



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Family Group Visitors to Museums and Art Galleries in the UK.

A 2 year AHRC Funded Research Project

The University of Salford

Centre for Heritage Studies

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VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

Phase 1 Report



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Executive Summary

This 2 year research Arts and Humanities Research Council (formerly AHRB) funded project investigates family group visitors at three art galleries/museums in the UK.; one national (the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), one regional (The Millennium Galleries, Sheffield), and one local (Manchester Art Gallery).

This report describes the findings of phase 1 of the project. Quantitative research was conducted with family group visitors, comprising a comprehensive survey undertaken between August and November 2004, that investigated the motivation of family groups for visiting the museum, their experience, their behaviour and demographic information.

Aims of the research

- To investigate the characteristics of family group visitors to the V&A
- To analyse family visitor motivation, influences and experience
- To explore family group activity and response to exhibition design and interpretation at selected exhibits

Objectives of the research

- To provide sound and robust empirical data on the characteristics, influences motivation and experience of family group visitors to the V&A
- To shed light on an underrepresented body of research by disseminating research findings to the academic and wider professional community
- To provide evidence to aid the design process for specific family oriented activity in museums and art galleries
- To provide a sound methodologically tested tool for future studies on family group visitors to museums and galleries

Research Methodology

This a 2 year project with 3 phases of research; phase 1, quantitative research, phase 2, qualitative research, and phase 3, synthesis and dissemination. This report describes the findings of phase 1 of the project; quantitative research into

family group visitors, comprising a comprehensive survey of 200 family groups, undertaken between August and November 2004, investigating the motivation of family groups for visiting, their experience, their behaviour and demographic information.

The questionnaire schedule was based on a review of a wide range of relevant publications, discussion with V&A staff, and an evaluation of the a range of research projects within the Centre for Heritage Studies and Vis a Vis, The Centre for Audience and Visitor Research at the University of Salford, into family group visitors. A pilot study was conducted and the results informed the questionnaire design, reflecting the research hypotheses. These were broadly divided into four sections dealing with motivation, experience, behaviour and demographic information about family group visitors.

Overall, Phase 1 of this study has succeeded in establishing the exact configuration of family visitor groups, showing that there are 6 distinct family types:

- Grandparents and grandchildren
- Mothers and children
- Mothers with other women friends and relatives with their children
- Fathers and children
- Couples with their children
- 3 generation groups

In the main, family groups are small, typically consisting of one adult and one child, and parents are likely to be well-educated and working, either full or part time.

In the V&A, family group visitors were motivated visit the general collection, except for regular visitors who live in London, who specifically visit for workshops or other organised family oriented activities.

Building on the evidence from phase 1, phase 2 will go on to provide robust evaluation of 'family activity' using a range of methodological strategies, This will include an assessment of the experience of organised activity and of family group response to specific methods of interpretation.

Introduction

This 2 year research project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (formerly AHRB), is directed from the Centre for Heritage Studies, and Vis a Vis, the Centre for Audience and Visitor Research at the University of Salford.

The project brief was to investigate family group visitors at three art galleries/museums in the UK.; one national (the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), one regional (The Millennium Galleries, Sheffield), and one local (Manchester Art Gallery).

The project is informed by previous research undertaken by the team into family group visitors from which it became clear that curatorial and managerial assumptions about the nature of family visits may not be accurate. Using quantitative and qualitative methods the study is intended to shed light on family group visits to museums and art galleries. The research is in 2 distinct stages. This report represents the data gathered from stage 1 at the V&A.

The report is organised with a comprehensive overview of the importance of family group research, then 2 sections on the research findings and finally the conclusion, summing up the activities to date.

The Importance of Family Group Research

Current research acknowledges that the composition of a family group is extremely various and difficult to define because of the growing diversity of family types and the contemporary changes in family formation and dissolution (Haskey 1995). Culturally and socially it is more appropriate to discuss 'families' rather than 'the family' because much recent writing on the family in the field of sociology has reflected changes in the politics and dynamics of 'the family': 'families are not clear-cut, but are highly complex and often confusingly fluid social groups' (Gittins 1996). Indeed, currently in the UK, the most common type of household is a family without children; comprising 38% of all households (General Household Survey 2000).

This research has focused on families with children under the age of sixteen, whom the General Household Survey categorises as dependent. These families currently comprise 31% of households (General Household Survey 2000). Families with dependent children include two parent families in which the adults may be married, cohabiting or forming stepfamilies and one parent families in which the adult has either divorced or (increasingly) never married.

The current research takes account of the fact that families are not static structures, but are in a continual process of change according to family type and ethnic background. It is increasingly clear from this and earlier research that the UK General Household Survey (2000) definition of a family as ‘a married or cohabiting couple living alone or with their children, or a lone-parent with his or her children.’ does not adequately describe the diversity of family types encountered throughout research into family visitor groups. Hilke (1989) found, for example, in her study of the Family as a Learning System, that 50% of visitors to the museums under investigation were in groups which included at least one child and in which all the group were related by blood *or* resided in the same household. Hilke included in the research any group that was inter-generational with no more than two adults and four children. Her research found that participating families ranged in size from two to five members. Falk (1991), investigating the behaviour of family visitors in natural history museums concluded that a family was at least one adult and one child, but no more than four adults and five children, differing in age in larger groups. Falk’s research made no effort to identify kinship, but each group appeared to be related (Falk 1991).

