The Impact of Migration on Paid Work and Child-Care Arrangements Among Polish Migrant Parents in Scotland

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This paper draws on a qualitative study of Polish parents in thirty families who migrated to Scotland after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004. It investigates the different ways in which these parents negotiate child-care and paid work, looking at how their preferences and choices relate to social and policy norms in Poland and the UK, to their own personal life trajectories, and to the contexts and opportunities available to them in Scotland.

In my analysis, I make use of theory relating to labour market change and to women’s preferences in work, drawing on Catherine Hakim’s ‘Preference Theory’. I look at the relevance of historical influences and norms stemming from communism and Catholicism in Poland, as well as the more recent impact of neoliberalism, on paid work and child-care strategies. In my analysis, I highlight in particular the importance placed by parents on the opportunities provided by the more flexible labour market, greater availability of part-time work and easier access to vocational training for parents in the UK than in Poland. To assist analysis, I distinguish three family types within my study group: first, young families in which parents migrated singly and subsequently started families in the UK; second, older families who migrated with school-age children in search of a better standard of living; and third, professional or skilled parents who migrated to take up employment in their field in the UK. I find that each type of family is associated with a different pattern of child-care and employment in the UK and explore how migration has impacted on parents’ ability to enact their chosen lifestyle.

Keywords: Polish migration, migrant families, lifestyle choices, work and child-care, Catholicism, communism, neoliberalism

1 The data presented in this paper was collected as part of my doctoral research project at the University of Edinburgh, funded by the ESRC. I am currently working as an independent researcher.
INTRODUCTION

This paper makes use of data from a study of Polish families who migrated to live in the UK after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 and who live in and around Edinburgh in Scotland. It explores how migration affects the choices of Polish parents in relation to family lifestyle and the division of paid work and child-care. It looks at how different types of family within this group differ in their preferences and identifies some potential sources of parents’ stated preferences and attitudes in relation to paid work and child-care. It presents interview data demonstrating how these parents see migration as having enhanced their ability to realise their preferred family lifestyles in relation to patterns of paid work and child-care and explores some of the other ways in which migration impacts on parental choices and lifestyles.

The paper starts by looking at the arrival of Polish families in the UK and indications of the numbers and types of families living in Scotland. The next section identifies and discusses some of the ideological influences that are likely to generate the attitudes and preferences of Polish parents over work and child-care. In the third section I look at the likely effects of migration on families. I then describe my study and drawing on quotations from the interviews to explore the different attitudes expressed by the study group members and their adopted lifestyles. In the final section of analysis I look at key ways in which migration has impacted on the choices available to parents in relation to child-care and paid work. Finally, I summarise my findings.

It is worth noting that the approach presented in this paper is acknowledged to be an ‘outsider’ analysis of Polish families, from the perspective of a British researcher. While, as a result, it perhaps fails to engage fully with Polish academic literature in the field of family and ideology, and this is perhaps a weakness of the analysis, I would argue that it is important in the context of migration to view experiences and influences on migrants from both insider and outsider perspectives to further a fuller understanding and cross-cultural communication of the complex influences on migrants. Particular issues that have been highlighted as generating potential failures of communication are the meaning and interpretation of the terms ‘communism’ (which would in Polish literature perhaps be referred to more commonly as ‘socialism’ – a term that holds a rather different meaning to British readers) and ‘neoliberalism’, which again is interpreted differently in Poland and the UK. I endeavour to make my use of these terms clear in the article.
POLISH POST-ACCESSION FAMILIES IN SCOTLAND

As has been frequently described in the migration literature, following Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004, the flow of migrants into the UK was dramatically larger than had been anticipated by policy makers and academics (Dustmann et al. 2003). It was also much larger than that to other European countries with over 625,000 migrants arriving in the UK between 2004 and 2009 (UK Border Agency 2009). This resulted from several factors: first, the UK, along with Ireland and Sweden, was unusual among the ‘old’ EU countries in not imposing temporary work restrictions on the new accession migrants; second, existing networks between Poland and the UK which result from earlier migration from Poland, both in the post-war period and in the years immediately prior to 2004, provided a basis for further migration, and finally the fact that English language is spoken in the UK made it more accessible and useful to prospective migrants, with its perceived potential for opening up career and migration prospects for the future.

The new Polish migrants settled in areas across the UK. The ratio of new accession migrants to the existing population was roughly similar in Scotland to that across the rest of the UK: Census figures for 2011 show 579,000 Polish-born residents in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2012) while those from Scotland indicate 61,000 ethnically Polish residents (General Register Office for Scotland 2011; while these figures are not precisely equivalent, they give a rough indication for comparison). Hence, by 2011, Polish residents constituted roughly one per cent of the population across the UK. In Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow share a history of receiving the most significant number of immigrants. After 2004 Edinburgh overtook Glasgow and became the Scottish city with the highest numbers of incoming migrants. Census figures for the city show 12,829 ethnically Polish residents out of a total population of 476,626, making up a little over 2.5 per cent (National Records of Scotland 2014).

