



Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group

ELiCiT: Exploring lifestyle changes in transition

Kate Burningham, Sue Venn, Birgitta Gatersleben,
Ian Christie and Tim Jackson



Overview

- ❖ Project aims & methodology
- ❖ Experiencing transitions
- ❖ Understandings of sustainable lifestyles
- ❖ Reported lifestyle and behaviour change
- ❖ Conclusions

Overview of Project

- ❖ Transitions to motherhood and retirement - focusing on understanding continuity and change in everyday life
- ❖ Interested in the things people do and their narratives of right way to live one's life
- ❖ Also interested in understandings of what constitutes a 'sustainable lifestyle'
- ❖ And exploring potential points for interventions during the transition



Methodology

- ❖ Longitudinal in 4 locations
- ❖ 10 about to become parents and 10 retirees in each location
- ❖ 3 interviews at 8 month intervals (n 240), focus on:
 - ❖ home
 - ❖ food purchase and consumption
 - ❖ modes of transport
 - ❖ leisure activities
- ❖ Seven day reflexive journals (n 165) following each interview
- ❖ Lifestyles and values questionnaires (n 167) after interviews 1 and 3



Experiencing transitions

1. Transitions are processes not 'moments' of change

- ❖ Becoming a parent and retiring both long processes with multiple phases - multiple 'moments' of change
- ❖ Characterised by shifts and readjustments in detail of everyday life
- ❖ Changes often transitory:

"There were changes. I don't think the changes have been permanent, I think we've reverted back" (New parent)



Experiencing transitions

2. Transitions are often multiple

- ❖ Individuals often experience more than one transition
- ❖ Concurrent or cascading transitions:
 - ❖ Job status
 - ❖ Health changes
 - ❖ Moving home
 - ❖ Partnership changes
 - ❖ Fluctuating household composition



Experiencing transitions

3. Transitions are experienced by households

- ❖ ‘Individual’ transitions affect other family members
- ❖ Household negotiation of changes in everyday consumption
- ❖ Change or stability in individual consumption practices often reflect others’ preferences or needs

“I’ll put a jumper on whereas [wife] will turn the central heating on... if she is cold I will let her put the heating on” (Retiree)

So how often does your husband eat meat?

R: “Probably only a couple of times a week actually. We were talking about it to someone and he was saying before he used to eat meat every day and ... he does eat it a lot less” (New mother)

Experiencing transitions

4. Transitions are a time of reflection on identity and priorities

- ❖ Becoming a 'good' parent overrides everything else

"Every waking thought is her really and now we're a family it's changed all sorts of things." (New mother)

- ❖ Contested identities for retirees – 'it's time for me' versus caring for grandchildren or other relatives

"I feel that I've done my bit and, ...yeah, before it [work] kills me or you know before I'm too old to do anything else. Yeah, no I actually feel now I deserve it [retirement]" (Retiree)

- ❖ Importance of family relationships

Experiencing transitions

5. Transitions are times of changing resources:

- ❖ Time - concern with creation of new routines:
 - ❖ For new mothers time perceived as scarce, but maternity leave also provided more time for local activities, shopping locally & cooking
 - ❖ For retirees continuing sense of need to remain busy and productive post retirement
- ❖ Money - concern with thrift:

"I've always been very aware of buying local and fresh produce and all that sort of stuff. You just can't... it sounds awful but... when you've got the choice of buying a pound of mince that's going to suit your family for like four days, for £3 from Tesco's or like ... half a pound from the farmer's market... that's £20 you know you just... you can't, it's just money... (New mother)

- ❖ Retirees unsure of how much income they would have post-retirement

Experiencing transitions

6. Transitions are experienced in material contexts

- ❖ Everyday activities fundamentally informed by available services and infrastructures (housing, transport, shops)

“We’ve got no choice, we’ve got recycling bins” (New mother)

“I don’t see myself using the car anymore, having a bus pass is just wonderful.” (Retiree)

- ❖ Importance of social norms – family homes and cars

Understanding Sustainable Lifestyles

- ❖ ‘Sustainable lifestyle’ often equated with maintaining current status

“Sustainable, well that’s finances really, sustainable, if you haven’t got the money to sustain what you are doing” (Retiree)

- ❖ Sustainable practices often explained by recourse to priorities of thrift, health, or aspects of care

