

Families biting their tongues to avoid Brexit rows, research shows

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Experts at the University of Sheffield have found that people are avoiding conversations about politics in order to prevent fall-outs over Brexit.

The research, led by Dr. Katherine Davies from the University's

Department of Sociological Studies, revealed that families are working hard to maintain positive relationships despite disagreements over the UK's [relationship](#) with the European Union—counter to the prevailing narrative of a bitterly divided nation.

The findings emerged from interviews with people from Sheffield and across the north of England—including those who voted to leave and remain, some who had changed their minds since the referendum, some who still felt undecided and some who had not voted at all—designed to explore the everyday impact of Brexit on family relationships.

Many of the participants had [family members](#) who had voted differently to them and most had experienced at least some form of difference of opinion, whether about the Brexit vote itself or some element of its aftermath. However, the study found that participants were not experiencing deep and lasting divisions in their [personal relationships](#) over these differences.

Dr. Davies is now looking for families from Sheffield to take part in a new project that explores in more detail the ways that people are experiencing Brexit in their everyday family lives. This will include a 'Gogglebox-style' session where families will watch a television programme about Brexit together while their responses are recorded. Participants will also be invited to keep short diaries about their experiences of Brexit and take part in interviews.

One participant in the initial round of interviews, a 64-year-old retired secretary called Kate who voted Leave, talked about a disagreement over Brexit at a family dinner party. Kate wished the subject had not been raised, stating: "I would now, on reflection, say what people want to hear."

She added: "I do not like any sort of big confrontation about it all. It's

happened, it's gone, you can't change it."

Brian, a 67-year-old retired civil servant who also voted Leave, talked about his relationship with his youngest son, Josh, who voted Remain. Brian said he often discussed Brexit with Josh and felt defensive about his position on the issue because of what he described as "scathing, sweeping statements" in the media deriding leave voters.

"I felt a bit defensive and I felt the need to try and explain... that when we voted for Brexit it wasn't any kind of knee-jerk reaction... I had to be so careful because it's very easy for us to say, 'listen, we're 67 and...we literally have a lifetime of experience of seeing the comings and goings of various political parties'."

Dr. Katherine Davies, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield, said: "Contrary to the overriding narrative of divided Britain, people are working hard to avoid divisions within their families over Brexit. This does not downplay the fact that some participants had been very upset by the opinions of some [family](#) members, particularly those who had themselves migrated to the UK from EU countries.

"But we see the effort and skill people put into keeping the peace, which requires the ability to understand others in order to make the right decisions about when, where and how to talk politics, and when to remain silent. The fact that these participants had not argued irrevocably about politics is testament to the strength of their [family relationships](#).

"Now we want to explore this further, by using Gogglebox-style recordings to uncover the everyday conversations happening around Brexit in people's homes."

More information: Families interested in taking part in the next phase of this research should contact Dr. Katherine Davies via

K.Davies@sheffield.ac.uk. Shopping vouchers will be given to all participants.

Provided by University of Sheffield

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