

'I BLAME THE PARENTS': ANALYSING POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE DEFICIENT HOUSEHOLD  
SOCIAL CAPITAL TRANSMISSION THESIS

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This article explores belief in parental deficiency as a causal factor of youth anti-social behaviour and crime. Empirical interrogation of household interview data from a UK city considers whether there is widespread support for blaming parents. Somewhat surprisingly, lower income households and those containing young people, are found to be more likely to consider parental responsibility a problem. Most notably, a tendency to blame the parents strongly associates with a perception that people in the area do not treat each other with respect.

**Keywords:** parental responsibility; anti social behavior; blame; youth offending; juvenile delinquency

### Introduction

Excessive child and youth anti-social behaviour (ASB) has long been perceived as a concern in western society (Bates 1921; Burrows 1946; Elliott 2011; Hutchinson, Parada and Smandych 2009; Le Sage and De Ruyter 2008). In various countries, as part of the 'punitive turn', this has led to the introduction of a range of punitive measures and interventions to encourage and enforce parental responsibility for the behaviour of their children (Arthur 2005; Bennett 2008; Burney and Gelsthorpe 2008; Flint and Nixon 2006). The legislation aimed towards parents, particularly emphasised by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, has changed in tone from "advise and ameliorate" (from the landmark Acts of the 1960s) to "insist and punish" (Goldson 2000).

In the United Kingdom these range from voluntary 'parenting contracts' (agreements between parents and support agencies to control a child's behaviour), through to compulsory training and counselling for parents, becoming criminal offences if not met. Parents can be 'bound over' by the court with a 'parenting order' to apply control over their child, obliging parents to improve the

perceived deficiencies of their parenting, with fines imposed for non-compliance. Some local authorities affected by such ASB have also applied to use eviction from local authority rented accommodation as an additional instrument of deterrence (Flint and Nixon 2006). The parenting order has been described as a continuation of the criminalisation of 'inadequate parenting', within the more general context of the 'criminalising of social policy' (Muncie 2004; Brown 2005).

More recently, the coalition government has launched the 'troubled families' initiative, which further exacerbates the stereotype of an 'underclass', now re-branded as 'troubled families'. This initiative is aimed at 'problem' families - including children involved in crime, ASB or truancy - that cost the public sector a significant amount of resources, addressed with methods that support families and challenge poor behaviour (Department for Communities and Local Government). The influx of legislation imposing the responsibility, and blame, for the behaviour of youths onto their parents is part of a wider ideological shift from social democracy to neo-liberalism that is explored in more detail below.

In the United States there is widespread use of parental responsibility laws. While these differ in each state, they generally refer to the potential or actual tort liability on parents for damages resulting from the acts and behaviour of their children, with some states proposing prison terms for parents if a child commits a serious crime. Parental responsibility laws can hold parents legally responsible, requiring parental involvement with the child's criminal sanctions, or criminally liable for contributing to the delinquency of their child (Brank and Weisz 2004).

These punishments may in part be retributive but are also premised on the assumption that their use can encourage parents of offenders (and also, through a deterrence effect, other parents) to exert more effective direction and control at home. The pattern of evidence on the effectiveness (Brank, Hays and Weisz 2006; Hutchinson, Parada and Smandych 2009) and actual public support for such measures is somewhat mixed (Brank, Hays and Weisz 2006). For a critical look at the function and history of parenting orders see Burney and Gelsthorpe (2008) and Arthur (2005).

For these interventions and sanctions to be successful it would be advantageous to have support from the general population (Nagin et al. 2006; Roberts 1992), and for these sanctions to be considered as enforcing social norms (Posner and Rasmusen 1999). Accordingly, empirical scrutiny of

this concern based on more recent data is warranted to potentially inform policy design and also shed some light on the likely pattern of acceptability for directing sanctions towards parents as a means of reducing child and youth ASB.

We need to ascertain whether there is general public support that parents should be held responsible for the behaviour of their children. Specifically, does channelling blame and sanctions via the parents have widespread support across society? Or is such a view confined largely to childless households, wealthier households who can afford more childrearing support, or perhaps older households, who may consider child and youth ASB a relatively recent phenomenon?

The study reported in this paper has explored these issues using household interview survey data consisting of a representative sample of just over one-thousand households. These interviews were undertaken within a single large UK city beset with the typical range of ASB problems confronting many other such cities - Portsmouth, England (See Figure 1). This city has a socially diverse population and features a typical range of other urban, labour market and social problems that might be expected in contemporary urban Britain. (See the “Anti-social behaviour problems and the socio-demographic profile of the study area” section for further details of the extent of the problems and the characteristics of a typical family/household).

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

The paper is organised in the following manner. The next section briefly surveys the body of literature relevant to exploring parental deficiencies as a causal factor in the genesis of child and youth ASB, and where this paper sits in sociological theory. This work informs our expectations in the modelling phase about the key influences on parental responsibility attitudes. Some brief contextual background on the study area and its prevalence of child and youth ASB is then set out. This is followed by a discussion of the data and modelling strategy employed in this study. The results are then displayed and considered. The final section provides a brief summary and offers some concluding remarks.

## **Parental Control and Youth Anti-Social Behaviour: A Brief Retrospect**

The 'blaming' of parents for the criminal behaviour of their children can be traced throughout criminology theory, and across its' different schools (Brown 2005; Pearson 1994). The family plays an integral role in the development of delinquency, according to a number of theoretical approaches, such as social control theories, social learning theories and psycho-analysis. However, the 'blaming' of parents has been popularised, emphasised and in some cases enshrined in law, through various government policies and rhetoric. This section first explores the role of parental involvement in child development as perceived by social scientists and economists. Then, the idea of youth as a social construct and the implications of the extension of youth, are introduced before going into further detail of relevant criminology theories. Finally this paper is placed within the wider ideological shifts in social policy and government implementation.

