

# The changing social worlds of 9-year-olds

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## VENUE

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## AUTHORS

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# Acknowledgements

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- Research partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)
- Members of programme steering group
- Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Study Team
- GUI families



## Background to the study

# Introduction

- Two cohorts of GUI enable us to look at the experiences of 9-year-olds a decade apart – 2007/8 (Cohort '98) and 2017/18 (Cohort '08)
- Period of rapid social, economic and policy change
- Cohort '08 were born on the cusp of the Great Recession so experienced challenging economic circumstances in early childhood and impact of austerity measures on services
- Penetration of digital technology
- Introduction of parental leave (both cohorts); subsequently increased (C08)
- ECCE scheme – Cohort '08
- Literacy and numeracy strategy at primary level; DEIS programme

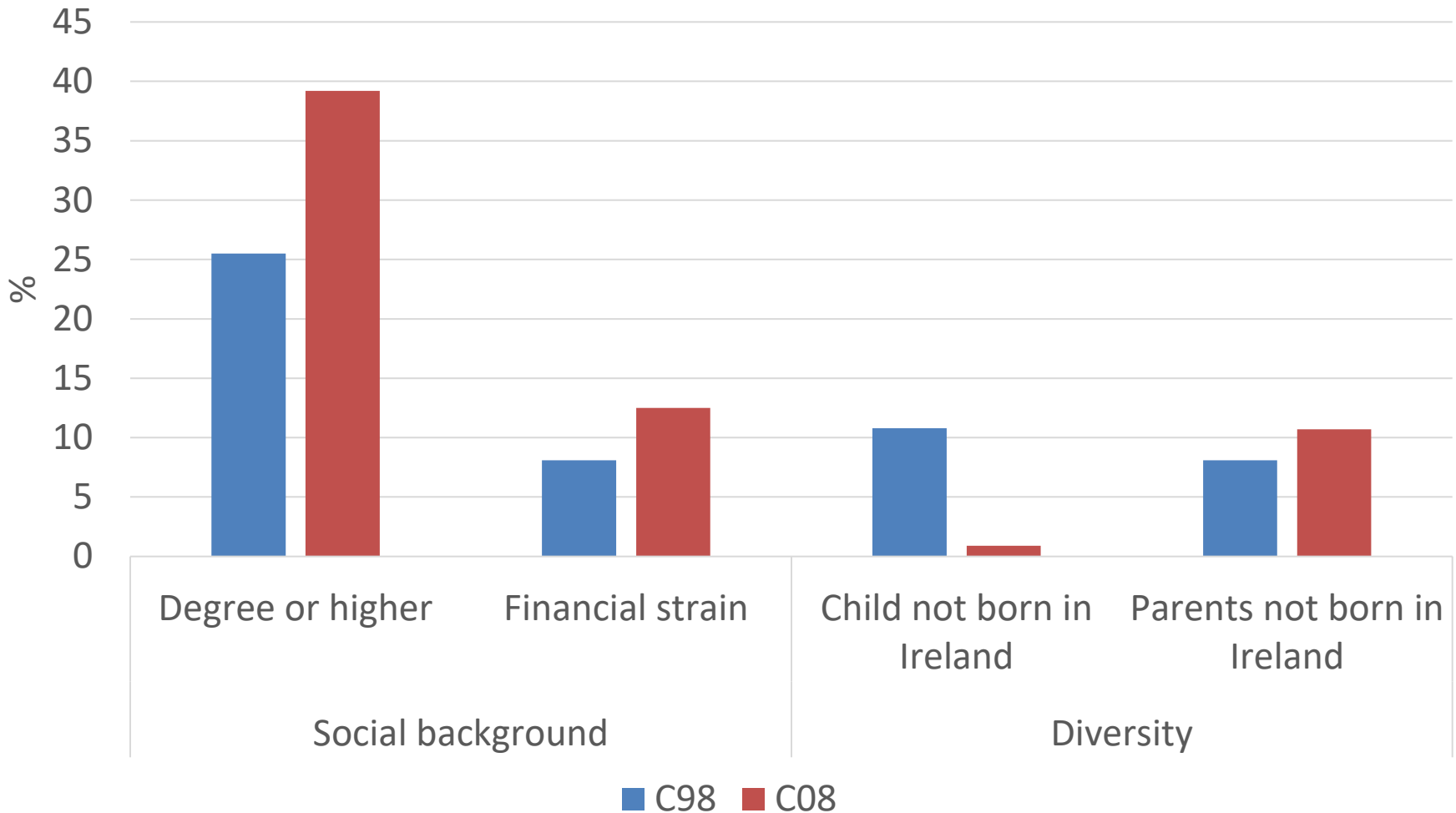
# Research questions

- How have the quality of family and peer relationships, experience of learning and activities engaged in by 9-year-olds changed over the course of a decade?
- Are any differences found due to changes in child, family and social background characteristics?
- Is differentiation by gender and social background in children's social worlds less evident for the younger cohort than previously?
- Use both survey and time-use data because of changes in information collected

