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# The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities,  
and socially supportive relationships  
of mothers experiencing deprivation  
poverty in austerity-era Britain

PhD Dissertation  
Amanda Elizabeth Bruck

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Doctoral Programme in  
Social and Cultural Anthropology

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Dissertation directors:  
Miranda J. Lubbers and  
Hugo Valenzuela García

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Departament d'Antropologia  
Social i Cultural

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Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

.....  
2021





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**UAB**

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Dedicated to the mothers of Willenford,  
and all the mothers, and fathers, that we have, will be, and have lost.



*“...poverty is at one and the same time both increasingly a normalised condition in contemporary Britain,  
and also one that is demonised to such a degree that its real causes and consequences are barely discussed.”*

*Tracy Shildrick, 2018*





## **Acknowledgements**

As is the case with all doctoral projects, this dissertation represents years of an incredible amount of work, which at times felt unsurmountable, and would have been impossible with the support from so many people.

First, I must thank the women who let me into their world. As I write this now, I find it hard to say ‘goodbye’ in some way to these women, they have become a part of my life. I have been humbled by their strength, tenacity, and love. I know my privilege as an ethnographer, and I hope the words written herein gives you a voice.

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Finally, my gratitude goes to two mothers who are no longer with me, but spirits are present throughout this dissertation. My own mother, Libby, and Tom's mother, Carol. I hope this will make you both proud.

## **Abstract in English**

This doctoral dissertation is an in-depth study of the lived realities and social support for mothers experiencing deprivation poverty during austerity-era Britain. In 2008, the United Kingdom experienced an economic crisis which was the result, in part, of the failure of global financial institutions. The government urged that the only way out of the crisis was to implement economic policies of austerity, which was an aggressive contracting of state support for socially supportive services, driven by narratives of deservingness and welfare conditionality. Austerity has been exceedingly detrimental for low-income communities, and when taking into consideration the intersection of gender, and family status, profoundly negative effects have been observed. This dissertation examines how economically uncertain mothers in the North West of England experience their daily lives in times of national, local and personal economic crisis.

Based upon ethnographic field work in two charitable organisations, this dissertation explores themes of gendered notions of deservingness, relationality, and temporalities. In using these lenses, the dissertation considers how narratives of worthiness influence the provision of supportive services, and altogether impact the formation of relationships among mothers, and between mothers and service providers. It was also observed that there is a dissonance between how organisations perceive mothers' time use and mothers' personal experience of their temporalities; this tension, partially originating from narratives of deservingness, is observed in institutional norms to which mothers' must acquiesce.

The findings in this dissertation bring forward power dynamics between mothers (as clients) and charitable organisations (as service providers) based upon organisations' perceptions of mothers' temporalities and worthiness. Nevertheless, mothers cooperate and display behaviours of distributive agency among themselves, which helps to ensure everyone

can access essential instrumental, informational and emotional support. However, the mothers have to assume the behaviours of a good, deserving mother to make ends meet.

Considering the experiences of economically uncertain mothers in regard to deservingness, relationality, and temporality advances an understanding of the lived realities of some of the most disadvantaged and formally unsupported women in times of economic crisis. The research herein presents a novel intersection in which to view a causality for maintaining a cycle of poverty for mothers. The themes examined in this dissertation, despite how social dynamics and power structures are rapidly changing due to the global pandemic, will continue to be relevant for social researchers for generations to come.

## **Resumen en castellano**

Esta tesis doctoral investiga en profundidad las realidades vividas de madres que padecen pobreza en el contexto de la era de austeridad en Gran Bretaña, así como el tipo de apoyo social brindado. En 2008, el Reino Unido experimentó una crisis económica derivado, en parte, del fracaso de las instituciones financieras mundiales. El gobierno instó a que la única salida a la crisis era implementar políticas económicas de austeridad, impulsada por narrativas de merecimiento y condicionalidad de bienestar. La austeridad ha tenido un efecto catastrófico para aquellos sectores con bajos ingresos, lo cual se hace particularmente notorio cuando se atiende a cuestiones de género y situación familiar. Esta disertación examina cómo las madres en el noroeste de Inglaterra, que sufren incertidumbre económica, experimentan su vida cotidiana en tiempos de crisis económica nacional, local y personal.

Basado en trabajo de campo etnográfico realizado en dos organizaciones caritativas, esta tesis analiza las nociones de merecimiento en función de género, relacionalidad y temporalidad. Mediante estas perspectivas, la tesis analiza el modo en que las narrativas de merecimiento (*deservingness*) influyen en la provisión de servicios de apoyo y, en conjunto,

impactan en la formación de relaciones entre las madres que acuden a estas organizaciones, así como entre madres y los proveedores de servicios. En concreto, la tesis analiza una la disonancia entre el modo en que las organizaciones perciben el uso del tiempo de las madres y la experiencia de estas madres de sus temporalidades, una tensión parcialmente originada por esas narrativas de merecimiento observable en las normas institucionales.

Los resultados de esta investigación doctoral muestran la dinámica de poder entre las madres (como clientes) y las organizaciones benéficas (como proveedores de servicios) basadas en las percepciones de las organizaciones sobre la temporalidad y la dignidad de las madres. Sin embargo, las madres cooperan y muestran comportamientos de agencia distributiva entre ellas, lo que ayuda a asegurar que todas puedan acceder al apoyo instrumental, informativo y emocional esencial. Asimismo, las madres se ven expuestas a presiones ideológicas como son la construcción social de una *buena madre* y *merecedora* conseguir subsistir.

El análisis de estas experiencias de madres en lo que respecta al merecimiento, la relacionalidad y la temporalidad contribuye de manera novedosa a la comprensión de su realidad vivida y al tipo de apoyo en tiempos de crisis económica. Estas cuestiones se revelan más relevantes y urgentes en un contexto de pandemia global y creciente desigualdad socioeconómica, lo cual abre escenarios de investigación prometedores en el futuro.



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## **Acronyms**

BAME	–	Black, Asia, minority ethnic
C.M.A.	–	Child maintenance Allowance
DWP	–	Department of Work and Pensions
ESM	–	Experience sampling method
NGO	–	Non-governmental organisation
NHS	–	National Health Service
TUC	–	Trade Union Congress
U.C.	–	Universal Credit
UDHR	–	United Nations Human Rights



# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Austerity-era Britain

On a cold, rainy March morning in 2018, I waited on a small train platform to go to Edgington<sup>1</sup>, a foodbank serving residents of Willenford, a city in the North West of England. I was going to the north of the city for the first time to meet with Martina, the foodbank's manager, at what became one of my two field sites. While waiting, I felt a sense of anxiety about the world I was about to step into, because how high levels of poverty had impacted the local community. I was also apprehensive about the ethical implications of investigating some of the most vulnerable women in one of the wealthiest countries in the world (World Bank, 2019). Up until that point, I had only read about austerity-era Britain and its negative impact on communities, in particular the acute effect for traditionally working-class and minority areas, exemplified by the 74% rise in foodbank usage between 2015 to 2020 (Trussell Trust, 2021). Additionally, there was a rise in homelessness between 2010-2017 of 132%, and the regions in the North of England have been the most severely impacted (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Specific to the gendered dynamic of austerity, in 2017, it was estimated that welfare cuts cost women 79 billion pounds in terms of tax credits, welfare benefits, and social support programs, equating to 86% of government spending cuts, in the years 2010 through 2017 (Stewart, 2017). At the same time, within those seven years, support for domestic violence refuges<sup>2</sup> experienced a 24% decrease (McClenaghan & Andersson, 2017). For those reasons, while waiting on the platform,

---

<sup>1</sup> All names of participating individuals, institutions, and their locations have been anonymised

<sup>2</sup> A *women's refuge* is also known as a 'women's shelter'. This is a place where women can escape from various forms of violence (most commonly physical or sexual, though in the UK economic abuse has recently become adjudicated).



I wondered how, in a landscape so hostile, particularly towards women, economically vulnerable mothers could subsist.

After changing trains in the city centre, while the second train moved towards Edginton, the landscape became visibly different. Leaving behind high streets full of shoppers and the city centre heaving with business suits, the residential area in the north of Willenford is significantly more populated, the horizon lined with grey, brown, and off-white high-rise tower blocks, and pockets of terraced two-up, two-down houses (see Image 1). Upon arriving at the train station for Edginton, I walked half a kilometre on busy roads with scarce pavement to safely walk. In our initial meeting, I told Martina how I had arrived at the foodbank, and she responded with stories from visitors and volunteers of the frequent muggings in the area between the Edginton and the train station. She said that it is not uncommon for knife attacks to occur, which were sometimes fatal. Martina, therefore, suggested that I take the bus in the future so I would not have to walk through such a dangerous neighbourhood. It was shocking to hear of serious assaults only a short distance from the affluent city centre. However, the rise in crime was unsurprising because of notable links between austerity and criminal activity because budgets for police (Office for National Statistics, 2019) and youth services had also been considerably reduced (Toynbee, 2018). The fear of crime, and its actual occurrence, compounded mothers' daily insecurities regarding the acquisition of basic items, for instance, food, shelter, and clothing. The daily uncertainties of accessing instrumental support contributed to the anxieties and fears mothers expressed to me in struggling to survive in the era of austerity in Britain.

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*Image 1. Area surrounding Edgington*

A few months later, I gained access to my second field site, Carol's House, a women's centre also located in the north of Willenford. Similar to Edgington, the route to arrive at Carol's House from the city centre was far, requiring me to change busses twice, and travel through economically deprived and, at times, neglected (see Images 2 and 3) and dangerous neighbourhoods. Germane to what would become one of the main focuses of my research was the length of time it took for me to arrive at Carol's House (see Section 2.4.). Depending on whether I had made my bus connection, the journey could take anywhere from thirty minutes to over an hour, while if I had driven, it would have taken me no more than fifteen minutes, even in traffic. As the bus got closer to Carol's House, progressively more mothers got on board, pushing prams with crying children and holding shopping bags from low-cost stores. Throughout my field work, I noticed that mothers would reuse these bags when collecting food parcels from foodbanks and donated clothes from charitable organisations to appear as if they had paid money on material items, as opposed to relying on charity to survive. To me, this was

an expression of internalised stigmatisation of receiving government welfare and being (single) mothers in relative poverty (Jun, 2019). While onboard the busses, seldom did the free Internet work, an essential service many mothers depended on because it was one of the only times they could get on the Internet at no additional cost. This was vital because, for these women who subsist on very little money, if they had to pay for mobile Internet, it could be devastating for their budgets and negatively have an influence on their ability to get by.



*Image 2. Empty lot close to Carol's House*

The north-western region of England is one of the most economically depressed and challenging places in the UK for women and mothers (Oxfam, 2013; Tew et al., 2014; Social Mobility Commission, 2016). According to Dunatchik et al. (2017), cities and towns in the North West of England were the worst for women to live in terms of income, housing affordability, personal wellbeing, safety, education, life expectancy, environment, and culture (Dunatchik et al., 2017). For that reason, I wanted to understand how women in this region

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made ends meet in austere times and the projections they have of their futures (Coleman, 2016; see Image 4).



Image 3. Newspaper article about 'slum' like conditions in one of Willenford's neighbourhoods



Image 4. Anti-austerity sign on a Willenford city bank building

Policies of austerity have become increasingly severe, and the Conservative government continues to implement an economic agenda that leaves the most vulnerable even further behind (Mueller, 2019). The reduction of state support, in a country that traditionally had a reliable social welfare system, has had a dramatic impact. Britain was one of the first countries to introduce large-scale public welfare initiatives based upon human rights, such as the National Health Service (Light, 2003). In the past, Britons were able to trust in the government to provide a social safety net to survive in the event of unforeseen crises. However, through the programme of austerity, supportive institutions have been dismantled, and trust in those institutions eroded. Moreover, austerity was initiated and maintained, in part, by a discourse that shames and blames its recipients (Garthwaite, 2016).

## **1.2. Economically uncertain women and mothers in Austerity-era Britain**

When I began ethnographic fieldwork, I was frequently confronted with the questions as to why I focused on economically uncertain women as opposed to men. While it is unmistakable that austerity also negatively impacts males, the core group for this project is mothers because of the unbalanced impact austerity has had on women, who are most often primary caregivers and rely more heavily on state welfare support. The intersection of the defining characteristics of these women as being (a) low- or no-income, (b) commonly single mothers, and (c) immigrants and/or from ethnically diverse and/ or working-class communities present intense challenges (see Section 2.2.). The junctures of these features lead to even greater complexities of disadvantage, and therefore they were a particularly relevant group on which this research focused.

In general, mothers have the responsibility of caring duties which are seldom associated with their male counterparts (Samman et al., 2016). These responsibilities can limit women's

ability to engage in paid labour or other spheres of life outside of the household as a result of temporal constraints. Due to this, women's potential income may be negatively affected. Moreover, it might be challenging for mothers in-poverty to form ties with those who could help advance economic opportunities because of the time spent on family responsibilities.

Also, women and children in low-income households are more often the victim of domestic and child abuse, and have less ability to leave an abusive relationship because of economic dependency on husbands or male bread-winning partners (Fahmy et al., 2016). Furthermore, for those claimants of Universal Credit (U.C.), families have to nominate one bank account to receive payments, which the Women's Budget Group (2018) is concerned "risks further financial abuse [and that] the reduction of women's financial autonomy could result in main carers (usually in practice mothers) losing clearly labelled child payments, which currently are often paid separately and can provide a lifeline to survivors of domestic abuse" (Women's Budget Group, 2018). As Wilcox (2000) discovered, for those women who do leave a violent relationship and are in economic crisis, debts can compound from the time living in a women's refuge, and therefore women are at risk of going into rent arrears (Wilcox, 2000).

### **1.3. Aims of the project and main research questions**

This doctoral research studies the lived experiences and socially supportive relationships of economically uncertain mothers in austerity-era Britain. In particular, the dissertation applies three major thematic lenses to problematise and analyse the mothers' lives. These are (1) gendered notions of deservingness, (2) relationality, and (3) temporalities, which I connect with the concept of navigation. It also explores the perceptions that actors involved with charitable organisations have of economically uncertain mothers, particularly in regard to notions of deservingness and the impact of these perceptions on the provision of supportive services.

The findings of my project shed new light on mothers' daily encounters by adopting three lenses: organisations' notions of mothers' deservingness, relationality, and temporality, and how these three concepts interact. Altogether, I am able to examine the ways these ideas impact economically uncertain mothers' livelihood practices in times of economic crisis and how the mothers navigate their worlds. Consequently, the research was directed by the following research question and three subquestions:

What are the lived realities of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain, and how do they form socially supportive relationships?

- a. How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in a neoliberal ideology affect the organizational norms of a charity organisation, and, consequently, the provision of support of these organisations to their visitors?
- b. How do non-government organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?
- c. To what extent is there a discord between economically uncertain mothers' critical temporalities and temporal pressures from supportive service providers?

Some of the terms involved in the main research questions need a conceptual definition, which is done in this section, and in Section 1.4. further explains the subquestions. The first is *deprivation poverty*. If an individual does not have the financial means to access resources that are considered to be necessary to live in accordance with what is socially acceptable in a

particular community, it can be said that the person experiences *deprivation poverty*. Lansley and Mack (2015) explain deprivation poverty as the “enforced lack of socially perceived necessities” (p. 45). In this dissertation, the term *economically uncertain mothers* is used interchangeably with *deprivation poverty*. Next, *socially supportive relationships* refers to the support (e.g., instrumental, emotional, informational) provided by primary and secondary social relationships, which helps manage major or daily stressors (Thoits, 2011; Wilkerson, et al., 2017).

The main research question and the three sub-questions served to guide an exploration of the lived realities of these mothers. Moreover, these help to examine how organisations’ allocation of mothers’ time can maintain a cycle of poverty, which asserts power over mothers who rely on social support, and the impact on the formation of socially supportive relationships among mothers and mothers/ service providers. In answering my research questions, the dissertation focuses on three theoretical concepts: (1) gendered notions of deservingness, (2) temporality: mothers' and organisations' perceptions of mothers' time use, and (3) relationality among mothers and between mothers and third-sector workers. It is explored how these are interrelated and these ideas are brought together using the concept of navigation in Section 2.5 (see Figure 2). In this dissertation, these questions are directly addressed based upon the ethnographic fieldwork conducted both in two charitable organisations and also outside of these, and in-depth qualitative interviews. This ethnographic fieldwork was carried out between March 2018 through September 2019.



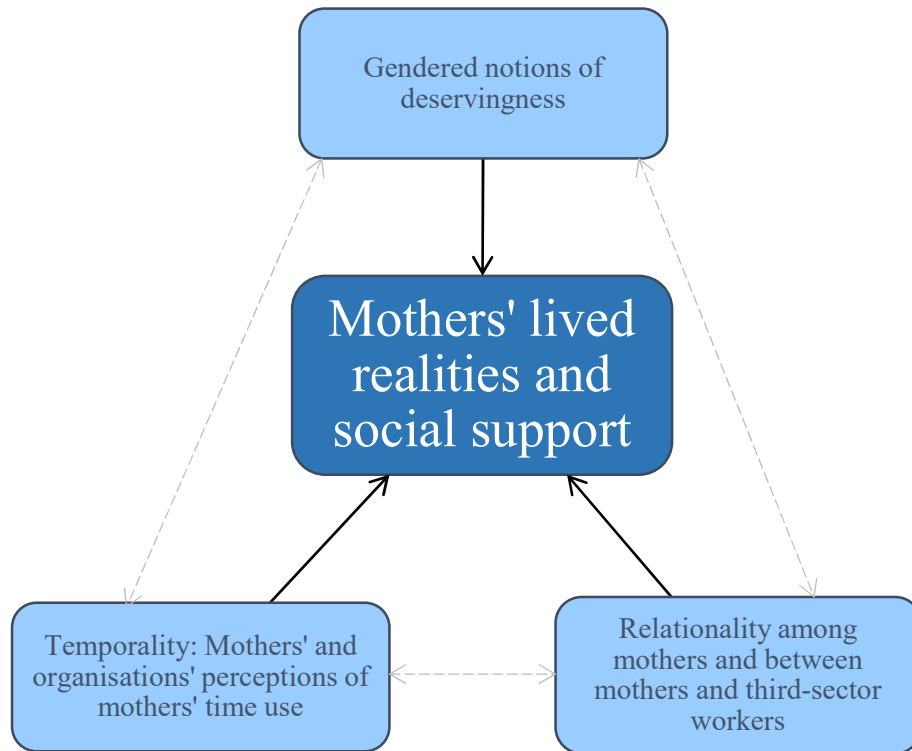


Figure 1. Interconnected components that influence mothers' lived realities and social support

#### 1.4. Description of articles

Through analysis of the data, three questions were developed that directed the academic journal articles in Chapters 4-6 (see Table 1). The three articles share analytical and ethnographic objectives yet apply different theoretical perspectives. One connection is temporality and the (un)deserving mother. In poverty research, the intersection of these ideas has not been deeply analysed, though I found this overlap to be highly relevant in the lived experiences of the mothers in this research. Framing mothers' subjective realities through the prism of temporality and deservingness is a novel approach (1) to understand how relatively impoverished mothers make ends meet, and (2) to appreciate the impact of temporality on forming social support and navigating the hostile landscape of austerity-era Britain. Another connection is social networks and social support. Through first surveying the influence of time and notions of worth on

livelihood practices, this research herein explores how social support is utilised in actualising ways to get-by in times of economic crisis. This deepened relational approach recognises the salience of different actors in mothers’ lives, and how these can be relied upon to help them get-by under exceptionally challenging social and economic periods.

Title & publisher	Research question	Theoretical concepts	Results & contributions
<p><b>Chapter 4.</b></p> <p><i>We’ll go back to a system you really don’t like!’’: Organizational norms and structural violence in a British foodbank’</i></p> <p>Published in: The Journal of Organizational Ethnography</p>	<p>How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in a neoliberal ideology affect the organizational norms of a charity organisation, and, consequently, the provision of support of these organizations to their visitors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural violence</li> <li>• Temporalities</li> <li>• Notions of deservingness</li> <li>• Livelihood strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of notions of deservingness on supportive exchanges/ forming relationships</li> <li>• Hegemonic structure results in structural violence</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chapter 5.</b></p> <p><i>Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality, and organisational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers</i></p> <p>Published in: Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa</p>	<p>How do non-government organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livelihood strategies</li> <li>• Temporalities</li> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Social networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short-term, potentially precarious sources of support are experienced as long-term, reliable support</li> <li>• Institutional trust mechanises formation of enduring bonds</li> </ul>

<p><b>Chapter 6.</b></p> <p><i>“It seems very unfair and unbalanced”: The assumed and critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers in the North West of Britain</i></p> <p>Article under review</p>	<p>To what extent is there a discord between economically uncertain mothers’ critical temporalities and temporal pressures from supportive service providers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical temporalities</li> <li>• Temporal agency</li> <li>• Livelihood strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers lack temporal agency resulting from organisations’ perceptions of their timekeeping</li> <li>• Negative impact on chronic poverty/ emotional well-being</li> </ul>
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Table 1. Schematic overview of three academic articles (Chapters 4, 5, and 6)

1.4.1. Description of Article 1:

“We’ll go back to a system you really don’t like!”: Organizational norms and structural violence in a British foodbank

The first article is entitled “*We’ll go back to a system you really don’t like! : Organizational norms and structural violence in a British foodbank*”<sup>3</sup>. I am the primary author and was co-authored by Dr. Kayleigh Garthwaite from the University of Birmingham. This article was published in the Journal of Organizational Ethnography<sup>4</sup>. The guiding question is: *How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in a neoliberal ideology affect the organizational norms of a charity organisation, and, consequently, the provision of support of these organizations to their visitors?*<sup>5</sup> As previously indicated, *notions of deservingness* refer to a discourse regarding a binary of deserving or undeserving recipients of support based upon the criteria of worthiness embedded in welfare states. Put simply, these are

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 4

<sup>4</sup> Journal of Organizational Ethnography has a Scopus score of 1.2; The journal is Indexed and Abstracted in British Library, Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities in Economics & Finance and Management, EBSCO, Emerging Sources Citation Index ESCI (Clarivate Analytics), ReadCube Discovery, Summon; and ranked by: Chartered Association for Business Schools (CABS, UK), Academic Journal Guide 2018, NSD (Norway), Scopus, The Publication Forum (Finland)

<sup>5</sup> Subquestion A

the ideas that pertain to individuals perceived as worthy of receiving charity based upon public opinion of welfare distribution, the perceived character of individuals, morality of scarcity, and notions of reciprocity, which are then positioned against the burdens they pose on society.

In this article we examine how a neoliberal normative framework has embedded itself into the organisational norms of Edgington's foodbank. Through ethnographic data collected from visitors, volunteers, and staff, we explore how neoliberal discourse and norms of (un)deservingness created a hostile environment for mothers accessing Edgington. Moreover, we interrogate how mothers' lived experiences, with an emphasis on temporalities (e.g., accessing multiple charitable organisations, welfare offices, mothering duties of care), are disregarded by Edgington's management, which in turn created a structurally violent environment. However, the hostility helped to form relationships among visitors themselves, and also with volunteers, to navigate institutional norms to access resources needed for survival. This article has implications for those working in the third sector and asserts the need to include visitors' lived experiences when devising their institutional norms. Moreover, it calls to embrace a horizontal management structure to ensure visitors' needs are met, while also recognising bureaucratic pressures.

#### 1.4.2. Description of Article 2:

Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality, and organisational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers

The second article is titled *Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality, and organisational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers*<sup>6</sup>. I am the sole author of

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 5

this article, and is published in the journal *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*<sup>7</sup> in a special issue that focuses on ethnographic accounts of personal networks led by Dr. Lidia Manzo of the University of Milan. The question this article answers is: *How do non-government organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?*<sup>8</sup> The term *spaces of transience* refers to spaces that an individual inhabits for a short duration.

This article draws on data gathered from both Edginton and Carol's House, and considers how organisations, which are formally presented as temporary sources of support, are actually spaces where enduring social support is fostered. The article analyses how security, safety, and reliability is experienced at Edginton and Carol's House, which is not experienced much in their daily lives. Due to these experiences, the women developed a degree of trust in institutions and gave them assuredness when trusting in other actors in the long-term. This article considers the temporal norms of organisations and welfare offices, combined with mothers' protentions of their lives continuing to be socially and economically challenging, or getting worse. By connecting with those who have similar experiences, mothers bonded with socially supportive networks to cope, find empathy, friendship, and non-instrumental support. The article concludes with a discussion of the importance of physical locations for social support, such as Edginton and Carol's House, and a pressing concern regarding the consequences of crises, such as COVID-19, on the longevity of such places.

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<sup>7</sup> *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* is indexed by Scopus Bibliographic Database, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), ERIH Plus, Sociological Abstracts, JournalSeek, Catalogo italiano dei periodici (ACNP), Google Scholar, Primo Central (Ex Libris), EDS (EBSCO).

<sup>8</sup> Subquestion B

### 1.4.3. Description of Article 3:

#### “It seems very unfair and unbalanced”: The assumed and critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers in the North West of Britain

The third article is entitled “*It seems very unfair and unbalanced*”: *The assumed and critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers in the North West of Britain*<sup>9</sup>, for which I am the only author, and is currently under review. The question which guides this article is: *To what extent is there a discord between economically uncertain mothers’ critical temporalities and temporal pressures from supportive service providers?*<sup>10</sup> The term *critical temporality* is defined as the “past, present and future; continuity and discontinuity; and multiple rhythms of time use” (Bastian, 2014, p. 137). And finally, the term *temporal pressure* refers to the constraints on one’s time, which may inhibit their ability to allocate their time in a way in which the mothers would choose.

This article relies upon data from both centres and explores the tension between (1) mothers’ critical temporalities and their lived experiences with (2) third-sector organisations’ assumptions of the women’s time. This article studies the narrative of relatively impoverished mothers having an abundance of time and, how in order to access resources necessary for survival, mothers should acquiesce to the timetables and temporal norms of organisations. That is to say their time is allocated for them by supportive services, and organisations believe mothers should comply because their support is necessary for the women’s survival. However, it is shown that the mothers do not experience having an abundance of time, and moreover, because their time is apportioned for them, they sense a loss of temporal agency. It is concluded that if this discord is not addressed, mothers will continue to feel a lack of agency over their time. Additionally, I assert there is a need for organisations and welfare offices to be receptive

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 6

<sup>10</sup> Subquestion C

to low and no-income mothers' lived experiences when creating programs and timetables to best serve those in need. Finally, the article calls attention to the need for poverty researchers to apply a lens of temporality. This is because not only is it a central feature of human experience but is also the nexus of (1) temporalities, (2) economically uncertain mothers, and (3) the tension between critical and assumed temporalities, which is a critically understudied, yet important, field of research.

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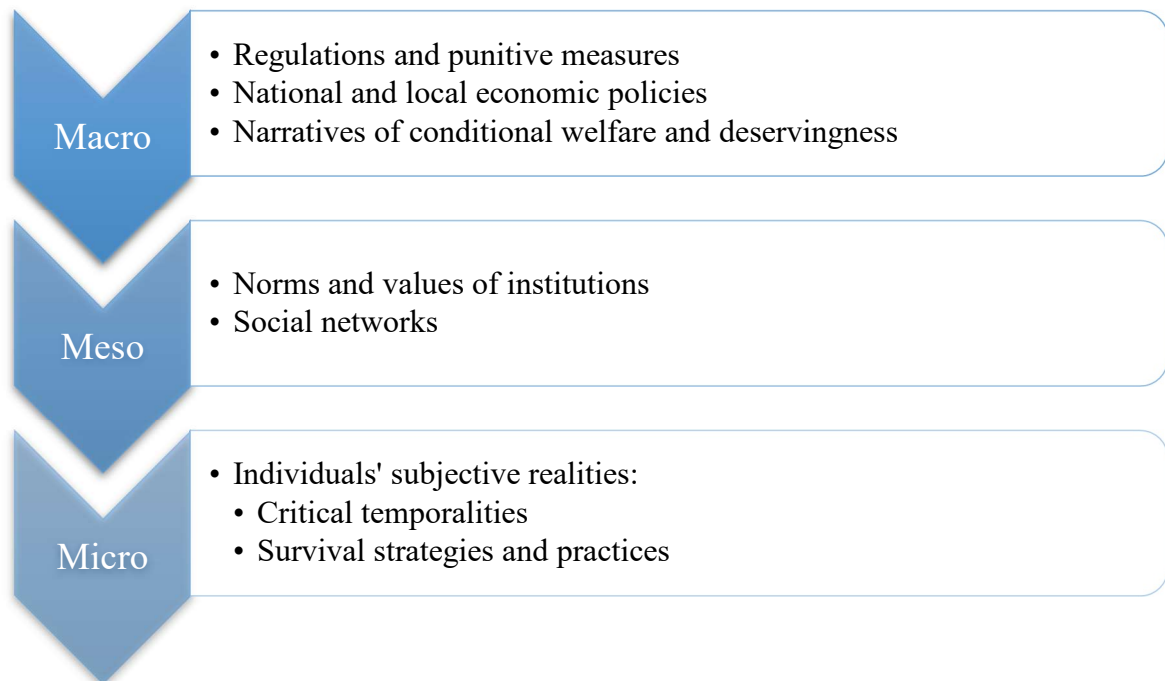
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## Chapter 2. Theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical concepts and central themes are introduced which run through this dissertation and articulate the different academic articles presented herein. These concepts are (1) notions of deservingness, (2) gender, (3) relationality, and (4) temporality. All of these are interwoven throughout and used in conjunction, along with the concept of navigation, to support the overall arguments.

One of the main contributions this dissertation makes towards the anthropological and social sciences is an examination of the temporalities and relationalities of the lived experience of (un)deserving mothers. This project brings together the micro-meso-macro dimensions of individuals and subjective realities and temporalities (micro), institutions' norms and values and social networks (meso), and national economic policies, punitive welfare, and the corresponding rhetoric of conditional welfare (macro). Through analysing these different levels and their interconnectedness it is seen how the normative frameworks of temporality in institutions (meso) associated with notions of conditionality and deservingness driven by national policies and narratives of austerity (macro) impact subjective realities, which in turn affects women's survival strategies (micro; see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Levels of analysis*

## 2.1. The (un)deserving poor in austerity-era Britain

In common with other countries in Europe, in 2008 Britain suffered a major economic crisis. This was triggered by the fracturing of global banking institutions in which the government provided a financial bailout (French et al., 2009). At the same time, political narratives emerged regarding welfare deservingness and conditionality, which was partially facilitated an acceptance of public spending cuts (Stanley & Hartman, 2016). However, resulting from the economic downturn, Britain experienced massive job losses as well as the introduction of severe economic austerity measures (Economic Social Research Council, 2015). When implementing reformed programs of social welfare in the late 2000's, policy makers introduced means-testing for welfare recipients (Hood & Oakley, 2004). Brought into mainstream discourse were notions of conditionality, defined as the dependence on an individual's

eligibility and that “welfare entitlements should be dependent on an individual first agreeing to meet particular compulsory duties or patterns of behaviour” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 269).

Notions of deservingness have always shaped the perceptions of the poor and the framing of policies for those in-need (Slack, 1988; McIntosh, 2005; Hitchcock & Shoemaker, 2018), as well as in scientific work regarding poverty (O’Connor, 2002; Brady, 2019). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the supporting ideologies of austerity and narratives on welfare conditionality were embedded in British economic policies precluding the 2008 financial crisis. For example, about a decade earlier under Tony Blair’s New Labour government, the official policy was to promote *the third way* in social and economic policy. Gilles (2013) asserts that the “notoriously vague concept of the ‘third way’ was developed in an effort to mediate individual rights and personal obligation through a contingent emphasis on both liberty and responsibility” (Gilles, 2013, p. 91). The third way espoused seven core values with a fundamental idea of “no rights without responsibilities” (Giddens, 1998, p. 35), which positions notions of conditionality of government support and “welfare rights” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 226) at the forefront of political discourse surrounding the poor. The four main areas in which these policies have had the greatest negative impact on economically vulnerable people are: social security, housing, education, and health (Dwyer, 2004). As a result, in part, notions of (un)deservingness have become increasingly pervasive and emphasise behaviours of undeserving actors during austere times. These two classes of the poor “rely on a demarcation between those who ‘contribute’ to and those who are ‘dependent’ on forms of social security” (Strong, 2020, p. 6).

In furthering the narrative of the (un)deserving poor, in 2010 Prime Minister David Cameron introduced a social project called Big Society which promoted volunteerism and social engagement as a means to lift the most impoverished areas out of their economic and social deprivation (Atkinson et al., 2013). During a 2010 speech in Liverpool for the

introduction of Big Society, Cameron said that the then current welfare state “has turned able, capable individuals into passive recipients of state help with little hope for a better future” (Heins, et al., 2019, p. 101) and concluded that his administration would be remembered as doing something “really exciting in their society” (GOV.uk, 2010). The narrative of the (un)deserving poor has had an influence on subjective realities and a sense of self for beneficiaries of social support, as well as donors and volunteers (Strong, 2020).

