à la crèche justement".

Finding a suitable *crèche* place when required was a key factor in enabling A1 to recently return to employment and thus move towards obtaining her and her partners' ideal work-care scenario. She became pregnant while unemployed and found a *crèche* place soon after spending eight months at home with her child, making it possible for her to then enter employment:

⁴⁰ The 2012-13 survey is the latest version available in the series.

“Juste après [having spent eight months at home] on a eu la crèche donc j’ai pu travailler au mois de septembre, dès qu’on l’a mis à la crèche j’ai travaillé quoi en fait. Donc c’était super”.

A2Fr argued that the existence of the *crèche* and his confidence in its quality was important in assisting him in seeking to obtain their ideal work-care scenario. It provided him with the time to pursue voluntary activities which were important to his identity while out-of-work:

“Moi ça me permet d’avoir des opportunités de de faire des recherches parce que je j’ai pleines d’activités qui ne sont pas des des activités rémunérées. Euh je suis musicien, je suis peintre donc ça me permet aussi de faire autres choses parce que si j’ai le petit à la maison toute la journée c’est des choses que je pourrais pas faire. [...] Donc ça me permet effectivement de continuer à avoir une activité qui n’est pas forcément une activité salariée mais en tout cas une activité au moins. Voilà pour moi c’était, c’est très important de garder, de continuer ces ces activités”.

This is interesting as it links to notions of childcare that are not generally considered ‘legitimate’ activities and concerns for the out-of-work. As discussed in Chapter 3, formal childcare in both France and the UK is mostly discussed in relation to promoting job search or child development. A2UK underlines the importance of formal childcare in providing out-of-work parents with the space to pursue leisure activities which are important to their general well-being. The lower price and greater accessibility of formal childcare in France than the UK provides greater opportunities for out-of-work parents to use formal childcare in such a way. This fits with Windebank’s finding that families in France would use childcare even if one of the parents – usually the father – was available to look after children in order to give themselves time (2001, p.287). It also fits with the argument in Chapter 5 that several couples in France mentioned in relation to their ideal work-care scenarios that they did not want to both work full-time because they wanted to bring up their children “*tranquillement*”. They valued using formal childcare primarily in relation to the benefits it provided to the mother (in terms of reducing the stress of attempting to balance work, personal and childcare responsibilities and ambitions), rather than the children.

Couple C had used a *garderie* at several points with their children. C2Fr linked having a *garderie* place with his partner finding employment:

“Ça fait je prends [...] la situation de de ma campagne, de ma campagne. Quand on avait, la gard-, fin, la première à la garderie, elle avait trouvé un job vous rendez-compte”.

Despite these positive experiences of formal childcare in France in facilitating parents in obtaining their ideal work-care scenario, issues of access were highlighted in the interviews.

A1Fr remarked that: « *Les modes de garde sont de plus en plus difficiles à trouver en fait* ». Her comments imply that finding formal childcare easily is unusual rather than the norm: « *Nous on a eu une chance incroyable* ». Couple C experienced difficulties obtaining places for all their children due to the general lack of spaces and the fact they were unemployed:

“On a connu des certaines difficultés. On devait déménager. [...], on est venu à Fives et aussi trouver une garderie [...] c’est pas aussi facile d’autant plus qu’il y a des places limités et deuxièmement il y a pas assez de garderies aussi. Euh il y a certaines garderies ici où il faut avoir l’argent ou faire des recours à la Préfecture pour avoir une subvention” (C2Fr).

C1Fr added that parents who are working are the priority for the spaces that are available:

“La garderie il prend que les parents qui travaillent [...]. Après il va prendre les enfants bah quand ils travaillent pas [...]. Plus de places”.

Issues of access are already established in the literature. The French government is well aware of the shortfall in childcare places. Indeed, as described Chapter 3, it has launched several recent initiatives to increase the number of formal childcare spaces. The Haut Conseil de la Famille (HCF) established a target of increasing the number of places in “*accueil collectif*” by 100,000 between 2009 and 2012 (Haut Conseil de la Famille, 2011, p.1). Since 2011 the HCF has provided yearly quantitative updates on progress. The reports have revealed difficulties in achieving the goals set. By 2012 considerable progress had been made but the target had not been met:

“Si l’on ne déduit pas les places en établissement d’accueil du jeune enfant qui ont été détruites sur la période, le taux de réalisation brut s’élève à 88% avec la création de 176 000 places ou équivalents places (dont près de 96 000 places ou équivalents places créées en établissements d’accueil du jeune enfant et près de 80 000 enfants supplémentaires accueillis chez des assistants maternels)” (Haut Conseil de la Famille, 13 juin 2013, p.3).

The HCF notes that whilst the number of places overall increased between 2009 and 2012, the number of children under three registered in the *écoles maternelles* fell by 58,000 (Haut Conseil de la Famille, 2013, p.3). The quotes above describing difficulties parents faced obtaining formal childcare provide qualitative evidence to advance the understanding provided by the quantitative reports undertaken the HCF. The evidence underlines the importance of further developing collective childcare provision for children under three in France by demonstrating how a difficulty obtaining childcare places, has in practice led mothers to withdraw from or not enter the labour market following the birth of their children.

Until provision is sufficiently increased to match demand, it is likely many mothers of children under three in particular, will be unable to achieve their employment ambitions due primarily to issues of childcare supply. It is possible provision in Fives is particularly problematic since part of the initiative to improve childcare provision included a focus on expanding childcare services within the *banlieues*. Whilst Fives is a disadvantaged area, it is not a *Zone urbaine sensible* (ZUS). The ZUS were targeted within the *Plan Petite Enfance* through the *Espoir banlieues* initiative. Similar, to the focus on expanding childcare provision in the ZUS, the French government in 2012 announced plans to develop provision in *écoles maternelles* “*en particulier dans les zones d’éducation prioritaire, dans les territoires ruraux isolés les moins bien pourvus et en outre-mer*” through the provision of 3000 additional teachers (Haut Conseil de la Famille, 2013, p.21). Again, Fives does not appear to fit into any of these categories. It is possible the parents interviewed in Fives, experienced particular difficulties obtaining childcare places because the neighbourhood has not been a focus of government investment in childcare.

It is very significant that in February 2015, the French government announced plans to improve access to childcare facilities for the unemployed. It pronounced that discussions would take place between itself, *le Pôle Emploi*, *la Caisse nationale des allocations familiales* and *les entreprises de crèches* in order establish concrete solutions for childcare during interviews, meetings with *le Pôle Emploi*, training and job trials (Le Monde, 2015). This study underlines the urgency of introducing increased childcare access for unemployed parents. It highlights how difficulties accessing existing provision are hindering parents in entering the labour market.

Parents interviewed in the UK painted a different picture of childcare provision. None of the parents described the support available as an enabler, some appeared uninterested in the facilities available and several were critical with one citing it as a barrier. Couple A were unsure of provision. That they had not attempted to research childcare options indicates that formal childcare is not an option they are interested in. This fits with their ideal work-care scenario which revolves around home-based care.

“To be fair I don’t know what there is and what there isn’t because I’ve not looked myself” (A1UK).

Although childcare was an issue in the experiences of P1UK, C1UK and A1UK, they did not cite a lack of formal childcare as a barrier. Instead they expressed hostility to formal childcare

particularly for younger children in line with their ideal work-care scenarios based around home-based care. P1UK whose son was two years old turned down the opportunity for her son to start nursery at two years of age as she felt her son was too young and it was unnecessary:

“P1: He’s not old enough to go to nursery unless I put him in that [...] programme what the health visitors have started and everything but.

AT: Oh I haven’t heard of that, what is that?

P1: It’s where you can put your child in nursery at two when it will help them with their social skills and everything like that ready for when they are in nursery when they are three but I don’t want to put him in yet because I feel like he is too young and everything. But he has got cousins and everything so he is like interacting with people”.

Only E1UK directly linked difficulties obtaining formal childcare with the difficulties she faced finding work. She criticises the availability, in particular, the limited number of free hours of childcare provision available in the UK for children four and under, and the high costs of formal childcare (for hours over the free allocation):

“It’s very hard, difficult to get childcare” and that “it’s like really expensive”.

E1UK revealed the biggest barrier she faced trying to find employment was that the free hours provided did not offer her enough time to look for work:

“E1UK: I won’t leave him [her son] here, there and everywhere, there’s not, there’s not many places like in, there like for for example in school he starts I assumed he starts nine and it finishes at four you know for like the erm toddler groups and stuff and it’s just not enough time really and it’s...

AT: So how long is he there for?

E1UK: He is only there half twelve to half four and there is no job offering me those times”.

The limited number of free hours available can be considered to restrict the employment opportunities the second earner can apply for. As discussed in section 3.3.4 the government is proposing to double the free nursery entitlement for children aged three to four whose parents are in work (Department for Education, 2015, p.5). As such, this should reduce difficulties parents of children aged three to four face balancing their work ambitions with their care ambitions. However, it is not clear whether the increased entitlement will be available for parents who are out-of-work but looking to find work. The results of this thesis underline the importance of the provision being extended to parents who are out-of-work especially, those looking for work.

Overall, childcare costs particularly, for public childcare are higher in the UK than France. The OECD found that gross childcare fees per two year old attending accredited early years care and education services in 2012 as a percentage of average wage was over 50% in the UK compared to 20% in France. Net childcare costs (the amount paid after cash benefits, rebates and tax reductions) for a dual-earner family with full-time earnings of 150% of the average wage and two children was more than 40% of average wage in the UK. In France it was 13% (OECD, 2014e, pp.1-2). As discussed in section 3.3.2 French childcare rates vary according to family income and the number of children in the family. Due to the greater childcare costs, income from the sorts of low-income employment the parents were looking for is likely to be less for mothers in the UK than in France, leading to questions of whether the income earned through employment would exceed other costs incurred e.g. council tax and childcare. Interestingly, net costs for lone parents in the UK were significantly higher – 6% in the UK and 2% in France– as a result of targeted childcare benefits and rebates (OECD, 2014e, pp.1-2). This provides further evidence of how moving out-of-work couples into work through childcare support, especially in the UK, is less of a policy priority than moving lone parents into work.

6.2.2 Job search

Section 6.3.1 demonstrated how childcare issues made it difficult for the parents interviewed, in particular, the mothers, to actively seek employment in practice. In addition to childcare issues, the parents - most often the fathers since as demonstrated above they were less likely to be hindered in their employment ambitions by childcare difficulties - faced a series of issues related more specifically to job search. The parents underlined that having confidence, appropriate skills and knowledge of the labour market was essential in finding employment and thus achieving their ideal work-care scenarios. Many of the parents interviewed struggled to find work because they either perceived or had been told by employers that they lacked such skills. Their experiences were exacerbated by a lack of jobs in their local neighbourhood. This played out differently in France and the UK. In the UK, linked to the shorter school day, parents (principally mothers) bemoaned a shortage of jobs within what they considered a reasonable travelling distance around the school day. In France parents suggested there was a shortage of professional jobs. Examples of the importance of tailored and human support in helping parents to overcome such difficulties and to look for work were provided in both countries. However, overall the parents' experiences indicate that policy is more reactive and less procedural in France than the UK. Greater availability of public transport and state public transport incentives further facilitate looking for work in France. Nevertheless, discrimination

was cited as a problem more frequently in France than the UK but caution must be taken when interpreting this due to differences in the sample.

These differences between the experiences of mothers and fathers, and between parents in France and the UK are illustrated in the experiences of couples CUK and KFr. Whilst both couples were seeking a one and a half earner model ideally, they were struggling to obtain such a model for a variety of reasons.

Couple CUK's Story

C2UK had previously worked in manual job. He lost the job as he could not afford the transport costs to and from work. At the point of interview he had been out of work for about six years. The main barrier which he faced with regard to employment was different to that of his partner. As discussed above whereas the main barrier facing C1 with regard to seeking employment was a lack of part-time jobs around school hours, childcare responsibilities did not seem to play a big role in the experiences of C2. Rather he was hindered in trying to obtain the couple's ideal work-care scenario by his low qualification level. He felt that his low qualification level meant employers turned him down for employment:

"It's hard trying to find a job. They said there are plenty of jobs out there but there is plenty more people with qualifications what will get it before me".

A further factor that affected both parents was poor public transport in the local area. The high cost of transport contributed to C2UK leaving employment in the first place, whilst the cost limited the geographical area in which C1 felt she could look for work. She also underlined how having to rely on walking could create a negative impression at interview. Neither parent had especially positive experiences of policy. C1UK was on the Work Programme but it did not seem to be expanding her skills or job search technique. C2UK had recently been released from prison and felt support for offenders was good. When asked if he felt going to prison had affected how he could look for work, C2UK replied: *"In fact it's quite easier to find work"*, citing that *"There are more schemes and that in place"*.

However, he had yet to benefit from such support. Even though he had been released two weeks previously C2UK said he would have to wait another two weeks to see his advisor to have his CV written up. In addition, there were questions over how long he would have to wait to receive funding to undertake a track safety course. Jobcentre Plus had agreed to fund him to attend the course prior to attending prison. Now he had been released, he was under the impression that he would have to wait for two years before he could apply for funding again:

"I've got to wait another two years until I've been unemployed to make a reclaim. It's not a rapid reclaim, they've put me on a fresh claim. And I've got to wait two years for that funding".

Couple KFr's Story

The main barrier K1Fr had faced related to having children, primarily reluctance among employers to employ mothers, and the need for employment to be well paid to cover childcare costs:

“Lorsqu'on a des enfants [...] pour trouver du travail c'est un petit peu plus compliqué. Déjà il faut trouver bah la nourrice, après ce qui ramène [04 :23] c'est après s'il y a des paiements tous ça donc on va dire si on travaille pas bon on peut pas trouver une nourrice parce que bah les paiements sont chers en fait les nourrices. Ils [les employeurs] le disent pas à nous mais [...], dès qu'on a des enfants s'ils sont malades ou quoi bah les employeurs forcément ils se posent la question s'ils sont malades, vous allez faire comment ? Alors qu'on a toujours un moyen de pouvoir [...] trouver quelqu'un pour les garder”.

K1Fr had previously worked but gave up employment (whilst her partner remained in employment) after having her third child in order to reduce the stress of trying to balance work and care:

“J'ai dit bah mon troisième je l'éleve tranquillement parce que les autres ils étaient toujours baladés de crèches en garderies et tout ça. Donc non j'ai dit le troisième je vais prendre le temps et l'élever tranquillement en fait”.

In giving up work to care for her child, K1Fr was moving away from her ideal-care scenario both in terms of not working, and in terms of providing home-based care. Her ideal-care scenario involved the use of day-care centres. Subsequently, K1Fr's partner passed away, something that was not explored significantly in the interview due to the sensitivities involved. She had recently chosen to begin a *remise à niveau* course to improve her skills level. It seemed part of a well thought through plan to re-enter employment. She explained how she hoped the course would lead to further training and eventual employment in the security sector.

Care responsibilities were not an important barrier in the experiences of K1Fr's new partner K2Fr. The principal barriers he faced were racism, issues linked to his low qualification and experience level and discrimination among employers towards people with criminal records. His issues stemmed from employers being unwilling to take a chance on him:

“Les patrons ouvrent pas leurs portes”.

As examined below he valued support from his *référént* but it was taking a long time to access support for people who have been in prison.

6.2.2.1 Confidence, Skills Level and Knowledge/Experience of the Labour Market

The extent to which parents had confidence and knowledge of the labour market was significant in the experiences of the couples who were both seeking employment in practice. Where parents had such confidence and knowledge, they were able to obtain employment and in turn, their ideal work-care scenarios more easily. Difficulties accessing subsidised job schemes/ work trials exacerbate the problems the parents with little confidence and low skills levels face.

A1Fr's attempt to find employment was relatively straightforward as she was self-assured about how to go about looking for employment and so once she took the decision to look for work she was able to put a strategy into place swiftly and efficiently. As her partner remarked, she found employment:

“très vite parce que c'est quelqu'un qui sait très, qui sait vraiment bien se démerder, qui prend le téléphone et qui va voir les gens tac tac, quelqu'un très très active et euh tres sociale”.

Where parents did not have such confidence and knowledge of how to go about finding employment, their experiences of looking for work were more complex. C1UK was unsure how to set about finding a job she would enjoy:

“I've not worked for that long that I think to myself what kind of job do I want. I mean I think I'll work in a wee café but I cook and clean every day you know what I mean. I don't want to be a cleaner because it's just, there's no hope out of there”.

A2UK had a clearer idea of the sort of work he would like – expressing a desire to work as a porter - but was uncertain of the path to take and so seemed trapped in a desperate situation with little chance of improving his prospects and beginning the journey to achieving his and his partners' ideal work-care scenario.

“There ain't no door and there ain't no arrow pointing the way to go really. Like the steps that you would take”.

E1UK had previously struggled to find employment due to depression and low confidence. She argues Jobcentre Plus should be doing more to address this:

“[They] should do more to help like young people [...] like young parents, to get there [employment] and build their confidence up because the more and more you keep at them like, it will probably help. [...] because some people they are actually really lost, they just need an extra direction you know what I mean”.

Self-doubt about employment is associated with parents' limited work experience and low qualification level. Qualification and experience issues appear to be an important barrier to obtaining ideal work-care scenarios, primarily for fathers in the UK. A lack of qualifications/experience was cited as the primary barrier in finding employment by four out of the five fathers in couples actively seeking employment in the UK. By contrast, only two of the five mothers in this group suggested qualification/experience issues were important in their experiences. Further, one of these mothers referred to qualifications as a secondary rather than primary barrier, with care difficulties being the primary obstacle. In France only K2 suggested qualification/experience issues were a barrier and this was mentioned as a secondary barrier after racial discrimination. Differences in the sample in France and the UK may be behind the greater number of fathers in the UK than France citing a lack of qualifications as a primary barrier. More fathers were interviewed in France who had degree level qualifications.

The parents interviewed stated a lack of basic literacy and numeracy qualifications was both a perceived and an encountered obstacle in finding employment due to employers requiring such qualifications as a minimum. The experiences of A2UK, who had been out of work since leaving school a few years previously, appear typical for fathers in couples looking for work in the UK. When asked what the main issues were that he had faced, he replied “*no qualifications*”.

“They (employers) want people that have got NVQs and GCSE’s and all that and I ain’t got none of them. [...] So if I go to an interview they’re going to pick, someone else other than me aren’t they?”.

Some participants in the UK described struggling to find employment due to a lack of trade/professional qualifications and experience. Difficulties trying to gain qualifications due to the limited training options available (as discussed below) compound their experiences. When asked what the main issues were that her husband faced, P1UK replied:

“Every time he has gone to look for warehouses [...], they always want experience or a [...] fork lift truck licence [...] which he hasn’t got and the government has stopped funding that now so he can’t do any courses”.

K2Fr had faced similar difficulties. He described how he had been turned down for employment because he only had *le brevet* and *un CAP mécanique-auto*. He mentioned qualification issues as a secondary barrier after discrimination.

“Il [le brevet] sert pas à grandes choses comme un bac ou un BAP. Je vais pas dire CAP parce que CAP c’est la même chose, parce qu’il sert pas parce que j’ai un CAP mécanique-auto. C’est pas assez. Quand je demande aux garages ou aux particuliers ou quoi ils me demandent [inaudible] toujours il faut avoir minimum cinq ans d’expérience ou deux ans d’expérience”.

Having foreign qualifications can be a hindrance. E2UK held a foreign medical qualification. His difficulties stem from the qualification not being recognised in the UK. As such, he has been forced to look for employment in less qualified professions, while he retrains:

“E2UK: The fact that I didn’t study here is a major factor. It’s it’s like obstacle because er I can only get cleaning jobs and probably working in, even if I want to work in care homes I still need to have a certain qualification to work there but it is not something that I really want to do.

AT: Yes have you tried doing any training here?

E2UK: Yes er I tried doing construction and erm at the moment I am studying for my ORACLE DVA, database administration and er I am hoping once I finish that it will help me out to get a job in the IT sector”.

The interviews also revealed that participants with learning difficulties such as dyslexia face particular difficulties looking for work. This only features in the UK interviews but as questions were not asked about provision for people with dyslexia, conclusions cannot be made on the effectiveness of policy in France. Parents in the UK with dyslexia found navigating work-assistance services difficult because the system was insufficiently explained:

“When I get there it’s just like, it’s all a bit confusing [...] I’m like ‘oh okay’ but then like how does how does it actually work?”.

This section has shown how a lack of qualifications hinders out-of-work partnered parents in finding employment. This would appear to contradict Shildrick et al.’s argument that possessing the “*right attitude*”, showing motivation towards the job and being flexible to employer needs, are often more important than formal qualifications (2012, p.76). The parents reveal themselves to be motivated and flexible, yet still describe facing considerable difficulties due to their low qualification level. However, it is important to note that the quotes given here are the parents’ narratives about why they cannot find a job rather than an objective yardstick. Without having interviewed the potential employers at the same time, it is difficult to comment on the pertinence of Shildrick’s claim.

An aspect of the French and British systems which appears to not be functioning as well as it could is subsidised job schemes/work trials. Difficulties accessing such schemes came up in the narratives of fathers in both countries. None of the parents in couples both actively seeking work had taken part in schemes where employers receive state subsidies to train unemployed recipients of welfare support. Whilst such schemes have been limited in the UK over recent years following the abolition of the Future Jobs Fund (and as such it would not be expected that many parents in the UK would have taken part in them recently), they are relatively prevalent in France. The French government has prioritised trying to combat youth unemployment by subsidising employers to hire young people with poor qualification levels through the *Emplois d'avenir* scheme (Emplois d'avenir, 2013). Despite the expansion of subsidised job schemes in France, the parents interviewed suggested they were hard to obtain. K2Fr (like the other parents interviewed in couples both looking for employment) explained he was ineligible for “*un contrat d'avenir*” as he was older than the age limit of 25 years. In addition, whilst he had signed up for “*un contrat aidé*”, *le Pôle Emploi* had not contacted him with any opportunities:

“Même avec un contrat aidé il y a rien. On m’a jamais appelé pour avoir quoi”.

He states he would like “*un contrat aidé*” due to the greater pre-employment support which it offers (e.g. advisers help job seekers more intensively with job search and they attend interviews with job seekers to explain why they are suitable for the job). In the UK, it also seems that job seekers would value subsidised job schemes in order to gain work experience. A1UK stated being able to take part in a work trial would make the biggest difference in helping her to achieve her work and care goals. As discussed in Chapter 8, developing the subsidies available for employers to train unemployed people would seem important in helping those who are actively seeking employment but who face considerable personal obstacles to achieving their ideal work-care scenarios.

6.2.2.2 Availability and Accessibility of Employment

Another barrier that was evident in the experiences of couples both looking for employment is a lack of jobs. The reasons for these difficulties vary according to the parents’ background. Some parents, predominantly mothers in line with their greater role as carers, described difficulties finding work due to the jobs available being incompatible with their family life. C2Fr had turned down jobs that began early in the morning as they conflicted with her care responsibilities:

“Il y a des gens qui donnent souvent du travail à la maison de retraite, ils donnent mais ça correspond pas à cause de mes enfants parce que à la maison de retraite, ça commence à six heures, moi à six heures il faut je prépare mes enfants pour déposer à l'école”.

A2Fr was the only father who suggested a lack of family-friendly jobs was important in his experiences. He had recently left temporary employment as he was working in a bar which was not compatible with his family life:

“Cette année j'ai travaillé [...] dans une salle de spectacle mais avec un petit bébé, fin un bébé travailler la nuit fin parce que effectivement c'est un bar de nuit. Donc on travaille jusqu'à deux heures du matin, trois heures du matin, le bébé se lève à six heures hehe donc il faut être d'attaque. Donc ça n'a pas pu, j'ai pas pu garder ça”.

