



Sweep 1 – Topic Research Findings

Summary of findings from Year 1

The Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) is an important new longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from the early years, through childhood and beyond. Its principal aim is to provide information to support policy-making, but it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. Focusing initially on a cohort of 5,217 children aged 0-1 years old and a cohort of 2,859 children aged 2-3 years old, the first wave of fieldwork began in April 2005. This document is one of a series that summarise key findings from the first sweep of the survey.

Methods

GUS is based on a cohort or longitudinal design involving the recruitment of a 'panel' of children (and their families) who will be revisited on a number of occasions over an extended period of time. Members of the panel were identified in the first instance from Child Benefit records. For the first year of the study, interviewers sought to contact the 'main carer' of the child named in the Child Benefit records. In virtually all cases (99%), this proved to be the child's natural mother. The interview covered a wide range of topics including pregnancy, birth and early parenting, formal and informal sources of support for parents, childcare, child health and development and parental health.

Characteristics and circumstances of children and their families

The baseline figures present a picture of the characteristics and circumstances of children and their families which is drawn on and developed in the rest of the Research Findings. This picture highlights the powerful inter-relationships between demographic factors, family structure and socio-economic circumstances.

Age of mother at birth of cohort child

- Around half of cohort children were born to mothers aged under 30 and half to those aged 30 or over; 8% were born to mothers under the age of 20 and 3% to those aged 40 or over.
- Age of mother at birth of the cohort child was closely related to socio-economic classification, household income and area deprivation: in summary, younger mothers were much more likely to be from less affluent areas and households.

Immediate and extended family

- Around a fifth of the sample lived in a lone parent household (20% babies, 25% toddlers), although the figures were much higher for children from less affluent households and areas and whose mothers were aged under 20 at the time of the birth.
- Cohort children born into lone parent households typically had mothers who were much younger, and who not only had low incomes and lived in social housing but were also more likely to live in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

- Children with young mothers in couple households were also more likely to live in circumstances of low income with associated disadvantages.
- Two-thirds of children with a non-resident parent had some contact with that parent at the time of interview; and a majority had contact at least once a week.
- Virtually all of the cohort children had at least one living grandparent and over half in both cohorts had at least four – indeed, 4% had *five* or more, indicating the growing significance of ‘blended families’.
- Only 7% of babies and 4% of toddlers had a grandparent actually resident in the household, though the figure was much higher for lone parent households (19%) and households where the mother was aged under 20 at the time of birth (28%).

Household employment and income

- In almost three-quarters of households, at least one parent was in full-time employment while a further one in ten had at least one parent in part-time employment; 17% had neither in employment. At the time of interview, 48% of babies’ mothers and 44% of toddlers’ mothers were not in any form of paid work. Most of those who were working were doing so part-time.

Ethnicity and religion

- Overall, 4% of children were from non-white ethnic groups – around a third of these were Pakistani. The data demonstrate a degree of disadvantage for some non-white families and their distinctiveness in a number of respects. As a group, non-white children were more likely than white children to live in a household in the lowest income quartile, to have a stay-at-home mother and to have three or more siblings.

Pregnancy and birth

Maternal experiences of pregnancy and birth were largely positive. But there were important variations in circumstances and experience across different sub-groups and, in particular, among children born to younger mothers, single parents and those from less affluent households and areas.

Whether pregnancy was planned

- Most pregnancies were actively planned (60%) – the vast majority of these were planned by both parents. Around a quarter of mothers said that the pregnancy was ‘not planned at all’ but a further 17% indicated that ‘it wasn’t

planned but I/we didn’t do anything to prevent it happening’.

- Age was a key factor here: only 12% of mothers aged under 20 at time of birth indicated that the pregnancy had been planned and 61% said that it had not been planned at all; for mothers aged 30 to 39 the corresponding figures were 72% and 13%. Other key predictors of a greater likelihood of a planned pregnancy were being in a couple and being in the highest income quartile.
- Overall, seven in ten respondents said they were ‘very happy’ at the point that they had found out about the pregnancy and a similar proportion of those in relationships said that their partner had felt the same way. Not surprisingly perhaps, mothers whose pregnancies were planned were more likely to say that they were happy or very happy about it.

Maternal health during pregnancy

- Just over a third of mothers (37%) had experienced pregnancy-related ill-health requiring medical attention or treatment – most commonly relating to raised blood pressure, bleeding or threatened miscarriage or persistent vomiting. While there were no significant variations in actual health problems, positive self-assessments of health during pregnancy were more likely among older, financially better off and better educated mothers.

