

PART II CHILDREN PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

5 Social and Economic Variables

Since the study schools are not a representative sample of all comprehensive schools, it is necessary to describe the particular children and families that are under study and to place them in the context of the wider population. It is also worth describing the wide variations in ethnic and social class composition between the study schools, since these variations will have to be taken into account in all further analysis.

Ethnic composition

Country of origin

Our information about the country of origin of the children's families comes from the survey of parents.¹ The classification depends on the country that each of the two parents came from originally.² Families in which the two parents originated from different countries are separately classified in one of the 'mixed' groups.

Across all schools, 42 per cent of the study families originated from overseas: 27 per cent from the Indian sub-continent, 7 per cent from the Caribbean; the remaining 9 per cent are of mixed origins or from other countries. Of course south Asians (from the Indian sub-continent) and West Indians are represented much more strongly among the study children than among all children in the relevant age group. We estimate that of all children aged 10 to 15, 3.1 per cent are of south Asian origin (compared with 27 per cent of the study children) and 1.6 per cent of West Indian origin (compared with 7 per cent). There are in the sample nearly four times as many south Asians as West Indians, whereas the ratio is about two to one in the general population. Also, the study population contains a relatively large number of Bangladeshis, many of them concentrated in one particular school. Of the south Asians in the study, 19 per cent are Bangladeshis and 15 per cent African Asians, whereas of south Asians in the general population, only 9 per cent are Bangladeshis while 24 per cent are African Asians. The balance between Indians and Pakistanis among the study families reflects the general population.

Children born outside Britain

A majority of the children whose families originate from overseas were nevertheless born in Britain. Only 2 per cent of the West Indians but 32 per cent of the south Asians were born outside Britain. However, this varies widely between the different Asian groups. A majority of the Bangladeshi (72 per cent) and African Asian (58 per cent) children were born outside Britain. These are the two groups that arrived in Britain most recently.

Adaptation to English schools is likely to be most difficult for children who were not only born abroad but also spent their early formative years in the country of origin. The proportion of children who came to Britain from the age of five onwards (after 1975) is 15 per cent of the south Asian children as a whole; it is much higher among Bangladeshis (51 per cent) and African Asians (16 per cent) than among other Asians. For all study children regardless of ethnic group, it is a small but substantial minority (11 per cent) who were born abroad; only one in twenty came to Britain from the age of five onwards.

Religion³

A majority (71 per cent) of the south Asians in our sample are Moslems; this is partly, though not entirely, because of the high representation of Bangladeshis (all of whom are Moslems) in a few of the study schools. The summary table below compares the profile by religion of all south Asians in Britain with that of the Asian families in our study. A substantial minority of the West Indian families (15 per cent) belong to the Pentecostal Church or the Church of God. Membership of these sects is virtually confined to West Indians.

	All south Asians ^a	Study south Asians
Moslem	46	71
Hindu	27	13
Sikh	20	14
Other or none	7	2

a Source: Brown (1984).

Variations between the study schools

Various indicators of the ethnic composition of the study schools are shown in Table 5.1. There are 19 schools for which we have information from the survey of parents and pupil questionnaires. They are identified by two-digit codes, the first digit (from 1 to 4) being the area code and the second being the identifier of the particular school within an area.

The proportion of children whose families originate from outside Britain varies from 12 per cent in school 33 to 89 per cent in school 15. There are five schools in which this overall proportion is up to 25 per cent, six schools in which it is between 26 and 50 per cent, seven schools in which it is between 51 and 75 per cent and one school in which it is over 75 per cent. There are three schools in which 15 per cent or more of the children originate from the West Indies and a further five in which 7 per cent or more are of West Indian origin. There is one school (16) that has a substantial proportion of West Indians but no south Asians, and a second school (12) in which the West Indians greatly outnumber the south Asians. In most of the remaining schools south Asians greatly outnumber West Indians, and there are several schools that contain many south Asians but virtually no West Indians.

The proportion of Moslems varies widely between the schools. The school with the highest proportion of children whose families originate from outside Britain (school 15 with 89 per cent) in fact caters to a large extent for Bangladeshis: 63 per cent of the children are of Bangladeshi origin and a still higher proportion (73 per cent) are Moslems. There is one Catholic school in the sample (32). Sixty-nine per cent of families interviewed at

that school are Catholics, compared with 7 per cent of the rest. This Catholic school contains a significant number of children belonging to ethnic minority groups, most of them non-Catholics.

The proportion of bilingual children varies sharply between the study schools. Children are classified as bilingual if they answered 'Yes' to the following question in the pupil questionnaire: 'Do you speak any languages other than English at home?'. On this measure, 29 per cent of the study children overall are bilingual, but 88 per cent of the south Asians, 18 per cent of the West Indians (who may be referring to Creole or a dialect) and 5 per cent of the children of British origin. The proportion who are bilingual is 40 per cent or more in six of the study schools; the extremes of the variation are 11 per cent in three schools and 78 per cent in school 15.