Many social scientists have explored the role of parental involvement in child development (Lamb 2010) and specifically in the contexts of positively improving academic outcomes (Coleman 1988; Coleman 1990; Kim and Schneider 2005; Morgan and Sørensen 1999; Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Teachman, Paasch and Carver 1997) and in reducing the likelihood of participation in crime and delinquency (Knafo and Plomin 2006; McNeal Jr 2001; Parcel and Menaghan 1993, 1994; Patterson and Dishion 1985; Sagatun 1991; Smith and Stern 1997; Thompson, Hollis and Richards 2003; Wright and Cullen 2001). Despite some concerns as to the bounds and specificity of the concept (Morrow 1999; Portes 2000) a number of these studies have deployed the concept of social capital formation in the family to help label the family processes and interactions involved in generating these positive outcomes for children. Many economists have also explored the foundations of household interactions. For example, Becker's (1974) 'rotten kid theorem' is premised on the existence of a parent who is concerned about the welfare of their children and has planned to give them wealth and other gifts. Should one of the kids be rotten and wish to harm their siblings, the parent could channel money to the other siblings when the rotten kid behaved harmfully to them. This, Becker surmises, should provide an incentive to the rotten kid not to harm their siblings as it would incur a cost in terms of lost transfers from the parent.

However, this household-focused and non-interventionist approach to sustaining behavioural order in a family (and thus to the potential benefit of wider society) can be subverted by various

circumstances. First, some parents may not be concerned about their children's welfare or be wholly absent or effectively absent by virtue of the very low levels of effort and time expended in actually nurturing offspring. Secondly, as Bergstrom (1989) highlights, there may be no transferable utility, or indeed prospect of any non-negligible transferable utility forthcoming from the parent. Thirdly, Bergstrom (1989) argues there may be considerable asymmetric information characterising parental-child relations in the family, though he shows this may not obviate some solutions to the rotten kid theorem in various particular classes of social interactions.

Becker (1976) also extended the analysis to try to explain more general altruistic behaviour beyond the family. This is premised on the existence of at least one identifiable altruist in a given large group such that they are concerned about the welfare of all the members. Becker contended that any egoist in the group would not engage in harming the altruist as well as the other group members in order that transfers to them (from the altruist) would not be reduced or discontinued. The model also suggests that transfers may contribute to the 'fitness' of the altruists and egoists at different rates. In this model altruism is wholly sustained via social interaction rather than kinship and thus does not require the existence of family relationships. Again, the absence of such an altruist proves a subverting stumbling block to this world view.

The absence of one or both parents/guardians would mean that parental capital was not being deployed to adequately transmit expected social norms of behaviour to their children. Yet even if they were physically present, this would not guarantee sufficient parental capital existed to enable such transmission to take place effectively. Put simply, some parents/guardians may not be up to the job of childrearing, thus warranting intervention and punitive sanctions.

This paper needs to be considered in the context of the idea of 'youth' as a social construct (and by extension, so is youth ASB (see Muncie 2004)), with the way it is understood varying over time and across cultures. Jones (2002) proposes that if childhood is defined as full economic dependence (for example, on parents), and adulthood is full economic independence, then youth can be thought of as the in-between, transitional, period of semi-independence. Further, this in-between period of 'youth' has become extended, with transitions to adulthood becoming far more complex (Jones and Wallace 1992). While there are some examples of a cultural change, the extension of youth is exacerbated by legislation that does not define young people as fully independent from their

parents until much later, such as in 'mature students' (21 years), minimum wage legislation (22 years) and access to welfare support, such as income support and housing benefit (25 years). Therefore the implicit responsibilities of parents have been extended, while at the same time, there is no provision or guidelines on their parental responsibility to young people over the age of 16 years. While welfare support has been withdrawn, there is no certainty that parents have or will bridge the gap (Jones 1995; Jones and Bell 2000).

While it has been argued that the social construct of youth is extending upwards, there has also been a move towards the criminalisation of young people at an earlier age. Pitts (2001) has referred to this as 'dejuvenilization', in that it erodes the principle of treating young people separately from adults. In particular, the abolition of the presumption of *doli incapax*, (which previously meant that courts had to establish that young offenders under fourteen understood the consequences of their actions) led to the reduction in the criminal responsibility age of children to ten and the child being 'responsibilised' in criminal law. This effectively implied that children from the age of ten were responsible for their own behaviour. Simultaneously, the implementation of a raft of seemingly contradictory parenting policies (e.g. parenting contracts and child safety orders) specifically blamed parents and had the conflicting objective of making them responsible for the behaviour of their children (Goldson 1999).

While this study was undertaken during the New Labour government, Muncie (2000) points to the fact that both major UK parties hold a shared belief of crime causation, highlighting the consistent theme of blaming irresponsible parents and holding offenders personally responsible for their actions. The empirical studies cited as influencing New Labour's policy include the 'Cambridge study of delinquent development' by Farrington and West (1993) and later analysis by Graham and Bowling (1995). Both studies found the quality of parent-child relationships and parental supervision as risk-factors in the chances of children offending. Graham and Bowling (1995) found that parental supervision was the factor most closely correlated with criminality in young people, with children experiencing weak parental supervision twice as likely to offend. However, these risk factor approaches received criticism for not taking into account the social and political context (Haines and Drakeford 1998; Smith 2003). Moreover, Wikstrom and Loeber's (1997) Pittsburgh study, looking at the socio economic status of the neighbourhood, found that the correlation between family risk factors

and youth offending breaks down in low socio economic status neighbourhoods. Despite the existence of some evidence to support the targeting of parents, it is in practise almost irrelevant, as there is broad agreement across academics and practitioners that the blaming of poor parenting has more to do with political success than the efficacy of such methods (Allan 1996).