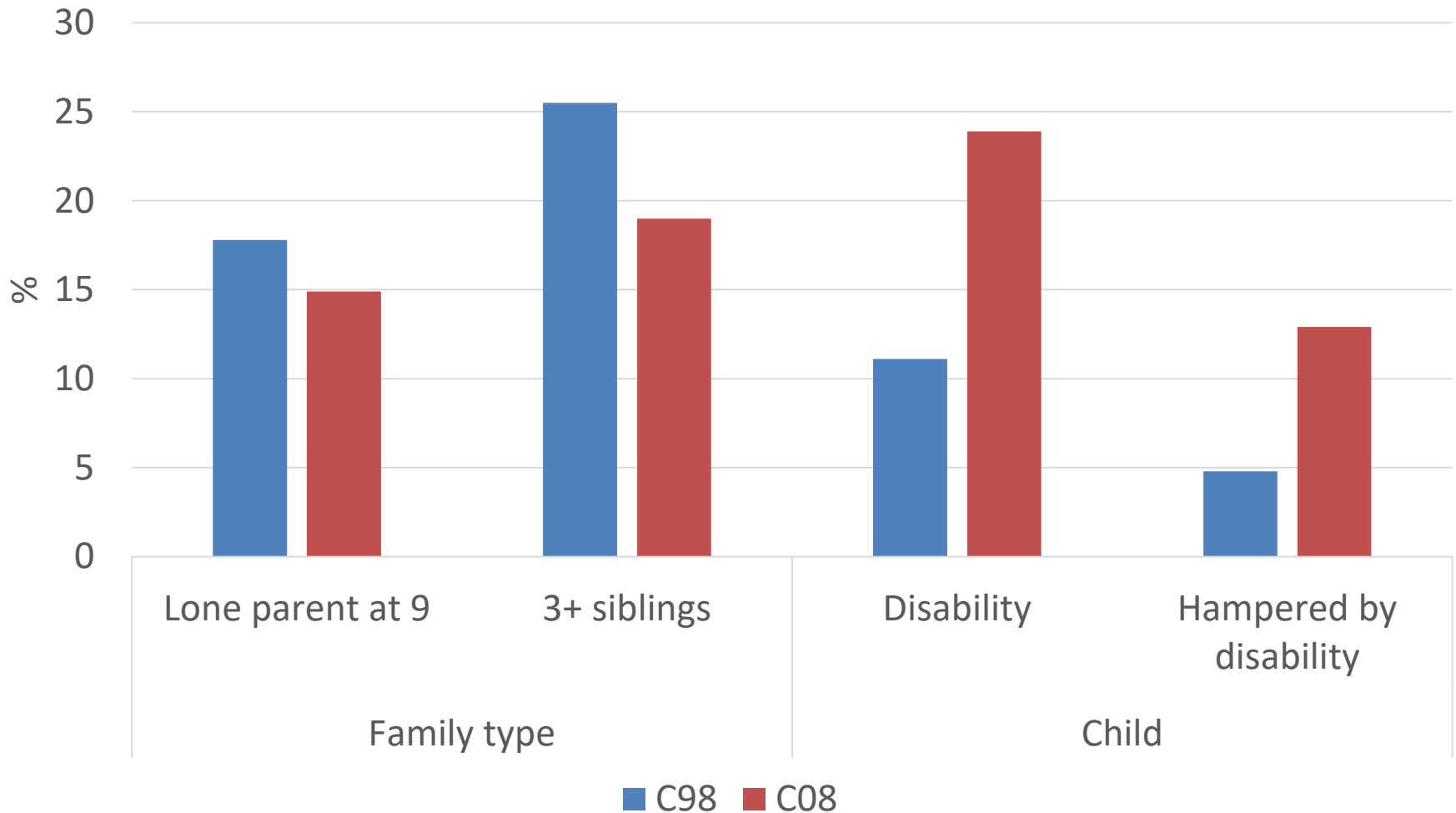


# Changes in the profile of families and children

# Family background and diversity



# Family structure and child illness/disability





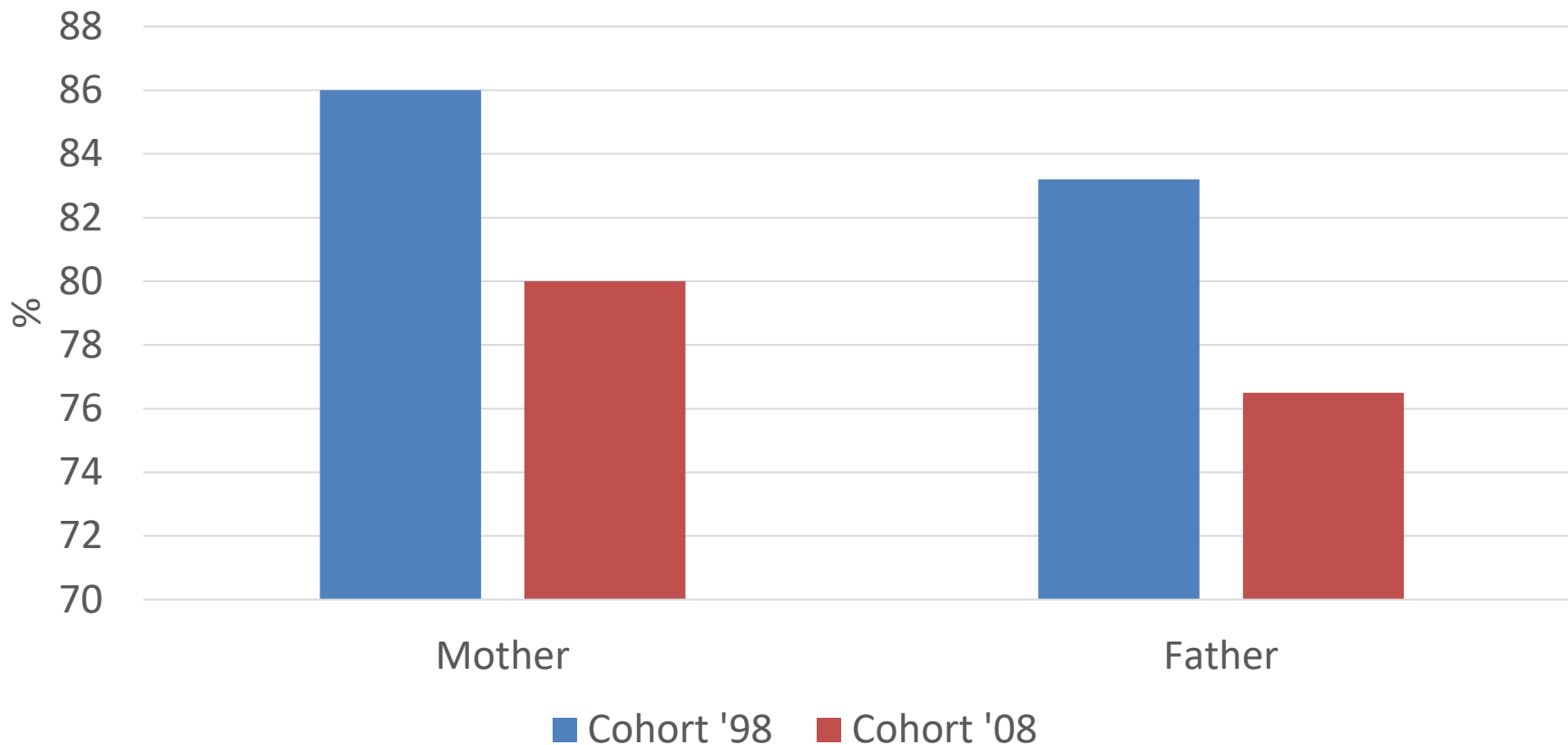
# Approach to analysis

- Domains:
  - Family relationships
  - Peer groups
  - Child's activities
  - Engagement in learning
- First look at overall ('raw') differences and then whether these hold when changes in family and child characteristics are taken into account