In terms of the proportion of children born outside Britain. School 15 is again exceptional: half of its children were born outside Britain and one-third came to Britain from the age of five onwards. There are four other schools in which 15 per cent or more of the children were born outside Britain, while in all of the remaining schools the immigrant children are a fairly small minority.

Sex

Among the 19 schools studied, there are two for boys only (12 and 42) and two for girls only (15 and 41). The rest of the schools are for boys and girls. Over all 19 schools there is an excess of boys over girls (55 per cent boys among the study children). The balance of the sexes varies quite substantially between schools.

Social and economic background

Lone parents

Lone parents can be identified from the following question in the survey of parents: 'Is there another parent of _____ living here?'. We deliberately avoided defining 'parent' in this context; whether a partner who is not the natural or adoptive father should be regarded as a 'parent' was left to the respondent. Table 5.2 shows that on this measure 17 per cent of the study families consist of a lone parent with children. However, there are large differences between ethnic groups: 39 per cent of the West Indian families are lone parents, compared with 19 per cent of those originating from Britain and 6 per cent of the south Asians. On this point it is helpful to make a comparison with the national figures shown in *Black and White Britain*.

Per cent of families that are lone parents	Ethnic group		
	White	West Indian	South Asian
Study families	19	39	6
National survey ^a	10	31	5

a The figures from the national survey refer to lone parents with child(ren) under 16 as a percentage of households with children under 16.

Source: Brown (1984).

The two sets of figures show very similar variations between the ethnic groups, but the proportion of lone parents is higher among the study families than nationally, especially among the whites and West Indians.⁴ This shows that schools of the kind that we are studying tend to contain a higher than average proportion of lone parents. This may reflect

class differences: lone parents are more common among the lower social class groups which are over-represented in the study schools. In the case of West Indians it is not uncommon for women to have children in their late teens and twenties and to wait until much later to establish a marital or cohabiting household.⁵

There are wide variations between the schools in the proportion of single-parent families. The lowest proportion (4 per cent) is at school 25 and the highest (31 per cent) at school 16, which also has the second highest proportion of West Indians. To an important extent, the school differences in this case resolve into differences between areas: thus, the proportion of single-parent families is generally high in area 1 and generally low in area 2 (these are the two areas in the South East).

Working status of parents

The survey of parents was carried out in late 1983. At that time, 17 per cent of the study families had two parents with neither of them working, and 9 per cent had a single parent who was not working; so that 26 per cent of the children belonged to a family without a parent at work. Although we are not able to make an exact comparison here with national statistics, it is clear that the proportion who were not in work was very much higher among the study families than nationally. Many factors are involved: the areas where the schools are located and the ethnic and social class composition of the study families are probably the most important. Table 5.2 shows that the proportion of parents who were not in work varies widely between the different ethnic groups among the study families. An amazing 64 per cent of the Bangladeshi children belong to families where neither parent was in work, and this proportion is also extraordinarily high among the other south Asians at 41 per cent. The figures for the white and West Indian study families are much lower and fairly close to each other. There are large differences at the national level between the rates of unemployment among different ethnic groups, with black people generally having much higher rates, but the pattern of variation between ethnic groups among the study families is different and seems to relate to the particular areas where the schools are located. In any case it is clear that a high proportion of children in the study schools, and an especially high proportion of Asian children, belong to families where money must be very short.

The pattern of variation between schools can be seen in Table 5.4. Parents' unemployment is the background factor that varies most sharply between the schools. At the extremes, 1 per cent of children in school 21 had no parent in work, compared with 61 per cent of children in school 15. Area 2 stands out as having the lowest proportion of parents out of work (9 per cent) and the extreme differences are between schools in area 2 and elsewhere. Even so, there are very large differences between schools in the same areas: for example, between school 33 (16 per cent) and school 35 (53 per cent). These differences are almost certainly much larger than would be shown by a geographical analysis of unemployment rates. To some extent, they are related to the differences in ethnic composition between schools. These differences in the social and ethnic composition of schools are probably a greatly magnified image of the composition of the areas where the schools are located: educational geography is probably an acute version of social geography. This analysis suggests that the size and nature of the problems facing different schools may be entirely different, even when the schools are drawn from a restricted range, as in the present study.