In the UK mothers struggled to find employment because of few jobs being advertised within Gleadless Valley itself or within what they considered to be a reasonable travelling distance of the neighbourhood. Due to their care responsibilities and the shorter school day in the UK than France they felt there was insufficient time in each day for them to travel far to work. In addition, it is likely that there will be intense competition for the few jobs that do become available in Gleadless Valley due to the large number of people looking for short part-time hours. PIUK's response when asked what Gleadless Valley is like in terms of work was particularly insightful. Other than two jobs she had seen in shops in the area:

“There have been no jobs around here. They are all at Meadowhall [...] but I used to work at Meadowhall and they are like nine o'clock finishings. By the time I get home it's about eleven o'clock and I can't see to my son”.

It is possible that the more developed transport network and the fewer hills in Lille compared to Sheffield mean it is easier for the secondary earner to look for work outside of Fives. They can travel more quickly to nearby areas to look for work either by public transport or by walking. Moreover, the greater state public transport incentives (as analysed in section 6.2.2.3) available in France than the UK are likely to facilitate parents looking for work outside of Fives. DWP guidance states that JSA claimants should be willing to look for work within a 90 minute radius (Gov.uk, no date given). Whilst the 90 minute rule has existed for a number of years, it now forms part of the new 'Claimant Commitment' that clients have to agree to in order to claim benefits. A mismatch must therefore be underlined between official policy guidelines and what parents, particularly mothers, believe to be feasible. Indeed, a three-hour round trip is the free nursery time that is currently available to parents of three to four year olds taken over a five-day period. The extent to which the new policy will be enforced is unclear but it does suggest a tightening of rules as it is signed by claimants. Given

the lack of central guidance, practice is also likely to vary according to Jobcentre Plus/advisor discretion leading to differences in parental experiences within and between regions.

Other parents, almost all in France referred to job shortages in particular sectors. A1Fr underlined a lack of jobs in the arts sector, A2Fr within the not-for-profit sector, and C2Fr within the IT sector. Only D2UK described shortages of jobs in a particular sector in the UK – the catering industry. The reason for this discrepancy is likely to be differences in the interview samples in the two countries. As stated above more parents were interviewed who had a profession in France than the UK. Those parents who had a profession or a clear idea of the sector they wished to work in were able to describe in more detail the impact of the lack of jobs and the geographic area they had looked for jobs in than parents who were less sure of the jobs they desired. When asked about the main issues he had faced looking for employment C2Fr, replied the lack of jobs in the IT sector:

“C’est parce que il y a pas vraiment d’emplois et plus encore dans notre secteur informatique”.

C2Fr provided a comprehensive answer contrasting the lack of opportunities in Lille with the greater number of vacancies in Brussels. He suggested he was looking for work as far afield as Dunkirk – approximately fifty miles from Lille. That a lack of jobs in specific sectors appears to be a greater issue in France than the UK also fits with trends in labour market and economic data in the two countries. Unemployment has consistently been higher in France than the UK over the last twenty years. The unemployment rate in 2014 was 10.2% in France, compared to 6.1% in the UK. In 2013 the year the fieldwork in this thesis was carried out the unemployment rate in France had reached 10.3% compared to 7.6% in the UK (Eurostat, 2015c). France can be considered to have a different attitude to unemployment than the UK due to the slower embrace of activation policies and greater opportunities for long-term training. Therefore at any given level of GDP, one would expect to find higher levels of unemployment in France due to its cultural attitudes to unemployment and the higher benefit levels it offers. Having said that, it is undoubtedly true that the unemployment rate in the last few years has been noticeably higher and economic growth noticeably lower in France than the UK. GDP in France grew by only 0.7% in 2013 and 0.3% in 2014, in contrast with growth in the UK of 1.7% in 2013 and 3.0% in 2014 (Eurostat, 2015d). The lower rate of unemployment and the greater economic growth in the UK suggest that new jobs are being created in the UK, and that unemployment is more likely to be linked to personal hurdles related to employment (e.g. having a criminal record). A note of caution in regard to the economic growth in the UK is that the majority of the jobs created appear to be low-skilled,

zero contract part-time jobs. Analysis by the TUC has shown that almost 80% of net job creation between June 2010 and December 2012 was in industries with an average wage of less than £7.95 per hour (TUC, 2013).

6.2.2.3 Support with Job Search and Training

Personalised and human support with job search and training is arguably a crucial enabling factor in supporting couples who are both looking for employment. As discussed in Chapter 4, on paper both Jobcentre Plus/Work Programme and *the Pôle Emploi/référent RSA* systems would seem to offer personalised support, in the sense of procedural and reactive support tailored to individual needs. The experiences of the parents interviewed who were actively looking for work in practice reveals strengths and weaknesses of policy in both France and the UK. However, taken as a whole the parents' experiences indicate that policy is more substantive in practice in France, and that policy in the UK is often too procedural and short-term. Consequently, it can be maintained that it is easier for parents to move towards achieving their ideal work-care scenarios in France.

In the UK Community Learning Centres should be viewed as providing strong pre-employment support. They appear to be an important initial step on the route to employment for parents, particularly mothers. They seem excellent at engaging parents with very low skill levels who live locally, providing an easily accessible route for parents into short-term entry level training. Based within small community hubs, they offer short-term courses such as IT, food hygiene, first aid, and entry level 1 and 2 Maths and English (Reach South Sheffield, no date given). Within Gleadless Valley courses are run through Reach South Sheffield (previously Gleadless Valley Community Forum). E2 explains how the IT course she is taking is important in developing the skills she needs to enter the labour market:

“[I am] studying an IT course which I actually, I really enjoy and feel as though there is a lot that I am learning from it that could help me when that time is there for me to get a really decent job so I can provide for him properly and stuff”.

Parents appear to value the friendly, supportive atmosphere in the classes. A1IUK who has completed a first aid course at the centre and also sought advice on applying for employment from the centre states:

“(They) would do owt for you to try and get you a job yeah. It’s who I have done my course through. And I have been down and she (one of the employees) has all my CV

with me and sent off for loads of jobs. She told me if you come and see me, I promise you at some point we, I will get you a job”.

The way in which ‘local’ staff are employed helps to create a sense of trust. Similarly, the location of the courses within the neighbourhood would seem to be significant. The courses take place in a building located in the second largest shopping area in Gleadless Valley. The location may also be beneficial. Being near to where participants live, is likely to make it easier for those with other responsibilities (such as mothers with care duties) to find time to attend. E1UK reveals she has to rush back from her course in order to take her son to her nursery:

“When I get back, I have to get him dressed and then feed him his lunch and then drop him off straight away”.

If the course was further from her home, it may not have been possible for E1 to attend.

Whilst Community Learning Centres must be praised for engaging such a hard-to-reach group (in terms of current engagement with service providers), questions emerge over the extent to which the centres support participants in the long-term. The courses appear to be relatively short in duration and it is not clear that the courses would lead to employment as the participants hoped. After completing her course, A1UK had not continued to be involved with the centre and it did not seem to have improved her employment prospects significantly.

Although Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme should be offering tailored and responsive support in theory, the experiences of the parents interviewed suggest the support offered in reality remains too procedural and insufficiently person-focused. The confidence and trust A1UK and E1UK express in community learning centres contrasts sharply with their comments about Jobcentre Plus. A1UK describes Jobcentre Plus staff as “*not bothered*” in the sense of not being interested in helping individuals to find work. She links this to Jobcentre Plus having to:

“deal with people in the same situation every single day”.

A1UK provides a striking example of how she feels Jobcentre Plus are not actively supporting partnered women who have joint claims for JSA in looking for employment:

“When I went into JobCentre once, when I were with my ex-partner still, he were claiming benefits for us both. [...] I said look I want to get a job, and I printed all these job things off. And the woman honestly in the JobCentre sat in front of me and

she got these pieces of paper with jobs on and she ripped them up in front of my face and chucked them into the bin. She said there's no point in you getting a job, because you'll be paying for you and him. That is what she said. Made me sign the paper and sent me on my way".

A1UK's experiences suggest tension with Jobcentre Plus can put off out-of-work partnered parents from seeking help with looking for work. After the above experiences A1UK has had little direct contact with Jobcentre Plus. She has received JSA as her previous and present partners claim for her but has not had another adviser appointment. It appears her experiences have led her to believe it is not worth asking for support. The impact of this perception is exacerbated in practice because she is not required by Jobcentre Plus to attend regular meetings:

"A1UK: I've not been in like JobCentre and asked for certain stuff myself so I don't know whether it's there or not. Maybe I should ask, maybe I should try you never know do you.

AT: Yeah if you don't ask you don't...?

A1UK: But then they're quick enough to ship you back out".

On the one hand, for parents who are not seeking employment the lack of direct activation pressure on the second claimant could be seen as a factor helping them to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios (as they face little pressure in practice to look for work). However, on the other hand, for mothers like A1UK who are looking for work, the lack of contact with Jobcentre Plus can be considered to obstruct their efforts. It makes obtaining potentially crucial advice and support more difficult. The impact of the joint claimant system will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7. It is possible that Universal Credit will reduce the mismatch between policy and parental goals as it will be not be the hours that couples are working that Jobcentre Plus are most interested in but the amount of money that couples are earning. Therefore couples will avoid conditionality policy as long as between them they are earning 35 hours at the minimum wage, enabling parents to more easily seek a male breadwinner model.

E1 contends that Jobcentre Plus offers inadequate tailored support to help her to find suitable jobs to apply for:

"They are personal advisers so I'd expect like a lot more from them like when something does pop up, then they'll they'll show them my CV which I have left my CV

there several times but still there is no contact from them saying 'oh we have found this, or have a look at...'”.

Bloch et al.'s review of Jobcentre Plus support established a link between claimants finding work, intensive support from advisers with finding suitable jobs to apply for and undertaking work experience (2013, p.110). E1's experiences further this argument by demonstrating that where support provided by personal advisers is limited, this can add to the difficulties parents face trying to find employment. E1UK also criticises employment support as being unsatisfactory at building parents' confidence:

“They should do more to help like young people as well, like young parents, to get there and build their confidence”.

That parents perceive Jobcentre Plus support as being of little value in building their confidence in order to help them to enter the labour market fits with Bloch et al.'s finding over 50% of the claimants they interviewed said advice and support from Jobcentre Plus had not improved their confidence with regard to finding a job (2013, p.79).

C2UK suggests it is particularly difficult for those with limited IT skills to use work support services:

“AT: What have your experiences of the JobCentre been?”

C2UK: Er good experiences, they are alright, they are helpful but they don't display as many jobs as what they used to do. Now that it's all on, you know a computer and if you're not computer literature. Before you used to just read them off the walls. And it's a bit harder now.

AT: Yeah. Do they give you help to use the computers?”

C2UK: Er no, no. It's just the security guards that are there”.

Bloch et al. discuss how lacking IT skills can present “a range of barriers” in terms of job search. However, they underline this as an issue in relation to JSA claimants in the 50+ age group (2013, p.167). C2UK was only in his early thirties at the time of interview. This thesis therefore underlines that poor IT skills should not be considered as a limiting factor only in the experiences of job seekers over the age of fifty. Given that ICT only really started to become an important feature of schooling in the UK in the mid-1990s (Condie et al., 2007, p.9), this is perhaps not surprising. Job seekers in disadvantaged areas are likely to have little disposable income to spend on technology and if they have worked in low-skilled particularly, blue collar employment previously, are perhaps less likely than those in skilled employment to have been given IT training.

Only three of the parents in couples who were both actively looking for employment were registered on the Work Programme. Their perceptions of the programme were negative. This fits with the argument developed in Chapter 3 that the job-search experiences of out-of-work parents in the UK where the private sector is responsible for the operation of the Work Programme will be characterised by weaker support, more limited training opportunities and a greater fear of sanctions than the experiences of parents in France. D1UK described her experiences on the Work Programme as “*rubbish*”, continuing:

“It’s just it’s like looking for work. They just send you to like this this like centre to look for a job online really. But you can do that at home so I can’t understand why they send you there really”.

P2UK said the Work Programme had not been useful for him as due to the focus on job search “*it’s the same as what I do at home anyway*”. His partner added:

“They are using the same resources what he does at home anyway on the laptop”.

Due to the low number of participants in this group of parents who were on the Work Programme, it is questionable whether it is fair to generalise from such a small sample. Nevertheless, it would seem important to note that for some participants it is clear that the atmosphere on the Work Programme seems to neither inspire them to widen their aspirations nor enable them to expand their skills; rather it compounds their disillusion with their situation. They appear to view the Programme as another compulsory job search element instead of a useful training opportunity. Whilst monitoring that participants are searching for work is important to ensure progress, it is evident the current system is not as effective as it could be.

The experiences of the parents interviewed who were both looking for employment, suggests that support with job search and training in France is generally more responsive and involves more long-term planning than in the UK in practice. Unlike in the UK, where policy aims do not seem to translate fully into practice, it can be maintained that the French system is succeeding to a greater extent at implementing policy goals in practice. Examples were found of parents benefiting from person-centred policy which took a wider, longer-term approach to supporting parents’ care needs than was visible in the UK. Although some parents in France criticised the bureaucratic nature of the system, there was not the same sense of personal hostility towards work assistance advisers as found in the UK.

The first example of this substantive approach is the support offered through the *référént RSA* system. As underlined in Chapter 5 access to a *référént RSA* is one of the rights of those claiming the RSA benefit (Ministère des Affaires sociales, de la Santé et des Droits des femmes, 2014). In practice, it should be noted that the *référént RSA* system offers more reactive support than was described by the parents interviewed who had contact with Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme. Whereas support experienced by parents in the UK was very procedural and concentrated strictly on employment and training, support was broader and involved more of a human element in France. This wide-ranging approach would seem to enable the *référénts* to engage more positively with parents who are actively seeking work but encountering difficulties than either the *Pôle Emploi*, or Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme. The system appears important in helping parents to achieve a more balanced home life and enable them to move to a situation where looking for work is more feasible. C1Fr suggested her *référént* helped to ensure she remained on track with looking for work. Her *référént* appeared to be a valued source of guidance:

“Elle m’aide pour chercher, pour vérifier, pour marquer que c’est vrai parce que moi je vais lui voir avec tous les détails je suis venue avec ça je vais lui montrer”.

Similarly, K2Fr who faced numerous difficulties trying to become part of the labour market after spending over five years in prison valued the varied support he had received from his *référént*. This ranged from emergency financial support in the form of “*chèques restaurant*”, to the opportunity to have someone with whom he could talk through his problems, to practical help with his CV:

“Quand je veux quoique ce soit, elle est là. [...]. Garder toujours, garder toujours, garder toujours, c’est pas bon. [...]. On vide le sac [...]. On s’explique, on parle, on rigole. [...] Si j’ai besoin de faire un CV ou quoique ce soit, je vais la voir, elle sait le faire”.

It is interesting here how K2Fr talks positively about ‘speaking’ and ‘laughing’ with his adviser. One of the strengths of the French system would seem to be that not only does it offer tailored support to help people to address and overcome the barriers they face with regard to employment but also it gives people space to talk through their problems. This would seem to be fostered through participants seeing the same *référént* each time and having the time to build trust with them. This contrasts sharply with the tension evident in the relationship between claimants and advisers in the UK (for example, the quotes from A1UK and E1UK above). By having a positive relationship, claimants are likely to be more responsive to suggestions from advisers and also to feel more comfortable asking for support.

The French system also appears to offer longer term, more comprehensive training courses than those described by parents interviewed in the UK. Whereas it was unclear how exactly the community learning courses would help participants to obtain their ideal jobs in the long run, the courses available in France seemed more suited to parents needs in terms of their long-term goals. The training courses are run in local associations such as *Culture et Liberté Nord*, a largely voluntary run:

“mouvement d’Éducation Populaire dont le but est de contribuer à la construction d’une société dans laquelle les droits sociaux, culturels, économiques, écologiques et politiques des femmes et des hommes sont au coeur des priorités” (Culture et Liberté, 2010).

K1Fr was registered on a *remise à niveau*, or refresher course, which involves approximately 18 hours of classes per week. For K1Fr, the course represented the initial step on a clearly identified path to employment. In future, she planned to undertake further qualifications to work in the security sector. The courses are free for people registered with *le Pôle Emploi* or on the unemployment insurance system. Again, the human aspect of the course can be considered important. K1Fr stressed how she enjoyed meeting new people on the course and the chance to learn about “*la culture des autres*”, a likely reference to the multi-cultural backgrounds of those taking courses.

Another example of the personalised system is the availability of relocation benefits from the *Pôle Emploi*. Whilst A1Fr did not require advice from employment support organisations with how to go about job search, the ease with which she found employment can be linked to the relocation benefit which she received from the French state when she gave up employment to move to a different *département* to live with her husband. As her partner states:

“A2Fr :Quand elle est arrivée à Lille c’était elle qui a démissionné mais comme elle me rejoint c’est un rapprochement familial, elle a quand même pu avoir des des allocations du Pôle Emploi.

AT : Ah d’accord.

A2FR : Qu’est-ce que lui a permis justement de financer par elle-même cette formation”.

A further reason why this chapter argues that policy is more reactive in France than the UK is comments made by the couples both trying to find employment in practice regarding transport costs. Parents in France describe having access to greater state public transport subsidies than parents in the UK and underline how this helps them move to move towards their ideal work-

care scenario. Conversely, parents in the UK stress how the limited nature of help with transport costs in the UK is an important obstacle. In France two forms of support exist, a free public transport pass (*la Formule Iris* in Lille) for those on the highest level of benefit⁴¹ (Transpole, no date given a), and a reduced costs transport pass (*la Formule Mirabelle*). Both appear to be widely appreciated by those who receive them. *La Formule Iris* is described as making attending job search meetings easier:

“A2Fr : Ça donne le droit de prendre le Metro, le bus, le tramway toute la zone Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing toute euh toute la communauté, la la commune. N’importe quelle heure ou jour, de la nuit, le weekend, la semaine, n’importe quand.

AT : Ça c’est très intéressant. Et quel est l’impact de ça sur vous? Et comment vous pouvez chercher du travail?

A2Fr : Ah bah oui on peut effectivement aller dans dans un endroit à un autre si on a un rendez-vous à quel endroit on n’a pas besoin d’acheter un billet à chaque fois [...] c’est très pratique”.

It was also suggested the passes extend the geographic area in which parents can look for work. C2Fr benefits from *la carte Mirabelle* which she describes as “*bien*”. She argues the existence of the tram between Lille and Tourcoing – a distance of almost 15km by road – means it is possible to look for work outside of Lille:

“C’est important, sans transports il y a des gens ils vont pas bouger. Transports c’est important on va faire, quand tu trouves peut-être un boulot à Tourcoing et tu peux pas aller à pied, tu es obligé il faut tu prennes le le tram jusqu’à là-bas”.

The situation in Sheffield is the mirror opposite. Parents disclosed that the high cost and infrequency of public transport hindered them in trying to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios. Cost concerns were a barrier for couple A in attending job search appointments:

“It were alright when they just dropped fares but they’ve put them back up again haven’t they which is alright but obviously when you are on benefits, it’s like for me and him to go town, it’s like a tenner, it’s like a tenner ain’t it, just underneath £10 and it is a lot. And the Jobcentre expect you to go to all these appointments. [...]. So they want you to go to all these appointments and it’s like you tell them [...] it’s costing me like nearly a fiver every time they want me to come and we can’t afford it” (A1UK).

⁴¹ This refers to the following groups: *Les travailleurs privés d’emploi indemnisés, Les travailleurs privés d’emploi ayant épuisé leurs droits, Les personnes en formation professionnelle, Les primo demandeurs d’emploi de moins de 25 ans, Les personnes en contrat unique d’insertion (la durée de travail ne doit pas excéder 90h par mois).*

Parents explained how having to rely on public transport and walking in the UK can impact on performance at job interviews. C1UK described the drawbacks of walking to an interview from Gleadless Valley. She contrasted the impression those who had driven or taken public transport would make with herself “*getting there with my trainers on, all sweaty and all ‘cause I’ve set off for half an hour early, it’s a bit I think it’s a bit out of order*”. She suggests that if Jobcentre Plus were to provide her with a weekly pass, it would ease her difficulties attending appointments. Reimbursing transport costs is not enough as she would still need the money upfront:

“They will say oh show your bus ticket when you get there and I think well if I walk down I’m going to walk back because I can’t purchase a ticket to prove that [...]. I said to them [...] if I’ve no money and I walk there, can you give me my bus fare back. And they said no, we only give you what you can show, what you can prove”.

The importance parents placed on having reliable public transport enables the development of established theory. Parkinson underlines the importance of effective transport systems for employment when he contends that connectivity is a significant measure of economic competitiveness since:

“The most successful cities have the physical and electronic infrastructure to move goods, services and people quickly and efficiently” (2004, p.49).

This chapter asserts that having developed public transport systems and transport subsidies/incentives for the out-of-work is important in facilitating the out-of-work to look for employment. It expands the speed with which and geographical area in which they can seek employment. This in turn contributes to the overall competitiveness of regions as job seekers enter the labour market.

Although the French work assistance system should be commended for the reactive and longer-term approach it takes in practice compared to the UK system, it appears the bureaucratic nature of parts of the system can lead to frustration among clients. The experiences of fathers A2Fr and K2Fr show how bureaucracy within the *Pôle Emploi* can mean it is difficult to find information and employment, as such obstructing parents in their journey to obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios. A2Fr hoped to undertake a course to work in the socio-educational sector. Prior to starting the course he was looking for temporary work. He found the *Pôle Emploi* were reluctant to refer him to low-skilled work because of his professional background. He also struggled to make progress applying for his course

because he could not find out what funding/benefits would be available to undertake the course:

“Quand on a l’envie de travailler, on on on arrive toujours à à, face à un mur parce que ils ont pas l’information, parce que ah je sais pas ce qui se passe il y a vraiment un un un blocage et même dans les secteurs qui embauchent moi j’étais allé au Pôle Emploi, je leur ai dit moi je veux n’importe quoi, j’ai besoin de travailler. Je peux bien faire travailler dans un McDonalds [19 :18] , fin, fin, qu’est-ce que, qu’est-ce qu’il y a. Ils me regardaient avec des gros yeux, écoutez on peut pas vous votre profil est plutôt un profil comme ça. On va pas vous donner tel boulot. Pourquoi pas finalement ? C’est peut-être trop rigide, euh trop cloisonnée comme ça dans des petits cadres, des petites boîtes. Et puis développer les formations parce qu’il y a effectivement voilà des gens qui ont peut-être envie de faire des formations vers des nouveaux métiers qui embauchent mais parce que les financements suivent pas, bah les gens se retrouvent effectivement à [...] rester à la maison”.

K2Fr was exasperated with the support that he had received from the *Pôle Emploi*. He was frustrated that support with looking for work for people leaving prison was not provided directly by the *Pôle Emploi*. Rather, they referred him to another organisation, who in turn, referred him to a further organisation:

“Ce que je veux je veux présenter mon CV, je veux présenter mes papiers. Je veux présenter, en sortant de prison j’ai pas besoin que tu me présentes à d’autres personnes pour qu’elles me présentent à d’autres personnes. Moi je juste veux que tu me donnes un travail”.

Nevertheless, an important difference between the criticisms of job search support made in the interviews is that in France criticism was aimed primarily at the system in operation whereas in the UK criticism was targeted much more at individual advisers.