The majority of the post-accession migrants were young adults: 72% were between 20 and 29, with a median age of 25 (Fihel and Kaczmarczyk, 2009: 34). It is clear from the 2011 Scottish Census results, as well as data from the Scottish education system, that children were increasingly represented among Polish residents. Many of the original single Polish migrants had settled and were starting families in Scotland. In 2010, 4 per cent of births in Scotland were to mothers born in A8 countries (General Register Office for Scotland, 2011a: 18). It is also evident that a substantial number of older families had migrated together with school-aged children: in September 2011, 7,054 pupils in Scottish schools stated their home language to be Polish (Scottish Government, 2012 Table 1.14). Scottish census results for 2001 indicate that there were 6,344
ethnically Polish children aged 0 to 4 in Scotland and 6,978 children aged 5 to 17 (National Records of Scotland 2014). It seems likely that the great majority of the children of school age migrated to the UK with their parents after 2004.

Families’ experiences of migration might be anticipated to differ substantially, along with their family stage at migration, with some families arriving together with school-age children, and others consisting of young single migrants who settled and gave birth to children in the UK. Further differences in their experiences are likely to result from parents’ differing English language ability and employment-related qualifications and skills. The study drawn on in this paper aimed to explore family lifestyle strategies across all of these different kinds of family, examining how the key differences (family stage at migration, English language level, employment skills and educational qualifications) related to family lifestyles and choices. These relationships are explored in the context of attitudes generated through societal and historical norms and ideologies in Poland, the UK and worldwide, and individuals’ personal histories in relation to these. It is to these ideologies and norms that I turn in the next section.

IDEOLOGICAL AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES

In analysing the sources of attitudes of Polish migrant parents in relation to work and child-care, I distinguish three primary ideological influences on their work and child-care preferences: Catholicism, communism and ‘Western’ values associated with neoliberalism and modernity. I start by explaining my choice of these ideologies and my use of each term. In particular the terms ‘communist’ and ‘neoliberal’ are used differently in the UK and Poland. While they hold many different connotations, the use I make of them relates each to parental work and child-care beliefs and behaviours, in a way I outline here.

I take an ‘ideology’ to be a set of ideals or beliefs relating to social policies and norms of behaviour. In my choice of ideologies for analysis of the attitudes and behaviours in relation to work and child-care among the participants in my study, I looked to longstanding historical norms and influences on Polish family life as well as current dominant influences on families in the modern world more widely. Participants’ responses could be seen to resonate with particular aspects of the three ideologies identified, and because of this I chose these as the focus of my analysis.

‘Communism’ and ‘socialism’ are labels which carry quite different meanings in the UK and in Poland, and as a British researcher I clearly have a different
and a less personal or experiential understanding of communism than people who have experienced living under a communist/socialist regime. I use ‘communism’ in this paper to describe an underlying set of beliefs, originally derived from Marxism, but whose influence on Polish parents is likely to be mediated by norms in its implementation during the communist/socialist regime in Poland. In relation to parental attitudes to work and child-care, I attribute to communist ideology in particular the notion of an obligation on adults to contribute to society through paid work, and the expectation that children should be in some kind of communal child-care from the age of four while mothers will be in paid work. Gender-equality within a communist ideology is taken to carry the sense that fathers and mothers have an equal obligation to engage in paid work and to receive equal pay for this (but see below for a discussion of the fact that in its Polish implementation, communism has been found to have relied on women maintaining responsibility for child-care, to a similar extent as was assumed by the UK welfare state in its conception in the 1950s).

The second ideology drawn on, ‘neoliberalism’, is also interpreted differently in dominant understanding in the two countries. Increasingly dominant across the modern world in recent decades, neoliberalism has been a major influence on policy and individual attitudes in both Poland and the UK. In relation to family life, neoliberalism is taken in this article to emphasise individual freedom over work and life choices, and an obligation to be financially self-reliant. Neoliberalism is taken to generate a conception of gender-equality that differs from that implicit in communist ideology, in focusing on equality of freedom of choice over lifestyle, and an obligation for personal independence and self-reliance applying to both women and men. Gender equality in these terms can be interpreted as implying that fathers have an equal responsibility (and right) to mothers for child-care.

Catholicism, the third ideological influence, is taken to highlight the importance of close ties with extended family, of informal family-provided child-care, and of maintaining traditional patterns of family life, including that the mother should be the primary care-giver and the father the breadwinner.

It might justifiably be argued that linking attitudes with these three ideologies oversimplifies them, and that greater complexity, nuance and conflict could be identified within each ideology; these simple definitions, however, provide a basis for distinguishing some different potential roots of parents’ preference and lifestyles identified in participants’ accounts in my study.