# Child-parent relationships

# Child reports of relationship quality (getting on 'very well')

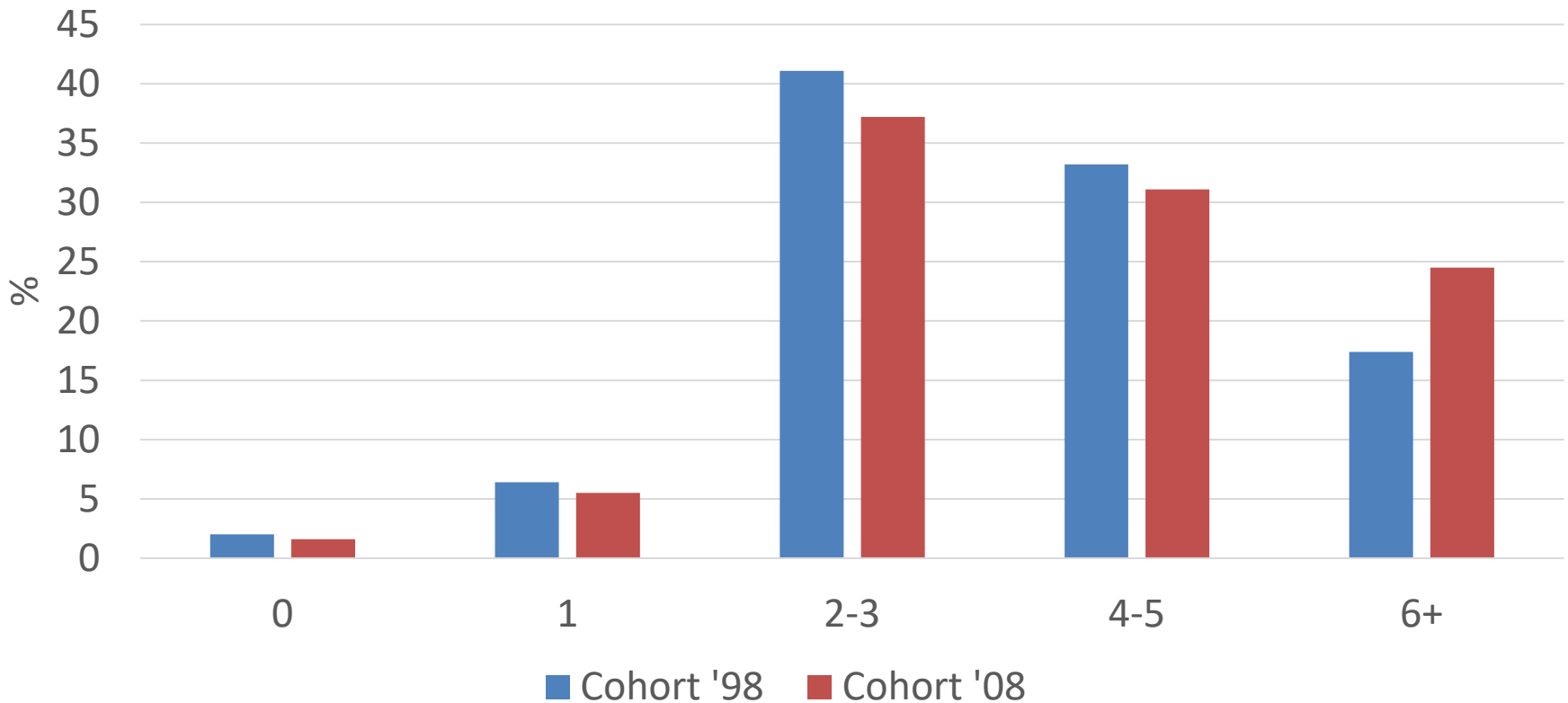


But parents report greater closeness; mothers also report greater conflict  
Decline in proportion eating dinner together every day as a family (72% to 67%)



## Peer relationships

# Size of friendship group

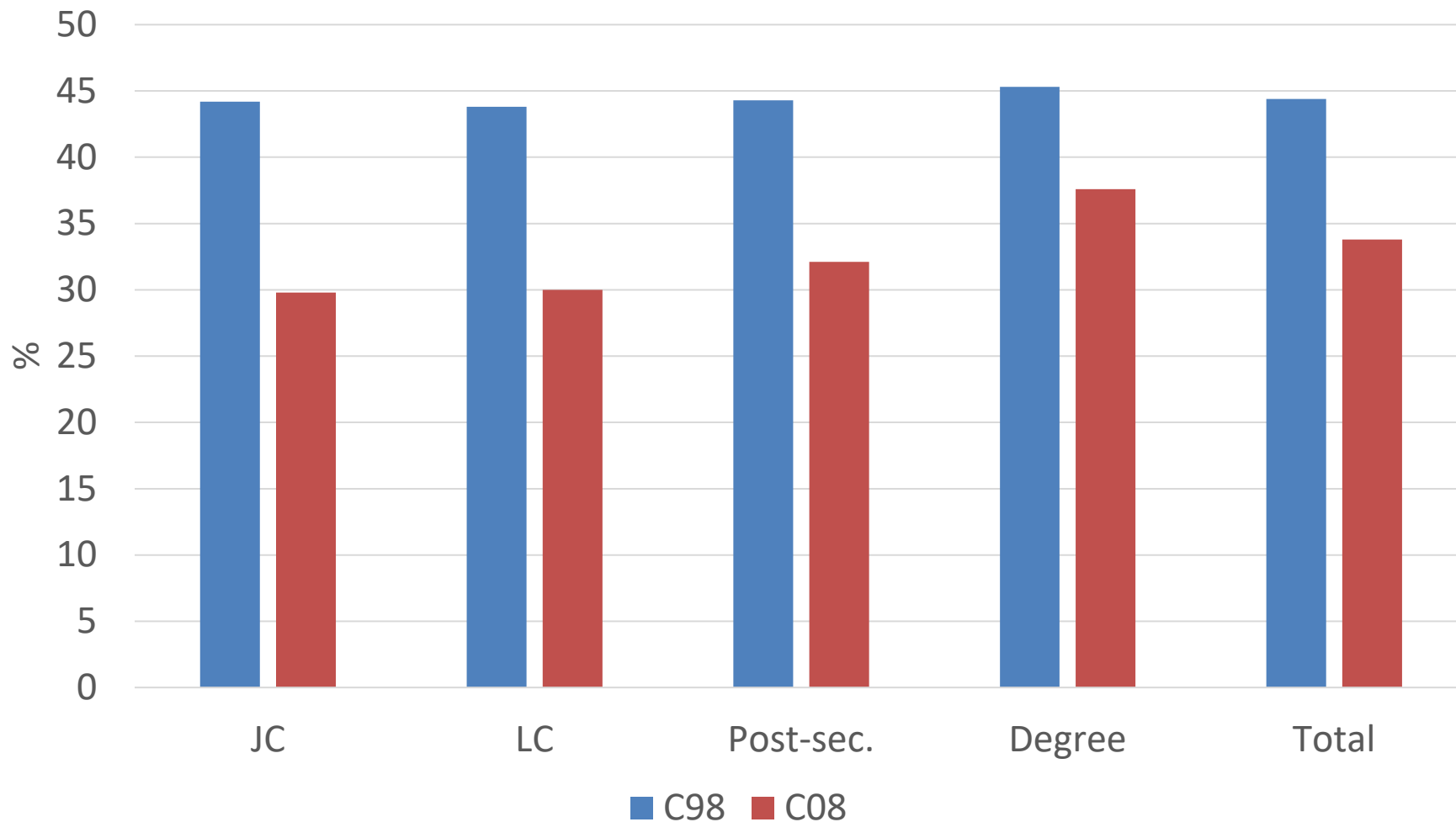


Slight decline in % seeing their friends almost every day but this is due to changes in the profile of children and families

