Class and eating: family meals in Britain.

Abstract

This paper examines social differentiation in eating patterns in Britain. It focuses on family meals among individuals with under-age children. Eating with family members has been associated with improvement in wellbeing, nutritional status, and school performance of the children. Modern lifestyles may pose a challenge to commensal eating for all groups, but the scale of the impact vary between social classes, with some groups at higher risk of shortening or skipping family meal time. Eating patterns are differentiated by individual's social class; they have also been associated with educational attainment, work schedules, and household composition. The objective of this study is to disaggregate the effect of these variables. Using data from the 2014/2015 UK Time Use Survey I analyse the net effect of social class, education, income, work and family characteristics on the frequency and duration of family meals. Individuals in the highest occupational class dedicate more time overall to family meals. However, class effect becomes insignificant when other variables, such as education or income, are controlled for. This study finds that higher educated individuals have more frequent family meals, and more affluent individuals spend more time at the table with their household members. Work characteristics are associated with frequency of meals, but not with their duration. Finally, household composition matters for how people eat. Parents of younger children eat with their family members more frequently than parents of teenagers. Single parents, a notoriously time-poor category, spend the least amount of time eating with their families and have fewer commensal meals.

Key words: eating, social class, UK, family meal, commensality

Introduction

Eating is strongly regulated by cultural norms and social modelling (Rozin et al., 1999; Cruwys et al., 2015; Hetherington et al., 2006). Though people often eat unreflexively, this routinized behaviour is certainly not a random act. Analyzing eating calls for recognizing its 'collective and unreflective elements' (Warde, 2016: 6) which shape daily practices and link them to higher-level structures such as social class, or national culture. Eating and attitudes towards food reflect individual values, beliefs, and identities (Hauck-Lawson, 1998). Social context has profound implications for what people eat (Bevelander et al., 2011), and meals may serve to enforce particular norms among those who share them. Though some studies report a decline in the number of commensal meals over the last few decades, most food is still consumed in the presence of others (Cheng et al.., 2007; Mestdag and Glorieux, 2009).

Within the social context of eating family meals play a special role. Family is the primary commensal unit and a majority of daily meals are consumed with family members (Sobal and Nelson, 2003). Family gatherings around the table provide space for transmission of values and cultural capital (Wills et al., 2011); they also offer an opportunity for 'checking in' with the children (Eisenberg et al., 2004). Eating with a family is associated with better child nutrition (Gillman et al., 2000, Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003), better school outcomes, and lower probability of substance abuse (Eisenberg et al., 2004). On the other hand, meal time can be used to exert control or reinforce the authority of some family members over others, and family meals might be a source of tension (Wilk 2010). In these cases, they may be shortened or avoided altogether.

A propensity for having meals together is thought to be related to respondent's social class, and as such it might form a part of their habitus (Bourdieu 1984). Habitus is a set of dispositions that shape people's perception of themselves and the way they act on daily basis. It is rooted in individual's structural position and as such it reflects internalized values and beliefs acquired through the process of socialization. With regard to food consumption, middle-class respondents put greater emphasis on eating together and having a 'proper meal' (Backett-Milburn et al., 2010), whereas in working-class families eating together sometimes seems secondary to other demands. Daily difficulties that lower-status families face may make healthy eating appear unimportant (Warin et al., 2015; Backett-Millburn et al., 2006). Parents in lower-income families often lack time and energy to prepare food or arrange a meal together with others (Devine et al., 2006). Meals can be consumed at different times and in different places by family members (Backett-Milburn et al., 2006). Replacing meals with snacks, using convenience food or visiting fast-food outlets are common strategies used to cope with time shortages and daily stresses (Devine et al., 2006), even though resorting to food for stress release has been linked with weight gain (Boggiano et al., 2015). Lower parental education and health awareness, both more common among individuals with lower social status, have also been linked with a less healthy diet (Crawford, 2006). Knowledge about the importance of nutrition may motivate parents to persist with having family meals at home even in the situation of time scarcity (Jabs and Devine, 2006; Mothersbaugh et al., 1993).

The relationship between class and meal patterns is not straightforward and there may be different factors behind it. Particular eating habits may be due to class-specific norms acquired through socialization, or differences in health awareness and educational attainment, but they may also be related to objectively existing constraints such as work schedules, or time and money shortages. Work conditions play an important role in how people eat (Jabs and Devine, 2006). The spillover from work to family life contributes to time scarcity (Senia et al., 2014; Doumas et al., 2003). Long working hours (Devine et al., 2006) and shift work (Dixon et al., 2014) negatively affect the frequency of meals and the time dedicated to food preparation. Individuals engaged in shift work or working during 'unsocial' hours find it more difficult to arrange time for social activities (Fagan, 2001; Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). In particular, weekend jobs pose a challenge to social participation (Bittman, 2005), and commensal eating is also likely to be affected. All of these, including less predictable work schedules, are more common among with lower occupational status.

