Understanding Feelings, Barriers, and Conflicts in Festivals and Events; the Impact upon Family QOL

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INTRODUCTION

Attending festivals as a family can foster bonding, belonging, happiness, and has the potential to enhance the family's quality-of-life (QOL) over time (Jepson & Stadler 2017). Time and space, money, and rest, health and happiness have been identified as frame conditions for QOL (Stadler & Jepson 2017), which - if positive - can improve a family's ability to attend festivals. In order to enhance a family's QOL through festival attendance festival programmes need to be tailored to families' specific needs and expectations. For example, they need to be safe, affordable, and offer activities that contain dimensions of 'play' that can be interpreted as meaningful to all members of the family.

In this chapter we explore feelings, barriers and family conflict that might arise if the family's needs and expectations are not met, and hence their ability to attend festivals becomes limited. Our chapter begins with a brief discussion surrounding the literature on families and festivals, including family time; motivations for attending festivals; and the role of children in the decision-making process; as well as the potential positive and negative impacts of festival attendance upon family QOL. We then present our methods for data collection and analysis and move on to a discussion of three major themes around the question of *how has family QOL changed as a result of attending festivals and events?* (Jepson & Stadler 2017). This chapter specifically focuses on the potential negative impacts upon the family's QOL through (1) barriers to entry due to high ticket prices; (2) conflicts arising within the family due to overstimulated children; and (3) a lack of opportunities for family bonding. We conclude our chapter with a set of practical recommendations for families, festival organisers and other stakeholders.

FAMILIES AND FAMILY TIME

Modern family structures and relationships are undergoing rapid change; they are vastly different to what was understood to be a nuclear family of two parents and their children (Murdock 1949) during the 1950s-1980s. Many reasons can be attributed to these changes such as the postponement of family formation or fewer child births per family. The average age of first childbirth in women within OECD countries is highest in the UK at 30 years of age despite the UK having the highest percentage of teenage motherhood in OECD countries (OECD 2011). The major reasons behind later childbirth in the UK and generally in western economies is that educational attainment in women has risen leading to an increased desire and likelihood to fulfil their career aspirations. Further important factors in the changing nature of the family structure can be seen in the increase in cohabitation rather than marriage, and higher divorce rates leading to an increase in the number of sole parents or reconstituted families (OECD 2011).

As a result of the ongoing changes to family structure, this chapter adopts Poston, Turnbull, Park, Mannan, Marquis, and Wang's (2003, p. 139) definition of a family; "A family includes the people who think of themselves as part of the family, whether related by blood or marriage or not, and who support and care for each other on a regular basis." Poston et al.'s (2003) study

is valuable as it recognised the importance of the extended family, and the conditions needed to ensure a healthy family such as spending time together, clarifying roles for the adults, respecting each other's individuality, offering unconditional love and support, and having open and honest communication.

Whilst family structures have changed, it is perhaps more important to look at the relationships within the family and how these impact upon its overall QOL; one of the key determining factors in all relationships is the amount of time one has to spend with others or in this case 'family time'.

FAMILY MOTIVATIONS TO ATTEND FESTIVALS

Motivations for attending festivals and events have been widely explored within event studies and event management. The most popular reasons for attendance are cited as bonding between attendees, fostering socialisation and family togetherness (e.g., Uysal et al 1993; Crompton & McKay 1997; Tomljenovic et al 2001; Nicholson & Pearce 2001; Lee, Lee, and Wicks 2004), but limited studies have investigated the long term social benefits of festival attendance which enhance well-being and QOL.

As discussed above, the role of children within the family has changed and increased in importance over recent decades; this has been recognised since the mid- to late 1980s, with a steady increase in family-centred service delivery influenced in part by the continuing marketization of popular children's characters from television programmes. This proliferation has led to the creation of many theme parks orientated towards younger children such as; Sesame Place, Philiadelphia, USA, Nickelodeon Universe, Minnesota, USA, J-World, Tokyo, Japan, Moomin Theme Park, Tokyo Metropolitan area, Japan, Thomasland, Drayton Manor Park, Staffordshire, UK, Peppa Pig World, Paultons park, Hampshire, UK, Hello Kitty Secret Garden, Drusillas Park, East Sussex, UKand more recently Shreks Adventure, London, UK. Service delivery is thereby characterised by family choices, a family strengths perspective and further recognition of the family as a support unit to all its members (Poston et al 2003).