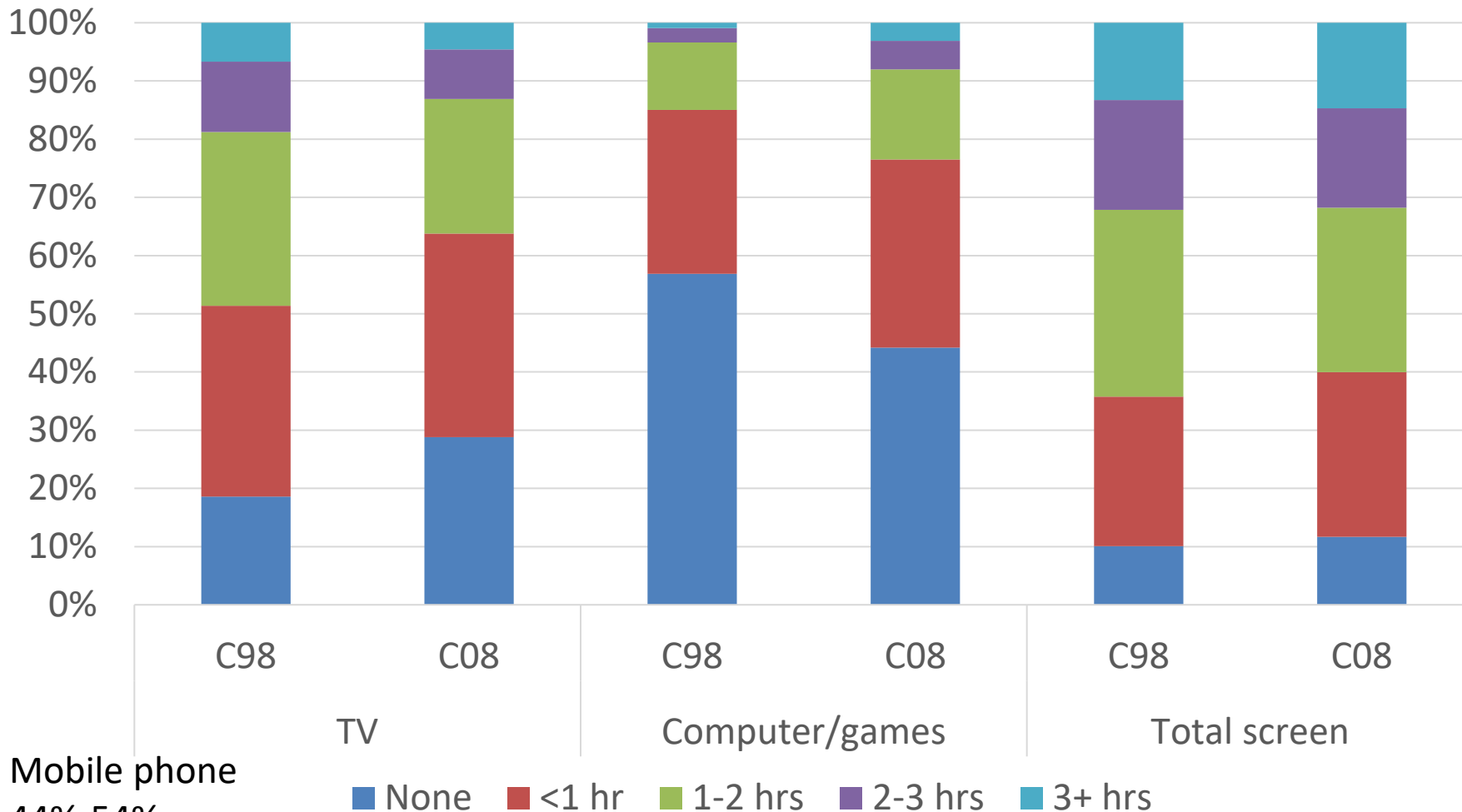


## Children's activities

# Child plays sport almost every day



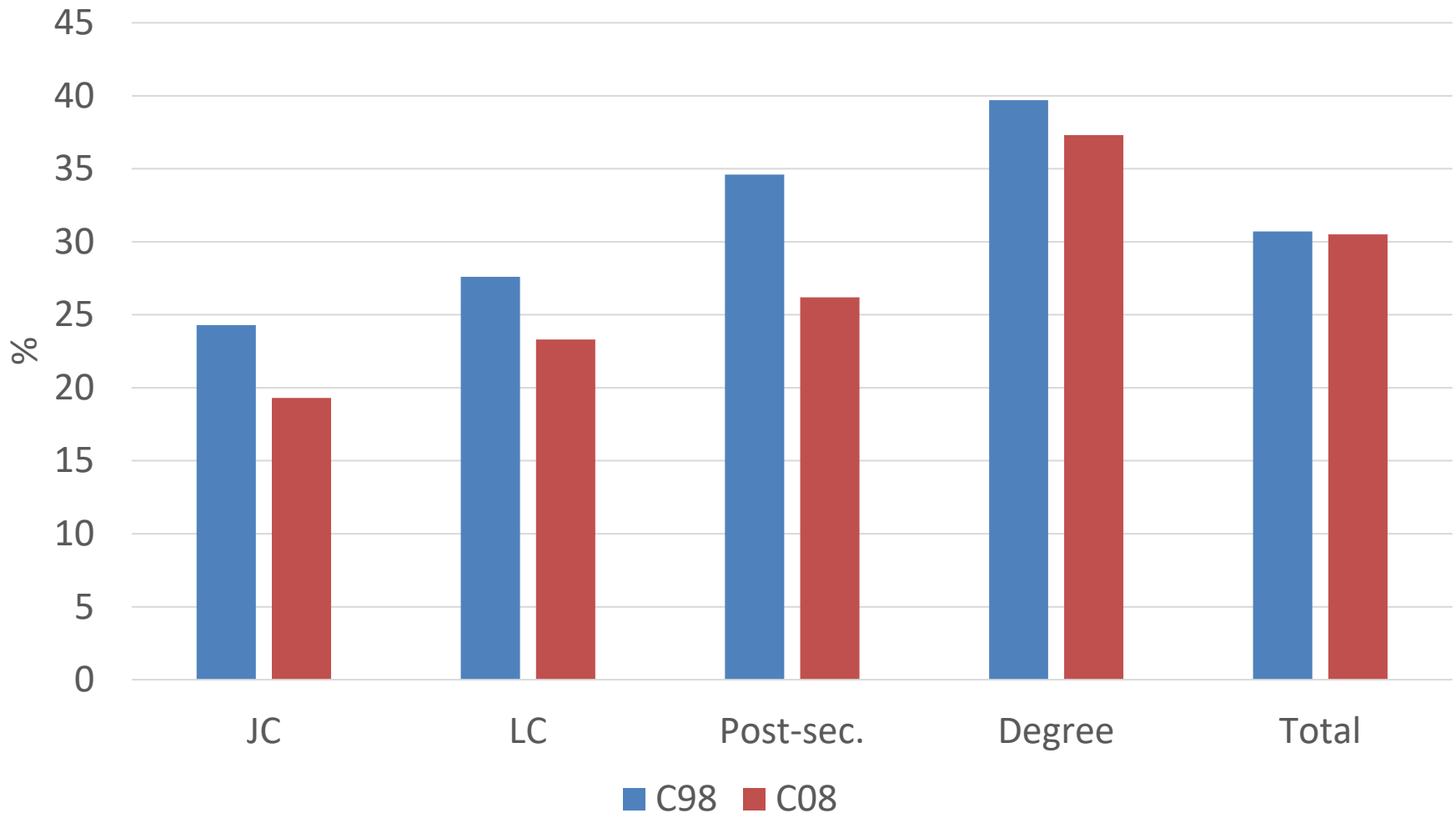
# Screen time as primary activity (time-use diaries)