Antenatal classes

- Approximately half of all mothers and seven out of ten first-time mothers said they had attended at least some antenatal classes, but there was marked variation by socio-economic group and by maternal age at birth. Around two-thirds of those aged under 20 did not attend any classes; three-quarters of those aged 30 to 39, by contrast, went to most or all.
- The most common reason given by mothers for non-attendance was that they had attended for a previous pregnancy (48%) – but mothers aged under 20 (who were actually least likely to attend) were much more likely than other groups to say that they simply did not like classes/groups (28%) or that they did not know where there were any classes (14%).
- Whilst attendance at antenatal classes was uneven and mainly for first births, the great majority of mothers who did attend (irrespective of age, income or education) said they found them either very useful or fairly useful, and very few said they were not at all useful.

Gestation and birth weight

- Around four in ten cohort babies were born early (with a slightly greater proportion among mothers aged 40 or over). The overall rate of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kilos) was 7%, but the figure was significantly higher among lone parents (10%) and families in the lowest household income quartile (9%).

Type of delivery

- Around six out of ten cohort mothers experienced a normal delivery, while around a quarter had a Caesarean section. Age was the key predictor here, with the number of normal deliveries falling and the number of Caesareans rising with maternal age at birth of the cohort child.

Parenting young children

There is much in the evidence from the study that is positive in relation to parenting young children. Many child-related issues reported at the time of interview were considered to be minor, such as teething or sleeping, suggesting that parents are coping with these and that they are part and parcel of everyday life with very young children. However, some trends emerge that may be important in policy terms: mothers under 20 were more likely than older mothers to report something as a big problem which might reflect levels of support, knowledge and self-confidence.

Maternity leave

- In total, 70% of mothers had a job during their pregnancy with the sample child and the vast majority of this group (85%) took maternity leave from that job. The duration of maternity leave taken varied by socio-economic classification and by household income. For example, women who took more maternity leave were more likely to be in managerial and professional households.

The first three months

- The issues most likely to be seen as either a bit of a problem or a big problem in the first three months after the child was born were wind or colic (47% babies, 41% toddlers), the child's sleeping pattern (38% and 37%) and managing the relationship between the baby and his or her siblings (25% and 22%).
- When asked to identify the single problem that had caused most concern during that period, parents again were most likely to mention wind or colic or sleep patterns; relationships with siblings were less prominent in this context.

- Around four in ten parents said that managing the house and other domestic responsibilities had been a problem during the same period while smaller proportions (between 14% and 18%) said that lack of suitable transport or being able to afford baby clothes and equipment had been a problem.

The situation at the time of the interview

- Approximately half of parents in both cohorts said that their child was sleeping through the night almost every night (48% babies, 52% toddlers).
- Key child-related issues at the time of the interview varied by cohort: in relation to babies, teething and sleep patterns were most likely to be seen as a bit of or a big problem (53% and 33% respectively); for toddlers, the most commonly mentioned problems were getting the child to eat (35%) and managing the relationship with his or her siblings (33%).
- The proportion of parents saying that managing the house and other domestic responsibilities was a problem at the time of the interview was slightly lower than it had been in relation to the first three months, but the proportion finding it a problem to afford clothes and equipment was slightly higher. Other key problems at this time included balancing work and childcare (for parents in both cohorts) and, in relation to toddlers, developmental or behavioural issues (including toilet training).

Breastfeeding

- Across both cohorts, around two-thirds of mothers indicated that they had originally intended to breastfeed their child and around 90% of this group actually did so.
- Levels of intended and actual breastfeeding varied greatly across different groups. For example, older mothers, those in higher income households and those with higher levels of educational qualifications were much more likely to have intended to breastfeed, to have done so at all, and to have still been breastfeeding at 6 months. Only 8% of mothers aged under 20 who breastfed at all were still doing so at 6 months, compared with 33% of those aged 30 to 39 and 40% of those aged 40 or over.
- By the age of 6 months, 96% of babies were regularly eating solid foods. Babies born to lone parents and in less affluent households and areas were more likely to have been introduced to solids at an earlier point.

Parental support

Parents' perceptions of the range of sources of support available to them have been mapped contributing to the knowledge base available to those developing and assessing policies and services designed to support parenting.