We might expect that the influence of Catholicism would result in parents’ accounts showing evidence of values relating to traditional family practices and discourses. For example, the Polish nationalistic ideal of ‘Matka Polka’ (‘Polish mother’ or ‘Mother Poland’) (Heinen and Portet 2009; Fidelis 2004) might be
linked to an expectation for mothers to stay at home to provide child-care, and the traditional importance of extended family relationships might lead to a preference for child-care to be provided by grandmothers and other family members. From communist ideology, we might expect a focus on both parents engagement in paid work with a rationale for this relating to obligation to contribute to society through paid work. From neoliberal ‘Western’ influences, we might expect to see a focus on engagement in paid work stemming from the desire for individual fulfilment and independence, as well as an equal division of parental responsibility for child-care. I do not suggest here that migrant parents only encounter neoliberal influences on migration to the UK, as the influence of neoliberalism extends worldwide and, with the introduction of the market economy and Poland’s accession to the EU, clearly plays a strong role in shaping attitudes among the population in Poland too (see e.g. Galbraith 2008).

A further important influence on parents’ expectations and preferences is likely to be the norms prevalent in Polish society prior to emigration. It is worth noting in this context that communism, as implemented in Poland, allowed Catholic practices and traditions to be maintained to a significant extent (Davies 2001), and even strengthened the importance of Catholic family values within the population (Heinen and Portet 2009). It has been argued that work and child-care arrangements under communism as implemented in Poland to some extent supported the maintenance of traditional division of labour in the home: women carried out the bulk of child-care (as they did also in Western European societies in the 1960s and later); mothers were able to take three years off work after the birth of a baby, and grandmothers were able to take early retirement, enabling them to take on child-care roles to support mothers who were in paid work.

In understanding the accounts of the migrants’ preferences and strategies in interviews in the study, along with the three ideologies: Catholic, communist and neoliberal, I also identify the influence of established Polish social policy norms. Further, more individual and personal factors are likely to also influence choices over patterns of paid work and child-care; these may stem from an individual’s own family or work history. In “Preference theory” Hakim argues that women across all societies fall into three categories, work-centred, family-centred and ‘adaptive’ (Hakim 2000), so that naturally family-centred women are those who want to stay at home with children. I do not engage with the debate about whether parents may innately have different personal preferences in this paper (see, for example Kan 2005), but acknowledge that in their preferences parents are likely to diverge in individual ways from societal norms, with some prioritising child-care to a greater degree, while others prioritise paid work.
THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON FAMILY LIFESTYLE CHOICES

In looking at how migration impacted on families’ ability to realise their preferences in relation to paid work and child-care, I draw again on Catherine Hakim’s ‘Preference Theory’ (Hakim 2000). As part of this theory, Hakim argues that certain features of modern societies enable women to realise their preferences in relation to paid work and child-care, where previously they were unable to do so. The societal features she identifies as salient in this respect are, the availability of contraception, the establishment of equal opportunities in employment, the expansion of white-collar occupations and reduction of traditional industry, the shift from traditional full-time work to more flexible working conditions suitable for secondary earners, and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices of modern affluent societies (Hakim 2000: 7).

Looking at European statistics relating to earnings and labour it is clear that (up to 2008 at least) some of these factors have been achieved to a greater extent in the UK than in Poland. In particular we can point to the availability of part-time and flexible work, greater affluence and an individualistic lifestyle, and the extent to which equal opportunities in employment have been achieved. In relation to part-time work, labour statistics show that, while a lower proportion of working age women are in paid employment in Poland than in the UK: 52.4% in Poland in 2008, compared to 65.8% in the UK, a much higher proportion of women who are in employment in the UK are in part-time work, with only 11.7% of women in employment in part-time work in Poland, compared to 41.8% in the UK (EUROSTAT 2012).

Earning power and standard of living also differed greatly between the two countries, as statistics again demonstrate. Around the time of Poland’s accession to the EU, earnings were significantly lower in Poland than in the UK. While the average annual salary in Poland in 2005 was PLN28,300, then equivalent to about £4,600 (GUS 2012: 176), median earnings for 2004–2005 in the UK were £22,900 (Office for National Statistics 2005: 2).

Academic analyses of the experiences of women during the post-communist transition highlight the range of impacts that rapid change in this period had on women’s participation in the labour market in Poland (see for example, Pollert 2003; Stenning and Hardy 2005). The introduction of a free market led to major cuts in public sector jobs, in which women had been employed in disproportionately large numbers, but also to a shift from traditional industrial employment towards service sector work and employment in finance, in both of which women were better represented than men (Leven 2008). New private
sector employment resulted in increased sex-discrimination in recruitment and in reduced employment flexibility for women. While the communist regime in Poland had, as mentioned above, to an extent supported women in combining engagement in paid work with maintaining their traditional role as the main providers of child-care, cuts in child-care provision, combined with lack of flexibility, made it more difficult for women to maintain this balance (Galbraith 2008, Matysiak 2009). Matysiak argues that these factors, in combination with neoliberal influences leading to an increased desire for Western-level individualistic lifestyles, meant that couples postponed having children. It could be argued further that migrating provided a solution to this problem and thus enabled migrants to fulfil the conditions that allowed them to make the decision to start their families.