The withdrawal of the right to welfare, due to so-called irresponsible behaviours<sup>11</sup> viewed through the prism of conditionality, may increase the sense of stigma and shame onto beneficiaries. In part, this is due to a dissonance between one’s subjective experience and the institutions’ assumptions about these experiences and, as a result, actors are coerced into assuming behaviours to project themselves as a deserving welfare recipient. As Shildrick claims, “such is the strength of stigma and shame that comes from this misrepresentation that even those experiencing deep poverty and related disadvantages do everything they can to distance themselves from the condition” (Shildrick, 2018b, p. 2). Link and Phelan (2014) also argue that the stigmatisation of the poor is as a tool of propaganda to uphold existing power structures. Shildrick, building upon their argument, claims that “the power and pervasiveness of poverty propaganda that virtually anyone forced to rely on out of work benefits is now perceived to be feckless and undeserving” (2018a, p. 793). Therefore, the intersection of austerity and deservingness has swayed the British public’s regard toward those experiencing deprivation poverty to the extent that individuals reliant upon state support are regarded as pariahs who are unworthy of assistance, and moreover it is seen as the fault of those in-poverty for being in an impoverished position.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, “engage in anti-social behaviours, refuse to accept help in tackling the problems they may face” (Welfare Conditionality, 2021)

The Welfare Reform Act was introduced in 2012 and implemented in 2013 with its capstone policy of U.C., which modified the amount of financial support given and was purported as a more streamlined welfare payment system. There has been condemnation of U.C. because of the negative outcomes on vulnerable communities and is credited with having a direct impact on foodbank usage and homelessness (UK Parliament, 2020). However, U.C. has been neither efficient nor client-friendly, but on the contrary is byzantine for recipients because it can be difficult for them to calculate how much they will receive monthly (BBC, 2021). Moreover, one requirement to keep receiving U.C. is individuals must follow strict temporal guidelines (e.g., monthly for a meeting with a welfare officer) to demonstrate their continued deservingness, or risk being sanctioned<sup>12</sup> for up to one-hundred and eighty-two days (Citizens Advice, 2018). As previously stated, U.C. and the corresponding punitive sanctions are imbued with the narrative of (un)deserving poor, which has contributed to an intensifying mental health crisis in Britain (Mattheys, 2015; Trussell Trust, 2021). Yet, in spite of this, there has also been defunding of mental health support services under austerity (Mattheys, 2015). In a general sense, U.C. places a significant amount of responsibility on mothers; however, the politicians who conceived and administer it assert that claimants should not be reliant on benefits, and therefore recipients should not complain, but rather try to better themselves, and not rely on the government for support.

Austerity for many has been seen as a direct attack on the most vulnerable of society, with some going as far as saying that policies were specifically designed to harm the lower classes. As Labour MP John McDonnell is quoted saying in British Parliament in 2015:

It is increasingly clear that the charter and the fiscal mandate are not economic instruments, but political weapons. This is not an economic debate. It is about the

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<sup>12</sup> “A sanction, where their claim is stopped for a set period” (Department of Work and Pensions, 2021).

politics of dismantling the welfare state, the closing down of the role of the state, and the redistribution of wealth from the majority to the minority. Austerity is not an economic necessity; it is a political choice. (UK Parliament, 2015)

Taken altogether, programmes of austerity are the quintessence of Britain's history of perceptions of the poor. The conceptualisations of economically impoverished peoples are not grounded in economic concerns, but rather in engineering a social hierarchy based upon productive labour and the aspiration for individual achievements. Austerity being the leading economic policy of the country is indicative of notions of deservingness and conditionality, along with a sense of a *hierarchy of worthiness* (see Section 7.2.2.3.), and ultimately influences how support is distributed.

### 2.1.1. The (un)deserving mother in austerity-era Britain

As a result of years of austerity there has been an increase in foodbank usage (Trussell Trust, 2021), an erosion of social programs, such as Sure Start<sup>13</sup> centres that help new families (Cattan et al., 2019), and cuts to public services like libraries (Flood, 2019). Many of these facilities were essential to families, especially single and low (or no) income mothers, for the delivery of a range of supportive services. Therefore, it can be said that woven into policies of austerity is gendered structural violence (see Section 2.2.). The structural violence embedded in austerity was such cause for concern that in 2018 Phillip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights of the United Nations, investigated human rights violations connected to austerity in the United Kingdom. He concluded that:

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<sup>13</sup> Sure Start centres are places which provide assistance and support regarding child and family (e.g., health, parenting, money, training and employment). Also, there are some centres which offer early years education and pre-school day care.

Reductions in social care services translate to an increased burden on primary caregivers who are disproportionately women. Under Universal Credit, single payments to an entire household may entrench problematic and often gendered dynamics within a couple, including by giving control of the payments to a financially or physically abusive partner. Changes to the support for single parents also disproportionately affect women, who make up about 90% of single parents, and as of August of this year, two-thirds of Universal Credit recipients who had their benefits capped were single parents. (OHCHR, 2019)

Alston's conclusions and grave sentiment on the gendered dynamic of austerity has been echoed by many social scientists (MacLeavy, 2011; Jensen & Tyler, 2012; Greer-Murphy, 2017; Jupp, 2017; Hall, 2019; Hall, 2020). For instance, Pearson (2019) argues that "these fiscal targets have been designed and implemented [, and] have disproportionately affected women, particularly low-income and BAME women" (Pearson, 2019, p. 29). In Britain, women are the greatest recipients of social welfare benefits and therefore as "(...) these institutions and welfare provision are being cut back, (...) responsibility for care falls back onto women in families and communities" (Hall, 2019, p. 46). For example, due to programs such as Sure Start centres losing significant funding and experiencing closures, mothers had to rely upon other actors in their community for sources of support. In turn, the loss of socially supportive programs can augment the burdens that mothers and communities must bear. Additionally, it may reduce the time mothers have to participate in other livelihood practices and increase the amount of social support reciprocated among homophilous<sup>14</sup> actors in their

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<sup>14</sup> "Homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people. The pervasive fact of homophily means that cultural, behavioral, genetic, or material



networks (see Section 2.4.; Offer, 2012). Entering into reciprocal relationships of support with their peers means that mothers are obliged to yield their time in order to continue participating in the socially supportive environment. Therefore, the extensive cuts to the social welfare budget have manifested as a “care gap” (Hall, 2019, p. 46) that is filled by women’s unpaid labour<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.2. Gender and intersectionality

As stated in previous sections, women who experience deprivation poverty in Britain have suffered disproportional negative effects of austerity, particularly in the North West of England (see Section 1.2.). As a result, women have had to confront and adjust to compounding challenges more so than men, such as poverty, social mobility, and mental and physical well-being. Moreover, there has been an increase in domestic abuse, a decrease in women’s refuges, which all together can lead to financial abuse and exploitation (see Section 1.2.). Also, the parsimonious approach to state services and social programmes has disproportionately impacted women. This has been devastating because, for many mothers experiencing deprivation poverty, this assistance is vital to their routine in which they can access instrumental, informational, and emotional support (see Section 2.1.1.). Therefore, this section outlines relevant themes related to gender such as (1) intersectionality, (2) time use, (3) BAME<sup>16</sup> communities, (4) gender norms, and (5) structural sexism.

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information that flows through networks will tend to be localized... It also implies that any social entity that depends to a substantial degree on networks for its transmission will tend to be localized in social space and will obey certain fundamental dynamics as it interacts with other social entities in an ecology of social forms” (McPherson, et al., 2001, p. 416).

<sup>15</sup> According to the Office of National Statistics in 2016: Women do 60% more unpaid work than men, more than double unpaid reproductive labour (cooking, childcare, household cleaning), 26 hours of unpaid work opposed to the 16 hours a week of men (Office of National Statistics, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> BAME refers to black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities

Throughout this dissertation the intersection of different components of mothers' identity are discussed, which ultimately create even greater barriers to successfully adopt livelihood strategies. For this reason, the term *intersectionality* should be addressed. This concept, theorised by Crenshaw (1989), was developed as a counterargument to the feminist ideas of her day, which did not account for the multiplicity of a woman's identity, such as race, and to include the range of identities that contributed to oppressive structures in society. In its essence, intersectionality "refers to the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression" (Gopaldas, 2013, p. 90). Crenshaw argued to address intersectionality in analysis of discrimination "because the intersectional experience [of black women] is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take *intersectionality* into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). Intersectionality is an imperative analytical tool because it helps to interrogate overlapping structural forces that are oppressive and scrutinise how social systems should fully consider structural discrimination (Crenshaw, 2014; Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Therefore, this dissertation concentrates on the intersections between gender and motherhood with other factors that contribute to mothers' daily challenges on the other, most significantly marital status, economic status, and local community.

One fundamental intersection is marital status. For a single mother who is fully responsible for caring duties, her time to participate in activities outside of the household and to spend time meaningfully with her children, may be less than that of their married equivalents (Kendig & Bianchi, 2008; Craig & Mullan, 2013). Additionally, single mothers who have to navigate systems of government welfare and charitable organisations have, perhaps, an even greater deficit of time. This is due to being the sole parent responsible for maintaining the household. An additional challenge for women is to access Child Maintenance Allowance

(C.M.A.)<sup>17</sup>. In this research it was found that C.M.A. can be difficult for women to access due to issues such as (a) unregulated and/ or undocumented work, (b) mothers' feeling of shame, (c) needing to have court interventions, in the case the women who do not want to have communication with their former partners, and (d) the payment scheme<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, the intersection with race is important in this doctoral research. Five of the research participants are from BAME communities, and despite there not being an explicit analysis of ethnicity and race in this dissertation (see Section 7.3.), it should be noted that women categorised as BAME confront additional challenges in their daily struggles to survive. According to Pearson (2019) women from BAME communities tend to live in dense, urban centres with higher rents and have a higher incidence rate of having three or more children. Consequently, they are more likely to encounter increased discrimination, lower rates of pursuing post-16 education, and a greater negative impact of the benefit cap (Pearson, 2019). In Willenford, and specifically among visitors to Edgington, there is a significant population of women from BAME communities. The particular challenges they faced connected to structural and institutional racism, which have been addressed occasionally when relevant, even though an in-depth analysis of this intersection is beyond the scope of this project.

Flax (1992) asserts that gender identities are socially constructed and that "gender connotes and reflects the persistence of asymmetric power relations rather than 'natural' (biological/ anatomical) differences" (Flax, 1992, p. 182). Female and gendered experiences are shaped by notions of citizenship and equality, wherein to achieve equality means to achieve the status of male (Pateman, 1992). At times, a woman's identity has been defined by her status

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<sup>17</sup> C.M.A. are government mandates payments made to a parent, or other person, who is responsible for the care of the child.

<sup>18</sup> C.M.A. arrangements can be family-based or through the courts. In the case of the latter, there is a 20% service fee on top of the mandated payments for the sender, and 4% for the receiver. All C.M.A. applications are subject to an application fee of 20 pounds, except for victims of domestic abuse, under 19, or from Northern Ireland.

of mother and motherhood, yet these categories have been constructed through the lens of men. The socialised notions of gender are influenced by conceptions of citizenship and corresponding policies, which maintain a patriarchal power dynamic (Pateman, 1992). It is seen that governance regarding economic structures and policies are “informed by assumptions around gender” (Whitworth, 2006, p. 96), yet financial institutions are seldom viewed as gendered (Griffin, 2015). Therefore, underpinning the policies of austerity is a materialisation of *structural sexism*, meaning systemic gender inequality in power and resources (Homan, 2019), as is evident in the imbalance of the deleterious impacts on women (Griffin, 2015). I assert that structural sexism is a form of *structural violence*, which are social structures that expose individuals to perilous situations and make it challenging, and at times nearly impossible, to access resources necessary to subsist<sup>19</sup> (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004; Farmer et al., 2006). Arguably, there are sexist structures making it even more challenging for women to thrive, let alone survive. Moreover, it has been documented that women, and particularly mothers, have what Wakefield (2019) coined a *triple whammy* based upon government cuts to local budgets:

(...) local government is responsible for many of the services on which women disproportionately depend; when services are cut many women have to increase their unpaid work to fill the gaps and women are disproportionately likely to work in local authorities and schools, so are hit harder when jobs, pay and conditions are cut. (Wakefield, 2019, p. 1)

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<sup>19</sup> “The arrangements are *structural* because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are *violent* because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetuating such inequalities)” (Farmer et al., 2006).

For that reason, the imbalanced impact onto different genders has been profound to economically uncertain mothers, with additional challenges for single and BAME mothers. Therefore, it is relevant to explore how organisations' gendered notions of poverty and deservingness have influenced livelihood strategies, social networks, and the concomitant lived experiences.

## **2.3. Relationality**

This dissertation also focuses on relationality among mothers and between mothers with third-sector workers and volunteers. In doing so, the various types of relationships that are part of mothers' social networks and how these interact with one another to support the women in making-ends-meet are explored. It was found that the mothers were able to navigate their worlds through locating, engaging with, and, oftentimes, reciprocating with different social ties, the women were able to access instrumental, informational, and emotional social support to help them survive in times of economic crisis.

### **2.3.1. Ties in social networks**

Relational sociologists and social network analysts have focused on the relationships between people, rather than on individual characteristics, to explain individual wellbeing. Informal relationships with family members, friends and acquaintances provide individuals with social support, ranging from economic and material support to information, emotional support and companionship, which can help individuals cope with daily life stressors (Thoits, 2011; McCarty et al., 2019). Such social support has been thought to be particularly important for women in poverty (e.g., Stack, 1974; Dominguez & Watkins-Hayes, 2003; Mazelis, 2017).

Social network analysts have emphasized the difference between strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). *Strong ties* have a strong degree of intimacy and are long-established, such as those between kinsmen and close friends and are generally considered to be those which can be more relied upon (Briggs, 1998). Furthermore, they tend to exchange multiple types of social support. Strong ties are also more often homophilous, that is, they tend to be formed between people who are similar in many characteristics, among others, social class (McPherson et al., 2001). Paradoxically, strong ties create a sense of cohesion, while also establishing isolation due to the finite amount of information amongst these actors, and thus not enabling individuals to gain a variety of capital to be employed for social mobility (Granovetter, 1973).

Strong ties are distinguished from *weak ties*, which do not possess the same closeness and reliability as strong ties, and they may not have as many common attributes or situations pulling the actors together, as experienced with homophilous relationships (Stoloff, et al., 1999; Steglich, et al., 2010). Therefore, weak ties are typically understood to be heterophilous. Though weak ties can lead to alienation from an ego's dense component of their social network, these also provide a more advantageous position through exposure to other components and wider base of knowledge (Granovetter, 1973). In addition, weak ties often complement strong ones in the provision of support, especially if a person lacks strong ties (Fingerman, 2009).

Burt (1992) argued that the different benefits of strong and weak ties were not caused by the strength of the tie, but rather by their structural embeddedness in the networks of relationships individuals form. Strong ties tend to form clusters and are therefore often called *bonding ties*, as opposed to weak ties that often form *bridges* between such clusters. Although weak in nature, they have a vital role for individuals' social mobility and for the dissemination of information, as bridges are able to connect "unconnected social worlds and provide ego with non-redundant information" (Stoloff et al., 1999, p. 95).

In addition to social bonds and social bridges, *social links* have been identified by scholars as secondary ties, which are more formalised relationships that can act to provide support for stressful situations (Thoits, 2011). For institutions to function as links, actors must gain *institutional trust*, a dynamic relationship between actors and institutions. For this form of trust to be established, an organisation must reflect the ability to support individuals who rely upon it in a credible, reliable, and empathetic manner (Phillips, 2006). In doing so, those in need are enabled to develop coping behaviours and facilitate the formation of relationships with other ties to build social trust.

These distinctions between relationships are relevant for research on mothers who rely upon state welfare in the following ways. First, bonds are expected to give individuals the strongest social and material support needed in conditions of poverty. However, in conditions of poverty, *kin ties* are often “lacking, lost or unavailable” (Voorpostel, 2013, p. 817), due to the erosion of relationships in conditions of poverty (Lubbers et al., 2020).

Therefore, women in poverty have been observed to form *fictive kin ties* based on “frequent contact, geographical and subjective closeness and support” (Voorpostel, 2013, p. 817). These ties compensated the deficit of emotional and material support that can be essential in adopting livelihood practices (Stack, 1974; Mazelis, 2017; Rebollo et al., 2019; Güler, 2020). Moreover, weaker ties with people in similar situations can help individuals understand how to navigate the benefit or legal system; this can be essential for social support because the information from strong ties may become redundant. Thus, weaker types of relationship, some of which thickened through kinning processes, have a significant impact on individuals regarding “the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience” (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 415).

Specifically concerning social networks and economically uncertain peoples, Lubbers et al. (2020), following Raudenbush (2016), assert that there are contrasting ideas pertaining to

the extent social networks of the poor facilitate survival in comparison to a reproduction of poverty. First, some researchers argue for *pervasive solidarity* among individuals experiencing poverty, that is, those in-poverty continually rely upon “networks of kin (often matrifocal) and other close relationships, mostly with people in similar economic conditions, to compensate for a lack of resources, adopting systems of generalized reciprocity” (Lubbers, et al., 2020, p. 13). Other researchers argue that individuals in poverty experience *pervasive isolation*, where actors have decreased network access and network returns due to the homophilious nature of their networks and the erosion of ties in conditions of poverty, and that ties do not possess resources to be lifted from an economically impoverished position (Lubbers, et al., 2020). Finally, there is *selective solidarity*, wherein the poor might experience distrust with those in their networks and have limited ties to their kin and other traditionally close ties, so they selectively decide on other individuals for exchanges of social support (Lubbers, et al., 2020).

Finally, for those experiencing poverty, third-sector organisations are important spaces to identify actors who can provide instrumental, emotional, and informational support. As Glasser (1988) found in her research at a soup kitchen in the United States, charitable organisations are much more than solely providing instrumental support, and in reality, offer a setting for those in-poverty to be emotionally supported. She impresses the significance of sociability in these places for those who are in economic and personal crisis, and though the relationships formed may not be necessarily deep, these are incredibly meaningful for visitors. Moreover, Mazelis (2017) contends that third-sector organisations are vital for those in economic crisis because visitors can develop various types of ties, and importantly can learn “navigation skills from people who share life experiences with recipients is itself a valuable asset, making those getting the help feel less alone and stigmatized, particularly as they learn about the widespread conditions of poverty” (Mazelis, 2017, p. 178). The importance of



charitable organisations as centres to locate ties is addressed throughout this dissertation, but is given the greatest attention in Chapter 5.

## 2.4. Navigating temporalities and social support for (un)deserving poor mothers

During my first fieldwork visit, I observed the amount of time mothers invest travelling around the city by public transport to visit charitable organisations and welfare offices essential to their livelihoods. As a consequence, mothers relinquish agency over their timetables and routines in order to access instrumental support. In this respect, the notion and meaning of time, and particularly of *temporality* and *chronicity*, acquire a central relevance in this work. These two terms refer to the ways time is experienced by actors, and the interrelation of objective and subjective temporalities. This dissertation focuses on the impact of objective time (e.g., timetables, time use) on subjective time (e.g., organisations' perceptions of mothers' temporalities; mothers' personal experiences and daily routines), and not insomuch one's subjectivity in contorting temporal experiences, such as "time tricking" (Moroşanu & Ringel, 2016, p. 18). Furthermore, the main questions advance a perspective of temporality to better understand mothers' subjective experiences and how they adopt livelihood practices and social support in an era of austerity, and the intra-actional<sup>20</sup> influence (Barad, 2007).

In regard to experiences of time for the relatively poor, there has been previous research on temporalities and power-dynamics, and the imbalance between genders and economic status. Sullivan (1997) found that women have less free time, and it is more fragmented, than their male counterparts. Furthermore, there is the intersection of a woman's economic and

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<sup>20</sup> Barad (2007) substitutes the term *interaction* with her neologism *intra-action*. This phrase indicates that human agency is a result of inseparable dynamic forces in which the totality of society exchange, diffract, and influence. Furthermore, in utilising the term *intra-action*, it indicates that there is only subjectivity of experiences.

marital status that has a negative impact on women's abilities to allocate their time. Women experience feeling rushed and not having sufficient time to complete tasks (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Pepin et al., 2018). And moreover, economically uncertain mothers are confronted with time constraints and punitive welfare systems when accessing multiple charitable organisations (McLeod et al., 2006; Cooper, 2014).

Temporal experiences, though growing in interest, have not been widely applied in research concerning poverty and third-sector organisations (McLeod et al., 2006; Cooper, 2014; Davidov & Nelson, 2016). However, as the data for this dissertation was analysed and findings compared to secondary research, strong connections were found between temporalities and mothers' survival strategies in the data set. Temporal allocation, the way time is used for different activities, is a relevant factor for mothers in adopting livelihood practices because, mothers constantly decide how to use their time effectively in order to gather the support necessary for survival, as well as to avoid punitive measures. For this reason, this dissertation focuses on the subjective experiences of temporality for economically uncertain mothers in austerity-era Britain. Furthermore, it argues that for poverty researchers to have a more well-rounded understanding of experiences in poverty, a lens of temporality should be applied.

The above-mentioned concepts have been some points of departure for this doctoral dissertation. From these concepts the research demonstrates how objective/ subjective temporalities and corresponding notions of deservingness influence the provision of social support for economically uncertain mothers. This dissertation advances the literature on both temporalities and socially supportive networks. By viewing the reproduction of poverty through a lens of temporality, some interesting insights arise from the association between socially supportive networks, poverty, and time. Moreover, conclusions are drawn regarding the relevance of time, not only in reproducing poverty, but also in how temporal stressors can

at times catalyse relationships among actors. As will be shown in Chapters 4 – 6, the findings highlight how time is utilised to assert control over those in poverty, and also how temporal pressures can sometimes bring the mothers together and construct a sense of stability. Nevertheless, it is observed that mothers' positions of relative deprivation are sustained, despite finding others who can help them cope emotionally, which is seldom experienced in the mothers' daily lives outside of the centres.

#### 2.4.1. The value of time

In British society, actors who have control over industrial time (defined below), otherwise known as clock time, have had influence over how social structures and norms were established, and therefore, having such control was an early indicator of social class (Thompson, 1967). In the 1755 pamphlet *Friendly Advice to the Poor*, regarding the poor and their use of time, Reverend J. Clayton states ““if the sluggard hides his hands in his bosom, rather than applies them to work; if he spends his Time in Sauntring, impairs his Constitution by Laziness, and dulls his Spirit by Indolence. . .’ then he can expect only poverty as his reward” (Thompson, 1967, p. 83). This quote indicates that quantitative clock time has been a long-established method to organise British life and establish power, such as in religious institutions and other features of society, even prior to the industrial revolution (Thompson, 1967). In a contemporary, global context, a hierarchy based upon time remains prevalent in the paid-labour sphere of life: dominant actors in society have greater agency over their time, and those who are dominated find their time squeezed and are penalised when not observing to industrial time (Standing, 2011).

The objective industrial framework of time is understood as an institutionalisation of synchronised time (Griffiths et al., 2013; Cano, 2017) and establishes the hierarchy prevalent

in productive labour (Standing, 2011). Therefore, in a (post)industrial society, there is a temporal structuring with productive labour as paramount. Those who do not adhere to this ordering of time are left behind and perceived as unproductive members of a society. In addition to this, punitive measures (Wacquant, 2009) for not keeping to an objective industrial framework of time can be used as a way to exercise power over those in-poverty. In contemporary British society there are many examples of punishment for not aligning with temporal ordering, for example the benefit sanctioning system for lateness to welfare appointments and the structural violence of unaccommodating timetables of third-sector organizations (Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021). However, oftentimes mothers encountered hostilities, either at Edginton or in their daily lives, due to penalties for not following timetables of welfare and charitable organisations. Therefore, this shared experience, in part, contributed to mothers establishing relationships with others (Bruck, 2021). In this sense, the temporal framework of which mothers had to navigate facilitated relationships and they were able to find others who encountered similar crises, and share their experiences to help cope emotionally and lessen feelings of isolation.

Within other research that focuses on the assertion of power dynamics established through the use temporality, there is an emphasis on waiting time (see Section 2.4.2.). Waiting time is embedded in power structures regarding the privileged (e.g., those who do not have to wait to access resources because they do not have to rely upon the welfare system) and the underprivileged (e.g., who are forced to wait due to a lack of resources to be self-sustaining) (Auyero, 2010; Lahad, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2013; Cooper, 2014). Specific to gender and motherhood, Manne (2005) argues that modern-day motherhood has been transformed by capitalistic structures and a “growing charge against the mother outside the paid labour force is the same as that levelled at the unemployed: one of parasitism – not contributing to the economy. As demonstrated with mothers on welfare, the accusation is that women at home do

nothing” (Manne, 2005, p. 40). In relation to my ethnographic findings in Chapter 6, and supported by research from the Office of National Statistics (Office of National Statistics, 2016), it can be asserted that this is unequivocally deceptive.

#### 2.4.2. Mothers have time to wait

This dissertation uses Bastian’s (2014) definition of *critical temporalities*, defined as the convergence of “past, present and future; continuity and discontinuity; and multiple rhythms of time use” (Bastian, 2014, p. 137), which are specific to the individual. As this doctoral research analyses the lived realities of economically uncertain mothers, the concept of a critical temporality is applied because anthropology concerns itself with subjective experiences. Through this lens, this research sought insight into the ways that time creates and recreates power structures, structures of inclusion and exclusion, as well as legitimacy and agency (Bastian, 2014).

In Chapters 4 - 6, the idea of notions of temporalities and demonstrate the centrality of chronicity to mothers’ lived experiences are used. Throughout all of this research, acquiescing to timetables (e.g., charity organizations, welfare appointments, schools) was a prevailing factor in mothers’ development of livelihood strategies, which was a source of anxiety, and, at times, invoked feelings of inadequacy. Cooper (2014) explored “the seizure of women’s time by service agencies” (Cooper, 2014, p. 165) wherein one’s time is appropriated as a result of organizations’ timetables. Additionally, an earlier study by McLeod et al. (2006) showed that no one organisation provides all the resources needed for mothers in-poverty, and schedules are often inflexible and unaccommodating, as well as overlapping and sporadic. Consequently, this establishes barriers to access essential services and resources (McLeod et al., 2006). These findings were relevant to this research in which the conflicting timetables of charitable

organisations and welfare offices, as well as public transportation and mothers' caring duties, all impacted mothers' livelihood strategies. As a result, mothers were dependent on relationships formed in organisations to cope emotionally with the temporal stressors because of negative influences on emotional and physical well-being. Furthermore, this project furthers research and discussions of mothers' acquiescence to the temporal norms of supportive organisations by viewing these challenges through a lens of relationality. The analysis herein explores the conditions of temporalities being partially embedded in conditional welfare and support, and how they mechanise social support and enduring relationships.

Grounded within critical temporalities and temporal agency is a power dynamic rooted in the subjective experience of waiting and hierarchies. This is built upon asserting domination over of those who have to wait (Auyero, 2010; Griffiths et al., 2013). Periods of waiting, referred to as empty time (Flaherty, 1999; Auyero, 2010; Cooper, 2015), conjures emotions ranging from "hope and a gratifying experience to a frustration, an illusion, and a form of indefinite distress" (Lahad, 2012, p. 172). Waiting (seen as wasted productive time) is perceived as a negative due to the emphasis on the efficiency of paid work (Lahad, 2012). Therefore, a binary is exposed between those who have to and do not have to wait, which can influence subjective realities and be integrated into livelihood strategies. The act of waiting manifests as economically uncertain actors being coerced into using their free time for bureaucratic activities in exchange for resources. Through the perspective of this sequestering or loss of temporal agency, power structures are reproduced which perpetuates a cycle of poverty. The ethnographic data in this dissertation shows that the lives of the mothers observed are punctuated by periods of waiting and rushing, all with the intention of making ends meet.

## 2.5. Navigation

In this research, to investigate mothers' lived realities, it is explored how mothers in-poverty traversed their world, woven into experiences both inside and outside of the third-sector organisations, and particularly in regard to notions of deservingness and mothers' time, and the intersection with relationalities and temporalities. Therefore, the term *navigation* is used, which explains how actors traverse their worlds through processes of anticipation, preparation, and reaction. The process of navigation is interwoven with concepts time and a view of temporality that integrates past, present, and future. Navigation is a dynamic, multidimensional experience that consists of not only place, but space. Ingold (2000) claims "people do not traverse the surface of the world whose layout is fixed in advance – as represented on the cartographic map. Rather they 'feel their way' through a world that is itself in motion, continually coming into being through the combined action of human and non-human agencies" (Ingold, 2000, p. 155). Additionally, Vigh (2009) states that navigation is "motion within motion" (Vigh, 2009, p. 420), analogous to a series of concentric circles that are moving at differing velocity and direction, which contributes to an individual's subjective reality and how to move on a micro and macro level. Finally, when an individual navigates society, they experience a *living present*, that incorporates their past-present-future into one synchronised time-space (Walker, 2014).

In addition to a temporal experience, social ties and personal relationships are also integral to navigation. Ties can be particularly relevant for a sense of agency when actors endeavour to achieve goals (Vigh, 2009), which can be aspirational or, as in the context of this research, day to day survival. Social ties are central to realising wants, needs, and desires, as is having a variety of ties in addition to connections with specific knowledge. Examples of these may include paid-work, reciprocity, aids, and favours; and for mothers in-need this can also

refer to shared childcare, cohabitation, paid work, financial loans, and employment and benefit information (Edin & Lein, 1997; Nelson, 2000). Furthermore, for livelihood practices to be effectively adopted, individuals must be aware of the actors in their social network who can be relied upon for various needs. Therefore, this dissertation interrogates the ways in which economically uncertain mothers engage with actors in their networks and navigate the hostile landscape of austerity-era Britain and how socially supportive ties are functions of their various livelihood strategies and help the women get by.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter has outlined the different theoretical concepts used in this dissertation. The three main notions that used to study mothers' lived realities are: (1) organisations' gendered notions of deservingness, (2) relationality, (3) temporalities, all of which are brought together by the concept of navigation. The ways in which mothers are able to access various sources of social support, is in spite of organisations' having largely negative perceptions of mothers' deservingness, has been explored using these thematic ideas in conjunction. In applying the three main concepts mentioned above to the context of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain, the analysis explores (1) the provision of supportive services in structurally violent organisations, (2) the formation of enduring bonds in spaces of transience, and (3) the disconnect of organisations' subjective view of mothers' time use compared to the women's object experiences. These are brought together using ideas of navigation and discuss how various forms of social support, or the lack thereof, facilitate the women getting-by in periods of acute financial insecurity.



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## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

The doctoral thesis has been developed between 2017-2021 and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2019 over four research periods (see Table 2). The preliminary research was for a month in March of 2018 in Willenford when I met Edgington's management. Also, in this period I met with a variety of experts in the field to gain background knowledge of the region and the impacts of welfare reforms driven by austerity. The second phase of fieldwork took place over three months in the summer of 2018. During this period, I was a "volunteer ethnographer" (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 2) at Willenford twice a week – once during the foodbank, and the other during morning art classes and an afternoon health and wellness courses. Over this time, I also gained access to Carol's House. While there, I had the chance to carry out ethnography as a kitchen volunteer two to three times per week. I mainly volunteered in the community kitchen, and I was also a general volunteer in the creche, arts and crafts workshops, and cleaning of the centre. The third and fourth research periods were each for three months (winter of 2018-2019; summer of 2019), when I continued research as a volunteer ethnographer at both Edgington and Carol's House. In the fourth period, I stayed at the home of one of my informants, which allowed me a deeper immersion. Thus, in total, the fieldwork had a duration of ten months.



Period	Activity	Location
<b>March 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preliminary fieldwork</li> <li>• Observations in Willenford City</li> <li>• Meeting with Martina at Edgington</li> <li>• Expert interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willenford City</li> <li>• Edgington</li> </ul>
<b>Summer 2018 (3 months)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer ethnographer at Edgington</li> <li>• Access Carol's House</li> <li>• Interviews and observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willenford City</li> <li>• Edgington</li> <li>• Carol's House</li> </ul>
<b>Winter 2018-2019 (3 months)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer ethnographer at Edgington and Carol's House</li> <li>• Interviews and observations</li> <li>• Follow-ups from summer</li> <li>• Experienced Christmas at the two institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willenford City</li> <li>• Edgington</li> <li>• Carol's House</li> </ul>
<b>Summer 2019 (3 months)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer ethnographer at Edgington and Carol's House</li> <li>• Interviews and observations</li> <li>• Follow-ups from previous fieldwork periods</li> <li>• Lived in interlocutor's house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willenford City</li> <li>• Edgington</li> <li>• Carol's House</li> <li>• Interlocutor's house</li> </ul>

*Table 2. Fieldwork calendar*

The research drew on a grounded theory approach with an inductive method and themes emerging through analysis of the data set, as opposed to validating an existing theory deductively (Barker et al., 2002; Jupp, 2006). Grounded theory has many advantages, such as, “intuitive appeal, ability to foster creativity, its conceptualization potential, and its systematic approach to data analysis, and the fact that researchers using it can gather rich data” (Hussein et al., 2014, p. 2). Moreover, grounded theory is a cyclical approach in the sense that it oscillates between theory and data collection. This iterative and non-linear method begins with a field of study, then the researcher develops the inquiry into the specific areas of inquiry, and finally can “check, refine and develop their ideas and intuitions about the data” (Charmaz, 1996, p.

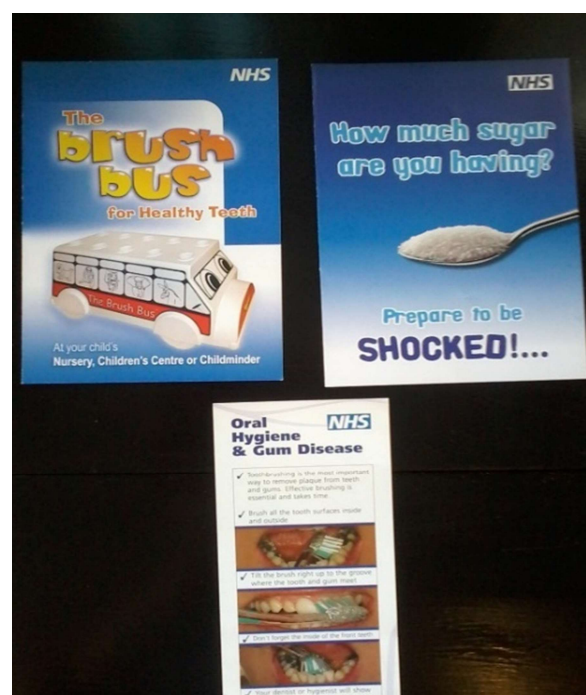
28). Additionally, grounded theory involves an “inductive analyses of data but moves beyond induction to create an imaginative interpretation of studied life ... [and] we engage in imaginative thinking about intriguing findings and then return to the field to check our conjectures” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 10). In this process, the researcher generates theory from the data, as opposed to a deductive approach of testing an existing theory and potential outcomes. Viewed in this way, using grounded theory gives a researcher greater flexibility and openness to discover new areas of inquiry and develop paradigms. Furthermore, grounded theory “involves performing a preliminary study in order to familiarize the researcher with the domain area, and also to produce a structure for the many categories, sub-categories and variables involved in the study of the phenomenon” (Barker et al., 2002, p. 220). In this chapter, I will describe the two organisations, the sample of interlocutors, methods of data collection, my own positionality, and the process of data analysis.