Research has demonstrated that a family day out is about much more than just satisfying adults, and that actually children's satisfaction comes above the needs of parents. Robinson (2008), for example, argues that happy and satisfied children should result in happy and satisfied parents, guardians or carers. When attending festivals as a family, 'happy children' have been identified as the most important factor enhancing the family's happiness overall (Stadler & Jepson 2017). This is particularly the case when parents get a chance to watch their children have fun or learn new things and gain new skills (Robinson 2008). However, although many festivals, attractions and other sites appear to be 'family friendly', it is not always clear what this means and what should/should not be included on site (Light 1996). Successful family attractions, such as the ones mentioned above, create memorable experiences and appeal to all age ranges. Key to success is thereby a combination of enriching educational and/or cultural experiences that are realized through parents (e.g. nostalgic memories) AND children (new, present-day memories). Family togetherness, socialisation and resultant bonding can therefore be seen as the most important motivational influence for families attending festivals and events.

The ways in which families make decisions (e.g. about which festival to attend) involves a subtle, yet complex and dynamic set of processes in which children can exert a decisive influence. Harbaugh et al (2003) found that "at age 7, children's choices about consumption goods show clear evidence of rationality, though also many inconsistencies. By age 11, choices

by children [...] are as rational as choices by adults". Harbaugh et al (2003) further showed in another experiment that children display good bargaining skills as early as 7 years of age. Gram (2007) examined the children's role in family decision making concerning holidays and found that parents thought their children had some impact on the decisions made, while children thought they had quite a high level of impact. Parents have "the decisive vote", but they do take children's wishes and prior experiences into account, both directly and indirectly, especially as children get older and therefore become better informed. A range of strategies are thereby employed, such as pestering, bargaining, compromising, or persuasion, but ultimately, as Gram (2007, p. 27) stresses, supportive parents engage their children in discussions as they want to have "quality time with their children" as well as "peaceful and stress-free holiday time, without conflict."

In relation to events and festivals, Foster and Robinson (2010) looked at motivational factors influencing families to attend events and also found that children are considered a very important factor during the decision-making process. It is not necessarily the novelty or uniqueness of the event, but rather an opportunity to spend quality time with children or, in other words, "family togetherness" (p. 124) that determines which event to attend. Again, this is closely related to the concept of happy children equals happy parents (Robinson 2008).

FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE AND THE IMPACT UPON FAMILY QOL

QOL has been a much-debated topic amongst social scientists in recent years (for a brief overview, see George 2006). Plagnol and Scott (2009) highlight that subjective indicators, such as life satisfaction and happiness, are commonly used to evaluate people's QOL. They go on to say that for most people, the concept of QOL changes over the life course. Rapley (2003, p. 67) stresses a similar concern when he says, " […] the relative importance of various aspects of life may differ at any given moment for each of us, and the relative importance of specific matters may change over a lifetime." Health is regarded as the most important element of QOL throughout one's life, but changes dramatically the older we get; other aspects, such as money, employment, family and friends, and home comforts take on a more or less important role in determining QOL over the life course. Not surprisingly, Plagnol and Scott (2009, p. 11) found that both men and women, "were more likely to mention family as an important aspect of their quality of life five or more years after the birth of their first child." We therefore take forward Poston et al.'s (2003, p. 139) definition of family QOL, which – in contrast to individual QOL – "considers all family members in terms of what it takes for them to have a good life and their "aggregated" perspective."

It is widely argued that social/personal relationships and opportunities to participate in leisure activities are both crucial elements of QOL (Rapley 2003). Cummins (1996), Lloyd and Auld (2002) and Brajsa-Zganec et al (2011) highlight the importance of leisure activities contributing to well-being/QOL, but acknowledge that the interrelationship between these two elements is rather complex. Participating in leisure activities with family or other people with whom one has more intimate relationships, can enhance the family's overall QOL through any one or a combination of building and maintaining social relationships, creating positive memories, feeling positive emotions, and sharing symbols, identities and meanings. Whilst family time and spending time together is an important factor, Agate et al (2009) argued that it is not necessarily the amount of time that families spend together engaging in leisure activities, but rather how meaningful the experiences are to individual family members as well as the family as a whole that is important.

