

INFANT  
COHORT

AT 3 YEARS  
DEC. 2011



# GROWING UP IN IRELAND

## KEY FINDINGS: INFANT COHORT (at 3 years)

### NO. 2 FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDCARE FOR 3-YEAR-OLDS

#### INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of *Key Findings* from the second round of interviews with the Infant Cohort in *Growing Up in Ireland*. The families of 11,100 children were initially interviewed in 2008/2009 when the Study Child was nine months old. They were re-interviewed between January and August 2011, when the children were three years old. This Key Finding presents summary information on family life and childcare for the Study Children.

Family life is a key developmental context for three-year-olds. Parent-child relationships and parenting behaviours such as discipline, as well as family-arranged experiences such as non-parental childcare, are associated with effects on children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical outcomes. Many of the Study Children at age three have experienced changes in their lives such as the arrival of a new sibling or placement in pre-school, centre-based care. This document provides an overview of key changes as well as summarising the family context for the three-year-old Study Children.

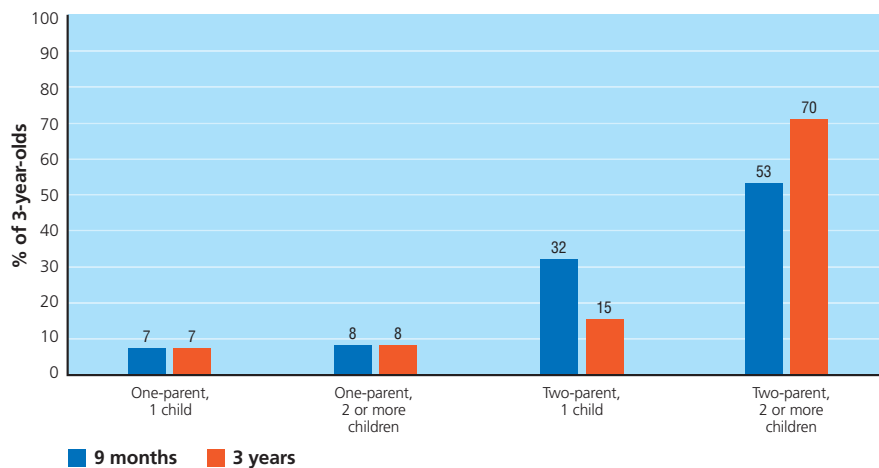


## WHILE THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY STRUCTURE WAS STABLE, THERE HAVE BEEN TRANSITIONS FROM ONE-PARENT FAMILIES TO TWO-PARENT FAMILIES AND VICE VERSA

Changes in family structure, such as parental separation, can affect a child's socio-emotional wellbeing as well as the financial resources available to him or her. Although such effects may often be negative, they are not universally so. This section outlines the changes which occurred in the family structure of the Study Child between the interviews at nine months and three years of age.

Overall percentages of Study Children in one and two-parent families were the same at the nine-month and the three-year interviews (Figure 1). This is due to similar numbers of families changing from a one-parent to a two-parent structure as changed from two-parent to one-parent (between 2% and 3% in each direction).

Figure 1: Distribution of family types at nine months and three years of age



## ONE-THIRD OF STUDY CHILDREN HAD A NEW SIBLING

- The most frequent change to family structure between interviews was the arrival of a new sibling into the family (33% of all families). The birth of a new baby has the potential to trigger significant changes in the life of the Study Child in terms of family dynamics and the re-organisation of resources.
- A new birth was more common for families with two parents (at the time of the nine-month interview) than for one-parent families (35% compared to 18%). New births were also more frequent among families in the professional/managerial group (40%) than in any of the other class categories. This may be due to factors such as greater financial resources, job security or family planning around career and work demands. Mothers in the professional/managerial group had the highest average age when the Study Child was born.