Grandparents

- The majority of parents in both cohorts (72% of babies' parents, 69% of toddlers' parents) said they were in regular contact with *all* of the child's grandparents with most of the remainder in regular contact with at least some of them.
- Most children in both cohorts (85%) had at least one grandparent living locally (within 20-30 minutes drive of the child's home) and 14% had no grandparents in the local area. The data indicate that geographical location has some impact on children's access to grandparents, despite the fact that the majority of children in remote rural areas were as likely to have contact with all grandparents and very regular contact with some grandparents as those in urban areas.
- The majority of parents received some support for their parenting from their own parents. However, lone parents, younger mothers and first-time mothers reported a higher level of support from the child's grandparents than parents in couple families, older mothers and mothers who already had other children did.

Involvement of non-resident parents

- Approximately two-thirds of children with a non-resident biological parent (70% of babies and 68% of toddlers) had some contact with that parent at the time of the interview.
- The majority of non-resident parents of babies were reported by the respondent to be either 'very interested' (62%) or 'somewhat interested' (19%) in the child. This differed slightly from parents of toddlers, around half of whom were said to be 'very interested', with just under a quarter 'somewhat interested' in the child. Furthermore, 15% of non-resident parents in the toddler sample were said to be 'not at all interested', compared with 10% of parents within the baby sample.
- A large proportion of non-resident parents took the child on outings or day-trips at least once a week (53% of

parents of babies and 48% of parents of toddlers), with a further 13% and 18%, respectively, taking the child out at least once a month. However, around a quarter of non-resident parents in both cohorts never took their child out on outings or day-trips.

- The level of interest the non-resident parent showed in the child was found to be positively related to the strength of the relationship between the child's resident and non-resident parents. In almost all cases (98%) where the relationship was considered to be very good the non-resident parent was reported to be 'very interested' in the child.

Knowledge of key government supported initiatives aimed at parents and families

- Knowledge and awareness of key Government policies varied greatly. Many parents had limited knowledge of a range of services and policies specifically aimed at supporting their parenting and their child's development. Whilst most had heard of Working Families Tax Credit, the Child Trust Fund, NHS24 and the Children's Traffic Club services such as SureStart, Parentline Scotland and the Childcare Link website and phonenumber were less well known. The better educated and more advantaged mothers were the most informed about these policies.

Attendance at groups and classes for parents and children

- Around 40% of parents in both samples said they had attended a mother and baby or mother and toddler group in the last year. Only a very small proportion of parents in each cohort said they had attended a parenting class or group in the last year – 4% of babies' parents and 3% of toddlers' parents.
- Lone parents and young first mothers were less likely to know about and have attended mother and baby or mother and toddler groups. They were also more likely to feel shy or awkward about attending if they were aware of such groups.
- Almost all respondents who had attended a parenting class or group reported that they found it to be very or fairly useful. A little over half (52%) of parents said the class they attended was very useful and a further 41% said it had been fairly useful.

Child health and development

Children's general health and development was reported by parents as good or very good overall and this assessment was fairly uniform across the population, although there was some evidence of less advanced development by children from more disadvantaged settings and by boys than girls.

Long-standing illness

- Health problems or disabilities lasting (or expected to last) 12 months or more were reported in relation to 13% of babies and 18% of toddlers, with slightly higher rates among lone parents, those in the lowest income quartile and in relation to male babies.

Health problems requiring NHS contact

- Around 8 in 10 babies and 7 in 10 toddlers had experienced at least one health problem (excluding accidents and injuries) that required contact with the NHS. Babies were not only more likely to have had such contact but to have greater frequency of contact.
- Children of parents with lower levels of educational attainment were less likely to have had such contact, suggesting a difference either in service awareness and accessibility, or an education effect in relation to perceptions of health problems.

Accidents and injuries requiring NHS contact

- A minority of parents reported that an accident or injury necessitated NHS help (10% of baby parents and 24% of toddler parents). Boys in both cohorts were slightly more likely than girls to have experienced such accidents or injuries, and rates were also higher among children in lone parent families and among those with parents in routine and semi-routine occupations.
- By far the most common types of accident or injury, reported in 64% of such cases involving babies and 42% of those involving toddlers, was as a result of a bang on the head.
- Only 5% of babies and toddlers were admitted as in-patients as a result of their accidents, although two-thirds of babies and three-quarters of toddlers had to visit accident and emergency departments.