Socio-economic group

In the survey of parents, we obtained a brief description of the job of each parent. The questions were asked if the parent was currently working or had had a job within the previous five years; the answers relate to the current or most recent job. The jobs were coded into five groups which are aggregates of the 17 socio-economic groups used in the census. These five groups (as shown in Table 5.3) are intended to run from low to high, but a difficulty with the analysis is that the classification tends to have a different meaning for women than for men because women tend to occupy particular niches in the labour market. A high proportion of women (about half) do white collar jobs, most of them badly paid and many of them part-time. In the case of men, white collar jobs are often superior to manual jobs in seniority, prospects and often pay, whereas this is much less true in the case of women. Our first approach to the analysis was to classify families according to the 'higher' of the jobs done by the two parents, but this quite often meant that the family of a man who was a semi-skilled manual worker would be 'upgraded' to white collar status because his wife was doing a part-time clerical job, probably very badly paid. In such a case it seems better to classify the family as semi-skilled. We have therefore classified the family on the basis of the father's job, if there is a resident father who is working or has worked in the past five years, and if not, on the basis of the mother's job.

Table 5.3 makes a rough comparison between the study families and national statistics from the census. If our study families are compared with all married men aged 35-44 it is clear that they contain a relatively small proportion of professionals and a high proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers. The differences are large: for example, 42 per cent of the study families that can be classified belong to the unskilled and semi-skilled manual groups, compared with 17 per cent of the general population; and 6 per cent of the study families belong to the professional and managerial group, compared with 29 per cent of the general population.

From national surveys we know that the proportion in different socio-economic groups varies between ethnic groups, and this pattern of variation is much the same among the study families. South Asians (except for African Asians) and West Indians tend to belong to lower socio-economic groups than whites both among our study families and nationally, and the high proportion of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in semi-skilled manual jobs is particularly notable. There are hardly any ethnic minority families belonging to the professional and managerial group in the study schools.

Table 5.4 shows the profiles by socio-economic group of the 19 study schools. As in a number of other respects, area 2 stands out from the rest: our families there tend to belong to higher socio-economic groups than elsewhere. Thus, about half of the families in areas 1, 3 and 4 fall into the unskilled or semi-skilled manual group, compared with 22 per cent in area 2. Comparing the schools within areas, the biggest differences are among the schools in area 3. Comparing across areas, there are some very large differences between several of the schools in area 2 and several of those elsewhere: for example, school 25 has 13 per cent belonging to the unskilled and semi-skilled group, compared with 66 per cent in schools 34 and 35.

Children receiving free school meals

We asked in the survey of parents whether the child was receiving free school meals, with the idea that this might be a useful indicator of poverty. Analysis shows that this variable is closely related to whether the parents are working and to the family's socio-economic group in the expected ways. Thus, 65 per cent of children in single-parent families and 28

per cent of those in two-parent families are said to be receiving free school meals. In the case of the two-parent families, there is a very strong relationship with the working status of the parents, with 84 per cent of children having two non-working parents receiving free school meals, compared with 11 per cent of those having a parent working full-time (or two working part-time). In the case of the single-parent families, this relationship is less strong, because children of single parents often receive free school meals even though the parent is working. The relationship with socio-economic group is marked, but less strong. These findings suggest that whether the child is receiving free school meals may be a good single indicator of poverty, but it probably adds little to the combination of the working status and socio-economic group of the parents.

Educational background of parents

There is much evidence to show that the educational background of parents is related to their attitudes towards the education of their children and the standard they expect them to achieve. However, it is not entirely clear how far the parents' educational background, separately from their job level and employment status, is related to the progress of their children. This is a question addressed by analyses to be reported in Chapter 10.

We asked some simple questions in the survey of parents to establish, in broad terms, what was the highest academic and job qualification of each parent. In the analysis we have combined job and academic qualifications into a highly simplified hierarchy, and we have then classified the family according to the highest qualification held by either parent. The findings are shown in Table 5.5 analysed by country of origin. There is no information for the general population on the same highly simplified basis, but from what comparative statistics there are it seems likely that the educational profile of the study families is not radically different from that of the general population in the same age group. It is important to notice, however, that 41 per cent of the study families have no qualifications at all; they may be hoping that their children will get more education than they did, but they cannot bring experience of educational achievement to their relationships with children or with school.

We have already discussed (Chapter 2) the level of qualifications held by the adult population belonging to different ethnic groups. In some respects, the study families show a similar pattern to the general population. However, the proportion of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi study families who have post-school qualifications is low, at 8 per cent, and lower than for the white study families. The reason for this is that the better-educated Asians tend to live in areas of lower ethnic concentration and mostly outside the catchment areas of the study schools. The West Indian study families are slightly less well-qualified than the white families, which is broadly similar to the national comparison between West Indians and whites. In general, these differences in educational background between ethnic groups are not large, and they are unlikely to go far towards explaining any difference in attitude or motivation among children belonging to different ethnic groups.