In their accounts the Polish parents in my study often attribute their ability to realise their family lifestyle preferences to migration. In doing this they cited some of the same societal features identified by Hakim as relevant to lifestyle choice, as having been achieved to a greater extent in Britain than in Poland. In particular they mentioned: greater affluence as a result of the higher earnings they can attain in the UK relative to living costs; greater availability of part-time and flexible work and training; and less gender-discrimination towards mothers seeking paid employment.

POLISH FAMILY STUDY AND FAMILY TYPES

The data used in this paper is drawn from a study of Polish families living in and around Edinburgh, carried out between 2009 and 2011. Thirty Polish families who migrated to the UK after 2004 were interviewed twice, over a period of a year. Interviews were semi-structured and carried out jointly with all members of the family who wished to participate. Families were accessed through a variety of different routes in order to include families representing a wide range over key factors anticipated as influencing the migration experience. These included: English language fluency, employment type, stage of family at arrival, children’s age and family structure. Locations where respondents were sought included: Catholic and non-denominational schools, Polish clubs, a Polish Saturday school, Polish delicatessens and a ‘SureStart’ Nursery scheme for Polish parents and toddlers as well as other places of work through my own indigenous British personal contacts.

2 Note that all interviewees’ names given in this article are pseudonyms.
Following the first round of fieldwork interviews, I observed that families seemed to fall into three rough groupings (with some families falling between types or sharing aspects of more than one type) in relation to their characteristics, attitudes and experiences. These groups could be described as follows:

1) Young families in which parents had migrated as single, usually highly-qualified, migrants, often shortly after graduating and before having children,
2) Older families who migrated with children, in which parents lacked fluent English and worked in unskilled employment in the UK; and
3) Professional or skilled parents who had found employment in the UK which utilised their skills and qualifications from Poland (who varied in age and family stage at migration).

In presenting the parents’ attitudes and experiences in relation to paid work and child-care, I begin by providing an overview, outlining views and patterns of family lifestyle which were associated with membership of each of these three groups in turn. For each view discussed, I point to its potential source as identified at the start of the paper: traditional Catholic values; communist ideals; neoliberal ‘Western’ values or Polish societal norms.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES 1:
YOUNG FAMILIES WHO CAME AS SINGLE MIGRANTS

Among this group, couples were noteworthy for prioritising, sometimes very strongly, an egalitarian division of child-care in their chosen lifestyle. This potentially reflects the influence of a neoliberal construction of gender-equality. This construction of gender-equality, focusing on fathers’ participation in child-care can be distinguished from that, prevalent across the whole study group, which emphasises the desirability of equal participation in paid work. The desire to achieve gender equality in paid work in itself could be identified either with a communist construction of gender-equality, holding that all adults have an obligation to contribute to society or, alternatively, with a neoliberal individualist ideology associated with the idea that individual fulfilment and autonomy are achieved primarily through engagement in paid work.

Young parents in this first group had reached a stage at which, having achieved sufficient English fluency during their first few years as single employed individuals in the UK, they were now able to embark on vocational courses and new careers. Prioritising shared child-care, as well as engagement in paid work, for several of these couples meant continual negotiation over, and changes to, their paid work and child-care arrangements and timetables. Some of these couples were engaged in non-standard hours of work and changed employment
frequently in order to successfully combine paid work with child-care and further their own careers. Some partners saw little of each other as their paid work shifts were specifically designed not to overlap in order to cover child-care needs.

Among the study group, for example, Edyta and Filip are a couple who describe a keen desire to negotiate over child-care and work and maintain an equal division of both. They are prepared to work shifts and have adopted a complicated and frequently changing lifestyle in order to meet these goals. Both parents graduated in Poland, Edyta in Political Science and Filip in Physical Education, and both subsequently decided that they would prefer not to pursue a career utilising their degree qualification. At the time of our first interview, Edyta is studying nursing and Filip, psychology. They both work shifts as auxiliary nurses and until very recently he also worked nights as a security guard, having switched from working as a PE teacher (making use of his degree qualification) in the years immediately after migration. The couple manage the care of their one year old daughter between them. They describe their lives as hectic, since their time off from work coincides only briefly during the week and they both work at weekends. By the time of our second interview, one year later, Edyta has graduated in nursing and they have moved to London so that she can take up a nursing job there. Filip has put his course on hold and has returned to work as a supply teacher again, while also providing the majority of the child-care.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES 2: OLDER FAMILIES WHO MIGRATED TOGETHER

This group was the largest in the study sample. Most of these families migrated with children of school age. Despite the majority of parents in these families stating their preference for an equal division of paid work between mother and father during interviews, in practice in the great majority of these families, in the years shortly after migration to the UK, the mother takes on the main responsibility for child-care and the father the role of primary breadwinner. As most parents in these families do not speak fluent English, employment is of necessity in unskilled manual work for both. For mothers, this work is almost invariably cleaning. Several mothers in the study managed to find or negotiate this kind of work at hours which allow them to pick up children from school and to be at home during the day when fathers were working and child-care is required.