Knowing the composition of the family group is important in visitor studies research because a key aspect of family life is the concept of kinship. This refers to relationships based on biological reproduction as well as socially defined relationships (Gelles 1995). Visitor studies research shows that there are fundamental changes to the concept of ‘family’ underway within museums, leading to programming for families and other multigenerational groups and that family groups vary significantly in their composition: grandparents may visit with toddlers, divorced and separated fathers may bring visiting children, young couples may seek mutual interests, siblings of different ages may explore together (Leichter, Hensel and Larson 1989). From existing evidence the National Association of Social Workers’ definition of ‘family’ as

a group that consists of two or more individuals who define themselves as a family and who over a period of time assume those obligations to one another that are generally considered an essential component of family systems (Lentell 1998)

comes much closer to the reality of the families under investigation than any definition that assumes a family consists of two adults married and caring for their own children (Spear 2000). In addition, various family types preferred by different cultures further widens the definition of family. For example, 7% of Indian and 10% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi families in the UK live in multi-family households (Commission for Racial Equality 1999).

Understanding the backgrounds of families also requires complex and subtle concepts of culture. In a multi-ethnic society, families are often in fact members of more than one subgroup (Leichter et al 1989). The diversity of family organisations and family values is reflected in surveys showing a wide variety of opinions about what constitutes a family (Lentell 1998). Families, even those in isolated areas are part of a national culture, often a media culture, and although this larger culture tends to have a homogenizing effect on families it also adds further possibilities to the variations that occur (Leichter et al 1989). Social class, race and ethnicity are major social structural forces that influence the family (Gelles 1995).

Despite wide variations in family type, recent research in European and American museums suggests that the family is a social unit that functions in a consistent way in the museum environment. It functions in this way because of the presence of children, but is not 'children with parents or relatives as extras' (McManus 1994). Some working definitions of family group visitors remove the emphasis on kinship within the group, for example, defining family as a group of people who have a strong and continuing relationship that goes beyond the museum visit (Kropf and Wolins 1989) and this would include 'looked after' children and their carers.

Recognising the diversity in kinds of families, Borun and Dritsas (1997) defined the family as a multigenerational group of no more than six people, at least one of whom is an adult and one a child aged between 5 and 10. The definition of a family must be broad enough to encompass a wide variety of types of family. Further, the composition

of the family group will dictate to some extent the reasons for visiting and the various needs of the family group (Borun et al 1996).

In addition, recent research into grandparents shows that, just as there is no single definition of family, there is no single type of grandparent, but a diverse range including 'companionate grandparents' whose relationship with grandchildren is characterised by closeness, affection and play, 'remote grandparents' who are geographically distant and 'involved grandparents' who assume parental roles such as disciplining their grandchildren (Gelles 1995). Seven factors influence intergenerational contact: distance, age of grandparents and grandchildren, gender, marital status and employment status of grandparents and relations with their children (Aldous 1995). Moussouri (1997) includes a summary of grandparent studies in her research into family agendas and family learning in interactive museums.

In visitor studies research, studying families provides an alternative to concentrating on individual development (Hein 1991). Families come to museums for social and entertainment reasons, but also to learn; and they transform the formal experience into personal activities based on family background and mode of interaction (Hein 1991, Pfrommer 2002). A Recent Mori poll for Resource in the UK found that eight out of ten adult visitors with children aged between 5 and 10 go to art galleries with their children and visit 'because the children want to come' (MORI 2001).

Family groups are typically studied when exhibits are specifically designed with family groups in mind or when families make up the majority of visitors (Macdonald 1993) and evaluating the success of family activities includes defining the target group. For example, the work of the education team at three Tate sites on family activities included the term 'family' used as a short-hand for small groups of adults and children, where the adults may be friends, carers, parents, grandparents or other relatives (Cox et al 2000).

Beyond the studies mentioned above, there is little evidence of the existence of accurate baseline data in relation to family audiences; for example, there appears to be very little recording of the social composition of visitors, including family visitor groups taking place and therefore information is scarce (Pfrommer 2002).

This project is set against the background of increasing interest in the 'visitor experience'. In 1991, the Museums Association in the UK published the Museums Charter as a reminder of the factors essential for 'the creation of a modern and dynamic museum scene' (Museums Association 1991) and in 2002 the Museums Association published the first edition of its Code of Ethics explicitly referring to the many forms of interaction between museum and society, and a 'relationship which is mediated through actions and attitudes at individual and institutional level' (Museums Association 2002). The stated aim of the Museums Association was 'to develop new audiences and deepen the relationship with existing users 'however specialised their subjects, or remote their location' demonstrating an institutional response to government pressure to acknowledge that museums exist to serve the public and that they are funded because of their 'positive social, cultural, educational and economic impact' (Museums Association 2002). Likewise, the Local Government Act of 1993 created a new climate of accountability to the audience that has led to curatorial staff in some art galleries adopting 'family friendly' strategies in order to broaden their appeal. This new approach can be contrasted with evidence from earlier research which found little evidence that curators view their overriding goal as being one of sharing knowledge or communicating with visitors (Wright 1989).