As part of control theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that a lack of self-control is the key factor underlying criminal behaviour. They propose that this is caused by an unsuccessful or incomplete socialisation, and is especially likely to be caused by ineffective childrearing. Poor parental supervision is blamed for this, rather than school or peers, as they argue the most important negative sanction comes from the explicit disapproval of parents. Within the field of right-realism, where crime was seen as the product of individual characteristics committed because of lack of self-control, Murray (1990) used the notion of the underclass, where its members' distinguishing characteristic is not that they are living in poverty, but that they are not respectable. Murray (1990) identified three main characteristics, or phenomena, of an 'underclass': illegitimacy, violent crime and economic inactivity. These early warning signals are found in abundance within the study area of this survey (evidenced in the next section). Murray (1990) sees the underclass as morally weak, which is a matter of choice – resulting in illegitimate children growing up ill-schooled and ill-behaved in a culture of unemployment, involvement in crime and drug addiction.

Murray's (1990) emphasis on individual weaknesses preventing full participation in society is considered as 'weak' social exclusion, whereas 'strong' social exclusion sees the problem at a structural level. Young (2002) observes two approaches within explanations of strong social exclusion: 'passive' and 'active'. A 'passive' approach emphasises the failure of the system to provide jobs, leading to social isolation. For example, this would include such relevant theories as the familial and cultural theories of deprivation that can lead to the inter-generational transmission and recurrence of deprivation and inaccessible attainment. Whereas an 'active' approach (more closely aligned with this paper) stresses the 'active' rejection of the underclass by society, stereotyping them as criminals and drug addicts and stigmatising those without jobs. The discussion of 'proper parenting' has strong connections to an enduring theme of neo-conservative criminology, where the choice element of right-realism is derived from parental failure to imbue self-control, whereas left-realism is more concerned with the restricting circumstances and social context within which parents must exist.

Concerns over child and youth ASB have also been stoked by various episodic moral panics following particular child and youth crimes with very high media visibility. One such high profile example was the murder in 1993 of the two year old child, James Bulger, by two ten year old boys (Hollingsworth 2007; Such and Walker 2004). Taken together, such incidents have prompted calls in the media for a greater use of sanctions being applied to the parents of child and youth offenders. More recently, the riots, violence, arson, and looting that engulfed many parts of London and other UK cities during August 2011 clearly showed considerable and widespread breakdown of social order. It also provided numerous examples of children and adults engaging in serious and costly ASB. In the aftermath of these riots police arrested and brought before law courts many of these children and youths. Articles in the news media, such as “Judge asks: where are the parents of rioters?” and “Parents of young rioters don't care, says judge” (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 2011; *The Times*, 13 August 2011) reflected considerable societal concern over the fact that in many cases the children and youths attending court were unaccompanied by parents or guardians. A widely aired inference was that the absence of these parents or guardians simply highlighted in sharper relief their negligence in bringing up their children with sufficient pro-social behavioural skills to sustain law-abiding civic participation. Put simply, the view that was promulgated was that parents were in large part responsible for the criminal actions of their children. This view was further supported by the final report of The Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2012), an independent panel set up to investigate the causes of the riots. Through a survey of residents in areas affected by the riots the Panel repeatedly identified ‘perceptions about poor parenting and a lack of shared values’ (p.3), as well as being frequently and explicitly told that ‘poor parenting was the underlying cause of the riots’ (p.28). This led to the report identifying children and parents as one of the key areas highlighted for action, with particular focus on absent fathers. Another view, epitomised by Boris Johnson and David Lammy MP in the national press, partly blames the riots on the 2004 decision to tighten the law on parents smacking their children (*The Times*, 30 January 2012).

The intervention of policy into family life occurred within the context of wider social policy developments – most notably a shift from the social democratic, with its universal welfare state, to neo-liberalism, with its reduction in government control and the replacement of community with individual responsibility. Ideas from right-realists, such as Murray’s (1990) writings on the underclass, united with the moral panics and condemnation of young people (Muncie 2004; Brown 2005) and

shaped a climate of retribution and blame. This growing climate of blame focused on those branded as the underclass, and insisted that parents should be punished if they failed to control and discipline their children (Drakeford and McCarthy 2000). Particular groups of parents, most notably the increasing number of divorced parents, single mothers and families with absent fathers were swept up in this definition. These so-called 'underclass' parents became the scapegoat, and were re-branded under New Labour as the socially excluded (and more recently by the coalition government as 'troubled families'). Whilst ostensibly accepting that social exclusion is a structural problem, New Labour's policies (epitomised by the Social Exclusion Unit) nonetheless went on to blame the supposed victim of social exclusion by targeting solutions at the individual level, blaming poor parenting, identified by Matthews and Young (2003) as shifting to an implicit control theory. Smith (2003) suggests that poor parents are treated as 'shock absorbers', charged with instilling self-control in their children regardless of the social and economic restraints. This raises the question: is it these 'troubled families' and so-called 'underclass' that survey respondents are thinking of when they blame the parents?

### **Anti-Social Behaviour Problems and Socio-demographic Profile of the Study Area**

During the time period this survey was undertaken, the study area experienced large reductions in police recorded crime of close to 12% on the previous year, slightly larger reductions than those seen nationally (British Crime Survey down 10%, all police recorded crime down 9%). The reduction in crime is reflected across the majority of crime types, with the exception of shop-theft and drug offences. As shown in Figure 2, this reduction follows a period of stability and minor increase of recorded crime in Portsmouth (2009).

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

To put this trend in context, there were 128 crimes per 1,000 residents in Portsmouth in 2007/08, which is below the average of its most similar group of 15 'Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships', but still well above the England average of 91 crimes per 1,000 people during the same

time period. There were 20,974 incidents of ASB recorded by Hampshire Constabulary in Portsmouth in 2007/08; three-quarters of these were for rowdy and nuisance behaviour. In March 2007, there were 56 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and 52 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in place in Portsmouth (Hampshire Constabulary 2008). Within the Hampshire Criminal Justice System area, 43 of the ASBOs issued in 2007 were to persons aged ten to seventeen years (Home Office 2009).