### **3.2. Ethnographic fieldwork**

This section first introduces the two research settings, Edgington and Carol’s House, where ethnographic fieldwork was conducted, interlocutors identified, and some interviews were held. Next, are experiences with mothers outside of the centres, where interviews with some women were carried out and observations made in their daily lives. Finally, is a discussion of the position as volunteer-ethnographer and the challenges that confronted upon entering and being in the field.

### 3.2.1. The first field site: Edgington

Edgington was the first of the two field sites in which I was a volunteer-ethnographer (see Section 3.2.4.). Located in the north of Willenford, this centre has been operational for over a decade and is an important site of instrumental, informational, and emotional support for the local community. The most utilised support service was the weekly foodbank, but Edgington also offered support in navigating the social housing and welfare systems, English language lessons, art classes, and health and wellness courses (see Images 5 and 6). All of the services provided were free if visitors could demonstrate they lived locally and presented proof of being a welfare beneficiary. Despite these aforementioned formal requirements, for those in unofficial housing (e.g., unregistered, privately rented rooms paid in-cash), Edgington would still permit them access to the centre. Also, the formal intention of Edgington was to support visitors in a short-term capacity; however, due to the fact that austerity increasingly places vulnerable peoples in uncertain positions and limits social support in their daily lives, visitors relied upon the centre for much longer-term assistance (see Chapter 5).



Images 5 and 6. Examples from the Health and Wellness courses

Edgington's centre is associated with a church and runs its services out of the organisation's facilities. There are two locations to Edgington's foodbank – the first is for registration and the second is the distribution centre. In the registration centre, there are two rooms: one where visitors sign-in for the day, and another, larger room with a kitchenette to make hot drinks/ toast and tables and chairs for sitting. On a typical day there are between 20 and 30 visitors, and there is generally an equal number of male and female foodbank users. Edgington also has a centre manager, Martina, who I write about extensively in Chapter 4, an assistant manager, and an allotment<sup>21</sup> manager. Additionally, there is a core group of 10 volunteers, mostly white-British pensioners, and there are other technical staff (e.g., maintenance, groundskeeping). Funding for Edgington comes from a mixture of sources, such as government subsidiaries, religiously affiliated donors, and fundraising. Food is also provided through a variety of sources, for example, low-cost supermarkets, bakeries, and corporate produce distributors.

An essential role of the volunteers is to inspect the food before it is distributed. This is particularly important for perishable goods because donations are either just before or slightly after the *best by* date. However, in regard to food safety, Edgington would not distribute food that was more than seven days beyond the *best by* date and would always check for the freshness of produce by hand each week; nevertheless, there were times that volunteers were working quickly and overlooked produce that had mould or were completely rotten, and accidentally distributed these to visitors.

Another important volunteer task is the collection of food from donors and transporting it to Edgington. On Tuesdays, two volunteers would drive Edgington's large white van and go to collect frozen chickens from a restaurant chain and then, boxes of produce from a corporate

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<sup>21</sup> Also known as a community garden for small-scale gardening and growing of crops.

provider, which were left outside by the front door uncovered regardless of the weather. On Wednesday mornings, two volunteers would go to low-cost supermarkets and collect donations of tinned foods, dried goods, bread, and miscellaneous items such as prepared meals, sweets, and occasionally flowers. There were two industrial sized freezers in the distribution centre for chicken and bread, and a pantry inside the registration centre for the weekly foodbank and emergency food parcels. Seldom was non-frozen food left inside the distribution centre because management feared of burglaries, yet it was impossible to move the freezers and furthermore, there was not sufficient space for them in the main building.

Edgington is a faith-based charitable organisation, yet religion was not very apparent. For this reason, there has not been much attention given to the impact of religious affiliations on receiving support. Nevertheless, there were moments when religion was noticeable and is worthy of mention. First, at the registration counter there was an ecclesiastical member who helped with daily registration who placed rosary beads next to her. Once visitors were registered, prayer cards were given out to everyone (e.g., visitors, volunteers, staff), and prayers were said. However, there were many religions represented at the foodbank, despite this all visitors would take a prayer card, but not all would recite the prayer. There were no repercussions for this, however it was noticeable that only about half of the visitors would say prayers, or even look at the cards after being given. Beyond these observations, there was no other signs of religious affiliation at Edgington, such as icons, religious images, or paintings. Despite Edgington being a religious organisation, religion was an insignificant factor in visitors' use of the foodbank, and therefore the intersection of religion has been excluded in this dissertation. However, the acquiescence to different belief-systems in order to access resources is an interesting and important lens to apply in future research (see Section 7.5.4.).

Visitors have to queue outside the centre until it opens, which can be quite problematic because the weather in Willenford can be very inclement and capricious. Visitors are allowed

## The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities, and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain

to enter at 10.00 A.M. and registration for the day closes a half-hour later. However, those who arrive first are not given priority, and the order in which visitors can collect food from the distribution location is random as such: after visitors present their identification, they take a BINGO ball out of a crocheted bag, which is their allocated number in the queue for the distribution centre (see Image 7). This procedure was controversial among visitors and some volunteers (see Chapter 4), but throughout the ethnographic fieldwork this system did not change. After entering, visitors registered for the day, and then received a hot drink and buttered toast. At 10.30 A.M. there are morning announcements and a raffle to win prizes (e.g., toiletries, children's story books, small toys). None of these items are offered in the distribution centre, so consequently visitors are excited for the prizes, and, at times, can be competitive and disagree with the staff and volunteers if they did not win. Following this, prayer cards are distributed, and a group prayer is recited. Finally, visitors are called by number to leave from the first location to walk about one kilometre down a busy road to the distribution centre, which was set up to emulate a grocery store, with a volunteer operating each station (e.g., bread, fruit/vegetables, meat, dry goods).

QUEUE NUMBER	NAME	MEMBERSHIP NUMBER	No. Adults	No. Children
1		83	2	3
2		118	1	1
3		79	2	2
4		11	1	3
5		115	1	0
6		NEW	2	3
7		80	2	0
8		36	2	5
9		106	1	4
10		82	1	0
11		16	1	2
12		35	2	4
13		22	2	4
14		162	1	4
15		100	1	3
16			2	2
17		10	1	2
18		163	3	5
19		NEW		
20		145	2	2
21		22	2	3
22		131	1	3
23		NEW	2	2
24		150	1	0
		NEW	1	0

DATE: 18/7/13

Handwritten notes on the right: "MUST SET FIRST"

Image 7. List for the foodbank queue at Edgington

Edgington is managed by Martina, a career third-sector worker who is local to the area. Despite Martina having a great deal of sympathy for visitors, she also has a highly controlling style of management. This was not just with visitors and volunteers, but also with me as a researcher, for example, I was not permitted to have formal interviews at Edgington. As discussed in Chapter 4, Martina is under bureaucratic pressures from upper management. The paper argues that due to austerity and the permeation of neoliberal ideology, Martina is compelled to implement strict spatio-temporal organisational norms, such as, the timetables and monitoring visitors' children.

### 3.2.2. The second field site: Carol's House

The second field site was Carol's House, a women's centre that has been an important organisation in the north of Willenford for over two-decades. Carol's House is entirely operated by women, inclusive of board members who do not rely upon their services. In this sense, it is empowering that the organisation is driven by women's voices, needs, and lived experiences. At the same time, it also reinforces women's caring roles, particularly for those who are economically uncertain, wherein women not only struggle to survive financially and emotionally, but also are formally responsible for providing support. At the time of this research Carol's House was open three days a week, however approximately five years prior it was open daily. During the time of the ethnographic fieldwork it was thought, that due to both public and private budget cuts, Carol's House might have to reduce assistance to only one or two days a week. The main services provided there were free counselling for women who were victims of abuse (e.g., sexual, physical, psychological, economic) or suffered from mental illness (e.g., depression, anxiety), which could be brought on by economic struggles or issues with their family, friends, and their children's fathers. There was also a community kitchen

where I participated as a volunteer-ethnographer. Additionally, there were sewing and arts and crafts activities, a creche, and a main area where women could spend time together.



*Image 8. Outside of Carol's House*

On any given day there were between 10-30 visitors at Carol's House, and the busiest day was during the group counselling sessions for women who lived in local refuges. Additionally, there were four hourly paid workers, a team of counsellors (one permanent and a small pool of rotating counsellors), and a small core of visitor-volunteers, all of whom were white mothers between the ages of 25 and 50 and had lived in the local areas for their whole lives. General financial support for Carol's House comes from a combination of government support and fundraising. Daily up-keep was funded by the sales from the community kitchen (e.g., hot dinners, non-alcoholic drinks, pantry goods from FareShare<sup>22</sup>) and some second-hand clothing and household items. All of the food for the community kitchen was purchased at a local low-cost supermarket, and the FareShare food, which is sold at a very low cost to Carol's House, is then sold at-cost to visitors.

Carol's House was a women-only centre, however male children only up until the age

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<sup>22</sup> An organisation which redistributes surplus food from supermarkets to charities



of twelve were permitted on its premises. The organisation's rule about gender was important because Carol's House was designed to be a safe space for economically uncertain women who have experienced various forms of abuse. However, while carrying out fieldwork there, the management team were informed that legally they would have to allow individuals transitioning into the female gender to access the centre. Though neither the management nor volunteers or visitors expressed transphobic views, many were fearful that allowing transgender/ transitioning individuals would make Carol's House feel less of a safe space for vulnerable cisgender women. This has not been a focus of this doctoral research, but it is an important stream for future research, as laws protecting the rights of transgender people progress, and notions of gender identity and personal safety for vulnerable peoples are gaining relevance (see Section 7.5.2.).

Carol's House is located in a cinder block building off a main road, accessible by various bus routes, and is open from 10 A.M. until 3 P.M. The women take great pride in their community's space and is therefore well maintained by staff and volunteers, but also by visitors. Outside the building, there is an allotment with flowers, fruits, and vegetables, which is taken care of by one of the kitchen-volunteers' son as well as occasionally by a volunteer organisation for at-risk teenagers. The building itself has seven rooms with the kitchen as the hub. The kitchen was well equipped with an industrial oven and cooker, an island in the middle for preparing and plating dinners, two large sinks, a pantry for dry goods, a large refrigerator and freezer, and a front counter with a large coffee urn and multiple hot-water kettles. The kitchen was not only at the physical centre of the building and in many ways at the heart of the mission of Carol's House – for many women the dinner, costing between 1.50 pounds and 5.00 pounds, would be the only hot meal of the day or week, and some of the only times to socialise in a safe-space with women who had similar economic and emotional experiences. The kitchen had a large hatch that opened up and visitors would come up to order their drinks and food, as

well as to have a chat with the kitchen workers. While conducting research at Carol's House, the majority of my time volunteering was spent in the kitchen, which was ideal as an ethnographer because it was opportune to connect with all of the women and build rapport.

Left of the kitchen was the counselling room, which had approximately twelve chairs in a circle, a small wooden coffee table, and countless boxes of tissues. There was a window with bars on it facing the street, covered by translucent, peach-coloured curtains. Also, at all times there would be at least one counsellor on site, however Carol's House also employed many part-time counsellors who would work with specific women. Once a week, Carol's House held a group counselling session with a group of women who were victims of abuse from a local refuge, and also had mental health issues as a result of their trauma (e.g., depression, anxiety, insomnia, eating disorders). When the door to this room was closed, no one except for the centre manager was allowed to knock for privacy. Furthermore, women were discouraged from discussing with one another the content of these sessions to uphold confidentiality and protect emotional well-being.

The day-to-day running of Carol's House is carried out by a variety of different women, many of whom also access the organisation for counselling services themselves. This was different to Edginton because Carol's House was female led and there was more acknowledgement of the lived experiences and challenges of economically uncertain mothers in this centre. Legally no one is officially registered as a full-time employee because the centre is open only three times in the week, so the hours worked in-person at Carol's House are part-time. However, some of the paid staff work from home on days the centre was closed, and therefore should actually be considered full-time. There is one centre manager, Emily, a former bank-manager, and there are three part-time office staff for technical support, one of which is one of the founders of Carol's House. Additionally, there is a team of visitor-volunteers who fulfil cooking and cleaning duties, and also some non-visitor volunteers who teach the art

courses and provide sewing services for visitors to have items mended for free. Finally, there is the main counsellor, Meg, as well as other part-time counsellors. The women who access Carol's House depend upon the centre for social support and many are long-term visitors. Despite the women being discouraged from engaging with each other outside of the centre due to anonymity, many stayed in contact through mobile messaging services.

Carol's House has a very familiar and friendly atmosphere, and staff and volunteers work hard to create a space where women can feel relaxed and safe, despite the serious uncertainties in their daily lives. Central to this is the group dinners are available every operating day. The women sit together at long tables, which can seat up to eight people, and at least one member of the Carol's House team sits at each table. Sometimes when children were on school holiday or were not yet of school age, they would join their mothers at Carol's House and sit together for a hot meal. However, the children also enjoyed eating together in the creche without their mothers, which they were allowed to do, and the mothers were happy to spend time with just adults. Conversations are intended to be kept light, discussing topics like reality television, movies, beauty tips and low- or no-cost days out with children. However, women did also discuss issues regarding their children's schools, welfare officers and benefit payments, as well as potential solutions to their difficulties. During these conversations, the women also found sense of comfort in sharing their experiences because they were reminded that they were not the only individuals who confronted these challenges. This time was crucial in locating social support ties and maintaining these relationships. Nevertheless, women were banned from discussing (1) their counselling sessions, (2) politics, and (3) religion. As an ethnographer, the time I spent in the kitchen and also sharing meals was important in building rapport and observing conversations and interactions that women had with one another.

### 3.2.3. Ethnographic encounters outside of the centres

In addition to carrying out ethnographic fieldwork at Edgington and Carol's House, there are also experiences with women outside the centres. There were two types of outside engagement with the women: (1) to interview those from Edgington, and (2) spend free time with mothers from both centres. Observing the women in their daily lives also produced an abundance of ethnographic data regarding their day-to-day interactions and routines. Also, there could be a comparison between the observations of their activities outside of the centres, to the answers provided during interviews or conversations. As Tellis (1997) asserts, interrogating the similarities and differences between observations and interviews allows researchers to validate data (Tellis, 1997).

In Section 7.3. the practical limitations of not being able to conduct interviews at Edgington will be discussed, but now is a discussion of observations when spending free time together. During research, in general, the women were receptive to me as a researcher and extended invitations to join in activities or running errands. For example, Padma invited me to go to a low-cost clothing store and a low-cost supermarket. During this afternoon, we were able to have conversations about her family and experiences. Additionally, I learned and experienced that Padma had to walk everywhere due to costly bus fare. Through personally experiencing this, I was subjected to the ways economic uncertainty puts physical strains on one's body. Moreover, I experienced the emotional impact of feeling ashamed from not being able to afford a bus ticket, as well as having to manage young children, especially when walking on large, busy roads.

On another occasion, Zawadie and Kate invited me to join them for a spa-day at a local, low-cost hotel that had a pool with an entry cost of 5 pounds for adults and children could go in for free (see Image 9). On this day, I was picked up and dropped off by Zawadie in her used,

compact 4-seater car that was packed with three adults and three children. Throughout the day we all played in the pool and hot-tub, and Zawadie, Kate and I conversed about the stressors in their lives and the importance of making time to relax, such as a spa-day. We ate sandwiches Zawadie made and drank juice boxes Kate brought. At the end of the day, I was driven home, and we further discussed how financially difficult it was for these two women and their friends. Kate was dropped off before me, so I could observe her house from the outside –a two-up, two-down terraced house at the end of a small, dark lane that was strewn with litter. Through the encounters outside of the centres, I first-hand observed the difficult lived experiences of the women. Nevertheless, I discovered that, despite their struggles, the women found and made moments of joy. Finally, I observed their resourcefulness, tenacity, and learned abilities in how to survive in incredibly difficult circumstances.



*Image 9. Spa day with Zawadie, Kate, and their children/ grandchildren*

### 3.2.4. On being a volunteer-ethnographer and challenges of fieldwork

Initially, I engaged as an observer-as-participant with the emphasis on observing rather than participating (Gold, 1969; Baker, 1988; Neuman, 1997). I maintained a distance from the core research group and made observations about their daily experiences without having too great of an influence on the daily operations of the organisations and actors. However, after months of volunteering with the organisations, the women considered me to be a credible and trustworthy person, and therefore I could behave as a participant-as-observer. Visitors and volunteers had accepted me personally and I had a “continuing sense of rapport with respondents” (Janes, 1969, p. 56). Nevertheless, moving into this research position can present a risk because the intimate relationships developed could have hindered my ability to collect data objectively. For that reason, I was diligent in keeping a fieldwork journal with daily observations and reflections of my personal experiences (see Section 3.4.1. for a discussion on positionality).

Of the two field sites, it was easier to access Edgington and gain access in my preliminary fieldwork, and once established as a reliable, dedicated volunteer, I continued to be welcomed. However, Edgington was an emotionally challenging field site to carry out research – this was mainly due to the hostility which the visitors were confronted with, and Martina’s unwavering centre rules and norms (see Chapter 4). Moreover, because many of the volunteers disliked Martina, they would confide in me; however, at the same time Martina also discussed her frustrations about the volunteers with me. Though this provided rich ethnographic accounts and strong insights regarding dynamics within the organisation, it could be difficult to remain objective because of the hostility the women faced and the poverty they confronted, though this was managed through my daily reflective exercises. Moreover, at times volunteers could be hostile towards the visitors, for example when asking for specific food

items and displaying preference, and in these instances, I also found it to be emotionally difficult. Though objectivity was maintained, visitors discussed how these negative encounters impacted them, and I would offer sympathetic words.

Initially, it was difficult to access Carol's House because during the preliminary research period they were burgled and two laptops were stolen, and therefore they were uncomfortable inviting an outside researcher at that time. Also, because Carol's House operates on a small budget and does not have full-time staff responding to email correspondences, it was initially difficult to receive a response to my requests to conduct research. However, after meeting with Meg, the main centre counsellor, access was gained, and I was continually invited to the centre. Unlike Edgington, Carol's House was a warm and welcoming centre for both visitors and volunteers, and due to its more friendly atmosphere, overall, it was easier to engage with interlocutors. The women were kind and openly supportive of one another at Carol's House, and there was only one instance of antagonism observed, which was just before the Christmas Dinner when the staff felt high levels of stress. However, as opposed to at Edgington where I had to be objective in the face of the hostility, at Carol's House I had to maintain objectivity because I developed close relationships with visitors and management, and at one point I was offered a part-time job, which I declined.

Once I had accessed the field, there were practical issues to manage. Much like mothers, my time had to be allocated between centres, and on Wednesdays I went between both organisations. The physical centres were located on opposite sides of the north of Willenford, and it would take me at least an hour on two different busses to travel between them. Also, as mentioned, interviews at Edgington were not permitted, and therefore my research schedule had to be managed in order to have interviews outside of normal volunteering hours and during times that were the most accommodating for the women. Finally, there was the issue of personal safety. Though never personally encountering a threatening situation, physical fights,

muggings, and petty crime were observed on the way to and around the centres; this became more frequent and frightening in the winter seasons when it would begin to be dark by the late afternoon.

In both sites I assumed the role of a volunteer ethnographer (see Garthwaite, 2016, for a similar experience) where I performed the duties of a volunteer and through this ethnographic research was carried out. As a volunteer ethnographer, I had to situate myself as both a source of support for visitors and assist with tasks at the centres, while also having to be an objective observer to gather data. While assuming this research position I observed visitors' daily lives first-hand. Additionally, I personally experienced the routines and functioning of the centres, how these aligned with mothers' personal responsibilities, and the tension between mothers' critical temporalities and organisations' perceived temporalities of the mothers. The position of a volunteer ethnographer posed challenges because in taking on a dual role, at times it potentially could have been difficult to remain objective (Tinney, 2008), though I engaged in extensive reflective activities.

### **3.3. Qualitative interviews**

#### **3.3.1. Sample for Qualitative Interviews**

For the interviews, I aimed to gather qualitative data regarding the lived experiences of my core research group. I held twenty in-depth interviews with female visitors of the two centres (10 from each organisation), and at this point I reached saturation and observed a repetition of themes to begin coding the data set. According to Bertaux (1981), the smallest sample size that is acceptable in qualitative research is fifteen, while Creswell (1998) asserts that between twenty and thirty interviews are acceptable for grounded theory studies. Moreover, Green and Thorogood (2004) claim that "the experience of most qualitative researchers is that in interview



studies little ‘new’ comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed twenty or so people in one ‘category’” (Green & Thorogood, 2004, pp. 103-104). And finally, it has been proposed by Atran et al. (2005) that “as few as 10 informants were needed to reliably establish a consensus” (Atran et al., 2005, p. 753). Therefore, based upon the assertions of these authors, the sample size of this research is robust, particularly because of my extensive participant-observation/ observation-participation.

The criteria for selecting mothers were based on the parameters of the desired core research group and interlocutors were identified through two methods of non-probability sampling: purposive sampling and the snowball method. First, purposive sampling was relied upon wherein the researcher decides “the purpose you want informants (or communities) to serve, and you go out to find some [which is] somewhat like quota sampling, except that there is no overall sampling design that tells you how many of each type of informant you need for a study” (Bernard, 2011, p. 145). The other method used was the nonprobability sampling technique of the snowball method to choose interlocutors. The snowball method is an effective chain referral technique in which to locate individuals who are in hard to find, hidden, or stigmatised groups (Bernard, 2011). Beginning with a set of parameters (defined below), the researcher finds initial informants who then recommend other suitable interviewees. This method is best for in-depth studies of samples smaller than 50 informants because of saturation (Bernard, 2011), and therefore was appropriate to use for this research. In the snowball method, it is important to have key informants, understood as “people whom you can talk to you easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you” (Bernard, 2011, p. 150). At both centres, two informants were quickly identified, Zawadie from Edgington and Jade from Carol’s House, with whom rapport was built, and they directed me towards others for interviews. Both Zawadie and Jade remained central to my research throughout my fieldwork periods.

The basic parameters of the core research group were defined as (1) cisgender women who had to be a mother of at least one child under the age of 16 and the primary caregiver for their child(ren); and (2) the mother relies partially on government benefits, third-sector organisations, or a combination of both for supportive services. Of the twenty total interviews, ten respondents were from Edgington and ten from Carol's House. From Edgington, only Padma, who is Indian, and Kate who is white-British are married, and from Carol's House, only Ivy has a partner who she lives with; all of the other women were either single or casually dating men, none of whom were the father of their children. The group of mothers from Edgington were diverse in terms of ethnicity and country of origin because the areas of Willenford that Edgington services has significant immigrant populations from African, South Asian, and Eastern European countries (5 white; 5 from BAME communities). The interlocutors from Carol's House were all white-British and their families had lived in or around Willenford for multiple generations. All of those interviewed were between the ages of 25 and 55. The wide age range was not necessarily significant because I focused on mothers who have caring responsibilities of children under the age of 16 due to children's dependence up until that age.

### 3.3.2. Interview guide and procedures

The research relied upon semi-structured interviewing, based on an interview guide with five thematic sections and 40 prepared question prompts (see Table 3). Because semi-structured interviews do not have the rigidity of structured interviews, I could retain "discretion to follow leads, but the interview guide is a set of clear instructions" (Bernard, 2011, p. 158). Therefore, the interview script could be used to investigate specific fields of the mothers' lives (see Annex 1), but also provided autonomy as a researcher. Interviews started with a base set of questions

on life-history (explained in more in detail below), and then depending upon my interlocutors' answers, there were follow-up questions and further exploration of their answers, or to continue on with one of the other 40 prepared question prompts. Also, interviewees would sometimes answer a question with a completely unexpected answer or personal story, and through giving the participant an opportunity to elaborate on their experiences, it was possible to follow new areas of inquiry and discover details of their lives that had not occurred in preparing the interview script. The semi-structured interview process afforded freedom to investigate beyond what was initially planned. Also, through this process of discovering new areas to investigate, new data was used to follow-up with informants and use it as a novel lens to view pre-existing data sets.

Interview section	Topics
<b>1. Life-history</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and family circumstances</li> <li>• Chronicity of 'good' and 'bad' economic periods</li> </ul>
<b>2. Livelihood strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habits of consumption and changes</li> <li>• Strategies for times of economic crisis</li> <li>• Reliance on charitable organisations</li> </ul>
<b>3. Social relationships and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social networks and systems of reciprocity</li> <li>• Temporalities and social networks</li> <li>• Received perceptions of personal economic situation</li> </ul>
<b>4. Motherhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of motherhood, particularly for economically uncertain mothers</li> <li>• Gendered experience of social support/ state welfare</li> <li>• Unfulfilled needs (children, family, personal)</li> </ul>
<b>5. Temporalities and emotional aspects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routines and ability to plan</li> <li>• Notions of temporal agency</li> <li>• Periods of wait</li> <li>• Time seizures</li> <li>• Critical temporalities (past/present/future)</li> </ul>

*Table 3. The five sections of the semi-structured interview*

The semi-structured interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length and recorded. All of the interlocutors were briefed about the research project, provided an information sheet,

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and informed the women they could ask questions about the project or withdraw at any point. Moreover, the mothers were informed their names and places would be wholly anonymised, which also aimed to make them feel more open to discuss sensitive issues. In the initial planning phases, this doctoral project was loosely designed around the Spanish research project “Survival Strategies in Poor Households: The Role of Formal and Informal Support Networks in Times of Economic Crisis,” led by Dr. Miranda Lubbers and Dr. Hugo Valenzuela. As the research plan evolved, the interview script was modified these to fit specific areas of inquiry. The interview question guide covered five main categories: (1) life-history, (2) livelihood strategies, (3) social relationships and support, (4) motherhood, and (5) temporalities and emotional aspects. Throughout the interview, demographic data was collected regarding age, income, benefit status, living situations, family security, and interactions with charitable organisations. The *temporalities and emotional aspects* section started with a “grand tour question” (Spradley, 1979, p. 63), asking about a typical day in their life, which would get “respondents talking, but in a fairly focused way” (Leech, 2003, p. 667). This section aimed to understand (1) daily routines, (2) the extent to which days can be and are planned, (3) experiences of daily anticipation and expectation, and (4) temporal agency. From these broad areas, a mini-tour was led to interrogate specific domains, such as experiences with third-sector organisations and benefit officers, feelings of anxiety, acquiescence of personal time to organisations, and the impact of relinquishment of temporal agency in making-ends-meet.

Another question in this section that yielded rich data was: *If you were going to give a new mother advice on how to make ends meet, what would it have been and why?* Though this question was quite broad, it elicited a range of insightful answers and indicated specific areas of their lives which have been practically and emotionally challenging (e.g., C.M.A., expensive school uniforms, school breaks, holiday periods). Three final questions that were important were: (1) *Do you remember a time when everything was going well in your life?*; (2) *How do*

*you see your future?; and (3) What three words would you use to describe your current situation?* These three questions were asked at the beginning, middle and end of the interview to avoid them having previous answers significantly influence anything subsequently. Also, their temporal experiences of past, present, and future could be examined, and then interrogate the intersections. Finally, these questions provided the space for interlocutors to go into greater detail about their subjective interpretations of the fluidity of their communities and how benefit programs, charitable organisations, and social support networks impacted their daily lives and livelihood strategies over a lifetime.

While interviewing, the technique of probing was followed, mainly the silent, echo, and *uh-huh* probing (Bernard, 2011). A silent probe means that the interviewer remains silent and patiently waits for the interviewee to continue with their answer – this can be done in the form of nodding one’s head or jotting down notes (Bernard, 2011). The echo probe is a repetition of the last words of the interlocutor. It is a neutral type of probe that demonstrates the interviewer’s comprehension of what has been said and encourages the interviewee to continue with their discourse (Bernard, 2011). During my fieldwork, I felt as if there was limitless jargon and British accents to learn, and therefore, at times when I was genuinely asking for clarification, it appeared as an echo probe. This not only allowed me to understand more clearly what was said, but also encouraged the interlocutor to continue their thoughts on a given question. Finally, the *uh-huh* probe is simply saying *uh-huh* or *I see* to signify encouragement and understanding (Bernard, 2011).

The practical aspect of carrying out the interviews could be challenging at times yet provided insight as to the spatially- and temporally-chaotic lives of my interlocutors. As mentioned, interviews were prohibited from being held on Edginton’s premises. Therefore, interviews had to be conducted outside of the centre (e.g., parks, shopping trips, weddings, cafés). Though it was a challenge to coordinate their hectic routines with my research schedule,

being with the women in their daily lives and having to follow their timetables was invaluable. Carol's House was more accommodating and allowed me to use the centre's mental health counselling room to conduct interviews. In using this room, I was aware that many of the women were used to confiding in their counsellors and disclosing very personal information (see Section 3.4.2. for a discussion on ethics).

### **3.4. Positionality and ethics**

#### **3.4.1. Position as a researcher**

As social researchers and ethnographers, we are our best research tool; meaning that through being receptive and adaptive to our surroundings, and relying upon our innate qualities and personal experiences, we can establish rapport and gather rich data with interlocutors. However, perceptions and interpretations are moulded through a world view and life experiences. There can never be pure objectivity in qualitative research because one's own habitus, which informs world views, cannot be escaped. For that reason, the reflective exercise for ethnographers is important because it offers insights about how we interpret the world that we research (Salzman, 2002). As Lichterman (2017) comments of the reflective process, "we take risks with the researched, and our reflexivity can help make that risk-taking more transparent to readers" (Lichterman, 2017, p. 39.) Therefore, throughout the ethnographic fieldwork data collection process, and analysis, this has been particularly important to ensure objectivity in my analysis.

With regard to my subjective position as an ethnographer, there were vast differences between the core research group, other actors involved with the two centres, and myself. First were the economic differences. I wanted to approach my research informants as a slightly uninformed outsider, but with some personal knowledge of their position (I will address this in

the next paragraph). Moreover, I wanted to demonstrate a sensitivity to their difficulties and to not appear so distant in terms of class that they would not trust in or engage with me. Therefore, when volunteering at the organisations or connecting with interlocutors I wore clothes and jewellery such as the other volunteers. However, interlocutor Zawadie invited me to a wedding of her Nigerian friend, and I wore clothing similar to that of what I wore to Edgington, only to discover the women in attendance were dressed in brightly coloured clothes and high-heels with gemstones (see Image 10). This presented another reflective moment to consider the differences of how mothers in various communities present themselves in different cultural settings. Also, I focused on being empathetic without being patronising, as well as never offered instrumental support. However, I may have assumed this role too well because some of Edgington's visitors offered me food from their parcels, saying that they knew that students struggled too, an offer which I politely declined. These times when the women offered me items from their own parcels were notable, and I assumed that their generosity was for one of two reasons. Either the women, who were surprised and grateful that I chose them as my research group and were appreciative I had given them a voice and a sense of worth, had wanted to display their gratitude by the act of offering me instrumental support; or they felt a sense of kinship and collective identity, and were participating in distributive agency to ensure that I too would be able to survive in times of economic crisis.



*Image 10. At a wedding with Zawadie and her youngest son*

Additionally, there was the distinction of me being from the United States. Despite some familiarity with the United Kingdom and having spent considerable personal time in the country, cultural differences always remain. However, the divergence was oftentimes to my advantage in accessing organisations and having interlocutors open up to me. Many individuals were curious about American life (e.g., foods, jargon, media). Conversations on these differences were useful moments to break the ice and provided the women with a non-invasive perspective on my life. Also, it allowed for me to be self-deprecating about the United States and demonstrated my understanding of British humour, which was important because “cultural preferences affect specific content and the perception of what is humorous ... [and moreover] cultures have their own sets of norms, rules, and values that determine the acceptable contents, styles, and targets of humor” (Ojha & Holmes, 2010, p. 281). Furthermore, most of those I encountered were interested in why an American was intent on learning about the lives of women in Britain experiencing deprivation poverty and economic crisis. In this respect, I relied upon the experiences of my British partner, who is from a working-class town in the West Midlands, and his childhood of being raised by a single mother and growing up with economic challenges. I discussed with the women about how difficult it was for his mother, Carol, whom I used as inspiration for the pseudonym of one of the charitable organisations in this dissertation, to raise three children on her own in the 1980’s in Thatcher-era Britain (Tew et al., 2014). Also, I could speak personally of my experiences of visiting his hometown and the adversities his community confronts as a result of austerity. Through these conversations, women understood that I was empathetic to their struggles, and had a sense of a personal interest in gathering and disseminating the experiences of those who live economically uncertain lives in the United Kingdom.

Finally, I wanted to gain an insider perspective on those who I was researching, and therefore sought to live in communities and neighbourhoods similar to theirs. I lived in a



different area of Willenford during each fieldwork period, including once living in the home of an interlocutor. In one instance, I lived in an impoverished area in the south of Willenford and had to take multiple busses and then walk to both of the centres. In living there, I experienced first-hand the financial and temporal expense in arriving to both Edgington and Carol's House. While sitting on the busses, I also observed those who took public transportation and overheard conversations. Also, on the bus I would read the free newspaper, which is how many mothers accessed their daily news. In these papers, there were often inflammatory stories about low- or no-income peoples, and by reading these, I gained insight into public discourse - received and internalised. During my fourth time in the field, an interlocutor from Carol's House allowed me to stay in a room in her home (see Image 11). While living in her home, she would not accept rent or money for bills, however I would help tidy-up around the house, buy groceries once a week, and was cognisant of the utilities. During this time, I was able to have an intimate experience of her daily life. Together we would go food shopping, take the bus to the centre, share meals, and watch television, such as *Coronation Street*<sup>23</sup>. In making meals, we would use leftover food from the community kitchen: we cooked soup and fried rice from nearly rotten vegetables, and watered-down boxed juices to drink. The showers I took got cold after a few minutes, and the heating seldom functioned because she struggled to pay the bills. Her house was cluttered and full of items which she repaired numerous times and had found various uses for. This final living experience solidified my appreciation of the struggles of making ends meet and how my core research group relied upon others for various forms of support.

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<sup>23</sup> A soap opera about working class peoples in England that has been on television since 1960.



Image 11. Neighbourhood around interlocutor's house where I lived in Willenford

#### 3.4.2. Ethics as a researcher

The research for this project was conducted under *UAB's code of good practices on research* and adhered to the three values and basic principles: freedom, honesty, and responsibility. Throughout the project I followed the guidelines developed by my research group GRAFO and received ethical approval from the department. Furthermore, I adhered to the *American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Principles of Professional Responsibility* and the *Association of Social Anthropologists' (ASA) Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice*.

