

Call for papers

Thinking of the Family Through Children:

Methodological Issues and Challenges

Coordination: Chloé Courtot (Triangle Lab - Cnaf), Céline Jung-Loriente (Collective in Applied Social Sciences - CESSA, LISE lab Cnrs-Cnam) and Arnaud Régnier-Loilier (Ined).

Authors are invited to submit an article title with an abstract (approx. 200 words) and keywords, to indicate whether the proposed article is a scientific article or an overview, study and method article, and to include a short biographical note, for 10 January 2022 to the journal's editor-in-chief (rpsf@cnaf.fr) and to the coordinators of this thematic issue: chloe.courtot@ens-lyon.fr, celinelorientejung@gmail.com, arnaud.regnier-loilier@ined.fr.

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Journal of Social and Family Policies

Founded in 1985, the *Journal of Social and Family Policies* [RPSF] (*Research and Projections* from 1985 to 2009, then *Social and Family Policies* until March 2015) is a quarterly peer-reviewed and multidisciplinary scientific journal. It publishes **original research studies** in the field of **family and social affairs** (public policies, benefits, service offerings, actors of these policies, targeted audiences, etc.), as well as developments affecting the **family, childhood, youth, parenthood, poverty and housing**. The journal welcomes articles in all areas of **social sciences and humanities**. Its multidisciplinary approach requires authors to use plain words and to explain what does not come under common language (presentation of measures, theoretical concepts, specific survey methods, etc.).

The RPSF journal is developed based upon special themed issues or thematic sections, or presented in the form of a collection of contributions (mixed issues). It is composed of different parts, which are all subject to expert review:

- "**Scientific Articles**" (maximum length of 60.000 characters with spaces). They are original contributions based on empirical research material;

- **"Syntheses and Perspectives"** articles (30.000 signs) offer problematised analyses of grey literature or research syntheses;
- **"Studies"** articles (30.000 signs), shorter than scientific articles, present the first outcomes of quantitative (in particular descriptive statistics) or qualitative surveys (exploratory surveys, ongoing studies and research projects) while placing them in their field of research;
- **"Methods"** articles (30.000 signs) discuss data collection tools in the fields covered by the RPSF journal (contributions to and limitations of these methods, discussion of indicators, etc.);
- **"Reviews"** are books (8.000 signs) and symposiums (20.000 signs) presentations, problematised in relation with the journal's areas of interest. Reviews cannot be submitted by reviewed book authors or symposium organisers.

Presentation of the Special Issue

Research in social sciences, in France and elsewhere, increasingly questions the child's place in society by taking a direct interest in the child's discourse, his/her timetable or daily relations (Sirota, 2005, 2006; Lareau, 2003 and 2011; Lignier and Pagis, 2017). Despite difficulties and constraints of field surveys with children (Côté *et al.*, 2020; Danic *et al.*, 2006; Fargas *et al.*, 2010; Punch, 2002; Razy, 2014; Robin *et al.*, 2017; Garnier and Rayna, 2017), these studies shed valuable light on the child's experience and what it reveals about the social world. They also show how their differentiated perceptions and interpretations make the approach to socialisation – and the sociological issues related to this age of life – more complex. This special issue is part of this approach by focusing on contributions, limitations and outcomes of research mobilising survey methods among children about their family.

In this context where "[b]eing a child is not [...] a seamless experience" (Court, 2017, p. 4), research with *children* and about *childhoods* testify to the challenges of differentiation (Lignier *et al.*, 2012), hidden by *the child* in the singular. *The child* (in the singular) is always present and becoming, according to his/her double conception – both as subject and actor – as laid down by law by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This is a specific issue for researchers. How to study families from a variety of children's experiences?

An increasing number of research focuses on this diversity of children's experiences, within this double temporality, by exploring children's socialisations, how they get through them, the diversity of contents and interpretations, in the different spaces in which they live. By moving the focus on socialisations at a young age, it is, in particular, possible to identify the genesis of social provisions and to better understand the dynamics behind both the process of social reproduction and the transformations that can appear at its margins (Lahire, 2019; Macchi and Oppenchain, 2019). Thus, field surveys among children shed new light on intra- and intergenerational social relations, in particular within families. The issue of inequalities at this age of life, as well as their future implications, are at the heart of social science research and

lead to the following question: "*how does the issue of childhood rework the issue of inequalities and, conversely, how does the issue of inequalities rework the issue of childhood?*" (Octobre and Sirota, 2021, p. 23). And more precisely, how is the plurality of children's experiences – rooted in these unequal social structures – influenced by and/or shows the diversity of past and present family realities, and this in different national contexts?

