



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



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THE LIVES OF 9-YEAR-OLDS

CHILD COHORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The final (and biggest) word of thanks goes, of course, to the 8,570 nine-year-olds and their families who participated in the study, initially in their schools and subsequently in their homes. *Growing Up in Ireland* would not have been possible without the time and assistance which they so readily and generously provided to us.

James Williams, ESRI

Sheila Greene, TCD

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, it gives me great pleasure to publish *The Lives of Nine Year Olds*. This represents the first formal publication from ***Growing Up in Ireland*** – the landmark National Longitudinal Study of Children. This Study was initiated and is funded by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as part of the National Children's Strategy.

Growing Up in Ireland is one of the largest and most complex studies of this nature that has ever been undertaken in Ireland. By tracking the development of two cohorts of young children for at least seven years (approximately 11,000 infants and 8,500 nine-year-old children), ***Growing Up in Ireland*** aims to 'examine the factors which contribute to or undermine the wellbeing of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families'.

I am confident that this first publication from the cohort of nine-year-old children will prove to be of enormous benefit to both policy makers and practitioners and will play an important role in the ongoing quest to improve children's lives in Ireland.

I would like to thank Professor James Williams of the Economic and Social Research Institute and Professor Sheila Greene of the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin, their research team and their team of fieldworkers who carried out this Study. Most importantly, I would like to thank the 8,570 children, their families and schools who have generously given up their valuable time to participate.

Barry Andrews, T.D.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



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1. INTRODUCTION

The nine-year-old cohort of *Growing Up in Ireland* is a nationally representative longitudinal sample of 8,570 nine-year-olds, their families, teachers and other regular caregivers (where relevant). The first substantive report¹ from the study provides a descriptive summary of the characteristics and circumstances of nine-year-olds in Ireland today.

The main objectives of *Growing Up in Ireland* include the description of the lives of children to establish what is typical and normal as well as what is atypical and problematic and to identify the key factors that most help or hinder children's development. In particular, it aims to identify the persistent adverse effects that lead to social disadvantage and exclusion, educational difficulties, ill health and deprivation. The data collected will also indicate the factors that are associated with good outcomes and positive development. In view of the longitudinal nature of the study, *Growing Up in Ireland* is particularly focused on charting the development of children over time and examining their progress and wellbeing at critical periods from birth to adulthood. A key consideration in the design of the project has been the recording of the children's views and opinions on their lives.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework² adopted by *Growing Up in Ireland* incorporates a model of the child's relationship to the world outlined by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 and subsequently developed into what is now referred to as his bioecological model³. This sees the child's world as a multilayered set of nested and interconnected environmental systems, all of which influence his/her development to varying degrees. The child (with his/her characteristics and traits) is located at the centre of this model. Parents and family are the most important initial influence on the child's life and development. Outside the immediate family surroundings the child is influenced by (and, in turn, influences) other important relationships, such as those in school, the wider community/neighbourhood in which he/she lives and so on. The reciprocal links between home, wider family, school and community have a bearing on the child's development as do the institutional structures such as government policy in areas like education, health and Social Welfare, as well as the less formal social norms and mores within the child's local neighbourhood or community.

3. THE DATA

The information in this report is based on a nationally representative random sample of 8,570 nine-year-olds, their families, principals and teachers. The sample was generated through the national primary school system. A total of 910 randomly selected schools participated in the study with the children being selected from those schools. The response rate at the school level was 82%, with 57% of families agreeing to participate. As is usual in analysing sample surveys, the data were statistically adjusted prior to analysis to ensure that all information presented is representative of all nine-year-olds in Ireland.

As some of the information presented is based solely on the details provided by participants it could be subject to reporting bias on their part. The Study Team has done all it can to avoid this source of bias, however, by using well-established measures that control for it and, whenever possible, by collecting information from more than one informant.

4. NINE-YEAR-OLDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

4.1 WHAT ARE THE FAMILIES OF NINE-YEAR-OLDS LIKE?

There are just over 56,400 nine-year-olds in Ireland, 51% of whom are male. The survey data show that the majority (82%) of them lived in two-parent families – 35% in two-parent families with one or two children

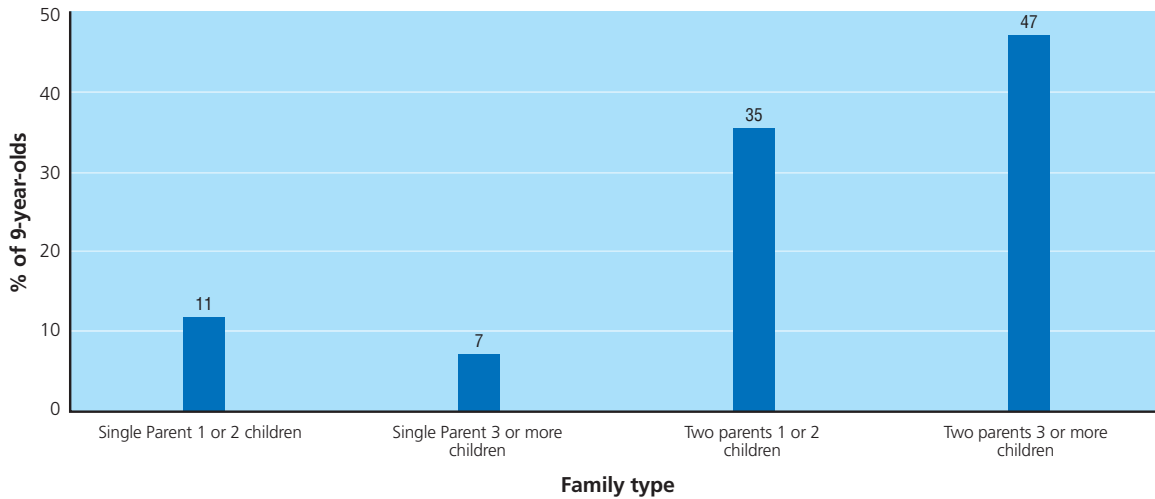
¹ Williams et al., (2009).

² For a full description of the underlying conceptual framework see Greene et al., (2009).

³ Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006).

and 47% in two-parent families with three or more children. The remaining 18% of nine-year-olds were in single-parent families – 11% in single-parent families with one or two children and 7% in single parent families with three or more children – Figure 1.

Figure 1: Family type and size of households in which nine-year-olds live

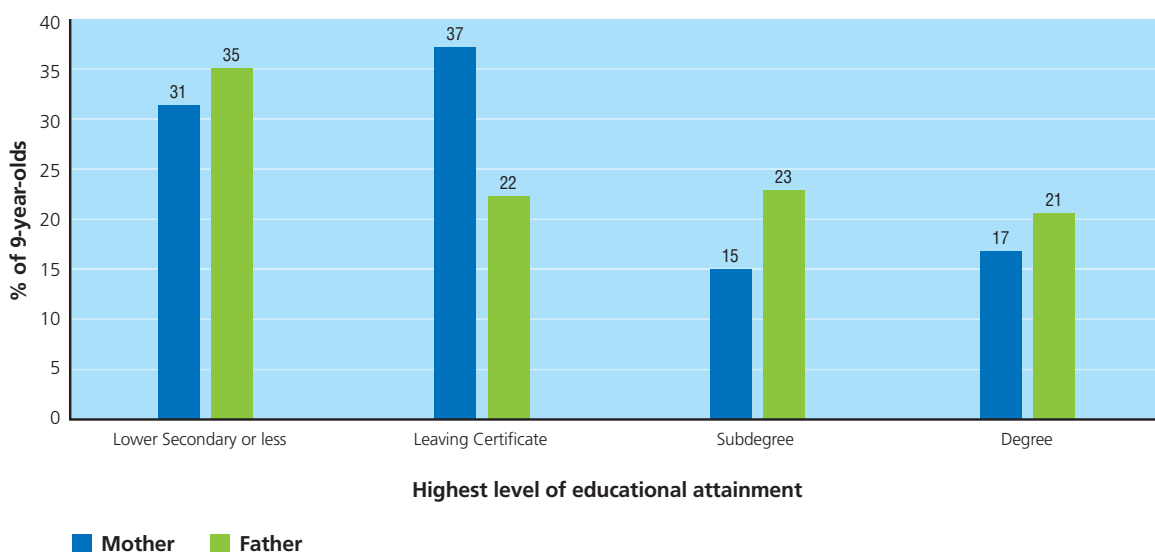


The Primary Caregiver⁴ of almost all nine-year-olds (98%) was their biological mother⁵. Where the child had a resident Secondary Caregiver that person was most likely to be his/her father – in 95% of cases. The average age of nine-year-olds’ mothers was 39.4 years (just over 30 years at birth). Their fathers were slightly older at 42.0 years (33 years at birth)