6.2.2.4 Discrimination

An issue that emerged only in the interviews with parents who were both looking for employment in practice in France is discrimination. Three types of discrimination were cited: gender discrimination, racial discrimination and discrimination towards people with criminal records. Gender discrimination centred on employers not believing that women could concentrate sufficiently on their employment if they had children:

“On va dire souvent les employeurs c’est les employeurs ils pensent que si nos enfants sont malades on trouvera pas quelqu’un pour les garder ou pour surveiller. On va dire en fait ça revient toujours aux problèmes de garde en fait” (K1Fr).

When pressed further, K1Fr continued:

“Moi je sais que bah quand je travaillais à [name of shop] c’est pas pour autant que mon employeur m’a embauché quoi parce que souvent il y en a beaucoup bah ils le disent pas à nous mais nous c’est les questions qu’on se pose, dès qu’on a des enfants s’ils sont malades ou quoi bah les employeurs forcément ils se posent la question s’ils sont malades, vous allez faire comment ? Alors qu’on a toujours un moyen de pouvoir les ga... trouver quelqu’un pour les garder”.

Discrimination due to having children is one of the factors highlighted within the gender section of the *IFOP* report on employment discrimination in France (pp.7-8, 12). Further, a 2009 survey for the *Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l’Egalité* found that 46% of French people consider pregnancy to constitute «*un inconvénient dans l’évolution d’une carrière professionnelle*», whilst 28% of women who had been pregnant during their working life considered that they had been a victim of discrimination due to their pregnancy (HALDE, 2009, p.4). This thesis improves understanding of the impact of gendered discrimination towards mothers by emphasising how it can have a long term impact on women’s employment, or more correctly, non-employment experiences. It is not something that is inconvenient for mothers for a short period and then no longer an issue; rather it remains a barrier for many years. It combines with other factors such as having a low skills level to lead to a loss of confidence with regard to looking for work. Interestingly, both the mothers who refer to discrimination towards mothers have large families – K1Fr has three children and O1 (whose experiences are discussed in Chapter 7 as she is no longer actively looking for work in practice) has four children. It is possible K1Fr, continued to look for work because she faced unique personal circumstances, increasing pressure on her to look for work. The biological father of K1Fr’s children had died and she had only recently moved in with K2Fr. As such, and due to the considerable difficulties he faced looking for employment she may have felt added pressure to continue her job search.

Racial discrimination was alluded to by parents K2Fr and C1Fr, two of the three parents among the couples both actively looking for work in France who were not ethnically white French. By contrast, one parent in the UK among the couples both actively looking for employment was not ethnically white British. He did not bring up racial discrimination. The nearest he came to discrimination was when he discussed difficulties converting foreign degree qualifications to work in the UK. For K2Fr discrimination due to foreign accent was described as a primary barrier. He felt it contributed to employers not having confidence in

him. This was exacerbated by the stutter which he developed when speaking to “*des personnes importantes*”.

“Le difficulté que j’ai c’est [...] principalement parler. [...]. Et à vrai dire avec un patron j’arrive pas à lui faire [...] avec ma tête, ou avec ma voix, ou je sais pas avec mes paroles, ils arrivent pas à avoir confiance en moi”.

C21Fr revealed she had been overlooked for employment due to her skin colour and nationality:

“C’est un peu bizarre parce que tu as un emploi les candidatures peut être cinquante, cinquante, déjà moi, ma peau et puis ma couleur et puis je ne suis pas la nationalité française, ils vont préférer les français, ils vont prendre ça”.

The experiences of K2Fr and C1Fr demonstrate the long-term lived impact of racial discrimination. It repeatedly affects certain job seekers, preventing them from achieving their career goals and in turn, impacting on their ability to provide for their families. Existing research has highlighted racial discrimination more generally within the labour market. A recent investigation by *l’Institut français de l’opinion publique* contends:

“Près de 6 demandeurs d’emploi sur 10 considèrent que l’origine et la couleur de peau constituent un frein pour accéder à l’emploi. Pour près de deux tiers des demandeurs d’emploi, avoir un nom à consonance étrangère (66%) ou être de nationalité étrangère (66%) peut engendrer une discrimination, tout comme le fait d’avoir un accent étranger (64%) ou d’être une personne de couleur (62%)” (IFOP, 2015, p.7).

That the families in the UK did not reveal suffering racial or religious discrimination is interesting. On the one hand, it could suggest the families had not suffered discrimination. On the other hand, it may be that the families were not comfortable discussing discrimination. A report by the Runnymede Trust in 2014 concluded that institutional racism has worsened within UK in the last decade. Omar Khan, Director of the Trust argues that:

“Insidious racism (is) happening across the country in public and private institutions that not only are preventing black and Asian people from being recruited and promoted but also are leading to higher rates of child poverty and lost opportunities” (Dugan, 2014).

It would be presumptuous and beyond the scope of this thesis to draw conclusions on this point, other than to note it is an interesting area for further research.

One parent in the couples who were both actively looking for employment described discrimination among employers towards people with criminal records as preventing him from obtaining his ideal work-care scenario. He had been released a year previously after spending 5 years incarcerated for theft and drug offences and describes how employers have the right to consult “*un skip*” to ascertain any convictions people have and time they have spent in prison. He explains employers have turned him down due to his criminal record arguing “*on cherche des gens clean*”. They consider those who have been to prison as “*pas honnêtes*”. Interestingly, C2UK who had spent a short time in prison for non-payment of fines suggests going to prison will “*make it easier to find work*” since “*there are more schemes and that in place*”. His attitude is most likely shaped by having only very recently been released. He had yet to start job search. His argument is further weakened by his disclosure that due to being in prison he would have to wait two years to be referred to a training programme. As will be explored in Chapter 7, having a criminal record is often a factor behind parents giving up looking for work entirely. It is possible K2Fr continued to look for work enthusiastically despite his record because whilst he had been released longer ago than C1UK, it was more recently than other parents who stated they had given up looking for work. It is possible that consequently he had yet to become as frustrated in his work his ambitions as other parents with longer term criminal records. Further, he faced being returned to prison if he did not shortly start paying back fines to the state.

6.3 Conclusions

This chapter has provided an in depth insight into the experiences in practice of out-of-work partnered parents who are in couples where both parents are actively seeking employment in practice. It has analysed the enabling factors and barriers in their experiences of attempting to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios, in particular developing existing research by focusing on the impact of micro-level factors. The chapter has explored how factors play out differently in the experiences of mothers and fathers, and also cross-nationally in France and the UK. Factors which appear particularly relevant in the experiences of mothers are: the availability and affordability of childcare, the length of the school day and whether they have reliable, regular support from family and friends. Factors that should be considered important in the experiences of both mothers and fathers are: consensus within couples on how they divide their responsibilities and personalised and human support with job search. The existence of enablers arguably differs between France and the UK. Overall, it can be maintained that greater support exists in France than the UK for out-of-work couples both seeking employment. Important enabling factors in France were the more developed childcare system

in operation, the greater availability of tailored, human job search support, the existence of longer-term more comprehensive training courses and the greater practical transport support available with job search. Nevertheless, the system in France is not faultless. Questions over access to formal childcare provision and subsidised job schemes, the extent to which bureaucracy in the employment support system leads to frustration, the extent of gender, racial and criminal discrimination and the availability of sufficient professional jobs have been identified. A further barrier found in the UK, particularly in relation to mothers is a lack of jobs within a reasonable traveling distance.

The chapter has shown how enablers can be cancelled out by barrier factors. Policy which takes a more wide-ranging approach to tackling the difficulties faced by out-of-work partnered parents may help parents who are both actively looking for work to overcome such barrier factors. Unless action is taken, the present situation is unlikely to change with parents not achieving their ideal work-care scenarios, the level of unemployment being higher than it need be, with reduced economic output and higher public expenditure on the benefits system than necessary. Furthermore, the introduction of Universal Credit may lead to additional difficulties for couples with children seeking a dual-earner model because as noted in Chapter 3 under Universal Credit they will only be entitled to one income disregard and as such there will be fewer incentives for the second earner to find work (Judge, 2013, p.4).

Chapter 7: The Experiences of Couples Where Only One Parent Is or Neither Parent Is Actively Seeking Employment

7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of out-of-work partnered parents' experiences in practice of trying to achieve their ideal-care scenarios. It explores the experiences of two further groups of parents in France and the UK: couples where only one parent is actively seeking employment and couples where neither parent is actively seeking employment.

A reminder of the parents who fall into these two categories and whose experiences are discussed in this chapter is provided in Table 7.1. The chapter demonstrates the extent to which the parents' experiences in practice correspond to their ideal work-care scenarios before exploring why the parents' experiences in practice differ from their ideal work-care scenarios. As in Chapter 6, the chapter underlines the enabling and barrier factors that characterise the experiences of parents in the two groups. This is summarised in Tables 7.2 and 7.3. The chapter comments on the strengths and weaknesses of policy targeting the groups.

Table 7.1 Couples whose Experiences are analysed in Chapter 7

Present Situation	Couples in the UK	Couples in France
Father Actively Looking for Work Mother Not	B, G, J, K, M, N, O, Q	B, D, E, H, I, J, L, M, N, O, Q, S
Neither Looking for Work	F, H, I, R, S	P, R

The chapter identifies four parental combinations of work and care scenarios sought in practice:

1. Father looking for work and mother looking for work (as analysed in Chapter 6).
2. Father looking for work and mother not looking for work due to ideal work-care scenario.
3. Father not looking for work and mother not looking for work due to practical constraints.
4. Father not looking for work due to practical constraints and mother not looking for work due to practical constraints and ideal work-care scenarios.

The chapter maintains that the experiences of fathers in couples looking for a dual-breadwinner model in practice (as analysed in Chapter 6) are similar to or more exaggerated

versions of those looking for a male breadwinner model in practice (both where the mother is not looking for work due to their ideal work-care scenarios and when the mother is not looking for work due to practical constraints). Moreover, it argues that there is similarity in the experiences of mothers in groups 2 and 4, and 3 and 4. In order to avoid repetition, this chapter focuses on what is different for each of the couple groups. Where issues are similar to those that have already been discussed, the issue is indicated on Tables 7.2 and 7.3 by a blue background. The issues are then not analysed in the main chapter analysis.

Table 7.2 Summary of Enabling and Barrier Factors for Mothers in Couples Ideally Desiring a Single Earner Model

Factor	Country important in?	Enabler or Barrier Factor in Practice?	Relevant to whom?
Normative views about the role of mothers and home-based childcare.	Both	Barrier to employment. Normative views about childcare push mothers to not look for work in practice. Age of children at which couples think the mother can enter/return to employment is higher in the UK than France.	Mothers
Availability and cost of childcare	France and UK	In the UK perceived difficulties accessing childcare were a secondary barrier to work reinforcing some parents' hostility to using formal childcare. In France, perceived difficulties accessing childcare and the cost of childcare was more often a primary barrier.	Mothers
Reliable, regular support from family/friends	UK	Barrier. Parents described a lack of such support. Parents in the UK suggested it was particularly important.	Mothers
Activation policy not being enforced in practice.	UK	Lack of enforcement of activation policy targeting the secondary claimant, was an enabler as it allowed couples to receive benefits without the mother being forced to look for work against their ideal care values.	Mothers
	France	In France policy was more flexible about the time parents took to find work, facilitating couples looking for a male breadwinner model in the long and short term.	Mothers

Table 7.3 Summary of Enabling and Barrier Factors for Mothers and Fathers in Couples Ideally Desiring a One and a Half Earner Model, and for Fathers in Couples Ideally Desiring a Single Earner Model

Factor	Country important in?	Enabler or Barrier Factor in Practice?	Relevant to whom?
Cost and accessibility of childcare	France + UK	Barrier. Perceived high cost of childcare led mothers who would ideally like to work, to not look in practice. High costs and accessibility issues were a primary barrier more frequently in France than the UK.	Mothers
Reliable, regular support from family/friends	UK	Barrier. Parents described a lack of such support. Parents in the UK suggested it was particularly important.	Mothers
Confidence, skills level, and knowledge/experience of the labour market	France + UK	Barrier to obtaining ideal work-care scenario as hindered experiences of looking for work. More likely to lead to mothers than fathers giving up looking for work.	Mothers + fathers
Health Issues	France + UK	Barrier. Often meant parents struggled to return to labour market due to physical barriers and skills becoming outdated.	Mothers + Fathers
Support with job search and training	UK	Barrier. Lack of policy enforcement hinders parents as it creates an advice gap for the secondary claimant. Universal Credit possibly addresses this but questions exist in practice.	Mothers
	France	Policy was more responsive and flexible in France. Enabler for parents wanting a 1½ earner model as it gave them space to address barriers they were facing regarding employment.	Mothers + Fathers
	France + UK	Parents in both countries valued intensive support with job search. Support for those with most complex needs appears weak in the UK. Tension with work assistance organisations was cited as a barrier to finding work in both countries but especially, the UK.	Mothers + Fathers
	France	Barrier. Limited policy support for those claiming insurance-based out-of-work benefits.	Fathers
	UK	Barrier. Limited policy support for over 25's	Fathers

		with training hinders job search options.	
	France + UK	Enabler. Availability of tailored, long-term literacy and numeracy courses in France helped mothers to prepare for work. Provision in the UK can be criticised for being less extensive and insufficiently integrated.	Mothers
Accessibility of employment	Both	Funding for driving lessons to address need for private transport for job search/getting to work, and for a car/driving licence to do certain jobs was an enabler for some parents in France. Lack of such support together with the high cost of public transport was a barrier for some parents in the UK.	Fathers
Volunteering	UK	Volunteering used by some couples in UK to gain experience/skills for and entry into the workplace. In France volunteering was motivated by other aims. This can be linked to promotion of volunteering in national activation policy.	Mothers + Fathers

7.2 Experiences of Couples where only One Parent is Actively Seeking Employment

Analysis of the experiences of couples where only one parent is actively seeking employment in practice uncovers interesting trends. In all of the couples in both France and the UK where only one partner was looking for employment, the gender of this partner was male. None of the couples interviewed were prioritising moving towards the mother being the breadwinner and the father being responsible for running the home and childcare. This corresponds to the finding in Chapter 5 that the ideal work-care scenarios of the fathers interviewed in both countries, showed only limited progress towards the characteristics of “*new fatherhood*” identified by Gregory and Milner (2011b, p.588); and that traditional values around motherhood and fatherhood, still appear to have a large influence on which parent (i.e. the mother or the father) couples prioritise for employment.

Comparison of the parents’ experiences reveals that for many of the couples, seeking a single earner model is not in line with their ideal work-care scenarios. The changes that occur are demonstrated in Figure 7.1. Regardless of country almost all the parents have moved from ideally seeking a model in which both parents work in some form to pursuing a single earner model with the father as the breadwinner in practice. Of the eight couples focusing on obtaining a male breadwinner model in practice in the UK, only two (BUK and GUK) ideally sought a single earner model. In France of the twelve couples attempting to obtain a single earner model in practice, only three (HFr, MFr and NFr) stated that such a model was their ideal work-care scenario⁴². This chapter examines the reasons why so many of the couples interviewed in both countries were not attempting to obtain their ideal work-care scenario. It also seeks to establish the extent and strengths/weaknesses of any interactions they have had with work assistance organisations.

⁴² For two of the couples in France, the model sought in practice was in line with the scenario of one of the parent’s ideal work-care scenarios. Where couples disagreed among themselves on their ideal work-care scenario, in practice, the model the couples sought was in line with the ideal scenario that involved the parents working the least (i.e. a single earner as opposed to one and a half earner model).

This section highlights the enabling and barrier factors in the experiences of couples where only one parent was actively looking for employment in practice. As summarised in Tables 7.2 and 7.3, it argues that the experiences of couples whose ideal work-care scenario involved the mother working differ considerably from the experiences of couples who ideally desired a single earner model. It underlines the different factors behind why some couples had planned and were content for the mother to not be looking for work in practice; whilst for other couples the mother not looking for work was not planned, being instead the result of external factors encountered. It explores different conceptions of what it means to provide 'good care', highlighting variances in parental experiences in France and the UK. Couples in the first group encountered problems obtaining their ideal care because the father could not find work. Couples in the second group struggled to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios as neither parent could find work, with the result being that only the father continued to look for work. The experiences of fathers in both groups are similar to each other and also in some respects to those of the fathers in couples both actively looking for employment, as discussed in Chapter 6. Where experiences are similar to those of couples both actively looking for employment, as stated above to avoid repetition, the factors are not explored in detail. Focus is placed on exploring issues not already discussed in Chapter 6.

How factors can play out differently within couples (in terms of the factors influencing the experiences of mothers as opposed to fathers) and cross-nationally is illustrated in the profiles of Couples MUK and MFr below.

Couple MUK's and Couple MFr's Stories

Couples MUK and MFr both have three children and the mothers have never worked. Couple MUK ideally desired a 1½ earner model whilst couple MFr were split on their ideal work-care scenario. M1Fr desired a dual-earner full-time model ideally, whilst her partner favoured a male breadwinner model. In practice, both couples were seeking a male breadwinner model.

The factors leading the mothers to not seek employment in practice differ from the barriers which hinder the fathers. Childcare responsibilities are the main barrier which prevent both mothers from seeking work. However, the difficulties vary according to country. M1UK expressed a distrust of formal childcare. She felt it was important that she cared for her children personally – like the mothers discussed in Chapter 6. She referred to cost factors but these were secondary to trust issues. She differed from the mothers in the UK analysed in Chapter 6 as she did not believe it would be possible to work part-time around her care responsibilities. M1Fr's decision not to look for work was more the result of worries about the cost of childcare and how long it would take to obtain a *crèche* place, thus being an exaggerated form of the problems encountered by C1Fr, as examined in Chapter 6. Prior to having children M1Fr had benefited from tailored support from *Itinéraires* who had helped her with accommodation difficulties and training. She seemed confident she could return to *Itinéraires* in future for help with finding work. By contrast, M1UK had taken part in a family learning course. This seemed to help her only in the short-term as it was not integrated into an advice service. As such, she was unsure what sort of jobs would be suitable to apply for and where she could seek advice. She suggested support could be improved by giving out-of-work people examples of qualifications that would lead to jobs.

“people what have got no qualifications, they think they can't get a job”.

M2UK had not worked for six years. His last job was as a labourer. He stopped working as the pay was insufficient to support his family. A lack of experience and qualifications hindered him in job search. Insufficient support from Jobcentre Plus seemed particularly significant. Most importantly, M2UK's experiences underline how training support in the UK is limited for job seekers aged over 25. He was ineligible for apprenticeships as he was over the age of 25. He was also unable to progress with his idea of setting up a gardening company as he did not have a driving licence and Jobcentre Plus had not offered him funding. The hills in Gleadless Valley and his lack of private transport further complicated his job search. As such, he seemed to be trapped without any options to improve his situation. M2Fr had been out of work for a year. Due to the more personalised work support available in France, his prospects looked brighter than those of M2UK. M2Fr had struggled to find and maintain work because he had few qualifications and did not hold a driving licence. He had recently been offered a job in the cleaning sector on the condition that he obtained a driving licence. *La Mission Locale*

had agreed to fund the cost of the driving licence and also enrolled M2Fr on a confidence building and job search training programme at the same time.

7.2.1 Childcare

Care responsibilities should be considered the most important factor in the experiences of mothers in couples prioritising a male breadwinner model ideally and in practice; and also in couples who desired a one a half earner model ideally but who are seeking a male breadwinner model in practice.

In couples who desired a male breadwinner model ideally, the couple's ideals guided their experiences in practice, pushing the mothers to not seek work. Whereas none of the mothers interviewed in the UK in couples ideally desiring a single earner model revealed any employment ambitions, the majority of mothers interviewed in France hoped to work in future suggesting that their ideal work-care scenarios differed according to the age of their children. The desire of mothers in France for a male breadwinner model only when their children are young can be linked to the "*historically stronger*" participation of women in the labour market in France than the UK (Lewis, 1992, p.159). It also chimes with the policy environment of long parental leaves when children are under three and lower employment rate of women with lots of children. Couple R had six children between them, the youngest of which was two year's old (R2Fr was not the biological father of the child). Couple HFr also had six children, the youngest of whom was seven years old. In the UK the decision to focus on obtaining a male breadwinner model fits with the stronger normative values against the use of formal childcare in the UK than France in working class families, as underlined by Vincent (2007, p.2). The existence of parental leave of up to three years for parents with two or more children creates a societal belief that mothers of children up to three years might not work, but beyond this due to the greater history of women participating in the labour market in France, there would seem to be a greater societal expectation in France than the UK for mothers of children who are above school age to work. The effect of the shorter history of women working in the UK can be considered to be intensified by the continuing existence of normative values that are suspicious of formal childcare.

Ideally, as discussed in Chapter 5, couples BUK and GUK sought a male breadwinner model. B1UK and G1UK struggled to answer questions about employment plans or experiences

because their lives revolved around their care responsibilities. Both mothers were unskilled, had only completed basic education, had children at a young age and did not work before giving birth. They did not describe ever having looked for work, or any future employment plans because they viewed themselves primarily as carers, responsible for the majority of day-to-day childcare in their families. G1UK stated:

“From morning till night, until they’re asleep I’m I’m the number one parent”.

As such, their days revolved around their childcare responsibilities leaving them with what they considered insufficient time to look for work, especially when their children were pre-school age. When asked the main issues she faced looking for work, G1UK replied:

“G1UK: Childcare is a big issue.

G2UK: Yeah childcare is a big issue.

AT: In what way?

G1UK: Er because my daughter is in part time nursery at the moment, half days so by the time I get her in nursery, I’ve got basically an hour to myself. If if I start working I’ve got an hour a day and then I have to pick her up so that’s the biggest issue really because I’ve got no one to like drop her off or pick her up.

AT: Yeah that is a big....

G1UK: And then there’s my youngest one so that’s the biggest issue for me?

AT: Yeah and is there any childcare available for her or?

G1UK: Er not really, not at this age. There is certain ones but still the point is it’s like I’ve got to juggle the two.

AT: Mmm.

G1UK: Like when she is in full-time school it might be a bit better because then I’ll only have to juggle with one”.

Here, G1UK can be considered to be reluctant to use formal childcare as she feels caring for her children herself is her responsibility as a mother. G1UK’s comment that there “*is not really*” any childcare available for her children is interesting. She does not refer to specific cost or availability issues; rather, she appears to be uninterested in exploring and using the options available. Such issues would appear to be secondary after concerns about the merits of using formal childcare. Elsewhere in the interview as in her ideal work-care scenario she expressed normative values against using formal childcare. This can be considered a further factor reinforcing her care ideals that in turn influences her decisions in practice:

“I couldn’t leave my children with a stranger. It was so hard getting the oldest into nursery. It weren’t that I didn’t wanna her to go or I was stopping her going, she went

from the first day and she has been there ever since. But it were hard for me to leave her like who, what are these people gonna to do to my child and stuff? But I think that there's loads of children in the school and then that made it more secure. The schools a lot securer. I can't just invite a random stranger into my home and say we'll pay you to be a babysitter and stuff like that. That would never happen in my eyes. I know there's around here and they actually work doing that. But I couldn't do that".

B1UK's son was less than two months old when the interview took place. As such it is understandable that the couple had not explored childcare options in depth. Nevertheless, B1UK's comments regarding nursery suggest that she does not see formal childcare particularly positively:

"I might let him [...] start going to nursery when he is about you know two or three. But I don't... I might put him in nursery depending on how he is".