Hospital in-patient admissions

- Around a fifth of toddlers (22%) and 14% of babies had ever been admitted to hospital as an in-patient as a result of an accident or illness. In relation to the toddler sample, rates of admission were markedly higher among lone parent than couple families (29% compared with 20%) and slightly higher among boys than girls (24% compared with 20%).

Child development

- Most parents had no concerns about their children's motor and language development. However, more parents of toddlers than of babies (19% compared with 8%) and of boys than girls (23% compared with 15%), expressed concerns about their child's development, learning and behaviour.
- Higher levels of concern were also expressed by lone parent than couple families (25% compared with 17%), and there is some evidence of a greater level of concern among parents from non-white ethnic backgrounds (although the base sizes are small).
- In terms of developmental milestones among babies, there were few differences between boys and girls in relation to gross motor skills, but girls tended to be more advanced in relation to fine motor skills and communicative gestures. Among toddlers, girls were also more likely to have reached developmental milestones, especially those related to getting dressed or undressed.
- In terms of language development, parents were again more likely to express concerns in relation to male than female toddlers (19% compared with 10%). Parents from households with lower incomes and from minority ethnic groups were also more likely to express such concerns.

Parenting styles and responsibilities

While the majority of parents are unsure about the possibility of being 'taught' how to be a good parent, it is clear that suspicion of professional experts varies according to age, education and socio-economic circumstances, and is highest among young parents. Like much previous research, the data also show that the use of resources and activities by parents is structured by differences in education and socio-economic circumstances.

Attitudes towards parenting

- The majority of parents were sceptical about the possibility of somebody teaching them about parenting: around six in ten agreed with the statement, 'Nobody can teach you to be a good parent, you just have to learn for yourself'.
- Suspicion of professional intervention was much higher among younger mothers – 23% of those under 20 agreed with the statement, 'If you ask for help or advice on parenting from professionals like doctors or social workers, they start taking over', compared with just 5% of mothers in their thirties.
- Responses from younger mothers and those from less affluent households to other statements also suggested they were more likely to find it difficult to know who to ask for help and to actually ask for such help.
- Differences in attitudes to smacking were not as clearly patterned by socio-economic circumstances. Less than half those interviewed agreed that smacking was 'sometimes the only thing that will work'. Agreement with the statement was predicted more strongly by the number of children in the family than by any other variable.

Activities with the child

- The use of resources and parental activities with the child were structured by differences in education and socio-economic circumstances. For example, less affluent children had fewer books with 40% of households in the lowest income quartile having fewer than 10 children's books, compared with 18% in the highest.
- Parents with higher levels of educational attainment spent the most time with children in activities generally regarded as having a high educational value. For example, 76% of baby parents in the highest income quartile looked at books or read stories with their child every day or most days compared with 57% of those in the lowest income group.

Television and other audio or visual media

- Around half the baby cohort (53%) and virtually all the toddler cohort (95%) had watched at least some television in the week preceding the interview.

- In the baby cohort, children with younger mothers were more likely to have watched television and to have watched it more often, as were children from lone parent families and from less affluent households. Children from these households, across both cohorts, were also relatively more likely to have watched television on their own rather than with other household members.

Household division of labour

- The survey found that gendered divisions of labour persisted in the majority of family households. For example, it was clear (for both cohorts) that the majority of household tasks were much more likely to be the main responsibility of the mother – even in situations where both parents were working for more than 16 hours a week. This makes 'work-life balance' a very different prospect for men and women.

Childcare

Parents of three out of five babies and just over three quarters of toddlers used some kind of childcare on a regular basis. The type of childcare used, and the mix of providers varied according to families' circumstances. The cost and availability of affordable childcare may explain at least some of these differences.

Use of childcare

- Most parents (65%) used childcare of some kind on a regular basis for their babies or toddlers and the dominant reason given for using childcare across both cohorts was so that the respondent could work. Parents of toddlers were more likely than parents of babies to be using childcare (76% vs 60%).
- The proportion of families using childcare was higher in cases where at least one of the child's carers was employed and particularly high when the child's mother was working.

Types of childcare used

- The most common type of childcare provider was the child's grandparents, used by around two-thirds of baby families and half of toddler families. Nurseries were the next most common provider used. These were used more often by toddler families than baby families (42% toddlers versus 27% babies).