These families are also notable for maintaining other more traditional family practices than is usual among British families, perhaps reflecting that they had lived as families in Poland for several years before emigrating. It is usual,
for example, for older children to be allocated regular housework tasks. Some younger children, who were noticeably better integrated with local children than their older siblings (as frequently evident from their strong Scottish accents) seemed to be rebelling from this norm, perhaps under the influence of their local school friends.

One example of a couple in this group are Emilia and Bartek, who migrated with two children, aged 9 and 14. Neither spoke English on arrival. Bartek had been employed as an engineer on the railway in Poland and Emilia had run a shop. In the UK Bartek found work as a kitchen assistant, Emilia works part-time cleaning private homes. Bartek’s job requires him to work long hours and shifts including evenings and weekends, with shift-changes often at short notice, and missing out on these leisure times with his family, for example on Sundays and feast days, is something he finds frustrating and upsetting.

Another couple in this group, Helena and Jacek, have two children who were 10 and 15 when they migrated. In Poland for the previous four years, Jacek had been working as a long distance Europe-wide truck driver and Helena as a care worker in Germany. Their children had lived with their grandparents, and the parents spent only one week together every two months. In Edinburgh Jacek works 12 hours a day, 5 days a week at a recycling plant, while Helena works slightly fewer hours, in a laundry. Neither have the employment or the flexibility they wish for, but migrating has at least allowed them to live together as a family unit again.

These families have migrated to improve their lives, having been under severe family pressures prior to migration, but their post-migration work patterns seem to stem more from necessity than to be a realisation of their ideals, with parents working longer hours than they would like and fathers having little choice over working evenings, weekends or holidays. This prevents them from participating fully in family leisure time. However, even among these families, parents comment that they have more time for their children than they did in Poland, and that work is more readily available and more reliable, as well as that they are more financially secure and have a better standard of living.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES 3:
PROFESSIONAL/SKILLED PARENTS

The third distinguished group consists of families in which parents had managed to find work in the UK which utilised their qualifications and employment skills and experience from Poland. Parents were either professional employees, usually graduates with vocational qualifications and fluent English
language working for example in IT or as architects, or skilled tradesmen, builders, joiners or electricians (there were, contrary to the stereotype, no plumbers in the study group) who had been engaged in paid work through employment networks in Poland and/or the UK.

Members of this group were the most willing among the study group to make use of nurseries for child-care of very young children, and some of them explained in interviews that they did not see this form of child-care, even for young children, as second best to parental care, but as providing something that they were unable to provide by way of education and socialisation. For example, Diana and Ryszard, both graduates, described their plans for their baby son to start at nursery:

*Diana:* I like him to go to the nursery. Even if I wasn’t going back to work, I really want him to go, because I think it’s important, you know, to develop socially...

*Ryszard:* And see something different...

*Diana:* ...and play with kids and catch up [with] the language really. Because we can speak English to him, but it’s not going to be the same. So, I think it’s gonna work well if he goes to nursery when he’s still young – he doesn’t speak and he goes there. I think it’s a kind of natural way for him to learn English.

Mothers in these professional families who lack fluent English or whose Polish qualifications are not recognised in the UK, and are as a result unable to utilise their qualifications straight away in employment, tend to stay at home with children, not feeling the financial pressure to take unskilled work. All of these mothers, however, planned to return to work once they have attained sufficiently fluent English and their children are at school. Zosia for example, stayed in Poland with their young son in order to finish her degree in Town Planning when her husband Mikolai first came to the UK to work as a painter and decorator. She and her husband Mikolai have a son of five and a baby daughter. She hopes eventually to find work in Scotland using her qualifications, but her English isn’t yet fluent so she is staying home with the children and attending evening classes in English. She says that as things have turned out she loves being at home with them – and gives the impression that she is surprised at this herself.
PARENTAL ATTITUDES

ATTITUDES TO STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS

The majority of mothers across the whole study group felt negatively about staying at home to care for children and not engaging in paid work. Their accounts suggest that they share the neoliberal individualist view that personal fulfilment is primarily gained through paid work, placing a lower valuation on the mother’s role as primary child-carer and regarding full-time child-care as boring, isolating and damaging to a woman’s status and abilities. Oliwia, for example, says:

*I have two children and I stayed home a long [time] as well, so I did lose some knowledge, because when you stay home all you do is nappies, bottles, crying, putting to sleep, and nappies, bottles... constantly the same thing. [...] I’m not this kind of person. My personality does not allow me to stay at home because I would be depressed, I would cry every day. I need to be busy to know that I’m alive.*