Family Group Visitors to Museums and Art Galleries in the UK is a 2 year project with 3 phases of research; phase 1, quantitative research, phase 2, qualitative research, and phase 3, synthesis and dissemination. This report describes the findings of phase 1 of the project; quantitative research into family group visitors, comprising a comprehensive survey, undertaken between August and November 2004, investigating the motivation of family groups for visiting, their experience, their behaviour and demographic information.

Research team

The project is headed by Pat Sterry; Director of the Centre for Audience and Visitor Research and Director of the Centre for Heritage Studies at the University of Salford. A Research Fellow for the project, Ela Beaumont, was appointed to the Adelphi Research Institute in June 2004. The team has extensive national and international links in visitor studies, and wide expertise in managing visitor studies research projects,

both professionally and with post-graduate trainees. Two research assistants were commissioned to gather and input data in August and September 2004.

Research to date on family group visitors to the V&A

The V&A, in common with a number of other prestigious national museums and galleries in the UK, received Heritage Lottery grants to refurbish several galleries in response to pressing environmental and audience needs as collections have outgrown the building and audiences increasingly expect sophisticated facilities. In general, a condition of such funding is the requirement to provide evidence that the audience is both growing and widening as a result of this investment. The V&A has undertaken research and evaluation to benchmark the current audience profile and identify potential within the gallery's public. They have also identified a number of opportunities, and identified further research into family group visitors as a priority.

In November 2001, the V&A opened the new British Galleries. These galleries were seen as a flagship initiative for the presentation and interpretation of an important V&A collection, because they incorporated a variety of interactive interpretation methods, as well as more conventional text and object labels. Prior to developing the new British Galleries, the V&A carried out a baseline survey of visitors to the old Galleries in 1996-7. In 2002, six months after the opening of the new Galleries, an evolution of the new Galleries was undertaken. Findings from this research suggested that despite the inclusion of interactives, children were not attracted to the Galleries, moreover, 29% of visitors were over 55, and 30% of visitors chose not to use any of the interactives. In June 2003 a further study found that 90% of visitors were using at least one interactive during their visit, but whilst over half of adult visitors used an interactive, only 37% of families did so. In 2004 a quantitative survey of visitors to the British Galleries was carried out, which identified 4 categories of visitors:

- Specialists
- Independent learners
- Families
- Overseas visitors

The term 'families' in this particular survey, related exclusively to adult only groups. The report itself suggests that the label 'family' may be misleading, as the term normally implies adults and children visiting together.

From a marketing perspective, the V&A has segmented its audience into six main groups, these are:

- Families
- Schools
- Students
- Professionals in the creative industries
- Groups
- Individual adults not in other categories

Here, the term 'family' referred to one or more adults visiting with one or more children aged 0-15, or children under 16 visiting alone. The V&A has identified that family groups want to spend leisure time together in a worthwhile pursuit, and that children generally drive the visit. The V&A has further identified that their needs include:

- Level access for baby buggies
- Activities to keep children occupied
- Direct experience and play for children
- Easy text so adults are able to scan and supply answers to questions
- Questions and suggestions to adults for discussion topics and activities
- Displays at suitable heights for children.

The V&A team are clearly responsive to visitor research, pro-active in collecting information, and building on findings. Institutional support from the V&A for the current project to investigate a range of these topics linked to family groups has been provided, with particular support from Morna Hinton (Head of Learning) and Juliette Fritsch (Head of Gallery Interpretation and Evaluation). The aims and objectives of the project are outlined below.

Key personnel at the V&A study site were enthusiastic about participating in the project. The choice of the V&A, London, as a research site offered substantive benefits as follows.

The V&A is:

- Committed to cutting edge visitor research
- Keen to support research that would yield data on a key plank of gallery policy- attracting family visitors.
- Committed to developing family audiences and considered that the current research would provide valuable information.
- At the forefront of initiatives to develop family audiences.
- A flagship site, with galleries recently refurbished through substantial investment, providing an ideal opportunity to generate insights into family visitors to a landmark museum.

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Objectives of the research

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- To shed light on an underrepresented body of research by disseminating research findings to the academic and wider professional community
- To provide evidence to aid the design process for specific family oriented activity in museums and art galleries
- To provide a sound methodologically tested tool for future studies on family group visitors to museums and galleries.

Methodology

Case study strategy was chosen for its empirical nature, allowing for a naturalistic examination of family behaviour within the context of a museum visit, without scrutinising the subjects of the research in an 'experimental' environment.

A survey of documents relating to the case study site was undertaken by the research fellow, throughout a series of visits, during which formal and informal interviews took place. The V&A is amongst a number of galleries that represent an important period in the development and reception of museum collections in the UK. It has generated interest amongst museum professionals, students and the public because they have dedicated children's spaces, commitment to, and emerging strategies for, attracting family audiences.

