

BARRIERS TO TOURISM



Research Partner:
Vision One



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Family Holiday Charity and Vision One would like to thank all the families that took part in this research and that took the time to talk to us about their experiences and the challenges that they face. Without their involvement this valuable research would not have been possible.

This research has been possible thanks to all our supporters that continue to donate to support the work we do in ensuring that all families feel able to have time away together.

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ABOUT FAMILY HOLIDAY CHARITY

Family Holiday Charity helps families get time away together, often for the first time ever.

We're here for children who've never seen the sea. For teenagers who can't remember when they last saw mum smile. For parents having to choose between a day out and a pair of school shoes. For young carers, grandparent carers and families facing illness, isolation, or bereavement.

Holidays open up new possibilities. There's time enough to share a laugh, watch the tide come in, and make happier memories. From a caravan on the coast, a woodland adventure, or a day out at a theme park. Whatever the weather, if it means time spent together, even a day's holiday helps build relationships, confidence and hope for the future.

Family Holiday Charity - for holidays that make a lifetime of difference.

Registered Charity: 800262 in England & Wales, and SC048203 in Scotland



FOREWORD

There's a common perception that the reason why people don't have a holiday is down to money. That the only reason people don't go on holiday is because they can't afford one. We've been monitoring the reasons why families don't take part in tourism for years. And while affordability is a big factor for many, it certainly is not the only reason.

Over the last two years we have been gathering insight to broaden our understanding of why families don't travel. With a better understanding of why families are not taking part in tourism, we can then work with the travel industry and government to make positive changes that will help all families to feel that they can enjoy much needed time away together.

In 2023 we commissioned this research and worked with **Vision One** who are an accredited research agency to help us delve deeper into our understanding of the barriers to tourism that families face, and what part we can all play in helping overcome those barriers.

Outcomes from the research confirmed that families are facing multiple challenges. That life can be complex. And that each family's needs are different from the next. What it also told us is that there are many re-occurring and connecting themes that link families together, and that could change to make tourism more accessible and inclusive for all.

We learned a lot, some of the key highlights are:

- Families want to take part, but often do not have access to the right support and information to know where to start. If you have never been away on holiday before, as many of the families we support have not, then doing this for the first time can be daunting.
- Families feel discouraged from taking part if they have additional needs. These needs could be physical, emotional, or practical. Lack of information about how families with additional needs will be catered for can be off putting and the way that some families are received by staff and other holiday makers can also have a negative impact on families taking part.
- Availability of suitable accommodation, in the right location and at the right price can be challenging to find. Ensuring that the facilities available are equipped for families that might have physical and/or neurodivergence needs can be a deal breaker for some families when choosing to travel or not.
- Logistics of travel, time off from work and being restricted to travelling in school holidays when prices are at their highest is a common theme. Families understand the importance of time away together and what it can bring, but for many it is currently unachievable.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all of the families that took part in the research.

They shared with us their personal experiences and those experiences have help us to gain tremendous insight into just some of the barriers that families are facing. Those firsthand accounts have been invaluable and have inspired us in so many ways.

We would also like to thank the team at Vision One for all of their resources and expertise in working on this piece of research.

Their dedication to promoting the dissemination of knowledge, insights, and findings throughout the project and during its conclusion made them an absolute pleasure to work with.

This research will play an integral role in advancing our knowledge and fostering our commitment in striving to understand those barriers even further. We truly believe that given the right support and with the right changes, more families can be included and will take part in tourism.



Jax Shaw
Director, Experiences & Impact
Family Holiday Charity

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Family Holiday Charity is the UK's largest charity dedicated to supporting families facing tough times to have a holiday. A holiday that for many can be lifechanging.

We have been gathering insight over the last two years to better understand the barriers that families are facing. Our goal as we gather insights is to use the insight beyond delivery of holiday experiences for families and that we do more to widen participation in tourism.

As a friend to the travel industry and government, sharing our insight will support a wider understanding of the core issues facing families excluded from tourism, and therefore have better knowledge to be able to adapt and make positive systemic changes for the better.

So that we can, collectively, work towards ensuring that every family feels able to take part in tourism.

This project started with our own detailed analysis of the barriers that families face to inclusion in tourism from data we have been gathering through the families that use our services. The data gathered told us that there were no less than 187 distinct barriers which we grouped into 12 dimensions. This initial insight showed us that although finances are a big part of why some families do not take part, that there are in fact many other reasons.

There are lots of families going through tough times. We want to make the biggest difference that we can. We focus our core holiday offering on families who:

- Are defined as adults with primary caring responsibility for at least one child under the age of 18 and their siblings.
- Are referred to us by a professional working with them in a supporting role as a representative of a statutory agency or registered charity.
- Have a household income of less than £24,000 per annum.
- That should not have been on a holiday together in the last 4 years.