'Criminal damage offences (incorporating arson)', as recorded by Hampshire Constabulary, account for 23% of all crime during this period and was the highest recorded crime type in Portsmouth. The peak area for criminal damage offences was the police beat which encompasses the city centre area of Portsmouth. Large proportions (40%) of known offenders were male and aged between eleven and twenty years (Safer Portsmouth Partnership 2007).

There were 670 young offenders in Portsmouth in 2006/07 (where 'young offenders' refers to anyone aged ten to seventeen who received a reprimand, final warning or a court sentence), known to be responsible for 2,046 offences. 369 of these young offenders were already known to the police for offences committed in previous years. The peak age was sixteen and the majority (80%) were male. The most common offence committed by young people was 'theft and handling', followed by 'violence against the person'. The Charles Dickens Ward, encompassing the city centre area, had the highest proportion of young offenders in the city (Safer Portsmouth Partnership 2007). Accordingly, in the empirical phase of this study we consider the importance of city centre residential location.

In 2007, Portsmouth's population of 195,000 had a disproportionately larger percentage of young adults (20-24 and 25-29 year olds represented 11.1% and 8.3% of the population respectively) than the average for Great Britain (6.7% for each age band). This is in large part a reflection of the student and post-graduate population of Portsmouth (Office for National Statistics 2007c). A lower percentage of residents described themselves as "non-white" (11.6%) than the average for England and Wales (14%). This was reflected across all ethnic groups except those that described themselves as "mixed", who represented a slightly higher proportion (2.7%) of Portsmouth residents than the England and Wales average (2.2%) (Office for National Statistics 2011).

Families with dependent children in Portsmouth were less likely to be married couples (53.4%) than in the rest of England and Wales (59.5%), and more likely to be lone parent households

(26.4% compared to 21.9%) (Office for National Statistics 2001). This is further highlighted by the proportion of the resident working age population that claimed lone parent income, as this was consistently 20% higher in Portsmouth (2.4%) than the average of Great Britain (1.9%) (representative figures from November 2007), (Office for National Statistics 2013a)

At the time of this survey, Portsmouth's unemployment rate (6%) was slightly higher than the national average (5.3%) (Office for National Statistics 2013b). However, Portsmouth had a similar economic activity rate and proportion of Job Seekers Allowance claimants to the national average. (Office for National Statistics 2007a). Those in work were more likely than the national average to be employed in elementary occupations, and sales and customer service occupations than in managerial/senior or skilled trades occupations. Gross weekly pay in Portsmouth was between 10-14% lower than the average in Great Britain (Office for National Statistics 2007b). Therefore the study area is highly likely to include a share of what Murray (1990) describes as the 'underclass'.

We move on to explore the open empirical question of whether channelling blame and sanctions via the parents has widespread support across society, or if such a view is confined largely to a specific group. Some groups merit particular consideration, such as wealthier households which can afford more childrearing support, or older households which may consider child and youth ASB a relatively recent phenomenon. In addition, households with young people may be less likely to blame other parents, as this in some way indicates themselves as not taking responsibility. Alternatively, households containing young people may exhibit a form of parental 'NIMBYism' (not in my back yard), whereby households advocate the proposal by blaming other parents but actually oppose it applying to themselves.

### **Data and Modelling Strategy**

The collection of data for the Residents' Survey 2007 was conducted by Ipsos Mori (a professional survey organisation) on behalf of the City Council. 1,005 Portsmouth residents were interviewed face-to-face in their own homes between 6 October and 14 December 2007. Respondents were randomly selected from sampling points across the city, using a stratified sampling method based on the 2001 census (gender, age, and work status). Only households within the Portsmouth boundary where the respondent was aged sixteen or over were included.

The survey consisted of fifty-four questions on a range of topics from satisfaction with the council, to fear of crime. The majority of questions related to existing measures used in previous surveys, while others were one-off questions to gauge public opinion on a specific topic of interest at that particular time. The majority of questions enabled quantitative data to be gathered, by requiring yes or no answers, or level of agreement with statements measured on a five point Likert scale. Detailed demographic information on the respondents (including gross household income) was also collected. Table 1 sets out the variables used in the empirical analysis alongside their formats, definitions, and *a priori* expectations.

The dependent variable for analysis reflects the extent to which respondents indicated that 'parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children' was perceived to be a problem in their area. Respondents were asked to indicate their response to this question using a four-point forced choice scale, with responses ranging from 'a very big problem' to 'not a problem at all'. The dependent variable is transformed into a binary form, where a value of 1 indicates a positive response to the statement, i.e. 'a very big problem' or 'a fairly big problem', and 0 otherwise (mean = 0.46). The relationship between the response to this question and the range of independent variables is tested using a direct logistic regression (binary logit). For the purposes of confirming the robustness of the empirical results, the logistic regression is also re-estimated with the imputed income removed.

Portsmouth can be split into six postcode district areas and the location of each respondent's home was recorded as part of the survey. The application of the Office for National Statistics' Output Area Classifications, developed by Vickers and Rees (2007), to these postcode areas allows us to profile the population of Portsmouth by where they live. This profiling information is based on the 2001 census and categorises areas into one of several super-groups with particular traits.