As a starting point, I had preliminary meetings with both organisations in reference to my research and my doctoral supervisors provided letters which explained my project. After these meetings both organisations proposed for me to conduct my research as a volunteer-ethnographer. We all agreed that I would engage as a regular volunteer so I could observe the daily happenings at the centres and develop relationships with visitors; however, the centre managers introduced me to volunteers/ visitors initially and then periodically to remind them

of my purposes, as was done regularly throughout the research periods. I also had to commit to a schedule, though both parties were flexible. Therefore, I maintained transparency throughout the entirety of my ethnographic research process.

For any situation in which I was engaging as an observer or conducting interviews, the nature of my research was explained in clear language free of terminology. Participants were allowed to ask questions and informed they had the right to leave the study without consequences should they feel uncomfortable. For those interviewed (a) the scope of the doctoral project was discussed and were informed that they may choose not to respond to questions they found too difficult and/ or opt out entirely, (b) provided informed consent forms to all interlocutors (see Annex 2), and (c) rapport had been established beforehand to ensure they felt comfortable responding honestly whether they felt unsettled or upset about questions and/ or being involved in this project.

Additionally, confidentiality was ensured, and participants' names/ places have been given pseudonyms, and throughout this project have done so accordingly. Furthermore, the data set was stored on my personal laptop under password-protected folders. All participants spoke fluent or nearly-fluent English, and therefore there were no concerns in regard to language barriers.

Finally, during my final research period I lived in the home of one informant. While living with her she refused any cash payments, yet we agreed that I should mind my utility use. Additionally, I would buy groceries every few days and make dinner for us when we were not using leftover food from Carol's House. Also, we would spend time together in the house and also ran errands, which was meaningful for her because she lives quite a solitary life outside of Carol's House. However, because of this, when we would start discussing themes related to my research I would ask for her consent to use information in my dissertation, encouraging her to ask me questions about the project and reminded her that she could (a) leave the study at any

time, and (b) should she require payment or wish to no longer have me live in her house, that she had the right to discuss her concerns together, and if necessary, I would make necessary arrangements.

### **3.5. Analysis of data**

All of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants (see Section 3.4.), fully transcribed, and analysed manually. Using grounded theory and an inductive method, systems of open, axial, and selective coding were applied (Matthew & Price, 2010). After the first four interviews were completed and transcribed, I began reading transcriptions alongside fieldnotes to find experiential and thematic commonalities and divergences. When shared experiences and answers appeared, these were recorded into a master document to create a list of codes. Throughout and after the ethnographic fieldwork experience, this process of locating similarities and themes continued, and were added onto the list of codes that were used in the interpretation of the data set. My set of categories are as follows: *motherhood*, *womanhood*, *livelihoods*, *poverty*, *time (projection/ protention/ critical temporality)*, *agency (temporal/ economic)*, *relationships (visitor/ visitor, visitor/ volunteer)*, *power structure*, *shame and stigma*, *emotional wellbeing (stress, anxiety, depression)*, and *insecurity*. Once codes had been established, it was found where various codes intersected. In the end, the connections between themes were used in the interpretation of the lived experiences of those researched.

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## The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities, and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain

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## Chapter 4. “We’ll go back to a system you really don’t like!”: Organizational norms and structural violence in a British foodbank<sup>24</sup>

### Abstract

*In the context of austerity, the logic of neoliberalism has not only led to drastic cuts in social welfare programs, but it also permeates the functioning of charity organizations that depend at least partially on external funding. Through ethnographic research with mothers attending a foodbank in Willenford, England, given the pseudonym Edgington, we discuss the impact of cuts to the social welfare system upon the organizational norms of the foodbank, and how these intersect with the provision of charity support and personal relationships between the staff, volunteers and visitors. Our research finds how a hostile environment transpires in a third-sector organization under increased economic and bureaucratic pressures and from this, organizational rules emerge that ignore the lived experiences of the people it serves. Herein, visitors must learn the organization’s norms and garner relationships to be able to navigate the organization to successfully access essential resources.*

### 4.1. Introduction

As seen throughout Europe, Britain has implemented an aggressive program of austerity following the 2008 financial crisis (Skidelsky, 2018), which had a profound impact.

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According to May et al. (2019, p. 210), “cuts have hit the poorest people and places hardest, re-enforcing classed, gendered, and racialised inequalities at a range of scales”. These austerity measures are rooted in neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism is a system of policies which aims to minimize state interventions and emphasizes local responsibility for economic and social welfare (Peck, 2012; Blyth, 2013). It shifts accountability for the provision of support away from the central government and onto communities and individuals through deregulation of welfare mechanisms (Strong, 2019). The directive for a retreat of the state can be observed in the current system of privatized foodbanking in Britain, which provides essential livelihood services (Strong, 2019). Ideologically austerity was promoted as a system of fairness and common sense “that matches effort with reward ... instead of a system that rewards those who make no effort” (GOV.UK, 2011). These policies impoverished “huge swathes of working-class people” (Tew et al., 2014, p. 3), particularly the North of England (Oxfam, 2013). Financial and labour market deregulation and the gradual dismantling of the social welfare system led to economic growth, but also increased inequalities (Oxfam, 2013; Powell, 2017).

In this context, people on low incomes have become increasingly dependent on third-sector organisations, such as foodbanks, as a part of their livelihood strategies (Garthwaite, 2016; May et al., 2019a; Strong, 2019). However, in times of austerity, the neoliberal ideology has also increasingly permeated third-sector organizations relying at least partially on external funding (Valenzuela-García et al., 2019). How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in this ideology affect their organizational norms and, consequently, the provision of support of these organizations to their visitors? This paper investigates this question based on ethnographic fieldwork of the first author in a foodbank in Willenford, “Edgington”<sup>25</sup>. We explore how Edgington’s organizational culture emerged

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<sup>25</sup> All names of participants and locations have been given pseudonyms and anonymized

within a wider neoliberal framework. Placed in the setting of austerity-era Britain, it unearths how the neoliberal ideals embedded in austerity can create barriers to access resources for some of the most vulnerable in society. Our analysis focuses on the relationships between the centre manager, volunteers and visitors, because it is at this level charity support is given and received. This relational perspective also allows us to see how everyday interactions normalize inequalities (Bourgois, 2009).

The research question is of great relevance because foodbank use is increasing. Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, the Trussell Trust's foodbank network distributed 1.9 million three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis, representing a 18% increase. Britain has at least 2,166 foodbanks, with 916 independent foodbanks identified by the Independent Food Aid Network (2020). These numbers emphasise how third-sector organizations have become important instruments for poverty relief, substituting the withdrawing government. Understanding how foodbanks work under the logic of neoliberalism in times of austerity, and what effects their policies produce on the wellbeing of the people who are dependent on them for their subsistence, is therefore essential.

We focus specifically on economically vulnerable mothers, as women and single parents (90% are women) are among the worst affected by austerity (Oxfam, 2013; Adkins, 2015; cf. Greer Murphy, 2016; Montgomerie & Tepe-Belfrage, 2016; Alston, 2018; Women's Budget Group, 2019). Through ethnography conducted in a third-sector organization, this paper gives a vision of the internal dynamics, "revealing the relationship between the institutional aims, the underlying idiosyncrasy, the different actors and intersections at play" (Valenzuela-García et al., 2019, p. 6).

## 4.2. Literature Review

Anthropologists have long drawn attention to the ways in which policies and institutions augment the suffering of vulnerable people (Bourgois, 2009). Bourgois distinguished between three processes of such invisible violence: structural, symbolic and normalized. Structural violence refers to “social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way” (Farmer et al., 2006, 1686), referring particularly to the consequences of the design of economic, political and social systems. Violence in this case is not directly physical, but prevents people from meeting their basic needs. Symbolic violence is the social reproduction of subordination and hierarchies. This manifests through the internalization and self-implication of the status-quo and existing normative framework. Finally, normalized violence is the legitimization of invisible routines which reproduce social inequalities (Bourgois, 2009, p. 19-20).

Austerity programs can create structural violence because they impose barriers to access material resources (e.g., guidelines/ regulations regarding how people receive support and which requisites they need to meet). Moreover, individuals can experience distressing emotions, such as shame and belittlement.

Although third-sector organizations are oriented at alleviating social suffering unattended by governments, they are also increasingly governed by neoliberal principles (Crossley et al., 2019; Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2019), partially resulting from accepting government funding. One of them is reporting of personal information for administrative accountability. Siliunas et al. (2019) discuss how visitors of charity organizations may be “expected to acquiesce to intrusions into their privacy” (Siliunas et al., 2019, p. 117) in order to access resources, particularly in the form of monitoring and questioning. Individuals who do

not surrender agency of daily routines may confront punitive measures (Garthwaite, 2016), which underscores an assertion of a neoliberal hierarchy present in third-sector organizations.

Numerous studies explore the impact of the neoliberal discourse and austerity on third-sector organizational practices in Britain, and particularly notions of deservingness (Shildrick et al. 2012; Horton, 2016; Williams et al., 2016; DeSouza, 2019; May et al., 2019a; May et al., 2019b; Strong, 2020). The binary of deserving and undeserving poor has long been used to delegate how charitable resources are distributed, and justify assistance withheld from segments of society (Katz, 2013). Additionally, Strong (2019) argues foodbanking modifies dynamics between livelihoods and power, which affects control, regulation, and management of individuals' lived experiences (Strong, 2019).

Williams et al. (2016) unpack various narratives surrounding foodbanks. Specific to neoliberalism they explore, in part, how conversations regarding structures and operations of charitable organizations, such as foodbanks, may bolster and reinforce prevailing neoliberal arguments concerning "dependency, deservingness and self-responsibility" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 2294). Moreover, Garthwaite (2017b) discusses how policies of austerity place responsibility on individuals, which influences the public's vision of (un)deservingness. She argues politicians' rhetoric creates a culture wherein welfare recipients are viewed not as victims of economic structures, but rather as the perpetrators of their own economic failings (Garthwaite 2017b).

Building upon notions of deservingness of third-sector visitors, May et al. (2019) discuss how in third-sector organizations in this era of austerity there has been a transformation of need into deservingness. Moreover, deservingness requires a moral arbiter guided by "a moral economy of scarcity" (May et al., 2019, p. 211). Thus, the ideological shift embedded in charity and scarcity established a structure wherein the gap between need and deservingness is

filled with a code of morality. This highlights independence as a central tenant in the construction of the opposition of deserving and undeserving in austerity-era Britain.

Another example of how neoliberal principles have pervaded third-sector organizations is the appropriation of time. As the efficiency of paid work is emphasized, waiting (e.g., wasted productive time) is undesirable (Lahad, 2012, p. 172). Herein, vulnerable people's time is valued and remunerated differently than the non-poor (Dwyer, 2004). Presumably, people living in poverty can invest time into bureaucratic activities in exchange for resources, but in losing temporal agency, it is more difficult to engage in productive labour. This perpetuates the view vulnerable people wilfully disengage with productive labour. Hodgetts *et al.* (2013) observed a lack of respect for the time of vulnerable people reliant upon welfare services. Time appropriation reinforces power dynamics and inequalities (Cooper, 2015). The control and seizure of temporal agency transforms visitors' sense of self, due to acquiescence of institutional norms (Cooper, 2015).

Tensions between charities and neoliberalism, and complicity of charities with neoliberalism's evolution is also visible in volunteerism. The moral identity of a volunteer is a testament "to a person's good character" (Kleinman, 1996, p. 5) wherein altruism motivates volunteering. However, volunteering can signal neoliberal restructuring of society and a substitution for welfare (May et al., 2019), transforming altruism and charity into a service delivery. Moreover, in a neoliberal framing, volunteer roles focus on individual responsibility, and emphasize self-reliance and independence (Nihei, 2010). Facilitating support to alleviate social suffering concerns perceptions of deservingness, and different subjective realities of volunteers and visitors (Caplan, 2017). However, volunteering also redirects responsibility for governments to provide welfare support. Williams et al. (2016) discuss how foodbanks may dilute potential political engagement and reinforce neoliberal ideologies and moralities of the (un)deserving and their conditions (Williams et al., 2016).

### 4.3. Methods

This paper is based on the first author's doctoral research regarding economically vulnerable mothers in the North West of England. In this region, the impact of austerity on vulnerable mothers can be observed acutely (Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2014). A league table representing the 380 best places for a woman to live in Britain ranked the area where the research, as well as the surrounding authorities, in the bottom quartile, with some of the lowest performance in terms of social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2016; Dunatchik et al., 2017).

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in a foodbank, pseudonymised Edgington, and ten interviews with women accessing it. The first author was granted access to Edgington for a total of five and a half months in the first phase of her doctoral research. During this time she assumed the observer-as-participant stance (Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960) wherein she acted as a volunteer and ethnographer with her identity and purpose of data collection known, but also engaged in activities with actors inside and outside the Centre.

Conducting research in an institution with vulnerable people presents ethical dilemmas. At least once a month, the first author was assigned this role, positioning herself as official gatekeeper, permitting for observations of interactions between visitors and senior management, although the double-role as volunteer and observer was also complicated. As Tinney (2008) questions in her research about nursing homes "where, in an area of such crying need, does the responsible ethnographer draw the line and limit participation to remain an ethically responsible observer and reporter?" (p. 203). On the basis of her fieldwork in a foodbank in the North East of England, Garthwaite (2017c) notes there are inherent tensions in navigating the space of the foodbank as ethnographer due to entwined discourses regarding visitors and compiling robust data (Garthwaite, 2017c, p. 2). To ensure objectivity as a

“volunteer ethnographer” (Garthwaite, 2017c, p. 3), the first author kept a daily fieldwork journal, providing details from participant observations, quotes from conversations, and personal reflections on the subjective position of the researcher. Moreover, the first author’s role as a student-researcher was made known formally by the Centre Director and she introduced herself in this way when engaging with people at Edgington. Through acting as a participant observer in a voluntary role, she was able to have informal conversations with people at Edgington. However, she was not allowed to be alone with visitors in the Centre, and therefore carried out formal, semi-structured interviews outside of Edgington. Finally, participants understood and signed informed consent forms.

For the interviews, the working definition of the core sample was women responsible for caring duties of children up to the age of sixteen in Willenford, and rely, at least partially, on the social security system. Interviews took approximately one-hour and the interview guide included sections on life history, livelihood strategies including foodbank use, motherhood, spatio-temporal experiences, and social relationships/ support. These themes were included based on literature and the research questions. Interviews were recorded with informants’ consent, then transcribed and coded. Themes in the data emerged through an inductive research analysis positioned within a larger research question related to economically vulnerable mothers and livelihood strategies in Britain. Throughout the analysis process, data was coded and a pattern emerged of the prevalence of temporality and notions of deservingness. Resulting from this, a direct research question evolved to guide the article and unpack the intersection of these prevalent themes.

With some mothers, the first author also met outside Edgington, at their houses, during leisure time, or completing errands, allowing for participant observation and informal conversations. She also had informal conversations with volunteers and Centre Director and

was ‘driver’s mate’ for a month helping to collect donations with another volunteer. All names in this article are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants and organization.

#### **4.4. Findings**

We will first describe the organization where fieldwork was carried out and the different groups of actors, who are the Centre Director, volunteers, and visitors. Subsequently, we explore formal and informal institutional norms. Lastly, we examine the impact these have onto social relationships and the provision of support.

##### **4.4.1. The organization and the actors**

###### *4.4.1.1. Edgington*

Edgington is a faith-based charity, serving the local area for over a decade. The Centre is located in one of the most densely populated and deprived areas of Willenford. Edgington is open all year, three days a week, except holidays, providing a foodbank, job support, free English lessons, advice on government benefits (e.g., housing, child benefit, Jobseeker’s Allowance), and signposts to other organizations.

The busiest day was when the foodbank was open, and the volume of visitors received had increased in recent years due to austerity (cf. Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2019). The foodbank has two locations: one for registering, morning announcements and hot drinks / toast; the second for distribution in a row of condemned shops where Edgington was the only occupant. The two places were separated because of insufficient space at the distribution Centre.



Leading to the front doors of the registration Centre twenty to thirty visitors of all ages, genders and cultural backgrounds waited on foodbank mornings. Some sat on the cement floor, others paced with arms crossed, and mothers held babies in their arms. Edgington opens to visitors at 10.00 am, with registration closing by 10.30 am. Nonetheless, many visitors arrived over an hour early regardless of weather conditions. The regularity of visitors waiting in inclement weather was as disconcerting as it was resonant to visitors' experiences. Some visitors waited after dropping their children off at school, while others did so to feel less isolated. Volunteers found visitors' early arrival curious, but never inquired about their motives. Instead, they discussed among themselves, concluding visitors should "find another place to go" (fieldnotes, April 2018).

Once visitors entered, they registered at the main desk with the Centre Director and a church member. Access to the distribution Centre did not operate on a first-come, first-served basis, rather a randomized queuing system. The randomization contributes to the poignancy of visitors waiting over an hour outside only to be positioned at the end of the queue. After registering and receiving their number, visitors received a hot drink and buttered toast from volunteers at the kitchen counter, and ate biscuits set on tables. Then, they would walk to the small distribution centre. This second location emulated a grocery store setting, with food items organized into areas (e.g., tinned goods, dried pasta and rice, fresh fruit/ vegetables, bread, baked goods, frozen chicken). Visitors walked through to select a certain number of items depending on Edgington's offer.

#### *4.4.1.2. The Centre Director*

The ethos and pressures of neoliberalism appeared to permeate into the organisational structure and daily operations. In early 2017, Edgington employed Martina, a local layperson and career

third-sector worker. Marina stated she was employed to limit expenditures, streamline operations, and ensure financial efficiency because Edgington previously ran at a financial loss with almost one-hundred weekly foodbank visitors, and provided clothing and household items to families. However, Martina felt a commitment to the community and expressed concerns about austerity. Often, she attended local and national social justice conferences, encouraging volunteers to sign anti-austerity petitions.

Martina had to manage expenditures, host fundraisers, apply for grants, monitor the allotment, and negotiate deals with third-parties (e.g., NHS Wellbeing Services, community art teachers, allotment volunteers). However, Edgington's top management prohibited her from discussing financial matters, which she found isolating, and the mounting pressures from Edgington's management, private donors, and bureaucrats was "exhausting" (fieldnotes, December 2019). Martina's position was challenging because she had to balance financial accountability with visitors' needs.

Martina embodied the position of an enforcer, who is a person who feels personally involved but upholds norms to assure resources are fairly allocated (Zacka, 2017). However, as Zacka claims, enforcers can also be highly suspicious and invasive to those seeking support. They tend to disregard the voices of those they are serving because of their perception of morality and may be less willing to compromise than peers (Zacka, 2017). Indeed, Martina precipitated in strict norms and a controlling management style. Consequently, visitors felt as if Martina lacked empathy and respect for their lived experiences because, in establishing the Centre rules, she did not acknowledge the stress of being the sole care-provider and conflicting timetables of the various organizations needed for support. The discord between these sets of expectations challenged and frustrated her, and she was provided little emotional support to cope.

#### *4.4.1.3. The volunteers*

The core volunteer team were mostly local white British pensioners. Prior to voluntary roles, they worked as social workers, nurses, drivers, and school teachers, but never experienced economic precariousness. Only a third of volunteers attended the church at Edgington, and motivations to volunteer derived from a desire to help their community, and not specifically religious. Volunteers were aware of austerity's impact locally and nationwide. Bob, a 73-year-old retired teacher, felt Britain was "going back to the Victorian times with this obvious disparity, you can see the disparity, at one end of the street is rich and the other is poor" (fieldnotes, March 2018). Volunteers acknowledged diminishing resources both in Britain and Edgington, which they found "quite sad really" (fieldnotes, March 2018), and apologized to visitors when there was not much in the foodbank. Volunteers were required to arrive between 9.00 am and 9.15 am, when the volunteer meeting began. Though certain volunteers assumed roles (e.g., setting out the biscuits, turning on the hot water urn), everyone was responsible. Before the meeting, Bob would make toast for all volunteers, and others would make hot drinks. Once the meeting began Martina discussed the upcoming day at Edgington and other points of interest (e.g., petitions or events happening at the Centre). During meetings, volunteers were prohibited to talk, and Martina verbally reprimanded those who commented on her talking points.

#### *4.4.1.4. The visitors*

Visitors went to Edgington for material support, advice on welfare and housing, and due to the capriciousness of their daily lives, many also obtained emotional support. To access the foodbank, visitors must be registered locally and had to pay one pound per visit. Numerous visitors were regulars and accessed the Centre anywhere from three months to several years.

Moreover, some returned after a period of not needing support, but fell back into economically uncertain positions. Periodically, however, there would be a regular who suddenly stopped attending the foodbank. This is not because they did not rely upon the material support provided by Edgington, but rather allocated social housing and moved to a different postal code. This could be a traumatic experience for those who were no longer able to access Edgington because their supportive networks changed, and moreover they had to learn new systems of organizational norms and integrate these into routines. Also, this could be distressing for those who continued to rely upon Edgington because of losing someone who could be relied upon for emotional and informational support. This exclusion stressed the reality that Edgington's support, though continuous and reliable when visitors were eligible, was also tenuous.

Mothers described never feeling as if they got to the end of the month with ease. They expressed a mix of gratitude for Edgington's support combined with frustration regarding its dwindling resources and increasing barriers for accessibility. Kate and Zawadie discussed managing financially day-to-day and emphasized the salience of the third-sector. Kate is a 55-year-old white British woman who lives with her husband, three children, and two grandchildren in a two-up, two-down privately rented house. Zawadie is a Kenyan mother of three boys who emigrated eighteen years prior, living in temporary housing for five years and classified as homeless until she is allocated permanent social housing. Zawadie remarked "we never lived like this before, not even five years ago! We are suffering!" (fieldnotes, August, 2018), to which Kate confirmed with a sigh.

All women cited Edgington as an important source of food for at least two to three days, but they also relied on other foodbanks, and would struggle otherwise. Zawadie discussed mothers' need to be knowledgeable of organizations, have good time management and support from friends to uphold their livelihoods. Zawadie's experience parallels many conversations

that only through combining multiple organizations, mothers could acquire resources for survival.

#### **4.5. Formal and informal institutional norms**

Martina implemented a strict set of rules governing the foodbank's functioning because of pressures she confronted. First was visitors' punctuality. Martina implemented strict temporal norms that did not align with mothers' lived temporal experiences. She felt that her rules, when unchallenged, ensured financial efficiency. Also, Martina expressed if she were not strict with visitors, they would take advantage of Edgington's services and "come whenever suits" (fieldnotes, December 2018).

Visitors occasionally arrived late generally because of caring duties, unreliable transportation, appointments with other services, and attendance to other third-sector organizations. Nonetheless, in not following norms, they jeopardised accessing resources or risked being shamed. One such example was Suzanne, a single mother who had accessed Edgington for five years. On a hot July morning she had missed her bus because of changes to public transportation timetables, and because of her chronic and debilitating foot pain, she was unable to walk quickly enough to be punctual. Upon arriving, Suzanne was distressed because of her pain, compounded by Martina reprimanding her for lateness. Visitors had to adhere to Edgington's timetables, however it was ambiguous what following temporal rules guaranteed, given the randomisation of queuing. Furthermore, when Edgington did not follow its own timetables, visitors did not receive an explanation or preferential treatment if they had obligations afterwards.

Martina further prohibited leaving children unattended (e.g., not by their mothers' sides), neglecting mothers' needs and caring responsibilities. She asserted to volunteers

Edgington was neither insured for childcare, not anyone was trained as a childcare professional. Therefore, if an accident occurred, Edgington would have to compensate visitors and “desperate people do desperate things to get-by” (fieldnotes, July 2018). Her reasoning was not explained to visitors; therefore, they found this rule unrealistic and difficult to follow. Martina publicly chastised mothers when they did not attend to their children, which could be so severe some mothers left crying and would not return. When Martina was absent, both mothers and volunteers disregarded this rule. Mothers shared information among themselves about when Martina would be absent from Edgington as to bring their children to play in the Centre. Padma, a married Indian mother of two who, after nine years in England continued to wait for permanent residency, and accessed Edgington for eight years, joked “[Martina] will go wild if she saw all the children here!” (fieldnotes, July 2018), and expressed relief and happiness that she had a safe, cost-free space for her children.

Finally, norms included expectations of verbal gratitude. These were made explicit by signs reminding of politeness, and Martina and volunteers demanded verbal gratitude. Frequently they took back hot drinks or food if they felt visitors were disrespectful or ungrateful. Embedded in Edgington’s structure are notions of deservingness and gratitude, which volunteers internalized, influencing how they engaged with visitors (van der Horst et al., 2014; Garthwaite, 2017a).

Martina disallowed volunteers and visitors to challenge rules, asserting her organization of Edgington was the most cost effective and any variation of norms would hinder efficiency. Visitors expressed various forms of discontent. Once, after weeks of visitors discussing among themselves the policy of randomization, they voiced concerns during morning announcements. Zawadie said to Martina “we want a change, if we come first, we go first” (fieldnotes, July 2018). Martina responded, “just try my system a few more weeks, then we’ll see” (fieldnotes, July 2018). However, throughout the entirety of the fieldwork the system remained, and both

sets of actors experienced anxieties and apprehensions because they could not challenge norms. Martina, in contrast, changed rules occasionally, dependent upon visitors' behaviours and her personal schedule. If Martina felt as if a visitor had been polite, cleaned the front stairs or wiped down tables, or followed Centre rules (e.g., arriving on time, bringing registration cards, and minding children) she would move them up in the queue, angering some visitors (fieldnotes, July/ December, 2018). Overtly she reinforced notions of deservingness and rewarded those perceived as deserving. Once, Alexandra, a 28-year-old Romanian mother of two, became upset with Martina moving people in the queue, perceiving this as arbitrary and disrespectful, exclaiming "she cannot follow rules, why have rules?!" (fieldnotes, January 2019). Alexandra's response was far from uncommon and many conversations among visitors circled around frustrations of Martina's wavering norms. Padma echoed this sentiment, but acquiesced to organizational norms. When asked her opinions of Edgington's rules she replied, "I can't say nothing on that, I have to listen to the boss" (interview, Padma). Padma's submission highlights tensions between strict norms and realising empowerment in this setting.

## **4.6. Social relationships and support provision**

### **4.6.1. The Centre Director's relationships with volunteers and visitors**

Martina's top-down leadership structured her relationships with volunteers and visitors. Volunteers openly disliked Martina because she appeared hostile to visitors and found enforcing rules practically and emotionally challenging. Their view of her was unsurprising as were not aware of financial pressures and organizational demands on her. Despite expressing discontentment among themselves they formally complied, ultimately perpetuating Edgington's strict spatio-temporal norms. However, they sometimes disregarded rules when Martina was

not there (e.g., children's supervision), and adopted different rules to visitors they established relationships (see below).

Martina's leadership made many visitors apprehensive of engaging with her because she enforced norms through reprimands and threats of banishment, creating a hostile climate. For example, on a cold, wet December morning, visitors had tried to enter the building early, to which Martina used her clipboard to swat them back yelling: "Get out! Get out! You can come in when I tell you to!" (fieldnotes, December 2018). That same day visitors talked among themselves during announcements, Martina yelled over the microphone: "Don't talk over me! Then we will go back to a system that you *really don't like*" (fieldnotes, December 2018). Her exclamation was met with murmurs of disbelief and frustration by both visitors and volunteers.

This climate, in addition to visitors' lack of voice in changing it, dissuaded some from returning, thus obstructing the provision of support. One such example was Cindy, a South-African immigrant with two daughters. One day when the foodbank fell behind schedule Cindy "got into trouble at school" (fieldnotes, January 2019) for tardiness in collecting her daughter. She resigned to stop accessing Edgington because, as she explained "I don't want the stress, I think I will miss it for a bit" (fieldnotes, January 2019) and "I didn't want them [volunteers] to think I was rude cos I'm in a rush" (fieldnotes, January 2019). Cindy's experience was not singular; others became deterred from using Edgington because they felt the Centre disregarded their many responsibilities. They are fearful of being viewed negatively or reprimanded for disobeying rules difficult to balancing with their caring responsibilities. Others, however, complied with the institutional norms, despite their disenfranchisement, because they did not want to upset those who provided the support needed. In this sense, submissiveness was induced in both visitors and volunteers. Edgington was central to volunteers' weekly routines and diminished social isolation and provided a sense of purpose. Therefore, despite their



general disagreement with the strict rules and how Martina interacted with visitors, they did not want to risk losing the opportunity to volunteer.

#### 4.6.2. The relationships between volunteers and visitors

Despite volunteers' occasional strictness, visitors trusted them to a greater extent than Martina. In contrast to Martina, they were not enforcers, but gatekeepers. Moreover, visitors and volunteers sometimes could overhear the other group's discontentment, and discussed this between groups. Visitors were aware of volunteers' feelings and had closer relationships with those who overtly disliked Martina. Empathy was central to visitor/ volunteer relationships both emotionally and transactionally. After a group of visitors had been publicly reprimanded by Martina for tardiness, Alexandra came to the tea and toast counter, thanking volunteers for their hard work, commenting "the volunteers are amazing – the kindest in the world" (fieldnotes, January 2019). Volunteers expressed pride in being relied upon, which contributed to their sense of fulfilment and purpose that drove their desire to volunteer at Edgington. They discussed among themselves visitors' stories (e.g., housing issues, limited financial resources), and how they provided support (e.g., connecting visitors with social workers, offering extra food).

Visitors also longed for someone to listen. They typically did not have many friends or family to rely upon because often they were in equally uncertain situations or lived far away, and visitors internalized notions of self-reliance. Cindy articulated this:

If you have a friend who asks for help 'help me I'm stuck here', you get fed up after a while. Yeah? So if you always seeing one person always saying, 'I need help', and you always helping then, then she gonna get fed up and not want to see them. You can't rely on people to help you with everything, you have to do the best that you can with your

family and you have to try and make things work for yourself, otherwise you won't get really far. Cos people do let you down, and it might not be that they want to, or, maybe there's, maybe there's a reason they can't help you. (Interview, Cindy)

Cindy's experience of self-reliance was not unusual. Many mothers expressed a need for self-reliance, producing both pride and anxiety. Alexandra was "quite proud because I have two kids and seven in my family...for girls my age it's very rare to take care of all, but I do" (interview, Alexandra). Yet, in the same conversation she expressed "I'm feeling, like, anxious, I spend a lot of time with anxiety and [have] none for me" (interview, Alexandra).

Despite aiming to provide an umbrella of support, periodically emotional support lacked from volunteers and Martina who, in bringing their own perceptions of visitors and deservingness of support, often would not listen or disregard visitors' lived experiences. Frequently, visitors' outward appearance was central to volunteers' idea of their level of need (e.g., new clothes, material items). When visitors did not appear destitute, volunteers perceived them as ingenuine or "being greedy" (fieldnotes, July 2019). Moreover, when visitors expressed preference or declined food, oftentimes bread because visitors had sufficient stock at home, volunteers commented "you know, we're not a supermarket!" (fieldnotes, July 2019). Additionally, on multiple occasions when visitors asked for extra sugar or brown bread, volunteers would, without hesitation, decline requests, or tentatively provide these and remark "this isn't a café" (fieldnotes, December 2018) or "No! You just have to have that! Go sit down!" (fieldnotes, January 2019).

Volunteers' perceptions of deservingness made relationships between volunteers and visitors paternalistic sometimes. Despite Edgington providing material resources, attitudes showed limited regard to preferences or dietary requirements. Often, visitors wanted tinned tomatoes for sauces or soups to make multiple meals; however, these were seldom available.

For example, one mother declined mushy peas in lieu of tomatoes, volunteer Mary rolled her eyes and slammed the tin back onto the shelf. Among themselves volunteers described visitors as “ungrateful” and “pushy” (fieldnotes, April/ August 2018) upon declining food or displaying preference, which is connected to notions of deservingness and choice (Garthwaite, 2016). Visitors continued to express food preferences, but it was almost always met with a negative response.

When visitors did not express gratitude when offered an item, volunteers would often take it back, scold them, and/ or demand words of thanks. For instance, Alexandra arrived anxious and distressed because of her precarious zero-hour contract as a kitchen porter in a museum. Upon approaching the kitchen counter, Alexandra said to volunteers “give me two pieces of bread” (fieldnotes, December 2018), and volunteers took back her tea and demanded she “ask politely” (fieldnotes, December 2018), to which she complied. After apologizing, she sat with Cindy and other visitors, discussing how upset she was by their reaction. She said she was having “a really bad day, but no one understands” (fieldnotes, December 2018). Others consoled her and shared their experiences of confrontations with volunteers. After the morning meeting, Alexandra approached the volunteers to apologize again and thanked them for their support. This act of submission was common, as was visitors’ complicity and the emotional support they gave to one another.

Visitors worked towards demonstrating deservingness, oscillating between the norms and language of daily life, and that needed at Edginton (e.g., showing gratefulness and making calm, polite requests). Moreover, they showed deservingness by helping in the Centre (e.g., volunteering during events, cleaning). Religious factors were not a major motivator for foodbank engagement, however visitors participated in church-led events. This presents an ethical dilemma of the intervention of religion, and expectation of religious adherence, in exchange for the provision of support subsequent to the withdrawal of state support.

Nevertheless, this was not overtly expected of visitors, despite the power dynamic present through soft power of providing essential services.

Martina emphasized visitors “don’t want to feel they just take” (fieldnotes, July 2018) as justification for encouraging reciprocity and strict organizational norms. When visitors successfully demonstrated deservingness, they employed this to negotiate formal and informal resources they wished to access. Both Martina and volunteers adopted different rules to visitors they perceived as engaging or with whom they had established relationships. One example is Bob and his wife Mary ensuring their favourite visitors obtained better resources. Visitors could receive extra or leftover food, more desirable items, or preferred food without volunteers’ judgment. Also, they could be re-allocated a better place in the queue or received discounts during church sales. This reinforces the social hierarchy, and acceptance of their vulnerable positions, as theorized by the concept of symbolic violence.

#### 4.6.3. Relationships among visitors

Edgington did not explicitly aim to encourage the creation of social capital among visitors and lacked a comfortable space of socialization. Nonetheless, due to reprimands and threats of banishment, visitors often relied upon each other - and volunteers - for empathy and advice. This was demonstrated when Alexandra and Martina had one of many arguments regarding the queuing system. Both volunteers and visitors told Alexandra “let it go” and “put it in the past” (fieldnotes, January 2019).