As we moved forward with this research, the overall aim was to:

- Better understand why families that fall within the above circumstances have not taken part in tourism over the last 4 years or indeed ever.
- How these barriers prevent them from taking part in tourism.
- How these barriers are linked and why / if having multiple barriers makes it more difficult for families to take part in tourism.
- To start to explore what changes need to be made to help support families in being able to participate independently themselves in the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

The research primarily took a qualitative approach, utilising online individual depth interviews (IDIs). This method was selected to give participants a more private forum in which they were able to openly air their views on the subjects being discussed. The IDI's were designed to garner more granularity on the participants perceptions, thoughts, and barriers towards social tourism.

During the field work, Vision One carried out 16 IDI's with participants. With consent from the participants the video calls were recorded so that they could be analysed internally afterwards. The team used a variety of techniques including following carefully designed discussion guides and using visual stimulants to incorporate projective techniques. These techniques allowed moderators to go beyond participants immediate conscious awareness and to support the participants in sharing their views and experiences, in particular with sensitive subjects.

Following the IDI's, Vision One's highly experienced qualitative team conducted the analysis and evaluation of findings as presented in this report.

Quantitative Research

Family Holiday Charity 2017-2023 database

Vision One also conducted some analyses on the 2017-2023 Family Holiday Charity database, which had previously been collected in-house by Family Holiday Charity, to supplement the results of the qualitative research that Vision One conducted to help contextualise the findings.

Vision One were asked to examine the demographic profiles of all of the application types, across people who have travelled with Family Holiday Charity, those who have not travelled, those that cancelled their holiday, had rejected their holiday offer, or withdrawn their application for various reasons in England, Scotland and Wales.

The analysis examined the family size, ethnicity, employment status, and the barriers that they faced. They also examined whether certain barriers were more prevalent in certain demographics, for instance, if family size impacted barrier type.

A supplementary analysis was also conducted on demographics at the local authority level.

The outputs of the analysis are discussed where appropriate in the report.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

Details Of Who Took Part

Vision One's in-house team of specialist recruiters and with the support of the Family Holiday Charity team worked to recruit for 16 in-depth interviews, with:

- 4 participants 'known to Family Holiday Charity' - from the Family Holiday Charity database,
- 2 participants 'that have used Family Holiday Charity' - from the Family Holiday Charity database,
- 10 participants 'free-find respondents' - from a social media campaign that were not known to Family Holiday Charity.

All participants met the eligibility criteria to receive support from Family Holiday Charity:

- Low-income household (total income less than £24,000)
- Not had a family holiday in the last 4 years
- Minimum of 1 child under the age of 18

To reflect the demographics of Family Holiday Charity's historic database of applicants, the research engaged 8 single-parent/guardian families and 8 two-parent/guardian families:

- Two in each of the 8 Single-parent/guardian and 8 Two-parent/guardian families, had mental health barriers (4 total).
- Two in each of the 8 Single-parent/guardian and 8 Two-parent/guardian families, had neurodivergence barriers (4 total).
- Two in each of the 8 Single-parent/guardian and 8 Two-parent/guardian families, had physical health barriers (4 total).
- 1 IDI in each of the parent/guardian groups had barriers not financially driven, and one stated no obvious barriers.

Broadly reflecting the demographics of the Family Holiday Charity historic database of applicants:

- The participants had a broad mix of ages. The average age of the lead parent was 38 years (\pm 7 years) and the sample ranged from 24 to 55 years old.
- 13 of the sample were females, 3 were males.
- Ethnicities included 11 white British, 1 Black African, 1 Black British, 1 Pakistani British and 2 Indian British.
- Participants had a broad geographical spread across the UK, from England (London, Manchester, Kent, Warwickshire, Leeds, Thorne, Loughborough, Birmingham, Hertfordshire, Leicester), South Wales and Scotland.
- Job status ranged from unemployed (10/16) to part-time employed (4/16 as a carer, a supervisor, gift administrator and a builder) and full-time employed (2/16 cleaning supervisor and sales assistant).

Please Note: *The results and findings of qualitative research cannot be projected onto the overall population due to sample selection, moderation techniques and sample size.*

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



60 Second Summary

Important But Difficult:

Participants felt that family holidays were important and essential, but difficult or impossible to access due to the barriers that they faced, which were largely financially driven, but also driven by physical, mental health and neurodivergence barriers.

Physical and mental health barriers required financial, emotional, and practical support to be overcome. Neurodivergence barriers required the same, but with the addition of removing societal judgement.

Varied Experience:

Some had been on a holiday before and knew what to do, whereas others had never been and were anxious about what to expect or overwhelmed with where to start. Support and advice are required for those who are new to holidays.

Flexibility, support, affordability, family friendliness, activities and being close to transport (with short travel time and low costs) were key to a good holiday. The seaside, action/adventure holidays, cultural trips and family visitations were all favourite holidays.

Paying for a holiday depended on their financial situation. It was felt that charities, the government, and the travel industry did not help to support access to family holidays.

Barriers:

Mental health barriers revolved around anxiety about being out of their comfort zone, being overwhelmed with numerous considerations, or feeling helpless. Some felt that going on holiday would help to alleviate these issues but made it harder to take one.