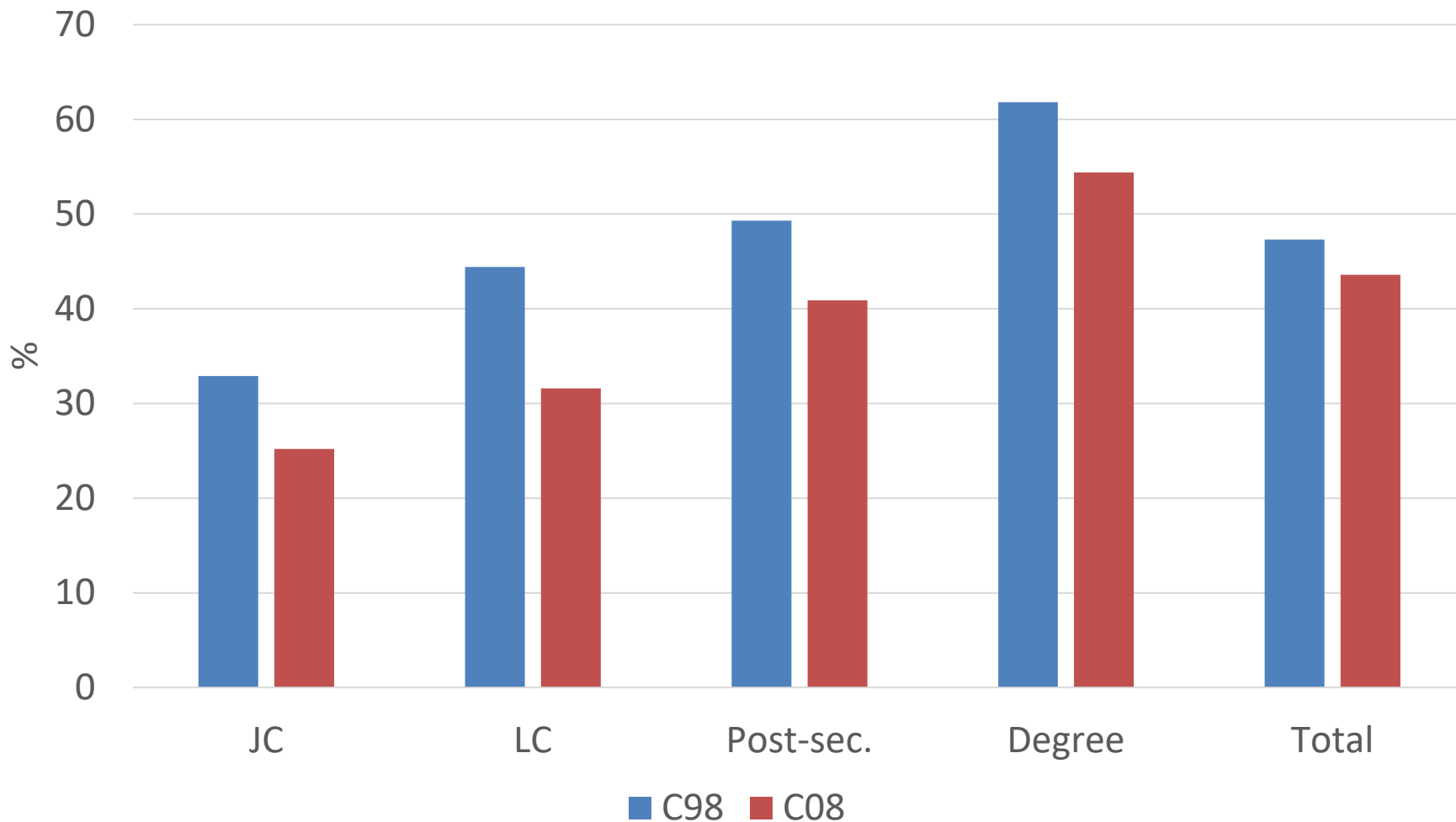
Mobile phone  
44%-54%



# Reading for fun every day by parental education



# Cultural participation (drama/music) by parental education



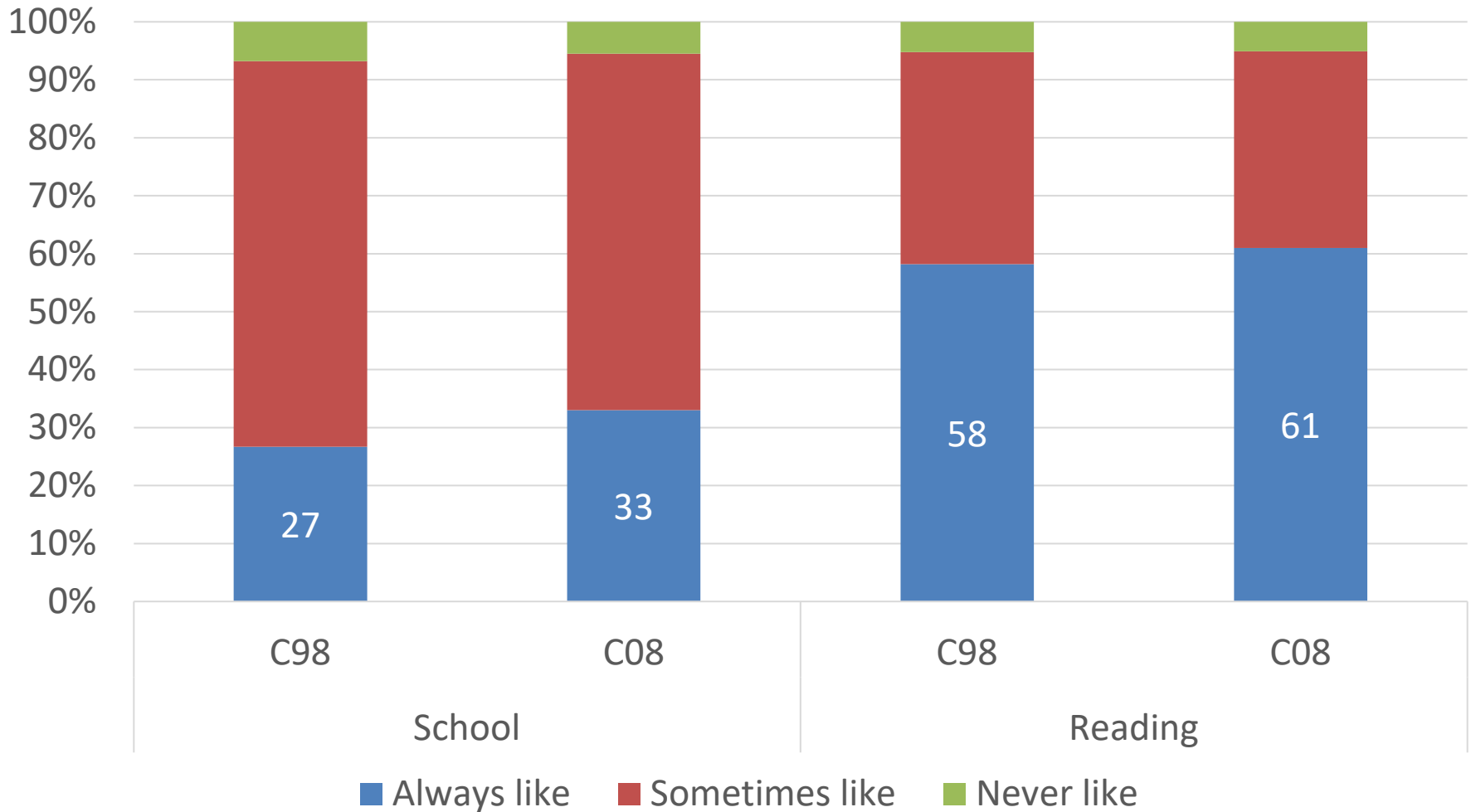
## Screen time and other activities

- Those spending more time watching TV and using digital devices are less likely to engage in sports, reading for pleasure and cultural pursuits
- Owning a mobile phone is associated with less time reading and lower levels of involvement in cultural activities
- The change over time in sports and cultural participation is not explained by increases in digital engagement

