

**Title:** Low social contact among UK working parents

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**Abstract:**

According to the Poverty and Social Exclusion survey 2012, a sizeable minority of UK working parents identify lack of time due to paid work and childcare responsibilities and lack of resources as obstacles to achieving desired levels of social contact with friends and relatives. Drawing on a wide range of theories and evidence, this thesis explores these findings by carrying out in-depth quantitative analysis on the large body of information about parents' social contact, work patterns, time and economic resources, material and social deprivation contained in three large UK surveys. The findings from this thesis provide a strong rationale for focusing on parents' social contact with their personal communities (Pahl and Spencer, 2006) by showing that low levels of social contact with these are associated with reduced levels of social support; a crucial asset to maintaining psychological and physical wellbeing during stressful times. This thesis also finds that the busy schedules and tight budgets of some working parents can affect their social interactions, particularly with friends. Specifically, it shows that working fathers and mothers generally experience high levels of time scarcity because of paid and unpaid work and that this increases their likelihood of having low social contact with friends. In line with much of the social network literature, it also finds that despite their double shifts mothers generally manage to maintain higher levels of social contact with friends than fathers do. Finally, confirming some of the exploratory findings from the social exclusion literature (Millar, 2007), it shows that the relationship between poverty and social contact is complex, and uses theories articulated by Townsend (1978) and Walker (2014) to explain the low levels of social contact experienced by a sizeable minority of working parents just above the poverty line.