Physical health barriers included chronic fatigue, having unstable or no income due to time off sick, being grounded and unable to travel, or being unable to enjoy a holiday due to being too ill.

Neurodivergence barriers included judgement from others, concern about disputing others, and additional care needs, meaning that a job was impossible.

Ways To Overcome:

Having financial stability, help with holiday costs, support and practical advice, paid transport for the holiday, emotional support, being aware of the support that is available to them, and help from the government and travel industry to alleviate barriers were all cited as ways to overcome barriers to taking a holiday.

Please note: *Clinical anxiety was not examined in the current research and any reference to anxiety is self-reported and can be either used to express an anxious emotional state, or a self – reported diagnosis.*

PERCEPTIONS OF TAKING FAMILY HOLIDAYS

Benefits of a Family Holiday

We asked participants what they thought were the benefits of taking a family holiday.

Rest and relaxation, spending time with family, and forgetting their day-to-day lives were commonly reported, and some felt it was an opportunity to explore and experience new things and build confidence.

“You can spend more time with the family”.

(Male, two-parent with barriers not financially driven)

“Relaxation”

(Female, two-parent with neurodivergence barriers)

“You get to see somewhere that you’ve not visited before and destress, unwind, relax and forget your mundane life”.

(Female, two-parent with neurodivergence barriers)

“The children can kind of experience and do things on their own and get that confidence. Again, meeting new people.”

(Female, two-parent with physical health barriers)

“I just leave everything at home and just forget about it, just that time when we’re on holiday...just to relax and feel refreshed.”

(Female, single parent with physical health barriers)

“To rest, destress, and promote mental health. To see other places to enjoy, and to see the world to expand your worldview of places.”

(Female, single parent with neurodivergence barriers)

“I think just, just for your mental health and having that reset and that refresh and time together and, and just an escape from everything that you’ve got in your real life, your responsibilities.”

(Female, two-parent with mental health barriers)

Perceptions of taking Family Holidays

Complete The Sentence

We asked participants to complete some sentences about family holidays and their benefits, what they mean to them, and what they would do if no challenges existed, to see what was front of mind for them.

For many participants, taking a family holiday was seen as essential. It was felt to be important for rest and relaxation, important for their children to have new experiences, and needed for spending quality time together to bond as a family and to create happy lifelong memories.

Despite this, many participants felt that holidays were too expensive and out of reach for them, due to limited income or unstable employment, and the rising cost of food, accommodation, transportation, and activities.

Others felt that judgement from others was a huge barrier when travelling with children who had special needs, and safety concerns and anxiety about navigating airports or long drives were raised.

If challenges were not preventing them, many had dreams of travelling outside of Europe with the family, many to Disneyland, and some to visit distant relatives. Some preferred the familiarity of their home turf.

"I think taking a family holiday is good for the mind, because everybody needs a rest."
(Female, single-parent family)

"For me, going on a family holiday is too expensive and means that I can't afford to go."
(Female, single-parent family)

"If no challenges existed, I would go on a family holiday to Walt Disney World, because I believe it is one of the best places on earth to visit."
(Female, single-parent family)

"I think taking a family holiday would be a wonderful treat for my daughter, because she's never had a holiday."
(male, single-parent, mental health, not financially driven)

"For me, going on a family holiday is hard because my daughter has special needs, and means that we get judged."
(Female, two-parent, neurodivergence)

"If no challenges existed, I would go on a family holiday to Canada, because I have got family out there."
(female, single -parent family)

Perceptions of taking Family Holidays

Holiday Experience

Participants' experiences of taking a holiday were extremely varied. Some had never been on a family holiday, some had been in childhood but not as an adult, and some had previously been on family holidays but shifting circumstances meant that this was no longer possible.

"I haven't had a permanent job since I left my ex, I've been attempting for three years, there's no stability."

"2020-2021 all got cancelled...we lost it all. We got the money back eventually, but we lost most of it."

- **Have Never Been:** Many participants that we spoke to had never been on a family holiday as an adult, mainly due to financial difficulties or lack of experience and some explained that they wouldn't know what to expect, which caused some anxiety.

"You've got to buy passports for two babies and then all the other kids, you're talking hundreds before you've even started paying for your holiday."

- **Have Been In Childhood:** Some participants fondly recalled childhood holidays in Butlins, Haven and Disney, and explained that they wanted their own children to have the same experiences.

"[Disney] I've been when I was younger. It's quite expensive, yeah, but the memories are amazing."

- **Have Been In The Past:** Some participants had taken their children camping or abroad in the past, but due to life events such as ill health, spousal separation, job loss or financial difficulties they are no longer able to. Some even tried to book pre-covid but had holidays cancelled and lost money.

"Due to circumstances, we can't. My husband got in a car accident, so he is not able to work now and has been home for the last two months."

"I got divorced about five years ago and since then it's been trickier for me to take the boys on holiday."