For example, almost half of Portsmouth's population fall into the 'typical traits' category. They are more likely to live in terraced housing, less likely to rent from the public sector and tend to work in a broad range of industries. 'Typical traits' are most commonly found in the postcode district PO3, so PO3 has been used as the reference group. Further information and classification of Portsmouth's areas can be found in the Portsmouth Population Profile (2010). However, of particular importance is the postcode district PO1, as this represents the highly urbanised 'city centre'. In this area, the most common super group is 'constrained by circumstances', characterised by residents being more likely

to live in flats rented from the public sector and rarely having more than one car per household. Other common super groups within this postcode district include 'city living', where residents typically live alone in flats, and 'blue collar communities', characterised by areas of terraced housing with a high proportion of children. Given the common characteristics, and combined with the high reported crime and ASB rate in this area, we would predict that residents from PO1 are more likely to 'blame the parents'.

One of the attractive features of this survey was the collection of gross household income, spread across eleven bands ranging from 'under £50 per week' to 'over £600 per week'. However, this income data was missing in 34% (342) of cases, of which 62% (212) 'refused' to answer, 33% (112) responded 'don't know', and 5% (18) gave 'no answer'. To address this issue, a missing data imputation exercise was conducted. This involved the independent estimation of 'missingness' logit equations by separate researchers. Two separate binary logit equations were estimated independently to identify the significant independent variables that could accurately predict whether a household would report its income. These variables were used to guide imputation of the missing income values, utilising a 'multiple imputation' method. As a test of convergence, the results of these separate imputations were compared and the same imputed income band was found in 27% of cases, and was within  $\pm$ two income bands (out of eleven) in 88% of cases. An average of the imputed incomes from both processes was assigned to one of the original eleven income bands.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

## **Results**

A direct logistic regression analysis was performed on the outcome of whether respondents to a survey thought that 'parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children' was a big problem in their area, with various demographic and attitudinal predictors. Twenty-four cases were excluded because they were missing information for at least one of the variables.

The logistic regression model was found to be statistically significant, with the McFadden  $R^2$  value estimated to be 0.44 (a value in the range of 0.2 to 0.4 is usually considered to be highly satisfactory) and the LR statistic indicating significance at the 99% confidence interval. Strong classification results were found, with 82.6% of those who thought 'parents not taking responsibility' was a major problem and 87.7% who thought it was not a major problem correctly predicted, for an overall success rate of 85.4%.

The model was also run excluding those cases where income banding had originally been missing, resulting in a smaller sample of 650 cases. The model retained its explanatory power, with a McFadden  $R^2$  value of 0.44 and the LR statistic indicating significance at the 99% confidence interval. Correct classification was still strong with an overall success rate of 84.7%. The signs and magnitudes of the predictor variables did not change considerably, with the exception of 'Tenure Owner' and 'Disability' that changed sign but remained non-significant. There were more noteworthy changes to the significance of the predictors with the following indicators no longer identified as significant at the 90% confidence interval: 'Community Cohesion', 'Young People In House', 'EducALevel', 'EducOther', 'PO4' and 'PO5', while the reverse was true for 'Gender'. This implies that the inclusion of the imputed income cases has not detracted from the goodness of fit of the model or changed the underlying relationships, as the signs and magnitudes have not changed considerably. However, the increase in the sample size and resulting degrees of freedom has helped to clarify those predictors which are significant.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Generally, these results suggest that exposure to greater levels of crime and ASB positively associates with a perceived problem of parental responsibility. For example, such beliefs are significantly and positively associated with a perception that crime levels had increased over the last two years. The calculated odds ratio of 1.66 implies that the probability of thinking that there is a problem with 'parents not taking responsibility' increases by 66% if the respondent also thought crime

rates had increased in the last two years. Additionally, a perception that drug use or dealing is a problem in the local area is found to be significant at the 99% level. The odds ratio of 1.93 indicates that those who thought drug use and/or dealing in their local area was a problem were just under twice as likely to also think that 'parents not taking responsibility' was a problem. Respondents that thought that there was community cohesion in their area were 30% less likely to think that 'parents not taking responsibility' was a problem. However, this was only significant at the 90% level.

Additionally, the effect of the level of ASB and crime experienced or witnessed by the respondent is also found to be statistically significant at the 99% confidence interval. This independent variable measures the number of different types of ASB or crimes experienced, rather than presenting the absolute number or making any value judgements about the severity of different experiences. The estimated odds ratio of 1.13 indicates that for every extra type of ASB or crime experienced, the respondent is 13% more likely to believe parents not taking responsibility for their children to be a problem. Given that the highest number of incidents identified by respondents was fourteen (out of a possible nineteen), there is the potential that those who had experienced the greatest number of different types of incidents could increase their likelihood of thinking parents not taking responsibility for their children was a problem by just under five times as much as those respondents with no experience of such incidents.

Somewhat surprisingly, the effect of living in the city centre (PO1) was found to significantly and negatively impact upon perceptions of a lack of parental responsibility being a problem. The sign is contrary to expectations given the higher level of reported crime and ASB, as well as the larger proportion of young people located in that area (Safer Portsmouth Partnership 2007). The odds ratio of 0.29 indicates that the odds of thinking that parents not taking responsibility for their children is a problem decreases by around 70% if the respondent lives in the 'city centre' area. This could indicate a greater tolerance of those directly affected that would be counter to the positive results seen for those experiencing ASB and crime and for those households containing young people. It could be that the respondents in this area are more likely themselves to be the parents of children exhibiting child and youth ASB and therefore are less likely to perceive this to be a problem, or be willing to cast negative aspersions on their own standard of parenting. Yet another explanation might be that acts of ASB carried out in this area are considered to be less a result of poor parenting *per se*, perhaps due

to a perception that crimes in this area are largely committed by young adults who are legally responsible for their own behaviour.

Imputed income, measured on a scale representing household gross income bands ranging from under £50 per week to more than £600 per week, was found to be negative and significant at the 95% level. The odds ratio of 0.89 indicates that for every increase on the household income scale the concern of 'parents not taking responsibility' reduces by 11%. This implies that those in the lowest income band are around three times more likely to think that 'parents not taking responsibility' is a problem than those in the highest income band.