Whether the school is local

It has sometimes been argued that a 'local' school, which draws its children from the immediate neighbourhood, has a number of opportunities for positive development that are denied to a school that has a wider catchment area. On the other hand, a popular school is more likely than an unpopular one to draw children from a wide catchment area. These two factors work in opposite directions, but the results of *School Matters* suggest that for

primary schools, the size of the catchment area mainly acts as an index of popularity: schools with larger catchment areas tended to be more successful.⁶

In the present study, we assessed the size of the catchment area by asking children (in the pupil questionnaire) how long it took them to get to school in the morning. Most of the schools seem to be fairly similar in this respect. In fact, for 11 of the schools the percentage of children whose journey time is 20 minutes or more lies between 31 and 40. It is interesting, and potentially useful in the analysis, that four of the remaining schools are definitely 'outliers', three of them (22, 42 and 43) having small proportions around 16 per cent and one (25) having a high proportion (63 per cent) with long journey times. Most of the variation is between schools rather than between areas.

Behavioural problems

The scores from the B2 behaviour scale provide an indication of the extent of behavioural problems among the study children before they transferred to secondary school. The main use of these scores is to help us allow for differences between the schools in terms of the number of children with behavioural problems who enter them.

There are some substantial variations between the schools in the proportion of children having deviant scores (Table 5.6). It is unfortunate that the response rate from the primary schools that were asked to fill in these questionnaires was variable, since this raises the possibility that some of the apparent variations between schools are related to non-response. It was common for the majority of the children at a given secondary school to have come from two or three primary schools, and in some cases one of these principal feeder primary schools failed to respond. In such a case it is possible that the primary school that did not respond is one having an exceptionally high or exceptionally low proportion of children with behavioural problems, in which case our estimate of the B2 scores for the study children at the relevant secondary school will be biased. Table 5.6 shows the number of children for whom a B2 score is available in each school, and also a 'response rate'. In calculating this rate we have taken as the base all children attending at some time in 1981/82. There are four schools where this rate is less than 50 per cent, and for two of these it is extremely low (11 per cent at schools 31 and 4 per cent at school 32). For the remaining schools, our estimates are probably reasonably accurate.

It is striking that three of the four schools in area 1 have very high proportions of children with prior behaviour problems – higher than for any schools elsewhere. The fourth school in area 1 has a low proportion with prior behavioural problems. This is the school that tends to be unusual in most respects: it is a girls' school containing a very high proportion of Bangladeshis. There are also some considerable differences between schools in areas 2 and 4.

The proportion of children with prior behavioural problems varies widely between population groups (Table 5.7). Boys are more likely to show behaviour problems than girls. West Indian children are (apparently) more likely and South Asian children less likely to show behaviour problems than white children. Across a wide range of family backgrounds, socio-economic group is unrelated to the incidence of behavioural problems, but there is a strong relationship at the two extremes of the scale. Children from the 'underclass' group (parents who have not worked in the past five years) are substantially more likely than others to show behavioural problems; whereas children of professional or managerial parents are substantially less likely than others to show them. Children from single-parent families are twice as likely as those from two-parent families to show behavioural problems.

The B2 scale has been well validated, and the questions on which it is based are about whether certain specific behaviours have been observed. Nonetheless, the results are ultimately based on how teachers perceive the child's behaviour, so we must be cautious in interpreting the finding, for example, that a higher proportion of West Indian than of white children show behavioural problems.

The variations between schools in the proportion of children with behavioural problems are fairly large. Of course, the intakes of the schools also vary sharply in terms of social class and country of origin, which are in turn associated with behavioural problems to some extent. However, much of the variation between the intakes to the schools in terms of behavioural problems is unrelated to the variations in other respects. For example, school 14 has the highest proportion of children in its intake with behavioural problems, but it does not have a high proportion of West Indians, nor does it have a particularly high proportion of children whose parents are in the 'underclass' group. Thus, variations between the intakes of the schools in terms of behavioural problems are certainly independent of other factors to a considerable extent. It is important, therefore, to try to take account of these variations in our analysis, though we are very much limited in what we can do by the low response rate in certain schools.

Notes

1. As explained in Chapter 15, we also obtained a teacher's assessment of the ethnic group of each pupil in the fifth year. This was to allow us to analyse examination results by ethnic group for pupils not present earlier or not included in the survey of parents. However, the information from the survey of parents is more detailed and accurate. It is used in parts II and III of the report (for all analysis of data from the first two years).
2. In the few cases where family origin was not stated, the family is classified according to the country of birth of the parents.
3. Religion was established from the survey of parents. Where the two parents belonged to a different religion, the classification is based on the religion of the child, where recorded, or failing that the religion of the person interviewed (generally the mother).
4. The basis for the two sets of figures is close enough for the comparison to be worthwhile: the difference is that the percentages from the national survey are based on all families with a child or children under 16, whereas the study families are those having a child aged 13.
5. See Brown (1984), p37-38.
6. See Mortimore et al. (1988), p221.