“It is not that I feel it is important for the environment or anything like that to buy second hand, but if that is where the best value is” (New mother)

Understanding Sustainable Lifestyles

- ❖ New mothers talked of less engagement with current issues, looking inwards

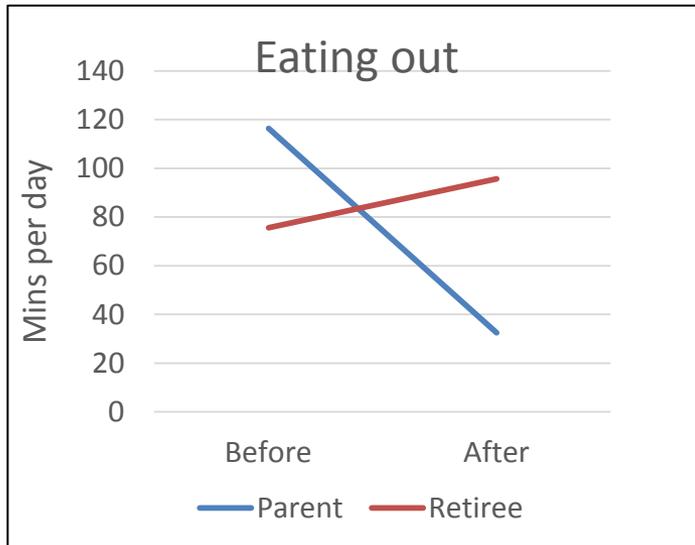
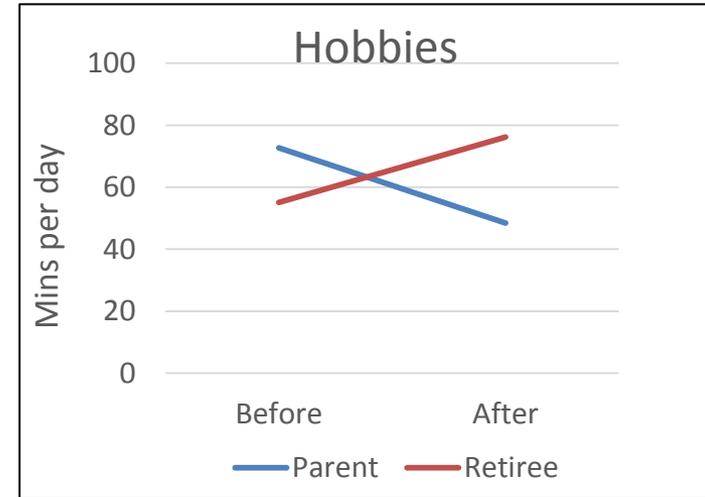
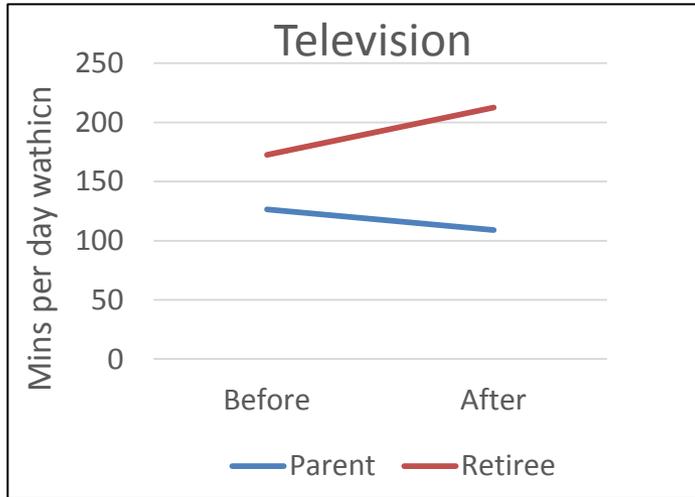
“Since she’s been born, crazy things have gone on around the world and I just haven't really noticed...So no, the outside world doesn’t really creep in” (New mother)

- ❖ Environmental sustainability as impossible dream, at odds with reality

“In my little ideal head I’d quite like to go and live in some nice green little commune ... not commune, but do you know what I mean? Solar panels and a sustainable lifestyle....I think we’re probably less sustainable realistically. We eat less organic fruit and veg because we can’t afford it. We do use the car ... if we want to go and see people for two hours, to do it by public transport becomes a pain... Disposable nappies are not sustainable by any stretch of the imagination. We use the washing machine more, an awful lot more... I don’t like a lot of my choices, but I find it’s just a reality of life” (New mother)

Reported lifestyle and behaviour change

❖ Did lifestyles change?