Perceptions of taking Family Holidays

UK Versus Abroad

Holidays abroad versus the UK are considered differently depending on whether people had taken one before, as their benchmark and expectations were different. Warm weather was important in a holiday, and family expectations and needs needed to be managed.

“For me, abroad would be a holiday and a break away would be a caravan.”

“We met my dad out there, instead of going to Ireland where it’s cold and not very nice, we met in Lanzarote.”

- **Holidays Abroad:** Some people who had been abroad before classed a UK holiday as a break away and abroad as a holiday, as they felt the experience was very different.

“I’d rather go abroad than a UK holiday if I could afford it, it’s the sun, the experience, you feel like you’ve been somewhere. In the UK, you still physically know you’re in the UK. It feels like you’ve had a holiday, the plane is exciting, it’s all an experience.”

- **UK Holidays:** Some people felt that there was plenty to see in the UK, so there was no need to go abroad, except for good weather.

“We tend to go for the UK, we have so much going on here and so much that we haven’t seen yet, it seems nonsensical to go anywhere to get a plane elsewhere. I suppose the weather is the only reason to go abroad, but we don’t mind a rainy day.”

- **Warm Is Best:** Some felt that although they would be grateful for a UK holiday, a warm climate was something that they wanted in an ideal holiday.

“A lot of people seem to go to Spain or Tenerife...anywhere hot and sunny, ideally.”

- **Balancing Family:** Those who used a holiday to visit extended family had to balance close and extended family's needs, and often this involved going abroad.

“At the moment my son and wife want to go somewhere else [than India to see the family] so when my daughter grows up, we will go back again.”

Perceptions of taking Family Holidays A Good/Great Family Holiday

We asked participants what their favourite types of holidays were and the seaside, active/adventure holidays, cultural trips and visiting family were amongst the favourites.

- **Seaside:** Many participants favoured the seaside as an ideal type of holiday:

"I'd say seaside."

"Seaside Holidays."

"Beach holidays."

Adventure: Active/Adventure Holidays were also popular:

"Adventure holiday."

"Activity based."

"Going to a theme park."

- **Culture:** Cultural Trips and destination in different formats:

"[Going to] Hong Kong."

"Some history."

"The Eiffel Tower."

- **Visiting Family:** Some participants consider 'Visiting Family' abroad, as a holiday:

"Canada, because we've got family out there."

"Home to Pakistan."

We also asked what aspects make a good or a great family holiday. Flexibility, entertainment and activities, good weather, family friendliness, good transport links, good food and affordability were important.

What would make it good or great family holiday?

"Being able to cancel on the day."

"Family friendly location."

"Entertainment on site."

"Good entertainment."

"Staff support."

"[Good] weather."

"Activities."

"Good choice of food."

"Excursions and day trips."

"Close to transport."

"Being able to afford it."

Perceptions of taking Family Holidays

A Bad Family Holiday

We asked participants what would make a bad family holiday.

Social: Multiple social factors were stated as causing a bad holiday experience, including overcrowded places such as beaches during summer holidays, not having a second adult present to help with young children, other people's judgement when families are large or have children with special needs, or being in places where drinking a lot is common.

"Crowded!"

"[not having] a second person to help."

"Judgement...people looking."

"Places where people drink a lot!"

Health/Safety: Participants stated that illness, issues with accommodation cleanliness, and concerns over knowing whether a destination is safe would all make for a bad holiday.

"Illness."

"Cleanliness or upkeep of the properties."

"Getting food poisoning."

"Getting robbed...[knowing] whether it's safe."

Practical/Knowledge: Being bored, having a lack of flexibility over payment and booking, and not knowing enough about the holiday or not having what you expected were all stated as bad.

"Not having flexibility, having to pay up front."

"Lack of communication, not knowing what to expect."

"Not doing research beforehand, if it's not what you thought it would be."

HOLIDAY SELECTION SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Booking A Holiday



How participants searched for a holiday depended on their experience of booking a holiday and their motivations/considerations.

“We went to Bridlington; we loved it, and we really want [our daughter] to have that experience.”

(Female, two-parent with mental health barriers)

“I would need help with a travel agent to get some advice for places [to go].”

(Female, single parent with neurodivergence barriers)

- **The Deal Focused:** Savings-driven participants used comparison websites to get the best deal. This tended to be single parents with more holiday experience.

“I would probably try to book online, to be honest, because I know that it's cheaper than when you book through a travel agent.”

(Female, single-parent family)

- **The Experienced Driven:** Some knew exactly what they wanted from a holiday. These participants tended to book directly on the caravan park website and were more often parents who felt they had good support/more stability.

“I'd go through the main park.”

(Female, two-parent, neurodivergence barriers)

- **The Advice Seeker:** Some felt that they didn't know what they were looking for and sought advice through the travel agent and brochures. This tended to be single parents, and two parents with neurodivergence barriers.

“First of all, I'll get my brochures. I need to go to the travel agent and get brochures You've got to really know what you're after before you can compare anything.”