The experiences of H1Fr are similar to those of B1UK and G1UK. Although, unlike them, H1Fr had worked previously (in her country of origin as a seamstress prior to getting married and then in France for one year as a cleaner); like them she did not refer to future employment goals and seemed content to seek a male breadwinner model ideally and in practice. She stated she could not work because of problems with her hands and the need to care for her husband and youngest son:

"Je peux pas travailler, je peux pas parce que à cause de mes mains et à cause de mon fils euh tous les jours je la ramène et je je prends à la maison le le le plus le plus petit. Il a sept ans et demi. Donc c'est moi que j'occupe de lui et et son père. [...] Tous les matins à 8h30 on ramène et tous les soirs à 16h30 16h30 on retourne à la maison. Tous les jours sauf samedi et dimanche".

The problems with her hands would seem to be a secondary barrier. Unlike I1Fr, who also stated she had problems with her hands (as discussed in section 7.2.3), H1Fr did not talk about trying to find work in alternative sectors. Like G1UK when discussing future employment plans, she focused on her husband looking for work not herself. She responded "*je ne sais pas*" when asked if she wanted to work ideally, but "*bien sur*" when asked if she wanted her husband to work.

The experiences of M1Fr and N1Fr were somewhat different. Both disagreed with their partners on their ideal work-care scenario, seeking scenarios that involved them working whereas their partners favoured male breadwinner models. M1Fr ideally wanted a scenario in which her partner worked full time and she worked 30-35 hours a week and N1Fr a one and a

half earner model. Unlike B1UK, G1UK and H1Fr, they could describe future employment plans:

“Je voudrais (du travail) dans le ménage, chez les personnes âgées, un truc comme ça” (M1Fr).

“Je veux passer une formation pour faire un diplôme après. Je veux avoir un bon travail. [...] je veux travailler pour des galeries” (N1Fr).

It is significant that in practice the couples were prioritising the ideal work-care scenarios of the fathers. It would seem that whilst their children are young the mothers put their employment ambitions on hold and focus on looking after their children and home. Neither M1Fr nor N1Fr expressed concern about not working.

“Non ils sont pas obligé pour trouver un travail c’est parce que moi je suis une femme au foyer, j’ai un enfant moins de trois ans. Je suis pas obligée pour aller au travail maintenant. En plus on va trouver pas d’un coup comme ça, un travail comme ça. Il m’attend quoi” (N1Fr).

As a mother of only one child, N1Fr would only have been entitled to six months of parental leave on top of maternity leave. Her response indicates how since parental leave of up to three years exists for parents with two or more children, there is a societal expectation that mothers might stay at home with children under three whatever the exact regulations around the *PAJE*. Her plan to work once her child was three again fits with the higher employment rate among women with fewer children. For M1Fr, a mixture of cost fears and worries about the length of time it would take to secure a *crèche* place led to her delaying her employment plans:

“Je suis tombé enceinte de ma fille, ma deuxième qui a 4 ans. Et euh c’était assez dur parce que je me suis dit dans ma tête pour faire garder mon fils et ma fille la crèche déjà il faut attendre longtemps au moins un an. Et deuxièmement j’ai pas beaucoup de revenus des fois et je me suis dit je pourrais payer tout le temps la crèche. Même si on a des aides, des fois c’est c’est dur quoi. Et puis euh bah [inaudible] je préfère qu’ils grandissent, qu’ils ont l’âge de 10, 11 ans pour qu’ils vont à l’école et qu’ils sont gardés par une nounou ou quelqu’un qui se connaît quoi. Et euh il y a un silence et je suis tombée enceinte de ma fille, la dernière. Et là, je me suis dit qu’elle a un an ou 2 pour la mettre dans la crèche et trouver quelque chose pour que [...] je travaille quoi un peu”.

The experiences of M1Fr and N1Fr suggest that mothers’ normative views about their role and home-based care differ more according to the age of their children in France than the UK.

Childcare responsibilities play a crucial role in the experiences of mothers in couples seeking a male breadwinner model in practice. This explains why some couples sought a male breadwinner model ideally and in practice, and why other couples were seeking this model in

practice when they ideally wanted a one and a half earner model. As in the case study of couple MUK (on p.194) for many of the British mothers although cost factors would be an issue if they were to use formal childcare and consequently, a barrier to employment, their main concern is ensuring they care for their children themselves due to their normative values which encourage them to care for their children personally rather than using formal childcare. She differs from the experiences of the mothers discussed in Chapter 6 who were looking for employment, not because they had weaker views regarding the use of formal childcare but because they thought it was more possible to get help from their partner or work hours around their care responsibilities than M1UK. M1UK did not mention either the possibility of her partner helping with childcare or working around her care responsibilities. The finding that childcare provision and costs is only a secondary barrier for parents in the UK matches up with Pfau-Effinger's argument discussed in section 2.2.2 that family policies are not the most important factor in understanding women's labour market participation in countries where cultural values place greater emphasis on using external childcare.

The interviews with fathers in the couples revealed that care issues rarely impact on the fathers' experiences of attempting to obtain their ideal work-care scenario (in other words their experiences of attempting to find employment). Care responsibilities can be considered to influence their actions in practice only in exceptional circumstances and for a short period of time. Problems mostly occurred when fathers were looking for flexibility from their employers and this was not forthcoming. B2UK was forced from employment in order to care for his pregnant partner for a few weeks after she fell. He was ineligible for paternity leave as he had been working for the company for less than the six months⁴³. M2Fr mentioned care responsibilities as a barrier to employment in the past. Again he had had to take a leading role in care responsibilities for a short period during his partner's pregnancy:

“J’ai dû rester à la maison, des fois quand je les ai amené à l’hôpital aussi parce qu’il y a des moments, une fois ma fille elle, ma deuxième fille elle était bien encombrée ça fait j’ai dû l’amener à l’hôpital parce que ma ma femme était souffrante. Elle pouvait pas, elle gardait déjà mon fils et elle était enceinte”.

This fits with the hypothesis in Chapter 4, that the absence of parental leave directly targeting fathers at the time of interviews might contribute to why some fathers were out-of-work.

⁴³ For more details on the eligibility rules for paternity leave in the UK, see: <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave/eligibility>

L2Fr was the only parent taking an active role with childcare on a regular basis. While his partner attended a training course he was responsible for childcare. He noted that difficulties securing a *crèche* place meant he had sometimes been unable to take up work opportunities:

“J’ai la petite et à cause de ça bah euh ma femme elle travaille et moi des fois si je trouve un boulot, je peux pas les faire parce que on n’a pas de pour surveiller la petite”.

The father taking on a childcare role goes against couple LFr’s ideal work-care scenario. This did not seem to be part of a detailed plan that the couple had developed but more a response to the circumstances they found themselves in. As discussed below L2Fr was not working after having given up work due to health issues. It is as if he took on a temporary care role almost by accident due to him being available.

7.2.2 Confidence, Skills Level, and Knowledge/Experience of the Labour Market

Even more so than in the experiences of couples who were both looking for employment (as discussed in Chapter 6), a lack of confidence, low-skills level and little experience/knowledge of the labour market were common barriers cited by couples looking for a male breadwinner model in practice in both France and the UK. They contributed both to the reasons why the mothers were not looking for work and to the difficulties the fathers were facing looking for employment. Due to the similarities with the experiences of parents looking for a dual-earner model in practice, this chapter does not illustrate the issues comprehensively. Instead differences between the experiences of couples both looking for employment in practice and those prioritising a single earner model are highlighted.

It should be noted that unlike for fathers, it would appear that if mothers encounter difficulties where their qualifications are not recognised, they adapt their immediate goals and fall back into the traditional caring role with care responsibilities likely to become their priority, at least in the short term. They focus on obtaining a care scenario in which they are not working whereas their ideal work-care scenarios involved them working part-time. In France, the situation looks to be particularly complicated for immigrant mothers whose qualifications are not recognised in France. Unlike the father in the UK – E2UK – reported in Chapter 6, who had a foreign qualification and prioritised retraining and working in any role even those well below his qualification level, Q1Fr who had completed a degree in North Africa stated how she would prefer to stay at home and take care of her son rather than work in an unfulfilling job:

“Quand je cherche un travail on me propose soit le ménage soit, et je vais vous dire la vérité pour moi j’ai j’ai étudié j’ai mes diplômes. Ça m’intéresse pas de, je préfère rester à la maison, garder mon enfant, de l’éduquer et tout au lieu d’aller faire le ménage. Ça ca je dis, moi franchement je. Même quand il y a des entretiens je je refuse. [...] ici le problème que j’ai trouvé comme je vous ai dit à chaque fois ils me disent bah non madame il faut un un diplôme spé- spécifique quoi”.

Difficulties related to non-recognition of the mothers’ foreign qualification explain why couple QFr moved from wanting a one and a half earner model ideally, to seeking a male-breadwinner model in practice.

7.2.3 Health Issues

Health issues contributed to the reasons why some couples were looking for a male breadwinner model in practice although they favoured a one and a half earner model ideally and to the difficulties some couples who ideally wanted a single earner model faced in achieving this model in practice.

Couple IFr and OUK both wanted a one and a half earner model ideally and yet were seeking a single earner model in practice. Whilst IIFr stated the biggest barrier to her finding work was *“ne pas savoir écrire et lire le français”*, health issues were also important. Problems with her hands combined with worry about leaving her children to work to explain why she gave up work after returning to work following parental leave:

“IIFr : C’était facile de de retourner au travail après le congé parental ou pas ?

AT : Non je me culpabilisais. À chaque fois je conduisais mes enfants à l’école je là si j’ai pleuré j’ai dit je veux pas aller à la maison, ils vont pas manger, je vais pas les voir. Et ça m’a inquiet beaucoup. Et je voulais voir mes enfants toute la journée.

AT : D’accord.

IIFr : Et avec les problèmes de la santé ça s’accumulait après j’ai arrêté”.

In a sense, IIFr fits with the established pattern of women struggling to return to employment after parental leave (as discussed in in section 3.3.2). However, in citing the role of health worries her experiences are different. More widely, the fact that fewer women did not mention difficulties coming back from parental leave is somewhat surprising given the discussion in Chapter 3. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of mothers interviewed for this study would not have been eligible for parental leave since they had not worked sufficiently

prior to giving birth to meet the eligibility rules (see section 3.3.2). This is interesting as it reveals that childcare policy in France for out-of-work parents is not only limited compared to the experiences of working mothers as out-of-work families are less of a priority for collective childcare places, but also their options for parental leave are extremely limited.

O1UK who had previously worked in the health sector in the Asian country of her birth, had suffered from breast cancer undergoing several operations since she arrived in the UK. This seemed to play an important role in her not having looked for work in the ten years she had lived in Britain. She wanted to work but daily life seemed to get in the way of looking for work. At one point of the interview she stated:

“I want to work. I am okay. I am looking for work”.

However, when asked directly about looking for work she replied:

“At the moment I can’t try to find a job [...] it’s recently last month I moved [...] house and err... actually I’m working as a housewife”.

A feature of O1’s experiences was attending English and Computer classes at Gleadless Valley Online Centre (now Reach South Sheffield). The classes can be considered to be important in helping to develop her employability skills. As in the parents looking for a dual-earner model (as discussed in Chapter 6), questions remain over the extent to which the Online Centre helps parents to develop a coherent career path. O1Fr wanted to work with children but unlike I1Fr did not discuss the steps she would need to take to reach this goal. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter I1Fr wanted to become a midwife. Attending long-term “*remise à nouveau*” courses was important in developing her employability skills and outlining the stages she would need to enter the profession.

Couple LFr ideally wanted a male breadwinner model. They had previously had such a model when the father worked in the delivery sector and the mother focused on caring for their four children. However, the father had been forced to give up work four years previously following an accident:

“C’est à cause d’un accident de travail. J’avais des problèmes de dos et c’est à cause de ça, j’ai fait arrêter parce que j’ai des problèmes de dos et c’est pour ça, ça je suis parti”.

He retained a strong commitment to work stating that although his back was still problematic he wanted to work, just in a different sector:

“Maintenant il faut quand même changer le métier”.

L2Fr was shortly to begin a training programme organised through *le Pôle Emploi* to find work adapted to his needs. Such specialised training and assessment would seem essential to help those with health difficulties find suitable work, otherwise they would seem destined to remain inactive in the long term. L2Fr described how he had looked for work intensively over a wide geographical area but had not been successful:

“Je cherche partout en ce moment. Je cherche même de loin sur Paris, sur Belgique”.

Targeted support would seem important in maintaining his enthusiasm for job search.

7.2.4 Support with Job Search and Training

In the UK activation policy not being enforced can be regarded as facilitating couples who desired a single earner model ideally, in obtaining such a model in practice, as it enabled the couples to receive benefits without the mother being forced to look for work against their ideals. In turn, this reduces the gap that Lewis (2001) suggests exists between policy and parental ideals. As discussed in Chapter 3, DWP guidance suggests parents will only be exceptionally excused from looking for employment if they make a joint claim for Jobseekers' Allowance. The experiences of couples in the interview sample suggest that this practice is frequent. As discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to parents who were both seeking employment in practice, the seeming ability for parents to choose a main claimant to liaise with Jobcentre Plus and consequently face the majority of pressure to find employment reduces pressure on the secondary claimant (the mothers in the majority of couples interviewed) to look for work against their will. Couple G imply they are receiving JSA with the father claiming for both parents. When asked if she felt pressure to look for work G1 did not reveal any pressure from Jobcentre Plus:

“At the moment it's like I'm pressuring him (her partner) to get a job”.

It is possible Jobcentre Plus have allowed out-of-work partnered mothers a degree of flexibility with job search because it involves a relatively small group of parents and they preferred to first target attention on larger groups of unemployed parents such as lone parents.

Overall, it would seem activation policy towards out-of-work couples facilitates the mothers in remaining inactive. However, some examples of mothers facing pressure to find

employment against their will can be identified. K1UK criticised how Jobcentre Plus had attempted to send her on various courses and interviews which conflict with her childcare responsibilities:

“K1UK: They tried to send me to back to work this and back to work that but it’s not, it’s not practical having three children.

AT: No? So what have they tried to send you to?

K1: Erm they tried to send me to do an English and maths course which was three days a week but it coincided with, my children are all at nursery at the minute right so they only do mornings, and I had to be there full days so I couldn’t do it”.

It appears K1 faced such activation pressure because couple K were the only couple interviewed in which the mother was the main claimant and the father the secondary claimant. As such K1 had more frequent contact with Jobcentre Plus than her partner. K1 explained they chose to make herself the main claimant for practical reasons based on who was better at paperwork but that this then led to her being under greater pressure to find employment than her partner when it was her partner rather than herself who desired and was looking for employment in practice:

“K1UK: They [Jobcentre Plus] expect one of us to look for work so because I am the main claimant they expect me to look for work. Erm I don’t know why we’ve done it where I’m the main claimant but you know we just have. It’s a lot easier for me, I think my partner struggles with filling in forms and this, that and the other.

AT: Ah right.

K1UK: So I’m the main claimant and they expect me to look for work but then they’d expect [name of partner] to look after the children permanently at home but yet he’s he’s trying to look for work himself. He doesn’t want to stay at home, day in, day out”.

Had K2UK been the main claimant, it is likely K1UK would not have faced such pressure from Jobcentre Plus to find employment, leading to less conflict between the state and individual couples. K1’s experiences suggest Jobcentre Plus could be more transparent about the requirements involved if you are the main claimant when people register for support.

In the longer term the lack of enforcement of policy in the UK is a potential barrier if parents seek to change the work-care model they are seeking. The possibility for couples on JSA to nominate a main claimant creates a gap in advice provision for the secondary claimant which can be considered to hinder couples who envisage a different care scenario in which the mother also looks for work in future. The secondary claimant seems to struggle to know where to turn with questions about employment and training. N1UK had little work

experience and had not worked since having her daughters. She wanted to return to college in future but was unsure of how to register and the childcare that she would need. Due to N2UK having the majority of contact with Jobcentre Plus, N1UK appeared isolated in terms of who she could approach for advice:

“N1: I would love to go back to college and just, just do my GCSE’s and get my grades so I’ve got some grades and then see what I could do after that.

AT: Yeah?

N1: I’d like to do that.

AT: Have you looked into going back?

N1: No I should do shouldn’t I? Especially now she’s getting bigger. She should start nursery in September as well. And wouldn’t she be able to go to nursery in a college?”

When asked what sort of policy change could make a difference, she suggested a personal support worker who could help with family and work issues. Her idea is close to the support offered by the *référent RSA* system which as discussed in Chapter 6 appears to be working well. Parents who had a *référent* or who had received support from *Itinéraires* previously, but who were not looking for employment at the time of interview, seemed more confident about accessing advice.

In France rather than parents benefiting from policy not being enforced fully, couples interviewed who were receiving *le RSA* and seeking a single earner model in practice were helped by policy being flexible about the time parents took to look for work. Those receiving *le RSA* are expected to sign either un *contrat d’engagement réciproque* or un *projet personnalisé d’accès à l’emploi*. It has not been possible to find rules for claiming *RSA* for out-of-work parent couples. Nevertheless, the Service Public website provides some insight. It states in relation to general claims for *RSA* that:

“Vous devez : rechercher un emploi, ou entreprendre les démarches nécessaires à la création de votre entreprise, ou suivre les actions d’insertion qui vous sont prescrites. Vous ne pouvez pas refuser plus de 2 offres raisonnables d’emploi telle que définie dans votre projet personnalisé d’accès à l’emploi (PPAE) ou dans le contrat d’engagement” (Service Public, 2014b).

This implies that there is a degree of flexibility with regards the extent to which claimants have to actively seek employment. The goal is for parents to eventually be looking for employment but the system appears to allow parents space to deal with other barriers in their lives before actively looking for employment if their advisor feels this is necessary. In other

words, the system responds to parents' personal circumstances more than the UK system. This interpretation is reinforced by guidance on the *Mairie de Lille* website. Referring to the wide ranging approach taken by the *référénts RSA*, it is suggested that *le contrat d'engagement réciproque* moves claimants step by step towards employment rather than requiring them to instantly find work:

“[les référénts rSa] accompagnent les allocataires du rSa dans leurs démarches liées au logement, à la santé, au budget, au projet professionnel, mais aussi l'accès à la culture, aux loisirs et aux vacances. Ces démarches entrent dans le cadre d'un contrat d'engagements réciproques qui reprend une à une les étapes afin d'améliorer la situation des allocataires et lever les freins à l'insertion professionnelle”. (Ville de Lille, no date given, c).

For couples where the mother was not looking for employment ideally, the *référént RSA* system appears to facilitate them in obtaining their ideal work-care scenario as it means the mothers are not under immediate pressure to find employment. In the longer term having regular contact with employment support services would seem to help the parents as it makes them aware of future options regarding work and care:

“M1Fr : Euh bah en fait il y a la Mairie, le référént RSA nous le voir tous les 6 mois. Il m'oblige pas mais il me dit que des que je pourrais faire garder mon enfant, je pourrais travailler et il pourrait m'aider en fait aussi. On peut être, on peut être aidé aussi par la Mairie la Mairie. [...]

AT : Ah. C'est intéressant.

M1Fr : C'est bien. Ça c'est bien quoi”.

Neither M1Fr nor N1Fr (the two mothers who disagreed with their partners on their ideal work-care scenario) referred to their partners having alternative ideal work-care scenarios⁴⁴. Although this thesis cannot comment on the probability of the mothers entering employment in future against the preferences of their partners, it underlines the importance of good quality support with job search and training. If mothers do seek employment without the support of their partner, they might struggle more for advice and become more easily frustrated than mothers who had support from their partners. It is significant that M1Fr is confident that she could obtain effective help from *Itinéraires* when she begins job search as well as the support of her *référént*:

“Parce qu'Itinéraires ils aident à chercher à à, après ils aident aussi à faire des formations par rapport à ça. Ils font beaucoup de choses donc je me retournerai, je

⁴⁴ M1Fr was interviewed separately to her partner, whilst N1Fr described her employment goals after her partner had left the room.

me retournerai vers eux pour voir euh ce qui me convient, et ce que je peux trouver le plus tôt possible”.

Parents who did not have a *réfèrent RSA*, in particular those supported through the unemployment insurance system appeared to have less of a sense of progression towards employment. As meetings at the *Pôle Emploi* were not compulsory, they did not seem to face any pressure or to receive regular support with looking for work and moving towards their ideal work-care scenarios that in the case of fathers involved full-time employment. For example, D2Fr implies that he can choose not to attend meetings with the *Pôle Emploi*:

“ Je vais pas à l’ANPE parce que je sais que l’ANPE ils disent que voilà il faut faire de tel à tel [inaudible] envoyez des CV ”.

Father D explained that he preferred to look in person to find work but did not have a detailed plan for how to find work.

As in the experiences of couples both actively looking for work, couples seeking a male breadwinner model in practice (both those who wanted such a model ideally and in practice, and those who ideally desired a one and a half earner model but who were looking for a male breadwinner model in practice) tailored support was important. Examples of how it is an enabling factor are evident in the testimonies of the fathers in both the UK and France. An absence of tailored support can be considered to be a barrier factor for other parents. Overall, as in the experiences of couples both actively looking for work, due to the greater level of tailored support available in France, it can be maintained that policy provides greater support for parents to move towards achieving their ideal work-care scenario (in the form of a male-breadwinner model) in France than the UK. Due to the extent of similarity with the discussion in Chapter 6 quotes will not be provided to illustrate the argument. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the parents’ experiences suggest that the Work Programme rarely inspires participants with multiple barriers to employment to widen their aspirations nor enables them to expand their skills. It also corroborates existing literature suggesting that ‘creaming’ (taking the easiest people to move into employment) and ‘parking’ (putting to one side the hardest people to move into employment) of participants on the programme is an issue.

In the UK a lack of policy support for job seekers aged over twenty five was raised in several interviews. Several parents with low qualification levels experienced difficulties obtaining training because they were above the age at which apprenticeships and other training courses

are available. As such, they were stuck in a situation of limbo with little chance of improving their prospects and obtaining their ideal work-care scenario. M1UK who was in his late twenties, had few qualifications and had been out of work for six years, described being placed on repeated maths and numeracy courses through the Work Programme but not receiving job-specific training. He felt he had been placed on the literacy and numeracy courses “*because there’s nothing else for them to make you do*”. Jobcentre Plus had been unable to offer him skills training as he was over twenty five:

“The JobCentre were no help at all. [...] I kind of asked to go into like different kinds of work like painting and decorating or kind of erm bricklaying and stuff like that but they said for my age range there is no er no kind of erm training anymore to do painting and decorating or building or anything like that so you have to be young to get your training”.

M2UK suggests that Jobcentre Plus could only offer him limited options for future employment, not taking into account his preferences for the types of work he would like to do:

“M2UK: They tried to push me into warehouse and packing jobs. I would like to do that kind but like erm driving a fork lift of some kind or because I am kind of an active person. I don’t want to be stood there on a packing line just packing boxes, I’d like to be running about grabbing stuff and stuff kind of like that. I tried to explain that to the JobCentre but they said there is no kind of thing like that. So I said er what about a PE teacher or kind of stuff like that, like football or stuff like that. There is no, there is no funds to do stuff like that so it’s just you try and think of ideas but they like slap, they crash all your ideas straight through.

AT: Yeah and how does it feel when they do that?

M2UK: Er it’s it feels horrible, it does, it it puts a big downer on me, erm the pressure to look after my family and stuff like that when I think [inaudible 06:40] I can’t find a job, I’m still stuck in the same rut for kind of three, four, five years, just stuck”.