To summarise, research so far has mainly focused on the positive impact of festival attendance (and other family leisure activities) upon an individual's and, to some extent, the family's QOL. We take a more critical look at festival attendance and family QOL and argue that whilst the positive experiences tend to be far greater than the negative ones, family QOL does not automatically change in a positive way as a result of attending a festival. A lack of opportunities to participate in these activities can have a negative impact upon the family's happiness and QOL. Similarly, issues such as family conflict caused by stress and tiredness associated with attending a festival with children, or a lack of activities that are appropriate for different age groups, can easily tear the family apart for the day; hence the desired family togetherness, socialisation, bonding and happiness – key determinants of family QOL – might not be achieved.

METHODS

Our research employed a mixed methodological approach and consisted of several phases. Within this chapter we discuss our focus groups which were informed by Lloyds and Auld's (2002) theoretical perspectives on life satisfaction, happiness and morale, as well as Ragheb and Tate's (1993) theory of frequency of festival engagement against levels of satisfaction. We collected personal accounts around these variables. Focus groups were deemed appropriate to explore the broad context and a range of more specific themes and topics around family QOL, as focus groups provide an opportunity for different voices to be heard and encourage people to openly discuss topics with each other (Rubin & Rubin 1995).

We employed a snowball sampling technique to identify potential participants, contacted local community groups in St Albans and Welwyn Garden City (toddler groups, cultural groups, social media sites), and visited local festivals in Hertfordshire, UK to recruit participants. Three focus groups were conducted with 3-4 family representatives each. We used the term "family" in its broadest sense, where a family "includes the people who think of themselves as part of the family, whether related by blood or marriage or not, and who support and care for each other on a regular basis" (Poston et al 2003, p. 319). The focus groups were held in local church halls or community centres and each lasted for approximately 60 minutes. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and later coded and analysed using NVivo software.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings presented here are based on the family QOL frame conditions published elsewhere (Stadler & Jepson 2017): time & space; money/wealth, and rest, health & happiness. Our findings suggest that each of these frame conditions may restrict a family's ability to attend festivals, cause negative feelings and conflict. The following sections explore and discuss our qualitative data along the themes of barriers to entry due to high ticket prices, family conflict due to overstimulated children, and lack of opportunities for family bonding. All findings and responses from family members across the three focus groups have been anonymised and names have been changed (*Focus Group 1. / FG.1; respondents A -D; Focus group 2. / FG.2; respondents E – G; Focus Group 3. / FG.3; respondents H - J*).

Barriers to entry

Families in our focus groups identified a range of challenges they face when attending festivals, such as parking, lack of childcare facilities, bad weather, etc. However, these were not considered as barriers to entry. High ticket prices, on the other hand, as well as having to pay for each ride once inside the festival space, were discussed by a number of participants in the focus groups as something that can limit the family's ability to attend or lead to family conflict.

> FG.1/C: Yeah, high entrance fees, you know… if you're paying £40 for a family ticket into an event and then it's sort of £2.50 per child for a ride on a merry go round, you're thinking yeah, this is going to be very expensive! So that's when it sort of tallies up and, see… I like doing free things

> A: I'm desperate to take Mike to […] Festival and I'm saying well, he's two-and-a-half, it's not going to be… It's expensive! I mean we can get half price tickets but it's still going to be £70 plus petrol to get round there and everything else. So really we're better off doing something local that's free.

As expressed in the discussion above, participants felt that ticket prices are a major factor in the decision-making process as to which festival to attend. On top of the entrance fee, families have to take into account having to pay for each ride once inside the festival space, which in addition to petrol, food, in some cases parking, and other fees adds to a substantial amount of money for a day out. Many families therefore prefer to attend local festivals that are free. This echoes Foster and Robinson's (2010) point about the importance of small-scale, local, community-type events, which tend to be more family focused in their themes as well. Participants went on to discuss that value for money and appropriate planning are key in these decisions.