(Male, single-parent, mental health barriers)

- **The Nervous Booker:** Some participants wouldn't know where to start in booking a holiday, which caused nervousness and put them off, so handholding and advice were needed. This tended to be parents with neurodivergence barriers.

“I'd like someone there, sort of hand holding, you know, to go through everything with me because I've never done it before.”

(Female, two-parent, neurodivergence barriers)

Holiday Selection Support and Advice Considerations

The type and number of considerations participants had when booking a holiday depended on the types of barriers that they experienced.

“If she’s not got anything to keep her busy, she gets bored, and that’s what can trigger her.”

“Family friendly where there’s a park for her.”

- **Travel Time:** Many participants with young children or children with neurodivergence barriers needed to factor in travel times and type of transport to minimise distress for the family. Participants with physical health barriers also needed to consider their health with long travel times.

“With a young child, I just want to limit a lot of travel.”

- **Travel Costs:** For families that did not have an income or a car, travel costs were an essential consideration and could cause a lack of holiday participation.

“Flights are so expensive, even if your accommodation is free.”

- **School Holidays:** Almost all participants cited school holidays as a consideration, as they felt that they could not afford a holiday during the school holidays but did not want to risk taking their children out of school during term time.

“I’ve got to think about school holidays, which can cost more money because it’s dearer at that time of year.”

- **Family-Friendly Location:** Having safe accommodation with support and activities available in a family-friendly area was essential for many families, especially for those with neurodivergent children or large families.

“Somewhere I know she will be happy and safe.”

Holiday Selection Support and Advice

Paying For A Holiday



All participants came from low-income households, so they all struggled financially to some extent. Some felt that they could access credit facilities, and some did not understand how credit facilities worked. Some felt that they should save up to ensure they could afford the holiday. Some had help from family members to afford a holiday.

[Credit facilities] “I would assume it would be too expensive. I don’t think you could spread the cost over a long period either.”

- **Pay As You Go:** Some participants explained that they accessed credit facilities to pay in instalments for their holiday, as they would not be able to afford it in one go. Some participants did not know this was available or felt that they could not access it.

“We need to be able to pay it on a payment plan, we can’t pay it all in one go.”

- **Prefer To Save:** Some participants felt anxious about using and affording credit facilities and would prefer to save up for a year or several years.

“I don’t like debt or credit cards or anything like that. I only do what I can afford.”

- **Help From Family:** Some participants received financial support from family members, which enabled them to access a holiday which they would otherwise be unable to afford.

“The Butlins holiday, we’re going with my mum and my stepsister, so the instalments for that are £50 a month. We’ve split it three ways.”

Holiday Selection Support and Advice

Role of Charities, Travel Industry and Government

No participants had heard of any charities that would support families such as themselves, but some had heard of charities such as Make-A-Wish and Family Fund.

Participants felt that the travel industry and the government prevented holiday participation.

- **Role Of Charities:** Aside from those who were familiar with Family Holiday Charity and had used it, no participants had heard of charities that promote social tourism, except for Make A Wish and Family Fund.

“There is Make A Wish and there's a Family Fund, I think, for children with disabilities.”

- **Government & Travel Industry:** Participants felt that the government and the travel industry actively discouraged social tourism for families, as they made it impossible to travel during school term and made it too expensive to travel during school holidays.

“They're not supporting anything for family holidays.”

Holiday Selection Support and Advice Segmentation

Never Been Away As A Family

Characteristics

- Don't know what to expect from a holiday, don't know where to start in looking or getting advice on booking, where to go, how to budget/afford it.
- Unsure how to go about getting transport or how to arrange travel or how much it will cost.
- Unsure about documentation and passports.
- Need extensive information or checklists to avoid feeling overwhelmed and giving up.

Who Are They?

In the current research they were:

- Parents with neurodivergence barriers (both single and two-parent families) and mental health barriers (single and two-parent families).
- Never been on a holiday or been on very few holidays before in a group when they did not have a family to consider.
- Haven't got a good support system/any support system in terms of friends and family.
- Those who suffer from mental health issues, or whose partners suffer from mental health difficulties.

Impactful Solutions:

- Provide educational content and videos online which tells and shows people exactly what to expect from a holiday start to finish to build confidence.
- Show people how to save for a holiday and budget with useful advice.
- Guide people on how to start in researching a holiday, what things to look out for, how to book and where to get further advice.
- Consider that some people need all of this advice given in person, so team up with travel agents to provide a hub where people can pick up brochures and information in a more personal manner.
- Some people think that travel agents are out of their budget, so alternative methods of getting in-person support and advice may be needed. Or look at ways that travel agents can become more inclusive.

Been Before but Challenging

Characteristics

- Know what to expect as they have either been on a UK holiday or abroad, they know how to book and where to go, usually online or a travel agent.
- Usually have older children and have been through the holiday booking process before.
- Some have a good supportive family that helped financially in the past.
- Do not know where to get financial assistance, or assistance in overcoming other challenges such as booking online when what you need is not available.

Who Are They?