There are a number of issues that the V&A shares with the wider museum community in relation to its family visitors. For example, demographic data suggests that younger and older visitors are underrepresented, as the museum attract a predominantly upmarket, highly educated adult audience. The V&A has identified opportunities to increase the number and frequency of family group visits, these include:

- Bespoke marketing to an increasingly sophisticated family market
- Cultural and organisational changes to ensure genuine family friendliness
- Permanent and consistent provision
- Coherent and identifiable exhibits, physically and thematically
- Empathy from curators and artists
- Partnerships and cross-venue working
- Innovation and variety in display methods to prevent ennui

There are 2 phases to the research. Phase one of the current research aims to provide a benchmark of information on the characteristics of family group visitors and their motivation, influences and experience in relation to their visit, through a quantitative survey. These data will inform phase 2 of the study, which will provide insights into family group behaviour based on observational and in-depth qualitative research.

Methods

Within the overall case study strategy, for phase 1 of the research, a questionnaire schedule was devised based on visitor studies research by Bourdieu (1971), Heady (1991), Smith and Wolf (1996), Moussouri (1997), Serrell (1998), Arts About Manchester (1998), Bianchi (1999), and Beaumont (2004). The characteristics, structure and item order of the questionnaire constructed for the survey was informed by a review of a wide range of relevant publications, full consultation with V&A personnel and an evaluation of a range of research data within Vis a Vis into family group visitors, and interviews with managers and professionals from relevant organisations. It was also based on an analysis of mission statements from the V&A, and other literature conducted in order to identify key aspects of policy with regard to family group visitors. These are widely represented in the bibliography.

Considerable care was taken in constructing the questionnaire to use language that respondents, including children, will understand. From earlier studies, a list of words was generated derived from the frame of reference of the family group visitors interviewed. These words were incorporated as far as possible into the phrasing of the items in the questionnaire because it is the responsibility of the interviewer to make clear to the respondent what is being asked.

The questionnaire was developed in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel, and the format of the questions determined the types of codes used which in this instance is decimal. The responses to the questions were both numeric and alpha. The coded master sheet shows that each pre-coded interview captured has a unique column in the spreadsheet and that data is gathered using three types of response; tick, numeric or more than one response. For coding textual responses, separate data collection provides a sorted list of categories of responses.

The number of coded responses in the questionnaire was limited to six in order to simplify the analysis, with the exception of data relating to age and ethnicity where there were more. The questionnaire was designed to be field coded using a decimal number system set against the questions and order of response.

Excel is a professional tool within the Microsoft Office suite. It is an industry standard package that is often used for statistical analysis. Its features lend themselves to the

type of analysis frequently carried out in visitor studies research because it provides a set of data analysis tools. When the data and parameters for each analysis are entered Excel uses appropriate statistical macro functions and displays the results in output tables. The data entry spreadsheets can be set against the coding structure and separate worksheets on the spreadsheets validate the data in each cell. Queries relating to entry or absence, range and or size, format and occurrence can be addressed.

Comparative analysis methods are used to examine relationships between pieces of data. Excel provides assistance with multiple worksheets, conditional and variable analysis and has the ability to handle numbers, letters and alpha numeric. Some of these worksheets can be used purely to generate extra analysis which takes separate items of previously entered data to provide new data in the form of correlations. Using Excel it is possible to plot positive and negative correlations between ranges of data. Cross-tabulation allows the analysis to show the relationship between independent and dependent variables by setting up simple tables. Excel will automatically produce such tables once the categories are designed and the data entered; using Excel it is also possible to perform regression analyses on the data.

Fieldwork for phase 1

A pilot study was conducted in the V&A. Finding from the pilot study informed the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire reflects the research hypotheses, derived from the pilot study and is broadly divided into four sections dealing with motivation, experience, behaviour and demographic information about family group visitors. The intention was to provide robust evidence on family group visitors to the V&A. Overall, 200 questionnaires were administered at the V&A, between August 10th and 27th August (the summer vacation) on a variety of days of the week. The refusal rate was low, and families were keen to express take part in the survey. This contrasts with earlier research carried out in the V&A which suffered a higher rate of refusal (Market Research Group 2003), explanations for the high success rate include:

- employing a motivated and personable group of young researchers
- clearly understood procedures and outcomes
- good briefing and training in questionnaire techniques
- the presence of the research fellow on all field visits

- well formulated questionnaire, clearly relevant to respondents' interests

The figure below shows how each question in the questionnaire relates to motivation, experience, behaviour and demographics.

Question no.	Motivation	Experience	Behaviour	Demographics
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

Fig. 1 Questions related to areas of investigation

The strategy employed to capture data was to administer the questionnaires as family groups were leaving the museum (exit survey).

The sample

One of the principle aims of this phase of the research was to establish what 'family' means in the context of family group visitors to art galleries and museums. The sample was not representative of the V&A's visiting public as a whole, but was intentionally biased to explore the museums' adult and children family group visitors, defined by and for the purposes of this study as:

Any multi-generational social group of up to 5-6 people, with children, that comes as a unit to the museum.