At least some of the challenges faced by working class families may be attributed to their lower income. Cost of food is an important barrier to healthy eating (Hendrickson et al. 2006). Furthermore, financial constraints limit the ability of families to reduce their workload by hiring housekeeping support (Cohen, 1998), which leaves them with less time available for eating or food preparation compared to those who can afford it.

In addition to being money-poor, low income families are frequently also time-poor. This stems primarily from the aforementioned difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance (Jabs and Devine, 2006). Time poverty leads to families cutting down on eating time (Kalenkoski and Hamrick, 2013). Hurriedness may result in skipping meals or moving eating to a secondary role (Hamermesh, 2010), that is, replacing meals with snacks. Meanwhile, less frequent eating has been associated with higher BMI values (Hammermesh, 2010), and skipping meals, in particular breakfasts, has been linked with other unhealthy lifestyle factors (Rampersaud et al., 2005).

There are also other factors that influence family eating patterns. Households differ substantially in how they eat depending on their composition (Mestdag and Glorieux, 2009). Sobal and Nelson (2003) list the number and age of children as characteristics that might affect eating patterns. Cheng et al. (2007) report less time spent eating and drinking in households with dependent children in the UK. Finally, being a single parent has been associated with less frequent meals due to much greater time poverty (Devine et al., 2006).

Family meals have mostly been analysed from a qualitative perspective (Backett-Millburn et al., 2010; Devine et al., 2006; Sobal and Nelson, 2003), which provides valuable insights but does not allow disaggregating the effect of specific factors. Quantitative analyses, though very few, suggest that eating habits in families with children are associated with working patterns as well as individual sociodemographic characteristics (Guthrie and McClelland, 2009).

Material and methods

The study uses the 2014/2015 UK Time Use Survey (UKTUS) collected by NatCen Social Research. Fieldwork was conducted between April 2014 and December 2015 on a representative sample of the British population following a multi-stage stratified probability sampling. A total of 11,860 households were sampled in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, which resulted in 4,238 households interviewed and 16,550 completed diary days. Respondents in most cases provided a record for two diary days, one for a weekday and another for a weekend day. Each diary collects the data on main and accompanying (secondary) activities as well as when, where, with whom, and for how long the activity was carried out. Respondents are not asked about any activity specifically, so their accounts of eating are unlikely to be biased. Time diaries are seen as a reliable and precise method for the measurement of how time is allocated across the day (Robinson and Godbey, 1999; Gershuny, 2000).

A subsample of adults living with under-age children was selected, i.e., parents or guardians (including single parents) of children aged between 0 and 17 years. Observations for which information on occupational class (also referred to as social class) is available were used, which resulted in the total number of 3,943 diary days. For regression analysis a separate category for missing values was used in order to maintain the subsample size. Mean estimates for the population and subsample were calculated using the sampling weights provided with the dataset. These adjust for person and household-level unequal response probability by age and sex, region, household type, tenure, household income and economic activity.

Initially, the number and duration of all meals in the subsample of parents was compared against the whole population. This was followed by a closer look at the amount of time dedicated to family meals. 'Meal' is defined as any episode of primary eating (in UKTUS coded as 'eating and drinking') that is recorded as the main activity at a given time. Eating and drinking reported as a secondary activity, i.e. activity carried out alongside something else, is classified as 'snacking', and corresponds to what other authors using time-use data call 'grazing' (e.g. Hamermesh 2010). Secondary eating was reported in 30% of all diaries. Due to low prevalence and relatively short time recorded in secondary eating, further analysis was not carried out.

The main analysis focused on the number of family meals and their total duration. Family meals include all meals for which a co-presence of one or more family/household members was reported. They were analysed as dependent variable in multivariate ordinary least square (OLS) regression models. Main independent variables were: occupation-based social class, education, income, work schedules, and family characteristics. OLS models allow estimation of the net effect of each of the variables included.