Existing research has focused on the experiences of older and younger jobseekers in the UK. Kirkpatrick (2012) looked at provision for helping people in their sixties into work and Foster et al. (2014) for people over fifty years of age. Tunstall et al. (2012) investigated the experiences of disadvantaged young people looking for work. Sissons and Jones (2012) examined the experiences of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Analysis in this thesis has shown how whilst it may be a less explored field academically, support from Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme for parents over the age of twenty five would appear to be insufficient. The limited support available can be considered to have an important impact on the experience of fathers, hindering them and their partners in obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios. A focus on young people might be

justified by the higher unemployment rates being experienced by 18-24 year olds⁴⁵. However, there is a trade-off with the impact on over-25 families.

The French system appears to offer greater opportunities for parents prioritising a childcare role in couples seeking a male breadwinner model. Parents in France described attending long-term training courses such as *remise à niveau* courses preparing them for employment at an often unspecified point in the future. I1Fr had attended training courses at *Culture et Liberté* on and off for five years. She explained that when she first started attending classes she struggled to read or write, yet through their encouragement she had been able to write a book about her experiences, improving her confidence and developing skills for the workplace:

“Ça m’a ça permet d’écrire le français et je fais moins de fautes qu’avant. [...] j’ai appris à écrire à l’ordinateur. [...] Donc ça m’a permis de faire des progrès”.

Whilst I1 was not looking for employment at the time of the interview, she valued the course in terms of preparing her for future employment as a midwife. The fact the course only involves eighteen hours of classes a week and that these are spread across several days would seem to make it easier for mothers to attend.

In contrast only one of the mothers in the UK (O1UK) in couples who were looking for a male breadwinner model in practice was attending a training course at the time of interview, despite several of them (such as M1UK and N1UK) expressing an interest in undertaking courses. Furthermore, although some mothers interviewed had attended courses to improve their qualification level outside of Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme, the courses appeared less extensive than those offered in France. M1UK had studied Entry Level One, Two and Three maths and English courses at her son’s school. She dropped out after finding the course hard:

“M1UK: I used to do maths and English at [name of son]’s school, courses [son interrupts]. And I only managed to get from Entry Level Three to Level One. I was struggling at that. I just can’t get around fractions. Hehehe.

AT: Hehehe.

⁴⁵ In 2014 the unemployment rate among people under the age of 25 was 24.2% in France and 16.9% people in the UK were unemployed. By contrast, the unemployment rate among people aged 25 to 74 years was 8.9% in France and 4.4% in the UK (Eurostat, 2015e).

MIUK: And English. I'd have to start back from the beginning there because I think I'm, I'm not sure if I'm dyslexic or what because I just don't understand it.

AT: And so did you stop going to the classes then or?

MIUK: Yeah at the end. Because I just gave up because I thought I can't get no further. I tried and tried and tried with fractions but there were just no chance".

The course which MIUK refers to would seem to be part of the family learning provision for parents and carers of children aged 0-12 years in Sheffield:

"Family Learning is about fun, friendly classes which benefit the whole family and are delivered in local schools and Sure Start Children's Centres" (Sheffield City Council, no date given, p.2).

The courses are designed to provide parents with opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and speaking and listening skills, participate in learning activities with and for their children; and to discover more about the ways in which their children learn and how they can best support them (Sheffield City Council, no date given). However, the courses do not seem to be integrated into a sufficiently developed advice and support service to enable parents to capitalise on the opportunities offered and develop an achievable career path. MIUK would clearly like to improve her qualifications and secure employment but the course she undertook did not seem to offer this support and so she dropped out. When asked how the government could better support people who are struggling to balance their family responsibilities with looking for work, she replied:

"Just like give them examples of jobs what they can get say they have got no qualifications. Tell them they can go on this course. They will get a qualification and then it will lead them into a job".

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the age of their children seems to be an important factor behind why the mothers are out of work. With the exception of J1UK and O1UK whose experiences can be considered different (because J1UK had two disabled children and O1UK had suffered severe health problems), all of the mothers in couples seeking a male breadwinner model in practice had children under the age of five. Improving the availability of personalised training during the school day would seem to be an important way of helping the mothers to improve their skills levels in preparation for employment once their children are older, whilst not conflicting with their care duties.

7.2.5 Volunteering

An enabler that only featured in interviews with parents seeking a male breadwinner model in practice in the UK is the importance of volunteering. Volunteering was used by the parents interviewed in order to gain skills for and entry into the workplace (and thus help them to obtaining their ideal work-care scenarios) to a greater extent in the UK than in France. In the UK volunteering can be considered to be motivated to a greater extent by a desire to gain experience and to compensate for poor qualification levels. J1UK was not actively looking for work at the time of interview since her husband has just found employment, thus limiting the number of hours she can work before losing her tax credits. Nevertheless, she hoped to work in future and her experiences of volunteering in a shop are particularly interesting. She directly linked volunteering with future employment. She was gaining experience and a retail qualification through volunteering:

“I love it. And then if I did want a job, I could get a reference from them. I’m also starting my NVQ training so then that will go to a qualification for shop work”.

She stated it was important in improving her confidence level:

“Being in the shop does help because when you are at home and all you have got is your children, erm it’s hard because you don’t get out to meet anybody. Apart from dropping them off at school, you don’t see anybody. So all the confidence that you have got just drops down and you go in yourself and get self-conscious”.

By contrast in France, the parents who volunteered referred to other factors as primarily motivating their behaviour. D1Fr highlighted the social and moral aspects of volunteering. She explained she had volunteered with a charity that supports disadvantaged people for several years in order to meet new people and help *“les malheureux”*. Similarly, S1Fr described why she volunteered for a foodbank in terms of helping others: *“Nous on aime bien aider les gens à récolter les denrées alimentaires”*. Whilst the social aspect was mentioned in the UK, it was not the primary motivating factor.

Existing literature has shown that the likelihood of volunteering increases with socio-economic class (Barker, 1993, p.24; Windebank, 2008, p.463-464). Windebank (2008) notes that in the UK and France *“the unemployed are least likely to engage in volunteering, formal or informal”*, linking this to a lack of *“resources, skills, contacts, and confidence to do so”* (p.467). The differences in volunteering patterns among the out-of-work in France and the UK can be related to how volunteering features in activation policy in the two countries. Volunteering is promoted to a greater degree in activation policy in the UK than in France. On the one hand, the gov.uk website suggests volunteering is a good way for job seekers to

improve their chances of finding work and suggests support from Jobcentre Plus is available for travel and childcare costs (gov.uk, 2015j). Clarke underlined how volunteering was promoted by New Labour as part of policy to make “*active self-sustaining individuals*” rather than “*passive recipients of state assistance*” (2005, p.448). On the other hand, the *Pôle Emploi* website does not actively promote volunteering – a search for “*bénévole*” brings up information stating that volunteering is allowed while claiming benefits under certain conditions but does not discuss advantages of volunteering or suggest *le Pôle Emploi* help with volunteering (Pôle Emploi, 2011). As such, it is understandable that out-of-work parents in the UK more frequently view and seek volunteering because of instrumental rather than altruistic motives⁴⁶.

Another interesting feature of the interviews was that whilst, overall, parents associated volunteering with instrumental reasons to a greater extent in the UK than France (and this is reflected in national policy) some interviewees in the UK were under the impression that they were not allowed to volunteer while claiming benefits even though they felt that it could be useful:

“AT: And have you ever thought of volunteering?”

[...]

GIUK: I’ve thought about it but basically erm the courses what he does, if he is volunteering on the course day, he has got to stop volunteering to go to his course because they have turned around and said basically erm...

G2UK: If I don’t turn up to that course, they are gonna suspend my money for up to three years, up to three years basically.

GIUK: So we will lose our money even though he is doing some work, he is working unpaid and the JobCentre should be happy with that cos he is actually doing something with his life, and he is earning the money [...].

G2UK: But the JobCentre is saying that you are not allowed to volunteer anymore because it is classed as working but yet you are doing it voluntarily”.

The reason for this discrepancy is likely to be that whilst volunteering is promoted at national policy level and you can still volunteer and receive benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance, those who volunteer and receive benefits need to comply with certain rules including informing Jobcentre Plus before they start volunteering

⁴⁶ For a discussion of these terms, see Anheier, H. and Salamon, M. (2001) Volunteering in cross-national perspective: Initial Comparisons. *Civil Society Working Paper* 10, p.11.

(DWP, 2010). Those receiving Universal Credit will not face any restrictions on volunteering if they are placed within the no work-related requirements group, the work focused interview only group or the work preparation group. Those in the all work-related requirements group will be required to receive permission for volunteering from their advisor. Therefore, whilst claimants will be allowed to undertake as many hours of volunteering as they like, volunteering will affect the total number of hours they are expected to look for work. Universal Credit advisers will be able to reduce the expected number of hours by up to 50%. However, what is considered “appropriate volunteering” will be up to the discretion of each Universal Credit adviser. This thesis suggests that guidance provided to claimants regarding volunteering needs to clear otherwise they may miss out on the advantages of volunteering in terms of developing skills and experience so as to increase their employability.

However, a note of caution emerges from the interviews concerning long-term volunteering. It would appear that long-term volunteering can reduce the extent to which people seek paid employment. This is evidenced by the experiences of C1UK for whom long-term volunteering had almost become a job; just without the salary.

7.3 Experiences of Couples where Neither Parent is Actively Seeking Employment

After couples who were seeking a one and a half earner model and those seeking a male breadwinner model, the third group of parents identified are couples where neither parent was actively seeking employment. Five couples fell into this category in the UK (F, H, I, R and S) and two couples (P and R) in France. This final section of Chapter 7 aims to uncover why the parents were not looking for work and to discuss whether the reasons they provided are ‘acceptable’ reasons for not working given the increased emphasis placed on activating the out-of-work in France and the UK over recent years as outlined in Chapter 3.

It is argued that although the couples were not looking for employment in practice, they were not work-shy. This is noteworthy given the growth in perceptions amongst society and especially, policy makers in the UK, that out-of-work people are work-shy⁴⁷. All of the

⁴⁷ There is insufficient space in this thesis to explore the growth in such perceptions but as Standing notes language has been used to “*shape perceptions*” of those out of work. For example, the 2010-2015 UK Coalition government argued there was a crisis of benefit dependency and worklessness in the UK (2011, p.143).

couples who in practice were not looking for work had ideal work-care scenarios where at least one parent was employed. Couples SUK and IUK both favoured a model in which both parents were employed part-time. This was also the model advocated by F1UK. F2UK stated he would prefer a male breadwinner model, which was also the option chosen by couple RUK. Couple HUK suggested they would like a one and a half earner model with the father as the main earner. In France couple R was in favour of a male breadwinner model and couple P a dual earner model in which both parents worked part-time. Figure 7.2 shows the differences between the ideal work-care scenarios and care models sought in practice by the couples where neither parent was looking for employment in practice. The desire amongst all the couples for at least one parent to work ideally suggests that the families are not work-shy since the couples aspire to employment, with employment forming part of their normative values. Instead, it can be maintained that emphasis should be placed on exploring how present circumstances are preventing the couples from looking for work in practice and thus seeking to obtain their ideal work-care scenario.

Overall, analysis of the interviews with the couples where neither parent was looking for work in practice suggests that the majority of parents (in particular, the fathers) had actively tried to look for employment previously. The parents shared the same difficulties looking for work as the active job seekers discussed in Chapter 6 and the first part of this chapter (i.e. couples looking for a one and a half earner model and a male breadwinner model). In addition to these not insubstantial difficulties, the couples then faced further barriers, or in some case extreme versions of the same barriers. It is these additional or more extreme barriers that combine to push the parents even further from the labour market than the other groups of parents. This helps to explain why neither parent in the couples were seeking employment. To put it simply, as the barriers add on, the further alienated the parents become from the labour market despite their commitment to employment in principle. From a minimalist perspective, it would be easy to criticise the parents as lazy with regards to employment. However, this thesis suggests that a more nuanced understanding is required. Whilst the parents perhaps have not explored all options available to them in terms of looking for work, their degree of isolation and the lack of role models and positive support in overcoming the barriers they face must not be ignored. The limited nature of interaction with work assistance organisations and wider support services is a consistent factor in their experiences and seemingly plays an important role in their experiences.

Like the couples in the other two groups, the parents in couples who were not looking for employment in practice, faced difficulties looking for employment due to care responsibilities (primarily in the case of the mothers), their low skills level and lack of work experience, health issues, having a criminal record and difficulty accessing job search support. It is the combination of these numerous factors and the extremity of the issues which they face that would seem to push them to not look for work. Overall, the couples not looking for employment in the UK would seem to be less 'job ready' than parents in couples not looking for employment in France. Rather than personal barriers to employment, in France it seemed difficulties were more the result of the economic conjuncture and ideological beliefs. Nevertheless, caution must be exerted in relation to this conclusion due to the very small number of parents interviewed in France who were in couples where neither parent was looking for work. Profiles of case study couples are woven into the analysis in order to demonstrate the arguments developed.

Furthermore, a significant finding of the chapter is that the couples' normative models of work and care were so strong that even where the mother might better placed to be successful in obtaining employment (for example, not having a criminal record) this did not influence who the couples prioritised to look for work in practice.

Care Scenarios Sought in Practice by Couples Looking for a Male Breadwinner Model in Practice in France and the UK



Figure 7.2 indicates the care scenarios the families interviewed were seeking in practice compared to ideally (excluding early/compulsory education). Families are identified by letter. Letters with no background colour show the scenarios sought in practice. Letters with a background colour show the couple’s ideal care scenarios. Letters in green indicate families in France, letters in orange families in the UK. Cases where the parents within a couple disagree on their ideal work-care scenarios are indicated by the letter of the couple appearing in underlined italics. None of the couples disagreed on the scenario they were seeking in practice. Strikingly, even though they were not seeking work in practice, work was an element of all of the couple’s ideal work-care scenarios.

7.3.1 Care Responsibilities

The first barrier that can be identified among the practical experiences of this group of parents' is care responsibilities. This was a barrier either because the couples held normative values that were against the use of formal childcare (couples FUK, SUK, RUK and RFr) and as such, were only seeking a male breadwinner model in their ideal care scenarios, or because of difficulties accessing formal childcare in practice (as in the experiences of couple HUK and RFr). Due to the similarities with the experiences of mothers looking for a male breadwinner model in practice as discussed above and the fact that, in essence, these mothers as individuals were no different from the mothers discussed in the rest of this chapter this point will not be illustrated with quotes.

The extent to which it is 'acceptable' for the mothers to not look for work in practice whilst their partner is also not looking for work and the couple claim benefits is not straightforward. In the UK if the mothers take on the main care responsibility, under Universal Credit they are unlikely to be forced to look for work until their children are primary school age. This would appear to be in line with the parents' desires. All of the couples in the UK where neither parent was looking for employment in practice suggested that it is acceptable for mothers to look for work once their children start primary school full-time. They would appear to follow this through in practice. For example, RIUK explained that as her child was starting school she had been planning to return to work in the year of the interview until she fell pregnant again. Universal Credit offers the potential for the mothers to gently prepare for employment as they move through the work-related activity groups as their children reach the age of five years. As stated above in relation to the mothers in couples looking for a male breadwinner model in practice, for Universal Credit to be a useful source of advice on employment, care and training, advisers must emphasise building trust with the mothers. The mothers are likely to have had little official contact with work assistance organisations previously and may well be reluctant to take part in the meetings at first.

In France, RIFr suggested that the age at which mothers return to employment is up to each parent but that she felt comfortable working once her child reached two years old. She had had a *référént RSA* previously and signed "*un contrat d'engagement*" with the *Mairie*:

« Ça m'oblige à chercher du travail, à m'occuper correctement de ma fille, à savoir gérer mon budget et à leur rendre de compte en cas changement de ma situation professionnelle ».

However, she was cynical of the support offered arguing “*ça sert à rien*”. She has not fulfilled the requirements. She reveals she has not had contact with her *référent RSA* for two years despite still being under contact with them. This suggests lessons for work support organisations in both France and the UK. In relation to France it raises questions about the extent to which *référents RSA* follow up clients who do not attend meetings. Whilst, as described above, the flexibility of the system appears to benefit parents who are looking for work (or who wish to work in future); for those who do not wish to look for work, the lack of pressure to look for work helps the parents to obtain the care scenario they are looking for but does little to improve their future employability. In relation to the UK, it suggests that regular meetings to monitor progress of participants are necessary. The difficulty is finding a balance between allowing parents flexibility to address issues which they face and ensuring they do move towards employment step by step. Meetings every few months would seem to provide mothers with flexibility whilst also ensuring they are not lost from the system.

It is particularly important that policy is improved to effectively support mothers in couples who are both out of work on their journey towards employment because many of the mothers arguably face fewer barriers to employment than the fathers. Whereas the fathers often faced long-term issues related to a very low skills level or having a criminal record, relatively short-term care related barriers seemed to be the main issues which the mothers faced. This is clear in the experiences of couple H in the UK.

Couple HUK's Story

Couple H had two children, one who was new-born and the other aged four years at the time of interview. Both parents had previously worked. The mother worked as a carer until she had her first child. The father had worked as a labourer but had been out of work longer term than his wife. Whilst she had had been out-of-work for four years, he had not worked for eight years. H1 had not worked since having her first child because she could not find a role which fitted around taking her children to and from school. She suggested the problem would be lessened, once her youngest child was in nursery:

“AT: Do you have a CV that you could give in?”

H1UK: Yeah at home, at home.

AT: So what are you waiting for?”

H1UK: Until my daughter is old enough to go into nursery. Then I will be all right to work”.

By contrast, the reasons why H2UK had not been able to find work seemed to be longer-term barriers, related to his low skills level and having a criminal record. When asked about the main difficulties he had faced looking for employment, he replied:

“Too many foreigners taking all the jobs. And a criminal record so you can't get owt”.

In addition, he reveals he is dyslexic and has been unable to pass the qualifications needed to work in the security sector:

“You can't get a job for security unless you go for this card. [...]. And [...] if you're dyslexic like me, you've got no chance really because you've got to do it all on computers. So really you've got no chance of getting a job in that at all. Because if you can't read big words, you can't write very well, you're knackered”.

H2 appeared to have given up on job search and was on disability benefits:

“I know that I don't need to go and look for a job straight away me I can wait. Because I've got, I'm on disability”.

It was particularly worrying that H2 described no recent contact with employment assistance or work support organisations. He had been to Jobcentre Plus previously but described it as “horrible”. He had been on CTS training scheme but it appeared ill-adapted to his needs, being too classroom based:

“I can't sit in a classroom for too long. I can't be indoors too long”.

As a result he did not attend the course and was sanctioned by Jobcentre Plus but this had no effect on encouraging him to look for work.

Overall, although the mother in couple HUK appears to be more ‘job ready’ than the father, the couple have not sought to alter their normative care model and prioritise her looking for work. In addition, there appears to have been no intervention to attempt to move her into the job market rather than him. Whereas ostensibly the mother was in a position to find work in future once her childcare issues had been resolved, the father’s situation appeared more complex. He would seem to require longer-term more intensive support to find work. The mother did not report any contact with policy organisations. Perhaps, if she had had access to such support, she may have found a way to address her childcare issues. When asked about childcare provision in the area, H1 described it as “*all right*” but said she had not used anything other than the playgroup. An adviser may have helped her to discover other options.

As discussed in Chapter 3, part of the reason New Labour focused on activating women was to help guard households against poverty (Lewis et al., 2009; Daly, 2010). Targeting support at mothers might have faster effects than targeting fathers due to the less complex barriers which some face. However, a note of caution must be must be sounded in terms of whether the income the mothers are likely to receive will be sufficient to lift them out of poverty. Mothers such as those interviewed are likely to only find low-skilled, low-paid, insecure employment. As demonstrated by the experiences of I1UK where parents consider work to not be financially viable, they are reluctant to attempt to enter the labour market. When asked the main barriers she had faced looking for employment, I1UK replied:

I1UK: It’s when you go into work obviously you’re housing benefits stop so it’s finding a good enough paid job for the both of us.

I2UK: To cover your housing benefit.

I1UK: To keep, just just to keep us afloat. You know to pay the rent, to pay the Council Tax and to be fair you are worse, we have worked out you will be worse off for working. We could both be working thirty hours and by the time we have paid childcare costs, rent, council tax, we would end up with less money than we do”.

One of the aims of Universal Credit is to ‘make work pay’. According to the DWP, it will enable those who move into work to keep more of what they earn than under the current system (2010, p.43). As such, it would appear to make it easier for mothers to take on a limited number of hours work during school hours. If they are the only earners in the family, they will have stronger incentives to work part-time than if they were the secondary earner (Finch et al., 2014, p.18). The reduction in incentives for the secondary earner would seem to add to the difficulties the fathers with multiple difficulties regarding employment face.

Two examples were found of care responsibilities influencing the extent to which fathers could look for work. R2UK left employment to help his partner to look after their disabled son as she was struggling to cope with looking after the children alone:

“R2UK: I were still working when he were first born and she were finding it hard to cope with [names of both children]. Because [name of eldest child] wasn’t at school then either or anything so I don’t know if he had just started nursery.

[...]

R1UK: He wasn’t walking or crawling or anything so I had got two children that couldn’t move around and that was fully dependent on me and I couldn’t cope with both of them.

R2UK: So I decided to stay off work for a bit and help out and get Carer’s Allowance and Income Support for a bit and help out”.

R2UK had been out-of-work for approximately five years. He revealed the difficulties people on Carer’s Allowance can face when they try to enter the labour market after a period not working. Even though prior to taking the time out of the market to care for his son R2UK had been able to find work relatively easily – working in a variety of blue collar jobs – when R2 tried to look for employment he was not successful:

“R2UK: I want to go back to work but after all this time it’s going to be hard for me to go back to work now after all this time because I have been out of work that long. I’ve had, a few years ago I tried going back to work when [name of eldest son] first started going to nursery.

AT: Yeah?

R2UK: I tried looking for work. And I didn’t get nowhere because they were just saying when were the last time you worked. I told them and they said oh that’s a bit, you know what I mean, they were like a long time ago and all this lot”.

The difficulties R2UK encountered when he attempted to find work are important in understanding why he was not looking for work. It appears the difficulties caused him to become disheartened about looking for work and felt he had no option but to remain on Carer’s Allowance, despite this differing from his ideal work-care scenario. R2UK had benefitted previously from the Work Programme, gaining both employment and training. However, at the time of interview he was attending neither Jobcentre Plus nor the Work Programme and was on Income Support. Strengthening advice and support services for parents on Carer’s Allowance would seem important in terms of reducing benefit dependency and helping parents such as R2UK to update their skills after a period out of the labour market. Under Universal Credit it is unlikely that someone in a similar situation to R2UK would have greater access to employment support and advice. Those caring for a severely

disabled child (receiving the highest or middle rate component of DLA) and receiving Carer's Allowance are likely to be placed in the 'no work-related activity group' (Citizens Advice, 2015). As such, they would not receive guidance with looking for work.

P2Fr also stated care responsibilities were important in his experiences. He was the father who took the most active role in childcare of all the fathers interviewed regardless of care model they were seeking in practice. His experiences are discussed in detail below.

7.3.2 Extreme Personal Difficulties When Applying for Work

Applying for work appears particularly difficult for out-of-work partnered parents in this group as they have extremely complicated lives, with severe personal difficulties and multiple barriers combining.

Many faced problems related to experience and qualifications like parents in the other two groups, but these difficulties appeared to be magnified. H2UK had severe literacy issues:

"It's hard for me to look for a job" "because I can't read".

H2UK's problems were such that his mother went to his house to read his post to him. S1UK suggested that having a combination of a low qualification level and care responsibilities meant she was overlooked by employers:

"I have not got really many qualifications or anything like that so really I'm like he said you are put to the back of the queue aren't you. If they see me and then there is somebody else with like two, three more qualifications than me that haven't got kids, they say oh I will have them instead. Save the hassle for them don't it so it's not that easy".