- Around two-thirds (69%) of families using childcare were using only one childcare arrangement, 28% were using two and 3% were using three or more. Toddler families were more likely than baby families to have multiple arrangements in place.

- Informal childcare was found to be central to almost all families' childcare arrangements but particularly so for families in more economically deprived circumstances. It was used by two-thirds of families who had a childcare arrangement in place, and was even more commonly used by babies' families and by lone parent families.

- Just over half of childcare users had some formal arrangement in place, with slightly higher use of formal providers amongst toddler families.

Number of hours and days per week

- Half of all families using regular childcare had arrangements lasting between 17 and 40 hours per week. Around a quarter (23%) had arrangements for 8 hours or less per week, with a further one in five arrangements totalling between 9 and 16 hours per week. A small proportion (8%) of families used childcare for over 40 hours per week.

Age at which child was first placed in a regular childcare arrangement

- The majority of babies (51%) first received regular childcare between the ages of 6 and 12 months, although a quarter (23%) did so when aged under 3 months. Almost nine out of ten of those families using regular childcare before the child was aged 3 months were using informal care.

Cost of childcare

- Just over half of families paid for the childcare they used; and for almost all the remainder it was free. The average cost of childcare, for the sample child only, was £66 per week. This was more expensive for babies (£75 per week) than for toddlers (£58 per week). Higher income households paid much more than lower income households.

- About one-quarter (27%) of parents reported that paying for childcare was either difficult or very difficult, with lone parents twice as likely to say it was very difficult than partnered parents (12% versus 6%). In addition, parents in the lowest income group were around twice as likely as those in the highest income group to find it difficult to pay for their childcare.

Degree of choice and childcare preferences

- The majority of parents did not think they had much choice of childcare providers. About one in five thought they had no choice at all, with higher proportions of families on low incomes or lone parents expressing this view.

- Just under 1 in 5 of those using childcare indicated that, if they could afford it and it was available, they would use a different main childcare provider to the one they were currently using. Those using informal provision were more likely to indicate a desire to change and private nurseries were by far the most popular alternative selected.

Parental health

Parental health and well-being are important in shaping the early experiences of young children, including their health and development. Overall, the indicators used in the study suggest that general levels of parental health and well-being are good. However, closer examination of differences between sub-groups reinforces the established pattern of inequalities in relation to health.

Physical health

- The vast majority of parents in both cohorts (85%) reported their general health to be either good, very good or excellent. Those in more disadvantaged households, more deprived areas, lone parents and younger parents were less likely to rate their general health as very good or excellent and reported higher rates of longstanding illness.

- Around one in six parents in both cohorts (16% babies, 17% toddlers) reported having a health problem or disability that had lasted (or was expected to last) for more than a year. Of this group, around 4 in 10 (or 7% of the whole sample) reported having a limiting illness or disability. Interestingly, though, there was not a clear relationship between these indicators and measures of self-assessed health.

Health-related quality of life

- The Medical Outcomes Study Short Form (SF-12) was used to assess health-related quality of life. Lone parents were more likely than couple parents to report that poor health or pain affected their lives, with the clearest divergence in relation to emotional measures: for example, 27% of lone parents said that they had accomplished less over the previous four weeks as a result of emotional problems, compared with just 15% of parents in couple families.

Smoking

- Around three in ten parents were current smokers, with marked differences by area deprivation, household income and socio-economic classification. In the toddler cohort, 51% of cohort children in the lowest income quartile lived in a household in which at least one person smoked, compared with just 10% of those in the highest quartile.
- Across both cohorts, about a quarter of mothers said that they smoked while pregnant with the cohort child; and, of those who did, around half said they smoked 'most days'. Four in ten mothers in areas in the most deprived quintile (42%) smoked during the pregnancy, compared with just 9% in the least deprived quintile.

Consumption of alcohol

- In terms of alcohol consumption, the overall picture was of low to moderate drinking with some evidence of more frequent drinking amongst older and more affluent parents but with higher amounts of alcohol consumed, less frequently, by lone or younger parents. Around a quarter of mothers indicated that they drank any alcohol during their pregnancy.

Illicit drug use

- Around a quarter of all parents (26%) said they had ever taken illicit drugs, and the vast majority of this was accounted for by cannabis use. Around one in twenty (5%) said that they had used drugs in the previous 12 months, again predominantly cannabis. Only a very small number of respondents (less than 1%) had used drugs other than cannabis during the time period.

If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any queries about the GUS project, please contact:

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