This definition was adapted from Hein (2001). Data about family group visitors was collected using questionnaires administered face-to-face.

The data collected included:

- Composition of family groups: the number of individuals in the group, the relationships of people to each other within the group, gender and the ages and ethnicity of people within the family group
- Where family group visitors travelled from
- The distance travelled to visit the case study sites

This information will be useful for the V&A and for the background to further in-depth qualitative research on family visitors in phase 2.

Section 1 Demographic Finding

The findings below are based on coded data from 200 family groups that formed the final sample and are divided into 2 sections: Section one presents an overview of the demographic data on family group visitors, section two presents an overview of data relating to family group motivation for visiting and experience during their visit.

Composition of family visitor groups

Two significant findings early in the analysis phase were:

- Firstly, that adult and children group visitors in the sample were family group visitors according to the definition above. The research excluded school groups, because they are not ‘family groups’ and multi-generational groups that did not contain children, for example, parents visiting with their grown up children. On the other hand, groups larger than 6 were not excluded from the sample, because they were family groups with children, and although there were few such groups, they were significant in the V&A sample, as overseas visitors.
- Secondly, family visitor groups fell into clearly definable family types, and evidence from the analysis of the sample shows that there were 6 distinct family types at the V&A:
 - Grandparents with their grandchildren
 - Mothers with their children

- Mothers and other women friends and relatives with their children
- Fathers with their children
- Couples with their children
- 3 generation groups

37% of family group visitors were mothers with their children, 20% were couples with their children, 10% were mothers and other women and children, 13% were fathers with their children, 7.5% were 3 generation groups, 6% were grandparents and grandchildren, and 6.5% were adults in a caring role, including nannies, friends, and godparents.

Size of family groups

In the V&A, 62% of all family groups consisted of 1 adult with a child or children. 48.6% of all groups had only 1 child, and 32.2% had 2 children. The evidence suggests that family groups are small and the largest single family type is 1 adult with 1 child. The second largest family type is 1 adult with 2 children.

Ages of adults in family groups

At the V&A, the largest group of adults in family visitor groups were age 41-45, but 63% of all adults in family groups were age 36-50. There were very few people over the age of 66. The table below shows the overall spread of ages of adults in family visitor groups.

17-20	1%
21-25	2%
26-30	5%
31-35	12%
36-40	20%
41-45	27%
46-50	16%
51-55	6%
56-60	2%
61-65	6%
66-70	3%
71-75	1%
76-80	0%
80+	0%

Fig 2 Ages of adults in family groups as a percentage, n=200

Ethnic background

Findings on the ethnic background of family group visitors were in keeping with earlier research conducted by Creative Research and Market Research Group, University of Bournemouth for the V&A (2003), as illustrated in the chart below:

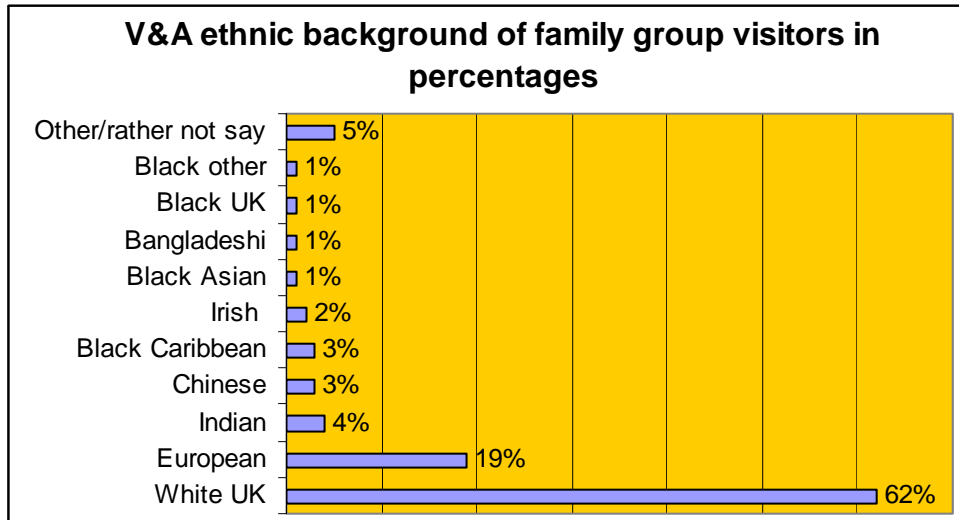


Fig 3 Ethnic background of family group visitors, n-200

How far did family group visitors travel?

In the V&A, 36% of family group visitors came from in and around London, 13% came from abroad, and 51% travelled from different parts of the UK, including Scotland and Wales. 34% of family group visitors were on holiday, that is, staying in London as tourists.

Occupations

The largest single category of adults was people working full time, almost half of respondents (49%) worked full time, and only 8.7% of respondents were retired. 23% of adult respondents at the V&A were either teachers, lecturers or worked in an education related job, in addition, another 10% worked in the arts, heritage or creative industries.