The number and total duration of family meals were analysed in four steps. The first model included social class and employment status as explanatory variables. It controlled for age, gender, country of birth (UK, other European, and other), and weekday. Social class was constructed based on the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NSSEC) which was collapsed into 3 categories: (1) managerial and professional, (2) intermediate, and (3) routine and manual. Studies using time-use data or data on eating practices show that these

categories are sufficient to describe class differentiation in the UK and a greater level of detail is not required (Olsen et al., 2000; Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). Employment status, a variable originally containing nine detailed categories, was collapsed into two basic groups – "working for pay" and "not working for pay". Paid work is the key factor that structures daily schedules including meal times. "Working for pay" included the original codes for "self-employed" and "in paid employment (full or part-time); "not working for pay" included all codes indicating being unemployed or permanently/ temporarily out of the labour market. At this stage I did not differentiate between working full time or part time because detailed information on the duration of working week was included in the model analyzing the effect of time constraints to eating (Model 3). I differentiated between a weekday and a weekend day, which is essential not only due to issues related to work schedules, but also due to families having particular day-related rituals, such as Sunday dinners (Wills et al., 2011). Regarding demographic variables, eating patterns were shown to reflect generational change. Older people are more likely to plan meals in advance and less likely to skip breakfast (Reicks et al., 2014). Gender has been shown to affect the amount of time spent eating and drinking in the UK (Cheng et al., 2007). Women also spend more time in food preparation and clean-up (as well as other unpaid work; Sayer, 2005), which can affect their time for food consumption. Lastly, national cultures shape attitudes towards eating (Rozin et al., 1999), and as such they may influence the amount of time people spend at the table, which differs across countries (Warde et al., 2007; Jarosz, 2016). Since British society is rather heterogeneous in this respect, respondent's country of origin was included in the analysis.

In the second model individual's education was added along with monthly net household income per person to account for class-related differences other than occupational characteristics. These variables are related to individual's social class but not equivalent to the NSSEC classification based on occupational status; they also have independent effects (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2013). In UKTUS data these measures are not strongly correlated, the highest correlation being between education and NSSEC (Pearson's $r=0.42$; significance level < 0.001). Education includes 5 categories: degree; post-compulsory secondary; compulsory secondary; below secondary and none; and other. The latter includes the original code for 'any other professional, vocational or foreign education', which could not be separated into more detailed categories. Income per person is originally a continuous variable, but here it is recoded into four categories relevant to the distribution: below 25%; between 25 – 50%; 50 – 75%; over 75% of the distribution. Education is associated with knowledge on healthy lifestyle and nutrition, whereas income provides a crude estimate of household's purchasing power.

The third model includes all of the aforementioned variables as well as variables theorized to represent time constraints to eating together: usual weekly working hours, usual weekly hours of domestic work, and whether a respondent works in shifts. Respondents were asked to report their weekly working hours in paid and domestic work, so these two estimates are not based on the diary record but on individual declarations. Domestic work hours account for temporal constraints outside of paid employment, which were shown to lower the amount of time spent eating in a similar way to working hours (Cheng et al., 2007). Weekly working hours, an originally continuous variable, were collapsed into four categories: below 20 hours; 21 – 40

hours; 41 – 60 hours; over 60 hours. Weekly domestic work time (originally continuous) was collapsed into the following categories: 0; 1 – 2 hours; 3 – 6 hours; 7 – 14 hours; and 15 and more hours. The categories are relevant to the distribution; 50% of respondents reported doing 6 or less hours of this type of work per week. Shift work is a binary variable differentiating between "working in shifts" and "not working in shifts".

The fourth and last model accounts for all of these characteristics as well as household composition, i.e., the number of under-age children, age of the youngest child, and whether it is a single-parent household. Number of under-age children includes the following categories: one; two; three or more. Age of the youngest child is collapsed into the following categories: 0 – 3; 4 – 10; 11 – 17 years old. Single parenthood status is included to account for the notoriously time-poor category of single parents (Harvey and Mukhopadhyay, 2007).

Results

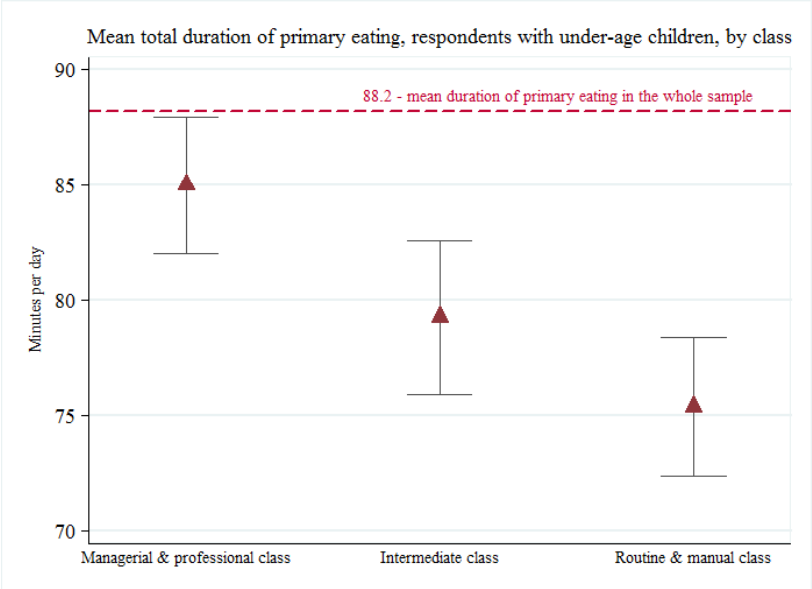
Within the analysed subsample of parents, managers and professionals accounted for 38%, routine and manual workers – 35%, and intermediate level workers - 27% of respondents. Among all respondents 36% had a degree, the same number of people had post-compulsory secondary education, 19% completed compulsory secondary education, and 4% did not complete it. Mean household income was £3363, and the median income - £2500; 20% of responses to the income question were missing. Women constituted 56% of the sample, and single parents (great majority of them being mothers) – 13%.