Research based on children is invaluable in renewing the scientific approaches to family. They make it possible to investigate decisive "thresholds" in the constitution of the individual, such as the confrontation with peers outside the family, the entry into economic autonomy or even in emotional and sexual life. They provide access to the child's view of intra-family relationships and of his/her active role in these relationships, by going beyond the strict parents-children relationship (siblings, extended family, etc.) beyond the boundaries of the household created by adults or the home they live in, in case of separation for instance. Thereby, they offer a complementary reading compared to that of adults on what makes the family and what perpetuates it over time and trials.

Following a [workshop](#) organised on the same research object on 14 December 2021 at the University of Paris Dauphine, this special issue proposes to show the family from surveys conducted among children (research axis 1), in France and elsewhere, while reflecting on the concrete and specific modalities of their realisation (research axis 2). What adjustments and adaptations should they make depending on law (minors and legal responsibilities), on possible interactions according to the age of the people surveyed and sometimes according to these so-called "difficult" research fields (Bolter, 2016)? Thus, researching among children provides a fertile ground for ethical and methodological reflections (quantitative, qualitative, mixed) on family in different disciplinary fields (sociology, demography, ethnography, history, political science, educational science, etc.) and research traditions.

Research Axis 1. Definitions and Configurations. Researching Family Boundaries and Producing Knowledge Through the Children's Perceptions

Depending on births, separations, family changes and the expansion of the family circle, children go through several family configurations. Therefore, one wonders how children perceive these changes? For instance, are the family boundaries experienced by the child the same as those defined by institutions and researchers? What place half- or quasi-brothers and sisters, the stepmother or stepfather, social or biological parents occupy for them? How do these family configurations reorganise individual places and identities within the family group?

By going beyond the family approach centered on adults (composition, reconciliation of private and professional life, parenthood, resources, etc.), field surveys conducted among children produce new knowledge on family and highlight unexplored issues. For instance, the child's view offers a different perception of relationships within siblings, between cousins or between peers, and highlights a sociability researchers conceive as horizontal.

Axis 1 articles will show the inputs and limitations of children's views in the study of families.

Research Axis 2. Survey Conditions and Methods: Collecting Children's Testimonies to Understand the Family

Within the area of family studies, investigating children raises many practical questions. The first set of questions concerns access to the field and its constraints. What are the specificities of a research project on families through the children's perception? How to take ethical issues into account when developing the survey protocol (parental consent, institutional consent, personal data protection, recording of personal data, etc.)? How to deal with these constraints without compromising the quality of data collection on family configurations? To what extent do these constraints represent levers or obstacles in the interaction between the researcher and the child? How to access the child's free speech out of the "gatekeepers'" control (parents, professionals) and how to guarantee its safe restitution? How does the child's age influence ethical and methodological requirements?

A second set of questions concerns data collection. More than in other fields, the issue of asymmetry between the interviewer and the interviewee is present. How to make children speak about their family realities? Classical tools of data collection (interviews, questionnaires) may not be adapted to this audience. It then involves designing *ad hoc* media (drawings, texts, images, games, etc.) to produce information. How are these tools designed, tested, implemented? How to analyse this new kind of material? What strategies should be adopted to investigate families through children with communication difficulties (due to age or disabilities)? What reflections or attentions should the researcher have on the conditions of the interview that could generate conflicts of loyalty (presentation of the survey to the child, place of the interview, presence of an adult, etc.)?

Axis 2 articles will show how family research involving children renews the ethical and practical issues of field surveys. They may also show the stakes of statistics – in particular on family structures – centered on children, whose difficulty and scarcity have been pointed out (HCFEA, 2019).

This special issue of the RPSF journal is conceived from a multidisciplinary (sociology, law, political science, economics, management science, etc.) and multi-method perspective. Empirical or theoretical approaches are welcomed. This issue will gather scientific articles, syntheses, studies and methods articles, as well as book and symposium reviews in order to address these issues from different angles.

Editorial Process

By **10 January 2022**, authors should send an abstract (approx. 200 words) and its keywords, indicate the section and research axis for which the article is submitted, and include a short biographical note. If the abstract proposal is accepted, the article should be sent by **1 July 2022**, at the latest, in order to be assessed (double blind review) and discussed by the editorial board. Therefore, there is no guarantee of the article's publication before validation by scientific experts and acceptance by the editorial board in the second half of 2022.

Instructions to authors (in French and in English), to be respected for all submitted articles, are available on the journal's website:

Timeline

- **10 January 2022:** Deadline for submission of abstracts
- **1 July 2022:** Submission of the first version of articles to the coordinators of the issue, follow-ups with authors
- **1 October 2022:** Submission of articles to the editor-in-chief and submission to reviewers
- **November 2022:** Editorial board meeting
- **1 February 2023:** Submission of the second version of articles
- **April-August 2023:** Editorial secretariat and issue's layout
- **September 2023:** Publication of the issue

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