4.2 THE EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF NINE-YEAR-OLDS’ PARENTS

The educational profile of nine-year-olds’ mothers suggested that 31% had left school having completed Lower Secondary level or less (i.e. Junior Certificate or less) with 37% having a Leaving Certificate, 15% a subdegree qualification (i.e. a 2½ level certificate or diploma) and 17% having a degree. The educational profile of nine-year-olds’ fathers was somewhat different, with a substantially lower proportion (22%) having higher secondary qualification but a higher proportion with a subdegree (23%) or degree level qualification (21%) – Figure 2.

Figure 2: Highest level of educational attainment of mothers and fathers of nine-year-olds



⁴ For the purposes of the survey the Primary Caregiver was defined as the person who provided most care to the nine-year-old and who was most knowledgeable about him/her.
⁵ For ease of discussion throughout this summary (as in the main report) ‘mother’ is used for Primary Caregiver.

4.3 THE WORK STATUS OF NINE-YEAR-OLDS' PARENTS

Approximately 54% of nine-year-olds' mothers worked outside the home while 39% were principally involved in looking after the home. In contrast, 91% of nine-year-olds' fathers were employed outside the home.

5. FAMILY AND PARENTING

The family of the nine-year-old has a strong influence on the child's development and learning and, within the family, parents usually have a central role in influencing the nature and quality of the child's life. Parents influence their children's behaviour, act as early role models and greatly influence their early socialisation and relationships with the world beyond family⁶. The nature of parenting is, therefore, of pivotal importance in the child's development and preparation for life.

5.1 PARENTING STYLE

Parenting serves several different functions: it involves supporting and caring for children, managing their behaviour and shaping their behaviour in ways that are likely to be socially acceptable or advantageous. Parents approach their parenting role in very different ways. Two key dimensions on which parents differ are the extent to which they exert control over their children and the extent to which they are responsive to their children's needs for warmth and support. Research has categorised styles of parenting adopted by parents into different types, the most widely accepted being a four-fold classification⁷:

- **Authoritative:** High control; high responsiveness
- **Authoritarian:** High control; low responsiveness
- **Indulgent (Permissive):** Low control; high responsiveness
- **Uninvolved (Neglectful):** Low control; low responsiveness

Parents with an *authoritarian* style put emphasis on observing rules and obedience but are less warm and responsive in their interactions with their child than average. An *authoritative* style combines reasoned control with support. The *indulgent* or *permissive* style describes parents who are responsive but lenient and tend to leave children to self-regulate rather than exercising control over their behaviour. *Uninvolved* or *neglectful* parenting is characterised by low levels of control and low levels of support. An authoritative parenting style, which combines parental control with warmth and responsiveness, is optimal since children whose parents use an authoritative parenting style tend to display more favourable developmental outcomes⁸. A link has been identified, for example, between authoritative parenting and secure attachment in children aged 9 – 11 years⁹.

Based on information provided by the children themselves¹⁰ we are able to categorise the parenting style of their mothers and fathers. Figure 3 shows that a majority of both mothers (77%) and fathers (68%) displayed an authoritative parenting style – considered to be the optimal style. The next most commonly used style for both parents was the indulgent or permissive style.

⁶ E.g. Rubin and Burgess (2002).

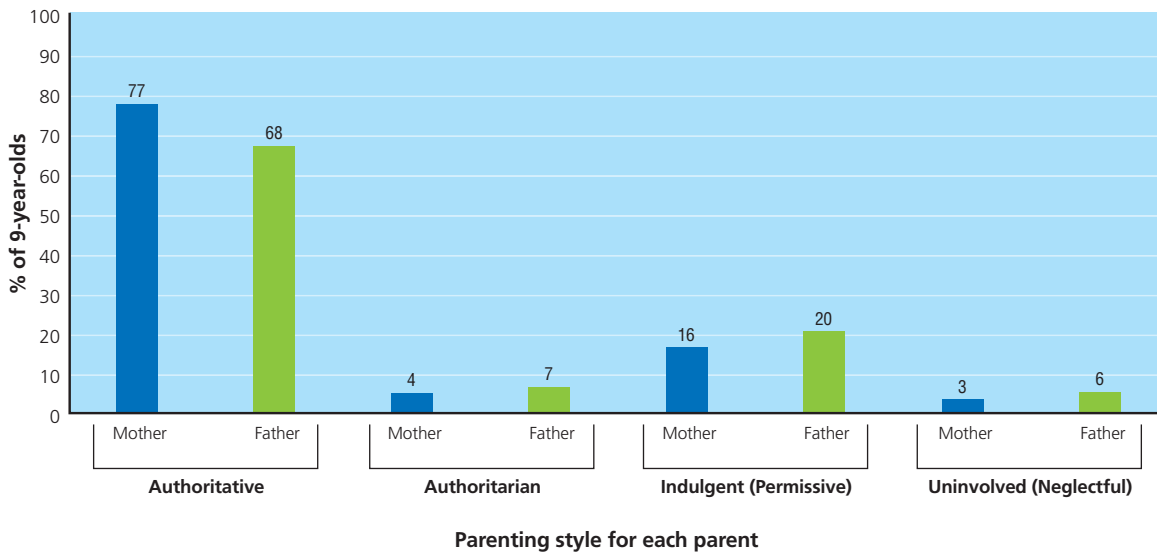
⁷ See Baumrind (1966, 1991).

⁸ See, for example, Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts, (1989); Avenevoli, Sessa and Steinberg (1999).

⁹ See, for example, Karavasilis, Doyle and Markiewicz (2003).

¹⁰ An internationally validated inventory known as the Parenting Style Inventory was used. See Darling and Toyokowa (1997).