### 4.7. Conclusions

We have presented the case of Edgington to describe how echoes of neoliberalism and austerity can permeate a charity organization; and how this philosophy embedded itself into

organizational norms through management's directives, enacted by volunteers, and internalized by visitors to access essential resources. Furthermore, we have explored how the structure of supportive exchanges affects relationships between staff, volunteers, and visitors. Through ethnographic research we have shown how formal and informal norms created tension, distrust, and anxiety, in addition to camaraderie and complicity. Visitors established and negotiated relationships to ensure access to resources, and garner emotional support for the hostility confronted in Edgington and their daily lives. The lived experiences of these mothers are likely to be comparable to those of women in other regions of Britain in similar economically uncertain positions (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016), although the severe deprivation in Willenford presents profound struggles.

Our work has several implications. From our fieldwork in other charity organizations (e.g., Garthwaite, 2016), we argue Edgington's climate of hostility is not representative for all charity organizations. However, Edgington clearly illustrates how the implementation of rules stemming from economic and bureaucratic pressures can have a large impact on the organizational culture, and can establish barriers to accessing essential material resources. Moreover, it highlights pressures economically vulnerable mothers confront to balance accessing essential material support with personal schedules. Not only are mothers responsible for caring duties, but also subjected to stigma and shame associated with having to rely upon charitable support and displaying deservingness. Although our work focuses on single mothers, making up 90% of single parents, we did not explicitly focus on gendered dynamics in the navigation of foodbanks. Future research could further explore the dynamic of gender with food poverty and a connection with structural violence.

The paper also informs the necessity to encourage visitors' voices and participation in establishing organizational norms. Our case demonstrates how the Centre's direction set on norms of punctuality and attending the behaviour of children disregarded the lived experiences

of mothers and hindered their capacity to find optimal support, while combining the time dedicated to this task with caring duties. The message of complicity to access support highlights the structural violence inherent in the systems at the foodbank and undermines efforts to effectively serve those in need of support. Allowing women to participate in establishing norms could create institutional rules and practices that work best for those who depend on these services. Through an open dialogue, organizations can tailor their rules to align better with mothers' timetables and obligations, preventing barriers to access to their services. While organizations may be limited in their capacity to change rules due to scarce resources and conditions imposed on external funding, the observations in our research showed that norms could fluctuate in the Centre if staff decided it suggests certain room for manoeuvre. Furthermore, even if some rules cannot be changed, a clearer explanation of the motives can reduce tensions and may encourage the suggestion of alternatives that work for all involved. Horizontal forms of decision-making also have other benefits, such as empowerment of economically vulnerable people (Mazelis, 2017). Further research can explore the viability and reach of participatory decision-making in charity organizations. For example, tensions can emerge if volunteers' and staff's belief systems align the neoliberal discourse of deservingness. The idea might be held that visitors should display their gratitude for charitable services, and only those who are willing to follow the guidelines are deserving of the support. Moreover, incorporating varying needs may create inefficiencies and an inability to provide adequate support, and this may further embolden a belief in the neoliberal discourse of deservingness.

In the case of Edgington, Martina embodies an enforcer figure with a strict, top-down management approach. She had to manage pressures imposed upon her whilst supporting the most vulnerable. If there had been a different Centre Director with a less heavy-handed approach to management Edgington's norms may have been more flexible and had a more horizontal structure. Ultimately, however, the structural factor of austerity-era Britain has

increased a need for charitable organizations, and the discourse of deservingness which has permeated into public policy and throughout media has established a climate wherein a harshness in approach has been allowed to exist in the organization.

Overall, a view of Edgington as a single case of mismanagement would neglect the central ethos of neoliberalism. We argued that the organization's climate is a result of inequalities in British society, exacerbated by neoliberal policy and ideology. The combination of policy decisions, a complex array of overt and implicit messaging at Edgington, political and media rhetoric, and perceptions of people living in poverty all influence how relationships are negotiated, and social support mobilised. Our research demonstrates how mothers in contemporary Britain confronted with hegemony structured on notions of deservingness are at a disadvantage. Moreover, the caring duties of mothers place them in vulnerable positions because they have to manage mothering roles, and seek out the provision of support through government welfare and third-sector organizations. Finally, negative perceptions of economically vulnerable mothers can affect how they receive support and the type of support which is available to them.

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## **Chapter 5. Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality, and organisational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers<sup>26</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Based upon ethnographic research in the North West of the United Kingdom, this article examines how social support is garnered and enduring bonds are formed in NGOs, which can be perceived as places of transience. Through a lens of temporalities, I investigate the lived experiences of economically uncertain mothers who rely upon NGOs for instrumental, and subsequently emotional support. This research analyzes how, through the consistency of instrumental support, NGOs establish institutional trust among its clients. Thusly, the mothers in this research garner social support and form durable bonds essential to lessen the experience of social isolation and stigmatization. Centrally, it is explored how NGOs, presented as spaces of transience, but are not necessarily in practice, facilitate social support with its visitors through providing security, safety, and reliability that they experience little elsewhere.*

### **5.1. Introduction**

Since 2008, Britain's economy has been guided by policies of austerity. Through this, the government has severely rolled back government benefits and "sold budget cuts as a virtue" (Muller, 2019). In 2010 a program called Big Society was introduced, which encouraged

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<sup>26</sup> Bruck, A. E. (2021), Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality and organizational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers. *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, 14(2), pp. 237-256.

citizens to take individual responsibility for their communities through volunteerism, as opposed to a reliance on government social programs and welfare, and dissuaded the use of government bursaries (Bale et al., 2011, p. 112; Grant, 2015, p. 35). Despite these programs, food poverty and the subsequent use of food banks have risen, as well as social isolation, because economic austerity “reduces resources that support community living, social support and contact for groups at particular risk of being lonely and isolated” (McGrath et al., 2016, p. 49). Cuts to government benefits system intensified in 2012 (TUC, 2015, p. 10). However, in spite of government assurances that austerity would end, economic policies which have exacerbated economic disparities and furthered the punitive welfare state (Grover, 2018; Wright et al., 2020), continued to be implemented (Inman, 2019).

The decreased reliability in government support has placed vulnerable people into increasingly marginalised and precarious positions. The effect of this has been profound for women more so than men (Fawcett Society, 2014), perhaps due to inadequate government benefits to balance work and mothering commitments (McDowell, 2016), and the persistence of a gender pay-gap (Women’s Budget Group, 2015). Indeed, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) observe a greater dependence of women than men on their support (TUC, 2015, p. 18; Trussell Trust, 2019). In previous studies however, reliance on NGOs for assistance has been shown to heighten a sense of precariousness and anxiety due to the temporary nature of support (Cloke et al., 2016, pp. 704-705). In other words, the NGOs that assist vulnerable people may be experienced as additional places of transience, or places to access support in the short-term, in their already highly fluid worlds. Yet, further research has also suggested that NGOs can create much needed social support, in the sense of the formation of networks of supportive relationships for vulnerable people that can help them cope with their adversities (Small et al., 2020). If these places are experienced as transient, how can they create social support? Therefore, the research question this paper aims to answer is: *How do non-government*

*organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?*

This paper examines how economically vulnerable mothers in the North West of England form supportive ties in two centres, “Edgington”<sup>27</sup>, a foodbank that also provides informal health and wellness and art courses, and “Carol’s House”, a women’s centre with free counselling services and a community kitchen. The aspect of temporality is central in understanding visitors’ experiences. All interlocutors in this research anticipate the future as increasingly challenging, both socially and economically. In this context, and despite economic support from NGOs being presented formally as temporary relief, mothers received long-term instrumental support from the centres, which created institutional trust. At Edgington, visitors had to periodically inform management as to their eligibility to access the centre; and if one’s circumstance changed, they would no longer be able to access support. The aim of Carol’s House was for women to become independent through counselling and skills development, and therefore there was institutional indication of support as short term. Nevertheless, due to the comfort mothers find in these spaces, they can also trust in other mothers to be durable sources of emotional support, even though their relationships are not necessarily strong. Bonds developed in the centres are vital because in their lived-experiences they have a deficit of enduring relationships for social support, and often feel isolated and stigmatised. Links with organisations and bonds with other mothers create a sense of safety, security, and reliability in a context of transience of NGOs’ support and uncertainty in mothers’ conception of support.

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<sup>27</sup> All names of people and places in this paper have been changed and made anonymous to uphold participants’ confidentiality.

## 5.2. Literature Review

In Britain women, and particularly economically uncertain women who rely, at least in part, on the social welfare system, experience the greatest vulnerabilities due to policies of austerity (Adkins, 2015; Greer Murphy, 2016; Women's Budget Group, 2019). As a result of austerity measures there has been a significant contraction in financial support from the government, as well as limitations on social support and instrumental resources essential for livelihood strategies (Hall, 2019, p. 57). Policies of austerity have a distinct gendered dynamic in which "women have been disproportionately affected by these cuts as a result of structural inequalities which means they earn less, own less and have more responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work" (Hall et al., 2017, p. 1). Moreover, in response to the specific impact of policies of austerity upon women in Britain, Phillip Alston, the UN's rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights asserted "if you got a group of misogynists together in a room and said 'how can we make a system that works for men but not women?' they wouldn't have come up with too many other ideas than what's in place" (BBC, 2018). Therefore, women dependent upon government support appear to be at a progressively disadvantaged position due to a combination of mothering duties of care with a retracting welfare system and an increasing emphasis on personal independence.

To conceptualise the mothers' experiences of temporality, the concept of a living present is utilised, which "construes the past as intra-active - that is, as always enfolded in the present" (Walker, 2014, p. 55). This is experienced as a bridge between the past, present and future, and allows for these three temporal experiences to concurrently exist. In other words, these interconnected temporalities function simultaneously to create a subjective temporal experience. This encompasses *retentions*, which are interpretations of the past and "successive updatings of perceptual beliefs relating to the proximate past, the next proximate past, and the

next, and so on” (Gell, 1992, p. 225), and *protentions*, the extension of the present into the future and “anticipations of the pattern of updating of current perceptual beliefs” (Gell, 1992, p. 225). These work in conjunction to create an “actual ‘now’ of consciousness” (Gell 1992, p. 227). Therefore, mothers’ living present as protentions and retentions in regard to government support and NGO assistance are explored.

Experiences of temporality further regard the transience of the support NGOs can provide and mothers’ perception of support. A state of ambiguity is experienced, and this uncertainty undermines a person’s ability to cope with their situation (Harms, 2013, p. 353). Periods of transience can erode an ability to plan for the future. Moreover, “enforced waiting becomes oppressive specifically when it undermines subsistence or precludes the ability to plan for better subsistence strategies” (Harms, 2013, p. 356), which can thus increase feelings of anxiety and affect their emotional well-being.

This paper focuses on how NGOs, which formally provide temporary economic support, is able to create social support for their clients. Moreover, I examine how social support can help the clients cope with adversities in their daily lives. Social support consists of supportive functions, be these emotional, informational, or instrumental, performed by primary or secondary social ties (Thoits, 2011, p.146; Wilkerson et al., 2017, p. 359). Social support is important to those attempting to cope with, not only major, but also day-to-day stressors (Thoits, 2011, p. 149-150). Moreover, social support provided by both primary and secondary groups has a direct impact on mental health and well-being. Supporters provide “stress-buffering effects” (Thoits, 2011, p. 156) to help cope with the variety of stressors during daily lived-experiences. Finally, there are two categories of social support provided by both groups: problem-focused and emotion-focused supportive strategies (Thoits, 2011, p. 152). Each group and variant of support provides differing, yet valuable social support.



Primary group members are significant others such as spouse, kin, and friends. These individuals are emotionally close and influential, but experientially distant (Thoits, 2011, p. 151). Moreover, significant others are “small in size, informal, intimate, and enduring” (Thoits, 2011, p. 146). Mainly these are strong ties, but also can be weak in nature (Fingerman, 2009, p. 70) and can provide emotional support, such as signally understanding, sustaining a sense of self-worth, or bolstering a belief in belonging (Thoits, 2011, p. 152). Primary ties are vital sources of emotional support because of closeness, so the emotional support is received as meaningful and this can protect feelings of self-worth; however secondary ties may be more valuable because of similarities of experiences (Thoits, 2011, p. 152-153). Moreover, primary ties offer instrumental coping devices, for instance, instrumental aid, information and advice, and coping encouragement, which can support a sense of self-esteem, belonging, and mattering. Finally, their instrumental support can decrease burdens, though problem-focused solutions may also have a negative impact due to feelings of resentment from the provider of support (Thoits, 2011, p. 153-155).

Secondary ties are more formalised, larger in group size, less personal, and membership is more discretionary, and therefore membership may be short to long term (Thoits, 2011, p. 146). Examples of this are NGO workers, social-workers, co-workers, or religiously affiliated individuals. A key feature of secondary group members is they have similarities in experiences. They have a deep, multi-dimensional view on the distinctions of stressful experiences. As a result, secondary ties are able to express empathy and offer effective emotional support (Thoits, 2011, p. 153-154). Additionally, because of the closeness in experience, they “can provide coping assistance that is closely tailored to the exigencies of the problematic situation and known to be effective in solving problems and dampening upset” (Thoits, 2011, p. 154). These individuals can act as role models to generate motivation and hope, and offer coping behaviours that generates a sense of self-control.

For institutions to perform such a role, clients need to develop trust in the institutions, which has to do with “institutional capacity and credibility as well as in the literal meaning of ‘integrity’ itself: honesty, trustworthiness, moral strength and soundness” (Phillips, 2006, p. 147). Szreter and Woolcock assert that “especially in poor communities, the nature and extent (or lack thereof) of respectful and trusting ties to representatives of formal institutions... has a major bearing on their welfare” (Szretzer et al., 2004, p. 655). As Fleischer (2011) examined, welcoming and reliable institutions which provide tangible and intangible support are important for those who feel left behind by a changing society (Fleischer, 2011, p. 444). The instrumental support offered is significant, nevertheless it may be limited, however the space provided by the institution mechanises visitors to develop important emotionally supportive relationships (Fleisher, 2011, p. 449). Therefore, institutional support is formalised social support which is considered consistent once trust in the institution is founded.

Informal social support is often formed within specific organisational contexts (Small, 2009), and organisations can have an explicit or implicit brokerage role in the creation of such support. Small (2009) argued that institutions can be important places where people experiencing poverty can create horizontal support. Small and Gose (2020) investigated the brokerage role for third sector organisations attending low-income people. They concluded that successful brokerage depended on the extent to which the organisation created frequent and long-lasting interactions among its clients, as well as activities that were outwardly focused or where clients performed joint tasks. Successful brokerage helped cultivate a sense of belonging. However, the finding that the frequency and duration of participation is needed for creating social support contrasts with the short-term goals of NGOs.

### 5.3. Research Methods

Data for this project was collected over an eighteen-month period between 2018 and 2019 in two NGOs in Willenford, in the North West of England. This region was chosen because it is both one of the most economically deprived regions of the country and worst places for women to live in Britain (Oxfam, 2013; Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2014; Social Mobility Commission, 2016; Duntachik et al., 2017). According to a tabulation of 380 local authorities on eight core domains<sup>28</sup>, Duntachik et al. (2017) developed a league table of the best places for a woman to live in Britain. They found authorities in the North West comprise 14% of the bottom quartile and Willenford expresses some of the lowest performance in terms of social mobility (Dunatchik et al., 2017). Comparing this to data from the Social Mobility Commission (2016), it was confirmed that Willenford had some of the lowest social mobility.

Data was initially collected through participant observation in volunteering activities. I assumed the role of “volunteer ethnographer” (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 1), which enabled access to mothers and to ask for participation in semi-structured interviews. The research’s purpose was made explicit to participants, and individuals were informed that participation was voluntary. The research followed ethical standards to ensure anonymity and the emotional well-being of interlocutors and NGOs. The double role of an ethnographer and volunteer required spanning two worlds, which could be a challenging space to navigate both emotionally and practically. As Garthwaite (2016) commented from her fieldwork in a British foodbank, this position requires one to negotiate “tense discourse and rhetoric surrounding growing foodbank use in Britain, whilst attempting to manage and maintain boundaries” (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 2). By keeping a daily fieldwork journal and taking notes on the day of research, with follow-up

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<sup>28</sup> Income, housing affordability, personal wellbeing, safety, education, life expectancy, environment, and culture

reflections, I was able to accurately and ethically capture experiences at the centres. Also, through building relationships with mothers while volunteering, I received some extended invitations to join them outside the centres in activities ranging from shopping for food, picking up children to picnics and attending a wedding.

In total, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted. Themes focused on areas such as life-history, livelihood strategies, social relationships/ support, motherhood, and temporal/emotional aspects. Moreover, there were a series of expert interviews with academics, journalists, politicians, community service workers to gain background knowledge and technical information about state welfare.

## **5.4. Transient places for long-term instrumental support**

### **5.4.1. Edgington**

Edgington is a faith-based charitable organisation that has been providing support to economically vulnerable peoples of all faiths for the last decade. The most frequented day at Edgington is when the foodbank is open, and visitors are able to access the food bank if they provide proof of receiving government welfare and living in the local area. There were two part-time employees and a small core of volunteers. In addition to the foodbank, Edgington offers various courses, although attendance to these diminished throughout the research period because the timetables and centre rules, such as prohibiting children, were incongruous with visitors' lived-experiences. However, due to the increased precariousness of visitors' lives outside of the centre, individuals continued to access the foodbank in spite of the unaccommodating spatiotemporal norms.

The goal is to support vulnerable individuals experiencing short-term moments of insecurity and is not intended as a long-term solution. Martina, the centre manager, recognised

that this did not always occur and visitors would continue to depend on Edgington's support (fieldnotes, July 2018). However, there was no policy to enforce the temporality of support and they could continually access support as long as visitors fulfilled criteria for eligibility. On a typical day, the majority of visitors were regulars, and most of those had relied upon the weekly foodbank had been users for years. However, others transitioned from relying on Edgington, but again found themselves in need of assistance. Additionally, there would always be at least one or two new visitors to the foodbank and five to six people who came only sporadically. For regulars, the foodbank had become an integral part of their survival strategies and weekly routines, utilising Edgington not only for instrumental, but also emotional and informational support. During my research at Edgington, I volunteered at the foodbank and other centre activities. Throughout the research it became evident that, despite Edgington's formal aim of the provision of short-term support, based upon interviews, conversations, and participant observation, the centre had transformed into a long-term place to access multiple sources of social support.

#### 5.4.2. Carol's House

Carol's House is a women's centre and has been a cornerstone of support for vulnerable women for over twenty-five years. The organisation was established as a support group by a group of local women who wanted to improve women's lives through gaining practical skills, qualifications, and confidence. There is a focus on counselling services for victims of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, and financial), empowerment, the promotion of women's well-being, and on providing support, for example, instrumental, emotional, informational) during insecure times. Carol's House is funded by charitable trusts, public grants, and self-funding through the organisation's charity shop and Fair Share store. There are three part-time centre

managers, long and short-term volunteers for cooking and cleaning, and professional counsellors. Throughout the fieldwork, I volunteered as a kitchen assistant and general volunteer.

The women accessing Carol's House were mostly white-British and from the local area. It is a women-only space, but allows males up to the age of twelve. Carol's House provides free group and individual counselling sessions, a community kitchen, a fair-share store, a crèche, and activities such as arts and crafts and sewing. Additionally, four women were hired as hourly-paid workers or worked on a voluntary basis to gain on-the-job training, which enabled the acquisition of practical skills, and an accompanying sense of confidence, pride, and accomplishment.

Finally, the official stance is for women to become economically independent through entering the workforce. In this sense, assistance is also meant to be temporary, nevertheless this was neither enforced in practice nor expected by visitors, volunteers, or staff. Many utilise the services of Carol's House for long periods and/or return for the provision of support. Typically, there was a group of about ten women who visited Carol's House at least twice a week. However, there were some women who came only occasionally when in need of counselling services or confronting stressful events, for instance, stoppages or delays to benefit payments, issues at their children's schools, or encounters with abusive partners. It was seldom that a visitor came to the centre only once because those who relied on Carol's House were in economically uncertain positions with sparse social connections for support elsewhere. Therefore, the emphasis on short-term support is rarely actualised.

## 5.5. Findings

In the following section, I start by describing the daily uncertainties that mothers confront due to their economic positions, and the impact on their emotional well-being. I then explore institutional trust established between mothers and the centres. Finally, I examine how institutional trust facilitated relationships among mothers, and how enduring bonds and social support formed in a place of transient institutional support.

### 5.5.1. Daily uncertainties

In their daily lives outside of the centres, mothers experienced anxiety and stress. This is attributed to a combination of economic deprivation, mothering care duties, and the continual and opaque changes to social welfare, all of which negatively impacted their ability to make ends meet. This was explained by Zawadie, a long-term visitor to Edgington and Kenyan immigrant. She is a single mother of three boys and worked part time as an NHS support worker.

I have to go to the foodbank and everything because I cannot afford food or anything. After you've paid the bills - my wages are like 600 pounds - and the other bills, I'm all behind and everything. They're getting worse. So, we used to get a lot of help, a lot of help. Especially mothers, single mothers. We used to get a lot - extra help, extra money, and we use to make do. All that is gone now. (Interview, Zawadie)

Outside of the centres, mothers envisioned unpredictable and unreliable futures, which produced feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, fear, and isolation. Due to their uncertain economic circumstances, they had an inability to plan for their futures, a limited sense of security, and envisioned their lives becoming increasingly difficult. In response to how

Zawadie imagined the future, she asserted “it’s gonna get worse [*laughs*], I’ll look forward to that. So, I’m not putting any kind of hope and say ‘things’ll get better’. No! Things won’t be better. Things won’t be better at all” (interview, Zawadie). This projection was echoed by Jade, one of the part-time centre employees at Carol’s House and a 50-year-old single mother of two girls. She did not receive Child Maintenance Allowance because of the children’s father’s financial insecurity, and due to the fact that Jade wanted to distance herself and her children from him because of his violent past. Jade responded, “we’re not going back in time to a lovely, sunnier day. I’ve been sat here for many years now thinking ‘have we reached bottom, have we reached the bottom?’ I don’t know. I’m just praying and hoping” (interview, Jade).

Many women also suffered from mental health issues. Also, they experienced isolation and shame, resulting from their stress, or exacerbated by it. Mary, a 30-year-old single mother of two and the part-time cleaner at Carol’s House described such a situation. She explained that anxiety and stress originated from, and is perpetuated by, “mental health cuts [that mean people] can’t access the care, but also because they’re struggling with like sort of what’s going on with the economy here and, like, financial worries” (interview, Mary). In spite of this bleak outlook, both centres were recognised as places of long-term support, and through accessing these places, the mothers could connect, form relationships, and find support from others with similar experiences.

### 5.5.2. Trust in centres, trust in each other

Edgington and Carol’s House represented important spaces for mothers, as these provided ongoing support that the women did not have outside of the centres. Mothers did not feel as if they had reliable people or places which could offer an enduring sense of stability. However, the continued support built a sense of trust in the women towards the institutions. These



linkages were formed through their need for the ongoing provision of instrumental support and relationships with volunteers. Through recurrent encounters and the formation of relationships, mothers established institutional trust. Moreover, owing to their confidence in the organisations, the mothers were able to trust other visitors who accessed the services. They formed trust in each other based upon a shared experience of the collective need for long-term assistance, both for instrumental support from the organisations and for emotional support from other mothers.

Given their collective need for long-term instrumental support, mothers had similar protentions of the future as negative. They understood that mothers would continue to access the centres, and therefore were actors who could be relied upon in the long term. The next section first explores how durable linkages were formed through institutional trust, and then considers how this led to the formation of enduring bonds between mothers.

#### *5.5.2.1. Safe spaces*

On top of practical support, the two centres offered moments of relief. First, mothers knew they could receive the instrumental support. Furthermore, because the women spent time waiting together to receive support, these spaces allowed for moments of respite from the chaos of their lives. In these moments of waiting, mothers could socialise and had opportunities to feel a sense of safety and security. Jade explained:

You feel so comfortable here and you think this is a lovely place... It's very special and it's the nature of the people who come here. But the things you go through, and the things you struggle with, here's where you feel safe, to even think about it.

(Interview, Jade)

Feelings of trust in the institution as a safe and reliable space were echoed by Alice. She was a 27-year-old mother of two who had previously accessed Edgington, but had fallen back into an economically vulnerable position. Alice was thankful to engage on a social level with other adults at Edgington because she spent most of her time with her children. During a conversation, Alice discussed how she had lost self-confidence and felt she was struggling emotionally and financially. However, she was happy to have found a community again, which gave her the strength to carry on (fieldnotes, July 2018). Both Jade and Alice expressed their faith in the organisations because of the security experienced in the centres' atmosphere, which created institutional trust.

The organisations offered a sense of assurance of being concerned for mothers' mental well-being, and this helped in building trust towards the institutions. Sarah from Edgington was a 43-year-old single-mother of three who had originally immigrated from Nigeria. She had been living in temporary accommodation for five years and worked as a care worker on a zero-hour contract. Sarah found Edgington's art classes particularly comforting because, as she explained, she suffered from emotional issues and the classes were her form of therapy and self-care (fieldnotes, July 2018). Throughout the class, Sarah got up to make herself tea and toast, and curated her artwork that had been placed on the centre's walls. She commented that her pieces of art depicted her anguish, but was also pleased that her technique had improved (fieldnotes, July 2018). Afterwards, the teacher described Sarah's anxieties and worries at the beginning of classes, but that by the end she was relaxed and focused (fieldnotes, July 2018). The experience of having a reliable place to access emotional support was also observed at Carol's House. Kayla, a 33-year-old single mother of two, who also supported her 22-year-old nephew, expressed the importance of Carol's House for support with issues of mental health:

With mental health, yeah, they've always gone 'you want to speak to a counsellor?' and I'm like 'no, it's just good enough going in a room with [Suzie] or [Jade] when I'm

having a really bad time. Or if they not seen me for ages', they'll ring me and go 'Where've you been?', 'I'm having a bad week'. They're really good. They've helped me a lot. That's why I come in here really. (Interview, Kayla)

In forming institutional trust, interactions with staff and/or volunteers were also vital because mothers could explicitly appreciate the care that the organisations were providing. At Edgington direct contact with volunteers was important in forming enduring links because the organisational structure was vertical, and these connections could make the volunteers seem more accessible.

Padma, originally from India, was a 32-year-old married mother of two and one of the longest-term visitors to Edgington, because, in part, she was still waiting for her 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' status to be approved after nine years. She had volunteered at Edgington's summer fundraiser event, partly because it allowed her to socialise with visitors and volunteers in a more informal setting, and enabled her to purchase unsold items at half-price. Bob, a 73-year-old pensioner and volunteer, drove Padma back to her house after the event. He recounted barely being able to close his car boot because she had brought so many unsold items home (fieldnotes, July 2018). The following Wednesday morning when Padma came to the foodbank, she brought in a plastic container full of homemade curry for Bob and his wife, who was also a volunteer, as a way of thanking them for their support. Despite this not being official support from Edgington, it demonstrated the volunteers' care for visitors' well-being, and gave visitors a sense of trust and authenticity in their relationships.

Exchanges at Carol's House also signalled empathy for mothers, which in turn engendered confidence in the organisation. The centre's low-cost, hot dinner was a part of many mothers' weekly routines and survival strategies. Meg, a centre psychologist, discussed in an initial research meeting that the dinner at Carol's House is the only hot meal in the day,

or week, for many of the women (fieldnotes, July 2018). In addition to being able to have a nutritious meal, the act of sharing the dining experience was important for creating community and fostering mental health. As Emily, the centre manager, said during an interview:

For a lot of women here there's social isolation... if you coming here, you getting waited on, which is important, and a meal cooked for ya, and you don't have to do the dishes afterwards, if somebody's waiting on ya and cooking for ya, it's just a general kindness they don't get outside, you've got the human value, you can sit, and food is an ice breaker, so I try to keep the subjects light at lunchtime, and we've always done community eating. (Interview, Emily)

Mothers' engagement with centres and interactions with volunteers facilitated linkages between the two groups. The formation of institutional ties derived from the feelings of continuity and security that the centres provided. Moreover, through displays of empathy and unprompted support, visitors trusted that Edgington and Carol's House were safe, reliable, and credible sources of support.

#### *5.5.2.2. Enduring Bonds among Mothers*

As a result of the institutional trust, mothers also initiated relationships and developed enduring bonds with other mothers at the centres. Due to the shared sense of reliability in the institutions, mothers had a common experience of being able to trust the actors who inhabited the places, even if they did not have long-standing or strong relationships with them. Therefore, durable bonds emerged and were relied upon for emotional support, for example, empathy, friendship, mattering, and belonging, which they did not experience in their daily lives. Relationships between mothers were built upon a mutual need for a sense of belonging and mattering, upon

a desire to lessen shame and stigma, and to pass time together. Trust between mothers was further based upon shared experiences and negative protensions. Emotionally supportive exchanges began within the safety of the organisations, and then these relationships extended to engaging with one another outside of the centre both by spending time together and staying connected through telephone text and WhatsApp messaging.

At Edgington, women found a sense of belonging. On foodbank days, visitors would socialise with one another while waiting to enter the food distribution centre. Oftentimes in their daily lives the mothers were confronted with hostility (Bruck and Garthwaite, 2021), they lacked support to emotionally cope, and they frequently felt isolated in their struggles. Therefore, the safety of the space inside Edgington allowed them to engage with others, while waiting for support, and to share stories without fear of shame.

One example was Cindy, a single mother of two and a white South African immigrant. She spoke of her daughter being the victim of severe bullying at her school, which resulted in her daughter moving to London to be with Cindy's estranged ex-partner. Cindy shared her experience with Alexandra one morning at the foodbank while waiting to collect food. Alexandra was a 27-year-old Romanian immigrant who supported her family of seven, lived in a privately rented house, and worked as a kitchen porter on a zero-hour contract. Cindy described difficulties she had confronted in making a formal complaint to the school and was unable to meet with the school's head teacher. She felt there was a deliberate barrier that prevented the school's management from knowing about students' and families' challenges and anxieties (fieldnotes, December 2018). Alexandra listened attentively and agreed with the issues regarding bullying, and difficulties in accessing school management. She shared the story about her 14-year-old sister who had also been victim to bullying, and which had led to her sister's acts of self-harm and low school attendance. Alexandra feared that her sister would soon drop out of school, which was a difficult prospect for Alexandra to confront because she

was the sole carer giver for her family and would thus feel a sense of failure. Moreover, she had a sombre sense of realism regarding her position and duty to her family saying “I just need to watch my kids how they growing up - this is my main concern, just look at my kids, and I just want them to grow, to have a nice life, and to be a good people. This is the thing I want to do” (interview, Alexandra). Neither women could resolve issues of bullying at school, and therefore felt this placed their kin in vulnerable positions. Cindy and Alexandra did not discuss such issues with individuals outside Edgington because they were neither acquainted with parents at the schools, nor had close friends. Moreover, Cindy was not in communication with her family, while Alexandra’s home life was chaotic and fraught with many social and economic challenges, and so she did not want to contribute to her family’s anxieties.

From their conversation Cindy and Alexandra realised that their daughters were approximately the same age and were experiencing similar difficulties at school. Afterwards, they exchanged phone numbers and connected on WhatsApp using the Internet at Edgington. Cindy and Alexandra could access the Internet, which was supposed to be for staff only, because Zawadie had received the password from a volunteer, and this information was shared in secret among the foodbank visitors. At a later date during a formal interview with Alexandra, she scrolled through messages exchanged on WhatsApp between Cindy and herself. After their initial discussion, the two mothers frequently shared pictures of their children and advice about other organisations’ support, for example, material items from other foodbanks, applications for a Christmas toy appeal at Central Mission<sup>29</sup>. Also, they shared uplifting memes sent in response to stories they had previous told each other about problems with family, school, or welfare officers. Therefore, having a community and space to talk about these issues, even if

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<sup>29</sup> Another organisation accessed with frequency for clothing and household items.

the dyadic relationships were not necessarily strong, was important in not feeling alone in their struggles, as well as being able to receive and give empathy.

Zawadie also expressed the importance of having a community for mutual support. Although the women were unable to provide substantial instrumental support, giving emotional support gave them the sense of being useful. The reciprocity of support was central in creating community and belonging. Zawadie explained:

We help each other, it's really good. I get help for so many things. Sometimes not only for my children, even for myself. Really, really appreciate some people like, helping you out with small, small things. It's really worth it. That's why my friend sometimes will like talk and everything. I like make them talk so I can see what kind of help they need. (Interview, Zawadie)

The mothers at Carol's House desired a safe community because they lacked spaces free from stigma to discuss shared experiences and economic vulnerabilities. One of the biggest financial struggles was purchasing school uniforms. As Kayla commented, when it comes to buying new school uniforms "it is the most difficult time of year, it's worse than Christmas!" (interview, Kayla). This perennial financial strain was highly emotional because mothers did not want their children dressed "scruffy and cheap" (interview, Kayla) or their children "feeling like the odd one out" (interview, Jade). Moreover, mothers feared to "let down" (interview, Mary) their children if they were unable to adequately provide. On one occasion during lunchtime at Carol's House Mary discussed how her children's head teacher was unaccommodating towards people on low budgets. Moreover, Mary felt he was putting too much pressure on her children, and that they now doubted her as a parent because she was struggling to find the money to pay for basic items (fieldnotes, August 2018). The women at her table listened to her experience and distress, and responded that the teacher's position was

ridiculous, unbelievable, and lacking in empathy; something they were able to do precisely because they had had similar experiences and understood Mary's anxieties (fieldnotes, August 2018). Through giving Mary space to express herself free of shame, they provided essential emotional support.