The effect of the respondent household containing young people (defined as seventeen years of age or under) had a significant and positive impact on the belief that 'parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children' is a big problem. This could be because of the greater contact that these households are likely to have with other young people and families, or an increased propensity to pass judgement on the parenting of others if the respondent is a parent themselves. However, the variable that was found to associate most significantly with 'parents not taking responsibility' is a belief that 'people not treating each other with respect and consideration' is a problem in the area. The odds ratio of 23.7 indicates that those that think people not treating each other with respect is a problem are around twenty-four times more likely to also think there is a problem with 'parents not taking responsibility', than those who do not think there is a problem with respect and consideration.

Only limited evidence is found that fear of crime, educational attainment, gender, ethnicity, disability, tenure, car ownership, volunteering experience and working status significantly affects the perception that lack of parental responsibility in the area is a problem. Age is found to (weakly) reduce the probability of considering a lack of parental responsibility to be a significant problem.

In summary, variables included to control for exposure to increased levels of crime (for example, drug dealing) and ASB are unsurprisingly found to associate positively with the extent to which parental responsibility is thought to be to blame. Higher incomes are found to associate with a reduced likelihood of believing parental responsibility to be a problem in their area, although other socio-demographic information, such as age, gender, educational attainment, car ownership etc. show

only limited evidence of a statistically significant association with a perception of lack of parental responsibility being a problem. An unexpected finding relates to the reduced likelihood of respondents in the city-centre perceiving there to be a problem of parental responsibility, as crime and ASB levels in this area are among the highest in the city. Perhaps this is because respondents living in this area are more likely themselves to be the parents of children demonstrating ASB and thus less likely to perceive crime committed in their area to be a problem of their own making.

By far the largest and most significant positive influence on the perception of parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children was a jointly held perception on the part of the respondent that people not treating each other with respect was a problem in their area. There is also evidence that a greater likelihood of considering parental responsibility to be a problem associates positively with having young people in the household. This suggests that respect for other residents is strongly regarded to be a function of responsible parenting and that those more likely to pass negative judgement on the parenting of others are more likely to be parents themselves.

### **Concluding Remarks**

UK survey data from 2007 is used to empirically estimate the effect of a variety of attitudinal and socio-demographic factors on the likelihood of believing that parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children is a problem in a given area. This analysis was conducted against the backdrop of the 2011 London riots and a surge of media interest in the issue of ASB and the absence, or poor standard, of parenting exhibited in relation to many accused of participation in the rioting. A rigorous statistical imputation process is employed in order to rectify the problem of missing data for income, where results from the full sample (inclusive of imputed income) and the reduced sample are presented side-by-side to check for the robustness of the findings.

The empirical findings presented in this paper paint an interesting picture of the respondent most likely to consider the issue of irresponsible parenting to be a problem in their area. Such individuals are disproportionately likely to have a lower income, live outside of the city-centre, have been exposed to a greater level of crime, and to reside with children. Most importantly, a tendency to blame the parents very strongly associates with a perception that people in the area do not treat each other with respect. This chimes with broader arguments pertaining to the privatisation of the family

and a culture of individualism, emphasised by an ideological shift from social democracy to neo-liberalism. In particular, this strongly resonates with Murray's (1990) characterisation of an 'underclass' as being one without respect. It was the parents of this 'underclass' that became the scapegoat and target of 'blame' legislation.

This seems to suggest that a very important associated aspect of poor parenting is the engendering of a lack of respect and understanding for others on the part of their children. Clearly however, unless those same parents were interviewed and judgements made about whether they treated others with respect, it cannot be definitively stated that it is those same parents to 'blame' that do not treat others with respect.<sup>1</sup> Although the nature of the causal relationship between respect for others and responsible parenting is unclear, the evidence presented here suggests that government policy measures being designed to tackle the issue of 'broken Britain' and its 'troubled families' may ultimately prove to be more effective if a significant focus were to be placed on learning to treat others with respect and understanding.

## Notes

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TABLE 1

*Variables Used in Logistic Regression*

Dependent variable	
0 / 1	<b>Parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children</b> Does not / Does agree that 'parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children' is a big problem

Independent variables	Description	Expectations
IMPUTED INCOME, 1 - 11	<b>Income band (including imputed income) of respondent and their partner/spouse's total gross income from all sources. Scale 1-11.</b> <£50 / £50-£74 / £75-£99 / £100-£149 / £150-£199 / £200-£249 / £250-£299 / £300-£399 / £400-£499 / £500-£599 / £600+ per week	Positive sign as we would expect wealthier households with higher incomes to be able to afford more child bearing support and have more resources to exert control and monitoring of children.
YOUNG PEOPLE IN HOUSE, 0 / 1	<b>Young people (under 18 years of age) in the household. Binary</b> No young people / At least one young person in the household	Conflicting expectations, as households with young people may be less likely to blame other parents, as this in some way indicates themselves (negative sign). Alternatively, they may exhibit a form of parental 'NIMBYism' (not in my back yard), whereby they advocate the proposal by blaming other parents but actually oppose it applying to themselves (positive sign).
NOT TREATING W RESPECT, 0 / 1	<b>Does the respondent agree that 'people not treating each other with respect and consideration' is a big problem in their area. Binary</b> Does not / Does agree it is a big problem in their area	Positive sign would be expected as households that consider there to be a problem with 'respect' in their area may also be more inclined to consider other issues a problem.
CRIME UP, 0 / 1	<b>Respondent indicates that they think crime has gone up in their area in the last two years. Binary</b> Does not / Does think crime has gone up	Positive signs are expected for all variables relating to crime and ASB. Assuming that the higher the perceived level, experience and fear of crime, drug use and anti-social experience then the more likely respondents are to think there is a problem and therefore blame someone (i.e. the parents).