Adam and Hania, who have a one year old son also present this as a gender equality issue and point to paid employment as enabling social engagement:

*Adam: Obviously, I think it’s fair that both Hania and myself have a career, not only me. It’s not fair for Hania to just be a housewife, blah, blah... Hania: I’d like to do something other than be a housewife, just to go and be around people.*

Two mothers in the group however, asserted that they really wanted to stay home with their children while they are pre-school age and also went out of their way to emphasise how important building a family and enjoying the children was in their lives. Both were larger than average families. Their attitude could either be seen as supporting Hakim’s view that women fall into different categories in their preferences, with some mothers being naturally family-centred (Hakim 2000) or, alternatively, as reflecting that some Polish parents maintain traditional Polish Catholic family values. These mothers were well aware that their approach went against the dominant norm, and both enjoyed their previous employment and hope to return to paid work when their children are of school age. One of these mothers, Teresa, who had worked as a teacher and who has three children under five and is expecting her fourth baby at the time of our second interview says:
I loved working at school, I really loved it, but you know, you’ve got these different periods in your life and that’s the time that I would prefer to stay with them at the house. I really love my family, I’m so proud of them – you know you get house-proud people? I’m a family-proud one! [...] I know many people will not understand our decisions, even about having another child, but I love it.

A further attitude, not often overtly expressed in interviews, but appearing to underlie many parents’ accounts, relates to reliance on public funds. It is important to many of the families in the study that they manage life in the UK without receiving benefits or working tax credits (or relying on their parents). Two separate elements were distinguished in the accounts underlying this attitude. The first relates to an obligation to contribute to society and the second to the desire to be independent and self-reliant. This focus on self-reliance seems likely to relate to neoliberal individualist discourse, while that of obligation to contribute might stem from communist ideology. In recent years however, a focus on obligation, rather than simply freedom, to be financially self-reliant has increasingly also entered neoliberal discourse, and in British political debate ‘welfare-to-work’ polices and a discourse which contrasts the ‘hard working family’ from the ‘benefit scrounger’ have become the dominant political rhetoric. This makes it harder to identify one clear source of interviewees’ strong feelings about maintaining financial self-reliance. A further contributory factor for Polish migrants may be their awareness of accusations in the media that Eastern European migrants to Britain migrate because of the more generous benefit system in the UK. The desire to distance themselves from this inaccurate media portrayal of Polish migrants motives and behaviours may increase the strength of migrants’ desire for financial self-reliance.

A respondent whose account particularly seems to diverge from British attitudes in relation to this issue is Daria, who has a two year old. Daria is studying and hopes to return to work shortly. She illustrates her disapproval of reliance on benefits by describing another Polish family she knows. She is unhappy about their lifestyle, even though the husband is in paid work:

I don’t want to sound horrible, but he had a plan that he would bring [his wife and child] over and they would live on benefits. That’s basically it, and I really don’t like it, but it’s his choice. He works hard and [mother], she’s the kind of person that, it’s hard because she doesn’t speak English at all, she’s really shy. So at the moment they just have the benefits and she stays at home and takes care of [their son], and [father] is working.
Later, Daria seems to draw both on attitudes to benefit scroungers and the personal confidence and security generated by financial self-reliance, when she says of herself:

*I think that I’d rather go to work than have it hanging in the air that I’m not, you know, that someone is giving me this money for free and they just might take it away any time, and it’s just like it doesn’t feel comfortable. I’d just rather go to work.*

**SHARED ATTITUDES: CHILDREN’S NEEDS, GRANDPARENTS, AND MISTRUST OF STRANGERS**

Several other views were shared by parents across the whole study group. In this section I outline some of the main topics raised including: perceptions of the needs of pre-school children, the benefits of grandparental care and a lack of trust in ‘strangers’ providing child-care. I look at what parents said about each of these three areas in turn. The selection of these topics for discussion partly reflects my perspective as a British researcher and mother, as the attitudes expressed clearly differed from those currently prevalent among the majority of mothers in Britain.

Many of the parents emphasised how children’s needs varied over the pre-school years, with children under three regarded as needing care, best provided by family members or close friends, while three to five year olds are viewed as needing educating and socialising. The prevalence of this shared view in the group perhaps reflects the Polish policy norm in which women have been entitled to three years leave after the birth of a baby, with their employment positions kept open for their return. Amelia, a mother with a teenage daughter, expresses this view about care preferences for pre-school children:

*Amelia: Well, naturally I would prefer if it was someone from the family, because I know that person well. I know what their approach to taking care of children is and whether they will do a good job at it. The teachers and guardians at kindergarten or nursery are strangers to me, and you know that all sorts of things have been known to happen. ...However, when it comes to the educational point of view, I would prefer kindergarten. That is more professional. At home, I am the one teaching my child – or my friend or relative. So yes, education-wise, nursery beats staying at home.*

*Lucy: At what age do you think education becomes important?*
Amelia: It’s important that a child is able to grasp what it is all about, so it would have to be around 4, 5 years old. […] Everybody knows children learn best through play. […] and I believe that this goes faster, smoother and better when they are in a group of peers rather than on their own. (translated).