The possibility of connecting with mothers with similar experiences and sharing time was vital for all the women. As the mothers did not have much financial or social support in their daily lives, friendships made through the centres became important fixtures of their free time. The structure and routine of Edgington was not structured to foster relationships among visitors. However, by virtue of waiting out time together on foodbank days or during the courses, mothers got to know each other. Despite Carol's House having a more horizontal organisational structure, the safeguarding and confidentiality surrounding group counselling sessions discouraged mothers from engaging with one another outside the centre. Nevertheless, in both cases the women engaged with each other outside the centres through WhatsApp and text messaging, while those from Edgington also physically spent time together. On a warm July afternoon, Martina suddenly cancelled the health and wellness course after the mothers had arrived. This was because, due to children being on school holiday, many had brought their children to Edgington and Martina emphasised that Edgington was not a childcare centre (fieldnotes, July 2018). However, Fridays at Edgington were a central component of mothers' weekly routines and the mothers had planned to spend the afternoon together with their children at the centre. Therefore, the mothers decided to have a picnic in a nearby park for a few hours instead. They walked up to the park in separate groups, and upon arrival those who were already there had unpacked a variety of items; some of which they had taken from Edgington without Martina's approval. Under an unusually hot summer sun for North West England, they sat for several hours while children played and ate snacks, and mothers shared their lived-experiences. Discussions revolved around welfare officers, changes to the benefit systems, their children,



other centres providing support, potential social activities, finding work, and how to get days off from work. During the picnic, Aisha, a 27-year-old Somali immigrant who was the single mother of two small children, received notification that her benefits had been stopped and she would have to go six weeks without any government welfare. Kate, a 55-year-old white British mother who lived in a small terraced house with her husband, three children and two grandchildren, exclaimed that it was typical of social services to give such news on a Friday before a Bank Holiday weekend (fieldnotes, July 2018). Aisha was distressed about suddenly finding herself in a heightened position of uncertainty because her youngest son was unwell, and they were living in temporary accommodation in an unsafe area. The others consoled her and when the picnic was over, put the leftover food and paper goods in one of her bags. Then, Zawadie, who had a second-hand car, drove Aisha and her children home. After losing her social welfare benefits, Aisha started coming to the foodbank less regularly. Despite her increased uncertainty and greater need for instrumental support, she did not have as much time to come to the foodbank due to meetings with welfare officers. Martina, aware of Aisha's situation, allowed for Zawadie and Kate to collect and deliver food parcels for Aisha's family and occasionally they had the opportunity to talk to her in person. Zawadie would give visitors and volunteers updates on Aisha and talk about the additional instrumental support they were able to provide, for instance, nappies, medicine, prepared meals.

Carol's House encouraged women to socialise within the centre because for many women, the time spent there was some of their only social time and an opportunity to feel like they were included in a welcoming community. The organisation thus provided spaces for social interaction, which initiated further engagement between the women outside of the centres through their mobile phones. One such example was the annual Christmas dinner hosted at Carol's House. This was important because of the cultural significance of Christmas in Britain, however it was also a stressful time of year because of extra expenses and social

pressures. Ivy, the full-time cook who was a single mother of a teenage daughter and an adult son incarcerated for drug dealing and assault, recognised the significance of the day. In a kitchen meeting before preparing the dinner Ivy exclaimed that everyone gets a Yorkshire pudding, vegetables, extra gravy, and, last, but not least, Christmas pudding (fieldnotes, December 2018). The Christmas dinner at Carol's House was an important event which everyone looked forward to and reminisced about throughout the year. Upon walking into the centre on the day of the Christmas dinner, many women were dressed up in green and red attire, and, quite a few had arrived earlier than usual to decorate the walls, set the tables, and offered their support in any way needed. Moreover, mothers took their own initiative to become involved with activities such as hosting a pub-style quiz or made homemade cards to hand out.

While preparing for dinner, some sent text messages to those who had not yet arrived to ensure they would attend. Kayla, known to suffer from severe depression and acute back pain, which rendered her immobile for extended periods, had not yet arrived. On the morning of the Christmas party Connie became worried when Kayla did not show up, not only out of a concern for her health, but also because she wanted to give her a Christmas card. Connie, a single mother of two girls and one of the kitchen visitor-volunteers, often sat with Kayla during lunches. The two mothers would share their experiences about their similarly aged daughters, discuss television programmes, and exchange beauty tips, which Kayla particularly enjoyed given that she was an unlicensed beautician. During a cigarette break, Connie sent Kayla a message on WhatsApp, and waited outside until she had received a response. When Kayla eventually arrived, she gave Connie a hug, then explained that it had taken a long time to put on her makeup. In the end, the two sat at a long table to enjoy the festive meal among the women.

At the end of the meal, Jade turned up the Christmas music on the CD player and the women danced and sang along. Not only did this event create a sense of belonging and

matter, but also a cheerful way to spend the holidays with a community that had become a source of comfort and attachments.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This article explored how social support is obtained by economically vulnerable mothers in NGOs, which are formally presented as spaces of transience. The lived experiences and living present of mothers in the centres were defined by uncertainty and insecurity. This was driven by an increasingly austere economic climate, and the subjective experience of lacking reliable social support, such as instrumental and emotional. NGOs also formally intend to provide short-term support, to help individuals in moments of economic deprivation. However, in practice, the two organisations are not truly transient because of the provision of continual instrumental support, which the women did not receive elsewhere, and this established institutional trust. Moreover, through confidence in the organisations and the formation of linkages, the mothers were able to trust in other visitors with shared experiences who accessed these services and they established relationships that were not necessarily strong, but which created a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, and stability for the mothers.

As a result of the continual interaction and similarities of social and economic challenges, mothers were able to share their lived-experiences free from stigma and shame. This was experienced both inside the safe spaces of the centres and outside, either in person or virtually. This ability to offer and receive empathy and to discuss common challenges was important for mothers because they did not have spaces in their daily lives to be emotionally supported or supportive. Paradoxically, while the centres could have potentially invoked a sense of precariousness, mothers experienced the opposite due to their continual engagement.

Enduring bonds emerged from this, and these relationships could be relied upon for empathy, friendship, and non-instrumental support.

Centrally, the instrumental support from the NGOs and the perception of this support are both transient. However, the organisations and actors who facilitate the provision of support are constant, as are the relationships between the NGOs and mothers, and among the mothers themselves. Therefore, these spaces of transience are able to facilitate durable ties among mothers because of the ongoing provision of instrumental support and institutional trust gained through relations with centres' managers and volunteers. Their certainty of the centres as safe communities was built upon security and continuity, which the mothers did not have in their lived experiences. Through their notions of belonging, cultivated in the NGOs, mothers were able to form enduring and meaningful relationships.

While these organisations thus present themselves as temporal sources of support, in practice they fulfilled important, often long-term functions for the wellbeing of mothers. Nevertheless, the discontinuation of these functions -as formally intended- might severely limit the coping ability of the women. At the time of writing this article, the global community is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Britain is projected to experience some of the most severe outcomes (Mason, 2020). Due to current government regulations, Edgington is only able to provide emergency food parcels and Carol's House has closed its doors indefinitely. There will be clear practical implications for visitors, such as inaccessibility to instrumental support. Moreover, those who rely upon these communities for emotional support will have also lost the opportunity to continually engage with these durable ties. Potentially, these mothers will experience a heightened sense of isolation and anxiety. This may be mitigated by the connectedness provided by mobile messaging services, however the loss of meeting physically, both inside and outside of the centres, will have an acutely negative impact emotionally. Moreover, they will have to continue to provide for their families and discover

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new ways of doing so as a result of the increasingly limited resources. As these centres are the focus of strong relationships, which help with coping, the indefinite loss of accessing these organisations and people will be profound, and potentially increase a sense of uncertainty.

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## The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities, and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain

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## **Chapter 6. “It seems very unfair and unbalanced”: The assumed and critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers in the North West of Britain<sup>30</sup>**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In the last decades, ethnographies and in-depth studies of populations in poverty have shed light on the lives of the homeless (Bourgois, 1995; Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009; Gowan, 2010), soup kitchen and food bank users (Glasser, 1988; Caldwell, 2004; Garthwaite, 2016; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021), evicted tenants (Desmond, 2016) and the working poor (Newman, 1999; Munger, 2002). However, in ethnographic accounts of women in-poverty, there is limited research that incorporates the dimension of temporality (Auyero, 2010; Cooper, 2015; Hecht and Summers, 2021). Furthermore, there is very scarce anthropological ethnographic research focused on the intersection on mothers in-poverty and their livelihood strategies with critical temporalities. Therefore, in this article I provide an ethnographically-based, theoretical discussion on the intersection of temporality, low- or no-income mothers, and the contradiction between assumed and subjective temporalities.

Subjective experiences in poverty, much like the human experience, is multidimensional, and though there is quantitative analysis regarding poverty and temporalities (Fieulaine, 2014; Merz and Rathjen, 2014), a purely qualitative exploration of the significance of the subjective temporal experience is hardly present. Moreover, even less attention has been given to temporal agency, which can also be referred to as one’s ability to do “time-work”

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(Flaherty, 2016, p. 21). As an academic community there is little known about the subjective experience of temporal allocation for those experiencing poverty and their ability to manage time, with the assumptions from support services about economically uncertain mothers' time. An assumption is that those in poverty have wealth of time which can be traded for the provision of support (Flaherty, 1999; Auyero, 2010; Cooper, 2015), and this discourse influences policy that impacts the most vulnerable in society. Therefore, this paper interrogates the discord between economically uncertain mothers' critical temporalities and temporal pressures from support service providers. To explore the intersection of poverty and temporality, I analyse my ethnographic findings from two third-sector organizations, Edginton<sup>31</sup> and Carol's House in Willenford, in the North West of Britain, in which the element of chronicity was prevalent in mothers' livelihood strategies.

The dimension of temporality and sovereignty over use-of-time is central to individuals' subjective realities. Temporality is considered a commodity and a raw material which can be transformed or exchanged for the tangible (Flaherty, 2003, p. 28, 31). Therefore, I argue applying a lens of temporality to problematise themes in poverty research should be a key feature in constructing an understanding of individuals' lived experiences. Hochschild's (1997) influential research on gendered dynamics in the family directs focus onto women's second shift, which is when women not only engage in the paid labour force, but also attend to unpaid caring and household duties after their productive day is done. However, based upon my research, I argue that there is a third-shift for single-mothers in poverty – (1) paid productive labour and/ or exchanges of favours, (2) visiting charitable organizations for material resources, and (3) engaging in mothering duties of care in the household. Those who experience a third-shift may experience a more profound lack of temporal agency due to the

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<sup>31</sup> Names of people and places have been anonymised to protect identities.

discord between an institutionalised synchronicity of time, or clock time (Griffiths et al., 2013, p. 4; Cano, 2017), and the subjective temporal experiences of an ability to do time work.

In the current era of austerity-Britain, the support which economically vulnerable individuals can access has become increasingly tethered to temporalities. Examples of these include strict timetables for appointments to access welfare benefits (Citizens Advice, 2020) and spatio-temporal norms of foodbanks and other third-sector organizations (Bruck, 2021; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021). In both instances when individuals do not comply, the most vulnerable of society risk benefit sanctions or not receiving the support they desperately need. In addition to this, the economically uncertain mothers in my research, particularly those who are the sole provider for their families, have expressed feeling a deficit of their own free-time, and, to apply the etic, their leisure time is “contaminated free time” (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p, 457). This type of time is vital for individuals because it allows for the pursuit of activities, relaxation, and the opportunity to not feel stressed and rushed (Mattingly and Bianchi, 2003, p. 1006, 1025).

The mothers in this research experience having limited capacity to do time-work because of their caring duties, and engage with livelihood strategies, for example, navigate welfare offices and third-sector organizations, and there is an impact of the macro-level objective reality onto the micro-level subjective realities. Moreover, there is a temporal tension between mothers who rely, in part, on the provision of social support from charitable organisations and state welfare, and service providers’ assumptions of their free time. In this paper I interrogate mothers’ subjective experience of critical temporal allocation and the temporal pressures they confront. I argue that this tension exists and that as a result of an embedded power dynamic of time (Bastian, 2014, pp. 137-138), mothers continue to experience a lack of temporal agency, which contributes to their anxieties that partly come from economic hardships.

In this article I explore the theme of temporal agency through ethnographic data collected from two field sites in Willenford, Britain. The first is “Edgington”, a foodbank that offering health-and-wellness and art classes, and the second is “Carol’s House”, a women’s centre providing a community kitchen in addition to counselling services. This article focuses on mothers’ experiences because of the gendered dynamic of caring duties and societal expectations of mothers (DeVault, 1991; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Hall, 2020), and the friction which emerges when coping with economically uncertain circumstances.

In my analysis I consider the temporal experience of free-time, also known as leisure time. According to Pepin et al. (2018), “leisure time provides a measurable but understudied indicator of discretionary time, which has implication for social isolation, mental and physical health, and overall life satisfaction” (Pepin et al., 2018, p. 108). Moreover, the amount of free time one has autonomy of indicates the amount of agency they have over their time. Through my findings I discuss how there is a closeness of time, or, in other words, mothers’ awareness of a necessity of acquiescence to support services’ timetables, and at the same time the need for uncontaminated free-time; however, they do not experience agency in their ability to do time-work. This research offers a novel insight into an understanding of the challenges economically uncertain mothers confront through bringing into focus the intersection of critical temporalities and temporal agency for those in-poverty.

## **6.2. Literature Review**

One’s subjective reality is interwoven with a subjective experience of time, or as Bastian (2014) cites, a critical temporality which is the “past, present and future; continuity and discontinuity; and multiple rhythms of time use” (Bastian, 2014, p. 137) that are specific to the individual. Temporality is closely associated with a sense of agency and regards in what ways, for how

long, and the purpose of which time is utilised. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) claim an “agentic dimension of social action can only be capture in its full complexity... if it is analytically situated within the flow of time” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963). For Flaherty (2003) time-work is the “intrapersonal or interpersonal effort directed toward provoking or preventing various forms of temporal experience” (Flaherty, 2003, p. 17). Flaherty interrogates the extent to which time-work is deterministic or agental and concludes “time-work is conditioned by the social context within which it arises – a context with cultural, organizational, and relational dimensions” (Flaherty, 2003, p. 30). In short, individuals are able to have temporal agency, however ultimately the outcomes depend upon society structures, social networks and social support.

In contrast to other social science’s approach to time which analyses time in quantifiable units, ethnographers recognise the nuanced, subjective, and qualitative nature of temporality (Southerton, 2006, p. 436). Subjective realities in time are dynamic, and therefore these guide the cadences of daily lived experiences. As Moroşanu and Ringel (2016) assert, individuals are not the subjects of time, but exercise agency through time (Moroşanu & Ringel, 2016). Three etic categories of temporal experience are sequencing, timing, and allocation. To explore temporal agency, consideration is given to the subjective/ objective control an actor has over these different experiences opposed to the submission of the actor’s desired outcomes. First is temporal sequencing, which refers to sequential ordering of events and planning time, and “diplomacy of interpersonal relations” (Flaherty, 2003, p. 26). The next is optimal timing that has to do with efforts to determine when something happens, and also relies upon “interpersonal coordination” (Flaherty, 2003, p. 27). Finally, is allocation of time wherein actors appropriate their own time and make time for activities and engaging with others. However, as Flaherty (2003) asserts, “the set-aside is not always about improving oneself; simply feeling better is often the issue” (Flaherty, 2003, p. 28).

This article applies the parameter of free-time as a metric of temporal agency. This is because an actor's free time can signify how they experience the amount of temporal resource they possess, opposed to their obligations and/ or livelihood strategies. Chatzitheochari and Arber (2012) argue that free-time is "the time that remains at one's own discretion after work and other necessary daily activities are conducted [and] is an important non-monetary welfare resources, providing an opportunity for rest, social interaction, leisure participation, and self-realization" (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p. 451). The emphasis on discretion is central because without the ability to make decisions over one's choices and how to use one's most innate resource, time, there is a distinct lack of agency. Moreover, as Chatzitheochari and Arber argue, "free time is more valuable when it provides an opportunity to synchronization with one's wider social environment (i.e., friends, family, and social institutions)" (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p. 454). This indicates that to have agency over time is to control when, how, and with whom time is spent. For the mothers in this research, I observed their time is allocated for them by charitable institutions and welfare services. In part, this may contribute to their limited social mobility and reproduction of inequalities for low- or no-income mothers.

In addition to this, Bittman and Wajcman (2000) assert that free-time is what "remains after maintaining one's body in a healthy and socially acceptable state, contracting time to the market, and meeting domestic and family responsibilities" (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, p. 167). Moreover, free-time is leisure time and utilised for elective activities, such as practicing a religion or community/ civic engagement (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, p. 167). Furthermore, Chatzitheochari and Arber (2012) state that free time is an "indicator of societal progress and freedom, as 'primary good', and a key element for the functioning of civil society and individual well-being" (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p. 452). The significance of free-time has been recognised as central to the human experience to be able to live happy, healthy, and

fulfilling life so much so that it has been enshrined in the UDHR in Article 24 (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2020).

Therefore, the experience of free-time can be considered a critical temporality is central in understanding the subjective temporal experience. To begin with is the concept of pure free-time, or uncontaminated free-time, wherein an individual is not distracted by other activities, and time that is wholly at one's disposal. In contrast is contaminated free-time when actors engage in simultaneous activities that contaminate or distract from the main free-time activity. This type of temporal experience is lower quality free-time because "constraining activities do violence to the very concept of leisure" (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, p. 171). And a final indicator of the quality of free-time is fragmentation, or the frequency in which free-time is interrupted by unpaid work, which leads to feelings of being rushed and consequently anxious (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, p. 171-172; Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p. 457).

As Flaherty (2003) argues, temporal agency is a construct of social structures, networks, and support, therefore it is relevant to discuss the dynamics of economic status and gender. According to Warren (2003), control over the allotment of time is a classed dimension of life. Seen with higher-earning wage-labourers, they have greater elasticity of time regarding when one works and also the ability to make time through employing others to carry out domestic tasks (Warren, 2003, p. 736). Additionally, Britain is broadly characterised as having a strong male-as-breadwinner/ female-as-caregiver dynamic across classes (Pfau-Effinger, 1999) with women having a greater burden for caring duties in the household (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012, p. 453; Hall, 2020, p. 245). Moreover, economically vulnerable individuals who rely upon charitable organizations for the provision of material support must adhere to their timetables (Bruck, 2021; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021), which results on a type of "seizure of women's time" (Cooper, 2014, p. 165). The acquiescence to organizations' time frames



impacts a sense of self, and reproduce power dynamics and inequalities in society (Foucault, 1977; Cooper, 2014; Auyero, 2010;).

### **6.3. Methods**

The data collection for this research was carried out in two third-sector organizations, Edgington, a foodbank, and Carol's House, a woman's centre, both of which are Willenford in the North West of England. This area was chosen because it is one of the most economically deprived and worst places for women to live in the country (Oxfam, 2013; Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2014; Social Mobility Commission, 2016; Dunatchik et al., 2017; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2020).

Ethnographic research had been conducted over an eighteen-month period wherein I was a participant observer (Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960) and volunteer ethnographer (Tinney, 2008; Garthwaite, 2017; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021), with my identity and purpose made known to all individuals. Through assuming the volunteer role whilst collecting ethnographic data, I began to establish rapport with potential informants and could observe the daily activities in the organisations. In addition to collecting data within the centres, I also spent time with informants in their daily lives, such as running errands (e.g., clothes shopping, pick-up children from school), going to various organizations (e.g., foodbanks, clothing banks), and special days out (e.g., a wedding, picnics, pool days). Moreover, I kept daily fieldnotes to authentically record observations and conversations with mothers, as well as volunteers, staff, experts, welfare case workers, and activists. In conducting any ethnographic research, it was imperative to be reflective of my position and assumptions (Payne & Payne, 2004, pp. 191-194), therefore, in fieldnotes I paid attention to the realities of myself as a research tool and reflected upon this daily.

I conducted twenty in-depth recorded interviews with the core research group, which is defined as mothers responsible for the primary caring duties of children and the household, and rely, at least partially, on third-sector organisations and government welfare for the provision of material support. However, the majority of mothers interviewed were single mothers with most not being able to secure child support<sup>32</sup> from the fathers of their children. During interviews, we discussed themes such as life history, livelihood strategies, social relationships/support, motherhood, and temporal/ emotional aspects. Both fieldnotes and interviews were coded and through an inductive process (Bernard, 2011, p. 7) themes emerged of the prevalence of temporality, agency, and emotional well-being. Transpiring from this developed an analytical focus that guides this article.

Initially, data collection was to include experience sampling method. In this method informants are able to provide specific data on time allocation through the use a device, such as a mobile phone, that is programmed to contact informants and collect data (e.g., location, company) at random moments throughout the day. Moreover, time diaries were considered to understand time allocation as to compare subjective and objective notions of time. However, both of these techniques were burdensome for informants, and would not have collected the rich and nuanced qualitative data of the subjective experience of temporalities.

## 6.4. Findings

In the following section I shall discuss my ethnographic findings. First, I examine organisations' assumptions of mothers' free time, and the impact this has onto how support services allocate mothers' time. Second, I explore mothers' subjective realities of their free-time and an (in)ability to do time-work.

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<sup>32</sup> In the UK this is called "Child Maintenance Allowance"

### 6.4.1. Assumptions of mothers' time

In this subsection I investigate discourse regarding assumptions about mothers' free time and the tension between these and mothers lived temporal experiences. I will explore the narrative regarding mothers' free time from the perspective of organisations, and the impact felt by mothers.

#### *6.4.1.1. Organisational timetables*

Mothers who accessed both Edgington and Carol's House had to adhere to temporal guidelines if they were to utilise the support services, which were not always accommodating to mothers' lived experiences (Bruck, 2021; Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021). Both organisations had temporal norms, however, Edgington's were more constraining and could have a greater impact onto mothers' livelihood strategies. Some of the most repeated phrases heard at Edgington by management, staff, and volunteers were "where else do they have to go?" (fieldnotes, December 2018) or "why are they in such a rush? Don't they need food?" (fieldnotes, August 2018). These comments indicate the narrative constructed about mothers' temporalities. First, it demonstrates the assumption of mothers having an abundance of the resource of free time, and which could and should be transfigured into obtaining the resources they need to survive. Moreover, it displays (1) a lack of understanding of mothers' fragmented and demanding schedules to make-ends-meet and maintain their households, and (2) empathy towards a need to have free time.

At Edgington the timetables of when visitors could access the centre were very strict and mothers confronted forms of violence if they did not follow the rules. For example, visitors were able to enter the building only after 10.00 am and had to be registered by 10.30 am. However, the number in the queue to access to distribution centre was randomised, not first-

come, first-serve, and therefore there was no benefit to arriving early, which created tension between the visitors, volunteers, and management (Bruck & Garthwaite, 2021). Moreover, if someone were to arrive after registration closed at 10.30 am, for any reason and regardless of their relationships with volunteers or management, they were placed at the back of the queue. The centre rules regarding time were strictly enforced by Martina, which was not only created hostility, but also demonstrated a disregard for the lived experiences of those accessing the centre for support services. For instance, one morning when I was working at the registration desk, a pair of mothers arrived around 10.45 am and had asked whether I could allow them to choose a random number for the distribution centre queue. While discussing their tardiness, which they said was due to a change in the bus timetable, Martina overheard our conversation, and, in a voice audible to the whole of the foodbank, she said “what time is it? What time do we close? Tell me! Every week!” (fieldnotes, August 2018). This demonstrates a lack of understanding for mothers’ lived experiences, compounded by the underlying sentiment that mothers have sufficient free time, and therefore should have no reason to arrive late.

On a hot August afternoon Kate, a long-time visitor to Edgington who was convivial and liked by volunteers, visitors, and management alike, had arrived early with one of her grandsons. Kate hoped because she had a meeting with social services in the afternoon, and that she was well-known and liked by those at the centre, she would either (1) be lucky enough to pick or (2) be able to negotiate a number close to the front of the queue so that she could quickly receive her food parcel and arrive to her meeting on time. However, Kate unfortunately picked number thirty, and was unable to change it with either management or other visitors. This made Kate very upset and Mary, a volunteer who had been with Edgington for nearly a year, said publicly “you can’t *really* give people special treatment, can you?” (fieldnotes, August 2018). The next week when Kate came to the foodbank she was distressed because she had missed her appointment with social services, and therefore was benefit sanctioned, which

in-turn placed her in an increased position of uncertainty. Despite the organisation formally advocating equity for all visitors in their temporal guidelines, through the rigidity of the timetables, the temporal norms are experienced as unaccommodating and could ultimately be devastating to mothers' livelihood strategies.

At Carol's House the temporal norms were much more accommodating for visitors, however there was still an undercurrent of the narrative of mothers having a surplus of free time. For example, during a board meeting, one of the board members, Lori, who did not attend the centre outside of these meetings, discussed her opinion on how visitors used their time outside of Carol's House. Lori explained to me that because there was no industry remaining in Willenford, "all people have to do is sit indoors and watch television and play games of their phones" (fieldnotes, December 2018). She continued to mention that the "only job our women have is to find charities for food, clothes, ya know, that kinda thingy" (fieldnotes, December 2018). Lori's sentiment was not overtly prevalent at Carol's House, however it does underscore a belief that mothers on no- or low-income have the material of free time to exchange for instrumental support.

#### *6.4.1.2. Welfare constraints*

In addition to mothers relying upon charitable organisations for their livelihood strategies, they also depended upon government welfare, which also have strict temporal norms to access their services. These norms are constraining for mothers, who also have to balance the temporal rules of charities, children's schools/ activities, public transportation, and in some cases paid-employment. One such example is Kayla, who is a single mother of two from Carol's House who also relied upon government welfare as a part of her livelihood strategy. On a rainy August morning Kayla came into Carol's House quite upset because she had missed an appointment

with a welfare officer that she had been waiting to attend for three months. In this meeting she was hoping to become eligible to receive an increase of benefits because of her medical conditions which had become increasingly worse and unmanageable. However, because of the heavy rainstorms that day, the busses were running behind schedule and she missed her appointment by ten minutes, and therefore it was rescheduled to a month later. Kayla was distressed because, though she felt as if she should not be punished for the public bus services not running punctually, the ramifications of her tardiness was treated as such and the impact of this further embedded a sense of economic insecurity. Moreover, the punitive nature of the welfare system reinforces that organisations believe, at least partially, that economically uncertain peoples should exchange their temporal resources for instrumental resources. Also, a narrative emerges of no- and low-income mothers are under temporal scrutiny and pressures, and compelled to assume personal responsibility and relinquish their free time/ temporal agency to for basic survival.

Another example of temporal constraints came through a conversation with Jenny, a long time visitor to Edgington. Sitting at a table together while waiting for visitors' numbers to be called to collect their food, Jenny told me about the various charities and welfare offices she has to visit and manage their timetables to survive. Jenny explained that her days were filled with dropping her children off at school, going to various foodbanks, sometimes two or three a day, visiting welfare offices, filling in paperwork on free computers at the public library, and then managing her household on her own. She told me that she did not "know what else they [welfare offers] want me to do, I keep losing benefits and I can't do everything [such as, completing job seeking paperwork, attending meetings punctually] and I'm losing benefits. What more do they want? I can't manage, I just can't manage!" (fieldnotes, December 2018). Much like Kayla, Jenny felt as if she were trying to do everything possible to fulfil the requirements to access government benefits to ease her financial burdens, however the social

welfare bursaries were insufficient and therefore also needed to rely on charitable organisations. Nevertheless, the lack of coordination of various timetables and arriving to centres/ offices on time and prepared felt unmanageable and overwhelming. Moreover, by organisations and welfare offices not coordinating their schedules, as well as having some leniency with the temporal rules, Jenny felt that she was falling further and further behind. And much like Kayla, Jenny was encumbered with having to assume personal accountability for her time. Ultimately, Jenny would need to reallocate her free time to fit with the requirements of the organisations/ offices and relinquish her temporal agency to survive.

#### 6.4.2. Mothers' temporal constraints

This second subsection explores mothers' lived experiences of time, and the pressures they feel from managing their households, childcare responsibilities, and their livelihood strategies. There are three fields of mothers' lives explored from their perspective: routines, timetables and punitive measures, and aspirations for free-time.

##### 6.4.2.1. *Routines and getting-by*

To appreciate mothers' sense of temporal agency, an understanding of a daily routines, or their daily temporal sequencing, had to be established, and then position their sense of free-time within their schedules. Almost all of the mothers were the sole provider for their families, and those who did have husbands or boyfriends said they were more burdensome than beneficial to the upkeep of the household responsibilities and livelihood strategies. Therefore, the mothers not only had to attend to caring duties by themselves on no- or low-income, but also had to develop and maintain livelihood strategies on their own. The mothers all discussed having busy schedules, which were mostly filled with childcare duties, household chores, visiting various

third-sector organizations, and coping with mental health issues, such as, anxiety and depression. Kayla is a 33-year-old single mother from Carol's House who is recently divorced from the father, who is in the Navy, of their two daughters. Her routine is similar to others and explained to me:

Like on a good day, like today, I dropped the kids off at school, went to the precinct, got my little bits, come in here to see me friends because I won't see them for a few weeks. And, the kids school's just there, so I'll probably wait here 'til 10-to-3, have me hot dinner [at Carol's House], have a chat, cheer meself up, go and get the kids. So, if I wasn't coming in [Carol's House], probably would've gone home, maybe putter around, tidy up, depending on how bad me back is. Sometimes the house can get - completely overwhelming - the washing basket, I can't pick it up. I can't move at all. I'll go to the precinct, get something for tea, cook it while they're in school, then I'll pick 'em up or I'll come in here. And I take 'em home, we have our tea, read the books, take the bath, bed. That's me routine. (Kayla, interview).

Kayla's experience was common among mothers whose routines primarily focused on reproductive labour balanced with livelihood strategies, for instance, accessing organisations for support and locating bargains/ deals on clothing, food, and other essential items. And, these routines hardly ever included uncontaminated free-time for themselves.

Mothers were aware of the lack of and contaminated nature of their free-time. They felt they had little ability to do what they desired, which was relax, see friends, or simply not worry. My questions regarding free-time were always met with one of two responses – exasperated sighs or bursts of laughter. At times this was also responded to with tears. Kayla told me that while she watches television in the evening with her nephew that lives with her, “I'll iron uniforms and pack lunches when they're in bed - that's in my time, but I don't really sleep. I'm



on a lot of [anti-anxiety] tablets and it kinda messes up my sleeping patterns” (Kayla, interview). Mothers described feeling as if they had limited free-time, and in their free-time they were continuing to attend to reproductive duties of care combined with anxieties about financially managing their households. Moreover, they felt pressures to not be seen as unfit mothers, as is one prevalent discourse regarding single mothers who are economically uncertain (Gilles, 2007; Gilles, 2013, p. 96; Cooper, 2020). Mary, another visitor to Carol’s House, and a single mother of a daughter and a son explained:

I’m always busy at the end of me day. I even have uniforms and cereal bowls out the night before ready for morning. I can't go to bed unless, like, the underwear and the socks are out of the dryer, and folded neat on top of the pile of clothing. I have everything set up like that. I make packed lunches from the night before, they're quite fussy eaters, so I'm not gonna pay for something they're not gonna eat. I'll buy stuff in ready for them, like stuff for sandwiches and little snacks and fruit and stuff like that, and I'll do it and bring it in the next day. It's not that, if they want the hot food, and they like it, they can have, but if I've got to pay for it and the full lots gone in the bin, I feel it's a waste. (Mary, interview)

#### *6.4.2.2. Timetables and Punitive Measures*

From their responses, there was an indication that mothers had some agency over their temporal sequencing. However, they had little self-determination regarding the allocation of their time in relation to mothering duties and to access external support services, such as, government welfare and third-sector organizations. Jade, a 50-year-old single-mother of two daughters, explained the limited allocation of time for those in-poverty. She described the

economic uncertainties intertwined with the strict timetables and punitive measures when not followed, and the anxieties these could induce:

I think it's, it's unsecured hours. It's being penalised for being on any sort of benefits. So now your trip to the job centre is to prove what you've done and be sanctioned. The job centre isn't the type of place you bop into anymore, you have to have an appointment for one. You can't bump in and think 'I'm looking for a new job', or 'I'm looking for a job', they don't seem to be supporting you in that degree. It's enforced courses, it's sanctions if you're late. Each time somebody's benefits is suspended, that number is up, the stats to display, and that's what I find a joke. Every change in circumstance that suspends payments, or alters payments, you then come out of the systems for weeks. Then they can plot that, and I think people have unsecured hours, very low wages, very basic wages, very expensive rents, very expensive food, very expensive life in general. Everything is more. Like your bus fare goes up for the kids, your dinner money goes up for the kids, everything is going up, I'm on the same wage, 'cos there's no increase, 'cos there's no money for any increase, and yeah, it'll go up a slight bit, but not enough to cover. So, it seems very unfair and unbalanced. (Jade, interview)

Managing daily routines was a stressful and hectic balance of fulfilling mothering duties of care, accessing essential resources, and manoeuvring around the timetables of social service organizations and offices. This example demonstrates how mothers relinquish temporal agency to access resources essential to survival, which underscores the lack of temporal agency.

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#### 6.4.2.3. Aspirations for free-time

To determine the subjective experience of temporal self-determination, I inquired as to what mothers wanted to do with free-time, but did not have the time. This uncovered their aspirations, but through the lens of the limitations of chronicity in these being actualised. Regarding paid employment, those who did not have a paid job desired to have one, and those who were wage-earners aspired to have greater flexibility and security of their hours and/ or higher wages. In both instances these aspirations were to free them from requiring government or third-sector support. However, due to their formal educational levels, they would have to study on a course or retrain, and the element of time was a prevailing constraint in educational advancement. For example, Lily, a 30-year-old single mother of two who is a part-time kitchen volunteer at Carol's House, expressed an interest in becoming a counsellor with individuals struggling with substance abuse and said "I'm hoping that it's at night, that I can do a night-time course. It would be a lot easier for me, otherwise I don't think I can manage" (Lily, interview). Alexandra, a regular at Edgington who was 27 years old and emigrated from Romania, explained the difficulties of starting an educational course and her perception the futility in regard to her responsibilities and financial circumstance:

Obviously, my future at this point is to look after [my family]. My kids are a new generation, I see myself looking after them. So obviously my age is very high to do something anymore, so if I start to do something I have no time, 'cos if I start to study, I'm going to have to study, and the study not going to bring money.

(Alexandra, interview)

Alexandra's projection of the future and feeling she is not being able to do what she desires in-part influences her perception of the present. Moreover, this interpretation of her

future to some degree may impact why she relinquishes her temporal agency - the most important element of her life is to support her family and raise her children, and therefore is willing to forfeit her free time. Perhaps for Alexandra this is not necessarily a negative consequence, however objectively she does relinquish her free-time and this may be the result of the future protentions.