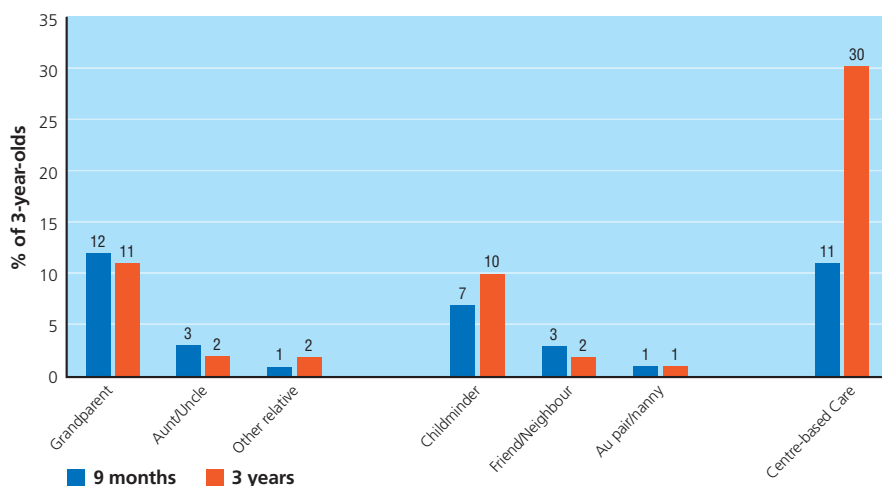
## HALF OF THREE-YEAR-OLDS WERE IN REGULAR NON-PARENTAL CHILDCARE

At three years of age many children were in regular non-parental care, including childcare aimed explicitly at providing school-specific experiences and increasing school readiness. When the Study Child was nine months of age, 68% of mothers reported that they intended to use childcare on a full-time or part-time basis when the child was three years old. However, at age three only 50% of the Study Children were in non-parental childcare for eight or more hours a week.

- The number of children in centre-based childcare almost tripled between nine months and three years, from 11% to 30% (Figure 2).

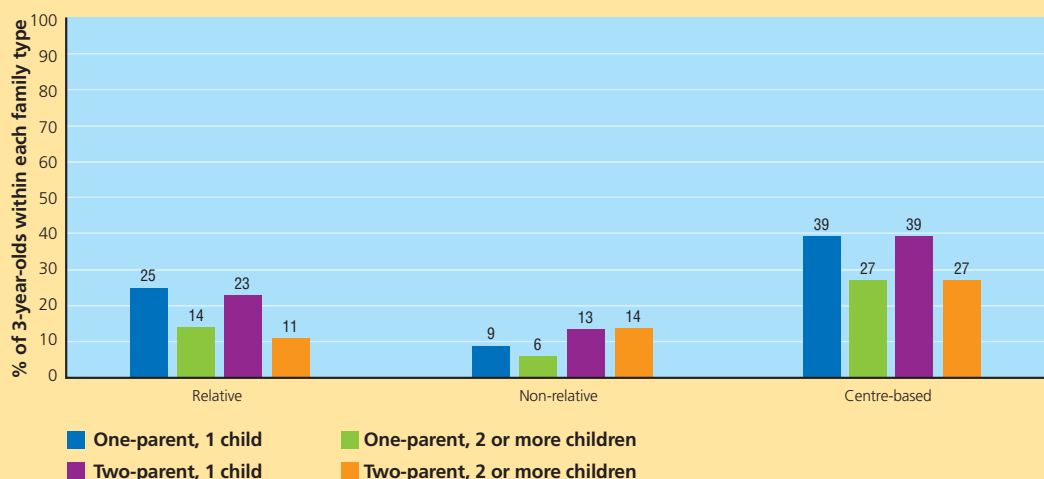
- A similar percentage of grandparents were caring for children at the two ages (Figure 2).
- Most children were cared for by paid childcare providers. Only 7% of children were in unpaid childcare, with relatives providing almost all of these unpaid childcare services.
- Children were spending an average of 23 hours a week in their main type of childcare.
- Most children who experienced non-parental childcare were in only one type of childcare (86%).
- 90% of mothers who had children in non-parental childcare said that the Study Child learned numbers and letters in that childcare arrangement.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children who were cared for by each type of childcare provider at age nine months and at age three years**



- Children in families with more than one child were less likely to be in centre-based care than children in families with two or more children (Figure 3).
- Care by relatives was most common for one-parent families with a single child (25%), and least likely for two-parent families with two or more children (11%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Percentage of children experiencing different types of non-parental care by family type (note that children may have been receiving more than one type of care)**