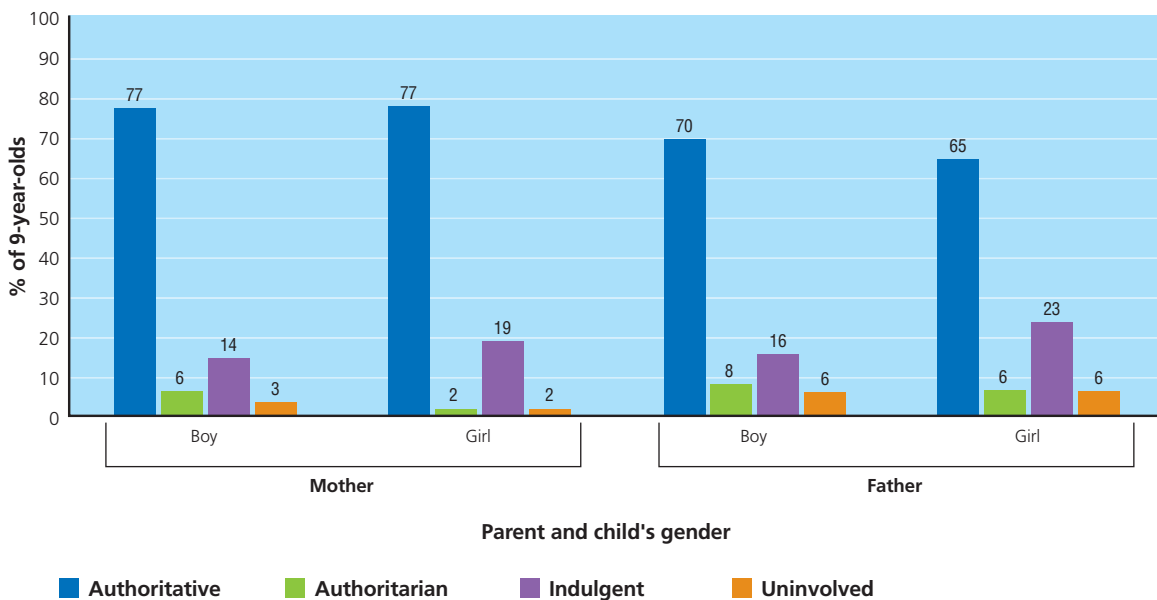
Figure 3: Percentage of parents in each parenting style category



5.2 DO PARENTS ADOPT DIFFERENT PARENTING STYLES WITH BOYS AND GIRLS?

Figure 4 illustrates how the parenting style of both mothers and fathers varies according to the sex of the child. Child’s gender did not appear to affect a mother’s use of an authoritative parenting style, but fathers were more likely to adopt this style with their sons (70%) than with their daughters (65%). Figure 4 also shows that girls were more likely to experience an indulgent or uninvolved/permissive parenting style from both parents, whereas fathers were more likely to adopt an authoritarian style with boys than girls.

Figure 4: Percentage of mothers and fathers using each parenting style with boys and girls



5.3 DISCIPLINE IN THE HOME

Mothers were asked to describe how often they used a range of discipline practices with their nine-year-olds. The most frequently used was ‘Discussing/explaining why the behaviour was wrong’. This was recorded as being used *Regularly* or *Always* by 88% of the nine-year-olds’ mothers. Over half of mothers (58%) reported that they *never* used smacking as a discipline strategy. Almost no-one used it *Always* and 11% of mothers said they used it *Now and again*.

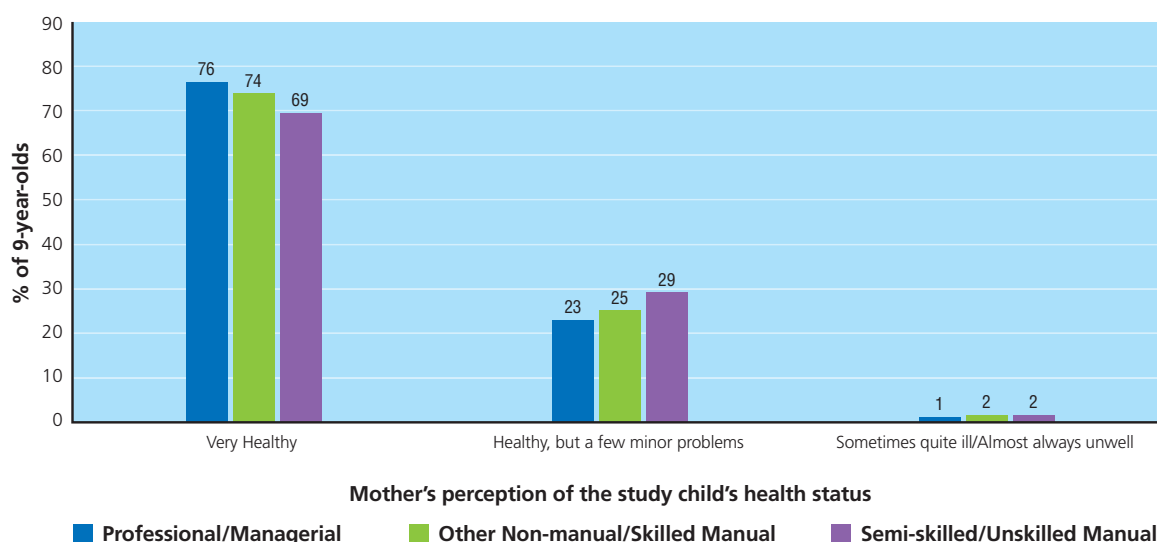
6. CHILD'S HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The foundations of a child's health are established early in life and clearly have a very substantial impact on development and quality of life over the entire life course. The public health implications of childhood health status and differences between children in health status are clear.

6.1 MOTHER'S ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL HEALTH

The majority of mothers reported that their nine-year-old child was in good health – 73% of children were reported to be *Very Healthy* and 25% were *Healthy with a few minor problems*. There were no differences in the reported health status of boys and girls though, as Figure 5 shows, children from higher social class groups were more likely to be reported as *Very Healthy* than those from lower ones – 76% of nine-year-olds from Professional/Managerial groups were reported to be *Very Healthy* compared with 69% from Semi-skilled/Unskilled Manual backgrounds.

Figure 5: Mother's perception of the study child's health status by family social class



6.2 CHRONIC ILLNESS/DISABILITY

Overall prevalence of chronic illness or disability among nine-year-olds was reported at 11%, with 7% of the children with a chronic illness or disability being reported by their mothers to be severely hampered in their daily activities¹¹.

6.3 ORAL HEALTH

Oral health in children predicts adult oral health. Tooth-brushing helps promote oral health by maintaining healthy gums and preventing plaque formation. Overall, oral healthcare was good among nine-year-olds, with 94% of their mothers reporting that their child brushed their teeth at least once a day. Girls were significantly more likely than boys to brush their teeth daily (95% versus 93%). Not brushing their teeth daily was significantly higher among nine-year-olds from the lowest income group (9%) compared to those in the top family income group (3%).

6.4 OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Overweight and obesity among children is recognised as a serious public health problem. Studies show that obese children generally become obese adults¹² and it is well established that obesity is associated with a range of health outcomes in childhood and later life¹³.

Using international cut-off points for Body Mass Index (BMI) *Growing Up in Ireland* found that 75% of nine-year-olds had a BMI which would be considered within the normal range; 19% were overweight and 7%

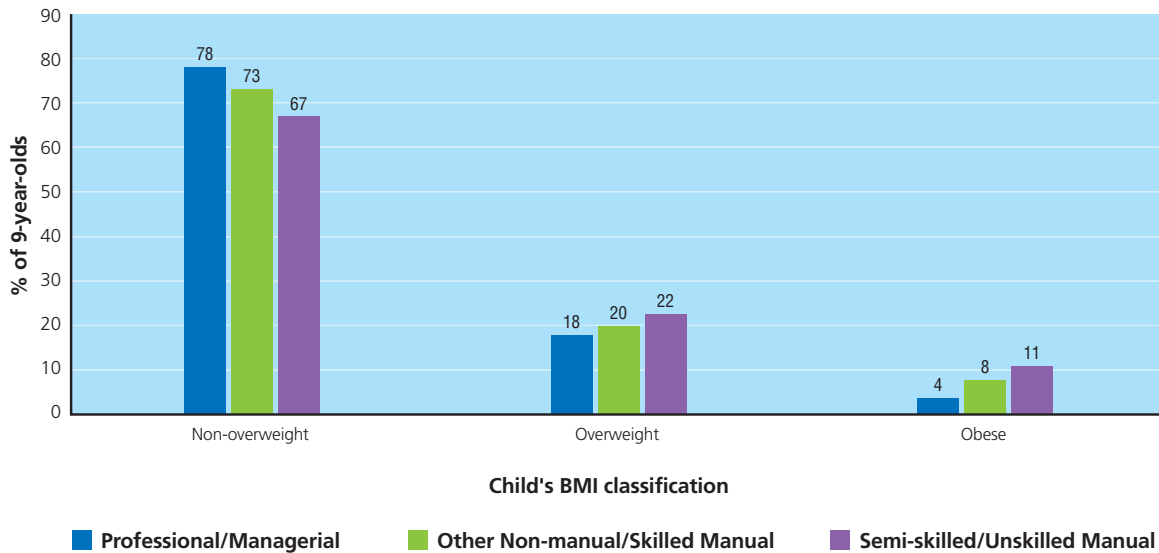
¹¹ This represents 0.7% of all nine-year-olds reported as experiencing a chronic illness or disability and being severely hampered by it.