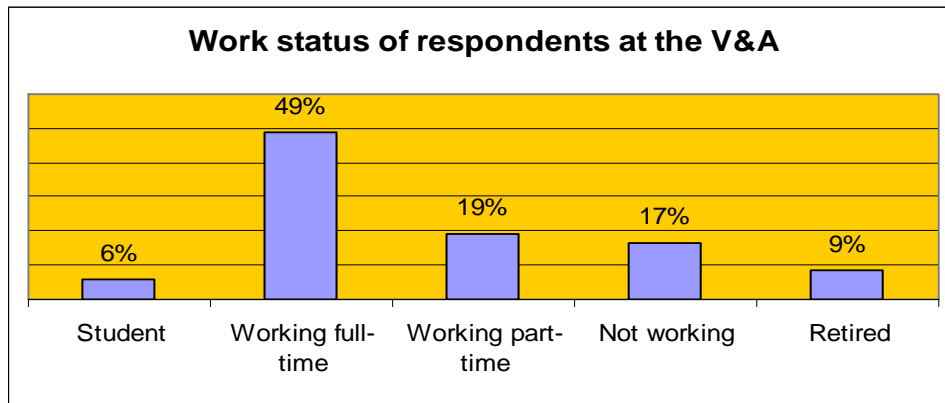


Fig 4 Status of respondents, n=200

Section 2 Motivation and Experience

Information on motivation and experience of family group visitors is based on answers to the following questions:

Question 1: What is your main reason for visiting the museum/gallery today?

Question 2: When did you decide to visit?

Question3: Why did visit this particular museum/gallery and what did you expect to do here?

Question 4: How did you find out about the museum/gallery?

Question 5: Who made the decision to visit here?

Main reason for visiting

Family group visitors suggested a number of reasons for their visit, but a primary reason for visiting the V&A was to see the general collection (33%). At the V&A, an intention to use the family activities was only cited by 8% of respondents. For 47% of respondents reasons for visiting included: 'always wanted to come', 'to see what there was for the children', 'we've just come across from the Natural History Museum', and 'we've done the other London museums'.

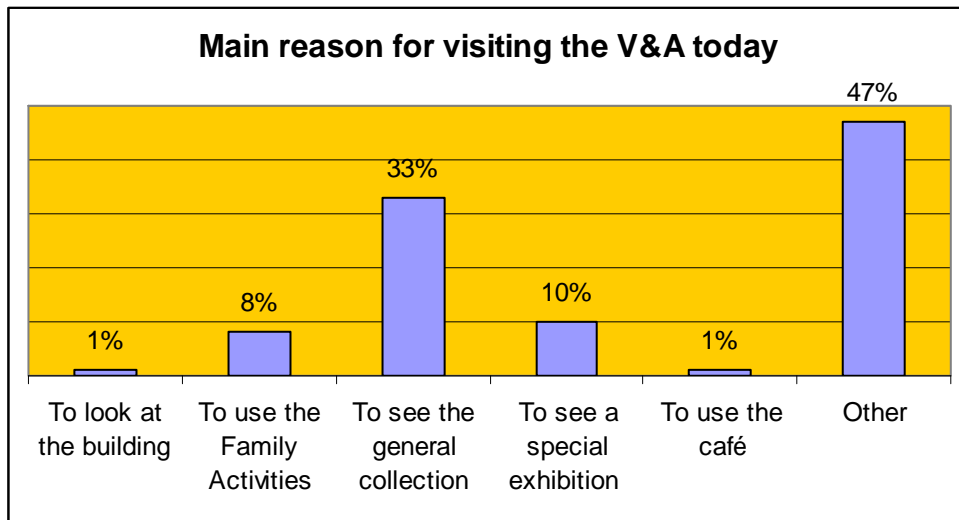


Fig 5 Main reason for visiting the V&A, n=200

When did families decide to visit?

Evidence from research into family groups suggests that the decision to visit is often ‘spur of the moment’. We wanted to test this by asking how long ago the visit was planned. The evidence clearly suggests that the majority of decisions to visit the V&A appear to have been made on the day or the day before.

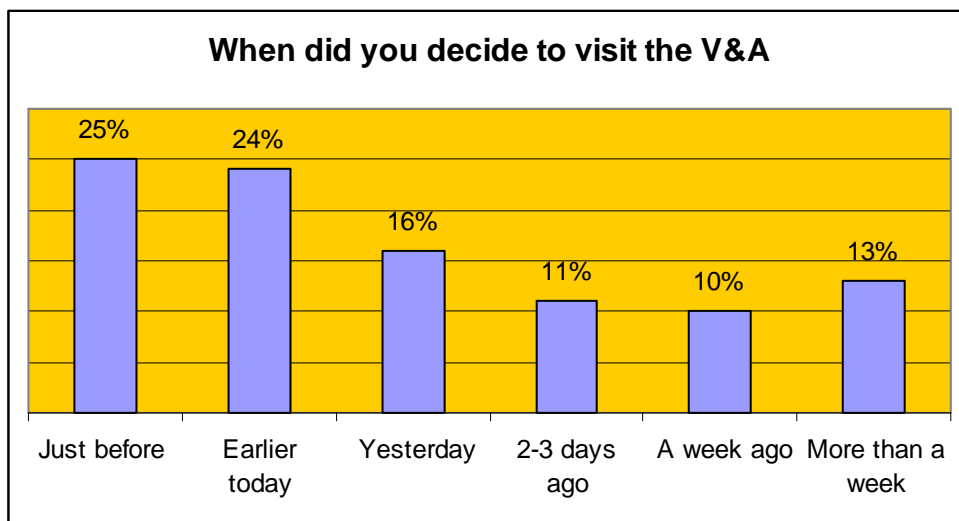


Fig 6 When did you decide to visit? N=200

What did families expect to do during their visit to the V&A?