DRUG USE OR DEAL, 0 / 1	<b>Respondent agrees that drug use and/or dealing is a big problem in their area. Binary</b> Does not / Does agree that drug use and/or dealing is a big problem in their area. Binary	See above
ASB AND CRIME COUNT, 0 - 14	<b>The number of different types of ASB or crimes that respondents had personally experienced or witnessed in their area. Scale 0 - 14</b>	See above
FEAR OF CRIME AT NIGHT, 0 / 1	<b>Respondent indicates that fear of crime prevents them from going out in Portsmouth in the evening at least a fair amount. Binary</b> Fear of crime does not / does prevent respondent going out at night	See above
EXACT AGE,	<b>Exact age of respondent. Scale 16 - 95</b>	Positive sign, assuming a bygone age effect from older residents who may consider child and youth ASB a relatively recent phenomenon.
GENDER, 0 / 1	<b>Gender of respondent. Binary</b> Male / Female	
ETHNICITY, 0 / 1	<b>Ethnicity of respondent. Binary</b> White British / Not White British	
DISABILITY, 0 / 1	<b>Does the household include at least one person who has a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they do. Binary</b> No disability / Disability	
WORK FULL OR PART TIME, 0 / 1	<b>Working status of respondent. Binary</b> Not / In full-time (30+ hours per week) or part-time (9-29 hours per week) work	Positive sign, with similar reasoning as to wealthier households i.e. residents have more resources to exert control and monitoring of children.
CAR OWNERSHIP, 0 / 1	<b>Does the household have access to at least one car or van. Binary</b> No car or van / At least one car or van	Negative sign as households with access to a vehicle have the ability to more easily get away from their local area and bypass potentially ASB interactions.
VOLUNTEERED, 0 / 1	<b>Has the respondent given unpaid help to any groups, clubs or organisations in the last 12 months. Binary</b> Has not / Has volunteered at least once in the last 12 months	Expected sign is unclear. This variable is an indication that the respondent does engage in pro-social behaviour.

COMMUNITY COHESION, 0 / 1	<b>Does the respondent agree that their local area 'is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together'. Binary</b> Does not / Does agree it is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together	Negative sign, assuming that if a resident thinks people get on well together, then they are less likely to think there are problems.
EDUC DEGREE / EDUC ALEVEL / EDUC OLEVEL / EDUC OTHER	<b>Respondents highest educational qualification. Exclusive dummies, reference group 'no educational qualifications'.</b> Degree (Binary) / Alevel (Binary) / Olevel (Binary) / Other qualification (Binary)	Positive sign for all education levels, with an increasing magnitude associated with the higher educational qualifications. This is based on the assumption that the level of human capital resources to exert control and monitoring on children increases with education.
TENURE OWNER / TENURE SOCIAL / TENURE PRIVATE	<b>Tenure. Exclusive dummies, reference group 'buying with mortgage'.</b> Owner (Binary) / Social rented (Binary) / Private rented (Binary)	A positive sign is expected for those living in social rented accommodation as the assumption is that they are more likely to experience crime and ASB.
POST CODE DISTRICT, PO1 / PO2 / PO4 / PO5 / PO6	<b>Postcode district where the resident resides. Exclusive dummies, reference group 'PO3'. Output Area Classifications have been used to profile the characteristics of the population</b>	Positive sign expected for PO1 given the higher level of reported crime and ASB, as well as the larger proportion of young people (and young offenders), located in PO1 (the city centre).