¹² For example, Dietz (1998).

¹³ For example, Regan and Betts (2006).

were obese. Girls were more likely than boys to be overweight or obese (30% compared with 22%). Weight status was related to social class; 33% of nine-year-olds from Semi-skilled/Unskilled Manual groups were obese or overweight compared with 22% from the Professional/Managerial group – see Figure 6.

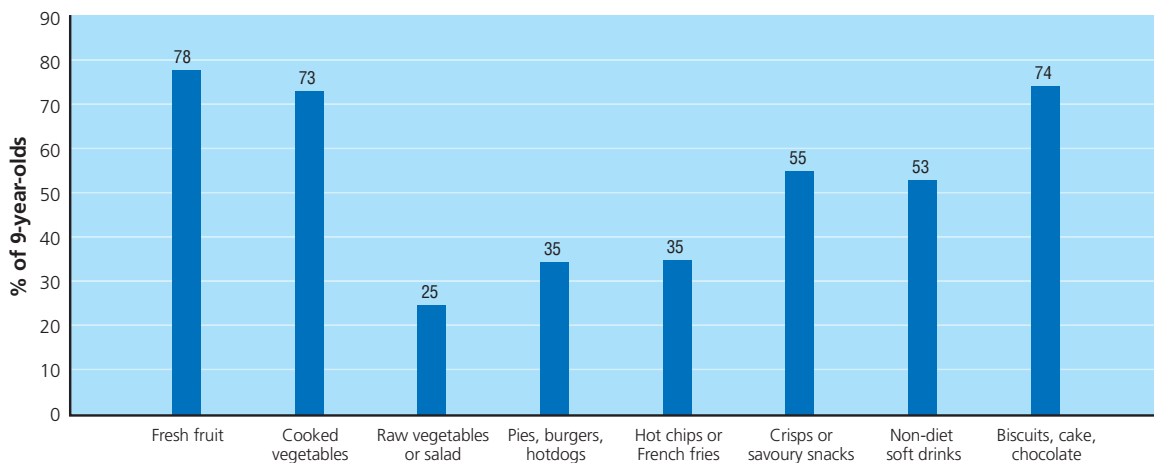
Figure 6: Percentage of children within each BMI category by family social class



6.5 WHAT NINE-YEAR-OLDS EAT

The type of food nine-year-olds eat clearly has an effect on their weight and related health outcomes. The nine-year-old's mother provided details on what her child ate in the 24 hours preceding the interview. Figure 7 shows that, for example, 78% of children had eaten at least one portion of fruit and 73% had consumed at least one portion of cooked vegetables in the previous 24 hours. A total of 55% of children had eaten at least one portion of crisps, 74% had consumed at least one portion of biscuits/cakes/chocolate and 53% had at least one non-diet soft drink in the previous 24-hour period. More than one-third of respondents indicated that their child had at least one serving of chips/French fries (35%) and pies/burgers/hotdogs (35%) in the preceding 24-hour period. This indicates a pattern of consumption of both healthy and unhealthy eating.

Figure 7: Percentage of children consuming at least one portion of various foods



Analysis of mothers' responses to the dietary inventory revealed that higher levels of parental education were associated with higher intake of fruit and vegetables and lower consumption of energy dense foods such as crisps, chips, hamburgers/hotdogs and non-diet soft drinks. For instance, 86% of nine-year-olds whose mothers were Third Level graduates ate at least one portion of fruit in the day before their interview. The comparable figure among children whose mother had a Lower Secondary education or less was 71%. This pattern was essentially reversed in respect of the more unhealthy foods – 65% of children whose mother had a Lower Secondary education ate at least one portion of crisps in the preceding 24-hour period compared with 42% of children where the mother had a Third Level education.

6.6 HOW PHYSICALLY ACTIVE ARE NINE-YEAR-OLDS?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that school-aged children engage in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical exercise every day to encourage healthy development. *Growing Up in Ireland* found that only one in four nine-year-olds met this recommended threshold. Boys were more likely than girls to meet it (29% compared with 21%).

7. EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The emotional health and wellbeing of the child contributes significantly to the quality of his/her life. Emotional and behavioural difficulties in childhood have been linked with physical illness, mental health difficulties and impaired relationships with partners in adulthood¹⁴.

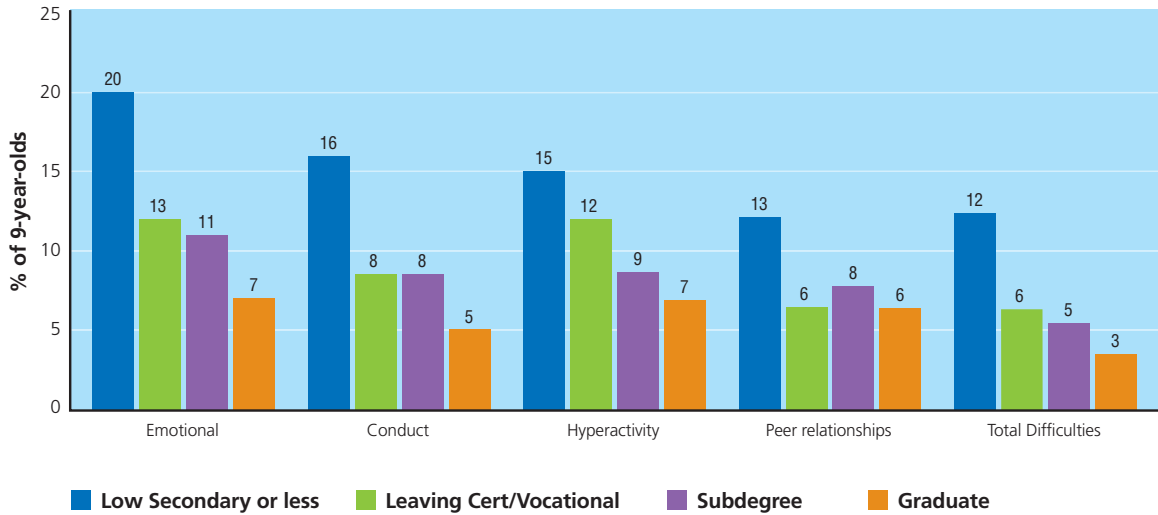
7.1 EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS IN THE NINE-YEAR-OLD

A widely used and internationally validated measure¹⁵ was used to record details from the nine-year-old's mother on potential behavioural problems which her child might experience. Separate scores were calculated for emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention and peer relationship problems, as well as a composite 'Total Difficulties' score. On this basis, it was possible to classify nine-year-olds as *normal*, *borderline* or *abnormal* using thresholds set by the scale developers. Figure 8 presents details on the percentage of nine-year-olds in each maternal education category who were classified as being in the *abnormal* range of each of the above four subscales as well as the 'Total Difficulties' scale. It shows that there are significant associations between mother's education and prevalence of problems across all measures. For example, 5% of nine-year-olds whose mother was a graduate were in the *abnormal* range for conduct problems. The comparable figure among children whose mothers were in the lowest educational category was 16%. In terms of hyperactivity/inattentiveness, 7% of nine-year-olds of graduate mothers were classified as *abnormal* compared with 15% of those with mothers in the lowest educational category.