❖ Both groups reported spending more time

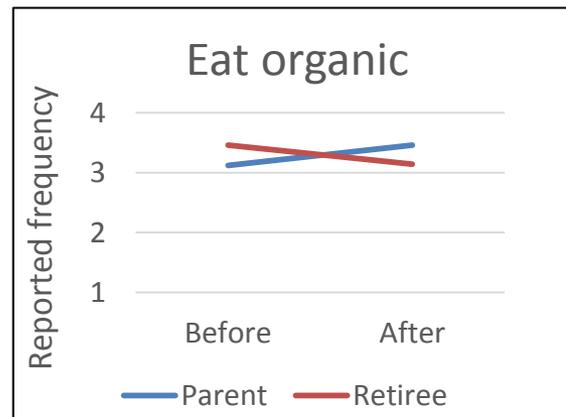
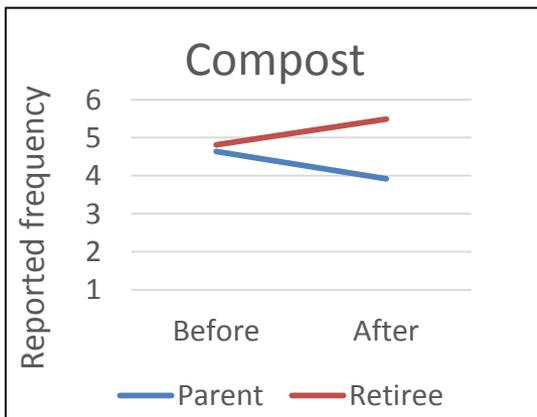
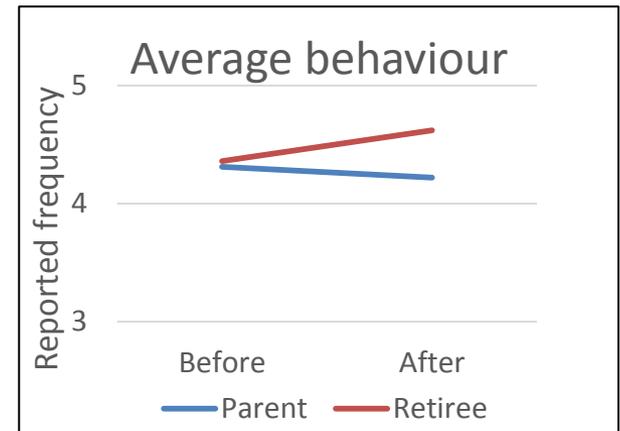
- ❖ Cooking
- ❖ Washing
- ❖ Shopping (more than expected)
- ❖ Going for a walk (but less than expected)

❖ Did reported behaviour change?

❖ On average retirees reported increases in pro-environmental behaviour

❖ But changes are varied: e.g.,

- ❖ Retirees compost more
- ❖ Parents eat more organic food



Awareness of environmental impact

- ❖ When asked:
 - ❖ 45% said they had made changes in their life that benefited the environment (37% of parents and 51% of retirees)
 - ❖ Less washing, more recycling, more walking, more organic food
 - ❖ Triggers were convenience, economical or health reasons - only one person mentioned environmental reasons
 - ❖ 27% said they had changed something that could harm the environment (52% of parents and 8% of retirees)
 - ❖ more heating, bathing and washing, more fuel use, more food waste and of course nappies.
 - ❖ The triggers for parents were 'having a baby'

Conclusions

- ❖ All transitions are not the same

- ❖ Transitions are:
 1. Processes of ongoing change
 2. Often experienced in multiple
 3. Experienced by households
 4. Time of reflection on identity and of new priorities
 5. Times of changing resources of time & money
 6. Lived in material contexts and shaped by social norms

- ❖ Transitions may be bad times for interventions specifically about sustainable living

- ❖ Initiatives need to work with the grain of existing priorities



Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group

Contact: Kate Burningham
k.burningham@surrey.ac.uk

<http://www.sustainablelifestyles.ac.uk/>

+44 (0)1483 686689