> FG.1/C: But also actually value for money because we could do sort of, you know, Legoland and all these other things but they're so expensive and they're…

> A: And they're too young really to get the value out of that anyway.

> C: So I tend to, especially as I, you know, I'm not earning at the moment because I'm on maternity leave, I have to really think about, also how long are we going to be there? Is it going to span over lunch? Because things spiral out and actually it can cost a fortune to go out for a family day out.

Family conflict
Conflict within the family was identified by our participants as a common problem of attending festivals with family and with smaller children in particular. In many cases, there is too much going on at the festival, an issue that can lead to overstimulated children, and in turn to stress, fatigue and conflict amongst the children as well as between children and parents. This then does not create family happiness on the day and does not have a positive impact upon the family's QOL in the long-run.

> FG.2/F: I prefer to go to a park, because it's not just about the financial aspect of spending lots of money, it's like funfair… a funfair with my children would be my worst nightmare because it will turn into a pester power and this and this and this and the noise and the crowds and they'd be off in all different directions because you're outnumbered. … [laughs] It's probably me though more than, I mean they'd love it, but I just find it far too stressful and then you know, if I'm stressed then you're not

dealing with them in a very positive way and a bit more snappy or whatever and then, yeah it's not the kind of experience you were hoping for.

The participant above noted that the children would love to go to a funfair and would enjoy such a day out, but this would not necessarily enhance the family's overall happiness and QOL. This contradicts Robinson's (2008) findings who highlighted that the overall happiness of the family unit is almost solely dependent on the happiness of the children. Taking into account the earlier definition of family QOL by Poston et al (2003, p. 139) which emphasises the family's "aggregated" perspective, our focus group participants admitted that as parents they cannot always positively contribute to the family's overall QOL, if the festival experience is stressful and exhausting for them. A similar issue was discussed in focus group 3, where participants agreed that children might get confused and overwhelmed if there is too much going on at an event, which can lead to conflict and disagreement:

> FG.3/J: I think sometimes if there's so much going on, you're sort of a bit like overwhelmed and the kids are sort of, oh I don't quite know, I'm a bit confused with what I'm...
>
> I: Yeah, I personally, I wouldn't want to see like loads of big rides, I mean that's nice as well but I (…) like anything you learn about a community. I find you're enriched about your community when you go to these things...
>
> J: Especially if there's a theme, and the kids understand that and it's easier for them to understand. Whereas if we go somewhere and it's all a bit higgledy-piggledy, they sort of don't quite know why they're there. It's too much for them, it's overstimulating. And then they start throwing tantrums and my husband and I will start blaming each other for… well, for nothing really… [laughs]. It's just too much!

For many families we spoke to, overstimulated children can cause conflict and disagreement within the family. They acknowledged that with regards to festival experiences, less is more and in some cases, the family as a whole will get more out of participating in just one meaningful activity. This is in line with Agate et al.'s (2009) research, which emphasised that it is not necessarily the amount of time that families spend together engaging in leisure activities, but how meaningful the activities are to individual family members and the family as a whole.

Lack of opportunities for family bonding
Following on from the above argument that family activities should be meaningful to all members of the family, a common theme and challenge for families discussed in our focus groups, was the lack of activities at festivals that are appropriate for different age groups. Families with 3-4 children at different ages identified this as a key challenge on a day out. In many cases, the parents need to split up in order to keep an eye on all children, which ultimately tears the family apart rather than bring them together. This lack of opportunities for family bonding can have a negative impact upon the family's socialisation, happiness and QOL, and makes it difficult to understand the family's "aggregated" perspective on QOL (Poston et al 2003).

FG.1/B: I mean sometimes we're finding on the weekends now that we're, my husband, and I, we'll split up. So he'll take Adam to one thing and I'll stay at home with the baby and that's, that works, but then you're not actually spending any family time together. And I'm also missing out so he'll take him to his football lessons and I don't really know what happens at those because I'm, you know, he doesn't tell me much so…

FG.2/G: Up until quite recently we would split in half because of having two younger ones and then two slightly older ones, it was very difficult because of their different needs and so it was just too much going out as a family, it was just too stressful.