¹⁴ Buchanan (1999).

¹⁵ The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

Figure 8: Percentage of 9-year-olds in each category of maternal education who were classified in the abnormal (high) category of (a) emotional symptoms, (b) conduct problems, (c) hyperactivity/inattention, (d) peer relationship problems and (e) Total Difficulties

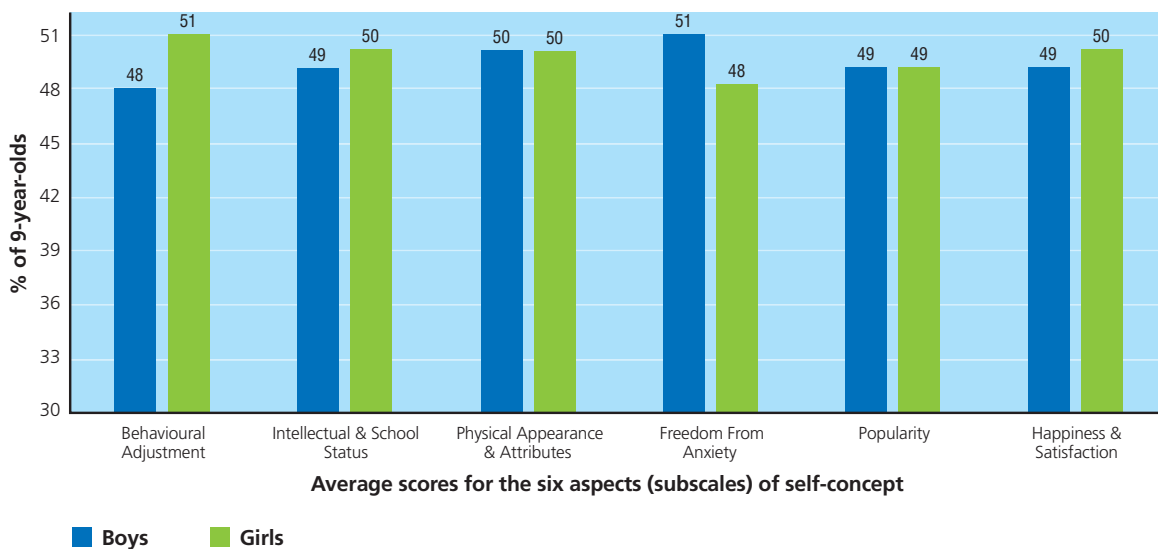


7.2 HOW DO NINE-YEAR-OLDS FEEL ABOUT THEMSELVES?

The child’s ‘self-concept’ refers to the set of beliefs and views held by the nine-year-old on his/her physical attributes, abilities, personality, values, goals and roles. Positive self-concept is usually associated with responsibility, independence, emotional security and life satisfaction. Negative self-concept is associated with fear, apathy and general dissatisfaction with life. Using an international scale¹⁶ *Growing Up in Ireland* measured children’s self-concept in terms of their behaviour, intellectual and school performance, physical appearance, freedom from anxiety, popularity and happiness/satisfaction.

Figure 9 shows that girls had a higher average score (51) than boys (48) on the Behavioural Adjustment subscale, indicating that they more frequently endorsed positive statements about their behaviour. It also shows that girls had a lower average score (48) than boys (51) on the Freedom from Anxiety subscale, indicating that they more frequently reported feelings of anxiety than boys.

Figure 9: Average scores for boys and girls on the six Piers-Harris total subscale scores



¹⁶ The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, 2nd Edition.

Further, in general it was found that children from Professional/Managerial backgrounds more frequently endorsed positive statements about their behaviour, freedom from anxiety and happiness/satisfaction than did their peers from Semi-skilled/Unskilled Manual backgrounds.

7.3 HOW DOES TEMPERAMENT VARY AMONG NINE-YEAR-OLDS?

A child's temperament refers to his/her individual style which affects the way he/she relates and reacts to people and places. The child's mother answered 25 questions¹⁷ which can be used to provide details on four aspects of the child's temperament:

- emotionality
- activity levels
- shyness
- sociability.

In general, boys were described as being more active than girls. Girls showed more emotionality and shyness but were more sociable than boys. Children of less well educated mothers tended to have higher scores on activity and emotionality than children of more educated mothers.

7.4 WHAT EFFECTS DO STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS HAVE ON A CHILD'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING?

In the course of her interview the nine-year-old's mother was asked if the child had experienced any stressful life event from a pre-specified list of 13 events. These were:

- Death of a parent
- Death of a close family member
- Death of a close friend
- Divorce/Separation of parents
- Moving house
- Moving country
- Stay in foster/residential care
- Serious illness/injury to self
- Serious illness/injury of family member
- Drug taking/alcoholism in immediate family
- Mental disorder in immediate family
- Conflict between parents
- Parent in prison.

Just over three-quarters of nine-year-olds had experienced some form of stressful life event. The most common were death of a close family member (43%), moving house (42%) and divorce/separation of parents (15%).

Children from single-parent families were (as might be expected) more likely to have experienced a greater number of stressful life events, including death of a parent, conflict between parents, divorce or separation of parents, or moving house.

Children who experienced four or more stressful life events were found to be at a significantly increased risk of developing emotional symptoms and also problems with hyperactivity or inattention.

8. THE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The child's educational development reflects a broad range of his/her experiences within the home, within the school and within his/her local community and neighbourhood. A range of factors – including the support and encouragement for education shown at home, the child's engagement with school, the characteristics of the teacher and the school itself, the child's attributes such as intelligence and temperament – all interact to mutually reinforce each other and to mould the child's educational outcomes over time.

8.1 THE NINE-YEAR-OLD'S GENERAL ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL

Nine-year-olds generally had a positive attitude to school. Over one-quarter (27%) said they *always* liked it, 67% were more ambivalent and said they *sometimes* liked it and only 7% said they *never* liked it. Similar positive views were expressed in their attitudes towards the teacher (only 6% said they *never* liked their teacher) and also in respect of looking forward to school (11% *never* looked forward to it). On balance, girls had a more positive attitude towards school than boys.

8.2 ABSENTEEISM FROM SCHOOL

Absenteeism among children will affect their school performance. On average, nine-year-olds missed 6.4 days from school in the year preceding the survey. Significant differences in the number of days missed were apparent in terms of the child's background characteristics. For example, children from low income families were more frequently absent than those from higher income groups (8.5 days compared to 5.3 days respectively). Similarly, nine-year-olds whose mothers had lower levels of education were more frequently absent from school than those whose mothers were Third Level graduates (7.6 compared with 5.4 days).

8.3 THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF NINE-YEAR-OLDS

In broad terms, based on the scores from the Drumcondra academic performance tests in Reading and Mathematics, *Growing Up in Ireland* found that the child's academic performance varied by social class, income and maternal education. Children from the higher social class groups, higher family income groups and those whose mother had higher levels of educational attainment generally achieved higher scores on the tests. To illustrate this the children were ranked from highest to lowest score on both their Reading and Maths tests. They were then assigned to one of five equal sized groups (each containing 20% of children) based on their scores. The lowest group (or quintile) contains the 20% of children with the lowest scores, the second quintile contains the 20% of children with the next lowest scores and so on until the top (fifth) quintile which contains the 20% of children with the highest scores. The percentage of children in each of the categories of maternal education who fall into the lowest and highest quintile is shown in Figure 10. This indicates that 30% of nine-year-olds whose mothers were in the lowest educational group were themselves in the lowest reading quintile. In contrast, only 8% of nine-year-olds whose mother was a Third Level graduate were in the lowest reading quintile. The opposite trend is clear from the percentages in the highest reading quintile: 11% of children whose mother left school with Lower Secondary education or less were in the highest reading quintile compared with 36% of children whose mother was a Third Level graduate.