In the current research they were:

- Large families of around 10 people as it is very difficult to book online and hard to get help to book.
- All of the sample cited that they did not know where to get financial assistance. People couldn't afford a holiday due to unemployment, poor health (mental and physical health) meaning that they could not get employment, having a neurodivergent child that needed more care meaning that they could not keep employment.
- Holidays are impossible during school holidays due to financial constraints and higher holiday prices.

Impactful Solutions:

- Work with online booking systems and holiday providers to increase the number of children allowed for an online booking.
- Work with the travel industry to create holidays for larger families that are easier to book and have a dedicated section on websites to support larger families looking to book to help them to know what to do.
- Educate all families on how to get financial assistance to take a family holiday and provide help with budgeting.
- Work with government to allow low-income families to travel during term time.
- Work with the travel industry to reduce costs for low-income families and address the in-balance in seasonal costs for holidays specifically in relation to term time vs school holidays.

BARRIERS TO SOCIAL TOURISM

Mental Health Barriers

Participants or their partners suffered from mental health issues such as low mood/depression, anxiety and OCD. Some felt anxious about leaving their safe space, others felt overwhelmed by the logistics of a holiday. Some felt helpless and that a holiday would help but would not make the stress go away, whereas others felt that it would make a holiday difficult but would help a lot.

- **Comfort Zone:** Participants feared the unknown of a holiday and sought the safety of their home. Some lacked confidence due to anxiety.

“I have OCD and because I’ve not been on a holiday, it’s like the unknown. It makes me feel a bit anxious because it’s something out of my comfort zone; my comfort is my home.”

(Female, two-parent, neurodivergence barriers)

- **Helplessness:** Some felt that the stress was a part of them and wasn’t going to go away, even with a holiday

“I don’t know how to put it, I’m not stressed any more, I think it’s just part of my life now. You just get used to it; it just becomes a part of you.”

- **Overwhelmed:** Some felt too overwhelmed and stressed about the holiday logistics

“You always constantly worry about money and paying for stuff and making sure everything’s going to be ok.”

- **Difficult, But Wouldn’t Prevent:** One participant stated that mental health issues make life more difficult, but taking a holiday would aid healing if they could manage to overcome this barrier.

“I don’t think it prevents us from taking a holiday. I think it makes day-to-day stuff more difficult. I reckon that would help.”

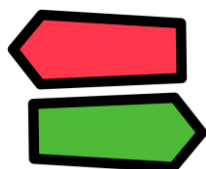
Characteristics

- Participants felt uncomfortable and unsafe when faced with fear of the unknown: taking a family holiday.
- Some felt too overwhelmed to take a holiday as they felt there were too many factors to consider and worried about being able to afford the holiday.
- Some felt that a holiday would not necessarily help, because their stress was something they just had to learn to live with.
- Some felt that it would be more difficult to take a holiday with mental health issues but could help their mental health if they could push through this barrier.

Who Are They?

In the current research those with mental health barriers were;

- White British males with one younger child who had never taken a family holiday.
- Often a single parent or, if in a couple, both were unable to work.



In the Family Holiday Charity participant database, mental health challenges were the most common problem families faced and were most common in larger families.

Impactful Solutions:

- Remove the fear of the unknown by creating videos and online content/tutorials about what to expect from a family holiday and exactly how they can do it from start to finish.
- Create content on budgeting and affording a holiday when you are struggling financially.
- Show people the mental health benefits of taking a holiday in those with mental health issues so that it can support them to understand the difference that it will make, so that they can then be more motivated to do it.

Physical Health Barriers

Having physical health barriers meant that many participants had to take time off work either intermittently, which caused job insecurity, or permanently, which caused financial pressure. Often participants were chronically tired from medication and could not travel long distances. Some felt completely grounded, particularly with acute health issues, and felt they would not enjoy a holiday.

- **Off Sick:** Many participants with physical health barriers had to be off sick from work, which caused financial pressures and prevented them from doing things.

“I will get a job when I feel a lot better but at the moment it’s a massive barrier.”
(Stomach issue, mental health issues)

- **Tiredness:** Participants with chronic illness had to take medication which made them tired, and they suffered from chronic fatigue.

“With Crohn’s disease and fibromyalgia, I get quite tired.... if I didn’t take the medication, I wouldn’t be able to function.”
(Crohn’s disease and fibromyalgia)

- **Travel Issues:** With physical illness, travelling long distances is problematic for some as it can cause symptoms to become exacerbated.

“I want to go Disney World, but even that would have been a challenge for me, all that walking with my health issues.”
(Crohn’s disease and fibromyalgia)

- **Grounded:** With acute physical illness, participants are grounded and are dealing with immediate health concerns.