## GRANDPARENTS WERE AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MANY FAMILIES

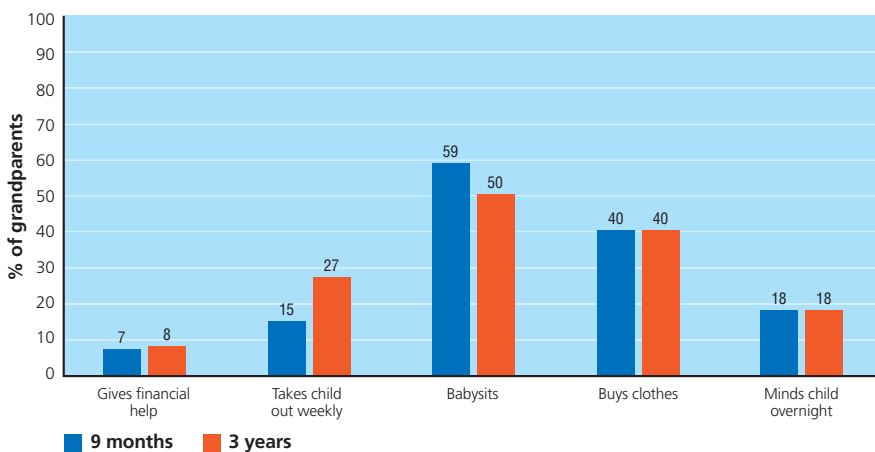
As well as providing childcare for 11% of three-year-olds in the study, many grandparents were in regular contact with, and provided considerable support for, the Study Children and their parents.

- 2% of families had one grandparent living in the household when the Study Child was three years of age. Just over 1% had two grandparents living with them.
- The vast majority of mothers reported that they had regular contact with the Study Child's grandparents (91%) when he or she was three years of age.

The remaining percentages in this section refer to those children in regular contact with grandparents.

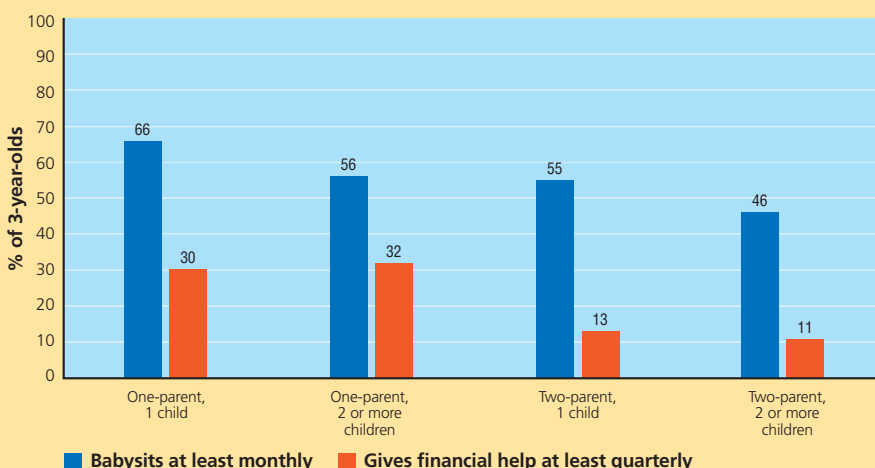
- 36% of mothers reported that the Study Child's grandparents 'helped the [Study] Child learn the ABC/alphabet or numbers/counting' on at least a weekly basis. Over one-half (54%) were reported to have been taught by their grandparents at least once a month.
- While contact with grandparents was high both when the Study Child was nine months and three years old, there was some change in the types of support provided as the child got older. For example, grandparents provided more 'babysitting' on a monthly basis for the Study Child when he or she was nine months of age, but more of them 'took the [Study] Child out' on a weekly basis when he or she was three years of age (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Percentage of grandparents providing each kind of support at least monthly (except taking child out) at nine months of age and three years of age**



- One-parent families were more likely than two-parent families to receive financial support from grandparents (Figure 5). Just under one-third of both one-parent family types received financial support from grandparents at least once every three months (i.e. quarterly).
- Study Children living in one-parent families (with no siblings) were the most likely to be baby-sat by a grandparent at least once a month (66%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: The percentage of three-year-olds whose grandparents provided support in the form of babysitting (at least monthly) and/or financial support (at least quarterly) by family type**



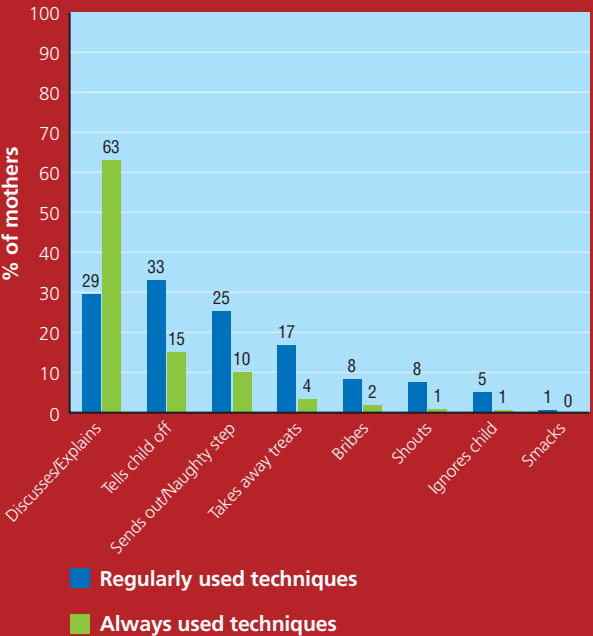
### MOST MOTHERS TALKED THROUGH BAD BEHAVIOUR WITH CHILDREN RATHER THAN USED PUNISHMENTS SUCH AS SMACKING