Figure 10: Percentage of children in lowest and highest reading quintiles classified by mother's educational level

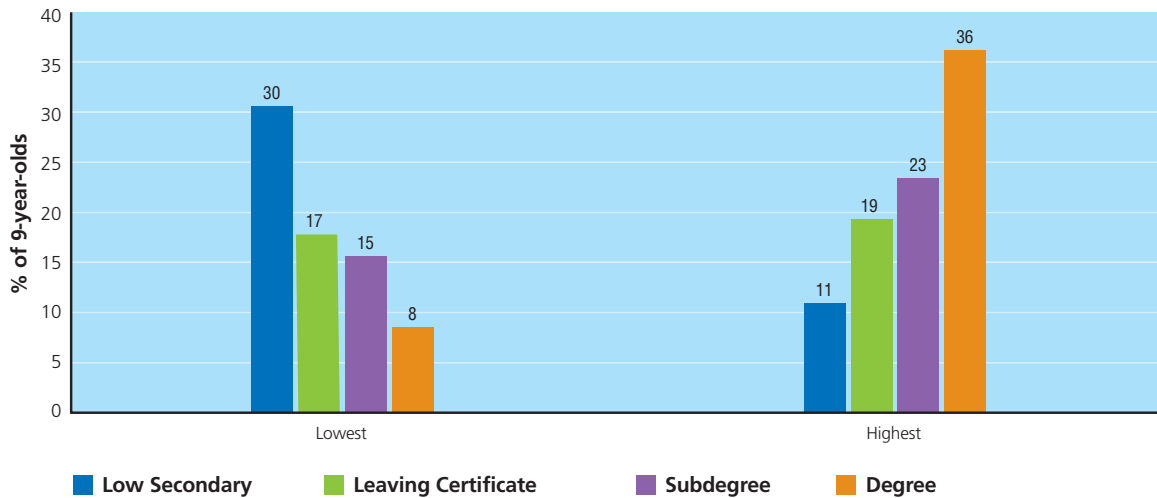
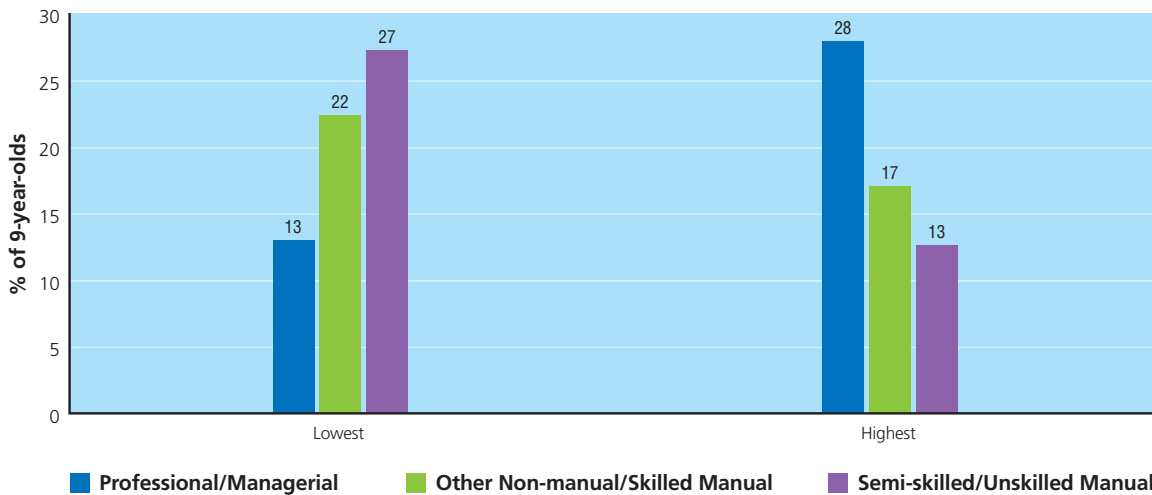


Figure 11 shows the percentage of children in the lowest and highest maths quintile according to family social class. It is clear from the chart that children from Professional/Managerial backgrounds were much more likely than those from Semi-/Unskilled Manual backgrounds to be in the top maths quintile (28% and 13% respectively) and much less likely to be in the lowest maths quintile (13% compared with 28%).

Figure 11: Proportion of children in lowest and highest maths quintiles by social class



8.4 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

The majority (85%) of nine-year-olds were taught by female teachers but only 47% had a female principal.

The average pupil-teacher ratio was 17.5:1. This was lower among more disadvantaged children – those in lower social class groups, lower family income groups and those whose mothers had lower levels of educational attainment. This latter may reflect educational policy of the last decade and higher levels of teacher resources having been targeted at disadvantaged schools.

The most commonly used form of discipline in schools among nine-year-olds is verbal and written reports to parents, extra homework and extra class work.

8.5 SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AT HOME

Parents were mostly found to be very supportive of their nine-year-old's education. This manifested itself, for example, by attendance at parent-teacher meetings (by 98% of the children's mothers) and helping with the child's homework (72% of mothers and partners provided help *always* or *regularly*). Only 10% reported that they *rarely* or *never* helped. Mother's expectation of how far the child would progress in the education system was high – less than 1% expected them to achieve only their Junior Certificate, 11% their Leaving Certificate, 7% an apprenticeship or trade, 11% a diploma or certificate, 49% a degree and 22% a post-graduate or higher degree.

9. PEER RELATIONSHIPS

At nine years of age children are spending increasing amounts of time with their peers, both inside and outside of the school setting. Peer relationships at this age serve as a testing ground for the development of future interpersonal relationships. Poor peer relationships in childhood may predict problems in adolescence and into adulthood¹⁸.

9.1 HOW MANY FRIENDS DO NINE-YEAR-OLDS HAVE?

Based on information provided by the child's mother, 2% of nine-year-olds had no close friends at all, 6% had one close friend, 41% of children had two to three close friends, while 51% had at least four close friends. No significant differences were found between boys and girls in the size of their social network.

9.2 PREVALENCE OF BULLYING – VICTIMISATION

A particularly important aspect of relationships is bullying and victimisation. Previous research indicates that victims of bullying report feeling lonelier and unhappier at school than classmates. Bullying in childhood is a strong predictor of children's school avoidance, with all of the associated consequences in terms of educational and related outcomes.

A total of 40% of nine-year-olds reported being a victim of bullying in the year preceding the survey. There was no difference in prevalence among boys and girls. Prevalence rates based on information provided by the child's mother, however, were substantially lower – only 23% of mothers said their nine-year-old child had been a victim in the previous year. This may indicate that many parents are unaware that their child was experiencing bullying in the previous year or that parents have different perspectives about what constitutes bullying.

The most common form of bullying identified by the children who were victims was verbal (74%), followed by exclusion (63%) and physical bullying (54%). Bullying by written messages (14%) and electronic means (5%) was less prominent. Boys were more likely to experience physical (67%) and verbal bullying (79%) than girls. Girls were more likely to experience exclusion (68%).

9.3 PREVALENCE OF BULLYING – PERPETRATION

A total of 13% of nine-year-olds (15% of boys and 11% of girls) reported that they had picked on a child or an adult in the year preceding the survey. The most common forms of bullying recorded by nine-year-old perpetrators were exclusion (56%), verbal (18%) and physical (43%).

¹⁸ For example Ladd (2005).