FG.3/J: Keeping track of the kids is our main challenge, it's if the two toddlers get out of the buggy, we've got to be really hot on keeping track of them and keeping them entertained. …there's loads of things that I don't go to because it would just be too difficult. Immediately Lisa will run one way, Tommy will stand still or walk slowly in the other direction and we're immediately separated …we've got to really keep in contact about which one of us is on which child and it just gets, it just gets very stressful very quickly, so…

We previously (Stadler & Jepson 2017, p. 170) identified that festivals "can act as a unique platform for families to share experiences and generate very powerful bonding memories," which in turn can enhance family happiness. Similarly, Foster and Robinson (2010) found that family togetherness was the most important motivating factor for families to attend events, closely followed by socialisation as the second most important factor. However, according to our focus group participants, it is difficult to achieve this if they have to cater for different age groups and different children's needs. This means, they do not always spend time together as a family, they do not socialise and bond as a family and do not create memories together as a family. One could therefore argue that their overall family QOL has not positively changed as a result of attending the festival.

CONCLUSION

Festivals and events harbor a huge opportunity to create playfulness, social interaction and long lasting memories amongst members of a family group, and thus enhance their QOL together. However, this 'snapshot' of our research has demonstrated that there are a number of key issues being overlooked by event planners in relation to a family's wants and needs when they visit a festival or event.

We discovered that under the surface of the desire to take one's family to a festival or event there lies a complex decision making process influenced by perceived barriers to attend (all of which can be linked to QOL domains; time & space; money/wealth, and rest, health & happiness; Stadler & Jepson 2017). We found that while these domains can enable families to visit festivals and events, they also restrict their ability to do so.

The first key issue highlighted by our focus groups was high entrance fees and cost of rides / food and drink, and the family's perceptions of value for money (QOL Domain; Money / wealth). The majority of families were very aware of the marketisation and meaning of festivals and events with many preferring the low cost and familiarity of small scale community festivals

and events whilst also suggesting that these types of events were more likely to appeal to their family.

The second key issue we identified was that of family conflict and the multifaceted reasons behind it (QOL Domain; rest, health & happiness). Most families suggested that a festival and event space can be very confusing to a family, even if they are given a map or directions. This is partly because the family has been placed in a new environment and therefore extra care and attention is needed to look after one's family, which was identified as a cause of fatigue and tiredness. Additionally, if there is too much stimulation, such as bright colors, music, big rides, or too much going on, this can lead to difficulty in making decisions over what to do and can overstimulate children. This was identified as the primary cause of conflict within families.

Our third and final key issue was that of family bonding; essential for memory creation, and overall QOL (QOL Domain; rest, health & happiness). Many family orientated events provided limited opportunities for families to interact together; the festival spaces tended to separate families rather than bring them together. Many of the events we visited tended to provide games, stalls, or activities for a very specific age range; and so activities that all of the family could take part in were limited. This effectively split up the family so at least one of the children within a family unit became separated from their family. We believe this causes a detrimental impact on family socialisation as it reduces the opportunities to bond as a family.

There is a clear opportunity for festival planners, local authorities and voluntary groups to develop festival spaces and programmes that cater to different age groups and offer a range of activities that are meaningful to all members of the family. Moreover, activities and events that have a strong local community element to them will be highly regarded by families local to the area. Families need to feel that they belong and that they have strong foundations; local festivals and events can achieve this if they are designed with this purpose in mind and have local inclusion within their planning processes.

In the case of family festivals and events less is more; opportunities to engage as a family and play together can be far more beneficial than a complex programme of activities and or bright lights and rides. One example we witnessed was a simple ball game to get balls through holes on a wooden board (all handmade by a local school teacher). There were two boards - one was the easy level aimed at small children and one was a larger board aimed at older children and adults. The games were side by side which allowed good socialisation and bonding to take place across the family. Once created, family memories are powerful and emotive, and while these narratives will change over time, as they are told and retold, the point is that we tell the story, we continue to tell the stories and that bond our families together over years and decades.

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