Discipline is an important part of parenting and effective, fair discipline has been linked with more positive behaviour and emotional wellbeing later in life. Techniques such as discussing why a particular behaviour was wrong may help children to deal more appropriately with difficult situations. In contrast, harsh punishment can contribute to children becoming more aggressive.

When the Study Child was three years old, mothers were asked to report how often they used a range of discipline techniques including ‘discussing or explaining why the behaviour was wrong’, ‘telling him or her off’, ‘sending him or her out of the room/to his or her bedroom/naughty step’, and ‘smacking’. A five-point scale of *never*, *rarely*, *now and again*, *regularly*, and *always* was used.

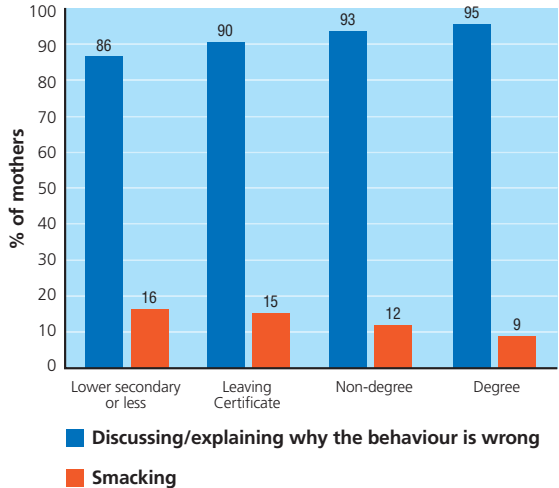
- The most frequently used discipline technique was ‘discussing or explaining why the behaviour was wrong’, with 63% of mothers saying they *always* did this (Figure 6).
- 92% of mothers used ‘discussing or explaining why the behaviour was wrong’ at least *regularly* (i.e. either *regularly* or *always*) while 48% used ‘telling the [Study] Child off’ and 35% used ‘sending him or her out of the room.../naughty step’ at least *regularly* (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Percentage of mothers who reported using each discipline technique either regularly or always**



- 12% of mothers used ‘smacking’ as a form of discipline *now and again* and less than 1% used ‘smacking’ as a form of discipline more frequently. Over half reported that they *never* smacked the Study Child.
- Mothers with a higher level of education were more likely to ‘discuss or explain why the behaviour was wrong’ either *regularly* or *always*; and were less likely to use ‘smacking’ as a discipline technique either *now and again* or more often (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Reported use of discussing or explaining why the behaviour was wrong (regularly or always) and smacking (now and again or more often) by mother’s education**





***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the National Longitudinal Study of Children. It tracks the development of two nationally representative cohorts of children: an *Infant Cohort* which was interviewed initially at nine months and subsequently at three years of age; and a *Child Cohort* which was interviewed initially at nine years and subsequently at 13 years of age.

The Study is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

The first wave of fieldwork with the families of the Infant Cohort included approximately 11,100 nine-month-olds, their parents and carers. Interviews began in September 2008 and were completed in March 2009. Interviews for the second round of interviews with this cohort took place between January and August 2011. A total of 90% of the original sample of nine-month-olds were successfully re-interviewed.

#### **Access to *Growing Up in Ireland* data**

An anonymised version of all quantitative and qualitative data collected in *Growing Up in Ireland* is being made available through the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) (<http://www.ucd.ie/issda/data/growingupinireland/>) and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) (<http://www.iqda.ie/content/growing-ireland>).

#### **'Thank you' to all participants**

The success of *Growing Up in Ireland* is the result of contributions from a large range of individuals, organisations and groups, many of whom helped to recruit the sample and collect the data. We are particularly grateful to the thousands of families from every part of the country who gave so very generously of their time on two occasions to make this Study possible. A very big 'thank-you' to the children and their families.

**[www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie)**



**Growing Up  
in Ireland**  
National Longitudinal  
Study of Children

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