Descriptive statistics

Mean time spent in all primary eating (meals), and all secondary eating (snacks) among individuals with under-age children was lower than the population average which is 88 minutes per day (Figure 1). Within this relatively time-poor category social class made a difference. Managers and professional ate for a significantly longer time ($p<0.001$) than did manual and routine workers.

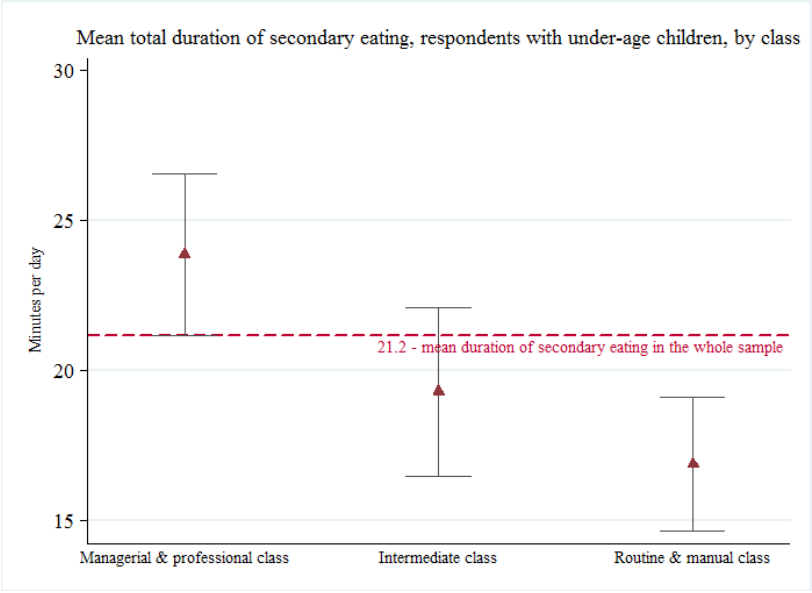
Disparities in time spent on meals were not balanced out by the duration of secondary eating (Figure 2). On the contrary, as in the case of primary eating, the lowest amount of time spent snacking was reported by individuals in the routine and manual class. This was around 10 minutes lower than the duration of snacking reported by individuals in managerial and professional occupations ($p<0.001$), as well as lower than the mean duration for the whole population. Difference in the duration of snacking between the intermediate class and either of the two other classes were not significant.

Figure 1: Duration of primary eating (meals), by class.



Note: Bars show 95% confidence interval for the means.
Means have been weighted using individual weights provided in the dataset.
Difference between two means is statistically significant if their 95% confidence intervals do not overlap.

Figure 2: Duration of secondary eating (snacks), by class.

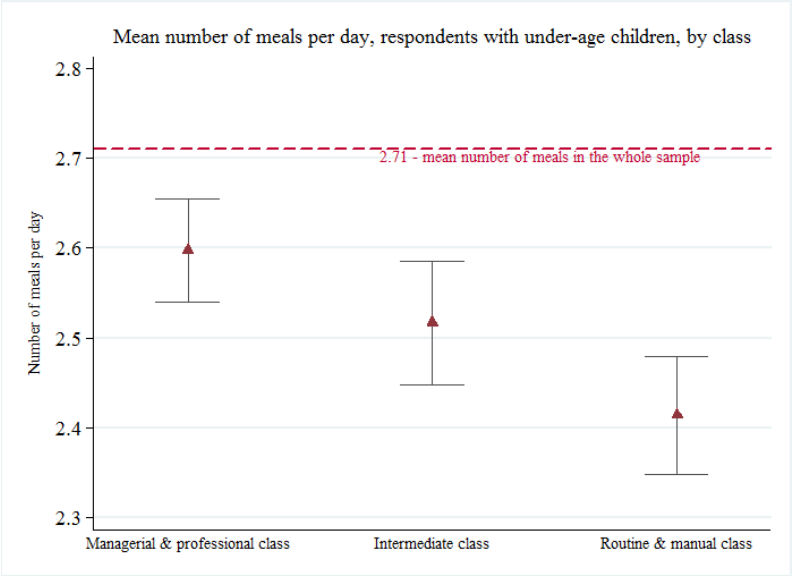


Note: Bars show 95% confidence interval for the means.
Means have been weighted using individual weights provided in the dataset.
Difference between two means is statistically significant if their 95% confidence intervals do not overlap.