R1Fr said finding employment had not been a priority as she had faced housing problems and then a battle to maintain custody of her daughter:

"J'étais en foyer donc il a fallu d'abord que je trouve un logement. Après le logement il a fallu que je gagne ma petite fille avec moi parce que malheureusement j'ai eu beaucoup de problèmes".

Analysis of the interviews reveals that in the UK many of the parents, especially fathers, who desired employment but who were not actively looking for work had criminal records. Within

the couples interviewed where neither parent was actively seeking employment, H2UK, S1UK, and S2UK spoke of how their criminal record limited their options for employment. For example, S2UK stated his criminal record for violence “*instantaneously [...] puts my CV to the back of the queue unfortunately*”. Having a criminal record increased the parents’ lack of confidence and isolated them from society due to employer reluctance to employ people with a criminal record. S2UK states the lack of support from work assistance organisations on leaving prison:

“S2: Just makes you feel like worthless man you know you don’t feel like a member.

S1: A human being”.

S2UK wanted to work but the extent of the barriers he faced because of his low skills level and criminal record caused him to give up looking for work and his ideal work-care scenario since he doubted he would be able to find work. In turn, he seems have become dependent on benefits as he feels he would be worse off financially in work due to only low-paid low-skilled available to him:

“S2UK: I could get a job me, I could get a job tomorrow if I wanted to that that’s not even in question. My issue is is I would be worse off getting a job. It’s as simple as that.

S1UK: It does work out.

S2UK: I would be worse off. I’m getting housing benefit and what not now for my property. All of these things totting up. I’d need a job at like four hundred pounds a week.

AT: Yeah?

S2UK: And what job is going to give me that? It’s just not, it’s not plausible at all. It’s just not happening”.

The parents’ experiences suggest important conclusions about the impact of criminal records over time. All of the parents with criminal records who were not looking for work described looking for work previously. It would seem that as time passes and parents with criminal records are repetitively turned down for employment, they become frustrated with job search and start putting less and less effort into looking for employment. As in the experiences of H1UK described above, this then combines with other factors such as poor health to alienate them further in the labour market. The fathers who were not actively seeking employment were all older and had been released longer ago than most of the parents with criminal records who were actively seeking employment. A factor that would appear to continue to push job

seekers with criminal records to continue to look for work even when they are repeatedly turned down for employment is pressure from family to work. Where participants' partners were encouraging them to find work to support their family (e.g. G2UK, N2UK), they continued to actively seek employment as shown above. This has important implications for future policy targeting offenders. It suggests that policy may be more successful if it involves the whole family, rather than just the parent who has the criminal record.

Whilst it is clear that the parents do face considerable barriers, a low skills level, family problems, and having a criminal record should not prevent people from being capable of working in some form. However, many of the parents appear to be lost in terms of how to overcome the challenges they face regarding employment. The parents are united in their experiences of a poor level of support to overcome the challenges they face regarding employment. Relations with work assistance organisations in both countries were limited, with parents having received little support in expanding their qualifications and looking for training and employment. In particular, policy did not seem to be sufficiently adapted to their complex needs.

Severe health barriers are also a reason why parents who desired employment ideally were not looking for employment in practice. F2UK was forced to leave a well-paid job as a result of an accident. Being out-of-work was a frustration in terms of reduced income and people considering him to be a benefit scrounger. He wanted to return to work in future but was unsure if his health would permit it:

“An employer’s not going to employ me the way I am at present. Because I could fall asleep anytime”.

Whilst beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that the interviews provide greater evidence of increased monitoring and scapegoating of those on sickness benefits in the UK than France. This fits with the recent cuts to benefits and services for disabled people that have taken place in the UK (Morris, 2013, p.724). F2UK worried he would be forced to look for work even though he felt he was not physically well enough:

“I could lose my benefits straight away, over summat trivial like putting the wrong like lettering down in a, on some paperwork or saying something wrong when I go for certain like interviews. [...] It’s worrying knowing I struggle like I am and having my benefits stopped and not being able to do anything”.

Policy could be strengthened to better support parents to explore retraining and finding work in sectors adapted to their needs. Whilst F2UK talks about his hopes of finding work in future as a driver, he does not mention any support from employment assistance organisations with finding suitable work. Instead, his interactions with official organisations seem to be fraught with fear that he could lose his benefits immediately. Where parents are physically incapable of working, policy should support them to maintain a reasonable standard of living through benefits. It is important that debates over the commitment of the unemployed to find work do not lead to the ‘demonisation’ of parents with severe health problems who claim benefits such as F2UK.

Some fathers in France also cited employment as unviable financially. They spoke of employment as if it was a choice, in discourse markedly different from that of parents, especially fathers, in the UK. Whereas the parents in the UK were more defensive about why they were not working - citing the reasons discussed above as barriers, the fathers in France in couples where neither parent was looking for work were more unabashed about why they were not working, overtly criticising the political system. This is likely to be linked to societal perceptions about the importance of work. As discussed in Chapter 3, debates have demonised benefit recipients as work-shy to a greater extent in the UK than France. This would seem to play a part in why parents in the UK felt the need to justify their actions more than parents in France. Recent policy change in France may increase stigmatisation of benefit claimants since policy change has sought to reduce/remove benefits from the wealthiest and strengthen support for families with the lowest incomes. The rise in unemployment levels might also affect public perceptions of the plight of the unemployed. The upper limit of the *quotient familial* has been reduced from 2000€ to 1500€, *allocations familiales* are no longer universal and support available under the PAJE has been reduced for the wealthiest families. Conversely, the rate of the RSA benefit will increase by 10% between 2013 and 2017, the complement familial (a policy aimed at the poorest large families) has been increased and the *Allocation de soutien familial* (which targets lone parent families) will increase by 25% between 2014 and 2018 (Jeanneau, 2015).

On the one hand, R2Fr explained he was not working due to tax increases and reduced employment hours available:

“Il (François Hollande) a beaucoup augmenté les impôts, il a diminué les horaires du travail. Donc on gagne moins. Tous les avantages au travail ont été retirés. Donc on

n'a plus envie de travailler. Celui qui travaille pas, il gagne plus à sa maison qu'en travaillant".

On the other hand, it was suggested that given the conditions involved in low-skilled employment, the salaries on offer did not make employment in such roles attractive. P2Fr had given up “*un travail humiliant*” in a restaurant kitchen because the amount of money he received for the job was similar to what he could receive on benefits and through undeclared work without the stress of the workplace, providing him with time for other interests such as volunteering. His biggest barrier to employment is:

“Problèmes de dignités je pense. C'est-à-dire que le le monde du travail moi ne me va pas quoi. C'est j'ai l'impression que ce qu'on donne par rapport à ce qu'on reçoit”.

The experiences of fathers P and R can be considered as at opposite ends of a spectrum of political discontent with the world of work. Whilst R2's issues look to be resolving themselves (he planned shortly to start looking for work again having enjoyed his “sabbatical” from the labour market), P2's issues are more complex. P2 described not having a *réfèrent* RSA even though he appeared to be entitled to one. It is possible that if he had received personalised support from an advisor, he might have been able to find paid employment he would have found rewarding.

7.4 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the experiences of two further groups of out-of-work partnered parents who can be identified as having distinct experiences in practice: couples where only one parent is actively seeking employment and couples where neither parent is actively seeking employment.

The chapter showed how for many of the couples, seeking a single earner model was in opposition to their ideal work-care scenarios. The majority of parents in both France and the UK moved from ideally seeking a model in which both parents were in work in some form to pursuing a single earner model with the father as the breadwinner in practice. For parents not ideally wanting a single earner model, high costs and accessibility issues, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications especially among mothers, and limited support for those claiming contribution-based benefits were shown to be problematic in France. In the UK important barriers identified include normative perceptions against the use of formal childcare, lack of support for families aged over twenty five with job search and an advice gap for the secondary

claimant. Health problems were shown in both countries to contribute to the reasons why couples were seeking a male-breadwinner rather than one and a half earner model in practice.

Childcare policy in France for the out-of-work was shown to be limited compared to the experiences of working mothers not only because out-of-work families are less of a priority for collective childcare places, but also because their options for parental leave are non-existent.

Overall, policy towards parents who were looking for employment either at the time or interview or in the relatively near future can be considered stronger in France than the UK. It was more generous and reactive in terms of support offered than policy in the UK. It particularly engaged mothers on a programme of moving towards employment, thus helping them to progress in moving towards their ideal work-care scenarios. Where policy was less 'helpful' in France was with regards to couples who did not want to look for work and those who were on the insurance-based system rather than *le RSA*. They seemed to face little official pressure to find work and did not benefit from the same level of advice as those on *le RSA*. No evidence was found that the multi-level system supporting the out-of-work in France was leading to confusion among participants. In the UK policy attempted to help those who were not looking for work but did not seem to have the resources to help the parents to overcome the barriers they faced regarding employment. In particular, an advice gap can be identified for the secondary claimants of JSA and provision for families over the age of twenty five can be criticised.

The chapter has highlighted the need for policy to target both the parent actively seeking employment and the parent who is taking more of a care role. Mothers seem particularly influential in encouraging their partners to look for work. Therefore, such changes are likely to make policy more successful.

In terms of couples where neither parent was actively looking for employment in practice, this chapter has shown that the majority of parents in this group in the UK were not work-shy. They had a commitment to employment in their ideal work-care scenarios but in practice were not seeking work due to having multiple, extreme barriers. Their present circumstances made

it difficult for them to look for work. Interestingly, many of the mothers in the UK seemed to face fewer and shorter-term barriers to employment than the fathers, underlining the importance of policy, especially advice services, involving and being specific to the needs of mothers. In France, male participants in couples not looking for work in practice talked about employment as though it was choice. This can be related to the lesser stigmatisation of benefit claimants in France than the UK. Another challenge faced by couples where neither parent was looking for work was caring for children with disabilities.

This chapter has highlighted the potential of Universal Credit to make it easier for mothers to work a small number of hours during the school day without their benefits being reduced. However, it counterbalanced this by underlining the need for advisers to spend time building trust. The chapter suggested that whilst on paper Universal Credit is in some ways similar to the *réfèrent RSA* system, it may not be as successful at engaging with hard-to-reach parents because it has a more limited remit and will be run out of Jobcentre Plus offices rather than in more neutral locations as the *réfèrent RSA* system is.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Overview

This thesis has provided an in-depth, micro-level analysis of the work-care experiences of workless families in France and the UK. Based on interviews conducted with parents in the two countries, it has provided a timely addition to knowledge examining the experiences of mothers as carers and potential workers and the experiences of fathers as workers and potential carers with a view to policy learning. It has compared parental ideal work-care scenarios and experiences of seeking to obtain these scenarios in practice both within France and the UK and comparatively between the two countries. This chapter summarises the implications and contributions of the findings highlighted throughout this thesis with reference to policy, theory and future research.

Responding to policy emphasis on activating large parts of the population including mothers, this thesis has filled a gap in knowledge concerning how work and care issues play out at the micro-level in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in two different national contexts and welfare typologies. It makes contributions in terms of policy learning and theoretical development. It is relevant to policy makers since it proposes policy change that could help out-of-work partnered parents to address the work-care issues that they are facing. In turn, this could increase both individual life chances and the economic contribution individuals make to society. Encouraging more people to return to work or to enter work for the first time is increasingly important given the economic implications of the ageing European population.

From a policy perspective, this thesis contributes to discussion in four principal ways. It reveals the families had weak support networks and lacked support from family and friends. It underlines how the families interviewed in both France and the UK had a strong commitment to employment; with each family ideally wanting at least one parent to be in employment. It indicates misalignment between policy goals and parental ideals in terms of the extent to which policy expected both parents to look for employment and in terms of the support provided to look for work and balance family responsibilities. It maintains that relationships between out-of-work partnered parents and work assistance organisations are generally

stronger in France than the UK, linking this to the more reactive support offered in France. It promotes cross-national policy learning, by making a series of policy proposals based on areas of policy that appear to be working well in the parents experiences' in one of France and the UK, but which are less developed in the other country.

From a theoretical perspective, first, this thesis develops activation regime theory by fronting the role of gender/ care. Secondly, it expands knowledge of how national welfare and activation regimes play out at the micro-level. It shows how national welfare regimes have a strong impact on the lives of individuals but that some disagreement within couples can be identified. Thirdly, it comments on the relevance of the fatherhood ideologies literature which is based on the experiences of in-work fathers in relation to out-of-work couples. Fourthly, it extends analysis of the role of moral and social factors, applying 'gendered moral rationalities' theory in relation to couples cross-nationally.

In terms of further research, this thesis maintains the importance of exploring eight avenues for further research. First, it explains that lessons learnt from experience are only one form of policy learning. Therefore, it contends that an important next step is to consider the extent to which the policy suggestions made by the parents and fronted in this thesis would be politically and administratively feasible in France and the UK. Secondly, it suggests conducting additional research using a similar methodology in other neighbourhoods and cities. This would enable greater understanding of how the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents are influenced by neighbourhood factors (such as transport availability and childcare provision) and regional work-care policy. Thirdly, this study could be repeated in other countries in order to provide insight into experiences in other welfare regimes. Fourthly, the factors argued to be important in parental experiences in this thesis could be examined using quantitative analysis to gain a greater understanding of the extent to which the experiences of the out-of-work partnered parents interviewed represent those of out-of-work partnered parents more generally. Fifthly, the experiences of immigrant mothers identified in this thesis points to the importance of conducting a study focusing on the work-care experiences of immigrant parents (particularly in France but also in the UK) at cross-national level so as to have deeper understanding of why some couples of an immigrant background were looking for work and others were not. Sixthly, further study in France of why some couples are suspicious of formal childcare could help policy to be improved. Seventhly, given the recent policy emphasis placed on developing childcare within the *banlieues*, a study

examining childcare experiences with a view to identifying lessons for policy both within and outside of the *banlieues* appears pertinent. Finally, it is critical that an evaluation of parental experiences of Universal Credit is conducted in order to investigate the impact the policy has on the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents.

8.2 Implications and Contributions to Policy

8.2.1 Weak Support Networks

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 considered how support from family and friends features in the work-care ideals and experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. They showed how almost all the parents interviewed in both countries lacked regular, reliable support from family and friends. The parents either lived far from their family, had no family left, were not in contact with their family or their family were otherwise occupied (e.g. through work, care responsibilities and illness). Several parents suggested that having family support would make a big difference to their ability to balance their work and family ambitions. This thesis provides evidence that a lack of family support is especially significant in the experiences of families in working-class areas in the UK due to continued suspicion of formal childcare services. Societal changes appear to be weakening the care ties between families in the UK but social attitudes have still not developed sufficiently to embrace formal services to take their place. The ideal work-care scenarios of couples in France involve greater use of formal childcare than the scenarios of parents in the UK. A very strong division in parental ideals was identified in that none of the couples interviewed in the UK wanted to use formal childcare ideally – all preferring home-based childcare – whereas the French interview sample was equally split between couples wanting to ideally use formal and informal childcare. In terms of policy this suggests that there is still much work to be done in the UK in encouraging families in low-income areas to trust formal childcare. Addressing trust and cost issues appears crucial. In addition, making it easier for parents to access one-off childcare – for example, whilst mothers attend meetings – might encourage more mothers to pursue developing their employability skills.

8.2.1 Commitment to Employment

Chapter 5 analysed the ideal work-care scenarios of the out-of-work partnered parents interviewed in France and the UK. Importantly, in view of the recent stigmatisation of workless families especially in the UK, it showed how the parents' ideal work-care scenarios

included a strong commitment to employment. All of the couples interviewed ideally wanted at least one parent to be in employment. Most, especially couples in France, ideally wanted a dual-earner model. Parents in France were slightly more likely than parents in the UK to favour a dual-earner full-time model. This suggests that, on the whole, policy aiming to activate out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK does not need to seek to change normative values in order to activate parents. However, it found some evidence to support Lewis' argument that a gap is opening in the UK between government policy which increasingly advocates a dual adult worker model and "*social reality*" which has yet to move to such a fully individualised model, instead preferring a one and a half earner model (pp.154-155). Not all of the parents in either France or the UK ideally desired the dual-earner model that policy is promoting in both France and the UK. Indeed, over a quarter of the interview sample in the UK had ideal work-care scenarios involving a male breadwinner model.

The findings suggest that if policy seeks to activate the partnered mothers of young children it is particularly likely to encounter resistance. On average the age of the youngest child at which couples in their ideal work-care scenarios felt that the mother could return/ enter employment was higher in the UK than France. Most couples in the French sample ideally wanted the mothers to work once their youngest child reached the age of three years, whereas in the UK parents did not feel it appropriate until children reached at least the age of four and in some cases as old as eleven years.

8.2.2 Misalignment between Policy Goals and Parental Ideals

Misalignment between policy and parental ideals in both France and the UK was found in relation to the support it provides for parents to look for work and balance family responsibilities. The type of tension varies between mothers and fathers and across the two countries.

Mothers of young children

Chapters 6 and 7 showed how a gap in advice for mothers regarding long-term work and care options can be identified in the UK. Whereas many of the mothers would like to improve their skills level and look for work in time, the way in which couples claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nominate a main claimant to have contact with Jobcentre Plus meant the secondary

claimant – most often the mother – did not have an easily accessible point through which to access advice regarding employment, training and childcare. Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrated how the *référént RSA* system in France would appear from the parents' experiences to offer more targeted long-term support that takes into account mothers' caring responsibilities than provision offered by Jobcentre Plus. The mothers had an outlet to discuss future options regarding work and care but did not suggest that the system was pushing them to look for work at a time when they were prioritising home-based care. When asked what could help her to balance her work and family goals NIUK suggested the idea of having a support worker that combines a focus on family and work issues. Whilst introducing a system involving support workers that go into homes is likely to be expensive and thus perhaps an unrealistic goal, there would appear to be potential to modify NI's idea based on the French system. The findings of this thesis suggest policy thinking should develop a system where mothers can easily access support and advice, in an environment where they comfortable. This thesis underlines how meetings and training opportunities would need to fit around childcare responsibilities.

On paper, the introduction of Universal Credit would seem to address to some extent the lack of support for the secondary claimant and provide a more long-term approach to enabling mothers of young children to move into employment. As discussed in Chapter 3, parents will be placed in work related activity groups. The requirement for parents who are taking on a care role of children aged three or four to prepare for but not actually have to look for work might support mothers, such as those interviewed, whose ideal work-care scenarios involve working (but who were not looking for work whilst their children were below school-age) to achieve their ideal work-care scenarios. If such parents could be given improved information on employment, training and care, it would also help to meet the government's goal of moving parents closer to employment.

Nevertheless, questions remain about the extent to which the mothers will trust their advisor and value the opportunities on offer through Universal Credit. It is possible that because Universal Credit is run by Jobcentre Plus parents will view meetings negatively and have pre-conceived ideas about the support on offer due to negative experiences they have had heard about in their community and possibly from their partner. Some participants may have 'inherited' an unfavourable perception of Jobcentre Plus. Chapters 6 and 7 have demonstrated how clear hostility currently exists between some claimants and Jobcentre Plus. In addition, it

is uncertain if work coaches will have sufficient time and leeway to address the broader issues which appear important in the parents' lives. Whereas the *référént RSA* system explicitly states that it seeks to support parents in resolving issues related to accommodation, health, personal finances, employment, culture and holidays, the support offered under Universal Credit has a narrower focus. Part of the success of the French system can be considered to be that it takes a broad approach, building trust step by step, through helping parents with a range of issues that are not directly linked to employment. But also it is operated at Local Authority (*Mairie*) level. Offering support in an organisation and location that is more neutral (for example, somewhere out-of-work people would go for other reasons and which is without negative public connotations of traditional work assistance organisations such as *le Pôle Emploi*), would seem to contribute to the success of the system. As parents' children grow up, long-term more intensive support would then seem to be important to build on the progress mothers have made preparing for employment; and to support them in the transition into employment. Removing income disregards for secondary earners in families receiving Universal Credit would seem crucial.

Evidence has been found of a misalignment between policy provision and parental goals regarding the provision of formal childcare in France. Chapter 6 showed perceived and encountered difficulties accessing places in publically run *crèches* contributed to the difficulties out-of-work partnered parents, particularly mothers, faced regarding employment. In addition, and somewhat surprisingly, given the much lower prices charged compared to in the UK, some parents felt that the costs involved were prohibitively expensive. In France increasing the number of *crèche* places as well as developing advertising of current costs would seem important. It is particularly significant that in 2015 the French government acknowledged the difficulties that out-of-work families face accessing state-funded formal childcare places (Le Monde, 2015). The government stated its intention to expand access to childcare facilities for the unemployed. By contrast, the UK has not explicitly sought to target childcare provision to the needs of out-of-work families in recent years.

Long-term Unemployed Fathers with Experience in Manual Professions

Misalignment between policy and parental goals was found in relation to support for long-term unemployed fathers with experience in manual professions in both France and the UK, raising several implications for policy. The fathers aspired to employment but they appeared far from finding employment in practice, partly as a result of policy support being weak. The

father's skills appeared outdated when trying to find work in today's labour market and some had incomplete qualifications. In both countries they were struggling to access the long-term, intensive retraining schemes, apprenticeships or training needed to help them back into employment. Options available tended to be shorter-term and less resource-intensive than the fathers felt was necessary to help them into employment. Those with criminal records were particularly isolated. They had often been on previous courses through work assistance organisations but had struggled because they had not received intensive, tailored support. In France, particularly, fathers receiving unemployment insurance benefits rather than the *RSA* appeared isolated, with limited policy support. The nature of the *Pôle Emploi* system where parents only attend infrequently when they feel that they need support would seem to exacerbate their difficulties. In addition, parents in this group in France face difficulties moving from short-term subsidised employment to gaining a permanent position. In the UK a high level of tension and suspicion can be observed between job seekers and Jobcentre Plus/ Work Programme staff; also training schemes are often reserved for those under the age of twenty-five.

These findings suggest greater attention should be placed on increasing the availability of intensive, longer-term support in helping parents to enter work and achieve their ideal work-care scenarios. Increasing innovative training opportunities, work experience and volunteering programmes, as well as mentoring, would seem to be critical in both countries. Mentoring would help to engage and motivate the parents. Ensuring that policy targets couples rather than individuals would seem important, as the mothers might help to motivate the fathers to take part. To move the most disadvantaged parents in France into work, policy makers in France may wish to consider increasing mandation requirements for job seekers in this group to engage with work support organisations. This thesis has argued that extensive conditionality – as evident in the UK – can be counterproductive leading to tension between job seekers and work assistance organisations. Nonetheless, some form of conditionality such as monthly meetings might help long-term unemployed parents to move closer to achieving their ideal work-care scenarios. Attention is drawn to the need to provide at least the chance of an interview for permanent positions at the end of subsidised training contracts.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis imply that policy in both France and the UK could do more to support parents with criminal convictions into employment. Parents with criminal convictions can be considered as amongst the most isolated job seekers and amongst those

who struggle the most to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios. Couples seem to particularly struggle due to their traditional views regarding gender roles which mean that even when the male partners' job search becomes fruitless, the mother in the couple does not pursue employment. Consequently, policy may wish to involve the whole family more, taking a long-term approach supporting mothers to become the main breadwinner. A further possibility would be to expand early referrals for support before people leave prison and to ensure that intensive support on leaving prison, including work experience and volunteering options, is offered. Work assistance organisation could prioritise developing links with employers willing to take on those with criminal records.