Mothers never felt they got to the end of the month with ease either financially, temporally, or emotionally. Moreover, they viewed the lives of mothers in similar economically vulnerable situations to have similar or worse deficits of these resources. The extent to which mothers experienced agency over an ability to engage with temporal agency varied, however all felt some degree of constraint over temporal self-determination. Some mothers felt highly restricted while others, such as Zawadie, engaged in temporal allocation and aimed to have uncontaminated free-time. When asked about the role the Health and Wellness courses at Edgington, which were child-free, in relation to her free-time she explained:

I don't have [free-time], the only free-time I have is to scream and shout, that's the only time I have. When [my children] collect all the gadgets from me, then I've got no choice but to lie down. But still then I wouldn't be having free-time. I'd be like tidying up, do this, do that. Which to be honest, is not a free-time. The only free-time we have is to get out of the house. Cos most of the time, I say to the kids 'getting out of the house is quite good'. Understand? So, we all need join in and learn, to make a community, that's what's important. I always learn something here, then I can share [what I have learned] with my friends. You need the free-time without the kids. You need time to relax and not always worrying where are the kids, what they playing. This is my time to be with friends and to learn, it's important. It feels good. (Zawadie, interview)

This section of ethnographic findings explored mothers' feelings of having little agency over their temporal horizons. Their daily routines were dominated firstly by their mothering responsibilities and their days organised by the objective reality of taking care of their children. In addition to this, they had to adhere to organizations' timetables and were acutely aware of the need to acquiesce to their organizational norms to avoid punitive sanctions or risk the ability to garner important resources, for example, instrumental, informational, and emotional.

## **6.5. Conclusions**

This article has analysed the tension between the assumption of economically uncertain mothers' free time and temporal pressures confronted, with the mothers' temporal agency and feelings of a lack of free-time. Through ethnographic research conducted in the North West of England it was revealed that mothers' experience limited temporal-agency based upon their limited uncontaminated free-time. The parameter of free-time is central in this analysis of temporal agency because it highlights the intersection of mothering responsibilities and acquiescence to timetables of organizations, with feelings of being unable to control their routines, negotiate between fragmented timetables, and engage with their aspirations. I first explored how actors who provide supportive services, such as charitable organisations and welfare offices, assume that mothers are in possession of free time, which should be applied to accessing support, and that this narrative impacts how mothers develop survival strategies to align with this discourse. Next, the article considered the perspective of mothers' subjective experiences of relinquishing their temporal agency through their routines, organisations' timetables and punitive measures, and mothers' aspirations for their free time. Through this a tension emerges of these two views of mothers' time, and that ultimately mothers do not feel as if they have the assumed free-time and this misinterpretation of their daily lives denies

mothers of their temporal agency. Moreover, by an inability to challenge this narrative, mothers continue to feel pressure and anxiety about making-ends-meet and project that in their future they will (1) not have temporal agency over sequencing or allocation, and (2) continue to be stressful because of conflicting temporal expectations.

Limitations of temporal allocation and the emotional impact impacts their ability to engage in productive, wage-labour which could provide them with a pathway out of poverty. However, the mothers do not have a financial safety-net which would free up their time to gain qualifications. As interlocutors discussed, their routines are consumed with reproductive labour and there is little room to manoeuvre or deviate from the strict temporal guidelines from government or third-sector support services due to timetables and sanctions. Moreover, they do not experience the ability to carve out free-time, and through not challenging the discord of temporal expectations, the cycle is maintained.

Another partial impact of this tension may be mothers' emotional well-being. Due to mothers having curbed temporal elasticity and limitations temporal agency perhaps may impact not only their emotional well-being, but also their economic status. Part of the anxieties mothers experienced might derive from their inability to have temporal agency and feeling stuck in a cycle of limited temporal self-determination. Moreover, the mothers experience temporal fragmentation, and due to this they are unable to block out time dedicated to uncontaminated free-time. A routine centred wholly on reproductive labour without uncontaminated free-time can imbue feelings of alienation and erode a sense of self. And the feeling of disconnectedness combined with the sense of limited support may negatively impact emotional well-being.

I argue that there is a strong connection between gender, economic (un)certainities, and temporalities, and therefore this research has implications far reaching in the field of poverty studies as well as for policy makers. Through framing poverty in terms of temporality,

researchers and legislators can apply this nuanced understanding of the critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers. Moreover, through exploring the dynamic of temporality, it can be envisioned how poverty is maintained for certain groups, and develop methods in how to break this cycle. This is not to say that engaging in wage-labour is the only way to break the cycle of limited temporal-agency/ emotional well-being/ economic poverty, and it would be unrealistic to assume all the mothers in my research, particularly in a climate of economic austerity and an economic slow-down (Chang and Plummer, 2020; Nagarajan, 2020) would in-fact engage, or want to engage, in paid-labour.

The impact of an assumption of those in-poverty having an abundance of time is they should negotiate for the provision of instrumental support with their raw material of time; this can be seen in the rules and regulations guiding both governmental and charitable support. However, this approach negates both the objective chronicity in managing a household while accessing resources essential for livelihoods and also complying with timetables. Moreover, it disregards the emotional impact that the subjective temporal-experience of a lack of temporal self-determination has onto the self. Policies and organisational norms that overlook the impact of temporality has created a cycle which keeps individuals in poverty and this in part may contribute to feelings of inadequacy, anxiousness, depression, and fear.

As has been demonstrated, temporality is a fundamental constraint for those in-poverty. Therefore, it is suggested that policy makers consider reintroducing programs which have been eradicated or diminished during this period of austerity. Objectively, the overriding factor which mothers struggle with is mothering duties of care and managing these responsibilities with accessing the provision of material support and/ or paid-employment. Therefore, if the government were to provide a form of cost-free childcare for those until the age of 12, when they can begin secondary school, it would alleviate mothers' responsibilities and provide them with the time to be used as uncontaminated free-time, (re)training on courses for (further)

employment, to engage in wage labour, or more easily adhere to timetables of third-sector organisations and welfare offices. On to this, organisations which provide supportive services should calibrate their timetables to best reflect the lived experiences of those to whom they assist, in addition to removing sanctions and prohibition of access. Finally, it was expressed by mothers, and supported by experts in the field, that welfare stipends were insufficient and resulted in the need to access support elsewhere. Therefore, if the government were to provide welfare support that reflected needs, mothers would not have such a fragmented routine which has a detrimental impact on maintaining the impoverished position of economically uncertain mothers.



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## The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities, and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain

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# Chapter 7. Conclusions, limitations, policy implications, and future research

## 7.1. Synopsis

This doctoral dissertation has set out to explore the lived experiences and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty during austerity-era Britain. The main research question which guided this project is: *What are the lived realities of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain, and how do they form socially supportive relationships?* By using an ethnographic approach, this research sought to examine tensions between mothers' lived realities and organisations' impressions of the women, and the formation of relationships between mothers and other actors that help them get-by in extended periods of economic crisis and navigate hostile supportive institutions.

In doing so, the three theoretical lenses were applied: (1) gendered notions of deservingness, (2) relationality, and (3), temporality, which have been brought together by the concept of navigation (see Figure 1). To support the main research questions, three secondary questions emerged that directed the journal articles (Chapters 4 - 6). This chapter presents themes from the subquestions and demonstrate how they are used, in conjunction, to establish the main arguments. These subquestions are:

- (A) How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in a neoliberal ideology affect the organizational norms of a charity organisation, and, consequently, the provision of support of these organisations to their visitors?

(B) How do non-government organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?

(C) To what extent is there a discord between economically uncertain mothers' critical temporalities and temporal pressures from supportive service providers?

The project has been designed around previous studies focusing on economically vulnerable peoples' strategies to survive in times of financial hardship, particularly in the context of austerity in Britain (Glasser, 1988; Cooper, 2015; Garthwaite, 2016; Hall, 2019; Wakefield, 2019). The empirical research presented in the journal articles (Chapters 4 - 6) explore mothers' common lived realities along with the consequent emotional well-being, and the importance of third-sector organisations in accessing instrumental, informational, and emotional support. However, it was also found there is an evident lack of mothers' voices in developing organisational norms, which can have a detrimental impact on how support is provided and received. Altogether it is established that mothers' need to share and compare experiences and reciprocate empathy as a form of support needed to survive.

There are different emphases in my three articles (see Section 7.2.), however these all investigate lived realities and social support, and use the concept of navigation to examine how relationships are formed. Additionally, the articles discuss influences of gendered notions of deservingness and the perceived/real use of mothers' time on their daily encounters. In Chapters 4 and 5 there is a greater focus on aspects of relationality. Chapter 4 shows the manners in which neoliberal ideology has permeated the norms of a foodbank, how the guiding norms have an influence on access to supportive services, and then the ways the structure of supportive exchanges influences relationships. Building upon these findings, Chapter 5 discusses how third-sector organisations, which are formally presented as short-term sources

of support, are relied upon for long durations and facilitate the formation of institutional trust, consequently enduring bonds between mothers are established. Finally, Chapter 6 interrogates the tension between organisations' perceptions of mothers' time with mothers' lived experiences, and the bearing this has on emotional well-being.

This final chapter is a summary of the main results and contributions. First, is an overview of the main empirical findings. Next is a discussion of research limitations. Then is a presentation of policy implications and suggestions. And finally, are proposals for future lines of research.

## **7.2. Main empirical findings**

### **7.2.1. Overview**

This project was developed and carried out between 2017 and 2021 in the North West of England approximately a decade after the implementation of economic policies of austerity. Embedded in these policies are notions of deservingness, which are derived from neoliberal ideas of individual accountability and worthiness (see Section 4.2.). Therefore, the aim was to examine how mothers who rely, at least partially, on government welfare have been able to make ends meet in a period of economic crisis. Knowing that most of these mothers would also depend on the support of third-sector organisations to a certain degree, the focus was on relationships between clients of these organisations (mothers) and service providers (volunteers and staff). Throughout the project, it became increasingly apparent that service providers' perceptions of their clients influenced how support was delivered, which in turn affected relationships between clients/service providers, as well as among clients themselves. Additionally, when mothers accessed organisations for instrumental support, owing to the stability and security mothers experienced in these places, they established bonds with those



who provided emotional and informational support to help cope with their lives fraught with stresses, uncertainties, and overwhelming economic demands. Moreover, as a consequence of the temporal norms of governmental- and non-governmental organisations, mothers seldom felt as if they had adequate time to fulfil their caring duties, which was in addition to accessing instrumental support, and also that they had limited time for themselves (e.g., uncontaminated free-time).

## 7.2.2. Gendered notions of (un)deservingness

### 7.2.2.1. Provision of support

From the outset, this project intended to understand how organisations' perceptions of economically uncertain mothers influenced the way support was received and given and the impact on the formation of relationships. To do so, the following question was asked: *How do the notions of deservingness and of individual responsibility inherent in a neoliberal ideology affect the organizational norms of a charity organisation, and, consequently, the provision of support of these organizations to their visitors?*<sup>33</sup> Through ethnographic data it was found that the mothers continually encountered a sense of insecurity in their survival, which, in part, was directed by narratives of deservingness that have permeated organisational norms of state welfare systems and non-governmental organisations. For example, at Edgington, ideas of who was considered worthy of support were evident not only in the temporal norms, but also in how volunteers engaged with visitors. Service providers' perceptions were sometimes personally experienced by clients, such as the insistence upon deferential, constant gratitude from clients and the dismissal of food preferences and lived experiences. At other times there were

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<sup>33</sup> Subquestion A from the article in Chapter 4: "We'll go back to a system you really don't like!": Organizational norms and structural violence in a British foodbank

occasions unseen by visitors, that included conversations between volunteers about mothers' timetables and their genuine need of support. However, it was notable that in spite of Edgington's volunteers expressing concern for visitors' welfare and the negative impact of austerity, some volunteers could be antagonistic towards the visitors when they did not display assumed behaviours of a deserving recipient.

There was a dissonance between volunteers' genuine desire to provide support and hostility in the delivery of charitable acts. However, mothers continued to cooperate and not compete for their survival (see Section 7.2.3.). Some volunteers' rhetoric and actions towards visitors indicated that notions of (un)deservingness had been internalised and were acted upon when engaging with visitors. In turn, the outward displays of a power structure between provider/ receiver and a hierarchy of worthiness affected how visitors engaged with volunteers, management, and other visitors, for example mothers' modified behaviours as overt acts of appreciation and requests for forgiveness. Moreover, the mothers' acquiescence to ideas of worthiness demonstrates notions of (un)deservingness as recognised, internalised, and consequently acted upon. Additionally, this displays that organisations' perceptions influence how supportive services are provided and received, which can be structurally violent. Finally, through these encounters, volunteers are active participants in maintaining a power dynamic, despite the volunteers' expressions of genuine concern and desire to help those in need.

The tension deepens when considering the exasperation volunteers felt towards management and their disagreement with the norms. However, the volunteers felt unable to voice concerns because, such as with visitors, they did not want to jeopardise losing access to Edgington because volunteering was a central part of their weekly routines and social group. Nonetheless, as stated in Chapter 4, Edgington is not simply a case of purposeful, irresponsible and dismissive management. Rather, this case should be viewed through a broader lens and consider the effects of neoliberal discourse on the corresponding notions of deservingness and

conditionality. For active participants who rely on common organisations, but for different ends (e.g., visitors for social support for livelihood strategies; volunteers for emotional fulfilment or assuaging feelings of guilt about socio-economic disparities) there can be a fear of losing access to the organisation when one questions its institutional structures. Consequentially, the power structure remains in place, and the provision of supportive services will continue to address the needs of client as well as volunteers only partially.

#### *7.2.2.2. (Un)deservingness and motherhood*

Inherent to narratives of (un)deservingness, specific to the mothers, is the notion of good parenting and motherhood, and the tension between expectations and lived realities. When the Conservative government took control in 2010, and continues until today, they solidified the public discourse on good/ bad mothers. However, the ensuing policies of austerity are not supportive of families and demonstrate a continuation of the government's steadfastness reducing government welfare programs and advocating personal responsibility. Furthermore, the Conservative government also coined the phrase *troubled families*, which could result in Parenting Orders<sup>34</sup>. Also, mothers have the additional burdens of notions of good-mothering, the discrete gendered dynamics of austerity, and the feminist ethic of care. Therefore, not only do the overarching notions of worthiness have a bearing on the delivery of support, but there is also the double burden of gendered notions of social support. Consequently, it is argued that all of these are important reasons as to why researchers must focus specifically on women because of the oftentimes unseen encumbrances. By this, it is meant that mothers have intersecting identities that present challenges that they must overcome to successfully navigate

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<sup>34</sup> Government interventions for parents and children when the child has been seriously misbehaving. This order can include parenting classes up to three months, curfews for offending the offending child, and in extreme cases, the child may be sent to a residential school.

their world, while also projecting an image of having adequate means to survive and have a socially acceptable family life.

As I will discuss in Section 7.2.4., mothers navigate the perceptions cast upon them in regard to their time use, obedience to institutions' norms based upon deservingness, and modifications to their behaviours. Mothers' routines centred around accessing resources for their children and sustaining the household, which can be partially attributed to an avoidance of being perceived as undeserving or a *troubled family*. A cyclical effect is observed in how mothers fear being categorised as undeserving, which influences their relationships with supportive services. Mothers have to display their deservingness in a manner that shows they are undeniably in-need, but also not in such desperate need that they are incapable of being the head of the household. Altogether, this creates a very small space for the mothers to inhabit - they must position themselves between displaying their worthiness of not only social support, but also of good motherhood. Through occupying these positions simultaneously, the mothers contribute to the perpetuation of a hierarchy of worthiness (see Section 7.2.2.3.) and perceptions of good mothering. However, it is unmistakable that if they were to break from these expectations without formalised social support, they risk their livelihood strategies, and perhaps their children.

### *7.2.2.3. Hierarchy of Worthiness*

The ethnographic research showed that mothers must navigate a *hierarchy of worthiness*, which is influenced by notions of deservingness and has an emphasis on organisations' perceptions of the women's temporalities. This hierarchy has an influence on both relationship building and how support is provided. I conceptualise the term *hierarchy of worthiness* as service providers' perceptions of the mothers' deservingness, combined with mothers' ability to align

with the expectations placed upon them – a more deserving woman could more easily access resources, opposed to someone unworthy who was at a higher risk of confronting structural violence. Though this was experienced inside Edgington, mothers at both Edgington and Carol's House encountered this in their lived realities outside of the centres. However, for many of these women, throughout their lives they have had to manage economic hardships and crises, which have only been exacerbated by austerity. Empirically it was found mothers who confronted this hierarchy did not act upon fear of a scarcity of resources, but rather connected and cooperated with others in similar circumstances; nevertheless, they are unable to help each other thrive due to their common social and economic positions. This solidarity which they express among themselves is an important factor in relationship building (see Section 7.2.3.).

### 7.2.3. Relationality among mothers and between mothers and third-sector workers

#### 7.2.3.1. *Collaboration, not competition*

This dissertation has sought inquiry as to how organisations' perceptions of mothers influence relationship building and the provision of social support, particularly in organisations which are formally presented as short-term support. To do this, the following question was presented: *How do non-government organisations, as spaces of transience, create social support for economically vulnerable mothers?*<sup>35</sup>. An important finding based upon the ethnographic research is the pervasive narrative of (un)deservingness did not invoke competition from the mothers, but rather collaboration. Mothers formed bonds with each because of the negative perceptions' organisations had of them and therefore the relationships among the mothers became important sources of reciprocal, non-instrumental support. This is not to say the women

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<sup>35</sup> Subquestion B from the article in Chapter 5: Enduring bonds in transient spaces: Social support, temporality, and organisational brokerage for economically vulnerable mothers

did not distance themselves from their own perceptions of others' impoverished positions. On the contrary, mothers were neither competitive among themselves nor attempted to tarnish other mothers' reputations. However, based upon the divergence between organisations' perceptions of mothers' time use and mothers' lived realities, there was a negative influence on the mothers' emotional well-being because they experienced a lack of agency over their time-use.

Therefore, as opposed to an assumption that a hierarchy based upon worthiness would emerge and divide the mothers, when confronted with conditional welfare requirements and notions of (un)deservingness, mothers established relationships with each other, empathetic volunteers, and members of staff to access support. Moreover, reciprocating non-material support, which they did not receive elsewhere (such as empathy and a sense of inclusivity), also helped mothers in receiving instrumental support. Mothers did not engage with power structures of deservingness that could contribute to structural violence and minimise capabilities to access resources, but rather bonded together, established enduring relationships, and supported one another. Therefore, the mothers demonstrated a sense of solidarity that facilitated group members to collectively adopt livelihood practices, despite the architects of the hegemonic structure, perhaps, intending that the women compete among themselves.

#### *7.2.3.2. Distributive agency and solidarity*

Central to the ethos of austerity is an emphasis on individual responsibility for economic survival, which has influenced organisational norms of both charities and government welfare institutions (see Chapter 4). However, as said in section 7.2.3.1. mothers did not focus on individual survival, but acted in solidarity with each other. Part of their relationship building

was related to distributive agency as opposed to individualistic determination. As Patricia Matos (2021) defines this term:

Distributive agency operates not by the expansion of substantive freedoms alone but also through the development, sustenance and maintenance of substantive networks of care and sociality, which secure the circulation and allocation of various kinds of personal and collective agency resources enabling the material autonomy of recipients as well as their capabilities to make claims and articulate the legitimacy of their entitlements. (P. Matos, personal communication, March 26, 2021)

Solidary bonds, cohesion, and cooperation were observed, and in spite of the temporal and moralistic power dynamics, the mothers ensured they all could access supportive services. Moreover, the emotional bonds the women established among themselves was an important driving factor in collaboration, as was the reciprocal empathy woven into these relationships. These relationships were found to be fundamental to cope emotionally with the difficulties in their daily lives.

A perennial question in anthropology arises: In the context of shared difficulties, do actors compete or collaborate<sup>36</sup>? Based upon the ethnographic findings, mothers were seen to be acting in collaboration to support each other for their collective survival, and therefore participate in a moral economy. In the particular context of this doctoral research and investigating themes in subquestion A (Section 7.2.2.), instead of competing for scarce resources, the mothers work in collaboration with others because of their shared financial and social insecurity, common gender identity and the formation of reliable ties in dependable

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<sup>36</sup> Introduced by Thompson (1971) and developed by Scott (1976), a moral economy refers to economic activities seen through not simply a material lens, but of morality. In moral economic practices, community members engage in systems of reciprocity, based upon social norms, mores, obligations, and responsibilities to others in the community to distribute resources among the community.

places. Additionally, it may be that the mothers were covertly resisting a hegemonic system. Similar to what Scott (1985) discusses in *Weapons of the Weak*, through their own script and rhetoric, the mothers may be trying to challenge systems wherein the norm would be to compete and struggle for scarce resources.

#### 7.2.4. Temporality: Mothers' and organisations' perceptions of mothers' time use

##### *7.2.4.1. Power in temporal control*

In examining the lived realities of mothers there has been a focus on mothers' critical temporalities and time use. Embedded in narratives of deservingness are perceptions of time allocation, and particularly that mothers should align their timekeeping to that of service providers to access support and therefore this question was examined: *To what extent is there a discord between economically uncertain mothers' critical temporalities and temporal pressures from supportive service providers?*<sup>37</sup> Through analysis it was discovered that at Edgington, and in the daily routines of mothers from both centres, there existed a power dynamic which centred around organisations' expectations of mothers' time use. And, in turn, shapes service providers' perceptions of the women's worthiness (see Section 7.2.2.3.), which instilled a sense of urgency, fear, and a lack of personal agency. Observed in mothers' behaviours was their submissiveness to supportive services' timetables, or they would risk losing access to vital components of their livelihoods. Moreover, mothers were aware that if they were unable to adequately provide as per government regulations, they would lose their children, which further instilled pessimism, dejection, and helplessness. As many mothers discussed during interviews and informal conversations, their main priority was their children.

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<sup>37</sup> Subquestion C from the article in Chapter 6: "It seems very unfair and unbalanced": The assumed and critical temporalities of economically uncertain mothers in the North West of Britain



Despite the challenges and complications confronted, the thought of their children being taken away was unimaginable, as of course is the case for all parents. Oftentimes mothers expressed that if it were not for their children, they would have no sense of purpose. In this sense, the threat of having a child taken away is leveraged by the DWP as a method to coerce mothers to comply with regulations and willingly concede to their rules.

#### *7.2.4.2. (Un)deserving mother, conditional welfare, and temporalities*

Embedded in the temporal power dynamic is the perception of the (un)deserving mother and conditional welfare, and certain behaviours associated with a supposed deserving person (e.g., displaying gratitude, punctuality). However, in delivering supportive services to mothers, personal circumstances and difficulties with time keeping were seldom considered. Based upon this doctoral research, and addressed in subquestion A, there was a lack of regard for how support is delivered, received, and could be hostile for visitors, and also, at times, volunteers. However, the expectation for the mothers to follow norms without there being consideration of their critical temporalities had an adverse impact on the adoption of their livelihood strategies, sense of self, and overall ability to control their timescapes.

These arguments are in fact the main thesis, which may be summarised as the following. First, economically uncertain mothers' critical temporalities should be considered when interrogating their lived experiences and social support. Time is central to lived realities, and a natural resource that all human beings possess. However, for those who are expected to exchange this personal resource of time for essential resources, time can be manipulated by gatekeepers to assert control. Therefore, third-sector organisations' perceptions of mothers' free-time has a significant impact the provision of support. Although temporal norms in organisations may genuinely intend to ensure efficient operations, and not be designed to

maintain hierarchical structures, a relationship of dominance transpires when lived experiences and critical temporalities are omitted. Through disregarding mothers' voices, the mothers feel a lack of control over their time and lives. As will be discussed in Section 7.2.4.3., this also impacts mothers' ability to escape from their relatively impoverished positions.

At Edgington, there were strict vertical structures partially based on temporal power structures and perceptions of temporalities. To some degree these affected and initiated the formation of ties among mothers because of their shared experience navigating structural violence (see Chapter 4). However, this is not a totalising reason as to why the women create meaningful relationships – there is also a need for empathy, the shared experience of economic uncertainty, and the amelioration of the hostility encountered in their daily lives. In addressing subquestion B, it was found that a more positive foundation for the development of relationships could be seen at Carol's House, where the dynamics of temporal norms were more balanced and contributed to these women forming meaningful, enduring relationships. The norms at Carol's House were to a greater extent horizontal and inclusive of mothers' responsibilities and needs, and therefore the mothers did not have the shared challenge of following strict organisational norms. Nevertheless, all of the mothers encountered temporal control to some degree either in the centres and/ or in their day-to-day lives. However, in spite of third-sector organisations being important sites for mothers, it should be emphasised that it is, in part, due to policies of austerity that the mothers felt isolated in their relatively impoverished positions and that the centres were some of the only places that they could receive social support. In the adoption of livelihood strategies, under increasingly desperate, uncertain, and unsettling positions, the women are compelled to follow strict and stressful temporal norms. In sum, notions of mothers' worthiness and their chronicity is impactful on both the provision of supportive services and the mechanisation of relationships, which are consequentially important for the participation in livelihood strategies and well-being.

#### *7.2.4.3. Maintaining relative poverty*

Throughout this dissertation there has been an examination of temporalities and notions of deservingness, and how together these have a significant influence on the ways relationships developed and social support found. One major insight this dissertation offers is how notions of deservingness, when imbued with perceptions and expectations of timekeeping, can impact how mothers experiencing deprivation poverty adopted livelihood practices and, at times, contributes to their relatively impoverished positions. This research has shown a connection between objective and subjective temporalities, and an ordering of worthiness. Therefore, from this dissertation it can be argued that one cause of mothers remaining in a relatively impoverished position is the power dynamic established through temporal control. Due to mothers' submission to others' timetables, their days are occupied by accessing instrumental support by following organisations and welfare offices' schedules, which do not always align with their daily lives and needs. Organisations such as Edgington and Carol's House are important places for mothers to form emotionally supportive, enduring bonds, in spite of the fragmented and chaotic schedules they have to piece together to manage their economic insecurities. Subquestion B also addresses this by explaining perceptions of how time use influences both the provision of support and also the chronicity in which they are reliant upon these services. Finally, it is indicative of the extent of mothers' vulnerable positions that organisations intended to provide short-term support are some of the only spaces where they reliability and security in the long-term.

It is essential to focus on the intersection of policy and discourse that contributes to organisations' perceptions of mothers, which is examined through subquestion A. In British policy and public narratives is an ideology that champions the reduction of the government's responsibility for supportive services, and transferring accountability to local councils and

charities. Therefore, for local authorities and third-sector organisations in economically deprived areas, there is both (1) less funding for supportive services, and (2) a greater need for social support. Additionally, individuals in economically deprived areas may also be less able to meet the requirements of conditional welfare due to temporal constraints. Therefore, the norms to access instrumental support in these areas will not lead to the mothers breaking free from a cycle of poverty, but remain in their relatively impoverished position. Moreover, in more deprived areas, where there is a greater scarcity of resources, temporal conditionality is arguably higher than in areas with more resources, which may make it more of a challenge to follow temporal norms that demonstrate deservingness. Taking everything into account, the perceptions of economically uncertain women impact how these women receive supportive services on a national and local level, and ultimately there is a significant impediment to them being financially independent, which is the purported goal of austerity. In sum, it was observed that there is a cycle of (1) a need for support due to policies of austerity, which (2) resulted in a reliance on charitable organisations for support, because of (3) relatively impoverished circumstances that are a result, in part, of austerity. For those who defend the economic policies of austerity, this cycle can be totalising and act as evidence of little need for national government interventions because local communities and individuals will function as supportive networks in times of economic crisis.

On one level, there is a perception that mothers have surplus free time, and therefore should use their critical resource of time to pay for essential resources. However, simultaneously there is the questioning as to why mothers have free time, when in a capitalistic society productive labour is considered paramount (see Section 2.4.1.). From the mothers' perspective, they do not experience time as free, but in contrast the women experience not having sufficient times to do everything they need to; the idea of *free-time to do as they please* simply does not exist.

Therefore, the mothers are confined to a cycle in which they cannot use their time how they wish and participate in activities that could lead to productive, wage-earning labour. This is not to suggest that everyone would use their free-time for economically productive activities, but rather it is to emphasise there is very little opportunity for them to make this choice. The possibility of pursuing activities beyond accessing supportive sites and maintaining household stability becomes limited for the mothers. And, despite the deep relationships formed in the centres, it does not facilitate getting ahead because the mothers' social networks are homophilious in nature, and due to this they are unable to find reliable individuals who are able to help them make-ends-meet. For that reason, notions of deservingness<sup>38</sup>, longevity of provisions<sup>39</sup>, and mothers' free-time<sup>40</sup>, not only influence the manner in which supportive services are received, but moreover are instrumental in keeping mothers in relatively impoverished circumstances.

It is unsurprising that economic policies are developed in such a way that mother's time is disregarded because British society devalues economically vulnerable people's temporalities. Moreover, the impact of a strict, punitive, temporal control is seen as secondary to the economically productive members of a community. This view of temporalities can be coupled with affirmations of austerity as a political, not economic, choice (UK Parliament, 2015). This supports assertions of the gendered dynamic of the economic policies of austerity having a greater impact on women than men, with women "much less likely to benefit from first-tier unemployment benefits and labour market policies, as the design of these policies prioritized workers within traditional employment dynamics" (Kushi & McManus, 2017, p.

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<sup>38</sup> Subquestion A

<sup>39</sup> Subquestion B

<sup>40</sup> Subquestion C

15). Therefore, a claim can be made that austerity creates a cycle of poverty founded on chronicity, the morality of the scarcity of resources, and notions of deservingness that entangle women. This denies them choice and personal agency, and moreover is an intentional structural and symbolic violence directed towards relatively impoverished women, and particularly mothers. As a result of this cycle of poverty mothers may be perceived as much less deserving, and due to a supposed undeserving status, they are subject to falling even further behind.

Based upon the cycle of poverty built upon temporal demands, one of the initial hypotheses has been established: mothers' time is sequestered by supportive services' timetables, which is impacted by a sense of temporal - and general - agency. It is argued there is a reproduction of a power structure embedded in perceptions of temporality, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty. Consequently, it must be asserted that a lens of temporality is essential in problematising and analysing cases of poverty. However, this scope is not frequently used, which can be partially attributed to the subjective nature of temporalities. Nevertheless, this underutilised theoretical framework is vital to enable a more well-rounded understanding of lived experiences, the formation of relationships with actors for social support, and engagement with livelihood strategies.

### **7.3. Limitations**

There are four areas of this dissertation which were limiting, and will be addressed in this section. The first set of constraints regards the inclusion of interviews that this research would have benefitted. One of the main concepts used to examine the collected data was *notions of deservingness* from the perspective of organisations. Despite the long-term participant observation and conducting in-depth interviews with experts in the field, along with the use of significant secondary data, scope of the research could have been deepened by the inclusion of

in-depth interviews with service providers, such as social workers and volunteers. In doing so, in the analysis process, it would have been able to contrast their personal experiences, opinions, and perceptions to that of mothers'. However, primary and secondary data sets have been used that concentrates on notions of deservingness in the context of austerity-era Britain, and in various contexts.

Additionally, it would have been interesting to further compare Edgington and Carol's House, as well as other organisations in the region. In evaluating organisations against each other, for example in terms of their histories, ethos, and financial circumstances (e.g., public/private funding), the differences in their approaches could have been analysed. For example, Edgington's organisational norms were experienced as structural violence, whereas this was dissimilar to the daily functioning of Carol's House. In doing so, a different exploration could have been developed regarding the organisational norms and the extent to which these were influenced by notions of deservingness or other factors. And finally, if there was a comparison between the two organisations and interviews conducted with service providers, as discussed in the previous paragraph, in the analysis process it may have been possible to use these in conjunction to develop a deeper line of inquiry.

Additionally, although this research is gender sensitive (Oxfam, 2019) and provides an extensive account of the lived realities of the mothers, it could have integrated gender transformative elements in the rationale, design, and methodology. *Gender transformative* research integrates "structural gender power relations and norms, roles and inequalities" (Oxfam, 2019). In Section 2.2. structural sexism is discussed, which is also a form of structural violence, and is inherent to policies of austerity. Though this dissertation is gender sensitive in identifying gender barriers, it would have also been interesting to have interviewed males, and include an explicit reflection process for females/ males about gendered power dynamics (see Section 7.5.2.).

Finally, this dissertation could have also focused more on intersecting dimensions of mothers' identities that can lead to intensified daily struggles. One intersection is that of motherhood and women from BAME communities. In Section 2.2. the intersection of gender and ethnicity is detailed, and the relevance of this juncture in an analysis of the result of austerity on lived realities. However, in the data set there were only five mothers from BAME communities, and therefore there was a refrain from an in-depth analysis. To further a discussion on the intersections of identities, those from LGBTQ+ communities were not included because all of the mothers were cisgender. In Section 3.2.2. I mentioned how legislation protecting the rights transgender peoples had become a concern for those at Carol's House. However, due to only having encountered one transgender woman, there was not a large enough sample to properly analyse this intersection. Finally, at neither centre there were not any openly bisexual or lesbian women, and therefore could not be analysed. This will be addressed in Section 7.5.2.

#### **7.4. Policy implications and suggestions**

The macro-level of this research has been austerity-era Britain, the effects of rolled-back, national government support and social responsibility being shifted onto local governments. On the meso-level, it was analysed that the focus on individual and local responsibility has influenced how supportive services are delivered and received. Therefore, the first suggestion is a call to include economically uncertain peoples' voices when developing policy, as opposed to asserting power over economically marginalised communities, which can deny them agency and dignity. As Beresford et al. (1999) states, in the United Kingdom "one key group has been conspicuous by its absence so far in poverty discussion and policy development – people with experience of poverty themselves". An implication of this suggestion would be to readdress



the system of U.C., particularly regarding the five-week waiting period for benefits to begin for new claimants and the punitive sanctions for those who have difficulty adhering to the regulations to receive government support. As Lister (2004), who has been involved in commissions for poverty, participation, and change, asserts:

People living in poverty and their organisations should be empowered by involving them fully in the setting of targets, and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programmes for poverty eradication and community-based development, and ensuring that such programmes reflect their priorities. (Lister, 2004, p. 116)

Specific to the context of Edgington and Carol's House, it is suggested to also include clients' voices to contribute to institutional norms, specifically in regard to mothers' critical temporal experiences. For these organisations to best serve the people who rely upon their support, they should look beyond the narratives of the poor and neoliberalism to develop rules and regulations that are more suitable for those who are most in need. As presented in this dissertation, there is a recognition and appreciation that both organisations are under bureaucratic, temporal, and financial pressures. However, if a pro-bono consultant or the organisations themselves conducted periodic surveys on their services, visitors' suggestions could be integrated into planning and delivering services.