Shorter duration of eating is positively correlated (Pearson's r=0.63, p <0.001) with a lower number of meals. Parents of under-age children have fewer meals compared to the population

average (Figure 3). Differences between the highest and the lowest occupational class were significant, but the number of meals eaten by individuals in intermediate class is not significantly different from managers and professionals or from routine and manual workers.

Figure 3: Number of meals per day, by class.

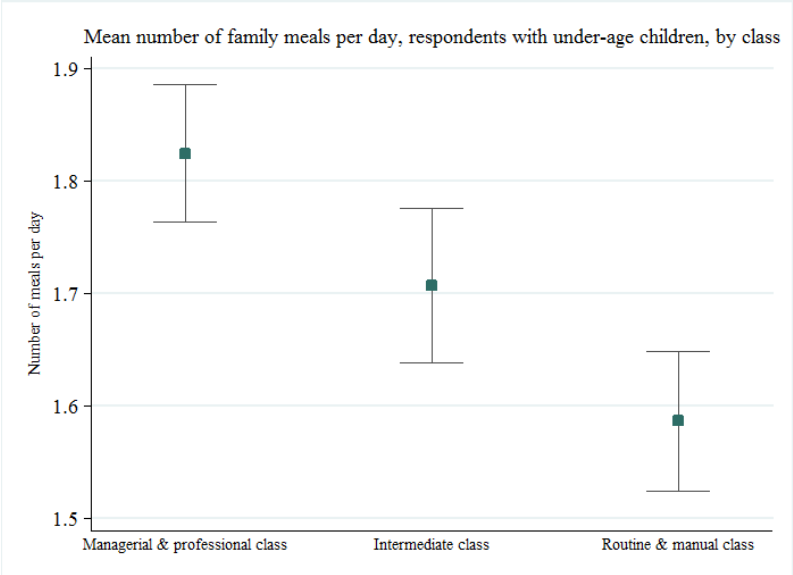


Note: Bars show 95% confidence interval for the means.
Means have been weighted using individual means provided in the dataset.
Difference between two means is statistically significant if their 95% confidence intervals do not overlap.

Class disparities hold also for family meals (Figure 4). Parents in the managerial and professional class, on average consumed 1.8 out of their 2.6 meals in the company of other household members. The lowest number of family meals was reported by individuals from the routine and manual class – 1.6 out of 2.4 meals eaten over the day. These differences are statistically significant ($p<0.001$) but not striking. The share of family meals among all daily meals was similar across classes, so differences are likely to be due to the working class respondents' having fewer meals in general. Number of family meals consumed by respondents in intermediate class did not differ significantly from those in the other two classes.

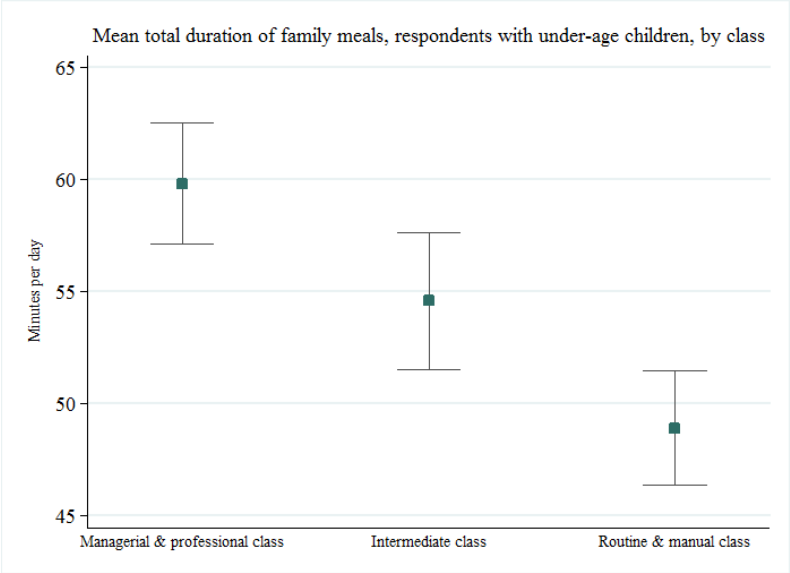
Duration of all family meals over the day (Figure 5), while being a function of their number, indicates also how much time household members spend together at the table. Mean time spent eating with their family members was longest among managers and professionals (around 60 minutes per day) and shortest among routine and manual workers (around 48 minutes). It means that, on average, the former spent slightly over 1.5 hours per week more on family meals than the latter. The difference was statistically significant at 0.001 level. Respondents working in intermediary occupations consistently fell between the other two categories but were not statistically different from either of them.