A further topic frequently raised by parents across the group is the importance of the relationship between grandparents and children and the benefits of grandparental child-care. In Poland, families often live near or share homes with grandparents, and grandmothers, as mentioned above, have been able to retire under the government’s early retirement scheme, enabling them to take on some child-care responsibilities to assist mothers who have returned to work. The high value that parents in the study group place on the opportunity for children to develop a relationship with grandparents seems likely then to stem from experience of these Polish norms, and may also be linked to the maintenance of traditional family values emphasised by conservative and Catholic elements in Poland. In five families in the study group, grandparents had migrated with, or to join, the family and provided child-care for working parents. Some of those with grandparents still in Poland expressed the loss they felt this meant for both children and grandparents (although, for themselves, many parents expressed positive feelings about the fact that migration had enabled them to establish lifestyles which no longer required grandparents’ involvement and support). Edyta and Filip say:

Edyta: I do miss my family especially, you know, since we have Martyna, I think it’s a big minus.
Filip: A big disadvantage for a child of course...
Edyta: …outside of Poland, not to have grandparents.
Filip: We are afraid that she will be shy and she will lose some of her personality growth – I don’t know – because of lack of extended family.

Julia, a stay-at-home mother of three in a professional family similarly says that she feels that child-care provided by grandparents is “good for children and probably for grandparents as well”.

Many of the children in the families in the study group spend the majority of their school summer holidays in Poland staying with grandparents (or great-grandparents). This is seen as a positive in several ways – in maintaining children’s links with Poland, in allowing them to enjoy the hot weather of a proper Polish summer, in allowing them to form relationships with their grandparents and,
presumably, in providing trustworthy child-care for the children during the school holidays. Dominika, a lone parent with two boys of primary school age says:

*My [daughter] loves to stay with grandad, she loves him, because when we’re visiting Poland now, lots of sweets, lots of fun, and they love it. Nobody at my home, [is telling them] to go to [have a] bath, to go to bed. Every day at my grandad, my mother’s, you do everything that you want.*

Many families in the group expressed a strong belief that for young children it is best that family members provide the child-care. Malgorzata, a stay-at-home mother of four children between the ages of two and sixteen, is unhappy about professional care for under threes, and sees this as a mother’s role. She says:

*I am impressed by Scottish mothers who give their children to nurseries. I could never do that. As long as I’m able to stay with the kids and as long as we’re getting the benefits, I’m going to stay with them. They need their mother. Regardless of everything else, a mother is a mother.*

Most parents of young children, even including those who left their children in nurseries during the day, shared a common reluctance to leave their children in the care of anyone who was not family or a close friend. No parents in the study group left an under-five age child with a baby-sitter or professional child-minder who was not a friend or family member, and many referred to such child-carers as ‘strangers’, whom one could not really trust. Teresa, who is a stay-at-home mother, for example, says:

*If we had a family around, I would love [the children] to have contact with family. I don’t want to separate them from the world, but I don’t want them to be raised by a stranger. If I need to leave them with somebody because I have a doctor’s appointment or whatever, I leave them with my friends. I don’t leave them with strangers.*

Even though Pawel and Eva, who both work professionally, leave their pre-school age daughter in a nursery part-time, they express fears of what might happen with baby-sitters, in a similar way to Amelia, above.

*Lucy: Do you have baby-sitters here who can look after her?*  
*Paweł: Our friends basically look after her when we go out.*  
*Ewa: It’s really rare. I think a baby-sitter could be quite... I think I’m not trusting. It must be friends. You hear these stories.*
Pawel: I don’t think I’d have the courage to leave [daughter] with someone I don’t know.

Ewa: And I’m not that desperate to go out.

HOW MIGRATION CHANGED THE OPTIONS FOR PARENTS

My respondents’ accounts highlighted how different features of British society had impacted on their lives and lifestyles. Some recurring themes were: attitudes to, and opportunities for, mothers who stayed at home with children, increased earnings relative to living costs, availability of jobs with flexible hours, and lack of discrimination in employment recruitment.

Attitudes to mothers who stay at home with children were highlighted, with several interviewees commenting on the greater availability of leisure and educational activities in Edinburgh for mothers at home and for children of preschool and school age. Julia is studying for a degree via a distance learning university course while at home with her children. She feels that such attitudes have benefitted her personally:

I always thought there was something about Polish men, that they would want the woman to be still a woman from the past, like, a mum, a housewife, someone who cooks, someone who cleans, someone who takes care of children and who takes care of them, and all they have to do is bring in the money. I don’t know if it’s changed. It’s changed with me and my husband. We now treat each other more equally, and it’s changed because we came here I think.

At our second interview, Julia sums up: ‘In Poland I was just a frustrated housewife and here I’m a full-time parent!’.