9.4 WHAT IS THE OVERLAP OF BULLIES AND VICTIMS AMONG NINE-YEAR-OLDS?

Based on the information from the children themselves nine-year-olds can be classified as

- bully – perpetrator only
- victim – victim only
- bully/victim – both perpetrator and a victim
- non-involved – neither a victim nor a perpetrator

A total of 3% of nine-year-olds were bullies only, 30% were victims only, 10% were bully/victims and 57% were non-involved.

10. WHAT ACTIVITIES DO NINE-YEAR-OLDS PARTICIPATE IN?

How children spend their free time and the activities in which they participate can have an important impact on their wellbeing in terms of physical and mental health, cognitive and socio-emotional development and peer relationships¹⁹.

10.1 HOW MUCH TIME DO NINE-YEAR-OLDS SPEND WATCHING TV AND PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?

Watching TV is an almost universal activity among nine-year-olds. Only 2% were reported by their mothers as not watching any TV on a typical week night during term time. Two-thirds of nine-year-olds usually watched one to three hours each evening with 10% watching three hours or more.

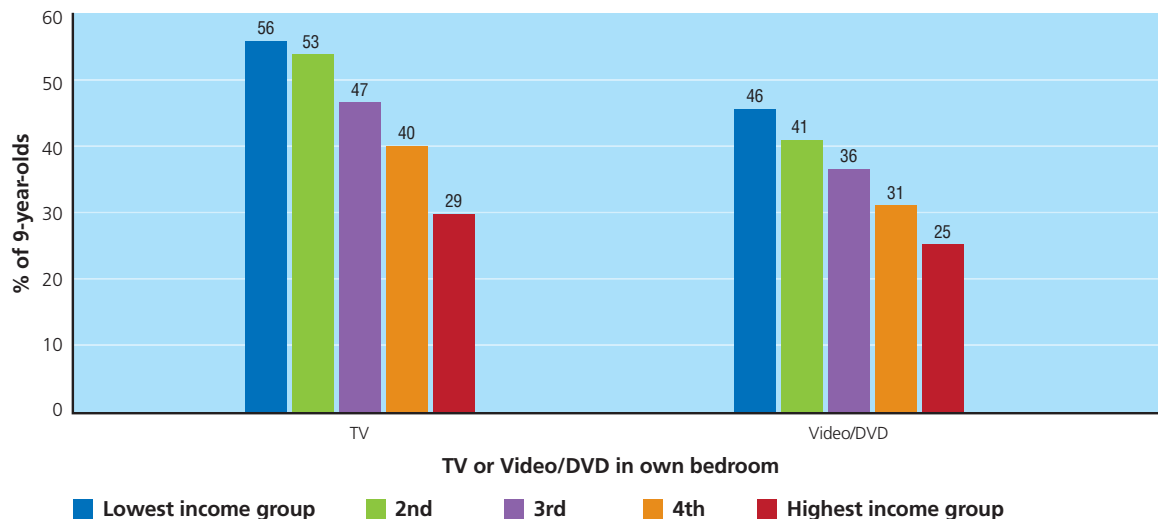
There was no difference between boys and girls in the amount of time spent watching television. Viewing times were significantly longer, however, for children whose mothers had lower levels of educational attainment and for those in lower social class categories.

Substantial amounts of time were spent playing video games, especially among boys. A total of 74% of boys and 54% of girls spent some time each day playing video games, with 30% of boys and 12% of girls spending one hour or more. As with television viewing, the amount of time spent on an average day playing video games was higher among children whose mothers were in the lowest educational attainment category.

10.2 WHAT PERCENTAGE OF NINE-YEAR-OLDS HAVE A TV OR VIDEO/DVD PLAYER IN THEIR BEDROOM?

A total of 45% of nine-year-olds had a TV in their bedroom and 35% had a Video/DVD player. It was particularly notable that family income was not a constraint in having these items in the child's bedroom. On the contrary, children from families in the lower income and social class groups were more likely than others to have a TV or Video/DVD player in their bedroom. Figure 12 shows that 56% of nine-year-olds in the lowest family income group had a TV in their bedroom compared with 29% of those in the highest income category. Similarly, 46% of children in the lowest income group compared with 25% in the highest group had a Video/DVD player in their bedroom.

Figure 12: Percentage of nine-year-olds who had (a) a TV and (b) a Video/DVD player in their own bedroom classified by level of family income (equivalised)



10.3 NINE-YEAR-OLDS' ACCESS TO A HOME COMPUTER

One of the biggest differences between the childhood experiences of current nine-year-olds and those of their parents is their increased access to and use of a computer at home. A total of 89% of children said they had a computer in their home. Ownership was strongly related to social class, maternal education and family type. For example, 76% of nine-year-olds whose mother had left school on completion of her Junior Certificate or earlier had a home computer. The comparable figure for children whose mother was a graduate was 95%.

Playing games was the most frequent use of the home computer (cited by 86% of nine-year-olds). This was followed by surfing the internet for fun and school projects (47 – 48%), movies (28%) and homework (26%). There were no differences in the uses to which the computer was put according to the child's sex, social class or other family characteristics.

10.4 PARTICIPATION IN STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

One of the seven long-term goals for children set out in *Towards 2016*²⁰ is that every child should have access to quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood. In *Growing Up in Ireland* the child's mother was asked to record whether or not her nine-year-old participated in a range of clubs or organisations outside of school hours, as outlined below.

10.4.1 Participation in organised sports club

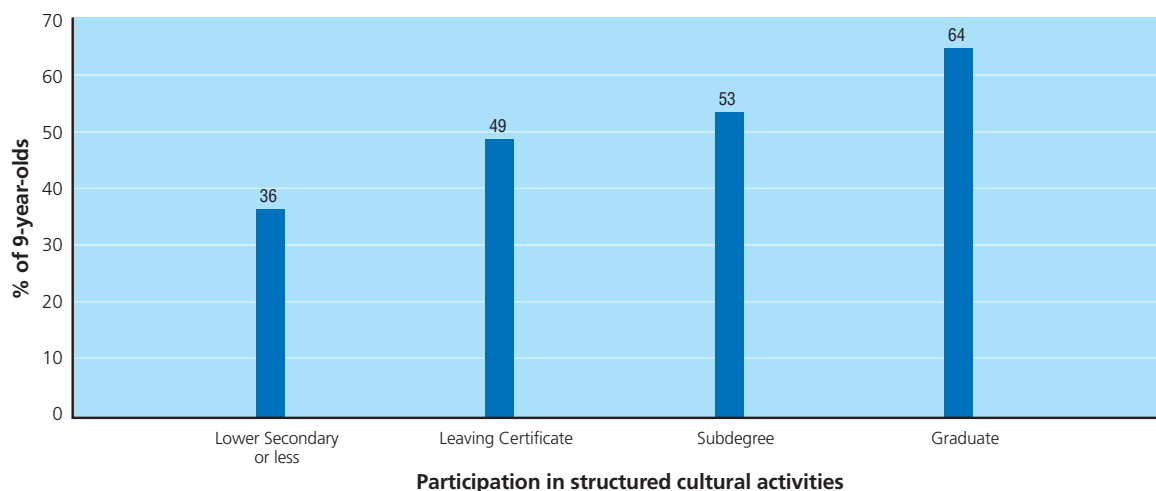
Three-quarters of nine-year-olds were involved in some form of organised sports club or organisation. Participation was higher among boys (84%) than girls (67%). Participation in structured sports clubs increased with family income.

10.4.2 Participation in structured cultural activities

Just under half (47%) of children were involved in structured cultural activities such as dance, ballet, arts and drama. Substantially higher percentages of girls (65%) than boys (31%) were engaged in these types of activities. Participation increased substantially with mother's educational attainment, social class and family income. Figure 13 shows how participation increased strongly with level of mother's educational attainment.