Figure 4: Number of family meals per day, by class.



Note: Bars show 95% confidence interval for the means.
Means have been weighted using individual means provided in the dataset.
Difference between two means is statistically significant if their 95% confidence intervals do not overlap.

Figure 5: Mean duration of all family meals, by class.



Note: Bars show 95% confidence interval for the means.
Means have been weighted using individual means provided in the dataset.
Difference between two means is statistically significant if their 95% confidence intervals do not overlap.

Disparities in the number and duration of family meals consumed by British parents from different occupational classes might be due to particular class-related factors such as education,

income or work schedules. The next subsection analyses the net effect of these variables as well as household composition on individuals' eating patterns.

Multivariate analysis

First set of models (Table 1) presents the covariates of the number of meals eaten with household members on a single day. In Model 1 class differences are significant – compared to the managers and professionals, individuals in intermediary and working classes had fewer family meals. Individuals who work for pay ate with their household members less often, net of their class characteristics. People born in the UK had significantly fewer meals than respondents of other European origin, but there were no differences between them and those born anywhere else in the world. Regardless of class or country of origin older individuals and women ate more frequently. Finally, more meals were consumed at weekends.

Model 2 adds education and household income per person. When these were controlled for, class differences became insignificant. Instead, it seems that the level of education plays a more important role for meals frequency. More educated respondents ate with their household members more often; the difference grew with each level of education. Income was not associated with the number of meals.

Work characteristics and duration of domestic work were added as time constraints on eating together (Model 3). Employment status remained significant, but the duration of paid work did not matter. Working shifts was associated with fewer family meals. Finally, duration of domestic work had a positive effect on the frequency of family meals. Individuals working for 7 hours or more had significantly more meals than those who did not work at home at all.

Family and household characteristic were added in Model 4. Parents of the youngest children (aged between 0 and 3) tended to have more frequent meals with other household members compared to parents of teenagers. Single parents had fewer family meals by 0.5 per day; taking into account that it was, on average 2.7 in the whole sample, this difference is substantial. In the last model educational differences remained significant; as did the negative effect of shift work.

Table 1: Covariates of the number of family meals per day, ordinary least square (OLS).

Covariates	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.01 (0.00)***[b]	0.01 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)**	0.01 (0.00)***
Sex: Female (ref.[a] male)	0.09 (0.04)*	0.05 (0.04)	–0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Weekend (ref. weekday)	0.45 (0.04)***	0.45 (0.04)***	0.45 (0.04)***	0.45 (0.04)***
Place of birth (ref. born in the UK)				
Born in Europe	0.36 (0.10)***	0.30 (0.10)**	0.28 (0.10)**	0.29 (0.10)**
Born elsewhere	0.10 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Social class (ref. managerial & professional)				
Intermediary	–0.14 (0.05)**	–0.04 (0.05)	–0.06 (0.05)	–0.06 (0.05)
Routine & manual	–0.23 (0.05)***	–0.06 (0.05)	–0.06 (0.06)	–0.04 (0.06)
Employment status: Working (ref. not working)	–0.21 (0.05)***	–0.26 (0.05)***	–0.19 (0.07)**	–0.19 (0.06)**
Education (ref. degree)				
Post-compulsory secondary	……..	–0.26 (0.05)***	–0.24 (0.05)***	–0.19 (0.05)***
Compulsory secondary	……..	–0.30 (0.06)***	–0.28 (0.06)***	–0.20 (0.06)***
Below secondary and none	……..	–0.57 (0.11)***	0.57 (0.11)***	–0.48 (0.11)***
Other	……..	–0.15 (0.11)	0.15 (0.11)	–0.13 (0.11)
Household income per person (ref. lowest 25%)				
25 – 50%	……..	–0.09 (0.06)	0.12 (0.06)*	0.03 (0.06)
50 – 75%	……..	0.06 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)
Over 75%	……..	–0.03 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	–0.08 (0.09)
Weekly work hours in main job (ref. less than 20)				
21 – 40	……..	……..	–0.12 (0.06)	–0.14 (0.06)*
41 – 60	……..	……..	–0.17 (0.06)	–0.19 (0.08)*
Over 60	……..	……..	–0.23 (0.22)	–0.24 (0.22)
Weekly domestic work hours (ref. 0)				
Less than 2	……..	……..	0.11 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)
3 – 6	……..	……..	0.10 (0.08)	0.07 (0.08)
7 – 14	……..	……..	0.21 (0.08)**	0.19 (0.08)*
15 and more	……..	……..	0.27 (0.09)**	0.21 (0.09)*
Shift work (ref: none)				
Working shifts	……..	……..	–0.13 (0.06)**	–0.14 (0.06)*
Number of children (ref. 1)				
2	……..	……..	……..	–0.03 (0.04)
3 and more	……..	……..	……..	–0.08 (0.07)
Age of the youngest child (ref. 0-3)				
4 – 10	……..	……..	……..	–0.14 (0.05)**
11 – 17	……..	……..	……..	–0.32 (0.06)***
Being a single parent (ref. in a couple)	……..	……..	……..	–0.51 (0.06)***
Intercept	1.46 (0.11)***	1.55 (0.11)***	1.54 (0.15)***	1.53 (0.15)***
Number of diary days[c]	3,943	3,943	3,943	3,943