Many interviewees pointed to the increased choice over work and child-care that British society provided as a result of better earnings and greater work and training opportunities. For some this meant that women were able to choose to stay at home with children, rather than feeling the need to earn. Ryan et al. similarly found that some of the mothers in their study linked migration to the UK with their ability to stay at home with children (Ryan et al. 2009). In my study, Teresa says:

I would be so unhappy if I were in Poland now and had to – I don’t know, because of finances or something – had to go back to work.

Other mothers were able to work only part-time where they felt they would have needed to work full-time in Poland. Grażyna, staying at home with her
two year old, points to the importance of availability of part-time work and flexible hours:

In Poland both parents used to work to survive, especially when you've got a lot of kids. Here it doesn't need to be so hard, so it's much easier to live. Yes – even if I would like to work, as I said, I can work evening hours, so it's much, much easier.

She goes on to describe how employers are prepared to allow mothers to return to work flexible hours, while in Poland there is less flexibility:

Even if you are coming [back to work] from maternity leave – you're saying ‘I'd like to work Monday and Friday and part-time’, and they are saying ‘OK’. In Poland – no. If you're a mother in Poland ...you come to the same position and the same hours. [It's] much more flexible here. I believe that's the biggest advantage for mothers.

Kinga qualified in management in Poland. She has two boys under five, and she works in Edinburgh in the early mornings as a cleaner and attends college during the day. She too describes how there is less discrimination in the UK towards mothers returning to work:

When I spoke to people from a company I always feel like that I was a woman from a village who won't work, because they always asked: ‘Yes, but you live in a small village, how are you going to get to the job?’, ‘I have a car’, ‘But if your car is broken [down] or if there is snow or something like that, or if your children would be sick?’. It's not like this country, they never ask about anything like that. They never ask if you are married or you have children. ...Very often I felt terrible. ...I felt like the first woman in the world who wants work.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the preferences and behaviours of Polish migrant parents in relation to child-care and paid work; it looked at how these are associated with a variety of different personal and societal factors and ideologies and at how migration impacts on the options available to parents for enacting their preferences. It also identified three distinct types of Polish migrant family in the UK, and identified preferences and lifestyles associated with each of these types.
Some of the preferences expressed across the group seem clearly linked to ideological influences and, in some of the highlighted attitudes, Polish parents differ substantially from indigenous British parents. Sources of attitudes are often hard to distinguish. The article attempts to separate influences from ideology, from social policy norms in Poland, but it acknowledges that differences also stem from parents’ personalities, personal preferences and life experiences.

In Poland, extended family, family relationships and mutual bonds have traditionally been highly valued and families usually live near or share homes with grandparents. Polish parents in my study emphasise the importance of very young children being cared for by family members and the gains to both sides of maintaining and encouraging close grandparent-child relationships. The attitudes of the few mothers in the study who felt that they wanted large families and to stay at home with young children might also be linked with this traditional Polish family lifestyle, with the discourse of ‘Matka Polka’, as well as with Polish policy norms which allowed young mothers to stay at home for three years after each child’s birth.

Neoliberal influences on attitudes are also evident in the parents’ accounts. In particular, the focus on parental sharing of child-care provision within young dual-earning couples who started their families in the UK fits with the current discourse of gender-equality in modern societies. Almost all couples across the group expressed a desire for equal division of work and child-care, but under pressure to establish a financially secure start in the UK, older families who migrated together with school-age children usually adopt a more traditional pattern of full-time working primary-earner fathers and part-time working mothers who take primary child-care responsibility.

The influence of communist ideology and the obligation to contribute to society is perhaps evident in the strength of feeling expressed by parents against dependence on benefits, although this might in recent years also be linked with the development of a focus within neoliberal ideologies for self-reliance and independence. The view shared by many participants in my study that four and five year olds require education and socialisation in nurseries, while children under three require parental care, seem likely to stem from norms in policy and practice in Poland, under which women have been able to take three years out of employment to stay home with children, after which they would normally enter pre-school education.

The paper looked finally at how societal differences between Poland and the UK are seen as enabling the gains families perceive from migration. Migration is seen by these couples as having enabled them to by-pass some of the obstacles which they anticipated would prevent them from realising their preferences
over family life in Poland. In particular greater earnings, flexibility of working hours, less discrimination towards working mothers and more positive attitudes towards mothers who stay at home, as well as greater availability of leisure and educational activities for children, combine to provide greater choice for parents and allow them to more easily achieve their preferences for family life after migrating to the UK. Since 2009 however, it is important to note that the economic crisis occurring worldwide has resulted in the introduction of austerity measures by the British government which are likely to have impacted heavily on these parents and have undermined to some extent the gains from migration. By 2015, the support for parents on low incomes through working tax credits has been substantially reduced, and the potential to change employment, to negotiate flexible hours and to find work are all reduced. How these factors are affecting parents’ lives and choices might provide a worthwhile area for further research.

REFERENCES