“When you’re not feeling well, nothing will make you happy.”
(Partner hit by car)

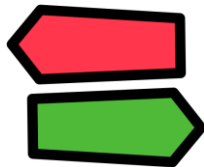
Characteristics

- Physical health barriers often caused participants to be on sick leave or to become unemployed, causing financial pressures.
- People suffered from chronic fatigue due to medication and pain.
- Traveling and mobility was more of an issue for people experiencing this barrier. Long distances were an issue as they could worsen symptoms.
- Often this group pushed themselves to go to work when they were not ready or to travel further for their children's benefit, exacerbating their symptoms.
- Sometimes people were completely grounded due to acute illness.

Who Are They?

In the current research, those with physical health barriers were:

- Those with chronic illnesses such as Crohn's disease or fibromyalgia.
- Often white British single mothers (sometimes two-parent households).
- Those who had experienced an accident (e.g., car crash), and now could not work (Male, Pakistani British).



In the Family Holiday participant database, physical health challenges placed 6th or 7th for the most common challenge faced by families and were most common in larger families of 7-10 people.

Impactful Solutions:

- Work with government and the travel industry to make affordable holidays for those with long term health problems who are unable or find it difficult to work. This will help them to rest and not return to work too early when they are not ready, helping them to recover and avoid flare ups.
- Provide coaches or other transport at a reduced cost to help those who struggle to travel long distances.
- Holidays located close to those in need at a reduced mark-up with travel, could help those suffering from acute illness to access holidays and to rest.

Neurodivergence Barriers

Participants who had children with neurodivergence often felt a huge amount of social pressure. They felt judged by others when their child was triggered in public, and they were concerned about their child upsetting others. Some participants were full-time carers for their neurodivergent children, causing additional financial pressures.

- **Judgment:** For participants with neurodivergent children, feeling judged by others was a huge barrier which prevented them from going to certain places as they wanted to protect their child.

“We don’t feel welcome in places. We took her to have some lunch one day, she got very worked up, then the attitudes of the staff members, it was just horrid. The looks and comments under their breath.”

- **Concerned For Others:** Some participants felt pressured to avoid certain social situations in case their child upset someone.

“My son has ADHD, he’d be running up and down, he’d be jumping, and I wouldn’t want to disturb the other passengers who want to have a nice, peaceful travel.”

*“She’ll just blurt out and whatever’s on her mind comes straight out. She can’t take social cues when someone’s getting a bit p****d off.”*

- **Additional Care Needs:** Neurodivergent children often had additional care needs which was a full-time job itself, which meant that parents were often unable to work, causing financial pressures.

“[My husband is] a carer for my son who’s got autism so he can’t really work.”

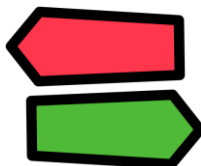
Characteristics

- This group feared judgment from others when their child became overstimulated, had a meltdown, or was loud and energetic.
- They tended to avoid certain places to avoid judgment to protect their child.
- They were worried about their child being loud and disruptive of other people's holidays.
- They found it difficult or even impossible to go to work due to their child having additional care needs, so often they, or their partner in two-parent families, were a full-time carer.
- Some felt isolated and that they would need some respite whilst away, such as a friend to help.

Who Are They?

In the current research, those with neurodivergence barriers were;

- Parents of children, usually young, with autism or ADHD.
- White British or black African female.
- Those who were single parents who were full-time carers. In two-parent families, one of the parents became a full-time carer, which caused financial constraints and led the parent to feel isolated.



In the Family Holiday Charity participant database, neurodivergence barriers fell under the categorisation of 'disability' in 2017-2021 and in 2022 were the 8th and 5th most common challenges experienced by families. In 2023 they were redefined into the category 'mental disability', placing 15th most common challenge.

Impactful Solutions:

- Working with holiday providers to create a safe space where families who experience this challenge can feel safe, welcomed, supported and free from judgement is essential.
- Work with holiday providers to ensure that they create plenty of spaces for children to express themselves without judging others would be important. Whilst ensuring that staff are fully trained and able to support appropriately.
- Holidays should be provided at a reduced cost for full-time carers who have financial constraints.
- Allowing friends or support guests to join the holidays to let the parents relax would be beneficial and would reduce the feeling of isolation.

Other Barriers

Financial issues were a huge barrier and were present across all participants. Not having care support or the ability to take a holiday at the same time as their family, pet care costs, and logistic issues were all significant barriers.

“There’s no disposable. There’s nothing disposable. You’re just kind of living.”

- **Cost of Living:** For many of the participants, the cost of living was the main barrier to social tourism participation, as they were more squeezed than ever and now had to shift priorities to survival.

“It’s hard to allocate any money outside of the bills and the immediate things that need to be paid.”

- **Cost of Holiday:** Participants felt that there were many aspects of a holiday that caused a financial burden, including accommodation, travel and spending money.

“Even if you stay in the UK, you’re going to have to take the money with you because you need to eat out, etcetera.”

- **Support Network:** Without a support network, some felt that they would struggle to take a family holiday. Some mentioned support whilst on holiday so that they could rest.

“Somewhere good and trusted, like a care facility for my daughter, just for me to take two days off.”

- **Work Versus Schools:** Some were allocated holiday times which clashed with the school holidays.