Teaching and inspiring children (Getty 1991, Borun 1998, Falk 1997) are frequently cited as reasons for families visiting art galleries and museums, although there are often other reasons too. This question explored family visitor expectations, and shows

that the majority of family group visitors to the V&A (69%) expected to learn more during their visit. Only 15% of family group visitors expected entertainment from their visit.

How did families find out about the V&A

The evidence suggests that the single most frequent way that people knew about the V&A was ‘we’ve always known about it’. We also asked whether respondents were on the mailing list and whether the children had told them about it, but neither of these ways of finding out were significant in this study.

The V&A museum appears to be an icon on the cultural landscape of London for both British and overseas visitors, as a ‘must see’.

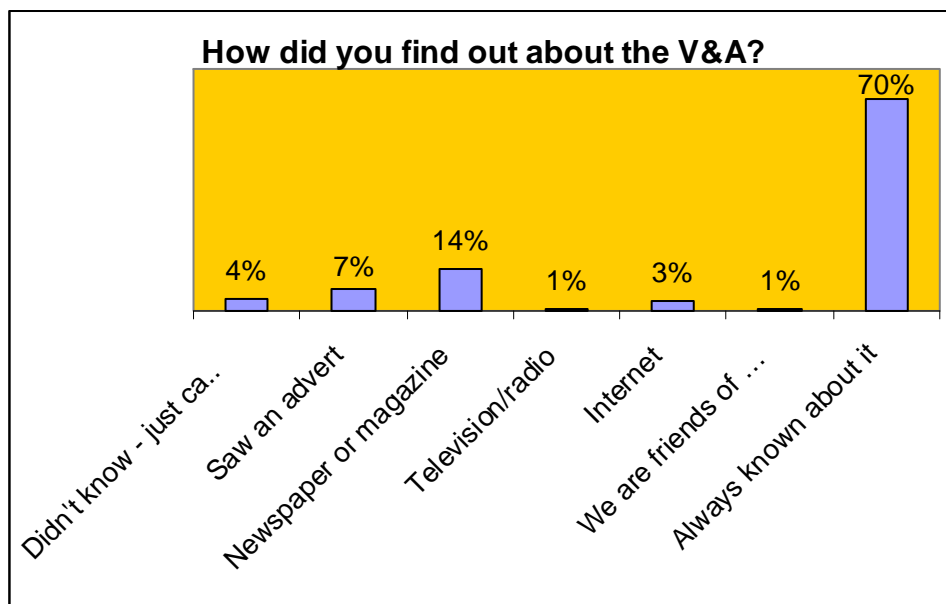


Fig 7 How did you find out about the V&A, n=200

Who made the decision to visit

Evidence from previous research suggests that children are often the instigators of art gallery and museum visits (Cox 2000, Falk 1998). We wanted to test this, and the data suggests that the majority of decisions to visit are made by adults in the family group (83%).

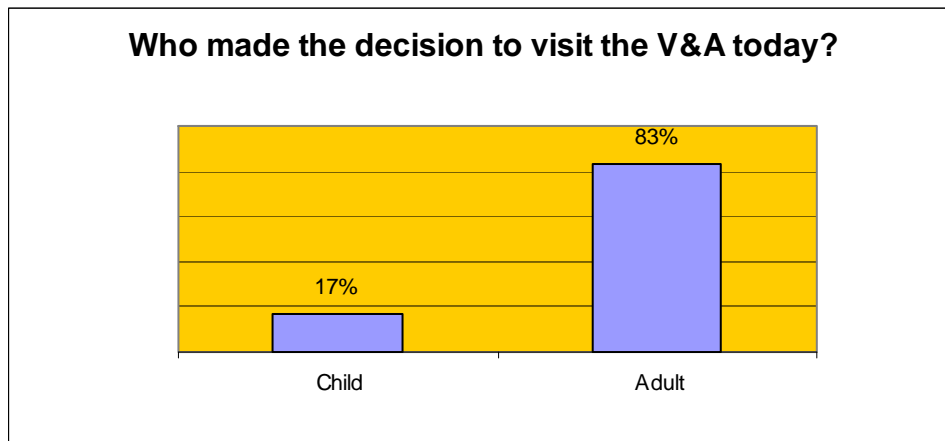


Fig 8 Did an adult or child make the decision to visit? N=200

Have family groups visited before?

Previous research has suggested that art galleries in particular have high numbers of repeat visitors. In this instance, in 62% of family visitor groups to the V&A, at least one person in the group had been before.