A second suggestion is for the government reinstate funding for programs which of a benefit to mothers, such as Sure Start centres and libraries. This is because Sure Start centres and libraries are important institutions for sustaining social relations, though they offer different types of supportive services. As Klinenberg (2018) asserts "a whole range of physical

and institutional infrastructures<sup>41</sup> are crucial for the development and maintenance of social connections” (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 2). Libraries are vital spaces for members of a community to connect, develop relationships for support and friendship, and represent important epistemological institutions (Brophy, 2006; Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Appleton et al., 2018). However, by 2020 public funding for libraries fell to 725 million pounds, whereas in 2010 the government allocated one-billion pounds (Flood, 2020). Sure Start centres, which are centres for young families and children, offering health services, educational programmes, and other social support throughout the country, but with a specific focus on areas of economic deprivation (Smith, et al., 2018). Between 2010 and 2018 programmes directed at early intervention decreased by 64% (Smith, et al., 2018). Therefore, if the government were to allocate funds to such public goods, these women would have easier access to supportive services, which potentially would free-up the mothers’ time, and also create both skilled and unskilled jobs in the local labour market.

## **7.5. Future Research**

### **7.5.1. The global pandemic of 2020**

The field this dissertation has explored is extensive and there is great potential for future research. It is vital for researchers to focus on perceptions of those relying upon supportive services in times of economic crisis, how they influence the provision of support, and to deeply consider critical temporalities.

In the immediate future, it is most relevant to conduct a follow-up project regarding the impact of COVID-19 on organisations’ (re)structuring, supportive services, and perceptions of

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<sup>41</sup> For example “libraries, parks, sports facilities, schools, and community centres” (Latham and Layton, 2019, p. 2)

clients' worthiness. Many single parents, and particularly mothers, who experience deprivation poverty have had to shoulder the heaviest burdens. First, care and service sector workers, who are predominantly women, have been furloughed with very little financial compensation (Single Parents Rights, 2020). Not only has this driven more women into poverty, but further puts a strain on the already meagre welfare state and supportive services that have been struggling to survive in the time of austerity. Perhaps, if there becomes a fear over the scarcity of resources, the solidary mothers have among themselves (see Section 7.2.3.2.) may transform into competition as a survival strategy. Second, many organisations have had to shut their doors, except crisis services, such as emergency food parcels. This might alter dynamics between institutions as brokers of relationships, and mothers would perhaps have to find different approaches to form bonds. In this sense, there could be a change from place to space in how mothers connect with social services and with each other. Conceivably, the relationships formed between volunteers and visitors may cease to exist if operations are streamlined to online spaces. Therefore, volunteers who interface with clients and assume the role of gatekeepers might no longer be relevant and reliable sources of support for those navigating hostile landscapes. If supportive services are put online, there might be an increase bureaucracy and automation, which could have biases (e.g., notions of deservingness, perceptions of mothers' time use) built into systems that automatically means-tests applicants. In turn, there could be an increased adverse influence on the delivery of supportive services. Finally, if supportive services are accessible only online, mothers may not be able to receive support because many of the mothers are unable to afford Internet in their homes (see Section 1.1.).

The final challenges regard mothers and the provision of childcare. In this dissertation the pressures of caring duties in times of economic crisis have been detailed, particularly in hostile environments, such as Edington, which has strict rules about attending to one's children. Throughout mandatory lockdowns due to the pandemic, many mothers have had to assume

extra duties of full-time childcare because of school closures. If social institutions, such as schools, continue to be closed or open for only limited hours, mothers will have had to change how they adopt livelihood practices, and might experience an even greater loss of agency over time use because of the extra responsibilities and full-time care required.

In sum, in a post-COVID world, there is the need for anthropologists who investigate the lives of marginalised communities because the global and local devastation from the pandemic will produce additional challenges to those already in crisis. Applying a relational approach, as done in this dissertation, is a valuable method of understanding informal economies of exchange.

#### 7.5.2. Gender perspective

This dissertation presented a case study of mothers who confronted incredible challenges in getting by during austerity-era Britain. However, there are also other gender dimensions which would be interesting in conducting gender transformative research (see Section 7.3.).

First, researchers could analyse gendered volunteerism, in other words explore the experiences of similar or different genders in delivering and receiving support. By viewing volunteerism through a lens of gender it could be theorised that the gendered notions of deservingness (see Section 2.1.1.) might vary between males and females in terms of empathy or indifference, and therefore relationships are formed differently between mothers and volunteers/ management. Alternatively, mothers may perceive the support given differently from a gender similar or different to their own, which could influence over how mothers engage with volunteers, develop relationships, and exchange support.

A second line of future research would be to include mothers who are employed on a variety of types of contracts, but also experience deprivation poverty. Part of the conditionality

of U.C. is claimants are strongly urged to take the job they are offered, or risk being sanctioned. Though one can refuse the job for a variety of reasons<sup>42</sup>, the final decision is up to the discretion of DWP staff. In these instances, mothers may be coerced into low-paid, precarious positions, such as jobs on zero-hour contracts, that can take time away from their mothering duties of care. An outcome may be that the women have to rely upon different actors in their networks to provide support for these responsibilities, such as neighbours. Therefore, there would be different economies in effect (e.g., morality, exchanges), and therefore different relational dynamics to study. Furthermore, for those mothers who are obliged to accept jobs, as opposed to pursuing educational opportunities that could contribute to greater opportunities, there should also be an examination of structural sexism inherent to British welfare systems.

The third suggestion for future research regards transgender peoples. As seen at Carol's House (see Section 3.2.2.), there was some sense of fear in having to incorporate transgender and transitioning women into the organisation. In a general sense, by not including those from the transgender community, they are at an even greater risk of being further excluded from socially supportive networks<sup>43</sup> and are potential victims of transmisogyny. It is essential for researchers to focus transgender peoples, as well as consider how to manage and mitigate apprehensions from the cis-gender female community. This research is vital because of legislation that increasingly recognises and protects the rights of transgender people (UK Parliament, 2020) and will make transgender peoples eligible to enter women-only (as well as male-only) spaces, such as Carol's House. Ethnographic data can provide suggestions to

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<sup>42</sup> Examples include: "it would take over 90 minutes to get to work (you're usually expected to travel up to 90 minutes to work), costs for travel to work and childcare would be too high to make it worthwhile, the job would have a negative impact on your physical or mental health, the job would have a negative impact on your caring responsibilities, you have a religious or ethical objection to the type of work" (Citizens Advice, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Transgender peoples "are around twice as likely to report symptoms of poor mental health (i.e. anxiety, depression) than heterosexual adults [and] have around 1.5 times higher prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders than heterosexual adults" (LGBT Health, 2018).

organisations grounded in research based upon lived experiences as to move forward in an inclusive and supportive manner. Finally, in the context of the global pandemic, members of the LGBTQ+ community have been more likely to have higher levels of mental stress and isolation due to social distancing precautions (The British Psychological Society, 2020). Therefore, a comprehensive research should further consider the impact of legislation for transgender peoples with the impact that the pandemic has had on their community.

Finally, future research should address austerity's impact on low- and no-income, single fathers. There is scarce research on this topic, yet many unseen men confront similar issues to their female counterparts. Furthermore, in a society, such as Britain, where men are traditionally the breadwinners (see Section 6.2.), single fathers not only have to demonstrate deservingness, but they also might feel the pressure to fulfil an assumed role to be successful and productive outside of the household. It may be that these men face compounded pressures, as women do who have to project themselves as good and deserving mothers. According to Samaritans (2017), "men in the lowest social class, living in the most deprived areas, are up to ten times more at risk of suicide than those in the highest social class, living in the most affluent areas" (Samaritans, 2017, p. 4). Poverty has been shown to also be a public health crisis, and further research onto the influence of socio-economic disparities onto single fathers is also of vital importance. In this sense, the same theoretical lenses of relationality and temporality could be utilised, and a comparative analysis drawn between the experiences of mothers and fathers.

### 7.5.3. Research methods

It also would be interesting to integrate different research methods into future research that are specifically designed for relationality and temporality. One example is within the area of social network analysis, social relationships could be mapped more explicitly using the social convoy

method, a participatory visualisation exercise. Social convoy method “integrates social network structure, relationship processes, and change over time” (Mejia & Hooker, 2013, p. 376). Through the use of this method, the social support mothers receive relating to the past, present, and future can be illustrated. Additionally, social convoy method is a respondent focused approach that informants provide their own parameters and meanings within broadly outlined scenarios and questions. Furthermore, it can guide researchers to areas of exploration which had not been previously considered in the initial planning phases of the project. Finally, using the social convoy method provides the researcher with insight regarding experiences of time, particularly the interactive nature of informants’ temporal cartography and uncovers points of conflict amongst actors in their network to illustrate power structures and factors which influence navigational techniques.

Additionally, Experience Sampling Method (ESM) could be integrated into the research methods. ESM captures real-time temporal experiences, both quantitatively and qualitatively, by interlocutors responding to text messages or phone calls and inform the researcher what they are doing in that exact moment (Weisner et al., 2001). ESM would be a useful method for future research because researchers can compare data (a) to information gathered in interviews and social convoy, and (b) in relation to mothers in a different economic milieu. The divergences in data collected will be valuable in analysis because it can emphasise disparities in subjective and objective realities in relation to time, and economic positions, and these variances can help to explain the impact of temporalities on lived experiences and social support.

Finally, a future line of research should be to develop an interdisciplinary research that brings together social-psychologists and anthropologists to understand mothers’ experience of time. As explained in Section 2.4., this project does not explore individuals’ ability to trick time, understood as “the many different ways in which people individually and collectively

attempt to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure the times they are living in” (Moroşanu & Ringel, 2016, p. 17). However, it would be interesting to consider the intersection of time tricking and mothers’ lived realities. Furthermore, it can be hypothesised there would be a connection between mothers feeling a need to trick time as a coping method, and their networks of social support. Together with a research team of social-psychologists, an important study could emerge that explores another understudied area of the lives of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty.

#### 7.5.4. The intersection of religion; longitudinal research with children

Subsequent research should concentrate on the intersection of religion and the provision of supportive services due to many organisations that are active in poverty relief are religiously affiliated. Therefore, it would also be important to analyse the experiences of those who rely, in-part, upon religious organisations for the provision of support, and specifically in cases when the individuals are not community members of the faith group. It is important to also explore the ways that religion influences notions of worthiness and how these are internalised by service users.

Finally, it is proposed that further research should examine the experiences of the children of the mothers, or a new project that has a longitudinal approach. Foremost, this would include an innovative dynamic to issues of perceptions of those in relative poverty. Second, viewing the challenges through the eyes of children provides an analysis of the effects of notions of worthiness on children’s social networks and sense of self-worth. Lastly, a longitudinal project with periodical follow-ups with the children would help to understand the long-term, intergenerational impacts of policies of austerity, notions of worthiness, and senses of temporal agency.



In sum, all of the themes presented in this final section are likely to remain on the research agenda of anthropologists. There should continue to be a focus on the relatedness macro-meso-micro dimensions that contribute a cycle of poverty. Also issues such as wealth inequality and wealth restructuring programmes, structural violence and sexism, and phobias of LGBTQ+ communities, will be compounded by the unequal consequences of the global pandemic, and therefore must be examined. The suggestions made in this final section are both feasible and important lines of future research. These not only give researchers insights into the lived realities and social support networks of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty, but also offers those who may feel isolated and voiceless a way to be recognised, and free from ideas of worth that intersect with their daily lives.

## 7.6. Bibliography

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# Annex 1. Semi-structured interview guide

## Interview for semi-structured interview

Interviewer questions	Objectives for the questions and instructions on administering
<b>1. Life history</b>	
<p>1.0. Can you tell me about yourself, your name, what you do (formal work), and generally how things are going for yourself? And, how do you think things are going for your child/ children?</p>	<p><i>Starting to get to know the informant, their situation, and the intersection of children in their lives</i></p>
<p>1.1. Do you remember a time when everything was going well in your life?</p> <p><i>Can you tell me a bit about the important moments that you remember from your childhood, studies, jobs, relationships before arriving at this situation of economic difficulty?</i></p> <p><i>(INTERVIEWER: If the informant does not remember well at any time, you can investigate the intergenerational transmission of poverty, asking a little about his childhood, the role of parents in their school decisions, transition to the labour market, types of work that she had, etc., but briefly)</i></p>	<p><i>Initiate an exploration of notions of temporality</i></p>
<p>1.2. What moments or events explain you having reached the current situation (of economic difficulty)? When did the problems start?</p> <p><i>Do you think the various austerity measures since Cameron's or May's government have influenced your current situation? Or, was there another important moment you can remember which catalysed your situation (such as the implementation of Universal Credit/ limited benefits offered to those with various immigration statuses)? Has your economic</i></p>	<p><i>Capture patterns that catalyze the situation of poverty. Attentive to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Labor situations (unemployment, dismissals, restructuring ...)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Family situations (separations, divorces, domestic violence);</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Social problems (drugs, alcohol ...)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Health problems (illness, accident, depressions)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Defaults (mortgages, debts, consumerism ...)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Notion of time (temporalities of poverty)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Children (challenges of motherhood whilst in-poverty)</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Ethical issues: decision making.</i></li> </ul>

<p><i>situation caused you other problems (health, family problems, etc.)? Do you feel as if this has had an impact on your children's lives?</i></p>	
<p><b>2. Livelihood strategies</b></p>	
<p>2.1. In what ways do you "tighten your belt"? Are there moments in the month/ week/ year when you feel more of a financial squeeze? Has this changed since austerity policies were implemented? What things have you stopped doing, buying or consuming to make ends meet? (For example: stopped going out with friends, eating meat ...?)</p>	<p><i>Changes in consumption habits and savings</i> <i>Temporalities in money saving techniques</i></p>
<p>2.2. Are there any activities which you had never done before your economic problems? (For example, do you regularly reuse or recycle resources in your home - clothes, food, appliances, furniture ...? Do you shop elsewhere?)</p>	<p><i>Changes in consumption habits and savings</i></p>
<p>2.3. In times of emergency, could you tell me what you would do, and perhaps who you would turn to (this can be a person or an organization)? How often do you feel as if you're in an emergency situations, and in what ways does this stop you from moving forward? (For example: your washer breaks down, you need to go out and no one can care for your children, you are unable to get to the local NHS walk-in centre?)</p>	<p><i>Strategies before needs or economic difficulties.</i> <i>Analyse the degree of agency.</i></p>
<p>2.4. You have already explained to me your income from formal work, could you now tell me other sources of income or aids that are also important? (For example, informal jobs, benefit receipts, selling of personal items, food banks, etc.) (If informants are reliant on benefits, ask in what ways they have been impacted by the implementation of Universal Credit, as well as allowing informant to discuss any other changes which have affected them [i.e. bedroom tax, closures of Sure Smart centres, etc.]; if they have relied upon food banks, ask about the number of times in which they have used these, if the parcels were sufficient, what they felt was lacking/ would have liked to have, and how this experience was for them. // If the person has a status wherein they are ineligible for benefits, inquire how much of a</p>	<p><i>Informal economy. Insist, if necessary, that the data is anonymous and that you should feel confident. We will never reveal sources of information.</i></p>

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<p>stipend they receive from the government and <u>the extent they feel it is sufficient to cover expenses → is there a significant difference between mothers who are (in)eligible for welfare?</u></p>	
<p>2.5 <b>[Ask only if the informant relies upon benefits]</b> Have you ever been sanctioned from claiming benefits? What were the circumstances of your sanction (i.e. why were you sanctioned) and what was the penalty? How did this impact you and your children? How did you manage the economic changes? Are there any new activities you engage in to make ends meet? Do you still do these?</p>	<p><i>Strategies utilized in moments of sudden economic crisis</i></p>
<p>2.6 Do you produce, sell or do anything that provides food or saves you or provides extra money? <b>(For example, grow own food, child minding, fixing your own appliances, etc.)</b></p>	<p><i>Self-consumption and self-production</i></p>
<p>2.7 Do you have, or had before, savings, or plan B, if necessary? (land, jewellery, inheritance, pension plans ...) Did you use or have you ever used those reserves? <b>(If they do not have a pension, ask why [i.e. eligibility requirements])</b></p>	<p><i>Contingency plans – family savings; barriers to savings</i></p>
<p>2.8 <b>[Only for those who do not utilize charities]</b> Why do you not turn to charities? Have you considered it at any time? Have/ do your friends, family or neighbours relied/ rely upon charities? <b>(If they know people who do use charities, ask follow-up questions about sharing resources/ knowledge from these charities)</b></p>	<p><i>Important to know about charity use</i>  <i>Perceived comparison to mothers in community (meaning mothers in-poverty)</i></p>
<p>2.9 If you were given 2000£, what would you do with the extra money?</p>	<p><i>Evaluate economic decisions on a surplus (savings, spending, investment, etc.).</i>  <i>Analyse the degree of reciprocity or redistribution.</i></p>



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<p><b>3. Social relationships and support</b></p>	
<p>3.1. <b>[Only for informants who receive help from their social contacts]</b> You have already explained to me that [your relatives / friends / acquaintances] sometimes lend you a hand. How important is their help in reaching the end of the month? What would happen if they were not? Do they help only in times of emergency or continuously?</p>	<p><i>Evaluation of the relative importance of the support of the current social network</i></p>
<p>3.2 When someone lends you a hand, in what circumstances do you feel as if you need to repay them? And, in what forms do you repay? Can you describe how time feels when you are in the process of repaying someone?</p>	<p><i>Systems of reciprocity within the social network</i> <i>Construct of economy in social networks</i></p>
<p>3.3 Would you say there are some items (i.e. money, child minding, etc.) which you can ask for indefinitely, and others which you can ask for a finite period of times?</p>	<p><i>Differentiate between types of needs and assistance; duration of assistance</i></p>
<p>3.4 Are there any items which you understand to be inappropriate/taboo to ask for assistance with and/or simply would not? What do you do when you cannot access something which you and your family need (i.e. food, transportation)? In these moments, do you feel like you don't have enough time, or perhaps too much time?</p>	<p><i>Perceptions of stigmatization and taboo within social networks</i> <i>Livelihood strategies employed under circumstances of self-reliance</i></p>
<p>3.5 Who is more of a help to you, friends or family? Who are you more support to, friends or family?</p>	<p><i>Perceptions of support received</i></p>
<p>3.6 How has the support of your family and friends changed since you experienced economic difficulties? At the beginning (the past), did they help you more, or less than now? Were there people who, in the past, gave you a hand and now cannot help you? Or, do not help you now? Who and why? Have you had any conflicts over it?</p>	<p><i>Temporal dimension of social networks and strength of relationships within social networks</i> <i>Impact on daily routines</i></p>

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<p>3.7. Are there any social activities which you used to engage in or see more of your friends/ family, but have had to stop because of your economic situation? Who? Why? How do you fill this time? Does time pass differently now with different activities?</p>	<p><i>Temporal dimension of the social network itself, detect possible (auto) –exclusion</i>  <i>Changes in size and heterogeneity of the network</i>  <i>Temporal opportunity costs</i></p>
<p>3.8. Do you feel that some people treat you or consider you different since you have these economic difficulties? Who and in what sense? Are there people which you used to pass time with more easily/ comfortably, but now don't? How does this time feel now?</p>	<p><i>Perceptions of stigma</i>  <i>Sense of self</i></p>
<p><b>4. Questions about motherhood</b></p>	
<p>4.1. When you had your first child, were there new economic challenges that you were confronted with? How did you manage these? Were there individuals who you could rely upon more for these new needs?</p>	<p><i>Perceptions of motherhood and support networks</i></p>
<p>4.2 Before you had your first child, did you have savings specifically for the needs of your new born? (If they have more than one child: Did your situation on savings change when you were pregnant with your second/ third/ etc. child?)</p>	<p><i>Saving plans pre-empting motherhood</i></p>
<p>4.3 (If the informant utilizes benefits aimed at families/ children) As a mother, what have you found to be the most important government benefit for your children? Are there any benefits which you used to use, but are ineligible for now or the government has done away with? If you could create one new benefit for mothers, particularly new mothers, what would it be? In what ways do you think this would help?</p>	<p><i>Analyse benefits aimed at motherhood – compare to benefits in general (see section 2.8)</i>  <i>Self-reflection on needs of in-poverty mothers</i>  <i>Living present</i></p>
<p>4.4 To what extent does the father of your child/ children contribute to their lives (i.e. child rearing in home, outside activities, financial contributions, etc.)? (If the father is not present ask: In what ways do you think his/ their presence would help/ hinder your situation?)</p>	<p><i>Explore the relationship amongst parents and livelihood strategies</i>  <i>Analysis of importance of fathers in social networks</i></p>

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<p>If the father is present: In what ways does he/ they contribute and how much do you depend upon their support?)</p>	
<p>4.5 Do you feel as if the lives of the father(s) of your child/ children is easier or more difficult than yours and in what ways? How could he/ they improve your and your child's/ children's situation?</p>	<p><i>Explore the gendered experience of parenthood</i></p>
<p>4.6 Over the school holidays, what do you do with your children? Are you able to go away on a holiday? Do you think this is similar to other mothers in the community, and the greater Manchester area?</p> <p><i>(Also can ask whether children are reliant upon free school dinners, and what the mothers do during these times)</i></p>	<p><i>Changes in consumer habits and savings - degree of agency.</i></p> <p><i>Analyse mothering role and changes in capabilities under austerity</i></p> <p><i>Perception of Other mothers (not in-poverty)</i></p> <p><i>Notions of deserving/ undeserving</i></p>
<p>4.7 Could you tell me how you imagine your child's life/ children's lives to be in 5, 10, and 15 years' time? Can you explain to me what you are doing now to facilitate your hopes for their future?</p>	<p><i>Temporalities of motherhood</i></p>
<p>4.8 If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to yourself for being a new mother?</p>	<p><i>Explore learned experiences of new-motherhood</i></p> <p><i>Connection of the past to the present (living present)</i></p>
<p>4.9 Could you tell me some items/ experiences you would like your child/ children to have, but cannot afford at the moment? To what extent do you go without something for yourself to fulfil the needs of your children?</p>	<p><i>Analyse unfulfilled needs for children</i></p>
<p><b>5. Questions about temporalities and emotional aspects</b></p>	<p><i>Routines → sense of self (see 'Perceptions and Experiences of time/ space'); ask how they 'compensate' for unwanted temporal experiences)</i></p>
<p>5.1 Could you walk me through a typical day in your life?</p> <p><i>What activities usually take the most/ least amount of time? Is there a time in the day (and week and year) you most/ least look forward to?</i></p> <p><i>And a time of the week/ year you will be able to get the most economic/ social/ emotional</i></p>	<p><i>Understanding of daily routines and extent to which days can be/ are planned</i></p> <p><b>→ Routines tell us about a sense of normalcy/ habits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>• Routines == have a lower framing anxiety because they are familiar</b></li> </ul> <p><i>Experiences of daily anticipation and expectations</i></p>

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<p><i>support, like Christmas or the summer holidays? How does time pass when you're relaxed/ stressed?</i></p>	<p><i>Agency of time (how much of our time is seized? By what/ who? To what extent is this necessary for survival? Why is this time seized)</i></p> <p><i>Gathering information on three different sets of time will help to understand the extent to which one can plan/ anticipate the future</i></p>
<p><i>5.2 How do you spend your free time (can ask either in general OR insert an activity they have discussed which takes up the most amount of their time)? Put yourself in this moment, how does time pass for you?</i></p> <p><i>How do you feel when doing this activity? How do you feel about the amount of time you get to spend on this activity? Do you ever find that your free time is disrupted by someone or something? Who and what? Do you feel as if this is similar to other mothers in your neighbourhood, and the Greater Manchester region?</i></p>	<p><i>Analyse <u>time poverty</u> and agency of time (Time poverty can illuminate the extent to which time is seized as well as how much agency there is over time)</i></p> <p><i>Agency of time/ seizure of time (Can this discuss industrial time; do the activities which they do align with industrial time (i.e. they have enough time laid out in their day to do everything because they follow a regimented 'clocking' of time)?)</i></p> <p><i>Analysis of classed time expenditure</i></p> <p><i>Comparison of Other mothers (non in-poverty)</i></p>
<p><i>5.3 And, how do your children spend their free time?</i></p> <p><i>How similar is this to other children in the area? Do you feel this is similar to the majority of children in the Greater Manchester region? Can you tell me which activities you like and do not like that they do? Is there an activity you anticipate (meaning realistically) take up in the future?</i></p>	<p><i>Analysis of classed time expenditure</i></p> <p><i>Perceptions of others</i></p> <p><i>Expectations for the future (notions of deserving/ undeserving)</i></p>
<p><i>5. 4 How often and by whom is your daily routine/ plan you make for a day disrupted? Do you feel as if you have enough hours in your day?</i></p> <p><i>In what ways do you readjust your scheduling to do everything you set forth to do/ need to do? Do you feel as if these instances have an impact on your economic situation? Could you describe to me what you do in these situations and if there is anyone you rely upon?</i></p>	<p><i>Ruptures to daily routine, and the impact onto livelihood strategies and relationships in social networks</i></p> <p><i>Agency of time (time seizure... how much of their time is for themselves; do they feel in control of time; do they have a sense of having to wait for things? Is there a higher sense of stimulus complexity (even in times of waiting) wherein they are more aware of time and have to employ a different range of livelihood strategies?)</i></p>
<p><i>5.5 Do you feel as if you have control of your schedule at your job(s) [here I am specifically asking about paid employment – not reciprocal relationships or reproductive work – see interviewer notes for</i></p>	<p><i>Agency of time and daily routines – if their job is a factor which erodes a sense of agency over time; how does this intersect with</i></p>

<p>modification for those in non-paid employment/ engage in reciprocity; IF not in paid, productive work, confront issues of clock time VS social/ lived time]?</p> <p><i>In the type of work that you do, are your hours normal, in that you can plan a routine around them, or are they not-normal, as in always changing? How do you feel this impacts your ability to plan out your day/ week/ month? Do you feel as if you have a sense of flexibility in your daily schedule due to your job, why? How does this make you feel? And, do you feel that you struggle to multitask work and family life? Could you foresee yourself gaining a less erratic schedule in the future, why (not)?</i></p>	<p><i>This question can also speak to liminality – do they feel as if they are in-between life moments due to the scheduling constraints of work/ family balance</i></p> <p><i>Question also addresses ‘industrial time’ in comparison to lived time (do the clock hours dictated by work align with the lived experiences of informants)</i></p> <p><i>This question is also focusing on the impact of zero-hour contracts – what is the intersection of these with sense of agency over time</i></p> <p><i>(Ask this question if the individual engages in paid work – make note of the type of contract they work under [zero-hour; non-normal hours]; if they do not engage in paid-work, shift the question to understand how they balance reciprocal relationships – In your agreement with [person] to [activity], do you have a set routine? Is this a reliable Schedule, or do you find yourself usually having to change this week to week? In what ways does this impact your routines/ planning?)</i></p> <p><i>To compare, ask some questions similar to this this to managers/ supervisors of in places where informants work (i.e. Do you feel as if the contracts offered afford some flexibility for your employees? Have you encountered an experience wherein your employees have had difficulty in balancing their work/ family responsibilities? Why? What could you do to change this?)</i></p> <p><i>Looks at conversion of time into social capital</i></p>
<p>5.6 To what extent do you plan your week and month?</p> <p><i>Do you find one of these more difficult to plan for, why? Is there a time of the month and/ or year you most look forward to, why? Can you tell me about the most recent time you were able and unable to actualize your plans? Is there someone currently that you are planning for longer-term, what are you doing to prepare for this, and do you think you can accomplish this in the time you have set to do it?</i></p>	<p><i>Long term planning capabilities</i></p> <p><i>Anticipations and expectations</i></p> <p><i>Ability to achieve goals over time – juncture of expectations and reality</i></p> <p><i>Liminality – ability to accomplish goals, or in a state of in-betweenness</i></p>

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<p>5.7 Have you ever had to wait a longer than you had anticipated to utilize state services (benefit system, NHS, Sure Start centres, etc.) over the last 12 months?</p> <p><i>Did this have an impact on your economic situation? If so, what changes did you make to make ends meet? Was there anyone you relied upon? Can you see this happening again?</i></p>	<p><i>Experience of waiting time – impact on livelihood strategies and social networks</i></p> <p><i>Documenting circumstances when in-poverty mothers have to wait</i></p> <p><i>Livelihood strategies in periods of waiting</i></p> <p><i>Agency – sense of self → coping mechanism for disjuncture time</i></p>
<p>5.8 (Interviewer should choose the most significant waiting period the informant mentions) In the initial moment when you had to wait, how did you feel and did you have to make any immediate changes to your routines/ plans (financial or otherwise)?</p> <p><i>And, over the course of having to wait, what were some of the more noticeable and permanent changes for your routines/ economic situation/ people you spent your time with and relied upon? Can you put yourself in this moment – how did time pass? Like it'd never end, or it was moving in fast forward? What'd you do to feel 'normal' within this time?</i></p>	<p><i>Feelings in waiting periods (initial moment and duration)</i></p> <p><i>Modifications to routines, livelihood strategies, and social networks: periods of waiting (initial moment and duration)</i></p>
<p>5.9 Can you describe the most recent time you had to wait for (use same situation as discussed above)?</p> <p><i>How did you feel and why? How similar do you feel your circumstance is to other mothers in your area and the wider Manchester area?</i></p>	<p><i>Feelings and experiences of waiting time</i></p> <p><i>Comparison to Other mothers (not in-poverty)</i></p> <p><i>Relational, as Demond says</i></p>
<p>5.10 I am also interested in your experiences in charities. Could you tell me with what frequency you utilize charities and which ones you use? Do you often find the schedules of these to be accommodating? Are you able to get everything you need from one charity [don't lead them to ask if they have to go to many... see if this emerges]? Do you feel as if utilizing charities is a good use of your time, why (not)? Can you envision NOT using this charity? DO you want to stop using it?</p>	<p><i>Time seizures from service organization</i></p> <p><i>Experience of temporalities in time seizures – intersection of livelihood strategies</i></p> <p><i>Agency over time</i></p> <p><i>Subjectivity in paying with time – sense of worth over price of time to barter for goods</i></p> <p><i>Transient spatialities</i></p>

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<p>5.11 Have you ever had a negative experience at a charity that you could tell me about? Do you feel as if this has impacted your use of charities following this experience? How? Why? In any way do you feel the timetables of charities/ services have deterred you from using them, why (not)?</p> <p><i>[If they have not, ask about a friend/ etc. that has and what they know of the experience, and to what extent it impacted the person it happened to OR the informant themself.]</i></p>	<p><i>Living present – a reciprocal affect of temporalities shaping livelihood strategies, and livelihood strategies impacting temporalities</i></p>
<p>5.12 Could you tell me about a time when you unexpectedly had to pay for something? How did this feel? Was there someone you could rely upon? And, how did you cope with this situation?</p>	<p><i>Temporalities and ruptures in routine</i></p> <p><i>Understand how livelihood strategies are employed in crisis moments</i></p> <p><i>Routine disruptions → reliability and sense of identity → where is identity sourced from? Time/ money?</i></p>
<p>5.13 How do you see your future in 1, 5, and 10 years? How do you feel you can achieve these goals?</p>	<p><i>Explores expectations (/ anticipations) for the future – analyse how these are embedded in the past and present</i></p> <p><i>Analyse notions of deserving/ undeserving</i></p> <p><i>Explore if the informant is expressing ‘realistic’ aims or fantasies – analysis of notions of deserving/ undeserving</i></p>
<p>5.14 If you were to give a new mother advice on how to make-ends-meet, what would it have been and why? What impact do you think it could have had? Is there one piece of advice that someone gave to on making-ends-meet that has been helpful?</p>	<p><i>Explore experience of learned livelihood strategies over time</i></p> <p><i>Understand a sense of self and reflexivity of the respondent over time spectrum</i></p> <p><i>Connection of the past to present, and present to future</i></p>
<p>5.15 What three words would you use to describe your current situation? Why?</p>	<p><i>Explore feelings of present circumstances and any connections this has to the past/ future</i></p>

## Annex 2. Informed consent form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title:

Traversing Austerity: Critical temporalities and livelihood strategies of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from March 2018 through September 2020. The project is performed by me, Amanda Bruck, a doctoral student of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, under the supervision of Dr. Miranda Lubbers (mirandajessica.lubbers@uab.es) and Dr. Hugo Valenzuela (hugo.valenzuela@uab.es). This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

- The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how people get by day to day, the people and/ or organizations that help them do this, and how time feels for mothers in the Greater Manchester region in austerity-time Britain.
- The benefits of the research will be to better understand how the three main ideas work together. Also, to identify the impact the economic climate has had onto mothers with younger children.
- Your participation involves being interviewed by me, Amanda Bruck. The interview will take approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours. The interviewer may contact the individual again in the future for further participation if agreed upon by both parties.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at anytime via email (amanda.e.bruck@gmail.com) or mobile (+447519433441 –calls or SMS; +34633229524 –WhatsApp).

Our discussion will be audio recorded to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.



## The (un)deserving mother?

Lived realities, critical temporalities, and socially supportive relationships of mothers experiencing deprivation poverty in austerity-era Britain

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Though direct quotes from you may be used in reports resulting from this study, **your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous**. Also, all photographs and/ or videos taken will pixelate faces in reporting this information as to protect the individuals' identity. Though direct quotes from you may be used, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous to other individuals than Amanda Bruck and in any reports of this study using information from this study.

\*\*\*\*

By signing this consent form I certify that I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and agree to the terms of this agreement.

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(Signature - Participant)

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(Date)

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(Signature - Researcher)

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(Date)