“When I get a holiday, my son can’t go, because he has school, or vice versa at work sometimes.”

- **Animals:** Some raised concerns about pet care costs.

“We’ve got five cats. He’s paying for like, a pet sitter to come and feed them.”

- **Large Families:** Taking a large family on holiday was logistically and financially difficult.

“[We had to take] a private coach because we went with other people as well. The coach cost £300.”

(Family/group with 10 children)

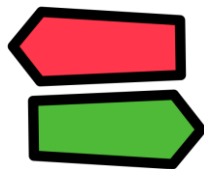
Characteristics

- For all participants, finances were a huge barrier, and many had to allocate money to just surviving day to day. Accommodation, travel, and spending money costs made a holiday completely unfeasible.
- Not having a good support network in the form of family and friends made taking a holiday difficult.
- Having pets was a barrier for those who did not have the money to have pet care or for those without support systems.
- Workplace allocating holidays and schools allocating holidays often clashed.

Who Are They?

In the current research those with other barriers were:

- For financial barriers, all participants as they all met Family Holiday Charity's criteria of a low-income household. Single parents with additional barriers such as mental health, physical health and neurodivergence were most at risk, as well as those with no support systems.
- Single parents were most likely to have a poor support network, as well as first generation immigrants as their families were often abroad.



In the Family Holiday participant database, isolation was the third biggest challenge experienced, with unemployment placing 4th and debt placing 7th on average.

Impactful Solutions:

- Helping people with government grants and reduced cost holidays for low-income households would help those who are just surviving to be able to access a family holiday. It is important to ensure the accommodation, travel and spending money are all considered in order for these families to take part.
- Providing financial support for pet care, or allowing the pets on site and without charge, would facilitate holiday involvement.
- Providing families with additional needs with support and respite whilst on holiday is important to encourage them to take part and to allow them to rest.
- Work with the government for more flexibility for low-income families to take their children on holiday when they are able to according to their shift patterns.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

Knowing participants' level of experience with taking a holiday can help with providing the right level of support and advice. Providing tailored support for an individual family's barriers is important, and working with the government and the travel industry to make holidays more accessible is a must. Financially supporting the whole holiday in some instances is essential, and providing support that can have a long-term positive impact on holiday access was suggested.

- **Level of Experience:** Knowing participants' level of experience with having a holiday can help to determine whether they need practical support and advice. Checklists and informational videos were recommended as ways to help them to know what to expect and to alleviate anxiety or being overwhelmed.
- **Tailored Support:** Providing holidays where people have support tailored to their needs would be beneficial. Single-parent families may need assistance with taking care of multiple children, so having people on-site to help, or allowing additional adults to join them would help.

Having places that are safe and non-judgemental for children with neurodivergence would help parents and children to relax. Having a coach to transport a family of 10 would be beneficial rather than splitting the children between taxis, and having a large accommodation so they do not need to be apart would help.

- **Travel Industry & Government:** This is a big barrier, as many families simply cannot afford to take a holiday when the prices are inflated during school holidays. Some people need to take holidays at specific times of the year, such as during the school term. Working with the government and the travel industry to make this cheaper and more accessible to families would help a lot. Working with travel agents and across the travel industry to provide discounts to low-income families or to those with additional barriers would help.
- **Financial Support:** Some families are more able to access a holiday than others, which is largely due to financial issues. Providing holidays on a sliding scale would be helpful in allowing the lowest income households to access holidays, by providing them with transport, accommodation, and spending money while away.
- **Long-Term Support:** One participant recommended providing financial support towards a car rather than an individual holiday, as this would allow her to regularly take trips with her family, rather than go on a one-off holiday.

Recommendations



Educational Content

- For first timers, show people what to expect from a family holiday from start to finish in the form of videos/content on the website and in-person advisors. This could be in travel agents.
- Information specific for big families and those with neurodivergent children, where to go, what to do and what support is available.
- Educate all families on how to get financial support to take a holiday and how to budget.
- Educate on the mental health benefits of taking a holiday (in particular for those with mental health barriers).
- Show people where they can get different support and advice.

Holiday Providers

- Make it easier for big families to book a holiday, increase the number of children allowed to book on the website or make it easy to contact the provider for help and booking. Work to ensure that a wider range of suitable accommodation is available for larger families.
- Create a safe space for families with neurodivergent children to express themselves and not be judged.
- Provide specialist travel for those with physical disabilities to ensure that they can travel longer distances safely and affordably.
- Provide support for families with additional support needs so that they can rest and relax.
- For those with good support systems already, allow friends or family to come on the holiday and support the parent(s).
- Reduce the cost of the holiday for low-income families and those experiencing additional barriers.

Government

- Work with the government & travel industry to allow low-income families to take affordable holidays, even during term time.
- Provide financial support for all aspects of the holiday for low-income families (particularly with multiple barriers like mental and physical illness and neurodivergence who struggle to work); this financial support includes pet care, accommodation, travel, and spending money.

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