8.2.3 Stronger relationships between parents and work assistance organisations in France than the UK but room for improvement in both

The findings of this thesis suggest that relationships between parents and work assistance organisations are stronger in France than the UK. In addition to the generally strong relationship between advisers and claimants under the *référént RSA* system in France – described in section 8.2.2 – the experiences of parents using the *Mission Locale* service were positive. This contrasts with the lack of reactive support parents suggested was on offer in the UK from Jobcentre Plus and the work Programme.

The support given to M2Fr could be viewed as model training. As analysed in Chapter 7, M2Fr was shortly to begin a training programme that combined one of M2's interests – sport – with learning how to look for work effectively, confidence building and obtaining a driving licence. The scheme seemed to interest M2Fr as well as to provide genuine prospects of employment. M2Fr had benefited from intensive support from *la Mission Locale* in helping him to move towards employment. Whilst a degree of reactive, personalised support was not universal across the experiences of all parents in France, it was more common than in the UK interviews. Here, training through Jobcentre Plus and under the Work Programme was suggested to not motivate or inspire participants, particularly those with the most complex needs. This underlines the importance of enhancing the provision of good quality, intensive training that addresses the skills difficulties job seekers face.

Several of the fathers interviewed in both France and the UK suggested that fatherhood was a catalyst for employment, as after having children they searched for employment more

diligently. The experiences of the parents interviewed suggests that it is essential that policy targets fathers as soon as they become unemployed to capitalise on the enthusiasm they have for job search and to reduce the chances that they will become long-term unemployed and possibly, inactive. In both countries it has been demonstrated how among some parents a lack of trust exists between jobseekers and work assistance organisations. Claimants need to trust work assistance organisations. In the UK offering up-front help with lower transport costs would be a good way of building trust and enabling job seekers to look for work more easily. Experiences in France show how having access to subsidised transport is a practical help for a parents looking for work. As discussed in Chapter 6, several of the fathers in France who were actively looking for employment valued access to free public transport, both in terms of looking for work and daily life. By contrast, the high cost of public transport was cited (for example, by M2UK) as a barrier when searching for work in the UK.

8.3 Implications for Theory

In addition to policy implications, there are also implications for theory. The contributions relate to fronting the role of care in activation regime theory, how national welfare regimes play out at micro-level, applying the fatherhood ideologies literature to out-of-work couples and applying ‘gendered moral rationalities’ to couples cross-nationally.

8.3.1 Fronting the Role of Care in Activation Theory

Activation regime theory is extended by fronting the role of gender/ care. As discussed in Chapter 2, activation regime theories have focused on differences between states in terms of the level of conditionality work assistance organisations impose on benefit claimants, the types of jobs promoted by the state and the level of work incentives such as tax credits. It is contended that when talking about activating parents, it is also necessary to analyse the extent to which policy supports the needs of mothers and fathers. Whilst such policy is not gender specific, due to the work-care models which couples are seeking, it can be considered to play a particularly important role in helping parents to move towards obtaining their and their partners’ ideal work-care scenarios. It is argued that France provides stronger long-term support for mothers in accessing training and childcare than the UK. It offers couples support which enables mothers to discover future work options without seeking to impose conditionality on mothers of young children. This thesis has underlined the importance of the RSA system in this regard. Policy in the UK offers more limited support for mothers. Whilst

in the parents experiences it allowed parents to pursue a male-breadwinner model, it did not offer proactive support for couples who wished to have a one and a half earner model in future. In terms of fathers, policy in France was again more reactive and targeted than policy in the UK. The experiences of parents interviewed in France suggest that French policy includes more innovative training opportunities and greater support with transport costs than provision in the UK, which is more generic and short-term in nature. This fits with the more 'liberal' nature of policy in the UK than France, as underlined by Barbier (2004). This difference in personal *suivi* in France would seem to be a consequence of the far higher level of public spending on (and lesser role of the private sector in) active labour market policies in France than the UK. Public expenditure on out-of-work income maintenance and support as a percentage of GDP is much higher in France than the UK (OECD, 2013).

8.3.2 How National Welfare Regimes Play Out At Micro-Level

This thesis has demonstrated how national welfare regimes play out at the micro-level. It has shown how national welfare regimes have a strong impact on the lives of individuals. Chapter 5 underlined how the broad distinctions in the ideal work-care scenarios of the parents interviewed fit with what one might expect in view of the macro-level categorisations of France and the UK in welfare regime theory, as hypothesised in Chapter 2 (e.g. Leitner, 2003 and Pfau-Effinger, 2006). Pfau-Effinger argued that France has a “*dual breadwinner/external care model*” and the UK a “*male breadwinner/female part-time care provider model*” (2006, p.145). Although the parents in both countries expressed a range of work-care ideals, more parents in France than the UK wanted to use formal childcare as suggested by Pfau-Effinger. Furthermore, in terms of ideal work-models more parents in France wanted a dual-earner model than parents in the UK.

In addition, by being a micro-level study this thesis has identified aspects of experiences that are not highlighted in macro-level theory. The findings of this thesis show that macro-level theories do not include discussion of experiences other than the most common. Chapter 5 revealed that although most parents' ideal-work care scenarios were in line with what one would expect in view of macro-level welfare regime theory, some parents interviewed in France had a strong suspicion of formal childcare. Some parents in working class areas in France have normative values regarding the use of formal childcare which are closer to those of parents in the UK. It is suggested that these values stem from negative media coverage of formal childcare and children experiencing problems attending formal childcare in practice.

This thesis has shown welfare regime theory could be maintained to assume an exaggerated level of homogeneity in terms of parents' ideal work-care scenarios. Focusing on the micro-level, has uncovered examples of couples disagreeing over their ideal work-care scenarios. This played out differently in the two countries. In France, some mothers of children under three were identified who ideally wanted to be part of the labour market, whereas their partner's ideal work-care scenarios involved a male-breadwinner model. In practice, the couples were looking for the scenarios advocated by the father although the mothers stated their intention to look for work once their children reached the age of three years. In the UK, discrepancy between the ideal work-care scenarios of mothers and fathers related to the mothers wanting both themselves and their partners to work part-time so that the fathers could play a more active care role, whereas the fathers wanted either a male breadwinner or a one and a half earner model where they provide 'good care' through earning the majority of the family income. Thirdly, the thesis has identified perceived racism among families who were of Franco-African origin on the part of staff in some formal childcare providers.

8.3.3 Applying the Fatherhood Ideologies Literature to Out-of-work Couples

In relation to the fatherhood regime literature, this thesis has indicated that as in the ideal work-care scenarios of in-work fathers, the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents in both France and UK reveal only limited progress towards what Gregory and Milner termed "*new fatherhood*" (2011b, p.588). None of the couples interviewed in either country (with the possible exception of P2Fr) were ideally seeking the father to be a full-time home-based carer. The vast majority of couples contended that the ideal role of fathers was as a breadwinner. Fathers, in particular in the UK, viewed mothers as more 'natural' carers and as such favoured male breadwinner scenarios.

Nonetheless, as suggested by Smith (2008) childcare was a less important feature of fathers' experiences in France than the UK. The majority of fathers in France spoke less of childcare responsibilities than fathers in the UK did. The use of split-shifting in the ideal work-care scenarios of several parents in the UK is likely to be connected to the traditional lack of state childcare provision in the UK. Even though they were not in work, several fathers in France favoured the use of formal childcare over looking after children themselves. This conforms to both the arguments of Smith (2008) and Windebank (2001). This thesis has also identified an important aspect of fathers' work-care ideals in France and the UK that has not been highlighted so far in the fatherhood literature. Fathers in the UK, more frequently than fathers

in France, referred to being willing to work “*any hours*”. This would appear to fit with the longer working hours culture in the UK and the 35 hour working week in France. In addition, it could also be interpreted as indicative of the ‘desperation’ of the parents meaning they were willing to take any work available. In relation to parental leave, it has been shown that even though policy did not at the time of the interviews explicitly support fathers to take an active childcare role in either France or the UK, in practice care issues were only a very small part of the reason why the fathers were out of work. Problems primarily occurred when fathers were looking for a higher degree of flexibility than was forthcoming.

8.3.4 Applying ‘Gendered Moral Rationalities’ to Couples Cross-nationally

The findings of this thesis extend understanding of the role of moral and social issues in terms of work-care ideals. In particular, they broaden understanding of ‘gendered moral rationalities’ to couples cross-nationally.

Evidence has been found that the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents differ according to parental characteristics. First, it has been shown that the ideal work-care scenarios of couples in France varied according to maternal education level and the number of children in the family. All of the couples who ideally were not seeking a dual-earner model were unqualified. Furthermore, one of the families had six children. This fits with the existing literature described in Chapter 2, which argues that a dual breadwinner model is not the usual practice for younger mothers, less well-qualified mothers and those with large families (Pak, 2013, p.11; INSEE, 2013; Eurostat, 2015a). Secondly, Chapter 5 argued that differences in the ideal work-care scenarios of immigrant mothers, especially in France, can be related to the mothers’ fluency in French. Having a greater command of the French language was positively associated with mothers’ desire to find employment.

In relation to experiences in practice, it has been demonstrated how, in line with Duncan and Edward’s contention that lone parents do not make decisions regarding work and care simply in terms of potential income from employment, the couples interviewed prioritised mothers’ roles as a carer above their financial ambitions. Unlike for the father, the couples interviewed often chose for the mother to look for part-time work - thus reducing their potential income – so as to allow the mother to take their children to and from school personally. Furthermore, the variety of ideal work-care scenarios both within France and the UK and across the two

countries, as demonstrated in Figure 5.1, corresponds to Duncan and Edwards' finding in relation to lone motherhood that "*good motherhood*" has different meanings for different parents (1999, p.123).

Chapter 6 stressed that differences in how parents were aiming to share their responsibilities and the number of hours work they were looking for, can be linked to parental conventionality and whether or not the parents had a professional background. Couples who were more unconventional and had a professional background were more likely to involve the father in childcare (e.g. taking children to a *crèche*) and seek a one and a half earner model than couples without a professional background. This corresponds to what one might have predicted based on Duncan et al.'s argument in relation to partnered mothers – that how they combine motherhood and employment varies according to class and conventionality (2003, p.314, 327).

The reluctance among out-of-work parents in the UK to use formal childcare fits with its lesser provision in the UK than France, and Vincent's finding that strong normative values against the use of formal childcare exist in working class families (2007, p.2). Furthermore, the experiences of mothers can be considered to vary more according to the age of their children in France than the UK. Unlike in the UK, mothers in France who advocated a male-breadwinner model ideally and in practice nonetheless revealed eventual employment ambitions when their children were older. This suggests some mothers in France only want a male-breadwinner model when their children are very young. This is in line with the greater historical participation of women in the labour market in France and the UK; and the existence in France of long parental leave for parents of children under three and the lower employment rate of women with large families.

8.4 Avenues for Further Research

Several avenues for further research, both cross-national and specific to France or the UK, can be identified. This thesis has examined lessons learnt from experience. However, this is just one form of policy learning. Political and ideological factors are equally as important. Therefore, a significant next step would be to consider the extent to which the policy suggestions made by the parents in this thesis would be politically and administratively feasible in the two countries. The feasibility of the cross-national policy proposals made in

this thesis would appear to be a particularly interesting and important step. One way of assessing this would be to interview senior and frontline policy makers in the two countries in order to ask them what they feel the main issues affecting out-of-work partnered parents are, as well as the extent to which they would consider the policy proposals made in this thesis to be realistic.

Given that this thesis is based on a small sample of parents in a single neighbourhood in France and a single neighbourhood in the UK, it would appear important for additional research adopting a similar methodology to be conducted in other neighbourhoods and cities. This could either take the form of interviews with out-of-work partnered parents in other neighbourhoods in Lille and Sheffield or interviews in other cities. A comparison between Lyon and Birmingham might be particularly interesting, given that they are the second cities in each country. The first option would provide greater insight into how the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents are influenced by neighbourhood factors such as transport availability and local childcare provision. The second option would allow greater insight into how work-family reconciliation policy differs at the city level in France and the UK. To what extent is improving care provision and support for out-of-work partnered mothers part of the priorities or proposals of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP)? LEPs are now largely responsible for economic development in England. For France, this thesis has highlighted the importance of the city-led *référént RSA* system recently introduced. To what extent is policy provision in other cities playing a similar role in the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents to in the experiences brought to light in this thesis?

Thirdly, analysis could be expanded to include a larger group of countries. Going back to the welfare regime, fatherhood regime and activation regime theories outlined in Chapter 2 further research could compare experiences with those of out-of-work partnered parents in countries within other categorisations. A Scandinavian or Mediterranean country could provide particularly interesting results given the likely differences in parental ideals and work-family reconciliation policy.

Questions regarding the extent to which the conclusions from this small sample are relevant on a larger level could be examined further through linking the conclusions with quantitative analysis. A large scale study could be conducted among out-of-work partnered parents in

Sheffield and Lille, questioning parents' experiences of the important conclusions in thesis – most notably, trust in and access to formal childcare, extent of informal support from family and friends, extent of trust in work assistance organisations, quality of support with achieving work and care goals received from work assistance and voluntary organisations, access and ability to afford public transport.

This thesis suggests that a study focusing on the work-care experiences of immigrant parents (particularly in France but also in the UK) could be important in terms of understanding why some couples are looking for work and others are not. Does the association that this study found between language level and desire to find employment carry through in larger studies? In addition, such a study could investigate the role that racism plays in the parents' experiences, as well as seeking to find examples of policy which has helped parents to overcome such problems. This thesis has argued that gender and racial discrimination appear to have a particularly important impact in France on the experiences of immigrant mothers, particularly those from the Maghreb; and that policy does not seem to be addressing the issue. A future study could consider racial discrimination on the part of employers. Furthermore, as this thesis has identified perceived racism among staff at *garderies* and *crèches*, investigating whether this perception exists more generally would seem relevant. An in-depth study of childcare experiences among immigrant parents would appear to have not only policy but also theoretical relevance. The experiences of immigrant parents have not been fronted in existing welfare regime theories.

The distrust of *crèches* and of *nousnous* expressed by some parents in France is somewhat surprising given the strong support for formal childcare implied in welfare regime theory and the fact that most policy documents relating to formal childcare in France focus on issues of supply rather than quality. This study has not been able to explore the reasons why parents developed such suspicion in detail and therefore future research investigating parents' views of the quality of formal childcare provision would appear to be valuable in order to understand the factors affecting the ideal work-care scenarios of out-of-work partnered parents and how policy could best be improved to support parents to enter the labour market in a time of economic constraint.

Given the development of non-traditional “*modes d’accueil*” within the ZUS (Comité interministériel des villes, 2008, p.31), it would seem important to investigate the experiences of childcare of parents living within a ZUS. This would enable evaluation of the extent to which the non-traditional childcare options are valuable in the parents’ experiences. Whilst it would be necessary to account for possible greater deprivation within the ZUS and how this impacts on employment aspirations, it would be interesting to investigate whether the non-traditional childcare models developed in the *banlieues* could be adapted outside of *the banlieues* to address the childcare issues experienced by parents in areas such as Fives. There may be lessons learnt which could be applied to the UK.

Finally, it is essential that an evaluation of parental experiences of Universal Credit is conducted. To what extent do parents feel Universal Credit and the associated support from Jobcentre Plus help them to achieve their work-care goals? How does the introduction of work-related activity groups and gradual conditionality for the second earner play out in practice? This thesis has revealed Universal Credit may reduce the lack of support for the second earner in looking for work and childcare. However, it has suggested that problems may occur as a result of tension between advisors and claimants and the increase in the rate at which benefits are reduced for second earners. Further research is necessary to explore whether this happens widely.

To conclude, this thesis has provided an initial step in understanding the work-care experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. It has demonstrated an overwhelming desire among parents, particularly fathers, but also a considerable number of the mothers to find employment. It has indicated how a range of personal, care, activation-side and societal barriers have hindered the parents attempts to obtain their ideal work-care scenarios. It has also identified aspects of policy that appear to be working well in the parents’ experiences. On the basis of this, it has suggested cross-national policy learning for France and the UK. It has made a series of proposals to improve policy but further research is needed to assess the feasibility of such ideas and to provide more in-depth understanding of how work-care issues play out in practice.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule in English and French

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family? Parlez-moi un peu de vous et de votre famille ?
 - How many children do you have? How old are they? Combien d'enfants avez-vous ? Quel âge ont-ils ?
 - Have you lived in Gleadless Valley for long? Depuis combien de temps habitez-vous à Fives ?
 - Did you go to school here?/Where did you go to school? What did you do after you left school? Où êtes-vous allé à l'école ? Qu'avez-vous fait après le collège ?
 - What about your partner? Are they from around here? What do they do? Et votre conjoint ? Vient-il/elle d'ici ? Que fait-il/elle dans la vie ?

Main Interview

2. What have been the main issues you have encountered in entering and maintaining employment? (depends if person says they have worked or not) (10 minutes – may be longer for father?) Quelles sont les principales difficultés que vous avez rencontrées en essayant d'intégrer le monde du travail et maintenir un emploi stable ?
3. How have care issues affected you in entering and maintaining employment? Quelle a été l'influence de la question de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants sur vos expériences d'intégrant le monde du travail et de maintenant un emploi stable ?
 - * **Neighbourhood (Family, friends and others in the neighbourhood)** - Do you have family and friends nearby? Are they important in helping you with your work and family responsibilities? (10 minutes) **Voisinage (la famille, les amis et les autres dans le quartier)** - Avez-vous de la famille et des amis dans les environs ?
 - * **Services** – What do you think of childcare provision in this area (cost, availability, suitability)? What about other services such as SureStart? (UK only). Have you used tax credits, or parental leave schemes? How did they affect your work-life balance? (10 minutes). **Infrastructures** - Que pensez-vous des infrastructures de garde d'enfants dans ce quartier ? Avez-vous pris un congé parental ? Pourquoi/pourquoi pas ? **Comment avez-vous vécu cette période ?** Comment la vivez-vous si vous êtes actuellement dans cette situation ? Avez-vous reçu des crédits d'impôts pour les frais de garde de vos enfants ?

- * **Work and training** – Do you feel under pressure to find a job? Where does the pressure come from? What have your experiences of job search (JobcentrePlus/Pôle Emploi) been? Do you think the Council/government should be doing more? How can they improve? Have you done any training (where, how long for, how was it)? Do you volunteer? Why? How is it? (10 minutes). **Le travail et la formation** - Vous sentez-vous obligé de trouver un emploi ? D'où vient cette obligation ? Décrivez-moi vos expériences de chercher un emploi ? Est-ce que le pôle emploi vous-avez aidé de trouver un emploi ? Comment ? Pensez-vous que le pôle emploi ou le gouvernement devraient faire plus pour aider les gens à trouver de l'emploi ? Quoi ? Avez-vous suivi un programme de formation (où ? pendant combien de temps ? C'était comment ? Avez-vous un référent RSA ?
- * **Environment** – How do you find this area in terms of balancing your work and family ambitions? What's it like getting around this neighbourhood (transport)? Do you feel safe? Is it a good neighbourhood for children (opportunities for play, atmosphere)? **L'environnement** - Comment trouvez-vous ce quartier en termes de la conciliation entre la responsabilité pour la garde de vos enfants et vos ambitions de travail ? Vous sentez-vous en sécurité dans le quartier ? Est-ce un bon quartier pour des enfants (aires de jeux, ambiance).

Conclusion (10 minutes)

4. Do you have the employment situation now that you would ideally want? Avez-vous votre situation d'emploi idéal ?
5. What is your ideal balance of work and family time? (Do you want to work? What age do you think children should be before their parents work?). Quelle est votre organisation idéale du travail et de la famille ? (Voulez-vous travailler ? Quel devrait les enfants avoir avant leurs parents travaillent ?)
6. Have you been able to achieve this balance of work and family time? (5 minutes). Jusqu'à quel point avez-vous réussi à obtenir cette organisation idéale de temps de travail et temps de famille ?
7. Is there one thing would help you the most to balance your work and family ambitions? Y a-t-il une chose que vous souhaitez que vous pourriez changer afin de mieux concilier vos ambitions de travail et de famille ?
8. Where do you hope to be in 5 year's time? What are your ambitions for the future? Comment vous voyez-vous dans 5 ans ? Quelles sont vos ambitions pour l'avenir ?
9. Why did you agree to take part in this interview today? Pourquoi avez-vous participé dans cet entretien aujourd'hui ?
10. Is there anything else that you think is important that I haven't asked about? Celles sont toutes les questions que j'ai à vous poser, y-a-t-il autre chose que vous pensez est important que nous n'avons pas discuté ?

Appendix B: Information Sheet in English and French



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13th December 2012

Work and Care Issues for Out-of-work Parents in France and the UK Information Sheet

You have shown interest in taking part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me, Abigail Taylor, if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the project?

The project focuses on the impact of work and care issues on the lives of out-of-work parents. First, it will look into the ideal work and family set-up for out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK. Secondly, it will explore the experiences of out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK of balancing their care responsibilities with their work ambitions. To what extent can out-of-work partnered parents achieve their ideal work-care set-up? How do work-care issues affect out-of-work partnered parents in France and the UK in entering and maintaining employment? The study aims to understand parents' experiences in order to suggest policy recommendations for partnered out-of-work families.

The project will ask out-of-work partnered parents about their experiences of these issues. Both parents will be interviewed. Questions will be around how views on motherhood and fatherhood, support from family and friends, the quality of local services, work and training opportunities, and neighbourhood characteristics affect parental experiences.

The project is motivated by differences in policy (e.g. labour market, work-family and employment policies) and parenting patterns in France and the UK. Few studies of how partnered out-of-work families balance work and care responsibilities currently exist, especially in relation to France. How similar are your experiences compared to those of parents in France?

Who can take part?

- Couples living in the local area in Sheffield who are both out-of-work and have at least one child under the age of 13. You do not need to be looking for employment to take part.

The project aims to interview 20 parents in Sheffield and 20 parents in Lille (northern France). You and your partner need to both be happy to be interviewed about your experiences to take part. Interviews cannot just be undertaken with one parent.



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Do I have to take part?

It is up to you and your partner to decide whether or not to take part. This information sheet has been designed to help you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to take part in the study, please return the enclosed pre-interview questionnaire to me either by email (abigail.taylor@shef.ac.uk) or by post (Department of French Studies, School of Languages and Cultures, The University of Sheffield, 1 Upper Hanover Street, Sheffield, S3 7RA). I will then contact you and your partner to arrange an interview time. Before the interviews start you and your partner will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason. You will be provided with the £10 gift voucher at the start of the interview as a thank you for attending.

What will happen if I take part?

- You and your partner will be asked to participate in an approximately 1 hour interview about your experiences. Both partners will be interviewed separately.
- The interviews will be conducted in a neutral environment easily accessible via public transport. Example venues include public buildings, community centres, cafes. The exact venue will be agreed upon at a later stage between the participant and me, Abigail Taylor.
- The interview will be recorded with a voice recorder.
- You and your partner will each be given a £10 gift voucher as a thank you for attending the interview.
- By signing the consent form you will be giving me, Abigail Taylor the permission to work with your anonymised data for transcription, analysis, presentations at conferences, teaching and publications.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Risks associated with taking part in the study are minimal. You will just be asked to talk about your experiences. One small but possible risk is that you may not enjoy talking about difficult aspects of your experiences.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will enable future policy to better target the needs of out-of-work partnered parents. Following the study, recommendations for how policy could be improved for partnered out-of-work families will be made to the UK and French governments.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

I will take care to ensure information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. A



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pseudonym will be chosen for each participant. Other information (such as date of birth, age of children, previous workplaces) that could identify participants will be anonymised.