How long do family group visitors stay in the V&

The graph below shows that more than half (55%) of family visitors to the V&A stayed more than 2 hours. Overall, 86% of visitors to the V&A stayed for more than an hour.

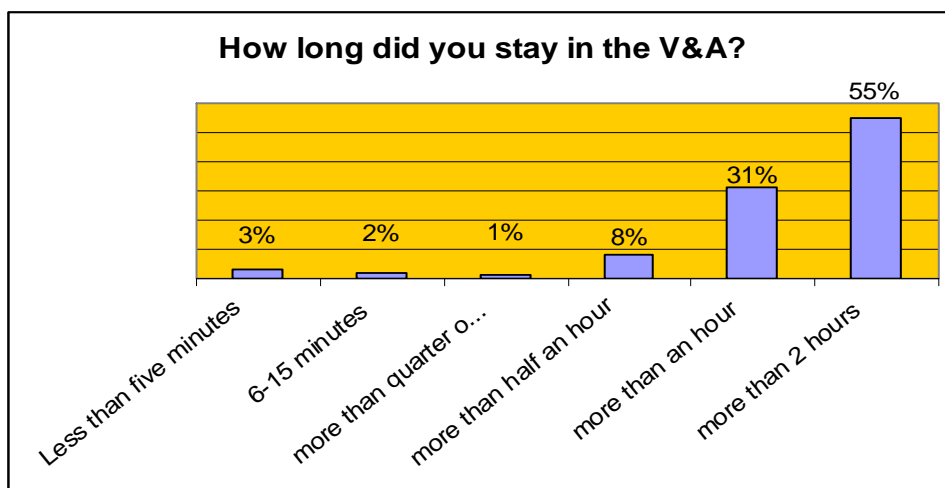


Fig 9 How long have you been in the V&A? n=200

Experience of the visit to the V&A

We asked family group visitors what had been the best aspects of their visit and what they had not liked so much about their visit. Our findings are as follows:

What families liked in the V&A

Families enjoyed the backpack activities, workshops and the interactive sections of the museum. Fashion, textiles and costume exhibits were popular, as were the Chinese, Korean and Indian collections. Weapons, samurai and musical instruments were also popular. Families mentioned the friendly and helpful staff, the way the exhibitions were well-maintained and the opportunity for wandering at length.

What families did not like in the V&A

Family visitors considered the signage confusing, and found the building difficult to navigate. They thought the café was too expensive, the service was slow and without appropriate food for children. In addition, the lunchroom was being used as a pottery workshop so couldn't be used for sandwiches. Many galleries were closed and this was frustrating for families. Printing out from the interactive computers was considered to be too slow.

Conclusions and recommendations for future research from phase 1

Phase one of this study has succeeded in establishing a more accurate configuration of family visitor groups in the V&A, demonstrating that they fall into 6 distinct family types:

- Grandparents and grandchildren
- Mothers and children
- Mothers with other women friends and relatives with their children
- Fathers and children
- Parent couples with their children
- 3 generation groups

Family groups are small, typically consisting of one adult and one child, and parents are likely to be well-educated and working, either full or part time.

In the V&A family group visitors come to see the general collection, except regular visitors who live in London, who visit for workshops or other specifically family oriented activities.

Interestingly few family group visitors used the internet to source details prior to their visit. This was typical across all our case studies.

A number of families interviewed were keen to join in phase 2 of the research and were happy to disclose contact details.

Phase 1 has established accurate baseline data and an overall understanding of the composition of family visitors to underpin the more in-depth research in phase 2.

Phase 2

Building on the evidence from phase 1, phase 2 will go on to provide robust evaluation of ‘family activity’; asking what this means and whether such activities meet the needs of family group visitors and the museum’s objectives. Specifically, the aims in phase 2 are:

- To analyse family visitor motivation, influences and experience
- To explore family group activity and response to exhibition design and interpretation at selected exhibits

The objectives in phase 2 are:

- To provide sound and robust empirical data on the characteristics, influences motivation and experience of family group visitors to the V&A
- To shed light on an underrepresented body of research by disseminating research findings to the academic and wider professional community
- To provide evidence to aid the design process for specific family oriented activity in museums and art galleries

- To provide a sound methodologically tested tool for future studies on family group visitors to museums and galleries

From the evidence, it is clear that there is no comprehensive definition of ‘family activity’ that encompasses the diversity of family friendly provision in each of the case study sites. In general, initiatives aimed at families are intended to increase both the amount of time spent within the gallery and the enjoyment derived from it (Eddisford and Prosser 2002). But families generally visit as a unit, and take part in designated family activities without the guidance of gallery staff. Programmes and activities for families are intended to provide an opportunity for people of all ages to experience the exhibits together, but evidence from a variety of art galleries and museums shows that the term ‘family activity’ is far from self-explanatory.

The term ‘family activity’ appears to be a catch-all description of a wide variety of workshops, events and interactive exhibits. Phase 2 of the research will clarify the relationship between family group visitors, interactive exhibition design and curatorial intent through a series of in-depth case studies using qualitative research methods.

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