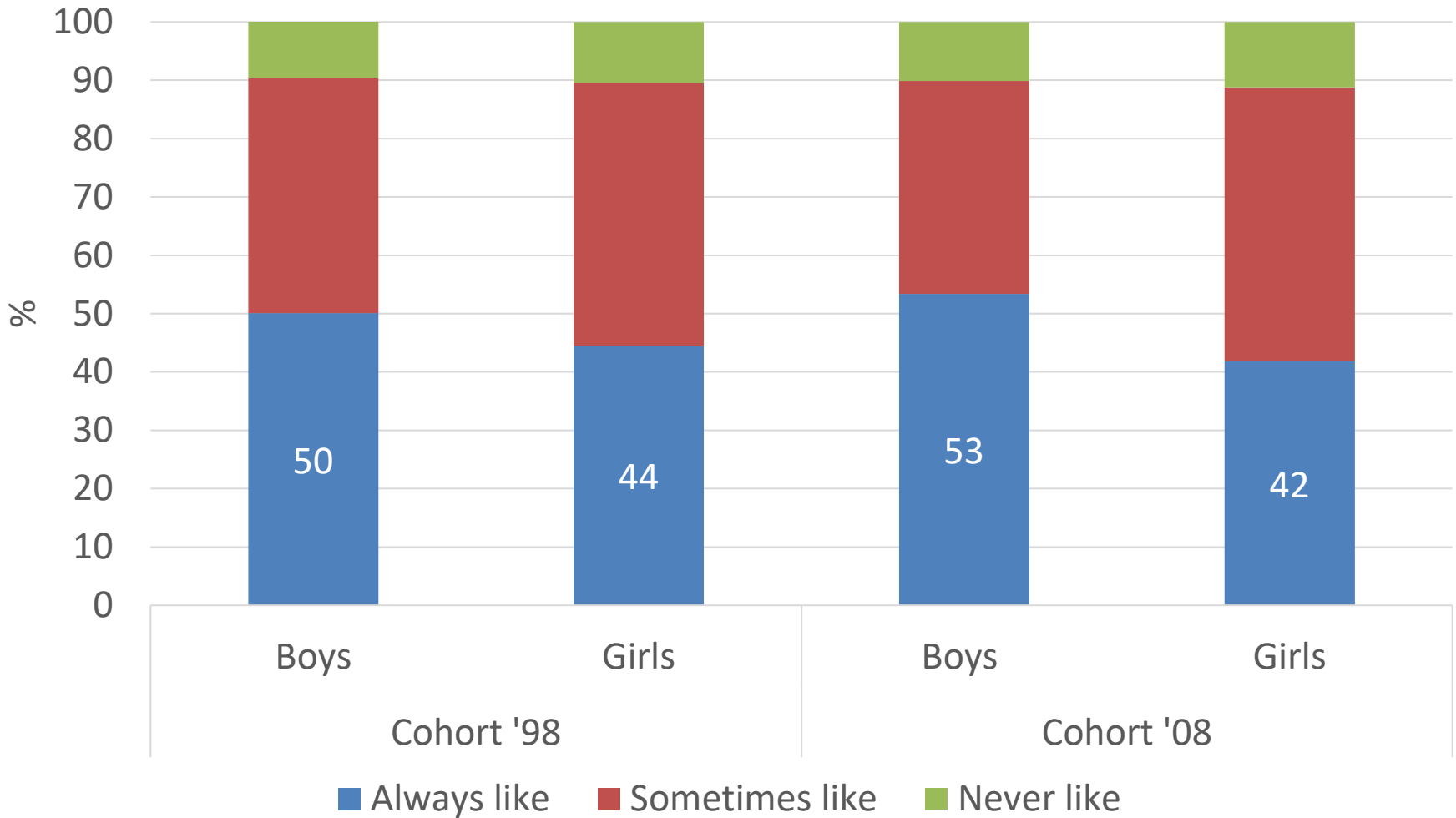


## Engagement in learning

# Attitudes to school and reading



# Attitudes to Maths by gender





# Gender differences over time

- Social worlds of 9-year-olds are gendered and these gender differences persist over time
- Girls have closer and less conflictual relations with their parents but smaller friendship groups and see their friends less often
- They are more likely to read for pleasure and engage in cultural activities but less likely to take part in sports
- They also spend less time on digital devices than boys
- They are more positive about school overall but less positive about Maths, and gender differences in attitudes to Maths widen over time



# Socio-economic inequalities

- Children's lives are strongly influenced by the socio-economic situation of their families
- More parent-child conflict is found and children tend to have smaller friendship groups where families are under financial strain
- Children from more advantaged families are more likely to be involved in sports and this social gap widens over time
- Social background differences in reading for pleasure become more pronounced over time



# Policy implications

# Implications for policy

- New insights into the changing lives of children in Ireland
- Gender and social background differences in children's activities emerge early - importance of early years provision in providing access to a variety of engaging activities for girls and boys and across all social groups
- Concerning trends in involvement in sports, cultural pursuits and reading, activities that enhance child development
- Need for more subsidised provision of sports and cultural activities for disadvantaged groups; role of schools in encouraging physical exercise
- Schools and libraries will be crucial in trying to reverse the decline in reading for fun found among many groups
- Ongoing revision of the primary curriculum offers the potential to address gender and social background differences in attitudes to Maths; importance of continuous professional development