TABLE 2

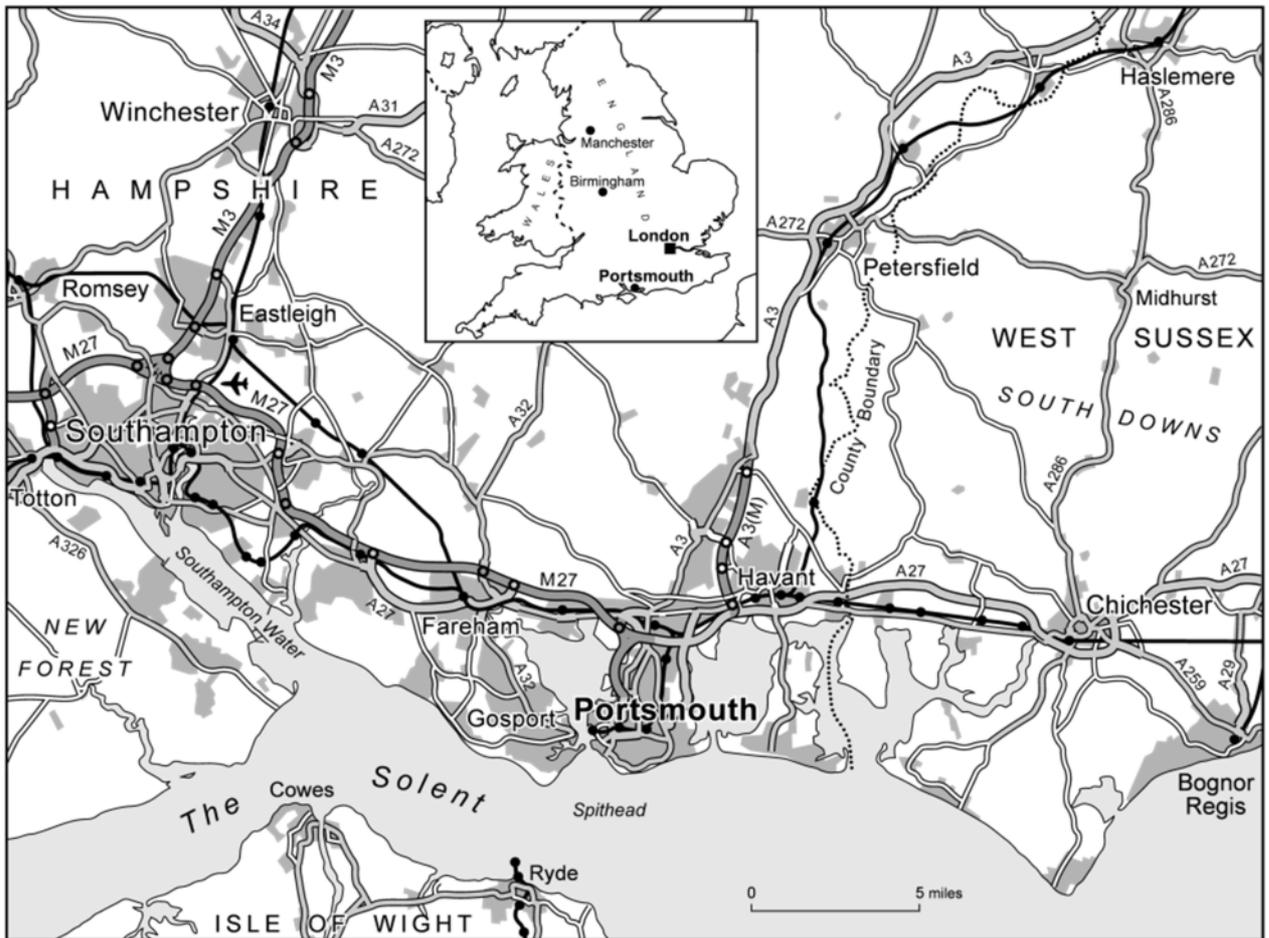
*Logistic Regression Results*

	Model including imputed income	Model excluding imputed income
	Coefficient	Coefficient
Constant	-1.210	-1.028
Imputed Income	** -0.142	** -0.116
Young People In House	0.185	* 0.385
Not Treating W Respect	*** 3.194	*** 3.165
Crime Up	** 0.594	** 0.508
Drug Use Or Deal	* 0.490	*** 0.656
ASB and Crime Count	*** 0.207	*** 0.123
Fear Of Crime At Night	0.133	0.316
Exact Age	-0.005	-0.004
Gender	* -0.457	-0.267
Ethnicity	0.108	0.665
Disability	-0.136	0.106
Work Full Or Part Time	0.375	0.322
Car Ownership	0.215	0.103
Volunteered	0.285	0.190
Community Cohesion	-0.125	* -0.358
EducDEGREE	0.569	0.468
EducALEVEL	0.671	** 0.706
EducOLEVELhigh	-0.196	-0.114
EducOTHER	0.524	** 0.642
Tenure Owner	0.030	-0.077
Tenure Social	* 0.838	0.477
Tenure Private	-0.125	-0.312
PO1	* -0.842	*** -1.225
PO2	0.174	-0.101
PO4	-0.372	** -0.688
PO5	-0.933	** -0.965
PO6	-0.069	-0.334

(Note: \* Denotes significance at the 90% confidence interval, \*\* at the 95% confidence interval and \*\*\* at the 99% confidence interval.)

FIGURE 1

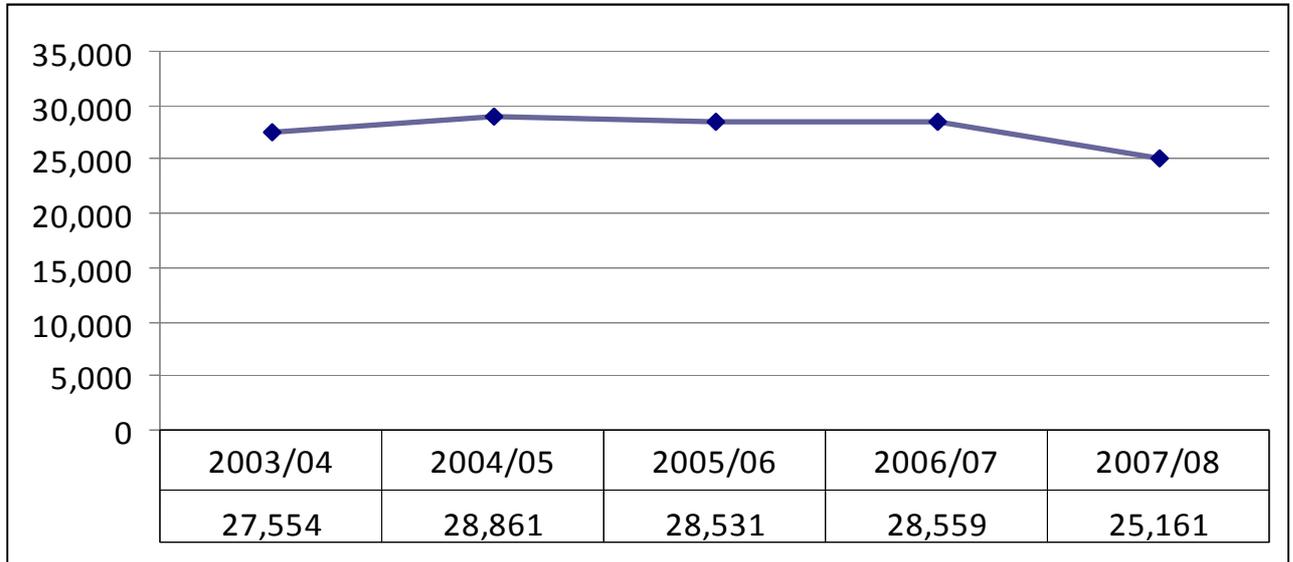
*Location of the City of Portsmouth*



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**FIGURE 2**

*Recorded Crime in Portsmouth, 2003/04 to 2007/08.*



**(Source: Hampshire Constabulary 2008)**