[a] "Ref." stands for "reference category".

[b] Significance level <0.001 is indicated by ***; ** denotes significance level <0.01; * denotes significance level <0.05.

[c] Dummy for missing values is calculated in order to preserve the same number of diary days in all Models but it is not shown.

Frequency and total duration of meals, though related, represent slightly different phenomena. Frequency of meals is linked with coordination between family members, while the duration of eating reflects the actual amount of time people spend together at the table.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that total time spent eating with household members was differentiated by social class. Differences grew with the distance between classes – respondents in intermediary class spent, on average, around 9 minutes less on family meals per day; the difference between the working class and the reference category was 13 minutes. Employment status did not matter for how much time people dedicated to eating (this is largely due to the fact that the weekday is controlled for).

When income and education were added to the model (Model 2), the results showed that these variables account for class differentiation. More educated people spent more time at the table with their families, and those with income at the level of 50% of the distribution or above, spent significantly more time eating than individuals in the lowest income category.

Selected time constraints did not influence how long family meals took over the day (Model 3). Duration of eating was not associated with weekly time in paid or domestic work or with working in shifts. However, the effect of the day of the week remained significant and strong.

Finally, family composition was not associated with duration of eating over a day, except for those with single parenthood status (Model 4). Age of the youngest child was not significant either, but being a single parent was associated with a nearly 17 minute reduction in time spent eating with other household members.

The net effect of education and income remained significant across all models in Table 2. The finding that more educated individuals spend more time eating is related to, but not explained by them having more frequent meals (Table 1). Differences in frequency of meals do not account for the whole variance attributed to educational disparities (results not shown). Association between the number and duration of family meals is high for all levels of education, but it is the highest for the least educated ones (Pearson's $r=0.70$; $p<0.001$).

Table 2: Covariates of the total duration of family meals per day, ordinary least square (OLS).

Covariates	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.28 (0.13)*[b]	0.20 (0.13)	0.13 (0.14)	0.16 (0.15)
Sex: Female (ref.[a] male)	4.21 (2.61)	2.95 (2.64)	1.58 (3.17)	4.88 (3.26)
Weekend (ref. weekday)	34.4 (2.49)***	34.4 (2.48)***	34.4 (2.48)***	34.4 (2.47)***
Place of birth (ref. born in the UK)				
Born in Europe	15.2 (6.29)*	13.3 (6.39)*	11.7 (6.43)	12.3 (6.42)
Born elsewhere	0.23 (4.00)	–2.73 (4.15)	–3.10 (4.17)	–3.60 (4.17)
Social class (ref. managerial & professional)				
Intermediary	–8.45 (3.13)**	–3.10 (3.31)	–5.10 (3.50)	–5.30 (3.49)
Routine & manual	–13.2 (3.01)***	–4.18 (3.47)	–3.57 (3.60)	–3.57 (3.61)
Employment status: Working (ref. not working)	–5.68 (3.20)	–7.74 (3.29)*	–0.90 (4.19)	–0.45 (4.20)
Education (ref. degree)				
Post-compulsory secondary	……..	–11.7 (3.28)***	–11.0 (3.29)***	–10.1 (3.31)**
Compulsory secondary	……..	–10.1 (4.00)**	–10.1 (4.02)*	–8.69 (4.05)*
Below secondary and none	……..	–13.9 (6.93)*	–14.5 (6.95)*	–13.5 (7.00)
Other	……..	–0.16 (7.31)	–0.62 (7.33)	–0.17 (7.32)
Household income per person (ref. lowest 25%)				
25 – 50%	……..	3.33 (3.63)	4.62 (3.66)	3.21 (3.83)
50 – 75%	……..	10.6 (4.43)*	12.4 (4.49)**	10.5 (4.74)*
Over 75%	……..	14.3 (5.66)**	16.2 (5.73)**	13.4 (6.00)*
Weekly work hours in main job (ref. less than 20)				
21 – 40	……..	……..	–4.93 (4.12)	–5.39 (4.13)
41 – 60	……..	……..	–3.69 (5.49)	–4.65 (5.48)
Over 60	……..	……..	–13.2 (14.4)	–14.2 (14.4)
Weekly domestic work hours (ref. 0)				
Less than 2	……..	……..	1.77 (5.70)	1.87 (5.69)
3 – 6	……..	……..	3.42 (5.35)	3.40 (5.34)
7 – 14	……..	……..	–0.19 (5.16)	0.50 (5.17)
15 and more	……..	……..	5.89 (5.52)	5.36 (5.56)
Shift work (ref: none)				
Working shifts	……..	……..	–6.03 (3.68)	–6.06 (3.67)
Number of children (ref. 1)				
2	……..	……..	……..	–0.43 (2.85)
3 and more	……..	……..	……..	4.29 (4.35)
Age of the youngest child (ref. 0-3)				
4 – 10	……..	……..	……..	–4.59 (3.10)
11 – 17	……..	……..	……..	1.09 (3.76)
Being a single parent (ref. in a couple)	……..	……..	……..	–16.8 (3.99)***
Intercept	47.4 (6.70)***	49.7 (7.24)***	47.5 (9.30)***	48.7 (9.65)***
Number of diary days[c]	3,943	3,943	3,943	3,943