Data from the interviews will be stored on my University password protected computer.

The audio recordings of the interviews made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations, teaching and publications. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research will be published in academic work. Participants will not be identified in any report or publication. The research is likely to be published in 2014. Participants will be asked if they would like to receive a copy of the final thesis by email. Participants can receive a copy of other published results by notifying me, Abigail Taylor.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project conforms to the University's Ethics Procedures. If for any reason, you would like to make a complaint about the research, please contact my supervisor, Professor Jan Windebank: j.windebank@shef.ac.uk or +44 (0)114 222 4888.

Thank you for reading this information sheet,

Abigail



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La question du travail et de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants pour des parents sans emploi : Fiche Informative

Vous avez porté de l'intérêt à participer à une étude. Avant de vous décider il est important de savoir de quoi il s'agit et pourquoi l'étude est si importante. Veuillez prendre le temps de lire cette page et de la discuter avec d'autres personnes si vous le voulez. Si vous avez des questions ou si vous voulez de plus amples renseignements, contactez-moi, Abigail Taylor. Prenez du temps pour décider si vous voulez participer ou pas. Je vous remercie de lire cette page.

Quels sont les objectifs de l'étude ?

L'étude se concentre sur l'impact de la question du travail et de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants sur les vies des parents sans emploi. Tout d'abord, elle recherchera l'organisation idéale du travail et de la famille pour des parents en couple sans emploi en France et en Grande-Bretagne. Deuxièmement, elle analysera les expériences des parents en couple sans emploi en France et en Grande-Bretagne de la conciliation entre leurs responsabilités pour la garde de leurs enfants et leurs ambitions de travail. Dans quelle mesure les parents en couple sans emploi, peuvent-ils réussir à obtenir un équilibre idéal entre le travail et la famille ? En quoi les difficultés de garde d'enfants ont eu un impact sur l'accès à un emploi stable ? L'étude vise à comprendre les expériences des parents afin de suggérer des recommandations de politique pour des familles en couple sans emploi.

Le but de l'étude est de s'enquérir auprès des parents en couple sans emploi de leurs expériences personnelles autour ces questions. Les questions seront centrées sur les manières dans lesquelles les vues des parents concernant les rôles maternel et paternel, le soutien de la famille et des amis, la qualité des infrastructures du quartier, les opportunités de travail et de formation, et les caractéristiques du quartier influencent les expériences parentaux.

L'étude est motivée par les différences dans les politiques menées (par exemple les politiques du marché du travail, de la conciliation travail-famille, et de l'emploi) et dans les stratégies parentales qui existent entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne. A ce jour il existe peu d'études (en particulier des études français) analysant comment les familles dont les deux parents sont en couple et sans emploi concilient leurs responsabilités de travail et de la garde des enfants. Dans quelle mesure les parents ont-ils les mêmes expériences en France et en Grande-Bretagne ?



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Qui peut participer ?

- Les couples qui habitent à Fives, qui sont tous les deux sans emploi, et qui ont au moins un enfant de moins de 13 ans. Pour participer à l'étude vous n'avez pas besoin d'être en recherche d'emploi.

L'étude vise à mener des entretiens avec 20 couples à Lille et 20 couples à Sheffield (ville dans le nord d'Angleterre). Pour participer, votre époux/compagnon et vous-même doivent tous les deux être prêts à participer à un entretien. Il n'est pas possible d'interviewer un seul parent.

Dois-je participer ?

Personne n'est obligé de participer à cette étude. La participation à l'étude dépend de vous et de la décision de votre conjoint. Cette fiche informative a été créée pour vous aider à décider si vous voulez participer à cette étude. Si vous êtes prêts à y participer, veuillez me téléphoner au 06 70 18 83 91. Après je vous (vous et votre conjoint) contacterai afin de fixer la date du/des entretiens. On vous demandera de signer un formulaire de consentement avant de commencer l'entretien. Vous aurez le droit de refuser de répondre à des questions que vous considérez inconfortables et vous pourrez vous retirer de l'interview à tout moment, sans explication et sans des conséquences sur des avantages auxquels vous avez le droit. Vous recevrez un chèque-cadeau de 15€ au début de l'entretien pour vous remercier de participer à l'entretien.

Qu'est-ce qui va se passer si je décide de participer ?

- Vous et votre conjoint serez invités à participer à un entretien (environ 1 heure) au sujet de vos expériences. Les entretiens seront menés avec vous et votre conjoint soit ensemble soit séparément.
- Les entretiens seront organisés dans un endroit neutre, facilement accessible par transport public. Par exemple dans un café ou un bâtiment public. Le lieu exact sera déterminé à une date ultérieure par moi, Abigail Taylor et chaque participant.
- L'entretien sera enregistré par un enregistreur vocal numérique.
- Votre conjoint et vous recevrez tous deux un chèque-cadeau de 15€ pour vous remercier de participer à l'entretien.
- Votre signature du formulaire de consentement me (Abigail Taylor) donne la permission d'utiliser vos données rendues anonymes pour la transcription, les analyses, leur illustration pendant des présentations de conférence, l'enseignement et les publications.



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Y-a-t-il des inconvénients et risques à participer ?

Il y a très peu de risques de participer à l'étude. Pendant les entretiens je ne demanderai aux participants que de parler de leurs expériences. Le seul aspect qui puisse être problématique est que les participants aient des difficultés à parler de leurs expériences difficiles.

Y-a-t-il des avantages à participer ?

Bien qu'il n'y ait pas d'avantages immédiats pour les personnes qui participent à l'étude, on espère que ce travail permettra la mise en place d'une politique future mieux adaptée aux parents en couple sans travail. À la fin de cette étude, des recommandations pour améliorer la politique envers les familles en couple sans travail seront faites aux gouvernements français et britannique.

Des données personnelles à propos de moi dans l'étude seront-elles gardées confidentielles ?

Je m'assurerai personnellement que tous renseignements collectés au cours de la recherche seront traités comme informations strictement confidentielles. Il ne sera pas possible de vous identifier dans aucun rapport ou aucune publication. Je choisirai un pseudonyme pour chaque participant et je rendrai anonymes les informations fournies qui pourraient identifier les participants (par exemple la date de naissance, l'âge des enfants, des anciens lieux de travail etc.).

Les données des entretiens seront conservées sur mon ordinateur universitaire personnel.

Les enregistrements audio faits pendant cette recherche ne seront utilisés que pour la transcription, l'analyse et l'illustration pendant des présentations de conférence, l'enseignement et les publications. Aucun autre usage ne sera fait des enregistrements sans votre autorisation écrite, et personne en dehors du projet n'aura l'autorisation d'accéder aux enregistrements originaux.

Où les résultats de l'étude seront-ils publiés ?

Les résultats de la recherche seront publiés dans des travaux académiques. Il ne sera pas possible de vous identifier dans aucun rapport ou aucune publication. Il est probable que les résultats seront publiés en 2014. On demandera aux participants s'ils veulent recevoir par mail une copie de la thèse finale. Vous pouvez recevoir une copie des autres résultats publiés en me notifiant.

Cette étude se conforme-t-elle au règlements d'éthique et de déontologie ?

Ce projet se conforme aux règlements d'éthique et de déontologie de l'Université. Si vous n'êtes pas satisfait de la façon dont nous avons conduit l'entretien, veuillez-vous adresser directement à ma directrice de thèse, Professeur Jan Windebank: j.windebank@shef.ac.uk ou au numéro: +44 (0) 114 222 4888.

Je vous remercie d'avoir pris le temps de lire cette fiche informative,

Abigail

Appendix C: Flyer in English and French



Work and Care Issues for Out-of-work Parents in France and the UK

I am a student at Sheffield University and I am conducting a study into the impact of work and care issues on the lives of out-of-work parents. The project will look into:

- * *The ideal balance between work and family life in France and the UK for out-of-work couples with children.*
- * *These families' experiences of balancing their care responsibilities with their work ambitions. How do work-care issues affect their experiences of finding and keeping jobs?*

The study aims to understand parents' experiences in order to make policy recommendations.

I would like to talk to:

- couples who are both out-of-work
- have at least one child under the age of 13
- live in the local area. **It is not necessary to be looking for employment to take part.**

The interview will be **confidential**. Information provided will be anonymised (I will not use names of individuals, date of birth, age of children, previous workplaces). I will not pass on the information to anyone else.

Interviews will last approximately 1 hour and will take place in a public venue easily accessible via public transport such as a community centre. Each partner will be interviewed separately.

Each participant will receive a **£10 gift voucher** as a thank you for attending the interview.

Can you help me? Participation is voluntary. **If you are interested in taking part, please contact me, Abigail Taylor on 07581 669 498 or abigail.taylor@shef.ac.uk.** If you know a couple who are in this position, please pass this flyer to them.

La question du travail et de la responsabilité des enfants pour des parents sans emploi en France et au Royaume-Uni

Je suis étudiante à l'Université de Sheffield au Royaume-Uni. Je mène une étude concernant l'impact des questions du travail et de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants sur les vies des parents sans emploi. L'étude recherche :

- * L'organisation idéale du travail et de la famille en France et en Grande-Bretagne pour des parents en couple sans emploi.
- * Les expériences de ces familles quant à l'équilibre entre leurs responsabilités pour la garde de leurs enfants et leurs ambitions professionnelles. En quoi les difficultés de garde d'enfants ont eu un impact sur l'accès à un emploi stable ?

L'étude vise à comprendre les expériences des parents afin de suggérer des recommandations de politique.

Nous recherchons :

- des couples dont les deux parents sont sans emploi.
- qui ont au moins un enfant de moins de 13 ans.
- qui habitent dans le quartier de Fives à Lille. **Pour participer à l'étude vous n'avez pas besoin d'être en recherche d'emploi.**

L'entretien sera confidentiel. Un pseudonyme sera choisi pour chaque participant et les informations fournies qui pourraient identifier les participants seront rendues anonymes (par exemple la date de naissance, l'âge des enfants, des anciens lieux de travail etc). Les données recueillies seront confidentielles.

Les entretiens dureront environ 1 heure et auront lieu dans un bâtiment public facilement accessible par transport public. Les entretiens seront menés avec les deux parents, vus soit ensemble soit séparément. Chaque participant recevra une **carte-cadeau de 15€** pour les remercier de leur participation à l'entretien.

Pouvez-vous m'aider ? Personne n'est obligé de participer à cette étude. **Si vous êtes intéressé et voulez participer à l'étude, veuillez me téléphoner au 06 70 18 83 91.** Si vous connaissez des couples dans cette situation, veuillez leur faire passer ce dépliant.

Je vous remercie d'avoir pris le temps de lire ce dépliant, Abigail TAYLOR

Appendix D: Pre-Interview Questionnaire in English and French



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13th December 2012

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Research Project: Work and Care Issues for Out-of-work Parents in France and the UK.

In order to ensure you and your partner are eligible to take part in the project and help me to plan the interviews, it would be useful if you could complete the questionnaire below.

You can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason. You will become entitled to the £10 gift voucher upon attending the interview.

As explained in the information sheet, all information collected on this form will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

Your Name:

Your Age:

Your Home Language:

Your Partner's Name:

Your Partner's Age:

Your Partner's Home Language:

The number of children you have:

The age of your children:

The area you and your partner live in:

Please highlight (e.g. by marking in another colour) which options apply to you and your partner:

You are: Working Not working

Your partner is: Working Not working



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Please select your highest level of education:

- GCSE/equivalent
- A level/equivalent
- Completed Degree
- Completed postgraduate qualification

Please select your partner's highest level of education:

- GCSE/equivalent
- A level/equivalent
- Completed Degree
- Completed postgraduate qualification

During the last 5 years you have mainly been:

- Working full time (more than 30 hours a week)
- Working part-time (8-30 hours a week)
- Carer (of home, family, etc.) (full time)
- Student (full-time)
- Temporarily unemployed (but actively seeking work)
- Other permanently unemployed (e.g. chronically sick, independent means)



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During the last 5 years your partner has mainly been:

Working full time (more than 30 hours a week)

Working part-time (8-30 hours a week)

Carer (of home, family, etc.) (full time)

Student (full-time)

Temporarily unemployed (but actively seeking work)

Other permanently unemployed (e.g. chronically sick, independent means)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form,

Abigail



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Questionnaire d'avant entretien

Projet de recherche : La question du travail et de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants pour des parents sans emploi

Afin d'assurer que vous et votre époux/compagnon sont éligibles à participer à la recherche et à m'aider à organiser les entretiens, il serait utile que vous complétiez le questionnaire ci-dessous.

Vous pourrez vous retirer de l'interview à tout moment, sans explication. Vous aurez le droit au chèque-cadeau de 15€ au début de l'entretien pour vous remercier de votre participation à l'entretien.

Comme expliqué dans la fiche informative, tous les renseignements collectés sur ce questionnaire seront traités comme des informations strictement confidentielles. Il ne sera pas possible de vous identifier dans aucun rapport ou dans aucune publication.

Votre nom :

Votre âge :

Votre langue maternelle :

Le nom de votre époux/compagnon :

L'âge de votre époux/compagnon :

La langue maternelle de votre époux/compagnon :

Le nombre d'enfants que vous avez :

L'âge de vos enfants :

Le quartier où vous et votre époux/compagnon habitez :



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Veillez entourer les options qui concernent vous et votre époux/compagnon:

Vous êtes En travail Sans travail

Votre époux/

compagnon est : En travail Sans travail

Veillez sélectionner le diplôme le plus élevé que vous avez obtenu :

BEPC seul

CAP, BEP ou équivalent

Baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel

Baccalauréat + 2 ans

Baccalauréat + 3 ans

Baccalauréat + 5 ans

Veillez sélectionner le diplôme le plus élevé que votre époux/compagnon a obtenu :

BEPC seul

CAP, BEP ou équivalent

Baccalauréat général, technologique ou professionnel

Baccalauréat + 2 ans

Baccalauréat + 3 ans

Baccalauréat + 5 ans



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Pendant les 5 dernières années vous avez passé la plupart de votre temps à :

- Travailler à temps complet (35 heures par semaine)
- Travailler à mi-temps (8-30 heures par semaine)
- S'occuper des proches, de la maison etc. à temps complet
- Etudier (à temps complet)
- Être temporairement sans emploi mais cherchant activement du travail
- Être définitivement inactif (par exemple être en maladie, avoir des moyens indépendants)

Pendant les 5 dernières années votre époux/compagnon a passé la plupart de son temps à :

- Travailler à temps complet (35 heures par semaine)
- Travailler à mi-temps (8-30 heures par semaine)
- S'occuper des proches, de la maison etc. à temps complet
- Etudier (à temps complet)
- Être temporairement sans emploi mais cherchant activement du travail
- Être définitivement inactif (par exemple être en maladie, avoir des moyens indépendants)

Je vous remercie d'avoir pris le temps de remplir ce questionnaire,

Abigail

Appendix E: Consent Form in English and French



Abigail Taylor
Postgraduate Student
Department of French Studies,
School of Languages and Cultures
The University of Sheffield
1 Upper Hanover Street
Sheffield
S3 7RA
Email: abigail.taylor@shef.ac.uk
Tel: 07581 669 498
13th December 2012

Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Work and Care Issues for Out-of-work Parents in France and the UK		
Name of Researcher: Abigail Taylor		
		Please initial box
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 13 th December 2012 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.		<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential with data from the interviews being stored only on Abigail Taylor's University password protected computer. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.		<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that my responses during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations, teaching and publications. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.		<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and publications.		<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant (or legal representative)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Lead Researcher	Date	Signature
<i>To be signed and dated in presence of the participant</i>		
<i>Copies:</i>		
<i>Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record, which must be kept in a secure location.</i>		



Abigail Taylor
Postgraduate Student
Department of French Studies,
School of Languages and Cultures
The University of Sheffield
1 Upper Hanover Street
Sheffield
S3 7RA
Email: abigail.taylor@shef.ac.uk
Tel: 06 70 18 83 91
13th December 2012

Formulaire de consentement pour les participants

Titre du Projet de recherche : La question du travail et de la responsabilité de la garde des enfants pour des parents sans emploi		
Nom de chercheuse : Abigail Taylor		
Merci de signer avec vos initiales		
1. Je confirme que j'ai lu et compris la fiche informative datée du 13 décembre 2012 expliquant l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus, et que j'ai eu la possibilité de poser des questions sur l'étude.		<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Je comprends que ma participation est volontaire, que je peux choisir de ne pas participer en partie ou en totalité au projet, et que je peux me retirer à n'importe quel moment sans être pénalisé ou désavantagé d'une quelconque façon.		<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Je comprends que mes réponses seront gardées strictement confidentielles. Les données des entretiens ne seront que conservées sur l'ordinateur universitaire personnel d'Abigail Taylor. Je donne ma permission aux membres de l'équipe de recherche d'accéder à mes réponses anonymes.		<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Je comprends que mes réponses ne seront utilisées que pour l'analyse et l'illustration pendant des présentations de conférence, l'enseignement et les publications. Je comprends que mon nom ne sera pas lié aux documents de recherche et que mon identité n'apparaîtra dans aucun rapport ou dans aucune publication résultant de la recherche.		<input type="checkbox"/>
5. J'autorise l'utilisation de mes réponses personnelles dans des études et publications futures.		<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Je consens à participer à l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus.		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____
Nom du Participant (ou avocat)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Chef de recherche	Date	Signature
<i>À signer et dater en présence du participant</i>		
Copies: <i>Une fois que ce contrat a été signé par toutes les parties, il faut que le participant reçoive une copie du formulaire de consentement signé et daté, et la fiche informative. Une copie du formulaire de consentement signé et daté devrait être mise dans le dossier principal du projet, qui doit être gardé dans un endroit sécurisé.</i>		

Appendix F: Tables Outlining How Participants Were Recruited

Sheffield

	Couple Identification Letter	Recruited at/via
1	Couple A	Street Flyering
2	Couple B	Street Flyering
3	Couple C	Street Flyering
4	Couple D	Referral from organisation
5	Couple E	Referral from organisation
6	Couple F	Talk at organisation
7	Couple G	Street Flyering
8	Couple H	Snowballing
9	Couple I	Snowballing
10	Couple J	Referral from organisation
11	Couple K	Street Flyering
12	Couple L	Street Flyering
13	Couple M	Talk at organisation
14	Couple N	Street Flyering
15	Couple O	Street Flyering
16	Couple P	Street Flyering
17	Couple Q	Participant phoned me after being passed flyer by neighbour
18	Couple R	Street Flyering
19	Couple S	Street Flyering

Lille

	Couple Identification Letter	Recruited at/via
1	Couple A	Referral from organisation
2	Couple B	Referral from organisation
3	Couple C	Referral from organisation
4	Couple D	Snowballing
5	Couple E	Snowballing
6	Couple F	Snowballing
7	Couple G	Snowballing
8	Couple H	Referral from organisation
9	Couple I	Referral from organisation
10	Couple J	Street Flyering
11	Couple K	Referral from organisation
12	Couple L	Referral from organisation
13	Couple M	Referral from organisation
14	Couple N	Talk at organisation
15	Couple O	Talk at organisation
16	Couple P	Street Flyering
17	Couple Q	Talk at organisation
18	Couple R	Talk at organisation
19	Couple S	Talk at organisation

Appendix G: Approval of Application for Ethical Permission

9/28/2015

University of Sheffield Mail - Ethics application approved



Abigail R Taylor <abigail.taylor@sheffield.ac.uk>

Ethics application approved

1 message

Dagmar S Divjak <d.divjak@sheffield.ac.uk>

1 February 2013 at 15:19

To: Abigail R Taylor <frp11art@sheffield.ac.uk>

Cc: "Claire L Leavitt (Google Drive)" <c.leavitt@sheffield.ac.uk>, PGR-enquiries <pgr-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk>, Janice E Windebank <j.windebank@sheffield.ac.uk>

Dear Abigail (cc to supervisor and PGR officers for info),

I am writing to let you know that your ethics application has been approved. The SLC ethics reviewers are happy for you to proceed with the proposed research as of today.

Two of the reviewers suggested 3 optional amendments each (i.e. it is left to your discretion whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

1. There is already a telephone number on the consent form, flyer and info sheet. Is this the dedicated number/SIM card mentioned in the application form? Consider buying a separate one in France as it will be cheaper for you and the possible participants to contact you.
2. Take good care that the language on information sheet and consent form is comprehensible to all.
3. Is there any likelihood that you might want to use the data collected from the interviews in future research projects? If so, anticipate this on the consent form. It now specifically refers to this particular project. If not, make clear whether/how the data will be deleted or stored.

i) The interviews will take place between February 2013 and July 2013 (just to confirm the dates that are on the form rather than on the application coversheet)

ii) On the consent form consider rewording point 4 to include mention of publications (with data anonymised). It is on the information sheet but maybe good to appear on the consent form too.

iii) On the pre-interview questionnaire consider using the term 'home language/s' rather than 'first language' as the latter could be confusing.

Good luck with your project,
Dagmar Divjak

On 20/12/2012 10:29, Abigail R Taylor wrote:

Dear Dr Divjak,
Please find attached my completed Ethics Application Form. I have also attached a flyer advertising my proposed study, a pre-interview questionnaire, an information sheet and a consent form for the project.

I have left a signed copy of Part B of the Application Form in your pigeon hole in Jessop West.

Best wishes,

Abigail
--
Abigail Taylor
PhD Candidate
Department of French Studies
School of Languages and Cultures

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=69f9b52fd6&view=pt&q=d.divjak%40sheffield.ac.uk&qs=true&search=query&th=13c9657475dfeaba&siml=13c96574...> 1/2

9/28/2015

University of Sheffield Mail - Ethics application approved

University of Sheffield
Jessop West
1 Upper Hannover St
Sheffield
S3 7RA
email: frp11art@shef.ac.uk

—
Dr Dagmar Divjak
Reader in Slavic Languages and Linguistics
University of Sheffield

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w: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/russian/staff/profiles/divjakd.html>

Times Higher Education University of the Year 2011

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/?ui=2&ik=69f9b52fd6&view=pt&q=d.divjak%40sheffield.ac.uk&qs=true&search=query&th=13c9657475dfeaba&siml=13c96574...> 2/2

ETHICS REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FORM

This form is for use when ethically reviewing a research ethics application form.

1. Name of Ethics Reviewer:	Dr Kristine Horner
------------------------------------	--------------------

2. Research Project Title:	A NEIGHBOURHOOD STUDY OF WORK-CARE INTERACTION AMONG OUT-OF-WORK PARTNERED PARENTS IN FRANCE AND THE UK
3. Principal Investigator (or Supervisor):	Abigail Taylor (PGR student) Professor Jan Windebank (supervisor)
4. Academic Department / School:	Modern Languages & Cultures/French

5. I confirm that I do not have a conflict of interest with the project application Yes

6. I confirm that, in my judgment, the application should:

Be approved:	Be approved with <i>suggested</i> amendments in '7' below:	and/or Be approved providing <i>requirements</i> specified in '8' below are met:	NOT be approved for the reason(s) given in '9' below:
	X		

7. Approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (i.e. it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments):

- i) The interviews will take place between February 2013 and July 2013 (just to confirm the dates that are on the form rather than on the application coversheet)
- ii) On the consent form consider rewording point 4 to include mention of publications (with data anonymised). It is on the information sheet but maybe good to appear on the consent form too.
- iii) On the pre-interview questionnaire consider using the term 'home language/s' rather than 'first language' as the latter could be confusing.

8. Approved providing the following, compulsory requirements are met (i.e. the ethics reviewers need to see the required changes):

--

9. Not approved for the following reason(s):

--

10. Date of Ethics Review: 31 January 2013

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