²⁰ This sets out the agreed position of the Social Partners towards social and related aspirations regarding Irish society in the years ahead. The Social Partners are made up of Government, trade unions, employers, farming organisations, and the community and voluntary sectors.

Figure 13: Maternal report on participation in structured cultural activities classified by mother's highest level of educational attainment



10.4.3 Participation in Youth Clubs, Scouts/Guides/Boys' or Girls' Brigade and After-School Clubs

A total of 7% of children were involved in Youth Clubs, there being no difference in participation rates between boys and girls. Involvement was more common among children for lower income families.

A total of 3% of children were involved in Scouts/Guides, etc. Higher rates were evident among girls (15%) than boys (12%). Rates increased with social class and family income.

A total of 8% of nine-year-olds were involved in After-school Clubs. There were no differences in participation between boys and girls. Children from three groups were significantly more likely to participate: those whose mothers had lower levels of educational attainment, lower family income and children in single-parent families (especially families with three or more children).

11. NINE-YEAR-OLDS' NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

The child's neighbourhood and local community will directly affect the child through their physical condition, perceived safety and availability of services. Indirect outcomes may result for the impact of local community on family functioning and parenting style. For example, living in a neighbourhood which is perceived by parents to be dangerous may result in changes in parenting style in an attempt to keep their children from falling under undesirable influences.

11.1 NINE-YEAR-OLDS' VIEWS OF THE QUALITY OF THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Approximately one-fifth of children felt that there was too much traffic near where they lived, that the streets were dirty and that there was a lot of graffiti (22% in each case). There were some quite large differences between children from households in the lowest and highest income groups. For example, 31% of nine-year-olds from families in the lowest income group reported that streets in the local neighbourhood were dirty, compared to only 16% in the highest income group. This trend was also apparent in respect of perceived prevalence of graffiti. No significant difference was evident between income groups in their views on there being too much traffic in the local neighbourhood.

11.2 MOTHERS' VIEWS OF THE QUALITY OF THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

The mothers of nine-year-olds felt that the most pervasive problem was rubbish and litter lying about. One-third reported this as being very common or fairly common in their local area. This was followed by people

being drunk or taking drugs in public (15%), vandalism and deliberate damage to property (15%) and homes and gardens in bad condition (10%). There was a strong relationship between family social class and perceived quality of the local area, with those in the lower social class categories being much more likely to report unfavourable physical conditions in their local area.

11.3 NINE-YEAR-OLDS’ VIEWS OF THE SAFETY OF THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

When asked about their perceptions of safety in their local area 95% of children said they felt safe ‘living around here’ and 77% said there were places for children to play safely near their home. This did not vary according to their social class, mother’s level of educational attainment or family income.

11.4 MOTHERS’ VIEWS OF THE SAFETY OF THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

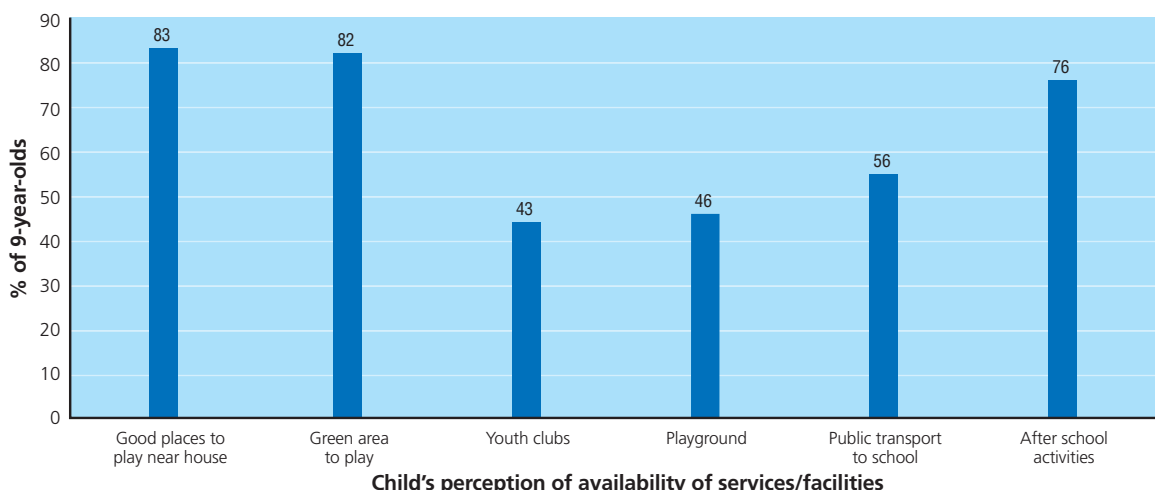
Most mothers agreed that it was safe for children to play outside during the day (91%). A smaller percentage (68%) said they felt it was safe to walk alone after dark and 58% felt that safe parks, playgrounds and play spaces were available in their local area.

There was no significant relationship between perception of the safety of children playing outside during the day and family social class. However, there was a modest effect in respect of the other two items. A total of 71% of those from the highest social class category felt it was safe to walk alone after dark compared to 65% of those from the lowest social group. The corresponding figures for safe parks, playgrounds and play spaces were 62% compared to 53%.

11.5 NINE-YEAR-OLDS’ VIEWS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES IN THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Children were asked to record whether or not six child-specific services and facilities were available in their local area. Figure 14 summarises the results. The children felt that the most generally available facility was ‘good places to play near the child’s house’ (83%). This was closely followed by ‘a green area to play’ (82%) and ‘after-school activities’ (76%). The other services were endorsed by only approximately half of the children: public transport to school (56%), playground (46%) and youth clubs (43%).

Figure 14: Children's perception of availability of services / facilities



For all items (other than after-school activities) there was no relationship between recorded availability and family social class. For after-school activities there was a slight positive relationship with social class.

11.6 MOTHERS' VIEWS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES IN THEIR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Mothers were asked whether or not eight pre-specified services were available in or in relatively easy access of their local area. The percentages of mothers who said they were available are in parentheses:

- Regular public transport (66%)
- Social Welfare Office (63%)
- GP or health clinic (89%)
- Schools (97%)
- Library (77%)
- Banking/Credit Union (82%)
- Essential grocery shopping (94%)
- Recreational facilities appropriate to a nine-year-old (57%).

It is notable that the least available service was recreational facilities appropriate to a nine-year-old. In general, availability of GPs, schools, banks and shopping was high across all social class and income levels, whereas services such as public transport, libraries, Social Welfare offices and recreational facilities appropriate to a nine-year-old were somewhat less prevalent, especially to families in lower social class categories.

11.7 MOTHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Just over one-third (35%) of mothers reported that they were involved in a local voluntary group. Participation in the local community increased with level of maternal education, family social class and family income group. Levels of community involvement were also higher in rural families than urban families. There was also a clear relationship with family type. Mothers in two-parent families were more likely than mothers in single-parent families to be involved in a local voluntary group.

12. SUMMARY

This report presents variations in a broad range of child outcomes, characteristics and attributes. In general, it indicates that the majority of nine-year-olds have quite positive outcomes in terms of child development. There were, however, quite substantial social gradients across all three main areas of child outcomes. Maternal reports on health status, educational attainment tests and details on emotional health were all found to vary to greater or lesser extents by family social class, level of mother's education and family income. These variations illustrate the areas in which the main policy challenges of the future lie, in order to ensure that all children in Ireland have as positive a childhood as possible.

This highly descriptive first report provides only an initial look at the lives of nine-year-olds. The wealth of data provided by *Growing Up in Ireland* will allow much more intensive, multivariate analysis to be undertaken to tease out the critical factors related to child outcomes. Most importantly, and uniquely, as each wave of data is recorded the longitudinal nature of the study will allow an analysis of the development of child outcomes over time.

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