[a] "Ref." stands for "reference category".

[b] Significance level <0.001 is indicated by ***; ** denotes significance level <0.01; * denotes significance level <0.05.

[c] Dummy for missing values is calculated in order to preserve the same number of diary days in all Models but it is not shown.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study provides quantitative evidence of existing socioeconomic status differentiation in eating patterns and allows the disaggregation of the effect of selected variables. Eating patterns in Britain are differentiated by class in the broad picture, but detailed analysis shows that particular class-related characteristics, such as education or income, might play a more important role than occupation-based class category. More educated individuals have more frequent family meals and, overall, dedicate more time to them throughout the day. Income is positively associated with how much time people spend at the table with other household members, but not with how often they eat with them. This suggests that more affluent individuals may have longer but not more frequent family meals.

Selected time constraints related to paid work, in particular having a shift job, matter for the number of meals but not for how long they take over the day. Individuals who work shifts eat with their families less frequently. This suggests that schedule coordination might pose a challenge to having meals together.

Overall, adults living with under-age children have fewer meals per day and spend less time eating than the population average, which might reflect relative time-poverty of this group. This is especially prominent in the case of single parents. The number of children does not influence meal frequency or duration, but their age does. Parents of adolescents have fewer meals with their family members than parents of younger children. Younger children generally need more supervision when eating, and parental presence may take the form of having a meal together. Moreover, eating with young children usually requires little to no schedules coordination. Older children might be at school, have extracurricular activities, or undertake some form of paid work, all of which might make arranging a meal together more challenging. Fewer family meals in families with teenage children might reflect greater independence of those children (also with regard to food choices), diversion of interests of family members or even tensions within family. Though reasons for a lower number of family meals at this life stage of a family cannot be explained in this study, this topic merits more research attention.

Regarding control variables, age proved significant in relation to the number of meals. Gender was significant, but only in the first model. Net of other social characteristics, weekend meals took longer and were more frequent. The effect of weekends remained strong and significant in all models which implies that weekend bears a special significance for family meals and this effect cannot be explained by respondent's work schedule or social background.

Lastly, respondents of European origin other than British had more frequent meals. Due to the small size of this subsample, a more detailed analysis of individuals by ethnic group is not possible. Taking into account existing cross-national differences in duration of eating (e.g. Jarosz, 2016), pursuing this direction of research may be interesting.

Limitations of this study include the fact that it does not jointly analyse the diaries of all family members but focuses only on adults for whom the NSSEC code is available. Status, education, and income as well as weekly working hours in paid or domestic work were self-reported, and they might be subject to bias. Because the data used in this study is cross-sectional, it cannot

add to the debate on the decline of family meal (Murcott, 1997), nor establish a causal link between the variables analysed in the models. Finally, it was not possible to examine the relationship between family eating patterns and BMI. Association between BMI and social class reported in earlier studies (e.g. Armstrong and Reilly, 2003) could be moderated by class-specific eating patterns. The relationship between eating patterns and BMI was confirmed in studies using American time-use data (Hamermesh, 2010; Zick, et al., 2011), and it is worth more research attention.

The results of this study support earlier claims (e.g., Backett-Millburn et al., 2006; Jabs and Devine, 2006; Warin et al., 2015) regarding the necessity to adjust policies aimed at improving eating practices by taking into account class-specific eating behaviours. Among others, policymakers should acknowledge differences in the frequency and duration of family meals, and, in relation to that, the potential effects of parental control or lack of thereof over children's diet.

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